



*Lit up by the dark:
immersing artmaking practice in
unknowing*

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Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in Fine Arts,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Caroline Clare Birch, declare that

The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Abstract

Practice-led research (PLR) is a paradigm which values artmaking as a non-verbal mode of research. When my artistic practice foundered on a crippling sense of not knowing, I turned to artmaking research to find a way through this block. In a previous study (Birch 2018), I discovered unknowing as a source of deep creative potential. In this doctoral study, unknowing deepens my understanding of PLR, materials, and artmaking processes. I develop in-the-dark artmaking methods, partly from artistic experience and partly from theoretical sources. These enable a recognition of the communal intelligence offered by the immediate array of artmaking materials. Crucially I realise that my body of artmaking experience is an aspect, not the sole controlling force, of this communal intelligence. The ensuing indeterminacy of the creative process means artmaking fizzles with the intra-active (Barad 2007: 97-185) pushes and pulls of materials.

In-the-dark artmaking methods offer a reliable means of availing the generative potential of the unknown. They constitute an aspect of unknowing as they embody active engagement with the immanence of the unknown. I argue that unknowing is immanent in the world as a force of differencing. This study interrogates the ways in which in-the-dark methods, materiality and artmaking process shape one another. Paradoxically, the reliability of in-the-dark methods lies in their mutability which proffers vulnerability to the oscillating dynamic of materiality.

Like unknowing, matter is also immanent and active (Bennett 2010b: 3; Coole & Frost 2010: 8,20). Intra-action of matter is differencing (Barad 2014: 175). Differencing is therefore immanent. There is no discernible barrier between the immanence of unknowing and that of matter/difference. Thus, materiality is posited as an oscillation of unbounded difference/extreme specificity. In-the-dark methods are proffered as a means of opening my human-ish self to this dynamic of unknowing/materiality.

In-the-dark methods are approximations until they are specified within artmaking engagement. For example, working across a ten-metre long drawing in a confined space means working in increments. Excluding an overview of the creative process in its entirety is

the ensuing in-the-dark method which is an approximation as it cannot contain the singularity of the moment-by-moment artmaking process.

In-the-dark methods thus side-line my mental thinking processes without losing the specificity of artmaking engagement. This reveals my body of artmaking experience as my artistic materiality, my mind as a practice more than a fixed entity, and PLR as a protean paradigm that allows for the mind's interrogation by materiality. In-the-dark methods entail wondering/wandering, a non-verbal mode of simultaneous enquiry and discovery. This kind of immersion in artmaking means that I can no longer distinguish whether I am working materials or materials are working me. Materials and in-the-dark methods roughen up my anthropocentric assumptions that I am able to direct the artmaking process because I know how to achieve a precise creative outcome. These methods destabilise my perceived internal/external boundary, or normative barometer, allowing the dynamic of materiality to move through my body of artmaking experience. Seemingly, it is not my presence which is problematic, but my perception of my presence.

Materiality's unlimited potential for extreme specificity is dizzying. The unavoidable averaging out of knowledge practices is found to be necessary and useful. The irreconcilable torque between for example, approximating/specificity is valued as a field of tension. I consider the multidimensionality of PLR is rooted in such fields of tension, and that torsion proffers sturdiness in artmaking research. PLR's intentional siting together of irresolvable non-verbal and verbal modes gives rise to my research questions and continues to propel the enquiry.

Keywords: unknowing, in-the-dark methods, oscillating dynamic, materiality, body of experience, PLR, communal intelligence, wondering/wandering, fields of tension, multidimensional

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Chapter One:

stepping off the edge ...

Behind the scenes

What drives the artmaking of this study is not primarily academic interests. It is other more elusive, invisible forces, such as unknowing. Unknowing seems to be the active aspect of the infinite generative unknown (Morgan 2014: 1-2). A deep all-engaging fascination with the dynamic interplay of the infinite and the intimately specific in artmaking emerges from immersion in unknowing. In this study, in-the-dark artmaking methods (Birch 2018) are the means through which I become immersed in unknowing, and thence in the oscillations of infinite and specific. For me, the infinite reveals itself in minutely unique instances of artmaking. In other words, the variations of these *minutiae* appear to be unlimited, endless. What happens between the infinite and the appearance of the minute is in part like the photon that issues from an electron's change of energetic state or quantum leap (Barad 2011: 137-139).¹ Behind the photon's appearance there is no process of change leading from cause to effect, in fact, no passage of time at all to account for its sudden ghost-like apparition. The artmaking processes that emerge from the interplay of infinite and specific are not as ghostly as the photon's apparition. Nevertheless, they can in no way be reduced to an unfolding of cause and effect.

In this study, it will become evident that the origin and the reach of its artmaking research processes are, like Adorno's different calibre of rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2), untraceable. Infinite unknowing, as the source of in-the-dark methods, is untraceable (Morgan 2014: 2). The minutest visible detail is not the culmination or full stop to the reach of this study's artmaking affect. Thus, this artmaking research, from its untraceable source to its invisible reach, will be steeped in unknowing. The way in which artmaking entices me might be partly because never-to-be-repeated specificity is the visible tip of a largely invisible spectrum of potentials. In this text, I use extreme, utter, or minute specificity interchangeably with singularity. Singularity has other meanings in physics, mathematics and technology, implying an occurrence of irreversible change (<https://www.merriam->

¹ In this study a quantum refers to a quantum of energy.

[webster.com/dictionary/singularity](https://www.webster.com/dictionary/singularity) Accessed 14 December 2022). However, I do not engage with this aspect here.

Fascination with the invisible spectrum in which this artmaking research is immersed, does not translate into the kind of visible detail that calls for single-hair brushes. In my experience, this invisible spectrum is potently non-verbal. Articulating its drives feels clumsy and a little stilted. Yet the tension between visible/invisible and between non-verbal/verbal modes is vital and for me triggers a fizz of excitement (personal journal 2018-2022: 280). A somatic spark alerts me to something riveting going on right here, right now. Fizz or thrill (Bennett 2015: 101) quickens my interest, allowing me to plunge into artmaking where any hierarchic scale dissolves into the intricate workings of 'stuff'.

Although the above might seem to be non-traditionally-academic, it is vitally important. It shows to me my deep interest in making, materials and unknowing. The active and immediate intelligence of the community² of materials together with creative process – what Donna Haraway (2004: 4) might call a situated knowledge practice – does not require my mental thinking processes to set it in motion or direct it. I could do so but this communal intelligence (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293) already has the potential to act without my input. I speculate that my response to fizz will demonstrate rather that artmaking and materials activate me.

In line with my central methodology, practice-led research (PLR), my academic interests and my research questions are rooted in this quick creative nexus. From the way in which artmaking seems to dis-assemble me, I recognise that I am not purely untouchably human. In artmaking I feel human-ish, simultaneously extended beyond my skin and an open thoroughfare for other flows and forces. It seems that we are only partly human (Bennett 2010b: xvii), inhabited by microbes from within (Radomska 2016: 132) and our external boundaries indeterminate (Barad 2007: 128,136). The term human-ish will thus point to my thorough dis-assembly as an untouchable human entity. Barad (2007: 136) confirms that the human body as an internal/external boundary is indeterminate. In becoming human-ish I

² Community/communal should not be taken to mean an array of individual entities, as I have come to understand in this study. It should be read as indeterminate until specifically configured within creative engagement.

become less solidly fixed. I seemingly become both haunted by matter and haunting as matter, no longer having a distinct 'within' and 'without'.



Figure 1, Clive Van den Berg, Map, Receiving And Expelling II, (2008 – 2021), wood, wax and pigment, 47 x 45 x 9 cm.



Figure 2, Clive Van den Berg, Map, Receiving And Expelling II, (2008 – 2021), wood, wax and pigment, 47 x 45 x 9 cm.

South African artist, Clive Van den Berg (1956-), works with the notion of the intrinsic porosity of the human body (Moloi 2021: 3). When I re-turn – look at and/or enact over and over again (Barad 2014: 168) – my artmaking through writing, Van den Berg will be an important

reference through which to diffractively read my creative processes. Van den Berg will be additionally relevant because he seems to work within the oscillations of opposites, in “the connective tissue between forgetting and remembering” (Moloi 2021: 4), in a way that is “simultaneously loose and exact ... an oscillation between complete calm ... and restlessness” (Moloi 2021: 2). *Map, Receiving And Expelling II*, (figures 1-2), is an example of simultaneous calm and disruption. In situating this study in the field of visual arts, I will also refer to the artmaking processes of Tim Knowles (1969-) and Phyllida Barlow (1944-2023), and the work of Mark Rothko (1903-1970) and Kath Fries (1979-).



Figure 3, Mark Rothko, No. 15, (1957), oil on canvas, 262 × 296 cm.

The thread running through my choice of artists is the way in which they engage with matter without dominating or flattening it. C.H. Waddington (1969: 133) finds that in general American artists demonstrate a genius for matter, “a quite exceptional empathy with what the stuff will or won’t do”. The American abstract expressionists looked for ways in which to surrender their perceived control of artmaking (Gombrich 1984: 479). Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) in particular took painting beyond the need for both imagery and coherent abstract forms (Waddington 1969: 135). I will refer to the later work of Mark Rothko. In my view he went further than Pollock and De Kooning because he dispensed with edges that might define marks or forms (Kosoi 2005: 28) and a focal point.

Unknowing

The roots of this enquiry partly lie in my Master’s practice-led research into unknowing. This study is not a continuation of that research. However, this current investigation will evolve in-the-dark artmaking methods taken from my prior research.

Previously I found that not knowing where my artmaking was headed or how I would get there, transformed my creative practice. I developed in-the-dark artmaking methods drawing on the *via negativa* from the anonymous *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Gallacher 1997; Hodgson 1944). The *via negativa* offers a mode of progressive exclusions, where space, time and place (Kourie 2008: 64), separate identity (Hodgson 1944: xli), and a destination or goal (Morgan 2014: 229) are eschewed. Both artworks and artmaking processes changed profoundly. Central to this research will be a deeper exploration of in-the-dark methods that open myself and artmaking processes to unknowing.

The unknown is quick, rather than a passive pool of knowledge awaiting discovery. Unknowing might be seen as the activity of the unknown (Morgan 2014: 1). Seemingly, the potency of unknowing is immanent, or always ready at hand (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: ii). Unknowing cannot in any way be encompassed by thought processes, knowledge, or theory (Morgan 2014: 1,3). This highlights that my research contribution will be methodological, and that methodology is possibly not merely the workhorse of epistemology.

In-the-dark artmaking methods entail careful and intentional exclusions (Barad 2007: 58). For example, imagery and/or a pre-determined goal are excluded from the artmaking processes. This seems to side-line my self-perceived control of the creative process and foreground the potency of materials. When in-the-dark methods immerse my creative activity in unknowing, I realise that the artmaking process is led by the cues proffered by artmaking materials (personal journal 2018-2021: 317) in those very particular circumstances. Unknowing appears to illuminate the forcefulness of matter (Bennett 2010b: 2). Unknowing and materiality are seemingly the potency driving this study. For me, in-the-dark methods radically disrupt my assumptions about what and how I know in general. This segues into an interest in and investigation of materiality and new materialism. Materiality broadly refers to processes of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261) that are intrinsic to matter.

Unknowing's immanence may sound far-fetched. Yet it is self-evident that every human experiences the unknown; it is an ineluctable element of being human-ish. Although unavoidable, we can choose how to meet it. It might for example, be ignored, welcomed or resented. It is ironic what unknowing reveals of itself in this process – ignoring unknowing constitutes ignorance, unknowing itself is not ignorance (Zembylas 2005: 142,150). In the way that many turn to knowledge as reliable, I find unknowing reliable. Whenever I open myself to unknowing it is already there; its immanence is unfailing (personal journal 2018-2022: 326).

Matter and materiality

For me, using in-the-dark artmaking methods excites curiosity about the interactions of materials. Through this study I will come to consider myself as a material with a material presence. This brings into question my position within this study. The way I previously understood human engagement with the world centred on the assumption that entities are separated by boundaries and intervening space. In other words, boundaries, or discrete being is a flawed concept (Barad 2007: 46-47; Haraway 2004: 67; Orlie 2010: 117,118). There is apparently one exception to this which I will return to below. I consider that tied to this flawed concept of discrete being is the notion that in general humans can freely exert control or mastery (Bolt 2004: 9) over other entities. Barad (2007) examines this relationship in her explication of materiality and material engagement. For Barad (2007: 142) and Bennett

(2010b: 49,58), becoming is a more pertinent mode than being. For Haraway too, all beings are emergent. They are “provisional, permanently emerging things Westerners call individuals” (Haraway 2004: 2), shaped by place, time and matter/s (Haraway 2004: 67-68).

Gloria Anzaldúa (2015: 7-8) voices a concern in her questioning of knowledge systems: “how to write (produce) without being inscribed (re- produced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against”. A central difficulty in new materialism is how to articulate and interrogate the world of matter/s without presuming that being human is a fixed ‘norm’, yet also not ignoring one’s own presence within the investigation. The authors above have written about this issue with perspicacity and sensitivity. In developing in-the-dark methods, I will partly draw on the ancient Chinese Zhuangzi (Kwek 2018). In discussing indigenous³ ontology, Kwek (2018: 25) suggests that what marks it as indigenous is the irrelevance or non-existence of binaries such as human/non-human, subject/object. Lawrence (2005: 4-5) views artmaking as indigenous to itself, generating insights that are unique to the mode of artmaking. Drawing on Kwek and Lawrence I consider artmaking to be indigenous to itself because immersion (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196) in artmaking seems to dissolve the hierarchy of the subject/object binary, and thence proffer greater potential for new insights.

This aspect of artmaking is important in two respects. Firstly, Kwek (2018: 22) voices concern over what she sees as a gap in the new materialisms between indigenous understanding of agency and human/non-human relations, and the recent interest in the agency of matter. I speculate that artmaking traverses both fields because it seemingly undoes the hierarchy of subject/object, and intuitively acknowledges the potency of matter. Secondly, I posit that the artmaking research in this study exceeds Kwek’s gap because no-longer-hierarchical binaries offer a fertile field of tension. That is, when binaries or other tensions are intentionally left unresolved and acknowledged as such, they manifest a field of tension that offers the potential for deeper insights in the terrain indicated by the binaries.

I consider that artmaking is a field crucial to deeper understandings of engaging with matter. In my view, artmaking, and other creative practices that handle materials, have always offered the potential for this rich, intuitive, immediate and ethical co-habiting of agency.

Gustav Metzger (in Stiles & Selz 2012: 473) experiences it as “[a]t a certain point, the work takes over, is in activity beyond the detailed control of the artist, reaches a power, grace, momentum, transcendence ...”. Waddington (1969: 147) expresses it thus: “The painter *participating in* [my emphasis] his painting is doing something much more profound than keeping his eyes open for effects which can be developed into the shocking, the chic, or the merely clever”.



Figure 4, James Brooks, *Igor S.*, (1971), oil on canvas, 191 cm x 244 cm.

According to Robert Motherwell (1915-1991): “I believe that painter’s judgements of paintings are first ethical then aesthetic ...” (Motherwell in Waddington 1969: 147). William Bazotes (1912-1963) describes how he starts to paint: “There is no particular system I follow when I begin a painting. Each painting has its own way of evolving. ... Each beginning suggests something. Once I sense the suggestion, I begin to paint intuitively. As I work, or when the

painting is finished, the subject matter reveals itself” (Baziotes in Waddington 1969: 116). For artist Paula Rego (1935-2022) “you are doing it to find out what the result will be” (Rego in Fortnum 2013: 70). James Brooks’ (1906-1992) material engagements I surmise were quickened by unknowing and materials: “The painting surface has always been the rendezvous of what the painter knows with the unknown, which appears on it for the first time. An engrossment in the process of changing formal relations is the painter’s method of relieving his self-consciousness as he approaches the mystery he hopes for” (Brooks in Waddington 1969: 116).

Thus, many artmakers seem to intuit the potency of materials and the unknown. In this study, the central fields of tension that will become manifest are: artmaking as indigenous and new materialism; unknowing and knowledge; non-verbal and verbal; somatic register and thinking /mental register; and visible and invisible. PLR as a paradigm has the insight to situate artmaking research at its core. Thus, PLR offers a tensioned non-verbal/verbal field that, I will argue, renders PLR robust. This is perhaps because, as confirmed by Macleod and Holdridge (2010: 87), the tension necessitates more nuanced modes of thinking, that is, “the depth of thought encountered in the final submissions”.

Within this study’s artmaking research, in-the-dark methods will decentralise my human thinking as pathfinder of the creative process. They will disengage my creative process from working towards both a preconceived (human) goal and the planning concomitant to this. I consider that this kind of disengagement foregrounds the tendencies and the disinclinations of matter. Acting with these pushes and pulls (rather than attempting to control them) will shape the artmaking at the core of this research.

This also highlights that non-verbal/verbal, somatic/mental, object/subject, visible/invisible are already entangled (Barad 2007: 175; Coole & Frost 2010: 8). Interactions no longer consist of a known external force visited on a passive object to produce a pre-determined result, observed from the empty space of outside, while taking precise measure of passing time (Barad 2011: 144). In a world that is self-evidently only partly visible, intra-action (Barad 2011: 126) points to: the entanglement of matter, visible and invisible, including space and time; the way in which matter, space and time mutually constitute one another, that is,

“spacetimemattering” (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181);⁴ a phenomenon, or specific intra-action, as the smallest unit for ontological consideration (Barad 2007: 139); the intrinsic indeterminacy of all being (Barad 2011: 144); dis/continuity as the underlying dynamic of the world (Barad 2010: 248).

Thus, Karen Barad, feminist and physicist, seems to shake up the solid dependability of our everyday world. Wong (2015: 9) confirms this unsettlement, suggesting that (no longer solid or determinate) things only offer a partial view of themselves.

Indeterminacy, dis/continuity and hauntings

For Barad (2010: 246-247), the term dis/continuity embodies the strange behaviour of electrons in their vibrational field around the nucleus of an atom. The quantum leap taken by an electron, and the concurrent emission of a photon of light, is so inexplicable and so thoroughly undoes the relation of continuity and discontinuity, and dichotomies in general, that the meaning of change is re-worked at each quantum leap (Barad 2010: 247-248). Seemingly, the indivisibility of a quantum and a quantum leap provide the stability of our world (Barad 2010: 248). In other words, we are inescapably haunted by the indeterminacy borne by dis/continuity (Barad 2010: 263). Paradoxically, the discrete being we humans would assign to ourselves seems to belong to the quantum. In other words, that by which we justify our elevated overview of the world really belongs to an invisible packet of energy.

Jacques Derrida’s spectre (Barad 2010; Davis 2005; Miller 2003) is of great value to the notion of haunting. It rattles academic traditions by “push[ing] at the boundaries of language and thought” (Davis 2005: 379) and our human assumptions about knowledge, our “established certainties” (Davis 2005: 376). In bringing secrecy in its wake, Derrida’s ghost opens up the *possibilities of meaning*, rather than offering already determinate though concealed meaning (Davis 2005: 377). The spectre carries the tension between desiring to know and being open to what lies beyond knowledge (Davis 2005: 379). Being open to haunting I suggest is being open to unknowing.

⁴ In this text, Barad’s neologism “spacetimemattering” will henceforth be written spacetimemattering.

For Derrida, hauntology is a dynamic through which the limits of hierarchy, dichotomies and dialectic might be challenged (Miller 2003: 4 of 21). He places the spectre of hauntology in *lieu* of ontology. For Derrida, enquiring into what determines being and presence is replaced with a hovering indeterminacy – “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (Davis 2005: 373). Thus, it is from Barad’s dis/continuity and Derrida’s spectre that the naming of the *hauntology* (2022) series will appear.



Figure 5, Caroline Birch, hauntology orange in process, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

Practice-led research (PLR) and diffraction methodology

This research will be conducted through a combination of PLR and diffraction methodologies, both of which are open-ended. PLR has been developed as a research methodology for creative practitioners (Barrett & Bolt 2007; Gray & Malins 2004; Hannula 2009; Mafe 2009; Sullivan 2010). Diffraction methodology has been drawn from the field of physical optics (Barad 2003: 803) and does not seem to have clearly established creative practice methods.

PLR valorises the entwining of artmaking/theory as a way of generating original insights, situating creative process at the core of this paradigm. In this PLR, artmaking activity is largely shaped by attractions and repulsions and unexpected happenings. The interests that emerge thus will be pursued in the literature search. The theoretical elements that resonate with the creative process will then be drawn back into artmaking. The artistic process as a research practice deepens further as elements of theory will be investigated through practice. Tensions between theory and practice become apparent which precipitates questioning. In this way, research questions are triggered by, and investigated through creative practice (Bolt 2006: 2 of 7; Gray & Malins 2004: 16; 103; Sullivan 2010: 119). This thorough entanglement of theory and practice and the ensuing field of tension and uncertainty proffers the richness of PLR (Mafe 2009: 68).

I surmise that aspects of diffraction methodology will work particularly well with PLR. According to Barad (2014: 168) diffraction methodology is an important way of re-turning insights. In this study, diffraction will offer a way of re-turning the specific detail above. In my view, a vital aspect of re-turning is that it might offer ways in which re-iteration could be maintained as “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15). Reading diffractively (Barad 2003: 803,811; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 1 of 6) will also entail drawing theories through one another, examining how they affect one another. Diffractive interference, or intra-acting, seemingly generates patterns of difference (Barad 2014: 168,175). Crucially, diffraction highlights where these patterns appear rather than what the generative differences are; that is, diffraction is “a place composed of interference patterns” (Haraway 2004: 70). In this study, I intend to use artmaking as a locus of interference patterns to interrogate the research questions.

In this study’s re-iterating artmaking/theory engagements, an important method is acknowledging the singularity that emerges from dynamic tensioned field of

difference/sameness. For Baudrillard (2002: 51; Baldwin 2018: 3 of 8) singularity stands out from difference as an impossible-to-replicate otherness. Bozalek and Zembylas (2017: 16 of 22) suggest that as with difference/same, diffraction and reflexivity (the latter is a central PLR method) need not be mutually exclusive but might work together in a tensioned relationship. Lenz Taguchi (2012: 272) voices an important methodological question as she asks in what ways difference interferes with our somatic register when we are immersed in research practices. Lori Clarke (2019: 126) and Amba Sayal-Bennett (2018: 5 of 17) also consider how, through attention to the somatic register, tensions might engender creative response. For Phyllida Barlow, engaging with artmaking through the somatic is important. In particular creative processes, she gathered her materials around herself and turned off the lights. Having carefully excluded its visual component, she then worked by means of her somatic register, through tactile engagement with her materials. For Barlow, it is sometimes a somatic element other than the visual that acts as a trigger for artmaking (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023).

My research questions are:

1. In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?
2. In what ways do these methods engender a deeper awareness of engaging with unknowing and materiality in artmaking practice?
3. What insights arise from using in-the-dark artmaking methods?

The thesis layout

In Chapter Two, I will introduce the literature pertinent to interrogating the research questions. This will entail giving a sense of the unknown and unknowing rather than attempting to encapsulate them within theory. I will then discuss materiality and new materialism. I will go on to indicate how unknowing and materiality might be drawn together to explore the research questions. Finally, I will indicate the gap in the current state of knowledge, and then introduce the hypothesis, and the original methodological contribution offered by this study.

Chapter Three will discuss my central methodology, PLR, and indicate which of its methods I will be using. I will introduce the research questions and aims and objectives of this study. Crucially, I will examine the literature sources of in-the-dark methods and then outline these methods. It is important to note that in this text, in-the-dark methods are approximations. They become specific when engaged with, and this kind of unrepeatability cannot be verbally encapsulated. It is due to this kind of specificity that I will use diffraction methodology together with PLR. In discussing diffraction methodology, I will also indicate which diffractive methods I will use. Finally, I will describe the heuristic I will be using to work 'in the dark'.

Chapter Four will discuss the artmaking practice that is at the heart of this study. These creative processes, together with the investigation of the literature, and the speculative mode of my research journal (2018-2022), will constitute the interrogation of the research questions. This will also entail exploring the ways in which in-the-dark methods become specific within artmaking. It seems that certain kinds of artmaking processes trigger particular kinds of insights. This chapter will thus be presented in four sections.

Processing painting will investigate material effect and following the flows and intelligence of matter. This curious enquiry will be discussed as a mode of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). The specificity of engagement with particular in-the-dark methods will be examined. This will necessitate acknowledging my habitual modes of artmaking, and thence questioning my assumptions and normative yardsticks. My body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265) will thus be revealed as a material in this study. Importantly, in-the-dark methods will demonstrate their efficacy in carefully excluding my mental register from leading these processes. This allows my body of experience to be quickened through my somatic register, highlighting that it is not availed through my mental thinking processes. Fields of tension will also be investigated in this section.

In *the light pods* section, engaging with the light pod materials will lead to an investigation of the assumed fixity of matter and the indeterminacy of boundaries (Anzaldúa 1987: 3; Barad 2007: 138; Johnson 2014: 609,617). Indeterminacy will necessitate an examination of agency, or the relation of cause and effect. Interestingly, these are the only creative processes in this study that have insisted on some consideration of meaning.

The stick installation will be investigated in the light of the ways in which it has re-configured my understanding of difference and singularity. In the *stick space* section, uselessness (Kwek 2018) as an in-the-dark method will be investigated as a mode that manifests fields of tension, and thus multidimensional potential. Barad's (Barad 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003) spacetime-mattering will also be relevant in this discussion. Crucially, re-cognition of materiality as a dynamic will be discussed.

The wax ground works will explore material effect when meaning and a focal point are intentionally excluded from the painting processes. Artmaking becomes a curious enquiry where I respond *with* rather than *to* material affect. Indeterminate boundaries (Anzaldúa 1987: 3; Barad 2007: 138; Johnson 2014: 609,617) will be explored as an opening for haunting by dis/continuity.

Chapter Five will re-turn (Barad 2014: 168) the research questions and their efficacy in exploring unknowing and materiality. In light of the new insights generated by this study, the research methodologies, hypothesis, originality, methodological contribution, and challenges and limitations of the study, will be re-considered. Importantly, this artmaking research will offer a means of exploring the questions rather than providing fixed outcomes to the research questions (Adams 2014: 218). The ensuing fresh insights I surmise will give rise to further questions and speculations.

Conclusion

In summary, unknowing is a ubiquitous "originative" (Morgan 2014: 1) force. In-the-dark artmaking methods will allow both an ongoing openness to and active engagement with this primal force. Following their cues in artmaking I surmise will lead into the unknowable – cannot be encompassed by knowledge – realm of matter where intra-action matters. In this theatre of pushes and pulls, torsions and co-operations there is no either/or but a mode of "both and" (Manning 2017: 104). Seemingly, opposites work together, maintaining fields of tension. Numerous fields of tensions collide, converge, diverge. What might momentarily appear from this can never be repeated.

I reiterate that there is a lack of artmaking research that is thoroughly embedded in unknowing. I posit that the originality of this study will lie in the use of in-the-dark artmaking

methods to lead the investigation. I will interrogate engaging with unknowing, matter, knowledge, new materialism, and PLR and diffraction methodologies. A deepening understanding of these suggests that what might emerge from this research will probably be unpredictable and unexpected. I anticipate that the trajectory of this process will likewise continue to be indeterminate. As mentioned, I surmise that the most likely outcome to this study will be more questions about the insights generated by artmaking. It is difficult to predict how in-the-dark methods might be transferable to other creative practices. I consider that they could be, as I find them to be fluid, open to on-the-spot changes.

Chapter Two: *inhabiting no man's land*

Introduction

The central issues investigated in this practice-led research (PLR) arise from unknowing, artmaking research (discussed in Chapter Four), materiality, and difference and singularity. The contextualising literature situates this study in the fields of visual arts and new materialism.

The aspects of unknowing that I discuss below are vital to the artmaking-as-research processes that constitute the core of this study. In the first section I attempt to give a sense of the unknown and unknowing through the literature, but not – as will become evident – to define them. Seemingly the differences between unknowing and the unknown are subtle. The literature is presented in sub-sections, each presenting a particular aspect of unknowing.

The next section explores materiality and the field of new materialisms. Potential links between unknowing and materiality are drawn together for exploration of the research questions in the following chapters. The third section briefly introduces the literature relevant to the interrogation of difference, otherness and singularity in Chapter Four.

In the final section, the hypothesis, the originality and contribution of the study are proffered in relation to the gap in research. The threads of literature are then finally drawn together to be pursued in the following chapters.

Unknowing

As I hope will become apparent through the literature examination below, the unknown and unknowing cannot be encompassed by understanding. I consider it important to attempt to provide a feeling of unknowing. As unknowing is indefinable (Morgan 2014: 1), this partly entails articulating what unknowing or the unknown is not. This mode of proceeding by negation, also called the *via negativa* (Gallacher 1997: 2 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Kourie 2008: 64), is central to the in-the-dark artmaking methods I have developed for interrogating

the research questions. Thus, unknowing, although evanescent, is crucial to how I interrogate my questions and therefore to the methodological contribution of this research.

In this study the term unknowing is predominantly used. Other words that point to unknowing are: **the void** (Kourie 2008: 62; Morgan 2014: 29); **no-thing-ness** (Kourie 2008: 61) or **nothingness** (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 12; Nishitani 1982); **“no thing at all”** (de Vries in Bennett 2010b: 3); **infinitude** (Morgan 2014: 57); **basho** (Krummel 2012: 22; Morgan 2014: 72); **the abyss** (Morgan 2014: 57); **“invisible shadow”** (Heidegger in Bolt 2004: 28); **limbo** (Moloi 2021: 3); **unbounded openness** (Kourie 2008: 64); **“the blinding brilliance of the divine darkness”** (Kourie 2008: 62); hauntology’s **“experience of secrecy”** (Davis 2005: 377); **divine ignorance** (Kourie 2008: 66; Zembylas 2005: 141); **learned ignorance**⁵ (Morgan 2014: 93; Zembylas 2005: 141). In my experience of unknowing, these terms hover in the region of unknowing, they do not pin it down to a fixed meaning.

Unknowing as an indefinable realm

Although unknowing is generally agreed to be indefinable it is possible to experience it (Gallacher 1997: 3 of 12; Kourie 2008: 65,70; Morgan 2014: 165; Zembylas 2005: 140). I consider that the unknown/unknowing are not different, and yet not quite the same. They are assumed to be different expressions of one face (Morgan 2014: 12). From my human perspective, the unknown feels distant and indefinable until it is engaged with (personal journal 2018-2021: 293). Unknowing I experience as closer – though still indefinable – than the unknown perhaps because it is an active opening to, and continuing engagement with the unknown (Birch 2018: 79; Morgan 2014: 1).

The anonymous *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Gallacher 1997; Hodgson 1944) seeks to engage unknowing which is posited as an approach to the ineffability or incomprehensibility of God. This study is not about divine essence, God, or mysticism. Unknowing entails relinquishing knowledge, language – including non-verbal language such as any system of imagery or signs (Maharaj 2009: 4 of 11) – and thinking processes (Gallacher 1997: 7 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xli;

⁵ The bold typeface is intended as a visual device that offers a simultaneous view of all the emboldened words within the usual linear mode of reading text. For me this is additionally interesting because it demonstrates that the visual engages the somatic register before the mode of reading engages the mind.

Kourie 2008: 62; Zembylas 2005: 143). This mode of successive exclusions is referred to as apophatic or the *via negativa* (Gallacher 1997: 2 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Kourie 2008: 64). Kourie's (2008) *Mysticism: a way of Unknowing* thus describes unknowing as a mode which "is free from the influence of ideas, concepts, words, philosophies and religious traditions, and therefore free from formulation" (Kourie 2008: 71). Situating this research in unknowing is thus clearly challenging. Developing in-the-dark artmaking methods from the *via negativa* I consider offers a way of accessing unknowing. These methods prevent my thinking processes from driving artmaking. Submerging the creative process thus in unknowing I contend allows for materiality to be experienced and not only thought of or theorised.

Not only is unknowing undefinable, it also apparently induces an undefinable state in whoever is immersed in unknowing. The suspension of the phenomena above seemingly "enables an unconditioned state" (Kourie 2008: 71). I experience just such an undefinable state when looking at Mark Rothko's paintings. Thus, I situate the artmaking aspect of this research alongside Rothko's work (figures 3,6,22,90,92) as is investigated in Chapter Four. Although it is impossible to know whether Rothko painted when in such a state, there is indeed an indeterminate unconditioned quality about his work (O'Doherty 1988: 160).

Like Kourie (2008), Morgan (2014) did not intend to describe, define, or theorise unknowing or the unknown. She intended that the reading of her PhD thesis, *A State of method: Unknowing* should trigger an experience of unknowing. Her starting point was Theodore Adorno's (1903-1969) mode of philosophising. Adorno seemingly refrained from defining the subject of metaphysics until, through this ongoing hesitation, he came to realise that perhaps the real subject matter of metaphysics was thus revealed. For Adorno, it was this ephemerality or evanescence that was the true subject of metaphysics. When his focus shifted, a different undefinable mode, or "another order of rhythm that could not be traced" (Morgan 2014: 2) was apparent.



Figure 6, Mark Rothko, Untitled, (1951), oil on canvas, 112 cm x 95 cm.

Adorno is important in grappling with the immanence and incomprehensibility of the unknown. Evanescence and immanence, together with PLR, shifts this research from focusing on outcomes to investigating dynamic creative processes. The unknown is within the world, that is, on “the near side” (Nishitani 1982: 90,97). Through in-the-dark artmaking methods unknowing is drawn into the realm of experience. I find Adorno’s untraceable rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2) apt when investigating materiality that is unconfined by physical boundaries

(see pages 83-84) and the ghostly behaviour of quantum particles (Barad 2010: 246-248; see pages 49,206). Their spectral sway destabilises how I understand what is generated by my artmaking research and what is required of it by academia. Paradoxically, the indeterminate boundaries of Rothko's colour fields (Kosoi 2005: 28; see figure 6 above) provide an important situating anchor in this study.

For Jane Bennett (2010b: 14), Adorno's negative dialectics are intended to highlight the gap between concepts and things, and to acknowledge what concepts miss (Bennett 2010b: 5). Bennett (2010b: 3) discusses Hent de Vries' absolute as radically free from representation. It is hence a no-thing, a force of detachment that loosens contextual ties. It delimits intelligibility because it "refuses to dissolve completely into the milieu of human knowledge" (Bennett 2010b: 3). De Vries' absolute sounds close to unknowing. According to Bennett, this view disregards the intelligence of things. Yet it might be unknowing's non-discrimination (Morgan 2014: ii,1) that renders it so suitable for interrogating materiality. In this study, I posit that in-the-dark artmaking methods enable the communal intelligence of things to lead creative process (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293).

Australian artist Kath Fries (2017) found unknowing to be an important aspect of her PhD artmaking process. In her thesis she argues that the unknowability or otherness of things in general, including artmaking materials, shapes engagement with the unknown. She terms this "encountering the unknown" (Fries 2017: 52). There is further discussion of Fries' encounters with unknowing in Chapter Four (see pages 189,194).

Fries's (2017: 10-11) artmaking research attests to the unknown as generative of knowledge. Paradoxically, knowledge is unable to touch the unknown. Self-evidently, as soon as something is known or defined it is encompassed by knowledge, yet the unknown seems to remain unknown despite this passage from not knowing to understanding (Morgan 2014: 2-3). This aspect is important regarding in-the-dark artmaking methods. They are *not* nuggets of indeterminacy that might be solidified into a form of knowledge. In-the-dark methods are offered as portals into the realm of unknowing because they resist stabilisation. Although these methods offer a means of accessing unknowing and generating new knowledge, I assume that they remain untouched by knowledge.



Figure 7, Kath Fries, Within and Without, (2016), wood, beeswax, oyster mushrooms, light and water, dimensions variable.

The point/moment at which knowledge appears from unknowing seems to be untraceable (Morgan 2014: 2), yet unknowing seemingly bears the potential of everything (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 1; Zembylas 2005: 143). Through this research process I have come to experience the unknown as the potential that sustains all possible possibilities.

Unknowing as a generative darkness

The generativity of unknowing (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 1-2; Vasudevan 2011: 1154) is essential to this study. PLR is partly premised on the research questions being generated by the process of making art. In this instance, the artmaking has been propelled by unknowing through the particular means of in-the-dark methods. The fecundity of unknowing has thus driven the creativity that has triggered the research questions.

In Morgan's (2014: 1-3) view it is action that triggers the actualisation of forms. Morgan, like Fries (2017: 15,27), considers that creative action is impelled by the unknown. That is, unknowing is active and generative. For Morgan (2014: 2) its light is discoverable in the realm of personal or specifically situated discovery. This is affirmed by my experience of this study (personal journal 2018-2022: 368) which seeks to tap into the specifics of making art 'in the dark' as a way of igniting creative light.

An intentional stance of acknowledging ignorance allows for the possibility of light/knowledge, or a "ray of darkness" (Dionysius the Areopagite in Zembylas 2005: 141) to enter us. Acknowledging ignorance I consider as the first step into unknowing. Giorgio Agamben (2011: 113) and Richard Smith (2016: 276) suggest that our ways of not knowing are more important than the ways in which we do know. Our capacity to know might be shaped by the ways in which we are ignorant. The relation between ignorance and knowledge could be fruitful by "allowing an absence of knowledge to guide and accompany our gestures" (Agamben 2011: 114). Although in a psychoanalytical context, Kenneth Eisold's (2000: 59) "being prepared to be unprepared" is nevertheless apt. Maintaining this immersion (Birch 2018: 55) in unpreparedness or learned ignorance then becomes vital to this investigation because it situates artmaking research in the generativity of unknowing. The intrinsic fluidity of in-the-dark artmaking methods is discussed in Chapter Two.

Somerville's (2008) *'Waiting in the chaotic place of unknowing': articulating postmodern emergence* also suggests that unknowing is generative. In *An Invitation to Unknowing* Lalitha Vasudevan (2011) considers that an approach of unknowing to difference and otherness generates a questioning of assumptions. Zembylas (2005: 140) sees otherness as irreducibly unknowable because it is epistemologically inaccessible. Zembylas (2005: 143) also sees

unknowing as the latent potential prior to form. For Kourie (2008: 70-71) it is the potential that originates all actualities by inducing “an unconditioned state” (Kourie 2008: 71).

In their article *The flow of anoetic to noetic and auto-noetic consciousness: A vision of unknowing (anoetic) and knowing (noetic) consciousness in the remembrance of things past and imagined future...* Vandekerckhove and Panksepp (2009) investigate anoetic or unknowing consciousness as generative of noetic – or what the authors term higher – consciousness. Their view is situated in the field of psychology which might account for the authors rating of knowing consciousness as higher than unknowing. Nevertheless, there are two elements of their paper that are relevant. Firstly, there is a receptive state of consciousness that is independent of, and does not trigger, thinking processes (Vandekerckhove & Panksepp 2009: 1022). This attests to the possibility of methods, such as in-the-dark methods, where thinking processes remain latent. Secondly, the authors view unknowing consciousness as a flow. This fluidity remains unaffected by the ‘higher’ conscious states which it enables (Vandekerckhove & Panksepp 2009: 1019). This suggests that unknowing is limitless and generative, which is important to the part in-the-dark methods play in shaping my artmaking research.

Unknowing as immanent

Morgan and Kourie state that unknowing (Morgan 2014: ii) or nothingness (Kourie 2008: 64) is immanent. Thus, the possibility of engaging with the unknown’s limitless potential is *always* present. In this text, nothingness is not restricted to Streak’s (2021: 4) sense of it as a blank, void or absence. Here, nothingness, or no-thing-ness, is intended to evoke awareness of unbounded possibility, of the immanence of materiality’s dynamism. To Keiji Nishitani (1982: 90,97), nothingness is immanent, on “the near side”. There is thus no need to rise above or beyond the world to access unknowing’s potential. The unknown does not exert power from beyond the world – as we perceive any deity to do – but is present in the world. In this thesis I argue that unknowing might be immanent as a force of differencing.

The immanence of unknowing is expressed slightly differently in Gallacher’s (1997) introduction to *The Cloud of unknowing*. He describes unknowing as being present everywhere in our daily world, yet not confined by specific time, place or embodiment

(Gallacher 1997: 6 of 12; Kourie 2008: 66). Coole and Frost's (2010: 8,20) *Introducing the New Materialisms* posit the vitality of matter as immanent. This is confirmed by Bennett (2010b: 3), Fries (2017: 46,49,116,152), Johnson (2014: 612,613), and Radomska (2016: 119). Together the immanence of both unknowing and matter's forcefulness are pertinent to investigating the research questions.

Unknowing as active

Unknowing is the active engagement with the potential of the unknown (Morgan 2014: 1-3). Recognising this has been vital to developing in-the-dark artmaking methods. These are premised on action because utter immersion in unknowing (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14) requires moving away from planning and prior thinking processes (Gallacher 1997: 1 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Ings 2014: 8-9 of 14; Kourie 2008: 62; Zembylas 2005: 143), and from imagery (Gallacher 1997: 5 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xli; Zembylas 2005: 143). In other words, creative process has been stripped bare of my thinking, leaving only unpremeditated action as the first artmaking step. Opening to the awareness that my artmaking practice is already thoroughly steeped in the unknown seems to generate a tension that resides in not knowing how to begin the creative process. It seems that action – without needing to know precisely what the action will be or where it will lead – is for me the way through this potential *impasse* (personal journal 2018-2022: 265). I surmise it is because unknowing is active that it renders in-the-dark methods highly effective. I argue that in-the-dark artmaking methods and materiality, by availing unknowing, generate a host of creative possibilities. The growing recognition of knowledge as experiential (Gallacher 1997: 5 of 12; Haraway 2004: 4; Kourie 2008: 64; Maharaj 2009: 2 of 11) affirms the use of in-the-dark methods in knowledge-generating research

Unknowing as multidimensional portal

I assume that unknowing is nondimensional because in its immanence (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: ii; Nishitani 1982: 90,97) it is unconfined by dimensions such as particular place, time or embodiment (Gallacher 1997: 6 of 12; Kourie 2008: 66) or by definitions (Morgan 2014: 2-3). Through this artmaking research, I find that unknowing enables an experiencing of materiality as multidimensional (personal journal 2018-2022: 355). This is discussed fully in Chapter Four.

In *The Importance of Being Useless: A Cross-Cultural Contribution to the New Materialisms from Zhuangzi* Dorothy Kwek (2018) offers a view of materiality through a mode of uselessness. This is an important source for developing in-the-dark methods. Kwek suggests that usefulness – a trajectory directed towards a specific purpose – offers a single modality. Uselessness could also be perceived as lack of human-oriented purpose (Kwek 2018: 28-29; Morgan 2014: ii,229), as a wandering without a purpose (Ings 2014: 8 of 12), or as that which remains generative because it is indeterminate or intentionally excluded (Manning 2017: 110). However, this study posits that this allows the forcefulness of matter to shape the artmaking trajectory. I surmise that in-the-dark methods are multidimensional partly because they are not shaped in advance by a pre-determined usage or goal (Kwek 2018: 36; Morgan 2014: ii,229). Barad (2011: 139) argues that the relationship, for example, that between useless and useful, is radically destabilised by the indeterminacy of dis/continuity (see page 11). According to Barad (2010: 251) this opens up dimensions in a polyvalent way.

Another challenge lies in presenting a multidimensional research project in the linear mode of academic writing. Language seems to flatten out the way in which understanding arises from experience. For example, artmaking experience informs the investigative reading of this study and *vice versa*. This happens repeatedly throughout the PLR process. Understanding arises thus from a complex which cannot be separated out into artmaking and reading occurring separately at distinct points on a timeline. The importance of multidimensionality in this study is that it proffers a far greater range of artmaking possibilities than are available when I inhabit the assumption that I instil the outcome in the process and control the materials.

Unknowing's positive negative

Richard Smith (2016) in *The Virtues of Unknowing* gives a sense of the value of unknowing. In my view, *recognising* the value of unknowing offers greater reliability than any ensuing knowledge. Acknowledging *the ways* in which we do not know could be of greater value than *what* we do not know in shaping the ways in which we come to understanding. “[T]he articulation of a zone of nonknowledge is the condition—and at the same time the touchstone—of all our knowledge” (Smith 2016: 276). Although the ways in which we do not know might be specific (Smith 2016: 276), unknowing itself is not. I contend that in this study, in-the-dark methods offer particular ways of not knowing. Smith affirms that in-the-dark artmaking methods might be generative because they embody *ways* of not knowing, rather than highlighting *what* I do not know. In this they embody a process, where particular ways of not knowing light up *process* rather than outcome. Thus, this study proffers a methodological contribution.

Another field where the negative is seen as generative is that of dialectical materialism or Marxism. Pheng Cheah (2010) in her chapter *Non-dialectical Materialism*, examines the Marxist concept of negation as generative. It seems that “negation [is] the source of actualization” (Cheah 2010: 71). In Marx’s view, human purpose constructs matter and reality (Bennett 2010b: xiv; Cheah 2010: 75). I find Marx’s generative negation to be of a very different order to that of the *via negativa*’s way into unknowing. In Marx’s reality the terms of engagement that configure matter are seemingly anthropocentric.

This provides a clear contrast to the way in which in-the-dark artmaking methods are generative and decentralise my perceived control of materials. De-centring my human thinking greatly broadens the artmaking possibilities (personal journal 2018-2022: 303-305). The differences between Marx’s dialectical materialism and in-the-dark methods might demonstrate that theory as a human construction could delimit potential in a similar way, if it remains anthropocentric. For Haraway, (2004: 87), when representation remains uncontested it is constructed from one side, that of the representative. It reduces difference to its own reflective terms (Haraway 2004: 87), that is, to sameness. Thus, constructing theory should be approached with a sense of the value of differences as undecidable or negative (unknowable) because unresolved/unresolvable difference is generative (Haraway 2004: 89).

In *The Art of Unknowing* Denys Turner (1998: 483-484) unintentionally provides a good example of the unavoidable constraints when approaching a problem in either/or mode. In discussing negative theology, or the *via negativa*, he launches a scathing critique of medieval mystic Meister Eckhart. Turner states that Eckhart's *via negativa* approach is nonsensical. Eckhart cannot deconstruct language as a means of affirming God because what then remains cannot be an affirmation of God (Turner 1998: 484). What is important here is that, although he intends it as negative, the irreconcilability of Turner's either language/or God approach to Eckhart holds potential. However, I do agree with Turner (1998: 484) that apophaticism, or the *via negativa*, disables the intellect, leaving space for experiential insight.

In juxtaposition, Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) found that there was no inherent need for the dichotomy implied by the traditional or Cartesian (Townsend 2010: 103) pairing of terms such as subject and object (Krummel 2012: 5). In tension with one another, Turner (1998) and Nishida (Krummel 2012) suggest to me that a field of tension might offer a more fruitful approach in research than looking to resolve conundrums into fixed answers.

Nishida's *basho*, which Morgan (2014: 72) likens to unknowing, is the dynamic through which everything appears in the world. What is relevant about *basho* is that it works through the fluxing of universal and particular. They are not oppositional in that they together maintain a fluid and generative relationship. Barad (2010: 263; 2011: 139) also posits that the seemingly oppositional pair continuity/discontinuity do not oppose but function together as the *dynamic* of indeterminacy/determinacy. What appear to be incompatibilities are generative relations because they are irresolvable.

In another kind of negation, Zembylas (2005: 154) considers that we are also unknowable or other to ourselves. This might be brought home to us through confronting otherness. Brian O'Doherty (1988: 166) suggests that for the viewer Rothko's indeterminate use of light triggers experience of coming face to face with their innermost delusions, which in my view, is an experience of being other to oneself. By means of indeterminacy, Rothko engages the viewer metaphysically (O'Doherty 1988: 162,166). Indeterminacy of matter (Barad 2007: 155-159) is central to investigating how in-the-dark methods, artmaking materials and creative process are embroiled in mutual configuration.

There is thus an experience of indeterminacy or incomprehensibility, and an element of the metaphysical in opening oneself to unknowing (Fries 2017: 53; Gallacher 1997: 6 of 12; Kourie 2008: 67). This is confirmed by artist Kath Fries who experiences unknowing as “a state of attentiveness... akin to meditation, a working state of embodied un-selfconsciousness” (Fries 2017: 53). Otherness is indeterminate so relating to it is impossible. The actual relationship is an experience not of absence but of impossibility, implicitly mysterious (Zembylas 2005: 146). For Zembylas, being rendered vulnerable by otherness is opening to “an unsettlement” (Zembylas 2005: 153). He considers that this impossibility unsettles the assumed reliability of knowing. For me, the unsettlement in this study indicates the active engagement of unknowing. More specifically, in-the-dark artmaking methods exclude my internal normative yardsticks, eliciting my artmaking materiality (personal journal 2018-2022: 265,275,334). Unknowing’s positive negative is thus important in re-considering artmaking research in relation to the research questions.

Unknowing as paradox

In considering the importance of unknowing as paradoxical the following is apt: a paradox has “seemingly contradictory qualities or phases” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradox>). Hence, in what way does unknowing show aspects that seem to oppose one another?

The paradox central to unknowing is that the unknown originates knowledge yet remains elusive to theorising (Morgan 2014: 1, 3). Concomitantly, generating fresh knowledge by opening to unknowing entails abjuring all notions (Kourie 2008: 62), space, time, imagery (Gallacher 1997: 1 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Kourie 2008: 62,66; Zembylas 2005: 143), and thinking processes (Gallacher 1997: 7 of 12; Kourie 2008: 62; Zembylas 2005: 143). This core paradox is important because it acknowledges that indeterminacy *and* knowledge arise from unknowing. Unknowing cannot be normalised, stabilised or subsumed by knowledge. At the same time, unknowing destabilises my practices of knowing in artmaking (see Chapter Four, page 75). This is important in excavating the insights triggered by using in-the-dark methods.

For Kourie (2008: 62) using paradox means denying the mind its usage of attitudes, concepts and imagery. This is intended to tip us into an inner darkness, whence we may be lit by an

illumination greater than our mind's; that is, by "the blinding brilliance of the divine darkness" (Kourie 2008: 62). In-the-dark methods were developed from these apophatic means to open myself and artmaking processes to new light.

The *via negativa's* silencing of the verbal is apposite for approaching that which is unsayable, unthinkable, unknowable, be it a divine principle or otherness (Gallacher 1997: 1,6 of 12; Kourie 62,69-71; Morgan 2014: 29; Zembylas 2005: 140,146). In the presence of the otherness of paint, wax, charcoal, paper, steam iron, canvas, there is no-thing to say (personal journal 2018-2022: 312,359,360). However, in *listening with* (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) materials, I might experience a new artmaking configuration.

