

# “Hollow”: Reflections on practice, the artefact and the body

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This article uses a rhizomatic approach to explore how the artist acquired experiential knowledge and insight through the experience and practice of making the expressive artefact “Hollow” (2011). Sullivan argues, “the **experience** of the artist is the core element in the creation of new knowledge ...” (my emphasis). Practice-led research in the visual arts explores multiple, new and diverse ways of experiencing, understanding and living in the world. The artefact serves as both data and evidence (Niedderer 2004: 3). This article adds to the debate whether the practice itself or the reflection upon it embodies the knowledge artistic action produces by exploring the creation of knowledge in the experience and practice of making an artefact (Pakes 2004).

I have structured my reveries and reflections as follows: pre-production, production and post-production. During the pre-production phase I explore my operating system as leading to the making of the artefact. This phase includes thoughts on the intention of the artefact, the intrinsic and expressive motivation, and some serendipitous happenings. I question how to make tacit internal, emotive, bodily experiences in order to transform the ineffable and invisible into a three-dimensional expressive artefact and how to make this experience academically explicit. During the production phase, I explore reveries about and resulting from the processes and explicate the practice of making. I further explore embodied and material forms of thinking. In the post-production section, I reflect on “shocking realisations” (Bolt 2006), the role of the lived body and knowledge discovered during and after the making of “Hollow”.

**Keywords:** Practice-led research, experience, practice, the artefact, the body, experiential knowledge

## “Hollow”: Weerspieëlings aangaande praktyk, die artefak en die liggaam

In hierdie artikel ondersoek ek, met behulp van ‘n risomatiese benadering, hoe ek ervaringskennis en insig verkry het deur die ervaring en die praktyk van die maak van die ekspressiewe artefak “Hollow”. My ondersoek volg op Sullivan se (2010: 192) argument dat “die **ervaring** van die kunstenaar is die kernelement in die skep van nuwe kennis... “ (my klem). Praktyk-geleide navorsing in die visuele kunste ondersoek veelvuldige, nuwe en diverse maniere van die begrip en leef in die wêreld. Die artefak dien as beide data en bewysstuk (Niedderer 2004: 3). Hierdie artikel dra by tot die debat of die praktyk self of eerder die besinning daarvoor die kennis wat deur artistieke aksie produseer is beliggaam, deur die ondersoek van die skepping van kennis deur die ervaring en praktyk van die maak van ‘n artefak (Pakes 2004).

Ek het my mymeringe en refleksies as volg gestruktureer: pre-produksie, produksie en post-produksie. Tydens die pre-produksiefase verken ek my bedryfstelsel. Hierdie deel sluit in gedagtes oor die intensie van die artefak, die motivering vir die artefak (beide intrinsiek en ekspressief), asook ‘n paar gelukkige, toevallige gebeurtenisse. Ek ondersoek hoe om interne emosies en fisiese ervarings konkrete vorm te gee, en om sodoende dit wat onuitspreeklik en onsigbaar is in ‘n drie-dimensionele ekspressiewe artefak te omskep. Ek kyk hier ook na hoe om die ervaring akademies eksplisiet te maak. In die gedeelte oor die produksiefase ondersoek ek my gedagtegang gedurende die vervaardigingsprosesse, en wys hoe my interne gesprek produksie beïnvloed het, en deur die prosesse beïnvloed is. Ek verduidelik hierdie proses, en kyk weer na beliggaamde en materiele denke. In die laaste gedeelte, oor post-produksie, bedink ek sekere “skokkende insigte” (Bolt 2006), die rol van die liggaam en kennis wat ek gedurende die maak van “Hollow” opgedoen het.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Praktyk-geleide navorsing, ervaring, praktyk, die artefak, die liggaam, ervaringskennis

The sculpture “Hollow” was exhibited at the May/June 2013 *Reflective Conversations: Typography, Topography, Typology* exhibition at the Gallery of the North-West University (NWU) in Potchefstroom, South Africa. The exhibition formed part of the third collaborative practice-led research project originating within the Faculty of Art, NWU (Potchefstroom Campus). This project was conceptualised and managed by Ian Marley (Graphic Design), Rita Swanepoel (History of Art) and Franci Greyling (Creative Writing) as part of interdisciplinary multi-practitioner practice-led research projects at the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU. According to Ian Marley (Marley 2012), the aim of this project is “to stimulate both creative practice and research within these disciplines and also to develop research capacity amongst the individual group members [...]”

