IN THE WEAVE: TEXTILE-BASED MODES OF MAKING AND THE VOCABULARY OF HANDCRAFT IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

by

Walter Oltmann

November 2017

Abstract

This research focuses on handcrafted artworks made by contemporary artists working in South Africa who employ textile-based materials and processes of fabrication related to weaving and/or unweaving in producing sculptural objects, installations and performances. The primary aim is to investigate how and to what ends contemporary artists working in South Africa have chosen to engage in practices that are common to textile-based handcraft traditions of weaving, stitching and tying. This is done with reference to indigenous southern African textile-based traditions of making where appropriate. The focus is on how artists have understood manual work and its philosophy, and how conceptualization in their creative practice is accessed through the physical act of repetitive making by hand, based particularly on those traditional textile craft practices associated with weaving. In examining selected examples, such 'textilic' making practice is considered from a generative perspective involving a process of 'following materials' through handcrafted fabrication (Ingold 2010a). Furthermore, the study considers a material-conceptual interplay between 'text, textile and *techne* (craftsmanship)' and the knowledge production that this intertwining generates (Mitchell 2012). In South Africa, craft materials and techniques are currently in use by contemporary artists in very particular ways, and in relation to the historically politicized context of the country. I critically examine how the selected artists' works intersect with a politics of craft that is particular to the country's post-apartheid context, and how they subvert or destabilize the hierarchical distinction between art and craft.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of PhD in the field of Fine Arts by creative project and thesis in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

……
Walter Oltmann

Date:……..

Dedication

Dedicated to my family

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Anitra Nettleton, for the guidance, direction and encouragement that she provided throughout the writing of the thesis. I am very grateful for the time and expertise that she always offered so freely.

I also want to thank the artists whose works I examine in this thesis and The Goodman Gallery, The Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery and blank projects, for providing information and granting permission to include images of artworks. Thanks also to Janine Zagel for assisting with details and images of Andries Botha's artworks.

I also thank the Inter-Library Loan staff at the Wits University Wartenweiler library for their assistance in obtaining articles and books for this research, and James Mokoka from the Wits School of Arts for assisting with technical matters.

Contents

SECTION II INCORPORATING HANDCRAFT IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN ART

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

> We do not have to think the world in order to live in it, but we *do* have to live in the world in order to think it (Ingold 2000a: 418).

The focus of my research is on handcrafted artworks made by contemporary artists working in South Africa who employ textile-based materials and processes related to weaving and/or unweaving in producing sculptural objects, installations and performances. I have chosen to look at a few artists who engage in processes that involve the interlacing of threads such as weaving, stitching, tying and knotting, i.e. the kinds of crafts involved in repetitive activity of making by hand in the structuring and/or un-structuring of form.[1] As Rizal Muslimin (2010: 340) points out, such iterative activities involve an 'immediate problem-solving procedure [in that] every knot […] constrains the next weaving step.'[2] By subjecting fibrous materials to repetitive handcraft procedures, a generative course of action is invoked that involves assessment of the self in action. I argue that such mindful manual making can be viewed as a form of conceptual work and examine how some South African artists use it towards their interpretive exploration in their artworks and to reference particular traditions of making.

My main goal is to demonstrate how manual activities in art making facilitate a reconnection between making and thinking and how artists are challenging the distinction that sees art as intellectually rigorous as against craft seen as being concerned primarily with questions of materials.[3] I consider how craft can

---

[1] Stitching is different to weaving but I include it as a process of sculptural making that is closely related to weaving. Claire Pajaczkowska (2016: 85-86) notes that the process of stitching becomes a mechanism of reflexivity by way of the forward and backwards movements within it, giving it 'a space and time of reflexive thought.' This characteristic of stitching is of particular interest to me in my consideration of repetitive craftwork as reflexive practice. Needlework practices of sewing and embroidery as associated with the matching and embellishing of textiles, however, fall somewhat outside of the scope of this research. I have chosen not to focus on textile practices of lacework and beadwork in order to limit the scope of my research.

[2] In his article "Learning from Weaving for Digital Fabrication in Architecture," Rizal Muslimin (2010: 340) notes how the activity of problem-solving in weaving is analogous to Donald Schön's notion of 'reflection-in-action.' Schön coined the term in his study *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (1990) where he examined such iterative working methodologies in case studies from architectural studio education and music.

[3] The distinction between art and craft, as Juliette MacDonald (2005: 35-36) points out, emerged during the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when a division was made

potentially allow ideas to be expressed and examine how content and meaning emerge from the materials and techniques used in such making processes. I also focus on how the textile-based artworks made by contemporary artists working in South Africa intersect with a politics of craft that is particular to the country's context. I argue that artists have used textile-based materials and processes in making connections to ethnic and other heritages through accessing craft traditions and rejecting boundaries dividing art from craft.

Weaving has been central to my own sculptural practice since my student years and wire has become my signature medium in fabricating forms by hand. I chose to use wire as a student because it was a relatively cheap and versatile material that allowed me to construct forms directly by hand, often on a large scale. I have always preferred making that involves direct manipulation whereby forms can slowly evolve out of repetitive process. Weaving (coiling), stitching and knotting are my primary methods for creating sculptures and I use very basic tools such as a pair of pliers and wire cutters. What it means to be making artworks in this way in a contemporary South African context and how such making can be seen to subvert categories founded on hierarchical distinctions made between art and craft will be a central concern of this research.

The artworks that I have chosen to focus on include the following: woven sculptures and installations created by Andries Botha and his co-producers, including a work titled *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart)(1995/6) collaboratively produced with Zulu artist Sam Ntshangaze; a woven artwork titled *Screen* (2000) by Siemon Allen (a former student of Botha's) and stitched sculptural and installation-based artworks by Nicholas Hlobo titled *Umthubi* (2006) and *Umtshotsho* (2009); and finally, artworks involving textile-based activities of undoing and redoing in a performance artwork titled *Unravel[led]* (1998) by Tracy Rose, an installation titled *Temporal Distance (with criminal*

---

between fine and decorative art and craft, but it was not until the age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that an absolute division began to open up between art and craft. MacDonald interprets Immanuel Kant as having given philosophical legitimacy to this separation in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* by insisting on the distinction between 'fine art' which he associated with the artist as genius and applied art or 'handcraft' which he regarded as based on mere technical skill.

intent): You will find us in the best places (1997) by Moshekwa Langa and woven/unwoven tapestry and installation artworks by Igshaan Adams (including works form his *Parda* (2015) and *Stoflike Oorskot* (2016) exhibitions). While some of these artists engage assistants and/or co-collaborators in realizing their artworks, the scope of my research does not extend to address the complexities of collaboration, collectivity and exchanges. Where artists do collaborate, I consider such working arrangements in relation to how they use craft media and processes towards their critical content and conceptual ends. I examine only works by the above-mentioned artists that speak most directly about their respective ways of making by hand. Because the artists whose works I examine do not all engage exclusively with textile-based materials and methods, my focus on specific examples will cover only a particular aspect of their creative work.

'Textile-based' modes of making refer to craft-identified processes associated with the handling of fibrous materials. Also often referred to as 'fibre-based' or 'thread-based' art practices, such forms of making engage a mode of production that anthropologist Tim Ingold refers to as the 'textility of making' (2010a: 91).[4] Investigating making with a focus on form-generating through what Ingold (2010a: 93) characterizes as an 'ongoing generative movement' involving a process of 'following materials,' I will examine artworks by the artists selected that exemplify such an engagement through hand-crafted fabrication. In focusing on the generative mode of such weaving-based approaches to making, I will consider what Catherine Dormor refers to as 'the matrix of knowledge that draws on the intertwining of text, textile and *techne*',[5] which brings together the 'material activities of writing textile and making text' (Dormor 2013: 1). Cultural philosopher Roland Barthes highlights such a material-conceptual interplay when he suggests that '*text* means *tissue*' and draws attention to the generative activity of creating the text/textile (Barthes 1976: 64). In focusing on this

[4] To quote Elissa Auther (2010: xx), fibre is understood here as 'a broad category including but not limited to string-based materials from thread to rope, felted substances, and woven textiles.'
[5] Howard Risatti (2007: 99) notes that the term *techne* comes from the Greek and refers 'to the knowledge of *how* to do or make things (as opposed to *why* things are the way they are). But more generally "techne" denotes a body of procedures and skills.' Mitchell (2012: 5) defines it as 'craftsmanship or making with intention.'

text/textile interface and generative modes of making, I will examine the emphasis that artists have put on the process of fabrication and how this can be seen to 'reframe the relationship between artist, object and viewer,' as Paula Owen (2011: 83) puts it.[6]

By looking closely at a number of artworks made by contemporary artists working in South Africa who have chosen to adopt a textile-based mode of artistic labour that consciously engages the hand and celebrates the sense of touch, the study aims to provide an account of such artwork being executed in South Africa today and to evaluate it critically in terms of its conscious engagement with the language of craft. In her essay titled "Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb," Owen notes that artists who employ craft-based methods of making espouse the significance of process both in the making and viewing of handmade objects and maintain that

> content and meaning emerge during use, as well as from the materials themselves and the traditional methods of fabrication that are rich in social and cultural history. In addition, many craft artists and crossover artists consider the tactile or sensual aspects of their work to be integral to their intent, as well as to the social relationships that this quality spawns (Owen 2011: 90-91).

I will examine how artists exploit such features of craft-based making in mobilizing them towards destabilizing assumptions about value surrounding art and craft and inflecting their work with cultural specificity. Their craft-based processes of making will be examined to illustrate how contemporary South African artists engage with materials and processes that connect with local meanings through craft. My central argument hinges on the recent resurgence of craft-based methods in contemporary art in the face of a disembodied conceptualism and the reintegration of craft into art praxis. I aim to examine the political implications thereof, specifically in the South African context.

[6] Dormor, for example, speaks of a 'generative continuity between subject and object' and that it is 'within this continuity between making and unmaking of textile that a matrix of intertwined and intertwining signifiers, signifieds, processes, and the raw material for all three is generated' (2013: 3).

In her book *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art*, Elissa Auther (2010: 165) points to the connections between aesthetic hierarchy and the social hierarchies of race and gender and writes about feminist artists, scholars, critics and curators who have since the 1960s and 1970s 'refused the "taken for granted" status enjoyed by the hierarchy of art and craft since its inception.' Their critique, she argues, has entailed an examination of the

> vast set of pejorative cultural associations circling around craft media – especially fiber – largely connected to women's traditional place in the home. In addition to insistently documenting the hierarchy of art and craft as an oppressive force tied to social hierarchies of gender and […] race, feminist artists also created works of art and scholarship aimed at deflating its negative effects (Auther 2010: 165).

In South Africa, the pejorative picture of craft is particularly pronounced in the context of its past apartheid politics which based the art/craft hierarchy not only on gender but also on race. As Anitra Nettleton notes, creative production defined as 'craft,' based on indigenous skills,[7] was

> encouraged among black South Africans under the apartheid regime. It fell within the ambit of what was derogatorily labeled "Bantoekuns" (Bantu art) in Afrikaans, because it was seen as inferior to European arts and crafts (Nettleton 2010: 56).

Overcoming or breaking down the boundaries between art and craft thus carries particular significance in the South African context.[8]

---

[7] Indigenous craft practices in South Africa are those that are 'rooted in technologies passed down in families or by master-apprentice system,' as Ingrid Stevens (2002: 77) states. She includes the following amongst such long-standing craft practices: 'Pottery – which is functional, made mainly in terracotta clay, handmade, decorated and low-fired in pit kilns; weaving – for example, intricate baskets made from Ilala Palm fronds, mats, large fish traps and even dwellings; beadwork – using imported beads, in intricate and colourful geometric patterns, for example, that made by the Ndebele and Zulu women, and woodcarving – of utensils, containers, decorated doors and figurative sculptures, as are found in Venda' (Stevens 2002: 77).

[8] The term 'Bantu' (Zulu word 'Abantu' meaning people) identifies a major linguistic group of Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Venda and Tsonga language speakers. Over the years, the original meaning of the term has changed and it became a strongly offensive term under apartheid. In the early 1960s it replaced the word 'Native' in official government usage; in South Africa, the Department of Native affairs changed its name to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. The term is no longer used except in its original context in reference to bantu languages ('Bantu' 2011: [sp]).

Any study of contemporary South African art needs to acknowledge the context produced by the racial domination of apartheid practices and has to be attentive to the ethical dimensions of representation and the histories and cultural practices that were subjugated in the past.[9] Commenting on the profound impact of racism in South Africa and its persisting legacy, Mario Pissarra (2006: 47) writes:

> Consistent with imperial practice across the colonized world, indigenous artistic production was relegated by the gatekeepers of (western) civilization to the inferior status of craft. It was in the 1920s and 1930s that the earliest black South African artists, i.e. those who adopted or adapted western conventions of making art, particularly drawing, painting and sculpture, began to emerge. These 'pioneers' were predominantly mission-educated, self-taught artists who were mostly mentored by white patrons and artists. Later, under apartheid, education was used deliberately as a tool for domination, and the majority of school-educated black South Africans found handicrafts to be a part of the (official) curriculum, whereas most whites had access to art education through schools and universities. These early manifestations of the divide between black and white established a pattern of unequal power relationships that still resonates today.

As Pissarra outlines above, the unequal power relations under apartheid were mirrored in the hierarchical disparity of art versus craft that exists in the visual arts. African art was marginalized as craft, constraining black artists from having access to the 'fine arts' of the West. Sabine Marschall similarly notes that the limitations that were forcibly imposed on black artists

> prevented them from producing what was defined as 'fine art', which, in turn, justified their exclusion from the artistic mainstream. Thus the limitations forcibly imposed on black artists induced them to produce what was labelled folk art or craft, thereby reinforcing apartheid ideology through enhancing the contrast between the

[9] Colin Richards (1990: 36) has, for example, written about the terminologies in modern art in South Africa and the strongly contested territory of representation. He notes that 'struggles around notions of ethnicity, tribe, culture, race and so on ramify and sustain the "discourse of domination" in contemporary South Africa. These notions are constructs. While not necessarily false [that would presuppose some essentially "true" or "natural" version] constructs exist by force of ideology. As such they are mutable, subject to the historical process in all its complexity.'

> cultural practices of different racial and ethnic groups (Marschall 2001: 63-64).

Marschall thus argues that the notion of fine art is a construct connected to power and class relations in society.

In this research, I will unpack some of the prejudices underlying the subordination of creative work produced by black artists as craft and examine how handwork was used under the Bantu Education Act to 'confine Africans to a menial education designed for servitude,' as Andries Walter Oliphant (2004b: 11) puts it. I will examine how artists working in South Africa are overcoming the historically negative repercussions of this prejudice towards handwork and whether the historically Western hierarchical relationship of art to craft carries particular meaning in post-apartheid artistic production. I am primarily concerned with examining how contemporary artists from South Africa destabilize such hierarchical distinctions through their engagements with craft-based forms of making.

In Section One, titled "Textile-based Processes of Making by Hand," I examine the encounter with fibrous materials and their transformation by hand. I address making as a reciprocal or collaborative way of working *with* materials that are active and vital and consider cognition as an embodied phenomenon. I further foreground the mutual relationship between maker and material in weaving-based forms of making and consider how such repetitive activities engage in a generative process involving knowledge in action.

In Chapter One I introduce my own creative practice and give an account of how I arrived at using fibrous materials and weaving-based methods of making in constructing sculptural forms. I articulate my own concerns in using such materials and methods and briefly examine how creative craft-based making can be seen to intersect with the categories of art, labour, work and play. The aspect of time invested in such immersive fabrication processes is examined as underscoring making as a generative process of growth involving self-assessment in action.

In Chapter Two I examine anthropologist Tim Ingold's observations on manual making as a modality of weaving. Countering the idea of making as an imposition of form onto the material world by an agent following a preconceived plan or design, Ingold's account conceives it in generative terms as a process of encounter, movement and growth. By 'following materials,' a maker attends to 'materials-becoming-things' and calls into question rather than assumes their objectness. Working *with* materials, the maker intervenes in fields of force and flows of materials and focuses on the process of formation itself (Ingold 2011a: 179).

Chapter Three examines aspects of technology, technique and tacit knowledge in textile-based practices of making and considers these in relation to language and the construction of text. Observations by various theorists who address the close relationship between text, textile and *techne* are introduced in examining a material-conceptual interplay in generative activities of creating text and textile. By reflecting on my own creative practice, I consider the notion of textilic knowledge production as an embodied experience and examine how the generative craft-based processes that I engage in provide a way of thinking from within my own making.

In Section Two, titled "Incorporating Handcrafts in Contemporary South African Art," I examine selected artworks by South African artists and consider their adoption of handcraft materials and processes within the politics of craft pertaining to the post-apartheid South African context. As outlined above, my primary focus is on establishing how South African artists working in a post-apartheid context are addressing the pejorative view of craft as sanctioned under apartheid, and how they can be seen to counter this prejudice through subverting hierarchical distinctions between art and craft by adopting textile-based forms of making and/or unmaking.

In Chapter Four I introduce the political histories of craft and art in a South African context. Under the racial domination of apartheid, indigenous artistic

practices were relegated to the inferior status of craft. The hierarchical division between art and craft mirrored the unequal racial power relations in the country. Black artists had limited access to the 'fine arts' of the West and handcrafted work came to underline a racially differentiated view of creative practice. A separated education was promoted, based on the belief that African and European cultures were qualitatively different and that they needed to be kept apart. This history is important to sketch before addressing current debates as it is still resonant in the ways in which the hierarchies of art and craft are played out in the contemporary cultural context. My examination of contemporary South African artists working in craft-based modes focuses on how the historically negative repercussions of this prejudice towards handwork are being challenged and overcome.

In Chapter Five I introduce the artworks produced by fellow South African artist and tertiary educator Andries Botha, who has consistently worked with collaborators, including Zulu artist Sam Ntshangaze, in constructing his woven sculptures. Botha first introduced weaving processes in his sculptures in the early 1980s when I too began to explore weaving in my own creative work as a student majoring in sculpture. I trace the development of Botha's engagement with local craft traditions and examine his involvement with craft and building traditions of the Zulu from the Drakensberg region in KwaZulu-Natal. Through tapping into such forms of making, Botha sought to develop a vocabulary that he felt would be more appropriate to a South African sculptural practice responding to socio-political changes in the country. I examine his working methods, some aspects of his collaborations and his views on the potentially liberating role that creative education and mutual contact can play through socially interactive craft-based forms of making.

Chapter Six looks at selected artworks by two South African artists, Siemon Allen and Nicholas Hlobo, who have incorporated textile-based methods in their artmaking as part of their conceptual engagement with materials and processes that connect with local meanings. I examine Allen's work titled *Screen* (2000) as an example representing a break away from the protest art of a previous

generation of South African artists in trying to find alternate ways to address the post-apartheid situation. Allen can be seen to combine a minimalist language with the traditional craft of weaving in blurring the division between art and craft. I examine Hlobo's work as celebrating his African heritage and his gay identity through referencing local materiality and craft practices of stitching and tying. I focus particularly on how he creates tensions between the physical and symbolic properties of his chosen materials and processes in confronting normative expectations relating to socio-cultural rules and gender roles. I argue that both Allen's and Hlobo's works convey subtle engagement with tradition in addressing the trauma of the past.

In Chapter Seven I look at artworks that engage with processes of undoing and redoing, thereby challenging and questioning conventional standards of craft. Through deskilled forms of manipulation, some artists use open-ended processes of undoing and redoing to shift the emphasis from object to performance and to enact the body-textile relationship as a means to advance their conceptual concerns. In these instances, thinking through manipulation transgresses the boundaries of formal closure in favour of more fluid, disorderly and even messy forms of playing out. I examine selected examples to foreground how artists use such imperfect methods of handling as a means of questioning traditional techniques associated with social and cultural history and to reflect on and challenge authority and/or stereotypes in specific contexts.

As creative PhD, this research is submitted in two components: a survey exhibition titled "In the Weave - Walter Oltmann: working over three decades," (Standard Bank Gallery, 28 January to 29 March 2014, curated by Neil Dundas) and this thesis. My own creative work is introduced in Section 1 to contextualize my methods and concerns ahead of examining the works of the selected artists. The exhibition provided a broad overview of my sculptural work (mainly wire weavings) and related paintings, drawings and prints. An accompanying catalogue with essays by Julia Meintjes and Brenda Schmahmann plus an interview with Neil Dundas offers further insights to my creative concerns.

I: TEXTILE-BASED PROCESSES OF MAKING BY HAND

CHAPTER ONE

WEAVING-BASED METHODS OF MAKING: A VIEW FROM MY OWN CREATIVE PRACTICE

Weaving is one of the oldest crafts known to humankind and is practiced all over the world. In Africa, it has been retained as a rich cultural tradition by many people, but nothing indicates that the ancient practice of weaving originated on this continent or emerged from any single region thereof. Nathaniel Johnson *et al* (2008: 6) observe that woven artefacts such as baskets have been made in many African cultures for millennia; their roots lie in different regions and represent an intermingling of many different cultures. The immediacy and adaptability that weaving affords in the handling of materials, whether based on traditional methods or not, remains an attractive way for makers to respond to the inherent properties of fibrous materials. As Stephanie Bunn (2014: 179) states, weaving is 'a process whereby practices and the forms to which they give rise are continually generated and regenerated.'

In contemporary sculptural practice as well as installation and performance-based art, the application of various techniques of weaving has become a commonplace feature across the globe as many artists experiment with fibrous materials.[10] In South Africa, too, several artists have adopted textile-based modes of making and use the vocabulary of handcraft in their artworks. In this chapter I start my examination of such approaches to making from the point of view of my own creative practice. By identifying certain characteristics in my own work, I then expand my examination of various textile-based modes of making as adopted by other South African artists in later chapters (Section Two).

[10] The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston USA has, for example, recently hosted an exhibition titled "Fiber: Sculpture 1960-Present" (1 October 2014 – 4 January 2015), curated by Janelle Porter, highlighting the adaptation of techniques and traditional materials used by international contemporary artists working in fibre. It foregrounded the shift from on-loom weavings associated with the craft of tapestry to off-loom sculptures exploring abstraction and dimensionality using thread-based materials.

A study of textile-based modes of making in contemporary art necessarily demands an examination of the relationship between time, labour and art. Manual handcrafts employed in the making of artworks clearly speak of time and effort invested in the fabrication process, thus emphasizing making as a physical and performative act. Whilst many contemporary artists prefer to outsource craft-based work to skilled fabricators, others are rediscovering the pleasure and self-fulfillment of manual labour and are reclaiming such modes of making as a critical means through which to explore conceptual concerns. They engage in a form of mindful practice that enables the work of personal reflection but also communicates knowledge and connects to broader discourses. In doing so, they challenge the perception that the artist's hand and head are divided.[11]

Weaving has formed the basis of my own sculptural practice for over three decades. I provide a brief account of how I arrived at weaving as my primary approach to making sculptural forms and reflect on my practice in terms of my materials and processes as well as the time involved in the making. The craft of weaving draws me into a contemplative space in which I can give focused time to developing my work in response to my materials. It allows me to enter into a meditative rhythm and pace of making whereby my artworks literally 'grow' out of repetitive process. The slow pace of, and the repetitive nature of processes that I employ in my making, are vital to the way in which forms and images develop. Although I start out with a source idea, the slow activity of weaving allows an image and meaning to emerge and also allows for changes to happen along the way. Thread has in this way become integral to the way I think and create images in dialogue with my materials and their transformation through time.

One of the most frequent questions I am asked by the public about my artworks is: 'How long did it take you to make that?' The hand-crafted processes of

[11] In her essay titled "Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb," Paula Owen (2011: 90) notes that there is a 'noticeable set of artists today who purposefully record their toil and time through the action of making. While many of them are associated with craft practices and materials, others are not. What is notable is that artists from many disciplines, including craft, are grounded in similar conceptual positions based in process, in contrast to other artists who turn fabrication over to others.'

weaving, coiling and knotting leave a trail of traces that make time evident so that the viewer grasps it as a tangible quality embodied in the material; the artwork carries the physical evidence of its own making.[12] By objectifying time, the patterns of the many interlacings that make up the weave slow down the experience of looking. I will further explore such aspects of temporality in the next section where I briefly focus on how the categories of art, play, labour and work underlie craft-based forms of making and how they can be understood as forms of production. As Glenn Adamson and Julia Bryan-Wilson (2012: 4) argue, redefining making as production 'serves to unhinge it from the grip of authorial intent, as well as to situate it within wider materialist questions.'[13] In considering the distinguishing features of art, play, labour and work I also briefly introduce Karl Marx's contribution to the subject in showing how artistic creation is essentially no different from other kinds of work and how art production is to be seen as manufacture.

1.1 Craft considered as activity of play

Practices involving labour-intensive forms of making can be seen to integrate aspects of work and play through activity carried out over time. As Janet Adams (2011: 2) states, making by hand puts the maker in touch with the real time of doing, but also brings him/her face-to-face with gravity and the properties and behaviour of physical matter. Materials present the maker with an array of possible manipulations and it is through both confrontation and dialogue with materials in this encounter that a form of play can be seen to emerge. I would characterize my own processes as involving empirical observation whilst experimenting in an explorative way. It is a process whereby 'material reality

[12] Coiling, as employed in certain forms of basket weaving, carries a temporal aspect in the spiral trajectory that is followed. As Ingold (2000a: 290) observes, 'in weaving, a surface is built up rather than transformed, and the spiral form of the basket emerges through the rhythmic repetition of movement in the weaving process rather than originating in the maker's mind. Indeed, despite their different geometrical properties, there is a close parallel between the generation of spirals in artefacts (such as the basket) and in living organisms (such as in the shell of a gastropod).'

[13] The authors quote theorist Pierre Bourdieu as asserting that the term *cultural production* redefines art practice as 'concrete economic practice, subject to questions of valuation, circulation, marketing, and consumption' (Bourdieu quoted in Adamson and Bryan-Wilson 2016: 4).

talks back,' as social-anthropologist Richard Sennett (2008: 272) puts it in his book *The Craftsman*, and an ongoing questioning of options takes place.[14] Through such an attentive activity of play I conduct a dialogue with my materials and probe expressive possibilities through slow repetition. As Sennett observes, skill is in this way allowed to evolve:

> The slowness of craft time serves as a source of satisfaction; practice beds in, making the skill one's own. Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination – which the push for quick results cannot. Mature means long; one takes lasting ownership of the skill (Sennett 2008: 295).

Sennett (2008: 268) proposes that the rhythm of routine in craftsmanship draws on childhood experiences of play. He further suggests that boredom is an important stimulus to both craftsmanship and play and that it is by becoming bored that the craftsman 'looks for what else he can do with the tools at hand' (Sennett 2008: 273). He argues that a release from boredom can only occur when there is a shift from one sphere of habit to another, i.e. when one is 'open to doing things differently' (Sennett 2008: 279-280).[15] The experience of curiosity, he writes,

> is an experience that suspends resolution and decision, in order to probe. The work process can thus be imagined as following a certain time rhythm, in which action leads to suspension while results are questioned, after which action resumes in a new form. We have seen this rhythm of action-rest/question-action to mark the development

[14] Sennett has written extensively on topics related to urban experience and the effects of new capitalism on the way in which we work. In assessing the quality of work under new capitalism he looks at 'craftsmanship' as an alternative way of doing. Sennett's book *The Craftsman* (2008) is often cited in writings on craft as it considers craftwork very broadly in examining the transformation of experience that the development of skill entails.

[15] Writing about *Experimentation and the Art of Play*, Juhani Palasmaa (2009: 71) mentions David Pye's distinction between a 'workmanship of risk' and a 'workmanship of certainty' in his book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1968). Palasmaa writes: 'The first attitude to workmanship means that at any moment, whether through inattention, or inexperience, or accident, the workman is liable to ruin the job.' In the second approach 'the quality of the result is predetermined and beyond the control of the operative.' David Pye, a master craftsman of skilled wood objects himself, concludes: 'All the works of men which have been most admired since the beginning of our history have been made by the workmanship at risk, the last three or four generations only excepted' (Pye 1968/1995: 9).' Palasmaa (2009: 72) suggests that the 'risk' in the 'workmanship of risk' usually implies 'the mental uncertainty of advancing on untrodden paths' and points to the creative state as being 'a condition of haptic immersion where the hand explores, searches and touches semi-independently' – a mentality of experimentation and play.

> of complex hand skills; merely mechanical activity, which does not develop technique, is simply movement (Sennett 2008: 279).

According to Sennett (2008: 175-176), the rhythm of doing something over and over is about dwelling in a moment of absorbed concentration by balancing repetition and anticipation. Because it is about looking ahead in anticipation of what the material should become in its next stage of evolution, craft activity remains stimulating and engaging.[16] He argues that craftwork embodies a great paradox in that simple acts like establishing facts and putting them to the test lead to a highly refined and complicated activity. In craftwork, such information and practices are converted into tacit knowledge, leading to what he refers to as 'embedding' (Sennett 2008: 50).

Thomas S. Henricks (2006: 202) shares a similar view to Sennett's on the benefits of play in relation to work and notes that it is ruled by a spirit of freshness or novelty and a sense that 'things have not occurred in quite the same way before.' Play 'draws us into the unpredictability of relationship and explores our reactions to it' (Henricks 2006: 203). This aspect of fascination can also characterize work activities such as making things by hand. Play is very much about a kind of work in progress and satisfaction is found in the doing itself. Pleasure is stimulated by the tenseness that comes from a sense of uncertainty about the outcome. It is derived from discovering an outcome and keeping this outcome unknown until the very end. In this way play prolongs one's attention and keeps one engrossed (Henricks 2006: 163).[17]

---

[16] In their article "Knowledge in action in weaving," Viveka Berggren Torell and Ulla Ranglin (2016: 31) comment on the importance of routine in craft work, or what they also refer to as an internalized knowledge of 'muscle memory' or 'procedural memory.' Citing Bengt Molander, they state that 'routine can form a well-known background against which unexpected incidents in the work-process can stand out.' In other words, when the routine that is established in craft work via skilled practice is interrupted, the crafter's attention is drawn to how and where things need to be directed next. Embodied routines contribute to making work flow more easily so that rhythm, dexterity and sensitivity can be developed but they are always accompanied by 'reflection-in-action' (Molander 1996 cited in Berggren Torell and Ranglin 2016: 26).

[17] Henricks cites Johan Huizinga who in his 1939 book *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture,* focuses on play as activity and argues that play underlies our lives as a mode of experience with latent possibility. Henricks indicates that Huizinga identifies it as a distinctive form of human expression in which people approach their environment differently from people who engage in

1.2 The experience of time and 'flow' in making by hand

Sennett (2008: 251) states that slow time in the crafting process enables reflection. This is true for both the maker and viewer of a handcrafted object. Allowing time to become embodied in material form through repetitive process is something that I often try to bring into correspondence with the imagery that I introduce in my works. In other words, I allow the subject matter to resonate with the recognition of condensed time spent on the making. In more recent works I have, for example, introduced time as subject matter in images associated with archaeology, e.g. fossils, skulls, skeletons and sites associated with archaeological finds. Such images evoke the vastness of deep time - geological time, change and evolution.[18]

In several works I have explored correlations between images that speak to the past and woven forms that resemble a kind of lacework drawing. Using a thin (1mm diameter) aluminium wire, I create net-like wall hangings by weaving 'doilies' that I layer and stitch together to arrive at a kind of three-dimensional tonal drawing. The resulting works declare their presence through scale and surface texture but often look delicate and at times even insubstantial. In their association with domestic textile practices (e.g. lacework or crochet work) such forms of making foreground the actions of making as a record of endurance and evoke fragility and the passage of time (see Fig 1, p17). In other works, I have

---

work. It is in this sense essentially an attempt to *engage* the world and draw other people or objects into patterns of communication or interaction (Henricks 2006: 188). Play is thus understood as a celebration of process rather than product. It presents opportunity for activity that allows for personal reflection and self-assessment. It is, as Henricks (2006: 189) puts it, 'a deeply phenomenological as well as behavioral affair, a process of cognitive awareness and assessment of the self in action.'

[18] Archaeological imagery interests me insofar as it stems from a discipline that is concerned with what artist Simon Callery describes in an interview with Paul Bonaventura as 'examining our relationship to time and our place to its continuity […] [It is] an activity concerned with the present [and] with projecting ourselves into the past […] Archaeology is ordered and structured to record and interpret evidence of past human activity, but it is driven by contemporary questions' (Callery quoted in Bonaventura 2011: 207).

explored processes of transformation and becoming such as metamorphosis, hatching and mutating, as evidenced in insect life.[19]

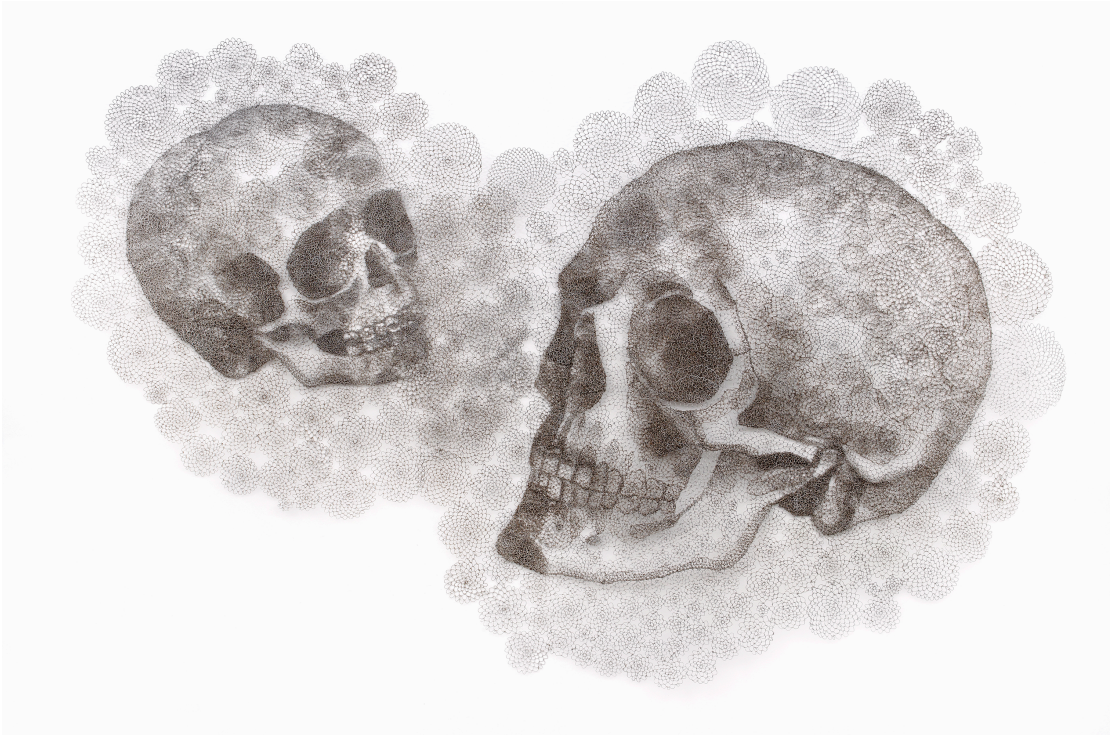

Figure 1 Walter Oltmann, *Mother and Child* (2013), Aluminium wire, 190 x 280 cm.

Sennett (2008: 123) observes that the durational aspect of making can prove to be one way to separate craft and art: 'craft practice is stretched out, art of the original sort is a more immediate event.' The making process involved in repetitive craftwork requires patience and persistence and seems to engage a particular temporal sensibility. The acquisition of craft skills also takes time. Ingold (2000b: 327-328) refers to this long durational sense of time associated with craft as 'social time' in opposition to the time of the clock that regulates human activity.[20] He suggests that it is a person-centered experience of time that

[19] M. Anna Fariello (2004: 148) writes about the relaying of time in the reading of handmade objects and proposes that one can interpolate the meaning of an object as a document by reading it as a physical record of the process that produced it. She argues that an important feature of crafted objects is the recognition of the work of the hand coupled with a sensing of their tactile dimensions. Fariello suggests that by shifting the focus from the handmade object itself to the action of its making, the maker's experience can be carried forward to the viewer of the object (Fariello 2004: 149).

[20] Ingold (2000b: 328) notes that so-called clock-time 'appears objective and impersonal, extrinsic to social relations, and governed by laws of mechanical functioning that have no regard

is intrinsic to and embedded in the performance of skilled activity; it is closely tied to specific *tasks* and the embodied skills that are required to carry them out.[21]

Marcia Tucker (2004: 119) similarly observes that labour-intensive and meditative hand work 'reclaims and interiorizes the mind and body' and that the common expression 'time flies' means that it seems to have lost its sense of urgency. She suggests that labour-intensive processes of making engage a

> polychronic time, which is interactive, multitasked, social, and in flux, rather than linear or goal-oriented. It's the kind of time experienced in the long and complex processes of embroidering, lace-making, knitting, and quilting. Polychronic time is inherently nonhierarchic and doesn't lend itself to scheduling or prioritizing in the way that monochromic time does [...] Polychronic time weaves the past and the present together [...] (Tucker 2005: 125).[22]

In my own work, I experience the sense of hand and mind as being inseparably engaged in such a temporal zone. The repetitive, step-by-step manipulation of thread-based materials contributes to a sense of insertion in material and process. It also demonstrates an investment in the physical act of making and conveys a sense of commitment to the work and its concerns. As the American textile artist Elaine Reichek says:

---

for human feelings.' He, however, argues against a depiction of the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society as one in which a task-oriented time has been replaced by a mechanical clock-time. Rather, he suggests, 'task orientation remains central to the experience of work in industrial society, even though the reality of that experience is systematically denied by the Western discourse of freedom and necessity. Indeed, clock time is as alien to people of industrial as it is to those of pre-industrial societies: the only difference is that the former have to deal with it.'

[21] Ingold (2000b: 324) speaks of *task-orientation* as 'an orientation in which both work and time are intrinsic to the conduct of life itself, and cannot be separated or abstracted from it.' He also states that tasks are never accomplished in isolation 'but always within a setting that is itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one's own. In other words, every task exists as part of what I have called a *taskscape*, understood as the totality of tasks making up the pattern of activity of a community [...].'

[22] Neil Maycroft (2009: 7) observes that the experience of time is variable and whilst it differs from person to person, activity to activity, it can be seen as emerging out of the activities themselves. Similarly to Ingold and Tucker, he suggests that creative activity involves an element of fulfillment where time deviates from universal clock time. Handmade artworks that are particularly labour-intensive exaggerate this aspect.

> The very nature of textile production reveals a sense of intention. If something is going to take a long time to make, it is unlikely that the ideas it contains are flippant or accidental. If something is produced swiftly, intention may or may not be present. This is not to say that labour in and of itself creates meaning, but it is harder to dismiss meaning from an object that has considerable time invested in its creation (Reichek quoted in Hemmings 2013: 30).

Linked to the question of immersive time, the notion of 'flow,' as described by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1992), expands on the idea of pleasure derived from a merging of action and experience. The notion of 'flow' is frequently cited in the context of such experiences in craft practice. 'Flow' describes a pleasurable experience of immersion whereby one is wholly engaged in a task, to the point where time passes unnoticed and one forgets about demands external to the task. It is, according to Csikszentmihalyi, an absorption through which a kind of work can emerge that is stress free but also doesn't lead to boredom. As Csikszentmihalyi (1992: 72) puts it:

> *Flow activities* have as their primary function the provision of enjoyable experiences. Play, art, pageantry, ritual, and sports are some examples. Because of the way they are constructed, they help participants and spectators achieve an ordered state of mind that is highly enjoyable.

While flow can be identified in a variety of activities, play is the flow experience *par excellence* and is viewed by Csikszentmihalyi as an important ally in countering boredom (Csikszentmihalyi 1975: 36).[23] Flow happens somewhere between anxiety and boredom; a condition whereby the participant is challenged but still in control and not overwhelmed by the demands of the activity.[24]

---

[23] For a critical evaluation of Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow in terms of its temporal dimensions see Stephen Knott's (2015) *Amateur Craft: History and Theory*. Knott (2015: 98) argues that the idea of flow does not fully address the plurality of amateur time, suggesting that 'it is just one temporal modality among others and cannot claim atemporal status.' Like play, he suggests, 'amateur time is temporary, constrained and reliant; it is an impermanent temporal displacement.'

[24] Andrew Jackson (2011: 268) comments that 'flow depends on an optimal relationship between challenge and skill.' He suggests that the rewards associated with such activities of making are a powerful motivational goal, not only constituted by the completion of creating an object but also as something intrinsic to the interrogating of the moment-to-moment experience of making. Such rewards not only encourage makers to return to their activities again and again but also give them a sense of personal agency and well-being (Jackson 2011: 271).

Viveka Berggren Torell and Ulla Ranglin quote weaver Karin Lindfors as describing the feeling of attaining the moment of full engagement and reflection as: '"being there" – being *in the weave*: "You are in it! I am here"' (Lindfors quoted in Berggren Torell and Ranglin 2016: 34; my emphasis added). The sense of being 'in the weave' points to a deeply embodied experience of making whereby the rhythm and routine of process leads to a dialogical unfolding between maker and work. I experience this in my own work through a contemplative attentiveness that happens in the repetitive activity of my hands.

1.3 Art as production and manufacture

Marx's contributions to the subject of artistic making and labour have been amongst the most influential in arguing that artistic work, or practical creative activity, is not essentially different from other kinds of work. Positing artistic practice as somehow different from, or superior to other kinds of human practice is viewed in Marxist terms as a distortion. The idea of the artist as a social outcast, removed from the usual conditions of ordinary people by virtue of his artistic genius, is held as being an ideological product of a particular period. It was sharpened by the nineteenth century Romantic notion of the artist that came about as a result of the rise of individualism alongside the development of industrial capitalism. The separation of the artist from the security of patronage left him[25] in a precarious position in the market, thus the image of the practitioner working 'alone, detached from social life and interaction and often in opposition to social values and practices' (Woolff 1993: 11).[26] Janet Woolff states that:

[25] It was mostly men who were considered to be artists.

[26] Woolff notes that before this period, artists were well integrated into the social structures in which they worked. They were commissioned by aristocratic patrons and in no sense defined themselves as outcasts or opponents of the social order. Even in a contemporary situation this view of the artist is misleading as it refers to only one type of artist – the struggling, self-employed artist trying to sell his/her work via dealers and galleries. While the decline of the secure commission from a patron is correct to note, there are however 'new forms of patronage and employment for artists, many of whom are indeed integrated, *as* artists, into various branches of capitalist production and social organisation. In the plastic arts, this would include

> while it is true that the development of our society *has* marginalized artists, it does not mean that it is the essence of art to transcend life, and to surpass the real, the social, and even the personal (Woolff 1993: 12).

The concept of the artist as an asocial being blessed with genius is thus an ahistorical one and, as Woolff indicates, the real problem is one 'which concerns capitalism more than the nature of art' (1993: 12).

Woolff (1993: 13) further argues that the mystification of art as divinely inspired or superior to other forms of making can be challenged by showing that all forms of work are potentially creative in the same way. According to Woolff, Marx made explicit connections between artistic making and labour. As she states, he argued that creative practical activity distinguished humans from animals and that, in non-alienated conditions, humans are able to use their creative imagination constructively to change nature and their surroundings. Thus, in its ideal form, such non-alienated labour is creative and transformative. Following Marx, Adolfo Sanchez Vasquez (1973: 61) points out: 'Work is the expression and fundamental condition of human freedom, and its significance lies only in its relationship to human needs.' Artistic labour/work shares common ground with all labour. As Vasquez (1973: 63) says:

> The similarity between art and labor thus lies in their shared relationship to the human essence; that is, they are both creative activities by means of which man produces objects that express him, that speak for and about him. Therefore, there is no radical opposition between art and work.

In view of the above, Woolff (1993: 13) argues: '[W]hether or not the poet, or artist, is self-consciously aware of the productive process, art is *always*

---

graphic artists working in industry, designers, artists in advertising, community artists, and so on' (Woolff 1993: 11-12).

"manufacture".' In other words, all forms of work are '(potentially) creative in the same way.'[27]

In arguing against the idea of artist-as-creator, Woolff demonstrates that the artist can be seen to play much less of a part in the production of the work than the notion of artist as divinely inspired genius commonly allows. Many people are involved in the production of the work. The work is also contingent on sociolocal and ideological factors and active part is also played by the viewers in creating the finished product. All of these factors can be seen to remove the artist from a centre-stage position of sole creator (Woolff 1991: 25).[28]

1.4 Labour, work, art, play,

John Roberts (2010: 87) states that Marx makes a fundamental distinction between artistic production and productive labour. Marx sees certain forms of creative labour as being excluded from the law of value because, as Roberts (2010: 87) puts it, 'their forms cannot be reproduced *through* socialized labour, and, as such, they remain resistant to, indeed excluded from, the routinisations of the labour-process.'[29] Woolff similarly observes that Marx, in writing about labour, or work, as a free form of activity or productivity, sees it as a necessary human activity insofar as it is not forced or alienated (Woolff 1993: 16). This is where a distinction between the notions of *labour* and *work* can be considered.

---

[27] M. Anna Fariello (2005: 167) notes that the etymology of the word 'manufacture' reflects the idea of craftsmanship as being integral to production: manus meaning 'hand' and *facere* meaning 'to make.' The handmade, she suggests, is thus implicit in manufacturing.

[28] On the point of the collective production of art Woolff (1991: 32) observes that in some cases, such as the making a film, it is quite obvious that the production of art involves a collaborative effort. But the argument of art being a collective product goes much further in that, firstly, it 'refers to aspects of cultural production which do not feature in the immediate making of the work, but are necessary preconditions for it – certain technological prerequisites (stroboscopes, electronic equipment, and so on, or even the simple act of the invention of printing or of oil paint in an earlier time), and particular aesthetic codes or genres, on which a new work will call and which it will, to some extent, even in innovating, employ.'

[29] As Roberts (2010: 87) comments, this is not to say that artists' works are not commodities, but rather that 'the artwork's status as a commodity is not strictly subject to the price-calculation of the new law of value.' He further qualifies: 'Some artists may fall under the disciplinary régime of the law of value – working harder, faster; subject to re-routinisation and technical division – that is, those that are engaged in the production of mass-produced artistic products, but the majority of artists are not, insofar as they are engaged in the production of *non-reproducible* forms' (2010: 86).

Labour and work are frequently used somewhat interchangeably and can be understood as being near-synonyms (in that they both refer to the human capacity to produce and be creative). But, as Bryan-Wilson (2009: 32) comments, 'it is important to recognize that they are not exact equivalents.' John Holloway (2010) suggests that Marx distinguishes between labour and doing. That is, between waged labour and the activity of producing as free creativity (outside the capitalist logic of production), which can be understood as *work*. In this context Bryan-Wilson (2009: 32) cites Raymond Williams as saying that work refers to general doing or making, including all forms of paid employment, while labour refers more explicitly to the organization of employment under capitalism.[30] She further observes that one of the legacies of Marx's thought is his assertion that 'art is a mode of skilled production – a mode of work – much like any other and as such is open to categories of analysis that attend to its production, distribution, and consumption' (Bryan-Wilson 2009: 29). She also adds that Marx conceived of art as being itself *productive* in that he understood aesthetics 'as formative to the education of the senses – art, that is, helps create social subjects' (2009: 30).

Understanding artists as working under conditions of relative creative autonomy where they have the freedom to express themselves and organize their own work processes raises the question of how the notion of art is to be seen in relation to work; how is art different from work? In an interview with Chris Mansour, Bryan-Wilson responds to this line of questioning as follows:

> First of all, there is no one type of work and no one type of worker; these are not monolithic constructs. Simultaneously, art is itself a category that is fragile and tenuous. It is challenging to place someone who sells hand-thrown ceramics at a craft fair together with someone who is in the Venice Biennale: the markets are different, the value

[30] Bryan-Wilson observes that Williams' *labor* as "a term for a commodity and a class," 'denotes both the aggregate body of workers as a unit and "the economic abstraction of an activity"' (Williams 1976 cited in Bryan-Wilson 2009: 32). She further notes Williams commenting on 'the slightly outmoded and highly specialized nature of labour; the phrase *art worker*, meant to signal class affiliations even as those affiliations were frequently disavowed, thus activated a much wider sphere of activity than *art laborer* and was used to encompass current concerns such as process and fabrication' (Bryan-Wilson 2009: 32).

