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Traces of interaction:
A practice-led exploration of 'makerspaces' in
South African art.

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

1. I understand plagiarism and I am aware of the University's policy in this regard. 2. I declare that this Dissertation is my original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed source, Internet, or any other source), this has been appropriately acknowledged and referenced by departmental requirements. 3. I have not used work previously produced by another student or any other person to hand in as my own. 4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work and pass it off as their work. 3. The University of Pretoria commits itself to producing academic work of integrity. I am aware of this, and have read the University's Rules and Policies, specifically the Disciplinary Procedure and the Tests and Examinations Rules, which prohibit unethical, dishonest, or improper conduct during tests, assignments, examinations, and any other forms of assessment. I am aware that no student or any other person may assist or attempt to assist another student, or obtain help, or attempt to obtain help from another student or any other person during tests, assessments, assignments, examinations, and any other forms of assessment.

SIGNATURE 

Thank you to my family and extended academic family.

PREFACE

In 2021, Jenni Lauwrens, a scholar in visual culture, art history, and image studies at the School of the Arts: Visual Arts, invited participants for *Haptic modes of engagement in Willem Boshoff's Blind Alphabet* (2023). Lauwrens'



Figure 1: The author explores the surface of *Lacertine* by Willem Boshoff 2020 (Lauwrens, 2023)

research project focused on the haptic experiences of sighted and visually impaired students when engaging with artist Willem Boshoff's seminal artwork. *Blind Alphabet* was designed to be explored by the visually impaired through a braille description and by touching the work. At the time, Boshoff's exhibition *Word Woes* (2021) at the Javett-UP Art Centre presented a collection of retrospective works spanning Boshoff's career (Javett 2021). Lauwrens' study, involving sighted and partially sighted individuals, sought to demonstrate that the senses, *excluding sight*, can shape "the experience, understanding and meaning of artworks" (Lauwrens 2023:1). The project proposed that whole-bodied, multisensorial engagements, that were achieved through handling a selection of sculptures in the installation, were interlinked with the memories and imagination of the participants. As one of the participants, I was blindfolded before I was allowed to handle the sculptures. It was not easy to trust myself to maintain my hold on these oddly shaped wooden sculptures, and I had to press my torso against them to provide added support, while I explored the surfaces of the sculptures with both my hands (Figure 1). Subsequently, during Lauwrens' interview with the all the participants, it dawned on me that I had failed to notice the subtle shifts in the surfaces of these wooden objects, yet their different grains were very obvious to my partially sighted counterpart. Our exchange prompted me to continue my own investigation of the interlinked workings of the senses, memory, and dialogue during embodied experiences of art.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

In this practice-led study, I use the creative process and the resulting artworks to prompt the audience to sensorially experience interactive installations. Artworks are made as part of a research process or as methods of collecting artistic knowledge (Mäkelä 2007:157). This knowledge can be accessed by others through interpreting the information within an artwork, according to Stephen Scrivener (2002:5). Furthermore, Scrivener (2002:5) suggests that humans can *know* in at least two ways: direct experience and communication. Artists can assist the audience with an interpretation of the materials, intent and practical knowledge that are involved in the creation of the artworks by providing the audience with a textual explanation (Mäkelä 2007:157; Carter 2004:20). The danger of this interpretive action is that art can quickly become overly dependent on text, enforcing the idea that text is more important and trustworthy than the art object itself (Barad 2003:801). Furthermore, sense experiences through language lack the immediacy of lived experiences; to make sense of signs and text “we must go elsewhere whether it be to their syntax or context, or the background system or usages of which they arise as meaningful” (Chesher 2018:427). Accordingly, texts are layered and subjective, presenting an inadequate expression of sensory experiences.



Figure 2: Joseph Kosuth, *One and two chairs*, 1965. Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of "chair". Dimensions variable. (Centre Pompidou [sa])

Artists have acknowledged this issue and work such as Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) (Figure 2), questioned language and photography as modes of interpretation which assume a direct correlation to a physical object. Audiences can become too accustomed to this form of passive interpretation if

the creator's intention should inform the experience of an artwork; that what the artist intended is the 'real' or 'authentic' meaning (Sutherland & Acord 2007:127). When textual information provides a singular reading, the audience can use it as an easy or 'correct' way of thinking. Therefore, textual guidance may cause the audience to mistrust themselves; and doubt their meaning, and sense-making capabilities by 'deliteralising knowledge'. Using alternative modes of interpretation or allowing the audience to create meaning for themselves, creates an opportunity for alternative knowledge and its production to occur (Eisner 2007:5). The turn towards alternative knowledge and making in contemporary art stems from a phenomenological rethinking of the artist-artwork-audience relationship (Eisner 2007:5; Seregina 2020:514; Chesher 2018:3). In this way, the audience can extract knowledge and create meaning by engaging with *material thinking* as a component in the logic of practice (Bolt 2006:5).

Material thinking may help the process of 'deliteralisation' and encourage a more body-centric and somatic way of experiencing art exhibitions. In my undergraduate research paper; *Knowing with one's fingers: an investigation of a multisensory experience in contemporary South African art (2021)*, I explored what a body-centric and multi-sensory approach may add to my understanding of the materials, emotions, and practical knowledge embedded in artworks. The study aimed to instil confidence in the South African art-going public to 'trust their gut' when seeking meaning in a contemporary art exhibition (Lauwrens 2018:84). Through the study I found that experiencing art exhibitions sensorially revealed similar meanings described in the artist statements. This suggests that the audience may 'figure out' or 'get to know' the artist's intent through their engagement with the work, while simultaneously connecting their lived experience and knowledge to the artwork.

Moreover, our senses are vital for gathering knowledge about objects, people, and events while providing insight into our intimate feelings (Bacci & Melcher 2013:1; Driscoll 2007:311). The senses work in tandem to create a multi-

layered experience of living and embodied sensation (Bacci & Melcher 2013:1). To know something is therefore “an embodied, tacit and contextual phenomenon [that is] varied and subjective” (Sutherland & Acord 2007:126). Complex forms of communication that function without text can be formed by focusing on sensory cues and bodily responses to art. These forms of communication are available to the audience and can aid in their sense-making when encountering art (Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher 2014:1121; De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007:486). By engaging with deliteralisation and other forms of knowledge and information gathering while in the presence of art, instead of focusing on the work’s physical form or ‘outcome’, viewers can enable a different sense of value to emerge as the process of knowing or understanding becomes significant (Wright 2024:533).

The audience uses marking, which multilingual researcher Anne Shivers-McNair (2021:4) defines as “marking (and remarking) the relations and interactions among people, things, technologies, communities, meanings, spaces, and disciplines” to make sense of the things they encounter. These relations are informed by practical knowledge, material exploration, play, and significance within the exhibition space. In the arts, knowledge is often reduced to “a pre-encoded viewer meeting a pre-encoded artwork” rather than a practical consciousness focusing on the situational relationship between the artwork and the viewer (Sutherland & Acord 2007). As participants encounter an artwork, they could create situational relationships that might include a “reflexive knowing” if they are allowed to handle a material (Bolt 2006:14). The audience can, therefore, be understood as engaging with this form of knowing as they explore the surface and environment of the artwork sensorially.

Artists engage with similar knowledge structures as they make art. By inscribing the traces of their engagement into materials, artists transfer their reflexive and situational knowledge, creating complex collections of matter and knowledge (Connolly 2013:400). In the artistic process, the artist can be understood as colliding with the material; shaping and being shaped by the material in the



Figure 3: Silvia Bächli and Eric Hattan, *Hafnargata zigzag*, 2008. Installation composed of 123 photos and nine wooden pieces. Total length of wooden pieces 21m. (Storsve 2013).

creative process (Bennett 2015:72). These objects of complex knowledge, matter and energy can be presented to the audience as incomplete and requiring interaction to come to fruition. Therefore, artworks can be understood as holding multiple complexities and collisions of both the artist and audience through interactions with

art objects.

In this way, artists act as 'context providers' rather than 'content providers' as they increasingly engage with the social and public realm (Kester 2004:1). Therefore, artists can use objects, social prompts, and sensory cues to guide the audience toward making sense of the work in its context. Artists encourage their audience to explore their subjective connotations and engage in relational aesthetics as they 'live through' the artwork or installation (Bourriaud 2002:5). Doing so, the audience can read and relate the work to their knowledge systems and experiences, as they become 'active meaning producers' that engage with the artwork 'experientially' (Grobler 2020:88). Silvia Bächli and Eric Hattan's artwork *Hafnargata zigzag* (2008) guides the viewers to view the photographs in a particular sequence which may force them to experience a particular narrative (Storsve 2013). It asks the audience to use their subjective perceptions, experiences, understandings, and behaviours to connect the different images to the prescribed narrative without any textual guidance. By displaying the work at table height instead of on the walls, the artists tell a specific story to influence the audience's physical actions by making them look down to experience the work.

By forcing the audience to interact with the work in a specific narrative may allow the audience to enact a performance and, in the case of *Hafnargata zigzag*, a ritualistic one. When the artist produces a performance, the audience's knowledge, senses, and experience shape the context of the work. Heather Cassils' *Becoming an image* (2013) is a performance piece where the artist questioned the idea of artist labour and trace (Figure 4).

The performance included Cassils punching a piece of clay in front of an audience. Scholar and art historian Amelia Jones (2015:19) recalls that she could "feel the drops of sweat flying through the air" and that she felt the "boxer's strenuous breathing" in her own body as she experienced an exhausting and "projective co-embodiment" with the artist. However, as per Claire Bishop (2012:9), the audience functions on two levels - the first being the participants involved in the experience; and the second being the spectators who encounter the documentation about the experience. For the second level to occur, the artwork needs mediating entities such as photos, objects, stories, films, or a spectacle so that the experience lives on in the spectators' minds in some form (Bishop 2012:284). Consequently, both the first and second audience encounter the same material through different times and mediating terms, which leads to other kinds of collisions and interactions.

The visceral experience of the first audience can only be imagined by the second as they only encounter the traces (clay object) and the documentation (photos, videos, and sound recordings) of the Cassils performance. Amelia Jones' (2015:19) account of Cassils' performance provides unique insight into her visceral experience, the energies, collisions, and knowledge systems she explored during the performance. Providing phenomenological accounts of performances is



Figure 4: Heather Cassils, *Becoming an image*, 2013. Lump of clay and video stills exhibited as evidence of the performance, Dimensions variable. (Cassils 2013)

crucial to the second audience who will have a less visceral experience when encountering the work as a trace or translation of artistic labour. Therefore, the second audience relies on the traces, translations, and phenomenological writings of others to begin to make sense of the artistic knowledge and to relate it to their reality. This provides the second audience with the content rather than context, as they rely on interpretations to understand the work rather than their own embodied experience.

1.2 Research question

This study proposed that applying the practices of a makerspace to interactive art installations could provide viewers with a space for curious exploration and embodied experiences that could invigorate artistic practices in South Africa.

To achieve the gallery as a makerspace, I used materials that reacted to interaction in different ways. I also incorporated found materials¹ from my studio and the gallery spaces which intended to encourage the audience's curiosity and creativity. The work was presented in three interactive exhibitions, to entice the audience to have sensory and embodied experiences with the work. By showing how the audience made sense of contemporary art exhibitions, this study highlighted how the audience explored and created practical, reflexive, and material knowledge. Without a prescribed narrative, the audience freely explored the space and interacted with the work. The presented work originated from the creative process where specific materials were presented to the viewers. The practice-led process was treated as a method that initiated material thinking and challenged the relationships of the artist-artwork-audience. The interventions of the artist and the audience left different traces or residues on the work which were documented, reflected on, and incorporated back into the creative process.

¹ The materials are presented 'as is' with minimal interventions from the artist.



Figure 5: *Interim*, 2022. Paint pens on a bent metal sheet. Dimensions variable.

Through designing with interaction in mind, this study proposed that the concept of the ‘makerspace’ - a site for collaborative, responsive artist-audience relations, could invigorate South African exhibition practices and provide audiences with a sense of agency, creativity and collaboration in their art-viewing experiences.

The term ‘makerspace’ usually describes a space that provides equipment to people with similar

interests or ideas to work on projects together and share their knowledge with others (Gerstein 2019:1). Shivers-McNair (2021:4) extends this definition of makerspace as a “process of becoming through making” that focuses on making as a form of self-discovery. This study used exhibitions as ‘spaces for making’ where alternative forms of knowledge could be discovered and explored. Through the vehicle of three interactive exhibitions that resemble makerspaces, this study asked the following questions:

1. Can emphasising the material quality of artworks contribute to the audience’s creativity and embodied participation?
2. How may a focus on the traces of interaction transform installations or galleries into makerspaces?

During the initial stages of the project, I explored ways to encourage audience interaction. *Interim* (2022) was a three-part interactive sculpture made of thin metal sheets (Figure 5). Attached to the sheets were paint pens that the audience could use to ‘make their mark’ on the metallic surface. The work was then exposed to the elements, and as detritus set in, the marks became more visible and formed a protective coating on the metal surface². The work encouraged the audience to read, interpret, react, and add to the artwork’s content. The work led me to consider less prescribed ways of interacting.

² The work was shown in the Nirox Winter Sculpture exhibition *Open Lab #2: Good Neighbours* from May to August 2022.

Subsequent experiments explored presenting the audience with 'raw' materials that are used or those that result from a creative process. The different physical properties of paper, rust, bronze, and found objects are explored and presented to the audience with the intent of encouraging interaction. Furthermore, the differing physical properties such as weight, ephemerality, texture, and shape prompt the audience to explore the materials sensorially. Processes of creation, destruction, assimilation, and erasure can be used as tools by participants to interact with the materials – I engage with similar processes while reflecting on past audience interactions and making artwork. As the audience or I interact with the materials and they are exposed to time, their appearance, structure, shape, colour, or orientation may change. Each material has specific characteristics that allow for the collection of artist and audience information when interacted with, becoming a recording device.

The sensitive surface of the bronze-casting wax is an enticing medium to touch because it is easily manipulated by the warmth and pressure of a person's hands. The wax can be shaped an infinite number of times before and after the bronze-casting process while still embodying the previous interactions. Paper can hold vast amounts of information on its flat surface. This material is susceptible to different types of marks, such as printing and drawing; some of which are intentional, and others unintentional. Dissolving the paper as part of the paper-making process offers an opportunity to expose the page for its materiality. While it may retain to a greater and lesser degree the information on its surface, it is rendered, fragmented, dislodged, and mostly unrecognisable. In some cases, the marks can lift off the surface, distribute through the surrounding water, and settle on different parts of the new paper's surface. That is to say that the information from the paper's previous state is embedded as a trace in the newly formed surface, which retains its material properties but is slightly weaker because of the fragmenting and reformulating process. These ephemeral material transmutations are fascinating and, in my mind,

encourage audience interaction with the shifting nature of the work, whilst the medium's nature captures the audience's engagement.

1.3 Aims and objectives

Through presenting interactive installations, this study intends to encourage audience interaction; to explore creativity and embodied participation within *the gallery as a makerspace*. Following the interactive happenings, the traces of these interactions are displayed to record the process and demonstrate the use of gallery contexts as makerspaces. Presenting work to the audience that invites interaction through sensory cues allows them to explore the installations of smells, sounds, vibrations, and differences in light and darkness rather than depending on the linear direction of the text. As the audience interacts with the materials, they collect the physical traces of audience interaction. At the same time, I, as the artist-researcher, document the interactive experience through photographs, which document the visual, and sound recordings of the vocal interactions. These forms of documentation inspire changes in the research and creative processes and create a specific perspective of the interactions that emerge from the exhibitions. The research explores both the audience and the artist's engagement with the creative processes and their outcomes. Conceptions and outcomes vary in this study because of the practice-led methodology that informs it.

This study comprises the following objectives to encourage audience participation and transform the gallery into a makerspace: Firstly the development of an embodied perspective and critical review of current South African art installations in different locations, that demonstrate a model of sensory engagement and *material thinking* aiding an engaged audience experience; identification of spaces, displays, and materials with the potential to encourage audience engagement and aid in the transformation of the gallery into a makerspace; The epistemic use of the artistic practice to explore a variety of art processes, and the qualities of the related materials to inspire audience's curiosity and engagement; the installation of artwork in such a way that

encourages interaction, creativity, and curiosity from the audience while also enticing their actions; The 'capture' of audience interactions on materials, supplemented with photographic and audio documentation.

1.4 Literature review and theoretical framework

A practice-led methodology informs this study to provide an opportunity for the creative practice and the research to influence each other as the study progresses. The study is rooted in phenomenology, relational aesthetics, and new materialism and utilises these concepts as described by researchers of cognition and perception; Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009:19), the artistic investigation is an "iterative cyclic web" that accommodates practice and research. This iterative cyclic web allows theory and practice to influence each other at many points throughout the process; allowing an entangled circle with many sub-circles, a complex web of many entry points – to demonstrate the iterative nature of the creative and research processes. In addition, this places research, ideation, and the artistic outcome in cyclical motion.