“Hollow” consists of three greyish forms or bodies that rest lightly on a raised, rectangular bed of black sand. Displayed at hand-height, you are invited to pick up and cradle, weigh and caress, inspect and explore the forms. They are smooth, rounded, hollow and surprisingly light. They look similar, are of the same type – and are indeed a playful variation on a theme. They can be described as resembling amoebic or embryonic forms, with eyelike slits. Each form leaves a shallow imprint in the black sand.

I am currently working on a body of artworks in which I apply concepts of practice-led research. “Hollow” forms part of that body of work. My aim is to explicate certain states of the body as sites of emotion by creating evocative forms in order to search for meaning and to gain an understanding of an individual consciousness of the internal emotive human body. Possible outcomes of the process and practice of making three-dimensional artefacts are new ways of (visual) communication, understanding and insight in the human body and the personal, physical realm as a resource.

Graeme Sullivan (2010: 192) argued that “ the **experience** of the artist is the core element in the creation of new knowledge...” (my emphasis). In this article, I explore how knowledge and insight is acquired through the experience and the practice of making the artwork “Hollow”.

I structured the experience and practice of making an artefact into three sections: pre-production, production and post-production. In the pre-production section, I describe my operating system that led to the making of the artefact, the intention of the artefact, the expressive motivation, and some occurrences that were decidedly serendipitous. In the section about production, I elaborate upon my reveries during the processes and practice of making the artefact. In the post-production section, I reflect on the insights obtained through the experience and practice of making.

Even though the interest in practice-led research in the arts is a relatively recent phenomenon at South African tertiary institutions, our academics have added insights to the on-going international debate. Various terminologies have been used to describe this kind of research. These are discussed in Leora Farber and Marit Mäkelä’s contribution to the volume *On Making. Integrating Approaches to Practice-Led Research in Art and Design* (2010) and, internationally, amongst others, Elo (2009), Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes (2007), and, of course, Sullivan (2010). For the purpose of this article, I shall use the terminology the author I am referring to opts for, and otherwise refer to the term *practice-led*.

Anna Pakes (2004) describes (art) practice as research “...as an engagement with particular questions, arising within the context of past and contemporary art practice, to which the artist’s practice offers a solution, thereby contributing to knowledge within the domain.” The practice-led research process in the visual arts is “one of co-evolution between creative acts and research

knowledge drawn from both informal experiences and organized studies” (Candy *et al.* 2006). It explores multiple, new and diverse ways of experiencing, understanding and living in the world. This becomes a basis for constructing theories of artistic knowing and ultimately aims for the production of transformative knowledge. It may even “offer ways of solving and re-visioning problems that are simply not possible through descriptive and linear language” (McNiff in Knowles & Cole 2008: 33). McNiff defines art-based research as “the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (*ibid.*).

Does an artefact intrinsically embody knowledge? Does its tacit knowledge need to be explicated in some form of exegesis? This is an on-going debate in practice-led research (see Scrivener 2002; De Freitas 2002; Biggs 2004a; Niedderer 2009, Arnold 2012, Nimkulrat 2013). According to Biggs (2004b: 6-21), the implications of practice-based research in the visual arts are that knowledge is obtained through experience. Such experiential knowledge is, at the same time, identified as being explicit, tacit and ineffable. Explicit knowledge is expressed linguistically, tacit knowledge is an experiential component that cannot be effectively expressed linguistically, and the ineffable is content that cannot be expressed linguistically. “These are relevant in the context of this argument because they raise the question of whether the practice itself or the reflection upon it embodies the knowledge artistic action produces” (Pakes 2004). This article adds to this debate by exploring the creation of knowledge in the experience and practice of making an artefact.

