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Embodied encounters: a performative, material reading of selected contemporary artworks by Santu Mofokeng, El Anatsui, Willem Boshoff and Johan Thom

Declaration of originality

I, Johannes Frederick Thom, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Thank you.

Abstract:

This dissertation is underpinned by two related materialist positions. Firstly, following in the analyses of Darwin (1871/2004, 1859/2009), Barash (2012), Miller (2001), Dunbar (1999, 2009), Donald (2009), and Grosz (2008, 2011) artworks are understood as being the material embodiment of context-specific ideals of beauty. That is to say artworks fulfil a performative, evolutionary function, one that is responsive to the corporeality of the body and the cultural and artistic values at stake in the specific material context to which that body belongs. Secondly, my body is not something I have but, rather, I am this body. However, following material readings by Barad (2007, 2009), Butler (1990, 1993), Foucault (1967), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) and West-Eberhard (2003), like the artwork the body is also understood to be a socio-culturally, economic and politically constituted entity: the corporeal body does not exist pure and independently from the values of discourse and culture, for the latter is always already materially inscribed in it. Accordingly neither bodies nor the artworks they encounter are postulated as isolated 'objects' but, rather, are understood as being relationally founded material phenomena that weave in and out of one another even as they (re)configure historically specific boundaries between them and the world they inhabit. In this dissertation I apply this performative, materialist approach and the methodology implicit therein to the interpretation of selected contemporary artist's works including 'The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890 -1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng, 'Man's Cloth' (1998-2001) by El Anatsui, 'The Blind Alphabet' (1991 – ongoing) by Willem Boshoff, and 'Every Sentence draws blood' (2012) by Johan Thom. Throughout the dissertation I will show how a performative, material reading provides for an interpretive framework constituted as much by the form, subject matter and context of the artwork, as by the viewer's embodied experience thereof. To this effect I have employed two voices throughout the text: a first-person account of specific moments in my life that have particular relevance to my meaningful encounter with - and interpretation of - specific artworks; and secondly, a questioning, analytic voice that attempts to map theoretically the deeply nuanced performative interrelationship between the material bonds and boundaries at stake in therein.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I.I Beginnings

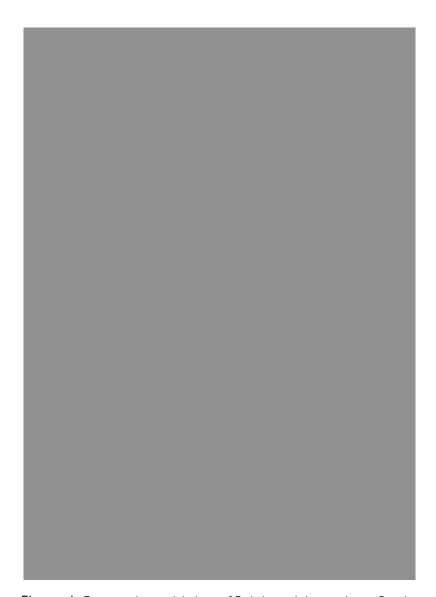


Figure I: Present day aerial view of Boksburg, Johannesburg, South Africa. This is the suburb where I grew up as it appears today. Most of the larger mine dumps such as those near the Elsburg Tailing Complex are in the process of being erased from the landscape by way of large-scale industrial recycling projects. (Source: http://wikimapia.org/#lang=en&lat=-26.256781&lon=28.220873&z=15&m=b&show=/7094592/ERPM-Gold-Mine, Accessed: I August 2013)

James, Paul and I are peddling away on our bicycles. It is quarter past one in the afternoon and like most of the other primary school children pouring from the open school gate we are

dressed in light blue and grey uniforms. But unlike most ordinary summer school days, today the three of us are not barefoot. This is because we are not going home this afternoon. We have something very special planned: today we are heading of to climb one of the mine dumps that dot the local landscape of the town of Boksburg and its surrounding suburbs.

First we stop behind the power station across the local Portuguese-owned take away café. James quickly scales the fence of the power station. He disappears from view whilst Paul and I make sure no-one else approaches. It takes less than a minute for James to return clutching a green canvass bag in his arms. Now it is my turn: I have to go buy some cigarettes from the café. The owner of the café, a rather humourless middle aged, black-haired man usually allows children to buy cigarettes for their parents. But, and this is why this particular task has fallen to me, only if he knows their parents. My mother smokes about a pack a day and I regularly have to go and buy cigarettes for her. I walk up to the counter and somewhat nervously ask for a pack of *Winston 20's*. "Your mother, she has changed her brand?" he says. It is more statement than a question but I am so nervous that I almost run away. When I ask for matches too, his suspicion grows and he slides the pack of cigarettes on the counter back towards himself. "You are sure this is for your mother?" I just stand there silently, desperately holding out a sweaty handful of coins towards him.

I meet James and Paul behind the café. A simple nod lets them know that I have succeeded. We jump on our bicycles to make our getaway. Only once we reach the safety of the veldt James stops to let us peek into the green canvas bag hanging from his shoulder. "He will not miss anything", James assures us. During the two weeks preceding our adventure James has carefully appropriated a number of samples from his father's sizeable collection of alcoholic beverages. Paul and I stare with real admiration at the bottles in the bag: it contains several seventy-five-millilitre bottles of whiskey, brandy and vodka. After a moments deliberation Paul asks the exact same question that bothers me: "No beer huh?" James shakes his head sideways and says: "No boys. My father only likes harde hout." But still what a prize!

On our way to our destination I keep looking up searching for some kind of omen. Because if the mine dumps are out of bounds, then drinking and smoking on a mine dump constitutes nothing less than a cardinal sin. But it is a clear cloudless day and everything seems to be working out as planned. Besides, for the boys in our Christian primary school there is only one

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¹ Harde hout is a colloquial Afrikaans expression for spirits such as brandy, vodka and whiskey that literally means 'hard wood' in English.

thing worse than the Lord's wrath and that is being called a chicken. We have made a pact with each other and there is no turning back now.

It takes us half an hour to reach our destination: the large, creamy yellow mine dump some five kilometres to the North of our primary school, *Laerskool Elspark*. It is a massive mound of soil, the size of a hill. Its sides are lined with deep vertical furrows, a sign of constant water corrosion. From this distance the yellow soil appears soft and often on slightly windy days such as this, a few powdery yellow clouds hover just above the mine dump's textured surface. Patches of vegetation sporadically sprout from its sides in decorative jots of green and brown. I think the mine dump looks like a bit like huge mound of custard set in distinct layers, just like the desserts my grandmother makes on Sundays: at its base there is a thin layer of red soil that resembles some kind of plate upon which the rest of the pudding is served up. Just thinking about it makes my mouth water. Suddenly I am rather sorry that we did not pack some sweet snacks too.

The massive hulking shape of the mine dump ahead of us forms an immediate counterpoint to the rest of the otherwise flat landscape of Boksburg. The whole of the East Rand including Germiston, Boksburg and Alberton is mining country and apparently once, not too long ago, the entire area was one single mining operation. Today large mine dumps exactly such as this one are a continuous presence in our lives and often I feel that it almost does not matter where you go in Boksburg there is always one looming on the horizon. But I have never seen one up close.

We make it to the rusty wire fence boundary designed to keep out any intruders. On top it is lined with razor wire and the sharp little wire 'thorns' seem to glisten wet in the hot afternoon sun. The fence also sports a large yellow and black sign that reads "Danger. Gevaar. Ingozi"². James cracks a feeble racist³ joke about the authorities wanting to warn the black population too. He says, "They can't read, so this doesn't really help at all". When Paul points out that everyone can still clearly see the ominous image of a skull and bones above the words James quickly adds that nothing will stop a Zulu from climbing over a fence. We burst out laughing. Actually we are so nervous that we would probably laugh at anything to help relieve the tension. We begin searching in earnest for a hole near the steel post in the corner. Paul spots

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² 'Gevaar' and 'Ingozi' being the respective Afrikaans and Zulu translations of the term 'danger'.

³ Given that the events related here occurred in 1986 such racism, and worse, was nothing out of the ordinary: this was the heyday of Apartheid South Africa when the white minority held absolute power in South Africa, a virtual dictatorship.

what looks like weak area in the fence and calls us closer: "You see, there on the ground", he says pointing to our way in.

It looks like an animal has hollowed out a section beneath the fence. The smooth area is devoid of any plant growth and the raw red soil and stones beneath the grassy landscape lay exposed. Clearly other human beings regularly use this hole as a means to reach the other side of the fence too. Paul quickly tests the tension in the wire by tugging at it until it lifts it a few centimetres, just enough for a body to slide underneath it. "This definitively is it", he says, "We can easily crawl through here". We leave our bicycles on the ground and take turns to crawl to the other side of the fence on our bellies. We must be very careful to not tear our precious school uniforms.

I am the last to crawl through the hole in the fence and of course a loose wire snags one of my socks just as I get up on the other side. The rusty wire leaves a long thin cut on my shin. Almost immediately a line of blood trickles down to my shoe. I am worried: I do not know exactly what tetanus is, but my mother's stern warning about the grave consequences of contracting it suddenly sound in my head. I quickly spit on the wound and wipe it with an old tissue from my pocket. James says that is not good enough and he proceeds to douse the wound with some of our precious harde hout. It burns like fire and James curses at me as I pull my leg away. "Hold still. If it hurts it is good for you", he says. Once the wound is clean we continue on foot through what is considered very dangerous terrain. As we begin walking towards the mine dump James turns around and faces the two of us. He says: "Be very quiet. If we hear something we all run in different directions and meet back at the hole". Paul and I shake our heads in agreement. Anxiously I blurt out my reply: "Move it! The longer we stand here the bigger the chance we will be caught".

The area near the mine dump is the source of much speculation amongst the local school children. The story goes that there is a man whose job it is to police the area inside the mine dump. He has a shotgun that is loaded with salt and always aims for your behind – a painful prospect to say the very least. Even if you make it past him this area in particular is rife with sinkholes - the miners have dug so many holes in the earth below us that the land is collapsing piece by piece. And then of course, they still regularly use dynamite to blow apart the massive rocks that block further deep level excavations. My father says some of the mineshafts extend six kilometres into the earth and I wonder what it must be like to work there everyday.

"Probably your nose is always blocked from all the dust", I think to myself as we walk towards the mine dump.

I know that being a mineworker is a very dangerous job: one of our neighbours' sons, an older boy named Stephen has a permanent back injury from the short time he spent working at the mines. Now he mostly just sits at home in his parents' pale-pink house listening to country music and raising pigeons in the backyard. I often go visit him and then he teaches me how to care for pigeons. Once he shows me how to kill a pigeon with a broken wing by turning its neck around. I cry but Stephen says it is an act of kindness - the pigeon is suffering. The sick pigeon doesn't even whimper as Stephen breaks its neck. Still, Stephen never talks about his own injury. Almost every other week the local news carries a report of yet another group of miners that have been trapped underneath the earth after an earthquake. Stephen is no fun when this happens. He turns the radio full blast and tells me to be very quiet in case there is any news about the disaster. Sometimes he drinks a lot of beer too. (I learn to stay away from his house when the radio is too loud).

I look towards the ground: somewhere deep beneath my feet there are hundreds of mining shafts in which the miners are working, chipping away at the soil bit by bit. "Hopefully there is no dynamite blast scheduled for today", I say to Paul. He smiles nervously. Growing up in Boksburg we are all accustomed to the constant earthquakes: owing to the extensive mining operations in the area, today the whole east-rand of Johannesburg is subject to increased seismic activity. The shaking of the earth is a part of our lives. Nonetheless feeling solid ground heave beneath you is always a terrifying experience. Perhaps more to the point, out here in the veldt, so far away from the safety of home, inside and above the workings of a bona fide mining operation, a scheduled mine blast could be lethal: what if the earth suddenly opens up beneath your feet and swallows you forever? It is very far from home and will take a few hours before a proper rescue party will come to your aid - if you survive the fall that is.

According to my some of my brother's older friends, there once was a child that disappeared in a sinkhole close to the mine dump a few years ago. The police, ambulance services and the mining company tried in vain for two weeks to find his body. When they finally found him he had died from thirst. (I wonder what its like to die from thirst in Boksburg? They say it's a quick death but I still think it must be horrible to be so hot, with parched lips, a swollen tongue and no light). Anyway, even though the sinkholes are real enough, I vaguely suspect that this is just a

scary story designed to keep children like us away from the mine dumps. But just in case Paul brought a length rope, a bottle of water and small bathroom mirror for signalling purposes.

I often have the same nightmare about being trapped underground. In the dream I simply fall into a dark hole without ever actually landing. The hole slowly closes shut as I fall deeper and deeper into the earth. On the way down I fall past a number of open caverns inside which there are miners all wearing hardhats with headlamps. Some of them continue to work as I fall past them screaming. Others turn their heads but then just stare. I reach out to them but they are completely oblivious to my plight. Eventually, on my way down, the air becomes so hot that it begins to burn my eyes, nostrils, ears and throat. When I can no longer breathe I normally wake up. Then, finding myself awake on solid ground, safe in bed in my house and covered by a warm blanket, I turn on my side and sleep some more. At this stage of my life the dream no longer bothers me: I know it's just a dream.

We take turns to walk in front. As we walk through the dusty field towards our destination we all keep our eyes firmly focussed on the path ahead of us. Nothing is trivial: every rock, minor cavity or recent sign of disturbance in the soil is treated with the utmost respect. When something appears even remotely out of place we quickly form a human chain by holding each other's hands. Then, with one foot extended as far as humanly possible, the leader carefully taps the surface of the soil with their toes. If the ground remains firm, we know it is safe to continue.

We make slow progress but with each step the mine dump ahead grows bigger and bigger. Today we will climb this mine dump.

1.2 Beginnings (reprise):

The formula for rich discoveries:

A rocky outcrop, the minute

Activity of ants, a garnet chip —

The small things close to the earth, that other men

Think trivial or do not see...

(Verse from the poem 'Old prospector' by Charles Eglington)⁴

James Paul and I finally did make it to the top of the mine dump without any incident. But thinking about it today it is an important moment because for the first time in my life I felt like an indelible, material part of the world: I knew that I was more than just a product of my community, my particular culture, its politics and its history. Sitting atop the mine dump with the pale blue sky above and the town stretched out all around me, I suddenly realised that my very identity as a living being is not only contingent upon, but also deeply, intimately interwoven with the highly particular material surroundings of Boksburg - including the landscape, the built environment and the living beings that populate it (humans and animals alike). In this sense the constant rumbling sound of aeroplanes and earthquakes, the hulking visual shapes of the yellow mine dumps and the somewhat dusty smell of the dry East Rand air were not static material 'props' in the unfolding reality of my life. Nor, as Eglington's suggests in his poem, were they simply incidental material 'trivia' that accompany the experience of being a child in Boksburg during the heyday of apartheid in the early nineteen-eighties. For when I eventually conquered the mine dump, sat down high above my surroundings with a bird's eye view of the town, something seemingly impossible happened: upon looking down at my immediate surroundings I found that the yellow soil had followed me all the way up there. Here is the paradox: even in the moment of my 'transcendence', of my rising above my surroundings and of having what might be considered a more objective, birds eye view of my world, the earth would not let go. In my mind these things are now inextricably woven together. Perhaps in Eglington's more poetic terms, I wish to suggest, by keeping our eyes firmly focussed, up close to the material

⁴ Cited from the anthology of poems collected in *Broken Strings: the politics of poetry in South Africa* edited by Stephen Finn and Rosemary Gray (1992, p37-38) and published by Miller Longman in Cape Town. The date when the poem was written is not given anywhere in the anthology. Regarding the poet, Eglington (1918-1970) was born in Johannesburg and is known particularly for his verses on animals. Diuring the course of his life he was a journalist, editor and a linguist. From 1962 Eglington was the editor of 'Optima', a journal published by the Anglo American Corporation. The latter, the Anglo American Corporation, was also a major mining house in South Africa.

surface of the earth where others do not always look ('the minute activity of ants, a garnet chip'), we may make a number of rich discoveries.

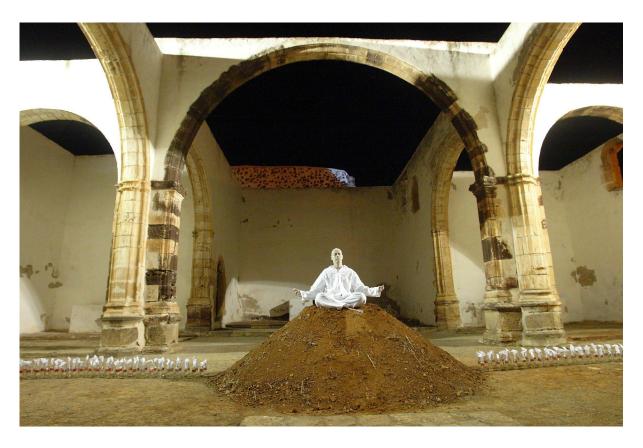


Figure 2: Documentation of the performance 'The theory of gravity' (2006), Johan Thom. Two-hour performance on the island of Betancuria commissioned by the First Landscape, Architecture and art Biennale of the Canary Islands curated by Antonio Zaya. (Image credit: Johan Thom). For this work I combined two well-known forms from South Africa's political and geographical landscape: the first is the mine dump and the second the Molotov cocktail. In this work 180 Molotov Cocktails are placed onto my body until it can no longer support their weight and I finally collapse. There are multitude references that include the rise of consumer society post the collapse of Apartheid in 1994; the continuation, in modified form of the exploitation of the working classes by way of the ongoing industrial exploitation of the land; and of course the more personal events described in the first section of this Introduction.

In this dissertation I wish to consider how the specific material properties of the artwork may actively participate in making of one's encounter therewith a singularly meaningful, performative engagement. To be certain this is not in any way to diminish the important role that artists play in giving shape and form to an artwork through the manipulation of such materials as soil, clay, paint, or even found objects. Instead I wish to suggest that the making of artworks is not simply a one-way process - a willy-nilly manipulation of form and meaning that occurs without any

regard for the inherent properties of material, for example. And similarity, I would argue that this holds true for the meaningful interpretation of artworks too: the emotive, associative and conceptual qualities we so readily attribute to artworks are as deeply rooted in the use of particular materials as in the exact bodily, sensory manner in which we interact with them. That is to say, materials do not in and of themselves mean anything but, rather, whatever meaning we may ascribe to them, is always performatively enacted through a set of decidedly material relationships.

Throughout the dissertation I will show how in linking the sensing, thinking feeling body with the artwork, a material approach foregrounds the existence of the deeply complex performative engagement between meaning and matter that ultimately lie at the heart of our embodied interaction with artworks. In an important way artworks are, much like those juicy appendages to be found hanging from an apple tree, the fruits that physically embody and communicate their respective findings to others. The figure of speech I think appropriate exactly because, much like the apple hanging from a tree, the complexity, particularity and indeed the value of the artwork may be fully appreciated only in the moment that one becomes fully involved with it: for me the experience of the artwork may be likened to the moment of tasting the fruit (this apple, this artwork). It is then that artwork unleashes a variety of (corporeal) sensory and cerebral experiences/ responses that cannot be reduced to any singular, totalizing interpretation or methodology. Moreover, it's a multi-sensory, material experience that is readily situated within the field of existing experience and knowledge (you know in advance that you can in actual fact eat an apple without being poisoned in the process, for example). In brief, there is no pure sensing, feeling body: as I will show throughout the dissertation, in my discussion of the material relationship between the experience of encountering the artwork and of its meaningful interpretation, the body is always already culturally, historically and politically inscribed by and through a variety of context-specific experiences, practices and discourses.

The material approach to the artwork I wish to put forward here is at once rather straightforward and exceedingly complex: this approach demands that the detailed, accurate material description of artworks be understood in concrete relation to the myriad, at times seemingly disparate, historic, cultural, natural and ideological forces at work in the act of sensory perception and interpretation. Thus in order to define, and clarify my own material approach to the relationship between the artwork I will refer to the work of a number of philosophers, natural scientists, anthropologists, physicists and of course artists. Here different modes of visual perception such as the framework of 'haptic perception' put forward by the theorists Gilles

Deleuze (1981/2004b), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) and Laura V. Marks (2002) will be applied to a discussion of a series of found photographic portraits collected by the South African photographer Santu Mofokeng and displayed as 'The Black Photo Album: Look at me 1890-1950' (1997). In this second Chapter of the dissertation I wish to show how the very, material surface quality of the photographic image is an active component in the meaning-making process: in haptic perception, seeing becomes a tactile engagement - the eye becomes a organ of touch that traces and interacts with the grain, scratches and marks on the material surface of the photographic image. Thus, what might otherwise be considered a form of visual 'noise', as something like a veil that obstructs any clear view of the subject of the portrait, is here configured as a means through which the artist signifies what is beyond the capacity of photographic image to faithfully reproduce, but not to induce: in this way the physical sensory engagement with the image photographic becomes a more open-ended, intimate, affective, material exchange between the viewer, the photographic image and the subject matter represented thereby.

In Chapter Three, 'Darwinian reflections on sex, beauty and art in the work of El Anatsui', Darwinian and neo-Darwinian insights on the nature of evolution and the contested place of sex and art therein will be applied to the work of El Anatsui, a contemporary Ghanaian sculptor living and working in Nigeria. Anatsui uses liquor bottle caps to manufacture large-scale, cloth like installations that, in the material reading I put forward, are understood not only as material elements appropriated from a specific time and place, but also as elements related to the context-specific, cultural process of human socialization. Moreover, when combined in the singular as an artwork, these bottle caps become something else: a visually arresting form that is understood here as a meditation on the material nature of the perception of beauty and its relationship to art. By referring to the writings of Charles Darwin (1871/ 2004 & 1859/ 2009), David Barash (2012), West-Eberhard (2003), Elizabeth Grosz (2008 & 2012) and a number of other neo-Darwinian researchers, the perception of beauty is shown to be a context-specific phenomena - one that has evolved for a number of seemingly disparate reasons including, but certainly not limited to, the game of seduction between the different sexes.

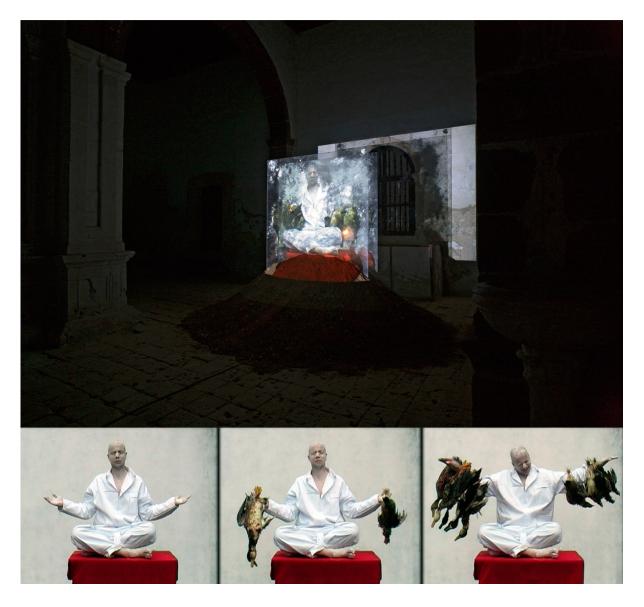


Figure 3: Installation view (top) and video stills (below) from 'The theory of flight' (2006), Johan Thom. Single video channel projection on layers of glass, mound of soil and building. Approximately $300 \times 300 \times 200$ centimetres. (Image credit: Johan Thom). This work is an accompaniment to the 'Theory of Gravity' (2006) shown before (Figure 2, p17) and is documented here as installed at the 16^{th} century monastery at Betancuria, Canary Islands, for the same exhibition. Again the reference to the mine dumps of my youth is present but this time it is combined with an image of me meditating whilst my arms are progressively loaded with the carcasses of recently slaughtered chickens and ducks. In this sense the works seeks to highlight the impossibility of reaching enlightenment (here understood as being an escape from the material reality of the weight of the carcasses and the soil). Also, the various layers of glass onto which the video is projected are covered with self-raising flour – lending a particular, textured, grainy material quality to the image that make it appear simultaneously concrete and ethereal.

Chapter Four is entitled 'The strange graveyard: Willem Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) as a material apparatus'. In this chapter the findings of Karen Barad (2007), a feminist physicist that expands upon the work of one of the founding fathers of the field of quantum

physic, Niehls Bohr, is discussed in relation to the notion of 'heterotopia' as defined by Michel Foucault (1967) and the artwork the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff. Willem Boshoff is a contemporary South African conceptual artist living and working in Johannesburg with whose work I am intimately familiar - we are close friends and I worked for him as an assistant between the years of 2006-2008. During this time I did research for him and worked on the manufacture of many of his art projects, including the 'Blind Alphabet'.

Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) is an artwork in which linguistic terms commonly associated with the tactile qualities of art are given palpable form through the manufacture of a three-dimensional dictionary for the blind. I put forward a more instrumental, structural understanding of the artwork in which the meaningful encounter therewith is indelibly shaped by a number of material concerns. These include: how the material form of the artwork, in this case an installation, actively contributes to the outcome of one's engagement with its subject matter; the form and sensory capacity of the body and its relationship to the normative biases implicit in the understanding of fine art as being a visually-oriented practice (whereby the blind are for example tacitly excluded); and lastly, the understanding of touch as being a heterotopic form of engagement through which the sighted may re-establish a proper, cathectic relationship with the artwork. This brings me to the question of methodology.

With the exception of the conclusion each chapter begins with a written narrative drawn from my personal life. This is done not so much to provide an account of the experiential and its role in the perception and interpretation of art, but rather to locate with more precision the specific material circumstances and conceptual considerations (historic, social, political and personal) at stake in my discussion of each artwork. Sometimes, such as in Chapter Three where I discuss the work of El Anatsui, the text recounts my first encounter with the artwork in the British Museum in the year 2004. Certainly it is very productive for me to return to that first encounter and to see how my perception of the work today remains anchored therein, although it has become much more complex in the years since. But this is not the case throughout. For example, in the discussion of the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff as a graveyard, I turn to a personal experience of the death of two close friends, showing how the notion of the grave takes on decidedly different meanings - one's intimately related to the exact material manner in which these two people were laid to rest. Thus, if the 'Blind Alphabet' is indeed a graveyard of sorts, then it is imperative to think about the material specificity of this graveyard, of how it performatively enacts the death of certain concepts and ideas whilst instantiating others. However, these pre-ambulatory texts always proceed by way of a first

person account written in the present tense. This allows the reader some access to the material specificity and complexity of my personal experience, including my state of mind at the time. In turn this provides the inter-subjective, perfomative framework through which I come to have knowledge of the artworks and concepts at stake in each chapter. In this sense the dissertation really is a performative, material process of thinking and not simply the re-presentation of artworks and the theoretic research implicit therein.

When I eventually turn to the conclusion of the dissertation where I discuss an artwork of my own entitled 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012), my firsthand experience of doing the work forms an integral part of the text: the work is an ongoing performance in which I had a text tattooed with water on my arms. Here I will show how the concepts, ideas and experiences that form part of the rest of the dissertation are woven together, generating a productive material framework through which the body may be understood as a 'surface for inscription'. However, by turning to the writings of Elizabeth Grosz (1994 & 2008) I will show how, contra the idea that the social writes itself upon the blank page that is the body, the body is here understood as having a material surface of its own, one that exerts pressure upon the very means of its writing. In this regard the healing process of the tattoo will be shown to clearly illustrate the agency of the body to resist and modify the force of ideology. This rather upbeat insight into the very materiality of the body and its agency seems to me a fitting manner to conclude the dissertation.

Before I continue I wish to outline some basic definitions and concepts that will be of use throughout the dissertation.

1.2.1 Materiality as framework for art

My approach towards the artwork is focused on exploring materiality as conceptual framework through which to rethink the relationship between artworks, viewers and their contexts, as a relational, performative process. The term 'materiality' here concerns the actual substance of things, what something (like an artwork or a body) is made of and how this impacts upon its capacity to function as a meaningful entity in relation to a particular (material) context. In that sense I am not following a purely Marxist trajectory, though of course given its focus on the role of labour performed by the human body it does have relevance. I would rather say that I am following a Deleuzian/ Darwinian trajectory, in the manner in which I wish to connect the sensing, human body (and its material properties) with the meaningful (conceptual) functioning

of the artwork as a 'material phenomenon' (a definition discussed in Chapter 1.4). Moreover, what a focus on materiality-as-framework makes abundantly clear, is that all the aspects of the artwork must be taken into consideration as part of the manner in which it produces, and thus actively contributes to the creation of forms of meaningful knowledge. Artworks cannot be neatly divided into form, content and meaning with one aspect almost invariably taking precedence over the other. Artworks may, with some revision, be described as being 'discursive practices' - where discursive practices are understood as being "…the material conditions that define what counts as meaningful statements" (Barad 2007, p63). My argument is thus hinged upon a crucial understanding of the mutually interactive, dynamic relationship between the materiality of the artwork, discourse, the body and knowledge.

In the reading I will put forward material objects such as artworks not only emerge from and function within a field of knowledge as Foucault would argue⁵, but are also constitutive of that field of knowledge. Here, following Barad's reasoning in the book *Meeting the Universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (2007), I would argue that the artwork is perhaps more closely related to the place and function of an apparatus within an experimental arrangement: the apparatus is not simply a device 'materialised' in order to fulfil a function and reach an outcome (one that is in some way already known in advance), but with more complexity, one that actively participates in the production of the objects of a particular field of knowledge. Thus contra, Foucault's rather negative view of the body⁶, I am not interested in the manner in which, for example, the material properties of bodies have historically been invested and made 'real' via certain discursive practices, such as prisons (where the prison is understood not simply as a 'place', a building, but rather as a 'discursive practice'). I am interested in investigating the possibility that the materiality of bodies - or in my analysis, 'artworks' - actively participate in drawing up the boundaries between discourse and the real, for example. This is in some sense a foundational argument, because in the reading I will put

⁵ Foucault, in the 'Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972, p214), argues that, "In analysing a painting, one can reconstitute the latent discourse of the painter; one can try to recapture the murmur of his intentions [or] ... set out to show a discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effect... shot through with the positivity of a knowledge (savoir). It seems to me that one might also carry out an analysis of the same type on political knowledge".

⁶ Barad (2007, p65) writes that: "For all Foucault's emphasis on the political anatomy of disciplinary power, he fails to offer an account of the body's historicity in which the materiality of the body plays an active role in the workings of power". Foucault's account of the materiality of the body is thus rather negative – a view that Butler (1987, 1993) inherits from him in her performative formulation of the manner in which sexualised bodies materialize through a process of 'iterative citationality'. Both Grosz's (1994) and Barad's (2007) account of the material body is decidedly more positive in this regard – though in these texts Barad is more focused on a reading of the materiality of the apparatus whereas Grosz is more focussed on the materiality of the body itself.

forward here, artworks do not do so as a function of their materialization via the field of discursive practices, but rather as a core effect of their very materiality. The distinction is finely cut indeed, but it moves from viewing artworks as being the embodiment of knowledge (as being the agents of that knowledge), to being in Althusser's terminology, a veritable part of the 'forces of interpellation' that calls certain 'objects' and forms of knowledge into being. Thus, as opposed to saying that artworks are the outcomes of 'discursive practices' - which would in some sense be the recapitulation of the institutional reading of artistic practice inasmuch as it privileges the field of discursive practices such as art history, art galleries, museums and educational institutions - the argument is that artworks already are discursive practices.

This brings me to the question of what, if artworks are already 'discursive practices', the role and function of writing about them may fulfil?

1.2.2 Writing (about) the artwork as material entity

I must begin with the fact that materiality-as-framework immeasurably complicates writing about artworks. In many ways I find much writing about art a tautological exercise or at worst a wilful discarding of the actual artwork as a part of the forces by which meaning is produced. In essence the argument I wish to put forward here is the following: for me an artwork is already a complex theoretical proposition albeit one articulated in a different, material language than everyday language of the spoken word and the written, theoretical text, for example. The artwork is not simply an illustration of ideas and nor is it something that always require further elaboration by theory in order to make it sensible and intelligible to others. The artwork is (already) situated in theory, history, art and life. I am not against the act of writing about artworks, art theory, or the closer study of art via the plethora of theoretic approaches that all bring something particular to our understanding of art and its place in society. It is certainly not the act of writing or of theorising about art that bothers me at all. But rather, as Susan Sontag noted in the essay 'Against interpretation' in 1966 already, it is the kind of interpretative writing that treats the work of art as being only a 'symptom', an entity of some hidden depth that has

⁷ For Althusser (1968, p170) ideology is a formative, normalising construct that seeks the 'interpellation' of the individual subject into its dominating structures. In this way the subject is 'called into being' by ideological forces that operate via normative institutions such as the church, the education system and even the family structure: Much like someone shouting 'Hey you!' to a crowd of people with one person somehow realizing that this address is specifically directed at them the 'subject' is hailed and recognises that this hailing is directed at them specifically.
⁸ My argument is decidedly non-humanist. Accordingly I deliberately avoid terms such as 'the subject' here and also afford non-human elements such as animals and even artworks their own distinct, relational forms of agency.

to be unearthed via the act of interpretation. In so doing this kind of writing foregoes the sensuous surface, the very materiality of the thing even as it discusses the physical artwork. Sontag (1966) takes particular exception to the work of Freud and Marx when she writes that:

All observable phenomena are bracketed, in Freud's phrase, as 'manifest content'. This manifest content must be probed and pushed aside to find the true meaning - the latent content - beneath. For Marx, social events like revolutions and wars; for Freud, the events of individual lives (like neurotic symptoms and slips of the tongue) as well as texts (like a dream or a work of art) - all are treated as occasions for interpretation.

I too find this kind of approach to art and art theory, artistic practice and writing indefensible. The artwork is not simply 'a symptom of', an occasion for theoretic interpretation. Where the value of the work resides is in its interpretation as part of an open-ended process that originates in the material specificity of one's physical encounter therewith. The sense of the physical artwork, the materiality thereof and our encounter with it, is too easily lost (and, echoing Sontag's sentiments of more than half a century ago, I would suggest still often lost today). Thus much of the writing the reader will find here is an attempt to bring the materiality of the artwork back into focus by asking such questions as: what does the artwork do, how does it function and what exactly is the role of its sensuous materiality within these questions?

Throughout the analysis presented here, I want to highlight how, by way of positing materiality as framework, the very materiality of phenomena (including that of the written text) participate in generating meaningful encounters (with artworks, bodies and indeed the surrounding world). And, inasmuch as it is a material encounter, in my view the meaningful act of interpretation (including writing about artworks) has a strong experiential component - one that relies equally upon the sensory inter-workings of the body, the artwork and the seemingly disembodied processes of abstract thought and memory.

It seems to me that materiality as framework is rather uniquely poised to give an account of the workings of the artwork without establishing set hierarchies, totalising interpretations, universal boundaries or most importantly for this dissertation, by privileging any one singular aspect of the artwork over another (such as concept over form, the mind over the body, theory over practice and so forth). This brings me to the question of what an artwork may be when understood from a material perspective?

1.2.3 Material beauty and material boundaries: the artwork

In an important way, one's physical and mental becoming-involved in the artwork wreaks havoc upon the seeming unity of the work by processing and displacing it. As Wollheim points out in Art and its objects (1968/ 1980) it is near impossible to determine exactly where the artwork may be found. Throughout the book Wollheim refutes what he terms the 'physical object hypotheses' - in short our preponderance for thinking and viewing the artwork simply as an isolated, static object. Perhaps, the case of a song best illustrates this problem. For, in song, where is the location of the artwork? Is the artwork to be located in the ideal performance, the ideal recording, the original musical score, the ear of the listener or the mind of the composer, for example? This rather confusing state of affairs is in fact germane two way in which I think artworks function not simply as an 'object' but as both a (material) phenomenon and a boundary drawing practice. Before I further elaborate these terms, it is necessary to understand that this duplicitous state of affairs is a direct result of the fact that I view art and artworks as having a function, one which is very much embedded in the material, sensory properties of the work.

Perhaps I could open this discussion by turning to the metaphor of the artwork as a fruit. True, in the process of tasting it, one ruins the fruit (though not the tree). I do not mean to imply that by writing about art we invariably distort and ruin its wholesome purity, so to speak. But rather, that the great variety of colours, smells and sensory information contained in the fruit have all though perhaps not exclusively - been focused upon attaining this singular goal: the fruit is meant for consumption by another living being. This is not in any way to be confused with some self-destructive impulse on the part of the artwork but more positively as an invitation of sorts. It is a productive, functional outcome that the fruit be consumed: whilst it nourishes the body it spreads the seeds of the plant. In this sense, the interpretation of the artwork registers not a loss but something like a desire for intercommunication on the part of the 'object' itself. Here it is vital to remember that the artwork implicitly addresses the audience by way of a sensuous, bodily experience, or the promise of it: the ripe red (or green or yellow!) fruit of the apple tree boldly advertises its sweet reward for becoming involved with it. And how should

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⁹ As Wollheim (1980, p7-8) shows, music introduces a new idea, namely that of an 'ideal performance'. That is to say there may be many performances of an opera but one may be tempted to think yourself 'nearer' to the original if you were say attending a performance of Wagner's 'Das Rheingold' in Bayreuth's Festspielhaus, than say an amateurish rendition of it by your local community theatre.

¹⁰ The same holds for a book or even a painting, which is all too often still fetishized as the original, contained object hanging on a museum wall e.g. is the painting the object on the wall, your interpretation of it, the authors state of mind at that particular point in time and so on

we interpret this? I cannot help but feel that Sontag (1966) touches a raw nerve when she argues that interpretation is 'the revenge of the intellect upon the artwork' inasmuch as it signals a kind of resistance to the corporeal interaction at the heart of the artwork's materiality. For at the base of it (and I choose my terms deliberately here¹¹), is a kind of fact of a corporeal, sensual and possibly even transgressive experience that the artwork shares with almost all things considered 'beautiful'.

As one of the great founding figures of contemporary material thought Charles Darwin understood all too well, the great explosion of beauty in, and diversity of, living forms that populate this planet, did not simply evolve by way of the process of natural selection alone. Early on in his professional career Darwin quickly realized that if he could not give a thoroughgoing account of the excesses that seem to mark the forces of sexual selection and reproduction, in short of the place of beauty in nature, his theory would remain fundamentally flawed. In fact, as Donald (Donald & Munro 2009, p15) states, "...aesthetics, were not, for Darwin, merely a matter of peripheral interest, but a key battle ground between him and his opponents". As Darwin notes in Origins of the Species (1859/ 2009, p692), if beauty is not a gift from God for humankind's enjoyment nor simply a frivolous by-product produced by the great diversity of natural life, then it has to serve some function. Granted Darwin (1859/ 2009, p693) would argue that the use of the term 'function' is somewhat forced here. Perhaps then the term 'relational function' is more appropriate: it is 'functional' in the sense that, for Darwin, the value of beauty actively, though in rather uncertain terms, participates in the ongoing evolution of the species (via the forces of sexual selection, for example) and 'relational' in that, the concept of beauty is therefore subject to various, changing interpretations by various living beings (including though perhaps not limited to humankind and the animal kingdom). Thus beauty is not a fixed metaphysical idea or Kantian category, but, rather, a value that is located within a particular material context as part of a larger, interactive, ever-evolving environment.

As Donald argues (Donald & Munro 2009, p16) for Darwin beauty is not a response to any inherent quality of an object but rather a value that emerges within context-specific circumstances, and one open to endless re-interpretation. Donald shows in the remainder of her analysis, that in stark contrast to the then dominant, moralist framework for art as proffered,

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¹¹ The term base signals here not only its usage in the Oxford Shorter English Dictionary (2007) as a noun i.e. 'a support structure; fundamental principle; foundation; principle ingredient' or even a space from which 'military operations are conducted', but also as an adjective especially inasmuch as signals a form of 'debased' corporeal behaviour, as in 'menial; despicable; degrading' and even 'low in the natural scale; illegitimate as in *baseborn*'.

for example by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his Seven discourses on art¹², Darwin's account of beauty is particularly corporeal, serving as a kind of sensuous pleasure, though importantly one sans the kind of moral underpinnings of Reynolds' approach.

To return then to the metaphor of the artwork as fruit, once a glistening, ripe apple has drawn you closer to it, the pleasurable experience of tasting signals an almost carnal involvement through which boundaries (between the self and the fruit) are collapsed and reconfigured. For even as you taste, enjoy and swallow a fruit it returns the favour from the inside out, so to speak. The fruit becomes part of you as you ingest it: after all, your 'diet' may not only change how you look but also how you feel and experience the world too! In that sense I would agree with Grosz's (2008) analysis that, in their capacity for reconfiguring boundaries through sensuous experiences, artworks signal the possibility of a Darwinian/ Deleuzian 'becoming' In an obvious though somewhat flawed, Darwinian sense, to partake of certain foods only will in the long run have definite implications for the co-evolution of humanity and the context in which we flourish. For example, for Darwin the different races of humankind were the products of sexual selection, of the prizing of certain external characteristics (such as a particular skin

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¹² Donald (Donald & Munro 2009, p13-19) argues that Reynolds's 'Seven Discourses on Art' of 1769-1790 laid the foundation for 18th century aesthetic theory that Darwin would respond to (he read the 'Discourses' during his time as a student a Cambridge). The 'Discourses' were "...intended to enhance the painting profession by an invocation of classic aesthetics – an identification of beauty with virtue, reason and order..." (Donald 2009, p17).

¹³ Of course what you eat has important consequences for the environment too in specific ways: if you choose to eat only certain kinds of apples (apples that look and taste a certain way) it will effect changes within the apple tree itself too, propagating specific species and so forth.

¹⁴ In Nietzsche and philosophy Deleuze (2006, p24) first articulates the idea of becoming "...as the affirmation of being". Of course, I cannot hope to do justice to the complexity of becoming in Deleuze's corpus in a footnote. Thus, apart from referring the reader to Deleuze's own writings on the idea of becoming in Nietzsche and philosophy (2006), Difference and repetition (1994), The logic of sense (2004), I would refer the reader to the following two articles that are perhaps less opaque in their description thereof: 'When is a Deleuzian becoming?' by Todd May (2003) and 'Bergson, Deleuze and the becoming of unbecomming' by Elizabeth Grosz (2005). For Deleuze there "...is only an unfolding of difference in time" (May 2003, p146) ...that gives rise to passing identities. Thus it may be said that all forms of being are in the process of becoming – that when understood in this way is the ontological condition of being itself. Thus, as May (2003, p145-147) suggests the acknowledgement of time within being gainsays any stability or fixity therein and moves toward an understanding where being is becoming. In this regard, as the title of May's article suggests it is more appropriate to ask 'when is becoming?' rather than 'what is being?' Or to put it in other terms, if as Deleuze (2006, p23 -24) suggests, difference lies at the heart of being, then the question of what being is, is deeply flawed inasmuch as it suggest some stable, fixed identity that precede this difference. As we shall see later in this dissertation, this means that Deleuze is less interested in what things are, their identities, than how they materially connect with each other (See the discussions of Deleuze in Chapter 2.1 and 2.3 of this dissertation).

colour) by groups of people as being beautiful, desirous and indeed of acting upon that impulse until such state in time that it became a defining characteristic of their visual appearance¹⁵.

Thus for me, 'becoming' signals a generative, evolutionary possibility: as Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) argue, this is the becoming of a new form of being that does not emerge from analogy and resemblance, but rather, like an assemblage, from discrete material elements that make contact with and influence one another¹⁶. The notion of 'becoming' will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two where I discuss the work of El Anatsui. But at present I wish to situate this rather uncertain possibility within the very workings of the artwork, that is to say, as something that forms a veritable part of the methodology at stake in the creation and functioning of artworks.

1.3 On art and method

In all, I feel that being an artist and making work means more than setting up a methodology and simply applying it uniformly to your subject matter whilst rendering the results in some

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¹⁵ This was, and perhaps still is, a highly controversial position because it means that no moral ground can be provided for the basis of racial discrimination other than that of the pleasures and wants of certain groups of people over and above that of others. That is to say, for Darwin the colour of one's skin holds no relation to anything other than what is considered beautiful within a particular socio-cultural context. Indeed as James Moore and Adrian Desmond argue in the introduction to *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to sex* (Darwin, 1871/2004) much of Darwin's core work regarding the evolution of the human races was motivated by his strong objection to slavery and racial discrimination. Darwin, for example, contra essentializing debates regarding race as an inherent signifier of an existing natural order in which the relative lightness of ones skin, the shape of your skull, nose, texture of hair and so forth, could be equated with ones superior position in society, (such as put forward by and indeed entrenched by the field of Eugenics via the work of his cousin Francis-Galton and others) argues that race is simply the result of sexual selection, and thus a context specific matter of taste. Some people found these features beautiful and thus they are the result of a slow, selective breeding. Also see *Darwin's sacred cause: race, slavery and the quest for human origins* by Desmond & More (2009) for an in depth discussion of this aspect of Darwin's life and work.

¹⁶ As Zizek would argue, pure "becoming is not a particular becoming of some corporeal entity, a passage of this entity from one to another state, but a becoming-it-itself, thoroughly extracted from its corporeal base" See 'Organs without Bodies - Gilles Deleuze 2. Becoming versus History" by Slavoj Zizek. (Available Online: http://www.lacan.com/zizcatpower.html. Accessed I March 2013). But Zizek is careful to add that 'becoming' also implies "...transcending the context of historical conditions out of which a phenomenon emerges". In this way becoming is not a state of becoming something else, such as moment in the passage between stages, but an immanent state of pure being, like an assemblage the emergence of a new unity through the movement between various discrete elements. Zizek (ibid) extends his discussion of Deleuze to include this remarkable passage regarding the historicist approach to art: "One often hears that, in order to understand a work of art, one needs to know its historical context. Against this historicist commonplace, a Deleuzian counter-claim would be not only that too much of a historical context can blur the proper contact with a work of art (i.e., that, in order to enact this contact, one should abstract from the work's context); even more, it is, rather, the work of art itself which provides a context enabling us to properly understand a given historical situation". Thus in placing the corporeal, sensory encounter with the work of art at the heart of my analysis it could well be argued that the entirety of this dissertation is motivated by a Deleuzian approach.

suitable form (one clearly recognizable as forming part of the accepted variants within canon of artistic practice - i.e. a sculpture, a painting or even a conceptual artwork). To return to the poem by Eglington cited in the beginning of Chapter 1.2, the making of an artwork does not amount to being some kind of 'formula'. If this is so it is because there exists within the encounter between the artist, their subject matter, the material form they choose to express themselves through and the viewer a form of interworking that, finally, elicits something more than the merely sum of its parts. The artwork is not simply the objective 'finding' of one's research but rather, the production of another element that could on occasion fundamentally alter the entire equation. Throughout history this something else has had many names including 'poetics', the 'aesthetic' experience and so forth. But, in general I would group it under the heading of 'art' and as part of the very thing that I expect from the practice of an artist to emerge. Even though the artwork may not fundamentally alter the framework in the short term, i.e. it remains an 'artwork', the idea here is that one cannot break up the artwork in some cool structural, analytic sense, determine what makes it work and the just chug out more of the same with exactly the same results. In that sense an artwork is not mechanical, like a machine and nor are its myriad outcomes exactly reproducible.

Artworks are 'unruly' meaning that the relevance of what artists contribute to society may not always be things that are easily quantifiable, immediately clear, acceptable or functionally useful. To deliberately misquote Laura Marks (2002, pXV) whilst holding the general thrust of her argument intact:

...the flowering of reality that is the artwork¹⁷ truly resists the idealization that serves to instrumentalise an object, whether to make it compliant to the flow of capital, or to the marketplace of ideas.

As Marks (2002) argues, an artwork is 'rich' exactly because the material experience of it cannot be wholly contained nor accounted for by even the most detailed of descriptions. Within the context of the artwork, that richness is the creation of a fertile field that allows for the emergence of specific, poetic/ aesthetic realizations: because all objects are indeed rich, too rich to be contained in their symbolic translation via language, for example, there are simply not enough words, pages, digital data storage space available to store a full and accurate written

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¹⁷ Marks is commenting here on the seeming excess contained within the particular object, and excess which following Deleuze in the book *The Logic of Sense* (2004a), she argues always exceeds its denotation. The original quote reads as follow: "The flowering reality that is the potential in an object does truly resist the idealization that's serves to instrumentalize an object".

description of any one artwork. However, there may well be enough words to describe the limited expectations and material experience we have of the artwork (which of course would always again be a limited account of the work itself and in fact, our capacity for language itself may be instrumental to both enabling and limiting that experience)¹⁸. This will be clearly illustrated in the Conclusion where I discuss a performance artwork of my own entitled 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012) in detail. This discussion proceeds predominantly as a descriptive written account of the details of the performance artwork including its medium, its material workings, context-specificity and the variety of nuanced, interactive experiences the work solicits. At present, the point is that I wish to focus on the 'richness' of the object within the context of artistic practice, in other words, the particular richness of the artwork as distinct from the more general acknowledgement thereof (with regards to say all phenomena – for even an apple is 'rich' in this sense) and of how this 'richness' is endemic to producing the more-thanitself, what I termed in the previous paragraph, the possibility of 'another element'. Thus the question may be, what distinguishes the artwork from any other productive entity, like a machine?

To be certain, a machine is also a productive entity that generates something else beyond itself (the smoke rising from a diesel tractor, the straight lines in a ploughed landscape – material elements that so clearly exemplify what Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) might call the tactile, surface effects of the variety of 'machinic' connections that inextricably map relations between the self and the world, the spider and its web). But here the equation stops: for despite the fact that an audience is readily materially mapped in into the working of the artwork, and the artist in the context of their world, the final outcome is not simply the reiteration of that mapping²⁰. For other than the artwork, the smoke rising from the machine is a clear outcome of its mechanical functioning, something that may without serious contradiction be causally linked to the very manner in which it operates to process certain raw materials (fuel, oil), for example. The artwork does not simply serve to illustrate, or make clear the fact that certain perhaps oblique, surface connections exist between the self and the world. I reiterate, for me the outcome is the (possible) re-working of the entire equation via the production of

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¹⁸ See the discussion in Chapter 5.4 of this dissertation. Also see the discussion on the relationship between sight, language, art and interpretation in Chapter 4.3.1 regarding the artwork the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 -) by Willem Boshoff.

¹⁹ The Deleuzian notion of the 'machinic' is discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation – see section 5.1.2. ²⁰ Which to be certain would in Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) terms be considered a 'tracing': a tracing maps ready existing connections whereas a mapping is the productive creation of something else. See the discussion of the 'map' and the 'tracing' in Chapter 5.2.1 of this dissertation.

another element (the more-than-itself), and not merely the drawing of our attention to the surface effects of their inter-workings or the production of a form of excess 'for its own sake' (here in some ways I depart company with Grosz's and Deleuze's analyses of artworks²¹). In that sense the artwork could be viewed as a 'boundary drawing practice' and as I will show, it does so in ways that are decidedly material, both in origin and outcome. In fact it is vital to understand that there exists a definite interrelationship between the status of the artwork as boundary making practice and that of its sensory, material form. In short, because artworks tacitly address, investigate and make use of ideas regarding aesthetics, poetics and beauty, and render these ideas in material form, there exists within it, something like a constant, dynamic interplay between the opening up and the narrowing down of possible meanings too.

Where the artwork as material form opens up a vast field of meaningful possibilities, exactly because the artwork is a boundary-making practice too it reconfigures those possibilities in a very specific manner. In that sense the artwork is not a open invitation for (re)interpretation and consumption, it's not just an expansion of the field of possible meanings but also, vitally for my reading, the imposing of limits upon that field. That is to say, artists do not create work from nothing, and nor do they do so for no particular discernible reason at all. It seems to me highly problematic to contend that artworks are wholly free-floating signifiers that we may ascribe whatever meaning strikes our fancy. For one thing, in asking the question 'What is the meaning of the experience of tasting a fruit?' we cannot divorce and do away with the material properties that both animate and limit our subsequent meaningful interpretation of it²². So to a certain extent, the richness of our experience of the artwork is already limited in and of itself. Moreover, art is not just the willy-nilly creation of things from nothing, like some kind of conjurers trick, for they are not only products of a specific place and time but also interventions into that place and time. That is to say the artwork straddles both the idea of being an object and a practice that enact boundaries.

²¹ As we will see in Chapter 3.2, 'beauty, art and boundaries' of this dissertation I have some problems with the analyses of artworks proffered by Grosz (2009) and Deleuze (1981/2004b). For his part, where it concerns fine art, Deleuze expresses a particular bias to modernist, abstract paintings and Grosz (2011, 2008) on the other hand seems to think that sensation resonates only for its own sake.

²² Human taste buds can for example distinguish a great variety of flavours including as is the case with most fruit, sweet and sour. But as with the human eye, there obviously exists a definitive limit to the range of its sensory capacities: The human eye cannot see ultraviolet light, whereas for birds this is not the case. Regardless the limits inherent to our sensory perception actively participate in the creation and interpretation of artworks. This becomes abundantly clear in a performative work such as 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff that is made ostensibly for an blind 'audience', here the sighted are rendered as something like 'outsiders', excluded exactly on the basis of their sensory capacity for sight. Moreover, in asking this question one is not positing a definite meaning to the formal properties of the fruit but rather drawing attention to how those properties participate in producing a meaningful encounter.

Again Wollheim's (1980) difficult question rears its head but this time I feel more prepared to provide a tentative answer. To ask 'where is the artwork?' is, in an important way to ask 'what does the artwork do?' As Wollheim's analysis hints this is not so much a 'where?' as a 'what?' and 'how?' kind of question. It is precisely because the artwork is not an object but rather a set of materially embodied relationships (how?) that we may begin to ask questions about the relative function those relationships fulfil (what?). How do these relationships for example connect the fruit, the bird and the nest? Thus whereas the artwork as fruit distinguishes itself, via its sensual, material properties, as something to become involved with — a sign produced ostensibly to attract the interest of others — the artwork-as-nest signals the fact that the artwork does not do so for the sake of pleasure alone and neither can it do so from a wholly disinterested, objective, and pure vantage point (as if the artwork is somehow part of a pure, somehow pre-discursive, natural realm of expression and experience).

As I will shortly argue in more depth in the next section of this Chapter, a nest is a distinct space comprising a set of boundaries materially enacted and drawn from within a larger context. In keeping with the larger thesis here, a nest is less of an object than a boundary drawing practice. And, exactly because the artwork is a boundary-drawing practice too, and not merely the reiteration of the variety of un-said/ undiscovered, material, sensual potentialities of the object (the ever-expansive 'richness' of the experience), it manages to alter the 'equation', so to speak. Somehow I am suddenly reminded of the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, in particular the 'X Portfolio', and how, in the moment of experiencing those works for himself, in the flesh, the American Senator Jesse Helms quietly turned around and raised a veritable storm about the national endowment for the arts in the United States. As Dave Hickey (1993, p27-37) argues, these artworks were in fact propositions about not only the relative (though somewhat accepted, commonplace) piousness of the vernacular of beauty, but about the very normative values upon which his American society (the Senators') were founded - values that were most certainly challenged by Mapplethorpe's 'X-Portfolio'. Moreover, as Hickey shows this challenge was not simply an effect of their subject matter (gay men and their sexual proclivities), but something germane to their rendering as, what might be considered within western standards²³, 'beautiful' images.

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²³ Hickey (1993) locates the vernacular of beauty at stake in Mapplethorpe's 'X-Portfolio' within the trajectory of western Italian Baroque painting by making particular reference to the painting 'The Incredulity of St Thomas' (1601-1602) by Caravaggio.

Now I realise that the legibility of the kinds of propositions that artworks make may be difficult to discern (sometimes in the extreme), but it does not detract from the fact that artworks may be understood as being propositions. Here I must specify. A 'proposition' may be understood within the terms fine artists are all too familiar with: a proposition may simply be understood as the act of displaying, (re)presenting or exhibiting something. This I take to be in its broadest sense, the manner in which one may via, for example the clothes you wear, and/or the particularities of your behaviour either mark yourself or be marked by others as belonging to a particular social, cultural, biological group (See Chapter 3.2 for an in depth discussion of the evolutionary relationship between art, social grooming and group formation). I am reminded of how, in Brighton in 2010, I found to my absolute amazement that I could not enter the bar of the hotel where I as staying because they have a no-hat policy, one ostensibly designed to keep out the 'caps 'n hoodies' as the bouncer mumbled somewhat apologetically²⁴. But certainly a proposition may also be understood as being something like a sexual advance, and thus we seem to be back at Darwin's definition of beauty outlined earlier: here we have the act of displaying something (not purely in the sense of how one may belong to a group) but also as an invitation. And yet as Hickey (1993, p31-34) contends when he discusses the rather contested place of Mapplethorpe's 'X-Portfolio' within the artist oeuvre as a whole, people will most certainly be divided into those who accept this invitation, those who do not, some who find it wholly objectionable and others who simply don't care one way or another. In other words, to the sexual proposition implicit in the question "Will you come over to my place?" there exist a broad range of responses that one cannot really plan for! But what is certain is that this invitation implies the opening up of one's body to the presence of another and the possibility of going somewhere else, somewhere perhaps much less familiar or even wholly outside your comfort zone.

