

RECOLLECT: HOME VIDEO AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF

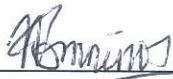
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2015

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has neither been submitted before to any other degree or examination at any other University, nor prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.



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6 day of August 2015

ABSTRACT

This research looks at home video footage and family photographs as part of the visual portrait of a curated record of the autobiographical self. The research includes a written thesis exploring the theoretical concerns and provides a reflexive analysis of the creative component of the PhD, which is a 60-minute documentary film. The research, both creative and written, assesses how autobiographical memory is informed and shaped by home video recordings, and how new digital formats have allowed home video to collapse the boundaries between the personal and the public. It also explores how personal narratives speak to the wider socio-political and cultural concerns of a particular time. These ‘collapses’ between boundaries provide a playful, pluralistic approach to a history of the self. The many paradigms that coexist within the work – the past and the present, time and space, previously accepted narratives and newly formed ones – do not exist as binary to each other, but rather exist in conversation with each other and serves to explore the ever elastic subject/object dichotomy.

The autobiographical film is titled *Fraternal*, with the tagline ‘The future isn’t like it used to be’. It tells the emotional story of the relationships between myself and my twin, and our parents – the hellos and goodbyes, arrivals and departures, beginnings and endings that happen within family ties. The film is set against the backdrop of the political situation in southern Africa during the 1980s and 1990s. It is cut predominantly from personal home video footage: a mixture of Super 8mm, Hi8 and DV footage shot largely between 1984 and 1994 in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Arts and Division of Film and Television, as well as the National Research Foundation and the Mellon Mentorship for their financial support, without which this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Prof. Bhekizizwe Peterson of African Literature and Prof. David Andrew of the School of Arts for reading my proposal and providing valuable and affirming feedback at the beginning of this journey, and Robyn Grimsley for proofreading the final written component.

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Jyoti Mistry for remaining enthusiastic about my research for four years, and for pushing me creatively and watching my film over and over and over again while still seeming to be enjoying herself.

I would like to thank my parents, Julie Frederikse and Stelios Comninos, for so carefully recording my childhood, which sparked the idea for this research, and also for being supportive in all possible ways throughout this endeavour. I would also like to thank my twin brother, Alex Comninos, for his support and commiseration on this journey.

I would like to give special thanks to Craig Maarschalk for his endless support. I would also like to thank the others who also who gave me encouragement along the way: Taryn Leyland, Kristen Broberg, Jessica Webster, Matthew Partridge, Kate White, Emma Holtmann (who read my proposal in the beginning when I was at my most shaky) and Alex Halligey (who read through the final draft).

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Introduction

The fullest and most carefully curated record of my life is the family photograph and home video of my early childhood. My mother and father documented the early years of the lives of me and my twin brother, Alex. Photographs were taken and many turned into slides, Polaroids were shared with eager eyes, Super 8mm footage was shot and audiotapes were recorded. The majority of the content featured my brother and I playing in the promising light of post-independence Zimbabwe.

I would suggest that three factors led my parents to create this extensive repository of family archive. First, my mother gave birth to boy-girl twins, a novelty which provided endless photo opportunities. Second, my mother's native country, the US, was some 12 000 kilometres away from where we were in Zimbabwe, so she felt the pressure to send home reassuring images of her new life and her new family. And finally, my parents had no family members close by since they were in political exile from South Africa, and were unable to travel back to South Africa easily to visit their friends or my father's family.

We lived in limbo, working towards and waiting for political change in South Africa, dislocated from both my father's home country and that of my mother. Their photographing and filming assumed an even greater importance than the usual chronicling of young children's lives. My family was, in a sense, 'homeless' and these images provided a profound sense of belonging. I have lived in this archival repository or metaphoric 'home' all my life, cross-referencing the archive to bolster my personal narrative. This metaphoric home, comprising mostly of the golden analogue days of family photographs and home video, provided a rich case study for my research, which looks at the importance of home video in autobiographical memory. I employed the work of Marianne Hirsch (2012, 2008, 2003, 1999), Annette Kuhn (2010, 2007), Roland Barthes (1981) and Susan Sontag (1977) to provide the bed of my analysis surrounding photography and the specifics of the ritual around

family photography. I added to this an analysis of home video (Patricia R Zimmerman, 2008 and James M Moran, 2002).

The research takes the form of two distinct elements – a creative research component – a documentary film titled *Fraternal* – and a written component, which is this thesis. The film is made up from my family photographs and home video, edited together with footage I shot specifically for the film. In the making of the creative component I have appropriated my family archive and curated it with my film as the vision. It tells the story of my relationship with my twin brother and tracks its changes into our adulthood. Different historical moments and analytical lenses would read and appropriate the archive differently; this film, this research and this moment holds my relationship with my brother at its heart. The written research augments the creative component by reflecting on the process of making a documentary film from my family archive. The written research is laid out, like the film, in three acts. The first act forms the literature review, the second provides the film analysis and the third offers a look to the future of home video. For my research on documentary I called upon, amongst others, Stella Bruzzi (200) and Michael Renov (2004). Both the film and the written research assess how autobiographical memory is informed and shaped by home video recordings, and how the autoethnographic processes of home video collapse the boundaries between the personal and the public, and how the transition from analogue to digital has impacted the engagement with home video. Catherine Russel (1999) and Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) gave me the theoretical landscape of autoethnography, with which I also explored the feminist concerns involved in my research through Patricia Mellencamp (1995) and Karen A and Sonja K Foss (1994).

I have married theoretical concerns with an artistic output to create a kind of “aestheticisation of the everyday” (Daly, 2007). Within these quotidian images of my childhood there exist wider socio-political dynamics; “The ordinary day-to-day lives of people ... constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions” (Ndebele, 1986: 156). Home video has a magical quality as a “[space] of projection and approximation and of

protection” (Hirsch, 2008: 117) thus opening the approximation of the footage to resonance with my narrative home, the viewer's narrative home and a collective southern African home.

The written research and the creative output meld together to create a portrait of a family – of a pair of twins – that is particular to my childhood while also extending to encompass the wider socio-political context of southern Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to the wider socio-political context I also looked specifically at the psychological bond between siblings and especially twins (Vivienne Lewin, 2006) and paired this with the psychology of melancholy (Sigmund Freud, 1917) and its aesthetic concerns.

Act One: Literature review

My mother, pregnant with twins, and my father left South Africa, still under the apartheid government in 1982, to live in political exile in Harare, Zimbabwe. In addition to teaching at the Harare Polytechnic and then heading a school for ex-combatants, my father worked for *Umkhonto we Sizwe*¹ as treasurer of his cell and sent ANC publications into South Africa. My mother was a journalist reporting for the US National Public Radio and other broadcasters. She has published a book covering Zimbabwe's transition to independence, *None but Ourselves: Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (1984). While in Zimbabwe she researched and wrote two more books: *South Africa: A different kind of war. From Soweto to Pretoria* (1986) and *The unbreakable thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (1990). My parents had friends who had made a similar move from South Africa, and they had also made friends with other exiles, as well as with non-political people who had moved to Zimbabwe to enjoy its new democracy and to help rebuild the country. In the eight years they were in Zimbabwe, my parents were waiting for the time they could return to South Africa, they also formed a relationship with their new, albeit temporary, landscape and home: Zimbabwe.

My brother and I were born – a month prematurely – just weeks after my parents arrived in Zimbabwe. We were born in exile – we did not make that choice, we did not even live through the decision to make that choice, we were simply born into a country that we knew was not and would never be our home. My parents were not 'ex-pats' whose newborn children could be citizens of their new country – my brother and I have South African and American citizenships through our parents. They chose to go to Zimbabwe because like so many South Africans they were excited by South Africa's newly liberated neighbour; they could have been temporarily stationed in any one of a number of places. My parents, during our upbringing in Zimbabwe told us about South Africa – the place we would go to when the war was over. We were told about Nelson Mandela and about the oppression of the majority

¹ *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (known as MK, Zulu and Xhosa for 'Spear of the Nation') was the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

of the population. We were, however, not told about the parcel bombs, the assassinations, or the underground nature of our parents' work.

While waiting for the change that would allow us to go home, my brother and I had a conventional childhood: we went to school, we made friends, went camping and enjoyed our lives in Zimbabwe. At our school we were the only white children in our class and that was what we understood as 'normal'. So we lived and learned and played as children do, in Zimbabwe but it was always with the knowledge that we would leave. I remember always using those words – 'going *back* to South Africa' – although my brother and I had never lived there. Through some kind of inherited allegiance from my parents, we knew that South Africa was our home without us ever having lived there. We visited twice, once as babies and once as toddlers although I have no recollection of those visits. It seemed to be home to my mother too, even though she was not South African at that time. My parents' allegiance to the land seemed to come from a kinship with the country and a commitment to the political struggle (the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa).

So from the time of our birth, my brother and I knew we were not at home, that our real home, South Africa, awaited our return. It was a given that we would go back, the only question was when. I cannot be sure now but I think at that time I may have even identified myself as South African if ever asked, while in my lived experience knowing no other place to call home except Zimbabwe.

My brother and I would wonder about South Africa, sometimes talking to the South African children of my parents' friends who came to visit. They could help us imagine what it would be like in South Africa – sometimes they would scare us. A friend who lived in Soweto, South Africa, and had come to visit us in Harare warned us that the police would shoot at us if we went back to South Africa. It was a confusing time, never quite feeling at home, always half-connected, half-severed. As Hana Píchová explains "to live as an émigré is to struggle to maintain a tenuous balance as if at a precarious height; the émigré finds himself or herself on a kind of unstable, rickety bridge between

two shores” (2001: 2). And indeed I found myself teetering between South Africa and Zimbabwe – expressing my identity as South African, but living in Zimbabwe. Píchová goes on, “the new, unknown territory has to be appropriated and familiarized while the old, known [in this case not known, but understood intrinsically as home] territory becomes the realm of the imaginary” (2001: 2). Yet my own relationship with the “two shores” was not so straightforward. South Africa was the old, known, but one I had not intimately known – it was home in “the realm of the imaginary”. While Zimbabwe was in actuality the only home I knew and thus “appropriated and familiarized”, it was also the home that I knew I would one day leave. My feelings of rootedness and belonging were seated in a liminal space.

So although in many ways the childhood of my brother and I was just like that of any other children, in some ways it was very different. From an early age we had to grapple with notions of belonging, with our relationship to place, home and landscape. “98 per cent of the world’s population never physically moves to another place on anything like a permanent basis, and the greater proportion of this 98 per cent hardly move at all” (Bender & Winer, 2001: 320). My life has been far more mobile; by the time my brother and I were eight we, had lived and been schooled in Zimbabwe, used our American passports to visit Washington DC and Greece, and even attended school in the US for a month, before finally being enrolled in a new school when we got ‘back’ to South Africa.

In South Africa I felt different; I did not feel at home. Suddenly I was surrounded by mostly white people, which was something new; I had expressed incredulity when my parents told us we would be enrolled in a racially mixed school when we got to South Africa (I was the only white child in my class in primary school in Zimbabwe): “A white teacher? I’ve never seen one of those,” I exclaimed – according to the anecdote I’ve heard my parents tell. South Africanisms never came naturally to me; I was not comfortable to say the words ‘*bakkie*’ or ‘*kombi*’² as they felt strange on my tongue and

² South African slang for various types of vehicles.

betrayed my 'otherness'. The food in South Africa was different, the accents were different; I was 'back' in South Africa but I felt like an outsider. Even though I had never come to identify with Zimbabwe as home, the promised homeland also felt alien. As Píchová (2001: 4) explains: "An émigré, not born and raised in the adoptive culture, will never gain the intense, innate understanding of a native". Alex and I were alienated both from our homeland, Zimbabwe, and from our newly adopted country, South Africa.

When I was a teenager, I wrote a poem about this moment:

I first saw it on TV
"that's where we're going"
a finger pointed
- the news from South Africa
I was terrified of images of children being beat by cold men in khaki
all I knew of South Africa
- bitty images;
where Yia-yia lives, and daddy was born
the fleeting TV snippets of oppression
so we packed up, everything in the car
except for what we had sold
at a jumble sale, in our front garden
I saw my jungle gym piled on the top of someone's car
as I sat in a tree, spying from above
our house was finally empty
and we were leaving,
leaving the house I had grown up in
and all I knew
my friends, lake Kariba and Mazoe orange juice
our house in Rowland Square
my home, Zimbabwe

It is clear to me now that I never had a strong understanding or relationship with the notion of 'home' in its most traditional sense. My parents, and

especially my mother, must have had similar thoughts about where their allegiance lay and how to position their understanding of home. My mother left her native US at 17 to study in her father's homeland, Holland. She returned to the US and a few years later went to South Africa. There she met her husband, my father, and together they had two South African children. Where was home for her, I wonder now. In order, I think, to quell the feelings of displacement and otherness for both herself and her family, my mother focused on the (her) nuclear family. She also felt the need to assuage the fears of her mother in the US, who would watch the news and hear of the violence in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, on the distant continent where their daughter now lived.

According to Barbara Bender and Margaret Winer, the distinction that is frequently drawn between physical and symbolic landscapes results in us defining *any* landscape (in this case, our 'home') as "either a physical thing or its mental representation" (2001: 181). They argue that this distinction between the physical and the symbolic can be an obstacle to understanding, and that a more helpful distinction would be between landscape as "an objective entity, outside of which [we] stand and observe, or a relational structure, within which [we] find [ourselves] engaged [and which] can be imagined as an uncompleted process rather than a bounded and static thing" (2001: 181). This distinction between landscape as a bounded and static place or as an uncompleted process is particularly relevant to me, given our status as exiles in an impermanent "home" and the effort my parents made to create a "home" unrelated to the physical place in which we lived.

While not positioning our geographical position of Zimbabwe as a home, my parents created a very strong sense of home in our house: meals were eaten together not in front of TV. Our house and our garden were made beautiful and were spaces where we spent a lot of time in as a family. We went on outings together, travels and camping trips, as a family. Although this seems to be common practice and therefore a glib observation, I have noticed a stronger emphasis on 'family time' with the four of us than I register in some other families who may not be dealing with the same issues of displacement

and being far away from their roots. All we had was each other. In the process of focusing on strengthening our nuclear family, my mother also created another kind of home for us, a place where we felt we could belong, and that was through the representation of 'us as family' through family photographs and home video. There was a need to send photographs and home video abroad so that faraway family could see that we were okay. So there is a strong record of our relationship as a family, with an underlying sentiment that if home was not a physical place, that home was place we created together.

So my mother created home video of us, broadcasting what she described as the 'Good News Show'. This description she offered during an interview I conducted with her as part of the creative component of this research, the film titled *Fraternal*. At one point the 'Good News Show' was also the working title for my film. These videos expose her desire to counter and mitigate the negative images of South Africa and Zimbabwe that she knew her parents were receiving in the media, to reposition the region as a comfortable and safe place to live and raise a family. These images and 'broadcasts' were both for her parents and also for us as a family. She managed to sidestep our feelings of exile and displacement through this strong representation of us as family, of us *belonging together*. She helped to create a sense of connection for my brother and me in an otherwise unconnected landscape.

While I know we did watch some slide shows of photographs, I cannot say I have strong memories of watching the home film and video footage. However, I do remember the videos being made. I remember the importance of taking pictures, of posing for pictures, especially the annual Christmas photo which would be sent with a photocopied letter to friends and family around the world. I remember receiving developed photographs in the mail, looking at them, and making albums. It is through the action of documenting our lives that I have a relationship with my family photographs and home video, and this footage and the memories of making the home video and taking the photographs have created a kind of internal place, a representation of that time which I can always return to, a space that makes me feel whole – like I belong. If I try to think of home as a place, I return to this imaginative landscape, and so I can

conjure up my childhood with the aid of the home video and photographs in order to return 'home', a place where my plural identification with home does not require explanation.

Píchová asserts that “[c]ultural memory, primarily composed of historical, political, and literary detours, is intentionally evoked by fictional writers and intellectuals, to re-evaluate, appreciate, even better understand one’s heritage from the newly gained across-the-border perspective” (2001: 10). Through my personal imaginative visitations to the past through the footage of my childhood, I am able to shape and change my relationship with this home. “Memory is not the true record of past events but a kind of text which is worked upon in the creation of meaning. Identities are continually crafted and recrafted out of memory, rather than being fixed by the ‘real’ course of past events...” (Thomas, 1996, in Bender & Winer, 2001: 4). This liminal ‘home’ that I have is part memory, part visible evidence in the form of the home video. And, like memory, home video is not a true record. The footage has a projected imagery of ‘the twins’ – my brother and I – as a strong unit, and my relationship with my brother has been strengthened and anchored by these early representations of us as a unit. As Rosalind Krauss explains “the family photograph [is] an index or proof of family unity, and, at the same time, an instrument or tool to effect that unity” (1984: 56). She goes on to explain that the camera is often understood as a passive apparatus, merely present to document, however in reality it is an active tool. Think of the phrase ‘smile for the camera’ as if the camera itself is expectant. Often at family gatherings the camera is central; “it is an agent in the collective fantasy of family cohesion, and in that sense the camera is a projective tool, part of the theater that the family constructs to convince itself that it is together and whole” (Krauss, 1984: 56).

My mother used the family footage to convince us we were “together and whole” to relieve some of the emotional stress that comes from the displacement of exile. However, through this part-fiction, part-truth, she constructed a new world, a fantasy world where everything seemed almost perfect. The home video footage helps to engender this fantasy world as truth

because of its indexical relationship with reality; it presents itself as a replica of reality. And while Krauss asserts that “[e]verything...is a copy”, she explains that “the true copy – the valid imitation – is that which is truly resemblant, copying the inner idea of the form and not just its empty shell” and is thus significantly different to “a false copy [or] simulacrum” (1984: 62). Indeed, much has been left out in the home video, while other things have been pulled into focus so that what is represented is only a version of reality, and not strictly reality itself. It is no longer a true copy of my childhood, but rather a “false copy, a simulacrum”. And this is not due only to my mother’s direction of the footage; I also project my own fantasies and my own versions of reality when I watch it.

I have adopted home video footage of my mother’s ‘Good News Show’ as my reality, my narrative home, but I have also embellished it. As Bender and Winer explain, “[l]andscapes contain the traces of past activities, and people select the stories they tell, the memories and histories they evoke, the interpretative narratives that they weave, to further their activities in the present-future” (2001: 4). The world of my mother’s ‘Good News Show’ allows me to return to a place where I felt safe, where there is no questioning of identity and belonging, where I can feel at home. The bond between my brother and I in this world makes me feel like he shares this space with me, like we are one. “Whether pleasant or dismal, the past is always a safe territory, if only because it is already experienced” (Brodsky, in Píchová, 2001: 3). In that private world that I can return to, my family, and particularly my twin brother, are my homeland. They are the only people who share my experience, and my brother is also the one who has the same relationship, if only in the manner of heritage and lived existence, with Zimbabwe, South Africa, the US, and Greece. I take comfort in the fact that I have this relationship – this shared sense of home – with my brother, Alex. Through the home footage I see that we are a unit, and through the home footage, my mother seems to tell us it will always be this way.

My mother’s ‘Good News Show’ is a false copy, “a paradox that opens a terrible rift within the very possibility of being able to tell true from not-true.

The whole idea of the copy is that it be resemblant, that it incarnate the idea of identity” (Krauss, 1984: 62). Indeed once the copy takes on the form of reality; it becomes very difficult to distinguish between the two. My mother’s family photographs and home video – her ‘Good News Show’ – have created a copy of reality, memorialising my idea of a homeland and I have invested in a false reality. My film, *Fraternal*, explores these feelings, around this narrative home, and focuses on the journey my brother is about to embark upon as he leaves to start a new life overseas with his German girlfriend. When, in the final segment of the film, he leaves me, both physically and symbolically, it is as if I am losing some sense of this home, losing some stability, losing a sense of belonging.

When I began this research, I assembled all the photographs and home video that existed as a record of my shared childhood with my brother. I looked through albums at my parents’ house in South Africa; I pawed through dusty trunks that revealed Hi8 tapes in need of conversion. I requested Super 8mm footage from my grandmother in Washington D.C., who found the reels, converted them to DVD and sent me everything in the mail. This process of gathering the footage already felt like collecting memories, and I had not yet even begun looking at it. In receiving these outdated analogue and early digital materials (audio tapes, Hi8 tapes and Super 8mm reels), I was reminded of their status as physical tokens of a bygone era, an homage to dead formats and thus to the past itself. In his book *The Gift*, French anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss discusses the “nature of the bond created by the transfer of a possession” (1966: 10). This gathering together of my family photographs and home video began a process of sharing and bonding for my whole family. Mauss articulates the action of gifting as creating a bond more significant than the material object – it creates a bond between persons. Even at this early stage, I began to feel a renewed sense of closeness with my family merely through requesting and receiving the boxes of family photographs. When it came to actually looking at the footage I was overwhelmed by my feelings about the past. I was gripped by both the pang of pleasure and pain that Barthes described in *Camera lucida* as “the melancholy of photography itself” (1981: 84). It was poetic and

beautiful, and somehow heart breaking. It seemed strange, this apparent sadness arising from looking at evidence of a life well lived, at the love and 'good times' contained in the images.

A certain kind of sadness



Figure 1: Daddy and Me (1985) Harare, Zimbabwe

The pang of both pleasure and pain that comes when you look at a photograph of your now distant childhood is a universal feeling. When I hold the picture of my father and me in my hands and I see my callow face, my wide eyes, my father looking so young – it evokes within me a warm nostalgia, a connection with a golden past, lived but no longer present. We are advised to say the family photos first in the event of a fire, as they are irreplaceable. These suspended moments stored forever provide visual evidence of my life's stories, and elicit an immediate response within me.

Barthes wrote about these feelings in his frank and personal *Camera lucida* (1981). He speaks of this pang induced by the very sight of a photograph, dubbing it the *punctum* – “that prick and shock of recognition, that unique and very personal response to the photographic detail that attracts and repels us at the same time” (Barthes, in Hirsch, 2012: 4). Barthes states “a photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (1981: 27). He contrasts this to the *studium*, which is “of the order of *liking*, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right’” (Barthes, 1981: 27). The *studium* refers to things with shared meanings of cultural, linguistic and political content; content we can all relate to in some “all right” way – almost the *mise-en-scene* of the photograph. The *punctum*, however, is the personal connection you feel with an image that reaches out and slaps you in the face.

