

University of the Witwatersrand
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Performative Materiality: Exploring Meanings and Expressions in the
Artworks of South African Contemporary Artist Sikhumbuzo
Makandula

MASTER of Art in the Field of HISTORY OF ART
Research Report

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Masters Research Report

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Acknowledgements

This Masters research report would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of several individuals and institutions.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Nontobeko Ntombela Akoi-Jackson, for her invaluable mentorship, critical insights, and unwavering support throughout this research journey. Her guidance has been instrumental in refining my ideas and shaping the direction of this study.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents, whose love, sacrifices, and encouragement have been the foundation of my academic and personal growth. Their unwavering belief in me has been a source of strength throughout this journey.

My sincere appreciation also goes to the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Scholarship, whose financial support made it possible for me to pursue and complete this research. Their investment in my academic development has been invaluable, and I am deeply thankful for the opportunity they have provided.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to everyone who has supported and encouraged me along the way— family, friends, colleagues, and mentors who have offered their time, insights, and encouragement. This study is a testament to the collective support and generosity I have received.

Abstract

This research addresses the absence of a structured framework for analysing the interplay between performativity and materiality in contemporary South African art. It introduces Performative Materiality, a novel analytical framework, to examine the dynamic relationship between artistic actions and material forms in the work of contemporary South African artist Sikhumbuzo Makandula. His practice integrates performance, ritual, and material culture to engage with South Africa's socio-political history and spiritual narratives. The study challenges traditional distinctions between passive objects and active performance, arguing that they exist in a reciprocal relationship shaping cultural expression and critique. A multi-layered qualitative approach combines visual analysis and artist interviews, incorporating Feldman's Critical Analysis Model and the Janice Mason Art Museum's Four Steps in Art Criticism, with Performative Materiality as the primary theoretical framework. This framework consists of six key criteria—Material Dynamism, Performative Impact, Reciprocal Influence, Contextual Embeddedness, Transformative Interaction, and Embodied Interaction—which together facilitate a nuanced analysis of how performative and material elements actively shape meaning and socio-political engagement. Findings reveal that Makandula's practice disrupts static historical interpretations by merging embodied actions with symbolic materials, re-signifying cultural memory and resistance. His use of ritual, ephemeral materials, and historic spaces challenges dominant narratives, offering new ways of engaging with identity, colonial legacies, and spirituality. The study demonstrates Performative Materiality's effectiveness as a structured and adaptable analytical tool in contemporary South African art, highlighting its potential for refinement in addressing temporality, audience engagement, and digital materiality. Ultimately, this research positions Performative Materiality as an essential framework for decoding the complex interplay between performative acts and material agency, reinforcing its significance in contemporary artistic discourse in South Africa and beyond.

Keywords: Performative Materiality, Performativity, Materiality, Contemporary South African Art, Sikhumbuzo Makandula, Performative-Material Narratives, Embodied Artistic Expressions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Art has consistently served as a powerful tool for social critique, reflecting societal issues, challenging the status quo, and giving voice to marginalised communities. Across history, it has acted as both a representation of the world and an active force capable of initiating conversations and fostering social change. In contexts marked by political oppression, social inequality, and cultural marginalisation, art emerges as a medium through which societal dynamics are explored and reimagined. The physicality of materials and the deliberate actions within artistic processes often amplify this impact, enabling deeper engagement with cultural narratives and social realities.

In the South African context, this role of art is particularly pronounced. During and after the apartheid era, artistic practices were integral in addressing socio-political injustices, utilising both material and performative dimensions to challenge dominant narratives. This tradition persists today as contemporary South African artists continue to grapple with the nation's complex legacies, exploring themes that resonate deeply with local histories and cultural identities. Sikhumbuzo Makandula (b. 1986), a contemporary South African artist, exemplifies how creative practices can provoke reflection on how historical legacies shape contemporary life. His work, characterised by an integration of performative actions and culturally significant materials, invites audiences to engage critically with the ongoing negotiation of cultural narratives (ICA Podcast nd; CCA [Centre for Curating the Archive] 2015; Anonymous 2016). Beyond this, Makandula's approach encourages viewers to reconsider histories and meanings beyond immediate contexts, disrupting traditional associations. This interplay enables alternative perspectives, reflecting the transformative potential of performative acts and material engagements in reshaping cultural constructs. By combining these elements, Makandula demonstrates the potential for art to both reflect and critique societal realities, making his practice highly relevant to this study. His art engages with the complexities of South African society by examining how actions and materials interplay to construct meaning and encourage reflection on collective identity and socio-political narratives (ICA Podcast nd; Makandula nd; CCA 2015; Anonymous 2016).

This study builds on these artistic evolutions by exploring the interplay between two key concepts in contemporary art—performativity and materiality—and examining how these elements function together as a lens for analysing artworks. Rather than viewing these aspects in isolation, the study introduces the lens of Performative Materiality, which examines their dynamic interaction to offer deeper insights into how meaning and expression are constructed and conveyed through artworks, specifically by Sikhumbuzo Makandula. By integrating these components, the study demonstrates how art critiques complex societal realities and reimagines socio-political narratives.

1.2 Personal Connection and Context

My interest in the interplay of performativity and materiality stems from personal experiences with South African cultural practices and socio-political dynamics. Born in De Aar, Northern Cape—a multicultural town rich in Black, Coloured, and Indigenous¹ traditions—I was exposed to diverse rituals and expressions of identity. Although I did not grow up in De Aar, its cultural significance deeply influenced my understanding of the dynamic ways cultural practices shape shared meanings and expressions.

Initially, my fascination grew from observing South African funeral practices² in De Aar. These rituals, blending Xhosa, Coloured, and Anglican traditions, are deeply embedded in spirituality and identity. Materials such as traditional attire, ceremonial objects (candles, incense burners, and ritual staffs), and sacred symbols (crosses, ancestral motifs on clothing, or carvings on wooden artefacts), alongside performative acts like singing and dancing, serve not just as markers of mourning but as expressions of resistance and unity. Within these practices, materials and actions occasionally seem to adopt meanings that extend beyond their conventional cultural associations, as though shaped by the personal and collective imagination of those engaging with them. This fluidity allows for reinterpretations that offer insights into evolving cultural contexts and personal experiences. Over time, my academic focus expanded beyond specific rituals such as funerals. While these ceremonies provided a foundation, my interest shifted towards understanding how the interplay between performativity and materiality operates across broader cultural contexts. This includes examining how actions and materials are utilised in various expressions to shape meaning, foster engagement, and contribute to socio-political commentaries. By moving beyond singular instances, my focus encompasses the broader role of these dynamics in cultural practices and their potential to engage with collective identity and societal narratives.

¹ De Aar was formally laid out as a town in 1902 after the railway station was established in 1881 (Stats SA nd). The town is known for its diverse population, with significant representation of Black African (16.5%), Coloured (71.7%), and White (10.4%) communities, as well as Indigenous groups, including the Khoikhoi such as the Nama, Koranna, and Griqua, who predominantly reside in the Northern Cape Province (Indigenous Navigator nd; Stats SA nd). Over time, many Indigenous groups, such as the Khoikhoi, integrated into Coloured and Black African groupings due to historical interactions and socio-political dynamics (Indigenous Navigator nd; Stats SA nd; Bhabha 1994; Erasmus 2011). This blending of cultural identities has contributed to the cultural hybridity of De Aar, enriching its traditions and creating a dynamic environment where multiple cultural influences coexist (Bhabha 1994; Erasmus 2011). The primary languages spoken in De Aar include Afrikaans (85.9%), isiXhosa (8.8%), and English (2.4%) (Stats SA nd).

² South African funeral practices are rich in cultural hybridity due to the nation's diverse population. These rituals often incorporate elements from various cultures and religions, reflecting the complex interplay of traditions (Comparethecoffin nd; Bhabha 1994; Erasmus 2011). For example, Xhosa funerals include singing, dancing, and drumming, while Zulu funerals involve the use of cowhide for wrapping the deceased and specific burial sites. Christian and Catholic influences are also seen in the structured ceremonies and prayers (Comparethecoffin nd). This blending of practices creates a unique cultural tapestry that highlights the importance of ancestry and community in South African spirituality (Comparethecoffin nd; Bhabha 1994; Erasmus 2011).

This evolving perspective shares resonances with the works of Sikhumbuzo Makandula, who, like me, hails from De Aar (Anonymous 2016). While his departure from the town shaped his artistic journey, the cultural significance of De Aar remains a shared point of connection (ICA Podcast nd; Makandula nd; CCA 2015; Anonymous 2016). His practice, however, reflects an evolution informed by broader experiences and diverse cultural influences, allowing his work to transcend local contexts. These interconnections between my personal background and Makandula's journey highlight shared starting points while acknowledging the broader trajectories that inform both his art and my academic inquiry. Through his nuanced engagement with materials and actions, Makandula's work aligns with the core themes of this study, offering a lens to investigate the multifaceted interplay between performativity and materiality.

This introduction chapter provides the foundation for the study by offering an overview of the research topic and approach. It begins by exploring the significance of art as a tool for social critique, particularly in the South African context, and introduces Sikhumbuzo Makandula's relevance to the study. Following this, the problem statement addresses gaps in existing literature, leading to the research questions, aims, and objectives that guide study. The methodology section outlines the approaches used for analysing Makandula's artwork, including interviews with the artist and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concludes with a detailed chapter outline, setting the stage for the subsequent sections and providing a clear structure for the dissertation.

1.3 The Interplay of Performativity and Materiality

The evolving relationship between human actions and material forms provides a vital lens through which contemporary art interrogates and reimagines societal structures. The interplay between performativity and materiality provides a compelling foundation for understanding how contemporary art constructs meaning and engages with socio-political narratives. Performativity, at its core, examines how actions, utterances, and gestures shape identities and realities within cultural and social contexts. Author John L. Austin's (1975) seminal concept of the performative in *How to Do Things with Words* illustrates how certain utterances and actions do more than describe—they enact reality. Expanding this notion, author Judith Butler's (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* highlights how repeated acts sustain or challenge social norms, showcasing the transformative potential of performativity in reimagining societal structures. These insights underscore the transformative power of embodied actions in art, which engage with cultural and political frameworks to challenge and reimagine societal structures. Materiality complements this by foregrounding the active role of objects and materials in meaning-making. Author Daniel Miller's (2005: 05–07) idea of the "humility of things" in *Materiality*:

An Introduction underscores how materials, though often overlooked, exert a pervasive influence on social systems. Building on this, author Terence E. McDonnell's (2023) *Cultural Objects, Material Culture, and Materiality* emphasises the mediating and transformative capacities of materials, while author Arjun Appadurai's (1986: 03–09) concept of the “social life of things” in *Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value* reveals how objects acquire and reshape meanings as they circulate through cultural and economic systems. These perspectives not only resonate with foundational cultural practices but also reflect the ways art critically engages with societal issues, grounding their significance in broader socio-political critiques. Together, these perspectives position materials not as passive tools but as dynamic agents that interact with human actions to shape cultural narratives.

The interplay between these foundational concepts lies in their mutual influence, where performative acts activate materials, and materials, in turn, shape and constrain performative gestures. For example, materials chosen for an artwork—whether ephemeral or enduring—affect the performative processes they inspire, while the performative actions imbue the materials with renewed cultural and socio-political significance. This reciprocal relationship demonstrates the dialogical nature of contemporary art, where the interaction between performativity and materiality invites audiences to engage with layered meanings that critique and reconfigure societal norms. Through this interaction, artworks create openings for reinterpretation, where actions and materials subtly encourage audiences to explore perspectives that move beyond the immediate, challenging, conventional narratives and foster deeper reflection on cultural and historical constructs.

Consider Marina Abramović's performance piece *Rhythm 0* (1974) (Figure 1 and 2). For six hours, Abramović stood motionless by a table, offering the audience 72 objects they could use on her body. The deliberate act of remaining still (performativity) becomes a test of human endurance and trust, while the objects themselves (materiality)—including a rose, scissors, a razor blade, etc.—transform from benign tools to potential weapons. This performance illustrates how actions (standing still, offering objects) and physical properties (the objects themselves) combine to create a powerful commentary on vulnerability and human interaction. This example underscores how the performative act and the material elements together shape the meaning and impact of the artwork (Sears & Cohen nd; Freeney 2021).

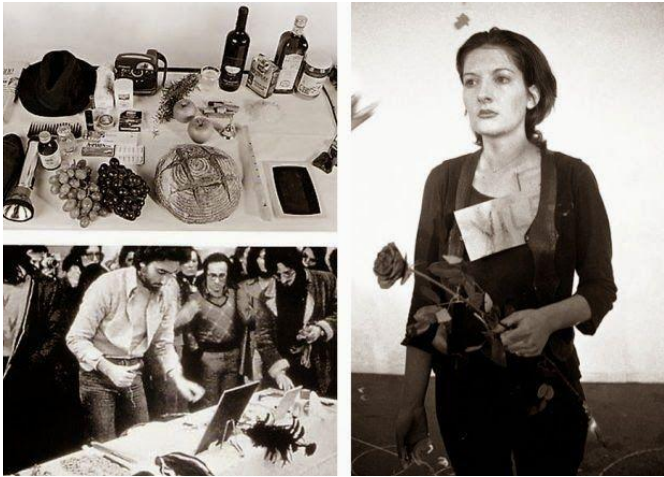


Figure 1: Marina Abramović, Rhythm 0, 1974. Image retrieved from Sears & Cohen (nd).



Figure 2: Marina Abramović, Rhythm 0 Exhibit, 2011, at the Museum of Parallel Narratives in Barcelona in 2011, Photograph by Rafael Vargas. Image retrieved from Freney (2021).

In the South African context, the interplay between performativity and materiality takes on unique dimensions shaped by the country's socio-political history. Marked by colonialism, apartheid, and ongoing struggles for social justice, this history profoundly influences contemporary art practices. South African artists often use performativity in their work, employing both performative and material strategies to explore themes of identity, resistance, and cultural memory (Opperman nd). Unlike static mediums such as painting, which occupy space passively, performativity allows artists to engage directly with audiences, confronting socio-political issues in visceral and immediate ways. This resonates with the interplay described, where performative acts and materials coalesce to critique and reimagine societal structures, aligning with the Reciprocal Influence of actions and objects.

Many contemporary South African artists employ performativity and materiality to construct layered narratives that engage with the ongoing struggles of post-apartheid society. For example, Zanele Muholi and Tracey Rose use performativity to interrogate themes of identity, resistance, and social justice (Opperman nd). These artists, like Sikhumbuzo Makandula, integrate performative acts with culturally resonant materials to challenge colonial legacies while reimagining cultural identities. By employing ritualistic actions and symbolic objects, Makandula not only critiques South Africa's complex historical narratives but also redefines notions of identity and community in the present. His practice aligns with global and local discourses in contemporary art, showcasing how performative acts and materials can work in tandem to critique socio-political structures. This interplay reflects the dialogical nature of art, where actions and materials together invite audiences to explore multilayered meanings that question and reconfigure societal norms.



Figure 3: Zanele Muholi, Somnyama Ngonyama (Hail the Dark Lioness) series, 2018, Aperture 3 out of 80 self-portraits. Image 1: Bester I, Mayotte, 2015, Image 2: Somnyama IV, Oslo, 2015, Image 3: Kodwa I, Amsterdam, 2017. Image retrieved from Granta (2019).

Zanele Muholi, known for their photography, integrates performative elements into their self-portraits. In the Somnyama Ngonyama (2018) series (isiZulu for Hail the Dark Lioness) (Figure 3), Muholi uses their body as a canvas, a powerful storytelling tool. By embodying personas and utilising materials like pegs, hair, and plastic, Muholi crafts narratives that challenge stereotypes and confront racial and gendered violence. The performative actions (posing, expression) and material objects (costumes, props) combine to critique identity and resistance, illustrating how performativity and materiality collaboratively produce socio-cultural commentary (Stevenson nd). This dynamic interplay, where materials and actions influence and transform meaning, exemplifies a reciprocal relationship. The imaginative use of materials—such as pegs and plastic—transforms their ordinary associations, re-contextualising them as symbolic components of resistance and critique. Intertwined with performative gestures, these materials amplify their meanings, offering alternative narratives that transcend their conventional contexts. This reinterpretation highlights art's potential to challenge and reshape cultural norms through the synergy of performative and material dimensions.



Figure 4: Tracey Rose, *Ms Cast, Venus Baartman*, 2001. Lambda photograph, 120 cm x 120 cm (O'Toole 2002). Image retrieved from Van der Merwe (2014).

Tracey Rose's work often involves performance art that addresses historical and contemporary social issues. In her piece, *Ms Cast Venus Baartman* (2001)³ (Figure 4), Rose uses her body, various props, and environments to critique colonial histories and their lingering effects on contemporary society. The title itself, "Ms Cast", references the controversial "Miscast" exhibition,⁴ which aimed to challenge historical misrepresentations of Indigenous people (Van der Merwe 2014: 123). Through her performance, Rose challenges stereotypical notions of race and gender while also prompting viewers to reflect on their complicity in perpetuating these representations. The performative use of her body and the materiality of chosen props and environments become powerful tools for historical re-examination (Van der Merwe 2014: 124–125). This alignment with the reciprocal relationship between actions and materials underscores how both serve as dynamic agents in challenging and transforming socio-political narratives.

³ *Ms Cast Venus Baartman* (2001) is part of Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella* series (2001), in which she represents herself as Venus Baartman, drawing on the historical figure of Sara Baartman, who was taken from Cape Town in 1810 and publicly exhibited in Europe. The series aligns with Rose's broader exploration of race as a constructed identity and culminates in a reimagining of the biblical Last Supper, where characters from the series reappear (Osha 2022).

⁴ The "Miscast" exhibition, curated by Pippa Skotnes at the South African National Gallery in 1996, generated significant controversy due to its portrayal of the San people and the inclusion of sensitive materials, such as human remains and culturally significant artefacts. Critics argued that the exhibition perpetuated colonial-era practices of objectifying and commodifying Indigenous bodies and cultures, despite its intention to challenge these narratives. The inclusion of graphic and dehumanising images, coupled with the absence of meaningful consultation with San communities, sparked public outrage. San representatives and other groups criticised the exhibition for reinforcing power imbalances and failing to adequately address the historical trauma it sought to expose, turning it into a focal point of debate on representation and cultural agency (CCA nd).

By examining this interplay, one can gain a deeper appreciation for how artists use performative actions and material elements to convey complex narratives. This understanding is valuable in art criticism and theory, as well as in the wider field of cultural studies, as it sheds light on how art reflects and shapes societal values and discourses. Art becomes a mirror, reflecting not just the aesthetics of a society but also its underlying social and political realities.

1.4 Introducing Performative Materiality

The concept of Performative Materiality emerges in this study as a novel framework that bridges the foundational theories of performativity and materiality. It combines elements from both to offer a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding the dynamic interplay between human actions and material substances in art. Central to this concept is the exploration of how performative actions and material properties collectively contribute to meaning-making in artworks. It emphasises that both the artist's performative acts and the material properties of the artwork are integral to its creation and reception, challenging the traditional separation between the physical and the performative. Instead, Performative Materiality highlights their interconnection as essential to the process of constructing layered artistic narratives, establishing a basis for further theoretical exploration and application in this study.



Figure 5: Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 1965–1997. Photograph, gelatin silver photograph, 30.7 x 20.5 cm image/sheet (irreg). Signed and dated u.c. verso, pencil Ute Klophaus/ 1965/1997. Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1997. © Estate of Joseph Beuys/VG Bild-Kunst. Copyright Agency © Estate of Ute Klophaus (Art Gallery NSW nd). Image retrieved from Art Gallery NSW (nd).

One of the most iconic examples illustrating this interplay is German artist Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) (Figure 5). In this performance, Beuys cradled a dead hare while whispering explanations of art to the animal. The hare, as an object, took on layers of meaning through Beuys' actions, such as his whispering, representing themes of communication, knowledge, and death (Takac 2020). This performance demonstrates how performative action and material properties create a dynamic narrative, inviting viewers to explore complex interpretive layers.

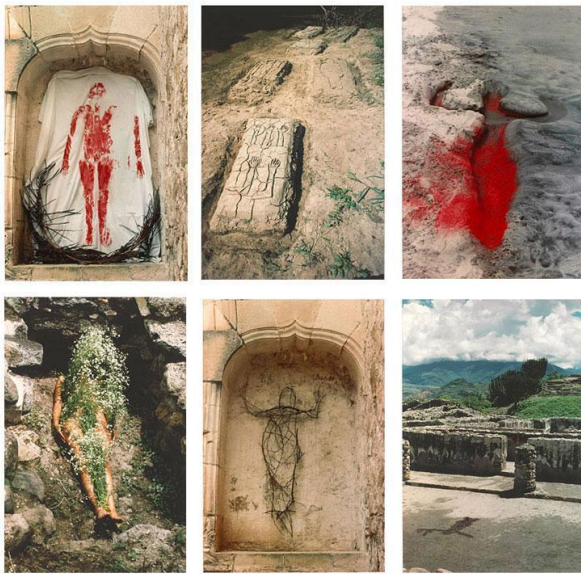


Figure 6: Ana Mendieta, *Silueta Works* in Mexico, 1973–77/1991. Pigmented inkjet prints, four parts, 7 x 50.8 cm (13 1/4 x 20 inch.); eight parts, 50.8 x 33.7 cm (20 x 13 1/4 inch.). Gift of Barbara Lee, The Barbara Lee Collection of Art by Women. Courtesy the Galerie Lelong. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC (ICA.org nd). Image retrieved from ICA.org (nd).

Similarly, Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta's *Silueta Series* (1973–1980) (Figure 6) exemplifies this dynamic. Mendieta imprinted silhouettes of her body in natural materials such as earth and grass, blending performative actions with the materiality of the natural world. The traces left behind by her body created a dialogue between the ephemeral and the enduring, highlighting themes of displacement, identity, and spirituality (Guggenheim New York nd; Teaching.ellenmuelle nd). This interplay evokes narratives that extend beyond their immediate context. The fusion of human impermanence with the enduring properties of natural elements illustrates how performative acts enliven materials, opening layered spaces of meaning. These spaces invite audiences to reinterpret cultural and political narratives, disrupting fixed associations and showcasing the transformative potential of performativity and materiality.



Figure 7: Installation view of *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa* Exhibition, curated by Okwui Enwezor, 1945–1994, MCA Chicago. Photo © MCA Chicago. Image retrieved from Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2001).

From an African perspective, Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor's exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa* (1945–1994) (Figure 7) explores the intersection of performativity and materiality in Africa's liberation movements.

According to MoMA (2002), this exhibition transformed curated spaces into performative sites where photographs, posters, and archival materials actively narrated the socio-political histories of African nations. Enwezor's curation demonstrates how materiality embodies struggles and cultural reimagining while performative acts reenact these histories, engaging audiences in dialogues about identity and emancipation (MoMA 2002). Through this lens, the exhibition reveals how material objects and performative acts work in tandem to evoke layered meanings, bridging the historical and contemporary within the African context.

It becomes evident that the interplay of performativity and materiality generates meanings and socio-political commentaries that neither could achieve alone. Artists rely on both the performative—actions, gestures, or inherent qualities—and the material to activate objects, transforming them from passive components into dynamic participants in art. This duality enriches meaning-making, inviting audiences to layer their interpretations based on cultural and personal perspectives. The qualities embedded within materials contribute significantly to this process, as they challenge rigid cultural meanings and encourage a reimagining of the material's role within the artwork. Through this dynamic, materials and actions extend beyond their immediate context, allowing for reinterpretations that broaden the scope of cultural narratives. By fostering this dialogue, Performative Materiality creates a continuum between the physical and performative, bridging artist intentions with audience engagement to uncover complex, multi-layered narratives that address both personal and socio-political themes. These examples underscore the value of Performative Materiality as a lens for examining the interconnectedness of actions and materials in art. While this section introduces the framework, its theoretical underpinnings will be further explored

within the literature review, and its application will be demonstrated in the analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work, offering deeper insights into the nuanced dynamics between performativity and materiality.

1.4.1 Significance of the Study

The study of the introduced Performative Materiality framework addresses a critical gap in contemporary art literature by integrating performativity and materiality into a cohesive analytical framework. Existing research often treats these concepts as distinct, failing to capture the dynamic interplay between human actions and material substances in the creation and meaning of artworks. This study bridges this gap by proposing Performative Materiality as a comprehensive approach to understanding how these elements interact in contemporary art practices. By applying this framework to the analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work, the study offers new insights into how contemporary artists use performative actions and material properties to engage with socio-political issues. This approach not only enhances the appreciation of Makandula's art but also contributes to a broader understanding of the complex processes involved in art-making and interpretation. Through this analysis, the study demonstrates the relevance and applicability of the framework of Performative Materiality to contemporary art, presenting a valuable tool for art critics, theorists, and practitioners. In addition, the study highlights the socio-political significance of contemporary South African art. By examining how artists like Makandula use Performative Materiality to address themes such as identity, resistance, and cultural memory, the research underscores the vital role of art in reflecting and shaping societal discourses. This approach provides a nuanced perspective on how art serves as a powerful medium for social commentary and change, offering fresh insights into the cultural and political landscapes of contemporary society.

1.5 Problem Statement

Contemporary South African art has evolved as a potent medium for socio-political commentary, particularly through the interplay of performative actions and material elements. This study explores how these components interact to construct and communicate complex narratives with a focus on the works of Sikhumbuzo Makandula.