Perhaps, as I have attempted to show here, it is the nature of the proposition that is fundamentally of interest. That is to say exactly because we are speaking about artworks and about what it is they do, as opposed to spoken language or rudimentary mathematics²⁵, we must consider what kind of propositions are part and parcel to materially embodied values of

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²⁴ 'Caps 'n hoodies' here implied young, mostly lower-class English youths that wear either baseball caps or shirts with 'hoodies' (head coverings) attached to them. Also, see the photographic work 'Lid/ Selfportrait on Wagner's Grave' (Johan Thom, 2010) and the interview contained in Appendix A, p18-19.

²⁵ Certainly there is a poetic beauty to the elegance of mathematics although its pragmatic function tends to be the primary way in which most people would think of the field first. In short beyond the fact mathematic equations are useful in ordinary life (such as when we pay a specific price for a specific amount of goods) I do not doubt that in its wondrous complexity it may be much more than that.

beauty and aesthetics as well as how we may write (about) and give account of them. But what I feel certain of is that despite the fact that its nature is akin to that of a sexual advance, it is not only sexual in nature. However it does concern the body, its senses and indeed it sensuality as a living organic being.

Finally for me the writing and interpretation of the artwork is less important than the way artists produce work and how this work functions within the world (considerations that may have serious impact on how one writes about and interprets artworks). After all, I am first and foremost an artist and not a critic or a philosopher. The point I am trying to make is that artworks cannot be reduced to being the one-to-one correlation between the kind of clear intent at stake in making a mathematical proposition and simply determining its outcome. If this is so it is because artworks do not remain on the level of abstraction only. But rather, I wish to suggest that the material process of making, of perception and of interpretation all complicate and ultimately lend depth to our encounter with the artwork.

1.4 Material culture and material concepts: towards understanding the artwork as 'phenomena'

The term 'material phenomena' is central to my thesis as it denotes not only the fact of the artworks' materiality (including the mediums artist choose to render their ideas through such as paint, wood, found objects, video and so forth), but also in that it signals the inseparability between the agencies of observation and the observer that forms the staple of the physicist Niehls Bohr's radical, proto-performative account. For Bohr the term 'phenomena' refers to "...the observations attained under specific circumstances, including an account of the whole experimental arrangement" (Bohr cited in Barad 2007, p119). Thus phenomena emerge as part of specific material arrangements and can never simply emerge via 'gendankenexperiments' (literally a 'thought experiment') as somehow pure, disembodied ideas only. Perhaps this is a complicated way of saying that in order for ideas to germinate as actual, veritable forms replete with boundaries they cannot remain ideas only - something which, as an artist, seems rather commonsensical to me. I mean, even though as an artist I am deeply conceptually motivated I ultimately make artworks and find that often, as in the case of artworks such as 'Recital' (2010, shown Appendix A, p16-17), the material process of making the work fundamentally alters the conceptual framework that forms its initial point of inception. In this way otherwise crystal clear 'conceptual' ideas are indelibly transformed by their artistic rendering as physical forms.

Following Bohr it may be said that phenomena are not simply 'ideational' in character but very much specific material entities that arise through particular material configurations (of which the observer and the artist is always part of too). Bohr, in stark contrast to Heisenberg's principle of quantum indeterminacy, here posits quantum wholeness²⁶ from and within which individual phenomena emerge. That is to say, for Bohr there is no inherent, Cartesian distinction between an 'object' and the 'agencies of observation' but rather, it is only via the introduction of an apparatus that such boundary distinctions emerge. Thus, we find in Bohr's analysis, in a manner quite similar to Darwin, Bergson and Von Uexkull (the latter being a major source for both Deleuze and Grosz²⁷), the question of some primordial wholeness from which life emerges and subsequent the elaboration thereof into distinct, ever-more complex life forms. But importantly for my reading this approach gives a clear account of the manner in which boundaries are enacted and maintained from within this unity, and thus opens up the way forward for me to think about the question of how the workings of the contemporary²⁸ artwork may be understood. Moreover as Barad (2007) shows, the material apparatus must be viewed as an integral part of the phenomenon it describes (even as it allows for the phenomena to emerge as a distinct entity).

In Barad's (2007) terms apparatuses are the instruments that enact 'agential cuts' between the observer and the observed. Barad argues that distinct phenomena - an object with distinct properties - emerge within and through an entire set of material arrangements that constitute the experiment (including the observer). The term 'material phenomenon' is therefore a tautology (all phenomena are material) but one used here to stress the materiality not only of the 'object' (the artwork) but also of the entire set of physical arrangements through which it emerges as a distinct phenomenon. In the case of the artwork then, we must consider how institutional frameworks such as museums and galleries help artworks materialise as distinct phenomena too. But this is only one aspect of the material arrangement - with the artwork acting as an apparatus too. But what in the case of making art? Where and how do artists enact such 'agential cuts' and how might these be intelligibly communicated to others? As I will show throughout the discussions of individual artist's work contained in the remainder of this

²⁶ Hooker (quoted in Barad 2007, p118) argues that: "Descriptively there is a single situation, no part of which can be abstracted without running into conflicts with others such descriptions...The object cannot be ascribed an independent reality in the ordinary physical sense".

²⁷ See the essay 'Deleuze, Bergson, and the concept of life' contained in 'Becoming undone: Darwinian reflections of life politics and art' by Grosz (2011, p26-39),

²⁸ According to the evolutionary approach pioneered by Darwin everything evolves into more complex forms – thus the practice of art will be no different and one must think of the artwork as ever-increasing complex phenomena too.

dissertation this is not simply a question of interpretation but also of the careful observation of how artworks operate and establish affinities to other living beings via their sensual, material properties. Here the writings of Marks (2002), Deleuze (1981/2004b), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) and Grosz (1994, 2008 and 2012) will be most useful.

Before anyone concludes from my focus upon, and usage of terms such, as 'surface' and 'medium' in relation to the artwork that I am making the case on the sly for the production of contained, modernist 'art objects', and/or for a wholly non-figurative form of art such as that proffered by the abstract expressionists of the nineteen sixties or even the conceptual minimalists, even a cursory glance at the contents of the catalogue²⁹ of my own works will reveal that most of my works are based upon soliciting a performative response from the audience, whether the work be a video, photograph, sculpture or installation. That is to say, I do not make contained objects only to 'look' at: often the audience must hear them, touch them, smell them and generally be physically present in order to fully comprehend the work (or imagine, via the writings and the images that I present for their consideration, what it is like to do so). For example, I expect the audience to read the descriptions that I have so painstakingly crafted to accompany the artworks I put forward for their consideration – written descriptions that often alert them to the fact that the work was created at another place and time (See for example the photographic works 'Fountain', 'Licked Colony' and 'Biblioclast' contained in Appendix A, p8-10). In my case the artwork can take many forms, including sculptural objects, texts, photographs and videos. But the point is, that I think that everything is important, even those lowly seemingly dispassionate text-labels that ordinarily accompany the display of an artwork.

Wall texts and name plaques are all aspects of the artwork that help materialise other phenomena, including the work itself. Importantly, in the reading I put forward here, this process works both ways in that the descriptive text is also materialised through the object. For example, in 2008 when I was walking through the basement of the Johannesburg Art Gallery I found a rather fancy engraved text label discarded on the floor. It was clear that no-one had cared for it in a very long time and although I kept it, I do not have it with me now³⁰ and so cannot give a detailed account of the information it contained. But I do know that it concerned some lesser-known European artist's painting from the eighteenth century that had somehow

²⁹ Attached to this dissertation as 'Appendix A'

³⁰ It is still in storage in South Africa at present.

made it into the Johannesburg Art Gallery's permanent collection. To be sure, the details of the written text could still be clearly discerned, but much like the wriggling of a freshly amputated tongue it appeared to be rather obscenely gesticulating – as if it were involved in a process of silent articulation that, being so brutally severed from its context, could now only express loss and longing³¹. Of course, this loss may be expressed in more positive terms as well, as in the signalling of some poetic moment and the possibility of becoming something new entirely. (This sense of loss and poetic possibility is germane to much of the performative, text-based works that I have created during the past few years and thus I would ask of the reader to keep this in mind as they look at artworks such as 'Phantom limb' (2009; Appendix A, p24-25)).

Throughout the dissertation the art object is not utilised as a placeholder or a secret that has to be unpacked via the information provided, nor as a straightforward apparatus that enact certain boundaries. But rather, given its status as an 'artwork', it is a means through which to imbue, probe, unlock and question the material relationship between beauty, the body and its specific context. In this regard I view the artwork as a form of doing - something that is both physical (in that one makes it) and performative (in that through this 'doing' one materializes phenomena with distinct properties – though always in relation to a host of other factors that are no less material and contextual). In the field of anthropology, there exists, by way of the writings of Evans-Pritchard (1902 -1973), a well-established tradition of viewing objects as performative part of material culture.

³¹ Of course the text-label may do much more than that, but viewed in express relation to the artwork of which it formed a part, the original sense of its functionality is lost. Often in my own works I am very specific about the exact conditions within and by which the work is 'framed'. In general this is what I suppose the notion of context specificity implies – here thus including the material arrangement through which various elements of the artwork all contribute to its meaningful reception by an audience. As we shall see later in the discussion of Willem Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' in Chapter four, once parts of the material arrangement of the artwork specified by an artist are disturbed, the meaning and function of the artwork invariably changes. This is also not to imply that such changes are negative only, but that in effecting such changes we fundamentally alter the artwork and its meaningful interpretation.

Broadly speaking, and perhaps in keeping with Darwinian approach³², the proto-performative, material understanding of culture put forward by Evans-Pritchard in texts such as *The Nuer* (1940), draws upon an integrated, ecological understanding of the manner in which fabricated objects function not purely as iterative entities that generally bespeak the characteristics of a people, their culture and sense of the world³³, but also as key players in the forces that give palpable shape and form to that culture.

It is well worthwhile citing Evans-Pritchard (1940, p89) extensively on this occasion:

Technology from one point of view is an oecological process: an adaptation of human behaviour to natural circumstances. From another point of view material culture may be regarded as part of social relations, for material objects are chains along which social relationships run... A single small artefact may be the nexus between persons, e.g. a spear which passes from father to son by gift or inheritance is a symbol of their relationship and one of the bonds by which it is maintained. Thus people do not only create their material culture and attach themselves to it, but also build up their relationships through it and see themselves in terms of it.

Evans-Prichard makes clear how, what he terms the 'inner world' of the Nuer is readily constructed by their material place within and encounter with the 'outer world'. Earlier in the text he discusses how when a Nuer child is born, they are not only born into an environment that is equal parts natural and 'domesticated' – a natural world that is readily populated by the

³² In many ways I view Darwin's theory of evolution as being proto-performative, in the sense that living beings develop both in conjunction with one another as well as their natural environment and the other beings that populate it (perhaps simply 'context' would be a more suitable metaphor than 'natural environment' here: the term context does not implicitly distinguish between material and discourse, nature and culture). The various genetic adaptations and high levels of specialization found in successive generations of any living creature always occur in relation to its immediate competition (both within its own species and that of other species that inhabit the same environment) and the larger context as well. As Evans-Pritchard (1940) shows in his extensive writings on the Nuer, the relative scarcity of materials within the region of Sudan, have not only functioned as a limitation, restricting the 'cultural advancement' of the Nuer. But rather, these 'natural' conditions have actually lead to very specific cultural practices that cannot be neatly separated from such ecological, material factors and nor qualitatively compared with that of other cultures (such as the west). Here Evans-Pritchard shows a decidedly relational (some would say 'relativist') approach that fits into the framework of 'Structural functionalism'. The Structural Functionalist approach basically sought to understand society as a complex system whose constituent parts all work together to promote stability and order. Often, as is the case with the writings of Herbert Spencer, this approach would utilize organic, corporeal metaphors to clarify itself: drawing upon the writings of Malthus and Darwin, Spencer famously described the functioning of society as being analogous to that of a body, whose individual organs that work towards the stable functioning of the whole. (See the discussion on p23-26 contained in 'Metaphors. Sociology beyond societies: mobilities for the twenty-first century' by John Urry, published in 2000 by Routledge). ³³ I deliberately avoid the western, English term 'worldview' here, privileging as it does, the concept of sight over and above the other bodily senses. See the article 'Colonizing bodies and minds' by Oyerunke Oyewumi (1997) for a detailed discussion of the particular relationship between sight and culture as put forward by non-western cultures such as the Yoruba from Nigeria. In brief vision does not play the seminal role in the Yoruba's relationship to the world but rather forms but one part of the many sensory means through which the Yoruba construct and interact with their world. Oyewumi thus argues that the concept of a 'world-sense' is more appropriate to Yoruba culture. See Chapter 4.3.1 of this dissertation for a more in depth discussion of Oyewumi's analysis.

objects and practices of human labour (Evans Pritchard 1940, p 85). This I think generally holds true for all living creatures for even a 'wild' bird is born into the domesticated space of its nest. At present I would like to focus on the role of manufactured objects (such as artworks) in this material understanding of culture. As Evans-Pritchard notes inasmuch as objects have symbolic function, we attach meanings to them, building up and maintaining cohesive social relations through them: in his terms 'material objects are chains along which social relationships run'. But this reading still holds rather negative connotation — as if such social relations are binding and objects are merely the restrictive placeholders through which cultural values are made concrete (no less as chains!). I wish to briefly distinguish between two very different readings of the functioning and place of an object (such as an artwork) within society here.

Firstly, in what seems to me to be the rather commonplace understanding of the artwork today, an object may be considered 'iterative' but still have no agency (inasmuch as one considers agency an act of free will and the capacity to inspire change in and of itself). This understanding of the artwork may be described in the following manner: an agent (mostly, though not exclusively, human) 'writes' upon an object such as a canvass or even a found object, and, in doing so, it becomes something meaningful that can/ may be communicated to others. I use linguistic metaphors here because it is perhaps easiest to view this understanding of the artwork in much the same way that one may write upon a blank sheet of paper (as something like a *tabula rasa*). Viewed in this way the object is understood as a placeholder, a document of sorts that embodies certain values and makes an ideological claim on behalf of its author and/or the society to which they belong. Broadly speaking, this is what I would term the 'representational' view of the artwork (the object-as-metaphor, inasmuch as it stands in for something else, represents something other than itself); Secondly, and this is the reading that emerges from the larger context of Evans-Pritchard's' analyses of the Nuer, there exists the possibility of viewing 'objects' more interactively as both products and producers of culture.

Although Evans-Pritchard (1940) does not specifically address the role of art in this text, he does show how the availability of materials such as wood and stone impacts upon the cultural development and forms of technological innovation of the Nuer. Here there exists a trace of what I think may be a 'non-representational' view of art and culture. Neither art nor science

³⁴ I use a linguistic metaphor here to help clarify the one-sided view inherent in this approach to the artwork. The relationship between language, the body and the artwork forms the basis of lengthy discussion in the Conclusion of this dissertation when I turn to the writings of Elizabeth Grosz (1994 & 2008), in specific to a consideration of her understanding of the body-as-surface for inscription.

begins purely as metaphor (in the realm of representation) but with the very fact of the proverbial nest and its myriad relations with its material context. For the domesticated space of the nest is neither purely natural nor purely cultural: it is irreducibly both. Thus despite all its seeming 'naturalness' the nest is a technological innovation readily drawn from and in relation to a larger ecological context. In this regard the nest is less a 'thing' than a practice, for its purpose is to momentarily generate in material form something like a domesticated space within a larger territory³⁵. And yet, the assortment of twigs and feathers is a nest too (here meaning that it is a phenomenon somehow distinct from its environment, an 'object' within a context from which it is drawn but still somehow, something separate). This is not purely a matter of linguistics - of the miraculous transformation of the phenomenon into a single meaningful entity by way of the semantic act of naming - but rather, a more complex performative, engagement in and from which the forms and values of representation are interactively drawn: a specific culture emerges from and within a material context and in so doing gives form and shape to that context. In this regard we have to consider the primary function of the nest as being a boundary-drawing device, one through which ontologically distinct phenomena emerge – the egg, bird, nature and so forth. Only once the nest emerges from its context it is possible to distinguish between it and its larger ecological context. Knowledge proceeds from here, it begins both within and through the making of the nest.

I have to make clear here that I do not have a problem with the acknowledgement of the relative domesticity of the space of the nest (the fact of its 'situatedness' within the culture of the birds, and their forms of representation if you like!). What I do find extremely problematic is the tendency to disavow the material, non-representational origins of the nest. I find it astounding that the very basic principles of evolutionary, material thinking are so willy-nilly disregarded in favour of its 'representational' function and 'cultural' characteristics (something we readily indulge in human cultural products but are not quite as certain of when it comes to other animals whose cultural products and forms of technological innovation we commonly view simply as part of 'nature'). For both the materiality of its context and the material fact of the nest's existence as a distinct phenomenon, cannot neatly be extrapolated from its cultural

³⁵ Grosz (2011, p184) discusses the relationship between the nest and territory in detail: "The nest is at the center of the insect's or animals territory. Territory is what radiates irregularly around the home...Territory is the space of courtship, rivalry, competition and resources. Without territory surrounding the home, both protecting it and infusing it with a certain amount of resources there can be no stable or ongoing home...And without the space and safety of the home, there can be no elaborate courtship dances and songs, no acts of spectacular rivalry, no acts of performance and enhancement – that is, no territory, no milieu, no art, no seduction, only the weighty reality of the phenomenal world..."

functioning as a meaningful entity. The same holds for the artwork. And, if anything, such material considerations will continue to problematise and sometimes even refute outright those very representational structures and conventions that we have so carefully and, as Nietzsche³⁶ might say, 'painfully' crafted throughout history in order to make sense of the world and our place in it.

Lastly I must say something about my specific choice of sources regarding 'performance' and the 'performative'. I realise it may seem an omission to not have included in-depth discussions of such seminal sources as Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (published in 1993 by Routledge) and Judith Butler's numerous insightful publications including *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex* (also published by Routledge in 1993), for example³⁷. That said I felt the need to concretely ground the performative in a material framework – one that is not at all hinged upon a constant critique of the seeming binary distinction between the real and representation, language and matter, discourse and the body, for example. Nor am I interested in exploring the idea of agency from a humanist perspective. This certainly is where Darwinian scholarship and the writings of Karen Barad suit my theoretical and practical interests: here humans are not the only agents and instead form part of a larger, differential unfolding of life. Perhaps in a more practical vein, let me broach the subject from another angle. Specifically regarding physical matter and my own relationship thereto I might add that inasmuch as I am an artist, I have to continuously interact with raw materials as part of my creative process.

Here is the rub: even in raw form these materials do not seem to be static, innate and without any agency whatsoever. Modelling clay is wet, heavy, it has a smell and a texture. Even as you attempt to shape clay it exerts its own kind of pressure on your hands and body. In this regard one really has to physically and mentally struggle with it in order to create a work of art. Importantly the ensuing struggle is not simply a question of the hardship of labour (though it may be that too) but, rather, one of material resistance against the wilful, one-sided human

³⁶ This is discussed in depth in section 5.4 of the Conclusion of this dissertation. But I will briefly clarify here: in texts such as *On the Geneology of Morals/ Ecce Homo'* Nietzsche (1887/ 1989) argues that pain is a key constituent in the creation of human memory. He argues that humankind generates this memory through 'mnemotechnics', in other words a process akin to branding, a burning of memory onto the body that never ceases to hurt and thus stays in the memory. Also see Chapter 5, 'Nietzsche and the Choreography of Knowledge' by Elizabeth Grosz (1994, p115-137) for an in depth discussion of this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical position regarding the body, especially as a "...social object, as a text to be marked, traced and written upon by various regimes of institutional...power".

³⁷ I should say that specifically where it concerns the work of Judith Butler, she is very much present in this text albeit in a roundabout way: firstly Butler is a major source for Elizabeth Grosz and for Karen Barad, two of my key sources in this study. On a more personal level Butler was also one of my key sources for my honours and masters degree dissertations when I wrote about gender and postcolonial identity politics respectively.

shaping thereof. As any potter knows, it takes a gentle touch to roll a perfect ball of clay – you have to be attentive to the material even as you model the shape of your choosing. So it is something like a material dialogue. In this way I would say that my creative production is an 'intra-active' process: it is as much about the material reality of speaking and making as it is about listening and thinking. This I would suggest is an apt metaphor for the relationship between the matter and thought, the artwork and its interpretation, this written dissertation and the practical body of artworks presented in the Appendix.

Chapter 2: Haptic perception, collaboration and the work of Santu Mofokeng

2.1 A visit to the Deutsche Guggenheim

i

I am visiting some friends in Berlin that I have not seen for many years. One of them, Nico, a native Berliner, is acting as my tour guide. He is a few years younger than me but since the very first day we met, sitting on the green lawn in front of the cafeteria of the Fine Art Department of Pretoria Technikon³⁸ in 2003, we were inseparable. Back then he was doing an internship for international students at the department and I was on the brink of completing my Masters degree. At the end of this three-month period we embarked on an adventure. Nico accompanied me on an art project to Italy after which the two of us travelled to the Mediterranean island of Elba³⁹ just off the west coast of Italy. For the two of us Elba was a slice of heaven. Isolated rocky beaches with crystal clear waters in which we could float around for hours, plenty of sun and locals that seem to not mind tourists like us too much. We lodged in our rental vehicle for two weeks (a small Renault Clio), swam naked every day and ate and drank whatever our meagre budget could afford. At night the police chased us away whenever they found us asleep next to the side of the road. They probably realised we were just two young students making the most of a holiday and, to their credit, were always rather pleasant in their dealings with us. However, I never said goodbye to Nico because I somehow managed to get the details of my return flight mixed up: Nico was wandering about the island alone when I suddenly realised that if I did not leave immediately I would miss my flight home. I left a short note on the dashboard and took the first ferry to the mainland.

Today, some five years later, it is very good to see Nico again. More to the point, given that he has become an active cultural presence in Berlin, it is also a great privilege to have such an expert tour guide. Nico looks like Clark Kent, Superman's rather bookish, middle class alter ego:

³⁸ At the time the students all still referred to the department as the Technikon although it was in process of changing its name to the Tshwane University of Technology.

³⁹ Elba is perhaps most famous today for the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte stayed there in the year 1814 for some three hundred days. But what is today a bustling tourist destination was in fact his prison: following the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1814, Napoleon the first was forced to abdicate his rule of France and banished to the island of the east coast of Italy.

striking blue eyes, dark framed reading glasses and his short, if blond⁴⁰, hair is smartly parted from the right. I become aware of this striking resemblance when, as we walk down the stairs toward the underground a young man with oversized sideburns steps up to him and says "Clark Kent". I am dumbstruck but Nico just shrugs and smiles. As we walk towards the platform he tells me that ever since he started wearing the black-farmed glasses and a blazer a few months ago this happens at least once a week. But its true, with the glasses Nico is the splitting image of Clark Kent as portrayed by the actor Christopher Reeve during the early nineteen eighties⁴¹. As a child I always marvelled at the stupidity of Superman's disguise, but in light of this experience I am not so sure anymore: a decent haircut, respectable jacket and a pair of glasses makes a huge difference to people's perception of you.

Nico takes me to the Deutsche Guggenheim where Anish Kapoor is exhibiting a massive, hollow round sculpture entitled 'Memory'. Among the myriad jobs he has in the art world Nico is an educational guide for this exhibition too. It might be said with some certainty that I have the best possible access to the artwork and the museum space. A single egg-like, metal sculpture occupies the entirety of the Deutsche Guggenheim's gallery. The shape seems to grow from within the far wall, neatly emerging from a hole perfectly cut into the white vertical space. And, owing to its gigantic size (14.5 \times 8.97 \times 4.48 meters) the sculpture also divides the museum into three distinct spaces from whence one may view the work, albeit from vastly different perspectives: first there is the main museum entrance where the shape appears almost foreshortened, as if the shape is completely round. This space is small and one cannot really take a step back from the surface of the hulking shape; a side entrance that leads to a larger second space. This space can be accessed by walking around the outside of the building and entering the museum via another door. Owing to the larger scale of this space one gets what might, for purely descriptive purposes, be thought a better view of the 'side profile' of the sculpture. Here the shape appears smaller and more manageable. It begins to make sense to me and I suddenly understand that it is indeed oblong, somewhat 'eggy' in proportion; and lastly, the gift-shop / café area that is also accessed from the second larger space. Once in the shop, I climb a few stairs until I reach a small room of approximately three-by-three meters. Here, to my utter surprise, I suddenly find that I can look right into the belly of the sculpture.

 $^{^{\}rm 40}$ In the comics and films Superman always has jet-black hair.

⁴¹ The late American actor Christopher Reeve (1952-2004) played the roll of Clark Kent/ Superman in 'Superman I-IV'. The films were based on character created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster in 1932, bought and developed by DC Comics in 1938. The film version of 'Superman I' was released by Warner Brothers in 1978 and Reeve played the roll until 1987, with his final appearance as Superman being in 'Superman IV: The quest for peace'.

There is a square window cut into one of the white walls that provides a direct view into the hollow metal shape (Figure 4, shown below). It is dark inside the hollow shape but I can still discern the gentle, smoother curve drawn by the lines of joints as the light from the space illuminates the shape. I think it would make a nice photograph but do not have a camera with me. I decide to buy the catalogue.



Figure 4: Detail from 'Memory', (2008) by Anish Kapoor. The work is shown here as installed at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany. (Source: Kapoor et al 2008, p111). The 'inside' of the corten sculpture can be seen from within a small room accessed via the gift shop.

The sculpture is an even rust-brownish colour all over. It is made from Corten steel, which from my experience of working as a sculptor I know well. Corten steel has one truly remarkable property: the thin layer of brownish red oxidation (or rust) that quickly forms on its external

surface actually insulates it against any further decay. That is why those massive spotlights erected around sport stadiums are almost always made from Corten steel – it is practically weather proof and requires virtually no maintenance. Before I was made aware of the material properties of Corten steel, I always thought these spotlights were simply in need of a new paint-job. It's an easy mistake to make because one ordinarily associates rust with decay. Of course in the world of sculpture, such rust is called 'patina' and one may use acid to artificially induce, in sped-up form, the effects of such natural oxidation.

I find 'Memory' a remarkable piece of work that fires the connective forces of my imagination and memory. I scribble the sentence 'ant & elephant' in my diary. This short note serves to remind me of the oft-recounted story of an ant that explores different parts of the same elephant on successive occasions. This story has many variations but at heart it concerns the manner in which one stitches together⁴² a mental image of the size and shape of a single phenomena through a series of sometimes vastly different experiential encounters. Much like the viewer of 'Memory', the ant can see only one aspect of the elephant as it approaches the animal before physically climbing onto it. And then, exactly because the ant is so small it cannot explore the entirety of the elephant in a single session. In some variations of the story many ants explore different part of the elephant with rather humorous results. They fight amongst themselves and cannot agree what exactly it is they have discovered. But perhaps more poignantly, the ants are not content to only walk around the shape to see it. No, the ants form a mental image of the elephant by physically exploring its material surface properties from close up: they climb onto the elephant seeing and exploring its material surfaces by tracing its myriad contours and textures with their little feet. But unlike these proverbial ants I am not allowed to climb around Kapoor's sculpture and must use my eyes to imagine the experience of texture and form so evidently at stake in it.

Nico takes me to the gift shop to purchase a catalogue at a discounted rate (employees benefits!). Once there he introduces me to one of the curators. We exchange pleasantries and she tells me that they also have especially editioned, miniature sculptures by Kapoor available for sale. It is titled 'Edition 45' and they have forty available for sale at the price of three thousand - and - seven hundred Euros each. She kindly offers to show me one and reaches

⁴² I think this resonates with the sculpture for it too is made from distinct segments, bolted together on thick joints that line the outside of the shape like stitches. Given this form of construction the whole of the sculpture may be considered tangential, compartmentalized and always only momentarily held together.

below the counter. The sculpture is presented in a small wooden display case and I immediately wish I had enough money to buy it.

I find the small shape very beautiful. These objects are billed as miniature replicas of 'Memory' albeit ones rendered in negative form (Figure 5, below). Here the space is cast as a solid form with the egg-like shape hollow cut into a rectangular block of transparent, gold-yellowish resin. I guess the curator notices my enthusiasm for the object and proceeds to remove it from the case. The three of us stand there quietly just looking at the shape. I hear myself asking to see it and before anyone can stop me I have it in my hands.



Figure 5: 'Memory - Edition 45.' (2008), Anish Kapoor. Scale 1:50. Cast made of coloured transparent acrylic (ABS, acrylate). Limited Edition of 40 with 10 Artist Proofs. Signed and numbered (engraving on the bottom of the sculpture). Issued by Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin. (Source: http://www.deutsche-guggenheim-berlin.de/e/ausstellungenanishkapoor03.php, Accessed: 2012-07-16)

I bring the glowing shape closer to my eyes and get lost in its marvellous complexity: the transparent sculpture becomes an unending surface glowing in different intensities as it is

illuminated by the surrounding light. I trace the hollow 'inside' of the shape with my eye as I hold the sculpture closer towards the light. Momentarily the details of the surrounding context (the shop my companions and so forth) are all forgotten. The best way I can describe this to a reader is to liken it to the manner in which a photographic lens focuses only on a single element with the rest of the surroundings becoming somewhat vague, hazy or out of focus. For this moment this surface is all that exists with even the shape becoming indiscriminate, connected as it is to an ongoing expansion of a single smooth surface. Rather than the experience of depth, the hollow shape within the transparent material encourages one to further explore the surface of the object – the different hues of colour hint at that which may still be found 'behind', 'inside', 'over' or 'under' the remainder of the shape by turning it around. The object entrances me until I hear an uncomfortable cough. The spell is broken and I look up to see a visibly agitated curator. I now realise that I should not have touched the small artwork. I am embarrassed but the damage is done. The curator quickly packs the artwork away and, if rather stiffly, makes her excuses. I can see she is angry about it but refuse to apologise: I cannot buy such an expensive object and in all likelihood won't get opportunity to see it up close again. To Nico's credit he never mentions the incident. We head off to go see the Holocaust Memorial.

ii

Often in my life I become so enthused by an object in someone else's possession that whilst asking to see it, I find myself instinctively reaching for it too. Mostly, if somewhat reluctantly, people do hand the object over. But I have been disappointed more than once in my life. In fact I can recall a number of separate occasions where the owner of the object has retorted by saying something like "You see with your eyes" as they shelter the object from my outstretched hands. The incident described at the Guggenheim's gift shop is perhaps no different, with curator's behaviour signalling something along the same line of reasoning: I should not have physically touched the object. But my actions caught her off-guard. After all, artists are supposed to know that one may not touch artworks, especially in a museum. (Of course, personal keepsakes sometimes have immense value to their owners too and one may find a similar reticence when dealing with them).

Perhaps all living beings – humans, animals, and insects - instinctively feel the need to touch things that arouse their curiosity. With somewhat more complexity, one might make a case for physical touching as part of the material ways in which we construct an image of something in

our mind, where touch becomes a 'heterotopic' form of seeing. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation when I turn to physical touch as a cathectic experience that links living beings with their surroundings. But beyond the need to touch something with one's hands, I think the incident at Guggenheim does suggest something deeper regarding the material relationship between the eye and the object too: my hands reached out toward the object not only because I wanted to touch it with my fingers, but because my eyes wanted to caress its very surface materiality from up close – where sight becomes a tactile experience.

As Deleuze reminds us in the book Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation (1981/2004b) to press the eye against the surface of the painting is to bypass the tedium of the narrative, of representation, and to unleash the haptic, violent but ultimately unifying possibilities of sight. Here Deleuze (2004, p37) writes that: "The eye becomes virtually the polyvalent indeterminate organ that sees the body without organs...as pure presence". Deleuze argues that through Bacon's particular use of colour, texture and line the representational qualities of the painted figure is displaced in favour of direct sensory action upon the viewer's nervous system, one that palpably links the viewer's eye with artwork. For Deleuze the body now goes beyond its structural organization as an organism, which is merely the imprisonment of life in a temporary form: lending a term from Antonin Artaud⁴³, Deleuze suggests that, rather, what we have here is a 'body without organs', an "...intense and intensive body" (Deleuze 1981/2004, p32). This body is flesh and nerve - not the representation of the body, or its formal organization in the singular as an organism, but the living sensing, affective body that is always connected to its surroundings. In this way the displaced eye of the viewer now directly traces the surface textures, the lines the colours of the work of art and does not remain stuck in the distance, on the level of subject matter only. For Deleuze, such a close-up haptic, engagement with the surface of the work now point us towards something like a presence (or in Deleuze's terms a 'force') that exists beyond the spectacle of the distorted, meaty figures that populate Bacon's canvasses. Instead we encounter therein the direct action of force upon the physical body, the 'affective athleticism' of meat (Deleuze 1981/2004, p33).

In what follows I will consider the possibility of such embodied form of looking by turning to an examination of photographs, a medium that is often considered simply representational (or as a

⁴³ In the opening paragraph of the chapter entitled 'Hysteria', Deleuze (1981/2004, p32) cites from Artaud's 'The body is the body' (1977) to clarify what he means by the term 'the body without organs'. Artaud writes that: "The body is the body/ its stands alone/ it has no need of organs/ the body is never an organism/ organisms are the enemies of the body".

documentary reproduction of reality) without giving any concern to its particular surface qualities and the precise material manner these qualities connect the sensing body, specifically the eyes, with the artwork.

2.2 Towards a haptic reading of 'The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng

In the remainder of this chapter I wish to consider the material, haptic dimension of the photographic practice of the artist Santu Mofokeng (born 1956, Johannesburg). Here I will consider how surface textures such as photographic grain, scratches and other forms of visual noise present in the photographic image may contribute to a more in-depth understanding of Mofokeng's practice as a photographer. Mofokeng has gamered international acclaim for his depiction of the lives of ordinary black South Africans: these South Africans are not public figures, politicians, heroic anti-apartheid struggle figures, business leaders or celebrities of any kind. In one sense they are emblematic of the everyman but yet, in Mofokeng's work the particularity of their lives is highlighted. Thus in photographic essays such as 'Billboards' (1991-), 'Rumours: the Bloemhof portfolio' (1994), 'Chasing Shadows' (1996 -), 'Appropriated Spaces' (1997), 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997), Mofokeng has given visual form to "...the evanescent, hidden aspects of black lives routinely marginalized, denigrated, forgotten" (Raditlhalo 2001, p67).

Throughout his career Mofokeng has insisted that he is not a documentary photographer and that his choice of subject matter and the very material process that characterize the production of his work, must be viewed as part of a collaborative attempt to make the vagaries of ordinary life visible within the highly politicized context of (post) apartheid South Africa⁴⁴. However, within his photographic oeuvre Mofokeng seems intent on exploring these vagaries by constantly drawing our attention to the existence of a number of seemingly irreconcilable values and forces to be found within the lives of his subjects and his photographic technique. These may be surmised as: the distinction between the representational, documentary function of the

⁴⁴ See for example the short text 'Like shifting sand' by Mofokeng (2011, p45) where he writes that the images taken between 1985-1990 aim to depict "…ordinary black South Africans as they are engaged in the ordinary day-to-day business of living". Also see the essay "Images of Radical will: Santu Mofokeng's Photographic Ambivalence" by Okwui Enwezor (2011). Enwezor (2011, p39) suggest that, in Mofokeng's focus on the ordinary lives of black South Africans and his particular use of the photographic medium, he is more interested in providing a "…nuanced exploration of the effects of apartheid than merely confronting it head-on at the frontlines".

medium of photography and the expressive freedom of artistic creation; the distinction between spiritual beliefs and value systems and the rampant materialism of post-apartheid South Africa; the personal and the institutional (especially as brought forward by his exploration of the apartheid archive); objective knowledge and the experiential; life and death; the visible and the invisible. The particular manner in which these relationships are configured as meaningful tropes within Mofokeng's work, also reflect the manner in which they may be said to exemplify the one-sided interplay between the macro - and - micro politics of the changing South African context and its dominant modes of representation.

Both Firstenberg (2001) and Hayles (2009) have, I believe correctly, argued that Mofokeng attempts to make visible the myriad interpersonal relations that have effectively been written out of the official, public archive of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This public history has largely been shaped by the proliferation of iconic, though by now almost stereotypical, documentary images that portray the suffering of black South Africans either as actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, or those who, in one way or another, are still made to suffer through its lingering aftermath in the post-apartheid context⁴⁵. As Peffer (2010, p83) writes in the essay 'Animal bodies/Absent bodies: disfigurement in art after Soweto':

... the everyday needs and the everyday resistances of South Africans were subordinated by the struggle (against apartheid)⁴⁶, which placed a premium on bodily imagery of heroic resistance and/or the traumas of (mostly) black bodies.

Here Firstenberg (2001, p61) argues that Mofokeng's work takes the form of a subtle rethinking and treatment of the archive as "...both a material mechanism of negotiating memory, trauma and amnesia and as a conceptual strategy with which to investigate identity and representation in South Africa". In this way Mofokeng's work seems to trace forms of continuity between the way that the black body has - and still is - positioned as an ideological prop within a larger struggle for self-determination and self-representation by ordinary (black) South Africans. Thus, in works such as 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997), Mofokeng attempts to frustrate, engage and provoke his viewing public into rethinking their easy relationship with the (black) body, the history of documentary photography in South Africa and the institutional archive of which it invariably forms a part. In this manner, the larger political context of South Africa including its very public struggle against apartheid, its subsequent peaceful transition into a

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⁴⁵ The immediate opposite of this trope would of course be white South African as the oppressor, the ruler of the land and its people.

⁴⁶ My insert

democracy in 1994 is placed in contradistinction to the intimate, lived experiences, beliefs and value systems of its individual subjects.

Arguably Mofokeng follows in a well-established tradition of South African photographers like David Goldblatt and Roger Ballen that have invested their artistic energy in the exploration of what may be termed the 'frayed margins' of South African society. Owing to the very real processes that mark the South African struggle for nationhood, including larger issues of selfdefinition and self-representation via the construction of nationalist tropes and its institutional archives, the lives and value systems espoused by those who exist at society's margins are often left unexplored or even wholly negated. Nonetheless for Mofokeng it is at the margins, where the failures of the nation state are at their most visible and its toll is extracted most painfully: whether it concerns the wholesale erasure of individual memory that accompanied the birth of the post-apartheid, South African nation state, the destructive reality of its institutional policies (towards the HIV pandemic, for example), the personal tragedies that somehow slip through or are indeed enacted by the gaps left unchecked by its particular vision of itself and its citizens the lives of ordinary South Africans are indelibly marked by its particular brand of institutional violence. In contradistinction to this Mofokeng views his own artistic practice as being a collaborative, highly personal process - albeit one still fraught with skewed relations of power. It is worthwhile citing Mofokeng (In Mofokeng & Raditlhalo 2001, p66) at length here:

As a photographer, I am aware of the nature of my enterprise, its possibilities, its limitations, and its tendency to unwittingly reproduce some of the hierarchies that it is in theory setting out to attack...Most of the time the subject has an idea of how they would like to be represented. This they mention and indicate through their body language, facial expression, choice of clothes and props in the setting. They often choose where they would like to be photographed. I make suggestions, throw them off guard in order to catch a fleeting, unselfconscious expression. I frame the image, I choose the viewpoint. I notice the light, I choose the depth of focus, what to accent, what to leave out...Hopefully this collaboration results in a successful image...when I make a portrait of any person, be it an Afrikaner or a Zulu, I try not to objectify them.

In this Chapter I wish to suggest that a haptic reading of Mofokeng's photographic practice is reflective not only of his particular material usage and understanding of the medium of photography but also of how it helps make visible that which cannot be seen by only looking at images 'optically', from a distance. Put in another way, I will argue that because Mofokeng realizes the limits of his enterprise, his very approach to - and use of - the photographic

medium is premised upon exploring other possible ways of interaction between the photographer and their subject matter, and similarly between the viewer and the photographic image. In this regard, much has been made of the spiritual and the intimate in relation to Mofokeng's practice (See for example the essays by Raditlhalo 2001 and Hayes 2009). Specifically, one may note the discussion regarding the concept of *seriti* in relation to the photographic image. As Mofokeng (2011, p7) makes clear in his artist statement for the exhibition 'Invoice' at the Cape Town National Gallery in 2007, in his mother tongue Sesotho, the concept of *seriti* means "...aura, presence, dignity, confidence, spirit, essence, status, wellbeing and power – power to attract good fortune and to ward of bad luck and disease". But most often, in English the concept of *seriti* is simply, though somewhat erroneously translated as 'shadow'.

Importantly the idea of 'seriti' is traced in Mofokeng's work as part of the means through which the photographic image is sometimes believed to capture or contain the 'shadow' of its subject matter — as if the camera is a somewhat magical instrument through which a trace of the life energy of the person is imprinted upon the image. In this way the photographic image is viewed as a talisman of sorts, a consecrated object that is supposed to have extraordinary spiritual powers (see the respective analyses by Mofokeng & Enwezor 1998 and Peffer 2003). But I wish to make a bold claim and suggest that, despite such seemingly spiritual concerns, Mofokeng's practice may be mapped utilising the decidedly material framework of haptic perception. For, as I will show in this Chapter, haptic perception attends exactly that which cannot be seen optically, from a distance, leading to an understanding of the artwork that is altogether intimate, tactile and collaborative in nature.

Moreover, Mofokeng is at best dubious⁴⁷ about spiritual matters and I would thus contend that, inasmuch as it concerns his approach toward photography, such a material reading may further supplement and expand the notion of that which cannot be seen by simply looking at the images as faithful, straightforward representations of individuals and places. For example, in the case of the photograph 'Eyes wide shut, Motouleng Cave, Clarens, Free State' (2004) (Figure 6, p55) Mofokeng has captured the likeness of his dying brother inside a well-known place of pilgrimage for many black South Africans: the Motouleng Caves are said to possess healing powers and in a desperate bid to save his life, Mofokeng's brother, Ismail, convinced him to

⁴⁷ I cite from an essay by O'Toole (2012, unpaginated) entitled 'My Brother is dying': "Santu tells me that his brother is a sangoma, a healer. "He believes in ooga booga — or whatever you call that stuff. He laughs caustically. His brother is dying. Neither tradition nor magic will save him".

bring him to the caves. In the resulting photograph Mofokeng has captured his brother's likeness at the exact moment in between closing and opening his eyes. However, possibly owing to the low light conditions that prevail inside the cave, Mofokeng's shutter-speed has been lowered, thus creating the layered appearance that affects his brother's eyes (making them appear simultaneously open and shut) and the figures in the background. This generates not only the appearance of movement, but also a ghostlike atmosphere that reduces the figures in the background to ethereal smudges.



Figure 6: 'Eyes wide shut, Motouleng cave, Clarens, Free State' (2004), Santu Mofokeng. Black and white photograph. Dimensions not provided. (Source: Disirens 2011, p121)

Certainly here the many definitions of 'seriti' are all formally and symbolically present thus generating a unified approach to the relationship between the materiality of the photographic image and the life-force of an individual: there are numerous 'shadows' here — including the shadow-like, smudged images in the background (as spectres or ghosts), the dark shadow of the cave itself that envelops and frames the various figures in the image, the shadow of Mofokeng's own presence during this pilgrimage (and as part of the photograph) but, also, the shadow (or

aura) of death that seems to linger so closely, intimately around his brother's very body - to which all the former attends both formally and symbolically. I would suggest that the sensuous surface qualities of the image are thus not merely incidental to the meaningful interpretation of the photograph, but are in fact germane to how we as embodied viewers interact with the material image itself and its subject matter. Basically there now seems to me to be more than one form of 'seeing' and thus of relating to Mofokeng's portrait of his dying brother.

In the book Sensuous theory and multisensory media Laura V. Marks (2002, p2) discusses examples of contemporary video art through a haptic framework, one in which the eyes are made to function like organs of touch. Here Marks explains that in contradistinction to optic visuality, haptic visuality primarily draws from the sense experience of touch and kinaesthetics from the Greek 'kinein' (move) and 'aisthesis' (sensation). In this way 'haptic looking' is a form of sensory engagement where the eyes are transformed into sensory organs of touch and an otherwise flat image may become something like a textured surface. But even more so, in haptic looking the very act of looking functions as a material mode of contact with the artwork, much like one might imagine⁴⁸ a finger that caresses the surface of the skin, intimately exploring its corporeal texture, its warmth, the softness of the flesh and the shape of the body. In short, to look 'haptically' is to experience things up close, to become involved with them in an intimate, corporeal way. As Marks (2002, XII-XVII) argues haptic perception is underpinned by a form of mimetic interaction, where the body rushes to press up closer against the surface of something else, like a face squashed against a glass panel, taking something of its form and engaging its shared materiality as a physical entity: the cheek, mouth and eye that is flattened out against the smooth, cool surface of a panel of glass. In short, haptic perception cannot attain the kind of distance from the subject matter "...required for disinterested, cool headed assessment, nor does it want to" (Marks 2002, pXV). Even as you visually perceive the phenomena in question you experience the movement of your own body, the contraction of the muscles as your eyes focus and follow its surface, the way both the body and the artwork changes as you move around it, for example.

⁴⁸ It is important to note that this is simply a figure of speech. As Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p543-551) make clear haptic perception is not the same as a finger caressing the surface, for the eye remains resolutely an eye, even though it begins to function as an organ of touch.

For Marks (2002) haptic perception is kinaesthetically⁴⁹ involved: the sensations that the body experiences in relation to their perception of the artwork are indissociable from it. In fact haptic perception is fundamentally premised upon a heightened self-awareness of the movements of the viewer's body and its material properties in relation to the sensation of the artwork: what Deleuze (1981/2004b, p33) terms the 'affective athleticism of meat'. As Marks (2002) contends it may thus be argued that haptic perception is less motivated by the need for interpretation than by attaining a kind of phenomenological, corporeal experience through one's intimate involvement and interaction with the artwork.

In the remainder of this Chapter I will discuss the work 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me I890-1950' by Santu Mofokeng (1997) (hereafter referred to as the 'Black Photo Album'), by physically, mentally looking at the artwork through the material framework provided by haptic perception. In this way I will argue that Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' is indelibly shaped by the intimacies of touch, of interpersonal communication, of the material surface quality of the found image, and finally, of the physical body of the viewer in relation to the artwork. Here Mofokeng presents us not with 'a neat slice of time', a snapshot captured for prosperity sake or a series of images steeped in 'melancholy and loss' in Sontag's (1979, p17) words. But, rather, Mofokeng presents us with a series of material surfaces that brim with possibility in the very moment of our spatially embodied, haptic encounter with them. In this way I will argue that through the very sensuous haptic, materiality of the images that comprise the 'Black Photo Album', the viewer comes to experience a form of closeness and intimacy too, one that is felt, lived and experienced in the moment of engaging the artwork.

In the reading put forward here there exists the possibility of another form of looking where the photograph does not simply furnish visual evidence (although it may do that too), is circumscribed by the desires and limits of our voyeuristic gaze or is captured within the reductionist language of what Barthes, in *Camera lucida: reflections on photography* (1980/ 2000, p6) terms 'the voice of knowledge, of scientia'.

The concept of haptic materiality that underpins my approach to Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' concerns a number of intersecting values that include: the material workings of the photographic camera (including its technical workings such as usage of light, lenses, depth of

⁴⁹ I turn to the definition of 'kinaesthesia', which is defined by the Shorter English Dictionary (2007) as: ...being aware of the position and the movement of the parts of the body, by means of sensory nerves (proprioceptors) within the muscles, the joints etc; the sensation producing such awareness

field, the choice between colour and black and white); the materiality of image-making process (the chemical development of the photographic negatives and/or further technological manipulation within the darkroom or via the digital technology); the visual, surface properties of the image itself (including the appearance of grain, dust and scratches); and lastly, also of the myriad context-specific personal, corporeal and spatio-cultural relations through which images are produced and finally disseminated. As Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/ 2004) analysis of the haptic in the book A thousand plateaus shows, there exists a decidedly spatial component to haptic perception, one that may be traced within the absolute particularities of the sociocultural and geographic context within which forms of haptic expression and perception are encountered. Thus where I would gladly admit that my own personal need to discuss the works of Mofokeng in this haptic, material way is motivated by a the kind of fury once expressed by Barthes (1980/2000, p7) at constantly finding the images that he loves being co-opted into reductionist, theoretical frameworks, I am convinced that the haptic is not to be confused with some kind of pure referentiality on the part of the artwork, and nor with the desire to be 'primitive without culture' as Barthes (1980/ 2000, p7) contends⁵⁰. As I will show by referring to the writings of Deleuze (1981/2004b), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) and Laura V Marks (2002), the haptic is always already infused by the forces of 'culture' and 'nature' too: the artwork and its haptic dimensions is materialized within the context-specific values of space and time (under which vastly different understandings of the values of culture and nature and their exact interrelationship may operate).

My aim here is to consider the complexity and power of Mofokeng's intervention into the field of photography and its contested place within the historic, colonial representation of black South Africans⁵¹. One way of doing this is to follow Barthes (1980/ 2000) approach toward the photographic image, and to consider my physical attraction to and love for these images (and

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⁵⁰ Barthes (1980/ 2000, p7) here makes a distinction between the two impulses at stake in looking at the work of so-called 'amateur' photographers (in specific his attraction for their photographs): the one is to follow the route proffered by critical thinking and to dismiss these images, and the other is to look at them whilst suspending any such cultural, critical considerations completely. This I believe is a false dichotomy inasmuch as it tacitly sets up an untenable distinction between professional and amateur photographers (how does one know which is which after all?). Besides, as I have argued throughout this dissertation there is no clear distinction between nature and culture, being irreducible to either, interpretation is always already a sensory, cultural act.

⁵¹ Perhaps as Sontag argues in the book *On Photography* (1977) we need to be very careful with photographs: as Sontag analysis makes clear, inasmuch as photographs seem to furnish evidence of some concrete reality they also seem to have "...a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic object" (Sontag 1977, p6). But as Sontag argues, photography is no less subject to the thorny problem of the relationship between taste and culture, and thus the very innocence that seems to lend the image its veracity, transparency and indeed authority, is in fact a trope already situated well within the "...shady commerce between art and truth" (ibid).

Mofokeng's work generally). Perhaps we may also consider the argument by way of thinking about Barthes understanding of the existential force of the photograph and its relation to the indexical material properties apparent in it. In Camera lucida: reflections on photography Barthes (1980/2000, p20) argues that the person we so readily identify in a portrait is due to the act of resemblance (although the photograph itself has no specific intentionality, it is resolutely an object with which we identify by way of its material properties). Thus, and here Barthes (ibid) quotes Sartre, the image drifts between "...the shores of perception, between sign and image without ever approaching either". Exactly because this is the case Barthes concludes that the image is never animated, it has no life of its own but it does "...animate me" (ibid). Barthes now considers the phenomenological implications of this realization by turning to the role of affect, of how the sensory relationship with the image induces a series of irreducible, powerful emotional bonds between the image and the viewer. The encounter between the viewer and the object - the photograph - is steeped in the experience of desire, mourning, grief, repulsion, nostalgia and euphoria (Barthes 1980/ 2000, p21). In this way both the production and reception of image are underpinned by the value of 'pathos': 'pathos' inasmuch as the production of the image bespeaks the stirring of emotion, of the photographer's affinity with their subject matter and secondly, of how through the embodied act of viewing the very loss at the heart of the photograph (as an 'unmoored' resemblance) induces pathos in the viewer. From the perspective of the viewer Barthes considers the image as something like a wound that exposes the fact of his deeply affective sensory relationship to the world: "I see I feel, hence I notice, I observe and I think" (ibid).

Like Barthes I refuse to simply devalue the deep love I have for Mofokeng's photographs by saying that, for example, it is underpinned by a voyeuristic impulse to gaze upon and to circumscribe the body of the black 'other' (something which would be easy to do given South Africa's racially divisive past and my heritage as a white Afrikaner). In such a reading I could, for example, find some kind of nostalgic, perverse pleasure in 'The Black Photo Album' – as being documentary images hailing from a specific moment in time when black South Africans were still considered inferior to whites. But I do not think the appreciation of the artwork a question of such representational politics and forms of identification only. Thus in thinking about the haptic dimension of 'The Black Photo Album' I also wish to consider the more corporeal forces of attraction at stake in the relation between the photographic image and the viewer. However, I cannot, as Barthes (1980/ 2000) does, only see in these images the 'beloved body', the 'pure' reference. And yet, my love for these images persists and troubles the socio-political and

cultural dimension of the work. Here Marks's (2002) analysis of the haptic reminds that as a form of looking, it is underpinned by the erotics of touch, a kind of intimacy and exchange that is felt and experienced from up close, upon the surface. This I think is more or less the point. I love these images because in a reading not too dissimilar to Barthes', they do touch a raw nerve, exposing the actual haptic workings of my eye even as I gaze upon their subject matter.

In next sub-Chapter I will outline and define the 'haptic'. I will then return to Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album', keeping this definition in mind whilst I explore some of the forces at work in the photographic production and reproduction of the images as part of 'The Black Photo Album'. Perhaps here it is important to highlight how, where Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) put forward a decidedly spatial reading of the haptic, Marks' (2002) analysis brings us closer to a reading of the performative nature of the haptic 'space'.

2.3. Haptic space: the 'smooth' and the 'striated'

Certainly within art museums and art galleries where looking and not touching is the norm, the potential of looking haptically is of paramount importance: the material, surface textures of paintings, sculptures, and as Marks (2002) extended analysis shows even those rendered in the otherwise 'flat' medium of video art must, for the most part, within the museum context be experienced through our powers of visual perception only. But, as I have argued in the introduction to this dissertation, I am convinced that the artwork-as-object hypothesis is wholly problematic if not entirely erroneous. Thus it is not simply a question of looking haptically at the artwork - where the artwork is readily conceived as a well-defined object. In the case of video art, films and photographic slide projections of found photographic material such as 'The Black Photo Album', this difficulty is further exacerbated by the fact that these mediums are all dependant on a secondary device for their very visibility: this device could be a television screen, a film/ digital data projector, a computer or these days even a mobile phone. We may physically touch the screen of such a device or even touch the surface onto which the image is projected. But actually touching the moving image with our hands seems to be a rather senseless, if not impossible feat especially given that today most videos remain in raw data

format⁵². To be certain one may still touch the strip of film, the individual photographic slide the memory stick, or the beam of light that transmits the projected image. But I would contend that this is still not the same as actually touching the image.

In order to interact haptically with such 'dematerialized'⁵³ mediums such as video, our eyes must become bodily organs of touch that intimately, materially explore the surface of the projected moving image. But more importantly, as will become clear from the following discussion of haptic perception, this is not a case of only imagining the surface properties of the image, but rather a different form of sensory, visual perception in which distinct forms of looking, and of the different experience of space so clearly at stake in each, is brought to the fore. That is to say, even as we attend the haptic, surface properties of artworks and their relationship to the workings of visual perception, we must consider how haptic perception is in itself conceived as a spatially organised, materially embodied phenomenon. It is this line of reasoning which I wish to follow in discussion of the installation of 'The Black Photo Album' (1997), by the photographer Santu Mofokeng. Before I do so, I wish to define what I mean by the concept of haptic perception by referring to the writings of Marks (2002) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004).

In the introduction to Sensuous theory and multimedia Marks (2002, pXII-XIII) first traces the usage of the term 'haptic' in visual art by referring to the writings of the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In a section from A thousand plateaus entitled 'The Aesthetic Model: Nomad art' (1980/ 2004, p543-551) Deleuze and Guattari put forward a spatial reading of the haptic by expanding on the work of the art historians Alois Riegl, Wilhelm Worringer and the phenomenologist Henri Maldiney. Here Deleuze and Guattari put forward a reading of the haptic in which they posit the 'smooth' as "...both the object of close vision par excellence and the element of haptic space". In contradistinction to this they place the 'striated' as a form of visual cognition derived from the requirements of long distance, optical space. In this reading we are thus not dealing with discrete objects that elicit a haptic response from the viewer but rather with different spaces, of which the haptic is one. This signals a reading distinct from that

⁵² Where the pioneers of video art such as Marina Abramovic, Bruce Naumann and others still had to contend with the tangible medium of video tape and weighty Portapak technology, we now live in the age of digital recording, streaming internet content and digital medial players. It seems probable that even Digital Video Discs or DVD's will simply disappear in the near future and that all video content will simply become electronic data that can be played from lightweight, highly portable devices such as USB or 'flash' discs.

