

Dust Imagined: A creative reflection on mortality, anxiety  
and process

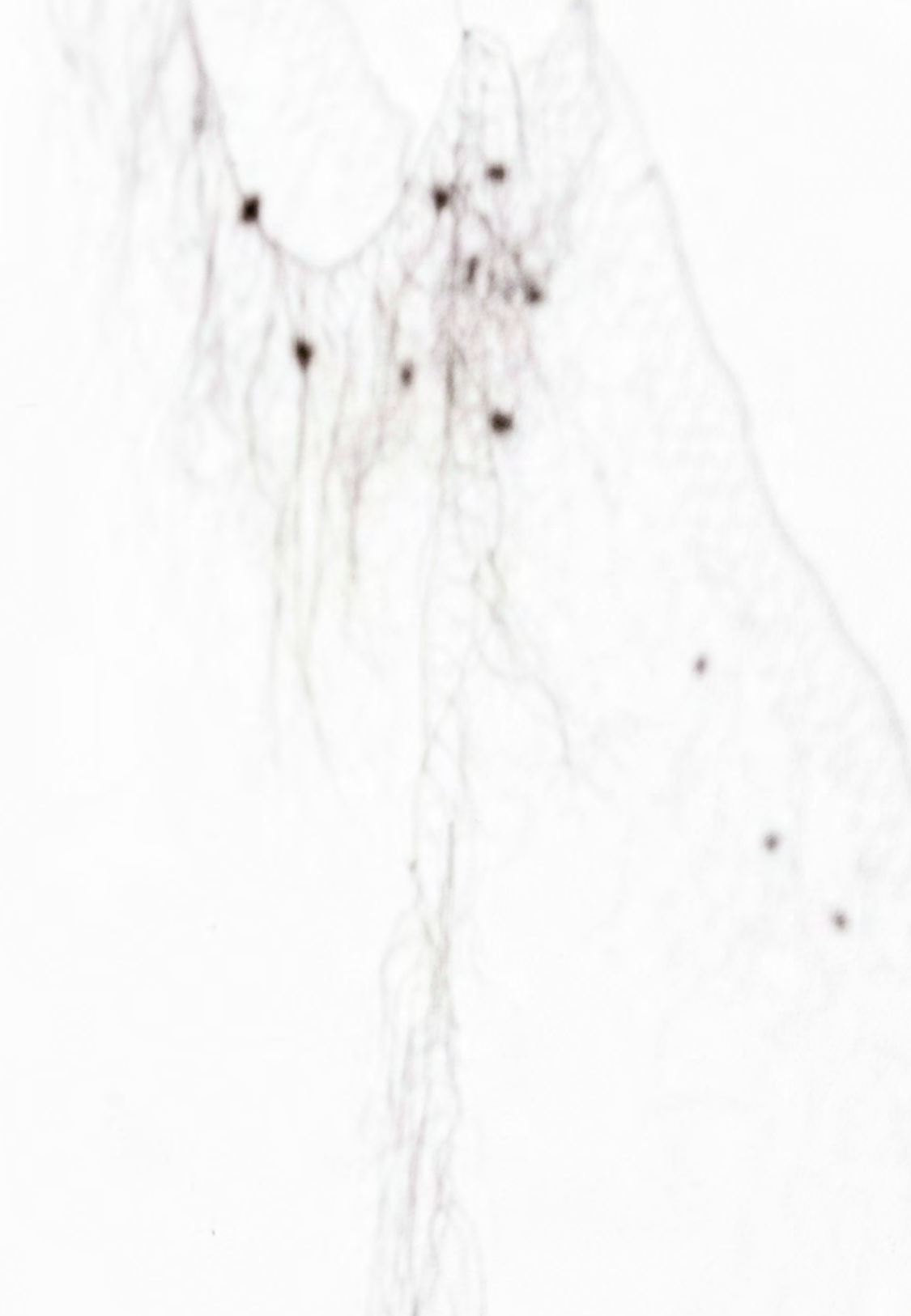
By  
Suzanne Duncan

Documentation and commentary on the body of work submitted for the degree of Masters of  
Fine Art

Faculty of Humanities  
University of Cape Town  
2015

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.



Shadows cast from *Tutu*:  
*All the hours in-between*

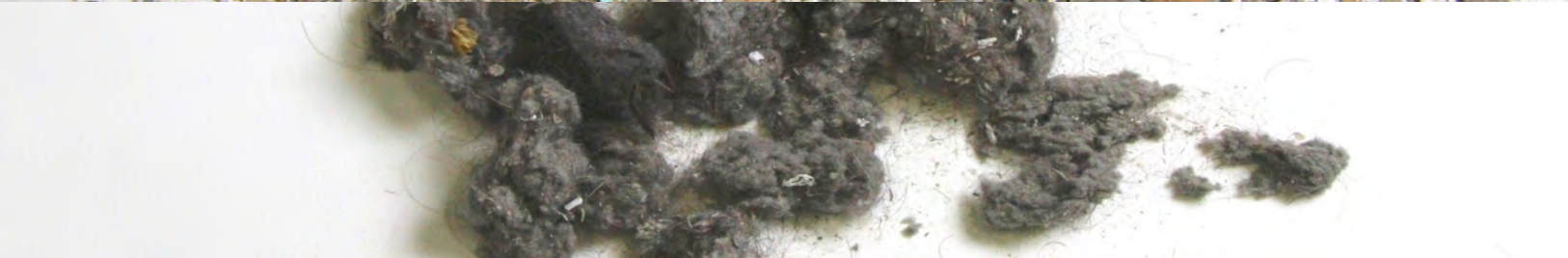
Introduction: As I peer over my dead body matter.

Chapter 1: Considerations of dust

Chapter 2: Matter

Chapter 3: Anxiety

Chapter 4: Process



Silt, bits, felt, left over

## Introduction: As I peer over my dead body matter.

*I sift the dust, one handful at a time, in a tea strainer. I tap the strainer against my palm, the number of years that I have been alive, and sift the dust into five separate categories: Silt (fine dust), Bits (too large to fall through the strainer, too small to be identified, Felt (lint), Large Dust Objects (these consist of recognisable objects, feathers, staples etc) and Left Over (matted hair and lint that remain when all of the loose dust has been sifted from it).*

Why do skin, hair and fingernails that are desirable objects, belonging to a whole body and adding to its decoration, cause disgust and become markers of mortality when they are no longer part of the living body? When disembodied and separated into single strands, skin cells and nail clippings they repulse. In this project, by reconsidering, altering and curating dust, I produce artworks that allow for a new construction of its meaning. Extracted from my living spaces, the dust consists of fragments of objects that were once useful and contributed to a daily existence. In the form of household dust, they become useless. Through the creation of art objects I rework this substance so that it regains purpose.

I view my body as a device for producing art, an instrument for construction as well as a producer of my chosen materials.

I consider dust through the lens of various dualities: attraction and repulsion, fragility and strength, public and private, clean and dirty, order and chaos and presence and absence. As in all dualities, the potency of the one cannot fully function without the contrast of the other.

Through the subtle altering of this non-matter (the dust), I have produced mark-making instruments, made use of it as props to aid performances and mediated its form through video pieces and photography. These products are an experiment in creating something from the non-thing. The material's original use value is lost in its state as dust, rendering it without purpose - a found material that is always lost.

Collecting my own dust allows me to review and measure how much time I have lost and how much of my lifetime remains. What is unknown is the amount of time remaining in a life.<sup>1</sup> To collect my dust for almost two years (the duration of a Masters in Fine Art) is to realise the extent that my body is slowly losing itself, slowly transcending from useful matter into useless matter. It is the material evidence of life as it wanes. I peer over my dead body matter in this form and imagine the function of this by product of corporeal existence. The loss of skin, hair and fingernails signal regeneration as these dead objects must be released from the body in order for new body matter to replace them. The loss of this matter from the body is a symbolic loss.

At the beginning of this Master's programme I began the monthly exercise of tipping out the contents of my vacuum cleaner in my studio and examining the objects included in this mound of uncertainty. I have extracted meaning from the dust that I have produced through my lived experience (collected by vacuuming my apartment and studio space). What I refer to in this dissertation as 'dust' includes every object (of various size, density and proximity to the body) in which my monthly harvesting of my vacuum cleaner results. Sifting is a process of clarification as things are separated and neatly organised resulting in order through classification: dealing with the little things rather than one large overwhelming mess that contributes to anxiety. Much of my production is constructed through a sense of compulsion. The 'death anxiety' that occurs when facing my own mortality through the collection of my dust fuels repetitive gestures and labour intensive production as a means of dealing with this unease. Channeling anxiety into an ordered product is one of the ways that I derive significance from this matter without purpose.

Sifting the dust is like panning for gold. Here detritus becomes precious as I seek treasures in the dust and valuable fragments that discretely increase my collection of materials. As I sift the dust into a plastic bag, the **Silt** falls into the bag; the **Felt** rises to the top, making itself evident; the **Large Dust Bits** are picked out and placed in their various categories; and the bits remaining are stored in another bag. From **Silt** I cast objects, crayons, and use as paint; **Bits** are cast into sculptures; **Felt** is rolled into balls and worked into a fabric; **Large Dust Objects** are ordered into a self-created taxonomy and photographed in their distinct categories; strands of loose hair are pulled from the **Left Over** to create fabrics - the strands knotted into decorative patterns; the **Left Over** are fixed somewhat, into another fabric. In this body of work the alchemical gold for which I pan is transformed rather than transmuted. Through the **Large Dust Objects** I confront all of the fragments of objects that assist in and are evidence of a life lived.

In the following four chapters I explore the concerns that shape the way in which I work with this dust: Considerations of Dust, Matter, Anxiety, Process. Tropes of mortality and time appear throughout this study and are included in every chapter as inextricable from the dust.

To be presented with my own dust is to become aware of the exchange from the living to the dead. The dust grows at the imagined equal rate of deterioration of my body: an hourglass on its side.<sup>2</sup> Wrinkles, age spots, thinning skin, grey hair, loss of hair - these all reveal the body's slow decay. For this reason, the exterior of the body interests me; those small objects and accretions that contribute to our dust, our loss, lost time. Collecting dust is a direct confrontation with this loss. My research considers the materiality of the body - I write of mortality with the notion that the body and life ends in death.

The body is in a state of atrophy. Molecule by molecule, in motion so slow that it is barely evident and like the accretion of dust on the surfaces of living spaces it slips away, silently; being gathered incrementally.

When writing about the work produced, I refer to facets of the work throughout the essay, as I apply different understandings of the medium and the various ways that the work operates. I have adopted a style of writing that is sympathetic to my practice: gathering and sifting texts and ideas. In some places the writing is as fragmented as the form of the work. When referring to artists, I make connections between my own practice and these artists' intentions and how their work operates.

My project is intensely personal; it reveals my own psychological struggles with an anxiety disorder and how it contributes to the form of my production. Present in the work is a vulnerability that is communicated in the fragility of objects that gain strength through their permanence. This body of work will intentionally grow and change each time I exhibit it (as the project will continue throughout my lifetime). It is this contingency that allows for an open-endedness in the work. It is a project that lacks a conclusion in its inability to be resolved.



## Timeline:

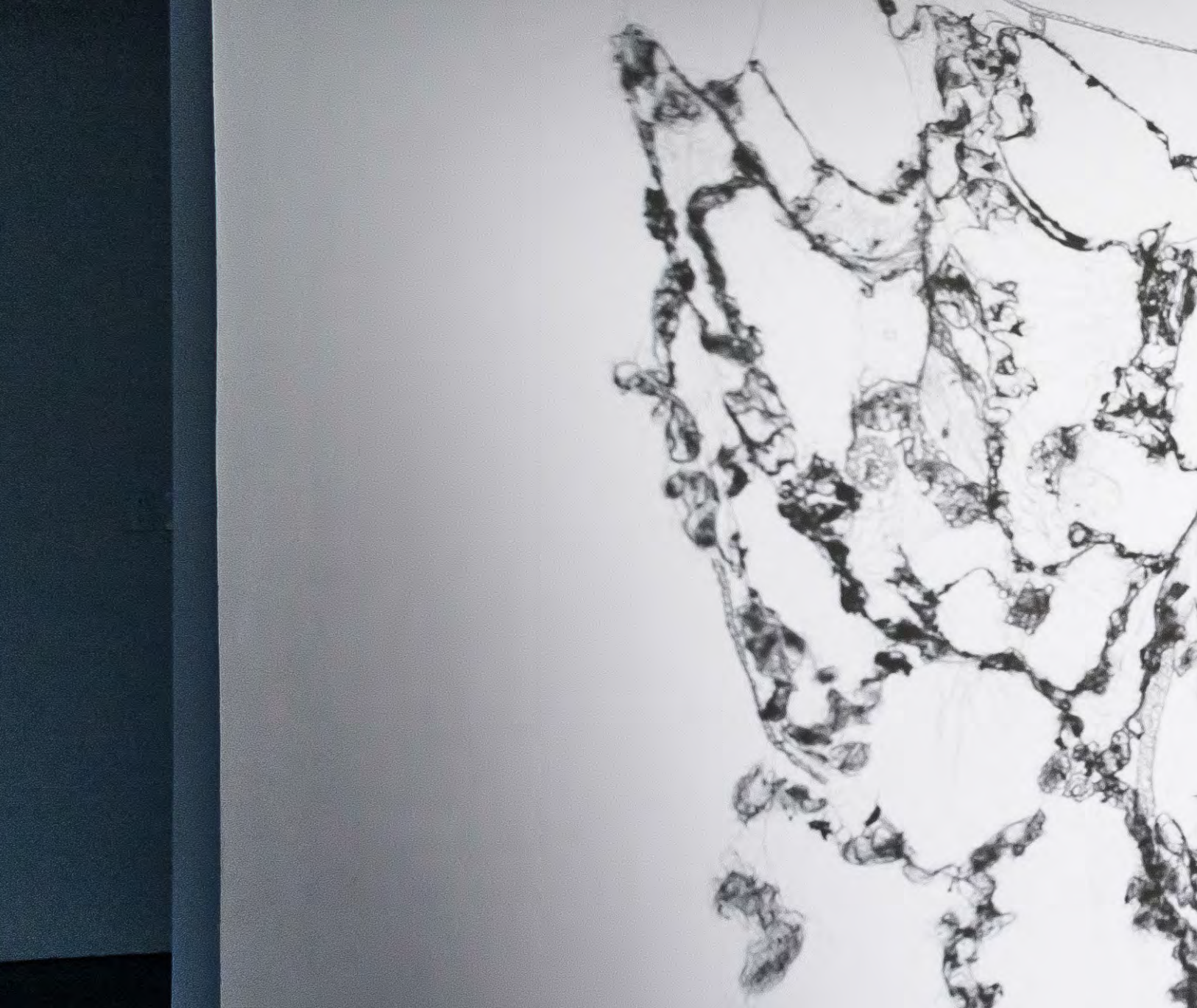
- 1981: Born
- 1990: My mother collected her hair as it came out in chunks, to show her doctor evidence that she was ill. She was repeatedly told that she was stressed.
- 1991: I begin obsessing over the number 11 (my age at the time) and developed numerous rituals that include this and other significant numbers. Eating, dressing, bathing, writing, playing, drawing, knitting, all involved certain repetitive behaviour as an attempt to order chaos.
- 1992 - 2002: Father in and out of work.
- 1998: Mother finally diagnosed with underactive thyroid, gets treated.
- 2003: Mother undergoes a hysterectomy. Due to hormone replacement therapy she grows a thick head of long, silver hair.

This obsessive behaviour reemerges whenever I feel that circumstances in my life are 'chaotic' and need to be systematized and ordered. These rituals and self stimulating behaviours, though always present, are diminished when I do labour-intensive work that engages my fingers, channeling the fidgeting unease into a product.

Notes:

1. Only those on death row are allowed the odd, questionable privilege of knowing the exact date on which they will cease to exist.

2. Fingernails, hair and skin, signify health and vitality and are vital clues to the interior of our bodies, which otherwise remains mysterious. Our skin is the only organ that is visible to us; we judge our health by its condition. A sleepless night reveals itself on our skin, but what effect does a lack of sleep have on our other organs that we are less aware of?



*Lace Border*

Matted hair and felt collected from the  
vacuum cleaner

250 x 130cm



## Chapter 1: Considerations of dust

In an essay that considers how dust operates, Professor of English at the University of Cambridge, Steven Connor (2009) states that “[dust is]...amorphous, without form and almost void...It is this very formlessness that allows it to act as a metaphor, mimicking other forms.” This quality that dust possesses, to morph into various meanings, allows for my imagining of this non-matter on which to construct my understanding of the world. I do this by reconstructing and reconsidering the mortal body through the creation of new art forms.

In his essay, *Dirt: The ecstatic skin of the earth*, William Bryant Logan explains that not having (scientific) answers for why dirt is special, offers a marvelous space for investigation.

Answerless questions are the best kind. What’s more, it seems that things that can’t be figured out can still be seen to be true. Confessions not of “sin” but of ignorance, and meditation, not on some mantra but on the created, yield results that are different from analysis, and much more powerful.  
(Bryant Logan, 1995:9)

This answerless question opens a space of possibility where new significance can be created, although this project poses more questions than it answers. The value of the vacuumed dust lies in this new meaning, found by recasting the dust into new forms.

My examination of dust is to consider it as a non-matter: inert, a product of decay and atrophy that silently builds, signaling death. I regard it to be a substance that is lost, separated from its original form as a working item. I imagine dust as liminal and located in the interstice between evidence of existence and the imminence of death. Dust has been reasoned in a number of imaginings and I have selected certain considerations to assist me in my understanding of the material.

The act of vacuuming my apartment and studio space is integral to my practice. The various definitions of the word ‘vacuum’ allows a deeper contemplation of dust. It is defined as “a space entirely devoid of matter; a space or container from which the air has been completely or partly removed; a gap left by the loss, death, or departure of someone or something significant” (“Vacuum, n.”, 2013).