There is a significant gap in comprehensive analytical frameworks that integrate performativity and materiality in contemporary art. Scholars have emphasised the role of performativity in shaping social realities through actions and behaviours (Austin 1975; Butler 1999). Meanwhile, for materiality, scholars have highlighted the importance of the concept and how it influences aesthetic and cultural experiences (Appadurai 1986; Miller 2005). However, the existing literature often treats these elements as separate analytical categories, which limits the depth of socio-political commentary that can be derived from

contemporary artworks. This fragmented approach fails to fully capture the dynamic interplay between performative actions and material properties, restricting the understanding of how contemporary artists like Makandula use these elements to convey complex themes of identity, resistance, and cultural memory.

In the South African context, the interplay between performativity and materiality takes on unique dimensions influenced by the country's socio-political history. South African artists frequently use their work to address issues of identity, resistance, and cultural memory, employing both performative and material strategies to comment on and critique these themes (Opperman nd). For example, Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* series uses self-portraiture and materials like pegs to create a visual narrative on racial and gendered violence (Stevenson nd). Similarly, Tracey Rose's *Ms Cast Venus Baartman* (2001) employs her body and various props to critique colonial histories and their lingering effects on contemporary society (Van der Merwe 2014: 123–125). These examples illustrate how South African artists use performative actions and material elements to address issues of identity, resistance, and cultural memory (Opperman nd). Despite these rich contexts, there is no comprehensive analysis in the literature that examines how performativity and materiality interact in these artists' works, limiting a deeper understanding of their socio-political commentary. Specifically, there is limited scholarly analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work, which uniquely combines performative actions with material elements to address socio-political issues. This gap in the literature not only limits the appreciation of Makandula's contributions but also highlights a broader deficiency in understanding the methods contemporary South African artists use to engage with their socio-political environment through the integrated lens of performativity and materiality.

Addressing these gaps will significantly advance the understanding of contemporary South African art. The study will enhance the appreciation of how performative and material elements coalesce to create complex socio-political narratives, providing a more nuanced perspective on the socio-political impact of contemporary art. By developing the concept of Performative Materiality, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on art criticism and cultural studies, offering a valuable analytical framework that enriches the interpretation and appreciation of contemporary artworks. This integrated approach will foster a deeper comprehension of how art can reflect and influence societal values and discourses, underscoring the pivotal role of contemporary art in socio-political commentary and change.

1.6 Research Questions, Research Aim, and Objectives

1.6.1 Research Questions

Following the exploration of the problem statement, this study delves into the central research question: How does the framework of Performative Materiality enhance the understanding of contemporary art, particularly in the context of South African artist Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work? This question explores how the dynamic interplay between performativity and materiality contributes to the creation of nuanced meanings in artworks, offering fresh perspectives on contemporary artistic practices and their socio-political significance.

To further dissect this overarching question, several sub-questions have been formulated to guide the research.

Firstly, What are the core characteristics of the framework Performative Materiality, and how are its themes and criteria articulated? This sub-question examines the theoretical foundation of the framework—performativity and materiality, focusing on its key themes and criteria. The goal is to establish a cohesive understanding of how these components function together to analyse art effectively. Secondly, Why is Performative Materiality a valuable framework for analysing contemporary artworks that integrate performativity and materiality? This sub-question investigates the framework's analytical value, highlighting how its holistic approach reveals deeper insights into the thematic and conceptual layers of contemporary art. It emphasises the framework's ability to uncover the socio-political narratives embedded in artworks by addressing the interplay between performative actions and material elements. Lastly, How does Sikhumbuzo Makandula's art exemplify the principles of the Performative Materiality framework? This sub-question uses Makandula's artworks as case studies to illustrate the practical application of the framework. It examines how the integration of performative gestures and material choices conveys complex socio-political narratives, demonstrating the effectiveness of Performative Materiality as a tool for art analysis.

1.6.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study was to explore and demonstrate the applicability of the Performative Materiality framework as a tool for analysing and interpreting contemporary artworks with a particular focus on the art of Sikhumbuzo Makandula. This aim bridged theoretical insights with practical application, providing a robust framework for understanding the complex interplay between performative and material elements in contemporary art.

To achieve this aim, the study was guided by several key objectives.

Firstly, it sought to identify and describe the core characteristics of Performative Materiality and how its themes and criteria are manifested in contemporary art. This objective aligned with the first sub-question, focusing on the theoretical foundation of the framework. It involved an exploration of its key criteria, such as Material Dynamism and Reciprocal Influence, and its themes—Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction. The aim was to establish a detailed understanding of how performative and material elements co-create meaning within artworks. Secondly, the study explored and justified the value of Performative Materiality as an analytical framework for contemporary art. Corresponding to the second sub-question, this objective examined the framework's utility in uncovering thematic and conceptual layers in art. It demonstrated how Performative Materiality provides deeper insights into the socio-political narratives of contemporary artworks by addressing the dynamic relationship between actions and materials. Finally, the study applied the Performative Materiality framework in the analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's art. In line with the third sub-question, this objective used Makandula's artworks as case studies to illustrate the framework's practical application. The analysis incorporated the artist's theoretical insights and reflections to demonstrate how performative gestures and material elements converge in his work to convey complex socio-political narratives. By contextualising his art within the broader socio-political landscape of South Africa, this objective enriches the discourse on contemporary art and highlights the framework's relevance and adaptability.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Analytical Approach

This study analysed two of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's artworks, *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Inggumbo* (2016), using the Performative Materiality framework to investigate how performative actions and material properties coalesce to create layered socio-political narratives. The methodology employed integrates the Performative Materiality framework with Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model from the reading by authors Maithreyi Subramaniam, Jaffri Hanafi and Abu Talib Putih (2016: 57–65) titled *Teaching For Art Criticism: Incorporating Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model In Students' Studio Practice*, and the reading by the Janice Mason Art Museum (2018: 1–2) titled *the Janice Mason Art Museum's Four Steps in Art Criticism*, ensuring a structured and comprehensive approach to art analysis.

The Performative Materiality framework serves as the core analytical lens for this study, focusing on themes such as Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction. These themes are operationalised through six criteria: Material Dynamism, Performative Impact, Reciprocal Influence, Contextual Embeddedness, Transformative Interaction, and Embodied Interaction. This framework was applied to

uncover the dynamic interactions between performative and material elements in Makandula's work, providing insights into the layered narratives embedded in his art.

To ensure a structured and comprehensive analysis of *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016), the study combined Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model (Subramaniam et al. 2016: 57–65) and the Janice Mason Art Museum's Four Steps in Art Criticism (Janice Mason Art Museum 2018: 1–2). This methodological framework guided the examination through stages of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgement. The description stage focused on identifying material and performative elements such as textures, objects, and actions within the artworks. The analysis stage evaluated the functional and symbolic interplay of these elements, supported by theoretical insights from performativity and materiality literature. Reflections from an in-depth interview with Makandula enriched the interpretation stage, linking the artworks to broader socio-political narratives. Finally, the judgement stage assessed the socio-political impact of the artworks and validated the effectiveness of the Performative Materiality framework as an analytical tool. This layered methodological approach enabled a detailed exploration of how Makandula's works critique colonial legacies, reclaim Indigenous narratives, and position materials as active agents in socio-political commentary.

1.7.2 Interview with the Artist

An integral part of this methodology was the interview conducted with Sikhumbuzo Makandula. This semi-structured interview included two meetings: an initial discussion focusing on the selected artworks and a follow-up meeting for additional clarification (King & Horrocks 2010). The artist shared insights into *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016), discussing their conceptual intentions, material choices, and performative strategies. Makandula elaborated on the artworks' thematic focus, the materials employed, and how they were used to convey meaning. He also reflected on the relationship between the two artworks, their connection to his broader artistic practice, and the socio-political goals underlying his work. These discussions provided valuable context for understanding how performative and material elements interact within his art, aligning with the framework's analytical criteria. The interview insights were incorporated into the analysis to complement the Performative Materiality framework (King & Horrocks 2010; Morgan 2013). By aligning the artist's commentary with the framework's criteria and themes, the study provided a holistic understanding of the artworks. This integration ensured that both theoretical and practical perspectives were considered, allowing the framework to be tested against real-world artistic practices (Rose 2001; King & Horrocks 2010; Morgan 2013). The recorded interviews were transcribed to accurately capture Makandula's insights, particularly from the follow-up discussion clarifying aspects of *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016). Key themes from the transcription were mapped onto the Performative Materiality framework,

ensuring alignment between the artist's reflections and the analytical criteria. This process reinforced the study's critical engagement with Makandula's artistic decisions, integrating his perspectives into the analysis while maintaining a balance between the artist's intention and theoretical interpretation (Stuckey 2014).

The interview adhered to ethical guidelines, with ethics clearance obtained prior to the interview. Makandula was provided with detailed information about the study's aims, participation requirements, and data use (Birch et al. 2012). Informed consent ensured his understanding of his rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without consequences (King & Horrocks 2010). Confidentiality was maintained by securely storing data and anonymising personal information, while the analysis faithfully reflected Makandula's perspectives (Birch et al. 2012; Bergin 2018).

1.7.3 Methodological Reflection

By combining these analytical tools, the methodology enabled a nuanced examination of how Makandula's artworks utilise performative actions and material elements to critique and reimagine socio-political narratives. Grounded in the integration of the Performative Materiality framework with Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model (Subramaniam et al. 2016: 57–65) and the Janice Mason Art Museum's Four Steps in Art Criticism (2018: 1–2), this structured approach ensured a detailed and multifaceted analysis. The inclusion of the interview with Sikhumbuzo Makandula enriched the study by providing contextual insights into the conceptual, material, and performative dimensions of his work. These reflections allowed the framework's criteria, such as Performative Impact and Contextual Embeddedness, to be directly aligned with real-world practices, demonstrating their adaptability and relevance. By employing a layered process—description, analysis, interpretation, and judgement—the study reveals how Makandula's performative gestures and material choices intersect to construct layered narratives. This approach not only highlights the interaction between performativity and materiality but also showcases the ability of the framework to unpack complex artistic expressions. The ethical considerations applied during the interview further strengthened the study's integrity, ensuring that Makandula's insights were accurately and respectfully represented. Ultimately, this methodological approach demonstrates the adaptability and effectiveness of the Performative Materiality framework in analysing contemporary South African art. By bridging theoretical insights with practical application, the study provides a robust foundation for understanding the interplay between performative and material elements in art, aligning with the study's broader aim of exploring socio-political narratives through Makandula's work.

1.8 Section on the Chosen Artist

1.8.1 Short Artist Biography

Sikhumbuzo Makandula is a multidisciplinary artist whose work spans performance art, photography, and video (Anonymous 2016). He holds a Fine Art degree from Rhodes University and a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Live and Public Art from the University of Cape Town (ICA Podcast nd). Makandula's journey into the arts was not straightforward. Initially studying at the Ruth Prowse School of Art in Cape Town, he later shifted to train as an interior designer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. However, he returned to Fine Art, recognising it as his true calling, which allowed him to fully explore and express his ideas on space, architecture, and identity (Makandula nd). Makandula has showcased his art both locally and internationally. His notable performances include *Zizimase* (2019) at the Infecting the City Public Art Festival in 2019 and *Ingoma ka Tiyo Soga* (2018–2019)⁵ at the ICA Live Art Festival in 2018 and the National Arts Festival in 2019 (ICA Podcast nd). Through his innovative use of performativity and materiality, Makandula challenges viewers to engage with the difficult histories and realities depicted in his work (Makandula nd).

1.8.2 Relevance of Makandula's Work to This Study

Sikhumbuzo Makandula's art exemplifies the dynamic interplay between performativity and materiality, making his practice a vital case for this study. His ability to intertwine performative gestures with culturally significant materials creates layered narratives that engage with South Africa's post-apartheid socio-political landscape (ICA Podcast nd; Makandula nd; Anonymous 2016). By critically engaging with historical and cultural legacies, Makandula's practice encourages reflection on the evolving role of cultural expressions in addressing collective identity and societal narratives. In his artworks, *Zizimase* (2019) (Figure 8) and *Ubuzwe* (2016) (Figure 9), Makandula utilises performative actions and material culture to reimagine socio-political narratives. *Zizimase* (2019) involves ritualistic gestures performed in traditional attire, with natural elements such as soil evoking ancestral memory and continuity. However, the notion of "traditional attire" in this context invites a deeper exploration of imaginative or fictional aspects (ICA Podcast nd; Makandula nd; Anonymous 2016). The clothing and materials employed in *Zizimase* (2019) are not rigid representations of historical traditions but are reimagined assemblages, blending cultural motifs with contemporary artistic interpretations. This intentional blending critiques the colonial legacy

⁵ *Ingoma ka Tiyo Soga* (2018–2019) is an interdisciplinary live art presentation and digital project that honours the heritage and legacy of Reverend Tiyo Soga, a prominent 19th-century Black missionary. This project, developed by Sikhumbuzo Makandula, Bulelwa Mbangu, and Zodwa Skeyi-Tutani, incorporates creative methodologies to investigate narratives about Nosuthu Soga's influence on Tiyo Soga. The performances and workshops associated with this project aim to inspire intergenerational dialogue and highlight the socio-political relevance of Mgwali village in both the history of South Africa and its post-apartheid context (creativeknow nd).

of imposing static identities, instead asserting the fluid and evolving nature of cultural heritage. Performatively, Makandula's movements animate these materials, transforming them into active agents that engage audiences in dialogues about disrupted African spiritual practices and their reclamation.



Figure 8: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Zizimase*, 2019, at the District 6 Museum as part of the Institute of Creative Arts' Infecting the City Festival. Image retrieved from creativeknow (nd). Creative Knowledge Resources.



Figure 9: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Ubuzwe I & Ubuzwe II*, 2016, Inkjet on Epson UltraSmooth, 150 x 200 cm, Edition: 5 + 2AP. Image retrieved from Makandulas2 (nd).

Similarly, in *Ubuzwe* (2016) (isiXhosa for Nation, Nationalism, Nationhood), the tension between monumental sites as markers of nationalism and the creation of new identities is central (Artthrob 2017). The use of red in his church-inspired attire symbolises both historical violence and the vitality of cultural resilience. Here, too, the attire operates within the realm of the imaginative, transcending traditional boundaries to challenge fixed notions of identity. The performative gestures in *Ubuzwe* (2016)—including deliberate movements that signify resistance and rebirth—imbue the materials with socio-political significance. Together, the interplay of materials and actions critiques institutionalised forms of

remembrance while envisioning alternative narratives of nationhood and community (Makandula nd; Artthrob 2017). This interplay between materiality and performativity aligns with the study's framework, illustrating how art can activate cultural narratives while fostering socio-political critique.

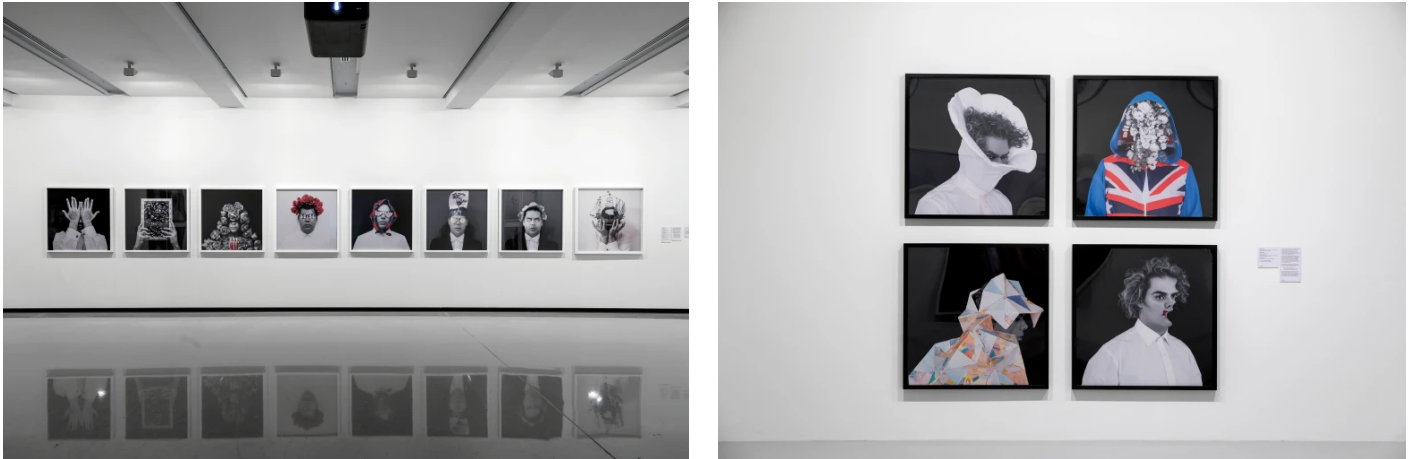


Figure 10: Christian Thompson, *Ritual intimacy*, 2017. Installation view: Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne 2017 featuring photographs from the series *We Bury our Own*, 2010 (C-type prints) (Bunyan 2017). Image retrieved from Art Blart (2017).

When compared to Indigenous Australian artist Christian Thompson and South African artist Buhlebezwe Siwani, the shared use of performativity and materiality further highlights Makandula's relevance. Christian Thompson, for example, employs performative gestures and archival materials to reclaim Indigenous agency, as seen in his series *We Bury Our Own* (2012) (Figure 10). Like Makandula, Thompson draws on the imaginative potential of materials to navigate complex cultural and historical terrains (Bunyan 2017). Similarly, Buhlebezwe Siwani (Figure 11) uses ritualistic actions and objects, such as water and soil, to evoke spiritual memory and ancestral connections (Infectingthecity.com nd; Madragoa nd; Makandula 2018). Both Thompson and Siwani, like Makandula, transform material objects into vessels of memory and resistance, emphasising their active role in shaping socio-political narratives. However, Makandula's practice extends this dialogue by emphasising the transformative relationship between materials and performative acts, showcasing their mutual influence in constructing layered meanings.

Makandula's artistic form is situated within the evolving discourse of South African live art practices, particularly those explored in *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa*, a collection edited by Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle (2019). This volume highlights "transgressive" acts that transcend disciplinary boundaries (Pather and Boulle 2019: 103). His work moves beyond genre into the realm of *umsebenzi*—an isiZulu/isiXhosa term signifying sacred labour, spiritual duty, and ancestral invocation (Pather and Boulle

2019: 269-270). As illustrated in *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa*, contemporary South African live art is not merely experimental but is deeply rooted in the political, spiritual, and material realities of the post-Apartheid context (Pather and Boule 2019). Makandula, trained in both visual and live art, draws from this transgressive tradition, blending public art, ritual performance, and visual symbolism. Situating his work within this live art lineage enriches our understanding of how Makandula's form itself contributes to the socio-political potency of his content.

In all, by seamlessly integrating performative gestures with imaginative material arrangements, Sikhumbuzo Makandula offers profound insights into the socio-political realities of South Africa. His work not only aligns with but also advances the analytical potential of Performative Materiality, demonstrating its capacity to uncover the complex interplay between cultural practices and socio-political critique. This relevance underscores the importance of his art as a focal point for this study, bridging personal and collective histories through a nuanced exploration of material and performative elements.

This initial exploration of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work has demonstrated the integral role of performativity and materiality in his practice. By the initial exploration of how imaginative reinterpretations and culturally significant materials interact with performative gestures in works such as *Zizimase* (2019) and *Ubuzwe* (2016), the study highlights his ability to construct layered socio-political narratives. This approach not only critiques historical legacies through the deconstruction of static cultural symbols but also fosters reimagined cultural identities by merging traditional elements with contemporary contexts and imaginative narratives. This examination sets the stage for the main analysis of the study, which focuses on Makandula's artworks *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016). The insights gathered here establish a foundation for applying the Performative Materiality framework, providing a lens through which the dynamic interplay of actions and materials will be further unpacked. By bridging Makandula's broader artistic practice with the study's specific objectives, this section underlines the relevance of his work to the framework and lays a critical groundwork for deeper analysis.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research focus, positioning art as a powerful medium for socio-political critique in South Africa. It introduces the key concepts of performativity and materiality and their dynamic interplay in shaping meaning and addressing cultural and societal narratives. Sikhumbuzo Makandula is presented as the central case study, highlighting how his integration of performative actions and culturally significant materials aligns with the framework of Performative Materiality. The chapter

outlines the framework's three themes and six criteria, linking them to the study's focus on socio-political commentary. Additionally, personal motivations, gaps in existing scholarship, and the research questions, aims, and objectives are discussed, providing a foundation for the study's methodology and analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations of performativity and materiality are examined, highlighting their role in shaping cultural narratives and socio-political critiques.

Performativity, as explored through Butler's (1999) concepts of repetition and subversion and Jackson's (2014) emphasis on co-creation, reveals how iterative acts reshape identity and meaning. Materiality, drawing on Miller's (2005) notion of material agency and Gell's (1998) concept of relational networks, demonstrates how objects influence and transform cultural systems. These insights are integrated into the Performative Materiality framework, structured around three themes—Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction—and operationalised through six criteria. This framework provides a robust tool for analysing contemporary artworks, uncovering the dynamic interplay between actions and materials in fostering imaginative and socio-political transformations.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4: Artwork Analysis and Interpretation

These chapters critically apply the Performative Materiality framework to Sikhumbuzo Makandula's artworks, *Umnikelo* (2015) in Chapter 3 and *Ingqumbo* (2016) in Chapter 4. The analysis explores the interplay between materiality and performativity, examining how these elements create layered socio-political narratives. Guided by Janice Mason Art Museum's (2018: 1–2) Four Steps in Art Criticism, each artwork is described, analysed, interpreted, and evaluated in the context of its cultural and historical dimensions.

Makandula's reflections, provided through an artist interview, deepen the analysis by offering insights into his material choices and conceptual intentions. Collectively, these chapters validate the framework's relevance in critiquing colonial legacies and envisioning new cultural narratives in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter synthesises the study's key findings, illustrating how the Performative Materiality framework has been applied to analyse contemporary art, particularly Sikhumbuzo Makandula's works. It evaluates the framework's effectiveness in revealing socio-political narratives through the interplay of performativity and materiality. The chapter also identifies areas for refinement, such as exploring temporal aspects and audience engagement to enhance the framework's relevance. Recommendations include

expanding its application to digital and hybrid artistic mediums to address contemporary art trends. Ultimately, the chapter reaffirms the framework's value as a tool for bridging theoretical insights and practical critique in art analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

This literature review explores the foundational concepts of performativity and materiality, examining their distinct characteristics and how they intersect to influence cultural and artistic practices. Performativity is investigated as a process through which meaning and identity are constructed and contested through iterative acts, while materiality focuses on the agency of objects and their capacity to shape and be shaped by socio-cultural interactions. These explorations foreground the interconnectedness of these concepts, revealing their relevance in critiquing power structures and reimagining socio-political narratives. The review further highlights key theoretical contributions, examining how scholars have positioned performative acts as transformative engagements with identity, power, and representation, and materiality as a dynamic force in cultural systems. The discussion critically engages with debates on agency, affect, and the relational dynamics between people and objects, demonstrating the ways in which these ideas converge to create layered meanings in cultural and artistic contexts.

Building on these insights, the literature review lays the foundation for transitioning into the Performative Materiality framework, which integrates these concepts to offer a cohesive analytical lens for examining contemporary artworks. By investigating the interplay between performativity and materiality, the framework will provide a structured approach to understanding how these elements function together to construct meaning and critique socio-political realities.

2.2 Performativity

Performativity provides a critical entry point for examining the dynamic processes through which meaning and identity are constructed, contested, and reimagined within socio-political contexts. It encompasses interconnected concepts such as 'performance' and 'performative', which operate as integral aspects within its broader framework. By situating these aspects of performativity within the framework of Performative Materiality, this study underscores its foundational role in understanding how meaning and identity are actively constructed and negotiated through iterative acts. Performativity serves as one of the guiding foundations for examining how artists like Sikhumbuzo Makandula re-signify norms and navigate systems of power. Through their work, which engages with themes of identity and cultural memory, performativity reveals the transformative potential of artistic practice. It challenges socio-political structures and reimagines cultural narratives. This demonstrates its capacity to destabilise and reconstitute entrenched meanings.

According to Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (1984: x) in *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, performance refers to a deliberate act of presenting or enacting something in front of an audience, typically bounded by time, space, and context. It often involves physical actions such as gestures, sounds, and uttered or written words (Battcock and Nickas 1984: xx). Contemporary artists incorporate multi-sensory elements like sound, touch, and bodily presence, engaging audiences on multiple levels. The ephemeral and immediate nature of performance is crucial, grounding its meaning in the specific moment and place of its enactment (Battcock and Nickas 1984: x–xi). Artists like Makandula leverage this temporality to address urgent socio-political issues, reflecting the transient yet pressing nature of such challenges (TATE nd). While fleeting, performances leave lasting cultural and political statements that resonate beyond their momentary existence (TATE nd; Battcock and Nickas 1984: x). Performance's reliance on deliberate actions introduces the concept of performative acts, through which performance enacts and shapes meaning. This reliance on deliberate and context-specific actions highlights the performative dimension within performance, where acts themselves become the means of enacting meaning. Austin's (1975: 6) idea of the "performative" explains how specific utterances or actions actively shape reality. For instance, expressions like "I do" in a marriage ceremony or "I promise" do not merely describe but enact the reality they declare (Austin 1975: 6). Similarly, gestures such as handshakes create new social conditions or relationships (Austin 1975: 13). These acts—verbal or physical—transform social structures by generating new realities, depending on their context (Austin 1975: 6–14). Understanding this dynamic underscores how performance and performative acts work together to influence social change and reshape cultural narratives.