⁵³ Of course I use the term 'dematerialized' in a relative and not an absolute sense here. For even in the case of a film projection, light is still very much a material phenomenon.

of the art historians Worringer and Riegl, where the haptic relates more to the conventions of pictorial depiction and perhaps even more to a conventional view of the artwork-as-object⁵⁴.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) invoke what they consider a primordial duality between the smooth and the striated under which they subordinate the difference between the haptic and optic, close vision and distant vision. For them the haptic is the effect of the smooth as the optic is an effect of the striated. To clarify, for Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004, p544) the first property of a smooth, haptic space is that "...its orientations, landmarks and linkages are in continuous variation: it operates step by step". They list examples of such smooth, haptic spaces as the desert, ice, sea, and steppe amongst others. In this sense, they argue that, within a haptic space, one is never in front or behind⁵⁵ anything other than such temporary landmarks as vegetation, sand dunes, precipitation or seasonal ice formations. These haptic spaces are continuously changing and all that inhabit them may be considered 'nomads' that entertain "...tactile relations amongst themselves" (ibid). And because everything is constantly moving within this space, there exists no single perspective that could constitute an immobile 'outside', an external observer. In this way Deleuze and Guattari argue that the 'smooth' is undifferentiated, pure space of haptic vision - within a haptic space even the line that separates the earth from the sky becomes undifferentiated, a continuation of the same substance. To be sure there is a difference in colour but here that difference may be considered a pure difference of appearance and not of form, substance or orientation: the sky is not in the 'background', nor somehow distinct from the landscape itself – it forms a part of that changing space. Deleuze and Guattari turn to examples of nomadic art in order to show how such a haptic space is reflected in the abstract⁵⁶, free use of line.

⁵⁴ When I turn to a discussion of 'The Black Photo Album' by Santu Mofokeng in section 2.4 of this Chapter, the notion of the haptic-as-space is useful in understanding how the work puts into play a material relationship between the 'smooth' haptic spaces of close vision and the 'striated' spaces of distanced, optical vision. I will now define the relationship between the 'smooth' and the 'striated'.

⁵⁵ I think again of one of the very first things I ever learned as a child about the medium of sculpture: sculptures too do not have a front, back or side view – and if they have a bottom it is one often clearly defined in relation to the pure, material forces of gravity. (I also like how Kapoor addressed this in 'Memory', where the sculpture fits so snug into the space that it touches both floor and roof).

⁵⁶ Abstract here is not synonymous with the organic (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p550) and again the importance of space is highlighted: "The haptic-optical, near distant distinctions must be subordinated to the distinction between the abstract line and the organic line: we must find their principle in a general confrontation of spaces". The notion of the 'organic' they draw from Worringer and view it as a form of representation, and more specifically the feeling of empathy that underpin and indeed unites this form of representation with a subject. The organic does not refer to what is represented but, rather, is understood as being a formal means of representing the organic tendencies with humanity. In this sense the organic is already a coordinated form of organization replete with boundaries between inside/outside, the human and the non-human, striated space and its occupants.

The haptic working of the abstract line is understood as the 'affect of smooth space' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/ 2004, p551): the abstract line is mechanical, inorganic yet distinguishable from the geometrical; it is intuitive and like a nomad its spatial movement is free and always relational; the abstract line reduces the surface to a plane; it distils from the organic an element of pure animality, one that is a momentary diversion from the ongoing process of life generally. Perhaps most interestingly, the abstract line of smooth space escapes geometry through its furtive, fugitive mobility even as it "...tears itself free from the organic" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p551). Before life is organized, striated and classified according to the idealised needs of an immobile observer, it is already, by virtue of the fact of its expressiveness, distinct from matter.

The haptic is for Deleuze and Guattari materialised through the expressive abstract lines of nomadic art – the feverish, zigzagging, twirly, snaking lines that are a direct force of the life that runs through each distinct organism. (This signals the organization of matter into life, of which it partakes even as it momentarily diverts its flow into itself). Importantly such a haptic form of expression is directly related to the haptic material experience of space in places such as the desert. But as we will see, Deleuze and Guattari are careful not to suggest that the haptic can only be found in smooth, nomadic spaces. For as they write even the modern city "…gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad or a cave dweller" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p 551). Moreover, for Deleuze and Guattari, nomads are privileged though not sole agents of haptic perception. That is to say, the haptic may be understood in relation to the optic. Again, for Deleuze and Guattari the relationship between the smooth and the striated is posited as a primordial relationship under which the values of the haptic and the optic are subsumed.

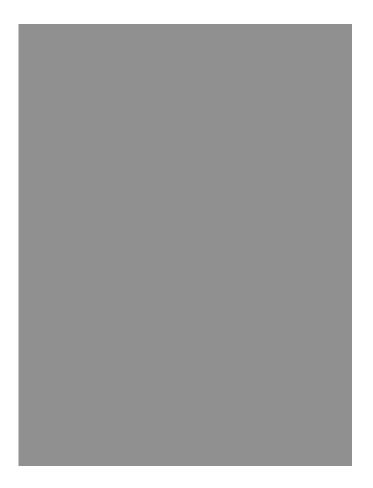


Figure 7: 'Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X' (1953) by Francis Bacon. Oil on canvas. Sizes: 153 × 118 cm (Source: Gale and Stephens ed., 2008, p119)

In contradistinction to the 'smooth', Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004, p545) place the 'striated', a value that may be understood as relating to more distant vision and constancy of orientation — overall, the requirements of a more optic, long-distance space. Within striated space distinct elements and forms may be discerned from within the stable milieu provided by the existence of ordered, perspectival spatial relations. In painting this signals perhaps something like the appearance of distinct foreground, middleground and background within which separate, well-defined elements now populate, and indeed conform to the logic of a structured, illusionistic representation. In this way, for example, in the work of the painter Francis Bacon, Deleuze (1981/ 2004b) argues that the human figure is cut loose from its material support and becomes an optic element only. It is at this very moment, when Bacon liberates his figures from the constraints of perspective, that the sensation (of seeing) is palpably linked to the body itself and ceases to be "...representative and becomes real" (Deleuze 1981/ 2004b, p33). If this is so it is because the eye no longer attends the figure itself as much as the force that is exerted

on the rendering of flesh as a smooth tonal value. For Deleuze, the viewer is drawn into this new space of sensation, linking their eye, their very bodies, with the pure sensation of colour.

The usage of the term 'striated' is closely aligned to its dictionary definition as "...the appearance of longitudinal lines, streaks furrows or ridges" (SOED 2007). One could well argue, as Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) do, that prior to the appearance of the striated, haptic spaces remain spaces of pure connection - the earth, sky and beings that populate it have not yet become distinct, 'striated' phenomena. Perhaps here one may also think of how the striated may be understood as when muscle structures, composed of regularly ordered fibres, are again subdivided by distinct bands into different 'striations'. Such muscles now exhibit the appearance of grooves of channels and are called 'striped muscle', skeletal muscle', or 'voluntary muscles'. The latter posits within the striated space a sense of structure, order and perhaps most intriguingly, voluntary control.

Speaking from an evolutionary viewpoint, the voluntary muscle is an adaptation of existing muscle, one over which voluntary control may be exercised through the (gradual) appearance of such striae. The power of the muscle is brought under control by the evolving body and may now be harnessed to fulfil a new function. Within artistic expression the function of such striae may be similarly be understood in its capacity to "...convert space and make it a form of expression that grids and organises matter" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p 549). No wonder Deleuze and Guattari spend the bulk of their energy investigating and indeed praising the creative possibilities of haptic forms of expression: whereas the striated-optic signals control, order and stability, the smooth-haptic brims with creative possibility and potential. Perhaps on this note, here we see how various forms of expression participate in structuring the world, how they are both instrumentalized by - and instrumental in - generating a particular worldview.

2.3.1 Haptic contexts: on Riegl

In their respective analyses of the haptic, both Marks (2002) and Deleuze (1981/2004b) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) explicitly turn to the writings of the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, for as they note, it is here where the first usage of the haptic within the field of visual art may be located. Broadly speaking Riegl's writings react against "...the gradual demise of the physical tactility in art and the rise of figurative space" (Marks 2002, p4). Following Riegl's analyses Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) consider how the introduction within late Roman art of illusionistic, single point perspective in the picture plane abolishes the haptic so evidently

at work in Egyptian art. The introduction of an immobile, central viewer (and viewpoint) signals a growing, ongoing, organization of life. In this new organization of life the emergence of the striated coincides with the founding of new empires within which new, striated spatial relations (between the self and other, the body and the mind, the individual and the world they inhabit, the artwork and the viewer) are tacitly at stake in the re-organization of the picture plane. Indeed, all such elements are now cut loose from their material support and made to function in new, ordered ways (think perhaps again of the example of muscle that is brought under voluntary control by the evolving body). Marks (2002, p5) summarises this neatly when she writes that:

The revolution in styles that Riegl observed coincides with a revolution in religious thought...barbarian notions that the spirit transcends the body seem to be reflected in the development of a figurative picture plane that transcends the materiality of the support.

In the visual arts Riegl notes how within Egyptian artforms there exists what might be thought 'shallow' depth of field, with the figures emerging from the picture plane by way of colouring and low relief. Riegl argues that Egyptian art maintains the haptic "...appearance of a unified isolated object adhering to a plane" (Riegl in Marks 2002, p4). Similarly, as Deleuze (1981/2004b, p33) argues, for the art historian Worringer Gothic art was defined as a powerful nonorganic life opposed to the structured ideals of representation in classical art. Whereas in Gothic art the line remains on the level of decoration, albeit one that has become vital and profound, in classical art the line becomes organic, fading into figure and the ideals of representation that underpin its representation. In much the same way Riegl considers the more optical forms of late Roman art during which figures slowly relinquish all tactile relations to the plane.



Figure 8: Painted Egyptian relief with human figures, goats, cattle and seed from the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2450 - 2350BCE) in mastaba of Ti, Saqqara, Egypt (Source: Kleiner & Mamiya 2005, p68)

In late Roman art the plane becomes an idealized spatial ground that could be populated with distinct objects and expanded into infinite depth. Marks (2002, p6) further develops this idea by arguing that in haptic representation the individual, human viewer is not reinforced: there is no single point perspective that tacitly acknowledges the viewer and provides for them something like a tailor-made, stable 'overview' of the depicted scene, so to speak. It is only with the introduction of a form of optic representation, one reliant on distance and order, that the external viewer may project themselves into the depicted scene. The eye no longer rests upon the surface, haptically tracing its contours and the elements that are enmeshed in it. But rather, with the arrival of optic space, the eye now looks 'beyond' the single plane of the surface and into the illusionistic, representational space of the image. This facilitates a form of identification with the figures and spaces represented within the image, one quite at odds with forms of haptic perception in which the very materiality of the image, its surface, the use of colour and line constitute a single, haptic space. Where in haptic perception one interacts with the surface of the image, in optic perception one identifies with figurative images that populate its illusionistic space. The question of identification here is moved from being a sensory bodily form of engagement to that of being one in which a viewer, identifies with the subject matter of the image. (And as I will show throughout Chapter 4 of this dissertation, this also implies a form of 'teloramic' looking - of looking whilst maintaining a 'proper' distance to the image itself – as if such distance guarantees some measure of objectivity). In this way, the body becomes disentangled, separating itself from its physical, sensory engagement with the artwork, leaving its tactile surfaces to languish whilst sensation and affect is relegated to being only an effect of disembodied identification with organically rendered subject matter. Perhaps to return briefly to the subject matter of Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' (1997), such an approach to photography says precious little about the non-representational properties of the image (such as the scratches, grain, areas of fading and so on that are an indelible part of these images)⁵⁷ to communicate anything of worth to the viewer.

Perhaps most importantly for the discussion at hand here, is the fact that for Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004), striated spaces exist in relation to haptic, smooth spaces. On one hand they argue that both Riegl and Worringer encounter the haptic under the imperial conditions of Egyptian art, a stage where the haptic is already mutating - where the smooth and the striated are already caught up in a mutual transformation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/ 2004, p546). The abstract line is in the process of mutating, of becoming organic. That is why the philosophers direct our attention toward nomad art and its abstract use of the line, which for them is the pure expression of the haptic. But even more so, they are directly opposed to the formalist bent in Riegl's account of the haptic, and argue instead, in a context specific manner, that the absolute materiality and spatial specificity of nomadic existence establishes the conditions for their haptic use of line. Again, one may think of the nomadic lifestyle within the desert, steppe, ice, sea and even the city as the local, historic conditions under which haptic expression emerges.

Today Riegl is widely considered to be one of the founding figures of the field of formalist, modern art history and its methods⁵⁸. But as Marks notes, from the year 1887 Riegl spent a decade working as curator of textiles at the Eitelbergers Museum of Art and Industry⁵⁹. Marks ponders how Riegl must have spent countless hours, hunched over and closely investigating

⁵⁷ This also begs the question of how and why specifically it is that I do identify with these photographs? - a question I discuss at the end of this sub-Chapter.

⁵⁸ See Maragaret Iversen's book *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory,* (1993) for an in depth discussion of Riegl's legacy and theories in relation to the world of contemporary art history.

⁵⁹ Moreover seminal publications by Riegl such as 'Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik' (Problems of style: foundations for a history of ornament) published in 1893 are all concerned with what may be termed the minor, decorative arts. As Marks (2002, p5-6) argues the decorative arts have historically been considered 'feminine arts' and it is tempting to suggest that the haptic itself may be considered a more feminine form of perception. But I would suggest we must attend the context-specificity of the haptic encounter again – and not posit it as a universal idea albeit by way of such gender distinctions.

textiles, their woven patterns and how, in turn, this must have stimulated his interest in the tactile qualities of artworks. Interesting then that Riegl is at great pains to deny the materialist account of artworks as put forward by his contemporaries such as Gottfried Semper (Cook 2007, p104-108).

For Semper various art forms were always the direct product of available materials and techniques. But it is here, where Riegl now works towards formally tracing the universal principles of all art by way of the development of a few fundamental decorative motifs⁶⁰, that the material specificity of the period in question is lost. In substituting universal formalist principles for the material specificity both of the artwork (the technologies and materials that underpin it) and the space within which the artwork is produced, Riegl eliminates any sign of the material culture to which forms of haptic expression belong (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p546). Here Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/ 2004) account of the haptic goes to great lengths to re-establish the absolute, material specificity of the different material 'spaces' to which forms of haptic expression belong. In short, for Deleuze and Guattari it is less a matter of tracing the cultural, historic development of the haptic, and more a question of defining it in relation to the actual experience of particular material spaces and culturally conditioned responses to them. I am briefly reminded here of the fact that the term 'context' derives from the Latin for weaving⁶¹, a decidedly material phenomena. As we will see, in Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' the images seem to weave in and out of visibility, materialised as they are through the creases and folds of the photographic paper.

I would argue that exactly because a form of striated, illusionistic representation locates the matter of one's identification with the artwork so firmly within the purview of its figurative, illusionistic workings, it reduces whatever relationship one may have to the image to being a matter of politics only. Put in another way, if one's identification with a photographic image is purely premised upon one's identification with the subject matter of the image, then it does beg the question why a white South African such as me identifies with old portraits of black South Africans? Certainly, as is clear from Okwui Enwezor's (1997) analysis of the politics of

⁶⁰ A search for the 'universal laws' that all artworks obey – the concept of 'kunstwollen' – something like an impersonal, historical force or drive that works through the artist. See for example *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race, and Music Theory in Fin-de-siècle Vienna* by Nicholas Cook published in 2007 by Oxford University Press, England (see specifically p104-108). Here Cook discusses the similarity of Riegl's Hegelian approach to art history to that of the influential twentieth century music theorist Heinrich Schenker, who lived in Vienna from 1884 until his death in 1935.

⁶¹ To be certain, my second supervisor Prof John Picton first drew my attention to this fact, something I am thankful for.

representation in South Africa art in the article 'Reframing the black subject: ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation', there has to be adequate critical consideration of the various historic, racial and political factors at stake in the South African body politic and its relationship to the differing treatment and representation of black and white bodies.



Figure 9: Image from the 'Rainbow series #9' (1996) by Candice Breitz. Collage on paper.

Sizes: cm 56,5 x 40 (Source: http://www.kaufmannrepetto.com/artist/candice-

breitz/#work_box. Accessed: 2 July 2013)

As Enwezor (1997) argues, during apartheid black bodies were routinely objectified by white artists: representations of black South Africans by white artists commonly reduced the black body to being nothing more than a ideological prop that served to buttress colonial claims of authority and indeed of ownership (not only of the land but of the very bodies of black South Africans that populated it too – here the black subject is reduced to being an object, like an

animal that simply exists within - and part of - the land itself⁶²). The deep racist, colonial legacy of apartheid has indelibly shaped the employ of the black body as subject matter in contemporary South African art.

Enwezor (1997) claims that many contemporary, post-apartheid white South African artists such as Candice Breitz still consciously or sub-consciously identify with a colonial, apartheid vision of themselves, investing representations of the black body in their work with negative colonial meanings: for example in the case of Breitz's 'Rainbow series' of 1996 (Figure 9, p70), Enwezor argues that by combining found pornographic images of white women with those found on tourist postcards depicting black women dressed in distinctly tribal apparel, she ultimately effaces the specific historic, political and racial differences at work in the representation of white and black South African women. To be certain, Enwezor acknowledges that these found images of women (white pornographic models and black tribal female figures) are certainly objectified representations of women in general. However, within the context of South Africa's racially segregated history these racially different women are most certainly not subject to the same historic, cultural and political forces: simply put for Enwezor this means that a white feminist artist such as Breitz cannot simply equate these objectified bodies with one another in order to make a more general point about the ongoing objectification of women in contemporary South African society. Thus for Enwezor Breitz's identification with the image of black women in the postcards is hinged upon her own material identity as a white South African woman. That is to say, as a white woman with a particular racial, political and economic history, Breitz' uncritical usage of the black body in the artwork is highly problematic⁶³. In the same way, my identification with the images that form part of Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' powerfully brings to the fore the question of my personal, racial, political, economic and historic implication in the project itself.

⁶² See for example the analyses proffered by on the work of the colonial painter Thomas Bowler and Thomas Baines by Arnold & Carruthers (1995) in *The life and work of Thomas Baines*. As Arnold & Caruthers (1995) argue these artists showed a clear preference for the rendering of picturesque landscapes in which the black body simply forms a natural part of the landscape. In this way black South Africans were viewed as being part of nature, and thus part of the bounty natural resources that could be owned and exploited by the white colonial authorities.

63 Enwezor's arguments were responded to, elaborated and sometimes even refuted by the subsequent publication of an anthology of texts investigating the nature of representation of black bodies in South African art. See the volume *Grey areas: representation, identity and politics in contemporary South African art* edited by Atkinson Breitz and published in 1999 in Johannesburg by Chalkham Hill. However, in these responses precious little was said about the materiality of Breitz' images and most responses focused on the right of the artist to represent the black body in her work (including the political, racial, and historical complexities of doing so). The process of representation identification in lieu of the South African body politic was key to this discussion: see for example the articles by Brian Keith Axel entitled 'Disembodiment and the total body: a response to Enwezor on contemporary South African representation' (Atkinson & Breitz 1999, p41-52) and by Colin Richards 'Bobbits feast: violence and representation in South African art' (Atkinson & Breitz 1999, p165-186)

It may well be the case that I do identify with the black subjects in Mofokeng's project out of a sense of white guilt - that I am implicated in the project inasmuch as my being a white South African of a particular sex, age and place implicitly situates me as part of a now outdated colonial, apartheid mindset and privilege⁶⁴. Perhaps inasmuch as the indexical quality of the photographs that form part of the 'Black Photo Album' seem to testify to the existence of a number of previously invisible black subjects, they allow for some hope of reconciliation in the present. Certainly, when I look at these images as a white South African that benefited from the policies of apartheid, I do feel a sense of personal responsibility, anger and even shame. But I have to be honest: if this were the fulcrum of my interest in the project I would not spend much time looking at these images because I take no real pleasure in feeling this way. Nor will I argue that I have included the project in this dissertation because as a specifically white South African I feel the moral obligation to do so - because I felt the need to be racially representative, for example. Perhaps in keeping with this line of thought, in a class-based Marxist sense, I would certainly agree that despite our racial differences (mine and the black subjects of the photographs), I do identify with the middle class aspirations implicit in the sitters of the portraits' wishes to be photographed in a dignified, presentable way – something that will be the topic of discussion in the next sub-Chapter. Of course, in a broader sense, it is certainly easy enough to appreciate the fact that the sitters yearned for a better life, one in which their individual lives are acknowledged as being important, relevant and worth remembering.

For me it is vitally important, to remember that 'The Black Photo Album' is an artwork and I am an artist. In this regard I identify with Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' because, as an artwork it unifies in the singular a number of seemingly disparate material and conceptual considerations, ones that are as much aesthetic as personal, ethical, political, economic, cultural and historical. This is not to disregard the specificity of my attraction to - and identification with - each photographic image that forms a part of the work but, rather, to locate it within the purview of the field of fine art (and its varied methodologies, forms of expression and creative potential). In short I would suggest that the material specifics of the artwork, including the precise manner of its conceptualization, production and display is germane to my attraction to - and self-

⁶⁴ It is near impossible to separate my identity, my life from the policies of apartheid even today. My parents' relative wealth (i.e. in relation to most black South Africans abject poverty during apartheid) ensured that I slept in a decent bed, in a decent house and had a decent education. The emotional and intellectual outcome of this privilege (such as feeling of relative safety, my choice of career as an artist, and even the very fact of my writing this dissertation) may all be understood in relation thereto. For example, notwithstanding the fact that I live in a country where many people simply do not have enough food to eat I still chose to become an artist, a career in which there is arguably few prospects in a country such as South Africa. And yet, I felt secure enough to do so.

identification with - the images that form part of Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album'. I now turn to an in-depth discussion of the artwork.

2.4 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng

In the artwork entitled 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997), the artist Santu Mofokeng has collected a number of self-commissioned photographic portraits from the private residences and township parlours frequented by black South Africans.



Figure 10: 'Unidentified subjects', Slide 27 from the 'Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng. (Source: Mofokeng 2013, unpaginated)

As regards subject matter, each of the images that comprise 'The Black Photo Album' depicts what appears to be a variety of old family portraits of black South Africans taken against a photographic backdrop - mostly a piece of cloth (Figure 10, shown above), sometimes with a faint Greek architectural impression visibly printed thereupon. Judging from their dress and

physical demeanour the subjects of these portraits appear urban and sophisticated: viewed from the front with their gaze directly meeting that of the viewer, hands are folded or tucked at the sides, hair neatly combed in paths or covered with either a hat or a piece of cloth tightly wrapped around the head. For all purposes the sitters appear smartly dressed in a manner befitting the working class/bourgeoisie aspirations and conventions of the day.

Overall the series of photographic images that comprise the bulk of 'The Black Photo Album' are what may be considered 'antique' photographs with their physical condition showing clear signs of ageing and handling. As Mofokeng (2013, unpaginated) notes, at the time of their 'discovery' some of these images were simply kept in cardboard boxes, plastic bags, cupboards and elsewhere - a thought I will return to in due time. For the 'Black Photo Album' these found photographic portraits have been re-photographed and compiled as a single carousel slide projection of eighty individual black and white images. In my view the artistic process of decision-making involved throughout the development of 'The Black Photo Album' is informed by the actual experience of sourcing the images and their physical condition at the time of doing so, of handling and transforming them, and of displaying them in their final form as part of a single artwork – all processes that are as much material and visual as they are conceptual in nature. To begin, one may briefly consider the status of these images as self-commissioned studio portraits.

As both Firstenberg (2002) and Mofokeng (2008) have stated these images closely follow the neo-colonial conventions established by Georgian and Victorian studio portrait painting in almost all facets of their execution, including "...composition, posture, setting, props, and costume in rendering families and friends with accoutrements of marriage, sports, femininity and Christianity" (Firstenberg 2002, p60). For example, one may distinguish between a series of wedding photographs replete with brides in white and grooms in black; the stock standard family portrait with standing husband, sitting wife and the new addition to the family propped up on her lap; a photograph of friends with three young men staring somewhat defiantly at the camera as self-assured young men often do - the closeness of their bond as friends betrayed only by the affectionate manner in which both standing figures rest their hands upon the shoulder of the seated, central figure. In this way the series of images are self-consciously posed, thus also signalling something performative regarding the occasion of their making: one might very well imagine the sitters bickering amongst themselves, as most families and friends commonly do, about who is supposed to stand where and exactly how right up to the very last moment of quiet before the photographer's finger pushed the button. Of course, racially

speaking the subjects of these photographic portraits are black Africans, and not white Europeans, as one may expect give the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century colonial, South African context within which the images were produced.

It may be noted that the images contain no overt evidence of social coercion such as is commonly discerned in various colonial photographic depictions of black Africans – the trope of the 'noble savage'⁶⁵ comes to mind as do the plethora of colonial images that depict black South Africans as labourers of industry, prisoners or as house servants, for example. As such the images clearly reflect their origins as private, self-commissioned photographic portraits created within the context of a rapidly changing, urban South African context. Here I would argue that the sitters are performing the vision they have of themselves for the benefit of the camera. This is important because despite the fact that this vision seems to coincide with a colonial, Victorian European ideal of civility, class and respectability – i.e. something 'foreign' to their culture - this is

⁶⁵ According to this trope Africans were either 'noble savages' in touch with nature and unencumbered by the 'unnatural' ideals of civilization or menacing, predatory savages that could contribute nothing of value to the realm of human culture, philosophy, the arts and so forth. In brief, the 'noble savage' is childlike, innocent and pure in their relationship with their surroundings, being true to their 'innate' nature they are also incapable feelings of guilt and free from the pressure of existence in then modern, civilized western society. In short the trope of the noble savage explicitly excludes Africa and Africans from the realm of humanity. However, a figure no less than the philosopher Hegel felt that Africans were simply animal like savages sans any redeeming qualities. I cite from Hegel's introduction to 'The Philosophy of history' (1956) first published in 1892: "The negro as already observed exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious to be found in this type of character...At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again" For Hegel Africa is not part of history, it is "...the unhistorical, underdeveloped spirit still involved in the conditions of mere nature" (ibid).

how they have chosen to represent themselves⁶⁶. In other words, the images that form a part of 'The Black Photo Album' begin with something like a collaborative process in which the sitters and the photographer have made a number of decisions.

This I would cautiously suggest is one of the reasons why Mofokeng, has chosen to deviate from his ordinary modus opperandi as a photographer and has instead chosen to display these images as 'found objects' (something he has never repeated). For example, Mofokeng could have taken photographs of the conditions in which the images were kept (including the spaces such as homes and parlours where they were displayed or stored) or the people to whom they belong. Instead Mofokeng has re-arranged the images as part of a photographic slide-projection within which he included a series of texts. In the next section I will consider the haptic relationship between the image and text-based slides included as part of 'The Black Photo Album'.

2.4.1 Haptic images: weaving in and out of visibility

The term haptic visuality emphasizes the viewer's inclination to perceive haptically, but a work itself may offer haptic images. Haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. Thus

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⁶⁶ Certainly one may well find this questionable by for example saying that this presents a good case example of the coercive power of colonial institutions to intervene and modify the value systems of colonial subjects. In such a reading we see how colonial subjects identify with the value systems of the colonial authorities: here the photographs in Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' becomes suggestive of this shift towards Eurocentric ideals of class, civility and even the family. Or, perhaps more fruitfully, one may follow Homi K. Bhabha's argument put forward in the article 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse' (1984) that such an appropriation of value systems by colonial subjects result in a kind of slippage - where the power of colonial narrative is displaced through the act of mimicry. It is worth citing Bhabha in some length here: He writes that: "Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers' (Bhabha 1984, p126). The threat that mimicry (such as threat of the colonial subjects of the photographs in the 'Black Photo Album') poses may now be understood as an ambivalent effect of a colonial discourse that seeks to partially reproduce its ideals in the colonial subject (producing subjects that are 'almost the same but not quite' as Bhabha says), but in so doing, it produces both adherence and menace: for if the colonial subject is an accurate reflection of the colonial ideal, it discloses an ambivalence at the heart of the colonial project, especially inasmuch as the colonial power may recognize itself in the representation of such alienated, authorized versions of 'otherness'. Thus inasmuch as the colonial 'other' are present and may gaze back at the colonial powers (such as is present in the subjects of the photographs that form part of the 'Black Photo Album') it implicitly shares "...the acuity of the genealogical gaze which, as Foucault describes it, liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty" (Bhabha (1984, p129). At this point it should be clear, that although I would certainly support such a postcolonial reading of the 'Black Photo Album' I remain focused upon exploring the actual materiality of the artwork in question, a reading in which the subject matter of the photographs form only one part of the manner in which the images meaningfully communicate with the viewer.

it is less appropriate to speak of the object of a haptic look than to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image.

The above paragraph cited by Marks (2002, p3) distinguishes between viewing images haptically and the fact that certain images are predisposed to forms of haptic perception. For example, in a chapter entitled 'Video haptics and erotics' Marks (2002, p1-22) considers how the material quality of video art contributes to its meaningful interpretation. She discusses how the video image may be thought in tactile, haptic terms by referring to such factors as the low pixel density ratio of the video format, the various forms of digital compression and manipulation that video is subjected to (which often generates visual artefacts) and the forms of visual decay that are the hallmarks of the medium. As Marks contends, video provides much less visual detail than film - its contrast ratio is approximately one tenth of that of ordinary sixteen-millimetre film, resulting in the loss of image detail and contrast⁶⁷.

On one hand video could be considered a medium that is defined by an 'unsatisfactory' or 'diminished' experience of seeing (Marks 2002, p10). But, on the other, whereas the capacity of video to accurately capture and faithfully reproduce images of the world is perhaps questionable, video artists have quickly turned this relative weakness into an opportunity to generate meaningful artworks - ones that more often than not utilise the very limits of the medium to create visual experiences that are as much about their subject matter as the materiality of the medium itself. In this way the artefacts that are the hallmarks of video (such as those resultant from its digital manipulation, the exaggerated appearance of pixels and indeed the pixelated images) are made to feature as an integral part of the video artwork itself. As Marks shows, in video one cannot extrapolate the image from the medium, the picture from the surface, so to speak. In brief, the eye lingers on the surface of the image and cannot, simply plunge into illusionistic rendering of depth and form: as Marks (2002, p8) argues, here looking serves "...not to distinguish form as much as to discern texture". This I would suggest holds true for the images that form a part of 'The Black Photo Album' too.

In my reading the images that form a part of 'The Black Photo Album' encourage haptic forms of perception through their texture (even as they seem to furnish evidence of the marginalised

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⁶⁷ From my own experience as an artist working with video I know that this holds true even with the advent of high-definition video technology. A simple experiment will suffice: one can easily spot the appearance of visual artefacts and the disintegration of high definition video by standing closer to any high definition television screen. True, today we have so called 4K and 16K video capacity, with digital video now being as good as film – but this is still very expensive and accordingly most international video artists avoid using it.

lives and aspirations of black South Africans). In these images there exists a play between the smooth and the striated, the well-defined, structured spaces of optic vision and the immediacy of the experience of texture and surface. Certainly, by virtue of its single point perspective, a photograph already implies something like a constancy of orientation (towards its subject matter). But this I would contend becomes questionable once the surface dimension of the image is introduced as another field or visual plane, one that operates in tandem or even in contradistinction to that implied by the illusionistic space of the photographic image. It is not simply that one looks at the image through a veil of 'noise', but rather that the image, its subject matter and the planes (background, foreground, middleground) they occupy, is interwoven into that of the surface texture itself. This material field or 'plane of texture' re-constitutes the possibility of haptic perception within the otherwise illusionistic space of the photograph. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/ 2004) terms the smooth and the striated are brought back into relation with one another as the organising grid of the conventions of studio photography are disrupted by the free, involuntary effects of ageing and handling that appear on the image surface.

The images that form a part of Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' all contain varying amounts of visual noise and damage - artefacts that I would suggest should be considered an integral part of the photographs. On first impression, the effects of photographic ageing are clearly visible in the grainy, almost cloth-like, textured areas that, to degrees varying in both intensity and scale, affect the whole of the image surface. These 'imperfections' are probably due to the excessive collection of dust as much as that of the actual deterioration of the material composition of the photographic images (including for example, the grade of photographic paper and chemicals used during the process of development). On par with this, is the evidence of their physical handling, with marks such as those resultant from the spillage of fluid (a cup of coffee or a drop of water?), tearing and folding and/or combinations of all the aforementioned visibly affecting almost all of the images. In select examples such as Figure 10 (p73) the whole of the image seems to have become enveloped in a grainy, play of texture that seems to extend from the piece of grey material used as a photographic backdrop - its folds and textures are now almost indivisible from those resultant from the process of ageing and handling. The three women appear to weave in and out of visibility as they become enmeshed in the material, surface play of texture and form.

In all the reworked photographs included in 'The Black Photo Album' the contrasts between black and white areas have also either been artificially heightened and/or have, through the process of ageing and handling, resulted in an almost complete loss of image detail. This relative 'loss' of detail is accompanied by what is often termed in the image-grading process the effect of 'burnout': here and there lighter areas such as a white shirt, a pair of bright socks or even select areas in the backdrop have literally been over-exposed resulting in both the loss of detail in that area and a form of 'spill-over': here the excessive white attained through the process of burnout results in a glowing effect that literally spills over into the surrounding areas. Thus the figures that populate the image now appear ethereal if not as ghostly apparitions. The processes of burnout and spillover are, in turn, juxtaposed by large areas that have become almost completely darkened. In all this leads to the heightened play of light and shadow that is the hallmark of much of Mofokeng's photographic output. This play of light and shadow is most certainly also connected to the flattening out of the image plane (and the fuzzy outlines) that have been previously noted in Hayles' (2009) discussion of Mofokeng's work generally.

However, in my reading this is not simply the rehashing of a photographic convention on Mofokeng's part, something that may be thought a part of his particular photographic style, for example. Through these heightened contrasts Mofokeng generates a play between light and shadow that is, in turn, connected to the desire to make apparent that which is hidden from sight, or cannot be captured by the conventions of the photographic image alone.

In another prominent example from the series 'Ouma Maria Letsipa, nee van der Merwe and her daughter Minkie Letsipa, c 1900' (Figure 11, shown on the next page), the top half of an adult woman standing next to a child has almost entirely disappeared into the surrounding surface texture. This area of burnout has for some reason not affected the rest of the image and is contained only in the top right corner – an area that also frames both the torso and the head of the woman. (This area now constitutes something like an image within an image). As with the rest of the image the bottom half of the woman's body is rendered in what could roughly be described as three separate tones of grey and black. However, we may I think rightly say that the image is more generally divided into areas of light and shadow, white and greys (here including black into its spectrum⁶⁸). The result is that the entirety of the woman's body now appears as if either emerging from - or disappearing into - the surface of the image itself. Only her head is framed and indeed now floats loosely in the area affected by burnout whereas her torso seems to disintegrate into it. Similarly, her black dress seems to extend from the

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⁶⁸ This distinction I believe also makes sense in terms of the medium of black and white photography that is always defined by the availability of light, resulting again in the rendering three-dimensional space in tones that reflect light and shadow.

darkened or shadow area at the bottom right of the image. On her left, a young girl, presumably her daughter, stands dressed in a patterned frock.

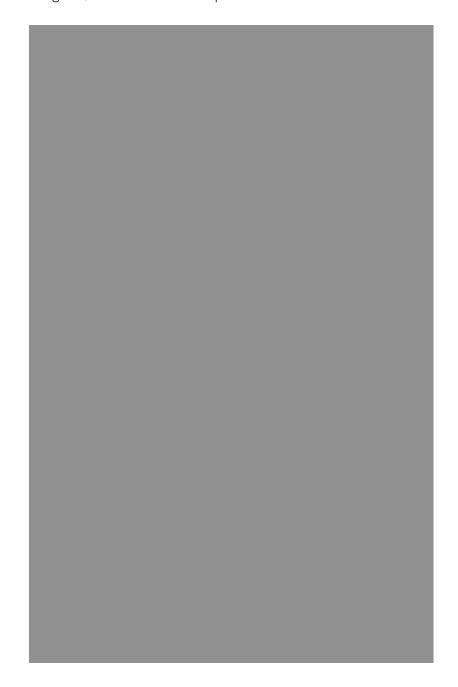


Figure 11: 'Ouma Maria Letsipa, nee van der Merwe, with her daughter Minkie. Photographer Scholtz Studio, Linley, Orange River Colony', Slide 7 from the 'Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng. (Source: Mofokeng 2013, unpaginated)

Along the hemline of her dress there is a distinct glow that serves to distinguish the bottom part of her body from the surrounding, blackened shadow area. The rest of her body including

face, dress and hands are clearly rendered as a part of the darker tonal areas and surface textures that affect the larger part of the image, with her feet being completely invisible: the girl emerges from the shadows to rest her hand upon the woman's forearm. This gesture should appear both intimate and comforting — the kind of pose one would under normal circumstances associate with that of the Victorian conventions of mother and child portraiture. But owing to the fact that the girl seems to hover mid-air this gesture now appears somewhat disconcerting. In short, the girl seems to be some kind of floating apparition that confronts the viewer from within the space of darkness and invisibility.

I have spent a great deal of time looking at this image and find that whilst my eye is first drawn to the head of the woman on the right, almost immediately thereafter it jumps to that of the little girl on her left. The child's rather enigmatic presence there on the side, in the darkness, troubles me and my eye lingers to discover her gaze, the patterns of her dress and then the texture of the rest of the image. In a rather Deleuzian way I feel that her presence 'opens up' the haptic surface of the image to my eyes: I am now drawn into a drama that is played out on the surface of the image, one that I am very much a part of. Thus beyond the question of identifying with the specific subject matter of the image (or not), there is thus the interaction with its surface, the sensations evoked by the intimacy of haptic seeing.

Perhaps as Marks (2002, p7) writes such forms of tactile looking offers "...a strategy that can be called on when our optical resources fail to see" And here, within 'The Black Photo Album' the contemporary viewer is witness to a catastrophic failure: these people could not be 'seen' for they were black, their aspirations and the details of their lives were considered unimportant or even objectionable by the colonial, apartheid system. Of course, since their inclusion as part of 'The Black Photo Album' by Mofokeng these images now do form a part of the photographic archive of black South African existence under the conditions of colonial rule. And yet, the individuals captured with these images can still not be 'seen' in any straightforward way: the images offer us only the most furtive of glimpses into their existence. Other than their names and some select details, we, the viewers, really do not know anything much about their personal lives, the things they cared about or even loved. Through their larger political

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⁶⁹ For Marks (2002, p-5-7) there are decidedly different ways of looking that may be traced throughout history by paying attention to the ways in which seeing and what is visible is actualized as part of a specific cultural value system. Here she mentions the pervasive phallocentric bias of western forms of looking, and of how it may be countered by a different form of looking, i.e haptic looking (inasmuch as the latter signals intimacy, involvement and not the hegemonic Cartesian promise of control offered by distance and objectivity). The point is that the feminine is tacitly excluded from the phallocentric gaze and that haptic looking may thus offer a means through which it may be made present - be brought back into the realm of the visible so to speak.

significance, we may through the very existence of these images help dispute the historically one-sided neo-colonial view of black South Africans as unskilled workers or even uncivilised savages. But I would suggest that attending the haptic plane constituted by the surface textures - the intimate experience and sensations at stake in it - is in keeping with Mofokeng's larger focus on that which cannot be seen by simply looking at a photograph as if it were a faithful depiction of an existing subject matter. This brings us to an important aspect of 'The Black Photo Album', namely the inclusion of text as part of the slide show.

2.4.2 Text, materiality and collaboration

Mofokeng has included in 'The Black Photo Album' a number of text-based slides where the information provided veers from the purely factual to personal observations and relevant historical quotes. In this way open-ended questions such as "Who is gazing? What was the occasion?" shown on Slide 9 (Figure 12, on the next page) are immediately followed by a photographic portrait of the brothers Moeti and Lazarus Fume dressed neatly in white and holding tennis rackets (Figure 13, p84). But there exist no easy answers to the questions that Mofokeng asks in 'The Black Photo Album'. Through his usage of language, Mofokeng now represents the images as part of an uncertain trajectory, one that requires the viewers to interpret and decide for themselves the meaning of these images and their own position in relation to it.

It is difficult to know who or what exactly Mofokeng addresses with the captions included in the slide show. For example, by asking the question "Who is gazing?" one might think that Mofokeng is tacitly appealing to contemporary viewer of 'The Black Photo Album' - a question that requires of them to consider their own identity and the workings of their gaze even as they engage the artwork. Mofokeng might also simply be making his private thoughts public, allowing the viewers of 'The Black Photo Album' entry into his artistic thought process. But Mofokeng's questions could as easily be interpreted as being directed to the subjects of these images, for their gaze is directed straight at the viewer and yet we, the viewers, have at our disposal precious little biographical information about the lives of these individual human beings.

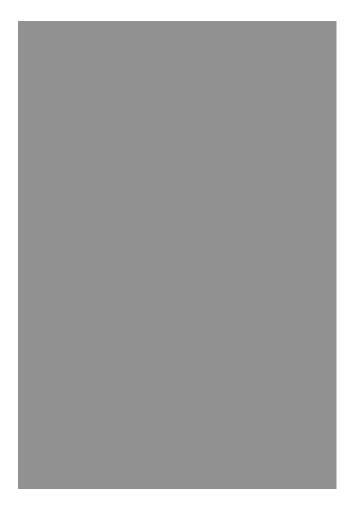


Figure 12: "What was the occasion? Who is gazing", Slide 9 from 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng. (Source: Mofokeng 2013, unpaginated)

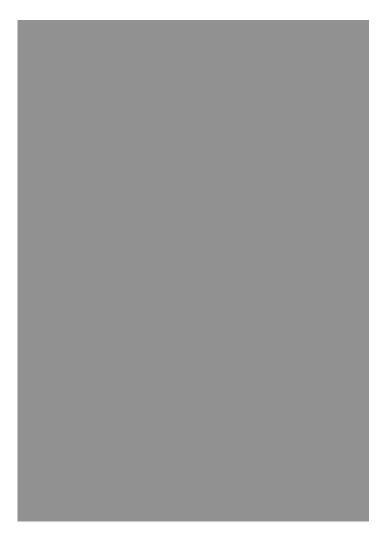


Figure 13: 'The brothers Moeti and Lazarus Foeme', Slide 10 from 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' (1997) by Santu Mofokeng. (Source: Mofokeng 2013 unpaginated)

Today these sitters are all but anonymous: in the larger, institutional workings of history the myriad little stories that is the unfolding of their lives have, but for the existence of these few material traces (the photographs and the limited oral accounts of the people in question), been almost entirely lost. Thus as has been noted before Mofokeng might be posing such questions in relation to the larger institutional framework within which these images are disseminated - for example, the art gallery or the existing official archive of information that comprise the existence of black South Africans under the colonial, apartheid South African nation state. I remember when I first saw the artwork exhibited as part of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, how I felt the text addressed me personally as part of the largely white art-going audience in South Africa at the time. Of course, as I have shown things are not that simple and perhaps this says more about me than the artwork. But the fact remains that I felt the text

performatively involved me in the artwork in a manner that was simultaneously embodied, personal and political. In time I began to re-evaluate this gut response. The lingering uncertainty about the subject matter of these texts began to open up the artwork to me in surprising ways: far from over-determining the artwork, these texts introduced an open-endedness into the work that brought me back to look at the images again and again. Today I think the texts are perhaps best understood in relation to Mofokeng's larger oeuvre, specifically, in the manner in which he continuously employs the written word in order to make clear his personal investment in - and experiences as part of - his photographic practice.

As with many of the texts written by Mofokeng, perhaps most prominently that of the catalogue essay 'Lampposts' (2001), in 'The Black Photo Album' the personal intermingles with the factual and the poetic, the present with the past. For example in the essay 'Lampposts' such harrowing, intimate narratives as that of the kidnapping of his son are interwoven into a catalogue essay detailing his own development as part of - and in relation to - the history of South African anti-apartheid photography. In this text Mofokeng is not simply addressing or capturing a hidden reality, but self-consciously mapping the very material reality in which he exists and from which his practice originates⁷⁰. But as Sontag (1977, p51-84) shows there exists a long photographic history of documenting the material living conditions of the poor as a tourist of sorts. But here is a crucial difference, for Mofokeng is not an outsider gazing in, but an active, embodied participant in the unfolding scene. In his written texts this is clearly manifest in the manner in which Mofokeng writes himself, his feelings, his personal experiences and views about photography into the narrative of each project. This methodology is part of Mofokeng's photographic practice too, where his usage of the photographic image traces a pathway between the documentary and the artistic, the factual and the poetic, the visible and the invisible. That is to say for Mofokeng the camera forms part of an embodied process of interaction and collaboration through which his subjects appear.

I would suggest the open-ended line of questioning is reflective of the very collaborative, material nature of 'The Black Photo Album'. For at heart, 'The Black Photo Album' emerged as part of a research project completed at the African studies institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (See Mofokeng 2001, p36 & Mofokeng 2013). During the field research for the project, Mofokeng travelled widely in search of the source

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⁷⁰ Of course 'hidden reality' often has a very limited meaning, as in 'hidden' from the photographer: "Social misery has inspired the comfortably well-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from them" (Sontag 1977p 55).

material, conducting personal interviews, visiting the homes and establishments daily frequented by black South Africans, and accessing their personal belongings. Mofokeng kept a meticulous written record of these dealings that, along with the images he found, would eventually form the basis of the final artwork. Thus we may consider how during this period of research Mofokeng became physically and mentally involved not only with the subject matter of the artwork (a series of old photographic portraits of black South Africans) but also with the lives of the individual owners. As Mofokeng (2001) notes this sometimes resulted in uneasy situations. For example, on one occasion he was challenged by a young man regarding his intrusion into their privacy and the outcome of the project, which for him was part of the ongoing objectification and negative rendering of the history of black South Africans: "Do you like what the white man has done with our history? Look at Dingaan. He is portrayed as a fat and idle chief" (exchange cited in Mofokeng 2001, p36). The question is how does this leave a trace upon the final artwork? Here I would suggest that the project is indelibly shaped by what might be termed the 'micro-politics' of touch.

One can only imagine the reticence of the owners of the images to allow someone, a stranger, access to their personal space and belongings. For this much is certain, for the project Mofokeng wanted to enter into their personal space, touch and take away from them, even if momentarily, the kind of treasured personal keepsakes often hidden in a box. This implies a relationship of trust, one that is not easily granted. For example, Mofokeng (2013, unpaginated) has written the following description for Slide 12 showing P. G. Mdebuka:

At the back of this print is written "A present from (and stamped P.G. Mdebuka - Location School, Aliwal North) to Jane Maloyi". P. G. Mdebuka was hymn composer and minister of the Methodist church. This photograph was found in a wooden box labelled (in Afrikaans), "Aan M.V. Jooste van die persooneel van Die Vaderland". In the box there were 68 images including one of "Their most Gracious Majesties, Edward VII and Queen Alexandra - In their robes of State". This box belongs to Moeketsi Msomi whose grandfather, John Rees Phakane, was a bishop in the AME Church. Photographer: Aliwal North Location School c.1900s

To be clear this description does not form part of the final slide show but is contained in Mofokeng's notes for 'The Black Photo Album' - notes also contained in the book of the same name and published by Steidl in 2013. In the slide show Mofokeng has added an abbreviated

version⁷¹. Regardless, I would argue that beside the factual information such a description provides (including dates, places and biographical information), it also hints at that which cannot be seen by only looking at the photographic image itself – in other words the history of the object and the manner in which it forms a part of the 'links along which social relationships run' (to paraphrase the quotation by Evans-Pritchard cited in section 1.4, p39 in the Introduction of this dissertation) For example, the handwritten inscription on the back of the image suggests that the image was given to a certain Jane Maloyi by P.G. Mbeduka. One wonders whether it formed part of their courtship rituals? Perhaps she kept the image close to her person, looking at it in secret and dreaming of their time together. This too would leave a trace on the surface of the image itself as it slowly became damaged, creased by its excessive handling and manner of its storage. In this way Mofokeng's use of language does not serve to fix ideas (about the subjects of these images or the project in itself) but rather as part of the material processes through which these images may be meaningfully interpreted and re-contextualised today.

2.5 Looking at the archive

Before I conclude this chapter, I wish to briefly compare Mofokeng's combined usage of image and text in 'The Black Photo Album' with that of the work of the Irish born photographer Alfred Martin Duggin-Cronin (1874 - 1954). I think it is both fitting and fruitful to view 'The Black Photo Album' if not as an outright riposte to, at the very least as being involved in some kind of conversation with Duggin-Cronin's images of black South Africans published in book form as 'The Bavenda' in 1928⁷². Moreover, as Raditlhalo (2001) states Mofokeng is very much familiar with Duggin-Cronin's work, having at one stage co-curated an exhibition of his photographs entitled "Salvaging and refiguring: The Duggin-Cronin Collection" in South Africa.

Duggin-Cronin's images of black South Africans hail from more or less the same period as those that form a part of 'The Black Photo Album' but the difference between these bodies of photographic works could not be greater. In brief, Duggin-Cronin presents his black African subjects as the fantasy of pure, pre-colonial existence - a society still very much part of and at with peace nature. The 'noble savages' that populate Duggin-Cronin's images are at times

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⁷¹ It appears as Slide 35 and reads as follow: "A present from ...(stamped)PG Mbeduka – Location School, Aliwal North – to Jane Maloyi".

⁷² Duggan-Cronin published The Bavende in the first volume of The Bantu Tribes of South Africa: Reproductions of Photographic Studies by A. M. Duggan-Cronin, which continued as a series in 11 volumes until 1954.

⁷³ Radithalo does not provide details of where and exactly when this exhibition was held.

strangely beautiful and yet somewhat familiar: these highly stylised images closely follow the conventions of European portraiture and at times more closely that of landscape photography (Raditlhalo 2001, p67). But somehow I am apt to think Duggin-Cronin uses these two modes almost interchangeably, even when he presents the viewer only with a figure in isolation. I suspect Duggin-Cronin ultimately treats his human subjects as if they were objects or blank surfaces onto which he may project his ideas onto without encountering much resistance (much like the colonial vision of Africa as a vacant land that still requires symbolic, cultural and political representation and inscription). Of course this despite his stated intentions of honouring the contribution of black South Africans to then South African society. As Godby (2010, p57) writes:

In 1928 he published The Bavenda, the first volume of 'The Bantu Tribes of South Africa: Reproductions of Photographic Studies' by A. M. Duggan-Cronin, which continued as a series in 11 volumes intermittently until 1954, the year of his death. Duggan-Cronin regarded his project as a monument to the Bantu people 'to whom', he said, 'we in South Africa owe so much'. But it was also a monument to the photographer himself: Prime Minister Jan Smuts is reported to have told him on a visit to the Gallery, 'You can die now, Cronin; your monument is raised'.

From Godby's extended analysis of the works, the following becomes clear: Duggan-Cronin views his work partly as that of an anthropologist and partly as an explorer-artist (of sorts). Perhaps here one may briefly add that the colonial explorer-artist in colonial Africa has a long history including most notably through such figures as Thomas Bowler and Thomas Baines⁷⁴. Much like the painterly work of these two figures, whose work often reflects a mixture of artistic convention and license even as they strive for accurate detail, I would argue that Duggin-Cronin's photographs remains similarly locked in a colonial mode of representation.

Of course, the meaning of an image may change and lead to contradictory readings, which is especially true in the case of Duggin-Cronin's work⁷⁵. But, in a manner closely reminiscent of 'The Black Photo Album', in 'The Bavenda' (1928) Duggin-Cronin has also included for his images short descriptive captions and paragraphs detailing aspects of his research. For example, for an image clearly invoking a 'Madonna and child' style pose (Figure 14, p90), Duggin-Cronin

⁷⁴ See the historical overview of colonial painters in South Africa proffered by Arnold and Carruthers (1995)

⁷⁵ This aspect of Duggin-Cronin's work and life is elaborated in depth in the article 'Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographs for the Bantu tribes of South Africa (1928-1954): the construction of an ambiguous idyll' by Micheal Godby (2010).

has chosen to add the following caption: "A Venda Mother and Child at Sibasa". But as Godby (2010, p55) notes the expanded caption for the images as originally published in 'The Bavenda' in 1928 reads as follow:

Sibasa is one of the largest villages of the Bavenda, and the centre of the Venda country. The woman's facial features are typical of the 'aristocratic' section. The pendant at her neck probably contains 'medicine' for the baby, for use in time of need⁷⁶.

Suddenly what could have been an image very much open to interpretation takes an ominous turn. The obvious beauty of the image is now brutally contradicted by its politically motivated employ as part of the spurious science of racialised, physical anthropology. In this way the woman is no longer conceived of as an individual human subject but rather becomes exemplary of a type. Added to this the fact that Duggin-Cronin precisely arranged his subjects in what may perhaps euphemistically be termed 'performative formations' and it is clear that the work is driven by a precise need to control everything, including the finest details of his subject's expression, their pose and clothing (or lack thereof).

As both Godby (2010) and Douglas (2009) note, in his staging of the scene, Duggin-Cronin even supplies 'tribal' artefacts for his sitters from his own well-stocked personal collection. These artefacts include objects, cloth and even a leopard skin that appears in number of portraits - all elements of material culture that signify regional belonging, status, political allegiance, gender relations within various black South African cultures.

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⁷⁶ This text was probably provided by the author of the introduction, one G. P. Lestrade - Ethnologist at the apartheid government's erstwhile Union Native Affairs Department, and a linguist who became Professor of Bantu Languages at University of Cape Town in 1935. See Godby (2010, p58).



Figure 14: 'The Bavenda. A Venda mother and child at Sibasa' (1928) by Alfred Duggin-Cronin. (Source: Godby 2010, p69)

But the point is that, as Godby (2010) makes clear, the subjects of Duggin-Cronin's work have little to no actual say in how they are represented and that the 'authentic' vision of pre-colonial Africa that Duggan-Cronin conjures up, is absolutely a product of his own making. Regardless, today Duggin-Cronin's work occupies a contested space in the representation of black South Africans. As Godby shows, despite the fact that Duggin-Cronin's images of black South Africans are staged according to his own, colonial, Eurocentric ideals of what and how 'tribal' South African's such as the Bavenda should be represented, these images have recently been

resurrected as part of the project of protecting black South African heritage by the post-apartheid government and its leadership⁷⁷.

Lastly, I want to say something about the pristine quality of Duggin-Cronin's images. Unlike the images that form a part of 'The Black Photo Album' there are little to no signs of wear and tear on Duggin-Cronin's well-preserved photographs. There is much that may be said regarding exactly by whom and for what purposes they were kept within circulation within various state institutions in South Africa and elsewhere – something on which Godby (2010) and Douglas (2009) have commented before. But the key point is that Duggin-Cronin's photographs were, unlike those that from Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album', always meant for public, institutional circulation and archival preservation. To this point I may add that Duggin-Cronin made a museum in Kimberly for this express purpose (Godby 2010, p57):

In 1925 he opened his first 'Bantu Gallery' at his home at Kamfersdam, outside Kimberley, which, twelve years later numbering 750 framed photographs, he offered to the city of Kimberley on condition that the collection be suitably housed and accessible to the public.

