Art, Place, Death:
The Transformative Power of Dynamic Thresholds

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Fine Arts

July 2021

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Philosophae Doctor (PhD) degree at the University of the Free State is my own original work, and has not been submitted at another university/faculty for any reward, recognition, or degree. Every effort has been made to clearly reference the contributions of others within this thesis. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

This thesis was completed under the guidance of Professors E. S. Human and J. Allen-Spies from the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Adelheid C. von Maltitz

July, 2021

Acknowledgements

- **Supervisors**

  A sincere thanks to my main supervisor, Prof. Human, who has truly supported me throughout my whole PhD journey. Thank you for all your hard work and for constantly motivating and inspiring me. Thank you as well to my co-supervisor, Prof. Allen-Spies, for your hours of work and constant encouragement.

- **The Family**

  I would like to acknowledge my family, all of whom helped me cope during my PhD: Michael von Maltitz, Saskia von Maltitz, Alexis von Maltitz, Manini Peli, Katie McDonald and Chantal Salzmann. A very special thank you to Michael, who made it possible for me to tackle this PhD endeavor and who helped me in many different ways. Also, I am very grateful for all my other family and friends not mentioned here, for their constant support and assistance.

- **The Department of Fine Arts, UFS**

  Thanks need to be extended to Waldo Human, Dina Grobler, Petrus Morata, Tanya Sarluis-Meyer, Johandi du Plessis-Kleynhans, Lyrene Kuhn-Botma, Janine Allen-Spies, Jaco-Spies, Dot Vermeulen, Willem Boshoff, Bontle Tau, Christa Swanepoel, Kara Schoeman, alumni and students. Thank you especially to Waldo for all his technical assistance through the years and with setting up and taking down my exhibition, and to all my colleagues for their continual support. I also truly appreciate the support of the student assistants, students and alumni who all contributed in different ways.

Abstract

In this study I endeavour to analyse my position as an artist from the point of view of the fields of art history and image studies, as well as across other fields, including mourning and funerary practices. In so doing, I discover that in a variety of historical and cultural ways for many centuries, the psychic or imaginary edge or threshold between life and death has been challenged, bridged and moved across.

This is of particular significance for my art and therefore I investigate how site, materiality and ritual — which span across works of art and funerary and mourning practices — may contribute to possibilities of healing or constructive engagement with death and loss. An analysis of the movement of the body, carrying objects and materials across the thresholds of significant places like cemeteries or art galleries, reveals that transferral may lead to the formation and translation of individualised transient inner images in the body. An exploration of materiality shows that material objects and their "edge qualities" may be exploited in certain contexts — such as when engaging with death and loss — to challenge imaginary or psychic thresholds and thus enable healing. The interplay between the field of funerary practices and art-making processes clarifies the way in which ritual and ritualised processes comparably mediate the contradictory experience of the degeneration of the corpse and the need to embody continuity and thus enable healing. Based on, and expanding upon this research, I am able to envision and conceptualise future installation and land art projects.

Key Terms

Roadside shrine; site; materiality; ritual; site-specific art; death and loss; thresholds, edge

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My research project consists of an exhibition of mostly sculptural installation art, aligned with this thesis. The thesis aims to articulate and contextualise the research questions which motivate my art-making. By researching these questions theoretically and historically, I am able to self-reflectively and comparatively situate my artistic production amidst the cultural and aesthetic work of other practitioners — past and contemporary, local and international. Furthermore, I envision how this study contributes to new conceptions and development for further projects. By distinguishing my focus and methods, and interrogating my research questions systematically, I endeavour to analyse this position from the point of view of the fields of art history and image studies, as well as across other fields in which mourning and funerary practices are investigated. By analysing how death and loss are interacted with, it becomes evident that the psychic or imaginary edge or threshold between life and death has been challenged, bridged and moved across in a variety of historical and cultural ways for many centuries. Within this broad field my own distinct focus on the transformative power of dynamic thresholds is adumbrated and

articulated.

My research questions emerge intimately from personal life experiences. From a young age, stories about my Polish grandfather's escape from Poland during World War II sparked my curiosity about the capacity of specific places to trigger fear and anxiety and have the potential to affect persons throughout their lives. My grandfather fled Poland in 1945 after an altercation involving a Russian officer at a Jewish concentration camp. My grandmother also left Europe (from Belgium), but in the hopes of starting a better life in a new country, and not because she feared for her life as my grandfather feared for his. While my grandfather hardly every spoke about his experiences in Europe, my grandmother did. She told stories about her childhood and young adulthood in Belgium, as well as the stories that my grandfather had shared with her of his own experiences. To my knowledge, my grandfather was not a prisoner. He was forced to work as a bookkeeper at a concentration camp, because he was a victim of coercive labour practise under the Nazi rule. After an 'incident' (the details of which he never fully disclosed even to his closest family), he feared for his life and fled over the mountains to what was then Czechoslovakia, in what seems to have been a harrowing journey. In Czechoslovakia he changed his surname. He then managed to move to Belgium, and to study in Antwerp, where he met my grandmother. My grandfather and grandmother left Belgium separately and met up in South Africa where they were married. In Johannesburg in 1959, two years after my mother was born, my grandfather changed his surname again.

On his deathbed in 1999, my grandfather was staying with my immediate family in my parents' home in Bloemfontein. When he was near the end of his life he struggled with throat cancer. The treatments and pain medication for this condition affected him to

such an extent that he would sometimes suddenly wake up in a delusional and paranoid state, feeling sure that the Russians were still after him and were about to find him. As a seventeen-year-old, I witnessed these outbursts. His anxiety, I later came to believe, was possibly not only because of the suppression of his feelings about experiences of World War II, but perhaps also because these repressed presentiments were based so very much on place. The events at certain places, mostly in Poland, changed him and his life so much so that he was hardly ever able to talk about them, never able to return to his birth country and unable to ever completely recover from their effect.

Figure 1.1

Adelheid von Maltitz, Polish passport, 2021.

I feel especially connected to my grandfather, his life story and his birth country, as I received Polish citizenship through him. Allara (2017) explains how the psychological effects of war may be passed on from one generation to another. I believe that the trauma which my grandfather had experienced first-hand impacted my mother's family home and

was passed on to me, and possibly other family members albeit to a lesser degree, as inter-generational trauma.

Personally, I have always considered myself anxious regarding specific places in my South African milieu, namely places which are associated with death and loss, or those that are politically charged. Both my parents grew up during the Apartheid era and in 1994, when I was eleven, Apartheid was finally brought to an end. I had grown up with parents who were especially nervous about the dangers of certain areas. My siblings and I were constantly told that we could not enter certain places and that if we did we could be stolen, raped or killed. As a young adult I found myself with preconceived, non-factual beliefs about the places around me. For this reason, in my previous MA Fine Arts research, I considered the topic: "Fear transformed: constructing roaming structures as a means of confronting and overcoming a fearful response to a displaced urban environment", to explore my anxieties about certain places. The roaming structure which I erected consisted of thousands of hollow resin-like bricks, with additional objects placed inside, or entombed within them; objects that I found at places which I believed were unsafe. I also enclosed objects which I used during the process of making these repetitive hollow-cast resin bricks, like masks and gloves, suggesting layers of protection. Lastly, I built site-specific sculptural structures at places that I identified as fearful to me.

From my MA Fine Arts study I came to realise that interacting with places engendering anxiety may well assist in bringing about a new understanding, which in turn may result in either some kind of healing, or an integration or working through, of previous trauma or beliefs. With this realisation my attention was caught on my daily commute to work over approximately one year, by what seemed like a mother and daughter consistently

constructing, maintaining and visiting a roadside shrine.

Figure 1.2

Roadside shrine in Bloemfontein. Collection of the artist. Photograph by Lynne Slettevold (2019).

At that time, I had recently become a mother myself, and I found that my general anxiety was heightened after having had a child. For the first time I had the understanding of being a parent, and this made it possible for me to imagine that the worst type of trauma would surely be to lose a child. As Reid (2014: 133) says the "unexpected death of a child is one of the most intense grief experiences for a parent". This thought made me feel connected to the 'bereaved/mother', and it was this specific roadside shrine that stood out for me because I had observed her and her daughter's routine returning to it.

The repetition that was involved in this site-specific mourning process reminded me of my own art-making practices which also required consistent repetition. I came to realise that

repetition in my own art-making practices is as ritualised and significant as the routines followed by family members visiting and maintaining a roadside shrine or other grave sites. Repetition is typically part of ritualised processes and, furthermore, it may remove one from everyday mundane action (Dunlaney & Fiske, 1994; Turner, 1982). Repetitive ritualised processes, like imaginative or artistic conceptualisation, are forms of symbolic communication. Firth (1967: 12) explains that ritual with regards to its repetitive and routinised formality is directed not simply at a solution of an immediate technical problem, but rather is regarded as having a symbolic validity. I understand this symbolism in terms of the productive function of the imagination (Ricoeur, 1979; Taylor, 2006).

Having made this initial personal connection to ritual, as well as to cultural repetition, I was able to further tease out the importance of site and material objects in the roadside shrine mourning practice as qualities comparable to my art-making. This observation of correspondence then became a springboard for my creative research and, subsequently, the reason why I decided to investigate the phenomenon of the roadside shrine as a heuristic tool to clarify my research questions.

