

**The magick of intuition and place in process-led performative spatial arts practices  
with reference to selected works by Marcus Neustetter and Olivier de Sagazan**

by

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## DECLARATION

I declare that *The magick of intuition and place in process-led performative spatial arts practices with reference to selected works by Marcus Neustetter and Olivier de Sagazan* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at the University of South Africa (Unisa) for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



Paul Stephen Cooper

February 2025

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This study is dedicated to my daughters, Kate and Jessica. Let it motivate them to strive for heightened creativity and discernment in their ever-growing quest for truth.

## SUMMARY

### Title:

The magick of intuition and place in process-led performative spatial arts practices with reference to selected works by Marcus Neustetter and Olivier de Sagazan.

### Summary:

This research project interrogates the complexity of intuitive processes organised around generative ritualised actions and transient experiences in the performative and spatial arts practices of two artists. Olivier de Sagazan is a French artist. His diverse practice includes painting, drawing, photography and sculpture, as well as performances. Marcus Neustetter is a South African artist. His work focuses on a wide spectrum of practice including arts activism and public art. He favours a wide range of visual imaging modalities including drawing, projection, sound and sculptural construction. Both artists favour situationally-specific and process-related performance. In this research I focus exclusively on a study of ritualised activity in de Sagazan's work and the transient qualities of light in Neustetter's work.

The otherworldly with its links to the magickal contexts of tacit knowledge – including the occult and esotericism – is framed in relation to critical iterations of place. Applying intuition as a multidimensional creative approach in the understanding of place-related phenomena, a phenomenological praxis of cognitive and metacognitive functioning is proposed as a necessary ingredient in a study of process-led art practices. Present moments are brought into the same conceptual ambit as embodied experiences that implicate personal histories and ontological responses, as well as emotional and sensorial encounters in real time.

A mixed methodological approach is employed, drawing on a literature review and interviews, as well as an in-situ and participative engagement with de Sagazan (in France) and Neustetter (in Austria and South Africa) in their studios or workspaces. In a close examination of selected works between 1998 and 2023 by these two artists, a critical case is made for how intuitive processes impact on and intersect with the complexities of place through the agency of de Sagazan's and Neustetter's embodied process-led practice. This is an important aspect of the original scholarly contribution to the field of performance and installation art in this study. While not strictly practice-led research, a mixed method presents opportunities to be cognitively embodied through an integral, immersive and sensorial position.

The artists' expansive imaginings materialise through moments of internalised vulnerability and uncertainty. Latent ritualised and transiently induced engagements with materials, people, spaces and objects prompt a polyvalent functionality of place that invokes otherworldly narratives. This

research shows that, to bring this into effect, requires a spatially immersive encounter with process through a fully embodied relationship to intuitive impulses and to place. In this way, a commitment to past and present memory, experience and day-to-day encounters enables a representation of personally resonant otherworldly narratives.

List of key terms:

Intuition; Place; Process-led arts practice; Olivier de Sagazan; Marcus Neustetter.

## ISISHWANKATHELO

Le projekthi yophandolwazi iphicotha ukuntsonkotha kweenkqubo zeemvakalelo okanye ulwazi lwendalo olulungelelaniswe ngezenzo eziveliswayo zemveli, namava exeshana kwimisebenzi yobugcisa bomdlalo nobendawo yamagcisa amabini. UOlivier de Sagazan ligcisa laseFransi. Imisebenzi yakhe eyahlukileyo ibandakanya ukuzoba ngepeyinti, ukuzoba, ukufota, imifanekiso eqingqiweyo, kunye nemidlalo. UMarcus Neustetter ligcisa laseMzantsi Afrika. Umsebenzi wakhe ugxile kwiinkqubo ezininzi ezibandakanya ubutshantliziyo bezobugcisa kunye nobugcisa basesidlangalaleni. Uthanda uluhlu olubanzi lweentlobo zobugcisa obubonakalayo obubandakanya ukuzoba, imiboniso, isandi kunye nokwakhiwa kwemifanekiso eqingqiweyo. Omabini la magcisa athanda imidlalo ejolise kwimeko nakwinkqubo ethile. Kolu phandolwazi ndigxininisa ngokukodwa kuphandolwazi lomsebenzi oqhelekileyo kumsebenzi ka-de Sagazan kunye neempawu ezidlulayo okanye ezingesosigxina zokukhanya kumsebenzi kaNeustetter.

Okucingekayo, okunonxulumano kwiimeko zemilingo yolwazi olungacacanga – kubandakanywa ubugqi kunye nolwazi olufihlakeleyo – kwakhiwe ngokunxulumene nokuphindaphinda okubalulekileyo kwendawo. Ukusebenzisa ulwazi lwendalo nanjengendlela yokuyila entloboninzi ekuqondeni iziganeko ezinxulumene nendawo, uyilo lophandolwazi ngokwamava oluntu kwezentlalo lokusebenza kwengqiqo kunye nokucinga ngokucinga komntu kucetyiswa nanjengesithako esiyimfuneko kuphandolwazi lobugcisa obukhokelwa yimisebenzi yobugcisa esekelwe kwinkqubo yoyilo. Amaxesha angoku angeniswa kwingqikelelo efanayo kunye namava aquka imbali yomntu neempendulo zokuba ngumntu, kunye nokudibana kweemvakalelo nesivo ngexesha langoku.

Kusetyenziswa indlela yokwenza uphandolwazi exubileyo, egxile kuphononongo loncwadi nodliwanondlebe, kunye nanjengendlela yokunxulumana nokuzibandakanya no-de Sagazan (eFransi) kunye neNeustetter (eAustria naseMzantsi Afrika) kwizityudiyi okanye kwiindawo zokusebenza zabo. Uphicotho olungqale ngokusondeleyo lwemisebenzi ekhethiweyo yala magcisa mabini phakathi ko1998 no2023, lucacisa umzekelo obanzi malunga nendlela iinkqubo zeemvakalelo okanye ulwazi lwendalo oluchaphazela ngayo luze ludibanise nokuntsonkotha kwendawo ngokusebenzisa impembelelo yomsebenzi wobugcisa ka-de Sagazan nokaNeustetter okhokelwa yinkqubo yokuyila. Lo ngumba obalulekileyo kolu phandolwazi, wegalelo kuphandolwazi lokuqala kwinkalo yobugcisa bomdlalo nobufakelwayo okanye obuxhonywayo. Nangona olu iluphandolwazi olungasekelwanga kumsebenzi wobugcisa ngokungqongqo, indlela yokwenza uphandolwazi exubileyo ibonelela ngamathuba okubonakaliswa kwengqiqo ngokwemeko ehlanganisiweyo, ngokwamava neemvakalelo zabo abazibandakanya nezi ntlobo zobugcisa. Iindlela zokucinga zala magcisa ezigabalala zibonakala ngamaxesha okuchaphazeleka

kwangaphakathi kunye nokungaqiniseki. Ubandakanyeko olufihlakeleyo nolwenziwa okwethutyana kunye nemathiriyeli, abantu, iindawo kunye nezinto ezibonakalayo lukhuthaza ukusebenzisa iintlobo ngeentlobo zobugcisa kwindawo evuselela amabali obugqi nolwazi olufihlakeleyo. Olu phandolwazi lubonisa ukuba ukwenza oku kusebenze kufuna ukudibana namava endawo kunye nenkqubo esekelwe kubudlelwane obupheleleyo, neempembelelo zeemvakalelo okanye ulwazi lwendalo kunye nendawo. Ngale ndlela, ukuzibophelela kwinkumbulo yexesha elidlulileyo neyangoku, amava kunye nokudibana kwemihla ngemihla kwenza ukumelwa kwamabali aguqakayo nacingelwayo.

Amagama angundoqo: Uvakalelo; Indawo; Umsebenzi wobugcisa osekelwe kwinkqubo yoyilo; UOlivier de Sagazan; UMarcus Neustetter.

## KAKARETŠO

Protšeke ye ya nyakišišo e botšološiša go raragana ga ditshepedišo tša go kwešišega gabonolo tše di rulagantšwego go dikologa ditiro tša go tšweletša ditlwaedi le maitemogelo a nakwana mešomong ya bokgabo bja papalo le bja lefelo ya batho ba babedi ba bokgabo. Olivier de Sagazan ke motho wa bokgabo wa Fora. Mešomo ya gagwe ya go fapafapana e akaretša go penta, go thala diswantšho, go tšea diswantšho le go betla, gotee le go dira dipapalo. Marcus Neustetter ke motho wa bokgabo wa Afrika Borwa. Mošomo wa gagwe o tsepeletše go mehuthuta ya ditiro go akaretšwa go lwela bokgabo le bokgabo bja setšhaba. O rata mehuthuta ya mekgwa ya go tšea diswantšho tša go bonwa go akaretšwa go thala, go bontšha, modumo le kago ya go betlwa. Bobedi bja batho ba ba bokgabo ba rata papalo yeo e theilwego godimo ga maemo a itšego le tshepedišo. Mo nyakišišong ye ke tsepeletše ka go lebanya thutong ya tiro ya setlwaedi mošomong wa de Sagazan le dika tša nakwana tša seetša mošomong wa Neustetter.

Sa go makatša, ka dikgokagano tša sona maamong a maleatlana a tsebo ya go kwešišega ka ntle le go hlaloša ka go lebanya – go akaretšwa maatla a phagametšego tlhago le tsebo goba dithuto tše di lebišitšwego go sehlopha se se nnyane sa batho bao ba nago le bokgoni – mabapi le dipoletšo tše bohlokwa tša lefelo. Ka go diriša tsebo bjalo ka mokgwa wa go hlama wa mahlakore a mantši go kwešišeng ditiragalo tše di tswalanago le lefelo, mokgwa wa go šoma wa go tseba dilo le wa go nagana ka dilo o šišintšwe bjalo ka selo se se nyakegago thutong ya mekgwa ya bokgabo yeo e hlahlwago ke tshepedišo. Dinako tša bjale di tlišwa tikologong e swanago ya kgopolo e le diphihlelo tše di akaretšwego tše di akaretšago histori ya motho ka noši le dikarabo tša tlhago, gotee le go kopana ga maikwelo ka nako ya kgonthe.

Go dirišwa mokgwa wa mokgwa o hlakantšwego, o šomiša tshekatsheko ya dingwalo, dipoledišano, le go ba lefelong gape le go boledišana le de Sagazan (kua Fora) le Neustetter (kua Austria le Afrika Borwa) distudiong tša bona goba mafelong a go šoma. Ka go hlahloba ka kelohlako mešomo yeo e kgethilwego magareng ga 1998 le 2023 ke batho ba bokgabo ba ba babedi, go dirwa taba e bohlokwa ya gore ditshepedišo tše di kwešišegago gabonolo di ama le go kopana le dilo tše di raraganego tša lefelo ka setheo sa mokgwa wa De Sagazan le Neustetter wo o eteletšwego pele ke mokgwa wo o hlahlwago ke tshepetšo. Ye ke karolo e bohlokwa ya kabelo ya mathomo ya tša thuto lefapheng la bokgabo bja go dira le bja go hloma nyakišišong ye. Le ge e le gore ga se nyakišišo yeo e laolwago ke tirišo ka go tia, mokgwa wa mekgwa ye e kopantšwego o aba menyetla ya go diragatša tsebo ka go ba le boemo bjo bo feletšego, bja go tsenelela le bja go kwa.

Dikgopolo tša batho ba bokgabo tše di atološitšwego di ipontšha ka dinako tša go ba kotsing le go se kgonthišege. Ditirišana tše di sa lemogegego tše di dirwago ka tsela ya setlwaedi le tše di hlohleletšwego ke dilo, batho, mafelo le dilo di hlohleletša go šoma ka ditsela tše di fapafapanego ga lefelo di baka dikanegelo, dikgopolo goba maitemogelo ao a bonagalago a phagametše tlhago.

Nyakišišo ye e bontšha gore go dira se go nyaka kopano ya tshepedišo yeo e akaretšago ka mo go feletšego, yeo e theilwego tswalanong e feletšego le dikgoketšo tša tlhago le lefelo. Ka tsela ye, boikgafo dikgopolong tša nakong e fetilego le tša bjale, maitemogelo le diphihlelo tša letšatši le letšatši go dira gore go kgonege go emela dikanegelo tšeo di bonagalago di phagametše tlhago.

Mareo a bohlokwa: Go tseba/go kwešiša selo le semeetseng, Lefelo, Mokgwa wa bokgabo wo o hlahlwago ke tshepetšo, Olivier de Sagazan; Marcus Neustetter.

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## PREFACE

This research is premised on the notion that an embodied process in the making of an installation or performative artwork evokes an experience of the otherworldly. Process is conceptualised from the perspective of an intuitive response to objects, people, surfaces, places and sites. Woven integrally into this assumption are the complexities of social and historical spatial relations that characterise scholarly conceptions of place.

Site-specific art has been a focus in my research for the past eleven years, and the topic of my thesis grew from a previous research initiative centred on a study of place in site-specific art practices in South Africa. I have presented papers at numerous conferences on site-specific installations and interventions in shopping malls, places of historical and political significance and public places such as children's playgrounds, and the inner city of Johannesburg, South Africa. It is only within the past three years that I have shifted away from an exclusive focus on place as a signifier of social, political and ideological aspects, to an intensive reading of the magick of intuition and place as a necessary and key aspect in spatial and performative process-led arts practices.

This has been a significant aspect of both written and practice-led applications in my work as an academic, artist and art historian. The present topic develops a new direction centred on the significance of intuition as a defining factor in how place is problematised as a key aspect in spatial and performative arts practices. The study also has a personal and professional significance. In recent collaborative art projects, I have employed intense intuitive and ritualised processes. This research grew from the broad assumption that intuition shapes and gives form to human creative endeavour and is at the centre of our embodied and lived experience.

I offer precursory comments on the significance of the word magick in the introductory chapter. The word features prominently in the title of this thesis as a descriptor of intuitive and place-related processes. It is applied as a conceptual thread that can be observed in how intuition works in setting up creative imaginings in process-led arts practices. In some cases, it may operate as an identifying motif in the form of mythical, mystical, occult and esoteric references in subject matter and narrative content. While I refrain from explicit commentary on magickal aspects throughout this thesis, the implications of magickal content becomes particularly evident when I analyse and discuss ritualised processes and the transient effects of light in chapter Three and Four.

I elect to ground the discussion on intuition around two core criteria: the ritualised practice as evidenced in the working methodologies of Olivier de Sagazan and the transient effects of the light-orientated work of Marcus Neustetter. Partly as a means to more fully experience an embodied

position, such as that enacted by the artists in their respective practices, and partly as a means to gather empirical data to give more purposeful form to the discussion in this thesis, a qualitative and mixed methodology is implemented. Information is collected from a review of relevant scholarly and literary sources, as well as from fieldwork that required an immersion in the process-led practices of the artists. To theoretically articulate this embodied experience with intuitive processes and their relation to place and the tacitly held aspect of otherworldly narratives, a phenomenological paradigm is applied. In this approach, the artists' practices are viewed from the position of an embodied cognitive experience, which assists in reconciling the seemingly disparate categories of conscious action and tacitly located metaconscious conditions, bringing the two modes of expression into the same ambit of creative imagining.

The scope of the thesis is purposefully situated in a study of performative and installation work by de Sagazan and Neustetter, specifically in the period between 1998 and 2023. The premise is that observations on the conjunctive relations of intuitive processes, place and the otherworldly in this research may assist and be critically applied by other scholars in niche areas of study into the broader disciplines of contemporary arts practice.

Chapter One makes up the introduction in this thesis. Chapter Two provides the necessary theoretical context for my discussion of the two artists' work. The sections on de Sagazan's work and Neustetter's work make up Chapters Three and Four, which comprise the bulk of the analysis of selected works in a discussion of ritualised and light-orientated transient practices respectively. Chapter Five is the conclusion in which I pinpoint the findings of this research.

I acknowledge that all artists work somewhat intuitively through a chosen medium, format or method. It stands to reason that further research into the relationship between the elusiveness of intuitive process-led arts practices and how this informs ritualised and transient methodologies requires further investigation. Rather than viewing this as a gap or restriction in this research, it is hoped that my discussion of de Sagazan and Neustetter's work specifically, prompts further investigation into intuitive and place related aspects in other intuitive process-led performative arts practices.

This research was made possible through the award of a Unisa Masters and Doctoral Support Program scholarship, which enabled my travel to Europe to complete essential field work activities there in May and June 2023. I also acknowledge the generous commitment to the development of this thesis in the supervisory contributions of Prof Bernadette van Haute and the critical input of fellow students and colleagues in the Department of Art and Music at Unisa. This research is dedicated to Kate Lilly and Jessica Stephanie and to the wonderment of magick.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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3. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2008). Performance. Video still, 21 minutes and 35 seconds. <https://vimeo.com/257856571> (Accessed 3 February 2023).
4. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2010). Performance. Video still, 4 minutes and 30 seconds. <https://vimeo.com/18818401> (Accessed 3 February 2023).
5. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2011). Performance. Video stills, 13 minutes and 54 seconds. [CD-ROM]. Angers: Setig Palussière.
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15. Marcus Neustetter, *The Sutherland Dome* (2013). Installation, Sutherland. Welded steel rods, cement and local stone, diameter: 3 meters, height: 4 meters. <https://marcusneustetter.com/the-sutherland-dome/>.
16. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hybridation* (2017). Performance with Gareth Pugh. Video still, 16 minutes and 21 seconds. [Olivier de Sagazan hybridation gareth pugh - Google Search](#) (Accessed: 3 February 2023).
17. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hybridation* (2018). Performance. Video still of teaser, 2 minutes and 58

seconds.

[Hybridation \[2018\]: Μονταρισμένα αποσπάσματα - Edited excerpts on Vimeo](#)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOP	Art On Paper gallery
ISS	The International Space Station
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
OED	The Online Etymological Dictionary
PIAD	Programme for Innovation in Artform Development
SAAO	South African Astronomical Observatory, Cape Town
SALT	Southern African Large Telescope, Sutherland
SMS	Short Message Service
TMRW	The Mixed Reality Workshop
UNISA	University of South Africa
WAM	Wits Arts Museum, Johannesburg
WITS	The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND

##### 1.1.1 Magick

When one considers the word magick, a number of associations come to mind – the realms of the spiritual, the paranormal, the occult, things concealed or considered to be of great mystery or secretive significance. These are phenomena that exist outside rational and conscious experience yet are an integral part of it. Something unusual, peculiar, inexplicable, fascinating and awe-inspiring happens when one considers the notion of place in relation to intuition. I identify a direct correlation between this and magick. By definition, any association with intuition as a means to acquire knowledge of something implies a directional movement inward that is in almost all cases prefixed by *in-*. For example, one might consider words like inward, innovative, introspection, involved, inside, in-tune, interpret, internal, intuit, invitation and information. This research makes a particular case for understanding intuition as a defining moment in process-led performative arts practices and specifically how this enables an understanding of otherworldly elements. Magick as a defining moment in intuitive processes is the key to unlocking, revealing or discovering the complexities of place in these practices.

Why magick and not magic? The term magick is not in use in any non-fiction or scholarly literature I have consulted. There certainly are references to the concept of magic in relation to intuition and tacit knowledge. For example, educationalists, such as Thomas Armstrong (2020), draw on the influential and authoritative writings of Michael Polanyi when he refers to the “magic” of tacit knowledge systems. The word magick was coined by Aleister Crowley and is defined and conceptualised in relation to occult theology in his book *Magick in theory and practice* (1929). I prefer and have adopted the word “magick” for the purposes of this research.

Magick exists integrally to, but mostly outside of, traditional and conventional conceptions of magic. Much more than just a form of street entertainment or ritualised and ceremonially enacted invocations in a witches’ circle, magick refers to the human capacity for shifting, altering or manipulating (subtly or drastically) worldly experiences in real time. This play with reality and experience operates from the embodied condition of the practitioner. Through an immersion in magickal processes and actions, the practitioner works unknowingly as part of a complex web of physical and metaphysical phenomena. This multidimensional operation moves across and through explicit and implicit realms of consciousness that activate sensorially rich experiences.

In this thesis, tacit knowledge, as it refers to things unknown and undefinable, is considered in relation to ritual and transience, couched in the theoretical field of phenomenology. I also formulate statements about tacit knowledge in relation to the word magick. This then leads to an expanded extrapolation of the unknown. As something undefinable, it resides in the seat of metaconsciousness in the consolidation of process, creativity and expansive realisations of self in the practices of the two artists that I discuss, de Sagazan and Neustetter.

To build a case for the context of magick in this research, this chapter begins with a cursory note on the precedents of magick to highlight the functions of intuition and place in contemporary visual arts practice. It is not at all a disputed fact that magick is well documented in art historical contexts as an iconographic, as well as a conceptually ubiquitous presence in narrative content, in visual art production throughout the history of art, but my focus is on recent practice. This said, I offer a brief selective survey of some relevant 20<sup>th</sup>-century artists by referring to an article entitled *Witches, shamans and grims: why the occult is on the rise in the art world*. In this essay, Alice Fisher (2023) makes reference to 20<sup>th</sup>-century movements such as Surrealism and modernist abstractionism, such as that of Piet Mondrian, in relation to a growing re-visiting of magick, mysticism and spirituality in recent exhibitions. She touches on driving narratives such as the paranormal, shamanism and astrology; spirituality and mysticism; paganism and spiritualism. “As recent exhibitions and auctions show, a new generation has been inspired by witchcraft, mysticism and spiritualism” (Fisher 2023).

Re-hashing the cultural thinking of the American feminist movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, Fisher mentions goddess worship and earth consciousness. She cites Monica Sjöö, a Swedish-born artist, referring to herself as a “radical anarcho/eco-feminist and goddess artist, writer and thinker involved in Earth spirituality” (Fisher 2023). The artist bones tan jones is quoted as saying: “As someone who feels deeply connected to spirit and earth, it’s important for me to view my artwork as craft and ritual” (Fisher 2023). She also cites Lucinda Bellm, founder and director at Lamb Gallery in London, where the exhibition *Surrealism and Witchcraft* was featured. Presenting the work of eleven women artists, shrouded in an over-sized serving of pseudo-feminist rhetoric, Bellm makes a highly problematical assumption about magick, witches and femaleness, conflating the nuances of each category in a highly questionable trope. She dips into the popularly over-exhausted complaint about the ever-dominant male art scene, and how women artists face an inevitable struggle for place and recognition in an on-going postmodern struggle. She advances the following: “The witch offers a means to delve into complex themes of dreams, gender and sexuality” (Fisher 2023).

Towards the end of her short review of the exhibition, Fisher (2023) addresses that aspect of otherworldly

thinking that brings the notion of tacit knowledge and magick into the scope of contemporary practice. With reference to British artist Pearson Wright, she highlights an implied conceptual ground for the rise in awareness of magickal processes in contemporary practice. Wright's primary preoccupation is with a spectral local mythological canine called a Black Shuck. The creature, an aspect of werewolf shamanism, is ingrained in the local mythology of East Anglia where Wright now lives. Fisher (2023) relays Wright's thoughts on Black Shuck: "Perhaps, most of all, he represents something within us, that part of ourselves which is unknowable and uncontrollable". Wright's observation pinpoints the tacit and phenomenological aspects of magick, which steer away from explicit occult references. This is where magick becomes a pivotal word in the way I apply it in this study of de Sagazan's and Neustetter's work. In his use of words like unknowable and uncontrollable, Wright refers to those aspects of intuitive human cognition that creative drive and thinking. From impulsive, intuitive and subsequent insightful moments to an immersivity in place, process originates from a primal and feral place in human consciousness, a place that is unbounded, chaotic and vibrational.

The neopagan-inspired work of artists like Bianca Bondi (Bondi [Sa]) test these new directions in an evocative way. Through a didactic narrative of transformation, process carries with it the alchemical notion of alteration but also a strong ecologically sensitive call to action. South African born Bondi (b. 1986) creates compelling installations employing a variety of materials and everyday collected objects that come together and are activated conceptually and visually through "chemical reactions, most often by salt water" (Bondi [Sa]). In her work, an occult-related and alchemically transformative and mutative process invokes "experiences beyond the visual and [advocates] the life of matter with an emphasis on interconnectivity, transience, and the cycles of life and death" (Bondi [Sa]). Themes of transience, magick and the occult are brought together in an ecologically critical ethos that is site-sensitive and "connected to the places in which they are to exist" (Bondi [Sa]). At the core of her work, she presents a narrative of hope as she prompts a reconsideration of humankind's "rituals and beliefs, of cycles with an emphasis on rebirth and regeneration" (Charpentier [Sa]).

The site-relational performance work of Athar Jaber (b. 1982) is also relevant in this regard. Jaber creates performances that draw on various media and materials, most notably stone, together with liquids, which have a strong ritualistic, spiritual or culturally religious significance. Jaber gives expression to aspects of violence that stem from cultural, ethnic, spiritual and religious customs. While differently situated to the immersive neopagan-related ethos, such as one would find in Bondi's work, Jaber uses ritual performance as a means to comment on the current state of the

human condition. In works such as *Anointing* (2018) (fig 1) and *Whitewashing* (2018) (fig 2), Jaber uses stone with ingredients such as blood, honey, herbs and milk. On his website, *Anointing* is situated as follows: “Most religions practice rituals that are centred around the anointment of specific stones that are considered sacred. In this performance Athar Jaber attempts to bring attention to this fact and to unite them all in one overarching ritual” (Jaber [Sa]).

The event involves the artist perpetually wiping, libating and cleansing the surface of a narrow, elongated, cone-shaped and vertically orientated piece of carved marble. He begins by brushing and rubbing the surface with culinary sage. Then he firmly presses whole lemons onto the stone and rubs this over the surface. There is a pause, after which he returns with cinnamon and begins rubbing this in. He libates the stone with milk and follows this with whole grapes that are pressed, broken up and rubbed onto the stone. He cracks eggs over the stone allowing the sound of the broken shell to become resonant. The second libation involves him pouring beer over the top of the stone. Rosemary and then butter are rubbed into the stone’s surface, followed by clove and thyme. In the third libation he pours honey and then red wine over the stone, followed by an application of flour, which is patted and rubbed onto the stone’s surface. The last ingredients include avocado and then salt. The fifth libation is arguably the most telling when he pours blood followed by olive oil over the stone. For this application, he spends a few moments in contemplation before adding the blood. In the final moments of the performance, he is shown pouring mineral water over the stone, presumably to wash and cleanse it, bringing the performance to an end with this sixth and final libation.

In *Whitewashing*, Jaber works with a block of uncut marble. He ritualistically moves the block between two tubs, one filled with milk and the other with blood. He describes it thus: “Blood on one side and milk on the other. This performance points to the cyclical, endless, and desperate attempt to wash one’s sins only to commit them again” (Athar Jaber [Sa]). The colour interplay between the milk and the blood has an uncanny effect. Moving the stone from the blood bath to the milk bath and back again visually transforms the rigid and unforgiving character of the white marble into a chunk of flesh. A powerful paradox is invoked in the process when aesthetic beauty is off set against metaphorical associations with ritualised violence. This is balanced against the gentle handling of the material that alludes to a reverence and trance-like introspection as is often associated with the embodied experience of ritual performance.

In an article entitled *Contemporary artists influenced by alchemy and magick*, Jason Louv (2015) discusses the visionary elements that see contemporary artists integrate the ancient spirituality of

alchemy in their work. Focusing on artists who work primarily two-dimensionally, Louv considers the tacit and secretive aspects of ancient alchemical and esoteric traditions and how these are brought into the field of contemporary visuality. He links contemporary alchemical imagery to the work of the Surrealists. He makes specific reference to narrative themes including “magick and the shamanic quest into the collective unconscious”, as well as the significance of the “esoteric knowledge of mankind and ... evolved reality” (Louv 2015).

The magick of the esoteric practice of alchemy as presented through the paintings and drawings of contemporary artists is paradoxical. On the one hand, it is shrouded in the secrecy of tacitly embedded and ancient knowledge. Artists extract this knowledge through focused research and distil this, together with current psychosomatic lived experiences, in their work. This is where the second aspect of the paradox becomes relevant: the work is not simply a decorative illustration of ancient alchemical practice but didactic in its distinct relevance to current conditions of lived experience. Louv (2015) cites an American painter Timothy Ely who elaborates on this point: “alchemy is a teaching process, an immersion into [that] which compels me to look at objects, materials, and ideas and how their movements can be tracked—movements that go through time rather than space”. Referring to related notions of change, Louv (2015) cites Ely when he explains how “materials change from one form to another. This change is on-going”.

### **1.1.2 Tacit knowledge, magick and intuition**

Closely associated with magick and integral to how I conceptualise intuition is the significance of tacit knowledge. There are two schools of thought that drive scholarly attitudes on intuition and its usefulness in situating tacit knowledge. One suggests that there is a certain magick in the way these processes work and the other flatly rejects this assertion. The Psychology Today blog (Intuition [Sa]) elaborates: “Intuition is a form of knowledge that appears in consciousness without obvious deliberation. It is not magical but rather a faculty in which hunches are generated by the unconscious mind rapidly sifting through past experience and cumulative knowledge”.

Conversely, some writers within the field of psychology and business management acknowledge the importance of tacit knowledge as a magickal phenomenon. Rich Gasaway ([Sa]) offers the following: “When interviewed, even the experts can struggle to explain how they know what they know. Because the knowledge is tacit (unconscious) the process of locating it, comprehending its application to the current situation and the resulting intuition that guides the decision, all lay (sic) outside conscious awareness. This makes the knowledge appear to be mystical – perhaps even magical” (Gasaway [Sa]). Magickal processes as identifying criteria in intuitive and subconscious cognitive

functioning make sense in the fields of psychology, business science and information science.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1.3 Intuition and place**

My research situates a relation between intuition and place as a process leading to otherworldly narratives. In part this involves mystical aspects related to the occult, as well as mythological context in selected representational strategies. I explore how tacit knowledge, concealed in the form of things, is a core criterion in understanding the work of intuition.

Place is a contentious signifier, bringing with it a platform for critical and theoretical engagement from a broad interdisciplinary perspective. The process of art making is situated in the intricate relation of intuition and place as an embodied experience of everyday life. Place complicates the conceptual terrain of memory, history and identity, as well as the more elusive realms of the human subconscious. Tacit knowledge relies heavily on a sensorial experience of hidden phenomena and in this way becomes crucial in understanding intuition and place through the conduit of embodiment.

No theoretically located discussion of place can ever be neutral, homogenous or totalising. Place exacerbates and further agitates a contemporary dilemma, as it assists in the deconstruction of knowledge as an ideologically secure and grounding signifier, and perpetually undermines any power-driven attempt to advocate for dogmatic truth. A consequence of this contemporary condition is a cognitive experience of being placed or more importantly concealed, hidden or displaced. By implication this infers an experience of the world that is outside of any rational, officially sanctioned and grounded position. I propose that to effectively and critically apply an understanding of place as part of a creative strategy – in this case in the ambit of performative arts practices – the equally elusive cognitive functions of intuition must be highlighted. Rather than seeing intuition as a separate category of the creative human experience and seemingly dislocated from any conventional discussion of place, I see the two as symbiotically and reciprocally necessary to access residual layers of meaning that I refer to as otherworldly.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The problem this research addresses is whether process-led practice in installation and performative art happenings is predicated only on conceptual and visual development that is pre-imagined, preplanned or

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<sup>1</sup> Defined in relation to creative processes and, even more specifically, in relation to spatial arts practices, this does not preclude reference to other applications of intuition one finds in the context of educational practice, psychology, business and information science. For example, in the latter context, intuition becomes a means or a tool through which emotional or psychological experiences are understood, as well as how these play a part in the conditions related to various psychological disorders and systemic functioning within communities of practice.

choreographed. If place-specific activities and moments of intuitive imagining are relegated to preparatory phases of production, this effectively short-circuits their significance in the meaningful outcomes of the final work. This research makes a case specifically for the relational interface between place and intuition in process-led installation and performative art practices, and argues that a particular signifying event emerges in the form of otherworldly phenomena and associated narratives that are evidenced in the process of the final realisation of the work.

Addressing this problem is consequential. The work itself *is* the process and the relation of intuition and place give this substance. Identifying the otherworldly resonates two-fold in process-led practices. First, as tacit knowledge, it underscores the value of hidden and concealed phenomena as framed within the conceptual reservoirs of metaconscious knowledge and information systems. Second, it highlights an embodied experience that evades totalising linguistic reasoning and therefore remains undefinable. I evaluate this hypothesis through an analysis of ritualised processes in the performative practice of Olivier de Sagazan and of transient modalities in selected works by Marcus Neustetter.

Three primary questions prompt this investigation:

1. How does tacit knowledge, as a symbolic provocateur of the word magick, assist in re-defining intuition and place as core aspects of the human creative experience in situationally-specific and place-related performance and installation art happenings?
2. In what ways does intuition enable the conceptualising and production aspects of performative and spatial arts practices that employ ritual and transience as formative and generative strategies?
3. How does the application of intuition further problematise notions of place in process-led performative arts practices through a visual articulation of otherworldly narratives?

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **1.3.1 Research approach and design**

I employ an integrated qualitative approach defined through a mixed methodology. To exact an embodied understanding of the artists' work and their working processes, field work is prioritised as a means to insert myself immersively into their practice. From this vantage point, an experiential approach is employed to enable the collection of data from both an objective observational position and, more importantly, from the perspective of my subjective experience. The following activities inform this approach: (1) Being inclusively and participatively integrated into the artist's working

process as an active collaborator or consenting participant; (2) conducting intensive interview sessions and interactively workshopping or observing process-related activities; (3) establishing a working relationship that allows for continued engagement and communication either in person or via social media platforms and email; (4) directing an immersive and enriched research process through the lens of an embodied and personal perspective. This qualitative approach allows for the excavation of primary data, including observational, factual and contextual information, as well as the on-site examination of specific installations and performances. This method is coupled with an extended literature review straddling scholarly and non-scholarly sources relating to intuition, place and the otherworldly.

The research design is based on two case studies. As an organisational framework I scaffold these case studies around two themes that I recognise as systemic to this research, namely ritual and transience. These themes are identified as key aspects informing the conception, production and implementation of visual outcomes in place-related performative and installation art events. The creative working process is examined as an interrelation of intuitive cognitive functions and the intricate complexity of place-orientated iterations. In a close examination of tacitly concealed phenomena, this study considers (1) a ritualised practice in selected work by de Sagazan and (2) process-related transient formulations enacted through the physical and metaphoric agency of light in selected works by Neustetter. The two themes of ritual and transience determined the selection of the two artists as case studies.

de Sagazan's and Neustetter's practices are emblematic in the way I conceptualise and discuss their work to address the above research questions. Neustetter's multimodal use of light underpins his intuitive processes and assists in complicating notions of place. A conceptual thread is drawn through his intuitive creative actions and tacitly embedded transient moments when the vertical gaze and imagined journeying generate otherworldly narratives. de Sagazan's ritualised processes literally and figuratively implicate esoteric and occult elements. The interrelation of place, the artist's body and the intuitive methods he deploys generates a ritualised context of production. His methods give form to intuitive creative thinking that extends beyond worldly dimensions.

Illustrations and diagrams are positioned as a separate section at the end of the written text. This comprises still images of the performances and installation works under discussion. Where required, I have provided a QR code that enables the reader to access the performance video. Due to copyright and access issues, it was not possible to provide the full performance video of every work under discussion. In most, but not all cases, these QR links to videos are teasers designed for

marketing purposes. This is the nature of the visual material provided by the artists on their websites and other platforms. Understandably this presents a potential logistical limitation in the study, in that the reader is not provided with the full edited version of each performance. To compensate, I offer expanded descriptive passages of the selected works that inform the primary content of this study.

The scope of this research is determined by a selection of visual examples produced between 1998 and 2023. The start date was defined by the experiments towards the development of *Transfiguration* (1998) (fig 3a, b & c)<sup>2</sup> by de Sagazan starting in June 1998. Neustetter's first postgraduate experiments with light and transience coincidentally also started in 1998 with works such as *00Untitled* (1998) (fig 4).

### **1.3.2 Data collection procedures**

First-hand data concerning the artists and their processes is a priority in this study. The analysis of examples shifts away from a strictly iconographic methodology to a close examination of the artists' working processes. The data collection techniques employed include the following:

#### *1.3.2.1 Interviews*

Locating the artists' position through engaged formal and informal interviews as a primary source is important in the collection of data. My interaction with both artists involved formal sit-down interview sessions, as well as informal discussions and conversations. Pre-arranged hour-long meetings were conducted in-person or via prescheduled online Teams or Zoom meetings. Where possible, all informal discussions with the artists were recorded as voice clips using the voice recorder application facility on my cellular phone. In some cases, the approach of a questionnaire or the casualness of candid conversation was implemented to allow for time flexibility and a consideration of the interviewees' personal and work-related circumstances.

On Monday 22 May 2023 at around 10am, I met de Sagazan in his lounge/office space. A formal audio-visual recorded interview session took place that lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes. Other conversations and discussions happened either socially, on the afternoon of Thursday 25 May 2023, for example, while enjoying a cool beverage and snacks, or as part of an actual participatory performative event, such as the experience at the clay estuary on the afternoon

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<sup>2</sup> While the work is dated 1998 to indicate when the first (unrecorded) version of the performance was produced in the privacy of de Sagazan's studio, note that fig 3a, b & c refers to three versions of the work, produced in 2008, 2010 and 2011, respectively. The reference to other versions is intended to give the reader an idea of the variation in the performance from one version to the next.

of Monday 22 May 2023. These discussions were recorded retrospectively as cursory notes and voice clips. Informal information was recorded in my field notes as observations of details collected through candid conversations.

I was afforded three audio-recorded interviews with Neustetter on 31 August 2022, 15 September 2023 and 24 October 2023. Each session lasted about an hour. Informal conversations during field trips took place as part of collaborative performative events, such as a drawing and conversation on the morning of Friday 2 June 2023 (fig 5) and The Zone meeting (fig 6) on the afternoon of Friday 2 June 2023, as well as a visit to the Wienerberger Lehmteich (fig 7) on Monday 5 June 2023. On Saturday 3 June 2023, we visited the Naschmarkt in Vienna (fig 8)<sup>3</sup> and on Monday 5 June we made a point of seeing the Venus of Willendorf<sup>4</sup> at the Naturhistorisches Museum (fig 9). Thursday 8 June 2023 included a hike and foraging activity through the Föhrenberge forest and the medieval Burgruine Mödling site (fig 10). These events are important to acknowledge as data collection opportunities, especially as this data provided important content for conceptualising our collaborative work together.

#### 1.3.2.2 *Field work*

My research is aimed exclusively at performative spatial arts practices and, more specifically, those in which a notion of place is complicated or problematised in some way. It was necessary to visit, examine and experience first-hand, the sites onto and through which an idea of place is interrogated. The field trips allowed for a close documentation, collection and primary collation of visual material relating to where and how the artists work.

I conducted field work in Europe in May and June 2023. In France, I spent time with de Sagazan, working closely with the artist in his Saint-Nazaire studio from May 22 to May 28, 2023. The purpose of this visit was to immerse myself in de Sagazan's studio practice. Part of these activities included a ritualised event at the Saint-Nazaire estuary (fig 11), as well as observing him working on sculptures in his studio context. I also participated in a performance in which I was given the opportunity to be the subject of the activity.

While in Vienna, information was acquired during participatory studio work with Neustetter, conducted between Friday 2 June 2023 and Friday 9 June 2023, including a visit to the Vienna inner-city site of the installation and performance for *Tracing absence* (2021) (fig 12), which took place on

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<sup>3</sup> I intentionally use an iStock Getty photograph of the Naschmarkt in Vienna as I was unable to document the site on the day of our visit.

<sup>4</sup> I explain and elaborate on the significance of these events in Chapter Four.

Saturday 3 June 2023. Field work was also conducted as part of The Zone meeting on the afternoon of Friday 2 June 2023, as well as a site visit to the Wienerberger Lehmteich on Monday 5 June 2023.

Attending the artist's public performances in real life adds more value to research of this nature. A good example of this was the first-hand account of Neustetter's video projection works at the *Light resonance* (2022) (fig 13) event as part of the centenary celebrations at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in October 2022, and the centenary celebrations at St John's College, Johannesburg in October 2023. I also had the opportunity in April 2024 to visit the Southern African Astronomical Observatory in Sutherland, South Africa, to see Neustetter's site-specific installation, *The Sutherland Dome* (2013) (fig 14).

The purpose of this fieldwork was to establish a layer of understanding over and above that provided by the interviews and the literature review. Importantly, this triangulation of data pertaining to each artist's practice is a valuable means by which the key concepts in this research can be appraised, interrogated and measured.

#### **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

I destabilise place as semantically preconceived, established, officially sanctioned and fixed in order to avoid undermining the flexibility I require to analyse selected works by Neustetter and de Sagazan. To theoretically contextualise critical positions on performative spatial arts practices, cultural geography, tacit knowledge and embodied cognition, I draw on an interdisciplinary field of place-related scholarship. Selected aspects of this scholarship are applied to frame place as polyvalent and explicitly relational to embodied experiences. An alternative reading of place is predicated on both the rational world of consciousness and the metaconscious conditions of intuitive creative thinking. This is crucial in creating a foundation for how intuition (made possible through an embodied relation with place) becomes significant and meaningful in the making of art.

Place is viewed as socially, ideologically, historically and esoterically produced. While the geographies of cultural and social encounters with place are a useful departure point for a discussion on temporal and casual spatiality, I shift to a theoretical reading of related art events and happenings as tacitly determined. Intuition is identified as a key constituent in these representational strategies. From an initial theoretical context for place, I plot the roots of intuitive processing, focusing on how this pragmatically drives imagination and creative thinking, integral to human embodied cognitive functioning. Intuitive action is rationalised through the lens of a cognitive embodied experience, which is activated through bodily senses. While place provides a grounded foundation, intuition gives form to subconscious experiences that are in themselves

magickal in the way they give form to the creative act. The significance of tacit knowledge assists in defining creative impulses, which are relayed through sensorial responses to given spatial contexts and everyday experiences.

Creativity stems from a primordial place of vulnerability and I frame this in relation to sensorial and ontological readings of place as these exist outside of or in contrast to a fixed empirical relation to worldly experiences. Place and the conditions that form a relation to place are essential in determining an intuitive emotional response through a bodily sense of knowing and feeling. In my research, a realisation of self is therefore a key identifying factor in an intuitively driven creative process. I employ a phenomenological lens to locate notions of embodied cognition and tacit knowledge as these implicate conceptual and theoretical applications of intuitive imagining. Enabled through a conscious and subconscious accessing of personal circumstances and memory, I build a theoretical scaffold to demonstrate an experience and representation of otherworldly narratives. A conscious decision is made to dedicate Chapter Two of this thesis to the theoretical framework underpinning this study and, in so doing, provide a comprehensive theoretical outline as this pertains to place and intuition.

## **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The primary data on de Sagazan's and Neustetter's practice was made available through my direct contact with the artists in an immersive approach to their working methods during field work excursions and prearranged meetings for interview purposes. I also consulted articles, published interviews and exhibition catalogues made directly available on the artists' websites, as well as those provided by the artists themselves. This included access to audio-visual recorded clips of performance happenings, as well as videos archived on their websites and social media sites such as Instagram. Neustetter was also able to provide archival material from his personal data base. de Sagazan presented me with a number of catalogues of previous solo and group exhibitions, mostly to do with the seminal work *Transfiguration*.

The significance of critical debates around what constitutes an intuitive approach and its effect on a reading of place in spatial arts practices is crucial in addressing the research questions in this study. It is therefore important to situate this study in a broader interdisciplinary context. My research process prioritises primary sources but also necessitates reference to secondary sources, especially in the way place and intuition are developed in the context of broader theoretical positions, including phenomenology and embodied cognition.

My study thus requires a close examination of scholarly books, master's dissertations, doctoral

theses and journal articles relevant to the key areas of this study. Theresa Hardman's (2019) and Jessica Jagtiani's (2018) theses on intuition and creativity are good examples of this. The problematics of place and intuition and the significance of tacit knowledge are seminal aspects of creative imagining in my study of selected performative spatial arts practices. I focus particularly on Polanyi's (1958, 1966) formulations on tacit knowledge – most notably in his book *The tacit dimension* (1966) – as well as secondary scholarly sources that followed with critical developments of Polanyi's ideas. For example, Richard Brock (2015), Thea Zander et al (2016), Klaus Nielsen (2002), Viktor Dörfler and Fran Ackermann (2012) and 'Kit' Dampney et al (2002) tease out more closely the importance of tacit knowledge in intuitive creative thinking.

Place traditionally exists in the theoretical and practical ambit of cultural geography and is conventionally understood as a fixed and descriptive signifier. For the purposes of this study, however, place is viewed theoretically at the interstices of an interdisciplinary application straddling the sciences and the humanities. Conceived as at the nexus of the spatial turn, space and place are viewed through a phenomenological lens: employing a phenomenological reading is useful when conceptually framing place in relation to the contemporary human condition. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1963) conceptions of the "body schema" and "the sensed world" are helpful when relating embodied cognitive conditions and intuitive encounters with place. Studies by scholars such as Henri Lefebvre (1976, 1991a, 1991b, 1996), Edward Casey (1976, 1987, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002), Michael De Certeau (1984), Edward Soja (1989, 1996, 2009) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 1991, 2011) constitute a body of scholarship that articulates the broader field of this literary and philosophical context. From this position, it is possible to consider how physiological, sensorial and by default emotional and psychological experiences give rise to relational and embodied aspects of place, and how subconscious thought triggers creative impulses that manifest in real time with real-time consequences.

My observations of intuition and related cognitive functioning are situated against the theoretical backdrop of writings by scholars such as Henri Samier (2018), Marta Sinclair (2011), Ingar Brinck (2000), Erik Dane and Michael Pratt (2007) and Emma Policastro (1995). The nature and relevance of the selected literature is calculated around positioning intuition from a pragmatic and everyday life context. From this platform, I then build a case for intuition in process-led performative arts practices.

## **1.6 OUTLINE OF CONTENTS**

Chapter One is the introduction in which I offer a basic blueprint of the underlying plan onto which I

scaffold the components that make up this research. A brief orientating discussion on magick, tacit knowledge and intuition and place, sets in place the overarching proponents of this investigative study.

A theoretical field is selectively plotted in Chapter Two, where three core categories in this research are discussed, namely, place, intuition and the otherworldly. With embodied cognition and phenomenology, I extend the relevance of tacit knowledge. Embodied cognition is used to conceptualise a phenomenological experience of space and place. When place and intuition form a reciprocal relationship through intuitive and sensorial experiences, otherworldly narratives are presented. This is made possible through creative imagining in embodied and cognitive processes that are both tacit and explicit. When enacted through intuitive actions and iterations, place and space set in motion metaconscious experiences that feed an otherworldly narrative. Tacit knowledge is purposefully integrated to conceptualise a particular aspect of the otherworldly as a magickal phenomenon that exists outside of objective and rational experiences.

Chapter Three focuses on ritual in selected examples of performative work by de Sagazan. This chapter addresses the following questions: When does the place of the ritualised body enable a narrative of transformation and ritualised trance? In what ways are the artist's methods driven by unrehearsed, impromptu and instinctive actions that lie in relation to socially encoded experiences? How does his work with base materials such as clay, hay, fire, pigment and others inform his intuitive process? How does the presence of the artist's own body assist in a reading of place? I argue that the ritualised body is the locus of place through which the artist undergoes a series of self-inflicted and intuitively driven ritualised processes to attain a heightened state of cognitive awareness and creative resolve.

In *Transfiguration and Hybridation* (2006) (fig 15a, b & c),<sup>5</sup> the ritualised body is a site of narrative subjectivity brought about through an interaction with the physiological and psychological self. An intuitive impulse sets in motion the represented body as a contested place through which the protagonist is held in a trance state of ritualised awakening. Through the iconography of masquerade, bodily alteration and monstrosity, de Sagazan invokes a mythical, demonic, monstrous and hybridised creature in a perpetual state of becoming. The ritualised body transcends the physical and material realm of cognitive resonance and slips between states of placeness and

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<sup>5</sup> The work is dated 2006 to indicate when the first version of the performance was produced. Fig 15a refers to the version of the work produced in 2017. Fig 15b & c refers to two clips of the same version produced in 2018. I include both intentionally to show the variety of video representation available for viewing.

placeless-ness.

The theme of transience, which complicates place-related contexts in spatial arts practices, becomes the central thematic thread in Chapter Four. This is identified in ephemeral and impermanent moments triggered by and through intuitive processes. In an explorative analysis of selected works by Neustetter, I demonstrate how place is prioritised in his creative agenda. An instinctive and impulsive interaction with materials signals an emotive, metaphysical and subconscious state. In Neustetter's performative installations, transience is presented through an articulation and manipulation of light. Light functions as an element in the sculptural work but also as a powerful metaphor for how a narrative of transience is enacted through a relation to place. The artist's intuitive response to place suggests a subconscious sense of things in which the ephemeral qualities of light give form and visual expression to the transience of place. Light, as a medium, metaphor and representational strategy enables an interface between an embodied cognition of the conscious self and an otherworldly narrative. Transient states allude to impermanence and undermine the physicality and fixedness of both the site onto which the performance is enacted and the performance itself, ushering in an embedded narrative of otherworldly experience.

Chapters Three and Four elaborate on how the otherworldly becomes apparent in intuitively process-driven place-articulated arts practices, which I sum up with reflections on the findings of this research in Chapter Five. Implicated in my findings is the porous and seamless flow of conscious, metaconscious and hyperconscious cognitive behaviours. An embodied relation is foregrounded, resolving into transient narratives in Neustetter's journeys through and with light, and ritualised trance-induced performance in de Sagazan's work. In my analysis of selected examples, I show how encounters with worldly and otherworldly phenomena produce a visionary narrative encapsulating a memory of past, present and future experiences. These are enacted through intuitive and impulsive imaginings and become profound through an implicit realisation of personal circumstances and heightened sensorial activation with people, places, spaces, materials and objects.

In my thesis, the otherworldly is aligned with phenomena that transcend linguistic contexts and result in what I refer to as a linguistic collapse. Otherworldly narratives evoked through intuitive creative impulses remain undefinable and unexplainable or, put differently, linguistic contexts can only offer a cursory explanation. The key is in the embodied action of the artist or participant; there, an authentic expression of intuitive creativity can be imagined and enacted. I conclude that the otherworldly is resolutely unresolved and remains firmly and defiantly beyond deeper human comprehension. Intuitive imaginings, such as those offered by Neustetter and de Sagazan, allow a

glimpse into how these narratives occur through transient and ritualised activities. Yet, an intrinsic experience of an otherworldly narrative plot, in representational terms, remains a fragile and tentative veneer when performed from an embodied position.

## CHAPTER 2

### **A theoretical framework for place, intuition and the otherworldly**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS**

I was asked recently to put in simple terms what this research was about and, more specifically, how I would present its theoretical foundations. My initial response was: nothing is certain. This is an ironic statement to make in the context of academic writing that supposedly draws on empirical data from the position of lived experience. However, the notion of uncertainty is a key driving motif in my analysis of intuition and place in the work of Neustetter and de Sagazan, and how this directly and explicitly implicates a lived experience. I build a specific case by elaborating on how this uncertainty is articulated through the processes they employ to produce their work.

Three core theories are identified in this research on place, intuition and the otherworldly: embodied cognition,<sup>6</sup> phenomenology<sup>7</sup> and tacit knowledge.<sup>8</sup> This section considers key authoritative texts from which I construct a theoretical scaffold to support the analysis of the case studies in Chapters Three and Four. I begin with a schematic layout of the theoretical terrain for intuition, place and the otherworldly to establish a connection between my three key criteria. How place, intuition and the otherworldly come together in a study of the performative and installation practices of de Sagazan and Neustetter is what gives the theoretical structure of this research its unique complexity.

Place, together with the associated aspects of site and space, is theoretically investigated from a phenomenological position. This requires a consideration of human experience in relation to a sensorial as well as a cognitive response to the world of lived experience. An application of ideas around embodied cognition is used to conceptualise a phenomenological experience of space and place. Recent scholarly attitudes to place originate in humanist and cultural geography. Here, specific attention is directed at the shift from a cartographically defined position into a phenomenological context. This is formulated according to a sensorial or bodily response when intuitive sensorial experiences are brought to bear on otherworldly narratives.

Intuition is the second area of study. Discussed closely in relation to aspects that drive imagination

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<sup>6</sup> The sensorial body is a means to navigate the world of lived experience or, as Ingar Brinck (2000:43) observes, a form of cognitive functioning that “depends on the body and the environment of the subject”.

<sup>7</sup> David Seamon and Jacob Sowers (2008:43) offer a useful definition: “Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience. The aim is to examine and to clarify human situations, events, meanings, and experiences as they are known in everyday life but typically unnoticed beneath the level of conscious awareness”.

<sup>8</sup> Tacit knowledge refers to implicit, concealed or veiled knowledge that is not easily accessible in the rational world of conscious experience.

and creativity, intuition is the formative point from which creative processes are analysed. The otherworldly is the third criterion, which I identify, on the one hand, as the resulting product of how place and intuition intersect meaningfully. On the other hand, I acknowledge it as an integral part of the magick that happens when place and intuition reciprocate symbiotically. I demonstrate how, to a large degree, these factors and experiences are tacit, undefined or unknown.

The broad field of tacit knowledge is selectively applied. Useful in its application to place, intuition and the otherworldly, tacit knowledge is purposefully integrated to conceptualise a particular aspect of the otherworldly as a magickal phenomenon that exists outside of objective and rational experiences. While these experiences are intuitively determined, I bring attention to ways in which they also reside outside of rational human cognitive systems of understanding. I integrate the discussion of the otherworldly throughout the study and offer a concluding account of my findings in Chapter Five.

## **2.2 PLACE**

### **2.2.1 Sensorial and emotional inflections**

The interrelation of place, space and site is necessary to position intuitive creative processes as constituent and integral aspects of spatial arts practices. Any definition of place defaults to a questioning of preconceived, established and fixed definitions. This undermines the flexibility required to investigate place and placeness, which instead requires a theoretical approach that frames place as porous and polyvalent. Place is investigated through the lens of the artist's interrelating psychic or sensorially attuned experience. I consider how this prompts an alternative reading of place that sits outside of the rational world of consciousness and, in so doing, feeds the artist's intuition. This provides a foundation for how intuitive processes can enable a reading of otherworldly narratives.

Conceptual and intertextual relations of place inform an experience with space and site. This extends into a prioritising of personal and collective identities, histories, geographies and social conditions. A planning and making process in spatial interventions is both connotatively and denotatively directed. Humankind is encoded with a need to belong through empathic and nostalgic yearnings that offer emotional and physical peace of mind. Judith Rugg (2010:7) notes that: "Concepts of identity and selfhood and the illusory nature of belonging are the psychic sites where the interrelationships of space are considered". This yearning for place transcends time but is still located in an empirical and bodily relation. Rugg (2010:10) explains this in her analysis of selected installations, when she writes: "Longing, it has been said, is a refusal of the present and inhabits the threshold of time; it is encapsulated by stasis and transcends the materiality of place". Psychic attachment to place defines

identity through social, cultural and economic realities. Rugg (2010:10) extends her observations on longing for place to include, “both joy and sadness and the need for attachment and identification”. An inaugural point about the political implications of place and identity is foregrounded. Subjective bodily responses, and the network of sensorial relations that give it meaning, are bound together in place.

To what extent do these physical needs and emotional responses impact and give form to psychological and subconscious conditions? A common phrase used in revisionist cultural geography is a sense of place. Sensing place, in contrast to knowing place, implies a familiarity with the world that is determined through the immediacy of embodied social interactions and conditions. In distinguishing between a “*sense of place*” and a “*spirit of place*” Steele (1981:11-13; emphasis original) describes the former as a “particular experience of a person in a particular setting” and “a pattern of reactions” brought on by aspect of the setting and the person in question. In the latter category, a spirit of place, place is given a “special ‘feel’ or personality suggesting a phenomenon that “acts in a powerful ... manner... [suggesting a] ... magic, with which certain locations seem to be endowed” (Steele 1981:13). Dolores Hayden (1997:15) analyses the history of American urbanism and offers an extraordinary account of the psychological complexities embedded in a discourse on spatial attachment. She acknowledges a nostalgic reliance on what she terms a sense of place and the personality of a location, and positions this as a necessary by-product of an attachment to place: “An individual’s sense of place is both a biological response to the surrounding physical environment and a cultural creation” (Hayden 1997:16). Psychologists Setha Low and Irvin Altman (1992) indicate how this process is similar to an infant’s attachment to parental figures: “Place attachment can develop social, material, and ideological dimensions, as individuals develop ties to kin and community”.

The human relation to place outlined by Hayden and others raises further questions on how human connections are established. I ask: Can emotional and sensorial connections to place be explained in relation to psychological conditions outside of mere physical relation? In what ways does this explain one’s emotional response to a sense of place and, by extension, a conceptual and personalised embodiment of place? I delve into the intricacies of these questions in the following section, beginning with observations of the work of memory and the senses.

### **2.2.2 Memory, presence and tactility**

The function of memory in situating place is central to a process of intimate knowing. Scholars such as Philip Sheldrake (2001:43) argue that “[t]he concept of ‘place’ refers not simply to geographical location but also to a dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. Place is any space that has the

capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious". Memory, when applied in this way, suggests a tactility of place that has sensorial bodily implications. Historical and ideological dimensions of place inform this tactility. As Hayden (1997:18) explains, "it is place's very same assault on all ways of knowing (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) that makes it powerful as a source of memory". This sensorial effectivity is significant. Citing Casey, Hayden (1997:46) explains how place and memory articulate as a bodily relation: "It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, ... memory is naturally place-orientated or at least place-supported".

Tacit aspects of place are realised and revealed through an embodied relation. Rugg (2010:49) alludes to this as a destabilising of social relations. "Theatres of the unseen, unacknowledged and overlooked, as well as sites of anguish and uncertainty ... unsettle forms of value where the contrived coherences of space are contained" (Rugg 2010:49). Physical space that is ideologically and geographically peripheral "reveal[s] the hidden social and economic mechanisms of order where conflict is concealed and where procedures of normalization are perpetuated" (Rugg 2010:49). When situationally specific interventions set up a critical dialogue with place, ideological conventions are negotiated. I test this in relation to de Sagazan's ritualised trance-like processes and the plumbing of undefinable social and historical relations in Neustetter's use of light.

### **2.2.3 Witness and thisness**

A theoretical positioning of place is realised in and through spatial bodily and psychically attuned terms. An embodied mindfulness of place exists in its deliberately inclusive design. Casey's (1997:214) comments on body and place are telling: "Place, then, arises within the witness essential to the body's primitive prehensions and repetitions of its environing world. Just as we are always with a body, so, being bodily, we are always within a place". How does this assist in understanding the sensorial implications of intuitive action and relations to place?

The role of intuition in a scholarly conception of placeness is central to this study and stems directly from conceptions of place as a socially produced phenomenon. Cultural and social geographies guide discussions on temporal and casual spatiality (Casey 1993). The shift to an embodied reading of place recognises tacitly embedded narratives in process-driven spatial arts practices. Although my core focus is on a phenomenological reading of place, it is necessary to consider scholarly positions that problematise the relation between bodily presence, place, space and site. How is the magick of place a means to experience spatial encounters? Some scholars motivate for a revisionist approach to theorising place in which a psychic dimension is prioritised. Here space is charged and transformed outside of a rational encounter. Soja (1989, 1996, 2000, 2009) and more specifically

Michael Keith and Steve Pile (1993:4) argue for a dematerialisation and abstraction of space and, by extension, place. “[S]patiality is reduced to a mental construct alone ... away from materialized social realities” (Keith and Pile 1993:4). Keith and Pile (1993:5) align with Soja’s call for an alternative spatiality or “radical openness” and argue for a sense of place that is “no longer passive, no longer fixed, no longer undialectical ... but, still, in a very real sense about location and locatedness”. In recounting his formulation of a socio-spatial dialectic, Soja (1989:79) explains: “Space as a physical context has generated broad philosophical interest and lengthy discussions of its absolute and relative properties, ... its characteristics as environmental ‘container’ of human life, its objectifiable geometry, and its phenomenological essences”.

The idea of locatedness as related to an abstract realisation of place – of being situated in a given time-space through both known and tacit criteria – suggests an intimacy of place. This intimacy is what reinforces the notion of a sensorial response in the phenomenology of scholars such as Tuan (1975, 1991, 2011). “To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another” (Tuan 1975:152). Locality, therefore, is not exclusively bound up in the physical properties of site, even though these may play a role. Rather it is contingent on a series of known and unknown conceptual elements that determine an experience of the social and historical criteria that define that site.

To experience locatedness is significant in the formulation of a critical attitude in performance and installation art. Art “provides an image of feeling; it gives objectified form and visibility to feeling ... [and] an awareness of place by holding up mirrors to our own experience” (Tuan 1975:161). Yet this function of feeling, both tangible and visible, is also problematic in its reliance on what I refer to here as the conceptual context of realisation. To be able to experience a site as place may require a lived and rooted familiarity with the site. “Experience takes time, ... requiring long residence and deep involvement ... To know a place is also to know the past” (Tuan 1975:164).

Passive as well as direct modes of experience elucidate a conceptual context of realisation. The passive modality is dominated by abstract knowing “too remote from sensory experience to be real” (Tuan 1975:152). The direct modality is determined by strong “visceral feelings in a locality” (Tuan 1975:152). One’s encounter with structures in urban spaces (more broadly, the built environment) and, by extension, a lived experience of things, objects and surfaces, may involve both experiences in varying degrees. A shift occurs when one considers place as an enacted thing over and above its thisness. Tim Cresswell (2004:40) observes: “Place ... becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing ... marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence”. Site therefore falters as the sole determinant factor of experience prompting “an accelerating

erosion of place” (Cresswell 2004:43). Through a conceptual and possible physical detachment, the particularity of locality is jeopardised and undermined, resulting in what Cresswell (2004:43) alludes to as a dilution of meaning.

#### **2.2.4 Sensing place: fluidity, porosity and elusivity**

Steven Moore’s (2001) critique of place and what he refers to as the nonmodern thesis presents a useful departure for a critical redefinition. In his appraisal of John Agnew’s (1987, 1989) revisionist conception of place, Moore (2001:131) writes: “Places cannot be understood within the limited dimensions of architecture or physical geography ... [V]ariables that characterise places are multivalent”.

In a discussion of the three elements of place, that being a location, locale and a sense of place, Agnew and Duncan (1989:2) refer to location as involving the “spatial distribution of social and economic activities. Locale is defined as “the settings for everyday routine social interaction and a sense of place is simply stated as an “identification with place engendered by living in it” (Agnew and Duncan (1989:2). These identifying observations of place are useful when considering the multi-layered aspects of spatial arts practices. To further discuss the theoretical positions that inform a porosity of place, I consider how the concept of place developed and in what contexts this happened.

Arguably the leading authoritative voice on the phenomenology of spatiality is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His contributions to philosophical positions in art, art history, history, embodiment and ontology, as well as the tectonics of perception, are a theoretical keystone in research on place and spatiality. “The characteristic approach of Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical work is his effort to identify an alternative to intellectualism or idealism, on the one hand, and empiricism or realism, on the other, by critiquing their common presupposition of a ready-made world and failure to account for the historical and embodied character of experience” (Toadvine 2023).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s observations of elusiveness add a further critical dimension to the notion of a porosity of place.<sup>9</sup> He distinguishes between “the natural and transcendental attitudes and the intentionality of consciousness”. In his critical appraisal of the link between consciousness and sensation, Merleau-Ponty (2002:5) emphasises that

pure sensation would amount to no sensation, and thus to not feeling at all. The alleged self-evidence of sensation is not based on any testimony of consciousness, but on widely held prejudice. We think we know perfectly well what ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘sensing’ are, because

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<sup>9</sup> The term porosity of place defines an intersecting relational aspect of sensorial and metaphysical phenomena.

perception has long provided us with objects which are coloured or which emit sounds. When we try to analyse it, we transpose these objects into consciousness.

For Merleau-Ponty, the inherent grounding of transcendental experiences cannot be separated from the empirical everyday human experience of social space. This theoretical construct informs a discussion of place and the artist's relationship to it. Physical activity, such as the embodied manipulation of the physical environment (advancements with tools, communication, technology), as well as humankind's perceived sense of spiritual self, are foregrounded. Subject and object positions are mutually corresponding. Merleau-Ponty (2002:61) expands on this point by stating "an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the imago of a whole segment of life. Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness".

Mind and body remain unified and simultaneously distinct. Consciousness, extending from perception, is reliant on place-related encounters. In *The visible and the invisible* (1968) Merleau-Ponty (1968:32) offers commentary being in the world:<sup>10</sup>

Is it not evident that, precisely if my perception is a perception of the world, I must find in my commerce with the world the reasons that induce me to see it, and in my vision the meaning of my vision? From who would I, who am in the world (*suis au monde*), learn what it is to be in the world if not from myself, and how could I say that I am in the world if I did not know it?

In earlier works, such as *The structure of behavior* (1963), Merleau-Ponty (paraphrased by Toadvine 2023) articulates this position: "Mind or consciousness cannot be defined formally in terms of self-knowledge or representation, then, but is essentially engaged in the structures and actions of the human world and encompasses all of the diverse intentional orientations of human life". In *Phenomenology of perception* (2002:68) Merleau-Ponty outlines a significant theoretical construct for conceptualising the notion of sensed things, as opposed to empirically rationalised scientific responses. He explains this more closely as an "[e]xperience of phenomena [that] is not, then, ... that of a reality of which we are ignorant and leading to which there is no methodical bridge – it is the making explicit or bringing to light of the prescientific life of consciousness which alone endows scientific operations with meaning and to which these latter always refer back. It is not an irrational conversion, but an intentional analysis". In these terms, worldly and bodily experience is rationalised as something explicitly presented as well as implicitly felt or sensed. With a re-evaluation of memory and sensation, experience moves from being a passive reception of what is given as meaningful

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<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty's comments on perception are particularly valuable in formulating an understanding of being in the world.

relations with things in everyday contexts.

The defiance of explanation referred to above is useful when relating the tacit aspects of place that activate intuitive responses rather than predetermined action. All meanings and values derived from cognitive judgement are treated as a sensorial relation to place which opens scope for meaningful interrelation outside of the prescribed and given context of an illusory condition of place. Merleau-Ponty (1968:39 emphasis original) offers a cautionary note:

To say that is and has always been an “inspection of the mind” is to define it not by what it gives us, but by what in it *withstands* the hypothesis of *non-existence*; it is to identify from the first the positive of a negation of negation; it is to require of the innocent the proof of his non-culpability, and to reduce in advance our contact with Being to eth discursive operations with which we defend ourselves against illusion, to reduce the true to the credible, the real to the probable.

Put simply – a fully realised experience of place is only possible through a bodily relation to place.

The significance of a bodily relation to place and the implications for understanding the workings of sensorial responsiveness is a central tenet in the function of place in de Sagazan’s and Neustetter’s work. Intuition derives from a felt encounter with place and is a grounding condition for an experience of alternate states or otherworldly consciousness. This extends theoretically into a primary condition known as the body schema. I build a case for the workings of this condition in relation to intuitive processes, as this contributes to an analysis of the process-led practices of de Sagazan and Neustetter.

### **2.2.5 The body schema**

The sensed world underpins bodily relations, which draw in metaconscious aspects of place that ordinarily would not be perceptible. The correlation of perception, the sensed body and place needs further contextualisation in relation to what Merleau-Ponty (2002:239) terms the body schema.

Highlighting the significance of perception, Merleau-Ponty (2002:239) explains:

Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception ... The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body.

The body is the starting point for any encounter in lived worldly spaces, and yet it has what Merleau-Ponty terms “double sensations” (Merleau-Ponty 2002:106). The body is present and simultaneously detached. He (2002:106) explains this point with a practical example:

[W]hen I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property

of being able to feel too. We have just seen that the two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other. When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the rôles of 'touching' and being 'touched'.