> structures are different, the gendered valences are different etc. So there is a huge range here, from what might be called the "low" to what we think of as the "high," in levels of production, levels of cultural capital, levels of access, and the question of free time. We have to be careful to not collapse all these things, even as it is helpful to consider the moments of vital connection between all modalities of making. The moniker "art worker" has always been contradictory. Art, in some regards, maintains a distinction from other forms of labor because of its unruliness (Bryan-Wilson quoted in Mansour 2012: 5).

An understanding of work in its most creative form aligns closely with Marx's view of work as being purposeful, social activity through which humans create a world, humanize nature and realize their potential.[31] Definitions of labour and work are not fixed, and as Bryan-Wilson (2009: 33) points out, their contours have been relentlessly called into question.[32] While Marx did not himself deal directly with play as a category, some of his comments do suggest that he considered play as being a dialectical coordinate of labour. The creative element of work is, as Maynart Solomon (1973: 123) puts it in writing about Marx's theories on art,

> the imagination, the free "play" of man's "bodily and mental powers." To participate in creative, human labor, man withdraws from the instinctive, repetitive labor process and turns it into play, into mimetic representation, into illusion, into art, so that when he returns to labor it may be transformed into a conscious, supra-instinctive, freedom-creating activity.

Solomon (1973: 123) states that work and play are a 'unity of opposites peculiar to the human being' and that in this sense 'play is the philosophy, the art of work.

---

[31] Many scholars have addressed the distinctiveness of art in relation to other forms of work. In her book *The Vocation of the Artist*, Deborah J. Haynes (1997), for example, examines notions of labour, work and action in an attempt to reconceptualize artistic work. She bases the distinctions of labour, work and action on the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, as explored in her book *The Human Condition* (1958). Haynes points out that Arendt analyses human activities in the world in terms of labour, work and action as follows: '*Labor* is cyclical and repetitive. *Work* is teleological: It has a beginning and an end, is instrumental, and is often violent. *Action* is unpredictable, irreversible, and anonymous' (Haynes 1997: 44).

[32] In her book titled *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (2009) Bryan-Wilson examines the massive shifts that the very definitions of work and labour were undergoing in the Vietnam War era and how 'substantive changes being wrought in global and national economies forced a reevaluation of what it means to work, what work should look like, and who counted as a worker' (Bryan-Wilson 2009: 33).

To argue priority is ultimately non-dialectical.'[33] Under capitalism the play and art elements of labour become diminished and thus, according to Marx, the play-labour unity needs to be restored so that the specifically human element can return to the labour process (Solomon 1973: 124). In this sense, Solomon argues, Marx's vision is ultimately identical with Friedrich Schiller's famous phrase: 'Man only plays when he is a man in the full sense of the word, and he is only completely a man when he plays' (quoted in Solomon 1973: 124).[34]

In my examination of handcrafted processes used by South African artists I consider how an integration of work and play is facilitated through meditative activity carried out over time. I begin by addressing my own engagement with weaving in my sculptural practice and articulate my concerns around craft processes involving making by hand. Later on, in Section Two, I focus on Botha and his co-producers' adoption of weaving in creating sculptures and how it embodies the notion of formation. I then examine other artists' adoption of similar processes.

1.5 Materials and processes in my own sculptural practice

In my own sculptural practice, I have always felt at home with craft-based activities involving slow and repetitive handwork. Aluminium wire is my primary sculptural medium, although I occasionally also work in steel, copper and brass wire or combine wire with sisal or nylon rope and introduce beaded

[33] Solomon (1973: 123) adds to this: 'And yet, we may note that play always precedes labor in childhood, and usually takes its autonomous modes of action from life processes quite remote from labor. In a Marxist sense labor becomes specifically human only through play, but play exists in dialectical opposition to modalities other than labor.'

[34] Tim Stott (2015: 18) states that 'the humanist argument understands play as a voluntary, intentional, or internally motivated activity, and often advocates play as the optimal achievement of a human agent. When we play, and especially when we play with art, we are most fully ourselves and most free. This argument finds its first articulation in Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). For Schiller, play has a reconciliatory power. It is the unified action of sensuous reason, an engagement with the world by which "the autonomy of reason is … opened up within the domain of sense" (*Die Selbsttätigkeit der Vernunft … auf dem Felde der Sinnlichkeit eröffnet*) and which therefore corrects and safeguards against the fragmentary demands of everyday necessities' (Schiller quoted in Stott 2015: 18).

elements.[35] My techniques recall both African and European craft traditions and acknowledge interchanges between them. I do not work in exact imitation of traditional techniques but rather adapt my own methods to reference or allude to crafts from Africa and the West and invoke gender associations attached to such traditions of making. By shifting between such references in relation to imagery that resonates with my processes, I set up unexpected combinations and uneasy alliances to unsettle assumptions underlying hierarchical divisions between modes of making.[36] Using mostly wire which is an intractable and tensile material in contrast to the more labile quality of twine, I often explore a much larger scale in the forms I produce than what one generally associates with traditional textile-based crafts.[37] Wire weaving continues to be my preferred mode of fabricating sculptures.

I first began to explore the possibilities of using wire as sculptural medium during my Fine Arts student years.[38] Some of my tutors used materials such as steel, wood and stone in creating their own artworks in the sculpture studio alongside our student works. Through this presence, a certain work ethic and approach to making rubbed off on us while we were being exposed to a range of sculptural materials and methods. The processes of building and joining that we observed our tutors employing in their own works spurred us on to explore similar ways of directly handling and responding to materials. It engendered in us a consciousness of process in the conceptualization of artworks. I began by

---

[35] The light weight of aluminium allows me to create forms on a larger scale and also gives me the option to consider subsequent colouring by way of anodizing. I order the wire from a factory that produces overhead electricity cables, specifying the wire to be annealed to its softest grade for easier handling in my weaving.

[36] Brenda Schmahmann (2014) elaborates on this in her essay on my work titled "Neither Fish nor Fowl: Walter Oltmann's Confounding Categories."

[37] Some of the information presented in this section is taken from an interview with Neil Dundas published in my 2014 exhibition catalogue "In the Weave: Walter Oltmann: working over three decades" as well as texts written by myself for flyers accompanying my solo exhibitions titled "Penumbra," Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg (20 June-22 July 2013) and "Cradle" Goodman Gallery, Cape Town (20 October – 12 December 2015).

[38] I completed the BA Fine Arts degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, from 1978 to 1981 and was taught sculpture by Henry Davies and Willem Strydom. Davies produced meticulously crafted small-scale objects in stone, wood, metal and plastics and Strydom constructed large-scale welded metal forms incorporating bolted wooden elements. Printmaking lecturer Malcolm Christian occasionally worked in the sculpture studio on welded metal sculptures and our ceramics teachers Juliet Armstrong, Ian Calder and Garth Claasen also maintained strong connections to the sculpture division through their own practice.

working in metal, stone and wood but found myself intuitively gravitating towards using thread-based materials and activities of binding and weaving.

As students, we would at times accompany our tutors to metal scrapyards in search for cheaper materials. In the early 1980s I came across a rusty roll of steel wire and a square-metre section of mesh during such a scrapyard visit.[39] Being similar to thread-based materials used for domestic handcrafts, the spool of wire and piece of mesh struck me as possessing potential for adapting the craft of looping a carpet on canvas, a technique that I had learnt at home as a child. I was attracted to the idea of creating an object that would incongruously combine a making process associated with the 'feminine' realm of the domestic with a hardware material associated with the 'masculine'; hard material would meet soft process, as it were. I proceeded by cutting, looping and crimping short segments of wire with a pair of wire cutters and then insert them through the holes of the mesh to create a dense bristle. Filling the rows of mesh sequentially, I had enough rusty wire only to tuft a corner of the mesh and had to commit to purchasing a much larger quantity of new galvanized steel wire from a local manufacturer. The accumulated weight resulting from the dense tufting soon became apparent and increasingly hampered the process of tufting. I had to find ways of supporting the weighty carpet over a strong metal frame while allowing access to further tufting from below. In accentuating the element of accumulated weight even further, I decided to add netted chunks of cut soapstone to the mesh. The making of this sculpture demanded a considerable amount of time, patience and commitment to completing the process. The density of the tufted wire translated into a highly tactile and very heavy, thick pile carpet. I finally placed it on a low wooden base with coasters to allow for ease of moving it. I titled my first wire sculpture *Carpet Piece* (Fig 2, p28).[40]

---

[39] At the time, I was registered at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, for the MA Fine Arts degree (1982-1985) under the supervision of Willem Strydom. My MA dissertation was titled: "Elements of Play and Environmental Concerns in Recent Sculpture."

[40] I was also aware of Eva Hesse's similar approach to using threaded materials in creating dense tufting, as for example in her sculpture titled *Accession II* (1967), a metal box tufted on the inside with segments of plastic hose. *Carpet Piece* (1983) was one of several wire and stone sculptures submitted towards my MA Fine Arts degree and is housed in the Wits Art Museum collection.

Figure 2 Walter Oltmann, *Carpet Piece* (1983), Galvanized steel wire and soapstone, 16 x 108 x 102 cm.

My choice to combine wire and stone was based on gabion baskets I had seen being built along roadside embankments and mine dumps in and around Johannesburg. Used as stabilizing retainers, gabions are a form of fortification against soil erosion achieved through the compact packing of stones in wire cages. Coming from the smaller city of Pietermaritzburg where I had completed my undergraduate studies, I was encouraged by my sculpture lecturers to try find ways of working in which I would respond to the particularities of my new environment in Johannesburg. Gabion baskets made from industrially pre-manufactured galvanized steel wire seemed appropriate in response to the tough mining environment of the city, and submitting such forms to sculptural manipulation was my way of responding to the urban-industrial mining metropolis. The rocks which I collected in and around the city for stacking inside my gabion sculptures spoke indexically to the site of Johannesburg and alluded to its history of mining.

Amongst the contemporary sculptors to whose works I responded in my research, Robert Smithson's gabion-like *Site/Non-site* works of the late 1960s intrigued me. Smithson's forms consisted of geometric aluminium containers stacked with rocks that he had sourced from specific sites. As Alex Potts (2000: 324) observes, Smithson was 'interested in exploring ambiguities and instabilities of everyday designations of place […].' Potts explains that Smithson's *Site/Non-site* works represented a form of symbiosis between the non-site of the gallery display and a place/site outside of the gallery from which he had collected actual bits of material and to which the container referred.[41] In the construction of my own gabion-based forms in the gallery context I was interested in similarly articulating an exchange between inside and outside. What also drew me to these forms was the fact that gabions would eventually rust and disintegrate, exposing a certain vulnerability in terms of their intended long-term function as buttresses against soil erosion. I responded to Smithson's concern with physical deterioration of materials and the notion of entropy.

What also attracted me to using gabion forms was the fact that they are manually constructed on site. Handwork is involved in the forming and arranging of the wire cages, the stacking of rocks inside them and the final stitching together of the containers. My interest in process-driven art forms also led me to research works by artists aligned with Postminimalism, Process Art and Anti-form such as Eva Hesse, Jacquie Winsor and Robert Morris. These artists introduced soft and malleable materials as well as textile-based methods to contemporary art.[42] In my own sculptures I explored forms of containing, strapping and netting of

---

[41] Potts (2000: 324) notes that Smithson's forms articulated a concern with the validity of the art object in relation to place, presenting a kind of anti-object that would destabilize the self-sufficient, specific object of minimalism. In their ambiguous status, he suggests, the works seemed to occupy their own niche. By accompanying the boxed chunks of rock with text and maps pertaining to the site, Potts continues, the raw encounter is evoked through mediating references, putting less pressure on the viewer's engagement with the significance of what is presented in the gallery.

[42] Stephen Feeke and Sophie Raikes (2010: 5) observe that the methods used in such process-driven artworks recall Richard Serra's "Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself" (1967-8) in which he listed 108 actions, e.g. 'to roll,' 'to fold,' 'to bend,' which he would then enact on materials in his studio. By doing these actions he was suggesting, as the authors point out, that 'the means of making an artwork can partly or wholly be its subject.' The action-based nature of craft-work allows for ideas to evolve through hands-on activity and can be a means through which to activate memory and engage particular meanings.

stones in wire to impart a sense of weight as a means to focus the viewer's engagement with the forms. Making apparent, within the object itself, the labour involved in the process of making as well as how the artwork was arrived at through repetition was another important element in amplifying such viewer engagement.[43]

While constructing frameworks encasing stones out of wire and weld-mesh, I also began to explore less compacted formations and emptied-out wire cages. I was attracted to the layering effects of transparent mesh and increasingly recognized possibilities in creating free-standing forms using wire on its own, i.e. without the addition of rocks. Weaving wire was the inevitable next step for me and I began to find my own technique of coiling to build forms incrementally, based loosely on the coiling method of basket weaving. By using a thicker gauge of wire as main thread and wrapping a thinner wire around it a few times before looping it through the previous row, I found that I could create self-supporting forms with a semi-transparent surface. I could work with the pliable but also tensile quality of wire in guiding the weaving into a desired form. The form would evolve and take shape via the repetitive process and slow accumulation so that I could anticipate where my process would lead me. Misshapen forms often happened in the process, but segments of weave could easily be cut away and rewoven. The hollow forms resulting from such coiling were certainly far more user-friendly and transportable than the massive gabion-based structures. Besides this main process of coiling, I have also explored other approaches with my materials such as knotting wires to create surfaces resembling crochet or lacework.

While exploring weaving, I gradually became more aware of the rich history of wire in Africa. I started to look more closely at examples of wirework in museum collections (including the Wits Art Museum's collection of African art) and in books. During my later teaching years in the Fine Arts department at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, I would also undertake further

[43] A series of related drawings accompanied these works, not so much as sketches towards sculptures but rather as works in their own right exploring similar ideas to the sculptures.

research into various uses of wire in African material culture of southern Africa as part of a sabbatical leave project.[44] I studied and documented examples such as elaborately woven coverings on wooden spears, staffs and knopkieries as well as present day PVC covered telephone wire adaptations of such crafts and the making of wire toys and domestic implements (Oltmann 1997).

On becoming aware of the varieties of materials used in pre-industrial African wirework (e.g. combinations of tin, copper and brass) to create richly decorative surfaces, I gradually began to explore other kinds of wire besides the galvanized steel that I had become accustomed to using for the gabion-based forms. Although more expensive, copper, brass and aluminium wire was obtainable from local scrapyards or local metal suppliers. I also introduced sisal rope to some of my weavings in response to grass-based African weavings such as Zulu baskets and mats.[45] Copper tubing cut into small sections resembling bugle beads would at times be added as a decorative surface treatment in some of my sculptural forms, loosely based on examples of African beadwork.

After completing my postgraduate studies, I was offered a short, part-time mentoring position in the sculpture department at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. At the time, sculptor Andries Botha, who taught at the Durban Technikon, turned to indigenous Zulu techniques of weaving and thatching in constructing innovative woven sculptural forms, employing Zulu weavers in collaboratively forming his works. His approach foregrounded a desire to acknowledge indigenous craft and building practices and finding ways of connecting contemporary South African sculpture with local craft traditions. In laying the foundation for a vocabulary that he deemed more appropriate for a

---

[44] I was in a full-time lecturing position from 1989 to 2016. After a term of sabbatical leave in 1994 I compiled a research report funded by the Centre for Science Development (Human Sciences Research Council) titled "Uses of Wire in the Construction, Decoration and Restoration of Artefacts in African Material Culture of southern Africa." An article titled "Decorative Uses of Wire in African Material Culture of southern Africa" was subsequently published in 1997 in the *De Arte* journal.

[45] In my drawings, I also explored such forms, as for example in a triptych titled *Stacked Baskets* submitted for the 1990 Standard Bank National Drawing Competition. In these realistic pen and ink renderings of baskets I used detailed mark-making to foreground woven and coiled forms relating to my sculptural works.

South African sculptural practice, Botha examined the dynamics of his personal relationship with his own immediate environment and the society in which he found himself. Botha's work received broad critical attention at a time when the social role of the South African artist in response to the politics of the day was hotly debated. Although I only met Botha a few times, his work and approach to making based on local craft traditions left an impression on me and corresponded with my own concerns in adapting craft techniques to sculpture.

Having grown up in rural KwaZulu-Natal, I was exposed to some extent to Zulu traditions of handwork and manufacture from an early age.[46] Also, coming from a German heritage, my family background with its traditions of handcraft played a part in determining the direction that my work would take. From my mother's and grandmother's side I was familiar with domestic crafts such as weaving and needlework, commonly associated in Western contexts with women's work. Such crafts have long been regarded as trivial and associated with superfluous decoration and nostalgic veneer. Nowadays this perception is being challenged in favour of understanding fabrication, ornament and decoration as potential conveyors of meaning. African crafts and practices of decorating objects have historically been viewed in similarly pejorative terms in relation to Western aesthetic production and such cultural prejudices are deeply rooted. Both traditions of craft thus have something in common in the way in which they have been deprecated. I view the adapting of these crafts to contemporary sculptural practice as potentially opening up a critical space for new creative possibilities.

Engagement with indigenous handcraft traditions raises the sensitive issue of cross-cultural borrowing and emulating across supposedly culturally restrictive lines. There have been suggestions that the agenda of white South African artists referencing or using indigenous art forms is inherently problematic and that such borrowing hinges on issues of power and race in the context of a colonial

[46] I grew up and attended primary school in Nongoma and my parents would later move to Melmoth.

past.[47] As Nicholas Thomas (1999: 141) observes, appropriation is characterized by an 'unstable duality'; it will always, in some proportion, combine a taking *and* acknowledging, borrowing *and* paying homage. The heat of the appropriation debate, he comments, 'arises from the fact that what is laudable interest in indigenous art from one point of view is unsanctioned borrowing, an act of theft, from another.' Whether the practices of contemporary South African artists who engage with local cultural meanings can be viewed as forms of redress, restoration and restitution will be a question attending my examination of artists' engagements with craft-based forms of making in relation to indigenous heritage.[48]

Having given some consideration to weaving-based methods of making and how such processes can be understood in relation to the categories of art, labour, work and play, I now turn my attention to the generative practice of weaving itself and consider the role of materials and hands in such activity. I expand on Ingold's notion of textilic making as 'form-taking activity' and an ever-emergent generation of things (Ingold 2012: 433).[49] His perspective on making as a process of growth is particularly pertinent to my study in giving an understanding of materials and makers as active and dynamic participants in unfolding activity. The South African artists whose works I examine in Section Two all engage in exploring materials by hand and are thus intimately involved in processes that Ingold describes as 'intuition in action' (Ingold 2011a: 211).

---

[47] Aneta Pawłowska (2011: 186), for example, argues that 'contact and exchange' carry traumatic connotations in the context of South Africa's colonial heritage and its politics of domination, and that appropriation 'extends beyond a simple (re)presentation of cultural artefacts and practices […].' She argues that non-indigenous artists should learn to step back from engaging with indigenous art.

[48] The fraught area of cross-cultural engagement has received considerable attention in art historical and anthropological scholarship from Australia and there seems to be a more general movement in that country towards viewing cross-cultural engagements in progressive terms, pointing towards a way out of a moral and political impasse of non-engagement (Morphy [Sa]: 1-2). There are clearly differences between a majority white country such as Australia and the racial profile of a country such as South Africa, as Kevin Murray (2005:17) indicates, but parallels can be drawn in concerns around cross-cultural engagements. I briefly touch on these at the end of my chapter on the artworks of Andries Botha.

[49] Ingold (2012: 432-3) borrows the term 'form-taking activity' from the philosopher Gilbert Simonden (1964, 1989, 2005) who postulated that 'the generation of things should be understood as a process of ontogenesis in which form is ever emergent rather than given in advance.'

CHAPTER 2

TEXTILIC MAKING AND THE ACTIVITY OF HANDS IN FOLLOWING MATERIALS

In this chapter I bring together a number of reflections on the activity of making viewed as the encounter with and transformation of materials by human hands. It includes anthropological and cultural perspectives on material practices that address fundamental questions of how we manipulate materials. I also consider reflections on the 'vitality' or 'liveliness' of materials, recognizing that agency is distributed and not only the province of humans (Bennett 2010). I further examine the hand and its seminal role in making, not only as a passive executor of intentions but also as having 'its own intentionality, knowledge and skills' (Palasmaa 2009: 21).

Understanding making processually, i.e. as not being so much about an end but an engaged process, highlights an open-endedness in the manipulation of materials. Materials have properties and potentials that invite handling in particular ways and can 'communicate' with the maker in experimentation. Working *with* materials by being sensitive to their possibilities can at times allow them to lead, i.e. to be agents of action. Through a process of discovery, invention and tactile interaction with materials, making involves processing through which the maker acquires embodied knowledge by *doing*. Ingold's textilic account of making presents it as a practice of weaving that underscores ongoing and generative movement. Making, according to Ingold, is about a world-forming experience that is continually coming into being through weaving (Ingold 2000b: 64).

I further introduce Ingold's critical response to environmental psychologist James Gibson's notion of affordance in outlining a reflexively engaged and world-forming relationship of practitioner to his/her environment. Our hands know their way around their environment and possess a degree of autonomy in enabling us to cope in our daily activities. Affordability is thus presented more as a matter of the experience of the maker than a 'given' quality of objects. Hands

play an essential role in orienting us but also in aiding us to construct our world. The chapter ends with observations on the skills of hands in the partnership between practitioner and materials and the development of anticipation.

2.1 The textility of making

In his book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Ingold (2011a: 178) writes:

> in practice, making is less a matter of projection than one of *gathering*, more analogous, perhaps, to sewing or weaving than to shooting arrows at a target. As they make things, practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of the world. It is a question not of imposing form on matter, as in the so-called hylomorphic model of creation, but of intervening in the fields of force and flows of material wherein the forms of things arise and are sustained. Thus the creativity of making lies in the practice itself, in an improvisatory movement that works things out as it goes along.

Writing about skills like sawing, drawing, calligraphy and even kite flying, Ingold's essays repeatedly focus on the notion of becoming and movement. The idea of the path is understood as the primary condition of being.

Defining the *hylomorphic* model of creation as based on Aristotelian reasoning that in order to create something one brings together form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*), Ingold (2011a: 210) states that this model works on the assumption that making is about the imposition of form on material by someone who has a design in mind. This model has become deeply embedded in Western thought but has also become increasingly unbalanced, as Ingold argues, and he proposes to overthrow and replace it with what he refers to as 'an ontology that assigns primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products, and to the flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter' (Ingold 2011a: 210). Arguing that skilled practice is not as much about an imposition of form on matter as it is about an 'intervening in the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated,' he remarks:

> Practitioners, I contend, are wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose (Ingold 2011a: 210-211).

Using this idea of wayfaring as the fundamental mode by which living things inhabit the world, Ingold understands making as a way in which forms arise and evolve within the 'force and flows of material' and that practitioners make things by intervening in response to these force-fields (2010a: 91). He thus describes making as a practice of weaving involving a binding of pathways and lines of becoming 'into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld' (2010a: 91). Life seen as a weaving together of a web of movements is central to Ingold's writings on making and he sees such movements as profoundly social activities that are perceptive of the world and also generative and transformative of it. Making is a matter of 'following materials' and attending to 'materials-becoming-things' (2011a: 179).

2.2 Making as growth and movement of becoming

Ingold (2013: 20-21) presents making as *growth* in contrast to making understood as a *project*, i.e. as starting out with an idea of what we want to achieve. Thinking of making as *growth* understands the maker as participant amongst active materials and in the process of making s/he 'joins forces' with the materials in manipulating them to see what might emerge in the process. He elaborates as follows:

> The maker's ambitions, in this understanding, are altogether more humble than those implied by the hylomorphic model. Far from standing aloof, imposing his designs on a world that is ready and waiting to receive them, the most he can do is to intervene in worldly processes that are already going on, and which give rise to the forms of the living world that we see all around us – in plants and animals, in waves of water, snow and sand, in rocks and clouds – adding his own impetus to the forces and energies in play (Ingold 2013: 21).

This is an understanding of making as what Ingold refers to as a form-generating process. It is not to say that the maker does not have an idea in mind of what

s/he wants to make, but an engagement *with* materials suggests that it is not the *form* that creates the work but rather the *engagement* with materials. It is therefore important to look at this engagement if one wants to understand how things are made (Ingold 2013: 22).

Ingold (2010a: 83) thus describes making in terms of an openness towards the world, a process of growth and becoming that is central to life.[50] His emphasis on becoming through movement stresses that it is in doing via movement that knowledge is integrated '*alongly*', as he puts it, in a process that he describes as *meshworking* (2011a: 154).[51] In a chapter titled *On Weaving a Basket* he argues the point that weaving is the basis of all making as follows:

> The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave. If it has a surface, it is like the surface of the basket: it has no 'inside' or 'outside.' Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is *in the weave* of the surface itself. And it is *within this weave* that our projects of making, whatever they may be, are formulated and come to fruition. Only if we are capable of weaving, only then can we make (Ingold 2000a: 348) [my emphasis added].

Ingold therefore sees weaving as an organic craft practice that is not produced from a visualized design before the weaving process: he considers it a profoundly philosophical activity. As Jane Webb observes, he sees the making of a basket as an activity of growth that combines the goal and the making practice and it is a process that also extends to how we exist in the world. In this sense, Webb (2010: 7) suggests, Ingold's notion of craft practice extends to the 'fabric of the world.'

---

[50] Ingold notes that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari express something similar in their view that 'the essential relation, in a world of life, is not between matter and form but between *materials* and *forces.*' In this respect, he suggests, they speak of life lived along lines – 'lines of flight' or 'lines of becoming' that do not connect (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 cited in Ingold 2010: 91-92).

[51] Ingold borrows the term 'meshwork' from the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre and notes: 'There is something in common, Lefebvre observes, between the way in which words are inscribed upon a page of writing, and the way in which the movements and rhythms of human and non-human activity are registered in lived space, but only if we think of writing not as a verbal composition but as a tissue of lines – not as *text* but as *texture*' (Ingold 2011a: 84).

2.3 Working *with* materials – towards a cognitive interface with materiality.

Underlining Ingold's idea of material as matter-in-motion, art historian Petra Lange-Berndt (2015: 12) elaborates on material as implicated in processes of enactment as follows:

> [M]aterial generally denotes substances that will be further processed, it points to the forces of production at the time. From a critical perspective, the term 'material' describes not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change, be it through their handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions. It is therefore a political decision to focus on the materials of art: it means to consider the processes of making and their associated power relations, to consider the workers – whether they are factories, studios or public spaces, whether they are known or anonymous – and their tools and spaces of production.

Such a perspective on material highlights the interface between people and their material world, i.e. the interrelation between our bodies in our societal interactions and the entities we encounter in the material world. Tim Dant (2005: 84) comments that this interaction between ourselves as material bodies and other things as material bodies is the stuff of technology and the material culture of society. It is something, as he suggests, that is so close to our life experience that we tend to take it for granted and that deserves to be looked at more closely in examining the way in which our material culture gives substance to the society we live in (Dant 2005: 84).

Lange-Berndt (2015: 12) further comments that, in the field of academic art-historical research, there has been a tendency to ignore or sideline the role of materials in the visual arts and to take it for granted. She states that engaging with materials seems for some to be the antithesis of intellectuality, 'a playground for those not interested in theory' (Lange-Berndt 2015: 12). Even in art historical discourse that explores aspects of embodiment, touch and materialization of thought, she comments, there is still a tendency to use materials 'only *to think about* or *to think with*, and again act as the indicator of

something else.' She argues that the societal characteristics emanating from materials and their histories tend to be ignored and that an actual focus on material, what it means to give agency to material and to follow material and act *with it*, remains surprisingly rare (Lange-Berndt 2015: 12). In the following sections I will focus on these questions, starting off by examining the notions of material culture and embodied cognition.

2.4 Material culture and embodied cognition

Jules D. Prown and Thomas J. Schlereth provide a broad definition of material culture as follows:

> Material culture properly connotes physical manifestations of culture and therefore embraces those segments of human learning and behavior which provide a person with plans, methods and reasons for producing and using things that can be seen and touched [...] [The individual object] is concrete evidence of presence of human mind operating at the time of fabrication (Prown and Schlereth 1999 quoted in Fariello 2005: 150).

As a field of study, material culture has its historical origin within the disciplines of archeology and anthropology but, as Michael Yonan (2011: 1) adds, it transcends academic divisions and exists as an interdisciplinary space among various categories such as cognitive science, psychology, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, history, folklore studies etc.[52] Schlereth puts it succinctly in stating that material culture studies refers to a 'method of cultural enquiry employing physical objects as its primary data' (1985 quoted in Bolin & Blandy 2003: 250).

Christopher Tilley (2006: 2) expands on these definitions by noting that people cannot be understood apart from things and that much of material culture studies is concerned with exploring how people make things and how things in

[52] For a discussion of the emergence of the terms 'material culture' and 'material culture studies,' see Dan Hicks's chapter titled "The Material Cultural Turn: Event and Effect" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Hicks D and Beaudry, M.C (eds.) 2010: 25 – 98).

turn make people. Tilley (2006: 61) uses the term 'objectification' in referring to this embedded relationship between subjects and objects and says:

> Through making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living with things people make themselves in the process. The object world is thus absolutely central to an understanding of the identities of individual persons and societies. Or, to put it another way, without the things – material culture – we could neither be ourselves nor know ourselves. Material culture is thus inseparable from culture and human society. It is not a sub-set of either, a part of a domain of something that is bigger, broader or more significant, but constitutive. Culture and material culture are the two sides of the same coin. They are related dialectically, in a constant process of being and becoming: processual in nature rather than static or fixed (Tilley 2006: 61).

In this sense, as Tilley states, material culture is the very medium 'through which we make and know ourselves' (Tilley 2006: 61).

Tilley (2006: 1) further observes that while the discipline of material culture studies focuses on the idea that materiality is an integral dimension of culture, 'material' and 'culture' still tend to be regarded as opposites, i.e. as the physical to the intellectual. Carl Knappett (2005: 35) argues that this points to the common view that sees the human body as a passive receptor of stimuli from the environment and the brain as a kind of central processing unit. He states that this perspective tends to regard the cognitive processes of the mind as being of a higher order and that such processes happen internally, in the mind, i.e. separate from the external world of perception and behaviour. It thus tends to see perception, as he puts it, as being 'somewhat "dumb," unguided, and passively responsive to stimuli' (Knappett 2005: 35).

Ingold (1993: 430-431) critiques this Cartesian perspective in which modern Western thought is rooted as a dichotomous comprehension of the material world, one that 'has given us a distinction between intellect (as a property of mind) and behavior (as bodily execution),' as he puts it. In recent years, a distinct shift has occurred away from such a dualistic view that equates intelligence with abstract reasoning occurring in the mind. Rather, intelligence is understood as deriving from or through the actions of our bodies and their interactions with

the material world. Chris Gosden (2006: 427) states that this shift has important implications for the study of material culture, but that these have still to be spelt out in detail. He argues that acting and thinking, body and mind are linked, rooted in our bodily activities in the world (Gosden 2006: 429). As Knappett observes, a focus on materiality involves consideration of embodiment and the idea that cognition is a dynamic and distributed process. He argues that humans are 'purposeful agents' who don't just passively wait for stimuli but actively seek them out in their environment (Knappett 2005: 41). Ingold puts it succinctly in stating that 'the skilled practitioner consults the world, rather than representations inside his or her head, for guidance on what to do next' (Ingold 2000a: 164).

Knappett (2005: 41) states that recent cognitive science has put forward a perspective in which brain, body and world are integrated and agents and objects are seen as mutually constitutive. Such an embodied/distributed cognitive approach, he argues, sees agents and organisms as extending beyond their own boundaries and similarly understands the mind as unconfined (Knappett 2005: 42). Ingold (2012: 438), for example, refers to Andy Clark's theory of an 'extended mind' as being based on the account that brain, body, and physical and social environments interact in equal measure. He mentions Clark as describing the mind as 'a "leaky organ" that mingles with the world in the conduct of its operations' (Clark 1997 quoted in Ingold 2012: 438). As Knappett (2005: 42) observes, this perspective of the mind as spilling out into the environment requires us to rethink many deeply entrenched assumptions.

In psychology and the biological sciences, the idea that thinking does not happen in an abstract, disembodied mind is referred to as embodied cognition. It recognizes that our bodies, and especially our hands, play a large role in how we think. Through physical actions we work out our thoughts – we think with our hands as much as with our brains. As psychologist Frank Wilson (1998: 307) says:

> The brain does not live inside the head, even though that is its formal habitat. It reaches out to the body, and with the body it reaches out to the world. We can say that the brain "ends" at the spinal cord, and that the spinal cord "ends" at the peripheral nerve, and the peripheral nerve "ends" at the neuromuscular junction, and on and on down the quarks, but brain and hand and hand and brain, and their interdependence includes everything else right down to the quarks.

A theory of embodied engagement is presented, for example, in archaeologist Lambros Malafouris's edited book *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (2013). In line with what I have sketched above, he posits his 'Material Engagement Theory' as challenging the view that the human mind thinks and the activity of thinking happens exclusively in the brain. Rather, he argues for an 'extended cognition' as one that sees thought as being continuous with the material world; as extending into the environment (Malafouris 2013: 2-3). Writing about the extended mind he says: 'Our ways of thinking are not merely causally dependent upon but *constituted* by extracranial bodily processes and material artefacts' (2013: 227). As an approach based on archaeological study of materiality, neurology and cognition, material engagement theory aims to understand how humans engage with material artefacts and sets out to show that such material artefacts are integral to the process of cognition.

Theories of embodied engagement such as Malafouris's imply that cognition is fundamentally a means of our engagement with the world, i.e. brain, body and material environment working together to produce intelligent behaviour. It provides a shift in perspective from 'stopped-up objects to leaky things,' as Ingold (2012: 438) puts it, challenging assumptions about materials as durable and discrete forms in favour of viewing them as active participants in a process that carries on. As Ingold (2012: 439) puts it: 'Materials are not *in* time; they are the stuff of time itself.' Such an activity- or process-oriented understanding of materials informs my own practice and that of the artists whose works I examine further on.

2.5 Active materials

Arguing that the focus in anthropology, archaeology and material culture has tended to be on the materiality of objects rather than on materials and their properties, Ingold (2011a: 16) suggests that engaging directly with materials teaches us more about what happens to them in our processes of making things. We then discover, he argues, that materials are in fact active (Ingold 2011a: 16). Following active materials, rather than treating them as dead matter, is what Ingold underscores in speaking about their *doing*. It is through their qualities, movements and force that they exert their life (Ingold 2011a: 16). Ingold further comments that making something by hand with materials involves a rhythmic activity of attunement in response to materials. It is not merely habitual but demands a kind of concentration that, as he puts it, 'is not confined within the head of the practitioner but reaches out into the environment along multiple pathways of sensory participation' (Ingold 2011a: 18).[53]

Political theorist Jane Bennett (2010) explores the idea of the presence and powers of materials in her book *Vibrant Matter: a political economy of things*. She argues that matter and materials are not neutral and inanimate but rather, lively and vital (Bennett 2010: xiii). By the term 'vitality' she means

> the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own (Bennett 2010: viii).

[53] Chantel Carr and Chris Gibson (2015: 6) argue that Ingold's understanding of making as following the lead of materials means working with the particular properties that materials afford and therefore also allowing failure, error and adjustment to guide the process. Rather than seeing these aspects as obstacles to overcome, they propose making in this sense as a process of iteration whereby making becomes 'a material conversation – a physical provocation and a response, iterated over and again, working with the material to understand its capacities, analyse error and make adjustment' (Carr and Gibson 2015: 7). They further observe that Ingold draws a distinction between material iteration and itineration and quote him as saying that the latter allows for 'continual correction, in response to an ongoing perceptual monitoring of the task as it unfolds' (2006 quoted in Carr and Gibson 2015: 7). In other words, it allows for improvisation to happen in the context of change. Creativity, they suggest, is in this sense about the ability to respond to iterations with materials as they unfold and to use the haptic knowledge that arises to manipulate processes, make judgements and seize opportunities as things evolve (Carr and Gibson 2015: 7).

Andrew Poe (2011: 153) comments that Bennett's is one of many voices in the so-called 'new materialist movement' which takes the idea seriously that things act as agents along *with* humans.[54] He states that the 'humanist' view that ascribes political agency solely to the human subject is challenged by the new materialists as causing division between the human and the world – between subject and object. Poe (2011: 153) further observes that this recent turn by theorists and philosophers towards materialism shifts the focus away from a human-privileged agency towards understanding humanity as embedded and working together in a context of material networks, both human and non-human, organic and inorganic. In asking whether 'things' cannot also evince agency, he sees the new materialists as calling for a major reorientation in our thinking about, and acting in, the world.

Bennett (2010: 6) speaks of 'thing-power' as 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle,' and suggests that a vibrant materialism begins with recognizing things in this way. She maintains that it will then also lead us to acknowledge our own body as a thing. Bennett also uses the term 'actant' (borrowed from Bruno Latour) to suggest that things have agency. She defines an actant as 'a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events' (Bennett 2010: viii). Poe (2011: 155) states that things are in this sense no longer mere objects as they are seen to have agentive force in the world. Bennett stresses, however, that actants never act alone. They act within 'assemblages' (a term she borrows from Deleuze and Guattari): 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts' (Bennett 2010: 23). In this sense, as Alan R. Van Wyk (2012: 132) argues, agency becomes distributed; any singular agency is always implicated by other agencies.

[54] Petra Lange-Berndt (2015: 17) also mentions feminist theorists Karen Barad and Elizabeth Grosz as important contributors to this new discourse of materialisms. She states that Barad's agential realism understands matter as 'a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations rather than as property of things.' Similarly, she mentions Grosz as pointing out how 'materials are always in a state of becoming, entangled in vibrant webs of relations, with their own ecologies and politics.'

Poe (2011: 159) suggests that this recognition of the agentive in the non-human allows for pathways of action outside of and beyond the human. He sees the new materialist argument as directly opposing human-centrism, instead positioning the human within the dynamic web of life. He observes that whereas a science-based humanist outlook depends on 'stillness,' a 'frozen' view of life that is in conflict with how we experience reality, new materialism is changing the very thinking of what 'matter' is. In stating that our own experience of materialism is always variable, he says:

> materiality is both what is there to be regarded as a thing and that which is the means of our conceiving its thing-ness. (It is the frame, as it were, by which we acknowledge the parameters of knowing thing-ness now) (Poe 2015: 161).

Thinking of materials as active and as agents of action in art making, i.e. as leading an activity, is an idea that poses the artist/material relationship as a dynamic dialogue. The artist and materials can be seen as participating in this dialogue by responding to each other and evolving together. Kelley Dobson (2013: 140) underlines this aspect when she says: 'People are material, too, after all; our materiality renders us in the mix.' In this comment, she echoes philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view that our bodies are things among things and that our bodies and things are made of the same stuff, or that 'things have an internal equivalent in me' (Merleau-Ponty 1964 quoted in Radman (ed.) 2013: 373). Dobson (2013: 140) further observes:

> Material is not passive, brute, inert, or dumb. Material has potential and activity independent of what we may see in it, make of it, or do with it. Material is as much force and energy as it is matter and volume. Materials that you think you drive could drive you. Or, you can take turns.

She further comments that perhaps more than any other material, fibre-based material 'isn't the end in itself; it is only through the making that it forms into something that might be the end […] it has to become something' (Dobson 2013: 142). Similarly, Tod Robinson (2013: 9) asserts that the way in which string, or

thread, presents itself to us as both material and tool, i.e. its capacity to be affected, is what invites handling and manipulation.[55]

2.6 Affordances

In his 'ecological approach' to perception, James Gibson[56] (1979: 127) refers to the 'graspable' or 'manipulable' property of an object or material as its 'affordance,' i.e. 'an immediate registration of an object's potential for interaction,' as he puts it. Robinson (2013: 9) refers to it as the action capabilities of an object, material or situation, i.e. understanding an object or material 'in terms of its possibilities of creative action.' Based on the complementarity of the perceiver and the environment, Gibson's concept of affordance has become a significant matter of consideration for philosophers and has been particularly influential in the field of design and ergonomics.

Ingold (2011a: 78) refers to Gibson's idea of affordances as being about perception understood as a 'discovering [of] meaning in the very process of use.' While acknowledging Gibson's important contribution to the field of perception, Ingold challenges his perspective, presenting it as being shot through with contradictions. It is worth outlining Ingold's argument in broad strokes as it illustrates his textilic approach to making, which sees environment and activity as integrated.

Ingold (2011a: 78) argues that Gibson's idea of affordances is based on the assumption that the environment comprises 'a world furnished with objects' and that he therefore surmises that an environment would be virtually uninhabitable

---

[55] Robinson (2013: 9) notes philosopher Martin Heidegger's description of the receptive aspect of being-in-the-world as *Befindlichkeit*, which has been interpreted as 'affectedness' or 'attunement.' Similarly, Ingold (2011a: 80) mentions the terms of *availableness* and *occurrentness* that Hubert Dreyfus ascribes to Heidegger in distinguishing between 'two ways in which things can show up to a being that is active in the world.'

[56] James Jerome Gibson (1904-1979) presented an influential theory proposing that our perception of the environment inevitably leads to some course of action. He suggested that affordances, or clues in the environment (e.g. buttons to be pushed, knobs to be turned, levers to slide etc.) indicate to us the possibility for actions, and that we perceive these in a direct, immediate way with no sensory processing (www.learning-theories.com/affordance-theory-gibson.html).

without objects. As Dant (2005: 106) puts it, Gibson grounds his notion of affordance 'in the physical properties of objects prior to their entry into the world of living beings.' Ingold (2011a: 78) argues that Gibson's idea thus 'rests unequivocally on the side of the environment and […] points in just one way, towards any potential inhabitant.' In Gibson's terms, he concludes, objects and materials have properties that are available to be *taken up*. Ingold (2011a: 79) then contrasts Gibson's view with Jacob von Uexküll's concept of the *Umwelt*, which proposes that properties of objects and materials are *bestowed upon* them 'by the need of the creature in question and the very act of attending to it.' In other words, it is the animal (or person) that ascribes functional qualities to things it encounters and integrates them to fit to itself (Ingold 2011a: 80). Von Uexküll's term *Umwelt* refers to this idea of every creature being wrapped up in its own world. Whereas Gibson's view of affordances sees the environment as pointing towards the organism, the *Umwelt* does the opposite by being, as Ingold argues, 'on the side of the organism pointing towards the environment.' In living, the organism already finds itself immersed in its surroundings in which it must commit to relationships that evolve (Ingold 2011a: 80).

But unlike animals, Ingold (2011a: 80) continues, human beings are

> capable of making their own life activity the object of their attention, and thus of seeing things *as they are*, as a condition for deliberating about the alternative uses to which they might be put […] The human *Umwelt* becomes an *Innenwelt* – literally a 'subjective universe' – an organization of representations, internal to the mind, which lend meaning to the raw material of experience.

Whereas the animal finds itself *taken* in the sense of being embraced in an environment, Ingold (2011a: 80) notes, the human being needs to take a stance *towards* the world and the things in it. This is what he sees Heidegger as referring to when he speaks of the 'world-openness of man. Man's being open is a being held toward […] whereas the animal's being open is a being taken by […] and thereby a being absorbed in its encircling ring' (Heidegger quoted in Ingold 2011a: 82). Ingold (2011a: 82) further notes that Heidegger's contrast between

these understandings of openness and closure are epitomized in what he says elsewhere about hands and handiwork:

> "The hand exists as a hand," he declares in his lectures on *Parmenides*, "only where there is disclosure and concealment" (1982: 80). No animal, he thinks, can have a hand or be handy. Animals can have paws, claws and talons, but these are mere conduits for its behavior. The hand, by contrast, is an instrument of world forming. It is a hand precisely because it is not tied to any particular way of working, but delivers an engagement that is both thoughtful and reflexive, guided by consideration. It is, in short, an instrument not of *behaviour* but of *comportment* (Heidegger quoted in Ingold 2011a: 82).

Ingold clearly adopts a phenomenological perspective that sees the nature of being with materials as emergent and as shaped by the temporal as well as the spatial dimension.[57] He understands an organism (animal or human) not as a bounded being surrounded by its environment but rather as 'an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space' (Ingold 2011a: 64). In this sense then he sees skilled practice as involving 'developmentally embodied responsiveness' (Ingold 2011a: 65).

2.7 The 'telling hand'

Ingold's (2013: 109-124) focus on the work of the hand and how it combines the verbal relating of stories and the coupling of sensory awareness with material variations as demonstrated and exemplified through weaving is of primary importance to my study. Central to his thesis is the point that as with weaving, both drawing and writing are ways of 'telling by hand' and entail a visual-manual engagement with equipment and materials that is fundamentally haptic. Addressing what he refers to as an 'education of attention,' Ingold (2013: 110) states that in the process of learning from their predecessors through hearing stories, novices grow through a process of 'guided rediscovery' rather than

[57] Julian Thomas (2006: 53) comments that while Ingold may not describe himself as a phenomenologist, the way he uses observations as a starting point for a wider argument is characteristic of the tradition.

receiving ready-made knowledge. In other words, telling a story is not about explicating but rather tracing a path that others can follow.

The key thing about telling stories, Ingold (2013: 110) indicates, is that they 'provide practitioners with the means to tell of what they know *without* specifying it.' In other words, they act as pointers and this is why stories are such an effective means of education. Guidance without specification, Ingold argues, allows the practitioners to feel their way forward in the accomplishment of a task.[58] Whereas specifications may define a project by providing information *about* specific details such as materials to be used, dimensions of parts, movements etc., stories, Ingold (2013: 110) observes, 'issue *from* moving bodies and vital materials, in the telling. They lay down an itinerary.' As already pointed out earlier, it is this itinerant character of both knowledge and practice that Ingold underlines in his writing about skillful practitioners and their personal knowledge.[59] He elaborates as follows:

> Whereas articulate knowledge takes the form of statements about the known, personal knowledge both grows *from* and unfolds *in* the field of sentience comprised by the correspondence of practitioners' awareness and the materials with which they work. Relative to articulate knowledge, then, personal knowledge is not buried deep down in the psyche rather than raised up at the forefront of consciousness. Indeed it is not submerged at all, as the iceberg analogy suggests, but rather swirls around and between the islands that articulate knowledge joins up. The skillful practitioner knows how to negotiate the passages. It is the gravest of errors to regard such know-how as subconscious, as though practitioners could 'do it without thinking', when in fact their work involves the most intense concentration (Ingold 2013: 111).

The hand is what Ingold then points out to be the most consummate organ of storytelling – as an extension of the brain. Adapting Wilson's statement that 'brain is hand and hand is brain' Ingold asks whether we could not then say that 'mind is hand and hand is mind?' (Wilson 1998 quoted in Ingold 2013: 112). If

---

[58] David Gauntlett (2011: 17) speaks of it as 'a *process*, and a *feeling* […] the sense of going somewhere, doing something that you've not done before.'

[59] This is often referred to as *tacit knowledge*. Ingold (2013: 109) describes it as 'ways of knowing and doing that grow through the experience and practice of a craft, but which adhere so closely to the person of the practitioner as to remain out of reach of explication or analysis.'

we understand the hand as being an extension of the brain, Ingold asks, could we not say that the '*humanity of the hand* [is] a phenomenon of mind?' (Ingold 2013: 112). Ingold's question points to the capacity of human sensitivity and intelligence as something that arises as an emergent property out of the whole human being, tool and material synergy. In other words, not as something that is thought of in advance by the mind (Ingold 2013: 116). The humanity of the hand, Ingold suggests, is about an assortment of capacities that are particular to various tasks and what they entail. Skilled hands are ones that have developed the capacities of movement and feeling through past practice. This is what Ingold (2013: 115) calls the 'mnemonic aspect of technicality,' with reference to hands knowing what to do in response to the conditions of a task as it unfolds. I examine this notion further in the following section.