My understanding of contemporary art is guided by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002:8) who proposes an active trajectory that evolves through signs, objects, forms, and gestures that spread out from its material form and encourage relations between the material, the viewer, and ultimately, the world. The artistic practice in this study emphasises "material thinking" as proposed in the theory of "New Materialism" as described by William Connolly (2013), Jane Bennett (2010), and Karen Barad (2013). For Connolly (2013:400) New Materialism is an entangled method of relating to the human and non-human actors encountered through being in the world; furthermore, proposing 'material' as "energy-matter complexes" that should be treated with care as some "energy-matter complexes" are capable of self-organisation which allows them to be unpredictable demonstrating agency (Connolly 2013:399-402). Jane Bennett (2010:13) emphasises the vibrancy of matter and its power to inspire awareness of the inextricably entangled, dense network of relations. Bennett (2010: viii) explains that the vibrancy, or vitality of matter is dependent on its

capacity to either impede the wills of humans or to act as forces with trajectories, propensities, and tendencies of their own. For Barad (2013:819), “matter comes to matter through its iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming”. In other words, the continual relations between the material and the world allow it to be continually evolving.

Language is problematised in Barad’s (2013:802) conception favouring performativity to shift the dialogical relationship between descriptions and reality to entanglements of practice-actions-doings; thereby challenging the excessive power given to language to determine reality. The study additionally refers to Elena Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher (2014) to discuss the use of language in participatory sense-making. According to Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher (2014:1089), language is an adaptive, social form of sense-making that emerges from the interplay of coordination and exploration which is inherent to sense-making. The term “participatory sense-making” was used first in *Participatory sense-making: An enactive approach to social cognition* by Hanne De Jaegher & Ezequiel Di Paolo (2007) and further explored by De Jaegher et al. (2016) in *The co-creation of meaningful action: bridging enaction and interactional sociology*. Incorporating social cognition and sociology reframes how meaning is created, how interaction is influenced by the individuals and ultimately, how interaction encourages alternative knowledge structures (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007:485).

Phenomenology and the phenomenological experience were neglected in conceptual art due to an emphasis on language and ideas rather than perception and the body (Chesher 2018:419). Lisa Guenther (2020) guided my understanding of phenomenology which was originally developed by Martin Heidegger (1927) and explored further by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1986). Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* (1986), argues that consciousness is an effect rather than a determinant of experience and that knowledge can only be gained through “being in the world” and encountering materials. Merleau-Ponty (1945), a scholar of phenomenology used Heidegger’s definition by directly

inquiring into the role of the body and suggesting that the situatedness of consciousness influences the perception and understanding of the world (Marratto 2012:20). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty explained that moving through an environment is a “tacit decision” of the body in response to the information and conditions of a situation (Marratto 2012:12). According to Guenther (2020:11), phenomenology is the lived experience of consciousness that is made possible and meaningful through reflection. She continues to explain that the conscious ‘I’ thinks thoughts, feels feelings, and remembers memories through every interaction with the world (Guenther 2020:11). By documenting the audience’s actions through photographs and voice recordings instead of interviews, this study uses an interpretive phenomenological method to capture the actions and traces of their interactions. A combination of this phenomenological method with empirical research allowed for flexibility. (Ferencz-Flatz & Hanich 2016:22).

Regarding audience participation, Rosalyn Driscoll’s, *The sensing body in the visual arts: making and experiencing sculpture* (2020) is seminal when defining embodied phenomenological perception while making, touching, and haptically engaging with artworks. “Aesthetic touch” is proposed as the primary way to investigate space, as it allows the body to explore available sensory qualities, make associations, establish relationships, discover hidden meanings, and transform objects mentally or physically (Driscoll 2020:3). Aesthetic touch can, therefore, be understood as building spatial knowledge through movement, collecting information about the space, the objects and how these affect the participant. Driscoll (2020:11) explains that the body’s dependence on movement is haptic as it unfolds through space and time and reveals the shape, dimensions, qualities, and emotional resonances of the space (Driscoll 2020:17). Haptic engagement with space allows the body to experience it ‘kinaesthetically’: to feel textures, discern forms, know spaces, and discover relationships, while simultaneously gathering information to orient the self and the body within that space (Driscoll 2020:16).

1.5 Review of visual texts

Throughout the study, I selected a range of contemporary artworks to not only support my arguments but also reflect on my decisions. Although the subject matter varies, all the works place a similar emphasis on audience engagement and the artists engage critically with the material properties through their creative practice. Katinka Bock's works *For your eyes only* (2019) (Figure 8) and *Horizontal words* (2019) (Figure 9) installed in *Avalanche* (2019) (Figure 6) engage with the physical dimensions of space and the traces of passing time through their material properties. Bock used the materials as measures of time and space in the gallery, engaging it as a production site rather than just a site to display finished works. *Every object is a temporal space* (2016) by Nicolás Lamas (Figure 9) is an artwork that comments on technology and its ability to capture traces in layers which continually change the form and content of the work. His work *Stop motion #3* (2016) (Figure 9) encourages the audience to interact with a piece of clay, changing the work and leaving their residues on the surface.

I selected three artists who exhibited in Johannesburg at the time of this study. This allowed me to visit and share my embodied perspective of the work. *A game of cat's cradle* (2022) by Johandi du Plessis (Figure 12-15) created a site-specific installation in which she exhibited materials from the Cradle of Humankind and the Cradle of Human Culture. The audience was encouraged to interact with the work with no further instruction. *Bird sound orientations* (2022) by Rhamina Gambo (Figure 16-17) comments on the censorship of schools in Lagos employing objects the artist made, to navigate through a field. Her installation provides her audience with sensory cues to follow. In Jeremy Wafer's *Material immaterial* (2023), the artist explores displacement, memory, and materiality in a way that – counterintuitive to this study – was difficult to decipher without referring to the artist's statement for clues to what the artist's intention may be. All the artists explored in this study engage with the material qualities of their creative practice to provide cues to their audience.

1.6 Methodology

A review of relevant literature was employed as a first step to developing the theoretical context in which this study is situated. The literature review was considered as a lens through which the study was rooted and discussed. The methodology for this study was practice-led, allowing the creative practice to lead to knowledge gained through the artistic process. Accordingly, creative practice and theoretical research are considered as entangled and collaborative, leading to a close investigation of the relationship between art, value, authority and autonomy and highlighting the ability of such an approach to test the social boundaries of art (Roberts & Wright 2004:532). This study considered artmaking and understanding as performative while being attentive to the hierarchies of power and artistic labour (of both the artist and audience) to focus on knowledge exchange, instead of creating “valuable objects” (Wright 2024:533). Through doing process-based work, documenting interactions, and interpreting artworks and actions, this type of research can become embodied and “known through action” (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat 2011:1).

The theoretical research supplemented the practice and grounded the work in contemporary discourses and ideas surrounding knowledge production. I approached the work of other artists through a phenomenological and almost ethnographical lens, analysed through my embodied experience. I extended this method of analysing in my own exhibitions as I was present in the gallery while the audience interacted and I used similar qualitative methods such as observation, reflection, and taking notes during the audience interactions during the exhibitions of my work. I made use of sound recordings to capture my thoughts, instead of relying on textual prompts. While not prescribing participation, the outcomes of the interactive exhibitions directly affected the direction of the research and the resulting creative outcomes. The traces, documentation, and reflections from my studio practice and exhibitions played a significant role in this study by lending itself to interpretation. I made artworks after the exhibitions as a response, reaction, translation, or destruction of the audience’s interactions and their physical traces. By providing embodied,

sensory and multimodal insight into the traces of interaction, this study enabled critical reflection and rich documentation of audience participation in contemporary art.

1.7 Ethical implications

When working with participants, it is important to consider the ethical implications of the study for those participants. The Link and Student Galleries exhibitions were accessible to all UP students and guests. Entry to the exhibitions was voluntary. Each participant was asked to read and consent to the terms of the study and whether they wanted to be documented. The forms for this consent were available online as a Google Form where the voluntary audience could agree to the terms of participation. A print form was also available at the gallery entrance (Appendix A and B). This mandatory form included a summary of the project, the risks, benefits, aims, and objectives, and tick boxes to select where the documentation applied. Each participant was guided through the form and informed that they participated voluntarily and could opt out anytime. The participants were also made aware that the documentation can be used in this study or future studies by the author as digital or hard copy. The consent form was the only form of text that the audience encountered during their exhibition interaction. The document was written in a non-prescriptive way to encourage a deliteralised³ and embodied experience. I documented and recorded the audience interactions as agreed upon in the consent form throughout the exhibitions and identified each participant by writing their attire in pencil on the back of the page. Minors were allowed to participate under the supervision of their parents or guardians.

1.8 Chapter outline

Chapter Two, Making space: A theoretical exploration of traces, space, and interaction with art, constitutes an exploration of the theoretical frameworks that

³ Using less text and encouraging the audience to have an embodied experience.

inform this research in analytical relation to the work of selected contemporary artists. Additionally, this chapter expands on key concepts of the study by discussing the work of Katinka Bock and Nicolás Lamas and their focus on space and materiality in their creative processes and installations. This chapter analyses the installation, *A game of cat's cradle* by Johandi du Plessis, *Bird sound orientations* by Rhamina Gambo, and *Material immaterial* by Jeremy Wafer through an embodied and haptic perspective. The selected installations explore materiality and the artwork-audience relations within the gallery space.

Chapter Three, Mark-making: The body in haptic understanding, reflects my creative process. 'Making' is positioned in this chapter as a process of enquiry and alternative knowledge production in practice-led research. An overview of the creative process provides insight into the intent, decisions, techniques, and constitutes a reflection on my creative process in relation to selected artworks and installations.

Chapter Four, Audience interaction: Understanding and making sense of contemporary art, analyses interactions while focusing on the material thinking (Bolt 2007) and sense-making (Groth, Mäkelä & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2013) capabilities of the audience. Additionally, this chapter explores social understanding and how conceptualising the gallery as a makerspace can extend the audience's participation and experience with contemporary art.

The fifth chapter concludes the study with a summary of important findings, suggesting the implications for the field of knowledge, acknowledging the study's limitations, and making recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF TRACES, SPACE, AND INTERACTION WITH ART

This chapter situates this study within contemporary discourses of embodied participation, and materiality within international and South African exhibition spaces. The previous chapter explores how the audience becomes active producers as they gather sensory and situational information to produce meaning. Through a theoretical exploration of key concepts, the work of Katinka Bock and Nicolás Lamas is discussed as examples of making in the exhibition space by encouraging material interaction. Through accounting my embodied perspective of selected installations, this chapter attests to the embodied experience an audience member could have in an encounter with the artworks, *A game of cat's cradle* (2022) by Johandi du Plessis, *Bird sound orientations* (2022) by Rhamina Gambo and *Material immaterial* (2023) by Jeremy Wafer. These exhibitions/artworks were selected because of their proximity to where I reside and have access to, their evocative titles, their respective use of materials or found objects, and their media or processes in-so-far as they resemble my own. The selected installations also provide an opportunity to reflect on possible installation methods, material engagement, and processes that apply to my work.

2.1 Defining space

This section defines space using examples of contemporary art installations. Space has no singular definition because of its interconnectedness with historical and socio-political mediation, while the term also constitutes the historical and cultural fabric of life. Lukas Feireiss (2013:3) mentions a few types of space: dwelling, individual or personal, social, or collective, informal, or formal, exterior and interior, fictional or visionary, and artistic space. In terms of the greater universe, space can additionally be understood as encompassing the spaces mentioned by Feireiss (2013:3). It is essential to acknowledge that fixing one definition of space is difficult because each definition depends on its relationality.

Jérôme Dussuchalle (2021:85) defines the installation space as “where sculptures can be located and influence the movement or physical engagement of the audience”. The gallery or installation is a collection of physical objects, where the interlacing of space, artwork, and audience occurs - shaping the audience’s experience of the space. The installation space influences the movement and physical engagement of the audience as the objects take up and create free, hollow, in-between, shadow or light, virtual, and sound spaces through material-audience-environment relations (Dussuchalle 2021:85; ZKM Karlsruhe 2019: [sa]). These relations are constantly renewed through time and as the audience passes through the space. Dussuchalle (2021:81) states that “stepping onto an artwork tells you about the materiality of its space-plane as you traverse it.” Accordingly when the audience is allowed to come in close contact with the work, the material properties of the work in relation to the specifics of the space can become sensorially gathered and stored by the audience and eventually translate into phenomenological knowledge. When considering the installations as interactive, the audience can be understood as being influenced and influencing the work through creating montages, assemblages, and other actions through space and time (Kayser & Coëllier 2021:5).

These actions can change for each individual as they participate in and are affected by space and time differently. There is, therefore, a constant renewal of sensorimotor information that influences the audience’s perception of objects in space (Dussuchalle 2021:81). However, Grant Kester explained in an interview (cited in Finkelppearl 2013:116) that conventionally trained artists and critics find it difficult to grasp that viewing art is not an isolated event and that he prefers artwork that goes beyond the artist’s intention and evolves audience interaction. These artworks add to the audience’s dynamic and changing perspective of the space to create opportunities for new interactions, simultaneously initiating collaboration or co-authorship between actors⁴ . Finkelppearl (2013:6) further

⁴ The artist-audience-artworks are the different actors referred to in this study and emphasis is placed on the relations between the different actors that can surface through interaction.

states that cooperation situates the practice in “the intellect zone of human cooperation” which seeks to examine the social dimension of interaction and blurs issues of authorship, crossing social boundaries. De Jaegher et al. (2016:2) explain that social understanding and the resulting meaningful action concerns understanding others, sustaining interactions, forming relations, and acting together.

Collaboration employs various forms of knowledge expressed through active interaction with other artists and non-artists as they each share their own experiences. Similarly, Shivers-McNair (2021:6) defines the makerspace as relational spaces where individuals participate in acts of making and practical knowledge production. Furthermore, Shivers-McNair (2021:11) explains that much of what she observes and engages with while studying makerspaces, can be described as “negotiating, persuading, solving problems, creating, and getting things done through acts of making with not only words and symbols, but also, objects, movements, spaces, and relationships”.

Makerspaces are usually associated with art education, technology, and engineering and are rarely (if ever) related to contemporary art. This may be due to the makerspace’s association with ‘tinkering’ instead of creating ‘high art’. It may also be due to the makerspace's focus on transferring knowledge rather than the individual creative process. From my observations, the artist usually shares their knowledge textually as an artist statement and is not present in the gallery, which usually leads the audience to make sense of the artwork alone, and in a varying degree led by the textual statement if the artist chooses this path. Applying the term, ‘makerspace’ to contemporary art and being present in the gallery presents an opportunity for the artist-researcher to discover how the audience makes sense of and manipulates the artworks through material thinking (Groth, et al. 2013).

Transforming the traditionally static gallery into a makerspace requires a focus on the traces of interaction. They not only become the ‘products’ of making but

also hold the knowledge and reveal the pathways of their sense-making. Observing the audiences' actions and material traces requires an understanding of their internal and external spaces, which gather sensory information and affect movement. Dussuchalle (2021:86) describes this space as "where the experience of both movement and contact can be felt, a place for complex but essential kinesthetics". The interconnectedness of the senses provides each movement with corresponding sense data through which perception, interaction, and aesthetic experiences arise. Through forming a haptic perception using aesthetic touch (Driscoll 2020:5), the participant can explore the space and the self through their orientation and engagement with objects and space. The participant's spatial field consists of their senses and ability to create a haptic perception of the art experience while referencing their internal and external environments.

Defining the gallery as a makerspace, shared with participants, allows this study to highlight the interconnectedness, relation and influence of the gallery, audience and the artworks. These definitions also situate 'making' as a relational practice, capable of influencing the space and producing practical knowledge.

2.2 Making in the gallery space

This section employs the work of Katinka Bock and Nicolás Lamas to situate the role of making in the creative process, and the use of the gallery as a production site. Making or placing objects in space can change or make space and direct the movement of the bodies within. Since Modernism, artists have shifted towards new interventions in space and providing different constructions of viewing; using sculptures that suggest openness, transparency, weightlessness, and changeability (Foster 1996:ix; ZKM Karlsruhe 2019:[sa]). Artists are more interested in enquiring into reality, through work that changes how space is experienced, instead of representing reality (Karlsruhe 2019:[sa]). Therefore, by enquiring into the epistemology of reality, artists can create work that questions the surrounding space or prompts the audience to do so. In my

view, the production site for the creative process for many artists moved from their studio to public, gallery, or shared spaces, allowing the artworks to question the role of the site itself during the creative process.

As a result of “an artist’s intense, physical interactions with materials, processes and tools”, a work of art is often a complex condensation of the making process through time (Driscoll 2020:48). The act of making and the resulting artistic outcomes in contemporary art act as Mäkelä (2007:157) explains, as “answers to research questions or creative arguments that can be seen as collecting information and understanding from the maker”. Therefore, the act of making becomes a way to produce, preserve, and reveal new knowledge, allowing artists to translate abstract ideas into material through solution-based thinking (Mäkelä 2007:159). The gallery itself can be used as a site of enquiry as the artworks reveal elements of the space that are not visible or noticeable without the work. Katinka Bock explores the gallery for its physical dimensions and its interaction with natural elements through her creative process, allowing the space to become a site for enquiry and discovery (L'Officiel Paris 2019: [sa]).



Figure 6: Katinka Bock, *Avalanche*, 2019. Installation view. (Pivô 2019).

Bock (cited in Centre Pompidou 2019:[sa]) states that she has always been intrigued by the edge of objects because “as one space ends, the rest of the object and its environment reveals itself”. Bock (cited in Centre Pompidou 2019:[sa]) states further that she prefers

to allow the viewer to explore and discover the edges of objects through sensory engagement, even though the work is not explicitly interactive. These object boundaries reveal aspects of how they started, how they exist, and when they will end (Kayser & Coëllier 2021:74). Bock’s exhibition *Avalanche* (2019), (Figure 6), was shown at Pivô in São Paulo, Brazil, and consisted of found objects (such as plants, architectural fragments, floor polish, and cast

sculptures (in ceramic and bronze). These materials allow the audience to discover different zones of contact, shared spaces, suspended moments, and the relationality of the objects and the space they occupy (Brenner 2019:4).