It is important to express that words are insufficient to give a full sense of the recognition that my being and cognition processes are constituted in the process of learning with materiality. This study's artmaking research requires me to re-cognise myself, materials and process (personal journal 2018-2022: 355). This is an unsayable process, yet this thesis is an attempt at some kind of academic articulation. This paradox I surmise arises from unknowing. In the active artmaking arena, paradox is re-cognised as specific and generative fields of tension (see *the light pods* section from page 123).



Figure 8, Phyllida Barlow, *Untitled: canvasracks*, (2018-2019), installation view, dimensions variable.

Phyllida Barlow confirms the use of paradox as a generative element in her artmaking. A central element of her work is what she calls the “lazy gesture” (Barlow 2019: 23:26, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). This embeds paradox in much of her work. For example, in *Untitled: canvasracks*, (2018-2019) above, the way in which the pieces of fabric drape looks accidental and has a lazy feel to it. Yet repeatedly throwing lengths of fabric over the underlying structures takes great effort (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023).



Figure 9, Phyllida Barlow, *untitled: lintelshadow*, (2018-2019), installation view, dimensions unknown.

In a similar vein, Barlow's *untitled: lintelshadow* (2018-2019) above, is a canopy of concrete supported by long, flimsy looking wooden stilts. Pushing the paradox even further, the artist constructs the structure's shadow not from any ephemeral material, but from stone (Kent 2019: 2 of 3).

Inhabiting unknowing

The materiality of each artmaking material, which includes my materiality as artist (personal journal 2018-2022: 303), is different. As difference or otherness is beyond the reach of knowledge, Vasudevan (2011: 1156) and Zembylas (2005: 141) suggest unknowing as an appropriate way of co-habiting with otherness. This is embodied in the main research question: In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?

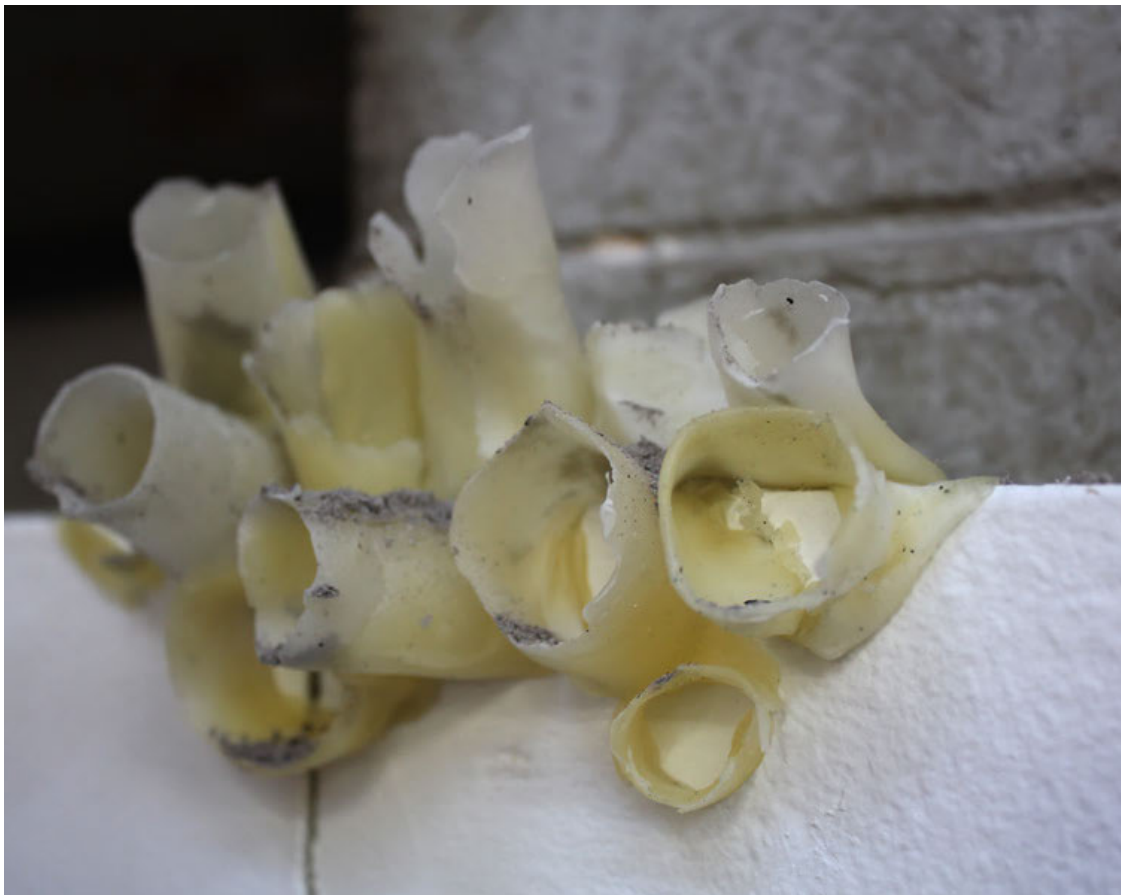


Figure 10, Kath Fries, detail of Divest, (2015), beeswax and ash, site specific installation, dimensions variable.



Figure 11, Kath Fries, Exhale, (2016), wax and charcoal on paper, 190 x 144 x 12 cm.

Fries' approach to the unknown is to embrace it because it opens a realm beyond human capacities: embracing unknowing "conjures an immersive and absorbed embrace of sentient matter-flow with the more-than-human" (Fries 2017: 196). I assume that Fries means that to avail the unknown/unknowing it is necessary to open to it, and/or embrace one's own ignorance in the face of otherness. Fries serves to emphasise the need to welcome difference

as an essential constituent of artmaking research. Her approach to how she engages with materials, such as bees wax, is also important in situating how I use wax in the hauntology series. This is discussed in Chapter Four.

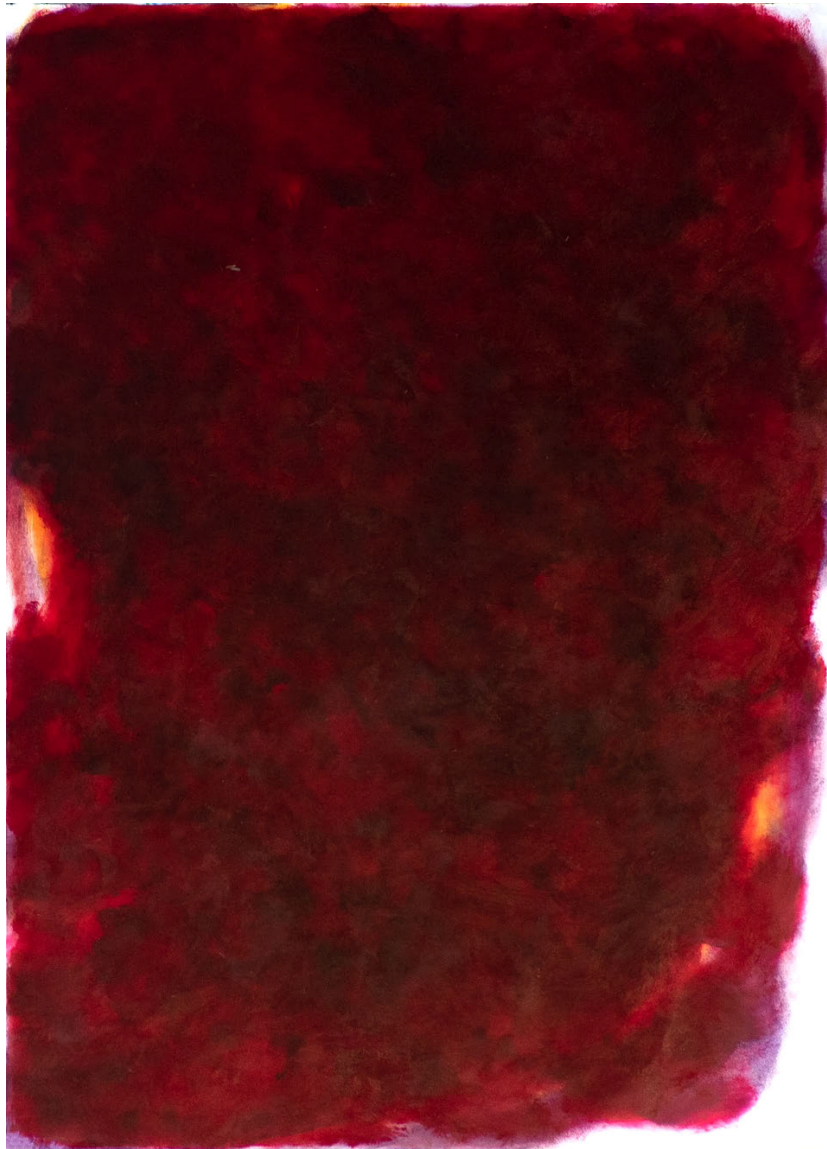


Figure 12, Caroline Birch, hauntology red in process, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

Welby Ings (2014) provides an important aspect for my approach to artmaking research. *Into the realm of unknowing* discusses a particular filmmaking process. Ings finds that immersing himself in drawing – and I contend in any artmaking activity – enables an engagement with potentials that are inaccessible through language (Ings 2014: 10 of 14). This utter immersion

in creative process enables Ings to access the generative potential of the unknown. Inhabiting unknowing space means “one can brush against the nuanced, draw into what withdraws, and retrieve from a protean world, a complex story that thinks ... and speaks in pictures” (Ings 2014: 6 of 14). Ings thus confirms that approaching unknowing through immersive artmaking activity is creatively generative; that unknowing is untouchable or indefinable; and that immersion in unknowing is protean or constantly changing. From his creative process, Ings realises that this kind of immersive approach entails an ability to inhabit uncertainty, instability, mystery and doubt without trying to grasp at logic or knowledge. Importantly, this contrasts with what is generally an academic explicit search for knowledge.

In ‘*Waiting in the chaotic place of unknowing*’ Somerville (2008: 210) realises the necessity of waiting for a prompt or insight without knowing what it might be or whence it may appear. She endorses patient and situated waiting in indeterminacy as a way of allowing insights to arise. She recognises this method is itself a creative process. In Chapter Four I discuss being poised for response as an aspect of immersion in creative process (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196). This moment of poise is I suggest closely aligned to the stillness of passive receptivity (Ings 2014: 9-10 of 14; Vandekerckhove & Panksepp 2009: 1020; Zembylas 2005: 143,146,155), and to a “tolerance for waiting” (Oksanen 2019: 4 of 7).

Morgan’s (2014: iii) approach of removing a clear destination is evidenced by her character Aporia who is required to begin a journey without knowing the destination. Aporia is defined as “an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument or theory” (<https://www.wordgenius.com/words/aporia> Accessed 19 December 2022). This suggests active immersion in uncertainty (and implicitly unknowing) is possible by co-habiting with, rather than resolving, contradiction.

Limitations of unknowing

The generativity of unknowing (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 1-2; Vasudevan 2011: 1154) I contend goes hand in hand with its untouchability. I assume that unknowing is untouchable (Ings 2014: 6 of 14) because it is untraceable to a source (Morgan 2014: 2). Morgan and Ings confirm what common-sense apprehends – that knowledge cannot touch or alter the unknown. Approaching unknowing requires a turn away from knowing or knowledge

mediating practices. “Moving constantly towards understanding only extends the territorial dimensions of knowing, moving away from understanding on the other hand...” (Morgan 2014: 111) brings one closer to immersion in unknowing.

Morgan suggests that because knowledge is mediated by language it cannot escape its mediator (2014: 111). Thus, something is unavoidably lost in writing about the engagement of in-the-dark methods and materiality. In this submission, I consider that the limitation of verbal articulation is lessened when a viewer becomes immersed in the body of artwork that is shaped by in-the-dark methods and materiality. Suze Adams (2014: 226) considers the artworks ensuing from PLR as evidence of engaged research: “... artworks should not be considered as illustrations of a research practice but as critical explorations of conceptual and [original emphasis] corporeal understanding.” In other words, in regard to artmaking, “the work is [original emphasis] the research” (Busch 2009: 3 of 7).

If language as mediator (Morgan 2014: 111) moves away from unknowing, and unknowing undoes the privileged position of knowledge, then what is the point of this thesis? This is where materiality – and its potential in viewing the world anew – comes to the fore. In a world which is in crisis seemingly at every level (Ghosh 2021), it is no longer a luxury to spend time considering our human role in this global situation. Knowledge as the especial realm of humans is arguably a western imposition (Ghosh 2021: 36,81-84). Ways of working with unknowing *and* knowing together seem less restrictive than isolating knowledge as superior.

It seems that what is possible with language is to articulate particular experiences of unknowing; to point to instances where unknowing has apparently been availed; and describe methods of opening to unknowing. Such methods, however, seem to work until they become familiar. This temporary efficacy means that in-the-dark methods need to be fluid and adjustable, especially I surmise when used in other contexts with different protagonists. What ensues in the artistic process from using in-the-dark methods is not reproducible.

The non-reproducibility and the challenge of transferring in-the-dark methods might, however, prove to be something more than limiting. Sarat Maharaj (2009: 5 of 11) confirms this: “repetition amounts to unpredictable generation of divergence and difference” This challenge could itself trigger questions about knowledge and how we approach knowledge-generating practices. I consider this non-reproducibility to align with the actuality of

materiality and living in the everyday world. We do not fit our lives to methodology or theory, because we need to be continually able to respond/react with what unfolds around us. Maybe academia sometimes forgets its roots in everyday experience. As Donna Haraway puts it, knowledge practices “are situated in dense, worldly webs” (Haraway 2004: 4). This thesis might also serve other researchers by suggesting different ways to generate better questions regarding materiality and demonstrate the generative potential of unknowing.

Unknowing and materiality

In this study, in-the-dark artmaking methods embody a nexus where unknowing and materiality afford creative possibility. I argue this because inhabiting unknowing, in the form of in-the-dark artmaking methods, offers vulnerability to the materiality of artmaking. Unknowing’s immanence, potential, and absence of discrimination (Morgan 2014: ii,1) are central to this. Thus, for me, unknowing offers a way of engaging with artmaking without ‘colonising’ or dominating materiality in the process.

What Gamble, Hanan and Nail (2019) call negative new materialism in *What is New Materialism?* suggests some relation to the *via negativa*. The authors offer negative new materialism as a theory that considers matter as external to human thought. The *via negativa* (Gallacher 1997: 2 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Kourie 2008: 64), and more specifically in-the-dark methods, seek to exclude human thought as the pathfinder of this study’s artmaking research. In-the-dark methods do *not* posit human thinking as separate from artmaking processes or materials. In-the-dark methods engage with cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176) as the means of excluding, not belittling or ignoring, my human thought from these artmaking processes.

Prior to my postgraduate research, my human tendency to dominate took the form of imposing imagery as meaning. This ignores the meaning that ensues from: what is included and what excluded (Barad 2014: 168,176; 2010: 253) from the artmaking process; the mutual configuration of materials (Barad 2003: 814,817; Radomska 2016: 30); the ongoing intra-acting that draws the viewer into the mattering/meaning process (Barad 2007: 148-149,157); the non-linearity of space and time – spacetime – as matter/meaning is forged (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181).

Another way in which I see unknowing and materiality converging is in the kind of paradox they both embody. As mentioned, unknowing originates knowledge (Morgan 2014: 1) yet remains untouched by knowledge and thought processes (Ings 2014: 6 of 14). Accessing the unknown is possible when thinking as the generator or leader of creative process is eschewed. When we think about matter, it, like unknowing, seems to withdraw from us (Coole & Frost 2010: 2). Working with the forcefulness of matter seems to similarly entail relinquishing human thinking as the generator or leader of process in general.

There seems to be an inherent gap between knowledge and unknowing (Morgan 2014: 111) and I assume between human thinking and unknowing, and human thinking and matter *if human thinking is allowed to dominate*. Jane Bennett (2010b: xv) states that “[i]f we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it”. This is echoed by Massumi’s (Green 2015: 7 of 13) contention that if we know where we will arrive before we get there, we have gone nowhere at all.

I consider that in-the-dark artmaking methods reveal the efficacy of (material and immaterial) matter because the ensuing artmaking processes illuminate the ravelling of matter, meaning, self, space, linear time and understanding. In the above relations of human thinking to unknowing and to materiality, this perceived gap seems to offer potential if we cede our perceived supremacy of knowledge and thinking processes.

Unknowing as non-discriminating (Morgan 2014: ii,1) is relevant to my interrogation of materiality because I speculate that if I remain unreservedly open to its potential (Birch 2018: 11), I am vulnerable to materiality. New materialism, as indicated, in part seeks to displace humankind viewing itself as the measure of normality in the world. The use of in-the-dark artmaking methods thus seems an appropriate and non-invasive means of investigating how materiality forms/takes form with artmaking processes. These methods are heuristic in nature which ensures that they do not develop a habitual carapace. Habit would hinder access to unknowing (Birch 2018: 47) and possibly de-sensitise awareness of materiality.

Materiality, matter and new materialism

A general consideration of materiality is necessary in situating this research and interrogating its questions. Matter is introduced as active (Bennett 2010b: 10; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 43; 59), agentic and forceful (Bennett 2015; 2010a; 2010b; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012; Johnson 2014; Radomska 2016). The literature on intra-action, agential cuts and spacetime mattering (Barad 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003) is discussed in relation to interrogating the ways in which in-the-dark artmaking methods and materiality configure together. Matter as unfathomable/other/different is also relevant to understanding the ways in which these configurations entangle.

This experience of artmaking research, where process is configured together with materiality and in-the-dark artmaking methods, shows that each artmaking engagement is utterly different (personal journal 2018-2022: 324). This I assume is congruent with matter as unfathomable/other: “there are only, everywhere, differences and traces of differences” (Derrida in Kourie 2008: 69). This implies that materiality is always and already different and is hence not definable. For philosopher Manuel De Landa (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 39), the departure point for any materialist theory is that matter exists independently of the human mind. For him it would thus be a mistake to build a metatheory for new materialism (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 43). Below I consider different understandings of materiality, which are all pertinent to this study in some way.

Generally, new materialists do not view organic/inorganic or other dichotomies as valid distinctions (Bennett 2010b: 12-13; Coole & Frost 2010: 9; Haraway 2004: 21-22,327). Matter is seen as having capacities to organise and change itself, and to respond to/with other material capacities (Bennett 2010b: 10; Coole & Frost 2010: 7; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 43). The ability to respond, change and organise with some degree of intention, that is, “emergent, generative powers (or agentic capacities)” (Coole & Frost 2010: 9), does not belong only to humans. The way in which things (including human-ish things) entangle in shaping the world, might be referred to as materiality. The most broadly applicable and accessible description of materiality I find in Deleuze and Guattaris’ (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. They refer to materiality as affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261). In my view this term embodies the multidimensionality and fluidity of materiality.

New materialism is a general term for the western renewed academic interest in the 'stuff', the matter of the world (Gamble, Hanan, *et al* 2019: 111). The key new materialist sources for this study are Alaimo (2018; 2014; 2012), Barad (2014; 2012; 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003), Bennett (2010a; 2010b; 2015), Bolt (2007; 2006; 2004), Coole and Frost (2010), Haraway (2004), Kwek (2018) and Wong (2015). These authors view new materialism as a way of engaging with the world ethically at every level, material and immaterial.

Stacey Alaimo (2012: 563-564) voices it thus: "... we must hold ourselves accountable to a materiality that is never merely an external, blank, or inert space but the active, emergent substance of ourselves and others". These ethical concerns throw light onto the anthropocentrism of humankind. As a species we assume that we wield control over the Earth, her resources and her inhabitants (Ghosh 2021: 81-84). I surmise that we assume we have control because we presume: that knowing is specific to humankind; that knowledge is power; that we know what knowledge is; and we know how to know. As Kameron Sanzo indicates, Karen Barad's (2007) agential realism is especially important because Barad demonstrates that "the physical laws underpinning the reality we experience are, themselves, an ethical matter" (Sanzo 2018: 3 of 8).

Coole and Frosts' (2010) chapter, *Introducing the New Materialisms*, provides a clear overview of new materialism as a field, and of the different trends within this. They believe that the current challenges facing the world at every level point to a need to pay closer attention to the 'stuff' of the physical world we inhabit as physical beings. The 'stuff' constituting humans is not separate from the 'stuff' of which everything else is formed (Alaimo 2014: 16-17; Haraway 2004: 67; Orlie 2010: 117). So, what then is "the place of embodied humans in a material world" (Coole & Frost 2010: 3)? The authors pick up on three dominant threads in the light of the necessity to re-look at materiality and materialism.

The first thread is ontological. The second trend concerns politics and ethics. Aspects of artmaking research touch on care and ethics as seen in Chapter Four. The third theme focuses on the entangled economic and political matters of living each day with our environment. The first ontological thread is most relevant to this study. Advances in the natural sciences have revealed that matter is not inert (Coole & Frost 2010: 5) and that we are not physically distanced from matter (Barad 2007: 134). Importantly, these advances in understanding atomic structure profoundly implicate our existential and normative understandings (Coole &

Frost 2010: 5). Matter seemingly displays a liveliness which is not dependent on any kind of sovereign force (Fox & Alldred 2019: 3) and is agentic in nature (Barad 2007: 91,177; Bennett 2010b 1-19). Interacting – or more accurately intra-acting (Barad 2007: 139; 2003: 815) – with lively and affective matter re-situates the human subject as posthuman (Barad 2003: 814-815). For Haraway (2004: 2), all beings are emergent including humans and non-humans.

In *Questioning New Materialisms*, authors Devellennes and Dillet (2018) probe what the different iterations of materialism do to the field of new materialism in general. Investigating materiality is relevant to a range of theoretical fields. The authors find that this extensive application lends a general sturdiness to materialism because it requires a plurality of approaches and methods (Dvellennes & Dillet 2018: 9). Thus, methodology relating to materiality remains open-ended. They are however, wary of the word ‘new’ because it does not acknowledge the thread of materialism that has run through western philosophies for centuries (Dvellennes & Dillet 2018: 7).

According to Dorothy Kwek’s (2018) *The Importance of Being Useless: A Cross-Cultural Contribution to the New Materialisms from Zhuangzi*, many indigenous belief systems acknowledge the affective capacity of non-human ‘things’. The forcefulness of materiality is perhaps newer to western perception than it is to indigenous perception. Gamble, Hanan and Nail (2019: 111) express this as “a perceived neglect or diminishment of matter in the dominant Euro-Western tradition as a passive substance intrinsically devoid of meaning”. However, I contend that artmaking should not be subsumed into a general category of western perception. According to Lawrence (2005) in *Knowledge Construction as Contested Terrain: Adult Learning Through Artistic Expression*, artmaking is a unique way of living with and understanding the world: “art is also indigenous unto itself. Art makes contributions to human society that are unique and cannot be duplicated by any other means” (Lawrence 2005: 5). I agree that the way in which artmaking processes work with the potency of artmaking materials means it is an indigenous mode. *Artmaking*, with its own indigenous means of engagement, has not been fully subsumed by western normative stances, and is thus a vital research mode. I do not assume that the same can be said for art theory.

Abstract expressionism is arguably the first articulated acknowledgement in art theory that the activity of artmaking and the person of the artist are not separate; and that similarly neither is the viewer separate from what is being viewed (Waddington 1969: 116,138,147).

In this aspect I surmise abstract expressionism foreruns Barad's (2011: 123; 2003: 812) notion of entanglement. In my view, this recognition also implicitly acknowledges the potency of materials in artmaking. The physicality and ethereality of paint on Rothko's canvases (Kosoi 2005: 25,30; O'Doherty 1988: 160,165) demonstrate material forcefulness (Arya 2016: 329,330), as discussed in Chapter Four.

Living with the forcefulness of matter seems to be inherent to some cultures (Ghosh 2021; Kohn 2013). Kwek (2018: 35) points out the potent effect Yoruba fetishes, assembled out of abandoned and useless 'stuff', have on their everyday lives. Ghosh (2021: 60) gives many instances of the way in which American Indians, for example, through living inseparably with their environments, were acutely aware of changing climates long before western science acknowledged this. Kohn (2013: 13) and Kwek (2018: 29-34) refer respectively to the way in which a particular Amazonian tribe and an ancient Chinese text draw on the transformative possibilities offered by oneiric insights.

In my view, western thinking lags behind indigenous and artistic understanding. The need to justify any stance – not only the academic – and confirm it with science, is uniquely western. “[N]othing counts unless it has the systematic rigour of ‘science’” (Maharaj 2009: 1 of 11). Although recognising the potency of the material world might be newer to western thinking, it nevertheless brings to it a great richness of exploration.

There are explorations from the visual arts. For example: Minty Donald's (2014) photo essay with the enchanting title *Guddling About*; Sayal-Bennett's (2018) diffractive investigation of her video practice; Katherine's Fries' (2017) and Lorraine Clarke's (2019) PhD theses. Karen Barad (2014; 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003) investigates new materialism through a multifocal lens of physics and feminism. Jane Bennett (2015; 2010a; 2010b) writes from political theory and feminism. Marietta Radomska (2016) is a biophilosopher and gender studies scholar. These examples are a tiny sample of research fields that productively engage with new materialism.

Perhaps those of us who use PLR-like research modalities are uniquely placed. We are situated in the realm of academia, a western system. Simultaneously we wield the 'stuff', the materiality, of 'our' craft and use the kind of intimate, situated non-verbal understanding that exceeds words (Maharaj 2009: 4 of 11).

Jane Bennett recognises the simultaneous creativity (Bennett 2010b: 31) and recalcitrance (Bennett 2010b: 3) of matter when agency is spread across a range of materialities.⁶ Morty Feldman (see pages 71,179) offers similar insights from his experience of music composing assemblages (Wong 2015: 5). This kind of bodily, situated experience (Haraway 2004: 4) reveals the entanglement of matter or materials. However, it is important to remember that human-ish thinking constitutes a vital element of matter or 'stuff'. Alaimo (2014) in *Thinking as the Stuff of the World*, and Bleeker in *The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking* (2020) investigate the materiality of human thinking.

Paul Rekret (2016) voices reservations about new materialism in *A critique of new materialism: ethics and ontology*. He objects to the way in which new materialism seemingly undoes any limits to analysing the ways in which human thought accesses the world (Rekret 2016: 226-227). To Rekret, this is embodied in the merging of ontology and ethics. In his view, theories that investigate the limits of human knowing have become converted to how humans relate ethically to matter. I disagree with his claim that new materialism grants human thinking universal access. Barad (2010: 253; 2007: 147) quite clearly describes how making a cut manifests a boundary for an apparatus delimiting the knowledge engendered by any specific intra-action. That is, intra-action provides "the local physical conditions that enable and constrain knowledge practices" (Barad 2007: 147). Intra-action entails the material and the discursive shaping one another (Barad 2007: 141). How humans come to know is ineluctably caught up in, and limited by, the apparatus/matter that enables this. In response to Rekret's claim, I posit unknowing and hence in-the-dark artmaking methods, as singularly abundant in creative potential *because* of the way in which they de-centre human thinking.

Matter as agentic and forceful

Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010b) and *A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism* (2010a) approaches materialities as agencies. Matter in her view is not simply instrumental, recalcitrant, a means to an end, or a social construct. It is forceful in itself, bearing "vitalities, trajectories and powers" (Bennett in Coole & Frost 2010: 47). For Karen

⁶ At a later stage in this study, I realise that rather than many different materialities, there is materiality as a dynamic and many different materials, or material expressions of materiality. However, I choose to leave my misunderstanding visible in this text (see page 187).

Barad, (2007: 141), entities – that is, all beings, human and non-human – are ontologically indeterminate until specified by the agency of intra-action. Barad confirms that entities “are not merely tools for our use but real living beings (and I include in this category inanimate as well as animate beings)” (Barad 2011: 127).

This study interrogates matter and materiality, and how these “vitalities, trajectories and powers” (Bennett in Coole & Frost 2010: 47) are ethically configured with the artmaking process. As discussed by Vasudevan (2011) and Zembylas (2005) a stance of unknowing respects and values unknowability or difference or otherness without subsuming it. Because matter and its significance are unknowable or indefinable outside specific situatedness, matter/meaning requires an ethical response (Alaimo 2014: 15; Barad 2007: 33; Bennett 2010b: 12-13; Radomska 2016: 201). Situating this study in the arena of new materialism means examining ‘my’ role or agency as artist.

This study in part investigates how in-the-dark methods greatly increase the responsive capacity of specific artmaking engagements. Bennett (2010b: 31) aligns efficacy to the capacity to respond with the potential for change or difference. I argue that being responsive with change or difference means becoming vulnerable to the unknown because the ways in which change/difference appear and re-appear is unknowable in advance and continues to be unknowable.

Agency and intra-action

The ethos of new materialism appears to be one of a willingness to inhabit indeterminacy rather than adopting an either/or dualism (Barad 2007: 125-126; Haraway 2004: 329-330). Discrete being having been deconstructed (Barad 2007: 46-47; Haraway 2004: 67; Orlie 2010: 117,118), *interactions* could be more pertinently described with the neologism *intra-action* (Barad 2007: 197). Intra-action situates humans in a nexus where the matter of subject/object is indeterminate until delineated through the enactment of a “local causal structure” (Barad 2007: 175). Agency is thus more intricate than a pre-existing cause initiating a predictable effect (Barad 2007: 175-176). Chapter Four takes a closer look at the effect of dis/continuity on cause and effect (pages 213-214), Barad’s understanding of the reality of agency (page 129), and agency that is constituted by a range of materials (page 153).

Barad's (2007: 451 n.22) wariness of the term assemblage stems from her concern that it might be taken to mean an array of individual entities, which would detract from the performativity of agency (Barad 2007: 139-140). Bennett (2010b: 31-34) and Haraway (2004: 306) see agency as fluidly spread or distributed across an array of entities. Tim Knowles' tree drawings below (figures 13-14) offer an example of this.



Figure 13, Tim Knowles, Oak on Easel #1 (2005), C-Type print, dimensions unknown.



Figure 14, detail of Oak on Easel #1, (2005), ink on paper, dimensions unknown.

Maike Bleeker (2020: 6-9 of 24) discusses Tim Knowles' interrogation of agency. Knowles attaches pens to the end twigs of branches. He then appropriately situates paper or canvas on easels so that the wind moves the branch/pen. The drawings that arise he calls tree drawings. For Bleeker, this physical assemblage of elements constitutes a questioning of agency. In other words, Knowles' argument is presented not in words, "but by means of a material discursive formation" (Bleeker 2020: 9 of 24).

However, Radomska (2016: 61-62) is wary of the concept and term agency and chooses to focus on the material affectivity of assemblages. Paradoxically, the agency of assemblage is maintained by internal strife or tensions (Haraway 2004: 24,35). This confirms that tension is potentially generative.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also consider assemblage to be performative. Their notion of the body without organs, which they designate BwO, is not a body minus organs (Deleuze and

Guattari 1987: 149-166). It is a performative arena in that how it works seems to be more pertinent than how it is defined (1987: 30). In this I assume that the BwO is akin to the performativity of artmaking that Bolt (2004) discusses in *Art beyond representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. Deleuze and Guattari imply that with a specific BwO, or performative arena, a process of ordering and territorialising plays out. They call the residues of these processes, strata.

Karen Barad points to a similar process, so reading the performative BwO through Barad's (2007: 119-120) phenomenon is helpful. For Barad (2007: 380), repeatedly delimiting certain kinds of phenomenon – acknowledging what is included as important and what is excluded as less so – constitutes normative practices. Normative practices seemingly densify matter in particular ways. In other words, her normative practices sediment out the world that we experience daily. In this project I interpret Deleuze and Guattari's ordering and territorialising as akin to Barad's phenomena. Ensuing from this, I consider that Deleuze and Guattari's stratification and Barad's sedimentation are very closely related. These understandings are important in the context of becoming human-ish specifically as a body of artmaking experience.

The BwO undoes the organs which render an organism recognisable as an organism. In the context of this study, what is being undone is my being as human. Making art using in-the-dark methods bares and disrupts my underlying assumptions that I am a uniquely, untouchably, clearly demarcated human being. Making art in the dark is, I contend, a BwO. The performativity of in-the-dark methods illuminates my body of artmaking experience as my mode of becoming material, becoming human-ish. Becoming human-ish specifically as a body of experience entails a mutual re-calibration of all the present artmaking materials, time and situatedness. The BwO as an active arena could also be conceived as a spacetime-mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) in its continuum of re-calibrating entities.

The BwO, or spacetime-mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181), is immanent in each specific artmaking engagement. Each creative action also proffers a double articulation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 72). A sedimentation (Barad 2007: 180), or stratification (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 40) process happens with each return to in-the-dark methods. The physical artworks I see as ensuing from these processes. Whatever is engaged in this performative

arena is thus sedimented or stratified, and simultaneously destratified and re-calibrated. I return to this inherent conundrum on page 247.

It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattaris' (1987: 160-161) BwO comes with a cautionary note. They warn that "wildly destratifying" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 160) could trigger a plummet into madness. As in-the-dark methods destratify my untouchably human being, do they constitute a wild destratification? *A Thousand Plateaus* suggests "a meticulous relation with the strata" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 161) as a safeguard. Crucially, I must question whether my body of experience provides such a scrupulous relation.

Barad (2007: 142) seems to prefer the term apparatus to assemblage. This is not simply an array of non-humans and humans. As explored in *Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart* (Barad 2014), an apparatus is a fluid enactment, a "cutting together-apart" (Barad 2014: 177). The act of marking (cutting) what is included and what excluded in an apparatus/practice also manifests the agency of the particular performance (Barad 2014: 176-178).

Marietta Radomska (2016) in *Uncontainable Life: A Biophilosophy of Bioart*, like Bennett (2010b), views assemblage as agency spread across human and non-human modes. Radomska (2016: 38) also confirms Barad's understanding that cuts might offer change or new possibilities. For Sarat Maharaj (2009: 8 of 11), change means breaching uncharted terrain. Bennett (2010b: 23) uses "event-space" or assemblage to describe terrain that ongoingly reworks the relations of the whole. Although I disagree with the notion of wholeness as fixed, I find that "event-space" (Bennett 2010b: 23) re-situated within artmaking is strongly evocative of artmaking as a dynamic. The focus is shifted to the artmaking process as central not merely the lead-up to the artwork as *finale*. I posit that in-the-dark artmaking methods arise from immanent unknowing as a force of differencing. The ways in which the re-configuring "event-space" (Bennett 2010b: 23) forges differences are inseparable from any potential meaning. Artistic process as meaningful in itself converges with practice-led research and Barad's (2007: 141) mattering/meaning. In this context, making art is very much a research mode:

"So for me the point becomes how can we investigate the world, the stuff of the world as the stuff of the world? for me it's as materiality, as stuff

with particular trajectories, and flows and stubborn halts. How is this to be articulated? In the [art]making before the words... we [humans] can't articulate for 'other' materialities. So art is a space of articulation for materials, and is thus a hugely valid research mode in and of itself!" (personal journal 2018-2022: 332).

Barad (2011: 140; 2007: 106) interrogates the experimental outcomes that demonstrate that the ontology or being of particles is indeterminate until situated within a specific set up. In other words, ontologically, there is no mode that is stable and unchanging that could be taken as normal. Neither particles nor people have pre-determined permanent boundaries (Barad 2011: 123,124). Clive Van den Berg's *Porous* (2021) (figures 15-16) is attentive to the openness of the human body: "porosity ... encompasses other people, political and social realities as well as the microscopic unseen world of viruses, fungi and other unseen elements" (Van den Berg in Moloji 2021: 3).



Figure 15, Clive Van den Berg, Porous, (2021), Wood, wax and pigment,

220 x 140 x 22 cm.



Figure 16, Clive Van den Berg, detail of Porous, (2021), Wood, wax and pigment,

220 x 140 x 22 cm.

The reality of our flesh is not so solid after all, there is “a ghost arm alongside the flesh one” (Anzaldúa 1987: 41). For Barad (2010: 246-248), dis/continuity is the ghost that ruffles epistemological and ontological determinacy. Hence, Barad (2007: 185) proposes an onto-epistemology because this acknowledges and values inherent indeterminacy. Haraway (2004: 110) offers the world as a borderland, where the undoing of pre-determined being (Haraway 2004: 67) opens it as a realm rich in mutually constitutive potential. In *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) also experiences boundaries or borders as indeterminate and unnatural divisions.



Figure 17, Caroline Birch, *hauntology green in process*, 2022, oil and wax on Fabriano

100 x 70 cm.

I am haunted by the ghostly beauty with which, under certain conditions, a particle is able to flow simultaneously through two slits (Barad 2010: 255-256). This is also a literal haunting as whatever constitutes matter does so in this spectral manner. Barad (2010: 252) refers to Derrida's hauntology as a polyvalent dynamic that re-works relations of time, presence, understanding and unknowing (Davis 2005: 377,379). I too, find a responsiveness with the dynamic of hauntology in the process of artmaking.

The double slit experiment has been very much written about because it is seemingly a seminal point in recognising quantum physics as radically different from classical physics (Barad 2011: 141). This experiment appears to reveal the ontology of for example, an electron as a particle and a wave. That is, a single electron can pass through two slits at once, demonstrated by the ensuing diffraction patterns. If an instrument is introduced into the experimental set-up, the electron behaves like a particle and passes through only one slit. The nature of the particle in question is not fixed, it is determined within, or together with, the experimental set-up. (Barad 2011: 141-142). That is why I use phrases such as learning *with* materials in this text.

The implications of this are profound. The nature of an entity alters depending on the apparatus used to determine its ontology. The apparatus or observer is an ineluctable player in the forging of matter/meaning (Barad 2011: 141-142). There is no fixed external standard. The particle does not pre-exist with a set of inherent traits by which it might be identified through repeating the 'same' experiment over and over again. Its identity is performed anew with each experiment.

This is *crucial*. That by which something is identified as belonging to a certain type, is indeterminate. In other words, there is no *fixed* normative yardstick because ontology – of both the yardstick and that to which it is applied – is indeterminate and is *performed* not *pre-existing*. However, as Barad (2007: 380) points out, normative *practices* are important. The capacity to be meaningfully responsive to differences in a specific practice, such as painting, develops through the re-iteration of the specific practice. “‘Recognizability’ ... obtains its meaning through its ongoing use in specific practices” (Barad 2007: 380). I prefer the term ‘re-cognise’ because in this artmaking research ‘re-’ acknowledges the presence of ongoing responsiveness to differences that shape *this* version of responsiveness *now*. For Barbara Bolt, in the term representation, ‘re-’ importantly points to a renewal of practice, or “again and

anew” (Bolt 2004: 15). In other words, ‘re-cognise’ acknowledges the evolving and performative nature of my body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 353). Re-cognition and my body of artmaking experience are crucial matters when interrogating the research questions.



Figure 18, Clive Ven den Berg, *African Landscape XII (Gold Below)*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 280 x 280 cm.

Annette Arlander (2018: 45), in *Calling the Dragon, Holding Hands with Junipers: Transpositions in Practice*, discusses the practice of transposing. She finds that in the act of re-locating her creative engagements, something new emerges each time. Even an attempt at mere repetition triggers something other than a replication (Arlander 2018: 57). I surmise that repeated transpositions might lead to a common or re-cognizable thread that runs through the differences of each repetition. Arlander's transpositions point in the direction of Barad's (2007: 380) normative practices.

Thus, for Barad (2007: 380), normative is an evolving practice, not a fixed, immovable, pre-determined yardstick. A more lyrical way of expressing this might be: the horizon has been unmoored from the landscape of cause and effect. South African artist Clive Van den Berg (Moloi 2021: 3) says "when time and space are fractured and collapsing, the horizon cannot remain secure. The perspectival system and logical point of view shifts." Van den Berg speaks of limbo as a hovering indeterminate mode (Moloi 2021: 3). His practice is an important reference in situating in-the-dark artmaking methods.

Spacetimemattering

Spacetimemattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) is relevant to investigating the mutual configuring of in-the-dark artmaking methods and materiality at the core of this research. This mutual shaping, in Barad's words, offers "an untimely collaboration" (2011: 133). In this interpretation, artmaking is not a series of material encounters in a space (that already exists as such) over a time period (measured in already existing unchanging units). *Everything* about right now is re-configuring right now. The space, the time, the matter, and the ways in which they come to mean what they mean *is* spacetimemattering (Barad 2010: 268).

Below is a pertinent example of spacetimemattering. Very recently a friend lent me a book, *American Masters* (O'Doherty 1988). O'Doherty's (1988: 166) discussion places Rothko's and musician Morton Feldman's work side by side. Eleven months ago, I had written about (see page 179) the multidimensionality of Feldman's composition (Wong 2015). What happens to time and meaning since O'Doherty found Rothko in his studio listening to Morton Feldman's *Swallows of Salangan* (1960), since Feldman composed *The Rothko Chapel* (1972), since

O'Doherty (1988) wrote his book, since Wong (2015) wrote her paper, since I read O'Doherty and Wong, since I in turn listened to *Swallows of Salangan* (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa-rTgP2CTQ> Accessed 12 February 2020)? Writing this paragraph is a re-cognising of these apparent coincidences. These seeming time lapses cease to exist as they are drawn together in the same phenomenon, where their meaning is re-configured. Reading this further re-configures the phenomenon of paragraph, time, meaning as a new and different spacetime mattering.

For Barad (2011; 2010; 2007), dis/continuity underlies this infinite differencing. Paradoxically, it is dis/continuity that renders the world stable (Barad 2010: 248). An atom is stable because a quantum of energy, as the smallest possible phenomenon (Barad 2011: 137), is indivisible (Barad 2011: 137; 2010: 246). The indivisible nature of the quantum accounts for dis/continuity because there is no gradual leaking away of energy leading to the change of an electron's state. This change happens only if an entire quantum of energy is available to facilitate the change (Barad 2010: 247). Thus, change is not a continuous segue through time until a new form is arrived at. Change is rupture, to use Barad's term (2011: 139; 2010: 248). There is no flow of gradual change, no time lapsing, just unfathomable difference. Dis/continuity uproots space and time – there is no way of stabilising what they mean and how they relate to each other or the world (Barad 2010: 244).

Difference, otherness, alterity, singularity

De Landa posits that differences arise from practice not from minds (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012: 47). Barad uses various forms of the word, such as “differencing/differing/diffe'ancing” (Barad 2014). She sees difference as active, as differencing. Having destabilised fixed ontology (see page 49), difference ceaselessly re-configures (Barad 2014: 175) and is thus irreducible to sameness (Barad 2010: 265; personal journal 2018-2022: 303,324). Othering is the specific situatedness which engenders particular (still entangled) differences (Barad 2010: 265).

For Haraway (2004: 89) too, difference is generative. Bodies – of all kinds, not only human – are collectively constituted by the differences of the collective components (Haraway 2004: 67). Despite being collectively constituted, we cannot avoid our humanness. Specifically

situating the difference of our human viewpoint within the world of differences is thus vital (Haraway 2004: 89). This is especially so because the potential of reducing difference to sameness is intrinsic to anthropocentrism. If relationship is important only in proximity to man, then all difference is reduced to this one kind of relation (Haraway 2004: 66). Haraway's discursive or theoretical construction centres on humans, radically and specifically situating how particular differences invite engagement (Haraway 2004: 67,89).

Thus, for Haraway (2004: 315), in the interests of not annihilating difference, the smallest entity that could be analysed is relationship. In critiquing difference, Haraway (2004: 329-330) suggests that in Western philosophical traditions, dichotomy is rooted in the practice of analysing difference in terms of its (human) purpose. Haraway views dichotomising as perpetuating the idea that difference is evaluated against the yardstick of sameness. De Landa (2012: 44-45) suggests that duality emerges when differences are generalised and are then placed in relation with one another. Haraway and De Landa both consider that dichotomies or binaries are not useful in knowledge practices that value difference. I argue that the irresolvability of binary relations offers potent and fruitful fields of tension (see page 56).

Jean Baudrillard (2002: 51-56) does not see difference as necessarily synonymous with otherness. In his view, the virtual world brings the potential to eliminate that which is perceived as dangerous, ambiguous or negative in our lives (Baldwin 2018: 2 of 8). Baudrillard's interrogation of singularity is relevant to interrogating the insights arising from this study's artmaking research. For Baudrillard (2002: 51; Baldwin 2018: 3 of 8), singularity is a radical otherness that can never be repeated or replicated. It offers an antidote to the virtual's "culture of equivalence" (Baudrillard in Baldwin 2018: 3 of 8) because it values that which cannot be represented, calculated, predicted or translated.

To Giorgio Agamben in *The Coming Community* (1993: 18-19), singularity upsets the poles of universal/particular. It is free from the kind of either/or choice that knowledge insists on (Agamben 1993: 1). Singularity seemingly takes place (Agamben 1993: 18; Murray & Whyte 2011: 201) because it is a mode that oscillates (Agamben 1993: 18) in an indeterminate field (Murray & Whyte 2011: 202). Agamben's (1993: 1-2,17) whatever singularity belies effect following straight from cause because it is a continuum of emergence (Agamben 1993: 18-19). Whatever is the watershed where all the properties of the singularity run off (Agamben 1993: 19). In other words, although its properties are fluid, not one of them embodies the

difference of this singularity from other singularities (Agamben 1993: 18-19; Murray & Whyte 2011: 201). Whatever singularity is as it is (Agamben 1993: 1). It is “in-difference” (Agamben 1993: 18), where indifference is the dynamic that propagates singularities.

The Gap

There are studies that examine the generative potential of unknowing (Gallacher 1997; Hodgson 1944; Kourie 2008; Morgan 2014; Zembylas 2005), and unknowing as an approach to/of otherness or difference (Kourie 2008; Kwek 2018; Smith 2016; Zembylas 2005). However, there is no evidence of artmaking methods that entail an ongoing and active openness to unknowing. There appears to be a dearth of research methods that offer the possibility of artmaking engagement with materiality as a material. In other words, there is no evidence of polyvalent methods such as in-the-dark artmaking methods that simultaneously: situate the artist as a material while de-centring the artist within the artmaking process; necessarily alter and are altered with the creative process; offer unbounded openness to unknowing; generate differencing and singularity; generate new insights. I find a lack of embodied explorations of the polyvalent potential proffered by unknowing.

‘Gap’ is perhaps an inaccurate description for the lack of understanding unknowing, as understanding is inherently impossible in relation to the infinitude of the unknown, and the immanence of unknowing. The lacuna – or rather, non-place, or no-thing-ness – this study attempts to inhabit is the materiality of artmaking research that is immersed in unknowing. This lack has been re-recognised through this artmaking research and the contextual literature in the fields of visual art and new materialism. In offering unknowing as a methodological approach, in the form of in-the-dark methods, this study might avoid the inevitable flattening of unknowing into an academic field of knowledge.

The hypothesis

In-the-dark artmaking methods proffer a reliable means of availing the generative potential of the unknown. They constitute an aspect of unknowing because they embody active

engagement with the unknown. There is no apparent division between the immanent unknown and immanent materiality. Unknowing I argue is immanent as a force of differencing. Paradoxically, the reliability of in-the-dark artmaking methods lies in their mutability. In other words, they proffer ongoing vulnerability to materiality, or the oscillations of unbounded difference/singularity. I posit that in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and creative process shape one another. In-the-dark methods are approximations until they are specified within artmaking engagement. In being rendered specific, these methods simultaneously render materials specific. In-the-dark methods additionally reveal my body of artmaking experience as my human-ish way of becoming a material in this study. Irreconcilable relations, such as that between the unsayable nature of artmaking and academic writing, manifest fields of tension that are fertile because they are irresolvable. I posit that fields of tension render PLR as a sturdy and generative methodology.

Originality

The originality of this study lies in using in-the-dark artmaking methods to investigate how they, together with materiality, configure this artmaking research. Additionally, in their ongoing re-configurability, these methods continue to offer new ways of engaging with materiality as a material. That is, in-the-dark artmaking methods illuminate my human-ish presence as a body of artmaking experience, not as the artist in control wielding expert knowledge. Through their fluidity, in-the-dark methods nurture ongoing vulnerability to unknowing, and thus to material affect.

The contribution

In-the-dark artmaking methods provide a means of engaging with materiality as a material without imposing any fixed normative yardstick on the artmaking process. I view this contribution as important firstly because in-the-dark methods are practical, so their efficacy lies in using them not in theorising them. Secondly, their usage shifts the illusion that human thinking precedes and is crucial to action and change in creative processes. These methods thus offer a means of opening to unknowing as a generative source. Concomitantly, they offer an approach to the unknown other than one of fearfulness.

Haraway (2004: 334-335) is committed to deconstructing stable categories into methodologies. This study contributes in-the-dark artmaking methods as a research mode that destabilises knowledge as fixed and avails the potential of fields of tension. In response to critique that calls new materialism flat because it rejects an either/or mode (Fox & Alldred 2019: 4), this artmaking research offers multidimensional fields of tension. These are polyvalent because the tension of intentionally unresolved dichotomies or binaries provides openness to creative potential. This potential is borne by the dynamic of materiality and unknowing. Unknowing is thus availed as a force of differencing.

In-the-dark artmaking methods thus offer a mode of creative engagement which: acknowledges and values material differences; allows the dynamic of materiality to drive the process; de-centres human-ish thinking processes without de-valuing them; reveals my body of artmaking experience as a material; renders the body of creative experience vulnerable to material affect and fields of tension. I contend that this study offers an important methodological contribution to the fields of visual arts and new materialism.

Conclusion

Unknowing, in the mode of in-the-dark artmaking methods, provides vulnerability to material affect or affect/being affected. This enables my human-ish self to intra-act freely with and as materiality. My presence, primarily as a body of artmaking experience, is thus situated in the artmaking investigation of the research questions.

In this study, unknowing offers a way of engaging *with* artmaking without dominating the process. This tendency to dominate for me takes the form of imposing imagery as meaning. This ignores the meaning that ensues from: what is included and what excluded from the process; the mutual configuration of in-the-dark artmaking methods and materials; the ongoing intra-acting that draws the viewer into the process; spacetimemattering or the non-linearity of space and time as meaning/matter is forged.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodologies, methods and concomitant literature. This groundwork prepares for Chapter Four, where the research questions and the literature relevant to their specific situation in the artmaking processes are interrogated. Crucially, this

entails re-turning to the ways in which the artmaking processes interrogate the research questions. The investigation is situated in a paradigm where PLR and diffraction methodology are drawn through one another. This contingent methodology additionally affirms *artmaking* as a sturdy means of generating new understandings.