2.8 Prehension and learning through doing

Ingold's understanding of making as weaving inverts idea and movement so that we see movement as being truly generative of the object rather than the object being something conceptualized in advance of the process. It emphasizes the mutual relationship between maker and material and proposes a correspondence between making and thinking. Sennett (2008) similarly considers material practice in terms of a dialogical interaction between making and thinking and examines the link between hand and head and how the sense of touch affects how we think. He argues that thinking and making are aspects of a unified process and emphasizes craft as a unity of body and mind (2008: 7-11). Sennett views satisfaction of physical making as a necessary part of being human and argues that we need craftwork as a way to keep ourselves rooted in material reality, providing a steadying balance in a world that overrates mental facility. Skill is understood by Sennett as something very particular and personal about the practitioner who has developed a relationship between him/her and his/her work. Craftsmanship is thus seen as a process of negotiation through which the practitioner develops a personal knowledge and partnership with his/her materials through practice.

Similarly to Ingold, Sennett sees the learning practitioner as re-discovering the wisdom and knowledge passed on and working *with* materials in the sense that they carry the story of their own past as well as a potential future. This personal relationship with materials is discussed in detail in a chapter that Sennett devotes to the hands – the practitioner's primary means through which to explore materials. He notes that hands are as much organs of perception as they are of action. Hands explore materials, effect changes and conduct the business of creation and are the primary means through which the experience of craft is distilled (Sennett 2008: 174).[60]

Sennett (2008: 174) speaks of the 'intelligent hand' in terms of the coordination between hand, eye, and brain that can lead to a sense of becoming all-absorbed in physical material as an end in itself. He mentions philosophers Merleau-Ponty and Michael Polanyi as referring to this experience as 'being as a thing' and 'focal awareness,' respectively (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Polanyi 1962 quoted in Sennett 2008: 174). Being absorbed *in* something and becoming the thing on which one is working anticipates 'what the material should become in its next, as-yet non-existent, stage of evolution,' as Sennett puts it (2008: 175). He refers to this as 'corporeal anticipation,' a state in which one is always one step ahead of the material.

The technical name for this form of bodily anticipation is *prehension*, something that the skilled worker learns to make a permanent state of mind (Sennett 2008: 154). Repeated action, i.e. doing something over and over is not mindless labour. Rather, as Sennett suggests, it becomes a pleasurable action in itself and

> stimulating when organized as looking ahead. The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, improve, but the emotional payoff is one's experience of doing it again. There's nothing strange about this experience. We all know it; it is *rhythm*. Built into the

[60] For further examinations of the interdependence of the manual and the mental, see Zdravko Radman's (ed.) book *The Hand, an Organ of the Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental*. Several authors contribute essays in which they explore our hands as possessing their own 'know-how' in our navigating of the natural, social and cultural world. In their accounts, they examine the ways in which the manual 'shapes and reshapes the mental and creates conditions for embodied agents to act in the world' (Radman 2013: dustcover).

> contractions of the human heart, the skilled craftsman has extended rhythm to the hand and the eye (Sennett 2008: 175).

Developing the skill of anticipation has something of the character of ritual about it, as Sennett (2008: 177) observes, and in performing a duty again and again in acquiring a technical skill, the craftsperson remains alert rather than bored: 'The rhythm of practicing, balancing repetition and anticipation, is itself engaging' (Sennett 2008: 176).

In my own creative work, I use repetitive process purposefully as a systematic working method through which I allow forms to unfold and grow.[61] The feeling of contact with the material is essential to my sense of anticipation of what might emerge. In the following chapter I expand on the embodiment of meaning that happens through such forms of making and examine the notion of textile knowledge as formed from inside the interlacings of language and textile practice.

[61] For a study of how the grammar of the module as constructive strategy activates repetition in the works of South African sculptors Willem Boshoff, Paul Edmunds, Alan Alborough and his own works, see Gordon Froud's (2008) MA Fine Art dissertation titled "Modularity, Repetition and Material Choices as Strategies in the Work of Selected South African Sculptors" (University of Johannesburg).

CHAPTER 3

TECHNOLOGY, TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN TEXT, TEXTILE AND *TECHNE*

Having introduced Ingold's textilic account of making understood as a practice of weaving as well as arguments that consider materials as lively and hands as intelligent, I now turn my attention to the technology of textile-based craft and what Catherine Dormor (2013: 1) refers to as 'material-conceptual tacit knowledge.' By this she means the knowledge that is gained through the processes and technologies of textile practice itself. Drawing on the intertwining of text, textile, and *techne* (craftsmanship), Dormor (2013: 1) identifies a generative knowledge-production in writing and textile-based art-making, both being characterized by activity that leads to new knowledge.[62] Textile knowledge is thus understood as arising from the altering of materials through the technology of the hand, i.e. via an embodied and interactive relationship between maker and material. In this view, anthropologist Trevor H.J. Marchand (2016: 3) argues, the pursuit of knowing is posited as an ongoing, interactive process rather than 'knowing as certainty.'[63] In this chapter I reflect on aspects of my own creative practice in considering the kind of knowledge and meaning-making that such an embodied relationship with materials activates.

Katherine Nolan and Victoria Mitchell (2010: 208) write: 'Textile is naturally a medium of storytelling, having the capacity to embed "language" into the interstices of its structures as well as to figure narrative in its unfolding forms.' Mitchell also points out that the etymological link between textile, text and

---

[62] In her examination of such knowledge, Dormor (2014: 1) emphasizes an indivisible relationship between text, textile and *techne* (craftsmanship) and draws on this interweaving of these three notions in considering writing and making as 'partners of knowledge-production.' She posits language and text as modes of practice alongside and mixing with material-based textile practice. Trevor H.J. Marchand (2016: 13) refers to this new knowledge as 'a new way of knowing (or getting to know) something.'

[63] Marchand (2016: 2) suggests that problem solving is something that is thoroughly integral to craftwork and that such problem solving is at the heart of learning and knowing. He argues that 'learning and discovery are not confined to abstract thinking *about* the problem, one step removed from the physical activities of implementing a solution. Instead, learning in craftwork (or any other endeavor) demands situated perceptual experience and physical activity, as well as emotional engagement' (Marchand 2016: 11).

techne reflects an intimate association between making and thinking and that a consideration of the relationships between textile and language is relevant to further understanding what it means to create forms through manipulating materials (Mitchell 2012: 6). Text and textile both come from the Latin root *texere*, meaning to weave, as Mitchell (2012: 6-7) observes; both share a pliability and a capacity to link components into formal structural relations. Drawing on the critical theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, she notes that it is particularly the formative relationship between words and textiles that underlies the notion of textility in both thought and matter and argues that these references 'suggest for textiles a kind of speaking and for language a form of making' (Mitchell 2012: 7).[64] This relationship between textile-based making and language and some of the commonalities they share will be further explored in this chapter.

3.1 Defining craft technology and technique

Peter Dormer (1997: 7) comments as follows on the use of the term 'technology':

> Most craft activities involve 'a technology' – using a brush, a palette and a set of colours is a technology. Our contemporary use of the term, however, refers to means of making or doing things which have a certain order of magnitude. Technology is the integration of machines and information to create processes of manufacture of the distribution of knowledge in ways that are increasingly independent of the vagaries, whims or decisions of individual employees or, indeed, employers.

Technology outlined as 'a technology' of craft activities at the start of Dormer's comment addresses the methods and materials used in the making of things. In a broader sense, as Dormer continues, it refers to the branch of knowledge dealing with the creation and use of technical means in various fields of production involving the use of tools that can range from the most ancient to the digital. In this regard, we speak of the 'technology' of an art or of science etc.

[64] I am aware of Mitchell's debt to Barthes and Foucault and discuss her articulation of their ideas further on.

Stressing that practical activities such as handcrafts are not about an automatic and involuntary flow of habitual action into which the mind intervenes, Ingold (1993: 433) argues for a distinction to be made between technology and technique. He points out that technique refers to the skills and embodied capabilities of a maker whereas technology refers more broadly to a body of objective knowledge. By contrasting technique and technology, Ingold underlines the tacit, subjective, observation-based knowledge associated with technique as 'knowledge how' as opposed to the explicit, objective, discursive 'knowledge that' which he associates with technological knowledge (Ingold 1993: 435). He thus emphasizes that the skilled practitioner's way of knowing the world is by acting *in* it through direct contact with materials rather than through formal verbal instruction.[65] Manual making is not a mechanical operation of a determining system but involves concentration and attunement where hands and mind participate in conjunction.

Howard Risatti (2007: 99) similarly addresses technical manual skill as acquired through practice or action and not through theory or speculation. He points out that the word 'technique' derives from the Greek '*techne*' and refers specifically 'to the knowledge of how to do or make things (as opposed to *why* things are the way they are)' (Peter Angeles 1981 quoted in Risatti 2007: 99). It denotes a body of procedures and skills in craft activity that cannot simply be verbally communicated and then executed. Rather, it involves an operation that requires a high degree of motor skill and specialized knowledge in the handling of materials. The kind of learning and acquiring of knowledge that Risatti refers to is constituted by experiential methods rather than being conveyed through verbal language.[66] Dormer (1997: 102; 147) similarly points out that craft is

[65] In describing technique as adaptable through trial and error, Sennett (2008: 149) observes that it develops 'by a dialectic between the correct way to do something and the willingness to experiment through error.' Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2014: iv) emphasize the active, experimental and processual modality of technique when they say: 'Technique […] belongs to the act. Techniques are not descriptive devices – they are springboards. They are not framing devices – they activate a practice from within. They set in motion.'

[66] Such knowledge need not, however, remain unspoken, as Ingold (2013: 109) argues (in response to Michael Polanyi's understanding of tacit knowledge as unspecifiable). Ingold states: 'The figure of the silent craftsman who is struck dumb when asked to tell of what he does, or how

about tacit knowledge, or what he also refers to as 'practical know-how,' acquired through experience. This knowledge, he says, 'enables you to do things as distinct from talking or writing about them' (Dormer 1997: 147).

Dormer (1997: 8) further comments on the way in which any technology, including craft, advances not only as a series of major inventions but also by way of many tiny alterations and adjustments made by thousands of people. It is in this organic and ongoing process that he identifies the power of technology, i.e. in the way in which improvements will 'suggest' themselves by one set of ideas leading to another. He notes, for example, that textile craftspeople and designers bring together materials through the process of weaving that

> encourages a natural incorporation of diverse materials. Indeed the term 'weaving' and the activity it represents is often used as a metaphor for the combining of disparate materials or ideas. Not for nothing have the workings of the human brain been described as 'weaving' and the brain itself been called 'the magic loom' (Dormer 1997: 169).

David Brett (2012: 2) similarly observes that the articulation of threads in textile-based processes of making and the many ways in which they can be combined can generate an almost infinite number of forms and structures from a surprisingly small number of basic operations. Transferring the articulacy of this form of construction to textual practice, Mitchell (2012: 10) suggests, 'can unleash previously undisclosed meanings for textiles as well as for critical theory.' Exploring links between language and textiles, she argues, allows us to consider a form of 'textile-textuality' that brings the haptic and the conceptual together. This idea of creating possibilities for a transition of modalities between text and textile will be further examined in the following sections.

---

he does it, is largely a fiction sustained by those who have a vested interest in securing an academic monopoly over the spoken and written word […] What remains unspoken need not be left unvoiced; nor need what remains unwritten be left without inscriptive words.'

3.2 Text and textile

Mitchell (2012: 6-7) refers to a 'textility of making' when she introduces the intertwining of text, textile and *techne* as a practice which informs thought, i.e. one that suggests an intertwining of speaking and making. As already pointed out, text, textile and *techne* are terms that share etymological roots from the Latin *texere*, to weave, thus having their origin within the practice of making. Dormor (2013: 1) describes them as being linked by 'formative processes that together establish an interwoven structure in which writing and art-making are brought together in knowledge-production.' Textile-based making as a process of fabricating is viewed in such terms as a form of 'embodied knowledge' and 'mindful production,' as Checinska and Watson (2016: 289) put it.[67]

A desire to make sense of the gap between words and things is what Mitchell (2012: 10) identifies Barthes and Foucault as expressing in their writings on textuality. She mentions Foucault as using the metaphor of interweaving and Barthes the analogy of braiding in illustrating how words and voices become 'threaded' to form writing. Mitchell (2012: 10) argues that this transferal of what threads are known to do in material practices to practices of writing and speaking has opened up new meanings for both textiles and critical theory. She elaborates:

> In recent years textile practitioners have begun to participate in ambiguous verbal play, for example speaking of 'the language of textiles' and suggesting that textiles are a form of writing or speaking. Textiles as metaphor have assumed in recent writing the agency of a sensory idea, a material of thought, so that it becomes possible to speak of textile thought and tactile literacy. The haptic and the conceptual have moved closer together through the agency of textile experience as expressed through metaphor and through words (Mitchell 2012: 10).

[67] Checinska and Watson (2016: 277) mention Sarat Maharaj's notion of 'thinking through textiles' as involving a form of knowledge being produced about oneself and from one's own personal history and place in the world and how it intersects (or not) with the received history of a region: 'Through an engagement with craft, i.e. through working by hand, through the gradual mastering of tools and materials, each artisan is able to make sense of the world around them. The home studio in this instance becomes a space of 'mindful production'[…].'

Dormor (2013: 2) points out that Barthes distinguishes between 'readerly' and 'writerly' textual forms (*texte lisible* and *texte scriptable*). He speaks of 'readerly' texts as offering pleasure through knowledge acquisition and 'writerly' texts as offering bliss (or orgasm) for the reader through the uniting of reader and writer as if in the act of intercourse. Through this intertwining of reader and writer he thus underscores the role of *techne* within the making of text in his consideration of the (inter)relationships between text, tissue and truth. As Barthes (1976: 64) puts it:

> *Text* means tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as an *hyphology* (*hyphos* is the tissue and spider's web).[68]

Janis Jefferies (2016: 100) observes that Barthes's statement suggests textile as being a kind of pliable language and that he uses it to illustrate how threads, codes and voices can be interwoven to form writing. Dormor (2013: 2) further comments that Barthes's foregrounding of the intersection between text and textile as metaphor for the interplay between readerly and writerly textual forms is useful in offering a means through which to see textile-based approaches of making as a form of practice-theory research. It is in the 'charged intimacy' between text and textile that she identifies tacit knowledge as residing.

Dormor (2013: 2) also states that by establishing the connection between text and textile, Barthes not only emphasized the generative activity of creating a text or textile but also that it is through this generative process that the author, weaver and artist are able to convey their 'power of meaning-making' to the reader or viewer. In his reference to the 'tissue' of text and textile she sees

---

[68] Barbara Clayton (2004: 84) mentions Barthes as suggesting here that all texts participate in a fundamental *undoing*; he 'proposes unweaving as the operative mechanism between text and textile.' This aspect is considered more closely in chapter 7 where I examine textile-based processes involving forms of unmaking and remaking in examples of contemporary art from South Africa.

Barthes as foregrounding the processual nature of intertextuality, i.e. 'the in-between aspects of text[ile] construction.'[69] It also foregrounds, as she remarks, the way in which the making of language and meaning are not linear processes but are rather

> developed through the (inter)relationship of the warp with weft of language and fibres. It is at the points of intersection (or intercourse) within that relationship that hidden or tacit knowledge emerges from within and behind the veil: a revealing of the text-textile-*techne* spectrum through the intertwining of language and practice (Dormor 2013: 3).

The French post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida, known for his practice of deconstruction,[70] was concerned with such an expandable web of intertextuality when he noted that the word 'text' is connected with 'textile' and the idea of interweaving. He said: 'This interweaving, this textile is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text' (Derrida 1981: 26). His notion of intertextuality is based on how the interpreter is related to the text/textile understood as a fabric woven from many threads; texts function in relation to each other like interwoven threads in a textile.

Like Barthes, Derrida saw text not as a production whose meanings are there simply to be deciphered by a critic but rather that there is a 'freeplay' (*jeu*) of the text.[71] He suggested that 'writing perpetuates itself infinitely and denies that its goal is to reveal truth' (Ryan and Van Zyl 1982: 95). His often quoted saying: 'There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text, *il n'y a pas de hors-*

[69] Victor Burgin outlines Barthes' concept of intertextuality as follows: 'Text, as conceived of by Barthes […] is seen not as an 'object' but rather as a 'space' between the object and the reader/viewer – a space made up of endlessly proliferating meanings which have no stable point of origin, nor of closure. In the concept of 'text' the boundaries which enclosed the 'work' are dissolved; the text opens continually into other texts, the space of intertextuality' (Burgin 1986: 50-51).

[70] Derrida's theory of deconstruction challenges Western philosophy's assumption of 'presence' based on a definite, external truth to which philosophical systems can correspond. The concept of deconstruction was a sustained attack on the principle of logocentrism which prioritizes the 'Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the self-presence of full self-consciousness' (Sarup 1993: 36). Derrida claimed that all Western thought was metaphysical for privileging the spoken word or logos as guaranteeing the presence of meaning.

[71] Derrida's key idea is that meaning cannot be pinned down. Because it is relational, every signifier only has meaning in a web of other signifiers, with the result that meaning is constantly deferred.

texte]' connotes that there can be no author; there can only be text and the constantly deferred signification of the text. E. Warwick Slinn (1988: 82) adds that 'we are not to be confined to "text," whatever it happens to be, in a manner resembling new critical isolation of the text as verbal icon, but are to confront the proposition that there is nothing outside textuality, no referent that is not already part of a system of signification.' Slinn thereby highlights that Derrida is not simply pointing to the text as an 'endless play of signifiers,' as has been understood by some of his detractors, but rather that the writer him/herself is regarded as becoming part of the system of signification in the interweaving of the intertextual network, i.e. his/her text is situated in relation to and intersects with already existing texts within the infinite text-fabric. Martha Nandorfy ([Sa]: 264) explains this self-inscription as follows:

> it is not to say that the text cannot be related to diverse experiences and reflections coming from outside the particular text being read. It does imply, however, that the critic cannot comfortably distance herself from the text, keeping her discourse scrupulously disentangled from its fabric […].

The text/textile/*techne* (inter)relationship thus suggests a multi-reflexivity between making, material and meaning, revealing the tacit within this material-conceptual matrix.

3.3 Textilic knowledge-production

Dormor (2013:1) focuses on the textile-based processes of folding, fraying and seaming as the ways and means in which knowledge is gained through textile practice. She presents this triadic model of folding-fraying-seaming as an organizational principle to further illustrate Barthes's text-tissue intertwining as a generative and communicative system that happens from within textile practice and materiality. As she stresses, these processes focus not only on gathering and processing of knowledge but operate as modes for *articulating* that knowledge (Dormor 2013: 11).

Pajaczkowsa (2016: 83) similarly puts forward a list of textile-base activities which she refers to as 'processes of the body through which we can think.' She examines textile practices of felting, spinning, stitching, knotting/knitting, weaving, plaiting, draping, cutting and styling and offers them as a 'toolbox' of techniques that invite us to think through verbs, i.e. activities and relationships. Arguing that the notion of textilic knowledge-production challenges traditional distinctions between technical skills of making and intellectual skills of understanding and knowing, she suggests that a reconsideration of knowledge as arriving to the mind through the body can transform the way in which manual labour is pejoratively viewed (Pajaczkowska 2016: 79-80). The toolbox of tropes that she puts forward is meant to enable makers to give an account of their work in terms of their own idiomatic textual expression and to identify the ways in which their practice is unique.[72] In the following section I briefly consider some of Dormor's and Pajaczkowska's reflections in relation to my own work to articulate how the generative processes of textilic making that I employ provide a way of thinking from within my own making.

3.4 Thinking through tying, knotting, stitching and weaving

Noting that fibre, filament or yarn is a materialization of the directionality of a line, Pajaczkowska (2016: 84-85) points out that the etymology of the word 'thread' lies in the root word 'to throw.' Thread, she observes,

> embodies not only the capacity to connect between spaces but also the creative uses of violent, aggressive energy. To twist in thread, connected with the energetic activity, to throw, to separate with violence, is also the origin of to write […] The first form of knowledge that thinking of line as thread shows us is the importance of relational, reflexive and dialectic (embodied) knowledge. (Pajaczkowska 2015: 22-23).

[72] In her writing on textile thinking, Pajaczkowsa invites makers and theorists to collaborate in a new culture of 'making known' whereby *techne*, the techniques and technologies of manufacture, are integrated in relation to the *episteme*, techniques of knowledge, philosophies and theories of knowledge (Pajaczkowsa 2016: 80).

The activities of twisting and throwing that Pajaczkowska describes above are emblematic of the *embodiment* of meaning as it occurs in textilic knowledge production. In my own work, I use wire for its usual function as a binding thread but also explore other manipulations with it such as weaving (coiling), knotting and stitching that are more commonly associated with the domestic crafts of basket weaving, knitting, sewing, crocheting and lace making. Such actions involve repetitive procedures through which forms can grow; they facilitate direct probing of materials through movement. Ingold (2013: 6) describes such craft-based forms of making as an 'art of enquiry' in which 'the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work.' It involves a process, as he states, 'in which images and objects reciprocally take shape' (Ingold 2013: 20). I experience this in my own work where manual processes such as tying, knotting, stitching and weaving act as catalysts for my exploration of ideas. The content is not fixed ahead of the making but unfolds in the evolving process of making and the materials and methods that I use are crucial to the meaning of my work.[73] As Owen (2011: 89-90) notes about artworks involving repetitive craft-based practices, concept and process are combined; the process of fabrication is inseparable from the significance of the work. Textile knowledge and meaning-making emerges from the observational engagement involved in such forms of making.[74]

Wire is a malleable and flexible material but it also imposes its own constraints. As an industrially processed material, it comes in various thicknesses and gauges

[73] As the fundamental elements in the construction of my objects, the materials and processes that I use originate and generate particular meanings. Adapting wire to traditional craft techniques already raises certain questions or points for reflection. As Schmahmann (2014: 43) writes in her essay on my artworks, my interpretations of craft techniques in wire do not simply *draw on* such forms and techniques but rather function as *references* to them. While my artworks are often set up to look like certain craft objects they are also *unlike* such visual forms. This point of 'unlikeness,' Schmahmann argues, is crucial as it marks my work as offering a critical engagement with categories and values attached to such forms of making and their associated materials.

[74] Nithikul Nimkulrat (2012: 9-10) uses the term 'materialness' to express the 'totality of the textile creation rooted in a material that includes the elements of form, content, context and time for the artefact.' It speaks of experiential knowledge being made explicit by way of 'thinking through the hand manipulating a material.' As Nimkulrat further notes, it is through the skilled hands of a craft practitioner that 'not only form is given but also meaning is embedded.'

and is made from a range of metals, each with its own particular properties. My manipulation of the material involves gradually developing a feel for its materiality and pliability and 'guiding' a form into existence through the repetitive processes that I employ. In other words, from the start it involves a participative 'give and take' between myself and the metallic filament. The incremental construction of forms involves movement; when the weaving expands to a larger scale it can involve my entire body. The physical engagement with material in this process can well be described as an 'active following, of *going along*,' as Ingold indicates, as the discovery happens in the movement of 'feeling forward' (Ingold 2013: 1-2). Although I do have a form in mind when setting out, it is my spontaneous engagement with the thread that creates the form rather than a predetermined idea. I articulate and conceptualize through the direct manipulation of the material.[75]

My wire-weaving and knotting results in the creation of a surface that openly displays the interlacings and knots that formed it. Ingold (2007a: 52) states that surfaces are brought into being through the 'transformation of threads into traces.' He describes a trace as 'any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement' and notes that in weaving it is the *trail* of the thread that evokes an emergent becoming, much like the line of ink does in writing (Ingold 2007a: 43). In my coiled wire forms, the filaments that I weave together leave a trail of traces that describe the pathway of growth through movement, not just along the linear, spiraling path directed by the core thread but also across a multitude of passages between lines as I stitch successive coils/rows to each other with the binding thread. Coiling does not involve the vertical warp and horizontal weft of weaving, but, as in weaving, it creates a planar surface of

[75] In underlining meaning that emerges through making and material investigation I am not suggesting that I do not engage with ideas outside of the making process, i.e. concepts or concerns that are extrinsic to the textile-based process. The point I am making is that the way I make something is not separable from its meaning. 'Concept' is not something imported but rather arises from questions relating to my production; it combines with the making process. As Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2014: 90) put it: 'Concept-work [does] not adopt an external posture of description or explanation.' Rather, it is activated 'on site, entering the relational fray as one creative factor among others.' Referring to this kind of activity as 'research-creation,' they characterize it as maintaining an 'exploratory openness [toward] producing new modes of thought and action.'

varying texture, depending on the gauge of filament used and the openness or closeness of the binding stitch. The weaving can thereby achieve infinite variability in surface texture, flexibility, opacity and transparency.

Pajaczkowska (2016: 87) points to this aspect of variability and multiplicity of becoming in textile processes when she says that

> each weaving process has the property of being a transformation of the singularity of the point to the field of the plane. The plane further offers the surface as medium of boundary and interface, and as layer or substrate.

This ability to transform also extends to the continual movement of woven cloth through the activity of folding; it demonstrates an open space of potentiality – of endlessly unfolding permutations. Wire, by way of its tensility, allows me to literally 'fold' the growing weave into the form that I wish to create, its shape taking form and 'solidifying' as the weave accumulates. My coiled weaving process is thus essentially one of modeling the emerging weave through introducing folds along the way. In my more loosely knotted wire forms resembling crochet or lacework I similarly allow the wire surfaces to 'hold' folds or I may even 'emboss' them with folded detail.[76]

Dormor (2013: 4-6) comments on the impermanent and continually transforming characteristic of folding by describing it as 'an ever shifting scenario that enables new knowledge to emerge and unfurl.' The process of folding cloth, Dormor suggests, celebrates the journey of twists and turns as much as an arrival; it is a mode of revealing tacit knowledge that is about 'creating and discovering new foldings, unfoldings and enfoldings.'[77] Within such a folding material-conceptual matrix, she argues, practice and thought become

---

[76] In some artworks, I have made impressions into my knotted wire nettings by laying them over objects and indenting the netting to retain an imprint of the form. See for example *Unearthed* (2007) (p48-49 in Dundas, N and Charlton, J (eds.) (2014) *Walter Oltmann: In the Weave: working over three decades*).

[77] Dormor (2013: 4) acknowledges the notion of folding as 'a means by which to think about and reveal tacit knowledge from within and across the material-conceptual matrix' as deriving from Gilles Deleuze's (1988) focus on the role of the Baroque in the work of Leibniz (see: Deleuze, G. (2006) *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: Continuum Books).

'folded within.' Initial thinking already involves consideration of how threads interact and it is through testing and producing *within* that she sees the thinking and re-thinking as taking place. Options emerge out of questions and perspectives that are driven forward within felt experience. This is certainly how I experience my own processes of forming whereby I continually assess where the expanding weave may lead me. I need to trust where the process will take me but also have to, at times, make radical decisions such as cutting away sections or starting over.

Stitching and knotting are two forms of binding that, not unlike weaving, involve the directional movement of thread and have the capacity for infinite growth. Pajaczkowska (2016: 86) describes the looping or 'doubling back' of the knot and the stitch as a mechanism of reflexivity, implying the notion of returning and rewinding. As she puts it, 'it carries the meaning of retracing embodied action through memory.'[78] Ingold (2011a: 195) observes that the action of the needle in stitching draws the line not *across* a surface but *through* it. Whereas a pen or pencil is used to inscribe a line that grows as the writing proceeds, a stitched or embroidered line, he notes, 'grows through the repeated looping back of the trailing thread-line between where the point meets the surface and where the thread meets the eye [of the needle].' He identifies a similar looping back of present experience to that of the past in the activity of story-telling; narrative imagination involves a fusing of past and present, real and fictive scenarios to create new meaning.

The activity of stitching as the tracing of a pathway carries similarities to the trail-following idea of wayfaring that Ingold (2011a: 162) proposes in underlining the *becoming* of a line through movement. He describes the wayfaring traveller as following or breaking a new pathway through a landscape in a process that is 'carried on' and elaborates as follows:

[78] Elaborating on the knot as an aid to memory, Pajaczkowska (2016: 86) mentions 'the symbolic use of knots used in the South American *quipus*, the leather thongs knotted in order to help orators recite the lineage of tribal descent, filiation and myth. It is also used as a form of accounting and debt reckoning.'

> It is in following this path – *in their movement along a way of life* – that people grow into knowledge […] Here it is the movement itself that counts, not the destination it connects. Indeed wayfaring always overshoots its destinations, since wherever you may be at any particular moment, you are already on your way somewhere else (Ingold 2011a: 162).

Ingold (2011a: 112) connects the idea of wayfaring to stitching more explicitly when he notes that 'beings, by way of their activity, participate in stitching the textures of the land.' By using the analogy of stitching he suggests that practitioners are engaged in an activity of binding their own pathways through ongoing movement into the texture of the world. The creativity of making lies in the improvisatory movement of the practice itself, working things out as it goes along (Ingold 2011a: 178). This idea of binding through ongoing movement finds further expression in the feature of the seam which is associated with the joining of cloth. Seaming is about an alignment and bringing together of elements to create new and expanded pieces. As Dormor (2014: [sp]) states, the fluid stitch of seaming not only brings different pieces together, but in doing so it also affects change on each of the pieces, i.e. it offers the expanded potential for new possibilities.[79]

Meshwork such as lace, crochet and knitting involves the continuous knotting of yarn to create a surface that carries the marks of its own making. As with weaving, it emerges in action but proceeds along the looping line of continuous thread. Solveigh Goett (2016: 127) distinguishes between the two processes of weaving and knotting by noting: 'While the woven fabric is created in steps, as the weft fills the warp of parallel threads set out in advance, the knitted fabric grows as a whole in the making.' Knotting techniques thus carry a somewhat different sense of growth and change to weaving; the knowledge of memory

[79] Dormor (2013: 9) further suggests that the seam, as a model for bringing together, illustrates how making and writing are processes of boundary setting 'continually defining and redefining the parameters of the project in hand, something that often comes about as a result of 'straying' beyond those boundaries, evaluating and analyzing one's location in relation to the project and stepping back within.' It thus foregrounds multiplicity in thinking through making that does not follow a linear narrative structured in terms of beginning, middle and end. Dormor discusses various forms of joining in articulating different aspects of convergence and correlation in a space of co-mingling and negotiation across borderlines. She sees this seaming space as a form of '*becoming*-articulated' where a certain fluidity abounds between language, meaning and understanding (Dormor 2013: 9).

seems more emphatically encoded in the continuously connected loops. As Ingold (2015: 15) puts it, knots 'retain within their constitution a memory of the process of their formation.'[80]

3.5 Textilic making as inventive method

Ingold (2012: 387) remarks on the commonplace fallacy that participation and observation are somehow contradictory, or that there is a split between being *in* the world and knowing *about* it. To observe, he argues,

> is not to objectify; it is to attend to persons and things, to learn from them, and to follow in precepts and practice. Indeed there can be no observation without participation – that is, without an intimate coupling, in perception and action, of observer and observed (Ingold 2012: 388).

Knowledge, Ingold (2012: 387) argues, is not about making propositions about the world but rather grows from our skills of perception and our capacity to make judgements that 'develop in the course of direct, practical, and sensuous engagements with our surroundings.'

From the perspective of textile practice, Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl (2016: 67) similarly underline the idea that knowledge happens through inventive method that always takes place *in-the-making*. In their chapter titled "Patchworking Ways of Knowing and Making" they speak of 'ways of living with technologies' to emphasize the ongoingness of such methods and the fact that they are made through the practice of making (Lindström and Ståhl 2016: 69). What Lindström and Ståhl identify as characterizing such an approach to making is 'an interest in knowing 'mess' […] – that which is contradictory, complex and relational.' Engaging with 'mess,' they suggest, means that

[80] Ingold (2015: 25) expands on the aspect of knots having memory by adding 'if you untie a knotted rope, however much you try to straighten it, the rope will retain kinks and bends and will want, given the chance, to curl up into similar conformations as before. The memory is suffused into the very material of the rope, in the torsions and flexions of its constituent fibres.'

> we cannot expect to know what the problem is in advance. Instead methods have to be inventive […], in the sense that they should not only aim at answering a predefined question or solve a predefined problem, but allow for re-articulation of the problem (Lindström and Ståhl 2016: 68).

This idea overlaps with what Ingold (2012: 387) refers to as a procedure of 'participant observation' or 'observing from the inside' by which he means watching, listening and feeling what is going on and participating from *within* the current of activity.

Lindström and Ståhl (2016: 68) further argue that method and that which we aim to know are not separable and that research is, in this sense, less about an observational position of control (as in a laboratory setup) and more about an engaged experimentation 'in the wild.' The aim is not to solve or resolve something but rather to '*stay with* the complexities and mess' of engagements and interventions with materialities and temporalities; in other words, 'to intervene from within' (Lindström and Ståhl 2016: 73). The notion of *staying with* corresponds closely with Ingold's idea of weaving as entailing an intuitive and improvisatory following of the flow of materials in ongoing action. It underlines thinking as a process that *carries on* within the act of making. This applies particularly to textile practice, as Solveigh Goett (2016: 128) indicates, where 'Textile Knowledge […] emerges in action, […] be that in making or playing.' The tangible properties of thread-based materials require an embodied immersion in making; textile-based artworks communicate through contact with materials via the senses.

Ingold (2000a: 290-292) argues that our tendency to think of art and technology as separate fields of endeavour prevents us from appreciating the true nature of technical skill. It is via a process of development, he suggests, that embodied skills are incorporated into the human organism, not through endowment or via an innate capacity. Rather than thinking of ourselves as *applying* our knowledge in practice, he argues, we should say that we know *by way of* our practice, i.e. 'prioritizing the practice of knowing over the property of knowledge' (Ingold 2011a: 159). It is through an ongoing engagement that knowledge is perpetually

'under construction' through *processing* of the whole person, body and mind, through the lifeworld. In this sense, he argues 'movement *is* knowing' (Ingold 2011a: 159).

II THE POLITICS OF CRAFT IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN ART CONTEXT

CHAPTER 4

REASSESSING HANDWORK IN A POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

This section introduces the political histories of craft and art in a South African context and examines artworks by selected South African artists to consider how their craft-based approaches to making intersect with this politics and how they use materials and processes to connect with local craft traditions. With the domination of indigenous peoples by those of European descent under apartheid, indigenous artistic practices were relegated to the inferior status of craft. The hierarchical division between art and craft mirrored the unequal racial power relations in the country. Black artists had limited access to the 'fine arts' of the West and handcrafted work came to underline a racially differentiated view of creative practice. A separated education was promoted, based on the belief that African and European cultures were qualitatively different and that they needed to be kept apart. This history is important to sketch in order to locate questions of ownership of traditions of craft techniques within a contested space.[81] By examining how contemporary South African artists choose to work with craft-based techniques, I consider how the historically negative repercussions of the prejudice towards handwork are being challenged and overcome.

4.1 Recovery and restoration

Pissarra (2006: 47) states that the segregation policy of apartheid that kept the artistic trajectories of black and white artists apart has led to deep fault-lines based primarily on race, but also on ethnicity, class and gender. While he

[81] It is beyond the scope of this research to provide an in-depth examination of this history. Rather, I provide a context by introducing a few authors who offer an overview of the issues relating to art and craft within this history.

acknowledges that there are clear signs of change under the new post-apartheid political dispensation (notably an increased visibility of black artists and opportunities for them to exhibit), he suggests that the re-entry of South Africa into the so-called international art community has largely been uncritically and opportunistically handled by the South African art world (Pissarra 2006: 48). He argues that this has happened 'at the expense of developing alternatives to imposed and entrenched neo-colonial networks' (Pissarra 2006: 48).

Lamenting a lack of intellectual leadership in the visual arts, Pissarra maintains that the biggest challenge ahead lies beyond merely achieving equity in the art world. He argues that it requires a comprehensive view of transformation that will address the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid, but that will not replicate their way of thinking, seeing and doing. He underlines the need for greater self-reflexivity and for creative interventions and strategies that will liberate art from the burden of the racist past (Pissarra 2006: 51).

In a similar appeal for critical intellectual engagement in the arts, Oliphant (2004a: 13) writes in his essay "!Ke e/xara //ke: South African Art under the Sign of Freedom" that South African artists have been presented with the challenge of 'constructing a new visual discourse, critical and creative, that can deal with both past and present.' He speaks of a necessary renewal of South African culture that has to come about through drawing on the traditions and resources that were disregarded in the past while at the same time inventing new modes of expression. He sees this double movement of recovery and renewal as being essential to a revitalization of South African society.

The pathway that Oliphant sees South Africa set on is one of 'recover[ing] what was trampled in the past and […] restor[ing] it as a crucial part of the irreducible multiplicity of cultures in contemporary South African society' (Oliphant 2004a: 13). In the visual arts, he sees the recognition of the diverse cultures of South Africa as implying that once marginalized indigenous traditions of making are now an integral part of the cultural resources of South Africa, and that these

traditions must be utilized for contemporary art (Oliphant 2004b: 18). He elaborates on this as follows:

> In the past, the arts in the hands of practitioners who opposed minority rule posed radical challenges to society and contributed to the attainment of democracy. With the accomplishment of this objective the arts were freed to explore a much wider range of themes and visual modalities than before on international platforms not previously accessible. In this process the main shift has been a de-accentuation of overt political themes in favour of personalized, inward explorations of intimacy, identity, memory and re-examinations of repressed aspects of the past (Oliphant 2004b: 18).

Oliphant defines the new paradigm in which the arts operate as involving a recognition of the diverse cultures of the country; a shift from ethnic exclusivity to inclusive diversity (Oliphant 2004b: 16).

David Elliott saw this happening in South African art when he observed:

> In South Africa […] history is literally being made. This […] encompass[es] the reconfiguring and recording of the past in terms of the needs of the present and the future (Elliott 1990: 7).[82]

Writing more recently, Annie E. Coombes (2003: 245) similarly characterizes contemporary South African artists as adopting a dialectical relationship between past histories and lived experience in the present. She comments: 'Rather than deny history, they mobilize (and in some cases, invent) historical memory as a tool for dealing with the contradictions of life in contemporary South Africa.' In this process of recuperating and articulating the past, artists can be seen to engage with forms, idioms and practices that have long been suppressed.

---

[82] Elizabeth Rankin (2001: 1) commented that since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, artists 'have carried a curious burden. To a degree surely less pressing for those who belong to long-standing democracies, contemporary artists seem to be counted on to create an art that will express a national identity in the wake of the country's transformation. There is a high level of expectation that their art will reveal the nature of the 'new South Africa' […] As Andre Brink has written of literature, "… it cannot come as a surprise to anyone that, ever since the first signs of the drastic socio-political shift in South Africa, there should have been expectations of new aesthetic responses to the changing circumstances.'"

4.2 A new representativeness

A broad showcase exhibition curated by Elliott for the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Oxford in the UK (1990), titled *Art From South Africa*, made a point of showing a selection of work that would be inclusive and 'democratic' in a representative sense by reflecting the whole range of contemporary visual culture. The exhibition included crafts such as beadwork, blankets, wire toys and dolls alongside posters, banners as well as fine art – painting, sculpture and video (Elliott 1990: 8). Gavin Jantjes (2011a: 35) commented that Elliott's exhibition 'attempted to be inclusive, placing issues of race and gender, urban and rural, 'fine art' and 'craft', 'art' and 'media' or 'propaganda' into its discourse.'

The exhibition was informed by substantive research done in the 1980s and followed on two landmark exhibitions: Ricky Burnett's *Tributaries* (exhibited in Johannesburg in 1985 and in Munich in 1986) and Steven Sack's *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a new history of South African art* (exhibited at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1989). These exhibitions were the first of their kind to display a range of visual production by all groups in South Africa.[83] As Kathryn Smith (2011: 125) remarks, they tried to show the ideological constructedness of 'art' versus 'craft' and 'traditional' versus 'contemporary' through the juxtapositioning of work produced both in urban and rural contexts.

Burnett's *Tributaries* exhibition brought to the fore the work of rural artists such as wood carvers from the Venda/Gazankulu area, showing them alongside the works of the country's leading painters and sculptors. As Williamson (2009: 66) states, the exhibition emanated from a non-hierarchical departure point, giving equal visual value to works by artists who had been generally regarded as craftspeople and artists who enjoyed a high profile in the art world. She cites

[83] Nettleton (2000a: 26) recalls that 'the show sent shock waves through the country's established art market, as it exposed a diversity of art practices whose existence had been masked by dichotomies present in the divide not only between black and white but also between art and craft, Africa and Europe, and the traditional and the modern. Trained urban black artists had shown their work in many exhibitions in South Africa and abroad (e.g., Sydney Kumalo in the 1966 Venice and 1976 São Paolo biennials, Ezrom Legae in the 1979 Valparaiso biennial), but the idea that there were artists in the rural areas who might be considered "contemporary" or "modern" was then entirely novel.'

critic Ivor Powell as writing in 2007: 'In the terms of the conceit set up in the title of the exhibition, all streams of culture were to be rendered up as tributaries of a strong brown river that is art in South Africa' (Powell quoted in Williamson 2009: 66).

Sack's exhibition drew attention to artists from South Africa's townships and rural areas and is today acknowledged as a milestone in the task of retrieving the lost histories and reputations of black artists who had been marginalized by colonialism and apartheid. Both exhibitions set new precedents of integrating the work of rural and urban South African artists and attempted to redress the marginalization of artists who had been omitted from the history of South African art (Proud 2006: 11). As Jantjes (2011a: 35) comments, these exhibitions 'offered the first democratic overview of art production from the rural countryside, the townships and the cities.'

While the above-mentioned exhibitions represented a 'major step towards opening a space for dialogue outside of racist institutional and art establishment frameworks,' as Kathryn Smith (2011: 125) puts it, the inequalities between artists from urban and rural areas cannot be ignored. As Nettleton (2000a: 26) has argued, access to formal training has largely been available only to urban artists whilst their counterparts in the rural areas have

> little exposure to modern art-production methods and media. For the most part their training has occurred in the ambience of indigenous traditions of material culture production, largely centered on woodcarving, beadwork, and mural painting.

Nettleton (2000a: 28) further comments that while many rural artists have limited access to theoretical debates on contemporary art and speak only rudimentary English or Afrikaans, they are nevertheless very aware of images from the larger world as disseminated through mass media, advertising billboards, school textbooks etc. Relegating these artists to an unspoiled realm of *primitifs*, she argues, must therefore be avoided as

> they are strangers neither to the comforts of Western living standards nor to the fact that the income from their artistic production enables them to acquire some of these comforts and gives them status, albeit at times ambivalent, at home (Nettleton 2000a: 28).

The positive impulses of the exhibitions from the 1980s and 1990s has been actively challenging the historical divide between art and craft, but an ongoing marginalization of some artists working in particular media or regions of southern Africa continues to this day. As Steele (2009: 181-182) states, a polarized art/craft thinking continues to impact on the reception of creative work produced in South Africa.[84]

4.3 Revision and reinvention

Smith (2011: 119) observes that a new democratic environment presented South African artists with the opportunity to experiment and re-imagine as well as critique forms and practices of the past. She states that this 'experimental turn' in the visual arts offset the more conventional modes of painting, sculpture and printmaking that had dominated institutionally legitimated art practice and comments that:

> The new dispensation demanded that we look anew at processes and objects previously designated as indigenous material culture or craft. The racial and gender profile of contemporary South African art was under keen scrutiny, as were its forms and concerns (Smith 2011: 135).[85]

Smith suggests that the shift away from institutionalized forms in the visual arts towards a re-imagining and critiquing of forms and practices of the past has a

---

[84] Pissarra (2006: 48), for example, laments that the divide between art and craft has been '[…] inadvertently reinstated by an official government emphasis promoting crafts whilst neglecting to engage with the issue of the fundamental transformation of the visual arts.'

[85] In his book titled *African Identity in Post-Apartheid Public Architecture* (2011), Jonathan Alfred Noble shows how recent public architectural projects in post-apartheid South Africa can be seen to have adopted such an experimental approach by opening up to new possibilities in response to the contemporary situation of the country. Considering the effects of colonial rule and its suppression of African idioms, he explores how African identity might now be addressed. He suggests that the circumstance of having to clarify the terms of reference in constructing a new visual discourse should be seen as an important opportunity that invites all South Africans to ask fundamental questions about their personal and collective belonging (Noble 2011: 1).

significant impact on how we think about the role and function of art in society (Smith 20011: 119). She argues that the end of apartheid and the first steps of dismantling its cruel systems led to South Africans having to 'work through a radical crisis of identity in front of a global audience' (Smith 2011: 119). It was, as Smith suggests, a deeply entrepreneurial moment that

> lent itself to both revision and reinvention. While there was no possibility of forgetting the past, the urgent need was to acknowledge that the space cleared by the demise of apartheid needed to be capitalized on, creatively and socially. Experimentation and the space to be experimental are interdependent, and so this is ultimately a story about space – the possibility of opening up spaces that had previously been closed off, access denied (Smith 2011: 120).

In her focus on identifying what characterizes contemporary art practice in South Africa, Smith considers what might constitute such an experimental turn in the visual arts (Smith 2011: 120).

Writing speculatively about the way forward in South African art, Oliphant (2011: 183) predicts that an intensification of intercultural exchange will weaken the black and white aesthetic ghettoes that had become entrenched under apartheid and that Western aesthetic traditions that had overshadowed African modalities will be significantly modified. He suggests that this will result in what Franz Fanon described as 'the re-immersion of artists in the denigrated African aesthetic traditions and modalities of making art' (Fanon 1961 paraphrased in Oliphant 2011: 185). However, Oliphant cautions:

> This will not be without controversies, contestations and even conflicts between black and white artists, as to who has the right to draw on African traditions […] the parameters of these contestations will for the foreseeable future be defined by the persistence of asymmetrical black/white power legacies from the past. The new trajectory will depend on the extent to which black artists in South Africa can translate their new-found political power into strategies and programmes for the transformation of arts institutions at all levels, grounded in African aesthetic traditions, alongside artistic traditions from the rest of the world (Oliphant 2011: 185).

As Oliphant suggests, future developments will test the creative resourcefulness of artists and facilitate cross-fertilizations and the emergence of new visual grammars (Oliphant 2011: 185). How current artwork produced in South Africa reflects some of these challenges by way of reengaging the vocabulary of handwork is what this research will attempt to demonstrate. I will also foreground the ethical dimension of the discriminatory practices that resulted in the marginalization of the work made by black artists through labeling it derogatively as craft rather than art.

4.4 Renaming and reordering:

With the entrenchment of the discriminatory policies of apartheid and the segregation of education, only a few regional art centres, usually with limited facilities and resources, were available to aspiring artists of other races. These included the Polly Street Art Centre, which opened in Johannesburg in 1952 and the Evangelical Lutheran Centre at Rorke's Drift, a Swedish run mission station that opened in 1963. Elsa Miles and Phlippa Hobbs & Elizabeth Rankin have written about the two art centres respectively, looking at the artists who attended, the teachers who contributed and some of the works produced.[86] Whereas the Polly Street Art Centre taught art, focusing on practices such as painting, sculpture and drawing, The Rorke's Drift Centre separated out art and craft. A distinction was made between 'useful' and other arts and women were largely the ones who carried out craftwork such as weaving, fabric printing and hand-coiled pottery. Men largely created fine art (Rorkes Drift [Sa]: [sp]).[87]

Following a period of increasing dissent during the 1970s (notably the Soweto Uprising of 1976), the 1980s were characterized by political unrest and

---

[86] See Elsa Miles's *Polly Street – The Story of an Art Centre* (2004) and Philippa Hobbs & Elizabeth Rankin's *Rorkes Drift: European Prints* (2003).