In the photograph of me and my father it is my father’s shoulders showing through his vest that prick me. A vest – what youthful attire! The vest also features a raised fist, an image of the struggle. But it is the fact that he is wearing a vest that I find arresting, his young sculpted arms jut through the white edges of the sleeves as he confidently holds me firm upon his shoulders. It immediately signifies his youth in this photograph, and simultaneously, and in sharp contrast, his age today. As Barthes notes, the *punctum* is personal, not universally shared. Another person viewing this photograph may not notice the clothes he is wearing. The *punctum* for Barthes is so deeply personal that the photograph that has the most profound *punctum* for him, the photograph of his mother, he does not include in the book. He explains:

I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations the ‘ordinary’; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium:

period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound (Barthes, 1981: 73).

This “wound” Barthes refers to is the subjective, personal relationship one has with an image. This wounding when he looks at the Winter Garden Photograph elicits a desire to keep the image sacred, away from eyes that may glance over it and see nothing but a nameless woman. His deep connection with the photograph means that he covets its private nature, and will not open it up to the public viewing; he will not share his wound with those who will not feel the resonance.

Barthes’ embrace of the subjective has earned him some detractors; indeed, many readers of *Camera lucida* lamented his almost conversational tone, longing for the ascetic theorising of his early writing. Yet for me it provides an anchor for my own subjective journey into the sphere of the creative arts. In a Creative Arts PhD the constant tension between theory and praxis can lead you astray in the academic world; the attempt to secure a balance between the analytical and the artistic can drive you wild. Claude Levi-Strauss (1966: 10), in his structural anthropology work *The Savage Mind*, speaks about these two autonomous ways of thinking:

there are two distinct modes of scientific thought. These are certainly not a function of different stages of development of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific enquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and the imagination: the other at a remove from it. It is as if the necessary connections which are the object of all science, Neolithic or modern, could be arrived at by two different routes, one very close to, and the other more remote from, sensible intuition.

This research serves to marry these two types of thinking. Works like *Camera lucida*, much critiqued but long enduring, are a testament to the creative arts in an academic domain and indeed in photography. Barthes has crossed this divide elegantly, we do not read *Camera lucida* for hard semiotic theory, but rather for its vulnerability, honesty, almost the *punctum* that it gives us – like a powerful personal photograph. When looking at the photograph of my father

and me and feeling the “prick and shock of recognition... that attracts and repels”, it is Barthes who gives me the language with which to discuss it.

When looking at the photograph I recognise the relationship I have with my father; the photograph represents its genesis, which in turn affirms our relationship now. It shows me at once where I came from, and where I am now. It shows the time that has spanned and how our interaction has changed. I can hear my mother’s voice directing us for this snapshot. It presents for me a space that anchors both the present and the past. The imagery of my young self as “Daddy’s little girl” in this picture is intentional – playing out a trope my mother and my father (even I?) want to preserve, so a photograph is taken to provide evidence, to give testament. Whoever took the photograph (I assume it was my mother) was controlling this imagery. Our physical closeness as depicted in the photograph (him carrying me on his shoulders) has now been replaced with an intellectual, or conversational, bond, one that would be captured photographically in a new way, such as us sitting at the dinner table deep in conversation. Yet at the same time the photograph repels; it captures of a moment that is past, it reveals how much has changed since the photograph was taken, and this produces a sense of anxiety. I am older now, perhaps not keeping as closely in contact with him as I should. The photograph reminds me of our early relationship, and of our youthful happiness – me, a child full of wonder at the world, and him a young father spending time with his daughter. It urges me to call him on the phone, while it also evokes guilt, reminding me of the time that has passed since we last spoke.

Discussing the tension between this simultaneous attraction and repulsion, Hirsch (2012: 5) explains:

[t]he referent is both present (implied in the photograph) [the relationship with my father and I] and absent (it has been there but is not there now) [I no longer fit on his shoulders]. The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other. Ultimately, the puncture of the *punctum* is not the detail of the picture but time itself.

It is this *punctum* that evokes the feelings of nostalgia, the bittersweet engagement with the image, which is itself a marker of time past, or time lost. “Look how different we looked then,” I seem to say to myself, “Look how young we both were”. Following these thoughts leads to my father’s ageing, to mortality, to an impending loss.

According to Hirsch “it is precisely the indexical nature of the photo, its status as relic, or trace, or fetish – its ‘direct’ connection with the material presence of the photographed person” (2012: 20). She goes on to explain that this indexical nature captures both life while it simultaneously signals the approach of death (2012: 20). For example, there is an indexical link to my father’s image in the picture, but now he wears not a vest but a grey goatee. It is the stark contrast with what has gone before and what exists now, and the meaning lies in the cleavage between the two – this is what produces a kind of sadness. “All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (Sontag, 1977: 15). My father is now sixty, and his chest is beginning to slouch. I have some wrinkles around my eyes. We’re older now and weathered by “time’s relentless melt” (Sontag, 1977: 15). “Most subjects are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos” (Sontag, 1977: 15). We are happy in the photograph, but when I look closer I imbue the image with a hue of sadness because in our eyes there is innocence about what we do not yet know about the world, about what is to unfold. My self of the present longs for that moment when everything seemed perfect, so simple and free.

The photograph does not capture the complexity of the time, but just a simple moment when I was safe on Daddy’s shoulders. “To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a good picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing” (Sontag, 1977: 12). Although I cannot remember the particular day this photograph was taken, I can conjure the scene in my mind. A day outdoors in the sun, my

father and I getting along so splendidly that my mother chooses to capture the moment, suspend it in time – trying to keep things as they are in that seemingly perfect instance. This instance, however, is a very complex one, constituting “a form of self-representation at once conscious and unconscious, fraught with anguish, uncertainty, suffering and doom. Posing involves a dramatic struggle for control and authenticity, a struggle between intentionality and convention, the essential and the objectified” (Hirsch, 1999: 194).

My instinctual emotion when looking at the image of my father and me is that I wish it was still like that. And, in a way, the photograph allows this – people or times may change but photographs do not. As long as I have that photograph, I can always return to that moment. When I feel like I wish things could be as they were back then, I just open the photo album and connect with the image, but not without the sensation of the *punctum*. “A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (Sontag, 1977: 6). It gives me solace with its “pseudo-presence” or seeming ability to preserve that moment, but is also a marker of how very different things are now.

I have countless family albums filled with these kinds of photographs that simultaneously provide joy and bittersweet sadness. Family photographs and home video footage seem to function in similar ways; in some ways the moving image makes the *punctum* all the more felt, as you once again see your late grandmother’s gait, or hear your grandfather’s laugh. Family photographs seem to take on an increasingly iconic status as they age, as the disjuncture between then and now grows. Barthes argues that cinema does not have this same kind of *punctum*, of melancholy:

because the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views; in the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favor of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a specter. Like the real world, the filmic world is sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl says, ‘the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style’; but the photograph breaks the “constitutive style” (this is its astonishment);

it is without future (this is its pathos, its melancholy); in it, no protensity. Whereas the cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic (what is it, then? It is, then, simply 'normal,' like life). Motionless, the photograph flows back from presentation to retention (Barthes, 1981: 90).

However, I would argue that home video, distinct from the cinema that Barthes talks of (he speaks of scripted, Hollywood style movies) displays the same kind of *punctum* and indeed melancholy as photographs, as they are also snippets, accidental bits of life. A kind of moving snap shot. There is no grand narrative, no plan, and no 'future' in the kind of shooting that happens for family photographs and home videos, from the burst of Bolex film to the candid moments captured on Super 8mm, or the dislocated photos stuck on the fridge.

My family photographs and home videos are carefully kept stored in falling-apart shoeboxes, and well-thumbed photo albums. Routinely, they are taken out, spilled onto the floor and looked over in a ritual of family bonding. My brother and I would haul out the VHS tapes of our childhood, and the converted Bolex footage of my father's youth, in an unarticulated quest to connect with our history, our ancestry – the people and places we came from. There is a special feeling as a child when you first realise that your parents had youthful lives and experiences before you – they too were children with their own parents. We were fascinated by this and played my father's family footage over and over again. I cannot think of a time when a family record was not part of my life. Marianne Hirsch, author of *The familial gaze* (1999), notes that since the invention of the "Kodak" by George Eastman in 1888 "the camera has become the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and self-representation – the primary means by which family memory is perpetuated, by which the family's story is told" (1999: xvi). Family images are so integral to the family setup that, as Sontag states, there would be a sense of loss if you did not have this archive to look back on – "not to take pictures of one's children, particularly when they are small, is a sign of parental indifference" (1977: 8). The act of photographing your children displays an

investment in their future – a sense of hereditary pride. “Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness” (Sontag, 1977: 8). The ritual around the taking and preserving of family images is linked to the creation of a family narrative.

Stories are told around photographs, images are stuck on the fridge. It follows from this that the ‘family story’ is promulgated around these family images, video and stills, our personal identity can also be constructed. The autobiographical memory-world is constituted by objects of memory and, indeed, by the family photographs and home video that is collected over a lifetime. We all have the visible evidence of our life’s narrative: ‘my first day of school’, ‘my final year of high school’, ‘the day I got my driver’s licence’. These recordings are timeless and universal.

The ritual around family photography is usually centred on pockets of documentation – there is an extra focus on birthdays, on weddings, on anything that indicates ceremony – as worthy of being recorded. Every aunt and uncle is there, your mother and your father, and they taunt you to ‘smile for the camera’. This, of course, is then an event that is recorded to be kept for that enduring sense of posterity. Thus, if we look back on ourselves we see the highlights package of a life well lived: smiling faces, new cars, presents, a newborn baby. Seldom are the darker moments recorded. Hirsch notes of her own exploration of the family archive, that “I can begin to see how certain images repeat themselves in our lives in over-determined ways, and I can wonder about the sources of these repetitions and the ‘unconscious optics’ that structure the life of every family” (2012: 107). I noticed these “repetitions” in both the home video footage and the still photographs. There is a specific experience that we have when watching moving footage of ourselves, or our loved ones – the recognition of a mannerism, the noting of someone’s youthful appearance, and the grimace upon seeing ourselves. Somehow watching moving footage, which is a rendering so close to reality itself, can instantly evoke memories and experiences of that time and place. Still photography requires some imaginative work to recall sound and

movement, but moving footage supplies it instantaneously making the experience all the more immediate. When watching the footage for this research and in the making of the film, I found inspiration in both the immediate experience of moving visuals and the imaginative work that the stills allowed.

Through the close analysis of family photographs and home video we can mine these images to reveal the “unconscious optics” that Hirsch speaks of behind the images, and we can embroider stories from these revelations. My personal archive provides for me a foundation from which to creatively explore the many secrets or stories that lie beyond the frame. In the moments when a photograph was not taken but the legend lives, or when a photograph gets lost, I can create my own story; when there is the proverbial blank in the carousel of slides that my family projected onto the wall, I am afforded the space from which I can embellish, probe and explore. The photographs link to existing stories in my mind but are also open to exploitation. While the home videos seem to contain more information they also display silence, or gaps or holes. Sometimes there is no sound; sometimes the footage cuts in the middle of an action. I am free to fill the silences and gaps, with my own memories, or even completely fictional ones. I am led to new thoughts about old stories; I find new insights, new stories through engaging with my family archive – all this has been fodder for the creative component to this research, my film *Fraternal*. While I have not directly fictionalised anything, the editing and construction of a narrative of my large repository of family footage has been a subjective experience. I have sculpted a story from moments that have resonance for me – my mother, father or brother would have each constructed something that looked quite different. I have taken our shared familial history and constructed a 60-minute narrative from my own perspective, my own analysis and through my exploration of filmic aesthetics.

Although I have woven together a narrative from my point of view there is already a sense of cohesion inherent in the footage. “The family photograph, widely available as a medium of familial self-representation in many cultures and subcultures, can reduce the strains of family life by sustaining an

imaginary cohesion, even as it exacerbates them by creating images that real family cannot uphold” (Hirsch, 1999: 7). When I look back on family holidays, we all seemed so happy: everyone was smiling and the food looked so good. The moment when the smiles dropped as the cameras were put away is not recorded, and sometimes, when it is recorded, those images are discarded. “Since looking operates through projection and since the photographic image is the positive development of the negative, the plenitude that constitutes the fulfilment of desire, photographs can more easily show what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not” (Hirsch, 1999: 7). Indeed, the moments that are recorded show the performance of the happy family – we all stand together and pose. We present a united front, a family woven together with love. This is what we want to present – not Mom and Dad’s rocky marriage, or an illness lurking below the surface, or any other murky pasts. We want to put our best foot forward. Through close analysis it is possible to cut through this projection.

Annette Kuhn, having written extensively about the ritual of family photography and meaning in family photographs, defines a process which she terms “memory work” – a methodological enquiry whereby “the task of the practitioner in memory work is not merely to analyze but also to understand – that is, to try and enter into the memory-world of the text” (2007: 284). Indeed, family photographs are a great repository of knowledge and through memory work this knowledge can be revealed, but not without understanding the paradigms that exist within home footage which then reveal insights about into broader socio-political milieus. As Kuhn urges, one must “enter the memory-world” of home video in order to unlock its insights. Doing Kuhn’s memory work unmask the autobiographical self; through this quest we can reveal the layers and alternative narratives that exist behind seemingly simple family photographs and home videos to expose deeper personal – and even wider political and social – truths.

Hirsch (2012: 107) reiterates this relationship between the creative engagement and the academic endeavour of the analysis of home video when she states:

in this process of reading – a process that is personal and analytic, visual and discursive – I am both spectator and spectacle, both subject and object. These pictures are allo-portraits and family portraits: the process of reading them is deeply affiliative, relational, familial, yet it is also aesthetic, political and theoretical.

It is through this kind of close reading that the ritual of capturing the family in an amateur impulse can be taken into the realm of an academic endeavour, and indeed also an artistic one.

Art historian Joan Gibbons, in her book *Art and memory: Images of recollection and remembrance* (2007), speaks about the changing understanding of memory, of a contemporary linkage between memory and imagination through the emphasis of memory as a formation of impressions (2007: 17). She questions the veracity of memory “on the grounds that images and sense impressions are exactly that, never the real thing, making it difficult to distinguish memory images from those *produced by the imagination*” [my emphasis] (Gibbons, 2007: 17).

Through Kuhn’s notion of memory work, and Gibbons’ link with memory and imagination, we can start to think about home video and storytelling, about unpacking the “unconscious optics” around the imagery of home video and what it means about how families represent themselves. As Sontag states in her collection of essays *On photography*: “photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire” (1977: 4). Applying this statement specifically to the genre of family photographs and home video suggests that when I look at my family photographs I am looking at “pieces” of myself, my history. When I look at the picture of my father and I, I am engaging with a “piece” of my identity. As Barthes notes, “show your photographs to someone – he will immediately show you his: ‘look, this is my brother; this is me as a child,’... A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least is not immediately or generally distinguished from its referent” (1981: 5). I am looking at myself, it is clearly and simply me – but intellectually I know there is a disconnect; however, this

emotional connection – this umbilical cord between me-past and me-present – creates an interesting and powerful relationship. “It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures” (Barthes, 1981: 6). By taking my personal archive and mining it for narrative I can begin to tell my story. Through the film *Fraternal* I have done Kuhn’s memory work, of analysing my family photographs and home video while also entering and immersing myself in my family narratives. I have then pitted this understanding of the paradigms of home video and my family’s accepted narratives against my own autobiographical memory so that my imagination and my memories create new meanings and new understandings of the past.

David Pillemer suggests, “human experience is conceived as a process of constructing and reconstructing a life narrative” (1998: 22). He indicates that we have a desire to make sense of ourselves by constructing a life story, or an autobiographical self, made up of perceived/remembered events that we deem important. The photographed images of our lives provide the visible evidence from which we can construct this narrative: our birthdays, our achievements and our captured (or posed) displays of affection signifying our most important relationships, and, as eternalised in photographs, they serve as the visual backup (or inspiration) for this narrative structure of the self. “Photographs furnish evidence” (Sontag, 1977: 5) – they provide testament to my existence and provide confirmation for the narrative I have built around my childhood, and my life. Through memory work I am able to unlock the paradigms around both: around family photographs and home video in general and my particular family narrative. “Only in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and in this self-conscious contextuality can photographs disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, breaking the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze” (Hirsch, 2012: 8). Hirsch refers to these photographs as “imagetexts” and states that “what we need is a language that will allow us to see the coded and conventional nature of family pictures – to bring the conventions to

the foreground and thus to contest their ideological power” (2012: 10). Indeed, family photographs and home video tell and reinforce an important family story. The images captured of certain events are either markers or illustrations of performed roles. For example, in the photographs with my father I perform the role of Daddy’s little girl for the family narrative, while a wedding video offers a performance of love and unity to be played for the future offspring of that union. Family photography and the resultant photographs are markers of an existing ideology, but also serve to reinforce those ideals.

This understanding of family photographs and home video re-enforcing narratives, or providing ‘evidence’ for family stories brings to mind Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, and how it could be applied to the role of family photography in the creation of autobiographical memory. Hirsch (2008: 107) describes postmemory as

the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.

Hirsch states that when she speaks of postmemory she does so “from a feminist perspective, at the conjunction of three powerful and prevalent elements in the trans-generational structure of postmemory... - memory, family and photography” (Hirsch, 2008: 108). I am using this idea of postmemory to reflect on postmemory in the personal sense by taking on the idea of an inherited relationship to your past and identity in relation to the stories that have been passed to me. I am mobilizing the term in this discussion further than the mode in which Hirsch employs the concept located primarily in the context of discussion around its relationship with a traumatic past, specifically the Holocaust. However I am retaining postmemories “powerful and prevalent elements” of “memory, family and photography” (Hirsch, 2008: 108). For example, my brother and I inherited a relationship with South Africa during our childhood in Zimbabwe through postmemory, through our parents’ lived experience of that land and not from any real

experience of our own. We also inherited an idea about the importance and strength of our relationship as twins from my parents and through the many posed twins photographs and home video. I inherited certain experiences surrounding my family photographs and home video, these emotional connections to the images are conceptions that I have been told about, or have learnt. They are inherited 'truths' about my family and myself. These are 'facts' – just look at the photo albums, this is what they show. Family photographs and the accompanying stories build a collective familial memory around events, people and even relationships. The photographs, in a sense, represent inherited memories and narratives that are almost imposed upon and not born from within the individual.

Hirsch defines postmemory as “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (2012: 22). She speaks of postmemory as a form of cultural memory in tension with personal memory. While these emotions or “postmemories” from the family photographs and surrounding narratives exist in an imaginative space, they were born out of something that retains a certain truth. While the posing of the pictures of Alex and I seem to accentuate our close relationship and become visual evidence of that relationship, they were also conceived from our real life relationship. As Hirsch (2008: 106) explains:

the 'post' in 'postmemory' signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. Postmodern, for example, describes both a critical distance and a profound interrelation with the modern; postcolonial does not mean the end of the colonial but its troubling continuity, though, in contrast, postfeminist has been used to mark a sequel to feminism.

In the same manner postmemories foster nostalgia; they are part sentimental legend, part family history, and part subjective narrative of an identity. Over time we also begin to remember in terms of the photographs themselves; the artefacts become part of the memory and the memory experience. They seem

to allow and encourage an honest use of sentimentality, and this is something I seek out in my revisiting of my family photographs. For example, as Daddy's little girl I seek out images of my father and myself looking very close because that is what I know, and what I want to further affirm.

This connection between postmemory and photography is particularly strong – “[p]hotography’s promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable” (Hirsch, 2008: 108). I have heard the story many times from my parents: “you and your brother were at our wedding,” they exclaim, pointing at my mother’s belly encased in a lace wedding dress. The photographs give me access to that day, allow me into the safe cocoon where Mom and Dad love each other and everything is stable and perfect. The photograph prompts the memory – you cannot really see my mother’s pregnant belly, but still I point it out to friends; “see I was at the wedding, too” - and so actuality is muddled by both human remembrance and the story that the picture appears to tell. I have inherited this family legend, I was not there but I can spout details as if I had been. “There was a spit braai”; “Mom’s pregnancy later had complications...”, and so on. “Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is “post,” but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force” (Hirsch, 2008: 109). These memories become shared elements of a life story; they give us connection as family. Think of the ritual of bringing a lover home to your parents; inevitably stories are told about your youth and then the photographs are brought out to serve as evidence. They serve as proof, but, importantly, the exchange is centred on the ritual of inviting someone new into the fold – now they can understand where you came from and they, too, can have access to the material to tell the stories and family legends themselves. The memories are passed on from one family member to another. This is often from the point of view of your aging parents looking back on your childhood, or your grandparents revisiting their family history. “As its direct bearers enter old age, they increasingly wish to institutionalize memory, whether in traditional archives or books or through ritual, commemoration, or performance” (Hirsch, 2008: 110). Through this older generation’s desire to engage with, and thus

reactivate, their past younger generations are introduced to the familial history, but also as Hirsch states “postmemorial work... strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (2008: 111).

Although I am aware of the complexity of the relationship between photography and memory, between emotion and ‘post-emotion’, oftentimes this intellectual reading is outweighed by the pure immediate and personal connection felt when viewing the image. Father and young daughter: my dad playing the paternal role of holding me on his shoulders – showing me what I could not see, and me revelling in this. It may be posed, it may be simple, but it tells of a meaningful relationship between father and daughter. Looking at the picture is a shorthand device in order to induce an emotion purely for the enjoyment of experiencing the emotion – the pleasure of reminiscing. I like these images because they make me feel. I cannot quite place what it is, but, as Barthes describes, “the incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance; [it] holds me, though I cannot say why, i.e., say where: is it the eyes, the skin, the position of the hands, the track shoes? The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign” (1981: 51). So there are two responses at play – the immediate one that Barthes talks of, the “unlocatable” but undeniable emotion steeped in family photographs, but also the analytic and theoretical breakdown which exposes the “unconscious optics” of our family photographs that Hirsch’s postmemory and Kuhn’s memory work encourage.