The term “artefact” is used to “refer to items created or resulting from human action and activity as well as a central concept in the study of practice” (Díaz-Kommonen *et al.* 2004: 11). Artefacts are containers of human experience, embodiments of thought and knowledge made into material form (Jacobs 2013). Susan Findlay describes them as powerful tools for researchers to use in different ways as they have the ability to “evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable” and have the “capacity to help us empathise and provoke new ways of looking at things critically” (Findlay in Knowles & Cole 2008: 47). The expressive artefact emphasises the intense, motivated action involved in the creation of the artefact, and refers to the art object’s ability to encapsulate and express an emotional state or idea (Díaz-Kommonen *et al.* 2004). The artefact serves as data and evidence (Niedderer *et al.* 2004: 3) and can also be seen as “a method for collecting and preserving information and understanding” (Mäkelä 2007). This article does not present a solution, but offers thoughts on the role of experience and practice in creating the expressive artefact “Hollow” in order to give a voice to the artefact and to interpret and reveal the knowledge it embodies (*ibid.*).

Etienne Wenger defined the concept of practice as a form of “doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do” (Wenger in Díaz-Kommonen *et al.* 2004:1). Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes (2007) explain practice in relation to knowledge creation as the “experiential part of knowledge which evades conventional communication by verbal or textual means and which is otherwise neglected by research because of the prioritisation of propositional knowledge”. Thinking and reflecting in and through practice should follow an open-ended, undetermined procedural trajectory but also aim for a deliberate intention (Hannula 2009).

My own creative practice can be likened to the sculptor Richards Evans’ view of practice as an attentive, reflective engagement in lived experience (Evans 2009), with the intention to create expressive artefacts. To practise one’s practice also means following a training programme

or framework for improving or achieving technical skill and mastery. Rigorous and repetitive training usually results in skills that, when applied, are seemingly effortless. Training towards 'best practice' opens the ability to push boundaries and to achieve forms of practical wisdom or knowing. Best practice – mastery – comes from forming insights or acquiring new knowledge through practise. Good or quality practice-as-research is long-term, "particular, content-driven, self-critical, self-reflective, situated and contextualised" (Hannula 2009). It is achieved and produced by engaging in it more and more, through more repetition and more training, with determination and passion, commitment and perspective, particular and contextual. Practise is often understood with regards to physical training, such as that of a dancer.

To align with academic research, Pakes (2004) suggests applying practical reasoning as part of an effort to "see **other** thinking processes and forms of knowledge as equally rigorous though they do not conform to conventional logical models" (my emphasis). Creative practice is such an **other** thinking process. It takes place within a physical, fluid, non-linear, flexible, and interpretive and continuously reflective operating system. In it, experiential, visual and textual contexts emerge over time. The expressive artefact comes into being as a result of an intuitive, serendipitous, unpredictable process as well as a physical engagement with materials and media. It is a rhizomatic and reflexive method of practice. According to Irwin and Springgay, the rhizome is "an interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured" (in Dean & Smith 2009: 106). Many artists have a stack of research tomes and other books in their studios, picking here and there, keeping the senses alert for connections and meaning-making. In this research article, I adopt this process-related and rhizomatic method in the search for knowledge.

To be process-driven is to have no particular starting point in mind and no pre-conceived end. Such an approach can be directed towards emergence, which is the generation of ideas, unforeseen at the beginning of the project (Dean & Smith 2009). New realities, new experiences and innovative interpretations are constructed by being open to not knowing. Lesley Duxbury (in Brearley & Grierson 2005) describes the state of openness in exploring the "not knowing" as reverie and as fanciful, possibly impractical musings and preoccupations. "Reverie is at once an active and a passive state of being in which we allow ourselves to acquiesce to a flow of ideas and associations while remaining alert and receptive". Throughout this article I shall refer to my reveries during the making of "Hollow".