[87] Brenda Danilowitz illustrates this gender division as follows: 'Azaria Mbatha became interested in drawing, although this was not a technique encouraged at the centre, which focused on the more "useful" arts such as weaving and fabric painting, practiced mainly by women. In fact, in the first years of the Centre's existence, Mbatha appears to have been one of the only male artists working there. Aside from his drawing, his work at this time also involved creating designs for tapestries, which were woven by the women and for which the centre soon achieved great fame' (Anon. [Sa]: [sp]).

consciousness-raising. Stringent counter-responses by the South African government included the imposing of states of emergency, censoring of the media and countering unrest in the townships with the army. Events such as 'The State of Art in South Africa' conference held at the University of Cape Town (1979), the 'Culture and Resistance' festival and 'Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa' conference that took place in Gaberone, Botswana (1982) (allowing exiles to participate), sharpened the focus on the theme of politics and the arts.[88]

The mid-1980s are often cited as a turning point in South African history.[89] As Van Wyk (2004: 6) states, it was also the period when institutions such as universities and museums belatedly recognized the art heritage of black South Africans. Collections of South African traditional beadwork, sculpture and ceramics alongside the work of contemporary rural and urban black artists were increased and augmented.[90] Van Wyk comments on this as follows:

> In 1990, the South African National Gallery installed in its foyer examples of beadwork alongside contemporary art by both black and white artists working within the Western tradition. This publicly signaled that henceforth neither "art" nor the idea of what is "contemporary" would be limited to art produced by whites. This initiative problematized curatorial practice, pointed to its politics, and

[88] Van Wyk (2004: 5) suggests that the latter event 'may even have kick-started the resistance art movement and stimulated such community-based initiatives as workshops for the printing of resistance T-shirts, posters, and banners, often directly linked to political organizations and events. Many white artists, through activism within non-racial, democratic structures, particularly after the formation of the United Democratic Front in August 1983, became more directly politically engaged and radicalized than other sectors of their white communities. Few artists in South Africa before this time had focused on social and political issues in their work, but in the early 1980s many began to.'

[89] Williamson (2009: 66) comments about the change that was in the air in the second half of the 1980s as follows: 'The lessons of cultural activism initiated at the Botswana conference on Culture and Resistance in 1982 had been absorbed and allowed whites, so long neutered by apartheid, to feel they had a stake in the struggle for freedom […] All of a sudden it seemed as if a truly African identity was available to whites as well as blacks.'

[90] Steele states that, according to Marschall, a phase began at the end of the 1990s (following the South African government's publishing of the White Paper on Arts and Culture in 1996), 'when public art galleries, for instance, reordered their permanent collections […] and began to exhibit objects formerly called 'craft' […] (such as small wood carvings, 'naïve' paintings, pottery and textiles) side by side with oil paintings, sculptures and installations by academically trained white artists under the heading of South African art.' Steele adds that a process of re-identification, renaming and reordering had thus been put in motion in an effort to redress past injustices and to forge new thinking about art (Marschall 2001 quoted by Steele 2009: 187).

> underscored the need for a new representativeness wherever the South African nation is represented. This decentring of the Western tradition was – and often still is – opposed by some white artists and critics as "ethnic art" or "folk" or "outsider" art. Their defence in privileging the Western tradition is generally formulated in the name of the avant-garde, which, ironically, has a long tradition of drawing inspiration from precisely the types of non-Western art production that this contemporary avant-gardist faction now dismisses. Furthermore, in this view, art in such "outmoded" idioms as abstraction or figurative art are irrelevant (Van Wyk 2004: 6).

As Van Wyk indicates, these shifts in the art world raised critical questions that testify to the rigorous critiques of race, art and cultural hegemony that South Africa generated during the 1980s (Van Wyk 2004: 6). He poses the following questions in highlighting the conflict between Western aesthetic perceptions and non-Western art production:

> What happens to the rural, self-taught artists operating with visionary inspiration? What happens to artists trained in community art centres and workshops, which encouraged the use of found materials and styles of abstraction and representation now unfashionable? What happens to the "democratic" principle of placing all of South Africa's cultures on an equal footing – is beadwork not art anymore? (Van Wyk 2004: 6).

Steele (2009: 182) addresses a similar concern when he refers to the dichotomous framework of rating that characterizes Western perspectives on art and craft. He argues that the appropriateness of such rating systems is questionable and needs to be interrogated against non-Western points of view. He mentions, for example, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir as noting that 'from some African perspectives there are no objects that "are considered as "'art' in the current Western sense"' (Kasfir 1992: 47). Steele also adds Silvia Forni's observation on her study of pottery traditions in the Cameroon that 'any distinctions made between art/craft "seems rather fluid, since the value of objects and actions is understood in the context of their production and use rather than in respect to a preconceived set of labeling categories"' (Forni 2001 quoted in Steele 2009: 182). From his own research into the ceramic work

produced by Qga Nongebeza, Steele mentions the artist as saying that in local Mpondo thinking

> an art/craft dichotomy is not present, and that in talking about visual art at home the concept used is known as "*ubugcisa*" which does not distinguish between types of visual art, but rather emphasises the fact that a work is "thought of and made by a person or people, it is made by hands." This way of describing is more holistic than reliance on art/craft dichotomies, and allows for "aesthetic evaluations and choice … criteria [to be] part of larger systems of preferences and processes (Steele 2009: 182).[91]

Steele calls for a change of mindset away from the dichotomous Western mode of thought that contributes to polarization of art and craft.[92]

4.5 Handwork and industrial education:

Traditions of handcraft and decoration have long been suppressed as forms of creation in comparison to the visual arts, but under apartheid the notion of 'handwork' came to underline a racially differentiated view of creative practice. Tracing the origin of this attitude necessitates an examination of perspectives on art education that prevailed before and during the apartheid administration. Recent studies have started to reveal the complex and ambivalent theoretical approaches that were engaged with around the question of art education in South Africa since the 1930s. As Melanie Klein (2014: 1350) states: 'Educators developed a conglomerate of different pedagogical agendas and had to deal with official policies of the Bantu Education Department along the way.'

In her article *Creating the Authentic? Art Teaching in South Africa as Transcultural Phenomenon* Klein examines case studies that reveal the various theoretical approaches taken by teachers. She sees these as oscillating between a

---

[91] Steele is citing Sylvia Forni from an interview conducted with Nongebeza in 2001.

[92] Steele quotes Nettleton as arguing that part of why difficulties continue to plague local discourse derive from the fact that 'art history is basically a Western discipline […] [and] when art historians take on the study of non-Western material culture as art, they may be according it similar dignity to that given to segments of Western material culture, but they are also fitting others' objects into a mould in which they are awkwardly crushed' (Nettleton 2006 quoted in Steele 2009: 188).

search for an 'authentic' African idiom and a claim made for a universally applicable art history (Klein 2014: 1347). Daniel Magaziner similarly examines the changing policy of education in South Africa in the first half of the 20th century. He provides an insightful post-anti-apartheid historical view into intellectual life under apartheid and the meaningful work with hands and minds that 'not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy,' as he quotes historian and political commentator Jacob Dlamini as saying (Dlamini 2010 quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1408). Some of the observations made by Klein and Magaziner will be briefly sketched. Both examine how, at the turn of the 20th century, handwork came to be a highly debated issue in the education of black students and provide useful overviews that help in grasping the demands made on students to work with their hands.

Magaziner (2013: 1416) writes that educational theorists, in Africa and elsewhere, began evaluating whether or not colonial schooling should be the same as European schooling and whether it was appropriate to the needs of African students. The initial position was one of providing an education aimed to equip African students to assume positions as skilled labourers and craftspeople in an industrial economy. However, it soon developed into a 'differentiated' education or what Magaziner (2013: 1417) refers to as 'an education for difference.' This became justification enough to make African students work with their hands. Magaziner (2013: 1417) states that handwork came to be seen as a 'solution to the problem of black economic insecurity.' He mentions, for example, that parents who complained that their children were receiving an education different from white children's, were told by a teacher that industrial education at a young age 'will save them [children] from going up and down the streets looking for jobs [after leaving school]' (Magaziner 2013: 1417).

Magaziner (2013: 1417) further states that during the interwar period, provincial schools in Natal emerged as the proving ground for industrial education, largely due to the legacy of Charles Loram who was the Inspector of Native Education in Natal at the time. Loram had studied for his PhD in New York

under John Dewey and Paul Munroe in the 1910s, both influential figures who had put forward the notion of an 'adapted education.' Magaziner comments:

> Loram envisioned a future in which African craftspeople would be vital within European dominated South African society. He mandated time spent working with one's hands on the primary school syllabus to ensure that training for this future began as early as possible (Magaziner 2013: 1417-1418).

Magaziner observes that Loram's vision was attacked from various quarters: missionaries who were dedicated to the idea of undifferentiated education found it to be biased; race theorists found the idea of an integrated South African economy to be naïve. He further remarks that Afrikaans speaking educationists and anthropologists were especially critical, suggesting that native schooling should preserve African cultural distinctiveness rather than train Africans to assume positions within European society.[93]

Klein (2014: 1349) states that several mission schools that had taught skills to Africans since the early nineteenth century were increasingly met with suspicion among Afrikaners, especially members of the *National Party* that was founded in 1915. Arguments for preserving 'authentic' ethnic 'traditions' gradually took hold and found their way into the art educational realm, as Klein (2014: 1349) indicates. The importance of handwork for Africans was presented less as a preparation for a future in an industrial society and instead increasingly justified as a means through which to 'help Africans become better Africans,' as Magaziner puts it (2013: 1418). This was to become a consensus supported in educational policy when the Bantu Education Act was formulated in the 1950s.[94]

---

[93] Magaziner mentions the anthropologist Bronislav Malinowski as arguing, during a visit to South Africa in 1934, that 'education was where African society could begin to reassert its traditions in the wake of colonial conquest and social transformation. In the schools, the African child should "be developed along lines which will not estrange him from things Africa or make it less easy for him to maintain his place in African society"' (Malinowski quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1418).

[94] Magaziner mentions anthropologist W.G. Eiselen from the University of Stellenbosch as organizing influential educational policy that would result in the establishment of Bantu education during the 1950s. He quotes Eiselen as saying: 'the duty of the native [is] […] to become a better native, with ideals and a culture of his own' (Eiselen quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1418).

As Magaziner observes, the reasons for the handwork training taught at schools thus shifted.[95]

However, Magaziner (2013: 1419) advises that a parallel discourse demanding that students work with their hands should not be overlooked. Provincial organizer of Arts and Crafts in Natal, Jack Grossert, was one of the most influential educators in the history of art schools in South Africa (Klein 2014: 1354). He was later to take on the role of Inspector of Arts and Crafts for African schools and colleges under Bantu Education.[96] Grossert founded the Ndaleni Art Centre near Richmond in the Natal midlands in 1948 as a training school for Africans. Besides art history, techniques such as grass weaving, basket making, wood and clay work were taught. These would later be necessary to teach the Arts and Crafts sections of the Bantu Education syllabus (Magaziner 2013: 2).[97] Elizabeth Perrill (2014: 15) remarks that indigenous media such as clay, weaving and wood carving were used as core elements in the transmission of cultural difference.

Bantu Education, Magaziner (2013: 1421) writes, was

---

[95] Elizabeth Perrill (2014: 15) observes: 'Following the rise of the Nationalist Party to power, any attempts at a western-style art education was increasingly repressed in South Africa's urban centers, but in rural areas "stress on vernacular medi[a]" was a preferred pedagogical means of instilling a narrowly defined cultural pride and encouraging what was referred to as "retribalization".'

[96] Magaziner (2014: 1421) mentions Grossert as having a PhD in Fine Arts from the University of Natal, having researched 'traditional' Hindu architecture. He published several articles in educational journals on the development of the arts and crafts syllabus in African schools and also gave talks during his travels on the government's patronage of the arts.

[97] Klein (2014: 1355) mentions that an independent Weslyan mission station had originally been established at Ndaleni in 1847 and this was then later developed into a teacher training college under the administration of the Department of Bantu Education. She writes that the *Ndaleni Art Centre* provided teachers with the opportunity to complete advanced training, but also allowed some to pursue an art career in addition to their regular breadwinning. She quotes art historian Juliette Leeb-duToit as noting that the training in art and craft was 'aimed at training prospective art teachers […] it came to be perceived as a significant art school in its own right' (Leeb-du Toit 1999 quoted in Klein 2014: 1355). Elizabeth Rankin is quoted as saying: 'The Ndaleni course was primarily aimed at the training of art teachers, not artists, but in the context of the 1950s it offered probably the most programmed art training available to Black students, who were drawn from all over South Africa. The course was wide-ranging in its scope, including classes in art history, design, picture making, clay modelling, crafts and wood carving' (Rankin 1992 quoted in Klein 2014: 1355).

> an unabashedly segregationist platform, based on the conviction that African ('Bantu') and European cultures were qualitatively different, incommensurable – forever – and that African students needed to be taught accordingly.

He quotes the then Minister of Bantu Education, Hendrik Verwoerd, as saying in 1954:

> The curriculum […] envisages a system of education which is based on the circumstances of the community and aims to satisfy the needs of that community. [It is] self-evident [that] handicrafts, singing and rhythm must come into their own [in the Bantu schools] (Verwoerd quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1421).

Magaziner (2013: 1421) states that these were thus seen as being traditional Bantu activities that were well suited to an education designed for Bantu society. Traditional activities like crafts were seen as vital to developing a 'new culture of their own, based on traditional bantu culture, and adopting those sections of other cultures which they find acceptable,' as the Natal Inspector of Schools, G.R. Dent said in 1954 (Dent quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1421).

Grossert's responsibility was to develop the arts and crafts syllabus in African schools and to encourage the practice of traditional crafts which were believed to be dying out. As Grossert said:

> within the next generation many of the traditional crafts will be almost as foreign to the urban Africans as to Europeans and therefore, while their appreciation of beauty and technical skill in craftwork still flows strongly, it must be directed into fresh channels (Grossert quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1421).

As Bantu culture was understood as 'apart' from that of Europeans, it was thus believed to be necessary to teach students to appreciate

> their own people's works of art, however old-fashioned these at times might appear to be [and to create] their own masterpieces of art which will be equal to those of any other race (Enoch Shezi quoted in Magaziner 2013: 1422).

Art training was to preserve African culture.

Both Magaziner and Klein argue that, in contrast to the guidelines that culminated in the 1953 Bantu Education Act, art schools and workshops (such as Ndaleni) fostered a sense of individual insight and vision more than being about reviving and preserving culture (Magaziner 2013: 1422). Klein (2014: 1349) notes that art education, in particular, was an experiment whereby the co-operations and interactions between teachers and students evolved in conceptually ambivalent ways. She states that 'European teachers stretched a complex and ambivalent discursive net that combined definitions of art as a modernizing and therapeutic factor with inclusionary attempts in regard to art as a fundamental human activity' (Klein 2014: 1354-5). Magaziner's research reveals the constant struggle that both learners and teachers faced under Bantu Education, but also the cultivation of creativity and self-worth despite the material constraints and ethical compromises that training at a government institution entailed.[98]

In this chapter I focused briefly on how the unequal power relations under apartheid promoted a hierarchical division between art and craft, subordinating creative work produced by black artists as craft and prejudicing handwork. In the context of the re-writing of South African art history, Marschall (1999: 2) argues that the paradigms and categories that were established in the past to classify South African artists, especially in contextualizing the work of black South African artists, still continue indirectly to influence current thinking on South African art.[99] She cites Steven Sack as arguing that the categorization of art into 'folk art' and 'high art' is a Western concept that is not only irrelevant to the

[98] See Magaziner's recently published book *The Art of Life in South Africa* (2016).

[99] Marschall (1999: 2) comments: 'The term 'township art' for example and the connotations it carries have only very recently been critically re-examined (van Robbroeck 1998) and still impact on the appreciation and status of the respective artists and their works. The term 'transitional art' has gone out of usage, but a new category, 'community art', has gained currency since the late 1980s and is now firmly established to classify a broad array of work produced by informally trained Black artists. Bongi Dhlomo has publicly articulated Black artists' deep resentment at constantly finding themselves "labeled, checked, re-labelled and re-checked" (Dhlomo 1995: 26).'

South African context but is also obstructive to the re-shaping of the South African art world and the re-making of South African art history (Sack 1996 cited in Marschall 1999: 5). The linking of black creative production to craft and the use of particular media and processes associated with handwork need to be freed from the chains of this classification system, which has created and replicated the divides between black and white artists and art and culture more generally.

I have included an overview of the above history in order to foreground how the issue of the separation of art from craft is particularly strongly marked in the South African post-apartheid context. In the following chapters, I will focus on the ways in which contemporary South African artists consciously engage with the language of craft and may or may not be seen to be indebted to local traditions. I examine how selected contemporary South African artists working with textile-based materials and processes modes can be seen to break down the boundaries between art and craft.

CHAPTER 5

SCULPTURE AS FORMATION: THE CO-PRODUCED ARTWORKS OF ANDRIES BOTHA

In his artwork, Andries Botha, a white Afrikaans male raised during the apartheid era, engages deeply with questions concerning his own heritage and identity in coming to terms with South Africa's troubled past and its transition to democracy.[100] He is motivated in his work by a belief that, as he puts it, 'there is a very important role to be played in forming and shaping South African cultural life' (Botha quoted in Becker 1998: 3). Botha has ardently called for a more socially and politically accountable or integrated creativity and for an articulation of a South African aesthetic as part of the country's emergent post-apartheid political identity (Botha 2000: 8-9). In an environment requiring major cultural, intellectual, political and economic refurbishment, he believes that artists have an imperative to think about their social role in a new way (Botha cited in Becker 1998: 2).

For Botha, such transformation requires a renewed effort in facilitating social interchange in a search for a more caring society. His own creative work and teaching is based on social interaction and an openness to the sharing of skills and knowledge exchange. Michael Chapman (1992: 78) states that Botha 'has consistently shown a deep concern to step beyond his own training and understand sculpture as a form of ethical intervention in the surrounding socio-political life.' The dark state of emergency years of the 1980s, Chapman (1992: 78) argues, conditioned Botha to scrutinize South African reality in trying to find responsible and relevant ways in which to embody forms with substantial

[100] Elizabeth Rankin (1991: 2-6) provides the following biographical details on Botha: Born in 1952 in Durban, Botha grew up in a working-class household. His father was a truck examiner and repairer on the railways. His mother was of Norwegian descent. Following his parents' divorce, Andries lived with his father at times and was sent to a hostel for boys at Bulwer in the foothills of the Drakensberg. He subsequently attended the George Campbell Technical High School, Durban, where he matriculated in 1969. From 1971-1975 he completed a BA Fine Arts degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and in 1977 he took a Higher Diploma in Education, teaching at Brettonwood High School before taking up a lectureship at Natal Technikon, Durban, in 1979.

content. By seeking an expressive content rooted in Africa, Chapman (1992: 85) sees Botha as struggling to enter a humanizing and democratizing societal contract.[101]

Not unlike the influential creative practice of Joseph Beuys, Botha's concerns are not merely aesthetic but address issues of personal, social and political renewal and regeneration. The shamanistic vision of Beuys's practice and his understanding of art's redemptive power seem similarly to inform Botha's outlook. Van der Wal (2010: 10), for example, mentions ritual and ceremonial elements related to initiation in Botha's works as well as forms that symbolize transition from one state to another such as passing through death to resurrection and rebirth.[102] He suggests that Botha draws on the semblance of the ceremonial not only to reference various rituals and traditions but also to call attention to the spectator's role in these ceremonies (van der Wal 2010: 10). In most societies, van der Wal (2010: 10) observes, rites and ceremonies are the means through which individuals interact with society in marking important transitions. Beuys's concept of art with its emphasis on the principle of resurrection and transformation of an old structure into a revitalized form resonates in Botha's work.[103]

---

[101] Looking back at Botha's work from the early 1990s Marion Arnold (2009: 6) comments that it seemed appropriately positioned at the time when apartheid's collapse was becoming inevitable. She comments: 'What had been rigid was now fluid; meanings which had been fixed were ambivalent, and sculptural metamorphosis was an apt equation for change.' Botha's reframing of elements of indigenous culture in a quest for a new artistic vocabulary has been read in terms of the practices of quotation associated with postmodernism. As Marylin Martin (1991: 26) states, postmodern strategies and methodologies played an important part in the polemic surrounding contemporary South African art at the time. She notes that the conjunction of a search for a relevant South African syntax and postmodernism was a useful one in that the artist was asked to consider history and own context instead of being concerned solely with the self and with formalism. As she puts it, he or she was 'expected to express experience in terms of narrative representation and in complex references to the history of art and to literature' (Martin 1991: 26).

[102] On the shamanistic dimension of Beuys's work Mark C. Taylor (2012: 25) comments: 'As Beuys learned from personal experience, within the redemptive economy of shamanism one cannot be reborn without dying. In the traditional structure of the initiation ceremony the individual passes through suffering and death to resurrection and rebirth. The person who undergoes this process emerges transformed and comes to share the shaman's curative powers. Indeed, only one who has been wounded can heal others.'

[103] Marilyn Martin (1991: 28) comments on Botha's 'vision and conviction that this country will be rebuilt […] He regards himself as accountable with regard to his contribution of another dispensation, another South Africa […].'

5.1 Weaving as form generating activity in Botha's sculptures

Mark C. Taylor (2012: 38) states that in emphasizing the social motivation for his work, Beuys described his art as 'social sculpture,' privileging sculpture 'because of its obvious association with formation – *Gestaltung.*'[104] Such formation, Taylor comments, referred not only to the processes he used in making objects or structures, but also to an educational process. Beuys's 'expanded concept of art' was understood to be coterminous with life itself as he famously concluded that 'everything is sculpture' (Beuys 1986;1987 quoted in Taylor 2012: 38). Taylor continues:

> When sculpture is understood as formation, the focus of attention shifts from product to process: the work of art is not so much the object produced as the creative process through which forms emerge. If, however, art is creative activity, then it is no longer a 'specialist activity carried out by artists.' Not only is 'Everything sculpture,' but, according to Beuys, 'Everybody is an artist' (Taylor 2012: 38).

The notion that every person harbours creative potential and that the teacher's task is to cultivate this potential is evident in Botha's creative practice, teaching approach and outreach to the community. It is also evident in his openness to learning from and exchanging ideas with fellow makers. Furthermore, the idea that creativity manifests itself through the process of formation is exemplified in his adoption of weaving in his sculptural fabrication. Weaving embodies the notion of formation as well as underlining the idea of forms being continually *in* formation, i.e. it exemplifies the principle of movement and the notion of 'the never completed text' (Chapman 1992: 80).[105] Chapman (1992: 80) suggests that one should consider an artwork by Botha as text-in-process rather than as completed 'product,' observing that the artist himself points to gaps and incompleteness when he states that he seldom conceptualizes his works fully

---

[104] Taylor (2012: 197) defines the German word *gestalten* as meaning 'form, fashion, mold, shape, arrange and organize,' and *Gestaltung* as meaning 'formation, forming, construction, shaping, fashioning, modeling; creation, and production.'

[105] Ingold's understanding of materials as being 'the active constituents of a world-in-formation' similarly underlines this idea of processual entities interwoven in a continuous process (Ingold 2011a: 28).

before starting with the making. Elizabeth Rankin (1991: 9) elaborates on this as follows:

> Botha concedes that his major works are rarely conceptualized fully before their making begins. The germs of a possible solution are usually present in working drawings of ideas, but, even when he makes maquettes, the final works are very much dependent on answers that emerge in the intuitive interaction between giving visible form to concepts and finding viable technical solutions.

Rankin (1991: 9-10) suggests that Botha's works are deliberately rendered as a visible outcome of process and that it is thus evident rather than masked by a 'finish'. She further comments that these works operate outside the conventional definitions of fine art by drawing on a wide range of unusual techniques, craft and industrial skills as well as non-precious and even 'throw-away' materials. She also observes that his work openly displays the effort that went into the production of his artworks, even displaying a kind of 'private catharsis through labour' (Rankin 1991: 10).[106]

Rankin argues that by acknowledging collective input in his artworks, Botha stresses the fact that sculpture by its very nature requires and benefits from multiple authorship, i.e. interaction with others in gathering materials, discussing ideas and discovering technical solutions (Rankin 1991: 10). The construction of Botha's woven artworks has consistently involved participatory working, underlining his belief in the dialogical potential of shared, cooperative creative practice and the sociality of craft.[107] Beyond this inclusive approach to his art making through which individuals can benefit economically through participating, Botha's involvement with the broader society has also included a number of community projects supporting creativity as a means towards re-

---

[106] Marylin Martin (1991: 19) argues that 'Botha's obsession with material, hard and time-consuming, physical labour is intimately interwoven with the appearance, intensity and expressiveness of the sculptures: making a sculpture becomes an action of purification' (my own translation from Afrikaans).

[107] In 1983 Botha cut his right hand on a sheet of glass, severing tendons and nerves. As Rankin (1991: 7) writes, it was doubtful whether he would be able to continue making sculpture and it was only through sheer determination that he regained strength in his hand. This injury was not the reason for employing assistants to help in the construction of his works, but the employment of helpers aided him in realizing some of his large-scale works.

imagining cultural forms via collective efforts as well as promoting and sponsoring individual artists (Leigh 2009: 4).[108] In an artist's statement he is quoted as saying:

> I would like to see myself as operating in many domains as a creative person: one domain is the manufacture of objects, the other is responding as creatively as I possibly can to the emotional and societal context in which I live (Botha quoted in MacKenny 2000: 1).

While his creative practice is about a self-critical questioning of his own identity within the geographic and socio-political context in which he finds himself, he also views it as extending beyond the making of art objects to engaging with cultural citizenship (Chapman 1992: 79-80).

5.2 'Human Structures'

After completing what he describes as a 'predominantly Western training' in art in the early 1970s, Botha began to explore materials such as metal and woven wattle branches coated with wax and sand in creating forms that he referred to as 'spiritual vehicles' - metaphoric containers evoking the human form (Botha quoted in Leigh 2009: 110).[109] His 1981 "Contemplation Series" and the works on his breakthrough 1984 "Human Structures" exhibition exemplify his search for a new sculptural language through which to express concerns relating to conceptions of self, locality and the notion of 'home' (van der Wal 2010: 8). Valerie Leigh (2009: 76) observes that Botha based these early works on images of ancient Egyptian sarcophagi and that he tried to convey a 'mythically charged' quality through using simple forms that have an equivalence to the human body. Often resembling boat- or fish-shaped vessels, they conveyed notions of containment, journeying, death and spiritual regrowth (Leigh 2009: 112).

---

[108] Botha founded and chaired the Community Arts Workshop (1984-6), established the Paga'Mani women's community project with Sam Ntshangaze in the 1990s, the Create Africa South Trust (since 2002) and the Amazwi Abesifazane Trust (registered in 2008). In 2005, he was also involved in establishing the Mazisi Kunene Foundation (rooted in many conversations he had with the poet laureate) and in 2009 he launched the Human Elephant Foundation.

[109] Leigh (2009: 118) notes Botha as recalling from his early boyhood years of living on a farm that woven-log enclosures were constructed to keep animals in. These structures inspired the woven-wood forms in some of his works.

Commenting, for example, on a pod-shaped work made from grass and wattle titled *Final Journey* (1984) (Fig 3), Botha said: 'I imagined building myself a shroud that would plant me back into the African soil' (Botha 2012a: 2). Leigh notes that through these sculptural forms he sought to articulate ideas concerning human destiny, the passage between life and death and the potential for regeneration (Leigh 2009: 112).

Figure 3 Andries Botha and the Ntshalinthsali family, *Final Journey* (1984), Human Structures Series, thatching grass and wattle, 189 x 350 x 120 cm. © Andries Botha.

Leigh (2009: 5) argues that Botha's early explorations in using local materials and indigenous techniques to fabricate his sculptural forms reflect his close identification with South Africa as the place that formed his identity. She comments that his search for a unique sculptural vernacular was motivated by his questioning of his own conservative Afrikaner background.[110] Critical of the political structures of dominance that institutionalized apartheid, his works

[110] Leigh (2009: 7) mentions Botha as identifying especially with the Afrikaans literary intellectuals of the 1960s and 70s known as "Die Sestigers." The "Sestigers" mainly launched an assault on established morality and social norms, but later some of them started questioning apartheid.

engaged with his own sense of belonging in Africa and finding ways in which to confront the troubled South African political landscape.[111]

Amanda Botha (2010: 20) suggests that Botha's 'escape-route' out of this troubled landscape 'passes through the inner landscape of the self.' Art, she maintains, is for him a means through which to rewrite the iniquities of the past by rethinking what it means to be human and humane. In this process of self-reflection, the notion of landscape is an important metaphor for him. She elaborates:

> What interests him is that human beings define the landscape with their actions and behaviours. The outer (geographical) and inner (emotional) landscapes merge. He believes that reaching across within the self and from the self to others and to the landscape is every human being's mythical moment in the process of becoming whole. Botha's art is a metaphor for this expectation, or belief (Botha 2010: 2).

In response to an interview question on his Afrikaans cultural background and the choice to be involved in the struggle to end apartheid, Botha himself replied:

> part of my instinctive reason for choosing the cultural arena was as a means whereby I could begin to reconvene my own personal identity. I had to find a completely new relationship with the landscape, both physically and intellectually. Because I certainly couldn't find them in my own mythology (Botha quoted in Becker 1998: 4).

Botha's engagement with the idea of landscape connects closely to his concern with family, safety and the notion of home (locality).[112] As a central motif in his work, the home signifies intimacy, familial belonging (place of origin) and social cohesion, 'a space of recollection and shelter […] amidst an existence of fluctuation and profound uncertainty,' as van der Wal (2010: 11) puts it. But as

---

[111] Adam Small (1991: 16) speaks of Botha's need to 'wrestle himself out of the culture of dominance […] of a working away of apartheid and its entire vision or lack of vision of life.'

[112] Leigh states that the possession and use of land is of particular concern to Botha and she quotes him as saying: 'If we are to consider territory and humanity as cultural metaphors then one could argue that our human desire for ownership is revealed in the character of the land we occupy, a body that is a measure of our willfulness expressed as conflictual history and mutated geography' (Botha 2003 quoted in Leigh 2009: 11).

Carol Becker (1991: 22) also remarks, Botha's concept of home can be understood as extending beyond the place where one is from, or where one might find oneself at present, to the place to which one might be going, i.e. 'it also allows for the ahistoricity of longing,' as she puts it.

The literal construction of a Zulu 'home' was in fact the germinating idea for Botha's "Human Structures" sculptures. Although he was familiar with the Drakensberg district from his primary school years spent in Bulwer, Sue Williamson (1989: 144) relates a particular encounter with Zulu builders constructing dwellings from grass in the area:

> Driving in the foothills of the Drakensberg one day, he stopped to watch men making a Zulu beehive-shaped hut by knotting together bent branches and thatching over them. For the next six months Botha travelled regularly up to the Drakensberg to learn the old rhythmical skills of rope-making, weaving and knotting. His teachers were master builder, Maviwa, and two women, Agnes and Myna Ntshalintshali. Botha started with very simple armatures and sculptural shapes (Williamson 1989: 144).[113]

Rankin (1991: 7) comments that the grass building process that Botha had witnessed many times before suddenly took on a new meaning and mirrored his own experimentations with woven materials with which he was engaged at the time. The chance meeting with the Zulu builders was to be the significant breakthrough for him in recognizing the path that he had been seeking.

Botha's arrangement of living with the Ntshalintshali family whilst learning the building skills in return for a regular wage was foremost about a desire to learn the thatching and weaving skills first hand.[114] But as Adam Small (1991: 16) says, it was also about searching for meaning through processes of being 'at work';

---

[113] Rankin (1991: 7) notes that Botha met with the Ntshalintshali family through the ceramicist Fee Halsed-Berning. The Ntshalintshali family lived on the Berning farm in the Winterton district. Maviwa Ntshalintshali was a master builder and the women, Myna and Agnes Ntshalintshali, the headman's wives, were skilled weavers and thatch makers.

[114] Rankin (1991: 7) suggests that a stimulus may also have come from his involvement with the Community Arts Workshop in Durban in the early 1980s where he, together with other artists, worked closely with black urban artists, providing training opportunities for those denied access to apartheid institutions.

processes that take time and are based on traditional wisdom, communication and dialogue.[115] Seeking an affinity with place and time, Botha realized that the European tradition of conceptualizing and executing art was not relevant to his situation in South Africa. MacKenny states that it was the moment where he

> moved away from mainstream sculptural production and initiated a series of works located in the very material of the South African landscape. It was from this point onwards that Botha's work took on its specific characteristics – referencing inherited practices and locally symbolic materials […] (MacKenny 2000 quoted in Watermeyer *et al* 2009: 69).

In one of his online statements Botha spoke of

> [r]elocating myself out from an overwhelming western European ideological narrative back into the African homeland […] [by] turning back to the landscape and its indigenous technologies […] [to] re-celebrate a renewed possibility of engaging an expanded new horizon of beauty (Botha 2012c: 2).

As Small (1991: 15) comments, Botha's turn to ancient forms (including Egyptian, Judaic, Christian) is about finding basic symbols and the kinds of materials 'that sculpture, as work, as handwork, may meaningfully explore.'

Leigh (2009: 52) argues that Botha's turn to local and indigenous materials and techniques in finding a suitable sculptural language was not only about understanding and adapting innovative forms but also about respecting a repository of ancient skills and traditions that had been undervalued. Small (1991: 16) describes Botha as placing himself within such 'traditional wisdom' via a process of work rooted in genuine dialogue. He refers to this wisdom as a distillation or precipitation through time, where time is viewed 'not merely as clock-time but as a reality far-fuller-than linear' (Small 1991: 16). British land artist Chris Drury (2004: 20) says something similar when observes that the making of woven vessels is one of the oldest crafts and is buried deep within

[115] Small (1991: 16) suggests that Botha 'has wanted to show, and to have, some deep understanding of the driving force of his indigenous time and place […] – and at the same time, "at work", to insert himself into wider, much wider reality: which, invariably, becomes possible only because of rubbing shoulders, so to speak, with "traditional wisdom."'

culture. Making shelters and baskets, he notes, speaks of an intimate way of linking cultural object to the outer world of landscape, place and time (Drury 2004: 17). Commenting on such ideas of linkage between place and time, Leigh (2009: 52) suggests that Botha was trying to find a way whereby conversations between materials and people could lead to the generation of a vocabulary in which symbol and material would potently combine. Botha alludes to this when he talks of 'experimenting with material as a way of finding or establishing a conceptual equivalent' (Botha quoted in Leigh 2009: 99).[116]

Writing about craftwork in rural contexts, Juan Carlos Pacheco Contreras (2010: 107) proposes that it can be understood as a system which interacts with its social and economic environment. The transformation of natural resources into handcrafted products represents part of the cultural identity of a community. As such, craft plays an important part in fostering social interchange. He adds: 'The nature of the environment as well as the territory are embedded in the identity and cultural particularity of craft, which results in craft having a cultural signature related to its region of origin' (Contreras 2010: 107). Craft involves technical-historical knowledge that is constituted in technological memory, and, as Contreras notes (2010: 108), it is this memory that gives local craft its particular identity.

The notion of 'embeddedness' and 'memory' that Contreras addresses speaks perhaps most clearly to Botha's search for 'conceptual equivalence' in generating a new vocabulary based on indigenous practices. In an interview, Botha commented that a different approach to art making and teaching was called for at a time when the country was going through dramatic transformation, one that would embrace the 'living knowledge-system' that local traditions of making hold. He believes that a certain confidence and self-assuredness in communicating ideas would emerge from tapping into deeply rooted cultural practice that demonstrates human endeavour through intense engagement with

[116] Drury (2004: 20) speaks of a kind of resolution that is found between the inside and the outside of a shelter. This speaks similarly to the kind of equivalence that Botha was seeking.

materiality. The history of particular materials and what they reference socially through their usage carries ideas. Materiality, as Botha notes, is always already embedded in meaning (Personal communication 14 July 2017).

Botha also comments that local producers of traditional crafts are very preoccupied with the notion of beauty and imbuing objects with elegance, an aspect that he feels was important for him to recognize even before engaging elements of metaphor and narrative in his art making. The engagement with beauty, he believes, is also of importance to receivers of cultural practice who recognize its significance in traditional cultural making. In other words, makers carry such values in a way that is embedded in a traditional knowledge system. Accessing this, he believes, allows one to 'enter the viscerally contested living experience of South Africa,' something that he was not able to explore fully during his university training due to the 'closedness' of the intellectual environment. Botha found it after he left his studies through his collaboration with Zulu builders. This encounter offered a means through which to explore form-making that felt relevant to him as a meeting point with his Western-based art training. It helped him to realize what he would have to un-learn and re-learn and, through a synthesis of Western and African, it 'opened up a library of thought' for him. He further commented that 'if we were to find out who we were we would need to re-enter the visceral experience of the street and the land.' The idea of artefact making in relation to land (or what people are making in the street in an urban context) thus became an important idea for him. At a cross-road in history, he felt, it was essential to evaluate the morality of the Western gaze as opposed to 'African beingness.' His heart and then his mind, he said, were opened to who he was as a South African and this allowed him to reframe the narrowness of the 'tag' of being a white South African (Personal communication 14 July 2017).

Figure 4-6 Ntshalintshali family members assisting in the construction of Botha's "Human Structures" sculptures © Andries Botha.

5.3 Building together

In their chapter titled "Woven Houses, Wanderers and Withies," (2005: 134) Cunningham and Terry quote the Zulu proverb: *Wadlula ngendl isakhiwa kayibeka qaza* (translated: 'He passed by a hut being built and he did not tie a knot'). The authors observe that in Zulu society it is considered impolite and disrespectful to pass people who are working without offering to help and that helping in the work is also an opportunity to learn. The proverb also suggests, as they elaborate, that in order to build a traditional house one needs to tie many knots; techniques such as cross-stitching and lattice twined wickerwork are the weaving processes commonly used. While in the past such weaving processes met very crucial needs in providing shelter and food storage in the Zulu homestead, Chapman (1992; 84) comments that they also 'give solidity to ideas of bindings in community.'

Cunningham and Terry (2005: 135) further observe that thatched and woven Zulu bee-hive dwellings are like giant baskets, providing a cool, 'womb-like' interior. A strong smell emanates from the grass and only a limited amount of light enters through the lowly positioned entrance. They note that in southern Africa the same plant species and weaving styles used for baskets are often also used for building dwellings. In the grassland areas of KwaZulu-Natal where there are often relatively few trees, Zulu people developed a specialist architectural style for the dome-shaped dwelling that makes maximum use of grass and minimal use of wood. The authors observe that unlike baskets which can be woven by a single person, the construction of a grass dwelling requires at least two people to thread binding materials. Men usually build the framework from saplings, bending them over and tying them together to form a strong lattice for the dome. This is then covered with thatch grass and tied down with a network of plaited grass rope (Cunningham and Terry 2005: 140-141).

Finding a close relationship with labour through practicing techniques, skills and associated knowledges that have endured for centuries as part of local social life was for Botha a way towards developing a new kind of sculpture in response to

local knowledge. It was also informed, as he puts it, by a response to 'the consequences of the day-to-day degradation of humanity that took place as a result of the political chaos in South Africa.' In other words, it is also in acknowledgement of the invisible labours and bodily efforts of workers in the context of the injustices of apartheid. Rankin (1991: 6) mentions that Botha was himself from the working class, having, for example, worked closely with black labourers as a ganger on the railways during his teens. For him the relationship to labour addressed what he saw as one of the major issues that came up as a result of apartheid, namely 'the way in which cultural production could inform or question the idea of cultural identity' (Botha quoted in Becker 1998: 2).[117]

From identifying with traditional Zulu craft materials and practices, Botha would in later works also begin to look beyond rural culture to include what he referred to as 'urban "rural" culture,' meaning creative work produced by people who come from rural areas but who work and live in the cities (Botha quoted in Leigh 2009: 119). He started to mix weaving techniques with industrial materials such as wire, rubber and nylon rope to create sculptural groupings of figures and animals, sometimes embedded in wave-like formations. Compared to the earlier "Human Structures" sculptures, which were unitary in form and meaning, as Rankin (1991: 9) notes, the new works

> seemed fundamentally paradoxical. They used craft techniques, yet subverted picturesque rural associations with industrialised materials; they were monumental in scale, yet detailed and cumulative in form; they seemed comic and narrative in some aspects, yet implied an epic seriousness (Rankin 1991: 9).

[117] Botha commented in an interview that coming from a white working class background meant that he was unsuited for the cultural framework of white middleclass-ness when entering the university environment but it gave him a strong sense of street survival. It alerted him to the need for his own students to be immersed in the dynamic tapestry of creativity beyond the safe confines of the teaching institution. The Durban Technikon sculpture department was situated at the bottom end of campus (128 Mansfield Road), away from the scrutiny of institutional authorities and close to the Warwick Triangle trading sector. As Botha notes, this proximity 'brought Africa to your doorstep.' His students were encouraged to engage with the non-formal creative energy of Durban and a fertile creative space was thereby developed. Being away from the bureaucratic centre of the institution and open 24 hours of the day, the studios were constantly occupied (at times including squatters) and maintained an openness to the surrounding community (Personal communication 14 July 2017).

5.4 Developing a new vocabulary

Commenting on his experience gained from learning Zulu building techniques, Botha (2012b: 2) states that it was 'the direct and deliberate response to structure, the manner in which it was made,' that was an abiding lesson for him in realizing the need to break away from his exclusively Western artmaking training to establish a new vernacular. He was attracted to the responsiveness of such building to its immediate situation and its involvement of an embodied skill acquired through much practice. Whilst learning weaving and building skills from the Ntshalintshalis, Botha started to explore his own sculptural forms based on the techniques he had learnt. Rankin (1991: 7) mentions that he persuaded his hosts to adapt their skills to helping in constructing his sculptures. Williamson (1989: 144) quotes him as saying: 'Initially my teachers thought it was hysterical I was making these non-functional things.' They would later continue working on pieces during weekdays while Botha returned to his teaching in Durban. Rankin (1991: 7) further comments that '[a]n increasingly fruitful interaction of ideas developed, with unexpected solutions worked out during Botha's absences incorporated on occasion into the creative process.' A reciprocal working relationship was thus established whereby Botha entrusted the Ntshalintshalis to carry on with work in his absence, affording them creative scope in the process.

Botha (2012b: 2) recalls: 'I was making works in the Drakensberg mountains […] Upon my return to the city I wanted to continue the ideas that I was working on but needed to deal with them in a different way.' Drawing on traditional materials and techniques required a further step of reinterpretation for Botha in adapting what he had learnt, i.e. experimenting and finding innovative solutions in his own work in the context of his own creative concerns. He adds that as a young boy he took great delight in buying model aeroplane kits and meticulously assembling them. In particular, the inner structure of the wings fascinated him: 'The skin always revealed an inner structure,' he comments (Botha 2012b: 2). Leigh (2009: 111) observes that a similar lattice structure used in the building of Zulu dwellings offered Botha great possibility in exploring the envelopment of

space through the use of armature and weaving. The strength of such construction techniques enabled him to explore relatively large and impactful forms resembling shelters. In the gallery context, the mysteriously enclosed forms dominated the space, highlighting the exchange between inside and outside.

Figure 7 Andries Botha and the Ntshalintshali family,
Force of Victory (1984)
Human Structures Series,
thatching grass, 300 x 222 x 100cm
© Andries Botha

Figure 8 Andries Botha and the Ntshalintshali family,
Journey Through Time (1984)
Human Structures Series,
thatching grass, 200 x 180 x 800 cm
© Andries Botha

Weaving on such a large scale involves the whole body and is a multisensory engagement that connects maker with material and environment. For his "Human Structures" sculptures Botha recalls using the dimensions of his own body as a unit of measure in trying to express something about

> how a body is carried when it is in the grip of a great idea. In many respects I was at the beginnings of a narrative or conversation about what I believe South Africa could be if it heeded the lessons of, what was then, a discredited African tradition (Botha 2012b: 2).

A re-attachment of the visual arts to craftwork that engages a fully embodied form of action and response is what Botha underlines here, one that gives expression to a sensory order beyond an exclusive focus on the visual.[118]

Rankin (1991: 7) writes that Botha would sometimes outline his own body on the ground to define the parameters of a new work and a framework would then be constructed and covered with thatch or another organic material. While the works were not representational, they implied human containment and shelter and spoke strongly to a relationship with landscape and dwelling.[119] Rankin (1991: 7) comments that Botha's "Human Structures" forms 'seemed to explore the bounds of basic life experiences,' and that calling them 'spiritual vehicles' indicates his concern with philosophical debates about life and death, beginning and end, genesis and apocalypse. She also mentions that his exhibition was well received, partly because his approach to using the materiality or 'fabric' of the geographical landscape of South Africa and indigenous weaving techniques appealed to a need for a new South African iconography.

---

[118] The occularcentric focus of Western aesthetics closely allied sight with scientific practice and ideology, as Constance Classen and David Howes (2006: 208) note: 'The visual arts were definitively detached from craftwork, which (despite the efforts of the Arts and Crafts movement) was negatively perceived by many as emphasizing the hand over the eye and functional considerations over aesthetic form.'

[119] Ingold (2000a: 330) places an emphasis on *dwelling* as involving a palpable engagement in the world. He comments that the focus in dwelling 'is on the process whereby features of the environment take on specific local meanings through their incorporation into the pattern of everyday activity of its inhabitants. Home, in this sense, is that zone of familiarity which people know intimately, and in which they, too, are intimately known.' Botha's concern with the notion of home underscores this idea of dwelling as grounded in the lived experience of a practical engagement in the world.

5.5 Collaborative weaving as journeying and correspondence

Botha often uses the metaphor of journeying in the context of his own work. His 1995 artwork titled *Embarkation* (Fig 9, p105) made from rope, wattle, steel and found objects, visualizes a world in flux in both its iconography and method of construction. A fragment of a larger installation comprising 6 pieces, it engages with the idea of exile or nomadism in search of a home (Botha 2010: 7). Van der Wal (2010: 11) describes the distorted central figure as floating in a sea of nylon rope together with 'various companions that are needed for its journey of corporeal and symbolic transformation.' He points, for example, to a few duck forms riding the waves, symbolizing transition through their migratory routes, as well as miniature figures of Jesus (crucifix figures) attached to the waves representing aspects of religious transformation. A figure holding an umbrella at the back of the procession seems to be steering the way forward, while a wire-woven figure at the front bends over backwards sharply, resembling the figurehead of an old ship. Signifying movement and journey through its various symbols and woven materials, van der Wal (2010: 11) suggests that the work underscores 'the physical implications of identity in motion.'

The idea of movement, becoming and journeying is further exemplified in the collaborative 'entanglement' of several hands involved in the making of Botha's artwork.[120] I asked Botha in an interview about his role in overseeing while also participating in the joint weaving of his larger works. He first commented that the process of manufacturing his works always involved an intimate engagement with materials as a 'perpetually unfolding event,' much like taking a journey. Transformation is effected *within* that process, i.e. it happens as a consequence of 'feeling' the materials. Through such close engagement in making by hand, something can grow and a material and metaphorical transformation is enabled,

[120] On the aspect of participatory construction Botha comments: 'Collaboration gave me an opportunity to take on board new skill sets which I then adapted to my creative process. I was assisted by Greg Streak and Lisa du Plessis on *Embarkation*. They were both students of mine. I understood the principle of collaboration and assistants to be well established in sculpture making tradition. I am never not present throughout the entire process of production in order to ensure the nuance I seek' (Personal communication 4 November 2017).

or as he puts it, 'material and metaphor are allowed to dance with each other' (Personal communication 14 July 2017).[121]

Figure 9 Andries Botha and co-producers Greg Streak and Lisa du Plessis, *Embarkation* (1995), Rope, wattle, galvanized and plastic sheeting, canvas, stainless steel mesh, metal, found objects, resin, lead, polypropylene, 350 x 180 x 700cm © Andries Botha.

Although he starts out from a clear point of departure, Botha comments that it is important for him, as principle author, to allow something to take shape but also to be wary of fixing a predetermined result. He must, instead, allow the process to remain flexible and open to the intuitive inputs of fellow weavers. This does not mean that the process becomes a 'free-flow' for all to do what they like, but rather, it is about guiding an improvisational procedure whereby potential can be harnessed through attunement to what is at hand. Botha does not see himself as the 'gifted honcho' in charge, as he puts it, but a facilitator who has the responsibility to see the work through to completion. His overseeing role is

[121] Ingold (2000a: 411) expresses something similar in commenting that intentionality and feeling are 'two sides of the same coin, that of our practical involvement in the dwelt-in world.' He further suggests that 'feeling – as the tactile metaphor implies – is a mode of active and responsive engagement in the world, it is not a passive, interior reaction of the organism to external disturbances.'

important in directing the energy of the weavers and shaping something conceptually. He observes that in a collaborative process that remains indeterminate and open, a 'conceptual feel' arises through the manipulation of materials, much like he imagines a musician composing a score would experience by way of an unfixed process that unfolds in time (Personal communication 14 July 2017).