To take this emotional response and pair it with an imaginative process and an analytical lens is to evoke something very powerful from family photographs and home video. “My desire to write on Photography, correspond[s] to a discomfort I had always suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical” (Barthes, 1981: 8). Zimmerman, an early proponent of the sociological import of home video, states “the theoretical and practical problematics of home movies as artefacts that require mining, excavation, exhumation,

reprocessing, and reconsideration. They mobilize these images into dialogical relationship with history, moving them out of the realm of inert evidence into a more dynamic relationship to provide historical explanation” (2008: 5). It is this very contradiction and ambiguity around the performative nature and banal recording of the autobiographical memory and the postmemory contained in family photographs and home video that makes them so rich for mining. Mining, for example, the way in which things documented during the act of family photography are about choices, what was deemed important and necessary to record and project and what was deemed better to keep outside the frame – this is the social-domestic construct of the family photograph. Furthermore, part of this mining for meaning also involves sitting back and soaking in the warm glow of memory – to look at a photograph and just feel: “the photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: ‘Technique,’ ‘Reality,’ ‘Reportage,’ ‘Art,’ etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness” (Barthes, 1981; 55).

This pang that the *punctum* induces pulls me towards a discussion of melancholia, and while I am, to an extent, relying on Freud’s well-known 1917 *Mourning and melancholia*, the clinical implications of melancholia are not my primary concern, but rather the artistic ones. Freud speaks clinically, but his words, and indeed melancholia itself, lead the discussion to one of imagination and of rumination. Freud’s writings offer the distinction between mourning and melancholia, that while they are both born out of the loss of a love object, in melancholia:

there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted) ... This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious (Freud, 1917: 245).

Lives in sync



Figure 2: Alex and Nikki (1982) Harare, Zimbabwe

I believe that a large degree of the melancholy I feel when looking at my own family footage is linked to my relationship with my brother. Freud states that “the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love” (1917: 245), and in my case, when looking at these photographs, I am urged to engage with the loss of the intimate childhood relationship with my twin. The family photographs paints a picture of two children as a single unit: posed pictures of the twins dressed in matching outfits, blowing out candles on birthday cakes, reaching the same milestone years, attending the first day of school, even sitting together on the toilet – every step seemingly happily in union. There is an overwhelming sense of ‘the twins’ in the footage, of my brother Alex and I as an inseparable unit. This was modelled in the pictures, but also reinforced in family folklore and has thus become, in a sense, one of my earliest and strongest postmemories. “Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced,

even evacuated, by those of a previous generation” (Hirsch, 2008: 107). When I look at these pictures, the idea that Alex and I are almost one being is so familiar and so inherent in me. The photographs tell me this, the family stories tell me this... even my heart tells me this. “The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture” (Sontag, 1977: 3). Indeed, this visual representation of us as twins was mimicking psychological processes happening internally within Alex and myself at the time.

I find the psychological notion of the “twin-breast” useful in my exploration of my relationship with my brother. “The breast is the infant’s first imaginary twin. The creation of this phantasy twin-breast provides the infant with the illusion of attaining the desired perfect state of mind. Thus, the experience of being understood without words is at the heart of the ubiquitous longing for a twin” (Lewin, 2006: 185). Although this “ubiquitous longing for a twin” may seem to indicate that being a twin can provide lifelong partnership and understanding, psychologist Vivienne Lewin has found that twin relationships may actually cause some developmental issues. In a twin relationship, “each twin may also perceive the other twin as the embodiment of the breast-twin” (Lewin, 2006: 185), and this creates a complicated experience of individuation.

On the one hand there are ‘special’ aspects of the relationship between twins that are the result of the unparalleled closeness and companionship of the twins. On the other hand, the more narcissistic elements of the twinship may result in the idealization of a twin relationship that seems to exemplify and embody an understanding without words. In the former, companionable type of relationships, the loss of the twin-breast is acknowledged, and the lost ideal object is mourned and relinquished (although never completely, hence our ubiquitous longing for perfect understanding). In the latter, *the ideal twin-breast becomes concretely identified with the other twin, and the recognition of the loss of perfect understanding is evaded* [my emphasis] (Lewin, 2006: 186).

This is where the twin relationship seems to mimic Freudian melancholia. While in the grip of melancholia, the melancholic subject is unable to let go of the lost object, in fact “the melancholic is so militant in his or her denials that the lost object is finally incorporated into the self, turned into the shelter of the ego, and preserved as a form of ghostly identification” (Eng, 2000: 1276). Eng explains that when an individual does not let go of their attachment to the lost object, they then become haunted by it instead. In twins the process seems to be the same (2000: 1276). “The internalization of the twin as a primary object leads to a lack of an adequately developed individual ‘skin’ between the twins and a confusion of identity between them. It is as if the emotional ‘skin’ forms around the twin pair rather than within the individual” (Lewin, 2006: 11). In a similar way I am unable to let go of my twin and individuate, and thus I incorporate Alex into myself (my ego) through the shared “emotional skin”. I have absorbed Alex into me and so my “self becomes so identified with the incorporated object that all sense of a boundary between self and object, and of a separate identity, is denied – a feature commonly observed in twins” (Lewin, 2006: 15). Lewin emphasises this noting “the anxiety that is associated with the awareness of separateness and an experience of dependence on the object is sidestepped” (2006: 15). I was able to continue my life with the notion that I have the perfect understanding of my twin, that I am not alone in this world – and if I ever needed evidence I just had to ask my mother or page through a family photo album. However, when looking at this footage now, doing Kuhn’s memory work and mining the footage for Hirsch’s unconscious optics, it becomes clear that things are no longer the same. Alex and I can no longer easily be photographed together because he lives on another continent, and I begin to see the relationship is not quite as I imagined it to be.

My film, *Fraternal*, looks at the moment of my brother’s moving overseas as the catalyst for these melancholic feelings. I know whom I have lost in my brother’s departure for Germany, but I have not quite established what this loss means inside me. In many ways I have used my brother as a safety net, never having to confront the loss of the Freudian “perfect breast”. And thus I

have never mourned the object loss in the normal way, but have been stuck in a state of melancholia.

This individuation and split in our close childhood relationship must have happened over time, but it would seem that as we grew up and apart I internalized him as a love object in order to ignore this reality and to stay connected with him even as he became the lost object. “The turning of the lost object into the ego not only marks a turning away from the external world of the social to the internal world of the psyche, it also simultaneously transforms all possible reproaches against the loved object into reproaches against the self” (Eng, 2000: 1276). Freud argues that the “substitution of identification for object-love is an important mechanism in the narcissistic affections” (in Radden, 2002: 288), and thus it is in the very mechanics of melancholia that narcissism operates. If my brother is my love object, I cannibalize him, internalize him, drawing him into my ego to forgo having to let go completely. Lewin describes this same narcissistic tendency as potentially peculiar to the twin relationship; “the seeking of other as self, and of self in the other. The idealization of sameness obliterates difference and the value of difference, and denies the need for an individual sense of self” (Lewin, 2006: 176). I can no longer see the difference between my brother and myself – he is so intrinsically linked to my sense of self that I can only see myself.

Wrapped up in this is the assumption that my relationship with my brother would never change; the relationship with my brother is so dear to me and so unconsciously true that I had never anticipated it could (or would) even be lost. In twin psychology these feelings are well documented: “the twins feel themselves to be inseparably bound to each other and feel that their psychic wholeness would be damaged or destroyed by separateness” (Lewin, 2006: 182). This sense of closeness is because “the twin relationship is a primary relationship, on a par with the parental relationships in terms of its developmental importance” (Lewin, 2006: 183). In looking at this footage I am confronted by the reality that this picture of two inseparable twins is no longer the reality – I even begin to question if it was ever a reality – and thus I find myself slipping into a melancholic state. As Lewin notes, “the closeness of

communication between twins resonates with us for a reason that is central to our idealization of twins – that is, a longing for perfect understanding as is perceived to happen between twins” (2006: 184). My parents, I think, bought into this “idealization of twins” and helped to promulgate this notion of me and Alex as perfect reflections of each other and as deeply connected companions who would never be apart.

Now, with Alex far removed from me and through the interviews I conducted around our childhood footage, I see this perfect understanding between us was a fantasy, and I feel cheated and betrayed. For a twin, this “awareness of physical separateness and the existence of an external world are experienced as catastrophic” (Lewin, 2006: 12). We are no longer that visual unit that so simply displays itself in the family photographs and home video; it makes me sad in the murky waters of my heart, or in Freud’s words “[I know] *whom* [I have] lost but not *what* [I have] lost in [me]” (1917: 245).

In some ways I am mad at my brother for abandoning me in his move away from me, from South Africa to Germany, when in reality the individuation probably happened long before and this moment provides, rather, a convenient symbolic abandonment in which to seat my feelings of betrayal. “Melancholia, from the psychoanalytic perspective, is one’s experience of abandonment – the belief that the loved object has betrayed one” (Ross, 2006: 22). In the film, as my brother steps onto the train that will take him to the airport, he tells me that he does not define himself as a twin, and in the dual act of leaving and articulating that he does not define himself in the same way as I do – “I’m not a twin, I’m Alex” – he betrays one of the strongest parts of what I had thought was *our* shared life’s narrative, he has renounced the core of what I thought was *our* being. By leaving, he urges me to the realisation that I have constructed an identity for myself that includes him in a way that is not true for him, and may actually not be healthy for me. In that realisation I also harbour anger for my mother, who seems to have lied to me with her idealised notion of twin-unity that she projected through the family photographs and home video. I have myriad emotions and I cannot process them, exhibiting the “the love-hate ambivalence that underlies the Freudian

understanding of melancholia” (Ross, 2006: 22). This love-hate ambivalence comes from my feelings of being abandoned by my twin brother, and from feeling like my mother has set me up to feel this loss by helping to construct a life narrative that proved to be unsustainable or, worse, was never real but always constructed – I love both of these people, but they betrayed me. Mostly, I feel sad and alone, “in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (Freud, 1917: 246). I am alone and I berate myself for not having nurtured my relationship with my brother, for having let it slip away. For Freud, this is the behaviour of a melancholiac: “the patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised” (in Radden, 2002: 285).

In Freud’s 1917 *Mourning and melancholia*, he distinctly sets out melancholia as pathological behaviour; however, in his 1923 paper *The ego and the id*, Freud admits that he did not:

appreciate the full significance of the [melancholic] process and did not know how common and typical it is,’ and he concludes that identification with lost objects has ‘a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its ‘character’ (in Eng, 2000: 1277).

So these feelings of loss, and identification with the lost object to evade pain, are not useless emotions and processes; in fact, they make us who we are. The feeling of loss is vitally important to me because it is part of who I am – I lost, therefore I built a construct of who I think I am. In his revised theorising of mourning and melancholia, Freud argued that it is this very identification, this very cannibalisation of the lost object, which seems to be the most worthwhile. “Identification thus becomes the condition for constituting the self, giving rise to a psyche internally divided as ego, id, and superego. It is only by internalizing the lost other through the work of bereaved identification, Freud now claims, that one becomes a subject in the first place” (Clewell, 2004: 61). Therefore, it is only through internalising my relationship with my brother and thus somehow preserving it that I am able to see us as individuals, to understand where we came from and where we are now. These feelings of

melancholia may be on-going; I may always feel this way about my relationship with my brother – but it is okay. “And actually, this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish” (Freud, in Clewell, 2004: 62). I can hold onto my feelings, cherish the past by keeping it within me while feeling the sadness that comes from understanding that things have changed, or even perhaps realising that my underlying assumptions were in fact flawed all this time.

“In this respect, melancholia cannot be regarded as pathological. To the contrary, it must be thought of as entirely normative – as a constitutive psychic mechanism engendering subjectivity itself” (Eng, 2000: 1277). Indeed, the pleasure of reflection, such as returning to one’s memories, paging through a photograph album or looking at family photographs, can be a productive process. These moments of engaging with family photographs and home video are definitely of a melancholic nature; “infused with the ache of absence, photographs are portals to fugitive moments” (Bowring, 2009: 149). But it is only through this process of memory work, of embracing melancholy, of looking through family photographs and home video and engaging with the past, that I can come to any of these conclusions about (my) self and other (twin). In some ways, without my melancholic impulses I would be lost, and:

[t]o lose melancholy is to be deprived of one of the imagination’s refuges, the dark interior realm where thoughts fly. They fuel one another. Melancholy slows things, allows for percolation, and facilitates solitude and solace for imagination. Imagination makes space for melancholy, they work together to construct the allied experiences of nostalgia, reverie, sorrow, shadows (Bowring, 2009: 210).

Through the process of constructing the film *Fraternal*, I can revel in my melancholia; I can take pleasure in my ambivalent sad and happy feelings. I can, for a moment hark back to the days when melancholia was linked to artistic and creative temperament; “melancholy in the Aristotelian tradition is the world weariness of the sensitive and creative” (Radden, 2009: 62). These moments of melancholia allow me to feel in “sensitive and creative” ways, I cannot exactly express what I have lost, but I feel it. The urge to express what

I am feeling encourages me to think in different, less literal ways about what is lost. The lost love-object is elusive and “the melancholic subject attempts to recover a meaning that is impossible to recover in any symbolizable form” (Ross, 2006: 23). It is a creative process, a play between reality and imagination, the seen and the felt. And so:

the relationship between art and melancholia... can be truly understood only if one considers what should be called the phantasmic nature of the melancholic attempt to reach the truth of the Thing while fully aware that It is inaccessible and can only be, at best, reconstituted by imagination (a phantasmic imagination) through which the self seeks to escape the ascendancy of reality over it to retrieve the lost object (Ross, 2006: 34).

The mechanics of melancholia, narcissistic in their very nature, dictate that I want to share this lack of self-worth/ loss of ego – “insistent talking about himself and pleasure in the consequent exposure of himself predominates in the melancholiac” (Freud, in Radden, 2002: 286). It follows that I am making a film for public consumption in an act of melancholia surrounding the realisation that my childhood relationship with my brother has now changed. The film becomes the object of melancholic reflection; “an attachment to the lost other whose loss I cling to so as to keep that other close to me, in me” (Ross, 2006: 3). My film then becomes an act of melancholia, according to Julia Kristeva’s description of melancholy as “the most archaic expression of the unsymbolizable, unnamable narcissistic wound” (1989: 12).

Smile for the camera

In the preparation for the making of my film I looked for other films that had incorporated home video. Indeed home video has been used in many mainstream films, such as the Spielberg-produced *Super8* (2011), yet even with its pervasive nature in television and film, home video footage, or amateur family movies, seem to be “the bastard of liberal video rhetoric and an orphan of theory... frequently constructed by intellectuals and journalists as the abject ‘other’ against which favoured media practices are measured,

home video has yet to inspire serious and systematic analysis but instead is cast to the margins, denigrated and dismissed, misunderstood” (Moran, 2002: xiv). Yet when a film cuts to home video it stirs something in us that is very alluring. It seems to immediately connect us to a personal past. There is a kind of honesty encoded into home video that is intimate but also nonthreatening and somehow comforting. This sort of footage has become a kind of visual shorthand in many feature films to indicate the past, and especially childhood; the footage usually alludes to the now defunct Super 8mm format. The footage is rich in saturated colour, grainy and augmented by sync sound, indeed even when sound is absent there is the ever-present hum of the film projector (remaining even on the DVD conversions) which completes the atmosphere of the “olden day” analogue footage. The Super 8mm visual texture has become a signifier for nostalgia, and indeed digital footage is often treated with filters that mimic Super 8mm to add an ‘authentic’ feel in order to evoke a bygone era. What the footage features may not be spectacular in itself, usually it is quotidian family scenes, but “like most keepsakes specific to one particular household, home movies become imbued with sacred meaning” (Moran, 2002: 42).

The use of home video footage as a visual signifier of the past is maybe best illustrated in the memorable title sequence of the American sitcom *The Wonder Years* (1988). Joe Cocker’s “With a little help from my friends” (1969) scores the cut against shots of Middle America – there is a family afternoon barbeque, two brothers fighting, and a mom and a dad posing for the camera, all images of a normal family ‘just like us’. The vignettes featured are familiar to most families. The footage shows two adolescent brothers in a harmless sibling punch-up, as they notice they are being filmed, they stop and hug each other, performing for the camera. At the end of the title sequence the family gathers in front of their home and poses next to their post box. These are recognisable scenes, scenes that have in some shape or form been played out in our own families. The footage in *The Wonder Years* is of course constructed – scripted, set dressed and staged – but it is operating within the recognisable motifs of home video. The camera is shaky and handheld – seemingly under the direction of an amateur. It exhibits point of view as the

'camera man' walks around pointing the camera right at the faces of the characters and they respond with direct address to the camera. As the final signifier there is, of course, the visual grade – the scratches on the film, the hair on the lens – to indicate to the audience this is indeed Super 8mm home video footage; it authenticates the medium. The analogue technology rouses in us thoughts of our own childhoods, and takes us back to a time when home video footage was precious, rare and revered – not merely a digital clip on a cellphone. With the title sequence, *The Wonder Years* sets up the idea of a past era. The show premiered in 1988 but was set in 1968. It is voiceover-driven through the reflections of the main character, Kevin Arnold, who leads the audience through his adolescence and his nostalgia towards “the wonder years”.

Each small story told in the show is composed of the subjective memories, and at times mis-memories, of twelve-year-old Kevin. My film is split into three parts, and the first segment mimics this use of home video as a marker of a golden childhood. My first segment shows baby steps, toddlers playing in the sun, family holidays – it exhibits the same kind of 'universal' home video footage we can all relate to. Towards the end of this segment my film starts to expose the broader political narrative – the story of my family in political exile in Zimbabwe. In the same way, although *The Wonder Years* purports to be about a little boy and his life, it actually tells a much broader story.

Both my film and *The Wonder Years* display the crossover between the personal and the political. In *The Wonder Years* we follow Kevin Arnold's everyday life, but in doing so the narrative extends to broader political, social and cultural moments of 1960s America. In the pilot episode, after the title sequence Kevin's voiceover starts:

1968, I was twelve years old. A lot happened that year. Dennis McLain won 31 games, The Mod Squad hit the air, and I graduated from Hillcrest Elementary and entered junior high school...but we'll get to that. There's no pretty way to put this: I grew up in the suburbs. I guess most people think of the suburbs as a place with all the disadvantages of the city, and none of the advantages of the country, and vice versa.

But, in a way, those really were the wonder years for us there in the suburbs. It was kind of a golden age for kids (*The Wonder Years*, 1988).

The footage shown during the voiceover is newsreel footage of the hippie movement, of Richard Nixon, of Martin Luther king, of the Vietnam War, of sporting events from that era with anonymous stock footage of the time, which moves seamlessly into Kevin Arnold running down his suburban street and we enter the world of the Arnold family, thus melding actuality into the sitcom. During the series we learn about Kevin's crush on his neighbour Winnie, and about Kevin and his best friend Paul's quest to understand sex, but we also engage with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, with feminism, with war and counter-culture. Through a subjective personal story, a broader narrative is exposed. The show employs the tactic of peppering real historical events through the snippets of news on both the radio and the Black-and-white television.

I have also used snippets (audio-bytes) of my mother's news readings and from current affair radio talk shows to hint (contextualize) the broader historical backdrop. The radio snippets I have used are representational of more traditional archive – 'news bulletins' stating the facts of the day – however even these more traditional pieces of archive are the outtakes from my mother's reports to National Public Radio, the BBC etc. They are the personal archive of a journalist and thus unofficial sources of the official. While my film explores the socio-political context of my childhood, it is done very much from a personal perspective, offering intimate insights. Both my film and *The Wonder Years* anchor themselves in a personal story while exploring a larger context. Like any television show, *The Wonder Years* uses its title sequence to introduce the key cast members, while also establishing the concept of the show. What I find to be most masterful is how *The Wonder Years* manages to imbue the title sequence with meaning by using the footage in the pilot itself; six minutes into the pilot episode we are shown longer pieces of the home video footage featured in the title sequence. Kevin's voiceover tells us "and that's pretty much the way that summer went. I

guess it was my last summer of pure unadulterated childhood”. After these words it cuts to moments that expose the magic of that summer, a summer like one we can all remember, when we were still children and being a family felt easy.

The footage features longer moments of Kevin and his brother punching each other, including another shot where they are wearing different clothes, indicating this behaviour as something that happened all summer long. One can almost hear Kevin’s mother lamenting, “you and your brother were always fighting”, which gives us a sense of the cyclic and compound nature of memory – it is made up of a series of events, and sometimes the most powerful ones are those that are repeated. There is even the patriarchal wag of a finger in front of the screen at the two brothers fighting. This presumably belongs to the grumpy Mr Arnold, the father figure we have now had a chance to meet. Interestingly, this sequence looks different to the rest of the show as it has the same colour grade as the title sequence – the imposed grain and scratches and the oversaturation signifying the past. It is as if, for a moment, we are allowed a double serving of sentimentality.

Through the title sequence there is an interpellation with the character and audience: as the audience we have been invited to create the memory of that summer *with* Kevin, and then we are able to relive it each time a new episode starts as it displays itself crystallised into the title sequence. Each time the show begins we are reminded of that golden summer. The final shot of the longer home video sequence features Kevin and his best friend Paul walking up the street together in the comfort and simplicity of a twelve year old friendship; the camera then settles on a car on bricks, which we have just learned belongs to Winnie’s brother. He is the 19 year-old cool kid of the block and he is about to go to Vietnam. What we do not know is that he will die there. While *The Wonder Years* is a good example of home video footage operating to create this warm fuzzy sense of nostalgia, it also, as Barthes indicates, produces pangs of sadness. At the end of the first episode when Winnie’s brother is killed in Vietnam there is a very strong undercurrent of sorrow. It is this pre-emptive shot of Winnie’s brother’s car on bricks that hints

at how home video can also be sad, foreboding and eerie. Winnie's brother died before he could get the car up and running, and now it will stay on bricks forever. When viewing the title sequence for the first time the audience would not know that Winnie's brother would soon die, and so may not have recognised that shot as sad, but when watching the title sequence again after the first episode the footage becomes tinged with a nuanced mood. This is reminiscent of Kuhn's memory work, where through the revisiting and mining of footage you can reach new insights.