Figure 19, Caroline Birch, detail of and the world 4 flows by in the dark, (2019-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

Chapter Three:

a road to nowhere

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methodologies that I use for interrogating the research questions. The primary methodology for this study is practice-led research – PLR. In my view the irresolvable tensions arising from the PLR proximity of non-verbal and verbal modes give rise to the research questions, propel the enquiry and generate insights that are distinctive to artmaking (Bolt 2007b: 31; personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282,302; Sullivan 2010: 102). I discuss PLR and the methods I use to maintain the rigour of this study.

Paradoxically, this knowledge-generating research is situated in unknowing. Although I develop in-the-dark artmaking methods from unknowing, I do not posit unknowing as a theory or methodology. I am wary of in any way attempting to theorise or ‘methodologise’ a realm that is so generative because it is unknowable. I posit in-the-dark artmaking methods as seminal because these creative methods, that are steeped in learned ignorance (Morgan 2014: 93; Zembylas 2005: 141), generate new understandings. Below I discuss the literature sources from which in-the-dark artmaking methods are evolved. These methods are protean in that they become specified only through usage.

As these methods become specified in creative engagement, the ensuing phenomena (Barad 2007: 119-120) are intensely specific or singular. Handling singularity in research in my view requires diffraction methodology (Barad 2014; 2007; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016), which is the third aspect of my research methodology. Articulating my research methods is challenging because these change within the multidimensionality of artmaking. Although I present the methodologies and methods in sections below, it is self-evident that the methods are entangled. This chapter brings unknowing together with PLR, and diffraction methodology to explore my research questions.

My research questions are:

1. In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?

2. In what ways do these methods engender a deeper awareness of engaging with unknowing and materiality in artmaking practice?
3. What insights arise from using in-the-dark artmaking methods?

Practice-led research (PLR)

PLR situates practitioners' research through their own creative processes at its heart (Barrett & Bolt 2007; Bolt 2006; Gray & Malins 2004; Hannula 2009; Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes 2007; Sullivan 2010). This paradigm is partly premised on the recognition that the ways in which artists interrogate theory within their own practices yields insights that differ from those of other research practices (Bolt 2007b: 31; Sullivan 2010: 102). Mika Hannula (2009: 3 of 20) considers that depth of artmaking experience, or "a background of solid practice and experience" is essential to the development of PLR. This might be partly because experience of the intrinsic slowness of creative research means the researcher allows time for differences to meet and work with or against one another (Hannula 2009: 2 of 20).

PLR valorises the entwining of artmaking/theory as a way of generating original insights. For Barbara Bolt (2006: 2-3 of 7), PLR situates the specificity of artmaking experience at its core. This specificity shapes the kinds of questions, methodology and insights which arise from the research. PLR in my view becomes a dynamic field tensioned by the insights generated in artmaking and the verbal interrogation and articulation of these. Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes (2007: 5 of 18) recognise that artmaking research presents a spectrum that lies between creative practice at one end and research at the other. However, in this text I argue that this spectrum exists not as a continuum (Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes 2007: 5 of 18) but as an oscillating field of tension.

Thus, the tensioned field of artmaking/articulation triggers the research questions (Bolt 2006: 2 of 7; Gray & Malins 2004: 16; 103; Sullivan 2010: 119). The initial contextual literature search helps in understanding the parameters of the fledgling research questions. These glimmerings of insight are drawn back into the artmaking (Gray & Malins 2004: 1, 169; Sullivan 2010: 105), and the research questions are refined (Gray & Malins 2004: 67). The thorough entanglement of practice and theory is vital to a fruitful PLR project (Bolt 2006: 3 of 7; Gray & Malins 2004:

105). The ensuing field of tension and uncertainty proffers the richness of PLR (Mafe 2009: 68) and insights peculiar to artmaking research (Bolt 2007b: 31; Sullivan 2010: 102).

From this tensioned core, methods can be specifically shaped to interrogate the research questions (Gray & Malins 2004: 32,72; Sullivan 2010: 111). Crucially, it must be remembered that these methods are protean not fixed. The verbal articulation of in-the-dark methods in this text is an approximation of their protean performativity. This is borne out by Phllida Barlow who is drawn to uncertainty and approximation. She is “suspicious of certainty” (Barlow in Enright 2018: 3 of 6). She finds herself deeply affected by the uncertainty of discarded objects (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). She states that she cannot know either an object’s exact way of being or its origins. This becomes evident in how she forms her sculptural objects approximately. Thus, approximation rather than accuracy in interpreting her materials into sculptural forms becomes an intrinsic part of her creative process.

Representational research modes generally ignore that articulating performativity is an approximate practice and assume that material engagement might be observed from the outside and thus focus on outcomes (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17). The PLR immersion of artist-researcher within the artmaking process is additionally important because my research questions interrogate materiality, and my seeming centrality as artist within artmaking processes. However, as becomes apparent in the next chapter, tensions – in the form of fields of tension – seem to provide a sturdiness in this research (personal journal 2018-2022: 282-283). In my experience, this tension renders PLR robust, and simultaneously keeps its parameters fluid and open (personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282). Creative research increasingly values fluidity, “where openness and indeterminacy are not seen as flaws of the system, but as advantages” (Thun-Hohenstein 2009: 2 of 3). Thus, in my view PLR is a potentially polyvalent or multidimensional paradigm.

Journaling is an important method contributing to the rigour of PLR (Gray & Malins 2004: 58, 59-60, 113-114). For me, it is a crucial way of working towards understanding the literature and the dynamics of creative process, and of artmaking and academic reading/writing. In this study, the journaling is verbal and visual. I differ from the view that the richness of journaling lies in its reflectivity (Somerville 2007: 237; 2008: 218). Bozalek and Zembylas (2017: 16 of 22) confirm that reflexivity is limiting in journaling. The journal offers a site for re-considering or

re-configuring (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017: 17 of 22) the experience of artmaking as situated research (Gray & Malins 2004: 58). It is thus an insightful means of documenting and pondering the research journey (Gray & Malins 2004: 15). The research journal is not necessarily a book, but it is a place where a range of information is collated, fleshed out, and consulted regularly as an “interactive device” (Gray & Malins 2004: 15). It thus constitutes a facet of diffracting practice and theory through one another. Journaling is also a site for opening up so called failures and/or mistakes (Gray & Malins 2004: 21). This contributes to the accessibility, transparency, and transferability of what Gray and Malins (2004: 168) consider to be sturdy research.

However, I question transferability in artmaking research unless transferability is understood as a protean matter. Transparency is also questionable as in my opinion it is tied to an assumption that it is the elevated human view which can see through and understand the many layers at work in artmaking research. The problem of perceived transparency is highlighted by Maaikje Bleeker (2017). Sophisticated optical technology enables humans to see planets at vast distances. Ironically, this obscures the perceptual particularities of, and differences between, the optical instruments and the human instruments. Ignoring the particularities of technological and human perceptual systems, and how they meet, gives rise to an illusion of directly accessible imagery, that is, transparency (Bleeker 2017: 3-4 of 12).

In this study, where my verbal thinking processes are sidelined by in-the-dark methods, I do not experience the artmaking research process as transparent. Indeed, much of the time I have no idea of what is about to happen creatively (personal journal 2018-2022: 305,331). Barad (2007: 97) contends that neither language nor observation are transparent activities. One cannot assume that these activities do not change that with which they engage.

I suggest that honesty is a more appropriate mode for investigating materiality in a way that does not assume an overview (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360) or mastery of artmaking materials (Bolt 2007a: 1 of 4). In both journal and thesis writing I attempt to be as clear as possible while acknowledging that what constitutes clarity is evaluated from my human standpoint. Using human language to articulate processes that are shaped by non-verbal engagement with other-than-human materials seems to me to be a contested and non-transparent practice.

The following are PLR methods I adopt in this research:

- The research questions are generated by my artmaking practice (Bolt 2006: 2 of 7; Gray & Malins 2004: 16; 103; Sullivan 2010: 119).
- Artmaking specifically shapes methods for interrogating the research questions (Bolt 2006: 2 of 7).
- A stance of honesty and care entails acknowledging: that artmaking intelligence is situated communally within materials and creative process (Bolt 2007a: 2 of 4; personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303); my body of experience is rooted in this communal intelligence; a willingness to wait (Oksanen 2019: 4) for the responsiveness of communal intelligence; whence artmaking research emerges and where it is heading are partly invisible to the researcher (this aspect arises from this research); the ways in which these affect the research processes.
- The tensions generated by the research are valued as they manifest generative fields of tension (a method arising from this research).
- The body of artwork and the thesis will provide complementary elements for my final submission (Adams 2014: 226; Gray & Malins 2004: 165; Macleod & Holdridge 2005: 197).
- The final submission will include my personal research journals and the residues of those artmaking processes that are not part of my final exhibition of artwork.
- Journaling (Gray & Malins 2004: 59-60) is a way of re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) my artmaking processes; attempting to articulate differences and singularities; acknowledging and examining my assumptions and my experiential knowledge; following traces of affect/being affected; tracking the affects of in-the-dark methods; reading differences through one another.
- Notetaking from literature sources provides a network connecting sources, specific aspects of my artmaking process, questions, insights, other artists.
- Photography and video clips provide a means of non-verbally re-considering creative processes (Gray & Malins 2004: 30, 89, 108-110).

From unknowing to in-the-dark methods

Unknowing assumes neither ignorance nor knowledge (Zembylas 2005: 142,150). *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Gallacher 1997; Hodgson 1944) discusses a mode of progressive exclusions, the *via negativa*, as a means of immersing in unknowing. The premise that God is unknowable lies at its core (Gallacher 1997: 1 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xli; Kourie 2008: 62; Zembylas 2005: 140). Gallacher, Hodgson, Kourie, and Zembylas consider that God cannot be comprehended through language or discursive thought processes, (Gallacher 1997: 7 of 12; Hodgson 1944: xli; Kourie 2008: 62; Zembylas 2005: 143), through viewpoints in general, or through literal or mental imagery (Gallacher 1997: 7 of 12). Following the *via negativa* into nothingness or unknowing means also eschewing space, time and place (Kourie 2008: 64), and separate identity (Hodgson 1944: xli). That is, “we ‘un-know’ the normal content of our awareness in order that an awareness of God may flow in” (Zembylas 2005: 140).

The intention of the *via negativa* is to unite with God (Gallacher 1997; Hodgson 1944; Zembylas 2005). Adorno’s (Morgan 2014: 2) untraceable rhythm shifts the attention from God to the unknowable or nothingness itself. From this viewpoint the *via negativa* is a way to access the unknown or unknowing and its generative potential (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 1-2). The unknown/unknowing is unapproachable through the means mentioned above. These exclusions are thus important roots for in-the-dark artmaking methods.

Gallacher (1997) describes the transcendence process in *The Cloud of Unknowing* as hierarchical because experiencing the ineffable is beyond the faculties of the senses and the intellect (Gallacher 1997: 2 of 12). In the context of new materialism this is a negative aspect of the *via negativa* because new materialism is intended to undo the hierarchical perceptions that humans impose on the world. Additionally, new materialism posits the forcefulness of matter as immanent not transcendent (Bennett 2010b: 3; Fries 2017: 2,7,13; Johnson 2014: 613; Radomska 2016: 119).

If in-the-dark methods are partly rooted in the *via negativa* then I must question whether they are hierarchical. The hierarchy apparent in *The Cloud* is embedded in the view that the divine exists apart from, and above, humankind (Kourie 2008: 64). A trajectory that aims at attaining such a divine realm – like the *via negativa* – is probably anthropocentric. I contend that removing a goal (Morgan 2014: 229) that embodies a pinnacle of knowledge or

achievement undoes the potential for hierarchical engagement. I find that in-the-dark methods are not hierarchical because they do not assume ultimate knowledge as a pre-ordained destination (personal journal 2018-2022: 305,330). Excluding a pre-determined route and goal is thus a potent in-the-dark method.

British artist Phyllida Barlow confirms this. Some of her creative methods lie close to some of the in-the-dark methods of this project. Barlow talked about her creative processes at length when she was invited to deliver The Shenkman Lecture in Contemporary Art 2019 (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). Barlow does not start with an idea that she then situates as a goal for her artistic process. Rather, the act of making leads her to the idea behind the work. In Barlow's words: "even though I'm not sure of the outcome, the outcome will reveal itself." (Barlow in Enright 2018: 3 of 6). This is akin to the in-the-dark method of removing a pre-determined goal from my work process.



Figure 20, Phyllida Barlow, Folly, (2017), installation view, dimensions variable.

I believe that traces of unknowing run through PLR as a methodology. Barbara Bolt (2007a: 3 of 4) suggests that in the material dynamism of artmaking research, outcomes are unknowable in advance. How then does artmaking proceed along an unknowable trajectory? In the foreword to *Visualizing Research* (Gray & Malins 2004: x) Mike Press posits wonder as the driving passion behind asking and investigating questions. Rachel Jones (2009: 1 of 8) offers wonder as a response to the unknown. For Margaret Somerville (2008: 210), processes of wondering and of generating arise from not knowing. What I call wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) is an in-the-dark method, or a mode of curious enquiry that requires no advance knowledge of the way ahead.

Gray and Malins (2004: 30) consider that experimenting with artmaking processes and materials is a valuable PLR method. In line with unknowing, I do not aim for experimentation as a goal. Instead, I “move *away* [original emphasis] from understanding” (Morgan 2014: 111) in this study. In my opinion, experimentation as a method reifies anthropocentric gauges of what constitutes either normal or experimental. However, using materials out of their traditional or usual context (Kwek 2018: 12) is an in-the-dark method that for me seems to carry artmaking into uncharted terrain. It is vital to acknowledge that in using this in-the-dark method I too am transported beyond my range of normal, and am thus, together with materials, being worked in unusual ways (personal journal 2018-2022: 340).

For Kourie (2008: 64) the *via negativa* is useful partly because it avoids crystallizing thought into theory. In-the-dark artmaking methods are intended to manifest learned ignorance (Morgan 2014: 93, 116; Zembylas 2005: 141) so that the artmaking of this study becomes open to the affect/being affected of materiality. Learned ignorance is a positive element of the *via negativa*. This is not a refusal to understand but an acknowledgement that understanding (of unknowing and otherness) is impossible (Zembylas 2005: 140-141). In *Knowing as Distributed Practice: Twenty-first Century Encounters with the Universe* Bleeker (2017) acknowledges that there are some arenas, for example, distant planets, to which humans do not have direct access. This inaccessibility includes some of the perceptual systems which mediate between technology and humans (Bleeker 2017: 3-4 of 12).

In *Mediants, Materiality, Normativity*, Arjun Appadurai (2015: 233) discusses mediation as a practice or an assemblage or site (see Bennett’s concept of event space on pages 45,113). He sees mediating practices as inclusive of human and non-human elements (Appadurai 2015:

232). Materiality provides the range of possibilities (Appadurai 2015: 225) or background (Manning 2017: 100; Krummel 2012: 18) from which mediating practices draw their effects. Importantly, mediating practices and materiality exist only in relation to one another, not individually or prior to one another (Appadurai 2015: 225). Although I experience writing this thesis as a mediating practice (in relations such as non-verbal/verbal, invisible/visible), I do not pursue the question of mediation as an accountable practice. Nevertheless, I speculate that mediation is an aspect of negotiating fields of tension, such as the tensioned field of writing accountably of artmaking research.

Maharaj (2009: 1 of 11) asks what kind of knowledge is generated by visual arts research, and how it is different from other kinds of research. He suggests its difference lies in the way in which it oscillates between know-how and ignorance: “it is neither hard-nosed know-how nor its ostensible opposite, ignorance” (Maharaj 2009: 1 of 11). Maharaj (2009: 1,4 of 11) then offers a mode he calls “thinking through the visual”. I would re-phrase this as *artmaking as thinking* to avoid possible anthropocentric assumptions that human thinking precedes material activity. Maharaj’s (2009: 4 of 11) mode he suggests is not equivalent to visual thinking whose structure is linguistic, with images simply replacing words. The discursive is not the motor of Maharaj’s artmaking as thinking, although it is one of its gears. Valuing artmaking as thinking is an in-the-dark method that engages my body of artmaking experience primarily through the somatic realm (personal journal 2018-2022: 354-355).

I consider that the potency of artmaking research is tied to a capacity to be affected by materials. Artist Amba Sayal-Bennett’s (2018) research paper *Diffraction Analysis: Embodied Encounters in Contemporary Artistic Video Practice* confirms this. (In this study I refer only to Sayal-Bennett’s research paper, not her artworks.) Sayal-Bennett investigates how focus on the somatic register drives her embodied creative process. This entails awareness of material affect which she describes as an intensity that moves across and through bodies, aligned to but not wholly ascribable to emotions and feelings. Its unfettered range of movement implies that affect augments capacity to act (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 3 of 17).

In PLR, where the researcher is inseparable from the research questions, I view the human somatic register as a vital element. Sayal-Bennett (2018: 1 of 17) and Lori Clarke (2019: 126) consider how, through attention to the somatic register, tensions might engender creative response. It seems that the somatic registering of material disturbances (Sayal-Bennett 2018:

5 of 17) need not be dominated by the verbal mode (personal journal 2018-2022: 292). Sayal-Bennett sees disruptions as nodes where material affect augments the capacity to act, allowing affect to flow through artmaking processes (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17) independently of thinking processes. In other words, materials are active participants in the work of art-as-research. Allowing the ‘thinking’ of materials to replace my thinking in the artmaking process becomes an in-the-dark method.

The capacity to be affected by materials enables a thinking *with* materials (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 13 of 17). Paul Carter (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 19-20,30) interrogates his experience of the “plastic and discursive intelligence” (Carter in Barrett & Bolt 2007: 21) of materials. Creative intelligence seems to be communal (Bolt 2007: 2 of 4; personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303). The in-the-dark method of full immersion (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196) in the communal intelligence of process and materials allows my body of experience to respond immediately with material affect. This reveals further in-the-dark methods of trusting both my body of artmaking experience and communal intelligence, and sometimes speeding up or exaggerating the creative action.

Phyllida Barlow confirms working at speed as an in-the-dark method. She turns her time constraints into a method. In the short slots of time available to her, she requires herself to reach some kind of visible result. Thus, working at speed becomes an artmaking method (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023).

Lenz Taguchi (2012: 272) posits that how materials affect us by interfering with our somatic register is important. Lenz Taguchi (2012: 267), and Sayal-Bennett (2018: 7-8 of 17), use “becoming-minoritarian” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 105-106) as a way of moving beyond the limits of sameness and stability, extending thinking processes beyond the human mind (Lenz Taguchi 2012: 267). Three differently nuanced in-the-dark methods arise from this. Becoming minor by focusing on the somatic allows my body of artmaking experience to respond freely with artmaking process and materials. Taking the risk of becoming minor opens me to unknowing and affect. Returning repeatedly to the somatic maintains the openness of my body of experience to unknowing and materiality.

In this study I posit that in-the-dark methods introduce disruption into and/or ignite my awareness of materiality and communal intelligence within 'my' artmaking processes (personal journal 2018-2022: 326,343,354-355,359-360).

My in-the-dark methods are as follows:

- Eschewing all imagery (Gallacher 1997: 1 of 9; Hodgson 1944: xxxv; Waddington 1969: 135; Zembylas 2005: 143), that is, reference, mental and visual imagery, means that indeterminacy remains unobscured. This allows the creative trajectory to open to indeterminacy and affect (this aspect arises from this research).
- Removing any planning or reasoning process (Gallacher 1997: 5 of 9; Hodgson 1944: xli; Zembylas 2005: 143) maintains indeterminacy and openness to affect (this aspect arises from this research).
- Eschewing separate identity (Barad 2007: 135); Hodgson 1944: xli) entails acknowledging and valuing difference.
- Not instantiating a pre-determined route and goal (Morgan 2014: 229) maintains indeterminacy and openness to affect (this aspect arises from this research).
- Wondering (Somerville 2007: 237; 2008: 218) in thought and wandering in artmaking action, that is, wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) offer a mode of curious enquiry (Birch 2018).
- Relocating materials out of their traditional or normal contexts of use (Kwek 2018) excludes normative yardsticks when engaging with them.
- Engaging a stance of unknowing (Vasudevan 2011) or "no-how" Maharaj (2009: 3,4 of 11) means intentionally not seeking to either know or ignore (Zembylas 2005: 150) the 'voice' of communal intelligence (Bolt 2007b: 30).
- Acknowledging and valuing artmaking as a mode of thinking (Maharaj 2009) where the affectiveness of materials enables artistic process to be a thinking *with* materials (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 13 of 17).
- Utter immersion (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fires 2017: 52,196) in the artmaking process maintains openness to affect.
- Following the cues of being affected or enchantment with immediate action (Bennett 2010b: xii; Fries 2017: 155) entails a fingertip, moment-by-moment responsiveness.

- Trusting my body of artmaking experience enables me to recognise and follow the cues generated by communal intelligence (a method arising from this research).
- Speeding up and/or exaggerating artmaking actions (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023; Birch 2018: 91; Gombrich 1984: 479) helps to move through not knowing as a negative experience (Cocker 2013: 126) and maintain openness to affect and openness of my body of artmaking experience (this aspect arises from this research).
- Becoming minor (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 105-106; Lenz Taguchi 2012: 267; Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17) by focusing on the somatic (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155; Sayal-Bennett 2018) rather than the mental register enables my body of artmaking experience to be responsive (this aspect arises from this research).
- Remaining somatically open and aware (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155) by repeatedly returning to bodily sensation (Clarke 2019: 126) maintains openness and responsiveness of my body of artmaking experience (this aspect arises from this research).
- Taking the risk of being open means being vulnerable (Clarke 2019: 126) to unknowing (this aspect arises from this research) and the movements of affect.
- Working incrementally (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360) means destabilising an overview of, and the ability to resolve or unify, the work in process (a fresh in-the-dark method arising from *bloubefok*, [2021], discussed on page 204).
- Refraining from instilling meaning into the process or interpreting meaning of the artwork maintains open-endedness of the trajectory of creative process (a fresh in-the-dark method arising from *in stalling the world +* [pages 182,196] and the *hauntologies*, [2022], [page 209]).
- Eschewing attempts to resolve inconsistencies such as binaries allows for the generative presence of fields of tension (a method arising from this research).
- Excluding a defined focal point is a way of maintaining indeterminacy of the creative process (a fresh in-the-dark method that emerged from the *hauntologies*, discussed on page 212-215).

Diffraction methodology

Barad (2014: 168) offers re-turning as a crucial method of diffraction methodology. She does not mean this in the sense of going back or trying to capture what has passed. Re-turning offers a way of tuning in to the generation of differences, that is, diffraction. Diffraction does not follow a pre-ordained pattern. Nor is it a string of discrete events (Barad 2014: 169). It is a re-patterning of the ways in which entangling differences forge further differences. Intra-acting is differencing (Barad 2014: 175). Thus, diffraction is a forceful dynamic, where “[e]ach moment is an infinite multiplicity ... an infinitely rich condensed mode” (Barad 2014: 169).

Differencing or diffraction might thus be experienced as unsettling. Many artists acknowledge that artmaking research is indeterminate and uncertain terrain to navigate. Some consider not knowing as negative or not generative in itself (Cocker 2013: 126), whereas others see it as the forceful potential of unknowing (Birch 2018: 21; Ings 2014: 4, 11 of 14; Jones 2009; Mafe 2009: 58). In-the-dark methods are intended to tap into indeterminacy and the uncertainty of unknowing in a fruitful way.

According to Barad (2007: 139) entities do not have determinate forms and properties until these are precipitated by intra-action. The notions ‘failure’ and ‘mistake’ are also indeterminate. Failure additionally points to a negative human evaluative barometer. Yet I do use failure, being careful to engage with perceived failure as potentially fruitful. Self-evidently, words are vital in a range of human communication. What my experience of failure highlights is that how we approach words/meanings affects material engagements. As a node of disruption (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17) failure might be generative (Green 2015: 10 of 13). How I engage with failure shapes my artmaking process (page 141). Acknowledging and valuing indeterminacy I consider means acknowledging and valuing difference, including failure.

Importantly, diffraction methodology focuses on where the effects of interference patterns appear (Haraway 2004: 70) rather than of what type these differences are (Barad 2014: 172). Additionally, Amitav Ghosh (2021: 34-35) suggests that modes of thinking that ensue from an initial ‘when’ question quickly lessen potential into a narrow determinate band. Questions rooted in ‘where’ acknowledge that agency extends beyond humans (Ghosh 2021: 34-35). Thus, situatedness seems central to differencing or diffraction.

Diffraction is a physical phenomenon where waves disrupt and entangle by meeting either an obstacle or each other (Barad 2007: 28; Bozalek & Zembylas 2017: 6 of 22; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 1 of 6). Diffraction occurs in water, sound, and light (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017: 6 of 22). In diffraction experiments (Barad 2014: 170-171), light appears unexpectedly (without apparent cause) in dark terrain, and *vice versa*: “Bands of light appear inside the shadow region – the region of would-be total darkness; and bands of darkness appear outside the shadow region. There is no sharp boundary separating the light from the darkness” (Barad 2014: 170). This experiment surprisingly shows that adding further light to existing light can generate darkness. **“Darkness is not mere absence, but rather an abundance** [my emboldened emphasis]” (Barad 2014: 171).

The dynamism that specifies patterns of difference exceeds either/or – light *or* dark – it is “both and” (Manning 2017: 104), or indeterminacy (Barad 2014: 178), or a productive field of tension (personal journal 2018-2022: 294,309,326). The diffractive behaviour of light (Barad 2014: 170) is important because it offers a visible demonstration of the fluid or indeterminate nature of boundaries. In this study, the indeterminacy of boundaries is crucial to the way in which in-the-dark methods, materiality, and artmaking processes configure together, and thence generate insights. Thus, indeterminacy is bound up in the capacity of in-the-dark methods to configure with creative process and generate new understandings.

For Barad (2014: 168) re-turning, that is, “re-turning as in turning it over and over again” is a generative diffractive method. As an approach to methodology, diffraction suggests one should be attuned to the assonances and dissonances within one’s range of contextual reading. For Barad (2007: 71) this means “reading insights through one another”. The discussions in Chapter Four constitute diffractive readings of this artmaking research, where creative intra-actions are re-figured through verbal articulation.

Choice of wording – for example, artmaking as thinking – is important in another way. Choosing words clearly emanates from theoretical sources and from artmaking experience, offering further evidence of the productive entangling of practice and theory. Pondering words drawn from theory requires a re-turn (Barad 2014: 168) to certain artmaking engagements. New insights emerge from re-turning practice through verbal articulation. This additionally demonstrates PLR as a polyvalent methodology.

The diffraction methods I employ in this research are as follows:

- Reading my artmaking process diffractively (Barad 2014; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 1 of 6) through the work of Fries, Knowles, Rothko, and Van den Berg means that the ways in which these processes/works differ might generate research insights.
- Acknowledging and valuing indeterminacy leads to: acknowledging, valuing and being responsive with differences; not attempting to override indeterminacy with settled/fixed research outcomes by acknowledging where averaging out is necessary (this aspect arises from this research).
- Engaging with failure and other disruptions as generative (Green 2015: 10 of 13; Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17) is a way of working with, not flattening out fields of tension (this aspect arises from this research).
- Reading theory, notetaking, and personal journals through one another means that the ways in which they are different might generate research insights.
- Re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) artmaking processes with verbal articulation re-configures creative process as a way of generating insights.
- Choosing terms from a nexus of experiential and theoretical knowledge draws artmaking into academic articulation.

A heuristic for working 'in the dark'

The *via negativa* indicates an openness that is passive so it might receive experience of God/otherness (Zembylas 2005: 146). I contend that in-the-dark methods constitute a receptiveness that oscillates between passive and active, allowing me to become a responsive material within the artmaking process. It seems that it is my mind that becomes open and passive while my body of artmaking experience is active (personal journal 2018-2022: 305). Welby Ings (2014: 9 of 14) attests to a state where thoughts are received rather than pursued. Satu Oksanen (2019: 4) voices "a tolerance for waiting". Fries (2017: 54) articulates a willingness to be with the elements of artmaking without attempting to hold onto them.

For me, passive receptiveness has come to mean accepting and simultaneously responding *with* the cues of communal artmaking intelligence whether they align with my own mental thinking processes or not. As this research is embedded in unknowing it is not possible to

develop *in advance* a step-by-step implementation of in-the-dark methods. Green (2015) attests to research as “always a fumbling act of discovery, where researchers only know what they are doing when they have done it; and only know what they are looking for when they have found it” (Hamilton in Green: 5 of 13).

An act/wait/act heuristic offers a means of engaging in-the-dark methods (Birch 2018). In other words, in responding with communal intelligence I make an artmaking move or series of moves, await further cues arising from the community of materials/methods/process, make another move/series of moves. This heuristic is confirmed by Wong (2015: 5) in her discussion of the work methods of composer Morton Feldman, who “responded to the hints, the calls, and sometimes outright commands” of his instruments. This also allows me to engage respectfully and sensitively in artmaking intra-actions, without flattening the dynamics of indeterminacy or of fields of tension.

In-the-dark methods are approximate modes that are shaped in the immediacy of intra-action (Barad 2007: 128). Chapter Four discusses specific engagements with in-the-dark methods. Acknowledging and valuing the roots of in-the-dark methods for me constitutes an element of integrity in this study. Additionally, I surmise that in this root form, in-the-dark methods might be transferrable as their specificity is left open to potential re-configuration in other research projects.

Conclusion

Jane Bennett (2010b: 31-34) posits material agency as distributed (see pages 145,147). For Sayal-Bennett (2018: 13 of 17), this raises questions about who/what is responsible for the insights generated by artmaking research. It is vital in her view to acknowledge the central role of materials in generating theory (Sayal-Bennett 2018: 13 of 17). In my opinion, this requires a re-cognising of my own participation as a material in theory generation. The relation of methodology to theory also requires re-consideration of how methodology is constituted. For Macleod and Holdridge (2005: 197) “[m]ethodology can be defined as a demonstration of theory that has previously been articulated, or theory that is articulated by the work itself”. This study’s contribution, in my view, leans towards the latter, additionally affirming PLR as a knowledge-generating paradigm.

Maharaj (2009: 1 Of 11) proposes that an essential element of artmaking as thinking is a thorough investigation of its protean methods. Maharaj (2009: 2 of 11) considers that experiential knowledge is continually changing as materials are handled. Framing this perceptual experience within a rigid overarching methodology endangers situated understanding. Experiential knowledge thus shapes research from within because artmaking methods are by necessity impromptu, “forged again and again on the spot” (Maharaj 2009: 2 of 11). In-the-dark methods are liable to change within the immediacy of artmaking.



Figure 21, Caroline Birch, detail of and the world 4 flows by in the dark, (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

In *Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter*, Barbara Bolt (2007a) challenges certain modes of artmaking. She finds that by focussing on embodying intentions and meanings in their artwork, artists tend to lose track of the forcefulness of materials (Bolt 2007a: 3 of 4). Lenz Taguchi (2012: 269) sees looking for meaning as a potential pitfall as in this kind of interpretive activity the researcher's own inner normative framework could subsume difference. For these reasons, I avoid paying particular attention to meanings that may be generated by artmaking. However, in Chapter Four (pages 137-138), chicken wire as an artmaking material insists on some consideration of meaning.

Working with artistic research methodologies comes with potential pitfalls. A polar – either/or – approach to artmaking research means there is a danger of missing singularity. Artmaking as thinking is a mode that that seems to dissolve the poles of individual and general, segueing between particular and universal without settling on one or the other (Maharaj 2009: 2 of 11). However, approaching creative research as only an oscillating mode poses the danger of treating singularity as a continuous essence or as 'normal' in artmaking practice (Maharaj 2009: 3 of 11). This I see as a possible averaging out of singularity. In attempting to avoid both these dangers, I intentionally inhabit fields of tension through using in-the-dark artmaking methods. The next chapter investigates the specifics of how I inhabit the indeterminacy of artmaking.

Chapter Four: *lit up by the dark*

Introduction

The previous chapter introduces in-the-dark methods in the form in which they have been developed from theory. Unavoidably, in this form they are generalised methods. This chapter discusses how engagement renders them particular, and how this, together with specific materials, shapes my artmaking processes. Interestingly, when situated in the specifics of artmaking, I was surprised by the appearance of new in-the-dark methods.

Certain kinds of artmaking processes seem to have engendered particular areas of insight. This chapter discusses four different types of creative process. Each of these four subsections draws the relevant literature into the interrogation of the research questions. The processes examined below are the oil paintings; the light pods; the stick installation; and the wax ground works.

In the first section, *processing painting* (page 82), I investigate material affect in the light of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261) and following the flows of matter (Fries 2017: 22; Ingold 2012: 433). Removing a goal from artmaking processes is the central in-the-dark method interrogated here. Within practice, this method takes on the more specific mode of excluding a planned trajectory and imagery of any kind. The ensuing curious enquiry becomes a heuristic mode of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). My body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265) is thence revealed as a vital materiality in this artmaking research. This entails acknowledging my habitual or mechanical modes and questioning my assumptions and normative yardsticks.

The light pod processes (page 128) necessitate an interrogation of the assumed fixity or solidity of matter and the indeterminacy of boundaries or borders. Immanent indeterminacy requires that I investigate my understanding of agency or cause and effect. These matters are interrogated in creative processes where the prime in-the-dark method is using materials out of traditional or usual contexts (Kwek 2018). The light pod processes are the only creative

engagements in this study that have insisted that I include some consideration of meaning in this text.

Working with the stick installation (page 163) has triggered a re-configuration of my cognisance of difference and singularity. This leads on to a discussion of uselessness as a mode that offers multidimensional potential because it moves beyond the one-dimensionality of either/or (Kwek 2018: 30,37). *in stalling the world +* (2020, figures 60-63,65,70-72) is a rich learning process, I surmise partly because proximate dichotomies manifest productive fields of tension. The space of the installation becomes a spacetime mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181).

In *the wax ground works* (page 193), I return to excluding a pre-defined goal. This re-turn (Barad 2014: 168) appears as an eschewal of instilling meaning or focal point into the wax works' creative processes. Wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) re-iterates these engagements as material enquiry where I respond *with* rather than *to* material affect. Boundaries re-appear as indeterminate borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987: 3), haunted by dis/continuity.

This chapter explores how in-the-dark methods, as discussed in the previous chapter, are rendered specific by the presence of materials, and the ensuing ways in which the artmaking process is configured. It is also important to point out that the affectivity of in-the-dark methods is partly and sometimes wholly invisible. Removing imagery, for example, has an immediately apparent effect. The in-the-dark artmaking methods below I contend open the way for an invisible and untraceable rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2). Valuing unknowing's potential (Vasudevan 2011: 1154; Maharaj 2009: 3,4 of 11) I argue is implicit in using in-the-dark methods. By not seeking either to know or to ignore (Zembylas 2005: 150) affect requires trusting my body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265) to respond *with* the communal intelligence of materials (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293). In writing this academic text, I realise that this invisible method of trust haunts each artmaking encounter in this study. The ensuing utter immersion in artmaking (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196) enables immediate responsive action to be triggered by affect. A stance of honesty is vital to acknowledging that the fecundity of difference in artmaking research is availed when I relinquish perceived control of the process.

processing painting

In this section, the prime in-the-dark method is removing a goal from the artmaking process. This entails excluding all reference imagery and any planned trajectory. Removing a goal manifests a heuristic mode of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184), revealing my body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265) as an artmaking material. It becomes evident through the painting processes that the boundaries of my being are indeterminate, and that I am not the director of creative processes. Once these internal/external, or normative boundaries are destabilised, my body of artmaking experience opens me to the sways of materiality. When dichotomies are destabilised as an either/or mode a productive field of tension appears. In this study, my somatic register is more attuned than the mental register to this sometimes-rocky terrain.

It is important to remember that within artmaking in-the-dark methods are not distinct, they segue into one another in a nuanced way (personal journal 2018-2022: 354). The discussion below begins with excluding a pre-defined goal and any planning and trajectory concomitant to this. Writing about immersing artmaking practice in unknowing through in-the-dark methods requires an interrogation of artmaking materials and of receptivity to unknowing. Thus, the literature on matter and materiality, and unknowing constitutes part of the discussion with painting.

If forward planning and pre-defined trajectory are absent, how do the steps of artmaking research unfold? Importantly, my act/wait/act approach capacitates me to engage with in-the-dark artmaking methods. This heuristic is central to the discussion of curious enquiry as an in-the-dark method of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). It is also relevant in light of the way in which in-the-dark methods intentionally disable certain aspects of myself, and reveal other aspects, as discussed below.

This PLR begins with artmaking. There are two important aspects to PLR in the context of this chapter. Unearthing the research questions is initially a non-verbal process. I assume this is because making art as research is an active mode where I find the creative process *is* non-verbal questioning. The second aspect is the way in which the non-verbal shapes the approach to discourse. Journaling – a central PLR method (Gray & Malins 2004: 59-60) – has been pivotal in pointing the way towards articulating the research questions and towards relevant

theories. By following the clues offered by painting and journaling, this investigation turns to artmaking materials and materiality.

Although I have eschewed imagery from my painting processes since 2016, using this as an in-the-dark method is more nuanced in this study than in previous research (Birch 2018). Excluding imagery is the way in which I interpret removing a pre-determined goal (Morgan 2014: 229). This means eschewing *all* imagery: “I [need] to lose all visual reference imagery (drawings, photos, mental images, everything)” (personal journal 2018-2022: 265). Working non-figuratively generally means that composition and the use of other formal elements, (such as colour, line, shape, texture, and tone) is planned to some extent. Although the abstract expressionists largely dispensed with figuration and coherent geometric shapes (Waddington 1969: 135), I cannot assume that some planning of creative process was also jettisoned. However, removing a goal means that I cannot plan any aspect of the painting process, including how I might use these formal elements. Excluding planning means I cannot impose a trajectory in advance of the creative process. This requires that

I [have] to act without knowing in advance what that action [will] be ... Removing all visual reference ... showed that I have a fund of experiential knowledge. That is, knowledge that has come from making art, and is now a part of my being. It cannot be unknown. ... In removing ref[erence] imagery (that is, embedding uncertainty), I began to make art without advance knowledge of the process, but with my experiential knowledge on call, available. I didn't know what would be called forth from this well of experiential knowledge, but I knew it was constantly available when making art. (personal journal 2018-2022: 265)

First, through the relevant literature I take a closer look at what it means to remove a goal. According to Morgan, an intentionally predetermined destination flattens creativity: “pointed determined routes are not creative, they block” (Morgan 2014: 229). In Morgan's (2014: 2) case, she engages Adorno's untraceable rhythm by removing a pre-defined goal from her thesis (other than that of fulfilling academic requirements). For Adorno, a rhythm of a different kind arises when the focus of immaterial or metaphysical thinking shifts from trying to define the subject of metaphysics to ephemerality itself (Morgan 2014: 2). This is evident

in viewing Mark Rothko's paintings. According to Brian O'Doherty (1988: 160,165) it is difficult to focus on the vagueness of Rothko's colour field paintings because their vagueness "*escapes attention*" (O'Doherty 1988: 160).



Figure 22, Mark Rothko, No. 21 (Red, Brown, Black and Orange), (1951), oil on canvas, 241 x 163 cm.

Without a preconceived goal, the indefinable presence of unknowing begins to emerge through Morgan's writing. Rather than a definite goal, she chooses a "destined no place" (Morgan 2014: 2), with unknowing providing the appropriate means of arriving at non-destination. In submitting research for examination, a "destined no place" (Morgan 2014: 2) seems to be unavoidable. Yet it nevertheless is possible to avoid pre-determining where artistic process is heading. Here, PLR is effective because I can align the destined non-destination to academic writing, leaving a sense of creative process's freedom to roam. Ultimately, creative process is bound for the same destination, but it is possible to leave it as a self-shaping process up to the point of selecting work for the final submission.

Kwek (2018) posits uselessness as a mode of letting be, as an active and sensitive opening to the differences amid which we are situated (Kwek 2018: 38). Perhaps letting be allows creative process to be a wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) in a landscape of differences. Barbara Bolt (2007a: 1 of 4) implies that this element of allowing is integral to artmaking where the artist is "co-responsible for letting art emerge". Perhaps letting be radically increases opportunities for unanticipated artmaking activity. In Brian Massumi's words "If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime" (Massumi in Green 2015: 7 of 13). I contend that excluding a goal as an in-the-dark artmaking method enables this kind of letting be that actively engages with materiality and simultaneously keeps the horizons of the mind clear and receptive.

For Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010b: 32), trajectory is a matter of movement *away from* rather than towards something specific. In-the-dark methods move artmaking away from knowledge and knowing (Birch 2018: 26). Trajectory according to Bennett is often assumed to be the capacity of an intentional mind to direct activity towards a specified end or particular purpose. However, she considers that moving towards something, or a "toward-which" (Bennett 2010b: 32) does not determine trajectory as a goal might be indefinable or absent. She offers Derrida's messianicity (Bennett 2010b: 32) as an alternative to trajectory. Messianicity is a capacity for holding out a promise of potential fulfilment. Derrida's alternative to trajectory offers a tantalising potential yet is also spectral and untouchable: "For Derrida this promissory note is never and can never be redeemed" (Bennett 2010b: 32). As fulfilment cannot touch potential, in this study I assume potential to be infinite. Removing a goal and its concomitant trajectory reveals the hovering potential proffered by messianicity.

Intentionally exclude imagery as a starting point, as a goal or as a mental reference or guide (personal journal 2018-2022: 265) means that a potential purpose or goal does not become finite. It remains indeterminate yet tantalising in the openness of its potential.

Bennett (2010b: 33) posits process as having agentic capacity. This is important in the articulation and investigation of my central research question: In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study? I surmise that excluding purposeful trajectory (Bennett 2010b: 32) as above removes anticipation of both route and destination which might place a restrictive valve on my openness to creative potential. Bennett discusses causality as emergent where activity does lead to effect. Yet what constitutes this activity is not completely apparent before its effects emerge. For Bennett, the reach of activity is recognisable through the effects it triggers. I contend that it is possible to only partly recognise the reach of effect. This is perhaps an aspect of Derrida's (Bennett 2010b: 32) promise of ghostly potential and Adorno's untraceable rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2). I surmise that human understanding cannot apprehend or trace the source or the reach of effect.

Artmaking research and its PLR proximity with academic reading and writing leads me to wonder about experiencing cause and effect in action. Journaling is a mode of re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) situated experience of the ways in which I respond with cause and effect and elicits understanding that is new for me. Seemingly, I try to impose boundaries on action, thus creating an illusion of cause and effect.

One of the things I like about PLR journaling is the way it draws different registers through one another... it's impossible to know beforehand what will happen here, where it (the 'what') becomes visible, and where it evaporates beyond my perception. Today I was gargling and suddenly recognised that I was trying to contain the edges of the action with tensed muscles. As soon as I let the throat muscles relax – re-recognised the parameters of action – there was a little fizz of excitement. I think that this is something that in-the-dark methods effect – this loosening/releasing of the edges of action, this relaxing at the visible edges. Perhaps this also concerns the field of tension. Maybe in-the-dark methods relax ... the 'visible' parameters

of binary tensions ... But these edges I suspect are not always at the 'edge'. Edges seem to be ephemeral territories, and ephemeral territories are sometimes slap-bang centre stage. Edges of action ... this is very much a felt mode ... I cannot reach for it with thinking ... it seems to be a reaching with somatic awareness and body of experience ... a re-cognition of action from the inside ... [This] got me thinking about ... trying to contain the discomfort or soreness. ... got me thinking (I say 'thinking' but it's more like dipping into somatically-held memory) about enjoyment, pleasure *et cetera*. In those experiences there is an attempt to contain the cause of the enjoyment. ... [T]his has made me wonder about human experience of cause and effect as linked in a deterministic fashion. By trying to contain discomfort/effect from spreading, and enjoyment/cause from disappearing, what else is being instantiated? (personal journal 2018-2022: 366-367).

Seemingly, activity and effects cannot be separated. In the continuum of the world's activity, the ways in which activity and effects entangle have the capacity to keep re-organising themselves while remaining receptive to new input (Bennett 2010b: 33). It appears that there is no clear line of sight leading from cause to effect as they are bound up in one another (Barad 2011: 139). Trajectory, or activity heads not towards a specified goal but towards an infinite potential (Bennett 2010b: 32) that in this study hovers in the borderlands of fulfilment. This indefinable quality I suggest is apparent in the evanescent meaning of the artworks of this study.

Lack of a defined goal or purpose might be perceived as uselessness (Kwek 2018), or as a kind of wondering in the dark. Kwek (2018: 36) and Somerville view uselessness and wondering respectively as pregnant with creative potential. Barbara Bolt (2007a: 3 of 4) confirms that creative processes are dynamic because they start without knowing the outcomes. Thus, removing the goal as an in-the-dark artmaking method might allow for new or unexpected outcomes that were not purposefully instilled, and might not have been present or visible, at the start of the creative process. This is borne out in Coole and Frossts' (2010) introductory chapter to *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. In pondering the world as a

complex of dynamic systems, it becomes apparent that within such a system, determinism is not linear. In other words, the possibility for (what is perceived as) the outcome may not have existed in the beginnings of the process (Coole & Frost 2010: 14). Modes such as uselessness or wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) are effective for artmaking research that inhabits indeterminacy because they maintain openness to unknowable creative potential (personal journal 2018-2022: 289).



Figure 23, Phyllida Barlow, Folly, (2017), installation view, dimensions variable.

Phyllida Barlow's artmaking processes inhabit indeterminacy in that she intentionally excludes an idea as a starting point (see page 68). This translates into the speculative mode that drives her artmaking (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). This I consider as a form of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). This is evident in Barlow's

process of installing *Folly* (2017), seen above, her work for the Venice Biennale (2017). Installing the work afforded an exploration of the relationship of space, artist, sculpture and viewer (Byng 2017: 1-5 of 5) that could not be defined beforehand. “It’s more the relationship of exploring the space with physical stuff that’s bigger than myself. ... That exploration leads into a relationship about whether the space dominates the work or the work dominates the space – or whether it’s somewhere in between.” (Barlow in Byng 2017: 1,5 of 5).

Removing a goal, the concomitant trajectory and planning as an in-the-dark method is intended to dissolve prior notions that I am leading the creative process, or in other words, the assumption that I know where I am heading and how to arrive there. This in-the-dark method is rooted in the *via negativa*. Zembylas (2005) compares the *via negativa* – a mode of restraint and exclusion – with Emmanuel Levinas’ (1906 - 1995) philosophy on our responsibility to that which is other to ourselves. Levinas questions the way in which philosophy – especially Western philosophy – privileges knowledge. In his view, knowledge practices tend to reconfigure alterity until it makes sense or aligns with a particular practice of knowing (Zembylas 2005: 146), whereas Levinas sees otherness as incomprehensible.⁷ Zembylas’ (2005) conjoining of the *via negativa* and Levinas’ responsibility to otherness leads me to question whether my creative practice attempts to assimilate otherness.

In this artmaking research, I have come to consider that imposing a prior goal might impose normative standards on creative process, materials and my body of experience. In this study, I find that setting a pre-determined goal is normative because this assumes a purpose that I impose on process and materials, thus impeding creativity (Morgan 2014: 229). How I then become responsive with materials, including my inner processes and body of experience, is crucial. Being responsively careful in my view requires confronting that one is unknowable to oneself (Zembylas 2005: 154). Acknowledging otherness within and without I consider undoes the boundary between (other) within and (other) without. I surmise that ‘normative yardstick’ is another expression for this internal/external boundary. In other words, any valuation process that takes the measure of ‘normal’ as internal and ‘other’ as external manifests this boundary as normative barometer. Another important aspect is that, whether one is aware of it or not, boundaries are enacted, hence the need for care; or, in Haraway’s (2015: 160)

⁷ Although I agree with Levinas that otherness is unknowable, I do not agree that otherness is transcendent (Zembylas 2005: 154) or that it is unknowable because it is exterior (Zembylas 2005: 146).

words, “keep[ing] the edges [of theory] open” is vital. Enacting normativity seems to show how situated responsiveness matters in a meaningful way without devaluing what is not deemed essential in the process (Barad 2007: 380).

In my opinion, although enacting normativity is a cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176), ‘normalising’ is indifferent or negligent towards what it excludes/cuts apart. Thus, I must ask myself if in-the-dark methods are an act of disinheritance? As described (pages 67-68,72-73), certain in-the-dark methods perform exclusions. However, what is intentionally excluded is not treated as valueless. This is confirmed by Barad’s (2014: 178) understanding of diffraction methodology, where what was excluded from particular performances returns – re-turns (Barad 2014: 168) – in further iterations of these particular kinds of performances. In this text, ‘re-’ implies value, excess, or multidimensionality in words such as re-turning, recognising, and re-configuring. Acknowledging modes of uselessness as generative and multidimensional also attests to care for all aspects of what is cut together/apart.

Removing a goal does not mean the creative process is useless or pointless, but in my view, renders it open to the sways of difference. This is evident in *and the world 1 flows by in the dark* (figures 24-25). Without a goal “the material has been freed to speak” (personal journal 2018-2022: 263). I am thus “feeling my way along moment by moment” (personal journal 2018-2022: 267). Feeling my way along triggers “a particular action at exactly that moment with those suddenly together beings (paint, brushes, person, light, dogs barking) [which] wrought an inconceivably new being” (personal journal 2018-2022: 263).

In a way, the physical painting is a response with artmaking materials. The painting is “[n]on-figurative, yet as I work feelings of past experience are aroused. For example, of doing a landscape, but this is not a landscape. Yet landscape elements have emerged. Also have felt the presence of weirdly-lit days...” (personal journal 2018-2022: 267). When painting without a determinate goal, there is evidently no boundary between material (paint, brushes, my human-ish physical body, board *et cetera*) and immaterial forces (such as the quality of light, my body of experience, memory, the immediacy of situation) that affectively shape the process. Rothko’s paintings attest to the entanglement of material/immaterial. According to O’Doherty (1988: 162), because Rothko’s later abstract works (see figures 3,6,19,103,105) take intense effort to see face to face, they are easier to see in memory. The energy between the paintings’ physical presence and the memory of them continues to flow. Entanglement of

material/immaterial additionally confirms that when a goal is excluded there is no discernible interior/exterior boundary. There is no barrier to the otherness of materiality or the movements of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261).



Figure 24, Caroline Birch, and world 1 flows by in the dark in process, (2018), acrylic, oil paint and board, 120 x 180 cm.

and the world 1 flows by in the dark is also useful to consider in another way. It is the artmaking that began this study, and it is still an ongoing process. Having thus begun and continued without a goal, this in-the-dark method has developed into a demonstration of this specific painting as a flow, as a process which has not culminated in a completed 'thing', that is, in a finished artwork (personal journal 2018-2022: 370). In my view, the painting as ongoing, unfinished, becomes vulnerable – can it be considered as an artwork, can it be taken seriously as art or myself as artist? I consider that none of the art *work* comprising this study is finished or closed. Each process could be picked up and continued. Each piece is not a

finished work, it is a pause on my part, to be continued by the viewer, or by other unforeseeable processes.