Duggin-Cronin's work is part of the very archive of black South African existence under colonial powers that Mofokeng seeks to challenge in 'The Black Photo Album' and indeed the whole of his practice. As Raditlhalo (2001, p67) suggests, with 'The Black Photo Album' Mofokeng reached a crossroads in his development as a photographer – one that would help shape and refine his project well into the present day. From this point onward Mofokeng simply refuses to add to the vast body of negative images of black South Africans. And yet, Mofokeng's work remains underpinned above all else by a hope to recuperate the intimate and the personal from the violent workings of the state and its institutions, both past and present. This decision has not affected the complexity of his artistic project but, rather, as I have attempted to show here,

As Godby (2010, p80) notes, a figure no less than the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, has endorsed the work of Duggin-Cronin stating that the photographs are "…a unique representation of the wealth and diversity of our many cultures. The dignity and the individuality of the people who chose to stand in front of Duggan-Cronin's camera shine out…" and that the restored Duggin-Cronin collection, is a ".symbol of the African Renaissance". As Godby (ibid) notes such endorsements from prominent South African political figures may in itself be based upon the promising vision of an unspoilt, pre-colonial Africa so clearly at stake in Duggin-Cronin's photographic productions of the Bavende people. In short, as Godby notes, today the work of Duggin-Cronin is subject to a strong opportunistic, revisionist postcolonial enterprise that now seeks to position the project "…on the right side of history" (Godby 2010, 82). Here postcolonial politics and business interest meet: the De Beers mining company has positioned itself as the primary corporate patron of the project. This makes for very interesting reading and I would urge the reader to study Godby's (2010 p79- 83) well-argued exposition of the primary issues at stake here.

become a deep commitment and appreciation of the very haptic materiality of the photographic image which, far from the weight of stone and grime, also offers the lightness of its gentle mutual touch.

Chapter 3: Darwinian reflections on sex, beauty and art. On the work of El Anatsui

3.1 The oversized bangle

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It's the year 2004 and I am on my way to Slovenia. But in one of those strange occurrences that seem to define the workings of bureaucracies the world over, I first have to stop in London to get a visa⁷⁸. After landing at Heathrow and standing in a queue for an hour it is finally my turn: I step forward and I whip out my South African passport. I assure immigration control that I will stay for no longer than six months. The officer stamps my passport and lets me through the gates without a fuss. My status as a once British citizen affords me an easy pass, just this once⁷⁹.

The detour through London is a blessing. I have not seen my cousin, with whom I will be lodging in Wood Green, since she started working in London about four years ago. Also, I will finally, after all the years of studying British artworks from books alone, have the opportunity to see them in real life. I cannot wait to see Turner's stormy landscapes and Bacon's savage renderings of human meat - artworks that, despite never having seen them in real life, I fell madly in love with as a child and still harbour much affection for. (I fell in love with a picture and a description of an artwork in a book. The more I think about it the stranger this seems). Of course there is much else to see including the Tate, the National Portrait Gallery, the Saatchi Collection, numerous commercial galleries and perhaps most importantly for my purposes, the famed British Museum too.

I honestly cannot recall the sheer number of times that, during my research into African art, I looked at images of objects in books to find, listed somewhere in all the details of their accompanying captions, they are housed in the permanent collection of the British Museum. Examples of the lost wax bronze reliefs made by the Benin in the 15th century onwards come

⁷⁸ Slovenia does not have a consulate in South Africa and South Africans must apply at their office in the United Kingdom for a Schengen visa

⁷⁹ South Africa was part of the British Commonwealth until 31 May 1961 when it became an independent republic. Regarding the events described here, this was the only time that I entered the United Kingdom, or anywhere in Europe for that matter, with such ease. (This events described here take place in the year 2004 before South African visitors to the United Kingdom became subject to more stringent border controls and had to apply for visas well in advance of traveling).

to mind immediately. On this trip I plan to spend two days at the British Museum looking at African artworks and taking copious notes. Apart from the selfish pleasure of seeing these works in the flesh, I will study them so that I may in future be able to better describe the works to my students back home.

I teach a course on African art at the Tshwane University of Technology⁸⁰. This is interesting and challenging because my students, the majority of whom are black often know more about their own regional customs and traditions than I do, including that of the Ndebele, Sotho, Tswana, Pedi and Zulu peoples. That is to say, I may have studied these practices from books and museum displays but many of the students have firsthand knowledge of them. But, and this is where it gets tricky, the students often do not view these cultural practices as being in any way related to the study and practice of 'fine art', where the fields of painting, sculpture and printmaking still dominate. And, for reasons that will become clear later, I am hardly cocksure about my position as a lecturer in African art. For one thing, my formal education in classical⁸¹ African art is almost non-existent, with two modules on the rock art of the Khoi-San Art representing the entirety of my undergraduate education therein. I spend long hours researching and preparing of each lecture.

I finally make it to the British Museum on day two of my visit to London. After wandering about for hours investigating the great variety of objects from the Enlightenment on the first floor I decide to go to the African art section on the lower level. To be clear, I do not expect to see the artworks displayed as examples of contemporary 'fine art' here - I know these historic works are housed in the British Museum and not the Whitechapel Art Gallery, for example. But little can prepare me for what I discover as I descend the stairs into gallery twenty-five, the African art section.

The far side of the entrance to the gallery is aglow with warm light. This is the result of an exhibit displayed immediately on the opposite wall, one that from this distance resembles a large glittering gold, silver and reddish cloth-cum-carpet. I am somewhat unsure of what exactly I am looking at but do know that it is breathtaking. However, from past experience I know that

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⁸⁰ I taught History and Theory of African Art 300 at the Department of Fine And Applied arts, Tshwane University of Technology for the period stretching from the year 2003-2006. The course was structured as an overview stretching over four semesters and divided into the following sections: Precolonial African Art; African Modernism; Modern and Contemporary African Art.

⁸¹ 'Classical African art' here meaning Precolonial African art up until the period of roughly the 19th century or, where it concerns contemporary forms of cultural expression practiced within specific ethnic communities such as that of the Ndebele in Southern Africa.

I should savour the moment because sometimes, when an artwork is so beautiful, so ethereal and magical from afar, coming in closer may just ruin it. I now pause to look more carefully at the interplay between the exhibit and its surroundings.



Figure 15: Installation view at the British Museum of 'Man's Cloth' (1998-2001), El Anatsui. Recycled metal foil bottle-neck wrappers, copper wire. (Photographic credit: Johan Thom)

Two things strike me as being odd about the work. Firstly, unlike a cloth or carpet hanging from a wall this 'cloth' somehow defies the ordinary material workings of the force of gravity. Despite the fact that the artwork is vertically displayed the material seems to be frozen in the moment,

as if it were lying somewhat frumpled⁸² upon the floor or being shook by two pairs of invisible hands. The forces that gave shape to the rolling folds and creases now jostle with those that would undo them, neatly flatten them out and, in so doing, also imbue the object with a kind of static, taut familiarity one might otherwise expect from looking at a wall-mounted tapestry or even a large painted canvass. In short, despite the fact that the work is static, the possibility of movement is made readily implicit therein through this formal conceit. Secondly, the work is in fact not hanging from the wall at all but seems to be floating loosely some thirty to forty centimetres in front of it - something made abundantly clear by its large shadow cast on the wall behind it. Somewhat humorously I imagine the artwork as a magic carpet racing vertically up the side of a building. Aladdin is nowhere to be found.

The hovering, vertical appearance of the work does beg the question how exactly the work is installed and what material it is made from (Figure 15, p95). Added to this is the fact that unlike any ordinary textile this 'cloth' seems to glisten wet in its admittedly man-made illumination. I am certain this has as much to do with the material from which it is made as with the somewhat overwrought usage of light in the museum⁸³. For quite unlike a carpet or a cloth the reflective properties of the object also bathe the immediate surroundings in subtle swathes of colour and light. (With the notable exception of fine silk, organic fibres such as wool and cotton appear 'matt' in finish and are thus much less reflective). I cannot discern any recognisable pattern in the work, such as one may generally associate with the manufacture of textiles the world over. If anything I am visually I reminded of the sporadic use of pattern in the paintings of Gustav Klimt, a thought I will return to. I am apt to think that the cloth is in fact no such thing at all but rather some kind of visually elusive, artistic form made from a reasonably sturdy, reflective material such as metal and industrial paint, or some such combination (it could very well be spray-painted plastic, for example).

⁸² A now almost obsolete English term deriving from the Dutch word 'verrompelen' meaning wrinkled, crumpled or irregular folds.

⁸³ I find the gallery lighting to be a touch too dark for my liking: it is as if the work is isolated by the extreme contrast between dark and light rendered through the over-dramatic use of spotlights. This makes the work appear a relic of sorts and detracts from the residual spill-over of the work's reflective properties. Put in a different way, if the work were shown in an overall lighter environment with white walls, this spill-over of light and colour would be made abundantly clear. As it is one has to look very carefully to spot it.



Figure 16: Side view of 'Man's Cloth' (1998-2001), El Anatsui. (Photographic credit: Johan Thom)

When I finally do step closer to the exhibit I am rather pleasantly surprised. The artwork is titled 'Man's cloth' (1998-2001) and was made by El Anatsui, an artist whose work I have come across before, though at the time he was producing another sort of work altogether (wood carving and some works with pottery as I recall). Moreover, 'Man's cloth' is in fact not a single object at all and though some of my initial observations were spot on, others were way of the mark.

I now realise that the cloth-like appearance of the form is the result of thousands of flat metal shapes that have been joined together with fairly crude, handmade copper wire links (although given the overall scale of the work these tend to largely disappear from visual consideration). The metal shapes so joined are in fact flattened, used metal bottle-caps (Figure 17, shown below). Closer inspection suggests these bottle caps were sourced from a variety of liquor brand names – names such as *Perfect Dry Gin*, *Liquour Headmaster*, *Ozde* and even a printed text that reads *Chemical & Allied Products Ltd*. Regardless, the brand names are unfamiliar to me but I think it can be safely assumed that they are 'local', as in local to wherever it is that the artist is currently based (according to the accompanying caption the artist is a Ghanain living in Nigeria). The assertion is so vague it is almost useless. I focus on investigating the material specifics of the work in front of me instead.



Figure 17: Detail, 'Man's Cloth' (1998-2001), El Anatsui. (Photographic credit: Johan Thom).

Unlike any ordinary 'cloth' or 'textile', this surface is not soft to the touch and nor will it provide any protection against the elements (such as ordinary clothing might). From up close the work is full of holes and light penetrates through the heaving shape, much like small flecks of sunlight that pierce through a canopy of leaves. In fact the work is quite dangerous: the flattened bottle caps are alive with sharp edges that advertise their malicious intent by shining brightly as the light bounces from them. This also suggests a certain amount of resistance inherent in the usage of materials to being folded and handled. I can only imagine how careful one must be when handling the object, not only because it may cut your fingers but also because a heavy hand may easily damage the delicate object, twisting and turning it out of shape. Besides, from past experience of working with wire I know that it is more unforgiving than fibre or rope - one cannot simply iron a wire-form back into shape once bent. Anyway, if this were a cloth it could function as shading or a room divider of sorts. But then again, given the title of the work ('Mans' cloth') I do not know of any man that would be foolish enough to attempt to wear it.

I quickly write down the words "disappointed crow" in my notebook: from afar the work shimmers gold and silver, luring the viewer closer through the promise of wealth and pleasure only to find that it is made from discarded junk. This I find both humorous and an ingenious use of materials. I am however not convinced by the explanation given in the accompanying caption⁸⁴: I cite the relevant parts of the caption exactly as found next to the work in the British Museum here:

The traditional narrow-strip woven silk *kente* cloth of Ghana is a source of pride and a receptacle of cultural memories. It is a leitmotif that runs through much of El Anatsui's work. He uses it to pursue the themes of memory and loss, particularly the erosion of cultural values through unchecked consumerism, here symbolised by the bottle-neck wrappers. Yet El Anatsui's work is ultimately optimistic, in this case using cloth as a metaphor for both the fragility and the dynamism and strength of tradition.

Personally I am weary of how these references may over-determine the meaningful encounter with the artwork, as if it might serve some clearly defined, illustrative purpose. In this way I do not think that the artist's use of found materials reduces the work to some kind of pithy statement about 'unchecked consumerism', recycling in Africa or even an obvious link to the traditions of *kente* cloth weaving in Ghana. To be certain such references may play a part in El

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⁸⁴ I wrote down the caption in full in my personal notebook.

Anatsui's decision-making process, but I am also convinced that the actual material encounter with the artwork is at once a more complex and more straightforward than such references might acknowledge. For a moment I consider to possibility that the artist is a raging alcoholic⁸⁵. However, given the sheer quantity of bottle caps required to complete the task the artist would probably expire before amassing the required materials. But one thing is certain, the evidence suggests that a lot of people were inebriated at some point. Perhaps the work is some kind of monument that celebrates ecstasy, ritual madness and intoxication? This would certainly link very nicely with the *peripeteiac* experience of seeing the work. The Greeks, especially Aristotle in his writings on the nature of drama, used this term to signal something like 'a reversal of circumstances', 'a turning point' or 'discovery' that as the prefix *peri* suggests occurs around or near the vicinity of something else (in this case, the artwork). In coming closer to the work I experience an epiphany of sorts, which really is the sort of thing one may readily associate with such intoxication and artistic inspiration. But the fact is, I have to reconsider my perception of the work when I realise it is made from the detritus of everyday life.

Before I depart I cannot resist the temptation to write, "Giant jewellery made from scrap materials" in my diary next to the artist's name and date of birth. Despite the artworks' rather rough and tumble construction, I think the overall appearance of the work conjures up the image of a rather large piece of jewellery such as may be worn around the neck. Klimt again: in Klimt's work the use of pattern often functions as a kind of ground against which the figure is simultaneously offset and part of (I think of 'Judith I' & 'Judith II' from 1902 specifically). In 'Judith II' the pattern literally weaves into the figure by way of a piece of jewellery around Judith's neck. But, if 'Man's cloth' were a piece of jewellery then there must be a body that it has been made for? "Perhaps the building is the body", I think as I make my way to the other works on display.

(ii)

I must confess that throughout my travels jewellery is very much on my mind. Probably this has something to do with the fact that I am a young man contemplating a rather serious

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⁸⁵ In fact as I later learned from Professor John Mack from the University of East Anglia, El Anatsui is teetotal. However this does not detract from the reading I propose here as it is not hinged upon his being a drinker. But rather, it is the possible meanings at stake in the use of the liquor bottle cap that is of interest here (and not whether the artist partakes of alcohol or not). Here the interpretation of the viewer is paramount.

commitment to my girlfriend⁸⁶. But also, whilst discussing the Ndebele practice of wearing golwani⁸⁷ in class the week just prior to this trip one of my students, Seitisho, becomes very excited and returns the very next lecture with actual examples to show the rest of the class. Seitisho neatly arranges the two bangles on the table in the front of the lecture hall.

Golwani are large, beaded round bangles worn by young Ndebele women around the neck, arms and ankles (Figure 18, below). Young, unmarried Ndebele women wear these oversized bangles during the process of their initiation to emulate the rolls of fat found on a healthy adult woman's body. Broadly speaking these bangles signal the availability of the wearer for marriage, thus fulfilling the function of beautifying the body as well as embodying a social a boundary. A number of the students are also of Ndebele extraction and we have a long and lively discussion about these extraordinary bangles.



Figure 18: Young sitting Ndebele woman dressed in *golwani* and related apparel. (Source: Fisher & Beckwith 1999, Vol. 1, p268)

⁸⁶ I eventually did propose to her some time after the trip.

⁸⁷ Also known as 'isingolwani' or 'izigolwani'. These bangles are worn by young Ndebele women when they enter a period of initiation that will prepare them for adulthood and marriage.

It is interesting and challenging to discuss *golwani* within the field of fine art, touching as it does on issues of community, ritual, function, politics and perhaps most interestingly for our purposes as fine artists, culture-specific ideals of beauty. For example, most of the young female students in the class make much of the different ideal of female beauty so obviously at stake in the wearing of *golwani*, say as distinct from that of the representation of the ideal female form in contemporary western-style fashion magazines (where being thin sometimes to the point of emaciation seems to be the norm today). Also, it is no secret among the students that like many of the seemingly distinct tribal groups that collectively comprise contemporary South African society, the Ndebele trace their roots to a mixture of black South African cultures. But the students are still genuinely surprised to learn that the colourful patterned house painting, for which the Ndebele are so well-known locally and internationally, is also a very recent phenomenon, one born from the requirements of apartheid government's interest and indeed insistence upon clear cultural differences between the various ethnic groups — a thought I will return to in a couple of paragraphs.

For the purposes of the course, I find it a real but productive struggle to explicate such cultural practices as the wearing of *golwani* from the web of their more commonplace⁸⁸ function within Ndebele - and - broader South African culture. Postcards of the Ndebele in their ceremonial dress line every tourist stall from Johannesburg International Airport to the Kruger National Park. Certainly owing to their seeming functionality as jewellery, *golwani* are often viewed only as examples of 'craft' and may, along with the rest of the beeadwork produced by the Ndebele, also sometimes be purchased as tourist trinkets. But, more often than not, such practices as wearing *golwani* are interwoven with specific rituals that take place in particular times and spaces – rituals that are conducted by - and - for the benefit of specific individuals and their communities. Not to mention that other than such collective social practices as rituals, the practice of fine art is hinged upon a form of individuality that often operates in contradistinction

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⁸⁸ Of course what is commonplace in one culture or field of expertise may not be in another. Charges of exoticism may easily be leveled against discussing such ordinary practices as the wearing of *golwani* within the field of fine art but for me the point was not to return to some pure unadulterated, ethnic African form of expression but rather how specific forms of expression help us rethink the very idea of fine art – to expand the historically monolothic western application of the term but also to show how it is always rooted in culturally specific phenomena and politics.

to the values of the larger community⁸⁹. For example, in the year 1990 the photographic essay of Northern Sotho initiation ceremony by Steve Hilton-Barber entitled 'The savage noble and the noble savages, Photography and an African Initiation' were, amidst an acerbic public debate about the historic representation of black bodies and culture by white South Africans, finally stolen from the walls of the Market Theatre Gallery in Johannesburg⁹⁰. Whilst many defended Hilton-Barber's artistic right to express himself in whatever way he felt, others saw his making public of this most intimate moment in the lives of his black subjects mired in racially motivated politics that remain largely unspoken by the white art establishment of South Africa.

In brief, the debate surrounding Hilton-Barber's photographs set the stage for a larger, ongoing discussion about the manner in which black (South) Africans, their bodies and their culture have been, and continue to be objectified by white South Africans including artists and academia⁹¹. It is worthwhile noting that, within the racially and culturally divisive context of South Africa, what Gayatiri Spivak in the article 'Can the subaltern speak' (1988/ 2006, p29) calls the two meanings of term 'representation' have historically functioned interchangeably, neatly effacing the difference between the corporeal and cultural identity of the artist, the production of images and their meaningful interpretation. In brief, Spivak (ibid) here defines the two distinct meanings of the term representation as a *proxy* (as 're-presenting' by way of the rendering of a likeness in the field of art, philosophy) and as a *political form* (representing the interest of a constituency, where the issue of representation implicitly denotes the act of 'speaking for').

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⁸⁹ I have commented on this before and feel that it suffices to say that this probably has much to do with the lingering legacy of the twentieth century, modernist avante garde and its reactionary politics. See the essays "The sense of fresh air" (Thom 2011). (Available online: Artthrob: http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/The-sense-of-fresh-air.aspx, Accessed: 2 March 2014); 'Life Intimidating Art' in The Diplomat, (Sept/Oct 2007: James M. Pach, Australia); 'The answer is under the rock. Interview with Willem Boshoff in Art South Africa Vol. 4, Issue 3, Autumn, 2005 (Available online: http://art-south-africa.com/component/content/article/213-main-archive/archived-reviews/1830-the-answer-is-under-the-rock.html, Accessed: 20 January 2014); 'Digging up old horses' in Onemillionandfortythousandyears(and sixtythreedays) edited by Kathryn Smith, (2007, p 214-218. SMAC Gallery: Stellenbosch).

⁹⁰ This photographic essay was exhibited at the Market Theatre gallery as part of the annual Staffrider exhibition. (Peffer 2009, p269). Of course here the matter was further complicated by the fact that these photographs were taken on Barber's family-owned farm. Thus, as Peffer shows, through the unequal power relationship in Barber's it could be argued that his photographs were exploitative of the farm laborers and their privacy. However as Peffer notes the same kind of criticism has not been leveled at Zwelethu Mthethwa's - a black artist - photographs of black youths taken on his farm. Thus, political issues of racial bias are central to the critique against Barber's artistic representation of his subjects.

This debate reached it nadir in 1997 when Okwui Enwezor, then curator of the second Johannesburg Biennale wrote the article "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation" (Enwezor, 1997). This debate surrounding identity politics in South African art is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.3.1 of this dissertation.

The tendency to conflate the distinct meanings of the act of representation in South African art and politics may be traced back to the policy of Apartheid that, through the doctrine of (enforced) 'separate development', implicitly argued that the separate races were biologically linked to particular socio-cultural, economic and politic ways of organisation and self-expression. In this way the flawed, essentialist logic prevails that an artist is always already engaged in the task of representing politically the interests of their racial/ cultural/ gender group even as they artistically represent certain ideas, for example in the making of an artwork. To clarify: in the book *Art at the end of Apartheid* by John Peffer (2009, p10-12), he shows how the seemingly 'old' tradition of Ndebele house painting is in fact a contemporary twentieth century development in Ndebele culture, one closely related to the fact that the Ndebele people were too geographically dispersed to fulfil the in the Apartheid government's vision of being a distinct ethnic group with a distinct culture and living in a clearly delineated territory. In relation to the tradition of Ndebele House painting Peffer (2009, p12) writes that:

After 1953 the South African government capitalized on this development. They supplied colourful acrylic paints to the local women and set up tourist villages, with the aim of buttressing the nascent ideology of apartheid and its separation of 'races' into linguistically, culturally and geographically distinct units.

In this example we may clearly discern how the two meanings of the term representation are conflated: the Ndebele people were required by the Apartheid government to produce distinct forms of cultural expression by and within which they could easily be identified – both politically and aesthetically. Certainly something very much like the kind of essentialist thinking at stake in the Apartheid government's erstwhile support of particular forms of self-expression by the Ndebele underpin the idea that black African artists should make a certain kind of art too, one that somehow reflects their particular cultural heritage. As the artist/curator David Koloane (1995) argues in the essay 'Moments in art', in apartheid South Africa no-one expected that black artists might produce non-representational, abstract art, for example. Instead they had to produce 'Township Art', a form of figurative art that tended to "...sentimentalize the lives of the poor after the manner of Sunday painters and dime store prints" (Peffer 2009, p31). As Peffer (ibid) notes, these works of art included such images as women washing clothes, teary-eyed children, mothers with oversized feet, hands and lips and sometimes also upbeat scenes featuring black people engaged in social activities such as playing the pennywhistle, playing cards,

drinking and/or generally enjoying life in the townships. But certainly Township Art did not include any images of resistance against apartheid or colonialism generally⁹².

However, during apartheid rule the model of so-called 'Township art' was entrenched not only by a preference by almost exclusively white patrons for pictorial, somewhat saccharine renderings of the hardships of everyday life in the black townships by black artists. But perhaps more insidiously, the development of 'Township art' was premised upon the colonial idea that black artists were innately creative and did not require any western style art education (which would somehow ruin their work)93. In this way, when figures such as the artist David Koloane began working in a non-representational manner during the late nineteen-seventies their work was initially dismissed as being mere copies of second wave abstraction in the United States and, more importantly, as being somehow 'untrue' to its particular cultural roots. The fact is that black artists such as David Koloane, Pat Mautloa, Kay Hassan and many others were exposed to mainstream western artistic practices at art educational institutions for blacks, including Rorkes Drift, Polly Street Centre and later the Thupelo Workshops, amongst others. I do not have time to discuss the history and the relative merits and problems regarding these art centres here and would kindly refer the reader to the studies by Peffer (2009), Koloane (1995), Okeke (2001) and Martin (2001) for further insight. But as Koloane (quoted in Peffer 2009, p29) states regarding his refusal to produce 'Township style' artworks and the difficulties of exhibiting and selling such work in apartheid South Africa:

If you didn't do this kind of thing it was harder. In 1977 and 1978 I started experimenting with collage, and I took some of these pieces to Gallery 21. The first thing the owner said was that I didn't do the work...because this is so un-African

⁹² See the chapter entitled 'Tuition, repetition and emulation: Township Art' in Peffer (2009, p22-34) for a general overview of the ideological relationship between 'Township art' and the racial polices of Apartheid.

⁹³ For a more in depth discussion of the relationship between African art and the notion of authenticity see the article 'African art and authenticity: a text with a shadow' by Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1992). Here Kasfir locates the binary relation implicitly at work within the distinction between authentic and in-authenticity in African art as being implicit in the field of 'African' studies in the west. Kasfir (1992, p41) writes: "In African art studies our most uncritical assumption has been the before/after scenario of colonialism in which art before colonization, occurring in most places from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, exhibited qualities that made it authentic (in the sense of untainted by Western intervention). Most crucially it was made to be used by the same society that produced it. In this scenario, art produced within a colonial or postcolonial context is relegated to an awkward binary opposition: it is inauthentic because it was created after the advent of a cash economy and new forms of patronage from missionaries, colonial administrators, and more recently, tourists and the new African elite''. As Kasfir (ibid) contends, unfortunately this view is still held by many art museums, art dealers and collectors, including the permanent collection of Metropolitan Museum's Rockefeller wing that specializes in African art. And, although things have much improved since then, I would suggest that it still permeates the art-world now more than twenty years after the publication of Kasfir's article.

By the patronizing, colonial logic at stake in this gallery owners' response to Koloane's works I suppose that it is thus also somehow 'un-African' to be educated, urban and to produce non-figurative work. Especially regarding the latter, initially in South Africa many white critics, artists and gallery owners were resolutely against the use of imported, western styles of expression by black artists⁹⁴ exactly because it seemed in-authentically African. But this begs the question: is it then 'African' to be un-educated, live in the townships and produce illustrations that clearly represent the hardships and joys of one's life (albeit ones in no way connected to the reality of colonial and neo-colonial political, social and cultural oppression)? I think it is absurd to suggest anything of the kind and would beg the reader to keep this assertion in mind throughout my discussion of 'Man's Cloth' (2001) by El Anatsui.

To return to the larger point I wish to make here, in relation to my duties as a lecturer in African art, I realize that as soon as a white South African such as myself speaks about black (South) African culture, as I invariably have to about twice a week, I tip-toe through an ethical minefield. In the case of *golwani*, how on earth am I to discuss these works without falling into the trap of the kind of essentialist thinking that would have me narrowly equate these abstract patterns and decorations with being only an ethnic, Ndebele form of cultural expression — one somehow not subject to the complexities of artistic expression in the realm of fine art? And, should I bring the practice of making and wearing of *golwani* into the field of fine art, what possible other avenues of critical exploration exist that do not tacitly re-affirm such polemical thinking about works of art that are ostensibly 'African' in origin?

In the classroom images and words will indeed collude in discussing certain communal African practices as the object of our study – whether or not the individuals concerned view these practice as fine art or not⁹⁵. This too is immeasurably complicated by the fact that the bulk of the source material regarding practices such as the wearing of *golwani* do not hail from within a fine arts context and nor from African writers. Put in another way, historically those scholars engaged in the study of 'traditional' African art forms are largely western and do so via

⁹⁴ See specifically the interview between Ivor Powel and David Koloane contained in the exhibition catalogue for 'Seven stories about modern art in Africa' (Deliss 1995, pp261-265) for a more detailed account of the difficulties faced by black African artists working in a more abstract manner under apartheid. Regarding the exhibition, 'Seven stories, about modern African art' first shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1995, for which Koloane was also a co-curator, this was also the very first time a black South African artist curated the work of white South African artists.

⁹⁵ Cornel West (Phillips 1995, p22) states with regards to the exhibition 'Africa: the art of a continent' that "...neither Africa nor art – the two animating principles behind this exhibition – played a role as ideas in the creation of the objects in this exhibition"

anthropological and ethnographic frameworks (some of which are excellent and some just plain flawed). I learnt about *golwani* predominantly through the photographic and written accounts of two white, western women, Angela Beckwith and Caroline Fisher (specifically the two - volume set entitled *African Ceremonies* published by Harry Abrahams in New York, 1999). There are notable exceptions to the rule - most of which begin by making the salient point that, other than its straightforward function as a geographic term for a continent, Africa really does not exist! And so, every year I begin the course by reading two short, related quotes from an essay entitled 'Why Africa? Why Art?' by Anthony Kwame Appiah (In Phillips 1995, p23)⁹⁶:

- (I) Only recently has the idea of Africa come to figure importantly in the thinking of many Africans and those that took up this idea got it, by and large, from European culture. The Europeans who colonized Africa thought of sub-Saharan Africa as a single place, in large because they thought of it as a single... race
- (2) That is why when we speak of Africa black people come to mind: despite the fact that lighter skinned North Africans Arabs, Berbers, Moors are unequivocally inhabitants of continental Africa.

I read these quotes to draw attention to the fact that there simply exists no single defining characteristic or definition (an identity, the *artwork*) that may provide something like a stable point of reference through which to discuss all the discursive practices that form a part of the coursework⁹⁷. Historically speaking, the 'Africa' in 'African art' remains a problematic label with a great many overtly negative neo-colonial associations implicitly at work in its continued employ. Here, what John Picton (1998) refers to as the 'myth of primitivism'⁹⁸ features large, and when for example, African art is praised for its 'raw', 'expressive' power, it really amounts to a backhanded compliment: as Appiah writes in the essay 'Discovering El Anatsui' (in Binder 2010, p69) when applied to contemporary art from Africa metaphors such as 'fresh', 'natural' and

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⁹⁶ "Why Africa? Why Art?" In the exhibition catalog *Africa: The Art of a Continent* edited by Tom Phillips (ed.) (London: Royal Academy, 1995, pp 21-26) I still have my old class notes and copied these quotes as is from my first lesson.

⁹⁷ In brief, I am not convinced that such a thing as 'African' art exists. For one thing, beside the fact that Africa is a massive continent spanning some fifty-four internationally recognised independent countries today, there are hundreds if not thousands more distinct cultural groups that populate it.

⁹⁸ Picton is here referring explicitly to collection of writings published as 'The myth of primitivism: perspectives on art' (1991) and edited by Susan Hiller. In the introduction Hiller outlines a critique of the 'othering' of the non-west, its art and culture through the enduring myth of primitivism and its pride of place in early twentieth century western art. In brief, Africa (its cultural practices, people etc) was posited as the radically other of civilized western society – a wellspring from which modern western artist could draw to reinvigorate the practice of art in the west. But this is conditional upon recognizing that agency of the western artist – they were subjects that could draw from it, not get stuck in it somehow and thus be lessened by its 'primitive' impulses.

'original' signal condescension, with notions of crudeness, naiveté and isolation (from the educated, western mainstream) being implicit therein. That said, as a fine artist lecturing in African art I find refuge in the fact that every object, no matter what its cultural origin or function, is always open for reinterpretation.

Perhaps more productively, whilst bearing the cultural and ideological dimension of artistic practice in mind, I also begin to consider how my sensory experience of various cultural forms help complicate and expand existing interpretations of them, often in quite contradictory ways⁹⁹. For as Eagleton reminds us in *After Theory* (2003, p60) our senses really do amount to being 'organs of interpretation' too:

All sensuous response to reality is an interpretation of it. Beetles and monkeys clearly interpret their world, and act on the basis of what they see. Our physical senses are themselves organs of interpretation.

Seeing, smelling, hearing and touch are some of the primary means through which we investigate and discover the complex details of our surroundings, not only as some kind of subjectively and emotionally tainted process but very much as activities at the core of any evidence-based approach the world as well. After all, naturalists such as Darwin spend countless hours observing their surroundings and making detailed notes. There exists for example evidence that Darwin walked around art galleries smelling paintings! ¹⁰⁰ But also, I do think that the historic focus of the field of fine art on notions such as beauty may help to reconsider, complicate and deepen the interpretation of such cultural practices as the making and wearing of *golwani* (albeit in ways that challenge their seeming straightforward symbolic function and framing within neo-colonial anthropological, ethnographic and western aesthetic discourse, for example). In fact I will show in the next few sub-chapters that a somewhat modified material

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⁹⁹ In one way, often what is physically there in an artwork often seems to contradict the somewhat highfalutin and often biased descriptions that accompany the artwork. For example, in the case of 'Man's cloth' by Anatsui, one cannot ignore the fact that the work is made from liquor bottle caps - ones that derive from a particular place and time (even if those particulars remain unknown to you a bit of research may yet plug the gap). Moreover, as I have mentioned before, these particulars are in themselves evidence of a number of actions and forms of behaviour – such as the highly organised use of tools (both in the manufacture of the bottle caps and their subsequent transformation) as well as the somewhat less respectable social activity of consuming vast amounts of alcohol. Concerning the latter I find it astounding that no commentators on Anatsui's so-called 'cloth series' (i.e. the works made from bottle caps from 1998 onwards) have made anything significant of the rather obvious material link between socialization, inebriation and artistic practice at stake therein.

¹⁰⁰ This note may be found on page 281 of Darwin's *Notebooks on Man, Mind and Materialism also labeled* 'M': "Aug. 12th When in National Institution & not feeling much enthusiasm, happened to go close to one & smelt the peculiar smell of Picture. association with much pleasure immediately thrilled across me, bringing up old indistinct ideas of FitzWilliam Musm. I was amused at this after seven years interval" (Barret 1974)

focus on beauty and aesthetics in relation to the discussion of an artwork such as 'Man's Cloth' has the advantage of being at once attentive to the material complexities of the artwork (of how it is made) and to the material complexities of our particular cultural attraction thereto (or not).

In the case of *golwani*, once you view the object in relation to its aesthetic function within Ndebele culture, it opens up context-responsive discussions about the general practice of making beautiful things and what societal function, if any, that fulfils. If the sole purpose of the *golwani* is to emulate the rolls of fat to be found on a healthy adult woman, then why do the Ndebele spend such long hours making and decorating these objects? Beading, such as found on the apron, is a painstakingly slow activity, with individual piece taking up to two years to complete¹⁰¹, something made abundantly clear through the brilliant use of fine abstract, geometric patterns rendered in small shiny beads of blue, red, yellow, white, green and black. *Golwani* are worn as but one part of a larger design that includes an apron, a blanket-style shawl and then even more hoops. These different parts all form a single whole, with various areas extending into one another - whether by way of the use of the beads as primary leitmotif or the various colours that make them almost indistinguishable from other areas of the dress. Moreover, on the surface the geometric use of pattern seems to operate in juxtaposition to the otherwise organic, round form of these oversized 'bangles'.

It could be said that the round form of the bangle introduces a curve into the straight lines of the pattern and, in turn, the pattern introduces geometric fields into the otherwise organic shape of the bangle (see Figure 19, 110). This serves for a vibrant, highly visible play of form and colour that sparkle and vibrate against the muted palate of the human skin even as it elaborates the shape of the body. And furthermore, by paying attention to issues of affect¹⁰², i.e. how the combined use of colour and form makes one feel, a rather straightforward explanation of *golwani* becomes a much more complex affair.

The intricate, combined use of colour and geometric form in *golwani* and related dress generates a playful almost boisterous feeling of movement and vitality – one momentarily 'grafted' onto the form of the body thus rendering it more attractive and visually alluring. When

Ndebele brides may work up to two to three years on selected pieces of beadwork. See the brief discussion on beadwork by the Ndebele in *South Africa and its people* by Godfrey Mwakikagile (2008, p193-194).

¹⁰² As I will show later in my discussion of 'Man's Cloth' by El Anatsui, affect and the perception of beauty are closely related – even as beauty embodies the particularity of its context the experience of it may not be limited to that cultural context (i.e. individuals that share it). In brief affect opens up other avenues for exploration in the discussion of the artwork.

stacked on top of one another around the legs, *golwani* seem to fit snug against the skin and the surface contour of the bangles become almost indivisible from those of the rest of the body.



Figure 19: Young standing Ndebele woman dressed in *golwani* and related apparel. (Source: Fisher & Beckwith 1999, Vol 1, p 269).

I would argue that in this almost magical elaboration of the fleshy sensuality of the human body, *golwani* capture and amplify something of the greater force that underpins the ongoing growth,

adaptation, proliferation and specialisation of all organic life on earth. That is to say, despite the high degree of cultural specificity at work in the manufacture and usage of *golwani* (i.e. culture specific ideas of beauty, the techno-cultural forms of self-expression at stake therein) these oversized bangles do partake of - and draw - our attention to the evolution of all life on earth. Much like the bulging heaving shape of 'Man's cloth' points towards a kind of movement beyond, or perhaps even implicit in the immediate object, this suggests a continuous shaping and reshaping of all material forms, including but not limited to, our bodies. Perhaps here the bottle cap may function as a metaphor for this process: it still bears what Darwin may have called the traces of its 'lowly origins' as part of a liquor container (even as it is transformed into an artwork that we now find great value in). The pun is intentional, for the bottle cap begins its life as a raw material extracted from the earth, shaped by countless geological forces well prior to the transformation thereof into functional items (as lowly liquor bottle caps no less) and finally being hammered out and transformed again into a beautiful artwork.

In the next sub-chapter I will explore how, from an evolutionary perspective, the very idea of beauty contains within it the seeds of a deeply material encounter between the self and the world that is constantly mutating, changing and adapting to a variety of socio-cultural and biological pressures. The point is that particularities of our cultural forms of expression are not set in stone, subject as they are to all kinds of evolutionary forces, some purely survivalist in impulse and others deeply embedded in a discourse of pleasure, sex and desire. The latter, sex and desire, is clearly related to the perception of beauty and the material, evolutionary forces at stake therein. As we will see, to speak of the very concept of beauty in relation to an artwork such as 'Man's cloth' by El Anatsui is to open a wonderfully fertile can of worms.

Chapter 3.2 Beauty, art and boundaries

This sub-chapter concerns the relationship between evolution (in particular the material workings of the processes of natural - and - sexual selection), art and the sensory experience of beauty. As Darwin shows in *The origin of the species* (1859/ 2009)¹⁰³ and *The Descent of Man*,

¹⁰³ The book was first published under the title *On the origin of the species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life*' in 1859. The title was shortened with the publication of the sixth edition to *The origin of the species*.

and selection in relation to sex (1871/2004)¹⁰⁴, the very idea of beauty occupies a seminal, if somewhat contested, position in relation to the evolution of the species. In a section entitled 'Organs of little apparent importance' contained in *The origin of the species*, Darwin (1859/2009, p692-3) writes that:

The foregoing remarks lead me to say a few words on the protest lately made by some naturalists, against the utilitarian doctrine that every detail of structure has been produced for the good of its possessor. They believe that many structures have been created for beauty in the eyes of man, or for mere variety. This doctrine, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory. Yet I fully admit that many structures are of no direct use to their possessors...The effects of sexual selection, when displayed in beauty, can be called useful only in a forced sense.

Broadly speaking Darwin views the perception of beauty as part of the adaptive, material strategies developed and elaborated primarily for the purpose of sexual seduction. In this way Darwin accounts for the sometimes striking differences between the male and female of the species - from the wonderful, decorative plumage of certain birds such as the peacock to the intricate courtship rituals that include elements of dance, song, physical conflict and even the construction of elaborate structures (such as that of the example of the Scenopoetes dentirostris, or 'Stagemaker Bowerbird' as its also colloquially known) 105. As Darwin's (1871/2004, 1859/ 2009) analyses shows, in their physical and behavioural elaboration within the courtship rituals of a species such adaptations may become excessive, especially when measured according only to the rather strict laws of natural selection. In brief, such physical adaptations and forms of behaviour as may be considered the hallmark of the process of courtship, may become almost non-functional or useless within strictly evolutionary terms: according to the doctrine of evolution by natural selection, no behavioural trait or physical modification will be selected if it does not provide an adaptive payoff of some sort. Showing off and prancing about in your best for the sheer pleasure of it is not generally considered to be an evolutionary payoff in itself. Nor is the making of such beautiful though non-functional artworks as Anatsui's 'Man's cloth'.

¹⁰⁴ Note the use of the full title here: the focus of the book all too often goes missing by referring simply to the book as 'The Descent of Man', thus focusing again on the evolution of humanity from what Darwin terms its lowly origins without acknowledging the pivotal role of sexual selection therein.

¹⁰⁵ In a beautiful passage from 'What is philosophy' Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p184) describe the activities of the Stagemaker Bowerbird as such: "Every morning the *Scenopoetes dentirostris*, a bird of the Australian rain forests, cuts leaves, makes them fall to the ground, and turns them over so that the paler, internal side contrasts with the earth. In this way it constructs a stage for itself like a ready-made; and directly above, on a creeper or a branch, while fluffing out the feathers beneath its beak to reveal their yellow roots, it sings a complex song made up from its own notes and, at intervals, those of other birds that it imitates: it is a complete artist".

Darwin theorises the process of 'sexual selection' to account for the appearance of the kind of excesses that are typically involved in the creation and perception of beauty. This introduces a seeming paradox into the otherwise deterministic logic of the process of evolution by natural selection one that I wish to address here in relation to the practice of art. However, this is not to suggest that something like a gene for art appreciation and production may be isolated but, rather, that owing to the demands of the survival of our species and their subsequent impact upon human physiology (including our large brains, the specific form and function our sensory organs sensory stimuli, the development of deposable thumbs and so on), we are perhaps predisposed towards the creation of various art forms. The demands at stake here may include those of reproduction (i.e. sexual selection), effective group communication, the complexities of social grooming and the servicing of communal bonds, and lastly, even the kinds of secondary or subsidiary demands that are demonstrably caused by the evolutionary adaptations developed by living organisms in order to fulfil those. Concerning the latter, as the studies by Barash (2012) and Miller (2001) argue, art may for example help service the shortcomings of language as a means of effective group communication, inasmuch as it gives expression to emotions and experiences that cannot be adequately expressed by spoken or written language.

My aim is to show how art, when conceived of in relation to the process of evolution, may be considered both useless and functional (even if in that apparent uselessness). This I will do by way of an in depth discussion of the role of beauty within the process of sexual selection. Certainly it is within the perception of beauty that much of what constitutes art (song, dance, object-making, rituals and the like) derives its origin but, and this is the point of this chapter, the practice of art is similarly underpinned by the creation and organisation of social boundaries – whether such as those presupposed by the existence of distinct sexes and territories as Grosz (2008, 2011) and to a lesser extent Miller (2001) argue, or even those at stake within the organisation and maintenance and growth of distinct species (or distinct social groups within that species) as Barash's (2012), Macneilage (2008) and Dunbar's (1999 & 2009) respective analyses suggest. I will argue that art forms, both in their production and appreciation, provide an 'adaptive payoff', in short, an evolutionary advantage without which a species would in some way be less suited to prosper within its environment. Basically I wish to suggest that art promotes the survival of the species, albeit in complex, sometimes counter-intuitive ways - this

perhaps in contradistinction to the readings put forward by Grosz (2008, 2011)¹⁰⁶ and Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) that seem to imply that art, and the forms of sensation it invariably produces, are almost wholly recursive and non-functional in their workings.

In the first section of this sub-chapter I will discuss the relationship between the forces of natural and sexual selection as put forward by Darwin and show how the latter (sexual selection) forms the basis of Darwin's understanding of beauty and art generally. Here I will define what Darwin means by the concept of beauty, drawing particular attention to the fact that Darwin views the concept of beauty as being a relational, context specific phenomena that may be found in many animal species, including but not limited to homo sapiens (see Donald & Munro 2009 and Donald 2009). In the second section I will look more at the practice of art in relation to the force of natural selection, where art, like any other human adaptation including language, is subject to the pressures of evolution, thus requiring it to provide benefits that potentially outweigh its seemingly useless status. That is to say, as David Barash suggests in chapters five and six of Homo mysterious: Evolutionary Puzzles of Human Nature (2012) the fact that human beings from all societies create forms of art such as dance, song, objects and the like, signify a deep-set evolutionary role for the production and appreciation of art generally. Moreover, this also suggests that the very idea of beauty (whether in its perception or appreciation), does have some biological basis - an argument that Darwin's (1871/2004 & 1859/2009) analyses would seem to support. However, it is not my intention to suggest that the practice of art may be equated with the existence of a specific gene, that is why I turn to a discussion of the relationship between art and sexual selection, for though sex is underpinned by biological impulses and drives it is deeply conditioned by historical, context - and - species specific definitions of beauty.

Following Darwin's definition of beauty I would identify two broad strands of thought in this discussion: (one) beauty functions as a culture - and - context specific phenomena that (two) in all living creatures endowed with the capacity for an appreciation thereof (human and

¹⁰⁶ In the two most recent books by Australian feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz entitled *Chaos, territory, art. Deleuze* and the framing of the earth (2008) and Becoming undone. Darwinian Reflections on life, politics, and art (2011) she puts forward a positive reading of sexual difference founded almost equally on her reading of the writings of Charles Darwin, Gilles Deleuze and Lucy Irigary. Moreover, as this chapter concerns the relationship between the evolutionary origins of art and the workings of beauty therein, Grosz's excellent though rather philosophical analyses in Becoming undone. Darwinian reflections on life politics and art (2011) may readily be considered part of existing theories put forward here (such as those by Miller and Barash regarding the role of sexual selection) and will thus not be elaborated upon in this chapter. I will however, where necessary, make some observations regarding the role of art that Grosz puts forward.

otherwise) also work towards generating and maintaining a series of boundaries such as those between the male and the female of the species. Moreover, concerning the latter, that those intra-species boundaries such as may be identified between various cultural, racial and gender specific groups of human beings are also partially derivative from what such social groups consider beautiful. As Darwin's analysis suggests the very idea of beauty is at once context - and - culture specific, even as it fulfils a subsidiary though no less important role within the much larger process of evolution. In this way beauty may be considered a 'primordial force' that is highly particular in the exact manner of its manifestation and workings within any given context. Thus, even though the function of beauty may be described according to the general laws of natural - and - sexual selection, its outcomes, i.e. the exact manner of its historic expression, is never exactly the same¹⁰⁷.

3.2.1 Art and sexual selection: on the evolutionary function of beauty

In this section I wish to elaborate on the relationship between the force of sexual selection and the practice of art as put forward by Charles Darwin (1871/2004 & 1859/2009). I will then outline the definition and relationship of the force of sexual selection in relation to the much more rigorous process of natural selection. Finally I will discuss the place of beauty as context-specific phenomena through which the process of sexual selection operates to create seemingly excessive forms of decoration such as may be found in *golwani*. These insights will be carried forward in the final part of this chapter when I return to a discussion of the artwork 'Mans Cloth' (1998-2001) by El Anatsui.

Following the thoughts fully developed by Darwin¹⁰⁸ in *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to sex* (1871/2004, Chapter 8, p240-300, see especially discussion on p276), it could be argued that *golwani* form a part of the energetic, sometimes highly ornate displays that all living things are apt to indulge when they reach sexual maturity - from the birds of paradise in New

¹⁰⁷ However, as I will show in this chapter by referring to Darwin's discussion of the human races, (see the discussion on the following page) this not to suggest that such boundaries are unchanging, nor, perhaps more negatively, that different ideals of beauty are in any way indicative of some larger hierarchy between various cultural and racial groups (or even those that exist between the different species for that matter). As Darwin's analysis shows, when measured according to a context specific, relational definition of beauty such as put forward here, humans are certainly not the only creatures that produce beautiful things and nor can it be said that there is some universal standard to which that which we find beautiful conforms to.

¹⁰⁸ I first read Darwin in late 2002 though I understood precious little of is importance to the field of fine art at the time. Thus I write this text with the benefit of hindsight, especially as regards the relationship between the value of sexual selection, beauty and art as brought forward by the wearing of *golwani*.

Guinea and Australia to the fashionable teenagers that walk the city streets of London and Johannesburg. In this way it could be argued that golwani are culture specific cultural markers of Ndebele identity that amplify material aspects of the human body - ones that are considered sexually alluring and indeed beautiful by Ndebele men and women¹⁰⁹. There is at once something very particular about the ideal of beauty at stake in golwani, through which it may be linked to the larger workings of 'sexual selection'.

According to Darwin sexual selection is a much less rigorous though, still vital counterpart to the force of 'natural selection'. During his research into the workings of evolution of the species Darwin was greatly puzzled by the observation of various forms of physical mutation and species-specific behaviour that seem to exceed the purely functional, at times almost brutal, workings of the process of evolution by natural selection. For example, in The origin of species Darwin (1859/ 2009) writes that he cannot by way of the workings of natural selection alone account for the great degree of variability between the male and the female of numerous species. Here Darwin mentions the high degree of physical difference between the male and the female of the same bird species, noting the exquisite patterns and iridescent colours of the birds including the peacock, hummingbirds, birds of paradise and the mandrill (also see Donald & Munro 2009, p19). These differences are complemented further by a variety of lesser differences between birds of the same sex though of different territorial groupings: in this way males of the same species appear somewhat distinct from one another. Darwin thus devotes the whole of The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to sex (1871/2004) to detail the workings of sexual selection, a force that, in relation to workings of natural selection, may be viewed as 'secondary' or supplemental to the evolution of the species. Importantly, because courtship involves a wilful process of decision-making (mostly though not always on the part of the female of the species)¹¹⁰ the question of choice and of preference here enters the equation.

In keeping with the larger aim of *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to sex* Darwin relates race with sexual selection in order to dispel any possible qualitative connection between racial differences and the notion of the 'survival of the fittest' (See the book *Darwin's sacred*

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps it is interesting to note that other than in the rest of nature where the male of the species commonly display colorful patterns, sing, dance and even battle as part of the rites of sexual selection, in the case of *golwani* it is the female of the species that engage such behavior. In western society this would certainly be construed as proof of the workings of patriarchy. Regardless, this does not hold true for all human society. For example, the men from the Woodabe from the Niger perform exquisite charm dances, wearing make up and pulling faces so as to best showcase their facial features (see Beckwith & Fisher 1999).

¹¹⁰ See the studies by Bro-Jørgensen (2007 & 2010) in which he also discusses the obverse: he clearly shows that sometimes 'pushy females' force 'choosy males' to make the decisions.

cause: race, slavery and the quest for human origins by Desmond and More 2009 for an depth discussion of the this aspect of Darwin's studies into human evolution). Darwin considers the racial differences between humanity as part of the physical mutations that may have come under the influence of the process of sexual selection. Thus according to Darwin race is not indicative of the superiority of one group of humans over another, but must rather be measured not only in relation to the specific adaptations of a people to their specific context, but also as being indicative of different social ideals of beauty. Darwin (1871/ 2004, p229) writes:

...we have thus far been baffled in all our attempts thus far to account for the differences between the races of man... there remains one important agency, namely sexual selection, which appears to have acted powerfully on man, as on many other animals.

In the remainder of the text Darwin theorises the doctrine of sexual selection to account for the appearance of the seemingly useless, though extraordinarily beautiful forms of display that accompany the rituals of courtship and mating throughout the natural world - from immensely complex forms of birdsong, to the elaborate horns of male antelope that by far exceed their function as purely a means of self-defence, sometimes even to the point of being slightly injurious to it (see specifically Darwin 1871/2004, p262). This in stark contrast to the process of natural selection that, as Darwin argues in The Origins of the Species (1859/ 2009, p694) "...will never produce in any being anything injurious to itself, for natural selection acts solely by and for the good of each". Darwin now concludes that within the rest of the animal kingdom such 'non-functional' physical mutations of the body and forms of behaviour are ostensibly utilised to charm potential sexual partners, even more so than as being a means of self-defence (to defeat rival males in the battle for courtship or to protect against predators, for example). And so the oversized, sometimes wonderfully decorative homs commonly found in the male of numerous bovine species such as the Kudu in Africa (Tragelaphus strepsiceros) are thus indicative of the power of sexual selection to modify the physical morphology of a species – a fact borne out by recent studies such as 'The intensity of sexual selection predicts weapon size in male bovids' by evolutionary biologist Jakob Bro-Jørgensen (2007)¹¹¹. Interestingly, Bro-Jørgensen correlates the much smaller less-decorative horn-size of female bovines with the pressures of natural selection - in other words, their horns do fulfil in the role of self-defence. Another case

See Bro-Jorgensen J (2007), 'The intensity of sexual selection predicts weapon size in male bovids'. Evolution Vol. 61, pp 1316-1326.

study co-authored by Bro-Jørgensen even charts the wilful use of deception as part of the mating game in the *Topi* (Damaliscus lunatus) in Kenya¹¹².

Returning to the issue of race and sexual selection: in order to establish a clear precedent for the emergence of the various human races Darwin (1871/2004, p230) finds it necessary to pass through 'the whole of the animal kingdom' to illustrate the exact inter-workings of the forces of sexual-and-natural selection. Darwin (ibid) argues that in doing so, on may come to understand that:

...the differences between the races of man, as in colour, hairiness, form of features &c., are of a kind which might have been expected to come under the influence of sexual selection.

Thus as with the homs of bovine species mentioned before, Darwin suggest that the physical hallmarks of race (such as the shape of the eyes, colour of the skin and so forth), are all physical adaptations that have been powerfully impacted by the pressures of sexual selection. In this regard Darwin conceives that the values of race, beauty and sexuality go hand in hand. That is to say, exactly because distinct groups of people find certain physical characteristics beautiful, they have, through successive generations, actively selected for the appearance of those properties within their sexual partners and subsequent offspring¹¹³. However, in positing the value of sexual selection in relation to the appearance of the races Darwin makes a controversial move and not only because of the political argument implicit therein against accepted racist thought of the day: the otherwise empirical natural scientist now finds himself marooned within somewhat unscientific, fuzzy logic of what exactly various species may consider beautiful, up until then arguably something that fell primarily within the purview of the arts and philosophy.

¹¹² See the article 'Male topi antelopes alarm snort deceptively to retain females for mating' by Bro-Jorgensen & Pangle (2010). During the mating season the male of the species falsely signals the presence of predators by snorting and pricking his ears, a form of behavior that keeps receptive females close-by from wandering off. Of course the female *Topi* would rather err on the side of safety than take a chance and thus the blatant lie may be repeated. The point is that the force of sexual selection acts powerfully on the appearance and behaviour of physical creatures, adapting and modifying existing traits in ways that exceed their purely functional role i.e. in this case a warning signal becomes a form of willful deceit.

¹¹³ Of course one has to bear in mind that certain physical bodily properties such as the colour of the skin may in fact be selected for not only on the basis of sexual preference but also because it is a decidedly advantageous adaption to one context: in parts of the world such as regions on the equator where the sun is at its brightest, having a lighter skin is quite simply detrimental to ones health. Thus both the distinct forces of sexual and natural selection may work together to create context-specific physical adaptations that in no way conform to some larger universal standard.

But what exactly does Darwin mean by the term 'beauty' and how does it fit into the workings of the processes of natural - and - sexual selection?

3.2.2 Beauty and the moral good?

As we have seen for Darwin it is through the production of various forms of species-specific adaptations and specialization, including that which a species values as being beautiful, that the process of evolution ultimately occurs. Even as the forces at work in sexual selection seem to only celebrate the anomaly of their own continued existence by way of seemingly useless, excessive displays, one may, through their interaction with the workings of natural selection, still trace the larger workings of the evolution of individual organisms and their surroundings. That is to say, in principle these two seemingly disparate forces (natural - and - sexual selection) form part of a single process through which organic life strives to express itself, reproduce and ultimately to survive. This Darwin (1859/ 2009, p693) terms 'the complex laws of growth' in which every structure of every living creature fulfils a highly specialised, though oft obscure function in relation to it and its greater context. This paradox stands central to much of Darwin's writing on evolution - one he felt required from him a clear definition of the value of beauty, given its importance within the forces at work in the process of sexual selection. And, as I will show, the very idea of beauty and indeed the practice of art remains a deeply troubling phenomenon for evolutionary biologists to this day.

As Diana Donald argues in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Endless forms. Charles Darwin, natural science and the visual arts* (Donald & Munro ed. 2009, p1-29) at the time of Darwin's life, the definition of beauty was still deeply indebted to Joshua Reynolds' 'Discourses'¹¹⁴ (1797) implicitly detailing the seeming 'natural' interrelationship between the values of beauty and morality. For Reynolds beauty and morality were somehow equated with each other on a quantative level - where the beauty of something such as a person, an artwork, an animal acts like some indication of its relative moral goodness, so to speak. Darwin felt that without any clear definition of beauty and its close relationship to the value of sexual selection, the entirety of his theory of evolution might be at risk. For how could such obvious uselessness and excess such as that presupposed by the very idea of beauty be accommodated

¹¹⁴ The 'Discourses' was a series of lectures delivered by Reynolds at the Royal Academy between 1760-1890 and published collectively in book form in 1797.

by the seemingly brutal logic that underpins the theory of natural selection by evolution? As noted before, in the ongoing struggle for survival posited at the heart of Darwin's theory of evolution, the workings of sexual selection introduces an almost wholly self-referential element of excess and pleasure. Perhaps as theological opinion might proffer, such seeming useless beauty and pleasure might thus be thought rather straightforward proof that some things are simply created by God for humanity's enjoyment. This represents a fundamental challenge to Darwin's theory of evolution, one he was all too well aware of.