Building on Austin's (1975) work, John R. Searle (1979) expands the concept of speech acts in *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, showing that language operates not merely as a means of communication but as a dynamic tool for action. Searle (1979: viii) categorises speech acts into five types: "assertives", "directives", "commissives", "expressives", and "declarations", each of which resonates with artistic contexts. "Assertives", where the speaker commits to the truth of a proposition, parallel artworks making bold political statements, such as graffiti or text-based installations (Searle 1979: 19–25). "Directives", which inspire action, align with participatory art requiring audience engagement (Searle 1979: 13). "Commissives", encompassing promises or vows, find resonance in performance art conveying obligation or future commitment (Searle 1979: 8–14). "Expressives", reflecting psychological states, are echoed in emotionally charged artworks evoking deep collective responses (Searle 1979: 15–23). Finally, "declarations", enacting immediate changes, mirror the transformative power of ritualistic acts in performance art, reshaping spaces and altering roles (Searle 1979: 17–19). These speech act types rely on context and intentionality to succeed. Searle (1979: 2–7) argues that performative acts depend on recognition within social and institutional settings; for example, a promise functions as a "commissive" only when the listener understands and

accepts the speaker's commitment (Searle 1979: 2–14). In art, audience interpretation determines the transformative impact of an action, underscoring the relational dynamic between intent and reception. Searle's (1979: 2–7) ideas illustrate how artistic practices depend on shared cultural frameworks to communicate effectively. While Austin (1975) highlights the intrinsic power of utterances to effect change, Searle (1979) emphasises the necessity of social validation, illustrating how the impact of a performative act hinges on its reception.

To ground Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1979) theories on performative acts within an artistic context, we can examine *AmaHubo* (2018) by Buhlebezwe Siwani (Figure 11). This video installation embodies the performative dimensions of language and action articulated by Austin (1975) and further developed by Searle (1979). Through *AmaHubo* (2018), Siwani explores the transformative power of ritualistic acts, which serve as expressions that reshape the spiritual and social spaces they occupy (Infectingthecity.com nd; Madragoa nd; Austin 1975: 14; Searle 1979: 17–19; Makandula 2018). The ritualistic performance is a purposeful enactment where intentional gestures transcend their immediate context, demonstrating how performance materialises the performative—actions that actively create and alter meaning (Austin 1975: 6–14; Searle 1979: 2–7). In *AmaHubo* (2018), a group of Black women dressed in garments that symbolise both Christian and traditional African spiritual practices engage in a choreographed ritual upon red soil, emphasising their profound connection to land and ancestry (Infectingthecity.com nd; Madragoa nd; Makandula 2018).

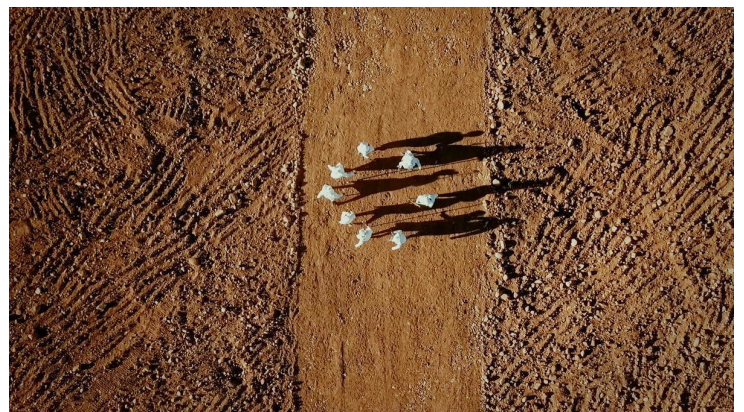


Figure 11: Buhlebezwe Siwani, *AmaHubo*, 2018. Video, high definition, three projections, colour and sound (stereo), duration: 13min, 1sec. Tate Collection. Frieze Tate Fund supported by Endeavor to benefit the Tate Collection 2021. © Buhlebezwe Siwani (Tate nd). Image retrieved from Tate (nd).

This enactment transcends visual representation to become a performative act constituting a ritual of healing and re-signification (Austin 1975: 6–14; Searle 1979: 2–14). The deliberate gestures and spatial positioning of the women reflect Searle's (1979: viii) categories of

“expressives” and “declarations”. As “expressives”, these acts convey psychological states deeply intertwined with cultural memory, invoking ancestral practices that affirm collective identity and spiritual devotion (Searle 1979: 15–23). As declarations, they enact immediate change by transforming the space into one that reconnects the present with ancestral histories and spiritual dimensions (Austin 1975: 14; Searle 1979: 17–19). The cyclical choreography serves as a symbolic meditation, embodying Austin’s (1975: 14) assertion that certain acts do not merely represent but enact. By extending performative categories to non-verbal acts, *AmaHubo* (2018) highlights how the body itself functions as a vessel for history and spirituality. The performance bridges the symbolic and the real, with artistic gestures operating as both expressive and declarative acts, thereby enacting transformations akin to those described by Austin (1975) and Searle (1979) in language. Here, performance acts as the conduit through which the performative is realised, showing how artistic gestures function as both expressive and declarative acts—bridging the symbolic and the real.

In her exploration of performativity, Butler (1999) extends the concept initially outlined by Austin (1975), emphasising the intrinsic potential for subversion within the repeated acts of gender. While Austin (1975) asserts that performative acts necessitate institutional validation for their efficacy, Butler (1999: xiv, 179) reinterprets this notion. She argues that the performative is not merely validated by social structures but is foundational to her theory of performativity, highlighting that identity is constituted through an ongoing process rather than a series of isolated performances. She deepens this understanding by integrating the concept of performance, illustrating that identity emerges as a continuous enactment of social norms that transcends mere linguistic expression, encompassing embodied acts as well (Butler 1999). This perspective also critiques John Searle’s (1979: 2–14) position, which stresses social recognition and intentionality for speech acts to succeed. Instead, Butler (1999: 179) posits that identity is not a pre-existing essence but is formed through the continuous, embodied repetition of social norms—a process that sustains identities and simultaneously opens them to subversion. Such repetition exposes the artificiality of socially constructed identities, rendering them as “acts” that are continually reconstructed rather than fixed truths (Butler 1999: 174–187). This reframing of identity introduces the potential for both compliance and disruption within the normative frameworks that shape it, leading into Butler’s (1999: 180) broader understanding of performativity as a process involving both the performative—referring to the acts that produce effects—and performance, which highlights the ongoing nature of these social enactments and their implications for identity. Building on this, Butler (1999) explores how repetition functions as both a stabilising and destabilising force in the construction of identity. While norms derive their power and apparent permanence from repeated enactments, these repetitions inherently allow for subtle variations that can disrupt their seeming inevitability. This duality is central to how identity is produced through performativity (Butler 1999: 185). For example, subversive practices like drag illustrate how

deliberate deviations in repetition challenge entrenched norms, though their impact depends on cultural and social contexts (Butler 1999: 178–188). Acts that may be radical in one context, such as women wearing trousers, could become normalised or even commercialised in another, demonstrating how cultural settings shape the subversive potential of repetition. Additionally, an intersectional lens highlights how repetition interacts with broader social identities such as race, class, and sexuality, revealing that performativity is not a uniform process but a dynamic interplay of identities and norms (Butler 1999). Thus, Butler's (1999) work underscores how performative acts and performance converge in the iterative enactments of norms, producing identities while simultaneously offering spaces for their reconfiguration.

Author Awam Amkpa (2010: 88) extends this understanding of performativity in *A State of Perpetual Becoming: African Bodies as Texts, Methods, and Archives* by foregrounding how, in African contexts, the body functions as archive, method, and text. He highlights how performative acts are not only social iterations but also embedded in bodily memory, ritual, and ancestral histories (Amkpa 2010: 83). This framing deepens the discussion of repetition by showing how embodied knowledge—particularly in postcolonial performance—materially carries and reactivates cultural meaning (Amkpa 2010: 87–88). Such a view complements Butler's (1999) emphasis on normativity while shifting focus toward the corporeal enactment of history and identity, offering a lens through which Makandula's work can also be understood.

This nuanced view of repetition strongly informs contemporary art practices, where repetitive actions and rituals critique societal structures. Butler's (1999) ideas reveal how repetition exposes the constructed nature of social realities and reshapes identities. Repetition serves as both compliance and resistance, reflecting the fragility of norms while demonstrating their transformative potential. Drag, as analysed by Butler (1999: 174–180), exemplifies this, parodying gender norms and exposing their constructed nature. Intersectionally, drag's subversive potential varies. In diverse queer spaces, it challenges hegemonic norms, while in commercialised contexts, its critique may be diluted. Sikhumbuzo Makandula's *Zizimase* (2019) (Figure 8) applies Butler's (1999) theories, using ritualistic gestures in historically charged spaces to disrupt entrenched norms and invite socio-political reimagination. By repeating ritualistic acts, Makandula critiques systemic power structures and emphasises the body's agency in subversion, aligning with Butler's (1999) assertion that repetition reveals the instability of norms and fosters identity reconfigurations. His work illustrates how race and history intersect with performative acts, reimaging cultural narratives and resisting systemic oppression.

Building on the foundational insights of Butler (1999), author Peggy Phelan's (2003) perspectives on visibility and invisibility in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* deepen the discourse on performativity by emphasising their intricate and often oppositional

dynamics. Phelan (2003: 47–97) contends that visibility, while politically seductive, often results in the commodification and reduction of marginalised identities, reinforcing the normative frameworks it seeks to challenge. In this context, she highlights the power of “remaining unmarked” as a strategy that resists the normative gaze, commodification, and simplification of identities (Phelan 2003: 6–17, 51). Her critique focuses on the risks of visibility leading to the objectification of identities, diminishing their capacity for resistance and fluidity.

“There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal. Visibility is a trap; it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession. Yet it retains a certain political appeal.” (Phelan 2003: 6–7)

Butler (1999), while sharing Phelan’s (2003: 6–17, 51) scepticism of visibility as an unequivocal political good, broadens the framework by positioning both visibility and invisibility as tools whose effectiveness depends on socio-political contexts. For Butler (1999), visibility can serve as oppression and subversion when wielded critically. In contrast, Phelan (2003: 6–51) emphasises invisibility as resistance, providing a space for identities to evade surveillance and commodification. Butler’s (1999) analysis of drag exemplifies visibility’s duality, critiquing and parodying normative gender constructions while engaging audiences critically. Drag becomes both a spectacle and subversive act, destabilising identities and creating spaces for reimagination. Both authors examine the subversive potential of invisibility and failure. Phelan (2003: 6–51) frames invisibility as a refuge from commodification, while Butler (1999) sees failure within performative acts as opportunities to reimagine identities. Together, these perspectives suggest visibility and invisibility as intertwined tools for resisting normative structures. Erin Manning’s *The Minor Gesture* (2016: 1–3) expands on these insights by foregrounding the transformative power of small, often imperceptible gestures in performative acts. She argues that “minor gestures” resist dominant structures not through overt subversion but by creating subtle disruptions that open new interpretive possibilities (Manning 2016: 2–4). This aligns with Butler’s (1999) emphasis on iteration and Phelan’s (2003) critique of visibility by demonstrating how micro-actions reframe engagement beyond spectacle or commodification. These minor interventions, often overlooked, contribute to a broader reconfiguration of socio-political realities.

Author Kira Hall’s (1999: 185–186) critique in *Performativity* builds on Butler’s (1999) analysis of drag, introducing creative potential within performative acts and highlighting individuals as active agents who strategically re-signify norms. Hall critiques Butler’s (1999) focus on repetition, arguing performative acts involve negotiation and reinterpretation, creating spaces for resistance. This underscores how visibility and invisibility enable artists to disrupt and reconfigure norms by selectively revealing or concealing aspects of identity.

Hall diverges from Phelan's (2003: 6–17, 51) scepticism of visibility, suggesting resistant visibility resists commodification while preserving identity complexity. This complements Butler's (1999) assertion that repetition allows for variations that destabilise norms, extending Phelan's notion of the "unmarked" to include strategic visibility. Hall's insights highlight how artists engage with norms not merely to critique but to transform their meanings through recontextualisation. Artists tactically use visibility and invisibility to challenge norms, destabilise identities, and assert new meanings. By embedding resistant visibility, they maintain the critique's subversive power, offering nuanced engagements with an identity that remains critically engaged with dominant narratives. Hall's framework demonstrates how contemporary art leverages performative acts to critique and reimagine socio-political norms, ensuring relevance within broader cultural discourses (Butler 1999; Hall 1999: 185–186; Phelan 2003: 6–51). Manning's (2016: 6–7) notion of the minor gesture adds another layer to this discourse by suggesting that performative resistance is not only enacted through grand gestures but also through the ephemeral, the unnoticed, and the affective shifts that reshape the conditions of reception.

Sikhumbuzo Makandula's *Ubuzwe* (2016) (see Figure 9) exemplifies Phelan's (2003: 6–51) notion of invisibility as resistance and Butler's (1999) performativity framework, where visibility and invisibility act as strategic tools. The red attire, symbolising historical struggles, Indigenous spirituality, and Catholic uniforms, reflects Phelan's (2003: 6–17, 51) idea of "remaining unmarked" to resist the normative gaze. By referencing a garment with spiritual and institutional meanings, Makandula reclaims and subverts its visibility as a marker of conformity, employing it to resist dominant structures. This opacity shields the work from commodification and aligns with Phelan's critique of visibility as inviting fetishism and surveillance (Phelan 2003: 6–7). While *Ubuzwe* (2016) illustrates invisibility's protective power, it also embodies Butler's (1999) argument that visibility can destabilise dominant narratives. Ritual gestures evoking ancestral memory disrupt norms and demand critical engagement, echoing Butler's (1999) framing of performance as critique and transformation. Hall's (1999: 185–186) concept of creative potential further enhances this, as Makandula recontextualises symbols and rituals, transforming visible meanings into acts of resistance. Here, Manning's (2016: 7–8) concept of minor gestures provides a lens to examine the subtle shifts in meaning that emerge through Makandula's performative acts. The interplay of visibility, audience reception, and micro-actions within the performance create nuanced disruptions that reshape the socio-political impact of the work. The interplay of visibility and invisibility invites dynamic interpretation, emphasising meaning-making's iterative nature. By navigating these strategies, Makandula resists reductive interpretations, aligning Hall's (1999) framework with Butler's (1999) assertion that variations within repetition destabilise norms. Furthermore, it extends Phelan's (2003: 6–51) notion by showing that visibility, when critically employed, reimagines identity and resists appropriation. *Ubuzwe* (2016) leverages these complexities to foster discourse on nationalism, identity, and heritage.

In *Performativity and Its Addressee*, Shannon Jackson (2014: 1–4) builds on Butler’s (1999) concept of performativity by emphasising the essential role of the audience in shaping the meaning and impact of performative acts. While Butler (1999: 179) explores how identity is constructed through repeated enactments of social norms, asserting that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts”, Jackson (2014: 1–4) highlights that performativity is inherently dialogical, engaging both performer and audience in a reciprocal exchange. The audience, or “addressee”, becomes an active participant whose response can reinforce, alter, or subvert the performer’s message (Jackson 2014: 15–29). This dynamic positions performativity as a co-creative process, extending Butler’s (1999) framework by emphasising how meaning is continually negotiated through the audience’s interpretive role. Claire Bishop’s (2018: 24–27) *Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention* expands on this notion by illustrating how contemporary performance art dissolves the rigid boundaries between performer and spectator, embedding audience engagement as an integral component of meaning-making. Bishop (2018) argues that in participatory and performative art contexts, spectatorship is not passive but constitutive, aligning with Jackson’s assertion that the audience’s reception reshapes the performative act. Through this co-creative process, the audience’s interpretations reshape or expand meaning, allowing acts to transcend their original intent. This leads to new meanings and associations that foster fictional or imaginative aspects, emerging as reinterpretations diverging from established narratives. Hall (1999: 185–186) expands on Jackson’s (2014) ideas by emphasising the creative agency performers exert in enacting norms. Hall (1999: 185) argues that performative utterances not only describe the world but act upon it, with their impact shaped by social context and audience reception. This complements Jackson’s (2014) view by presenting the interplay of performer and audience as a dynamic process, where agency emerges through reception and reinterpretation.

This evolving understanding of co-creation in performance can be deepened through African-centred perspectives such as those of authors Kene Igweonu and Osita Okagbues’ (2013) edition of *Performative Inter-Actions in African Theatre 3: Making Space, Rethinking Drama and Theatre in Africa* who argue that African performance traditions collapse fixed binaries between performer and audience, ritual and art, individual and collective. Their framing positions performance as a communal and spiritual practice, where memory, ancestry, and social transformation intersect (Igweonu and Okagbue 2013). This view does not reject the contributions of Western theorists like Butler (1999), Phelan (2003), Jackson (2014), or Hall (1999), but rather expands their frameworks by foregrounding how performative meaning emerges within culturally embedded, participatory contexts. Amkpa (2010: 83–88) similarly emphasises the body as text, method, and archive in African postcolonial performance, suggesting that performative acts are materially inscribed with ritual knowledge and ancestral presence. These perspectives deepen the reading of

Makandula's *Ubuzwe* (2016), where the red garment and ritualistic gestures are not only tools of resistance but also acts of embodied memory. Activated in the presence of the audience, they become sites of cultural reclamation that blur the boundaries between viewer and participant. Such interpretations extend Jackson's (2014: 15–29) notion of the "addressee" into a space where the audience is part of a living archive, and performance becomes a shared act of remembering, transforming, and reimagining identity.

Together, Jackson (2014) and Hall (1999) show that performative acts extend beyond compliance or resistance, creating spaces for reinterpretation where social expectations are reframed. This dynamic is significant in contemporary art, where artists invite audiences to collaborate in meaning-making. By dissolving traditional boundaries between performance, theatre, and visual art, Jackson (2014: 1–30) demonstrates how audience reception becomes integral to the work, expanding performativity's socio-political dimensions. Similarly, Bishop (2018: 28–29) highlights how contemporary participatory art shifts traditional spectatorship towards an active, immersive role, reinforcing Jackson's notion that performativity is dependent on audience interaction. Her analysis of the "Gray Zone" between theatrical performance and exhibition space further underscores how contemporary art invites audiences into fluid, co-creative encounters, making their presence and attention an inseparable part of the work (Bishop 2018: 38–39). This intermedial approach transforms viewers into active contributors, embedding socio-political critique and engagement into a continuous exchange. Igweonu and Okagbue's (2013) framing of African performance as inherently communal and spiritually anchored complements these insights, deepening the notion of audience as co-creator by situating participation within a framework of ancestral memory and socio-cultural renewal. Jackson (2014), Hall (1999), and Igweonu and Okagbue (2013) present performativity as a framework where meaning is constantly reshaped through the interaction of performer and audience, grounded in agency, interpretation, and socio-political context, while also revealing the imaginative possibilities inherent in this exchange.

Performativity is a dynamic, iterative process transcending mere acts of performance, embedding itself in the construction and reshaping of identity, power, and meaning within socio-political frameworks. Drawing from Austin (1975), Searle (1979), Butler (1999), Phelan (2003), Hall (1999), and Jackson (2014), it examines how actions, utterances, and gestures actively shape reality. Austin (1975) and Searle (1979) highlight the transformative power of speech acts, where language not only communicates but enacts social change. Butler (1999) expands this by illustrating how identity is constituted and destabilised through repeated enactments of norms. Phelan (2003) and Hall (1999) address the dynamics of visibility and invisibility, showing how individuals and artists strategically navigate these forces to resist commodification and reimagine cultural identities. Jackson (2014) underscores the audience's co-creative role, positioning performativity as a dialogical process where meaning is continuously negotiated. Amkpa (2010), however, insists that in African contexts,

performativity is inscribed within the body itself—as archive, method, and text—where embodied gestures are saturated with historical and spiritual memory. This extends the Western ideas by foregrounding ritual and ancestral connection as essential to meaning-making. In contemporary art, these insights converge as artists like Sikhumbuzo Makandula and Buhlebezwe Siwani embody cultural narratives to challenge socio-political norms. Through performative gestures, ritualistic acts, and material engagements, they transform abstract symbolic meanings into lived realities, inviting audiences into interpretive spaces where identities and norms are both reinforced and contested. Performativity thus becomes a site of negotiation and transformation, illuminating how contemporary art critiques systemic inequalities and reimagines collective memory and social narratives through iterative and subversive acts.

2.3 Materiality

The distinctions among material, material culture, and materiality reveal that each concept serves a unique role within the cultural landscape, interacting in ways that contribute to a nuanced understanding of how objects and substances participate in and shape social meaning. Material, as author JeeHee Hong (2003) elaborates, refers to the raw, tangible substance of an object, such as wood or metal, but its significance extends beyond mere physicality. Material embodies a dual quality: it is both corporeal and symbolic, carrying the latent potential for social and cultural functions (Hong 2003). This interconnectedness is vital, as material serves as the foundation upon which broader cultural and social interpretations are built, interacting dynamically with material culture and materiality to form a cohesive system of meaning-making (Hong 2003). For instance, the raw physical properties of material anchor cultural practices, while its symbolic dimensions allow it to be reframed and imbued with context-specific significance. Hong's (2003) discussion of philosophical tensions—such as Kant's framing of material as having a primarily surface role and Hegel's view of its essential physicality—demonstrates how material is both a structural necessity and a cultural force mediating human interactions. In this study, material acts as the entry point into examining the intricate ways objects and substances ground, influence, and intersect cultural narratives, offering insight into how the tangible can shape and be shaped by broader systems of meaning.

The concept of materiality is central to understanding objects as dynamic, relational elements actively shaping social interactions and meanings (McDonnell 2023: 196). McDonnell (2023: 196–204) shifts from material culture's focus on the social use of objects to emphasise their intrinsic properties and capacity to act as agents in cultural processes. Materiality critiques anthropocentric views by showing how objects' physical traits—size, texture, or design—constrain or enable actions (McDonnell 2023: 196–204). Appadurai (1986: 5) complements this by proposing that objects have autonomy through their

“trajectories”, acquiring meanings as they move across contexts. While Miller’s (2005: 205) “humility of things” emphasises objects’ unnoticed role in sustaining hierarchies, McDonnell (2023: 196–204) highlights their capacity to disrupt norms. This reframing integrates objects’ transformative dimensions, creating a “network of affordances” where material and symbolic properties mediate actions (McDonnell 2023: 201–202). Alfred Gell’s (1998: 02–19) theory in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* of “secondary agency” complements this by attributing cultural influence to objects through their symbolic and relational qualities. His “art nexus” illustrates how objects function within networks of influence, shaping systems and challenging structures (Gell 1998: 21–23). Together, these perspectives show materiality as an active force mediating adaptation and transformation through human intentions and objects’ capacities. This duality positions materiality as both stabilising and transformative, critical for reshaping narratives and critiquing entrenched systems. Counterarguments to material agency, particularly from Miller (2005: 02–44) and Appadurai (1986: 03–09), frame materiality as relational and dependent on socio-political systems for significance. Miller (2005: 02–03) situates materiality within cultural systems, where objects shape social life through relational dynamics. Unlike McDonnell’s focus on disruption, Miller underscores objects’ stabilising role in maintaining norms. His “humility of things” reveals how objects condition behaviour and sustain stability, operating unnoticed in routines (Miller 2005: 05–06). Appadurai (1986: 03–09) redefines materiality through the “social life of things”, where objects acquire layered meanings via their movement across cultural and economic landscapes. His focus on “things-in-motion” highlights how objects negotiate and sometimes subvert narratives (Appadurai 1986: 05–09). These counterarguments illuminate materiality’s duality, showing how objects reinforce and challenge socio-political systems. This is particularly valuable when analysing artworks like Sikhumbuzo Makandula’s, where materials serve as repositories of historical narratives and mediums for their interrogation and disruption.

Materiality, as defined across these perspectives, encapsulates objects’ intrinsic properties and their capacity to influence human systems through relational and agentic dimensions. McDonnell (2023: 196–204) and Gell (1998: 02–26) emphasise materiality’s disruptive force, where objects mediate cultural interactions through adaptation and transformation. Gell’s “art nexus” frames objects as active participants shaping social dynamics through material and symbolic properties. Conversely, Miller (2005: 05–44) and Appadurai (1986: 03–09) highlight materiality’s relational dimension, focusing on stability and reinterpretation within human-driven networks. Appadurai’s (1986: 15) “regimes of value” and Miller’s (2005: 05–07) “humility of things” converge on materiality, subtly reinforcing stability while enabling contestation. These dual roles make materiality essential for analysing cultural critiques in art, particularly works like Makandula’s, where material agency and cultural symbolism drive narratives. Together, these perspectives position materiality as a continuum where objects stabilise and transform systems, bridging the tangible and symbolic to shape human experiences and enable socio-political critique.