While installing *Avalanche*, Bock created *For your eyes only* (2019) by leaving pieces of fabric on the roof to act as recording devices, capturing the time taken to prepare the exhibition (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Katinka Bock, *For your eyes only*, 2019. Installation view. (Pivô 2019).

As the sun bleached the fabric, the entanglement of space, time, and natural elements created a piece that acted as an abstract photograph (Centre Pompidou. 2019:[sa]). The fabric in this work captures the interactions between the natural elements, the roof of the gallery, and the nature of the material. The specific set of circumstances through which the work was created is indicative of the space and time of its exposure – the materiality of the work holds a specific set of information.

In *Horizontal words* (2019), the artist threw a lump of clay that resembled the size and weight of a body off the roof (Figure 8). The height of the building and the impact of the material on the surface below determined its final shape. The usually invisible dimension of the gallery is captured by the physical properties of clay and its relationship with gravity. The edge of the work is determined by the edge of the space (weight and velocity), showing the complexity that the space and materials create when they interact with the maker. Using the medium in this way juxtaposes it with her intricate clay sculptures and questions the gallery's role as a production site and in making art.

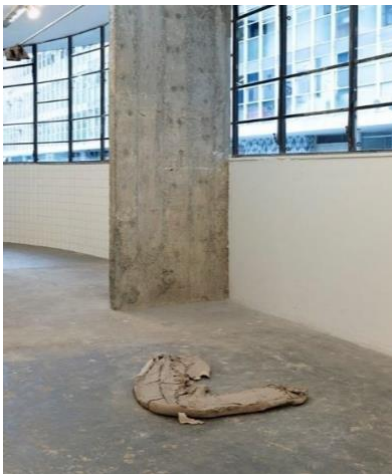


Figure 8: Katinka Bock, *Horizontal words*, 2019. Installation view. (Pivô 2019).

While Bock works with the gallery space as a medium in her creative process, Nicolás Lamas considers the role of the audience within the production site and how the traces of their making leave information behind. Lamas considers his work to be

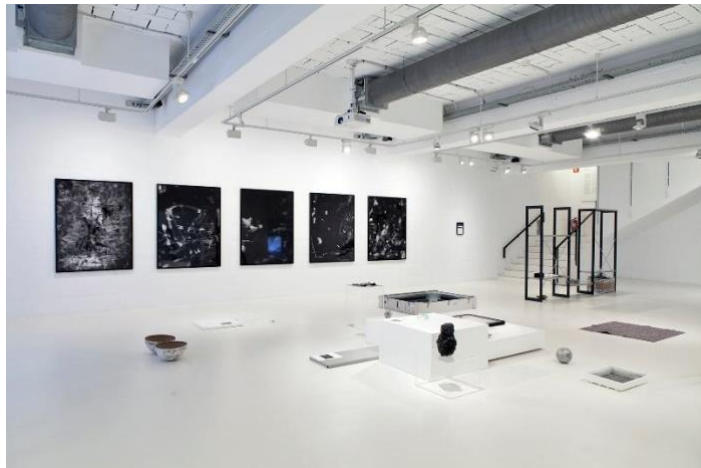


Figure 9: Nicolás Lamas, *Every object is a temporal space*, 2016. Installation view. (Antas 2017)

“active, layered spaces that are subject to change (both in form and content) through a process of transformation” (Antas 2017). Lamas’ exhibition, *Every object is a temporal space* (2016), (Figure 9), consists of an installation of photographs, digital tablets, a photocopier, video work and clay sculptures. Lamas focuses on the relational interactions with digital objects and showcases the traces of use. Featured in this exhibition was *Stop motion #3* (2016), an interactive clay sculpture that visitors could modify, (Figure 9) as they left marks and fingerprints behind, “creating a constantly changing piece that is transformed according to criteria that are not subject to any particular purpose or result that can be controlled” (Antas 2017).

Lamas’ focus on tactile interaction in both *Stop motion #3* and the digital works included in the exhibition showcase the dexterity of the many hands and the entangled role they have when exploring, discovering, and producing knowledge. Lamas’ works also reveal the layered nature of interaction and information exchange between objects and the audience. The information exchange present in the work can be understood as indicative of movement and a physical form of knowledge production as the audience discovers the material through their tactile capabilities. In this way, this work greatly contributes to the audience’s sense-making capabilities and encourages interaction without textual confirmation or prescription.



Figure 10: Nicolás Lamas, *Stop motion #3*, 2016. (Antas 2017)

In *Avalanche* (Figure 7), Bock uses her own physical experience to ‘imprint’ on the space before she makes the artwork, which, in turn, influences the audience’s bodily experience of the spatial installation; While Lamas’ *Every object is a temporal space* employs audience’s interactions and residues to present and add to the ever-changing and active layers that comprise the works and installation. Both exhibitions depend on the “propositions and interaction modalities available” in the space to shape their work (Pais 2014:3). Bock uses the gallery space as a production site in the mode of a makerspace where the ‘shape and edges’ (Bock cited in Centre Pompidou 2019) of some of her works are relationally and experientially determined; While Lamas asks the audience to interact with and change his work in the gallery. Both Bock’s *Horizontal words* and Lamas’ *Stop motion #3* use clay because it is a malleable material that is dependent on manipulation by external forces - the ‘makers’ such as the gallery, the audience, or the artist. The next section will provide an embodied perspective on the installation of a national artist to situate the study in a South African context.

2.3 A haptic interaction

My embodied phenomenological experience of the work became the primary means through which to analyse the work of the selected artists. As an audience member, artist and researcher, I focused on my situational thoughts, actions, reactions, haptic engagements and reflections, rather than the accompanying text to analyse the work. Haptic interaction is an “active, exploratory, and manipulative touch, involving more than the passive stimulation of skin receptors” (Schiff & Foulke 1982: xi). In this section, I use an experiential approach to analyse *A game of cat’s cradle* by Johandi du Plessis (Figure 10). This site-specific installation was installed in the Cold Room during the *Good Neighbours* (2022) group exhibition at Nirox Sculpture Park and consisted of bottles filled with seawater, shells, earth pigments and DiaMount photographs. The photos were of a laptop screen which displayed a photo of the Cradle of Culture that Du Plessis captured. Replete with glares, reflections, scratches, fingerprints and smudges, the images of both sites were overlaid along with the laptop’s traces of use. In so doing, Du Plessis juxtaposed two ‘points of origin’: The Cradle of Humankind in Magaliesburg and The Cradle of Culture in the Western Cape. Du Plessis did not provide any specific instructions to the audience, only urging them to take and share photos with her through an online archive.

Du Plessis displayed primarily organic materials such as shells, pigments, rocks, twigs, and seaweed collected from the two different points of origin. Some of these materials were carefully arranged and others were scattered all over the floor in no specific pattern. Some found objects were placed with no apparent structure, and others, like the earth pigments and shells (Figure 11), were displayed in a grid on a table, some organised according to their size. This mix of structure and chaos made the space resemble a construction site or an excavation that was either in progress or abandoned. The exhibition presented a unique space for exploration and contemplation that could not have occurred without the artist creating this relational space (situated in the NIROX residence gallery site at the Cradle of Humankind) , and facilitated through the media she

chose to install. The following passage explores my phenomenological and situational experience of *A game of cat's cradle*, employing an embodied and haptic perception, offering an expanded analysis of Du Plessis' work.

As I moved from the outside space to the Cool Room building, I noticed the space was close to empty and had a noticeable echo. The outside noises were silenced except for the occasional calls from Hadedas. Each step I took felt and sounded differently as each material affected the generated sounds. Walking through the space, I felt the difference in textures under my soles. I let my feet glide over the sand on the floor, watching the materials move out of the way, leaving a thick stroke behind. I walked towards a photo on the wall and listened to the crunch beneath my feet. After looking at the photograph and reflecting on its glossy surface, I noticed a few neatly placed mussel shells. I selected two, and while holding them, I softly hit them against each other and then the floor. They sounded hollow and sharp simultaneously, echoing through the space. I decided to collect rocks from around the room, placing and then organising them between the shells. As I made my way over to the table with the earth pigment display, the sounds of monkeys, seeds and leaves blowing in the wind made clattering noises on the metal roof. The pigments were fine dust; more of it stuck to my fingers with each touch. I tried to remove the pigment by rubbing my index finger and thumb together. I could see that others did the same, as multiple fingerprints were visible (Figure 11). After noticing the intricate symbols drawn into the pigments, I looked around the room for a small stick to mimic the shapes. Failing in my mission, I combined some of the pigments to see how they would interact when not strictly separated. When revisiting the exhibition a few days later, I could see where the work changed from when I last encountered it. I joined a group on one of my visits and noticed that groups of people often showed their contributions off to their companions or others who shared the space.



Figure 11: Johandi du Plessis, *A Game of cat's cradle*, 2022. Detailed view of the floor.

Exploring *A game of cat's cradle* as a multi-sensory space, allowed for an embodied and visceral experience with the work. At times, I acted curiously and impulsively as I moved to materials that grabbed my attention. My internal desires provoked my actions. This observation is extended by Pais (2014:56)



Figure 12: Johandi du Plessis, *A game of cat's cradle*, 2022. Detailed view of the earth pigments

who notes the characteristic of interactive installation to affect both the internal and external states of the interacting body, making its interior physical space evident. According to Driscoll (2020:30), movement can be understood as a way of knowing the environment through enaction.

However, tactility does not only include movement and can be extended to a wide range of skin receptors. These receptors are listed by Driscoll (2020:8,11) as mechanical (pressure and vibrations), thermal (temperature), kinaesthetic (movement), proprioceptive (orientation),

exteroceptive (external) and interoceptive (internal). It is worth noting, that my awareness of these receptors in relation to Du Plessis' artwork enhanced an embodied perspective and understanding of the work. For future iterations of *A game of cat's cradle* it is worth noting that access to a spatial glossary such as that explored by Driscoll (2020:8,11) could further inform the audience's connection to the work, which may otherwise go unnoticed.

Through interacting haptically and using my skin receptors as tools to understand, I can see similarities to my encounter and Driscoll's (2020:82) definition of haptic art:

It is not simply art that one is allowed to touch. It is art imbued with tactile intelligence. It exudes haptic awareness and calls for the sense of touch to embody a particular kind of consciousness: one that knows body, earth, gravity, weight, and pressure; one that is aware of time, memory, and mortality; one that feels at home in nature's laws and ways; one that embraces the material world and the spirit world.

Every being is therefore able to have haptic experiences with art if they are aware of the interactions between their internal and external worlds. Because certain materials have general connotations, assumptions, and known-use areas and evoke certain emotions (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:5). Tactile intelligence expands to include knowledge systems, experiences and perspectives that differ for everyone (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:5). For example, the shells and



Figure 13: Johandi Du Plessis, *A game of cat's cradle*, 2022. Detailed view of the mussel shells.

seawater (Figure 13) led to my association of the work with the ocean, which urged me to try to understand their significance in an inland exhibition. The carefully placed earth pigments and accompanying labels made me think of the tools used in excavation sites. The monkeys on the roof made me think of human evolution and how humans have used tools and pigments throughout time to capture and manipulate their environment. The installation venue also reminded me of human movement between places and how palaeontologists still seek to find the full story of the evolution of humankind. The artist's approach in exhibiting these materials together allowed me to create various connections and assumptions without wanting to refer to the artist's statement. In this way, Du Plessis' artwork offers a space for reflection, haptic discovery, and interaction, which the audience can explore without tools or textual prescriptions from the artist. The gallery space is also important as a site of production where the audience is invited to 'get to know' the materialities presented to them without strictures – there are no right or wrong ways to interact with *A game of cat's cradle*.

2.4 A textual dependence

Du Plessis' display methods and choice of materials urged the audience to discover the installation as a collection of materials and possible interactions. This opened the surrounding environment (NIROX⁵) and the experience thereof to audience interpretation through interaction. In contrast to this encounter, while experiencing *Bird sound orientations* (2022) at the Stevenson Gallery and *Material immaterial* at the Goodman Gallery, I discovered that my haptic exploration of the work was not

⁵ NIROX is a renowned sculpture park in Krugersdorp that regularly presents contemporary art exhibitions, residencies, and workshops.

sufficient on its own to make sense of the work. The dependence on textual direction could have been encouraged by several reasons ranging from the materials, the exhibition space or lack of experience with the artistic signifiers employed in the work. As such I used text to understand the artist's intent in both these works, to provide context to the materials used. In this section, I analyse and discuss the textual dependence I experienced.

For the artist to make haptic art, the work must activate the audience's skin receptors, providing stimuli for unlocking their past experiences, memories, and associations (Driscoll 2020:50). This occurs when a knowing, sensory body can source from a collection of experiences to create a haptic perception of the work. Consequently, the audience's experience resembles a performance - an enactment of an ongoing conversation and an iterative back-and-forth of information that shapes the interaction and audience experience. This performance can also apply to the artist's engagement during the creative process. An example of this is artist Rhamina Gambo, who explains that during the making of *Bird sound orientations*, she walked through Maiduguri in Lagos where "[she] saw [her] body as a porous tool, a carrier bag, where multisensory information could be gathered and stored during the documentation process" (Stevenson [sa]). In this way the artist pre-empted the audience's engagement when she employed her sense capabilities in a haptic exploration of her environment. Other artists who have employed walking as an integral component to their work, have likewise encouraged audiences to traverse their work to search for invisible linkages between objects (Chesher 2018:418-419). Gambo later imbued her artworks with the sensory information and embodied language she used to make sense of her surroundings during the walk. The embodied language she creates through her creative process is difficult to understand without knowing the artist's intent.

Bird sound orientations was exhibited at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg. The show featured videos, photographs, two-dimensional work, wall-drawn figures, found objects, metal and clay (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Rhamina Gambo, *Bird sound orientations*, 2022.

Gambo's creative rendition of embodied language is intended to simulate a multifaceted experience for the audience while hinting at the nature of play and childhood learning structures. Gambo cues the viewer in on a game, as her work playfully comments on the disorientation caused by censorship in schools. Here follows an account of my embodied phenomenological engagement with the exhibition:

Walking through the Stevenson gallery, I heard my shoes on the wooden floors fade into an eerie flute-like sound that would fade, return, and then be followed by bird sounds. I felt a sense of discovery while walking through the installation as I began to see recurring symbols and materials I had encountered before. I noticed that the metal and clay objects resemble familiar symbols that the artist created to remember her experience of walking through Maiduguri. The longer I watched the projected video, the more I recognised the symbols as part of Gambo's way of orienting herself in the environment (Figure 14). I became curious and wanted to use the objects and find out how they would respond to the unknown environment in which they were placed. I wanted to touch them, remove them from the dirt where they were displayed and mimic Gambo's movements. I didn't proceed to touch the works as they seemed meticulously placed and somewhat complicated. The objects in the installation emitted a smell, creating a unique mix of aural cues in each room. The main room smelled musty like old wood floors, and the room with the projection had hints of soil and a warm projector. Many moving images and fine details created a playful atmosphere bordering on the unknown. I felt uneasy and found it challenging to connect the childlike activities, games, and

the sounds of birds. I felt an instinctive urge to recreate the poses of the figures drawn on the walls, and I wondered if they were instructions that would allow me to unlock embodied knowledge or access the game's parameters. As I started imitating the poses, I realised I probably seemed childlike to other viewers.

As illustrated by my multi-sensory experience of Gambo's exhibition, a playful curiosity emerges through the art experience. I experienced an urge to pick up objects and make sense of the experience through play. I noticed that my understanding of the work remained playful and curious, as opposed to contemplative and self-reflective. Pais (2014:314) found that in some interactive artworks, "even if participants cannot grasp the symbolic meanings and are unaware of some layers of the work - the play experience is still meaningful". However, the work was not intended to be playful in this case, perhaps ironic - as it commented on school censorship. Restricting play in *Bird sound orientations* was a tool through which Gambo placed restrictions on the audience, effectively censoring their interactions and understanding of the work. The experience of censorship is successfully presented in *Bird sound orientations*. However, I could only fully reach this conclusion by reading the artist's statement. Although my associations and understanding of the work do not follow the artist's intent, my understanding of the experience changed after reading the statement, making me doubt the confidence I had in my subjective experience.



Figure 15: Rhamina Gambo, *Bird sound orientations*, 2022. Projection and sculptures on earth



Figure 16: Jeremy Wafer, *Material immaterial*, 2023. Installation view. (Goodman Gallery 2023)

I experienced a similar textual dependence while experiencing Jeremy Wafer's *Material immaterial*. I realised that I could discover the materials the work was made of but could not make sense of the content or context without the textual component. *Material immaterial* featured blankets, rope, cement, maps, geometric shapes, sea salt

and fabric (Figure 16). The artist's statement (Goodman Gallery 2023) informs the viewer that Wafer creates conceptual sculptures and site-specific installations that frequently explore dislocation, memory and materiality as the landscape and the sea become "containers of memories, desires and vulnerabilities". My embodied phenomenological experience of Wafer's installation was less forthcoming:

I first tried to make sense of the materials as if they were collected from the gallery's surroundings. Walking through the exhibition, I relied heavily on my senses to establish the material qualities of the objects presented. Exhibiting so far away from the ocean left the work feeling out of place, and many of the materials' nuances, traditions and uses were unfamiliar to me. The topographical maps featured large, blackened shapes, reminding me of my inability to navigate without a map and of feeling lost in an unknown place. Some of my interpretations aligned with the artist's intent, but after reading the artist's statement, I felt excluded from the exhibition as my initial understanding was contradicted by the artist's statement and I couldn't trust myself to make sense of the work by relying on my own experiences.