My film is crafted mainly from my family's photographic archive; however, during this process I completely repurposed the material for my own intent. The original intent or purpose of the footage was part of my mother's recording of her family 'for posterity'; she wanted to capture her new family in order share her experiences with her relatives abroad, most specifically, her parents. In essence the footage was directed by my mother, and, to a lesser degree, my father. Together they shot the footage, composed the shots and directed the subjects – mostly my brother and me. As most parents do, my mother modelled us before the screen; she filmed important events and milestones, she took out the camera on sunny days and left it in the cupboard on overcast ones, and so the footage contains many happy memories. As Kuhn explains, "family photographs have considerable cultural significance, both as repositories of memory and as occasions for performances of memory" (2007: 284). Although I am dependent on the 'found footage' of my parents' captured moments of my life to construct a visual story, in the making of my film I am able to re-position the footage; I curate and re-compile it to construct the story of my family according to me. It is in my construction of a film that the footage finds new meanings.

Let me label the footage in its original intent – that of my mother and father – as ethnographic. They were observing and documenting their newborn twins, my brother and myself. And so let me label my re-purposing of the footage as "autoethnographic", as described by Catherine Russell in *Experimental Ethnography* (1999). In chapter 10, Russell (1999) notes that Mary Louise Pratt introduced the term autoethnography as something oppositional to

ethnography: “if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations”. Thus, if my parents were recording with an ethnographic impulse, I am making my film from an autoethnographic one. I am moving from the position of a passive subject in my parents’ recording of my youth, and fashioning myself into the active mediating object of the film. I return to the evocative words of Sontag, “to photograph is to appropriate the thing being photographed... It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore like power” (1977: 4). In the moments of the photographing of my childhood this appropriation lay in the hands of my parents, who turned my brother and me into the currency of the happy family. As my mother admits in the interviews I conducted as part of the film, she was attempting to put on display the success and perseverance of her family, living far away in a newly independent African country serving as the frontline state for another war. She used the taking of photographs and posing of pictures to create images that affirmed the story she wanted to tell. In this way, my mother appropriated my childhood to construct a particular narrative. Now I take these images back, I re-appropriate them as mine; first on an intimate and personal level – this is my life story, this is where ‘I came from’: this is the folklore of me – and second, and more formally, on a creative level for the film.

There is a duality, almost mimicry in this; in order to re-appropriate the images through an autoethnographic process, I imitate the ethnographic behaviour of my mother. For *Fraternal* I have recorded sequences where I perform the ritual of home video, I re-enact certain sequences from existing home video and stage similar situations for home video occasions using a cheap and simple amateur camera. The relationship between my mother’s footage and my own is very intimate and connected, almost one of twins. I am performing what Michael Renov defines as “domestic ethnography”, where “the documentation [is] of family members or, less literally, of people with whom the maker has maintained long-standing everyday relations and has thus achieved a level of casual intimacy” (2004: 218). He speaks of a

“consanguinity and co(i)mplication” (2004: 218) at the core of this kind of documentation, stating that “[f]or the domestic ethnographer, there is no fully outside position available” (Renov, 2004: 219). As I reclaim the footage for myself, I seem to also become my mother through my mimicry of her behaviour. I am at once myself in the footage (the little girl depicted in the ethnographic footage) and the filmmaker (the director of the sequences cut from the old footage, and the director of the creation of new additional footage). This relationship is not always easy to understand, as Bruzzi explains, referring to the onscreen presence of ‘real’ characters in documentaries, such as Nick Broomfield who also performs himself on screen, “because it throws into sharp relief previously held notions of fixity of meaning and documentary ‘truth’” (2000: 208). Renov speaks of “domestic ethnography [offering] up the maker and her subject locked in a family embrace; indeed, as we have seen, subject/object positions are at times reversed” (2004: 229). In the same way that I was the object of my mother’s home video, I have now become the subject as I reclaim the footage as my own. In a cyclic manner, I have taken the filmmaking baton from her.

This complicated tripartite relationship between my mother, the footage and myself seems to indicate relations described by Hirsch in her theorising of postmemory “between an object, the creator of the object and a medium or mediator of that relationship” (Hirsch, 2012: 22). With the object, in this case, being the ethnographic footage, the creator of the object being my mother and the mediator of that relationship being myself. As Hirsch expounds these three, object, creator and mediator, all have their own separate but linked relationships with each other (2012: 22). By using the footage in the film in combination with new footage I aim to expose these interlinked relationships; how my life’s narrative was shaped by both the creator (my mother) and the object (the ethnographic footage), but how in my appropriation of the footage through the film of my “inventive version of the object”, I am able to tell my own story. Using memory work to cut through these postmemory relationships leads me to an ownership of my (auto)biography. As Mistry notes “8mm film or ‘home-movies’ firstly produce in themselves as a medium an

autobiographical quality owing to their provenance; the conditions of their production” (2010: 17).

In my mimicry I re-enact the footage, I restage certain events and ceremonies. In the making of my autoethnographic film I utilise the film language of home video in order to link it with the ethnographic footage. This is purposeful and indeed I do it to blatantly engender the new footage with a sense of frankness and give it an aesthetic relation to the genuine home video footage.

“Amateurism is encoded in a visual style which operates in association with the first person point of view to position a work as a self-produced, less manufactured, more truthful expression of the autobiographical impulse” (Beattie, 2004: 120). This performance is my attempt to complicate the relationship between the ‘original’ footage and my staged footage. Bruzzi terms the performative documentary “a mode, which emphasizes – and indeed constructs a film around – the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers” (2000: 185). When I restage certain events – mimicking fairground visits, trampoline jumping, beach outings and the repetitive making of a gingerbread house – my aim is to imply the cyclic nature of memory, that a life narrative is constructed through repeated events. The visual repeats show conceptual repetition while the technical changes visible in my restaging in different formats reveal shifts in grain and texture, displaying the passage of time in the shift from analogue to digital.

The experience of my close relationship with my brother comes in part from my mother’s modelling of us as twins in the footage, but is also actively highlighted through my repetition of her behaviour in this mimicry. I now actively perform ‘the twins’ for the autoethnography. “The performative element within the framework of non-fiction is thereby an alienating, distancing device, not one which actively promotes identification and a straightforward response to a film’s content” (Bruzzi, 2000: 186). This style of mixing past and present, as Bruzzi notes, requires work to enter into this subjective dream-like memory world where old and new footage flow and it becomes difficult to discern which is my mother’s posturing and which is mine.

Bruzzi's statement that "reality does exist and that it can be represented without such a representation either invalidating or having to be synonymous with the reality that preceded it" (2000: 3) seems to also extend to autobiographical memory. The footage – the original ethnographic footage, the repurposed ethnographic footage and the newly shot footage – work together to enhance the story, each adding its own perspective to the narrative. "The point to stress is that for this mode of ethnography [domestic], the desire for the other is, at every moment, embroiled with the question of self-knowledge; it is the all too familiar rather than the exotic that holds sway" (Renov, 2004: 219). I furnish the film with a subjectivity that could only have been gained from my lived experience. This kind of subjectivity or interior knowledge is the expectation of an autobiography – an expectation that the audience will learn inner thoughts that they could not know in any other way – "documentaries are a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance" (Bruzzi, 2000: 186). Bruzzi argues "a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality" (2000: 186).

Kuhn (2010: 303) also puts forward an argument for the use of a cinematic approach in memory work, as she expands:

with its affinity to cinematic expression, as a performance of memory the memory text (as opposed to autobiography or the autobiographical) appears to be capable of feeding readily into collective forms of consciousness, and those of engaging social memory. This is precisely because of the very absence of an identifiable singular 'I'; an 'I' that combines author and protagonist. This, in conjunction with the memory text's characteristic vignettish, imagistic narration, shifts of standpoint and indefinite temporality, aligns it with a form of engagement characterized by a sensation of *recognition* on the viewer's part.

The 'I' in my film is hard to identify – the blending of the identity my brother and I provides one conflation, but also the filming and filmmaking of my parents during my childhood and myself in this creative process all serve to

create 'collective forms of consciousness'. Indeed, as Hirsch mentions, the very form of cinematic expression mimics that of memory; the "vignettish, imagistic narration, shifts of standpoint and indefinite temporality" of memory are mirrored back in my film through the snippets of various home video moments pieced together.

How we talk about our lives is often a dance between creative license, hard fact and personal reflection; it is this move away from strict sticking to facts that gives autoethnography its worth. As Russell (1999) notes, "ethnic autobiography is an 'art for memory' that serves as protection against the homogenizing tendencies of modern industrial culture". In some ways my documentary is taking a generic story (the liberation struggle of South Africa) told many times on our local broadcaster and channels, and in international documentaries and fiction films – such as *Born into Struggle* (Rehad Desai, 2004), *The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife* (Nick Broomfield, 1991), *Mapantsula*, (Oliver Schmitz, 1989), *Catch a Fire* (Phillip Noyce, 2006), *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Darrel James Roodt, 1995), *Drum* (Zola Maseko, 2004) and *Invictus* (Clint Eastwood, 2009) – and retelling it. This time I have used the public backdrop of apartheid to reveal a private narrative about the interaction between two siblings. By constructing this private narrative the film removes the "homogenizing tendencies of the modern industrial era" – I show Nelson Mandela's release, but in a personal manner; his release meant political change and being unlocked from limbo as my family left their political exile and returned to South Africa. Politically, it was the beginning of the Golden age – the age of the rainbow nation. This jubilation, however, also marked the beginning of my brother and me separating as siblings, as twins. As Kuhn (2007: 283) lays bare:

In work on cultural memory, the conjectural method involves taking as a starting point instances or cases – expressions of memory of some sort – and then working outwards from them, treating what can be observed in the instances at hand as evidence pointing towards broader issues and propositions about the nature and the workings of cultural memory. This kind of inquiry can be productively conducted with singular instances (a life story, a film or a photograph, for

example) and with several or numerous cases; with the researcher's personal memory material or with materials gathered by, with or from others.

I have chosen to make a film about the "singular instance" of the relationship between my brother and myself, and through this subjective and autobiographical treatment based on personal memory, the film points "towards broader issues and propositions about the nature and the workings of cultural memory" (Kuhn, 2007: 283). Autoethnography holds at its very core the understanding that the subjective experience gives insight into broader issues.

Kuhn (1995: 4) argues that memory work also has this potential to merge the public and private spheres:

As far as memory...is concerned, private and public turned out in practice less readily separable than conventional wisdom would have us believe...[I]f the memories are one individual's, their associations extend beyond the personal. They spread into an extended network of meanings that bring together the personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, social and the historical. Memory work makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and 'personal memory'.

Indeed, autobiographies evoke history and thus, through the personal account of my relationship with my brother, many greater public and political narratives are evoked: the bigger political history of exiles in Zimbabwe, the history of an emerging new democracy in South Africa, and a cultural history looking at the development of technology (specifically photography and home video) and its impact on people's lives. The latter is also texturally felt with the shifting of the media used in the act of visual story telling – from Hi8 to Super 8mm to HD. Indeed Russell's definition of autoethnography also speaks to this melding of personal and political: "autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes" (1999). And as Zimmerman notes when autobiography is made up of personal archive the

relationship between the personal and political becomes yet more striking as home video traverses the complex terrain of the intimacies and universalities of collective memory (2008: 19).

In Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003) the director uses intimate authorship by crafting his film from hours and hours of the Friedman's home video footage to tell a very real horror story about the witch-hunt for paedophiles in the US. The film explores the criminal case against an all-American father who is arrested on allegations of paedophilia, the truth of which the audience never quite learns. The family had a wealth of home video footage shot during the children's upbringing and during the father's trial; the film uses this footage to weave the story. However, Jarecki blends this typical home video footage with newsreel footage and interviews. There are times when the film returns to certain sequences of home video footage after specific revelations; at the time that the footage was shot, there had been no intention of revealing anything, yet when the audience has more information about the allegations against the father, the footage is placed under new scrutiny as the audience looks for particular clues about his sexuality.

In *Capturing the Friedmans* the home video footage at first glance seems very different to the kind of home video we are accustomed to where:

the goal... is to chronicle the ritualized leisure activities most closely associated with the most widely sanctioned version of the American dream-weddings, birthdays, vacations, holiday gatherings, etc. ('It's a Kodak moment'). There is clear emphasis here on positive celebrations of the domestic community, and a tacit prohibition on depictions of the traumas and tragedies that are also a part of family life (Fore, 1993).

In contrast, during *Capturing the Friedmans* the oldest son, David, turns the camera on in the middle of a huge family crisis when his father has been arrested. David orchestrates or stages the recording of home video, which includes the family arguments and lays bare the fact that his father has been accused of paedophilia, as well as openly chastising his mother for not being more supportive. It is honest, awkward and seems to be a very strange form of home video recording. "David's video acts effectively disturb the various

parts of the familial unit, factionalizing the group and, perhaps as a consequence, the audience as well . . . Aggressive, confrontational, and propagandistic at the microscopic level, David's videography teases out familial chaos in search of an affirmation of his own beliefs" (Orgeron, M. & Orgeron, D., 2007: 53). But, upon further inspection David is actually fulfilling the tropes of standard home video in that he is "in search of an affirmation of his own beliefs". He wants to portray his father as innocent, as a loving dad, he wants to use the video to counter the unnerving representation of his family in the media, and so he reclaims the camera and the representation of his family in a way that gives him control. He is trying to use the home video to show his father as innocent, as his father – not as the faceless monster shown in the media. In home video family members come together to make sense of themselves by using visual evidence to promote the idea of their happy family, and although the Friedmans' circumstance is different, David is doing exactly this. This is the same impulse shown by my mother in my film that uses family footage, what she describes as her 'Good News Show', where she used the home video she shot to counter the perception her parents might garner from what was represented in the media that South Africa was a warzone and Zimbabwe an unstable new African state. However, it is the ease of access and affordability of digital home video, in contrast to expensive home movies, that affords David Friedman's investigation in less than perfect circumstances of family life – now both the good and the more complex can be recorded, because it is so much easier to record everything, "thereby challenging the domestic idealization prevalent in the representational tropes of the prevideo age" (Orgeron, M. & Orgeron, D., 2007: 50).

To reiterate, traditionally, most family footage favours the positive, putting its best foot forward, trying to display only the good version of itself and hiding the negative aspects of family dynamics. In the case of *Capturing the Friedmans*, it seems that the family footage was shot in order to impose a sense of normality on an abnormal situation, to continue the rituals and codes of recording the family's activities in resistance to the legal drama that was tearing the family apart. This staging or orchestrating of home video scenarios

is also a tactic I have used, and the impulse to do this comes from a strangely similar place. Although my family was not falling apart because of a legal battle, I am grappling with my brother leaving the country – something that seems to indicate the end of our relationship as I know it. I am clutching at this relationship and so I return to its strongest moments – the scenes I see in the home video of our childhood. In the same way the Friedman children continued to go through the motions of home video recording to maintain a sense of family, I am also re-enacting the golden years of my family because I do not want to leave them behind. I am replaying the past in order to search for clues, for affirmation of the relationship between my brother and myself. I treat the footage very lovingly and tenderly, in a manner reminiscent of the emotion I feel for my brother.

Filmmaker Jonathan Caouette in his documentary *Tarnation* (2003) treats home video footage very differently. *Tarnation* is a blend of home video and pop culture sampling. Although Caouette speaks lovingly about his mother, the way in which he portrays her is fraught with other emotions, and watching it I began to mistrust the alleged home video footage. The film opens with Caouette in tears and vomiting over the news of his mother's lithium overdose, seemingly to indicate his intense emotional reaction to her precarious mental and physical state. While watching it, however, questions about the authenticity of the footage come to mind – who is filming this footage, and how were they there during these seemingly private moments? It seems to be staged and breaks the contract of genuine home video. Later in the film there is a protracted sequence in which Caouette's mother dances and laughs coquettishly with a Halloween pumpkin. She seems pathetically insane and it raises the question of why he is exposing his mother like this. The film clearly documents Caouette's mother's bipolar sickness, so she could not have given informed consent for her image to be used, and certainly most people would have objected to being presented in the manner that she is. At worst it feels like exploitation and at best it breaks the contract of home video. While David Friedman seemed to be exposing the darker sides of his family's life, it becomes apparent he is doing so in a desperate bid to support his father. Caouette, in contrast, comes across as sensational and even cruel.

Although I have probed the ritual surrounding home video and explored the intimate nature of my relationship with my brother, I have tried to not break the familial contract by presenting them in a way that compromises them or the spirit in which the images were created. I have maintained the family contract, and I have exposed our differences while still honouring each of our characters, allowing them agency and ownership over their views. Caouette seems to use his mother to further drive the surreal explosion he has put together about himself. She is treated in much the same way as the pop culture sampling is. Home video can be employed in film in very different ways, provoking very different responses. I watched as many films that used home video as possible to read my response to the distinct uses of the footage. Caouette's use of his footage jarred with me, and while Jarecki's film engaged me, I found that I felt a different connection with my footage and my story. I felt loyalty to my home video footage such that I wanted to honour its provenance and the people within it. I wanted to play the footage out in a way that urges the audience to share my emotional response to the footage.

The personal is political



Figure 3: Alex and Nikki (1986) Harare, Zimbabwe

Visual artists such as Su Friedrich and Penny Siopis have also used home video footage in interesting ways in their work. In both Friedrich's *Sink or*

Swim (1990), and Penny Siopis's *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), the filmmakers employ home video in an imaginative and illustrative manner. They have both anchored their films with a voiceover (in Siopis's case the voiceover is in the form of text on screen) that tells the story while anonymous found footage illustrates it. The visuals may not directly relate to the narrative, but tangentially and artistically expand or augment what is being said. *The Wonder Years*, as I discussed earlier, uses home video footage that has an indexical and very literal relationship with the voiceover and story, in the case of Siopis and Friedrich the relationship is a more poetic.

In Siopis's, *My Lovely Day* (1997), she has pieced together old home movies shot by her mother creating an autobiographical study on immigration; the personal is stimulated by the political. Thus, in this film the home video is directly related to the story, and like *The Wonder Years* has an indexical relationship to the narrative. The footage from 1950s and 1960s South Africa is overlaid with text. This text or narration appears to be the oral history of Siopis's maternal grandmother: "You love my stories. You beg me 'tell us granny about the island'" the voice begins. This voice tells stories of her travels from Europe to Africa, and the dislocation that is felt from that migration. As Coombs (2003: 274) describes:

Siopis creates a historicized version of her grandmothers 'voice', and it is this 'voice' that narrates the film; it is a narrative recreated through the imperfect and partial fragments of Penny's childhood recollections of her grandmother, a fiction made up of different times and places, imagined and experienced, in the fickle way that only memory produces.

The grandmother's reflections seem to move from the past to the present. Her words have a very personal and ruminative quality. Her anecdotes are relayed in snippets of sentences; often things seem incongruous, as if some details have been left out. "The film feeds into the conceptual notion of memory: as fragile collection of elisions, erasures and continued (re)interpretations across time that is reflected on" (Mistry, 2010: 15). The visuals and the narration are also not always directly related; sometimes narration follows visuals and other times the relationship is broader and less literally linked.

The character seems somewhat bitter about the rootlessness that comes from being foreign – the film is essentially “an exploration of traumatic displacement” (Coombs, 2003: 274). The grandmother often seems to speak directly to her grandchild (filmmaker and artist Siopis): “you play as if nothing is happening around you”. It is during these times of direct address that the visuals are most closely related and images of what appears to be Siopis as a young girl are featured as she dances in a leotard “as if nothing is happening around” her. Siopis uses her personal archive to tell the story of another person – her grandmother.

In Siopis’s scenes of childhood there are also two moods at play – young carefree children and the undercurrent of a broader context, her grandmother’s feeling of dislocation and lack of belonging. Both my film and Siopis’s film simultaneously explore happiness and sadness. In mine the sadness is the threat of the changing of my relationship with my brother and the displacement of being in exile in an underground struggle contrasted with the heyday of my relationship with my brother. In Siopis’s film it is the almost bitter commentary of the grandmother’s feelings of displacement due to immigration, while a child dances carefree and with a perfect sense of belonging.

Both films explore intensely personal stories, but through these stories they also speak to the broader context. The footage is simultaneously markedly personal and readily identifiable. There is a sense of the universal in childhood home video, something we can all relate to over and above the particularities featured. In *My Lovely Day* “much of the film moves between the registers of public and private. Scenes of public life, represented through larger scale, more ritualized (possible national) spectacles ... are juxtaposed with more intimate familial domestic scene” (Coombs, 2003: 276). In my own work I utilise my mother’s journalistic voice to provide the links to the public story: I have included sound bites of her international radio reports on the political situation in South Africa during the early 1980s while my brother and I play unaware, part of a happy white middle class family. I also weave audio

interviews with my family into the home video to provide additional political background – my grandmother whispers “I knew you were involved” and my parents relay details of bombs scares and assassinations. During that time my brother and I were protected from knowledge of those threats. In a similar way Siopis seems unaffected by her Greek roots, while her grandmother struggles with their burden. Retrospectively Siopis and I expose the concurrent modes of comfort and discomfort that were at play during our respective childhoods unbeknownst to us. “The effect is to assert an unspecified connectedness between the everyday familial and the grand narrative of public government” (Coombs, 2003: 276). Our films aim to expose a shared public history through personal anecdote; the minutiae of daily life that makes history come alive, breaking down the boundary between personal and public. While Siopis and I explore different political contexts, life as an immigrant and a childhood in exile, we are both consumed by “difficult loyalties, nostalgic longings, misplaced desires, and internalized prejudices” (Coombs, 2003: 274). Both Siopis and I utilise personal archives to tell our stories; “the meaning produced in the assemblage of these images is in the act of finding the Self thus producing a reflexivity and creating the space for the autobiographical whether it is through memory work, revisionist histories or through confession and/or testimony” (Mistry, 2010: 17).