Figure 25, Caroline Birch, and world 1 flows by in the dark in process, (2018), acrylic, oil paint and board, 120 x 180 cm.

Thus, removing any goal renders the materials of the painting process, including myself, vulnerable. Responsibility to otherness means being willing to become vulnerable, that is, to eschew any internal normative barometer, and to acknowledge one's vulnerability, one's openness to alterity (Zembylas 2005: 148). Levinas contends that in this way otherness/alterity configures responsible being (Zembylas 2005: 148). Vulnerability is central to investigating how in-the-dark methods respond together with materials in artmaking.

Vulnerability might offer what Levinas (Zembylas 2005: 146) refers to as passive receptiveness. There is a difference between the *via negativa* and Levinas' approach to otherness. The receptivity they both offer leads to unity (with God) for the *via negativa*, and to nurturing a non-subsumptive relationship with otherness for Levinas. Thus, removing a

goal to guide the creative process might forestall subsuming the otherness of artmaking materials and my body of experience. It might be that imposing a prior goal on creative process normalises or flattens both process and my well of experience.



Figure 26, Caroline Birch, and world 1 flows by in the dark in process, (2018), acrylic, oil paint and board, 120 x 180 cm.

The *via negativa* requires an openness that is passive so it might receive – rather than construct – experience of God (Zembylas 2005: 143,146). I contend that in-the-dark methods constitute this kind of passive receptiveness because they require me to abandon my stance of knower (Zembylas 2005: 155).

Vandekerckhove and Panksepp (2009) confirm Zembylas' (2005) view that there is a state, anoesis, that is passively receptive and does not depend on or manifest thinking processes. A medical definition of anoesis is "consciousness that is pure passive receptiveness without understanding or intellectual organization of the materials presented" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/anoesis> Accessed 5 February 2021).

Vandekerckhove and Panksepp (2009: 1020) together with Ings (2014: 9-10 of 14) and Zembylas (2005: 143,146,155) provide useful transversal confirmation of the potential proffered by this kind of receptivity.

Another relevant aspect of anoesis is the authors' view of this unknowing consciousness as a flow. Other intentional or knowing states of consciousness emerge from this seemingly without affecting the underlying flow of anoesis. Thus, "[e]very definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows around it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead" (James in Vandekerckhove and Panksepp 2009: 1019). James' words embody and confirm a sense of the potential borne in the fluidity of unknowing.

With the intentional exclusion of a goal, planning or defined trajectory and the ensuing openness to unknowing, *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* (2018, figures 23) is already vulnerable to the forcefulness of matter. Opening creative process and myself with this in-the-dark method means artmaking becomes a nexus immersed in unknowing (personal journal 2018-2022: 305). In-dwelling or immersion in creative process maintains openness to unknowing (Ings 2014: 8 of 14), as is evident in *and the world 2 flows by in the dark*. As I was priming the board for this painting, I wondered why the painting process should only properly start after the priming. "The way the white paint [primer] behaved on the darker masonite suggested that the artmaking process was already beginning" (personal journal 2018-2022: 276). This kind of wondering (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228) remains vague and inarticulate. It is "driven by a question mark ... not a particular question but a wondering ... a wanting to discover what will happen if..." (personal journal 2018-2022: 276). The non-verbal wondering embodied in my creative process is simultaneously a wandering because there is no defined goal or finished state at which to point the process. I realise through painting that for me wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) is a central non-verbal mode of enquiry.



Figure 27a-d, Caroline Birch, and the world 2 flows by in the dark in process, (2018), ink, acrylic, oil paint and board, 65 x 122 cm.

Udall and Turner (2008: 14-15) in *The way of nowhere* suggest that leaving a question unanswered has greater generative potential than attempting to answer it immediately. Returning (Barad 2014: 168) *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* through journaling shows that

artmaking immersed in unknowing does not offer verbally articulated questions. The creative process itself seems to be a simultaneous non-verbal questioning and discovery (personal journal 2018-2022: 277). Thus, *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* becomes a curious artmaking enquiry. On the 'what ifs' prompted by materials, I began to add colour during the priming process. Board or canvas, although usually treated as only a substratum, nevertheless has a 'voice' in the painting process (Bolt 2007b: 30), as has become evident. Although the colour is covered with subsequent layers of paint, its invisible presence nevertheless continues to be felt.

Welby Ings (2014: 9 of 14) attests to an immersive state where thoughts – such as the way in which 'what if' as a verbal form of the prompting above appears in my mind – are received rather than pursued. Satu Oksanen, when curator at the Finnish National Gallery, highlights "a tolerance for waiting" (Oksanen 2019: 4). Fries (2017) articulates this as a willingness to inhabit artmaking without trying to restrain its elements. In discussing how her artmaking follows the flows of matter, she uses Tim Ingold's (2012: 436) term "matter-flow". For me, passive receptiveness has come to mean being immersed in unknowing, and thence being poised for response. Capacity for response is shaped in attunement with the cues of materiality or "matter-flow" (Ingold 2012: 436) whether or not these align with my thinking processes. As becomes evident below, passive in this study's artmaking context does not mean inactive, it is a phase in the heuristic research process.

Although I may not know how myself and materials are about to begin or continue the creative action, the impetus to act overcomes the anxiety of not knowing what the act will be. Welby Ings (2014) confirms this in his conference paper *Into the Realm of Unknowing*. He attests to the new insights that are aroused by continuing to draw through the instability, anxiety, and fear concomitant to immersion in unknowing. This emphasis on acting despite not knowing the destination, the precise trajectory or the step-by-step progression is crucial to my heuristically engaged in-the-dark methods.

Is a heuristic approach the best way to interrogate how in-the-dark methods are rendered specific by materials as they render materials specific? Heuristic is defined as "a method of learning or solving problems that allows people to discover things themselves and learn from their own experiences" (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/heuristic> Accessed 13 September 2022). I contend that given the intra-active and thus constantly re-

configurative nature of the world (Barad 2007: 141), the most appropriate means of interrogating my research questions through artmaking is heuristically.

Having rendered myself vulnerable by using in-the-dark methods which “enable one to be ... continuous with/inhabit unknowing” (personal journal 2018-2022: 331), the next step seems to be one of re-cognition: “then I am open to, am swayed by, *am* [original emphasis] materiality” (personal journal 2018-2022: 331). I acknowledge that there is a forcefulness to the particular array of materials poised in the creative space, and that I too am a material. Without making any creative decisions about the imminent process, I begin to handle materials, tuning in to the somatic. This is experienced as simultaneously being handled by materials (personal journal 2018-2022: 340-341). I surmise that because in-the-dark methods exclude my anthropocentrism, or my being as already complete and distinct (Hodgson 1944: xli; Kourie 2008: 67), I become a material, or thing-like (Bennett 2015: 104-105). Thence, “it’s possible to let [the] ebbs and the flows [of materiality] move my willing hands” (personal journal 2018-2022: 331). Thus, in this study, I begin heuristically with becoming vulnerable. I then somatically acknowledge specific materialities (including myself) by, for example, seeing the paint tubes and feeling the presence of those colours, or breathing in and appreciating the combined smell of oil paint, genuine turpentine and linseed oil. Then it is a matter of waiting attentively (Oksanen 2019: 4; personal journal 2016-2018: 305), poised for immediate responsive action.

What is vital is that I respond “without knowing in advance what that action [will] be” (personal journal 2018-2022: 265). There are several elements through which this is effected. Firstly, immersion in a specific field of tension, for example, the tension between my mind being excluded from advance knowledge of the creative process, and my poised-for-action body of experience, keeps the impending action and the creative process unknowable. As outlined in Chapter Two (page 59), the impossibility of resolving binaries into an either/or mode manifests a field of tension. Perhaps this keeps action unpredictable because I become aware of inhabiting this tension “when I’m nonplussed, or don’t quite know what to do, or [am] knocked slightly off kilter” (personal journal 2018-2022: 290). Secondly, the intelligence that recognises that there is no internal/external boundary to materiality and responds to the specific situation, is seemingly a communal intelligence. “It seems I become a material not singly, or on my own, but when I am part of a community of materials. Then it seems clear

that *if* [original emphasis] I manage to forgo my personal thinking processes, there is another possible intelligence or possibility of intelligence” (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293). In other words: “Through my process of making art in unknowing it became apparent that the parameters ... of intelligence or understanding are communal” (personal journal 2018-2022: 303). Barbara Bolt (2007a: 2 of 4) confirms that intelligence is generated by the community immediately engaged in the particular creative activity.

Removing imagery at material and immaterial levels does not affect unknowing. It does, however, enable the potency of an array of materials to lead the painting process. “It’s as though – having got rid of imagery – the material has been freed to speak. The paint can say its ‘words’ of dark and light, of colour ... [In] the meeting of brush, board, paint ... none of these things are separate entities. So they can’t be thought of as distinct elements” (personal journal 2018-2022: 263). Paint evidently communicates from entanglement rather than isolation. What Hodgson (1944: xli) understood as renouncing separate identity in *The Cloud of Unknowing* takes on new meaning when situated in a nexus of artmaking research. Removing all imagery, planning, precise trajectory and a goal from the painting process reveals not individual materials or entities, but a potent creative nexus. This lies in the presence of artmaking materials, the current situation and my ‘past’ artmaking experience.

This kind of ‘knowing’ ... a series of thinking processes that could result in ‘knowledge’ ... I could exclude from my creative processes. This mental processing includes imagery – choosing imagery, trying to create imagery with attendant meaning. By removing creative action that is triggered by thought processes, I seemed to free up ... [experiential] ‘knowledge’ so it could operate more fully. In this way, experiential understanding ... came to the fore in my artmaking. Maybe another way of putting it is let the materials do the talking (experiential understanding is a material too). Implicit to experiential understanding is the kind of responsive action specific to myself as a situated energy density.⁸ (personal journal 2018-2022: 275)

⁸ Energy density is the term I used in previous research (Birch 2018) to express the physical openness of entities in general, and porousness of their/our perceived boundaries. It also refers to the open atomic structure of all matter.

The ways in which I access this creative nexus are embodied in the research questions. The awareness of unknowing as active, and thence availing it, is crucial. For Morgan (2014), any creative activity, including living, is an ongoing meeting with the unknown. She refers to this engagement as “the activity of unknowing” (Morgan 2014: 1). For Vasudevan (2011: 1157), inhabiting the space between not knowing and knowing is an act of unknowing. This is further attestation of unknowing as active. Refraining from setting knowledge as a pre-determined goal situates Vasudevan in this active space. Vasudevan’s means of active engagement is to focus on asking questions rather than seeking for answers. This she contends allows further questions to be generated (Vasudevan 2011: 1157). When questions are allowed to remain unanswered, they operate in other and generative ways (Udall & Turner 2008: 14-15). Removing any form of goal from my painting process is, I consider, a non-verbal mode of refraining from resolving the question or enquiry.



Figure 28, Clive van den Berg, Party in Limbo, (2021), Ink on paper, 35 x 25 cm.

Clive van den Berg's exhibition, *Remembering* (2021), at The KwaZulu-Natal Society of the Arts (KZNSA) gallery, is relevant because an aspect of Van den Berg's methods entails what he refers to as a state of limbo. During the exhibition walkabout, Van den Berg spoke about limbo as a mode where he intentionally chooses not to know where his work is heading. It seems that he engages limbo, or what I would call unknowing, in his drawing processes more than his painting processes. In his introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, Nkgopoleng Moloji (2021: 3) interprets limbo as an indeterminate no-place, a hovering between heaven and hell. *Party in Limbo* (2021, figure 24) above, according to Moloji and Van den Berg, offers a space that is indeterminate visually and metaphorically. This is where Van den Berg situates his work, in this realm of what Moloji (2021: 3) calls "neither worlds."

At his walkabout, Van den Berg spoke about using 'fugitive'⁹ colours in his painting process. Scarlet lake, evident in *African Landscape XVI (Scarlet Lake)* (2021, figure 25), is one such colour. Van den Berg's intentional use of this evanescence offers an instability that to me is spectral. At what point might the colour begin to disappear? What trace, if any, will remain? What will its disappearance leave behind? Another relevant element of Van den Berg's painting is the sense of disorientation in his imaginary landscapes. He intentionally blurs the boundaries between what is above and what below ground (Moloji 2021: 3). Like Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands, the topography is unstable. By unmooring the horizon from his landscapes Van den Berg elicits a profound sense of disorientation. For Moloji (2021: 3), this is due to the disruption of space, of that by which we orient where we are. In other words, the artist intends to undo the viewer's normative barometer. In Van den Berg's words: "when time and space are fractured and collapsing, the horizon cannot remain secure" (Moloji 2021: 3).

⁹ 'Fugitive' colour is one that fades over time and when exposed to daylight (Clarke 2010: 40).

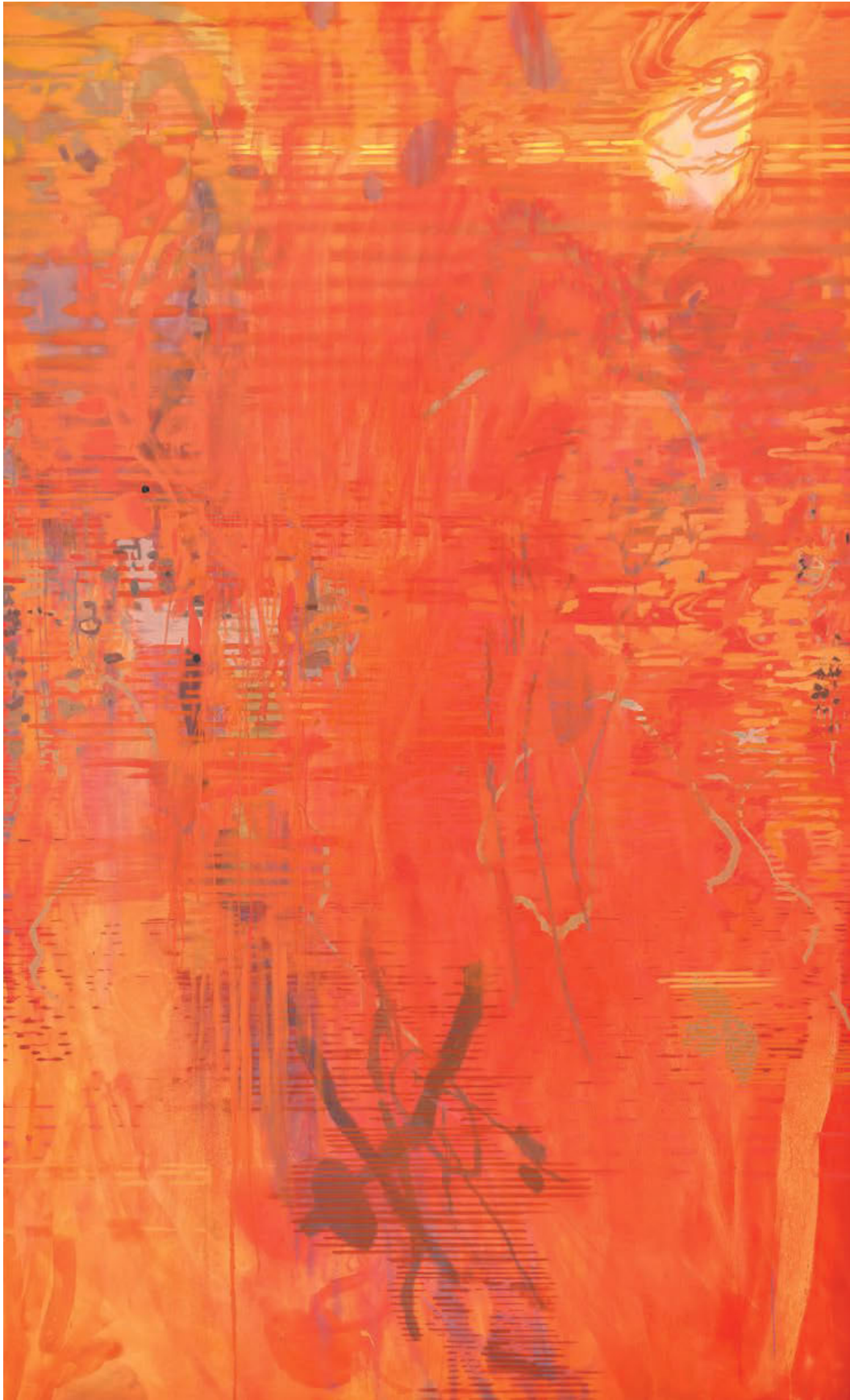


Figure 29, Clive Van den Berg, African Landscape XVI (Scarlet Lake), (2021), Oil on canvas, 250 x 150 cm.



Figure 30, Clive Van den Berg, African Landscape XV, (2021), Oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm.

Van den Berg's body of work is a questioning and a probing at the apparent global apathy towards the abysmal abuse and killing of gay men in some societies. I consider this to align with the ethical considerations concomitant to how artists use materials in shaping meaning.

Van den Berg does not offer solutions but intends to leave a disturbance in viewer's patterns of forgetting. Moloi (2021: 4) sees the exhibition as directing the viewer to "enduring questions of which lives matter and how they matter".

The relationship between forgetting and remembering is central to Van den Berg's work. In my view, *Remembering* offers a field of tension which Van den Berg intends should generate memory that in proximity with the irresponsibility of forgetting, stirs the viewer into action. Moloi (2021: 4) describes this as "the connective tissue between forgetting and remembering". Van den Berg's mode of remembering I surmise is akin to recognising that alterity is as much internal as it is external. He holds the ghosts of gay victims up to our attention, quietly insisting on the viewer's re-cognition of them. Listening *with* his works might open the portal for them to slip through and disrupt our blinding yardsticks.

Barlow also, in my view, draws on the generativity of fields of tension. She intentionally sets up counter tensions in her work. For example, she is drawn to the tension between forms that have inherent structure, and qualities of "spillage and formlessness" (Barlow 2019: 16:58 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). This is also evident in her fascination with where the edges of things are located (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023).



Figure 31, Phyllida Barlow, *Brink*, (2012), installation view, dimensions variable.

For Vasudevan the practice of not seeking for answers engenders a mode of “listening with” (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) as a less contested way of listening than listening *to*. Thus, excluding a goal shapes the painting process as a responsive mode of listening *with* rather than listening *to*, of looking *with* rather than looking *at*, and touching *with* rather than providing the sole sense of touch. Thus, through using in-the-dark methods the somatic register (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155) enables a mode of learning *with* materiality. Lenz Taguchi (2012: 272) suggests that the way in which difference interferes with our somatic register is an important matter in research processes. Barad (2014: 175) posits intra-action as differencing. Thus, the way in which intra-acting materials interfere with my somatic register is vital in this study. This I find enables the heuristic way in which I learn together *with*, rather than about, artmaking materials. Learning *with* also offers a way of engaging with intra-acting materials on an unexceptional footing, allowing my input as a materiality not as a controlling presence. In this text, the ‘with’ of learning *with* refers to the potent artmaking nexus mentioned above. Crucially, learning/listening with implies that there is no prior hierarchy already possessing specialist knowledge (Bolt 2007a: 3 of 4) that will unerringly guide artistic practice. Learning *with* further implies re-cognition and acknowledgement of difference. Unknowing, in the form of in-the-dark methods, facilitates active and ethical engagement with difference without attempting to normalise it.

With priming *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* (figure 27a-d) “I tried the colour that had suggested itself. Then ... came the next layer of priming ... So in covering up the [board] and subsequent colour, and being open to the nature or voice of materials, a change in the usual procedure was suggested” (personal journal 2018-2022: 276). The in-the-dark methods discussed above thus destabilise what I understood as the normal preparation of *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* bringing unanticipated change. Preparation is evidently not separate from creative process and requires the same kind of attentive engagement. In this painting in-the-dark methods undo the internal/external boundary, that is, the yardstick, of what is and what is not part of creative process, of what matters creatively.

Writing about the creative process of *and the world 2 flows by in the dark* thus led to the understanding of this perceived internal/external boundary as the measure of normal within and other without. As implied by Baudrillard (2002: 55) and Derrida (Kourie 2008: 69), there is no site where a normal state of being is situated, there is only alterity. For Barad (2014:

175) intra-action as differencing ensues in part from the openness of the internal/external boundary. Both intra-action and openness are central to interrogating the sway of materiality through my creative processes. Materiality is further interrogated through the triptych *and the world 3 flows by in the dark* (2019) below.



Figure 32, Caroline Birch, and the world 3 flows by in the dark in process, (2019), acrylic, oil paint and board, 250 x 195 cm.

Effect is a contentious word if it is seen as ensuing from a cause. As signalled by the term affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261), effect is not separated from causal activity by a timeline. Affect/being affected is central to cause as a performative nexus (Barad 2007: 335) and is determined by intra-action, not only by human presence. Having realised that artmaking intelligence is communal (Bolt 2007a: 2 of 4; personal journal 2018-2022: 292-

293; 303) I assume that affect/being affected informs creative intelligence in this study. There are no predetermined parameters to intra-action, thus the continuum of affect/being affected is unpredictable.

As indicated by the term affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261) materiality seems to entail a simultaneous giving forth and taking in of affect. Both aspects appear together pointing to their mutually formative presence as materiality. This additionally implies that materiality may be a mode more than concrete substance (Bennett 2010b: 21-22). Materiality is thus not tied to specific entities. What entities appear to exhibit in my view is only an aspect, sometimes visible, of a multidimensional spectrum of materiality, where many of the pushes and pulls, such as gravity, can neither be seen nor contained within a specific entity.

This is apparent in the situatedness of making *and the world 3 flows by in the dark* (figures 32,34). The triptych inhabits the studio space together with an enormous tangle of fishing line. At the time the knot was in jest called the nylon poo, and the name has stuck. It is difficult to write *about* the relationship of *and the world 3 flows by in the dark* and the knot of fishing line because the sways of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261) that pulse through their relation are partly invisible and at the time were not intentionally included within the focus of artmaking. My understanding of the painting's situated process is also only partial. Rather than attempting a verbal description of their mutual affect, I offer below a photographic paragraph. This is proffered in the spirit of Dr Minty Donald's (2014) delightfully titled photo essay *Guddling About*. This ensues from Donald's ongoing interest in working with water as a "more-than-human" (Donald 2014: 2) material. Donald, who is currently Professor of Contemporary Performance Practice at Glasgow University, describes her practice-based research for *Guddling About* as "performance of/with rivers" (<https://performanceecologyheritage.wordpress.com/portfolio/minty-donald/> Accessed 5 September 2020). It is relevant that she refers to performance *with* because the painting process developed through being somatically present *with* the materials in the studio space. As suggested by the visual evidence below, creative intelligence is a communal and situated matter.



Figure 33, Minty Donald, Water Carry, Calgary, (2013), performance.

Figure 34, below, Caroline Birch, A photo paragraph/phenomenon: and the world 3 flows by in the dark and the nylon poo, (2022).



The images show that there are elements of the knotted fishing line in *and the world 3 flows by in the dark* (figure 32). How do materials make themselves so strongly felt? Although I may not understand the reach of the nylon poo, it has become important as a presence within my studio community. This aligns with Haraway's (2004: 315) contention that the smallest unit for consideration is a relationship. After a crit session with my peers and CVA staff, I wrote in my research journal:

I don't know how the nylon poo works. But somehow it really activated the space, kind of made it fizz a bit. I also don't know how to use it ... Maybe there is potential in this, this kind of handling stuff blind, following the fizz. Although there is some experience of working with fishing line, it's as though it has a secret hidden life. There are hints of it in its twistiness and defying of easy handling. So how is it possible to work with its hidden voice? (personal journal 2018-2022: 280).

Jane Bennett (2015: 97; 2010: 61) warns that words for affect cannot represent the actuality of affect. This has been experienced strongly through situating myself more attentively in the proximity of *and the world 3 flows by in the dark* and the nylon poo. No words can reproduce the actuality, the 'fizzing' of the artmaking process or standing in among the artwork (personal journal 2018-2022: 280).¹⁰ This also attests to PLR as a generative paradigm, and to the methodological contribution of this study. Bennett (2015: 97-98) confirms this, stating that the power of things is felt most in the non-discursive realm because elements such as texture, smell, colour strongly affect our cognitive processes. "All my artmaking experience is embedded in me ... more deeply ... than the memory of my mind; as somatic memory" (personal journal 2018-2022: 293). Clive Van den Berg's visual allusion below (figure 35) to the somatic nature of memory is self-evident:

¹⁰This foregrounds an apposite example of how the forcefulness of matter is enhanced by disruptive circumstances. I strongly feel that, for the reasons above, being in the presence of this body of research artwork is vital for examination purposes. The assumption was that this would happen as usual. However, a matter that seemingly occupies at most a space of 0.00014 mm in diameter (Cuffari 2020) has radically exceeded 'itself'. How the world in general has intra-acted with the SARS-CoV-2 virus has destabilised 'norms' globally. My examination concerns pale enormously in this context.



Figure 35, Clive Van den Berg, *Mapping Memory*, (2011), Oil on canvas, 43 x 33 cm.

Bennett ponders the “thrill-effect” (2015: 101) – which to me is akin to the fizz above – where affect crosses the gap between bodies.¹¹ Such a thrill she proposes involves an element of recognition of some non-human element. That is, the ‘stuff’ of another bodily presence is recognised as none other than the ‘stuff’ of my own physical presence. “The thing’s ‘sheer physical presence’ taps into the sheer physical presence of my body as external thing and my

¹¹ It is important to note that there is a key difference between Barad’s and Bennett’s (2015) understandings. Barad (2007: 128) claims that entities are indeterminate until manifested anew in each intra-action. Any seeming gap between entities is continually re-determined together with the entities. The between spaces proposed by Bennett (2015: 95) exist, as do her entities, prior to their engagements. As the focus of this study is how materiality and in-the-dark methods configure artmaking processes, these differences will not be pursued.

thinginess resonate. One result is that my experience of what it is to be ‘human’ is altered, recomposed” (Bennett 2015: 105). This mutual resonance is considered below through returning (Barad 2014: 168) the process of *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* (figures 37,38,40a-b,41a-c,43a-b,44,45a-b,102a-b).

and the world 4 flows by in the dark is a group or assemblage of paintings. During lockdown they were so physically close together in my studio space that their processes are not distinct from one another. That is, “I surround myself with lots of [artmaking] stuff, so I work across many pieces at once. It is difficult to convey in writing this web-like way of working... it’s difficult to write sequentially about non-sequential processes” (personal journal 2018-2022: 297).

When launching into this new painting process, I realise I had been “feeling boxed in by the ‘wrapped present’ nature of a stretched canvas. Was wondering and wondering ... how else could it be done?” (personal journal 2018-2022: 296). Simultaneously, I was working in the presence of *and the world 3 flows by in the dark*, of which each panel measures 250 x 62 cm. “There was this feeling of wanting canvases to tower over and around me. [This] started with triptych” (personal journal 2018-2022: 297). Both elements – size and edges – come together in *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* in a very specific way.

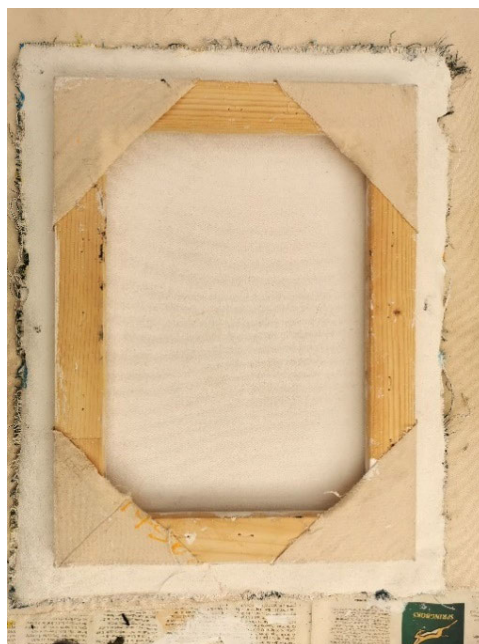


Figure 36, *Trying an alternative way of mounting canvas onto a stretcher, (2020).*

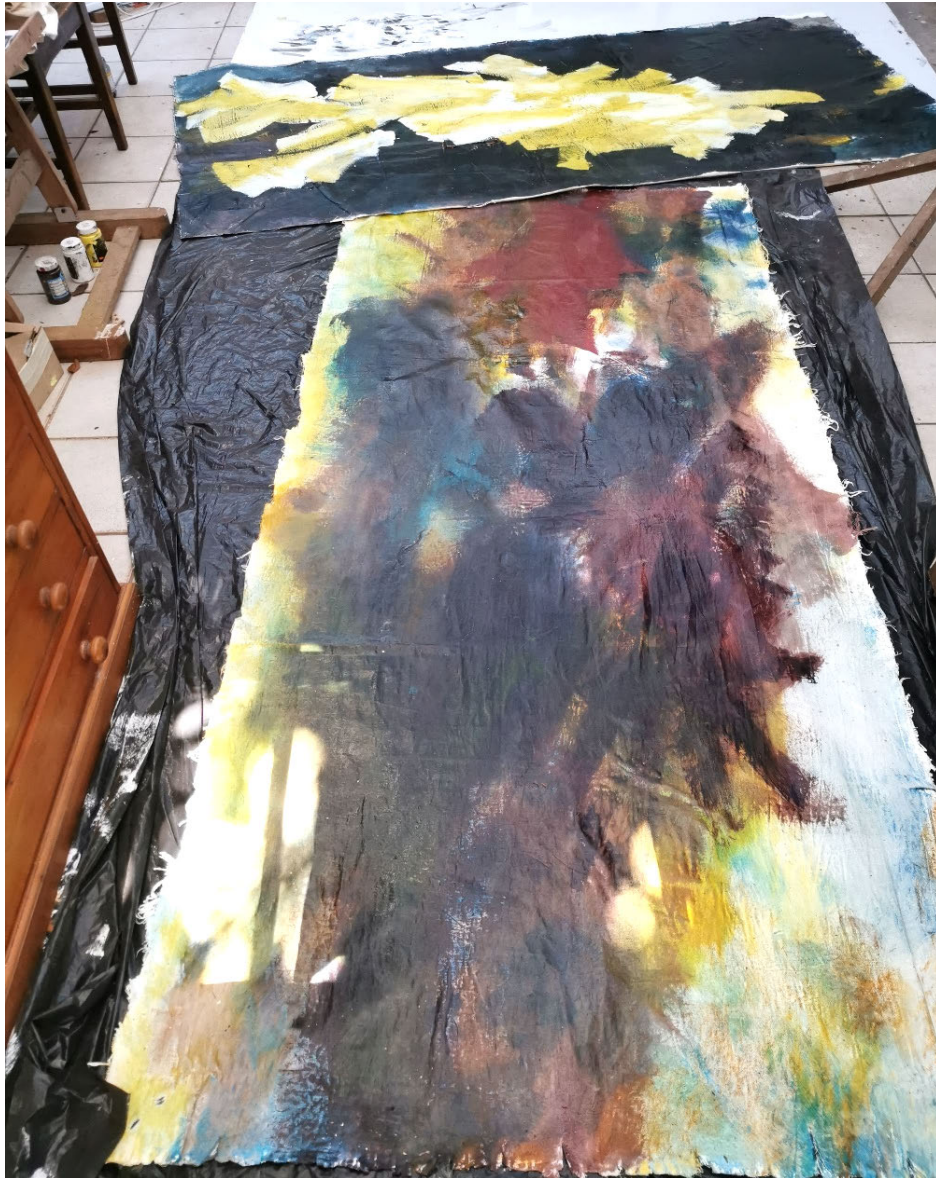


Figure 37, Caroline Birch, and the world 4 flows by in the dark in process, (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

In wondering about the boundaries of the canvas, there was a sudden fizz of excitement in recognising the potential of leaving the edges raw. I also “... helped them to be a little rawer!” (personal journal 2018-2022: 296). Bennett (2015: 108) sees the moment of thrill as an inhabiting of a thing-like posture, where part of the thrill is the short duration of the experience. A spectral thrill perhaps? A mutual haunting where, in unexpectedly confronting the strangeness of oneself as ‘thing’, one becomes ghostlike or other to oneself. A mutual entangled haunting of thing and self.



Figure 38, Caroline Birch, *waxing game*, (2020) and *the world 4 flows by in the dark in process*, (2020), painting installation, dimensions variable.

Becoming haunted by my inner 'thing-ness' is unanticipated, I could not have predicted this from inside my self-imposed human blinkers. PLR, and in this instance journaling, have been vital to understanding the shifts wrought by in-the-dark methods and thus for investigating the research questions. The realisation of how I become thing-like and strange to myself takes form with roughing up the canvas in *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*. Initially, I was picking at the edges of the canvas to undo its weave.

Then I suddenly remembered the sawing action of pruning branches ... The pruning saw is ... marvellous at roughing edges up! In doing this, it suddenly dawns in my mind that what's happening is a roughing up of the canvas's mechanical nature. The previous slow unravelling was working with its mechanical structure. The saw was roughing up its mechanical element ... this is a way into ... the canvas's ... non-mechanical state... Paint marks and a mess of threads ... very exciting! Also, what is mechanical in my (material) nature? How could this be

roughed up? Are my thinking, [and] my assumptions mechanical? Is my 'mental' knowledge mechanical? How am I a non-mechanical material? a mass/mess of what? (personal journal 2018-2022: 299-300)

For Bennett, recognising and acknowledging the “thingness” (Bennett 2015: 104) of oneself deepens sensory capacity. In my experience, this recognition also deepens the potential to intra-act with materialities as materiality. Working as materiality means being an element of the artmaking agency at work. It is important to remember that although agency emerges as real within intra-action, each of its specific determinations is fleeting (Barad 2007: 175). The memory of the pruning saw’s rasping bite is held somatically in my being without subject/object distinction between myself and saw. It is a thing-like memory, a moment of being held saw-like in the palm of this somatic experience. The journal quote above and below (figure 39) attests to a questioning that deepens awareness of my material capacities when in community with other material capacities such as saw, canvas and paint.

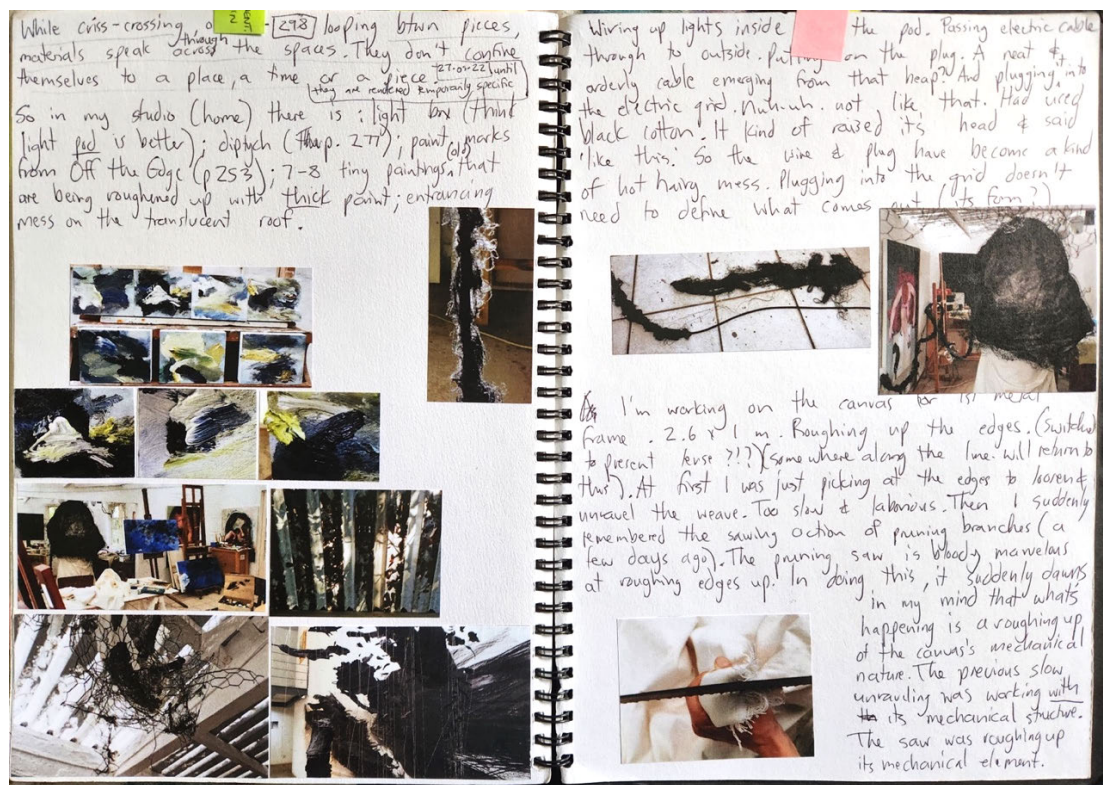


Figure 39, Caroline Birch, detail of personal journal (2018-2022: 298-299).

This kind of haunting moment Bennett (2015: 105) says is not completely passive as it vibrates tranquilly. In the example above the vibration is not noticeably tranquil but it is specific to the circumstances. Such resonance is situated, that is, it is “shaped by place, time and matter/s” (Haraway 2004: 67-68). Bennett’s resonance might be tranquil because, like passive receptivity, it is without a goal-induced trajectory. I consider it to be akin to the passive receptivity (Zembylas 2005: 146) availed through unknowing, and to Johnson’s (2014) enchantment. However, there is no longer an expectation that receptivity must be tranquil.

Rochelle Johnson’s (2014) *“This Enchantment Is No Delusion”* draws on Thoreau’s notion of enchantment as an experience that permeates each ordinary day. For Thoreau, enchantment proceeds from engagement not passivity (Johnson 2014: 610). As is confirmed by Ings (2014: 10 of 14), being poised, ready to respond, and attuned to the specific situation is not merely passive. Johnson refers to such an engagement as being occupied. By this she means perceived boundaries become blurred, which effects the occupation or enchantment (Johnson 2014: 609,617). What I have come to recognise through working together with the materials of *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* is that enchantment – or thrill, occupation, or fizz – is highly specific. For me, it is the seeming infinity of ways in which difference, or singularity emerges that thrills and elicits creative response. This is relevant in the light of the research questions. In other words, in-the-dark methods, process and materiality together manifest singularity and ‘fizz’.



Figure 40a-b, Caroline Birch, details of and the world 4 flows by in the dark, (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

In *Encounters with an Art-Thing*, Bennett (2015) places people and things on the same plane. Undoing this hierarchic distinction is congruent with Anzaldúa's borderlands (1987) and Johnson's (2014: 609,617) blurred boundaries. Bennett (2015: 96) is not granting personality to things but is generally viewing humans as materials. Barad (2011: 123; 2003: 812) contends that although everything, including material and immaterial, human and non-human, is already entangled, their differences should not be ignored. In other words, although perceived boundaries between beings of all kinds are indeterminate (Barad [2007: 128,136] rejects boundaries as blurred), this does not render difference into sameness. For Barad (2014: 173-174), intra-action is differencing, manifesting subject and object, or agency that emerges from entanglement as real although its particular form is temporary.

To Bennett (2015: 96) people have much in common with things. Bodies – things and humans – strive to persist and amplify their power by joining forces with other bodies. Thus, humans “participate in impressive thing-like tendencies, capacities and qualities” (Bennett 2015: 96). In Bennett's (2015: 97) reading of William Connolly, creativity does not ensue from the work of an individual agent. Creativity is embedded in the processes of things (including human things) seeking to maintain, enhance or recreate themselves. Such processes occur most potently when the equilibrium of these strivings is upset. This affirms the potential of in-the-dark artmaking methods as in this study they do indeed unbalance or roughen up established artmaking habits: “It seems like the interesting stuff happens when [materialities] bicker and push and pull and shove and roll and jump...” (personal journal 2018-2-22: 330).

I view a community of materials as more than an assembly of materials; it is a performative phenomenon (Barad 2007: 139). Barad (2007: 451 n. 22) is wary of the term assemblage because it might be taken to mean an assembly of individual entities or agents. She sees assemblage as a state of entangled agency (Barad 2007: 23), where an assemblage is more complex than its appearance suggests. Assemblage should be seen as performative to a degree that reworks its parameters of space, time and matter (Barad 2007: 142). I thus assume that communal creative intelligence (Bolt 2007a: 2 of 4; personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293; 303), is the intelligence of a specifically configured phenomenon. Artmaking intelligence thus seems to be sturdily protean with a capacity for extreme specificity.

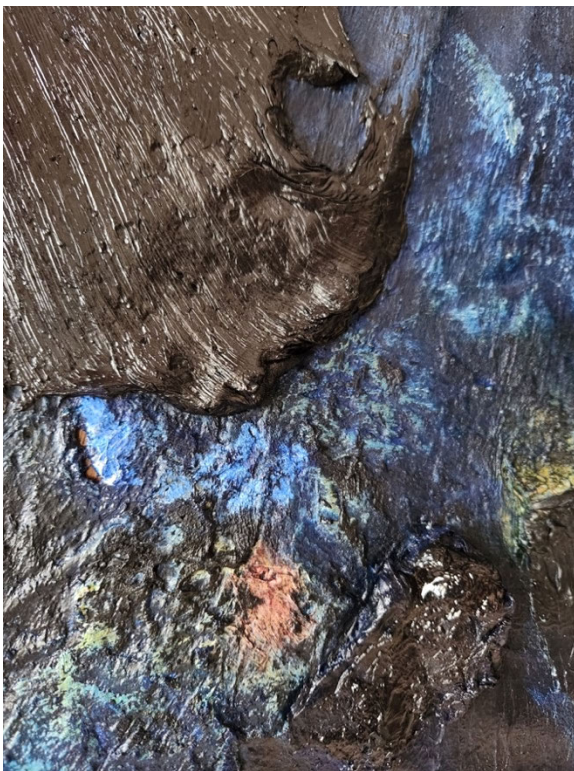
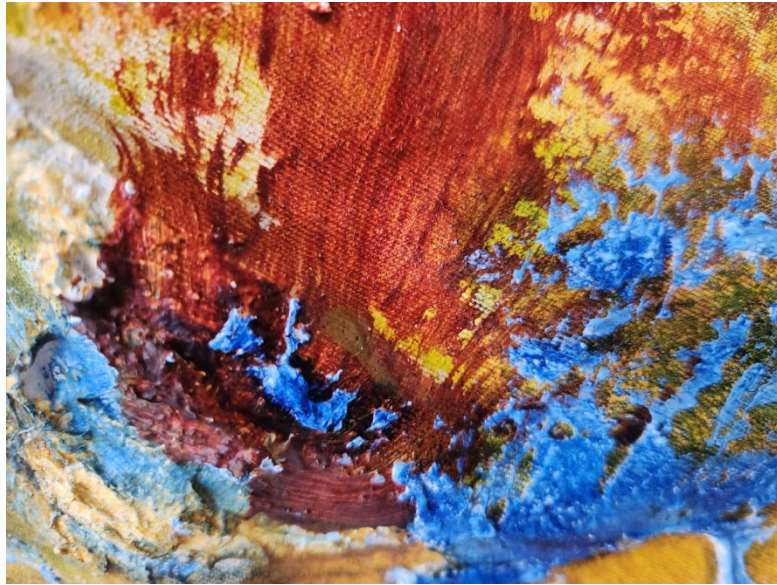


Figure 41a-c, Caroline Birch, details of and the world 4 flows by in the dark (2020-2022).

Jane Bennett's (2010b: 20-24) understanding of assemblage is nevertheless relevant. Drawing from Spinoza, Bennett (2010b: 21-22) sees not objects but modes. For example, paint, pruning saw, artist, and canvas are all modes. Modes have the capacity to engage with other modes forming assemblages. Modes carry their capacities or pushes and pulls, their tensions

and counter-tensions into an assemblage.¹² What is relevant here is that the differences (of modes) partly configure the agentic capacity of Bennett's assemblage (2010b: 23-24). The painting processes discussed above confirm that my human-ish mode, when re-configured with making art 'in the dark', has exceeded what I assumed were its capacities. I would not have been capable of conjuring up the creative practices of this study through thinking alone (personal journal 2018-2022: 355) because on my own I am not an agent. In my view, PLR has enabled such re-cognitions, valorising it as a sturdy knowledge-generating paradigm.

Bennett posits assemblage as dynamic, as an "event-space" (2010b: 23). No mode says Bennett (2010b: 24) has sufficient efficacy to generate and persistently maintain any trajectory in an assemblage. In my view this is perhaps because affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261) entails a simultaneous give and take. Kwek (Bennett 2015: 97) does not see affect/being affected as a tide of inputs and outputs that wash through a stable entity but as "waves of (re)constitutions" (Kwek in Bennett 2015: 97). For Bennett affect/being affected exceeds – is not confined to – assemblages, and is thus, I surmise, multidimensional. Perhaps this multidimensionality excludes the continuing dominance of any single mode. This is important to interrogating the research questions because artmaking is a performative arena and is not dominated by a single mode, such as an agent or artist. Artmaking processes become a series of event spaces. Artmaking as event space engages communal intelligence to interrogate the research questions. This for me validates that the contribution of this research is methodological.

I agree with Bennett (2010b: 21-22) that materials are fruitfully viewed as modes because it avoids the pitfall of aligning agency with an individual entity. Artmaking engagements become material phenomena that are performatively configured with intra-action (Barad 2007: 182). What happens when different modes/materials meet in *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*? The creases in the canvas (see figure 36b), from being bunched together to roughen up its edges and innards, are held by the paint. I start each of these canvases with acrylic paint. Its quick drying time lends itself to the speed and exaggerated movement that enable me to start painting without knowing how I will paint. The paint crusting thickly on the canvas round the rips and loose threads becomes a changing terrain. In the thick of the painting action brush,

¹² Bennett's modes seem to imply that they pre-exist the assemblages they enter. I agree rather with Barad's (2007: 23,142) view of assemblage as performative at every level.

speed, paint, hands, colour, texture, human-ish somatic register, become indecipherable as distinct causal modes. This is in line with Barad's (2007: 182) contention that agency is a space of possibility that is engendered by indeterminacy. Within this thorough (nylon poo-like) entanglement of modes, capacities are stretched beyond what seem to be particular modes. For example, the initial roughing up (of canvas) extends through my thinking patterns (as is evident in the quote on pages 107-108) and through the paint, roughening up the terrain of the creative process.

Spacetime mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) is another kind of roughening up of space, time and matter. Right now, with the end of this study imminent, I am diffractively re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* through the *hauntology* (for example, figure 37) processes. As the *hauntologies* become visually thicker with layer upon layer of paint (see page 211), I find I am increasingly reluctant to cover up the previous layer. I thus want to push my own preference for translucent paint. As my eyes register a box holding different kinds of paints, I move with this impulse. Letting it run means taking up a range of hot opaque colours I would normally ignore. As the *hauntology* surface becomes more hidden, it ignites my interest. I re-cognise the fizzing, realising that as the layers of artmaking process become less transparent, less immediately visible, I become increasingly fascinated. I am unable to see and understand the entirety of creative intelligence at work. The *hauntology* processes are indeed an "experience of secrecy" (Davis 2005: 377). What is concealed is not some already established meaning. The *concealment* of immediately accessible visibility seemingly *reveals* the oscillating of unknowing/materiality, that is, of differencing (personal journal 2018-2022: 388-389).

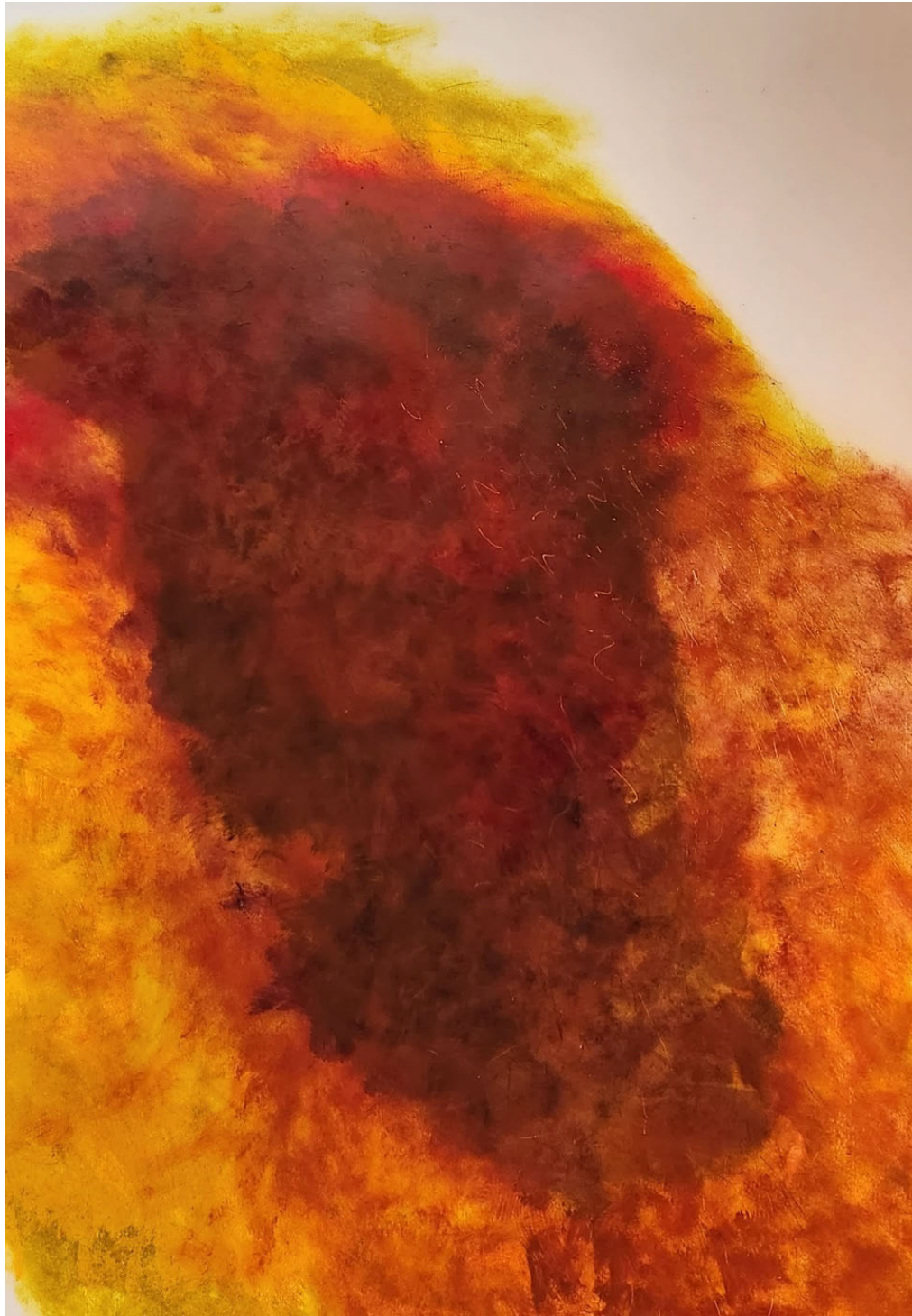


Figure 42, Caroline Birch, hauntology purple in the process of covering up, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

This revelation further roughens up the relation of painting process to the surface of the painting. With *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*, they are utterly inseparable. Process, surface and materials together become a terrain. PLR becomes an embodied non-verbal

exploration of terrain, where it is impossible to know the way ahead because the terrain forms *with* its exploration.