### **Pre-production: "Sehnsucht" and conception**

The intrinsic motivation for the making of "Hollow" came from the ideas of the late German choreographer Pina Bausch on "Sehnsucht". The German word "Sehnsucht" can be translated as longing, yearning, moving, craving or intensely missing. Sehnsucht attempts to find something that is lost. Sehnsucht describes a deep emotional state and brings about heightened inner or emotive awareness. Sehnsucht is a romantic notion in that it represents thoughts and feelings about all facets of life that are unfinished or imperfect, paired with a yearning for ideal alternative experiences. This produces what has been described as an ambiguous emotional occurrence (Du Preez 2013). Evans (2009: 15) describes Sehnsucht as an awareness of a "crisis" or lack, a hollowness, which forms an impetus for wholeness, the desire for order and completeness (Elkins 1996: 128). Sehnsucht may lend life "a vividness and coherence that it may lack in the distracting wooliness of the present" (De Botton 2002: 15). What was I yearning for?

The expressive motivation for the artefact “Hollow” came from asking myself Bucher’s (2010) apt question: What is my operating system? I had to find that space where, as a contemporary artist, my particular and unique area of knowledge is located. I subsequently developed a personalised creative operating system for my visual art practice, located within an informed contemporary visual arts paradigm (Corporeal feminism, Feminist phenomenology). This operating system became the point of origin for the creative or artistic research practice and framework for the artefact “Hollow”. This operating system is open to elements of chance - or trust in serendipity - and aims at making meaning, be it through understanding, insight, catharsis or transformation.

Finding your yearning can be compared to stating your intention or conceiving the idea for creating an expressive artefact. Defining the intentions in order to formulate research questions and sub-questions can give academic value and direction to the making of the artefact. Defining research-intentions contextualises the artwork in terms of the proliferation of its meanings, ensuring that it conveys the relevant message and knowledge outcomes (Biggs 2003). Pakes (2004) refers to Arthur C. Danto’s ontology of art (1981), which highlights the intentionality of artworks as their distinguishing characteristic. Without intentionality, artefacts are “mere things”. Danto uses this concept in the philosophical sense of an action’s (the practice) or an object’s “aboutness”. This emphasises the maker’s intention as a determinant of an expressive artefact’s specific character and meaning, in relation to the concepts available and in context with the times.

In order to learn what I was yearning for, I turned inwards, trusting an interior and visceral place or space within myself that exists unconnected to anything in particular. In his remarks on the film “Pina” (Wenders 2011), blogger Simonbuc remarks on how we become most open to transcendence when we are most embodied. In order to foster a vulnerable hyperawareness of the body, I danced. Through the physicality of dance and movement practice, I explored and experienced the way in which my own body acts, reacts and communicates, how it bulges, sags, tenses, relaxes, contracts, retracts, stretches, folds, twists and balances in relation to gravity and around the symmetrical axis of the spine, in order to foster a vulnerable hyper-awareness.

Mettler (1947) stated that “by awakening the sense of space and cultivating it in a visual motor direction, it establishes a functional basis for the creation of visual forms”. By habit, I had thus far experienced my body as an “outer body”, in contact with the external world. Now I consciously cultivated an awareness of my body as an “inner body”, not just occupying physical space, but as an inhabited, psychical space (Morley 2001). With regular practice, I deliberately sensitised the awareness of the (my) body’s physical actions, reactions and movement in space with focus, mindfulness, intent, grace and flexibility. I became more and more adept at feeling and sensing the way my own body physically reacts in emotionally loaded situations: a rush of nervous energy to the fingertips. Balance. Imbalance. Hollowness. Strength. Lengthening. Contracting, Retracting. Nausea in the pit of my stomach in the face of loss or fear. I began to think in movement<sup>1</sup>. Leigh and Bailey (2013) refer to this as a way in which to experience a mindful body that is tied to an evolving, changing situation. “It is a way of being in the world, of wondering or exploring the world, taking it up moment by moment and living it directly in movement. It is the work of an existentially resonant body and becomes the source of a reflective practitioner” (ibid.).

The body’s internal sense of itself is called proprioception (Elkins 1996: 137). This, for me, is where the intrinsic concept for a work of art originates, where I begin to conceive a visual object. The practice of proprioception and embodied self-awareness (Leigh & Bailey 2013)

originates in an interior and visceral place or space, an interior topos. Through the kinaesthetic awareness of my movements and sensations as they are experienced by my body (ibid.) in what Evans (2009) describes as physical thinking, I experienced a hollowness in my stomach which I verbalized as: “I am feeling hollow and drained.” These felt perceptions brought me to an understanding of mind as an embodied phenomenon (ibid.). With the whole body being used as a tool or thinking instrument (ibid.), I was able to translate the invisible emotion located in the physical body into language, and so discovered my intrinsic intentions for the making of a specific artefact. In other words, the experience of heightened and focused proprioception became the means to formulate a problem statement for the research.