Reading the artist's statement made it clear that the objects in *Material immaterial*, such as the rope measuring tool in Figure 16, are used at sea to measure, sink, cover, and navigate. Therefore, the overall exhibition and the practical nature of the objects may have been more evident to someone with previous nautical experience. *A game of cat's cradle* also included references to the ocean, I could however make sense of the sea-related materials in that

context because I collected mussel shells as a child and brought 2-litre bottles, filled with seawater, home. However, due to my lack of seafaring experience, I could not rely on previous knowledge to make sense of Wafer's work. Instead, I used my olfactory senses in the material the work was made of in a more haptic and sensory way. I then attempted to relate the sensory information to my surroundings, and my limited contextual knowledge led me to make assumptions about the work which did not lead to a clearer understanding but rather a dependence on the artist's statement.



Figure 17: Jeremy Wafer, *Material immaterial*, 2023. rope and cement measuring tool (Goodman Gallery 2023)

Although the work provided plenty of sensory cues, I found that without relevant pre-established knowledge, I was dependent on the text instead of my own embodied experience. I may have responded to Du Plessis' work differently than to Wafer's or Gambo's work due to more shared epistemes or frameworks of knowledge, interests, material engagements and experiences. Du Plessis's work reminds me of my art practice, as I have worked with similar materials before; also presenting the materials in a state that seemed 'raw' or unworked by the artist, in so doing suggesting room for the audience to explore and interact haptically. This is perhaps an important observation as Gambo's and Wafer's work seemed less raw as the artists' control over interventions and the creative process is more visible in the artistic outcomes. Furthermore, these installations seemed to focus on creating contemplative objects with specific meanings revealed through their artist statements, whereas Du Plessis' work functioned without and beyond its textual counterpart.

Discovering a textual dependence in these installations and reflecting on my situational sense-making led to my conclusion that my lack of previous knowledge, and the displaced nature of the artistic symbols in the work caused my insecurity and textual dependence. Although Wafer's work aided in my

embodied sense-making to an extent, the installation seemed 'localised' to the artists' experience, rather than related to the environment surrounding the exhibition space.

One significant difference between the work of Du Plessis, Wafer and Gambo is the exhibition space. While du Plessis exhibited in a space situated on the grounds of a sculpture park, she also integrated her work with the surrounding environment. Both Gambo and Wafer were exhibited in galleries, which intend to exclude the outside environment and allow the work in the space to generate a disconnected contextual environment. In so doing, the discrete gallery spaces isolated the work, leading me to feel disconnected from it and perceive it as too complex to make sense of without understanding the artists' stated intent regarding the context in which the work was made. I believe that the gallery space itself (its white walls and little exposure to the world right outside its doors) would have discouraged my sensory sense-making if I had not entered the gallery with the methodology of this study in mind. However, I consider Wafer's work to be complete in itself and that they are successful, in the context of this study, they serve as examples of works that did not invite the necessary haptic interactions.

Through this comparative analysis, I found that Johandi du Plessis' Rhamina Gambo's and Jeremy Wafer's work provided insight into how three contemporary artists in South Africa engage with space and how the audience might experience their work in that space. Du Plessis' exhibition at NIROX encouraged the audience to explore the work haptically without relying on text to provide context. In contrast, the work of Gambo and Wafer presented in the Stevenson and Goodman Galleries encouraged audience curiosity that required textual guidance to provide context to the work. The analysis also revealed the multisensory and entangled nature of experiencing artworks and how the space itself influences the audience's perception. Through experiencing the exhibitions, I acted as an embodied, haptic performer, paying close attention to my different skin receptors and sensory cues in the work. The next chapter

provides an overview of my intentions, practice, and reflections on my creative process concerning spatial, interactive, relational and material aesthetics from a phenomenological viewpoint.

CHAPTER 3: TRACING MY CREATIVE PROCESS THROUGH MATERIAL THINKING

Building on the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter, this chapter situates ‘making’ as a process of enquiry and provides an overview of my creative processes. The overview follows the chronological journey of the work, highlighting my intentions, decisions, and reflections before, during and after the exhibitions. This chapter also provides detailed layouts of all the exhibitions to orientate the viewer. Two of the exhibitions were presented for a week each in March and May 2023 in the Link Gallery, at the University of Pretoria, where the audience could interact without prescription. The audience of these exhibitions will be understood as participants enacting an embodied performance with the work. The exhibitions are titled *Iteration I (2023)* and *Iteration II (2023)* and the participants consisted of invited visitors and students studying art or interested in art because of the location and its proximity to the Javett Art Centre, University of Pretoria, and the Student Gallery. The last exhibition in September 2023 in the Student Gallery had a longer duration and acted as a retrospective of the study. The installations were intended to encourage visitors to explore the work haptically, while the materials allowed for traces of their interaction to be captured and retained.

3.1 Making as a process of enquiry

The creative process and artistic making are explained by art professor Ellen Saethre-McGuirk (2022:14) as both an “organisational and re-organisational practice”. Furthermore, she states that making art offers new ways of “thinking about how we organise ourselves, how we are disposed to organise ourselves, and how we could reorganise ourselves” (Saethre-McGuirk 2022:15). Making art enables a space for reflection and change through which different materials, processes and techniques can be used between media. Saethre-McGuirk (2022:14) explains that she can envision the various possibilities for action within her practice and artistic space by honing her material knowledge and skills with tools. I similarly conduct experiments with media and modes of

artmaking to use and expand my skills, assumptions, and intentions. Even though I have an idea of the types of work and processes that I want to make, my engagement with the materials would be rudimentary without experimenting and thinking with the materials. Through testing and working with the materials to the point where I extend their boundaries and expose their limitations, I get to know them and use them to answer questions that arise through my artistic process. The practice-led process of this study enables me to focus on the physical properties and material thinking used to make the work. The open-ended and 'raw' nature of the works allows me to focus less on creating aesthetic work and more on creating an experience that would cater for an aesthetic touch.

Often, through making art, movements and gestures direct the creative process. Artists such as Driscoll (2020:3) use what she refers to as aesthetic touch as an active and exploratory process that involves the artist's somatic senses to enrich and amplify the meaning of the work. The artist can use forms of aesthetic touch by exploring the gesturing and mark-making abilities of materials. When the artist hones in on this type of touch alongside their material thinking, they use it to imagine many possible outcomes of intentionally using objects to cause different kinds of possible effects; sometimes using them differently from how they were intended to be used as Saethre-McGuirk (2022:12) notes. Using materials and tools intentionally, unintentionally, correctly, or incorrectly according to their original function could result in marks on the artwork's surface as the artist moves, processes, handles, experiences, and realises ideas.

These residues of action are indicative of the object's 'previous processes of making', their 'having been made' (Jones 2015:23). These residues could also be understood as joining signs of the same order or a collection of different orders such as phonetic-graphic, tactile-visual or gestural-aural (Collins 2006:220). In other words, traces act as evidence of the interaction of the senses; the visual and tactile inform and push each other forward, while the

tactile elements leave marks on the surface being explored. When drawing from life, for example, the eyes inform the hand about reality and the hand then traces the object's likeness on a page (Figure 18).



Figure 18: *Toolmarks*, 2023. Ink and metal detritus drawing, 297 x 420mm

To create *Toolmarks* (2023), I used silicone sheets dipped in ink and found objects made of metal. I used a form of aesthetic touch through drawing to discover the material's mark-making abilities. The silicone and metal created a collection of traces that varied according to their individual material properties and applications. My actions were revealed on the surface of the page as traces which hold a multisensory, thinking being who used skills, situational knowledge, and past experiences in the act of making. These marks capture how my creative process, material thinking, and bodily orientation were constantly negotiating with each other.

The relationality, interactive art-making process and the traces of interaction are essential to my creative process. Traces are used in my creative process as intentional and unintentional mark-making which show the kinetic and abstract terms through which thoughts are expressed when making art. These traces become similar to what Carlson (2017:59) describes as performative or live

drawing as “born from an outward gesture that links inner impulses and thoughts to the other through touching a surface with repeated graphic marks and lines”. I used my drawing to discover the qualities of materials, their mark-making abilities and traces to record my movements in the studio or gallery space.

In some way, the physical drafts with comments that I received from Dr. Grobler became a space for collaborative conversations about the research process through our mark-making. Her feedback, ticks, crosses, encircling arrows and fold marks acted as traces of her phonetic-graphic and tactile-visual orders and as a space for shared thinking. When confronted with her feedback, I enacted a ritual to document and destroy the physical copies, transforming them into new forms. Transferring the medium into different physical forms and digitising it initiated a conversation between the material and the digital. Using artificial intelligence to select the subject of my work, simplifying or re-meshing objects and drawing precise foldable maps – during the process I saw my role in this process as an initiator and archivist.

I often use repetitive movements to explore and get to know the materials, employing curiosity and compulsions as expressed by Driscoll (2020:34) as she discusses using her vague and impulsive feelings to enact her intention when making artwork, requiring a degree of trust in her body to make artistic choices. Artists practice by trusting their senses and creative compulsions to make embodied choices, which could lead to dead ends or failures where the artist's limitations (financially, conceptually, physically, and so forth) inhibit them, leading to a feeling of being stuck or uncertain of the way forward. When unsure, I often rely on conceptual development skills I learned during my undergraduate studies. These include changing the scale of the work, translating the concepts into other mediums, using repetition, adding, or destroying material, and combining different materials through assemblage. As discussed by my embodied experience with the work of Du Plessis, the practical skills, curiosity, and the urge to discover open many avenues to

explore in the creative process. According to Driscoll (2020:48), the artist's interactions with the materials can be initiated by struggle, longing, confusion, ambition, fear, joy and passion to create a result that is a complex and unruly time capsule that contains the embodied knowledge and actions of the artist. These time capsule artworks are presented to the viewers alongside an interpretation that allows the audience access to the particularities of the creative practice which takes form in the artwork (Driscoll 2020:48).

Interacting intuitively, sensorially and using material thinking is not limited to a physical, creative space. These skills can also be transferred between digital and physical spaces. According to Saethre-McGuirk (2022:32), making in digital space offers specific characteristics as the digital and physical space fluidly overlap. They might be experienced differently, but they are similarly material and require an actor to set the processes in motion. Like working in physical space, the artist cannot imagine the completed artwork beforehand, and it is through experimenting with the limitations of the interface that the objects come to be. Through operating the computer and adjusting the outcomes in a physical space, the digital space can be seen as "a range of realities" between the virtual and the physical (Saethre-McGuirk 2022:35).



Figure 19: *Glitches on fabric with extended edges and scuffmarks, 2023.*

Through my practice, I experiment with digital interfaces to abstract and create work, sometimes encountering failures. Throughout my process, I transfer work from the digital to physical reality. This digital-to-analogue translation or transference adds the marks of facilitation to the surfaces or edges of the work. Printing digital glitches onto fabric (Figure 19) presented an opportunity for unintentional expansion to the edge of the fabric and scuffmarks on its surface. Using making as a process of inquiry has allowed the direction of the study to be determined by the materials and their physical properties, which allows them

to have a significant role in the creative process. The next section provides an overview of my creative process to explain the decisions and translations I have made in this body of work; and how I transferred knowledge between media.

3.2 Cultivating my creative process

In this section, I offer a detailed explanation of my creative process that developed before the work was presented to the audience. Throughout the study, I used papermaking, analogue photography, and bronze-casting to develop my material thinking and creative processes. Paying close attention to the mark-making and holding abilities of the materials, I noticed that I transferred my practical knowledge between my practices and research - using processes as starting points for initial ideas and experiments.

After the *Good Neighbors* (2023) exhibition ended at Nirox, I noted that the rust and detritus that formed on the work, titled *Interim* (2022) was more pronounced where the grass met the metal surface. As I sanded down *Interim* and carefully collected the pieces of rust, I noticed that the texture of the grass had been imprinted onto the metal surface. Upon closer inspection, I saw that pieces of the paint pens were mixed with the rust and dried grass, creating a capsule that contained material information, such as the type of grass the work stood on, the amount of water the work was exposed to, and the marks made by the audience. I then decided to use bronze-casting wax to capture a different set of material information. The wax presented an opportunity for less prescribed audience interactions, which would also be more sculptural.

In this vein, I made *Waning* (2022) out of bronze-casting wax and presented it to the audience at the *Unsettling Paradigms: The decolonial turn and the humanities* (2022) conference and exhibition at Future Africa. I decided to follow a colleague's advice and add sculpting tools to the work as the wax was intended to decolonise the medium by allowing the audience to explore the medium and create their memorials. Some members decided to write in the wax with the tools, while others used the tools to create textures and figurines.

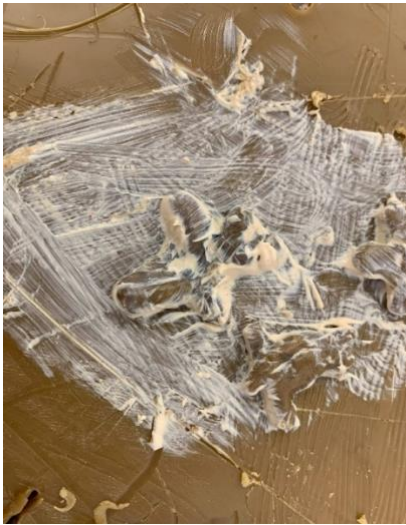


Figure 20: Detail of the silicone mould on *Waning*.

After the exhibition, I wanted to experiment and cast the marks in something other than bronze. I decided to coat a piece of the work in a thin silicone layer to start with, but once it was dry, I decided to peel it from the surface (Figure 20). The thin silicone had a fleshy texture and balloon-like smell. It curled into organic shapes that stuck together in some places and could not be stretched back to its original form. When observing the intricate details and material nature of the silicone objects, I found that they were capable of evoking some of my childhood memories. I proceeded to explore the material qualities of the silicone objects and decided to apply ink to their surface. I could then use the object as a stamp to preserve the textures from *Waning* on paper. Working with the objects, I noticed that they could produce more intricate, expressive, and varied marks than what I first believed. I used the object beyond stamping and rather pushed, pulled, dropped, pressed, and rubbed the silicone objects, sometimes only grazing the page through rhythmic movements. These actions caused varied and expressive marks that captured the texture of *Waning* more abstractly.

Although I wanted to experiment with papermaking from the start of the study, I became more aware of the role of paper while doing administration as an intern⁶, doing research, and being creative during my processes. I started thinking of paper as a residue of the internship, and the MAFA process which could hold a lot of information beyond text. Crinkles, fingerprints, and scuffmarks on a page's surface all reveal the conditions, movements, and points of contact between the page and its environment. I used recycling and papermaking processes to create a book that held various textual and environmental information on different pages. I realised that the more pulp I

⁶ In 2022 I applied to be an art education intern under the Department of Education at the University of Pretoria.



Figure 21: *Assimilation*, 2022-2023. Installation view.

added to the water, the thicker the paper became. As the pulp was removed from the water, the pages became thinner and more fragile. Starting with my proposal, I continuously added the drafts of my dissertation, research notes and discarded drawings to a large piece of gauze which eventually resulted in *Assimilation* (2022-2023). The papermaking process I used to create the work offered a space where I could physically destroy, manipulate, and control the information on the page.

As I reached into the bucket of water and pulp, I noticed some pieces of paper retained text, from unrecognisable marks or shapes to letters and a few words. As the pieces of paper from different drafts mingled and reformed into one entity of information, a physical representation of my practice-led and creative process unfolded. Some of the words were recognisable and reminded me of the influence of my supervisor on the study. *Assimilation* (Figure 21) is the artefact of a process that allowed me to visualise and reflect on the key concepts and ideas of the study, the successes and failures, the discoveries, and the knowledge that I gained through creative and textual research. The physical outcomes of the research recorded on paper were only a fraction of the knowledge and direction of the study. I wanted to engage with a similar process for the virtual documents exchanged between Dr Grobler and myself. After importing the virtual pages into Photoshop, I used the 'select subject' function to create layered digital collages. Using this function permitted an artificial intelligence to select what it thought to be the subject on each page and



Figure 22: *Tangible and transparent feedback*, 2022. Digital collage.

separate it from the rest of the page. The resulting digital collages were layered text, written comments, and highlighted areas on a transparent background (Figure 22). These collages, titled *Tangible and Transparent Feedback* (2022), forced the comments into obscurity and further into ephemerality. While the original text I typed was confined within a square, the marks from Dr Grobler’s feedback extended beyond the typed text, towards the edges of the page.



Figure 23: *Ephemera* (virtual version), 2022.

After recycling the physical and digital documents, I wanted to use the digital files to create objects. These objects were intended to add virtual mass to the comments while exploring digital space. Experimenting with Blender (a 3D modelling app) I extruded the pixels into virtual 3D space, then re-meshing them. The resulting abstract digital objects titled *Ephemera* (2022)

(Figure 23), did not resemble the individual comments but was based on the comments. These shapes revealed how the digital interface interpreted and interacted with the comments as 3D objects. The intricacy of the shapes fascinated me, and I wanted to extrude them into the physical world, to feel their flat surfaces and angled edges. I wanted to know the comments as objects, and to see how they interact with the studio and gallery environment — how they make space and influence interaction.