The notion of a double sensation and the ambivalence it instils evokes the idea of a subconscious or metaconscious experience. Toadvine (2023) mentions how Merleau-Ponty makes specific reference to "the existential space of night, dreams, or myths in relation to the abstract space of the 'objective' world". A bodily experience of real space in real time is intricately bound to an experience of otherworldly phenomena, the development of mythical narratives and the subconscious. In this research I recognise the importance of how these otherworldly conditions are embedded in lived experience. Kruks (1990:180-181) extends the point: "From the gestures of the body, to language, to cultural artifacts, ways of producing and institutions, all that pertains to human existence is transcendent insofar as it perpetually creates meaning, meaning which is never completed but which opens onto the future". Following this thinking, Merleau-Ponty (2002:104) refers to the unobservable second body which I align with the double sensation and the notion of an otherworldly condition. He teases this out in a comment on the observable or physical body when he writes:

[I]t is necessary in the first place that my body should impose upon me one of the world; and the first necessity can be merely physical only in virtue of the fact that the second is metaphysical; in short, I am accessible to factual situations only if my nature is such that there are factual situations for me. In other words, I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable. When I say that my body is always perceived by me, these words are not to be taken in a purely statistical sense, for there must be, in the way my own body presents itself, something which makes its absence or its variation inconceivable.

A perceived and tactile experience of place moves beyond a physical experience and reveals aspects of the subconscious and otherworldly. Situated embodiment is perceived to be integrally part of a lived experience. Toadvine (2023) alludes to this when he observes that "[t]here is as yet no sharp division between the sensing and the sensed, between body and things". The matter of the sensing body raises an important question around sentience and sensibility. Phillips (1999:81) explains the relation of sentience and sensibility in Merleau-Pontian terms as occurring when, "flesh brings together self and world as well as self and other. Flesh as the sentient sensible applies to things as well as to the sensing individual". This interrelation of sentience and sensibility carries with it three key aspects that Merleau-Ponty (quoted by Toadvine 2023), identifies as first, "an 'exemplar sensible' that demonstrates the kinship or ontological continuity between subject and object", second, "this relationship is reversible, like 'obverse and reverse' or 'two segments of one sole

circular course” and third, “the sentient and sensible never strictly coincide”. In *The visible and the invisible* (1968:160 emphasis original), Merleau-Ponty offers specific comments on the notion of the chiasmic sensible-sentient body when he explains:

[T]hese alternatives are not imperative, since perhaps the self and the non-self are like the obverse and the reverse and since perhaps our own experience *is* this turning round that installs us far indeed from ‘ourselves,’ in the other, in the things. Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world.

Yet the sensible-sentient is far more complicated than binary relations of “touch and vision, body and world, self and other, fact and essence, perception and language” (Toadvine 2023). Instead, a matrix of polyvalent layering defines structures that operate conceptually. The theoretical construct of the sensible-sentient relation is a foundational platform for Lefebvre’s (1976, 1991a, 1991b, 1996) and Soja’s (1989, 1996, 2000, 2009) theories on what became known in cultural geography and the social sciences as the spatial turn.

### **2.2.6 The spatial turn**

The work of Lefebvre and Soja is a key turning point in the fields of cultural and human geography. As a theoretical lens, the spatial turn is useful for conceptualising notions of space and place beyond the physical world of rational conscious awareness. The spatial turn ushers in an experience that gives form to a spatial context that transcends the immediate everyday condition, and extends further into the realms of the subconscious. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (2009:1) describe the spatial turn in simple terms as part of a bigger re-construction of knowledge structures across the humanities and sciences. “[S]pace is a social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena”. This is premised on the fact that “the spatial turn is much more substantive, involving a reworking of the very notion and significance of spatiality to offer a perspective in which space is every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs”. They conclude, “*where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen” (Warf and Arias 2009:1; emphasis original).

The spatial turn marks a significant point in the scholarly re-evaluation of space, place and site. In my research, the analysis is steered from a conception of traditional geographical formulations of place to one in which the sensible-sentient operates. Warf and Arias (2009:12) allude to this as the development of “a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial / geographical and the temporal / historical imaginations”.

### **2.2.7 Thirthing and the trialectic of spatiality and being**

In the work of Lefebvre, particularly his seminal publication *Production of Space* (1991b), attention is

given to urban environments and the expression of the social relations of production in everyday life. In his Marxist critique of urban spatial flows, Lefebvre considers closely the political spatialisation of social life, framed within the ambit of capitalist cultural production. Lefebvre's contribution to the revisionist shift on space is an important stage in developments on place. From "sociological texts on 'territoriality' and social ecology", notions of space are reconstituted as part of a critical appraisal of cultural, historical and ideological exchange (Lefebvre quoted by Shields 2011:281). Lefebvre (1991b:26; emphasis original) promulgates a critical attitude to space as a social construct. "*(Social) space is a (social) product ... space has taken on, within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own*". Expressed in terms of relational experiences, Lefebvre (1991b:27) proposes that "social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space ... on the one hand, and physical space ... on the other". In more defining terms, Lefebvre (1991b:86-87; emphasis original) states categorically: "*Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia*".

Lefebvre's three-part dialectic of space presents a tripartite arrangement of spatial relations. First, *le perçu* is the perceived space of everyday social life. In his analysis of Lefebvre's work, Shields (2011:281) highlights how, with *le perçu*, "common-sensical perception blends popular action and outlook" as a key experience of space. Shields (2011:281) points out how this is overlooked in the second of Lefebvre's categories *le conçu* or conceived space which is characterised by the official and professional experiences of "cartographers, urban planners, or property speculators". The third aspect of Lefebvre's triangular dialectic, and most relevant to this research, is *le vécu* or the "'lived space' of the imagination" (Shields 2011:281). Initially identified as a third space, Shields's (2011:281) description of this category of space suggests that it "not only transcends but has the power to refigure the balance of popular perceived space and official conceived space".

Lefebvre's *le vécu* alludes to the idea of a momentary presence and awareness as "the basis for becoming more self-fulfilled" (Shields 2011:281). Fleeting experiences with heightened sensorial activation translate into a totalising and ubiquitous index of encounters in day-to-day conditions or as Lefebvre (1991b:40; emphasis original) phrases it: "Bodily *lived* experience, for its part, maybe both highly complex and quite peculiar". Articulating this line of thinking with the notion of social space, Lefebvre (1991b:101; emphasis original) explains this as a consequence of interactions in space: "The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles, or is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is *in space* ... either through their cooperation or through their conflicts". Lefebvre's interrelating momentary events in his conceptualisation of

social space is in contra-distinction to capitalist spatial identity in the way it resists, subverts or falls outside of official categorisation.

By propagating imaginative processes in the way the tactile causality of physical experience is transcended, *le vécu* makes allowance for an understanding of the otherworldly as it relates to space in Lefebvre's ideas around emancipatory and revelatory moments. Lefebvre discusses this in relation to what he terms the "perceived–conceived–lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces)" (Lefebvre 1991b:40). In recounting more specifically issues with representational spaces, Lefebvre (1991b:41-42) critiques the work of ethnologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts when he explains how "they frequently ignore social space" in favour of representational spaces "which interest them: childhood memories, dreams, or uterine images and symbols (holes, passages, labyrinths). Representational space is alive: it speaks ... it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic".

Soja (1996:61) presents the possibility of a "continued expansion of knowledge" in his appraisal of Lefebvre's ideation of "a cumulative trialectics that is radically open to additional othernesses". The theorising of place circulates through a development of the body as a constituent producer of social space and aligns with what Soja refers to as thirding or third space. In Soja's iterations of a trialectic of spatiality and a trialectic of being, influenced by Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicité*, space is framed in an interpretive framework "to introduce a new and different mode of critical spatial thinking and praxis" (Soja 2009:22). This is defined in relation to an integrative model of spatiality that folds together the physicality of place and its cultural, social and historical precedents (see fig 16).

The multi-layered complication of generalisable aspects of the known world is important in the way it sets up an understanding of space as always and perpetually more than what is immediately perceived. A conversation opens up around the otherworldly aspects that fold into and intertwine with the known world. Everyday experiences enable an enchanted reading of place and the spaces that give it form. Soja highlights such interconnectedness when he alludes to this directly: "Never before was geography more enchanting, more alluring ... there were other worlds, at least five formative layers building on one another to create and tie together the vividly spatial organization of human society: movement – networks – nodes – hierarchies – surfaces" (Soja 2009:16).

Soja's trialectic of being takes aim at the favouring of a historicism and temporal understanding of space that leans heavily on a critique of a fixed conception of space (Latham 2011:381-384). This leads to an opening up to a possibility of spatial realisation. Soja (2000:11-12) explains this as the impossibility of "perfect or complete knowledge ... There is too much that lies beneath the surface,

unknown and perhaps unknowable, for a complete story to be told. The best we can do is selectively explore, in the most insightful ways we can find, in the infinite complexity of life through its intrinsic spatial, social, and historical dimensions, its interrelated spatiality, sociality, and historicity”.

Latham (2011:381) lists Soja’s three primary propositions for a theoretical structuring of space and spatial relations: (1) a privileging of the spatial as a generic aspect of capitalist culture over a temporal experience of spatial relations; (2) spatiality as constitutive of and contingent on a perpetual critique of social relations and experiences; and (3) that critical social theory foregrounds space as a priority in establishing meaningful insights into the contemporary lived experience. The third category, which marks Soja’s particular contribution to the spatial turn, is what resonates most in a discussion of reformative spatial arts practices.

A postmodern human geography that paves the way for a phenomenological reading is advanced through scholarly contributions by thinkers such as Soja and Lefebvre. Space as a social construct is analytically positioned by Soja “firmly back at the centre of every element of social theory ... critical social theory had not simply ignored space, it had actively repressed and denied spatiality” (Latham 2011:381). The contribution of Lefebvre’s trialectic and, later, Soja’s third space assist in forming an interlocking theoretical context that favours an ontological experience of space over a historically-specific and temporal spatiality that favours “a particular texture of everyday lived spaces” (Latham 2011:384).

This critical unbundling of conceptions of space and place is rooted in part in a re-figuring of scale as something extending beyond the confines of cartographical geography. Scale features strongly in Lefebvre’s conception of space as a medium and is part of the revisionist attitude around which the spatial turn is conceptualised. We embody our physical world and see this as a relational dialogue between ourselves as conscious beings. Thus, one might understand place as something that extends beyond the known world of physical limits. Shields (2011:284) reiterates this as “spatial patterns of social action and embodied routine, as well as historical conceptions of space and the world”. This extension of a conception of self beyond the physical limits of causal spatial arrangements is the point at which scale, and proportion, become restrictive determinants in the experience of otherworldly conditions. An idea of place, therefore, is stretched across time to define an embodied relation that extends beyond physical limits to the metaconscious conditions of subconscious experience. The foundational work of Lefebvre and Soja continues in the development of a phenomenology of place in the theoretical contributions of Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 1991, 2011), Marc Augé (1995), Edward Relph (1976, 2017) and Edward Casey (1976, 1987, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002).

### 2.2.8 Being-in-the-world: place and placelessness

A theoretical context for place and its significance in the creative process is provided by Martin Heidegger's reading of space and place. Extending Heidegger's thinking, it is worth noting that space is acted upon to enable place (Heidegger quoted in Leach 1997:118).<sup>11</sup> Space is not necessarily a qualifier in itself and relies on social interactions and relations over time. Place as a container of experience signals Heidegger's *Einräumung*.<sup>12</sup> Place makes room for the revealing of tacit, forgotten or ideologically suppressed aspects in an analysis of spatial encounters. A conscious awareness of both physical interrelation with site and also movement through spaces of social and historical significance blends with tacit inflections that operate outside of human cognition.

In a metaphoric link to language, Heidegger alludes to the creation of place (or locality) as the by-product of spatial clearing-away. For Heidegger, "[c]learing-away is release of places" (Heidegger quoted by Leach 1997:117), ushering in the potential for habitation and thus belonging. Heidegger identifies two activities: "Making-room admits something. It lets openness hold sway which, among other things, grants the appearance of things present to which dwelling sees itself consigned. On the other hand, making-room prepares for things the possibility to belong to their relevant whither and, out of this, to each other" (Heidegger quoted by Leach 1997:118). Spatial belonging may also effectively guide one's thinking around the significance of community, shared reality, identity and heritage. It triggers the kind of determined criticality one finds in process-specific spatial arts practices. In short, belonging in place extends to a reading of illusive psychological as well as metaphysical space. This in turn unfolds into what is referred to as an attachment to place, which is enabled not only through bodily relations but also through the mechanics of memory. An important question is prompted. In what ways can Heidegger's ideas on space and bodily relations and the notion of memory be reconciled with an emotional and sensorial relation to place?

Parallel and integral to the notion of thirding and the spatial turn is Tuan's unique conceptualising of place through the lens of an embodied, emotional and sensorial experience. Tuan's work sets a strong precedent for the further development of a phenomenology of space and place. From a humanistic perspective, the concept of being-in-the-world evolved, defining not just a physical encounter but, more importantly, a sensorial or emotional encounter with the world.<sup>13</sup> It is worth

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<sup>11</sup> In his publication, *Rethinking architecture: a reader in cultural theory* (1997), Leach presents a collection of key excerpts from primary scholarly contributors. I deliberately choose to reference these authors through Leach's publication to pinpoint specific theoretical moments that are relevant to this study.

<sup>12</sup> A good critical appraisal of *Einräumung* is offered by Marco Cavazza (2022:73-89).

<sup>13</sup> This defining moment underscores an "understanding of ourselves as 'Being-in-the-World', fundamentally defined by and in relation to the world both physically and emotionally (an interpretation of phenomenology)" (Rodaway 2011:426).

providing some context as to how Tuan's phenomenology developed, especially since a significant influence on Tuan's work is the writing of Heidegger. Bringing attention to the multiple modalities of a humanistic cultural geography and associated methodologies, Rodaway (2011:427) expands on Heidegger's influence on Tuan: "He absorbed the perspectives of existentialism and phenomenology and in particular the ideas of Martin Heidegger – 'Being-in-the-World', 'Dwelling' and the four-fold connectivity of Being with the earth, the cosmos, the body and the spirit".

Tuan's reading of Heidegger filters closely through in Tuan's particular framing of the concept being-in-the-world. An engagement with space is not merely tactile or physical but also affective. Tuan (1975:164-165) explains this further when he distinguishes between space and place:

Space is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance and illusion; it is possibility and beckoning future. Place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement ... place is no longer an apt image of our crowded earth; place is.

Throughout his authoritative contributions in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s,<sup>14</sup> Tuan's analysis considers closely the relational structures between human consciousness and multimodal spatiality. At the core of this is the idea that people identify with and grow attached to place. Rodaway (2011:429) comments on Tuan's contribution noting that it is crucial in the way he defines and explores a geography of self. The self is conceived as an emotional, sensual and spiritual embodied being. Introducing his observations on what he terms the "experiential perspective", notions of the sensorial self are advanced: "Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active perception and the indirect mode of symbolization" (Tuan 1977:8).

A multimodal experience of place is defined by Relph in his post-doctoral publication, *Place and placelessness* (1976). Referring to his observations and analyses of "a phenomenology of place", Relph is quoted by Seamon and Sowers (2008:43) arguing for a spatial experience that is inherently "instinctive, bodily, and immediate – for example, what he calls pragmatic space, perceptual space, and existential space. On the other hand, he identifies modes of spatial experience that are more cerebral, ideal, and intangible – for example, planning space, cognitive space, and abstract space", giving way to "tacit, unself-conscious" ways of encountering space (Seamon and Sowers 2008:43).

The instinctive experience of place prompts consideration of nonplace and placelessness. Peter

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<sup>14</sup> Tuan advanced the significance of language in his continued contributions to the phenomenology of place. For reasons of scope, I don't pick up on this theoretical aspect in this study but for further reading consult Tuan's 1991 essay entitled *Language and the making of place: a narrative-descriptive approach*.

Merriman (2011:27) defines Augé's term supermodernity as a summation of a broader global spatiality that marks "the changing characteristics of space, time, individuality and place in an excessively modern or 'supermodern' world that is characterised by ... a proliferation of non-places". In Augé's supermodernity, an intersubjective experience of gloomy temporality is entangled with memory in a distorted fixation with popular culture. "[O]blivion' is as necessary as 'memory' in contemporary culture" (Merriman 2011:27-28). Place is characterised by Augé as "the spaces of circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion" (Merriman 2011:28). Supermodernity describes an anthropological place which exists in the metaconsciousness of its inhabitants.

Both Relph's and Augé's<sup>15</sup> analysis of contemporary urban spatial experience foreground a globalised and multimodular conception of space, which ushers in detachment, disembodiment and, in extreme cases, existential dislocation. This situates a critique of "globalisation in an era of advanced / late capitalism, late / high modernity or postmodernity" (Merriman 2011:31). The theoretical trajectory on place and place-relatedness took a further turn in the work of Casey (1976, 1987, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002). In Casey's writing the theoretical focus shifts to nostalgia as a defining aspect of place-related phenomena in a phenomenological un-doing of existing constructs of spatiality and lived experience.

### **2.2.9 A plenum-of-places**

The unique attributes of Casey's analysis of place are bound up in a nostalgia that is not about an obvious loss of teleology, fictitious imaginings or contrived recollections. Nor is it about a "discreteness of place in particular" but rather a mode of memory that defines "an intermediate sense of place as a more suitable vehicle of nostalgia" or what Casey refers to as a "plenum-of-places" (Casey 1987:378). The plenum defines an elusivity of place. Nostalgia informs an experience of this plenum of place – something present but that exceeds any full grasp of things that "we only sense on the margins and only catch sight of in a glance" (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:1). A nostalgic experience of place is rooted outside of the tangible world of things and becomes a phenomenon of subconscious bearings and insightful imaginings. Casey "brackets it off from its place in poetry, politics, dreams, and mystical experience ... the resulting eidetic phenomenology of imagination remains importantly psychical" (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3).

In Casey's work, priority is given to the placed body and the way memory prompts social interaction.

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<sup>15</sup> I deliberately paraphrase Relph through Seamon and Sowers's citation and Augé through Merriman's citation, as I feel these readings are usefully and concisely aligned with the observations I present here. Seamon and Sowers are referring to *Place and placelessness* (1976) and Merriman is referring to *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (1995).

With reference to Casey's categories of "body memory" and "place memory", Landes and Cruz-Pierre (2013:4) observe how these "reshape this phenomenological approach and propel a reflection that is still unfolding today". For the purposes of this research, I emphasise the significance of body memory in the way that it underscores not only an empirical reading of place but also the social, metaphysical and sensorial significance of place. Hayden (1997:48) explains how it "connects into places because the shared experience of dwellings, public spaces, and workplaces, and the paths travelled between home and work, give body memory its social component". Body memory originates at the confluence of these physical and metaphysical circumstances, aligning metacognitive and physical experiences. "What is remembered is well grounded if it is remembered as being in a particular place" (Hayden 1997:48). A holistic encounter with place extends to collective affiliation.

Casey's contribution to the discourse of place and the body in place continues the invaluable critique of contemporary lived experience in terms of both an objective and a subjective encounter. He (1987:xi; emphasis original) makes this clear when he explains place memory in relation to body memory as involving "the fact that concrete places retain the past in a way that can be reanimated by our remembering them: a powerful but often neglected form of memory. Body memories are not just memories *of* the body but instances of remembering places, events, and people *with* and *in* the lived body". The bodily aspect of this account is foregrounded and prioritised in body memory through his use of the word "sensitive" when he (1987:148) explains that "body memory is in turn the natural center of any sensitive account of remembering. It is a privileged point of view from which other memorial points of view can be regarded and by which they can be illuminated". Place has the power to "direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are *not*)" (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:4; emphasis original). Casey (1996:24; emphasis original) defines this further in relation to emplaced emotional sensitivities:

[P]laces actively solicit bodily emotions. At the very least, we can agree that the living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement: *living bodies belong to places* and help to constitute them. Even if such bodies may be displaced in certain respects, they are never placeless; they are never *only* at discrete positions in world time or space, though they may also be at such positions. By the same token, however, *places belong to lived bodies* and depend on them. If it is true that "the body is our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:46), ... the body is the specific medium for experiencing a place-world.

Plenumic body functions such as nostalgia, memory and imaging evoke the lived body (Casey 1996:24). This describes an embodied condition of being that is hyper-sensitively interwoven with place. Such places generate a myriad of body types including virtual bodies and subtle bodies. The

traversed terrain is no longer a geography of physical economy but rather one of imagined possibility. As Casey (1996:24) asserts: “Bodies and places are connatural terms. They interanimate each other”.

Things off-centre and fleeting are central to Casey’s critique of place and the body in place. This is inscribed in what he discusses as edges and borders. Casey’s analysis of the edge is most apparent in his comments on peri-phenomena. These are diaphanous phenomena of place that are in a state of relentless becoming. Focusing on Casey’s analysis of subliminal phenomena such as glances and edges, David Morris (2013:53) concludes that “place is both beneath and beyond delimitation”.

Casey’s comments on the analogy between place and space on the one hand, and art on the other, add to this debate. Landes and Cruz-Pierre (2013:9) allude to this in their paraphrasing of Casey:

In keeping with his Merleau-Pontian and Heideggerian influences, Casey’s accounts of space and place emphasize the way by which the transformation from space to place involves an act of creation and installation, be it of my body, objects, or memories. Such creative acts are central to his description of the act of representation in a work of art, as in the case of earth art installations which require the re-creation of nature in a place that has been expressly created for this event.

The sublime is an edge that destabilises and spurns new conceptions of place that return a theoretical orientation to the sensorial context of the body. “In this transformative movement from topography to topoetry, the sublime arises from the very body of beauty as its porous threshold, its ethereal but powerful partner” (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:10). Casey formalises his thoughts on the edge in his analysis of non-place, inter-place and in-between places. Landes and Cruz-Pierre (2013:12) quote Casey: “There is no intertwining, no chiasm, without a limit, an edge, a defining feature that marks ‘this’ from ‘that,’ ‘my body’ from ‘your body,’ ‘here’ from ‘there’”. Casey’s analysis of edges, thresholds and borders assists in suggesting an experience of remembering and imagining that is not exclusively bound to sensorial encounters, but that transcends the tactile world of lived experience and becomes sublime.

Place is an edge where nostalgia, memory and imagining are integral elements in an ever-evolving concept of space and time. Being in a place, and having a secure ontological experience in place through deeply embedded sensorial interactions and relations, is both grounding and simultaneously becoming in its ungrounded-ness. The phenomenon of place renders one part of a continuum that is both inwardly realised and at the same time outwardly resonant and, in that sense, collectively connected. The assumption I start with in the following section is that intuition forms a significant aspect of place-related representational strategies.

## 2.3 INTUITION

### 2.3.1 What is intuition?

Intuition in the context of this research is defined in relation to processes that extend beyond a rationally configured and conscious response to everyday things. In a visual arts paradigm, intuitive process is grounded in the expansive bodily experience of the artist. Jillian Holt (2020:122) explains this in relation to her practice as a film editor: “The concept that we touch a film and it touches us back resonates with intuition”. Research into the emotional effects that give rise to intuitive reactions to things prioritizes context and a direct relation to spatial circumstances. This refers to one’s engagement with modes of representation that are physical, imaged, and imagined: “It refers to both how we interact with our environment and what transpires inside us” (Sinclair 2011:3).

Scholarly definitions for intuitive behaviour span a wide range of scientific and creative modalities. How do seemingly inexplicable actions inform and give shape to impulsive gestures that result in creative outcomes? Henri Samier (2018:1-2) notes how “intuition can be seen as a spontaneous gush coming from within, an ability to see all at once and a type of immediate knowledge that does not derive from a rational process or logical thinking”. As impulsive as this experience may be initially, however, the limitless effect stems from a persistent unconscious movement that enables access to an alternative paradigm of consciousness. The intuitive experience is integral to human conscience in the way it sets in motion the idea of a gut feeling or an action stemming directly from a small yet unidentifiable place of self-motivation. “When carrying out exercises involving intuition, individuals reacted in three ways: instinctively, emotionally and mentally” (Samier 2018:30).<sup>16</sup> Brock (2015:129), citing Dane and Pratt’s (2007:35) highly recommended cumulative definition, offers a comprehensive chronological outline demonstrating the complexities of definitions for the word intuition (see fig 17). This is useful as a theoretical foundation in relation to two main characteristics: (1) Intuition is rapid, and (2) it occurs without conscious awareness (Dane & Pratt 2007:35).<sup>17</sup> To be

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<sup>16</sup> To define this further, Samier (2018:8) discusses intuition in relation to the four primary psychological functions of cognitive processing: (1) Intuition involves perceptions conveyed through the unconscious without the need for logical reasoning; (2) The ability to understand reality, analyse it logically and intellectually and to work conceptually informs the human capacity to think; (3) An emotional value is inscribed in being able to feel and discern levels of pleasure and displeasure; (4) Information is conveyed through an embodied sense of bodily awareness in space.

<sup>17</sup> Brock (2015:129) explains further that:

The term intuition derives from the Latin *intueri* meaning ‘to look upon’ or ‘to see within’ (Goldberg, 1985, p31). Intuition has been described as a ‘semantic riddle’ (Bastick, 1982, p1) and ‘the last frontier of the mind’ (Cloninger, 2006, p15) as it was thought to be resistant to empirical measurement (Sinclair & Ashkansay, 2005, p355). Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999, p44) argues the commonly reported difficulty in defining intuition arises from its nonconscious nature ... Kahneman (2003, p697) defines intuition as ‘thoughts and preferences that come to mind quickly and without much reflection’ and Lieberman (2000, p111) opts for ‘[t]he subjective experience of a mostly nonconscious process-fast, a-logical, and inaccessible to consciousness’.

more specific, Brock (2015:129) explains that “[o]f the seventeen definitions of intuition listed by Dane and Pratt (2007, p35) eleven include some sense of nonconscious processing and five refer to its speed.”

There is value in defining intuition from a philosophical position in relation to impulses that drive embodied cognitive functioning. Intuition as a concept can be traced to seminal texts that help define and theorise the work of imagination and its role in creative processes. For Martha Sinclair (2011:xvii), the overarching problem in intuition research is that “problem solving and creativity seems to receive less attention”. The artist’s intuitive action is rationalised through the lens of an embodied experience that is activated through – among other things – bodily senses. While place provides a grounded foundation, intuition gives form to subconscious experiences that are magickal in the way they give rise to the creative act. I acknowledge the significance of how notions of tacit knowledge assist in these defining moments. The artist’s impulsive and creative endeavours are relayed through sensorial responses to given spatial contexts and the everyday experiences that give them form.

If one is to understand intuition as the impulse that gives form to a creative decision or action, what then precedes intuition? To be inspired is a form of motivation that prompts an impulse and will to act. To add context to this, one may accept that inspiration happens not only as a result of a sensorial or cognitive response to things but from somewhere less easily understood or tacitly tucked away in inaccessible regions of human consciousness.

The creative act of art making originates from an inspired position of self-awareness and a search for clarity and certainty beyond the known. Cocteau (quoted by Connors 2009:71) calls this “the darkness of our own night, not from outside, from a different so-called divine night”. Linking inspiration and the creative place of the psyche, he makes reference to the tacit places of the subconscious. On the one hand, he alludes to an aspect of divinity or divine sourcing for this experience and, on the other, a foreboding disquiet. Inspiration as a precursor to the intuitive impulse happens in a condensed space-time continuum that has no rational explanation in the conscious world of everyday experience. This suggests a certain spontaneity or immediacy. Following an impulsive moment of inspiration, intuition is, to quote Zoka Zola (2007), an “immediate apprehension”.

An experience that is so highly personally charged would naturally lead to a feeling of uncertainty or scepticism, opening up to an initial moment of criticality. It is a knee-jerk reaction that not only responds to a given thing immediately, but also suggests a capacity for things not yet fully understood. Things without rational form are, for a moment in time, realised in purely abstract

terms. The word immediate signifies the absence of a distracting element when thinking happens through subconscious impulsivity. These sensational responses are mediated (Zola 2007). As Zola (2007) observes, “we can understand ‘intuition’ as a term used to define edges between what is mediated and what is not mediated”. Something that occupies the space of edges suggests Casey’s (2002) plenum where knowledge and experience condense in space. When considering intuition in this way, questions are raised. How is intuition key in the creative process of imagining and idea generation? What intricacies and complexities inform intuitive enactments in the place-based production of installation and performance art?

To further elucidate a definition for intuition as a process of human cognition, I offer an account of characteristics and criteria that underpin tacit process-related creativity. The term non-conscious processing is applied, which involves a cognitive response that resides outside of analytical and rational thinking. Bracketed in an interplay between being aware and behaving outside of a state of focused awareness, “intuitive processing is not directly conscious or non-conscious, but can be viewed as reflecting cognitive processing on the fringe of human consciousness” (Zander et al 2016:3).

Intuitive action emerging from non-conscious processing also raises the question of behaviours that are both automatic and uncontrollable. This in-the-moment action involves a time space in the way it exists outside of a context of self-judgementalism, “without attentional effort” (Zander et al 2016:3). Henri Bergson<sup>18</sup> posits that “intuition is an ‘immediate consciousness, a vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, a knowledge which is contact,’ and the principal function of intuition is ‘the direct vision of the mind by the mind’” (Bergson quoted by Samier 2018:5).

Intuitive processes and tacit cues are environmentally placed. Zander et al (2016:3) describe this as “experientiality”. Life experiences are acquired over time in ways that are outside of official experiential or learned behaviour. It presupposes a need for pre-existing learnt experiences as a necessary condition for intuitive action. For example, one might distinguish between learning how to climb a tree as a child and learning how to do addition and subtraction in foundation-phase schooling. The latter is a formulaic approach that does not necessarily lead to a condition for intuitive action. In the former example, learning is premised on repetitive bodily actions that become conditions required to instinctively grasp each respective branch in order to climb the tree. Quoting Claxton (1998), Zander et al (2016:3) refer to former learned behaviour as an experience of

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<sup>18</sup> Reference is made to Bergson’s *Creative evolution* (1907) and *The creative mind: an introduction to metaphysics* (1970).

“knowing without knowing why”. An embodied relation to spaces, objects and things foregrounds the need to satisfy an as-yet-unrealised sensorial and emotional condition. David Myers (2002:28; emphasis original) phrases it as: “Sometimes we intuitively *feel* what we do not know we know”.

Being impulsive in an intuitive action is the “tendency toward a hunch, which serves as a go-signal that is strong enough to initiate action” (Zander et al 2016:3). Information is accessed through a felt compulsion to act. Tacitly embedded in the subconscious, “felt knowledge” stretches the experiential aspect of intuition to a signifying bodily relation of sensorial activation (Zander et al 2016:3).<sup>19</sup> This form of activation raises the question of the relation between intuition and insight and provides a starting point for a further understanding of the process of intuition.

### **2.3.2 The process of intuition**

The debate on intuition and insight evokes the proverbial chicken and egg adage. Installation and performance art practices necessitate both a contextual place-centred embodied approach as much as an abstract impulsive generation of ideas. The creative transition from intuitive action to the manifestation of an insightful iteration is identified in two stages according to Michael Polanyi’s (1966) formalising of the concept of tacit knowledge. An intuitive gesture extends into an explicit insight through a “sensitivity and responsiveness to information that is not consciously represented, but which nevertheless guides inquiry toward productive and sometimes profound insights” (Zander et al 2016:6).<sup>20</sup>

The argument follows that intuition precedes insight: “[E]nvironmental cues trigger the activation of tacit knowledge associatively connected in semantic memory, which results in an implicit perception of coherence that (yet) cannot be explained verbally” (Zander et al 2016:6). In the insight stage, information is “enabled via a gradual accumulation of the previously activated concepts [and is] now explicitly represented” (Zander et al 2016:6). If intuition precedes insight, then the assumption is that intuition is a formative stage in a process over time. Can the same not be said for insight? An intuitive investigative approach may be reliant on insightful action. Are the two cognitive processes interchangeable? What factors of a particular stimulus guide the practitioner to respond either intuitively or insightfully? Existing scholarly attitudes remain unresolved, but generally argue in favour of a discipline-specific approach.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Also see Brock (2015:142) for a discussion of sensorial impulses and intuitive behaviour.

<sup>20</sup> Zander et al (2016:6) are citing Bowers et al (1984:256), who in turn include Polanyi’s formulation in their analysis.

<sup>21</sup> Zander et al (2016:6) qualify this by stating that “it has remained unclear which cognitive and/or physiological conditions foster the transition from sensed intuition to justified insight”.

For this research, I accept that the two forms of cognitive processing are integrative in a given visual methodology. Insightful and intuitive actions and responses operate semantically and conceptually through each other. “Intuition and insight build upon each other, [they] are not considered qualitatively distinct or mutually exclusive” (Zander et al 2016:6). Complex and seemingly unresolvable and insurmountable problems require insight into contextual and related phenomena, which then trigger an intuitive response. The debate on insight and intuition is more nuanced and is notably present when situating intuition as integral to creative processes as it applies here in relation to process-led performative spatial art practices. The linear progression of insightful realisation to intuitive response can be differently configured. Brinck (2000:39) explains that when “intuition as a to a great extent unconscious process ... leads to a sudden realisation, [this is] what we call an insight”. Following on from this, one can deduce that the unconscious intuitive act may lead to the conscious insightful realisation.

This defining criterion carries value in performative spatial arts practices that originate from a particular subjective experience. Tacit knowledge informs how an embodied cognitive experience leads to an intuitive response that carries through creatively. “Intuition prepares for creativity” (Brinck 2000:39). It follows then that tacitly embedded knowledge and the cognitive processes of the practitioner are enabled through intuitive thinking. “Intuition can be seen as the mechanism by which tacit knowledge may link to conscious understandings of a concept” (Brock 2015:139). One may ask, how is the tacit made evident in the flow of real time experience?

Tacit aspects can be presented explicitly in process. H.M. Collins (2001:108-111) proposes three “ways of making the tacit explicit”. In the first formulation, *The motor-skills metaphor*, Polanyi’s (1958) bicycle-riding analogy is discussed. The idea follows that one learns something (for example, how to ride a bicycle) without specific coaching, relying on an ergonomic relation to the vehicle and its propulsion forward. Through this physical interaction one is able to formulate the rules to enable one’s cycling and pass this knowledge on to someone else (Collins 2001:108-110). The second formulation is *The rules-regress model*: in a cognitively driven process, there is an “inability to describe exactly what are the circumstances under which one convention applies rather than another” (Collins 2001:110). What interests me in this formulation is its application in the acquisition of experimental and experiential skills typical of what one finds in intuitive processes. Collins (2001:110) suggests that the process necessitates a feeling towards something, an impulsive excavation of information. The final rule discussed by Collins (2001:110-111) is *The forms of life approach*. In this context, tacit knowledge is bound to the idea that “people in different social groups take different things to be certain knowledge but they are not aware of the social basis of their certainties”. These formulations permeate through and give definition to creative intuition.

Bringing an embodied experience into the fold of creative acts through the agency of intuitive action is central to my discussion of spatial arts practices. In her PhD thesis entitled *Understanding creative intuition – perspectives from Eastern and Western philosophy*, Theresa Hardman (2019) analyses the theoretical field informing creative intuition. Referencing the work of Bergson and Polanyi, Hardman's conception of creative intuition contributes to understanding tacitly embedded ways of knowing in the processes and methods in the performative practices of de Sagazan and Neustetter. Drawing on a Jungian paradigm, she explains how "inner streams of consciousness affect the way we make meaning out of the external world" (Hardman 2019:41). She (2019:42) follows a thread into the work of Edmund Husserl (1970), who extended Jung's ideas by situating the intuitive experience as an embodied phenomenon in his reference to "a sensation, an 'intentional' act which interprets the sensation, and an intentional object which is referred to by means of the sensation". Through an experience that has significance beyond bodily sensation, "our sensory impressions become mingled with our thoughts, emotions and intuitions, resulting in a rich, multi-faceted 'meaning experience'" (Hardman 2019:42). Hardman encapsulates her conception of creative intuition in relation to "expanded consciousness" as well as "fluid ways of thinking". She makes the point that an intuitive experience in the creative act "cannot co-exist temporally with rational, intellectual functioning. Other ways of being in the world, which involve a surrender of the ego, are required for intuition to flourish" (Hardman 2019:8).

Matters of ego are confluent with heightened states of insecurity, uncertainty, and vulnerability. In the ritualised work of de Sagazan and the transience I observe in Neustetter's work, intuitive thinking as a necessary part of the creative act is inherently a product of these emotional states. Hardman (2019:45) relates how the experience of uncertainty in the act of being creative stems from what Jung conceptualises as the collective consciousness. Intuition is the cognitive space in which one's attachment to things is brought into question through what Jung refers to as non-duality. "In this state of consciousness there is no distinction between subject and object ... It is the realm in which logical, categorical and binary thinking disappears and intuition functions," resulting in "unprecedented uncertainty" (Jung quoted by Hardman 2019:45). The practitioner's uncertainty feeds an intuitive condition, which results in insightful manifestations. Binary cognitive fixtures dissolve and give way to creative circumstances. Assuming that the artist is open to this level of unconditional and uninhibited method, nothing is what it seems and the possibilities for a process-led practice are infinite.

### **2.3.3 Intuition and systems of knowing**

The root of intuitive processes is located in what is widely referred to in scholarly sources as direct

knowing. Sinclair (2011:4) describes how the “cognitive architecture of intuition remains mostly a mystery ... [embedded in] nebulous boundaries among its many facets”. She distinguishes between types of intuitive cognitive processing systems. Of these, the separating out of experiential and deliberative systems is useful for the purposes of my research. The experiential system is “preconscious, rapid, automatic, holistic, primarily nonverbal, and intimately associated with affect” (Pacini & Epstein quoted by Sinclair 2011:4). The rational deliberative system may – depending on circumstantial contexts – favour a state of aroused awareness. The deliberative system prioritises a place in western scientific rationality that minimises the as yet uncharted discourse of otherworldly consciousness.

In intuitive visual arts practices, an affective component is prevalent in what Sinclair (2011:6) refers to as “experiential-based intuiting”. Two types are identified: (1) Affect in processing styles sees one dominant role of affect involving an associative style which operates via “relatively direct affective responses to stimuli that result from previous experiences” and can be found in both constructive and creative intuiting. Creative intuiting implicates “divergent associations” (Sinclair 2011:6). (2) Affect as antecedent or attribute suggests notions of emotion or mood as being affective in the experiential system. This refers to personalised embodied response that implicates “emotional intuitive decision making”. She describes this process as “the onset of intuition into consciousness (through) confirmatory feeling” (Sinclair 2011:9).

Intuitive affectivity has specific functions that are brought to bear in process-related spatial arts practices. In her discussion, Sinclair (2011:10) distinguishes between two systems in relation to the speed at which they occur. (1) The traditional perspective: decision making and problem solving that is slower because decision making hinges on prolonged responses. (2) The neglected perspective: interpersonal interaction is premeditated and complex cognitive systems that are integrally entwined in the formation of intuitively driven action. These include “facial expressions, gestures, body language, tone of voice etc. and leads to the ability to be able to intuit events / actions before they occur” (Sinclair 2011:11). A moral implication is embedded in these functions “[s]ince the sense of rightness usually evokes strong feelings” (Sinclair 2011:11). Intuition pertains to an emotional and sensorial human experience that is personal and simultaneously collective in its spatial aspect and, more specifically, in a bodily awareness. Both Samier (2018) and Sinclair (2011) argue that intuition is inextricably bound up in sensorial experiences that defy and, in some cases, contradict the empirical scientific measurement of metaconscious processing. Some scholarly positions contest the assertion that intuitive processes are not measurable. In her article, Creative intuition: an integrative review, Policastro (1995) argues that creative intuition is well-grounded, coherent and empirically testable. She delineates creative intuition, defined in phenomenological terms, from the subject’s

experience. Creative intuition is a “tacit form of knowledge that broadly constrains the creative search by setting its preliminary scope”. She notes how this is not infallible and describes it as more like “rough estimates [with] margins of error” (Policastro 1995:100).<sup>22</sup> In phenomenological terms, being intuitive involves not just tapping into the known and measurable aspects of life experiences but, more importantly, it requires an emotional abandonment to a process that is outside of conscious thought.

The measurable epistemological positions that specific groups inhabit reside outside of their immediate social contexts, and to fully integrate these requires something beyond conscious socio-historical conditioning. Collins (2001:111) observes: “Our belief systems, then, are based on tacit understandings”. This grounded certainty in what makes us social beings requires a bold step into uncertain and as yet uncharted knowledge territory to more fully comprehend a sense of past, present and future lived conditions. The significance of this formulation is a personal abandonment to an external phenomenon or context in order to enrich a creative experience. I contextualise this here in relation to Nicholas Davey’s (2006:27) notion of *theoria*.

#### **2.3.4 Aristotle’s *theoria* and immersivity**

A state of contemplation is entered into that resides outside of formulaic method, “utility and purpose” (Davey 2006:27). These introspective circumstances “rely upon impulses from outside the realm of awareness” and are unique in giving the “impression of being beyond and above what can be accounted for by the familiar mental mechanisms” (Rosner & Abt 1974:8). In applying the word *divination* to describe this process of accessing an otherworldly condition further, Rosner and Abt (1974:9) couch the concept in relation to Plato’s *Timaeus*: “Since what man calls his self are the functions controlled by him, the creative powers beyond man’s control were naturally thought of as originating outside of the self”. Returning this to the work of intuition, Davey (2006:28)<sup>23</sup> draws on Aristotle’s conception of *theoria* as a spiritually activated “intuitive apprehension of a reality in which the grasping is what is grasped and the real is self-manifest ... [in this process] the human being comes to approximating divine unhindered activity”.

*Theoria* is an experience that is relational, dialogical and participative (Davey 2006:27). In using the word contemplation, Davey (2006:27) alludes to a solitary and subjective experience, and yet the shared capacity of this work is common to the broader collective creative condition. A flow of creative stimuli is available for intuitive, spontaneous and impulsive action through a giving over to a

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<sup>22</sup> To bring her hypothesis into effect, Policastro (1995:100) looks at specific sources of evidence such as autobiographical testimonies that rely on the firsthand reports of practitioners.

<sup>23</sup> Davey (2006:28) consults H. Joachim (ed.) 1951. *Aristotle: the nicomachean ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

metaconscious state that occurs in the present. The ability to let go is explained by Davey (2006:27) through a directed reading of Heidegger as “letting oneself be carried away by what one sees ... the themes of encountering the unanticipated and of abandoning oneself to a world that can never be mastered form part of the particular emphasis [given] to *theoria*”.

Being able to give over and abandon oneself to a context that is accessible and yet difficult to fathom rationally is made even more daedal and intricate through expansive possibility. For example, the wondrous, involute and imaginative realm of dreams is accessible through subconscious processes such as sleep yet may be difficult to make sense of in a conscious and awake state. I use the analogy of high diving into a pool of things comprising every possible physical, visual and sensational aspect of human experience. Naturally, this accumulation of stuff is registered from one’s personalised life experiences. Even though it seems representative of the stuff of all human experience, its limits are set, but its idiosyncrasies are typically undefined. Myers (2002:23) echoes this in his reference to knowing without awareness in the way the mind is “buzzing with influential happenings that are not reportedly conscious. ‘Deep cognitive activation’ is how psychologists Daniel Wagner and Laura Smart describe this subterranean world”. A constant flow of stimuli is conceived as a fabric of ideas presented in unexpected and surprising ways. An inherent curiosity in tacitly buried and unknown phenomena sets off an interpretative stance.<sup>24</sup>

Considering an embedded orientation towards participatory involvement, *theoria* cannot ever direct a process-driven solution towards any singular objective. This has particular gravity in intuitive work when there is “an ever deepening immersion in the practice itself” (Davey 2006:29). Tacit knowledge, when viewed under the auspices of *theoria*, provides the springboard for intuitive action that cannot be neatly packaged as a definitive methodological solution. It is a “‘never-ending process of learning’ and does not culminate in knowledge in any fixed sense” (Davey 2006:30). The solution is not secure or contained, but fluid, chaotic and energised.<sup>25</sup> The function of place and being placed raises an interesting dynamic to extend this theoretical position.

An immersive deep dive into unknown and unfixed phenomena in intuitive practices suggests an open-ended approach to place. To bring intuition into the scope of this aspect of place, requires a brief and concise reference back to my previous observations of place. From the chthonic well of tacit narrative context emerges an otherworldly condition that is embedded in collective

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<sup>24</sup> Referring to the notion of tacit phenomena, for Davey (2006:28) this is significant because “of our participation in their unfolding”.

<sup>25</sup> As Rosner and Abt (1974:17) observe: “Before an artist decides passively to surrender to the spontaneous impulses that come to him from below the threshold, he may wish to remember that such utterances tend to be chaotic”.

consciousness and is, at the same time, embedded subjectively in the life experiences of the artist. In the section on place in this chapter, I argue how place is integrated into this paradigm with particular consequences. Immersivity in a process-related practice follows an embodiment of place that prompts questions about one's sense of social orientation in space. Reminiscent of my observations on the porosity of place, Coessens et al (2009:17) explain: "Places are human-made, forged in human experience, embodiment and interpretations, and backed by tradition and culture. 'Places' are also malleable and have no clear boundaries. They can be mapped by different interpretations and tools ... places always imply a certain viewpoint; here, the point of view is that of the artist".

Following the thought trajectory of *theoria*, coupled with the spatial turn's revisionist attitudes to place, a strong correlation between the open-ended and infinite relations that define place and the human experience of being placed prompts a revised consideration of how these experiences are cognitively compressed. I have argued how a phenomenological application through scholarly contexts offered by Casey, Tuan and others, together with an activated relation of place with notions of the unconscious, brings meaning to this point.<sup>26</sup> To conceptualise this meaning in psychocartographic terms fits with the way intuitive embodied processes enable otherworldly narratives. When refigured this way, place and place-specific intuitive processes enter the realm of endless otherworldly consciousness, where boundaries dictated by world and bodily limits, time and space prompt further investigation for alternative relevance.

If we are to fully understand the need for unconditioned and unencoded immersivity in, and abandonment to, process, then we are reminded of how "creativity originates in unfathomable profundities [where] the alleged irrationality of the creative process was an invitation rather than a deterrent" (Rosner & Abt 1974:10). Through the advent of deterministic thinking in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century from the physical sciences to the comfort-couches of psychology and the straightjackets of psychiatry, this distilled into a "democratization or secularization of the human mind" (Rosner & Abt 1974:10). I align this point with the workings of those reaches of human cognitive mechanics that are feral and primordial. I argue that it is to these unconscious depths that the artist descends to kindle the spark of an intuitive creative impulse by recollecting and reconnecting with past events and experiences. "The primitive quality of certain ways of functioning which prosper below the level of awareness, and which are variously described as beastly ... keep the artist in touch with the foundations of human experience" (Rosner & Abt 1974:14).

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<sup>26</sup> Rosner and Abt (1974:13) observe how "Originally, the term 'unconscious' designated nothing more than an attitude applicable to any mental act, indicating simply that the act takes place without awareness. Under the influence of psychoanalysis, however, the term came to mean a particular place in what might be called a metaphorical geography of the mind".

An immersive stance presents a two-fold problem. First, memory and recollection are not factual and can therefore be construed as subjectively located and, second, a creative process is not strictly explicit nor fully intuitive but rather an experience that operates in degrees between these extremes. This has a particular bearing on how tacit knowledge informs intuitive thinking through Sinclair's (2011:4) notion of direct knowing. Framing evidence in relation to something hidden and needing to be excavated, PolICASTRO (1995:103) explains that "tacit knowledge takes time to develop into a fully differentiated and integrated theoretical structure".

Direct knowing as an immediate gesture that happens outside of conscious processing – in other words, how information is acquired – influences what the outcome is. An embodied relation to things in the world happens on a sensorial level without one understanding fully what the relation is or what it is about. The only known or fixed reference is a particular problem that needs to be addressed. "Intuition does not consist in free association ... there is a certain direction to it. It is locked to a target" (Brinck 2000:43). The process is buried in layers of impulsive behaviour. Being intuitive can involve a bringing together of seemingly abstract thoughts or sensations that have no bearing in the rational or conscious state required by the context or situation in question. Intuitively acquiring and working with tacit knowledge is not necessarily impulsive and can take time to evolve through analysis and transformation into something creatively concrete. Intuition is best framed as a fragment of a bigger process of cognitive layering that resides in memory and socio-historical conditioning. While providing a scientific explanation for measurable intuitive outcomes is feasible, the case is not quite as clear cut when one factors in the work of tacit knowledge.

Creative intuition carries with it a residual uncertainty. One means to overcome this ambivalence is a consideration of the inherent human fascination with pattern and patterns of behaviour. Understanding the repetitive nature of patterning elicits a cognitive action that is conscious and unconscious simultaneously. It puts in place unconscious systems of routine and flow. As PolICASTRO (1995:110) suggests, "certain forms of intuition seem to operate as tacit pattern recognition". Through patterned momentum, syncretic and implicit forms of knowledge transform into differentiated, integrated and explicit ones. The creative process follows a developmental sequence of perceived changes. It is in the cognitive progression from implicit to explicit that the intuitive moment presents an achievable form and "promising exploration" (PolICASTRO 1995:111). A tension exists between behavioural patterns and perceived changes in moments of intuitive action. Through "experienced-based perception", process-related methodologies direct one to tacitly embedded patterns, giving form to impulsive behaviours (Zander et al 2016:5). The pairing of intuitive responses to patterned environmental circumstances with tacit conditions of embodied experience or the interruption of these experiences makes the magickal faculty of intuitive thinking

contentious. Without a clear standpoint by which intuitive action can be described and understood as a patterned phenomenon, a large part of its magickal property resides in its precarious nature and in the complexity of its definition. This may result in a foregoing of clarity in exactly what intuitive thinking is and how it works and a subsequent ushering in of feelings of uncertainty.

To bring intuition into the scope of credible science, PolICASTRO (1995:111) attempts to remove all considerations of otherworldly phenomena from the scholarly debate on intuition by separating “intuition from overly mysterious connotations”. A long standing and as yet unresolved debate is whether or not intuition originates from an unexplainable and magickal ability located in innate human cognitive processing. To address this dispute, I rethink the binary relation of insight and intuition, in a discussion of heuristic methodologies.

### **2.3.5 Heuristic applications and memory**

The view of intuition in heuristic methodologies is conflicting. On the one hand, it is a meaningful way of arriving at conclusions through an impulsive problem-solving process. On the other hand, it opens up the probability of inaccurate or erroneous results. Zander et al (2016:4) distinguish between the “single view on intuition” and the “dual-system view on intuition”. The single view holds that intuitive thinking is unexplainable and an inherent part of human cognition. The dual-system suggests that it is steeped in esoteric or mystical induced behaviour, but can be scientifically explained. In my analysis, I propose a variant of the dual-system that accounts for a rationalised and measurable methodology coupled with an understanding that some aspects of human cognition fall outside of scientific measurability.

When pragmatic solutions are applied through unknown and abstract resources, measurable outcomes are achievable. In some cases, these measurable outcomes fall outside of the scope of the process due to impulsive action that may or may not be relevant in any given creative action. The latter can be explained in relation to otherworldly phenomena as a byproduct of experimental and expansive thinking. Quoting Sadler-Smith (2008), Zander et al (2016:4) identify an agreement in current research: “intuition need not to be “magical”— it can be defined and explained scientifically”. However, this can, in some sense, be misconstrued as a sequentially affective process of manifestation and problem solving. Brinck (2000:40) uses the idea of an algorithm to describe a scientific approach that makes provision for a convincing solution when considered in relation to heuristic methods, when, for example, a rule of thumb is preferred over deductive logic. Brinck (2000:40) surmises: “There are no explicit rules for how to intuit a truth”.

From within this paradigm, two heuristic threads are identified. First, the “*fast and-frugal-heuristic approach*”, which suggests an immediate response in process-related problem-solving activities with

constraints on “time and cognitive capacity” (Zander et al 2016:4; emphasis original). Constraints are presented in relation to the specifics of place, including time of day, difficulties with access, and negotiating unknown or undisclosed characteristics, such as previously enacted events. Intuitive actions are known to take place in heightened states of deprivation, trauma or conflict, requiring momentary responses that usually are fleeting and short-lived. Second is the “*heuristics-and-biases approach*”, which underscores the problem of human fallibility (Zander et al 2016:4; emphasis original). Instinctive and impulsive behaviours result in adversarial outcomes, giving rise to errors that negatively impact a given problem. The latter is not a result of calculated or malicious carelessness but rather stems from behaviours that are unknowingly inaccurate through a misalignment of the relationship between problem and solution (Zander et al 2016:4).

The potential for error in intuitive thinking does not occur in a cognitive vacuum. Contextual information is located in processes that function outside of rational thinking. This knowledge is tacitly or non-consciously acquired. Zander et al (2016:6), citing Bowers et al (1990), refer to an “environment triggered by tacit knowledge that has been acquired unintentionally during a person’s life”. Bringing intuition further into the scope of a heuristic function, Zander et al (2016:5; emphasis original) see this as “signals ... continuously going on as *cognitive byproducts of cognitive processes*”. This is particularly true for creative thinking that implicates intuitive, heuristic and insightful action. Brinck (2000:41) makes the point that when the “creative process that lies behind science and art is similar ... then irrationality cannot simply be transferred to art”. Intuitive responses in visual arts processes, while located in tacit origins, remain equally within the cognitive sphere of rational as well as irrational thinking. To limit the concept of intuitive thinking to irrational or unconscious processes alone discounts the more complex nature of intuitive and impulsive actions as embedded in tacit patterns, memory and sensorially driven actions, as well as explicit responses to environmental conditions.

### **2.3.6 Intuition, memory and the creative process**

Intuitive creative processes, according to Graham Wallace (cited by Brinck 2000:40-41), follow four phases: *Preparation* – one encounters a given stimulus for the first time and personal insights begin to form a possible response; *Incubation* – an unconscious state when information is compressed and rationalised; *Illumination* – insights towards resolving a problem are triggered; *Verification* – the “ah-ha” moment when the creative process is validated and resolved. If one is to accept that both memory and impulsive and irrationally derived actions come together in intuitive processes, is it not possible to see any one of the above phases as a trigger point for subsequent phases?<sup>27</sup> For example,

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<sup>27</sup> Admittedly these deviate from Wallace’s conceptual ground for each phase and therefore become

illumination may lead to an insight derived from a cognitive process that could easily prompt preparation before it can be verified in a final result.<sup>28</sup>

Factors leading up to a moment that results in intuitive thinking resides in personal experience. The articulation of memory, as a means to access as well as imagine intuitively, should not ever be disputed. Brinck (2000:48) highlights the problem of a denial of unconscious reasoning when “creativity depends on having access to a conceptual structure or a means of categorising that is stable. Humans construct knowledge structures that enable creativity to flourish”. It is in the incubation of ideas and the subsequent illumination of possible solutions that embodied cognitive processes happen, which implicate the function of memory. Working with stimuli that are neither fixed nor coherent invokes a strong selective ordering of information in the practitioner. I concur with Brinck (2000:50) when she corrects the problematic point that Pat Langley and Randolph Jones (1988) make about unconscious reasoning by explaining how incubation “depends on memory and also on unconscious processes that include indexing and retrieval, as well as ... operations on images or perceptual representations ... and [the] superimposition of images of different situations”. In what ways is memory a crucial point in the forming of independent intuitive ideations and simulations that exist outside of conscious or analytical cognition?

In her discussion of “contextual and context-independent information”, Brinck (2000:42) highlights the relation between memory and an embedded skills set. Is this a viable means to understand enacted intuition as part of a creative process? “Memory constitutes an integral part of an account of intuition. Intuition is not sheer guess-work or luck, but a skill. It depends on having the right sort of knowledge that will allow one to exercise this skill” (Brinck 2000:42). This skills-based understanding suggests a determination that is goal-orientated, albeit without a clear perception of the outcome. It also offers a flexibility of choice when information arrives as fragmented and raw. Involving expansive experimentation and abstract thinking within this flexible cognitive paradigm strengthens a creative agenda. Brinck’s (2000:43) assertion that cognition depends on an embodied response to the environment of the subject affirms that memory takes a central role in the process of creative intervention. However, memory is also unreliable in its unpredictable aspect. Memories shift and change over time. When this aspect of memory is applied in the process-led context of visual art making, memory can be understood to operate as fragments as well as enmeshed and hybridised visualisations in the way they transform into what appears to be fixed and generative representational structures.

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semantically rather than conceptually applicable.

<sup>28</sup> Brinck (2000:48) explains this: “[I]llumination consists in mapping from a source structure stored in long term memory by a recognition process to a target structure”.

Memory is not an entirely trustworthy source; it is more accurate to understand the work of memory in relation to abstract associations and fantastical imaginings. Brinck (2000:47) explains that “the subject will only have access to representations that are detached from the actual context if she can invent or create new contexts, for instance, by make-believe”. Grounded in a range of sensorially activated processes, these new contexts for memory are better understood as comprising emotionally charged responses.

Imagining is intimately bound up in personal and collective memory. Extending the interrelation of “context specific and context-independent triggers”, memory is formulated in “a mesh of spatio-functional properties projectable from the context of action and the environment with patterns of interaction from memory” (Brinck 2000:45). Acquired knowledge and subsequent skill or ability allows for sensorially driven activities to be integrated through unexplainable conditions of chance, luck and coincidence. Assuming an embodied relation to historical and social contexts, it is also given that “[c]reativity depends on being able to detach oneself and one’s conceptions from the actual context” (Brinck 2000:45). This dual flow of memory and embodied cognition, and the empirical relation this has to the lived conditions of place, injects a fresh impulse towards an as yet unrealised creative act.

I present the above configuration demonstrating how the two forms of mental images emerge from the triangulation of memory, embodied cognition and creativity in the diagram in figure 18. The first form of mental images involves complex representations – also known simply as *constructions* – distinguished from simple representations, and happening through “combinatorial and recursive mechanisms” (Brinck 2000:45). This is an open-ended process of chance encounters between a wide range of sensorially perceived stimuli that is deliberately disconnected from a targeted resolution and instead encourages an open-minded experimental mindset with no planned outcome. The second is termed “propositional construal” (Brinck 2000:45). Differently conceived, this approach favours a selective method in which certain aspects are identified as relevant over others. “Both constructions and propositional construals rely on mapping symbols into each other according to spatial schemata” (Brinck 2000:45). Mapping ideas through associated and relational factors based on embodied encounters with spatial and object-related contexts informs Neustetter’s and de Sagazan’s processes directly. I recognise constructions operating from the conjuncture of memory and cognitive thought processes in the two artists’ work as a determining factor in their use of metaphor. Visual narratives are constructed when process operates in tandem with place to formulate narrative outcomes. Extending Brinck’s (2000:46) context-specific modality, the constructions complex suggests a mapping of past and present encounters, partly through the function of memory and personal history and partly in relation to current circumstances.

“[M]etaphorical mapping can produce novel and surprising results that are not derivable from a prior set of rules or constraints” (Brinck 2000:46). Imagined visual possibilities implicate both context-specific and, in some cases, context-independent relations. Metaphoric associations lead to fantastical imaginings that are determined through, and are also significantly a part of, the artist’s metaconscious memory-functioning. With a detachment from context-specific relations, a new and imagined visuality is formed. Memory is therefore not only a means through which intuitive processes happen, it is also an integral part of the creative act, which is itself embedded in uninhibited imaginings that carry a visionary function.

This complexity solidifies into cognitive functions that trigger an intuitive process through an advanced form of human cognition and the processing of past experiences. Weisberg (1993:67) asks the question: “Does creative thinking depend on extraordinary thought process?”. What is to be said for those still unrealised aspects of human intuitive thinking that enable creative work? If the precondition of extraordinary conditions were entirely removed, is it not probable that a cognitive neurological functioning exists that enables a creative and generative state? When applying the integrative model of associative combinations involving abstract ideation and encoded lived and embodied experience, the idea of creative thinking is, to quote Weisberg (1993), indeed extraordinary. I offer more context for this in a closer examination of cymatic and kinaesthetic triggers for intuitive thinking. A real time embodiment of intuitive thinking is synonymous with a living entity that vibrates, shivers and pulses through real time stimuli.

### **2.3.7 Cymatic and kinaesthetic triggers**

Information is never static or inert. It gyrates, flows and rhythmically moves. The practitioner selectively captures and distils emotional and place-related moments in shifting worldly experiences. Samier (2018:x) opens his book *Intuition, creativity, innovation* with the statement that the phenomenon of intuition is “vibratory, observable and reproducible”. His authoritative analysis covers a range of methodological areas to expand his triadic hybridisation of intuition, innovation and creativity. Of these, the neuroscientific method is presented in a close study of cymatic and kinaesthetic triggers. Intuition is shown to be an embodied experience through unconscious actions that permeate through the relations of the vibratory bodily and environmental circumstances.

The intuitive experience begins from a deep and resonant place in human consciousness that is, on the one hand, experienced from the contained place of the body and, on the other, simultaneously infinite in its unbounded and limitless state. Drawing on the notion of intuition as a third eye phenomenon of “unconscious vibration”, Samier (2018:15) analyses cymatic and kinaesthetic triggers in a discussion of intuition as a vibratory phenomenon. Using the phrase “inner smiling”,

Samier (2018:38-39) alludes to intuition as a form of perception that is orientated inwards. This suggests contemplative or meditative aspects that can be immediate and long-lasting and potentially inhibit creative functioning. As an antidote to this inhibiting condition, Samier (2018:15) articulates an embodied triadic functionality of music, vibration and emotion, diagrammatically represented in figure 19.

Samier (2018:15) discusses the triggering effects of the sound-wave phenomenon of cymatics as a triadic relation between physiological bodily phenomena, vibratory resonances (as a result of emotional responses), and rhythmic and melodic sound. "Music activates the brain's 'emotional areas', modifies heart rate, breathing, body temperature and skin conductivity" and directly influences "our brain, emotions, body and heart rate" (Samier 2018:15). This includes in part how sound vibrates in liquid form in and through the body. "Our body is situated in an environment of constant inner vibrations. It has its own vibrations and inner frequencies (heartbeats, blood circulation and breathing movements)" (Samier 2018:16-17).<sup>29</sup>

This physiological response to sound, and the reason why the vibratory effect of cymatics is useful as a trigger for intuitive processes, lies in the way sound behaves in the presence of a liquid, more specifically water. Cymatic movement is a core principle in this process. It reveals the three elements that constitute this phenomenon visually, "namely vibration (represented by the shape obtained), dynamics and kinetics" (Samier 2018:20-21).<sup>30</sup> Complete by the act of sensing, and the physical responses to the vibrational cymatic effects, the process sets in motion an acute and fleeting ability to perceive (Samier 2018:24). This precedes any cognitive and rational process of analysis (Samier 2018:29).

Like pattern and patterning, rhythm is a strong indicator of the emotional impulses apparent in intuitive behaviour. Bodily reactions to harmony and melody result from innate rhythmic enactments. Bodily rhythms are located in the functionality of the heart and its physiological as well as metaphorical associations. These align with particular emotional states. In conceptualising intuitive processes, rhythm not only sets up emotional interactions, but also marks a close tie to the function of memory through the bodily recognition and storing of experiential knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Memory

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<sup>29</sup> Samier (2018:20-21) explains further: "It demonstrates that everything is in a state of vibration, oscillation and pulsation. Sound waves, electromagnetic waves and supersonic vibrations exist in the universe on both an infinitely large and an infinitely small scale down to atoms".

<sup>30</sup> It is well documented that: "Water constitutes 50–70% of our body, if we consider mass, or 99%, if we consider the number of water molecules, as our body includes ( $3.7 \times 10^{13}$ ) water cells. Vibrations create unexpected pulsating, dynamic and kinetic phenomena in the body" (Samier 2018:24).

<sup>31</sup> "The heart receives intuitive information well before the brain, and it reacts by slowing down the heart rate and then sending this information to the brain. The heart is naturally a functional and sensorial organ" (Samier 2018:26).

is activated through the rhythmic pulsing of the heart's beating, sending a vibratory pulse that cymatically affects the liquid constitution of the body. Vibrational resonance and rhythmic conditions for cymatically induced intuitive behaviour suggest a necessity for systematic repetition. Woven into this is the implicit functioning of tacit information. It is through the operation of kinaesthetic workings that I develop this point.

Memory, emotion and time are autonomous yet interrelating factors that implicate an intuitive activation of tacit understandings. Revealed through time-regulated circumstances, emotional iterations are found in kinaesthetic representations.<sup>32</sup> These situations follow a spatial trajectory. They are prompted from a given source and from a specific spatial point in that source. For example, it is commonly known that, in order for an object to remain in motion, it requires a force to set a momentum. That force is then applied instinctively. A disclosed intuitive sense is not always immediately present. In an intuitive response, the affectivity of a given stimulus relates directly to sensorial perceptions. Dane and Pratt (2007:36) consider affect, or to be affected by something, as involving "consciously accessible feelings". Brock (2015:129) includes a point about an emotional sensation that happens as a result of one's bodily response as well as an emotional response to something. A bodily action can never happen in a time vacuum. Every embodied sensation and cognitive structure occurs in a real time context.

Time and timing in the form of the speed by which an intuitive action is brought into effect, is significant. Brock (2015:129) refers specifically to the work of "physical sensations and moods" and associated processes, and to the speed with which these happen. While he acknowledges the value of kinaesthetic representations in the way one encounters and processes perceived observations of things in real time, Brock (2015:129) argues that "there is insufficient evidence to claim intuitions are invariably grounded in physical sensations". This caution is significant as it opens up the scope of thinking around intuitive and cognitive functioning as not exclusively and simplistically determined through measurable and explicit means. Yet it also bypasses a highly salient point around the effect of environmental conditions bound up in the context of place.

A kinaesthetic understanding of tacit knowledge marks and defines a time-specific context. Kahneman (2011) (cited by Brock 2015:129) alludes to an intuitive action carrying a momentum that "operates ... quickly". In discussing the nature of intuitive physics, Brock (2015:129-130) describes the activation of phenomenological knowledge as having a rapidity of recognition that relies on sensorial and bodily responses and resides outside of the realms of language. It may be that non-

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<sup>32</sup> A point I raised earlier in discussion around pattern, time and the durational specifics of intuitive thinking is suggested in the way intuitive action manifests as "tacit hunches or feelings" (Dane and Pratt 2007:37).

formal intuitive concepts “can be interpreted in ways which are fast and effortless” as they require “little or no deliberate processing, nor any explicit invocation of a definition of the concept” (Brock 2015:130). However, as Hogarth (2001) (cited by Brock 2015:130) infers: “neither speed nor certainty are necessarily correlates of intuitive thought. While it is true that we often make speedy judgments about many issues, some people report experiencing intuition as a slow realization of a state, an impression being built up over time by a succession of minor intuitions”.

Is it possible to account for the tacit nature of intuitions if they are conceptualised as information that is encoded non-verbally or, by extension, encoded from a non-sensorial position? Can intuitive response be forced through an externally imposed stimulus, such as an inherent or already learnt gesture, action or behaviour? Brock (2015:135) points out that “an early precursor of this idea is found in Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/2005) notion of ‘knowledge in the hands’, the embodied knowing that allows a typist to find the keys without conscious thought”. This usefully extends the significance of kinaesthetically determined tacit information as an integral part of how embodied cognition operates intuitively.

Bodily functions involve the memory of sensorial stored experience. “Sensorial motor processing” of tacit information is kinaesthetically accessed through memory (Brock 2015:135). Drawing on Karen Pearlman’s (2009) notion of embodied “kinaesthetic empathy”, Holt (2020:124) articulates this in relation to the “‘thinking body’ in terms of ‘a body that gathers, stores and retrieves information about rhythm and uses it strategically – in other words, a body that thinks, but does so primarily through a directly physical, experiential process’”. Extending an analysis of the kinaesthetic function of embodied cognitive processes into an interrelation of an organism’s brain, body and environment, Andrew Wilson and Sabrina Golonka (2013:1) define these functions as other than what is predetermined and conducted exclusively through neurological channels. Previous psychological attitudes about simply thinking a solution into being are deposed by an idea that bodily and sensorial aspects act in tandem with neurological processes in any reasonable definition of embodied cognition. Citing Lawrence Shapiro (2011), Wilson and Golonka (2013:8; emphasis original) discuss a “*conceptualization hypothesis*” that clarifies “how we conceive of our world as grounded in and constrained by the nature of the perception-action systems that we are (our bodies)”. This sensorial response to environmental stimuli points to a time-space specificity where kinaesthetic action is brought full circle as a sensorial action rooted in bodily relations.

This latent kinaesthetic construct is interestingly conjoined with tacit and abstract forms of knowing that vibrate meaningfully at the edge of bodily and sensory actions. This edge gives form to conscious interaction as it encounters metaconscious conditions for knowing. For example, Brock

(2015:130) observes how intuition “may develop through the operation of implicit learning, a nonconscious process that results in abstracted knowledge”. To what extent is this form of knowing, contingent on the operation of language? An alternative perspective on intuitive knowing, which I argue for here, suggests that the work of concepts outside of rational and objective thinking operates in the ambit of language. Further to this, Guy Dove (2011) (quoted by Brock 2015:135) demonstrates how language acts “as a form of ‘dis-embodied cognition’ that ‘extends cognition’ beyond the concrete and perceptual to form abstractions”.