1.1 The roadside shrine as a heuristic tool

A roadside shrine is a type of grassroots memorial that is created by the bereaved in order to "satisfy a human need during a time of crisis" (Reid, 2014: 125). The roadside shrine practice is an international phenomenon dating back more than 200 years (Reid, 2014: 130). Unlike more formal mourning rituals or practices, the roadside shrine mourning practice is intensely personal; therefore, the bereaved are far less limited and restricted

(Margry & Sánchez-Carretero, 2011: 18). Comparable to practices associated with artistic freedom, the bereaved will decide where to place the shrine, what it should look like, and how they will interact with it. The bereaved's authority is believed to emanate from the intensity of grief and the belief in the spiritual presence of the deceased (Clark & Franzmann, 2006). Decisions about the location of the shrine (or about why shrines would not be built), while personal, are influenced by the belief that the soul or spirit had left the body at, or close to, this place. Thus, the place is either metaphorically or physically soaked in blood, and sacred (Margry & Sánchez-Carretero, 2011: 21). Claassen (2011: 501) also explains that the roadside shrine markers, especially in Northen Guerroro, Mexico, are believed to anchor the soul of someone who had died accidentally or prematurely. It is also because of the very different beliefs, that the roadside shrine markers are not found in South African townships (Mchunu, 2020). Mchunu (2020: 5) asserts that, according to certain beliefs in African, for example in Ghana, marking the "last alive" place and attempting to anchor the soul at this place is "tantamount to encouraging [or] inviting such incidents to occur in one's life".

Although the roadside shrine mourning practice is based on individuality and uniqueness, and is furthermore not limited to any religion or heritage (although excluded from some African cultures due to a particular set of beliefs), the roadside shrines themselves do share common qualities, such as the frequent use of the Latin cross (Reid, 2014: 130). While the use of the cross could be considered a universal theme, it does not always symbolise the same thing. Reid (2014: 130) argues that the cross is multi-vocal, and can be used to "communicate a range of meanings, from plainly religious to the quasi-secular". For example, the cross could be used as a generic marker to symbolise death, and not specifically religion. It could also be used to symbolise the deceased person, as it is usual

to see that a cross is placed for each person lost (Reid, 2014: 135). Roadside shrines constitute an individualised, performative and communicative private mourning practice within the public domain (Sloane, 2005: 68). They are a meaningful part of material culture, like site-specific sculptural art practices, because the objects used to construct the shrine have specific values, beliefs, feelings and associations attached to them (Morgan, 2012).

With the ability of roadside shrines to seemingly allow the bereaved to constructively engage with trauma and loss, I articulate my initial research question as follows:

> How do art works and places associated with death and loss (cemeteries, memorials and shrines) have the potential to contribute to constructive engagement with death and loss?

My investigation of the roadside shrine functions as a productive heuristic tool to introduce my main research question and formulate sub-questions which is analysed in each subsequent chapter. These sub-questions will ultimately help in meeting the primary goal of exploring the possibilities of art-making as a healing or constructive experience in the face of the anxieties associated with death and loss.

Three characteristics of roadside shrines — namely site, materiality and ritual — emerged from my investigation as comparable to my own art-making practice. Furthermore, these three overlapping characteristics assist in defining both art works and places associated with death and loss, as the three aspects help in illuminating dynamic thresholds in the way that they oscillate or negotiate between oppositions, including life and death, public and private occurrences, mundane and sacred experiences, original sites of death and

institutional sites. In this thesis, thresholds (and their included edges) are defined from both a psychic or imaginative perspective as well as a physical perspective. Additionally, it is shown that our experience of psychic and imaginative thresholds and edges relates to our physical experience of being in the world. Indeed, these thresholds are challenged and negotiated at the roadside shrine using site, materiality and ritual, and thus, for me, questions arise about the dynamics of the traversing of such thresholds in artworks (especially about death and loss) and in art museums exploiting the same attributes: site, materiality and ritual.

1.2   The roadside shrine and site

Unlike mourning practices in general, the mourning practices associated with the roadside shrine are site-specific to the place of death — if not the moment of death, then certainly the moment which led to death. The roadside shrine is constructed at the exact location where the trauma actually occurred, or as close as possible that location (Santino, 2011: 99). The intensity of this type of site-specificity in comparison, is lacking at other sites or places related to the death, like a hospital, cemetery or place where ashes were scattered.

The Turin Shroud is a comparable historical example showing the belief in something with this kind of intense site-specificity. In this case, the Shroud was believed to have been in contact with Christ soon after death. Essentially, the Shroud's importance is not only linked to the existence or non-existence of scientific proof that the site or the object was in contact with the body, but rather because of the need to make a connection

between something left behind and the deceased (Meacham et al., 1983: 309). In this way, a site or an object is transformed from being mundane to being sacred. Comparably, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York, or the Nazi concentration camps in Poland, for example, changed from being mundane places at some point in history, to being sacred places because of the trauma and loss which occurred right there. Similarly, the roadside shrine has the ability to change anonymous space into significant place (Claassen, 2011: 503). However, while roadside shrine activities (such as the material building process) do occur at the site of death, the change predominantly occurs in terms of the way the site is understood by people — the transformation is imaginative. Therefore, the roadside shrine is essentially a portal between the physical world and the imagined world (Claassen, 2011: 503). This threshold characteristic of the original site of death is significant to my imaginative conceptualisation associated with the roadside shrine and my art-making, and it is this threshold characteristic by means of which I crystallise the research question for Chapter 2.

I investigate how the power of the site lies in the fact that it holds very special meaning, how it opens up this meaning through the imagination, and how it therefore makes connections which are able to span across the physical and non-physical worlds. For the bereaved the roadside shrine makes a connection with the deceased — a connection that seemingly moves across the threshold between life and death. In this context, I review site-specific art in general, while exploring the comparison of my processes of collecting samples of earth from roadside shrines and other places which I associate with death and loss with broader mourning practices. The roadside shrine reveals that the transfer of meaningful materials between significant sites comes to be a productive and healing way in which to engage with death and loss, and thus the major question and sub-questions

in terms of Chapter 2 are:

Major question:

> How may art works, in art galleries and museums and at other sites, in comparison with places associated with death and loss (cemeteries, memorials and shrines), have the potential to contribute to constructive engagement with death and loss?

Sub-questions:

> In this process, what is the significance of the movement of the body carrying objects and materials across the thresholds of these places? To put it differently: What are the function, significance and effects of moving meaningful materials between significant sites with regard to enabling healing or integration of the trauma resulting from death and loss? How may this knowledge cast new light on the topic of site-specific art in general?

With reference to other site-specific art, Hans Belting's (2011) anthropology of images, and Gottfried Boehm's (2009) theory on "iconic difference", I explore how, by transferring meaningful materials between significant sites, the body as a site of transitory images enables this transfer to be considered in terms of the translation and processing of inner images. With reference to Edward Casey (2017), I also explore the complexity of edges in order to look at site-specific art from a recent and fresh perspective, which builds onto the understanding of site-specificity in the 1960s and 1970s, when it experienced its height.

I carefully select a number of works and sites to analyse with reference to these research

questions. In Christian Boltanski's site-specific installation *Animitas* (2014) (Figure 2.3), his translation of earth to a gallery as an institutionalised site makes special reference to death and loss. The Pisan cemetery, Camposanto Monumentale (Figure 2.6), provides an historical example of the transfer of site-specific earth from a site venerated as Golgotha, where Christ was crucified, to an institutionalised site. The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Center (JHGC) (Figure 2.8) and the Treblinka Memorial in Poland (Figure 2.10) are modern examples of institutionalised sites which inspired me to explore the way in which the body can be both a site of transitory images and also the object of transportation. Within this context, my own works *(R)evisit, rebu(I)d, re(P)eat* (2013) (Figure 2.13) and *Roadside* (2015) (Figure 2.12), are introduced in terms of a complex site-specificity, which includes the need for consistent physical and imagined healing movements to occur across dynamic thresholds.

1.3 The roadside shrine and materiality

Some roadside shrines are carefully planned, while those which are contributed to by hundreds or thousands of people (such as the spontaneous roadside shrines after the death of Princess Diana in 1997), rarely are (Sloane, 2005: 67). Roadside shrines may grow through offerings and they may also be renewed, maintained, made more permanent, or age and disappear over time (Sloane, 2005: 67). Creating individualised roadside shrines, like the one which I observed being built and maintained, is a physical task. To a large extent, the bereaved work 'sculpturally'. They may make changes to the site by cleaning and preparing it, and they often put up a Latin cross and place flowers. In the roadside shrine which I observed being built, the surface directly in front of the cross was also

laid out with a variety of stones and pebbles, referencing the aesthetic qualities of a grave. Objects used in roadside shrines also vary from a personalised to a generalised character, for example, personal objects might include photographs and letters. The roadside shrine as it develops, grows, ages, and possibly eventually disappears, could be considered present in the public domain. The presence may well reference the missing body of the deceased. While the deceased no longer have birthdays, celebrate festivities or get older, the roadside shrine might. It is not uncommon, especially in the United States of America, to see roadside shrines decorated for Christmas or Halloween, nor is it uncommon to see roadside shrines age as the material objects deteriorate.