Figure 43a-b, Caroline Birch, *and the world 4 flows by in the dark in the process of covering up* (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

The affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261) of roughening up reaches beyond the painting process of *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*. The edges of the ten-metre long *bloubefok* (2021, figures 80-82) are also roughened up, the paper torn. I only realise this now in this current mode of academic writing. When immersed in *bloubefok* I did not intentionally refer to the roughened-up canvases of *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*. Yet the capacity

for texturing reached into *bloubefok's* process, I surmise partly through my well of artmaking experience. "Impulses from me seemed to be responses to the material. And they emanated from my well of artmaking experience" (personal journal 2018-2022: 292).



Figure 44, Caroline Birch, *terrain detail of and the world 4 flows by in the dark*, (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

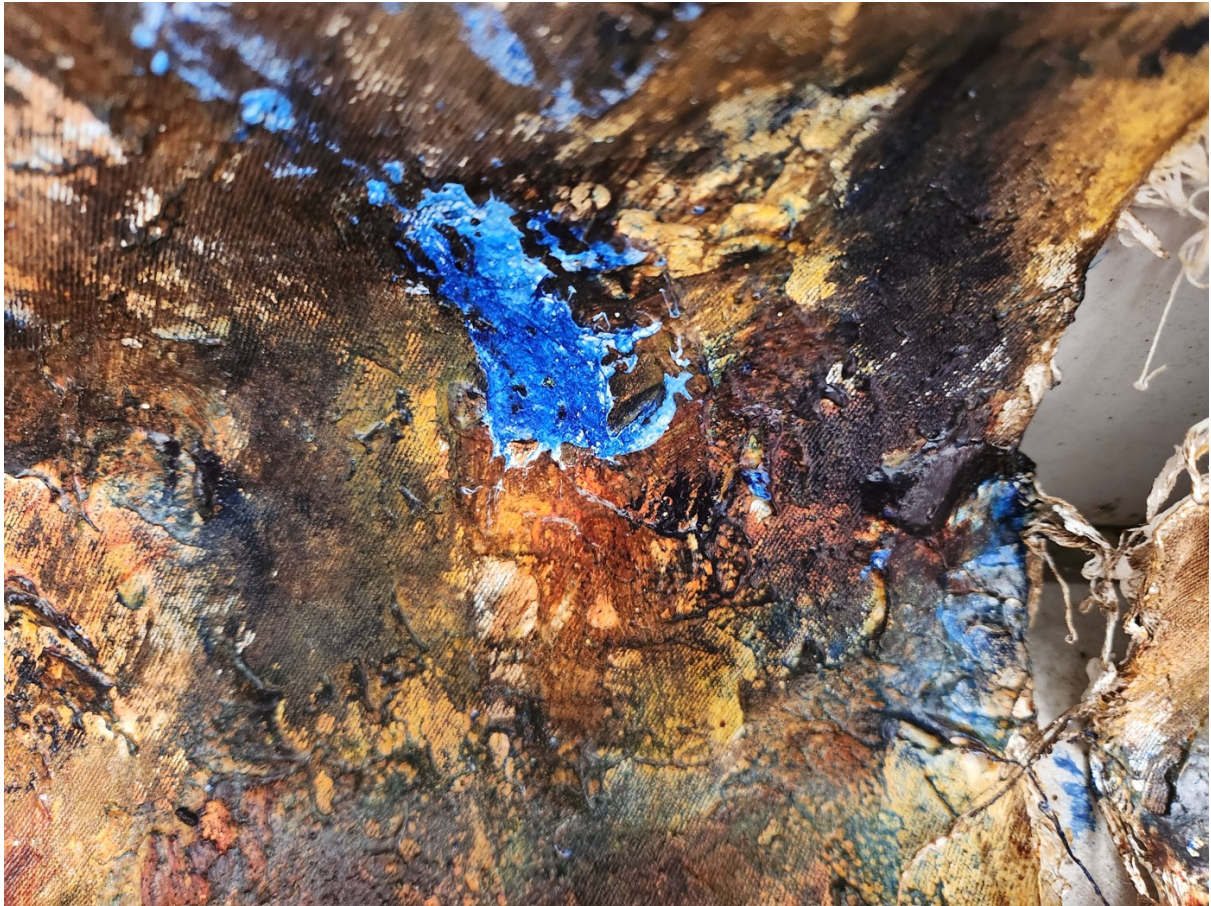


Figure 45a-b, Caroline Birch, terrain detail of and the world 4 flows by in the dark, (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

In *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* the artmaking is configured by immersion in the ongoing pushes and pulls of materials/modes and responding with these. Even pushing against a mode is a responding with, in my artmaking experience. My body of experience proves to be vulnerable to the polyvalent reach of affect. This is rendered possible I posit through the in-the-dark methods discussed above. Becoming open to immanent unknowing allows my body of experience to participate as a mode/material in the artmaking intra-action. Intra-action entails differencing (Barad 2014: 173-174; 2007: 184). Immersion through in-the-dark methods situates me within the artmaking process of differencing. I contend that the potency of unknowing is immanent as a force of differencing, and that my body of artmaking experience as a nexus of material capacity allows me to attend artmaking as a material not a manager.

Conclusion

My research questions are:

1. In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?
2. In what ways do these methods engender a deeper awareness of engaging with unknowing and materiality in artmaking practice?
3. What insights arise from using in-the-dark artmaking methods?

In this section, in line with the third research question, I return to the insights arising from the painting processes discussed above. These insights are then considered in the light of the first and second research questions. In this way the questions also remain active in thesis writing mode.

As discussed above, in-the-dark methods roughen up the mechanical aspects of my artmaking practice. This renders my body of experience receptive to the sways of materiality by means of my somatic register. Becoming thus immersed in unknowing and materiality reveals the possibilities for creative action. The way in which in-the-dark methods or modes

simultaneously disable and reveal, demonstrate that these entangled modes are multidimensional.

Specifically removing any goal, planning and concomitant trajectory (personal journal 2018-2022: 265,270) disables my anthropomorphic assumptions that I direct the artmaking process, know what the likely outcome will be, and how I might achieve it. This in-the-dark method excludes the possibility of mental thinking dominating the painting process. My body of artmaking experience is quickened by means of my somatic register. The cues that shape its responsiveness come from the immediate situated community of artmaking materials. Thus, removing the goal reveals my body or well of artmaking experience as always already available. I consider my body of artmaking experience as a material. Excluding my perception of individual identity (Kourie 2008: 67; Hodgson 1944: xli) demonstrates that this fund of experience, when situated in specific artmaking activity, is a sensitive and responsive element of materiality. In other words, the painting processes discussed in this chapter manifest as configuring together with in-the-dark methods and materiality.

How this mutual configuration is enabled is relevant to the de-anthropocentric aims of new materialism. I surmise that the presence of a fixed normative barometer ensues from believing the actuality of the internal/external boundary. As discussed above, such a static normative yardstick flattens creative practice and my body of experience. In-the-dark methods appear to disable the boundary between 'normal' as internal and 'other' as external when I recognise that alterity is immanent, that is, internal and external. This seemingly opens the creative nexus of process and materials – including myself – to unknowing and removes any blockage in perception to the oscillations of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261).

I consider that in-the-dark methods enable recognition of alterity to become a re-cognising that is shaped by particular differences. That is, my understanding re-cognises at each engagement with differencing. This is apparent when I am open to unknowing and situated within the communal intelligence of artmaking materials. It is relevant to new materialism that unknowing, in the form of in-the-dark methods, offers a way of actively engaging with material difference without attempting: to normalise it or dominate it with human thinking; to belittle the material of my human-ish artmaking experience.

With my internal/external barometer destabilised, the capacities of materiality seem to reach through my somatic register into my well of artmaking experience. Adorno's rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2) might be untraceable because it is not possible to fully comprehend the partly invisible reach of both materiality and the parameters of creative intelligence (personal journal 2018-2022: 366). I speculate that much of the world we inhabit is invisible/inaccessible to humans, so the human somatic and thinking registers are only able to engage limited aspects of materiality. Materiality thus cannot be traced to a source or pursued as an attainable goal. I contend that using in-the-dark artmaking methods further reveals that: materiality is continuous with unknowing; my body of artmaking experience is an emanation of materiality. These understandings attest to the generativity of unknowing.

Having re-recognised that my well of creative experience emanates from materiality, immersion in artmaking deepens this understanding. When immersed in unknowing, learning *with* a community of materials demonstrates that my body of experience is not privileged over this community which shapes it. This well of experience is quickened through somatic memory (personal journal 2018-2022: 293). My experience of immersion in somatic memory (for example, the memory of the pruning saw coming together with canvas) is that the memory itself holds no subject/object division. I thence assume that my somatic register is not attuned to binary divisions but rather to the sensory landscape of fields of tension.

The indivisibility of my body of experience and somatic register allows the artmaking process to *act* its way ahead rather than the way being *thought* out beforehand (personal journal 2018-2022: 293,365). How the artmaking action configures is shaped through becoming receptive to or enchanted (Bennett 2010b: xi,xii; 2015: 101; Johnson 2014: 609) by materiality. In-the-dark methods show that being receptive might not be experienced as tranquil, as discovered through *and the world 4 flows by in the dark*. For me, the fizz of singularity elicits creative response (personal journal 2018-2022: 283).

It is important that fizz, or thrill (Bennett 2015: 101) for me largely registers somatically, not verbally. The way in which differences interfere with my somatic register (Lenz Taguchi 2012: 272; Sayal_Bennett 2018: 1,5 of 17) configure my heuristic act/wait/act mode of learning *with* materials. Artmaking becomes a non-verbal questioning. Wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) is a non-verbal polyvalent mode of simultaneous enquiry and discovery that also valorises PLR as a sturdy, fluid, and generative paradigm.

the light pods

The central in-the-dark method discussed in this section is the use of materials out of their usual or traditional context. When the normal relation between user and object is re-configured, different kinds of engagement are possible (Kwek 2018: 38). This method engages one aspect of Kwek's (2018: 30) multiple modes of uselessness. Chicken wire as an artmaking material requires further investigation of indeterminate boundaries. Inherent indeterminacy means interrogating my understanding of agency and thus relations of cause/effect. This is the only section in this study where meaning is considered, as the process of working with chicken wire seemed to insist on some consideration of meaning. Chicken wire also demonstrates the sturdiness proffered by tension in research (personal journal 2018-2022: 282-283). These processes confirm that the reach of materiality is untraceable (Morgan 2014: 2), and materiality is only partly visible. Seemingly, unknowing segues into materiality as a force of differencing.

Boundaries or borders are also interrogated as indeterminate zones. What happens when materials are re-located from their usual habitats into this kind of uncertain terrain? Working in this way additionally demonstrates how agency is spread across an array of materials (page 153). Traditional notions of agency appear to be tied to conceptions of discrete being (Bennett 2010b: 23), whereas "[t]here is no fixed dividing line between 'self' and 'other' ... 'cause' and 'effect'" (Barad 2010: 265). In my interpretation, assigning particular capacities to discrete entities supports the myth that as humans we can select which capacity to wield in order to achieve predetermined ends.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 3) in *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera* views boundaries or borders as divisions that are unnatural and indeterminate. The inhabitants of her borderlands have moved beyond the realm of the normal. This is where I seek to situate this study – beyond the measure of normal, in unknowing. This discussion interrogates how in-the-dark methods, materials and the light pod processes configure together. Thus, artmaking-in-the-dark is intended as an active means of enquiry that moves beyond definable borders, normality, agency as already fixed, and cause and effect as predictable.

Boundaries as permanent and solid entities are called into question by the materials of the light pod works (figures 46-60a-b). The light pod processes offer the materiality of chicken

wire as a borderland (Anzaldúa 1987), instead of as a fixed and pre-defined material, such as a boundary-marking fence. A borderland appears to be an impermanent and indefinable territory: "...a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa 1987: 3). In the borderland of the light pods, *in stalling the world* (2020), the seeming clarity of a boundary dividing entities and their capacities from one another is scrambled visually and conceptually.

In my understanding "... matter does not have sharp boundaries. Our edges are indistinct ... our natures or properties are as indistinct and entangled as our non-edges" (personal journal 2018-2022: 313). However, according to Barad (2007: 123), although the appearance of distinction between entities emerges is not unreal, specific differences, such as cause and effect, are temporary. She calls this agential realism. Although the blurring of edges is visually evident in the tangle of chicken wire, what is not immediately apparent is how agency emerges as temporarily distinct.

I have been using chicken wire as a material for roughly seven years. This was an appropriate material when previously exploring the spaciousness of the atom – and thence of all matter – in the context of unknowing (Birch 2018). The appearance of chicken wire's open structure offered a way of working visually with the openness of boundaries and with matter's indeterminacy.

As a material, chicken wire is illuminating in this research. Its structure embodies tension in the way that wires are twisted together, then separated, then twisted together, to give the material its form. In other words, "the very thing that's been under my nose is torsion; in fact, material [chicken wire] that embodies or exists because of torsion... Without torsion it would be a tangle of wire" (personal journal 2018-2022: 282). Recognising tension and torsion¹³ informs the ensuing creative process which becomes a curious enquiry. This is apparent as the light pod's processes wander without prior knowledge of what the next step will be. At the same time, the potential held by the material's torsion triggers wondering (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228). Wondering feels like expanding one's perceptions into the unknown, into uncertainty without intending to prove or resolve anything.

¹³ Torsion refers specifically to the tension generated by elements twisting against one another. In this text, tension is a term that refers to stress, strain, tautness or contested terrain.

This material, this torsion network ... is its own creative process. So how is it singular (singular as the continuously morphing human face is singular [Agamben 1993: 18])? I wonder this because the torsion of its being spawns an abundance of uses. So maybe torsion generates creative potential? (personal journal 2018-2022: 283)



Figure 46, preparing chicken wire at the start of installing the world, (2019), site specific installation.



Figure 47, before twisting the chicken wire, in *stalling the world*, (2019), site specific installation.

In the initial stages of *in stalling the world* I realise that although the amorphous pod-like shape is flexible, it is also a little flimsy. I consider that immersing this process in unknowing, by using the material beyond its original purpose (Kwek 2018: 36), has enabled me to listen *with* (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) materials. For Vasudevan, asking questions without seeking to answer them enables a mode of listening *with* rather than *to*. In company with Vasudevan's listening *with*, Somerville's (2008: 210; 2007: 228) wondering constitutes a mode of enquiry which enables me to listen with the chicken wire. The embodied ways in which such insights become apparent helps in answering my second and third research questions.



Figure 48, after adding and twisting the chicken wire, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

Working with chicken wire also demonstrates the efficacy of exaggerating the artmaking action as an in-the-dark method. I wondered (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228) what would happen if I twisted the already tensioned chicken wire of the pod with pliers. The tentativeness induced by not knowing the outcome required that I exaggerate the twisting action.

“The flow of the material was suddenly recognised. And the strength embedded in its flow and twist. In shaping the structure by twisting, it gave great sturdiness. It had been a little flimsy before. It seemed like exaggerating the flow and twist allowed me to recognise the essential nature of the material. Then I could follow its lead”. (personal journal 2018-2022: 292)

I was surprised at the sturdiness this gives to the structure. It seems that tension offers robustness in this creative process. Another aspect of tension is foregrounded (Krummel 2012: 18; Manning 2017: 100) by the unusual use of chicken wire. Using it for something other than defining and maintaining a boundary imbues the creative process with tension because I do not know how the material will be used until I begin to handle it. Strenuously twisting the chicken wire moves the process into uncharted territory (Maharaj 2009: 8 of 11). Inhabiting unknowing through this unusual usage additionally helps me to recognise that as I am handling the chicken wire, it is handling me (personal journal 2018-2022: 331). As a material participant in this research, my body of experience and my understanding are being continually re-configured (Barad 2007: 136). I consider that this mutual wielding of/by materiality opens my perceptions to the greater possibilities offered by our entangled materiality. For me, it is also interesting that the physical tensions of the chicken wire are indivisible from the immaterial tensions of working with it beyond its traditional contexts.



Figure 49, twists in the chicken wire, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

The inseparability of material and immaterial is borne out by Barad (2007: 185), Coole and Frost (2010: 10), and Radomska (2016: 81). I surmise that fields of tension are thus only partly visible, so the reach of their affectivity exceeds the visible. For example: with the light pod *in stalling the world* (figures 46,48) the viewer stands with head immersed in the pod structure. There is no physical support to hold on to, no imagery or immediately apparent meaning to hold on to, and the structure sways very slightly. My experience is that this unsettlement exceeds the materials of the piece, including *looking at* the work from the outside. For me, the feeling on the inside is of looking *with* that with which one is present, visible and invisible.



Figure 50, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of *in stalling the world*, (2019), site specific installation, video available from: <https://youtu.be/hbFEN8RKXFq>

Further tension exists in the relation between the (visual) openness of chicken wire and (invisible to the naked eye) atomic structure, and my concept of my human embodiment. If my corporeal body is open in structure and not contained within what appears to be a physically isolating boundary, where does it begin and where end? If my physical being is so radically open to the world, then what am I? In this study, I feel ethically bound to acknowledge myself as human-ish for several reasons. Firstly, according to Barad (2007: 128), entities do not exist as clearly defined beings prior to intra-action. The ways in which I experience being human are partly wrought by experience with the non-human. Thus, experiencing the visual and immaterial tensions of chicken wire has re-worked my understanding of myself as not exclusively human, as human-ish. Secondly, I see humans as human-ish because much of our genetic material is not human: “recent studies have shown that humans carry in their DNA as many as 145 genes from other species (bacteria, other single-celled organisms, and viruses)” (Radomska 2016: 132). Thus, it seems that ‘I’ am approximately human. In Jane Bennett’s words ‘I’ am an “impure, human-nonhuman assemblage” (2010: xvii).

Any entities referred to in this study should be understood in this way – as open and approximate presences. This renders entities, including myself, as unknowable and unrepresentable. Diffraction methodology was developed for this reason (Barad 2007: 88; Haraway 2004: 234), as discussed in Chapter Three. I consider it an appropriate approach because it focuses on where the effects of differences arise (Barad 2014: 172; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 3 of 6) without attempting to diminish the performative nature of becoming.

Being human-ish situates humans in the thick of matter. In Rochelle Johnson’s (2014: 613) view the world is *all* matter, physical and non-physical. “[H]uman meanings are components of matter, no more so and no less so than nonhuman matter, since the human/nonhuman dichotomy fails to hold” (Johnson 2014: 613). Seemingly humans do not transcend matter. Perhaps our immaterial aspects, such as our thinking and cognising processes, are no more elevated than an insect’s digestive tract. This approach to matter is enormously different from a traditional western stance.

Historically, the western view of approaching matter was apparently straightforward. Matter was either alive or dead. Descartes (1596-1650) posited that human cognition is different in nature to matter (Coole & Frost 2010: 8). Thus, humans as subjects transcend or have mastery

over inert and non-human matter. Coole and Frost (2010: 8) see this as a forceful imposition of subjectivity. They propose that acknowledging the potency of stuff or matter, makes it impossible to ignore that binary concepts, primarily the subject/object divide, are a human imposition and have no prior existence beyond human perception. Maaïke Bleeker (2017: 4 of 12) confirms the inseparability of subject and object.

For Stacey Alaimo (2018), subjectivity is a fluid matter. In my understanding, Alaimo (2018: 1-2 of 8) sees subjectivity as configured by and reaching through a range of systems of differing scales, such as social, economic, political and biological. Subjectivity is thus fluid because it is open to movements across these different arenas and scales. She posits that because subjectivity is fluid, this requires a responsibility to locate where and how knowledge is situated. “[S]ituated and embodied knowledges” (Haraway in Alaimo 2018: 3 of 8), are seemingly responsible and sturdy.

Working with the fluid boundaries of chicken wire and subjectivity entails recognising that being also seems fluid. Perhaps this is why Barad (2007: 142) and Bennett (2010: 49,58) generally emphasise becoming rather than being. If entities are *not* discrete, bounded and separate (Barad 2007: 46-47; Haraway 2004: 67; Orlie 2010: 117,118), that is, if being is not fixed and stable, what happens to subject and object, or knower and known? As Coole and Frost (2010: 5) indicate, the effect of undoing ‘solid’ matter is ontological and epistemological. Re-cognising one’s sense of being as performative becoming implies the need to re-cognise how one comes to know anything in the world. Indeed, this requires one to ask whether undoing stable being also undoes knowledge as stable and enduring. As humans, where do we now stand in relation to the world? This shift in understanding being additionally undermines the notion that there is a pre-existing benchmark for normal. An attitude of *either* normal *or* different is rendered invalid (Barad 2014: 170), I suggest especially in relation to subjectivity.

If the stability of being is contested, so is the permanent domination of a single entity or force. We thus inhabit a world constituted of lively and agentic matter (Barad 2007: 91,177). Matter is ceaselessly active, and materiality refers to how this activity works, how the different elements or forces push and pull, sometimes with, sometimes against one another (Bennett 2010b: 23-24). There seems to be no permanent hierarchy, no ‘normal’ in the world’s

materiality. Forces may converge and seem to dominate, but temporarily as domination is always contested (Bennett 2010b: 22; Radomska 2016: 65,80-81).

Coole and Frost (2010: 8) and Johnson (2014: 612) see the liveliness of matter as immanent. Kourie (2008: 64) and Morgan (2014: ii) consider that nothingness or unknowing is immanent. In my experience of this study there is no discernible divide between opening to unknowing and following in the wake of material forcefulness. It is as though the immanence of matter merges into the immanence of unknowing. The immanence of unknowing and matter are important in this context. The ways in which in-the-dark methods, materiality and creative practice mutually configure also offer insights into the PLR process, new materialism and unknowing. Immanence allows a non-hierarchical or non-transcendental approach to these matters.

Another aspect of immanence is apparent in Kourie's article about Christian mysticism. Kourie's (2008) *Way of Unknowing* is partly based on the *via negativa*. The *via negativa* offers a way of renouncing human confines and experiencing the divine (Gallacher 1997; Kourie 2008: 66; Morgan 2014: 140; Zembylas 2005: 145). Kourie (2008: 71) indirectly refutes the notion that the divine essence/God transcends the world. In her view, any such divine presence is immanent and might be experienced through unknowing or nothingness. The immanence of unknowing (Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: ii) implies that the potential of the unknown is already and unfailingly present. The renunciations of the *via negativa* (discussed in Chapter Three) thus lead into this immanent potential and have been vital to originating in-the-dark artmaking methods.

Another word expressing renunciation is exclusion. Specific in-the-dark artmaking methods require particular exclusions. Exclusions shape these artmaking methods as seen, for example in *processing painting* which focuses on excluding imagery and planning processes. In this section, excluding materials normal usage from artmaking draws them together in highly creative and unpredictable ways. In-the-dark methods are indeed a practice of "cutting together-apart" (Barad 2014: 168) or cutting together/apart.

In focusing on artmaking processes as a research practice, I have intentionally refrained from interpreting meaning in the artworks of this study. However, in the confluence of in-the-dark methods, chicken wire and creative process, meaning insists on being acknowledged.

Working with the material that usually divides chickens from the world at large requires working with boundaries. The visually scrambled material for me elicits consideration of what it means to scramble boundaries in general.

Barad's cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176) refers to the temporary instantiation of a boundary between what is included as mattering in an intra-action and what is excluded. Marking this border is a cutting together/apart because the separation is notional and not actual. Inclusions, exclusions are inextricably entangled in the how they matter or materialise boundaries (Barad 2007: 93; 2010: 253). From our human-ish standpoint we can choose to mark out what we consider is relevant and what is not.¹⁴ For example, I choose to include chicken wire in this discussion. How chicken wire is made is excluded although, as discussed above, this process informs the light pod process.

Twisting the light pod wire also twists the fence line dividing inside and outside. Internal and external become indistinguishable, together/apart. In this context it is not possible to conceive of "the [human] body as the natural and fixed dividing line between interiority and exteriority" (Barad 2007: 136). There is additionally no possibility of an either/or stance in the whorls of wire. To me there is a strange and fascinating beauty in these convolutions and my position in relation to them. What strikes me as I am twisting the wire is that there is also no possibility of neutrality, of sitting on the fence (Draper & Wintjes 2021: 25 of 44 *Isivivane: performing materiality*, 25 November—12 December 2021). I am so thoroughly entwined in the process it is as though being neutral or at a remove does not exist as an option.

The dependability of separating inside from outside and hence choosing a relative fixed position is convoluted by *in stalling the world's* creative process. As discovered, there could be a sturdiness in tension (see page 126-127), in not being able to settle comfortably into a fixed stance. Concomitantly, for me this calls theoretical knowledge into question. If knowledge is situated (Haraway 2004: 4), is it even possible for it to occupy a fixed and/or neutral position? Would acknowledging the fluidity of what is included as theoretical knowledge and what is excluded render it sturdier? I certainly did not expect to discover that scrambling chicken wire, a material of boundaries, would proffer sturdiness and a questioning of theoretical knowledge as a fixed and neutral stance.

¹⁴ The ethical nature of new materialism is evident in Barad's "cutting together-apart" (2014: 168).

Chicken wire is not the only material used apart from a normal context in *in stalling the world*. Tin foil, wood glue, mosquito netting and sewing thread are some of the other materials engaged in unusual ways. However, I realise that the light pod processes do have a trajectory, albeit open-ended in line with Derrida's messianicity (Bennett 2010b: 32). The pod structure is lined with tin foil to make maximum use of the LED lights attached inside the pod. I worked on a 250 cm by 120 cm sheet of hard plastic to make the lining. I cut up an old mosquito net, then mixed wood glue with black acrylic paint and spread it onto the plastic. Having worked the mosquito netting into the glue/paint with a paint brush, the tin foil was flattened on top of that. The layers were left to dry, and subsequently, with a little maneuvering, peeled off the plastic.

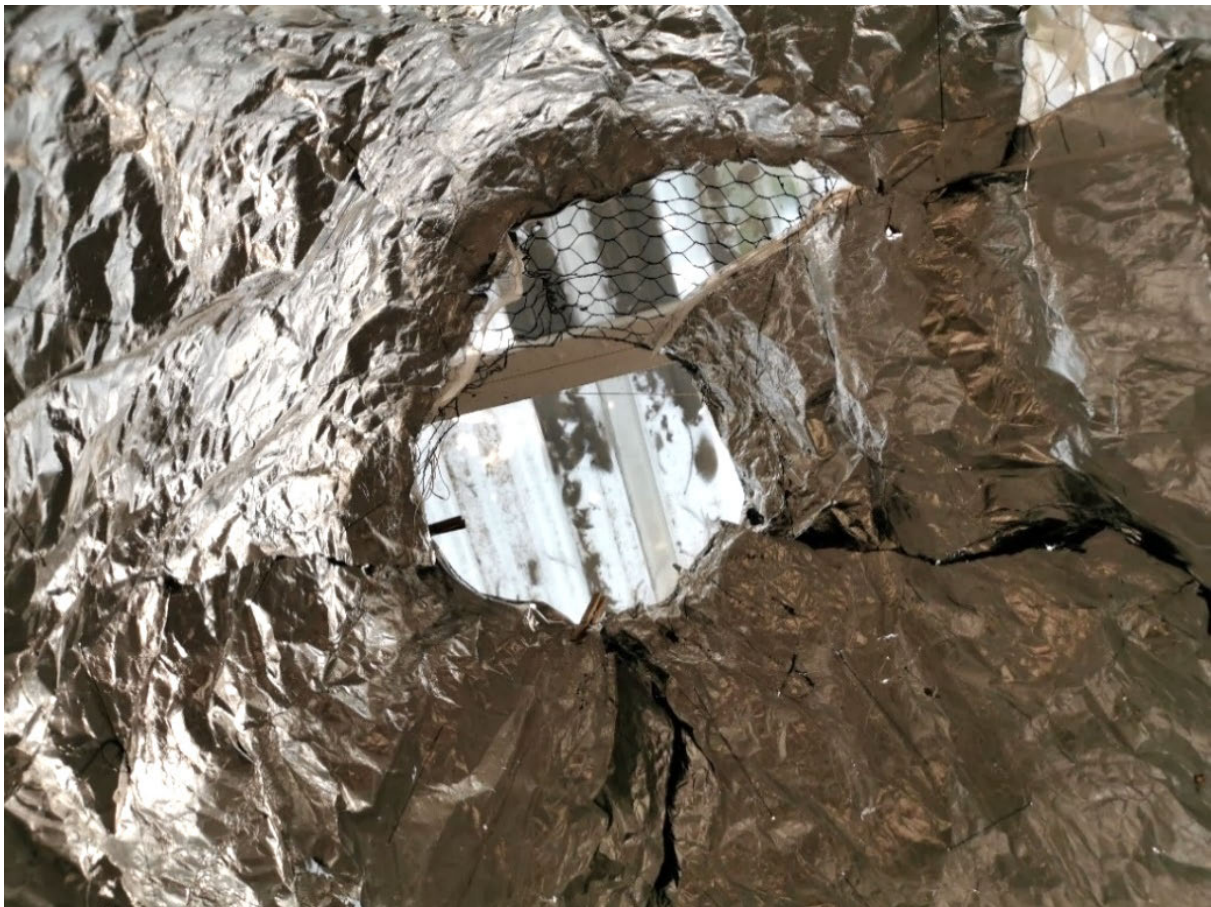


Figure 51, fitting the lining, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.



Figure 52a-b, the failed screen in process, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

The screen is made in a similar fashion by drying a sheet of wood glue on the plastic. I began painting the dry wood glue screen before peeling it off the plastic, as seen above (figure 52a-b). The wood glue screen proved to be too heavy to hang in the chicken wire pod without tearing itself off its supports. However, the failure informed the ongoing process. This is an instance where intentionally not planning the way ahead showed firstly, that some kind of trajectory was anticipated. Secondly, working with other of the light pod's wood glue elements has been illuminating. As I was peeling up filigrees of dried wood glue, I recognised/remembered childhood delight of playing with glue. As adults we have become so attuned to purposefully directed activity that we easily lose our sense of play as purposeless activity. My mind's freedom from focusing on a pre-defined goal enabled a recognition. Could it be that a mind thus de-centred from purposeful focus becomes a usefully insightful element in larger-than-itself thinking/making processes? In this sense, making the screen was a rich and multidimensional process.



Figure 53, Caroline Birch, detail of filigree wood glue, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.



Figure 54, attempting to fit the failed screen, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

Physically scrambling the chicken wire tangled its usual boundary-defining function. I wondered (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228) what would happen if the screen was also disassembled. In remaking the screen, I reduced the size of the wood glue pieces, instead making multiple small screens. This seemed to trigger a reduction in the process of painting the wood glue pieces. Their smaller size asked for single brushstrokes of paint rather than the intense layering process of the previous screen. This disruption of my usual mode of painting (prior to this study) I surmise stems from the scrambled chicken wire and from working on a wood glue surface rather than the usual canvas or board. In this new process, sometimes I place a blob of paint into the drying glue and then dribble more glue onto the paint. Having introduced paint to glue, I then leave the materials to continue their intra-action.



Figure 55, wood glue and paint at work, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

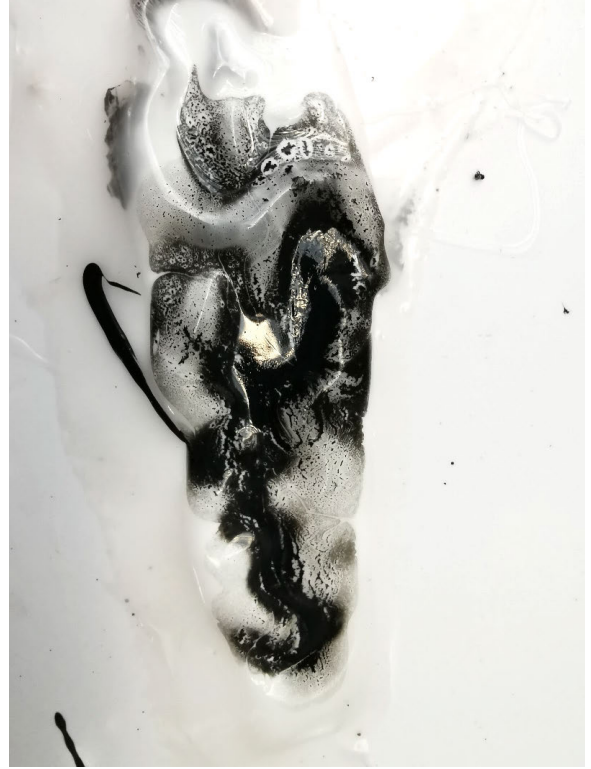


Figure 56a-d, wood glue and paint at work, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

Reducing the size and multiplying the number of screens reveals the light pod's innards. Previously unseen materials called for more active input. I used sewing threads to attach the

foil lining, the lights, and then the screen pieces to the pod structure. The ensuing mess of thread becomes an active visual element that is also experienced somatically as a fizz of excitement. The visual excitation of threads converges with the excitation of electrons in the electric cable leading to the lights in the pod. This indivisible entanglement of physical materials and the immateriality of electricity draws an unanticipated response with thread and glue.

Passing electric cable through to the outside. Putting on the plug. A neat and orderly cable emerging from that heap? And plugging it into the electric grid. Nuh-uh... not like that. Had [been using] black cotton. It kind of raised its head and said 'like this'. So the wire and plug became a kind of hot hairy mess. Plugging into the grid doesn't need to define what comes out...". (personal journal 2018-2022: 299)



Figure 57, electric cable, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

The thread continues to be the tricky element that was operative in the first failed screen. It still seems to tear through the wood glue pieces. My ability to listen with materials seems to

grow with practice. Thus, experience with the film of wood glue seems to trigger memories of my experience with human skin. Thin white plaster stuck onto the wood glue skin prevents the thread from ripping it. The failure of the first screen was perhaps necessary to become more attuned to the 'voice' of materials and respond with my body of artmaking experience. Thus, "...even failure is significant and interesting in itself, and productive" (Green 2015: 10 of 13). I consider that using materials beyond their normal context enables me to listen with artmaking materials. I additionally find that unknowing's immanence allows failure to be re-configured as generative. Hence, I consider that in-the-dark artmaking methods in general provide a means of accessing unknowing and thence engaging with materiality as materiality. In this study I posit my materiality as my body of artmaking experience (see page 55), an important aspect of answering my third research question.



Figure 58, plaster to stop thread ripping wood glue skin, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

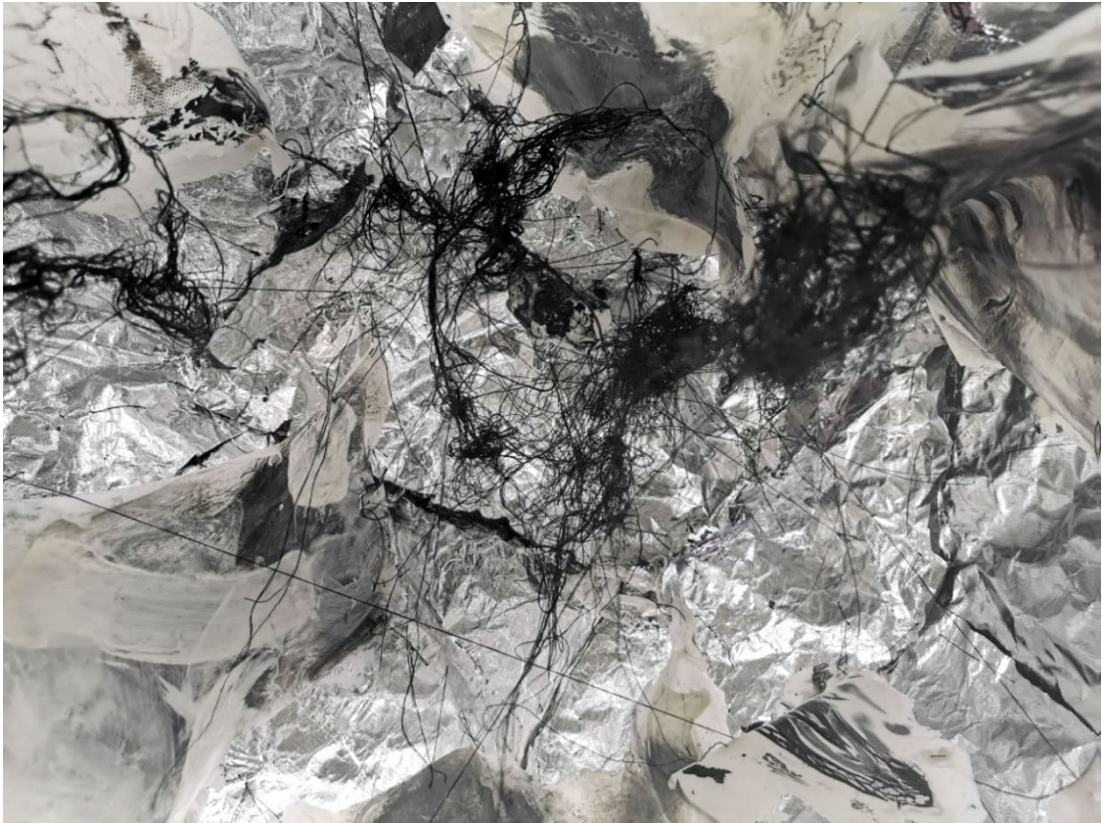


Figure 59a-b, interior views of in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.



Figure 60a-b, interior views of in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

Coole and Frost (2010: 10) suggest that there is no discernible boundary between material and immaterial occurrences. Materiality is posited as immanent. This is evident above in the way that thread and electricity intra-act in configuring the light pod's cable. Gallacher (1997) interprets immanent unknowing as located in no particular place but being metaphysically everywhere. In other words, unknowing is present in the world that we inhabit, without being confined to specific place, time or embodiment: "a bodily 'nowhere' that is spiritually 'everywhere'" (Gallacher 1997: 4 of 8). Although unknowing is not tied to specific forms of physical or metaphysical matter, its immanence suggests that unknowing is always already present. Additionally apparent in the light pod example is the way in which immanent unknowing renders my human-ish materiality not dependent on cues generated by human-ish thinking.

Thus, the making of *in stalling the world* brings matters of agency to the fore. Working with chicken wire as an artmaking material indicates that agency could indeed be spread across a range of entities rather than confined to individual materials. This aligns with Bennett's (2015: 97; 2010b: 33) reading of Connolly who considers that creative action is engendered by a range of elements. As suggested by Barad (2007: 132-185) specific agency appears temporarily as real. The material of my artmaking experience I posit as an aspect of agency (personal journal 2018-2022: 265, 275, 292, 293). In the visual tangling of boundaries, *in stalling the world* questions my understanding of the parameters of agency.

In trying to orient myself within a different understanding of agency, several matters seem immediately relevant. Self-evidently, matter and being are highlighted by this. Barad's (2007: 132-185) agential realism in my view offers a most productive way of engaging with the world as an already entangled part of it. I find Barad's notion relevant because she proposes that although all matter is entangled, the appearance of separate entities bears an element of reality (Barad 2007: 136).

Barad (2007: 134, 136) focuses on our human view of ourselves as exceptional. This stance encapsulates humans – in our own eyes – as distinct and apart from the rest of the world. In this privileged view, we distance ourselves, and thus grant ourselves the possibility of

overview¹⁵ and oversight. From this perceived pinnacle, I consider that we humans assume we can know and understand the world. If I adopt an artistic stance of being elevated above artmaking materials then I tend to be partly blind and deaf to their input, assuming that what I know has the capacity to control the creative process (personal journal 2018-2022: 304). In my experience this quickly leads to stultification of creative flow (Birch 2018: 2).

Thus, the human becomes embroiled in articulating the ways in which the world corresponds to his world view (Barad 2007: 135). In this endeavour to correlate world and view, language is crucial. Words stand for what and how humankind knows. In assuming the position of sole perceiver of knowledge, we assume in my view that we are the representatives of both knowing and what is known (Barad 2007: 133).

This is contested by the oneiric experience detailed in the *Zhuangzi* (Kwek 2018: 32-33) where it is impossible to decipher whether the man is dreaming the butterfly or the butterfly is dreaming the man. I cannot decipher whether I am twisting chicken wire or chicken wire is twisting my understanding of boundaries and agency. When working with chicken wire, words follow after this re-working of my human-ish self, they do not precede it. Barad (2007: 133) considers that performativity challenges the pivotal role we assign to language and other representational modes of knowledge. Because boundaries are performative, neither matter nor words have stable meanings. That is, “things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings” (Barad 2007: 138).

Participating with the tensioned possibilities held in chicken wire contests the way in which I understand my role as artist within the arena of creative process. “I’m standing in a field I’m uncertain of, I don’t quite know where I am. Could this be [because] the field isn’t of my own making? [Because] it has been made by the ‘entangled agencies’ of its makers, is its makers?” (personal journal 2018-2022: 312).

Using the light pod materials out of their normal context as an in-the-dark method opens the creative process, including my artist self, to the potency of unknowing. In this openness, unknowing generates ongoing and different configurations of creative process, chicken wire

¹⁵ In the discussion of the wax ground works such an overview is interrogated in the context of in-the-dark artmaking methods.

and myself (and I assume many other differences which are not focused on here). In Barad's (2007: 135) words: "What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all ... but a doing – the enactment of boundaries...".

It appears that boundaries are indefinite prior to specific performances. This is evidenced in diffraction patterns where shadows appear in lit up areas and light spots in dark areas (Barad 2007: 135). Dark and light are seen to be entangled, not showing separation until shaped into a particular pattern by a specific performance. The performance of boundaries delineates the differences between the entities in that enactment. That is, delineating boundaries enacts different embodiments of matter. "Mattering is differentiating" (Barad 2007: 137).

The entangled lights and darks of diffraction patterns/difference are not static. Patterns of difference change. They cannot be viewed in purely light and dark terms, that is, as either cause or effect. Nevertheless, it is self-evident that cause and effect are at play around us. According to Barad (2007: 137) cause and effect is enacted in the embodying of differences, as is subject and object.

Re-thinking agency through making art 'in the dark' is for me a questioning of agency and whether, like Alaimo's (2018: 1-2 of 8) fluid subjectivity, it continues to be open-ended in creative practice. Jane Bennett (2010b) offers agency as distributed. Bennett (2010b: 32) sees agency as spread across a throng of vitalities or materialities. This is where Bennett (2015) differs from Barad (2007). The former sees entities as having an already separate existence in space (Bennett 2015: 101), while for the latter, separate being only emerges temporarily in the forging of space and time (Barad 2007: 140). For Bennett (2010b: 31-32), agency is initiated from an assemblage of discrete beings. Whereas, for Barad (2007: 234-235), agency is a continual re-working of possibilities and the parameters of possibility, that is, of spacetime-matterings (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) (see page 180-181). For Barad (2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181), spacetime-mattering is the mutual configuration of matter, space, and time.

Barad's (2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) spacetime-mattering, my body of artmaking experience – that is, my materiality in this study – and unknowing together forge deeper insight. This is an appropriate response to my third research question: What insights arise

from using in-the-dark artmaking methods? From many re-readings of Barad, I understand that:

... intra-action differentiates entities and properties. ... they emerge in intra-action from unknowing. Maybe unknowing enables potentiality to exist without differentiation until specifics are drawn forth. ... If I'm not [at the centre of the artmaking process] if I'm only as important as every other present material, then what is my role in the process? (personal journal 2018-2022: 317).

Thus, making art 'in the dark' draws agency into my interrogation.

Through her investigation of Adorno, Spinoza (1632-1677) and others, Bennett (2010b) looks at the way in which agency as a spread reaches beyond the human. In western philosophy, agency has been perceived as belonging exclusively to the human domain. In this realm, only the human subject has intention, or the ability to conceive and set in motion a plan towards an already specified goal. In other words, human beings initiate certain actions, already knowing largely where and how to direct them to achieve a particular end. However, as discussed above (pages 132-133), certain of the light pod processes are partly shaped by the chicken wire, the pliers, and my re-cognition of the potential held in the way that the material is manufactured. Using materials out of their usual context enabled, and is inseparable from, my re-cognition of this potential. It seems that in-the-dark methods and materials are entangled, constituting a spread of agency.

in stalling the world's creative process demonstrates that not only is agency communal, but that matter itself is forceful or agentic. Coole and Frost express this clearly:

Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert, disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature. (Coole & Frost 2010: 9)

in stalling the world has specifically taught me that what is amiss is my perception of myself as the dominant artmaking agency in my creative practice. If my artmaking self dominates, it is a contested and thus fleeting domination. It is not my presence that needs decentralising but my perception of my presence in relation to the world. In other words, my human intentions do not hold permanent sway in 'my' artmaking practice. Recognising that chicken wire is as instrumental as my artmaking experience and the particular in-the-dark method in action, means acknowledging that agency as causal extends beyond my human-ish self (Bennett 2010b: 31).

Bennett (2010b: 31) recognises that part of the efficacy of agency is the ability to create; and that this capacity is not exclusive to humans or confined to the action of individual entities. In other words, "A theory of distributive agency ... does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play" (Bennett 2010b: 32). Thus, relocating sewing thread, foil and electricity from their usual domestic arena into an artmaking process configures a (for me) visually new form of electric cable. This confirms that in-the-dark methods do indeed constitute an efficacious element of the agentic spread.

Along with efficacy, Bennett (2010b) sees trajectory and causality as facets of agency. For Bennett (2010b: 32), trajectory does not entail a movement towards a defined goal. This also aligns with Celia Morgan's character Aporia (2014: iii) setting out on a journey without knowing what or where the goal might be. Likewise, sewing thread was not introduced into artmaking performativity with a known end in view. Bennett's trajectory moves away from the known towards tantalising possibility of Derrida's messianicity (see also pages 80,133) as "the open-ended promissory quality of a claim, image, or entity" (Bennett 2010b: 32). According to Derrida, it is the unspecified nature of possibility that initiates and maintains trajectory because in the way that knowledge cannot change the unknown, fulfilment cannot change potential.

Both Bennett (2010b: 117) and Coole and Frost (2010: 8) consider that all materialities hold the potential for liveliness and affectiveness. For Bennett, materialities offer a field where differentiations are not fixed but protean. Thus, neither cause in general, nor agency as causal can be aligned to specific entities. Nor can effect follow cause in a smoothly unfolding linear operation. Working with materialities of chicken wire, glue, lighting, electricity, and thread

lead me to the writing of the authors above and hence a re-cognition of myself in the light of agency.

in stalling the world insists that I recognise that the province of agency is indeterminate until communally engendered, and that matter, and structures engendering cause and effect, are entangled and protean (Barad 2007: 137; Bennett 2010b: 117). My comprehension thus cannot possibly encompass the myriad potential ways in which communal agency might intra-act. If such intensity of not knowing is not to freeze artmaking action, how might I proceed?

Lalitha Vasudevan's (2011: 1157) stance of unknowing entails listening *with* rather than *to* people speaking, which for me means listening *with* materialities. On pages (66,121) I discuss how/whether my body of artmaking experience is a crucial element of my materiality (personal journal 2018-2022: 275). In my experience, important facets of the materiality of artist or self are a capacity for listening with, and a "tolerance for waiting" (Oksanen 2019: 4). During artmaking my body of experience becomes a nexus of patiently listening with materiality until certain aspects of experiential knowledge are called forth. This allows me to recognise that as a responsive element of communal artmaking intelligence (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293; 303) I am also part of a communal agency.

Having recognised that "the parameters ... of intelligence or understanding are communal" (personal journal 2018-2022: 303), requires a re-consideration of thinking and its affects. Both Stacey Alaimo in *Thinking as the Stuff of the World* (2014) and Maaïke Bleeker in *The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking* (2020) consider that human thinking is already entangled in, and part of the world. Alaimo's paper attests to our human-ish thought processes as materially active in the world. New materialism seeks to decentralise not eradicate human thinking. If, as suggested by Alaimo, Bleeker, and my artmaking experience, human thinking is entangled in the world's intra-acting, then it is not, and never was, central. In my understanding, it might be only human perception of our standing in the world that needs to be de-centralised. For example, our perception of human knowledge – rather than human knowledge itself – might be an anthropocentrism.

Having introduced artmaking experience as experiential knowledge (personal journal 2018-2022: 275; 293) leads me to wonder (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228) about the differences between theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge. What arises is not a comparison

but an apprehension that in this study, wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) opens out the field of experiential knowledge from within the field. In other words, this approach does not assume a central or controlling overview of the investigation. Does theoretical or academic knowledge assume this kind of eminence? This question is an outcome of this research and is not pursued in depth. In this study, the focus is on experiential knowledge.

As I am writing, I re-cognise where – not to be confused with how – in-the-dark methods operate. This is in line with diffraction methodology which considers where effects of differences arise (Barad 2014: 172; Haraway 2004: 70; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 3 of 6). In this study, in-the-dark methods work in the arena of my somatic perception and hence with my perception of myself as artist-in-charge. The effects of material differences as crucial artmaking players also become visible and acknowledged by my human-ish perception. Diffraction methodology offers human perception a way of re-cognising the value and potential of differences in shaping creative processes.

Yet diffraction methodology is not the focus of this enquiry. I am interrogating how creative process configures with in-the-dark methods and materiality. The ways in which they interact points to agency as entangled and distributed in artmaking and in knowledge generation. According to Alaimo (2014: 13), knowledge is generated by enmeshment with other-than-human entities. This implies that, as mentioned, knowledge is situated and experiential, ensuing from a “corporeal crossroads of body and place” (Alaimo 2014: 20). In her view, beings are open to the affect of the world, which changes them and is changed by them. Alaimo’s term for this is trans-corporeality (2018; 2014: 20; Johnson 2014: 623).