While remaining embedded in bodily actions, the emphasis on language as a purveyor of meaning lends itself to a useful application in the way intuitive visual arts practices are enacted through physical and tangible means. States of linguistically derived, metaconscious processing underscore the value of language in signifying systems that enable intuitive kinaesthetic functioning. Brock (2015:135) distinguishes between two plausible models: “diSessa’s (1993) phenomenological primitive (p-prim) account and Clement’s (2008) model of intuition”. Both modalities are useful in the way intuition works kinaesthetically in a creative process. John J Clement (2008) (cited by Brock 2015:137) infers that intuitive reasoning is not formalised and is better understood as a manifestation in present time of “knowledge structure[s] (schema[s]) that [reside] in long term memory”. In this model, behaviour is implicitly “self-evident to the subject” (Brock 2015:130). This self-evidence is made apparent through “‘imagining,’ ‘picturing,’ ‘hearing,’ a situation or ‘feeling what it’s like to manipulate’ a situation” through “mental simulations based on motor sensations (Clement quoted by Brock 2015:137)”.

Andrea diSessa’s phenomenological primitive method describes tacitly embedded personal phenomena that are obfuscated through the complexity of language due to kinaesthetic or visual encoding (diSessa cited by Brock 2015:136-137). diSessa (quoted by Brock 2015:137) describes these interactions as “‘little pieces of intuitive knowledge’ or p-prims”. Knowledge acquired over time is configured as small fragments of information determined through any given physical, emotional or sensorial response to environmental stimuli.

If intuitive sources are linguistically fragmented and simultaneously self-evident, then why search for tacit structures in their operational formats? The process of intuition and the resulting product of expedient action remains a given. This does not preclude further investigation into the significance of these outcomes and how they carry meaning, but it does emphasise the context of the intuitive event. The idea that intuition is innately a part of human cognition and is in that sense self-evident, “bridges the boundary between the tacit and explicit” (Brock 2015:131). The operational formulations of metaconscious or unconscious functioning offer a direct explanation for an

experience of the otherworldly in intuitive processes. A clear case is laid down for the significance of tacit knowledge in the defining moments of intuitive cognition. The axiomatic nature of intuition is given form in the flow of language and creative imaginings. The above discussion of cymatic and kinaesthetic formulations of the interrelating aspects of embodied cognition, imagining and prerequisite creative processes is extended in the following section. I revisit Casey's comments on place-related imaginings to further develop the notion of intuitive cognitive embodiment.

### **2.3.8 Intuitive imaginings**

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how creativity stems from a primordial place of vulnerability, and is framed in relation to sensorial and ontological readings of place as these exist outside of or in contrast to a fixed empirical relation to a worldly experience. Place and the conditions that form the artist's relation to place are essential in determining an emotional response through a bodily sense of knowing and feeling. A realisation of self is therefore a key identifying factor in an intuitively driven context when the creative act is enabled through a subconscious relation with place. A theoretical scaffold is necessary to demonstrate how this directly implicates the artist's sense of being placed.

In his analysis of imaginings, Casey's (2000a) observations become instrumental in how notions of creativity and place intersect spatially. In his book *Imagining: a philosophical study*, Casey (2000a:xi) explains that "we do need to acknowledge the amplitude and intrinsic power of imagining and to recognize it as an autonomous act that is comprehensible and significant in its own right". To isolate and identify the fundamental components of imagining and the resulting "eidetic phenomenology of imagination", Casey brackets it off from its place in poetry, politics, dreams, and mystical experiences (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3). This method of theoretically framing imaginings is valid in a discussion on creativity as it relates to intuition. Husserl's theory of subjective intentionality distinguishes between the noetic and the noematic.<sup>33</sup>

Following Husserl, Casey (2000b:48) identifies the act phase and the object phase of imagining. Careful not to separate out the two phases, Casey (2000b:48) insists that the two phases "call for one another and are strictly correlative ... Each phase is equally essential, since an actless memory is as unthinkable as a contentless remembering". These phases constitute "the two poles of every 'complete phenomenon' of imagination" (Casey quoted by Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3).

Defined as "the actual phase of remembering, with how remembering is accomplished or realized on specific occasions" (Casey 2000b:48), the act phase is centred on conscious human experience,

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<sup>33</sup> For a scholarly account of Husserl's phenomenological conception of noetic and noematic constructs, refer to Shahabi and Rassi (2015:29-34).

which I recognise as a form of embodied remembering. An act of remembering gives rise to imaginative circumstances that derive primarily from sensuous or sensorially stimulated action. In a category of the act phase, Casey (2000b:50) refers to primary remembering<sup>34</sup> as “a way of enriching present experience by adding the dimension of ... the just-having-been, to an otherwise purely punctiform present ... what Husserl [terms] the ‘living present’”. The immediacy of this experience of the primary remembering of the act phase is made known in relation to what Casey (2000b:53-55) refers to as sensuous and nonsensuous aspects. In reference to a type of act phase remembering that he described as “remembering *simpliciter*” (Casey 2000b:52; emphasis original), he explains how in such a form, “there is a pronounced tendency, ... however abstract in nature it may be, ... to sediment itself into a sensuous format of presentation” (Casey 2000b:53). In his continued discussion of types of act phase remembering such as “remembering-that” (Casey 2000b:53), it is noted that sensuous as well as nonsensuous experiences become apparent. While remember *simpliciter* activities may well involve sensuous experiences, remember-that activities can operate nonsensuously (Casey 2000b:54-55). The act phase is advanced in the idea that “remembering realises itself as an act” (Casey 2000b:63).

In the object phase, content is foregrounded and this content always has a context inherent to the remembered event or thing. Casey (2000b:65) explains that this “serves to remind us that to speak of what we remember, i.e., the total object, is to presuppose an act or activity by means of which we remember this object”. Casey (2000b:82) divides the object phase into two broad categories: the Mnemonic presentation and Modes of givenness. In the former category, remembering can be descriptive and detailed but also reduced to its barest essential state or as Casey (2000b:66 emphasis original) puts it using words like “sparsest” and “economical”, “[i]t is thus *just what* we remember and no more”. In the Modes of givenness category, four criteria determine the object phase of remembering, namely: clarity, density, textuality and directness. These four categories are discussed by Casey (2000b:79-82) as signifiers and qualifiers of how the context of a remembered event or thing is prioritised.

From Casey’s iterations of the act phase and the object phase, it is clear that the two phases operate conjunctively in active remembering: “The experience of remembering is always act and object at once” (Casey 2000b:48). I rely on this to conceptualise the idea of pulling together an embodied significance where the act of remembering stems from a physical experience that is contingent on the material conditions of a remembered experience in real time. Two questions emerge from this

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<sup>34</sup> Casey (2000b:49-50) analyses primary remembering and secondary remembering in his discussion of the act phase. I focus on the primary aspect to emphasise the immediacy of the act phase.

statement. What bearing does this have on a discussion of creative intuition and how do Casey's categories of remembering assist in understanding the complexity of embodied creative processes? To answer these questions, I start by considering Casey's views on the notion of imagining.<sup>35</sup>

It is integral to Casey's linguistic methodology that he carefully distances the adjective imaginative "from any positive or honorific connotation" (Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3). Instead, extending his discussion of the object phase, the "adjective 'imaginal' is introduced as a technical formulation for concepts such as the 'imaginal margin'" (Casey quoted by Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3). For Casey (1976:53), the imaginal margin is the "fading fringe found at the outer limit of specific imagined content". He (1976:53) describes it further as "featureless", without "any definite location" and defiant of "exact description of any kind". In terms of the imagining process, it is both "unspecific" and "formless" (Casey 1976:53). The word "'imaginary' is given a narrow and technical definition" (Casey quoted by Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:3). Casey (1976:xvi) defines the "imaginary" as "the totality of a given range of imagined objects or, at the limit, the sum of all imagined objects". The totalising implication embedded in this word's definition is useful when discussing the cumulative and conjunctive effects of act and object phase imagining.

In his discussion of body memory and place memory, Casey's observations consider place-based or context-specific creative experiences that are both embodied and intuitive. Casey (quoted by Landes & Cruz-Pierre 2013:4; emphasis original) recognises the "irrepressible centrality of body and place, since we 'imagine *with* our bodies and *in* place, never without the ingredients and the co-operation of both'". This iteration of an embodied sense of place in the act of imagining is made specifically known when related to memory. Casey (1987:182; emphasis original) elaborates on this when he distinguishes between being embodied and being disembodied:

To be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a particular perspective and position; it is to have not just a point of view but a *place* in which we are situated. It is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we both undergo given experiences and remember them. To be disembodied is not only to be deprived of place, *unplaced*; it is to be denied the basic stance on which every experience and its memory depend. An embodied existence opens onto place, indeed *takes place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place as to its own basis.

In as much as memory is place-bound, so too can one make a similar statement for imagining and the creative process involved there. To create imaginatively requires the role of both an object-related factor and what I refer to as an act-instinctive and intuitive functionality. On the one hand, the artist is present in the past, present and future moments of a given place. On the other hand,

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<sup>35</sup> In selected areas of my discussion I deliberately refer to Casey's formulations as they are presented by Landes & Cruz-Pierre's (2013) as their observations of Casey's analysis emphasise the function of imaginative processes and place in a manner that aligns concisely with my argument.

and in varying degrees, this experience provides a conceptual platform for intuitive imaginings as these are enacted through memory.

Creativity and intuition are products of the emotional triggers that result from euphoric moments brought on by cymatic conditions and the realisation of an alternate realm or the otherworldly. Emotional expression realised intuitively enables a creative impulse (Samier 2018:82). An emotional response to something brings into effect a personal transformation that can be described as having both a physical effect as well as a psychological impact. The creative act is preceded by “an emotional feeling, which introduces a motivation and ends with the action required to realize the idea” (Samier 2018:82). Creativity and the act of being creative follows a path that begins with an inner intuitive resonance and that culminates in a highly personalised experience of inner (embodied) and physical (bodily) transformation (Samier 2018:82). Alluding to alternative ways that creativity operates through the work of wondrous emotional feelings, Samier (2018:82) explains this euphoric experience as “enjoying the pleasure of discovery. Putting new concepts together. Doubting, asking, transforming”.

The intersubjective harnessing of place elements and enacted instincts for imaginative workings implicates another dialectic of intuitive behaviour: intuition and innovation. For the purposes of this research, I identify intuitive thinking as indicative of the act phase and innovative thinking as integral to the object phase. Innovation stems from an active position of being inspired. It is the function of imagination and the human ability to consciously produce imaginings from a primordial source of unknown phenomena that defines innovative thinking. How does this process of delving into the unknown relate to the human capacity for imagining? The object phase locates imagination as a process that draws on embedded memory and subconscious conditions that are highly personal to one’s own lived experience. “Imagination involves seeing the unknown, the unrepresented and the yet unseen, like fantastic or magical worlds. It is a sort of mental projection that blends memories and the brain’s ability to create a new and previously unknown frame of reference” (Samier 2018:98). Intuition determined through the act phase derives from a form of intelligence realised as a necessary aspect of the evolutionary path of human cognitive reasoning and rationality. Is it possible to re-figure Casey’s phases in relation to a more intrapersonal human experience?

The three-fold relation of “the inner world, experience and outer world of an individual” is a core trajectory for the development of specific types of intelligence, especially as this informs intuitive functioning (Samier 2018:99). The notion of wonder as a precursor to imaginative thinking is attributed to a certain carefree and unhindered set of actions that give form to insouciant behaviour. “[I]nsouciance makes our mind somewhat lighter, our ideas fresher and it gives us a

feeling of wonderment at the magic of life” (Samier 2018:99). Imagining involves the forming of ideas through the illusory faculties that emanate from a nebulaic junction of cognitive awareness and an abandonment to the unknown world of fantastical imagining. How do imaginings and the perception of illusory and tacit phenomena assist in teasing out the relation of intuitive and innovative acts? In what ways does this realisation inform otherworldly narratives?

Illusions are either optical or magical. Optical illusions are based in part on the knowledge of how perception works and how sensorially perceived things and circumstances are also physically experienced. Illusions derive from the principle of “least incoherence” of brain functioning and the way we process encounters in our conscious states (Samier 2018:99). “Thus, the brain will shift fixed elements in a drawing. Illusionists or magicians create magic tricks with multiple effects based on illusions or sleight of hand, and by diverting the attention” (Samier 2018:99). Conversely, intuition is conceptualised as an experience that moves from the inward to an outward expression that resides momentarily outside of an embodied sense of place and time. In terms of sensorial experiencing, illusion “means not being part of reality. This is what amplifies an individual’s innovative abilities” (Samier 2018:99).

An insouciant state, in the form of illusory events and phenomena, precedes the empirical and rational world of scientific logic (Samier 2018:102). Knowledge that is inherently tacit in character and therefore outside of rational and, to some extent, credible accountability, exists only in the realms of the invisible (Samier 2018:103). These expansive instances that see an amalgamation of imagination, illusion and intuition are an important precursor to the theoretical framework onto which the notion of the otherworldly is conceptualised in this research. I have stated that intuitive processes are integrally part of the tectonics that enable the expansive realms of imagination. I extend this into a real time experience. Henriksen, Mishra and the Deep-play research group (2018:215-216) consider the phenomenology of the spatial turn thinkers such as Casey and Tuan when they discuss Richard Buchanan’s ideas on creativity and creative processes. They put forward the idea of creativity as something involving a process of becoming. For Henriksen et al, creativity is bringing together conceptual and visual data that “shows what could be”. In some sense this has to do with “making the familiar unfamiliar” or, put differently, of “making the familiar strange” (Henriksen et al 2018:216). This is identified by Buchanan as the key enabling aspect of creative work. The complex cognitive functionality of thinking and problem-solving sets in motion the human experience of “invention, discovery, innovation, and intuition. Those four terms are, to me, the dimensions of what we call creativity” (Buchanan cited by Henriksen et al 2018:217).

Perception is at the root of Buchanan’s primary argument for creative connections: “that sudden

perception of a connection” gives rise to “what we often mean by ‘innovation,’ or creativity” (Henriksen et al 2018:217). Perception then is integral to the way an artist creatively straddles the familiar and the unfamiliar. Perception coupled with insight and intuition positions the artist at the uncanny point of embodied awareness in preparation for impulsive and spontaneous action. Reminiscent of the Freudian idea of the *unheimlich* (The “Uncanny” [Sa]), some aspect of uncanny phenomena can be recognised in a suggestion of things tacitly concealed. “Creativity is nothing more, and nothing less, than a perception of what is not familiar, what we don’t know, what we don’t have in front of us” (Henriksen et al 2018:217). An uncanny experience invokes uncertainty that, in itself, evolves into creative and insightful thinking.

The embodied context of artists and their creative experience is moulded in potential risk, vulnerability and uncertainty as a necessary recipe for creative action. Samier (2018:85) points out that “[l]ogically, creative individuals are more curious, optimistic and intuitive, they are passionate about their activities, uncertainty is an ally for them and creativity comes more naturally to them”. This has specific relevance within creative responses and actions. Creative methods, such as reflection, combinational logic and analysis, involve instinctive associations “as well as spectral and systemic methods” (Samier 2018:86).

Perception and intuitive response also give form to experiences of vulnerability and uncertainty when *confronted* with risk. Risk and chance develop from seemingly random connections and associations. They carry with them a sense of the unknown, which in turn alludes again to tacit aspects embedded in Freud’s *unheimlich*. Perception then can also be disabling when preconceived ideas and expectations are not met and emotional responses short-circuit a potential creative solution. Weisberg (1993:63) considers this in relation to obstacles experienced in creative thinking and, more specifically, in relation to a perceptual and emotional block: “one emotional block to creative thinking is fear of taking a risk, since production of a creative idea involves taking risks” (Weisberg 1993:63). There is no definitive planning involved of what may be. One operates within the unfamiliar zone of knowledge that is yet to be realised. Buchanan (cited by Henriksen et al 2018:217-218) maintains that the logic of creative thinking resides in imagination and reason and that, beyond this, it is intuition and context that provides the greatest understanding and sense of something. Buchanan (cited by Henriksen et al 2018:218) explains this as a need to “grasp a wholeness” (enacting Casey’s object phase) by “learning to see” (manifesting through the act phase). Put differently, it is a capacity for perception that goes beyond the enabling privilege of learned, acquired or innate skills set. Asking questions about all aspects of something and being perceptive through an interrogative approach is foregrounded in intuitive processing (Henriksen et al 2018:218).

A rationalist way of understanding intuition contradicts the sensorial responses that are necessary for intuitive processes to happen. A possible line of questioning for further research into this aspect of intuitive processes is: How is process affected when the object phase collapses into and contradicts or overrides the act phase? Would an intuitive action not be severely compromised? Perception, as an embodied experience, cannot rely solely on simplistic ocular occurrences. A questioning approach through critical inquiry and problem-solving is also needed to bring into effect emotional action that feeds perceptual functionality. Pulling the analytical workings of rationalist inquiry in the object phase together with sensorially driven and embodied impulses in the act phase ensures an otherworldly experience that is enacted through process-led practices.

## **2.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Notions of the otherworldly, as made manifest through intuitive experiences, can be understood as having relevance in place-situational contexts such as installation and performative spatial arts practices. Before I offer concluding remarks on this chapter, I elect to first reflect on how the otherworldly fits with the above articulations of place, intuition and process. The premise holds that process-driven spatial arts practices such as installation and performance events are both intuitively activated and contextually specific in their relation to place. What remains is the narrative impact of these constituent parts and how this ushers in an otherworldly experience. It is for this purpose that, in this chapter, I concentrated my observations through a phenomenological lens.

Tacit knowledge casts the relation between place and intuition in a critical light. Intuition is shown to be a seminal aspect of creative processes. Coupled with tacitly-embedded narratives, these constructs assist in how I defined and applied the otherworldly from a phenomenological viewpoint. Max Van Manen (2014:13) points out the complex contemporary and historical manifestation when he explains how phenomenology “continues to make us mindful to be critically and philosophically aware of how our lives (and our cognitive, emotional, embodied, and tacit understandings) are socially, culturally, and existentially fashioned”. For a process-driven practice, tacit knowledge resides within the same theoretical space as the practice in which it is embedded. To methodologically separate the two jeopardises the foundational scaffolding onto which a practice is built and enabled. While it is accurate to state that tacit knowledge remains elusive and awkwardly defined (Collins 2001:107), this is also a misconception.<sup>36</sup> An inaccessibility shrouds this knowledge bank in universal and homogenising mystery. Underlying defining criteria are squared off against the enigmatic entropy of uncertainty and a curious mindset. An optimistic immersivity in endless possibility is cognitively revealed.

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<sup>36</sup> Collins (2001:107) advise that it is misleading to think “that there are hidden structures that underlie practices, whereas all we need to refer to are the practices themselves”.

The rhythmic and vibrational aspect of intuitive creative thinking in cymatic and kinaesthetic events mirror the chaotic and energised character of tacit knowledge. Degrees of engagement stretch beyond the known cognitive thresholds of measured human thinking and in doing so assist in the realisation of an otherworldly experience. This unconscious process is prioritised over and above the need to rationalise its workings. “[T]here is no question that most of the decisive impulses of the artist ... [emerge] ... from below the threshold of awareness” (Rosner & Abt 1974:13). Echoing the point about being able to know outside of a state of rational and mindful reasoning, it is clear that “intuition is vibrantly alive. Our minds produce vast amounts of information outside of consciousness, beyond language” (Myers 2002:23). It is in this state that the otherworldly operates. It constitutes that aspect of metacognitive working that is directly enabled by acts of creative intuition. To bring this point further into the fold of this discussion, a probing question underscores the analysis of de Sagazan’s and Neustetter’s work in Chapters Three and Four. In what ways does the vibrancy of intuition shed light on the importance of an embodied state and how does this implicate the otherworldly?

The human body as a medium dictates the terms in which human creativity and creation are brought into being (Coessens et al 2009:30). Theodore Schatzki (2001:8; emphasis original) extend this point by arguing that “the *human body* ... offers itself as the point of connection between individuals and social manifolds. [It] becomes the ideal determining phenomenon, sufficiently psychological to avoid physical determinism, sufficiently non-psychological to be embodied, and adequately supple to account for much if not all human activity”. It is in this embodied social relation that one finds a porous veil of encounters through which a reciprocity and exchange happens, which either mediates, mitigates or encourages a visionary condition that hints at an experience of the otherworldly. The artist, operating intuitively, thinks “deeply *through* what he observes so sensitively; and his observation consists in seeing the appearances of our world as embodiments of the significant facts and forces of existence” (Rosner & Abt 1974:18; emphasis original). A spontaneous and impulsive interaction makes provision for intuitive thinking that is authentic as much as it is idealistic, prophetic and possibly messianic. From within this visionary experience a natural trepidation or apprehension is emotionally felt as otherworldly narratives are ushered in.

Negotiating the unknown realms of tacitly concealed knowledge in intuitive creative processes evokes an emotional response when one is faced with the inevitable expansiveness of open-ended processes and otherworldly conditions. In Husserlian terms, Coessens et al (2009:19) describe this as “the pre-noetic, deeply intuitive and intensely felt quality of experience that constitutes an artistic performance. This is the fear that lurks within some artists who believe that research is reductive of artistic creativity”. This fear stems from an emotional response to that which is unpredictable,

ambiguous, and not yet visually formed. In short, it is a knee-jerk reaction to things that can't be rationally controlled or manipulated. Coessens et al (2009:21) relate these as "fears of reduction and of non-comprehension, or miscomprehension, of the complexity of artistic practice and its manifestations and relations with the outer world". It is this fear, which manifests in engaging with the tacit aspects of the unknown, that leads to the vulnerability and uncertainty necessary for creative impulses to produce otherworldly narratives from real time encounters.<sup>37</sup> The reward for such emotionally laden curiosity into the untraversed realms of consciousness is what Rosner and Abt (1974:17) call "flashes of discovery". I alluded to these in my defining comments on intuition, as the eureka moments of intuitive knowing (Brock 2015:131; Jagtiani 2018:29). The abstract locks into a state of concrete and tangible realisation at a fleeting point in time. It propels the impulse to create, originating from a tacitly veiled intuitive condition, "located below the level of consciousness" (Rosner & Abt 1974:17).

When I distinguished between the functionality of intuition and the purpose of insightful action, I demonstrated how this articulation between the two forms of knowing informs the way an embodied action enlivens a creative context. Both behaviours operate outside of a measured conscious awareness. Impulsivity and intuition in arts practices draw on instinctive responses to either physical objects and materials or feelings and sensations. These may or may not arise through moments of conscious decision making. Zander et al (2016:1; emphasis original) call this "*non-analytical thought processes*" that reaffirm "an experienced-based process resulting in a spontaneous tendency toward a hunch or a hypothesis". An underlying moment in the debate around insight and intuition denotes ideas that have been reached by sensing the solution without any explicit representation of it" (Zander et al 2016:2). Resulting creative actions are embodied and surprisingly unexpected.

Where tacit knowledge is congruently aligned with an intuitive experience, explicit forms of knowledge derive from moments of insightful realisation. When the two conditions are separated out, other factors such as the highly personal embodied position of the practitioner come into play, emphasising a subjective position. Naturally it follows that the impulsive response is rooted in a multimodal and sensorially activated state. It is from this subjective and personalised experience of the artist that an otherworldly narrative is produced.

I observed how the context of time, and more specifically real time, is a factor in how an embodied position operates in a creative process. Brock (2015:129-130) offers a distinction in relation to time

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<sup>37</sup> Coessens et al (2009: 21) explain this as being "provoked by art's capacity to produce something from nothing".

and consciousness. Often brief and fleeting events give rise to immediate insight through an impulsive reaction to a problem or event. However, the process moving towards this point may also arise from periods of prolonged contemplation, exercised through a problem-solving activity in which abstract concepts are configured. An experience of the otherworldly is brought to bear in these time-determined periods of introspective contemplation. A metaconscious state of deep knowing is realised through implicit and explicit forms of tacit knowledge made visual through intuitive processes. Although certainly linked through their commonality as channels of access to tacit information, an intuitive process and its orbital and mercurial relation to insightful realisations remains unresolved given the contextual variables in which these experiences take place.

The embodied position of the artist is tantamount in this research to intuitive process, place and otherworldly phenomena. A bodily relation draws together tactile and sensorial experiences of conceptual and physical information in real time. From this, an experience of the otherworldly is made possible through instinctive and preceptive moments, as well as impulsive and impromptu decisions that drive intuitive actions. These are not necessarily predicated on rational thinking and experiential knowing. Any rational calculated attempt to visualise these undefinable moments jeopardises the impulsive and intuitive process. Drawing on Polanyi (1962, 1966), I reflected on how this form of knowledge acquisition – what Polanyi (1966) refers to as the tacit dimension – is a signifying part of experiential knowing.

A key characteristic that clears a platform for creative intuition is a curious mindset. Being curious necessarily precedes an impulsive action and enables creative encounters in real time. It resolves into an ecstatic or euphoric moment of giving over to external stimuli. Curiosity itself does not enable access to tacit realms. It is a trigger for creative decisions to emerge from the perceived locale of tacit knowing and previously unknown conditions. Polanyi (1966) uses the word “passions” as a means to underscore the innate human capacity for curiosity. Vincent Colapietro (2011:58) refers to Polanyi’s comments on the logic of self-affirmation and the “exercise of all intellectual passions” which, through a process of self-judgement, “makes intellectual passions and heuristic virtues, rather than logical rules or formal procedures, the heart of the matter”. For Polanyi (cited by Colapietro 2011:58), this involves a cognitive experience that is “overwhelmed by its own passionate activity”. Polanyi (1966:4) describes this as a form of knowing without formally and cognitively recognising the object’s or the event’s significance in a world of tactile experience.

Marking a space of indeterminate potential, intuition enables a flow of creative proclivity. In performative arts practice, fixed ideas around process and place remain relative and contextual. From this universal position, the practitioner enters a stream of consciousness where tacit

information is processed through a fleeting, subjective and embodied relation. Rational decisions enmesh with metaconscious stimuli in the collapse of linguistic structures. The resultant experience is steeped in undefinable otherworldly narratives and vibrational awe.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> To probe the intricacies of this relation further would require a theological study into the validity and credibility of scripture-based faith systems, in which the interrelation of real-world phenomena is understood as a dialectical condition in the defining moments of metaconscious or paranormal experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### Ritual in selected work by Olivier de Sagazan with a focus on *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

##### 3.1.1 The chapter's structure

Olivier de Sagazan (b. 1958, Brazzaville, Congo) is a French artist living and working in Saint-Nazaire, Northwest France. On a research trip to Europe in 2023, I spent time with de Sagazan in his studio. I was able not only to observe him working in his studio context but also to actively participate in his working process. de Sagazan's practice is diverse, including painting, drawing, photography, sculpture and site-specific performances.

In this study, I focus on a series of interrelated objectives: to investigate the significance of his implementation of ritual; to understand his intuitive methods through a personalised encounter with his working methods; to identify ways in which place initiates an intuitive response; and to investigate how this generates an otherworldly narrative. Most important of these is to understand his working method from a fully immersive, embodied and experiential position.

Focusing on the theme of ritual, this chapter is structured around the three key aspects of intuition, place and the otherworldly. The latter is integrated into the conclusion. The study begins with an account of my field work experiences. This sets a solid empirical ground for discussion and analysis in the subsequent sections on intuition and place. My research focuses on the two on-going performances entitled *Transfiguration* (1998) (fig 3a, b & c) and *Hybridation* (2006) (fig 15a, b & c). Selected reference is made to other works to further elucidate key concepts and to provide a comparative and historical context for his working methods. Structuring the chapter in this way leads to concluding comments on how otherworldly narratives develop from an intuitive and place-related, embodied working method into representational strategies in his performances.

##### 3.1.2 Field work at Atelier de Sagazan, Saint-Nazaire, France

I worked closely with Olivier de Sagazan in his Saint-Nazaire studio from 22 to 28 May 2023.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this visit was to immerse myself in de Sagazan's studio practice to realise a series of

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<sup>39</sup> The intensely intimate encounter with de Sagazan and his studio practice allowed for a first-person experience that registers in the tone and form of the writing in this section.

objectives. I set out to understand the layers of microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects of place that inform his working approach; to record and document his working methods and process from the objective lens of a researcher – a position that allowed me to view his work from the outside looking in on his studio practice; to also position myself as the subjective participant in relation to his working process and in so doing allow myself the space to personally experience the sensorial depravity and activation that are important in de Sagazan’s performative work. Through these strategies I aimed to understand holistically how de Sagazan uses intuitive processes, and how they assist in defining the nature of ritualised practice in performance art works. I set out to determine how constructs of place and intuition assist in reading otherworldly narratives in de Sagazan’s performances from the perspective of the artist’s personal experiences and, more importantly, from the represented narrative content of his work. I prioritise my personal field notes made during my time in his studio, as well as further notes generated after my visit. Being inserted into the flow of de Sagazan’s life and work allowed me a brief glimpse into a matrix of physical and metaphysical triggers that enabled me to measure relevant aspects relating to his ritualised processes. Frenner (2021:10) puts this in general terms: “Every ritual, as a matter of metaphysical reality, has a context ... in understanding their contexts, we can understand more deeply how they function in our lives”. I begin with cursory observations of his working methods, which I extend during the course of my analysis of selected works.

The primary aim in this section is to reflect on how de Sagazan explores the human form as a direct visual evocation of otherworldly phenomena. As an expression of defiance, an iconography of monstrosity, and what one might mistakenly interpret as demonic, is visualised. Formative life circumstances, mentioned here in no particular order, influence his visual repertoire. As a student he read for an undergraduate degree in biology at the University of Rennes from 1979 to 1984. Evidence of this can be seen not only in the physiological and anatomical aspects of his sculptural work but also in the way he prefers to create the body from organic materials such as clay, hay and plaster of Paris. His intimate realisation of personal historical circumstances comes through in memories of people and places he encountered as a toddler in Brazzaville, Congo, where he lived until he was three years old, as well as later experiences as a young military conscript and traveller in

Cameroon.<sup>40</sup> His fascination with clay is a central focus in works such as *Transfiguration*, *Hybridation* and others. This stems directly from his home context in Saint-Nazaire, where the beach area includes a large clay estuary (fig 11), which is the site for regular performances.

I met with de Sagazan at his studio in Saint-Nazaire, France on Monday 22 May 2023. A large hearth-like fireplace occupies a central position in the living room area of his house. This space also serves as his office and administrative working area, all of which takes place on a large table facing a window, which looks out across a rustic and overgrown backyard area and on to his studio spaces towards the back of the compound. The interflow of spatiality and spatial arrangement is a fit-for-purpose signifier of an integral aspect of de Sagazan's work as an artist. This extends beyond the boundary walls of his studio and domestic spaces to include the broader area of Saint-Nazaire, as well as the beach and clay estuary located at the beach of the Saint-Nazaire promenade, approximately 500 meters from his studio.

The seamless flow of spaces suggests a particular way in which de Sagazan works with place and, more specifically, how his choice of materials indicates a sense of being placed. de Sagazan works with clay sourced from a local supplier, as well as other local materials that he finds through foraging in and around Saint-Nazaire. In our interview (de Sagazan 2023b), he describes his curiosity as similar to that of a stray dog, in the way he collects materials, sniffing around for discarded objects and materials in unlikely places to repurpose in his sculptural processes. The estuary is an inspirational incentive that prompts his work with clay, but is also the place of a daily ritual that he performs when he is at his studio in Saint-Nazaire.

On 22 May 2023 at around 10h00 after a lengthy interview, he invited me to join him on a routine ritualised activity. This was the first activity in a series during my weeklong visit. The event presented important clues that assisted in understanding the seamless interrelation of de Sagazan's life circumstances and his studio-based practice. The opportunity for me to join him on the excursion was to experience first-hand a personal ritual that he underwent daily and, more specifically, to gather a clearer understanding of the significance of the place that gives form to his work.

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<sup>40</sup> In personal correspondence with the artist (Olivier de Sagazan 2023b), he relates experiences of ritualised objects and contexts and how these motivated his interest in the human form. As a young military conscript in Cameroon, he remembers a specific event involving the placement of a fetish-type object: "I was petrified by this object, I understood that I shouldn't go any further. After reflection, I saw the metaphor of a body in which a shard of a bottle was inserted as a sign of reprisal for anyone crossing the line".

The activity included a brisk run to the ocean edge at a particular time of day when the tide has ebbed to approximately 800 meters from the edge of the beach. Once there, he instructed that we kneel on the beach and soak in the warmth of the mid-day sun. After about five minutes he led me to the ocean's edge and out across the clay estuary. This was a challenging exercise. As one wades out, one sinks ankle deep into the clay, making it a physically demanding activity. Each step took a great deal of effort. de Sagazan was well ahead of me and managed to reach the edge of the estuary where the clay embankment gave way to the low tide ocean's edge. At a point approximately halfway, the clay suddenly deepened and I could no longer continue upright. I proceeded to crawl on my hands and knees, but this also proved futile, as I became more and more embedded in the clay. I then sat up, exhausted, and observed de Sagazan standing, legs apart, and performing what I would describe as a combination of Chi Kong or improvised Tai Chi-like actions. After about fifteen minutes we made our way back to the beach. At a small rockpool we washed the clay off our bodies in a type of cleansing ritual and proceeded to run the 500-meter distance back to the studio.

Part of our conversation on this ritualised activity centred around three important themes. First, came an immersion in the five cardinal magickal elements of air, fire, water, earth and spirit. Second, the act of turning one's back on the city to face the seemingly infinite expanse of the ocean, while traversing the unforgiving clay bed, signalled a process of dying and relinquishing all of what constitutes one's physical being.<sup>41</sup> Third, a transformational experience occurred that involved a metaphoric death and rebirth in an adapted and improvised initiatory rite of passage. In the fifteen or so minutes we spent in the estuary, there was a suspension of the culturally, historically and socially encoded place represented by the trope of the city, Saint-Nazaire. The estuary and the expanse of the ocean with endless horizon stretched out before us. For de Sagazan, breath and breathing are crucial factors in his ability to heal bodily ailments. For him, clay too encapsulates a deep physical healing, not only in the literal sense of it containing healing minerals, but also in its powerful potential for creative transformation from its formless plasticity into the humanoid forms he creates.

The second encounter in the studio space – the area where most of his sculptures and paintings are

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<sup>41</sup> The walk across the clay estuary brings one into close contact with one's personal uncertainty, which is only resolved once one has abandoned all sense of self to the presiding elements.

housed – occurred on Tuesday 23 May 2023 at around 14h30 (fig 20a & b). I spent some time walking through and documenting the space and its contents while de Sagazan prepared. Selected views of his studio are included in figure 21. He suggested that I become the subject of a work that relates in process and visual effect to *Transfiguration*. I undressed and put on the shirt and black suit that he invariably wears in works such as *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. I was seated against the studio wall. He began by instructing me to cover my face and head with a clay slip from a bucket of clay he placed at my feet. With my eyes closed, I could smell burning material that I presumed to be hay or grass. de Sagazan later explained how burning natural fibres such as hay and herbs is an important part of his process of coming into the moment of his work. While de Sagazan worked on my head, face and shoulders, he hummed a repetitive tune, which I became rhythmically aligned to. A unique auditory and rhythmic link was created between my breathing and his humming. The experience was a close simulation of his own experience as the artist, subject and protagonist of his clay-based performance work. The process necessitated an emotional abandonment to what de Sagazan was doing. Smell, sight and taste were relinquished to a heightened sense of hearing and touch. As smell, sight and taste were suspended, the ritualised event continued. I transformed in appearance through a repetitive process of adding and subtracting material, objects and pigment. Immersed in de Sagazan's intimate and personal process, I entered a state of becoming in shifting from objective and active researcher to subjective and passive subject. The development of the character I transformed into differed from de Sagazan's variations of *Transfiguration*. First, he made use of flowers, fresh grass and petals<sup>42</sup> that he had collected from the rustic garden outside his studio before the performance commenced. Second, this was the first time that he had positioned himself outside of the final work, and chosen to take the role of the artist exclusively. Third, in a thematic sense, notions of subtle satire can be read into the final work through his deliberate decoration of myself as the protagonist at advanced stages of the performance.<sup>43</sup> At a point, he realised that I was under some degree of distress when my nose was blocked. He simply whispered the instruction to breathe through my mouth and left me to contend with the sense of vulnerability and panic. With the taste of clay and acrylic paint in my mouth, I resumed a rhythmic breathing.

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<sup>42</sup> This is not uncommon in his work. His choice of material often carries a seasonal approach. One can see this in works such as *Nos Coeurs en terre* (2021) (fig 23), performed in partnership with David Wahl.

<sup>43</sup> The use of social commentary and satire is a device that underpins much of de Sagazan's work and has precedents in his earlier performances such as *Aux abois* (2014) (fig 24) and *Le dictateur* (2022) (fig 25).

Towards the end of the performance, he instructed me to stand up while keeping my arms folded and, at that point, he asked how I felt. Through the heightening of my sense of touch at the expense of smell, taste and sight, a sense of euphoria and invincibility was achieved. To de Sagazan's question I responded, "like a god". The embodied effect is one of conscious awareness giving way to subconscious expansiveness imbuing one with a sense of invincibility and the divine. Manipulating clay, pigment and other materials, de Sagazan is intensely focused on the character transforming and becoming.

A third engagement with de Sagazan and his process-led practice occurred on Wednesday 24 May 2023 when he invited me to his studio to observe him producing a figurative sculpture, *Untitled (Fallen Angel)* (2023) (fig 22a & b).<sup>44</sup> de Sagazan took approximately two hours to make the work. In this time, he demonstrated the production of a figurative work, beginning with an armature stage, and progressing through a making process that included only basic materials such as clay, hay, plumber's hair, plaster of Paris, pigment, paint, fire and smoke. The process I observed has relevance to his sculptural works and his performative works, including *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. Using a combination of hay, plumber's hair (for reinforcement) and clay, he began creating a generalised humanoid form. The armature was attached to a horizontal stretch of truss wood approximately 125 x 30 x 2 cm. He started off working horizontally but, as the work progressed, the orientation toggled between a horizontal and vertical orientation to facilitate structural aspects of the process. The work is not without precedent, as a view of his studio reveals a number of works in a similar vertical compositional arrangement, produced using the same approach (fig 21).

de Sagazan works quickly, impulsively and intuitively, revealing an engaged familiarity with his materials and the processes. His approach is tactile and hands-on, as he moves into and through a multifunctional role. His bodily relationship is not one of technical distance but rather embodied investment in a seamless interrelation of art object and maker. The artist slips between the interchangeable roles of creator, shamanic-healer, destroyer, liberator and saviour. Artist and art object are denotatively actioned in all his performance works. He prefers a limited use of tools and pats, squeezes, pinches and rubs the materials with his hands as specific forms and details take

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<sup>44</sup> The work was not ever officially titled: for convenience I refer to the work as *Untitled (Fallen Angel)*, based exclusively on its visual and compositional attributes.

shape.<sup>45</sup> The process extends beyond the simple manufacturing of a sculpture and slips into a performative aspect.

Once the figure was partially completed and he was satisfied that the basic composition and form were in place, he moved the sculpture outdoors to apply heat with an acetylene torch. I noticed two effects: it hardens and strengthens the clay, but also produces a diversity of visual marks, textures and colours on the surface. Embedded in his process is a conceptual ambiguity. The need for permanence (hardened clay and plaster of Paris) and the promise of a completed sculpture give way to impermanence (a constant making and remaking of detail and form).<sup>46</sup> de Sagazan's lifelong fascination with the human body in its anatomical, physiological, mysterious and esoteric aspects is inscribed in his process. A delicate balance of admiration, fascination and worldly attachment is offset against a significant act of abandonment, violent destruction and otherworldly detachment.<sup>47</sup>

In *Untitled (Fallen Angel)*, ambiguity and polarised functionality are brought to bear in the evocation of esoteric elements. Clay, hay and other naturally sourced materials foreground the element of earth as life-giving sustenance and renewal. The trope of the maternal body is bound up in the correspondence between clay and ancient conceptions of the primordial earth mother motif with its life generating aspects. This highlights the notion of a divinely sanctioned creative impulse that is, in the history of human spirituality and theology, miraculously mysterious. Yet the form of the work suggests destruction, death, decay and decomposition. This is evidenced in the act of creating and destroying, and shaping and un-shaping, but also in the symbolic iconography of the final piece. The fallen and crucified angelic figure is presented frozen in time in a post-mortem stance. Its deathly state is brought into being explicitly in the materials and processes employed to produce it. In this sense the work exists in a perpetual cycle of otherworldly narrative signifiers. A conceptual oscillation between cyclic aspects such as life and death, presence and absence, knowing and not

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<sup>45</sup> Throughout the process his use of tools was limited to store-bought pliers, used specifically for bending and binding the thick galvanised wire he uses for the armature, and for making adjustments to the compositional pose of the figure. Other tools included a repurposed kitchen knife which he sharpened and shaped to enable a cutting-through of material and the shaping of detail.

<sup>46</sup> He continued working on the piece in the days after my studio visit. He documented the process to a performative end point that included additional applications of fire and smoke, as well as the inclusion of white cherubic wings behind the figure in its final realisation.

<sup>47</sup> He mentioned in passing how, after spending considerable time and effort in making a work, he would then go through a process of dismantling what he made and destroying it entirely.

knowing, being and not being, is entrenched. A reciprocal interrelationship between the artist-creator and the represented inanimate deathly state of the sculptural form suggests a process-based enactment when creative life and perpetual death circulate indefinitely to produce a sculpture that is inherently uncanny.

Smoke is used traditionally in ethnic contexts and spiritual practices to cleanse, neutralise a space and prepare a space for ritual, but also becomes explicitly integral to a ritualised context. As an indexical and symbolic signifier in de Sagazan's work, smoke sets up a foreboding and ominous atmosphere of change and transformation. It appears in two ways in his sculptural works: first, in the form of heat-induced carbonisation to create a differentiated surface effect and, second, as a means to evoke an ethereal effect that enhances the dramatic otherworldly impact of his work. He uses smoke to inject a living aspect into his sculptural works. An idiosyncratic feature of his sculptures is bodily orifices. Using his fingers and, in selected instances, a sharp repurposed kitchen knife, he shapes a mouth, a chest cavity and in some cases eyes and a navel. One esoteric reference to bodily orifices stems from the idea that these openings are portals, in and through which relations are established with spatial contexts, but also in a metaphysical sense, to multidimensional realms and otherworldly states of being. By applying fire and the resulting smoke to cavities such as navel, mouth and chest openings, the figure metaphorically comes to life and appears to breathe. Yet, smoke also points to a destructive force, suggested in its smouldering appearance. It signals the aftermath of the destructive presence of fire.

Alongside the primary significance of clay in de Sagazan's work, fire and heat are arguably the second most significant elements in his making process. While the earth aspects of grass and clay bring physical form to his work, fire carries with it the key ingredient for alchemical transformation. In the esoteric sense, fire has a powerful association with transformative, destructive and unpredictable chaos. In de Sagazan's work, it is the primary means through which dehydration is made possible, resulting in the cementing of form.

As with clay and its suggestions of death and decomposition, fire provides an active building block for form and also evokes an ultimate destruction and annihilation. de Sagazan symbolically gives the sculpture life and sustainability through the application of fire, yet simultaneously suggests an otherworldly state of chaotic, unpredictable and transformative death. This is made clearer in the

final version of the *Untitled (Fallen Angel)* sculpture (fig 22b), where the work is photographed with a cloud of rising smoke as the flames die down.

de Sagazan's embodiment is situated at the juncture of a perplexingly complicated role in his capacity to make and create but also to un-make and destroy. It is in this role that I find the fifth esoteric element ordinarily referred to as spirit. de Sagazan is not just the conduit or tool through which his works are brought into being. He is the embodiment of all that constitutes his work to the extent that this is made possible through his bodily involvement in the process of making. He is the embodiment of a sculptural and spatialised process of perpetual becoming and otherworldly presence.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.1.3 Transfiguration and Hybridation

This chapter focuses on two on-going performative works: *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. The latter is a development on the performative experiments that de Sagazan initiated with *Transfiguration* and a progression from a solo performance, using his own body as both subject and place-related object, to a collaborative activity.

In *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, de Sagazan is seamlessly immersed in his performative self. He employs the recipe that he is already familiar with, deploying a variety of materials, ranging from clay, hay, sand, synthetic plumber's hair, acrylic paint to pigment dust, in a gradual process of self-application.<sup>49</sup> In addition to his personalised interest in the human form and its systems, he has an invested curiosity in how these materials evoke associations with ritualised transformation and complex identities. On his website, a caption directly alludes to the transition from human to non-human entity, as he is depicted "disfiguring himself with clay into a kind of monster. This half-man, half-beast is searching beneath his masks for who he is" (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b).

Thematic aspects emerge from this human / non-human binary that motivates de Sagazan's commentary on the contemporary human condition. Satire or folly, as well as questions of normalcy and morality, which implicate a mythological and imaginative content, are central themes in his

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<sup>48</sup> From foraging for collecting materials and the ritualised integration of his social and geographical contexts, to his intensely meditative and ritualised studio practice, de Sagazan immerses himself in the pragmatic and technological aspects of process. He activates a heightened sense of self and being through his intuitive responses to the forms he is producing.

<sup>49</sup> Locational, ambient or situational sound is incorporated as part of the audio-visual sequence.

work. The matter of materials, and how these operate as signifiers beyond the structural and aesthetic form of sculptural media, is an important entry point into de Sagazan's ritual processes and how this underpins these dominant narratives.

In June 1998, *Transfiguration*<sup>50</sup> was developed in de Sagazan's studio as part of a series of experimental exercises through which he seeks a means to engulf himself and become enmeshed in a performative process. In these formative experiments, immersivity and ritualised sensorial activation, as well as ritualised depravity, are driving conditions. Altering physical form through an iconography of transformation results in his typical mythical and imaginative beasts. Invoking inwardly organised metaconscious experiences, de Sagazan's humanoid creatures signify primordial and undefinable aspects of self, resulting in a poignant narrative commentary.<sup>51</sup>

Each version of *Transfiguration* (fig 3a, b & c) differs slightly although they share the same basic actions. To begin with, the artist is either seated or standing. He is dressed in a formal suit.

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<sup>50</sup> *Transfiguration* was first performed in 1998 and has since been enacted more than 300 times in 25 different countries (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]a & b). For the purposes of this research, I focus on three versions of the project.

<sup>51</sup> I purposefully present the quote in full as it offers a unique window into de Sagazan's thinking that filters through explicitly in his work:

I am in my workshop. I have been trying for weeks to give life to a sculpture. Suddenly an idea comes to me: I want to immerse myself in the matter – that way, I will be sure to make a lively structure. I place a camera in front of me, surround myself with material I use to sculpt and paint, and then I begin. My head is a pedestal, I work blindly, with my internal perception as my only guide. I cover my face with a layer of clay, then make a first sculpted face, which I erase rapidly. I try again and again. These masks are moveable and transformed at the stroke of the hand. Everything is touch here: my hands explore my modelled face, and my faces feel the deformation of the clay. It spreads across my chest and my limbs and I feel my body in a way I have never experienced before. What guides me is also what I am looking for: this inner perception that constitutes selfhood. What I have recorded fascinates me: I see half-men, half-beasts, between African fetish masks and Francis Bacon's meat heads. Despite myself, the painter is also a painting and this living painting is also a dance. I have repeated and amplified this experience, this performance, with other actors and dancers on stage. The sight of naked bodies covered in clay, deformed by it, and turned into worm-like creatures is startling to both the dancers and spectators. I am currently working this vision into a theatre piece. Clay forces you to improvise and take risks: masks magnify presence and at the scale of the body or bodies, this presence becomes truly impressive. This practice carries us to unknown terrain, close to primitive dance and trance. There is no such thing as inert matter. All matter is sensitive, alive. I am matter; you and I are Earth! I love works of art, whether in painting or dance, where traces of the body are visible: hesitations, failures, and those that are lost in acts of folly. These traces speak of life and the mystery of its origins. To be alive is to feel lost. All the rest is a pose, or lies we tell ourselves. We have all felt this over the last year and the waking nightmare we lived through in the flesh will mark us forever: prohibited touch, distorted faces, banned meetings. May Venice, city of masks and carnivals, be the place where we truly feel each other again (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b).

Impulsively, he applies clay and other detrital materials to his head and face. Gradually he transforms into a hybridised demonic-like creature with nightmarish features, framed in a state of perpetual becoming. This narrative of fluidly moving between states of form echoes the experience of trance-like shamanic processes. The ritualised body is a site of narrative subjectivity, brought about through an interaction with the physiologically embodied self, foregrounding the importance of an animistic and shamanic event. de Sagazan's physical body is a powerful tool and agent in the shift in meaning motivated by his intuitive manipulation of material. An impulsivity sets in motion the represented body as a contested place, through which the protagonist is seen to be held in a state of ritualised becoming. A resonant effect extends through the body of the artist, into the material he uses and the processes that he employs.

de Sagazan's intentionally shifting bodily motif is a device he emphasises in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation* to destabilise any fixed relation between himself as the artist and protagonist, as well as himself and his physical location in space. Through an intuitive process of making, these once grounding markers – artist, protagonist, space – give way to an uncertainty in the physical experience of reality. Through the deprivation of senses that are submerged in material, and the resulting heightening of other senses, such as touch and hearing, his general being becomes acutely attuned to an expansive void or nothingness. It is in this abysmal space of nothingness that his experience of being physically anchored is suspended and replaced by a powerful animism. Through process he emerges into a matrix of consciousness that extends beyond the limits of his own body. In this nonplace of being, an ever-shifting and multidimensional character is visually invoked. Through the iconography of masquerade, bodily alteration and monstrosity, a mythical, monstrous and hybridised creature in a perpetual state of trance-like becoming appears. The ritualised body transcends the physical and material realm of cognitive resonance and slips between states of placeness and placeless-ness.<sup>52</sup>

Hybridity, as imaged in *Hybridation*, directly references ritual transformation and the resultant complexity of identity. Boundaries, frontiers, surfaces, features and sheaths of disparate phenomena

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<sup>52</sup> In a short narrative passage on his website, de Sagazan (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b) explains this in relation to the idea of an alternative sense of self: "Yet the material blinds him and he is forced to look inward, into the very depths of himself ... In *Transfiguration*, he gives new meaning to the notion of life, offering a captivating, disturbing and stirring glimpse into an alternative selfhood utterly unconstrained by inhibition".

come together and amalgamate into a unitary and singular form. In *Hybridation*, the participants are depicted abandoning themselves through the gradual addition and subtraction of clay, in a process where identity (a sense of self) is measured through an interrelation with the other. This illustrates two points of contact: first, through a singular experience in which each performer relinquishes and dissolves aspects of themselves, and, second, through the tactile and gestural manipulation of material, both figures gradually become a unitary body through formal amalgamation. Form and gesture extend to emotional responses made possible through physical interaction with self and other in real time. Material aspects of this interaction – of hybridising through physical and emotional integration – accentuate an acute awareness of self and other in a unified sensorially driven experience. In *Hybridation*, (fig 15b & c) performed with Stephanie Sant, two participants are involved. One is male, the other is female. The work is an extension of de Sagazan’s experiment with clay in previous versions, stemming from his initial experiments in June 1998. An exception is evident. While toying with parody, satire and folly, this work presents a shift to a more subtle narrative of monstrosity that sees two figures transform through the medium of clay and pigment. Identity is obliterated as the figures gradually engulf each other, becoming a hybrid entity or being. A binary narrative is extended in bodily gesture and pose in an exposition of resistance and reciprocity, division and fusion, as well as “rivalry and love” (de Sagazan [Sa]b).

de Sagazan’s intuitively driven and experimental working approach and the extreme ritualised conditions that inform his making process are commensurate. Through process, he thinks and responds intuitively and impulsively. An interesting tension exists between the difficulty and, at times, unforgiving plasticity of the clay medium and themes of resistance and subversion in his work. Both are forthright and challenging, affording the artist the necessary means to articulate personal ideas about himself and the collective human condition.<sup>53</sup>

There is a place that the practitioner enters in ritual that is beyond prosaic behaviour, a place that transcends the rational and conscious condition. This suggests a sensorial starting point for an otherworldly experience that is not easily defined and even less easily understood. In de Sagazan’s

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<sup>53</sup> In an interview he was asked the question: “Do you think your art is subversive?” To which he answered: “Like every artist, I try to get out of this collective hallucination in which we live and that makes us believe that everything is normal in this world, while, in reality, the World and our presence represent incredibly, at the same time, strange, disturbing and magnificent things” (Cicinelli 2020).

practice, ritual operates conceptually and visually. It is embodied through the materiality of the media he uses. This embodiment carries experiential consequences. The artist's processes and methods are driven by impromptu and instinctive actions that lie outside of – as well as in critical relation to – socially encoded experiences. The place of the ritualised body signifies a form of detachment through a narrative of shamanic-like trance. Through a trance state induced by the manipulation of sculptural materials such as clay, hay, fire, water and pigment, the artist is able to temporarily suspend his current place-specific circumstances and the dominant social codes that give this meaning.

## **3.2 RITUAL, INTUITION AND CREATIVITY**

### **3.2.1 Introductory comments**

Observing de Sagazan's working process prompts an idea that his intuitive approach requires an understanding of impulses beyond the literal place of the studio. How is his creative process made explicitly intuitive? What aspects of creativity as a process suggest a means by which the artist taps into other realms of consciousness? Why and how is this significant in his ritualised approach to art making? To address these questions, I look at an interface between intuition as a physically enacted occurrence, and intuition as something generated through a metaphysical condition. I focus on how this interface operates through ritualised processes to evoke the otherworldly.

### **3.2.2 Intuition, metaphysics and creativity**

Bergson's (1970) formulation of intuition as an integral aspect of metaphysics is useful for two reasons. First, it provides a base on to which to build formative conceptions and definitions for intuition and intuitive thinking, as these become relevant in a discussion of ritualised action. To extend this, I will also refer to Polanyi's (1958) seminal observations. Second, Bergson's formulations are at the root of scholarly discussions about the conceptualising of somewhat elusive notion of metaphysics and how this informs intuitive action. One recent example of this is Hardman's (2019) PhD study on creative intuition. Her work follows a thread that traces intuitive thinking in the ways that it informs a creative process. She effectively locates this as an experience of metaphysical phenomena and shows how this provides a valuable source to theoretically contextualise an art process that is ritualistically inclined.

Bergson (1970:107) begins his chapter on philosophical intuition by observing how "metaphysics at

present is tending to become more simplified, to draw closer to life". In this brief statement, Bergson makes a case for a shift away from metaphysics as a discourse separate and disconnected from the present context of real-time experience. Bergson looks more closely at intuition from an embodied perspective, and recognises in it a close correlation of a previously distanced shadow self and the immediacy of a present condition. Citing Bergson, Hardman (2019:133-134) reflects on how intuition is the kind of cognition we use in non-intellectual acts of consciousness, such as sympathy or aesthetic appreciation and creative expression. It enables an effort to get inside the object that it depicts.

The natural progression is to think about intuition as something beyond the present moment of action. This requires looking further than simply the performance of impulsive actions. Intuitive impulses are symbolically represented in the present moment. Applying the lens of metaphysics to this condition reins in the abstract and complex physical appearance of intuitive thinking. Bergson's (1970:109) account of this relationship extends this point:

What is this intuition? If the philosopher has not been able to give the formula for it, we certainly are not able to do so. But what we shall manage to recapture and to hold is a certain intermediary image between the simplicity of the concrete intuition and the complexity of the abstractions which translate it, a receding and vanishing image, which haunts, unperceived perhaps, the mind of the philosopher, which follows him like his shadow through the ins and outs of his thought and which, if it is not the intuition itself, approaches it much more closely than the conceptual expression, of necessity symbolical, to which the intuition must have recourse in order to furnish "explanation".

To fully grasp intuitive actions, requires that one is granted access into the symbolic order that gives rise to these actions. Extending his point about the philosopher's shadow, Bergson (1970:109) explains this as an intimately embodied condition: "Let us look closely at this shadow: by doing so we shall divine the attitude of the body which projects it. And if we try to imitate this attitude, or better still to assume it ourselves, we shall see as far as it is possible what the philosopher saw". I maintain that this symbolic relation happens in the present moment of the creative act. It sets off a chain of creative events that evokes undefinable metaphysical conditions. In de Sagazan's work, these creative events are enacted as concentrated ritualised events.

Aspects of de Sagazan's methods such as visionary experiences that reside beyond a fixed point in the present stimulate his imagination. These are tacitly concealed and not easily discernible. His

intuitive actions preside over access to visionary experiences beyond a fixed point in the present when his imagination is stimulated. In their comments on modern art and its ability to make meaning of a rubbished, chaotic and nihilistic world condition, Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch (1975:116) discuss how visionary experiences transcend a present reality through the power of symbolic action: "It accentuates the decomposition of meaning by crying out against it, but its power to transcend this decomposition by new ranges of visionary experience has revealed to us new worlds of imagination". This is a determining factor in creative processes involving ritualised action. Polanyi and Prosch (1975:117) refer to the symbolic value of actions: "An action without interest of its own may acquire interest by embodying some other action of essential importance and become, therefore, a symbolic action". They highlight the power of metaphor in this relation when "the symbolic action also bears some resemblance to that which it embodies – to that which it stands for. Such a symbolic action then becomes metaphorical as well" (Polanyi & Prosch 1975:117). Symbolic and metaphorical systems, gestures and objects are a conceptual basis for imaginative thinking in de Sagazan's ritualised practice. The function of action to stimulate imagination provides a creative conduit between unseen or unrecognised phenomena, and occurs in the intimacy of the present moment. His process involves little preparatory planning and relies almost exclusively on the present conditions and circumstances of creative production.

de Sagazan's context is, by default, an extension of his dissatisfaction with normative global and societal conditions. His conscious criticality of a present and real-time social encoding and societal grooming makes allowance for a rich influx of imaginative stimuli. I locate this specifically as a consequence of his ritualised approach. For this I recognise parallels in Polanyi's and Prosch's (1975:117) observations: "All such occasions, like poetry and other works of art, break into the course of our current occupations and set free the imagination from the cares of the day ... the basic techniques and instrumental material used by these arts detach them quite definitely from the course of our normal experiences". The intimacy of present moments in time in de Sagazan's process contradicts the conventional timelessness inscribed in ritual contexts. Intimacy is framed as an unscripted condition in his practice.

Ritual-based impulses are timeless and abstract and, in conventional ceremonial contexts, are enacted in rites that are seemingly banal due to their repetitive and mundane nature. Polanyi and Prosch (1975:119) recognise in this a misalignment with the real conditions of everyday life. They

refer to the contemporary attitude that sees the fabric of imagination as “artificial” and “unoriginal” in the way these phenomena are situated outside of the rational and real-time context of everyday lived experience. In de Sagazan’s working methods the inverse is true. His ritual-based work is closely aligned and interlaced with the context of his current lived experience. Yet it is the perceived artificiality or predictability of ritual conventions that foregrounds an effective imaginative condition. Polanyi and Prosch (1975:119) allude to this aspect of imaginative condition when they note that: “It is the very artificiality of traditional forms that enables them to act as a framework, detaching the events to which they apply and thus endowing them with a forceful and lasting quality through the work of our own luminous imaginative powers”. de Sagazan’s creative process is therefore an integrated network of embodied, present and external imaginative possibility. The physicality of his sensorial self and the abstract and intuitively derived stimuli and impulses that direct his actions and gestures point to what Shorter (1996:5) in his comments on creativity in ritual circumstances, infers as an “inspired creativity”, which involves a “mysterious process in which the intrinsic wholeness of the human personality is enlivened by a significance which outlasts the production itself”.

### **3.2.3 Ritual multimodality**

In de Sagazan’s process, the ritualised body is the locus of emotional and physical impulses, through which the artist undergoes a series of self-inflicted and intuitively driven actions. The result is a sculptural approach that involves bodily action and, through this, a heightened awareness. To assist in the theoretical placement of ritual in everyday experience, I refer to *Ritual communication* by Gunter Senft and Ellen Basso (2009). Their focus on how meaning is generated through encounters in real time and space, and how these impact significantly on an experience of otherworldly states brought about through concentrated moments of physical, sensorial and emotional events, provides a theoretical backdrop for my analysis of de Sagazan’s work throughout this chapter. From a sociopsychological perspective, a multimodal ritual experience prioritises the effect of an embodied self. This brings together “[t]he human body, temporalization, and formally categorized spatial settings” (Senft & Basso 2009:2). The artist’s emotional presence foregrounds “meanings and values of remembered past events, made manifest through special verbal registers, costuming, and musical activities, [and offers] strategies for constructing links to contemporary social settings, with the aim of constructing new or refigured communicative practices” (Senft & Basso 2009:2). Personal inflections on both a physical, emotional and psychological level make up the totality of a

multimodal ritualised experience (Senft & Basso 2009:3). Put differently, the artist's experience is an inwardly as well as outwardly driven socio-centric state, filtered through the embodied self.<sup>54</sup> In no way does this exclude a consideration of an emotional impact. Rather, it is accentuated. The embodied self necessitates a totalising and integral effect, especially through the socio-centric filter it engages. However, in de Sagazan's case, the emotional impact carries a weight that surpasses the physical impact, when the ritual action enables an experience of things beyond the present condition.

Emotional states inform how imagination works in ritualised processes. I couch this as a psycho-social explanation for the way this presents consequences for a physical or enacted experience. In an edited volume of essays called *Emotions in rituals and performances*, Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf (2012) cover a vast field of emotional, psychological and religious contexts of practice. They draw attention to the emotional underpinning of the ritualised body by identifying a praxis they refer to as a "bio-social character".<sup>55</sup> As noted earlier, emotions stem from various triggers that reside within the embodied aspect as well as emanating from external stimuli. The latter is acknowledged by the authors as a product of social and/or cultural influences (what I previously refer to as a socio-centric state), and extends to tacit phenomena that reside in the human capacity for creative action. In the propagative process, these are not yet visually developed, predictable or perceptible. Michaels and Wulf (2012:10) offer a credible reason for this: "Many emotions can be described as fluid ... They overlap with previous emotions and form ensembles of emotions. In this process imagination plays an important role; it contributes to the selection and updating of emotional dispositions". The artist's emotional state mirrors a physical experience in an outward (socio-centric) as much as inward (psycho-centric) orientation. In challenging the idea of an inward orientation as a sole source for emotional expression, Michaels and Wulf (2012:12) note that "there is a difference between the material processes in the body and the immaterial processes in the soul, both of which would not exist without the materiality of the body". Scholarly discussions around

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<sup>54</sup> Senft and Basso (2009:3) describe this experience as a "highly 'self-oriented' enterprise, in which human imagination and the dialogical figuration of sociality produce important reflexive 'sites' or 'centers'".

<sup>55</sup> Michaels and Wulf (2012:10) elaborate on this: "Emotions are understood here not as physically fixed phenomena, but also not merely as social or cultural constructions. It is rather the case that one proceeds on the assumption of their bio-social character".

emotional capacity and embodiment have noted this to be an unresolved problem.<sup>56</sup>

Emotional states bring into scope a transformational effect. Emotional intensity feeds the transformative function of ritual. Drawing on the effects of a mapped network of interrelated social relationships, H Tristram Engelhardt Jr (2012:35) lists a series of points that describe this exchange. Ritual activities not only invite but also train “participants to act and feel in accordance with a particular geography of metaphysical, axiological, and a particular enveloping fabric of social relation and ... political reality” (Engelhardt 2012:35). Of all Engelhardt’s points, the most important for my discussion of de Sagazan’s ritualised processes is how rituals are “transformative of reality”. He explains further: “They are transubstantiating in changing the metaphysical character of what they address [and] in some cases transform the nature of things” (Engelhardt 2012:35). Emotions are generated partly through a rigidity and adherence to tradition but, more importantly, through “openness and flexibility that necessitate transformative power and creativity of emotions in the context of rituals” (Michaels & Wulf 2012:20-21). Shorter (1996) locates the transformative potential that gives rise to human self-development and advancement through ritual theoretically from a Jungian perspective. Shorter’s (1996:x) contribution to the discussion of a transformative function of ritual brings into focus the importance of a multifaceted and interrelated experience, with unpredictable, surprising and volatile outcomes.

de Sagazan’s intuitive arrangement of actions and gestures makes allowance for a ludic feature that further defines the ritualised act in his performances. Emotion is expressed visually and plays an important part in this process when “the topicality and ability to express and represent the ritual occurrence in emotional terms” (Michaels & Wulf 2012:20) is increased. Represented emotion is made prominent in the way it carries through in playful actions and gestures that are a consequence of representational strategies such as satire, parody and folly. In de Sagazan’s work, an intensification of an emotional investment is brought to bear through satirical and parodied themes in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation* and notably in work such as *Aux abois* (2014) (fig 24), *Le dictateur* (2022) (fig 25) and *La messe de l’âne* (2021) (fig 26). Emotional intensity is a key ingredient in unlocking a creative process that flows from both his lived experience and the metaphysical context of his subconscious state. This propels de Sagazan on an authentic self-made path of cohesive

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<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these debates, refer to Michaels and Wulf (2012:13).

creative involvement.

The immersive and embodied ritual experience takes on a particular form of expression in performative arts practices. A momentary slip from the rational world of conscious thinking through a dream-state of sleep or a euphoric state brought on by extreme bodily exertion, is where the unconscious and conscious meet. This is important for understanding de Sagazan's use of intuitive processes. In general terms, an immersive experience describes an encounter when the artist's capacity for seeing is replaced by an inner vision. A thought is momentarily spliced with other non-related imagery, conjured through the workings of the subconscious. There is no rational explanation for how this montage of mind-images emerges or how the elements relate. The artist is wrenched from this sliding conscious state into the rational world of cognitive processing. A state of irrationality brings imagery together in ways that cannot easily be explained without the complexities of a neuroscientific approach. de Sagazan's intuitive process of an induced trance-like state, is no different. In *Il nous est arrivé quelque chose* (2023) (fig 27) he presents a representation of bodily trauma when an extreme bodily activity is announced through excessive hydration and punishing cardiovascular exercise. In this work the representation of an extreme modality with a acute sense of emotion is foregrounded. A version of this performance was presented at la Frontière des Arts et de la Science in March 2023.<sup>57</sup> A line of a caption on de Sagazan's website,<sup>58</sup> describes how: "A deep alchemy manifests itself which seems to reveal an entanglement of the body with the cosmos." This entanglement refers to a transition between a physical and the metaphysical consciousness brought about through extreme bodily activity made possible by his location in a large Perspex cylinder gradually filling with water. The theme of blood, circulatory systems and life force is abundantly referenced in the video visuals through the projected imagery of an electrocardiogram

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<sup>57</sup> The work was performed in collaboration with musicians Pierre Chéguillaume and Alexis Delong with sound specialization by Rodrigue de Sa, video and lighting production by Guillaume Ménard and Antoine Desprez and voice-over text by Renaud Barbaras (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b).

<sup>58</sup> de Sagazan's website (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b) provides a telling description of the work:

On stage, a man connected to numerous sensors enters a test tube 2 meters high. He begins a race on the spot and his electrocardiogram draws his physiological state live. His increasing breathing, body noises and voice are taken up by 2 sound artists who shape the musical tempo live, just as video and light interact with the state of the performer. In search of a 'radicalization of sensory experience', the performer enunciates live words and thoughts that come to mind. His tongue stumbles, his alphabet falls apart and madness takes over when the subject wonders about the origin of the words that are born in his mouth.

heartbeat motif. de Sagazan is jogging on the spot in the human-sized glass cylinder or test tube against a large video screen back drop of projected differentiated visuals, music and an amplified voice-over. His gestures range from exhaustion, anguish to desperation. The clip ends with him gasping for breath.