That it exists in a space “entirely devoid of matter” strengthens my understanding of dust as non-matter; “a gap left by loss...” (“Vacuum, n”, 2013).

Household dust mainly consists of keratin, the primary protein of human skin, which sheds constant-

ly and as much as 1,5 grams a day (Sagan, 2009).<sup>1</sup> For this reason the writer Dorian Sagan considers it “...an ensign of entropy, of buildings destroyed and neglected, matter without purpose” (Sagan, 2009). Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966:44) notably relegated dirt (which I understand to be a category to which dust belongs) as impossible to classify or order, outside of symbolic order, and therefore, as “matter out of place”. While other writers define dust as “anti-matter...negative of form” (Connor, 2009) and “amorphous, without form and almost void,” I agree with Connor (2009) that “it is this very formlessness that allows it to act as a metaphor, mimicking other forms.” This “emblem of death” (Connor, 2009) gathers on surfaces in the lived environment, onto any object that remains still. But life is not still and the action and movement of living things stirs the settled dust back into the atmosphere only to resettle onto surfaces. Steven Conner goes on to note that:

Dust can get anywhere, insinuating itself into every crevice. This makes it a medium of transformation and change. Almost without qualities itself, dust has the quality of qualitylessness, the virtue of transmitting the virtues of other substances. It is both a terminal and a mediate matter, inert, but sometimes, for that very reason, omnivalent.  
(Connor, 2009)

The many varied considerations of dust can be attributed to this metaphoric state. I understand dust to be matter without purpose, a springboard, constantly shifting and therefore a place where meaning can be constructed.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses how women have been represented as Other and simultaneously associated with death (de Beauvoir, 1949:474-475). De Beauvoir conjoins dust with death and understands the act of cleaning and housework as women’s Manichaean task, abolishing the evil of dirt through housework (de Beauvoir, 1949:474-475). “The battle against dust and dirt is never won” (de Beauvoir, 1949:474).

Dr Phyllis Palmer, a professor of American and women’s studies, writes of “good women” as linked to the domestic space and, for this reason, housework is associated, at least subconsciously, with dirt (Ward,1992:10). Frazer Ward emphasises this common categorisation of women as “naturally” and



inextricably linked to dirt and decay and that acts of cleaning the home allowed for women to avoid this tendency towards dirtiness (Ibid). With this understanding, cleaning can be viewed as a battle: both in women abolishing the threat of dirt from the home and in the association of women's bodies with dirt.

The relation of dust with death is integral to my imagining of it. Its incremental growth is a reminder that mortality follows the living like a shadow, growing longer as death nears. "Mortality provides the internal limits on human existence, which enables humans to exist in the dialectical relation between finitude and infinity, and between temporality and eternity, which is quintessentially human" (Schott, 2012:3). In this way the contemplation of the many dualities that exist in the work could be thought of as a quest for homeostasis that is only experienced temporarily, if at all.

Throughout *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir notes that men are associated with infinity and women with the finitude that threatens infinity (Heinämaa, 2010:73). The process of men's projection of finality onto women and her introjection of this finitude have endured, motivated by both sexes' anxiety and dread (Ibid).<sup>2</sup> De Beauvoir (1949:474) sites the myth of Sisyphus as being akin to the endless repetition of housework by stating that "The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present". Although I have selected writings that contextualise women in a domestic framework, I argue that few things have altered this traditional view of women in this particular space. The conflation of women with dirt remains relevant.

In the West, for the first half of the 20th century, it was believed that women who could afford to employ servants were more feminine, relegating her servants, who dealt directly with the dirt, as less feminine (Fuenmayor, Haug & Ward, 1992:6). These connotations of dirt and femininity can be understood as socio-economic (class) striations; a direct response to the cultural ordering that the relationship to dirt has helped to define.

Directly after World War 2 the hegemonic white housewife came into being. This model of femininity did not render a return to the propinquity of dirt. Rather her electrical appliances, cleaning agents and pre-packaged foods replaced the human servants of the previous years. "Indeed, a history of femininities might be a catalogue of cleaning agents"(Ward, 1992:10).<sup>3</sup> These labour-saving devices maintained the distance between the housewife and the dirt (or at least alluded to this), in order for her to remain " 'clean' for her husband" (Fuenmayor, Haug & Ward, 1992: 6). A contradiction exists here as, if women are associated with dirt, then surely women who work closely with dirt are more feminine? If cleaning is a socially coded and engendered act, then my acts of making art disrupt this notion by returning the unclean to a space of creativity where dirt is used as a creative medium.

While these "labour-saving devices" were possibly only symbolically labour-saving, I incorporate labour-intensive processes in my production to reference the repetition of de Beauvoir's "battle" the

cleaning that must take place daily but is never truly achieved. I use the ubiquitous vacuum cleaner, considered a “labour-saving device” to subvert the action of removing dust from its domestic or studio surfaces and then use the collected material as medium for labour-intensive work. I perceive vacuum cleaners as spaces where dust is incarcerated, removed and contained, out of sight and away from threat. Although vacuums are usually not emptied regularly, I tip out and sort through the contents of my vacuum cleaner on a monthly basis, as a way of marking time. Vacuum cleaners allow our dust to remain dormant within these spaces while life continues around them. They are the urns of the living space containing the dead body matter that was once critical to the functioning body.

In this way I place my female body in direct contact with the substance that marks the female body as unclean, unideal and as socially ‘low’. It is in this low position of symbolic order that I transform the substance into an artistic medium. Contrarily, I am involved with the production of art, an activity considered to be at the opposite end of cultural productivity.

One of these transformations occur in the sculpture *Lace/Border*. Lacework, produced from a set pattern, is ordered fabric, predictable through its repetition. The semi-knotted and semi-woven hair that I use in *Lace/Border* fix the matted hair and lint, the **Left Over** into a permanent shape. While it threatens to fall apart in its sections of abandoned patterns, mimicking lace, it vaguely holds the piece in shape. Lace is made by weaving and braiding, using strands of fibre (usually cotton) to decorative effect. Here I have used a self-devised system of knotting to hold the aberrant strands in place. This project involves traditional domestic activity and the feminine body interacting with dust and dirt. By reconfiguring this practice into the production of artworks, the content has changed.

Hair and skin are external manifestations of body matter and therefore do not destabilise the perceived impenetrable boundary of the interior and exterior. The materials that fall from the body, hair, skin, as well as finger and toenails (either chipped, or forcibly removed, like a haircut) are all dead body matter. It is death, removing itself from the living body, in these forms. These signifiers of death – hair, skin cells, fingernails - are removed from domestic spaces.

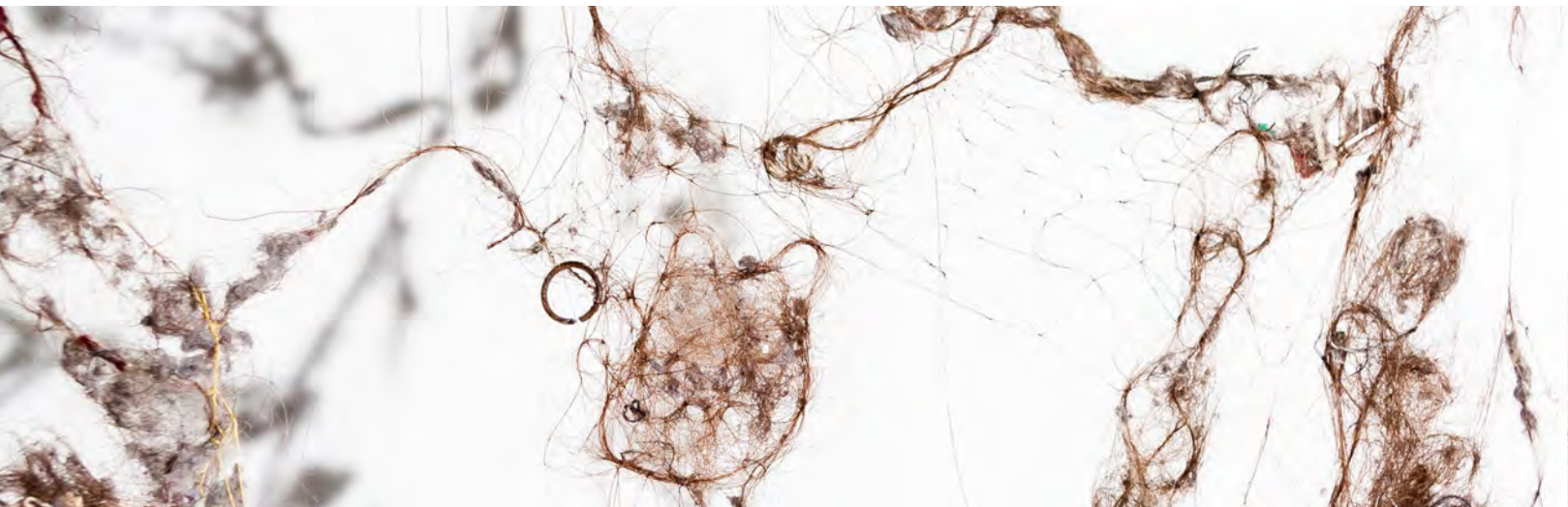
Dust is rendered dirt through constructions of social and symbolic order in which taboos classify it





Figure 1.  
*Ghost of my Living Mother*  
Paul Hazelton  
2010  
3,5 x 9 x 2,5cm  
Household dust and cobwebs

Detail of Lace/Border



according to rules surrounding purity and contagious disease. Regulations that promote avoidance and penalty help construct these systems (Douglas, 1966:6). Mary Douglas (1966:xvii) states that “there is no such thing as dirt”. Rather, she asserts that it is a social construct. That which is deemed dirty does not neatly fit into a system of classification that orders anxiety. Therefore threatening order that is required to keep taboos against hygiene in place and guard against the threat of transgressing societal order (Douglas, 1966:1-7). “In chasing dirt...decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea” (Douglas, 1966:3).

These processes of “decorating, tidying”, as Douglas explains above, or becoming “prettified” as Bauman (1992:12) suggests, manifest in my work as decorative patterns, such as in the *Tutu: All the hours in-between* piece. Here I create motifs similar to those found in crochet while ordering strands of hair into an ordered structure that conforms to a predetermined pattern. Small sections of similar patterns are found in *Lace/Border*.

Paul Hazelton is an artist who works with dust. He collects household dust including cobwebs, from neglected or overlooked areas within the home. Rather than collecting dust with a vacuum he uses his hands (the interface where unclean and clean meet) and fashions the dust into a vague fabric from which he produces recognisable objects. In *Ghost of My Living Mother*, Hazelton created a three-dimensional version of a photographic image of his mother as a young girl. The artist explains that the work connects his mother’s obsession with cleaning and dusting the house (which resulted in his own obsession with dust) and juxtaposes their different living environments as children: “hers that had been made unsafe and dusty by the war and mine that was made clean and safe by a war on dirt” (Hazelton, n.d.).

I was brought up by a mother who taught my sisters and I to knit at the age of six, followed soon after, by other needlework techniques. My mother knitted and sewed for pleasure as well as out of necessity, because it was cheaper to produce clothing for my sisters and I than to purchase them. Like Hazelton, who reflected on his mother’s fixation with dust, I repeat my mother’s needlework activities by using the same techniques she used. Rather than producing out of necessity, however, I utilise these techniques to alleviate anxiety. While producing objects that operate in an exhibition context where



issues of use and value are different, Hazelton and I both utilise childhood activities which mimic our mothers' actions but purposefully break with tradition. We do the same as our mothers, but not quite.

The scale and abject material utilised in *Lace/Border* suggest the experience of a body out of control. Like the body that grows irregular materials that are regularly removed and the body whose shape shifts with weight gain or loss, these practices attempt to control an unmanageable body that continually defies dominance.

This work is produced from matted hair and lint that is inextricably linked; impossible to undo in parts and barely held together in others. It is the border of the body from which the abject is propelled as well as the border of symbolic order that I attempt to transgress.

Abjection is typically understood to arise from the point of infant separation from the maternal body and stands for all future separations between subject and object (Ward, 1992:22). This explains how all social and symbolic order<sup>4</sup> is predicated on demarcations that are developed around the body (Ward, 1992:21), the exterior of the body, from where many of my materials are collected. These separations from the maternal body are echoed in *Lace/Border* and *Tutu*, where I have mimicked the needlework taught to me by my mother, but where I have created my own handwork technique, using my own hair. This simultaneous incorporation and departure from the techniques my mother taught me asserts my separation from the maternal, allowing me to define myself as independent from her (an independent body).

Julia Kristeva establishes the boundary of the body (that separates the interior from the exterior) as pervious rather than impervious, as it is socially dictated (Ward, 1992:21). Subjectivity is ruptured when, in the experience of dirt and body matter that has been expelled from the body, we feel simultaneously intrigued and disgusted (Ward, 1992:21). The confrontation with the abject (these articles expelled from the body) obscure the established distinction between the subject and the object. This re-consideration of borders allows for an open-endedness where boundaries have no predetermined edge.

“To be at once attracted and repulsed indicates the presence of the abject, for ambiguity is a state which does not answer to systems or rules” (Jones, 1993:38). In the studio I entertain this fascination with dust - its dual lure and revulsion and its engendering. In this space dust does not operate as dirt but as a curious substance whose contents can be pondered and analysed.

Amongst other dualities that I have mentioned, the most significant is the push and pull between permanence and impermanence. This body of work is driven by the need to make work that cannot operate as a monument to life. Because of its ephemerality and fragility it does not dictate the permanence required of a lasting structure. The work functions as a temporary memorial rather than a monument. Neither component in the dichotomy is ever at an equilibrium They are never at rest.<sup>5</sup>

In his book *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Zygmunt Bauman refers to the awareness of mortality claiming that the production of culture is about transcendence. “It makes permanence into a task, into an urgent task....a measure of all tasks - and so it makes culture, that huge and never stopping factory of permanence” (Bauman, 1992:4).

“It is because we know that we must die that we are so busy making life” (Bauman, 1992:6). That mortality comes upon us is the reason why we create; it is a quest for immortality, a dismissal of death (Bauman, 1992:7). We create to leave something behind beyond death (Bauman, 1992:6). The two, according to Bauman (1992:7), cannot exist without the other, without death immortality would have no meaning without mortality; culture would not exist. By creating work that would continue to exist after my living body perishes, I attempt to restructure my living, transitory body into objects of permanence.

According to Bauman, one of the strategies used to deal with the overwhelming knowledge of death is to manage it in the same way that distressing items are handled:

We sweep things away, put them at a distance from which their stench or repulsive sight is less likely to affect us; we hide them. Offensive thoughts must be suppressed. Failing that they must be prettified or otherwise disguised, so that their ugly look would not vex us...

We must not suspend our vigilance; we must keep trying - and we know it.  
(Bauman, 1992:12)

Bauman (1992:24) lists a few expedients that the living apply as a way of dealing with ambivalence. The action of excluding the dead by increasing the spatial distance between the living and the dead and life and death is the most widely practiced across cultures. Bauman (1992:24) proclaims all funerals “acts of expulsion”. Through this separation, death is placed amongst other maladies that are cast away from life, such as the sick, the mentally ill and the criminal (Bauman, 1992: 24). This principle of out of sight, out of mind, can be easily applied to the action of removing dust and dirt from living spaces. Concealed through the undertaking of funerals and cleaning house, death is cast away, if only



temporarily. This ridding of death equates to the gendered act of cleaning house.

My work questions what occurs when what was cast away from life is returned into a lived space like the artist's studio, where it is reconsidered and resuscitated. Without this motivation to sort and order chaos and devise a use-value there would be a lack of incentive to create.

Art is the one area where social taboos and fetishes can be examined in close proximity. The studio is a vacuum. The studio becomes the space of incarceration, where dust has been interred. In this space anything is possible, both infinitude and finality. According to Bataille (1962:140), we demarcate barriers then attempt to transgress them."We are incessantly ... trying to get at continuity, which implies that the boundaries have been crossed without actually crossing the boundaries of this discontinuous life" (Bataille, 1962:141). It is in the studio where these boundaries can be breached. Douglas (1966:142) also notes that the borders of the body supply metaphors and symbols for any social system where the boundaries are fragile.

In the vacuum, death is interred. In the broom cupboard, it rests with other funereal items. Only in the form of ash, contained in an urn, can the corpse be tolerated in the living space; in particles so slight that they are barely matter at all. In this shape between matter and non-matter the body is perceived as permanent in its end form of formlessness. Ash in an urn is the last of the body; it will no longer produce any other body matter. There is a conviction that the ash in the urn contains the body of our loved one while the dust with which it cohabitates is a mess of uncertain provenance. The denial of death refuses the entropy of our bodies, but like ash (in an urn) and dust (in a vacuum), decay is stationary in these liminal containers of arrest.

Bauman (1992:131) proclaims that "Death is the Other of modern life". "Death is nothing but waste in the production of life; a useless leftover" (Bauman, 1992: 131).<sup>6</sup> Hair, matted hair and lint are expulsions of the abject other from the self. I remove the threat from the periphery in order to maintain structures, then release them into the studio to challenge this threat.

I have also used other expulsions in my work. In my *Border drawing*, I pressed thin paper against my body to pick up the natural oils of my skin, mingled with the dust that I am coated with after I have spent hours sifting the contents of my vacuum cleaner into separate categories. The *Border drawing* is constructed from the exterior of my body, offering a trace of the body through its residue. The crinkled paper marks the negative space around my body. Hair, nails, and skin are the negatives of the lived body, the impending death that is cast off the living.<sup>7</sup>

*Relic* is a sculpture I have been working on for several years. It consists of my collected finger and toenail cuttings, which are being assembled into a replica of my skeletal structure. I use several x-rays of my hand to ensure accuracy. As I have only collected enough nail cuttings to fashion half the

bones in my right hand, it is highly unlikely that I will complete this task within my lifetime. The title of the piece refers to the relic as valued religious artifact (whose potency relies on the belief of its provenance) and as an outdated, outmoded object. Its structure brings to mind the art historical term 'evidence of the artist's hand', referring to the record of the artist's gesture in the material. The word 'relic' has significance to this dissertation as all of the objects I collect from my vacuum cleaner act as referents to the human life, which they will outlive. This piece also literally references the rate of atrophy that I view as equal to what the body leaves behind. It is a pyrrhic task. My daily supplements, biotin, calcium and magnesium remind me of this intention to grow and strengthen this material for sculptural outcome.