My first attempt at extracting the objects by making them of sturdy cardboard was not successful. However, while creating foldable 3D shapes, the program glitched as it struggled to complete the complex and precise task (Figure 24). Consisting of colours and pixels that appeared to be random, the glitches were an unexpected part of the creative process that represented failed digital actions and a residue of the transition between digital and physical realities. I decided to document and print the glitches

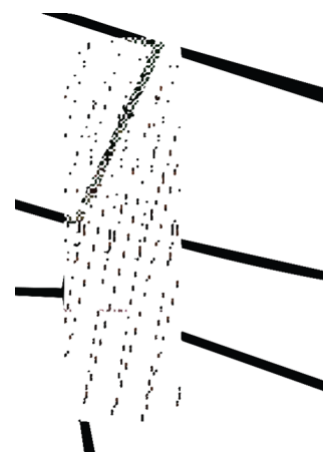


Figure 24: Still of a *Glitch*.

on paper as a type of digital mark-making. I intended to present the glitches to the audience to see how they would interpret the marks on a material that featured frequently in my creative process.



Figure 25: Detail of the Sound-to-light unit.

Throughout the study, I recorded the sounds of the making processes with the intent of using them to create a video or audio work. I recorded the wet sloshing noises of the paper pulp and the sound of the noises from the printer when printing the glitches, to preserve the more ephemeral traces of the process. In 2021, I saw soldering kits at an electronics store. The soldering kits were intended to teach someone how to solder with varying levels of difficulty. While in the store, I saw a kit for a 'sound-to-light unit' which translates sound directly into light (Figure 25). These kits inspired me to explore if they could be used to take analogue photos. The soldering process produced globs of soldering alloy and LED anodes and cathodes (or legs) that I decided to collect. I was not sure if the LED lights would emit a bright enough light to expose the photo paper, but I decided to put the sound-to-light unit and a piece of unexposed paper into a light proof box. The resulting images had differing areas of exposure which following the development of the images, appeared dynamic and abstract. In some places, the LEDs and wires of the sound-to-light unit were visible.

The photos titled *Ambient Abstractions* (2023) (Figure 26) acted as visual representations of the aural residues of the making process. Throughout the creative process, I focussed on abstraction and how I

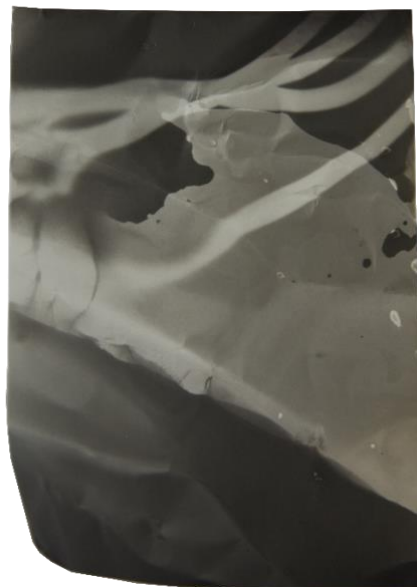


Figure 26: *Ambient abstractions*, 2023. Analogue photograph.

could co-create work with other actors such as the artist, audience, artificial intelligence, and material properties. The interaction between these actors produced residues that I interpreted as clues to the types of knowledge that were created and shared between them. Employing the creative outcomes and practical knowledge of this section, the next section will discuss how the work was presented to the audience.

3.3 *Iteration I*

The layout, display decisions, and my response to the audience during the first exhibition, *Iteration I*, will be discussed in this section. Most of the creative process and decisions revolved around presenting the work to an audience, recording, and then responding to their interactions. Visitors were encouraged to visit my exhibitions after walking through the others. I decided to be in the space as the participants interacted to document their actions and the ambient noises produced in the gallery. This gave me valuable insight into the sense-making process of the audience and how their interactions emerged through their experience. Additionally, I documented through my embodied and haptic perspective, focusing on the traces of interaction. Considering the audience as co-creators and their traces as clues to their interaction, was essential for this study to emphasise the gallery as a makerspace. The audience, materials and artificial intelligence are available for interaction within the gallery space.

Iteration I featured the paperwork *Assimilation* (Figure 20); the silicone objects and ink drawings, wax blocks, glitches printed on paper, rust flakes from *Interim*, a black box with the sound-to-light unit and photo-paper inside, soldering globs and LED legs and lastly, brick pieces I found outside the gallery. Initially, I also included an augmented reality (AR) version of *Ephemera*, but after a feedback session with my peers, Fine Art staff and supervisors, Adele Adendorff (2022) proposed that the AR objects did not add to the work and contradicted the focus on materiality presented by the other objects in the space, especially the printed glitches. I decided to remove the QR code and place a greater emphasis on the physicality and materiality of the objects I presented to the audience. The objects

were displayed as outlined in the following floor plan (Figure 27) on black metal plinths placed parallel to the walls, on the floor or as hanging work.

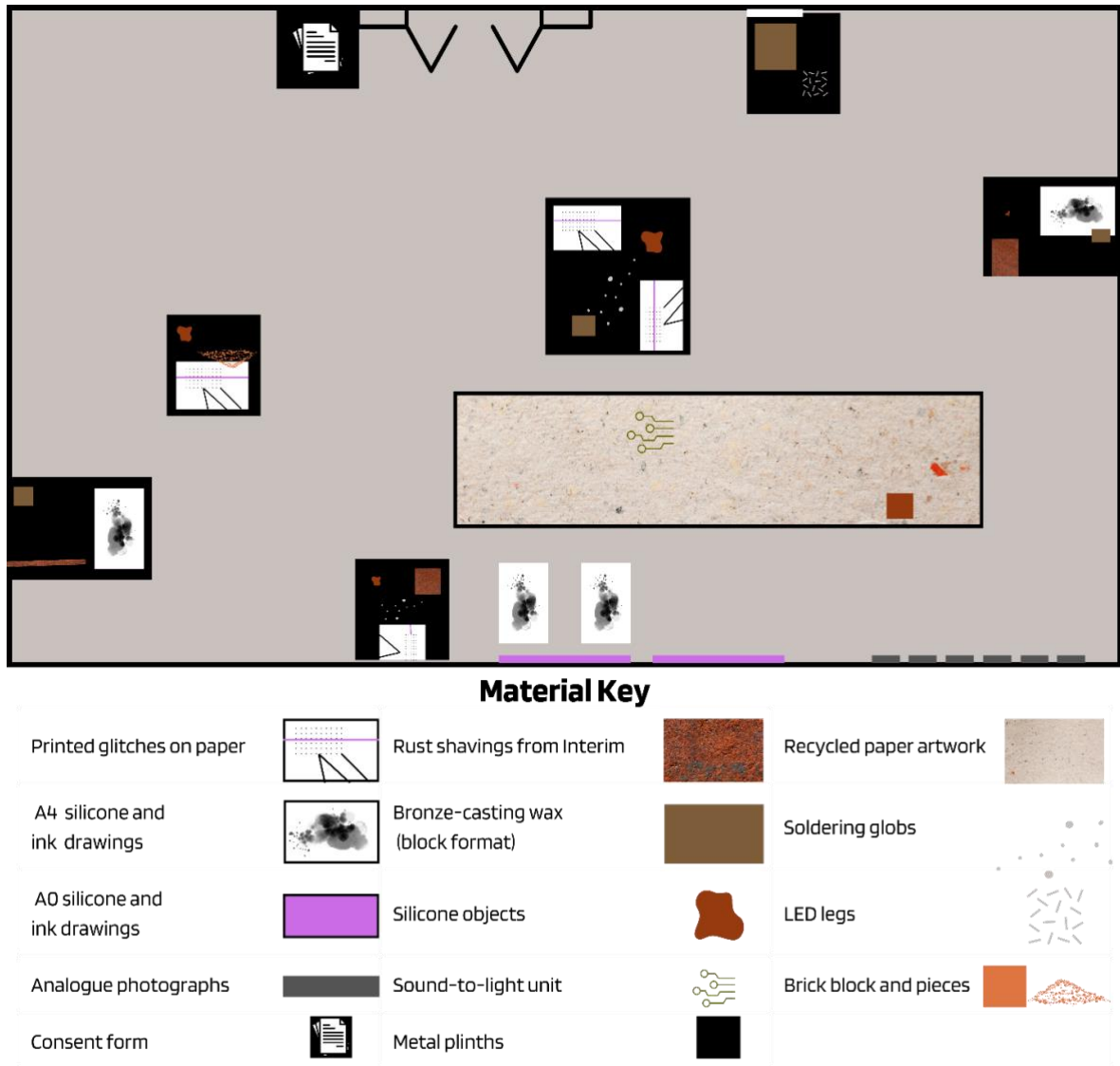


Figure 27: Layout of *Iteration I* (2023)

Assimilation (Figure 21) inspired the participants to make holes in its surface and step on it. It was challenging to let the audience interact with my work and not feel precious about it. Additionally, this interaction made me question how far I would allow the audience to go when participating in the work, potentially destroying it. I had to make peace with the idea that the unknown nature of the work could lead to violence and destruction. Printing the glitches on paper and

presenting them to the audience prompted the use of the pages to test the mark-making abilities of other objects. One participant used the printed pixels to guide the placement of brick pieces, while another used the lines as a folding guide. *Assimilation* inspired some participants to pick up the work and later bury one of their peers beneath its layers of unrecognisable information. Some participants interacted with the paper works by folding them into origami – tearing off pieces until they resembled something, even using the pages as surfaces on which to play games.

Throughout *Iteration I* I noticed that the participants moved the materials from plinth to plinth to explore how they relate to other materials in the space. Curiosity and discovery played a role in the audience's sense-making and meaning-making as they moved the materials and connected or embedded materials into others, forming micro-narratives through assemblage. Some of these micro-narratives included embedding brick pieces, soldering globs, LED legs and other materials into the wax blocks.

I responded to the audience by testing each material's ability to be used as a tool and to make marks. Following an urge to preserve these conversations, I proceeded to form the wax blocks into different shapes. I decided to use the wax blocks as tools, allowing the heat of my hands and contact with different



Figure 28: *Artefacts*, 2023.
Bronze, metal wire and brick pieces.

surfaces to influence the shape. The resulting objects (Figure 28), shaped by conforming to the negative space between my hands and other surfaces, featured handprints, the embedded foreign materials, and the micro-narratives of the participants. I decided to cast the objects in bronze through the lost wax method. The embedded materials had been permanently embedded in the wax, and following the high temperatures of the bronze casting, burnt away, leaving voids and ash in

the bronze forms. The ten bronze pieces titled *Artefacts* (2023) were intended to provide contrasting material to the audience, allowing different micro-narratives to form and reveal as well as capture the traces of the audience's embodied experience.

I used the remaining pieces of *Waning* to create thinner sheets of wax to encourage more sculptural interactions. After the exhibition, I experimented with acetate as a material that would easily capture the traces of movement.

In mimicking the actions of the participants, I intended to understand elements of their embodied experiences and the types of traces that were left behind.

After completing the actions, I noticed that the acetate was charged with static electricity that held onto fine dust particles (Figure 29). Fine, directional scratches formed where the acetate met the floor and my feet. Similarly, I wanted to preserve the layout and physical qualities of some of the traces through blind embossing. I placed paper over the materials on the floor and distributed my body weight over the

page. This process allowed the material's form and, in some instances, colour to shape the surface of the page. Mimicking the participant's movements and embedding the placement of objects, allowed the ephemeral interactions to be preserved in a material form and through photographs.



Figure 29: Detail of the movement scratches on an acetate sheet, 2023.

3.4 *Iteration II*

After *Iteration I*, I decided to use wooden plinths and tables placed diagonally, to evoke the feeling of a workshop that invites change and participation.

Additionally, the white plinths were added because the marks and residues were easier to see compared to the black metal plinths of *Iteration I*.

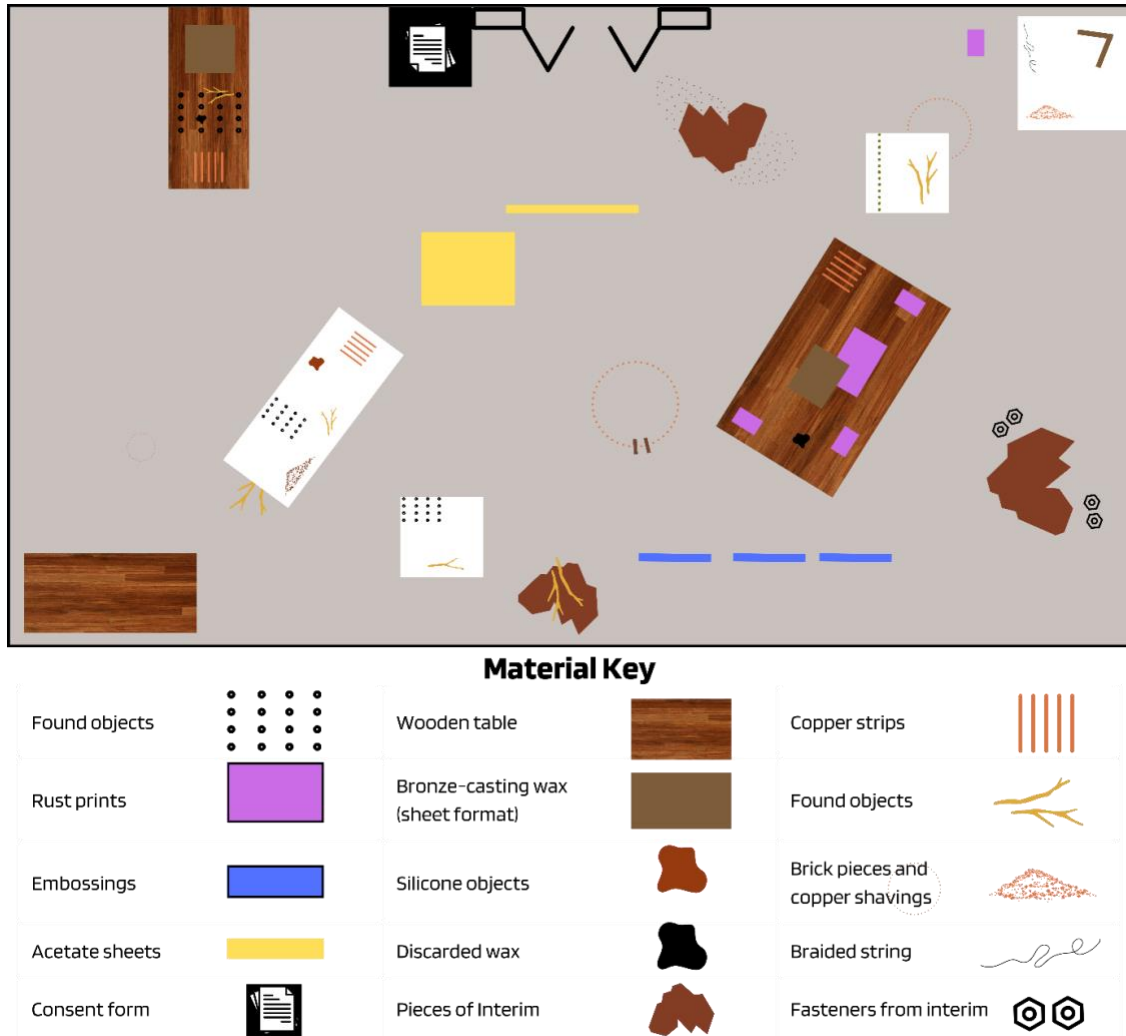


Figure 30: Layout of *Iteration II* (2023)

This section explores the layout, the curation, and my response to the audience of the second exhibition, *Iteration II*. The exhibition featured thin wax sheets, *Artefacts*, rust flakes and pieces cut from *Interim*, silicone objects and two large-scale ink drawings, copper strips and flakes, embossed textures on paper, scratched acetate and found objects. The materials were displayed on the plinths, tables, and floor, and some were hung from the ceiling (Figure 30).

The participants used the wax sheets more sculpturally by making boxes or envelopes that held other objects deemed valuable. The acetate sheets were also treated similarly as participants used the hanging system to fold the sheet in half and use it as a place to store other objects. Some participants embedded copper flakes into the acetate sheet on the floor as they listened to the noise it made. *Artefacts* were also used as tools to manipulate other objects and make marks on the plinths. I noticed throughout *Iteration II* that the participants moved the plinths to influence the flow and presentation of the materials unlike in *Iteration I*. Throughout the exhibition, I noticed that the plinths became a material to interact with and were used to direct space rather than being only a display method. The audience seemed more comfortable with changing the layout of the space rather than only moving the materials from plinth to plinth.

In preparation for *Iteration II* (2022), I included more objects found in and around the studio and gallery to provide materials that would add a site-specificity to the exhibition. Additionally, I presented the audience with copper strips and flakes I collected from the studio whilst a group of undergraduates were busy with a metalworking project (Figure 31). The copper was discarded as an excess of the creative process of others and reminded me of my previous experience with the medium in an etching project in my undergraduate studies. I remember the laborious process of polishing the copper to a mirror finish and



Figure 31: Copper strips, 2023.

working with the etching acid to create an image. Presenting the copper pieces to the audience to interact with was an act redolent with rebellion, as I recalled how I had struggled with the oil-free surface required by the printmaking process.

Iteration II provided valuable insights into the participatory sense-making of the audience and my artistic practice. As I reflected on the audience's engagement with my work, I became less concerned about the visual aesthetic of the work

and more about what the audience's interactions can reveal about sense-making and how I use the materials in my artistic practice. Although *Iteration I* and *Iteration II* presented different materials and aesthetic experiences with the audience, the artistic outcomes and exhibitions embodied the practice-led methodology as the materials inside were actively changing and influencing the participants and their interactions.