It is evident from Botha's comments that his work is not about executing a ready-formed idea but rather about experiencing an awareness *in* the doing and allowing the performance of the making to embody intentionality and feeling. It involves a process of attention that is about being 'continually responsive to an ever-changing situation,' as Ingold puts it: 'intention is carried forward in the activity itself' (Ingold 2000a: 413-414). The joint weaving is in this sense a generative source of 'purposeful coordination,' to use Susanne Küchler's expression (quoted in Bunn 2014: 176). Participants in Botha's projects understand the common principles of the task but are allowed to develop and learn through their collaborative engagement with material.

Writing about the formation of baskets, Bunn (2014: 166) comments on how the weaving of forms by hand does not always simply unfold or flow but can at times involve a battle with materials. She adds that the strength of a woven form is 'an outcome of the resistance produced between maker and material, and the ways this is resolved through their meeting and exchange' (Bunn 2014: 166). The weaver has to find a kind of attunement with his/her material and has both to perform the technique of weaving and develop, shape and build up the growing form (Bunn 2014: 166). When weaving on a large scale, the multisensory engagement of the maker is experienced not only through the hands but the entire body. As Bunn (2014: 168) suggests, it 'enabl[es] the connection between artist, material and environment to be directly experienced' and allows for a kind of 'intuitive space' in which to develop forms. She argues that this allows the maker to develop a more unconstrained form of practice and frees him/her up to 'make imaginative leaps to find solutions to problems in new and innovative ways' (Bunn 2014: 169).

Botha comments that the unfolding activity of collaboration demands mutual respect for each other's inputs and a willingness from all involved to make bold decisions along the way. While a certain amount of 'filling-in' of woven detail may at times be required in constructing the works, it never closes down innovation. He speaks about a process of 'unlocking' that can happen during the making; a participant's input can at times open up a door for the work to develop in an unexpected direction. A collaboration of this kind, Botha says, is about sharing in a common humanity, listening and affirming as well as trusting one another's abilities and responses. It is about keeping process and conversation going (Personal communication 14 July 2017).[122]

Ingold (2007a: 42) characterizes a person's interaction with other beings and things in the world as 'complexly connected bundles of threads.' He further observes that the person who weaves is threading a line *into* a surface, i.e. it is a form-generating activity that happens *in* the world rather than *on* it (Ingold 2013: 22-25). Weaving, he suggests, is a practice that brings together observation with participation through action in what he calls 'correspondence,' a way of living 'attentionally' rather than 'intentionally' with others (Ingold 2014b: 389). As 'participant observer' in the process, Botha's own perception and action is coupled with the forward movements of others in a form of correspondence, as Ingold (2014b: 389) describes it, whereby they proceed by continually answering to one another. Ingold (2014b: 389) further states that correspondence is 'neither given nor achieved but always in the making'; it is a relation that 'carries on or unfolds along concurrent paths.'

[122] Ingold makes an analogy between the emergent process of making and the act of speech in conversation when he notes that 'in speech, the voice is incorporated into a current of sensuous activity – namely, narrative performance – from which, as it unfolds, form and meaning are continually generated' (Ingold 2011b: 28). Engaging in repetitive handcrafting can in this sense be understood as a form of 'speaking through doing' whereby meaning evolves as work unfolds in-the-making.

Botha's woven forms created through participatory activity exemplify the lines of becoming and movements of relations expressed by Ingold. People become as much 'threaded' in such interactions as the materials that are used in the weaving. As such, the work speaks to an immersive condition in which beings are constituted in participatory activities where binding conveys the notion of lives being literally connected. Botha comments:

> It is about being on the precipice of possibility and potential. There is no roadmap; participants must throw their parachutes away and trust that they will fall on their feet. To feel insecure is ok, but you must trust that you will create yourself into a position of resolution. Collaboration unlocks possibilities (Personal communication 14 July 2017).[123]

It is the space of intersection and conversation in emergent making that Botha stresses as bringing forth a dynamic hybridity that allows new forms to emerge.[124]

Since his first explorations of creating forms with wattle branches in the early 1980s, Botha has introduced woven elements into his sculptures using materials and methods associated with traditional African crafts, perhaps, as Small (1991: 16) suggests, as a form of 'wrestling with *himself*: […] wresting *himself* out of the culture of dominance.' He argues that Botha's working of material through weaving can be read as an emphatic struggle for meaning through a process that comes to *show*: 'it is a show-off affair – rather than to cover.' For Small (1991: 16) it represents a 'rubbing of shoulders, so to speak, with 'traditional wisdom'' so as to insert himself into much wider reality than what the vision of apartheid allowed. Botha's later works expand not only in scale and range of materials and

---

[123] Ingold (2014b: 389) expresses very similar points in noting that 'to attend to what others are doing or saying and to what is going on around and about [is] to follow along where others go and to do their bidding, whatever this might entail and wherever it might take you. This can be unnerving, and entail considerable existential risk. It is like pushing the boat out into an as yet unformed world – a world in which things are not ready made but always incipient, on the cusp of continual emergence. Commanded not by the given but by what is on the way to being given, one has to be prepared to *wait* (Masschelein 2010b: 46). Indeed, waiting upon things is precisely what it means to attend to them.'

[124] This corresponds with Ingold's observation that 'knowledge is not built from facts that are simply there, waiting to be discovered and organized in terms of concepts and categories, but that it rather grows and is grown in the forge of our relations with others […] Knowledge […] is *co-produced*' (Ingold 2014b: 391).

processes used, such as wire, welding, bolts and nuts, but they are also characterized by a move away from a highly political focus to a concern with ecology and craft at a more generalized level.[125] In the following section I examine a later work, collaboratively created with fellow artist Sam Ntshangaze, that explores the multi-sensory, affective and emotional capacities of textilic making as mediated through colour, tactility and scent.

5.6 Botha's collaboration with Sam Ntshangaze

Botha has had a particularly close association with a Zulu artist, Sam Ntshangaze, who he first met in the 1990s selling handcrafted objects in West Street, Durban. He comments that it was difficult to walk past or not to notice Ntshangaze who he describes as 'an enigmatic magus-like figure with a massively generous disposition.' Botha occasionally bought some of Ntshangaze's crafted objects and from regular encounters and conversations, a friendship soon developed. Ntshangaze, who was then in his 50s, was fascinated by the idea that Botha was an artist and teacher, something that he had a deep desire to be himself but could not because of the need to support his family through the selling of his handcrafted items.

Botha invited Ntshangaze to visit the Durban Technikon sculpture studios and, on Ntshangaze's request, arranged a workspace there for him. He was given access to equipment, interacted with students and learnt technical processes such as welding from them. Botha relates that Ntshangaze soon began to construct extraordinary sculptural forms and his creative energy rubbed off on the students. Although it was not possible to formally appoint Ntshangaze in a teaching position at the Technikon, he took on a quasi-tutoring role that was

[125] Botha's works from the late 1980s were often given Afrikaans titles and addressed political themes. For example, *Dromedaris Donder! ... en ander dom dinge* (1988), which translates as 'Dromedaris Thunder (or 'damn it') and Other Stupid Things,' makes reference to the ship that brought the first white settlers to South African shores. Although the work does not literally describe the event of the arrival of Europeans, it 'conjures up contradictory images of imposed power and threatening political intervention,' as Rankin (1991: 9) puts it. Botha's most recent works of herds of elephant made in metal, wood and stone (associated with Botha's 'Human Elephant Foundation') are very different in tone, focusing on issues of ecology, sustainability, conservation and migration.

enabled and supported internally by the department. According to Botha, he provided something that was lacking in the formal teaching arrangement and students were 'hungry' to learn from his 'survival skill-set' and the particular aperture of experience that he brought to his work.

Ntshangaze eventually approached Botha about the possibility of studying Fine Arts at the Technikon. He had a matric qualification and as a person with a vast body of experience, Botha was able to convince the authorities to have him registered in the department where he studied for 3 years. Whilst working and studying in the sculpture studios, Botha got Ntshangaze to show him and the students how to weave. On receiving the 1999 Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Botha invited Ntshangaze to assist him in the weaving of some of his large sculptural works and a collaborative association thus began.

ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo (To Touch the Heart) (Fig 10 and 11, p111-112) was a work that Botha and Ntshangaze jointly created for an international exhibition titled "Container '96 – Art across Oceans," hosted by the city of Copenhagen in celebration of its designation as Europe's capital for 1996. Instead of putting together a conventional art exhibition, the promoters decided on inviting 96 artists from harbour cities across the world to create installations in ship containers in their countries of origin which were then shipped to Copenhagen where they were displayed in the port area in a kind of 'container village.' Both Botha and Ntshangaze travelled to Copenhagen for the opening event. Some of the containers were stacked three high with metal stairways, walkways and bridges connecting them. Arranged according to 9 regions, they provided visitors an insight into 'how contemporary artists from far afield confront an identical challenge' (www.nytimes.com 1996: [sp]).

Describing some of the submissions from around the world, an online *New York Times* article wrote about Botha and Ntshangaze's work as follows:

> Artists from Africa produced materials, shapes and colors strongly evocative of their homelands, with Andries Botha and Sam Ntshangaze of South Africa even adding the smell of rural Africa by

> creating a huge woven basket with corn spilling across the floor (www.nytimes.com 1996: [sp]).

Leigh describes the artists as having

> lined the interior with grass-weaving (using a variety of KwaZulu-Natal grasses), arranged in decorative geometric and colour patterns, structured the front of the container into a roof formation and covered its floor with a thick layer of mealie pips, giving a strong feel and smell of what is familiar sensory experience of their locale (Leigh 2009: 163).

Figure 10 Andries Botha and Sam Ntshangaze, *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart) (1995/6), four grasses from KwaZulu-Natal, dried corn, mild steel, container, 350 x 350 x 550cm (installation view inside container, *Container '96 – art across oceans*, Copenhagen) © Andries Botha.

Figure 11 Andries Botha and Sam Ntshangaze, *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart) (1995/6), four grasses from Kwa-Zulu-Natal, dried corn, mild steel, container 350 x 3,5 x 5,5m, the woven elements being inserted into the container © Andries Botha.

Botha welded a metal structure inside the container to which woven and thatched grasses were attached that he and Ntshangaze had jointly collected from the KwaZulu-Natal region.[126] Created to be an immersive experience, the space of the container was one viewers could physically enter by stepping onto the corn covering the floor. As such, the work resembled a giant basket or shelter (Personal communication 14 July 2017).

By engaging the viewer on a bodily level, *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart) celebrates a sense of place and belonging through a relationship to materials that is spatial and sensuous. Craft's tactility and sensory dimension is

[126] Rankin (2009: 6) writes: 'It was Ntshangaze […] who insisted that the grasses should come from Nkandla because it would have rich associations with Zulu history through the royal kraals built in that particular grass, and that the colours woven into the panels should be similes for different manifestations of love in Zulu culture.'

made highly palpable by transforming the interior of the container into a warm, protective enclosure that effectively draws the visitor into him/herself. Through creating an enveloping environment by way of weaving and thatching the grasses, the artists brought the landscape of 'home' into the container, inviting the viewer into an intimate haptic relationship with it.

David Howes (2011: 2) argues that one of the least examined aspects of craft is its sensuous qualities, especially its appeal to touch.[127] Whereas reductive modernism (as exemplified in Clement Greenberg's critical writings) restricted aesthetic experience in the visual arts to sight alone, craft objects engage all the senses because they are used in so many different ways. In craft processes of material manipulation, the senses continually *intersect* with the visual. The visual can be given tactile presence, enhancing a more 'felt' experience of things. In Botha's and Ntshangaze's work such an experience is conveyed through the tactility of the thatched and woven grasses together with the strong scent that they impart. It presents much more than a visual representation, carrying an emotional intensity that speaks very strongly of journey and the idea of 'home.'[128]

Ingold (2000: 330) argues that it is especially in those contexts in which we claim to be 'at home' that artistic creativity as socially situated skilled practice is situated. He adds that 'home' may also be thought of as representing a certain perspective which he calls *dwelling.* He elaborates as follows:

> Its focus is on the process whereby features of the environment take on specific local meanings through their incorporation into the pattern of everyday activity of its inhabitants. Home, in this sense, is that zone of familiarity which people know intimately, and in which they, too, are intimately known (Ingold 2000: 330).

---

[127] Howes (2011: 1) argues that the disparagement of the crafts has partly to do with the conventional Western hierarchy of the senses where sight is opposed to touch as mind is opposed to body. Vision is considered in this Western context as being a 'nobler' sense while touch is relegated to a lower level of the sensorium. He notes that this opposition between sight and touch underpins the distinction between art and craft in the art/craft value system.

[128] In the context of global warming and climate change there was also an underlying eco-political aspect to the work in its use of natural materials and allusion to the vulnerability of the natural environment.

Ingold's perspective of dwelling as grounded in the lived experience of engagement seems particularly apt to the intimate qualities expressed in Botha's and Ntshangaze's artwork. A strong and enduring attachment to a place called 'home' is expressed through the materials and processes used in making *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart). They carry distinctive features of the local landscape and address, as van der Wal (2010: 10) puts it, 'the complicated human relation to spaces associated with intimacy, familial allegiance and social cohesion.'

5.7 Cross-cultural contacts

In her essay "Cross-cultural (Under)currents in South African Sculpture," art historian Elizabeth Rankin (2009: 2) addresses issues of collaboration across ethnic divides in South Africa, highlighting some of the challenges as well as 'the dangers of replicating the patronizing hegemony of a divided society.' She cautions that one cannot forget 'the mistrust between black and white engendered by apartheid and the huge divide in circumstances which impeded understanding in both directions' (Rankin 2009: 2).[129] Rankin ends her essay by leaving the reader with the question whether 'drawing indigenous art into the mainstream has perhaps been at the expense of those who made it possible' (Rankin 2009: 6). Rankin's question highlights the sensitivity surrounding cultural exchanges in contemporary South African art and to what ends they are used.

[129] Rankin curated the exhibitions "Images of Wood" in 1989 and "Images in Metal" in 1994 as attempts to 'create a holistic history of South African art that included both black and white sculptors.' She further comments: 'Of course the idea that I could present all these artists on a level playing field was an idealistic figment of my liberal imagination. The capitalist economy of colonialism had eroded cultural beliefs and historical forms of southern African art. Moreover, black artists who sought to work in European forms were denied an art education under apartheid and were starved of resources. In the later twentieth century, a few were supported by community centres, invariably headed by white teachers, which provided a limited substitute for formal art education. But recognition was still minimal, and dependent on the commercial ambitions of more adventurous art dealers' (Rankin 2009: 2).

The complex realities in South Africa cannot be ignored. As artist/curator Thembinkosi Goniwe (2007: 10) comments: 'It is no secret that the South African art field is fraught with unremitting racial, gender, sexual, and class disparities.' In a context of such continuing inequalities, complaints about the exploitative dimensions of cultural exchange have to be heeded and assimilations of indigenous perspectives into dominant Western modes must be resisted. At the same time, the perpetuation of an 'aesthetic apartheid' between indigenous and Western art must also be challenged (Double-Desire [Sa]: [sp]). What strategies are available to artists to negotiate this contradictory terrain? Does a white artist have the right, or not, to reference indigenous art and cultural practices in South Africa? Cultural appropriation and exchange remains a fraught area of debate.

Writing from an Australian perspective, art historian Ian McLean (cited in Neale 2012: 88) argues that a 'politics of disengagement' or fear of engagement has led to a stalling of discussions on cultural convergence and collaborations, effectively closing off any forms of engagement or borrowing between indigenous and non-indigenous artists.[130] Yet, as he observes, the call for non-indigenous artists to disengage has not been heeded as engagements and collaborations have increased. It seems, as he puts it, 'as if the only ethical position is to engage, to respond positively to the invitation of art.' Current exchanges are testing and pushing the ethics of politics and vice versa, he maintains (McLean 2012: 30).

McLean ascribes the ethical demand of art in some respects to postmodern and postcolonial art as well as the changing dynamics of globalization. In a world that has become increasingly decentered, he argues, a new openness to cross-cultural exchange is evident and the debate seems to have moved beyond the moral and

[130] The very viciousness of colonial exchange, McLean (2016: 26) remarks, seems to thwart any possibility of exchange or dialogue and presents an ethical minefield that seems to offer no alternative move except to withdraw. Unequal power relations in which indigenous voices have little agency seem to override any way forward. He comments: 'there appears to be no ground for negotiation. The over-arching coercive power of white discourse is an inescapable conundrum. In the 1990s engaging with Indigenous art was so controversial that most non-Indigenous artists avoided it as if it was the plague. The same prohibitions were evident in critical and curatorial spheres. It became impossible to engage with Indigenous art except through an Indigenous voice' (McLean 2012: 28).

political impasse of non-engagement. He sees the issue now as being not about *whether* to engage but *how* to engage (McLean 2012: 31).[131] Conversations have increasingly emerged in recent years around transculturation as 'a complex process whereby traditions are appropriated, shared, or negotiated between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures' (Tyquiengco 2015: 209).[132]

The issue of appropriation and cross-cultural exchange is open to much deeper debate than the scope of this thesis can allow, but it clearly remains a controversial topic that will always raise questions about who is profiting. Perhaps, as Thomas (1999: 141) argues, the problem whether appropriation can be construed as legitimate exchange or not demands not an endorsement or rejection but 'an exploration of how particular works were motivated and assessed' (Thomas 1999: 141). The question whether artists and their works speak with respect has to be paramount. In my examination of Botha's creative practice, I foregrounded his engagement with issues of personal, social and political renewal and regeneration as well as his understanding of sculpture as a form of ethical intervention. Seeking a socially and politically accountable or integrated creativity was, for him, about finding an expressive content rooted in Africa. The depth of his respect towards African crafts is very evident in his approach to learning and practicing traditional forms of making himself, and he is clearly sensitive to the discriminatory context in which craft has been devalued in South Africa's past. An engagement with neglected local craft traditions was essential for Botha in his search for a distinctive sculptural vocabulary that would respond to the socio-political changes in the country. He

---

[131] Taking similar account of contemporary cross-cultural practice in Australia, Aboriginal activist and anthropologist Marcia Langton (2012: 15) observes that culture is always dynamic and cross-cultural fertilization is inevitable in the modern world. She argues that 'the notion of "appropriation," often used with an intimation of theft, is highly unstable.' She further comments: 'throughout history, artists have referenced other artists, artworks and concepts, and have done so because they intend to respond to an idea, an image, not to steal it, but to elaborate the idea, to have a conversation of a visual kind, to form a relationship across space and time' (Langton 2012: 15).

[132] Ian McLean (2014a) states that the term 'transculturation' was first coined by Fernando Ortiz in his 1940 text "Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar": 'Ortiz proposed the neologism "*transculturation*" as a better description of intercultural processes in colonial cultures than the anthropological term "acculturation," which emphasizes the one-way imposition of the coloniser's culture.'

was attracted to traditional craft-based forms of making because they were so distinctively connected to place (landscape) and cultural history. Bringing them into his art practice expressed his recognition of the need to redress the wrongs of the past as well as defining his own sense of belonging.

Figure 12 Sam Ntshangaze and Andries Botha

CHAPTER 6

WEAVING AND STITCHING IN THE ARTWORKS OF SIEMON ALLEN AND NICHOLAS HLOBO

In this chapter I examine selected works by two contemporary South African artists, Siemon Allen and Nicholas Hlobo, both of whom have incorporated elements of handcraft as part of their material-conceptual concerns. Their creative processes of weaving, stitching and tying with unusual materials such as video tape, inner tubing rubber, yarns and ribbons are examined to illustrate how contemporary South African artists engage with materials and processes that connect with local meanings through craft. Through their engagement with handcraft both artists have created works that are 'informed by cultural nuances,' as Perrill (2012: 597) puts it.

During the 1990s Allen was a student of Botha's and learnt weaving techniques from Ntshangaze. At the turn of the millennium some of his woven works featured prominently on local and international exhibitions, profiling new and innovative work from a young generation of South African artists. I examine Allen's work titled *Screen*, produced in 2000, as an example of a woven work that represents a clear break from the protest art that characterized the art of a previous generation in a search for alternate ways in which to address the new complexities of South Africa's post-apartheid situation.[133] Following the isolation of apartheid South Africa through the international cultural boycott, a new generation of artists followed Western avant-garde precedents from which they had remained isolated. Allen can be seen to combine these avant-garde-isms with traditional African art forms in an attempt to arrive at an Africanist artistic language that would be suitable to the new situation.

[133] In my discussion of Botha's work, I mentioned this shift in observing that the concerns in his later works represented a move away from the highly political focus of his earlier works. In the aftermath of apartheid, South African artists found different ways of working in response to the recent history and current context. They were able to participate in international exhibitions and biennales and found themselves to be the focus of a fascinated international gaze.

Hlobo's works have been described as reclaiming and celebrating his African heritage through referencing 'deeply local materiality' but also celebrating the 'recently acquired constitutional right to assert his sexual identity and to propose alternate readings of his umXhosa traditions' (Jantjes 2011b: 58). Perrill (2012: 586) argues that, as an openly gay man of Xhosa background, Hlobo tests notions of cultural tradition in his work while exploring aspects relating to gender, language and identity (Perrill 2012: 586). Similarly, Jantjes (2011b: 53) comments that, following the collapse of apartheid and the eradication of discrimination on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, religion or political affiliation, Hlobo is of a generation of artists that 'had been given the possibility to speak openly and declare their attitudes and preferences without offence to others but with the defence of the law.' In addition, Jantjes (2011b: 53-54; 81) argues that Hlobo's confidently flamboyant work marked the beginning of something new. It demonstrated a desire to restore and reconnect histories and identities that had been severed and broken. He elaborates:

> Nicholas Hlobo's professional development is framed by a period in South African history when things were in a state of flux. The disruptions democratic elections brought to the everyday of post-apartheid, revealed an absence of cultural and political cohesion. Normative social interaction and systems of beliefs that had remained unaltered for centuries, imploded. Things were falling apart and the long shadows cast over Archbishop Tutu's "rainbow nation" were not immediately shortened by the adoption of a democratic constitution. Neither did the media reports of South Africa's transition as a 21st century 'political miracle', remove these fears of disintegration and loss (Jantjes 2011b: 81).

Mergel's (2009: 31) observation that Hlobo's processes of threading together through stitching, weaving, binding and tying thus carry strong metaphoric meaning in a post-apartheid South African context, similarly raises questions of cultural and social connection across traditions.

Following South Africa's transition to a constitutional democracy, foreign observers have been fascinated with the country's contemporary art, commenting on the ways in which artists have negotiated the complex history and social transition from apartheid. Andres Mario Zervigón (2002: 69) states,

for example, that many South African artists revisit the apartheid past by 'mining South Africa's material history like an archive of memories and re-presenting this archive's contents for careful consideration.' While much attention has been focused on this extractive engagement with the past, often relating it to the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),[134] not much has been said about the reinstating of past traditions of making and the recovery of resources that were disregarded in the past. Understandably, attention is often focused on the invention of new modes of expression, and the exploration by young artists of new mediums that fall outside of traditional art practices like painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking. The new political and cultural climate allows young artists to operate outside of what may sometimes be deemed to be 'stereotypical approaches associated with the past' (Kinsman 2015: [sp]). Emerging practices and new directions can perhaps be seen to align more readily with the notion of a 'new' and transforming South Africa. It is, however, to the return to craft-based modes of making that I now turn in examining how some contemporary South African artists are bridging the art/craft dichotomy.

6.1 Weave and memory

I start by examining Allen's work *Screen* (2000) (Fig 13, p121) that features weaving as its process of construction.[135] I closely follow Zervigón's discussion of this work in his essay "The Weave of Memory: Siemon Allen's *Screen* in Post-

[134] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was constituted to investigate politically motivated acts of violence and human rights violations committed during the apartheid era. It was formed in an attempt to come to terms with the crimes of the past, allowing individuals to speak about their suffering under apartheid. The commission sought to reveal truth through the recovery of stories that had previously been ignored in order to arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the country's oppressive past (Miller 2005: 40). Jyoti Mistry (2001: 8) suggests that one of the functions of the TRC was 'to use the process of disclosure and reconciliation as catharsis, thereby uniting a very fragmented society through the experience of healing. This common heritage of suffering; mediated in a very public manner; forms the foundation for a new South Africa's construction of its identity.'

[135] Allen created two versions of *Screen*. The original version, simply titled *Screen* (consisting of 12 panels), was presented in an exhibition at White Box, New York in 2000 and was subsequently destroyed. Another, taller version titled *Screen II* (consisting of 4 large panels) was made for a semi-retrospective show "Imaging South Africa" in Richmond, Virginia in 2010. This second version was since shown a number of times in various altered configurations (Personal communication 20 October 2017).

apartheid South Africa" to argue that the craft of weaving underlies the conceptual concern of this artist working in the post-liberation context of South Africa. The work in question consists of 12 panels of tightly woven VHS videotape to form a screened rectangular enclosure measuring 1,8 x 2,4 x 5,5m. Williamson (2009: 202) notes:

> To make *Screen* (2000), Allen wove reams of videotape into grid-like screens that form a life-size room within a room. The work is a savvy combination of apparent opposites: a contemporary medium associated with personal documentary narrative is morphed via a traditional, handcrafted construction method – while a student in Durban, Allen was taught to weave by Zulu artist Sam Ntshangaze – into a cryptic physical enclosure. The former sequential reading of the videotape is made redundant. Only the reflective sheen offers the viewer an access point, but this turns out to be a dead end, reverting the audience's reflection to themselves.

Figure 13 Siemon Allen, *Screen* (2000), metal frame, VHS tape, 180 x 240 x 550cm © Siemon Allen.

Zervigón (2002: 69) describes the structure as a 'shiny black behemoth' reminiscent of Tony Smith's classic Minimalist sculpture titled *Die* of 1962, a black steel cube standing 6 foot high. He comments that the imposing size of *Screen* as a walled enclosure together with the shiny surface of the tightly woven videotape contributes to the sense that it 'appears to mean something beyond its mere physical presence' (Zervigón 2002: 69). One cannot peer inside and the reflective surface of the woven videotape adds to the work's opacity (Zervigón 2002: 69).[136]

Allen's artwork is a kind of archive of inaccessible recordings, the tightly woven tape fabric 'holding' but also withholding its content.[137] Zervigón comments on the material and metaphorical ambiguity of the work as follows:

> As videotape, *Screen* offers a material term for memory even as its black opacity references that memory's utter inaccessibility, the same sort of memory other South African artists labor to recoup. Indeed, the very weave of Allen's *Screen* offers a metaphor for the integration of individual memories into one national history, yet, simultaneously, the weave's tightness denies any simple decoding of that memory by, for example, feeding the tape through a video player (Zervigón 2002: 69).[138]

Used VHS videotape is usually associated with recordings of personal memories, news events or surveillance footage, and as Zervigón observes, the material has particularly unsettling associations in the South African context. It may remind

---

[136] Clive Kellner (2010: 33) comments on the surface of Allen's *Screen* as follows: 'The black reflective surface of the woven videotape acts as an interpellation of its immediate environment. The viewer's image is reflected together with the space and contents of the environment in which the work is situated. The result is an effect of recognition or conscious identification with one's self and one's surroundings.'

[137] Commenting on Allen's later collection-based installations, for example, where he displays his prodigious stamp collections, books, newspapers, vinyl records and sound recordings, Kellner (2010: 30) suggests that Allen's act of art making can be described as 'an archival impulse.' He notes that collecting (including video tape) is a form of archiving and that Allen's displays of collected items thus reflect the changing social, political, and economic climate of a transforming South Africa. Williamson (2009: 202) similarly describes Allen's obsessive collecting and compiling of eclectic found objects as 'revealing […] a shifting national history.'

[138] On the aspect of deferral and blocking of access, John Peffer (2000: [sp]) observes that, together with the VHS tape as a raw material which stores information being rendered mute when woven, the installation of *Screen* as 'a 6 foot tall box, just low enough to encourage the viewer to want to see inside, just high enough to block that desire' also becomes a 'metaphor for historical evidence whose legibility is frustrated.'

viewers of the surveillance industry of the apartheid regime and disturbing recordings of brutal acts executed by police officials against immigrants uncovered after 1994. It may also allude to the recordings of the TRC hearings (Zervigón 2002: 75). By reflecting South Africa while at the same time refusing memory, Zervigón (2002: 69) argues, *Screen* functions quite literally as an anti-memorial, making the mechanics and deferral of reference its primary concern. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where the stakes for representation remain high, he comments, this contingent or propositional aspect of *Screen* 'necessarily highlights the process, rather than the terms, through which a nation renegotiates its past' (Zervigón 2002: 70).[139] It underscores the conception of memory as a fluid discursive field, or as Peter Ehrenhaus (2009: 232) puts it, as an arena

> of contested meanings, a site of struggle that reveals diverse and competing interests in society. Viewed in this manner […] memory (and thus collective identity) is not so much a stable condition as it is a dynamic and unstable site (i.e. a fluid field of shifting meanings) where competing and contesting points of view vie to be heard and […] prevail.

Being a relatively lightweight and transportable screen construction, Allen's hollow artwork refuses the emphasis on massive structure and permanence as is characteristic of the Western monumental tradition. It moves away from the idea of a memorial as a stable entity permanently located in time and space, proposing instead a more expansive and discursive notion of memorializing. Yet *Screen* still conveys a sense of dense physical presence or '*apparent* mass', as Herbert George (2014: 94) puts it, even when it doesn't contain great actual mass. It presents the illusion of a massive monolith.

---

[139] Zervigón (2002: 70) sees Allen's work as taking memory as its central concern, but unlike other artists who engage heavily with uncovering memory in relation to South Africa's past, it does it without outlining the contents of such memory. He argues that the very opacity of *Screen*, its impenetrability to sight, memorializes memory and that 'such a strategy can only find success in an environment where memory's terms are actively contested' (Zervigón 2002: 70). By not determining the meaning of his artwork and referencing memory through a yet undecipherable opacity, Zervigón (2002: 75) suggests that Allen allows *Screen* to be read as evoking both the country's past and its deferred reconciliation. The videotape elicits an understanding of the work as referring to national memory but it resists the contested terms through which memory is normally articulated (Zervigón 2002: 75).

Screen manifests itself vividly as the product of repetitive crafting. The tight criss-crossing of tape reflects the repeated steps of weft filling warp to create a perfectly controlled woven boundary. The regularity of the small squares of weave is mirrored in the hard-edged frames of the large screen units as well as the overall geometric structure of the artwork. As a neatly gridded form repeated within the geometry of the gallery space, *Screen* presents itself as a 'fragment […] cropped from a much larger fabric of information,' to use Rosalind Krauss's description from her reflections on the grid (1986: 18).[140] The blackness and reflectiveness as well as the precision of facture contribute potently to a sense of the ineffable - that which is beyond words. The close linking of the interwoven threads also evokes a feeling of suspension in time; a constant holding together.[141]

Tilley (2006: 62) speaks of the silent but potent nature of embedded/embodied material language, commenting that material forms

> often 'talk' silently about […] relations in ways impossible in speech or formal discourse […] the artefact through its "silent" speech and "written" presence, speaks what cannot be spoken, writes what cannot be written, and articulates that which remains conceptually separated in social practice. Material forms complement what can be communicated in language rather than duplicating or reflecting what can be said in words in a material form […] The non-verbal materiality of the medium is of central importance.

In the case of *Screen*, it is the medium of textile and its ability to ''talk' silently' that powerfully conveys the commanding presence and muteness of Allen's work.[142] The weaving together of threads also visualizes the notion of the flow of memory, as described by Goett (2016: 125) in the following passage:

---

[140] Kellner (2010: 33) quotes Allen as describing his *Screen II* (2010) as 'an archive of the unseen or the unknown' and points to his frequent use of the minimalist grid. He characterizes the seriality of Allen's treatment of image and surface via the use of the grid as an indeterminable process, one without a distinct beginning or an end (Kellner 2010: 33).

[141] As George (2014: 76) states: 'Black is a colour that carries with it the associative power of the unknown; it is simultaneously all colours of the spectrum, and also their absence.' The flat black of Allen's *Screen* adds to its introspective presence.

[142] The 'room-within-a-room' aspect of *Screen* featured in another work titled *La Jetée* (1997), installed on curator Colin Richards's "Graft" exhibition in the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, as part of Okwui Enwesor's *Trade Routes: History & Geography*, 2nd Johannesburg

> Our memories change as those of others blend into them […] It does not matter whether they are true or false, whether they are truly our own or made up from those of others, but how we make meaning through them, of our past, in the present and with view to the future. The knowledge of memory is not a collection of empirical facts, but arises in the weaving together of felt and imagined experience.

Allen's Screen effectively epitomizes the notion of the continuously interweaving 'fabric' of memory in constant flux. Its intertwining of threads expresses the ongoing organizing effort to manage and shape a collective understanding of shared experience in relationship to the past.[143]

6.2 Connecting with local meanings:

By highlighting the craft basis of its construction, Zervigón (2002: 77) suggests that Allen's *Screen* can be seen to blur the divisions between craft and fine art into which African and Western art, respectively, have customarily been separated. Commenting on Allen's construction of the work in the context in which it was made, he notes that it 'suddenly seemed prescient in gently engaging African and Western aesthetic traditions […]' (Zervigón 2002: 77). Following the dramatic political events that led to the end of apartheid in the

---

Biennale. Kellner (2010: 30) recalls that the 'massive installation of black mirror-like panels made with woven videotape' was installed amongst the gallery's permanent collection, and comments that the reflection of these artworks in the black panels 'interfered with any attempts by visitors for neutral viewing or normal movement through the space. Composed of 40 connected panels, each measuring one metre by three metres, the installation operated as an architectural intervention within the gallery's display of iconic "resistance art." The title *La Jetée* (The Jetty) was taken from a film by Chris Marker that struck Allen in its dealing with the idea of memory through a 'knitting together' of still images with sound. Allen also notes that the idea of a jetty appealed to him as a structure enabling one 'to penetrate the ocean, but only superficially. Likewise, the installation penetrated the SANG collection and reflected upon it, but was by no means a permanent fixture or even a desirable one' (Allen 1999: [sp]). Colin Richards (2002: 39-40) commented that the artworks reflected on the surface of *La Jetée* 'functioned as "echoes" of South African art of the recent past. The screens reflected these works in a sort of infinite reproduction. The obscuring of some works in the peripheral passages staged for viewers the exclusion of certain cultural traditions and histories from "official" national culture. All that tape was also textual in that it contained information we have no way of accessing. Information became sheer physical material.'

[143] In her book *Tangle Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Marita Sturken (1997:1) expresses the connections between memory and identity as follows: 'Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday functions to the recognition of the self. Memory establishes life's continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity.'

early 1990s, a younger generation of artists such as Allen had a sense of being free to experiment, especially after the years of cultural boycott.[144] Zervigón comments that Allen and fellow artists were selectively adopting Western avant-garde precedents from which they had remained isolated during the boycott years. Engaging with such Western models, he suggests, served to produce an aesthetically and politically radical art (Zervigón 2002: 72). Allen was part of the FLAT gallery cooperative established in 1993 in an experimental space in Durban.[145] New possibilities for actions and interventions were explored by this group of artists with both traditional art forms and new ones in trying to arrive at an artistic language that would better articulate their experiences (Smith 2011: 133). Allen himself comments:

> This shift was perceived by us to be a definitive and rapid break from the 'resistance art' of the previous decade – unambiguous narratives spoken through the language of protest. It was as if our crumbling isolation and a new international dialogue made possible a broader conversation both within the country and the large global community. Something opened up and demanded a subtler and more suitable artistic language for the complexities of our shifting ground (Allen 2001 quoted in Smith 2011: 133).

Zervigón (2011: 80) suggests that Allen's woven works literally bind African and Western aesthetic traditions together 'while leaving the significance of this

---

[144] Richards (1997: 236) observes: ' 'Making' – crafting by hand and the tacit knowledge and skill this entails – has a long, strong tradition in South Africa which probably benefited partly from the cultural quarantine which attended the boycott politics of apartheid.' He further suggests that 'Work – as 'craft' – seems to be in crisis in contemporary South African art, a crisis which is spawning new (or rehabilitating old) debates about the politics of representation.' In a later essay titled "The thought is the thing," Richards elaborates on what he sees as a tension between 'making' and 'taking' culture - 'the appropriation of the more or-less readymade reconstituted in another space [which] has a more fragile tradition [but] is now common practice.' He examines how South African artists can be seen to approach materiality and 'the dialectic between craft and conceptualism,' which he proposes as being 'what is vital in art and a producer of value within avant-gardism in Africa' (Richards 2002: 38).

[145] Smith (2011: 133) writes about the urgency around the 'socialization of an aesthetic' that was 'brewing in the minds of art students Siemon Allen and Thomas Barry, and their social circle. This urgency shaped itself as the FLAT gallery, or FLAT International, an experimental space established in a communal flat on Mansfield Road. They were clear about their intensions and how they understood their work in the context of a transitional South Africa no longer bound by cultural sanctions, and in relation to international art practices.' FLAT existed from 1993 to 1995. The premises burnt down but the exhibitions and experiments in media and sound were carefully archived by Allen and are available online at http://www.siemonallen.org/flat.html (Smith 2011: 133).

interaction open to the intersubjective consensus of its viewers.' He sees the significance of its basis in craft as resonating with local artistic traditions.

As already noted in the quotation from Williamson above (p121), Allen studied weaving with Ntshangaze who was a semi-permanent resident at the FLAT space.[146] Zervignón (2002: 77) mentions that Ntshangaze encouraged his students to dissociate weaving processes from their usual association with fabric and Allen thus began to explore various materials such as shredded Coke cans, movie film, ripped canvas paintings and videotape. These early works, Zervignón (2002: 76-77) suggests, were already pointing to 'positive associations produced by a work that could be viewed simultaneously as craft and as fine art […].' The weaving contributed strongly to the referential power of his works. He also adds that Allen's woven panels were mostly exhibited as two-dimensional works, encouraging them to be viewed as paintings.[147] In operating between painting and object or architectural enclosure, his works therefore also interrogated Western distinctions between painting and sculpture. Zervigón (2002: 77) thus observes that Allen's early weaves established a dialogue between South Africa's cultural traditions and avant-garde gestures associated with places like Paris and New York.

Having learnt approaches to weaving from a black artist who alerted him to particular cultural techniques of weaving, Allen can be seen to use handwork as a form of political commentary. His weaving skill is put to a conceptual use and, although perhaps not directly referencing specific indigenous art forms, it is used

[146] Allen (1999: [sp]) writes about Sam Ntshangaze as follows: 'He would not only appropriate natural materials, but "industrial waste" for re-use in his works. He also re-kindled in me an interest I had in "craft-work" made out of telephone wire. What intrigued me conceptually in his particular process was how a cast-off material from the communication industry could be transformed into "raw" material in a manner that contradicted its original function.'

[147] Allen mentions that the earliest public version employing the woven VHS tape was a single panel that 'operated like a "painting."' It was exhibited at the ICA, Johannesburg in 1983 and thereafter shown on the Vita Art Awards exhibition, Johannesburg Art Gallery, in 1994. He had experimented with woven film as early as 1990 in art school, but none of these works were ever exhibited (Personal communication 20 October 2017).

for its cultural associations with indigenous practices of making, notably the weaving of grass and palm leaf baskets and mats.[148]

Weaving is in itself a craft not peculiar to indigenous peoples here or anywhere else, but certain textile-based technologies such as grass and palm leaf weaving are strongly represented among traditional African practices. By traditional African or indigenous craft practices I am referring to customary methods of making developed by people who have inhabited the local geographic region for many generations. Such practices employ materials, designs and techniques in the making and repairing of useful artefacts and are based on knowledge and know-how that has guided interactions with the natural environment. Many traditional African crafts originated with the need for objects of daily use made from local materials that were readily available, such as wood, clay and grass. Practiced over generations, such traditional crafts are rooted in local knowledge and form an integral part of cultural heritage. The materials and techniques of grass weaving used in making baskets, mats and other items are not unique to African cultures and thus are not 'owned' by them, but they reference ancient local handcraft traditions that offer evidence of indigenous cultural heritage.

Traditional grass weaving techniques have been handed down from generation to generation but have also seen adaptations from outside influences with the incorporation of new materials and techniques. In her MA research into grass mats made by women in Swaziland, Ramila Patel (2006), for example, focuses on the change and effects of economic development on the design and production of the traditional Swazi grass mat. She observes that while the mat making techniques have remained unchanged, the visual quality of the traditional Swazi grass mat has transformed through the adoption of new materials such as plastics and the introduction of elements such as colourful sweet wrappers. She also notes that the technology of making grass mats has been revolutionized

[148] In using VHS video tape to create a regular lattice, Allen's weaving could be seen to be similar to certain Zulu ilala palm basket weaving techniques, such as the flat cross-weave used in the making of beer strainers. This form of plaited weave is, however, not unique to Zulu weaving.

through the introduction of the *Imbongolo* mat-making frame, a 'modest-looking' device that may have originated from Mozambique (Patel 2006: 21).[149]

Patel (2006: 21) describes the *Imbolgolo* as being manouevred by hand in enabling the binding action of securing grass strands with string. Discarded torch batteries are used as weights attached to the strings. Patel (2006: 36) comments on the *Imbongolo* as having revolutionized the process of mat-making, thus making a significant contribution towards the production of innovative grass mats in Swaziland. Allen's use of a specially constructed wooden loom apparatus for the making of his video tape screens plays a similar role in facilitating the hand-manipulated weaving process. A You-tube video documentation of him at work shows how the externally positioned loom enables him to keep the warp strands perfectly aligned and to have them alternately raised and dropped for inserting the weft sections by hand. In this way, he was able to achieve a neatly woven video tape fabric which he finally tightened and anchored to a steel frame.[150]

6.3 'Sample weaving'

Allen's *Screen* displays some characteristics of Minimalism in the precision of its regularity and gridded arrangement as well as the repetition of modular units and absence of ornamentation. Emma Cocker (2011: 271) notes that the gesture of repeated or reiterated action can be identified within the serial repetitions of Minimalism and also Conceptual Art, where a certain formalized code is often used to guide a systematic praxis.[151] A text to a recent exhibition titled "On the

---

[149] Patel (2006: 35) comments that the word *Imbongolo* means 'donkey' in *Siswati* and suggests this ascription to the frame as perhaps being due to 'the metaphorical connection of 'stationary like a donkey,' or because it has four legs and emulates 'working like a donkey.'

[150] A stop animation film titled *Weave: In Progress* shows Siemon Allen weaving a screen titled *Weave* for the exhibition "Imaging South Africa: Collection Projects by Siemon Allen," Andersen Gallery, VCU. It can be viewed on You-Tube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhlHUNyDx_I (uploaded by The Andersen Gallery 9 September 2011, video by Michael Lease). Prior to using this loom, Allen used to hand weave his frames and he comments that it would take many days or even weeks to do one panel. Using the loom with the help of one or two assistants would allow him to complete his projects much quicker (Personal communication 20.10.2017).

[151] Cocker (2011: 271) mentions Mel Bochner as exploring the idea of seriality and repetition as emergent mode of operation within artistic practice in his 1967 essay "The Serial Attitude"

Grid: Textiles and Minimalism" (displayed at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, July 23, 2016 – April 2, 2017) states that:

> Minimalist art is based upon pre-existing systems that conceive of the artwork in advance of its actual execution. These systems, often mathematical, rely on the repetition of simple forms. Textiles by their very nature comply with these core elements, and textile artists, like the minimalist artists, predetermine the finished work through their selection and processing of materials and in the warping or preparing of the loom (de Young Museum 2016: 1).

The loom acts as a template where the weaving is guided by a geometry, i.e. regularity of form arrives through the rhythmic repetition aided by the loom. But as Ingold (2013: 43) argues, such a template is itself a material artefact, i.e. it is not about a pre-apprehended idea created in the mind. He adds that 'whether or not the artisan has an idea in mind of the final form of the artefact he is making, the actual form emerges from the pattern of rhythmic movement, not from the idea' (Ingold 2013: 115). Ingold thus insists that the rhythmic repetitions of gesture in craftwork are

> not of a mechanical kind, like the oscillations of the pendulum or metronome. For they are set up through the continual sensory attunement of the practitioner's movements to the inherent rhythmicity of those components of the environment with which he or she is engaged (Ingold 2013: 115).

The rhythmic and mnemonic character of technical activity as performed in craftwork, he argues, entails a dialogical 'correspondence' between maker and material. 'Rhythms are […] the creators of forms,' he asserts (Ingold 2013: 115).[152]

(*Artforum* 6, no.4 (December 1967), pp 28-33.). He identified several generative or cumulative approaches whereby artists explored permutational or "systematically self-exhausting" actions. Cocker (2011: 271) further notes that 'within both Minimalism and Conceptual art, the rule becomes *resigned to* for the production of potentially incalculable permutations within a given structure, as a procedural device or a pre-set plan. In "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), Sol LeWitt asserts, "when an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair" (*Artforum* 5, no.10 (Summer 1967), pp 79-83).'

[152] Ingold (2010: 98) states the following in his text "The Textility of Making": 'For there to be rhythm, movement must be *felt*. Rhythmicity, as the philosopher Henri Lefebvre argues, implies

Allen's weaving with the loom demanded full engagement of his and his helpers' bodies and an ongoing evaluation by 'feeling' the process forward. Care had to be taken in maintaining just the right tension when lining up the vertical warp and horizontal weft. Constraints had to be applied in feeding the strands of tape through the weave without tangling or creasing them in the process. The properties of the VHS tape were thus directly implicated in the form-generating process as were the guiding body movements and movements of the hands in maintaining a uniform weave. The template of the loom and its geometry were, to use Ingold's (2013: 43) words, 'built into the morphology and properties of the bodies – and above all of the hands – that made them.'[153]

Allen's decision to weave with VHS tape began as much from a material and sensory starting point as a conceptual one. Torell and Ranglin (2016: 29) refer to what they call 'sample weaving' as an experimental form of material sketching in trying out a weave. In Allen's case, it would have involved handling the tape and testing its characteristics and suitability for weaving and then deciding how best to up-scale the weave. The specially built loom was part of this 'tuning' process towards conceptualizing the whole. Through continual adjustment and checking he would have arrived at the right procedure in forming a routine for creating the large screens.[154] It involved an 'attunement' by way of feeling a way forward that would allow the making process to flow easily. Ingold (2010: 96) refers to this as a 'shuttling back and forth between mind and the material world.' Kinaesthetic sense, i.e. the experience of movement, is essential to craft work and, as Frances Liardet (2014: 209) comments, a feeling of 'rightness' emerges from the interaction between the various elements that are seamlessly

---

not just repetition but *differences within repetition* (Lefebvre, 2004, p.90). Thus, there is no rhythm in the perfectly iterative rotations of the mechanical cutter. The mechanism feels nothing and is wholly unresponsive to what is going on while it rotates. The same is true of the oscillations of the pendulum or metronome. Iteration is metronomic, itineration rhythmic.'

[153] Thompson (2015: 189) observes: 'All weaving requires a base technical understanding of the parameters one is working with: decisions get made about materials and loom set-up, which affect subsequent possibilities [...] The finesse is worked out through [...] materially woven samples; it is essential to test densities and relationships of structures to ensure correct pattern proportions.'

[154] As Torell and Ranglin (2014: 34) state, 'knowing in weaving' occurs when the weaver is engaged in what happens to the weave while at the same time reflecting on what s/he does. They quote Donald Schön (1983) as referring to this as 'the practical intellect' which is tied to action and performance.

interrelated in skilled craft practice. Feeling and observing are modes of active engagement in such forms of making.