These anti-monuments, functioning away from imposed societal structures (such as the association of women with dirt and death) are used to connote a new understanding of this engendered material as not finite but rather rich in its ability to be transformed, fixed and more permanent than the human body. Yet, it still retains a certain ephemerality and fragility. The prettiness of the articles are intended to supply the viewer with an ease when confronted with these challenges and dualistic contradictions. The body is more permanent as a disembodied structure made from the body's waste, byproducts and objects that evidence its existence, creating something from the non-thing. This disembodiment suspends the body in time. It acts as a cross section for the lived body that existed for a time and will continue to be after the body dies. This body of work confronts mortality, bringing it to our close attention as it collects silently around us, in barely visible particles.





Detail of *Border Drawing*

Dust on paper

Paper pressed against skin after a few harvestings

105 x 70.5cm



*Relic*

The artist's fingernails  
Fingernails collected for 8 years, replicat-  
ing the bones in the artist's right hand.  
29 x 18.5 x 3cm



Detail of *Relic*



## Notes:

1. Dust is an umbrella term, encompassing smoke, powders, magical/pixie dust, sands and many other forms. For the sake of examining the material closely, I have chosen to consider dust as it exists in a lived environment.

2. Through the bifocal lens of existential duality, de Beauvoir understands both women and men to live between two poles, the mortal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. Heinämaa notes that while we are preoccupied by these two poles, they can be transcended, through creative and imaginative thinking, contemplation and language, “Incessantly, we move from one pole to the other and then back...eventually we have to embrace both opposites” (Heinämaa, 2010: 74).

3. It is worth noting that when I melt wax and add the fine dust to the melted mixture to create crayons, the scent of cleaning agents is unmistakable and remains to a degree when the crayons have hardened. This brings to mind the removal of dust from surfaces that have been cleaned with chemical cleaning products in an attempt to resist the dirt. These cleaning agents then bind to the dirt, becoming part of the dusty layer that is removed. They are evidence of the unclean tainting the clean and rendering it unclean once again.

4. The Symbolic Order that I refer to is the generally accepted structure that incorporates all human way of life that is the fate of every human being, assisting in the formation of identity through communication and culture.

5. In the book *Birth, Death and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*, Robin May Schott notes that Grace Jantzen explained the popularity of death as a topic in philosophy as “necrophilia” ((Jantzen, 2004: 5) in Schott, 2010 :4-5), expressed as a love for death and corpses, to explain the societal fixation of death and the violence associated with it (Ibid). While viewing necrophobia, the fear of death that compels us to treat it medically and keep it away from the living, at bay, as stemming from a foundational preoccupation with death and dying. (Schott, 2010: 5). Jantzen suggests that this preoccupation with and use of the word ‘death’ in modern philosophy, such as the death of the author, the death of the subject etc is centred in an organizational interest in resistance and violence (Ibid).

6. Bauman (1992:155) states that the deconstruction of mortality requires hygiene in order to function. It breaks down mortality into numerous causes of death. These battles with death are further broken down into a number of conflicts that tackle diseases. This “disgust” (that emotional corollary of desire)” is produced to ensure distance from the violating object (Bauman, 1992:155).

7. The Border drawings are similar in form to David Hammons' Body Prints, in which the artist applied grease to his body and then pressed his hands, face and sections of his body onto sheets of paper. Other works incorporate dreadlocks created from hair collected from a barber shop floor. As Tom Finkelppearl noted in an essay about the artist " (Hammons) has always chosen the dirtiest materials available. He looks for the traces of time in his dirty materials, the physical evidence of human use" (Taylor, 1993: 79-80).



## Chapter 2: Matter

*Unmonumental*, an exhibition held at the New Museum of Contemporary Art between 2007 and 2008, included 30 contemporary sculptors who produced what the curators deemed as agitated, anxious, tense sculptures (Kalm, 2008). The curatorial premise for the exhibition was that anti-masterpieces are produced in “an age of maximal distraction” (Flood, 2007:12). The forms that many of the sculptures took were precarious, as if fashioned in a hurry, as well as fragmentary and roughly assembled, often incorporating found materials.

It is this consideration of the art object as uncomfortable, utilising waste materials and revealing the discomfort of the contemporary era that prompts the construction of my own sculpture. Massimiliano Gioni (2007:64), curator of *Unmonumental*, defines these objects as “... a sculpture of proximity that is at the same time reassuring and threatening because it dwells in a place that is intimate even promiscuous.”

Kristen Morgin, whose work forms part of the exhibition, creates wire armatures that suggest familiar items such as cups, trophies, cars and musical instruments, onto which she glues unfired clay. The unfired clay renders the work incredibly fragile and the potential for disintegration is immediately apparent. Morgin (Kadist Art Foundation, 2010) notes that the mortality of the work is evident and it suggests fragility as a manifestation of anxiety of production in a world of mass-technology.

The waste in my work is extremely intimate in that it reveals much about my life. It is a collection of my own waste and thus reveals too much about my life, in the fragments of objects and dead body matter. The handling, the examination and the consideration of this liminal by-product confronts established systems of ordering and value, where the boundaries of normativity are shaken. Hence dust as non-matter is a means of questioning set hierarchies of permanence. It defies description in its function and operates as dualism and dichotomy - opposed and inseparable. Abjection occurs in the confrontation with this presence of death, in this fragmentary material that surrounds everyday interactions despite attempts to eradicate it.

Helen Escobedo explains this tendency for the use of waste as follows:

Artists today naturally reflect the temporality of all that surrounds them and have been doing so for decades, which is not surprising, since most of what is built today is temporary, looks temporary, or ages badly. All that is manufactured becomes obsolete the moment it hits the market ... So recycling makes sense, and using industrial and organic trash makes for critical and inspirational sense.  
(Escobedo, 1999:54)

In Cornelia Parker's artwork *Exhaled Blanket* (1996), dust and fibers collected from Freud's couch are projected onto a wall via slide projection. Ewe Lajer-Burcharth (2001:92) describes this action as "less a "projection" than a *recollection*: a gathering up of the material remnants of the past selves and their – involuntary, volatile – installation in the present." Here Parker displays the remnants from Freud's couch as souvenirs - objects that exist in the present that draw our attention back to the place in which the objects were collected.

I extend this mode of enquiry into the materiality of the projected image via a digital projector, through which the dust in various forms are transmitted for display. The very act of projection is a dispersal of the recorded image and thus a more accurate representation of dust as an imagined loss of matter.

The video piece *Marking* records the action of the *Toe-tips* marking the *Ronde Jambe* (a ballet exercise) on paper until they break, documenting the work as it is made and the destruction of the *Toe-tips* that is inevitable in their making. Shallow depth of field and close-up footage of the disintegrating shoes translate their vulnerability. The two projections and the video piece describe their own temporality in that they have a clear duration, a clear beginning and an end.

To work with objects that have had a previous use is to work with souvenirs and transformation. Every fragment and every particle that makes up the dust had a previous function. Susan Stewart (1993:151) writes of the function of souvenirs as encompassing the present within the past, as the souvenir redirects attention into the past. Pertinent to my own and Parker's work are the different means of transforming everyday objects and although the articles I use are non-objects, they retain reminders of their previous use in everyday life. Stewart (1993:151) interprets the device of creating souvenirs as "magic objects" and states that the apparatus involved in this type of conjuring only ever results in a limited and incomplete transformation.

The dust that occupies space is revealed in the shaft of light formed by the projector, allowing the recorded dust (in video form) to be temporarily re-enacted. In relation to Cornelia Parker's *Exhaled*





Figure 2.  
*Cello (Number) 8*  
Kristen Morgin  
2001  
53,3 x 167,5 x 71cm  
Clay, wire, wood and strings



Figure 3.  
*Exhaled Blanket*  
Cornelia Parker  
1996  
Slide projection of dust and fibres taken from Sigmund  
Freud's couch



*Marking*  
Projection still  
Looped

*Blanket*, Lajer-Burcharth (2001:92) states that it is the projector, rather than the artist, that is tasked with propelling the object of the past involuntarily into the present. Parker's piece, with the inclusion of Freud's objects, refers to Freud's concept of Projection, whereby individuals attribute their own undesirable behavior to another as a defense mechanism. An example of projection is believing that someone dislikes you in order for you to accept your own dislike of that person. A reduction of anxiety may result from projection as an expression of desire occurs, even if it goes unrecognised. The video projections are also intended to reference dust in their materiality, as both create a temporary landscape when they cover a surface. In the dark space where a projection is required, the dust that inhabits any interior is made visible in the shaft of light in which the image is projected. This is the liminal space between reproduced image and machine.

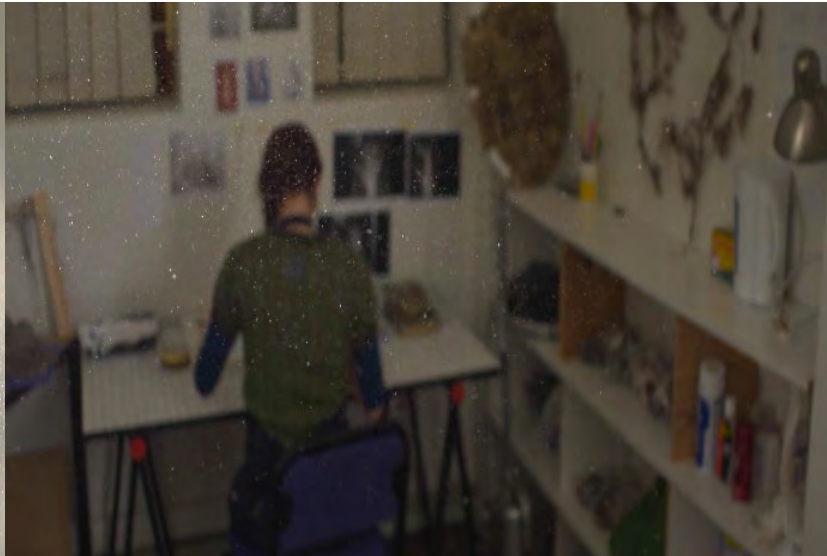
In my understanding, this temporary landscape that the dust casts behaves as a shadow. Dust mimics the surface of the object on which it rests and shadows reveal the objects of light's attention. The shadows that appear when *Lace/Border* and *Tutu: All the hours in-between* are displayed, reveal elements of the work. Certain fragile, delicate elements that are lost to the naked eye appear on the white walls behind the work. When exhibited, I trace these shadows on white paper, combining the **Silt** with water to form a paint that records the shadow and remains after the work is completed, as a document of the work. Here the waste products in these two works have become more permanent through their construction denying the infinitude proposed onto women. The shadows they cast are ephemeral, but even these are made permanent through the dust as material.

The second projected work included is *Dust Interior* consisting of interior shots of my apartment, and of my studio where a shaft of light in each shot highlights an exaggerated portrayal of the dust as it swirls and billows, twinkling like star dust. The interior frames are devoid of people, but I am included in the shots of my studio. The shot reveals a woman (myself) surrounded by death, relocating waste matter and dirt from the domestic to the studio space. In the studio the material is transformed into objects that question our relationship with dust, from the impermanent waste matter to the more permanent art object.

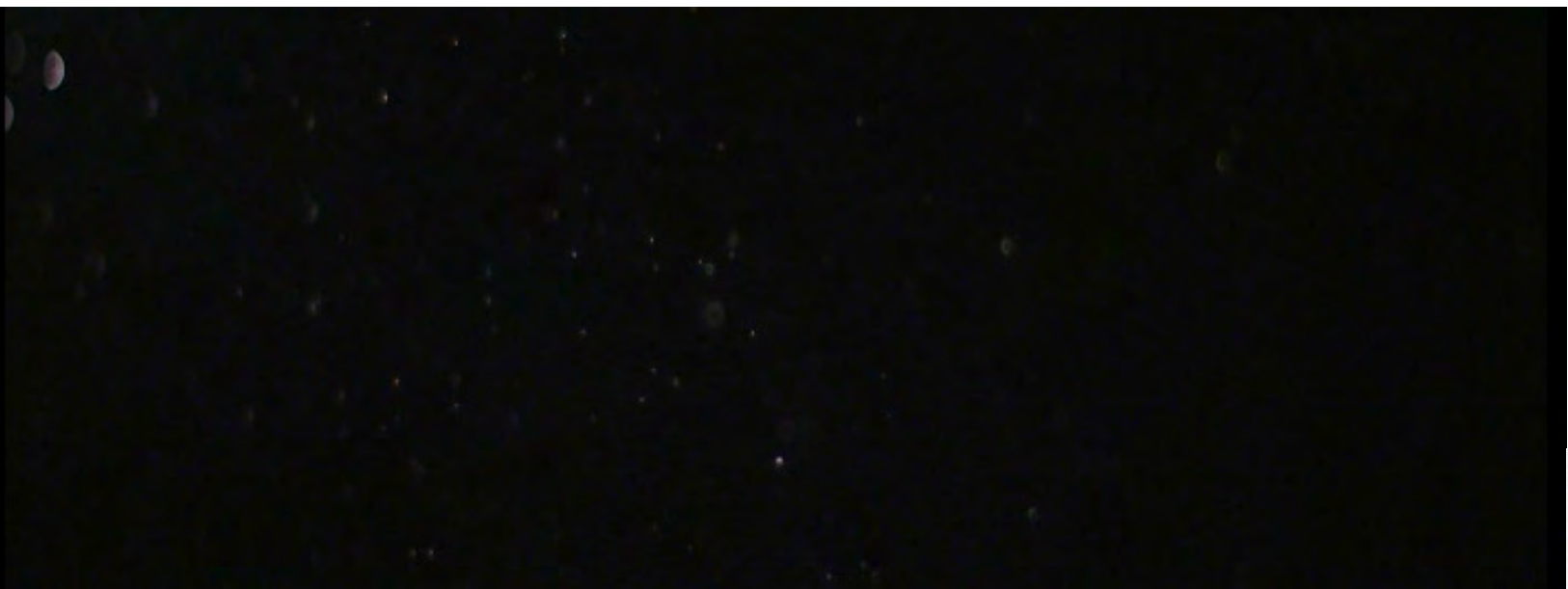




*Dust Interior*  
Projection still  
Looped



*Dust Interior*  
Projection still  
Looped



*Night Sky*  
Video still  
Looped

The video piece that is displayed on a screen depicts what at first appears to be the night sky, complete with twinkling stars. On closer inspection the stars slowly move and twinkle, changing colour as they travel closer to and away from the light. The video reveals itself to be a slow motion shot of dust as it moves in the air before the camera; the light picks up the glimmering nature of the dust. This piece is titled *The Night Sky: Aspirations of dust*.<sup>1</sup> To record the dust as it moves at night, illuminated by a light. This is my imagined aspiration of dust particles, to be cosmic dust. They perform, under the spotlight that illuminates them, they perform stardust in their glittering rendition.<sup>2</sup>

While the collecting of the dust is inclusive/democratic in that nothing gathered by the vacuum is thrown away, the photographs of the **Large Dust Objects** are considered, posed and edited compositions. By removing the dust from its natural environment and photographing it lit, shot and displayed, it mimics the glossy image of a product advertisement. In this format the dirt and threat of contamination is contained by the hermetic and static format.

The idea of dust as “anti-matter...negative of form” (Connor, 2009) has introduced much of my work. In *Death Mask/Life Mask* I cast my face in compressed dust and in *Body Parts*, I cast various parts of my body as well as the negative spaces surrounding my body, bringing these negative spaces to attention.<sup>3</sup> While Connor uses “negative of form” figuratively, I consider its literal connotations as well. I view the dust as negatives. Dust reveals the spaces around and on top of objects; it is the preposition that describes the shape of the dormant object. *Death Mask/Life Mask* is a negative cast of my face in dust, which creates a thin skin. It references the death masks, where a dead person’s face or head was cast soon after their death, to be used as references for portraits or as mementos for loved ones. Life masks are cast for the same reason, but are casts of a living person. These negative spaces are the liminal made apparent and permanent. *Body Parts* will be discussed in a later chapter.

Throughout this project I have been influenced by the work of Cornelia Parker. Much of Parker’s work testifies to the existence of time through its mark on materials and the fact that the objects that people own will outlive them.<sup>4</sup> Parker’s piece *The Negative of Whispers* consists of two ear plugs made from the compressed dust of the Whispering Gallery in St Paul’s Cathedral, London. Here, due to the dome structure, a whisper of another can be heard clearly on the other side of the gallery.





*Life Mask/Death Mask*  
Cast dust of the artist's face  
16 x 9.5 x 16.5cm



Figure 4  
*Self* 2001  
Marc Quinn  
2001  
Artist's blood and refrigeration equipment  
201 x 63 x 63cm



Figure 5.  
*The Negative of Whispers*  
Cornelia Parker  
1997  
Ear plugs made from the dust collected at the Whispering Gallery at St Paul's Cathedral, London

Iwona Blazwick (2001:61) asserts that Parker's chosen objects and materials, always selected for their powerful associations, seem to defy the varied processes that the artist applies to them, at least to the viewer who imagines the objects as they were before Parker intervened. These often personal objects indicate a proximity to the body (Blazwick, 2001:59), traces that evoke the people that own or owned them and the relationship they had with their things (Lajer-Burcharth, 2001:87). The *Negative of Whispers* consists of two ear plugs that are displayed together, side by side, as a pair, embodying the duality that Parker employs as a strategy in the making of her work. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (2001:87) interprets Parker as intending to shift the focus to the "un-making" of the already existing object.