Through ritualised work in this and other performances, the bodily self (that seat of ego awareness) dissolves into, or gives way to, a phenomenon beyond the limited world of scale, time and space. Using ritually induced trance, de Sagazan becomes an integral part of a formless flow that is fathomless and incomprehensible. This point has applications in other aspects of de Sagazan's practice and prompts a directed commentary on the relations between ritual, place, intuition and process. His emotive and extreme working method is inherently intuitive and this is a significant marker of place in his work. The artist's implementation of ritualised action is important in the processes he employs in his performances. Intuition and place interrelate as enablers of otherworldly narratives brought into effect through a rich visual mediation of imagery and sound. Mediated imagery, physical performance and sound are necessary ingredients in the construction of narrative meaning in de Sagazan's work. I argue that through this de Sagazan engenders an embodied sense of process that extends beyond a mere manipulation of sculptural materials and objects. In *Il nous est arrivé quelque chose* and other works such as *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation* focused, frenetic and ritualised auditory and visual aspects allow the artist to tap into multidimensional states of consciousness that give form to a representation of otherworldly narratives.

The implementation of olfactory, auditory and visual aspects of his performative process also occur instinctively in some works. For example, in my observation of the making of *Untitled (Fallen Angel)*, I noted how de Sagazan prepares the studio space by making provision for the work in respect of space, tools and materials. Then, to initiate the process ritualistically, he uses the burning of locally sourced grasses and hay. He also uses his own voice (humming) as a means to focus and enter a conducive state for creative work. This is different, for example, to the character he transforms into in *Sanctus Nemorensis* (2010/11) (fig 28), which bears a strong resemblance to the creatures produced in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. The difference lies primarily in the materials used and how these are somewhat prepared and staged. In the latter works he uses clay, hay, plumber's hair, plaster of Paris and pigments. In *Sanctus Nemorensis*, materials are readily available through the

artist's direct engagement in the out-of-doors with objects, materials and surfaces in the streams, meadows and forest setting.

de Sagazan's studio floor consists of raw sand and soil. To make *Untitled (Fallen Angel)* and other works in his studio, he uses sand dug directly from the studio floor and combines this with clay, hay and other materials. There is a physical intimacy in the way he digs into the earth of the studio floor, which is a significant part of his production process. The resulting artwork emerges not only as a product of ritualised embodied experiences but also directly and explicitly from the studio itself. This has implications for his stand-alone sculptures, which thus carry with them layered and residual traces of the artist's bodily activity – including the integration of olfactory and auditory elements – and of the studio as a place. In *Sanctus Nemorensis*, the inclusion of materials and objects in the form of naturally sourced materials, such as clay, grass and twigs, carries with it an alternative inflection as a result of materials collected from the site in which the performance was enacted.

In the section that follows, a broader platform onto which to scaffold the analysis of key iconographic, narrative and process-led factors in de Sagazan's performances, is presented. I focus on how ritualistic processes are defined and re-defined through an intuitive working method and an unwavering conceptual as well as literal connection to place. I will consider implicit as well as connotative aspects of his working methodology and extend the analysis into exacting and demonstrative notions of place, and how this interfaces denotatively with elements that evoke otherworldly narratives.

### **3.3 RITUAL RE-DEFINED**

#### **3.3.1 Introductory comments**

To suggest a definitive singular definition for the word ritual in relation de Sagazan's work is problematic, given the widely discursive application of the term in a plethora of cultural, religious, spiritual, and historical contexts.<sup>59</sup> Referring to specific features of ritual, such as performance, formality, invariance, utterances and encoding procedures, a leading scholar on the subject, Roy Rappaport (1999:24; emphasis original) offers the following: "I take the term 'ritual' to denote *the*

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<sup>59</sup> Roy Rappaport (1999:24) extends this by referring to its wide application in the social sciences, including psychiatry, anthropology, sociology and ethology.

*performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*". Encoded process is a key defining element in thinking around ritual contexts that are less easily recognised. In a study of inter-participative strategies in religious rituals, Marianne Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:1) contends that "Ritual participation is a multifaceted phenomenon that takes many forms, depending on (1) the context in which it occurs, (2) the intention that undergirds the sharing of ritual, (3) the nature of the ritual performed, and (4) the religious communities involved". With de Sagazan's process-specific practice and the significance of place and context in his work, the issue of the multi-layered and interrelational aspects embedded in the word's definition is appropriate. An embodied intuitive method of working, as well as the significance of place, are determining factors in de Sagazan's performances. These formative criteria are useful in examining aspects of de Sagazan's practice that resist and invert conventional ritual acts in a gesture of defiance that serves his disillusionment with the contemporary human condition.

A brief overview of types of ritual can be useful in situating de Sagazan's practice. In her discussion, Ana Iltis (2012:17-28)<sup>60</sup> refers to six types of ritual. These include rites of passage, most notably those involving an initiation into a social order or hierarchy; calendar rites which are designed to mark the passage of time especially in relation to calendar events or events determined through astrological or astronomical contexts; rites of exchange and communion, which are described as "offerings to a god or gods with the practical and straightforward expectation of receiving something in return"; and rites of affliction, referring to rituals designed to appease a deity or "mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune' or '... to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify'" (Bell quoted by Iltis 2012:19). The last two types she discusses are arguably among the most common ritualised activities. She describes these as "feasting, fasting, and festivals" that highlight "public display[s] of religio-cultural sentiments" (Bell quoted by Iltis 2012:19). The final category is ceremonial political rites that "specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups'" (Bell quoted by Iltis 2012:19).

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<sup>60</sup> Iltis (2012:28) makes specific reference to two scholars and their authoritative publications: Orrin E. Klapp. 1965. *Ritual and cult: a sociological Interpretation*. Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, and Catherine Bell. 1997. *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions*, New York: Oxford.

How these ritualised occurrences, gestures and utterances serve to reinforce and validate a dominant socio-political or religious-cultural hierarchical order is significant in this study. While embedded in ritualised content and process, de Sagazan's work resists many of the defining criteria around which traditional conceptions of ritual are built. Instead of validating, promoting or reinforcing existing social and moral codes, he actively dismantles them or, at the very least, provides a means by which they can be challenged, deconstructed and refigured. His approach to ritualised action stems from his highly personalised and embodied sense of place, memory and history, as well as an astute aversion to systems of social control.

In the highly specialised context of de Sagazan's process, a further proviso to this discussion is necessary. Performative and spatial arts practices, such as his, are brought into the public sphere through various mediated forms such as video and photo documentation. This can be seen as problematic. Ronald Grimes (2006) presents a focused study of ritual in relation to differentiated media modalities. Beginning with general comments around the separation of ritual and media contexts, Grimes (2006:3) observes: "Media not only intruded upon but also profaned ritual". However, a growing need for, and shift in the importance of, digital and audio recordings is made more pronounced through the individuation of mobile technology and the usefulness of social media platforms. Grimes (2006:4) notes how the symbiotic relations between media and ritual events has become foregrounded in scholarly contexts. Rather than being separated as irreconcilable discourses, Grimes (2006:4; emphasis original) observes: "The media, some claim, *are* ritual in contemporary form. However, when a metaphor (media *as* ritual) collapses into a simple identity (media *are* ritual), both terms can become useless". The base line here is that the relation of media forms (the means and mode by which ritual is documented and presented) and ritual (the subject of media processes) cannot be oversimplified. The relation between the two remains a critical point of complexity in the "ways in which media and ritual interact" (Grimes 2006:4).

de Sagazan's work is produced, documented and disseminated in ways that bring attention to his ritualised process. First, it assists in questioning the purpose and functionality of digital technology that is at once a means by which a performance is recorded and documented, but also a conduit through which it is represented in a public context. Editing, cinematography, set, lighting and direction construct a filmic narrative that deviates from an experience of the work in situ. He makes use of these devices extensively in performances that have a theatrical or staged purpose. Second,

through official organisational or institutional channels including festivals and galleries and, more importantly, through his own personal marketing activities on social media platforms such as Instagram, the impact of ritual and process becomes a teasing cinematic fragment or visual trace of the initial event or activity. This is not disabling and certainly should not be construed as an ineffective means by which the ritualised performance is presented. Rather, these conventions are an integral part of the technological process used to produce and distribute the work.

The relations between ritual and media are nuanced and neither explicit nor implied (Grimes 2006:7). Grimes (2006:7) draws on several scholarly contexts to demonstrate this. At a key point in Grimes's discussion, he includes a reference to Gregor Goethal's (1981) argument about bringing "explicit rites and tacit ritualisation processes" into the ambit of mediated broadcast programming. Goethal (cited by Grimes 2006:7) observes how ritual is associated with "order, rhythmic patterning, and play, on the one hand, and with things mystical and supernatural, on the other". Grimes (2006:7) makes reference to the similarities between TV viewing and ritualised activity, presumably referring to how TV has a dumbing down effect on the viewer in its immersive impact or how viewing regular programming follows timed scheduling as one might find in some observant ritual behaviour. However, Grimes (2006:7) challenges these notions directly when he mentions Bobby Alexander's (1994) defining comments of ritual involving alternative contexts of realisation through transformative acts of improvised actions in mediated theatrical religious contexts. Offering a caution, Grimes (2006:7) explains that "equating them [ritual and drama], like equating ritual with media, only confuses matters". Citing Alexander directly, Grimes (2006:7) notes how ritual transforms everyday experiences "especially everyday human encounters". However, a critical concern is lodged when he insists that "[t]ransformation is announced but not really accomplished" (Grimes 2006:8).<sup>61</sup> In my analysis of *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, and other examples, I maintain that the mediated presentation of the video recorded performance – to quote Grimes (2006:8) – is not in itself a transformational aspect of the work and that the core ritualised process that takes place in real time is what ultimately carries the impact of the work's visual and conceptual effect. In tandem with de Sagazan's real-time actions and gestures, a multimediated production may affect

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<sup>61</sup> It is to be noted that Grimes (2006:7-13) offers an extensive critical overview of the scholarly means through which the complex relation between ritual and media modalities is offered in recent publications. For reasons of scope, I have opted not to extend on this aspect of his study here.

what the performance is about and how narrative meaning is constructed but remains a filmic trace of the original event.

The theatrical and performative nature of ritual and how this is brought into a public sphere in de Sagazan's case is noteworthy. Ritual and media flow together as enacted processes (Grimes 2006:11) yet through the agency of filmic media narratives risk becoming abstract, provocative and unverifiable in their myth-making capacity. Grimes (2006:11; emphasis original) brings attention to the underlying aspect of ritual enactment in its myth-generating capacity: "Such mythmaking also reminds us that the media are not only electronic, printed, or spoken but also enacted. Ritual, like television, *is* a medium of communication, an enacted one ... ritual is a multimediation, a synthesis of drama, storytelling, dance, and art. A conundrum presents itself and prompts further questions. First, to what extent does ritual as a medium of communication hold true for de Sagazan's performative works and, second, how do narrative themes such as myth and ritualised transformation reconcile to enable an intuitive creative agenda? In de Sagazan's performances, a merger occurs between myth as represented truth – narrative mythmaking, following what Grimes (2006:11) refers to as storytelling – and myth as performed content. I expand on this in the section that follows.

### **3.3.2 Ritual and mythical narratives**

To further extend his performance oeuvre, de Sagazan explores a broader collaborative context in which he functions as both artist (and in this sense objective producer) as well as collaborating participant and integrated subject. This is true for the 2021 version of *Nos coeurs en terre* where he worked with the poet and writer, David Wahl, at the Festival d'Avignon.<sup>62</sup> Differently articulated to works such as *Hybridation* where he is integrally part of the subject content, and similar in many ways to the performance he enacted on me when I visited him in his studio, these works present less of a merging of characters and more of an active role by de Sagazan as collaborating participant. In the video on his website (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b),<sup>63</sup> it is only after approximately 20 minutes, at the 19:15 time mark of the video clip, that he begins to transform himself, after

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<sup>62</sup> *Nos coeurs en terre* was also performed repeatedly in 2022 and 2023, with Wahl as collaborating participant.

<sup>63</sup> The video can be viewed through the following link: <https://olivierdesagazan.com/nos-coeurs-en-terre> (de Sagazan [Sa]b) as well as on his Instagram account (de Sagazan [Sa]a).

conducting considerable work on Wahl. Throughout the performance, Wahl directs an oration, at times this is aimed directly at de Sagazan. He relates and narrates a story about the animistic life of stones.<sup>64</sup>

A variant of this performance includes numerous participants and sees de Sagazan collaborating with artists, dancers and other performers. The performance *La messe de l'âne*, including a multitude of performers, extends the idea formulated in the singular aspect of *Transfiguration* and the hybridised aspect in *Hybridation*. A similar process of transformation is “applied to the six dancers in his creation *La messe de l'âne*. Demonstrators, priests, politicians, scientists, prisoners and patients are all, with the help of clay, undergoing transformations that are emerging from the position they occupy in society” (de Sagazan [Sa]b).

A further development happens in a multi-collaborative work entitled *Hands do not touch your precious me* (2021-2022) (fig 29). Here de Sagazan delves into a more explicit mystical aspect by referencing ancient religious practices. Specific reference is made to mythological contexts, in this case, ancient Sumerian deities.<sup>65</sup> The Sumerian goddess Innana’s descent into the underworld, and a reference to the limits of human existence, connotes risk and danger. de Sagazan develops a richly layered performance, pulling together previously enacted themes stemming from *Transfiguration*. In collaboration with key figures, such as Belgian choreographer, Wim Vandekeybus, and the composer and music producer, Charo Calvo, de Sagazan commands an intricate combination of dance, theatricality, sound and music. *Hands do not touch your precious me* is described as “a mythical tale of confrontation and transformation, light and darkness, death and rebirth”, embodying a visual play

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<sup>64</sup> Wahl is a poet and writer whose ideas align strongly with those of de Sagazan. He is cited as follows:  
Olivier de Sagazan like me are [sic] obsessed with metamorphoses, transformations. His material is clay. He sculpts it, creates a new skin, a body to write about. My subject matter is stories; often little-known stories, sometimes incredible but always true, born from meetings with scientists and researchers. This work with Olivier de Sagazan is an opportunity to explore the mineral, the origin of our world. Mythical stories make clay the material of creation. Have rocks always been considered inert? What are their interactions with living things? What if the latest scientific discoveries revealed unexpected and poetic links between mineral species and biological ecosystems? (de Sagazan [Sa]b).

<sup>65</sup> On his website, de Sagazan explains this in relation to the work’s title:  
The poetic, mysterious title is a verse taken from a hymn by the Sumerian High Priestess Enheduanna to the goddess Inanna. Of all the myths surrounding the goddess Inanna, her spectacular descent into the underworld is the most intriguing. Innana is the divine embodiment of the paradoxes of human existence, and her deeds are a reflection of the tensions and contradictions that every person is forced to navigate in life (de Sagazan [Sa]b).

of the “utopian and the gruesome, the powerful and the fragile” (de Sagazan [Sa]b). Through his signature work with clay, hay and pigment, de Sagazan expands the process into a reciprocal response to Calvo’s electroacoustic music.

The reference to ancient pagan and mythological contexts is also depicted in other works, such as *Ghost in the mud* (2015) (fig 30), *Batammariba* (2010) (fig 31) and *Sanctus Nemorensis*. Likening archetypal goddess imagery to his work with clay and its symbolic and metaphorical reference to earth and flesh, de Sagazan writes: “You and I are the earth, don't forget this intuition, the clay and the earth are like flesh in the making, already sensitive” (*Ghost in the Mud* [Sa]). Reminiscent of a state of creation, his work with deity imagery and archetypal goddess themes suggests the primordial aspects of being, exemplified in the material conditions of place. *Ghost in the mud* is enacted in a clay pit, evoking a coming into being, but also suggesting self-inflicted harm and ritualistic purging in the visual metaphor of faecal matter. De Sagazan comes to terms literally and figuratively with his own bodily waste in an intimate relationship with the encoded and socially sanctioned self. The metaphor of faecal waste is affirming in its implication of a primordial state of divine creation, but it also undermines the morally and socially constructed self through its reference to defecation and waste.

An uncanny effect is developed which extends previous themes of risk, mutilation and potential danger (de Sagazan [Sa]a).<sup>66</sup> Impulsive and intuitive work with clay is visually and auditorily combined with impromptu performative gestures and utterances to bring into effect a dystopian visual narrative that, through the inclusion of mythological content, suggests a conceptual spatial extension across time and a strong evocation of otherworldly phenomena.

### 3.3.3 Death and resurrection

Ritual themes of death and resurrection reoccur in both *Batammariba* and *Sanctus Nemorensis*. In *Batammariba*, the figure sits crouched at the edge of the brightly illuminated watery clay pit. About halfway through the video, it slides into a bath that is heated. Steam is shown rising from the bath as the figure slowly submerges. Towards the end of the performance the cinematic effects shift to a solarised impression, where the figure rapidly levitates upwards and out of the watery pit.<sup>67</sup> The two

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<sup>66</sup> Here I refer to clips de Sagazan includes in his Instagram account.

<sup>67</sup> This scene was shot in reverse and then edited into the video for effect.

performances *Batammariba* and *Sanctus Nemorensis* relate strongly as a continued narrative of ritual action. In *Batammariba* a cleansing and purification ritual is performed, which is a logical precondition to the implied baptismal death and resurrection, when the figure submerges entirely and then rapidly ascends in the last few seconds of the clip. The work prefigures *Ghost in the Mud* where the protagonist, now redeemed, is re-birthed from a primordial state.

The title of *Sanctus Nemorensis* refers to the sanctuary of the woods or grove. The use of Latin in the title contributes a further layer of ancient mysticism, suggesting reference to a magickal grimoire. The work is replete with references to ancient pagan iconography, as well as polytheistic mythology. The setting is a forest where self-realisation is extended to a primordial self that is formed through the place of the forest. This metaphor evokes an ancient mythical phenomenon. The protagonist, a primordial being, is in a perpetual state of birth and becoming, covered in clay, found materials from the forest floor, and a red pigment. The figure makes and remakes itself as it stares into a stream, evoking a motif that suggests the mythological tale of Narcissus. It pokes eye holes into its face to see itself in the reflective water. Saliva drips from its mouth, reminiscent of the trance state alluded to in other works such as *A la folie* (2017) (fig 32). *Sanctus Nemorensis* is an example of how place is articulated as a signifying narrative implicated in a ritualised event.

The conception of place as a physical space – a forest – as well as a mystical and mythically charged space is brought into sharp focus with cinematic takes of the stream, the forest itself, the weather and clouds (bringing with it a sense of real time). A point in time condenses together with a mythological narrative that stretches multi-directionally across time. This occurs most notably in the use of natural light. The specificity of time as signaled in natural light brings home a positional reference to place. Place is visualised as both time-specific and timeless in the way atmospheric imagery and sunlight filter through forest trees to reveal the figure crouching on the forest floor. The figure then transforms from the clay-coated narcissist to a clay-coated forest nymph that basks in the light of the sun after emerging from the primordial place of the forest stream. The nymph transforms again into a horned deity, evoking a visual reference to Cernunnos and Pan. A classically cathartic moment occurs when the figure transforms yet again – and the word “Icarus” appears on the screen. This scene is set against the open sky, evoking an elemental transition from earth to water to air. Fire is symbolically referred to in the presence of sunlight. All demarcate a strong associative function to occult elemental magick. The performance depicts a transition from an earth-

bound figure, deeply self-aware in the process of its own making, to a state of exuberant emancipation and freedom. However, this is short-lived when, following a further editorial cut, the figure retreats into the shaded dark recesses of the forest to enter a dormant state, reclining on the ground, seemingly inert and dead. Narrating the mythological content in this way reveals embedded occult references, including primordial elements and symbolic associations with ancient forms of divinity. Esoteric components compress together through the embodied ritualised performance of the artist-protagonist, as he transits between worldly and otherworldly states in a perpetual cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Death and resurrection as thematic narratives are present in the form of a motif of trance-like becoming in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. de Sagazan places this in the same ambit of process-led de-figuration. Self and other, subject and object, human and monster, and, by extension, artist and artwork are melted together. With a veiled reference to the overly romanticised and clichéd idea of the artist-creator-genius myth, a caption on his website explains how it is a “painter and sculptor’s unfulfilled longing to breathe life into his creation. In a gesture of desperation, he sculpts clay onto his head, burying himself in the material, eradicating his identity and becoming a living work of art” (de Sagazan [Sa]b). Death and resurrection occur in other forms in his work and need some discussion here to assist in probing these themes in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, especially in ways that raise questions around established ritual conventions and traditions.

Ritualised practice in de Sagazan’s process-related method is not strictly conventional, yet it does imply relational aspects embedded in repetitive ritualised action – the centrality of his body in the process, for example, and the trance-like state he enters when working. Rappaport (1999:27; emphasis original) offers the following defining observation about the relational and logical nature of ritual, which presents a useful means to further conceptualise it, in the way that process and working method articulate to “possess *logical entailments* as well. *I will argue that the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers logically entails the establishment of convention... and the construction of orders of meaning transcending the semantic*”.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Rappaport (1999:27; emphasis original) includes in his list “*the sealing of social contract, the construction of the integrated conventional orders, ... the investment of whatever it encodes with morality, the construction of time and eternity; the representation of a paradigm of creation, the generation of the concept of the sacred*”

If one is to hold that de Sagazan's approach is not intentionally ritualised – in the conventional sense – then how relevant is a traditional modality in an analysis of de Sagazan's approach and what form does this take? For this, I consider the scholarly contributions of Ittis in the anthology *Ritual and the moral life: reclaiming the tradition* (2012), edited by David Solomon, Ping-Cheung Lo and Ruiping Fan. In an essay entitled *Ritual as the creation of social reality*, Ittis (2012:17-28) lists attributing characteristics of ritual, which I feel are an adequate starting point to outline its characteristics in de Sagazan's work. Citing Klapp (1965), Ittis (2012:19) begins with how practicality is needed to remedy circumstances where control is lacking.<sup>69</sup> The point made by Klapp (1965) (cited by Ittis 2012:19) is that, even though ritual activities are enacted and performed, "much ritual has no practical effect whatever – and the participants know this but nonetheless perform it". Ritual is seen to require a certain formality in consistency and regularity, involving the best known or most favoured "pattern, formula, method or role". The underlying assumption is that: "Originality is not welcomed in ritual" (Klapp cited by Ittis 2012:19). On the point of formality, Rappaport (1999:33) asserts: "Rituals are performed in specified contexts, that is, they are regularly repeated at times established by clock, calendar, biological rhythm, ontogeny, physical condition, or defined social circumstance, and they occur in special places as well".

I address rhythmic aspects of ritual under the word periodicity or repetition. Ittis (2012:19) draws on Klapp (1965) to highlight the need for ritual to be a learned or rehearsed activity that must be performed correctly and at prescribed times. Both these criteria are problematic when projected onto an idea of ritual as spontaneous and intuitive. For example, it is often the case that rhythmical or impulsive processes including instrumental percussion, spontaneous dance or voice-specific resources originate from unchoreographed contexts where timed action is made possible through entirely intuitive impulses. While traditional ritual is triggered by events such as a rite of passage, and such rituals and their structure would be well known within any given community, there is still a case to be made for how ritual opens the possibility for a layered and embodied experience for the

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*and the sanctification of conventional order, the generation of theories of the occult, the evocation of numinous experience, the awareness of the divine, the grasp of the holy, and the construction of orders of meaning transcending the semantic".*

<sup>69</sup> For example, one could list weather systems, natural disasters and supernatural phenomena. In agrarian communities this could be extended to the availability of food and water and the success of hunting and agriculture, as well as inter-tribal conflict over territory.

initiate, as well as for those performing the ritual. If this point contradicts Iltis's (2012:19) observations regarding regularity and periodicity, then how does an embodied experience carry significance and therefore meaning in a ritualised process such as that in de Sagazan's case? To address this, I briefly explore selected criteria, including notions of sacrifice and depravity and the idea of accessing a feral or primordial self. An integral strategy of ritualised abandonment is a metaphoric succumbing to an intuitive process in the performed body.

Suffering is made apparent through ritualised depravity, as evidenced in a later work entitled, *Ash* (2020) (fig 33). Extending the ritual purpose of sculptural materials, it calibrates reference to risk and sacrifice. Here de Sagazan includes the element of fire to further extrapolate a narrative of transformation in the representation of bodily trauma. The work is performed in his studio. After applying clay, he appears to be burning himself to oxidise the clay surface. The possibility of injury is real with a potentially harmful consequence and is galvanised in a representation of intentional bodily damage. Clay and other material are added, shaped and removed, as the artist-protagonist enters a state of trance through sensorial deprivation. Tellingly, the short teaser video clip of the performance ends with a cinematic shot of a flowing stream of water. This, coupled with the removal of material from the face, signals a return to the sensorial self, with the water contributing to a symbolic cleansing.

de Sagazan delves into a state of concentrated awareness of his conscious self in his working process. Cognitive rationality is suspended and, in some cases, abandoned entirely. Process shifts to centre field and his sense of socially encoded self is relinquished into the background. Through his performance, the artist retreats into a personal space, which I refer to as feral or primordial. Grimes (2006:12; emphasis original) describes this as something "more primary" when he explains: "The notion of performance can be almost as slippery as that of ritual. There is the ever-present equating tendency. Ritual *is* performance; performance *is* ritual". To avoid an over-simplified or reductionist slippage, Grimes (2006:12) posits that "both ritual and theatre are kinds of performance, the difference being that ritual aims at efficaciousness and theatre at entertainment or that ritual arises from belief and theatre from play or make-believe". Through the ability to tap into deeper facets of his being, de Sagazan tests this dichotomous understanding in a complex way. First, ritual and theatre occur interchangeably in his work. A real-time mediated and process-led practice is embodied and enacted in his performances. Second, ritual is *not* an end in itself nor a motivating

factor to create anything.<sup>70</sup> An examination of his intuitive approach in the form of ritualised gestures and actions confirms that intuition and place come together in his work, providing a conceptual platform to identify and measure the efficacy of narrative meaning.

Ritual process is an embodied experience of personal transformation, emancipation and expansiveness. In his focused working method, de Sagazan allows a certain subjectivity in how he transitions through ritualised action, beginning from the rationalised place of self-judgement and control, and setting in motion an abandonment to the process of making. Through the subjective embodiment of process and the tactility of forming and making, de Sagazan articulates a charged representation that is significant both extrovertly and introvertly. The former is a theatrical and outwardly orientated activity. The latter involves a calculated abandonment to process and working with the ego self. Put another way, one might describe de Sagazan's process-led practice as a means by which and through which the artist negotiates a ritualised embodiment.

To further define the ritualised body in de Sagazan's performances, I advocate for two primary threads that, while necessarily formally separated, interrelate. On the one hand, formal considerations are performative and theatrical. On the other hand, these considerations give rise to unpredictable and intuitive impulses, and they in turn give form to represented figurative characters and their particular contexts. This applies to public events, as is the case with *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, as well as the private performances such as *Sanctus Nemorensis*. In the public works, de Sagazan follows a theatrical format of spectacle including a performed act, props, a stage, lighting and video documentation, as well as the presence of an audience. The protagonist is presented either in isolation or together with collaborating participants. A tension exists between the inwardly directed and intuitively driven performative content and working process and the more impersonal and formalised theatrical canon.

Paradoxically, it is through the medium of theatricality that a contradiction is resolved in de Sagazan's work. Citing Klapp (1965), Iltis (2012:19) notes that ritual is meaningful and necessarily dramatic. The mnemonic purpose of ritual communicates in a particular organisational context. A dramatic spectacle provides a compelling base for the validation or justification of infrastructural

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<sup>70</sup> At no point in my rigorous discussions with the artist, did he allude to any conventional ritual formula as a starting point for his working methods (de Sagazan 2023a).

societal conditions necessary for the dominant social order to maintain a moral or ideological status quo (Iltis 2012:19). But for ritual to be convincing, or for its validating purpose to work, the spectacular and dramatic approach must involve an audience – even if, as Iltis (2012:19) observes, “the audience consists only of the person performing the ritual”. In the privacy of his studio, de Sagazan looks upon himself as artist, protagonist and audience. These representational categories are foundational signifiers of an alternative thinking around ritualised action.

### **3.3.4 Artist / protagonist / audience**

The body as a signifier of being and becoming in the material sense is significant. The iconography of a conceptual and visual binary opposition is apparent in the two protagonists that perform in the work *Hybridation*. The binary aspect takes on a more complex form when two bodies are involved. From a starting of similarity in bodily form, the two protagonists are represented separated and in that sense in opposition to one another. As the performance progresses so too does a gradual amalgamation of form occur resulting in the breaking down of the binary relation into a unitary form. The representation of a binary aspect as imaged through the transformation of form is made possible through an awkward additive and subtractive process of material.<sup>71</sup> While the binary aspect is conceptually secure, its visual manifestation is fluid. Binary relations of here and there, self and other flow into each other seamlessly. The artist is at once outside creator and at the same time central protagonist. In *Transfiguration*, the narrative describes the relationship between artist and monster, while in *Hybridation*, the coalescence of one figure into the other affirms a conjoined biomorphic shapeshifting entity. de Sagazan’s website further elucidates the performing act, highlighting the significance of the actions as ritualistically derived: “They pierce, erase and unravel the layers of their face in a frenetic and uninhibited quest. Painting and sculpting themselves become a form of ritual positioned between dance and trance where improvisation is the matrix” (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b).

The motif of victim slips and gives way to the motif of aggressor, made uncanny through a trope of buffoonery. The artist as creator and master puppeteer is interwoven visually with the iconography of the puppet, whose actions are in one way dependent on the actions of the artist-creator but

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<sup>71</sup> Observing de Sagazan at work, I noted that even though he is persistent in the shaping and making of features and form, the process always appears clumsy and awkward in the way he feels his way around and through the material.

simultaneously autonomous in the way the character is caught in a perpetual cycle of being made and remade. The narrative is intentionally inconsistent. This surfaces in a work performed in collaboration with Richard Nadal called *Transept* (2017) (fig 34). Echoing his collaborative approach in *Hybridation* a caption for this work on de Sagazan's website explains: "Frankenstein is in front of his mirror. In a fantastic duo between the puppeteer and his creature, the identities are ultimately muddled. Which one, then, animates the other?" (de Sagazan [Sa]b). de Sagazan's reference to a mirror suggests the act of looking at the self. The transforming characters are caught in a state of constant becoming, as they are depicted unpredictably in states of vulnerability and fragility at the mercy of a tragic yet powerful, dangerous and out-of-control figurehead. This characteristic fluidity of form and iconography is enabled through an immediate intuitive response to the materiality of the participants' bodies, made possible through the process of working and reworking material.

In de Sagazan's practice, an understanding of ritual action is important in an analysis of the thematic threads that run through his work, including the otherworldly. Citing Bell (1997), Iltis (2012:19) demonstrates how a prescribed moral grounding through ritual necessitates the representation of otherworldly aspects: "Sacred symbolism" implicates the ritualised "appeal to supernatural beings". This point can be extended to include how this appeal is manufactured into a spectacle of visual allure through the performance of "highly symbolic actions in public" (Iltis 2012:19). If we are to accept the general premise that rituals are organised and structured events designed to maintain and validate a social order or an ideological status quo, how then does one refine a definition of de Sagazan's approach to ritualised process, and in what ways is this useful in understanding his work? A dialectical relationship is worth highlighting in addressing this question. In my analysis in this chapter, I recognise and extrapolate a tension between the everyday reality that informs de Sagazan's practice on the one hand, and the polydimensional contexts of his performances on the other. I identify three broad areas to further contextualise the complexity of ritual functionality in de Sagazan's process:

1. Ritual and social reality,
2. Intradimensionality and multidimensionality and
3. Ritual boundaries.

In my diagram (fig 35), the interrelation of the three primary components is demonstrated. One would ordinarily view the otherworldly as conceptually separated from the social reality of the

artist's personal circumstances. My research on de Sagazan suggests otherwise.

### **3.3.5 Ritual and social reality**

Any form of creative process involves a context. In de Sagazan's case, this context extends from a point in the studio or on the stage (in the case of commissioned performances) and beyond. I identify two contexts that assist in conceptualising this point: first, social, historical and personal circumstances that exist across his lifetime to the present and, second, his intuitively creative responses to the materials at his disposal. A probing question emerges, one that I offset against predominant thinking in scholarly writings on ritual. Definitions of ritual suggest that ritual and ritual behaviour establish a repetitive stabilising social development through formulaic, officially sanctioned and repetitive action by being meaningful, communicative and consistent (Iltis 2012:19-21). This, Iltis (2012:21) further observes, "has important implications for attempts to renew or reintroduce rituals. Rituals and the commitments that they reflect are bound up with one another. Thus, as the commitments that ground and are communicated by rituals are weakened, we should expect to see the practice of the associated rituals weakened". If ritual is presupposed to be imbued with "social power" and is implemented or performed to "create and mark social reality", as Iltis (2012:21) maintains, then what of the inverse of this position? In the context of a discussion of ritual, one refers to social reality to stabilise and reinforce ideological dominance and social hierarchy. Can one not also see ritual unsettle and destabilise this same social order?<sup>72</sup>

There are moments in de Sagazan's oeuvre when his determination to undermine and subvert hegemonic orders overrides a ritualised approach. These moments are still important to acknowledge. Ritual shifts from the conventional approach. His use of clay and other materials marks a departure from conventional ritual actions to acts of conceptual boundary transgressions and the reimagining of official systems of ordered reality and acceptability. In the following works, de Sagazan applies his brazen and extreme ritualised tactics in a series of related works that invert the preordained notion that ritual sanctifies official systems of order. In these works de Sagazan is using ritual to explicitly topple the systems that normalise social and cultural perceptions.

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<sup>72</sup> I am not referring to the frivolity and flamboyance of the Mardi Gras and Carnival or other such festivals, involving entirely their own inversive and subversive ritualised and theatrical behaviour and gestures. I am referring to the use of ritual to critique an established moral platform.

In *Aux abois* and *Le dictator*, de Sagazan explores gestures of resistance, defiance and protest through the lens of satire and folly in performances that enact extreme actions in public forums. In *La messe de l'âne* and later versions of *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, this becomes more nuanced and concentrated. In these works, de Sagazan adopts a more inward-orientated configuration, in which he shifts his focus to his own body and bodily processes. Again, worldly experiences give way to otherworldly phenomena through ritual gesture.

*Aux abois* was performed on 30 March 2014. de Sagazan used a canine metaphor and made a barking sound for approximately seven hours. He performed the event on two further occasions at the Base Sous-Marine of Saint-Nazaire and in the square of La Défense in Paris. The metaphor of the barking dog motif is two-fold. First, de Sagazan evokes a barking dog responding to a threat (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b). This enactment of a response to a threat mirrors a broader political resistance to the *Front National*.<sup>73</sup> He makes a point of announcing this on his website when he writes: "Olivier de Sagazan barked for 7 hours to *awaken the consciences* against the dangers of the Front National. Here in front of the polling station for the European elections, the police will (sic) quickly come to interrogate him" (Olivier de Sagazan [Sa]b; emphasis original). Second, the image of de Sagazan barking raises the notion of humour, suggested in his satirical snub of the *Front National*. Satire and, more specifically, associated undermining effects of folly are devices de Sagazan employs to enact extreme responses to the conservative officialdom of French middle-class society and, by extension, his dissatisfaction with the current global condition of humankind.

Rituals mark social reality through "signals or cues that indicate stability or continuity and as such shape the social world and one's perspective of it" (Iltis 2012:23). These are affirmed through existing social hierarchies, structures and behaviours. The outcome is a sense of cohesive unity, identity, and social harmony. Iltis (2012:24) concludes that "rituals can link the past, present and future. They sustain the social fabric and expand it by connecting generations". Yet this assertion only holds true if there is a consistent historical thread that remains intact over time. What would one make of a situation where this constancy is interrupted abruptly (war, natural disaster) or in a prolonged and gradual way (political instability and social degeneration)? de Sagazan's particular use

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<sup>73</sup> Also known in English as the National Rally, the *Front National* is a far-right conservative political party with fascist, antisemitic and xenophobic inclinations.

of satire and social commentary assists by defiantly collapsing the time continuum of past, present and future. One of my points of departure for analysing de Sagazan's work resides in this inversion, challenging the assumptions of what ritual is broadly expected to bring into effect. Instead of becoming weaker in visuality and conceptual impact, the unpredictable, unconventional and in some cases overtly resistant themes in his work become a point of meaningful evocation and visuality.

By reinforcing social, cultural and historical identity within a given social reality, rituals shift a personal sense of self to "help individuals recognize themselves as part of a defined group, organization or tradition" (Iltis 2012:24). Again, what if the reverse is true? What does one make of a ritualised situation that has the opposite effect? For example, one might willingly enter a ritual context, expecting it to re-establish a social contract or align one with a larger cultural or religious condition, only to discover that it foregrounds an aspect that one is not comfortable with, and that it in fact shifts one's expectation away from the original objective. I raise this as an important element in de Sagazan's work, especially since his ritualised work is interchangeable with a narrative of satirical and, in some cases, trickster-like social commentary. At a minimum, rituals are characterised by their communicative power: "Rituals are expressive, evocative, performative, educative and transformative" (Engelhardt 2012:35). In de Sagazan's work, this is brought out in a trope of resistance and defiance, underpinned and reinforced through satire, parody and folly.

In *Le dictator*, which continues the process-related approach found in *Transfiguration*, de Sagazan redirects his aim by presenting a satirical version of president Macron's response to the violence that erupted in what has become known as the yellow vest protests (de Sagazan [Sa]b).<sup>74</sup> de Sagazan's continued commentary on localised social and political issues, especially in the way these form part of his overall commentary, is brought into relief as a critique on current delusional human experiences. In this work, he reenacts his version of Macron's speech and interjects this with a version of his approach in *Transfiguration*. The outcome is a bizarre combination of a real time referent (Macron's speech) with an evolving monstrous face. A deliberate visual effect undermines the political public address, bringing the protocolled and politically sanctioned icon of French socio-

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<sup>74</sup> The Yellow Vests Protests or Yellow Jackets Protests or Yellow Vests Revolution (*Mouvement des gilets jaunes*) started on 17 November 2018 in resistance to rising crude oil and fuel prices, and the rolling unequal economic impact this had on the French working and middle classes. Protests were reported to occur weekly and include elements of violence and destruction of public property (Les Gilets jaunes: qui sont-ils? [Sa]).

political order into the same conceptual ambit of a fluid and evolving clown-like monster. The intersection of humour, folly and subversion present a convincing dynamic in which officialdom is confronted with the intentionally deceptive, undermining and defiant tactics of de Sagazan's performances. Although ritualised actions formed part of these projects, it is in later works that the thematics of monstrosity and de-corporeality highlight his work with things that are forbidden and traditionally considered taboo.

Gesticulation is a key device in articulating an uncanny narrative of visual buffoonery. This becomes pronounced in a work such as *Le dictator*. The eyes and mouth are orifical referents to the satirical schema. These suggest the folly of the politician's claimed ability to see the reality of the protest event, as well as verbally comment on it through the prepared speech – both these iconographic elements are inversions of the sanctioned political power and protocol of the political speech in real time. In this work and *Transfiguration*, de Sagazan's reference to folly cuts through an already monstrous narrative. Satire reinforces and explodes the image of a bizarre and intentionally ridiculous protagonist that is represented in a schizophrenic and chaotic self-destructive relationship with itself.

Hands and, by extension, the artist's body make and remake the mask-like character, extending the satirical comment on the gestures of the protagonist as it transitions into a monstrous state. There are repeated gestures, including motifs such as the vertical cut and horizontal swipe, and the poking in of eye sockets, as well as more methodical building up of the face and head which shape-shifts from a grimacing demonic glare in *Transfiguration*, to a partially recognisable pig or boar motif in *Le dictator*. At times the face is pulled apart, re-exposing the artist-performer. The tension of revealing and concealing through a process of material disclosure is deliberately enacted. de Sagazan's focus on the head and shoulders raises the relevant question of the function of the masquerade as a ritual device. The mask motif is the pivotal point around which one begins to understand the way formal aspects of process and the ever-transitioning monstrous protagonist (the subject of narrative content) combine to give meaning to his performance.

### **3.3.6 Intradimensionality and multidimensionality in ritual process**

Ritual processes call for a particular kind of spatiality, one that flows porously between states of being. The complexity of this aspect of ritual is discussed by Engelhardt (2012:34-35), whom I quote

selectively here: “Ritual relates humans to nature ..., humans to each other ..., humans to spirits ..., and humans to God”. The intersection of both physical and metaphysical aspects, and how they are directed towards a meaningful outcome, is a valid point that underpins a similar emphasis in de Sagazan’s working process. To further conceptualise this seamless and animistic relation between objects, I consider intradimensional and multidimensional phenomena that inform ritual circumstances. This is not exclusive to an external-orientated experience for ritual participants. Instead, it accentuates an internal and personally resonant interaction. Ritual conceptualised as intradimensional and multidimensional requires a concerted defining application. I offer a brief working definition of each term and use this to illustrate how these come together in de Sagazan’s practice. In the context of ritual, intradimensional describes an action occurring “within a dimension” (Intradimensional [Sa]) and refers to the immediacy of time and place. At the moment of ritualised work, the subject becomes intensely focused on place and objects, giving form to intuitive actions as these are foregrounded in the moment of making.

The word multidimensional refers to “having or relating to multiple dimensions or aspects” (Multidimensional [Sa]). Multidimensional interrelations are more commonly described in liturgical or theological contexts but contribute to this discussion too. The idea of ritual is an act of communing, not only across physical and metaphysical realms, but also more pragmatically between groups of people or individuals. The two forms that Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:1) locates in religious contexts are useful in grounding my comments on multidimensional experiences: “[O]n the one hand, ritual sharing ... is responsive and outer-facing and on the other hand ritual participation ... is inner-facing and follows the pattern of extending or receiving hospitality”.

Intradimensionality experienced through the ritual event is made possible through what David Fenner (2021:7) refers to as the “internal integrity” of objects.<sup>75</sup> I recognise this in de Sagazan’s working methods as the crux of his ritualised behaviour, which goes beyond his intuitively driven and animistic actions and gestures. Fenner (2021:10) acknowledges Kant when he refers to the character of an object as having no inherent “instrumental function” but still being “purposeful and purposive” in a ritual ceremony. One can ascribe this condition to de Sagazan’s use of sculptural materials such

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<sup>75</sup> Fenner (2021:10) describes internal integrity as: “pieces of the aesthetic puzzle [fitting] together to create a seamless organic whole, one that demonstrates maximum coherence among all its various aspects”.

as clay, hay, plaster of Paris and pigment. His intuitive work with materials is not an end in itself but rather a deliberate extension of his own embodied state. Clay becomes an extension of the artist's bodily presence and intuitive actions.

When put together, a graphic image of de Sagazan's process emerges, one that straddles the complexity of intuitive action implicating place, time and space. Bringing these terms into the reality of de Sagazan's practice has two consequences. First, it is a useful means to understand his working process in real time through his sensorial approach to process, highlighting an impulsive and intuitive tactility with his materials. Second, these terms articulate a seamless interrelation of a real-time experience with the metaphysical qualities of his subconscious. de Sagazan's working process is embedded in the reality and immediacy of his working methods in the present moment. It also extends outwards in a multidirectional orientation to include his experience of tacit otherworldly phenomena.

### **3.3.7 Ritual and boundaries**

Pulling together an idea of boundaries in the ritualised work of de Sagazan rests in a layered and sedimentary modality. The prescriptive presence of boundaries is a central denominator in the complexity of intradimensional and multidimensional directionality in de Sagazan's practice. The argument for a multidirectionality is easily misunderstood as a product of chaotic behaviours and things out of control. de Sagazan's approach is not chaotic nor is it out of control. Moreover, intuitive action does not neatly fit with, or equate to, entropic behaviour. On the contrary, the multidirectionality of ritual practice suggests the initiate's abandonment to a state of intense concentration and focus, one that enables a cognitive impulse to toggle between worldly and otherworldly experiences. It is with this mindset that I bring the notion of ritual and boundary into my consideration of the scope of de Sagazan's practice. I consider the physical attributes of boundaries in ritual and how these are a significant starting point for the operation of ritual boundaries in his work. This discussion merges into selective observations on metaphysical conditions, which are a necessary scaffold for the formulation of embodied otherworldly experiences. I will reflect on how these operate sequentially yet in unpredictable and discursive ways to bring meaning to de Sagazan's performative work.

Finding a means to conceptualise de Sagazan's particular use of boundaries in his ritualised process

requires that one begin with a place-related and locationally present spatiality. “Rituals announce boundaries”, states Engelhardt (2012:36). This is arguably the most important starting point in the physical and spatial boundary debate. In spiritually or religiously organised ritual work, demarcating a specific spatial context brings with it a concentration and focus on a designated area for the work to take place. This often involves a boundary or marker – a physical structure that is either built and fit for purposes or a naturally occurring boundary made possible through natural elements that are repurposed.<sup>76</sup> Such structures are important in the way they are used to bring into being ritualised behaviour. Demarcating what is contained within, as well as what is deliberately excluded, is a central feature in this spatialising process. Spatial transgression or spatial ambiguity demarcates liminal spaces and also signifies conceptual boundaries in the way they are integrated into ritual activities.

One would ordinarily associate liminality with things that are undefinable, things that slip between categories of order and organisation, or things that deliberately and intentionally do not fit with the defining criteria of any dominant social order. However, the word liminality also carries with it a relevant linguistic context that suggests an activation of space that is relational and therefore transformative. In a discussion of liminality and reflexivity in ritual performance, Barry Stephenson (2015:50) outlines the etymological significance of the word liminality in the root word *limen*, in the way a “threshold or doorway mediates and joins two different spaces and has long been a symbol of transformation and change”. Referring to redressive ritual, Stephenson (2015:50) continues his discussion by noting how the fluidity and porosity of liminal boundaries enable a reflexive response that is also reconciliatory for those participating. In the context of a transformative and narratively communicative strategy of the sort that underpins de Sagazan’s work, this has immediate implications. To bring a creative aspect into the already layered defining criteria of ritual, reinforces the significance of a liminal spatial organisation.

Boundaries and portals as conceptual and physical dividers situate and separate one realm from another. For example, ritual contexts naturally include a point through which initiates and ritual participants would enter and exit the space. Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:6) situates her critique of ritual boundaries in relation to her broader discussion of the problematics of

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<sup>76</sup> For example, a clearing in a forest or a particular geological formation such as a cave or mountain top.

interreligious ritual participation: she discusses ritualised boundaries in a Western religious paradigm as involving insular observant practices that discourage interreligious activity. To understand boundaries as a basic insider-outsider binary and a central determinant of identity in a ritual context, it is worth interrogating the traditionally fixed nature of ritual contexts. “[M]any regard ritual participation as an expression of an ongoing spiritual journey which does not allow itself to be fixed in bounded traditions. After all, what is Ultimate transcends all human comprehension” (Moyaert in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:11). These “arbitrary constructs” and “historical-culturally determined products” are a product of punitive, hierarchically determined, authoritative organisational structures “which prevent religious communities and their believers from growing toward one another” (Moyaert in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:11). Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:11) asks: “Why not break through ritual boundaries and enrich one’s religious perspective by means of interritual sharing?”

The question of moral boundaries plays a crucial role in traversing the predictable but also unpredictable aspects of ritual work. On the one hand, ritual, as noted previously, adopts a necessary formalised appearance to instil social organisation within a community. On the other hand, one accepts the intuitive and unrehearsed aspects of a ritual agenda or program. What happens when ritual implicates both informal as well as formal arrangements and actions without mitigating the one aspect in favour of the other? By extension, it is possible to recognise a critical approach to both informal and formal aspects in de Sagazan’s practice when he defiantly undermines both modalities through deliberately inersive behaviour. His work is neither conventionally ritualistic nor does it give over to strictly prescribed moral codes and boundaries. Engelhardt (2012:36) makes the point that “[r]ituals disclose community by announcing borders, moral, social and political. Rituals bind moral/metaphysical friends ... They separate moral/metaphysical strangers. Rituals indicate where a community does and does not exist” (Engelhardt 2012:36). This becomes problematised in de Sagazan’s performances. In his collaborative performances, specifically, his critical position is foregrounded in the inherently volatile and potentially unpredictable nature of shared ritualised participation. At any given moment in his performances both physically and emotionally concentrated embodied experiences dissolve together into a multidimensionality of otherworldly conditions. In constructing or deconstructing a ritualised experience, the product is always narratively generative in its

transformative effect. These nuances of announcing and denouncing, of fixing and dissolving ritual boundaries, I argue, are at the heart of the complexity of ritualised spatial circumstances in de Sagazan's work. The complexities of spatial encounters resonate meaningfully, irrespective of whether moral codes and boundaries are compromised or reinforced. In de Sagazan's performances, ritualised actions operate to enable rather than disable meaningful narratives in inclusive rather than exclusive actions and gestures embedded in his production process. One criterion of conventional ritual organisation, which may be contested in de Sagazan's work, is the presence of a physical platform onto or through which a ritual is conventionally conducted. How does one reconcile this with de Sagazan's use of a site such as a stage, a natural setting or, more broadly, a concentrated site such as his studio space where his ritualised work takes place?<sup>77</sup>

de Sagazan's studio or the stage-like venues allocated for works such as *Transformation* and *Hybridation* are contentious. Fenner (2021:8) considers the physical and psychic aspects of the stage or setting as indicating a limen-like boundary when he explains that "the setting must focus attention by psychically bracketing off the ritual from the ordinary, from daily worries and distractions. Whether inspiring of calm or gregariousness, the setting must focus attention 'on' and 'away from'". While a physical boundary and the psychically loaded aspect of physical place, whether studio space or theatrical platform, are an important aspect of de Sagazan's work, the material resonance of this physical, site-relational aspect is lost if not placed in the same conceptual ambit as the metaphysical experience of his creative process. This is further complicated when one factors in the above discussion of liminal boundaries. The focal point in de Sagazan's ritualised working process is ambiguous. Prompted by the activation of ritual space and the ritualised processes that de Sagazan employs, conceptual barriers evoke the limen.

I argue that the threshold presented by the limen is located at a single and determinate point: the embodied presence of the artist himself. The artist is the soul-agent and medium through which these spatial complexities are agitated. The notion of boundary is extended to include the porosity and physical relation of his hands-on process of making and the subconscious and metaphysical implications of his intuitive and impulsive action.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> An altar, for example, is traditionally considered a focal point for ritual activity.

<sup>78</sup> It would be remiss to think that any significant aspect of this creative decision-making existed outside of this immediate time-based context of action. However, evidence collected during the field work with the artist in

### 3.4 PLACE, THE BODY AND RITUALISED PERFORMANCE

#### 3.4.1 Introductory comments

Place gives a context for three aspects of ritualised creative processes. First, the literal and physical reference to an actual site such as a studio, a stage and a public space carries a literal conception of place. Second, a conceptual application of the word place suggests an enactment of a process that straddles worldly and otherworldly contexts. Third, place evokes a profound resonance of the artist and the artist's body.

A physical presentation of place links closely to a metaphysical manifestation in the dialectical relation of mind and body. Stephenson (2015:94) notes how the idea of ritual embodiment carries distinct connotations that stimulate the work of scholarly studies that tease out the long-established Cartesian dualism of mind and body: "The term can refer, in a rather suspicious fashion, to the ways in which ideas and values are inscribed into the body through ritual practice. Second, the language of embodiment highlights the fact that ritual is one of the ways people go about making sense of their world. Like reason, ritual is a way of knowing". As Stephenson (2015:93; emphasis original) explains: "*Embodiment* ... points to a more integrative understanding of mind and body".

This relation of the physical and metaphysical is usefully extended in a comment made by Marcia Langton (2002:260).<sup>79</sup> In her essay, Langton outlines the land-claim proceedings for the Aboriginal peoples in the Lakefield and Cliff Island land claims tribunal by the Bama community in Australia. One particular point she raises is the significance of the elders of a community as mediators of place through a trope of life and death.<sup>80</sup> Place is interlaced with the embodied agency of community elders whose symbolic affiliations carry meaning in a cultural as well as socio-political forum. Can a similar train of thinking not also be applied to artists? In what ways can artists be seen as conduits of mediated reality? Langton (2002:260; emphasis original) continues her analysis to make the

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his studio suggests that some precursory planning may have taken place, although this seems to have been a minor and insignificant feature when considering the primary focus of his process-led practice.

<sup>79</sup> Her essay, *The edge of the sacred, the edge of death*, provides a comprehensive account of the complexities of place and spirituality in Aboriginal claimant proceedings brought before an Aboriginal Land Tribunal in 1991.

<sup>80</sup> Langton (2002:260) writes:

The question of how the human being, and other beings, are constructed as beings in a place, and how the place is constructed by the conceptions regarding their being, is treated as the relationship between embodiment and emplacement: how beings are embodied in place and emplaced in body.

following observations regarding the impact of the mediating function of the Old People or Elders in the claimant communities: she brings attention to their numinous function: “These a priori significances of places are the *Story Beings*, numinous, mysterious, powerful, and ubiquitous. This signification of being by place, and by symbols of place – songs, dances, expressions, designs – is crucially represented in the authority of Elders who mediate between the spirits of the dead and the living, protecting each from the other”. To understand the way place operates as a signifier of personal, social and political criteria, one needs to begin with the artist himself, paralleling the role of the Elders. In de Sagazan’s case, he embodies the physical and metaphysical aspects of place as these are invoked powerfully in and through his process-related work.

Place is an evocative and triggering point in a ritualised process. It prescribes the physical means, influencing conditions and temporal context by which a ritual is made possible. Fenner (2021:10) alludes to this: “In addition to histories, traditions, associations and other contextual matters, each ritual has a physical context, a setting. That setting can be read and understood in terms of its aesthetic form”. As a necessary constituent of place-specific ritual, a numinous effect is enacted through place in its affective capacity to provoke an emotional response. This is not necessarily a sympathetic relation but instead is the means through which the emotional states of uncertainty, fear and vulnerability are brought into focus.

Place enables an embodied position. The practitioner’s realisation of place is sensorially orientated. The practitioner activates or charges a place in preparation for ritual activity. This is necessary, especially in the event of physical risk or danger and, more importantly, in the likely experience of intense vulnerability. Place is not merely a passive conduit or container for practice – there is always a reciprocity. With its enabling attributes, place and spatial relations are crucial in and for a ritual process to become a central part of a performative artwork. A sympathetic dialectic occurs when place enables the performance to take place by providing socio-centric conditions for performative action. Fenner (2021:3) refers to this as “stages” that are “set to provide contexts for rituals”. He notes further that a theatrical context, such as a stage or platform, foregrounds social and cultural considerations that are inherently “culturally bound” (Fenner 2021:9).

For de Sagazan’s studio practice, place is an obvious site for an engagement with sculptural

materials<sup>81</sup> but place is also inserted into his works as a necessary part of his subjective experience. The artist's embodied self conjoins with a multidimensional sense of being in place, that is to say, the embodied microcosm – or inwardly aspect – melds together with the outwardly aspect or macrocosm of the studio and, by extension, the surrounding urban and peri-urban areas where de Sagazan lives and works. Phrased differently, a ritualised conception of place is both exclusionary and inclusionary (Iltis 2012:17). This can be applied in other ways too. Spatially, a ritual literally separates the initiated from the uninitiated. On a personal level, ritual brings the temporal and corporeal presence of the initiate into the scope of an otherworldly consciousness. Recognising this in de Sagazan's process, this consciousness is both inwardly (embodied) and outwardly (otherworldly) situated, but always integrally part of the artist's metaphysical experience. In a discussion of conscious and unconscious phenomena, Hardman (2019:53) alludes to this as "merging internal and external worlds and connecting the conscious with the unconscious, [when] a uniquely creative form of consciousness arises".

One acknowledges that the artist brings with him personal histories and socio-cultural baggage. Yet he purposefully resists and denounces the very social infrastructure that encoded this. A ritualised context in a process-led practice requires all of what one is in the present moment, yet it also actively negates it. Socio-centric attributes are stripped away when place transforms (in both its emotional resonance as well as its physical characteristics) from something of a substance into something of a metaphysical vacuum. This condition defines a state of being that resides outside of place and outside of time in the way it necessitates further discussion of the body as place.

### **3.4.2 The body as place**

The body as place informs de Sagazan's intuitive process-led performative practice, which follows the logic of bodily form translated into action, gesture, and utterance. The bodily presence of, in this case, human participants brings a ritual aspect into the transformative fold of "maintaining orders of meaning, purpose and value" (Stephenson 2015:38). Utterance and the effects of verbal communication work in tandem with bodily gestures and actions. This raises an important question. How do intuitive, impulsive and creative ritual actions fit or align with preordained, officially sanctioned and canonical ritual ceremonies? Rappaport's (1999:152-153) distinction between ritual

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<sup>81</sup> I mention this earlier in the chapter in a description of his direct use of raw studio soil and earth.

form and ritual substance is a good starting point. “The relationship of ritual’s reliance upon language to its reliance upon material representation is, roughly, that of the canonical to the self-referential”. Rappaport (1999:153) expands this point by explaining how, “on the one hand, canon is contingent upon words and, on the other, that the material components of ritual are especially appropriate for the indexical transmission of message”. Utterance in the form of spoken words may not be sufficient.

The substance Rappaport (1999:152-153) refers to relates closely to the functionality of a material bodily presence that is orientated inwards but, as noted previously, also draws in an outwardly aspect. With specific reference to the artist’s presence, bodily action presented as movement and gesture further entrenches the substance of ritual. The body is central in a confluence of real-time worldly presence and metaphysical otherworldly experiences. Form and substance are thus inextricably fused together in a totalising ritual experience or, as Rappaport (1999:135) phrases it, “they complete each other”. Consequently, materiality gives form to substance: “The use of the body ... is a meta-message concerning the nature of the acceptance – that it is the act of an identifiable living person” (Rappaport 1999:153).

de Sagazan’s body shifts to centre stage as the subject. In a ritualised state, de Sagazan metaphorically and representationally evolves and transforms into a host of physical states. In this instance, I am reminded of Rappaport’s (1999:153) idea of form. His body is the manipulable material or substance that brings the multifaceted protagonist physically into being. Subject and object animistically merge. Christian Kerslake (2007:65-66) draws on Bergsonian theory<sup>82</sup> to expand the connection between intuition, creativity and animism.

There is an animism which can be found in most art forms. The artist attempts to grasp “the intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance” – in other words, to animate the descriptions, paints and forms that render the shape of the thing depicted. He or she develops this power by “placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy”.

In what ways do these formulations assist in the reconciling of metaphysical and mythological narratives, especially since the latter is a formative structure in de Sagazan’s work? I extend this

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<sup>82</sup> Kerslake (2007:65-66) is referring to the first edition of Bergson, H. 1907. *Creative evolution*. Translated by A Mitchell. London: Macmillan.

question by asking how the bodily presence of the artist is pivotal in the relation between the temporal conditions of ritualised practice, determined through form and substance on the one hand, and metaphysical or ontological narratives reinforced in ritual-making activity on the other. While de Sagazan's methods are ritualised rather than actual rituals, it is fair to say that some degree of canonical structure informs his practice, even though this does not necessarily define a conventional ritual approach. The semiotic significance of the body in ritual, as it relates to canonical ritual formulae, is noted by Rappaport (1999:153) as a reciprocity between the initiate's presence and the conventional gestures prescribed in the ritual canon. "By drawing himself into a posture to which canonical words give meaning the performer incarnates or embodies a canonical form. As he participates in the form or order he incorporates it into himself. His body gives substance to the canon as the canon provides his body with form" (Rappaport 1999:153).

For intuition to work as a means through which the body is ritualised, intrinsic knowing is necessary. "This religious knowledge should not be mistaken for scholarly (theological) knowledge, which is secondary to the primary religious knowledge that is conveyed through symbolic practice and inscribed onto the body" (Moyaert in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:8). To know through bodily means implies learnt traditions and practiced actions that are internalised and integrated. Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:8) observes how these "become interiorized and incorporated, thereby shaping and transforming the religious identity of the ritualist".

The artist-performer embodies physical place through a presence that is both an immediate in-the-moment experience of heightened sensorial awareness and, simultaneously, a foregrounding of all that came before. By deductive logic, the causal presence of the artist, now brought into the formalised context of the ritual canon, accesses metaphysical phenomena, including mythological, supernatural and otherworldly contexts. Rappaport (1999:164) highlights this relationship in a liturgical ritual context in which creation myths are enacted: "In ritual, however there is not only reiteration but a re-establishment of the form itself. What better way to represent form than through the invariant words of liturgical order, or to provide substance to that form than by drawing the body into a ritual posture?". It is at this point of self-reflexive realisation that the artist's work begins. Rappaport (1999:164) elaborates that, when ritual, form and substance converge, bodily form and embodied substance invoke a primordial creation narrative. By temporarily relinquishing a present and outward sense of self while working, de Sagazan taps into an inward world that is

formless, primordial, feral and outside of time. “There is in ritual not only a representation of creation, but a re-creation of the primordial order, the primordial union of form and substance” (Rappaport 1999:164). This has consequences for a ritualised process involving heightened awareness. Referencing Merleau-Ponty, Hardman (2019:46) underlines the highly personalised aspect in her discussion of creative intuition: the material bodily conditions for a ritualised experience involve a “lived relationship of the entire body with the world. Consciousness is embodied in that the body itself is conscious of its relationship with the world; ... It experiences heat, cold, unhappiness and despair, and Merleau-Ponty refers to this as ‘embodied subjectivity’”. Magnified through these trajectories, the artist shapes and forms sculptural materials, setting in motion conscious and subconscious processes. The body as place has a role to play. While operating as a means to focus on the present moment through “subjective embodiment” (Merleau-Ponty quoted by Hardman 2019:46), it draws from experiences across time. Personal histories and present-moment experiences are bound together. Once sensorially activated, the body is a springboard into the realms of expansive nothingness, where being is no longer relevant in a rational and predetermined logical way. Instead, the artist-performer enters a sensorial state of conscious void. He is present and absent in space; he is simultaneously placed and unplaced; formed and unformed. He becomes and un-becomes. Hardman (2019:52-53) relates this to states of consciousness and argues that this state of being is the seat of the creative impulse. Drawing on Jung and Collier, Hardman (2019:52-53) relates the experience of this vacuous state<sup>83</sup> as coming

from within through the process of intuition in which impressions convey attitudes or states of being generated from within the Self. In line with Jung’s theory, Collier regards intuitive consciousness as a very deep level of consciousness that is connected with and draws from the unconscious. Collier points out that it enables us to make previously unthought-of associations that may not be logically or sensorially apparent. Intuition gives insight and allows us to perceive a different kind of truth to the ‘truth’ we receive through the senses.

The embodied experience of the paradoxical relation of fixed place and intuitive action evokes a phenomenological function of place. Place is embodied through an interstitial relation of physical presence and otherworldly expansiveness. Referring to notions of physical symmetry, location and direction, Tuan (2011:43) discusses the human form’s sense of being in space and its relations to otherworldly phenomena as “the spaces, social and cosmological, that extend from the body”. Tuan

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<sup>83</sup> Hardman (2019:53) refers to this as “‘expanded consciousness’ or intuition, a kind of intelligence which harnesses body, mind and heart”.

(2011:52) extends his analysis of spatial expansiveness to a discussion of transcendence, which by default straddles the present spatial moment as well as an expansive nothingness that is both liberating and emancipating: “Freedom implies space ... [and] the ability to transcend the present condition”.

The liberation Tuan refers to stems directly from the microcosmic embodied position of the artist-performer. I conceive this as centred around the act of physically creating something through an intense intuitively driven and ritualistically fuelled experience. Elizabeth Grosz (2008:8) expands on this point when she discusses “the peculiar relations that art establishes between the living body, the forces of the universe and the creation of the future”. Tracing a philosophical thread through Deleuze (1990) and Strauss (1963), Grosz (2008:8) relates the importance of sensation in the expanded field of consciousness and the way sensation is a formative link between the subject (in this case the artist or performer) and the world: “Sensation is what art forms from chaos through the extraction of qualities”. Grosz (2008:8) explains further how art “throws over chaos, gives life to sensation that, disconnected from its origins or any destination or reception, maintains its connections with the infinite it expresses and from which it is drawn”.

The “embodied mind or a minded body” (Moyaert in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:7) ensures a creative experience through a sensorially enriched ritual performance. Intuition and ritual come together to “transform the participant in the ritual, to mold her identity, not so much by altering the mind, but through rewriting the body” (Moyaert in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:7). One can also bridge the emancipative and transformative effect of ritual with the expansive creative experience that sees the artist-performer draw from mythological and otherworldly contexts. In de Sagazan’s case this involves the coming together of undefined outward stimuli that can be loosely identified as personal life experience. How does this reinforce sensorial or embodied actions? Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:8) asserts that: “The body plays a central role in establishing beliefs. Surpassing the mere expression of consent, ritual has the power to inscribe beliefs onto the body”. She makes an interesting case for interreligious ritual participation by distinguishing between inter-riting and intertexting. Commenting on the transformative power of ritual evoked through affective and emotional experiences, Moyaert (in Moyaert & Geldhof 2015:8) notes how “[i]nter-riting makes one vulnerable to change and transformation in a way that discursive dialogue (intertexting) cannot do. Inter-riting enables him to enter into the sensory world of the religious other”. This interrelational

nature of the embodied ritual experience is a central defining criterion in the place-related spatialisation of ritualised processes. Rather than ritual being a singularly and monotheistically directed initiative, it makes accessible an open-ended repertoire of otherworldly stimuli. In foregrounding embodiment as a central aspect in this process, Grosz (2008:3) quoting Deleuze and Guattari (1994), explains:

Sensations, affects, and sensitivities, while not readily identifiable, are clearly closely connected with forces, and particularly bodily forces, and their qualitative transformations. What differentiates them from experience, or from any phenomenological framework, is the fact that they link the lived or phenomenological body with cosmological forces, forces of the outside, that the body itself can never experience directly. Affects and intensities attest to the body's immersion and participation in nature, chaos, materiality: 'Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:169).

A unique intersection of body, place and process is brought into sharp relief when considering the function of a ritualised practice in de Sagazan's performances. If we are to understand embodiment as the substance, and the physical body as the manifestation of form, to draw on Rappaport's (1999:153) terms, then one may assert that place, as both a physical and a multi-layered and multidimensional phenomenon, carries agency. This level of embodiment implicates "expanded consciousness" (Hardman 2019:52) to open up an infinite world of creative possibility. To think of place as both worldly and otherworldly is crucial to understand intuitive and impulsive actions and their role in de Sagazan's practice. Notably, this happens through a conceptual flow that gives form to the artist's sense of emplacement.

### **3.4.3 Current, place and emplacement**

In my interview and informal discussions with de Sagazan, he made reference to *jus* (juice). On Monday 22 May 2023 (de Sagazan 2023a), he animatedly explained this as alluding to a current or flow of life force. First, it refers to actual viscid liquid substances such as sweat, tears, urine, vomit and blood. Second, it carries the metaphoric connotation of a current or something having currency as one finds in the movement of electrically charged particles. This was an important point in understanding something of the animism that runs pervasively through de Sagazan's work. Third, it suggests the artist's conception of place, space and process as seamlessly interrelated that by extension – and for the purposes of this argument – implies a flow between worldly and otherworldly phenomena. This animistic and interdimensional vibrational flow provides a sound

grounding for how one could begin to define and conceptualise the complex interrelations of spaces, places, objects and materials, and how these symbolically and literally coalesce with metaphysical realms and layered consciousness to give meaning to his work.

The interweaving of these threads into one metaphorical fabric of creative work is what brings significance to how the artist's body, as well as discursive notions of place, are literally, symbolically and metaphorically (implicitly and explicitly) meaningful signifiers in de Sagazan's performances. The concept of *jus* is the catalyst for this notion of metaphoric flow. *Jus* brings together not only a physical association with blood as a life force – the essential ingredient allowing his body to create and perform – but also suggests a metaphor for a fluidity or flow of creative thought. To draw on Rappaport's (1999:153) notion of substance, it can be pointed out that the body as form unifies with ritual substance or *jus*, which in turn gives definition to a current of creative impulse that osmotically moves from the microcosmic intuitively driven manipulation of materials to the macrocosmic and broader context of place and memory. *Jus* is that undefinable metaphysical stuff drawn from de Sagazan's life contexts, history and memory, which filters through space, place and objects. A grouping of stimuli is given form that straddles both his physical conscious state and an otherworldly consciousness.

A web of associations condenses from the broader field of the artist's life experience and is injected into his creative process. Out of this singularity de Sagazan's universe explodes and rapidly expands. The artist's being is concentrated and magnified through his personal intent, which draws from both rational decision-making as well as abstract, subconscious or intuitive circumstances. All of these are brought onto a platform of creative work through a process-driven sensorial response to, and his instinctive manipulation of, physical materials. de Sagazan becomes the line of realisation when sensorially connecting things in a broader intuitive creative process.