It is evident in trans-corporeality that the roots of experiential knowledge spread broadly across matter, embodiment and place (Alaimo 2018: 4 of 8). For Haraway, knowledge practice is grounded in “dense, worldly webs” (Haraway 2004: 4). Bill Brown’s (2001) *Thing Theory* implies that “thinking and thingness” (Brown 2001: 16) are not distinct. In probing the materiality and performativity of human thinking, Bleeker (2020: 4 of 24) takes this further and views thinking as distributed across a range of affects. Her term for thinking that is spread across assemblage is “thought-apparatus” (Bleeker 2020: 3 of 24). Thus, thinking is more than human-ish in that its performances are configured across an array of human and non-human materiality. Human thinking, as shown in Tim Knowles’ tree drawings, is exciting and important in the world, but not normative.



Figure 61, Tim Knowles, detail of Ginkgo on Easel #1, (2011), ink on paper and C-type print, dimensions unknown.



Figure 62, Tim Knowles, Larch on Easel #1, (2005), C-Type print, dimensions unknown.



Figure 63, Tim Knowles, detail of Larch on Easel #1, (2005), ink on paper, dimensions unknown.

With *in stalling the world*, the performativity of communal agency becomes apparent when materials are relocated from their usual habitats into an artmaking arena. This in-the-dark artmaking method additionally reveals that the invisible processes that configure my humanish thinking are inextricable from the materialities which are working with me as I am working with them. Thus, it seems that communal agency permeates thinking processes. Perhaps the “thought-apparatus” (Bleeker 2020: 3 of 24) element of agency – in this I include possible thought-apparatuses that exclude humans – renders the reach of the agency invisible and I surmise untraceable. I assume that the in-the-dark methods I have used, like Adorno’s untraceable rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2), are continuous with unknowing. The apparent untrace-ability of material agency in my view attests to the immanence of unknowing in all performances of materiality.

As far as I am able to understand, in Barad’s (2007: 139) terms the performativity that manifests difference is a phenomenon. For example, chicken wire, pliers, unusual use of materials and my body of artmaking experience are a phenomenon. My attempts to interrogate materiality and agency are inextricably bound up in the twisted whorls of chicken wire. These elements are indivisible. In the temporary appearance of chicken wire, pliers, unusual use of materials and myself as distinct, we are distinct in a specific way at each engagement. The meaning borne by our differences also has indeterminate boundaries and is liable to re-configuration.¹⁶

¹⁶ Language on its own cannot convey the meaning of particular performances of the world (Barad 2007: 137,138).

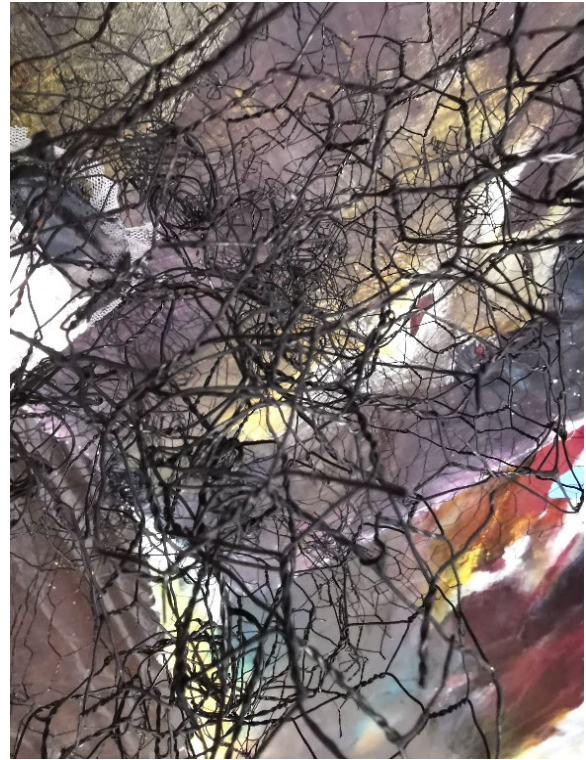
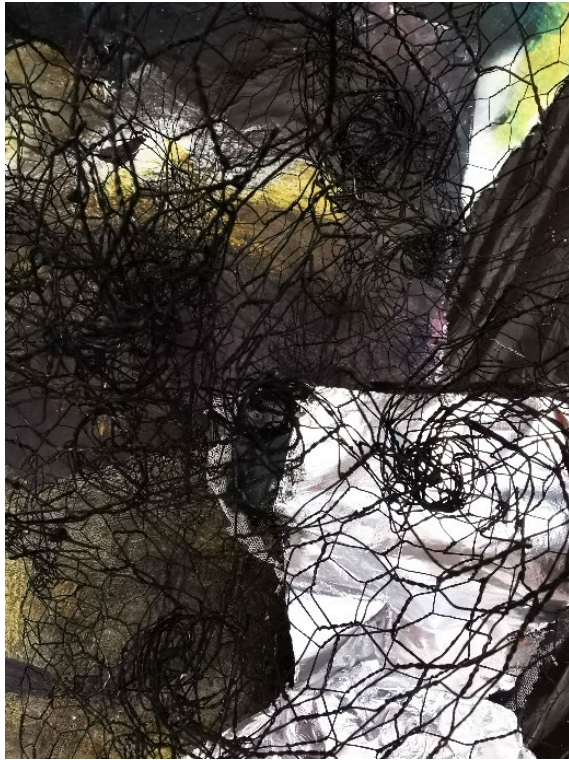


Figure 64a-c, twists in the chicken wire, in stalling the world, (2019), site specific installation.

Who exactly – chicken wire, pliers, artist, working with material in an unusual way – is doing precisely what, is indivisible during artmaking. In other words, “phenomena are the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting ‘agencies’” (Barad 2007: 139). This is apparent in the light pod processes:

[E]ach new twist would make the flow visible, and point out where the flow could re-emerge with another twist. I became like the material; I flowed with it, then would twist with hands and pliers. There was no thinking about the process. It was just allowing the flow and twist of the wire to flow and twist through me too. I flowed along with the chicken wire's impulses. (personal journal 2018-2022: 292)

It is perhaps because of the indivisibility of agency, as in the example above, that Barad (2007: 139) posits the phenomenon as the basic unit of ontology.

However, within the indivisibility of creative action, the hand wields the pliers which twist the wire. Hands, chicken wire, and pliers are clearly causal in shaping *in stalling the world*. In this highly specific context, they, together with process, constitute agency. Agency is real – though its specificity undergoes ceaseless re-configuration – and its structure is distributed (Bennett 2010b: 21) and spatial (Barad 2007: 177-178) rather than individually assigned. It is important to note Barad (2007: 178) considers that the causal structures of agency are enacted with intra-activity. Whereas Bennett (2010b: 21) suggests that it is the efficacy spread across an agentic assemblage that is protean.

Prior to creative engagement chicken wire, hands, pliers did not exist in the highly *specific or singular manner* that is wrought when their communal intelligence is drawn into making art 'in the dark'. As is apparent in the images below, each twist and whorl is different. From this visual evidence, I assume that the other materials – pliers, artist, working with material in an unusual way – also continue to be differentiated differently. When my human-ish thinking also becomes confused I find it helpful to remember that the reality of agency and cause and effect, and subject and object are protean realities. All of these matters *are* matter or materiality in ongoing intra-activity. This includes invisible or spectral matters such as meaning or human-ish thinking. "It is worth remembering that the line between the physical and the metaphysical is not a natural, permanent delineation" (Barad 2007: 428)

Conclusion

Reading the theories above through the light pod's creative processes demonstrates how these processes are wrought together with in-the-dark methods and materiality. The predominant in-the-dark methods in this section are using materials beyond their normal usage (Kwek 2018), exaggerating artmaking action, listening with (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) materials in conjunction with a capacity for waiting (Oksanen 2019: 4), and wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184).

The third research question asks what insights arise from interrogating the ways in which in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and *in stalling the world's* process take shape together. Below, the second research question is central to re-cognising in these insights the different ways in which unknowing and materiality might be engaged with in the context of artmaking research.

The central insight emerging from engaging the torsion of chicken wire is a realisation that tension proffers sturdiness in artmaking research (personal journal 2018-2022: 283). In the case of *in stalling the world*, torsion – a central aspect of chicken wire's materiality – generates creative potential. This creative potential is evident in the ways in which the visual scrambling of boundaries shapes its creative process, and in the interrogation of the concept of boundaries.

The robustness of twisting boundaries expands beyond artmaking, triggering a questioning of my understanding of academic knowledge. Does undoing boundaries and the fixity of matter undo the stability of theoretical knowledge? Would theoretical knowledge be sturdier if it were not allowed to settle into a fixed and/or neutral position? In a new materialist view, is it even possible for knowledge to remain fixed or neutral? In the light of this, how might knowledge generating practices be approached? Perhaps aiming for resolution or clearly definable and fixed outcomes might be counterproductive. This could steamroll the fields of tension that are inseparable from indeterminate ontological boundaries.

It has surprised me that the *tensions* of artmaking in proximity to academic writing offers the sturdiness to question theoretical knowledge. I consider that this attests to the efficacy of PLR as a paradigm. In this particular PLR usage of in-the-dark methods, I recognise that it is not my physical/metaphysical presence that is anthropocentrically problematic, but *my*

perception of my presence as artist. Assuming a stance of artist as dominating tends to blind and deafen me to material. This blocks the creative flow or the awareness of and ability to engage with the world's continuum of intra-action.

Realising that I am approximately human – or human-ish – loosens up the hierarchical view from which my artist self previously surveyed materials.¹⁷ When human-ishly absorbed in artmaking, I can no longer distinguish whether I am working materials, or materials are working me. Being handled by materials, like chicken wire, opens my perceptions to greater creative possibilities. Creative potential is specifically realised through patiently listening with materials until particular facets of my experiential knowledge are called forth. In this way, unknowing renders my human-ish materiality – in this context, my body of artmaking experience – independent of verbal thinking processes.

in stalling the world has taught me that there is no discernible divide between being open to unknowing and following the cues of materiality. In other words, the immanence of materiality seems to merge into the immanence of unknowing. At the beginning of this study, unknowing was vital to developing in-the-dark methods. Through immersion in artmaking research, I have come to recognise that unknowing is equally vital to interrogating materiality. I thus find that immanent unknowing offers a non-hierarchical approach within new materialism and PLR.

Unknowing seems to be immanent as a nexus of in-the-dark methods, materiality and artmaking process. Interestingly this sheds light on agency and the untrace-ability of its reach. Unknowing – present in this study as in-the-dark methods – shows that agency cannot be aligned to 'individual' entities. The visible parameters of agency are apparent in their spread across a range of materials. Its invisible parameters are ghostly, I surmise only partially detectable through the somatic register. I speculate that in-the-dark methods thus provide an effective means of working with the spread of artmaking agency. PLR journaling (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293; 303) elicits the understanding that for me, artmaking

¹⁷ It is important to re-emphasize that in this study, the undoing of hierarchical understanding means undoing *pre-determined* notions of hierarchy. This aligns with Haraway's (2004: 67) view that being is not pre-determined, and Barad's (2011: 123,124) undoing of boundaries as permanent. This does not mean to say that certain elements of artmaking, such as my human-ish body of experience, do not dominate for a brief time.

intelligence is communal (see footnote 2). Being part of a responsive communal intelligence, I consider means being part of communal agency.

Following the cues of materiality by means of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184), leads to re-cognising my artist self in the arena of agency. This in-the-dark mode is offered as an important methodological approach in the context of new materialism because it does not assume a controlling overview. In the flow of artmaking, in-the-dark methods clearly enable a 'letting be' (Kwek 2018: 38) of materials, including my body of artmaking experience. That is, in-the-dark methods side-line my perception of myself as central to creative process, while allowing my situated experiential knowledge to engage fully.

In-the-dark methods are thus inseparable from materiality when immersed in artmaking. Ironically, parting materials from their normal usage reveals materiality in new and unpredictable agentic structures. Perhaps in-the-dark methods are a cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176). Entangled entities are differentiated in a specific way at each intra-action. In-the-dark methods reveal re-configuring matter as highly specific or singular.

The unknown could perhaps be posited as non-specific or boundless potential. Whereas unknowing, its active aspect, might be generative of ongoing differentiation. In this study, this generativity is engaged with through in-the-dark methods and is experienced as a somatic fizz of excitement. Thus, I tentatively offer in-the-dark artmaking methods as a unique methodological contribution for interrogating materiality where my perception of myself as central is (with intention and care) excluded, and the full range of my situated body of experiential knowledge is included.

stick space

A mode of uselessness (Kwek 2018; Manning 2017) is the primary in-the-dark method in the stick installation, *in stalling the world +* (2020, figures 60-63,65,70-72). I explore how uselessness as a polyvalent mode is open to spacetimemattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181). This space of sticks becomes the means of interrogating my research questions further. During this process, the experience of extreme singularity becomes apparent through utter immersion (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14) in fields of tension. I speculate that PLR offers this kind of generative torque. A deeper understanding of difference as an oscillation of

unbounded difference/extreme singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326) also emerges from this intense immersion.

This section focuses on matters of difference and singularity, and the multidimensionality of uselessness (see page 161). In line with my methodological research contribution, the stick installation is much more a process than it is an artwork. By now, only the vestiges of its original form still exist. Aside from the drive of my research questions, the installation grew out of a need to keep moving physically and creatively during lockdown. This was the South African government's response to the global Covid-19 pandemic. It started on 26th March 2020, where for five weeks South Africans were not allowed to leave their homes except for emergencies, and was slowly eased until restrictions ended in April 2022.

Difference (see page 161) is central to the ways in which artmaking has shaped 'my' understanding within this study. During global lockdown, my home studio filled up with work in progress, as discussed in 'Processing painting' above. In the space, none of the pieces existed independently of the others. Canvases covered the floor, pieces of installation hung from the rafters. The consequent weaving through and around the studio turned the space into an installation. "As I mulled over my brimming studio space – which is itself like an installation – the garden just popped into my awareness as ... the inside installation expanded beyond the walls" (personal journal 2018-2022: 319). Without any thought, the movement and the work in progress flowed out into the trees around the studio.

In response to the CVA's call for a postgraduate online exhibition (*Works in Process: Preludes*, 2020, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/VFFiUt1jk40>), I contributed a video called *in stalling the world* (2020). The light pod was central to this site and time specific installation. As the stick installation processes continued after the online exhibition, it became apparent that the stick installation or "stickspace" (personal journal 2018-2022: 325) exceeds the original *in stalling the world*. Thus, I call the stick installation *in stalling the world +* (2020). I additionally surmise that the affective reach of the stickspace exceeds its visible aspect. In my view, *in stalling the world +*, and artworks in general, are exceeded by their invisible and untraceable range of affect. For example, I have seen brown ibises yanking sticks from the space to build their nests, to raise their young, to proliferate their population *et cetera*.

From the beginning of *in stalling the world +*, I intended to document the process with photography and video. However, the documentation that attempts to convey an overall feeling or impression of the installation (see figure 60) does not hold any significant experience or interest for me. The bodily and somatic experience of being immersed in the ceaseless shiftings and rustlings, the fleeting whiffs of compost, the feeling of being immersed in another non-human awareness, is lost. As I search my mind for wording to convey this immersion, I cannot find anything that approaches the singularity of the embodied experience. It feels as though my mind is being probed by the stick space. This bodily situated experience affirms the insufficiency of representation, and my subsequent choice of diffraction methodology.

I experience the specificity of the close-up photographs or video footage as much more engaging perhaps because they offer a potential experience of singularity (see pages 1,13). This reiterates what the installation has taught me about the relation of general and specific. Hanging each stick is utterly specific, and this specificity I understand as more than difference, as singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 324). It seems that the polyvalence of the specific cannot be captured in a general overview. This discussion unfolds below through the medium of the stick installation because dead sticks, engaging them beyond any usual purpose, and the installation's process configure together. This discussion further offers an apt interrogation of the research questions.



Figure 65, Caroline Birch, detail of in stalling the world +, (2020), site specific installation.

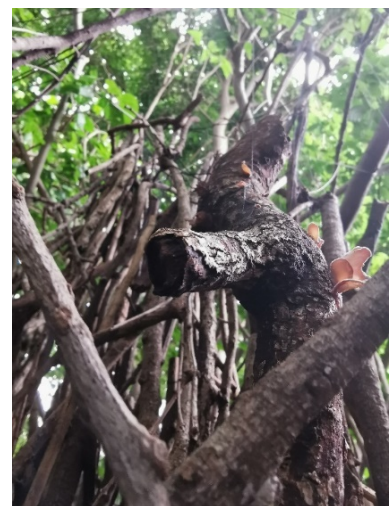


Figure 66a-h, Caroline Birch, specific details of in stalling the world +, (2020), site specific installation.

The stick installation was entirely spontaneous and contingent which is in line with the way in which artmaking research broaches new territory (Maharaj 8 of 11). As I hung many, many, many hundreds of sticks from the branches, I was suddenly struck by a profound realisation. Something that might seem very repetitive was always extremely – not slightly – different in its enactment. “Yet each hanging is completely unlike every other hanging ... Utterly different!” (personal journal 2018-2022: 324).

In re-considering the process of hanging dead and ‘useless’ sticks, I realise that here, as in the painting processes, uselessness is apparent in the lack of pre-defined goal and concomitant trajectory. In the light pod installation, uselessness is evident in using materials out of their traditional context. Both aspects are evident in the stickspace. The unusual use of sticks additionally leads to a recognition of uselessness as multidimensional, as discussed below.

For Kwek (2018), uselessness becomes expansive when processes and their trajectories are uncoupled from their normal pre-specified purposes. Uselessness thus opens processes to layers of possibility, as seen in the light pod installation. The stick installation also reveals this kind of multidimensionality. Kwek (2018: 30,37) posits that *usefulness* is one-dimensional; for example, sticks make compost, or kindling – either one or the other. Whereas *uselessness* is multidimensional, proffering multiple simultaneous potentials. In the installation spiders make webs *and* birds flit *and* sticks and thread knot *and* monkeys bite off strings *and* windblown debris is trapped *et cetera*. The installation process was not restricted by a purpose that was instilled at the start, or by a need for my human intervention. The process of shaping the installation I contend is multidimensional because agency is open-ended (Barad 2007: 235; Bennett 2010b: 24), and thus liable to ongoing re-configuration.

An important element in Kwek’s (2018: 36) development of the potential of uselessness, is the re-using of material that is defunct regarding its original purpose. She sites various instances, and these suggest a way of using sticks out of their traditional context as an in-the-dark artmaking method. To Kwek (2018: 38), that which is useless, proffers a destabilised relation to the world.

Bennett (2015: 97) proposes that creativity is enhanced when the equilibrium of an encounter is disturbed. She proffers demoted objecthood as a simultaneous release *of* potency and *from* the strictures of human “norms and judgements” (Bennett 2015: 102). An encounter with

demoted or useless objecthood frees one's inner subjectivity from its normal mode (Bennett 2015: 103). Re-cognising one's internal workings as partly thing-like re-invigorates sensory capacity (Bennett 2015: 103-104). Maybe modes of representation ignore the quickening of one's somatic range as I experienced in the stick installation. In my view, the protean quality of uselessness lends itself to the requisite fluidity of in-the-dark artmaking methods.



Figure 67, Caroline Birch, detail of in stalling the world +, (2020), site specific installation.

Kwek (2018: 28-29,32-34) develops the notion of uselessness through modes of story and dream. *Zhuangzi* tells the story of a tree which a carpenter passes by. Initially the carpenter barely notices the tree. When its astonishingly size is pointed out to him, he dismisses it because he habitually views the world through a lens of carpentry-oriented usefulness. This tree would be no use for boats, coffins, doors, or anything else he can conceive of. Later, the tree visits him in a dream (Kwek 2018: 29). It tells the carpenter how it has nurtured its

uselessness. The next day, the carpenter notices the shade offered by the tree, the shrine erected there, the many herds of animals that take shelter, the festive crowd of pilgrims. In the presence of the tree there is also a sense of a throng of possibilities waiting in the wings, ready to burst forth (Kwek 2018: 31).

This sense of potential I surmise is partly carried in the recognition that currently unfolding events are forging further events – such as the artmaking processes in this study – that are as yet unseen and unknown. The tree’s uselessness bears a potential that is immanent and multidimensional. Kwek (2018: 31,37) indicates that such fecund potentiality may be availed through the multidimensionality of uselessness *if* uselessness is not flattened into a binary pair with useful. However, I posit that binary relation is flattening if considered only as an either/or mode.

An aspect of the original contribution generated by this research is the creative potential offered by binaries when they are viewed as instantiating a field of tension. For example, the tension between actively engaging dead sticks and their uselessness led to an interrogation of difference and singularity, and of the untraceable reach of affect beyond the visible. In other words, in-the-dark-methods, materials and creative process together engender specific experiences leading to specific insights. The original contribution of this study is thus rooted in the artmaking interrogation of the research questions.

Experiencing the tension of binaries seems to also be a necessary part of the *via negativa* process. Kourie (2008) presents two aspects of the *via negativa*: epistemological and ontological. As discussed earlier, the epistemological process of negation is meant to trigger an understanding of God or divine essence. The ontological proceeds through negation of understanding to repudiate self and the being of God until finally there is only no-thing-ness, nothingness. In other words: “the soul is drawn to bearing the dialectical tension of opposites – knowing-unknowing, being-unbeing – until it breaks through to the nothingness of self and deity” (Lanzetta in Kourie 2008: 69). There are moments in this study of being blinded by tension and breaking through into clarity. My research questions evidence breaking through the tension generated by wordless artmaking and journal writing (personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282). Discovering the sturdiness of tension in twisting the light pod’s chicken wire is another instance of a tension generated break through (personal journal 2018-2022: 282-283).

Unknowing might offer a productive way of working with the disruption of binaries. Fields of tension might offer concurrent dimensions rather than the kind of delimiting choices inherent to linear trajectory or dichotomy. For Nishida Kitarō (Krummel 2012: 40), tension of dichotomies is intrinsic to the processes that determine what presents in our experiencing of the world. Nishida posits a dynamic mode where general and particular provide the foreground and background for materializing entities. The situation determines which aspect of a pair foregrounds and which backgrounds (Krummel 2012: 18). What is important here is that binaries are not mutually exclusive. They work together as a dynamic which in this study I term a field of tension.

Erin Manning (2017: 99) attests to the potency of relational fields, such as a field of tension. For Manning, what engenders this potency cannot be adequately articulated but it is certainly felt. This additionally affirms that working with the somatic register is vital. I speculate that the dynamic of foregrounding/backgrounding (Manning 2017: 100; Krummel 2012: 18) or including/excluding (Barad 2007: 135) configures specific fields of tension that defy verbal articulation because they register somatically and exceed visible parameters.

I assume that tension is generated when as humans we parse our understanding of matter into binaries such as nature/culture, subject/object. Although this is a decidedly anthropocentric activity, it nevertheless offers general potential for deeper insights into the world we cohabit. Barad (2014: 171; 2007: 89) considers that the potential for difference or change is proffered as performativity through the disruption of binary relations such as useless/useful. That is, unresolved binaries seemingly disrupt human understanding opening space for awareness of differencing. Whereas if understanding is filtered through dichotomy as an either/or mode the potential for openness to difference is vastly decreased. For me, not attempting to resolve or eliminate dichotomies – a *via negativa* mode of restraint – manifests a field of tension. For example, within “the tension of internal/external ... [the stick] space is a materiality that actively configures the installation and my notions of difference and singularity” (personal journal 2018-2022: 367). This disruption might carry the potential for difference to breach our anthropocentric blindness and ignite new insights (personal journal 2018-2022: 367).

Peng Cheah (2010), in her chapter *Non-dialectical Materialism*, also claims that our understanding of matter has been bound by oppositional pairs, predominantly subject/object

and inside/outside. Cheah discusses Derrida's alterity as a kind of dynamism that is evident in what emerges from the impossibility of relationship with alterity (Cheah 2010: 76). She speaks of alterity as a force in itself, independent of human input: "[T]his force, or dynamism ... is inhuman. It is prior to any figure of human consciousness such as the subject, reason, or spirit, and even practical action" (Cheah 2010: 74). This force of alterity also shows as a disruption, especially of the inside/outside binary (Cheah 2010: 74). It is like Barad's (2011: 139) quantum leap in that it simultaneously proffers yet disturbs the dynamic of impossibility and possibility. In the force of alterity these are not in opposition, affirming that a field of tension might offer a mode of differencing rather than one of opposition. The force of disruption dynamizes alterity because it does not allow for assimilation into sameness. In other words, it "both gives and destabilizes presence" (Cheah 2010: 74). When working with chicken wire, a field of tension becomes apparent "when I'm non-plussed ... or knocked slightly off kilter" (personal journal 2018-2022: 290). At the same time, I realise that this instability is partly induced by the immediacy of artmaking possibilities pulling against each other (personal journal 2018-2022: 290).

Nishida provides a view of universal/particular existing in an interdependent state of flux. Nishida uses the Japanese word *basho*, a combination of *ba* and *sho* which loosely translate as: place as occasion; and place as locality (<https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en> Accessed 23 March 2021). *Basho* is dynamic (Krummel 2012: 9,22). It carries a sense of experience that is also spatial, and a sense of locality, or experience in locality (Krummel 2012: 13; Morgan 2014: 221-222). There is a clear link to Haraway's (2004: 4) situated knowledge.

Morgan (2014: 17) sees *basho* as unknowing. For Nishida, there is a *basho* of ultimate nothingness, or absolute nothingness, that bears the potential for all possibilities (Krummel 2012: 22; Morgan 2014: 175). At the same time there is a *basho* of relative nothingness, as the field within which the lived experience of reality is situated (Krummel 2012: 5). In this investigation, this field of living experience is the realm of materiality. Nishida's concept of *basho* is thus relevant as it offers universal/particular as indivisible. I assume that generally in human understanding this kind of indivisibility holds binaries in tension. Relative *basho* is able to withdraw towards the universal or diversify into specificity. Through writing about it, I have come to understand relative *basho* as a field of binary-generated tension. In its potential for ongoing diversifying, *basho* also demonstrates openness to affect/being affected (Deleuze

& Guatarri 1987: 261). Awareness of fields of tension emerged with twisting the chicken wire of *in stalling the world* (figures 46-49). Through journaling (personal journal 2018-2022: 290-291) I recognise that the indeterminacy of fields of tension might be an aspect of unknowing. *Basho*, as a field of tension, is thus rooted, as I understand it, in both unknowing and the quick of materiality.

However, Nishida's philosophy of *basho* does not – in my view, no philosophy or metaphysics can – comprehend the transition from ultimate *basho* to relative *basho*. In other words, how our singular moment-by-moment experiencing of the world emanates from nothingness lies beyond the reach of 'knowledge' or theory. This creates a tension for me in conducting this research within an academic environment, because in my view, implicit to much academic research is the notion that knowledge or theory encompasses experience.



Figure 68, Caroline Birch, detail of *in stalling the world +*, (2020), site specific installation.

To Giorgio Agamben (1993: 19), singularity ruptures the 'poles' of universal/particular: "[c]ommon and proper, genus and individual are only the two slopes dropping down from either side of the watershed of whatever [singularity]". He sees singularity as the watershed

that briefly emerges from the tension of universal/particular (Agamben 1993: 18-19; Murray and Whyte 2011: 201-202). Singularity seems to be a multidimensional nexus which Agamben likens to the expressive mobility of the human face (Agamben 1993: 19; Maharaj 2009: 2-3 of 11). Singularity seems to flirt with both particular and universal without ever settling on one.

For Jean Baudrillard (2002: 51,199; Baldwin 2018: 3 of 8) singularity is a radical otherness that can never be repeated or replicated. Baudrillard's singularity points to the recognition of open-endedness in the experience of living: "...singularity stands as, and valorises, the unique, uncertain, unpredictable, incalculable, unrepresentable, untranslatable, and unproductive" (Baldwin 2018: 3 of 8).

Diffractionally reading the experience of making the stick installation through Nishida (Krummel 2012: 18,40), Baudrillard (2002: 51,199; Baldwin 2018: 2-4 of 8) and Agamben, (1993: 18-19) has led to my recognition of singularity as extreme difference or specificity. For Nishida, the universal or general lies closer to the realm of nothingness or unknowing. However, might the creative process viewed through the sticks as diffraction grid enable a deeper understanding of difference (personal journal 2018-2022: 325)? Reading Nishida actively through the stick grid has surprisingly demonstrated that the utterly specific or singular lies closer to unknowing. This surprised me because the *via negativa* moves away from specificity: the "way of unknowing ... leads to the absence of all distinction" (Kourie 2008: 68). What I experience as the confusion of working in a whirl of sticks I realise arises also from "the presence of radical utter difference. I'm starting to think that such unprecedented difference is very close indeed to unknowing!" (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). This unexpected insight lends to the interrogation of my third research question (see pages 186,234), and to the original contribution of this study.

Cheah (2010) sees Derrida's other as exceeding any inside/outside relationality (Cheah 2010: 74). The other exists right through us (humans) not only outside us. For Derrida, materiality is not actualized matter but this "impossible relation to the other" (Derrida in Cheah 2010: 76). Nishida (Krummel 2012: 23) posits that absolute nothingness is impossibly other: "perpetually other than what we can think or say and yet concretely lived in our immediate experience". I speculate that this relation is impossible because the reach of difference is an untraceable rhythm (Morgan 2014: 2) and thus only partly visible. This includes those aspects of ourselves that are untraceable and invisible. Further, Levinas suggests that otherness cannot be

assimilated by knowledge, rendering relationship with the other as relationship with the impossible (Zembylas 2005: 146). In my understanding, otherness and materiality cannot be touched or encapsulated by 'knowledge' although they are everywhere. This is evident in the stick installation:

Singularity (never to be repeated specificity) and infinite difference (unlimited capacity for difference which I consider is inseparable from unknowing) seem to oscillate. Understanding how they oscillate is beyond the capacity of my mind because only a part of this oscillation is visible as in stalling the world +. (personal journal 2018-2022: 326)

Thus, running Derrida, Cheah (2010: 76), Nishida (Krummel 2012: 23) and Agamben (1993: 18-19) through the diffraction grating of sticks (personal journal 2018-2022: 325) shifts the parameters of how I understand materiality. Materiality seems to be close to the above oscillation of difference, a matter that I suggest is only ever partly visible because it apparatuses¹⁸ from the invisible. This shift of understanding is central to interrogating my second and third research questions (see pages 229-230). I posit materiality as the above oscillation of difference, and in-the-dark methods as a way of working with this dynamic, as a vital contribution to the gap in research.

Zembylas (2005: 150) and my artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 305) suggest that being open to the unknown is enabled by receptive stillness and active engagement. This entails relinquishing our stance as knowers so that, in becoming vulnerable or receptive to inassimilable otherness (Zembylas 2005: 146) one might ethically engage with otherness. My ensuing approach has been to keep making art, or reading or writing while immersed in the tension, without trying to reconcile it or choose between binaries. The tension between useless and useful, radical otherness and knowing in the stick installation allowed questions to emerge (personal journal 2018-2022: 309). Allowing tensions to stand as a means of generating questions (personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282) is an outcome contributing to this study's methodological offering. Both journal writing (for example, personal journal 2018-2022: 270,282,309,312,325,) and thesis writing generate questioning.

¹⁸ In this text, apparatus means "[t]o appear magically; to teleport to or from a place" (<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/apparate> Accessed 19 December 2022).

For instance, what use could dead sticks have apart from kindling and compost? What if use were not part of my thinking? “What if I viewed creative process through the sticks? Like a stick diffraction grid?” (personal journal 2018-2022: 325). I surmise that a most likely outcome to this study is more questions about the ways in which practice/theory intra-act and about the kind of understanding thus generated.



Figure 69, pile of sticks outside the studio, (2020).

The *particular* potential offered by a pile of sticks (figure 69) was signalled by their material presence rather than by my own thought processes. In other words, my past experience of being attuned to the way in which tree branches shape negative space (personal journal 2018-2022: 321) played a central part in recognising the potential held out by the pile of sticks, and the development of the installation. The fulcrum here – tipping away from my thinking process towards the material presence of sticks – is Kwek’s (2018) understanding of uselessness. Uselessness tips creative process towards the specificity of hanging dead stick after dead stick in the trees (personal journal 2018-2022: 324). Uselessness seemingly excludes mental processes from leading bodily engagement (personal journal 2018-2022: 321).

Making the installation demonstrates that uselessness as an in-the-dark artmaking method maintains the openness of my mind as it clearly cannot be eliminated altogether (personal journal 2018-2022: 305,321). I consider that artmaking becomes thinking when

verbally focussed thinking ... [is] excluded from creative decision making; this exclusion means that goal and trajectory remain unknown because not restricted to my human cognition. It also means being patient, waiting *with* [original emphasis] responsiveness of materials, situation ... to see what happens next. Hence FIZZ [original capitals] because each engagement is so different. (personal journal 2018-2022: 305)

The above in-the-dark methods, together with the sticks, simultaneously generated and illuminated the ineluctable difference of each move in the process. Such radical differencing means artmaking activity fizzes (personal journal 2018-2022: 305). In this artmaking process, uselessness seems to precipitate singularity.

Haraway (2004) suggests that in western philosophical traditions the practice of analysing difference in terms of its purpose anchors dichotomies such as useless/useful. Clarity of ideas is a prerequisite of knowledge in Cartesian rationalism, whereas the senses give rise to confused thinking because they are subject to doubt (Townsend 2010: 103). This confirms that, in sidestepping my purpose-driven mental activity, in-the-dark artmaking methods, which are intended to situate this enquiry in indeterminacy, are not in my view aligned to rationalist or Cartesian western tradition. Kwek (2018: 22) voices concerns that new materialism exhibits a gap between a largely western approach and an interest in indigenous modes of materiality. For Kwek, this reinstates an “us–them dichotomy” (Kwek 2018: 22). However, Lawrence (2005: 4-5) confirms that artmaking, as a mode of understanding that values diversity, is indigenous to itself. Thus, I contend that artmaking in general (pages 8-10), and in-the-dark artmaking methods in particular, bridge the gap between the perception of new materialism entrenched in the occidental and indigenous understandings of materiality.

In discussing sex and gender, Haraway (2004: 329-330) suggests that when difference is placed under the lens of theoretical purpose, what emanates is a mode of either/or: for example, compost *or* kindling. She views dichotomising as perpetuating the one-dimensional

difference that reifies normality. This implies that purpose and normality are allied. To avoid the instantiation of normal evaluative yardsticks, difference and sameness (and I surmise all binaries) might be approached as a field of tension not as a one dimensional either/or mode. This has been understood by reading Barad (2014; 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003) (personal journal 2018-2022: 319,322-323), Haraway (2004) and Kwek (2018) (personal journal 2018-2022: 321) through the stick installation.

I am curious as to what it is about hanging sticks that has been so revealing in this study? If I average out the process, each instance could be presented as selecting a stick, looking for the space with which it resonates, attaching string, hanging it (personal journal 2018-2022: 324). The actuality is that the cycle above is so astonishingly different at each turn that I do not know how to write about it without partially averaging it out. Importantly, the possibility of averaging out singularity is apparent only in writing up the research: it was not a possibility in the installation process. Approximation loses some of the richness and import of the embodied experience. The unwieldiness of verbal articulation in the face of such radical difference and the inevitability of losing something of it in the writing instigate a field of tension.

The stick hanging process is, I posit, primarily driven by oscillation of singularity and infinite or unbounded difference (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). When disengaged from the process I realise that it is fascination with this oscillation that maintained the momentum of the installation. I find that the term 'difference', when used on its own to describe hanging the installation, to be an averaging out of the embodied experience.

Jean Baudrillard (Baldwin 2018: 2,4 of 8) is concerned about the loss of human alterity in the posthuman view. Human entanglement with advancing technology in Baudrillard's view, tends towards technology subsuming all that is enigmatic and ambiguous in the human mode. The virtual world to Baudrillard subsumes otherness, including negativity and danger (Baldwin 2018: 2 of 8). The virtual offers a modicum of difference, that is, an appearance of difference without the intensity of living the experience of difference (Baldwin 2018: 4 of 8). Thus, for Baudrillard (2002: 53), difference is debased otherness. This debased coin exchanges the richness of otherness for difference flattened out into identity and its politics (Baldwin 2018: 4 of 8).

Viewed diffractively through Barad (2014: 170; 2003: 803), difference flattened out (Baldwin 2018: 4 of 8) might be a cutting apart, where the specificity of what has been excluded does not matter. In my view, the multidimensionality of cutting together/apart has been lost. My experience in the stick event space (Bennett 2010b: 23) is that difference as infinite oscillates in relation with singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). The array of words indicating difference – such as otherness, alterity, singularity – are not as potent individually or when cut apart by comparing them with one another. I speculate that words are more potent when cut together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176) or situated in relation to other words and/or specific events.

I feel it is necessary to indicate awareness of ‘difference’ as a contested term. However, in this text, difference, alterity and otherness indicate a dynamic such as cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176) or the oscillation of infinite difference and singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). Through the stick installation I suggest that creative process manifests singularity from the oscillation of limitless difference and singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). The polyvalent potential of differencing – like unknowing – is immanent because it is already present in the world. It is not transcendent, that is, above or apart from the world. Through the immanent multidimensionality of differencing, I am also attempting to generate a sense of the unknown/unknowing as abundantly present.

Each stick I pick up and turn around and around is singular. How it changes the space it shares is singular. When the sticks are hanging, whether they are still or turning, the shapes between them are singular. This becomes apparent by standing in the installation and allowing oneself to be occupied by this singularity. It is a radical occupation as the entangled sticks and spaces ceaselessly shift and change, always differently (figures 70,75-77). Kwek’s (2018: 35-37) discussion of the potential of defunct materials sheds light on the unusual use of sticks. The way in which hanging dead sticks in living trees engendered the above insights into difference and singularity attest to this. In no way was re-installing the now dead sticks intended as a parody. What was realised and re-cognised was singularity not imitation. That each element of the installation is always already so utterly different leads me to re-cognise the fecundity and multidimensionality of unknowing. Could unknowing be immanent as the dynamic of differencing (personal journal 2018-2022: 326)? As a question and an insight, this is for me an important outcome of my research.

Zhuangzi (Kwek 2018: 27-34) points to another aspect of multidimensionality that originates beyond the occidental view. It offers a mode of dreaming, which according to Kwek (2018: 29,32-33) is not dismissed as unreal in the Daoist view. The *Zhuangzi* tells of a dream (see page 150) where a man and butterfly meet (Kwek 2018: 32-33). Is the man dreaming the butterfly or *vice versa*? Each dreamer is equally real in their dream situatedness. In my interpretation, to each dreamer the other is being dreamt. To each the dreamer/subject and dream/object are different, yet each is equally valid and equally indivisible. In this example, the differentiations of the dream/dreamer are entirely entangled.

There is a ghostliness to this, as each oneiric subject is haunted by the presence of the other. Instead of a single process experienced from a single dominant viewpoint, *Zhuangzi* (Kwek 2018: 27-34) offers concurrent and equally valid realities. For example, with both *in stalling the world* and *in stalling the world +*, the uncanny experience of standing still yet being invaded by the movement of the installation are simultaneously real and embodied encounters.

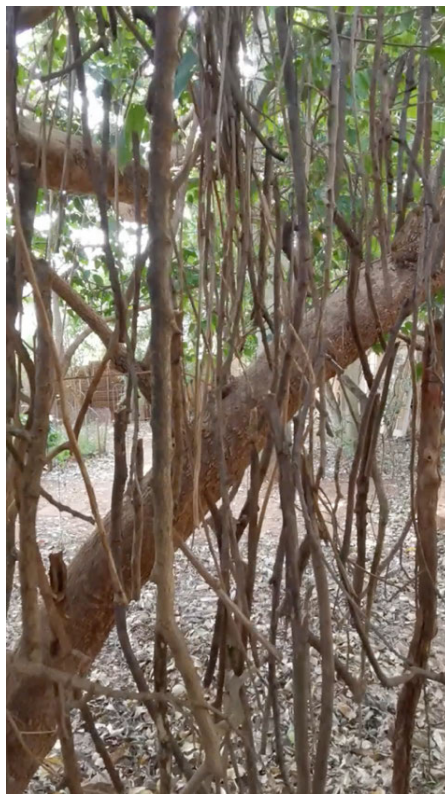


Figure 70, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of *in stalling the world +*, (2020), site specific installation, video available from: <https://youtube.com/shorts/Fx3SQawroBQ?feature=share>

Another relevant example of spectrality is Tim Knowles' tree drawings. In *The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking* Maaïke Bleeker (2020: 6-8 of 24) describes how Knowles attaches pencils to the twigs of various trees in a set-up that also includes paper, air movements, tree movements and easels (Bleeker 2020: 8 of 24). Knowles plays a part in preparing this apparatus, and subsequently in displaying the tree drawings. In the mark making, however, Knowles' presence is spectral. His presence, although excluded bodily from the performativity of the drawing, is nevertheless entangled with the drawing assemblage as he waits in the wings.



Figure 71, Tim Knowles, detail of *Weeping Willow*, (2005), ink on paper, dimensions unknown.



Figure 72, Tim Knowles, installation view of Weeping Willow, (2005), dimensions unknown.

Similarly, in viewing the tree drawings in a gallery, the trees are spectral. They are absent yet utterly present (just as Knowles was during the drawing) in a way that defies 'linear' time. The multi-dimensionality of agency is carried in this spectrality or dis/continuity (Barad 2011: 139). I surmise that for Knowles, trees, and drawings, their experience of mutual re-configuring is spectral and immediate because it happens without a discernible process through time. I assume this because dis/continuity shows that the photon of light appears without process, from nowhere, and the electron re-appears in equally ghostly fashion (see page 184).



Figure 73, Tim Knowles, detail of Weeping Willow installation, (2005), ink on paper, dimensions unknown.



Figure 74, Tim Knowles, details of *Dragon Spruce*, (2012), ink on paper, dimensions unknown.



Figure 75, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of in stalling the world †, (2020), site specific installation, video available from: <https://youtube.com/shorts/Lxx0Qs6MW-o>

In the same way, the Zhuangzi's (Kwek 2018: 32-33) butterfly dreaming man/man dreaming butterfly is in my view, otherworldly and multidimensional. Here the oneiric is multidimensional partly because there is not one viewpoint. There is no single 'truth of the matter'. They are indistinguishable, entangled, indivisible, yet in experiencing the dream, man and butterfly are impossibly other to each other (Cheah 2010: 76; Zembylas 2005: 146), or cut together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176). Cutting together/apart in this context suggests multidimensionality because the butterfly and man in their dreaming exceed the state of

together *or* apart, as is apparent in the potential of Manning’s “both-and” (Manning 2017: 104). In this study, multidimensionality is that which exceeds not only binaries, but intra-action and its constituents. For example, when videoing the stick installation in the wind, I experience a somatic disorientation within this realm of thrashing sticks. The confusion affects my understanding of where my bodily boundaries are in relation to the sticks, and of how and where to place myself with the cell phone camera. This bewilderment far exceeds the visible and invisible presences that constitute *in stalling the world +*.

Entanglement (Barad 2011: 123; 2003: 812) is a haunted matter because the immaterial is present and indivisible from the material. Coole and Frost (2010: 10), Barad (2007: 185) and Johnson (2014: 613) all stress the inseparability of material/immaterial. As seen above with *in stalling the world +* (figure 75), sticks and space seem to occupy one another at visible and invisible levels. In other words, material and immaterial mutually constitute one other. My bodily presence in the installation and my experience of this are likewise inseparable, as are my physical body and my body of artmaking experience. Global lockdown and the immediate environment of trees are also entangled in the installation. These examples demonstrate that the entanglement of material/immaterial bring multidimensionality to the stick intra-actions.

In her introductory editorial *Towards Vital Materialist Aesthetics*, Mandy-Suzanne Wong (2015) points to creative process as a means of interrogating multidimensionality. She ponders a music score of composer Morton Feldman (1926-1987). Feldman considered that making music was a jostling and pushing among instruments, paper, human, sounds. None of these elements ever do quite what they are told and are availed by expressions reaching from beyond the human (Wong 2015: 5). In other words, there are “multiple kinds or registers of liveliness that exceed biology” (Wong 2015: 13). There is something spectral in this because Wong implies that the materiality which shapes music is also invoked from a realm beyond the visible. The reach of material/immaterial that shapes creative process to me seems to be unknowable.

It seems that as the intangible reaches through the somatically discernible, they together bear the potential to re-shape dimensions. For example, when sixty-year-old paint¹⁹ is used in the

¹⁹ My mother bought oil paint approximately sixty years ago and then switched to using acrylic paint instead, recently, I found the old oil paint. Most of it is still useable. It seems to dry a little more quickly than newly

hauntologies (2022, figures 5,10,15,37,85,87,89-94,96), those sixty years are unstrung from linear time. They seem to snap into the immediacy of the painting process, the timeline dissolved. In the way that paint/ing and time are entangled, so are the global and local entangled with *in stalling the world +*. Vast global distances are transported into the immediate stick hanging locality by means of the intangible lockdown. Thus, the entanglement of material/immaterial reaches through vast swathes of distance and time to affectively shape the stick installation. Although opened to multidimensionality by in-the-dark methods, I feel sure there are further affective material/immaterial entanglements of which my human-ish self is not aware.

According to Wong, experiencing Feldman's music is multidimensional. It is experiencing the pressure of Feldman's pen on paper and the flow of ink; which is interpreted through the pressure of hands touching instruments, expelling air strongly or hardly at all, a string setting off a vibration; which might pressure an ear drum; and touches somatically whatever is present (Wong 2015: 6). In the *presence* of Feldman and his music (he died thirty-four years ago), air, instruments, fingers, pen, lungs, linear time, ink *et cetera*, become meaningless as discrete notions. The music's somatic presence draws time, matter, affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261), fleeting agency through itself. That is, each performance ineluctably shapes the music anew.

If Wong's experiencing of Feldman's music is run diffractively through Barad's entanglement, creative process might be interpreted as spacetime-mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181). Spacetime-mattering scrambles linear time and the unrolling of cause into effect. Each performance of a score, or experience of creative process is a re-working of material/immaterial, a spacetime-mattering. Concomitantly, in each rendering, the relation of meaning and matter is re-calibrated. Thus, in my view, matter/meaning is experienced and understood through the specificity of its spacetime-mattering.

For example,

[The] repeated turning to trees [in my creative practice] over many years does something to the span of time. These repeated references

bought paint. Perhaps over this time the drying process has been happening slowly. The decreased drying time is thus also a materiality.

seem like beads on a string; they draw close together leaving no gaps between. When working with/from trees, all my past tree experiences draw together, feeling like there are no real gaps of time having passed. An odd thing happens with space too. As the sense of linear time evaporates, the feeling of space flows/billows outwards They don't feel like separate matters. (personal journal 2018-2022: 322)

No creative process can be encompassed by one particular experience or understanding and is thus unknowable. Each artmaking engagement – be it making or seeing – is also an unknowable spacetime-mattering. In my experience, each engagement is a singular node that disrupts the linearity of time, prior existence of matter/s and the boundaries of phenomena.

Each stick hanging engagement is a specific intra-action where the parameters of the creative performance are never quite the same. I might think I am cognisant of what is being included in each intra-action. However, as mentioned, where and whence affects appear is often indiscernible. This for me destabilises the notion of intentionally setting the parameters of what will be part of the meaning/mattering performance, or the cutting together/apart (Barad 2014: 168,176). This is apparent in the stick installation. When I walk away from it, as discussed earlier, the shaping of it continues: our family dogs dash through it; the wind tangles strings and sticks; ibises pull at the sticks for nesting material; fungus grows on some sticks; others are eaten by ants; insects lay eggs; monkeys playfully pull up a string and bite it off. The list goes on and very probably includes factors which I do not witness.



Figure 76, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of *installing the world +*, (2020), site specific installation, video available from: <https://youtu.be/6WCJ1rmqbtI>

When re-visiting *installing the world +*, Barad's (2014: 168,176) cutting together/apart presents as a porous, as well as a temporary matter. She posits this enactment of boundaries as performative, where meaning and matter are forged equally by what is included and what excluded from intra-action. An in-the-dark method configured by the stick installation is refraining from instilling or working towards meaning. In the stick installation, for me meaning is left unsolicited, until it appears out of the darkness of its own volition. This is the way in which some insight into singularity emerged.

In the installation, I attempt to offer an experience of immersion by suspending my cell phone in the thick of the hanging sticks, facing up into the trees (figure 77). Doing this partly clarifies the performance of matter/meaning because the phone's video delimits what is included in each such video version of *installing the world +*. How and what is recorded is delimited by invisible and unpredictable factors such as the wind. This kind of unpredictability means that each time a stick is selected and hung, the performance is always already different. I also realise that when hanging sticks is considered overall as a process, (that is, when I attempt to generalise it), the differences are reduced to approximate similarity. This could not be said of the singularity of each hanging experience where there seems to be no categories of similar,

that is, no benchmark for normal. Kwek (2018: 37) confirms that singularity resists (I assume fixed) normativity.

It seems that it is not possible to articulate how the singularity of being immersed in the installation process relates to the installation overall. The attempt to frame the singular with words seems to lead into a bottomless spiral that never arrives at clear articulation. Thus, through writing of the stick installation, I realise that approximating or generalising, while unavoidable, is also useful in this academic context. Barbara Bolt (2006: 4 of 7) attests to the necessity of generalising into theory the insights that arise from specific embodied experiences of handling materials. I find that the tension of approximating difference-through-writing/singularity-in-making is maintained because it is unreconcilable. The uneasy relationship of writing and making is intentionally central to PLR (Mafe 2009: 68). In the torque of the approximating/singular field lies the fecundity of artmaking research and PLR.²⁰

In this text, the spectral alludes to dis/continuity. There is something spectral in the way that what cannot be articulated about artmaking haunts the theoretical writing. Barad's (2010: 240) exclusions haunt intra-actions and the appearance of difference. Let us return to the cell phone slung amongst the sticks. Only that captured by the phone's video will be visible but more than the visible is apparent. There is something otherworldly about being drawn into the whirl of sticks in the wind, a feeling of an unfolding of which only a small part is visible (personal journal 2018-2022: 385).

²⁰ In my previous research (Birch 2018) I experienced the implicit tension of the making/writing relationship: "where the depth of certain experiences drove transformation yet could not be amply described in academic language" (Birch 2018: 95). In this study, I recognise more nuanced forms of this tension in the relation of approximate difference/singularity (Bolt 2006: 4 of 7).