The materiality of both our films is also important. In Siopis’s work the visible dust and markings draw attention to its history. The footage is analogue and thus old; it has also perhaps been uncared for – kept in a box somewhere and got dusty and scratched... The visual look of this old and flawed footage distinguishes it from the hyperrealism of “the movies”, linking it more closely to the fuzzy workings of memory itself. In the same way I have chosen to leave certain markers of the formats in my film; the slightly sped up sound of our voices, the crackle of film, the burnt-in date of Hi8 video. These markers help to transport the viewer into the time in question and evoke feelings of the past. The film also serves as a cultural history looking at the development of technology (specifically photography and home video) and its impact on people’s lives. The changes in technology is felt texturally with the shifting of mediums used in the visual story telling – from Super 8mm to Hi8 to HD. “In

the age of digital technologies as well, the medium of 8mm is thus rarified and produces in its wake the desire to re-read the mechanical reproduction of the past as an artifact imbued now with its own aura” (Mistry, 2010: 18).

In Siopis’s work, *Obscure White Messenger*, she uses an array of anonymous 8mm home video to tell the story of Demitrios Tsafendas, the disturbed Greek/coloured man who stabbed to death the apartheid South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd four times in full view of parliament in 1966. Once again she uses text on screen – this time the text is taken from the media and official sources to make a kind of testimony from Tsafendas himself. The visuals are a series of unrelated but evocative images. For example during one scene she focuses on an octopus dancing in its aquatic tank. The footage shows a very beautiful but unsettling creature, there are tones of evil in its movement, while simultaneously it is captivating to watch. This seems to be illustrative of Tsafendas’s character by the end of the film where the audience knows he is a murderer, but also a mistreated man. He also has shades of both dark and light, making him at once alluring and repellent. Siopis, in this film, is continuing her theme of “an exploration of traumatic displacement” (Coombs, 2003: 274). Tsafendas states “I am a man without a country” and indeed he seems to have the same searching questions as *My Lovely Day*. In a post-apartheid retelling of history, Siopis sketches Tsafendas as a vulnerable man, and re-frames his killing of Verwoerd as a politicised assassination. The film does not retell the grand narrative of the ‘madman’ that everyone is familiar with, but rather presents a nuanced tale of a struggle for identity and freedom within a difficult society. The apartheid government led the public to believe it was an unmotivated attack by a madman – a story better suited to upholding their racist political policies without any questioning. While the film serves to tell an oppositional narrative, it does retain an ambiguous questioning of his sanity, and indeed the infamous tapeworm that Tsafendas referenced as living inside him and which was used to indicate his madness is not elided.

So, in *My Lovely Day*, Siopis works from very specific images to tell a wider story. Her mother, Anna Siopis, “is the documenter [she was the creator of

these home movies] and Penny Siopis works to assemble and edit this archive, carefully constructing her version from the already existing fragments” (Mistry, 2010: 15). In the same way, I take the scraps of my life, of my childhood, as captured in home video by my parents, and I use them to create my own story. I piece together what I see in front of me in such a way that I am able to share my subjective experience of my life. Siopis’s process with *Obscure White Messenger* is different. In *Obscure White Messenger* she uses nameless, anonymously gathered footage to stand in and tell the story, a wider political story: the biography of an infamous man. No visual fragments of Tsafendas’s own life are used; rather, Siopis gathered the images from anonymous reels from around the world. The images are not indexical as they are in both my work and in Siopis’s *My Lovely Day*; rather, they are suggestive, much like the images in a collage – the green of a truck can serve as the grass, the captured dance of the octopus stands in for a troubled man. If *My Lovely Day* is using the personal as its thread, the weave of *Obscure White Messenger* is the public. However, both films use home video to explore the relationships between the real and the imagined, between fact and subjective experience, that exist in life stories, and both tell a broader story through personal histories. In some ways *My Lovely Day*, *Obscure White Messenger* and *Fraternal* are all telling the same story. These are all stories of South Africans displaced, misplaced – they explore the different struggles to claim a space in South Africa and the personal reasons for this.

Another film that spans both the personal and the political is the feature film *A World Apart* (Menges, 1988), written by Shawn Slovo. It is a feature film that has that ever-marketable cachet of being based on a true story; it is an autobiographical account of a brief period in Slovo’s childhood. Slovo is the daughter of anti-apartheid activists Ruth First and Joe Slovo and the film also crosses the personal/ political divide as it focuses on her twelfth year – the year her father left the country in political exile and her mother was imprisoned under apartheid’s 90-day detention law. Even though her mother and father bravely faced off against an oppressive regime, young Shawn (or rather her character Molly) harbours an underlying resentment against her parents, particularly her mother. Her parents are so committed to the struggle

that they are emotionally unavailable to her. The story told in the film is not the grand narrative of apartheid that we are used to, but one that focuses on a much smaller story: how one individual's life was affected by South African politics. Some may find the way that the politics becomes a kind of backdrop a cause for criticism, for example, it preferences the story of a privileged white girl, while the black characters are in supporting roles. However, in the time in which *A World Apart* was made, 1988, using the palatable story of a young white girl may have been a tactic to get a story of this kind told, and indeed the film was critically acclaimed. Now perhaps in contemporary times, these sorts of stories are less privileged, with most choosing to focus on previously unheard voices. Either way I would argue that this story is an important one, and while it may be a story of a privileged white girl during apartheid, that in itself makes it unusual. The film does not attempt to traverse all the issues inherent in a liberation struggle. It bypasses much of the usual grand political themes and focuses on a small, familial story: the coming of age of a young girl, and her relationship with her mother. In some ways my film functions in a similar way. My story focuses on the relationship of two siblings, boy-girl twins. The politics are important insofar as they set the scene of a family in exile, and create a family focused on documenting their daily lives and the twins' early childhood to send to family abroad, but it is my relationship with my brother that is the primary focus. Small stories are also important; indeed, history is made up of the lives, actions and experiences of individuals. These small stories, or particular circumstances, suggest nuances to the usual binaries that exist in the retelling of history, but are not often featured. The title itself illustrates this personal/ political dialogue. The "world apart" could be the white minority ruling over an oppressed black majority, but could also refer to Molly's existence in relation to her parents and her peers.

A World Apart gives us access to the politics of the time through a child's eyes – the young daughter of a freedom fighter, Molly sees pictures of the Sharpeville massacre after Spanish dancing class when she is dropped off at her mother's office. She hears snippets of her mother's work in phone calls, and learns of the need for secrecy as she walks in on her mom putting something into a hiding place. She hears about 90-day detention on radio,

and when she picks up the newspaper at the gate and looks at the front page. It is through this construct that the audience experiences the child's world (or the personal) in contrast to her parent's reality (or the political). The overwhelming themes of the film are, like Siopis's *My Lovely Day*, "difficult loyalties, nostalgic longings, misplaced desires, and internalized prejudices" (Coombs, 2003: 274). Molly feels alien when in assembly at school the students sing the apartheid era national anthem, because at home she has learned the words to the then struggle song (which later became South Africa's national anthem) *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*, from her domestic worker. Although she feels frustration at her parent's failings as caregivers, she has also become conscientised by them, and on some levels can no longer relate to her peers. However, a focus on the quotidian, and the normality of everyday life in the face of extraordinary circumstances, is the crux of this story. For example, during the celebration of the youngest daughter's birthday, just before she is about to blow out her candles, the security police arrive and raid the house. This forms the catharsis of the film as Molly protects her mother by stopping police officers from seeing a message hidden in a book. But this also leads to her confronting her mother's emotional distance and lack of interest in her own daughter's life. You can see the pain of a child lacking a set of nurturing parents while slowly coming to terms with the importance of her parent's political journey. Watching the film has a very strong impact as you follow a young girl's emotions, especially if the experience of watching the film is partnered with the knowledge of the political reality that extends beyond the narrative featured in the film: a parcel bomb will later kill Shawn Slovo's mother in Maputo in 1982. This personal story gives insight to a broad context: it affirms the right to personal filmmaking with its potential for powerful emotional impact.

While personal histories can speak specifically to the socio-political elements of the time, sometimes a complete elision or absence of the socio-political markers of a particular era can also speak to a particular mind-set. During the oppressive apartheid era in South Africa, artist Walter Battiss created the imaginary kingdom of Fook, including accompanying cartography, flora and fauna. He furnished the world with bureaucratic accompaniments such as

postage stamps, currency, passports, driver's licences and an alphabet based on Southern Arabic and San rock art. Battiss has explained his impulse to create Fook Island as an escape from conceptual art. My take on Battiss's Fook is that he may have also been trying to create a new world to live in, in order to provide relief from his current reality, which was, perhaps, not only a comment on conceptual art losing its meaning, but also on the restrictive landscape of apartheid. Battiss was engaging in a playful escape by breaking away from the reality of South Africa and creating an imagined multi-coloured world, one without race or censorship.

Battiss's Fook Island struck me because I think my mother was creating her own escape through the home video record she created of her twin children's childhood while in exile in Zimbabwe through the 'Good News Show'. She imagined a world where Alex and I *were* a single happy unit, where the sun was always shining and there was no threat of violence, no war against apartheid, a world where there was only her thriving new family. She was creating her own Fook Island for me and my brother to live in and recording it for my grandmother to see. It was as if she was saying "Forget the politics for now, they are not your concern – but look at these lovely twins". Through this she was creating a heightened sense of family in a place where our nuclear family was strained and dislocated from our extended family. "Smile for the camera", she directs us, "say 'Hi' to Granny" she coos. I embraced the idea of this idyllic world, and became a patriotic citizen of her Fook Island. I accepted her ideology that my childhood was perfect, that Alex and I were never alone and never wanted to be apart. In my work on *Fraternal* I have explored how this was an imagined reality; Alex and I now live apart, are apart and are indeed sometimes lonely. In my mother's Good News Show/Fook Island reality there were never any negative or scary parts to our childhood because my mother did not focus on that: things were left out and not shot. In some ways she did not share her lived reality with us, or with her parents overseas. My allegiance to this 'state of mind' makes it so hard to accept the reality that it may have been, in part, fantasy. My brother Alex and I are no longer that close, and perhaps we never were, given that the 'evidence' presented in the home video no longer seems to be the whole and only truth. Through my

mother's record of a shifted reality, where she took what she needed, and subverted and changed what she did not need, in order to reassure the judging and worried parents outside of Africa, she created a visual record of her Fook Island. Viewing the footage conjures up the forgotten, the beautiful, the new, the fragile beginnings – and, in the end, it provides a reassuring re-configuration of reality, one without the worrying, disturbing backdrop. In some ways my mother's simulation of our childhood has come to replace the real one in my mind.

While Battiss created magical multi-gendered, racially nondescript, playful, colourful animals as the creature inhabitants of his island, the creatures of my mother's Fook Island were my brother and I – twins filled with all the possibilities in the world. My mother's positioning of us consisted mostly of the satisfying duplication of her twins: two children, the same size, age and similar in appearance (not just siblings of different ages, but a unit that consisted of none of the hierarchy within the twosome of older and younger). We provided the perfect analogy for equality, democracy and socialism, we shared everything – a womb, birthdays and, she might argue, a sense of a collective mind. We were lucky, and perfect. Every image she captured of us featured us together – two children on a bench holding their pet kittens, two children playing with a hose pipe in the sun, two children on the first day of school in brand new uniforms and so on, each image re-affirming this twin bond. Thus the footage testifies to my mother's active construction of the representation of the relationship between my brother and myself – her imaginative island of consolation and comfort. It is no wonder that this is the strongest memory I have of my childhood: my brother and I living life happily in tandem, each augmented by the presence of the other. Of course, this memory does not come only from the home video footage, but it is certainly vindicated when I look back at the visual evidence. In a sense, this footage represents a Baudrillardian conception of simulation in the third order, the order he most associates with the postmodern era. In this conception of simulation we are confronted with simulation that precedes and determines the real – the division between reality and its representation breaks down so that only the simulation remains. "In the third [order], it plays at being an appearance – it is

of the order of sorcery” (Baudrillard, 1983: 12). Using Baudrillard’s conception of simulation, my mother’s representation of my childhood (and thus my relationship with my brother) through the home video becomes the reality of my childhood. Her “sorcery” constructed this golden beginning of closely entwined twin bliss that is my only, and thus my real, referent. The sunny golden early years of my brother and I together, hassle-free as if in some kind of child-like love story, are now a strong part of my memory and my reality, the Fook Island on which I grew up.

Act Two: Film analysis

The creative component of this research, my film *Fraternal*, is an autobiographical narrative pieced together with home video which I use as a prompt or impetus from which to return to the past, to try to recollect the feelings and emotions that were felt at the time the footage was shot and play them out against the present in a narrative film. “The temporal gap between the collection of images and the editing of them into [a film] many years later [renders] every image a memory, a trace or fragment of a time in a trajectory that reaches back” (Russell, 2009). The film is thus a rendering of a time – my childhood – that I shared with my twin brother. The audience is placed intimately in my familial space when watching the film; they are invited into the inner fold through the sharing of this home video. The home video does not feature grand historical events, but simple activities and daily life, and this focus on the quotidian or the banal serves to fight against the totalising effect of the grand narrative. “The grand narrative, whether masquerading under the name of modernization, the Enlightenment, Christianity, socialism, or whatever, determines the questions that research is expected to ask, the form of the main argumentation and the positioning of the research within the world of academic study” (Magnússon, 2006: 907). My film provides a counter narrative, a personal one.

In the film my brother and I talk about our different versions or experiences of our childhood. I have a firm understanding of the close bond between my brother and I, a belief that, I believe was engendered by my mother who also gave me the impression that this bond would never be broken. My brother’s experience was not the same; he felt the bond break early on and did not harbour sentimentality about being a twin in the same way that I did. There is no meter for accuracy in each of these experiences; they are both true. As David Pillemer notes in his study of memory, *Momentous events, vivid memories*:

according to Singer and Salovey (1993), ‘What is most intriguing to us about the self is that identity may be as determined by events we

believe happened to us as ones that did' (p. 157). The concern with the accuracy of memories, so prevalent in experimental cognitive psychology, gives way to an emphasis on the person's beliefs about what happened: psychic reality is as important as historical truth. Spence argued that the patient's created narrative account is 'truthful,' but that its truth value does not lie in its historical accuracy (Pillemer, 1998: 10).

My film aims to expose the plural experiences of the past by showing my truth offered as a subjective rendering of my childhood pitted against my twin brother's differing experience and interpretation of the same events.

I began making the film by simply wondering if my brother and I shared the same memories of our experiences of childhood. I had a huge collection of home video footage, or 'evidence', of our childhood, which was my starting point. I then conducted audio interviews with my family, and began to shoot new footage in home video style. I realised when looking at the home video that "it is impossible to know more than a tiny fragment of the story, that the sources preserve only a minute selection of the moments, and that if the compass is increased our possibilities of attaining an understanding of what happened decrease still further" (Magnússon, 2006: 907).

What I found was that my memory of my childhood differed from the footage that depicted it, and differed markedly from my brother's experience of it, and even from my parents' experiences of raising us. The home video footage provided one take on the story, the interviews shed light on another, and finally the filming of new footage brought further insights to the narrative. I found that personal memory is indeed a slippery thing, that "truth value does not lie in its historical accuracy" and "psychic reality is as important as historical truth" (Pillemer, 1998: 10). I came to understand my relationship with my twin from his perspective and not just my own, and I came to understand my parents' projections onto our relationship with each other, and their fears as young parents. I began to get a much deeper perspective of the simple story of my happy childhood by projecting our daily moments on the proverbial big screen and scrutinising what I saw. This became possible as I broke

“away from the shackles of the grand narrative and approached the research material free from the constraints of any predetermined scholarly conception of what is significant and what is not and where the difference lies” (Magnússon, 2006: 907). I was able to construct a film about the past from the present in order to speak about the future. My tagline, ‘the future isn’t what it used to be’, is a play on words to indicate the quandary of how my imaginings of the future have changed, as well as a set up of the temporal collapses that exist as a style in my film. The juxtaposing of past and present in the edit of the film is introduced by this tagline, which speaks about the future in the past tense.

Although the film is autobiographical, I have spoken about how it shifts itself into the realm of autoethnography. As Russell (2009) describes:

Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a “staging of subjectivity” – a representation of the self as a performance. In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based.

My film is not a singular autobiographical exercise; most simply it is a story that attempts a double-biography as I am telling the story of my twin brother’s childhood as well as my own – it presents versions of our childhoods. Immediately it is wider than just an individual, but it also extends even further, implicating my story in “larger social formations and historical processes”. It is both a story of my experiences while also examining the story of an exile community in living between two emerging post-colonial African states; South Africa and Zimbabwe. Through my personal story several wider discourses emerge – notions of national identity, whiteness, being middle class and psychological sibling relationships.

Historically, autoethnography came about when:

scholars began illustrating how the ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ scientists ‘found’ were inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them...[and that] producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise with people who are different from us (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 274).

Autoethnography provides a counter discourse to the narrowly accepted, and arguably dated, forms of knowledge production and academic writing styles that are accepted. It is through autoethnography which connects the personal to the social and cultural that I am able to bring my own personal experience to this research. “When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 276).

This notion of experiential research through autoethnography is also given credence by Patricia Mellencamp in her discussion of the “empirical Avant-Garde”, which “destabilizes history through the experimental, granting women the authority of the experimental (which includes both knowledge and memory). The focus is on *becoming*, on *relations*, on what happens *between* experience and thought, between “sensation and ideas”, between sound and images, between cultures, between women” (1995: 175).

Indeed, like Mellencamp, for me there is an important relationship between autoethnographic and feminist approaches in that they both validate the personal.

Two tenets that characterize feminist scholarship are of particular relevance to the use of personal experience in feminist scholarship. One is that women’s perceptions, meanings, and experiences are taken seriously and valued. The second is that the information gathered about women’s perceptions, meanings and experiences

cannot be understood within the constructs and theories that were developed without a consideration of women's perspectives; thus, new methods are needed to understand these perspectives, and new theories are needed to account for them. (Foss & Foss, 1994: 39)

Links of the personal endeavour and feminism are clear. The phrase 'the personal is political' is inseparable from Second Wave feminism, which aimed to challenge the divide between the public, and private or domestic domains and challenge the traditional understanding of a nuclear family. In an interesting parallel home video also exists in this private, domestic space and is often understood as the affirmation of this space, and relegated to the fringes of importance. Yet, as Hirsch, Sontag, Kuhn and Barthes make clear, family photographs contain considerable insight into our cultural, social and political lives. Using my personal experiences, my personal narrative and my personal archive I contribute to a wider understanding of, not only, domestic life, but also a political life in 1980s and 1990s southern Africa, as well as familial relations and emotional bonds. Home video represents the everyday, the personal and the individual and thus the very meat of the political. However this was not always a position I felt completely comfortable with; there is a vulnerability in sharing your personal narrative and I constantly felt the threat of attack. "The exploration and use of personal experience data is a significant and subversive act in the process of constructing new methods and theories that truly take women's perspectives into account. Because women's first-person accounts traditionally are not listened to, believed, or taken seriously, women themselves often come to distrust and suppress their own knowledge claims." (Foss & Foss, 1994: 42).

Both autoethnographic and feminist approaches are positioned as counter discourse, and are often devalued and attacked within academic frameworks where research of a personal nature gets sidelined. "Women suffer terribly from the belief that we must understand ourselves and the world through men's history, including the history of ideas. If we confine ourselves to establishing the validity and credibility of our scholarship by appealing – however briefly – to fathers of thought, academia limits us to reactive

beginnings and inhibits us from reaching our own new ground” (Culpepper, 1987: 9). In a similar manner home movies go against the dominant paradigm of commercial filmmaking, considered as an amateur or personal mode of filmmaking that is often trivialized, and in this way my research serves to offer up a counter discourse in its written and creative manifestations.

The medium that lays the bedrock of my film is this amateur home video shot on Super 8mm – the whirring of the film projector is heard and the film grain is visceral, shot on a consumer-level camera with cheaper film stock (much cheaper than, for example, 35mm) and by an amateur camera operator. This footage indicates it could be from the 1970s or 1980s. Catherine Russell talks about “technologies of representations” (1999) indicating that “auto-ethnography in film and video is always mediated by technology, and so unlike its written forms, identity will be an effect not only of history and culture but also of the history and culture of technologies of representation”. The use of Super 8mm in my early childhood home movies is significant because it reveals my mother’s profession as a journalist, as someone with access to and understanding of equipment and the notion of making a record, producing a document. She was also using slightly outdated technology, as Zimbabwe did not have up to date technology for sale. However the fact that my family had a Super 8mm camera in Harare still reveals my privilege. When my parents moved to Zimbabwe it was in a pre-digital age, further delayed because of Rhodesia’s isolation under sanctions in the 1970s. Then in the 1980s, with independence, Zimbabwe was suddenly opened to the world, a darling among the newly liberated. However, it was still a place where you had to ask visitors to bring you technology and luxuries from South Africa, Europe and North America – at considerable expense. To my home video I have also added my mother’s radio news reports on southern African politics for National Public Radio (in the US) and other news outlets, which adds to this “history and culture of technologies of representation” (Russell, 1999). “The rise of autobiographical acts which use multiple media require autobiography scholars to expand our methods of reading to include attention to the communication and representation of the historical, social and semiotic conditions of identity and selfhood which exceed narrative representation”

(Poletti, 2012: 158). There is a sense of the past, of returning to analogue days, to 'home', to our childhoods that is evoked by the medium; there is a sense of nostalgia brought on by this visual return. The environment of this footage is clear: it is southern Africa in the early years of Zimbabwe's independence, while neighbouring South Africa was still under apartheid rule. While southern Africa is the specific location of my footage I believe there is a universal connection that it can take others back to moments in their own pasts as it speaks to an era in our lives we can all recognise: childhood. Then there are also the specificities of my upbringing, which other southern Africans can relate to. The scenes of the everyday that depict my and their milieu: jacaranda trees, the Matobo National park, Hwange National Park, fishing, radio reports of news in the region and big political events that pepper the narrative.