As shown, the relationship between place and emplacement in ritualised gestures lies at the heart of de Sagazan's practice as a seamless interrelationship of place and process. In his critique of Jonathan Z Smith's book, *To take place: towards theory in ritual* (1987), Grimes (2006:101) recognises Smith's assertion of the complexity of place in a ritual context. In Smith's writing on ritual, Grimes (2006:107) notes, "place is not only central, but also active. As he imagines it, a place is not a mere empty or passive receptacle. It is not just the context or backdrop of action but rather a force that

forms actions and actors". These observations emphasise ritualised place as hierarchically organised and underpinning a social condition but, most importantly, constituting a flow of connecting phenomena (Grimes 2006:109-110).

de Sagazan's *jus* fits with this idea of an activating or agitational flow and becomes evident in his working process, especially as this revolves around conceptions of place and emplacement and by extension the function of ritualised activity in this process. The idea of a flow suggests that emplacement has agency in the activation of place. Emplacement does not merely describe a subject's position. While securely grounded in the fabric of place, it is more accurately a condition of a relational metaphorical placement. Grimes (2006:112), building on his critique of Smith, offers a perspective on this as part of an alternative theory of ritual. In his tabulated comparison of Smith's assertions, he elaborates further: "Emplacement may metaphorically extend the 'reach' of a place, but it does not transcend that place, nor is it superior to it ... Places and schemes of emplacement may either consolidate or critique hierarchy. They do not *necessarily* reinforce or reflect it" (Grimes 2006:112; emphasis original). The artist's body and an internalised sense of emplacement can be seen as an integral part of the broader ways in which a ritualised context is conceptualised. How does one reconcile the artist as an embodiment of ritual processes with his work as an objective producer of intuitive creative solutions? One possible solution is through the way memory and mnemonic systems of recollection function. Ritual and nonritual can be distinguished to explain this.

#### **3.4.4 Process, the body and mnemonic triggers**

An intuitive ritualised creative context can be distinguished from the nonritualised and embodied function of the artist. Grimes (2009:103) makes a case for how ritual is born out of a dissonance between ritual and nonritual "making their incongruity the definitive feature of ritual", adding that this incongruity "is a source of cultural creativity". What aspect of the artist's experience would this naturally relate to if one was to deduce that ritual is a source of cultural creativity? While ritual may involve intuitive acts that are creative, it follows that past experiences are brought into the realm of the present to tease out the incongruity between what is ritualised and what is nonritualised. For Grimes (2009:103; emphasis original), "memory connects the ritualized with the nonritualized domain. Ritual actors *remember* their ritual actions in nonritualized space (or vice versa: they recall the chaos of nonritualized life in the midst of ritualized performance). These acts of recollection are a source of both tension and interconnection".

The relation of the ritualised process and the nonritualised body raises the question of how mnemonic systems and the notion of a memory-image contribute to the totalising effect of the performative outcome. A ritualised process results in a creative transformation, which in turn affects the artist. The artist is transformed through the ritualised act of making. I argue that this condition is always sequentially contingent on previous intuitive actions. The transformed body in the ritualised process of making, while driven by intuitive, impulsive and impromptu stimuli, is not, in itself, produced in a vacuous creative act. It is derived from what came before. In de Sagazan's performances, the evolution of form happens in a linear narrative trajectory.

In *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, de Sagazan shapes the features of a current enactment of the performance based on actions and gestures in previous versions of the work. It is not impossible to imagine that any subsequent versions of his performances are not in some way determined through an embedded visual attitude that was formed by drawing on previous imagined experiences extending even further back in time to his childhood. I make specific reference here to his contact with local Brazzaville and Congolese folk magick, which he would have encountered during his time growing up and later living there. A seamless flow of stimuli is enacted between the disparate contexts and circumstances of his social and historical life experiences. An interface between past experiences and present representations is formed through mnemonic approaches that are integral to his intuitive process. In the following discussion on the metaphysics of the embodied self, I extend an analysis of the body as it transitions from an inert and passive state into an activated mnemonic state. I address this through representations of ritualised deprivation, as well as abject bodily fluids, as markers of the ritualised body as place.

### **3.4.5 Narrating the metaphysical through the embodied self**

I open with a question: How and under what circumstances does embodiment present a continuous extension of the body and ritual and its effectiveness in creative intuition? Embodiment in ritual is the reciprocal relation between an objective state of being grounded in a relation to self on the one hand, and to place on the other. For Stephenson (2012:94)

the notion of embodiment has a couple of distinct connotations. The term can refer, in a rather suspicious fashion, to the ways in which ideas and values are inscribed into the body through ritual practice. Second, the language of embodiment highlights the fact that ritual is one of the ways people go about making sense of their world. Like reason, ritual is a way of knowing.

Considering this relation of self to place, one deduces that the artist's macrocosmic context is channelled and given form through process. To delve deeper into the emotional states of vulnerability as a necessary self-referential state, the artist-performer undergoes a self-imposed or externally imposed sensorial activation. A deliberate shutting off of selected sensorial reactions and stimuli happens in the form of depravity, abstinence and/or sacrifice. Citing Bell, Stephenson (2015:94-95) notes how embodiment brings two contrasting meanings to the fore in ritual contexts. First, "Ritualists are imagined as a kind of malleable wax," and the ritualised body, "engaging in ritual is not really engaging at all but is more of a passive receptor of codes and scripts that lie outside, in our wider social world". In his second point, Stephenson (2015:95) notes how embodiment "emphasizes that the body and senses are noetic channels in their own right". This noetic function of the sensorial body is what informs much of de Sagazan's process and explains why he often prioritises extreme modalities of action. This relation is described in the diagram I produced (fig 36). The noetic quality of de Sagazan's practice is contingent on the interrelation of real-time life experience and a heightened awareness of himself as place and in relation to place. Pragmatically, the latter translates into the physical materials he collects and uses. For example, clay is not just a means to develop form and features, gestures and expression. It is also a powerful expression of the primacy of sight, hearing, breathing, taste and touch, which are in varying degrees repressed or temporarily severed by the application of the clay.

Depravity, abstinence or sacrifice as narrative content in de Sagazan's performances converge through the filter of ritualised action. The former, depravity, is a process-specific activity that places his working methods squarely in the substance of a ritual space. The latter, abstinence or sacrifice is the resulting form of this process. The two are not mutually exclusive and, to fully understand the way ritual process sets up narrative meaning in this way, one needs to engage with these two points as not just intersecting but as contingently reliant on one another.

Sensorial deprivation brings dis-ease and emotional trauma. The heightened experience of pain in ritual events gives expression to this. Exacting will and resolve, commitment and dedication, this experience may instil extreme degrees of discomfort and physical and emotional distress. I extend this position to prioritise an emotional response to pain that operates psychosomatically as well as psycho-physiologically. For example, in an experience of sight deprivation, physical pain gives way to a state of panic that is as traumatic as physical injury. Ariel Glucklich, in *Sacred pain: hurting the*

*body for the sake of the soul* (2001), focuses specifically on the trope of pain in relation to ritual and ritualistic practices. The initiate's body is foregrounded as the object onto and through which a ritualistic intervention is enacted. A sensorial narrative intersects with a representation of bodily alteration and transformation. Gluklich's observation of the body as a locus for the infliction of physical and emotional trauma – represented through a performative event – becomes useful in the way I argue that the ritualised body is a place in and of itself, over and above the obviously inscribed trope of bodily transformation and personal creative advancement.

In performances such as *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*, clay and found materials are used to obfuscate the artist's sense of sight and, in some cases, hearing, taste and smell too. This is not a homogenising aspect to his working process. The additive and subtractive progression sees the protagonist transition in appearance. As the represented creature develops over time, so too does the shift in sensorial reception and activation. At all stages in the process, the predominant value of touch is prioritised. Tactility is the single sensorial position that determines the activation or deactivation of others. A transformation in form is accentuated through other bodily actions such as gesture and pose, all of which work together to give a totalising expression of perpetual change. de Sagazan recalls his initial experiments with clay that provided the foundation for later performances. In an interview, de Sagazan (quoted by Cicinelli 2020) explains:

The Transfiguration performance was born from the desire to give life to my sculptures and that day, failing that, "I threw my body into the battle", in other words, I covered my face with the materials I used to paint and sculpt: clay and paint, aiming to vitalize my body. After seeing the result through my camera, I realized that this act went well beyond my desire: it had revealed very intimate things about our underground identities and our uncanny weirdness.

My personal experience of this process, in the work I did with de Sagazan, highlights the levels of emotional relay contained in periods of deprivation that allow other senses to be foregrounded. With the obliteration of sight, one's bodily self shifts to favouring tactility, gesture, posture, breathing, hearing, taste and smell. One embodies the process of giving over and abandoning oneself to the experience in the present moment and, in so doing, experiences a heightened sense of uncertainty, vulnerability and insecurity.

In *A la folie*, de Sagazan is initially seen lying naked on a wire-framed bed. His movements are limited, and he is breathing sporadically. The stage and bed are covered with a fine dust, with which

the artist works closely, in tandem with his own bodily gestures and movements. At 2:33 minutes into the video, the artist sits upright on the bed and slumps over. A stream of saliva drips from his mouth. The artist's body is a signifying conduit. The absence of wetness as a motif undercut only by the minimal presence of de Sagazan's saliva in this performance signifies a symbolic lack or deprivation in a trope of thirst. Thirst as a narrative thread in the conceptual making of this work is offset against de Sagazan's bodily presence that is made up primarily of water. The absence of wetness and water as an element and the intensely dry set are amplified through the ochre colour that predominates throughout the entire performance. The dryness of dust carries with it associations with dehydration, which is magnified when contrasted with the spit dripping from his mouth. The narrative of dry versus wet naturally also infers an alchemical process of dehydration and rehydration in the chemical transformation of the physical properties of material. But, more importantly to this discussion, it signals an important point to note in relation to ritual. It is not uncommon to observe a neophyte or initiate undergoing an involuntary release of bodily fluids, including vomiting, crying, defecating, urinating, sweating and bleeding.<sup>84</sup> This is ordinarily self-induced through an experience of a ritual process, and is not the product of an externally inflicted trauma or influence such as flagellation or the ingestion of psychoactive drugs.

At the core of this point is the idea of an aesthetic of transformation through a represented change in form. The artist shifts progressively into a state of perpetual becoming, as he moves between identities from artist to protagonist; from human to monster and from monster to non-monster. An experience of conscious metanarrative is induced by sensorial deprivation and the experience dissolves into a sensation of nothingness or void.

In addition to sweat, a key identifying aspect of de Sagazan's ritualised approach is the presence of bodily substances, most notably blood.<sup>85</sup> This takes the form of red paint in performances such as *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation*. In other works, he has presented his own blood as a symbolic

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<sup>84</sup> This is a common indicator of the subject achieving a trance state in a ritual context involving a state of deprivation. I experienced this personally when undergoing the ritualised performance with de Sagazan in his studio on Tuesday 23 May 2023.

<sup>85</sup> I have not encountered any reference to other bodily substances, such as hair, skin or flesh, faeces, urine, tears or semen. It should, however, be noted that the inclusion of these substances is not necessarily entirely discounted. Much of de Sagazan's work takes place in guarded privacy, and in these moments his processes are simply not divulged or publicly known.

referent, reiterating his interests in human biology, physiological systems and anatomy (de Sagazan 2023b). The use of bodily substances such as blood is accentuated in a work entitled *Circulation-extra-corporelle* (2017) (fig 37). It includes a direct reference to blood-related ritual and working with blood as a metaphor for a life-force, alluding to de Sagazan's *jus*. In the performance, he extracts blood from his arm using a needle and syringe. He uses the blood to imprint images of his face on paper. Bodily fluids such as blood evoke a narrative of risk, self-harm and death.

A death mask motif is alluded to in his bloodied facial imprints. The Sudarium from the cult of Veronica<sup>86</sup> can be acknowledged in the way de Sagazan extends the concept of a blood rite through a performative articulation of what is a biblical reference. Themes such as death and resurrection, depravity and sacrifice foreground the levels of ritualised process in de Sagazan's work. The reference to the Sudarium is an important precursor to later works in which the theme of resurrection through ritual suffering is enacted.

The blood motif is symbolically and metaphorically imaged in *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation* in the verisimilitude of red acrylic paint. Red paint is a crucial part of his repertoire of preferred materials.<sup>87</sup> In some cases, it is mixed in with clay in performances such as *Le Dictator* and *La Nef des Fous (VOST)* (2015) (fig 38), or added to create a visceral fleshy tone to the colour of the clay, implying not only a skin colour but also blunt force trauma and bruising. He also applies it to his clay-covered head to suggest lipstick as he transforms into a monstrous female protagonist. Repeatedly occurring in versions of *Transfiguration* and *Hybridation* and *Le Dictator*, the red pigment motif transforms from its application in his process-specific approach to a powerful signifier of gesture and idiosyncratic features. For example, in *Transfiguration* (1998; February 2010 version) (fig 3b).

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<sup>86</sup> The *Veil of Veronica*, or *Sudarium* or sweat cloth is also known as the *Vernicle* and often called simply the *Veronica* (The Historical Origins of Veronica's Veil: Inside the Cloth Relic of Jesus' Holy Face Wiped on Calvary [Sa]). For more on this Christian relic, said to preserve an imprint of the face of Christ produced when Saint Veronica wiped sweat from his face as he progressed to Calvary, refer to the following sites:

<https://www.ewtnvatican.com/articles/historical-origins-of-veronicas-veil-inside-the-cloth-relic-of-jesus-holy-face-wiped-on-calvary-2357>

<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/mellan-sudarium-of-saint-veronica/>;

<https://www.sudariumchristi.com/en/oviedo/index.htm>;

<https://thepilgrimsguide.com/projects/the-veronica-enacting-the-virtual-and-the-physical/>;

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=2856>.

<sup>87</sup> de Sagazan uses an inexpensive student-quality acrylic paint to accentuate specific dramatic moments in his performances by creating facial features such as a grimacing smile or the evocation of an open wound.

*Hybridation* (version created with Gareth Pugh in 2017) (fig 15a), as well as *Le Dictator*, finger-dotted red paint suggests bleeding eyes. A hand-slashing gesture creates a seeping wound. Orifices such as grimacing clown-like smiling mouths and gaping abdominal wounds contrast with pigment enmeshed in clay and plumber's hair to suggest de-corporeality, death and decay. In *Transept*, he slashes a red horizontal line across his victim's face giving the protagonist a mouth, in a way reminiscent of Luis Buñuel's popular scene in the 1929 film, *Un Chien Andalou*. A visualisation of extreme violence is presented ambivalently. Red pigment is dragged up from across the bloated and extended pregnant body in *La Nef des Fous (VOST)*. From an abject abdominal wound, a small clay figure is visually birthed by the monster itself.

In *Transfiguration*, the binary opposites of worldly and otherworldly are brought into sharp focus through his use of bodily fluids such as sweat and saliva as these combine with clay, hay and pigment. These are important referents to trance-like shamanic practices involving physical and metaphysical transformation. The protagonist transforms through motifs that include a representation of blood, ferocity of gesture and pose. Ingestion and oral deprivation, as well as garish make-up, serve to accentuate and enhance a bizarre and uncanny disfigurement. In an interview (Cicinelli 2020), de Sagazan reflects on the iconography of disfigurement as a metaphorically charged device:

Disfigurement is a trick to get my nervous system to take into consideration the strangeness of my human face ... disfigurement has the function of awakening our brain ... the fantastic aspect of our being is resurrected in the world ... Something very profound about reality is revealed to you. The disfigurement in art has the function of creating this electroshock in the brain to get us out of our torpor.

The focus on the eyes and mouth in this work is significant. The eye-poking gesture has two visual purposes. It evokes the idea of a creature or monster that is depicted blinding itself, but it also enables its own sight through the application of eye motifs. Healing and self-mutilation are implied in this gesture of receiving and removing sight. This involves an uncanny narrative of a protagonist that is at once powerful and yet undercut through moments of self-inflicted metamorphosis. When probed, de Sagazan (in Cicinelli 2020) reflected on the human monster protagonist that he becomes, and how personal resonance is intimately inwardly orientated with each performance.

### 3.5 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Before I offer any particular concluding statements to this chapter, a few important disclaiming parameters and points of fact need to be affirmed. de Sagazan is not pagan nor is he a practitioner of witchcraft in any way (at least not in the conventional or formalised sense). He is also not a dabbler in occult mysticism, esoterica or demonolatry. During the time I spent with de Sagazan, he did not ever mention or discuss a spiritual path or personal beliefs in otherworldly phenomena. This did not preclude or exclude the in-depth discussions we had concerning the relationship between his physical and metaphysical realms and how these seamlessly intersect, entangle and, in some cases, uncomfortably collide and splice through one another in his work. He is first and foremost a performance artist who uses ritualised processes to represent otherworldly narratives in his practice. The main objective of this chapter has been to ask why, and in what ways is this made apparent. How is it significant? First, this line of questioning prompts the observation that his process-related production methods and the materials he employs are noetic and, in that sense, personally resonant. Second, his embodied sense of place and his impulsive and intuitive working approach bring with it an understanding of personally centralised otherworldly narratives. de Sagazan's choice of materials and his methods of working suggest an expressive extension of the artist's agency. Clay, hay, pigment and other organic materials are enablers of a limen-like phenomenon. Through the tactile action-based handling of materials and the shaping of form and physical articulation of detail, de Sagazan positions himself at the precipice of an embodied and subconscious state that feeds his creative impulses. His rational decision-making is an integral part of a broader multidimensional and multimodal spatiality, which sets in motion a subconscious and intuitive process that resides both within and outside of the physicality of his being.

These states are the sum of his intuitive creative impulses and need to be understood as intra-relational; in other words, they come together at the specific time of making and occur seamlessly and simultaneously as a sensory experience of being both present and absent. At that expressive moment when rational decisions are overridden by intuitive impulses, de Sagazan is present in a rational, cognitive and embodied sense, while at the same time absent in the timeless and momentary space of a creatively induced trance-like condition.

Through an immersion in the artist's process, it becomes evident how place is conceptualised in a multidimensional, multilayered and multimodal way in de Sagazan's practice. It is this complexity

that enables the artist to seamlessly traverse physical as well as metaphysical states. In this autonomous zone of emancipation and free will, the artist abandons himself to a creative act that is unbounded. Impromptu creative gestures are directed and repeatedly redirected through an embodied self that exists in multiple realms of consciousness. Through this interstitial connectivity, de Sagazan finds a sense of place – a point from which he launches an intuitive creative process. The performative outcomes are represented as a projection outward through the aesthetic veil of mediation, provided by either digital photographs or video documentation, or on the theatre stage or platform when presented in front of an audience. Place also features in real time as the space of the studio and residential compound and, more broadly, the city of Saint-Nazaire. These thematic and iconographic threads fold together conceptually through the use of locally sourced processes and materials.

The artist evokes a metaconscious state in the ritualised performance and reveals a heightened sensorial awareness. As an embodied place-generator, he straddles the real-time site of his own bodily, studio-based presence and the place of his subconscious state. This, I argue, is made possible through immersion in an intuitive creative process. A not-so-subtle dialectic of place interweaves through his bodily presence to become simultaneously part of a compressed moment.

de Sagazan's narration of the otherworldly implies two main trajectories of meaning. First, the artist's personal shift from real time to an alternative state of being, subjectively becoming one with the protagonist he creates by collapsing identity and emerging as a coalescent being. Second, through the agency of social commentary and satire, the work relates a narrative that is reliant on the process of the artist's becoming and unbecoming. de Sagazan's performative practice is an open-ended formulation of embodied experiences that permeate and traverse physical bodily action with undefinable metaphysical conditions. It is at this numinous juncture that the otherworldly is located as both a personal and a collective experience.

## CHAPTER 4

### Light and transience in selected work by Marcus Neustetter

#### 4.1 Introductory comments

#### 4.2 A conceptual context for the study of Neustetter's work

Marcus Neustetter (b. 1976, Johannesburg) is a contemporary artist living in Vienna, Austria. His work focuses on a wide spectrum of practice including arts activism, public art, situationally-specific and process-related performances. He favours a wide range of visual imaging modalities including drawing, projection, sound and sculptural construction. An opportunity arose to work immersively with Neustetter at his home and his studio in Vienna, Austria, from Friday 2 June 2023 to Friday 9 June 2023.

This study looks selectively backwards and forwards from the epicentre of a crucial turning point in Neustetter's working approach, marked by the pivotal work *Right to reflect* (2017) (fig 39). With an emphasis on process-related activities, I present an overview of his work before 2017 and an examination of selected performative works produced after 2017. I build a case for how embodied process takes on a highly charged transformational significance. I show how this is enabled by working with materials, objects, situations and interpersonal relations in a multidirectional and multidimensional way.

At the core of this approach is Neustetter's search for definition, understanding and meaning in the places he encounters and the physical and metaphorical spaces he moves through, as well the collaborative projects he initiates. The complexity of his creative process is signified through the idea of a physical, symbolic and metaphoric journey. This follows a directional trajectory that is enacted in the representation of a vertical gaze. For Neustetter, the vertical gaze is a directional act of looking that is orientated along a vertical trajectory and from the specific vantage point of a fixed point or place. It can also be applied in a symbolic as well as metaphoric way following the idea of a journey within the infinite expanse of time. In an interview, Neustetter (2022) responds to my point about the vertical gaze operating from the notion of being placed. He begins with a pragmatic explanation, that "basically it's me looking up into the night sky and down above the earth's surface and so by scratching or moving dust away and letting light travel down, whether we are opening caves, moving dust out of the way, ... to let light through we are creating something called the vertical gaze ... We are looking back in time so for me it's always interesting that light takes time ... for my eyes to receive it so it means I am always looking back in time. So when am I in the here and now? What is that very thin moment of the here and now that we exist above the crust of the earth? ... That's where you are right when you said we are in place".

The idea of a journey associated with the vertical gaze is complicated through his commitment to mapping undefinable fleeting moments of his subjective, and intuitive response to things. His own personal circumstances, including his empathic interactions with people, objects and places, are at the centre of this approach. Through the mechanics of light as a medium and as a metaphor, Neustetter traverses a complex terrain of process-driven performance that is uncertain in its formulation. The multivalency of light is not only explicitly rendered in his performances but operates denotatively as both a signifier of a transient journey and a sensorial trigger of a transient state.

#### **4.2.1 Transience, place and light**

In a process that applies light as a physical, metaphorical and metaphysical element, transience implies a multi-directional movement or motion from one state to another in a given time continuum. It describes a state of perpetual becoming. Unlike a change from one form to another suggested in the word transformation, a transient experience conjures up a conceptual restlessness that is never inert or static. The term transience should not be conflated with the word transcendence, although the latter can be thought of as a consequential product of the former.

Words such as trance and those with the prefix trans, such as transition, transcendent and transformation, are bundled together as defining criteria for transient (adjective) and transience (noun). Transcendent refers to a transformative experience in physical, emotional and psychological form. The word trance evokes ecstatic behaviour and proto-bodily sensations, which elevate one psychologically beyond an experience of present time-constrained spatiality. Notably, this happens in a state of extreme emotional or euphoric intensity. The gap between intuitive imagining and the heightened sensorial experience of embodiment is dramatically reduced when transitioning across a bodily boundary – for example, when experiencing pain. Susan Greenfield (2004:19) offers an example in the subjectivity of pain thresholds: “Something transient is changing if you, as the same individual, do not experience the same pain depending on what time of day it is”. In the fleeting transient moment, a suspension of sensation may result from being immersed in and overloaded by a given experience. One transcends through a transient experience.

Transience signals a state of being existing between realms. Given this, how does this concept align with Neustetter’s intuitive process, and how is it useful in understanding Neustetter’s use of light and conception of place? To answer this requires that one understand Neustetter’s work as a continually streaming personalised journey, which narrates a trope of discovery through situationally-specific space and place-directed visibility. If the purpose of light is to facilitate a journey of discovery and the stories contained therein, in what other ways can this idea of a

transient state give credence to this narrative?

Transience complicates place-related contexts in spatial performative arts practices. Ephemeral, impermanent and fleeting moments are triggered by and through intuitive processes. In a study of selected works by Neustetter, I ask how place matters in a context of production in which an instinctive and impulsive interaction with materials and space signals an emotive, metaphysical and subconscious state. To situate this discussion, I consider the work of scholars who locate the human experience as something beyond the tactile time-space of everyday experience. For example, Louis Roy's (2001:xi) definition underscores this subjective experience as a condition of being which is essentially infinite: "Individuals, by themselves or in a group, have the impression that they are in contact with something boundless and limitless, which they cannot grasp, and which utterly surpasses human capacities". This begets further questions: How can that which is considered real simultaneously represent an experience of transience? Can the artist transcend a real experience while remaining rooted in the present moment and how is this demonstrated? To critically evaluate how transience and ephemeral conditions are evoked in Neustetter's work, I consider the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In the introductory chapter to *Merleau-Ponty: space, place, architecture*, Patricia Locke and Rachel McCann (2016:1) respond to Merleau-Ponty's (1993) statement that "space and light, which are there, speak to us". Homing in on human perception and the multivalent experience of spatial contexts, they write: "Perception undergirds our cognitive and affective schemata, our experiences of simultaneity and disjunctive multiplicity, and our social institutions" (Locke and McCann 2016:1).

Neustetter's intuitive work is place-based. On the one hand, this defines an interaction with physical things. On the other, it brings attention to an embodied sense of self. Put differently, the physical attributes of site (important in Neustetter's installations and performances) give way to a personally resonant narrative of otherworldly states. Light functions as an element but also as a powerful metaphor for how a narrative of transience is enacted through an intuitive relation to place. Light enables an illuminating interface between an embodied cognition of the conscious self and the immediate social and historical characteristics of place. Neustetter's manipulation of light is imperative to the way he sets up metaphorical and symbolic associations. An intuitive response to place through the agency of light suggests a subconscious sense of things. Light gives form and visual expression to the ephemerality of place.

#### **4.2.2 Multimodal practice and process**

Neustetter's process is only partly a product of responses he enacts through actual art making. A large part of his process is determined by his sensorial encounters with people, places and spaces

that occupy his everyday experience. His emotionally driven response to the clutter and noise of contemporary life carries through into how he reflects on humankind's obsession with everyday mundanity. The illusion and deception of the here and now short circuit cognitive abilities but also pave the way to heightened consciousness. From consciousness comes awareness and through awareness he becomes curious. Through curiosity, Neustetter acquires the will to know and to understand, and it is this that drives his intuitive creative imagining. It is this path of consciousness that allows the artist-practitioner to *see the light* and gradually, over time and space, *know the self*.

The extent of his practice requires a broader definition of what the word practice means. His studio activities and the processes he enacts and formulates to produce a work, be it a performance or installation or a series of small drawings in a moleskin notebook, are the end result of a vast collection of visual and sensorial stimuli. It is from the flow of day-to-day life experiences that Neustetter collects, records, documents and assembles the stuff that brings meaningful personal resonance to his work. From the spaces he moves through, the ordinary people he interacts with, the built structures and natural phenomena that guide his movement through urban and rural spaces, to his own imaginings, Neustetter instinctively and impulsively creates from both the context of an immediate situation or circumstance and the deepest recesses of his subconscious. His process is self-reflexive and self-conscious, as well as open-ended and limitless.

There are two interrelating sides to Neustetter's process. He begins with a series of conceptualising and strategising activities. This has less to do with preconceiving and planning each project than with the logistics of how the project will come into being.<sup>88</sup> Generative drawing is an important part of this phase. A creative approach extends through impromptu and intuitive actions from these initial phases of logistical scaffolding into site-situational enactments and performative work. Place brings these intuitive creative actions into the present moment. One example of this is the events surrounding his exhibition *Into the light* (2015).<sup>89</sup> Part of this exhibition included the happening, *Sweep central* (2015) (fig 40), enacted in Port Elizabeth as part of the global initiative, International Year of Light (19 January 2015 – 06 February 2016). For the exhibition at the NMMU, Neustetter earmarked specific sites for intervention in the city centre, identified for development: "from a run-

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<sup>88</sup> Stakeholders range from funding organisations, to collaborating participants, to technical and equipment suppliers and contractors. Site considerations, funding, travel and accommodation, participation, general ideas around what the work could be about, and technical and equipment requirements, as well as any given commissioning requirements, are included in this part of the process.

<sup>89</sup> *Into the light* (2015) was held at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), at the Bird Street Campus Gallery in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, between 13 – 25 October 2015. The second version of this exhibition *Into the light* (2016) was installed at the Wits Arts Museum (WAM) in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, from 26 April to 19 June 2016. The *Into the light* (2015 and 2016) exhibitions were the last performances and exhibition events before Neustetter's working methodology, and the intentions that go along with this, shifted dramatically in 2017.

down part of town to a cultural hub, through the Bird Street campus, the Athenaeum, the Donkin Reserve and now to follow, Vuyisile Mini Square” (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]). Motivated by a perceived need for reflection on these sites through activated light performances involving community participation, Neustetter aimed to revive forgotten histories and in so doing bring past narratives into the critical scope of current re-imagining through collective “participation and reflection”. His multimodal approach became particularly evident during the wide range of activities that I had the opportunity to share with Neustetter when I visited him in Vienna, Austria, between 2 and 9 June 2023. A brief account of this experience is useful in this regard.

On the morning of Friday 2 June 2023, Neustetter and I began a conversation at his home (fig 5). This was visually recorded in the form of a drawing that extended from left to right in a landscape-orientated and A4 sized Z-fold book format. Using drawing and mark making, we set out to visually render our anticipated joint emersion in a week-long process. Without pre-empting any part of the conversation, the process involved trying to make sense of the unknown journey that was to unfold in the time I spent with him, while keeping in mind an organic flow of ideas as they emerged. We needed to ask questions and touch on aspects that were not necessarily answerable or even comprehensible in the intuitive, impulsive and impromptu moments of creative responses in our dialogue. In any discussion of light with Neustetter, connection is tantamount. Perpetual instability, vulnerability and uncertainty, and the uncontrollable yet inevitable process of chance, give context to an illuminating and fleeting moment when an interaction with others happens.<sup>90</sup> Our conversation meandered through life circumstances, the multidimensional workings of the cosmos, transience, and the significance of intuition, place and light in his work.

Utilising mapping as a strategy and the emotional and self-conscious exertion needed to enable a flexibility of flow in ideas, we talked about how ripples (or events) change life moments that impact on one’s process, and how flexibility gives rise to unexpected moments in the form of waves and layers. We discussed how transience is paraxially rooted in a foundation of place, allowing for conditions of one’s influences to impact on a moment. How does one frame a transient experience in a time-specific way when past, present and future moments begin to take on a momentum in different directions? In what ways does a process of creative thinking that begins from a place of uncertainty – in a void or a state of nothingness – enable a creative impulse?

Coincidentally reminiscent of my discussion with de Sagazan about *jus*, Neustetter and I talked about how

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<sup>90</sup> He reflects on how this “is about that process of not necessarily finding the answers, but acknowledging the process of uncertainty and vulnerability in myself and the work as a source of creative tension” (Rodrigues and Neustetter 2023:11).

particles give rise to matter through the idea of a current, a conduit or an electric flow. Referring to an analogy of life-bubbles, Neustetter asked how they get tethered and made relational to himself as an artist, so that he is able to move forward with other journeys. And how does this bring value and meaning to creative production?<sup>91</sup> Gravity is ever-present in all his work as a signifier of his own undefinable journey, as well as a more literal element in his work. How are elements of past, present and future held in place through a journey in which things move uncontrollably in and out? How do testing and measuring things in relation to each other, without defining them too closely, assist this process without it becoming locked down in definable, predictable and contradictory terms? Insights are achieved through a lens of temporary intensity. Things spiral in and out of creative potential and possibility, offering a bewildering linear timeline that is only one of many formats to consider.

We talked at length about light. Light is not only an important way of structuring a working process; the prism, for example, has facets and angles that define creative impulses. He relates how organisational thinking, such as one finds in arts administration, involves structured thinking that ultimately enables creative freedom. We own and claim the frame of reference for creative production, yet it is always refracting outwards – a projected light of its own making.

We spoke about how light translates to movement and how that movement is choreographed and directed. Light is not just absorbent but also moves outwards physically and metaphorically in a multidimensional and multidirectional way. Light projects onto a surface and the surface is real; then what is to be said of the unconscious, he asked. The context and conditions are still there in the body-mind relation as condition-specific rather than site or situationally specific determinants. The subconscious has a context or a condition that is not definable. It has influence in our experience of moments with past, present and future aspects. It continues to influence us, with infinite possibilities, including dreaming, through the circumstances of the present. The act of drawing under distraction is a creative process that happens when one's attention is directed elsewhere while drawing. In more complex terms, it demonstrates how, within the conscious structured state, the brain is able to access a subconscious dream state for free intuitive working. Through the unconscious, traces of reality are always involved in the transfixed moment of making. In his process, Neustetter oscillates between states of being by letting something happen without judgement, magnifying something else, or allowing a space for mechanical processes that are always derived from an outside influence.

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<sup>91</sup> For Neustetter, the bubbles he refers to are the circles of contingent priority. He explains that it is about finding a balance and allowing everything to fit. His life-bubbles also influence his dream world and his creative decision making. He makes allowance for conceivable and inconceivable events to happen in a subconscious mindscape.

The difficulties of fitting into an art market that is, by definition, selective and exclusionary are an important part of his work. Unlike the automatism of the Surrealists, momentary depth and opening up tiny moments of consciousness do not fit with art industry-driven aspects. Commitment and self-agency are lost in the process of market circulation. Only the thin layer at the top (the honey or the cream) is what counts in this commodified sense. The final veneer, which is not really important to the artwork, is ironically what carries value and currency. Yet it is the stuff beneath the honey-cream surface that really matters. One cannot always work in a suspended state. Structure is necessary to balance the veneer of money markets and the invisible underbelly of creative freedom. Neustetter compares this to traveling from the dark to work through and with the light. This conversation and our corresponding drawing lasted about 45 minutes.

By being integrally part of Neustetter's working process between 2 and 9 June 2023, I was afforded an understanding of his process-related working methodologies. Neustetter is a strategist. Typically working from a constructivist paradigm, he conceptualises his projects through a series of interrelated activities. On the one hand, these are people-centred and, on the other hand, they are derived from his personal observations and encounters in the spaces he moves through, and from his daily interactions with objects and surfaces. I developed a diagram (fig 41) to demonstrate how Neustetter's process forms an intricate web of intersecting resources. To explain this further, I present a brief overview of the activities during the field work conducted with Neustetter between 2 and 9 June 2023.

On the afternoon of 2 June, I met Neustetter at his studio for The Zone meeting (fig 6). As a collective, The Zone describes itself as a "collaborative transdisciplinary space" that calls for the "development of an entirely novel transdisciplinary and deliberative approach to inquiry and curation across the arts and sciences and beyond" (The Zone [Sa]). Comprising Marcus Neustetter, Bronwyn Lace, Yogi (Johannes Jaeger) and Basak Senova, The Zone is built on principles of autonomy and equity.<sup>92</sup> The meeting, somewhat chaotic in its colloquial familiarity, moved from reports on the progress of current projects to funding possibilities for new proposed projects, as well as generative discussion around potential events. Neustetter used the event to produce mind-map-like drawings of the conversations. Each moment of creative expression thus becomes part of a large ongoing

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<sup>92</sup> Through funded projects, The Zone has one overarching paradoxical goal: to define the undefinable by directing a critical focus at seemingly insurmountable and incompatible methodological, epistemological and ontological ideas that fall outside of dominant knowledge systems. In its conceptualisation, the possibilities for active engagement and the realisation of how this form of criticality is made manifest in the real-life contexts of contemporary lived experience are infinite. In The Zone there is no beginning and no end. Process is not ever an end in itself but rather a medium to set in motion a continuous fractal-like propulsion that is progressively directional (The Zone [Sa]).

archive of evidential source material.

On the morning of Saturday 3 June, we visited the Naschmarkt in Vienna (fig 8), where we purchased objects that would become useful in an event planned for the evening of Sunday 4 June. For example, Neustetter found and acquired an old astronomy handbook with illustrations and written guidance on the identity and use of astronomical equipment, such as telescopes, and the viewing of cosmological and planetary objects. On the evening of Sunday 4 June, we set up a corner of the studio space with a large roll of paper and found objects, as well as the objects we had purchased the day before at the Naschmarkt. We set about spontaneously creating an installation together, integrating a dynamic kinetic element as well as a movement of light and colour through the space. Using randomly selected drawing and painting media, we intuitively produced marks on the paper surface, working with light, colour and shadow (fig 42). The installation and happening involved a performative aspect, where I read a passage from the old astronomy handbook on the planet Venus, while Neustetter responded by interacting with some of the objects, including large paper cylinders and a blow-up globe. The event was formative as well as generative. Until this point Neustetter and I had not produced art together in an immersive and collaborative capacity.<sup>93</sup>

Part of our wanderings in Vienna was a planned day visit on Monday 5 June to the Naturhistorisches Museum (fig 9) to see, amongst other things, the 29,500-year-old Palaeolithic figurine, the Venus of Willendorf.<sup>94</sup> Neustetter keeps a plaster of Paris replica of the figurine in his studio. We also visited the Wienerberger Lehmteich (fig 7) and conducted a clay collecting activity there. The introduction of clay into our work aligned significantly with the visit to the Naturhistorisches Museum. Pulling together important conceptual and physical layers of experience, two aspects of this visit inform this layering. First, an experience of the historical, archaeological, geological and geomorphological exhibits at the museum instilled in us a profound sense of earth-related events and activities through a symbolic journey across time. Clay became a signifier of these ancient and prehistoric aspects. Second, one particular artifact, the Venus of Willendorf, represents a specific moment in relation to this prehistoric content especially since the object is widely known to carry with it ancient Upper Palaeolithic associations with fertility in the iconograph of the earth mother goddess aspect (Kuiper 2025). Clay is important in this signifying relation since the artifact was removed from a patch of the earth on the left bank of the Danube river at an excavation site in Willendorf, Austria on 7 August 1908.

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<sup>93</sup> The motif of Venus is a heavily layered metaphor for the work Neustetter and I did together, the links of which only became apparent as the week unfolded.

<sup>94</sup> Venus of Willendorf was discovered on 7 August 1908 at an excavation site outside the town of Willendorf in the Wachau region of lower Austria (nhm [Sa]).

The collection of clay from the banks of a lake at Wienerberger Lehmteich – once a brick making precinct – as part of our activities on Monday, 5 June, involved meditative collecting, cleaning and immersion in the human-made site. The clay was integrated into a reworking of the drawing that we had produced on the first day. On the evening of Monday 5 June, our second performance took the form of projected imagery (fig 43), Neustetter’s drawing, and my reworking of the Wienerberger Lehmteich clay to create an earth form, based entirely on a tongue-in-cheek reference to a mythical character developed by Neustetter.

The performance roughly followed the idea of Neustetter’s fictitious narrative about an anthropologist who discovered a mythical tribe of people that made what Neustetter terms earth forms. In the performative sequence, I used the clay to visually reproduce these earth forms, based exclusively on Neustetter’s verbal description of what his mythical anthropologist had found. No visual material was presented to me. What ensued was a multidimensional, multi-experiential and holistic interface, which was three-pronged. First, there was an interrelation of sculptural, drawn and projected elements that suggested a bringing together of various spatial formats in the ambit of one performative event. Second, it put into motion an interactive reciprocity between Neustetter and myself in our process of producing imagery. Third, it made apparent a link with the imaginings in real time in the space of the studio, as we realised that our intuitive actions are both explicit in the moment of making, and implicit and tacit in the way each of us operated meditatively with the materials in responding to each other’s improvised actions. This event pulled into focus the intuitive creative imaginings that remain hidden from view in the product of these actions on the surfaces we were working on, as the drawing and clay sculpting happened.

On Wednesday 7 June, Neustetter was visited in the studio by two friends<sup>95</sup> from the USA, as well as his The Zone partner, Yogi. Neustetter saw this as an opportunity to reflect on and measure the progress of his working methods, and simultaneously fulfil contractual needs for reporting on his progress to funders. Taking stock of completed projects, he also used these reflections as motivation for application in future initiatives. In this sense his process follows a flow from one project to the next, manifesting through media, materials, notions of place, and his own embodied and sensorial responses, as well as emotional and personal relationships with collaborators.

A final outing on Thursday 8 June to the Föhrenberge forest and the medieval Burgruine Mödling site (fig 10) involved collecting materials that would again be brought into the drawing produced on our first day together on Friday 2 June. Working into and over the existing drawing brought the reality of

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<sup>95</sup> The anonymity of these visitors is intentional, as they requested that I should not divulge their names or professional contexts.

our tactile as well as sensorial experiences at the Föhrenberge forest into a culminating full circle in the way we integrated collected objects and materials into the drawing process and onto the paper surface (fig 44). This drawing event took place on the evening of Thursday 8 June. While the first drawing process included something of a conceptualising of our time together, the second and third interventions resulted in a palimpsest-like approach, in which we drew over and into the existing drawing to enact a reflective commentary on what we had worked on during the week. Specific to this was the idea of sensorial responses to objects and surfaces, as well as landscape and place-based phenomena such as sound, colour, light, climate and weather, textural considerations, and our own interpersonal relations while working and performing together in the experimental, intimate space of his apartment and studio.

### 4.2.3 Chapter structure

Following on the outline of our collaboration, I organise this chapter in two parts to approach Neustetter's process that fits the rubric of directional journeying with and through light.<sup>96</sup> In the first part of this chapter entitled Looking back, looking down: observations of Neustetter's process-led practice from 1998 to 2017, I look back on selected works produced before the *Right to reflect* performance, including the comprehensive retrospective exhibition at the Wits Arts Museum entitled *Into the light* (2016). Specific observations on how place, intuition, light and transience intersect and are given form in his intuitive process are discussed. I show how otherworldly narratives extend through and outwards from his immersive practice. My study of Neustetter's process-led practice begins with a study of formative experiments with light, place and transience in works produced in 1998.

In the second part of the chapter entitled Looking forward, looking up: observations of Neustetter's process-led practice from 2017 to 2023, I consider works produced after 2017 through the lens of Neustetter's subjective and reflective stance. I make pointed reference to performative events in which Neustetter repurposes and recycles the material collected during the previous years of production. The section begins with a detailed analysis of *Right to reflect* and continues into a brief analysis of *Processing videos 1-16* (2019) (fig 45), which looks back in order to propel a gaze forward. Enacted performatively as deliberations intending to let go of previous emotional and physical attachments, the sixteen short videos in *Processing Videos 1-16* suggest a series of activities designed to enable processing of previous experiences rather than an outright purging and moving forward from a clean slate, so to speak. Building on analysis of experimental work

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<sup>96</sup> By employing a combination of chronological as well as thematic approaches, and working closely with material shared with me by the artist, as well as what he has archived on his website, I draw selectively on examples of his performative work.

stretching back to 2018, I continue the analysis of place and intuition in Neustetter's work with light and transience in *Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018) (fig 46), *The vertical journey – a tribute to the still unknown* (2019) (fig 47), and *Solo solidarity future* (2020) (fig 48). This section concludes with an analysis of *Lead the way again* (2021/22) (fig 49).

To better understand the act of directional looking and its meaning in Neustetter's process, this section is structured around the following criteria, each with guiding questions. (1) Repurposing: Why does the artist repurpose previously used materials to look back and forward in his process? (2) Emotional and personal motivation and investment: In what ways does the materiality and the physical manipulation of objects signify the artist's emotional and introverted journey into unknown psychological circumstances? (3) Tearing down and clearing out: How and why is a destructive element necessitated in selective instances of his repurposing process? (4) Taking stock, sweeping and tidying up: What form do new creative frontiers potentially take?

Foregrounding transience, its impact on notions of place and the agency of light in Neustetter's intuitive process, my study aims to:

1. Theoretically contextualise the elusive concepts of ephemerality, transience and transcendence;
2. Expound the purpose of intuition in Neustetter's work;
3. Interrogate the relation between (a) light as a metaphor, (b) light as an ingredient, tool or medium, (c) light as an explicit spatial phenomenon and (d) light as a narrative device to enable a journey;
4. Provide a forum to identify instances where light, transience and intuitive processes elucidate the complexity of otherworldly narratives.

#### **4.3 Part 1: Looking back, looking down: observations of Neustetter's process-led practice from 1998 to 2017**

##### **4.3.1 The audacity of light**

We speak of bringing something into the light; of shining a light on something; of seeing the light. There is a vast spectrum of contemporary and ancient scholarship on metaphoric and symbolic associations with light. Liane Gabora (2014:3) alludes to this as "the metaphor between external light and inner light". Charles Forceville and Thijs Renckens (2013) define the metaphor of light as "the distinction between creative and conceptual metaphor, and the medium-specificity of metaphor". Neustetter's work with light moves impulsively through themes that straddle the abstract and the figurative, the physical and the metaphysical, the conscious and the unconscious, the real and the illusory, the sacred and the profane, and the worldly and the otherworldly.

Neustetter's use of light is audacious. Why the descriptor, audacity? This is a defining way to

conceptualise light as an essential element of Neustetter's practice and, by extension, his embodied self. The audacity of light is linked to its omnipresent aspect, a phenomenon that persistently and stubbornly is surprisingly absent and yet present in its ability to amplify sensorial and emotional states. Shifts happen from a point of equilibrium and balance to a state of growing illumination. Light presents an opportunity for deep introvertive reflection on the tenuous presence of one's illuminated self and place in the world. Neustetter enables a ritualised initiation through ontological transformation into a transcendent state of heightened self-awareness. As an articulator of space and spatial experience, light is a signifying ingredient in his work from his earliest experiments during his undergraduate and graduate studies.

Some of his earliest works with light are *00untitled* (1998) (fig 4) and *Untitled-Projection (installation)* (1999) (fig 50). The latter is one of Neustetter's first exhibited works using projection. In this work he made use of a "3-beam data projection of a live screen recording across a busy passageway" (Neustetter [Sa]a). *00untitled*, installed at The Nunnery at WITS, Johannesburg, comprised "[d]elicately hand-crafted paper cones and flashing lights simulating pixels in an installation environment" (Neustetter [Sa]a). Arranged in a modular format to suggest an illuminated landscape, the cone-shaped pods are lit through the use of flickering Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights. Neustetter emulates a pixelated environment, anticipating his work with pixelation and digital and cellular mobile forms of communication in later works such as *mobilelocalsystems* (2002) (fig 51), *Desire* (2003) (fig 52), *Mobile\_interventions. Johannesburg art gallery* (2003) (fig 53), and *Transformation* (2003) (fig 54). The visual effect in *00untitled* is one in which the interior of the Nunnery is transformed into a landscape of sound and light, which operates in the darkness of the space to dematerialise the physical interior and prompt visual cues. Neustetter attempts to shift the materiality of place through the presence of light as an illuminating but also deconstructing element. Immateriality, as a metaphoric narrative, is also present in the motif of an implied fungal growth as the pods flicker, casting light and shadow across wall, floor and ceiling surfaces. The resulting ambience gives form to a dislocated space that is disorientating and at the same time affirming. The glowing ambient interior reminds one of the flickering effects of candlelight in the context of spiritual worship, which both orientates the visitor towards a contemplative and introvertive place of prayer, and also effects a dislocation from outside interference and distraction.

Neustetter's light-orientated approach extends into his conceptualisation of a journey of discovery where frontiers are neither barriers nor boundaries but rather porous veils of self-conscious action. With light, Neustetter brings seemingly dis-associated phenomena into close conceptual and physical proximity. It activates the artist's sense of himself and others as agents of transformative potential. In Neustetter's process, light is animistic. Light illuminates the relations between things:

spaces, objects, actions, emotions, states of being.

Neustetter interrogates the deception and illusion of living in the turbulent, toxic and traumatic currents of modern times. Through light activation, he confronts the human condition of being dumbed down and induced ideologically into a hapless state of circular false hope. Light is understood differently. He questions the functionality of light in terms of time and scale. In what ways do things, unimaginably minute and demonstratively huge, acquire a human relation? In what ways can the unknown, the unformed, the infinite expanse of untapped potential become a source of intimate connection, interrelation and resonance? How does this actively dismantle oppressive historical, cultural and social boundaries? At what point can the undefinable become the primary source of self-realisation and becoming? To address these questions, I focus on four general criteria in his use of light: (1) media and objects through which Neustetter directs a light-orientated and process-led practice; (2) metaphoric associations that assist in visual correlations at the juncture of place and spatiality; (3) the relation between the physicality of light and its metaphorical operation in his intuitive working process; and (4) aspects of light that pertain to Neustetter personally, and how these in turn define transformative moments with the communities and individual collaborators in his performative and installation works. In the subsections that follow these four core areas of focus underpin the close examination of key themes and how these become useful in an analysis of selected examples of his performative works.

#### **4.3.2 Death and light**

Creativity happens in the vacuous space of metaphoric death where vulnerability is foregrounded to be creative and where one acknowledges the finiteness of one's potential for autonomy.

Neustetter's work is suggestive of a shamanic state that requires first a descent rather than ascent to attain enlightenment: through an entanglement with the substances of the lower worlds, the ego takes on its dark states to progressively and gradually acquire illumination. A seamless shift between the worldly and the otherworldly and between states of consciousness is invoked. Neustetter embodies light, as he intimately knows his darkness. Acceptance of a journey to find death and the potency of creativity, presents a transition and transformation from one state to another. This is the act of making art.<sup>97</sup>

Death, for Neustetter, is an enabling portal and an integral part of a perpetual cycle of

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<sup>97</sup> Neustetter resists the description of his work as performance. It is less theatrical and more inwardly orientated because it emanates from embodied actions and what he terms his sacred space (his studio). The word performance suggests a distance from the creative self or an enactment that is not his process. He prefers words like provocations or happenings. For the purposes of this research, however, I refer to his work using words such as performance, installation and performative installation.

transformation and transition – a vacuous black void through which he must pass to do the work. What emerges after this metaphoric death is his transformed self. Rising from the unknown entropic realms of dark consciousness, the artist forms a conduit through which his physical and emotional experiences and those of others are enabled. As an active agent of change, he embodies and transmits traces and elements of place through his physical and metaphoric use of light and, in so doing, brings into effect a transient state with a shared capacity for an otherworldly experience. In 2002, he produced a work in which sound, movement and projected light operated to visually deconstruct bodily presence with a haunting spatial void.

In this work, *Connected?. Johannesburg (2002)* (fig 55), the presence of impulsive action fades in and out of ambient spatial activation through the effects of projected light, imagery and sound. Physical action gives way to visual traces made possible through illuminated imagery. Starkly bright as well as muted glowing lights are placed strategically throughout the interior of an abandoned building. Neustetter illuminates aspects of the interiors that strongly suggest ghostly traces and remnants of previous occupation. Rather than dematerialising interior structure, light serves to reify otherworldly presence by bringing attention to suggestive traces of previous occupation. Absence collides uncomfortably with presence, marking an historical past as an indefinable signifier of the uncanny. In this installation, light de-structures through the suggestion of unknown and unseen presence. The effect is paradoxically one of warmth and illumination giving rise to an eerie resonance.

Neustetter enters a state of conscious embodiment in his art making process. Extreme discomfort is often the core sense of his embodied state. Thoughts are disconnected from bodily senses. Conscious and objective realisation are short-circuited. This results in a pathological dependency on moments in which he seeks to access aspects of the known, of this world, wanting to maintain a state that works at the expense of other undefinable moments. For Neustetter, the antidote is the journey towards finding the ability to straddle otherworldly states, to enable fresh creative moments in the real world of lived experience. Space and time and the work of light in this relation are foregrounded.

Light is governed by propellant and enabling qualities in Neustetter's work. Conceptualised as a defining point at the core of consciousness, it is the essence of both physical and metaphorical work. When understood in relation to time, light becomes a metaphor for cognitive functions of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge is acquired in the time it takes to exercise a thought. In Neustetter's process-driven work, this happens intuitively in the unconscious state. Light enables thought and thought evolves (over time) into the ability to reason. At this magical juncture of human cognition, one encounters the binary of constructive and deconstructive forces that are expressed relationally, contingently and empathically in his work. Light is catalysed as a product of the connectivity of these binary phenomena encountering each other in

unpredictable and chaotic ways. Poetic as this is, for Neustetter, infinity resides animistically in matter that he encounters, not least of all in himself as the artist, as he moves creatively over time through the unknown and undefinable. In the diagram (fig 56), I plot out Neustetter's process as an agent of light. Light makes provision for a shift between states of being that evoke a metaphoric cycle of life and death, which is applicable in his performative and collaborative works as an experience of shared memory.

Through early experiments with digital and online presence, Neustetter brings attention to the spatialisation of the real and virtual and, by implication, differently real. Subjective relations with place are articulated through the agency of light in two ways. First, light is metaphoric in its association with the cognitive functions of memory and the suggestion of past events. Second, experiments with light as directed through digital technology, agitate and tease out personal and public spatial relationships. Intuitively calling in words and word associations in *Home* (2000) (fig 57) and *In the future will these be memories of the past (website)* (2000) (fig 58), for example, Neustetter builds a narrative around notions of home as a physical place and home as a virtually represented place. In what he describes as imagery comprising "an animation of words and typographical visuals" (Neustetter [Sa]a), he presents a body of online work that encapsulates his conceptions of memory and how these mediate a sensorial perception and engagement with physical place and emotionally charged relations with place. Through his interest in time and light in a clever arrangement of words, Neustetter personalises complex spatial relations by asking: "In the future, will these be memories of the past?" (Neustetter [Sa]a). Delving into the world of his own subconscious, he uses the work *In the future will these be memories of the past (website)* to formulate an idea of a journey through time as he reflects on the past, present and projected future through an assimilation of words and digitally produced imagery.

The modular pixel is translated through a cubic format into constituent spatialising elements that compress the conceptual and spatial logic of things that are ordered and systematic with notions of chaos and disorder. This brings forward a calming effect, especially in the ambience provided by the lighting system. Neustetter re-figures a trope of introverted contemplation in ways that metaphorically and physically allude to the agency of light. In this sense light is an important means to foreground and mediate these complexities.

In a site-specific interactive installation reminiscent of his experiments in *00untitled*, Neustetter again works with LED lighting in both *<Void> (installation)* (2001) (fig 59) and *.Matrix on paper Untitled104 (installation)* (2001) (fig 60). Through the placement of 1000 origami styled paper cubes produced from dot matrix printed paper sheets in *.Matrix on paper Untitled104 (installation)* to the instinctive shaping of space with ambient electronic sound in *<Void> (installation)*, Neustetter

activates and deactivates a spatial experience condensing light and time in an unpredictable pulsing lighting system. This effect of light in the installation space activates the viewer's senses and is, at the same time, disorientating. An emotive reaction is prompted. A sensorially heightened and subjective experience is deliberately offset against the sense of exposure and openness brought about by the public aspect of the space. The ambient environmental effect instils a feeling of introversion and vulnerability.

### 4.3.3 Intuition and defining the magick of light

In the field, I observed how the effect of Neustetter's work is one of engrossed fascination.<sup>98</sup> The effects of light-projected imagery and his use of light in site-situational installation work, as well as cross-disciplinary performative events, are spell-binding and enchanting. For Neustetter personally, and for a given receptive audience, the effect is awe-inspiring and mesmerising. In a word, his work is fascinating. Etymologically the word *fascination* is a useful means to frame the effectiveness of his work with light. The verb *fascinate* originates from a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century description of something bewitched and enchanted (OED [Sa]).<sup>99</sup> This is traced further back to the 14<sup>th</sup>-century French word *fasciner*, which stems from the Latin word *fascinates* translating to "bewitch, enchant, fascinate" and a word of unknown origin, *fascinus*, implying "a charm, enchantment, spell, witchcraft". According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (OED [Sa]), in 1815 the word fascinate was recorded to signal a "sense of 'delight, attract and hold the attention of'". The dictionary entry concludes by stating: "To fascinate is to bring under a spell, as by the power of the eye; to enchant and to charm are to bring under a spell by some more subtle and mysterious power. This difference in the literal affects also the figurative senses" (OED [Sa]). The etymology of the verb to fascinate makes compelling sense when conceptualising Neustetter's use of light. The awe-inspiring and mesmerising effects are brought into the scope of a metaphysical context of embodied sensation that pulls together an experience of the magickal phenomena of light. Tacitly hidden from any cognitive rational explanation, light in Neustetter's work is fascinating in its capacity to enchant, delight and potentially bewilder. How and in what ways is this made possible? How is light made magickal, and how is this a pivotal point in Neustetter's process-specific practice?

Before light manifests as a medium in Neustetter's work, it carries a prolonged metaphoric

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<sup>98</sup> I refer here not only to the work I did with him in his studio in Vienna, Austria. I also closely observed how audiences responded to his light performances for the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) centenary celebrations in October 2022 as well as the more recent centenary celebrations at St John's College, Johannesburg, in October 2023. I refer to these events later in this chapter.

<sup>99</sup> The OED [Sa] provides a good overview. For example, in a humorous etymological twist, the word is also interpreted as deriving from the ancient Greek word *baskanos*, which evolved into the Latin word *bhasko*, suggesting a "band, bundle". This in turn alludes to an "'amulet in the form of a phallus'" which is compared to the "Latin *fascinum* 'human penis; artificial phallus; dildo'".

association in a narrative of exploration and experimentation. Light is the proverbial spark of consciousness that sets in motion an intuitive creative process. Consciousness, when related to light in this way, is subjective, generating what Greenfield (2004:6) refers to as one's own personal world of experience or "unique inner state". Through an engaged logic of curiosity and with an openness to endless possibilities, Neustetter uses light to define a moment of clarity and a symbol of hope (Neustetter 2023b).

An emotional sensitivity directs a genuine drive to facilitate progressive change. Neustetter critically interrogates the spaces of socially and historically compromised communities, coupled closely with his critical stance on the limitations set out in officially sanctioned aesthetic visuality. He immerses himself in and confronts his own fragility and vulnerability as an artist and as a human being. These are the abstract, tacit and undefined psychological conditions that form his journey from unrelated or bisociative encounters. Forceville and Renckens (2013:7-8) cite Arthur Koestler's (1969) formulation of the word bisociation when "'the logical pattern of the creative process consists in the discovery of hidden similarities' (1969, p. 27). Discussing examples from the fields of humour, scientific discovery, and art, Koestler coins the term 'bisociation' for the unexpected fusion of two elements, 'previously unconnected matrices of experience' (1969, p. 45)". Koestler's bisociation elucidates Neustetter's experimental mindset in, for example, his earlier explorations with the quirky glitchiness of digital technology.

Light projections and the journey narrative are conceptualised in Neustetter's experiments with mobile cellular and digital technology, in works such as *Corrupted capture (photographic experiments)* (2003) (fig 61) and *Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg* (2003) (fig 62). The notion of mobility is bound together in a visuality of transience. Fleeting moments of discord and corrupted imagery are produced through what he describes as the "analogue disturbances of digital capturing and presentation processes. Through movement, light, dropping of camera, transfer cable damages and magnetic interferences" (*Corrupted capture (photographic experiments)* (2003) [Sa]). *Corrupted capture (photographic experiments)* presents a series of incongruous moments of deliberation as Neustetter journeys through the uncertain territory of digital accidents by allowing one activity to collapse into another. The cell phone device transforms from a known mode of communication into a tool for absorbing concentration through generative creative action. For a period of time, the artist explores the idea of minimal contact and restricted tactile relations, brought about by digital devices. *Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg* is strategically digitally participative through pixelated graphics downloaded on mobile phones. It is an interventionist strategy of collective collaboration with a wider audience (*Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg* (2003) [Sa]). The work extends from the personalised format of mobile phone technology to open projections in a public space. In the

original installation of *Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg* in August 2003, Neustetter targeted the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) to playfully inject a critical vibrancy through his light installations into and through the gallery space. Using an overhead projector, he projected intuitively drawn imagery, as well as printed cell phone-generated imagery, between art works from the collection hanging on the walls of the gallery. He also formed a connecting gesture in the form of projected imagery and motifs created from sheets of paper temporarily pasted on to surfaces between spaces and selected sites on the north façade of the gallery building.<sup>100</sup>

Neustetter's bisociative light process is never inert, static or stable. Implicit in his performances is movement that follows a directional trajectory. Directional movement is implied in an innate capacity for searching as light directs a path through the spaces and places he encounters and discovers in unpredictable moments of bisociation. This directional emphasis congregates with an equally visionary approach that grows from Neustetter's sensorial immersion in intuitively experimental processes. This tangential aspect has precedents in the work of other artists employing light metaphorically and as a physical process-led medium. For example, the two projects that Gabora (2014:10-11) responds to, in an article entitled *Physical light as a metaphor for inner light*. The first is an installation art work, *Light and enlightenment*, an interactive art installation, and the second is a piece of software known as *Soultracker*, which is described as enabling a virtual reality project.<sup>101</sup> Providing no empirical data as to who produced the projects, when they were produced, or in what context they would be engaged with, Gabora (2014:2) describes the collective aim as "to be of clinical value as therapeutic tools, as well as of pedagogical value by providing a concrete language for depicting aspects of human nature that can otherwise seem elusive and intangible". Gabora's observations are useful to elucidate a bisociation between therapeutic and pedagogical aspects in Neustetter's work. An experimental approach is brought unexpectedly into the ambit of metaphor resulting in entirely new and resonant effects that are illuminating and enlightening in a therapeutic sense. Participants learn as much as they are able when they find resolve through Neustetter's light-infused interactive works. The effect of illumination has particular significance in Neustetter's conception of a journey.

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<sup>100</sup> He explains further: "The downloadable sms picture-graphic series was produced as a playful commentary on the artworld and different processes of its existence" (*Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg* (2003) [Sa]).

<sup>101</sup> Gabora (2014:15) elaborates: "The art installation enables attendees to visualize and creatively experiment with light based representations of themselves and others. Handheld devices attached to control panels enable attendees to direct beams of light of different sizes and intensities ... The SoulTracker software works along the same principles as the art installation, but offers a more private forum for visually depicting people's inner processes using spheres and beams of light".

#### 4.3.4 Light and illumination

The ethereality of light measures off against a directional emphasis in Neustetter's work when conceptualised as invoking a journey or adventure. Neustetter employs this device in tandem with a playfully experimental approach to suggest a goal, objective or destination. In other words, his journey with and through light carries with it the grounded expression of an end point, but one that is not ever attainable or fully realised. As an antithesis to darkness, void and the abyss – those places from which he begins the journey – light is not just a metaphoric vehicle for travel but also a marker or beacon in the evocation of beauty, awe and wonder. In her work on virtual reality, Char Davies (2004:71) infers that a “means of perceiving freshly” follows the immersive experience of virtual space. She writes: “[T]he medium's paradoxical qualities may effectively be used to redirect attention from our usual distractions and assumptions to the sensations of our own condition as briefly embodied sentient beings immersed in the flow of life through space and time” (Davies 2004:71). Similar comments can be applied to Neustetter's work when considering the conceptual frontiers of the unknown in his creative work.

The resonance of light as part of intuitive creative thinking extends into the notion of illumination. I suggest three ways in which this occurs in Neustetter's work. First, in the physical sense, light illuminates a way forward, revealing a layering of experience. This happens conceptually, through space, through the physical infrastructure of a built environment, or as a means to traverse the as yet unknown frontiers of experience that are still to be realised and formed. Forceville and Renckens (2013:6) refer to this as the “activation of novel, unprecedented mappings”. Working in a state of unconstrained potential, Neustetter's process originates from an impulse to reveal and make known physical and metaphorical depths which extend directionally inward as well as outward. This is not multidirectional matter out of control, but rather a visual method that draws on the opportunity for chance encounters to enable moments of clarity and deep knowing. Neustetter's work sets in motion a means to work with and through a conception of the unknown as something to be feared and avoided, in favour of overcoming personal and collective uncertainty. These are positive attributes in Neustetter's process, which he welcomes as part of his stock of embodied experience to feed an impulsive and intuitive creative approach. Gabora (2014:3) extends on this in the function of metaphor, when it “derives its power not through persuasive arguments that touch the mind, but through imagery that works at an intuitive gut level”. Rather than a point of conflict, Neustetter sees these moments as an opportunity for a relational reciprocity and progressive development.

Second, illumination signifies a state of knowing in the acquisition of knowledge and clarity through understanding. Writing from a theosophic and esoteric perspective, Alice Bailey (1932:149), a scholar on illumination and spirituality, discusses how “the condition of illumination supervenes

directly upon the stage of contemplation, and might be described, in its turn, as producing three effects: That of an illumined intellect, of intuitive perception, and an inspired life upon the physical plane of existence". The illuminating function of light works to overcome emotional obstacles through the availability of potential and the will to develop from a dystopian state of darkness to a utopian emancipation. In a direct reference to eastern spirituality, Bailey (1932:151) brings "an illuminated perception and an intuitive apprehension of truth" into the scope of an experience with the divine. Although Bailey's comments have some weight in this discussion, her theosophic observations collapse when she negates the impact of the senses and the embodied state of physical and emotional awareness (Bailey 1932:155). I contend that it is not possible to conceive of an illuminated state that is suggestive of a divine consciousness without directly implicating sensations or sensorial reactions and responses.

A third and significant point is how illuminating light induces a state of expansiveness that implicates a celestial relation and an awareness of divine presence or, more appropriately in this case, an embodied sense of the otherworldly. Expansiveness in Neustetter's work functions in a twofold way. In part it is – as stated above – integral to his investigative and intuitive methods and signals an openness to endless possibility in the creative act. On the other hand, it is also formative in the end product of the performance, when the result evokes a strong sense of a cathartic, celestial or divine presence, which emanates from an introverted embodied self and extends outwards in a trope of ethereal and interconnected phenomena. Bailey's (1932:164) comments on this interrelation are useful, specifically her concluding point: "The mind receives illumination from the soul, in the form of ideas thrown into it, or of intuitions which convey exact and direct knowledge, for the intuition is ever infallible. This process is in turn repeated by the active mind, which throws down into the receptive brain the intuitions and knowledge which the soul has transmitted". Put differently, an expansive experience originating from an illuminated state requires what Davies (2004:102) refers to as "an 'undoing' of habitual perceptions in favour of alternative sensibilities".

In 2005, Neustetter shifted his attention in a more focused way to the cosmos and the wider reaches of space. Through telescope optics, light and site-specific interventions, Neustetter extended his work on the transient and ephemeral qualities of light through devices that produce, emit, project and process these qualities. A metaphor for directional journeying through space emerges.

*Telescope Photos* (2005) (fig 63) and *Afterimages* (2005) (fig 64) are examples of initial experiments with his formative ideas of light in its illuminating forms. In these works, he harnesses and uses light from an astronomical body, the sun, as a tool in his production process. Underlying these works is the suggestion of a device to enable a process of movement through the projected effects of a singular light source. Neustetter describes *Telescope Photos* as involving "[d]etails of Johannesburg

through a telescope lens from my apartment on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor – A search for content / experience / life on the streets of a transforming city from my removed perspective” (*Telescope Photos* (2005) [Sa]). In *Afterimages* Neustetter utilises Ozalid photo-sensitised paper to capture the light filtering through the windows of the Franchise Gallery in Johannesburg. Once the paper sheets are developed, using ammonia fumes, the effect is a ghostly apparition that indexically references the path of light through the gallery windows.

Neustetter’s use of the word “search” in the quote above implies an active process of enquiry and discovery, suggesting formative moments of looking through a device to set in motion an action to find something, more specifically, the movement from the worldly to an otherworldly or unknown state. The phrase “removed perspective” implies a position away or outside of that which is being viewed. In Neustetter’s case, this is the privileged voyeuristic place of the apartment that he self-consciously yearns to journey away from. Capturing images in this way evokes the idea of an expansive and celestial realm made apparent through photographic projection. An iconography of expansion is bound together in a trope of potential emancipation and open-endedness. The journey narrative is also underscored by an emotional conflict. The umbilical attachment to the safety of the enclosed apartment space is contradicted by a curiosity that prompts a need to move outwards into the expansive and precarious place of the transforming city. In these images, one encounters a continued personal dialogue with the spatially unknown and an embedded experience of vulnerability and uncertainty, all of which are mediated through the technology of light.