As Donald (Donald and Munro 2009, p15) argues, beauty was thus a key battleground for Darwin and his opponents, including supporters of the school of natural theology established by William Paley at the turn of the 19th century such as the Duke of Argyll. Ultimately Darwin's theory of evolution would leave no room for the kind of teleological thinking at stake in Reynolds *Discourses* (1797) nor in Paley's *Natural Theology* of 1802. In this way, Darwin responded to the challenge implicit in Reynolds' theory by formulating his own theory of beauty, one decidedly amoral, corporeal and contextually responsive. That is to say, through his countless observations of the mating habits of various organic life forms, Darwin could not support the notion of a universal ideal of beauty, nor that of beauty as having any intrinsic moral value.

Beauty according to Darwin is not a fixed, unalterable quality in the mind, nor is it something inherent in specific objects or organisms, such as artworks or even flowers. Outside the mind and our sensory perception thereof, the concept of beauty simply does not exist. Rather, for Darwin beauty is simply that which a species (or even a group within a species) finds physically attractive and thus pleasurable to perceive¹¹⁵. Here Darwin (1859/ 2009, p697) is clear: the forces of sexual selection do not strive for perfection (perfect adaptation) but rather for the advancement of each species within its context, even when the workings of sexual selection potentially signal waste of energy, expenditure or, on some occasions even become slightly injurious to the species itself. Darwin devotes some time to discussing the oversized horns of

¹¹⁵ In the *The Descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* (1871/2004) Darwin advances this thesis to account for the different appearance of the various human races, for example. Thus no further support could be given to the kind of broad-based thinking that would link race with mental capacity or some kind of overarching, natural pecking order between the different races so often utilised to justify slavery.

certain elk¹¹⁶ that are clearly a hindrance to their ordinary movement. But, and this remains contentious point, clearly females of the species find these horns beautiful and are thus attracted to them¹¹⁷.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I find it incredibly heartening that at the heart of one of the most important scientific theories ever-advanced one of the central tenets of artistic practice, namely the value of beauty, occupies such pride of place. But perhaps more poignantly it is within the uncertain territory of sexual selection where Darwin glimpses the origins of art. After a lengthy discussion of what different groups of people seem to find physically attractive, including the different values attributed to beards by the Anglo-Saxons, the Makalolo in Africa, the Fijians of the Pacific, the Japanese and the Samoans of New Zealand, Darwin (1871/ 2004, p648) finally concludes that that there is no single definition of beauty and that each society strives for its own ideal:

We thus see how widely the different races of man differ in their taste for the beautiful. In every nation sufficiently advanced to have made effigies of their deified rulers, the sculptors no doubt have endeavoured to express their highest ideal of beauty and grandeur. Under this point of view it is well to compare in our mind the Jupiter or Apollo of the Greeks with the Egyptian or Assyrian statues; and these with the hideous bas-reliefs on the ruined buildings of Central America.

Note the point is not that Darwin thinks the bas reliefs of central America 'hideous', but rather that they represent a different ideal of beauty than that at stake in the other examples, albeit

Though, as Darwin (1859/ 2009, p695) writes some adaptations used purely for self-defense, such as the stinger of an ordinary bee, also cause grievous harm to it once used. This too can hardly be considered a 'perfect' adaptation. However, it is an adaptation that is of special use to the creature, one which it fulfills with great efficiency. The stinger strikes what Darwin (1859/ 2009, p694) refers to as a 'fair balance' between the relative good and evil caused by its existence and thus, on the whole it may still be considered an advantageous adaptation. In relation to the races of humanity and their various distinct features, this reasoning also dispels with the idea that certain facial/ bodily features are indicative of some kind of natural inferiority on the part of its possessor, because as Darwin (1859/ 2009, p697) argues, each such modification is in fact measured and weighed according to the standard of that particular environment within which creatures such as humans exist.

Of course, sex and the pleasure living creatures derive from the act of copulation, remains one of the great mysteries of the sciences for there is simply no self-evident reason why the act of copulation should be pleasurable at all. As Barash (2012, p49-89) argues, the utilitarian idea that sex is purely about procreation cannot account for the very fact of physical pleasure that accompany copulation. In evolutionary terms, why if the adaptive payoff of choosing the right sexual partner is so clear for one's offspring, is it accompanied by the seemingly useless pleasure of the orgasm? In this way, the workings of sexual selection are on surface at least, not optimized for efficiency and one might well view it all as being illogical and a waste of time! And yet, as Darwin's analysis clearly shows, the workings of sexual selection infuse almost all aspects of organic life on earth, from the appearance of the different sexes and races, to their courtship rituals, their forms of self-expression and ultimately even their struggle for survival.

one whose charms are obviously lost on a Victorian English gentleman such as Darwin. Moreover, following this logic, distinctions between various forms of art (i.e. western and African art, painting and craft) really do not amount to much other than saying that they are the material embodiment of context-specific ideals of beauty as well as being wonderfully functional in some, though not all instances. Here Darwin (1871/2004, p648) writes that natural selection, and by extension its somewhat unruly second-cousin sexual selection, "...will produce perfection, or strength in the battle for life, only according to the standard of that [environment]¹¹⁸". The point is that ideals that underpin natural and sexual selection are indeed relational and perhaps more specifically, that the very material experience of beauty in no way suggests some single standard ideal according to which all such preferences may be measured. But it is clear that Darwin holds the perception of beauty and the evolution of art in close approximation.

Moreover, Darwin discusses the experience of beauty not only from a visual perspective but in relation to the other senses as well. For example in Chapter 19 of the *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to* sex entitled 'Secondary sexual characters of man', Darwin (1871/2004, p622-652) discusses the role of sound, in specific birdsong in relation to sexual selection, a discussion that leads him to ponder the possibility that song ultimately leads to the evolution of language. This is not the place to consider the full implications of this thesis but it suffices to say that Darwin views song as the prototype to language and thus, by extension, also supplies a decidedly material, corporeal basis for the evolution of language (see for example Macneillage 2008), a point elaborated later in this chapter¹¹⁹. Here then Darwin takes the idea of beauty one step further and suggests that not only is it context-specific with regards to the races of humanity, but also species-specific, attributing aesthetic taste to animals - something that in its relation to artistic practice still remains a highly contentious observation (see Donald & Munro 2009, p19-20). Darwin¹²⁰ ponders this rather perplexing phenomenon in this note jotted down in one of his personal diaries:

Why do bulls & horses, animals of different orders turn up their nostrils when excited by love? Stallion licking udders of mare strictly analogous to men's affect for women's breasts.

¹¹⁸ My insertion. Darwin uses the term 'country' here but within the context of the discussion at hand the meaning is more or less the same although the term 'environment' is without the political implications of the term 'country'. One may well imagine that smell would play an important role in the workings of sexual selection, whether it concerns the production and usage of various perfumes or the naturally released pheromones that may help charm potential partners (see Darwin 1859/ 2009, p695 for a brief discussion on the use of smell in sexual selection).

¹²⁰ This reference is to be found on page 278 of the diary titled 'Notebook M' (Barret 1977).

Dr. Darwin's theory probably wrong, otherwise horses would have idea of beautiful forms¹²¹.

I think one may safely deduce that what looks, smells, feels and sounds pleasurable to a species is certainly a part of the multisensory, context-specific function of the perception of beauty. Interesting that, despite his deep involvement with the debate surrounding beauty in the arts, Darwin actually thought himself devoid of any understanding and appreciation for the fine arts such as painting, viewing it "...as an affected nonsense, a waste of money and time" (Donald & Munro 2009, 13)¹²². Thus whereas Darwin views beauty as being an 'instinctive feeling' (Darwin, 'Notebook M' cited in Barret 1974, p272) the same cannot be said of his approach towards art. This thought will be developed in the next section when I discuss the evolution of art from its primordial beginnings into a complex contemporary phenomenon.

At present we may draw from Darwin's rather perplexing attitude towards the fine arts of his times, that he does not unequivocally equate the values of art, sexuality and beauty – but rather that the forms and sensations involved in the practice of art are perhaps similarly burdened with a seeming useless celebration for its own sake. Nor does Darwin specifically say that art begins with some kind of proto-language ostensibly founded on erotic impulses. But in *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to sex* Darwin (1871/2004) does argue that song may be the proto-form from which spoken language originates (a claim that I think perhaps rife with poetic possibilities but not necessarily borne out by the facts – more on this in section 2.3 of this chapter). Nonetheless it is perhaps in making this claim that Darwin comes closest to positing any clear relationship between art and the biological impulses and forces that underpin sexual selection. The point is that for Darwin, as for the numerous contemporary scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz (2008 & 2012) and Geoffrey Miller (1999) that have since followed and expanded his reasoning, sexual selection may signal something like the primordial beginnings from which the practice of art first emerges¹²³. But, this in itself is not enough to guarantee the ongoing practice of art within human society, for it fails to question what, if anything, art as an

¹²¹ The reference here is to Erasmus Darwin's 'Zoonomia, or the Laws of organic life' of 1794.

¹²² But similarly, according to his sons, Francis and William Darwin, late in his life Darwin viewed himself as an "…ignoramus concerning all matters of art" (ibid), and so it is difficult to take this charge too seriously. Perhaps as Donald (Donald and Munro 2009) suggests one should rather read it in relation to the fact that Darwin was all too well aware that his thesis had fundamentally undermined the traditional basis of the field of aesthetics ala Reynolds' 'Discourses'.

¹²³ The relationship between sexual selection and art is discussed in more detail of Chapter 2.2.4 of this dissertation.

activity contributes to society - something without which it would surely be less well-adapted to its surroundings.

3.2.3 Primordial beginnings and complex ends

To conclude section two of this chapter I would argue that, even if art begins in a primordial sensory elaboration and celebration of self that is the hallmark of sexual selection, this is not where it ends. For, as a practice, art too is continuously mutating (or 'evolving') and renegotiating its place and function in society. After all, what distinct groups or even individuals within those groups consider beautiful may change in time. And so, what begins with a dash of colour or a simple grunt evolves into highly complicated patterns of self-expression that connect the sensing body with the thinking mind in ever-more subtle and complex ways. And because this concerns the vagaries of sexual selection and not natural selection, I wish to remind the reader that there simply is no perfect standard or ideal which the forces of sexual selection strive to attain: there exists no single trajectory that can be traced between say the cave paintings of the first human beings and the making of golwani, or that of conceptual art of the nineteen sixties in Britain. In short, given that each living being adapts according to what Darwin terms the 'complex laws of growth' there is no purist sense in which one may locate the origins of art. Besides, all societies differ greatly and the evolution of art is a similar fact to that of any other species-specific adaptation and modification.

As to the more thorny question if one species or even a sub-species may be genetically predisposed towards certain forms of beauty (i.e. colour, pattern, song and so forth), I will say that even if this were the case, the remit of that bias would be so broad that it would be basically useless¹²⁴. For example, we know the human eye cannot see certain colours or that the human ear is deaf to certain high-pitched frequencies, and so we may correctly deduce that the charms of that particular colour or sound are fundamentally lost on human beings (not too mention some species that are colour-blind). Besides, as West-Eberhard's (2003) analysis shows

leasure' – i.e. one that exists outside human imagination. In 'Notebook M p 272 (Barret 1977) he writes that:'' There is absolute pleasure independent of imagination (as in hearing music), this probably arises from (1) harmony of colours, & their absolute beauty (which is as real a cause as in music) from the splendour of light, especially coloured.—that light is a beautiful object one knows from seeing artificial lights in the night.—from the mere exercise of the | organ of sight, which is common to every kind of view—as likewise is novelty of view even old one. every time one looks at it.—these two causes very weak. (2d) form. Some forms seem instinctively beautiful /as round ones/;—then there the pleasure of perspective, which cannot be doubted if we look at buildings, even ugly ones''.

the hugely influential process of infant development cannot be underestimated in terms of the physiological development of the species (this is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.2.1 of this dissertation). The hypothesis regarding the importance of infant development can certainly be extended to include its role as an arbiter of taste and determinant of what particular, cultural forms of creative self-expression may arise in a specific society (whether 'animal' or 'human' 125). As Macneilage (2008) argues in The origin of speech even the birds learn to sing largely by parental example. But simply stating the fact that a particular species of bird can sing (i.e. it is equipped with vocal chords and neuronal processes that may work to that effect) has little clear impact on what, and exactly how, they sing. Besides, not all sound is made to be beautiful – as is the case with language sometimes sound is simply produced to convey factual information. As Macneilage (2008, p299-p302) shows in his analysis of certain species of canaries, despite the fact that there exists adequate proof that song is innate to them 126, this could be likened to the fact that babbling is innate to human infants. But this in itself, says little about whether infants will develop language later in life¹²⁷ and nor what function language will fulfil in their lives – for example, some of us will become singers, poets and orators of all kinds whilst others will use sound in many different ways to convey largely factual information. It is to the latter, the question of the function of art that I now wish to turn my attention.

As noted before, *golwani* are worn by young Ndebele women during the period of their initiation, signalling their availability for marriage and thus also clearly distinguishing the women from the rest of their community. Thus beyond simply forming part of the elaborate display as part of the rituals of courtship, *Golwani* may be understood as performative, boundary drawing practices that form part of the web of larger interaction between people, material objects, their culture and their surroundings. Of course in thinking about the artwork as a boundary-drawing device, it is by no means to imply some kind of straightforward instrumental view thereof, for as

¹²⁵ From an evolutionary perspective humans are animals, albeit highly intelligent ones! The fact is that we are not simply evolved from certain ape-species, we are a species of ape.

l²⁶ Macneilage (2008, pp299-302) cites the following as proof: (1)The canary still develops basic syllables and phrase structure even without any exposure to songs of their adult conspecifics. (Though the repertoire of song is decidedly smaller). When given a choice between learning the songs of other species or their own, they prefer to copy their own – so there is evidence for innate perceptual capacity inasmuch as this shows a clear preference for certain kinds of sound. We may thus deduce that within canaries there exist both innateness in the production and reception of song. For example, Roller and Border strands of canaries do not readily learn the notes of each other's songs. But, when they are interbred, the resultant offspring readily learn both. Thus genetics certainly plays a role in the production and reception of song.

¹²⁷ As Macneilage (2008) argues we do not really know whether human infants will develop full-blown language skills of their own accord if not exposed to it by their conspecifics (their parents, siblings, and communities). We cannot for ethical reasons as with birds, simply deafen and wholly isolate infants to test this hypothesis. Besides, the production of rudimentary song (such as produced by isolated canaries) can hardly be likened to the complexities of language.

Darwin's (1871/2004 & 1859/2009) analyses shows, the very notion of beauty (and sexual selection to which it belongs) complicates any such reading. Here *golwani* may indeed be thought functional, though not in any simplistic way: *golwani* are not simply objects with a symbolic, visual function, but material objects, albeit very beautiful ones in my mind, that actively help establish and maintain certain discursive limits and boundaries within Ndebele community (most obviously such as those between married and unmarried Ndebele women).

The pleasurable act of looking at beautiful forms such as *golwani* is only a small part of the manner in which these objects function, made as they are to serve only as something like a highly visible reminder that a young Ndebele girl has reached puberty and is currently in process of initiation. Perhaps one may say that such a young woman is, through the act of wearing *golwani*, also performatively materialised as an 'unmarried, Ndebele, female initiate'. The now seemingly self-evident status of the young wearer as a 'unmarried, female Ndebele initiate' has clear implications for her role and position in society, affecting both her own conduct and those of others within the society.

I would ask of the reader to look at the image of the *golwani* again and see how a number of rather disparate ideas and values ranging from the cultural to the sensory are brought together in the singular as part of a larger process through which the individual subject of the image is collectively materialised. In other words, there exists a complex, performative interplay between the visual beauty of the object and its socio-cultural-and-historic function within Ndebele society one that cannot be adequately understood as being a form of sensory elaboration 'for its own sake' as Grosz's (2008 & 2012) respective analysis of art would suggest (this is discussed in the next section of this chapter). Thus, even though the practice of making art (of which I see the making and wearing of *golwani* as forming a part of) may seem a useless activity, it is always involved in the material act of establishing territory and of organising society too¹²⁸.

3.3 Art and natural selection: the adaptive payoff hypotheses

In formulating my own approach towards the function of art I would like to focus more specifically on what Barash (2012) terms the 'adaptive payoff hypotheses. This approach

Here I certainly am in agreement with Grosz (2011) but it is at the point where Grosz's analysis is applied to examples of contemporary art where I part company with her. The reasons for this will become clear in the next section of the chapter where I discuss the 'adaptive payoff' hypotheses in relation to the practice of art.

suggests that the practice of art may be considered as part of the physical and behavioural adaptations that provide an evolutionary advantage (or some kind of 'tangible' benefit if you like) to the survival of a species. The point is that though art may not be good for us in any moral way, it may still be good for the survival of the species by establishing, servicing and maintaining social bonds for example. As Miller (2001, p7) argues, the cardinal rule of evolutionary biology is that "...to understand an adaptation, one has to understand its evolved function". In relation to contemporary art, it is not enough to simply posit the primordial source of its expression via its workings as part of the process of sexual selection. One has to pay attention to what art does as part of the ongoing process of evolution in the here and now.

I should also like to make clear at this point that the distinction between the two sections under which I discuss art and beauty (natural and sexual selection respectively) serves only to clarify some of the issue at hand: clearly even when considered predominantly in relation to sexual selection art still fulfils a functional role i.e. it serves as a strategy for successful courtship. This Barash (2012, p176-187) terms the 'Show-off' hypotheses – one advanced perhaps most clearly by Geoffrey Miller in the book The mating mind. How sexual selection shaped the evolution of human nature (2001) and perhaps more philosophically elaborated by Elizabeth Grosz in the two recent publications Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and framing of the earth (2008) and Becoming undone: Darwinian reflections on life, politics and art (2012). The line between those that would support the various hypotheses at stake here often overlaps - as is sometimes the case with Grosz's (2008, 2012) and Miller's (2001) respective analyses. But there are those that do not view art in such a clear relationship with the force of sexual selection, for example. Proponents of this approach may include Dunbar (1999, 2009), Macneillage (2008) and to a lesser extent Barash (2012). However, often, as is the case with Dunbar's analysis of the importance of social grooming in relation to the evolution of language, the practice of art is not the primary focus of the analysis.

As should be clear from the time I have spent thus far on elaborating the relationship between art and sexual selection, I am apt to think that art is closely bound with the difficulties, pleasures and complexities that arises from the process of sexual selection, within which beauty plays a pivotal role. Nonetheless, as with many other evolutionary traits, such as language, I think that one cannot really posit any single origin for art and that, in all likelihood, it arose from a multitude of other factors too. However, before I proceed to give a more detailed account of the various hypotheses regarding the evolution of art it is important to briefly show what kind

of problems may be encountered when one only utilises the sexual selection hypotheses to account for the function and form of art.

As Barash (2012, p157-165), makes clear, even if art fulfills a social function related predominantly to sexual selection, this still leaves the question of why it does not remain something like a private pleasure only. In simple terms why do artists want to show their work to others? Of course, one might take a rather cynical, approach and say that artists such as myself only want to sell their work and that is why they exhibit it. But I suspect that apart from the fact that one needs to survive (and if you can do so from selling your work all the better) that selling the work is a by-product of exhibiting it, of showing it to others and, as I have made clear in the previous chapters, of a member of your audience finding it a desirable, that is to say a beautiful piece of work. Thus, somewhat contrary to Miller's (2001) and Grosz's (2008, 2012) respective positions regarding art, I do not think this simply amounts to the artist as being a 'show off', of utilising their particular skill-set to only seduce potential partners¹²⁹. I am not interested in simply creating 'art for arts sake'. And this brings me to a serious problem with the sexual selection hypotheses in relation to the practice of art.

Once the sexual selection hypothesis is applied to an in-depth discussion of specific artworks as by Grosz (2008 & 2012), it comes dangerously close to reaffirming the formalist modernist attitude towards art. The formalist position is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the credo 'art for art sake' most commonly associated with twentieth century art critics like Clement Greenberg and Roger Fry. In the seminal essay 'Avante Garde and Kitsch' published in 1939, Clement Greenberg argues that meaning resides purely in the formal properties of the artwork, properties that should also be pushed to their absolute extremes as part of the ongoing, progressive development¹³⁰ of art. In short, this requires that artists seek the 'truth' of their

logical logica

¹³⁰ For Greenberg the development of art always takes place against the staid certainties of mass culture, which for him is also the home of kitsch, so to speak.

medium and materials and thus the subject matter of art becomes its own 'forms': the canvass, paint, clay, steel or whichever medium an artist chooses to express themselves through is no longer only the medium through which the artist communicates their ideas to their audience, but the focus and disciplinary limit of their ongoing artistic research within the field of aesthetics. Thus even though the materiality of the artwork takes centre stage Greenberg's account of the artwork's meaningful function in society, this material plane is wholly isolated from society.

In this regard Greenberg argues in the essay on Cubism, 'Collage' (1959), that in the case of painting for example, the basic properties are firstly the 'flatness' of the canvass. Greenberg writes that:

Painting had to spell out, rather than pretend to deny, the physical fact that it was flat, even though at the same time it had to overcome this proclaimed flatness as an aesthetic fact and continue to report nature¹³².

In another essay written by Greenberg the very next year, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), he goes even further arguing that the a-priori acknowledgement of the 'flatness' of the canvass by the artist is "...the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself". Here Greenberg asks what, in a modern world filled to the brim with images and competing and widely differing ideological and aesthetic standards, is the proper subject matter of art? He has no choice but to recuperate the hallowed mission of art from the chaos represented by modern, industrial society in what might be considered 'pre-discursive purity' of art. Here Greenberg reaffirms the old Platonian view of the world as being comprised of ideas and appearances, where the former exists as 'pure' ideals that, like a prisoner in a cave, humans can only glimpse as passing shadows. Artists strive towards rendering these pure ideals as forms and are thus somehow, much like philosophers, the primary agents through which society is made aware of ideal standards of perfection to which all forms should aspire (aesthetic and otherwise). But this also means that for Greenberg artists are innocent and separate from the

stretched over a wooden frame that also adds further three dimensionality to it. But taking into account Greenberg's attack on the pictorial/ figurative tradition of painting, such 'flatness' is explicitly posited in relation to the conventions of the illusionist depiction of space and forms, which would have the viewer forget/ ignore the very material qualities upon which it is hinged. Thus, in the case of painting, 'flatness' is for Greenberg a riposte, or perhaps rather a first step towards the 'unveiling' of the real, mimetic workings of the figurative tradition of painting. Inportantly, Greenberg argues that this investigation arises not through a theoretical framework firstly, but through the joint practice of Picasso and Braque: "Neither Braque nor Picasso set himself this program in advance. It emerged, rather, as something implicit and inevitable in the course of their joint effort to fill out that vision of a "purer" pictorial art which they had glimpsed in Cézanne, from whom they also took their means'. This lends credence to Greenberg's view of the artist as being somehow separate from the world, of discovering the truth of art not through an engagement with reality, but solely with the means and forms of art.

world – their struggle remains untainted by the vagaries of ordinary everyday life and its politics. Here notions of pure artistic expression are entrenched and to this day it is a struggle to disentangle artistic practice from many of these assumptions inherent to this position¹³³. Perhaps most poignantly, by separating the work of the artist from society and its politics, Greenberg's formalist approach also entrenched the idea that art is of no real-world value¹³⁴.

In Grosz's (2008 & 2012) analyses of the evolutionary relationship between sensation and art, one primarily based upon the forces of sexual selection, she uses almost the exact wording as Greenberg to describe the practice of art. In relation to the behaviour of the *Scenopoetes dentirostris* bird cited earlier Grosz (2008, p12) argues that:

The constitution of a territory is the fabrication of the space in which sensations may emerge, from which a rhythm, a tone, colouring weight texture may be extracted and moved somewhere else, may function for its own sake, may function for the sake of intensity alone

This seems to me a bit like having your cake and eating it: art cannot function only *for itself* and have a meaningful social function, as Grosz seems to imply here. Grosz's analysis of the space constructed through the artistic behaviour of the bird seems closely reminiscent of Plato's transcendent, primordial world of ideas. Except of course this time, in Grosz's (2008, p13) analyses this space is not invisible, but highly visible and still part of the material world – a veritable act of framing and thus of creating a territory where:

qualities are now loosened onto the world, no longer anchored in their "natural" place but put into the play of sensations that departs from mere survival to celebrate its means and excesses.

But the premise of Grosz's analysis is more or less the same as Greenberg's: there exist something like an isolated area within which art operates independently from the real-world

¹³⁴ This patent disavowal of the real-world value of art continues today, where the first budget cuts the world over are almost always to the fields of art. In another way we could easily see how art, if it is traded as being only a commodity, might very well be fundamentally worthless to the bulk of human society. As Barash (2012, p155) argues such a view of art, as being divorced from the material world of the here and now, its evolutionary pressures and complexities, ultimately leads us to view art as nothing more than the equivalent of cheesecake - a non-essential luxury that teases the taste buds by providing, in excess, a nutrient (sugar) that is in actual fact quite scarce in nature. Basically cheesecake is just a sweet without any real evolutionary benefits.

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As I have argued earlier in section 3.1 of this Chapter by referring to the development of 'Township art' in South Africa, one might conclude that artists really do not need education, that it may spoil their capacity to meaningfully express the greater, transcendent truths that artists are supposed to access directly by way of their 'innate' creative powers. (To recap briefly, in apartheid South Africa black artists were supposed to be naturally creative, and thus further education in the arts would only spoil their artistic talents).

requirements of the evolutionary struggle for survival and the petty politics and violence that, for better or for worse, is the hallmark of all life on earth.

I will now proceed to briefly discuss the most important hypotheses regarding the evolutionary origins of art here. As I go along I will connect these ideas with aspects of Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' (1998-2001) and where applicable, the practice of making and wearing *golwani*.

3.3.1 The complex case of a broken kettle: beauty as by-product

Let me briefly outline a hypotheses closely aligned to the origin and function of language that I think of general importance throughout the discussion of beauty in this dissertation. Barash (2012, p153-157) suggest this may be called the 'broken kettle hypothesis', so named after a rather well known passage in the novel 'Madame Bovary' (1865) by French author Gustave Flaubert. In this passage the novel's main protagonist, Emma, expresses her love to her wealthy, if emotionally distant seducer, Rodolphe, through a series of rather clichéd expressions. Flaubert now relays Rodolphe's rather callow thoughts regarding these expressions, which he, in turn, considers 'exaggerations', 'empty metaphors' that ultimately conceal Emma's 'mediocre affections'. But as Barash (ibid) suggests, for Flaubert this serves as much as proof of Rodolphe's own intellectual deficiency: in disregarding Emma's affections in this seemingly cool-headed way, Rodolphe fails to grasp the simple fact that language remains inadequate to express the depths of her needs, emotions and experiences. As Barash suggests as humans we have been bequeathed particularly large brains that are frustrated by the depth of what we may perceive and comprehend about the world and our relationship to it, and the limited means we have available to express it. In this regard for Flaubert (cited in Barash 2012, p154) language is "...a cracked kettle on which we beat out our tunes for bears to dance to, when we long to move the stars to pity". Thus, as Barash (ibid) suggests, perhaps we may consider art as a means of going beyond the "...mundane quotidian, expressions and achievements of daily, functional life".

Perhaps our large brains were first developed out of purely functional reasons, but the way in which they shape our perception and experience of the world is certainly reflected in the way we put them to use. Here art may be viewed as a secondary adaptation, one that like the functional architectural spandrels of San Marco¹³⁵ may be further elaborated and decorated for

¹³⁵ See the article 'The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian paradigm: A critique of the adaptionist paradigm' by Gould and Lewontin (1979).

purely aesthetic reasons¹³⁶. This hypothesis views art as a rather transcendent, if somewhat excessive by-product of purely functional, evolutionary adaptations with little to no value in itself except for providing pleasure. Barash (2012, p156) suggests¹³⁷ a rather plain analogy to clarify this: a motor vehicle is produced to transport persons and things, but in so doing its engine also generates heat. This is why most motor vehicles have complex cooling systems that stop the engine from over-heating. The heat of the engine is a by-product¹³⁸ that, like the spandrels of San Marco, could potentially be put to other uses as well – say as a surface for decoration or even for cooking a pudding wrapped in thick foil during a journey (which I have coincidently seen done by more than one enterprising oddball).

'Man's cloth' by El Anatsui is indeed a by-product of the rather straightforward processes of industrial production, albeit one bent not on satisfying some purely survivalist need - the production of liquor. No matter how rough and tumble things get, getting inebriated is hardly a survival strategy! However for the various employees at the liquor factory having regular work certainly is a question of survival. And, in the subsequent recycling of this industrial detritus Anatsui also provides work for many young assistants whilst making a decent living himself. So in applying the broken kettle hypothesis to a reading of Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' it draws our attention to the struggle for survival in the here and now via the rather functional processes of industrial production and labour, and the forms of elaboration and intoxication at stake in the manufacture of art (which as I have stated before may imply some kinds of transformative, Dionysian state). Moreover, on first encounter, the work literally took 'my breath away'. In my recourse to this tired phrase I empathise with Flaubert's Emma! But, as Barash (ibid) suggests, it is wonderfully incongruous that Flaubert's description of the general shortcomings of language "...is a notable exception of language transcending itself, that is to say, of becoming art". In

¹³⁶ However, as Barash (2012, p154) argues, once such secondary adaptations come into being they are no less subject to various evolutionary pressures than those of survival.

¹³⁷ In actual fact Barash cites the source for this metaphor as the book *The art instinct: beauty, pleasure, & human evolution* by Deniss Dutton (2009, published by Oxford University Press).

¹³⁸ But I think the analogy between art and the motor vehicle somewhat problematic inasmuch as a motor vehicle does not only produce heat, it produces a noise and smoke as well. My point is that we know you should not touch an engine after a long(ish) trip as it will burn your fingers. Without the sound of the engine it is certainly much more difficult to be aware of an approaching vehicle whilst crossing the street. One cannot simply dismiss these by-products as being only useless material effects of the function and indeed the evolution of the motor vehicle itself. But also, clearly these by-products fulfil a function inasmuch as they form a part of the various processes through which certain boundaries are established and maintained. These boundaries could, for example include those between natural resources such as oil and humanity, the way in which traffic is regulated and our movement as a species between various territories, the pollution of the environment and its effect on all life on earth.

¹³⁹ As I suspect does Barash (2012, p154) for he uses exactly the same term in discussing the relative effect of beautiful artworks on individuals.

keeping with this line of thought I would argue that the transcendent element of 'Man's cloth' has little to do with whether or not the work collapses traditional modernist boundaries such as those between painting and sculpture, art and craft as Storr's (2010) analysis in the article 'The shifting shapes of things to come' would suggest. I would rather argue this transcendent element fits rather nicely into a kind of self-referential, almost Nietszchean 'overcoming' of the cliché, the daily Darwinian struggle for survival that we are all subject to. In so doing, the work becomes art.

One might say that the transformation of the bottle cap in Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' draws our attention to the specifics of the experience of surviving, of making and of consuming that remain hidden within a product that is known the world over. For example, upon seeing the work we may well ask, who drank all this liquor and why? How far did these bottle caps travel prior to being found and transformed by the artist? Which boundaries are at stake in the production and consumption of the work? As Anatsui (cited in Vogel 2011) states regarding his use of the found object:

One thing that I have grown into is working with things which have been used before -things which link people together. I don't know about DNA, but if you touch something,
you leave a charge on it and anybody else touching it connects with you in a way - and the
fact that anything that has been used by humans has a history, so those properties I think
help whatever I do to gain some meaning.

There are numerous hidden, meaningful narratives embedded in the production of this work that cannot simply be communicated by recourse to what it 'says' in any straightforward way: like Rodolphe, we may well miss the central point of the conversation, which as Flaubert reminds us, is not that Emma loves Rodolphe, but that she cannot express the particulars of her experience, the depth and complexity of her love for him. As Flaubert makes clear the actual meaning of her declaration of love is not, as Rodolphe thinks, that she is shallow. As much as language, or in this case fairly generic liquor bottle caps connect people of vastly different backgrounds, we are similarly connected by the frustration of having limited means at our disposal to communicate with each other.

In 'Man's cloth' El Anatsui has chosen a fairly well defined medium, liquor bottle caps, as his primary means of communicating with others. This may seem limiting, and yet as I have shown in my own encounter with the work, it is in fact not so. But rather, in Anatsui's ingenious material reconfiguration of these discarded found objects, he has created an extraordinarily

beautiful artwork, the experience of which far exceeds the capacity of language to adequately translate. It is a wondrous occasion when these limited means still manage to beat out a tune that 'moves the stars to pity'. But even more so, if evolution and the forms of self-organization at stake therein, is fundamentally a system that works toward complexity, as Macneilage argues (2008, p9), then we have to consider the valuable contribution that the artwork makes towards producing and furthering such complexity. (This is discussed in more detail in the section 3.3.3 of this dissertation). For clearly whether it concerns poetry, prose, fine arts, song or any form of art really, these means of expression lend depth and complexity to our experience and understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit. Such relative 'depth' will have a knock on effect, altering our future as it organizes and impacts on our ongoing evolution as a species. In this way art is not simply an evolutionary by-product of other, more functional processes and adaptations.

3.3.2 Art and social grooming

In 'Grooming, gossip and the evolution of language' (1999) and 'Why Only humans have language' (2009) Dunbar argues that language evolved to provide a substitute for the ordinary processes of social grooming "...the main mechanism our fellow primates use for bonding social relationships" (Dunbar 2009p14). As Dunbar points out, in nature there exists a limit to the relative size of the social groups that can be maintained without the use of language. Dunbar (ibid) argues that the evolution of language was necessary in order to "...break through this glass ceiling and allows larger groups to evolve". What is important is that Dunbar does not view language as having evolved primarily in order to exchange factual information, i.e. that language has a predominantly instrumental function, but along with Miller (2001) and Deacon (1997)¹⁴⁰ views language as having a largely social function¹⁴¹. As Dunbar (2009, p20) makes clear, cross-cultural analysis supports that idea that ordinary everyday language use is utilized for predominantly social purposes with sixty-five percent of all human conversation aimed at servicing and maintaining social bonds. Thus, by way of analogy, as Barash (2012, p157) argues

¹⁴⁰ See The Symbolic Species: The Coevolution of Language and the Brain by Deacon (1997).

¹⁴¹ Although both Miller and Deacon view the origin of language as being underpinned by the force of sexual selection: in the case of Miller's analysis the function of language is related to courtship, and in the case of Deacon, language is understood as a social contract that prevents mate theft by signalling that someone is quite literally 'spoken for' – a largely symbolic affair.

even if art is produced in solitary it is still "...performed and experienced with others" 142. My point is that art, which is after all very much culturally and not so much factually inclined, may fulfil a similar social function to that of language. The central argument I wish to bring forward here, the origins of art, like language, are not only underpinned by the primordial impulses that originate within the force of sexual selection as Grosz (2008 & 2012) and Miller (2001) suggest. Here Dunbar's analysis (2009) of the relationship between the evolution of language and the complexities of social grooming within larger groups provide a possible way of refining and rethinking the parameters of the debate.

Dunbar (2009, p19) argues that language is a much more effective tool for socialization than other, manual forms of social grooming such as petting, cuddling, stroking, cleaning and so on. In nature there exist a clear correlation between group sizes and the time spent on servicing social bonds via grooming: from detailed observation we know that the highest amount of time spent on social grooming by primates is about twenty percent of total day time. Importantly Dunbar (ibid) states that this percentage does not seem to represent: "...the result of any endogonous limit set by the animal's biology, but is an exogenously determined limit set by competing demands of other core activities (foraging, resting, etc)". As Dunbar (ibid) argues, this sets the limit on social group sizes in primates at about fifty individuals and prevents any further increases beyond that size. But in humans that number is approximately three times higher — with a hundred and fifty being the average number of individuals we know as 'persons' (people with whom one has a personal relationship) (Dunbar 2009, p17). If this is so, it is precisely because language is a much more effective means of social grooming that allows humans to create larger group sizes¹⁴³.

One might given this hypothesis also expect a correlation between group sizes and the relative complexity of the various forms of inter-communication utilised by them. Here Dunbar refers to a well-known study by McComb and Semple (2005) that show exactly that: in the article 'The coevolution of vocal communication and sociality in primates' McComb and Semple (2005) give a detailed analysis showing how in the study of more than forty primate groups, a

¹⁴² Barash' italics

¹⁴³ Moreover, Dunbar's calculations suggest that in expanded human groups the time required by other forms of social grooming is estimated at almost double the amount required by the use of language – a total of thirty-seven percent, suggesting that language is about twice as efficient as other forms of social grooming. In this way language presents a massive evolutionary advantage to the human species: as a technology is highly ergonomic allowing for the creation of larger social groups (which in turn, allows for increased survival, expanded opportunities for procreation and the production of greater variety).

larger vocal repertoire size clearly correlates with larger group size. McComb and Semple (2005 p383) conclude that:

...our findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the vocal communication system may facilitate (or constrain) increases in group size and levels of social bonding within primate social groups. Moreover, they emphasize the key role that vocal communication can play in the evolution of social behaviour.

Similarly, a study by Freeberg (2006) (cited by Dunbar 2009, p20) suggests that in larger flocks of American finches the repertoire and thus complexity of vocal calls was also significantly expanded. Interestingly, Dunbar here notes that one of the ways in which greater complexity of vocal communication is measured is through the level of uncertainty implicit in the act of decoding meaning. That is to say, even within groups of conspecifics, where one would certainly expect a relatively close agreement on the meaning of certain vocalizations, this is not always the case. From this we may deduce that as forms of communication become more complex, it invariably becomes a more complex operation to decipher what exactly is meant by otherwise standard signals. The more complex a means of communication the more it allows for slip-ups, and tiny miscalculations to creep into the exchange of information. Now as much as such uncertainty (and hence complexity) is a well-acknowledged feature of spoken and written

language it is almost certainly pushed to extremes by the vagaries of the interpretation ¹⁴⁴ of the meaning of artworks, even well-known ones ¹⁴⁵.

In 'Mans' cloth' El Anatsui has deliberately chosen to work with a specific material with specific socio-cultural and historic implications readily implicit therein. Moreover, he has done something very specific with these materials, and not just left them at the recycling facility. I think it would be erroneous to suggest that Anatsui is not aware of the fact that his work will have to generate meaningful resonance with a culturally diverse audience, where not only ideas about beauty may differ widely but also knowledge of specific art-making traditions such as the west-African tradition of the making of *Kente* cloth may not have any relevant history. So material forms of self-expression contained in concepts such as 'art', 'cloth'/ 'textiles' are put into some kind of relation with a specific material (a found object – the recycled liquor bottle caps) to communicate the artists intentionality (his goals) to others. I think an argument could be made that the broad remit of the concepts at stake here reflect a broad remit on the part of the artist's goals. But, as I have shown in my discussion of 'Man's cloth' in the first section of this chapter, it is in the exact manner that the artist has chosen to combine these ideas and materials within the artwork that the specifics are patently manifest i.e. exactly how did Anatsui

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¹⁴⁴ As Tomasello et all (2005) show the process of interpretation is beset by all kinds of difficulties, not least of which is that the audience pay attention to only, or at least mostly, to certain material properties of the artwork and not all of them. It is at this point that the line between 'perception' and selective 'attention' becomes blurred but the key point at stake here is the following: artworks are certainly not unmotivated by the kind of goal-directed thinking that underpin intentional behaviour. One of the key ways in which artist manifest their intentionality is through the use of specific materials in their work. As an artist I know this to be true, for I do not simply use materials, or even specific material means of expressing myself (such as painting, drawing, sculpture) without considering exactly how these things may impact on the specific interpretation of the work.

As I have shown throughout this Chapter the interpretation of artworks such as 'Man's Cloth' by El Anatsui raise problems of communicating experience, ones that we may respond to by being more or less creative. I think again of Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary' and how, in dismissing Emma's declaration of love Rodolphe reveals more about his own lack of insightful perception than hers. In keeping with the argument that I have put forward in Chapter 2 of this dissertation where I discussed the haptic qualities of the artwork I think that our experience of sound, paint, the material surface textures of art generally all participate in generating a meaningful encounter with the artwork. But this does not mean that the senses are any less interpretative tools than speaking, writing and generally thinking about the artwork. Perhaps if anything, I would take recourse to the empirical argument here inasmuch as I avidly support the close sensory study of the artwork (its material properties, our material relationship to it) as part of the means through which we reach meaningful interpretations of the work. It might very well be possible that humans utilise such material affects as part of the 'intentional agents' that may help direct their audiences attention to specific meanings at stake in the production of work - see specifically the article 'Understanding and sharing intentions: the origins of cultural cognition' co-authored by Michael Tomasello, Malinda Carpenter, Josep Call, Tanya Behne, and Henrike Moll (2005). In this detailed article the authors suggest that an organism's intentions typically manifest as concrete behavioural action that is observable by others (Tomasello et all 2005, p677). In the same way I would suggest that the close observation of the material properties of the artwork is not some side-product of the creative process, but rather, may be understood as being integral components through which others may come to share in the intentional state of the artist - and hence the meaning of the artwork.

combine these materials and ideas into the singular, how is the work physically made and installed? Once all of this has been done and the work is complete (so to speak), it is up to the audience to tease out those specifics and not just remain stuck on the level of Rodolphe's casual dismissal of the cliché.

In my mind, there can be no doubt that the larger social groups become the more complex forms of expression are required to establish and maintain them, and that art is certainly one such complex form of communication. However as McComb and Semple (2005, p383) make clear, larger vocal repertoire do not only coincide with the requirements of social grooming within larger group size but that "...the vocal repertoire itself may facilitate social bonding in non-human primates". Thus, the element of uncertainty in language as in art may signal a growing complexity of expression that is directly related to the evolution of larger group sizes too. In short such complexity of communication is both an evolutionary cause and effect. When framed in this way, the intentional, social evolutionary role of art seems to me a key feature of artistic practice that remains almost completely neglected in previous studies of the evolutionary role of art.

To conclude this section I would argue that, contrary to Grosz's (2008, p12) confident assertion that all the arts are underpinned by the forces of sexual selection inasmuch as they represent the constitution of a 'sexualised space', I believe that art evolves as a social technology that allows for the formation of larger group sizes too. That said, to my knowledge no clear studies similar to the language-based analyses proffered by Dunbar (1999 & 2009) and McComb and Semple (2005) have been undertaken that clearly show that societies (animal or human) where art plays an important role are generally larger than those where it does not. But a study by Kirschner & Tomassello (2010) does provide key empirical evidence that song actively assists in the formation and maintenance of social groups. In the article 'Joint music making promotes prosocial behaviour in 4-year-old children' Kirschner & Tomassello (2010) show how children that sing together are not only more likely to engage in spontaneous social cooperation but to be more helpful towards one another in subsequent group activities. As they argue it is unlikely that such social behaviour was related to any conscious, rational decision-making process on the part of the participants, but is rather a direct result of intuitive decision-making readily based upon the shared experience of singing together:

Understanding music as a collectively intended activity – with specially designed features that satisfy this human desire to share emotions, experiences and activities with others – might explain why the children in our study felt a stronger commitment after joint music-

making, and so spontaneously helped or cooperated with one another (Kirschner & Tommasello 2010, p362)

The shared participation in song was key to establishing and maintaining social cohesion among the group. The study by Kirschner & Tomassello (2010) provide empirical evidence to suggest that other art forms such as the visual arts, dance, prose and poetry may all perhaps be thought as part of the process of social bonding and grooming ala Dunbar (1999 & 2009).

If we now return to a proposition put forward earlier in section 2.2.2 of this Chapter, that art is a means of generating complexity and boundaries we can see a clear correlation emerging. If as Dunbar (1999, p34) suggests, "...language helps us manage more complex propositional sequences" (such as those ostensibly required by and for the formation of larger group sizes), one might very well ask whether artistic enterprise does not accomplish the same? As Dunbar argues, the shift from coupling specific word-forms with specific referential and symbolic concepts such as 'house' to the point of making the following propositional statement "I believe that this is the house that Jack built which is made of straw" represents a massive evolutionary shift in complexity of thought and group communication. The latter proposition shows clear signs of recursive thought generally required for the establishment and maintenance of larger group sizes (and intentional thinking) i.e. implicit in this proposition is a clear sense of the specific relationships between individuals (lack and myself), of property relations (lacks' house), of propositional thought (I believe), of referentiality (this house and not any old house), of indexicality (the concept of house as a general category to which this particular structure belongs) and so forth. Perhaps one may ponder such incredible complexity of communication in relation to the artwork specifically at stake here, 'Man's cloth' by El Anatsui. Here the artist has recycled used liquor bottle caps and plied them together to create something beautiful that resembles a huge cloth (even as it refutes that very status). This game is as much visual as it is conceptual and I certainly hope that this essay gives some indication of the complexity of this wonderful artwork.

3.4. Art by night play by day?

To conclude this chapter I wish to briefly return to Grosz's (2008 & 2012) and Miller's (2001) respective hypothesis that art is in an important sense underpinned by the forces of sexual selection. As I show in my analyses I believe this is partially true. However if this is so it is most likely because art, as with language, is an evolutionary adaptation primarily bent upon the

creation and maintenance of social groups (within which sexual selection obviously plays an important role). It is easy enough to see this at work in the way in which ideas about what is beautiful and pleasurable feature prominently within the formation of distinct groups of people the world over. So against the rather one-sided reading of the age old adage that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and thus a form of perception that divides rather than bonds, I would suggest it is both: various forms of music, fine art, dance, sexual behaviour are not only indicative of the taste of individuals but actively contribute to the formation of distinct social groups. For, as Darwin's analyses shows, whether one likes it or not, the idea of taste is not bound to what is good, or 'authentic' in this case, but to what a group of people (or species/ sub-species) find beautiful, both sensually and mentally stimulating, desirable and pleasurable.

The bond created by shared taste (or perhaps rather the shared perception of beauty) is incredibly strong, sometimes coinciding with and sometimes superseding that of nationality, race, sexuality, class and politics. Of course, taste is in itself a political declaration. Simply put cultural activities such as attending music concerts, art fairs and poetry readings all signal not only the existence of distinct ideals of beauty (i.e. taste) but also the existence of peer groups that share in that predisposition. The example of the activities of the 'Stagemaker Bowerbird' cited earlier by Deleuze and Guattari, (1980/ 2004, p184) could be conceived of in this exact same way: by building such an elaborate stage the bird is certainly looking for a partner, but perhaps more specifically, for one that shares their particular aesthetic taste. (This perhaps against the idea that males are 'forceful' and females are 'choosy')146. Broadly speaking this search for a suitable, like-minded partner through such aesthetic means would primarily 147 appeal to birds of its species, but such taste may subdivide the species again, serving as a reflection of the aesthetic ideals that predominate within the inhabitants of a specific region and then to that of specific individuals of the group. Not all female bowerbirds will find the performance attractive and the guest is to find the one that does. When all these factors do not coincide courtship does not take place 148. For what is courtship if not the act of producing distinct social groups too? To be sure, courtship is always driven by the survival of the species, but as Dunbar's (1999 & 2009) analyses shows, the formation of distinct social groups is an integral, adaptive part of the strenuous demands placed on the species by the natural environment. Simply put, group formation, like procreation, is a survival strategy. If art is one of

¹⁴⁶ See the article by Bro-Jorgensen (2010) in which he also studies female aggressive behavior in antelope – behavior that clearly gainsay this biased approach to the relationship between the sexes.

Though not exclusively – humans find the feather of the peacock beautiful too.

Here it is not simply a case of 'stronger is better', as with most courtship battles fought between rival males.

the means in which group formation is accomplished, it is not a marginal, useless activity, but one that has an active role to play in our very survival as a species¹⁴⁹.

To conclude I want to reformulate a rather poetic metaphor put forward by Miller (2001) to unify these ideas. Miller argues that art, and indeed the mind, evolves largely by the 'darkness of night'. Miller (2001, p7) formulates this hypothesis in relation to his own area of expertise as follows:

Where others thought about the survival problems our ancestors faced during the day, I wanted to think about the courtship problems they faced at night. In poetic terms, I wondered whether the mind evolved by moonlight. Evolutionary psychology must become less Puritan and more Dionysian

Especially where it concerns 'Man's cloth' by Anatsui I find this a particularly apt metaphor: in this art work we seem to have a connection between the forces of intoxication, sexual pleasure and excess put into concrete relationship with the 'clarity' of day (or 'purity' as Miller somewhat ironically calls it — as if nothing questionable ever happens during the day!). The activities and distinct material properties of the day and the night both seem to be at work here: in this artwork Anatsui's uses liquor bottle caps to create a highly visible, field of colour and light. There can be little doubt that the consumption of alcohol is an activity most commonly associated with the activity of socializing at night. Bars and nightclubs are places of social interaction and courtship and, for better or for worse alcohol is a means of facilitating this. So

 $^{^{149}}$ The example of golwani is perhaps an interesting case in point here unifying as it does, particular aesthetic ideals with the act of courtship and the complex display of socio-cultural bonds and affiliations. Perhaps contemporary visual artists are the same, inasmuch as they produce specific work that appeal to very specific aesthetic ideals that both assist in and circumscribe the formation of specific social groups. True, owing to the ease of global communication and travel, today artists may find peer groups the world over and they are no longer confined only to their immediate conspecifics. But the central idea is that the arts still service and maintain community bonds even as the specifics of their aesthetic activities become somewhat obscured by its ever-evolving complexity. We have to account for such ever-evolving complexity and I think the social grooming hypotheses does just that: it posits a more encompassing sense of intentionality at the core of artistic practice, one not encumbered by some kind of 'purist uselessness' as with the sexual selection hypotheses. As Tomassello et al (2005, 675) argue: ...collective activities and practices are often structured by shared symbolic artefacts, such as linguistic symbols and social institutions, facilitating their "transmission" across generations in ways that ratchet them up in complexity over historical time. Indeed, material and symbolic artefacts of all kinds, including even complex social institutions, are in an important sense intentionally constituted". As this analysis shows intentionality (which lies at the heart of all goal-directed behaviour) is hardly an easy matter. I do not have sufficient time here to fully elaborate the details of Tommasello's findings but will say that it shows how, with the increasing demands on communication technologies (such as language) by goal directed behaviour, we have to seek increasingly complex means of formulating and communicating ideas to others. I would suggest that whether it concerns the aesthetic use of language in poetry, of bodily gesture in dance, the production of visual forms or, and indeed any and all combinations of these means, artistic expression is one such complex, evolved technology of communication. (Besides, as I have argued earlier in this chapter artists do not make work for the purity of self-expression, but often because the have specific goals in mind).

the bottle cap here may be understood as a metaphor of human sociality, of the sometimes-public, sometimes-secret joys and pleasures that derive from it. And yet, because Anatsui combines these bottle caps in a particular way, he generates a larger single entity, an artwork, that unlike the more clandestine activities of the night is highly visible and public. But here is the thing, this seemingly single material surface seduces us and draws us closer. And so we are lead to discover not only that the work is made from recycled detritus of the night (the bottle caps), but to do so by way of making a series of cerebral leaps and jumps that delight and confuse almost in equal measure: we read the labels, we scrutinize and analyse the relationship between the form from up close and from a distance. Here the analytical processes of the mind and the desirous body are unified into a single process that is the interpretation of the artwork. Perhaps this is why I find it so puzzling that thus far there has been so little talk about the relationship between the liquor bottle caps, sex and sociality in Anatsui's 'cloth' series (of which 'Mans cloth' forms only but one example)? In the reading I put forward here Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' allows us a rare glimpse into the relationship between the perception of beauty and the process of human socialization, intoxication and sex.

I would agree with Miller there is the uncertainty of the night, of its allure and the beauty of its darkness as distinct from the bright certainty of day. But where I would expand Miller's metaphor is that the activities of the night leave its traces by day - like little children that run around the village causing delight and consternation in equal measure. They are the future of the social group even if their behaviour may threaten to unravel it. (It is after all a rather universal lament that the social activities of children, their likes and dislikes do not match our own!). But the point is these children are not solely the product of the night, inasmuch as they represent the fulcrum of nightly human courtship. We have to remember that it is by the light of day that we define what we find beautiful and thus how we know that we want to at night. In this way boundaries are put into play by day and consummated at night — tonight I will share my bed with this person, because for whatever reason, whenever I see them in the clear light of day I find them very beautiful. Perhaps then somewhat poetically Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' could be likened to the moon that illuminates our courtship rituals and our more clandestine, social interactions. Besides, the moon only shines brightly because it continuously reflects the rays of the sun.

Chapter 4. The strange graveyard: Willem Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 -) as a material apparatus

4.1 Bottle, bone and ashes

A graveyard. That's it. Willem Boshoff is speaking at the Tate Modern¹⁵⁰ when he mentions in passing the relationship between the visual appearance of a graveyard and 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing)¹⁵¹. My mind immediately latches onto it and I furiously jot down some quick thoughts. On the surface it appears to be the kind of offhand observation that artists often make about their work and the art-public rarely take too seriously. In this case, one might add that on the surface graveyards are morbid places far removed from the world of the living (such as the audience gathered at the Tate in order to hear one of South Africa's foremost conceptual artists speak about his life's work). Moreover, as Paul Koudounaris, the author of *The empire of death: a cultural history of ossuaries and charnel houses* (2011) argues, the physical presence of death has all but been banished from everyday contemporary western life - a banishment of form that is reflected in the relative absence of any serious acknowledgement of the material reality of death in popular western culture. The graveyard reference barely draws a nod from the audience and when its time for questions no-one raises it again. One might say it has disappeared from view.

Today, in societies like those of contemporary South Africa and Britain, people commonly place their deceased relatives and friends in closed caskets and bury them six feet deep in graveyards. Sometimes bodies are cremated and the ashes collected in urns. I have not seen an urn in someone's house in a very long time but I still remember clumsily trying to shove my friend's ashes into a whiskey bottle. What a mess. Eventually his girlfriend of sorts at the time, Heidi, somehow succeeded. That is how on the 7th of April 1997, a week before his birthday, we dispatched my best friend, Werner into the lukewarm waters of ocean.

Werner was a diver and a drinker and somehow it seemed fitting. He loved diving but died a drunken driver. After the church service in Pretoria, a small group of family and close friends took his remains out to his favourite diving spot about three to four kilometres off the coast of Sodwana Bay on northeast coast of Southern Africa. We said a prayer and then cast his remains into the ocean.

¹⁵¹ This is an ongoing artwork: being a veritable dictionary for the blind it will most likely never be completed.

¹⁵⁰ This public talk was held on Monday, 14 May 2012, 19.00 – 20.30 at the Tate Modern in London.



Figure 20: 'Blind Alphabet' (1991-), Willem Boshoff. Three hundred and eight wooden sculptures in metal wire baskets, with Braille text on aluminum, cloth and steel bases (with a collective height of 73.5cm). (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p54). The work is shown here as installed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. In this photograph the lids of the steel boxes are partially opened to reveal the contents of each. Importantly this is not how the work is exhibited, as the boxes are kept closed until such a time as a blind person opens them.

I still think about the piece of bone that got stuck in the neck of the whiskey bottle that day - this despite the fact that back at home, some six hundred kilometres away in Pretoria, Heidi had already used a sieve to remove the larger pieces of bone from the ashes (at which point I withdrew from the process as I simply could not sift the remains of my best friend like a bit of soil). No one aboard the dual engine rubber duck - a plastic boat - wanted to throw the bottle into the ocean as it would pollute the sea. But we really did not want take the remaining bits of him back to shore. A vigorous, though rather undignified struggle with the contents of the bottle ensued.

It was a rather practical problem at a most inopportune moment: the bottle simply was not a suitable tool to dispense ashes into the sea, with the relationship between the precise rounding

of its neck and the solid weight of its somewhat compressed, grey contents making a mockery of an otherwise, gentle heartfelt gesture. In the ensuing chaos someone (I think Heidi though this is difficult to remember) finally stuck a finger into the neck of bottle to remove the offending bit of bone. Suddenly the rest contents of the bottle just came flooding out. About half of Werner's ashes made it to sea with the rest either floating away in a cloud of grey smoke and/or ending up inside all over the boat and its eleven dismayed occupants. Oddly, more than any other detail of the day's proceedings, I remember the physical struggle between the bottle, the ashes and the sad group family and friends aboard the boat. If Werner had simply been buried none of this would have happened but then the sensual, material specificity of the event including the difficulty with the whiskey bottle, the texture, smell and feel of the ashes and bits of bone, the slight windy breeze and the ebb and flow of the water that gently rocked the boat during our little ceremony, would all be naught today.