Figure 1.3

Aged roadside shrine in Bloemfontein. Collection of the artist. Photograph by Lynne Slettevold (2019).

As part of my own creative process I visited and collected samples of earth from roadside

shrines in Bloemfontein and the surrounding areas. During these visits I found myself feeling very out of place, as if I were trespassing, but also as if I were in an unusually sacred place. This experience of feeling unfamiliar and uncomfortable was in contrast to my experiences of sacred places such as churches, cemeteries, temples and the like, which were not accompanied by feelings of discomfort. I ask if these uncomfortable feelings were due to an oscillation between the contrasting dynamics of the culturally differentiated dialectics of private or public and sacred or mundane place. This ambiguous experience made me ask if the roadside shrine, in its material manifestation at a specific site, challenges these various 'edges'. Not only do the edges between private and public, sacred and mundane, life and death, all coincide at this place, but it seems as if the veil between death and life is thinner just there. There remains a question of why it seems that there is imagined movement through this veil or threshold when, for example, a letter is left at the site, by means of which the bereaved speak directly to the deceased. This practice reminds one of the position of the iconostasis in Orthodox churches, by means of which the threshold to the sacred space is marked.

In Chapter 3 I explore the significance of the material qualities of the objects left at the site, as well as the materials which I use in my art-making as a means with which to imaginatively challenge the threshold between life and death. The major question and sub-questions are:

Major question:

> How does the use of material objects and materiality in artworks associated
>
> with death and loss, and in funerary practices, contribute to imaginatively

> changing, shaping and challenging experiences of real, psychic or imagina-
>
> tive thresholds between life and death?

Sub-questions:

> Which new perspectives may my focus on death and loss contribute to the
>
> recent wave of academic interest in materiality? What are "edge qualities"
>
> of materials and how do they contribute to imaginatively challenging expe-
>
> riences of real, psychic or imaginative thresholds between life and death?

By analysing the changing historical and modern functions of materials and material ob-
jects in mourning practices and in art, I explore the revealing connections among practices
removed across diverse geographical, cultural and historical fields in terms of memoriali-
sation, mourning, and art-making. Using definitions articulated by Edward Casey (2017),
I ask how the notion of transitional "edge qualities" of materials bring about imaginative
translations between the physical and imagined experiences, and how they endeavour to
imaginatively or creatively shape the threshold between life and death, in various histor-
ical and artistic ways. I compare historical examples of material engagement with death
and loss with modern counterparts in order to answer these questions. These examples
include the Egyptian use of specific materials and their materiality during death rituals,
materials used for votive statues and for effigies, objects left by visitors at the Vietnam Vet-
erans Memorial (Figure 3.10), objects and materials displayed at the Majdanek Memorial
(Figure 3.13) and Mausoleum (Figure 3.14), Carl Michael von Hausswolff's controversial
paintings titled *Majdanek* (1989) (Figure 3.17), and my own work, *Cleansing/Entombing*

(2021) (Figure 3.19).

1.4   The roadside shrine and ritual

One of the first correlations I noticed between my art-making and roadside shrine mourning practices were the repetitive actions of building, maintaining and visiting. Thus, I investigate the significance of ritual and ritualised processes when engaging with death and loss. While the processes of visiting shrines in general have a "multifunctional" (Nelson, 1996: 147) and highly individualised nature, the processes could be considered in terms of ritual performances (Brown, 2003: 13). Ritual performance is capable of initiating transformation and it "represents a site of cultural production" rather than merely being a representation (Brown, 2003: 13). Therefore, while roadside shrines may appear to be no more than static structures, they are able to transform space into place (Claassen, 2011), because they come into existence and stay in existence through ritualised processes. The ritualised processes seem to imbue the place and the material objects with meaning. For this reason, it became apparent to me that ritualised processes associated with roadside shrines are meaningful with regards to place and materiality, so that the bereaved can indirectly engage with the cause of the shrine: the death of a loved one. To an extent, the roadside shrine is a site-specific and material object which replaces the deceased and the now-vanished body, and the ritualised processes bridge between the two experiences of life and death, connecting them.

From the understanding of ritualised processes and its connection to roadside shrines, my major question and sub-questions for Chapter 4 in terms of ritual arise:

Major question:

> What is the purpose of ritual and ritualised processes during the construc-
> tive engagement with death and loss and how does ritual mediate between
> the contradictory experiences which emerge at the event of a death? By
> extension: What is the significance of ritual processes in making and ex-
> periencing art about death and loss?

Sub-questions:

> What is the significance of repetition in ritual processes and how does it
> meaningfully contribute to healing in death rituals and in my art? How
> have social death rituals counteracted abject experiences of the degenerat-
> ing corpse over many centuries, challenging experiences of real, psychic or
> imaginative thresholds between life and death? How does this still happen
> in art and in death rituals in an era in which the corpse is avoided at all
> costs?

In answering these question, I explore the nature and meaning of my own artistic ritu-
alised processes of sprinkling, burning, grinding and mark-making. I further explore how
ritualised mourning processes beginning at the onset of death and loss, in parallel to the
unmanageable process of the degeneration of the corpse, function as a means by which to
constructively engage with death and loss.

I explore various types of ritualised processes associated with art work, memorials, tomb
sculptures and monuments. Firstly I examine Paul Emmanuel's work, *The Lost Men*

France (2017) (Figure 4.2), Wim Botha's solo exhibition titled *The River* (2021) (Figure 4.3), and *transi* tomb sculpture (Figure 4.4). I then explore the painting by Louis Edouard Fournier, *The Funeral of Shelley* (1889) (Figure 4.8), smoke produced by cremation as part of the genocide during the Holocaust (Figure 4.9), my own drawing *Smoke* (2021) (Figure 4.10), Doris Salcedo's works *Atrabiliarios* (1993) (Figure 4.11) and *A Flor de Piel* (2010-2014) (Figure 4.13), and the Swedish phenomenon of the *Offerkast*. Lastly, in terms of ritualistic processes and healing I look at Arnolfo di Cambio's tomb of Guillaume Cardinal de Braye (Figure 4.15), my own work, *Window* (2018) (Figure 4.18) and Thaba Bosiu, the national monument in Lesotho (Figure 4.20).

Working from the initial research question, with a review of the means by which the roadside shrine informs my main questions and sub-questions for each chapter, I am able to re-articulate my major overarching research question as follows:

> How may an investigation of the three identified attributes of the roadside shrine — their association with site, materiality and ritual, which span across works of art and funerary and mourning practices — contribute to developing and refining innovative perspectives on the imaginative crossing of dynamic internal and external thresholds in a healing way? Furthermore, may artworks which are concerned with death and loss, and their materials, rituals and places, suggest dynamic threshold qualities which could be aesthetically enhanced in order to encourage healing?

Activated by the roadside shrine, anxiety, and art-oriented personal responses to intergenerational trauma, my research method emerges as the comparison between art con-

cerned with death and loss, and funerary and mourning practices including cemeteries, memorials, funerary sculpture and shrines, over large geographical and historical areas. Thus, core features are distinguished and cross-analysed to reveal mutually relevant changing and constant questions and problems which span across different fields and time spans. In this way, new perspectives on site-specific art, the renewed current interest in materiality, and the significance of ritualised processes in art are contributed to, reviewed and investigated, ultimately with reference to my own art.

Chapter 2

Site

In this chapter I examine how the transfer of meaningful materials between significant sites becomes a productive way to generate inner images and enrich works of art. I further research how this transfer facilitates constructive engagement with death and loss in site-specific art, and how site-specific art may be informed by transferral procedures in funerary and mourning practices. I propose that with this comparative analysis of the transfer of meaningful materials, the invaluable idea of translations (Ricoeur, 1979) over edges (Casey, 2017), with further reference to the image studies of Belting (2011) and Boehm (2011), contributes to a new perspective on site-specific art.

Site-specificity could be understood in terms of both mourning practices and art-making practices. Artistic site-specificity occurs in multiple ways, fundamentally making visible exchanges between the artwork and the place or places in which the artwork's meanings are defined (Kaye, 2000: 1). According to Kwon (2002: 12), site-specificity establishes an "inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site". Similarly, mourning practices may be place-bound, as in the case of a cemetery, a shrine or a memorial,

and their meanings and values are intertwined with these places. For site-specificity to function meaningfully, I argue that further investigation of the edges of a site is crucial.

2.1 Edge

Casey (2017) identifies an edge as something that is important, not only in terms of how we perceive our world, but also in our cognitive realm. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2), located at Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, is an example of a site-specific work described by Casey (2017: 18) as having inspired an entire movement of earth art. This earth art movement, with its central abstract concept of site-specificity "far exceeds the literal dimension of the *Spiral Jetty* itself but for which this work has become iconic" (Casey, 2017: 18). According to Katz (2010: 330), while this work does mobilise the notion of place as part of its intention to displace, the work essentially aims to "always inevitably [be] elsewhere, suspended between site and a nonsite". Although the work is built at a specific site, it also exists in other ways, such as the film which Smithson produced and the text which he wrote, both titled *Spiral Jetty*. Lunberry (2002: 118) describes his experience of visiting the *Spiral Jetty* as an object which is no longer there but is still visible. The *Spiral Jetty* for Lunberry (2002: 118) was both present and absent as an "image and expectation", and he was "seeing feelingly. . . seeing indeed more than was there to be seen — something more than the sight itself."