In the consideration of dust as the negative space around the body, Jessica Morgan (2000:21) views Parker as seeking "the negatives, opposites, or contradictions in objects in order to upset the viewers' normative reading and to open up alternative interpretations." When confronted with the earplugs in *The Negative of Whispers*, it is easy to imagine inserting the earplugs and feeling the material of the dust and lint inside the ears, an orifice between the interior and the exterior body.

Central to Parker's strategy is the provenance of the material. For this reason the dust collected from the Whispering Gallery could be understood to be made from the skin of tourists who visited the gallery; the ear plugs intending to muffle the whispers. The ear plugs are both a souvenir of this tourist attraction as well as what is left behind by the tourists themselves. The provenance of the dust that I collect is central to my production of souvenirs and self-portraits, which I consider to be inherent in every object that I produce. They are considered self-portraits because they consist of my own body matter and items that have contributed to my lived experience. Self-portraits are unfailingly autobiographies, fragments suspended in time, in this case fragments of my body that contain my DNA.

Marc Quinn's *Self*, is a cast of the artist's head in four litres of his frozen blood (the amount found in the average adult body). It is often referred to as the ultimate self portrait in that the artist's DNA is present in the work. Quinn produced his first *Self* sculpture in 1991, the work became a series five years later when he produced an identical copy and continued this sequence every five years. K. Grovner comments that the sculpture reflects the fact that each seven years our bodies remake themselves.



Every molecule that currently comprises this you-shaped you will have vanished – left behind on the seats of busses, brushed off by the abrasive elbows of strangers ... dissolving back into the surging ocean of everyone and everything else ... There is no suspending this endless lava-lamping of identity, no slowing the slow morphing into and out of all that surrounds you ... [Quinn] annexes his very atoms to create versions of himself arguably more stable than his own body. His art does not merely resemble life, it becomes it ... more susceptible than most to the atomistic profundities of our fluid nature, our endless dissolution and reconstitution.  
(Grovier, 2013:226)

When looking in the mirror, you are a different composition of cells than you were the day before and the day after (Grovier, 2013:226). This is in contrast to my *Unfinishable pieces*, always exhibited in part, a partial image, a fragment. All of my objects are self-portraits. They contain my DNA in the 50% of skin cells that dust consists of: my hair and my nails. They also contain my interaction with objects in the world. Every object that I produce is a record of a moment in time: a material record of what has been. In casting objects of the body, a certain memorialising occurs. Trapped in Quinn's cast head is the face of the artist, aged by five years, the slowly sagging, wrinkled, worn countenance of the artist as his body grows older.<sup>5</sup>

Three of my sculptures do not have a foreseeable outcome or cannot be completed in a lifetime. They are the *Unfinishable Pieces: Tutu; All the hours in-between, Relic, and Lace/Border*. They begin in the middle and are able to evolve. However, this evolution depends on the material. Their incompleteness relegates them to a state of becoming, never complete, even at death. These *Unfinishable Pieces* measure a life time: the in-between time, the passive time spent waiting for the monthly harvest to yield the material so that I can add to the work.

Jane Bennet (2000:viii) suggests that all matter consists of “vitality”. Even inert substances have agency, in that they contain “forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennet, 2000:viii). I regard the dust that I collect as exerting agency in that it is produced at a rate that is only just sufficient for my production. This dependency on accumulation is a practice of subsistence. My monthly harvesting yields just enough to add to the works, leaving no surplus.

In *Mortality* Christopher Hitchens' account of dying from esophageal cancer, written from his deathbed, the author writes: “It's no fun to appreciate to the full the truth of the materialist position that I don't 'have' a body, I 'am' a body” (Hitchens, 2012:41). Hitchens mentions Julian Barnes, a British journalist who documented his experience with cancer in a weekly column, which Hitchens followed. Hitchens commented that the narrative anticipation that slowly built was never concluded due to the death of the author (Hitchens, 2012: 89). In what I understand as an act of dramatic irony, Hitchens'

fate would echo Barnes' as his own record of his fatal illness ended abruptly, as all life ends. For even though we are aware of death, it is beyond human comprehension that life and matter could come to an absolute end. Even when death is expected (in the case of a terminal illness or someone dying at a very old age) it is always a shock to the friends and family that remain in life, unable to explain the void that their loved one leaves behind.

In considering the materiality of autobiography, fingernails are sculptures in their own right, before they leave the body. They are shaped, cut and painted at will, objects in themselves, extensions of the body. Shaped to correspond with current fashion, like hair, they are an aberrant part of the anatomy that must be controlled in order to seem feminine.

Hair is not necessarily abject, as some of the highest quality wigs are made with human hair, retaining the potential to be modified into an object of desire. According to Smelik (De Becker and Nettleton, 2014:59), hair only becomes abject when it is found in places that it does not belong, in food for example, but when made into a wig it is no longer thought of as unclean or revolting "...since the beauty as well as the function of head hair are maintained."

Following Leach (1958) and Douglas (2002[1966]), we argue that hair (alongside a range of other bodily materials such as nail clippings and teeth), once separated from the body, finds itself on the margin between object and subject. As a substance that literally grows out of someone's body, it is intrinsically tied up with that person's life and is therefore entirely subjective. However, once separated from a living entity, it ceases to evolve and grow and can therefore be objectified and added to other materials or turned into something else entirely. It will, however, never be fully separable from its creator, the person it originated from, and therefore remains in a liminal position between the two.  
(Cuthbertson and de Becker in De Becker and Nettleton, 2014:53)

Kiki Smith writes that unlike other excretions, "your hair holds on you ... you can feel your hair in the second person not feeling it in the first" (Whitechapel, 1995:13). I use long strands of my own female hair, an object of desire in itself and a signifier of femininity. It is the single strands that threaten. Left in the domestic space, they signify disorder in that losing your hair signals illness, and a slow altering





Figure 6.  
*Dowry Cloth*  
Kiki Smith  
1991  
Lint collected from tumble dryers and hair  
274 x 274cm



Figure 7.  
*Dolce Far Niente*  
William Godward  
1904  
Oil on canvas  
50.8 x 76.2cm



*Felt*  
Lint and fiberglass resin  
100 x 20 x 62cm

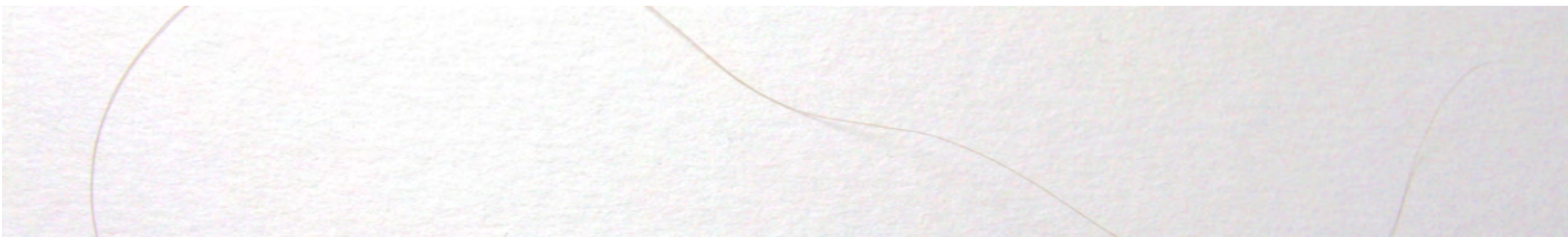
of the body. Single strands of hair can go unnoticed and gather, like dust. Overlooked, they threaten to creep into living spaces, becoming dirt, even without the threat of contagion. Loose hair, if not fixed into a style and shape, references the aberrant woman, out of control.<sup>6</sup>

In her piece *Dowry Cloth* (1990), Kiki Smith collected lint and wool, transformed these materials into small felt squares and sewed them together with hair. About her work she writes:

The female body keeps reverting to the particularity of its material being. Its reading is so rigidly encoded that it is extremely difficult to get any other reading than narcissism if the body happens to match the current bodily ideal; or if the body varies from the ideal in any way, then the work must address this variation.  
(Whitechapel, 1995:18)

I display a work very similar in form to *Dowry Cloth*, consisting of **Felt**, sieved and separated from the monthly harvest. I have cast my squares of **Felt** in the pose that mimics the woman in John William Godward's painting *Dolce Far Niente* (1904), which literally translates to 'how sweet it is to do nothing'. The pose is of a woman languidly reclining in a vaguely fetal position, outside on a fur rug, which in its time symbolised pubic hair.<sup>7</sup> I have used my own body to cast her idle pose. This figure is not a woman plagued by housework and the dirt associated with it. In this sculpture titled *Felt*, the pose is obscured, the *Felt* reads as a fur rug and the woman's body in this sculpture appears to have been swept under the carpet, out of sight. Where other sculptures in this body of work are indexical of my labour in the construction and therefore reference activity and 'work', this sculpture is quiet, resting.

In other sculptural installations, I hint to my physicality in other ways. I produce *Lace/Border*, with the use of my gendered body which assists to determine my petite physicality. With small fingers, I knot and order with a knowledge of plaits, braids and various kneedlework techniques, passed down/taught directly from my mother, who learned them from her mother. I do this with an eye for pleasing shapes and decorative patterns and a knowledge of and familiarity with lace, particularly the machine manufactured lace that is stitched onto the borders of bras and panties that are worn from a young age. The lacy edge is the border between a woman's body and her gendering as a constructed, pretty,



desirable feminine body. When considering underwear or lingerie, lace is employed for the mystery involved in a fabric that reveals as much of the body as it conceals. Rather than a small piece of lace, intended to wrap neatly around the hips of a woman, the 'Lace'<sup>8&9</sup> that I have produced is large in structure, measuring metres when displayed.

I have created *Hair Net*, made from many metres of three strands of hair plaited<sup>10</sup> together and crocheted to mimic the hair nets worn by ballet dancers during practice and performance. *Hair Net*, made from women's hair, struggles to maintain the aberrant female hair it attempts to encapsulate.

By using dust as a marker of low social status I challenge notions of the idealised female body and its associated labour. I do this by creating delicate, fragile objects.



*Hair Net*

Hair

3 strands of hair plaited together then  
crocheted

5.1 x 65.5 x 3.5cm

1/33

## Notes:

1. Cosmic dust is closer than we assume. It mingles and is collected with other dust found in our interior and exterior spaces. The dust particles from space contain tiny rocks, which could have once been part of a planet, the moon, asteroids and comets. These tiny pieces of dust allow for the study of objects in the solar system, from earth, although the exact origin of every cosmic dust particle remains a mystery (Imperial College London, 2014).

2. Cosmic dust is made up of minute particles of solid matter, which drift around the universe between stars. The particles measure between a few molecules and grains that are 0.1mm. So unlike household dust, cosmic dust operates like smoke. Cosmic dust is important in that it is the raw material from which planets are formed, and assist in the formation of young stars (<http://herschel.cf.ac.uk/science/infrared/dust>).

(Herschel Space Observatory: no date, no author).

3. Rachel Whiteread casts objects that are otherwise so familiar, so quotidian that they are disregarded and overlooked. I cast the negative space around my body as a way of making this space more prominent. I relocate the dust (half of which are skin cells) back to its source.

4. Ewe Lajer-Burcharth (2001:91) positions time as central to the effect that Parker's artworks have on the viewer. These artworks she defines as "objects as relics of our selves" (2001:91). It is this very encounter with time that Lajer-Burcharth states is both "...intimate and alienating" (Ibid). Lajer-Burcharth (2001:90) asserts that Parker's objects, which will remain after we die, represent time that moves through us and will also remain after we die, therefore some of Parker's works are didactic: time is continuous, we are not. It is this very notion of time that I apply to my work.

5. It should be noted that Kiki Smith stopped casting herself (intended as a stand in of a women's body)

when she grew older, conscious of the fact that her body now represented an older women (Witechapel, 1995:21).

6. The discourse and meaning of hair in Africa and the diaspora has a rich history, but I have chosen not to discuss this topic in this dissertation.

7. It should also be noted that in the Victorian era women would exchange locks of their hair as a sign of friendship, designed into objects known as 'Victorian Hair Art'. They would grow their hair long, only cutting it in instances of illness.

8. In the 1500's lace was made with fibres including cotton, silk and flax, along with metallic threads such as gold, silver, copper and hair. European women with grey hair would interlace their silver hair into a lace called hair lace. (McMasters, 2007) I link this greying hair, a signal of the transitory body, to value as it references the colour of a valuable metal, silver.

9. Today, the word 'hair' and 'lace' are linked to full lace wigs and lace front wigs. These are usually made with human hair (some with synthetic hair), which is tied to a lace base. The entire base of a full lace wig is made from sheer lace, while a lace front wig only has the sheer lace at the front of the wig, the hairline, the rest of the wig consists of a more durable material. The lace wig is attached to the wearer's hairline with glue and is bonded to the hair for around a week. Some lace wigs include fine baby hair which creates a more realistic hairline and helps conceal the lace edge of the wig.

10. The 'thread' that I use to sew/bind the pieces together, or fix sections of the matted material in place, consists of three strands of hair plaited together. In order to assign a use value to the various forms of dust that I collect, every form must be altered and with the altering the meaning changes.



Figure 8. Cosmic Dust in the Trifid Nebula (NGC6514)





*Rubber things*



*Things that reveal movements of air*



*Bone shaped things make Icarus wings*



*Colours that don't appear in my work*



*Origami*



*Things that can still grow*

### Chapter 3: Anxiety

As detailed in earlier chapters, I collect the **Large Dust Objects** from the monthly harvesting of my vacuum cleaner and categorise them according to my own devised taxonomy.

The taxonomy is systematic in applying a hierarchy to the excavation of my own incremental waste. Waste is the end point of consumption. This methodology is also an attempt to convert the chaos and anxiety experienced when confronted with mortality (from the material in question), into a productive end. I produce this body of work with the understanding that life consists of an unknown measure of time and quantities of this time are lost with each moment lived. I find this diminishing time to be analogous to the almost imperceptible presence of gathering dust, collecting in incremental quantities.

In *Collecting in a Consumer Society: A critical analysis*, Russel W Belk (1995:139) states that what we collect and exhibit is inevitably and increasingly sourced from the consumer culture in which we are inextricably absorbed. In this instance many of the objects that I collect from the vacuumed dirt are the remains of objects that once operated in a consumer society, but that are now separated from their use. Bits of outside brought into the interior, fragments of food that once nourished my body, hints of clothing that I have worn, furniture that has aided in my comfort and crumbling materials from my studio. In relation to my production, collecting as an activity forms a ritualised practice, an attempt to soothe anxiety.

In a further attempt to transform chaos into order, I have photographed my collection of categorised **Large Dust Objects**. The photographs subtly document the separate contents of each category as they increase in size throughout the duration of the project. Each category is pleasingly arranged and photographed with a macro lens, which focuses attention on small aspects of each category. The photographs are small in scale, printed on paper that is torn at the edges, suggesting a dislocation from a fixed taxonomy. I relate this practice to Susan Sontag's (1997:156) definition of "photographic acquisition". Sontag (1997:156) further states that the mere act of photographing something renders it a part of a system of classification, this "interminable dossier" of duplicates of the world, provides potential for control. The photographic documents are displayed in rows next to each other in stacks and in so doing represents a system that the placement of these photographs represents a system of



classification that is cross-referenced both horizontally and vertically. It must be noted that an attempt to control disorder does not necessitate the achievement of this goal. The potential for shifting classifications draws attention to the instability inherent in the chosen material: here the acts of ordering and re-ordering destabilise this control.

While formally drawing on a legacy of minimalism and conceptual art, artist Martin Creed is of interest for his use of strategies. Uncertainty permeates his work, for example, in *Work No 227 The lights going on and off* (2000) and in *Work No 132 A door opening and closing and a light going on and off* (1995), where a door opens and closes and a light goes on and off at regular intervals. Motifs of ordering through sequence also appear often in Creed's work, for example, *Work No. 960* (2008), where several cacti are placed in order of height. Of this work Creed notes that "having things in a kind of order like that, to me that's a comforting thing to see" (Sooke, 2011). Creed often refers to his life as a "messy soup" from which he can pull aspects out of and classify/order them as a means of control (Sooke, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Paul Morley suggests that Creed's choice to number his work, rather than title them, is another means of control through order (Guardian Music, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The exercise of ordering my *Large Dust Objects* photographs is parallel to Creed's, where ordering, classifying and categorising are a means of making sense of the world. In neat sequences things can be understood, rather than in a murky 'soup', where the lack of clarity evokes anxiety regarding the unknown, the confusion. In Creed's statements on his own work, the motivation and considerations of production take a prominent position in the analysis thereof.

The categories into which I separate the **Large Dust Objects** are based on my own hierarchies for use-value, which are founded on idiosyncratic concepts. Classifications such as *Things that reveal movements of air*, *Maggie attractors* and *Colours that don't appear in my work* are just some of the categories. This need to find significance in fragments and found objects involve less certainty and more vague traces as well as the inclination to be "drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects" fit some of the criteria for what Hal Foster (2004:3,5) terms "an archival impulse". He relates this to artists who propose alternative methods of ordering, inclusive and exclusive of the museum, defining it as:

archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic...  
(Foster, 2004:5)

The desire to archive this entropic substance is another attempt to keep anxiety in control by doc-

umenting my autobiography through remnants of objects that relate directly to me, assisted in my experience of living and evidence of my existence.

In an early paper, *Character and anal erotism*, Freud (1956:45,47) identified a specific personality type as having the character traits of “obstinacy, parsimony and orderliness” and attributed these traits to the sublimation or perpetuation of impulses originating in childhood.<sup>3</sup> These characteristics are useful in defining my current practice. My orderliness is evidenced by a devised taxonomic system in which to categorise my dust while my obstinacy and parsimony are clear from my unwillingness to let go of my own resources (the dust that I had a part in creating), hence parsimony. Schwartz (1982:429) states that contemporary consideration of the obsessive compulsive (those who have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)<sup>4</sup> originates in Freud’s essay.