In contrast to this, I remember how we buried Alex, my other best friend that also passed away during the same vehicle accident. As a point of order, even though he was the driver, I certainly never thought Werner was to blame for Alex's death. For one thing, when they left the party that night both of them were far over the legal limit. The two of them loved drinking and without wishing too sound harsh, they had the gene (we buried Werner's wonderfully eccentric but total alcoholic of a father the year before and Alex's mother, a once local beauty queen, was but a shadow of her former self). Besides they crashed into a rather unlikely tree next to the University of Pretoria: no amount of reasoning post the fact could explain why both of them had somehow neglected to spot the oncoming problem. They simply weren't that drunk. In the weeks that followed I visited that site a great many times to try and make some sense of a rather senseless event. Somehow they had veered off the road and crashed headlong into a lone, but massive palm tree sprouting from an otherwise deserted patch of land beside the pavement on Lynwood Street. A palm tree in Pretoria.

The fact is that both of them died together - instantly according to the coroner's report. Their funerals took place in close proximity to one another and it was very difficult to say exactly which of the two of them, Alex or Werner, the many people that had gathered at each service were in fact mourning. But for the two families wanted decidedly different things and so we had two funerals. Alex's funeral was a more traditional Dutch Reformed Church ceremony in Pretoria East: first a formal sermon, some church hymns, a few friends and family members eulogies, followed by a standard burial in a plot in Pretoria East. Personally I am not ashamed to say that I cried for them both at Alex's grave. This was followed by a smaller reception for close

family and friends in a hall hired specifically for the occasion. I think they served soup, bread, some *biltong* (dried meat), an assortment of cold cuts and fruit juices. There was no cash bar. The hall was located close to the city centre in an area called Arcadia. It looked a bit past its prime as if it had seen one to many a twenty-first celebration go well beyond the limits of decency. It felt drab and I remember thinking Alex would have enjoyed a sunny barbeque more.

For a very long time I felt guilty about Alex's death. I simply forgot about it. True, at the time Werner and I were closer friends, but that really does not explain why the year after, I tried to phone Alex for his birthday. In some important way Alex's death remains invisible in my day-to-day life, something I became acutely aware of when a few years later I visited his grave for the first time. During this visit I first realised that I actually have to physically visit Alex's grave to think him dead. It is as if the fact of Alex' death is contingent upon fact of the graveyard, the slab of marble and neat little headstone upon which his short life is briefly summarized. But Werner is decidedly dead, everyday and everywhere - as if in physically struggling with his remains and casting him out sea, the loss of him was materially written into my very being and my ongoing performance as part of the world of the living.

Today I would argue that these two funerals are not simply two different methods of doing more or less the same thing, but rather the materialization of two entirely distinct phenomena. In short, where it concerns my experience thereof, the way in which I live the fact of their death if you like, both Werner and Alex are dead but in decidedly different ways. Alex's body was placed in a coffin and buried six feet deep. I never touched the remains of his body though I remember the weight of it briefly resting on my shoulder as I fulfilled my duty as pallbearer. Owing to the precise manner of Werner's burial, the broad range of sensory and material conditions that went into the preparations for the ceremony, Werner's death is not firstly a visual phenomenon to me: his is not a disappearance from my 'world-view', but rather something like a grafting of his passing onto my skin, my nostrils, hands and indeed my mind. By touching, smelling and handling his ashes the process of his 're-materialization' into another form was made readily apparent to me. Werner became something else to me when he died, Alex just vanished.

Suffice to say, I miss them equally but struggle to shake the fact of Werner's passing more. Alex's death doesn't intrude on my daily life. I suspect this is because my hands, nose and mouth don't remind me of him as part of their ordinary everyday workings. The last time I saw Alex he simply looked like he was sleeping (the mortician had done a particularly good job of restoring

his former likeness – heaven knows where they found a picture of him not grinning like an idiot). I cannot see either of them anymore but somehow, in getting so intimately, physically familiar with Werner's remains, his death is a more immediate, embodied and indeed intimate sensation.

The larger point here is that a funeral, including the precise physical manner in which we deal with the body of the deceased, may be viewed as part of a material apparatus through which different forms of being 'dead' are performatively enacted in the world of the living. In this particular instance, this matters not least of all because I love(d) my two friends dearly, but because I deal with the reality of their death in decidedly different ways.

4.2 Willem Bohsoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 -): 'heterotopic seeing' and the 'apparatus'

If you are reading this you are doubly blessed: you are both sighted and literate. (You are also proficient in English, but that may be a mixed blessing). You have been reading for so long, you cannot imagine not having the skill. Open a book in Braille and run your fingertips over a page. This gives you an inkling of what it must feel like to be illiterate. Enter a room where the 'Blind Alphabet' is displayed. This is what an illiterate person must feel like confronting a library.

From the essay 'Willem Boshoff: a tactile literature' by Ivan Vladislavic (Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p54)

In what follows I will discuss the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff as a material apparatus. In order to do so I will outline the notion of the 'material apparatus' as put forward by Karen Barad in the book Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning (2007). The apparatus stands central to Barad's feminist, post-human account of the manner in which distinct phenomena 'intra-actively' emerge through a dynamic, performative process of materially enacted relationships. Here Barad (2007, p32) uses the term 'intra-action' 152 to signal the "...mutual constitution of entangled agencies". It is through the mutual interworking of such 'entangled' agential relationship that distinct forms of agency emerge. In this way Barad views the appearance of singular 'phenomena', such as the

performative, material enactment of such boundaries

For Barad (2007, p32-33) the notion of 'interaction' may still signal the existence of distinct phenomena prior to their mutual intra-action. For example, one may think of a subject and an object, such as a viewer and an artwork, as being well-defined entities that only momentarily come together when the viewer interacts with the artwork in the context of a gallery, for example. Here the notion of 'intra-action' is thus in stark contrast to a Newtonian, humanist view in which discrete entities replete with determinate properties somehow pre-exist the

viewer, the artwork and the gallery as signalling "...the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies" (Barad 2007, p206). Here the material apparatus plays a defining role: for Barad matter is not an innate property of things but a property attributed to objects by way of the use of a specific material apparatus (such as a microscope, an art gallery or even an artwork in this particular case).

As Barad's (2007, p97-121 & p141-146) extensive analyses of the material relationship between the observer, the apparatus and the phenomena under investigation shows, the instrumental role of the apparatus cannot be underestimated: by way of its precise material workings the apparatus enacts an agential cut into the 'entangled whole' through which agential relationships are defined such that a number of discrete, meaningful entities emerge. In an interview entitled 'Posthuman performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter' (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2003, p816) Barad summarises her approach towards the apparatus in the following way:

...apparatuses are not mere static arrangements in the world, but rather apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted. Apparatuses have no inherent 'outside' boundary. This indeterminacy of the 'outside' boundary represents the impossibility of closure - the ongoing intra-activity in the iterative reconfiguring of the apparatus of bodily production. Apparatuses are open-ended practices.

Importantly there is no inherent 'outside' to the apparatus although it is co-constitutive of a boundary. Apparatuses are 'material practices' that enact agential relationships and not simply objects to be used¹⁵³. This might seem very confusing but an example from the realm of art may help clarify the argument. The gallery may be thought an apparatus through which locally enacted phenomena, such as 'viewers' and 'artworks' emerge as relational entities¹⁵⁴. In this way the viewer of an artwork is not a 'viewer' until they enter into a specific material relationship with the 'artwork' inside the 'art gallery' (where the latter is understood as an apparatus). Here

¹⁵³ Thus, to where an apparatus is understood purely as an object its boundaries are constituted by another apparatus. See p15 - 17 in Chapter 4.2.2 of this dissertation for further clarification of this point.

¹⁵⁴ We may therefore differentiate between various kinds of 'viewers' that emerge through the specifics of a particular situation: the viewer of an artwork, the viewer of a film, the viewer of a sexual act (a voyeur), the viewer of wildlife on safari, are all decidedly different kinds of 'viewers'. Thus the concept of a viewer is in itself relational emerging as it does from the specific material apparatus at work in any given situation: the film theatre is an apparatus as much as the pomographic cubicle or even the wildlife safari drive. Moreover the objects at stake in each of these situations (the 'wild' animals, the film, the naked, fleshy body of human performers and so forth) emerge as distinct phenomena through the enactment of boundaries by way of the workings of the apparatus.

the gallery does not simply fulfil the function of being a place in which individuals may encounter artworks. But rather through its very structure, (including the rules of engagement and material conditions implicit therein) the gallery-as-apparatus enacts a set of agential relations such that 'viewers' and 'artworks' emerge as locally enacted phenomena. Thus the gallery, the artwork and the viewer are all co-constitutive of one another despite the fact that one might not commonly assume this to be the case: after all, under most ordinary circumstances one might think that a 'person' goes to an 'art gallery' to look at 'artworks' - as if these seemingly well-defined entities somehow pre-exist their mutual intra-action. Barad's analyses (2002 & 2007) suggest that this is not the case and that we need to pay attention to the particular manner in which, how in conjunction with the audience, the art-gallery as apparatus enacts agential relationships through and by which viewers and artworks are intra-actively materialized.

Following Barad's (2002 & 2007) analyses, I will argue that highly particular aspects of artwork and of the viewer are rendered determinate by the entirety of the material arrangement at work in the art gallery. For example, in the case of the art gallery, we may be fairly certain that the primary sensory means through which viewers encounter artworks is that of sight. That is to say the art gallery-as-apparatus fulfils its institutional (and indeed instrumental function) by tacitly giving primacy to visual phenomena. Let me rephrase this statement slightly: art galleries are mostly, though not exclusively¹⁵⁵, spaces where *sighted* viewers encounter *visual* artworks. But even more so, it is for a sighted person such as myself nearly impossible to conceive of the very notion of the artwork without implicitly thinking it a visual object. In this way it could be argued that the very language of art, of one's encounter with a work of art and one's meaningful interpretation thereof, all pay homage to the salient fact of its visual orientation: terms such as 'colour', 'form', 'line', 'texture', 'contrast', 'composition', 'subject matter' and indeed all other pictorial considerations including the use of the written word as part of the artwork continuously honour this breach. Certainly there can be no arguing that these terms may be applied non-visually, say to the properties of sound, and nor that other sensory means of

¹⁵⁵ Certainly there are contemporary art-forms sound art and installation art that often challenge this bias toward the visual. Besides, one cannot really adequately consider examples of sound art and installation art from the sensory perspective of the visual only. As Don Goddard argued in the catalogue for 'Sound/Art'" at The Sculpture Center, New York City, May I–30, 1983 and BACA/DCC Gallery June I–30, 1983: "It may be that sound art adheres to curator Hellermann's perception that 'hearing is another form of seeing,' that sound has meaning only when its connection with an image is understood... The conjunction of sound and image insists on the engagement of the viewer, forcing participation in real space and concrete, responsive thought rather than illusionary space and thought' Today the works of Yoko Ono, Janet Cardiff, Christian Marclay and the South African artist James Webb, may all be cited as examples of contemporary sound art.

interpretation such as smell or touch may not be as important as that of sight in the appreciation of the artwork. But I say this fully understanding that this is mostly not the case, and that, if I am inclined to occasionally smell a painting, or touch a sculpture when a security guard is not looking, this is in no small part due to my encounter with the Willem Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing).

4.2.1 Challenging the sighted norm

This brings me to a seminal point in this chapter. Barad (2007, p158) argues the specific ideological, material workings of the apparatus often remain obscured by the seeming fact of the accepted, normative relationships that tacitly support it. Thus, a sighted person such as myself may well visit, celebrate, take pleasure in and indeed revel in the complexities of interpretation of artworks without ever realising that the blind are implicitly excluded from this conversation. Fortunately art galleries do occasionally play host to artworks like the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff that challenge this sighted norm. Here then I will argue that the 'Blind Alphabet' functions as 'material apparatus' that, in turn, challenge the normative, workings of the art gallery by revealing the shortcomings of sight as the primary, often sole means of meaningfully encountering and interpreting the artwork.

Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' imposes a series of materially enacted boundaries that operate both in conjunction and contradistinction to those of the art gallery. For example, exactly because the 'Blind Alphabet' is an artwork made for the blind, the material forms that it utilizes privilege the sense of touch, and not sight, as the means of primary communication. Accordingly the material shape of the work, including its formal arrangement within the gallery and the individual components that form part of the work, all tacitly acknowledge the blind viewer as its primary audience. As Vladislavic (2005, p54) argues, through its workings as a tactile dictionary for the blind the ordinary (read 'sighted) viewer of art, is transformed into an illiterate stuck in front of a vast library, one to which they have no access whatsoever. The library metaphor is important, for the material workings of language remains integral to the 'Blind Alphabet', with the notion of the viewer and the reader becoming semi-interchangeable. Thus the blind may 'see' the artwork by utilising both the Braille texts and the objects that form a part of it, a process through which complex dictionary terms are given palpable form. (This will be further clarified throughout the description of the artwork in Section 4.2 of this text). The 'Blind Alphabet' thus forcibly interrupts and indeed questions the presuppositions upon which the practice, interpretation of

contemporary art as a 'visual' phenomena (replete with a corresponding, sensorially-biased vocabulary) are largely premised — one of which is that idea that the foremost experts in fine art are indeed sighted, able-bodied viewers. Furthermore, I will also argue that, if this somewhat deconstructive 'turning of the tables' presented the entirety of the work, I would still not consider it an artwork.

As an extension to the question of what the 'Blind Alphabet' as material-apparatus does I will argue that it generates a heterotopic space in which 'normal' human bodies are, in their overt and deeply set reliance upon the sense of sight, shown to be 'disabled' in some important ways. That is to say, in the 'Blind Alphabet' the very notion of 'seeing' is methodically re-routed into a kind of multi-sensory, heterotopic language based upon the material mechanics of touch, social interaction and physical intimacy that often seem to be neglected in the encounter with and interpretation of artworks. In this sense it will be shown that the 'Blind Alphabet' must be understood not as an object, but as a 'material practice' that, even as it foregrounds the ideological workings of the art gallery-as-apparatus, investigates and materializes other objects, concepts and the meaningful sensory relationships inherent in them. In so doing, the material workings of the 'Blind Alphabet' also show the sighted viewer how a more complete bodily, sensory intra-action with the artwork may uncover hidden meanings, concepts and pleasures that, much like the contents of a graveyard commonly remain marginalised and indeed hidden from view.

I must now briefly clarify the relationship between the notion of a heterotopic space and the graveyard.

4.2.2 The heterotopic space

Central to my analyses of the affective, sensory, poetic and material workings of Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' is the idea that it generates what Foucault (1967, unpaginated) terms a 'heterotopic space'. For Foucault (ibid) heterotopic spaces may be defined as:

...counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.

Importantly, and in keeping with Boshoff's assertion that the 'Blind Alphabet' be understood as a graveyard, Foucault identifies the cemetery as a 'heterotopic' space. Here I will utilize Foucault's analysis to help illuminate the more poetic, sensory, affective and conceptual workings of the 'Blind Alphabet' (which after all is an artwork, and not simply a machine somewhat mischievously placed within the confines of the shop-floor). Plainly put, just because an artwork may be thought an apparatus does not mean to imply that its poetic, affective workings are buried beneath the more functional, instrumental values that such a reading implies. But, rather, in reading the 'Blind Alphabet' as graveyard, the relationship between the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the centre and the margin so poignantly at stake therein are, in turn, figured as a palpable moment of loss and longing - one that stands central to the material, sensory workings of the artwork: we visit the graves of loved ones because we wish to be closer to them, to remember them more clearly and pay our respects. We long for their physical presence, the touch, the smell of their bodies, the sound of their voices, their friendship and company and love. And, as Bataille shows in Eroticism: sensuality and death (1957/2001), in doing so we also acknowledge the existence of continuity between ourselves as sensing, living, reproducing beings and death. Perhaps, this is where we move closer again to the notion of 'intra-action', as the ongoing material process of change and transformation within which distinctions such as those between the living and the dead are always only momentarily and relationally enacted. As Barad (2002 & 2007) might argue, we are always a veritable part of the phenomenon we seek to describe. 156

Perhaps our various descriptions of death say as much about the inevitable material reality of death as about our particular cultural value systems and the exact material manner in which we come to experience and have firsthand knowledge thereof. But in a more scholarly sense, Barad's (2002, 2007) analysis shows that to have an adequate understanding of the very material properties of the phenomena under investigation, we have to take account of the entirety of the material arrangement, including our physical presence as part of the agencies of observation through which particular properties of phenomena under investigation are

¹⁵⁶ Barad discusses the findings of the experiments regarding the complexities of measurement by the physicist Niels Bohr and states that: "We are part of the nature that we seek to understand" (Bohr cited in Barad 2007, p67). This insight is both implicit in and applied by Bohr's subsequent reformulation of the concept of 'complimentarity' in relation to the field of quantum physics. For a broader understanding of the principle of complementarity by Bohr, as well as the way it has been utilized subsequently in the field of quantum science, see the paper 'Complementarity and paraconsistency' by da Costa & Krause 2001. Here Bohr (quoted from da Costa & Krause 2001, p4) defines the principle of complementarity as: "The phenomenon by which, in the atomic domain, objects exhibit the properties of both particle and waves, which in classical, macro-scopic physics are mutually exclusive categories".

materialized: we cannot neatly separate ourselves, the physical presence of our bodies and their precise sensory workings, from the workings of the apparatus and its findings.

Before I proceed with the discussion of the artwork I wish to first define the concepts of the 'material apparatus' and the 'heterotopic' clearly.

4.2.3 Materiality and the heterotopic: the sensory and spatial

In this section I wish to briefly expand upon a material reading of the 'heterotopic'. Here it will be argued that where it concerns the blind, the use of the hands as organs of sight may be thought a 'heterotopic' phenomenon not only in its evolutionary, adaptive sense but also as part of the appearance of a space that may contest the hegemony of the sighted norm.

From an etymological perspective the term 'heterotopic' derives from the Greek term 'heteros' meaning 'the other of the two' (though the prefix 'hetero' is frequently used simply to imply a sense of 'other' or 'different' as well), and from 'topos' meaning 'place'. In biology and medicine the term 'heterotopic' is often applied the presence of an organ or other tissue at a site where it is not normally found, such as a 'heterotopic' pregnancy. A heterotopic pregnancy is an extremely rare condition defined as the coexistence of intra-uterine and extra-uterine gestation, in other words, the existence of twins with one pregnancy attached inside the uterus and the other outside it in the fallopian tube, for example. (As point of fact, the related condition of an 'ectopic pregnancy' is used to refer to the foetus growing within the fallopian tube).

Returning then to the sensory relation between the blind and the sighted at stake in Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet', one may well argue that seeing 'heterotypically' is defined as seeing with your hands - as the blind commonly do. Here the customary organ of sight (the eyes and their corresponding function) has, perhaps despite the lingering physical presence of the eyes as part of the body, now appeared as part of the ordinary function of another sensory apparatus. For example, the blind may 'see' the world through their hands. In this way their sense of sight is thus not metaphorically operating from elsewhere, but virtually forms part of the tactile, sensory workings of their fingertips. In short, for the blind the hands do not function as 'if they were eyes' but are their eyes. Perhaps we should accordingly also consider that the heterotopic transformation of touching-into-seeing occurs in response to the workings of the body and the manner in which it relates to its environment. Put simply, if one is born blind then you learn to see the world by using your hands (though the other senses also play an important role). One

might say that during the developmental phase of childhood the blind person works toward becoming something like a viable adult, one that can sensibly discover and negotiate their place within the world.

This introduces a form of 'phenotype plasticity' into the debate, one which as West-Eberhard (2003) shows in *Developmental plasticity and evolution*, is vital to understanding the material relationship between the genetic evolution of an organism and its sometimes rapidly changing cultural/natural environment. West-Eberhard (2003, p34) defines phenotype plasticity as "...the ability of an organism to react to an environmental input with a change in form, state, movement, or rate of activity". The concept of the phenotype was first articulated by Wilhelm Johansen¹⁵⁷ in the early twentieth century and is used to refer to an organism that is distinguishable from others of the same species by its observable features. For example the individual shells of a single mollusc species may contain great variations of pattern and colour. Today the phenotype is simply defined as "...the sum of the attributes of an individual, regarded as resulting from the interaction of its genotype with its environment" (SOED 2007). In turn the 'genotype' is the inherited genetic instructions that all genes carry within them. Thus, as the extensive analyses of West-Eberhard (2003) clearly illustrate, owing to environmental input, genes of the same kind may express themselves differently, rapidly taking on novel forms and different functions.

I broach this subject here because it counters the dualistic understanding of heterotopic phenomenon such as may be gleaned only through the example of the heterotopic pregnancy — where one foetus invariably exists in some well-defined, normative relation to another other. Perhaps in a manner analogous to the notion of 'heterosexuality' where the often-biased distinction between the male and female of a species is upheld, the ectopic foetus may be understood as being 'outside' the womb, a deviation from the norm. But as West-Eberhard (2003) argues, groups of the same organisms may display vastly different adaptive responses to environmental factors and the challenges these invariably pose to its own form and behaviour - thus also accounting for the appearance of novel features and novel uses of existing character traits within the same species. In section 14 entitled 'Heterotopy' West-Eberhard (2003, p255 - 259) links phenotype plasticity with the concept of heterotopy by defining it as "...evolutionary change in the location of trait expression" (West-Eberhard 2003, p255). For example, in a

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¹⁵⁷ The article 'The genotype conception of heredity' by Johannsen was first published in 1911 in the American Naturalist Vol 45: 129–159.

process closely resembling that of the manner in which the blind see with their hands, sometimes the leaves of a plant may, during its ontogenetic development, migrate to other parts of the stem and take on new but otherwise necessary functions. Genes compensate for - and adapt to - environmental factors.

Most interestingly for my purposes West-Eberhard (2003, p51-54) uses the example of 'Slijpers goat' - a congenitally two-legged goat that somehow learnt to walk using its hind legs only. West-Eberhard describes the case as follows:

A domestic goat born without forelegs adopted a semi-upright posture and bipedal locomotion from the time of its birth. By the time it died due to an accident (sic)¹⁵⁹ at the age of one year, it had developed several behavioural and morphological specializations similar to those of kangaroos and other bipedal animals, including the ability to hop rapidly when disturbed, enlarged hind legs, a curved spine, and an unusually large neck...Postmortem dissections of the two-legged goat revealed profound changes in the skeleton and muscle insertions compared to a normal goat of the same age...

West-Eberhard here uses the example in order to illustrate how a dramatic change in one phenotype (the forelegs) may quickly¹⁶⁰ lead to adaptations in other parts of the body. Might one not also consider the use of touch by the blind in the same manner? Such a variation (in the re-organization of individual parts of the body and their function) may be considered heterotopic phenomena thus signalling a more positive, material understanding of the ideas at stake here. Certainly one may also need to consider how recent research in the field of neuroscience has shown that the loss of one sense such as sight or hearing is actively compensated for by the adapted and sometimes enhanced functionality of another. But in keeping with the idea of phenotype plasticity, as Ramachandran (1998, 1999, 2008, 2012) has shown, in the case of the phantom limb syndrome, what is stake is not pain resulting from the loss of existing sensory input (i.e. where the nerve endings have been damaged in the process of losing the limb), but rather that the brain is still actively looking for the same sensory input once received from the body part in question. As Ramachandran suggests in the recent book *The tell tale brain: a neuroscientist's quest for what makes us human* (2012) this may lead to the

¹⁵⁸ The original case study was presented by Slijper as an article entitled 'Biologic-anatomical Investigations on the Bipedal Gait and Upright Posture in Mammals, with Special Reference to a Little Goat, born without Forelegs' in 1947

¹⁵⁹ This is not true, actually the goat was euthanized by Slijper (see Slijper 1942).

¹⁶⁰ As opposed to the standard view of Darwinian evolution by natural selection in which such changes appear gradually, slowly transmitted through successive generations.

adapted functionality of the neurons in question, with alternate and sometimes bizarre remappings of sensory input in the brain – the experience of synaesthesia being as good a case example as that of phantom limb syndrome, both discussed by Ramachandran. Regardless, using West-Eberhard's and Ramachandran's respective analyses as support, I would venture that the remapping of sensory input in the brain may lead to wholly different, though not necessarily 'illusory', forms of sensory experience as well ('illusory' as in the examples of phantom limb and synaesthesia cited by Ramachandaran). The point is that although we may have some qualitative agreement on what it means to physically touch something else, there exists a vast difference between touching as performed by the sighted and the blind: stated in another way, the blind actively see by touching, with the existing neuronal pathways commonly used for sight now physically remapped into the other remaining senses including, touch, hearing, taste and smell. Keeping this analysis in mind, I would also suggest that the very question of able-bodiedness is actually a misnomer, suggesting as it does that the blind or the deaf are somehow 'less' able than the sighted whereas the opposite may in fact hold true! As we shall see in the case of the 'Blind Alphabet' where sight is actively marginalised, the blind person's adapted experience of touch may somewhat paradoxically make of them the experts of seeing.

Returning to the notion of the heterotopic as a positive form of variation on the norm. Through West-Eberhard's (2003) analysis the heterotopic is configured as a relational space of novelty and adaptation, one that cannot be defined as part of an existing binary system in which values such as inside/outside, normal/ abnormal, healthy/ unhealthy are the a-priori condition for its emergence. But perhaps more broadly, the concept of heterotopy signals a variation in the otherwise over-deterministic realm of gene-centred, post-Darwinian evolutionary theory. As West-Eberhard (2003, p3) notes in the very first paragraph of Developmental plasticity and evolution, her discussion seeks to address and help resolve the age-old debate in which the values of nature and nurture are viewed as being distinct, often binary values. In this way the heterotopic signals not a radical separation between the norm and the aberration, nature and nurture, the gene and its adaption, but rather the ongoing material interplay between an organism and its environment - a form of contact and exchange that I would argue is clearly discernable in the expression of such phenomena as the 'heterotopic seeing' that the blind commonly engage in. In this way heterotopic seeing may be understood as being an innovative, evolutionary adaption in which the fingers become the eyes.

As shown in the discussion thus far the concept of the heterotopic involves the body (its genetics) but also the material space, or environment, within and by which a body is defined.

Regarding the latter I wish to now elaborate a spatial reading of the heteropic by referring to the essay 'Of other spaces: heterotopias' by Micheal Foucault (1967). Foucault here uses the term 'heterotopia' to signal the existence of non-hegemonic spaces, 'other' spaces that, much like a mirror, are neither here nor there but absolutely real. Foucault argues that the heterotopic space is a counter-site, an 'effectively enacted utopia' and not merely an imagined space. Crucially then Foucault's reading of the heterotopic space is premised upon its status as a real, material space¹⁶¹ operating as part of a society and its settlements. But importantly, for Foucault (1967, unpaginated) heterotopic spaces are distinct from all ordinary spaces in they that have:

...the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.

Foucault (1967, unpaginated) uses the example of an actual mirror to further illustrate this point by stating that: "From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there". There exists at the very core of the heterotopic space's presence a reflexive multiplication of itself and a concomitant exclusion: as Foucault argues heterotopic spaces exist outside all other spaces, even though much like the example of the ectopic pregnancy discussed before, it may be said that they are already contained within the body. One should also note that in Foucault's reading the heterotopic is the mirror, the material thing, and not simply the reflection (which is what it does, not what it is). Perhaps to return to the experience of visiting a gravesite: much like the experience with the mirror there exists something like a double form of identification (and exclusion) that takes place inside the graveyard.

Firstly, within the graveyard one is tacitly confronted by your own mortality. You identify with the remains of those persons buried there. For though it might be almost unfathomable that you too will one day join them, it is an inevitable material reality – 'I see myself over there'. But also it is not simply the remains of an individual that your are visiting as much as it is the desire for reconnection with a lost part of yourself – with someone with whom you shared a part of your life, probably cared greatly for, respected or even may have unresolved feelings about. This

¹⁶¹ The word 'utopia' actually has a double meaning being both a 'good place', in the sense that it represents an ideal, perfect place, and a 'no place' inasmuch as it does not actually exist. (According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007, the etymological root of the word traces back from the Greek 'ou' or 'not' and 'topos' or 'place'). But as Foucault (1967) argues a heterotopia is always a real, effectively enacted utopia.

aching, lingering absence now forms part of your very being. And yet such a palpable feeling of absence is made all the more real through the actual experience of visiting the grave. But finally, you are still alive and thus you are patently excluded from belonging there, inside the graveyard, other than being a visitor as it were.

Like any utopia, the heterotopic space presents an ideal, one seemingly impossible to attain but worthwhile striving for. But, as Foucault argues, unlike Thomas Moore's imaginary state of Utopia, heterotopias are real spaces constituted in and as part of the very founding of a society. Here Foucault (1967, unpaginated) lists several examples of heterotopic spaces including the huts of menstruating women located on the outskirts of villages, bordellos, hospitals, gardens, museums and libraries. Importantly, for the purposes of this essay Foucault also lists the cemetery as an example of a heterotopic space. To be sure, heterotopic spaces like the cemetery are not fixed, for a space like the cemetery may duly change in location and function. For example, Foucault (1967, unpaginated) argues that in Europe cemeteries became heterotopic spaces during a specific period in time, one that also includes a shift in the relations between the state and the church, the individual and faith:

...from the moment when people are no longer sure that they have a soul or that the body will regain life, it is perhaps necessary to give much more attention to the dead body, which is ultimately the only trace of our existence in the world and in language. In any case, it is from the beginning of the nineteenth century that everyone has a right to her or his own little box for her or his own little personal decay, but on the other hand, it is only from that start of the nineteenth century that cemeteries began to be located at the outside border of cities ...cemeteries then came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place.

Here the graveyard fulfils a multiplicity of roles, including the banishment of death from the presence of everyday life. For after all, death now signals a complete return to materiality and not the gateway to the spiritual everlasting. Death now signals a form of decay, one that may very well contaminate the living through the ravages of disease and illness to which the body of the deceased invariably plays host. Dead bodies have to be removed from the space of the living not only for reason of general health, but in order to claim ownership over them and to acknowledge the newfound importance of the body "...which ultimately is the only trace of our existence in the world and in language" (Foucault 1967, unpaginated).

Lastly, in considering the relationship between the blind and the sighted, where seeing with the eyes is the norm it is easy to forget that our eyes remain only one sensory organ of 'sight'.

Perhaps the case in point of animals such as bats, dolphins and whales that use sound in order to construct a vision of the surrounding world is an apt example here. Moreover, seeing with the hands, through touch, is only a heterotopic phenomenon in a relational and not an absolute sense. In this way the heterotopic understanding of touch-as-sight is a historically conditioned idea that, much like the cemetery, is materialised as a heterotopic phenomena via culturally specific 'discursive practices'. In the same way contemporary ultrasound technology not only helps visualise what is already there, contained within the body, but also through the particularities of its workings as a form of imaging technology, helps materialise the heterotopic pregnancy, making of it a visible and indeed a meaningful concept replete with boundaries. Thus like the cemetery, ultrasound technology has a cultural history that has most certainly helped define its function, form, location (or space) and uses. As Barad (2007 p193-204) argues the apparatus of ultrasound technology emerges through specific 'observational practices' that contribute to the manner in which it enacts agential cuts, visualising and giving form to discrete phenomena. This brings me to a discussion of the apparatus.

4.3 The apparatus: materiality, performance, boundaries

In this section I wish to discuss the notion of the apparatus¹⁶² and its relationship to materiality, performance and boundaries. In this regard, Karen Barad (2007) revisits and significantly expands upon the work of the Danish physicist Niels Bohr (1885 -1962) on the apparatus. In the book Meeting the Universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning, Barad (2007, p142) describes the form and function of the apparatus as such:

According to Bohr apparatuses are macroscopic material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others, and through which particular phenomena with determinate physical properties are produced. The far-reaching conclusion of Bohr's protoperformative analysis is that the apparatus plays a much more active and intimate role in experimental practices than classical physics recognizes. Apparatuses are not passive observing instruments; on the contrary, they are productive of (and part of) phenomena.

¹⁶²According to the SOED (2007) the term 'apparatus' is derived from the Latin 'apparare' which means 'to make ready'. An apparatus is also defined as "The things collectively necessary for the performance of some activity or function; the equipment used in doing something; a machine, a device. Equipment used for scientific experimentation or processes. The organs etc. by which a natural process is carried on. Equipment used in athletic, gymnastic, or sporting activities" (ibid). But I do find it very interesting that the notion of performance is touted here as being integrally part of the definition of the apparatus.

As alluded to in the closing paragraph of the previous section, there is an important sense in which the function and form of apparatuses is determined by cultural practices. For example in a culture where sight is considered the primary vehicle for meaningful sensory intercommunication, will actively work towards creating imaging technologies of a specific kind: lets say that rather than simply listen to the pulse of sound generated by ultrasound technology (or re-rendering this high-frequency pulse as a sound wave audible to the human ear), a visually orientated society uses ultrasound technology to generate a series of images! In this way the pulse of sound is rendered as a visual image that the sighted may study using their eyes. Here Barad argues the apparatus is not simply a device used in the scientific laboratory that "...embody human concepts and take measurements" (Barad 2007, p146) but, rather, is a 'material-discursive practice' that actively produces boundaries as it intervenes in the world (within which it invariably forms a part too)¹⁶³. Importantly, in Barad's (2007, p150) employ of the material-discursive in the conjoined singular, she positions matter as not being prior to - or somehow separate from - the field of discourse but rather follows Butler's (1990, 1993) analysis that physical matter is not simply static and devoid of discourse but rather enmeshed in it.

In *Bodies that matter* Butler (1993, p9) argues that matter should be understood as a "...process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface". Butler's focus is on reconsidering the relationship between the values of biological sex and gender (as a culturally determined representation of sex) in a way that links the formation of the subject to the production of the body's materiality. In *Gender trouble: feminism* and the subversion of identity Butler (1990) posits gender as a performative enactment in which there is no pre-existent, universal script and/or role to fulfil: gender is something we do rather than something we inherently are. This means that gender is relational and always open for reinterpretation, although inasmuch as it is continuously reiterated by its ongoing performance it may indeed be forcibly reproduced as a material fact.

As Butler's (1993, p7) analyses of ultrasound equipment makes clear, the fact of the gendered identity of the body is subject to all kinds of ideological interpellation, a process starting well before birth: once the sex of the infant has been determined by an ultrasound scan the body is drawn into culturally conditioned gender values that will throughout its life be reiterated until such time as it appears a natural fact. At some point during its development the child will come

¹⁶³ The apparatus is not located outside the world or a (human) instrument that simply imposes meaning on already existing concepts but is itself a discursive practice that enact, through its mutual interaction with the world, a set of determinate properties and limits such as the distinction between a 'subject' and an 'object'.

to understand its sexual, bodily characteristics an indelible part of its particular gender. Thus in a manner starkly reminiscent of what I have referred to earlier as 'phenotype plasticity' the values of nature and nurture, the gene and its (adaptive) expression, are always open, and indeed subject to, remapping albeit by way of ideology¹⁶⁴. (The parallels with West-Eberhards analysis of 'phenotype plasticity' and the body's capacity to respond to external conditions and stimuli in a short time seem clear enough to me here. But it would certainly be worthwhile discussing them at greater length in a future study).

Importantly as Barad (2007, p191) contends, Butler's (1990, 1993) account is limited in that, even as it sufficiently shows how the value of discourse comes to matter through its 'performative reiteration' (i.e. how socially determined values and norms impact upon the manner in which bodies are understood as gendered entities), this account does not adequately explain how matter may participate in this process. To be clear, I am convinced that both Butler's (1990, 1993) and West-Eberhard's (2003) analyses are correct in arguing for a more open-ended, performative understanding of the relationship between the materiality of the body and its particular environment. However, especially where it concerns Butler's analyses, I feel that in order to forcibly sever the normative, oft biologically determined link between sex and gender at work in heterosexual, patriarchal society, it slips into a kind of anti-materialism quite at odds with Darwinian evolution by natural selection. I wish to avoid the assumption that bodies (and their properties) are materialised rather one-sidedly by the values of culture, discourse and language. Here Barad's writing on the exact, intra-active relationship between the apparatus, its materiality and that of the outcomes of its measurements (which are always material-discursive) helps reframe the debate in material terms.

4.3.1 The agency of the apparatus

Barad argues that the apparatus is much more than merely a functional instrument that generates objective, 'disembodied' outcomes or one unilaterally used to perform certain functional tasks - such as one might easily consider the manner in which the ultrasound machine is used to determine the gender of an unborn child. In this scenario the unborn child is conceived of as a well-defined form (the object) that is unilaterally acted upon by a human

 $^{^{164}}$ See Chapter 5.2.1 - 5.2.3 of this dissertation for a discussion of the role of ideology in relation to Judith Butler's work.

being (the doctor or the subject) through the apparatus (which in this case fulfils something like the role of an objective mediator). Barad's reading refutes such an a-priori distinction between the subject and the object, insisting instead that such distinctions come into being as a condition of their mutual intra-action by way of the apparatus. But more importantly, for Barad the apparatus does not serve an intermediary function in this process, making visibly apparent what exists independently of the observational instrument (a 'sexed' foetus). For in the very material manner of its working the apparatus already constrains and enables what is observable and thus determinate – basically the apparatus draws up boundaries even as it seems to perform the task of objectively studying the phenomena in question. Ultimately ultrasound technology makes it possible for us to visualize and give form to the reproductive organs of an infant whilst it is still in its mother's womb. In this way the sexed foetus is performatively produced by way of its 'intra-active' material relationship to the apparatus - where the apparatus is always already a materially enacted phenomena. As Barad (2007, p) shows apparatuses are not only 'gendanken experiments' (literally 'thought experiments'). But rather, for Barad the physical and material properties of the apparatus including its physical form, size and shape, the materials that it is made from (such as surgical steel, glass, aluminium) and the material conditions of its placement (within the controlled environment of the laboratory, for example) all contribute to rendering it outcomes as sensible, communicable phenomena.

It has to be acknowledged that, as part of its material workings the apparatus actively addresses certain bodily senses, such as sight, smell, sound or touch. That is to say apparatuses are a means to render intelligibly highly specific properties of a phenomenon to a highly specific kind of observer. To use a rather informal example, attempting to detect the nuanced scent of different wild animals through a pair of binoculars will not yield highly satisfactory results¹⁶⁵. Regardless, there exists a material sense in which apparatuses are in control of, or at the very least contribute as active agents to the kinds of outcomes they produce. Thus, as Barad (2002, 2007) argues, despite the seemingly subjective elements put into play in her material intra-active account of the apparatus, the kinds of findings produced by apparatuses remain objective: in

¹⁶⁵ Of course nothing stops one from attempting to do so. But other than leading to the realisation that the object in question is not meant for this kind of usage, it will hardly lead to the kind of objective, reproducible result that may be attained through the use of the object as a pair of binoculars - which simply put is to bring something distant closer into view. Of course a pair of binoculars may be used just as effectively for other as yet undiscovered purposes: perhaps it is exactly the right weight and size to serve as kind of counterweight for another kind of currency. One might in some way attach to the strap of the binoculars to a predetermined amount of this form of currency and hang it over a thin branch as kind of crude weighing scale. Regardless, even then its outcome of this usage will remain objective (and still premised upon using sight as a primary means to access these findings – the improvised 'scale' will balance out once the weight is on average the same).

rather straightforward terms, if we use a scale to measure the weight of an object, we may be certain that our findings will correspond not only to other measurements taken of the same object utilising the same kind of material-apparatus, but also that what we are measuring is in fact a property of the object (as in, the measurement obtained does in fact accurately represent the weight of the object in question – whether we render this weight in pounds, kilograms or stones, there will be some consistency).

In all Barad (2002, 2007) rethinks and indeed, accounts for the very agency of materiality (of the body, of the apparatus and the artwork) in and as part of the forces through which knowledge of ourselves and the world we inhabit is 'intra-actively' produced. Barad's in-depth analyses shows how, as much as we cannot discount the cultural nor the sensory, material workings of the body and the brain as veritable parts of the process of knowledge production ¹⁶⁶, we can also not discount the very materiality of the apparatus in generating specific meaningful, objective outcomes. The primary question here is how the artwork may function as a material-apparatus and what such an understanding thereof this may lead to?

Without wishing to stretch Barad's (2002, 2007) analysis to simply suit my needs, I would still argue that today it is not uncommon to see the artworks by the same artist exhibited all over the world to a generally receptive audience: I remember in the year 2005 when I saw the work of William Kentridge exhibited to great acclaim within three different continents within a single month. At the time I found it somewhat irritating as I felt it evidence of how the art world works towards institutionalising the work of one artist whilst neglecting so many so others. But in hindsight, I think that there is an important way in which artworks retain something of their meaning, even within vastly different contexts. It's not a qualitative question as in saying that great artwork in this context is a 'good' artwork in any context (for clearly that is not the case). Nor is it a case of the intentionality of the artist, which I think can only ever be partially inscribed into an artwork: as I have argued in the introduction to this dissertation, artworks are not clear mechanical illustrations of thoughts.

In line with the discussion of the apparatus outline thus far, I would argue that the artwork may communicate something of real, even objective value to different audiences of the world because contemporary art galleries and museums function like controlled environments within

¹⁶⁶ The field of neuropsychology is a prime example of how thought is in itself understood as being materially enacted process located in the workings of the brain.

which artworks fulfil their function¹⁶⁷. Such environments are deeply controlled, and highly structured spaces in which highly particular aspects of artworks are highlighted to highly particular kinds of observers. This is generally what may be termed the 'institutional theory of art', perhaps one closely akin to Judith Butler's understanding of the way in which gender relations are structurally determined. Certainly we cannot underestimate the instrumental role that specific institutions play in structuring human desire, thought and forms of self-recognition. This certainly helps to account for the defining, material role that institutions such as art galleries, museums, universities and the discourses of art history, art theory and even the commercial art market, for example, all play in defining not only what counts as an artwork but also how it functions in society. But that is only one aspect of how the materiality of the artwork may be linked to the orthodox workings of normative discursive practices of the field of fine art and its institutions.

In the reading put forward here the artwork may also be thought, not only as part of the rather structural, ideologically motivated workings of art and its institutions, but perhaps more productively, as heterotopic 'spaces' that contest such hegemony even as they work from within its seeming institutional limits. That is to say, artworks may resist the homogenizing impulse of the art gallery context - serving as a kind of counter apparatus. Thus, in thinking about the artwork apparatus I wish to put this sense of objectivity (albeit a highly relational one) and materiality-as-agency into play. This reading will form the basis of my discussion of the 'Blind Alphabet' in the following section.

4.4 Encounters with the 'Blind Alphabet'

Boshoff's the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991- ongoing) is a remarkable aesthetic experience. I choose my words carefully here, because despite the fact that so much of this dissertation is based upon the careful observation of artworks, in this case the ordinary sighted viewer like myself, cannot 'see' the final artwork. To be certain one may see the final installation but this does not amount to actually seeing the artwork - much like seeing the work in a book, by reading about it and/ or by looking at some glossy illustrations is not seeing the work at all. If anything, that is

¹⁶⁷ I want to be careful here, because, in keeping with the discussion thus far, I do not want to give the impression that artworks are somehow 'intentional' entities in and of themselves: The artwork is a relational, albeit structured entity existing both in and as part of a set of performative, material relationships between a certain kind of audience, the space of its display and so forth

¹⁶⁸ Where space is defined as the entire performative arrangement generated by the artwork.

because the 'Blind Alphabet' was not made for the sighted viewer. No this artwork was made for a very particular kind of viewer – one that has the right perceptual tools at hand with which to unlock the treasure trove of sensory, linguistic and conceptual information contained within the artwork. I am briefly reminded of the simple fact that, contra Descartes' transcendental view¹⁶⁹, even the form and the shape of a triangle is not self evident to someone that has never seen one before. However, the point I wish to make here is that the material shape of the triangle (say as a graphic representation thereof) may, depending upon the perceptual tools you have available, be interpreted in vastly different manners: for someone that has never seen such a shape before or has any corresponding mental knowledge of it, it cannot be held true that they are in fact seeing a 'triangle'. In the case of the 'Blind Alphabet', there exists two vastly different experiential encounters, ones driven by different perceptual mechanisms of sight and touch respectively. In what follows I will briefly recount my personal, sighted experience of encountering the work and show how it may be distinguished from that of a blind person's. As stated in the introduction these are vastly different experiences that are directly related to the exact manner in which the 'Blind Alphabet' as material apparatus has been constructed.

I have been studying the 'Blind Alphabet' for a while now and, to my knowledge no-one else has noticed or made anything of the rather overt reference to the graveyard before. But the 'Blind Alphabet' is decidedly a graveyard: here unused, extinct words are stored. These word-objects are something like once dear friends that have now passed into dis-use, become unhinged and disappeared through the evolution of language and its function in an ever changing world. I would argue that for a sighted viewer the experience of seeing the 'Blind Alphabet' is akin to the particular experience of death that I today associate with being buried six feet deep in a coffin with a small marker such as a gravestone in order to identify the site. What the grave signals is that someone has gone missing, disappeared from view as if they no longer belong to the ordinary (read 'visible') world of the living. The deceased dwell in darkness. And yet, in the 'Blind Alphabet' this experience of invisibility, of darkness, also animates the

¹⁶⁹ Descartes fifth Meditation entitled 'Of the essence of material things; and, again, of god; that he exists' opens with a discussion of a triangle in which he writes: "When, for example, I imagine a triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought, there is still a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle which is immutable and eternal, and not invented by me or dependent on my mind" (ed. Adam, Charles, and Paul Tannery. 1964–1976. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vols. I-XII, revised edition. Paris: J. Vrin/C.N.R.S).

work, producing a kind of aesthetic experience¹⁷⁰ quite distinct from the purely visual experience of artworks. In turn this space may be understood as a kind of 'heterotopic' space that is accessed quite appropriately by a form of heterotopic seeing.

To be sure Willem Boshoff has made many artworks that refer to graveyards in the past. Politically loaded works with acerbic titles such as including 'How to win a war' (2004), '32 000 Darling little nuisances' (2003), and the 'Garden of words I & II' (1991 &1997) all in some way take their cue from the rows of stones that bespeak the horrors of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa now more than a century ago. In this regard the death of literally thousands of Boer women and children in the British-made concentration camps still haunt the collective memory of Afrikaners and their descendants (such as Willem Boshoff). A short background to the war is appropriate here.

Since it includes both the First Boer War of (1880 -1881) and the Second Boer War of (1899-1902) the Anglo-Boer war is also sometimes the 'South African wars'. There exist but a single clear reason for the Second Boer war of 1899-1902: the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886 re-ignited British imperial interest in the then Dutch Republic of the Transvaal¹⁷¹. The promise of the spectacular wealth at the Witwatersrand proved too much to resist for representatives of the colonial British government such as Cecil John Rhodes (then Prime minister of the British held Cape Colony at the southern tip of Africa). As Roy Macnab writes in the book 'Gold: their touchtone' (Macnab 1987, p8)¹⁷², Hans Sauer a once physician turned prospector sent out by Rhodes to survey the Witwatersrand in 1887 was "... convinced that he had visited the new Eldorado where fortunes would be made".

¹⁷⁰ In 'Aesthetika' (1750) Baumgarten argues that aesthetics be understood as the capacity to receive stimulation via the senses – all five of them. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2007) definition still foregrounds Baumgarten's approach and defines the concept of aesthetics as: "Greek aisthētikos, from aisthēta things perceptible by the senses, from aisthesthai perceive: see -ic. Current senses derived through German from A. T. Baumgarten's Æsthetica (1750)"

¹⁷¹ For a well researched, meticulous overview of the Anglo Boer war see 'The Boer War' by Thomas Pakenham published in 1979 in New York by Random House.

¹⁷² Macnab's book is actually a meticulously researched history of the company Gold Fields, tracing its history from its founding in 1887 to 1987. Also, the full title of the book as shown on the inner page is 'Gold: their touchstone. Goldfields of South Africa 1887-1987. A centenary story'. And to be clear, this is hardly an objective account of the impact of the gold industry on South Africa's people and history: The book is ostensibly a publication that honors the existence and history of the company, and not the country and its complex history. I cite from the preface: "This is a tale told on the occasion of a celebration. It is a book to mark one hundred years of activity in South Africa of the country's oldest mining house". This celebratory bias toward Gold Fields and its not inconsiderable commercial achievements is evident throughout Macnab's account.

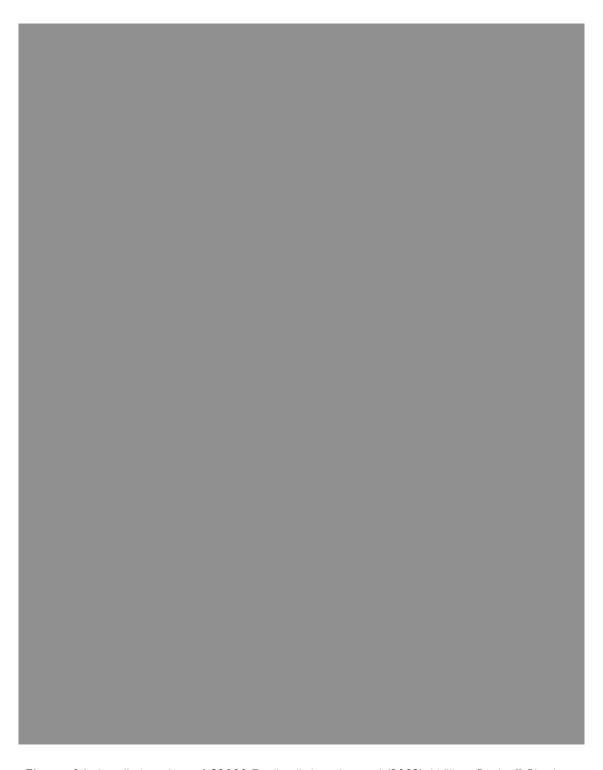


Figure 21: Installation view of '32000 Darling little nuisances' (2003), Willem Boshoff. Plastic tags, portraits and mirror film. (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p59). In this work Boshoff has written, in mirrored form, the names of the Boer victims of the British concentration camps on small plastic tags. The portraits of the British regency are placed just below. However in the reflection on the floor the names of the children can be read whilst the portraits of the regency, including the autobiographic details of their lives, are reversed (and become illegible).

Upon his return to Kimberly Sauer related these findings back to Rhodes, thus setting in motion the wheels of a series of commercial, imperial and personally motivated events that culminated in the Second Anglo-Boer War. For example, along with Charles Rudd, Rhodes was also one of the founding fathers of the largest mining houses in the history of South Africa and indeed the world, called 'Gold Fields' in 1887.

As Macnab (1987) makes clear, at the peak of its various operations in South Africa Goldfields produced almost ten percent of the entire world's gold supply. In this way Rhodes' personal and political fortunes were inextricably connected to each other. Perhaps most regrettably, this war so clearly motivated by the discovery of gold also resulted in the creation of the first concentration camps. At places such as Bethuli, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Kimberly and elsewhere the British forces set up camps where the Boer women and children (and indeed any pro-Boer Africans, including their servants) were effectively imprisoned under inhuman conditions. Here the prisoners lived in tents with poor sanitation, little to no medical care and meagre rations - conditions that soon lead to widespread disease and malnourishment.

It is worthwhile noting that, that whilst the Boer women and children initially refused any resettlement from their homes. But after a scorched earth policy was officially implemented by Lord Kithcener (the then Governor of the Cape Colony) in the second Boer War of 1899-1902 the Boer non-combatants could no longer sustain themselves, even if they wanted to: the British armed forces effectively burnt all Boer-owned land, including their houses, crops and cattle. The only remaining choice for the wives and children of the remaining Boer commandos was to either join the men in the battlefield (a crippling option since the semi-informal Boer commandos largely relied on guerrilla tactics and could not provide for their families) or to report to the concentration camps. This they did with disastrous results: approximately thirty two thousand women and children died in these camps in less than two years. And as Boshoff (2007, p86) makes clear in his notes for the artwork '32000 Darling little nuisances' (2003) to this very day there has been no official apology from the British regency for this particular crime against humanity.



Figure 22: Video still from 'Challenging mud (after Kazuo Shiraga)', (2008), Johan Thom. Single Channel Video loop (10min 42 sec) projected onto a layer of self-raising flour on the floor. (Source: Johan Thom) For this work I covered my body in 23 carat gold leaf and invited friends and family to bury me in a full-scale grave. The work was made for an exhibition entitled 'Jozi and the Mother City' curated by Carine Zaayman, investigating the relationship between Cape Town (as the Mother city, the first colonial outpost in South Africa) and Johannesburg (as the current business and cultural metropolis of post-colonial South Africa).

I would argue that Boshoff's preoccupation with the graveyard (as that which remains hidden though always present) is certainly motivated by his own personal history as a descendant of the Afrikaners who were interned in the British concentration camps. For example in '32 000 Darling little nuisances' Boshoff (2007, p86) notes that there are at least two children on the list he included as part of the artwork who share his exact name (Willem Hendrik Boshoff) and that these children are in fact buried only but sixty kilometres from his grandfathers farm in Bethulie, Free State.



Figure 23: Installation view of 'Challenging mud (after Kazuo Shiraga)', (2008), Johan Thom, shown at the Hidding Gallery, University of Cape Town 2008. (Photographic Credit: Paul Weinberg). Here the artwork is shown as it is installed – making for the illusionistic appearance of a real grave on the floor that the audience can physically walk around thus drawing their attention to the physical relationship between their body and the artwork.

However Boshoff's complex personal history also makes its presence felt in subtler, though no less important ways. As Vladislavic (2005, p60) notes, the erstwhile policy of Apartheid implemented by the Afrikaner nationalist government after their rise to power in the elections of 1948 was also based on the skewed politics of sight. Vladislavic (ibid) writes: "Apartheid's visual obsession with skin colour as an index of difference produced distance". This distance was reflected and embodied in the effective creation of separate territories and material spaces for white and black South Africans (in the case of black South Africans these territories were again subdivided according to tribal differences, with the Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, Tswanas, Pedis and so forth all being allotted their own particular 'homelands' by the apartheid government). However, in large the distance that was to be policed, to be maintained at all cost was that between black and white south Africans with separate amenities including toilets, railway carriages, public housing, public seats, separate graveyards all being installed and maintained

throughout South Africa. In fact owing to the 'Immorality Amendment Act', of 1950 (Act No. 21 of 1950) any intimate, sexual contact between white and black South Africans was declared illegal. Here we see how the intimacy of touch was policed whilst the divisive workings of sight were actively encouraged by the Apartheid government. To this effect, in Apartheid South Africa there could be no positive, constructive understanding of any form of difference (be it racial, cultural, sexual) or dialogue between them (Vladislavic 2005, p61). Boshoff thus views touch as form of provocation that may counter the divisive workings of sight: the intimacy of touch may abolish distance and lead to altogether more constructive forms of intercommunication between otherwise distinct social and cultural groups.

4.4.1 Encountering the apparatus: the sighted viewer

I think Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) not only functions as a graveyard of sorts but formally resembles one too. For, much like the neat rows of stones that line contemporary graveyards almost the world over, the 'Blind Alphabet' consists of a large amount of rectangular metal shapes all arranged upright in a grid-like format. From a distance the work appears almost cruel in its precision, its callous detachment from the sighted viewer rendered through the relative absence of colour and the brutality of its external metal form, as if to say: "There is nothing for you here". And, unlike the granite gravestone commonly found at a graveyard, there is no neat engraved epitaph that somehow makes sense of the experience for the sighted, literate visitor (this is a grave and this is the name of the person buried here).

But what is the purpose of Boshoff's hostility to the sighted viewer? This question is made all the more perplexing by the simple fact that the artwork is still exhibited within the art gallery context.