Simon O’Sullivan (2001: 125–126), in *The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation*, conceptualises affect as a dynamic, visceral force operating beyond representation, highlighting its experiential and sensory nature. He critiques traditional art history frameworks centred on representation, arguing that these overlook art’s capacity to generate affective intensities that shape perception (O’Sullivan 2001: 125–133). For O’Sullivan (2001: 128), affect is not merely symbolic but an embodied, material interaction—a “moment of intensity” that disrupts habitual perception and reconfigures the viewer’s engagement with the world. Through this process, materials transcend their physicality, provoking sensorial and emotional responses that alter interpretation. These interactions encourage a break from fixed associations, opening pathways for new relational meanings and speculative possibilities (O’Sullivan 2001). Gregory Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell’s *The Affect Theory Reader 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures* (2023: 13) expand on this by demonstrating how affect materialises through dynamic encounters with space, bodies, and objects. Their analysis reinforces O’Sullivan’s (2001: 128) claim that affect is an embodied force rather than a purely cognitive or symbolic phenomenon (Seigworth & Pedwell 2020: 13–14). However, unlike O’Sullivan (2001: 128), who situates affect as an immediate rupture in perception, Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 12–14) foreground its accumulation across time and space. This shift complicates O’Sullivan’s (2001) emphasis on immediacy by demonstrating how affect lingers, morphs, and circulates beyond singular encounters (Seigworth & Pedwell 2023: 12). In doing so, their work underscores the socio-political dimensions of affect, offering a temporally layered perspective.

Katherine Young (2014: 179), in *Aesthetic Ecologies: Reflections on What Makes Artifacts Art*, extends this discussion with her concept of “aesthetic ecologies”, which explores the interrelationship between objects and environments. While Young (2014) does not explicitly theorise affect, she highlights materiality’s capacity to evoke responses beyond its functional purpose, resonating with O’Sullivan’s (2001) focus on affect’s relational dimensions. Young (2014: 189) further argues that materials, through their historical and cultural imprints, evoke affective engagements that anchor objects within broader ecological and social contexts. Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 22–23) contribute to this discussion by demonstrating how affective encounters occur through layered interactions between materiality and temporality, where objects and spaces function as affective archives that register and transmit intensities shaped by historical and political residues. While O’Sullivan (2001: 128) situates affect as an embodied force tied to perception, Seigworth and Pedwell (2023) shift the focus to the broader material environments that mediate and extend affective intensities. This reorientation raises important questions about the agency of materials—whether affect is produced solely in the moment of engagement or whether it accumulates through ongoing spatial, social, and historical interactions. Together, O’Sullivan (2001), Young (2014), and Seigworth and Pedwell (2023) illustrate how affect is entangled with materiality, enabling both immediate sensory

engagement and extended cultural resonance. However, a crucial distinction arises—O’Sullivan (2001) views affect as a rupture from the representational, while Seigworth and Pedwell’s (2023) analysis suggests that affect never truly operates outside of cultural and historical structures. This marks a conceptual shift from affect as an autonomous force to affect as a socially embedded process.

Miller (2005: 02–03) highlights materiality’s role in shaping human experience through visible and invisible engagements, positioning objects as relational forces that provoke affective responses embedded in socio-political contexts. His concept of the “humility of things” reveals how objects condition behaviours and shape emotional atmospheres even when their influence is not consciously acknowledged. This aligns with O’Sullivan’s (2001) assertion that affect functions beyond cognition, shaping perception at a pre-reflective level. Similarly, Young’s (2014: 179–196) exploration of materiality’s transformative potential demonstrates how affect emerges through the embeddedness of materials within cultural and spatial systems. Here, fictional possibilities arise as materials become active sites of reimagined social and emotional connections. Gell (1998: 02–19) enriches this discourse by framing objects as affective participants that elicit responses such as awe or unease through their material and relational properties. By functioning as “indexes” within networks of intentionality, as Gell (1998: 21–23) conceptualises, objects anchor sensory experiences within broader historical and cultural narratives. Seigworth and Pedwell (2020: 12–13) further elaborate on this by arguing that affective encounters exceed individual perception, operating through and within material configurations that mediate social and political intensities. Their work aligns with O’Sullivan’s (2001) in emphasising how affect is an encounter that disrupts habitual perception, but they extend this by considering how affect’s circulation is shaped by power structures and spatial dynamics. This perspective integrates affect with relational dynamics, showing how materiality critiques entrenched systems, disrupts normative structures, and creates spaces for reconfigured socio-cultural narratives.

Rooted in the duality of tangible presence and symbolic meaning, irony enables materials to reinforce and subvert established frameworks, positioning them as active agents in cultural critique and transformation. Hong (2003) explores this concept of irony within materiality, focusing on the dynamic tensions and transformations in how materials are valued across cultural and historical frameworks. Materiality operates as both substance and symbol, embodying the paradox between its tangible presence and capacity to convey cultural meanings. Hong (2003) highlights this ironic reversal, noting the shift from Kant’s view of material as a symbolic surface to Hegel’s emphasis on its intrinsic physicality—an evolution in which, as Hong (2003) explains, material becomes central to the content of art. By framing materiality as a site of redefinition, Hong (2003) positions its duality as a critical tool for cultural critique and transformation. McDonnell’s (2023: 206–208) analysis complements Hong’s by showing how objects simultaneously stabilise and disrupt cultural frameworks

through material and symbolic affordances. For instance, McDonnell's (2023: 205–213) example of condoms repurposed as jewellery by Ghanaian women demonstrates how flexibility and malleability enable objects to transcend original functions, challenging their cultural roles. Together, these perspectives position materiality as a dynamic, relational process that reconfigures cultural frameworks and reshapes narratives, paving the way for further exploration of its broader implications in art and culture. Authors Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss (1994: 66–87), in their analysis, *Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism*, enrich Hong's (2003) exploration of irony within materiality by illustrating how everyday objects, recontextualised as art, embody the dual nature of materiality as both substance and symbol. Duchamp's readymades⁶, like Hong's (2003) discussion of materiality's paradoxical interplay between tangible properties and cultural meanings, show how material qualities can critique and reinforce cultural norms. The designation of mundane objects as art, such as the urinal in *Fountain* (1917)⁷, critiques traditional artistic value while relying on the authority of art institutions to legitimise this redefinition (de Duve and Krauss 1994: 67–70). This dynamic aligns with McDonnell's (2023: 206–208) view of materiality as relational, where objects create opportunities for stabilisation and disruption within cultural frameworks. Ntombela's (2016: 87–88) exploration of irony in South African art, in *Shifting Contexts: Material, Process and Contemporary Art in Times of Change*, builds on this foundation, highlighting how materials like cowhide or beads, often stereotyped as primitive within Western frameworks, are imbued with irony when used in politically engaged art. Far from being mere cultural artefacts, these materials critique and transform stereotypes, reflecting an ironic inversion where objects once viewed as static symbols of an "exotic" Africa destabilise colonial narratives in global and local discourses (Ntombela 2016: 98–99). By positioning irony as a strategy for resistance and reclamation, Ntombela (2016) reveals how South African artists assert cultural agency and navigate the interplay between history, identity, and materiality.

Irony within materiality, as reflected in these perspectives, operates as a multifaceted force that critiques and reinforces cultural frameworks. Emerging from the tension between materiality's tangible presence and symbolic potential, as Hong (2003) highlights, physical properties anchor cultural narratives while generating new meanings through reinterpretation. De Duve and Krauss (1994: 66–87) demonstrate how Duchamp's readymades use irony to subvert artistic hierarchies while paradoxically relying on institutional validation to achieve their critique. Ntombela (2016: 87–88) adds depth by illustrating how South African artists reclaim materials stereotypically associated with primitivism, transforming them into tools of critique and empowerment. Through these

⁶ Readymades refer to Duchamp's practice of selecting mass-produced objects and designating them as art. This act shifted the artist's role from maker to chooser, revealing how meaning and value are shaped by context rather than craftsmanship (Tate nd).

⁷ Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), a urinal submitted under a pseudonym, exemplifies the readymade's challenge to artistic conventions. By relying on institutional framing to be seen as art, it questioned both aesthetic norms and the authority that sustains them (Tate nd).

processes, irony becomes intrinsic to materiality's role in reshaping cultural narratives, positioning materials as both subjects and agents within broader socio-cultural dialogues. These perspectives collectively establish irony as a critical mechanism for challenging entrenched systems and re-defining cultural boundaries.

In conclusion, materiality encapsulates the layered interplay between material, material culture, and materiality itself. Material serves as the tangible foundation, embodying both physical and symbolic dimensions that anchor cultural practices and narratives. Material culture extends this interaction, examining how society imbues objects with meaning, shaping identities, norms, and shared values. Materiality, however, transcends these layers by foregrounding the agency, affect, and irony inherent in objects, positioning them as active participants in cultural and social dynamics. This study frames materiality as a dynamic and relational concept where agency enables objects to influence and reshape human systems, affect generates embodied and emotional responses, and irony destabilises and redefines established meanings. Together, these dimensions reveal materiality's capacity to critique, reinforce, and transform cultural frameworks. By integrating these perspectives, this study positions materiality as an essential lens for exploring the nuanced ways objects interact with and influence socio-cultural landscapes, re-defining them as both reflective and transformative forces within the human experience.

2.4 Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

The concept of Performative Materiality emerges in this study as a novel framework that bridges the foundational theories of performativity and materiality while addressing critical gaps in contemporary South African art discourse. This framework provides a cohesive lens to analyse how contemporary artists construct and convey complex socio-political narratives by integrating performativity—the dynamic actions shaping social realities—and materiality—the agency of materials in cultural narratives. Grounded in the assumption that performative actions and material elements are deeply interwoven, Performative Materiality uncovers the layers of meaning within artworks, particularly those exploring identity, resistance, and cultural memory.

2.4.1 Diagram of Framework

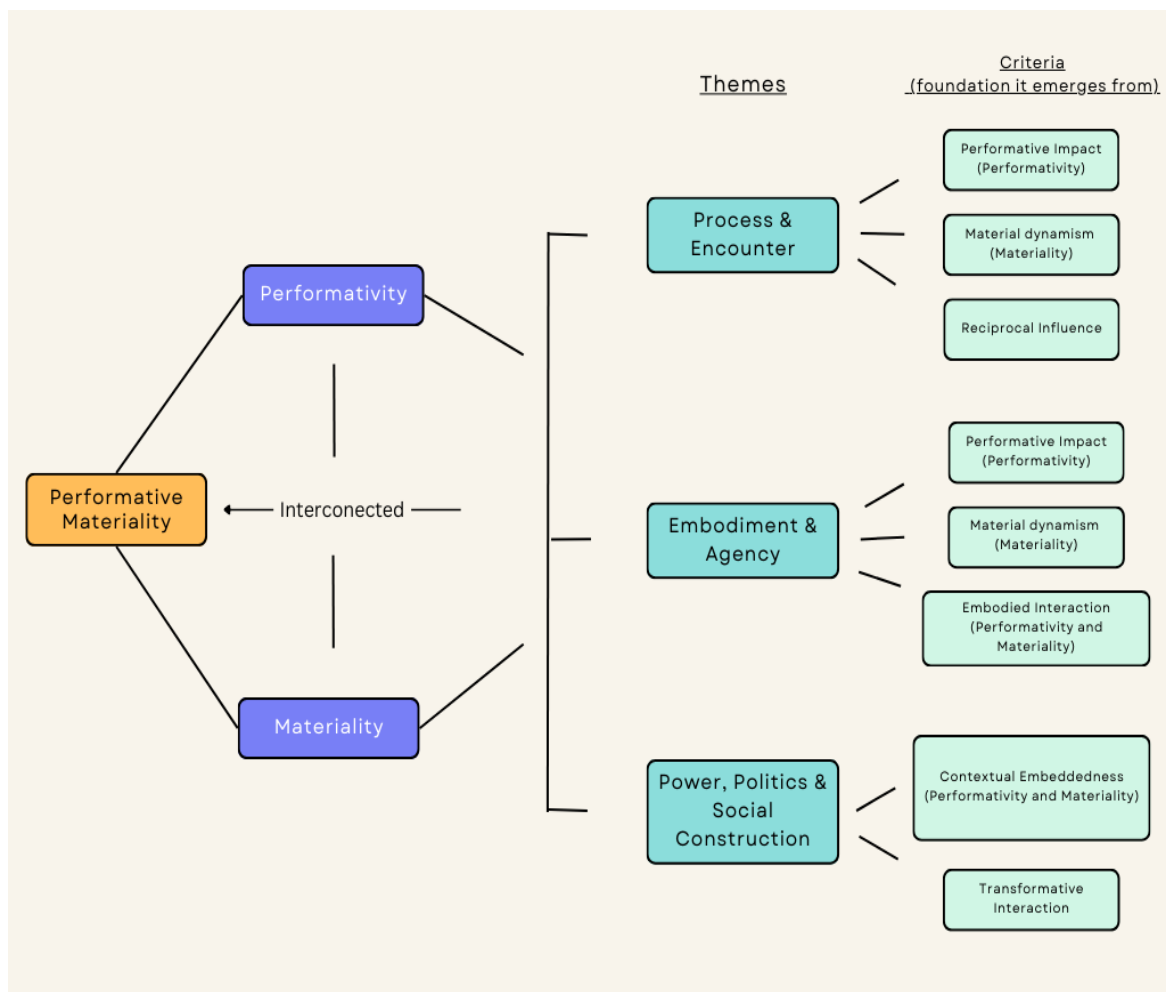


Figure 12: Own illustration of Performative Materiality, a self-coined framework within this study.

2.4.2 Themes

This section details the core themes of the Performative Materiality framework—Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction. These themes draw on key theories from both performativity and materiality, establishing a foundation for analysing how actions and materials coalesce within artworks. By integrating perspectives from scholars across these fields, the framework reveals how contemporary artworks, particularly in the South African context, function as sites where socio-political, cultural, and material dimensions interact and converge.

2.4.2.1 Process and Encounter

Process and Encounter within the Performative Materiality framework highlight the iterative and relational dynamics of artistic practices, focusing on how meaning emerges and evolves through interactions among materials, performative acts, and audiences. This theme bridges the temporality and transformative aspects of performativity with the agency of materials, emphasising their combined role in shaping cultural and socio-political narratives. Process emphasises the dynamic and adaptive nature of artistic creation, where materials and actions continuously evolve. Butler's (1999: 42–180) theory of iterative performativity frames the process as the repeated enactment of norms, where each repetition carries the potential for subversion and the reimagining of identities. Hall (1999: 185–186) expands this by highlighting the creative agency within performative acts, showing how artists re-signify norms to drive cultural critique and transformation. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) concept of material agency situates process within the physical and symbolic dimensions of materials, which act as active participants in cultural systems. Encounter, as an experiential dimension, emphasises relational engagement between the audience, materials, and performative acts. Jackson's (2014: 15–29) dialogical model underscores the co-creative role of the audience, demonstrating how meaning is dynamically shaped through participatory and sensory responses. Similarly, Bishop (2018: 24–27) reinforces this by illustrating how audience engagement in contemporary performance art is an active process that reshapes the performative act itself. O'Sullivan's (2001: 125–128) focus on affect highlights the power of materials and spatial arrangements to provoke visceral and emotional reactions, fostering deep audience engagement. Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 12–14) extend this by showing how affect does not operate as an isolated instance but instead accumulates across time and space, reinforcing the idea that material and spatial configurations hold affective intensities long after an initial encounter. This suggests that affective engagement is not only immediate and sensory but also lingers, influencing subsequent interactions and interpretations. These interactions illustrate how performativity and materiality converge to create interpretive and transformative encounters. This theme informs criteria such as Performative Impact, which emphasises relational engagement; Material Dynamism, focusing on materials' active roles; and Reciprocal Influence, examining the interplay between performative acts and materials. Together, these elements show how Process and Encounter capture the evolving and reciprocal nature of art, revealing its capacity to generate layered cultural narratives and socio-political critique through iterative and participatory engagements.

2.4.2.2 Embodiment and Agency

Embodiment and Agency within the Performative Materiality framework examines the relationship between the body's physical presence (embodiment) and the capacity of human and material entities to act and influence (agency). This theme highlights how

performative actions and material elements work collaboratively to generate meaning, critique societal norms, and invite transformative engagement. Embodiment refers to the active role of the body as a medium for meaning-making. Butler's (1999: 43–179) theory of performativity shows how embodied gestures both sustain and subvert societal norms, Amkpa (2010: 88) expands this understanding by positioning the body as archive, method, and text, showing how embodied gestures are not only performative but also carriers of memory and ritual in African context. Hall (1999: 185–186) emphasises the creative potential of the body in re-signifying and challenging cultural norms and O'Sullivan's (2001: 125–126) concept of affect underscores how materials provoke visceral, sensory responses that engage the body, activating deeper emotional connections and reconfiguring meaning.

Agency extends beyond human actors to include materials as active participants. McDonnell's (2023: 202) material agency and Gell's (1998: 21–23) "secondary agency" both highlight how materials shape cultural narratives and influence social actions. Phelan (2003: 6–17) further complicates this by discussing the role of visibility and invisibility in performative acts, showing how materials and bodies can resist commodification and exert agency. Miller's (2005: 05–06) "humility of things" emphasises the subtle but pervasive influence materials have in shaping social systems and behaviours, often without recognition. Together, Embodiment and Agency underscore the interdependence of the body and materials in the co-creation of meaning, demonstrating their role in shaping and transforming cultural and socio-political contexts.

2.4.2.3 Power, Politics, and Social Construction

Power, Politics, and Social Construction within the Performative Materiality framework explores how artworks engage with and critique systems of power, political ideologies, and socially constructed norms. This theme emphasises the collaborative role of performativity and materiality in generating meaning and challenging societal structures. Performativity addresses power through the repetition of norms that either reinforce or subvert hierarchies, as discussed by Butler (1999: 43–179), who explores how performative acts disrupt established power structures. Kira Hall (1999: 185–186) furthers this by highlighting the creative potential of re-signifying norms, showing how performative acts are both a form of control and a tool for transformation. Materiality complements this by examining how objects embody and reinforce socio-political practices, with McDonnell (2023: 196–204) focusing on the agency of materials to shape and challenge social norms. Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 12–14) extend this discussion by demonstrating how affect circulates within power structures, accumulating across material and temporal contexts. Their analysis highlights how affect sustains or challenges dominant ideologies, reinforcing materiality's role in socio-political dynamics.

In terms of Politics, performative acts reveal and reshape political systems by exposing exclusions and marginalisations, aligning with Hall's (1999: 185–186) critique of the political function of performative acts. McDonnell (2023: 196–204) extends this by emphasising the symbolic roles of materials in reflecting and contesting political ideologies, suggesting that materials are not passive but active agents in articulating political meanings. Social Construction is seen in how norms, identities, and values are formed and perpetuated through repeated enactments, as Butler (1999: 43–179) argues. Materials participate in this process by embodying and reinforcing these constructions, which McDonnell (2023: 196–204) and Appadurai (1986: 03–09) describe in their theories of material and social life, showing how objects gain meanings through cultural contexts and human interactions. This theme informs two key criteria in the Performative Materiality framework: Contextual Embeddedness, which examines how artworks engage with socio-political contexts through performative and material elements, and Transformative Interaction, which looks at how the interplay of actions, materials, and audience engagement provokes change or offers new perspectives. Together, these criteria highlight how artworks function as spaces for resistance, dialogue, and transformation, revealing how performativity and materiality critique, challenge, and reimagine power and social norms. This theme underscores the transformative potential of art as it engages with and critiques socio-political realities, providing a powerful tool for artists to navigate systems of power through performative and material acts.

2.4.3 Criteria

This section introduces the six criteria that underpin the analytical framework of Performative Materiality. Each criterion serves as a lens through which the dynamic interactions between performative actions, material elements, and socio-political contexts are examined. By detailing these criteria, the framework provides a structured yet adaptable approach to analysing how artworks generate and convey complex meanings. The flexibility of these criteria allows for nuanced interpretations, acknowledging that not every criterion will apply uniformly across all artworks.

2.4.3.1 Performative Impact

Performative Impact within the Performative Materiality framework highlights the transformative role of human gestures, utterances, and actions in co-creating meaning alongside material elements (Butler 1999: xiv, 179; Hall 1999: 185–186; Phelan 2003: 6–17, 51; Jackson 2014: 1–4). Rooted in the concept of performativity, it synthesises theoretical insights from Butler (1999), Phelan (2003), Hall (1999), and Jackson (2014) to evaluate how performative acts transcend representation to enact and reshape social realities. Butler's (1999: 42–180) emphasis on the iterative nature of performative acts illustrates their

capacity to construct and destabilise norms, while Phelan's (2003: 6–17, 51) critique of visibility addresses the political significance of opacity and resistance to commodification. Hall (1999: 185–186) adds depth with the notion of resistant visibility, focusing on the re-signification of norms through creative performative acts, and Jackson (2014: 1–4) underscores the dialogical relationship between performer and audience as a site of meaning-making. Manning's (2016: 1–3) concept of the minor gesture expands this by demonstrating how subtle, often imperceptible performative acts generate affective disruptions that shift meaning in ways not immediately apparent. She argues that these micro-actions work beneath the surface of dominant structures, subtly unsettling norms and expanding interpretive possibilities beyond spectacle or overt critique. Analytical application involves identifying performative acts within an artwork, examining their capacity for repetition and subversion (Butler 1999: 128–185), assessing strategies of visibility and invisibility (Hall 1999: 185–186; Phelan 2003: 6–51), considering audience engagement (Jackson 2014: 15–30) and contextualising their socio-political resonance, and recognising how micro-gestures shift Performative Impact in non-obvious ways (Manning 2016: 6–7).

This criterion is particularly effective for analysing how performative gestures critique or reimagine societal structures, offering a dynamic tool for interrogating their transformative impact. While Performative Impact is a versatile criterion, its applicability can vary depending on the artwork. For performance-heavy pieces, such as those relying on embodied gestures, rituals, or spoken acts, this criterion provides a comprehensive framework for analysing how actions actively construct meaning. However, in more static works, like traditional paintings or sculptures, where performative elements are minimal or absent, its relevance may diminish. Here, analysis might shift to other criteria better suited to exploring the material or symbolic aspects of the artwork. This flexibility ensures the framework remains adaptable, respecting the unique characteristics of each artistic practice without imposing rigid evaluative standards.

2.4.3.2 Material Dynamism

Material Dynamism within the Performative Materiality framework examines the active role of materials in shaping cultural narratives and influencing socio-political frameworks (Appadurai 1986: 03–09; Miller 2005: 05; McDonnell 2023: 196–204). It draws on insights from scholars such as McDonnell (2023), Miller (2005), and Appadurai (1986) to position materials as dynamic participants rather than passive mediums. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) concept of a “network of affordances” highlights how materials interact with their contexts to shape outcomes, while Miller (2005: 05–06) emphasises their unnoticed yet pervasive influence on social structures through the “humility of things”. Appadurai's (1986: 03–09) “social life of things” expands this understanding, showing how materials gain layered meanings through their circulation and interaction within cultural systems. These perspectives emphasise that materials have both physical and symbolic dimensions, which

dynamically shape their role in artistic practices (Appadurai 1986: 03–09; Miller 2005: 05–06; McDonnell 2023: 196–204). Analytical application involves exploring how materials’ intrinsic properties, cultural associations, and histories contribute to meaning-making, challenging traditional norms and engaging audiences (Appadurai 1986: 03–09; Miller 2005: 05–06; McDonnell 2023: 201–204). This criterion foregrounds materials as central agents in artworks, capable of evoking complex socio-political narratives through their physicality and embedded cultural significance.

While Material Dynamism is a flexible and robust criterion, there are contexts where it may be less effective. For example, in highly conceptual artworks that rely heavily on abstract ideas or linguistic elements, materials may play a minimal role or act as mere vessels for transmitting the concept rather than as active participants in meaning-making. Unlike performance-heavy artworks, where materials often engage dynamically with human actions and gestures, these concept-driven works may prioritise intellectual or theoretical engagement over the interplay between materiality and performativity. This limitation highlights the need to contextualise the framework’s application, ensuring that the emphasis on Material Dynamism aligns with the characteristics and intentions of the artwork.

2.4.3.3 Reciprocal Influence

Reciprocal Influence focuses on the dynamic interaction between Performative Impact and Material Dynamism in artworks. It examines how performative acts such as gestures and rituals interact with material elements like objects and textures to co-create meaning. This criterion reveals how materials influence actions and how performative acts shape and activate materials. The analysis involves identifying moments where materials and performativity inform and transform each other, highlighting how they generate layered socio-political commentaries. By exploring this interplay, Reciprocal Influence uncovers how performativity and materiality are inseparable, co-creating meaning and challenging cultural norms. This criterion emerges in the analysis of the artwork, with its prominence depending on how the materials and performative acts interact within the work.

2.4.3.4 Contextual Embeddedness

Contextual Embeddedness examines how artworks reflect and engage with their socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts, positioning both performative and material elements as extensions of their environments. This criterion underscores that materials and actions in artworks are not isolated but intricately tied to external forces, shaping and being shaped by cultural and spatial conditions. Drawing on Butler’s (1999: 43–179) insights on performativity and McDonnell’s (2023: 196–204) perspectives on materiality, it highlights how performative acts and material elements interact within and contribute to broader

socio-political narratives. Butler's (1999: 179) exploration of iterative acts as both sustaining and subverting norms aligns with McDonnell's (2023: 201) assertion that materials operate within a "network of affordances", mediating cultural meanings. Appadurai's (1986: 03–09) concept of the "social life of things" further enriches this understanding by illustrating how materials acquire layered meanings through circulation, while Jackson's (2014: 15–29) focus on the dialogical relationship between performer and audience highlights how meaning is co-constructed within specific contexts. Analytically, this criterion reveals how culturally specific materials and performative gestures evoke themes of identity, resistance, or memory. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) "affordances" explain how objects mediate cultural meanings, while Butler's (1999: 179) iterative performative acts destabilise or reinforce societal norms. Appadurai (1986: 03–09) adds that the historical and cultural trajectories of objects deepen their socio-political significance, and Jackson (2014: 15–29) emphasises the role of audience engagement in shaping meaning. Together, these perspectives situate artworks within broader cultural narratives, offering a nuanced lens for understanding how they function as reflections and critiques of their environments.