Figure 77, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of *in stalling the world +*, (2020), site specific installation, video available from: <https://youtu.be/Xw6WtJp-4TY>

To re-turn Barad's electron (2011: 137; 2010: 246; 2007: 182), there is no process, no where, no when from which a differentiated electron *and* a photon of light apparate. As with the electron, that which engenders difference (for example, the way in which each stick reconfigures the surrounding space) cannot be assigned to any particular entity or to a process of gradual change (Barad 2010: 265; Cheah 2010: 82). Barad's (2011: 139) dis/continuity draws together with Derrida's impossible relation to alterity (Coole & Frost 2010: 74). It seems impossible to relate to that ghostly photon (Barad 2011: 137; 2010: 246; 2007: 182). Here indeed is utterly unknowable untouchable alterity. In this context unknowing feels pervasive and evasive (personal journal 2018-2022: 328).

Barad offers a view of matter and mattering (2014; 2011; 2010; 2007; 2003) that in my opinion renders a stance of anthropocentrism impossible. This I surmise is because her extensive and thorough research undoes normative yardsticks as fixed (Barad 2007: 225). Although Barad suggests that there are normative practices, these are shaped through re-iterative and performative response to differences that matter in ways that matter. What seems to be important is the kinds of differences that are thus re-iteratively and performatively constituted (Barad 2007: 380). I speculate that this is the kind of generalising which Bolt

indicates (2006: 4 of 7). Barad's normative practices seem to avoid averaging out difference into an enduring or fixed normality I assume because they are rooted in the indeterminacy of intra-action.

Awareness of the underlying indeterminacy of normativity is crucial when re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) through the artmaking engagements of this study. When *in stalling the world +*'s creative processes are placed in proximity with language (including reading, making sense of what others and myself have written, and writing) they are re-configured through these further intra-actions. Language does not supply the 'norm' through which the artmaking is evaluated. Each verbal articulation offers the potential of re-engaging anew with the artmaking process. In my view, the tensions embedded in PLR hold out the possibility for each making/writing/viewing/thinking engagement with artmaking to be lively and fresh (Bolt 2004: 15). At the same time, perhaps this diffractive re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) of the tensioned making/writing relationship is the kind of normative practice that reveals/configures PLR as a sturdy knowledge enlivening paradigm.

Conclusion

In the stick space, uselessness as an in-the-dark artmaking method evolves from removing a pre-defined goal and any related trajectory (Morgan 2014: ii,229) to the unusual use of sticks. Uselessness emerges from *in stalling the world +*'s process as multidimensional. The mode of uselessness that shaped the installation additionally renders visible the installation's further re-configurations that happen with or without my presence. Multidimensionality seemingly includes a range of agency that is not necessarily human. *in stalling the world +* is thus shaped by uselessness and sticks, string, cell phone, camera, by a biological array of a human, dogs, birds, insects, monkeys, and by an immaterial array that includes lockdown and wind. This relates to the first research question: In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?

The above mutually constitutive process reveals that alterity/otherness/difference is a potent and immanent dynamic. In different words, the inside is always already haunted by the outside and *vice versa*. What ensues is a radical, fluid and fleetingly visible singularity, the embodied richness of which is lost in the more generalising mode of writing. As I surprisingly

realised in the making of the stick space, the specific (only partly visible and articulatable) is closer to unknowing than the general (largely visible and articulated). Specific embodied engagement has led to the above insights which help to investigate the second and third research questions.

Becoming open to unknowing through in-the-dark methods allows material/immaterial agency to reach through the stick hanging process, rendering it unknowable. That is, creative practice cannot be encompassed by knowledge. However, PLR importantly affords a way of reading theory diffractively through artmaking practice and reading artmaking diffractively through academic writing. Making the installation becomes a non-verbal thinking process that productively pulls against the thinking processes of journal and thesis writing.

The way in which the above in-the-dark artmaking methods deepen my understanding of unknowing and materiality is apparent in positing fields of tension as generative. This valorises PLR as a paradigm and artmaking as a mode of thinking. A field of tension might be availed when, in *via negativa* mode, one refrains from attempting to resolve it. The oscillation of tensioned binaries I assume maintains openness to further differencing. I posit that PLR as a field of tension, and the other tensions above, root this study in unknowing and materiality. Additionally, in-the-dark methods situate this study in the field tensioned between the western zone of new materialism and the indigenous zone of artmaking (Lawrence 2005: 5) as research.

In response to the third question, there are other insights that have issued from using the above in-the-dark methods. Stick space as a diffractive 'grid' shows me that purpose and normality are often conflated. Undoing purpose seemingly undoes fixed normative benchmarks, revealing difference everywhere. The singularity discussed through *in stalling the world +* vibrates with unbounded difference. I find that in both writing and thinking practices, a line of enquiry becomes easily lost in the oscillations of infinite difference/singularity. Thus, although it reduces difference, generalising seems to be necessary in pursuing and presenting research. Averaging out is specific to verbal thinking in this study. Finally, through writing this chapter, I realise that removing a prior goal has developed into refraining from instilling meaning. This element is picked up in the next section.

the wax ground works

In-the-dark methods provide a nexus of creative potential, as I hope is becoming evident in the preceding sections of this chapter. In this discussion, the central in-the-dark methods are excluding a prior goal (Morgan 2014: 229) and wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). In the wax ground processes, I discover that excluding a goal means I refrain from instilling meaning or a focal point in the wax ground works. The wax/paper becomes an indeterminate borderland (Anzaldúa 1987: 3), haunted by dis/continuity. Creative process deepens my experiential understanding of the above in-the-dark methods, materials and concepts.

I contend that unknowing facilitates the flow of material forcefulness through human-ish thinking and action. This is evident in the way the materiality of creative activity has been given centre stage in articulating the research questions. I am discovering that wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) is questioning in action before it is precipitated into imagery or verbal articulation. Coole and Frost (2010: 2) consider that a wide range of immaterial elements – such as questions – emerge from the space between human thinking and physical manifestations of matter. I might re-phrase this after Stacey Alaimo's *Thinking as the Stuff of the World* (2014): human thinking processes are already ineluctably entangled with material manifestations. The ways in which in-the-dark methods, materiality and artmaking configure together I suggest is a thinking process. Sarat Maharaj (2009: 3,4 of 11) refers to creative practice as thinking, as “thinking through the visual”. The wax ground works evidence that the performativity of thinking happens across an array of materials.

I realise that thus far in this research I have been considering materials as materialities (personal journal 2018-2022: 332), mulling over the ways in which multiple materialities work together. Investigating the above artmaking processes through the PLR nexus of writing (particularly this chapter) and making has revealed an important understanding at this point. Materiality seems to be a mode that enables unlimited potential for specifying materials in particular contexts. Rather than replacing ‘materialities’ with ‘materials’ in this text, materiality as a term/mode includes materials. Positing materiality as an oscillation of infinite difference and utter specificity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326) I contend allows for the possibility of all material encounters. Thus, there is materiality, which includes all materials, rather than multiple materialities.

The material thread that runs through what I have called the wax ground works is candle wax melted into paper. The initial processes begin with this combination of wax/paper and charcoal drawing and evolve to using ink with the charcoal and wax/paper, then to using oil paint with the wax/paper.

Fixative is not environmentally friendly, so I wondered (Somerville 2008: 210; 2007: 228) about alternatives to fix the charcoal drawings. In an attempt to find such an alternative, I used a steam iron to melt colourless candle wax²¹ into the paper. Then when I started drawing, the initial charcoal marks were intriguing. Over the waxed areas the marks were much darker and denser than those on the bare paper. Although initially I had a human-ish purpose in using wax, this intention was outstripped by the fascinating ways in which the materials converged (personal journal 2018-2022: 314). When my mind is focused elsewhere, it seems to allow something unexpected to appear. In-the-dark methods are intended to loosen my mind's focus on creative processes. In my view, this enabled the affectivity of wax, steam, paper, charcoal to expand my responsive capacity (Bennett 2010b: 31) beyond using wax for its charcoal fixing potential.

The process of drawing with charcoal is for me, deeply engaging. For me this is evident in the somatic experience of how the softness and darkness of charcoal engages my response. It is as though the materials draw out all my previous drawing experience in a kind of fingertip, moment-by-moment response. Lenz Taguchi (2012: 272) voices an important methodological question as she wonders in what ways difference, or that which seems other to ourselves, interferes with our somatic register when we are immersed in research practices. In the context of this study, difference is not a negative, a dissimilarity, but rather a forcefulness that manifests change (Lenz Taguchi 2012: 269). In the wax ground works as the charcoal first bit into the waxed areas, it both darkened in tone and lit up my curiosity. The light of curiosity for me indicates that my mind is open and receptive. It was attention to registering somatically how the feel of the charcoal changed that crucially shaped the following processes

²¹ As I considered using wax, I was aware that whatever kind I use has an incalculable effect. If I use beeswax, what is the impact on bee colonies, flower fertilisation, plant life, food sources *et cetera*. Similarly, using petroleum- or soy-based candle wax, indeed any material, has an impact that cannot be fully comprehended or traced. During hard lockdown, candle wax was the most accessible.

as an enquiry. This also shows that for me, insights register somatically and mentally at the same time (personal journal 2018-2022: 292).

Artist Kath Fries (2017) similarly finds that tactile and repeated engagement with her materials, such as beeswax, reveals the potential for deeper conversations with them. For her this is triggered by unknowing: “Unknowing is vital to the flux and flow of these entanglements and connections, inviting us to repeatedly encounter our materialities and surroundings anew, despite assumptions of familiarity” (Fries 2017: 52).

Lori Clarke’s (2019) thesis considers how, through attention to the somatic register, tensions might engender creative response. For example, working with the unwieldiness of *bloubefok’s* (figures 85,86a-b) ten-metre roll of paper (see page 193) triggers impatience and explosive creative energy. Another possibility beyond impatience is to allow that explosive energy to translate into drawing wildly and furiously with charcoal. It is as though the process feels its way along by means of the affordance (Bleeker 2020: 8-9 of 24) or conjoint capacities of materials. In this my role is that of co-researcher because I listen *with* (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) materials, lending my embodied non-verbal artmaking experience to their impulses, capacities, stubbornness and cues. Haraway (2015: 161) confirms this: “Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with ... become-with, compose-with ...”. Anzaldúa (2015: 5) voices it thus: “There’s a difference between talking with images/stories and talking about them”. In this text, the conjunction ‘with’ seems to point away from individuals and towards communally entangled engagement. Responsive artmaking capacity becomes an entangled nexus where materials

mark one another with their difference. (The wax gives the charcoal density and depth of tone. The charcoal embeds itself in the wax. The wax renders the paper translucent, it floods it with light. the paper gives substance to the wax’s flow, its flood of light). (personal journal 2018-2022: 314)

Curiosity draws me into this nexus. Kath Fries’ creative process begins with curiosity and is rooted in the premise that the exact outcome is unknowable (Fries 2017: 52). Thus, curiosity and unknowing are central to her methodology. Curious enquiry seems to be a mode that allows in-the-dark methods to engage (Birch 2018: 26). In this study, it manifests as

wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) in thinking and in action. Wondering one might assume to belong to the mental realm and wandering to the active if approached *via* Cartesian duality. Surprisingly, Descartes saw wonder as the first passion or emotion when encountering any unknown object. For him, wonder preceded knowledge (Jones 2013: 1 of 8). Although Descartes considered that matter occupying space was incompatible with, and intrinsically separate from, the substance of thinking, Haraway (2004: 11) points out that there is no clear boundary between material and immaterial. The experience of artmaking as enquiry highlights that modes of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) exceed dichotomies, segueing through material and immaterial.

The marked difference in the feel of moving charcoal over waxed and unwaxed paper (personal journal 2018-2022: 355) triggered a response of wonder in my somatic and my thinking systems. This demonstrated for me that the realms of matter and human thinking are indeed entangled. In the engagement with wax and charcoal, wonder is an awed acknowledgement that the intrinsic potency of these materials does not depend on any human thinking process. Because their forcefulness is independent of human perception and/or intervention, engaging with wax, paper and charcoal means abandoning the illusion that I decide on the process and its outcome in advance. As discussed at length, relinquishing a pre-established trajectory and goal manifests as wandering. The artmaking process, and the way in which the mind follows – not leads! – the creative pathways, both wander because there is no knowing the way ahead. The ways in which the process wanders are highly specific to how materials respond within each active engagement as will become apparent.

In this study, it is an important aspect of PLR that wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) in artmaking also shapes the thesis writing. Somerville's (2008) *'Waiting in the chaotic place of unknowing': articulating postmodern emergence* confirms the generativity of unknowing. Her paper articulates her understanding of the way in which knowledge emerges from the spaces between differences (Somerville 2008: 215-218). These spaces are seemingly unknowable, chaotic, and generative as borne out by her title. Somerville (2008: 218) considers difference as a generator of deeper understanding to be especially relevant to academic writing. When non-verbal forms of representation are used in conjunction with the text these offer a way into other meanings and insights that render the text multidimensional, extending the limits of academic writing. I do not agree with Somerville's view of

representation, or with the implication that the prime bearer of knowledge is verbal. However, her claim that knowledge is engendered by difference is crucial (Somerville 2008: 209).

My wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) response to the different ways in which charcoal behaves with waxed or unwaxed paper demonstrates that bodily and mental responses are entangled. Moreover, the wax ground works show that curious enquiry as an in-the-dark method is a generality. As demonstrated in previous sections of this chapter, the specificity of in-the-dark methods is configured with the wondering/wandering as artmaking. The initial wax/paper/charcoal processes thus indicate that in-the-dark methods are generalisations until they are drawn into the specifics of artmaking. Immersion (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196) in creative action seems to render the general into the specific. Materiality as a dynamic (personal journal 2018-2022: 326) means: that bodily and mental responses are entangled; curious enquiry as an in-the-dark method is a generality; that specificity changes with each artmaking encounter.

In the wax ground works, wax is used beyond its traditional purpose (Kwek 2018). As becomes clear when immersed within artmaking (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196), in-the-dark methods are intrinsically not separate from one another and converge differently each time. Thus, in the first wax ground wanderings, the anomalous use of wax, utter immersion in the process and being somatically aware and open (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155) released a new line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 116-117; Cocker 2013: 131). This kind of openness feels risky and vulnerable because it means disregarding my inner judgemental operations. In the language of this inner judgment system, I could go horribly wrong, or be required to obliterate something I judge to be good.

One potent way of sidestepping the mechanics of self-judgement is to speed up and/or exaggerate artmaking actions (Birch 2018: 91). The abstract expressionists used techniques such as speed in their desire to surrender to spontaneous artmaking action (Gombrich 1984: 479). Below I return to the work of Rothko who worked on the fringes of abstract expressionism. When I initially used the charcoal over wax, as in the explorative piece below (figure 78), it was necessary to work at great speed as this self-appraisal kicked in.



Figure 78, Caroline Birch, first wax and charcoal exploration, (2019).

Dashing through these internal constraints headlong into the unknown revealed several things. Firstly, not knowing seems to be a personal experience of unknowing. As Emma Cocker (2013: 126,131) points out, one can interpret not knowing negatively or positively. She thus posits *not* knowing as not generative in itself. However, I agree that *unknowing* generative in itself (Ings 2014: 4,11 of 14; Kourie 2008: 64; Morgan 2014: 1; Zembylas 2005: 143). Following on from this, one's particular and situated relation to unknowing I suggest manifests a productive field of tension. This kind of tension or torque might be generated through the simultaneous presence of (unknowing as) universal and (the experience of not knowing as) particular. For Nishida, tension is intrinsic to the fabric of the world: "[t]he actual always involves this tension of contradictories ..." (Krummel 2012: 40). The tension triggered by universal and particular (Agamben 1993: 18-19; Krummel 2012: 40) in my view offers creativity as a fluid and multidimensional nexus. I surmise that dichotomies could proffer a potentially productive field of tension because they are inextricably entangled yet different

(Barad 2014: 174). As they twist or pull against one another I find that the spin-offs offer potential next moves in the creative process (personal journal 2018-2022: 290).

For example, *bloubefok* (figures 85,86a-b) is an intensely committed process of exploration – the level of commitment is apparent in repeatedly working over the ten-metre length, on the back and front of the roll of paper (personal journal 2018-2022: 356,359). I am torn between caring about the outcome and throwing artmaking caution to the winds (personal journal 2018-2022: 359) in the interests of exploring how materiality and in-the-dark methods configure with the artmaking. Consequently, there is no attempt to draw beautifully or edit the charcoal and ink marks that emerge. The wax ground creative processes also importantly demonstrate that this kind of torque or tension could be what renders PLR productive. “The torsion provides sturdiness; and something unknowable ... is this where strong research questions come from?” (personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282). In my experience it is the irresolvable tension triggered by the intentional proximity of non-verbal and verbal modes (Somerville 2008: 218; personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282,302) that gives rise to research questions and continues to propel the enquiry.

This written re-configuring of the creative process highlights wax as a ghostly element. A steam iron is used to melt the wax into the paper. The wax grounds would not exist without the input of iron and steam, yet there is no immediate evidence of their presence. Heat and steam offer a ghostly presence, perhaps because they do not leave distinct mark-like traces in the way that brush or charcoal might. Iron and steam are also excluded from the form in which these works are submitted, yet they were inextricably formative in their making. Although they may have been physically excluded from the presentation of artwork, they are nevertheless entangled in the wax. Steam and iron are ghostly presences.

Fries (2017: 56) experienced something similar when she worked with beeswax. She moulded the wax into a funnel using the heat and form of her finger. She considers that this move was influenced by the beeswax itself, and by the way in which the bees use their wax. In my view, bees were a ghostly yet potent presence in her process. She discovered *after* making the funnels that bees too make funnels which only become hexagonal when fitted cheek by jowl with neighbouring funnels. In Fries’ view, materials have their own extensive histories and connections beyond the human. Do bees continue to be entangled with their wax long after it has left the hive? Is heat entangled with wax whatever its state?



Figure 79, Kath Fries, making beeswax funnels, (2014).

Fries engages with her materials in such a way that they lead her creative process. This allows her “to follow the material’s sentient matter flow” (Fries 2017: 5). She considers that everything in existence is caught up in a continual flow of change. It is “constantly vibrating, changing, assembling and evolving into forms and organisms, cycling through decay and disintegration, then reforming again with diversity and difference” (Fries 2017: xi). Thus, materials, in their ongoing flow of change, are able to make connections, intra-act, and leave traces of these histories without human input. To Fries, (2017: 5,153) it is this life apart from the human that renders matter unknowable and thus alluring or enchanting.

Closely aligned to enchantment is what Fries (2017: 128) calls “silent illumination.” Silent illumination ensues from non-thinking. Fries derives her understanding of non-thinking from Dōgen (1200-1253), who was a Buddhist philosopher, priest, and poet. For her it is a practice, a capacity to be willingly present with change and instability. For me, in-the-dark artmaking methods embody this capacity to be willingly present with unknowing. Fries goes on to align non-thinking with the way in which new materialists view ‘things’. Seeing things as processes, or assemblages of changing matter requires non-thinking or the capacity to remain present with instability. Non-thinking is for me a general capacity for tapping into unknowing’s

potential. Thus, non-thinking could lead into the realm of understanding, and “has nothing to do with knowing” (Stambaugh in Fries 2017: 128). Silent illumination points to unknowing’s potential for shedding light. Fries was drawn to wax partly by its luminosity, and although she does not directly state that beeswax indicates silent illumination, this is clearly implied.



Figure 80, Kath Fries, Permeate, (2015), beeswax and sandstone shards, 300 x 400 x 600 cm.

Fries’ *Divest* (figures 10,81) is a site-specific installation. The title refers both to the wax that has been appropriated from beehives and to the effect of human ravaging on the environment. Vestiges of her presence are evident in the fingerprints left in the wax. There are also traces of ash scattered over the beeswax funnels. Fries (2017: 58) uses the relationship of wax and ash to indicate the often destructive effects of humans on the environment. She also intends the ash to instil a sense of loss. Fries seems to carefully

consider her use of materials in conveying meaning. In my interrogation of the way in which in-the-dark artmaking methods and materials shape process, I find that I do not use materials in a particular way to instil meaning into the work. Any meaning there is seems to arise from this nexus, which includes me but is not directed by me.



Figure 81, Kath Fries, detail of Divest, (2014), beeswax and ash, site specific installation, dimensions variable.

In her thesis Fries (2017: 12) engages with the layered meaning of materials and the ensuing co-created works. She examines how the meaning evolves with the different uses of beeswax. It seems to me that Fries uses materials to convey her intended meanings. She is evidently open to this meaning being expanded by the input of materials, as with the wax funnels mentioned above. As my focus, articulated in the research questions, is primarily on how methods, materials and the artmaking *process* form together, meaning remains elusive for me. I do not attempt to imbed meaning into the process or interpret the artwork when disengaged from artmaking. I think this would be an imposition on the viewer's engagement. Below I return to notions of meaning and matter.



Figure 82, Kath Fries, Within and Without (PhD exam), (2017), wood, beeswax, oyster mushrooms, light and water, dimensions variable.

Looking at changing attitudes to matter and its reach is necessary to this investigation. In the 1600's Descartes interpreted matter as inert and passive, discrete and bounded with measurable dimensions. Thus, "material objects are identifiably discrete; they move only

upon encounter with an external force or agent, and they do so according to a linear logic of cause and effect” (Coole & Frost 2010: 7). Thun-Hohenstein (2009: 2 of 3) suggests that the idea of reproducing a logical sequence of methodological steps is an additional illusion.

Advances in physics have demonstrated that what appears to be ‘solid’ matter is not solid or fixed. That is, “matter has become considerably more elusive (one might even say more immaterial) and complex” (Coole & Frost 2010: 5). Although the structural openness of matter is generally acknowledged, there are significant differences in how this is approached by new materialists.

Barad (2007: 155-159) extrapolates the open-endedness of matter and posits that entities are not only structurally open, but also open in nature or indeterminate (Barad 2010: 249,254). Their boundaries and properties are not defined prior to intra-action (Barad 2010: 253). Alaimo (2018) and Bennett (2015) differ from Barad. In their view, beings are open to affect, but they are already discrete entities prior to being washed through by this tide of affect (Bennett 2015: 97). Distinct entities are implicit in Alaimo’s (2018: 3 of 8) transcorporeality where affects “move across bodies and places” and in Bennett’s notion of things and “thing-power” (Bennett 2010b: 2). I follow Barad’s cue as is borne out by my central question: In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?

In each intra-action, being is (re-)determined (Barad 2014: 178; 2007; 141). Although it may seem within an intra-action that there is a single agent causing effects, the agency that forges the artmaking is spatial (Barad 2007: 177-178) and ensues from intra-action (Barad: 2014: 173-174). The paper, human-ish hand, steam *et cetera* enact the artmaking. Intra-action also precipitates specific agential structures – for example, that of steam iron and artist – whose relations and therefore boundaries are specific only for this intra-action. Barad’s agential realism accounts for the seeming reality of agency and for the affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261) of matter.

Agential cuts enact difference (Barad 2014: 176), that is, differentiate the performers. The differentiating or mattering of ‘performers’ also forges meaning. Matter and meaning mutually shape one another. For example, earlier I referred to how the installation-like state of my studio during lockdown spread outside beyond the studio confines (personal journal

2018-2022: 318,319). The human response to the COVID-19 virus played a vital part in shaping the ensuing stick and virtual installations. When the Centre for Visual Arts (CVA) asked for submissions for our annual postgraduate exhibition, a re-cognising of the expanded studio installation was necessary as the format had to fit the virtual platform (see page 158). From these various elements, the virtual installation's title emerged as *in stalling the world* (2020). This example demonstrates the complexity of the matter/meaning nexus. The dynamics are entangled and difficult to pick out individually, yet the mutual shaping is evident.

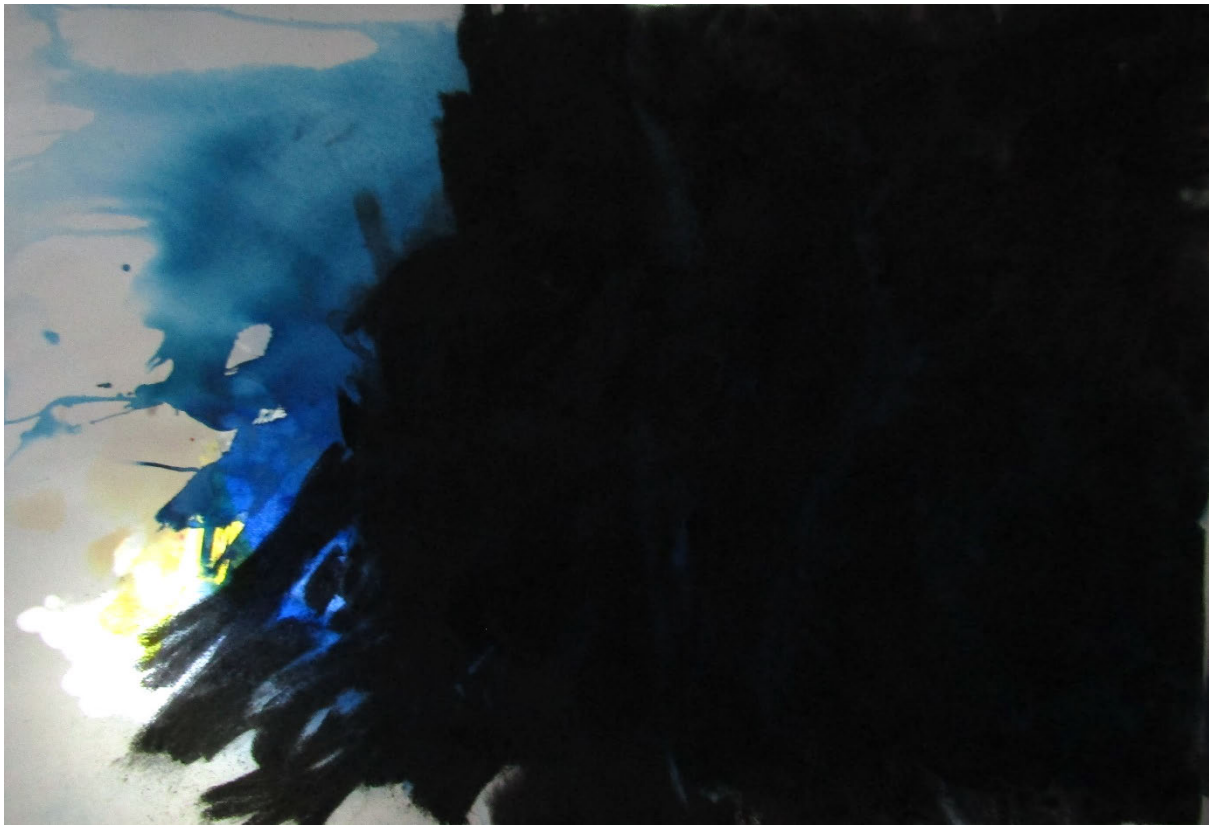


Figure 83, Caroline Birch, waxing game, (2020), ink, wax, charcoal and Fabriano, 70 cm x 100 cm.

As seen in the wax ground works, the boundaries of paper and wax are evidently open to one another because together they enact their re-determined being. Their entanglement forges a visible pathway for light, giving the wax/paper a different translucent form. The translucency of wax is another aspect of ghostliness, as it is not initially apparent until there

is light behind the paper. This is evident in *waxing game* (figure 83) where the opaque, heavy 300-gram wax/paper allows light to pass through. The translucency of wax re-determines the presence of light rendering it more explicit than implicit. Light as colour is more implicit. In looking at the colour of paint, for example, one might forget that each colour one sees is a very specific wavelength of light (Barad 2011: 137; 2007: 252). The translucency of waxed paper renders colour (of paint, ink, *et cetera*) and light simultaneously explicit.



Figure 84, Kath Fries, *Irradiate*, (2017), beeswax on paper, 260 x 150 x 80 cm.

For example, in *bloubefok* (2021), ‘white’ light and light as colour are simultaneous presences. Recognising and listening with (Vasudevan 2011: 1157) re-differentiating materials is central to how this work developed. Ink, charcoal, and paper behave differently when for example, wax is introduced to paper: “Soft charcoal on paper is lovely, but as the charcoal hits the wax you have liquid velvet in your hands ... soft, deep, dark” (personal journal 2018-2022: 355). This nexus of difference or alterity activated the layering of *bloubefok*.



Figure 85, Caroline Birch, detail of bloubefok in the making, (2021), ink, wax, charcoal and Fabriano, approx. 1500 cm x 10 000 cm.

Alterity is perhaps akin to unknowing in that it is not passive (see page 86,165). This is evidenced by the apparition of the photon (Barad 2011: 137; 2010: 246; 2007: 182), or in other words, by light and colour. For example, when looking up at a clear daylit sky, it seems to be impossible to look directly *at* the blue although it is indubitably visible (personal journal

2018-2022: 361). There is no finite 'place' which could be identified as blue. This experiencing of blue is deeply spectral perhaps because there is no object with which to conflate the colour blue. My fascination with this experience of blue's alterity influenced *bloubefok*. In the everyday world around us, colour and objects are usually conjoined. The blue of *bloubefok* is ghostly because it is there as colour, not aligned to specific imagery, and because the presence of blue is not directed towards particular meaning.

In *bloubefok* light and dark were also used as themselves, independently of specific imagery and/or meaning. Traditionally, tone is the term denoting the range and arrangement of light and dark in an artwork. Tone is central to creating the illusion of three-dimensional form (Edwards 1999: 194). Interestingly, what is referred to as the value scale of tonal differences attaches high value to light and low value to dark. Edwards (1999: 194) uses the term light logic. As evidenced in the research questions, the 'logic' of artmaking research in this study is in-the-dark.

The dark of *bloubefok* is present as a material and not *as a means* to create a range of tone or to convey pre-determined meaning. *bloubefok* is also dark in the way the incremental process denied any overview of the unfolding process or any predictable way forwards. Light works through the wax to open the perceived back/front boundary of the paper.²² It also works as the colour blue (as wavelength). The convergence of wax and light/colour draws light through the creative exploration and through the more passive reception (viewing) of the work. Thus, once light and dark have been relieved of a pre-defined use, they offer great multidimensional potential.

In undoing the apparent boundary between back and front of the paper, the paper becomes a borderland, "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa 1987: 3) in the artmaking process. When engaging with *bloubefok* it is impossible to tell what is on the other side of the paper, what will be drawn together by the wax's translucence when lit. Working like this also reveals a new (for me) in-the-dark method and has deepened my understanding of in-the-dark methods overall.

²² In this text, the images of the wax ground works have not been lit from behind, as they will be in the exhibition of my body of research artwork.

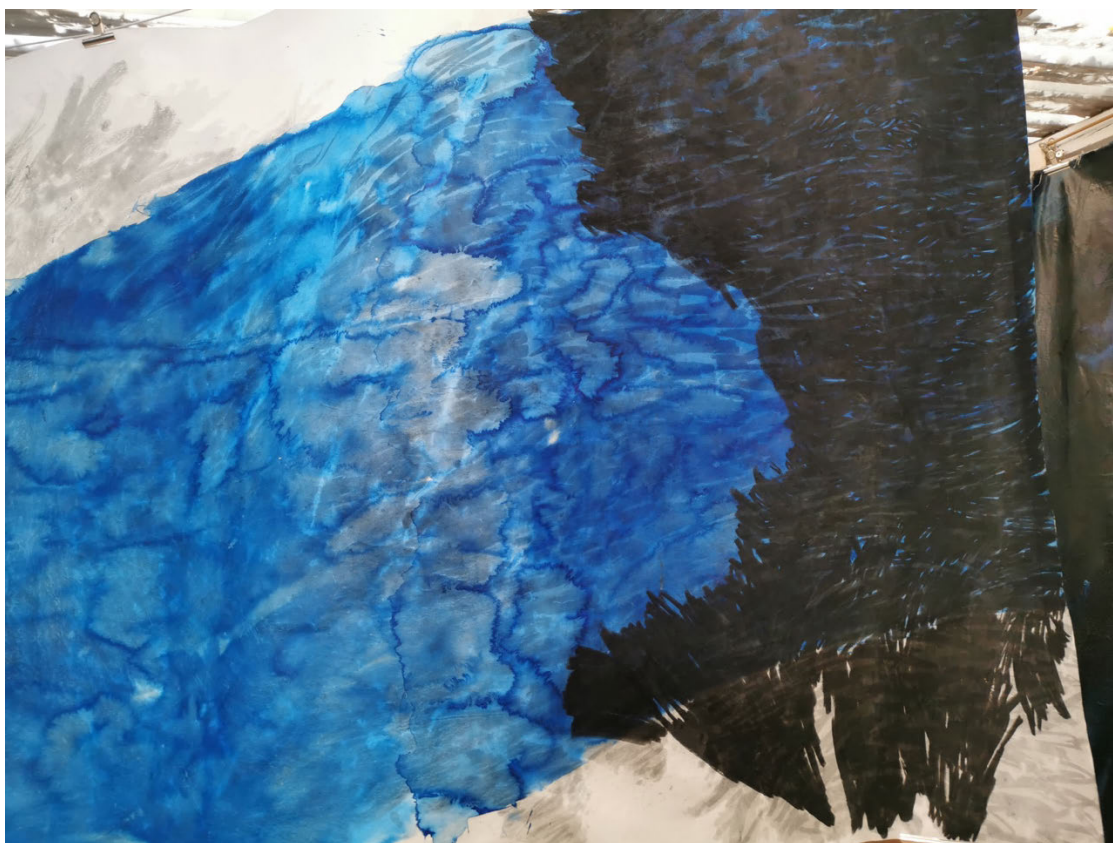


Figure 86a-b, Caroline Birch, details of bloubefok in the making, (2021), ink, wax, charcoal and Fabriano, approx. 1500 cm x 10 000 cm.

bloubefok is ten metres in length. The affectivity of ten metres of paper, of wax, of cluttered studio space (an effect of lockdown), of artmaking experience, shaped *bloubefok*'s step-by-step creative process. The length of the paper and the available studio space meant that it was possible to unroll and work with only a portion of the paper at a time. Working flat on a table meant only one side was visible during its making. It was thus impossible to gain an overall view of the work, destabilising the ability to resolve or unify the work in its process. This exclusion of an overview of the process was vitally formative to the process and showed that working incrementally is an in-the-dark method (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360).



Figure 87, Phyllida Barlow, *Untitled: 21 arches*, (2012), installation view, dimensions variable.

Phyllida Barlow makes use of incrementality, although in a different way. She configures certain exhibition spaces in a way that denies the viewer an overview of the work. This is evident in, for example, *Untitled: 21 arches*, (2012) above. She configured her exhibition *Siege* at the New Museum in New York (22 May 2012 – 24 June 2012), so that in the viewer's experience the work is revealed incrementally (YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZPFtkBPZMQ&t=3908s> Accessed 19 March 2023). Whereas, in my experience of making *bloubefok*, incrementality is intrinsic to the creative process.

The way materials respond with one another is important. Ink, charcoal, and wax evidently cannot be layered simultaneously. Water-based ink precedes melting wax into paper, and the waxed paper was necessary to capture the richness of charcoal (personal journal 2018-2022: 355-356). As also mentioned above, the embodied experience of working with this combination of materials showed the way. This was possible through repeatedly returning to bodily sensation (Clarke 2019: 126) – the feel of brush on paper, the smell of the ink, the heat of the steam and humidity of the day, the changing feel of drawing with charcoal, the energy or tiredness of hands and arms. Being somatically open and aware (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155) together with returning to bodily sensation (Clarke 2019: 126) instils a focus independent of thought processes. It feels as though my mind becomes open and loose, leaving the flow of thoughts to remain as peripheral movement (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293). This allows a recognition that the artmaking steps are primarily generated by the materials and appear in the mind as an invitation to engage with the creative process. The way in which this kind of somatic in-the-dark experience lights up the mind is relevant because the mind remains passive in each particular artmaking flow of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261). It also clearly demonstrates that the human mind is a very useful aspect of materiality when it is recognised as being already open to the world. It is then crucial to allow the mind to be receptive to what it does not know (Ings 2014: 9 of 14; Zembylas 2005: 146).

Not letting the mind decide the artmaking steps in advance was possible because of the incremental nature of the process (personal journal 2018-2022: 360). The ten-metre length was worked across five times, with ink on one side then wax on both sides and charcoal on both sides (personal journal 2018-2022: 359). At no time was there more than one metre

visible. Despite working repeatedly over the paper each return was different. For Maharaj (2009: 5 of 11), repetition generates difference. I think differencing was facilitated by working incrementally (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360), the peripheralizing of the mind (personal journal 2018-2022: 293) and the immediate availability of 'past' artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265). As soon as artmaking is engaged bodily, this 'past' artmaking experience is present. The presence of experience cannot be pinned down to a precise location but feels immediate throughout body and mind. My body of experience is able to respond freely to the specificity of the immediate situation when I let it be (Kwek 2018: 38). In-the-dark methods are pivotal in enabling my body of experience to be both at the cusp of the immediate process, and to be a continuum of fluid and plastic responsiveness.



Figure 88, Caroline Birch, detail of bloubefok hanging in my home studio, (2021), ink, wax, charcoal and Fabriano, approx. 1500 cm x 10 000 cm.

At each moment the 'past' (or artmaking experience) is thus threaded through creative activity. It helps in shaping the artmaking process in such a way that each moment also reworks the fabric or weave of the past, present and future. Working incrementally and with somatic sensitivity allowed 'my' body of artmaking experience to demonstrate that the continuity or linearity of time is a misconception. In *bloubefok's* creative process it seems that time flows, yet whenever awareness turns to time, how it flows is different. How time seems to move has changed along with one's sense of its relations to space and matter. These changes may be incremental, but they are evident when working repeatedly across *bloubefok*.

Barad's (2014: 181; 2010: 261; 2007: 181) understanding of spacetime mattering is relevant here. As mentioned (see pages 1,52), an electron's quantum leap does not happen as a process. At no point does the electron exist between its old energy level and the new. Neither is there any passage of time (Barad 2011: 137). There is no point of departure or arrival – only the ghostly appearance of a photon, and an altered electron – utter discontinuity.

Discontinuity extends to the seeming effect of this leap. From the discontinuous change of energy level appears a quantum of light, a photon. This photon is of a specific wavelength or colour (Barad 2011: 137; 2007: 252). Thus, in this study colour carries with it this spectral quantum action. Precisely when or whence the photon appears is a mystery because there is no causal process that might account for it. The leap must occur in the same instant as its 'effect', the photon, is emitted. Impossibly, they seem to be simultaneous events. The leap is seemingly the cause of the photon emission, yet the 'cause' does not precede the 'effect'. The apparition of the photon is indeed a spooky happening. This discontinuity means that there is no lynch-pin of time and place for the "here-now and there-then" (Barad 2011: 139) of the quantum leap. The quantum leap might be like pulling the pin out of a hand grenade – even the relation of discontinuity to continuity is blown apart. Dis/continuity means there is no linear unfolding process, no continuous flowing of cause to effect, so no way of orienting in pre-determined time and space. Cause is no longer a complete guarantee of a specific effect (Barad 2007: 233-234). The ensuing multidimensionality becomes apparent through using in-the-dark artmaking methods, such as working incrementally.

Nothing persists against which sameness or difference might be measured because dis/continuity means that the essence or meaning of change differs for every intra-action (Barad 2007: 234). Derrida claims that there is only difference (Kourie 2008: 69). Although he

says this in relation to text, this is relevant because Cheah (2010: 74) sees text and matter as interdefinable, and Barad (2007: 148-149,157) states that matter and discourse are forged together (see page 210). If there is only difference how is this not sameness? The complete rupture of relationship offered by dis/continuity (Barad 2011: 139) ensures that nothing persists unchanged through time. I surmise that dis/continuity, as a rupture of its own relationship, also ruptures the relation of same/difference. Without continuity of sameness or difference, how differencing shapes matter/s in any instance is always fashioned anew. Matter/s is/are not forged in time and space. Matter/ing is also the simultaneous forging of spacetime – spacetimemattering (Barad 2011: 124,139). Dis/continuity means that spacetimemattering becomes a mode shorn of *fixed* normative constrictions (Barad 2007: 225).

In-the-dark methods are posited as nodes of spacetimemattering. Interrogating my research questions requires me to immerse (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196) this study in unknowing. I hypothesise that in-the-dark methods are reliable because their mutability offers a means of crossing repeatedly into uncharted territory (Maharaj 2009: 8 of 11). Maybe narrowing the possibilities by imposing a pre-designated goal, or imposing a controlling overview, renders the creative research process less likely to traverse the virgin territory (Birch 2018) required by the PhD research degree.

For Kwek (2018: 35-37), when an entity becomes useless regarding its intended human usage, its potential for affectivity expands. Generally, a purpose or intended effect is defined in advance, or imposed from the outside as shown by the carpenter's attitude to the tree (see page 162) in the *Zhuangzi* (Kwek 2018: 28-29). Through the carpenter's dream the relation of uselessness and human purpose is disrupted. The tree's mode of uselessness exceeds the carpenter's mastery because it resists the intentions of his human purposes (Kwek 2018: 35). His normal modes of measuring and evaluating that precede his carpentry are thus incapacitated. Thus, for Kwek (2018: 31,37), uselessness, by resisting normative, reproducible frameworks, exceeds normal usage.

Uselessness bears a potential whose indeterminacy is immanent (Kwek 2018: 31). This potential might appear as recalcitrance, as a creative spark (Kwek 2018: 35) or in other impossible to anticipate ways. Erin Manning's (2017) *For a Pragmatics of the Useless, or the Value of the Infrathin* further elucidates uselessness. For Manning (2017: 110), creative

potential is borne by that which remains indeterminate or excluded, or spectral, invisible. Value remains elusive because it is the spectral, the exclusions that proffer value (Manning 2017: 110). Perhaps this is what Barad (2007: 177) means when she posits that exclusions maintain open-endedness by precluding determinism. In its indeterminate potential, uselessness exceeds utilitarian evaluations (Kwek 2018: 31; Manning 110). If uselessness is dismissed because it has no clear purpose, its potential will probably be missed.



Figure 89, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of bloubefok, (2021), ink, wax, charcoal and Fabriano, approx. 1500 cm x 10 000 cm, video available from: <https://youtu.be/YAWNb25Xhps>

Spacetime mattering is evident in the way very ordinary materials shaped the (for me) unusual path of *bloubefok*. *bloubefok*'s process started before the artmaking action began. The presence of the ten-metre roll of Fabriano paper in my studio shaped curious enquiry, a 'what if' mode – 'what if the paper weren't cut?' The initial move of not cutting the paper necessitated working incrementally and working 'big'. Working big meant using a large quantity of blue ink at once; not tempering the intensity of the colour; applying the ink with big brushes and large movements; a 'largeness' or expansiveness in accepting without editing what appeared on the paper; using thick sticks of charcoal unstintingly; being willingly led by materials. This 'bigness' is a specific aspect of the in-the-dark method of exaggeration, and one of the many in-the-dark methods which together with the materials wrought *bloubefok*'s process.

In *bloubefok*, the in-the-dark method of using materials out of their normal context (Kwek 2018) expanded in another way. Before my supervisor made a studio visit, *bloubefok* needed to be hung. The studio space was too small and too full to hang the ten-metre piece against the wall or straight across the space. *Bloubefok* had to be curved around the studio (personal journal 2018-2022: 359). I found I was inhabiting the space together with *bloubefok*. The piece was not continuous with the wall framing the studio space. It seemed that I could not look *at* the drawing, *bloubefok* refused to be comprehended through looking. I felt invaded and enchanted by the materials, by the matter of the work. There is a great deal I might explore in the experience of artmaking with *bloubefok*, but not much I can say *about* the work (personal journal 2018-2022: 359).

The meaning of an artwork is generally associated with the completed work because the purpose of the work is traditionally assumed to be its meaning (Mitchell 1996: 76). In eschewing a pre-defined goal (even that of 'finishing'), I discover that in the creative process I am not instilling meaning into the work. Any meaning that emerges I contend ensues together with the affectiveness of materials. This confirms Barad's (2003: 817) assertion that matter and meaning forge one another. Any meaning *bloubefok* might engender did not precede the making of the work. Although Rothko did not clearly state what he intended to convey with his painterly means, this did not detract from the forcefulness of his work (Arya 2016: 330). The materiality of paint was an inherent element of Rothko's means of expression. He says of his paintings: "Mine are here. Materially. The surfaces, the work of the brush and

so” (Rothko in Arya 2016: 329). Rothko demonstrates the indivisibility of paint and artistic expression.



Figure 90, Mark Rothko, No. 10, (1950), oil on canvas, 130 x 145 cm.

For Barad (2003: 814,817), meaning and matter entail a mutual configuration, and the world is thus a nexus of intra-action (Barad 2003: 817). Meaning/mattering is not stable and cannot become fixed by a discrete entity such as an artwork. I consider this to be an important aspect of this research. Firstly, this clearly embeds this study in processes not outcomes, that is, in a practice-led not a practice-based paradigm (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 64). Secondly, this suggests that using in-the-dark methods might indeed constitute a fruitful way of interrogating materiality from a de-centralised situation.

Meaning for me ensues from being handled by/handling the materials. In this study I surmise that meaning appears as insight (personal journal 2018-2022: 375). The insights that appear in-process, such as the efficacy of incrementality, and those that appear when becoming a viewer, such as the realisation that I was not the instiller of meaning, are different. This difference was very evident with *bloubefok* because I had not seen the whole length of the work until it was hung (personal journal 2018-2022: 359). Up to this point, I had not experienced the way in which the work reached right through my being and beyond to creative processes not yet begun.

Wax expands beyond an alternative fixer of charcoal (see page 188) and carries through the *hauntology* series as a conductor of light. These offer an exploration of light and colour (or differentiated light). The wax opens the paper to undifferentiated or what I assume to be white light. The exploration in each *hauntology* process lies largely in the layering of the oil colour. How these will work together with wax/paper and light and without a goal, focal point or meaning is entirely unpredictable. How the light will work with particularities of material, space, place and viewer is also unknowable. I surmise that it is rendered so by the strange relation of discontinuity and continuity, whence light of a particular wavelength, that is, colour, appears (Barad 2011: 137; 2007: 252). Experiencing colour cannot be disentangled from the spectrality of dis/continuity. In the *hauntology* series (or *hauntologies*), I surmise that *experiencing* colour as spectral shapes the ways in which colour is layered in amorphous fields of pigment.



Figure 91, Caroline Birch, *hauntology yellow*, (2022), ink, wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

Perhaps in destabilising the paper's front/back boundaries, the translucency of the wax highlighted the indeterminacy of matter and meaning. In the *hauntologies*, the process of eschewing both imagery and non-figurative undoes any sense of solidity. This has had an unexpected effect on my understanding of the traditional use of a focal point. In general, artists intentionally emphasise a formal element of the artwork to draw the viewers' attention and/or to emphasise meaning. A focal point might be located in an image, form or an aspect of either. Working non-figuratively does not necessarily mean there is no focal point in an artwork as this might be centred in an abstract element such as tone or colour. In the *hauntologies*, the lack of focal point was not a deliberate choice on my part, but a realisation.

It dawned on me that these painting processes exclude a focal point. My experience with the *hauntologies* is of indeterminate hovering because there is no defined focal point or form and thus no sense of defined meaning (personal journal 2018-2022: 364).



Figure 92, Mark Rothko, No 61 (Rust and Blue), (1953), oil on canvas, 293 x 234 cm.

In *Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings*, Natalie Kosoi (2005) suggests that Rothko's paintings undermine the viewer's ability to read them conventionally in terms of form, space or colour (Kosoi 2005: 28). Rothko achieves this by intentionally blurring the edges of forms (Kosoi 2005: 27) and the boundaries between different colours (Kosoi 2005: 28). For Kosoi (2005: 25), Rothko's painting evokes experience of the impossibility of relating to nothingness. She suggests the relation is one of impossibility because his painting quickens the viewer's awareness of nothingness as both their beginning and their end. Rothko's method is to exclude most of the language of conventional painting except for the stretched canvas and colour (Kosoi 2005: 30). Kosoi argues that in this way Rothko simultaneously covers and reveals nothingness, as is evident in figure 86 above.

Perhaps the *hauntologies* emanate from the blue of the empty sky as an unadulterated experience of light as colour because there is no focal point (personal journal 2018-2022: 361). The *hauntologies* cannot attempt to do this in the same way because here the materiality of colour is entangled with the materiality of the paint. They do I consider offer a different way of engaging with colour and light maybe because there is no fixed focal point in the paintings. Another aspect of the focal point in general is that it is defined or delimited in some way. In other words, some kind of boundary or edge is indicated. The spectral blue of the sky has no edge from an earthbound perspective. Perhaps it is also the vagueness of edges in the *hauntologies* that is ghostly. I speculate that the *hauntologies* come closest to rendering something of in-the-dark methods visible: "I think that this is something that in-the-dark methods effect – this loosening/releasing of the edges of action, this relaxing at the visible edges" (personal journal 2018-2022: 366). I posit this as evident in the loosening of the edges of the *hauntology* colour fields.

The development of the *hauntology* process is simple. A single colour straight from the tube is thinly laid down as a field of colour. The paint is almost scrubbed in with the paintbrush which means each layer needs to dry thoroughly before the next layer of single colour is added. There is no attempt to make decisions about each colour field process prior to creative action. If the colour field assumes any kind of shape, it is amorphous and is arrived at directly through the action of paint moving from the brush to wax/paper ground. There is no imagery or abstract form to shape or be shaped by the brush marks. Laying colour down in this way thus excludes specifying a focal point.



Figure 93, Caroline Birch, still from video detail of painting *hauntology*, (2022), video available from: <https://youtu.be/JdvSNR-bi8k>

According to Barad (2010: 253), what the delimiting edge or boundary of an intra-action excludes, shapes its matter/meaning as much as what is included. She considers it important to understand that the process of enacting these boundaries or cuts (Barad 2014: 175) triggers differentiation among entities. For example, in the studio there are many, many artmaking possibilities. Picking up charcoal and not paint is making a cut that delimits the imminent activity. Charcoal, hand, paper, marks, are indivisible within the artmaking activity and simultaneously reveal the differences of *these* elements in *this* process. Prior to this intra-action, those particular elements were not showing those specific differences because *those* differences were generated by and inseparable from *that* intra-action.

In Barad's physics philosophy, matters are so thoroughly entangled that there are no clear beginnings or endings. The world is ceaselessly intra-acting (Barad 2010: 265; 2007: 141). In research, the necessity of demarcating an arena of focus thus becomes clear. Such demarcation means deciding what to include and what to exclude when focusing on the enactment of meaning/mattering. Such inclusions/exclusions or cuts as Barad terms them, are temporary because they are performative. Marietta Radomska (2016: 38) articulates cuts

thus: “They temporarily separate elements or concepts and simultaneously modulate and modify the material and conceptual assemblage”.