After both exhibitions concluded, I added another set of paper drafts and drawings to *Assimilation* (Figure 21), which allowed the ink to seep into the next section of the work. Following this, *Assimilation* grew into a three-part artwork as can be seen in Figure 32. This development was not only a chronological visualisation but also a metaphor for my subjective experience of my practical and research process.



Figure 32: *Assimilation*, 2022-2023. Installation.

Using recordings of ambient gallery sounds, I created a series of 14 images titled *Ambient abstractions* (Figure 33). Parts of the sound-to-light unit are



Figure 33: Photo positives on Perspex

visible in the photos and act as a point of connection for the audience. After developing the images, I found that crystals formed as the developer and fixer evaporated. The photo negatives were inverted, retaining their original colours and textures, and printed on Perspex. Printing the images on Perspex introduced a material like acetate, allowing the photos to accumulate scratches and particles on their surface.

I approached the Makerspace at the University of Pretoria to 3D print the objects I made in Blender. I asked them to 3D print twelve unique objects created from each draft of the dissertation that Dr. Grobler provided feedback on. The twelve-part series titled *Ephemera* (Figure 34) was printed by adding thin layers of white plastic on top of each other to form the shape. Some of the shapes were unbalanced and needed a temporary support structure that could be removed after printing. Even though the supports seemed random, they were designed as specialised structures to ensure the print could be completed without being compromised.



Figure 34: *Ephemera*, 2023. 3D printed plastic

After the exhibitions, I wanted to create metal sculptures as a poetic interpretation of the interactions. I used found metal objects (residues from a machining process), which I discovered when visiting a scrap yard, to initiate a series of assemblages. These metal objects were combined with other elements of the creative process, including materials from my studio space



Figure 35: Metal found object with silicone and copper strips, 2023.

(Figure 35). After working with the metal objects, I explored their ability to make marks by stamping, dragging, pushing, swinging, and dropping them onto paper. In some places, the marks resemble those made by the silicone objects exhibited in *Iteration I* and *Iteration II*. These similarities led me to explore how the marks made by the silicone and metal objects would interact

in a series of ten drawings titled *Toolmarks* (Figure 18). Sharing the studio with other art students allowed me to incorporate the residues of their process into my work. I added wood objects to the found-metal objects alongside the silicone objects.

3.5 Traces of Interaction

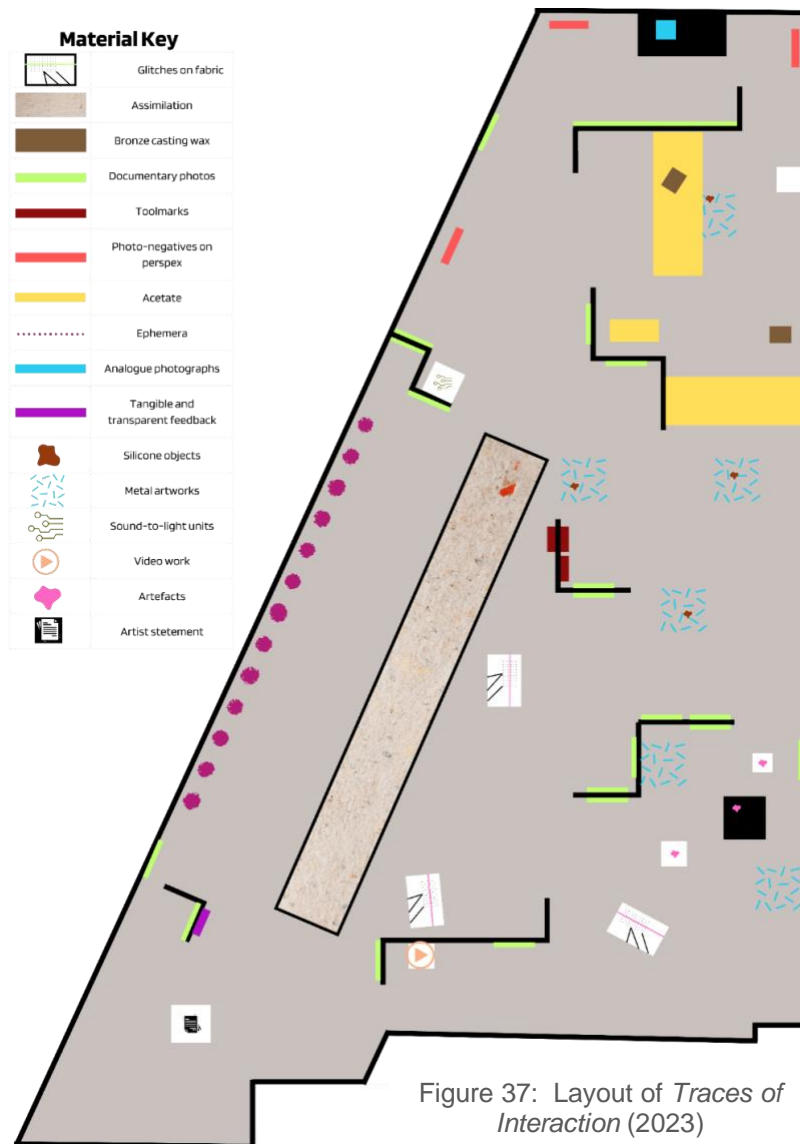
The final exhibition, *Traces of Interaction* (2023) acted as a third iteration and a moment for reflection and was displayed in the Student Gallery at the University of Pretoria. The exhibition included works from the two previous exhibitions as well as reactionary work and artworks translated into different media. The exhibition included works such as *Assimilation; Tangible and Transparent Feedback; Ephemera; Toolmarks and Artefacts*. In addition to these works, the exhibition also included glitches printed on canvas, three large-scale acetate works, wax sheets and objects, sound-to-light units, positive prints on Perspex, and metal found-object assemblages. I decided to print the glitches on canvas instead of paper for this exhibition to create a different opportunity for interaction (Figure 36). The heat transfer printing process embedded marks and tiny pieces of string into the white surface of the glitch. My work was also printed in between the work of other clients, adding marks on the border of my print. I decided to keep the marks as a residue of the printing and translating process.

Contrary to the previous exhibitions, the artworks in *Traces of Interaction* were accompanied by printed labels with titles, descriptions, and sizes, even though many of the works could potentially be part of future iterations and changes. Titles were given to these works as they culminated the creative process and were more resolved than the other pieces in the space. Additionally, the exhibition featured documentary photographs I took of the participants in *Iteration I* and *Iteration II*. Upon reflection, these images may have discouraged the



Figure 36: *Glitches* printed on fabric, 2023.

audience from interacting with the works, if they were deemed to be too prescriptive. One significant interaction was an assemblage made by a participant where they moved the pieces of *Ephemera* around on their stands and added pieces of *Assimilation* to the stands. The practice-led nature of the creative process explained here illustrates how the ideas, materials, successes, and failures influenced each step of the process and inspired constant change and reflection.



Traces of Interaction was intended as a retrospective exhibition and therefore, the work was displayed in a way that would take the audience on a journey through the creative process. As such, the works were grouped together to

allow the audience the opportunity to make their own connections. These decisions affected the kinds of participation as the audience tended to stay within contained areas when they interacted with the artworks. Additional textual elements, such as an accompanying artist statement, provided more context to the work. I assume that the vastness of the gallery space and the structured display may have influenced the audience to not ‘ruin’ or ‘destroy’ things, as their interactions were less expressive compared to the previous iterations. Exhibiting printed photos of previous interactions may have further deterred the viewers, as they could compare their actions to those of the first audience and may have been intimidated by this comparison. Participants could only reference the physical traces in the first and second exhibitions involving other active participants. This reticence reinforces that creating a makerspace in the gallery and urging the audience to engage more confidently requires specific space, display, and intimacy considerations.

Throughout the exhibitions, I used a practice-led methodology and focussed on my intuitive material thinking (Groth & Mäkelä 2017:6) to create and present work to the audience. Throughout my creative process, I developed work that would allow the audience to have haptic interactions through aesthetic touch (diagrammatically recorded in Figure 38). My practice unfolded organically as I discovered different aspects of each material or process, developing my material skills, I transferred the skills between the physical and digital realms and across different processes whilst regarding the resulting work as feedback from the different agents that influence my work. The audience’s aesthetic touch and their engagement with my practice influenced the types of work I made and how I approached the materials.

This chapter discussed the role of making in practice-led research by positioning it as embodied intentional and incidental actions which lead to traces through physical and digital processes. Figure 37 illustrates an overview of my creative process from the artworks’ inception to their inclusion in the exhibitions throughout the study and finally their inclusion in *Traces of Interaction*. By discussing my creative process and intent before, during and

after the exhibitions, this chapter provides the viewer with a clear understanding of my material thinking, intent and reflections. These concepts will be applied in Chapter Four as the interactions of the participants and how they engaged in sense-making and social understanding will be discussed.

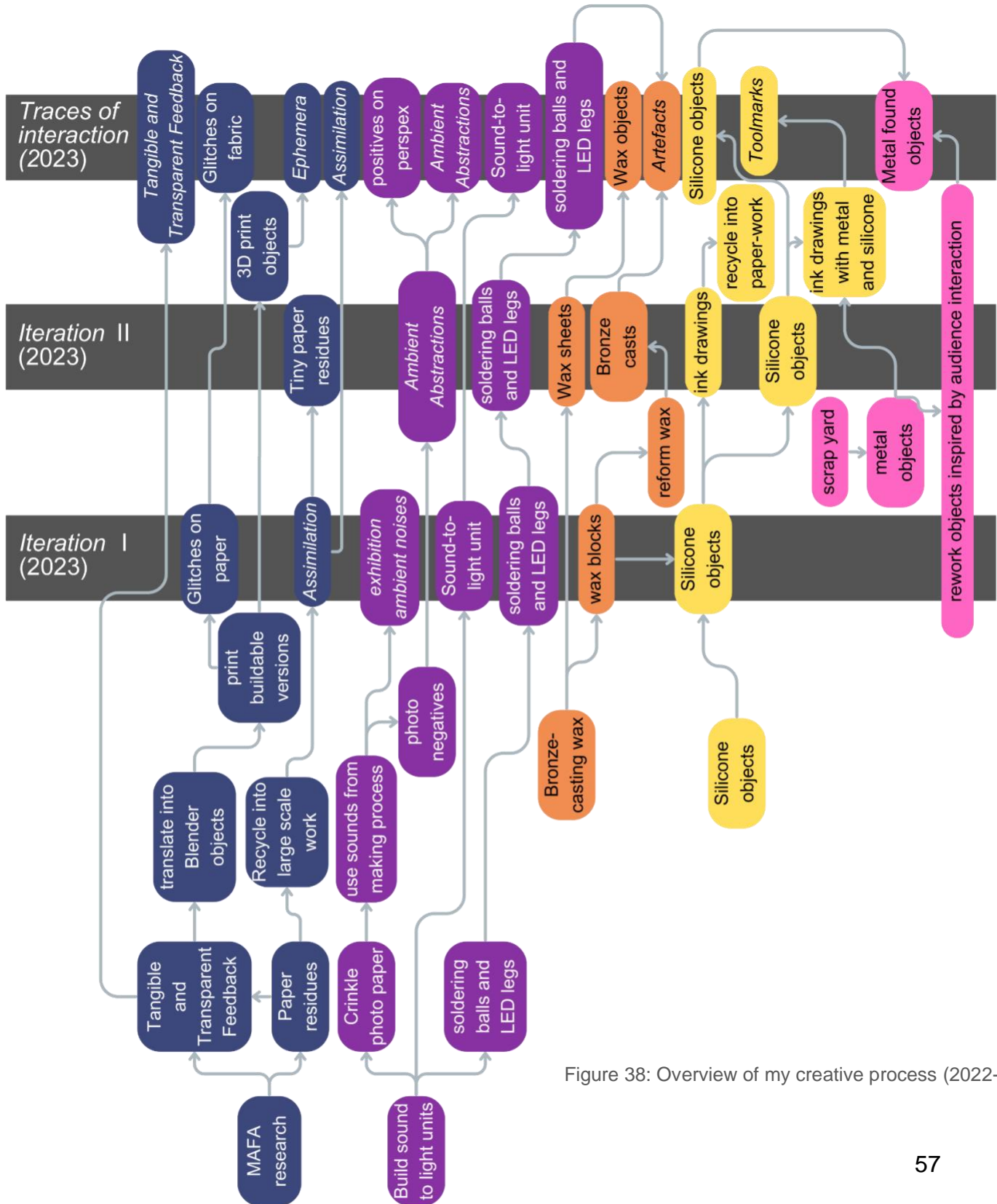


Figure 38: Overview of my creative process (2022-2023)

CHAPTER 4: AUDIENCE INTERACTION AND SENSE-MAKING

In this chapter, I focus on the audience's interaction with my work. Because the work was intended with the audience and their interaction or discovery in mind, I will start by discussing the material properties of my creative work and how the audience can understand and make meaning using these properties. Before any interaction, the audience member must imagine how to interact with the work by speculating how and what the object's material properties mean to them. Once the audience understands and connects with the material, the potential ways of interaction are revealed. This chapter considers how the material's tendencies influence the intent of the audience and influence the resulting interactions.

4.1 Material properties and audience intent

In this section, I discuss how the material's properties influence the audience's interactions through material thinking and situational knowledge creation. By encouraging the audience to interact with my work, I explore how participants used materials to create meaning; to make the gallery and the work more susceptible to co-creation by analysing the residues of action and in doing so, elevating their meaning. Before the audience could participate in the exhibitions, I asked them to sign consent forms (Appendix A and B) and then proceeded to assure them that they could interact for the time they felt was appropriate.

Mediation can be understood as marking boundaries and the dynamic configurations of bodies and possibilities created by those boundary marks (Shivers-McNair 2019:2). 'Mediation-as-boundary-marking' involves not only ongoing becoming but also the ongoing un-becomings and re-becomings of bodies, media, and meanings (Shivers-McNair 2020:2). "The boundaries of objects fluctuate in interactive art, as the visitor participates and physically activates the artistic apparatus" (Pais 2014:115). Physical activation here can

be understood as making a way through which the audience can discover, manipulate, destroy, or add to the material properties of the work. Making can be considered “a way of being in contact with oneself”, as Groth et al. (2013:8) explain:

Our body is in contact with a material that we bend to our will, but the material also has its own will; thus, there is a struggle between our will and the material. We make concessions to the material and compromises with ourselves due to the material's will. It is as if there is communication with and through the material, and the outcome expresses this struggle or collaboration. Therefore, the outcome of this process is not a pure expression but rather evidence of that process. In other words, it is an artefact that embodies the self and the material.



Figure 39: Participants around a plinth.

As the participants gather material information, they compromise and adjust their intent according to the qualities and affordances of the materials. As Bennett (2010:37) explains, the emergent properties of the medium and audience are generated in the moment of interaction as each can

“make something happen”. This suggests that the process of making is a dynamic to-and-fro of actions determined by the materials, the imagination, and interactions (Figure 39). Materials can be understood as alive with possible interactions, which the audience can speculate about, explore and test.

Gathering sensory information about the material qualities of objects directs the interaction. The interaction can also change the material - for example, body heat is enough to change wax to a more malleable state. Changing the materials can leave residues on the surface that can, according to Rosner, Ikemiya, Kim & Koch (2014:1649), reveal the attributes (material qualities),

trajectories (temporal patterns) and entanglements of the object. These residues can affect the interactions of others as the marks provide cues to possible interactions. Furthermore, the iterative nature of the exhibitions allowed some audience members to be recurring visitors. Some participants were invited to *Iteration I (2022)* and *Iteration II (2022)*, allowing them to interact with both exhibitions. One of the revisiting participants shared with me that they could use the knowledge they gained in *Iteration I (2022)* and apply it to similar materials in a new format in *Iteration II (2022)*. Therefore, the possible interactions depend on previous knowledge, material tendencies, the audience's imagination and the inscribed marks or residues of earlier actions.

A block of wax, for example, allows for some interactions and not others. I experimented with the medium in my undergraduate studies and when producing *Waning (2022)* in the initial stages of this study, which gave me insight into the type of interactions the material allows. Through my interactions, I used heat sources to shape the wax, but when presenting the wax in block form in *Iteration I (2022)* without designated tools, the audience used the wax in ways that I did not consider before. Participants embedded objects into the wax, wrote on it using the LED legs or their fingers, built structures with the wax and used it as glue. The block was used as a tool because it was not malleable due to its thickness, shape and cool weather that week. Fascinated with the embedded materials, I wondered how they would influence the bronze-casting process and how changing the thickness of the wax would influence the interactions.

In the casting process, the soldering globs melted away, the paper pieces incinerated, and the brick pieces stayed in place; each had a different effect on the resulting object. Participants of *Iteration II* turned the bronze objects around in their hands to establish what they were, and how to hold or use them. First, the participants had the *Artefacts (2023)* close to their bodies, supporting them with their torsos and then held them at a distance, as far away as they could, without feeling like they would drop the objects. For *Iteration III* I additionally cast

the wax into sheets which inspired more sculptural interactions such as making boxes to hold objects, filling space, connecting materials, and cutting out and creating figure-like forms (Figure 39). Instead of a tool, the audience used the sheets as a material that can be manipulated, cut out, bent, and formed.