Figure 2.1

Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Basalt rock, salt crystals, earth, water. 4.572 × 457.2 m. Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, USA. Source: image by Harward (2005) from Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 2.2

Rainer Ganahl, *Wading through the Spiral Jetty*, 2012. Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, USA. Image from Ganahl (2012).

The *Spiral Jetty* is far more than the dimensions or edges which defined or defines it at the Great Salt Lake in Utah. These physical and structural edges out in the world connect to the edges within us; edges of ideas and beliefs. Casey (2017: 19) defines edges as the "endings of whatever lies around and under them". He explains that even though our senses, namely sight, touch, taste, smelling, hearing and seeing, do enhance what he calls "edge-bearing phenomena", the existence of edges in no way depends on whether we interact with them or not (Casey, 2017: 19). Casey (2017: 19) further discusses how edges are not merely physical or literal and that they do not "exist exclusively as determinate matter". Edges are also not always the outermost part of something; they can be part of inner structures. There are edges to thoughts or to music as much as there are edges of tables and houses. Edges are, as Casey (2017: 19) says, "*there*: they are out there and in there".

Even though edges exist independently of our interaction with them, they exist only as long as there are things, places and events. In themselves however, Casey (2017: 20) explains, edges are not things, places or events but they are constituent parts and components of them. Edges lack wholeness and completeness and therefore require the rest of that which they form an edge of, and in so doing, an edge to some degree or other reflects that which it edges. Casey (2017: 20) further describes edges to be evasive and resistant to "being pinned down" or "simply located as just here" and notes that rather than "dropping off into a void", edges trail off.

The complexity of edges is realised through the idea that they are not clear or easy to locate and identify. This makes our attempt to witness edges dependent on our senses, in whichever form the edge exists. Casey (2017: 20) calls this "apperceptual work" and

a form of "deep play". Casey points out that we learn more about that which we are considering if we also consider its edges. Edges are further discussed as meeting up with other edges and therefore "double jointed"; everything meets up "edge-to-edge" and in this way edges connect what Casey (2017: 21) calls "widely different regional identities", and therefore, "the edge-world is a world of co-presences".

Everything physical meets up by their edges, and developing that, I would argue that physical edges meet up just as easily or as often with non-physical edges. This is why I would suggest Lunberry (2002: 118) can 'see' the *Spiral Jetty* even when it is not physically there to be seen. The confrontation of this complexity of edges and the "deep play" required for its comprehension aids my analysis of site-specific interventions.

In Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* there is no obvious transfer of materials from an outdoor site into the gallery, although the transfer of materials like earth between the outside and the inside of the gallery was something which Smithson did explore at length. Hogue (2004: 54) explains this exploration as Smithson's "dialectic between Site and Nonsite" which was a "displacement of earth from the actual 'site' to the gallery nonsite that produced the shift in awareness between found and constructed ideals of site". In this context of transferring materials to bring about a further understanding of the edge of things as something which meets up with the non-physical, I explore Christian Boltanskis site-specific work *Animitas* (2014). This work is directly related to engagement with experiences of death and loss.

When installing *Animitas* in an art museum or gallery space, Boltanski painstakingly strives to create a piece of landscape with the earth-materials that he brings into the gallery so that it 'runs', so to speak, fluidly into the landscape image projected on a

screen (Figure 2.3). In essence, the edges of the transferred material run seamlessly into the projection. These transported materials and the projected images reference the installation at the original site in the Atacama Desert in Chile (2014), which preceded the one in the gallery. The original site, the Atacama Desert, is the site where death and loss occurred.

Figure 2.3

Christian Boltanski, *Animitas Chili* (detail), 2014. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Installation view, 22 October – 19 December 2015, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, France. Source: Marian Goodman Gallery Archive (2015) in Dream Idea Machine: Art View (2015).

In this work, Boltanski is concerned with the large scale death and loss in Chile which occurred under the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s. Detention centers, also known as concentration camps, were established in the Atacama Desert, which spans over 100 000 square kilometers in a 1000 km strip. Many political prisoners were abducted, detained there, and tortured; their bodies "disappeared" in the

desert over a seventeen year period (Chornik, 2013: 51). The families of the people who had disappeared were "inflected [with] a sense of never-ending (or achievable) mourning" (Distretti, 2019: 128). The continual searching for lost loved ones is very well known in this desert (Guzmán, 2010).

Figure 2.4

Christian Boltanski, *Animitas Chili*, 2014. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, France, 22 October – 19 December 2015. Source: Marian Goodman Gallery Archive (2015).

Lacombe (2016) describes Boltanski's *Animitas* as it was previously installed in the desert as an installation, "composed of eight hundred small Japanese bells attached to long stems planted in the ground. The bells, chiming to the wind, let out the 'music of the souls'." The name *Animitas* is the Latin American term for a 'roadside shrine'. The reference to communicating with souls at a place where death occurred is reminiscent of the way in which Clark & Franzmann (2006: 579) defines the roadside shrine, namely, "as expressions of alternative authority drawn from the intensity of grief, from a belief in the spiritual

presence of the deceased, combined with a profound sense of the importance of place".

Figure 2.5

Christian Boltanski, *Animitas*, 2014. Cast iron bells, steel, Plexiglas. Dimensions variable. Permanent installation view, Atacama Desert, Chile. Source: image by Christian Boltanski (2014).

While the transfer of earth-like material in the *Animitas* installation in the gallery is not claimed to be from the Atacama Desert, Boltanski gives special attention in terms

of visual qualities, such as textures and colours, which enables the work in the gallery to reference the Atacama Desert. In this way, the materials makes a connection to the Atacama Desert as a whole. This is a site (gallery) to site (Atacama Desert) connection, which was brought about by the transfer of material into the gallery space.

This site-to-site connection is important because the Atacama Desert as a whole — and not a specific site in the desert — replaces the lost bodies of the loved ones who disappeared there. Bodies that had disappeared were said to be have been dropped from helicopters, so the specific sites of death could be anywhere in the desert. The lack of knowledge of the locations of these sites and of the bodies is part of the trauma specific to this whole desert. Utilising the earth-like material in the gallery to reach out to the imagined surface area of a place in its totality, Boltanski correlates the "never-ending" landscape of the Atacama Desert with never-ending mourning, which is due to the lack of having a body by means of which to mourn. In this example, the transfer of physical materials across thresholds has allowed the edges within the institutionalised site to meet those of the original site.

2.2   Translation

A cemetery, not an artwork, may further enlighten how transferred materials may bring about a connection between the physical and the psychical. The Camposanto Monumentale is a medieval cemetery which made use of site-specific transferral of earth centuries ago and which has retained the site's and earth's meaning and significance over many centuries. I analyse how the site-to-site connection comes about and is maintained through

translation. The Camposanto Monumentale remains connected with Golgatha or Mount
Calvary not because the transferred earth is imagined to look similar, but because the
knowledge that the earth had been transferred is 'kept alive', so to speak, in cultural
memory.

Figure 2.6

Giovanni di Simone (architect), Camposanto Monumentale (South Corridor), started
1278, completed 1464. Cathedral Square, Pisa, Italy. Source: image by Luca Aless
(2016) from Wikimedia Commons.

The Camposanto Monumentale, which can be directly translated as 'Holy Field', is situ-
ated in Pisa, Italy. According to Ahl (2003), the Composanto Monumentale was concep-
tualised by Ubaldo Lanfranchi, archbishop of Pisa, as far back as 1203. After leading his
city's navy, as well as the military of Pisa, Genoa and Venice by means of a pilgrimage to
"liberate Jerusalem from the infidel", Ubaldo removed soil from a site identified as Mount

Calvary which was "sanctified through Jesus' sacrifice" (Ahl, 2003: 95). Fifty-three galleys were filled with the holy earth and transported back to Pisa around 1192, and by 1203 the earth was placed on land that Ubaldo had acquired beside the Pisa Cathedral. The construction of the Camposanto Monumentale began under Archbishop Federico Visconti (Carletti & Polacci, 2014). Medieval Pisa's "spiritual and civic identity" had been defined by its relationship to the Holy Land, and the earth transported from Mount Calvary in Jerusalem contributed to that identity a great deal, even attracting pilgrims to Pisa (Ahl, 2003: 98). The removal of this earth from Jerusalem is not unlike the removal of cultural objects, artifacts or artworks as loot, booty or spoils of war, when one country invades another, and it is also not unlike the claiming of land by the conquerors of a country. The earth that was re-located from Jerusalem to Pisa is both a transportable object and a part of land which in turn is part of a sacred landscape.

The sacred earth at the Camposanto Monumentale is meaningful because, by means of the earth transfer, it can be understood as holy land. W.J.T. Mitchell (2000: 199), in his discussion of current land issues in Israel, describes holy land as ". . . a *passage*, an imaginary and symbolic. . . entity". Therefore, comparable to the transfer of materials in Boltanski's *Animitas*, which connects a relatively small sample of earth in the gallery to the larger Atacama Desert, the transfer of earth in the Camposanto Monumentale connects to the larger notion of holy land.