Figure 24: Selection from the *'Blind Alphabet (Dacryoid - Drusiform)'*, (2007), Willem Boshoff. Twenty wooden sculptures, wire baskets, Braille on aluminium, cloth, steel base. (Source: http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/boshoff/blind-install.htm; Accessed: 01 - 28-2013)

A short note before I continue: it seems odd to me that only the sighted are considered 'viewers', for it is absolutely true that the blind can in actual fact see too. Rather, a bit like the notion of 'synaesthesia' suggests, they just see the world through their sense of touch. However, even though I want to suggest that even if something like a cross-over sensory experience such as implied by the notion of synaesthesia defines the sense of sight for the blind, I do not think it entirely appropriate: As Ramachandaran's (1998, 1992, 1999, 2008, 2012) neuroscientific analyses suggests, in the strict medical sense of the term, synaesthesia is understood as the appearance of illusory sense impressions that accompany ordinary perceptions - such as implicit in the idea of 'coloured hearing' touted before. Thus when I use the term 'blind viewer' here I would rather suggest that the blind use their sense of touch as a heterotopic means through which to encounter, interpret, visualise and ultimately appreciate

¹⁷³ The SOED (2007) defines synaesthesia as: "The production of a mental sense impression relation to one sense by the stimulation of another sense, as in coloured hearing". In this sense, it could be argued that the blind visualizes such properties as texture, size and form of the artwork through their sense of touch (though arguably the colour of an artwork is of little to no importance to them).

the artwork: as discussed in relation to the studies of West Eberhard regarding developmental plasticity cited earlier in this chapter *touch-as-seeing* is thus considered an adaptive variation of *sight-as-seeing* – where the various neurotransmitters through which distinct forms of sensory perception are actively rewired not only to compensate for the loss of one sensory organ, but as part of the process through which the blind interact, negotiate and generally make sense of their particular surroundings.

The installation of the 'Blind Alphabet' in the art gallery is, in a manner of speaking, 'dead' to the eyes but not to the sense of touch. But, and this is a central point, exactly because the 'Blind Alphabet' is structured in such a way, it actively generates what Barad (2007, p158) terms a 'break down' in the body through which the ordinary sighted viewer is incapacitated, left 'blind' so to speak. In what follows I will pay particular attention to the manner in which this experience (one ostensibly related to the sighted viewer's encounter with the 'Blind Alphabet') challenges and reveals the normative, sighted workings of the art gallery and the discourse of able-bodiedness that tacitly underpin it.

During the course of 2008, whilst working for Boshoff as an assistant of sorts, I was fortunate enough to help manufacture a small component of the ongoing installation that together comprises the 'Blind Alphabet'. Through this process I was able to see and touch many of the components of the 'Blind Alphabet' - a sensory experience ordinarily denied the average, sighted viewer to a museum or gallery where the artwork is exhibited. In the time I worked for Boshoff I became intimately familiar with the different components of the work: from the cool touch of metal grids and rectangular bases that form something like the external structure of the work to the sometimes smooth, velvety and rough finishes of the warmer, wooden shapes that would eventually be placed atop each base and covered with a lid. At the time of their making, I could still smell the familiar freshly worked scent of wood on each of the shapes as they came out of the workshop day after day. Each of the wooden shapes can be comfortably handled, with their relative size and weight remaining on average more or less the same. In this way I found that I could easily hold a single shape in one of my hands, whilst caressing and discovering the nuances of its particular material form with the other.

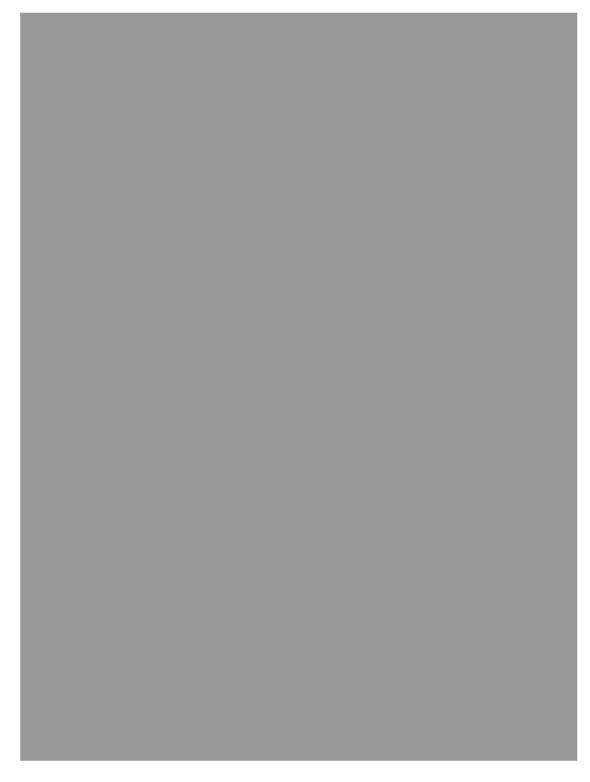


Figure 25: Detail from the *'Blind Alphabet (Dacryoid - Drusiform)'*, 2007, Willem Boshoff. (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2004, p59)

As I held the objects in my hands, I felt that the pieces of wood were still very much 'alive' and it seemed to me to be a great pity that they would all eventually be hidden away in the final installation. Nonetheless, when placed next to one another still prior to their assembly as part

of a final artwork, these smallish wooden shapes made little to no sense to me. The individual wooden shapes resemble parts of toys or even on some occasion small semi-abstract sculptures. Certainly some objects seem pretty obvious — an anvil, a broken arrow and even a toy dart. But, when grouped together, any sense of collective order disappears. Looking at the shapes one might very well think them all part of a much larger three-dimensional puzzle of sorts or even some kind of crazy machine-like apparatus ready for assembly. Thus, on the surface there exists no clear relationship between the many varied wooden objects produced as part of the 'Blind Alphabet' - other than the fact they are all made from wood and rather meticulously manufactured.



Figure 26: Nine wooden forms from the letter 'B' for the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 -), Willem Boshoff. (Source: Boshoff 2007, p74)

Each of the beautifully crafted wooden sculptures that forms the heart of the 'Blind Alphabet' are finally placed upon a tempered, sheet metal base and hidden from view within a rectangular wire mesh casket. Vladislavic (Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p57) describes the wire metal caskets are 'krypts', a composite term derived from the from the Greek words 'krupte' meaning

'vault', and 'kruptos' meaning 'hidden'. Thus the final installation of the work could well be read as something like mass grave, like those of the Anglo Boer war that Willem Boshoff is so familiar with: here lie a plethora of once 'alive' wooden objects.



Figure 27: Detail from the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 -), Willem Boshoff. (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p54)

However Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' will reward the bravest of sighted viewers, those that despite its formal hostility still step in closer to get a better look by only adding insult to injury: in looking through the fine diamond shaped openings of the grid mesh box nestled neatly atop each metal base, the viewer might realise that contained within each is something like a small(ish) wooden sculpture (see Figure 27, shown above). In order to make sense of the shape, and indeed the work, the viewer might also then attempt to get a better view of the contents of the container by circling around it, only to find their movement severely restricted by the close proximity of yet more steel boxes. In short, these graves are too close together

and for the sighted viewer there is little information through which to make sense of them. For the sighted viewer that decides to come in closer the 'Blind Alphabet' may be a deeply claustrophobic experience as there simply is no stepping back once you enter the maize. Here images of the artwork may be misleading¹⁷⁴ because it is in fact a gigantic, ongoing installation with previous showings such as that of the 'Blind Alphabet ABC' (Figure 20, p144) at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1995 including up to three hundred and thirty eight individual pieces in all (Vladislavic 2005, p58). Thus it may be said that installation comprises an overwhelming, ever-expanding number of sculptural shapes contained within a tight grid-like structure that seems to delight in frustrating the sighted viewer by resisting their each and every attempt to make sense of the experience. Better to dismiss the whole thing and go look at something else in the gallery?

However, today I know that these wooden sculptures were expressly made to be physically touched, intimately explored and discovered by the hands. If this is so, it is because the 'Blind Alphabet' is a specialised, technical dictionary made expressly for use by blind people - a fact first hinted at by the existence of a Braille text imprinted upon an aluminium sheet and attached to each casket. Ironically the subject matter of this dictionary is closely related to the field of aesthetics: this dictionary comprises highly nuanced definitions of values of form, structure and texture – all values that arguably occupy a central position in the discussion and appreciation of artworks. For Boshoff these altogether more sensory, material and indeed embodied values have, through an overbearing focus upon on the value of sight in art, been systematically neglected, a neglect of form that is perhaps most neatly mirrored by their disappearance from the general lexicon of fine art. As Vladislavic (2005, p58) argues, today relatively obscure terms such as 'barbigerous' (from the Latin 'barba', roughly meaning 'beard', 'hair) has little to no seeming relevance to everyday language. Today only but a select few might know its meaning without consulting a specialised dictionary.

One might be tempted to think that Boshoff wishes the viewer to return to Baumgarten's initial definition of aesthetics put forward in Aesthetika, published during the second half of the 18th century already: "Aesthetics ...is the science of sensible cognition" For Baumgarten aesthetics was foremost the capacity to receive stimulation via the senses, all five of them - sight, hearing,

¹⁷⁴ But I added it specifically because those are the ones that I worked on.

¹⁷⁵ See Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb, Aesthetica, cited from Hans Rudolf Schweizer, Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis: Eine Interpretation der "Aesthetica" A.G. Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe der lateinischen Textes und deutscher Übersetzung (Basel: Schwabe, 1973).

taste, smell, touch. This definition holds with its ancient Greek origins as 'aisthesis', meaning sensation or perception. As Eagleton (1989, p75) argues in the 'Ideology of the aesthetic', for Baumgarten as for the Greeks, the value of aesthetics is born out of a discourse surrounding the body. In Baumgarten's reading the value of aesthetics is not to be found in its separation between art and life but rather in the manner in which sharp distinctions may be drawn between the "...material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, what is bound up with our creaturely life of perception as opposed to what belongs to the mind" (Eagleton 1989, p75). For Baumgarten the age-old separation between reason and the particularities of sensory perception is the exact space where aesthetics must intervene, albeit as Eagleton (1989, p76) states, as the somewhat 'confused sister' to logic. The field of aesthetics now becomes the 'feminine' supplement¹⁷⁶ to the supposed 'masculine' enlightenment tropes of reason, logic, clarity and certainty - in all the possibility of disembodied, objective knowledge.

In the field of aesthetics, sight is posited as the intermediary between the senses and the mind, assuring the intelligible flow of communication between dualistic values such as the male/ female, body/ mind, reason/ the senses, thought/ materiality. That is to say, more than any other sense, sight seems to assure a modicum of objectivity when dealing with artworks - a thought I will soon return to. As Marks (2002, p xiii) and Boshoff (1995, p1) argues the marginalisation of touch (and indeed all the other remaining senses) within the practice of art is therefore firmly located within the emergence of a particular (post) Enlightenment Eurocentric 'worldview' and its largely visual understanding of art, one where objective knowledge and disembodied, distanced, sighted observation also becomes the norm.

In the article 'Colonizing bodies and minds' Oyewumi (2003) argues that the term 'worldview' is biased towards a western, cultural perception of the world in which the visual plays the dominant role. Here Oyewumi views the physical act of seeing, of sight itself, as being a primary metaphor in western thinking. Oyewumi distinguishes between the concept of a 'worldview' and that of a 'world sense': the concept of a 'worldview' is based on a western approach that give privilege to the visual and employs a 'gaze of differentiation' (whether gendered, cultural) that also leads to an exaggerated focus on the physical properties of the body (its sex, race,

¹⁷⁶ For an in depth discussion regarding the issue of the feminine as supplement in aesthetics see for example the collection of essays contained in the book 'Differential aesthetics: art practices, philosophy and feminist understandings' edited by Penny Florence and Nicole Foster and published in 2000.

shape and so on)¹⁷⁷. For Oyewumi the concept of a 'world-sense' is a better indication of the manner on which various non-western cultures such as the Yoruba may utilise a combination of the senses – sight, sound, smell, taste - to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the world and their place in it. Interestingly Oyewumi shows how prior to its colonization by the west women enjoyed high-ranking positions in Yoruba society exactly because in pre-colonial Yoruba state organizations "...power was not gender determined" (Oyewumi 2003, p258). A well-defined division between gender roles only occurred once military, colonial British forces refused to deal with high-ranking female Yoruba chiefs and officials. As Oyewumu (ibid) states it was impossible for the male-dominated military apparatus of British colonial government to "...recognise female leaders among the peoples they colonized, such as the Yoruba". The bolstering of such gender divisions by British colonial forces had the effect of disinvesting Yoruba women of any power and institutionalizing patriarchy, as a visually oriented power structure under which women's bodies where effectively controlled by the state and its (now) visually orientated power structures.

Much like a graveyard, one might easily attain a visual overview of the space and the structure of the 'Blind Alphabet' whilst remaining blind to the specificity, complexity and intimacy of each grave and its contents. And, even though one might spend hours wandering through a graveyard, reading countless epitaphs and committing such biographic details as they contain to memory, it is very much a visual experience: the casual visitor to Highgate Cemetery in London (a place I have often visited) might hear the voice of history and the individuals that populate its unfolding by looking at the vast amount of gravestones and reading each epitaph. The epitaphs are not too small and most can easily be read from a respectable distance.

To be sure, as Marks (2002) contends, the sighted viewer may still look 'haptically', mentally imagining the experience of surface and texture at stake in the engraved surfaces as it connects with the eye. Marks shows how it is indeed possible to utilize such haptic looking to generate more engaged, embodied interpretations of visual artworks such as videos (a reading that that forms the basis of Chapter 3 of this dissertation). But regardless of such attempts at haptic interpretation, as Boshoff (1995) argues and indeed Marks (2002, pvii-viii) concedes, where it

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For example, when conceived of in this manner, sexual difference forms a part of a dualistic worldview that operates by establishing and maintaining a set of core differences that cannot be negated by other forms of cross-cultural analyses. Conversely the term 'world-sense' implies no specific sensorial focus and bias and opens up a multitude of possibilities regarding the relationship between the body and the world (Oyewumi 2003 p257).

concerns the field of fine art, a form of 'teloramic' looking (still) remains the norm. Boshoff (1995, p3) writes that the term 'teloramic' comes for the Greek for 'far off', a kind of looking accomplished at a distance of approximately two meters. For the Greeks the concept of 'telos' in turns signals an "...end, purpose, the ultimate object or aim" (SOED 2007), thus implying that if the aim of teloramic looking is to discover a sense of objective purpose, it requires a minimum distance through which the dis-entangling of the body from otherwise highly subjective sensory phenomena may be accomplished. And so objectivity and sight (or perhaps more specifically the act of looking 'teloramically') become synonymous.

From this point it is hardly difficult to understand the link between sight and the act of looking as a biased, Eurocentric, patriarchal means to objectify the world (including the female sex, animals, landscapes and even entire cultures). I will not devote time to this here but there exists an immense body of feminist and postcolonial scholarship devoted to the discussion of this normative objectifying aspect of Eurocentric/ patriarchal 'looking' an its broader cultural ramifications for the non-west. This would certainly include Laura Mulvey's seminal critique of the 'patriarchal male gaze' and its workings in cinema entitled 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' published in 1975. But where it concerns the field of art, the normative, dominant workings of 'teloramic looking' within the gallery context has slowly but surely ensured the erasure of touch from the language of contemporary aesthetics generally. Of course figures like Laura V. Marks, Alois Riegl and Gilles Deleuze discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation have all in their own way addressed this problem in imaginative ways. Thus it cannot be said that teloramic looking has wholly displaced touch from the appreciation and interpretation of art. And similarly many artists including Willem Boshoff and myself have made work expressly to be touched and not only to be looked at.¹⁷⁸

And so it is in the case of Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet', which at heart serves as a dictionary where terms associated with touch are now stored, and momentarily re-animated. Boshoff (1995, p5)

Regardless, I would still argue that inasmuch as sightedness constitutes a norm and indeed a vital resource required for the survival of human beings, the process of evolution by natural selection has also played its part here. As Darwin (1871/2004, 112-113) writes: "The formation of different languages and of distinct species, and the proofs that both have developed through a gradual process, are curiously parallel...Dominant languages and dialects spread widely and lead to gradual extinction of other tongues. ...there is a limit to the powers of memory, single words like whole languages gradually become extinct". Also See Nowak's paper 'Evolutionary Biology of Language' (2000) for a more detailed discussion inspired by mathematics and game-theory of a materialist, Darwinian account of the use and evolution of language. Nowak also argues that each individual is able to store in memory in the approximate region of fifty thousand words although their combined use is of such a high level of complexity and novelty that it deeply complicates any reading of language as a singular system.

argues that the concept of texture is properly defined as 'what something feels like' (a palpable sensory experience of form), and not as it is often used in the interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art as "...something that looks as if it feels like". In this way the haptic has become a concept only (or perhaps, at best, a metaphor for actual touching). It is perhaps worth remembering that the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2007) defines the term 'haptic' as being derived form the Greek 'haptesthai' meaning to grasp or to touch. Regardless, today you may look haptically at the artwork as much as you like, as long as you do it from a real distance!

Certainly, where it concerns the field of fine art, the normative relationship between aesthetics and sight outlined thus far presents a real problem for the blind, for they are brazenly excluded from the practice of art thereby. For one thing the blind use their hands to 'see' the world, an activity that is almost universally frowned upon in art galleries, museums and even graveyards. The blind person at a graveyard such as Highgate Cemetery in London is, in a manner of speaking 'dead' too - rendered invisible by the all too visible workings of the graveyard itself. Put in another way, should you close your eyes for the duration of your visit the distinction between Highgate Cemetery and Pretoria East Cemetery all but disappears. There is an important sense in which places like galleries, museums and even graveyards are all alike to blind people exactly because they have been made by the sighted for the sighted. In this regard I would argue that graveyards, museums and art galleries are indeed apparatuses whose function and form derives from a normative, though exclusionary politics that begins with the act of seeing - one presupposed and shaped by the condition of able-bodiedness in which the act of seeing occupies prize of place. But the loss of specificity that the blind so commonly, daily experience through the able-bodied communities' insistence upon institutionalizing the workings of sight, is not confined to them only.

As the tactile, sensory workings of the 'Blind Alphabet' makes clear, the sighted viewer's continuous neglect of the value of touch as part of the aesthetic experience, may lead to them forgetting about the deeply nuanced, pleasures of touch altogether. But more than that it also lead to a break down of the 'cathectic' relationship with the artwork. Boshoff (1995, p4) here uses a term that is perhaps more commonly associated with the field of psychoanalysis - where 'cathexis' is understood as the concentration or accumulation of libidinal energy on a particular object. In Freud's work the term first appears in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895/1957)¹⁷⁹. However,

¹⁷⁹ This edition published in 1957 by Basic Books in New York.

for Freud the id does not distinguish between reality and the mental image the brain generates thereof. It is through the process of cathexis that an object is re-presented in the mind as being 'emotionally charged' and thus as being significant to the self. Moreover as Freud (1895/ 1957, p89) contends unresolved cathectic relations may impair any future effort to relate to new experiences:

At this point I may perhaps refer to a short paper in which I have tried to give a psychological explanation of hysterical paralyses... I there arrived at a hypothesis that the cause of these paralyses lay in the inaccessibility to form fresh associations of a group of ideas connected, let us say, with one of the extremities of the body; this associative inaccessibility depended in turn on the fact that the idea of the paralysed limb was involved in the recollection of the trauma a recollection loaded with affect that had not been disposed of.

As Boshoff (1995, p5) argues, there exists an element of 'acathexis' in everyday life that "...introduces respect and care for objects as 'meaningful', 'worth keeping' and 'worth lookingafter"". However the terms so deftly given shape and wooden form in the 'Blind Alphabet', are all premised upon the tactile, sensory values that are effectively marginalised by the discourse of the visual that predominate in the field of art: they are dead to the sighted. But, as Freud (1895/ 1957, p89) cautions, the cathexis of an idea "...whose affect is unresolved always involves a certain amount of inaccessibility and of incompatibility with new cathexis". Thus to speak of the tactile in art without resolving that affective relationship patently at stake in such values as form and texture for example, leads not only to a form of disassociation with new forms of cathexis, but to a virtual lacuna on the part of the sighted viewer - a dead end. Perhaps utilizing Freud's example of the paralysed limb, for the sighted viewer there exists in their relationship with the world something like an unresolved trauma that is patently manifest in their dissociative, teloramic relationship with their world. In the same way for Boshoff, the fact that human beings attach emotional meanings and significance to objects like artworks, cherish and protect them is closely related to being able to touch them physically. Boshoff (1995, p4) contends that to touch is to consummate the union (with the object, the 'other'), to fulfil the promise of beauty and our desire for it: "Courtship rituals begin as visual acts and are thereafter increasingly intensified on a haptic level until they are fitfully fulfilled in an intimately palpable union" (ibid). Following this reasoning I would argue that much like a lover we need to become physically, intimately involved with these objects, risk something of ourselves by allowing for the affective union with the object that is accomplished by touch. In doing so we express our care and

concern for them but more than that, we open ourselves to their tactile, affective presence - thus enabling new forms of cathexis to occur.

Perhaps, on another level, we may be reminded again of Bataille's analysis in *Eroticism: sensuality and death* (1957/ 2001) and the notion of the orgasm as the 'little death' that signal the pleasure and the danger of the obliteration of self in this most intimate encounter with another. To know something else is to have to renegotiate your own sense of self, your boundaries and otherwise normative relationship to the world. To return to Karen Barad's (2007) distinction between the terms 'interaction' and 'intra-action' outlined in the introduction of this essay, it seems to me that teloramic looking is associated with the kind of one-way involvement with objects at stake in 'interaction': where one enters into communication with a well defined object without allowing for the encounter to work both ways, so to speak. One cannot attain a proper cathectic relationship with an object through teloramic looking and interaction alone: it is reduced to being the object of your study and not an active agent in a mutual, haptic, affective encounter through which new phenomena intra-actively emerge.

Where critics like Marks (2002) aim to generate a form of haptic criticism Boshoff seeks to forcibly reintroduce the value of the haptic - as actual touching - into a gallery context. Vladislavic (2005, p61) summarises it as follow: "The project re-establishes touch as a socially viable catalyst for interactive discourse". The discourse at stake in the 'Blind Alphabet' is thus not only defined as that between the blind and the sighted, extinct words and everyday language, but perhaps more specifically as that which results from having a proper cathectic relationship to artworks (in which touch plays a seminal role). Here the 'Blind Alphabet' seeks to reintroduce a larger vocabulary of aesthetic terms and the tactile, material values they embody into the field of contemporary fine art. It does so by inducing the fact of their disappearance from the language of art as a painful aching into the body of the sighted viewer. The sighted now become the bereaved: for where they languish in the distance of those left behind like the frustrated mourners at a gravesite, the blind approach the installation and find comfort in its seemingly hostile, lifeless form. For the blind the artwork is a well-structured space that can easily be negotiated without the help of a guide.



Figure 28: Installation view of the 'Blind Alphabet' (2011), Willem Boshoff. Twenty wooden sculptures, wire baskets, Braille on aluminium, cloth, steel base. Installation view: FADA Gallery Johannesburg (Source:

http://www.uj.ac.za/EN/Faculties/fada/FADAGallery/Publishinglmages/Opening%20of%20Setups%20and %20Upsets.jpg; (Accessed: 12-02-2013)

The grid-like arrangement of the metal bases now make sense: what is for the sighted a labyrinthine, nonsensical, claustrophobic space is for the blind a space of ease and comfort — one tailor-made for their way of 'seeing'. The boxes are close enough to easily move from entry to entry, the accompanying texts are written in Braille and the objects are made specifically with the sense of touch in mind. The blind may lift the lid of each casket and continue to discover another dictionary entry, in the process bringing it back into view — both physically and cocneptually: as Boshoff (2012) notes sometimes they laugh to themselves (for some terms are quite sexually suggestive) whilst others are so complex that they may struggle with it for quite some time.

In the space of the 'Blind Alphabet' the blind truly become the guides to a world of sensory, material experiences that the sighted viewers of art have all but lost contact with. Boshoff will show the ordinary sighted viewer what they are, in their 'able-bodiedness', their normalcy, in fact missing. As Vladislavic (2005, p58) writes, the force of this revelation has been known to

bring the sighted viewers to tears: for they can only stand on the sideline and watch as the blind enter the library and discover the wealth of information it contains. If the sighted viewer wishes to share in this experience, they will have to ask a blind person to help them see it too. (In the Figure 28 shown on the previous page, it is immediately noticeable how the work remains unactivated by the sighted – the whole space of the gallery taken up by the artwork is thus practically unused).

4.4.2 Encountering the apparatus: the blind viewer

In a complete reversal of the accepted relationship between the blind and the sighted, in the context of the 'Blind Alphabet' the blind become the 'seers', the 'visionaries' or the guides that momentarily reintroduce into the world of the sighted art visitor a once cherished travelling companion. As Boshoff argues, all their lives the blind have been guided by the sighted, in the 'Blind Alphabet' it is their turn: "The sighted visitor feels denied, lost in a labyrinth that might lead nowhere. As one blind guest said: '...you had it all - now it is our turn to have it all - this is ours" (Boshoff 2007, p74).



Figure 29: Sculptural rendering of the term 'baribigerous' from the 'Blind Alphabet (Dacryoid - Drusiform)' (2007), Willem Boshoff. (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p58).

In this way the 'Blind Alphabet' can now perhaps more clearly be understood as material apparatus: the Braille texts, wooden objects and indeed the grid-like arrangement of the work

itself, all form part of the material tools through which the blind viewer may communicate the meaning of near extinct, though highly technical English terms to an audience of otherwise 'sighted', able-bodied viewers. Moreover, the written text and the objects help explain one another, with the object serving as a kind of sensory elaboration of the definition of the relevant term outlined in the Braille text (including in the description its derivations, origins and examples of its usage). In this way the term 'barbigeorus' (bearded, hairy) is made into a small wooden box, smooth on all sides except for one where short bristly hairs suddenly protrude to tickle the fingers (Figure 29, p185). At first glance the object may not look like much but to the sensitive, heterotopic fingers of a blind person the contrast between the textures and forms must be quite shocking. The tactile encounter with the grassy, hair-like texture in the midst of a perfect, polished rectangular shape is something like the visual equivalent of finding a wild animal unexpectedly snapping at your feet whilst you pleasantly drive along a pristine golf course.

Importantly the accompanying Braille texts are not 'easy', for Boshoff does not wish to patronise the blind. Perhaps more to the point, the concepts at stake in the 'Blind Alphabet' are sometimes exceedingly complex and obscure. Here the object is not simply a redundant illustration of the written definition (or vice versa) but forms an indelible material part of the tools through which blind people may come to have a broader, perhaps more poetic, sensual understanding of the meaning of the term - one which they could 'sensibly', (if always only partially) communicate to others. Moreover, as Vladislavic (2005, p58) notes, the text and objects are all accessed by touch with the textured, rasp-like surfaces of the Braille descriptions sometimes mirroring those of the wooden objects. Braille writing is already haptic, a material, tactile form of communication and there exists something like a form of continuity between it and the wooden object. Besides the blind have no visual connect with the concepts at stake: the relationship between images and words is of little consequence to the blind - other than the fact that this relationship is seminal to their ongoing marginalization in the field of fine art, that is. This marginalization Boshoff is clearly acutely aware of and he now utilises it as part of the workings of the 'Blind Alphabet' to turn the tables.

Here the material relationship between language and form is clearly rendered through the value of touch and I am reminded of how Darwin first posed the emergence of language as part of the forces of sexual selection. In *The Descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* Darwin (1871/2004, p632) argues that language probably begins with song, as a mating call no less. Here Darwin articulates the hypotheses that "...the vocal chords were primarily used and

perfected in relation to the propagation of the species". As Coulter (2010, p283) argues for Darwin and for Mead¹⁸⁰:

... linguistic practices developed from pre-linguistic gestural signing, a development facilitated by the evolutionary descent of the larynx, they argue that, not only would vocal gestures ramify exponentially the range of communicative expression, they would (at least in part) free up the hands for engaging simultaneously in other tasks, including elaborating upon the signs being vocally articulated.

Through his detailed observations and lifelong study of animals Darwin noticed how the male of the species, including fish, tortoise, alligators, birds but especially mammals most use their vocal chords during the time of mating. Thus material properties of the voice rendered as song serves to charm, excite and allure the females of the species. For Darwin this is the first step towards distilling from the purely material sound of the voice something like intelligible speech: for the female of the species readily responds to the rhythmic and tonal variations produced by the male, thus signalling a form of communication in which specific ideas are rendered as mutually intelligible phenomena. Darwin's material definition of language is one that here language works toward abolishing distance, placing in its stead the sensory, affective values of physical intimacy and intra-action ¹⁸¹.

4.5 Tactile problems and hermeneutic ends

As should be clear the tactile workings of Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' introduce a number of rather obvious, somewhat practical problems into the gallery context. For example, as one of the central material conditions of how the work functions, we know now that blind people have to be present to (I) 'operate' the artwork (2) explain the work to sighted viewers - if needs be, for it is by no means certain that there will always be a sighted visitor in attendance whilst a blind person explores the work. Thus the 'Blind Alphabet' is inanimate or even 'dead'

¹⁸⁰ Coulter is here referring to the book Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist by Mead (1967).

As I have argued in the Introduction of this dissertation the materiality of the object cannot be wholly accounted for by language. But perhaps most interestingly, by placing materiality at the very heart of language and its origins, the more subjective values of affect and pleasure is readily entrenched in it. Thus paradoxically one may say that whilst language cannot wholly account for the agency of materiality, by approaching the question of language through the framework of materiality, a trace of the kinds of slippery uncertainty so readily apparent in the analysis of artworks is located already well within its seemingly cerebral 'incorporeal' workings.

until such a time as the right kind of 'viewer' comes along (ironically being blind, within the confines of the art gallery this viewer is in fact no kind of viewer at all!). Much like any scientific apparatus the artwork requires very particular kinds of persons with particular kinds of knowledge in order to work correctly. In this way the blind are, as Boshoff (1995) contends, something like the experts of touch, a form of material expertise that Boshoff and indeed all sighted viewers will have to defer by way of the workings of the 'Blind Alphabet'.

Also, one may well ask are the blind supposed to know that they will have to act as guides to the sighted? Here Boshoff relies on one of the most accepted, often unwritten rules and conditions of the gallery or museum to help the process along: Boshoff knows that artworks are not meant to be touched. Of course Boshoff also knows that blind people read and indeed 'see' with their hands. Once Boshoff has sent the invitation to the blind community to come and 'see' his work inside an art gallery, his intentions are more or less clear: they are free to use their hands to engage the artwork. Besides, no blind person will ever see the written sign on the gallery wall that instructs ordinary, sighted viewers not to do so!

With rare exception actually touching an artwork in a gallery or a museum is expressly forbidden, a prohibition that is somewhat analogous to the one on touching and handling a dead body. At the 'visitation', where the coffin is kept open so that one may pay your final respects to the departed, one may still view the body of a loved one (though actually picking it up and doing a little dance will be severely frowned upon). Thus, whereas it seems perfectly fine for certain individuals such as the coroner or the mortician to physically engage the body in a variety of rather intimate and even violent ways (by for example performing an autopsy to determine the cause of death), for the rest of us such physical contact with the dead is actively discouraged. There exists some kind of proper distance that one ordinarily maintains both from the artwork and the dead body. Moreover, those select few that may cross this divide have throughout the ages been subjected to superstition, social stigma, fear and even respect: I am thinking of the clairvoyants, shamans, witches and seers, those who channel the voices of the dead or are in contact with them in some way. This then brings me to the function of the blind viewer in the artwork, for clearly it is not simply that of a tour guide or a technician in a lab coat.

Exactly because the blind can only see by becoming physically involved in a rather obvious, intimate way they will pick up these dead words and in doing so accomplish something of a minor miracle: they will bring them back to life. Here the blind become something like the

messengers of the gods, speaking to us, the able-bodied, the sighted, of things that can no longer be seen, as if from beyond the grave. It is perhaps interesting to briefly return to the definition of the definition of 'hermeneutics'.

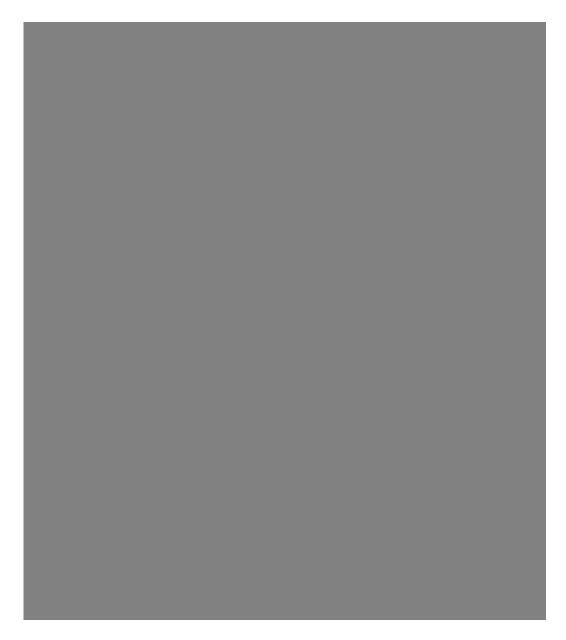


Figure 30: Detail from the 'Blind Alphabet (Dacryoid - Drusiform)' (2007), Willem Boshoff. (Source: Boshoff and Vladislavic 2005, p56)

In *The Hermeneutics of seeing* Davies (1991, p6) writes that hermeneutics clearly invokes the figure of Hermes, the messenger of the Greek Gods "...whose allotted task was to listen to what the gods wished to convey and to translate it into terms mortals could understand". Moreover, Hermes was expected to appear at night, to perform his revelatory task from within

the darkness. For, as Davies (ibid), argues the darkness reveals our human need for light and guidance.

The darkness also allows for the revelatory possibility that things may yet be seen in a new light. As Boshoff (2012) notes, to the sighted viewer watching the blind experience the 'Blind Alphabet' it may seem as they are speaking in tongues: highly complex ideas drip from their mouths as they caress, prod and fondle odd wooden shapes. Perhaps they might think they have stumbled upon a gathering of soothsayers engaged in the act divination: these 'bones' are all the more talkative in the hands of such highly skilled diviners.

Exactly because Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' is not a 'visual' artwork – one made to look at - it opens up the lesser-travelled, sensory pathways into the experience of art (ones that are as much about the ongoing discovery and mapping of the world via the broad range of the senses, as about the materiality of the apparatuses through which those discoveries are made and sensibly communicated to others). In short, whereas blind people are almost daily confronted by the fact of their bodies' breakage - the 'broken' status of their eyes if you like - in the 'Blind Alphabet' the normative act of seeing, of looking at art only with your eyes, becomes a disability that 'blinds' the average sighted viewer to an art gallery or museum to larger workings of the work, and indeed the world itself. One may say that the 'Blind Alphabet' shows the viewer how through the normative function of looking they are in fact blind to other perhaps more vital, complex and indeed interesting aspects of the experience of art. But in the process of doing so, very materiality of the artwork, of its status as a material apparatus is highlighted. As Barad (2007, p158) writes:

It is when the body doesn't work – when the body "breaks down" ...that the apparatus is first noticed. When such (in)opportunities arise the entangled nature of phenomena and the importance of the agential cut and their corollary constitutive exclusions emerges. It then becomes clear that "able-bodiedness" is not a natural state of being but a specific form of embodiment that is co-constituted through boundary-making practices that distinguish "able-bodied" from "disabled".

In this regard Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' is an illuminating, material experience that exposes and deconstructs not only the normative functioning of art as a sighted, visually orientated discursive practice but one that signals a more holistic, material, embodied and performative approach to art and its reception. For at heart the 'Blind Alphabet' is a graveyard-cum-dictionary constructed for the blind, one in which they will serve as the guides to the sighted visitor. And despite the fact that there is nothing much to see with the eyes there still is much of value to be 'shown' - but only if the sighted can remember how to look properly.



Figure 31: Detail showing a blind person interacting with the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991 – ongoing) at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1995 (Source: http://www.willemboshoff.com/images/artworks/800px/BLIND-ALPH-13-1-.jpg; Accessed: 3-04-2009)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have put forward a thoroughly materialist, performative understanding of the relationship between the artwork and the body that encounters it. Recently I created a process-based artwork in which I had a concrete poem by Decio Pignatari entitled 'beba coca cola' (1957) tattooed with water on my arms. I have included the original written proposal for the artwork here as I consider it an integral part of the material means through which the work was conceptualised (see Figure 32, p193).

I want to conclude this dissertation by tracing through this artwork, some of the theoretic and artistic developments that underpin this study both as a final document and part of a process of development throughout its writing. The artwork is called 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012-) and it was made in collaboration with two tattoo artists in Kassel, Germany as part of the European Artistic Research Network's (EARN) participation in Documenta XIIV¹⁸².

As I write this text, the residue of the work, namely the text on my skin, is in process of disappearing, leaving only traces of its presence: because the tattoo was inked with water it is not permanent and my skin is quickly healing from where the tattoo needles finely pierced the skin. No doubt some minor scarring will occur which will take much longer to heal. This too I view as part of the artwork and am documenting the process photographically. But for all purposes and intents I am a walking artwork until such time as the text has disappeared completely¹⁸³.

¹⁸² From 6 - 8 September 2012 EARN presented a series of workshops, lectures and presentations as part of Documenta XIIV in Kassel (curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev). These presentations were premised upon exploring and presenting current debates in fine art doctoral research. A number of current doctoral candidates from European art departments including the Slade School of Fine Art (University College London), Gradcam (the Graduate Scool of the University of Dublin), the University of Leeds, the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna the University of Utrecht and the Finnish Academy of Fine Art all participated in the project, For more information on the individuals that participated in project and their various contributions please refer to the website of EARN: http://www.artresearch.eu/ (Accessed: 21 July 2013)

There is the distinct possibility that, owing to the scarring of the skin, the text may never completely disappear. If this is the case the work will be complete only when I reach the end of my life.

'Every sentence draws blood' (2012), Johan Thom

Broadly speaking my research concerns the materiality of the artwork as veritable part of the meaning-making process.

I wish to collaborate with a tattoo artist in Kassel to design and write a disappearing text upon my body. The tattoo will be 'inked' with water meaning that it will be visible only for a few days before it heals and disappears. I will write as short poetic text of thirteen words* and the tattoo artist will be in charge of its design. This event is my presentation and the tattoo-shop is the venue (with the audience defined simply as those who are present in the shop at that point).

The title serves to remind of the manner in which tattoos may be said to 'write bodies into' various institutions and communities such as prisons, to name an obvious, though rather negative example. However, the design of the text (including choice of font and where applicable pattern and decoration) signal an element of pleasure found in the material meaning making process and forms of artistic expression. In this way the material form and content of the presentation works together to question existing boundaries (of what is inside and outside the body, or, of what and what not is considered 'research' within the context of contemporary art, for example). Moreover, unlike conventional tattoos the 'image' will disappear thus further drawing attention to the momentary, sensory nature of art. The material capacity of bodies to heal and ultimately to resist the excessive power of ideology and discourse is also highlighted.

*The thirteen-word form is an ode to Brazilian concrete poet Decio Pignatari's 'Beba Coca Cola' of 1957.

Also this is the thirteenth edition of Documenta.



'Beba Coca Cola' (1957), Decio Pignatari.

Thomas Waldemeyer (2008) argues that Pignatari's work may be viewed as an incitement to "...renounce the role of passive consumers of commercial propaganda". He also provides a quick summary of the work:

"Decio Pignatari's 1957 concrete poem, "beba coca-cola" both anticipates and subverts new forms of communication, most particularly television commercials, which did not become culturally significant in Brazil until the 1970's. Appropriating the industrial language of commercial propaganda, Pignatari creates an "antiadvertisement" by turning the soft drink's advertising slogan against itself. The poem begins with the command beba (drink) and then rewrites the imperative to babe (drool). The word "coca" is isolated from cola, creating a clear reference to coca leaves, the raw material for cocaine and original ingredient of Coca-Cola (Solt 14). Through a simple vowel shift, Coca is then deformed into caco or glass shard. (Coke was bottled in glass at the time the poem's composition). Next, separating the word cola from coca, Pignatari produces the Portuguese word for glue, which is then combined with caco to form (cola caco or glue shard). Finally, the poet scrambles the letters of Coca-Cola to form the word cloaca, meaning a "filthy place" or cesspool".



14 May 2012

Figure 32: Original proposal for 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012), Johan Thom.

I want to preface this discussion by saying that it is not my intention that this particular artwork be thought the fulcrum of the study, as something like a neat conclusion. Apart from the fact that the artwork is still in process, the work actually began over three years ago when, without having any clear idea of what it would become, I scribbled down its would be title as little more than a fleeting thought in my diary. Moreover, looking back at the development of the artwork, I can clearly see how the meaning of the title of the artwork has changed over time. At first I understood the title as a statement against the tendency to marginalise the corporeal in theory, art and western philosophy (see the discussion in Chapter 5.1.4 of this dissertation). But today, through the material process of conceptualizing and producing the artwork, for me the title has become a much more nuanced statement signalling the potentially transformative, material interrelationship between artwork, language and the body. This I would suggest holds true for the written dissertation as well, with the written component of this PhD being as much a creative, material process of thinking as an academic account of the research project.

5.1 Language, art and the body

In the practice of art language always matters. The complexities of language seep into the material work of art bringing with it problems of interpretation, bodily experience and meaning. This is true whether artists make field notes and provides detailed captions to their work as Santu Mofokeng does, produce dictionaries for the blind like Willem Boshoff, or even if, during the encounter of the artwork, one ends up reading the labels of liquor bottles as in the case of Anatsui's 'Man's Cloth' (1999-2001).

To return to a thought mooted at the very beginning of this dissertation, even when there are no obvious physical traces of language in the artwork itself such as an abstract painting, one still has to include the wall-caption that provides details about the artwork and the artist as a veritable part of the interpretation of the work. For example, in the case of the discussion of El Anatsui's 'Man's cloth' (1999-2001) in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I have shown how the short description that accompany the work in the British Museum actively participates in the act of interpretation by providing biographical information regarding the artist, their place of birth and their working method (including the materials used in the artwork). In this sense language helps to materially connect the body with the artwork, that of the artist but also that of the audience - in the process enacting affective, experiential connections between artworks and bodies that are all fundamental to establishing and maintaining a number of boundaries. These

boundaries may include: geographic boundaries such as those between African artists and their European counterparts; the sighted and the blind as is the case in Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet'; the subject matter of a photograph and its meaning as in the case of Mofokeng's 'Black Photo Album' (1997), and perhaps more subtly, the distinction between the viewer and the artwork as an 'object'. In short, the material encounter with the artwork is framed, shaped and indeed translated by the workings of language. Thus even as language struggles to adequately translate the complexities of lived, felt experience (in this case of the artwork,) it certainly has an instrumental function too. Put in another way, though as Barash (2012) suggests, language may be a broken kettle¹⁸⁴ on which we beat out a tune, this does not make of the translation of experience into language a neutral, somewhat poetically open-ended¹⁸⁵ affair only.



Figure 33: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (7 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Abrie Fourie)

I require a visa to travel anywhere in Europe and am accordingly also acutely aware of the instrumental capacity of language to help classify me as belonging to a certain part of the world and as being a particular subject (in the case of my participation in an art-project in Kassel, as being a South African student in need of a visa!). That is to say my presence in Europe is

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter 2.3.1 of this dissertation for a discussion of the 'broken kettle' hypothesis regarding language as outlined by Brash (2012, p153-157).

¹⁸⁵ 'Open ended' in the sense that exactly because if language is a 'broken kettle' its efforts will always fall short of describing the actual complexities of lived experience, allowing for a certain amount of slippage and uncertainty to always form part of the workings of language itself. Just because language cannot always accurately describe the complexities of lived experience does not mean that it does so neutrally or tacitly acknowledges this shortcoming.

conditional upon the workings of written language, including such trivia as a filled-in application form, a medical insurance certificate, my passport, a recent bank statement, proof of permanent residence and statement of student status from my university - in general a series of written documents that attest to my conforming and adhering to the laws that govern the entire visa application process and its outcome. Much like the written tattoo in 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012), language here physically marks the body, delimiting certain meanings and actively maintaining certain physical and cultural borders. Put in another way, even though I might experience myself (my body, my very subjectivity) as now belonging to Europe¹⁸⁶, identify with its culture, politics and value systems, on paper this matters very little: in this regard it would seem that written information always trumps one's feelings, experiences and personal convictions.

However, and this is a key point, is also seems to me that the body does something with linguistic, written information that is easily ignored or left underexplored. For example in the case of my water-based tattoo, my body it is in fact responding immediately to the text-bleeding, but certainly also immediately healing. As Butler's (1993) performative analysis shows the body does not simply adhere to its linguistic determination, forming a neat indexical relationship with the very linguistic terms that identify it as belonging to a particular race, gender, culture or class¹⁸⁷. There also exists the occasion for 'speaking', for linguistically registering ones discontent and for numerous other acts of resistance and civil disobedience. Here Marvin Carlson argues in the article 'Resistant performance' (2006, p310), that Butler's work has provided a theoretical grounding for performance artists like myself that acknowledge and accept "...the postmodern suspicion of an empowered subject existing outside and prior to social formations without renouncing the possibility of a position of agency to oppose the oppression of these formations". But, other than suggesting a historically-grounded, performative form of resistance (such as the activity of drag ala Butler) this approach still does

¹⁸⁶ I do not really feel this way but many immigrants that come to Europe to make a new life for themselves there might feel more at home in England than in their place of birth, for example.

¹⁸⁷ In 'Bodies that matter' Butler (1993, p122) argues that there exists something like a slippage between the institutional command and its appropriated effect that she views as "...the possibility of disobedience subtly registered through a parodic inhabitation of the very norms that underscore the law itself". In a well-known example taken from Chapter four of 'Bodies that Matter' entitled 'Gender is burning: Questions of appropriation and subversion' (1993, p121-140) Butler argues that the performance of 'drag' (the wearing of women's clothes, make-up and generally the appropriation and exaggeration of feminine behavior by men) constitutes a playful challenge to the very social norms it seems to honor. If this is so it is because for Butler (1993, p122) the performative aspect of interpellation, that is to say the call by the law, which seeks to produce a lawful subject, also produces a set of unintended consequences (including 'drag', for example) that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law.

not adequately address the specific material role, or agency of the body in relation to the instrumental workings of language¹⁸⁸, for example. In this regard, even though I acknowledge that the body is always a context-specific phenomena, one grounded in the ideology of a given historical, cultural and economic moment, I am not certain that the body only amounts to being the sum-total of these ideological forces.

Initially I felt that the title of the artwork, 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012), could too easily be read as a one-sided statement that makes of the encounter with language a punitory engagement only – something like the imposition of a sentence that transforms the author and the reader into nothing more than 'prisoners of language', to paraphrase Nietzsche¹⁸⁹. But one day I suddenly had the thought of using the title for a water-based tattoo as part of an artwork.

Implicit in the particular methodology of making the artwork is two key ideas: one, a sentence could be physically written onto - and indeed into – the skin of my body. This would materially connect the sensing body with language (and by extension with any form of research presented in linguistic form – such as reading a book or the presentation of a paper at a conference); Secondly, by substituting water for ink in the production of the tattoo, it would highlight the body's capacity to heal. This understanding of the material relationship between the body and language is closely akin to what Grosz (1994, p117), in the book *Volatile bodies: towards a corporeal feminism*¹⁹⁰, describes as the physical and psychical 'inscription' of the body by various socio-cultural and politic ideologies.

To be clear I was reading *Volatile Bodies* (Grosz 1994) at the exact time of first conceiving the artwork. For Grosz the relationship between the inscription of the body and language is clear – with language clearly forming a part of the very social formations that actively write and inscribe the body with meaning. This forms the basis of the discussion in the next two sub-chapters.

¹⁸⁸ To be clear, for Butler (1993) a 'performative utterance' (i.e. the speech act) is not merely a linguistic proposition that somehow instantiates the objects to which it refers - as if simply by articulating a proposition one could give substance and form to the world in a rather one-sided sense (I now pronounce you 'husband' and 'wife' being the classic example here). But rather, when understood from a Foucaultian perspective such as Butler (1990 & 1993) proposes, such performative utterances are the very means by which matter comes to matter, so to speak.

¹⁸⁹ Actually Nietzsche never used these exact terms. In aphorism number 522 of the *The Will to Power* Nietszche (1901/1968, p83) writes that: "We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation". This idea will be discussed in more detail in section 6.2 of this Conclusion, where I turn to Nietzsche's and Grosz's respective understanding of the relationship between knowledge, language and the body. On related note, inn 1972 Frederick Jameson published the *The prison house of language* in which he argued that the structural, Saussurian linguistic model tends disassociate language and knowledge from temporal, that is 'historic', change. Of course Jameson's is a Marxist critique - one that materially situates any form of language within a particular time and place in history.

¹⁹⁰ Hereafter the text will only be referred to in abbreviated form as *Volatile bodies* (Grosz 1994).

And, as we will see later in section 5.1.4 of this Conclusion, exactly because the very material surface of the body - the skin, the flesh - provides a modicum of resistance against this process of social inscription, it also suggests that the body is not entirely powerless against the social. With this material understanding of the body and language in place, I began visiting tattoo shops and speaking to tattoo artists about the technicalities of making the final artwork.

5.1.2 The body as a surface for inscription

The analogy between the body and a text remains a close one; the tools of body engraving - social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary – all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways; the writing instruments – pen, stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing, diet, exercise function to incise the body's blank page. These writing tools use various inks with different degrees of permanence, and they create textual traces that are capable of being written over...in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical chronicle of prior and later traces, some of which have been effaced, others of which have been emphasized, producing the body as a text which is as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript (Grosz 1994, p117).

By turning to the work of Elizabeth Grosz, in particular the model of the 'body-as-surface' for inscription' as proffered in *Volatile bodies* (Grosz 1994), I wish to suggest that corporeality may play an active role in resisting and transforming the ideological forces at work in institutionalised, ideological forms of subjectivity. Before I discuss this I must first give a brief description of the model of the 'body as surface' model.

In the section entitled 'Part 3: The outside in' Grosz (1994, 115-160) investigates corporeal forms of subjectivity by turning to models of social inscription in which "...social values and requirements are not so much inculculated into the subject as etched upon the subject's body" (Grosz 1994, p120). In Grosz's reading the body is understood as being a surface that implicitly serves as a material link between a series of otherwise discontinuous processes, organs, energies and forms of matter. In this way the body is flattened out and becomes instead a:

...surface to be inscribed, written on, which can be segmented, dissolved into flows, or seen as a part (or parts) of a larger ensemble or machine, when it is connected to other organs, flows and intensities' (Grosz 1994, p121).

Grosz (1994) now follows Deleuze and Guattari's analysis put forward in A Thousand Plateaus (1980/2004) in viewing the body as being an assemblage that establishes material, surface

linkages with surrounding objects. For example, in the case of oral sexuality, as in Lacan's psychoanalytic approach, Grosz argues that it can be more productively explained by a yearning to make material connections, rather than a desire for what is symbolically absent or lost. Grosz (1994, p116) writes that: "...the child's lips...form connections (or in Deleuzian terms, 'machines', 'assemblages') with the breast or bottle, possibly accompanied by the hand in conjunction with the ear, each system in perpetual motion and mutual interaction". In this way Grosz argues that the law and the physical punishment of the body (or 'constraint' in Grosz terms) replace the psychoanalytic model of symbolic desire and lack¹⁹¹. Interestingly, for the purposes of this chapter, Grosz use the example of the body's relationship to books arguing that although the body is not a machine, it certainly establishes machinic connections with objects such as books - meaning that in this example the body is thus better described as a 'literary machine', one that produces all the effects of a particular kind of subjectivity through external surface connections with books. But the appearance of such depth on the part of the subject is deceptive, producing "...all the effects of a psychical interior, an underlying depth, individuality, or consciousness" (Grosz 1994, p116).

In the 'body-as-surface for inscription model' the body is never simply an occasion for interpretation, for the investigation of some innate, internal psychical depth. Here Grosz parts ways with the western metaphysical approach to subjectivity that would draw a-priori distinctions between the boundary between the 'inside' and the 'outside', the subject, their body and their world. Instead Grosz (1994, p120) argues that the body is

...not an organic totality which is capable of the wholesale expression of subjectivity, a welling up of the subject's emotions, attitudes, beliefs or experiences, but is in itself an assemblage of organs, processes, pleasures, passions, activities, behaviours linked by fine lines and unpredictable networks to other elements, segments and assemblages.

Thus there simply existd no transcendent, disembodied subject - one that somehow precedes the reality of its material, historical relationship with other objects, beings and surfaces. But rather, throughout one's life the material encounters with other objects and practices all constantly 'write' the body, leaving psychical and sometimes physical traces that, over time collectively produce the appearance of a distinct form of embodied subjectivity.

¹⁹¹ Grosz (1994, p120) further argues that the obsessional person's desire is not motivated by a yearning to stave of fear (of castration) or of the identification with a father figure, and the subsequent wish to occupy this symbolic paternal position in the house, and indeed the world. Perhaps in a rather Foucaultian sense we have here the concrete signs of a material struggle for power via the institutionalization of patriarchy.

Perhaps with more bearing upon the methodology and subject matter of this dissertation, as Grosz (1994, p121) makes clear, this means that instead of asking what the body means, we must pay attention to what it does, and indeed has done throughout history? This means that as Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004, p13-15) argue, that the interpreters of the body must instead become its cartographers, mapping the exact manner in which the body connects with other material forms, including books.

Before I clarify the difference between the 'map' and the 'tracing' as put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) in the next section, let me stress the following: if as Grosz (1994, p117) contends, the body is a palimpsest, it means that we may not only map the history of the body by way of referring to the layered history of its inscription - drawing links between the various texts that exist upon the surface of the body - but also, we may in the present moment map the way in which it currently connects with certain material objects and practices ¹⁹². The point is that the body is thus materially located not only by way of its present connections but also by way of this history of inscription that has actively produced it (and left marks on it).

Now on an obvious, but rather appropriate level my hands and arms carry the traces of numerous events that have shaped my life: these include scars from bicycle and motorcycle accidents, small burns and scratches from making sculpture, minor blotches and skin-discolorations from over-exposure to the hot South African sun, stitches from where I once cut myself when I was working as a glass-cutter (my part-time student job), miniscule traces of past skin troubles (overactive hormones and oily skin - the scourge of being a teenager) and somewhat ominously, a cut from where a mugger once tried to stab me with a knife (but fortunately only partially succeeded).

¹⁹² If these objects and practices leave their marks upon the body, a body that is indeed acting upon them even as they act upon it, then perhaps we are closer to the definition of 'intra-action' put forward by Barad (2007) (and discussed in Chapter 4.1 of this dissertation).



Figure 34: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (7 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: David Thom)

The tattoo now joins these marks to form a layered text upon the skin that may be read and re-interpreted. However, these marks are as much proof of the body's capacity to heal as it is proof of the power of discursive practices (such as the making of art, crime, working and going

on holiday once a year and so forth) to mark the body¹⁹³. Here, we may ask how all of these marks on the body in their current form materially connect not only with each other, but also with the very forces, bodies and objects that populate its environment? Let me clarify this by describing the various surface connections and material factors involved in the process of being tattooed in Kassel.

The arm is connected to the tattoo needle by way of the skin (Figure 35, on the following page). The skin is textured, with the various marks on it providing a small amount of resistance to the flow of the water and the needle moving along the skin – thus influencing the shape of the tattoo on the skin but also materially communicating with the tattoo artist (for example, as they adjust their working process to each new area). The tattoo artist is sat on a free swivelling chair that helps determine their position in relation to the arm. The tattoo needle is connected to a blue pipe that provides electric power for the motor as well as a small container within which the water (or usually ink) is contained. This container feeds the ink to the needle in a regulated stream. The container and pipe also provide some restriction on the free movement of the tattoo artist's arm, again influencing and shaping the manner of their engagement with my body. (And, because the ink or water level is constantly changing as it drains from the container, changing its weight in the process, there is constant variation in the amount of influence it exercises in relation to the hand of the tattoo artist). This description gives some indication of the various material connections between my body and the various other material elements within the tattoo parlour. But there is more, for there are many other bodies present in the space.

The audience may move around the space freely as long as they do not touch my skin or intrude upon the working space of the tattoo artist. Most of them have cameras that they use to capture the event with regular light flashes illuminating my body and the surroundings. One has a sketchpad with her and she makes a number of drawings that she shows me every now and then. I like the drawings very much: it seems such an appropriate response to the work with one surface becoming another - the skin is the page and the needle is the pencil.

¹⁹³ And, if the body-as surface is acting even as it is being acted upon (by the social, cultural forces of inscription) then, in keeping with the aims of the dissertation, it signals a deeply performative approach to relationship between subjectivity, the body and the world.