Interestingly, juxtaposing *Artefacts* and the wax sheets encouraged the participants to use the bronze objects to manipulate the wax sheets. Participants used the sharp edges of one object to cut shapes out of the wax sheet and the blunt rounded edge of another to join pieces and hit them onto a plinth. In this poetic moment, the audience used *Artefacts* created by the audience with wax in *Iteration I* as tools to manipulate the wax in *Iteration II*. The solid and sharp nature of the bronze objects offered contrasting material properties to the thin, malleable wax. Preserving the wax and its information as bronze and juxtaposing it with the wax sheets inspired a unique collision of materials which resulted in an even greater collection of information (Figure 40).



Figure 40: Wax to bronze process: wax block with embedded objects, object to be bronze cast, interactions with the bronze object and interaction in *Traces of Interaction*.

I suspect that this moment may have slipped away from the audience because the material properties of the bronze may have been too far removed from that of the wax. They used *Artefacts* as tools that appeared uncomfortable because of their irregular shape. As the oils and dirt from the audience's hands transferred to the bronze surface, the dark patina was polished from the edges of the forms due to repetitive movements and contact with other materials buffeted the objects. Presenting the *Artefacts* in the exhibition, *Traces of Interaction* (2023), the participants mainly moved objects without changing their form with one person balancing one object on the skirting in a corner of the room.

Handling the bronze objects required a different touch to the fragile paper works. *Assimilation* (2022) (Figure 21) required a soft touch whereas *Artefacts* (2023) demanded stability, a certain degree of strength and commitment from the participants. Driscoll (2020:22) explains that hands are capable of various types of touch by employing the fingers and palms in different sequences; the index and middle fingers allow for fine manipulation, guiding and searching, and the ring finger and pinkie offer support and strength. Participants appeared to be part of a ritualistic performance around the plinths which, according to Kearney (2016:8), allowed the co-creation of internal logic and sign systems that emerge from the materials. In this process, the audience engaged in 'art learning', where the experience was processed through reflection, conceptualisation, and production, allowing the unconscious to become conscious and inner reflection to transform into action (Räsänen 1999:198). Therefore, the audience creates signs and transforms their bodies into signs as they act in the space.

4.2 Sense-making

As the audience performed in the gallery space, they could be observed making sense of the materials, environment, and other participants they encountered through their senses and would revisit and interact with objects throughout their experience. When an audience visits an exhibition, they can be understood to

construct a map that places the objects in the space and that they can refer to throughout the experience. According to Driscoll (2020:28), this map can contract to focus on the objects in arm's reach or expand to include the surrounding space and things it wants to do or touch. In conjunction with movement, the sensory map allows the body to explore the knowledge and potential actions available in a space (Driscoll 2020:30). Exploring the possible actions enables the audience to organise themselves and the objects in space while generating meaning and making sense of the things they encounter.

It was evident throughout the exhibitions that with verbal permission, the audience was more confident to act on their curiosity and explore the space. The verbally affirmed audience was constantly carrying objects, moving them from their original positions. The participants forced the materials to form new relations, often remarking that "this one goes here" or "this belongs there". This suggests that the place of the materials was subjectively determined and, in some cases, determined by their material relations. As the audience moved the materials, they intended to discover and/or unlock potential interactions and opportunities for different meanings. Exposing the potential for multiple meanings, each audience member created assemblages which allowed them to discover the individual properties and how the materials could collide. These assemblages were the audience's way of making sense of the combined material using micro-narratives. Other participants or objects in the space could change these micro-narratives as the assemblages and actors in the space were constantly changing.

These micro-narratives were part of the different language structures the audience used that allowed others to access the meaning. These language structures created tension between haptic exploration and material thinking (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:11) for which this study argues. However minimal and despite my efforts to minimise text exhibitions, some audience members still tend towards dependence on language and signification throughout their interactions, telling stories as they interacted, some of which were irrelevant to

the exhibition. Although text, signs and language also draw on context, background and uses to be meaningful and texts do bear reference to the phenomenological world (Chesher 2018:427). In this study, texts have a tangible materiality which can be felt and sensed. Some audience members used materials to demarcate areas on the floor, make assemblages and create messages or symbols. Humans are primarily linguistic sense-makers, which, according to Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher (2014:1092), involves “comprehending texts or verbal utterances” and “enacting the balance of the idiosyncratic and the in-common” (Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher 2014:1092). Some language systems, like dialogue and body language, require interpretation and comprehension from embodied participants who share the same space and are actively working towards making sense of the work.



Figure 41: Snowman made on a glitch with soldering globs and LED legs. 2023

However, as the participants added symbols and text to understand the work, it guided others down a similar path of significance. Although the participant initially drew two circles to explore the mark-making abilities of the soldering globs, once the circles reminded them of something they completed the character by giving it eyes, a nose, and accessories (Figure 41). The participant also wrote down the word “snowman” below the figure which made the subsequent participants read, look at the figure, and consciously avoid disturbing it.

Symbols like the snowman (Figure 41) became similar to text, and as the exhibitions accumulated signs, the audience would read and interpret them rather than interact haptically and exploratively. The signs would guide the audience’s thinking and sense-making, and in the instance above, change their behaviour towards the collection of materials by being careful to not to disrupt the recognisable sign. Contrary to my initial belief, participants inscribed marks not to relay a message but instead to use symbols and text to justify their engagement and influence the stories being told.



Figure 42: Participant creates micro-narratives with discarded materials. 2023

Observing the audience's interactions, it was clear that although some members understood the traces of others as intended, they nevertheless constructed new stories and further altered the objects (Figure 42). In some cases, participants read materials that others discarded as complex stories and symbols. Therefore, both the intentional or unintentional marks can be understood as signs because they signify movement or actions (Malafouris 2020:99). Additionally, mark-making can be understood as the 'mingling of material enactive signification and creative thinging' (Malafouris 2020:95). This conceptualisation of mark-making suggests that 'thinging' or making is an intrinsic activity and response to understanding materials. Subsequently, signification is an inescapable element of sense-making. These language systems were aspects of the participation process that I could not control and even though the study aimed to aid deliterisation, the interactions showed that language (both spoken and written) is integral to sensemaking.

The symbolism of marks is subjective and depends on the participant's imagination. An example of this type of symbolism is two participants who used unintentional and discarded materials on a plinth to create a narrative. One participant commented that a plinth with random materials looked like a dragon's lair, complete with bones of its victims (bamboo sticks), a footprint (rust flakes), a nest (leaf litter from outside the gallery), treasure (copper strips and intricately shaped wax pieces) and piles of ash (brick pieces). As the two

participants interacted, they shared what they thought the materials represented. While moving the materials around to better fit their vision of what the materials symbolised, they would comment on what the other was doing. One participant recognised that the rust flakes resembled a footprint, and then decided that “it must be a dragon” based on the surrounding materials. Reflecting on this materially-led process of sense-making, it is clear that the materials inform the symbolism and their micro-narratives, instead of there being an initial intent or subject matter in the mind of the audience participant. The micro-narratives created by the participants revealed how they subjectively make sense of materials and artworks by rationalising them as part of a story. Many of the participants created these micro-narratives using material thinking (Mäkelä 2007:179) and engaging with the properties of the materials. The creation of micro-narratives did highlight the importance of social dynamics and sense-making and how the materials, environment and other actors in the space participated in, offered cues, and influenced the creation of these language systems.

4.3 Social understanding

This section analyses the social and participatory sense-making of the audience as they encountered my work. I also discuss how language systems, play and sense-making are forms of coordination which form the audience's embodied perception of the experience. Using a social form of material thinking through language and play, the audience can form meaning (Cuffari, Di Paolo & De Jaegher 2014:1092). Additionally, De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007:496) explain that in socially interactive encounters, individuals are constantly making sense of and affecting each other's experience. Sense-making is also a pattern of coordination as participants mirror, anticipate, imitate, and synchronise their behaviours (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007:491). Accordingly, De Jaegher & Di Paolo (2007:496) suggest that participants exercise patterns of coordination and their implications for meaning should be approached in terms of how the meaning-making process is affected by the participant's coordination during interaction.

When sharing a space, the participants can engage in different patterns of coordination as they observe, share, and direct the experiences of others. I observed that when a participant discovered other potential meanings for



Figure 43: A participant stepping on an acetate sheet, 2023.

materials, they usually informed others by participating in some or all the patterns of coordination. The causality of this coordination can be understood through the interactions of a group of audience participants: One participant accidentally stepped on a piece of acetate and discovered that it made a peculiar noise (Figure 43). He in turn told another participant of the noise and directed him to imitate his movements and recreate the sound. Curious about the sound, one of the pair bent down and rubbed his fingers over the acetate surface. He discovered that the sound emanated from the copper flakes that pushed through the acetate's surface under their weight. Sharing the discovery led both participants to discover the aural and tactile properties of the colliding materials, creating a unique situational and social experience between them.

Participants used the patterns of coordination to discover the material properties of the objects. As the first participant interacts with an object, the rest of the group may consciously or unconsciously mirror, anticipate, imitate, and synchronise their behaviours to discover the material similarly. While exploring the material properties individually, one group of participants occasionally observed each other and changed their actions accordingly. They eventually synchronised their actions and discovered enough information from the materials that they could work together to engage in 'thinging' together and make something through a shared experience.

‘Thinging’ together (Figure 44) indicates that the group engaged in participatory sense-making. Another example of this type of sense-making is the actions of a group of four which started to explore the space by venturing to a plinth and touching each material. They shared their findings and then ventured off to other plinths, collecting and sharing the materials. Sharing what they discovered, they engaged in conversations, told stories, and engaged in a social form of material thinking. The participants appeared to use each other as sounding boards for ideas, actions, and potential meanings. They remembered the layout of the room and would frequently refer to materials elsewhere and incorporate them into their social interactions.



Figure 44: Group sharing their thoughts. 2023.



Figure 45: Tic-tac-toe board. 2023.

The same group used materials to create games, illustrating the imaginative power that transforms ordinary objects into other things or things with extraordinary powers (Pais 2014:113). This power is often observed in children’s play, where a ‘make-do’ attitude is prevalent. Other

members acted playfully by joking, gesturing, and laughing, which illustrated that social play can temporarily emerge from the relations and negotiations between audience members (Pais 2014:136). The playful interactions of this group of participants were due to a specific set of elements of the group dynamic; their imaginations, their ability to communicate and their playfulness.

One instance saw a group use the materials to demarcate the edges or 'board' game, 'tic-tac-toe' (Figure 45), making use of rust flakes and pieces of brick and silicone instead of drawing noughts and crosses.



Figure 46: Participants playing hopscotch on my drawings. 2023

After a few rounds of playing, another audience

member from this group used drawings as hopscotch squares (Figure 46). Further to this another used a drawing as a dustpan to collect brick pieces and demarcate a circle on the floor formulating another game. All the games were simple, allowing others to join with ease. After the group left, the subsequent audience members recognised the 'tic-tac-toe' board and used it to play more rounds of the game. Although I intended the materials and the gallery to be used as considered and reflexive exploration, I realised that play was an important form of sense-making and material thinking. The audience used the materials to challenge each other and spent more time in the gallery and with the materials than many of the other participants who were not playing games.



Figure 47: Participants passing the sound-to-light unit around to figure out how it works, 2023.

As the participants spent time in the gallery, the meanings of materials changed for everyone. When faced with the black box housing the sound-to-light unit, a member started by picking up the box and shaking it. After showing it to the other group members, they proceeded to open it and attempt to figure out how the objects inside worked (Figure 47). Using their limited previous knowledge, they tried to understand how the elements were connected, turning it around as they contemplated its use. Each member had a chance to touch the object, suggesting that when objects do not make sense, the individual turns to the group to provide more information. The LEDs flashed in response to the continuous conversation, leading the group to believe the object was not working correctly.

Some groups who entered the gallery shared their interactions, while others acted more independently - allowing for pockets of dialogue to emerge from their interactions. One group member directed another towards a specific interaction, telling him what to do next while relating the materials to their shared memories. In comparison, another group walked through the gallery, looking to each other for guidance while asking, “What are we doing?” and left after receiving no response. While interacting, some participants shared stories with others about where the materials came from or for what they could be used. Some members joined in the dialogue, adding, or changing elements of the story. Sometimes, individuals watched or listened to other groups - likely wondering how the group knew what to do. “What if we...”, “Look at this...” or “What are you making?” were frequently uttered among these group interactions, suggesting the influence of group dynamics on the interactions and art experience.

In one instance, two participants explored the space in complete silence. One member set off to explore the space independently, focussing all her attention on the task ahead of her with her back turned to the other member (Figure 48). Moving through the site in opposite directions, the members gave each space to explore the materials individually, eventually circling back and encountering each other's interactions. One participant played tic-tac-toe by herself, scratching a further game-board into a piece of rusted metal from *Interim* (2022). The two silent students



Figure 48: Participant acting alone. 2023.

continuously looked up throughout the interaction, hoping to find the other's gaze to confirm that they had interacted enough. A continuous adaptation of their body postures, avoiding eye contact, walking around, and retreating into liminal spaces (such as the corridors between the galleries or the courtyard) enabled the audience members to stay silent (de Vaujany 2019:219). Although these participants did not use spoken or written language to communicate, they used their bodies to perform in space and communicate with body language.

4.4 The gallery as a makerspace

Activating the gallery through audience interactions transforms the space to become like Shivers-McNair's (2021:29) definition of a makerspace: a shared social space for visitors; where they can form and share knowledge, experience, perspectives, and form relationships while in the space. Considering the installations of my work as makerspaces, revealed the depth and in some cases playful nature of the audience's sense-making. In this section, I reflect on these explorations into exhibitions as makerspaces; the audience as makers; and my creative response to the traces of interaction.

Although *Iteration I* and *Iteration II* had structured and geometric layouts, the audience was not afraid to explore the space sensorially and move the

displayed materials to some degree. The installations were set up in an intimate way where the materials were near each other, allowing the participants to explore and relate the work to each other as a first step in engaging. The audience usually discovered the materials sensorially and then explored the material's mark-making abilities. As they moved through the space, the participants would revisit the plinths and move the materials to new locations. In so doing, they related the materials to others in the space and uncovered their meaning potential. The physical qualities of the materials influenced if, how, and how far the materials were moved, for example, the wax blocks in *Iteration I* (Figure 49) were moved from plinth to plinth and used as a tool to discover and preserve the material qualities of other objects.



Figure 49: *Iteration I*, 2023. Installation view.

Most participants were objective-oriented and used the materials to create something or 'leave their mark' in the space. These 'marks' would range from touching everything to writing with or on something, to destroying or building with the materials. It almost seemed like they wanted to leave traces or evidence of their labour and presence in the space. It should also be acknowledged that some participants only interacted because of my presence. Being in the space, watching and documenting them potentially placed the audience participants under pressure to perform and to 'do what [they] can' to leave a trace of their actions in the space. Some participants were not inspired by the materials to explore the materials further than the initial touch while others only engaged superficially, leaving evidence of their being in space without engaging haptically. On these occasions, the participants were 'absent-

mindedly' discovering the materials until they thought of something to do with them. Some participants decided to resort to symbolism after their initial explorative engagement, using the materials to write, create assemblages or build structures.

I intended for both *Iteration I and Iteration II* to be dynamic by not prescribing the interactions and allowing the audience to change any aspect of the space. I approached both exhibitions as makerspaces and frequently added or removed artworks which allowed the space to become more active. I intended to create as Carroll (2004:101) suggests, 'a cultural site where the interpretation skills of the artist and audience can be practised' by deliteralising the space. This encouraged the audience to discover the materials and engage in sense-making through experiential knowledge, material thinking, mark-making, play, language, and social dynamics. Because of the practice-led methodology, I incorporated what I had learned from *Iteration I and Iteration II exploring* the audience's interactions with different aspects of my creative process. I intended the white plinths of *Iteration II* to be solid structures that would hide materials and encourage discovery while simultaneously being invisible against the white gallery walls. The participants used the plinths as a surface to hold marks and to direct bodies in space by changing the layout of objects. One participant used the plinths to designate the exhibition area while others used the same plinth arrangement to hide objects.

Throughout the exhibitions, I offered little guidance to encourage the audience to create their own embodied experience. As the participants built up their knowledge through their haptic engagements, they became the 'knowers' who shared what they knew with the others in the space. The 'knower' and maker roles were continually redefined as individuals shared knowledge and participants used the patterns of coordination to learn from one another. The participants were using the gallery as a makerspace to create a site for examining what counts as making, and who can be makers. Some visitors were students from visual arts or architecture, and they either asked me about my

creative process or told me about theirs, or how they might use the materials differently. Some students engaged with the exhibition through the embodied language they developed in their creative practice. Using the materials presented to them, the students made symbols, indicating that the materials were used as a 'means to an end' or to accomplish a certain vision rather than exploring the materials themselves. However, to use their own embodied language and creative practice to engage with mine still requires material thinking (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:2) as the students apply their skills and aesthetic touch to different materials.



Figure 50: *Traces of Interaction*. 2023. Installation view.

As stated earlier in this chapter, *Traces of Interaction* (Figure 50) was intended as a retrospective exhibition in the Student Gallery. Each section of my creative practice had its own designated area in the gallery to create a path for the audience which would explain my practice without depending on the mediating text. In keeping with this more contemplative purpose, the artworks were displayed in a more static and structured way and were exhibited alongside labels and photo documentation of the interactions in *Iteration I* and *Iteration II*. I assume that the vastness of the space and the display (useful for practical examination purposes) may have pressured the audience to not 'ruin' or 'destroy' things by touching or moving them out of their designated areas. I included an artist statement to give some context to the work without allowing the audience to depend on it for answers. Exhibiting printed photos of previous

interactions may have further deterred the members as they compared their actions to those of previous members.