One should view this transferral of meaningful material — the sanctified earth from Mount Calvary around which the Camposanto Monumentale was built — in terms of translation. This may be enlightening because translation literally means "to carry across", or "bringing across", from the Latin *trans-latio* (Harper, 2021). Furthermore, one can make

a connection between the current word *ferry* and the *fere* which is part of the word *trans-fere*. The Old English origins of the word *Ferry* come from *ferain*, "to carry, bring" which is related to the Old Norse *ferja* which is "to transport". The predominantly early use of the word *ferry* occurs in Greek mythology where, "Charon the ferryman carried the souls of the dead across the River Styx" (Dictionary.com, 2021). In this case transference is interestingly related to the engagement with death and loss. Even in contemporary mourning practices it is very common to transfer either a corpse or cremated remains to a significant place.

Kearney (2007: 149), following Ricoeur (1979), explains that the term translator "carr[ies] the sense of an intermediary laboring between two distinct languages or speakers". Translation, as understood typically between languages, is a transference of meaning which occurs due to this "intermediary laboring", and that is why the origins of these two words, translation and translator, are so closely linked. Essentially, meaning is transferred from a written language to another during translation, and meaning is transferred from one spoken language to another during interpretation. It is not possible to translate without transference occurring, specifically the transference of meaning.

However for Ricoeur (1979), the notion of translation exceeds that of translation in the generic sense of translating from one language to another (Kearney, 2007: 150). According to (Kearney, 2007: 150), translation "indicates the ontological act of speaking as a way of not only translating oneself to oneself (inner to outer, private to public, unconscious to conscious) but also, and more explicitly, of translating oneself to others". Kearney (2007: 150) further unpacks translation according to the perspective of Ricoeur (1979), as a "middleman" that exists between "two masters". These two masters when it comes to

translation of written or spoken word, could be the "author and a reader, [or] a self and another".

The act of physically transferring embodies the movement from one site to another, as well as the movement of something from one site to another. In the case of transferring bodily remains to a place of burial or resting place, the object being transferred and most often the site from which and to which a transfer is being made, are all very significant. If one compares that physical transference of meaningful materials between significant sites to translation, I would argue there is a direct correlation due to the 'meaningfulness' of the concept in the case of language or the 'meaningfulness' of material or object in the case of the transferral of bodies for burial. In other words, we tend to move things to make better sense of them. I will return to the fact that this movement occurs mostly with the aid of human bodies, which are the loci of images.

The meaning of the holy earth, around which the Composanto Monumentale was built, has not been forgotten over centuries. Thus, it is evident that the means by which the unspecified site of Golgatha or Mount Calvary in Jerusalem relates to the Composanto Monumentale in Pisa has been sustained by the place and the way in which the place promotes the continuation of cultural memory. The Composanto Monumentale's unique layout is one of its defining characteristics. This layout ensures that it is unavoidable for visitors to walk over graves rather than over the transported earth from the holy site.

Figure 2.7

Giovanni di Simone (architect), Camposanto Monumentale (Central Garden), started
1278, completed 1464. Cathedral Square, Pisa, Italy. Source: image by Mariangela
Ribeiro (2017) from Pixabay.

The cemetery is part of the Cathedral square, which further consists of the Duomo, the

Pisa Baptistery, and the Leaning Tower (M. A. C., 1897: 268). From the outside, the

cemetery appears to be a large oblong Gothic building without any windows or opening

other than two doorways. M. A. C. (1897: 268) describes it as, "an immense square sur-

rounded by cloister halls or colonnades", with two of the enclosing walls having formed

part of the original ancient city walls. Most of the graves are under the floor surface

and there are also tombs directly under the archways, within the cloister halls, as seen in

Figure 2.6. A walkway connects one long length of cloister hall, where one enters, with

the opposite long cloister hall. The walkway does cross over the sacred earth which is known as the *terra santa*, and splits it into two parts as seen in Figure 2.7. The walkway is lifted slightly higher than the sacred earth, and it also has a few very special graves beneath it. It is said that the people buried there—directly into the sacred earth— are blessed, and therefore decomposed instantly. On the walkway between the cloister halls, the visitor still continues to walk over graves and not directly over or on the sacred earth. The rectangular grass area is central to the Composanto Monumentale, even though it is split into two parts and in its totality it is described by M. A. C. (1897: 268) as being vast. The sacred earth, making up the grass area on either side of the walkway, as well as under the walkway, is quite literally central in the layout of the cemetery, whereas the graves are not.

Upon entering the cemetery, one walks directly over the graves situated underfoot that are part of a reasonably even marble floor surface. In my experience of visiting cemeteries, it is disrespectful to stand on top of graves, as they are generally experienced as sacred in their own right, and it is more acceptable to stand or walk on the earth surrounding the graves. Therefore, I found it quite disconcerting when visiting the Camposante Monumentale, knowing I was walking over buried bodies. Simultaneously however, walking over the graves I felt that the earth which I am watching and contemplating and *not* walking over must then be more sacred than the bodies of the deceased.

It is not unusual for the structure of a building — especially a religious building — to enhance beliefs and ways of thinking, *i.e* one's inner images. The central garden, or garth, was a common feature of monasteries in the 18$^{\text{th}}$ and 19$^{\text{th}}$ centuries. Helms (2002: 142) describes such gardens as a "sacred center...and therefore, as imbued with the broadly

protective and delimiting symbolism that accrues to all thresholds." If you were to walk on the sacred grass-covered earth in the center of the Camposanto Monumentale you would be walking over a representation of the place where Jesus was crucified. As such, one would physically walk over the earth which not only witnessed this event in an imagined way, but which was touched in a physical way.

M. A. C. (1897: 268) describes his own personal encounter with the sacred earth in the Composanto Monumentale in the 19th century: "we could find nothing holier in the ancient graveyard than the earth brought hither, so many ages ago, in Pisan galleys, and considering that it may have once been pressed by the Blessed Feet of our Saviour, we reverently gathered a small portion and kissed it, with a *Requiem Aeternam* for those who sleep their last sleep in so holy a bed." However, the way in which he describes what they imagine the earth to be, as it made contact with "the Blessed Feet of our Saviour" and the way in which the earth is treated as they "kissed it" show how the earth retained its significance over centuries.

With reference to the work on translation by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1979), the Camposanto Monumentale as an institutionalised site brings about a translation of meaning because of the transference of site-specific earth around which it was built. The way in which the unique layout of the cemetery channels visitors' passage through the area — counter to the way in which cemeteries are usually navigated — enhances the significance of the connection between the original and institutionalised site, as well as the production of images within visitors.

I would argue that while comparable to some extent, the latter two examples, namely Boltanski's *Animitas* and the Camposanto Monumentale, are different. Boltanski's *Ani-*

mitas relies on visual qualities (such as texture and colour) and the Camposanto Mon-
umentale relies on the architectural structure to re-enforce the cultural memory which
retains the significant meaning of the transfer of material. In these unique ways (which
both utilise the transferral of earth-like material or earth itself), both examples connect
with an original site, and in both the transferral of material to an institutionalised site
differentiates the original site from the insitutionalised site. In both cases these transfer-
rals are types of translation, if translation is conceived as moving something meaningful
from one site to another, to come to a new understanding. However, it is pertinent to
ask how a material transfer from one site to another is understood as a different type of
translation from language translation. Moreover, it is worth exploring in more detail how
images and pictures are produced in this process.

2.3   Corporeal image events

Reviewing the processes of translation and of transfer of meaningful materials between
significant places within the light of Gottfried Boehm's image studies may shed light on
site-specificity in contemporary art. According to Boehm (2009: 173,174,175), what all
images have in common is the imaginative process they activate, to become removed from
a background. All images harbor a difference — an "iconic difference" — which describes
the event of imaginative separation of picture objects from what they point to, to become
inner images which are inseparable from these picture objects and their materials (Boehm,
2009: 172). The process of experiencing these two aspects of the image together forms
the event of all images (Boehm, 2009: 173). When it becomes apparent that image object
becomes differentiated within the imagination from the meaning to which it points, this is

the moment when the picture looks back at the viewer. This is the event when an object becomes an image. These transformations occur within the imagination of the viewer and are inseparable from the material image object. Boehm (2009: 174) further explains that the transformations are always asymmetrical and highlight a contrast between the image and that to which it refers.

Furthermore, this process brings about continuity because there is a continuous to-and-fro movement or oscillation between the image and that to which it points. This movement is described by Boehm (2009: 174) as an oscillation which makes the image attractive and seemingly alive. In this way the event generates various nuanced meanings and points to, opens up or provides an entrance to a different reality in multiple ways. Unlike a sign, for example a speed limit sign on the motorway, an image is interpreted in an individualised manner, because in this image event inner images are stimulated anew each time the picture object is viewed. The character of this oscillation between the image and that to which it points will be different depending on an individual's time of life, frame of reference, cultural background, education and personal history, for example. Boehm (2009: 175) credits the material and aesthetic qualities of an image object for sparking the oscillation between identity and difference; it is this oscillation which enables the image event to occur within the imagination of a viewer.