2.4.3.5 Embodied Interaction

Embodied Interaction examines the physical and sensory engagement of the audience with an artwork, emphasising the interplay of performativity and materiality and immersive and imaginative experiences. Jackson's (2014: 15–29) focus on the dialogical nature of performative acts highlights the co-creative role of the audience, showing how their responses actively shape the meaning of an artwork. Hall's (1999: 185–186) concept of creative agency complements this by demonstrating how embodied interactions allow audiences to re-signify cultural norms through their engagement with gestures, actions, and materials. O'Sullivan (2001: 125–128) highlights how artworks generate visceral, affective responses through material and spatial qualities, while Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 12–14) extend this by showing how these intensities persist and evolve over time. Together, they illustrate how embodied engagements exceed the moment of interaction, embedding affect within broader cultural and political narratives. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) notion of a "network of affordances" further shows how the physical properties of materials—such as texture, weight, or spatial arrangement—guide and constrain audience responses, making the sensory experience central to the artwork's meaning. Finally, Miller's (2005: 05–06) "humility of things" illustrates how materials subtly condition behaviours and responses, embedding their influence into cultural and sensory systems. Together, these perspectives position Embodied Interaction as an analytical tool to examine how performative gestures, sensory stimuli, and material properties engage audiences, revealing how embodied experiences generate layered cultural and political narratives through active participation and transformation. Fictional and imaginative aspects emerge as sensory and emotional responses to performative gestures and materials transcend their physicality, fostering reimagined realities and cultural narratives.

2.4.3.6 Transformative Interaction

Transformative Interaction examines how artworks generate meaningful change through the interplay of performativity and materiality, emphasising the co-creation of new meanings and socio-political critique. This criterion emerges during the analysis of artworks, focusing on how performative acts and material elements interact to provoke shifts in meaning, challenge norms, and reshape socio-political narratives. The analysis should explore how materials enable or constrain performative actions and how these actions, in turn, transform the materials, creating a dynamic exchange that drives social and cultural transformation. Through this interaction, artworks engage the audience in a dialogue that amplifies the interpretive and political impact of the piece. For example, how do embodied gestures activate materials, and how do the materials themselves influence the nature of the performative acts? This interaction can disrupt expectations, challenge established frameworks, and provide new insights into the socio-political context being explored. By observing these moments of transformation, Transformative Interaction becomes a tool for identifying how performative and material elements combine to generate significant shifts in meaning and perception, offering a critical lens to assess the socio-political impact of the artwork.

Chapter 3: Artwork Analysis

3.1 Introduction to Analysis

Chapters 3 and 4 conduct an in-depth analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016), respectively, employing the Performative Materiality framework to explore the interplay between performativity and materiality and how this dynamic interrelation reveals layered socio-political narratives. The selected artworks are analysed to investigate the co-creation of meaning between material agency and performative acts, using the framework's criteria— Performative Impact, Material Dynamism, Reciprocal Influence, Contextual Embeddedness, Transformative Interaction, and Embodied Interaction—and its themes—Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction.

The chapters employ a multi-layered methodology combining the readings on Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model from the authors Maithreyi Subramaniam, Jaffri Hanafi, and Abu Talib Putih (2016) and the Janice Mason Art Museum (2018). These models guide the analytical structure through four steps: Description, identifying the material and performative elements of the artwork; Analysis, evaluating their functional and symbolic roles; Interpretation, connecting the artwork to broader socio-political and cultural narratives; and Judgement, assessing the effectiveness of the Performative Materiality framework in uncovering these dynamics (Subramaniam et al. 2016; Janice Mason Art Museum 2018). Additionally, the analysis integrates insights from an in-depth interview with Sikhumbuzo Makandula, during which he provided reflections on the conceptual intentions, material choices, and performative strategies within his artworks. The artist's commentary enriches the interpretative process by offering firsthand perspectives on the cultural and socio-political dimensions of his work, as well as its reception and significance. By incorporating these insights, the chapters seek to provide a holistic understanding of the artworks, reflecting not only the viewer's perspective but also the creator's intent.

The chapters' structure mirrors this methodological approach. Each artwork is introduced with a detailed description of its visual and material elements, followed by an analysis of how these elements interact within the performance. Interpretative sections incorporate Makandula's reflections to contextualise the artwork within its socio-political and historical framework. Finally, the judgement considers the artwork's ability to critique and redefine narratives of power, resistance, and identity while examining the efficacy of the Performative Materiality framework as an analytical tool. By employing this methodology, each chapter situates Makandula's work within a critical discourse, aiming to explore how his art interrogates colonial legacies, reclaims Indigenous narratives, and situates materials as active participants in socio-political commentary. This layered analysis seeks to

investigate the collaborative agency of performativity and materiality in reshaping cultural narratives and examines the framework's potential for analysing contemporary South African art.

3.2 Artwork Analysis 1: *Umnikelo* (offering), 2015



Figure 13: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Umnikelo* (offering) 2015, Live performance, Joburg Art Fair. Image retrieved from the artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

3.2.1 Title and General Description

The artwork titled *Umnikelo*, meaning 'offering' or 'sacrifice' in Xhosa, is a live performance by Sikhumbuzo Makandula, first presented at the Joburg Art Fair in 2015. The title itself hints at themes of devotion, sacrifice, and contribution, often tied to cultural and religious practices. According to Makandula, the term *Umnikelo* encapsulates a layered interplay of physical presence and spiritual resonance, aligning with the performative and material elements of the piece (personal interview, 30 January 2025). The performance engages with South Africa's intricate socio-political and cultural landscape, reflecting on colonial legacies that persist in religious, cultural, and institutional frameworks. Makandula described the work as an interactive experience, drawing attention to specific moments within the performance where audience members were guided to focus on particular elements, emphasising their role as witnesses (personal interview, 23 August 2024 and 30 January 2025). This participatory aspect underscores the idea of responsibility and the act of bearing witness to histories of labour, sacrifice, and divine justice.

Furthermore, Makandula highlighted the Christian connotations of the piece, which critiques and reinterprets religious symbolism in light of historical and cultural contexts (personal interview, 23 August 2024 and 30 January 2025). By weaving together these layers, *Umnikelo* (2015) interrogates the intersections of ritual, labour, and memory, creating a dynamic space for reflection and engagement. The next section focuses on a detailed description of the artwork's different aspects and an analysis of how these elements function within the performance, revealing their interconnected significance and offering insights into their cultural and historical significance.

3.2.2 Description and Analysis

The performance, as captured in the image (Figure 12), features Sikhumbuzo Makandula dressed in a striking red garment that commands attention not only through its vibrant materiality but also its evocative symbolism, linking it to both Christian clergy attire and broader institutional authority. This choice of material grounds the artwork in a visual narrative that immediately signals the convergence of spiritual and institutional power. Reminiscent of ecclesiastical robes, the garment establishes a direct visual and symbolic connection to Christian clergy attire, evoking colonial religious frameworks and the historical authority imposed by these institutions. The title *Umnikelo* (2015), meaning 'offering' or 'sacrifice', reinforces this connection, as the garment's rich red hue echoes themes of sacrifice, spiritual resonance, and labour, discussed by Makandula (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024 and 30 January 2025). According to Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024), the red garment operates as a medium for embodying both physical presence and spiritual significance, tying its materiality to the performative and interactive nature of the piece. While its ecclesiastical connotations are significant, the

garment also engages broader institutional frameworks, including the art space in which Makandula performs. The garment's structured architectural design intensifies its association with authority and control. However, its rigidity is juxtaposed with Makandula's deliberate, fluid gestures, which emulate the solemn ritual movements of Christian clergy.

These gestures activate the garment as a performative agent, dynamically interacting with the space and embedded cultural narratives. Through the interaction of materiality and performative gestures, the red garment transcends its immediate symbolism, engaging audiences in imaginative reinterpretations that challenge conventional associations. This interplay invites viewers to explore alternative perspectives, where the embedded narratives of the garment inspire fictional possibilities and reimagine cultural and historical constructs (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014).

Reflecting on his upbringing in an Anglican family, Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024 and 30 January 2025) discussed the ways in which Christian Judeo traditions intersected with his African spirituality. This duality, central to his artistic practice, shaped his conceptualisation of *Umnikelo* (2015), drawing from his experiences as an altar boy when he witnessed and participated in moments of offering and spiritual devotion. These early encounters with ceremonial gestures and sacrificial symbolism later informed his performative approach, allowing him to recontextualise *Umnikelo* (2015) beyond strictly religious connotations. Instead, he reframes offering as an exploration of spiritual labour and cultural negotiation, expanding the concept beyond theological sacrifice to encompass broader histories of resilience and exchange. This layering of personal and cultural histories strengthens the garment's significance as both a site of spiritual offering and a tool for reclaiming Indigenous identity. While its connection to Christian iconography reflects themes of sacrifice and institutional authority, it simultaneously engages with cultural and ancestral narratives. The artist highlighted the garment's dual symbolism as a reflection of spiritual devotion and a marker of resistance tied to Indigenous histories, positioning it as a means of exploring the intersections of colonial and Indigenous cultural frameworks.

Furthermore, the performance highlights Makandula's engagement with the socio-political legacies of colonialism, demonstrating how cultural resilience and resistance intersect with historical trauma. The striking red garment, in this context, not only critiques institutional power but also serves as an assertion of spiritual and ancestral identity, underscoring its role in reclaiming Indigenous histories and reimagining cultural narratives within the South African socio-political landscape.

The criteria of Performative Impact and Material Dynamism, as illustrated in the Performative Materiality framework, are exemplified in the interplay between Makandula's gestures and the garment's physicality. Through rhythmic and intentional movements, Makandula draws attention to his capacity to reshape the narrative power of the garment.

Performative Impact emerges as the artist re-signifies the red garment, originally associated with colonial ecclesiastical authority, into a living, active medium for cultural resistance. Butler (1999: 42–180) and Hall (1999: 185–186) highlight how performative acts reshape societal structures and destabilise norms. In this context, Makandula’s repeated gestures subvert the garment’s historical power through deliberate bodily performance. His movements transform the material into a medium for negotiation, reimagining its historical meanings through physical engagement and challenging its imposed authority. This dynamic process, where gestures destabilise the material’s preordained function, embodies the core of Performative Impact as it activates the garment’s capacity to transcend its original symbolic role (Phelan 2003: 6–17, 51; Jackson 2014: 1–4).

The criterion of Material Dynamism is illustrated through the garment’s texture, structure, and colour, which function as active agents in meaning construction. McDonnell (2023: 196–204), Miller (2005), and Appadurai (1986: 03–09) emphasise that materials are not passive but significantly shape cultural and socio-political narratives. The contrast between the garment’s rigid architectural form and Makandula’s fluid, rhythmic gestures creates material tension, reflecting the historical friction between colonial institutions and acts of resistance. Makandula extends this tension by incorporating elements that connect beyond Christian and colonial histories, referencing Yoruba cultural practices through the red Kufi⁸ he wears. While the red tunic aligns with ecclesiastical vestments, the Kufi introduces an alternative spiritual lineage, linking the performance to African diasporic traditions and reinforcing the interplay between multiple spiritual and cultural frameworks.

This fusion of material signifiers disrupts singular interpretations of the garment, positioning it as a tool for negotiating historical and contemporary cultural identities (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024 and 30 January 2025). The garment’s structure, rigid yet pliable in response to the performer’s gestures, demonstrates how Material Dynamism activates it as a symbol of both institutional control and cultural subversion (McDonnell 2023: 196–204). The texture and colour of the red material catalyse cultural negotiation by embedding a symbolic dialogue spanning colonial violence, sacrifice, and ancestral vitality (Appadurai 1986: 03–09). The use of red as the garment’s dominant colour is deeply symbolic, associating it with themes of sacrifice, vitality, and power. In various spiritual traditions, red is a potent symbol of life force, transformation, and ritual significance (The Elemental Mind nd; Bell 2023: 41–42, 96, 236).

⁸ The Kufi is a significant cultural and religious head covering in West African traditions, commonly worn by men as a symbol of wisdom, religious devotion, and patriarchal status. While it is widely associated with Islamic identity, it is also worn by Christians in the region. In Christian communities, the Kufi is unisex, with women and children often preferring crochet or knitted variations. Among men, the Kufi is traditionally linked to peace, mourning, renewal, or spiritual protection. Its use extends beyond Africa, particularly among African-American communities, where it signifies cultural pride and heritage (AfricImports 2025).

In *Umnikelo* (2015), Makandula expands these associations, embedding the colour within a broader dialogue that connects ancestral vitality to historical trauma. By performing in spaces tied to colonial and institutional histories, he positions the garment as a vessel for negotiating layered narratives of resistance and resilience. His deliberate gestures disrupt static associations of authority, reanimating the garment as a living entity that embodies cultural memory and identity. These gestures further align the garment with Indigenous traditions that emphasise continuity and the presence of the past in the present. The garment's structured design reinforces its connection to historical power, yet its activation through deliberate gestures transforms it into a medium for ancestral communication. The bold red hue, evocative of red ochre, bridges spiritual and protective qualities with the vitality of Indigenous practices. This interplay reflects the garment's role in invoking cultural memory and ancestral vitality, positioning it as a site of negotiation between historical trauma and resilience. Through this lens, the garment transcends its symbolism, intertwining spiritual, ancestral, and socio-political narratives in Makandula's performance.

Makandula's performances highlight how materiality and performativity intersect to navigate the layered narratives of colonial and contemporary frameworks. This exploration builds on the dual symbolism of red, where its material presence and performative engagement bridge historical trauma with cultural resilience, creating a dynamic interplay between institutional authority and ancestral vitality. In *Umnikelo* (2015), the red garment transcends its representation of institutional power, becoming a medium of transformation that connects ancestral vitality with the endurance of historical trauma. This transformation reflects Reciprocal Influence as per the framework, where the Performative Impact of Makandula's gestures and the Material Dynamism of the garment converge in a mutually reinforcing dialogue. The gestures activate the garment as a site of cultural negotiation, while its material properties amplify the power of these performative acts. This interplay redefines the garment through movement, positioning, and rhythm, embedding it with historical and cultural narratives. Simultaneously, the vibrant red fabric reciprocates by enhancing the gestures' communicative power, influencing their reception by the audience. This synergy demonstrates how material and performance together shape the interplay between history, memory, and identity, affirming the framework's utility in uncovering these dynamics in contemporary art. By balancing these dual perspectives, Makandula reimagines the garment as a tool for engaging with cultural memory, resilience, and the enduring dialogue between history and identity.



Figure 14: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Umnikelo* (offering) 2015, Close-up of boots. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

Building on the dual symbolism of the red garment, Makandula's military-style boots (Figure 14) introduce a contrasting element that deepens the socio-political narrative of the performance. The rugged, utilitarian design and greenish hue of the boots stand in stark contrast to the structured red robe, creating a visual tension that underscores the grounded realities of labour and resistance. The greenish hue of the boots, muted and earthy, further emphasises this tension, visually anchoring the performance in the physical realities of struggle while symbolising resistance rooted in the land. The deliberate choice of boots reflects the physical demands of struggle and endurance, with their industrial and military connotations evoking histories of oppression. These connotations resonate with the enforced marches and militant struggles of anti-colonial resistance in South Africa, embedding the performance within specific historical realities. Unlike the ceremonial associations of the robe, the boots emphasise materiality and functionality, anchoring the performance in the physical realities of survival. This duality situates the boots as both a functional and symbolic element, where their rugged design transcends practicality to evoke resilience within socio-political struggles. This symbolic tension introduced by the boots finds further depth in the deliberate and ritualised movements that Makandula employs, transforming ordinary actions into profound acts of resistance.

This contrast is heightened by Makandula's deliberate and steady movements within the performance space, where each step transforms walking into a meditative, almost ritual act

of resistance. His slow, deliberate pacing mirrors the gestures of Christian clergy while simultaneously embodying the burdens of labour and survival. Through this ritualised movement, Performative Impact emerges as Makandula reimagines walking—a mundane act—as a symbolic expression of resilience and endurance (Butler 1999: 128–185; Hall 1999: 185–186). The military-style boots amplify this impact, their rugged structure and heavy soles emphasising the physicality of labour and grounding the performance in the material realities of resistance. The repetitive contact of the boots with the ground produces a steady, audible rhythm, which transforms into a sensory and symbolic dialogue with the audience. According to Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024), sound plays a critical role in his work, serving as a medium to convey history, memory, and ritual. This auditory element, produced by the boots, functions as a marker of time, reinforcing the cyclical and enduring nature of resistance and sacrifice. As Phelan (2003: 6–17, 51) alludes to, sound can become an essential “invisible” performative element that challenges visibility and brings attention to the persistence of subjugated histories. Here, the sound of the boots acts as an agent of resistance, amplifying the material’s significance and further engaging the audience in the narrative of endurance.

The auditory and physical elements of the boots seamlessly connect to their material properties, which contribute to their symbolic resonance within the performance. This juxtaposition of the boots with the robe deepens the narrative of resistance and survival, where the performative gestures and material properties work together to transform symbols of oppression into agents of resilience and endurance.

The interplay between the boots’ material properties and Makandula’s gestures exemplifies Material Dynamism, where physical and performative elements dynamically intersect to shape meaning. McDonnell’s (2023: 201–202) notion of a “network of affordances” helps explain how the boots’ material qualities—rough texture, worn surface, and heavy soles—actively engage with the context of the performance. These physical properties do more than serve a functional role; they trigger associations of struggle, survival, and endurance. The worn soles of the boots, with their frayed edges and scuffs, visually communicate the passage of time and labour, reflecting both personal and collective histories of resistance. In the context of Makandula’s work, these tactile elements invite the audience to consider the lived experiences of oppression and survival, making the material itself a potent symbol of resilience. McDonnell (2023: 196–204) argues that materials interact with their cultural contexts to shape outcomes, which is evident as the boots’ material properties connect directly with the historical and socio-political narratives of struggle. The rough texture of the boots reinforces the hardships of labour, while their heavy soles emphasise the weight of oppression and the physical toll of resistance. Similarly, Miller’s (2005: 05–06) concept of the “humility of things” helps further explain the boots’ role. Miller suggests that materials, while seemingly mundane, often have a profound and pervasive impact on social structures.

The boots, despite their utilitarian design, hold an underlying power that speaks to the pervasive influence of everyday objects in shaping societal meaning.

The boots' scuffed surfaces are not just a sign of wear; they are an active part of the performance's narrative, representing how the material world carries the weight of social struggles. The boots' rough, worn textures become vessels of meaning—emphasising the endurance of those who wear them and the everyday acts of resistance they represent. In Makandula's performance, the boots act as more than just a symbol of labour; they embody the unseen, often ignored, forces of resistance that shape history. The scuffed soles and worn surfaces of the boots encapsulate a visual narrative of endurance and resilience. These tactile qualities—marks of wear and toil—actively evoke the physical toll of labour while embodying the repetitive cycles of resistance. Makandula's embodied engagement with the boots transforms them into markers of both personal and collective struggle, as each step visually communicates the difficulty of progress. The scuffs and worn textures are not merely remnants of use but integral to the narrative, anchoring the performance in tangible realities of survival. This tactile engagement exemplifies Material Dynamism, as the boots' material properties carry and convey cultural and historical weight, shaping the audience's understanding of resilience within oppressive systems.

By presenting the boots in this state of wear, Makandula foregrounds the lived experiences of those who endure oppressive systems, illustrating how the materials themselves hold meaning through their wear and use. In the context of institutionalism, the boots evoke complex connotations, including their links to the military and labour. Their rugged, utilitarian design and heavy soles echo the militarised histories of enforcement and control, where boots symbolise power, discipline, and oppression. Yet, these same boots also align with the physical realities of labour, symbolising endurance and survival through their functionality and wear. This duality situates the boots as both symbols of institutional authority and tools of defiance, emphasising their multifaceted materiality. While the robe's structured design reflects the rigidity of colonial and religious frameworks, the boots challenge and complement this narrative by grounding the performance in the physicality of labour and resistance.

The deliberate pacing and rhythm of Makandula's movements further amplify Performative Impact, transforming the boots into active agents that dynamically interact with the performance space. The audible rhythm of each step reinforces the cyclical nature of resistance, engaging the audience through sensory and symbolic layers. The interplay between their utilitarian design and the deliberate gestures recontextualises the boots from symbols of institutional control to markers of resilience and defiance, bridging their connotations of military discipline with the struggles of everyday survival. This dynamic interplay exemplifies Hall's (1999: 185–186) notion of resistant visibility, where Makandula's embodied gestures make visible the resilience and defiance embedded in the boots.

The boots, through sound, movement, and tactile engagement, become a site of re-signification, transforming institutional power into a symbol of personal and collective resistance. Through this dual engagement of movement and materiality, Makandula integrates Performative Impact and Material Dynamism to reinforce the layered narrative of resistance. The boots' scuffed surfaces and audible presence highlight survival as both a physical and symbolic process, framing resistance as an act that spans personal, historical, and socio-political dimensions. By combining their tactile and visual properties with deliberate gestures, Makandula reshapes the boots' material presence into a potent commentary on survival, endurance, and defiance, grounding the performance in the realities of collective struggle. This layered interplay of gestures and material presence culminates in a cohesive narrative of Reciprocal Influence.

At the core of the performance lies Reciprocal Influence, where the Material Dynamism of the boots and the Performative Impact of Makandula's gestures coalesce to produce a cohesive narrative. The worn, rugged design of the boots amplifies the rhythm and physicality of Makandula's movements, grounding the performance in the tangible realities of labour and resistance. Conversely, Makandula's deliberate pacing activates the boots as symbols of resilience and defiance. According to Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024), his performances are grounded in the concept of *umsebenzi* (work or labour) rather than traditional performance, emphasising the physical and symbolic labour involved in these repeated actions. This focus on labour resonates in the scuffed soles of the boots and the repetitive rhythm they produce, both of which evoke a shared sense of effort and endurance. Reciprocal Influence emerges as the boots' materiality interacts with Makandula's ritualistic gestures, transforming the boots into active participants. Their scuffed soles and rhythmic sounds amplify the gestures, creating a symbolic dialogue of resilience and resistance.

The interplay between Material Dynamism and Performative Impact reshapes the boots' cultural resonance, making them vehicles for a living history. Makandula also noted that repetition functions as a site for evoking memory and presence, further highlighting how the rhythmic patterns created by the boots serve as a medium to engage the audience and anchor the performance in shared histories of resistance (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). Reciprocal Influence underscores how gestures reanimate the boots' cultural associations, while the boots ground the performance in physical realities, enhancing the audience's grasp of collective struggle. This interplay reinforces themes of resistance and survival, illustrating the utility of Reciprocal Influence within the framework.



Figure 15: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Umnikelo* (offering), 2015, Close-up of Skull in hand. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

The skull (Figure 15), a universal symbol of death, connects deeply to ancestral memory and the losses incurred through colonisation. Makandula noted that the skull reflects the weight of historical violence and disrupted Indigenous spiritual frameworks (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). Its polished surface and hollow interior illustrate Material Dynamism, with the skull's tactile qualities shaping its narrative. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) “network of affordances” concept highlights how materials interact with their context to produce meaning. In this case, the skull represents the erasure caused by colonialism and symbolises the preservation of memory. Its hollow interior emphasises the absence of Indigenous narratives, while its polished exterior evokes preservation, suggesting an active reclaiming of lost histories. The connection between the skull and cultural reclamation finds further elaboration in the beads that emerge from it, bridging the gap between loss and renewal. Makandula explained that the beads symbolise cultural reclamation, where ritual and spirituality facilitate the process of restoring what was lost (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). He expanded on this, noting that these particular beads also signify an individual of a particular stature, marking their presence within the performance. Their significance extends beyond aesthetic function, operating as spiritual conduits that link ancestral reverence with contemporary identity. As the beads emerge from the skull, they signify the transmission of knowledge and cultural continuity, reinforcing how history is actively reclaimed through performance. Their presence within the performance introduces a symbolic figure within the space of an art fair, an environment that is spiritually laden with

multiple meanings (Makandula, personal interview, 30 January 2025). The beads' flow from the skull narrates the restoration of fragmented cultural identities, reinforcing Material Dynamism and illustrating how ancestral knowledge is reanimated through performance. Appadurai (1986: 3–9) emphasises how materials gain layered meanings through circulation; here, the beads act as material agents for the restoration of disrupted histories. Their fluid motion contrasts with the stillness of the skull, embodying the dynamic interaction between loss and renewal, which is central to Makandula's performance. The beads serve as active extensions of the skull's symbolism, reinforcing the tension between absence and presence, past and present. This interplay between movement and stillness amplifies the materials' symbolism, embodying the continuous negotiation of historical trauma and cultural resurgence within Makandula's performance.