#### **4.3.5 Synectic approaches to light**

Central to Neustetter’s light work is a paradox. On the one hand, he enacts a professional and decisive focus in the unfolding process. On the other hand, his methods are injected with a proclivity to precocious humour in their explorative statements. Citing the work of John Eccles (1972) on the foregrounding of imagination in human behaviour, Joe Khatena (1984:75) comments on brain activity and creative capacity: “If creativity is to occur, such a brain must also have the capacity for unceasing activity which continually combines and recombines these patterns in novel ways ... It provides illumination that gives a new insight or understanding”. How does one further explain Neustetter’s light-hearted approach to a working process involving a developed digital-production dexterity, as well as seemingly insurmountable hardware challenges, in his performative projections? What mechanisms of cognitive thinking enable the playful encounters and delightful disasters in Neustetter’s working process? How does he exercise and maintain a primordial curiosity while navigating through an experimental visual landscape in which his personal responses oscillate between moments of reassuring lightness and anxious unease? Part of this explanation may reside in the widely known differentiation of left and right brain functioning. Khatena (1984:76) sums this up:

The left brain specializes in handling incoming information processing, ... language into logical-analytic thought and decision in a continuous stream of conscious internal discourse. Through relaxation, meditation, hypnosis, fantasy, daydreaming or sensory deprivation, left hemisphere functions can be stilled to make way for right hemisphere functions. The right brain is known to specialize in divergent thinking, intuition, insight, invention, metaphor, analogy and production of creative imagination imagery.

Neustetter's immersion in and abandonment to the process of making reveals a confidence in the acquired skills and technical proficiency that he brings to his work. He is able to transform the anxiety-inducing effects of rational thinking to prioritise a right brain capacity for intuitive, inventive creative impulses. I see this as an analogy to the process he undertakes to bring into effect his own personal enlightened state. Neustetter journeys through the shadow of self-doubt and rational technicality and into the light-filled clearing of an engaged intuitive self. Subjective immersivity in process gives leverage to his own emotional maturity. In this multimodal mode of production, Neustetter negotiates the parameters of his creative potential and inventive mindset by favouring a synectic problem-solving approach. Khatena (1984:98) describes this synectic approach as prioritising "emotional and irrational" actions, infused with a playful demeanour, over "intellectual and rational" responses. I find relevance in Khatena's comments to Neustetter's processes, especially, as Khatena (1984:98) observes, when these include "the ability to tolerate and use attitudes, information and observation that appear to be irrelevant to the problem and the ability to play or sustain a childlike willingness to suspend adult disbelief".

For Neustetter this translates into playing off the known, regular and precedented aspects of his practice against the unknown products of his experiments with light and mark making. Taking the point a step further, through his deliberately unconventional methods, Neustetter taps into a system of consciousness that is self-generative. Residing outside of the embodied self, transient moments of creative indulgence reveal an undefined realm of untapped potential. This has bearing on how Neustetter's transient encounters enable a meaningful experience. Khatena's (1984:181) explanation extends this point further when he describes how information "[finds] storage in memory, closely related to internal sources like the various states of consciousness, so that in the act of retrieval the unconscious and preconscious may be stirred to activity for its occurrence". Transient encounters provide for a transformation that is both inwardly drawn – as an expression of personal will – and outwardly extended. A closer consideration of transient moments and how these are present in Neustetter's practice is necessary. I contextualise this in the next section in relation to the material and immaterial qualities of light.

#### 4.3.6 Light, materiality and immateriality

Light as an articulation of material and immaterial phenomena in Neustetter's work infers a re-figuring and, in some cases, a suspension of being positioned through the effect of projected light. In representational terms, the rendering of material objects and surfaces becomes impermanently immaterial through a symbolic dissolving of boundaries. This happens in Neustetter's work when a conflation of social, historical and cultural narratives in built structures is temporarily dismantled and re-imaged.

In mediated imagery, light dissolves boundaries between states of being, between the physical world of lived reality and the metaphysical state of otherworldly consciousness. Davies (2004:72) explains her lifelong investigation into worldly presence as articulated through the immersive digital media and virtual reality she employs in her work, and shows how this intersects with otherworldly phenomena. She (2004:73; emphasis original) seeks to "re-present the world as I have intuitively sensed it to be – *behind the veil of appearances* – as immaterial, interrelated and dynamic flux. Within this all-enveloping flux and flow, habitually perceived distinctions between things dissolve, and boundaries between interior self and exterior world become permeable and intermingle".

The effect of a dismantling of reality resides in the interface of conscious awareness and the subconscious imagination of Neustetter's participants. He produces the uncanny effect of a gravity-free environment in which light enables a transcendence of present rational reality and time, and where a feeling of weightlessness translates into a perceived suspension of being that emanates from the self. With strong emotional consequences, "floating tends to evoke euphoric feelings of disembodiment and immateriality ... confounding these sensations by paradoxically grounding this experience in the participant's own body" (Davies 2004:85). This condition is later described by Davies in her analysis of her own work titled *Osmose*, involving "a transcendence of difference through the mutual absorption; a dissolution of boundaries between inner and outer; an intermingling of self and world" (Davies 2004:87).

A further development in the discussion of materiality and immateriality is the euphoric effect of bringing into being a transient state. Grosz (2008:60) relates the idea of materiality and the sensation of a substance and material as "embodied as and in material forms". Through the effects of sensation and the sensing body's response to the production of material and immaterial phenomena through the effects of light, an awareness in the immediate present condition is transiently dissolved into the realm of the unknown or as yet still to be formed. Grosz (2008:60-61) follows this thread by asking how the affectivity of sensations in art can signify what is

unknown, unexperienced, traces not of the past but of the future, not of the human and its

recognized features, but of the inhuman? Is this not the very goal that art itself – the exploration of the sonorous and pictorial becomings of the universe that are always coupled together with the becoming-cosmic and becoming-other of the lived subject?

I associate Grosz's inhuman condition with metaphysical phenomena that fall short of and outside of scientific logic. In other words, these phenomena remain undefined in as much as they sit outside of human parameters of understanding. Attempts to define them fall short as they rely on the predetermined and restrictive codes of language, culture and history.

Responding to the specifics of place in close collaborative proximity with others, Neustetter embarks on a concerted unlearning, unbundling and re-figuring of what he already knows in order to make conceptual and creative space for emerging ideas and stimulating impulses. His work with the metaphoric qualities of illuminating light makes allowance for these adjustments through the results of his continuous experiments with process. He steps out of the comfort of what he knows and into the dis-ease of what is to come. He moves between the material and the immaterial. Citing Arthur Deikman (1990), Davies (2004:102) refers to the notion of expansiveness that usefully extends on Neustetter's experiences, when "conditions fostered by such practices involve a de-habituating or 'de-automatizing' of perceptual sensibilities, ... leads to perceptual expansion". Neustetter traverses a creative terrain that is not easily discernible. It requires the gymnastics of a curious mind that thrives on a flexibility and openness to new and fresh visual possibilities. Through his collaborative work with others, Neustetter actively decentralizes the trope of the artist-as-genius. He implements a constructivist approach to preliminary workshop activities in which ideas are formulated generatively within a collective context of experimental and creative investigation.

Viewing the sensorial affectivity of material forms through the lens of creative imagining may seem remiss. This conundrum can be more effectively understood by looking more closely at the mechanics of perception. Grosz (2008:60-61) quotes Deleuze and Guattari (1994) when she asks: "[I]s this not the definition of percept itself – to make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become?". Using the words imperceptible and immaterial (and perceptible and material) interchangeably, when referencing the transitory and transcendent effects of light, has consequences in this discussion of Neustetter's work. Light is not simply an agent of perception in its articulation of what is and what is not but, more importantly, a primary ingredient in shifting one's embodied sense of being. This shifting action relays a state of fragility and vulnerability (a state of darkness), as well as an acquired feeling of strength and invincibility (the illuminated self). To reiterate, the cognitive functioning of the sensorial body begets the mechanics of perception.

The year 2006 ended with Neustetter ascending the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, ushering in a momentous event that set the tone for his practice to come. Neustetter observed the lights of the city of Moshi mirrored in the clear star-lit night sky. “The sky could as well have been a map of the landscape below” (Van Rensburg 2009). It is these continuous experiments with a mapping approach to correlating proto-earthly and earthly encounters that develops into Neustetter’s life-long fascination with cosmological and astrological phenomena. His experience at Kilimanjaro was one of the first instances where this realisation happened and it paved the way for a more in-depth and focused exploration through his conception of the vertical gaze.

#### 4.3.7 The vertical gaze

Building onto the defining comments that I offer earlier in this chapter, the vertical gaze is an act of looking both physically and metaphorically at one’s bodily self in relation to the earth and the cosmos. A directional emphasis extends beyond a set of axial geolocational coordinates. It defines a method of looking that prompts a curiosity in other states of being and alternative modalities of existence. It has a metaphorical application that extends the life of its signifying prompts into a complex confluence of intuitive impulses.<sup>102</sup> The act of looking while stationary in place allows for (1) a cognitive readjustment of one’s physical and metaphysical condition, and (2) a dual directionality. Neustetter elaborates: “Gazing vertically is to follow sightlines directed upwards or downwards along the same vertical axis, be it looking up into the night sky or using the gaze to peel back and peer beneath the layers of the earth” (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]). By prompting an awareness of being, the vertical gaze becomes a tool for self-realisation and embodiment, through which one becomes accountable for one’s condition in space. “Such an intensive act of observation inevitably brings answers – and even more questions – to the observer” (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]). Ordering his thinking in relation to scientific methods provided by archaeologists and astronomers, Neustetter explains how data is excavated in “order to offer up new perspectives for an imagined future as well as the immediate present” (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]). For Neustetter, this brings into reality a powerful moment of reckoning, when being placed signifies a spatial context.

The vertical gaze is a moment or perception that is transient. With this transient moment comes the embodied relief of oneself projected against the unattainable immensity of time. He describes this as “entirely a never reachable point. Because there is always going to be ... this kind of mind twist. I always thought about the vertical gaze as a study of [mine] of looking at time – my existence in the

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<sup>102</sup> We were working together on a workshop at Die Bulte, Johannesburg, South Africa, in preparation for the *Light resonance* event as part of the centenary celebrations at WITS in October 2022. Towards the end of the evening, Neustetter looked up and gleefully pointed out the line of pin-prick lights of the star link satellites. At this moment, it occurred to me that he instils the same awe that he experiences in his star gazing activities in those who attend and participate in his light projection installations and performances.

here and now and how we become aware of the here and now in this moment. And that's about being vulnerable" (Neustetter 2022).

Time is significant in the conceptual articulation and metaphorical undercurrents of the vertical gaze. Extending his observations into a subjective position in space, Neustetter aligns the functionality of time and light as tools for self-awareness through expressive intuitive modalities of narration when "light becomes a medium for ... storytelling" (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]). When light moves from a symbolic order – as a means to illuminate – to a vehicle in the mechanics of the vertical gaze, mediated imagery becomes narratively charged. Neustetter observes how "light-based activations and long-exposure photography" trigger "open-ended and deeply personal interpretation[s] of the subject matter that might not otherwise have been possible" (*Into the light* (2015) [Sa]).

In 2008, Bronwyn Lace and Neustetter enacted and installed *Traces* (2008) (fig 65) for an event of Visi Magazine and Arts on Main, facilitated and sponsored by the Nirox Projects.<sup>103</sup> The work was performed and installed at The Cradle of Humankind.<sup>104</sup> As an experiment employing a site-specific approach with the idea of looking back through an archaeological and geological lens, Lace and Neustetter worked with Google Earth traced imagery to interact with the landscape, using wooden dowels and white ribbon. The three-dimensional drawing was raised off the ground to suggest the grid lines of an archaeological dig and thereby reinforce the primary ethos of the place. The act of looking up and down, vertically and horizontally through layers of terrestrial strata was evoked. The piece is an important springboard for works that evolved between 2008 and 2010 when Neustetter's preoccupation with light as a metaphor is foregrounded. This has some bearing on how he approached *In two minds* (2008/9) (fig 66).

*In two minds* is a significant moment when Neustetter begins to visually express the idea of a vertically orientated journey setting direction for his work with light and place. These formative experiments developed over the following five years into a visual and metaphorical alignment of gazing and journeying. The functional movement of light projected outwards features prominently. For *In two minds*, he uses the language of mapping as a means to visualise motion as a metaphor for time in geographical space (Van Rensburg 2009). The relation of light with cosmic realms and a rapidly growing fascination with astrological, cosmological and subsequent otherworldly qualities of light is used to articulate a relationship between celestial and earthly phenomena.

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<sup>103</sup> Nirox Projects, the administrative wing of the Nirox Foundation, is an artist residency and non-profit trust located at Arts on Main, Maboneng Precinct, Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>104</sup> The Cradle of Humankind is a world heritage site located northwest of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province, South Africa.

Images generated for *In two minds* were exhibited at the Art on Paper Gallery (AOP) in Johannesburg in April 2008, having been previewed in the form of an artist's book at the Johannesburg Art Fair a month earlier in March 2008. *In two minds* highlights Neustetter's search for a "method of referring to our experience of the coalescence of space and time" (Van Rensburg 2009). In these works, Neustetter consolidates his experiments with light, mapping and light refraction. Through this emphasis in his process, he is "shifting perceptions within the reflections of lights, formal abstractions and visual constellations through his own mark-making processes in drawings and digital experiments" (Van Rensburg 2009). The security of place suggests the comfort of being placed and of a certain knowing in place. Conversely, a discomfort implies not knowing or, at the least, being open and abandoning to possibility, change, impulse and transient modes of being. Neustetter's process is situated at the interstices of these two experiences. It is this that I identify as the seat of complex directionality in Neustetter's performances.

#### **4.3.8 Transience and the complexity of place**

A locomotive directionality prompts questions about transience, place and Neustetter's working process. What is the relationship between a sense of a fleeting time space and the implied lengthiness of a journey or adventure? How does place play a crucial role in understanding a transient narrative in Neustetter's work? This question branches into two sub-questions: (1) How does light in its physical as well as metaphoric qualities operate as a signifying medium and tool in an articulation of place? (2) In what ways is light a cue for an embodied and subjective experience of directional movement and how does this assist in re-imagining notions of place in his working methods? To put it simply, how does Neustetter *leave* (to journey) yet remain rooted to place? I recognise a paradox of place in Neustetter's working process. Place is bound to the present moment of lived experience and, with light as a teleological propellant, it is also a transient working assembly.<sup>105</sup>

Moving from the known and the comfortable into the unknown, and returning with fresh insights, Neustetter re-figures previous experiences and, in so doing, visualises or projects into a potential and imagined future. This is not an end in itself, however. Neustetter looks back again and repurposes previous encounters with places and objects to re-enact the process repeatedly. This is not a balancing act of intentional experiences between one point and another along a linear trajectory. Nor does this describe Neustetter's attempt to create balance on a proverbial see-saw through his bodily and sensorial imagining enacted through the medium of light. It relates more to a

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<sup>105</sup> The term working assembly in the context of this research refers to the bringing together of symbolic or physical elements to enable a process that gives meaning to a series of actions or events.

problematic of how place is conceptualised.

Place takes on a particular ambient bodily function (Relph 2017:180). Casey (1993a:313; emphasis original) explains:

[T]he priority of place is neither logical nor metaphysical. It is descriptive and phenomenological. It is felt: felt bodily first of all. For we feel the presence of places by and in our bodies even more than we see or think or recollect them. Places are not so much the direct objects of sight or thought or recollection as what we feel *with* and *around*, *under* and *above*, *before* and *behind* our lived bodies. They are the ad-verbial and pre-positional contents of our usually tacit corporeal awareness, at work as the pre-positions of our bodily lives, underlying ever determinate bodily action or position, every static posture of our *corpus*, every coagulation of living experience in thought or word, sensation or memory, image or gesture.

Located in place, Neustetter is the emotionally charged object of the see-saw, which is neither secure nor fixed, but instead embodies a process that extends outwards in a radial manner. In a short essay entitled *Moving between places*, Casey (1993b) (Casey in Karnos and Shoemaker 1993:216) cites Freud when he explains that “the various modes of mentation – above all, imagining, fantasizing, hallucinating, and remembering – are intertwined in one concrete psychical whole. To investigate one form of minding is perforce to examine the others as well”.

Place as dialectically multidimensional informs an embodied engagement that is perpetually and cyclically multidirectional. Barrett (2007:6) reminds us that “as systems develop, their material configurations become more complex”. With the artist positioned strategically at the centre, a heightened sensorially aware state is ushered in. Bergson’s (1954:2), thinking on the notion of perpetual change, extends the idea of an on-going experience of embodied exchange:

Still more is this with states more deeply internal, such as sensations, feelings, desires, etc., which do not correspond, like a simple visual perception, to an unvarying external object. But it is expedient to disregard this uninterrupted change, and to notice it only when it becomes sufficient to impress a new attitude on the body, a new direction on the attention. Then, and then only, we notice that our state has changed. The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.

In relation to Neustetter’s processes being neither fixed nor static, place begins from his embodied transient experiences and moves outwards in a myriad of radial trajectories into the realm of unknown imaginings and back again. One may relate this point as an example of what Jeff Malpas (2017:65) refers to as the singularity of place. Drawing from a dictionary definition, Malpas (2017:65) explains a singularity in lay terms as “a point at which a function takes infinite value”. In his analysis, he makes reference to both extraordinary places that impress one to such an extent that “they force the place to the forefront of our attention”, as well as familiar, banal or regular or generic places

(Malpas 2017:68-69). In Neustetter's construction of place, place as a singularity extends beyond the confines of a physical realisation. Instead, it straddles and pulls together an idea that is both objectively and subjectively understood. As Neustetter's work with light progresses, and especially as it traverses the important watershed moments of 2017, so this dialectic of place evolves. Implicated directly in this development is Neustetter's conception of time and its significance in his transient processes.

#### **4.3.9 Light, time and transience**

A playful engagement with constructs of time underpins Neustetter's work with light and transience. This is brought into the present through meaningful relations that are realised internally. These relations are embodied as both psychological and emotional as well as sensorial experiences. To bring Neustetter's notion of transience into a logical present state of change, it is necessary to look beyond the immediacy of bodily presence. The body is a constant in time as the tacit dimensions of the psychically embodied self extend outwards. Conceptualised in other terms: "[T]he passing from one state to another resembles, more than we imagine, a single state being prolonged; the transition is continuous" (Bergson 1954:2).

While not interchangeable or synonymous, light and time come together in Neustetter's performances. Time sets in motion the real consequences for a place-based spatiality that is directionally continuous. Time gives rise to movement and a rhythm in Neustetter's embodied relation to place. The site for each performance carries with it a unique and authentic sense of time. In some cases, this is realised literally through an adherence to the restrictions brought about through seasonal aspects, weather conditions, or the time of day. In others, time translates into a narrative flow in the conceptual underpinning of a particular performance or in the meanings generated through imagery. Time brings to the surface a unique referent to the actuality, tangibility and tactility of place. Time is textural. Place is made real through time and is explicitly present in the existing infrastructure of the performance. A tactility of place provides a generative process that folds together in conceptual imaginings the way place, time and light intersect in his work. If the mechanical, digital or object-based devices – projected imagery and fluorescent objects, for example – work in tandem with place-based time to operate symbolically and metaphorically, then how does this bring into effect an embedded personal transient expression? To evoke phenomena beyond the confines of a selected site and the conceptual ramifications of place which are time-based, light needs to trigger associations beyond what is known. The subjectivity of light calibrates with the material objectivity of the place-based device. In Neustetter's work, this straddles a cosmic narrative.

With light as both the source and extension of artistic creative agency, the subjective and relational dimensions of artistic practice are extended in a multidimensional process. Drawing on the formulation and iteration around “materialising practices” that she worked on with Barbara Bolt, Estelle Barrett (2007:5; emphasis original) clarifies this subjective position:

Rather than constituting a relationship between *image* and text implied by Carter’s material thinking, *material practices* constitute relationships between process and text – of which the first iteration is necessarily the researcher’s own self-reflexive mapping of the emergent work *as enquiry*.

How does Barrett’s (2007:5; emphasis original) conception of “*materialising practices*” give further definition to actions that exist in the real time context of studio practice, as well as the meta-logical contexts of sensorially and emotionally stimulated and place-triggered intuitive processes? Before I launch into the relations of situationally-specific and place-orientated considerations in answer to this question, I return to the idea of process as initially subjective, inwardly-oriented with an outwardly-projected and intuitive extension over time. As Barrett (2007:5) discussing problem-based learning, asserts: “The experiential approach ... starts from one’s own lived experience and personal reactions”. I include in this list, personal contexts of lived experience and memory, which is woven into the following section.

#### **4.3.10 Subjectivity and emergent knowledge**

A unique sensibility to look beyond the immediate frame of visual reality and perception informs Neustetter’s methods. This implies an active state of critical engagement rather than a passive state of reception. As Barrett (2007:1) puts it, “knowledge is derived from doing and from the senses”, which she elaborates on as a “generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies”. Opening the scope of critical research, the boundaries of what is conventionally perceived to be officially fixed and static are extended.

Neustetter’s inherent curiosity translates into an active and engaged process of experimentation and play with spaces, objects, media and things in an open, intuitive and chance-driven methodology. Grosz (2008:85) phrases this as “the movement of intuition ... in which a philosophical subject must place him or herself in the midst of things in the world without preconceived patterns or expectations and, through this immersion, to discern, gradually and with effort, through learning, the natural articulation between things, the places in things and events where differences most directly emerge”.

An imitation of formal elements and impulses that derive from sensational and emotional responses and reactions cannot easily be recognised or rationally explained. Barrett (2007:4) suggests that this is “motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns”, which implicate the work of both

“explicit and exact knowledge” on the one hand, and tacit knowledge on the other. Grosz (2008:85) alludes to this state of awareness as an overarching experience that is “understood as an open-ended whole. This too is a tripartite movement from chaos to the infinite through the immersion of life in the absolutely particular or the singular”. Applying this to Neustetter, his practice involves a randomness and a selectiveness that exist outside of rational logical thinking. He directly engages a vulnerable state to enable an intuitive processing of found things through fresh creative impulses. “Intuition is the way that ... the new is capable of being understood outside of or beyond readymade concepts, opinions or what Deleuze reviles as the cliché” (Grosz 2008:85-86). That which is hidden, veiled, occulted and eclipsed from immediate and rational visual perception carries agency and weight. Neustetter relishes the discovery of new stimuli or the immersion in unresolved past experiences in his nostalgic journeying backwards into his own personal histories and that of others. Barrett (2007:4) recognises this movement in the way that “tacit knowledge and the alternative logic of practice underpins all discovery”.

For Neustetter, an alternative logic resides in the vast field of untapped phenomena. Referring to his use of readymade objects, Van Rensburg (2009) discusses the term “taxonomy of production” in Neustetter’s “accessing of information”.

The processes of production and fabrication that Neustetter employs addresses the ‘lag’, or, if you will, the ‘delay’ that exists between ‘thinking’ and ‘making’: he expands and contracts this delay at will. The confrontation with each of the various media he uses poses the real challenge. No matter how carefully he orchestrates the production, each medium holds its own inherent potential; each medium requires ... intuitive exploration.

The interface between the object and the artist drives the embodied relation between a diverse range of experiences and intuitive moments. Citing Grenfell and James (1998), Barrett (2007:4; emphasis original) explains this as cognitive thinking dissolving into intuitive impulse: “This acquisition of knowledge may thus be understood as a cognitive operation or ‘sense activity’ involving relations between individual *subjectivities* and objective phenomena which include mental phenomena – knowledge and ideas”. In this interrelational manifold of tacit information, Neustetter enacts an intuitive approach in his work. He acknowledges this when he explains: “In my artistic pursuits, I believe that the medium emerges from the concept – most of the time. So that means that I’m not an expert in any one medium but rather that I’m dabbling in many media. Very often I allow, in my so-called process-based research, for the medium to evolve out of the process” (Rodrigues and Neustetter 2023:199).

Things directed through intuitive and impulsive reasoning give rise to an ability to manipulate familiar material into creative acts. The matter of life experiences is directly assimilated with

unknown and hidden phenomena, forming the stuff from which Neustetter conducts his practice. Looking intimately through the lens of his personal histories and memory, Neustetter extracts the base material for his creative encounters. There is always an uncomfortable chaos that follows the tacitly driven aspects of memory and experience and intuitive processes of acquisition.

Neustetter's responsive position as active artist-collector operates from the core of his intuitive experiential being. He instils what Barrett (2007:2) refers to as an experience that derives from "personally situated knowledge" that is interdisciplinary, divergent as well as emergent. It is both the known and the tacit aspects of his process that infuse an unforgiving uncertainty that is crucial in his intuitive creative work. Barrett's (2007:3) proposal for a model of alternative modes of logic aligns with Neustetter's multimodal approach, especially in his process-driven work with light. Through the powerful metaphor of illumination and the wonder instilled in a forward projection into the realms of the unpredictable and unknown, of imminent potential and possibility, Neustetter's process is, to put it in Barrett's (2007:3) words, "predicated on an alternative logic of practice often resulting in the generation of new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations".

Barrett's (2007:6) second order of knowledge acquisition, as it develops from the subjective position of the artist, can be applied in Neustetter's practice too. Barrett (2007:6) refers to this as "emergent methodologies". Drawing on Heidegger's conception of praxical knowledge, Barrett (2007:6; emphasis original) defines the emergent tendency in the evolution of new knowledge: "These 'effects' broadly understood as 'knowledge' emerge through material processes. Because such processes are (at least in part) predicated on the tacit and alternative logic of practice *in time*, their precise operations cannot be predetermined". Yet, there is also a case to be made for Neustetter's obsession with objects and their residual trace to past personal experiences. Echoing Barrett's (2007:2) ideas around personally situated knowledge, Neustetter's objects are imbued with qualities that relate to his personal life experiences. Objects are not ever randomly selected or used for purely decorative purposes. There is always relevant reasoning in their selection. Bjørnar Olsen (2010:108- 109) explains how there is a "role that things play in upholding the past, thus enabling various forms of memory. Things are not just traces or residues of absent presents; they are effectively engaged in assembling and hybridizing periods and epochs. As durable matter, things make the past present and tangible".

Neustetter's process brings together an interdimensional place-time relation that traverses both present circumstances and conventional methodologies, and also looks decisively forward to unknown and unscripted contexts. Pulling together the logic of alternative systems of knowledge means that sensorial, intuitive and impulsive actions, as well as emotionally charged and nostalgic

experiences, are enacted. Personal histories and memory are given priority in the present through an assimilation of seemingly banal objects and routine events. This raises the question of the triangular relation between the function of memory, the process of imagining and place. I turn my attention to this in the section that follows.

#### **4.3.11 Memory, imagining, place and the *derivé***

When does the capacity for emotive response translate into creative imagining? Robert Sokolowski (1992:20) reminds us: “There is almost always some emotional concern in imagination, and its place in the displaced self can vary”. While the realm of imagining fits well in Neustetter’s work, how is this further understood in relation to notions of place, and what function does memory have in this process?

An impulsive emotional response triggers memory of past events, which are brought into the same plane of visibility as the present and future visual manifestations. Memory operates across layers of realisation to evoke an enriched narrative journey. Neustetter looks back, nostalgically, to bring meaning to his performances and from the lens of the present he looks forward to enact his journey. Similarly, an intra-directional contingency between emotional states and being is described by Sokolowski (1992:20-21) in personalised terms. “In times of sorrow, for example, the memory of earlier happiness may be bitter because what we enjoyed has been lost, but the memory can also be consoling as it asserts itself more fully, as it insists that the happiness did exist and still survives in remembrance, and as it breaks, for a while at least, the distress we now have”. Bringing a past reality into the present, to effectively imagine an unknown future, is what Neustetter’s work does.

A sensorial awareness stems from Neustetter’s conscious and subjective relationship to the world. Consciousness and the subjective experience work in unison to enable memory and his subjective intuitive imagining. Bringing these two terms into the ambit of transience, Greenfield (2004:10) posits that “we are always conscious of something. When we become very sophisticated of course we have an inner hope or fear or dream or thought or fantasy: you can close your eyes and have a trigger of consciousness occurring internally. In the simplest terms we have momentary states triggered by the changing input from our sensory world”. Notions of place are configured closely in relation to the fleeting moment. This weighs in heavily as a subjective relation, as place takes precedence in Neustetter’s work. There is no one key defining moment to this experience and any attempt at such would offer only a myopic understanding of the tangential nature of Neustetter’s process-driven approach.

Place in Neustetter’s work moves beyond the physical locale of tangible objects and structures. Being placed and displaced are not necessarily diametrically opposite aspects but instead work in a

symbiotic manner. The one informs the experiences of the other as “boundaries between objects and surrounding space are dissolved in light” (Davies 2004:74). Being placed necessitates some understanding of being displaced.<sup>106</sup> While one might be tempted to view Neustetter’s journeying as a form of escapism away from the real world of experience, this is not the case. Working with light and transient processes allows Neustetter to temporarily puncture through layers of conscious lived experience to find new meanings in light-forms. In an essay entitled *Virtual space*, Davies (2004:69) makes a similar case in a study of her own work with immersive virtual reality:

Rather than approaching the medium as a means of escape into some disembodied technoutopian fantasy, I see it as a means of return, i.e. of facilitating a temporary release from our habitual perceptions and culturally biased assumptions about being in the world, to enable us, however momentarily, to perceive ourselves and the world around us *freshly*.

Light and projection operate in tandem with an immersive experience of Neustetter’s performances. Through the visual environment of light, the real world of objects and tangible experience evokes an alternative visual sensibility steeped in imagined narratives. When forms dissolve in light and become integrated into a matrix of projected imagery, this imagery becomes transformative. Davies (2004:75) explains this as a consequence of a subjective experience: the process involves a “spatiality without ‘things’, in which the threshold between interior self and exterior world becomes porous, and the separation between ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ is transcended ... one becomes aware of space as *all around*, bodily enveloping as if one were immersed in the sensuous liquidity of the sea”.

This particular aspect of imagining requires some discussion around the relationship between the projected image (the *represented thing*) – a drawn motif or a digitally produced and manipulated image – and the object of this projection, the *thing* itself. It is in this relationship that one finds the seat of emotional resonance. Sokolowski (1992:25; emphasis original) frames this relation in phenomenological terms: “A *thing* must be distinguished from its *being*”. The object-thing is what exists in real time. The subject-being is what exists in representational form. The latter (*being*) is comprised of a complex signifying system of what it is in its current state as well as what it is not, that is to say, “*being* includes the modes of presentation; it encompasses presence and absence as well as what is presented and absented. Hence, pictures and names and remembrances and profiles ‘are’, even though they are not things” (Sokolowski 1992:25; emphasis original).

In Neustetter’s response to places, people and objects and his means of presenting these through

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<sup>106</sup> For example, working on a specific site, defined by conflict or inequality, gives form to the experience of a journey through time that straddles a sensorial conscious awareness of these factors as well as a leap into the unknown potential of creative intuitive process.

the technology of light mechanics, a sequence of multidimensional relations can be made in relation to Sokolowski's *being*. The *seen* and *unseen* pull together in and through process. *Things* as well as their complex layered meanings are channelled into a signifying system of materiality and immateriality. Light as a medium, as well as a powerful tool for the mediation of seen phenomena, works through historical, political and cultural inflections tacitly embedded in place.

The object-thing is integral to the embodied process and means through which Neustetter touches the world around him. This touch is not cold and mechanical but warm and sensorial. Emotional and sensorial responses circulate intra-actively. Physical actions, gestures or utterances remain hidden as implicit and ineffable phenomena that are present yet undefined and unresolved. In reference to Merleau-Ponty (1962), Olsen (2010:130) draws on a particularly apt analogy, when he makes reference to instinctive and intuitive processes that inform one's bodily relations with the external world of objects:

Discussing the way we "instinctively" adjust our actions to create a "fit" between our body with its adjuncts and the material world, Merleau-Ponty uses the well-known example of the blind man's stick ... The stick becomes an extension of the body, not an object in and of itself. By being used, this instrument has become an extrasensory organ that extends the radius of the blind man's touch. To familiarize oneself with such instruments or items "is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:143).

Neustetter's emotionally charged ephemeral experience intersects with a mechanical aesthetic in the devices he uses. A contradiction presents itself. The mechanical implies an emotionally impoverished, rational, repetitive and machine-like way of working, which contrasts with the metaphysical workings of intuitive impulses and actions. Merleau-Ponty's blind man's stick analogy is useful here. For Neustetter, the device is an extension of cognitive function. This evolves into an animistic relation where the device takes on the significance of a prosthetic. The prosthetic analogy is a defining characteristic in the way he enacts a bodily interaction with spaces, people and objects. Neustetter's process is inextricably linked to his embodied use of mechanical and digital technology, as well as the objects he makes and found objects he uses. Olsen (2010:131) elaborates that "[a]s a carnal being, my body is what connects me with things; it is the means by which I grasp and affect the world and the way I myself can be grasped and affected".

The emotional meets the tactile and mechanical and is activated through the directional presence of light. The mechanical aesthetic occurs literally in the form of found objects, devices and structures, as well as in the projection of represented and repurposed imagery. Applying Merleau-Ponty's analogy, one could assert that, through the agency of Neustetter's objects and devices, the object-thing appears. Through the medium of the object-thing, light is directed as a propellant to enact a

journey. Images are projected through a visual device through which aspects of place are symbolically and metaphorically embodied. Neustetter's object-things become conceptual holding mechanisms for emotive reactions and personal investment. In the light process he deploys through his objects, charged sites and heightened emotions are brought full circle into the fold of intuitively derived imaginings. His experience of "being-in-the-world" (Olsen 2010:130) implicates what Husserl (1966) (cited by Sokolowski 1992:134) describes as "the consciousness of inner-time".

Thinking about transience has particular consequences in the spectrum of imagining, especially in relation to memory and conceptions of self. This is relevant in any discussion of Neustetter's work given that, as an artist, he is at the very centre of these imaginings. In his book *Pictures, quotations, and distinctions, fourteen essays in phenomenology*, Sokolowski (1992:19-20) refers to the "imaginative displacement of the self". An awareness of being placed is set off against a state of semi-consciousness or the liquidated dream state. He refers to this as being "displaced into the imagining and imagined self ... no perceiving self is, for any length of time, deprived of the plastic contrasts that are provided by the imagining and imagined self. Perception goes on in constant and labile comparison with imagination" (Sokolowski 1992:20). Included in this comparison is a personal inflection that binds together perception, emotion and, by extension, memory. How does place make provision for these inwardly orientated perceptual expressions? How are memory and emotion, as conceptions of the displaced self, embodied intuitively to make complex imagining possible? These questions are a good starting point for a consideration of work Neustetter produced between 2009 and 2016, when he directs the vertical gaze figuratively and metaphorically. Imaginative displacement assists in Neustetter's fascination with the technological mechanisms that enable his imaginings. To build onto his interests in embodiment, light, space and the spatialised interrelations between things, Van Rensburg (2009) makes an important reference to the psychogeography of Guy Debord (1958):

Debord labels this mapping, *derivé*, or, as he explains it, drifting, or deliberately losing oneself. "In a *derivé*", Debord expands, "one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attraction of the terrain and the encounters they find there ... From the *derivé* point of view [spaces] have a psychological relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones".

With his third solo exhibition at AOP, *The observatory in the making: observation structures and sites of discovery* (2009/10), Neustetter articulates this *derivé*. First, he steps forward into ideas about light and space by sculpturally interpreting notions of the celestial and the cosmos through the technology of astronomy. Second, Neustetter's work with specific sites is intentional. He selects sites

that allow him to immerse himself in the mysterious and often precarious space that stretches out between points in time, between celestial and earthly events, and between his own bodily presence and the expanse of the universe. Third, Debord's "psychological relief" (cited by Van Rensburg 2009) takes form through his integrative process. The *derivé* alludes to a psychological dimension that is dormant until the intuitive moment of creative action happens, and is therefore useful when describing Neustetter's envelopment in process. Digital technology and other represented playful devices trigger a condition in his working approach that evokes the *derivé*. His inherent curiosity about things translates into an unconditional dedication to the immersive moment of making when he imaginatively displaces himself impulsively, through the agency of sites, places and objects.<sup>107</sup>

Neustetter's light imaginings condense cognitive experience in an incorporation of worldly time and metaphysical time. To describe the workings of worldly time, Sokowloski (1992:134-135) refers to mechanised digital clicks and analogue swipes that bring into effect "continuous motion" and "instantaneous change". Abrupt change is incorporated with otherworldly criteria that define imagined journeying. While this may seem a point of conflict in which personal time ("inner-time") disassociates from worldly time ("continuous motion"), it is through light that vulnerability is aligned with "instantaneous change", suggesting a "strangeness of the identity of a moment in time" (Sokolowski 1992:135). A psychological conflict in the experience of this intra-active momentum therefore becomes a source for a meaningful relation in an encounter with projected imagery and physical objects.

A significant work on *The observatory in the making: observation structures and sites of discovery* (2009/10) exhibition is *The Observatory I* (2009) (fig 67). This is a three-dimensional sketch made from Balsa wood for a proposed artist's observatory at the South African Astronomical Observatory, Sutherland, South Africa,<sup>108</sup> which was rejected and instead re-directed as a proposal for an artist's observatory on the rooftop of Main Street Life, Maboneng, Johannesburg. *The Sutherland dome* (2013) (fig 14), the alternative observatory he was later able to construct, marked the launch of a publicly accessible site-specific installation at the observatory in Sutherland. The immersive vertical gaze into the vastness of space "activates the imagination and allows humans to think beyond the

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<sup>107</sup> This is visualised in pen and ink drawings, drypoints and editioned digital prints. The exhibition includes his visual responses to selected sites, evidenced in the use of phosphorescent glow sticks and lasers during interventions at Vredefort, archaeological dig sites in Vela Spila, Croatia, the observatory in Sutherland, his documentation of experiences in Norway, and his visual responses to climbing the volcano Mount Teide on Tenerife, the Canary Islands.

<sup>108</sup> The observatory referred to in the catalogue text is the observatory in Sutherland, the home to Southern African Large Telescope (SALT) and the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) (Neustetter [Sa]c). In personal correspondence, Neustetter (2023b) regrets that the structure was not built in Sutherland due to reluctance from the Sutherland observatory management. Instead, he was able to construct an alternative observatory called *The Sutherland dome*.

present. It is an imaginative space, which provides the inner eye with the ultimate reflexive motion: to view the world as if one is no longer of it" (Corrigall 2010).

Neustetter's sculptural structures on *The Observatory in the making: observation structures and sites of discovery* (2009/10) exhibition evoke an idea of one's perceptual awareness being directed and channelled visually. One encounters this in works such as *Observation Structure 1* (2009) (fig 68), *Observation Structure 2* (2009) (fig 69) as well as *Observation Unstructured* (2009) (fig 70).

*Observation Structure 2* encourages the viewer to mount a short set of steps onto a wooden platform and take a seat on a single chair placed on the platform, facing a blank white gallery wall surface. Neustetter's on-going imagined journey into and through the cosmos consolidates expansive experiments in journeys between earth and outer space through the agency of light. In *Observation Structure 2*, in-house gallery light reflects off the blank wall surface to create a luminous intensity for the viewer staring forward. An ocular perceptual effect is set in place in the way light refracts off the expansive white wall surface. This may take various forms including eye floaters, the tiny specks of material suspended in the eye's vitreous humour. This sensation works in combination with other ocular effects. In extreme cases, this may involve flashing or pulsing points of light, aural effects or a combination of geometricised patterns that constantly change shape and flit in and out of one's vision as a result of the effects of phosphenes.

Neustetter's use of a white gallery-lit wall surface as part of this installation is carefully calculated to enable the equivalent effects of cosmic and celestial light, evoking a sensorial and cosmological induced experience. Light as a physical phenomenon enables the viewer's intuitive imaginings of a celestial otherworldly condition, which has the effect of suspending time and space as the viewer enters a state of abandoned metaconsciousness. Neustetter continues these experiments in sensorially stimulated works such as *Chasing light* (2009-2012) (fig 71). This digital projection is an extension of experiments with light, based on his documentation of sites and events in the previous years. This work sees him recycling and reworking material into a video projection that simulates visuals that evoke the northern lights.

On a trip to Tromsø, Norway, in 2009 with a fellow artist and travel partner, James Webb, Neustetter intended to view and document the aurora borealis. Due to poor weather conditions this was not possible. The final realisation of the visit to this site resulted in Neustetter needing to extrapolate from collected data that included documentation "in the form of sound recordings, a series of photographs and drawings that depict his journey and search. From this foundation, Neustetter attempts to re-visit his journey by extracting visual data from sound documentation through the manipulation of sound, water, laser-light, and drawing" (Neustetter [Sa]c). In *Chasing Light*,

Neustetter recreates a personalised visual presentation of the Arctic aurora borealis. In an interview with Erin Haney, Neustetter (2010) describes the process of visually forming the work. To emulate the electromagnetic effects on the earth's atmosphere, Neustetter used laser and sound. "I played these sounds through a strong speaker onto which I placed a large flat tray with a little bit of water. The sounds coming from the speaker vibrated the water; ... [simulating a] version of the northern lights".

*Chasing Light* marks a developmental shift in Neustetter's work with light, the cosmos and the multidirectional relationship between humankind and the celestial realms. Laser presented a double inflection as both a harmless means to direct a coherent diodic light source with a focused beam diameter of low-power potency as well as a potentially playfully mean to do so. Neustetter became interested in the luminosity and phosphorescent qualities of light, especially in the way these interpolate the viewer through their entrancing qualities, and in the metaphoric associations with transient moments of self-realisation. It is through this work that Neustetter turned to the use of phosphorescent glow sticks and the range of visual performative and photographic opportunities that the mass-produced objects present.

An intersection of transience, place and the performative effects of light at the time that Neustetter was working with *Chasing lights* is captured in performative works such as the collaboration with students from the Space School Africa<sup>109</sup> at the Vredefort meteorite impact crater.<sup>110</sup> Events were photographed in a series of digital prints, using a delayed exposure, printed in high resolution and presented as an editioned series of prints on Fabriano paper.<sup>111</sup> He included stills from various time-specific points in the activities and interventions enacted at the Vredefort Dome site. Being the oldest known astrobleme on earth, the site yields a particular reading of place as a site of collaborative engagement.

In *Glowstick Northern Light – Vredefort Dome* (2009) (fig 72), *Vredefort Dome 2008/2009 I – Vredefort Dome* (2009) (fig 73), and *Performance at the Vredefort Dome – meteorite impact crater* (2009) (fig 74), light is photographically activated in a mesmerising moment that echoes the significance of the Vredefort site as a place of immense and unfathomable interstellar contact. Light operates not only as a beacon bringing attention to these transient moments of wonder, but also doubles as a tool for personal reflection and deeper contemplation of humankind's fleeting and precarious existence. These performative events highlight an extreme realisation around the

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<sup>109</sup> For reference to this, consult Neustetter [Sa]c.

<sup>110</sup> A useful description of this site can be found at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1162/>.

<sup>111</sup> Some of these transient moments are included on *The observatory in the making: observation structures and sites of discovery* exhibition at AOP gallery from 2009 to 2010.

projected transience of life, given that the cataclysmic event of the meteor impact itself is said to have resulted in a massive evolutionary shift in a short timeframe. Enabling a deeper probing of how to recreate a terrestrial event, this preoccupation with residual cosmic effects catapulted his work with light in further projects. I turn the focus to *Visual Collider* (2009) (fig 75) and *Erosion* (2013) (fig 76).

*Visual Collider* is a project that materialised in collaboration with Canadian artist Nina Czegledy.<sup>112</sup> The artists describe the project as comprising “image sets (derived from our own source material) [that] traverse cultural, political and personal boundaries suggesting different connotations. During the journey we cross time and space, bracketing generations and spanning continents in a never-ending conceptual loop” (*Visual Collider* (2009) [Sa]).<sup>113</sup> Emulating the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) located near Geneva, Switzerland, Neustetter and Czegledy consider closely how art, science and technology overlap and intersect. A voyage of discovery is enacted by the artists through a collection of images that they intuitively fragmented, assimilated and re-assimilated together, using analogue and digital methods. The project’s ethos is described further:

[W]orking with the bizarre, traveling towards unpredictable destinations is a regular pursuit. In science a negative experimental result might become as valid as an expected outcome. These unexpected results including happy accidents often lead to significant alternate solutions or theories. Our adjacent images presented in this exhibition reveal unconventional interpretations frequently through unforeseen collisions (*Visual Collider* (2009) [Sa]).

Continuing experiments initiated at the Vrededorp Dome impact crater, Neustetter pushed the limits of place as an indelibly fragmented and transient phenomenon. In his description, he refers to the work as evoking the sublime through a fleeting interaction in a presentation of “raw, spontaneous records that reflect more a momentary involvement that is simply juxtaposed with another. With this we make use of everyday experiences, experimenting with commonplace objects and situations” (*Visual Collider* (2009) [Sa]). Everyday moments are fragmented and visually sewn together in a kaleidoscopic assimilation of familiar and regular occurrences and experiences. Visual cues and signs are quite literally “smashed” together through a digital collaging process. Visual obliteration turns in on itself to produce new, as yet unknown encounters that “can produce data through reaction, some of which is measured and some of which we are not able to comprehend or express” (*Visual Collider* (2009) [Sa]).

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<sup>112</sup> Nina Czegledy is an “artist, curator, educator, works internationally on collaborative art, science & technology projects. The changing perception of the human body and its environment as well as paradigm shifts in the arts inform her projects” (Czegledy [Sa]).

<sup>113</sup> The project is presented differently from venue to venue.

*Erosion* took place as part of the weeklong events of the *Infecting the City Public Arts Festival* in Cape Town, held between 11 and 16 March 2013. Commissioned by the festival committee, Neustetter set out to bring attention to selected places in and around the city of Cape Town. The work is described in a dramatic tone through the use of words such as “invades”, ostensibly to fit with the rubric of infection expected in the call for submissions for this particular festival (Neustetter [Sa]a). The performance, enacted after sunset, involved randomly distributing the glowsticks at selected sites, then sweeping them up and over architectural features and finally gathering them together in large 50-litre white buckets. One such example involved an intervention at Iziko, the South African National Gallery, in the Cape Town city centre. Neustetter and his helpers swept glowsticks over the steps and front plinths of the gallery façade. Translated photographically, the glowsticks took on a flowing effect with light cascading over the architectural features. At the Cape Town harbour, in the presence of large concrete tetrapods, Neustetter built a light kern from glowsticks. He then picked up a handful of the phosphorescent objects and threw them up into the air and out at the ocean. In a recent conversation, Neustetter (2023) explains how this gesture was a means to symbolically return the objects to their place of origin – across the expanse of ocean to the presumed mythological place of the far east, China, where they were manufactured.

The glowstick interventions were temporary and fleeting, lasting only for the time that the phosphorescent material is illuminated. A paradox exists between the implied transient act of working with the glowsticks and the prolonged unsustainable and environmentally damaging presence of the toxic plastic and glass glowsticks. Neustetter’s gesture of symbolically returning the objects to their place of origin is a commentary on this paradox.<sup>114</sup> The opportunities presented with the *Into the light* exhibitions (2015 and 2016), afforded Neustetter a process of consolidating his ideas around the vertical gaze and the sites, places, objects and collective memory through which the experience was developed. *Into the light* (2016) is an extrapolation of his process-led research into “archaeological and cosmological mysteries [through] artistic investigations [that] focus on the spaces in-between, within and between these disciplines” (*Into the light* (2016) [Sa]).

The *Into the light* (2016) exhibition covers topical areas of his work, including his enabling of public response and participation through active storytelling and open-ended creative intervention. Attention is given to the coalescence of past, present and future trajectories through the implied

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<sup>114</sup> Because of the unsustainable nature of many of the materials Neustetter uses, the artist meticulously collects the materials and houses them in storage units located at rented artist’s studio premises at Arts on Main, Maboneng, Johannesburg. In his post-2017 processes, much of the material – including the over 5 million accumulated glow sticks – is repurposed into other later installations and performances. Examples of this include the *Into the light* exhibitions of 2015 and 2016, as well as the performances recorded as part of the *Processing videos 1-16* series produced in 2019.

journeying through time, the activation of a reflective awareness around place, and the critical engagement with inscribed personal and collective memory. A narrative of circulation and appropriation runs through the sculptural works produced from repurposed objects from previous performances and installations. Consumer objects are entirely reworked into new forms, or reconstituted as base material in new three-dimensional formats. “[D]ead glow sticks are stitched together to become the Great Wall of China or melted down and cast into fortune frogs, shark fins and an ornamental dragon. Precisely woven glow sticks and brightly coloured plastic strips are transformed into interpretations of ancient Chinese maps and African trade routes” (*Into the light* (2016) [Sa]). The exhibition is less an act of nostalgia and more a sign of a cul-de-sac. *Into the light* (2016) was indicative of a need to re-figure and re-organise the vertical gaze that had provided momentum in the formation of his intuitive process-led practice. It presented an opportunity in the form of a portal – a conceptual threshold into another chapter of the undefinable and the unknown. Only this time, there was a veil and the veil needed to be transgressed. This arrived unexpectedly in *Right to Reflect* (2017) (fig 39).

#### **4.4 Part 2: Looking forward, looking up: observations of Neustetter’s process-led practice from 2017 to 2023**

##### **4.4.1 Right to reflect (2017)**

With *Right to Reflect*, Neustetter finds himself at a crossroads in his journey as a performance artist. It is a crucial point in his career that marks a dramatic shift in both his methods and processes of working. This influences how light operates in his work, as well as a shift in the significance that light holds. I begin with an extensive description of the performance, given its significance in this research.

In 2017, Neustetter entered a tumultuous period and was deeply affected by the death of his father. He speaks openly about his relationship with his father (Neustetter 2023b) and how this impacted on his own insecurities about his practice as an artist. This event becomes integral to much of the reflective work he does from 2017 onwards. Seeking an opportunity that could possibly trigger a fresh creative impulse, Neustetter invited Xolisile Bonogwana, a dancer and performer whom he admires and has worked with before, to his workspace, the Concept Store at Maboneng. Bonogwana’s work presented an interesting signifier of groundedness and place for Neustetter, offering some direction forward from the emotionally impoverished circumstances he found himself in (Neustetter 2023b). Through this collaboration, Neustetter re-calibrated himself and his creative context.

The performance *Right to reflect* includes a large two by two meters cotton sheet screen attached to

a free-standing metal frame, positioned parallel to the camera view. A large 50-litre bucket filled with a collection of keys and magnets is set to one side. Neustetter has also rigged the space with a lighting system that projects shadows onto the screen. The lighting operates off a circuit that is set to flash intermittently and randomly. He empties the bucket of keys and magnets onto the floor. A very loud screeching, which Neustetter describes as “space sounds”, is amplified through the space (Neustetter 2023b). Bonogwana begins spontaneous movements behind the screen as he responds to both sound and light activations. The effect of sound and pulsing light creates a space of sensorial overload to which both artists respond through intuitive rhythmic gestures and actions. Using paint and a brush, Neustetter impulsively makes marks on the screen surface that are triggered by the shadows cast from the unpredictable light source, as well as movements projected by Bonogwana’s bodily actions.

Neustetter (2023b) and I viewed the video documentation of the happening together. He alluded to specific moments of significance in the performance. At a point into the performance, Bonogwana initiates a shift and Neustetter follows on. The screen is lifted and turned 45 degrees from a parallel position to the camera viewing plane to a perpendicular position. Both artists are now in profile view. There is also a change in the music. Neustetter includes a composition by a Canadian composer with whom he has worked previously, which shifts the atmosphere of the space from an anxiety-provoking intensity to a low-key contemplative ethos, in line with Bonogwana’s classical dance movement. It is at this time in the performance that Bonogwana also introduces a voice element that melodically aligns with the classical music.

Neustetter temporarily abandons the paint and brush mark making and begins to physically engage with the screen surface, as does Bonogwana, through a series of probing, rubbing, scratching and pushing gestures. The effect is one of the two participants pushing against each other through the veil of the screen in an attempt to break through, so to speak. Simultaneously, Bonogwana’s vocal contribution becomes more high-pitched until it reaches the crescendo point of an evocative wail-like cry. It is at this point of the performance that the narrative shifts again from the two emulating and mimicking of each other’s gestures and actions to a more concerted endeavour to search, struggle and eventually discover a new dispensation. While Neustetter (2023b) and I sat viewing the footage on his laptop, he became still and quiet. Then, tearfully, he recounted the memory of that point in the performance when his entire reason for making art and working with light in installation and performative events turned.

Neustetter and Bonogwana then pivot the screen another 45 degrees, bringing it parallel with the camera viewing plane again. Neustetter and his mark making are now behind the screen, away from

the camera, and Bonogwana's dance movements are in full view. Neustetter resumes work with paint to produce marks prompted by the pulsing light source and Bonogwana's projected bodily movements. A pivotal moment occurs when Neustetter perforates the screen using one of the sharp keys and Bonogwana moves through the open slit. The gesture of breaking through the cotton screen suggests the idea of breaking through a veil of consciousness to embody a deep realisation of self and, more specifically, in relation to Neustetter's art practice. This may be construed as an initiatory event, facilitated by Bonogwana and his spontaneous dance and voice pronouncements, as well as the logistics offered by the props, lighting screen and space. Including the pile of keys was a significant decision, especially in the way these signify the idea of unlocking and releasing, enabling an opening into another realm or state of realisation.<sup>115</sup>

In an interview, Neustetter (2023b) summed up the profound moment of reflection that highlights all this performance came to be: "From this point I realised it is so important to embody myself in the performance". In previous performances and in his work with others in public contexts, he wore a white or red overall. The overall as a uniform brings with it a uniformity and humility that sees him actively and symbolically take on the role of facilitator of the experience of others. In *Right to reflect*, this narrative evolves into one of a highly embodied and personalised significance. For the first time in a public context, Neustetter wears the overall for himself and for his own purposes, pulling together a symbol of self-empowerment and self-realisation through the overall as an evocation of transformative, immersive and embodied labour.

Following the pivotal moment in *Right to reflect*, the solo journey of self-discovery was enacted in projects that follow. For example, *Against the Shed* (2018) (fig 77) was a happening for the *Watershed: Art, Science and Elemental Politics*, at WITS, Johannesburg. Doherty and Neustetter (2021:1) describe how Neustetter, dressed in a white two piece overall and white gum boots, with a powerful LED headlamp fastened to his head, rolled a large transparent plastic ball containing a quantity of water up the Yale Road watershed that separates the east from the west campus of WITS. This performance did not include a participating audience. It was live streamed by Doherty and screened for a viewing audience at the opening at WITS and in the foyer of the Institute for the Study of the Environment at Brown University, Providence, RI (Doherty and Neustetter 2021:1).<sup>116</sup> Distracted by the social and networking activities in the foyer, few of the audience members actually

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<sup>115</sup> A search on the symbolism of keys points to these signifiers: "The key is the mechanism of the powers of opening and closing, and denotes liberation, knowledge, mystery, and initiation. SILVER keys usually refer to temporal power, while GOLD ones refer to spiritual power" (Key [Sa]). Another site indicates how keys signify beginnings: "Keys symbolize new beginnings, hidden talents, solutions, authority, freedom, mystery, knowledge, and responsibilities" (The symbolism of keys [Sa]).

<sup>116</sup> The recording of this performance can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utlfnm5ZlgM>.

stopped to watch the full 46-minute performance of Neustetter rolling the plastic water-filled ball up the steep slope of Yale Road.

Using the mediation of live streamed digital technology, Neustetter publicly confronts notions of environmental degradation and humankind's blatant disregard for this serious global condition. He measures himself against the weight he is pushing. Evoking the well-known Greek myth of Sisyphus, he is struggling against himself physically, as the weight of the water in the ball is exactly his body weight. He therefore positions himself as the everyman – the nobody-man and simultaneously, the all-man. The weighted ball is a signifier of the extreme physical and emotional labour required to complete the work but also indicates the strong probability of failure. Of interest here is the highly charged emotional impact that this work had on Neustetter. Reflecting back on the performance as an attempt to bring attention to the ecological crisis of the global condition and the inherent lack of human accountability, Neustetter struggled to “express the emotional and sensory experience” in words. In an article written with Chris Doherty, he used phrases such as “futility and hopelessness” and feelings of uselessness to the point that, at the end of the performance, once he had returned to the bottom of the hill dragging the now damaged and deflated plastic ball behind him, the overwhelming and immersive emotional impact “brought me to tears” (Doherty & Neustetter 2021:5).

There are two primary narratives circulating through this work. One is the commentary on environmental degradation and the other is a more abstract immersion in exhaustive emotional and bodily exertion. The environmental theme is a trigger or prerequisite context for the experiential enactment of the latter. I read the performance as being less about a critique of sustained environmentalism and more about the artist confronting personal emotional and physical limits through the implementation of extreme physical action. The global crisis theme is a localised catalyst for a vast reservoir of raw, un-activated, uncontrollable and undefined metaconscious cognition. The two themes interlace as a unitary commentary on the personal experiences of the artist.

*Against the Shed* sets the tone for an even more deeply emotional series of performances from 2019 onwards, in which Neustetter re-examines the overwhelming immensity of the load he has amassed and bears, Atlas-like. What is important here is how his struggle with his past is metaphorically situated in the objects he has collected over time, and how he redefines and undefines his embodied relationship with them.

#### **4.4.2 Self-reflection as process**

Neustetter turned his attention to all the material he had accumulated over the past 18 years and reconciled this in a series of 16 short videos collectively entitled *Processing videos 1-16* (2019) (fig

45).<sup>117</sup> How does this 'spring clean' of his creative circumstances and practice carry meaning in relation to the large quantity of work produced between 1998 and 2019? What significance does this carry for the artist personally as a means to articulate and visualise a cathartic moment of accountability and relinquishing of control? How does this consolidation, processing and reflection prompt further creative opportunities?<sup>118</sup>

Neustetter produced an interview, *16\_Interview* (2019) (fig 78), as the sixteenth instalment in the series of videos, with which I open my discussion of the series. It reads as a fragment of the overall performance sequence,<sup>119</sup> but also operates as an overarching cathartic metaphor for the entire process that preceded the 17:13-minute interview. Neustetter reflects back on the process of producing the videos and explains some of the reasoning behind the project. It is set with the remnants of the last performance, *15\_Emptying* (2019) (fig 79) as a backdrop. The interview is filmed in black and white, with Neustetter seated in front of the wall, against which are placed red overalls and black gum boots.

Neustetter explores the emotional and personal depths of his creative processes by actively manipulating and physically altering objects. He explains how this is a means to reimage and refigure an understanding – for himself – of what objects mean artistically. The idea behind the project is a purging of residual traces in either physical or object-related form, through an emotional and embodied response to these objects as signifiers of past events and journeys, as well as dis-/relocated relations to place, people, situations and circumstances. The experience gives Neustetter the opportunity to immersively re-engage with these past events, which formed the cornerstone of his prolific practice as an artist in past years. More importantly, it allows him to redefine and lubricate moments that were previously concretised as fixed and static. He is depicted talking animatedly about the need to acknowledge the difficulty of relinquishing control of past events through an interaction with objects in the present moment. He holds himself accountable for his own process and his co-dependency on the sustained presence of the finalised and static art object. Two thematic narratives permeate the videos. First, he confronts his awkward relationship with his father's art practice and how this plays out in the way he works with his father's drawings and objects. Second, his intuitive and impulsive altering and repurposing of objects from previous performances evokes a layered emotional response.

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<sup>117</sup> The exception is the 17:13-minute *16\_interview*; the longest of all the other videos is 1:12 minutes.

<sup>118</sup> All videos were produced in Johannesburg in his studio at Maboneng in 2019, and were filmed, edited and scored by Mark Edwards. Neustetter works collaboratively in selected videos. Wiseman Sibanyani appears in *1\_Strapping* and *2\_Blocking*. Nkosinathi Mthombeni and Paul Setate assist Neustetter in *8\_Erasing*. Phala Ookedibe Phala joins in on *14\_Offering*. Local refuse recyclers are included in *4\_Repurposing*.

<sup>119</sup> The video has no title sequence and no credit roll.

The *Processing videos 1-16* series is a sequential narrative, grouped in a particular way. Neustetter sets out to investigate “what things mean artistically” (Neustetter 2019) by actively journeying back through the presence and manipulation of the mediated objects. In an impromptu and intuitively driven approach, he sets about purging through processing – “saying good bye” – as he puts it (Neustetter 2019). Through his direct reworking of collected objects and things, he works through what these objects meant previously, what their purpose was and how they functioned in his installations and performances. He confronts his memory of past events as these manifest through nostalgic yearnings and profound emotional swings, and also through acknowledging his accountability, not only to the objects and their place in the world, but also to the role the objects play in the present moment, and the inherent and explicit meanings they carry with them. These meanings are bound together in fantastical imaginings of past events and experiences. I will consider a selection of the videos to explain this. *7\_Fragmenting* (2019) (fig 80) is a disturbing work. Neustetter is surrounded by his father’s drawings. A large plinth is centrally positioned. Wearing a welding helmet, he begins to draw a target-like shape on the top surface of the plinth. In a series of repeated actions, he gently places and arranges his father’s ceramic figurines on the plinth surface and, using a 1.8kg club hammer, destroys them. The video ends when he tosses the hammer on to the plinth surface in a gesture of resignation. In *8\_Erasing* (2019) (fig 81), the black plinth surface has remnants of his father’s destroyed ceramic figurines. Neustetter tries to re-place and re-assemble, reconstruct, repair and refigure the destroyed pieces in an attempt to form a new fragmented diorama. This is an important moment that captures his inability to let go of things related to his father, as he evinces a desire to achieve a further visual realisation of the destroyed figurines. Intuitive actions suggest a delusional state of emotional turmoil. Neustetter (2023b) alludes to this confusing state as “one big blurry mess”.

Coupled with the manic state of trying to fix that which he destroyed in *7\_Fragmenting* and *8\_Erasing*, the narrative of an alternative meta-worldly consciousness in the arrangement of objects in *10\_Practicing* (2019) (fig 82) engenders a cathartic moment, with the possibility of fresh creative frontiers that are as yet unrealised. By intentionally releasing himself from a psychological co-dependency on objects and the narratives they represent, Neustetter is also re-defining what process actually means in terms of constantly searching for something, and how it operates in his art practice. Neustetter (2023c) explains that “you never get past that point. It’s not about trying to get past it but rather making it part of one’s life ... accepting the search”. In accepting the search, Neustetter engages an aspect of himself that sees the reflective work in the *Processing videos 1-16* as an opportunity to redefine his previous process by accepting and being accountable to an ongoing relationship with the undefinable.

*14\_Offering* (2019) (fig 83) includes a significant role for Phala Ookedibe Phala, a collaborating participant. A humorous interaction veils a more penetrating emotional act of letting go. Neustetter is arranging his father's tools and other objects on shelves in the space. Through playful and provocative gestures, Phala coaxes the objects away from Neustetter who reluctantly gives them up, and places them in a black plastic crate. In *15\_Emptying* (2019), Neustetter intuitively makes black marks on sheets of paper that are propped up on his father's easel. The sound-over is Neustetter having a conversation with himself. Could it be that the conversation is also with his father? Neustetter then arranges red overalls sequentially against the studio wall, and places a pair of black gum boots under each one. The video finishes after he paints a dripping line of watery black in a horizontal line across the area above where the overalls are hanging. This is an act of consolidation, processing and reflection that opens a further chapter in his intuitive imaginings. Neustetter is undone as an artist. The uncertainty he attaches to this offers a catharsis and a release as much as it brings a personal foreboding and trepidation of what lies ahead. During this time of deconstruction, destruction and radical re-evaluation, Neustetter also turns his gaze towards the infinite realms of the cosmos. With exception to the *Processing videos 1-16*, the notion of the cosmos – the fathomless depths of time and immensity of scale – features predominantly in Neustetter's work from 2018, through the difficult period of 2019 and onwards, culminating in a rather intimate personal relationship with an actual orbiting satellite called Sumbandila.

#### **4.4.3 Looking upwards: the cosmos and beyond**

Considering his earlier approach at Vredefort and Sutherland, in *Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* a familiar interest re-emerges. The problematic relationship between institutions of scientific research and the communities that are spatially, economically and geographically separated is expounded.<sup>120</sup> He expands on the significance of a conceptual trajectory in the vertical gaze by assimilating the notion of the gaze into the idea of a journey through a parallel experience of personal and introverted action. The collective condition is conceptualised as a spaceship metaphor and the shared journey on earth is compared to an interstellar journey. “[W]e speculate about new territories and landscapes that have yet to be discovered ... And yet, with all the gazing into the sky and studying the distant explorations, we need to ask ourselves what is happening back on earth?” (*Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018) [Sa]). In *Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance*, the vertical gaze, conceptualised as a vertical journey, circulates through localised stories, “artistic imaginary landscapes and speculative future visions that will start to stimulate audiences”, through physical action in the form of “shadow sculptures, light drawings and stop-

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<sup>120</sup> He (*Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018) [Sa]) explains: “I want to turn the spaces of scientific pursuit and presentation into a studio of co-production and personal exploration”.

frame animation” (*Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018) [Sa]). A key factor in Neustetter’s vision of a collective pivots around personal and shared narrations and iterations. This continues to evolve in performances such as *The vertical journey – a tribute to the still unknown*.

Unlike previous interventions, where Neustetter’s attention is directed exclusively at others, in the series of works in *The vertical journey – a tribute to the still unknown* he foregrounds his own personal vertical journey as much as he encourages that journey in local communities through the agency of individual and shared memory and localised narratives. A multidisciplinary process of three- and two-dimensional imaging, as well as projections that activate and bring attention to place, sets in motion a visual coalescence of image (projection) and object (landscape) to evoke “imaginary landscapes and speculative future visions that will start to stimulate audiences to contribute with their unique perspective to the studio environment of the planetarium” (*Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018) [Sa]).

With the advent of the Covid pandemic in 2020, his practice moved further to an online modality. Expansive thinking brought broader definitions of community in a pervasive climate of isolation. Driven by the opportunities for online global interaction, his practice evolved into a metaphorical journey between physical and visionary places. Imagined and otherworldly modalities are revisited through the infinite realms of the cosmos and a renewed fascination with light as a conduit for adventurous exploration. The year 2020 is marked by collaborative events surrounding the project *Imaginary futures* (2020) (fig 84), as well as solitary ventures such as *Tracing absence* (2021) (fig 12). While I refrain from analysing the work, it is worth briefly mentioning the significance of *Imaginary futures* as part of his development as an artist. In 2020 Neustetter extends this working methodology and conceptualisation of narrative journey for this new project. This ongoing catalogue of performative work sees Neustetter repositioning himself in a process that straddles both introverted feelings of alienation and isolation and a search for human connection through the agency of cosmic as well as earth-bound elements, objects and structures. These are also visualised through place-related responses to both South Africa, Austria and, more widely, Europe, as well as online engagements in which the digital realms become the only means to condense and make tangible communication across vast spatial distance. He describes the work as “a collective understanding of our relationship to space” by bringing “together an experimental dialogue of creative producers from different disciplines and contexts to look at what our shared peripheral perspective of a space-future might look like” (Olats [Sa]).

In October 2021, Neustetter briefly turned away from a collective creative context and centred his intuitive responses to place in solitude. In *Tracing absence*, he identifies a site to the northeast of the

city of Vienna near the South banks of the Danube River, known as the Praterstern or, more commonly, the Prater.<sup>121</sup> At a nearby and bustling pedestrian intersection, Neustetter collects clay from a site where an inner-city tree had previously grown but had died and been removed. He identifies an adjacent wall surface that is part of a larger building that is known for bohemian-type experimental and interdisciplinary public art events. Against the wall surface he begins an intuitive making process using the absent tree as a trigger. He is searching through process to find a visual equivalent to something that cannot be visualised rationally. Neustetter (2023b) refers to this as the “the absence of the tree, absence of something”. By extension, the absence of the tree signals his own longing to belong, to be rooted. The absent tree is neither rooted in place (uprooted, unrooted, re-rooted) nor present in space. In the iconography of the absent tree, Neustetter revisits a narrative of death as he continues a personal journey for redefining the self.

Using impulsive activities to work through highly personalised moments of self-realisation, Neustetter turns his gaze to the idea of an absent object. This is the object-thing inverted. He relates how the “temporary making process ... was about being in a completely personal space and centered around incidents in my life that I was making sense of ... and relating this to the absence of the object” (Neustetter 2023b). The marks he makes are spontaneously generated through figments of his imaginings, and filtered through an introspective lens of his status as a South African artist with years of productive art making now needing to redefine himself in relation to a new life in Vienna.<sup>122</sup>

One can make out a circular motif that, he suggests, may reference the old Ferris wheel in the Prater. Neustetter (2023b) builds on this interpretation by alluding to the subliminally referenced Mexican headdress, El Penacho,<sup>123</sup> which at the time was on display in the Weltmuseum in Vienna. Visual references to the headdress and the Ferris wheel motif can be made out in the images in figure 12. On the left-hand side of the two top images, Neustetter produces a series of lines that converge to form what looks like the spokes of a wheel. In the third and bottom image, Neustetter photographs himself with the Ferris wheel in the background to the bottom right of the composition.