In *Iteration I* and *Iteration II*, the participants engaged with the work through material thinking (Bolt 2007:3) even though some interactions seemed superficial or absentminded. The intimacy and lack of text did not discourage the audience from participating and many explored the material properties of the work through making in the space. Therefore, the first two exhibitions successfully created a makerspace in the gallery and invited varying degrees of haptic participation. Although many of the interactions eventually led to signification, the participants used the materials available to them to think or create with. I presume that the absence of documentary photographs and text encouraged the audience to explore the properties of the materials and engage without feeling pressured by what had already been done. In this way, these exhibitions demonstrated how the gallery can be used as a production site where artist-artwork-audience relationships can be investigated and manipulated. This is a praxis with the potential to invigorate South African exhibition practices as well as give audiences agency and creativity in their art-viewing experiences.

During the interaction process, the appearance, structure, shape, colour and orientation of materials were changed. Many of these interactions such as collecting, marking, building, moving, or destroying left physical traces in the gallery. These traces indicated movement and intentional action which other participants used as cues to the sense-making process. This chapter recounts observations relating to how the audience participants at all three exhibitions shaped a social understanding of the exhibition alongside peers in the gallery-makerspace; demonstrating how a makerspace was created within a formal gallery context. This was achieved through 'open-ended' installations that prompted the co-creation of meaningful action. This chapter also considers the influence that other participants (peers) have on the sense-making and understanding process through language, play and material thinking.

Additionally, the situational, previous, and practical knowledge used by the participants to make sense of the installations is also considered. The conception of the gallery as a makerspace is developed further through these exhibitions, which also tested different display systems such as using metal or wood plinths and wooden tables, hanging work from the ceiling, and placing objects on the floor.

CONCLUSION

During the process of making *Traces of Interaction* (2023) (Figure 48), several experiences influenced my way of thinking about the relationship between the artist, audience, traces, and artwork. Although I had always been intrigued by the complexity of materials and how to make sense of them, I only recently started exploring these questions through my creative practice. In the body of work created for this study, I let the materials influence my practice and encouraged the audience to become co-creators in the process. I became more aware of the relationality of the materials as I engaged with them and watched the participants during the exhibitions. Analysing the work of international and local artists while planning *Iteration I* (2023) and *Iteration II* (2023) and allowing the participants to act without prescribed actions allowed the exhibitions to become active and continuously changing. The analysis and observation allowed me to make creative decisions and changes from exhibition to exhibition while also allowing me to react to the interactions through intuitive material thinking and aesthetic touch (Driscoll 2020:34).

In Chapter Two, I proposed that exhibition areas can be understood as spaces that capture the traces and micro-narratives of interaction, which in turn influence current and future audience engagements. I analysed the work of Katinka Bock and Nicolás Lamas to demonstrate their approaches to enable the gallery space to become a site of production. Through these examples, I realised that when the gallery is used as a production site, the artist, audience, material, and space constantly negotiate and define their edges through interaction. These negotiations require a haptic engagement of complex kinaesthesia (Pais 2014:126) where the actors discover and relate to one another. As the audience interacts with art through space and time, they gather sensory information that can be translated into knowledge. Therefore, the gallery acts as a site where knowledge and creative making are produced by artists concerning spaces and audiences. Space is therefore where meaningful action can be produced through interaction which leads to the production of alternative knowledge creation.

To situate the study within contemporary South African art practice, I undertook to explore what a haptic engagement of art would entail. Providing a phenomenological and embodied account of Johandi du Plessis's *A Game of Cat's Cradle* (2022), was an attempt to engage with her work haptically, impulsively, and out of curiosity. However, experiencing Rhamina Gambo's *Bird Sound Orientations* (2022) and Jeremy Wafer's *Material Immaterial* (2023), I noticed a textual dependence which discouraged my haptic and embodied sense-making activities as an audience member. Only after reading Gambo's statement, did I realise that the frustration I felt with the tactile restriction of her exhibition may encourage the audience to empathise with the censorship of the education system in Lagos that the artist explores and comments on through her work, providing a space for reflection on the topic. After reading the statement, my frustration felt justified as censorship and the inability to access materials were ingrained into the experience and evoked my empathy for the subject. Experiencing the work of Johandi du Plessis, Rhamina Gambo, and Jeremy Wafer revealed my embodied perceptions and offered valuable insights into how the audience could make sense of the work through material thinking (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:7) and sensory exploration.

At the inception of my practice, I wanted to use participatory art to explore how the audience made sense of art. I intended to create exhibitions that were participatory employing the concept of a makerspace. Throughout my creative practice, I collected materials and made artworks with audience interaction in mind. I intended to provide an active space where the audience could discover the potential meanings and physical properties of materials within the gallery. These interactions allowed the gallery to become active and understood as a makerspace. Interacting sensorially through discovery and curiosity allowed the audience to develop a sense of confidence to develop their own sense-making abilities (Driscoll 2007:312).

The body of work unfolded through my engagements with materials from different creative processes. As I explored the mark-making abilities of the materials, I also aimed to understand the material properties, limitations, and similarities of each material. I remained responsive to the materials throughout the creative process as I translated materials from the digital to the physical realms, noting that as I moved from one medium to another, supporting materials were required such as the support structures for *Ephemera* (2023) and the extended edges of the glitches printed on fabric. Throughout the creative processes, I employed the audience, materials, artworks, other students, artificial intelligence, and myself to relate to, change and influence the work. This gave me perspective and time to reflect on the abstract and unpredictable nature of these processes. Inviting others to participate in the work required a considerable amount of trust in the audience and technology as the outcome and direction of the study depended on their influence and care. Additionally, this process of trusting allowed me to reflect and spontaneously react to the relationality in the research, writing, making, and exhibiting process.

Throughout the study, I emphasised the use of the traces or residues of interaction. The materiality of traces does not only reveal actions or movement, but material traces are also products of knowledge and sense-making. Interactions occur either intentionally or unintentionally and are cues to how the audience moved and discovered materials in space through analysing the documentation, notes and characteristics of marks left in the space. Traces could also be understood as the collision of the edges of objects and space, revealing an active layering of information as seen in the work of Nicolás Lamas and the accumulation of micro-narratives seen in *Iteration I* and *Iteration II*. Traces are produced in this study by the artist and the audience, blurring the boundaries between authority and who is considered 'a maker'. Documenting and analysing the traces of interaction offered this study insight into how the material evolved through interaction and how the audience made sense and meaning through movement.

Even though participants stayed for various amounts of time, they claimed they were “done” or “did all they could,” suggesting that they were satisfied with their interactions or had soothed their curiosity. However, the open nature of the exhibitions implied that these artworks could never be complete. Some members asked if they had to revert the materials to their original state or ‘fix’ the work, often concerned that they wouldn’t be able to because they could not remember where the materials came from. One member stated that he was “shy to interact at first, but when I started, I couldn't stop”, suggesting an engaging dialogue between the materials, exploration and meaning creation. Of course, every participant interacted until they were ‘done’ by adding, destroying, changing, or moving the materials while exploring the meanings of the materials.

The participants also created traces through intentional and unintentional actions when engaging with interactive artworks. Firstly, the potential ways of interaction is revealed by imagining how to use material through general associations and known use areas. Chapter Four discussed how material characteristics influence the intent of the audience and the resulting interactions. Additionally, this chapter analysed how the audience made sense using their material thinking abilities enabled by their interactions with the installation. The audience could also shape a social understanding with others in the space and activate the gallery through co-creating meaningful action. As the participants engaged with play and making in the gallery, they imbued the work with subjective micro-narratives which were captured through the residues of their actions. The social understanding of the audience further enabled different knowledge and language systems to form and be discovered in the gallery.

This study found that under these circumstances, the gallery resembled a makerspace because the traces of interaction demonstrated that the audience used degrees of material thinking (Groth & Mäkelä 2016:7) to make sense of the materials presented. Through developing and engaging with making, relationships, stories, spatial manipulations, community, and teaching - the audience activated the gallery and used their situational and practical knowledge

to engage with my work. Although many of the interactions emerged from sensorial engagement, some of these lead to signification which in turn, shaped the experience of others. This caused tension between language and the haptic interactions that this study intended to facilitate.

Even though some of the participants responded to the work through signification, these interactions still involved aesthetic touch. Using this type of touch, which is more common in artistic practice, allows the audience to become performers and co-creators as they embed practical knowledge into the work. As they use their aesthetic touch (Driscoll 2007:126), the medium reveals its meaning-making potential and the possible actions for the audience and artist to discover.

Documenting the participants through observations, photographs, and sound recordings provided a multisensory account of the interactions. However, by not conducting interviews, the audience's intentions, gained knowledge, and insights could only be speculated on based on observation/fieldwork. Initially, the study was set up in this way so that the audience could interact without the pressure of being interrogated afterwards. However, interviews may have provided different insights than the physical traces, language I heard and the interpretation of physical actions I could record through my embodied perspective. This could be an avenue for further exploration that may need an interdisciplinary analysis or review of the social dynamics and relations of this study. To make the gallery more like a makerspace, the artist could work in the space alongside the participants as a performer. This could allow a knowledge exchange between the artist and audience through which authorship and knowledge production can be questioned further.

This study offers an embodied perspective and critical review of three contemporary art installations that highlighted the sensory engagement, haptic interaction and material thinking that an audience may engage with in different locations; pointing out the sensory engagements and material thinking that aided the experience. These embodied experiences demonstrated that, for the

audience to use their material modes of thinking, sensorial curiosity can be stimulated, instead of relying on didactic symbols or signs which can foreclose haptic experiences. It is also beneficial for the work to have a degree of anonymity or be 'raw', not have titles or textual descriptions and not be too textually narrated for the audience to make autonomous sense of the work and relate it to their own reality.

This study also defined and determined contemporary uses of space as a production site to aid the gallery in becoming a makerspace. My creative practice intended to highlight the properties of materials from processes in my practice and inspire an appetite for discovery from my audience. Furthermore, the work was juxtaposed and displayed intimately with little to no explanation or pressure from the artist to understand the artist's intent. Finally, using specific media such as wax, bronze, paper, brick pieces, soil and white plinths proved successful in capturing and revealing the audiences' interactions while providing cues to their sense and meaning-making abilities.

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APPENDIX A

Photo and voice recording release form



School of the Arts

Photograph and video consent form

Traces of interaction: a practice-led exploration of "makerspaces" in South African art

Marika du Toit

18009876

I hereby give consent to The University of Pretoria and artist Marika du Toit, to use my image or sound of my voice as recorded in any photograph or voice recording as specified in the tick boxes below in her Master of Fine Art titled *Traces of interaction*. I hereby grant Marika du Toit and the University of Pretoria the irrevocable and unrestricted right and permission to copyright, in its own name or otherwise, and to use, re-use, publish or re-publish the photographs or sound recordings taken of me or in which I may be included. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of my images, likeness and/or sound of my voice. I hereby agree to release, defend, and hold harmless The University of Pretoria and Marika du Toit, its legal representatives, licensees and assigns and all persons acting under its permission or authority, from and against any claims, damages or liability arising from or related to the use of my photographs, likeness, or sound of my voice for documentation purposes.

I give consent to the following:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Posts on social media | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of my Voice and words | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I can be identified on the photo (recognised by people who know you) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I do not want to be identifiable on the photo | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am older than 18 years of age | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I have read this release before signing below and fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. _____ (Signature) (Date)

_____ (Printed Name)

My formal contact details are:

Marika du Toit, MA Fine Art at the School of the Arts: Visual Arts of the University of Pretoria:

Cell: 067 905 6108

Email: marika.dutoit@gmail.com

Supervisor:

Dr Nicola Grobler

Tel: 012 420 2353

Email: Nicola.Grobler@up.ac.za

APPENDIX B

Project details and participation form



Informed Consent and Photo Release Form: participant

Traces of interaction: a practice lead exploration of makerspaces in South African art. A participatory art project by Marika du Toit, a MAFA (Fine Art) candidate

MA (Fine Arts) Creative practice and Research of Marika du Toit 18009876
Supervisor: Dr Nicola Grobler
BKS 859 (Fine Arts)

Project Description

Marika du Toit is a MA Fine Art candidate at the University of Pretoria's School of the Arts: Visual Arts. Her project titled *Traces of interaction: a practice lead exploration of makerspaces in South African art* consists of interactive exhibitions where the audience is encouraged to experience the work with all their senses. This study will follow a practice-led approach where the audience-artist-artwork-space relations will be explored. By making interactive artworks re-working, and re-presenting them, this study will reflect on both the materiality of the artwork and the exhibition experience. After the exhibition, the artworks will be documented and enter a repetitive cyclical creative process and form part of the practice-led research process. Artworks will be cleaned, dismantled, cast in another medium or recycled as part of the creative process. Practice-led research aims to investigate the audience's interactions with art and the traces they leave behind on the artwork's surface. Engagement comes in different forms and discussion, walking around, or experiencing the work sensorially will all form part of the research for this project. The form of participation is completely open to interpretation.

Procedures

The exhibitions will take place in the Link or Student Gallery at the University of Pretoria. The exhibition will consist of participatory artworks that will invite the audience to participate through sensory cues. You will have the opportunity to participate in any number of the artworks presented in the exhibition. You can interact with the art by writing, touching, or listening to the artworks and walk through the exhibition and experience the art through your senses or movements. You will not be limited to engaging in a prescribed manner and could therefore participate in any way you wish. Before entering the exhibition, each audience member should be made aware of the study and of the photo release form. If you did not RSVP, you will be guided through the form in person before participating. Only once you gave your consent will any photos be taken. The photos will be used as documentation of the participation and could be used in a research dissertation, at conferences, as discussion points, as part of the catalogue or on the School of Arts or Marika du Toit's social media platforms.

Benefits

You will get an opportunity to explore art sensorially with no restrictions. This aims to encourage you to experience future exhibitions differently and in more body-centric ways. You will be encouraged to express your individuality and you might start to trust yourself more when they encounter an art exhibition. The researcher will have financial gain if the artworks sell and she can add them to her portfolio.

Risks and Discomforts

There could be a risk that while engaging, you leave fingerprints on the surface of the work. Everyone will be responsible to interact with the work within their own limits and understand that Marika du Toit will not be liable for any injuries. If you add any sensitive information such as fingerprints, names, dates, detailed descriptions, or images, as part of your interaction with the art you do so voluntarily.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any repercussions and there will be no loss or penalty if you do not wish to participate. The RSVP form will clearly state that you are entering the exhibition space voluntarily and that you can leave at any time. You will have the opportunity to ask questions about the study before you sign the consent form. You will not be forced to participate nor stay for any amount of time. The consent form at the door of the exhibition will reaffirm this.

Confidentiality

Photographs and audio recordings will only be taken of you if you give your written consent, and you will have the option if you want to be recognisable in the images or remain unidentifiable. Sensitive information that you share, such as specific marks, names, etc could be visible in photographs of the work, used in this study. All confidential information will be stored on a private hard drive with restricted access. The consent forms will be stored safely at the artist's home.

Data Storage

The Principal Investigator, Marika du Toit of the following study titled *Traces of interaction: a practice lead exploration of makerspaces in South African art*, will be storing all the research data and documents referring to the above-mentioned study at the following address: University of Pretoria School of the Arts, Visual Arts, Visual Arts Building, Hatfield Campus, 0028. Start Date of Study is 2022-02-01, end date of Study is 2023-09-01 (This period includes the time needed for conducting the research as well as writing up the results). The storage of the abovementioned data and documents must be maintained for a minimum of 10 years from the commencement of this trail/study. The data will be stored until 2032. Start of Storage Date is 2022-02-01, End of Storage Date is 2032-12-01.

Parental or legal guardian information

Your child may participate in this research study if they so choose. This information document will help you to decide if your child may want to participate. Before you agree that your child may take part, you should fully understand what is involved. If you have any questions that this document does not fully explain, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher. If you are the legal guardian of a child who would like to participate in this research study please note that your child's participation is entirely voluntary. Your child can refuse to participate or stop at any time during the study without giving any reason. Your child's withdrawal will not affect his/her access to the exhibition. All information about your child will be kept strictly confidential. Once we have analysed the information no one will be able to identify your child. Research reports and articles in scientific journals will not include any information that may identify your child.

Consent

I hereby give my consent to be photographed as part of the documentation process of *Traces of interaction: a practice lead exploration of makerspaces in South African art*. I am aware that the photographs will be used in a MA Fine Art mini dissertation, that they could be printed or shared digitally as documentation of the project. I understand that I am taking part freely without being coerced into doing so.

Participant Signature: _____

Signed on this date : _____

Parental or legal guardian consent

I confirm that the person requesting my consent for my child to take part in this study has told me about the nature and process, any risks or discomforts, and the benefits of the study as stipulated above. I have had adequate time to ask questions and have no objections for my child to participate in this study. I am aware that information obtained in this study will be anonymously processed and presented in the reporting of the results. I understand that my child will not be penalised should they wish to discontinue with the study and that my child is participating willingly.

Parent/Legal Guardian's name (Please print) : _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's signature: _____

Signed on this date: _____

My supervisor's contact details are:

Dr Nicola Grobler

Tel: 012 420 2353

Email: Nicola.Grobler@up.ac.za

My formal contact details are:

Marika du Toit, student in the MAFA (Master of Fine Art) programme

Cell: 067 905 6108

Email: marika.dutoit@gmail.com