The beads' emergence from the skull visually narrates cultural reclamation, their fluid motion evoking cleansing, renewal, and the emotionally charged act of retrieving lost narratives. Their movement, contrasted with the skull's stillness, enhances Material Dynamism, transforming the skull from a static symbol of mortality into a vessel of resilience. This interplay invites viewers to witness how materials actively shape the reclamation of disrupted histories, bridging Indigenous spirituality and Christian symbolism. The beads, initially reminiscent of Christian rosaries, are re-signified through their movement within the performance. Their fluid emergence disrupts colonial religious symbolism, embodying a performative adaptation that asserts Indigenous continuity and transformation (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014). Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) described how he distributed the beads to the audience, turning them into ritualistic objects of exchange and shifting spectators into participants, thereby extending the artwork beyond the performance space. Butler (1999: 128–185) posits that performative acts destabilise dominant narratives through repetition and gesture—here, Makandula reinterprets the Christian symbolism of beads into a ritual of Indigenous adaptation. Their calming blue contrasts with the red of his robe, symbolising endurance and resistance. The beads' motion reanimates histories erased by colonialism, embodying O'Sullivan's (2011: 105–112) notion of "material ephemerality", where movement conveys complex socio-political meanings. Seigworth and Pedwell (2023: 12–14) expand on this by illustrating how affect does not fade once the act is complete but instead accumulates in the material and spatial elements of the performance. The beads' movement, as a performative and affective act, lingers beyond the moment, reinforcing the way materials become vessels of historical and cultural resonance. The interplay between Performative Impact and Material Dynamism reveals how ritual and material agency narrate cultural survival and reclamation, reinforcing Indigenous resilience within the Performative Materiality framework.

Makandula's upward-facing palm holding the skull and beads reinforces the Performative Impact of ritual supplication and spiritual offering. His bent arm and offering-like pose merge Christian and Indigenous frameworks, illustrating acts of resilience and reclamation.

Hall (1999: 185–186) argues that resistant visibility re-signifies material elements, disrupting dominant norms. Through his gestures, Makandula reinterprets the Christian rosary into a symbol of Indigenous spiritual continuity. Smoke rising from the skull further enriches this symbolism, representing the impermanence of colonial power and the persistence of cultural memory. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) noted that burning frankincense was central to evoking ancestral traditions, immersing the performance in a multisensory spiritual offering. O’Sullivan (2011: 105–112) identifies ephemeral materials like smoke as representing both colonial fragility and Indigenous endurance. The rising smoke actively alters the ritual space, signifying ancestral presence while simultaneously eroding the authority of colonial narratives. Its fleeting nature reinforces the instability of imposed histories, aligning with the material’s ability to subvert fixed meanings. Jackson (2014) argues that ephemeral elements in performance create imaginative possibilities, here challenging dominant historical narratives. Performative Impact intensifies as Makandula’s gestures activate material elements, weaving the skull, beads, and smoke into a cohesive ritual. Phelan (2003: 6–51) asserts that the performer’s visibility shapes interactions with materials, subverting dominant structures. Makandula’s engagement reshapes colonial violence into cultural endurance, reinforcing Material Dynamism, where materials actively shape meaning rather than remaining passive.

This interplay between materials culminates in Reciprocal Influence, where performativity and materiality co-create meaning. The skull, beads, and smoke together construct a layered narrative of resistance and resilience. The skull, with its polished surface, anchors the performance in memory and mortality; the beads, with their fluid motion and calming hue, signify renewal; and the ephemeral smoke represents spiritual transcendence and colonial impermanence. These elements illustrate Material Dynamism, as their symbolic and physical properties dynamically shape the performance’s depth. Makandula’s ritualistic gestures transform the skull into a vessel of transcendence, the beads into conduits of memory, and the smoke into a metaphor for resilience. This bidirectional relationship exemplifies Reciprocal Influence, where materials and gestures continually inform and activate one another, reinforcing the socio-political commentary of cultural memory, endurance, and spiritual reclamation. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) described how his activation of materials was essential in immersing both himself and the audience in a transformative process. The audience’s engagement extended the materials’ performative reach as their participation in handling and distributing the beads transformed the ritual into an evolving, co-created act of cultural memory. Phelan (1993) argues that a performance’s vanishing nature underscores its impact—here, the ritual transforms spectatorship into an act of cultural transmission. Appadurai’s (1986: 3–9) notion of material circulation aligns with how the beads extend their meaning through interaction, reinforcing cultural survival. Through this Reciprocal Influence, the performance enacts a socio-political commentary on resilience and reclamation, demonstrating how Material Dynamism and Performative Impact function within the Performative Materiality

framework. The fusion of material and performative gestures dissolves boundaries between historical, fictional, and speculative reimagination, reinforcing the transformative potential of artistic ritual.



Figure 16: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Umnikelo* (offering), 2015, Close-up of the bell in hand. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

The metallic bell in Makandula's left hand (Figure 16) resonates throughout the performance space, creating a "sonic imprint" that marks both presence and absence. The reflective surface of the bell, catching light within the space, emphasises its material prominence while visually linking it to spiritual and ritualistic practices. The bell's polished finish suggests sacredness, positioning it as both an object of ritual and a participant in the performance. Held with his arm falling straight against his side, Makandula grips the bell at its top, a deliberate posture that conveys restraint and authority. This deliberate stillness contrasts sharply with the dynamic motion of his other hand, drawing attention to the symbolic weight of stillness as an embodied gesture of reverence and control. When observing this, it becomes apparent that the deliberate stillness enhances the bell's role as an instrument of ritual, situating it as a central element of the performance. The rigid positioning of the arm suggests a sense of reverence, evoking formalities akin to religious ceremonies. This reverence is further underscored by the way the bell is held, indicating that its materiality and sonic presence demand attention. The resonance of the bell bridges sound and materiality, inviting viewers into a space where sensory and emotional engagement fosters imaginative connections. Through this interplay, the bell disrupts fixed associations, opening pathways for reinterpreting histories and envisioning new cultural narratives that transcend immediate contexts (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014; Young 2014).

This interaction between bodily stillness and material presence illustrates Performative Impact, where Makandula's deliberate physicality activates the bell as a central symbol of ritual and resistance (Butler 1999: 128–185; Hall 1999: 185–186; Phelan 2003: 6–51). The stillness of the bell, embodied in Makandula's restraint, transforms the bell from a mere object into an active site of resistance, marking a re-signification of ritual in opposition to colonial structures.

The bell's polished metallic surface and circular form resonate with Christian liturgical traditions, where bells punctuate moments of worship or call congregants to prayer. Material Dynamism emerges through the bell's reflective surface, which amplifies its presence within the space, and its circular form, evoking continuity and cyclical rituals that anchor it in temporal and spiritual contexts (Appadurai 1986: 3–9; McDonnell 2023: 201–202). Its ringing sound, with reverberations that linger long after it is struck, transforms the space into an auditory landscape, extending its presence beyond its physical form and engaging the audience through sound that interacts with and reshapes the environment. According to Makandula, the imprint of the bell's sound functions as a marker of presence and absence, evoking memory and ritual while reflecting the historical erasure of Indigenous practices (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). This sonic imprint reinforces the notion of resilience, as the lingering echo acts as a symbolic trace that resists erasure. Material Dynamism is evident in how the bell's sound after it is struck extends beyond its immediate material form. As Appadurai (1986: 3–9) notes, materials gain layered meanings through their circulation and interaction within cultural systems. Here, the bell's sound acts as a material force that engages with the audience and reshapes the space, marking both the presence and absence of colonial practices and thus giving the bell a dynamic role in communicating memory and resistance. As the bell rings repeatedly throughout the performance, its rhythmic ringing mirrors the repetitive nature of labour and ritual, grounding the act in themes of endurance and resilience. Performative Impact is evident in Makandula's deliberate gestures, as the repetitive act of ringing transforms the bell's sound into a ritualistic and symbolic act of resistance. Butler's (1999: 128–185) emphasis on repetition in performative acts demonstrates how the bell's repetitive ringing enacts a transformative role in shaping the artwork's meaning, especially when coupled with the way sound lingers and resonates. Makandula explained that sound, particularly through its repetitive nature, serves as a medium to communicate history and memory, underscoring how intangible elements can leave traces that resonate across time and space (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). This auditory and sensory engagement critiques colonial frameworks that disrupted Indigenous practices, while the persistent reverberations suggest a resilience that echoes across temporal and cultural boundaries. The bell's resonance interacts dynamically with its polished surface, connecting sensory perception to cultural and spiritual significance. Together, these elements create a multi-sensory dialogue that bridges memory, identity, and resistance, highlighting the bell as an active agent of cultural memory and a potent symbol of survival against histories of erasure.

Phelan (2003: 6–51) emphasises how invisibility in performative acts transcends representation, which is demonstrated by the bell's sound becoming a transformative presence, not merely symbolising history but activating memory in the present. The sonic imprint of the bell, despite being intangible, becomes a key force in communicating the ongoing presence and absence of colonial legacies, making it a sonic resistance against erasure. Through its lingering reverberations, the bell transforms into a performative act by marking time, rhythm, and memory, while its polished surface and circular form evoke continuity and resilience. The rhythmic sound fills the space, engaging the audience and reinforcing the endurance of cultural practices. This interplay of sound and materiality critiques historical erasure and amplifies cultural survival, positioning the bell as an agent of reclamation and identity.

The interplay between sound and silence highlights both the weight of colonial histories and the resilience of Indigenous spiritual identities, as Makandula recontextualises the bell's use within this ritualistic framework. At the heart of the performance lies Reciprocal Influence, where the Material Dynamism of the bell's reflective surface and resonant sound interacts with the Performative Impact of Makandula's deliberate gestures. His controlled grip and intentional stillness imbue the bell with ritualistic authority, transforming it into an active participant in the performance. Conversely, the bell's polished surface and sonic reverberations enhance the impact of Makandula's actions, amplifying their cultural and spiritual resonance. This bidirectional relationship underscores Reciprocal Influence by showing how the bell's material properties and its performative activation co-create meaning. The lingering echo of its sound extends its presence beyond the physical, engaging the audience emotionally and symbolically. As Makandula noted, the resonance of the bell transcends its physical boundaries, creating a connection that invites reflection on presence, memory, and cultural survival (Makandula, personal interview, 23 August 2024). Through this dynamic interaction, the bell becomes both a material and performative agent, reinforcing the framework's utility in analysing the intersections of history, memory, and identity.



Figure 17: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Umnikelo* (offering) 2015, Close-up of the blade in the mouth. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

The deliberate staging of a blade in his mouth (Figure 17) emphasises the blade's dual function as a weapon and a symbol, merging its physical presence with the embodied resistance of the performer. When observing the way the blade is positioned, its sharp and reflective surface becomes inseparable from Makandula's body, transforming the performer into an active participant in the object's symbolism. The visual tension created by the blade is further heightened by its Material Dynamism, as its reflective surface interacts with the surrounding light to amplify its presence within the performance space.

This act appears deliberate, as the metallic blade's threatening presence draws attention to the physical risk involved in this gesture, emphasising the vulnerability and defiance embodied in his performance. This interplay between risk and resistance demonstrates the criterion of Performative Impact, as the act of gripping the blade transforms Makandula's gestures into powerful agents of meaning-making (Butler 1999: 128–185; Hall 1999: 185–186; Phelan 2003: 6–17, 51). The blade's sharpness and reflective surface invite imaginative connections, where its performative activation fosters reinterpretations of fragility and power. This interplay allows the blade to transcend its materiality, opening pathways for reimagined histories and narratives of resilience (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014; Young 2014). The act of holding the blade with his teeth merges Makandula's physical presence with the object, suggesting that acts of defiance are not external but deeply embodied. This

interaction positions the body itself as a site of struggle, where resistance and vulnerability converge in an intricate balance.

Building on this visual tension, the blade's angular form contrasts sharply with the flowing motion of the blue beads elsewhere in the performance, creating a stark visual dichotomy between continuity and rupture. Material Dynamism emerges in the blade's rigidity and sharp lines, emphasising fragmentation and severance, visually embodying the historical disruption of Indigenous narratives during colonial rule (Appadurai 1986: 3–9; McDonnell 2023: 196–204). In contrast, the fluidity of the beads symbolises regeneration and continuity, offering a visual representation of the dual forces of destruction and reclamation. This juxtaposition between the blade's angularity and the organic vulnerability of Makandula's body reinforces the struggle to reclaim cultural identity, highlighting the complex interplay of severance and renewal. Positioned in Makandula's mouth, the blade introduces a symbolic tension between silence and assertion. Its sharpness, held precariously between clenched teeth, prevents speech, symbolising the enforced silencing of Indigenous voices under colonial rule.

Simultaneously, Performative Impact emerges as Makandula reimagines silence as an act of resistance, where the act of gripping the blade becomes a powerful assertion of resilience against cultural erasure. The reflective surface of the blade amplifies this tension, catching and redirecting light to the performer's mouth, transforming it into a site of both suppression and defiance. Hall's (1999: 185–186) concept of resistant visibility is useful here, as Makandula's physical gesture engages the blade in a way that shifts its symbolic visibility, repositioning it from mere object to active agent in the struggle against erasure. Expanding on this tension, Makandula's body becomes a site of confrontation, carrying the weight of historical and contemporary struggles. The blade's placement in the mouth—a site of vulnerability and intimacy—underscores the personal cost of resistance while highlighting the intersection of bodily risk and symbolic power.

The physical tension created by the blade's precarious balance visually reinforces its Performative Impact, suggesting the dual threats of harm and perseverance inherent in acts of resistance (Jackson 2014: 1–4). This tension is further heightened by the angularity of the blade, which clashes with the organic curves of Makandula's body, symbolising the conflict between rigid colonial frameworks and the fluidity of Indigenous expression. Material Dynamism amplifies this interplay, as the blade's sharp form, reflective surface, and its interaction with Makandula's movements command visual attention and intensify the stakes of reclaiming identity. By activating the blade as both a material and symbolic agent, Makandula transforms it into more than a static object; it becomes a participant in the performance, dynamically engaging with his body to create a layered narrative of cultural reclamation and embodied defiance. Jackson (2014: 15–30) emphasises the dialogical relationship between performer and audience, which is reflected here in how the visual

tension created by the blade actively invites the audience into a dialogue about resistance and the embodiment of struggle. The blade, as an active material participant, communicates through its presence and interaction with the performer, reinforcing the audience's understanding of the themes of defiance and reclamation.

The interaction between Makandula's performative engagement and the blade's material properties underscores the criterion of Reciprocal Influence, where materiality and performativity co-create meaning. The Material Dynamism of the blade, with its sharp edges and reflective surface, visually heightens the tension in the performance, while the Performative Impact of Makandula's gestures transforms the blade into a potent symbol of vulnerability and defiance. The deliberate positioning of the blade in Makandula's mouth emphasises the physical and symbolic risk inherent in resistance. Simultaneously, the blade's reflective surface captures and redirects light, amplifying its presence and evoking fragility and persistence in cultural memory. This dynamic interaction transforms the blade from a static object into an active participant, infusing the performance with a layered narrative of resilience. Makandula's precise control over the blade's placement further activates its symbolic potential, merging his body with the object to convey both the personal and collective costs of resistance. This interplay demonstrates how materiality and performativity inform and transform each other, illustrating the framework's capacity to uncover the socio-political and cultural narratives embedded in Makandula's work.

In all, Makandula's performance in *Umnikelo* (2015) vividly exemplifies the interwoven first three criteria of the Performative Materiality framework—Material Dynamism, Performative Impact, and Reciprocal Influence—revealing the layered interplay between bodily gestures and material agency. These criteria fall under the themes of Embodiment and Agency and Process and Encounter, which together underscore how performativity and materiality co-create cultural and socio-political narratives. The rhythmic sounds of the boots and the resonance of the bell create an immersive sensory experience, drawing the audience into a participatory dialogue. This engagement demonstrates how materials and gestures evolve in relation to one another, producing narratives that bridge historical memory and spiritual endurance. The theme of Embodiment and Agency is reflected in the collaboration between Makandula's deliberate movements and the agency of materials like the red garment, boots, and skull. His gestures activate these materials as agents of resistance and resilience, transforming static objects into dynamic participants. The bold red garment, with its structured form, symbolises the weight of colonial authority and the vitality of ancestral memory. Similarly, the rhythmic pacing of the boots bridges the physical realities of labour and survival with the symbolic weight of resilience. Together, these elements illustrate how materials and actions co-create layered meanings, transforming historical trauma into acts of renewal and resistance. By aligning Embodiment and Agency with Process and Encounter, *Umnikelo* (2015) constructs a layered commentary on resilience, subversion, and cultural reclamation, affirming the transformative potential of the Performative Materiality

framework. Through the lens of Performative Materiality, Makandula's work demonstrates how materials and gestures dynamically reimagine cultural narratives. This interplay fosters fictional connections, as the red garment transcends its ecclesiastical roots to symbolise resilience, and the beads and skull transform fragmented histories into acts of renewal. These elements bridge tangible materials with imagined possibilities, opening spaces for cultural redefinition (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014; Young 2014).

3.2.3 Interpretation and Judgement

Makandula's integration of the red garment with the boots illustrates how performativity and materiality intersect to navigate the dualities of institutional authority and grassroots resilience. The bold red robe's structured design recalls ecclesiastical authority, its rigidity challenged by the grounded presence of the boots, which evoke labour and anti-colonial resistance. This juxtaposition embodies the criterion of Contextual Embeddedness illustrated in the framework, anchoring the performance within the legacies of colonial oppression and the ongoing struggle for cultural reclamation (Butler, 1999: 179; McDonnell, 2023: 201). The physicality of these objects—such as the scuffed boots and the authoritative silhouette of the robe—visually encapsulates the complex interplay of power, resistance, and survival. By embedding these materials in the performance, Makandula highlights how cultural objects reflect and challenge societal norms, resonating with Butler's (1999: 179) and Appadurai's (1986: 03–09) perspectives on the iterative and layered meanings of material culture. As illustrated in the framework, Transformative Interaction emerges here as the interplay between the boots and robe shifts their meanings beyond their individual associations. The scuffed boots, symbolising resilience, disrupt the hierarchical connotations of the robe, creating a dynamic exchange that redefines both objects within the performance. This transformation occurs because the socio-political significance of the materials is deeply embedded within historical and cultural contexts (Contextual Embeddedness), allowing them to operate as co-creators of a critique against colonial oppression. Similarly, the skull adorned with flowing beads engages with themes of mortality, memory, and renewal, extending the narrative beyond the tangible to explore the ephemeral. The skull's hollow void and polished surface symbolise both loss and preservation, while the beads cascading from it evoke a reconstitution of disrupted histories. This interplay highlights Transformative Interaction, where material elements and performative gestures transform the skull into a vessel for cultural memory and resilience. The beads, reminiscent of rosaries, bridge Indigenous spirituality and Christian devotional practices, reimagining colonial frameworks within a context of renewal (Appadurai, 1986: 03–09; McDonnell, 2023: 201). The transformation of the skull into a vessel for memory occurs through the tactile and visual interplay with the beads, which physically and symbolically flow to connect disrupted histories. This transformation emerges from the material's ability to evoke sensory and emotional engagement (Embodied Interaction) while

simultaneously being tied to broader cultural frameworks (Contextual Embeddedness), fostering a narrative of renewal that challenges colonial erasure. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) reflected on the significance of space in his work, noting that performance spaces are not neutral but deeply embedded within historical and psychological contexts. He explained that public spaces often carry the residue of violence—both colonial and contemporary—making them sites that demand engagement and, in some cases, cleansing. The integration of the boots, robe, and skull into this charged environment extends beyond material agency, becoming a broader interrogation of how performance can navigate, disrupt, and reclaim contested spaces. This understanding reinforces how performative and material interventions work in tandem to critique systemic structures while offering possibilities for reimagining socio-political narratives.

The auditory and sensory dimensions, particularly the bell's resonance and the blade's precarious presence, further amplify the performance's impact. The bell's repetitive ringing creates a sonic imprint that punctuates the performance, engaging the audience in a sensory dialogue about historical persistence and resistance. Its reverberations extend beyond its physical form, transforming the performance space into a temporal and spiritual landscape. Concurrently, the blade clenched in Makandula's teeth underscores the interplay between vulnerability and defiance, symbolising the silencing of Indigenous voices under colonial rule and their subsequent reassertion through acts of embodied resistance. These sensory elements invite the criterion of Embodied Interaction illustrated in the framework, compelling the audience to experience the tensions and resolutions within the performance through both physical and emotional engagement (O'Sullivan, 2001: 125–128; Jackson, 2014: 15–29). The sharpness of the blade, its precarious positioning, and the evocative resonance of the bell collectively evoke visceral responses, grounding the audience in the intensity of the performance. O'Sullivan's (2001: 125–128) notion of affect illustrates how these materials generate immediate sensory engagement, transcending symbolic representation to create an immersive experience. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) elaborated on how sound functions as an agent of disruption within spaces marked by historical violence. He noted that the repetitive ringing of the bell and the physical tension of the blade serve as interventions that reframe the public's interaction with space, questioning how performance can reshape collective understandings of these environments. This perspective aligns with Transformative Interaction, as the sonic and tactile elements reshape the audience's perception of time and space, situating the performance within a shifting narrative of resistance. The repetition of the bell's chime functions as both a summoning and a disruption, evoking a ritualistic presence that extends beyond the performance moment. The transformation occurs as the bell's resonance, emerging from its repetitive sound, transcends its materiality to anchor the performance in a continuum of memory and resilience (Contextual Embeddedness). Similarly, the precarious balance of the blade not only evokes embodied tensions (Embodied Interaction) but also challenges the audience to reconsider the dynamics of oppression and agency,

fostering a visceral redefinition of defiance. By placing these materials within the charged environment of the performance space, Makandula underscores how sound and physical presence operate as performative acts that contest historical narratives and provoke critical engagement with colonial legacies. The materials, through their sonic and corporeal presence, reinforce the affective intensity of the performance, demonstrating how the intersection of sensory engagement and performativity enacts resistance.

In all, Makandula's performance *Umnikelo* (2015) exemplifies the interwoven first three criteria of the Performative Materiality framework—Contextual Embeddedness, Transformative Interaction, and Embodied Interaction—revealing how performativity and materiality intersect to critique Power, Politics, and Social Construction. These criteria, aligned with the themes of Embodiment and Agency and Power, Politics, and Social Construction, underscore the collaborative agency of materials and gestures in shaping cultural narratives. Makandula's engagement with the structured red garment and scuffed boots illustrates this agency, transforming them into active participants. The garment, symbolising ecclesiastical authority, and the boots, evoking labour and resilience, embody the tension between institutional power and grassroots defiance. Through rhythmic movements and tactile gestures, these materials actively reshape cultural narratives, asserting resilience against historical oppression. *Umnikelo* (2015) also exemplifies Reciprocal Influence, where material properties and performative gestures dynamically interact to shape meaning. The juxtaposition of the blade and the skull reflects destruction and renewal, challenging institutional power while reclaiming cultural memory. Beads cascading from the skull symbolise continuity and spiritual reclamation, transforming disrupted histories into narratives of renewal. Similarly, the bell's resonant sound extends its presence beyond the physical, creating an emotional dialogue that engages the audience in shared acts of memory and resilience. By aligning Embodiment and Agency with Power, Politics, and Social Construction, the performance critiques colonial histories while envisioning socio-political transformation. This synthesis affirms the framework's capacity to reveal how materials and actions collaboratively transform cultural narratives and resist systemic oppression. Collectively, the artworks analysed demonstrate the Performative Materiality framework's ability to synthesise performative gestures and material agency, offering a multisensory critique of socio-political structures. The dynamic interplay of materials, actions, and space transforms disrupted histories into resilient narratives, engaging audiences in shared acts of memory and reclamation.

Chapter 4: Artwork Analysis

4.1 Artwork Analysis 2: *Ingqumbo (Wrath)*, 2016



♪♪♪ A dirge for Nxele, Ndlambe and Umhlaba ♪♪♪...



♫ ♫ ♫ Die kwaai man, voetsek altar boy ♫ ♫ ♫ ...
♫ ♫ ♫ Burn the sins of St. Michael & St. George ♫ ♫ ♫ ...

♫ ♫ ♫ Die kwaai man, voetsek altar boy ♫ ♫ ♫ ...
♫ ♫ ♫ Burn the sins of St. Michael & St. George ♫ ♫ ♫ ...

♫ ♫ ♫ Die kwaai man, voetsek altar boy ♫ ♫ ♫ ...





♪♪♪ We took selfies while we await the hanging of Cecil John Rhodes ♪♪♪ ...

♪♪♪ Petrol bomb the colonial walls of his university ♪♪♪ ...

♪♪♪ Sikhokhele kwaai man ♪♪♪ ...