Deployed partly to illuminate the working surface and partly to project shadow, Neustetter’s use of

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<sup>121</sup> The Prater is a fun fair and amusement park, situated in a large entertainment park that is an integral part of the much bigger Nationalpark Donau-Auen.

<sup>122</sup> In December 2019 Marcus Neustetter and Bronwyn Lace, with their daughter Layla Lace, made the difficult decision to relocate to Vienna, Austria, for personal and family-related reasons. Neustetter also recognised potential in interdisciplinary and international projects that could significantly expand his practice beyond the borders of South Africa.

<sup>123</sup> El Penacho, is an early 16<sup>th</sup> century feather headdress of Mexican, Aztec, origin. Negotiations had ensued to have the headdress returned to Mexico. Other marks suggest a landscape of meta-worldly forms, generating the impression of a mind-scape. The work was included in the *Properties of a presence* exhibition in October 2021, curated by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll. The exhibition drew from works produced during a series of public art interventions around Vienna (von Zinnenburg Carroll [Sa]).

light is multi-purpose.<sup>124</sup> Metaphorically, the idea of illumination is inverted through the subject of the repatriation of El Penacho. The colonialist mindset – entrenched in the historical narrative of the Spanish subjugation of Aztec communities and signified in the motif of El Penacho – relays the notion of European enlightenment imposed on colonised territories. This narrative is challenged through the fragmented imaging of El Penacho as it appears in this intuitive drawing. This is made even more pronounced if one were to understand the lump of deliberately distorted clay as referencing faecal matter as Neustetter (2023c) suggests. The lump of faecal-like clay is a metaphor for Neustetter’s personal tongue-in-cheek opinions on historical colonial activities such as that signified through the distorted drawn image of El Penacho. By extension, the reference to debased material culture refers to Neustetter’s personal frustrations of living in Vienna, and the limitations he experiences for his development as a performance artist. The lump of clay, formed through a clasp of the clay between his hands and embedding his fingers into the surface, while applying various liquid pigments, equates with his depiction of absence.

The key to understanding this metaphor is in the work’s title, *Tracing absence*. In the process of drawing, Neustetter responds directly to imagined objects such as El Penacho but also physically present objects such as the Ferris wheel. He literally traces his impressions of these objects and interprets them intuitively through gestural mark making both in the lump of clay as well as with various drawing media on the inner-city wall surface. The notion of absence is referenced in two ways. First, the actual absence of objects such as El Penacho and second, a symbolic absence suggested in Neustetter’s personalised sense of being displaced. Presence in the form of a clay object is undercut and cancelled through the implied metaphorical absence rooted in personal circumstances and his emotional response to being dislocated and yet still present in place; in this case, the place of the city of Vienna and by extension, Austria.

Attempting to frame and render the as yet undefined and unknown through his emotional responses to Vienna as place, he resorts to processes already embedded in his previously embodied experience of materials and how these evoke but also repress strong visual and conceptual associations with place.<sup>125</sup> He gives the clay lump the ironic title *untitled, circa unknown, dimensions undetermined, materials unclear* (2021) (fig 85), which underpins an evasive acknowledgement of an emotionally driven experience of himself being displaced, uprooted and floating between places and states of

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<sup>124</sup> He employs directed flood lights to illuminate the working area and continues working on the piece late into the evening.

<sup>125</sup> As part of the exhibition *Properties of a presence* (2021), Neustetter focused on working with mud and clay and its potential as a three-dimensional medium to define the unknown and the absent. “Marks conjure up abstract forms that have changed due to distance and displacement and the composition evokes territories and landscapes permeated by both the forgotten and the unknown” (von Zinnenburg Carroll [Sa]).

being.

However, teleological loss and the metaphoric dissolving into a haptic state are resolved through astute curiosity about exactly what it means to be interacting with physical objects and materials in the present moment. This happens while simultaneously experiencing in-between states and the uncertainty that this evokes. The sense of touch plays a crucial role in the haptic process. “Touch can be both passive and active, a juxtaposition of body and world and a careful exploration of the size, shape, weight, texture and temperature of features in the environment. Touch is above all the most intimate sense” (Rodaway 1994:41). How is touch indicative of emotional impulse in the way Neustetter works? An emotional relation underlines this interaction with space. I draw parallels with Bruno’s (2007:152) discussion of the forces of attraction and curiosity in regard to the spectacle of cinematic imagery. She writes:

Fascinated, we plunge into the discourse of (e)motions and delve into the language of the interior, curious to see memories exhibited and phantasms screened, transported by the display of remnants, carried away by mesmerizing images, mesmerized by the body of images in a ‘transport’ that attracts us to them and to one another.

Rodaway (1994:44) alludes to this when he elaborates: “[I]t is not just a physical relationship, it is also an emotional bond between ourself and our world”. When this bond is compromised or disrupted one’s participation in this experience results in uncertainty. Neustetter employs a curious mindset to navigate these experiences. In informal conversation, Neustetter (2023c) confides how being an immigrant invokes in him a strong sense of placelessness that translates into an experience of uncertainty and of being territorially invisible. These impulses continue in projects that follow. It is in *Lead the way again* (2022) (fig 86) that I recognise a culmination of the previous year’s processes and concepts.

In 2021, Neustetter’s relationship with the cosmos is directed at a satellite, Sumbandila.<sup>126</sup> The name translates to “Lead the way” in the northern South African Nguni language, TshiVenda. The satellite, officially known as “SumbandilaSat (formerly ZASAT-002, AMSAT designation SO-67), is a South African micro earth observation satellite, launched on 17 September 2009 on a Soyuz-2 launch vehicle from the Baikonur Cosmodrome” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). Using digital software, Neustetter was able to track and document the satellite’s movements, as well as receive data from the satellite, resulting in the production and generation of a vast range of imagery entirely based on the satellite’s viewpoint.

Neustetter uses his reflective stance to literally orientate himself upwards. The upward vertical gaze

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<sup>126</sup> Sumbandila or Sumbandile? Both spellings are recorded in the literature on his website. The correct grammatical reference would be Sumbandila. I use Sumbandila, as it appears in direct quotes on his website.

is not a mythological construct nor an abstract notion of subconscious imagining. Instead, it directly amplifies the movement of the satellite in orbit as well as its function to collect, receive and transmit data. More than simply an object of fascination or a vessel for the purpose of imaginatively journeying to the frontiers of space, which he had previously evoked in performances in Sutherland and the Vrededorp Dome and Maropeng, *Lead the way again* presents the opportunity to put many of his light-related experiments with representations of the cosmos and the universe in general into the specific context of the satellite.

*Lead the way again* presents a development on process, especially in relation to Neustetter's affinity with collaborative working methodologies. Sumbandila's purpose as a point of fascination is multi-fold; as extended subject, the satellite is a collaborating partner. The working process shifts from the earthly locale of Neustetter's studio and the orbiting motherboards and communication technology of onboard computers, to the space between these two points. For the first time the modalities of process extend to something one cannot see – that being his experiences of feeling invisible in *untitled, circa unknown, dimensions undetermined, materials unclear*. Data is transferred through space between two receivers – Neustetter and Sumbandila. It is this invisible journey of data in space and over time that becomes the crucial point in Neustetter's process in this project. Growing from similar systems of communication in previous online projects, *Lead the way again* reveals an aspect of Neustetter's working methodology that is undefinable and inherently tacit in form. The evidence of this process is brought to bear in the mark-making Neustetter generates after each transmission is complete. More than simply a transmission of data in abstract form, this reception of data from the satellite is central in the generation of imagery. A strong indicator of this is the incorporation of transmission glitches, also evidenced in works such as *Corrupted capture (photographic experiments)* and *Mobile\_interventions, Johannesburg*, which signal a field of imaging that Neustetter has no control over but is implicated in through his image-generating methods.

With the image-based data he received from the satellite, and with consistent tracking of its orbit and trajectory over approximately a decade of long-distance interaction, Neustetter was able to generate a vast quantity of drawings and paintings, as well as performative installation art works. The satellite evolved into more than an object signifying and facilitating Neustetter's journey into space, as the artist's subjectivity and emotionally charged focus translated into an intimate obsession. More than a satellite, Sumbandila took on a personalised identity for Neustetter, as he rapidly developed a relational empathy with the inanimate object. Through this vicarious interaction, the satellite came to signify the physical journeys that Neustetter was only ever able to imagine. By extension and emotional projection, Sumbandila became Neustetter's proxy, extending his journeys through space in a perpetual orbit around the planet.

In 2022, Neustetter submitted the letter that makes up the artwork *Lead the Way Again*. The artwork was accepted by a project known as the Moon Gallery.<sup>127</sup> The press release elaborates on the function and purpose of the project: “The Moon Gallery will be installed inside a Nanoracks Nanolab, serving as moving targets for camera observations and performance tests. The gallery offers a diverse range of materials and behaviours for the camera to detect, and in return, the artists will get a chance to learn about the performance of their artworks in microgravity” (Sitnikova [Sa]).

Neustetter’s submission was based on imagery generated through his collaboration with Sumbandila. The artwork is currently housed in the Nanorack Nanolab in the International Space Station (ISS), launched in 2022 (Sitnikova [Sa]).<sup>128</sup> Neustetter’s tiny cubic artwork takes the form of a love letter containing images made up of prototype ink drawings and laser-engraved morse-code script on Z-folded square acrylic Laparello sheets. It continues the intimate relationship he has built up with the satellite over time. It is telling that, in his description, the satellite is referred to as female, strongly underpinning the curiously amorous relationship he brings to his work with the satellite.<sup>129</sup>

In June 2022, the satellite was damaged by a solar flare and burnt up on re-entering the earth’s atmosphere. This was significant for Neustetter for two reasons. For a period, it caused the satellite to not function, due to the damage to its onboard computer and camera. Neustetter was able to continue tracking the orbiting vessel but not to receive or send data of any sort, “prompting the artist to actively speculate, search and imagine” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). Secondly, it motivated Neustetter to configure his emotional relationship with the satellite differently. Its presence is inscribed in his imaginings as an emotional dependency on an object that no longer exists. As with

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<sup>127</sup> The official website describes the initiative: “Moon Gallery is an international collaborative artwork and a gallery of ideas worth sending to the Moon. Moon Gallery aims to set up the first permanent museum on the Moon. Moon Gallery will launch 100 artefacts to the Moon within the compact format of 10 x 10 x 1cm plate on a lunar lander exterior panelling as early as 2025. In this Petri-dish-like gallery, we are developing a culture for future interplanetary society. What are the ideas we want to promote into the future? What are the ideas we want to leave behind?” (Moon gallery [Sa]).

<sup>128</sup> In February 2022, the official ISS press release makes mention of only 64 artifacts. “In collaboration with Nanoracks, powered by Voyager Space, the test payload of 64 artifacts, each no bigger than one cubic centimetre, is targeting launch aboard the NG-17 Cygnus resupply mission on February 19, 2022. The gallery is represented by artists from Asia, Europe, North America, South America, and Africa” (Sitnikova [Sa]).

<sup>129</sup> “The letter is addressed to the Sumbandila Satellite as a gesture of hope to connect to this defunct lonely orbiting ambassador ... the letter asks her to *Lead The Way Again*. With this inclusion, the artist looks back at a decade of work that attempts to connect to a lost collaborator, the Sumbandila Satellite. This act is his chance to get closer than ever to the orbiting space object; he is posting a letter to the satellite as his latest endeavour to take up communication. For the artist, the call into the distant unknown is a hopeful contemplation and conjecture for new meanings and new prospects in response to the complex conditions on earth” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]).

the lump of clay in *Tracing absence*, the satellite emerges into a state of presence enacted through its absence.

The second instalment of the project is *Seeking Dialogue with a Satellite (2010-2021)* (2021) (fig 87). Neustetter presents work motivated by a persistence to reconnect with the lost satellite, even with the knowledge that the vessel no longer exists. A second letter in the form of an artwork that includes “drawings, videos, performative dialogues, responsive robots, planetarium shows, installations and sound pieces for the past decade – attempts to both reach out and to visualise what Sumbandila’s perspective and encounters might be” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). This installation and public performance was presented in The Mixed Reality Workshop (TMRW)<sup>130</sup> space between November 2021 and January 2022.<sup>131</sup> It is a voluminous project involving three primary parts.

*Seeking Dialogue with a Satellite (2010-2021)* and *Lead The Way Again* are the two completed components with the proposal for a final 2025 instalment, which would see the second letter sent to the Moon. For the first instalment, Neustetter lists the dates for this part of the project as extending between 2010 and 2021. As with his reflective methodology in *Into the light* (2015 and 2016) and *Processing Videos 1-16*, Neustetter uses this work as an opportunity to look forward by looking back. *Seeking Dialogue with a Satellite (2010–2021)* involves a selection of drawings and digital prints produced between 2010 and 2021. Neustetter points out how this event “brings together some of the performances, objects and collected bi-products of this journey over the last ten years and a version of the letter artwork being sent to the ISS and the Moon, into an immersive experience for the audience” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). I selectively refer to the event and happenings in the section that follows.

In a darkened room with black painted walls, one part of the exhibition layout is organised spatially into three components. *Lead The Way Again Installation Part I* (2021) (fig 88) is made up of overalls, African-styled wooden stools, morse-code painting motifs orientated in a linear horizontal configuration above the overalls, and paper which is situated on the floor below the stools. *Lead The Way Again Installation Part II* (2021) (fig 89) consists of a 1950s wood-framed slide viewer from the Astronomical Society, Johannesburg, and science slides that hold ink drawings on paper. These are mounted on and lit by the slide viewer. *Lead The Way Again Installation Part III* (2021) (fig 90) is a

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<sup>130</sup> The TMRW is situated at The Atrium, the Trumpet Building, Keyes Art Mile, 21 Keyes Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg.

<sup>131</sup> Large-scale installations emanating from this research also formed part of exhibitions such as *Lead the Way* at the ZKM in Karlsruhe (Germany) with interactive robots that track Sumbandila and send her morse-code light signals; in Dakar (Senegal) as a form of durational performance with local collaborators looking at speculative landscapes’ possibilities experienced by the satellite; and in Bloemfontein (South Africa) as a series of planetarium performances and films (Neustetter [Sa]).

version of the tiny artwork that was sent up into space. This is displayed in glass petri-dishes and is internally lit by lights embedded in the sculpture bases on which the petri dishes are placed. *Lead The Way Again Installation Part IV (2010-2021)* (2021) (fig 91) is a humorous spin on Sci-Fi robots. They are made of “rusted metal globally-sourced, rusted metal robotic lights” that, as Neustetter states, implies a possible tracking of the satellite as it periodically and intermittently flashes morse code that translates to lead the way again (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). The final instalment of the exhibition is *Lead The Way Again Installation Part V (2010-2021)* (2021) (fig 92), which consists of “mixed media artworks and props from performances and films, drawings, Imaginary Futures Planetarium Film projection, time-coded lights as well as photosensitive blueprint paper” (*Lead the way again* [Sa]). This part of the exhibition also includes various improvised performances, actions and gestures that are directed at and directly involve a manipulation of the installed objects. The latter realisation of the project is part of the bigger initiative in the form of a letter-artwork destined for launch to the moon in 2025 (*Lead the way again* [Sa]).

#### 4.5 Concluding observations: “Is there a sense of direction?”

At our final meeting on the morning of 9 June 2023 in Vienna, Neustetter and I met at his studio. We unfolded and arranged the large drawing we had worked on the night before (Thursday 8 June) on a studio table. Neustetter stared down at the drawing questioningly and asked, “Is there a sense of direction?”. This question is a multimodal referent in itself, and sums up the ethos of Neustetter’s working process. It encapsulates Rodrigues and Neustetter’s (2023:189) reference to the Homeric *techne*, when they write: “Neustetter’s commentary offers fresh insight into *techne*, that is, the particular details of an artist’s practical methods or know-how, which reflect the kinds of knowledge based in making and doing that usually remain unspoken” or tacitly embedded in process. Transience as a product in Neustetter’s intuitive processes underscores this idea of *techne*. Leach (1997:116; emphasis original) refers to *techne* as the process of clarifying something without revealing its deeper tacit significance. In ancient Greek terms, it describes a process of knowing called “*aletheia*, that is, in the uncovering of beings. *Techne*, ... is a bringing forth of beings, in that it *brings forth* present beings as such beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making”. In this chapter, I have formulated Neustetter’s *techne* in three broad areas. First, it neatly pulls together an intuitive process of working that unfolds as a journey of discovery. Light enables this journey through physical and metaphoric applications that in part mediate his experiences with the places, objects, people and sites he encounters, but also gathers internalised yearnings of wondrous and fascinating moments of self-realisation.

Second and more denotatively, Neustetter’s question underpins his multi-directional working

approach. A linear progression from one point to the next is enriched through an infinite lexicon of possibilities that project inwardly and outwardly. His personal and artistic vision come together in a progressive movement forward into and through the endless stretches of space and time. This process galvanises an impulse to create through intuitive and impromptu actions, gestures and responses with an interplay of light and place. An embodied and sensorially heightened experience enables Neustetter to position himself teleologically in relation to this interplay, in a perpetual intentionally unstable and multi-directional state of creative intuition. A significant part of this is his drive towards an inclusivity in creative production by actively incorporating visual narratives from across national and geographical, historical, social and cultural contexts.

Third, the question underlies a paradox in Neustetter's process-driven practice. A hapless disembodiment is offset against the specificity of embodied directionality. Invoked through light as a medium and light devices as light transmitting tools, the idea of a journey brings into sharp focus Neustetter's sensitive and sensorial interactions with place. One could say that Neustetter's interaction with place is indeed critical and carries with it a remediation of ideological, institutional, historical and social injustice. Yet within this work, a fleeting moment of magick happens that infuses place with meaningful experiences and lasting affectivity. This paradoxical complex underscores how I employ the word transience in the above analysis of his work.

A transient state suggests fogginess. Perception is clouded in an unsure experience of things fleeting and ungrounded. From a fixed personal point, directionality is prompted by movement as a constant and embodied experience. In his process of ongoing discovery, Neustetter finds himself in a place where he consciously intertwines with his subconscious, foregrounding a heightened sensorial experience. The artist's emotional state gives way to a psychological condition of uncertainty and vulnerability. Immersing himself in a process of chance, a sense of being in the world is suspended as the embodied self travels between points in time, between fleeting and momentary occasions and across space, unpredictably and instinctively mapping encounters with objects, emotions and points.

In transient moments of creative intuition, Neustetter defines, undefines and redefines place, peeling away layers to reveal more of the complex dynamic of self – self in relation to self and self in relation to others. Through conflicting experiences of being simultaneously placed and displaced, multidirectional visuality functions to locate and dislocate, embody and disembody, secure and unhinge. The open-ended and porous juncture of each of these experiences is, however, illuminated and enlightened by the question: "Is there a sense of direction?"

The fogginess of the transient condition provides a matrix of stuff and objects through which Neustetter discovers an innate curiosity and a tenacious persistence to conjure personalised

journeys. In an email conversation on his practice and how this originates and resonates personally, Neustetter responded with a pointed statement that sums up his *techne*: “The question itself gives [one] direction / the direction is in the questioning :)” (Neustetter 2023a).

## CHAPTER 5

### The otherworldly

#### 5.1 Introductory comments

In this conclusion, I summarise the findings of the earlier chapters in order to provide a reflective outline as a basis for identifying the outcomes and conclusions of this research. I organise the chapter into five parts. In the first, I outline the conceptual criteria and assumptions onto which I scaffold my analysis of de Sagazan's and Neustetter's work, and offer a focused commentary on aspects common to their working processes. In the second part, I reflect on each artist's work respectively to highlight how ritualised and transient practices merge in a consideration of the otherworldly.

A reflection on the original contribution of this research makes up the third part of the chapter and centres on the signifying and interrelating aspects of intuition and place, and the key thematic components of process-led ritualised and transient practices. I offer comments on the specific contribution this study makes to the broader discourse on installation and performative arts practices. Following this, in part 4, I outline the limitations of the study with a view to suggesting opportunities for further research.

I end the thesis with the fifth and final part – an epilogue. Here I expand on the ripple effect that this process brings to me personally and as an academic, and how this is emblemised in the word resonance. I briefly conclude my thinking on the otherworldly as it appears in relation to this research by reflecting on its semantic elusiveness. A final statement is centred around Joseph Beuys's artwork entitled *Intuition* (1968) (fig 92).

#### 5.2 Part 1: Reflections on assumptions about place, intuition and the otherworldly

The assumption adopted for the purposes of this research is that place is conceived of as a multidimensional, porous and polyvalent phenomenon. Embedded in this assumption is the guiding factor that such a conception of place stems from an immediate lived experience, in this case, that of the artist. I discussed how this experience stems from both psychic – or what I referred to as a metaconscious – working, as much as it does from the sensorially attuned embodied circumstances of the artist. Sensorial embodiment begins with a tactile relation to objects and surfaces in space, and extends through the intensified creative and intuitive moments into a world of chaotic and fluid imaginings. This imaginative process requires an active bodily engagement with materials through intuitive methodological approaches.

The artist's experience cannot be seen as isolated and hermetically sealed off from broader

circumstances. In both de Sagazan's and Neustetter's practice, the introverted and private moments of the artist always extend outwards into a collective context that draws to itself historical, social and cultural determinants. In both artists' work, a collective and participative intention is enacted with collaborating participants as well as audiences.

Place shifts from an externally experienced thing onto which one projects a set of predetermined actions to an internally realised locality through which visceral feelings are channelled. Embodied locatedness intersects with a realisation of the mental capacity of place – its typically human character or, put differently, the character with which humans imbue place – which in turn is brought about through an abstract conception of place in its defining complexity. At first this may seem to mitigate the banal everyday realities of a real time experience of place but, in this research, it is esoterically determined by criteria that are tacitly concealed. Place is brought into a new paradigm of human action. This leads to a conclusive point that place becomes not just a surface but rather an actual embodiment of actions. Place transforms from a means to facilitate action to an active phenomenon in itself. Place becomes an event. Conceiving place as an active rather than passive thing suggests an openness and fluidity, which results in an accentuated sensorial and embodied sense of everyday lived experience.

I reflected on how place is not the secure and fixed entity of cartographical calculations, or the unshifting sands onto which a coloniser might plant a flag of proclamation, discovery and ownership. In drawing together the heightened sensorial action of the artist, coupled with a narrative of fluid abstract coordinates, place becomes porous. An embodied relationship to place that informs process-led practices, such as those of Neustetter and de Sagazan, moves beyond the bodily parameters of sensation. An embodied relation to place is rooted significantly in memory. Through previous experiences, unprecedented intuitive impulses give form to the artists' embodied relation to place and, through this, I showed how an experience of alternate states of consciousness is invoked.

Subjective bodily responses are cognitively driven through direct action, but also intuitively formed through the involvement of memory. These reactive and responsive moments, which happen in real time and space, give definition to notions of place as something embodied through human agency. Memory and its relation to a tactile responsiveness to place highlights tacit conditions, implicating both physical and metaphysical encounters. Place presents an opportunity to trace an ontological continuity between subject and object. I identified this as a polyvalent layering of information that is embedded and inscribed in spatial contexts, and that ultimately assists in articulating how place operates in intuitive practices such as those of de Sagazan and Neustetter. This underscores the

relevance of past and present experiences, as the artists' sensorial relations with place carries their memory of past events. This has less to do with a fixed relationship to past and present experiences, and more to do with a fluidity and intersubjective exchange of implicit and tacit forms of experience that are expansive, spontaneous, and impulsive, resulting in open-ended and abstract cognitive thinking. A familiarity with visual sources filters through into a creative process and a direct retrieval of remembered events. This involves a certain cognitive sifting in which imagery is accessed through a subjective mental filter. For de Sagazan, this has to do with the trance-induced and extreme embodied experiences in ritualised performance. For Neustetter, this process features strongly in mental iterations and personalised memory, which result in a narrative of transient journeys.

Although the argument stands that memory is given priority in intuitive creative experiences, I infer that it is not the sole determinant. Memory is not fallible or reliable as a fixture of visual representation. It is in the potential for fantasy and fantastical imaginings in the work of de Sagazan and Neustetter that a further constituent for intuitive thinking can be found. However, memory and imagining cannot be used interchangeably in relation to intuitive thinking. There is a reciprocity between these two forms of cognitive work that I recognise in de Sagazan and Neustetter's intuitive processes. From this subjective and embodied position, experiences based on circumstantial and place-based encounters are foregrounded in terms of the artist's sense of scale and proximity to place.

Scale and proximity play a determining role in the discussion of tacit criteria that inform spatial dexterity, leading to useful formulations of place as expansive and enchanting. Place is something that extends beyond the known world of physical limits, opening up the potential for an experience of the otherworldly. Being admitted and metaphorically ushered into space, brings with it an ergonomic aspect where scale is measured as bodily proximity, ensuring a physical and emotional sensation of belonging in place. From this research, I deduce that intuitive functioning as a process involving an elusive psychic space evokes a different scale and proximity. Credence is given to a realisation of place, which opens into an outwardly orientated experience. Sensorially charged and engaged bodily relations, which stem from a sense of expansiveness, reach a point of accented otherworldly resonance through personalised reminiscence of past experiences. It becomes clear that, in Neustetter's performances, the vertical gaze enables an expansive scale in which a transient practice articulated through light results in a personal emotional investment. In de Sagazan's performance a ritualised trance state mediates a point between the physical moment of making and an embodied state of imagining, which extends into the infinite space of the subconscious through an existential as well as intentional encounter with the materials he uses. I recognised a cerebral and, at the same time, temporal effect in spatially activated process, which redefines notions of

place in the two artists' works, and simultaneously assists in the facilitation of an otherworldly experience.

Existential encounters result from metaconscious experiences influencing how spatial arts practices are located in temporal, historically determined and memory-infused place. Yet, at the same time, this experience defines an intersubjective and dislocated relationship, which opens out into an expansive and ontological position that shifts between being placed and un-placed. A grounded placeness, and an embodied placelessness, provide a forum for conceptualising a process-led practice. First, an intuitive, process-driven practice is made credible through its ironic status as ungrounded, fleeting and idiosyncratically tacit, and, second, notions of place are accessible through embodied abstract and intangible moments that operate outside of conscious action. Place enables an undefinable, self-realising and interjecting moment of both worldly and otherworldly experiences. This occurs in the form of otherworldly narratives in Neustetter's projected vertical gaze into the endless realms of the cosmos, and de Sagazan's immersion in making through his ritualised trance-induced states made possible through his bodily relation to place. What drives these is subjective and embodied, social and historical conditions of place. Cognitive thinking may originate from external sources but finds relevant expressive form in an internalisation of past experiences that carry personal resonance.

My research demonstrated how intuition, imagination and creativity, considered from a phenomenological perspective, assist in conceptualising the otherworldly. Through a specifically emotional response to things, the practitioner is motivated to feel. The verb *to feel* involves consecutive sensations: from an embodied position, the practitioner feels through the activation of a sensorial interaction with everyday circumstances and situations. An emotive response draws together psychosomatic and psychological conditions. This stepping up, from a consciously tactile experience into a metaconscious state of limitless, unpredictable, fluid and chaotic stimuli, is the point at which expansive and unhindered imagining evolves into creative thinking. Impulses are extracted from a metaconscious state. As much as this is consciously orientated outwards, it also involves a highly subjective expression of introverted and inwardly directed action.

A core finding is that creative intuition is elusive. It sits on a boundary between the known and the unknown, the definable and the undefinable, but is always contingent on an embodied response to a place-specific situation in real time. Words such as experience, experiential and experientiality signify a direct channel between an intuitive moment and a sensorially determined action. I posit that this embodied relation to a conscious moment in real time unfolds from tacitly embedded knowledge in the subconscious. Put differently, intuitive action is a coming together of real-time

response and unknown instincts, which may be previously acquired or reside in unexplainable and undefined metacognitive thinking. An immediate response points to the subconscious realm of tacit experience. I analysed this particular aspect of cognitive thinking through a focused discussion of how an intersection of insightful and intuitive moments results in an otherworldly experience. The way knowledge is acquired, and the form this assumes, defines the criteria used in the way I discussed intuitive cognitive processing systems in de Sagazan's and Neustetter's practice.

The human propensity for and reliance on pattern and repetition foregrounds intuitive cognitive functions through pattern recognition and generation. It follows then that syncretic, abstract and tacitly embedded sources resonate through rational cognitive behaviour. The result in visual terms resolves into a creative event. The insistence on a coherency of process through a patterning of circumstantial and abstract information translates into otherworldly narratives in the work of Neustetter and de Sagazan. And yet I found that a reliance on pattern is undercut by intuitive processes that are unpredictable and therefore imperfect. Adopting a heuristic reading of process fits the open-ended nature of intuitive process. I reflected on how provocative and impulsive approaches stem from trial and error to inform Neustetter's performances, injecting them with deliberately inaccurate or unresolved outcomes that are enacted through experimental curiosity. In de Sagazan's work, this is demonstrated through a spontaneous and impulsive application of material that is enacted through repetitive and already familiar actions and gestures. In each respective case, creative responses occur when the artists confront the fragile self. Each intuitive act happens as a result of an unknown impulse rooted in a curiosity of what-could-be rather than what is known. These are the emotive moments that give intuitive action its profound expression. I have observed this in the immersive way in which de Sagazan created the work *(Untitled) Fallen Angel* (2023) (fig 22b). It can also be seen in the production of *Transfiguration* (1998) (fig 3a, b & c) when deprivation of sight instils an uncertainty in how the creature evolves as clay and material are manipulated. In Neustetter's pre-performative workshops for *Light resonance* (2022), I documented a purely experimental approach that resulted in the artist responding with trepidation as to how the work will unfold. Often these workshops are purely intuitive exercises that may or may not have an impact on the final work.

Moments of uncertainty and vulnerability in confronting seemingly insurmountable or incompatible situations, or the technology that enables these situations, set in motion a pattern of emotional reactions, in which previously acquired knowledge and insight enable intuitive and impulsive action. However, my research concludes that the converse also holds true. Insights conceptualised through metaconscious resources and filtered as specific memories of past events enable sensorial responses as well as access to tacitly embedded knowledge. These feed directly into moments of intuitive

reason and clarity. Bringing place into this relationship means that investigative or experiential approaches are always viewed in relation to a place-situational context. As a compelling consequence of impulsive and surprising associations, seemingly incompatible situations and things are intertwined with fantastical imaginings that result from expansive and open-ended thinking. With the flow of tacit knowledge from sensorial and embodied experiences, previously acquired knowledge converges with predictable but also coincidental associations between things. Through a process of performative trance (in de Sagazan's work) and transience (in Neustetter's work), the artists temporarily detach themselves from the moment of inception to enable intuitive behaviour, which leads to a creative context of on-going production. It can therefore be stated that an intuitive process in the artists' work is activated by creative impulses that are formed through a combination of memory, environmental context and embodied aspects of emotional and sensorial responses, leading Neustetter and de Sagazan into a disembodied state through detachment from the present moment. The artists escape through transient moments and trance-induced action into a visionary field of otherworldly imagining.

A key finding ensues when this expansive and detached moment of intuitive imaging is narrated as an otherworldly experience. Through an embodied engagement with process, a type of tacit knowledge is evidenced that is vibratory and in a constant state of flow. Cymatic resonance corresponds with the inner physiological workings of the body, which in turn feeds an environmentally-activated sensorial relationship. With both artists, a spatiality is directly contingent on bodily functionality, bringing the experience into the full realisation of perpetual rhythm. By elaborating on how rhythm and rhythmic systems are directly related to intuitive thinking, I conclude that this vibrational effect, derived from rhythmic bodily impulses, evokes otherworldly contexts. A rhythmic element in cymatic presentations raises the question of how time and timing is pragmatically brought into the scope of intuitive thinking. Time is distorted and warped in trance-induced states of altered realities. It is in kinaesthetic representations that time resonates with embodied notions of tacit knowing. Time is conceived as both spatially as well as sensorially significant in the artists' embodied responses to a given stimulus. This relation of rhythm, time, embodiment and tacit knowledge is a critical moment in the manifestation of otherworldly narratives. Through the rational, learned and encoded knowledge of stored memory, coupled with the abstract, fragmented, tacit and undefinable experiences, I showed how kinaesthetic workings assist in imagining an otherworldly consciousness.

A consideration of perception as a precursor to emotional responses such as vulnerability and risk is found to be important in this study. Perception is located in that moment of intuitive creative thinking when seemingly aberrant stimuli come together in unexpected but workable ways. I

recognised embedded emotional reactions of uncertainty and potential risk in works by both Neustetter and de Sagazan. Inherent in these reactions is a trepidation when delving into the unknown, that is, in the knowledge that is tacitly concealed in layers of perceptual stimuli that operate in otherworldly terms. A full immersion in a realm, space or place is what enables an ability to move beyond the comfort zone of what is presently experienced and known. I conclude that this is, in part, a result of a didactically acquired perceptual, cognitive and embodied skills set. More than just a passive receptive or active perceptive gesture, the otherworldly therefore becomes an embodied experience activated through sensorial means.

Imagining is foregrounded as a moment channelled through the artist in an embedded manner. The flow from a pre-active state into an intuitive response happens in an uninterrupted manner. I elected the phrase act-instinctive reactions and responses to describe this relation in works by Neustetter and de Sagazan. Locating innovative thinking in relation to a process of imagining then develops the embodied experience into one that is organised naturally into a certain insouciance. The wonderment of insouciance prompts the question of an illusory state of subconscious cognitive processing, especially as this adds another facet of imagining through tacitly embedded phenomena. It is therefore resolved that imaginings presented in the form of illusionary content directly invoke a tacitly embedded and sensorially derived experience of the otherworldly.

### **5.3 Part 2: The otherworldly in the art of Olivier de Sagazan and Marcus Neustetter**

#### **5.3.1 Ritualistically becoming and un-becoming in process: Olivier de Sagazan**

Three main areas formed the chapter on de Sagazan and ritualised process. First, embodied process articulates a sense of place in works such as *Transfiguration* (1998) (fig 3a, b & c), *Hybridation* (2006) (fig 15a, b & c) and others, where process is configured as an extension and therefore expression of the artist's embodied self. Second, ritual operates as process through intuitive actions and gestures that form a key moment in place-specific enactments, as well as multimediated productions, in de Sagazan's performative works. Third, process invokes a trance state that suggests an experience of the otherworldly when ritualised practice is framed as an intuitive method, a crucial part of his performances. I conclude with a commentary on ritualised practice and otherworldly states in de Sagazan's process.

##### *5.3.1.1 Embodiment and emotionally charged intuitive methods*

The artist delves into aspects of himself through an awareness of bodily presence in space and time. He accesses memories of past life experiences to give form to present creative expressions. These expressive moments are relevant beyond the immediacy of time and the specificity of place, so that an otherworldly consciousness is offset by experiences in the present. de Sagazan's process is

integrally part of a narrative in which making is intuitively driven by place-related triggers, an integration of life circumstances across time, and an ability to access undefinable and tacitly embedded experiences. Traces of this metaconscious condition reside in the completed sculptures and intuitively enacted performances. I showed how it is in the bringing together of these interrelated conditions that an otherworldly state is enabled.

Through resurgent visualisation of imagined esoteric forms, intuitive impulses provide access to primal and feral aspects of himself. In part, this is activated by an impulsivity in handling selected materials such as hay, clay, pigment and plaster of Paris. Intuitive actions and gestures are directed through unscripted performances. While regularly performing works such as *Transfiguration* and *Hybridization*, routine actions such as the daily clay-estuary visits, as well as previously enacted theatrical actions, are crucial for understanding the intuitive nature of his work.<sup>132</sup>

Social commentary, satire, political critique and his own sense of embodied self inform de Sagazan's ritualised and sensorially driven practice. This is his social reality, and it is the base from which I considered the ritualised nature of his making processes. From the perspective of intra-dimensionality and multidimensionality on the one hand, and the porosity of ritual boundaries on the other, I demonstrated how his intuitive methods catalyse through a spatiality that is fluid and filtered through his conscious and metaconscious experiences.

A prominent finding in the study of de Sagazan's performances is his attainment of a higher state of consciousness, the subsequent creative impulses that flow from this, and the bringing together of a multimodal encounter that suggests the presence of an otherworldly state. In de Sagazan's work this is enacted through physical, sensorial and emotionally embodied responses, which stem from socio-centric and psychological impulses. The multimodal nature of this experience is shown through inwardly driven aspects, such as tapping into past experiences and remembered personal histories, as well as outwardly orientated socio-centric states, such as those present in the characteristics of place.

Significantly weighted in de Sagazan's process is the impact of his emotional state. A direct relationship between the artist's emotional state and the ensuing intuitive creative impulse is anticipated in this socio-centric and psychological condition, enacted through heightened physical action. States of vulnerability and uncertainty are used to tap into unknown, numinous and tacit phenomena. His ritualistic methods take on what I call a bio-social character. I positioned this as a consequence of external (place-related) as well as internal (emotional and psychological) factors.

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<sup>132</sup> In Chapter Three, I discussed one of these excursions, when I accompanied de Sagazan as part of my documentation of his process in field work activities.

The emotional impact of his process has a transformative effect in the way emotional resonance is coupled with extreme bodily enactments. A direct conceptual corridor opens up between acute states brought about through ritualised processes and embodied sensorial activation on the one hand, and the flow of unrestrained creative impulses on the other. A shift in conscious awareness occurs when these impulsive actions enable an experience of otherworldly phenomena.

de Sagazan's use of his own body defines notions of place through external factors as well as through an awareness of his bodily self. Put differently, a ritualised approach assists in the formulation of the body as place. In my research, this has particular significance for the operation of the otherworldly in his performances. The relation of physical place and his ability to tap into a metaphysical condition of imagining mirrors the relation of outwardly and inwardly orientated actions. In de Sagazan's work, this validates a working method that stems from an embodied sense of knowing. As the artist straddles the realms of physical and metaphysical experience, an otherworldly consciousness is realised, one that is not prescribed but operates outside of established, conventional and previously enacted conditions. It is at this point of universal expansiveness that the intuitive creative impulse occurs. I described this as a fluid and perpetually evolving state of becoming and unbecoming, which positions the artist metaphorically at the brink of unfathomable creative potential.

A question that emerged during the research process was the extent to which performative theatricality either disabled or enabled a ritualised method in de Sagazan's work. In part this problem lies in the relation between an objective theatrical approach and the inward and introspective work of a trance-induced ritualised state. I identified a metaphorical device in which this awkward duality is resolved. Through the agency implied in the word *jus*, the metaphoric body as an enacted place, but also as a conduit through which relations of the worldly and otherworldly are articulated, is visually activated (de Sagazan 2023).<sup>133</sup> I pointed out how the metaphor extends directly to, and is emblematic of, the body as a place through which a flow of consciousness occurs. Signifying both blood as a life force and the flow of impulsive creative action, the concept *jus* pulls together an authentic expression of creative impulse. An implied flow or current marks a point at which a metaphoric correspondence enables intuitive and impulsive moments in real time, which in turn provides a further understanding of how an otherworldly experience emerges from ritualised action.

It is in this nexial juncture of the ritualised body, as both inwardly orientated substance and

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<sup>133</sup> As previously discussed, in an interview on Monday 22 May, de Sagazan (2023) spoke animatedly about the word *jus* (juice) and confirmed its significance in his practice.

outwardly material presence, that an otherworldly narrative is visualised through mythological thematic narratives, as well as extreme expressions of bodily action. The artist subjects himself to a transformation that is understood to be two-fold. On the one hand, extreme experiences of ritualised bodily activity bring into effect a personal transformation in which the artist confronts aspects of his own ego in moments of heightened vulnerability and uncertainty. On the other hand, he uses his body as place, as a means to transform the substance that defines his sensorial and embodied visual representations. The otherworldly is inscribed, recorded and represented in visual terms.

#### *5.3.1.2 Ritualised actions and place-specific enactments*

Spatiality and the question of place remain integral to the activation of otherworldly states through ritual. This is predicated on three core aspects of ritualised practice in de Sagazan's work: literal and physical place, conceptual application of place, and evocative and resonant effects of place. These concepts give specific form to the inward orientation of the socio-centric filter of his embodied process. Place shifts from a theatrical locale or platform to an embodied phenomenon, which not only makes a ritualistic process possible, but also becomes the material substance or conceptual ingredient in de Sagazan's process. The real-time manifestation of this relation of physical to metaphysical conditions operates from the sensorial responses of the artist and the use of his own body in his work. Through the physical actions of making and his bodily interactions with specific sites, de Sagazan's process is incorporated into physical elements as well as aspects that are undefined, unseen and unknown. An important aspect of this intuitive approach is when an immediate spatial context is charged by bringing into the present unrelated, cognitively unrealised and as yet unformed phenomena. From this point of incoherent and chaotic grafting together of aberrant stimuli, de Sagazan's creative process emerges.

de Sagazan's daily routines and his sensorial relation with everyday spatial circumstances, physical surfaces, materials and objects (including sculptural media), as well as his own astute self-reflexive observations of the world, instil a multidimensionality to the actions and gestures of his intuitive process. While this may suggest purely automatic actions, outside of conscious thought, it is not so. For de Sagazan, intuitive action is made possible through a sensorial deliberation that is impulsive, but simultaneously reliant on previous experiences. These formative behaviours suggest a complex spatialisation that is integral to his performances. Seemingly chaotic and uninhibited actions are bound ritualistically to place and space-related contexts. Physical space (for example, the space of the studio), emotional space (as shown through extreme impulsive and repetitive actions), and multidimensional space (for example, the vast imaginative world of his subconscious) are brought

together in his ritualised events. This is most pronounced in performative works that involve an abandonment to potential bodily harm or life-threatening injury.

### *5.3.1.3 Ritualised practice and otherworldly states*

de Sagazan's bodily presence presents a seamless interrelation of (1) functionality, in the sense that his works are performed or made through his fully realised physical presence; (2) passage, as a conduit through which otherworldly narratives are experienced; and (3) site for intuitive ritualised action.

I focused a significant part of my analysis on how de Sagazan uses his body and its relation to place as a mnemonic device. I argue that a close relation is necessary in the way everyday experiences intersect with otherworldly experiences in what I refer to as the memory-image. The ritualised body in de Sagazan's performative works is always contingent on precedent that exists in the everyday world of lived experience. I discussed this as the tactility and bodily enactment of process in de Sagazan's work. A flow (*jus*) exists between a state of ritualised embodiment, a reciprocal relation of grounded everyday experience, and the artist's personal conception and experience of place. This relationship is internally dependent on the extent of a sensorial state of either activation or deprivation.

In conventional ritualised settings, a timeless trajectory presents a misalignment with current socio-spatial contexts. Notions of past, present and future do not seem to matter. However, this study of de Sagazan's process suggests otherwise. On the one hand, he ritualistically accesses stimuli beyond his conscious reckoning, yet, on the other hand, in his process he consciously and deliberately integrates personal past and present experiences with the immediacy of place. These two approaches are interwoven in a complex arrangement of actions that transgress past and present time constraints. In and through this conceptual and physical relation of place, self and physical context, the artist's personalised conception of vulnerability and uncertainty is evoked through an embodied ritualised state. It is the noetic functions of ritualised practice, in what I termed a coalescence of being, that the otherworldly is narrated.

### **5.3.2 Light, transience and journeying through process: Marcus Neustetter**

In Neustetter's work I recognised the significance of light as a medium that catalyses a multidimensional intersection of life experiences, which implicate conscious as well as metaconscious conditions. I introduced the idea of a transient experience as one that underpins a momentary impulse associated with an intuitive action, and how this underpins impermanent and fleeting conditions initiated through intuitive processes.

In my study, Neustetter's work is conceptualised around a pivotal performance entitled *Right to reflect* (2017) (fig 39). I applied a contextual approach to outline a conceptual action of looking backwards on the development of his work before 2017 and forward to selected works post 2017. The motivation for this was based on a shift in his practice-led approach from 2017 onwards. This shift involved moving away from a collaborative methodology to a highly emotive, self-reflexive approach, while maintaining a multi-pronged, immersive and experiential working agenda. I considered five primary areas that dominate the discussion of Neustetter's work in Chapter Four: (1) the purpose and functionality of light as a tool and a medium; (2) the embodiment of light, and how it effects a dialogue with place; (3) how the technologies and personal pathologies of the vertical gaze set in motion personalised journeys; (4) how light and movement invoke a continuous search for a transient condition; and (5) how a state of transience signals an otherworldly condition. Interrelated primary objectives underscore a reading of Neustetter's process. On the one hand, ephemeral conditions and transience can be analysed through the agency of Neustetter's embodied relations with his personal circumstances, as well as interpersonal experiences with the sites, spaces and places he works with. On the other hand, intuitive thinking and action are real-time methodological approaches that define the way he positions himself as facilitating subject in his performances. To conclude my observations of Neustetter's intuitive practice, I divide this section into four broad areas prompted by the following statements: (1) An instinctive and impulsive context of production signals an emotive state, which in turn activates a metaphysical or subconscious experience. (2) Neustetter's interactions with place, objects, surfaces, people and sites are activated by the mesmerising and enchanting qualities of light. (3) The vertical gaze enables a transient state and the articulation of material and immaterial conditions. (4) The efficacy of place enables an emergent, engaged and heightened state of physical, emotional awareness.

#### *5.3.2.1 Emotional and illuminated states and the metaphysical experience*

In an analysis of Neustetter's performative works, I discussed how the embodied self is made possible through a complex relation with place in the way otherworldly narratives are evoked. Aside from its application as a creative medium, I showed how light both illuminates a conscious experience of things and also operates as a metaphorical agent. First, it is a medium through which his process is visually articulated. Second, it functions as a spatialising and de-spatialising phenomenon. Third, as a device through which the notion of a journey is narrated, it sets up a platform for a manifestation of otherworldly narratives. All of the above condense into a complex narration of a resonant, revelatory and transformative experience.

I applied the word audacity to Neustetter's approach, as a means to demonstrate the tenacity with

which he directs a sensorial and emotional substance in his work with light. I extended this further by grafting an animistic functionality onto the way light is employed physically and metaphorically. Light is both an omnipresent and necessary ingredient, and a pervasive signifier that initiates intuitive action and enables cathartic reflection. This polyvalent function extends even further than simply being an ingredient, a tool or a metaphor. It is the numinous spark that brings disparate phenomena into close proximity and resonant connection. Seemingly fixed conditions and experiences are dismantled, reconstituted and given new form. At the centre of these experiences is an embodied curiosity and openness, defined through states of fearless, emotionally charged vulnerability, which injects Neustetter's performative events with a forward momentum that is never static or inert. Through this implied forward momentum, light operates as a journeying device, directed by a current that is brought into being through binary relations resolved in Neustetter's embodied experiences.

#### *5.3.2.2 Mesmerising and enchanting interactions*

A large part of what informs the otherworldly dimensions of Neustetter's use of light is what I refer to as the enchanting aspects of light. The word fascination extends to light and its ability to evoke a sense of enchantment, delight and bewilderment in its awe-inspiring and mesmerising effects. Light operates metaphorically and symbolically through visual projection.

Neustetter's application of light is bisociative. It is a physically manipulated device as much as it is a powerful metaphor of personal transformation. To extend this I advanced the idea of an entropic aspect that emanates from this bisociative position. Light signifies a directional trajectory that is never inert as it gives visual form to a journey or adventure. A further point I made is how light evokes a sense of the ethereal through its immersive action in Neustetter's performances, and how this measures off against the idea of a transformative adventure or journey. On the one hand, light is intangible, metaphorically constructed and a carrier of a meaningful expression of unknown realms, yet, on the other hand, it sets in motion a tangible journey through real time and known places.

I discussed three ways in which this happens in his performative practice. First, in the physical sense, light is an embodied means to negotiate frontiers of memory, self and other. Mapped strategies highlight introspective and extrovertive expressions through visual realisations of personal and collective vulnerability, relational reciprocity and exchange. Second, illumination is positioned metaphorically to suggest the internalising of knowledge and understanding. Emotional obstacles are negotiated when moving from an ungrounded and entropic state of chthonic darkness into a place of inspired awareness or knowing. Aspects of the sensorial body, and more specifically the feeling body, invoke a sense of the divine and otherworldly, leading to ecstatic wonder, joy and

happiness. Third, light opens out a narrative of expansive space, evoking a celestial consciousness to channel the otherworldly. In Neustetter's performances, the curiosity that drives his experimental approach with light impacts the physical spaces and places, objects and people in his performances. Light as a signifying element is an integral part of the final realisation of his works. Processes of explorative experimentation lead to what I colloquially referred to as playful encounters and delightful disasters.

### *5.3.2.3 The vertical gaze and materiality and immateriality*

Neustetter's idiosyncratic curiosity is a consequence of his persistent questioning of the contrasting and oppositional relations of light and shadow. This is articulated in what he refers to as the vertical gaze. While light operates to illuminate the journey of the vertical gaze, shadow stands as an important reminder of the place from which the creative impulse emerges, especially in relation to the artist's internalised self-doubt and vulnerabilities. The path of this creative journey is echoed in his integration of a technical proficiency and confidence with processes of visual production through a synectic experimental method. At this juncture, Neustetter's engaged intuitive self is fully articulated as a product of synectic processes on the one hand, and rational cognitive decisions built on previously acquired experience on the other. This point defines a transient action that has long-term effects, which bring into full circle a transformative experience. This led me to the conclusion in my analysis of his performances that tacit conditions are inherently a part of metacognitive processing. These conditions are channelled outwards through actions that give form to a metaphor of personalised journeys through an otherworldly experience.

To further measure the significance of light as a medium in Neustetter's process, I provided focused observations of how materiality and immateriality advance a case for the otherworldly in his performative practice. More than a tool for projected imagery, Neustetter uses light as a means to tease the veil between the fixed materiality of surfaces and objects and their inherent immateriality: physical form gives way to perceived states of impermanence. This has the effect of foregrounding a transient condition in which boundaries between worldly and otherworldly, self and other are made permeable and fluid. For Neustetter's process-led practice, that which is imperceptible and immaterial is rendered interchangeable with perceptible and material conditions. The two conditions exist in the same time space in the present moment. This transient moment ushers in the perceived effect of impermanence, as light reconfigures relationships between objects and surfaces. All perceptual relations to fixed conditions of being in time are temporarily suspended, rendered uncanny and emotionally heightened. This embodied experience is what allows Neustetter the opportunity to explore deeply embedded emotional states of vulnerability and uncertainty, while

simultaneously finding resolve in the cosmic expansiveness made possible through the vertical gaze.

The sensorial body, acted upon through the transient tectonics of light, enables an experience beyond cognitive and perceptual faculties. I conclude that the process involves a deeper metaphysical experience that gives definition to the transformational impact of his performances. Resulting states of vulnerability are offset against the intensity of imaginative curiosity in momentary transient states that open up an expanded outwardly orientated view.

#### *5.3.2.4 The efficacy of place, light and the on-going journey*

A transformational experience of a fleeting state of being, and how it enables an interrelation between the physical and metaphysical realms of consciousness, defines a personal journey through time, space and place-directed visuality. In Neustetter's practice, this is an uncomfortable experience, brought on by the multidimensional and inter-directional character of place in the way it functions in his work. Place is conceived in relation to an emergent and engaged state of physical, emotional and heightened mental awareness. Transient moments of intense imaginings initiate a momentum that radiates through Neustetter's personal histories and memory, as well as through physical and imagined spaces.

Neustetter's curiosity extends into a playfulness in the process of producing his performance works. Each impulsive decision carries with it an experimental approach that forms meaningful sensorial reactions in his creative imaginings. Understood more clearly as a singularity of unfathomable dimensions and characteristics, place defines a conceptual point that propels Neustetter's intuitive process. Marked by differential and axial trajectories, Neustetter's conception of place is the seat of a multidirectional movement that defines an on-going journey.

Light is brought into the same conceptual space as the tactility and tangibility of place through the narrative of a journey. The two are mutually exclusive yet, at the same time, reciprocal in providing the conceptual platform for Neustetter's process. This has particular consequences for understanding the complexity of place in his work. On the one hand, I observed how light offers what I referred to as a transient working assembly through the physical devices and objects he uses yet, paradoxically, it offers a powerful signifier of emotional distress premised on an excavation of personal memory. The context of place-related lived experience extends outwards in intuitively driven gestures of creative expression. Time, place and personal memory intersect to give Neustetter's journeys heightened resonance for the artist and his collaborating participants.

Neustetter's journey always begins with himself and then extends outwards to others. In part this implicates his own experiences of uncertainty and vulnerability in the volatile contexts of his own

personal entropy. It is from the metaphoric cave of possibility that the raw ingredients of intuitive functioning give form to light-infused creative imagining. From the artist's subconscious, the tacit conditions for creative imaginings enable his journeys through time and space. The undefined subjective position of stored memory and cognitively acquired experience over time is generative. Life experiences and personal memory on the one hand, and his intuitive engagement with places, objects and people on the other, emerge to form an energetic, lively and creative initiative. Neustetter's intuitive process-led methodologies are both divergent and simultaneously emergent in their complex and multimodal praxis. His journeys into tacit and alternative logic of unknown phenomena make provision for the excavation of the raw material for his intuitive imaginings. I noted how the banal and material conditions of his conscious life experiences directly impact his subconscious imaginings to provide substance to his intuitive and fun-filled performances.

By implication, notions of place impact on how transience works in Neustetter's practice. In the discussion I concluded that being placed and being displaced are significant in understanding his intuitive responses to the spatial contexts in which he works. I rationalised this as an extension of the subjective impulses that drive his work. When discussing placement and displacement in relation to Neustetter's work, a further observation was made. While operating subjectively from his personal life experiences, he is also enacting an escapism from the world of real-life experiences to perform a fantastical journey. The veil that separates experiences of external orientation from an internal dissonant expression of personal reality becomes porous and penetrable. Intuitive imaginings enable a conceptual movement from placement or being placed to an intentionally self-inflected emotional and physical displacement.

#### **5.4 Part 3: Reflections on the original contribution of this research**

The original contribution of this research centres on the interrelation of intuition and place. I plot why I chose the scope of ritual and transience as a thematic structure for the study of de Sagazan's and Neustetter's work respectively, and why this presents a significant contribution to the study of their work, as well as to a discourse on installation and performative arts practices in general. I focus particularly on how process informs this significance.

In this research the use of the word magick deviates from occult narrative references and an iconography of spiritualism and mysticism. In each artist's practice, this becomes evident, in the idea of a journey and the metaphor of light as a signifier of otherworldly states for Neustetter, and the use of ritual and otherworldly realms for de Sagazan. The idea of magick is applied as a tool to deconstruct the mechanics of intuitive process and to identify a current in each artist's vibrational relations with place.

Imagining as a core ingredient in creative thinking is a priority in intuitive processes. The analysis of examples of de Sagazan's and Neustetter's work highlights one common criterion underpinning this – time. Time provides the conceptual movement that enables cognitive processes to originate from the tactility of everyday experiences, the fluidity of memory and the unpredictable and tacit realms of the subconscious. In de Sagazan's process, time follows a linear trajectory from inception to conclusion of the process of making a work or enacting a performance. In Neustetter's process, time operates as a multivalent tool for a transient experience implicating memory, everyday experience and site-responsiveness.

I selectively employed a phenomenological lens to locate theoretically how process-led spatial arts practices are intuitively activated through an embodied relation to place. This is necessary in an understanding of how tacit knowledge is conceptualised as a magickal process, allowing an experience of both conscious past and present circumstances, as well as metaconscious, undefinable and unknown resources. This articulates a phenomenological conjuncture of place and intuition that culminates in an expression of the otherworldly.

I located tacit knowledge in relation to process-led practice. Tacit knowledge exists outside of literal and preconceived conceptual and perceptual experiences. I conclude here that it is more accurate to conceive of tacit knowledge as embedded in practice and exercised through sensorial means and through the embodied actions of the practitioner and other participants. In this way, knowledge that is insulated in inaccessible mystery or a fantastical illusion of subconscious vision shifts into a rich resource of potential stimuli, which the practitioner makes sense of and is able to use selectively. My research showed that it is necessary to operate from an explicit internalised view of knowledge towards a deliberate decoding of tacit knowledge, and that this happens when there is an active abandonment to the inevitable uncertainty of what is abstract, undefined and unknown. A concluding point is that this abandonment to a state of uncertainty, and how this aligns with process-related work, culminates in an experience of otherworldly phenomena. Relating this to the way Neustetter and de Sagazan work, I discussed how this is an integral process of giving over to a metaconscious state, without pre-emptive or preconceived notions of what this may entail. The artists make allowance for conditions of a present moment without the interfering effects of self-judgement. Foregrounded in my analysis of selected works by Neustetter and de Sagazan is their immersion in the rich matrix of triggers, impulses, sensations and emotions, and how this assists in redefining preconceived notions of creative intuition.

Probing the depth of a metaphorical and psychometric reading of place requires a further positioning of the practitioner's internalised and personal circumstances. To extend this as a

tangential expression of the embodied self, I reverted to the idea of an emergent collective consciousness and an unhindered, preverbal, feral and primordial core aspect of the practitioner's egoistic self. Through what I called the porous veil of encounters, an expression of self translates through and into a visionary recollection of past experiences, as well as unresolved or untapped conditions that defy linguistic reasoning and operate as pure instinct. Cognitively, these currents of experience convolute and transform into a visionary expression that is unique and authentically intuitive. A consequence of the process through which visionary thinking leads to impulsive and intuitive action is a sense of apprehension and trepidation. It is this embodied response that manifests through an engagement with tacit aspects of the unknown, which leads to the vulnerability and uncertainty necessary for creative impulses to produce otherworldly narratives in real-time encounters. The resulting realisation is described by Rosner and Abt (1974:17) as "flashes of discovery".

A further extension of this is the way tacit knowledge works in an intuitive process. I showed how intuition suggests a cognitive peering through veils of mundane or explicit knowledge, being able to access insightful understandings beyond what is ordinarily shown. If one were to see tacit knowledge as the seat for the otherworldly, then it requires a means to access this. Enabling insightfulness, as well as innovative practice over and above or integral to an intuitive process, are credible ways to address this problem.

While it is a given that intuitive thinking relies on previously acquired skills, there is a point at which this becomes secondary to the inevitable chaos and viscous fluidity of tacit information. Balanced against the tumultuous flow of both familiar and unfamiliar signs, I conclude that it is a process of giving over to possibility, and it is in this moment that creative action manifests the otherworldly through intuitive realisation. Emanating from a fixed point in space as well as expanded notions of place, the creative moment unfolds magically as an expression of awe, amazement and wonder. In this revised conception of place, the word expansive implies an unbounded, open-ended and ongoing index of possibility. Freeing up a conception of the mind in this way enables a spontaneous path to the workings of tacit impulses and the creative production of chance encounters.

My research shows how the fluid interfacing of metaconscious, nonconscious and hyperconscious cognitive activity is resolved in transient narratives, given form in the narrative journeys of Neustetter's work with light, and in the ritualised trance-induced embodied processes of de Sagazan's performances. From the shared experience of the artists' encounters with worldly phenomena, a visionary narrative, encapsulating past, present and future experiences, is presented. These narratives are projected through visual modalities of performance and installation in a close

articulation of personalised conceptions of the otherworldly.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.**

The scope of this research is deliberate. A decision to focus exclusively on the two artists in this study was intended to highlight how their respective practices is emblematic. Located in relation to the extended analysis and discussion of an intuitive process-led arts practice, I concentrate on ritualised approaches in performative work by de Sagazan. In Neustetter's work, the analysis is centered on the transient effects of light. In each case, selected examples are examined to demonstrate the evocation of otherworldly narratives. The first limitation this study presents is a comprehensive comparative analysis of the two artists' work. A research initiative opens up scope to investigate how such an analysis could highlight differences and similarities in how otherworldly narratives are inscribed. Such a study needs to focus on articulations of space, critical attitudes to place, process-led practices that emanate from the artists's embodied position and how installation and performative practices are disseminated through mediated and digitised forums.

A second limitation is identified in how the word magick is defined and conceptualised. Couched in the esoteric and occult thinking of Aleister Crowley, a more in-depth investigation focusing on Crowley's contributions in the formulation of contemporary occult and esoteric practices will reveal complex insights into how the otherworldly operates as a generative feature that may be applied in a concentrated study of selected contemporary installation and performative visual arts practices. Of significance here, is how Crowley's particular form of magickal practice underpins intuitive approaches that in turn necessitate metaconscious conditions. Crowley's legacy is usefully analysed and discussed in authoritative texts such as Dave Evans's (2007) *Aleister Crowley and the 20th Century Synthesis of Magick* and Marco Pasi's (2014) *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*. In Henrik Bogdan's (2007:16) book *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, he mentions how drawing from seminal texts by MacGregor Mathers, Crowley's doctrines included a "union of the conscious mind with the unconscious". In *The Problem of Disenchantment: scientific naturalism and esoteric discourse 1900 – 1939*, Egil Asprem (2014:13) offers an extensive scholarly analysis of Max Weber's "Disenchantment of the world". He compares the work of Alaister Crowley and Rudolf Steiner to reflect on the "diversity of problems associated with disenchantment, and not least, the diversity of intellectual contexts that have been coopted by esoteric spokespersons".

Related to and extended from the above suggestion, is a further limitation. In her book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, Silvia Federici (2018:1-2) provides a detailed discussion of how witchcraft accusations ensured an ideological campaign of economic and political terror against women and marginalised communities. Two thematic areas form the basis of her argument. On the

one hand she focusses on, “the contemporary process of land enclosure and privatization”, and on the other, “the relation between witch-hunting and the increasing enclosure of the female body through the extension of state-control over women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity”. A further source is Federici’s (2004) book *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation in Medieval Europe* in which she provides a useful starting point to extend a discussion on contemporary iterations of the occult and esotericism. Framed through the critical lens of a feminist perspective, this approach problematises notions of sexuality and identity in contemporary performative arts practices. A critique of identity politics can be further extended. In her book, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, Amellia Jones (2012), sets in place a critical account of identity in contemporary performative arts practices. She (2012:xx-xxi) destabilises notions of what she terms a “post’ identity rhetoric” by arguing that “issues of identification (how we identify the bodies we see, whether in representation or in real time and “live”) still guide and even overdetermine every experience we have in the contemporary world”. Her observations, particularly in chapter 5, on the implications of what she terms the relational aesthetics of a “queer feminist durational” lens, provide a formidable ground for re-evaluating modalities of objectification and identity politics in contemporary visual practices.

Recent scholarship in cultural geography and performance theory includes contributing critical voices such as Claire Bishop (2012), Grant Kester (2005), Nicholas Bourriaud (1998/2002) and Susan Lacy (1995). Acknowledged as an appropriate avenue to further expand on notions of participative and relational approaches in political and socially engaged practices, a further limitation and opportunity for study of contemporary installation and performative arts contexts is advanced. Bourriaud’s (1998/2002) landmark publication *Relational Aesthetics*, presents an overarching critique of institutionalised systems of artistic production, reception and authorial exclusivity. Bourriaud’s discussion is a useful precursor to Bishop’s (2012:14-15 emphasis original) observations. She expresses a turn towards a participative strategy by further demystified the relationship between artist, art object and audience:

[T]he artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*.

To further the analysis, Kester’s (2005) advocacy for a dialogical approach in which artists shift away from a position of “context providers” to “content providers” may also be applied. Kester (2005) discusses “provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of

producing". The analysis extends into the arena of public art through Lacy's (1995) scholarly contributions. Lacy's (1995) anthology, *Mapping the terrain: new genre public art* consists of eleven essays. Collectively, the essays in this volume, interrogate relational, participatory and interactive art strategies to problematise hegemonic institutionalised art practices through community-orientated and public outreach programs. Lacy (1995) provides a grounded critical platform from which to interrogate notions of reflexive authorship and accountability through provocative and responsive interventions directed by a broader public involvement.

Lastly, the complexities of haptic experiences as briefly discussed through citing Rodaway (1994) and Bruno (2007) in relation to Neustetter's work make up the final limitation in this thesis. The broader application of teleological conditions brought on through haptic relations with the lived world is advanced as a focus for an independent study of emotional and embodied responses to objects and spaces in contemporary spatial arts practices.

## **5.6 Epilogue: seeking resonance through Joseph Beuys across time**

### **5.6.1 Resonance**

To describe the purpose of this research, its meaning to me personally, and its significance in the broader scholarly context of visual spatiality, installation and performative arts practices, I settle on one noun: resonance. Related to this is the adjective resonant and the verb resonate. Most common searches for definition of the word resonance will offer the following: originating from the Latin, "resonantia, meaning 'echo'", it describes a resounding effect on something. In relation to physics, the word points to a "frequency of an external oscillation or vibration [matching] an object (or cavity's) natural frequency, and [which] as a result either causes it to vibrate or increases its amplitude of oscillation" (Johnson [Sa]). The adjective resonant implies a continuous prolonged and resounding synchronous vibrational sound, bringing about resonance in a relational proximity to another object, or enriching the quality of something. "Resonant describes sound that is deep and rich. It also can mean deeply evocative" (resonant [Sa]). The verb resonate refers to a full reverberating sound, or to produce a resonating effect on something. "The verb resonate, which comes from the Latin *resonatum*, first referred only to sound, but has now developed an emotional connotation" (Resonate [Sa]).

### **5.6.2 The undefinable and incomprehensible**

The otherworldly is perceived here in relation to things that fall outside of language and linguistic constructs. Logical thinking and rational cognition only offer so much resolve. We have labels – nouns, pronouns and adjectives – to describe otherworldly phenomena. These presuppose a desperate attempt to explain the unexplainable and define the undefinable. Rooted in this is the

ego-self defined through vulnerability, uncertainty and the insecurity of not knowing or not understanding, or the perception of a situation when knowing and understanding are incomplete. The work is to find a means to discover and accept a place in relation to this state of ontological crisis, and to settle into a state of awareness to integrate and make allowance for not knowing what cannot be fully understood. While this study of the magick of intuition and place in the process-led works of Olivier de Sagazan and Marcus Neustetter reveals levels of understanding not previously formulated, there is a point at which understanding collapses. In the infinite depths of metaconscious functioning, and across the expanse of ergonomically configured time and space, there is a place where the otherworldly resides as a defiantly unfathomable, undefinable and incomprehensible thing.

### **5.6.3 Intuition (1968)**

Joseph Beuys made *Intuition* (fig 93) in 1968. The work exists in multiple copies (approximately 12,000), made from wood panels configured as a shallow box with the word intuition lightly penciled in on the backboard, near the top and centrally placed. In the version produced in 1968, two horizontal parallel lines are drawn below the word intuition. The first line includes two vertical lines at either end denoting a measurement. The second line extends from the one edge of the box on the left to the other edge on the right. With dimensions of 30 x 20.9 x 5.8 cm, the wooden box approximates the size and shape of an A4-size paper tray.

This project finds completion in my 56<sup>th</sup> year. Five and six translate numerologically to the summative number eleven. I was born on 11 October, 1968. Beuys' *Intuition* was produced in 1968. Coupled with this thesis, the confluence of the two dates signal a resonant transition into the next chapter of my life.

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1. Athar Jaber, *Anointing* (2018).





2. Athar Jaber, *Whitewashing* (2018).





3a. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2008).





3b. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2010).





3c. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transfiguration* (2011).



4. Marcus Neustetter, *00Untitled* (1998).



5. Marcus Neustetter and Paul Cooper. Performative drawing and conversation. Friday 2 June 2023.



6. The Zone meeting. Friday 2 June 2023.

Attendees from left to right: Bronwyn Lace, Basak Senova, Yogi (Johannes Jaeger) and Marcus Neustetter.



7. Visit to the Wienerberger Lehmteich. Monday 5 June 2023.



8. The Naschmarkt in Vienna.



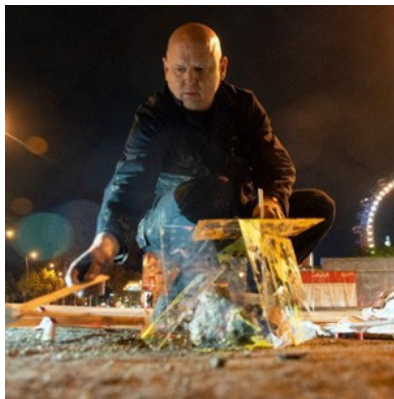
9. Visit to the Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. *Venus of Willendorf*. Monday 5 June 2023.