This image event can be understood as occurring in the imagination and in the body as a whole. Belting (2011: 37) describes the human body as a "natural *locus of images*" and he explains that our bodies are "a living organ for images". He further explains that, regardless of all technological devices that are used to send and store images, it is only within the human body that "images are received and interpreted in a living

sense". Belting (2011: 37) clarifies what he means by the phrase, "in a living sense", explaining that images within the body that are in constant motion, ever-changing and problematic to control. As a "locus of images", the body in its own right is a place or a site. According to Belting (2011: 38), only at this site can images actually be generated and recognised as images. However, images are transitory, because we do not know where the images come from or where they go when they are forgotten or where they return from if they are to be remembered (Belting, 2011: 38). Transitory images are contrasted against more permanent images like digital images in computer memory or physical images on a museum wall, but, because our own images or the images within our bodies "process personal meaning for us" they "compensate for their lack of permanence" (Belting, 2011: 38). Images within the body are, as Belting (2011: 38) puts it, "in our corporeal memory [and are] linked to our life experience in space and time".

Therefore, the corporeal process of carrying materials across thresholds is part of the process of generating images. As materials are moved and as they are associated with the place where they were removed from, inner images are produced that make and retain a site-to-site connection. This connection and the relevance of the connection is experienced and translated in an individualistic manner, and for that reason, may generate healing.

By their very nature, transitory images within the body are fluid and mobile (Belting, 2011: 37), and it is because of this, I would suggest, that physical edges meet up just as easily or as often with non-physical edges. The earth moved from Jerusalem to Pisa needs the Camposanto Monumentale to create and retain the connection. Comparably, Boltanski's *Animitas* needs the gallery space to retain the connection through image events. For this reason, I explore the notion that institutionalised sites, like cemeteries,

galleries, memorials and centres, are comparable places which can ignite image events as a result of transferrence of materials across edges.

In order to deepen an understanding of processes of transferral, translation and the production of images, I compare the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) (Figure 2.8) with the Treblinka Memorial (Figure 2.10) in Poland. These two are diverse institutionalised sites which translate similar materials to generate image events, with the generated images being bodies moving over thresholds. The translated materials in both examples are railway tracks; specifically railway tracks that carried prisoners to concentration camps and most likely their death. Within the body as a site of transitory image production we produce imagined images of bodies in motion.

The JHGC was officially opened to the public in 2019. The purpose of this center is to "[honour] the memory of the victims of genocide in the 20th century and [teach] about the consequences of prejudice and hate speech so as to prevent the recurrence of mass atrocities and genocide in all its forms" (Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, 2017). This institutionalised site attempts to re-contextualise trauma and loss within the South African context by teaching about the histories of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. This joint history is considered an entry point to learn more about the specific South African history of trauma embedded in, for example, Apartheid, but also to further connect to the contemporary South African and African reality of racism, xenophobia and homophobia (Nates, 2021). In this way the JHGC differentiates itself from other memorial museums by striving to be relevant to the South African audience and the future of the South African context, with reference to diverse historical events.

Figure 2.8

Lewis Levin (architect), The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (exterior view), 2016. Johannesburg, South Africa. Source: image from Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (2017).

The process of designing the JHGC building included workshops with survivors of both the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. As the architect Levin (2015) explains, "the first images that emerged from our discussions were those of trains, railway lines and the vast transportation network of Europe that was employed and diverted to haul people to their deaths." Railway track designs are embedded into the walls of the building on the outside, and on the inside of the building's foyer, the railway tracks are suggested by means of empty spaces shaped like railway tracks, (Figure 2.9). The railway tracks surrounding the building on all sides, which usually symbolise modernity and progress, simultaneously symbolise oppression and destruction (Levin, 2015; Cocking, 2019; Nates, 2021).

Figure 2.9

Lewis Levin (architect), The Johannes-
burg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (interior
view), 2016. Johannesburg, South Africa.
Source: image from The Heritage Portal
(2017).

For a transferred material object — the railway tracks in the JHGC or the earth in the

previous two examples — to be able to reference an original European site from which it

was removed, an institutionalised site like the museum must transform the way in which

the object is looked at. According to Elliott (2006: 63) the museum as an institution

determines how the visitor engages with objects within the museum, and therefore, he goes

on to describe the museum as a mediator between object and visitor. Alpers (1991: 27) describes the museum as being an institution that produces a specific way of seeing. This specific way of seeing comes about because of what she calls the "museum effect" which enables "attentive looking". Alpers (1991: 27) further explains that because the museum tends to isolate things from the world, it 'offers it up for attentive looking and thus transforms it..."(Alpers, 1991: 27). In this light, the art museum can be thought of as an institution that mediates between the living subject and the non-living object. This mediation may also enhance the tendencies of how the living subject, possibly the artist, treats the object to be displayed.

Due to the tendency to remove objects from the living world and bring them into the museum, or to see objects as removed from everyday life, museums have been compared to "grave-yards, catacombs, mausoleums, reliquaries, sacred places, cathedrals [and] temples", as well as "stuffy warehouses of dead objects" (Van Bleek, 2009: 26). Adorno (1967: 175) further explains that museums can testify to the neutralisation of culture because of the way in which objects are seen as removed from societies or cultures.

However, in light of the above description of the body as living and transient site of images, it becomes apparent that the gallery or art museum as institutionalised site encourages image events. Although this is the case, especially in the art gallery or museum, I argue that translations across thresholds have similar image-generating effects in centres like the JHGC and the memorials like the one at Treblinka Extermination Camp. Although these sites are associated with death and loss, as the art museum has also been argued to be, they have the ability to inspire image events. Meaningful materials, such as the railway tracks in the JHGC and the Treblinka Extermination Camp, are comparable to earth

in site-specific works, for example Boltanski's, as a means by which to make site-to-site connections and new understandings. Thus, moving materials across thresholds to make sense of a concept has a rich and diverse cultural history. Moreover, such a perspective highlights the relevance and topicality of site-specific art in contemporary times with previously site-specific art demarcated to the 1960s and the 1970s.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the transfer of materials or material objects can make such objects 'disappear' into the institutionalised site, or to re-appear in a very quiet and unobtrusive manner, by means of which individualised translation through inner images is promoted and not discouraged. In the body, an image develops through the combination of personal factors (gender, age and other biographical idiosyncrasies) and collective factors (environment, historical time, education, and upbringing). Belting (2011) writes that this duality is expressed when we respond by rejecting or accepting images in the external world

I would argue that the images which the railway track may develop within the body and imagination are more unassuming and minimalistic than, for example, a photographic image of Holocaust suffering, because of the way in which the railway track augments, rather than depicts reality. These types of descriptive images, even though silent in their own right, are painful and even traumatic to look at, as Levin (2015: 4) says in the context of the cattle trucks which were used during the Holocaust, "[w]e can barely look at the photographs of the bewildered families as they boarded and disembarked from these trains". Jaworski (1993: 142) argues that silence, related to abstraction in art, "exists on different levels and... is meaningful, [as] it takes various forms, and performs different functions." One such function is that, at times, when things are omitted and demand more

"contemplation", the omission is a strength rather than a weakness. Jaworski (1993: 143) explains this is the case with an abstract painting, where more contemplation may be required, or with a *haiku*, a short Japanese poem, which is "powerful because of what is left unsaid".

The railway tracks, as material objects which are transferred to relate an original and an institutionalised site, are augmenting reality and are used in an abstract, rather than descriptive manner, demanding more contemplation and work from the viewer due to its silent nature. The abstract material objects enable a personal interpretation or understanding of trauma and loss through image production, because the transfer from one site to another is not merely a literal transferral.

The material reference to the Holocaust railway is also apparent in the Treblinka Memorial site, where railway sleepers (or ties) are used (Figure 2.11). A railway sleeper is a rectangular support for the railway tracks, generally laid perpendicular to the rails. This material object brings out a layered image experience in a comparable manner to the way in which the JHGC's railway tracks are interpreted. Unlike the railway tracks at the JHGC, the railway ties in this example create an image at an institutionalised site, namely the Treblinka Memorial, which is overlaid with the memory of the original site, namely the extermination camp. In this way the railway sleepers, along with the rest of the materials at the memorial, relate sites over time rather than over space. The original concentration camp site is connected with the current memorial site over time through the image production encouraged by the displayed material.

Figure 2.10

Franciszek Duszeńko, Treblinka Memorial on the site of the Treblinka Extermination Camp, 1958. Granite. Height 8 m. Site of the Treblinka Extermination Camp, near Treblinka, Poland. Source: image by Grycuk (2010) from Wikimedia Commons.

The Treblinka extermination camp is described by Young (1993: 186) as "the deadliest of all death camps, where some 850 000 Jews were gassed and burned." Unlike Auschwitz, it was destroyed, plowed under and planted over in 1944 by the Germans. In 1958 work began on the mausoleum and "between 1961 and 1964, hundreds of freight trains rolled slowly back into Treblinka, filled not with human cargo but with thousands of sharp granite stones" (Young, 1993: 188). At the same time a two-hundred-meter walkway of rounded cobblestones was laid adjacent to a walkway of concrete railway sleepers suggesting the tracks that "once fed the death camp" (Young, 1993: 186). The memorial, as explained by the sculptor Franciszek Strynkiewicz and architect Adam Haupt, was meant to "suggest

iconographically the greatest of all genocidal cemeteries."