During the reflective phase of the practice discussed above, I drove past a small plumbing supplier in my hometown of Parys in the Free State. Serendipity indeed has a sense of humour. I am feeling hollow and drained and Willie Hallaby Plumbing Supplies and Hardware sells hollow drainpipes. It was a revelation, a sign: a small “shocking realisation” (Bolt 2006). I avidly explored the PVC pipes and connecting bits in the shop, bent like disconnected body parts: elbows, knees or shoulders with neck-like protrusions and strange names. It really made sense to me. In this scenario, serendipity and intuition directed attention to unanticipated possibilities. These, according to Sullivan (2009), are a valued part of experimental inquiry.

### **Production: conceptual practice and production (gestation, prosthesis)**

I had the idea, I had the media, I could start making. I drew on my previous ways of making: the created forms needed to be reminiscent of the (female) body, symmetrical and rounded, with surfaces like a skin and openings like orifices. In this case, their size had to be smaller than the body, to metaphorically fit inside the stomach, as they are making visible and tangible that which is experienced inside the body. I experimented with the grey PVC elbow joints by cutting, slicing, sanding, reconfiguring and re-assembling them to create new forms. I spent a long time sawing, filing and sanding to get particular angles to fit.

During the production of the artefact, both embodied and material thinking processes take place. Material thinking is the logic of practice (Ihde in Bolt 2006: 7). This is manifested in the obsessive, continuous and often intuitive ‘fiddling’ and improvisation with material: drawing, cutting, fitting, experimenting, making, unmaking, adding, designing, finding. The relationship between the artist, materials and tools is an “acting ensemble” (Bolt 2007). Many associations start appearing at this stage. Thoughts are given form. In material productivity, “the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist’s creative intelligence” (Bolt 2006). Words may allow us to articulate and communicate the realisations that happen through material thinking, but as a mode of thought, material thinking involves a particular responsiveness to or conjunction with the intelligence of materials and processes in practice. “Here the artist-researcher engages in practices that make good use of the capacity to ‘think in a medium’ utilising the distributed cognitive modalities associated with visual knowing” (Sullivan 2009).

I assembled the PVC elements using complicated strips of masking tape, PVC glue and body putty. This became at times a playful activity, like putting together a puzzle one does not know the picture of yet. The forms became appendages or prostheses: I touched and felt and rolled them around, running my hands over them to experience and feel the form and texture. I weighed and balanced them in my hands. I carried them with me wherever I went, with files and sandpaper. They fitted on my lap. I left traces of white-ish PVC dust wherever I went. Each

bulge, hollow, angle, opening, edge and fold became intimate and personal. I rarely let go of the forms. I rarely stopped thinking about them. I was haunted by their intention.

This “total intensive engagement in the moment”, according to performance theorist Zarrilli (in Sellers-Young 2006) meant a shift from the heightened and focused self-perception during pre-production to a loss of self-perception during production. The artefact is a prosthesis that is entwined with the artist. The artefact is embodied by the artist.

Csikszentmihalyi (1991: 4) describes this experience during practical making or creating as “flow”. Piper (2013) relates flow as a “state of forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and worry. Instead of being lost in nervous preoccupation, people in flow are so absorbed in the task at hand that they lose all self-consciousness—in this sense, moments of flow are ‘egoless’”. Time and self disappear; the use of energy is unforced and seemingly sublime understandings surface. “Paradoxically, people in flow exhibit a masterly control of what they are doing, as it is a state devoid of emotional static, save for a compelling, highly motivated feeling of mild ecstasy” (Goleman 1996: 91). These descriptions allude to aspects of the space in which the making partnership operates towards masterful and caring handling of materials and focussed intent (Piper 2013).