Figure 18: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Ingqumbo* (wrath), 2016, 25-minute Live Performance + song, Makhanda (formerly known as Grahamstown), South Africa. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

4.1.1 Title and General Description

The artwork titled *Ingqumbo* (2016), a Xhosa word meaning ‘wrath’ or ‘anger’, was performed by Sikhumbuzo Makandula in 2016. The title itself evokes powerful emotional states such as rage, retribution, and protest, signalling the thematic focus of the performance. According to Makandula, *Ingqumbo* (2016) addresses historical and cultural grievances, inviting a reckoning with the legacies of oppression and the possibility of liberation. The performance unfolds as a layered act of prayer, protest, and a search for peace, connecting the architectural symbolism of St. Michael and St. George Cathedral⁹ with the Drostdy Arch at Rhodes University¹⁰—both sites deeply embedded in South Africa’s colonial history. The collaborative nature of the performance is evident, particularly in Makandula’s partnership with violinist Christopher Jardine. The violin’s presence intensifies the emotional resonance of the piece, amplifying its dual exploration of oppression and liberation. Drawing inspiration from Max Roach’s *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*¹¹, the performance aligns itself with broader struggles for justice and freedom, echoing historical movements against systemic oppression. According to Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024), the audience plays a critical role as witnesses, actively engaging with the performance by acknowledging historical injustices and contemplating the possibility of divine justice. He further elaborated on the recurring symbolism in his work, such as the burning red outfit, which is found in the previous artwork *Umnikelo* (2015), which signifies both transformative experiences and the raw intensity of wrath. These elements imbue the performance with a sense of urgency and symbolic resonance, inviting viewers to not only observe but also introspect.

The 25 minute duration reflects a concentrated yet profound engagement with the themes of wrath, reconciliation, and resistance, challenging viewers to confront the ongoing impact of colonial legacies in institutional spaces. Through this, *Ingqumbo* (2016) becomes a powerful interrogation of emotional, cultural, and political histories, demanding both introspection and collective reckoning. The layered emotional and historical narrative of *Ingqumbo* (2016) unfolds through its visual, material, and auditory components, transforming it into a multisensory interrogation of oppression and resistance. Makandula’s

⁹ St. Michael and St. George Cathedral in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) reflects South Africa’s colonial and ecclesiastical history. Established in 1853, its Victorian neo-Gothic design by Sir George Gilbert Scott and John Oldrid Scott features granite and sandstone exteriors. Completed in 1952, the cathedral’s history includes notable conflicts over Anglican authority, symbolising the region’s complex colonial heritage (Gould 2011).

¹⁰ The Drostdy Arch, now the entrance to Rhodes University, was designed in the early 1840s, likely by Maj. Charles Selwyn of the Royal Engineers, under plans initiated by Governor Sir Benjamin D’Urban in 1835. Initially used as a gateway, it features colonial architectural significance and once housed a curfew bell, now relocated to the Albany Museum. Proclaimed as a heritage site in 1938, the Arch remains a prominent symbol of South Africa’s colonial past (Artefacts nd).

¹¹ Max Roach’s *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (1960), co-written with Oscar Brown Jr., combines jazz innovation with political commentary. Spanning themes from slavery to civil rights and African independence, it features powerful performances like Abbey Lincoln’s vocalisations in “Triptych”. Banned in apartheid South Africa, the suite’s protest against racial oppression is epitomised in “Tears for Johannesburg,” dedicated to the Sharpeville massacre victims (Monson 2024).

embodied gestures and the transformative power of materials converge to create a profound act of artistic resistance. The next section offers a detailed description of different aspects of the artwork and an analysis of how these elements function within the performance, revealing their interconnected significance.

4.1.2 Description and Analysis

Sikhumbuzo Makandula appears in a long black coat that extends to just above his ankles, with a high collar lifted around his face, enveloping his figure in a commanding silhouette. The coat's dark colour absorbs light, rendering him as a shadow-like figure against the surrounding space, emphasising themes of erasure and invisibility. This visual tension is heightened by his deliberate, upright posture and measured movements throughout the performance. The stillness of his form contrasts with the subtle swaying of the coat as he moves, creating a rhythm that underscores the labour involved in challenging structures of authority. Material Dynamism is evident in the coat's dark, absorbent fabric and its movement, which responds to Makandula's gestures, reflecting a negotiation between visibility and invisibility (Appadurai 1986: 3–9). Covering his head is a mask made of lighter, fluid fabric, which contrasts with the structured rigidity of the coat. The mask, draped carefully over his face with an opening that partially reveals his eyes, draws attention to how Makandula deliberately controls his visibility. This act of partial veiling becomes a powerful expression of reclaiming agency over visibility, evoking South African narratives of surveillance and identity under apartheid. By selectively revealing his presence, Makandula challenges the colonial legacy of imposed invisibility, linking this performative gesture to collective memory and the ongoing negotiation of identity. This selective concealment highlights the Performative Impact of the mask, where its soft, fluid material contrasts with the coat's rigidity, symbolising a duality of resistance and vulnerability. His gaze through the narrow opening of the mask establishes a connection with the audience, inviting them into an active, imaginative dialogue. Hall's (1999: 185–186) notion of resistant visibility is particularly relevant, as the mask enables Makandula to assert control over his visibility, shaping the terms of engagement and turning opacity into agency. This relationality between material and performer fosters fictional dimensions as the mask transforms into a site of imagined narratives that transcend its physicality.

Accompanying Makandula is violinist Christopher Jardine, whose live auditory contribution adds a dynamic layer to the performance. The violin's mournful tones resonate throughout the space, producing a rich auditory texture that complements the visual elements and intensifies the ritualistic atmosphere. Its ability to sustain long, poignant notes amplifies the solemnity of the performance, aligning the sound with overarching themes of loss, grief, and spiritual reflection. The resonance fills the environment, engaging the audience not only emotionally but also physically, as the sound weaves through the space and interacts with the material and performative elements. According to Makandula (personal interview, 23

August 2024), sound serves as both a material and a temporal marker, with its repetitive qualities acting as a medium to convey history and memory. Phelan's (2003: 6–17, 51) exploration of the political significance of invisibility reinforces this notion, as the violin's sound embodies sonic invisibility, becoming a medium through which history and memory are conveyed. Building on this, Jardine's informal attire contrasts with Makandula's structured outfit, further enhancing the socio-political critique. Jardine's rugged clothing evokes resilience, while Makandula's formal attire positions him as a figure of authority and ritualistic vigilance. Together, their contrasting aesthetics and auditory contributions construct a multisensory narrative where sound and materiality dynamically interact to amplify themes of endurance and defiance. This interaction invites the audience into an imaginative reconfiguration of socio-political narratives, as the violin's resonance disrupts fixed associations and fosters reinterpretation (O'Sullivan 2001).

Makandula's movements, deliberate and purposeful, transform his body into a visual anchor. His gestures imbue the coat with symbolic resonance, amplifying his body as a site of resistance. Butler's (1999: 128–185) emphasis on the iterative nature of performative acts aligns with Makandula's repetitive movements, which re-signify the coat's meaning. Through these actions, the coat's motion becomes a performative gesture of defiance, turning it into more than clothing—it becomes a material agent of resistance. Jardine's violin enhances this dynamic, transforming the performance into a layered, multisensory experience. Material Dynamism emerges as the violin's sound and the coat's fabric interact, shaping themes of resistance and memory while inviting the audience to reinterpret cultural and historical constructs beyond their immediate context (O'Sullivan 2001). The polished violin and Makandula's reflective boots symbolise transformation and persistence, adding depth to the performance's socio-political commentary. This relationality between the sound, movements, and materials fosters fictional possibilities, enabling new narratives of resilience and defiance to emerge.

Jardine's violin and Makandula's movements together create an immersive interplay of sound and physicality. Jardine's intentional bow strokes align with the violin's mournful tones, sustaining a sense of loss and reflection. Simultaneously, Makandula's deliberate movements mirror the fleeting yet sustained notes of the violin, reinforcing themes of endurance and mourning. This synchrony transforms the performance space into a site of ritualised remembrance, where gestures and sound contribute to a collective narrative of resilience. The Performative Impact is evident as their actions imbue the material elements with agency, turning them into active participants in the narrative of resistance. The contrasting aesthetics of their attire deepen the socio-political critique, with Makandula's structured outfit symbolising authority and resistance and Jardine's rugged attire embodying resilience. This visual and auditory alignment culminates in Reciprocal Influence, where sound, movement, and material elements dynamically interact. Through this relationality, fictional dimensions emerge as materials inspire imaginative connections that

challenge fixed socio-cultural meanings and reconfigure their roles within the artwork (Young, 2014). The rhythmic sound of footsteps and the violin's sustained tones further amplify the dynamic interplay, ensuring that each material element and gesture actively shapes the performance's thematic resonance (O'Sullivan 2001).

The performance unfolds across multiple locations, with each site contributing uniquely to its narrative. These distinct settings amplify the themes of 'wrath', resistance and memory, as significant actions at each location interact with the surrounding environment to deepen the performance's socio-political and spiritual resonance.



Figure 19: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Ingqumbo* (wrath), 2016, Makandula's Interaction with the Monument. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

In one still, Sikhumbuzo Makandula stands atop a concrete platform resembling a historical monument adorned with sculptural reliefs (Figure 19). This landmark, with its institutional significance, situates the performance within a critique of colonial legacies. According to Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025), the reliefs celebrate colonial victories, symbolising entrenched dominance. He explains that the statue of Colonel Graham in High Street venerates figures like Elizabeth Salt, who aided settlers in the 1819 Battle of Grahamstown (Makandula, personal interview, 30 January 2025). However, this narrative omits Indigenous presence and resistance. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) reflected, "What was missing there was the history of Black people, natives... Their history is not written in any of these statues that you find in High Street." This absence reinforces the monument as a site of erasure. Through his performance, Makandula confronts this omission, challenging dominant narratives and reclaiming visibility for those deliberately left out. By positioning himself atop this structure, Makandula subverts its authority,

transforming it into a platform for critique. The monument's unyielding concrete reflects colonial permanence, framing it as a site of imposed history. Material Dynamism emerges as its rigid surfaces and historical significance are reinterpreted through performance. According to Appadurai (1986: 3–9), materials like stone carry social life, evolving through interactions with human bodies and histories. Confronted by Makandula's presence, the monument shifts in meaning, symbolising resistance rather than authority. This re-signification fosters imaginative dimensions as audiences reinterpret colonial structures (O'Sullivan 2001). O'Sullivan (2001) suggests that engaging imaginatively with materials transforms how histories are rewritten. Makandula's intervention urges viewers to reconsider narratives embedded in these monuments. The invocation of material agency aligns with Butler's (1999: 128–185) assertion that performative acts destabilise norms. Butler (1999) argues that repeated actions and embodied interventions subvert entrenched meanings, allowing new understandings. Here, Makandula's performance challenges the monument's authority, using his body to question its legitimacy. His occupation of the structure disrupts the assumed permanence of colonial symbols, demonstrating how performative gestures redefine material spaces.

Makandula draws on the symbol of '*Amaqaba*'—those who resisted Christian conversion—who anointed their bodies with '*Imbola*', a red ochre mixture representing cultural defiance. This gesture, often misinterpreted as backwardness, signifies Indigenous identity against colonial erasure. According to Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025), "*'Amaqaba,'* as a marker or as a symbol, their bodies would be anointed with '*Imbola*'". This act functions as cultural autonomy and rejection of colonial assimilation. By invoking this symbol, Makandula honours past resistances while reasserting defiance and resilience in a contemporary context. His positioning atop the monument intensifies the contrast between imposed histories and Indigenous agency. Makandula's posture, slightly bent forward, amplifies Performative Impact by embedding his movements with emotional weight and symbolic defiance. His stance suggests confrontation, visually representing the tension between oppressive histories and active resistance. This motion conveys the burden of colonial legacies while asserting agency. The elevation of his body disrupts the monument's hierarchy, reframing it as a site of collective reclamation. Butler (1999: 128–185) speaks to the iterative nature of performative acts that destabilise norms. Here, Makandula's posture disrupts the monument's permanence. His body's resistance becomes an act of destabilisation, reshaping the site as contested. By invoking historical resistance, Makandula reclaims the monument while inviting audiences to reimagine it as a space of struggle and redefinition. This act encourages imaginative engagement, prompting alternative interpretations of history and identity (Jackson 2014). Through this interplay, Makandula challenges static narratives, transforming the monument into a site of fluid meaning where histories are continuously reinterpreted and re-signified.

The interaction between Makandula's gestures and the monument's materiality reveals how physical presence transforms static symbols of power. The monument exemplifies Material Dynamism, as its rigid, cold concrete surfaces resonate with the permanence of colonial power structures. While the monument remains static, Makandula's dynamic interaction transforms its materiality into an active participant in the performance. The sculptural reliefs, which originally symbolise colonial authority, are recontextualised through his presence, emphasising the mutability of their meaning. McDonnell (2023: 196–204) expands on Material Dynamism, suggesting materials are not passive; they interact dynamically with their contexts. Makandula's embodied resistance redefines the monument as a site of cultural transformation. By physically engaging with the structure, Makandula reclaims the space, challenging its narrative of dominance and transforming it into a platform for resistance and resilience. This engagement repositions the monument as a contested site, where performative gestures disrupt its colonial symbolism and invite imaginative reinterpretations of history and cultural identity (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014). Through this interaction, fictional dimensions emerge as the monument becomes a vehicle for reimagined socio-political connections (Young 2014). The tension between the Performative Impact of Makandula's gestures and the Material Dynamism of the monument creates a compelling duality. His movements, imbued with emotional defiance, activate the monument's surfaces, reshaping their narrative from one of reverence to critique. The visual contrast between his expressive stance and the monument's static materiality accentuates the dynamic relationship between human agency and physical structures. Through this interplay, the performance critiques the supposed permanence of colonial legacies while highlighting the potential for reinterpretation through embodied actions. Hall (1999: 185–186) and Phelan (2003: 6–17, 51) highlight resistant visibility, focusing on how performative actions re-signify dominant norms. Here, the monument's visibility, initially as a symbol of colonial authority, is re-signified through Makandula's embodied performance, altering its meaning from reverence to critique. This dynamic interplay encourages audiences to reconsider traditional associations and explore reimagined narratives that challenge fixed meanings (O'Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014).

Reciprocal Influence emerges as the bidirectional relationship between materiality and performativity. The monument's cold and static materiality amplifies the significance of Makandula's gestures, grounding his movements in a tangible representation of colonial oppression. Conversely, his performative engagement redefines the monument's role, transforming it into an active site of resistance. The cold, unyielding texture of the concrete contrasts with the emotional intensity of his gestures, emphasising how material and performative elements co-create meaning. Makandula's performance ultimately shifts the narrative, interrogating whether such spaces can be reclaimed as tools for resistance and reflection. His elevated position atop the monument reframes it as a contested site where history is reimagined. By bridging Performative Impact and Material Dynamism and culminating in Reciprocal Influence, the performance demonstrates how Performative

Materiality effectively interrogates the layered interactions between material and performative elements, amplifying the socio-political resonance of the artwork. This interaction fosters fictional possibilities, as the audience's engagement reshapes meanings and opens pathways to imagined realities and reconfigured socio-cultural narratives (O'Sullivan 2001; Young 2014).



Figure 20: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Ingqumbo (wrath)*, 2016, Still of Makandula Cutting and Burning Fabric. Image retrieved from artist's website (Makandulas2 nd).

Makandula holds a length of dark-coloured fabric, grasping it firmly in one hand while cutting through it with a blade in the other (Figure 20). The deliberate tension in his gestures emphasises Performative Impact, as his movements enact a confrontation with material and symbolic oppression. The slow, intentional motion of the blade heightens the tension, evoking themes of rupture, resistance, and reclamation. By transforming the fabric from an intact object into fragments, this act becomes a metaphor for challenging entrenched histories and institutions. Makandula's gestures embody defiance, illustrating how performative acts critique and transform social realities. As Butler (1999: 128–185) highlights, the iterative nature of performative acts continuously destabilises and redefines norms. The cutting gesture transforms the fabric into an active agent of resistance, re-contextualising its materiality in opposition to colonial control (Phelan 2003: 6–17, 51). Hall's (1999: 185–186) notion of resistant visibility deepens this reading, emphasising how the fabric transitions from a passive object to a dynamic participant in cultural critique. The act demonstrates how Performative Impact interacts with Material Dynamism, as the fabric's material properties are activated and redefined through his movements. McDonnell's (2023: 201–202) concept of a "network of affordances" supports this analysis, showing how the fabric's texture and resistance to cutting engage with human actions to generate meaning. In his earlier works, such as *Hlanga waphum' eluhlangeni* (2015), red fabric symbolised blood, vitality, and ancestral memory. Here, cutting deepens this symbolism, signifying severance from colonial oppression while reclaiming agency (Appadurai 1986: 3–9). This engagement fosters fictional dimensions, as the act of severing

material disrupts its fixed associations and opens pathways to reimagined histories and connections (O’Sullivan 2001; Young 2014). Historical critiques of colonial narratives from South Africa’s apartheid era resonate in this act, further grounding it within the broader socio-political landscape. The fragmentation invites the audience to reinterpret colonial histories and imagine possibilities for collective reclamation.

As Makandula sets the cut fabric ablaze (Figure 20), its red hue emerges in the flames, intensifying the emotional resonance of the sequence. The fire introduces a climactic transformation, illustrating Material Dynamism as the fabric’s properties shift from tangible to ephemeral. This transition symbolises purification, destruction, and renewal. Through fire, the fabric’s latent qualities are exposed, underscoring that destruction can serve as a pathway to historical and cultural reclamation. Makandula (personal interview, 30 January 2025) reflected on the ritualistic and political significance of this act, noting that burning the tunic marks a moment of transition. He connected this gesture to the concept of ‘*Ingqumbo*’—meaning ‘the wrath’—which conceptually engages with imposed colonial histories and architectures. The act of burning is both a symbolic response to these structures and a means of evoking memory, particularly within the historically fraught space of Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown), which once housed the second-highest court in South Africa. He elaborated that the performance was structured as a procession, leading the audience towards the climactic burning in front of the cathedral. The deliberate selection of this location, rich with colonial legacy, heightens the performative tension. By setting the tunic alight, Makandula engages with the violence of inherited histories, exposing how these narratives persist within contemporary South African consciousness (Makandula, personal interview, 30 January 2025).

The burning represents renewal and reimagining identities, echoing collective South African expressions of resilience and resistance. Appadurai (1986: 03–09) reiterates that materials are dynamic entities, their meanings evolving through interaction, as the fabric’s transformation through fire reveals deeper layers of significance. The ephemeral nature of fire emphasises the transient yet transformative aspects of resistance, dismantling colonial narratives while reaffirming cultural endurance. Compared to the static permanence of earlier sequences involving monuments, the fire highlights the dynamic process of redefinition and renewal. Miller (2005: 05–06) discusses the “humility of things” and how materials influence social structures in unnoticed ways. Here, fire redefines the fabric’s meaning, shifting its materiality from fixed and symbolic to ephemeral yet profound.

This transformation is further amplified by the performative intervention, where Makandula specifically engages White audience members, ringing a bell around them to invoke historical reckoning and disrupt entrenched associations with colonial violence. This deliberate engagement forces an acknowledgement of historical injustices, drawing attention to the weight of colonial legacies that linger in everyday spaces. The performance,

therefore, extends beyond the material act of burning; it actively disrupts and reconfigures social memory through participation and confrontation (Makandula, personal interview, 30 January 2025). The burning transcends physicality to evoke narratives of rupture and renewal, inspiring fictional connections to past and future socio-political struggles (O'Sullivan 2001; Young 2014). Through this interaction, the fire disrupts habitual associations, inviting audiences to imagine alternate perspectives and reconfigure historical constructs (Jackson 2014). Additionally, the transformative power of fire visually recalls historical acts of protest and reclamation within South Africa's socio-political history.

This transformation engages the audience by evoking both collective memory and fictional possibilities for cultural renewal. The surrounding setting reinforces the ritualistic undertones of this sequence. Arranged objects—including a coiled rope, a plastic bag with unidentified contents, and two bells with rope handles—situate the performance within a ceremonial framework. The bells, emitting auditory signals during the performance, bridge sensory dimensions and mark significant transitions, amplifying the ritual's intensity. The coiled rope symbolises both constraints and connections of history, grounding the sequence in broader narratives of remembrance and reclamation. Hall's (1999: 185–186) notion of resistant visibility links these elements to performative acts that re-signify cultural norms. Through *Performative Impact*, Makandula's gestures—grasping, slicing, and burning—activate the fabric as an agent in the performance, re-defining its symbolic role. Material Dynamism manifests in the fabric's transformation through fire, uncovering latent meanings and highlighting the capacity of materials to embody and convey complex narratives. Jackson (2014: 1–4) underscores the dialogical relationship between performer and audience, as the performance invites reflection on resistance and reclamation. This interplay between materiality and performance calls for re-defining cultural symbols, engaging the audience in the transformation of colonial histories. By invoking sensory and emotional responses, this sequence fosters fictional dimensions, inspiring viewers to reimagine connections to collective struggles and cultural renewal (O'Sullivan 2001; Young 2014). The ceremonial arrangement, reminiscent of South African cultural rituals, further situates the performance within a shared socio-political memory, encouraging the audience to envision new cultural narratives rooted in resilience.

Reciprocal Influence emerges as the synthesis of *Performative Impact* and *Material Dynamism*. Makandula's deliberate gestures activate the material's symbolic potential, while the fabric's transformation through fire enhances the performative resonance of his actions. Cutting signifies severance and reclamation, while burning uncovers hidden red hues, representing the uncovering of buried histories. This interaction demonstrates Reciprocal Influence by showing how the fabric's properties—its texture and visual transformation—are activated and redefined through Makandula's actions. The material's shift from intact object to fragments and then to ash underscores its dynamic participation in the performance, transitioning from passive to active as it contributes to the narrative of

resistance and renewal. This interplay illustrates the bidirectional relationship between materiality and performativity, where actions and materials co-create meaning in continuous dialogue. By merging these forces, Makandula transforms the sequence into a powerful commentary on resistance and renewal, exemplifying the central thesis of Performative Materiality. The engagement fosters imaginative possibilities, as the transformation of materials inspires audiences to reinterpret socio-political narratives and envision potential futures beyond immediate contexts (O’Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014). The visual drama and ritualistic framing invite viewers to confront histories of oppression while imagining pathways to cultural regeneration and reclamation.

Before reaching the final site of the performance, Makandula paused along the procession to distribute Molotov cocktails (petrol bombs) and matchsticks to audience members. Standing in front of a crowd, he retrieved these objects from a concealed container and deliberately handed them out, one by one, inviting individuals to hold them. Audience members were visibly hesitant—some took the items cautiously, others refused, unsettled by the gesture. The exchange unfolded in silence, heightening the tension and symbolic gravity of the act. This moment created a shift in atmosphere—from reflective observation to confrontation—as the materials themselves invoked memories of protest and rebellion in South African history. Within the Performative Materiality framework, this gesture exemplifies Performative Impact, as it disrupts passive viewing and introduces a direct, participatory reckoning with resistance. The petrol bomb, here, operates as a politically charged material object, activating Material Dynamism through its latent potential and historical weight. The deliberate act of distribution transforms the object from symbolic reference to experiential encounter, situating the audience within the affective and political terrain of the performance.



Figure 21: Sikhumbuzo Makandula, *Ingqumbo (wrath)*, 2016, Still of Makandula’s interaction with a noose and ladder. Image retrieved from artist’s website (Makandulas2 nd).

In a haunting nighttime scene, a noose is suspended from a structure, with a wooden step ladder positioned directly beneath it (Figure 21). Artificial lighting casts stark shadows, isolating the noose and ladder while amplifying their symbolic weight. The noose, rigid and precisely shaped, becomes a potent symbol of systemic racial violence and colonial control, evoking historical oppression and dehumanisation. Makandula reflected that the imagery of the noose and ladder resonates deeply with South Africa's ongoing struggle with historical injustice. The noose is not merely a relic of past violence but a reminder of contemporary structures that continue to marginalise and oppress. By situating these objects in a public space, he aimed to provoke reflection on how colonial symbols persist in shaping present realities (Makandula, personal interview, 30 January 2025). Its curved form and stark visibility in the light emphasise its function as an instrument of subjugation, aligning with the Material Dynamism criterion, as the noose's material properties—its rigidity and placement—actively shape the scene's thematic resonance. McDonnell (2023: 196–204) emphasises that materials interact with their contexts to shape outcomes, and in this case, the noose is not just an object but an active participant in conveying the historical power dynamics associated with colonial violence. The juxtaposition of the noose and ladder introduces a dialogue between despair and hope, showing how materiality embodies oppression yet invites reimagination. The ladder interacts with the noose to create a layered narrative. On the one hand, it recalls imagery of executions, reinforcing the noose's connotation of death. On the other, it suggests the potential for resistance, ascent, or escape, symbolising a pathway to transformation. Material Dynamism emerges in the relationship between the ladder and the noose, where the ladder's worn texture juxtaposes with the noose's taut form, creating a dynamic interaction between hope and oppression. This duality mirrors South Africa's history of systemic violence, where colonial and apartheid systems enforced oppression, while resistance movements symbolised enduring hope and liberation. Appadurai (1986: 3–9) notes that materials have symbolic layers, and here, the ladder's worn texture becomes a symbol of resilience and potential escape from colonial systems. The contrast between the noose's rigidity and the ladder's splintered wood heightens the tension between despair and hope, disrupting fixed associations and opening pathways to imagined futures (O'Sullivan 2001).

Makandula's physical presence near the noose brings the Performative Impact criterion to the fore. His deliberate proximity introduces unresolved tension into the performance. His passive stance, juxtaposed with the violent histories represented by the noose, emphasises the societal struggle to reckon with systemic violence. This gesture engages with the symbolic power of the noose and ladder, transforming the scene into a dialogue between vulnerability and defiance. Hall (1999: 185–186) highlights resistant visibility, where performative acts re-signify norms and challenge representations of power. Makandula's stillness and proximity critique historical violence while inviting conversations about reclamation and resilience, encouraging viewers to reconsider dominant cultural narratives.