Figure 2.11

Franciszek Strynkiewicz (sculptor) and Adam Haupt (architect). Railway sleepers on the site of the Treblinka Extermination Camp, started in 1961 and completed in 1964. Concrete. Near Treblinka, Poland. Source: image by Little Savage (2006) from Wikimedia Commons.

The concrete railway sleepers are not only an important and defining element of the Treblinka Memorial but the very first introduction to the site. The sleepers suggest the tracks that once led many prisoners to the deaths. Once past the railway sleepers, "the visitor steps into a huge expanse of open land, enclosed by trees. The broken obelisk stands in its center, surrounded by the immense graveyard of sharp-toothed stones set in slabs of concrete" (Young, 1993: 187). I believe the cast concrete slab railway ties not only reference the tracks that led into the camp but, in their material quality they also reference

an uncountable number of coffins and/or tombstones which is reminiscent of Eisenmann and Serra's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, which opened in 2005. As transferred material objects, the railway sleepers may stimulate the production of transient images in the visitor, contributing to linking of original and institutionalised sites over time.

Comparable to the transferred railway ties, my own works *(R)evisit, rebu(I)ld, re(P)eat* (2013) and *Roadside* (2015) utilise both transferral and repetition of materials across thresholds, attempting to make site-to-site connections and connecting sites over time. Furthermore, with the combination of repetition and transferred materials, the body, not only as the site of images, but the body in motion, becomes more prevalent. In order to transfer materials, bodily actions are required and as the materials are replicated, the bodily movements are replicated as well. This bodily movement in itself is a means of recurring translation through transient inner images. In the next section of this chapter I will argue that this type of translation, namely repetitive and recurring translation, may contribute to healing.

2.4   Body as dynamic threshold

In its motion between sites, the body allows for both stability and flexibility due to the combination of edges it contains and utilises. This unique combination of edges in humans stems from experiencing the world by means of living in the world as a physical body as well a conscious body (Casey, 1997: 205; Casey, 2017: 213). Through an empathetic connection, our bodies feel for other bodies more deeply than for other things, as all

understanding comes from a place within our bodies being part of the world.

In both the JHGC and Treblinka extermination camp memorials, the railway track is an object which references the body in motion across thresholds, even across the threshold of death. In my work *(R)evisit, rebu(I)ld, re(P)eat* (Figure 2.12), I collected earth from many different roadside shrines and sprinkled this earth into multiple resin blocks. These blocks were connected into a sheet and exhibited in the gallery over site-specific earth (also from a roadside shrine). While I was transferring earth from various sites of death and loss in Bloemfontein, reworking or entombing the earth into resin blocks and then transferring it into the gallery, I became aware that my body is a site that is in continuous motion as well. We move things in order to come to new understandings and in doing so we inevitably move our own bodies.

Figure 2.12

Adelheid von Maltitz, *(R)evisit, rebu(I)ld, re(P)eat*, 2013. Site-specific earth, ash and resin. 2540 × 3800 × 135 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

Figure 2.13

Adelheid von Maltitz, *Roadside*, 2015. Sourced earth, wooden crosses. Dimensions variable. Installation view, June 2015, Nelson Mandela Dr., Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Adelheid von Maltitz (2015).

In the work *Roadside* (Figure 2.13) I sourced different colours of earth and gravel with which I constructed mounds of earth suggestive of graves. The earth in this work was not from a site of trauma — however, the site itself is related to trauma. This site is relatively close to an intersection where regular fatal accidents occur. Of all the earth-moving which I attempted in my art-making this work was the most physically taxing. This work made me realise and come to terms with my own physical limitations. However, it also made me realise that it is personally important that my art-making process is physically taxing as I engage with death and loss. This is not unlike the transfers of meaningful material

objects during death rituals, such as being part of a procession, carrying a coffin, placing a handful of earth into a grave after burial or having to walk to a special place to sprinkle ashes. The transferral of materials is intertwined with the bodily process to do so.

While constructing this work on the roadside over the period of seven days, I was in the constant view of the public going about their daily commutes, as the bereaved are when constructing roadside shrines. During this time people would occasionally stop and ask me what I was doing. Most of these interactions were positive with the feeling that it was important because it was bringing awareness to the large amount of fatal accidents at the nearby intersection. However, this was not always the case. Two African truck drivers stopped at different times, and shared with me their own beliefs and deep concerns about roadside shrine building, which is what they understood my artwork to be. From my conversations with the truck drivers, I understood that in general the belief is that if shrines are erected at a place of bad death, such as a roadside shrine after a fatal motor vehicle accident (but not limited to that), it would be tantamount to encouraging or inviting such incidents to reoccur at that place or in one's life. This view is explained by Mchunu (2020) as prevalent in certain specific African cultures and the reason why roadside shrines are not to be found in the informal townships in South Africa. However, the transferral of meaningful materials to significant sites is still an important part of certain African funerary rituals and belief; it just arises differently:

> When a person dies an unexpected and violent death outside the home, a branch from a special tree is brought to the spot where the individual met their untimely death. The Buffalo Thorn Tree (*Umlahlankosi* or *Umpafa*) or Marula Tree (*Umganu*) is used for males and females, respectively (Ndlovu, 2008). A ceremony is

> performed at the site and with the branch of this special tree; the soul of the de-
>
> parted is symbolically carried away from the site of the fatal accident. The branch
>
> is placed on top of the coffin to be buried together. (Mchunu, 2020: 8–9, emphasis
>
> added)

In this context, while meaningful materials transferred to significant site remains relevant, it also become apparent that meaningful materials can be experienced as transferred incorrectly or even dangerously. In this way a transient image event may still occur in the body, according to the Boehm's (2009) theory of iconic difference and Belting's (2011) theory of the body being the locus of images. However, rather than a positive outcome of translation by means of transferral, enabling individualised experiences and understandings and possibly resulting in healing, translation by transferral can also result in wounding. For the truck drivers, transferral of material continued to make connection between the site of death and the body of the deceased but in a negative, rather than positive manner.

In all my works, but especially those which required the physical transfer of large amounts of earth, I felt restricted by my bodily abilities and yet I felt it very necessary to engage with this restriction. I explore the world around me by means of my place in it; my bodily place. The exploration of death and loss is, I would suggest, incredibly corporeal — more so than everyday exploration or living in the world as a body.

It could be argued that we may feel the most deeply for the death and loss of humans because we can most clearly understand such pain or suffering from our own bodily perspective. This could contribute to why we tend to find images of death and loss which are detailed and figurative — photographs depicting bodies burning, starving or tortured,

for example — difficult, disturbing and even traumatic and to look at. However, more abstract, silent and diminishing material qualities may prove beneficial for the production of inner transient images of the body, in the body.

According to Casey (2017: 212), the edges of our own bodies are active ingredients which are woven into our experience of everything. Casey (2017: 212) calls these edges "proprioceptively experienced" edges, *i.e.* those edges which we sense to be ours and belong to our body. Casey (2017: 212) acknowledges that thinking about our bodies in terms of edges seems awkward compared with considering only body contours or body shape. However, he argues that these notions are limiting, "given that they are absorbed or imposed rather than chosen and are subject to metric determination." Casey (2017: 213) further details a comparison between bodily edges and the psychical edges within our minds, in that bodies cling stubbornly to their form while psychical edges in the mind do not. In this way, the body in motion between sites is both stable in its physical qualities and transient and flexible in its psychical and imaginative abilities.

While I move earth from the thresholds of public space associated with death and loss, over the thresholds of the gallery space, I am experiencing and connecting both these spaces through the threshold that is my own body. Casey (2017: 213) defines the edges of a body as not seeming to fit any of the more common categories of edges such as verges, margins, borders, boundaries, rims, nor any other kinds of edges which he is familiar with. Our bodies can be described as being a threshold because it is only through our body's edges that we access most of the world around us (Casey, 2017: 213). Our bodies' edges are also especially differentiated from any other types of edges in the world because they are "*turned out*" from ourselves to others and simultaneously they are "*turned back*

in" towards ourselves (Casey, 2017: 216). For this reason, our bodily edges stem from us while being situated in us, and the one can not be separated from the other.

This simultaneous outward and inward capacity of the living body, as a threshold and a site of inner transient images, is central to the individualised and personal translation which may come about when transferring meaningful materials between significant sites. The body may enable site-to-site connections by encouraging imaginary oscillations between the physical location of one site and the psychical location of another. The oscillations form the transient image in the body. Furthermore, the movement of the body between sites may result in recurring translation, which could contribute to extended translation and possible healing.

With reference to the work of the image theorist Gottfried Boehm, by adding the body as a dynamic threshold that can move and transfer images (apart from materials and objects), I argue for a layered idea of site-specificity. With reference to Edward Casey's work on thresholds, and to Paul Ricoeur's richer notion of translation, I relate site and threshold to transferral and image translation. In my definition of different types of site and threshold (physical, psychical, bodily), I aimed to explore the beneficial experiences produced through transferral and image translation. In this way I contribute by expanding the idea of site-specificity.