Understanding Allen's weave in Ingold's terms as an 'emergent' form rather than something imposed by a predetermined plan draws attention to the complex interplay of forces at work in the making. Ingold elaborates as follows:

> the process of making is not so much an *assembly* as a *procession*, not a building up from discrete parts into a hierarchically organized totality but a carrying on – a passage along a path in which every step grows from the one before and into the one following, on an itinerary that always overshoots its destinations (Ingold 2013: 45).

Elsewhere he describes this notion of growth as 'concrescence' or material accumulation in a process of 'self-making or *autopoiesis*' – a way in which 'in life, beings continually surpass themselves' (Ingold 2014a: 2). It entails continuous labour and care in an attuned and responsive engagement, even when the process is guided by a template. The action is itself a process of attention whereby know-how is gained *in* the doing (Ingold 2000a: 413).[155]

6.4 Re-using and transforming

Allen's aesthetic conforms to Minimalist art in the way in which a level of complexity arises out of applying the simplest of means, i.e. his very direct and explicit use and presentation of the material and process of formation reflect the core principles of Minimalism. Commenting on *Screen*, Allen (1999: [sp]) comments that what intrigued him conceptually in the process of weaving video tape was 'how a cast-off material from the communication industry could be transformed into 'raw' material in a manner that contradicted its original function.' He continues:

> I was interested in the contradiction of the high-tech material being used as raw material; and also in the fact that the video-tape was

[155] As Ingold (2000a: 417) succinctly puts it: 'meaning already inheres in the relational properties of the dwelt-in world.'

> rendered 'mute.' That this 'illicit' information remained present but unreadable, for me, evoked notions of mistrust and frustrated desire. 'Disguising' this work as a formal, minimalist 'painting'/object also added to its covert function. The whole process spoke of misused and/or re-used technology (Allen 1999: [sp]).

Allen's comment about transforming the cast-off material of video tape into 'raw' material and rendering it 'mute' through the direct act of weaving indicates that the handcrafted aspect of the weaving is used towards a particular metaphoric purpose. In its more immediate terms the act of weaving can be read as a symbolic gesture, one that underscores linking and connecting. The 'plain weave' method of constructing involves the alignment of warp and weft of threads to form a simple criss-cross pattern; it involves an over-and-under crossing of threads at right angles to arrive at a grid format. Syniva Whitney (2010: 1) suggests that such basic weaving through which a grid is materialized 'produces an object that is dependent on links and connections.' In this interlinking sense, the act of weaving can be read as a symbolic gesture of connection.[156] Allen's weaving also reformulates the VHS into a new story, much like a new recording over the tape would replace a previously recorded one. This element of repetition strikes up an effective contrast and correspondence between an embodied understanding of repetitive craftwork and the previously high-tech associations of video tape, i.e. between the repetitive work involved in the manual weaving and the potentially perpetual process of over-recording.

The reuse or misuse of technology is what Allen highlights as significant to the reading of his work. A catalogue text by Henrietta Hamilton *et al* (2008: [sp]) mentions Allen's interest in appropriating high tech materials such as video tape, audio recording tape and movie film for use in low-tech processes and that he intentionally uses the simple grid weave of vertical against horizontal as an interfering mechanism. This is particularly apparent in a work such as *The Birds* (1962) where he uses the film from a copy of Alfred Hitchcock's apocalyptic

[156] Whitney (2010: 1) further comments that the grid, and the more contemporary manifestation of it, the matrix, feature especially in works by contemporary artists who weave or use concepts of weaving in their work. She argues that woven artworks that explore grid structures are instances where the figure is embedded in the ground: 'The figure in fact IS the ground, the process of making the cloth forces the tension between ideas of labor and concept' (Whitney 2010: 2).

movie. Here the film is no longer presented in its sequential format that creates the illusion of motion but rather becomes frozen in a grid construction. The overlapping of the film and the absence of light from the movie projector's lamp further complicates the reading of the original narrative of the film (Hamilton *et al* 2008: [sp]). Not least in the choice of a movie that strongly evokes unease and an uncertain future, Allen's work engages with elements of contradiction, uncertainty and displacement. By acknowledging the contested terms with which it engages it points to a complex engagement with issues of identity and cultural exchange.[157]

Zervigón's discussion of Allen's *Screen* illustrates how the application of a textile-based craft technique combined with the unusual material of videotape delivers a conceptually complex work when read in the political context of South Africa. Williamson (2004: 34) mentions Susan Sontag as commenting during a visit to South Africa that, unlike the Eastern Bloc, which rapidly became depoliticized after the fall of the iron curtain, South Africa remains profoundly political years after it won its freedom. It is this context that provides the conduit for the complex reading of Allen's work. Through engaging in the materiality of a handcrafted surface, Allen is able to create a conceptually powerful work that resonates deeply within the South African socio-political context.

6.5 Stitching and tying

Having used Allen's *Screen* as an example of how a contemporary South African artist can be seen to engage with a textile-based craft practice to articulate his conceptual concerns, I now turn my attention to the work of Hlobo whose work displays a similar conceptual engagement with materiality and craft. Hlobo explicitly connects the activity of stitching and suturing to processes of 'healing' in post-apartheid South Africa (van der Vlies 2012: 100). Erica de Greef (2010: 7)

[157] Allen currently lives and works in the United States and his recent installations and projects involving the collecting of historical artefacts speak to a certain separation from the source. Through collecting, for example a web-based archive of South African audio, he explores issues of identity and branding through displacement (Hamilton *et al* 2008: [sp]).

observes that stitching in Hlobo's work becomes an act of making as well as 'recycling that which is discarded, destroyed or has fallen apart.'[158]

Elizabeth Perrill (2012: 585) argues in her essay "South African Rubber and Clay" that the generation of South African artists that hit the international stage during the transition into the post-Apartheid era became members of a world that Nicholas Bourriaud described as *altermodern*. Perrill describes the altermodern artist as

> a global, nomad who embodies life after the postmodern, creates art from networks and shared signs. In Bourriaud's model constellations and networks of meaning are brought together by the nomad, *homo viator*, a pilgrim in search of truth. Artworks are connections brought together through narrative and theory (Perrill 2012: 585).

In contrast, she sees a younger generation of South African artists in their twenties and thirties as choosing to focus on local meanings through their particular choices of materials and approaches to making. She suggests that their attention to the specificity of meaning and materials demonstrates a more nuanced articulation of their artistic concerns with both international and local audiences. Perrill proposes that Okwui Enwezor's term *aftermodern* is more fitting for these artists who value certain materials through a reconnection and engagement with local meanings. She sees them as

> play[ing] with the edges of the new African modernity, purposefully drawing in viewers with a superficial seduction and then challenging the altermodern to realize its own lack when engaging with a new African-centered perspective (Perrill 2012: 586).

Hlobo, for example, titles his works only in Xhosa, an act that is seen by some as hiding the works' most intimate meanings from non-Xhosa speaking viewers while revealing nuances to native speakers, as van der Watt (2006: 69) notes. Jantjes suggests that it is a strategy used to engage the viewer in an act of

[158] Jantjes (2011b: 58) comments that '[m]ost of Hlobo's work emerges from these processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. The material from his research into the histories of South Africa is sorted, edited and aligned to the discourses surrounding South African art in the global arena. These myriad and sometimes incommensurate parts are carefully reconnected in sculptures and installations that are rich and dense in their diversity of subjects and contexts.'

cultural translation. The non-Xhosa speaker 'has to take the first step of finding out what his idiomatic titles could mean' (Jantjes 2011b: 61).[159] Hlobo says:

> Language has become my identity as a South African. South Africa is culturally very diverse, and you cannot be too general when you talk about it. You have to find a focal point. That's where my plot begins (Hlobo quoted in Buys 2009: 3).

Perrill (2012: 586) suggests that Hlobo and Sithole, through drawing on the local by employing metaphors and expressions that are rooted in specific cultural traditions, challenge viewers within a globalized culture to pay attention to, and engage more deeply with the artist's particular psychological and personal explorations. Hlobo himself states that he wants to challenge visual art conventions when he says: 'I think there is a tradition of English language and culture being very dominant in the art world, and I feel there is a need for that to be challenged somehow' (Hlobo quoted in Buys 2009: 3).[160]

Hlobo's unsettling yet evocative artworks, some of which also involve performative elements, reveal an innovative reworking of tradition by creating tensions between the physical and symbolic properties of his chosen materials and processes. He brings together black inner tyre tubing rubber, leather, coloured ribbons, wool and yarn, textiles and paper in works that seem to have a malleable and adaptable character (Corrigall 2010: [sp]). Via the layered associations and references that these materials evoke, Hlobo explores themes of sexual and cultural identity. By way of stitching, binding and tying elements together, he combines his materials with found objects and props in constructing

---

[159] In her review of Hlobo's exhibition titled *Izele*, held at the Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery in Cape Town (2006), Liese van der Watt interprets this as an act of pointed discomfort that frustrates the viewer. She suggests that it becomes 'metaphor – metatext even – for identities forged of tradition, ethnicity, culture, sexuality and race. Hlobo mentions in his walkabout that he often feels himself as slipping away from his culture and perhaps this exhibition should be read as an effort to engage, albeit subversively, those nodes that provide fixity and certainty, albeit perversely' (Van der Watt 2006: 69).

[160] Allara (2010: 29) suggests that 'it is not an affection or a simplistic device for signaling otherness; instead, it is a means of resisting reductive interpretations, a strategy that requires the viewer to gain at least a passing familiarity with the artist's culture, so that a basis for dialogue about commonalities and differences can be established. Simply put, by using his native language, one that is especially difficult for Westerners to pronounce, Hlobo avoids having his work co-opted into a dominant Western narrative.'

often quite large and sprawling installations and sculptures. Tracy Murinik (2012: 1) observes that the assembling and intricate joining of his materials and objects speaks quite literally about a probing of 'the edges of identities in formation or evolution.' It also underscores the idea, as Kopano Ratele (2009: 23) puts it, 'that what we accept as our traditions are fabrications and that all cultures are always works in progress.'

6.6 Confronting tradition

Ratele (2009: 19) suggests that it is the tense relation between Hlobo's gay identity and coming from a Xhosa cultural background that underlies and informs his artworks.[161] He sees Hlobo as bleeding one identity into the other, celebrating both and rubbing them up against each other. In this sense, he says, Hlobo uses his materials and techniques such as stitching and sewing as a means of confronting normative expectations relating to socio-cultural rules and gender roles. He is 'showing the culture its fears,' Ratele (2009: 19) writes, 'upsetting his consciously embraced cultural traditions – so that they can be nourished, reconstructed, better seen.'

While stitching may be viewed as a constructive gesture of mending, joining, assembling and linking, it is also 'that which breaks the surface, which penetrates the skin, which pricks in order to connect, pierces in order to join […],' as Jan-Erik Lunström comments.[162] Identifying both gestures in Hlobo's work, Lundström (2011: 184) suggests that the artist could be said to engage in a kind of 'benevolent perversion.' He elaborates:

> Here is the complete exhuberant phallic vocabulary […] Here is the body with organs and the body without organs, here is blissful excess

[161] Through his playful and performative exploration of Xhosa tradition Hlobo provocatively confronts and challenges a tradition that does not easily embrace the gay identity. Commenting on *ubuXhosa* (Xhosaness) and the pride it takes in manliness (having one of its most privileged rituals the initiation of boys into manhood), Ratele (2009: 22) writes: 'Homosexuality is felt by traditionalists to be deeply offensive and (inexplicably) unsettling to the culture.'

[162] Joseph McBrinn (2015: 313) quotes Peter Hobbs as saying: 'The sewing needle is both prick and hole, it penetrates and is penetrated.' An analysis in such psychoanalytic terms, McBrinn (2015: 313) suggests, presents a different gendered reading of needlework.

> and joyous decadence, here is the display of strength and power but all without or before violence and dominance. What emerges is […] certainly a celebration of the body and the home and the consummate identities they may house or engender, as they form and reform (Lundström 2011: 184).

Closely aligned to the stitch is the fold, which Lundström describes as 'the act which further discloses or generates temporal and spatial complexities' (Lundström 2011: 176). These are the two ingredients that he sees as characterizing Hlobo's transformative use of materials. He suggests that the accumulative nature of stitch and fold privileges movement as a leading principle, underscoring the idea that life itself is a process of perpetual metamorphosis (Lundström 2011: 179). In pointing out these features, Lundström underlines the exploratory nature of Hlobo's work, characterized as it is by a process of 'becoming' through the constructive act of stitching.

Corrigall quotes Hlobo as commenting that '[t]he process of stitching is the process of subtracting and adding' and she notes that he compares the process of joining materials as a process of self-discovery by saying: 'Trying to find your identity is about cutting things off and bringing things back; sometimes you don't know what you want to keep' (Hlobo quoted in Corrigall 2017: forthcoming).[163] She thus describes his process of stitching and binding as reflecting 'a struggle to reconcile with his identity, sexuality, an inner state' (Corrigall 2017: forthcoming).

6.7 Gendered needlework

Nettleton (2000b) has indicated that many producers of needlework in Africa have historically been male and suggests that the gendering of needlework in Africa as female is connected to the interpellation of a Western system of classification. She notes that males continue to work with textiles in societies

[163] Hlobo's comment underscores Pajaczkowska's (2016: 86) observation that the 'reflexive looping, or doubling back' of the stitching process 'becomes a metaphorical, as well as literal, mechanism of reflexivity. When a progressive movement forward includes a backwards movement within it, there is space and time for reflexive thought.'

where historical traditions are current. In most South African societies, Nettleton (2000b: 21) observes, men were responsible for the preparation of leather and the sewing of it into garments such as cloaks, skirts and breast covers, as well as accessories such as bags and hats. It is not clear whether men who executed such 'heavy sewing' involved in the manufacturing of the garments may also have applied decorative elements, but Nettleton (2000b: 32) states that it was only *after* missionary influence that needlework became largely gendered as female or feminine.[164] Amongst the Xhosa speaking people of the Eastern Cape, she observes that appliqué was common in the form of beading, buttons and bits of other materials from the time when the first Europeans arrived. Such appliquéd elements, she suggests, would initially probably have been added to leather garments (Nettleton 2000b: 31).

While needlework is perhaps commonly associated with women in a Western context, this is not necessarily the case in African cultures, as Nettleton's study shows. Hlobo's stitching of tough materials such as thick rubber and leather can certainly be described as 'heavy sewing,' i.e. the kind of stitching customarily carried out by men in African societies.[165] His use of materials and techniques should therefore not *only* be associated with the domestic and the feminine. Jeremy Kuper (2011: 4) mentions Hlobo himself as pointing out the paradox that while sewing is seen as a woman's role, most fashion designers are men. Kuper suggests that such elements of contradiction are played out in his work through both conforming to but also subverting established gender boundaries. For example, the masculine materials of rubber and leather, commonly associated with fetish gear used in S&M practices, are brought together through means that are, in Western terms, usually associated with women's crafts such a sewing and stitching.[166]

---

[164] See also Rayda Becker's (2015: 96-107) article "Tsonga Beaded Garments: Then and Now" where she writes about Swiss missionaries teaching men to sew cloth.

[165] Commenting on the gender differences between the sewing that men and women carried out, Nettleton (2000b: 31) postulates: 'The fact that men did the heavy sewing – the hems and the piecing of lengths of cloths together – possibly using iron needles, while women did the embroidery, possibly utilizing bone or bamboo needles, suggests that this differentiation would have allowed women to work on cloth without transgressing restrictions on their use of metal.'

[166] Murinik quotes Holbo as saying: 'What is interesting is how rubber tends to take on a shape of its own, despite being cut into a particular shape. It almost resembles flesh in its tone, finish,

Leather also reflects the importance of cattle in Xhosa cultures. Significant events such as initiations and marriages are marked by ritual slaughter and hides are frequently used in burial rituals. In an interview with O'Toole (2012: 80) Hlobo commented that, where he grew up in the Transkei, hide wasn't readily available and boys who made traditional *indimoni* drums to be used during parades and performances resorted to using inner tube rubber as an alternative to cowhide. Rubber has also been a replacement for hide for quite a long time in contexts where migrant labour brought such substitutes into play.[167]

6.8 Playfulness and ritual

Hlobo describes his use of the handcraft of stitching as

> revisiting some of the things that are long forgotten. It's labour-intensive work. You stitch, some people think it's craft, it's not important. And also, it's demanding (Hlobo quoted in Kuper 2011: 4).

There is a pragmatic 'do-it-yourself' tone to Hlobo's comment. He brushes aside the issue of stitching as craft, presenting it as the most suitable and appropriate way for him to make art. Noting that it carries associations with the past, he highlights the investment that such activity demands and asserts the values of

---

elasticity, and even fragility for that matter' (Hlobo quote in Murinik 2010: 3). Van der Vlies (2012: 105) mentions Hlobo as commenting that rubber suggests 'queerness' in that it evokes intestines ('the link to man-to-man sex is very strong here') (Hlobo quoted in van der Vlies 2012: 105). In Xhosa, inner tubes are referred to as *ithumbi* which is the same word for intestines. Allara (2010: 31) argues that a subtle political content is suggested by this in that: 'Discarded inner tubes are ubiquitous in South African townships, where the primary means of transport to the cities is via overcrowded mini-buses. The cheap tires (manufactured in Korea and the U.S.) wear out quickly, often causing serious accidents. The rubber skin of the vessel thus references the vulnerability of a disadvantaged population whose lives have not substantially improved under ANC rule: their empty stomachs have not been filled.

[167] In their essay titled "Migrant Workers, Production, and Fashion," Klopper and Rankin-Smith expand on the inventive use of urban waste and recycled materials by migrant workers in their production of costumes and adornments. They argue: 'Although, in many cases, this creativity seems to break with traditional forms by using new materials and by drawing on new values and ideas, more often than not, the artifacts migrants have either used or produced tend to affirm a sense of continuity between the past and present, the rural and the urban, the homesteads where these migrants grew up and the hostels and compounds to which they were, and still are, confined during their long absences from home' (Klopper and Rankin-Smith 2010: 532).

time and energy spent on making things by hand.[168] Asked in an interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist whether the computer plays a role in his process at all, Hlobo responded:

> No, I feel in that sense that I'm very old fashioned. I believe in the power of my mind and in my fingers. I am neither against computers as such and nor do I feel threatened by them, but I enjoy employing a childlike approach. A child is not from the digital age; a child is archaic in that sense. A child is one who just dreams and looks around at what is happening (Hlobo quoted in Obrist 2012: 3).

Hlobo's characterization of his approach as child-like suggests that his work involves a form of explorative play. He thus sees handcraft as an activity that possesses a disposition of work and play, embracing both seriousness and the fanciful.[169] Following this logic, Hlobo's work can be argued to suspend the relationality of categories such as art/craft, work/play, masculine/feminine, allowing such binary identities to be seen in more fluid and unstable terms. As Alexandra Dodd (2011: 73) states, his intention is to disrupt the familiar and to disturb the perceived normalcy of received stereotypes.

Commenting on his work titled *Umthubi* (2006) (Fig 14, p143), Hlobo says: 'The reason I introduced play is to challenge the notion of what is respectable, and what is respected as a man's space' (Hlobo quoted in Perryer 2006: 4). This large-scale artwork takes the form of a round *kraal* enclosure constructed out of found bits of wood collected from a rocky ridge near his home in Johannesburg.[170]

---

[168] Jantjes (2011b: 54) comments that Hlobo's intentions are 'to reconnect what has been segregated, severed or unplugged in previous eras of art history and to do this in a simple manageable way. The appeal of his work is its aesthetic difference and its craftsmanship and how these working techniques support Hlobo's narratives.'

[169] Ratele (2009: 19) remarks that a sense of play and the playfulness of culture informs Hlobo's approach to work, but that being playful does not mean 'horsing around': 'It does not imply being disrespectful to traditional cultural life, as Hlobo is at pains to make clear. But without irony, he avers, the culture and traditions around masculinity, or any other set of cultural practices, are not only wearisome subjects, they are likely to lose their essential vitality and attractions to all but the initiates.'

[170] Perrill (2012: 593) argues that Hlobo's choice of materials collected 'from townships and rural areas' fleshes out his work as 'a specifically black South African reconstruction' through its material attention to the local. In her essay on Hlobo's and Sithole's artworks she writes: 'The

Traditionally used for fencing in cattle and livestock, the circular kraal is more commonly found in isiZulu-speaking communities than isiXhosa-speaking ones.[171] As a feature central to traditional households, it is also a space used for rituals and has deep symbolic significance. Hlobo elaborates on this as follows:

> When the boys come out of the bush and go to their final graduation, the celebration where they are introduced back to the family, they go to the kraal and get advice. They sit there and older men advise them on how they should carry themselves now that they're grown up. It's a space where women are not freely allowed to go to. Only if you are a daughter of the family can you go into the kraal. If a woman has married into the family, she will be invited into the kraal to be introduced to the ancestors. That ceremony, *ukutyiswa amasi*, gives her the right to enter the kraal. It's also a space that symbolises wealth. The size of your kraal is like a show of how much wealth you have, as traditionally African wealth was portrayed through cows or sheep (Hlobo quoted in Perryer 2006: 4).

Hlobo turns the ritualized kraal enclosure into something that resembles 'a plaything, a trampoline,' as he himself describes it (Hlobo quoted in Perryer 2006: 4). By connecting the wooden stakes around the perimeter with pink ribbons to form a web suspending a more densely woven central membrane across the kraal, it becomes a space of play that, according to a Western trope, implies a feminine presence (Goldberg 2009: 104). Pink ribbon is a very specifically European motif, but Hlobo also acknowledges the colour pink for its usage in Xhosa tradition. He is quoted by Perryer (2006: 14) as saying:

---

highly imbricated metaphorical relationships that Hlobo and Sithole have developed with their media bind these artists in a conceptual love of materiality.'

[171] O'Toole (2008: 142) writes: 'On not being representative, Hlobo simply states: 'I quite enjoy that, because I am somehow celebrating all my heritages: my African heritage, my colonial heritage, all those things personal to me – the language I speak, my Xhosa.' While Hlobo's comment indicates a desire to connect with diverse cultures, there is, however, also an increasing insistence on differentiation among isiXhosa speakers, as Nettleton, Ndabambi and Hammond-Tooke (1989) point out in their essay "The Beadwork of the Cape Nguni." The authors note that the tendency to refer to all speakers of the Xhosa language as "the Xhosa" is incorrect as the Cape Nguni are divided into nine related yet politically independent groups of chiefdoms: the Xhosa, Thembu, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Bomvana, Xesibe, Mfengu, Bhaca and Ntlangwini. The distinguishing features of the beadwork in the different groups may, for example, be seen to be used as statements asserting their specific cultural identity.

I wanted to play with the colours of the red and pink ribbons. Even though I use pink to suggest homosexuality, pink is also a very strong colour in the Xhosa tradition. There are pink beads, and the Bhaca people use pink pompoms in their headdresses. So, the colours relate to fashion – Xhosa traditional fashion. Red relates more to the red masks that people wear – the initiates would wear red masks when they are coming out – and it relates to Aids, and to blood.

Figure 14 Nicholas Hlobo, *Umthubi* (2006), Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube, 200 x 400 x 730cm (variable) © Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery.

Writing about southern African beadwork, Nettleton *et al* have indicated that there are specifically male forms using pink beads in Xhosa and Zulu beadwork. On the beadwork of the Cape Nguni they note, for example: 'Pink beads, called *murugwana*, are generally made into objects that will be worn by older men […]'

(Nettleton *et al* 1989: 42).[172] Hlobo harnesses the associations of such materials and colour attributions from both African and Western sources and brings them into his work in what Pamela Allara (2010: 28) refers to as an 'uncomfortable assimilation,' thereby destabilizing established socio-cultural rules and gender roles.

Liese van der Watt (2006: 69) comments on this subversive aspect, observing about *Umthubi* that the kraal as signifier of masculinity is coopted and altered 'by a symbolically queer and feminine infiltration.' She continues:

> It is not simply challenged from the inside by someone who does and doesn't belong, but it is also literally rendered unusable, posing questions about its continued significance. And yet, as Hlobo explains, the title invokes a celebration of new life in its reference to the first rich milk given to a calf (van der Watt 2006: 69).[173]

Jantjes (2011b: 80) proposes that the trampoline reference suggests a launching of a body into the air and thus a site where a new life is released into the world.[174] The silky pink of the ribbons signals new-born babies but at the same time also invokes 'the birth of Hlobo and others' sexual identity.' He also adds that a long trail of plaited ribbon that slithers out of the kraal entrance and ends in a bulbous leather sack

---

[172] Nettleton (2015: 16) comments on the variety of colours in beadwork from the East Coast, the Highveld siNdebele-speaking peoples and examples from KwaZulu-Natal. She notes that 'especially noteworthy was the inclusion of pink (Nettleton 2012), which came to be particularly favoured among Mpondo and Mpondomise peoples and was included in beadwork by the isiZulu-speakers of Msinga district in the twentieth century, but which may have been part of their, and some seSotho-speaking peoples' repertoires in the late 19th century, especially in the areas of Lesotho that border the Eastern Cape.' Addressing the use of beads in Ndebele beadwork, Helene Smuts and Petrus Khobongo Mahlangu (2015: 139) quote Ester Mnguni as saying: 'Wearing pink beads in one's apron means that one's husband is wealthy enough to afford them. And if you don't have pink beads, you are sort of a penniless someone!'

[173] Hlobo says: 'The title *Umthubi* is inspired by the boys who go to a house where a cow has given birth to a new calf. For about three days after the birth, the kids help to feed the calf by cooking the cow's milk, which is called *umthubi* – it becomes porridge, almost like cheese, very rich and very nice. It's about helping, giving a hand to someone else. This is a celebration of new life' (Hlobo quote in Perryer 2006: 7).

[174] Ntombela (2016: 108) adds that the stands of ribbon becoming denser towards the centre also resembles 'the quality of 'cooked' milk (a layer that forms on top of the milk when it is cooked and left to stand off the heat).'

> suggests a castrated chauvinism. In the heart of the kraal birth is given a new dual meaning. Something is lost and something has been gained (Jantjes 2011b: 80-81).

Ntombela (2016: 108) states that it is by altering the meaning and function of the kraal through its construction as an artwork in an art gallery space that Hlobo compels us to examine it in conceptual terms and that his addition of 'new material' such as rubber and ribbon further adds to this. The complexities connoted by Hlobo's choice of materials, Ntombela (2016: 109) argues, question traditions, ethnicity, rituals and hierarchy and relate directly to his 'problematisation of his own sexuality within the hierarchies of what defines a young Xhosa man.' He uses what could be considered African traditional material to 'subvert and complicate connotations attached to it […] invit[ing] us to make a closer investigation into what this 'traditional material' means to those who exist outside the normative definitions of gender and sexuality.' This strategy is examined more closely in the following section.

6.9 Materializing tensions

de Greef (2010: 7) observes that what is key to Hlobo's work is the conflict that it presents between an expression of 'authentic' Africanness as conveyed through references to rituals, traditions and language (as used in his titles), coupled with his expressions of homosexuality. She cites Nomusa Makhubu as remarking that the visual language used by Hlobo 'subverts the notion that homosexuality is un-African' (Makhubu 2009 quoted in de Greef 2010: 7).[175] As van der Vlies (2012: 95) argues, Hlobo's gayness radically confronts and contradicts this African stereotype and through the queering of Xhosa custom and normative black masculinity his works speak directly to tensions between tradition and contemporaneity.[176] Through reflecting and contesting the ideological constructs of masculinity (and femininity), Xhosa cultural identity, sexuality, religion, ritual,

[175] Nomusa Makhubu examines the works of Hlobo and photographer Zanele Muholi in her MA dissertation titled *The "Other" Africans: Re-examining Representations of sexuality in the works of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi*, Rhodes University, January 2009.

[176] Ratele (2009: 19) describes Hlobo's approach as 'upsetting his consciously embraced cultural traditions – so that they can be nourished, reconstructed, better seen.'

tradition and difference, de Greef (2010: 4) sees Hlobo's work as addressing 'questions around the definitions of 'Africanness,' the constructs of belonging, and the symbols and signs of place and time,' thereby complicating the reading of 'Africa.'[177] Sean O'Toole similarly sees Hlobo's work as 'questioning the luggage of its past, the negative discourse about Africa, the marginal position of tradition, and confines of sexuality' (O'Toole 2008 cited in de Greef 2010: 5).

Challenging ideas of manhood is central to Hlobo's artworks. 'I come from a culture where the penis is very important,' he comments (Hlobo quoted in Perryer 2006: 10). Hlobo also points out that *ubukwetha*, the circumcision of male Xhosa initiates, is one of the few rituals that Xhosa people still practice and 'have almost total claim to, since most other cultures have allowed similar traditions to be diluted by Western influence' (Hlobo quoted in Buys 2009: 3). In the context of such practices, the stitching in red wool and ribbon that appears in some of Hlobo's works takes on visceral and painful connotations of bleeding and suturing of wounds. Ratele (2009: 20) suggests that Hlobo is very aware of the fact that 'young men have literally bled to death trying to be men […] traditional beliefs that true men must have their foreskin cut have too often been fatal.' Thus, while Hlobo's stitching may often signal a decorative playfulness, it at times also pays painful reverence towards culturally significant rituals (Mergel 2009: 28).

For his 2009 exhibition titled *Umtshotsho* (which translates as 'youth party') (Fig 15 and 16, p147-148) Hlobo stitched together a group of eight amorphous figures which he called *Izithunzi* (which translates as 'shadows'). The oversized figures, composed from bits of rubber stitched together with colourful yarn and ribbons, were combined with items of furniture in a scene flooded in red light to resemble a club-like parlour. The party that this work refers to is based on a traditional Xhosa ritual that encourages adolescents to socialize. They would

[177] De Greef argues: 'In his artwork, Hlobo […] presents various hypotheses around the material cultures and codes that reference Africa, African-ness, and an African identity. These re-constructions of complex, ambiguous and shifting definitions of identity are knotted, stitched and strutted by Hlobo in an attempt to challenge so-called normative ideas of Africa' (de Greef 2010: 7-8).

dance, engage in mock-fighting and practice experimental sexual behaviour such as *ukusoma*, which is a kind of non-penetrative 'thigh-sex' (Perrill 2012: 593). As Mark Gevisser (2009: 9) notes, this peer-regulated ritual is 'a dry run, as it were, for lives of war and procreation […] a crash course in Xhosa gender relations: the active party gets all the gratification, while the passive party learns to serve.' However, as Gevisser (2009: 9) adds, a radical feature is that the passive party need not be female. He quotes Hlobo as saying:

> In Xhosa culture, it's well understood that when boys are in the fields, that's what they would do – because one was not allowed to have penetrative sex with girls. [With *ukusoma*] what you can do with girls, you can do with boys (Hlobo quoted in Gevisser 2009: 9).[178]

Figure 15 Nicholas Hlobo, *Umtshontsho* (2009), installation view, found objects, rubber inner tube, ribbons, red light, dimensions variable © Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery.

The figures in Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* gathering remain very ambiguous. With their closed off heads and lacking arms and legs, Gevisser comments, they are rather ghoulish and conceal rather than reveal their identity. Jantjes (2011b: 68) suggests that this creates the impression that the figures are

[178] Anthea Buys suggests that *Umtshotsho* represents 'a small gap in a forcefully heterosexual tradition in which homosexual identity is given some latitude […] *Umtshotsho* is about finding a place for marginal subjects – particularly gay men and women – within traditional Xhosa culture […]' (Buys 2009: 1).

> spirit beings, ancestors perhaps who seem to be stripped of their once omniscient power to control social behavior. They could be the ghosts of people that once were important or effigy figures for a ritual.[179]

Hlobo himself never participated in such a gathering but often heard about the parties as a boy and fantasized about joining in. It has been suggested that Hlobo's *Umthsothsho* could be read as a Xhosa version of a European coming-out ball and that Hlobo created it partly as a fantasy but also as a willed reconstruction of a world that he was denied, one that he imagines would have allowed him to channel his own desires (Jantjes 2011b: 74; Gevisser 2009: 11).

Figure 16 Nicholas Hlobo, *Umtshontsho* (2009), installation view, found objects, rubber inner tube, ribbons, red light, dimensions variable © Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery.

The painstaking stitching together of pieces of rubber, leather and textiles into organic forms that at times also merge with garments expresses what Hlobo refers to as 'the baggage we carry around with us as South Africans' (Hlobo quoted in Mergel 2009: 29). In his performances, this element of burden is particularly reinforced through the wearing of harnesses and dragging of

[179] Jantjes also suggests that when considered in the context of the risks of HIV Aids, the spurious identities of the shadowy figures could also refer to the many who have died from this disease (Jantjes 2011b: 74).

appendages. As Mergel states, it references the sexual theatre of S&M as well as the oppressive weight of history. Mergel further describes Hlobo's materials as

> loaded with suggestive suspense – objects hanging or penetrating, stitches like scars highlighting a history of cuts, costumes that tether, bind or drag, often staged with dramatic lighting in installations titled with idiomatic double entendres (Mergel 2009: 27).

Mergel (2009: 29-30) comments that his works materialize tensions in a 'viscerally charged' way that implies 'an action in progress.' Forms often resemble orifices and organs such as a stomach or a womb, spilling out onto the floor or dragging themselves forward (Mergel 2009: 30). Murinik (2012: 3) observes that while the rubber in Hlobo's work has an apparently solid constitution, an element of vulnerability and fragility is consistently dramatized in Hlobo's constructions through the juxtapositioning of 'delicate, ethereal materials such as ribbon, lace or organza against the thick finiteness of black rubber.' She suggests that such material contradictions of masculine imagery with decorative, feminine elements obscures and challenges gender stereotypes. Murinik then mentions an important feature in Hlobo's work, namely the seam: 'Not only is this combination of material and technique aesthetically ambivalent, but what it produces, metaphorically and visually, is the seam' (Murinik 2012: 3).

6.10 Edges and seams

The seam can be read as highlighting joins and connections as well as drawing attention to edges and gaps, i.e. it can be read simultaneously as joining and separating a fabric. Dormor (2014: [sp]) addresses this inherent ambiguity of the seam by stating:

> at the same time as it brings two or more pieces of cloth together, it sets them apart. It functions both as an extending mechanism, whilst also as a limit. The seam conceals and asserts the raw edge of the fabric, the space between the pieces and bodies: a crevice, a suture, a scar.

Hlobo's explicit stitching together of edges by way of seams, often in brightly coloured thread, draws attention to the splits and fissures in the materials that he reconstructs. Jantjes (2011b: 57) argues that this dominant feature of edges and seams indicates a deeper strategic approach to his production and presentation of his work. Not only does such a 'patchworking' method of construction call attention to the notion of wounds and healing, but it also points to the potential for the viewer to unlock deeper meaning through a process of excavation. Jantjes alludes to this in the following passage:

> An edge is the point furthest from the centre of something. It marks the outer limit or periphery […] A seam marks the place at which two edges have been brought into proximity or touch one another in an exchange. In geology a seam is also a rich vein of something that has value such as a mineral or a metal, but is hidden or submerged. It suggests that excavation will reveal this value and make it accessible (Jantjes 2011b: 57).

O'Toole (2008: 142) similarly argues that the seam becomes the defining metaphor of Hlobo's work, 'grafting histories and reconciling opposites.'

A seam can be thought of as 'agitating' the liminal area of a cloth's edges. Dormor (2014: 7) suggests that a focus on a seam, as in a sutured scar, proposes the role of the seam not just as a joining mechanism but as a 'linking' site, an explicit drawing of boundaries that carries strong bodily and erotic experiences of materiality. The thickened space between the seam as suture, also known as the 'gutter,' draws attention to the 'fleshiness' of the seaming but also to the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the work produced (Dormor 2014: 11). Through bringing to the fore an accumulation of gestures of joining and stitching, Hlobo's work can be seen as being as much about the process of fabrication as it is about completed objects and/or installations. His stitching of both yielding and somewhat unyielding materials actively marks the performative, processual and also bodily aspects of his works. Hlobo's seaming activity can in this sense be viewed as 'conversationally' performed where joiner and joined play co-active roles in the production of the seams.

I earlier noted Ingold's (2011a: 178) analogy of the wayfarer's pathway to practices of making, drawing attention to the fact that activities such as stitching and weaving are not about projection of images but rather about 'breaking through a terrain and leaving a trace.' Describing it also as a matter of *gathering*, Ingold identifies the creativity of making as lying in the practice itself, i.e. 'in an improvisatory movement that works things out as it goes along.' Weaving and stitching, he argues, accurately describe the binding of mind and world in an ongoing generative movement, one that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic (Ingold 2011a: 179). Hlobo's stitching exemplifies such a 'becoming' of his materials through an alignment of observation with performance. As Dormor (2014: 10) puts it: 'Thread and fabric are neither active nor passive, but become re-cast as forces on each other that reply and respond, even answering back.' The performative act of seaming is about creative improvisation involving hands, eyes, body, needle, thread and textile fragments as a materialization of storytelling. A 'story-fabric' is brought into being through a seaming together of multiple routes and arrangements of parts and fragments (Dormor 2014: 11).

The piecing together of bits of rubber creates wavy trails of seams that meander across the expanses of Hlobo's works. These sprawling stitches can suggest lines of communication, as Mergel (2009: 31) suggests, raising questions about links and cultural and social connections. Yet, while they may create a sense of movement and growth, the seams can simultaneously signify a closing off or concealing. Mergel (2009: 29) comments on this revealing/concealing feature by stating that Hlobo's stitching

> actively *reveals* that something is hidden – whether one's sexuality, a nation's apartheid history or a traditional culture's uncertain future – drawing us to question how and why we might conceal what pains us.

Artists such as Allen and Hlobo demonstrate the power of communicating serious issues through reference to handcraft traditions. Their works convey a subtle engagement with tradition in addressing the trauma of the past. In engaging with materiality and visually sensuous and tactile elements through making by hand, their work deviates strongly from the social realist impulse of

previous artworks associated with resistance art. As Kwesi Gule (2009: 10) notes, they seem to feel comfortable with revisiting indigenous visual material, practices and symbolism and bringing them into a contemporary context. Gule sees this not only as being a mere act of recovery but as

> a way of re-examining issues of ethnic identity and the visual vocabularies associated with them. In this way these artists not only question rigid notions of Africanness or more specifically of ethnic identity but more importantly do so with an acute sense of the pleasure of looking (Gule 2009: 10).

CHAPTER 7

UNWEAVING AND UNDOING – RE-CREATION AND RE-FORMING IN SELECTED TEXTILE-BASED ARTWORKS BY SOUTH AFRICAN ARTISTS

Whereas my examination of textile-based modes of making has so far focused on acts of piecing together and joining, I now turn my attention to examples of artworks that engage with practices of unweaving and redoing of threads. I look at instances where artists have adopted textile-based materials and processes that allow for explorative ways of working and reworking, focusing on how their spontaneous and improvisatory modes of working underline the provisional, precarious and open-ended possibilities that textile-based activities offer. Through referencing the commonplace by way of their chosen materials and processes, each of the artists examined can be seen to appeal to the handmade and the domestic in ways that counter perfection of technique in favour of an approach to materials that speaks of incompleteness, disorderliness and even mess. Grounding their works in a textile-based language that is open to forms of repetition, disjunction and messiness has allowed them to feel their way through the physical making of their work in addressing their conceptual concerns.

Christine Checinska and Grant Watson (2016: 288) comment on textile-based making as a form of knowledge production that involves doing, undoing and redoing; stitching, unstitching and re-stitching. They suggest that this feature of repetition and revision that characterizes the construction of textiles 'facilitates a way of thinking beyond fixed limits, one that resists the closure that occurs when we attempt to transcribe concepts through the written word.' The open-endedness of textile-based making, they argue, involves a sense of ongoing questioning (Checinska and Watson 2016: 288).

Jefferies (2016: 3) similarly characterizes contemporary textile practice as a form of thinking through manipulation that is about forms of translation rather than about perfecting traditional skill. Making, she argues, implies 'unmaking, remaking, *making* connections whether through deliberate entanglement or

drafting code' (Jefferies 2016: 3). In pointing out the piecing together of textiles and writing as being analogous to the process of quilt making, she quotes Barthes as saying:

> in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving the constructive secretions of its web (Barthes 1975 quoted in Jefferies 2016: 99).

Jefferies interprets Barthes's statement as implying a certain kind of risk and even messiness. Textile as mobile sign *and* material practice, she suggests, allows for fluid, disorderly and loose forms of playing out. By virtue of its 'handedness' in working around the body she maintains that the weave is perhaps the most political 'mark' of all (Jefferies 2016: 99).

From examining examples of artworks by young South African artists who engage in forms of unmaking, it becomes evident that they engage in such processes to convey particular meanings through adopting craft work's performative gestures and use its materials and methods in ways that flout traditional craft skill to advance their conceptual concerns. As Owen (2011: 88) states, in such works 'the content is not wholly fixed but occurs – at least in large part – during production.'[180] I examine their experiential and open-ended processes of making which they adopt as a means of undoing and consider what is being communicated. The works that I look at foreground the tactility of textile-based making and often resemble entangled scribbles, mappings and meanderings. As such, they adopt a language that reflects a working through, mapping out or struggling with a terrain that never quite settles.

[180] Stephen Feeke and Sophie Raikes (2010: 5) state that the methods used in such process-driven artworks recall Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself* (1967-8) in which he listed 108 actions, e.g. 'to roll,' 'to fold,' 'to bend,' which he would then enact on materials in his studio. By doing these actions he was suggesting, as the authors point out, that 'the means of making an artwork can partly or wholly be its subject.' The action-based nature of craft-work allows for ideas to evolve through hands-on activity and can be a means through which to activate memory and engage particular meanings.

7.1 Unravelling:

In a chapter dealing with censorship and iconoclasm in his book *Art and the End of Apartheid*, Peffer (2009: 234) discusses an unfinished performance artwork by South African artist Tracy Rose. Titled *Unravel(led)*, the work was performed at the Little Karoo National Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn in 1998.[181] The artist set out to unravel 25 crocheted doilies and to wind the threads around a bronze police monument of an officer and his dog situated in the town's main street. Some of the doilies had been given to Rose by her grandmother and others were made by women from a coloured community outside Oudtshoorn.[182] The performance could not be completed as police officers interrupted and demanded that the activity be halted. In a review written for the *Mail & Guardian*, Lauren Shantall (cited in Peffer 2009: 234) stated that Rose's performance was considered an embarrassment by the police who saw it as an insult and a tarnishing of their image. The threads were finally cut away and removed by an officer.

Rose's performance artwork is one of several undertaken by the artist to problematize issues of colour and race-identity. She usually performs her works herself in order to address issues relating to the apartheid classification of 'coloured' as defining persons of 'mixed race.'[183] Commenting on *Unravel[led]*,

---

[181] Unfortunately, images of Rose performing *Unravel(led)* could not be included here. An image can be found in Peffer's book *Art and the End of Apartheid* (2009) on p235.

[182] Peffer (2009: 237) mentions that Rose attached labels with the names of the women who made the doilies to a wall behind the monument which supported plaques commemorating the duties of the police.

[183] Although Rose's artworks do not generally engage with textile-based processes, Coombes (2003: 254-257) discusses another performance artwork of hers titled *Span II* (1997) in which Rose highlights racial and sexual connotations attached to coloured identity through her activity of knotting a mass of hair. Performed as part of the *Graft* exhibition curated by Richards for the Second Johannesburg Biennale, Rose sat naked with shaven head on a television monitor in a diorama-like glass cabinet, knotting the shaven hair in her lap. The monitor played back a close-up of her knotting hands. Through the use of hair Rose drew attention to the arbitrariness of it as a marker of identity, commenting: 'Hair is significant in coloured communities. It marks you in certain ways, towards blackness or whiteness. On the one hand, it's about the 'privilege' of having straight hair as opposed to *kroes* [frizzy] hair, but on the other hand, having straight hair meant you were often insulted for thinking you were white, for pretending to be white' (Rose 1998 quoted in Coombes 2003: 254). Coombes (2003: 259) argues that through her use of autobiography and her own body, Rose is one of the few younger generation of artists who 'actively questions her own complicity in apartheid at a moment when it would otherwise be

Rose mentions that where she grew up, doilies were produced by women, often in knitting and crochet circles, and that they represented for her a form of self-censorship and 'female damage control,' a means to busy the hands so as to 'shut you up […]' (Rose quoted in Peffer 2009: 235). Her act of undoing them and wrapping them around the monument was not meant as one of destruction (of the doilies or the police image) but rather as a reconciliatory re-forming of something already created, as Peffer states. The weaving of the doilies, which for Rose represented an incapacity to speak, was purposefully undone and re-used in an act aimed to reveal the prejudicial 'covering up' contained in the process of weaving. Furthermore, the performance was meant to expose and confuse the gendered race relations that the monument and the doilies stood for (Peffer 2009: 236-238).

Peffer (2009: 236) argues that Rose's wrapping of the police monument highlights contradictions underlying coloured identity, unravelling that which lies behind the public image. Commenting on her uncomfortable relationship with the language of Afrikaans, which she was brought up with but which is also associated with Afrikaner apartheid culture, Rose is quoted as saying that it is 'the tongue that stole my own' (Rose quoted in Peffer 2009: 235). The contradiction is further echoed in the 'coloured' labelling:

> if you were colored it was as if you were the product of some kind of "illicit sex." […] [In] being labeled colored, one was (and still is) being labeled semi-criminal, a bastard, but also exotic, sexy, and desirable. It is this double sense – of being made in the image of a sex object, but also repressed, contained, kept in one's place by apartheid and the general misogyny of South African society […] (Rose cited in Peffer 2009: 236).

The statue of the policeman with his dog represented for Rose the authority of white men in apartheid South Africa and her undoing of doilies and wrapping of the threads across the image as a form of covering or 'cocooning' represented an act of restoration. Peffer (2009: 236) comments that wearing a white gown with

---

only too easy for her to trade on her status (particularly abroad) as part of a constituency discriminated against during that period.'

nothing underneath, the artist 'took the passive sexuality of the colored woman and made it active, and she took the dominating image of the white masculine oppressor and "protector" and wrapped it in love.' Through temporarily confusing these roles, Peffer (2009: 238) suggests, Rose's performance of undoing threads over the bronze statue brought attention to the continuing gendered race relations in the country.

7.2 Doing and undoing

Rose's simple task of unwinding and rewinding doily threads has an informal, fragile quality about it in contrast to the formality and hardness of the bronze statue. Crocheted doilies connect directly with life experience through the time and energy spent in their making and speak about the commonplace monotony of ordinary tasks associated with the domestic. The notion of decoration attached to doilies also carries references of the commonplace and sentimental in domestic settings as opposed to the seriousness and permanence attached to a public monument. Through her unraveling and tying action, Rose underlines an element of doing and undoing as an ongoing act of handwork being cancelled out.[184] Her action counters the formality and fastidiousness of 'well-made' craft in favour of an informal and comparatively 'crude' mode of facture that requires little expertise. What Rose chooses to do with her threads leads to an amateurish looking result in comparison to the neat and uniform crocheted doilies. Elaine C.

[184] In suggesting a process that never reaches finality, Rose's action of unweaving and reweaving recalls the ancient Greco-Roman myths of Penelope and Arachne. The story of Penelope tells of her waiting patiently at her loom for her husband Odysseus to return from the Trojan war. Beset by suitors who tried to convince her that her husband had died and that she needed to remarry, Penelope warded off their advances by promising to make up her mind about marrying one of them when she had finished her weaving of a shroud for her husband. As a way of stalling for time she would weave during the day and at night she would undo her weaving again. As a strategy, Maharaj comments, Penelope's stalling tactic and perpetual deferring 'encapsulates something of their "recalcitrance," the sense of feminine resistance' (Maharaj 2015: 252). Arachne, a talented mortal weaver, dared to compete with goddess Athena by weaving tapestries depicting Zeus's and other male gods' errors and failures. As punishment, Athena turned her into a spider to weave for the rest of her life. Barbara Clayton (2004: 84-85) mentions critic Nancy Miller as arguing that Arachne presents a more compelling model for the female artist in that, unlike Penelope whose 'unmaking and remaking of the subject suggests "the mindless work now performed by women," […] Arachne is punished for her point of view. For this, she is restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself. Cut off from the work of art, she spins like a woman' (http://www.goddessathena.org/Encyclopedia/Athena/Arachne.htm).