After making the three forms, I sanded them to a satiny skin-like texture and applied a patina. The next step was to think of a way of displaying these “bodies” (I almost wrote “babies”). I visualised the forms on various structures such as a bed, a bath or a shelf projecting from a wall. I knew their “display platform” had to be at a height that would make it easy to pick up and handle them, but would beckon the forms to be placed back gently, without them rolling or falling off, or getting injured. I designed a simple welded metal stand on which the three forms would rest. The metal stand took on an industrial A-line form and grey colour. The second “shocking realisation” occurred as I was driving home that day: I realised the stand was referencing the many electricity pylons that cross the Free State landscape.

The three forms-as-bodies needed to rest or be cushioned on the surface of the stand. I investigated the idea of a “cushion”. They were body parts, after all, and needed to be handled with care. Sewing a cushion seemed laborious, and would introduce materials I felt would not add to the work. I wanted a mound of something soft though, so that the forms would leave an imprint in it. I had previously used a metal foundry in my hometown, “Parys Gieterij”, to sand-cast sculptural forms in iron (*small pile of bones* 2005). I decided that the three hollow forms would rest on the silica sand the foundry uses for casting iron into a hollow form shaped by the hardened sand. They would leave their imprints in the sand, and claim their space by leaving a trace.

Silica sand, called “water glass” or sodium silicate, is a mix of silicon, molasses and caustic soda. The introduction of these additives results in the sand being capable of being hardened by either introducing CO<sub>2</sub> gas or methylated spirits. The sand itself is quite ordinary river sand from the Vaal River. Since I live next to the Vaal River, I found that serendipitous. I discovered a particular silica sand that is mixed with carbon dust (coal dust) at the foundry. If a mould needs to be chipped away easily, for example in casting hollowed-out objects, coal dust is added to the silica sand. Coal is used as a domestic energy source, in other words to keep the human body warm and fed. This linked with the idea that the forms needed to be cradled, nurtured, and cared for as bodies.

Yet coal dust is also implicated as a factor in air pollution of the Vaal Region (Gauteng State of the Environment Report June 2004 Chapter 7). It was at this point in the process of

creating that I had the third “shocking realisation” (ibid.): that my feelings of hollowness and emptiness were as a result of working in the Vaal Triangle Region, which is highly industrialized and is regarded as heavily polluted, both ecologically and aesthetically, due to its industrial nature. I drive through it daily, to and from my place of employment. Its ugliness drains me.

**Post-production: some reflections on the artefact as body (birth, excorporation and separation).**



**Figure 1**  
**Linda du Preez. 2011. Hollow. PVC, metal, coal dust and river sand.**  
**(Image by Anneke Laurie 2011).**

In this section, I consider dialectical practices as forms of inquiry (Sullivan 2009). As artist-researcher, I explore the uniquely human process of making meaning. I reconstruct and reinterpret my felt and lived experiences. This action results in the emergence of new possibilities, insights, transactions and narratives that could have the power and agency to mediate change at an individual or community level. “Here the artist-researcher utilises the cognitive capacity of the arts as socially mediated processes and the process of ‘thinking in a language’ whereby images and objects are texts that carry forms of cultural coding that require analysis and dialogue to create and communicate meaning” (ibid.).

Biggs’ knowledge components (explicit, tacit and ineffable) can be applied to the practice of making the artefact “Hollow”. In an “active reflection that manifests itself in the engagement between the mind and the body” (Díaz-Kommonen *et al.* 2004: 3), the physical emotive state



of the body, which is ineffable, is first made explicit by using a common linguistic expression: “I am feeling hollow and drained”. The process of making the artefact gave a visual, tactile, three-dimensional expression to “I am feeling hollow and drained”. The material thinking and serendipity involved in this process drew upon tacit and ineffable knowledge in selecting symbols that give fuller and more accurate expression to both the feeling itself and the reason for its existence. The process thus made the internal emotive but invisible physical state of the body known and visible. At the same time the artefact itself has both invisible and visible aspects to it. The visible aspects have recognizable visual clues to give access to the meaning of the artefact.