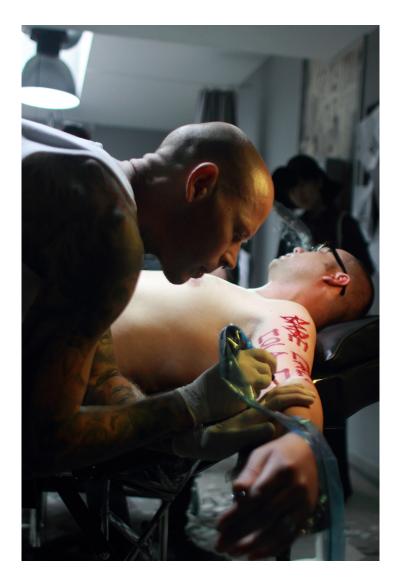


Figure 35: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (7 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Mika Thom)

Some members of the audience ask questions during the performance: "Does it hurt?"; "Is it a permanent tattoo?"; "Which text am I tattooing on my body and why?". I struggle to answer these questions over the noise of the tattoo needles and the ongoing conversations between the other members of the audience, the tattoo artists and myself. Through it all this there is the incessant burning pain of the tattooing process. One participant has many questions and she talks to me at some length (Figure 36, p204). During our conversation I notice the colour of her eyes, her black dress and her long light-brown hair. Any other day and I might have thought her simply a pleasant companion. But at that moment, she forces me to think critically and I simply do not have enough mental resources available to deal with such personal considerations as

well¹⁹⁴. I have to focus, ignore the physical discomfort and deal with her difficult questions. Moreover, she is involved in the performance and my responses to her questions will become a part of the work: I try my best to explain this to her even as I elaborate on the various philosophical and aesthetic ideas that underpin the creation of the artwork. (See section 5.2 of this Conclusion for a more in depth consideration of the inter-subjective relationship between the performer and the audience).



Figure 36: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (7 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: David Thom). The woman standing in the centre of the image just behind me spoke to me at great length during the performance, forcing me to think clearly during the tattooing process (which is very painful, to say the least).

¹⁹⁴ This will come later when I review the documentation of the tattoo and see her likeness captured in the photographs. Honestly I am still surprised by the images: they are too solemn, a butchery. But this cannot be entirely accurate, because I clearly remember some people laughing (including the woman with the light brown hair shown in Figure 36) and talking throughout the tattooing process as well.



Figure 37: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (8 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Mika Thom)

A classmate is deeply affected by the work, shocked even. After the tattoo is completed she briefly hugs me and I end up consoling her. My wife is angry and refuses to speak to me for the rest of the day. Another classmate has plenty of tattoos on his arms and we discuss the complexities of after-care: *Bipanthen* (a greasy white salve available from most pharmacies) must be applied every day and my arms must remain covered in layers of cling-wrap and plastic for at least a week – this will stop infection and help the skin heal. It is very hot in Kassel and my arms sweat profusely under the plastic wrapping. A small group of friends and classmates join me for drinks at a local bar where the conversation continues as we have something to drink. Afterwards, we all decide to go and see the rest of the works on this year's instalment of Documenta. My arms the plastic makes a crinkly, 'ssh-ssh' sound that I find somewhat distracting as I move around the various exhibition venues at Documenta. Later, when I bath (Figure 37, shown above), the plastic coverings will become a positive irritation, effectively intervening in my daily cleansing routine. I keep a diary where I write down all the small ways in which the tattoo (and its after effects) intrude upon and shape my life. It seems that nothing escapes its

presence and when I fly back to London the security personnel at the airport ask me to remove my jacket - just in case I am concealing something dangerous beneath it. They simply stare at my plastic covered arms as I explain about the tattoo.

5.1.3 The map and the tracing

The difference between what Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) term a 'map' and the 'tracing' is important because it signals the difference between re-affirming what we already know and that which may be discovered by attending the exact manner in which the body is connected to other objects and material practices. Let me clarify. For Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004, p13) the tracing is the structural reproduction of a de facto state. Here the tracing serves as the affirmation of what is already there, something like a ready-made unconscious hidden beneath layers in the "...dark recesses of memory and language" (ibid). The tracing proceeds by way of structuring the unconscious in a tree-like order: there is a central axis that holds the various branches together, it provides balance by crystallizing the various inter-subjective relationships between various parts as the codified expression of a single structure. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) view the tracing as being the very embodiment of representation, where the latter is understood as being a kind of 'stand in' or representative of something else. As we have seen earlier in Chapter 2.1 of this dissertation Deleuze (1981/2004b) urges us to bypass the tedium of representation and to pay attention to the manner in which sensation links the body with the painted surface of the canvass. Thus, as subject matter recedes, the complex, creative task of mapping the various relations between the body and the world (or in Deleuze's analysis, the artwork) may begin.

"Make a map, not a tracing" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/ 2004, p13). How are we to do this and what exactly constitutes a map? Deleuze and Guattari argue that the map is the expression of the rhizomatic, material engagement with the world: unlike the tree the rhizome is more like a spread of lawn 195 that connects various surfaces, forms of life and experiences together as part

¹⁹⁵ Strictly speaking I suppose a lawn is not a rhizome: the rhizome is defined as being a continuously growing underground stem that sporadically sprouts lateral shoots and roots at various intervals. The lawn grows on the surface of the soil. Of course the rhizome is perhaps an infinitely more poetic, creative a metaphor than that of some ordinary suburban lawn! But I honestly think the lawn is a more suitable metaphor for the various material surface relations and linkages at stake in the discussion of the relationship between subjectivity and the body in this chapter: together the many shoots and leaves of the lawn constitute a singular surface, that connects other surfaces (the soil and the foot) and, as its spreads, it allows for multiple sensory and material experiences to form part of a single phenomenon (one part in the shade the other exposed to the sun).

of a single, organic field. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004, p14) argue that what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with the real "...it constructs...it fosters connections" (ibid). Like a paper map it can be torn, folded, reversed and "...adapted to any kind of mounting" (ibid). We may draw it on any surface such as a wall, the floor or even the soil and it may form part of an artwork, a political action or some kind of meditation. In this sense the map is tentative, signalling a non-representational engagement with the world, one that does not seek to trace what is already there. But, rather, the map serves to investigate and to draw links between the numerous variables – forces, beings, materials and surfaces - involved in one's precise material relationship with the world. The map constructs new territories whereas the tracing simply reaffirms older boundaries (even if by tracing older maps)¹⁹⁶.

Interestingly unlike the tree the rhizomatic structure has multiple entryways (into and out of the soil) signalling a much more open-ended engagement with the boundary (a thought I will return to in section 5.3 of this conclusion when I make some final notes about the problem with the boundary inherent in Grosz's and Deleuze and Guattari's respective formulation thereof). This approach I would say is very much in line with the manner in which, throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to map the very affinities and material connections that I have with specific artworks — of how these affinities and connections bespeak particular desires, experiences, political and aesthetic (or cultural) biases and so on. But with more depth, when I began writing this dissertation I experienced a deep crisis: I felt language collapse the moment I saw it as a closed system representing only what is already there (a past, a history, a culture, an identity!). Why would I simply re-write this? Only when I began writing about the artwork without having any clear goal in mind did I begin making surprising, sometimes contradictory connections between the various artworks and my relationship with them. With the benefit of hindsight I would argue that if this is so it is because I no longer began with a structure already

¹⁹⁶ The seeming duality between the map and the tracing, the original and the reproduction, is addressed by Deleuze and Guattari (2004) on pages 14-16 of A *Thousand Plateaus*. Here they liken the tracing to a photographic reproduction that has already transposed the map into a representational image. In this sense the tracing is no longer tentative for it has become solidified, concrete, it can only reproduce the structure of the map but not the process of experimentation through which it came into being. The most grievous error would be to look at this image and to project through its seemingly structural form, some kind of original structure: here they take exception to Freud's analysis of the cartography of Little Hans which Freud always "...projects back onto the family photo" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 15).

in place (a tracing) but, rather, I began with the infinitely more complex process of mapping ¹⁹⁷. Perhaps this is pure projection on my part, but I do think the dissertation more a map than a tracing.

This brings me to the next sub-section where I wish to make a few brief remarks about the problem of writing the body. Or perhaps let me rather say 'of making the presence of the body a veritable part of the text' and not merely writing about it (which I would argue would constitute a tracing of it).

5.1.4 Writing the body

It is worthwhile citing Grosz (1994) at some length here, for her stated feminist concerns seem almost analogous to the manner in which, throughout this study, I have sought to approach the material encounter between the production of art, the artwork and its interpretation by a viewer. Grosz (1994, p20) formulates her position as a feminist ostensibly focussed on exploring the materiality of the body as such:

If as feminists have claimed, "our politics starts with our feelings" 198 and if the very category of experience or feeling is itself problematized through a recognition of its ideological production – if, that is, experience is not a raw mode of access to some truth – then the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publically observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between what is inside and outside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition.

Grosz's subsequent feminist analysis, including most recently the books 'Chaos territory and art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth (2008) and Becoming undone: Darwinian reflections on life,

¹⁹⁸ Quotes used in the original without attributing the statement to a particular feminist author.

¹⁹⁷ To be sure, I must thank both my theoretical supervisors Prof Sharon Morris and Prof John Picton for helping me to make this leap in my writing process. Both had independently of each other urged me to simply write about the artworks without first having any clear theoretic structure in place. This was a major departure from the very manner in which I had come to conceive of the role of artworks in relation to art theory. Throughout my undergraduate studies in South Africa works of art were routinely utilized as being illustrative of theoretic feminist and postcolonial concerns about identity politics and power. The ongoing discussion in South Africa about Candice Breitz' 'Rainbow nation series' (1997) seems to me a good case point. Though I touched on these works in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I would briefly argue here that the representational aspects of the semi-pornographic images of black and white bodies spliced together are too easily read as being symptomatic of white cultural biases inherent in the representation of the black body – as if the images betray some pre-existing political and social structure, one that somehow predates their coming together in the artistic process.

politics, and art (2012), remains motivated by a Feminist desire to speak her corporeal experience of being a woman and thus of challenging western patriarchy. As we will see, if Grosz views the act of embodied speaking as a potentially resistant, destabilising power, this is because Nietzsche (a constant reference throughout her writing¹⁹⁹) views the virtual forgetting of the body by western thought as a process of becoming silent, contained within the law and the narrow ideological confines of a particular historic situation. Thus even as this Feminist-Nietzschean approach forcibly reminds us to consider exactly how various regimes of power actively produce "...the body as historically specific, concrete and determinate" (Grosz 1994, p116), Grosz also reminds us that such control and stability as is seemingly inherent in the boundaries of the body, is always conditional upon the containment of the corporeal. However, if the corporeality of knowledge, art and language is acknowledged and carefully attended, the forces at work in the body are liberated thus making of corporeality a dynamic, potentially transformative force.

In *Volatile Bodies* Grosz (1994, vii) argues that subjectivity can indeed be thought in non-dualist terms based upon a biased distinction between the mind and the body, for example²⁰⁰. As Grosz's (1994) analysis shows many western philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Alphonso Lingis are acutely aware of this possibility and have all in their own particular ways sought to extricate the body from "...the biological and pseudonaturalist assumptions, which it has historically suffered" (Grosz 1994, p20). However to reconfigure the field of philosophy as an enterprise that "...refuses to privilege the mind at the expense of the body" (ibid) is to fundamentally alter the very nature of the field of philosophy itself, requiring different modes of expression, critical thinking and interpretation – in all another set of methodological tools through which to conceive of the encounter between the embodied subject and their world. Crucially, I wish to suggest that this applies not only to the field of philosophy, but also to all other disciplines including the practice of art and its methodologies.

¹⁹⁹ Almost all of Grosz's books including *Time travels: feminism, nature, power* (2005) are peppered with references to Nietzsche, sometimes as with '*Time travels*' (Grosz 2005, p55) including long citations utilized as prominent parts of the text. In point of fact she begins Chapter 4 of *Time Travels* with a citation from Nietzsche's 'On the genealogy of morals'.

²⁰⁰ Throughout *Volatile bodies* Grosz (1994) undertakes a study of the different ways that European philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze have conceived of the relationship between the body and the production of knowledge (including the fields of philosophy, art and linguistics). Throughout her analysis Grosz is at pains to show how the body has been marginalised by western philosophy and how by turning to the body as a means of writing, philosophising and generating discourse, one may implicitly destabilise the patriarchal, western logic at work therein.

Grosz (1994) now investigates the emancipatory, transformative potential located within an embodied form of feminist philosophy. In this regard Grosz's work certainly fits into a trajectory of corporeal feminist theory that has focussed on 'writing the body' as means to destabilise the phallocentric logic of western discourse - the primary example here is the field of Écriture Féminine²⁰¹ pioneered in the nineteen-seventies by French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Lucy Irigaray, Monique Wittig, and Helene Cixous²⁰². For example in Volatile bodies Grosz (1994, p204) explores the Möbius strip model first proposed by Deleuze in The logic of Sense (1969/ 1990), through the 'metaphorics of fluidity' proposed, in turn, by French Feminist philosopher Lucie Irigaray. Here Grosz argues that 'woman' has been inscribed as "...a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid" (Grosz 1994, p203) and ultimately as an overwhelming form of 'contamination' or 'dirt' within contemporary western society. Exactly because this is the case the neat interplay between different values (such as inside and outside, self and other, male and female) presupposed by the Möbius strip model remain inoperable. But arguably this reading is in itself flawed, given that in the Möbius strip model there really is no 'inside' or 'outside' to speak of: the Möbius strip is one long continuation of a single surface²⁰³. However, notwithstanding the flaws of this particular reading by Grosz, I am convinced that Grosz's understanding of the marginalization of feminine and the body by western philosophy, has transformed her writing in other material ways, ones that are perhaps less easy to analysis from such a purely analytical vantage point.

It is certainly interesting to see how Grosz's mode of critical engagement with the act of writing slowly changes from being at first overtly analytical in *Volatile Bodies'* (1994) to becoming more experiential and poetic, by for example paying close attention to the sensuous qualities of art and indeed of the written word itself in her later publications such as *Chaos territory and art:* Deleuze and the framing of the earth (2008). This shift in writing style may perhaps also be

²⁰¹ Historically speaking Écriture feminine was a strain of feminist theory that first evolved in the nineteen secventies. Hélène Cixous first uses the term ecriture feminine in her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976). Cixous argue that "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies." In the article 'Feminist criticism in the wilderness', Elaine Showalter (1986) defines this approach to writing as being the "...inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text." The inscription of the feminine in writing may take many forms including a formalist approach to style where the biological rhythms of femininity are written into the text itself, a focus on the manner in which sexual difference is articulated in a positive non-phallocentric manner such as in the writings of modernist male authors including most prominently Jean Genet and James Joyce, and even the outright dismissal of western capitalism and its institutions that are viewed as being innately phallocentric.

As a point of order Grosz posits the difference between the sexes within contemporary western society as one premised upon a masculine "mechanics of solids" (Grosz 1994, p204) that encodes the feminine as a dangerous/suspicious form of indeterminacy, fluid, formlessness or chaos.

²⁰³ I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof Sharon Morris, for pointing this out.

attributed to the fact that, in the time since publishing *Volatile bodies* (1994) Grosz has become a mature, self-confident writer and academic. But I do think it is largely indicative of her self-conscious awareness of her own corporeal investment in the act of writing. For example in a beautiful passage from *Becoming undone: Darwinian reflections on life, politics, and art* in which Grosz (2012, p190) discusses contemporary Aboriginal art of the deserts in Australia, she describes the affective relationship between the artwork and its meaningful interpretation by writing that these artworks may express:

...many things at once; a past, a people, and a future. It also expresses what all other arts express — a world. It presents the teaching of, and prepares for the opening up to, new worlds, worlds linked to our own, to the past, but soaring from them, singing new tunes, beating out new rhythms.

Clearly the numerous pauses in the text (especially in the last sentence of the paragraph cited here) serve to introduce something like a rhythm, a breathing space linked not only to a stylistic conceit on the part of the author but also, perhaps more closely, to the rhythms of the sensing, thinking, feeling body itself. Here I would argue that rather than attempting to clearly capture or represent a single fact, a single well-defined statement, such writing on Grosz's part attempts to open a number of disparate thoughts and practices (teaching, singing, art, the mapping of new worlds) to the presence of each other in non-hierarchally structured, corporeal manner. Thus apart from the subject matter of the text, and such stylistic conceits as whether the text is written well or not, the presence of the body therein is tacitly acknowledged: the passage forces the reader to halt, to think within the rhythms established by the numerous breathing spaces (the commas), and then to connect the various thoughts as a part of the expression of a single trajectory that runs within and through them. This certainly is in keeping with Grosz's larger aims as a Feminist that seeks to rethink and reconceptualise the binary structured, patriarchally biased relationship between the "...inside and outside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition" (Grosz 1994, p20).

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I have similarly sought to avoid the pitfalls of a binary approach to the act of writing by, for example, employing distinctly different voices as part of

the text. These voices may perhaps now be better understood as being material supplements²⁰⁴ to one another, signifying not an oppositional dualistic relationship between the personal and the analytical, but rather being an attempt to integrate the thinking feeling sensing body into the text and its material workings (and vice versa). As Barad (2010, p268)²⁰⁵ argues in the article 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come' regarding the notion of the text as 'supplement': "Deconstruction is not what Man does (it is not a method), it is what the text does, what matter does, how mattering performs itself'. Put in another way, within this dissertation these supplemental voices intra-act with one another, attesting to their performative, material relationship with the body (and each other) even as they present the reader with a material text to read and ultimately to interpret. In this reading the text is a performative, material phenomena that does something beyond the neat, linguistic system at stake in language and writing generally (including the rules of syntax and so on).

Of course as Barad's (2007) analysis makes clear, the written text (in this case ostensibly a Phd dissertation!) here serves to draw agential cuts within the otherwise entangled material world as well. In this way the text is in itself understood as being a material apparatus that actively participates in generating and maintaining a set of boundaries too. For example, clearly this dissertation serves as some kind of instrumental proof of my capacity to give a clear, in-depth account of my artistic research and its findings to others (including my supervisor, my examiners and so forth). In this much the material text is readily implicated in, for example, the very question of assessment – drawing up a series of agential relationships between artistic practice and theoretic research, the body and language, the author and the reader. Here I must turn again to the question of the boundary in particular the material, surface relationship between the body and instrumental function of language.

²⁰⁴ The notion of the supplement is ostensibly drawn from the book *Positions* by Jacques Derrida (1978). In *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex' Butler* (1993) summarizes the Derridean notion of the supplement rather succinctly. Butler (1993, p38), writes that, in his "...consideration of the form/matter distinction in *Positions*, he suggests as well that matter must be redoubled, at once as a pole within a binary opposition, and as that which exceeds that binary coupling, as a figure for its nonsystematizability".

²⁰⁵ This comment is actually found in Footnote number 11 of the article by Barad. However in the main text where the footnote is found Barad (2010, p265) considers how ethics is part of the very nature of nature and "…not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world (as if fact and value were radically Other)". For Barad materiality always entails exposure to the Other, and in this way one cannot simply choose to be ethically responsible, for it is "…an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness" and thus not some obligation on the part of the thinking, sensing, feeling, human subject.

Throughout this discussion I will implicitly draw parallels between Grosz's approach to the body as a site that may be etched and written upon by the social and the usage of language by way of the tattoo in 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012).

5.2 The instrumentality of language: the body and its memory

In a sub-section entitled 'Nietzschean body writing' Grosz (1994, p129-134) outlines Nietzsche's approach to the relationship between the body, memory and truth. As Grosz shows Nietzsche views the creation of memory as a painful mnemotechinic process through which the subject comes into being as a distinct phenomena. In order to create the conditions for civilization that underpin the formation of a particular kind of subject, the body must be branded by the law and given a memory that it cannot, dare not, ever forget. In *On the genealogy of morals lecce homo* Nietszche (1887/ 1989, p62) writes that:

Perhaps there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his mnemotechnics. 'If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory' - this is the main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth...Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself...

In this mnemotechnic, Nietzschean sense, the subject retains the after affects of its painful experience of branding, one that leaves traces on their very psyche even as they learn to forget the pain through which this memory was first constituted.

As Grosz (1994, p132-133) shows in her subsequent discussion of Nietzsche's writings on the origins of justice, Roman law was based upon the pleasure of inflicting pain on others as recompense for crimes committed (schadenfreude indeed!). Thus, if fields concerned with the problem of truth such as the law and philosophy were to acknowledge their corporeal origins they would be reduced to being handmaidens of the passions of the body, with pleasure and pain being its primary mediums of currency and exchange²⁰⁶. As such the creation of memory is a painful double operation of remembering and of selectively forgetting: even as the subject is required to have a memory, it is required to forget the exact corporeal means by and through

cited in Grosz 1994, p132).

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²⁰⁶ As Grosz (1994, p132) argues the lawful cost of debtors unkept promise is thus their pain. Here Grosz is actually referring to the analyses of Gilles Deleuze put forward in the book 'Nietzsche and philosophy' (1962/2006) where he argues that pain thus becomes "...a medium of exchange a currency, an equivalent" (Deleuze

which this memory was first constituted. This means that the body, the force of its passions and the particularities of its experiences is effectively written out of the western history of truth exactly because its very presence threatens to unravel it. As Grosz (1994, p132) writes, in order to see itself as being...

...objective, true, valid for all, independent of formulation and context, outside of history, and immutable, knowledges must disavow or deny that they are consequences not only of particular bodies but, even more narrowly, of particular dominant forces or passions of bodies.

Importantly Grosz (1994, 132) argues that the skin serves as the pages of notebook on which the very conditions required for any form of social organization is physically²⁰⁷ and psychically etched. In a material process reminiscent of Butler's (1993) analysis of 'iterative citationality' 208 the very conception of the body as an entity to be reckoned (for example as an entity with a gendered identity, one with physical properties and capacities to match) is the result of the repeated contact between the workings of materially embodied discursive practices and the physical body²⁰⁹. Of course, as Grosz argues, the seemingly self-evident truth of the relationship between the body and its particular identity is tacitly reinforced by the workings of language: for Nietzsche truth is a frozen, 'mobile army of metaphors'210 whose meaning is mistaken as being literal. Moreover, language is doubly metaphoric. As Nietzsche argues in 'On truth and lie in an extra moral sense' (1873/1982) the representational function of language begins with the body: "A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image – first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound - second metaphor" (Nietzsche cited in Grosz 1994, p126). In this way language begins with the body, it is a transcription of the experiences of the sensing body and the forces that flow through it. But exactly because these experiences have been transposed, gradually removed from its corporeal origins, language seems to have an objective status as being a truthful, representational account of reality The difficult boundary between representation, ideology and particular forms of subjectivity now come to the fore.

As I will show in my later discussion of Grosz's analysis in section 5.3 of this chapter, the very means through which the body conceives of itself (including the dualistic, Cartesian western, perception of itself as being a subject with a mind and a body) is not simply the result of a disembodied, mental process of ideological coercion.

²⁰⁸ The concept of iterative 'citationality' mooted by Butler (1993) is discussed in Chapter 5.3.1 of this conclusion. ²⁰⁹ Also see the discussion on language in sub-Chapter 4.3.1 of this dissertation where I discuss the link between objectivity and distance especially as regards the capacity of touch to eliminate it by generating a cathectic relationship between language and the body.

²¹⁰ Thus Nietzsche's admonishment that we should 'philosophize with a hammer' in Twilight of the idols, or How to philosophise with a hammer' (1889) may be understood as a call to shatter the frozen metaphors that attempt to capture the dynamic forces within the body, to liberate them and in doing so to infuse philosophy with renewed vigour.

As the postcolonial, feminist filmmaker and theorist Thi Minh-ha Trinh (1991)²¹¹ makes clear in her discussion of the boundary between the performer and the audience, it is vitally important to disrupt the idea that the artwork, like language, is a mere representation of 'reality as it is'. In such an understanding of the relationship between the artwork (or performance) and the audience the latter exists merely to decode such meaning as is already present in the work²¹². As Trinh's analysis (1991, p93-94) shows, the seeming indexical relationship between meaning and matter inherent in this approach tacitly reifies the normative workings of dominant ideology and is, in turn, better understood as being the complete denial of the mediating power of the subjectivity of the audience. That is to say, in Trinh's approach the audience is understood as being active contributors to the very meaning-making process itself. Here Trinh urges the audience to discover the reality of representations even as they engage with the material fact of what is presented for their consideration. In this regard the acknowledgement of the agency of their own subjectivity serves to disrupt the normative workings of ideology that make of them mere spectators in the world: instead the audience now become co-producers of reality, of the artwork, by addressing it "...in their own language and with their own representation(al)213 subjectivity" (Trinh, 1991, p94). In effect this means that performance is no longer role-bound, inasmuch as it is the performance of a specific predefined role for a predefined entity (the audience). But rather, performance becomes the plurivocal expression of different material bodies and representational realities that productively interact with one another.

Perhaps we may follow Barad's (2007) reasoning here: we may consider how the theatre itself acts as a material apparatus that actively participates in the exact manner in which agential cuts are enacted – generating such boundaries as those between the performer and the audience. However Barad and Trinh's approaches are in fact compatible: whereas Barad pays attention to the agency of the material apparatus (one that is always mediated by the very material presence of the body that uses it) Trinh approach suggests that the power of the apparatus (or its agency) remains but one active form of agency in many: as Trinh (1991, p93) argues, the audience also brings with them their own particular subjectivities (and ideological biases) that, if

²¹¹ See the book When the moon waxes red: representation, gender and cultural politics (Trinh, 1991).

²¹² I would suggest that Trinh's (1991) analysis of the relationship between the artwork and its interpretation holds true for our material encounter with language as well: language is never simply am indexical representation of reality as it is. And any attempt to posit it as such, that one may merely interpret it without becoming materially, subjectively and ultimately performatively involved with the meaning of the text for example, is in itself a working of a dominant ideology. In this sense the interpretative encounter with a written text may be understood as the plurivocal expression of particular subjectivities that interact with one another, and with the dominant ideology that seeks to shape this encounter.

²¹³ My insert. In the original text Trinh (1991, 94) simply uses the term 'representation subjectivity'.

acknowledged as an active participant in the creation of the performance, may fundamentally alter its meaning. Now, as Marvin Carlson argues in 'Resistant Performance' (1996, p312), when a specific performer engages with a culturally and historically specific audience there are new and often surprising negotiations that take place: Carlson here mentions the work of Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco entitled 'Two undiscovered Amerindians' (1992).

For 'Two undiscovered Amerindians' (1992) the artists presented themselves publicly for three days in a golden cage as recently 'discovered' peoples from an island in the Gulf of Mexico. Importantly mock anthropological signs and scientific explanations of these recently discovered peoples and their customs further supplemented the display. The performers engaged a variety of so-called 'traditional' tasks including lifting weights, watching television, sewing voodoo dolls and being taken by leash to the bathroom by armed guards. As Carlson (1996 p311) notes to the absolute surprise of Gomez-Pena and Fusco many people took the work seriously! In this sense then the apparatus (the cage and the various actions performed by the artists) would seem to have over-determined the meaningful interpretation of the work. But, as Carlson (ibid) notes the fact is that the performance took place in a particular western, cultural context where such displays are well known and historically serve a particular purpose. In this way this particular western audience shares a particular kind of subjectivity through which they identify with the artwork (whereas clearly the artist did not share this subjective framework).

Returning then to the signs that accompanied the display in 'Two undiscovered Amerindians' (1992): here we see how in a culture where the authority of language (its seeming indexicality and capacity to simply describe things as they are) remains largely unquestioned, this also actively contributes to the very meaningful functioning of the material apparatus. This as Carlson (1996) argues in this instance the overtly ironic meaning of the texts (and indeed the whole of the display), was irrevocably lost, changing the very meaning of the artwork. In all I would argue that the material conventions of the display, its very material form including the cage and the signs, all contributed to this seeming disjunct between artists' intention and the actual outcome of the artwork.

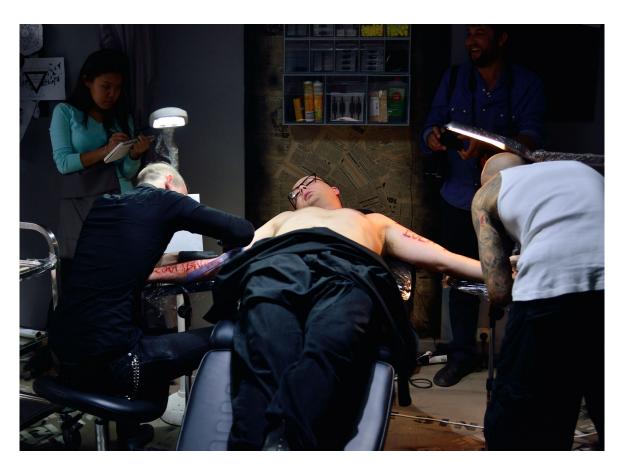


Figure 38: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (7 September 2012), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: David Thom).

A brief related, note here: in 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012) I too faced a similar problem. Exactly because two tattoo artists were simultaneously working on my body (one on each arm) this generated a crucifix-like form (Figure 38, shown above). For me, and for the tattoo artists the positioning of the body in this particular was simply a practical solution to a rather practical problem: in order to allow sufficient access to the areas on my arms that were to be tattooed I had to lie down on my back and remain entirely still for the duration of the process. However, for many of the audience members from Europe who share in a Christian background and history, the symbolic inference of the pose was vitally important. To be certain I am not against this reading of the work of such. The larger point here is that what I conceive of as an apparatus (in this case the artwork) and what the particular subjectivities of the audience conceives of as being one, and how we relate to it by way of our intersubjective frameworks, have a decisive impact on its meaningful interpretation. Basically, I thought the material form of the work would act as a means to clearly render my particular concerns related to the relationship between art,

artistic research, language and the body, but owing to the audience's identification with the crucifix-form this changed the meaning of the work itself.

Regardless, beyond such deep-seated cultural differences involved in the immediate presentation and interpretation of the performance in Kassel, the fact is that it did not represent the entirety of the artwork: again, the work is still in process. In this sense I would caution against the tendency to view this performance as being contained within a single space (the tattoo shop in Kassel). This artwork now forms part of other artworks, my daily activities and indeed my life - influencing and changing their signified meanings. In this regard see for example the artwork shown in Figure 39 (below) where the fading tattoo on my arm is clearly visible as I physically interact with my surroundings (including plants and other written texts engraved on them or visible as small plaques that describe them). Thus, despite the initial disjunct between the signified meanings of the work at play in Kassel, I am loathe to suggest that it is in any way wholly representative of the artwork itself: unlike 'Two undiscovered Amerindians' (1992) the artwork is durational and continues to this very day.



Figure 39: Photographic documentation of 'After Linnaeus', (2013), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Mika Thom)

5.3 Unruly origins: pleasure and the boundary

In keeping with the idea of a certain modicum of unruliness being inherent in the artwork, throughout the dissertation I have sought to show how such a certain amount of resistance to conformity is inherent in the very material approach that forms the basis of this study. Thus in conjunction with the analysis proffered by Barad (2007) regarding the instrumental role fulfilled

by the material apparatus, as I have shown in the previous sub-chapter, we also have to conceive of how the very materiality of the artwork and the body that perceives it may readily complicate and open up the meaningful interpretation of art. Of course the act of interpretation forms a veritable part of the way in which boundaries between the artwork and the audience, the self and other, congeal as meaningful structures. But this still does not adequately address the question of why such boundaries are enacted to begin with? Basically, I would argue that outside the narrow confines of arguing that socio-politic and economic boundaries are enacted purely as part of a survivalist, institutional drive to control, order and govern the corporeal, we also have to consider other perhaps less instrumental, unruly material possibilities. Here the discussion regarding Darwin's approach to beauty in Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides a truly rich avenue of exploration - for the practice and interpretation of art as much as for the relationship between the body, the boundary and the institution.

To reiterate the position I put forward earlier in the Chapter 3 of this dissertation, 'Darwinian' reflections on sex, beauty and art in the work of El Anatsui', artworks are the material embodiment of context-specific ideals of beauty. As I have shown Darwin's (1871/2004 & 1859/2009) material approach to the question of beauty and its relationship to the boundaries that exist within society (including but not limited to those between the various sexes and races) provide an insightful means of theorizing and accounting for the appearance of boundaries whilst retaining a modicum of unruliness: as Darwin's analysis of the relationship between sexual selection and beauty illustrates, the perception of beauty is not in any way connected to the moral good (Donald 2009). But, rather, the perception of beauty originates in the expression of a particular sexual preference for certain physical characteristics and forms of behavior. However, through the repeated expression of this preference, (such as that for the particular eye color) it is translated into the appearance of material boundaries - both as part of the body and as part of the culture of a particular society. To be sure, these boundary modifications are both 'cultural' inasmuch as they be particular taste of a specific group, as much as they are 'corporeal' (including the desire of the body but also of how, during the ongoing process of its evolution, the body physically responds to those preferences evolving ever-more decorative, complex forms). This is a complicated way of saying that exactly because through a number of successive generations certain individuals express a particular preference for certain physical and behavioral characteristics, and act upon this preference by way of their sexual conduct, we may eventually be able to distinguish racially, sexually and culturally, between one group of people and another.

Following the analyses proffered by Dunbar (1999 & 2009), Barash 2012, McComb and Semple (2005) and Tomasello et al (2005) and Kirschner & Tomassello (2010), in Chapter 3 I have argued that the perception of beauty plays an active material role in the process of group formation and social grooming. And exactly because beauty is not purely an expression of the morally good, we may also consider how its relatively unruly, material origins within the body also leave its indelible mark the processes of group formation and boundary maintenance. Although I have touched upon this area of investigation in Chapter 3.2 and 3.3 of this dissertation, I do believe that more empirical research that clearly connect the maintenance of social groups with the force of sexual selection is required here - in particular where it concerns the role of the fine arts therein. To be plain, whilst the study by Tomasselo et al (2005) makes a hugely important contribution to understanding how song (or to be more specific the act of singing together) may help service and maintain social bonds, the largely solitary practices so readily associated with the field of fine art such as painting, drawing and sculpting are still not accounted for. Perhaps here we have to reconsider the very idea of solitary art-making, for even when one is alone, engaged in the seemingly useless activity of making an artwork, you are always already socially, culturally and materially engaged.

Importantly, even as Darwin materially connects the perception of beauty with the body by way of the principle of sexual selection, the social makes its presence felt, shaping and refining such taste as is involved in the process of procreation until such time as these modifications become seemingly useless or excessive²¹⁴. In animals we have seen how the certain species of elk have evolved hugely over-sized antiers that seem to fulfill no purpose whatsoever. Thus what begins as a useful means to attract a potential mate may turn into a positive boon, threatening the very survival of the species. But in humans the evolution of language, as with the practice of art, may very well be just such an excessive adaptation: for no matter how useful we think our complex vocabulary actually is, its complexity far exceeds what the strict rule of individual survival pure and simple dictates (see particularly the analyses by Dunbar 1999 & 2009 and detailed in Chapter 3.3.2 of this dissertation). Here the discussion of the 'Blind alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) by Willem Boshoff in Chapter 4 of this dissertation provides some key thoughts.

In the 'Blind Alphabet' (1991- ongoing) Boshoff provides a delightful artistic rendering of the complexity of relationship between everyday language and the body. The work is a stark

 $^{^{214}}$ 'Useless' or 'excessive' only as in when measured according to the strict laws of survival that govern the process of evolution by natural selection – see Chapter 2.2 - 2.3 of this dissertation for a more in-depth discussion.

reminder not only of the fact that language is always evolving, but that it is always material embodied practice too - one no less involved in the drawing up of corporeal boundaries. For who would employ the archaic, now largely defunct term drusiform as part of their everyday vocabulary? The answer presents an opportune moment to reflect on the complexity of the close interrelationship between social boundaries, corporeality and language: simply put, the blind may still have much use for the forgotten terms contained in an artwork that is ostensibly a dictionary of touch. Perhaps then with more acumen, we may consider how the transformation of linguistic boundaries (between everyday and archaic language, for example) always also implies the creation of new boundaries and exclusionary practices that attend them. As the discussion in Chapter 4 of Boshoff's 'Blind Alphabet' makes clear, for the blind it a veritable disaster that terms associated with touch have effectively disappeared from use in everyday language - rendering their physical blindness as a virtual disconnect not only from the world of art, but indeed their functional participation in contemporary everyday life. That is to say, through the bias towards the sighted inherent in everyday contemporary language of art the blind are effectively materialized as a disabled group of individuals. More specifically, Boshoff shows us how the very practice of art participates in maintaining this boundary – thus providing a critical form of self-reflexivity that attends the involvement of visual art and artists within this process of marginalization even as he attempts to address the situation. Thus even if, and especially when we wish to suggest that boundaries may yet be transformed, we have to consider how those boundaries came into being and exactly what other boundaries may come into play once old boundaries are reconfigured? Throughout my dissertation this has been a central concern and I think it fitting to clearly address this question in the conclusion again.

As Boshoffs 'Blind Alphabet' clearly reminds us, even in the seemingly disembodied realm of language, we always have to consider the body's relationship to the boundary, including that of its desire, pleasure and pain. Here is the rub: in keeping with Nietzsche's understanding of the relationship between the law and the body proffered in the previous section, I would argue that there is always an element of schadenfreude within the formation and transformation of boundaries too. Let me make a few brief, related observations here: in my mind there can be no doubt that in the 'Blind Alphabet' Boshoff enjoys making the sighted squirm, positively disabling them by presenting the blind with an opportunity to showcase their particular skill-set as the 'experts of touch'. In fact throughout his oeuvre Boshoff seems intent on subverting

existing boundaries at the expense of the dominant group and its ideology²¹⁵. I would argue that, in doing so Boshoff is as much ethically and politically motivated as by personal pleasure. But, beyond such more personal and political concerns on the part of the artist, I would, in agreement with Nietzsche, suggest that, consciously or unconsciously, the veritable taking of pleasure from someone else's misfortune lies at the heart of the law and its ongoing maintenance and transformation of social boundaries too. Thus even as I wish to suggest that the artwork 'Every sentence draws blood' (2012) is in one important sense a Nietzschean²¹⁶ statement that seeks to reconfirm and reconnect the corporeal relationship between the law, the individual body and language (or to be more specific, the capacity of language to inscribe the body with meaning), I would also suggest that we have to consider the role of pleasure therein.

People with tattoos are not masochists, for why decorate and indeed inscribe their bodies with ink if this were the sole purpose of the act? In short, aside from the official marking of the body by institutions such as the prison system, when people actively choose to have their bodies tattooed these markings also serve to make the body more beautiful. Certainly today tattoos largely serve a decorative purpose that may only tangentially signify one's belonging to a certain group²¹⁷. Here Darwinian overtones abound, for if beauty is indeed involved in the drawing up of group boundaries then tattoos would be one cultural form of expression that signify distinct ideals of beauty.

²¹⁵ In earlier works such as 'Abamfusa Lawula/The purple shall govern' (1997) Boshoff makes veritable fools of those who can understand English by physically writing in large a number of anti-apartheid slogans in Zulu and other African languages on the wall. The English translation of these political slogans is in turn written in very small letters just below each slogan. This has the comical effect of having educated, largely white audience stand up close to the artwork, whilst black South Africans that can read the messages from afar, are left to marvel at the fact of their ignorance (of what is writ large against the wall).

²¹⁶ As we will see in the next sub-chapter, according to a Nietzschean understanding there is a deep-seated element of pleasure in drawing up the very boundary between the body and the social in such a way that it becomes a 'bloodless' process i.e. that it erases the presence and indeed the suffering of the body from memory even as it inscribes it with a history.

²¹⁷ Basically the social stigma attached to tattoos has largely disappeared today and though groups like prisoners may still inscribe their bodies with particular signs that identify them as being part of a particular group, the practice is certainly now too widespread to make of group belonging the primary function of the tattoo.



Figure 40: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood' (8 September 2013), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Mika Thom)



Figure 41: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood' (11 September 2013), Johan Thom. (Photographic credit: Mika Thom)

So there exists an element of pleasure in 'writing' the body in this particular material way, one that tacitly contradicts the rather negative associations inherent in the title of my artwork. Put in another way although, every sentence may draw blood, painfully marking and inscribing the body with an identity and a history, by choosing to have one's body decorated in this particular material manner also acknowledges the sensuous drives and desires of the body: basically tattoos are sexy (to some people!). In this way the final artwork seeks to highlight the very materiality of the written text in a more positive, open-ended manner thus lending complexity to the meaningful interpretation of the artwork. For example, the element of design in the tattoo and its relationship to pleasure signify a material reading of the relationship between the body, language and the artwork that is not solely defined by instrumentalizing forces of ideologically biased, institutional prerogatives.

Of course the question of choice is vitally important here. For example, the Jewish inmates of concentration camps who were tattooed by the Nazis to clearly identify them as belonging to a specific racial group had no choice in the matter. Thus the prisoner numbers tattooed on their arms would only in the narrowest, tragic sense serve as some kind of pleasure – perhaps as in the pleasure of having survived the holocaust despite the Nazi aim of exterminating the whole of the Jewish race. But even then, this form of pleasure would be so tinged with loss and sadness that it would arguably bring no joy whatsoever to the bearers of the tattoos. But, and this is a deeply contentious point, I am convinced that the Nazis actually enjoyed marking their Jewish victims, and indeed destroying their bodies, during the Second World War²¹⁸. Regardless at my personal horror at thinking this the case, as we have seen in the previous sub-chapter, Roman law itself was in fact based upon the pleasure of exacting pain as recompense for crimes committed. And sadly, as the analysis of Foucault in texts such as *Discipline and Punish: the birth of prison* (1975/1991) and *Madness and Civilization* (1964/1988) shows, what constitutes a

²¹⁸ Of course, the Nazi's may have positively enjoyed marking their Jewish prisoners in this material way, exactly because it concretely materialized these inmates as their sub-human, sub-ordinates. (Ironically, after having visited the camps in Munich in 2008, I can honestly say that this particular reading of the Nazis violent, inhuman conduct toward the Jewish people gives me no pleasure whatsoever). But this does not alter the fact that we have to account for pleasure - even in the most violent, deplorable of situations.

crime is always a historically materialized phenomena 219 – as in the case of the 'crimes' of homosexuality, insanity, vagrancy, and racial otherness so brutally persecuted and punished by the institutions of the Third Reich, including the infamous concentration camps in Auschwitz.

5.3.1 The transformation of the boundary: concluding remarks about the apparatus

If the body may resist, and transform the ideological forces at work in and on it, how are we to theorize the reconfiguration of methodological boundaries inherent in such transformation? I am convinced that we always have to consider the structural problem with the boundary, of how it is maintained and of how it may be reconfigured by practices associated with philosophy, art and science. If this is so it is because there are context-specific material boundaries and corporeal limits through and by which the very act of being itself occurs. Here I must briefly turn to the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) showing how gender itself may be considered a performative engagement between the body and the social through which boundaries are slowly materialized.

In Bodies that matter (1993) Butler argues that gender identities are the result of a form of 'iterative citationality' that materially link corporeality with discursive practices — where each act of gender identification patently cites all other cultural acts of gender identity until such time as the boundaries between them become 'real' and seemingly 'natural'. Butler (1993) shows that this means that gender formations are always grounded in historically specific conditions that are also open to a certain amount of slippage, excess and ultimately resistance. In this regard Butler argues that 'drag', as the exaggerated miss-appropriation of the feminine qualities associated with the biologically female, not only cites and thus patently re-affirms that seemingly natural linkage between the body and its gender identity, but also actually destabilizes the very,

²¹⁹ Throughout his writings Foucault stresses that discourse is always embodied by and within the workings of specific material institutions such as prisons, psychiatric asylums and the like, ergo the notion of 'discursive practices': Like the rules of grammar, the normative workings of the institution, including its very material form, do not only affect how something may be said, but exactly what may be said or not. In *Discipline and Punish: the birth of prison* Foucault (1975/1991) uses Bentham's panopticon, ostensibly a design for a prison house, as example. In the panopticon a single guard is placed centrally in the prison with prisoners all individually positioned in a circular form around him. This means that the prisoners are all under constant surveillance, thus fulfilling in the primary goal of the prison – which is to monitor and curtail all forms of self-expression. Punishment here amounts to the loss of all privacy. The important point is that the status of being a prisoner is discursively materialized through the very form of the institution too (including its built structure and the laws that govern it).

institutional norms of heterosexuality itself. This brings to the fore the very question of self-identification - not only with the identity formations that are actively at work within any given society, but also with the other individuals that one may come into contact with.

Here I have first-hand experience of how my encounter with a young girl in India in 2010 as part of an artwork was rendered more complex: this encounter was shown to be conditional not only upon the great variety of normative socio-cultural expectations that shape what it means to be a young female child but also upon the exact material context provided by the artwork 'Thank you' (Appendix A, pp34-37), Basically, through its particular material workings (including in a narrow sense the use of materials such as oil and milk as part of the work and, in a more structural sense, the particular material conditions that govern the participation of individuals within the context provided by the artwork) the artwork introduced a form of slippage into normative, ideological identity formations including, but not limited to gender and class. This resulted in my being unable to maintain seemingly ordinary linkages between the experience of encountering individuals, their physical appearance and their social identities — imagining them to be older, younger of different gender and so forth. But whereas this may be considered the result of a Deleuzian, machinic, interaction with the surrounding material world and the individual beings therein, it does leave me with a problem.

If as Grosz (1994,) argues boundaries such as those between the sexes are not conceived of in any well defined, seemingly pre-discursive order (such as the distinction between the mind and the body that forms the basis of Cartesian analysis), and if the material surface of bodies connect us with the world in such as way as to render distinctions between internal and the external, the object and its boundaries subjective (if not entirely suspect), then a complete and utter collapse into the chaos of pure materiality may seem immanent. Put in simpler terms, if everything is connected as part of an ever-expanding material-discursive machinic assemblage as Deleuze and Guattari (1980/ 2004) and Grosz (1994, p120) suggest what are we to make of the fact that in rather pragmatic terms certain boundaries remain? Some people are wealthier than others, there is a biological distinction between the sexes, the surface of an oil painting is not one's finger and so on. As I have argued in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the insightful analyses of Karen Barad (2007) in Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning regarding the role of material apparatus provides a means of rethinking the boundary and its relationship to the exact material manner in which agential cuts are drawn into the otherwise wholly entangled state of existence.

Barad's particular material understanding of the apparatus has the advantage of not connecting the existence of boundaries to any pre-discursive, transcended philosophic principle. Instead, boundaries are understood as being performatively enacted through the intra-active, material workings of the apparatus - a context relational, material process that distributes agency amongst the various phenomena involved in the experimental arrangement. In the case of the discussion of Willem Boshoff's artwork the 'Blind alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, within the confines of the gallery space the artwork functions as an apparatus that undermines the ordinary, sighted workings of the art gallery²²⁰. If this so it is because the 'Blind Alphabet' functions as an apparatus that by way of its reliance on touch as the primary means of engagement with the audience, enacts agential cuts in such a way that sighted viewers in the art gallery are actively disempowered. Instead the blind become something like the visionary guides that may help the sighted viewer unlock the cathectic potential of touch within the experience of the artwork. The sighted audience can no longer identify with the objects that form part of the artwork purely through teloramic sight (a kind of disembodied looking from afar) but are reliant upon the blind to describe the artwork to them by way of their experience of touch thus linking the material workings of language, interpretation, the artwork and the body.

This approach I think a neat riposte to the idea that, by way of their inclusion within the institution, artworks are somehow wholly disinvested of power - in the process neutering their material-conceptual 'unruliness' (to return to a term I used in the introduction). In brief, Boshoffs 'Blind Alphabet' may indeed have something like an instrumental function in relation to the institutions of art, but one that tacitly, tactilely, critiques and undermines its dominant visual mode of operation. Here I must briefly reconsider the more positive productive understanding of the apparatus and its instrumental workings at stake in this dissertation, showing how it opens up pathways of resistance and transformation not accounted for by Agamben's analysis in the book *What is an apparatus and other* essays (Agamben, 2009).

In the essay 'What is an apparatus' Agamben (2009, p3-24) traces the entomological roots of the term 'apparatus' (or 'dispositif' in French). He does so in order to more clearly understand the place of the apparatus in the work of the French Poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault who never actually formalized and defined the apparatus throughout his life's work. Though there is certainly much of interest in Agamben's subsequent analysis, both regarding the

From this perspective there certainly exists a number of parallels with the artwork 'Thank you', Johan Thom, (2010), which is similarly engaged with the sensory experience of touch as a means to reconfigure existing social hierarchies.

work of Foucault and the idea of apparatus, the key point here is that Agamben comes to a rather negative conclusion: for Agamben (2009, p18) we must incessantly do battle with apparatuses, struggling against their oikonomical drive to administrate, manage and control the forms of subjectivity produced by the apparatus itself. Here Agamben refers to the origins of the term 'dispositive' in the Greek term 'oikonomia' which "...signifies the administration of the oikos (the home) and more generally, management" (Agamben 2009, p8). Thus, as Agamben notes, the apparatus firstly refers to a useful practice, "...a practical activity that must face a problem and a particular situation each and every time" (Agamben 2009, p9). Of course, as Agamben shows, the institutional way in which this practice resolves problems is by actively producing forms of subjectivity that are in effect useful only inasmuch as the apparatus manages to 'capture' living beings within particular, institutional forms of subjectivity. Here Agamben moves beyond both Foucault analyses and the etymological roots of the term in Greek: Agamben (2009, p13) now proposes a massive partitioning between "...living beings (or substances)... and apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured".

However, what bothers me is that, in the universalizing way that Agamben (2009) conceives of the negative role of the apparatus in society, he seems to forget that this practice is indeed particular: the apparatus is particular not only to the context-specific way in which different state institutions administrate, organize and govern different societies, but also in the way that individuals may strive to do so through the construction of (or even inherent reliance upon)²²¹ their own apparatuses — one's conceived sometimes in contradistinction to the larger ideological aims of their particular society or social group. In Agamben's subsequent analysis this has the effect of generating a closed, self-referential circle in which the workings of the apparatus continuously refer back only to the power relationships inherent in the administration and governance of society by way of its dominant institutions. On this point Agamben (2009, p13) argues that apparatuses take the place of universals in Foucault's analysis — making of them the primary enemy of individuality, specificity, in fact of all difference (a viewpoint Agamben tacitly supports throughout his subsequent analysis). This leaves little to no room for the micropolitics of the personal, of pleasure, taste and individual preference within the institutional, constraining workings of the apparatus.

²²¹ It is perhaps good to remember that the material apparatus is not simply an external device that humans construct, like a machine. But it is certainly also those sensory capacities that we have evolved such as eyes ears, through which we consciously or unconsciously intra-act with the world. See Chapter 4.1 of this dissertation for a more in-depth discussion of this aspect of the apparatus.

As Barad's (2007) analyses suggests material apparatuses are in fact central to the entirety of our meaningful encounter with the world. Perhaps with more specificity, as I have shown apparatuses can also be turned against other apparatuses - even when they seem to form an integral part of them: Boshoff's 'Blind alphabet' (1991 - ongoing) is a very good example. For despite the fact that the 'Blind Alphabet' is an artwork, which from a larger institutional perspective forms part of the very apparatuses that seek to govern and control the conduct of individuals, it still manages to undermine the instrumental, ideological functioning of the institution itself. And again, why does Boshoff seek to do so? As I have previously argued in this conclusion there is an element of schadefreude inherent in his practice. Some might term this pure maliciousness on Boshoff's part but I would rather suggest that, like me, Boshoff takes real personal pleasure in introducing an element of corporeal and political 'unruliness' within the institution and its various ideologically biased, instrumental workings.

5.4 Concluding remarks regarding the politics and pleasures of identification

The question of choice, identification and pleasure may also be posited in another related way: for example in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, 'Haptic perception, collaboration and the work of Santu Mofokeng', I argued that the photographic subjects of the 'The Black Photo Album /Look at Me 1890-1950' by Santu Mofokeng (1997) consciously chose to represent themselves in a particular photographic manner. Certainly this is as much a conscious statement regarding the personal aspirations and desires of the sitters of the portraits, as a deep-seated act of resistance against the ruling apartheid ideology of the day - one which would have these black subjects remain uncivilized 'other' counterparts to their white, European contemporaries. And, even as I have showed how, by turning to the potential of haptic perception as a means to identify and to enter into a productive, enjoyable material conversation with the artwork, I kept feeling something like a secret joy at the political implications of the series of photographic images. In brief, I love the images that form part of 'The Black Photo Album' not only because I am attracted to their surfaces, but also because I am drawn to their political implications. In this way I also take pleasure in the challenge they represent to narrow-minded racist, neo-colonial ideology of apartheid. Here then we see how the sensory, the political and the body-politic connect by way of a material surface approach to the meaningful interpretation of the artwork. This I would suggest holds true for 'Every sentence draws blood' as well.

A few brief notes regarding the notion of schadenfreude and its relationship to 'Every sentence' draws blood" (Johan Thom 2012) now seem in order: the elements of design were left up to the 'experts' (i.e. the two tattoo artists) to decide, thus leaving them with the polemical problem of designing the tattoo even as they realize that in order to materialize their particular vision of the beauty implicit therein, they would actually have to inflict pain upon my body; at the very outset of formalizing the work I knew that I would enjoy the fact that the audience present at the making of the tattoo in Kassel would be shocked by the physical appearance of blood during the tattooing process. To be certain I felt that this shock was necessary in order to illustrate clearly how the practices of art and research were always connected by way of the body. But shock in itself is meaningless: I wanted to make an artistic statement that is as much political, philosophical as it is aesthetic. And, I felt that in order to do so most clearly I had to reduce writing to the material level of the body - a point amply illustrated by the fact of its bloody intrusion into the skin. Again here we see how aesthetic and political, the cultural and the material collude in the making of an artwork. And last but not least, I enjoy the fact that my body will heal (whereas the memory of the event will remain etched in the mind of the viewer in a rather one-sided way).

Nonetheless, I must take some recourse to logic too, that is, in the capacity of the mind to think and analyze the experience of the performance in some coherent manner. All tattoos hurt, bleed and eventually heal. To be sure tattoo artists commonly use a clean cloth to wipe the blood - something I asked the tattoo artists not to do on this occasion. In hindsight it seems to me that what most bothered the audience at the presentation was the physical appearance of blood at what they thought was ostensibly a 'bloodless' occasion (i.e. a conference on artistic research and also, someone getting a tattoo)²²². In real terms this means that some of the attendees at the presentation were deeply shocked and prone to make rather over-exaggerated, gut statements regarding the work – something clearly illustrated by a short video

²²² Somewhat humorously, I remember just after the presentation in Kassel my brother saying to me that (I) clearly people with tattoos are tough as nails and not to be trifled with and (2) that he would never get a one. Given how popular and widespread tattoos have become I am certain that the former is highly debatable. Moreover, I think that if people were to physically attend processes of bodily modification such as plastic surgery, another widespread practice today, they might express a similar reticence at having their bodies physically modified through surgery. But reticence is not wholesale refusal to do something, and certainly if someone felt a strong enough desire to modify their body they would forgo their own predilections in the pursuit of a more attractive body.

of the event now available on the internet²²³ describing it as an example of 'torture art'! This I would suggest misses the point entirely, implicitly making of the art of tattooing the act of (self) mutilation and suffering only.



Figure 42: Photographic documentation of 'Every sentence draws blood', (26 November 2013). (Photographic credit: (Mika Thom)

To conclude. Where it concerns my participation in the project in Kassel Germany, and indeed the enterprise of completing a PhD, it seems to me the transformative capacity of one's material, corporeal encounter with the written word, with language and theory, is a central to the act of doing research and producing art. And as I have argued throughout this conclusion, the transformative capacity of this encounter is not a one-way process, one that leads only to the complete submission and pain of the body as it is effectively 'written' out of existence by

²²³ This video is available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYGIwykVU2U (Accessed: 09-08-2013) and was posted by Dr Tim Long another participant from the Slade School of Art present at the conference in Kassel. As a point of order I have not asked him to take down the video and nor to modify its content in any way: I think such contradictory opinions about an artwork form an integral, material way in which it is meaningfully discussed. Besides information that gainsays this interpretation of the artwork is readily available on my personal website.

language, discourse and ideology. Although I am convinced that bodies suffer, are shaped and damaged by their material encounter with ideology (and the many material-discursive forms it may take), I am similarly convinced that ideology never has the last word, so to speak.

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