Freud (1956:48) noted of such individuals that “the cleanliness, orderliness, and reliability give exactly the impression of a reaction-formation against an interest in things that are unclean and intrusive and ought not to be on the body (‘Dirt is matter in the wrong place’).”<sup>5</sup> My practice foregoes this “reaction-formation” and claims an interest in dirt and objects that are no longer considered part of the body, notably hair, nails and skin cells.

Existentialist writers such as Becker (Schwartz, 1982:429) place emphasis on the use of ritualised thoughts and patterns as a mechanism to distract obsessive-compulsive personality types from the awareness of being “vulnerable and finite”. What the “Obsessive” seems to be attempting with the creation of self-implemented rituals, is to control what he/she can as a means of avoiding the acknowledgement of how little control they actually have over essential matters such as their “physical existence” (Schwartz, 1982:429-430).

In his paper “Job Involvement as Obsessive-Compulsion”, Schwartz (1982:429) reports on studies that conclude that for certain workers, job involvement is viewed as the end point itself, secondary to the outcome of the performance. He asserts that the ability to become absorbed by a job (rather than the mechanics of doing the job) is the primary concern of obsessive-compulsives. Such persons may concentrate on elements of the work that support their technique of avoiding anxiety rather than quality of execution (Schwartz, 1982:430). Creed’s compulsion to work in order to avoid negative feelings





Figure 9.  
*Work No. 227*  
 Martin Creed  
*The Lights going on and off*  
 2000  
 5 seconds on / 5 seconds off



Figure 10.  
 Martin Creed  
*Work No. 960*  
 2008  
 Cacti  
 13 Parts, dimensions variable



Figure 11.  
 Martin Creed  
*Work No. 132*  
*A door opening and closing and a light going on and off*  
 1995  
 Materials and dimensions variable

about himself may be related to Becker and Schwartz' understanding of the function of work for some personality types.

As a method of avoiding anxiety, my production includes a labour-intensive process in which strands of my hair and threads of cotton and yarn (collected from the vacuum cleaner) are knotted into a fabric that vaguely resembles a ballerina's tutu or a shed snakeskin. The construction of *Tutu: All the hours in-between* consisting of thousands of knots, is a ritualised means of work and ultimately an endeavor aimed at avoiding the anxiety caused by the imminence of death. The action of tying knots in the work indicates anxiety, while the tying of an interminable amount of knots suggests a disorder in myself. Knots in a decorative pattern also suggest a disorder.

Granted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised, but its potential for patterning is indefinite ... we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns ... Ritual recognises the potency of disorder.  
(Douglas, 1966:117)

I perceive the literal, decorative patterns created in needlework and lace that I mimic in my work as an analogy for the symbolic ordering of societal structures. This decorating of domestic environments with the use of pattern (found in wallpaper, for example) recalls a social ordering, where women must be "prettified or otherwise disguised" (Bauman, 1992:12). I observe this prettiness through the physical contorting of a women's body into contrived shapes (such as plaiting strands of hair) to push her away from the 'natural' inclination towards dirt or death, through literal and figurative systems of ordering (I refer to this notion in chapter 1). This tidying of the female body was evident in Victorian nudes where loose female hair signaled the aberrant nature of a women and her body.





Detail of Tutu: All the hours in-between



Detail of Tutu: All the hours in-between



Detail of Lace/Border



Figure 12.  
Traditional crochet doily

While making *Tutu*, even after tying the strands into permanent knots, the natural curls in the hair defy this ordering, refusing certain patterns, and bend away from imposed order. Strands left loose when the work is displayed are animated in the gallery, twisting around other loose strands and often creating their own knots.

Patterns in my work are to be found in *Tutu* that was produced according to a decorative pattern, and in *Lace/Border* that has some of these doily or lace-like patterns.<sup>6</sup> The motifs in *Tutu*, as in traditional doilies, are often circular. This circle traditionally symbolises entirety, the eternal and the absolute, as it is without beginning and end and includes concepts of permanence. It is also associated with the wheel, sun, moon, ouroboros and the clock. A dot within a circle is the alchemical symbol for gold (Tresidder, 2004: 108-109). Cycles, the circular motion of a symbol are also related to women's menstruation cycles. This circularity is prevalent in the action of vacuuming, using the contents of the vacuum cleaner as material, then vacuuming my studio space and cleaning up the minuscule bits of dust that escaped the sifting and categorising, only to be excavated in my next harvesting.

There is a contradiction in this symbolism; as while women are thereby connected to nature and its cycles, they are simultaneously denied the permanence attributed to the male body. I cause shifts in these cycles by extricating waste from its certain future and repurposing it as art material. In some works my use of circular form is material and in others it is a physical action.<sup>7</sup>

These cycles occur in the circuit walked to break down the platform shoes in *Walking a Familiar Route* (which I will explain in chapter 4), the *Toe Tips*, crayon shoes that draw the ballet movement *Ronde Jambe*, where the tip of the foot is pushed directly in front of the body, then to the side and placed back next to the ankle. This sequence is repeated again and again. Other repeated cycles are found in the drawings *Breakthrough* and *Until it Breaks*. These drawings involve the repetition of my thumb, placed for a moment on each fingertip positioned on the reverse side of a piece of paper, then back towards the thumb. This pattern of finger tapping in the same order was repeated until the paper broke. It took 9,5 hours of tapping the Fabriano Academia, at 30-minute intervals, in *Breakthrough* until the paper wore through. It is displayed as a small piece of paper, sullied with dirt and the body's oils around the tears, evidencing the body's mark on the paper. The same repetition of fingers occurs in *Until it Breaks*, a much larger piece of paper with just 1 hour and 30 minutes of tapping, indicating that the piece must still be completed.





*Practice*

Dust crayons on paper

Drawing done by artist wearing *Toe Tips* and practicing ballet exercise, *Ronde Jambe*

70.5 x 105cm



*Toe Tips*

Dust crayons and ribbon

12 pairs: 312 x 8 x 11cm



*Breakthrough*  
Paper tapped with fingers until the paper wore through  
9,5 hours  
29 x 22 x 2.8cm



*Until It Breaks*  
Paper tapped with fingers for 1,5 hours  
52.5 x 180 x 3.8cm



Detail of *Breakthrough*



Detail of *Until It Breaks*





Figure 13.  
*Commuter*  
N. Dash  
2011  
Graphite on paper  
37,5 x 24,8cm

Mudra, a Sanskrit word meaning seal, mark or gesture, are hand positions, developed in ancient Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and are still practiced today during meditation and in certain yoga positions. Those who practice hand mudras believe that placing light pressure on the hands will correspond and therefore stimulate specific regions of the brain (Austen, 2012). Different Mudras are used for different ailments or the benefits they bring to the person practicing; most of them involve pressing two or more fingertips together. For example, daily practice of the Gyan Mudra is said to benefit memory, concentration and the nervous system, and prevents headache, loss of sleep, tension, anxiety, depression and fears (Datta, n.d).<sup>8</sup>

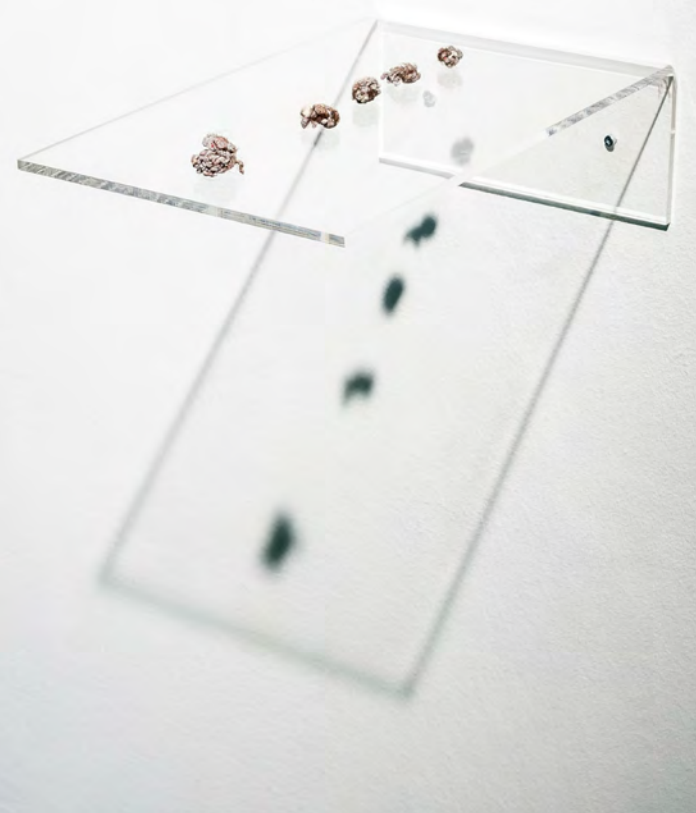
The Mudra for balancing energy is the exact sequence that I press my fingertips, used in *Breakthrough*. This pattern is a system that I have used for much of my life, mostly unaware that I am doing it at the time. Psychologists explain this type of repetitive motion as a self-regulating device, commonly used by those with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.<sup>9</sup>

These repetitive gestures can be found in N. Dash's *Commuter* drawings. These consist of sheets of paper that she folds, unfolds and refolds repeatedly until the paper has been stressed to the point that the folds create deep, permanent creases in the work. These are created while she rides the public transport between her home and her studio. Once the creases have transformed the paper, she coats the paper with a thick layer of graphite, keeping the fragile worked paper from disintegrating. N. Dash notes:

the touch that is less visible is no less important ... I know the piece is finished when it can no longer take the stress of my touch. As I work on a piece, the relationship with it builds and becomes more satisfying, so in a way I must force myself to stop working ... I don't consider it a task or routine. The work, to me, is very deliberate and conscious...Every mark is intentional ... I have a problematic relationship with the pencil, which I feel creates a distance between the hand and the piece itself ... Making drawings through touch allows me to have direct contact with the paper.

(Nackman, 2014)





*5 Stressballs*

Lint

Lint rubbed between the palms for 15, 25, 35, 45 and 55 minutes



Figure 14.

*1000 hours of staring*

Tom Friedman

1992 – 1997

82.5 x 82.5cm

A piece of paper the artist has stared at for 1000 hours

Dash's paper drawings and *Until it Breaks* and *Breakthrough* bring the attention back to the fingers, which become mark-making instruments, changing the quality of the paper, questioning its integrity. By utilising the disquiet that prompts fidgeting, channeling this anxious energy into something useful, a drawing that soothes during its making is transformed into evidence of anxiety, transferred from a body to an object, from the subject (maternal body) into an Other. Like N. Dash, my work is also involved in making through unmaking, such as the two drawings mentioned as well the *Ronde Jambe* drawings. The *Toe Tips* made from crayons, of wax mixed with **Silt**, are strapped to my feet as I practice the movement, the crayons mark the paper and gradually crumble and break. I repeat the exercise until the *Toe Tips* are broken. I have repeated this exercise 12 times over this project, collected from 12 monthly harvests. One drawing is presented along with the broken shoes, as evidence of the performance that took place.

As Dash's hand and finger movements are such an integral part of her praxis, her work becomes an extension of her body. I understand this to be an expression of how certain artists, including myself, position their art as a seamless extension of their lives or physical activities. I work with materials that come from my body, I grow my material and apply devices that alleviate anxiety to practices of art making.

With reference to her work made between the studio, Dash notes that the title of the work references the gap in time that is considered "dead time" (Nackman, 2014). I interpret this as a means for the artist to make useful that which is referred to as "dead".

Dash also produces fabric pieces by kneading squares of cotton fabric, while her hand is in her pocket, until the small piece of cotton unravels and begins to fall apart. To my mind this questions the integrity of the material as well as the unease that results in a need to work objects until they break. It fulfills the need to hide certain nervous fidgeting from public view. Dash exhibits enlarged photographs of the cotton, archiving the object, much like my own *Large Dust Object photographs*. The photographs are end points to materials that have been directed towards decay through human touch. The photographs are indexical of the materials that assist the living.





Figure 15.  
*One Year Performance 1980-1981*  
Tehching Hsieh

April, 1980

STATEMENT

I, SAM HSIEH, plan to do a one year performance piece.

I shall punch a Time Clock in my studio every hour on the hour for one year.

I shall immediately leave my Time Clock room, each time after I punch the Time Clock.

The performance shall begin on April 11, 1980 at 7 P.M. and continue until April 11, 1981 at 6 P.M.

Sam Hsieh

*Sam Hsieh*

111 HUDSON ST 2FL N.Y.C. 10013

Figure 16.  
Statement for *One year performance 1980-1981*  
Tehching Hsieh

In *Stressballs*, I have rubbed lint between my palms in a circular motion for a set amount of minutes, 15, 25, 35, 45 and 55 minutes each. All these points of time devisable by five, referring to five minutes often expressed as the timing of a short, manageable moment: “I’ll be there in 5 minutes”, “It’ll just take 5 minutes”, “We’ll be 5 minutes late”. Five minutes is a symbol, but one day and one life can be divided into a number of five minutes. The number 5 also refers to the digits on each hand, the instruments used to operate daily lives. The hand is the source of the body where I concentrate many of the works that deal with anxiety.

A stress ball is usually made from rubber or an elastic material and filled with a substance that allows the shape of the ball to be manipulated. One rubs a stress ball in one hand, between palm and fingers or between two hands to alleviate stress in the hand, arm, neck or shoulder muscles. The action is also commonly believed to stimulate pressure points in our bodies that help relieve stress and anxiety.

In *Stressballs*, the more time spent rubbing the stressballs between the palms, the more compact the balls become. The stress has been transferred from the body to the ball of lint, evidencing the time spent on producing the ball. The possibility of the viewer imagining the rubbing between two fingers is the site in which the work exists. In Tom Friedman’s *1000 hours staring at a piece of paper* (1992 – 1997), the artist did just as the description states. The piece of paper becomes a marker for the time spent making the work rather than the outcome of the work. Friedman’s piece only functions if the backstory is believed.

Tehching Hsieh’s *One year performance 1980 - 1981* (informally known as *The Time Clock Piece*), is one of six durational performances by the artist that took place over an entire year. His statements detail his intent for the piece. Over the course of 365 days Hsieh ‘punched in’ a worker’s time clock every hour, on the hour for an entire year in his Manhattan studio. Each event was documented and he edited these images together in a film. The entire year is repeated in 6 minutes. The film demonstrates the movement of time in the changing light in Hsieh’s room, the hands of the time clock speed around the time piece and Hsieh’s hair slowly grows from his shaven head. The photographs resemble those taken of a kidnapper’s victim holding the newspaper of the same day, to prove that the subject is alive. When viewing Hsieh’s piece the viewer considers every hour of a year and how they have been spent.



In my monthly harvesting I examine my waste, indicators of how I have spent my time. Bits of rubble that collected in my shoe during a walk, down feathers that escaped my pillow, crumbs of plaster of paris used to make a mold for a sculpture. I examine my waste that represents how I have spent my time, how my time is slowly wasting away and how my time on earth slowly wastes my body. How much time do we waste in a year? What is the definition of time wasted? Hsieh seems to have already answered this question for himself: “For me, life is a life sentence, life is passing time, life is freethinking” (Forrest, 2014). When asked why Hsieh chooses a year as his chosen length of time Hsieh responds: “One year is the basic unit of calculating life, is the time that the Earth goes around the Sun. I used one year as the time frame; it also can bring the piece a quality of life” (Forrest, 2014).

This awareness of my mortality, that time slowly runs out, that “All things move toward their end” (Cave, 2007:215-216, line 43) contributes greatly to my anxiety. That every second the clock ticks, indicates one second less. Christopher Rawlence notes, on the subject of the development of the mechanical clock: “Perhaps the nature of the mechanical clock encourages us to abstract time from nature itself. Sixty-minute hours weren’t waiting to be measured; they were the creation of time measurement” (Rawlence, 1985:36). It is according to this abstract idea, that a day happens to be divisible by sixty, in which we conduct our lives.

The clocking in and clocking out references the factory worker’s monotonous working day.<sup>10</sup> Although, unlike paid work, the time clock does not account for the hours Hsieh worked. The emphasis has shifted to the action of clocking in, that is the artwork, what happened in between was almost inconsequential. One can’t help imagine what occurred between the clocking in, the lack of sleeping time, recreational time, time to make a living in the year that Hsieh was chained to his clock. Rather than his work being a seamless extension of his life, the one year performances dictated every aspect of Hsieh’s life and the ‘work’ took place between hours.

Those who are paid according to the hours they have worked, validated by the time clock, are indeed aware of the exact value of their time.<sup>11</sup> Art is a vocation where the worker/artist is not paid according to the hours they have worked, yet much process art centers around measurement, often of investments and records of time. In my own work I consider time in relation to a ‘lifetime’, slowly decreasing as death nears: death anxiety is inextricably linked to time.

However, the post industrial transformation has altered collective encounters of time (such as the factory whistle) into fragmented units of temporal symbols, for example, reminders from personal electronic devices (Ladner, 2009:285).<sup>12</sup> The postmodern concept of the temporal in general has changed from the linear acceptance of time unfolding to a non-linear, discontinuous, fragmented sense of time, where past, present and future are inextricably linked and allow for a constant darting back and forth,



*100 Stressballs*

Lint and foamboard

Lint rubbed between the palms for five minutes, one hundred times

34 x 65.5 x 3cm



between these three sections. I employ this movement from incomplete to the imagined complete object, from the imagined original use of the fragments in my work, to what they could possibly become. On the subject of (Existential) paradox, Becker explains that humans are split into two, aware of their uniqueness compared to nature while conscious of their finite body (Becker, 1973:26). Humans have both a “symbolic identity” constructed from symbolic meaning, while also operating from a physical body (Becker, 1973:26). The fear of death is the principal cause of motivation for humans and the production of heroism is a reaction to this fear (Becker, 1973:11). Becker writes of “heroism” constructed through the admiration of the boldness required to confront death, while doubting our own courage (Becker, 1973, 11-12). To construct this hero from the symbolic side, is to deal with the inevitable physical decay and finality of the body.