The unpacking of the artefact also involves what Simon defined as a boundary between the inner environment (that which comprised the substance and organization of the artefact), and the outer environment (that which consisted of the surroundings in which the artefact operates), and an interface as the meeting point between these two realms (Simon in Díaz-Kommonen *et al.* 2004: 1). The three forms “Hollow” relate directly to (my) body in size and placing. Since they represent what is felt inside the body, they are smaller than the body or stomach area, as if to fit inside it. Thus the artefact “Hollow” can be viewed as a body that is has an inscribed exterior that is constructed of a psychical interior (Grosz in Joyce 2005: 149). The sculptor Barbara Hepworth’s statement is apt: “You can’t make a sculpture, in my opinion, without involving your body. You move and you feel and you breathe and you touch. [...] Sculpture is involved in the body living in the spirit or the spirit living in the body...” (Hepworth in Nemser 1995: 21).

In stating that “every work of art is a representation of the body”, Elkins (1999: 1) interprets the way we as human beings project ourselves into images or objects, as we are “creatures of volume, meeting volume, procreating and creating volumes” (Irigaray in Betterton 1996: 13). This projection is intentional in the sculptural forms of “Hollow”, as they are bodies, directly reminiscent of and alluding to aspects of the human body. They are placed at a level below the waist, which influences the way the viewer interacts with the forms: tempted to touch and hold in the hand, but hesitant to do so lest it is not allowed or it is too fragile, or perhaps even repulsed by the references to the body and its orifices. The forms occupy and demand a three-dimensional space, as the human body does. Their fragility, their sensuousness, balance and tactility refer to the human body. They are metaphors for aspects of the (female) body as a location of a defined emotive and sensual experience. My (female) body is subjectively inhabited, in other words embodied. The work “Hollow” thus falls within a framework of feminist cultural practice, as concepts of the body and its sensual experiences (sense-ual, meaning all the senses, not necessarily sexual) like pain, pleasure, desire, and emptiness remain central to such practices (Betterton 1996: 17). The forms become re-inscriptions of the female body in ways that transgress its boundaries, in an attempt “to visualize the repressed, corporeal and unregulated aspects of ourselves” (Betterton 1996: 18-19).

The forms might reference multiplying and growing cells (gestation). They may remind one of the physicality of the body not clearly mirrored but diffused, suggestive, transformed and uncomfortably strange. The body is cropped and the symmetrical mirror axis angled, as if the forms were mechanized, manipulated, miscreated, malformed and alien, staring blankly. The distortion/distension/disruption of the artwork as body makes us think about it (Elkins 1996: 136). They are closed and introspective, delicate and vulnerable. Their deliberate symmetry, rounded muscular form and possession of a taut skin-like smoothness of surface add to their allusions to the body.

Skin denotes the division between the inside of the body and the outside. In the normal functioning of visible bodies, skin separates whatever is visible from the parts of ourselves that

are hidden. The body's barrier is its skin: the skin protects the inside, holds it together and hides it from view. Skin is both dividing and divided, at one and the same time inside, outside, and between. "Skin is the locus of both seeing and sensation, and it has several properties that makes it especially interesting for contemporary art practices. It is the traditionally visible portion of the body, and yet it has always been traditionally kept invisible. It is the place where sensations are most sharply delineated in space: i.e., a pain is localized and visible on the skin, but diffuse and invisible elsewhere on the body" (Elkins 2003). Skin is the "master trope" of the division between inside and outside. Skin is substance, a signifying surface and an organ. Bunn (2005: 1) refers to skin as integument: a hardened, organic covering that is both a shield for some imagined inner vulnerability, and a signifying surface that is taken to refer to some inner sign or wider social field. This notion is of the surface heaving with pressure from below. Sometimes a radical colour change occurs that is a symptom of an underlying condition or emotional experience. Skin has the ability to transmit, to breathe, to open and to close, to emit and to absorb.

There are few ways to see inside the body: either via an orifice, or by rupturing the skin or epidermis. Skin is usually a continuous surface, unbroken except for the body's orifices. It is normally impolite even to look at places where the inside of the body becomes visible – the twilight of nostrils, ears, mouths, anuses, vaginas, and urethras. The inside is by definition and by nature that which is not seen.