Paterson and Susan Surette (2015: 7) argue that such 'failure' of the craft amateur speaks of craft skill as 'a way of being in the world,' i.e. skill is seen in this sense as problem-solving as the maker does not feel bound by it. As they put it:

> Skillful manipulation of materials might be the expertise of the craftsperson, taking much time and energy to acquire, but artists consider the skillful manipulation of ideas to be their purview [...] If skill is set up as a way of achieving "cultural authority" within a material discipline, then working within that discipline without the requisite skill has the potential to mount a challenge to this authority (Paterson and Surette 2015: 7).

Presented as a social critique of the practice of skillful crocheting of doilies carried out as a dutiful activity of constraint, Rose distances her work from the conventional expectations and values of such craft forms, including mastery over materials and perfection of technique. Refusing the obedient role of 'homework' given to women by patriarchy, her rewinding of the unraveled threads creates its own rhythm and results in a cumulative and excessive form of doing that is not bound to skillful manipulation. In her performance, the undoing and doing is presented as an empowering act through its displacement of conventional standards and release from constraint. It also highlights an inequality of values assigned to separate work domains of the domestic and the public, the feminine and the masculine, craft and public art.

Peffer (2009: 239) argues that what is most profound about Rose's act is the fact that the bronze statue still stands and that her defacing of the image even enhances it, reinvesting the object with power. As a spontaneous intervention in a public space, Rose's action remains defiantly transitory and improvisational. Peffer also remarks that the unfinished nature of the event underscores the 'revelatory' and precarious nature of her action. By keeping the event performative and in constant mobile relations, he argues, Rose succeeds in bringing it 'in touch with an ongoing and shifting reality, [placing] authoritarianism in perpetual disgrace' (Peffer 2009: 239).

Nolan and Mitchell (2010: 207) observe that many contemporary artists who engage with textiles challenge the medium's aesthetic of technical perfection by reenacting and questioning traditional techniques, and that they often do so through

> a staging of exchanges and an awareness of performance (or, more critically, the performative) as a mode of discursive and radical communication. The textile artist questions the authority of dutiful skill through the acts of "un-doing" and "re-doing," of self-conscious and socially conscious contamination of, and engagement in, a dialogic global tradition (Nolan and Mitchell 2010: 208).

Rose's performative staging of textile work clearly reflects on a specific social-cultural context. Also, by using her own body as site of enactment, she dramatizes what Nolan and Mitchell (2010: 214) refer to as 'the mutually constitutive relationship between body and material, that is the "action" of the body on the textile and the textile on the body.' The tightly knotted doilies contain traces of the body in the labour invested in their stitching and Rose's performative undoing and rewinding of the threads draws attention to the 'embodied' aspect of the textile but also suggests a liberation from an ongoing constraint. Using not only her hands but her entire body in navigating her way around and through the statue she adds an element of physical exaggeration to amplify her defiant act. By shifting the emphasis from object to performance and enacting the body-textile relationship in a new context, she establishes a radically different relationship to textile practice, thereby 'giv[ing] voice to an apparently silent medium,' as Nolan and Mitchell (2010: 225) put it.

The fact that Rose could not complete her performance is somewhat ironically appropriate to her activity of unravelling, i.e. the performance itself having become 'unravelled.' It was in any case the *gesture* in her action that was important, perhaps more so than the final outcome of the winding. Adopting a textile-based process was crucial to the content and meaning of her performance through its associations with social and cultural history, but she subverted such craftwork through her foregrounding of imperfection and inexpert handling. Her undoing and repurposing of the doilies represented an act of defiance, calling

attention to a deskilled form of manipulation that goes against the conventional standards of craft. Her public unraveling and winding of the doily threads shifted the textile-based craftwork out of its usual domestic realm, thereby speaking effectively to the untying and unsettling of 'the usual order of things,' as Peffer (2009: 238) puts it. Her unravelling also speaks to the undervaluing of women's work specifically, calling attention to its low position within the hierarchy of art and craft. Her action challenges the negative associations of thread-based craft with femininity and the domestic sphere, recasting it as a valuable feature and a legitimate art medium. Rose's re-using of the doily threads to produce something new or different in a public space points to the possibility of endlessly playful reinvention and an open space of potentiality.[185]

7.3 Webs and meanderings

The unravelling of threads also features in the artworks of another young contemporary South African artist who came to prominence in the 1990s, Moshekwa Langa. Produced in 1997, his installation artwork titled *Temporal distance (with criminal intent): You find us in the best places* (Fig 17 and 18, p163-164) was the first of a series of map-based artworks. Produced for the Second Johannesburg Biennale, this floor installation has since been recreated on several exhibitions across the world with subtle changes made in each version in response to the specific sites.[186]

Langa unravelled coloured threads from industrial-sized cotton spools and bundles of wool and twine to create a floor-based three-dimensional map. He stacked and arranged the bundles and spools, interspersing them with a

[185] Auther (2010: 126) comments that such 'reuse' highlights the transformation of women's traditional art forms on both a literal and symbolic level, creating 'a view of women's material culture as "imbued with dignity, stature, and autonomy".'

[186] The work was commissioned by Colin Richards for his "Graft" show which featured as a satellite exhibition to the Second Johannesburg Biennale (1997) at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town. O'Toole quotes Richards as remarking that Langa was a bit like Houdini: 'a magician, an enigma, a stranger, a "mobile subject" before such things were faddish' (Richards quoted in O'Toole 2013: [sp]). Venues featuring the restaging of his installation included: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago in 1999; "Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary art Diaspora" at the Museum for African Art, New York in 2003; "Making Worlds" at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 and others (Speakes 2016: 12).

collection of objects such as bottles, toy cars and knitting needles. In subsequent versions of the installation he also included plastic animals, puzzle pieces and balls; in one instance a glitter ball. O'Toole (2013: [sp]) comments that the work 'reads as a map, as an elaborate metaphorical cityscape.' But he also mentions Langa as suggesting to him that it was about wish-fulfillment in speaking to the things he wished for but could never own as a child.[187]

Langa grew up in the small rural town of Bakenburg, Limpopo Province and was educated at the Max Stibbe Waldorf boarding school in Pretoria where he was taught art based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (Corrigall 2011a: 151). Despite not having the opportunity to study at a tertiary level, Langa spent time experimenting with drawings, collages and found materials in the backyard of his mother's home. His first exhibition came about when he confidently approached several Johannesburg gallerists for the opportunity to show his work. He was offered a solo exhibition in 1995 at the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery, Johannesburg, by the then director, Stephen Hobbs, who recognized in his work 'a keen "sense of materiality" as well as an enigmatic "furtiveness" and conceptual "lightness"' (Hobbs quoted in O'Toole 2013: [sp]). This show led to him being acclaimed by some critics as the first black South African neo-conceptualist.[188] O'Toole quotes Emma Bedford, then senior curator at Cape Town's National Gallery, as saying: 'At the time there was nothing like it at all. It inhabits that space between referential art and Conceptualism' (Bedford quoted in O'Toole 2013: [sp]).

---

[187] Olga Speakes (2016: 12) mentions Langa talking about the work in terms of his experience of living in large cities and the associated threats, risks and allures that this experience presented. In this sense, she suggests, the objects can be seen as markers of urban presence, things that fascinated him as a child growing up in rural Limpopo, and that he uses the objects to revisit that space in the past.

[188] Corrigall (2011a) comments: 'The attention he generated was mainly because he was seen as the first black artist to have created art that was undeniably contemporary, given that it evinced characteristics associated with neo-conceptualism – a label which activated his reaggregation into a white dominated art world, then beholden to a Western construct of art.' In her essay "At the Border Post of Western Art: The Provisional "Reaggregation" of Moshekwa Langa's Art into The South African Canon," Corrigall (2011b) highlights the controversy surrounding this pronouncement, arguing that it resulted in a typecasting of his work. She states in another essay titled "Inside-Out: Unravelling the Cultural Positioning of Moshekwa Langa's "Skins,"' that Langa's work '[…] came to serve as a marker for what the art intelligentsia at the time deemed a turning point for South African art' (Corrigall 2011b: 68). Maintaining that Langa was himself partly complicit in constructing his liminal identity, she argues that he challenged reaggregation in response to the skewed reception of his 1995 exhibition.

7.4 Mutating maps

Several critics have interpreted Langa's map-based works as a playful diaristic charting of personal experiences and spontaneous search for self-definition.[189] However, while his use of colourful threads and dispersed objects, including toys, does indeed convey a light-hearted playfulness, the clutter of objects and threads also suggests disorderliness and has been interpreted by some as signifying chaotic displacement. Ulrich Clewing (2005: 2), for example, observes that the work inevitably calls to mind issues relating to work, exploitation and dependency. He comments that the cotton reels are of the kind that are used in industrial spinning factories, some reels still unused while others are already partly unraveled. Interspersed with bottles of beverages, mostly alcoholic, the installation offers an unsettling view of disarray. Corrigall (2011a: 150) suggests that the sense of displacement conveyed by the work may relate to the way in which black people had previously been removed and relocated to land that had been prescribed by the apartheid state and Speakes (2016: 12) similarly suggests that the installation evokes aerial views of urban landscapes, possibly suggesting an element of surveillance. A geopolitical reading is also invoked by Clewing who remarks that:

> Geographic and geopolitical guidelines have always played a special role in South Africa, a country which was created more or less arbitrarily on the drawing board, like so many other African states. Colonialism and usurpation, the demarcations and exclusion of

[189] Neelike M. Jayawardane (2016: 2), for example, interprets Langa's map-based works as being a means of locating himself, tracing his own and a collective cartography of experiences. Linda Stupard similarly comments on Langa's works as 'charting the search for personal definition within a globalized world. In this process Langa uses a conglomeration of materials […] that specifically reference the naivety and all-encompassing vision of a confused child – a technique that makes the artist's complex linguistic and cultural references all the more potent' (Stupard 2008: 96). Speakes (2016: 13) comments on the diaristic quality of Langa's work, mentioning his scrapbooks and his attempts during adolescence at writing an autobiography. His works, she suggests, are like pages in the book about himself, and, finding language alone too limiting, he would include images and collaged elements to flesh out his personal journey. As such, Speakes (2016: 13) argues, his shifting installations can be interpreted as an unfixed autobiographical 'mind map' featuring traces of his memories, dreams and imagination. The colourful threads have a dreamy quality that she describes as being 'reminiscent of distant views,' and the interwoven quality of the work captures the importance of memory to his practice (Speakes 2016: 14).

> Apartheid, cities with a "white" centre and "black" townships – for decades the Cape of Good Hope was dominated by a social system which displayed the rifts within society more overtly than in any other African country (Clewing 2005: 1).

In these terms, Langa's mappings have been variously interpreted as raising questions around national affiliation, identity, exploitation and territorial domination.[190] Yet, most commentators agree that Langa's installations simultaneously convey an innocent element of child's play and that this ludic element, together with the network of signs, results in an ambivalence that prevents any specific definition or full reading of the works.

Figure 17 Moshekwa Langa, *Temporal distance (with criminal intent: You will find us in the best places* (1997-2009), found objects, wool, twine, dimensions variable, (installation view, 53rd Venice Biennale 2009) © Mosehkwa Langa.

[190] Stupard (2008: 96) comments, for example, that his appropriation of the map questions the classificatory process of mapping and interrogates 'the setting of arbitrary boundaries by a hegemonic power […] the very process through which mapping flattens space, negates place and fails to take account of the realities of cultural, historical and political borders and quirks of context.'

Figure 18 Moshekwa Langa, *Temporal distance (with criminal intent: You will find us in the best places* (1997-2009), found objects, wool, twine, dimensions variable, (installation view, 53rd Venice Biennale 2009) © Moshekwa Langa.

Williamson (2009: 230) suggests that this constantly shifting and purposefully ambiguous or unreadable quality of Langa's works points to a resistance to being stereotyped in relation to his personal history, nationality, race or age. Corrigall (2011a: 151) similarly argues that he seems to be circumventing any efforts at fixing his identity and

> generates his own Esparanto by drawing from a territory of circulating signs which include both Western and African visual languages, between which the boundaries are no longer clearly defined. Consequently, within this domain neither is privileged and both are subordinates to the artist's agenda. In this way, self-definition is not predicated on advancing an image of the self but on (re)determining the language of self-expression (Corrigall 2011a: 152).

By foregrounding ambiguous and shifting elements in his work, Corrigall maintains, Langa presents identity as a constant state of becoming. She quotes

him as saying: 'Making stuff that you can't quite pin down is a way of dealing with the situation without really dealing with the situation' (Langa quoted in Corrigall 2011b: 69). Corrigall argues that it is his strategy in an attempt to 'tackle the politics of identity that had overshadowed his career [and] to dislodge the typecasting of his work' (Corrigall 2011b: 69). In whatever way one may interpret Langa's engagement with ambivalence, it can also be seen to underlie his attitude towards the handmade, choosing as he does to engage in a form of *un*doing or *un*making.[191]

7.5 Trailing threads

The trailing threads in Langa's installations speak perhaps most clearly of the state of continual flux as symbolic expression of the self. By placing his objects and allowing the threads to straggle between them directly on the floor, Langa's arrangement incorporates the site of the gallery space into the conceptual parameters of his work, thereby 'heightening the psychic energy of the art object[s] in relation to the exhibition space,' to use Janelle Porter's (2015: 17) characterization of such floorbound artworks.[192] The excess of collected items and threads creates a visual push and pull and on one level the spread-out tangle reads as a psychological state; evidence of actions that speak of repetitive behaviour.[193] The amassed gesture of loose threads appears disorderly and

---

[191] O'Toole (2013: [sp]) describes Langa's work, seen as a whole, as 'polymorphous' and 'shape-shifting.' Ranging as it does between forms of drawing, collage, painting, abstract and representational photography, video and installation, Langa refuses to be confined to any one medium or style. He further suggests that Langa's works are therefore best understood collectively and that the many maps are 'all the flotsam of a biographical novel [...]' (O'Toole 2013: [sp]). O'Toole also comments that Langa's use of ordinary materials at hand and his curious manner of assembling and disassembling his artworks was to be very influential on the works of other young artists such as Nicholas Hlobo, Dineo Bopape and Nandipha Mntambo.

[192] Writing about the emergence of Fiber art during the 1960s and 1970s, Porter (2015: 17) comments on the 'jettisoning of the intermediary pedestal [...] proclaim[ing] the horizontal axis by exhibiting their work directly on the floor. She cites Robert Pincus-Witten as writing about a new 'floorness' in the work of 'so-called process artists, conceptual artists, earthwork artists, and artists, particularly sculptors' (Robert Pincus-Witten 1977 cited in Porter 2015: 17).

[193] Commenting on the charge generated by Eva Hesse's rope and string sculptures from the 1970s that are 'all connectives without any substantial body [...]', Alex Potts (2000: 349) describes them as 'curiously insubstantial substantiality.' The same can be said of Langa's trails of string and wool that similarly, as Potts puts it, 'define [themselves] in space while almost collapsing into disarray.' Potts (2000: 349) further speaks of the 'distinctive occupancy of space

messy, but it also reveals an underlying order or structure by being arranged in a rectangular format echoing the architecture of the gallery space. This rectangular formatting lends a wholeness or containment to the chaotic freedom of the objects and wandering lines, not unlike the grid and nodes of convergence that one would find on a page of an atlas.[194]

Langa's installations invoke a past in the sense that the objects and threads belonged to daily life. The surface aesthetic of the collected objects and colourful threads carry associations of domestic life; bottles, toys, home-craft hobbies and decoration accentuate connections to activities that take place in private life and the everyday. A personalized history is thereby reflected. Besides emphasizing the relationships between objects in space, the threads also draw attention to the residue of accumulated bodily gestures and the time that went into the making of the work. As Siùn Hanrahan writes in an essay on installation art, we as viewers are physically and conceptually implicated in the work via such relationships:

> the viewer is charged with discovering relationships between things within the space so as to move those relationships beyond mere juxtaposition. Furthermore, because the work explicitly depends on the viewer giving attention to expand its temporality beyond the time of the exhibition, *durée* is exposed, not only the duration, practice and physicality of making (beyond a founding perception) but more particularly the duration, practice and physicality of reception. Thus reception is explicitly revealed as an activity, a process of active response and remembering (Hanrahan 2006: 149).

The routinized and repetitive 'doodling' quality of the pools and trails of thread emphasizes the cumulative development of the overall installation.[195] Using a

---

and complex interplay of internal and external resonances' that such string works activate; an 'evocation of being immersed in the material fabric of things.'

[194] Manning and Massumi (2014: 114-115) refer to a 'quasi-chaos,' a term they borrow from philosopher William James (1996). By this they mean a 'creative chaos' played out from the initial conditions at hand; one that sorts itself out in the unfolding of the event. As they put it: 'The event draws itself out into a line of formation that folds in and through its welling expression, describing the abstract shape of the event it will have been.' It renders the generative forces of its unfolding not only visible but multi-modally palpable 'in an unforeseen unfolding composition of sense modes, spaces, roles, and rhythms of transition entering into unaccustomed resonance.'

[195] Beverly Gordon (2011: 24-25) expands on fibre terms that connect to the notion of the passage of time, noting that the idea of thread as a pathway or a line to follow is perhaps the most

colour palette of reds, blues and yellows, the overlapping passages of threads set up rhythms and pauses that visualize non-linear time, creating what Auther and Speaks (2015: 51) refer to as 'temporal drag.' A term first coined by Elizabeth Freeman, they describe it as

> a way of projecting subjectivity into space, into a site, such that it can produce a means of "haunting" culture, enacting a spectral relationship to the past in order to elicit its residue within the present. It does this, in part, by using the past to puncture the present (Auther and Speaks 2015: 51).

Auther and Speaks (2015: 51) further quote Bryan-Wilson as saying: 'Temporal drag implies a chronological distortion in which time does not progress seamlessly forward but is full of swerves, unevenness and interruptions.' Langa's groupings of collected objects and his casually unraveled and pooled threads produce visual punctuations and interruptions that represent varied rhythms of activity. A reading of different temporalities is also supported by his enigmatic title containing the words 'temporal distance,' a term that may suggest that time perspective affects how one responds to certain events.[196] The term may also point to an understanding of temporality as a form of exclusion, as Michael Herzfeld (2009: 114) argues. He cites anthropologist Johannes Fabian's critique of 'allochronism' as challenging the evolutionist notion that 'non-Western peoples inhabited a time historically removed from the (predominantly Western) anthropologists' own' (Fabian cited in Herzfeld 2009: 109). Herzfeldt

---

obvious metaphor. Textiles are thereby symbolically linked to generation, expansion and growth. She mentions 'the thread of time' as an expression that links textile strands to our mortal path and 'hanging by a thread' as similarly reminding us of our fragility and our limited time on earth. Threads also symbolize connection, wholeness and strength, she continues, entangled threads symbolizing the idea that 'the whole is much more than the sum of its parts'. Fibre terms can also be used to describe deterioration or coming apart, such as when 'things are frayed, ripped, tattered or shredded. A phrase commonly used at funerals is "a rip in the fabric of human relationship." The ultimate fragility of cloth – it is subject to degenerative processes such as illness and decay – is another reason it is tied to mortality and the passage of time.' As a mnemonic device, Gordon adds, thread can also serve as an icon for memory.

[196] In the field of social psychology, construal-level theory (CLT) predicts that, as Liberman, Trope, McCrea and Sherman (2007: 143) put it, 'the greater the temporal distance from a future event, the more likely is the event to be represented schematically in terms of a few abstract features that convey the essence of the events, rather than in terms of concrete and more incidental details of the event.' Speakes suggests that the 'distance' in Langa's title may also imply 'an external gaze being projected on a group, of which he may or may not be a member' (Speakes 2016: 12)

(2009: 114) elaborates, 'to say that 'others' experience time in ways different from our own is the expression of a taxanomic refusal to treat them as our coevals – of a tendency to view them as mired in past time, as opposed to our own modernity.' This position supports the interpretation of Langa's work as raising questions around exploitation and domination.[197]

Speakes (2016: 14) reflects on Langa's title, suggesting that it may point to himself as protagonist 'with criminal intent,' i.e. assigning himself a position of marginality and/or deviance. In other words, it may point to his desire to resist the pressure to conform to a set of expectations.[198] Such resistance is also reflected in his deskilled handling of threads for purposes other than crafting. In other words, it underlines his choice *not* to craft in any conventional sense. Unlike Rose who engages in undoing and *re-doing* (albeit in a form that lacks evident skill) previously crafted objects in her performance, Langa unravels machine-wound spools and entangles *unformed* threads in a way that retains their unformedness. In line with Speakes's interpretation of his title, this may again be read as a tactic of avoiding definitive declaration and being purposefully ambiguous.[199]

---

[197] Herzfeld (2009: 115) comments: 'If, then, we can see time as a shaper of events, rather than simply as a measure of their duration, we can also begin to appreciate that events themselves take courses that are determined to some extent by social structures that may be peculiar to a particular kind of social organization (Dresch, 1986); micro-events, such as the fashioning of a set of objects, may be expected to follow a similar context-specific trajectory. The *understanding of time in general* is thus common to all societies, as Fabian argues; *the experience of particular uses of time* flows from actual exigencies and capacities, and is shaped by local idioms of representation.'

[198] Speakes mentions an earlier poster based on a photograph that Langa had taken of himself titled "Wanted" in which he 'makes himself the focal point of the desiring gaze of the art world.' She argues that his hypervisibility as a young South African artist on the international and local stage had made him weary of having his practice reduced to identity discourse illustration. By presenting himself as wanted subject, she argues, he was 'juxtaposing the idea of fame and notoriety, and the price an artist like him may have to pay for inclusion into the art historical narrative' (Speakes 2016: 4).

[199] Adamson (2014:149) suggests that the 'deflationary' impulse of soft formlessness in certain fibre-based artworks can be read as an artistic preference for an understated flaccidity that 'diverge[s] from explicit position-taking.' He notes that it is strongly associated with fibre art, especially when artists give over the soft matter of their fibrous materials to gravity and allow it to be pulled to the ground. The softness, he argues, 'disrupts conventional, male-dominated narratives of artistic creativity.'

It is nevertheless in the appeal to the handmade and the domestic that both Rose's and Langa's works embody a mode of making that can be considered as a kind of performative 'craft' of undoing.[200] Through this form of undoing, together with the 'unkempt' appearance of the tangle of threads, Langa embraces a form of deskilled or 'sloppy craft' that gives his work an expressive charge. His approach suggests a makeshift style of making (or *un*making) that, as Auther and Speaks (2015: 52) put it, enhances 'fiber's affective, sentimental, and personal valences.'[201] Langa's display conveys both fragility and impermanence through the use of unraveled threads and disposable objects. His work attests to a way of making that flouts the skill and perfect workmanship of fine craft in favour of investing ordinary objects and casual-looking methods with an affective character.[202] Through engaging with what is at hand and embracing elements that speak of imperfection, irregularity and uncertainty, Langa's approach illustrates what I earlier mentioned Lindström and Ståhl (2016: 73) as observing about an 'interventionist' approach to making. As they suggest, it is not about solving or resolving something but rather about 'stay[ing] with the complexities and mess' of engagement and intervention with materials and temporalities; 'making relational re-orderings' as an intervention from within. It implies, as they argue, a slowing down to grapple with complexities, issues, questions and concerns in a messy world (Lindström and Ståhl 2016: 73).

---

[200] Speakes elaborates by mentioning Langa's earlier *Untitled* map collages from 1996 that were made for a specific project addressing the impact of apartheid. Langa used old maps that reflected the apartheid policies of forced removals and relocations and, as Speakes notes, these works made such a strong impact that he needed to 'find ways to disengage from the fixed expectation placed on him as a commentator on post-apartheid politics' (Speakes 2016: 13). She states, for example, that he resisted talking about his map works in geographical or political terms, discussing them instead in terms of memory and in the context of his desire to record his life and the traces that he gathered when travelling.

[201] Auther and Speaks (2015: 53) discuss such 'sloppy craft' in terms of an 'irreverent, *bricoleur* approach to craft' that has 'the look of improvisational free play.' Skill is understood in this sense as open-ended and a way in which to think through problems in any given situation. In his book *The Savage Mind*, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss defines the 'bricoleur' as 'someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman […] His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand", that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogenous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project […]' (Levi-Strauss 1966 quoted in Wilson C, Laroque JP, Thompson, K and Wilson P 2015: 166).

[202] Auther and Speaks (2015: 58) comment: 'Nowadays the use of common materials and/or craft media, low techniques, and ways of making that look like deskilling constitute a new visual and material vocabulary for the exploration of historical, personal, and mundane realities.'

7.6 Structured chaos

Igshaan Adams is my final example of a young contemporary South African artist engaging in textile-based processes of undoing and redoing. Adams produces works that he describes as 'structured chaos,' involving as they do the use of old carpets, tapestries and textiles that he unravels and/or reconfigures (Adams 2016: 4). By putting old textiles to new use, his process-driven approach is charged with personal history and memory. In a catalogue statement the artist says:

> I am born Muslim and raised by my Christian maternal grandparents. I am openly homosexual and classified as 'Cape Malay' (of mixed race) in the Apartheid South African system. Navigating my way around the expectations imbedded within the stereotypes of my social roles, I continue to search for new understanding, new ways of seeing my combination of identities (Adams quoted in Higgins 2015: 109).

Through his use of old textiles and mats, including prayer mats associated with his Islamic upbringing, Adams harnesses the mundane in order to invest it with new meaning. One of his earlier works titled *I am no more* (2012), for example, involved the displaying of a prayer mat given to him by a friend who had used it for over thirty years. The wear and tear from continuous kneeling in the ritual of prayer had left traces where his friend's head, feet, knees and hands had come into repeated contact with the mat. 'It's an artwork produced over thirty years,' Adams (quoted in Ball 2015: 31) comments.

The effects of repeated action in the making and use of textiles has fascinated Adams since he first encountered processes of sewing and weaving. His mother is a seamstress and processes of sewing, quilting and embroidery were thus familiar to him from an early age (Higgins 2015: 110). During and following his art training at the Ruth Prowse School of Art, Cape Town, Adams worked at the Phulani child health and nutrition centre in Khayalitsha as an art facilitator, assisting unemployed mothers with their textile creations in producing commercial craft items towards a sustainable income. Adams would help the

women in developing their imagery and they would in turn show him how to weave.[203] All of this led him to consider textile-based modes of making as a form of expression in his own creative work.

In gathering textile remnants for use, he decided to unravel and recycle his own Islamic prayer mats that he had used in the past. He comments that symbolically this made good sense to him:

> this was a nice way of doing things […] undoing and redoing which would have made sense with the way how I see myself as a Muslim. You know the idea that you almost create your own form of Islam that suits you, there are things you choose to honour and there are certain parts that are too big to take on that point […] (Adams 2016: 5).

This comment reflects his uneasiness with religious doctrine that condemns homosexuality. Higgins (2015: 111) mentions his ongoing search for narratives and progressive scholarly views that approach the issue of sexual orientation in more nuanced and compassionate ways. She mentions, for example, his identification with 'narratives of *Mukhannathun*, effeminate if not sometimes transgender men who lived outside the patriarchal heteronormative sexual framework, who were accepted in the time of the Prophet' (Higgins 2015: 111).

Adams speaks of his maternal grandmother, the primary caretaker during his childhood, as being a devout Christian who was also supportive of her grandchildren's religion (Islam) (Rappaport 2015: 2). This acceptance of different religious outlooks plays an important role in his deeply personal approach to questions about selfhood and identity. His incorporation of aspects of his familial upbringing and religious rituals speaks powerfully about a 'past puncturing the present,' to use Auther and Speaks's (2015: 51) words again, summoning a personalized and embodied history and reconciling with the inherited past within the present. Higgins (2015: 110) states that his strong identification with women and the complication of gender stereotypes indicates

[203] Adams (2016: 5) comments as follows in an interview: 'My position there was a facilitator teacher where I would help the mothers who were weaving already. They used t-shirt material to weave with and the imagery was also scenes from the Eastern Cape where most of them were from. So I would have to help them develop their imagery and they taught me to weave.'

agency in the construction of his own identity, underlining identity as fluid and unstable. She further states that the balance between construction and destruction in Adams's work suggests a process of transformation and becoming, reflecting his struggle to reconcile Islam with his sexuality. Through combining completeness and incompleteness and allowing parts to become undone, Adams's artworks reflects an aspect of conflict and struggle (Higgins 2015: 111).

Starting out with a series of large wall-based tapestries in which he explored approaches to weaving, Adams allowed mistakes to happen along the way, incorporating errors and failure as a productive force. He comments, for example, that the idea of failure and things coming undone is evident in the occasional 'unraveling of the tapestry and the fact that I started weaving something that was not completely planned' (Adams: 2016: 5).[204] His approach to such mistakes was one of seeing what forms could be developed from them (Adams 2016: 2). Higgins (2015: 113) observes that he would, for example, incorporate disruptions in the form of outpourings of threads or leaving unwoven sections exposed, imparting a feeling of incompleteness. The tapestries thereby look as if they are in a state of continuous construction. His incorporation of failure into his process of crafting can be understood as a refusal to conform to a goal-determined model of making, challenging the pressures of dominant doctrine. It points to a playfully subversive disruption of a binary logic that sees failure and incompletion as negative terms.[205]

For his exhibition titled *Parda*, Adams displayed a series of wall-hangings made from old curtains, tablecloths and burial cloths previously owned by his family.

---

[204] Paterson and Surette (2015: 7) argue that failure of the craft amateur speaks of craft skill as 'a way of being in the world,' i.e. skill is seen in this sense as problem-solving. While the skillful manipulation of materials and tools may be present in sloppy craft, the maker does not feel bound by them. They say: 'Skillful manipulation of materials might be the expertise of the craftsperson, taking much time and energy to acquire, but artists consider the skillful manipulation of ideas to be their purview.'

[205] Manning and Massumi (2014: 103) state that 'all explorations at the edge of inquiry risk failure,' but that failure, processually speaking, can add an unplanned 'fissional and fusional dimension.' They suggest that failures can be generative and can be a positive formative factor in a self-organizing way and can be thought of as opportunities for the emergence of new techniques of experimentation. Such an embracing of failure as a creative factor in the process of making, or what Sandra Alfoldy (2015: 79) refers to as 'a purposeful approach to failure,' certainly characterizes Adams's work.

Referring to a curtain or veil, *Parda* is an Islamic term pertaining to the law requiring women to cover their faces in protecting their identity. Higgins (2015: 113) points out that the covering veil is paradoxically also a symbol of enlightenment, 'a search for answers, as the prophet Mohammed's teaching states that there are 70 000 veils of light and dark separating individuals from God.' Engaging with this idea of veiling and unveiling, Adams plays with the relationship between seeing and not seeing, concealing and revealing and between tangible (external) and intangible (internal) worlds (Simbao 2015: 122).

A blurring of boundaries between visible and invisible can be seen to feature in the way in which several of Adams's tapestries incorporating labyrinthine patterns associated with particular Islamic prayers are rendered both legible and obscured. Adams worked collaboratively with the women at the Philani Art Centre in creating these tapestries that were displayed to be seen from both sides (see Fig 19 and 20, p174-175). By including the disorderly back view of the tapestries, Adams exposes the construction in the weaving, revealing the knots, tassles and accidents that happened along the way. Revealing the opposite views makes visible the order and disorder involved in the weaving. Asked in an interview about the content of these tapestries and his use of prayers translated into shapes, Adams commented:

> I've kind of walked the journey (I hate to use that word) with Islam. I was born Muslim in a Christian home and then left, didn't want anything to do with the religion. I wanted to be gay, and I couldn't do both. Then things just kept changing and at some point I felt a bit of a distance, so the starting point of the prayers was my yearning to go back to the origins of Islam (Adams 2016: 3).

Adam's' spiritual renewal in his mid-twenties led to him rediscovering the texts of Sufi Islam and its knowledge, as Higgins (2015: 110) points out, offering a way of understanding the world based on 'an unseen chimerical world of disorder and creation, seemingly beyond language and representation' (Higgins 2015: 110).

Figure 19 Igshaan Adams, *Ayatul Kursi 1* (front) (2015), Woven nylon washing line, string-beaded necklaces and string, 230 x 180cm (photo Monique Pelser) © blank projects.

Figure 20 Igshaan Adams, *Ayatul Kursi 1* (back) (2015), Woven nylon washing line, string-beaded necklaces and string, 230 x 180cm (photo Monique Pelser) © blank projects.

More recently, Adams's work has engaged more explicitly with messiness and less structured approaches to making. He speaks of his decision to take the tapestries from a two-dimensional into a three-dimensional space and even though he always considered his works as being sculptural, this allowed him to consider them more as installations. His most recent exhibition titled *Oorskot* featured works made from various materials such as textiles, wire, nylon rope

and beads which he gathered into loosely arranged forms (see Fig 21). Often resembling curtains or clustered cocoons, these forms were allowed to sprout tendrils or erupt and unravel, at times spilling elements onto the floor. The Afrikaans word 'oorskot,' refering both to excess (surplus) and remnants (remains), captures a condition of abundance and overflow but also of surviving fragments or traces. In his work *Stoflike Oorskot*, which translates as 'mortal remains,' a mass of knotted rope is draped over a skeletal metal frame suggesting something in a process of decomposition. Other works such as *Groen Amara* (2016) (Fig 22, p177), an erupting cascade of woven nylon rope and string, similarly evoke decay but also retain a softness and delicacy in the weave that suggests a memorializing impulse. As Stielau (2016: 3) observes, 'they have the quality of memory about them – forms and thoughts that have grown hazy and come undone.'

Figure 21 Igshaan Adams, installation view of *Oorskot* exhibition (2016) with *Stoflike Oorskot* on the floor to the right, woven nylon rope, string and mild steel, 300 x 120 x 240cm © blank projects.

Figure 22 Igshaan Adams, *Groen Amara* (2016), woven nylon rope and string, 262 x 112 x 26cm © blank projects.

Works such as the ones discussed above illustrate how the process of undoing is used as a contradictory or complimentary gesture to the handcrafted act of making (as constructive fabrication), opening up possibilities for exploring concepts that remain in flux. Often manifesting as chaotic or messy looking creations, such artworks illustrate quite literally what Ingold (2010b: 3) refers to

as the 'entanglement of things' and 'interwoven lines of growth and movement' when he describes the notion of meshwork. Thinking of practical activity not so much in terms of composition but rather as a tissue of lines caught in multiple entanglements, i.e. 'not as *text* but as *texture*' (Ingold 2010b: 84), allows us to experience it as an unfolding along winding pathways, flows and counter-flows without beginning or end. In such an event of unfolding, materials undergo change over time through a process that is kept moving along. The artworks discussed in this chapter exemplify such delineation through movement, reveling in the fluid trajectory of their own 'coming-to-be,' as Manning and Massumi (2014: 8) put it. The artworks' messiness and often somewhat unstructured vocabulary expresses something about the dynamics of such an unfolding. By not constructing according to a prefigured design, the process allows things to happen on the way to a destination that is in the process of being invented. Tidiness and skillful mastery in workmanship are of less importance to artists engaging in such processes than the activity of 'carrying out,' (Ingold 2015: 128). By adopting processes of undoing, artists embrace ambivalence through a kind of *re*-ordering by hand that sets in motion processes through which to unravel, think and discover on the run.

The artworks discussed in this chapter involve a different form of making to the works created by Botha and his co-producers, Allen, Hlobo and myself. The latter engage an approach to handcrafting that leads to the structuring of form and speaks through the detail of cumulative manufacture. Weaving-based making involves controlled rhythmic movements that guarantee a certain constancy and regularity of form. Both approaches, however, whether driven by a structuring or de-structuring impetus, make the generative forces of their unfolding activity visible and transfer this to the viewing process. They employ repetitive gestures over concentrated periods of time involving a reciprocal relationship between body and material. Such craft-based art making activity enables and generates the emergence of concept and form through a dialogical and evolving exchange; process cannot be separated from meaning.

CONCLUSION: MAKING MEANING THROUGH MAKING BY HAND

In this study, I have explored textile-based modes of making by hand as processes of thinking through a close and immersive engagement with materials. I have looked at how elementary techniques of manual making such as weaving, tying, knotting and stitching of thread-based materials involve a merging of mind and body based on rhythmic repetition, and how the formation of ideas in such embodied making occurs through a material-conceptual interplay between text, textile and *techne*. Drawing on Ingold's reflections on the 'textility' of making as a modality of weaving, I have investigated how textile-based materials and processes inflect meaning and produce modes of thinking through action. Such an emphasis on meaning-making through movement, as opposed to an imposition of pre-conceived ideas, has framed my focus on explorative craft-based making as it features in the works of selected contemporary artists from South Africa. Considering manual making in this way as happening via a process of thinking through the hands challenges the pejorative perception of craft technique as mechanically repetitive, mindless activity, positing it instead as a form of creative intellectual work.

I have chosen to research this topic because of my own engagement with craft-based forms of making and my deep interest in African and European handcraft traditions and their intersections. By first introducing my own creative practice and outlining where my interest in textile-based making started, I set the stage for my subsequent examination of how other South African artists similarly engage with the meaning of making by hand, and how and to what ends they have adopted and reconfigured traditional craft-based materials and modes of making. A primary aim was to investigate how South African artists are overcoming the historically negative effects of a debased view of handwork and whether the historically Western hierarchical relationship of art to craft carries particular meaning in post-apartheid artistic production. My main focus was on how contemporary South African artists are destabilizing such hierarchical distinctions by testing conventional categories through their engagements with textile-based forms of making.

Under apartheid, weaving-based craftwork such as basket making was encouraged among black South Africans 'because it was seen as inferior to European arts and crafts,' as Nettleton (2010: 56) has stated. A deep-rooted prejudice towards such textile-based forms of making informed handcrafted work, casting it as a categorically inferior 'other' to fine art practice.[206] In my investigation of contemporary artists using textile-based modes of making, I wanted to examine how their reengagement of the vocabulary of handwork could be seen to counter this stigmatizing discourse. Whether engaging in processes of weaving or unweaving, artists are aware of the resonances of such working modes and some adopt them as a strategic methodology through which to connect to previously suppressed forms of making, reclaiming them as a resource of invention and a means through which to critique hegemonic dominance.

Unconventional or so-called 'non-fine art' materials have long been used to question elitist modes of cultural production in the realm of modern art, and as Françoise Dupré (2015: 171) remarks, cross-disciplinary practice has been favoured by artists wanting to challenge hierarchical relations. Commenting on the artist's political role in such cross-over practices she states:

> by shifting across disciplines, the artist finds herself in a hybrid, in-between position that does not fit well with artistic norms […] cross-disciplinarity is a zone without a territory, in-transit, a threshold. [It is] a space of variation, of difference and becoming. For this reason, cross-disciplinarity provides a potentially subversive context, predisposed to engagement with differences and otherness (Dupré 2015: 171).

Cross-disciplinarity allows artists to break free from traditionally restrictive artistic models and enables a different and potentially transformative approach to art making. As Dupré (2015: 171) further argues, a cross-disciplinary approach that combines art and textile-based forms of making offers a radical site for engagement, especially because of the marginalized coding of textiles as

[206] As Sónia Silva (2012: 3) puts it, creativity in Africa was 'relegated to the realm of the body and emotions, in opposition to the intellectual sophistication of the West.'

'feminine' or 'ethnic.' Such an art practice becomes political, she maintains, because textile-based materials and methods offer an opportunity for *resistance*, 'a performative and transformative site for political struggle and becoming.' It does so, she argues, from a privileged position of being able to 'open up dialogues with history, subjectivity and others' (Dupré 2015: 171). With its capacity for transformation and adaptation, textile-based making thus presents itself as an ideal medium and context for an art practice that seeks to disturb conventions and disrupt the normative.

In my study, I have foregrounded how the transformation of material through repetitive crafting by hand can allow meaning to evolve over time, a process that enables the merging of ideas and actions. As a revelatory mode of inquiry, such activity maintains an outlook oriented towards growth, change and an open-ended 'becoming'; it involves doing and investigating at the same time. I have consistently invoked Ingold who compares such 'unfolding' activity to the act of speaking where meaning evolves in and through the activity itself (Ingold 2011b: 28). By using textile-based making as a mode of inquiry, artists convey their experiential sense of self but also validate and affirm historically marginalized creative practices. The deliberate choice of adopting a textile-based mode of making can constitute a form of subversive critique of its own culturally inscribed status.

Sue Rowley (2012: 227) directs attention to such simultaneously affirmative and resistant modes of creative production when she addresses the centrality of language in postcolonial creativity. Postcolonial writers and artists, she argues, use language as a means of resistance to the imposition of colonial culture as well as a means through which to give expression to their own local and specific experiences. In their attention to local histories and cultures, they frequently invoke traditions, 'especially those related to creative and symbolic practices such as storytelling, popular culture and craft' (Rowley 2012: 227). In doing this, she suggests, language itself becomes transformed through the articulation of 'foreign' experiences and reflections. By using language to underline difference, she argues, the artists can be understood as 'making meaningful objects,' not

simply objects from which meaning may be inferred but rather, objects made from a position of strengthened authorship. According to Rowley, the invocation of craft by postcolonial artists draws attention to and champions local distinctiveness, i.e. it signifies non-Western and resistant modes of creative practice, while at the same time being recognized as contemporary art.[207]

Issues related to contemporary art and postcolonial politics can only be briefly mentioned here as a note for further research. Marschall (2004: 186) states that, in South Africa, postcolonialism can, in many respects, be equated with the post-apartheid era (following 1994). Responding to the changes brought on by the fall of apartheid, South African artists were concerned with the issues underlined by postcolonial theory and understood the urgency to 're-forge' their artistic practices so as to be relevant to the new context.[208] Questioning the 'post' in postcolonial meant addressing historical systems of power and imbalance. However, this applies equally to both a local and global situation, as Pissarra (2011: 18) states:

> with the majority of the world experiencing some form of colonization, occupation, and exploitation, artists the world-over have had to rise to the challenge of making art that is relevant for their contexts. Frequently this has taken the form of developing a new form of art, one that in part draws upon their unique heritage and on the other reflects their engagement with the culture of the colonizing force.

[207] Rowley (2012: 227) elaborates as follows: 'In spite of, or perhaps because of the centrality of language, resistance to the imposition of colonial culture and the re-forging of identity has emerged as a central theme of postcolonialism. So postcolonial artworks might invoke craft and might incorporate craft practices or objects as a means of delineating that which is indigenous, local and specific. But, just as postcolonial writers take English (or Dutch or French) as their starting point, so many postcolonial artists take 'international' contemporary art as theirs. It is in this milieu that they seek to affirm the specificity of their historical and cultural experience.'

[208] Following the country's readmission into the international fold, South African artists had to engage with issues of political transformation, representation and identity in a national and international arena. As Natasha Becker (2011: 95) writes, artists were 'concerned with issues underlined by postcolonial theory: that of representation, history, culture, identity, and the ethical imperatives embedded within the postcolonial moment.' South African artists found themselves in an ambivalent position of figuring out how to re-orient their practices while also engaging critically with questions of production during a time of great uncertainty. Using a range of resources, they interrogated the recent past as a way to effectively move forward.

The recovery and affirmation of the local and indigenous is commonly meshed with dominant 'Western' forms, as Pissarra observes. Western art forms are invested with new or 'local' content.

As I have shown in this study, a number of South African contemporary artists inflect their work with specific meanings by connecting with craft-based methods of making. They give voice to the expansive and positive dimensions of such forms of making, challenging the gender- and race-based devaluations thereof. While often using unconventional materials, they nevertheless engage in processes that are common to textile-based handcraft traditions and, in some instances, make specific reference to indigenous southern African traditions of making. I have explored how such referencing of traditions of making informs their works as well as how they have used a material-centered language to grapple with the political realities of production in a post-apartheid South African context. Evolving from past traditions of practice informed by process, textile-based making can be richly expressive of cultural identity.

A primary purpose of my research has been to show how craft-based forms of making offer artists a dynamic methodology and mode of expression through which to conceptualize and explore important issues. By bringing such activity into their fine art practice, they are able to engage with questions of labour, the value of production, the gendered gesture and the dichotomies of structuring and unstructuring; revealing and concealing. Understood as a language of materiality that slowly unfolds, textile-based making allows artists to explore expressive potential through an emphasis on time. As I have shown, this durational impetus is also transferred to the viewing of the artwork. I made particular reference to my own creative practice in elaborating on how time-consuming and repetitive making opens up space for reflection through which meaning can emerge. In my subsequent examination of other artists' works, I focused closely on their specific engagements with materials and processes as well as the contexts in which they were executed, to investigate how they have dealt with various significations of craft-based making.

I started with an examination of the co-produced woven sculptures and installations of Andries Botha, foregrounding his engagement with local traditions of craft as a means through which to develop a new sculptural vocabulary. I focused on his working methods and presented some of his views on the potential of socially interactive craft-based forms of making. In direct contrast to the pernicious apartheid policies that sought to keep races and cultures separate, Botha embraces cross-cultural contact and exchange, opening his practice up to include co-producers and engage them in social interchange, dialogue and sharing of ideas. His search for a new sculptural language based on indigenous cultural practices is premised on a very genuine belief in the value of cultural intersection and learning through exchange. I have shown how he uses weaving-based approaches to making in his practice as a way of challenging negative perceptions of craft, positioning it instead as a dynamic element in cultural life. I further introduced Botha's and Ntshangaze's *ukuUthinteka kwenhliziyo* (To Touch the Heart) to illustrates how craft-based artworks can actively register affect and mediate the experience of place through a multi-sensory mix of colours, scents and textures.

In my chapter on Allen's and Hlobo's works, I similarly focused on how they connect with local meanings through craft in their respective engagements with processes of weaving and stitching. By manifesting the act of connecting through interlacing and binding, such forms of making carry strong metaphoric meaning in a post-apartheid South African context. I examined how the artists make meaning through their processes, introducing the experiential dimension of their work into their conceptual explorations. While the continuous forward movements in weaving and stitching are very different, both processes of making invoke a form of narrative inquiry that provides a way of 'thinking knowledge' through rhythmic activity (Goett 2016: 125). Both artists blur the division between art and craft and explore new possibilities with traditional art forms as well as new ones in articulating their conceptual concerns. I have shown how they use handwork as a vehicle through which to grapple, respectively, with issues of memory and the trauma of the past and confronting tradition and normative definitions of gender and sexuality.

In my examination of the works of Rose, Langa and Adams, I foregrounded how doing, undoing and redoing in textile-based making have been used to 'think beyond fixed limits' (Checinska and Watson 2016: 288). Through their engagements with repetition, revision and re-ordering of textile-based materials, these artists explore ideas that are in continuous flux, thereby challenging conventional standards and practices of craft to confront normative perceptions and stereotypes. Rose's *Unravel(led)* performance draws her spectators directly into the experiential process of undoing and redoing. Her process of unwinding and rewinding of crocheted doilies, techniques associated with women's work in the home, addresses prejudices perpetuating racial and gender hierarchies. Langa similarly uses unravelled threads and scattered objects in his floor-bound installations as a strategy to dislodge and resist. The shifting and ambiguous quality of his installations together with his purposefully deskilled aesthetic accentuate a refusal to be stereotyped. Likewise, Adams's woven, unwoven and rewoven tapestries and installations embrace an 'unkempt' aesthetic to challenge established values and underline the unstable and endlessly negotiated.

The artists whose works I chose to focus on highlight particular approaches to textile-based modes of making and foreground the politics of craft in a post-apartheid South African context. While I could have included more artists, I chose to limit my selection for the purposes of allowing more in-depth examination of fewer examples. It became apparent to me during my research that there are not that many South African women artists who engage in the weaving-based approaches to making that my study focused on. Needlework practices such as sewing, embroidery, quilting and beadwork are, however, well represented by women artists. There is scope for further research to include a wider range of artists and processes as well as paying greater attention to the complexities of collaboration and contributions made by collectives in this field.