“More sensational are those familiar miscarriages of lies about reality, what we call obsessions and compulsions, phobias of all kinds” (Becker, 1973:180). As mentioned earlier, compulsions are an attempt to keep obsessive thoughts in check or distract from negative thoughts around meaning, death anxiety and the problematic, finite body. My works have this same sense of compulsion. “No wonder that one cannot give it up: that would release all by itself the whole flood of terror that one is trying to deny and overcome” (Becker,1973:180).

## Notes:

1. Martin Creed's word piece: This poem, also a work, may shed some light on his process.

### If you're lonely...

Work... this is work. This is hard work. Talking about work is work. Thinking is work. Words are work. Words are things, shapes. It's hard to compose them, to put them in any kind of order. Words don't add up. Numbers add up! Things are everywhere. Everything is something, everything has something, but not everyone has someone. It's hard to distinguish between things, to separate things. I'm in a soup of thoughts, feelings and things, and words. Actually, it's more like a purée... or thick and stiff, like a paté. I'm in a paté and it's hard to move. It needs a lot of work to get out of it — or to separate it and find something in it. Thoughts, thoughts, sometimes I want to stop them, but it's hard to stop them. It's work. Dealing with thoughts, that's work. Thoughts, thoughts, don't come! Stop! Please! When you're going to sleep and you can't stop thinking, thoughts queueing up, that's when you need drugs — or a notebook.

I want something to ease the pain. I want to get out of my head.

Smoking used to help. For a long time smoking made my life bearable. I gave up smoking because I couldn't do it enough. I couldn't smoke enough. It was never enough. I wanted to smoke all the time, to breathe in all the time, but I couldn't, not in the shower, not when I was talking, not when I was eating. I wanted something I could do all the time. Not smoking, that was something I could do all the time. I am an addict in search of drugs.

Maybe working is trying, and work — the result of work — is everything that one tries to do. Trying... looking for excitement, or trying to handle it and use it to get out of the paté. Trying to do things; talking. Or maybe testing is a good way of putting it: testing things out. Testing things out by putting things about, and all the time trying, hoping to be excited, wanting. Wanting is what makes me work: excitement, desire for something.

Sometimes people say: 'What the fuck do you think you're doing? That's not art.' I say: 'Fuck off, assholes!'

Assholes... they are something to get excited about, something to work for. Work is a fight against loneliness, against low self esteem, against depression, and against staying in bed. Sometimes my self esteem is so low that I cannot reach it even when I'm feeling down.

I want to be on my own, but I don't want to be alone.

Work is everything, I think. Everything is work. Everything that involves energy, mental or physical. So... everything, apart from being dead. Living...

I don't know how anyone can do it. How can anyone get through it? I can see why people hide. I can see why people commit suicide.



If you're lonely, If you're sad, If you're lovely, If you're mad,

Then this is for you.

(Creed, 2005)

Work #470 (2005)

I relate the work that Creed writes of to my own practice in that the work is not merely a distraction from an unquiet mind but a means of finding purpose in existence.

2. This numbering system illuminates the amount of artworks that Creed has produced in his career, now in their thousands. It is both a testament to the amount of work that Creed has produced as well as the amount of work required to keep his unease and even depression, at bay.

3. Freud discovered that the character types who displayed this triad of personality traits had something else in common. As infants they would withhold their bowel movements when placed on the toilet, as they took pleasure in defecating. Freud (1956:46) noted that this anal erotism “the erotogenic significance of the anal zone” lost its significance in these individuals after childhood, when the three character traits, orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy, became prominent. Freud (1924:47) suggested that the three traits of the former anal erotics may be the result of these individuals’ sublimation of anal erotism.

4. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is an anxiety disorder, affecting 2,5% of people over their lifetime, regardless of gender, culture or ethnicity. This disorder is characterised by the affected person carrying out a number of compulsions in order to deal with obsessional thoughts. Common compulsions include cleaning, counting, checking, requesting or demanding reassurance and ensuring order and symmetry (Kelly, n.d).

5. This quote, although not cited in *Character and anal erotism* is often attributed to Freud, yet the true author is Lord Palmerston, who included the quote in an 1883 issue of Longman’s Magazine (Croak. 2012). This quote is notably similar to Mary Douglas’ (1966:44) quote of dirt being “matter out of place”.

6. Crochet is a type of needlework that is done with a crochet hook and a single piece of thread, usually cotton or yarn. A doily often takes the form of a flat crocheted mat. A motif is a small, usually circular doily which reoccurs in the garment contributing to the pattern. These motifs are usually produced independently



Figure 17.  
Mudra for balancing energy



and then attached to the rest of the garment or mat by using crochet stitches or are otherwise hand sewn together.

The craft of crochet speculatively began around the 1800's. Due to the dropping price of cotton thread, the British, American and French practiced crochet as a cheaper form of making lace (Foss, 2014).

7. For several years, I have knitted a length of knitting twelve metres long. When I reach the end of the wool, I reknit the length of material, with the same wool. This is a circular activity that is located between produced artwork and a compulsive action.

8. The directions for a Mudra for balancing energy are as follows:

Set of four mudras for balancing energy that are used in a sequence. Alternately touch the tips of each finger with the tip of your thumb. Keep each connected for a few seconds or longer and do for a few minutes total. Do this with both hands simultaneously. This is a simple way of balancing your energy that you can do almost anywhere, while sitting, standing, walking, lying down. The overall effect is that you get calmer, more relaxed and concentrated. The separate mudras (hand positions) have the following effects: Thumb touches tip of index finger opens the Root chakra, and moves more energy to the legs and lower body. Makes one calmer and more concentrated. Thumb touches tip of middle finger Fosters patience. Thumb touches tip of ring finger Energy, stability and self-confidence. Thumb touches tip of pinky finger. Intuition and feeling.

(Berkers, n.d)

9. Compulsions, or repetitive behaviors may be overt actions (ie hoarding, cleaning, arranging, repeating, checking, tapping, rubbing) or mental rituals (ie mental counting, mental reviewing, repeated prayer, silent list making, etc.). Typically, rituals are performed to allay fears or ward off physical tension. Unfortunately, they bring only short-term relief to the sufferer and act to further reinforce the obsessions (Advanced behavioral health, 2013). Sometimes people with OCD use their fingers to tap out numbers, spell out words in a repetitive manner.

10. The Enemy:

Between here and there  
The corridor journey  
On two buses

To a clock That rings And a slot  
With a name - Mine  
And the numbers One two nine These are mine

A card marks time

Among faces sad and disinterested Amid wheels that hum to the strum of steel  
Machines work the mind  
To a gentle hypnosis

As you give all you can  
Often more  
To receive what is given  
Which is less  
Remember the others  
And this life of no questions

And as you feel at your ease  
And feel you belong  
Beware of this ease  
The prize of the blind  
And the strong

Mike Haywood - steelworker, third hand roller  
(Rawlence, 1985: 34)

11. The first mechanical clocks arose from a need to accurately divide the day. These mechanical clocks were found in churches and monasteries in the thirteenth centuries and indicated the set times in which the clergy were called to prayer (Rawlence, 1985:32).

The first generation of factory workers at the start of the Industrial Revolution came from an experience of working the land where a sense of time was centred around the time it took to complete the task at hand. They would often own an implement and, therefore, be in charge of their means of production. The factory clock and clockwork rhythm of working, changed the worker's association with time. As they no longer owned their means of production, their labour time became what they sold, making time the worker's ultimate objective (Rawlence,1985:44).

12. Even in this era, time is still gendered, as women spend more time in domestic labour. The figuring of time in the workplace can constrain the amount of time the individual spends on domestic tasks (which in turn affects the amount of time the family spends on these chores) (Ladner, 2009: 285).



## Chapter 4: Process

In the tradition of Process Art, I set myself a condition of making which is meaningful for the work. It is a means and not an end. The artwork takes place during the process, the making of the work. The form is a record of the artwork, which takes place during the process.<sup>1</sup> Many of the works defy an end and resist the model of completion that an exhibition usually assumes. In the case of the *Unfinishable Pieces* these works are always in the process of becoming and are produced with the intention of re-exhibiting these anti-monuments as the work grows.

Contemporary artists working with a process-based methodology that incorporates a labour-intensive practice, include Paul Edmunds and Tom Friedman, amongst others. These artists utilise quotidian materials, finding new considerations for them through specific processes. Often modest objects are created with a meticulous labour intensity applied to familiar materials, emphasising their materiality.

Paul Edmunds embodies this specific practice of producing. He notes (in O'Toole, 2004) that “[his] work is characterised by an unconventional use of materials and cumulative processes as well as an ongoing exploration of pattern. On the cusp between abstraction and representation, my work seems more concerned with process than depiction”. The exhibition *In the Making: materials and process*, held at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in 2005, included a number of local artists (including Edmunds) working with this approach. The introduction to the catalogue states that the artists were creating art objects that were “testament to intellectual curiosity, perseverance, vision, aesthetic appreciation and transformative potential” which demonstrated the inventive and original engagements with their chosen materials and processes and the same text also emphasised that “[o]bsessive traits manifest themselves in many of the works” (Michael Stevenson Gallery, 2005).

Edmunds (2013) states that time is always engaged in his process and that others have described his practice as being “extravagant with time”. He devises new techniques of making to suit the given material in a method he refers to as the accretion or accumulation of gestures (Edmunds, 2013). The monthly harvesting of the dust from my vacuum cleaner is an effort to indicate this time. My monthly production of crayon drawings marks this time on the paper, while the five minutes allocated for each of the *100 Stressballs* document the effects of the labour and shorter periods of time, on these objects. The *100 Stressballs* are pinned in neat rows, like an entomologist’s collection of insects, ordered and classified into their various genera. The repetitive labour that has transformed them still renders them fragile, five minutes is not enough to fix them into a permanent shape and their unraveling evidences their impermanence, between form and formlessness. The motif of the circle/sphere is a symbol of permanence that the piece cannot achieve.

The resulting sculptures, the material evidencing its delicate handling and manipulation by Edmunds



*Tutu: All the hours in-between*  
Hair and mixed media  
570 x 70cm



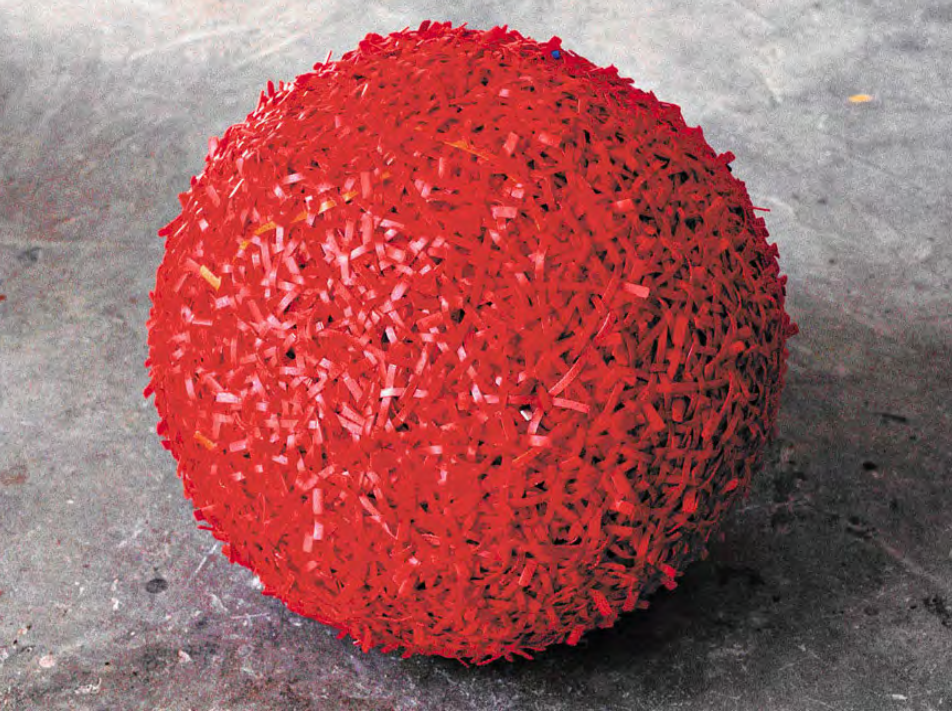


Figure 18.  
*Kernal*  
Paul Edmunds  
1994-1999  
Plastic bottle sealing strips  
38cm in diameter



Figure 19.  
Tom Friedman  
*Untitled*  
1995  
Toothpicks  
66 x 76 x 58.5cm  
A starburst construction made with 30,000  
toothpicks

brings to mind the time spent making the work. It is with this intention that, when viewing my process-based work, the viewer can relate to the gesture used to alter the material, and replay in fragments (in their own mind), the production of the work and performance of the work.

In *Tutu: All the hours in between*, the knotting is a ubiquitous motion. To make a knot for the purpose of securing or tying is a relatable task used throughout life in various ways. It is the recalling of this corporeal task that I hope to evoke in the viewer by the thousands of knots in the *Tutu*, used to construct the designs which form the pattern.

In 1994 Edmunds began making *Kernal* (1994 – 1999), which eventually took the artist five years of working on the piece an hour a day, to complete. He collected the plastic strips around sorghum beer bottles from a shop on his farm and the result is a testament to the hours spent making the work. In his altering of the everyday objects, we are forced to engage with these quotidian, banal objects, so often overlooked.

Bruce Hainley (2001:59-61) notes that the majority of materials Tom Friedman requires to make his work can be found in his home and yet he never makes work about the domestic. “It is not as if many of Friedman’s sculptures, formed from repetitive motions and gestures, could not also be seen as a way of avoiding the void opening up in the quotidian” (Hainley, 2001:66).

In *Untitled* (1995) the accompanying description of the work reads: “A starburst construction made with thousands of toothpicks” (Hainley, Cooper, & Searle, 2001:80). In this piece the construction seems to have begun at the centre of the piece and the thousands of toothpicks applied atop this starting point, seems to have exploded outwards.

On the concept of time in his work, Friedman states: “I think the time element becomes relative to each piece. Even ones that take a minute or a second seem to compress or expand time in a way whereby they become similar to the more laboured pieces. One’s idea of an instant or an eternity takes the same amount of time to think about” (Friedman in Hainley, Cooper & Searle, 2001:24).<sup>2</sup>



In *Stressballs*, as in the *Tutu*, the *Toe Tips*, *Walking a familiar route*, *Lace/Border*, *Breakthrough* and *Until it Breaks*, the sculptures are intended to not only act as proof of a performance, but to relate to the simple repetitive actions in the work and with this corporeal knowledge, relate to the time taken to make each piece. This documented time, which slowly runs out and signals anxiety that causes the construction of the work: feet that walk, fingers that tie knots and sew thread, palms that rub together in circular motions, thumbs that press each finger. Illnesses and abnormalities may lurk within, but the corporeal sensations that we are aware of and have some control over, such as touch and movement, are a collective knowledge that connects all human bodies on the planet.

Like Edmunds and Friedman, my objects represent the time it took to produce the objects, evidenced by the labour-intensive work. But unlike these artists, I present incomplete works, which will be added to. Every time they are exhibited they will have changed, and thus the work at any time also points to the future in which I will continue to work on these pieces. The *Unfinishable Pieces* can be considered in a number of ways: as unfulfilled wishes, failures, or permanently residing in a state of incompleteness.<sup>3</sup>

In Francis Alÿs' *The paradox of praxis (sometimes making something leads to nothing)* (1997) the artist pushed a large block of ice around the streets of Mexico City while it melted. As the title suggests, the 'making' of the piece did not result in an object, but 'something' was still produced, the cognition of the artwork. This work speaks of ideas concerning intended failure.

*Walking a familiar route* refers to an unwitnessed action, where I walked the circuit from my apartment, to my studio at Michaelis, to my ballet class, then back to my apartment, until the shoes (made from **Silt** and wax) broke and were impossible to walk in. The action saw the shoes slowly crumble and break as I walked, distributing my dust (with which the shoes were made) into an environment familiar to me. When experienced in the detail or within the title of the work, the performance becomes an imagined/intersubjective experience.

Ferguson points out Alÿs' preference for "fragments rather than wholes", noting that these fables that the artist creates are indeed fragmentary moments (Ferguson, 2007:73). These 'fragments' are both literal, the bits of dust and metaphorical, indicating the the fragments of time, as well as the fragmentary aspect of my work. Alÿs has stated:

If I were to make a "more complete story", I would not start at the beginning or the end.  
I would need to work from some middle point, because – the "in between" - is the space  
where I function the best.  
(Alÿs in Ferguson, 2007:198/199)



Figure 20.  
*Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*  
Francis Alÿs  
1997  
Photographic documentation of a video



Figure 21.  
Detail of *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*



Renee Holleman, a Michaelis MFA graduate of 2008, works with concerns of futility, optionality and language. She has stated similar concerns to Alÿs in the construction of a non-linear narrative. She questions, “How to begin from the middle, which is further than it should be, but still too far behind?” (Holleman, 2008). I locate my *Unfinishable pieces* in the “in between” (*sic*) spaces, beginning in the middle, collecting bits of time marked out by the labour of the work as well as the time taken to collect the material. The dust I have begun collecting (in the middle of my life) is a measure of the time lost in life and alludes to the time remaining. This in-between space, between beginning and end is the general space of production.

Alÿs situates his work in another (in-between) space, the realm of the rehearsal. This responds to his reluctance for resolution and conclusion: there is always the possibility for change or altering (Ferguson, 2007:195). I posit my own *Unfinishable Pieces* in this realm of rehearsal, always worked on, added to, but defying the goal of conclusion, denying performance (and yet evidencing performance as the production, rehearsal as performance). The titles and dates of Alÿs’ artworks often change as they are exhibited, reinforcing this notion of incompleteness. This insistence of rehearsal as performance, continuous rehearsal, is a refusal of the finite, the completion. The production is an assertion of life, an attempt at the continuous, with a material that signifies mortality: life confronting death.