The eye-like openings in the forms refer to places on the body where orifices meet the enveloping skin, in what Lacan calls the liminal forms of eyelids and anuses (in Du Preez 2005). The openings are the entry or exit points to the inside of the forms, the places where the inside meets the outside. They are the sites of intense physical experiences: sight, sound, taste, feeling and even more so the sites of the basics of human life: breathing, eating, procreating and expelling waste. The orifices of the body are borders or boundaries to and from the inside and, as such, liminal places. Douglas (1966: 4) writes that bodily orifices sometimes seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. The bodily margins are often thought to be specially invested with power and danger. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its especially vulnerable points. "All the orifices, which play a major role in the transmission and reception of information from the inside to the outside of the body and from the outside to the inside, together with the sexual drives, which find their sources in these bodily openings, induce the sensitivity and thus the privilege of the erotogenic zones for the body image" (Grosz 1994: 74-75). The openings in the forms may allude to cracks, either as a result of internal pressure or external drought, or to onslaught by external damaging forces. These meanings can be unpacked further. The sharply defined openings are especially shocking in contrast to the rounded, subtly flesh-like, forms-as-bodies.

Yet inside these forms, unlike inside a human body, there is nothing. They are empty and hollow voids that allude to silence, the ineffable and ultimately the unknowable – a black hole. They represent the opposite of being whole, alive and filled with sound. This void is waiting to be filled; it is a description of negative space. It thus becomes a meaningful void, where both emptiness and silence are the content (Du Preez 2005: 19-20). Luxembourgian performance artist de Robertis refers to the void in her re-enactment of Courbet's "Origin of the World" at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris titled "Mirror of Origin" as a "black hole, this concealed eye, this chasm, which, beyond the flesh, refers to infinity, to the origin of the origin" (in Sutton 2014).

The way the sculptural forms press into the bed of sand implies the weight and solidity of the body. The three forms are embedded or resting in the sand, leaving a print (a negative space or hollow) when they are removed. The imprint implies a greater weight than the actual weight

of the objects, just as one's body can feel hollow and heavy at the same time. Thus a memory of the form is imprinted. The imprinted memories of the forms refer to theoretical constructs around the trace as a stand-in for physical presence.

I find associations with ideas of Heidegger and Evans in the sculpture's dimension of placing. Heidegger posited the notion that being human requires belonging: to be related to location (topos, Greek for Place) and "thing" (in Malpas 2006: 267). To Evans (2009: 88), the idea of place is a concept that accommodates a broader definition of "situatedness". "Situatedness" is, for example, being located in what one does, and how one goes about one's doing within the environment particular to the doing. The placing of the three forms on a stand makes them bodies-on-display. They do not belong. They are alienated, isolated. Their industrialized setting (the stand refers to a pylon; the coal dust to pollution) is the antithesis of the Romantic depiction of landscape as a wild ideal of escape, freedom and intense emotion. The empty body in an ugly, polluted landscape full of factories belching smoke cannot connect with nature and its ideals.

## Conclusion

I felt "hollow and drained" – like many people do. My knowledge about the nature and cause of these feelings was extended by the process of making the artefact. As the inexpressible within me sought expression, it recognised and latched onto symbols. Some serendipitously appeared as "shocking realisations", others became clear through reflection on the visual forms and materials I chose. Whether or not my personal sense of the disconnection and isolation caused by an industrialised landscape and pollution is intelligible to the viewer is not a question I can answer.

According to Munro (2010), the key to making a lived experience academically explicit lies in reflexive practice. The cathartic realisations (hollow drainpipes, electricity pylons, industrialised and ugly environment) that occurred during my reflexive practice were deleuzeian occurring catastrophes (Arnold 2012) that have the potential to broaden research strategies (Farber & Mäkelä 2009).

Yet the artefact became curiously obsolete and useless to me. It was a means to an end. It took on a poise of its own, separate from myself and detached from my activity and work. Mute and silent, does the artefact resonate and embody the processes it went through to come into being? The reflexive processes continue and are open-ended. I hesitate to conclude.

## Notes

Sheets-Johnstone (2011) has written extensively on thinking in movement.

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