I am an African who was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in South Africa. While South Africa fought a struggle for non-racial democracy, which in part is what the film looks at, we still grapple with a society organised and judged along racial lines. In a way this autobiography is an attempt to reconcile some of those differences – to show that childhoods have shared experiences. I am a white South African born in the 1980s, but I have things in common with both privileged white South Africans and also with those who fought in the political struggle for liberation from apartheid. I had wonderful trips overseas, and I was well looked after, but I also attended a government school in Zimbabwe where I was the only white child in my class. I walked to school with the children in my neighbourhood, played outside in a communal park and slept at friends' houses next door and down the street – there was no 'Mom's Taxi' like other places in the world. My film, *Fraternal*, is a South African narrative, but I hope in some ways it collapses the borders between a classic 'white narrative' and a classic 'black narrative' of Africa, hopefully moving towards telling a story without strict racial lines. The people featured in my film are mostly white, but some of the experiences explored in both the political and the personal familial story are able to extend to further traverse racial boundaries. The notion of an African autobiography is not one without contention; "in fact, non-African theorists have consistently denied Africans

the privilege of autobiography, of telling individual stories... In 1956, in an important and widely-read article that marked the beginning of a renewed critical interest in the study of autobiography, Georges Gusdorf claimed that the concept of individual identity was uniquely Western” (Gabara, 2003: 333). “James Olney... following Gusdorf’s lead, [wrote] that African autobiography is ‘less an individual phenomenon than...a social one,’ since the African subject, as opposed to the Western one, is not individually, but rather socially determined” (Gabara, 2003: 333). Even Frederic Jameson “maintained that all ‘third-world’ texts necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (Gabara, 2003: 333). In many ways we as Africans have ourselves taken on this burden – I found myself struggling with whether my story was ‘good enough’ to tell, that perhaps it needed an explicit social and political context, that it could be self-indulgent to focus on just my relationship with my brother. However, I soon realised I could not tell my personal story without telling a political one; I saw the “vitality of the tension generated by the dialectic between the personal and the public” (Ndebele, 1986: 156).

In the cutting room

As a professional working in the South African film and television industry I approached the narrative of my film as an editor who has been honing her craft for nearly a decade. As I was finding out more and more about my relationship with my brother and plotting a narrative out of my findings, I started to see how to tell the story in a dramatic way with plot points, climaxes and emotional arcs to ensure maximum audience engagement. I organised my film into three parts, a filmic triptych – each part with a different mood and tone, and added intertitles that highlight these three parts to the audience: ‘Part one: when we were a baby’ serves as the introduction to the main characters and their milieu. The phrase ‘when we were a baby’ stems from something Alex and I used to say to our parents, and my mother mentions it in her interview in the film. We grew up so closely entwined that in our early years we elided the difference between two separate individuals into seeing ourselves as one baby. ‘Part two: sibling rivalry’, exposes the obstacles and setbacks faced by the main character (myself), and ‘Part three: sweet sorrow’

provides the resolution. Each part is progressively shorter and shorter until the climax; this is a storytelling tactic often employed to create pace and a sense of suspense. My film unfolds in an episodic nature in which there is a relationship between the three segments, but also distinctions. “The continuous *excursus* and *recursus* of multistory films, in which episodes bid not a string of *adieu*s but *au revoir*s (akin to the Joycean ‘till the agenseeing’), heightens the spectator’s paradoxical desire for both closure and continuation, departure and return” (Diffrient, 2009: 23). This also plays on my usage of an elastic temporal structure, in which I shift from past to present and back.

In addition to these three segments I have set the film up with a kind of prolepsis, or flash forward. The opening sequences of a film introduce the style, genre and approach of the film, offering a kind of contract with the audience. It also means that I begin my film with an anticipation of how it will end. My voice asks, “Do you think our relationship will change when we are far away from each other?” My brother Alex replies “Ja... Sorry” as he walks through a security checkpoint at the airport. Text appears on screen: “My brother is the most important person in the world to me... he is moving away”. More text stresses the closeness of our relationship and the film cuts to home video footage of a white, middle class family – my family.

The prolepsis helps to set up a relationship between past and present from the very beginning, as the footage dances between past and present the relationship between the two is highlighted. I set up these stylistic devices in this opening segment. Just as memory is a multifaceted imaginative space that collapses time, so is my film – it makes use of juxtaposition of disparate audio and visuals through the layering of audio from various sources against visuals from other sources or points in time, creating a multi-layered spatially and temporally indeterminate space. As the film progresses the link emerges between the, at first, seemingly unrelated audio and visual elements. The visuals are of my brother, father and I flying kites against a blue cloudless day. This seems to be an idealised past, a relishing of days gone by. The use of Super 8mm film stimulates these feelings through the attachment to an object or format that conjures the past. Both the format’s hazy feel and

memories' hazy recollection allow for a carefree enjoyment of the past. There is diegetic sound and also the whir of the film projector. To this I add two layers of non-diegetic sound, my mother interacting with my brother and I as much younger babies and snippets of my mother reading news reports from the time as well as present day interview with my parents. "The image track is highly fragmented and belongs to the past, while the sound track provides a narrational continuity that belongs to the present" (Russell, 1999). There is a sense of temporal collapse as I use voices from the past and the present day with visuals from the 1980s. These temporal collapses lead to a sense of foreshadowing, about our emotional, political and technological futures. "Once again that identity is inscribed not only in history but in technologies of representation" (Russell, 1999).

In lieu of voiceover I have used text on screen. Aesthetically, I did not want to use voiceover, and after seeing *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2003) I was inspired by his 'voiceover' as text on screen, in the form of a sort of fleeting diary entry. For my film, with its focus on memory and memory making, a reference to diary writing or scrapbooking as a nostalgic activity seemed fitting. I chose a handwritten font as it points to the ritual around putting together a photo album or writing a diary, and how these albums and writings serve to tell a story or narrative about one's life. Indeed, this story is a kind of photo album made from family home video and photographs, all pieced together by Nikki's 'hand'; Nikki – the sister, daughter and filmmaker. The intertitles are short sentences, as if notes 'jotted down' to anchor memories. They come across not as incomplete thoughts, but rather as captions in a photo album. Sometimes the text on screen anchors a date, 'Thursday April 7th 1983' or an event, 'Amnesty International Human Rights Now! Concert'; sometimes it shares something more personal, like an emotion or a thought. Once again this echoes scrapbooks and diaries, which contain quotes and personal details peppered in between the factual information. The sentences occasionally feature family folklore or postmemories, passed down by word of mouth. For example the title of part one, 'when we were a baby', is, as I mentioned, the quote from a story I've heard my mother tell many times to her friends, and which I later started to tell as it became part of my own narrative

and exists as Comminos family folklore. In a way my film combines visual history with oral narratives and shared memories. “Autobiographical film and video tends to be couched within a testimonial mode, as the authorial subjects offer themselves up for inspection, as anthropological specimens. But they do so ironically, mediating their own image and identifying obliquely with the technologies of representation, identifying themselves as film-and video makers” (Russell, 1999). Indeed, my text on screen identifies me as, while subject, also clearly the filmmaker, a filmmaker with a quest to recapture her childhood relationship with her brother. “Because autoethnography invokes an imbrication of history and memory, the authenticity of experience functions as a receding horizon of truth in which memory and testimony are articulated as modes of salvage” (Russell, 1999).

The film moves from the political back to the personal and Alex and I begin to form as characters. I begin with details of our twinness, but there is always an awareness of the political backdrop, even in my mother’s description of twinship: “from a left, socialist communalist perspective it’s we, not I or me...” However, it is still the twins who are central, as she swiftly goes on to say, “Who else has this experience of never being alone?” This is what forms the emotional thrust of the story, an outsider’s perspective (my mother’s) of what twinship seems to mean to her. It seemed to be a rare experience of sharing, of community, of support – “of never being alone”. My mother seemed to idealise our lived experience as twins. The set-up of the film shows both this idealised take on twinship, and the fact that my brother is leaving, and so from the start the film has a tinge of sadness throughout it, that prick or *punctum* that Barthes describes. “This *punctum* is more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die” (Barthes, 1981: 96). Literally, what is going to eventually die (or change) is the people in the shot, but also the era, the relationships, the emotions and even the politics held at that time. This tinge of sadness is heightened by the dramatic irony that the audience knows what is going to die. The impending departure of Alex signals a change in this tight twin relationship that is set up in the prolepsis. The experience of “never being

alone”, as my mother describes it, is exposed as fragile, or perhaps as a crutch, and when he is no longer there I need to face my dependency on it. The shot of Alex walking through airport security repeats just before the title, *Fraternal*, comes up, imbuing the film with a sense of melancholia.

The title, *Fraternal*, refers to the medical term for twins who developed from two different eggs, and thus are genetically the same as normal single siblings, except that they share a womb. Their gestation of nine months together produces a closeness that continues outside the womb, reaching specific milestones together, from the first day of school to their high school dance. The title alludes to a close physical and emotional bond, but it becomes permeated with a sense of sadness when I reveal the intangible loss of my love-object, my brother, as he moves abroad and then later, in the film’s climax, disavows our twinship.

Part one: when we were a baby

The words ‘Part one: when we were a baby’ are displayed over white film grain, the projector projecting white light, and from this emptiness the story officially begins. The medium is Super 8mm. This emptiness cross-fades into my brother, mother and I looking through stacks of photo albums, engaging in a recognisable family bonding ritual and introduces us immediately to one of the film’s overarching themes: the recording of family life. As Zussman explains the photo album is not just a way to remember an occasion or a person important to our autobiography, “these accounts do not simply represent the self but constitute it. The self, as many sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers recognize, is not an entity, not a thing, but a story (or stories) we and others tell about ourselves” (2006: 28). Later, the film features the archaic swivel of a slide carousel, the sound once again conjuring up our analogue pasts. Voiceover interviews with my parents talk about how times have changed when it comes to taking pictures – how back then (in the 1980s) they would send exposed photographic film and Super 8mm reels from Harare to my grandparents in the US to get them developed because the costs were far lower than in Zimbabwe, and the photographs and film were taken in large

part for our family overseas anyway. This seems incredible in an era of digital photography, cellphone cameras and instantaneous sharing of photographs across social networking platforms. “Sometimes”, my father giggles in the film, “it would be three months” before they saw the image of a picture they had taken. This takes the audience back to a time where part of memory-making existed in the ‘re-living’ of the moments once the film was developed, and this is in sharp contrast to the instant snapshots on a cellphone camera.

In the home video my mother seems to be leading the documentation, from off camera you can hear her directing us (my brother and I) as well as the camera (“tell them to say hi to Granny”). My brother and I are shot together, side-by-side in similar but not matching outfits. We provide symmetry for each other through the satisfying imagery of twins. “Family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance” (Hirsch, 2008: 114). This is the ‘Good News Show’ where I have lived my mother’s version of my childhood – “fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance” (Hirsch, 2008: 114).

In an act that mirrors her professional career, my mother cues me in one scene to record a message for granny in which I tell granny that “we are sitting where you can stay” when she comes to visit us. Thus the film begins to explore another theme: the politics of belonging and the notion of exile. In an interview, my grandmother states that “what I liked very much were the tapes when she recorded the two twins playing together”. The use of home recordings was my mother’s way of trying to bridge the physical distance between her and her family, and often she would record audio interviews and monologues to send to her parents instead of letters.

One shot, for me, vividly exposes this tension around being far from home. It is one of the rare shots that features the whole family together, as it was shot by my uncle who was visiting at the time. My parents are in the middle of the

frame kissing each other while my brother and I hang around their ankles. The vegetation shows rural, undeveloped land with the iconic Zimbabwean boulders in the background. Off-camera a chorus of voices is heard singing in the most widely spoken indigenous language of Zimbabwe, Shona. The camera pans to the source of the singing and a group of five people walks past and waves. In that moment, a sense of alienation is felt. My family is 'the other' in this environment; we are the minority. Even the fact that a camera was being taken to this space for personal use was unusual for that place and time. It visually illustrates our dislocation in the landscape that we lived in.

The political theme is most pronounced in the film's first segment, in providing the exposition of my family's milieu. However, even though it is most strongly featured in this segment, it is still a subtle, implicit context, until the politics specifically touch our family dynamics. For example, when my grandmother is talking about the experience of her daughter giving birth in a foreign country far from her, she mentions that she "can't remember the [hospital's] name, it was an English name that later got changed". She is referring to the Mbuya Nehanda Maternity Hospital, renamed after a Chimurenga (Zimbabwean struggle) heroine that is part of the Parirenyatwa General Hospital renamed after the first black Zimbabwean to qualify in medicine, formerly known as the Andrew Fleming Hospital named in colonial times. Her words are a veiled reference to the previous regime of Ian Smith and thus colonialism, diaspora, exile and displacement. At other points in the narrative less positive aspects of the political situation surface, for example when my mother's journalistic voice narrates "eyewitness reports of beatings and killings of members of the minority Ndebele ethnic group by national army troops" over visuals of my brother and I as tiny babies. It starts to become evident that there is political conflict and tension in the background as our seemingly golden childhood is captured. This notion of things simmering beneath the surface is another theme that the film explores. In this instance I am investigating political implications, but my relationship with my brother is later exposed as also having complicated nuances.

After the sound bite describing the “beatings and killings”, I repeat the audio of my mother saying, “it’s always been the ‘Good News Show’”, which was her way of explaining her spin doctoring of our home video that she sent abroad to her family. While things may be different beneath the surface, what we present to the world through family recordings, and indeed the view she wanted to give her own worried mother and father was that everything was ‘going to be just fine’, despite any news reports to the contrary about conflicts in South Africa and Zimbabwe. This was very important to her because when her mother had visited her the year before Alex and I were born, several of her friends, including Barbara Hogan and Rob Adam was detained by the South African security police, along with the unionist who died in detention, Neil Aggett. My grandmother was also with my mother when she drove to Zimbabwe for a research trip and the security police at the border stopped them and searched the car. My grandparents needed and deserved reassurance through these difficult exile years before the unbanning of the ANC and our (my brother’s and my) move to South Africa and their return.

Through my re-interpretation and layering of this footage I aim to expose the fears my parents must have had at the time. After this moment I edit in my mother’s voice saying, “I’m going to do another take on that” as she records a radio report to send overseas to Washington DC or London, once again suggesting the manufacturing or construction of a narrative. This kind of repetition of particular audio for emphasis is a leitmotif that is used throughout the film. The audio serves to create the world of the story as much as the visuals do. I juxtapose the visuals with the struggle songs I heard throughout my childhood, and with my mother’s voice, including excerpts from the broadcasts she recorded during her days as a foreign correspondent, as well as audiocassette tapes of the bedtime stories she used to read to us, recorded for our endless replaying, and the tape-recorded newsy updates for my grandmother.



Figure 4: Alex and Nikki (1984) Harare, Zimbabwe

The concrete bench is another example of how memories are revisited in different scenes in the film, with each visit serving to expose more details and nuances about a situation. We first see the concrete bench when Alex and I are sitting holding our cats – Alex is holding his cat in manner uncomfortable for the cat and my mom urges him to readjust – “He’s not going to like you,” she warns him. Our characters, even from that young age, are in contrast to each other. I hold my cat ‘properly’ and try to show my brother how to do the same; he’s a little otherwise and unconventional compared to me. Our contemporary voices come in over this footage with me asking Alex about his first memory. He tells me he doesn’t have one – he’s not really invested in this process and it becomes clear that we are also at odds with each other over the ideas of memory making and recollecting past events. My mother’s voice affirms this as a news report cuts through the conversation Alex and I are having: “As Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda said in a recent interview, when you are lame in the leg you do not sit down and start crying, you must find a crutch for limping on.” The snippet provides a metaphor for my emotional journey with my brother, while also revealing something about the

political landscape in southern Africa in the 1980s; the personal and the political begin to meld in mirrored narratives.

My mother's voice continues: "The black people of Zimbabwe found they had to rediscover their history before they could determine their future, they had to decolonise their minds before they could decolonise their country. These discoveries about the past and the present encouraged thousands of blacks to leave what was then Rhodesia..." The decolonising of their minds that my mother talks about is the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe, but it is also a metaphor for my relationship with my brother. It serves as an indication that I need to de-colonise my mind from everything that I was taught to believe – that Alex and I "were a baby" together and thus would be the same when we were adults. The phrase "decolonize the mind" was very much the post-colonial diction of the time and alludes to the title of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1986 book *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. In the same vein my mother's book *None but ourselves: Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (1984) incorporates this same diction with her evocation of Bob Marley's *Redemption Song* (1980) which exhorts "emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds", lyrics that were a quote from a speech by political leader and proponent of Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, Marcus Garvey.

The concrete bench is later revisited and my father reveals that this was where he used to keep ANC material³ for his underground cell. Once again things are not as they seem – the bench we sat on playing with our cats and reading our books is actually a vessel for secrets, a hiding place for contraband material. My father talks about how the underground operated in Harare at the time, and so the story of my family grows wider to include this political context. "The autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more

³ This included the accounts of the cell he was operating in, code names and related post box numbers (used as Dead Letter Boxes), ANC literature, and any other material that would compromise the security of the cell which was involved in the underground struggle against apartheid operating in the frontline states.

diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 277).

My mother joins in and my parents then go on to explain how, although times were exciting during the struggle for change in South Africa, there were also a lot of bombings and assassinations, several of which occurred within earshot of our house. The visuals on screen show my father wearing a NUSAS (National Union of South African Students)⁴ T-shirt while talking gently and comfortingly to Alex and me. It seems to heighten our vulnerability, especially as my father tucks Alex’s hair behind his ears and my mother’s voice tells us there was a bombing right next to our school. Once again the personal and political narratives align and the underlying fear that my parents must have been feeling about our – and their – safety seems to transfer to the foreboding of the dissolution of Alex and my relationship. This sense of the dissolution of our relationship has been set up in the prolepsis, but it gets weightier with Alex’s imminent departure cut against the playing out of our closeness during childhood. It is the *punctum* or death mask that Barthes speaks of - the harbinger of the future. As Barthes (1981: 96) states:

I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another ‘stigmatum’) than the ‘detail’. This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but on intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (that-has-been), its pure presentation... I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is at stake.

From the present and the knowledge that Alex is leaving I look back, and invite the audience to look back, on this time – “this will be and this has been”. In this reflection there comes a tender sadness about these sequences. What is captured in those images is stuck in the past. Alex and I will never be close in that way again; we are no longer children walking hand in hand, our relationship is changing and this evokes the “horror [of] an anterior future of which death is at stake” (Barthes, 1981: 96). These are captured moments

⁴ This student organisation was an active force during the anti-apartheid struggle, and led to my father’s political conscientisation while he was studying and working at the student newspaper at the University of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal).

from the past that have been brought into the future – they show “time defeated” (Barthes, 1981: 97). Part one ends on the photograph of Alex getting a hug from Nelson Mandela (on Mandela’s visit to Harare a few weeks after his release from prison) as it cross-fades into an older Alex, now back in South Africa. This moment with Mandela shows us a time of great hope and promise in southern Africa in the early 1990s, which mirrors the simple happiness of Alex and my closeness at the time.

The photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand ‘it is not there’, on the other ‘but it has indeed been’): a made image, chafed by reality (Barthes, 1981: 115).

After this “hallucination”, part two begins with text on screen: “When Mandela was released everything changed. We left Zimbabwe. We left our golden childhood behind, packed it all up, the lofty ideals and memories. We visited granny, but not Mickey Mouse. And then launched ourselves into The New South Africa, The Rainbow Nation.” From a political perspective there was an energy and a hope in this move – the anticipation of a democratic South Africa under a new dispensation, as anti-apartheid activist Albie Sachs wrote at the time “the only questions are how to end the system as rapidly as possible and how to ensure the new society which replaces it lives up to the ideas of the South African people and the world community” (1991: 21).

The political change in the film also comes with an aesthetic change; the words “Part two: sibling rivalry” appear over digital snow, visually and aurally guiding us into a new era. No longer are we in the analogue era of Super 8mm, but we have slid into early digital video, Hi8 and DV, just as we are entering a new political epoch. This transition is echoed in a third manner through the transition of Alex and myself into adolescence. As the film features us crossing over a pontoon bridge, the narrative enters its second phase.

Part two: sibling rivalry

Part two of the film begins with my brother and I being coached by my mother to conduct an oral history interview with my grandmother, and so the familial tradition of interviewing, begun by my mother, continues. The visuals feature Alex and I, only now we are in separate shots. We are beginning to individuate and the visuals mimic this process, I have chosen images that no longer feature us in the same frame. Gender roles are also starting to form, and over the oral history interview I am shown playing with my baby cousin in a maternal role, while Alex fiddles with a computer in a more stereotypical masculine role geared towards science and technology. As Hirsch (1999: xvi) points out:

when we photograph ourselves in a familial setting, we do not do so in a vacuum; we respond to dominant mythologies of family life, to conceptions we have inherited, to images we see on television, in advertising, in film. These internalized images reflect back on us, deploying a familial gaze that fixes and defines us. But each picture is also the product of other looks and gazes as family members define themselves in relation to each other in the roles they occupy as mother, father, daughter, son, husband or lover.

Later, my brother will mimic the behaviour of my father and uncle who pull faces and put 'bunny ears' over each other's heads for the camera, and I will scold him, as my mother has scolded them, each of us internalizing our roles, masculine and feminine, within the family structure.

Alex and I play in the snow in North America. After my grandmother's interview I ask my brother, in the present day audio interview, if we were to write out our life story would it be the same. He seems disinterested and mentions he has never even written a diary entry before. In the visuals from the 1990s he slides away from me, in the past, down a snowy bank. I am left standing alone. The past and the present are temporally out of sync but are brought together by the emotional link of the moment in the film. Visuals cut to poor digital footage featuring myself and three other girls giggling on screen. Snow and digital interference mar the visuals. My cousins and I have fit our

young bodies into the same pair of pants and the same shirt and we fall on top of each other laughing; we are dressed up as two pairs of conjoined twins. My brother is sidelined, both in the frame and from this dress-up party. He can only watch my performance of 'twinning' with these girls. He is left out. There is a breakdown in audio due to the poor quality of the digital footage, which also seems to aesthetically mimic the breakdown in our relationship. A lonesome guitar begins over this footage, it starts as non-diegetic sound, as Alex's musical theme, and later it transpires that the music comes from Alex's practicing of his guitar. He carefully and methodically beats out the song for my father who patiently records it. The twanging guitar is naïve and melancholic. This serves to illustrate his mood in this era, but also remains faithful to the childlike quality to this storytelling.