In Alÿs’ work, the point of completion is always delayed: the work is situated in the future - a point that is always moving forward as one moves towards it (Ferguson, 2007:195). The *Unfinishable Pieces* are positioned in the future, as they are perpetually unfinished. They equally exist in the past as the non-materials (dust) that they are made from deem them self-referential souvenirs of a life lived.

Emma Cocker (2009:159) categorises Alÿs’ strategy of repeated failure as revision, as a playful scheme that “disrupts normative expectations and values by refusing their rules in favour of another logic”. By establishing the rules of my own ‘game’, I am setting myself a task, the achievement of this task, in this case incompleteness, is not a futile act. Futility is defined as that which is without purpose. In the act of transforming matter without purpose into something with a function, namely the respite of anxiety (during the act of construction), matter with a use (as material) the dust is transformed or transmuted into matter with a function, matter with value.

The incompleteness of the *Unfinishable Pieces* relates to the incomplete life, the unfinished product, created from my body matter that is left once my body expires.

The self-portrait is produced by the effect on the materials, the repetitive action, the record of my own physicality and my cognition that form a ‘handwriting’ (in this confusing, multiplicitous and omnipresent substance: dust). Tom Friedman’s work is self-portraiture, Bruce Hainley (2001:47) writes: “Self-portrait as a way of indicating a self no longer there, no longer what it was, no longer what it is.



Crayon shoes before performing *Walking a familiar route*.  
30 x 9 x 27cm



*Walking a familiar route*  
Shoes worn while walking a familiar circuit until they broke  
Dust crayons and ribbon  
30 x 9 x 27cm



Self-portrait as a mouth having chewed, self-portrait as the utensils for cleaning a body, self-portrait as a mouth having sucked...”.

I consider my works as self-portraiture, both in the provenance of the material, the evidence of life through the fact of having a body, as well as the mark of the body on the work. Hainley (2001:48) states that “The relation between Tom Friedman and the thing he makes a complicated performance of identity.” (Hainley, 2001:48)

Many of the works reference ballet, an extreme form of physical control that links to the duality of strength and fragility within the body. A ballet dancer’s body is also a record of years of training to acquire the technique, lengthening and strengthening of the body into a workable sculpture.

Today it is agreed by experts that the proportions of a ballet dancer’s physique are necessary for enduring the stress on the body that the discipline demands. The ideal figure for a classical dancer is a long neck, lengthy legs, a torso that is considered to be medium or short in proportion to the rest of the figure, long arms and feet with high insteps. However, if the feet are not strong and “aesthetically pleasing”, a female dancer’s chances of dancing professionally in classical ballet are slim (Nolan, 2011). Even the toes should be uniform, so that one toe does not take more weight than the others. Many ballet dancers who appear on stage must also boast a thin, swanlike body and be pale and petite. This is difficult to achieve if a dancer is not born with this ideal body. The ballet companies define the height of their dancers, with most companies requiring an average height of 167cm, while some European companies accept a maximum height of 165cm (Nolan, 2011). The body is a known source of anxiety among dancers, especially once puberty sets in and it seems less controllable than before.

Even with the ideal body, the ballet dancer must possess an inclination towards perfectionism in order to endure a rigorous training schedule, a fair dose of physical pain and the demands of perfection. The bodies that fit this discipline portray weightless swans, princesses, and a number of supernatural or mythical beings. They should also be able to hide their athleticism through graceful movements during performance. There is a forced grace in ballet, a going against what the body is innately capable of. It is about appearance, the appearance of grace and beauty. A denial of the body.

As stated by Bataille (143:1962), the less a woman resembles the animal in her appearance, the more beautiful she is considered to be, as any hint of the animal in the human body is found to be repulsive.<sup>4</sup> Bataille rationalises that eroticism in the female form is linked to the apparent lack of weight that implies the body’s use of the limbs and the essential need for the skeletal structure. In his view “the more ethereal the shapes and the less clearly they depend on animal reality or on a human physiological reality, the better they respond to the fairly widespread image of the desirable woman” (Bataille, 1962:143). It is this feminine ideal that I explore with the ballet related works. I paradoxically position

a feminine ideal, the ballerina, whose body is manipulated throughout her training (with ‘ideal’ affect), with the dirt that the ideal feminine is so far removed from.

*Body Parts*, is an installation consisting of various casts of certain body parts that do not conform to a professional ballet dancer’s body, for example flat feet, the space between my legs when standing in first position and basic arm positions for example. Both positive parts of the body and the negative spaces in between these parts are all suspended from the ceiling, in limbo. *Body Parts* is similar in form to Cornelia Parker’s *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view* (1991).<sup>5</sup>

*Body Parts* refer to the female body and its lack of ability to conform. The *Toe-tips* that I produce are larger and fit around the front of my foot, secured with ballet ribbon where I repeat a simple ballet exercise, *ronde jambe*. The drawings refer to this development of skill through repetition and the impossibility of achieving this task, despite this repetition.

The drawing works continue in a video piece where I record the passage of the shoes marking the paper as I perform the action of the ballet exercise. Throughout the video only the toe tips are seen. The body is absent but for this recycling of keratin.

The *Toe-tips*,<sup>6</sup> are partial documents of my skin and other materials, trapped within a form that is destined to break during the performance. This is a cycle: the collection of the non-thing, cast into something, destroyed in the making and (fragmented), finally returned to the detritus gathered in the used-up materials of the world. The *Toe-tips* assist in the performances of practicing ballet and refer to the contortion of the body, which is indeed a defiance of what a body is capable of.

Dust marks the body through its traces and I reinterpret this using my dust crayons where drawings are markers and traces of actions, souvenirs. The act of drawing runs parallel to my understanding of dust in that drawing is defined as “part of our interrelation to our physical environment, recording in and on it, the presence of the human” (Dexter, 2005:6).<sup>7</sup> The temporal significance of these drawings is primary. The duration of practice time is embedded in the lines on the paper, serving as evidence of physical struggle. It is also embedded in the monthly marking of the sifting and separating of the





*Body Parts*  
Cast dust of the artist's body  
420 x 400 x 90cm



Figure 22.  
*Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view*  
Cornelia Parker  
1991  
Mixed Media  
400 x 400 x 500cm

vacuum required to cast the material. One month older means one month closer to unforeseen death. These broken toes, these fragments of a body mimic the fragments of the body that they are (the skin-cells that the dust is composed of).

Mark-making documents gesture towards the decisions made by the artist in the process of their making. Tony Oricco produces work that is at once temporal and process based. *Penwald Drawings* is a series in which he marks the various actions of his body with the use of graphite pencils. The pencils capture the process of the performance, as well as playing a major part in the assisting of the body's movement during the performance. In *Penwald: 3: project, circle on knees* (2009) Oricco sits on his knees in the centre of a sheet of paper. With a pencil in each hand the artist swings his hands back and forth, marking the paper, while he slowly shifts the position of his knees in an anti-clockwise direction. The result of this repetition is a large circle, caused by the pencil marks and the artist's shifting cyclical position. The video documentation demonstrates the artist's endurance, and the determination to complete the work with an exhausted body, which the drawing arguably wouldn't reveal. Like the *Penwald Drawings*, my *Toe-Tip* drawings<sup>8</sup> would not function without the aid of mark-making devices, revealing the marks of the repetitive performance as well as aiding in the performance itself.

Repetition serves a psychological function: the repetitive moment soothes and provides a certainty that is not always available in everyday life. My intention is to create works that are as ephemeral as the materials used to create them. The repetitive action that the construction of many of my objects demand is both soothing and stressful: a repeated gesture which is eventually committed to muscle memory.

..the worrying of a rosary through repeated touch, bead by bead. They are ways of being in contact with something and someone in order to alleviate, to block or thwart, materially, the imateriality of doubt, the abyss of consciousness or the nothingness of anyone's ... living ... It is not as if many of Friedman's sculptures, formed from repetitive motions and gestures, could not also be seen as a way of avoiding the void opening up in the quotidian.  
(Hainley, 2001:66)



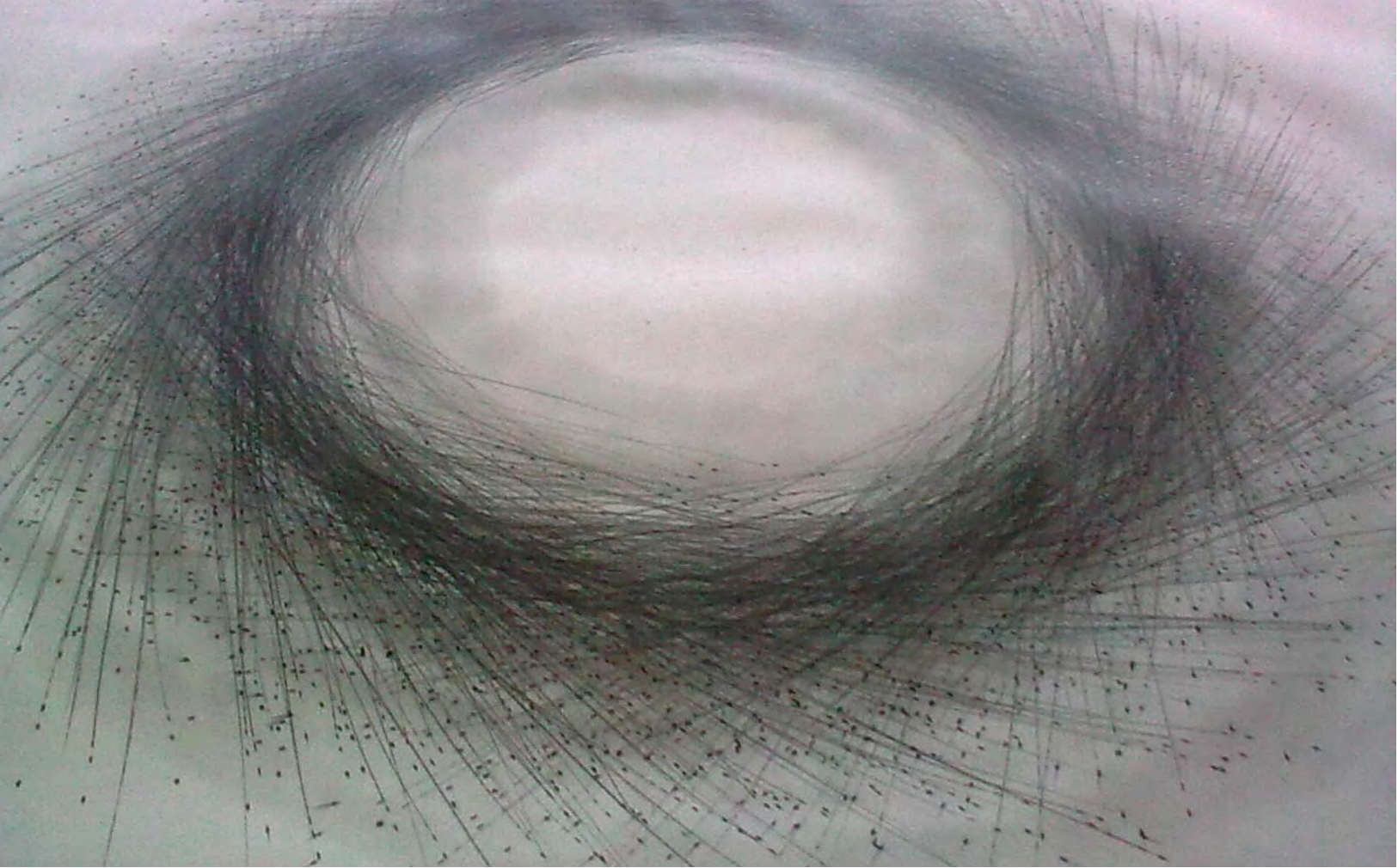


Figure 23.  
Document of *Penwald 3: circle on knees*



Figure 14.  
*Penwald 3: circle on knees*  
Tony Oricco  
2009  
Graphite on paper  
8 laps  
152 x 152cm



*Toe Tips* after performing *Practice*  
Dust crayons and ribbon  
1 pair: 23 x 7 x 10cm



The accretion of gestures grow the *Unfinishable Pieces*, which will eventually consist of more of my body matter than my living body. As I work on them they are continually transforming, and like an hourglass on its side, my living body will slowly diminish as my sculptures grow. They will be a memorial remaining after I have perished. Markers of time in the labour-intensive processes as well as the life lived between their production. The sculptures remain incomplete as life never reaches completion, not even in death. In this manner they challenge notions of the feminine body as finite.

*I sift the dust, one handful at a time, in a tea strainer. I tap the strainer against my palm, the number of years that I have been alive, and sift the dust into 5 separate categories: **Silt** (fine dust); **Bits** (too large to fall through the strainer, too small to be identified); **Felt** (lint); **Large Dust Objects** (these consist of recognisable objects, feathers, staples etc); **Left Over** (matted hair and lint that remains when all of the loose dust has been sifted from it).*

## Notes:

1. What we term process art today, often referred to as process-based work/art, is not as dependent on randomness as the initial movement declared. There is a tendency for contemporary artists to produce work with an end in mind, which alters the intention of the production. Indeed, a degree of labour is often present in these process-based works, where process has become active processing.

2.

Friedman's aesthetic project requires not immediately filling in absences or ignoring absences but keeping watch over their meaning and their absence of meaning. The nothing not there and amidst much actually, physically present the nothing that is. His work pivots between annihilation and imagination. What is not there formed by what is. What is there formed by what is not. He manipulates what forms and informs the between between the one and the other.  
(Hainley, 2001:47)

3.

Through failure, one can potentially stumble on the unexpected ... Yet to strive to fail is to go against socially accepted drives towards even better success ... Between the two subjective poles of success and failure lies a space of potentially productive operations. Rather than being a space of mediocrity, failure is required in order to keep a situation open and to raise questions rather than answers.  
(Le Feuvre: 2006:313)

4. Bataille then states paradoxically, that without a peculiar trace of the animal, a woman would seem unalluring. That the element that makes a woman desirable is that most resembling an animal through the hair on her private parts, as men are instinctively drawn to these parts (Bataille, 143:1962). We desire beauty so intensely for the potential to defile it by means of possessing it, for the sureness that is evoked in profaning it (Bataille, 144:1962). Bataille understood profanity to be equal to transgression (Bataille, 145:1962).



5. In Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view, the artist exhibited the content of a garden shed that she had blown up with a bomb. The fragmented contents are suspended from the ceiling as if in limbo, suspended animation.

6. Similar to the toe tips that a ballerina inserts into her ballet shoes and allow her to dance on-pointe, the 'toe-tips' that I produce are cast around my toes and fill the space of about 4cm above my toes. They are secured to my foot with ballet ribbon.

7. A further correlation between dust and drawing is E. Dexter's understanding of drawing:

drawing forever describes its own making in its becoming. In a sense drawing is always nothing more than that, and in its eternal incompleteness re-enacts imperfection and incompleteness." (Dexter: 2005) "Drawing is improvisatory and always in motion, in the sense that it can proceed ad infinitum without closure or completion, continually part of a process that is never ending.  
(Dexter: 2005)

8. Walking and the ballet exercise that I have selected serve to reinforce the notion of duality present in my work. Each foot relies on the other to achieve the motion of walking, running, dancing, where each leg mirrors the action of the other. Both equally important to the other's action, but the direct opposite to the other in their form. Inextricably linked, but diametrically opposed, like the dichotomy's and dualities in my work that they are involved in performing and representing.



Figure 25  
Ballet dancer's tutu



Figure 26  
Ballet dancer's feet

## Bibliography:

1. Advanced Behavioral Health. 2013. *What is obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)?* Available: <http://www.behaviortherapynyc.com/obsessive-compulsive-disorder.php> [2014, August 2].
2. Austen, C. 2012. *Hand Mudra meanings, explanations and benefits.* Available: <http://www.eyogaforbeginners.com/hand-mudra-meanings-explanations-and-benefits/> [2014, August 4].
3. Bauman, Z.1992. *Mortality, immortality and other life strategies.* Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers & Cambridge: Polly Press.
4. Becker, E. 1975. *The denial of death.* New York and London: The Free Press.
5. Beckett, S. 1983. In *Worstward Ho.* Available: [http://www.samuel-beckett.net/w\\_ho.htm](http://www.samuel-beckett.net/w_ho.htm) [2014, March 11].
6. Belk, R.W.1995. Collecting in a consumer society: A critical analysis. In *Collecting in a consumer society.* S. Pearce, Ed. London & New York: Routledge. 139-158.
7. Ben-Levi, J., Houser, C., Jones, L.C., & Taylor, S. 1993. *Abject art: repulsion and desire in American art, selections from the permanent collection.* New York: Whitney Museum of Art.
8. Bennet, J. 2000. *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.
9. Berkers, E. 2003-2014. *Mudras for balancing energy.* Available: <http://www.eclecticenergies.com/mudras/4mudraset.php> [2014, July 31].
10. Bishop, C. 2012. Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media. *Artforum.* September. Available: [www.artforum.com/inprint/id=31944](http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=31944) [2014, September 11].
11. Blazwick, I. 2001. Dramatic acts of luxurious violence. In *Cornelia Parker.* G.Barsanti, I. Blazwick & E. Lajer-Burcharth. Torino: Hopefulmonster. 59 – 65.
12. Cave, N. 2007. Do you love me?. *Nick Cave: the complete lyrics 1978-2007.* London: Penguin Books LTD.
13. Checkerboard TV. 2012. *Kiki Smith: Squatting the palace* [Video file]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUdX1yHTomo&list=PL9277A2177324F336&index=8> [2014, August 4].
14. Cocker, E. 2010. Over and over, again and again. In *Failure.* L. Le Feuvre, Ed. London, Cambridge and Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. 154-163.