In this study, I aimed to foreground the potentially subversive but also generative dimension of textile-based making in fine art practice, focusing on

how artists can be seen to disrupt normative expectations and articulate new forms of agency and subjectivity. By invoking traditions of making through performative modes associated with weaving-based practices, the artists examined have been shown to engage in a material-discursive practice as a means through which to make meaning of and explore their own context and situation. I have shown how they use their materials and techniques strategically for their transformative potential in an engagement with making that is never pre-designed but rather remains open to ongoing negotiation, re-articulation and repositioning. Today, artists are rediscovering the value and significance of the immersive experience of working through a performative engagement with materials and are using it to explore new forms and create innovative work.

Bibliography:

Adams, I. 2016. Igshaan Adams: Perspectives. *adjective.* https://www.adjective.co.za/2016/09/16/igshaan-adams (Accessed 28 February 2017).

Adams, J. 2011. Craft / A Return to the Hand. http://www.metropolismag.com/core/pagetools.php?pageid=12242&ur…April-2011&2FCraft-A-Return-t-the-Hand%2Findex.php&mode=print (Accessed 21 August 2016).

Adamson, G. (ed.) 2010. *The Craft Reader*. Oxford: Berg.

Adamson, G. 2007. *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford: Berg.

-------- 2013. *The Invention of Craft*. Oxford: Berg.

-------- 2014. All Together Now: Craft Across Boundaries. *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics, and Culture*, April: 1-5. http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/04/criticspage/all-together-now-craft-across-boundaries (Accessed 16 August 2016).

Adamson, G. and Bryan-Wilson, J. 2016. *Art in the Making: Artists and their Materials from the Studio to Crowdsourcing*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Alfoldy, S. (ed.) 2007. *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*. Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Arts.

Alfoldy, S. 2015. Doomed to Failure. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, edited by E.C. Paterson and S. Surette. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 79-92.

Allara, P. 2010. Nicholas Hlobo: Where is Your Navel? *Sculpture* 29(7): 26-33.

Allen, S. 1999. *Siemon Allen* (Monograph, Durban: FLAT International). www.siemonallen.org/project_pages/weaves.html (Accessed 05 October 2016).

-------- 2017. Personal communication (e-mail). 20 October.

Arnold, M. 2009. 1986-1999: Looking back at politics, art and young artists. *Standard Bank Young Artists: 25: a retrospective Exhibition*, edited by A. Crump and E. Maurice (eds.). Johannesburg: Standard Bank: 19-27.

Auther, E. 2004. The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg. *Oxford Art Journal* 27(3): 339-364.

-------- 2010. *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Auther, E. and Speaks, E. 2015. Sloppy craft as temporal drag in the work of Josh Faught. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 45-60.

Ball, J. 2015. Igshaan Adams – Selected Works 2009-2015: In Conversation with Jennifer Ball. *Igshaan Adams*, edited by C. Cronjé, J. Garnham and H. Lewis. (Exhibition catalogue, Cape Town: blank projects): 13-90. www.blankprojects.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Igshaan-Adams-catalogue_digital-version.dpf (Accessed 10 April 2017).

'Bantu'. 2011. Defining the term 'Bantu'. *South African History Online*. http://www,sahistory.org.za/article/defining-term-bantu (Accessed 14 October 2017): [sp].

Barthes, R. 1976. *The Pleasure of the Text*. London: Jonathan Cape.
Becker, C. 1991. Imaginative geography. *Andries Botha: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 1991*. (Exhibition catalogue, Grahamstown: National Festival of Arts).
-------- 1998. An Interview with Andries Botha. *Sculpture Magazine* 17(10): 1-4. http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag98/botha/sm-botha.shtml (Accessed 1 September 2016).
Becker, N. 2011. Africus Johannesburg Biennale 1995: Batusi Tart? *Globalization and Contemporary Art*. Chichester, edited by J. Harris. West Sussex (UK): Wiley Blackwell: 86-96.
Becker, R. 2015. Tsonga Beaded Garments: Then and Now. *Beadwork, Art and the Body: Dilo Tše Dintshi/Abundance*, edited by A. Nettleton. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 96-107.
Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press.
Berggren Torell, V. & Ranglin, U. (2016). Knowledge in Action in Weaving. *Techne Series A* 21(1): 22-37.
Bolin P. E. & Blandy, D. 2003. Beyond Visual Culture: Seven Statements of Support for Material Culture Studies in Art Education. *Studies in Art Education* 44(3): 246-263.
Bonaventura, P. 2011. Communicating in the present tense: an interview with Simon Callery. *Sculpture and Archaeology*, edited by P. Bonaventura P and A. Jones. London and New York: Routledge: 197-214.
Botha, Amanda (ed.) 2010. *Andries Botha*. Stellenbosch: Sasol Art Museum.
Botha, Amanda 2010. A Taste of the Mythical Moment: Art as Conformation of our Humanity. *Andries Botha*, edited by Amanda Botha. Stellenbosch: Sasol Art Museum: 3-7.
Botha, A. 2000. Shifting Boundaries. *Jabulisa 2000: The Art of KwaZulu-Natal*, edited by B. Bell and J. Addleson. (Exhibition catalogue, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg 14 December – 4 March; Durban Art Gallery 18 April – 20 May; Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle, Empangeni Museum; Margate Art Museum): 7-12.
-------- 2012a. Andries Botha – Artwork and Sculpture: Final Journey. http://andriesbotha.net/artwork/1981-1985/final-journey/ (Accessed 16 April 2017).
-------- 2012b. Andries Botha – Artwork and Sculpture: African Seed. http://andriesbotha.net/artwork/1986-1990/african-seed/ (Accessed 12 July 2016).
-------- 2012c. Andries Botha – Artwork and Sculpture: To Touch The Heart. http://andriesbotha.net/artwork/1996-2001/to-touch-the-heart/ (Accessed 29 June 2016).
-------- 2017. Personal communication (interview). 14 July, Durban.
-------- 2017. Personal communication (e-mail). 4 November.
Brett, D. 2012. Towards a Poetics of Workmanship. *Textiles: Critical and Primary Sources: Production (Including Sustainability)*, edited by C. Harper. Vol 2, London/New York: Berg: 1-8.
Bryan-Wilson, J. 2009. *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*. Berkeley and Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
Bunn, S. 2014. Making Plants and Growing Baskets. *Making and Growing:*

Anthropological Studies of Organisms and Artefacts, edited by H. E. Hallam and T. Ingold. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate: 163-181.
Burgin, V. 1986. Something about Photography Theory. *The New Art History*, edited by A. L. Rees and F. Borzello. London: Camden: 41-45.
Buszek, M. E. (ed.) 2011. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, Durham/London: Duke University Press.
Buys, A. 2009. Fabric of Life. *Mail & Guardian* 25 June: 1-9. http://mg.co.za/article/2009-06-25-fabric-of-life (Accessed 14 October 2014).
Carr, C & Gibson, C. 2015. Geographies of Making: Rethinking Materials and skills for Volatile Futures. *Progress in Human Geography.* phg.sagepub.com, sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermission.nav DOI: 10 10.1177/0309132515578775 (Accessed 20 September 2014).
Chapman, M. 1992. The Sculptor and the Citizen: Complimenting/Complementing Andries Botha. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 80: 77-86.
Charny, D (ed.) (2011). *Power of Making: The Importance of being skilled.* London: V&A Publishing and the Crafts Council.
Checinska, C & Watson, G. 2016. Social Fabric: Textiles, Art, Society and Politics. (2016). *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, edited by J. Jefferies, D. Wood Conroy and H. Clark. London and New York: Bloomsbury: 279-291.
Classen, C. & Howes, D. 2006. The Sensescape of the Museum: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts. *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, edited by E. Edwards *et al*. Oxford: Berg: 199-222.
Clayton, B. 2004. *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Lexington Books.
Clewing, U. 2005. Moshekwa Mokwena Langa. *Culturebase.net*: 1-3. http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?926#article (Accessed 27 February 2017).
Cocker, E. 2011. Over and Over, Again and Again. *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, edited by I. Loring Wallace and J. Hirsh. Farnham UK/Burlington USA: Ashgate: 267-293.
Contreras, J. C. P. 2010. The Adaptive Capacity of Rural Crafts in the Face of Global Challenges. *Craft Research* 1(1): 101-122.
Coombes, A E. 2003. *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
Corrigall, M. 2010. Nicholas Hlobo at Standard Bank Gallery. *The Sunday Independent*, April 4: 1. corrigall.blogspot.co.za/2010/04/Nicholas-hlobo-at-standard-bank-gallery.html (Accessed 25 January 2017).
Corrigall, M. 2011a. At the Border Post of Western Art: The Provisional "Reaggregation" of Moshekwa Langa's Art into the South African Canon. *Image & Text: A Journal for Design* 17: 138-157.
Corrigall, M. 2011b. Inside-Out: Unravelling the Cultural Positioning of Moshekwa Langa's "Skins." *Art South Africa* 9(4): 68-69.
Corrigall, M. 2017. Fabrication*. Ogojiii* (forthcoming).

Cronjé, C., Garnham, J. and Lewis, H. (eds.) 2015. *Igshaan Adams*. (Exhibition catalogue, Cape Town: blank projects). www.blankprojects.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Igshaan-Adams-catalogue_digital-version.dpf (Accessed 10 April 2017).

Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1975. *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, San Francisco, Washington, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1992. *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Harper and Row.

Cunningham, A. B. & Terry, M. E. 2006. *African Basketry: Grassroots Art from Southern Africa.* Simon's Town: Fernwood Press.

Dant, T. 2005. *Materiality and Society*, Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Deleuze, G. 2006. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: Continuum Books.

De Greef, E. 2010. 'Unknotting Place and Space' Considering The Signs of Africa in the Works of Yinka Shonibare, Junya Watanabe, Black Coffee and Nicholas Hlobo. (Conference paper, *Art & Architecture: Heritage in the Postcolonial World*, Johannesburg, Wits University, 5 November 2010). www.lisof.co.za/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/research/conference-paper-de-greef-wits-university-2010-unknotting-place-and-space (Accessed 20 January 2017).

Derrida, J. 1981. *Positions* (transl. Alan Bass). Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

De Young Museum. 2016. ON THE GRID: Textiles and Minimalism. Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. www.textileartscouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016.09/September-2016-Newsletter.pdf (Accessed 27 July 2017).

Dlamini, J. 2010. *Native Nostalgia*. Johannesburg: Jacanda Media: 19.

Dobson, K. 2013. Conversation: Materials. *The Art of Critical Making: Rhode Island School of Design on Creative Practice*, edited by R. Somerson, and M. L. Hermano. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons: 138-163.

Dodd, A. 2011. Pump up the Parlour: Entanglement and Desire in the work of Nicholas Hlobo. *Art South Africa* 9(4): 72-72.

Dormer, P. (ed.) 1997. *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Dormer, P. 1997. Introduction: The Salon de refuse? *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press: 2-16.

Dormor, C. 2013. Matrixiating Knowledge. www.academia.edu/4179390/Matrixiating_Knowledge (Accessed 23 September 2014).

Dormor, C. 2014. Writing Textile, Making Text: Cloth and Stitch as Agency for Disorderly Text. *Textile Society of America Symposium Prodeedings*, Paper 926. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/926 (Accessed 21 November 2015).

Double Desire. [Sa]. Review of McLean, I (ed.) 2014. *Double-Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*, https://www.amazon.com/Double-Desire-Transculturation-Indigenous-Contemporary/dp/1443867438 (Accessed 21 October 2016): [sp].

Drury, C. 2004. *Chris Drury: Silent Spaces*. London: Thames & Hudson.
Dupré, F. 2015. From Brixton to Mostar: Social Practice through Textiles. *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*, edited by J. Hemmings. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury: 168-189.
Dundas, N. & Charlton J. (eds.) 2014. *Walter Oltmann – In the Weave: three decades of working*. Exhibition catalogue, Johannebsurg, Standard Bank Gallery, The Standard Bank of South Africa, 28 January – 29 March).
Ehrenhaus, P. 2009. Memorials and Other Forms of Collective Memory. *21st Century Communication: A Reference Handbook, Vol 1*, edited by W. F. Eadie. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington (DC): Sage: 228-238.
Elliott, D. 1990. *Art from South Africa*. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art. Oxford, London: Thames & Hudson.
Fariello, M. A. & Owen, P. (eds.). 2004. *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press.
Fariello, M A. 2004. 'Reading' the Language of Objects. *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Craft and Art*, edited by M.A. Fariello and P. Owen. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press: 148-175.
Fariello, M. A. 2005. Regarding the History of Objects. *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, edited by M.A. Fariello and P. Owen. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press: 2-23.
Feeke, S., Le Feuvre, L. and Raikes, S. (eds.). 2010. *Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture*. (Exhibition catalogue, Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 30 September 2010 – 2 January 2011).
Feeke, S. and Raikes, S. 2010. Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture. *Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture*, edited by S Feeke, L. Le Feuvre and S. Raikes. Leeds: The Henry Moore Institute: 4-10.
Forni, S. 2007. Containers of Life: Pottery and Social Relations in the Grassfields (Cameroon), *African Arts* 40(1): 42-53.
Froud, G. 2008. Modularity, Repetition and Material Choices as Strategies in the Work of Selected South African Sculptors. MA Fine Art dissertation, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg.
Gauntlett, D. 2011. *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Gell, A. 1988. Technology and Magic. *Anthropology Today* 2(2): 6-9. http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0268-540X%28198804%294%3A2%3C6%3ATAM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y (Accessed 17 May 2016).
Gell, A. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Gell, A. 1992. The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology. *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, edited by J. Coote. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 40-63.
George, H. 2014. *The Elements of Sculpture*. London & New York: Phaidon.
Gevisser, M. 2009. Under Covers, Out in the Open: Nicholas Hlobo and Umtshontsho. *Nicholas Hlobo: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 2009*, edited by S. Perryer. (Exhibition catalogue, Michael Stevenson

Contemporary Gallery/Grahamstown, National Arts Festival, 2 – 11 July 2009): 9-17.
Gibson, J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Goett, S. 2016. Materials, Memories and Metaphors: The Textile Self Re/collected. *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, edited by J. Jeffries, D. Wood Conroy and H. Clark. London and New York: Bloomsbury: 121-136.
Goldberg, R. 2009. Live from South Africa. *South African Art Now*, edited by S Williamson. New York: Harper Collins: 101-105.
Goniwe, T. 2007. Reflections from uneven ground. *Spier contemporary 2007: exhibition & Awards (Dec 2007-Dec 2008)*, edited by J. Pather. Cape Town: Africa Centre Publishing.
Goniwe, T., Majavu, M. and Pissarra, M. (eds.) (2011). *Visual Century: South African Art in Context Volume Four 1990-2007*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
Gordon, B. 2011. *Textiles: The Whole Story - Uses, Meanings, Significance*. London: Thames & Hudson.
Gosden, C. 2006. Material Culture and Long-term Change. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, P. Spyer. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage: 425-442.
Gray, Z. (ed.) (2011). *Making is Thinking.* (Exhibition catalogue, Rotterdam, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 23 January – 1 May).
Greenhalgh, P. 2002. *The Persistence of Craft: The applied Arts Today*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum.
Grossert, J. W. 1978. *Zulu Crafts*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.
Gule, K. 2009. Beauty and Pleasure. *Beauty and Pleasure in South African Contemporary Art*, edited by S Wendt. Oslo: Stenersen Museum: 8-11.
Hamilton, H. Fraser, R. and Sadie, V. (eds.) 2008. *Siemon Allen: Light Show*. (Exhibition catalogue, Durban, BANK Gallery, South Africa). www.siemonallen.ofg/assets/pdfs/flat/flat05_flatfile2.pdf (Accessed 05 October 2016).
Hanrahan, S. 2006. Poesis. *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on art* as *research* edited by K. MacLeod and L. Holdridge. London and New York: Routledge: 143-155.
Harper, C. (ed.) 2012. *Textiles: Critical and Primary Sources.* Vol 1-4, London, New York: Berg.
Harrod, T. (ed.) 1997. *Obscure Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century*, (Conference papers, London: Crafts Council and University of East Anglia, 10 – 12 January).
Harrod, T. (2015). *The Real Thing: essays on making in the modern world*. London: Hyphen Press.
Haynes, D. J. 1997. *The Vocation of the Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hemmings, J. (ed.) 2012. *The Textile Reader*, London, New York: Berg.
Hemmings, J. 2013. Postcolonial Textiles – Negotiating Dialogue. *Cross/Cultures: Postcolonial Studies Across the* Disciplines, edited by J. Gohrisch and E. Grünkemeier. Amsterdam: Radopi: 23-50.
Hemmings, J. (ed.) 2015. *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Henricks, T. S. 2006. *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
Herzfeld, M. 2009. Rhythm, Tempo, and Historical Time: Experiencing Temporality in the Neoliberal Age. *Public Archaeology: Archaeological Ethnographies* 8:(2/3): 108-123.
Hicks, D. 2010. The Material-Cultural Turn: event and effect. *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, edited by D. Hicks and M. C. Beaudry. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 25-98.
Hicks, D. & Beaudry, M. C. (eds.) 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Higgins, J. 2015. Should I Just Keep Telling Stories?: The projections of self in the works of Igshaan Adams. *Igshaan Adams*, edited by C. Cronjé, J. Garnham and H. Lewis. (Exhibition catalogue, Cape Town: blank projects): 107-114. www.blankprojects.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Igshaan-Adams-catalogue_digital-version.dpf (Accessed 10 April 2017).
Hobbs, P. & Rankin, E. 2003. *Rorkes Drift: Empowering Prints.* Johannesburg: Juta.
Holloway, J. 2010. Crack Capitalism. London/New York: Pluto Press.
Howes, D. 2003. *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*. Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press.
Howes, D. 2011. Reply to Tim Ingold by David Howes. in *Social Anthropology* 19(3): 318-322.
Huizinga, J. 1939/1955. *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
Ingold, T. 1993. Tool-use, sociality and intelligence. *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution*, edited by R. G. Gibson and T. Ingold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-------- 2000a. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. London/New York: Routledge.
-------- 2000b. Making Culture and Weaving the World. *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, edited by P. M. Graves-Brown. London and New York: Routledge: 50-71.
-------- 2007a. *Lines: a Brief History*, London and New York: Routledge.
-------- 2007b. Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13: 19-38.
-------- 2010a. The Textility of Making. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34: 91-102.
-------- 2010b. Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials. (Working Paper #15, ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, NCRM Working Paper Series 05/10): 1-14. eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1306/1/0510_creative_entanglements.pdf (Accessed 23 September 2017).
-------- 2011a. *Being Alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description*, New York: Routledge.
-------- 2011b. Beyond Art and Technology: The Anthropology of Skill. *Anthropological Perspectives on Technology*, edited by M. B. Schiffer. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
-------- 2012. Towards and Ecology of Materials. *Annual Review of Anthropology*: 427-442.

-------- 2013. *On Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London, New York: Routledge.
-------- 2014a. Making and Growing: An Introduction. *Making and Growing: Anthropological Studies of Organisms and Artefacts*, edited by E. Hallam and T. Ingold. Farnham UK, Burlington USA: Ashgate: 1-24.
-------- 2014b. That's Enough About Ethnography! *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(1): 383-395.
-------- 2015. *The Life of Lines*. London and New York: Routledge.
Jackson, A. 2011. Men Who Make: The 'Flow' of the Amateur Designer/Maker. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by M. E. Buszek. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
Jantjes, G. 2011a. Great Expectations: A View from Europe. *Visual Culture: South African Art in Context Vol 4 (1990-2007),* edited by T. Goniwe, M. Pissarra and M .Majavu. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 21-45.
-------- 2011b. Edge, Seam and Space. *Nicholas Hlobo: sculpture, installation, performance, drawing*, edited by G. Jantjes, G and M. Yvenes. Oslo: National Museum: 51-82.
Jantjes, G. and Yvenes, M. (eds.) 2011c. *Nicholas Hlobo: sculpture, installation, performance, drawing.* Oslo: National Museum.
Jayawardine, N. M. 2016. Real, imagined and wishful: The Sea of Things. *Contemporary And*. 13 May: 1-4. http://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/the-sea-of-things/ (Accessed 27 February 2017).
Jefferies, J., Wood Conroy, D., and Clark, H. (eds.) 2016. *The Handbook of Textile Culture*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
Jefferies, J. 2016. Editorial Introduction (Part Two). *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, edited by J. Jefferies, D. Wood Conroy and H. Clark. London and New York: Bloomsbury: 97-105.
Johnson, N., Schildkrout, E., Ghelerter, D., Elmquist, D., and Rosengarten, D. 2008. *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art.* New York: Museum for African Art.
Kasfir, S. L. 1992. African Art and Authenticity: A text with a Shadow. *African Arts* 25(2): 40-53; 96-97.
Kellner, C. 2010. *Imaging South Africa: The Archival Turn in Siemon Allen's Production.* (Exhibition catalogue, Richmond VA: Anderson Gallery, August 27 – October 31): 28-31.
Kinsman, H. 2015. Tracing emerging contemporary art practice in South Africa. www.doppiozero.com/materiali/why-africa/tracing-emerging-contemporary-art-production-in-south-africa (Accessed 16 August 2016).
Klein, M. 2014. Creating the Authentic? Art Teaching in South Africa as Transcultural Phenomonon. *Culture Unbound*, Vol 6: 1348-1365. http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se (Accessed 30 June 2016).
Klopper, S. & Rankin-Smith, F. 2010. Migrant Workers, Production, and Fashion. *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion, Africa,* edited by J. B. Eicher and D. Ross. Vol 1. Oxford and New York: Berg: 529-532.
Knappett, C. 2005. *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Knott, S. 2015. *Amateur Craft: History and Theory*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Krauss, R. E. 1986. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
Kuper, J. 2011. In search of a rubber identity. *Mail & Guardian* 15 April: 1-9. http://mg.co.za/article/2011-04-15-in-search-of-a-rubber-identity (Accessed 14 October 2014).
Lange-Berndt, P. (ed.) 2015. *Materiality*, London, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
-------- 2015. Introduction: How to Be Complicit with Materials. *Materiality*, edited by P. Lange-Berndt. London, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press: 12-23.
Langton, M. 2012. Creolising Australian Visual Culture. *Roads Cross: Contemporary Directions in Australian Art*, edited by S. Radok. Adelaide: Flinders University Art Museum: 12-15.
Lefebrvre, H. 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum.
Leigh, V.T.L. 2009. *Andries Botha: Creativity in a Context of Change*. (PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg).
Liardet, F. 2014. Movement in Making: An Apprenticeship with Glass and Fire. *Making and Growing: Anthropological Studies of Organisms and Artefacts*, edited by E. Hallam and T. Ingold. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate: 203-220.
Liberman, N., Trope, Y., McCrae, S., and Sherman, S. J. 2007. The Effect of Level of Construal on the Temporal Distance of Activity Enactment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 43: 143-149. psych.nyu.edu/tropelab/publications/LibermanTropeMcCraeSherman2007 (Accessed 11 April 2017).
Lindström, K. & Ståhl, Å. 2016. Patchworking Ways of Knowing and Making. *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, edited by J. Jefferies, D. Wood Conroy and H. Clark. London and New York: Bloomsbury: 65-78.
Livingston, J. & Ploof, J. (eds.) (2007). *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production.* Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press.
Lundström, J. 2011. Transgressive Form in the Art of Nicholas Hlobo. *Nicholas Hlobo: sculpture, installation, performance, drawing*, edited by G. Jantjes and M. Yvenes. Oslo: National Museum: 167-185.
MacDonald, J. 2005. Concepts of Craft. *Exploring Visual Culture: Definitions, Concepts, Contexts*, edited by M. Rampley. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 34-49.
MacKenny, V. 2000. Andries Botha. *Artthrob* 32. http://artthrob.co.za/00apr/artbio.html (Accessed 04 June 2017).
Magaziner, D. 2013. Two Stories About Art, Education and Beauty in 20th Century South Africa. *American Historical Review*, December: 1403-1429. www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/file%20Uploads%20/the_american_historical_review-2013-magaziner-1403-29.pdf (Accessed 05 May 2017).
-------- 2016. *The Art of Life in South Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
Maharaj, S. 2012. Arachne's Genre: Towards Inter-Cultural Studies in Textiles. *The Textile Reader*, edited by J Hemmings. London/New York: Berg: 247-266.
Makhuba, N. 2009. The "Other" Africans: Re-examining Representations of

Sexuality in the Works of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi. (MA Dissertation, Grahamstown, Rhodes University, January).
Malafouris, L. (ed.) 2013. *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
Mansour, C. 2012. The occupation of art's labor: An interview with Julia Bryan-Wilson. *Platipus Review* 45 (April). http://platypus1917.org/2012/04/01/occupation-of-arts-labor-julia-bryan-wilson/ (Accessed 26 January 2016).
Manning, E. & Massumi, B. 2014. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
Marchand, T.H.J. (ed.) 2016. *Craftwork as Problem Solving: Ethnographic Studies of Design and Making*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.
Marchand, T.H.J. 2016. Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving. *Craftwork As Problem Solving: Ethnographic Studies of Design and Making*, edited by T H J. Marchand. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate: 1-29.
Marschall, S. 1999. Who is in and who is out? The process of re-writing South African art history in the 1990s. *Mots Pluriels* No 12, December: 1-10. http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1299sm.html (Accessed 16 August 2016).
Marschall, S. 2001. Art in South Africa: "redress" through terminology. *De Arte* 64: 63-74.
-------- 2004. Art, postcolonial. *Encyclopedia of African History 3*, edited by K. Shilling. London and New York: Routledge: 184-187.
Martin, M. 1991. Ons sit oorgehaal in die geskiedenis. *Andries Botha: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 1991*, edited by Amanda Botha. (Exhibition catalogue, Grahamstown: National Festival of Arts): 18-21.
Maycroft, N. 2005. *Labour, Work and Play: Action in Fine Art Practice*. www.academia.edu/429780/Labour_Work_and_Play_Action_In_Fine_Art_Practice (Accessed 25 January 2016).
McBrinn, J. 2015. "Male Trouble": Sewing, amateurism, and gender. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, edited by E. C. Paterson and S. Surette. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 27-44.
McLean, I. 2012. Between Indigenous and European Art. *Roads Cross: Contemporary Directions in Australian Art*, edited by S. Radok. Adelaide: Flinders University Art Museum: 26-31.
-------- 2014a. *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
-------- 2014b. Double Desire: Becoming Aboriginal*. Contemporary Visual Art + Culture* Broadsheet 34(4): 65-71. www.cacsa.org.au/wordpress/yoo_bigeasy_demo_package_wp/wp-content/uploads/Broadsheet/2014/43_4?MacLean_43_4.pdf (Accessed 24 October 2016).
Mergel, J. 2009. Nicholas Hlobo: In Medias Res. *Nicholas Hlobo: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 2009*, edited by S. Perryer. (Exhibition catalogue, Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery/Grahamstown, National Arts Festival, 2 – 11 July 2009): 27-31.
Merleau-Ponty, M. [1945] 1962. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press.
Metcalf, B. 1997. Craft and Art, Culture and Biology. *The Culture of Craft: Status*

and Future, edited by P. Dormer. New York: Manchester University Press: 67-82.
-------- 2004. Evolutionary Biology and its Implications for Craft. *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, edited by M. A. Fariello and P. Owen. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press: 216-229.
-------- 1993. Replacing the Myth of Modernism. *American Craft* February/March: 40-47.
Metcalf, B. & Koplos, J. (eds.) (2010). *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Miles, E. 2004. *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre*. Johannesburg: Ampersand Foundation.
Miller, K. 2005. Trauma, Testimony, and Truth. *African Arts*, Autumn 38(3): 40-51.
Mistry, J. 2001. Conditions of Cultural Production in post-apartheid South Africa. (Extraordinary Times, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol 11, Vienna): 1-20.
Mitchell, V. 2012. Textiles, Text and Techne. *The Textile Reader*, edited by J. Hemmings. London/New York: Berg: 5-13.
Morphy, H. [sp]. Impossible to ignore: Imants Tiller's response to Aboriginal art. http://nga.gov.au/exhibition.tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=5 (Accessed 31 October 2016).
Murinik, T. 2012. Nicholas Hlobo. *Kaleidoscope-Press* Issue 15. http:/kaleidoscope-press.com/issue-contents/Nicholas-hlobo/ (Accessed 14 June 2014): 1-8.
Murray, K. 2005. *Craft Unbound: Make the Common Precious*. Victoria: Craftsman House/Thames & Hudson Australia.
Muslimin, R. 2010. Learning from Weaving for Digital Fabrication in Architecture. *Leonardo* 43(4): 340-349. http://hdl.handle.net/a721.1/60337 (Accessed 20 April 2017).
Nandorfy, M. [Sa]. Duende and Apocalypse in Lacan's Theory and Poetics. *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispanicos* http://www.jstor.org/stable/27763767 (Accessed 22 October 2014).
Neale, M. 2012. Review of "Roads Cross: Contemporary Directions in Australian art." *Artlink* 32:4: 88. www.artlink.co.au (Accessed: 21 October 2016).
Nettleton, A. & Hammond-Tooke, D. (eds.) 1989. *African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township*. Johannesburg: A.D. Donker.
-------- Ndabambi, Sipho. Hammond-Tooke, David. 1989. The Beadwork of the Cape Nguni. *Catalogue: Ten Years of Collecting (1979-1989)*, edited by D. Hammond-Tooke, D. and A. Nettleton. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries: 39-44.
-------- 2000a. Home is Where the Art Is: Six South African Rural Artists. *African Arts* 33(4): 26-39 and 93-94.
-------- 2000b. Needlework in Africa. *Material Matters: Appliqués by the Weya Women of Zimbabwe and Needlework by South African Collectives*, edited by B. Schmahmann. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press: 20-38.
-------- 2010. Life in a Zulu Village: Craft and the Art of Modernity in South Africa. *The Journal of Modern Craft* 3(1): 55-78.

-------- 2015. 19th Century Beaded Histories: Tracing the inventions of tradition through the photographic image. *Beadwork, Art and the Body: Dilo Tše Dintshi/Abundance*, edited by A. Nettleton. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 9-27.
Nettleton, A. (ed.) 2015. *Beadwork, Art and the Body: Dilo Tše Dintshi/Abundance*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
Nimkulrat, N. 2012. Material Inspiration: The practice-led research of a craft artist. https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/8602 (Accessed 17 September 2014).
Noble, J. A. 2011. *African Identity in Post-Apartheid Public Architecture: White Skin, Black Masks*. Surrey (UK), Farnham, Burlington (USA): Ashgate.
Nolan, K. & Mitchell, V. 2010. Staging Material, Performing Culture. *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 8(2): 205-225.
Ntombela, N. 2016. Shifting Contexts: Material, Process and Contemporary Art in Times of Change. *Tribing and Untribing the Archive: Identity and the Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods*, edited by C. Hamilton and N. Leibhammer. Vol 1. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: 87-115.
Obrist, H.U. 2012. Writing in Space. *Flash Art* 285 October. http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=958&det=ok&title=NICHOLAS-HLOBO (Accessed 14 October 2014).
Oliphant, A. 2004a. *!Ke e Ixara IIke*: South African Art under the sign of Freedom. *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa*, edited by G. Van Wyk. USA: Axis Gallery/SA: Sondela.
-------- 2004b. Postcolonioal South Africa: Three Canvas Bags on Art and Change. *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994-2004 From the Permanent Collection of Iziko: South African National Gallery*, edited by E. Bedford. Cape Town: Iziko, South African National Gallery: 10-23.
-------- 2011. Imagine Futures. *Visual Culture: South African Art in Context Vol 4 (1990-2007)*, edited by T. Goniwe, M. Pissarra and M. Majavu. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 176-193.
Oltmann, W. 1995. Uses of Wire in the Construction, Decoration and Restoration of Artefacts in African Material Culture of Southern Africa. (Research Project conducted during a period of sabbatical leave in 1994, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Fine Arts).
-------- 1997. Decorative Wirework in African Material Culture of southern Africa. *De Arte* 56 (September): 9-24.
-------- 2013. Penumbra. (Exhibition foldout, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 20 June – 22 July).
-------- 2015. Cradle. (Exhibition flyer, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, 29 October – 15 December).
O'Toole, S. 2008. Phalluses, saddles and South Africa: handmade costumes and the Xhosa language. *Frieze Magazine*, May: 142.
-------- 2012. Nicholas Hlobo: The Subversive Stitch. *Kaleidoscope* Summer: 75-84. www.lehmannmaupin.com/artists/nicholas-hlobo/press/1936/artist-installation (Accessed 3 August 2017).
-------- 2013. Another Chapter: Biography and timelines in the works of Moshekwa Langa. *Frieze* Issue 159, November/December: [sp].

Owen, P. 2011. Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by M. E. Buszek. Durham/London: Duke University Press: 83-96.
Pajaczkowska, C. 2016. Making Known: The Textiles Toolbox – Psychoanalysis of Nine Types of Textile Thinking. *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, edited by J. Jefferies, D. Wood Conroy and H. Clark. London and New York: Bloomsbury: 79-94.
Palasmaa, J. 2009. *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture.* Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
Pawłowska, A. 2011. Transitional Art in South Africa. www.academia.edu/11765087/Transitional_Art_in_South_Africa (Accessed 1 September 2016).
Patel, R. 2006. From Grass to Plastic: The Effects of Economic Development on the Design and Production of the Traditional Swazi Grass Mat Made by Women. MA dissertation, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
Paterson, E C. and Surette, S. (eds.) 2015. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.
Paterson, E C. and Surette, S. 2015. Introduction. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, edited by E. C. Paterson and S. Surette. London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 1-21.
Peffer, J. 2000. *Translation/Seduction/Displacement.* (Exhibition catalogue, New York: White Box) www.siemonallen.org/assets/pdfs/publication/translationsd.pdf (Accessed 7 February 2017).
-------- 2009. *Art and the End of Apartheid.* Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
Perryer, S (ed.). 2004. *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa.* Cape Town: Bell Roberts Publishing
-------- 2006. *Nicholas Hlobo: Izele*. (Exhibition catalogue, Cape Town Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery, 17 August – 16 September).
-------- 2008. *Nicholas Hlobo: Kwatsityw-Iziko.* (Exhibition catalogue, Cape Town: Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery, 6 March – 26 April).
-------- 2009. *Nicholas Hlobo.* (Exhibition catalogue, Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery/Grahamstown, National Arts Festival, 2 July – 20 September 2009).
Perrill, E. 2012. South African Rubber and Clay. *Third Text*, 26(5): 585-597. http:/www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctte20 (Accessed 17 August 2016).
-------- 2014. An Illustrative Legacy: Art Education and Zulu "Crafts". *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, 8(1): 10-30. http:/wwwdx.doi.org/10/1080/19301944.2014.889947 (Accessed 17 August 2016).
Pissarra, M. 2006. Cast in Colour? Towards an Inclusive South African Art. *Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*, edited by H. Proud. Cape Town/Pretoria: SA History Online and UNISA Press: 46-53.
-------- 2011. Wishes for the Future: Taking on the Task. *Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South.* (CIHA Colloquium, Johannesburg 12-15 January 2011. University of Johannesburg).

www.savah.org.za/files/OtherViews%20SAVAHCIHAColloquium2011WebDocument.pdf (Accessed 2 October 2017).
Poe, A. 2011. Review Essay: Things-Beyond-Objects: New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 19(1): 153-164. http://www.jffp.org (Accessed 15 April 2016).
Pollock, G. (ed.) 2006. *Psychoananlysis and the Image*, Oxford: Blackwell.
Polanyi, M. 1962. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicagho Press.
Polanyi, M. 1966. *The Tacit Dimension*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Porter, J. (ed.). 2015. *Fiber: Sculpture 1960-Present*. Boston, Munich, London, New York: Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and DelMonico Books/Prestel.
Porter, J. 2015. The Materialists. *Fiber: Sculpture 1960-Present*, edited by J. Porter. Boston, Munich, London, New York: Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and DelMonico Books/Prestel: 8-22.
Potts, A. 2000. *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Proud, H. 2006. The Collection as the Image of the Collector. *Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*, edited by H. Proud. Cape Town, Pretoria: SA History Online and UNISA Press: 17-23.
Proud, H. (ed.) 2006. *Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art.* Cape Town, Pretoria: SA History Online and UNISA Press.
Prown, J.D. 1980. Style as Evidence. *Winterthur Portfolio* 15:3 (Autumn): 198.
Pye, D. 1968. *The Nature of Art and Workmanship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Racz, I. (2009). *Contemporary Crafts*. Oxford: Berg.
Radman, Z. (ed.) 2013. *The Hand, An Organ of the Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press.
Rankin, E. 1991. Genesis, Genesis. *Andries Botha: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 1991*, edited by Amanda Botha. (Exhibition catalogue, Grahamstown: National Festival of Arts).
-------- 2001. Contemporary art from South Africa: still segregated voices? review of Herreman, Frank (ed.) 1999 *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa*. H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. February. http://www.hnet.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4925 (Accessed 12 July 2016).
-------- 2009. Cross-Cultural (under)currents in South African Sculpture. *One Day Sculpture Academic papers Online*. http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz (Accessed on 30 June 2016).
Rappaport, E. 2015. Islamic Tradition Meets Post-Apartheid Identity in Igshaan Adam's Intricate Tapestries. *Artsy Editorial* June 15: 1-19. https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-islamic-tradition-meets-post-apartheid-dentity-in-igshaan (Accessed 28 February 2017).
Ratele, K. 2009. Pride and Playfulness: Hlobo's Subversive Love of Xhosa Traditions. *Nicholas Hlobo: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 2009* edited by S Perryer. (Exhibition catalogue, Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery/Grahamstown, National Arts Festival, 2 – 11 July 2009): 19-24.
Ravetz, A. Kettle, A. & Felcey, H. (eds.) (2013). *Collaboration*

Through Craft. London, New York: Bloomsbury.
Richards, C. 1990. Desperately seeking 'Africa.' *Art from South Africa*. (Exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, Thames & Hudson): 35-44.
-------- 1997. Graft. *Trade Routes: History and Geography*, edited by M DeBord and R Bester. (Exhibition catalogue, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, South Africa, Johannesburg/Netherlands, Den Haag: AICA - Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council/Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development): 234-267.
-------- 2002. The Thought is the Thing. *Art South Africa* 1(2): 34-41.
Risatti, H. 2007. *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Roberts, J. 2007. *The Intangibles of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*. London/New York: Verso.
-------- 2010. Art After Deskilling. *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory* 18: 77-96.
Robinson, T. 2013. Bringing Action into View: Provocation and Ambiguity in Touch and Talk Sessions. (EKSIG 2013: Knowing Inside Out – Experience, Knowledge, Expertise and Connoisseurship Conference Proceedings, 4-5 July 2013, Loughborough (UK): Loughborough University).
Rorkes Drift. [Sa]. Towards a people's history: The Rorkes Drift Art Centre. *South African History Online* http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/rorkes-drift-art-and-craft-centre (Accessed 16 August 2016): [sp].
Rowley, S. 2012. Craft, Creativity and Critical Practice. *Textiles: Critical and Primary Sources: Production (Including Sustainability)*, Vol 2, edited by C. Harper. London/New York: Berg: 223-239.
Ryan, R. & Van Zyl, S. (eds.) 1982. *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory.* Johannesburg: A.D. Donker.
Sarup, M. 1993. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Second edition). New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
Schmahmann, B. (ed.) 2000. *Material Matters: Appliqués by the Weya Women of Zimbabwe and Needlework by South African Collectives*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press.
Schmahmann, B. 2014. Neither Fish nor Fowl: Walter Oltmann's Confounding Categories. *Walter Oltmann – In the Weave: working over three decades*, edited by N. Dundas and J. Charlton. Johannesburg: The Standard Bank of South Africa (Exhibition catalogue, Standard Bank Gallery, The Standard Bank of South Africa, Johannesburg, 28 January – 29 March): 24-63.
Schön, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, New York: Basic Books Inc.
-------- 1990 *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Sennett, R. 2008. *The Craftsman*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
Silva, S. 2012. Creativity Revisited: Narration and Embodiment in African Art. *Museum Anthropology Review*, 6(1): 1-14.
Simbao, R. 2015. Cleansing Via the Senses as Eyesight Follows the Soul: Igshaan

Adams' "Bismillah" performance. *Igshaan Adams*, edited by C. Cronjé, J. Garnham and H. Lewis. Cape Town: blank projects: 117-131.
Simonden, G. 1964. *L'Individu et sa Génèse Physio-Biologique*. Paris: Presses Univ. France.
Simonden, G. 1989. *L'Individuation Psychique et Collective*. Paris: Aubier.
Simonden, G. 2005. *L'Individuation à la Lumière des Nations de Forme et d'Information*. Grenoble: Ed. Jérôme Millon.
Slereth, T. 1999. *Material Culture Studies in America*. Walnut Creek: Altamira.
Slinn, E.W. 1988. Deconstruation and Meaning: The Textuality Game. *Philosophy and Literature* 12(1): 80-87.
Small, A. 1991. Between bad abd happy endings: a quite personal impression of Andries Botha. *Andries Botha: Standard Bank Young Artist Award 1991*. (Exhibition catalogue, Grahamstown: National Festival of Arts).
Smith, K. 2011. The Experimental Turn in the Visual Arts. *Visual Culture: South African Art in Context Vol 4 (1990-2007),* edited by T Goniwe, M Pissarra, M Majavu. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 118-151.
Smuts, H. & Mahlangu, P. 2015. Looking deeply on the way my mother does her beadwork: Conversations with three foremost Ndebele beadwork artists. *Beadwork, Art and the Body: Dilo Tše Dintshi/Abundance*, edited by A. Nettleton. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 126-143.
Solomon, M. 1973. *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne University Press.
Speakes, O. 2016. Out of Diaspora: Moshekwa Langa's Travels, Maps and Landscapes. (Conference paper, Association of Art Historians, University of Edinburgh): 1-34. www.academia.edu/26142709/Out_of_Diaspora_Moshekwa_Langa's_travels_maps_and_landscapes (Accessed 10 February 2017).
Steele, J. 2009. Tackling art/craft nomenclature, again, with particular reference to octogenarian potter Alice Qga Nongebeza, of Eastern Cape, South Africa. *SAJAH* 24(1): 181-192.
Stevens, I. 2002. The State of the Crafts: South Africa 2001. *Science, Crafts and Knowledge: Understanding of Science among Artisans in India and South Africa – A Cross-Cultural Endeavour*, edited by G. Rasa and H. du Plessis. Pretoria: Protea Book House: 75-80.
Stielau, A. 2016. Stranger Things: Igshaan Adams' Oorskot. *Artthrob* October: 1-4. http://artthrob.co.za/2016/10/07/stranger-things-igshaan-adams-oorskot/ (Accessed 29 February 2017).
Stott, T. 2015. *Play and Participation in Contemporary Arts Practices*, New York and London: Routledge.
Stupard, L. 2008. Moshekwa Langa: Goodman Gallery, Cape Town. *Art South Africa* 6(3): 69.
Sturken, M. 1997. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Taylor, M.C. 2012. *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turell, Goldsworthy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Thomas, J. 2006. Phenomenology and Material Culture. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, K. Webb, S. Küchler and P. Spyer. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications: 43-59.

Thomas, N. 1999. *Possessions*. London: Thames & Hudson.
Thompson, K. 2015. Weaving practice and pedagogy. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 185-192.
Tilley, C., Keane, W. Küchler, S. Rowlands, and M. Spyer, P. (eds.) 2006. *Handbook of Material Culture*. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications.
Tilley, C. 2006. Introduction. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage: 1-6.
-------- 2006. Objectification. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage: 60-73.
Torell V.B. & Ranglin U. 2016. Knowledge in action in weaving. *Techne Series A* 21(1): 22-37;
Tucker, M. 2004. A Labor of Love. *Objects & Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, edited by M. A. Fariello and P. Owen. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press: 106-134.
Tyquiengco, M. 2015. Decoding Double Desire: A Conversation with Ian McLean. *Contemporaneity* 4:1. http://contemporaneity.pitt.edu (Accessed 24 October 2016).
van der Vlies, A. 2010. Art as archive: Queer activism and contemporary South African visual cultures. *Kunapipi* 34(1). University of Wollongong: 94-116. http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol34/iss1/10 (Accessed 20 January 2017).
Van der Wal, E. 2010. Filaments of Narrative Sculpture and the Unravelling of Identity. *Andries Botha*, edited by Amanda Botha. Stellenbosch: Sasol Art Musem: 8-11.
Van der Watt, L. 2006. Nicholas Hlobo. *Art South Africa* 5(2): 69.
Van Wyk, A.R. 2012. Review Article: What Matters Now? *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 8(2): 130-136.
Van Wyk, G. ed. 2004. *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa.* Axis Gallery (USA), Johannesburg: Sondela.
Van Wyk, G. 2004. Reflecting Democracy. *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa*, edited by G. Van Wyk. Axis Gallery (USA), Johannesburg: Sondela: 5-9.
Vasquez, A.S. 1973. *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics*. London: Merlin Press.
Von Glisczcynski, V., Suhrbier, M., and Raabe, E.Ch. 2017. *The Common Thread: The Warp and the Weft of Thinking.* (Exhibition catalogue, Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt, 17 November 2016 – 27 August 2017).
Watermeyer, N., Koseff, L., Bazukile, D., and Holden, W. 2009. *25 Years Standard Bank Young Artist Awards – (Andries Botha)*, edited by L. Watterson. Johannesburg: Standard Bank of South Africa: 68-69.
Waters, S. 2012. Repetitive Crafting: The Shared Aesthetic of Time in Australian Contemporary Art. *Craft + Design Enquiry* Issue 4: 69-87. press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p202481/pdf/ch04.pdf (Accessed 29 September 2015).
Webb, J. 2010. The Craft of Enlightenment. api.ning.com/files/-TO-

IUzZLBjou*e4jopnFizsRNODAcq788JLOS-cOgZrDWHmbVLd3PHhvi49PGLWSAgFKEoBQzDemnqf5n23PXpTe*e3oY/TheCraftEnlightenment.pdf (Accessed 23 September 2014).
Whitney, S. 2010. The Grid, Weaving, Body and Mind. *Textile Society of American Symposium Proceedings*, Paper 60: 1-8. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/60 (Accessed 02 September 2016).
Williamson, S. & Jamal, A. 1996. *Art in South Africa - the future present.* Cape Town/Johannesburg: David Philip.
Williamson, S. 1989. *Resistance Art in South Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
-------- 2004. Siemon Allen. Perryer, S (ed.) *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa.* Cape Town: Bell Roberts Publishing: 34-35.
-------- 2009. *South African Art Now*. New York: Harper Collins.
Wilson, C. Larocque & J. Thompson, K. 2015. Sloppy craft and interdisciplinarity: The conversation. *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, edited by E.C. Paterson and S. Surette. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: 151-178.
Wilson, F.R. 1998. *The Hand: How its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture.* New York: Pantheon Books.
Woolff, J. 1993. *The Social Production of Art* (second edition), Houndshill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press.
Wright, M. 2012. Book Review: African Identity in Post-Apartheid Architecture: White skin, black masks. *African Affairs*, 00/00. http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/12/03/afraf.ads078.full.pdf (Accessed 29 July 2016).
Yonan, M. 2011. Towards a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies. *West 86th* 18(2): 1-15. www.west86th.bgc.bard.edu/articles/yonan.html (Accessed 29 February 2016).
Zervigón, A.M. 2002. The Weave of Memory: Siemon Allen's *Screen* in Postapartheid South Africa. *Art Journal*, Spring: 69-81.

Websites consulted:

Culturebase.net – a unique online source on contemporary international artists: Moshekwa Mokwena Langa http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?926#article (Accessed 27 February 2017).

http://www.goddessathena.org/Encyclopedia/Athena/Arachne.htm (Accessed 15 February 2017)

http://www.learning-theories.com/affordance-theory-gibson.html (Accessed 7 December 2015).

http://www.nytimes.com1996 (Accessed 20 March 2016).

South African History Online: towards a people's history:

The Rorkes Drift Art Centre http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/rorkes-drift-art-and-craft-centre (Accessed 16 August 2016).

http://www.siemonallen.org/flat.html (Accessed 7 February 2015)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?vz=LhlHUNyDxI (Accessed 20 October 2015)