I wanted to keep the soundtrack, as much as possible, within the provenance of the home video footage. An interview with my mother and my brother (to be sent to my grandmother in the late 1980s, probably several years after the footage of my cousins and I) then begins to play over the visuals of me playing with my cousins. My brother is telling my mother that he has a "tough life" because my friends are always telling him to leave when I take him along to go and play with them. I seem to be oblivious to the potential pain, loneliness and feelings of separation that my brother is experiencing. Alex tells my mother "he can handle it". He is more introverted and pensive. As this sombre mood continues, Alex is shown standing alone while I happily play with my friends.

However, halfway through part two Alex begins to become more independent and able to stand up to me. When I am annoying and tormenting him, he begins to push me away. At the same time this confidence is giving him the strength to also push the camera away, and he becomes more resistant both to me and to being filmed. 1994 brings South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections which serves to anchor the story in time, and metaphorically democracy brings with it new freedoms as my brother and I enter our teenage years. My brother is now beginning to be more resistant to me; visuals feature him resisting the camera as a young adolescent, and in

the present day he actively states he feels uncomfortable with being filmed – and yet I continue, I persist. I persist as a filmmaker, and as the tormenting sister from our adolescence. It becomes clear that he does not want to be in my film. He says he does not want to have his privacy invaded and so this pushing away of the camera and of me has come full circle, as he is now coming up against me as a fellow adult. But as he could “handle it” when I left him out as a child, he grudgingly tells me, “I’m willing to co-operate” as I shoot us having dinner as a family in the present day. When he tells me bluntly that he does not want to be filmed, that he thinks that “it doesn’t in any way need explaining” what his apprehensions may be, it provides a kind of pay-off for the viewer who has been seeing him struggle against me, my mother and the camera since he was a child in the home video footage. Finally, he gets his say. In the same way I might have bullied or overpowered him as a child, I am, it seems, also coaxing him into participating in the film. By the end of the film, it is apparent that he has decided to participate in my film project – on his own terms.

It is in part two that my relationship with my brother seems to break down. Politically it is a time when South Africa gained its freedom, and personally it is our adolescence. As Albie Sachs said of the time “all revolutions are impossible until they happen; then they become inevitable. South Africa has for long been trembling under the impossible and the inevitable...” (1991: 21). And from a domestic and personal perspective, my relationship with my brother seemed so strong that it was “impossible” it would ever break down, while intellectually and psychologically it was “inevitable” that it would change.

When my father talks about nostalgia during this part of the film, similarities emerge between my mother and myself and in opposition to the views of my brother and my father. Do all daughters become their mothers? I am invested in nostalgic practice, saving artefacts to allow prompts for later reminiscences; my mother is the same. Although my brother and father find little comfort in these practices, my mother and I enjoy them and indeed psychologists have found such practices to be beneficial: “nostalgia magnifies perceptions of social support, thus counteracting the effect of loneliness... and nostalgia can

contribute to an overall sense of enduring meaning to one's life" (Sedikides et al., 2008: 306). Once thought of as a sickness, it is now found "nostalgia boosted perceptions of life as meaningful and assuaged existential threat" and facilitates "continuities between past and present selves" (Sedikides et al., 2008: 306). My brother and father find this emphasis on a relationship with the past unnecessary and unrewarding; they are in the camp of the critics who have found "nostalgia may erode a sense of meaning in the present and may forestall motivation, if the individual is fixated on better days gone by" (Sedikides et al., 2008: 306). My father tells me "I don't need to go back now... I'd rather think about what I'm going to do", while my mother shares that "you can get sentimental about things in the present and the past... wanting the past to be there. I enjoy going to another place in my mind and my heart by seeing the photos".

My mother's sentimental words are heard over Alex and I playing with our dog in the garden – it cuts between visuals that mirror each other: half are from the past (authentic home video) and the other half are from the present (re-staged footage I shot specifically for this film). I have reconstructed the footage, in the same house, with not the same dog but the same breed (the dog of that era has long since died and been replaced by two other Ridgebacks – my parents' consistency serves me well). From hereon I begin a visual motif of parallelism between the then and the now through the mimicry of existing footage from my childhood.

Stella Bruzzi, a proponent of what she terms "the new documentary", defines a genre which she terms the performative documentary as "a mode which emphasizes – and indeed constructs a film around – the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers" (2000: 185). My film displays elements of this performativity, both in my treatment of the original footage from my mother's time and in how I have re-constructed the footage. I have mimicked fairground visits, trampoline jumping, beach outings and the family ritual of making a gingerbread house – these familiar activities aim to imply the cyclic nature of memory and the augmentation of memory through repetition and ritualization, that a life

narrative is constructed through repeated events and activities – Christmases, birthdays and the like. My feelings of the closeness of the relationship with my brother comes in part from experience, but also in part from the revisiting of memories through the home video and photographs that feature us each time together, a kind of construction imposed on these records by my mother's direction. I repeat her behaviour through my mimicry of the home video scenarios; I film my family re-enacting activities, featuring and reinforcing us as a nuclear family unit.

I restage my brother and I jumping on a trampoline in the present day and layer into the film my mother's voice from the past urging us to "look at Dad and jump". There is fluidity in this back and forth between past and present staging. Indeed, my present day footage involves staging as I re-enact certain scenes, however the past's 'true' home video involves staging too, as my mother directed us in front of the camera. There is a dance between these similarities and differences. This reconstruction creates meaning in the juxtaposition of the new and old images; the contrast between the two incites new meanings through their intersection. There is a departure from continuity editing as the temporal shifts create a visual jarring with the visual differences in our physicality as adults and as children, but also with regard to format in the shift between analogue and digital. There is a reference to Eisenstein's intellectual montage where "the juxtaposition of two concrete images leads to an abstract concept not fully contained in either of the two images" (Polan, 22: 1977). This dance between past and present once again brings us to Barthes' *punctum*. If meaning changes over time, what happens when you re-enact the past? It evokes the connection between past and present while also revealing the disconnect. When you think back you cannot go back in time, but you can go to an imaginary space that conjures up that time – a liminal place between the past and the present. The footage of the time serves as a prompt to transport you to that space, but the engagement happens in the mind, in the realm of the imaginary.

Through my restaging of the home video I have attempted to act out this space by connecting the past with the present. This style is in opposition to

traditional narratives that are usually guided by temporal chronology. “The performative element within the framework of non-fiction is thereby an alienating, distancing device, not one which actively promotes identification and a straightforward response to a film’s content” (Bruzzi, 2000: 186). This style of mixing past and present may distance an audience because, as Bruzzi notes, it requires work to enter into this subjective, dreamlike memory world. But there is a degree of candour in this act that also invites an audience in. Exposing my home video reveals my mother’s hand in creating the relationship I have with my past and with my brother. It further exposes it to perhaps a kind of a fiction, which demands a certain vulnerability from me as a documentary filmmaker. “The authenticity of the footage is completely bound up in the honesty and humility of the filmmaker” (Russell, 1999). For example, the footage of my brother’s experience of alienation, and indeed of him sometimes being bullied by me, is captured in a way that affronts me when I view it today. It is so clear in the footage that Alex is individuating because I was not aware of him needing my support at the time. I was only a child at the time and did not have the developed emotional capacity to feel the impact of my actions on him. This is painful for me to watch today with adult emotional reflexivity and awareness. This kind of subjectivity or interior knowledge is the expectation of an autobiography – an expectation that the audience will be offered inner thoughts that they could not know in any other way. “Documentaries are a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance” (Bruzzi, 2000: 186). Bruzzi argues “a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality” (2000: 186). So it is my subjectivity that weaves meaning in the film.

Part two ends once again with intertitles, like notes from my journal: “Politics were changing. Alex and I were not as close. I didn’t even notice; he did. After time all stories change”. The text “Part three: sweet sorrow” comes on screen against a blue screen reading ‘play’ in the corner, a visual signifier of HDV – leading us into another technological era.

Part three: sweet sorrow

Part three begins with an audio recording of my mother reading the children's classic *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952) in an audio recording she made for us. Recording bedtime stories was a common practice of my mother's; she would read the book to us while simultaneously recording it on audiocassette so that when she was not there to read to us we could play the tapes. I selected a part of the book where the characters are at the fun fair, its music as evocative of childhood as the smell of wax crayons. The passage I chose is about growing up and separating from one's parents which as used here speaks to my 'maternal' letting go of my brother as he begins his move overseas. "They've got to grow up sometime," the father in *Charlotte's Web* says to the mother.

In this section I restage the home video footage of the making of the gingerbread house that I used in the second segment. This is the first time I make use of the restaging motif without intercutting it with the past. I am no longer being faithful to the original home video footage; this is *my* gingerbread footage, the reference to the past is only in the action filmed, not in the intellectual montage in Eisenstein's sense. The footage looks completely different now in the HD era, and I take the liberty of using different, bolder shots and not just reshooting the same shots my parents had taken of my childhood as I did in the other restaging where I mimicked the camera. The metaphor of the gingerbread house also becomes a reference to how my brother and I are now making our homes separately and in different geographical places. The next sequence begins the film's climax, and is a long meditative sequence at the ocean. Alex and I seem to be more at peace with each other.

My film is multi-layered, exploring many themes: the politics of the 1980s and 1990s in southern Africa, sibling bonds and family ties, belonging and exile, but also the rituals around memory making, family folklore and making home video. In a present day scene at the Durban beachfront the personal and political narratives are syncing up once again. "It's irrational to feel sad about

the past,” Alex tells me, and the visuals cut to a sand sculpture of Mandela with the words “celebrating 18 years of freedom”.

In the next scene Alex is packing his bags, his departure is becoming more palpable. He checks his computer and there is one more interchange between past and present. The computer Alex plays on in the past is clunky and old fashioned; he turns around from the computer game to see my father who asks, “Is this all you can do?” Alex retorts, “It’s the modern age, Dad” offering a humours exchange between the past and the present. Everything is in constant flux and change: relationships, technology, politics and memories.

As I mentioned earlier my film can be classified as what Renov terms domestic ethnography (2004), a genre that identifies as having a certain inherent intimacy. And the climax of my film is indeed a very personal, and intimate, one; it comes in one small but devastating sentence that Alex says to me, “I don’t define myself as a twin... sorry”. After he says these words, over the arrival of the train to take him to the airport, I cut back to baby Alex and Nikki on a swing, back when all we were to each other was twins. Through the film I am clinging to our early childhood when we both only defined ourselves as twins. Indeed, as Hirsch (2008: 115) notes:

more than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic ‘take’.

The footage of us ‘as a baby’ allows me to cling to this “irretrievably lost past world” of Alex and I as one unit, when in reality Alex is going to Germany, “to be with my girlfriend”, he tells me. Now another woman is more important to him than both my mother and myself. It is a small climax but a universal one. We are all alone in this world, even twins are alone in the world, although my mother had thought (and inadvertently led me to believe) otherwise. The footage, however, offers itself up as a “ghostly [revenant] from an irretrievable lost past” (Hirsch, 2008: 115) – it serves to provide a space I can return to in order to live out the simplicity of my childhood. The photographs of my

childhood and the home video “become screens—spaces of projection and approximation and of protection” (Hirsch, 2008: 117).

The experience of viewing a photograph is about looking at something that happened before, in the past, and of looking at the space between the past and the present. The photograph provides strength for the melancholic or subject in mourning because it keeps the love object alive in that moment of tryst. It has been preserved, but only in the mind – that captured moment has been added to a memory bank and in doing so it has been transformed and made subjective. Thus the real moment has been lost, it is gone, experienced, it is over. The hyperreal, the memory, the stain is what remains. “In this refusal to sever any attachments to the lost object, the melancholic becomes instead haunted by it” (Eng, 2000: 1276). It follows that the final sequence of the film is a repetition from the beginning: the kite flying footage. There is now an enhanced melancholic edge – Alex’s guitar twanging sound track has now become *my* theme music as I am shown in full HD flying a kite alone. I have chosen to finish the film in high quality HD, compared to the consumer level HD that has been used up until the final scene. This decision was made for two reasons: most simply I wanted to show the full progression in the shift along the eras from analogue to digital and increasingly improved digital formats. On a more ephemeral level, I want the ending to represent the future and, in some way, to feel clearer than the past; it is an imagining forward, not a recollecting of the past but the possibility for a future precisely because the past has been remembered. In recollection things grow fuzzy, but in a projection forward we can impose a kind of clarity because it is about imagined possibilities. There is a naïve feeling that we know what will happen, for example in the decisiveness of New Year’s resolutions.

I end the film with the first instance of traditional voiceover by the director as I read from a book, in the same vein as my mother’s bedtime stories. I read from Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s short story *White Nights* (1918). Dostoyevsky’s story appears to be in diary form, split into four nights and an epilogue. The main character and narrator refers to himself as ‘the Dreamer’. He meets a woman one night and they begin a four-day tryst where they share their

innermost stories. It is a coupling of emotional intensity without physical consummation.

As Rosenshiel (1977: 192) notes the Dreamer:

tells her that he had once convinced himself that his dreams were superior to everyday reality, but now he has come to see that they are in no way comparable to real life. He condemns his dreaming as a sin against life, for not only has it failed to sustain him, it has also condemned him to a hopeless and barren future.

In the same way my dreams of my childhood with Alex have become superior to everyday life, through my romanticisation of this dream I have made my future “hopeless and barren”. The film drives this hopelessness home, but also brings me to the reality of the present. The quote I read in the closing sequence is as follows: “For, after all, you do grow up, you do outgrow your ideals, which turn to dust and ashes, which are shattered into fragments; and if you have no other life, you just have to build one up out of these fragments” (Dostoyevsky, 1918: 22).

I have inherited my mother’s ideals about this fantasy of being a twin, the myth of never being alone; it has “turned to dust and ashes”, but fragments of this still exist even if it is not as simple and true as I had thought. From this fragment I must begin a new life. This new life begins from my still very real relationship with my brother, but now it is one that needs to exist across distance and must accommodate another very important relationship, with his long-time girlfriend. But my relationship with nostalgia means I still enjoy this return to the past, as Dostoyevsky’s Dreamer continues:

In vain the Dreamer rakes over his old dreams, as though seeking a spark among the embers, to fan them into flames, to warm his chilled heart by the rekindled fire, and to rouse up in it again all that was so sweet, that toughed his heart, that set this blood boiling, drew tears from his eyes... (Dostoyevsky, 1918: 22).

But as our dreamer warns, you cannot live your life in the past, in the fantasy of Fook Island, the simulacra, and the myth. The Dreamer continues:

Your fantastic world will grow pale, your dreams will fade and die, and fall from the trees like the yellow leaves... Oh, Nastenka! You know it will be sad to be left alone, utterly alone, and not even have anything to regret – nothing, absolutely nothing... for all that, all was nothing, stupid, simple nullity, there has been nothing but dreams!

(Dostoyevsky, 1918: 23).

The film finishes with the repeated motif of the kite in the sky, a bookend from the beginning, only now it transforms into the present day with a new kite, this time featuring me alone, with my dreams of the past but also with the promise of my future. The ending is open; an invitation into the future, but one that does not indicate what it may hold. The final scene reveals I am alone but also that I always was. By its conclusion it is clear that “as an example of new autobiography”... my film “is a site of generic indeterminacy, episodic, nonlinear chronology, and de-centered subjectivity” (Diffrient, 2009: 29). Indeed it has played out episodically in three distinct (and labelled as such) acts, it has temporal collapses that disrupt the chronology, and the subjectivity has shifted from myself to my brother and parents and back.

The credit sequence is a final self-aware deconstruction of how the film was made, an ode to my parents who shot the footage, and as in any film when music is credited I have credited Alex and myself for the recordings of our childhood guitar and piano playing. The title sequence implicates my parents in the construction of my personal narrative, but it also allows me to take ownership as the director and mediator of my story. “Our memory is never fully ours, nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a ‘real’ one” (Holland & Spence, 1991: 14).

Act Three: The future of home video

I have written in detail about the golden age of family photography, of Super 8mm filming, of family slide shows, and the materiality of the photo album – but I am from a generation on the cusp: one that can remember this time but also one that now lives in the digital age. I can recall when family photographs used to sit in shoeboxes under beds, but I also know life with my smartphone, the device that, arguably, has had the biggest impact on home video. As analogue moved to digital, family photographs became digitised and home movies became home video. Through this format change people were able to make records of their lives with more accessible, cheaper and easier to use cameras and camcorders. Today the camera-equipped cellphone, or ‘smartphone’ has become a ubiquitous gadget that has changed our understanding of how we frame and present our families and ourselves. The ability and impulse to document has become a pervasive social norm inspired by a growing number of online social media platforms designed to share moments from your life with your friends and the public. When a moment is documented on a smartphone, the image or video can be shared swiftly in private messages to family and friends and then just as easily with millions of strangers on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

In essence, Web 2.0 technologies have made it possible for the average user to access the means of production and distribution, previously restricted to professionals. Never before have so many individuals, with a growing digital and visual literacy, been able to distribute content to so many others, participate and interact visually with the surrounding reality, and share their views and understandings of the world in which they live (Trivundža et al., 2013: 178).

These moments of our daily lives captured on our smartphones in images and short videos are very often intimate daily moments, shot on entry-level technology by amateurs, following the tradition of analogue home video, but there has been an increased focus on the subject of the self in cellphone still photography and video. In 2010 a front-facing camera was built into the iPhone 4, and the ‘selfie’ took the world by storm. The selfie is given bolstered

importance, as social media requires a profile picture or avatar in order to share images.

My brother in Germany can easily and cheaply document his life, and can show me instantly how he is feeling, what he is doing or what his surroundings look like with a quick picture message or selfie. It has enabled immediate yet remote communication. What is interesting about this technological advent is that “by the 1980s and 1990s [and increasingly now in the era of the smartphone] the skills – indeed, even the resources – needed to film and edit no longer appeared the exclusive province of adults, the former gatekeepers of the family iconography” (Orgeron, M. & Orgeron, D., 2007: 48). Now teenagers, and even children, are able to document themselves, and are even tasked by their parents to take the family footage.

The average person, of all ages, can take what would have been a private amateur video or photograph and use it to share and explain their worldview through their blog or through their ‘profile’ on any social networking site. No longer do you need a motivation to take a picture or a video – your morning cup of coffee while driving to work is easily captured and shared, immediately, electronically, anonymously (or not), and sometimes without any context. This kind of subject matter has become normalised; in an analogue era there would have been an underlying reason for capturing an image. While this normalising of this process removes much of the interrogation of this impulse to ‘share’, there is a self-consciousness which happens in the conceptualising of the distribution of a photograph or movie even before it has been taken, in thoughts around “how will this look on my Facebook profile?” or “will I get any likes on Instagram?”. These thoughts of the future reception of the images are now inherent in our captured moments, which would previously have been deemed personal and private in family photographs and home video. When my mother took pictures of my brother and me she only thought of how her immediate family, her parents, would receive the pictures. Her thoughts were not about social fallout if the images were not liked on Facebook. In a more positive vein this capturing and sharing, liking and commenting of pictures in

the digital context can stimulate a pleasant, if superficial, sense of community, collaboration and creativity.

“Our contemporary experience of moving images is increasingly interactive and multi-faceted, from varying perspectives, blurring the line between producer and consumer, spectacle and spectator, representation and information” (Daly, 2007). The idea of this dichotomy between “producer and consumer, spectacle and spectator, representation and information” builds an interesting paradigm into digital family photographs and home video. There is a heightened sense of self-consciousness as these images are displayed in public places and even compete with celebrities, news content and an array of other kinds of media that is considered professional, rather than amateur self-documentation. Our selves and families are inevitably juxtaposed with and compared to the media’s representations of perfection and normality. Previously personal, domestic images that remained within the covenant of the family are let loose into the “public domain” with no protection. There is also a sense of spectacle and voyeurism as strangers are able to look through your intimate moments; people who have no vested interest in your wellbeing, and who find some form of entertainment from looking into your private life.

With this ease of taking and sharing images our communication has become increasingly more visual than audio or written. “Cell phones with moving and still photographic capabilities can store and transmit these documents of the moment, fostering a kind of pandocumentary culture for whom the recorded event has become a dominant form of communication” (Orgeron, M. & Orgeron, D., 2007: 50). Sometimes it is expedient to share an image rather than to articulate our thoughts; short message applications often rely on ‘emojis’ or cartoon images that are provided by applications to intersperse throughout messages; smiley faces help anchor your text message in a friendly tone to avoid possible miscommunication or misunderstanding. Tumblr is a blogging site that encourages picture-only blogging with little captioning. These are the contemporary photo albums, collections of personal photographs and repositories of home video. But “technology is not value-free: to some extent different technologies dictate the way in which we see the

world, the way we record and interpret 'reality,' and they influence the types of codes we use to communicate a message" (Moran, 2002: 40). Changes in format have led to changes in ritual and behaviour around the documentation of the self and the family.

"Rethinking 'medium' as a discourse rather than as a technology therefore requires a methodology suited to analyzing both its cultural and aesthetic effects" (Moran, 2002: 17). Technology now does not necessitate the well-crafted picture; no spouse or parents will later chastise you for wasting film, for using the last shot so that now no more can be taken until you can buy more film stock. There are no regrets about bad photographs because several options can be taken at one time, no need to remind yourself to shoot better next time, no need to be more circumspect about what picture you take. The notion of the photographic object has also changed and the viewers are less discerning; selfies, dinner plates and baby pictures are so common in the online world, where they do not warrant a second glance. Digital technologies certainly have different aesthetics – the blur of film in contrast to the pixels of digital formats and the increasingly quotidian subject matter, it is the cultural changes that I find the most profound. Home videos are different from pre-digital home movies: "the basic differences of operation will precipitate differences of production and reception, which in turn may extend home videos' range of content and space for interpretation beyond the limitations of home movies" (Moran, 2002: 41).