15. Connor, S.2009. Pulverulence. *Cabinet Magazine*.35(Fall). Available: [cabinetmagazine.org/issues/35/connor.php](http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/35/connor.php). [2013, April 9]
16. Cooper, D. 2001. Interview. In *Tom Friedman*. Hainley, B., Cooper, D & Searle, A. London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 6-43.
17. Creed, M. 2005: *Work No 470*. Available: <http://www.martincreed.com/site/words/if-youre-lonely> [2013, March 4].
18. Croak, J. 2012. *Summer reading: body and soil*. Available: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/books/croak/summer-reading-6-18-12.asp> [2014, September, 13].
19. Cuthbertson, H. & De Becker, L. 2014. Inseparable. In *Doing Hair: Art and Hair in Africa*. L. De Becker & A. Neddleton, (Eds). 2014. Johannesburg: Wits Art Museum. 52-62.
20. de Beauvoir, S. 1949. *The second sex*. New York: Everyman's Library.
21. Datta, Pradeep. n.d. *Mudras - healing hand yoga*. Available: <http://www.suprapowers.com/mudra.htm> [2014, August 10].
22. Dexter, E. 2005. To draw is to be human. In *Vitamin D: New perspectives in Drawing*. [Introduction] Burton. J, Dailey. M, De Chassey. London & New York: Phaidon. Page Numbers. 006-010.
23. Douglas, M.1966. *Purity and Danger*. Oxon and New York: Routledge Classics.
24. Edmunds, P. 2013.Lunchtime Lecture: Works in progress. University of Cape Town, 17 April 2013.
24. Elliot, R, K. 2006. *Aesthetics, imagination and the unity of experience*. Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
25. Ferguson, R. 2010. Politics of rehearsal: Francis Alys. In *Failure*. L. Le Feuvre, Ed. London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. 194-199.
26. Flood, S. 2007. Not about Mel Gibson. In *Unmonumental: the object in the 21st century*. Flood. S, Massimiliano. G & Smith.T. London: Phaidon in association with The New Museum. 10 – 13.
27. Foss, S.n.d. *Crocheting and its origins*. Available: <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/6/520/crocheting-and-its-origin1.asp> [2014, September 7].
28. Forrest, N.2014.Interview: Tehching Hsieh on his “time clock piece” at Carriageworks, Sydney. Available: <http://au.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1037011/interview-tehching-hsieh-on-his-time-clock-piece-at>

[2014, September 7].

29. Foster, H. 2004. An archival Impulse. *October*. 110 (Autumn): 3-22.

30. Freud, S.1956. *Character and anal erotism*. In *Collected papers: Volume II*.10th Edition. Translation under supervision of Joan Rivierre. London: The Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

31. Fuenmayor, J., Haug, K. & Ward, F. 1992. In *Dirt & domesticity: Constructions of the feminine*. [Preface] New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. 6-7.

32. Gioni, M. 2007. Ask the Dust. In *Unmonumental: the object in the 21st century*. S.Flood, G.Massimiliano & Smith.T.London: Phaidon in association with The New Museum. 64 – 77.

33. Groom, A.2013. Indifference and repetition: an interview with Tehching Hsieh. *Das platforms/ocntemporary art*. 26. Available: <http://dasplatforms.com/magazines/issue-26/indifference-and-repetition-an-interview-with-tehching-hsieh/> [2014, September 13].

34. Grovier, K.2013. *100 Works of art that define our age*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.

35. Guardian Music. 2011. *Paul Morley meets Martin Creed* [Video file]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HptMNJyDycQ> [2014, September 7].

36. Hainley, B. 2001. *Self-Portrait as Untitled (without Armature)* In *Tom Friedman*. Hainley, B.,Cooper, D & Searle, A. London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 44-85.

37. Hazelton, P. n.d. *Paul Hazelton*. Available: <http://paulhazelton.com/ghost-of-my-living-mother/> [2014, August 5].

38. Heinämaa, S. 2010. The sexed self and the mortal body. In *Birth ,death and Femininity: Philosophies of embodiment*. Schott, R.M., Ed. Indiana: Indiana University Press. 73-93.

39. Historical Craftology. 2012. *Doilies: Why grandmothers have so many*. 2012. Available: <http://historicalcraftology.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/doilies-why-grandmothers-have-so-many/> [2014, September 6].

40. Hitchens, M. 2012. *Mortality*. London: Atlantic Books.

41. Holleman, R. 2008. *Erratum: an exploration of language, the fragmentary, and the gaps in the narrative of the everyday*. MFA dissertation. University of Cape Town.

42. Imperial College London. 2009. *ESE solves cosmic dust origins, 2014*. Available: <http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/earthscienceandengineering/aboutese/hottopic/pasttopics/cosmic%20dust> [2014, August 10].

43. Jones, L.C. 1993. Transgressive femininity. In *Abject art: repulsion and desire in American art, selections from the permanent collection*. Ben-Levi, J., Houser, C., Jones, L.C., & Taylor, S. New York: Whitney Museum of Art. 33-57.
44. Kadist Art Foundation. 2010. *Kristen Morgin*. Available: [www.kadist.org/en/programs/all.1331](http://www.kadist.org/en/programs/all.1331) [2013, September 5].
45. Kalm, J. 2008. *Unmonumental at the new museum*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-PSxh6pw8lo> [2013, April 31].
46. Kelly, O. n.d. Top OCD facts: here are the essential ocd facts you need to know. Available: [http://ocd.about.com/od/whatisocd/a/Top\\_Ten\\_OCD.htm](http://ocd.about.com/od/whatisocd/a/Top_Ten_OCD.htm) [2014, August 04].
47. Kopel, D. n.d. *Daniel Kopel: in the studio with N. Dash*. Available: <http://artwrit.com/VOLB/05.html> [2014, July 28].
48. Ladner, S. 2009. 'Agency time': a case study of the postindustrial timescape and its impact on the domestic sphere. *Time and Society*. 18:284. DOI: 10. 1177/0961463X09337851.
49. Lajer-Burcharth, E. 2001. Metamorphosis. In *Cornelia Parker*. G. Barsanti, I. Blazwick & Lajer-Burcharth, E. Torino: Hopefulmonster. 87-93.
50. Lampert, C and Isaak, J A. 1995. *Kiki Smith*. London: White Dove Press.
51. McMasters, L. 2007. *A brief history of lace in the 1500's*. Available: <http://www.lynnmcmasters.com/lace.html> [2014, September 6].
53. Michael Stevenson Gallery. 2005. *In the making: materials and process*. Available: [www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/materials/materials.htm](http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/materials/materials.htm) [2013, August 31].
54. Morgan, J. 2000. Matter and what it means. In *Cornelia Parker*. Morgan, J & Ferguson, B. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.
55. Nackman, R. 2014. *Notations: contemporary drawing as idea and process*. Available: <http://notations.aboutdrawing.org/n-dash/> [2014, July 31].
56. Nolan, B. 2011. *The Ideal Ballet Body*. Available: <http://www.danceinforma.com/magazine/2011/07/the-ideal-ballet-body/> [2014, March 1]
57. O'Toole, S. 2004. *Paul Edmunds*. Available: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/04feb/artbio.html> [2014, September 9].

58. Oxford University Press. 2013. Vacuum: Definition of vacuum in English. Available: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/vacuum?q=vacuum> [2013, July 24].
59. Rawlence, C. Ed.1985. Clock Time In *About Time*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.
60. Sagan, D. 2009. *Stardust Memories*. 35(Fall).Available:[cabinetmagazine.org/issues/35/sagan.php](http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/35/sagan.php) [2013 April 1].
61. Schott, R.M. Ed. 2010. *Birth, death and Femininity: Philosophies of embodiment*. [Introduction]. Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1-23.
62. Schwartz, H.1982.Job involvement as obsession-compulsion. *The academy of management review*. 7(3):429-432.
63. Sontag, S. 1997. On Photography. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
64. Sooke, A. 2011. *Alastair Sooke interviews Martin Creed* [Video file]. Available: <http://youtu.be/YIs7Z-doDGW0> [2014, August 5]
65. Stewart, S.1993. *On longing :narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
66. Tresidder, J. Ed. 2004. *The complete dictionary of symbols: in myth, art and literature*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.
67. Taylor S. 1993. The Phobic Object. In *Abject art: repulsion and desire in American art, selections from the permanent collection*. Ben-Levi, J., Houser, C., Jones, L.C.,& Taylor,S. New York: Whitney Museum of Art. 59-83.
68. Ward, F. 1992. Foreign and familiar bodies. In *Dirt & domesticity: Constructions of the feminine*. Fuenmayor, J., Haug, K. & Ward, F New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. 8-37.

## List of figures:

Figure 1. *Ghost of my living mother*. 2010. Hazelton, P. Available: <http://paulhazelton.com/ghost-of-my-living-mother/>

Figure 2. *Cello (Number) 8*. 2001. Morgin, K. Available: <http://joanmitchellfoundation.org/artist-programs/artist-grants/painter-sculptors/2005/kristen-morgin>

Figure 3. *Exhaled Blanket*. 1996. Parker, C. Available: <http://ridiculouslyinteresting.com/2011/07/24/from-the-dusty-corners-of-the-museum-part-two-cornelia-parker/>

Figure 4. *Self 2001*. 2001. Quinn, M. Available: <http://www.boumbang.com/marc-quinn>

Figure 5. *The Negative of Whispers*. 1997. Parker, C. Available: <http://ridiculouslyinteresting.com/2011/07/24/from-the-dusty-corners-of-the-museum-part-two-cornelia-parker/>

Figure 6. *Dowry Cloth*. 1991. Smith, K. Available: <http://archive.renaissancesociety.org/site/Exhibitions/Images.The-Body.65.1313.html>

Figure 7. *Dolce Far Niente*. 1904. Godward, W. Available: [http://www.johnwilliamgodward.org/Dolce-far-niente-\(Sweet-Nothings\).html](http://www.johnwilliamgodward.org/Dolce-far-niente-(Sweet-Nothings).html)

Figure 8. *Cosmic Dust in the Trifid Nebula (NGC6514)* n.d. Available: [http://www.cosmotography.com/images/cosmic\\_nurseries.html](http://www.cosmotography.com/images/cosmic_nurseries.html)

Figure 9. *Work No. 227*. 2000. Creed, M. Available: <http://martincreed.com/site/works/work-no-960>

Figure 10. *Work No. 960*. 2008. Creed, M. Available: <http://martincreed.com/site/works/work-no-960>

Figure 11. *Work No. 132*. 1995. Creed, M. Available: <http://martincreed.com/site/works/work-no-132>

Figure 12. Traditional crochet doily. n.d. Available: <http://allcrafts.net/crochet/crochetdoilies.htm>

Figure 13. *Commuter*. 2011. Dash, N. Available: <http://notations.aboutdrawing.org/n-dash/>

Figure 14. *1000 hours of staring* 1992 – 1997. Friedman, T. Available: <http://culturevulture.net/art-architecture/tom-friedman-a-survey-of-recent-work/>

Figure 15. *One Year Performance 1980-1981*. 1980 – 1981. Hsieh, T. Available: <http://www.tehchingsieh.>

Figure 16. Statement for *One year performance 1980-1981*. 1980. Hsieh, T. Available: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/one-year-performance/images/2/>

Figure 17. Mudra for balancing energy. 2003 - 1014 Available: <http://www.eclecticenergies.com/mudras/4mudrasets.php> [2014, July 31].

Figure 18. *Kernal*. 1994-1999. Edmunds, P. Available: [http://www.pauledmunds.co.za/works/scale-mark-coetzee-fine-art-cabinet-1999/edmunds\\_paul\\_1.jpg/](http://www.pauledmunds.co.za/works/scale-mark-coetzee-fine-art-cabinet-1999/edmunds_paul_1.jpg/)

Figure 19. *Untitled*. 1995. Friedman, T. Available: <http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/tom-friedman#/images/65/>

Figure 20. *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*. 1997. Alys, F. Available: <http://www.htvdeijtsberg.nl/84-maps/map-17/>

Figure 21. Detail of *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*. 1997. Alys, F. <http://imageobjecttext.com/2012/07/18/all-in-a-days-work-from-something-to-nothing/>

Figure 22. *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view*. 1991. Parker, C. Available: <https://narratingwaste.wordpress.com/2010/09/11/cornelia-parker-and-the-untimeliness-of-waste/>

Figure 23. *Penwald 3: circle on knees*. 2009. Oricco, T. Available: <http://www.tonyorricco.com/ARCHIVE.html>

Figure 24. Document of *Penwald 3: circle on knees*. 2009. Oricco, T. Available: <http://www.tonyorricco.com/ARCHIVE.html>

Figure 25. Ballet dancer's tutu. n.d. Available: [http://pixel.nymag.com/content/dam/fashion/slideshows/2012/11/nyc-ballet/22\\_nyc-ballet.jpg](http://pixel.nymag.com/content/dam/fashion/slideshows/2012/11/nyc-ballet/22_nyc-ballet.jpg)

Figure 26. n.d. Leutwyler, N. Available: <http://nycexpeditionist.com/2012/11/27/a-ballet-dancers-feet/>

## Acknowledgements:

Thank you Fritha, for encouraging me to follow my instincts and to experiment. Thank you for taking my work seriously, including the many failed attempts (even sound pieces that resembled whale sounds).

Thank you Christopher for always being available to assist with technical endeavors and for being an unshakable source of moral support. Thank you for always being on my side.

Thank you Dale for the many studio visits and stimulating discussions. My great hope is to inspire you as much as you inspire me. Thank you for being so available to help with installation and photography, especially for the times when you pitched up of your own accord, without me having to ask.

Thank you Rone for all of your enthusiastic assistance, your presence is always welcome in my studio.

Thank you to Andrew Juries for endless patience while assisting me with the design and layout of this catalogue.

Thank you to the staff members of Michaelis School of Fine Art for numerous suggestions and references.

Thank you to my fellow students for their interest in my project. Especially Sepideh, Maurice and Francois, for such insightful seminar responses.

Thank you to the support staff of Michaelis for their guidance and assistance.

Thank you to the Postgraduate Funding Office, Michaelis School of Fine Art and UCT for numerous scholarships. Without your generous support, my participation in the MFA programme would not be possible.

Twamley Postgraduate Bursary 2013

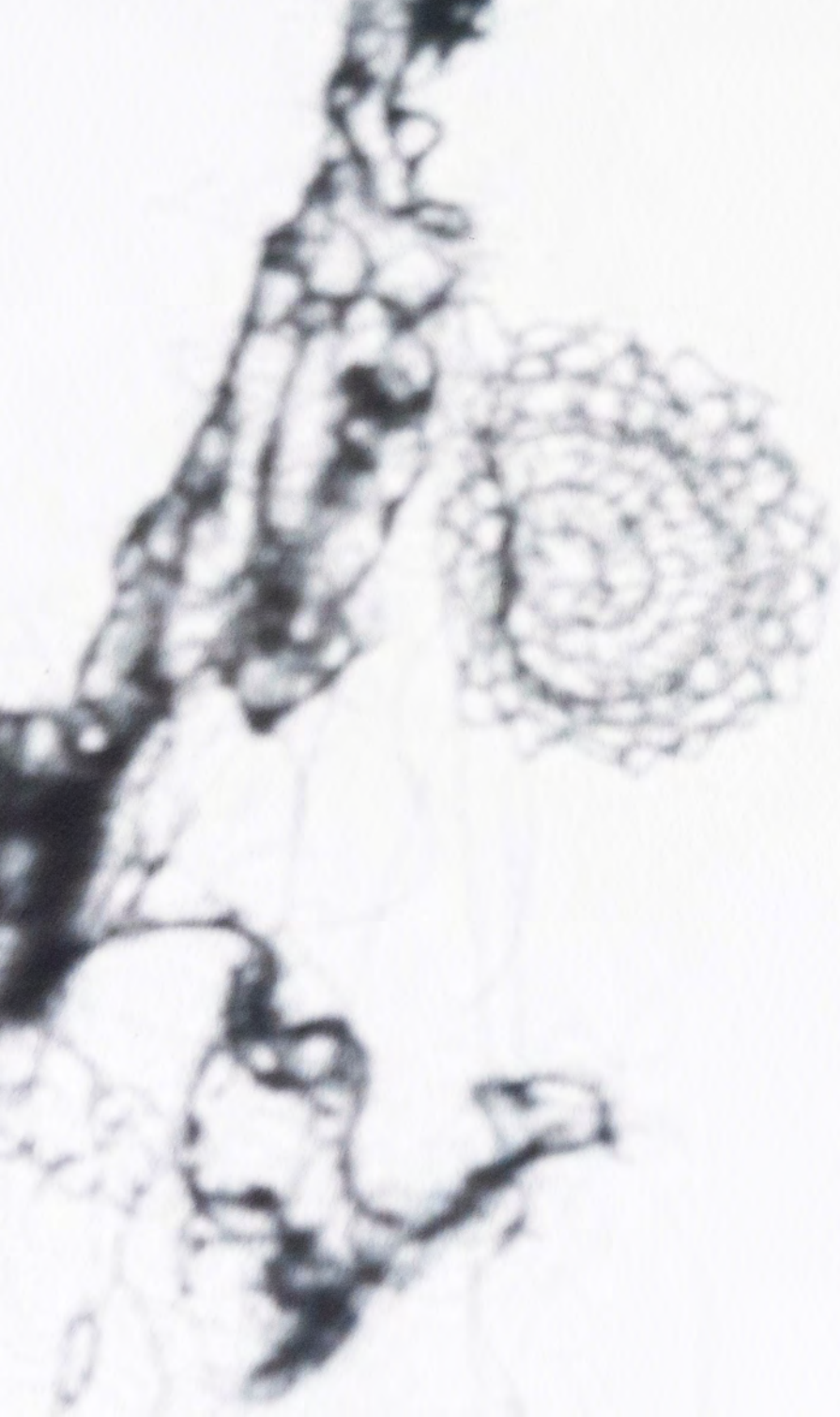
Maclver Scholarship Departmental Award 2013

Jules Kramer Music and Fine Art Scholarship for International Travel 2013

Twamley Postgraduate Bursary 2014

Maclver Scholarship Departmental Award 2014

Jules Kramer Music and Fine Art Scholarship for Travel 2014



Shadows cast from *Lace/Border*