The noose and ladder also evoke implied movements—climbing, hanging, escaping—that deepen the narrative. These static objects become agents of potential action, transforming their symbolism. The noose imposes control, while the ladder introduces an alternative: a path of defiance or escape. This interaction reflects the tension between oppression and agency, reinforcing both Material Dynamism and Performative Impact. Jackson (2014: 1–4) emphasises the dialogical relationship between performer and audience, where the noose and ladder serve as active participants, inviting the audience to engage with their layered meanings. The stark imagery critiques colonial legacies. The noose recalls brutal histories of lynching and execution used to enforce systemic racial subjugation, while the ladder’s dual function as a tool of violence and a means of escape parallels colonial histories’ paradoxical nature. Artificial lighting sharpens this critique, distorting shadows to blur boundaries between past and present, suggesting the enduring legacy of systemic control. This interplay fosters fictional possibilities, inspiring audiences to envision transformed socio-political realities (Young 2014).

Reciprocal Influence emerges as the synthesis of Performative Impact and Material Dynamism. The noose’s rigid materiality gains amplified meaning through Makandula’s deliberate stillness, transforming it from an oppressive object into a site of defiance. Similarly, the ladder’s worn texture and dual symbolism dynamically interact with the noose, creating a layered narrative of resistance and reclamation. This interplay highlights how materials’ physical properties—such as the noose’s taut rigidity and the ladder’s grounded texture—are redefined through Makandula’s gestures, turning them into active participants in critiquing systemic oppression. The proximity of Makandula’s body to the noose enhances its oppressive connotation while simultaneously challenging its authority. This juxtaposition underscores the bidirectional relationship between materiality and performative acts, as the noose’s historical associations of control are re-signified through the artist’s deliberate positioning. Similarly, the act of distributing petrol bombs intensified this bidirectional exchange, as the materials’ historical potency was activated through the performer’s gesture and the audience’s embodied participation. The ladder, placed beneath the noose, shifts its symbolic role through its interaction with the performance, offering a metaphor for resilience and liberation. By merging material transformation with audience engagement, the performance highlights how historical symbols can inspire reimagined connections to past and future socio-political struggles, fostering imaginative pathways for cultural renewal (O’Sullivan 2001; Jackson 2014).

Contribution of Written and Sung Elements

Makandula’s *Ingqumbo* (2016) integrates spoken and sung elements, weaving a multilayered narrative that deepens its symbolic and emotional resonance. Recitations, such as “Burn the sins of St. Michael & St. George” and “We took selfies while we await the hanging of Cecil John Rhodes”, merge historical critique with contemporary cultural

references. These utterances function as dirge, protest, and a call for justice, addressing colonial oppression while reimagining historical figures like Nxele and Ndlambe in a modern context. The deliberate delivery of these lines, coupled with tonal shifts, enhances their Performative Impact, where Makandula's vocal gestures transform written words into dynamic performances. According to Butler (1999: 128–185), the iterative nature of performative acts destabilises norms, which is evident in how these utterances transcend representation and actively reshape the audience's understanding of colonial histories. Makandula's intonation and rhythmic delivery evoke a layered response, blending satire, defiance, and mourning. The phrase "Burn the sins of St. Michael & St. George" critiques the colonial and missionary legacies of institutionalised religion, symbolising a purging of historical transgressions. Makandula's deliberate intonation enhances its ritualistic tone, inviting the audience to participate in a symbolic cleansing. Similarly, "We took selfies while we await the hanging of Cecil John Rhodes" juxtaposes the triviality of modern social media culture with the gravity of colonial atrocities. This interplay underscores the Material Dynamism of the written text as it transitions into performance, activating its critique through speech, tone, and delivery. Phelan (2003: 6–17, 51) underscores the political significance of visibility and opacity in performative acts, and here, the shift from written to spoken performance materialises these critiques, amplifying their resonance as living acts of resistance.

Alternating between spoken and sung elements, Makandula draws on traditional oral storytelling and ceremonial practices. The rhythm and pacing of his utterances mirror rituals that summon ancestral presence and collective memory. Performative Impact emerges in his vocal modulations, which shift between mourning, resistance, and reclamation. The invocation of historical figures like Nxele and Ndlambe connects the performance to a lineage of resistance, grounding it in the historical struggle against colonial violence. The repeated invocation of "*Umhlaba* (the land)" further highlights its centrality, framing the land as a site of dispossession and a symbol of spiritual and cultural reclamation. This connection ties the spoken and sung elements to Material Dynamism, where the land actively participates in the narrative, embodying both loss and resilience. Hall (1999: 185–186) discusses resistant visibility, where invoking ancestral memory through the voice re-signifies the past, transforming it into a dynamic force for reclaiming identity. The sung elements amplify the ceremonial atmosphere, transitioning from subdued lamentation to impassioned defiance. Shifts in tone and rhythm engage multiple sensory dimensions, immersing the audience in a shared act of remembrance and resistance. The Performative Impact of these invocations transforms the performance space into a communal ritual, where Makandula's vocal gestures activate historical memory and ancestral presence. This interplay of speech and song compels the audience to reflect on their relationship to colonial histories and systemic violence. Jackson (2014: 1–4) emphasises the dialogical relationship between performer and audience, where Makandula's utterances act as vehicles for meaning-making, inviting the audience into the reclamation of collective

memory. The dynamic interaction between auditory elements and broader themes exemplifies how Material Dynamism transforms symbolic texts into lived experiences. Appadurai (1986: 3–9) notes how materials gain layered meanings through cultural systems, and here, spoken words become active materials that reshape engagement with colonial history and cultural identity.

Makandula constructs a layered commentary on historical memory, identity, and justice by intertwining auditory, visual, and symbolic elements. His performance transcends critique to become an act of collective remembrance and transformation. The interplay between spoken and sung elements exemplifies Reciprocal Influence, where Performative Impact and Material Dynamism co-create meaning. Vocalising written texts activates their symbolic weight, transforming static language into a medium of resistance and critique. Simultaneously, the written words' materiality—rooted in cultural and historical contexts—shapes their delivery, grounding the performance in a socio-political narrative. This co-creation amplifies the critique of colonial legacies, weaving together historical memory and cultural resistance. Makandula's tonal shifts, alternating between satire, mourning, and defiance, draw on the historical resonance embedded in the written words. Conversely, his delivery transforms their material presence, extending their meanings beyond textual origins. Reciprocal Influence emerges as the spoken and sung elements activate the materiality of language, while the words' symbolic weight amplifies the performative gestures. This interplay ensures the inseparability of material and performative elements, enriching the performance's critique of colonial legacies. By grounding the vocal elements in ritual practices and ancestral invocations, the performance invites reflection on colonial histories while envisioning possibilities for reclaiming agency and identity. This integration reinforces the framework of Performative Materiality, demonstrating the essential interplay between performativity and materiality in co-constructing meaning in contemporary art practices.

Through this synthesis, *Ingqumbo* (2016) exemplifies the first three criteria of the Performative Materiality framework—Material Dynamism, Performative Impact, and Reciprocal Influence—showcasing how performative acts and material elements critique and reimagine cultural narratives. By intertwining resistance with relational encounters, the performance highlights the framework's transformative potential to uncover the evolving interplay between materiality and performativity.

4.1.3 Interpretation and Judgement

Sikhumbuzo Makandula's *Ingqumbo* (2016) represents a profound interplay of performativity and materiality, transforming the artwork into a dynamic site for reckoning with colonial histories and envisioning cultural reclamation. Through deliberate gestures,

symbolic materials, and immersive auditory contributions, *Ingqumbo* (2016) transcends representation to critique systemic oppression while affirming resilience and renewal (Appadurai 1986: 3–9; Butler 1999: 43–179; McDonnell 2023: 196–204). According to Makandula (personal interview, 23 August 2024), the recurring theme of wrath in *Ingqumbo* reflects the intense historical and cultural grievances addressed in the work, where specific materials, such as the noose and the black coat, symbolise both trauma and resilience. Makandula further explained that sound functions as both a material and a temporal marker, with its repetitive qualities serving to evoke memory and communicate historical narratives. This deliberate use of sonic elements aligns with the work's overarching exploration of reckoning and renewal. The performance is deeply embedded in its socio-political and historical context, engaging monumental spaces such as the St. Michael and St. George Cathedral and the Drostdy Arch. These structures, marked by colonial narratives, are transformed into contested sites of memory and critique. This engagement reflects Contextual Embeddedness as it highlights the interaction between Makandula's performative gestures and the colonial legacies symbolised by the architecture. The transformation of these spaces into sites of resistance is rooted in their historical and cultural significance, which amplifies the performative critique. Drawing collectively on insights from Butler (1999: 179), McDonnell (2023: 201–202), and Appadurai (1986: 3–9), the performance illustrates how performative acts and material elements, such as the noose and ladder, disrupt the static authority of these monuments. By activating these objects, Makandula transforms them from symbols of oppression into dynamic participants in an ongoing dialogue of resistance, reframing colonial power through iterative acts and re-signifying cultural meaning.

Makandula's material choices, including the black coat, mask, boots, and noose, further extend the socio-political critique. These materials operate within what McDonnell (2023: 201–202) describes as a “network of affordances”, where their physical properties and historical connotations enable layered interpretations. The mask's concealment, for example, negotiates visibility and identity, while the noose juxtaposes despair with defiance, embodying both historical trauma and potential resilience. Transformative Interaction emerges here as the performance engages in a process of destruction and renewal, where materials like the noose and ladder are reactivated through performative gestures to shift their meanings. By incorporating these elements into the performance, Makandula reshapes narratives of colonial violence into acts of cultural reclamation. This process is further supported by Contextual Embeddedness, as the socio-political significance of these materials and spaces anchors their transformation, and by Embodied Interaction, as the audience's sensory engagement deepens the impact of these shifts. The interaction between materials and actions highlights how these elements co-create meaning, enabling the audience to engage with the work's socio-political critique. Auditory components, such as the violin's mournful tones and the resonant bells, enhance the immersive experience, underscoring Embodied Interaction. These elements bridge the material and performative

dimensions, creating a visceral sensory landscape. The audience is drawn into the performance through the sounds' affective resonance, which O'Sullivan (2001: 125–128) and McDonnell (2023: 201) collectively describe as central to embodied engagement. By juxtaposing mournful melodies with striking visual imagery, the performance compels the audience to confront the lingering legacies of colonialism while imagining pathways of renewal. The interplay of sound, gesture, and material elements transforms the performance space into a shared site of memory and resistance, highlighting the co-creative role of the audience in shaping the artwork's meaning. Through its integration of performativity and materiality, *Ingqumbo* (2016) achieves a transformative impact, challenging static notions of history and identity. Transformative Interaction underscores this process by demonstrating how performative acts and material elements provoke shifts in meaning, disrupt norms, and reshape socio-political narratives. By building on Contextual Embeddedness and Embodied Interaction, the performance amplifies its interpretive and political impact, illustrating the framework's utility in analysing contemporary art.

Makandula's *Ingqumbo* (2016) vividly exemplifies the interwoven first three criteria of the Performative Materiality framework—Material Dynamism, Performative Impact, and Reciprocal Influence—while aligning with the themes of Embodiment and Agency and Power, Politics, and Social Construction. These criteria and themes underscore the transformative potential of performative acts and material elements in critiquing socio-political structures and reimagining cultural narratives. The black coat and mask, integral to the performance, illustrate Embodiment and Agency by negotiating visibility and identity. The mask resists surveillance, transforming into a tool of defiance, while the coat's light-absorbing fabric amplifies Makandula's movements, embodying resilience and resistance. Together, these materials and gestures challenge colonial systems of control, affirming cultural agency and highlighting the collaborative interplay between human and material elements. Power, Politics, and Social Construction emerge as Makandula critiques systemic authority and historical oppression by re-signifying materials like the noose and monumental spaces. These materials, such as the St. Michael and St. George Cathedral, become contested sites where colonial legacies are disrupted and reimagined. The performance also demonstrates Reciprocal Influence, wherein materials and actions dynamically shape one another. For instance, the coat and mask gain symbolic weight through their interaction with Makandula's deliberate gestures, which derive their socio-political resonance from the materials' properties. Through the dynamic interplay of performativity and materiality, Makandula's work transcends immediate contexts, encouraging viewers to imagine alternative socio-political realities and challenge conventional cultural constructs (O'Sullivan 2001; Young 2014). This analysis demonstrates how the framework of Performative Materiality uncovers and validates narratives of identity, resistance, and cultural expression, aligning directly with the study's aim to analyse South African art within its socio-political context. By effectively analysing the interplay between materials and performative acts, the framework addresses the research question,

demonstrating its utility in revealing how these elements coalesce to critique colonial legacies and envision cultural renewal.

Through this layered commentary, the performance not only confronts hegemonic narratives but also generates transformative cultural meanings, showcasing the power of contemporary art to provoke change and resilience.

4.2 Final Interpretation: Evaluating the Framework Through Artwork Analysis

The concluding interpretation of this chapter synthesises the findings of the analysis of Sikhumbuzo Makandula's *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016) artworks and evaluates the effectiveness of the Performative Materiality framework. This assessment highlights both the strengths and limitations of the framework's themes and criteria in exploring the intricate interplay between performativity and materiality within contemporary South African art.

The Performative Materiality framework's themes of Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction have been instrumental in uncovering the socio-political resonance of Makandula's works. For instance, *Umnikelo* (2015) exemplifies Embodiment and Agency by demonstrating how Makandula's deliberate gestures activate materials such as the red garment, transforming it into a dynamic participant that navigates cultural memory and resistance. The fluidity and vibrancy of the garment become extensions of Makandula's body, imbuing the performance with layers of meaning tied to identity, memory, and cultural heritage. Similarly, *Ingqumbo* (2016) vividly engages with Process and Encounter, as the multisensory interplay of sound, movement, and materials, like burning fabric, evokes a layered narrative of resistance and reconciliation. The resonant tones of the violin juxtaposed against the visual intensity of burning fabric construct a poignant commentary on historical violence and cultural endurance. Both artworks reflect Power, Politics, and Social Construction by interrogating colonial legacies and institutional authority while foregrounding cultural resilience. Through these performances, Makandula challenges the viewer to engage with the tensions between destruction and renewal, rigidity and fluidity, and erasure and reclamation. Despite these successes, limitations within the framework's criteria require attention. The criteria of Performative Impact and Material Dynamism, while effective in isolating the roles of gestures and materials, often overlap, as evidenced in both artworks. In *Umnikelo* (2015), the red garment's rigid structure and vibrant colour interact with Makandula's gestures to create reciprocal meaning. This interaction transcends mere aesthetic appeal, positioning the garment as a conduit of cultural memory and a tool for political resistance. Similarly, in *Ingqumbo* (2016), the deliberate burning of fabric and the violin's mournful tones demonstrate a dynamic interaction between performative and material elements, forging a

dialogue between ephemeral gestures and enduring materiality. These intersections suggest that merging Performative Impact and Material Dynamism into an expanded Reciprocal Influence criterion could better address the framework's core aim of analysing the interplay between performativity and materiality. This expanded criterion would enable a more cohesive understanding of how materiality and performative acts coalesce to generate meaning.

The criterion of Reciprocal Influence has already proven pivotal in analysing how materials and performative acts co-create meaning. In *Umnikelo* (2015), the red garment's physicality amplifies Makandula's gestures, and his movements, in turn, re-signify the garment's historical connotations. This bidirectional interaction reshapes the garment's meaning, positioning it as a site of cultural negotiation. Similarly, in *Ingqumbo* (2016), the tension between Makandula's movements and the monument's rigid materiality illustrates how performative acts could recontextualise static symbols of colonial authority into contested sites of resistance. The burning fabric serves as a metaphor for the destruction of oppressive structures, while the violin's haunting tones underscore the emotional gravity of this transformation. These examples affirm the utility of Reciprocal Influence in capturing the nuanced dynamics of materiality and performativity, revealing how their interplay generates new meanings and disrupts established narratives. While the framework's adaptability across different artworks is a strength, the analysis highlights a need for refinements. For instance, the Transformative Interaction criterion, which focuses on the socio-political impact of performative and material interplay, was more evident in *Ingqumbo* (2016) than in *Umnikelo* (2015). This discrepancy can be attributed to the distinct nature of each artwork. In *Ingqumbo* (2016), the layered interplay between sound, movement, and materials—such as the violin's resonance and the burning fabric—provided a richer context for Transformative Interaction to emerge as a pivotal criterion. The integration of sound as a material element, combined with the visceral imagery of burning fabric, amplifies the artwork's socio-political commentary, creating a multisensory experience that deeply engages the viewer. Conversely, in *Umnikelo* (2015), while the red garment and deliberate gestures were powerful, they did not achieve the same level of multisensory integration. This uneven applicability underscores the importance of contextualising criteria to suit the specific characteristics of each artwork, ensuring that the framework remains flexible and adaptive to diverse artistic practices.

Additionally, the absence of a dedicated criterion addressing audience interaction limits the framework's capacity to fully explore participatory dynamics, as seen in both performances, where audience engagement plays a critical role in shaping the narrative. In *Umnikelo* (2015), the rhythmic sound of Makandula's boots not only anchors the performance in a temporal rhythm but also invites audiences to reflect on the cyclical nature of resistance and endurance. The deliberate use of repetitive sound patterns engages the audience's senses, creating a shared space of reflection and resonance. Similarly, in *Ingqumbo* (2016),

the mournful tones of the violin and the visceral impact of burning fabric create a participatory space where viewers become witnesses to acts of resistance and reconciliation. The emotional and sensory immersion of the audience amplifies the socio-political themes of the artworks, reinforcing the need for the framework to incorporate criteria that address these participatory dimensions. Future studies could expand the framework to include criteria that explicitly examine the temporality of materials and gestures, exploring how they evolve and resonate over time. The rhythmic sound of Makandula's boots in *Umnikelo* (2015), for example, evokes cyclical patterns of resistance and endurance, suggesting a temporal dimension that warrants further analysis. Similarly, the violin's mournful tones in *Inggumbo* (2016) highlight the role of sound as an ephemeral yet potent material element, reinforcing the need for a more comprehensive approach to temporality within the framework. These expansions could provide deeper insights into the role of temporality and its relationship to audience engagement, further refining the framework to accommodate the evolving dynamics of performativity and materiality in contemporary art.

Extending this reflection on temporality, the photographs taken during *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Inggumbo* (2016) further reveal how meaning endures through residual materials. These images do not function merely as documentation, but as charged artefacts that carry the emotive, spiritual, and political intensity of the performance into new temporal contexts. They allow the gestures, materials, and atmospheres of the live performance to persist, inviting continued viewer engagement long after the act itself has ended. In doing so, they activate the criteria of Transformative Interaction and Material Agency, as the photographs become new surfaces where meaning is reconfigured and extended. This suggests that future refinements of the framework could more directly account for the role of post-performance residues—such as photographs—as critical agents in the ongoing life of performative material meaning-making.

In conclusion, the Performative Materiality framework has successfully illuminated the complex interplay of performativity and materiality in Makandula's artworks, providing valuable insights into their socio-political and cultural dimensions. Through its application, the framework has revealed how materials and gestures coalesce to create layered narratives that challenge historical injustices and celebrate cultural resilience. However, the analysis reveals opportunities for refinement, particularly in consolidating overlapping criteria and expanding the framework's focus to address audience interaction and temporality. By integrating these refinements, the framework can offer even greater analytical depth, enhancing its applicability to a wider range of contemporary artworks. This evaluation underscores the framework's potential as a critical tool for unpacking the nuanced dynamics of performativity and materiality in contemporary art practices, especially within the socio-political contexts of South Africa.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of Performative Materiality emerged from the need to develop a critical framework that accounts for both material agency and performative actions in contemporary art. This research reaffirms the transformative power of art as a medium for socio-political critique and cultural reimagination. Through its theoretical articulation and practical application, it has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Performative Materiality framework as an analytical tool for examining contemporary South African art. The framework's three key themes—Embodiment and Agency, Process and Encounter, and Power, Politics, and Social Construction—along with its six operational criteria provided a structured means to investigate how materials and performative actions coalesce to construct meaning in artworks. By bridging theory with practice, this study established a deeper engagement with artistic processes and their socio-political implications. It emphasised how Performative Materiality enriches the understanding of the dynamic relationship between performativity and materiality, reinforcing their interconnectedness rather than treating them as separate analytical categories. Additionally, it established a foundation for future scholarly and artistic inquiries into the evolving landscape of contemporary art.

Building on this structured approach, the study systematically addressed its central research question: How does the Performative Materiality framework enhance the understanding of contemporary art, particularly in the context of South African artist Sikhumbuzo Makandula's work? This question explored how the dynamic interplay between performativity and materiality contributes to the creation of nuanced meanings in artworks, offering fresh perspectives on contemporary artistic practices and their socio-political significance. To further explore this overarching question, the study examined three key sub-questions. Firstly, What are the core characteristics of the Performative Materiality framework, and how are its themes and criteria articulated? This sub-question was addressed through a detailed articulation of the framework's theoretical foundation, drawing from the interconnected concepts of performativity and materiality. The study demonstrated how its key themes and criteria provide a structured means to analyse contemporary artworks effectively. Secondly, Why is Performative Materiality a valuable framework for analysing contemporary artworks that integrate performativity and materiality? This sub-question was answered through the application of the framework in the analysis of Makandula's artworks. The study reveals how the framework's methodology uncovers embedded socio-political narratives by addressing the interplay between performative gestures and material agency, reaffirming its capacity to provide a nuanced, context-driven analysis. Lastly, How does Sikhumbuzo Makandula's art exemplify the principles of the Performative Materiality framework? This sub-question was explored through the case studies of *Umnikelo* (2015) and *Ingqumbo* (2016). The analysis of these

artworks illustrated how Makandula's integration of performative gestures and material choices conveys complex socio-political narratives.

Beyond its immediate findings, this research contributes to contemporary art discourse by providing a practical framework for artists, scholars, and curators seeking to engage with performativity and materiality in contemporary artistic practices. The study reinforces the idea that Performative Materiality is not just a theoretical construct but a critical tool for understanding how artistic processes and material choices shape socio-political narratives in visual culture.

The research findings provided insights into both the framework's strengths and areas for refinement. While the application of Performative Materiality proved instrumental in unpacking the complex interplay of performativity and materiality, it also revealed opportunities for further development. One key refinement involves the overlap between the criteria of Performative Impact and Material Dynamism, suggesting that merging these into an expanded Reciprocal Influence criterion would provide a more cohesive analytical approach. Additionally, the study highlighted the need to integrate temporality into the framework, as elements such as rhythm, sound, and iterative actions play a crucial role in shaping how meaning unfolds over time in performance-based artworks. Audience engagement also emerged as a significant yet underdeveloped factor within the framework. The analysis of *Ingqumbo* (2016) underscored the necessity of addressing how viewers interact with and interpret the interplay between performative actions and material elements. Future iterations of the framework could incorporate audience participation as a structured component to provide a more comprehensive analysis of participatory dynamics in contemporary art.

Furthermore, as contemporary artistic practices increasingly incorporate digital and hybrid media, the study identified an opportunity to explore how Performative Materiality operates in relation to virtual and digital environments. Investigating the interaction between physical materials and digital technologies would enhance the framework's relevance in contemporary art discourse. Future research could also explore how digital media and interactive installations engage performativity and materiality in new ways, particularly in virtual spaces where bodily interaction with materials is redefined. As technological advancements continue to shape artistic practices, these expansions will be crucial in maintaining the framework's relevance in an increasingly digital art world. Future research could also examine how Performative Materiality operates in cross-cultural contexts beyond South Africa, considering how different socio-political landscapes and artistic traditions influence the interplay between performative gestures and material agency. This would contribute to a more global understanding of Performative Materiality, ensuring its adaptability across diverse artistic practices and critical discourses. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach that integrates anthropology, cultural studies, and media

studies could further expand the framework's applicability, allowing for a more nuanced engagement with the ways in which performative acts and material interactions shape cultural narratives across different societies.

In all, as South Africa continues to navigate its historical legacies and evolving cultural identities, the insights provided by this research establish a foundation for future inquiries into the intersections of art, history, and society. The study broadens the theoretical landscape of art criticism and deepens discourse on the socio-political impact of contemporary art. Future studies could refine and expand the Performative Materiality framework by integrating the proposed refinements, ensuring that it remains a dynamic and adaptable analytical tool. By incorporating considerations of temporality, audience engagement, and digital materiality, the framework could evolve to meet the changing landscape of contemporary art. These refinements would enhance its applicability across a broader range of artistic practices, reinforcing its relevance for scholars, curators, and artists seeking to explore the evolving relationship between performativity and materiality in contemporary art. Through these developments, Performative Materiality could continue to serve as a critical framework for analysing how contemporary artistic practices negotiate history, politics, and cultural identity through the dynamic interplay of materials and performance. By expanding the scope of Performative Materiality to include evolving artistic mediums and audience interactions, this research paves the way for broader applications in contemporary art criticism. Performative Materiality is not only a valuable analytical tool but also an evolving framework that continues to shape discussions on materiality, performativity, and artistic meaning-making in diverse socio-political contexts. Its continued refinement and application will ensure its relevance in the ever-changing landscape of contemporary art. Ultimately, as contemporary artistic practices continue to evolve, Performative Materiality stands as an essential framework, ensuring that the interplay of materiality and performativity remains central to critical discourse and artistic innovation in the years to come.

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