Figure 94, Caroline Birch, the hauntologies' studio space, (2022).



Figure 95, Caroline Birch, *hauntology pink-ish*, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

The boundaries or identities of the performers do not pre-exist the cuts. Indeterminate being might be more accurately described as an ongoing becoming that temporarily yields, for example, subject and object. For Barad (2007: 24-25), it is vital that theory acknowledges the (temporary) appearance of subject/object and other binaries. In any intra-action the performers are *inseparable yet different* (Barad 2014: 175; 2007: 128). The

inclusions/exclusions of a cut shape the way in which these roles differentiate. A cut temporarily delimits performance and performers. What ensues because the *hauntologies* exclude clear delimiting edges – apart from the edges of the paper – and thus I contend a focal point? If there is no focal point, on what is the focus? What have the convergence of wax, paper, engaging with Rothko’s paintings, oil paint, colour, artmaking experience, steam, iron, and in-the-dark artmaking methods wrought? Could indeterminacy or vagueness be a means of bringing materiality as a dynamic into a spectrum that is visible to humans?

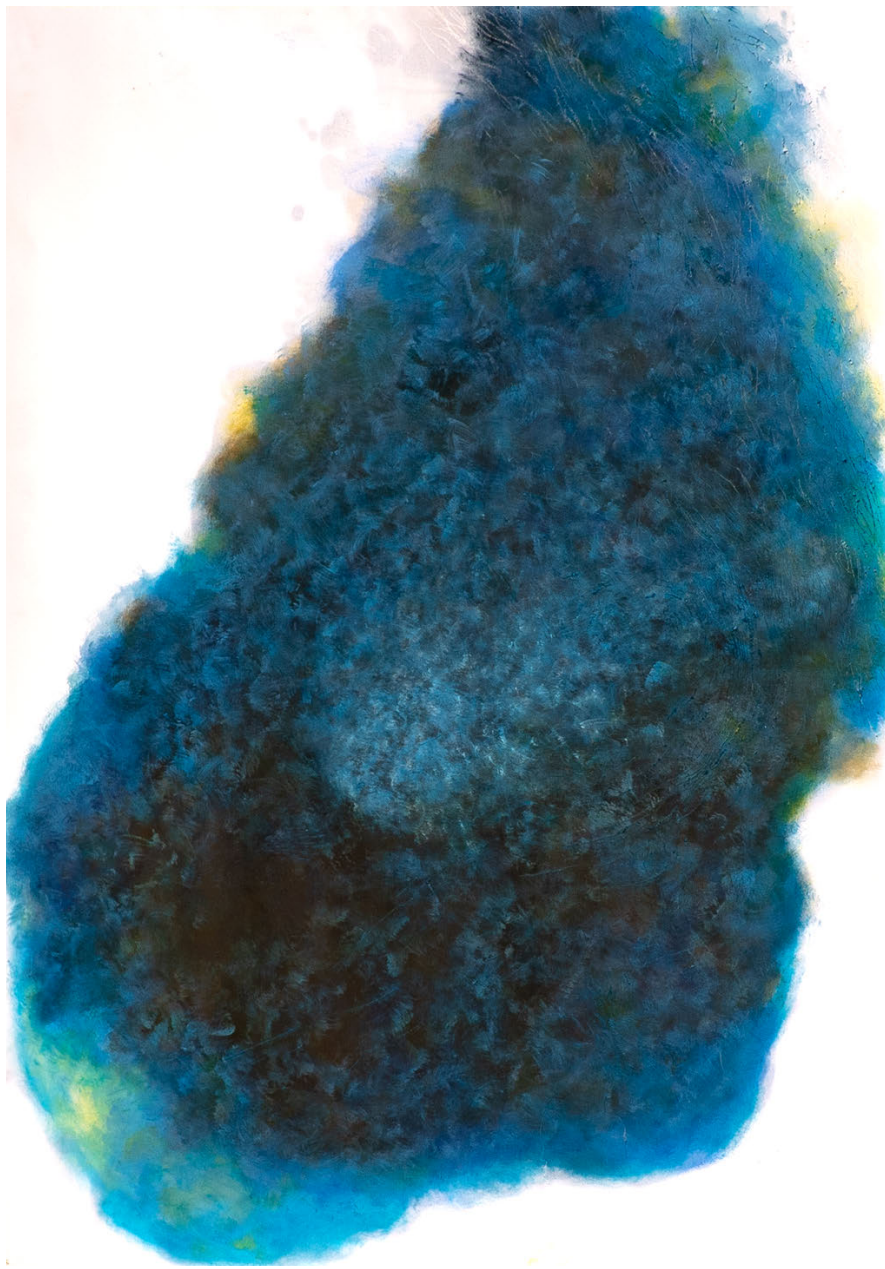


Figure 96, Caroline Birch, *hauntology blue*, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

In the view of Brian O’Doherty (1988), artist and critic, all Rothko’s visual means are indeterminate. Vagueness – O’Doherty’s (1988: 160) term for this quality of Rothko’s – also opens the paintings to any interpretation by the viewer. Rothko’s light has no source, no perspective, and yields no shadows or modelling of form (O’Doherty 1988: 166). His paintings draw the viewer away from aesthetic (or theoretical) evaluation into direct experience of the work (O’Doherty 1988: 166; Arya 2016: 329). Face to face with this insubstantial light the viewer experiences a yearning that reveals the otherness within. In O’Doherty’s (1988: 166) words the longing “subjects the observer to the mutable delusions of his own mind”.



Figure 97, Caroline Birch, hauntology umber, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.



Figure 98, Caroline Birch, hauntology deep, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

Conclusion

The wax ground works demonstrate overall that theory becomes particular in artmaking practice. In other words, theory is an unavoidable approximation or generalisation. So too are in-the-dark methods until they become temporarily specified with creative engagement. How they become manifest within artmaking intra-action is intimately specified by the array of materials which includes situation and my body of artmaking experience (personal journal 2018-2022: 265).



Figure 99, Caroline Birch, hauntology purple, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

My human-ish mind habitually refuses vulnerability of opening to what it does not know by averaging out ignorance and understanding. It then assumes this approximation to be knowledge without acknowledging the how this generalisation was arrived at. Crucially, in-the-dark methods are experienced and posited as a means of sidestepping this tendency, releasing my body of artmaking experience to respond freely in artmaking intra-action. Using in-the-dark methods in making the wax ground works in conjunction with writing about this,

show that in this way these methods facilitate receptivity to materiality. This is effective because I consider that in-the-dark methods draw primarily on my somatic rather than my mental range. This additionally attests to the value of PLR in broadening ways of knowing and unknowing through artmaking. Being thus open to the forcefulness of matter enriches the artmaking process with myself as an able and experienced assistant.

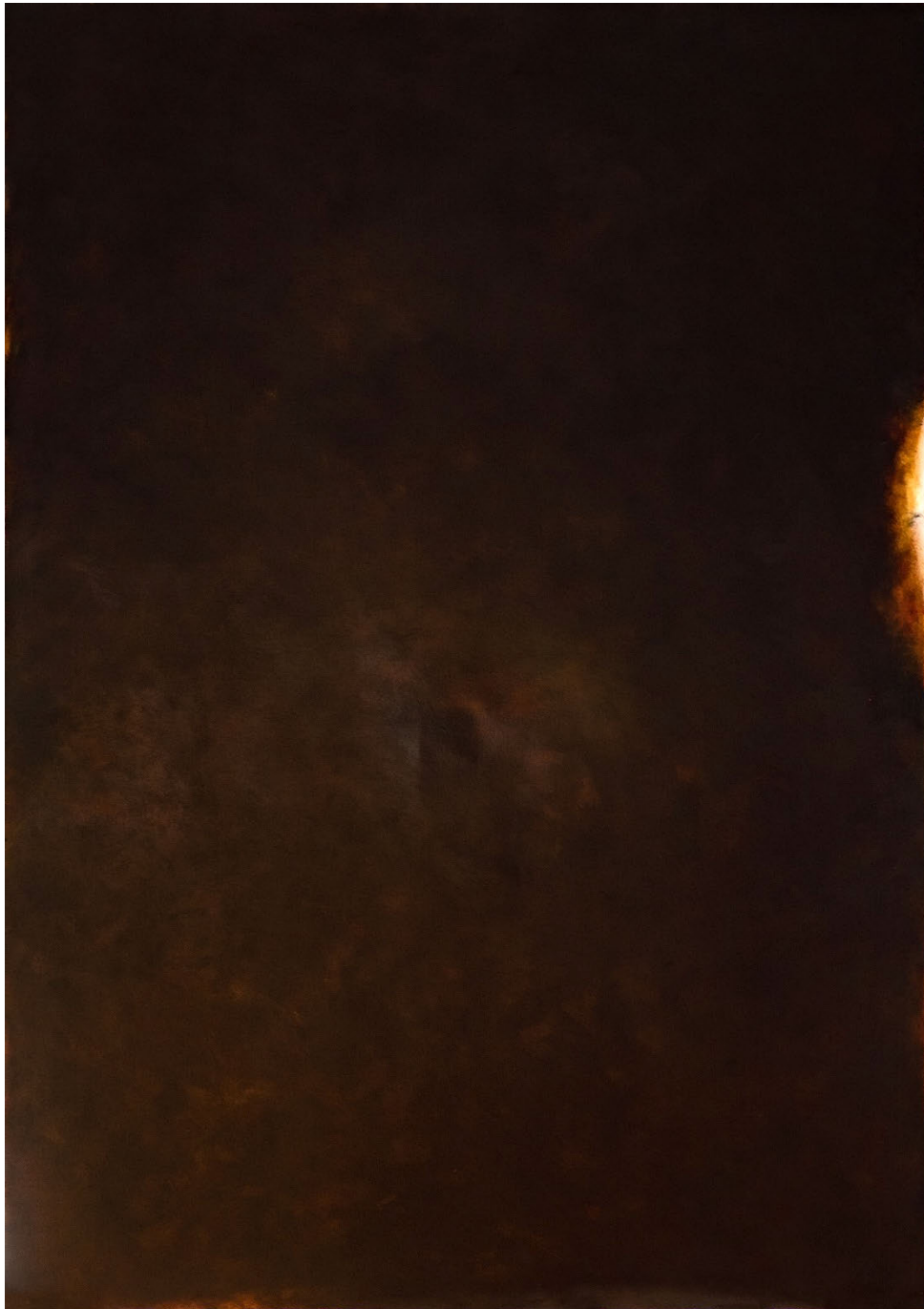


Figure 100, Caroline Birch, hauntology dark, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

This verbal re-configuring of the wax ground works shows that there seem to be two (entangled) aspects to in-the-dark methods. Elements affecting the somatic register and the mind constitute the receptive aspect of in-the-dark methods. Their other and indivisible aspect is that in-the-dark methods then allow responsiveness *as* a material *with* materials, acknowledging the communal intelligence that generates response.

As I began writing this chapter, I viewed materiality as the forcefulness of matter, as a mode of affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987: 261), or as a force of differencing. In-the-dark methods enabled artmaking, a *range of materialities*, and creative process to take shape. As is evident in the course of the chapter, re-turning (Barad 2014: 168) the artmaking through the thesis and journal writing processes deepened my understanding of opening to materiality. I now see materiality as an oscillation of unbounded difference and utter singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326) which works with a *range of materials*. Initially, I wanted to delete all traces of the former partial understanding from the chapter. However, I realise that honesty is an in-the-dark method that is operative in the thesis writing. For me, this entails leaving the traces of how my understanding shifted through writing academically. Honesty requires me to acknowledge that its mode of wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) – in other words, whence this artmaking research emerges and where it is going – are only ever partly visible. That is, for me the process of this study is not transparent, but it is honest.

Writing anything conclusive about the above engagements with in-the-dark methods seems to return them to the realm of the general. I now recognise that generalisation is unavoidable and useful because it is impossible to articulate each minutely particular experience with the dynamic of infinite difference/utter singularity. I speculate that one could become creatively and academically lost in the impossible relation to this dynamic if one did not generalise. Necessarily, averaging out, with its indeterminate boundaries, should be acknowledged as a mode central to knowledge generating practices.

Materials of all kinds, including my body of artmaking experience, are crucially understood to be indeterminate. The dynamism of materiality means that there is no fixed stable being, but rather an ongoing mode of becoming (Barad 2007: 142; Bennett 2010b: 49,58). Thus, in-the-dark methods allow materiality to lead this artmaking research in the very specific ways

discussed in this chapter. In-the-dark artmaking methods enable a fingertip moment-by-moment responsiveness (personal journal 2018-2022: 267) with the minutiae of singularity.

Curiosity – indicating that my mind is open and receptive – seems to recognise the ‘fizzing’ of difference (personal journal 2018-2022: 305). In-the-dark methods I posit draw my body of experience into creative response or “following the fizz” (personal journal 2018-2022: 280). The capacity to let oneself be led entails listening *with* materials (Vasudevan 2011: 1157), and sometimes waiting patiently (Oksanen 2019: 4) for responsiveness of the community of materials (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293). Wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184) becomes freed from human thinking or purpose.

Thus, this artmaking research inhabits a field of irresolvable tension triggered by PLR’s intentional proximity of non-verbal and verbal modes (Bolt 2006: 2,3 of 7; Gray & Malins 2004: 16,103,105; Sullivan 102,119). I contend that this particular tension triggers strong research questions and continues to propel artmaking research (personal journal 2018-2022: 281-282). The site of artmaking becomes a borderland (Anzaldúa 1987: 3) or generative field of tension. I posit in-the-dark artmaking methods as a means of inhabiting these borderlands. The *hauntology* processes demonstrate that I do not instil meaning into artmaking. It ensues from in-the-dark methods, materials and artmaking process. Although this study does not focus on meaning, the artmaking processes discussed in this chapter demonstrate that in-the-dark methods constitute a fruitful way of interrogating materiality from an engaged yet decentred situation.



Figure 101, Caroline Birch, hauntology orange, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

Chapter Five:

vanishing point

Introduction

This chapter re-turns (Barad 2014: 168) the research questions. I found that the questions worked together as a protean nexus where a question or an aspect of a question would foreground in response to the immediate research activity. Some of this fluidity is unavoidably lost in this written response to the questions. Below, I discuss the first research question, and then the second and third questions together. Finally, in the light of the research-generated insights, I re-consider my research methodologies, the challenges and limitations of the study, the hypothesis, the originality and the contribution of this study.

The research questions are:

1. In what ways do in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and the artistic process configure together at the heart of this study?
2. In what ways do these methods engender a deeper awareness of engaging with unknowing and materiality in artmaking practice?
3. What insights arise from using in-the-dark artmaking methods?

It is important to acknowledge that in this study I do not seek to resolve the questions or provide settled outcomes. The productivity of this study is rooted in unresolved tensions, that is, fields of tension. Paradoxically, for me it is this finding that offers the closest approach to resolution in this study. The central fields of tension have been largely manifested by: the non-verbal and verbal modes of PLR; unknowing and knowledge; visible and invisible; new materialism and artmaking as indigenous. Within PLR's field of tension lies another vital field tensioned by the research questions and my somatic register.

In this study, the research questions seemed to operate like gears for both my body of artmaking experience and my mind. Perhaps not gears for speed, but gears for re-cognition. My somatic register, (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155; Lenz Taguchi 2012: 272) in responsive engagement with the artmaking interrogation of the research questions, engaged a re-

calibration, that is, a re-cognition – a cognising “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15) – of my human-ish understanding. Seemingly, each research question has not elicited settled knowledge so much as particular kinds of re-calibrations. Below, I consider how this is engendered by the focus of each question.

In-the-dark methods, materiality, artistic process

I am finding great difficulty in writing specific responses to the first question because its manifestations in this study *are the now invisible artmaking processes*. It is additionally challenging because as one of an array of artmaking materials, I had no controlling overview (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360) or mastery (Bolt 2004: 9) of the creative processes.²³ Thus, elements of the artmaking interrogation were invisible to me. What remains visible as artwork is a limited spectrum of the artmaking research processes. Chapter Four, through its discussion from my human-ish viewpoint, and my research journals (2018-2022) also offer partial visibility of the artmaking processes. Thus, together the artworks, journals and this text proffer an imperfect view of the artmaking research. This should be noted as a drawback of artistic practice as research, and research/knowledge generation in general.

For me, the verbal does not sufficiently answer the first research question. This is perhaps because the ways in which in-the-dark methods, materiality and artmaking processes configured together was intensely specific. Thus, I am left asking two related questions. Is this question insufficient because what it manifests is largely not amenable to verbal articulation? Could PLR be on the cusp of an evolution that might accommodate this? However, I can indicate how certain in-the-dark methods have evolved in the course of interrogating this question.

The first question provided me with a way into artmaking research as an engaged yet de-centred material. It worked to simultaneously manifest curious enquiry and generate responses to the second and third research questions. The latter are more amenable to verbal

²³ Importantly, I suggest that artmaking fluency is borne by my body of experience and is not excluded along with an overview.

articulation probably because creative process is re-turned (Barad 2014: 168) or read diffractively (Barad 2014; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 1 of 6) through my mental register.

The in-the-dark methods that have re-iterated most often in the artmaking research are removing a pre-determined goal (Morgan 2014: 229), using materials beyond their normal range of usage (Kwek 2018), and wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). In response to the first question, I show below how these methods have evolved with artmaking and materials. Removing a goal began as removing all forms of imagery, actual and mental, as a starting or an end point. This unsettled my verbal thinking or mental register. Like taking a pruning saw to canvas, removing a pre-determined goal roughened up and exposed those aspects of myself that are mechanical or habitual in artmaking. This revealed that my body of artmaking experience is always ready at hand and is situated within the communal intelligence of artmaking materials and process. All these elements are indeterminate prior to specific engagement. Paradoxically, they are intrinsically indeterminate even as they are specifying. This open-endedness of being, or indeterminacy, ensues from dis/continuity (Barad 2007: 182).

Removing a prior goal lit up the immediacy of indeterminacy and became a way of maintaining my decentralized situation in artmaking. I found that my body of experience is the way in which I simultaneously opened to the dynamic of materiality and became an artmaking material. The quickness or freshness of each repeated (Bolt 2004: 15) artmaking enactment with/as material was maintained by carefully engaging with in-the-dark methods. In the wax ground works, excluding a prior goal became an eschewal of instilling meaning or focal point in the creative process. This does not mean the works carry no content. It does mean that in this study I have intentionally not interpreted and imposed meaning on materials and processes.

In the light pod processes, using materials beyond their normal usage (Kwek 2018) clearly demonstrated that in-the-dark methods, artmaking process and materials have the capacity to generate meaning with the assistance of my body of experience but without my human-ish thinking or imposition of meaning. Any meaning manifested by this nexus of methods/materials/process is nevertheless haunted by humankind as these materials were developed for human purposes. When I used human-haunted chicken wire beyond its range of normal, this in-the-dark method altered and became a generator of tension and thus

creative potential. In the stickspace, using dead sticks beyond their normal usage became a revelation of the oscillation of unbounded difference and extreme specificity or singularity. Thus, the first question became the spark that illuminated in-the-dark methods as a fruitful and non-invasive way of engaging with this dynamic of differencing.

The third in-the-dark method that re-iterated throughout this study was wondering/wandering (Morgan 2014: 184). This mode is inseparable from my act/wait/act research heuristic. Wondering/wandering began as curious enquiry – wondering in mind and wandering in artmaking action. Without a goal, trajectory or purpose it became a mode that was rich because its uselessness in terms of human purpose (Kwek 2018) opened the way for the oscillating dynamic of differencing. Wondering/wandering was an active non-verbal quest/ion/ing, becoming a response *with* rather than *to* material affect. Wondering/wandering allowed my body of experience to engage unhindered with the communal intelligence of artmaking materials, in-the-dark methods and creative process. Wondering/wandering evaded the control of my verbal mental register. It also embodied a letting be (Kwek 2018: 38) that enabled my human-ish self to follow with the artmaking process instead of attempting to think out its trajectory beforehand. Wondering/wandering became a portal where creative potential is realized through listening *with* (Vasudevan 2011: 1157), and patiently waiting (Oksanen 2019: 4) until communal intelligence engaged my body of experience in a specific way.

Thus, the interrogation of the first question became a potent nexus of in-the-dark methods, artmaking process, and the oscillating dynamic of materiality that appeared as differentiating materials. This polyvalent hub served to simultaneously manifest curious enquiry and the interrogation of the second and third research questions. For me, the primary research question has additionally illuminated that in-the-dark artmaking methods offer openness to the immediacy of indeterminacy.

Unknowing and materiality

Seemingly the world is haunted through and through by indeterminacy (Barad 2010: 248). Although thus haunted, the second and third questions are more amenable to verbal response, perhaps because they engaged and re-calibrated my verbal thinking register. The

responses to these questions came together, already entangled. They seemed to work together because the insights arising from using in-the-dark methods engender deeper awareness of engaging with unknowing and materiality in artmaking processes. Artmaking, as I assume with all processes, is a mode of differencing. Thus, deeper awareness of unknowing and materiality might be appropriate to differencing processes beyond artmaking. Below, I re-turn the insights arising from this study, and my re-recognised approaches to unknowing and materiality.

A seminal insight for me has been that fields of tension offer great generative potential. Crucially, in-the-dark methods offered a means of inhabiting fields of tension in such a way that their potential remained active and polyvalent, and my body of artmaking experience quickened. Availing fields of tension through unknowing means not seeking to know or to ignore (Zembylas 2005: 105) or resolve, that is, flatten, the difference of particular binaries. The ethics of unknowing (Zembylas 2005: 147) and materiality (Barad 2014: 182-183; 2011: 123-124; Bennett 2010b: 12-13) require that one acknowledge the differences that manifest potential. Unknowing highlights that the ways in which differencing is engaged with are more important than what the particular differences are.

Approaching irresolvable tensions or binary relations, (such as PLR's non-verbal/verbal mode) as a lively field of potential has for me yielded deeper understanding of differencing and hence materiality. I began to wonder if unknowing is immanent as differencing (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). The curious artmaking enquiry that followed further evolved my understanding, leading to a re-cognition of differencing as a force. This force seems to work through the oscillation of unbounded/infinite/limitless difference and extreme specificity or singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326). I speculate that the forcefulness of materiality is an emanation of unknowing.

I speculate that the oscillation of infinite difference/singularity (personal journal 2018-2022: 326) includes particular fields of tension, and the dynamic of foregrounding/backgrounding (Manning 2017: 100; Krummel 2012: 18). I consider that fields of tension emanate within the above dynamic of differencing. I view this oscillating dynamic as multidimensional, enabling multiple fields of tension to manifest simultaneously. I speculate that in the situated specificity of in-the-dark methods, materials and artmaking, particular fields of tension are manifested through certain careful inclusions and exclusions. The ensuing relation of for

example, colour in the *hauntology* paintings and lack of a defined focal point, operate as a field of tension. Within this, an aspect of the field provides a particular ‘flavour’ of backgrounding as another aspect foregrounds specific artmaking potential. The artworks that constitute part of my submission are the visible marks remaining from the (now invisible) oscillations of artistic process. For me, the artworks are the ghosts of immersion in artmaking.

When not making art, becoming immersed in the presence of the *hauntologies* cannot be conveyed with words. The studio space belongs to the *hauntologies* rather than to me (personal journal 2018-2022: 389; figure 88). In their domain, colour is experienced as more than multi-layered, it is multidimensional. The effect of the *hauntologies’* presence is irreducible to the workings of discrete layers of colour. Attempting to voice this experience reveals the inadequacy of my mind for interrogating colour as presence/matter. Rather, the matter of colour probes the workings of my mind. ‘What happens when matter de-centres my mind from an investigative purpose?’ is a residue of colour haunting my mind.

Tension embodied as a field is experienced through my somatic register (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155; Lenz Taguchi 2012: 272), and re-cognised and articulated through my verbal or mental register. It is important that in the creative processes, my somatic register was attuned to the landscape of fields of tension, because it is sensitive to what is not visible, to thrill (Bennett 2015: 101), fizz (personal journal 2018-2022:280) or being haunted. My somatic register was quickened through my being handled as/handling material. In other words, when I become primarily a material, the dynamic of materiality becomes apparent. I consider that the inherent indeterminate nature of the world, because it is underpinned by the dynamic of dis/continuity, (Barad 2010: 248) confirms materiality as dynamic. It seems that indeterminacy also offers polyvalency (Barad 2010: 263). In different words, becoming does not solidify into stable being. Becoming, in my view, is haunted by unknowing, or the immanent potential of indeterminacy. Differencing is ceaseless, always pushing through what is visible as specificity.

Another way of re-cognising a field of tension is to acknowledge boundaries as indeterminate (Anzaldúa 1987: 3; Barad 2011: 123,124; 2007: 135). Indeterminate boundaries mean that the inside is haunted by the outside and *vice versa*. In other words, difference or otherness is immanent, intrinsically indeterminate and thus unknowable. This has led me to question academic knowledge as fixed and/or neutral, and to acknowledge the necessity of averaging

out in knowledge practices. In their verbal articulation, in-the-dark methods are an unavoidable approximation because it is only when they were engaged in artmaking that they became specific.



Figure 102a-b, Caroline Birch, and the world 4 flows by in the dark in the process of covering up (2020-2022), painting installation, dimensions variable.

Prior to this research, it seemed that my mind refused the unease of not knowing (a personal experience of unknowing in my view) by flattening out the experiencing of discomfort and its perceived cause. For example, *and the world 4 flows by in the dark* triggered great discomfort in me because the texture, colour, marks and tears were outside my usual artmaking means. I did not know how to work with them. I wanted to average out the disquietude and the jarring differences with a single all-encompassing layer of paint. Having averaged/damped down the

differences, I would know how to carry on. However, this would have ignored the complex of materials (including myself), in-the-dark methods and process that had foregrounded the elements above. This suggests that when an average is fixed as a means for evaluating differences within creative practice, it tends to flatten artistic process, my body of experience, and materiality/the dynamic of differencing. I posit that in-the-dark methods sidestep this tendency. When I acknowledge the disquietude as an element of the above complex, the subsequent layers of paint do not average out difference. Covering up becomes a revealing/revelation of differences.

Clive Van den Berg's work probes the devastating effects of applying (unacknowledged) averaged-out difference as a normative gauge. Thus, I consider averaging out to be a practice that ethically requires one to acknowledge that while certain kinds of difference tend to recur in particular kinds of performativity, minute specificity is excluded. Averaging out should not attempt to fix these recurring phenomena as a stable measure of normal (Barad 2007: 380). Perhaps averaging out should be approached as a normative *practice* (Barad 2007: 380). Knowledge generation that acknowledges the differences which are averaged out, and the ways in which this is done, might offer more sturdily de-anthropocentric research practices.

In this study, I have found that the polyvalency of unresolved fields of tension exceeds the practice of averaging out. The verbal working of my mind was productively tensioned with my somatic register (Clarke 2019: 126; Fries 2017: 155; Lenz Taguchi 2012: 272). This tensioned field that was active in the artmaking research (as discussed in the previous chapter), reveals that it was my perception of my role as artist that was problematic, not my presence. In-the-dark artmaking methods excluded the perception of my human-ish self as central and controlling in artistic processes. This I contend has direct bearing on the de-anthropocentric focus of new materialism. I consider that unknowing, in the form of in-the-dark artmaking methods, offers a non-hierarchical approach to materiality and artmaking. Excluding my hierarchical self-perception highlights that: materiality is not activated by human capacity, human capacity is enlivened by materiality; that is, human capacity is but an aspect of materiality; materiality is only partly visible, much remains invisible; materiality is not traceable as a source or attainable as a goal, it is ultimately unknowable. My somatic register was thus vital in my becoming an active artmaking material.

When immersed in artmaking (Ings 2014: 8,10-11 of 14; Fries 2017: 52,196), my somatic register did not seem to distinguish between being handled/handling materials (personal journal 2018-2022: 340), that is, between subject and object. Becoming thus attuned to fields of tension meant becoming attuned to the thrill (Bennett 2015: 101) or fizz (personal journal 2018-2022: 280) of differencing. Curious enquiry was quickened together with the somatic register in a way that allowed my body of experience to be responsive independently of mental thinking processes. In-the-dark methods enabled my human-ish capacity to be led by the communal intelligence of materials and creative process (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303). In-the-dark methods additionally revealed that as a dynamic materiality appears to be continuous with unknowing. That creative processes continue without me (personal journal 2018-2022: 335) seemed to demonstrate that materiality and agency are also inseparable matters. In-the-dark methods thus seemed to offer an appropriate means of simultaneously inhabiting and interrogating materiality and agency. As I was an unavoidably material and agential aspect of what I was investigating, I discovered in-the-dark methods, because of the ways in which they cut together/apart (Barad 2014), were apposite in the interrogation.

In line with PLR, the tensioned oscillating artmaking processes have been the source of new insights in this study. From the tensioned field of artmaking research, I find that the specific (which, because it never stands still, is less visible and less prone to articulation than generalisation) lies closer to unknowing than the general. I wonder whether the *minutiae* of the specific is the dynamic of materiality re-configuring materials “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15). Thus, it seems that “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15) is intrinsic to materiality. This confirms that it is human-ish perception that we are the generators of “*again and anew*” (Bolt 2004: 15) that hinders our letting-be (Kwek 2018: 38) of the dynamic of materiality.

Acknowledging and articulating the oscillating dynamic of infinite difference/minute specificity, and emanating fields of tension, demonstrates that interrogating the research questions has elicited a deeper understanding of unknowing and materiality. A *via negativa* approach of intentional and careful exclusions, that is, in-the-dark methods, enabled me to co-habit the dynamic of unbounded difference/singularity as a polyvalent artmaking materiality, simultaneously quickened by, and curious about, unknowing and materiality.

As I sit with, and carefully, once again, turn over the research questions, I wonder if I would change them now. I find that I am holding a gratitude and respect for these questions and what they have wrought together with the creative nexus of methods/materials/process. Sayal-Bennett (2018: 13 of 17) confirms the role of materials in knowledge generation. I am a facet of what the questions have configured. The questions in their current visible form were shaped by artmaking, careful reading and notetaking, artmaking “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15), following threads of thinking, and again artmaking. Ultimately, the questions were never mine alone, and I respectfully acknowledge this and let them be.

PLR and diffraction methodology

In this study I have found PLR to be a polyvalent and protean paradigm. It foregrounds artmaking as a non-verbal questioning. I have found that PLR provides a suitably versatile approach to investigating artmaking and materiality as the dynamic of infinite difference/extreme specificity. PLR situates non-verbal artmaking at its core and then draws verbal theoretical threads into its creative innards. I found that a fruitful field of tension was engendered by the proximity of irreconcilable non-verbal/verbal modes. Additionally, the way in which these modes seemed to twist against one another proffered a sturdiness to PLR’s open-endedness. The sturdiness of tension was evident in the way it maintained openness to unknowing and the quickening tides of materiality. The open, bracing, irreconcilable tension of PLR generated the research questions, the appearance of insights from the artmaking investigation of these questions, and further questions. PLR additionally maintained the ongoing curious enquiry, and the verbal articulation of the ensuing insights and new questions. I consider that PLR’s tensioned sturdiness enabled it to merge effectively with diffraction methodology.

In my view, PLR acknowledges and values that artistic process, while producing unique insights, cannot be encompassed by knowledge. Additionally, PLR and diffraction methodology worked together fruitfully because PLR generates irresolvable tensions, and diffraction methodology values the ways in which differences generate potential (Barad 2014: 168-169; Geerts & Van der Tuin 2016: 5 of 6) for specificity. It is thus necessary to consider the patterns of difference that appear in the meeting of PLR and diffraction methodology.

For me, the most re-iterated of these patterns are care and honesty. As in-the-dark methods have undone my perceived overview of materials and process (personal journal 2018-2022: 359-360), I found the *attitude* with which I approached these to be of fresh importance. There were two aspects to this: care and honesty. Care entailed acknowledging, respecting and responding with the communal intelligence of artmaking (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303) and waiting willingly (Oksanen 2019: 4) rather than pushing for communal input. Honesty entailed acknowledging that demise of an overview meant the simultaneous demise of transparency (Barad 2007: 97). That is, there was no separating distance from which I could look at and through the many dimensions of artmaking research. Honesty required me to acknowledge that when immersed in artmaking often I had no idea of what was about to happen next, or where I was heading (personal journal 2018-2022: 305,331). Although I have listed honesty and care as a PLR method (see page 61), I realise that it was engendered within artmaking by the meeting of the two methodologies.

Diffraction methodology contends that *where* the effects of interference patterns appear (Haraway 2004: 70) is more important than the kinds of differences that appear (Barad 2014: 172). However, I have in part found otherwise. While it is indeed important that artmaking situatedness has shown patterns of care and honesty, care and honesty as certain kinds of repeating patterns are in themselves essential in this study.

Perhaps the patterns that issue from the meeting of differences should not be considered apart from their meeting or phenomenon (Barad 2007: 139). In my reading of Barad (2007: 380) the kinds of differential patterns that repeat in certain kinds of situations are important because they are normative, where normative is understood to remain open to further differencings. What if the averaging out (that is unavoidable when articulating freshly generated knowledge) was undertaken as a normative *practice* rather than knowledge itself being taken as normative? What if averaging out as a normative practice were intentionally situated in a specifically accounted for field of tension? These questions issued from the PLR/diffraction methodology nexus through not attempting to override indeterminacy – that is, the dynamic of dis/continuity – with settled or normalising outcomes. In other words, the focus might shift from *what* the knowledge is to how the knowledge is articulated/averaged out *in relation to* how it was generated. What might ensue is knowledge practices that remain open-ended as normative *practices* rather than becoming fixed as a measure of normal.

The hypothesis

My hypothesis as set out in Chapter Two is as follows:

In-the-dark artmaking methods proffer a reliable means of availing the generative potential of the unknown. They constitute an aspect of unknowing because they embody active engagement with the unknown. There is no apparent division between the immanent unknown and immanent materiality. Unknowing I argue is immanent as a force of differencing. Paradoxically, the reliability of in-the-dark artmaking methods lies in their mutability. In other words, they proffer ongoing vulnerability to materiality, or the oscillations of unbounded difference/singularity. I posit that in-the-dark artmaking methods, materiality and creative process shape one another. In-the-dark methods are approximations until they are specified within artmaking engagement. In being rendered specific, these methods simultaneously render materials specific. In-the-dark methods additionally reveal my body of artmaking experience as my human-ish way of becoming a material in this study. Irreconcilable relations, such as that between the unsayable nature of artmaking and academic writing, manifest fields of tension that are fertile because they are irresolvable. I posit that fields of tension render PLR as a sturdy and generative methodology.

Below I re-present my hypothesis afresh to illuminate how interrogating the research questions has changed my understanding:

In-the-dark artmaking methods proffer a reliable means of availing the generative potential of the unknown. They constitute an aspect of unknowing because they embody active engagement with the unknown. There is no apparent division between the immanent unknown and immanent materiality. Unknowing I contend is immanent as a force of differencing. I posit differencing as the oscillating dynamic of infinite difference/extreme specificity. In the process of differencing, I propose that fields of tension emanate from this oscillation. Each field of tension offers a certain a 'flavour' of oscillation in the artmaking process.

Irreconcilable relations, such as that between the unsayable nature of artmaking and academic writing, manifest fields of tension that are fertile because they are irresolvable. I posit that fields of tension render PLR as a sturdy and generative methodology.

Paradoxically, the reliability of in-the-dark artmaking methods lies in their mutability. In other words, they proffer ongoing vulnerability to materiality, or the oscillations of unbounded difference/singularity. In-the-dark methods are approximations until they are specified within artmaking engagement. As they appear in newly specific form, materials and process are also simultaneously specified. In-the-dark methods additionally reveal my body of artmaking experience as my human-ish way of becoming a material in this study.

The complex of in-the-dark methods, materials and process have lit up the above shift in my human-ish understanding. For me, this deeper awareness is apparent in the realisation that unknowing is immanent as an oscillating dynamic of infinite difference/ singularity. Further, fields of tension that emanate from this dynamic bring a particular 'flavour', or set of potentials into play.

Originality

The originality of this study lies in engaging with in-the-dark artmaking methods to investigate how they, materiality, and artmaking configure together. Additionally, in their ongoing re-configurability, these methods continue to offer new ways of engaging with materiality as a material. That is, in-the-dark artmaking methods illuminate my human-ish presence as a body of artmaking experience, not as the artist in control wielding expert knowledge. Through their fluidity, in-the-dark methods nurture ongoing vulnerability to unknowing, and thus to material affect.

This study further proffers materiality or differencing as a dynamic, an oscillation of unbounded difference/minute specificity. A more particularised aspect of this oscillation is the field of tension. Intentionally leaving counter tensions unresolved is a generative way of approaching irreconcilable tensions, such as dichotomies or binaries.

The contribution

My heuristic engagement of in-the-dark artmaking methods provide a means of intra-acting (Barad 2007: 148-149,157) *with materiality as a material* without imposing any human fixed normative yardstick on the artmaking process. I view this methodological contribution as

important firstly because in-the-dark methods are versatile and practical, so their efficacy lies in using them not in theorising them. Secondly, their usage shifts the illusion that human thinking precedes and is crucial to action and change in creative processes. These methods thus offer a means of opening to unknowing as a generative source. Concomitantly, they offer an approach to the unknown other than one of fearfulness.

Haraway (2004: 334-335) is committed to deconstructing stable categories into methodologies. This study contributes in-the-dark artmaking methods as a research mode that destabilises knowledge as fixed, and avails the potential of fields of tension. In response to critique that calls new materialism flat because it rejects an either/or mode (Fox & Alldred 2019: 4), this artmaking research offers multidimensional fields of tension. These are polyvalent because the tension of intentionally unresolved dichotomies or binaries provides openness to creative potential. This potential is borne by the oscillating dynamic of materiality and unknowing. Unknowing is thus availed as a force of differencing.

In-the-dark artmaking methods offer the following within creative engagement:

- In-the-dark methods acknowledge and value material differences.
- In-the-dark methods allow the dynamic of materiality to drive the artmaking process.
- In-the-dark methods de-centre human-ish thinking processes without de-valuing them.
- In-the-dark methods reveal my body of artmaking experience as a material.
- In-the-dark methods render my body of experience vulnerable to material affect and fields of tension.
- In-the-dark methods reveal that the communal intelligence of materials and process is inseparable from the oscillating dynamic of materiality.

The combined PLR/diffraction methodologies of this study have elicited the following fresh methods:

- A stance of honesty and care entails acknowledging: that artmaking intelligence is situated communally within materials and creative process (Bolt 2007a: 2 of 4; personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303); my body of experience is rooted in this communal intelligence; a willingness to wait (Oksanen 2019: 4) for the responsiveness

of communal intelligence; whence artmaking research emerges and where it is heading are partly invisible to the researcher (this aspect arises from this research); the ways in which these affect the research processes.

- The unresolved tensions generated by the research are valued as they manifest generative fields of tension.
- not attempting to override indeterminacy with settled/fixed research outcomes by acknowledging where averaging out is necessary, and how it is practiced.
- Engaging with failure and other disruptions as generative (Green 2015: 10 of 13; Sayal-Bennett 2018: 7 of 17) is a way of working with, not flattening out fields of tension (this aspect arises from this research).

Becoming material as a body of experience offers conundrums at every level. I experience this as fields of tension, or as the simultaneity of “both-and” (Manning 2017: 104) of apparently oppositional tendencies. The irresolvability of these conundrums is important. The tensions inherent to becoming a body of experience precipitate insights. For me, my body of artmaking experience is a spacetime-mattering (Barad 2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181), a multidimensional node that carries all of my past artmaking experience as potential that is present and open to re-calibration. In Deleuze and Guattaris’ (1987: 161) words my body of experience inhabits “a small plot of new land at all times.” The piece of land is my past artmaking experience. It is new each time because in-the-dark methods re-calibrate each artmaking engagement differently. Thus, my body of experience is a mode of “again and anew” (Bolt 2004: 15). I thus find that in this affordance, in-the-dark artmaking methods provide my body of experience with “a meticulous relation with the strata” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 161).

In this study, I hold that my role as artist is taking care of this meticulous relationality within the creative process. In other words, my role is to become human-ish, it is to allow my body of experience to engage creatively independently of my thinking processes. Nurturing this relationality allows insights and artworks to precipitate forth from the creative processes. Artmaking processes, and physical artwork thus ensue from the artist’s role of careful and meticulous responsiveness with the dynamic of unbounded difference/singularity. My role as a body of experience, in co-relation with other materials and forces, is allowing artwork – the

work of art (Bolt 2006: 6 of 7) – to become sedimented out, or stratified, or composed. I cannot claim the processes or physical artworks as mine alone as they ensue from a protean collective of different and situated materials and creative experience.²⁴

I now consider the body of experience as its own safeguard because one cannot undo one's own artmaking experience. Through this research, I have found that: my body of experience is rooted in its multi-layered artmaking experience; unknowing renders my body of experience present and multi-dimensional; unknowing opens my body of experience to the oscillations of unlimited difference/extreme specificity. In this study, I have found my body of experience to be a protean mode. Ensuingly, becoming material or becoming human-ish is a fluid protean mode that defies precise definition.

I posit that unknowing proffers the potential of the oscillating unlimited difference/extreme specificity dynamic. Further, in-the-dark methods specifically exclude my mental register from occupying pole position in the artmaking as research processes. In other words, in-the-dark methods, materials and creative process shape how I become humanish or become material as a body of artmaking experience. In other contexts, availing unknowing and the dynamic of unlimited difference/extreme specificity could offer other ways of becoming material, becoming human-ish.

This study might offer overall methodological contributions to PLR by adding to the current dialogue around creative outputs as research, broadening the application of PLR, and tendering fresh insights into PLR's non-verbal/verbal relationship. This study's overall contribution to new materialism lies in the practicality of in-the-dark methods, their de-anthropocentric exclusion of my thinking processes within artmaking, subsequently revealing my communally rooted body of experience as a material, and re-cognising unknowing as a force that oscillates as unbounded difference and singularity. I thus contend that this study provides an important methodological contribution to the fields of visual arts and new materialism.

²⁴ This additionally calls into question the gallery convention of wording the labels attached to artworks. However, this is not something I address in this study.

Challenges and limitations

Developing and working with in-the-dark artmaking methods as academic research methods was challenging. These were generative challenges as shown in Chapter Four. Writing the thesis was sometimes generative but was sometimes experienced as limiting of the artmaking experience and insights of this study. Letting irreconcilable tensions be was also challenging but generative. Importantly, as my research contribution is methodological, I must question whether this contribution is potentially re-workable in other arenas.

As in-the-dark methods are highly protean, their potency lies in engaging with them, not theorising them. This could be a limitation, although a paradoxical one. I have found these methods to be sturdy because they have been sufficiently fluid with each instance of extreme specificity in this artmaking research. It is their malleability that is partly lost when they are averaged out through writing. In current research modes, this is the primary means of transferability. However, I consider that they could be transported across disciplines and/or creative practices if they are recognised as approximations until bodily re-engaged with in practice.

The challenges below were experienced as limiting. The central and constricting challenge has been articulating, in my mind and in writing, what has arisen from the nexus of in-the-dark methods, materiality and artmaking processes. Insights that were generated by singular instances of the above nexus – that is, by the investigation of the first research question – were averaged out in the process of articulation, and thus unavoidably limited by the verbal mode. This applies to this academic text and to the more informal journal writing (personal journal 2018-2022). Although I found this limiting, it did also generate some re-cognition of the potential of knowledge practices as normative practices.

A central challenge has been working with my evolving understanding. Paradoxically, this has caused me confusion in the context of this text. Although towards the end of this study I have intended not to broach new territory, re-cognition of my understanding continues to evolve. In line with honesty as a research method, and time constraints, I let be (Kwek 2018: 38) my misunderstandings. I realise now that juxtaposing Barad (2014; 2011; 2010; 2007) and Bennett (2010b) is problematic.

Barad 's (2007: 132-185) agential realism engages with agency in a way that accounts for the indeterminacy of agency, and human perceptions of cause and effect. Although Bennett's (2010b: 2) understanding of the forcefulness of matter is useful, her spread of agency across assemblage seems to rely on pre-existing *notions* of these terms. Barad's agential realism tackles notions as much as matter because meaning and matter are indeterminate until they mutually configure.

I have also come to disagree with the term affect/being affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 261), and my use of the term communal intelligence (personal journal 2018-2022: 292-293,303). I find Barad's (2010: 244,260-261; 2007: 181) spacetimemattering to offer an acuter understanding of affect/being affected. Instead of communal intelligence, I now prefer the notion of energy density (Birch 2018; see footnote 8, page 93) as more indicative of inherent indeterminacy. I have found that when my mind is de-centred from purposeful focus, it becomes an insightful element of a larger making/thinking process. Perhaps what the notion of energy density offers is an expansive indeterminate node of engagement that includes my body of experience and the openness of my mind, but excludes my mind's pre-determined focus.

I found that the most limiting aspect relating to written articulation is that much of the polyvalency of artmaking research, unknowing and materiality is lost. The multidimensionality of making art 'in the dark' I found was flattened when translated firstly, in the mode of verbal thinking, and secondly, into academic writing. Thus, in this study, my experience of polyvalency as "again and anew" (Bolt 2004: 15) does not entirely survive this translation. Do PLR's submission requirements need to evolve further to accommodate the flattening effect of academic writing? How might this be possible without losing the generative tension of non-verbal/verbal?

The submitted body of artwork extends a challenge to the viewer, and examiners, because it is easy or 'normal' to assume the artwork is the visible outcome of PLR's central mode of artmaking. Whereas I found that the kernel of this study is largely not what is now visible as artwork. In my view, this is a limitation of, and presents a challenge to, practice-*led* research.

In conclusion

In this thesis I have argued for in-the-dark methods as a vital means of availing creative potential. I found that creative potential is borne by unknowing and the dynamic of materiality. The artmaking research has shown that both are immanent and indivisible potentials. Thus, I posit that unknowing segues into the oscillations of infinite difference/singularity or minute specificity. The creative processes of *in stalling the world* and *in stalling the world +* in particular have demonstrated that fields of tension emanate within the oscillating dynamic of materiality. These emanating fields of tension constitute in the ceaseless process of becoming, where fields of tension offer a particular spectrum of possibilities. I contend that the range of possibilities proffered by the dynamic of materiality is limitless because materiality is continuous with unknowing. In working with in-the-dark methods I have found that their reliability in accessing infinite potential lies in their protean responsiveness *with* fields of tension.

Using in-the-dark artmaking methods as a way of interrogating the research questions has revealed these insights:

- In-the-dark methods offer ongoing vulnerability to unknowing and the dynamic of materiality.
- In-the-dark methods offer a mode of intentional and careful inclusion and exclusion, for example, specifically excluding imagery, a pre-determined goal, normal usage of materials, and including a mode of wondering/wandering.
- These inclusions/exclusions crucially include my body of experience and my somatic register and exclude my verbal thinking or mental register from leading the artmaking research.
- My body of artmaking experience is always responsive, protean and available.

Thus, I posit that my body of artmaking experience is the way in which I become an artmaking material in this study. Importantly, I found that my body of experience situated me as an engaged yet de-centred material within the artmaking research. In-the-dark methods exclude, with care, my verbal thinking processes and hierarchical self-perception, and equally carefully, include my body of experience in artmaking processes.

I contend that this study offers an important methodological contribution to the visual arts and the new materialisms. In-the-dark methods have been shown as an effective means of availing the generative potential of unknowing and materiality. Interrogating the research questions has additionally illuminated questions for further enquiry. For example: What constitutes normative practices (Barad 2007: 380) and what do they elicit? How does singularity as a node of irreversible change re-calibrate fields of tension? Is specificity in its fleeting appearance the ghost of differencing-as-reality? How might PLR research submissions centralise creative processes instead of the written element without losing the polyvalent tension configured by these modes?

I also wonder in what ways in-the-dark methods might work in other methodological paradigms and in other fields of research? As I have found, they are sturdy and protean. In their written presentation in this thesis, they are in an approximate, and therefore I surmise an adaptable, form. I consider that they could be re-configured in a range of explorative processes.

Having almost reached the destination of submission, I am aware of a subterranean dissatisfaction. Intentionally embarking on this study with its unavoidable submission/destination has constrained an utter abandonment to the depths of unknowing and the tides of materiality. This study has nevertheless profoundly changed 'my' artmaking and thinking practices. I speculate that the artmaking demonstrates this more clearly than does this text. As the end of this study disappears from my view, I am left feeling ignited by unknowing yet as infinitesimal as an about-to-expire filament. As humans we seemingly never quite become fixed into a state of permanence or mastery. Paradoxically, in our intrinsic human-ish indeterminacy, we are haunted by discrete being, that is by quantum dis/continuity. The ghost is apparently the only discrete stabilising entity in our world (Barad 2010: 248); or does that make us the ghosts?

In the light of being haunted by indeterminacy, I have come to trust the responsiveness and capacities of my body of artmaking experience. I now re-cognise that my body of experience is a mode of being handled/handling (personal journal 2018-2022: 391). There is also a deeper awareness of my somatic, emotional and mental registers. The distress of not knowing at a personal level how I will instil something meaningful into an artwork, now dissolves in the *milieu* of making art 'in the dark'. Here, materiality/meaning emerge from unknowing. What

seems to be required of my artist self is a sturdy openness and vulnerability of 'my' somatic, emotional, and mental registers. As they become vulnerable, these registers appear as nuanced and versatile modes. In-the-dark artmaking methods have lit up that for me, these modes, mind especially, are situated and embodied practices. Viewing 'my' mind as a practice, not an entity, has re-calibrated my understanding of normal, of inside/outside. Accountable normative practices (Barad 2007: 380) take on new significance. PLR as situated and embodied becomes more than entanglement of practice and theory, potentially offering materiality as a creative force that interrogates mind, not only the residues of thinking, such as theory. Perhaps a secluded mind is the hinge that shuts the door on unknowing and materiality. In-the-dark artmaking methods have indeed proffered a radical opening to the oscillations of infinite difference/singularity.

As this study starts to disappear from view, the *hauntology* below (figure 103) kept pushing at my mind to re-engage with meaning. As a *non-verbal* postscript, *hauntology human-ish* pays homage to unknowing, materiality, PLR and the human-ish.



Figure 103, Caroline Birch, hauntology human-ish, (2022), wax, oil paint and Fabriano, 100 x 70 cm.

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