While social media has made sharing personal moments socially accepted and even expected, another factor bringing home video increasingly into more public and mainstream spaces is that previously it was "assumed that 'amateur' photographers come up with material that is normally considered inferior to the standards expected of a 'professional' media operation: mass-market camera hard-ware and tape software are not state of the art" (Fore, 1993). But with the advent of better technology, and the smartphone, that technological gap has been eclipsed (with software to ensure steady shoots, optimal exposure, etc. – which also benefits professionals, it must be said). Consumer-level technology now has the capability to look and feel very much

like professional footage. Many of the characteristics of shooting that used to indicate an amateur have been re-marketed as conveying a rough and real feel, hence the advent of effects apps to doctor photographs (and videos) after shooting, such as the 'retro' filters of Instagram.

As Marshal McLuhan said many years ago, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1967: 15). And the medium these days is cheap, copious and transient. The home movies and family photographs of the analogue age would be lovingly stored objects – boxes of photographs, love letters and film reels. These items would have cost time and money to gather and there would be but a treasured few. The 'shoebox' from today stores far more imagery in the form of jpegs, SMSs and .movs, all of which can be acquired quickly and cheaply. Repositories of memory are no longer shoeboxes under the bed, but gigabytes of data that exist in various digital storage spaces such as phone memory cards, hard drives and 'in the cloud'. There may still be a few who cling to analogue, but in a few years it will only be artisans using formats like Super 8mm, Bolex or any photographic film stock, with even MiniDV already becoming obsolete.

Some have converted, or migrated, their footage to DVD, but many have not. Carroll and Romano's 2011 book *Your digital afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr and Twitter are your estate, what's your legacy?* provides a kind of 'how-to' for the maintenance and handing over of a digital legacy. The authors talk about how "the old media and old tech create a body of content that is locked in dozens of obsolete formats. If we, as a society, continue to neglect the content made from the 1950s to the 2000s, we stand to create a digital dark age – a stretch of time that is lost because the content is beyond rescue" (Carroll & Romano, 2011: 82). This notion of a possible "digital dark age" is in part horrifying and in part thrilling – a threat of personal pasts lost forever. In the analogue years it was war, or natural disaster, that would efface these memories, but with contemporary digital forms there is a different, added threat in the well-planned obsolescence of formats with regard to their purchase and technical support for continued use.

Although the gap between analogue and digital has not been sufficiently traversed to ensure that good backups of readable formats exist, you can rest assured that digital images have the ability to be safe – facilities like Google drive and Drop Box have been created to automatically back up your pictures. Yet what this ultimately means is gigs of digital waste – endless, uncurated, automatic updates of your smartphone photographs. “Our capacity to store, sort and access [is] vastly increased and enhanced. The compression of text, images and audio means that issues of space and cost no longer deter us from keeping anything and everything that seems remotely interesting or amusing” (Reynolds, 2011: 56). Blurry photographs, misfires, everyday detritus, non-historical, and informational pictures of consumer goods – everything is saved and stored, but is it ever looked at?

I think of my photograph albums from my youth, images printed and stuck down into a book – a physical remnant of those times. I know my photographs backwards; I have held them in my hands, considered them, shown them to friends and revisited them many times. There are not many albums, but those images and the accompanying memories have been entrenched in my mind over the years. My albums were lovingly organised, often decorated, given captions, curated and themed:

Not only do photographs operate as props and prompts in verbal performances of memory, but the collection of photographs that makes up a family album itself also follows an ‘oral structure’: ‘An album is a classic example of a horizontal narrative shot through with lines of both epic and anecdotal dimension (Martha Langford, in Kuhn, 2007: 285).

The ritual around storing and looking at photographs has changed. The digital folders of photographs are unordered and vast, including many mistake photographs that have not been filtered out. Kuhn speaks of the analogue days when “family photographs and family albums figure as occasions for communication, cross-cultural exchange and cultural continuity” (2007: 285), while now looking at digital family photographs is largely a solitary activity. Even the viewing of someone else’s photographs is usually done alone and online, without any physical connection with the people in the photographs. And the dialogue around the photographs is through digital comments left on

social media, which may or may not be responded to. Before the digital age family photographs would rarely go further than the family's own photo albums, whereas now your parents and friends blithely show anyone and everyone your own personal history by posting it online such that the ritual of 'sharing' can at times seem like exhibitionism.

What does it mean for the notion of privacy?

What are the ethics, what are the politics, of this 'exposure', this public reading of images that generate their meanings in the private realm?

The conventions of family photography, like ... Barthes refusal to show us his mother's picture are designed to keep the family's secrets and to protect it from public scrutiny (Hirsch, 2012: 107).

Hirsch expands that family photograph albums only contain pictures, which countenance the shared family narrative; she notes "pictures that diverge from the communal narrative tend to be discarded as 'bad' or 'unrepresentative'" (Hirsch, 2012: 107). Now there is no family album to speak of, but rather individuals' albums of their families, containing images that are curated without collaboration, which are not necessarily bound by the same unified codes. The new repositories are social networking sites and blogs where photographs are collected and grouped as if in photo albums. Often photographs are uploaded to the public that those photographed find upsetting, disturbing "the delicate balance of agreement on which the construction of the album and the narrative of family rests" (or at least, used to rest) (Hirsch, 2012: 107). The process is more individual, less familial and these digital age 'photo albums' usually represent one individual's perspective through their profile. The personal 'profile' on Internet platforms is augmented by other photographs (or videos) uploaded by friends and family, which, when tagged, are included on the respective person's profile. Thus, while these photo repositories are managed by individuals representing themselves and no longer the family unit, they still have links to a sense of community, and meaning is also produced between interactions and commenting on these social networking sites. In response to the public nature of Facebook, Tumblr and the Internet in general private social networking sites like Notabli, Path,

23snaps and Everyme have been developed to share instantly and globally but not publically.

This notion of privacy raises some interesting questions for me as I used my personal childhood home video to make a film which curates my childhood and will go into the public realm. As witnessed in the film there is tangible resistance from my brother, who does not feel comfortable being in front of the camera, in moments as a child and quite markedly in the additional footage I shot for the film for the making of the film. This brings to the fore the complexity of the ethical codes surrounding documentary filmmaking: how to portray subjects, what to include and what not to include, the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject, and in this case the relationship is compounded as it is also a relationship between family and filmmaker.



Figure 5: Alex and Nikki (1985) Harare, Zimbabwe

In some ways home video also works within these paradigms; for example I remember sharing the toilet with Alex during our childhood, I remember photographs being taken of us doing this (See Figure 5). The photograph has become a quintessential childhood image for me, one that displays Alex and my close bond through an intimate moment captured at a time when Alex and I had not yet developed a self-consciousness that would have prevented this image from being captured. I did not have a sense that this image is an invasion of (my) privacy during my upbringing, but looking at it now it does feel very intimate.

In some ways the making of this film treaded that fine line of invading privacy as I used many recordings that were made in this pre-self-conscious phase. To add to the existing footage I also attempted to do more recordings in the present day. My brother, now an adult, sometimes stopped this, but other times he did not. He was uneasy with the film in the beginning and uneasy with my wanting to document him, and us, in the present day. I explained to him I was not trying to expose him. I explained that I just wanted to paint a portrait of our relationship. He remained agitated by the film. I had a screening with my brother once I had made a rough cut of the film. The transformation in his relationship with the film was interesting – once he saw the film, and fully realised my intention with it, he became very relaxed and participated. It became something we bonded over – just like families bond over home video and family photographs.

Home video goes viral

One of the early precursors to this public sharing of private moments for entertainment is the popular *America's Funniest Home Videos* which started to be broadcast in South Africa when we came in early 1991. My family and I watched it avidly, getting view into American society and their openness to the recording and sharing of personal moments.

America's Funniest Home Videos takes advantage of two interlocking factors in the contemporary culture and economic development: the enduring middle American obsessions with visually documenting the

rituals of everyday life in the nuclear family and the explosion of consumer market camcorder technology, which makes that process easier and more accessible than ever (Fore, 1993).

The show continues today, the precursor to user-generated content, and seems “to mark a victory for vox populi on the mass market airwaves... [with the creation of this] hybrid product that selectively incorporates those aspects of home mode production that dovetail most comfortably with the institutional demands of network television” (Fore, 1993). However, the show offers a crude usage of home video; no character identification is allowed and the footage comes together as a string of dislocated farts, burps and falls by faceless people whose principle shared characteristic is the ability to evoke cheap laughs.

We are not free from the days of *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, the Internet is still using home video in undiscerning, unregulated ways and not only for high jinx. Notably, one of the first leaked citizen journalist cellphone recordings to go viral was the execution of former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. This crude and brutal video comprised of a low angle shot of the execution with audio (the official recording was silent), in the audio taunting from the audience as well as the snap of Hussein’s neck can be heard. Home video recordings of celebrity sex tapes have also taken the Internet by storm. Once these videos have been made public on the Internet they can be viewed by anyone, including children, and the effects of this digital rubbernecking can be damaging. Children are also starting to have their own Facebook profiles and Instagram hashtags that their parents set up for them before they can even understand what these things mean. Thus they have a public Internet presence without having given their permission. Take for example ‘Charlie Bit My Finger’, a 55-second video clip that has over 338 million views, and which remains the most viewed YouTube video that is not a professional music video. The clip features two baby brothers in the backseat of a car, while the younger brother bites the older sibling’s finger and giggles. Their father, Howard Davies-Carr, claims the video clip was only meant for one viewer – the boys’ godfather, who lives in the United States. He tells the *British Sunday Times* (2009):

the clip only went up as I wanted to share it with the boys' godfather. I was naive about the whole YouTube thing. It became viral and once that happened there was nothing I could do. People have sent lovely comments and messages and I now upload a new video of the boys every six weeks.

Besides the plundering of home video for the use of lowest common denominator entertainment and other sinister entertainment, home video is also being utilised in the digital age in more meaningful ways. Home video is being featured in other forms of media broader than the intimacy of family home screenings as a valuable social and history source. "Since the 1990s a significant number of documentaries have been produced that rely heavily upon primary footage taken by the subject(s) of the documentaries over the course of their purportedly predocumentary lives" (Orgeron & Orgeron, 2007: 47), most notably, *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003), *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003) and *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005). These films use home video footage as their primary source of storytelling. This privileging of the home video content "compels us to consider the implications of using home videos as narrational and illustrative tools, as conduits to history and memory" (Orgeron & Orgeron, 2007: 47). The digital transformation of easy-to-use and affordable technology seems to indicate a shift from oral history into visual history, and with it come new kinds of narrational devices within our image-obsessed world.

As cellphones make home recordings so easy and so pervasive, perhaps home video will begin to lose its cachet. People often say after watching my film "it's amazing you have all that footage", but moments later they may show me clips of their own children on their cellphone, and within moments it becomes clear they too have significant amounts of home footage. Perhaps film ideas may even be discarded if they cannot integrate an element of personal archive. In the analogue era only personalities that were deemed newsworthy seemed to warrant such coverage – celebrities may have had such documentation as there was a pre-existing hunger for such footage, but now the smaller stories can be told as everyone carries a digital archive

device and is embroiled in the self-documentation generation. We previously had to have unusual amounts of home video footage, or construct re-enactments, to sculpt stories about less famous characters, while today many films are made about ordinary characters, which we may discover to have extraordinary stories, through the increasingly common archival footage that exists today.

'Charlie Bit My Finger' must be the most vivid example of the changing interaction with private family home video footage into a public realm where viewers of the footage are no longer family and close friends, but are rather a world of strangers. The video clip has been viewed many more times by other people than by the actual family and friends of the boys on screen. The footage itself is nothing to speak of – over exposed visuals shot with an unsteady hand that happens to capture (or arguably exploit) a humorous moment. The footage's digital nature allowed it to be easily and swiftly uploaded onto the Internet where it then reached the status of a cultural meme. "The ease of distributing videos outside of the domestic circle by simple, low-cost duplication within the home by means of two VCRs [and even more easily with computers and Internet] enlarges the artifact's audience, diffusing its sacred importance to one family" (Moran, 2002: 43). Twelve years after this observation, this process is far more simple and executable now that computers and cellphones easily link to the Internet. This notion of the loss of the "sacred importance" evokes Benjamin's concerns regarding the erosion of the aura (Benjamin, 1969). Still photography shot on film and filmed movies were the medium which aroused Benjamin's fear of the loss of aura, yet these analogue mediums are what now retain an aura in our digital age. "In the world of digital replication, the digital image and the video object lose the aura that the photograph and film had retained because the copy is finally independent of the original; in fact there is no sense of an original at all" (Daly, 2007). Thus, the Super 8mm footage retains the aura that Benjamin describes, in its singular existence and ritualistic viewing, but the same cannot be said about 'Charlie Bit my Finger'? It may have achieved worldwide status but it has lost, or perhaps it is emancipated from, the element of ritual. It is important to note that while Benjamin theorised about the changing meaning

of art in the mechanical world, he was by no means placing a value judgment on this change – in fact, he welcomed a more democratic interaction with art. It seems to be that with the introduction of new technology the aura shifts, and the digital age is a “new shattering of tradition” (Benjamin, 1969: 221). New technologies, such as full high definition footage shot on cameras capable of 4k and 6k, seems to have currency or value in the precision and crispness of the footage; however, the Super 8mm footage although grainier, and less crisp seems to elicit a strong emotional response.

In watching my film I am painfully aware that my footage is nothing like the crisp Hollywood standards that we have become accustomed to. With increasingly better and better technology everyone is potentially able to shoot high quality footage (this is barring aesthetic considerations and professional skill). My footage does not contain this visual detail or technological state excellence that current home video would, but it has a veracity which is the “aura” in authentic home videos. While full HD shows every pore, every minute detail, my converted Super 8mm footage shows none of that kind of detail, but it does evoke emotion and transports us to a time and place: (my) childhood. There seems to be a value placed on technology that is at odds with the value of story and imagery. If I evaluate the materiality of either Super 8mm or full HD, analogue media comes out on top.

Digital images are everywhere; family footage has no sanctity, no special place. As Daly (2007) notes today’s world in an ever changing technological landscape, “with the ubiquity of moving images and the distracted reception they entail, we have not just the actor and the politician and the mass, but we have a sixteen-year-old girl’s room next to video from Darfur, equally captionless – the aestheticization of the everyday in a flurry of accidental montage”. Daly’s phrase “the aestheticization of the everyday in a flurry of accidental montage” elegantly summaries a description of the archived self in the modern age. The digital autobiographical self exists in a myriad of links made by many people – sometimes knowingly collaborating but often intersecting purely by chance.

When I access social media networking sites and log on to my online profile – to the malleable and changing digital record of myself – it aggregates my pictures, my videos, other people’s videos and pictures and creates some kind of picture of a life lived. Today anyone with a cellphone just above entry level can shoot photographs and videos and maintain a digital photo and video album of themselves. We are all recording our memories and ourselves, constantly adding to these digital albums. Not only major milestones like birthdays and weddings are recorded, but endless banal (quotidian) incidents too. This in turn modifies the audience consumption of the record – the audience is no longer a select few but is potentially anyone in the world. The ‘photo ops’ are endless and the ways to share these images just as abundant. We live in a world able to, and obsessed with recording ourselves. Ross McElwee, noted personal documentary filmmaker, warns:

 this notion of constantly wanting to capture reality as much as humanly possible is a kind of neurosis. It’s also one that’s perhaps more pervasive than it ever has been. We have a proliferation of readily available digital, and now computer-based and web-based technology, where making movies has become much easier than writing a novel or a poem. Now, technically speaking, almost anybody can make a movie. It’s interesting to think about the pathological aspects of this addiction to filming, this desire to interact with reality by filming it (Rhu, 2004: 10).

When my mother took home movies of us she was trying to capture and record a time to provide evidence for a very specific and interested audience, her parents; now there seems to be a shift in the impulse to capture and record to share with a wider, somewhat anonymous audience – there is a sense of display, of spectacle. The recording sometimes seems to overshadow the actual experience at hand. A bottle of champagne is opened, but before the first sip can be enjoyed the event must be documented and shared publicly. These days at social occasions it seems that people spend more time with their cellphones than they do with physical company who are present. They capture images, share them and interact with the commentary that comes through. Changing technology has brought with it new forms of engagement with the documentation of our private lives. Who knows what the

digital natives, those born into the Internet and smartphone era, and their technology will bring to our future reality.

Conclusion

I have found the process of revisiting my past through home video and family photographs very enriching. I have looked back, remembered, learned and reconnected with where I came from. I have traced a technological journey, from analogue to digital, looking at the inherent mood of each medium and the evocation of an era through each respective materiality. I have explored how this technological shift has also heralded a change in the engagement of home videos, and thus with our pasts. I have looked back on my childhood and returned to the present with new perspective. I found that I learned more than I ever expected to about my relationship with my twin brother, a deep and close relationship I had never questioned. At times during this process I felt destabilized about how I felt about this relationship as mining the footage during the process of making the film revealed nuances I had not noticed before. Yet now I feel a deeper connection with my brother and more refined sense of who we are, and what we mean to each other. I have my family photographs and recordings to thank for this. I feel rooted in the home video footage, as well as in the theory which helped me to unlock these insights. There is something deeply moving about returning to your past, something warming and nostalgic. I would argue through my creative and reflective process that nostalgia is the connection between the past and the present and is what enables the future.

The feelings associated with 'looking back' to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship to the 'lost'. They express a contrast between 'there' and 'here', 'then' and 'now', in which the absent/gone is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, more comprehensible, than its existent alternative in the present (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2003: 82).

And of course in this binary of 'then' and 'now' many have declared an undue sentimentality:

Indeed, it is this indiscriminate idealization of past time and lost place that has angered nostalgia's critics, and engendered vitriolic denunciations of nostalgic memory as 'reactionary', 'sentimental', 'elitist', 'escapist', 'inauthentic'— as a 'retrospective mirage' that

'greatly simplifies, if not falsifies, the past' (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2003: 82). But I have found power in personal reflection. I have found sadness and truth, but I have also found comfort, and I have peace in the revisiting. I have also found scholarly inspiration in this process. Through the reading of predominately Barthes, Kuhn and Hirsch I have found kindred spirits who also champion the investment in looking back, and in personal narrative. I have found a pronounced appreciation for nostalgia and revisiting the past.

I spent four years revisiting my childhood, attending the birthday parties again, reliving the long car drives, re-enacting days gone by – some significant days but many not. "One common feature of personal narratives is the focus on the 'mundane, everyday, private, informal and often conversational uses of language by diverse and ordinary people'" (Erdmans, 2007: 11). My research found its focus in a single small story: the changing nature of my relationship with my brother, and I have explored this through a study of the quotidian, through our home movies. "Maybe something within the personal (the study of the private, the everyday, the self, emotions, blood and the gummy underside of the table) invites skepticism" (Erdmans, 2007: 13). However, there are others, like myself who also find meaning in this study of the everyday. In a South African context, as Njabulo Ndebele has argued: "the spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it calls for emotions rather than convictions; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge" (Ndebele, 1986: 150), while "the ordinary is defined as the opposite of the spectacular" (Ndebele, 1986: 152). "The assumption that science is precise, that historians and sociologists are in search of facts, that the self is not a legitimate subject, and that the real story is not the same as an individual version of the story" (Erdmans, 2007: 13), but as Ndebele points out "by rediscovering the ordinary, the stories remind us necessarily, that the problems of the South African social formation are complex and all embracing; that they cannot be reduced to a single, simple formulation" (Ndebele, 1986: 156). Not only the theoretical analysis, but the making of the film also offered me an intimate connection with my past and with my familial relationships. Yet, it also seemed to provide me with a connection with my place in the world. It afforded me the space to consider

my relationship with the political landscape of my country and my continent, it allowed me the space to consider what family ties mean, it gave me an opportunity to consolidate my life's narrative. It follows that through sharing my narrative I am able to share broader details about, and make vivid, a collective experience: "The ordinary day-to-day lives of people should be the direct focus of the political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions" (Ndebele, 1986: 156). There is beauty in the everyday, beauty in banality, and more important there is meaning there, too.

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APPENDIX A: Release Forms



Wits School of Arts Film & Television

Private Bag 3, Wits, South Africa Fax : +27 11 717 9755 Tel : +27 11 717 9749 e-mail tvadmin@wits.ac.za

RELEASE FORM

DATE: 10 Dec 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Nicola Commins the producer of Frakma! thank you for your assistance in making this production possible.


By appending your signature and details you allow Frakma! the rights to your appearance in the production for whatever media the producers their partners, successors or assignees, now or in the future, may wish to utilise.

NAME Julie Frederikse

ADDRESS 6 Mons Road, Bellair

Durban 4094

TEL: 031 465 2857 / 083 309 8956

SIGNATURE 

For WSOA Film and TV



Student Production Coordinator



Wits School of Arts Film & Television

Private Bag 3, Wits, South Africa Fax : +27 11 717 9755 Tel : +27 11 717 9749 e-mail tvadmin@wits.ac.za

RELEASE FORM

DATE: 10 Dec. 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Nicola Cominos the producer of *Fraternal* thank you for your assistance in making this production possible.

By appending your signature and details you allow *Fraternal* the rights to your appearance in the production for whatever media the producers their partners, successors or assignees, now or in the future, may wish to utilise.

NAME *Stelios Cominos*
ADDRESS *6 Mons. Road Bellav*
Durban 4094
TEL: *083 255 3334*
SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

For WSOA Film and TV

[Signature]

Student Production Coordinator



Wits School of Arts Film & Television

Private Bag 3, Wits, South Africa Fax : +27 11 717 9755 Tel : +27 11 717 9749 e-mail tvadmin@wits.ac.za

RELEASE FORM

DATE: 10 Dec 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Nicola Cominos the producer of Fraternal thank you for your assistance in making this production possible.

By appending your signature and details you allow Fraternal the rights to your appearance in the production for whatever media the producers their partners, successors or assignees, now or in the future, may wish to utilise.

NAME Alex Cominos

ADDRESS 6 Mons Road Bellair
Durban 409A

TEL: 031 465 2857

SIGNATURE Alex Cominos

For WSOA Film and TV

Student Production Coordinator

APPENDIX B: Creative Submission – *Fraternal* (DVD)

Please see included disk