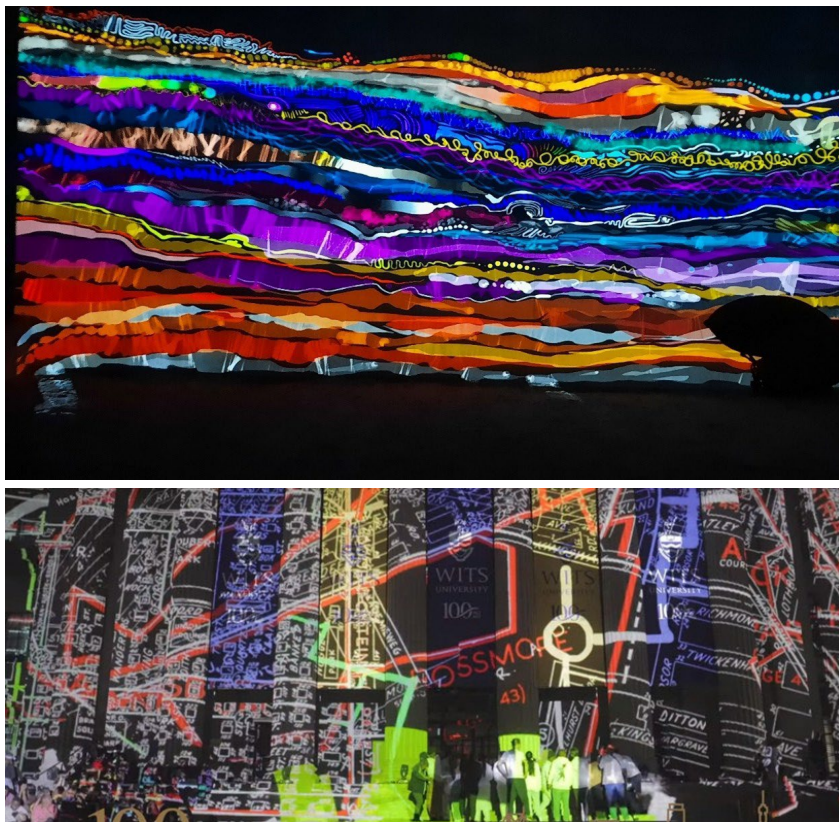
10. Visit to the Föhrenberge forest and the medieval Burgruine Mödling site. Thursday 8 June 2023.



11. Beach and clay estuary, Saint-Nazaire.



12. Marcus Neustetter, *Tracing absence* (2021).



13. Marcus Neustetter, *Light resonance* (2022).



14. Marcus Neustetter, *The Sutherland Dome* (2013).



15a. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hybridation* (2017).





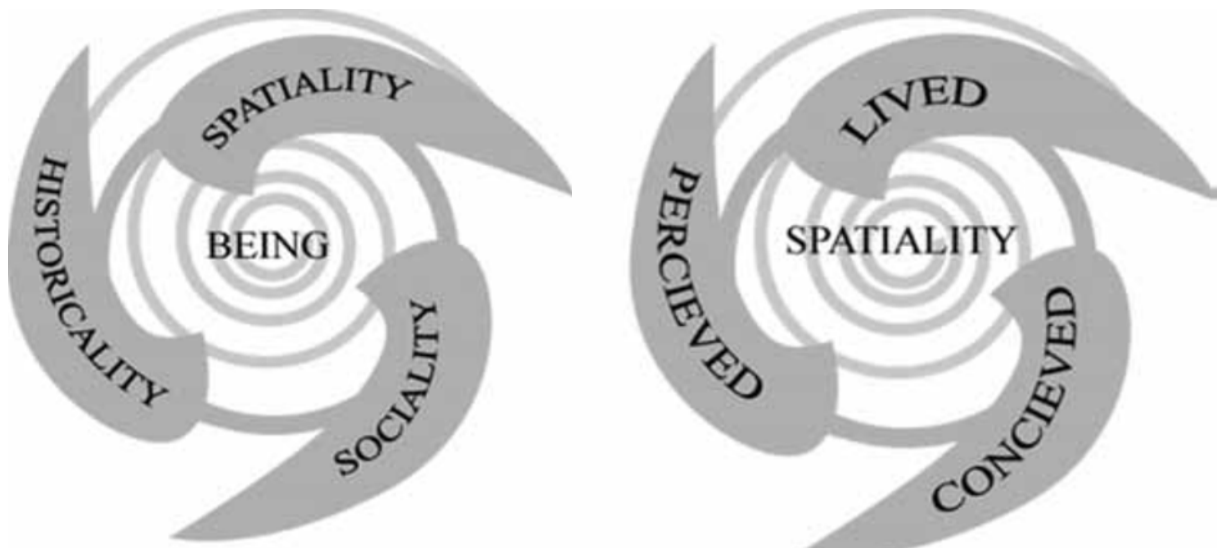
15b. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hybridation* (2018).





15c. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hybridation* (2018).



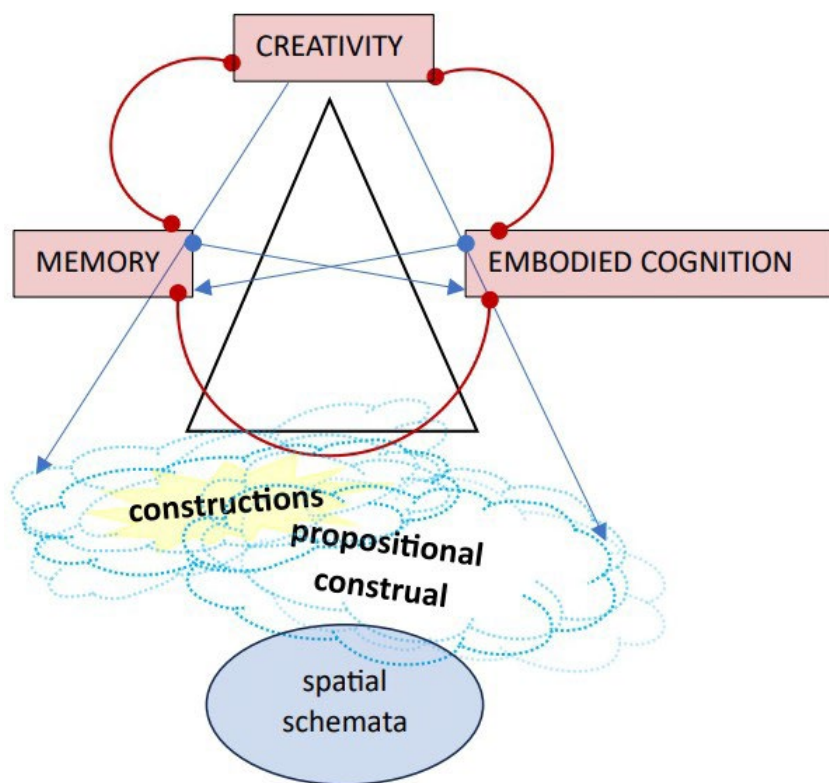


16. Diagram depicting Soja's conception of a trialectic of being, derived from Lefebvre's *Dialectique de triplicité* and a diagram of Soja's trialectic of spatiality.

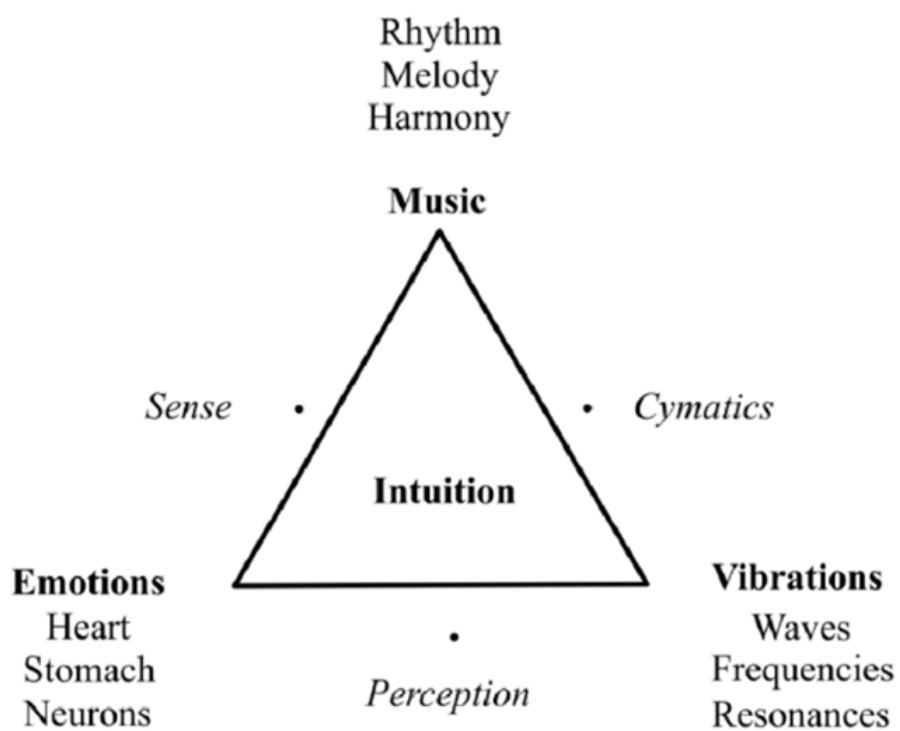
### Definitions of Intuition

Source	Definition of Intuition
Jung (1933: 567–568)	That psychological function transmitting perceptions in an unconscious way
Wild (1938: 226)	An immediate awareness by the subject, of some particular entity, without such aid from the senses or from reason as would account for that awareness
Bruner (1962: 102)	The act of grasping the meaning, significance, or structure of a problem without explicit reliance on the analytic apparatus of one's craft
Westcott & Ranzoni (1963: 595)	The process of reaching a conclusion on the basis of little information, normally reached on the basis of significantly more information
Rorty (1967: 204)	Immediate apprehension
Bowers, Regehr, Balthazard, & Parker (1990: 74)	A preliminary perception of coherence (pattern, meaning, structure) that is at first not consciously represented but that nevertheless guides thought and inquiry toward a hunch or hypothesis about the nature of the coherence in question
Shirley & Langan-Fox (1996: 564)	A feeling of knowing with certitude on the basis of inadequate information and without conscious awareness of rational thinking
Simon (1996: 89)	Acts of recognition
Shapiro & Spence (1997: 64)	A nonconscious, holistic processing mode in which judgments are made with no awareness of the rules of knowledge used for inference and which can feel right, despite one's inability to articulate the reason
Burke & Miller (1999: 92)	A cognitive conclusion based on a decision maker's previous experiences and emotional inputs
Policastro (1999: 89)	A tacit form of knowledge that orients decision making in a promising direction
Lieberman (2000: 111)	The subjective experience of a mostly nonconscious process—fast, alogical, and inaccessible to consciousness—that, depending on exposure to the domain or problem space, is capable of accurately extracting probabilistic contingencies
Raidl & Lubart (2000-2001: 219)	A perceptual process, constructed through a mainly subconscious act of linking disparate elements of information
Hogarth (2001: 14)	Thoughts that are reached with little apparent effort, and typically without conscious awareness; they involve little or no conscious deliberation
Myers (2002: 128–129)	The capacity for direct, immediate knowledge prior to rational analysis
Kahneman (2003: 697)	Thoughts and preferences that come to mind quickly and without much reflection
Epstein (personal communication, 2004)	The working of the experiential system

17. Tabulated and chronologically arranged definitions for the word intuition.



18. Diagram demonstrating the two forms of mental images that emerge from the triangulation of memory, embodied cognition and creativity.



19. Diagram depicting the triad of intuition.



20a. Olivier de Sagazan, Untitled performance on Tuesday 23 May 2023.



20b. Olivier de Sagazan, Untitled performance on Tuesday 23 May 2023.



21. Selected views of de Sagazan's studio, Saint-Nazaire.



22a. Olivier de Sagazan, *Untitled (Fallen Angel)* (2023).



22b. Olivier de Sagazan, *Untitled (Fallen Angel)* (2023).



23. Olivier de Sagazan, *Nos Coeurs en terre* (2021).





24. Olivier de Sagazan, *Aux abois* (2014).



25. Olivier de Sagazan, *Le dictator* (2022).





26. Olivier de Sagazan, *La messe de l'âne* (2021).





27. Olivier de Sagazan, *Il nous est arrivé quelque chose* (2023).



28. Olivier de Sagazan, *Sanctus Nemorensis* (2010/11).





29. Olivier de Sagazan, *Hands do not touch your precious me* (2021/22).





30. Olivier de Sagazan, *Ghost in the mud* (2015).



31. Olivier de Sagazan, *Batammariba* (2010).





32. Olivier de Sagazan, *A la folie* (2017).



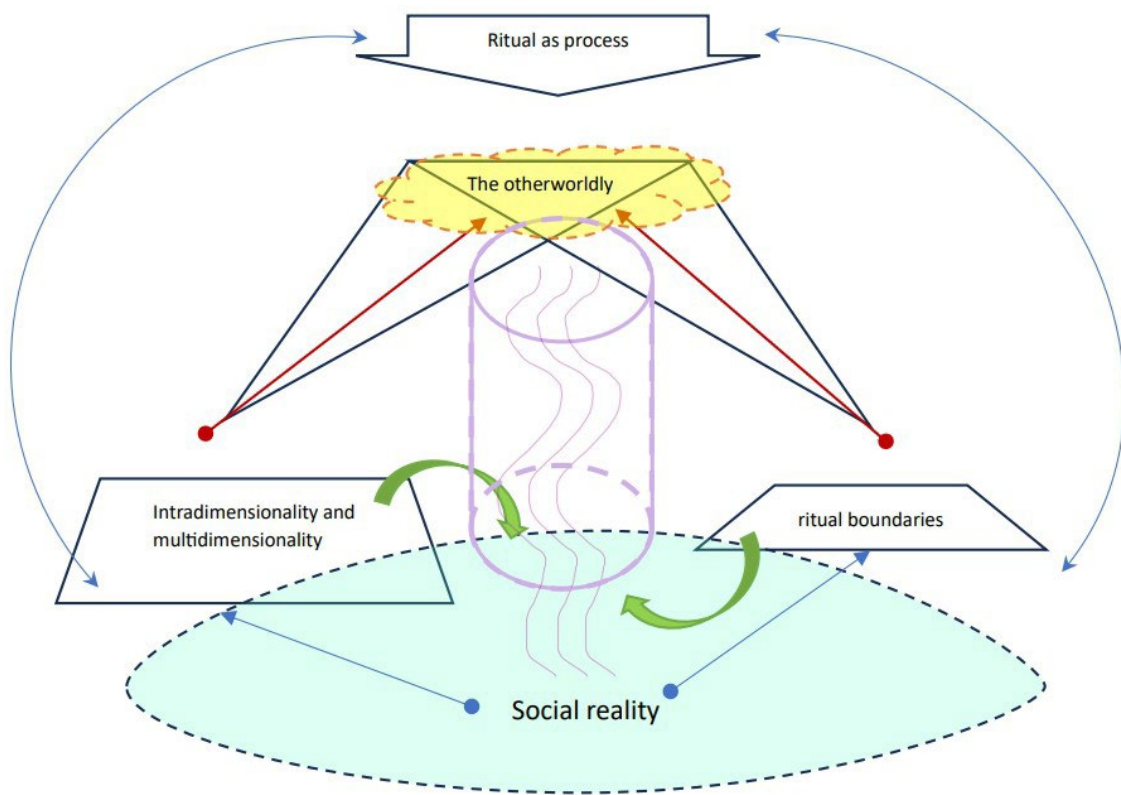


33. Olivier de Sagazan, *Ash* (2020).

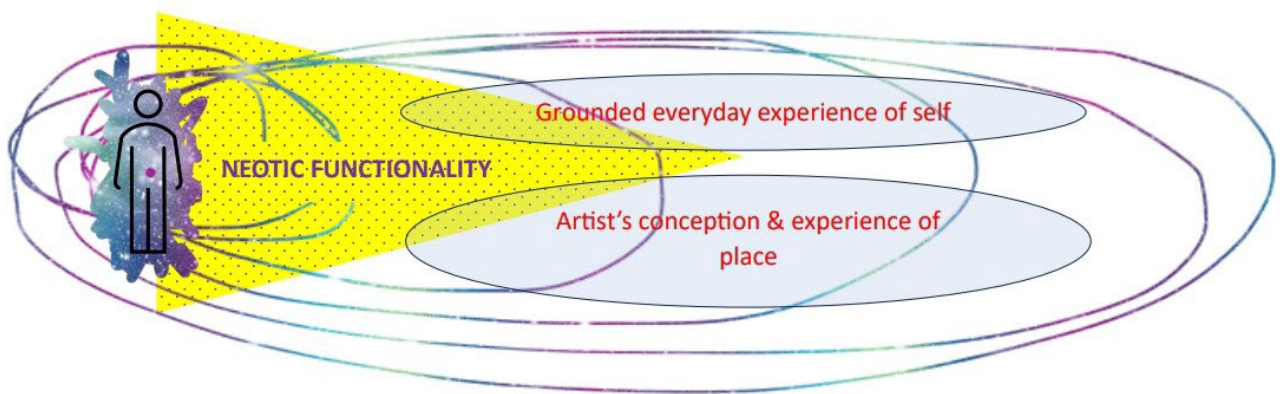


34. Olivier de Sagazan, *Transept* (2017).





35. The interrelation of ritual and social reality, intradimensionality and multidimensionality, and ritual boundaries in de Sagazan's process.



36. Noetic functionality in de Sagazan's practice.



37. Olivier de Sagazan, *Circulation-extra-corporelle* (2017).



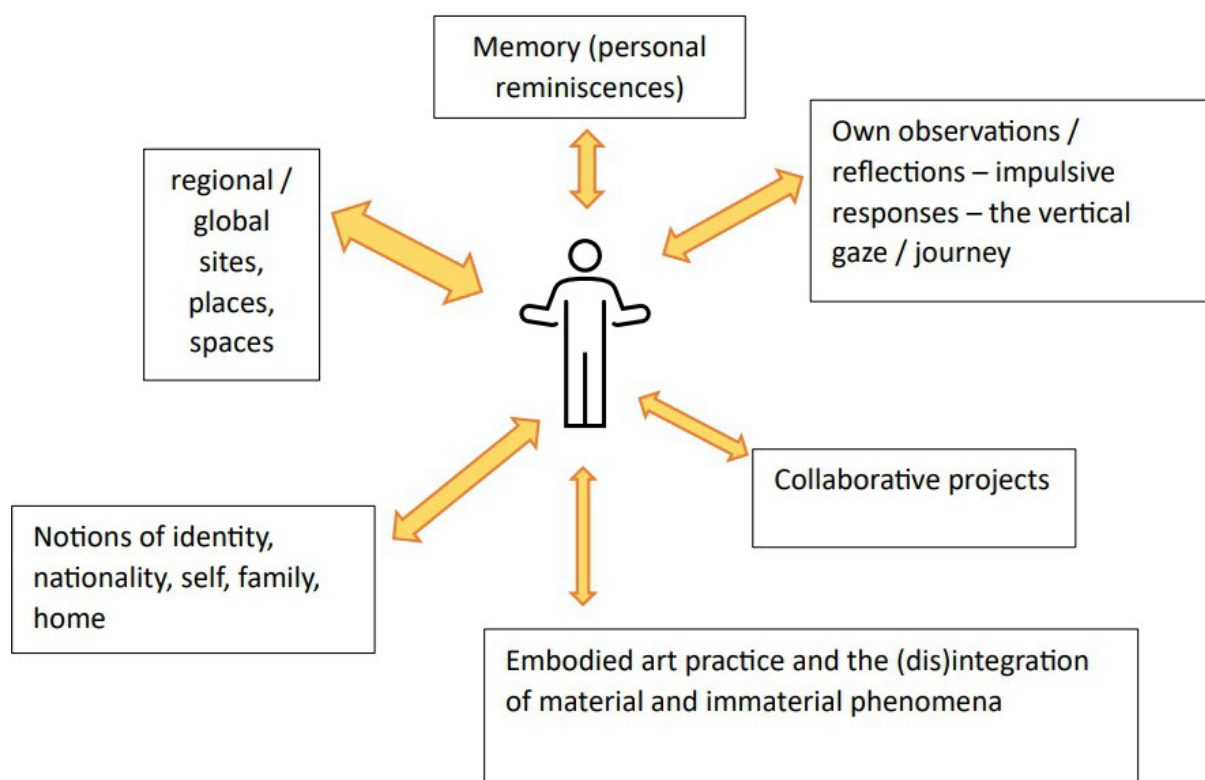
38. Olivier de Sagazan, *La Nef des Fous* (VOST) (2015).



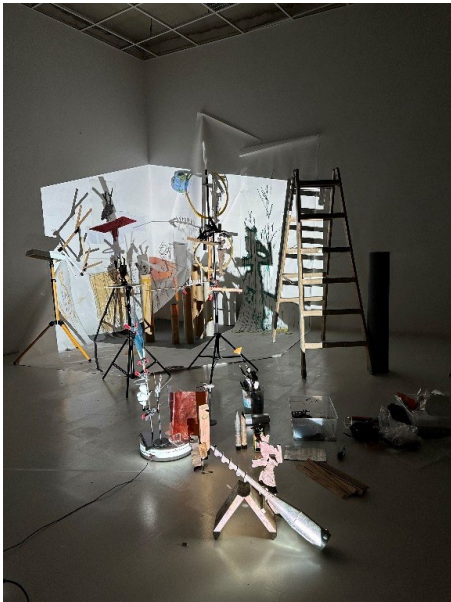
39. Marcus Neustetter, *Right to reflect* (2017).



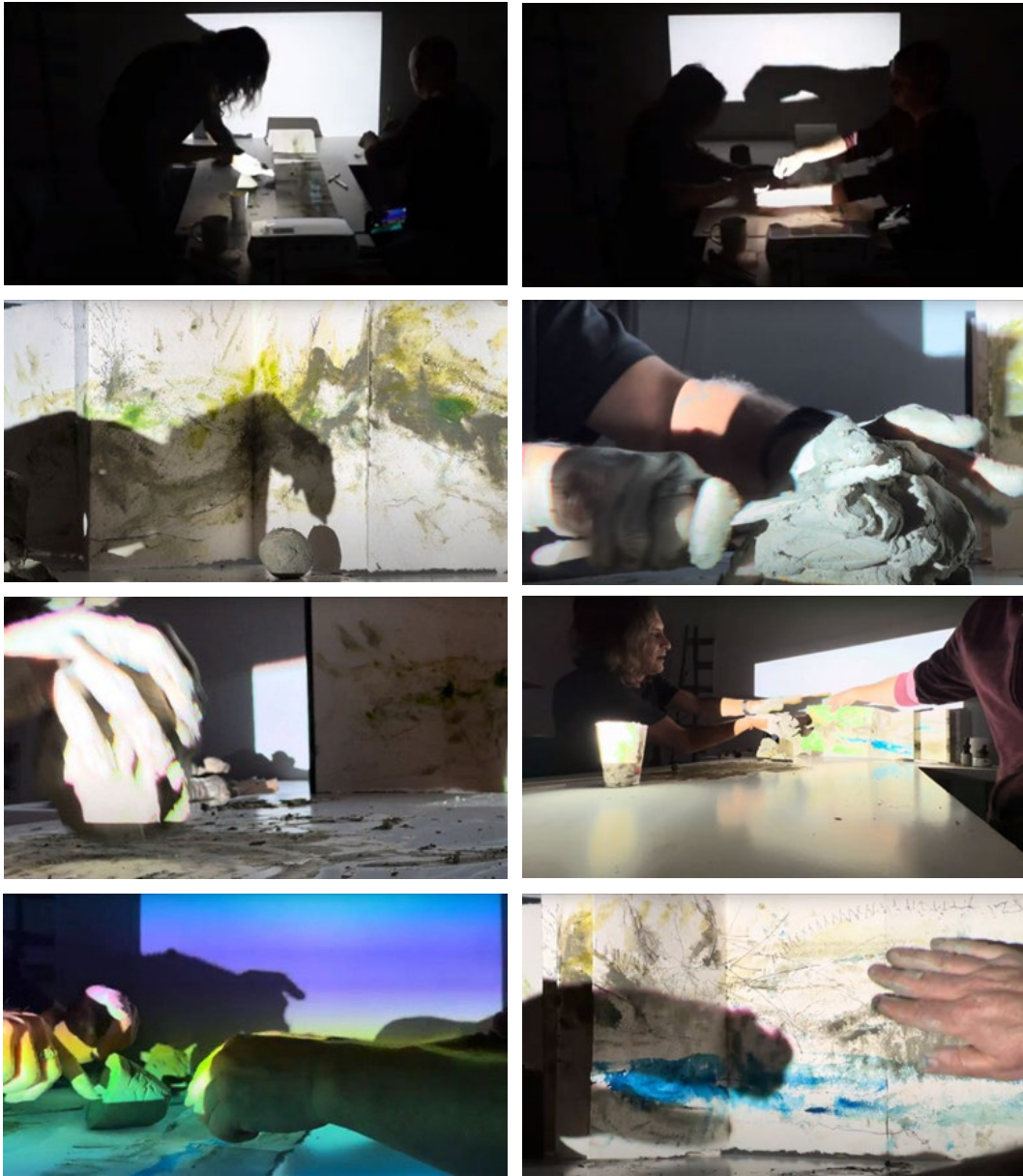
40. Marcus Neustetter, *Sweep central* (2015).



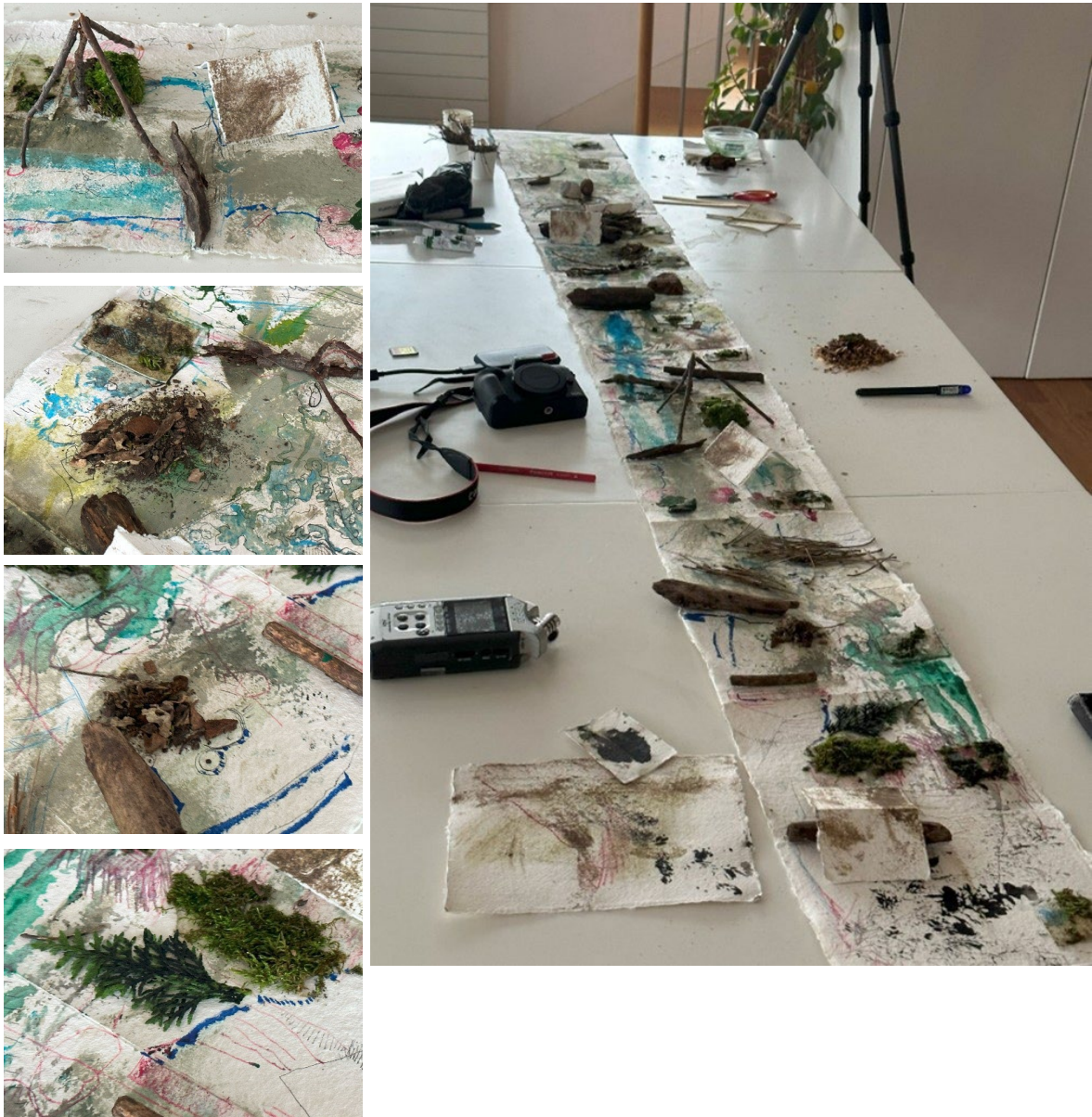
41. Diagram representing Neustetter's multimodal working methodology.



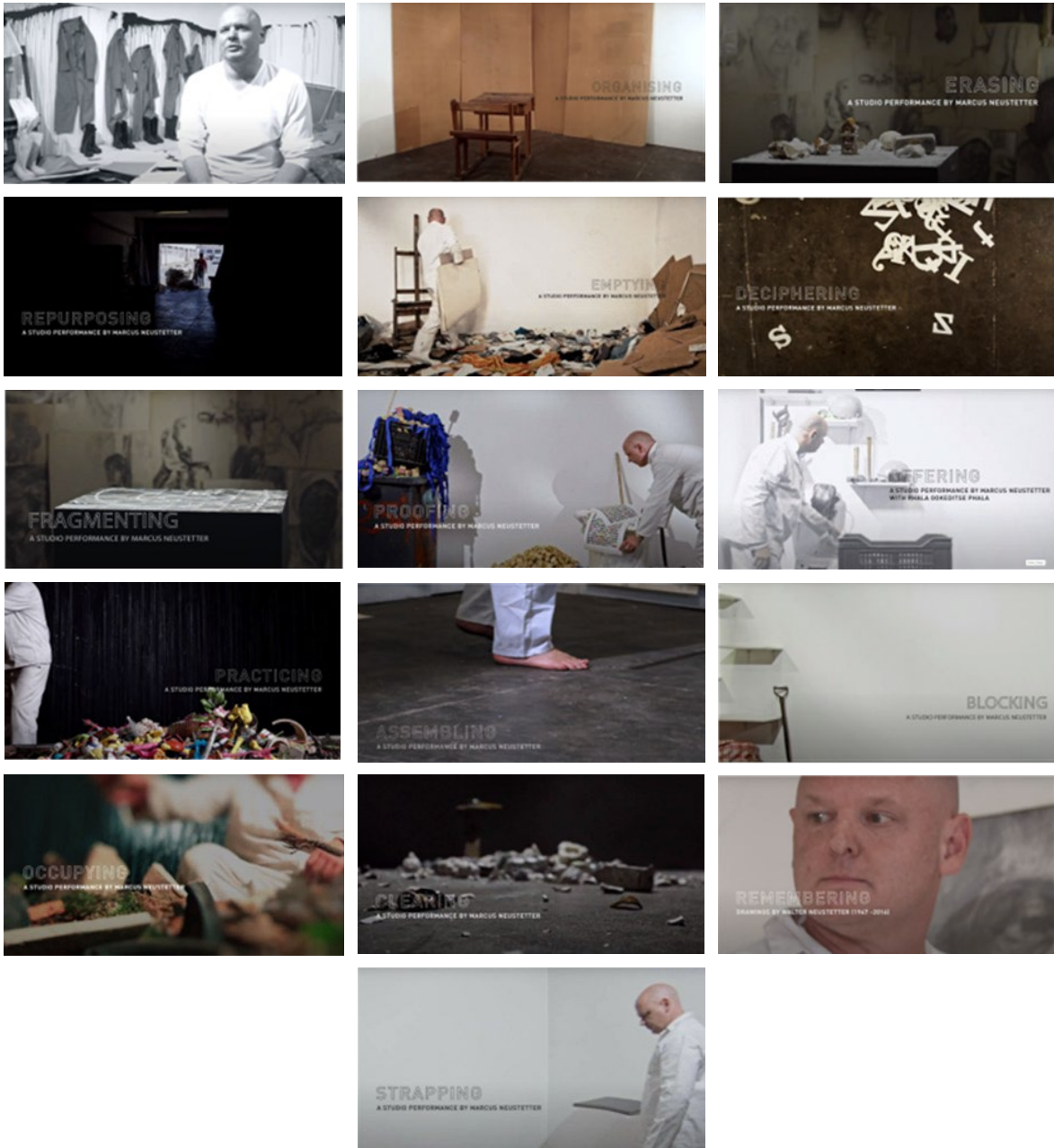
42. Marcus Neustetter and Paul Cooper. First untitled spontaneous studio happening. Performance and installation. Sunday 4 June 2023.



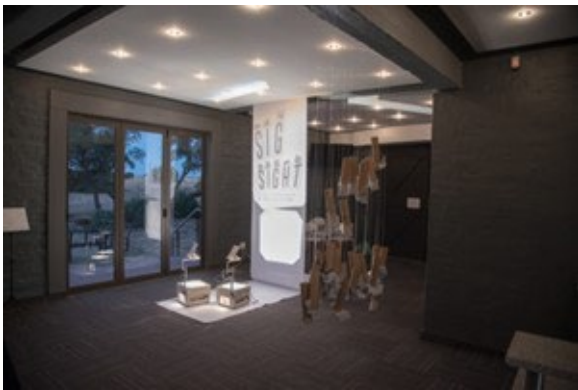
43. Marcus Neustetter and Paul Cooper. Second untitled spontaneous studio happening. Performance and installation. Monday 5 June 2023.



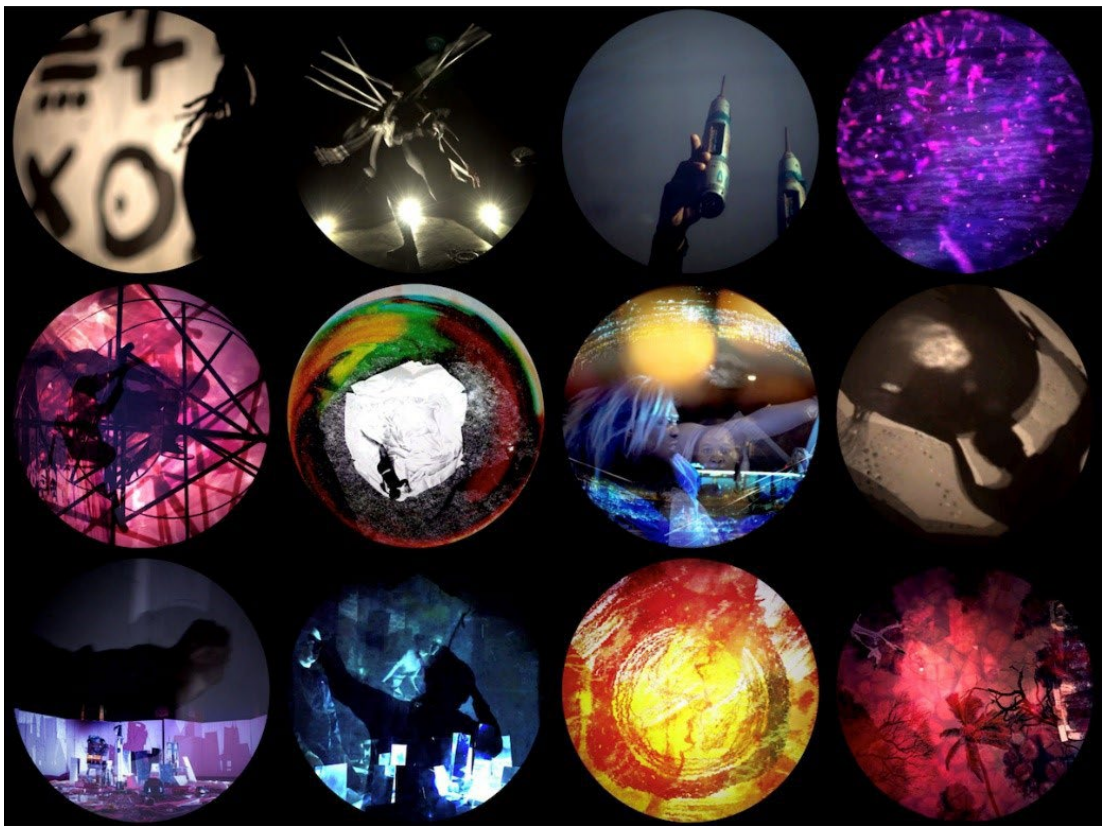
44. Marcus Neustetter and Paul Cooper. Drawing produced after the visit to the Föhrenberge forest and the medieval Burgruine Mödling site. Thursday 8 June 2023.



45. Marcus Neustetter, *Processing videos 1-16* (2019).



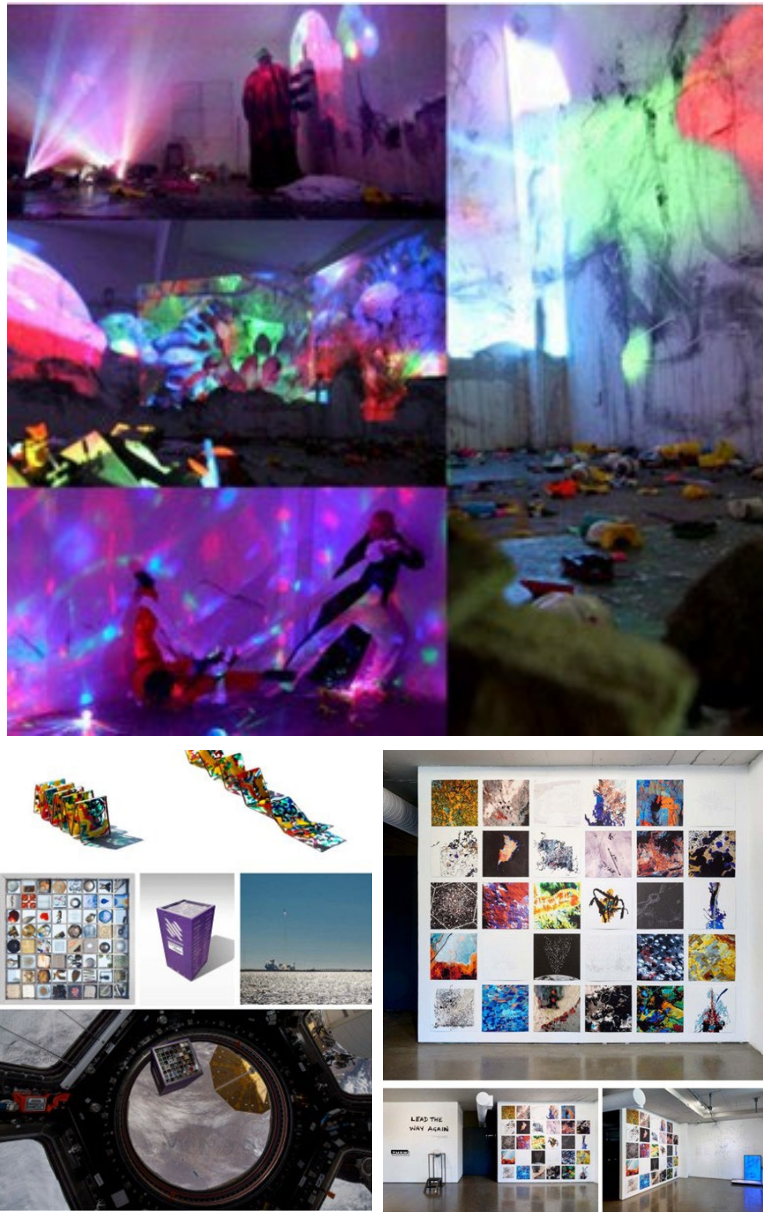
46. Marcus Neustetter, *Sig / Sight – a planetarium studio performance* (2018).



47. Marcus Neustetter, *The vertical journey – a tribute to the still unknown* (2019).



48. Marcus Neustetter, *Solo solidarity future* (2020).



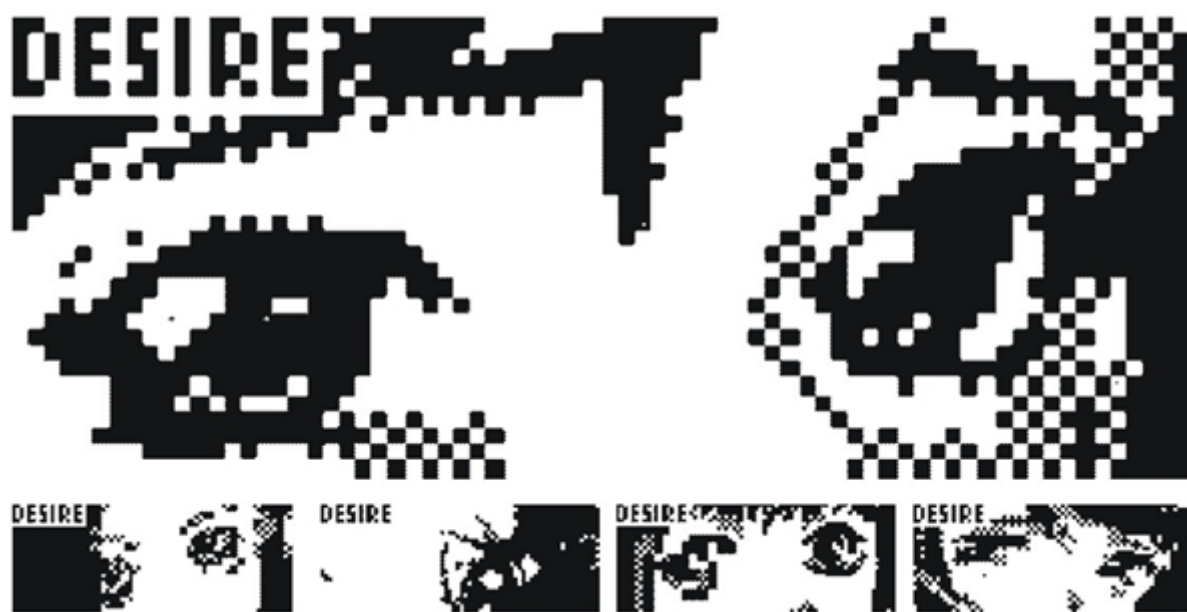
49. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead the way again* (2021/22).



50. Marcus Neustetter, *Untitled-Projection (installation)* (1999).



51. Marcus Neustetter, *mobilelocalsystems* (2002).



52. Marcus Neustetter, *Desire* (2003).



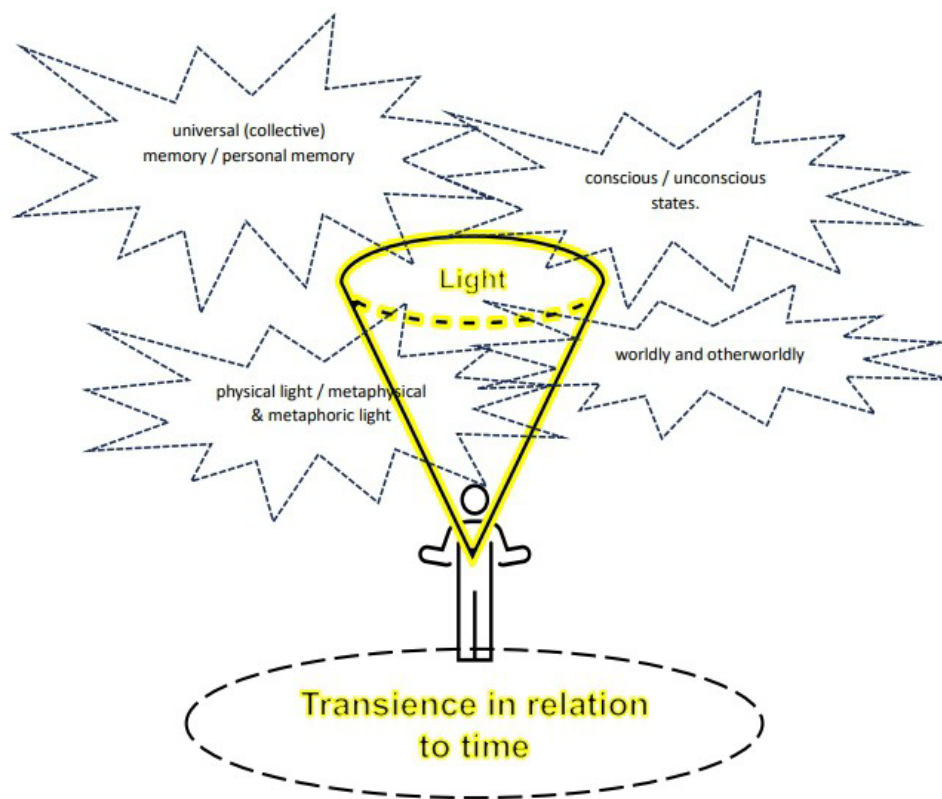
53. Marcus Neustetter, *Mobile\_interventions*. Johannesburg art gallery (2003).



54. Marcus Neustetter, *Transformation* (2003).



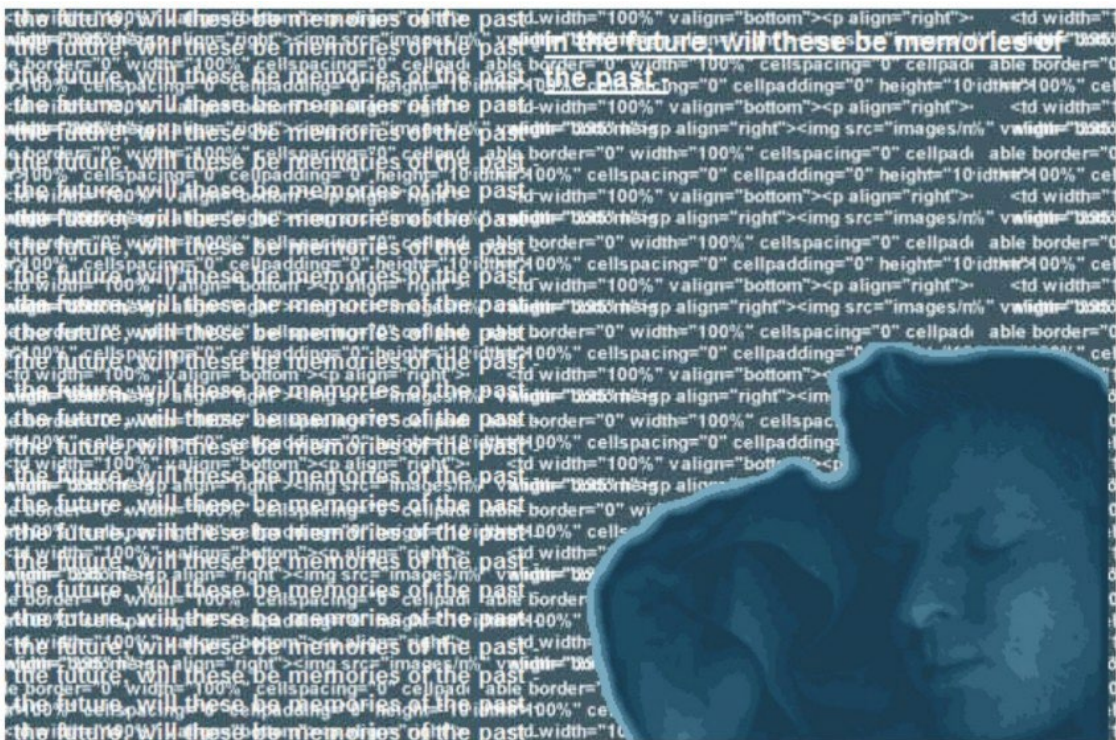
55. Marcus Neustetter, *Connected?. Johannesburg* (2002).



56. A diagrammatic representation of light as a propellant and enabling factor in Neustetter's practice.



57. Marcus Neustetter, *Home* (2000).



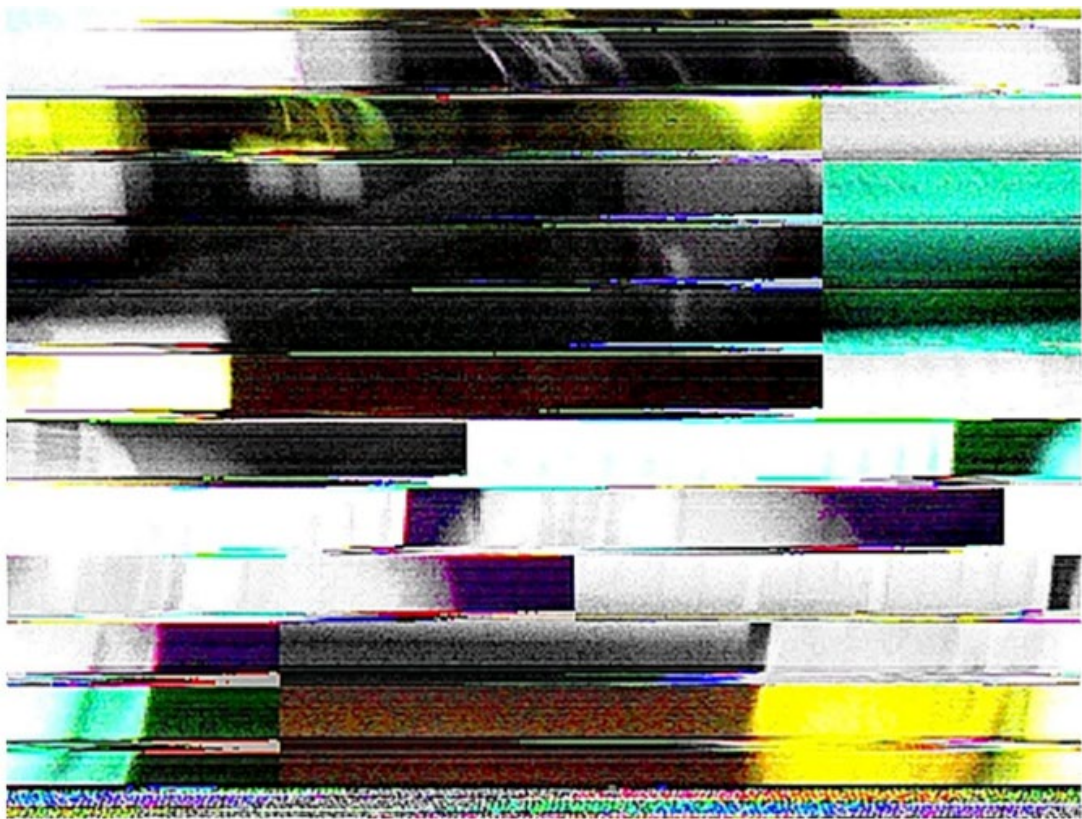
58. Marcus Neustetter, *In the future will these be memories of the past (website)* (2000).



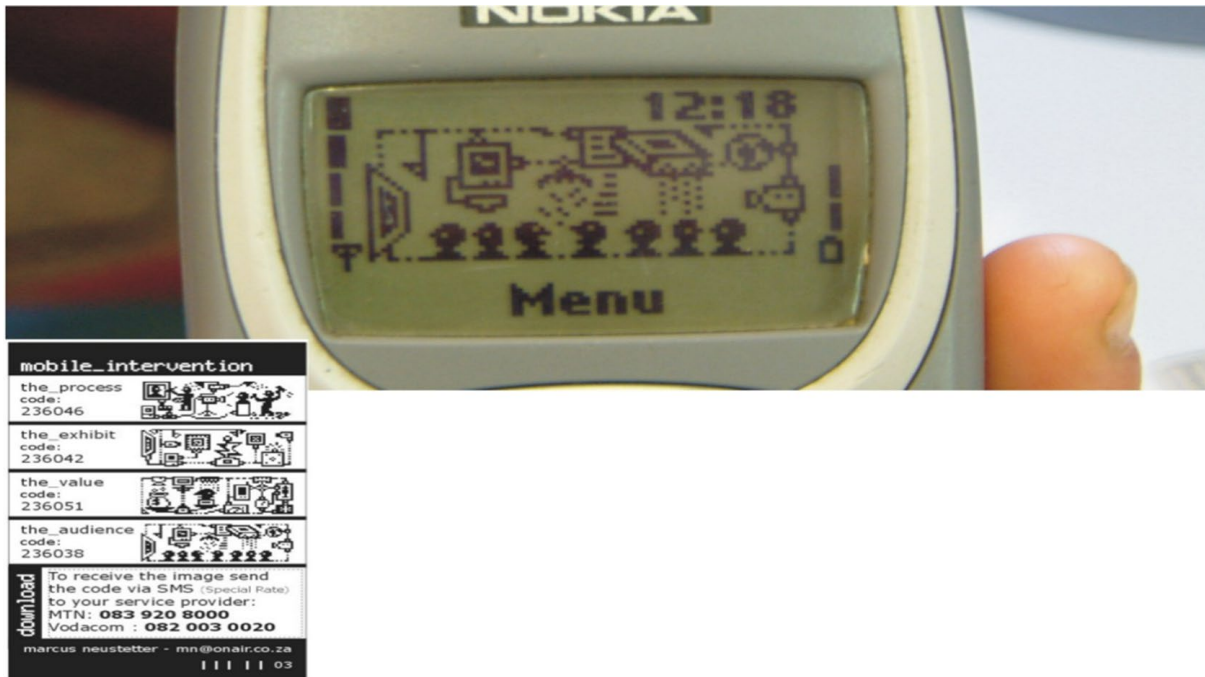
59. Marcus Neustetter, <Void> (installation) (2001).



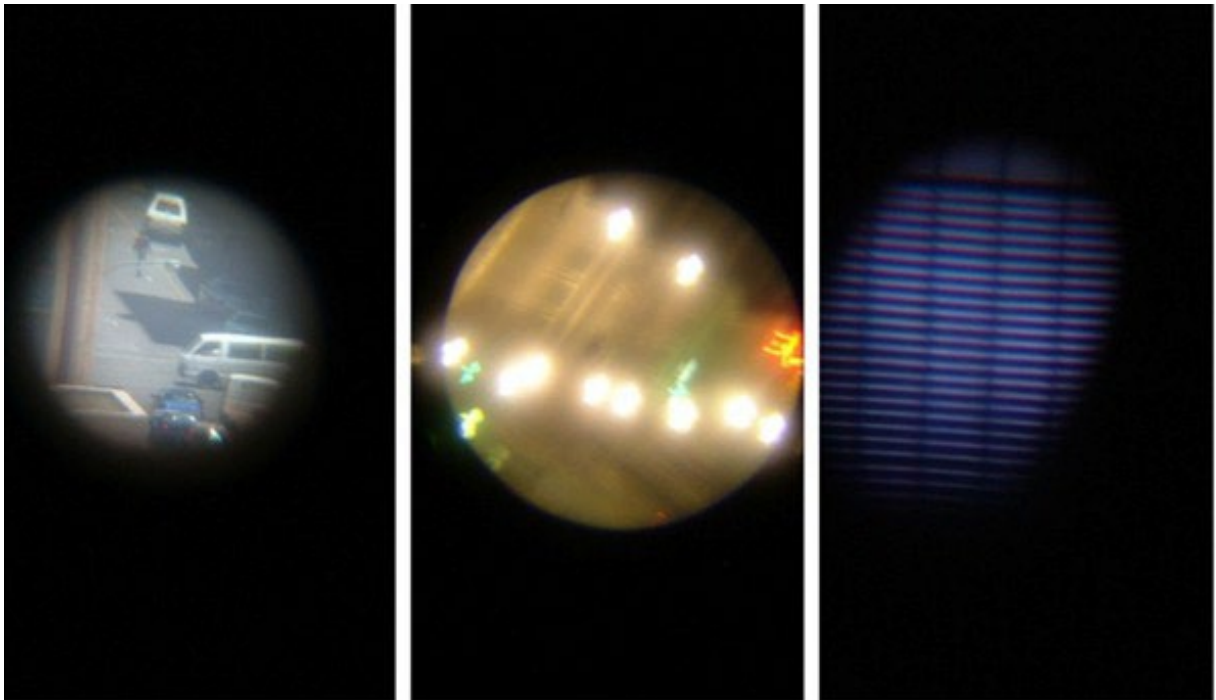
60. Marcus Neustetter, *.Matrix on paper Untitled104 (installation)* (2001).



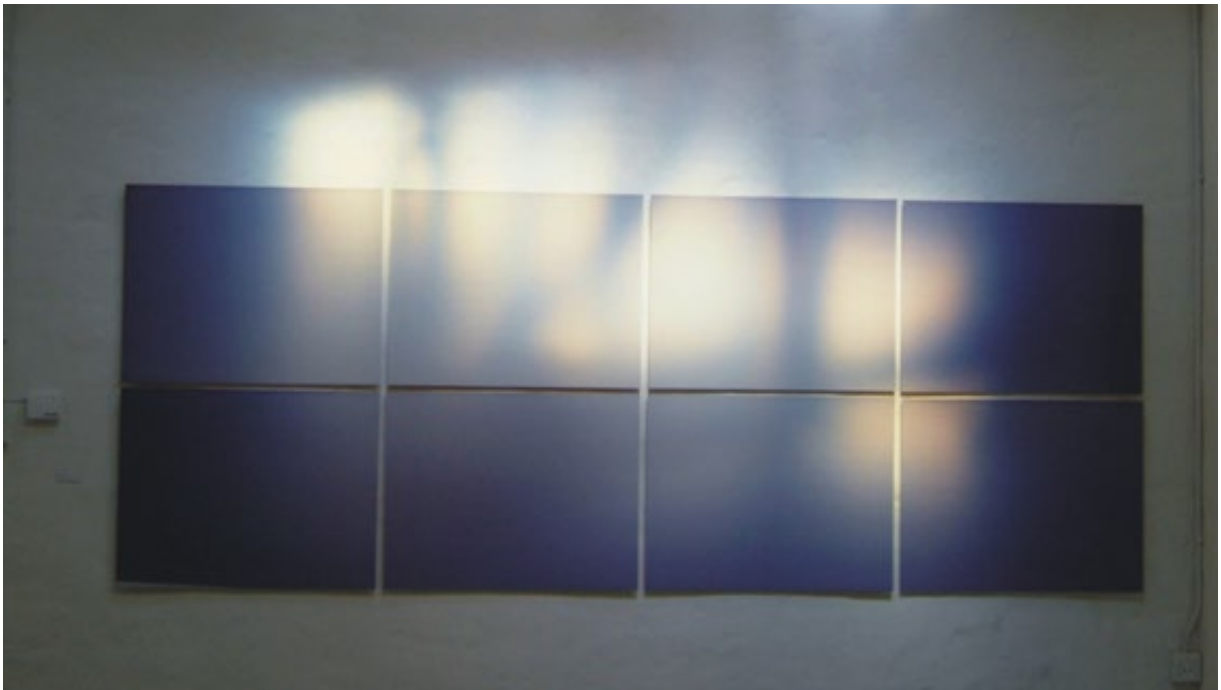
61. Marcus Neustetter, *Corrupted capture (photographic experiments)* (2003).



62. Marcus Neustetter, *Mobile\_interventions*, Johannesburg (2003).



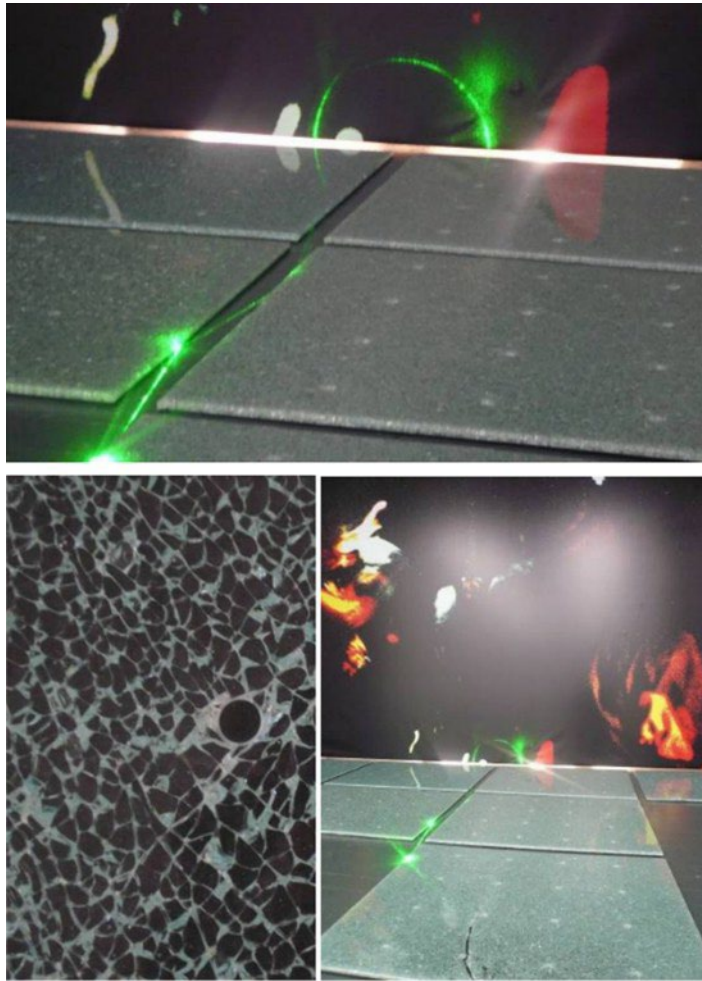
63. Marcus Neustetter, *Telescope photos* (2005).



64. Marcus Neustetter, *Afterimages* (2005).



65. Marcus Neustetter, *Traces* (2008).



66. Marcus Neustetter, *In two minds* (2008/9).



67. Marcus Neustetter, *The Observatory I* (2009).



68. Marcus Neustetter, *Observation Structure 1* (2009).



69. Marcus Neustetter, *Observation Structure 2* (2009).

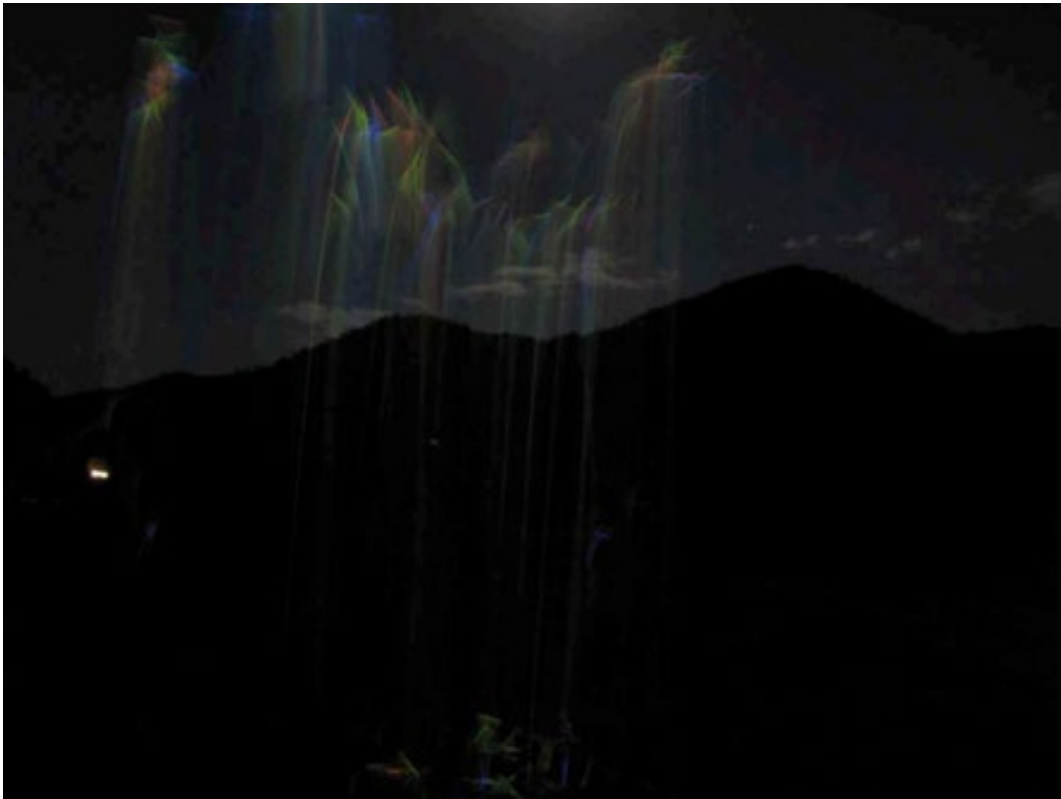


70. Marcus Neustetter, *Observation Unstructured* (2009).



71. Marcus Neustetter, *Chasing light* (2009-2012).





72. Marcus Neustetter, *Glowstick Northern Light – Vredefort Dome* (2009).



73. Marcus Neustetter, *Vredefort Dome 2008/2009 I – Vredefort Dome* (2009).



74. Marcus Neustetter, *Performance at the Vredefort Dome – meteorite impact crater* (2009).



75. Marcus Neustetter, *Visual Collider* (2009).



76. Marcus Neustetter, *Erosion* (2013).



77. Marcus Neustetter, *Against the Shed* (2018).





78. Marcus Neustetter, *16\_interview* (2019).



79. Marcus Neustetter, *15\_Emptying* (2019).



80. Marcus Neustetter, *7\_Fragmenting* (2019).



81. Marcus Neustetter, *8\_Erasing* (2019).



82. Marcus Neustetter, *10\_Practicing* (2019).



83. Marcus Neustetter, *14\_Offering* (2019).



84. Marcus Neustetter, *Imaginary futures* (2020).





85. Marcus Neustetter, *untitled*, circa unknown, dimensions undetermined, materials unclear (2021).



86. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead the Way Again* (2022).



87. Marcus Neustetter, *Seeking Dialogue with a Satellite (2010-2021)* (2021).



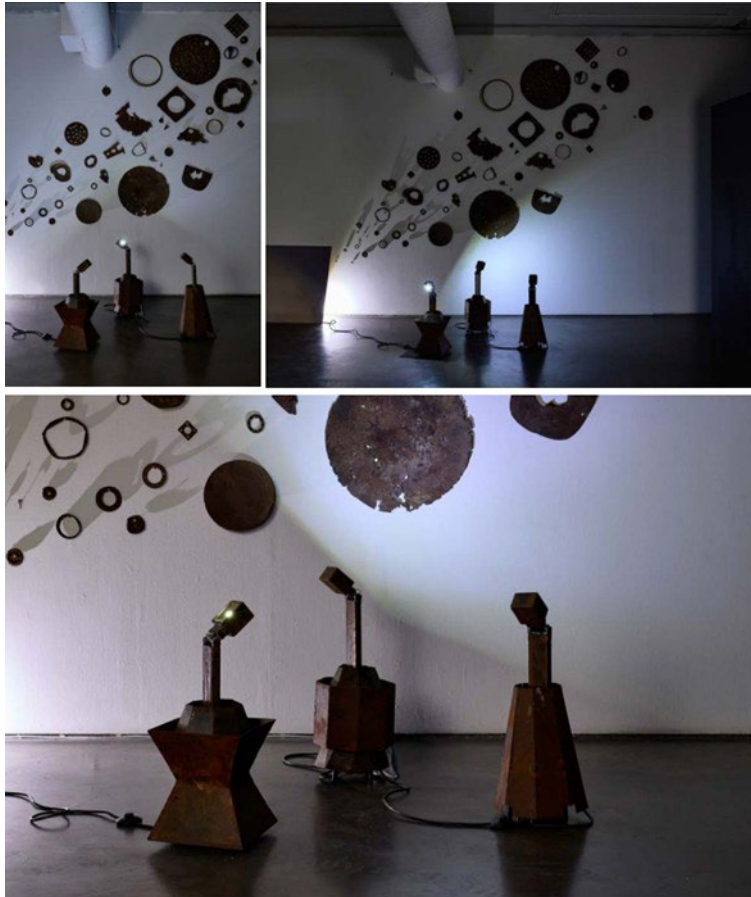
88. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead The Way Again Installation Part I* (2021).



89. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead The Way Again Installation Part II* (2021).



90. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead The Way Again Installation Part III* (2021).



91. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead The Way Again Installation Part IV (2010-2021)* (2021).



92. Marcus Neustetter, *Lead The Way Again Installation Part V (2010-2021) (2021)*.



93. Joseph Beuys, *Intuition* (1968).