Chapter 3

Materiality

In the previous chapter, I explored site-specificity and how it is relevant today from the perspective of death and loss. In this chapter I ask how materiality may contribute to constructive engagement with death and loss, and which new aspects are highlighted by my specific focus. I propose that an analysis of materials and materiality of artworks, memorial monuments, cemeteries and shrines related to death and loss, in terms of what I call the "edge-qualities" of materials, contributes to current discourses on materiality. I argue that because avoidance of death is more prevalent in the modern era, material qualities become especially important in terms of the way in which they challenge the threshold between life and death. Although materials and material objects have been used over centuries to challenge and negotiate the imagined or psychic edge between life and death, the use of materials and their specific material characteristics are more personal, imaginative and creative in the modern era.

In order to define the "edge qualities" of materials in this context I refer to the phenomenological work of Christopher Tilly (2004), and again to Edward Casey's (2017)

definitions of edges and thresholds. I explore the "edge qualities" of materials in historical and contemporary examples by focusing on the means through which materials were used to challenge the thresholds between life and death. These examples include, amongst others, the use of materiality both in ancient Egyptian culture and in contemporary memorials such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (completed in 1982). I start off by examining the functions of material qualities in my own art-making practice in terms of my artistic exploration of their changing "edge qualities" and how I endeavor to imaginatively affect the psychic or imagined threshold between life and death. I conclude that my own use of materiality endeavours to enhance "edge qualities" to enable imaginative conceptualisation and healing, and furthermore that "edge qualities" of materials should be differentiated and may be exploited in certain contexts, such as when engaging with death and loss.

Although the term materiality is not new, there has been renewed academic interest in materiality in the last decades; a trend which I briefly refer to with reference to art history, in order to contextualise my own contribution to this field. The renewed interest in materiality is related to the increased concern with the "sensory [and] physical aspect of artifacts" in the wake of the rapid development of digital visual cultures (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 2019: 6), amongst other factors. According to Athanassoglou-Kallmyer (2019: 6), art historical collaboration with interdisciplinary research has contributed to the discipline's changing and varied profile. Materiality is thus interrogated from a variety of angles in a comprehensive manner (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 2019: 6). This "material turn" may be said to have resulted in an overhaul of the field of art history by expanding it to include, in visual culture studies and image studies, "material culture, design history, connoisseurship, technical art history, conservation, museum studies, fashion, and decorative arts"

(Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 2019: 6). For instance, David Hurst Thomas's (2017: 379) re-search on materiality is informed by the practice of "interrogating objects in ways akin to asking questions of people". Thomas (2017: 379) concludes that objects in their ma-teriality are powerful in that they can have an impact on controlling a society at large. Comparably, the "vitality, willfulness, and recalcitrance possessed by nonhuman entities and forces" leads to the notion of "thing-power" and specifically, the ecological implica-tion of thing-power (Bennett, 2004: 347). Jane Bennett (2004: 365) defines thing-power as "the lively energy and/or resistant pressure that issues from one material assemblage and is received by others" and her exploration in this regard emphasises the connections between humans and nonhuman materials. Bennett (2010: XVI) goes on to expand on the term "thing-power" as the power of material objects to "gesture towards the strange ability of ordinary, [hu]man-made items to exceed their status as object and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness".

For Michael Ann Holly (2013: 15), materiality is *the meeting of matter and imagination*". In this way, the edge between the material object and the imagination is at play. Holly (2002: 15) suggests that the materiality of artworks have been repressed in favour of meaning production and further that the aesthetic rather than the art object itself has mostly received the attention of philosophers of art. For Holly (2002: 15) "[w]orks of art are wrapped round by their own materiality, to which embodied spectators respond," and as such, Holly substantiates that the interaction between viewer and artwork need not always be about 'locating meaning'. Materiality is more than just a medium and material qualities, it is a "substance that occasionally is substanceless, evinces tangibility sometimes without physical touch" and as such a "place where opposites take refuge from their perpetual strife" Rosler et al. (2013: 15,16). To this I will add that "edge qualities"

investigated from the perspective of death studies as well as art, gives an insight into how materiality is able to function in such contradictory ways.

It is important to note that the interest in materiality is also flourishing in death studies. As Newby & Toulson (2019: 1) says unremittingly, "[t]angible remains play an important role in our relationship with the dead [and] they are pivotal to how we remember, mourn and grieve." Objects such as monuments may still be regarded as a substitute for the dead as well as a distraction from the decaying body, while the corpse — in its materiality — remains essential for the process of grieving (Newby & Toulson, 2019: 1). The study of materiality as an "updated materialist-conscious approach" is empowered by interdisciplinary scholarship and it is a "fully revamped and dynamic analytic tool" which opens up new understandings and possibilities (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 2019: 7). I thus propose that my differentiation of the power of "edge qualities" of materials and material objects in the context of the experience of death and loss contributes a new perspective in art history and image studies by looking specifically at how the artistic use of materials may be informed by materiality in death studies.

All of the materials I use in my own art-making processes allude to endurance in the face of destruction, even though some materials are extremely fragile. In this way, much of the materiality of my works for the exhibition *Site, Materiality and Ritual: Constructively engaging with death and loss*, are resilient and resistant. They are, especially the bone ash, the remains of heat processes which would eradicate most material objects. Similarly, it is not unusual to think of sculpture and sculptural installation as one of the most forceful and enduring art-forms, in that sculpture occupies the space in which we live, not the walls or the surface areas, but the volume of lived space. Mitchell (2005: 249) describes

sculpture as enlivened because it fills up space, intervenes in a space, occupies a site and imposes upon it in such a manner that it is altered, in a similar way in which humans do. For this reason sculpture, after architecture, is experienced as the most "ancient, conservative and intractable of the media" (Mitchell, 2005: 249). This space occupation, as well as the materials used, often lend sculptures and sculptural installations the ability to suggest resilience and resistance.

Clay, for instance, like earth and bone, is an especially enduring material. For Antony Gormley, this material quality, as much as the volume of Gormley's sculptural installation, contributes to the way in which space is occupied and endurance is suggested. Mitchell (2012: 28) describes the sculptural work of Gormley as a means of occupation — the seizure of empty space — "a demand for presence, an insistence on being heard". Mitchell (2012) analyses Gormley's *Asian Field* (2003) as a "sculptural meditation on the whole cluster of issues surrounding the occupation of public space". More importantly in the current context, the materiality of the 200 000 figures is in itself enduring, since the clay has been through a process of heat.

The quality of endurance of the materials which I use, embodies a pattern of "creation-destruction-reconstruction", just like my process of installing (building) and removing (breaking down) sculptural installations in the gallery or elsewhere. Elam & Pielak (2018: 77) theorises about mourning rituals and notes that this same cycle is a means by which we "meaningfully [shape] our experience with the dead", especially during cremation processes. "Creation" refers to life, "destruction" to the cremation process, and lastly "reconstruction", to the imaginative thinking with regards to life after death and the continuation of the spirit or soul. One could also see aspects of cremation to be linked

with "reconstruction" as remains are entombed, housed or sprinkled, and as smoke — believed to transport the soul Elam & Pielak (2018: 75) — rises from the cremation process. "Destruction", or the destroyed materials themselves, links to or opens up imaginative reconstruction and healing. In my own art-making process I comparably think about destruction in terms of processes of heat, and of reconstruction as imaginative conceptualisation which stems from the qualities of those materials themselves; materials such as bone ash, lint and resin.

3.1   Bone ash, lint and resin

In many of my artworks I use white bone ash which I make by cremating animal bones in a ceramic kiln and by then grinding the cremated bones mostly into a bone ash powder. By confronting the materiality of bone ash, which suggestively includes the processes of its creation, I intend to reference human cremated remains and the power which that material embodies.

In any cremation process, whether animal or human, the natural degeneration process is hastened; what would take hundreds or thousands of years, now happens within four to eight hours. The cremation process changes the initial body object — the deceased human body or the animal carcass — and there is an enduring material which remains: the ash which is produced as a byproduct of this cremation process.

Figure 3.1
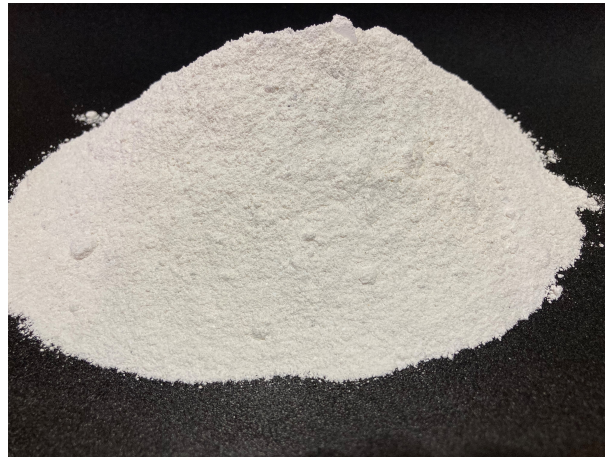
Adelheid von Maltitz, pile of the bone ash
used in artworks, 2021. Animal bone ash. 70
× 200 × 170 mm. Photograph by Adelheid
von Maltitz (2021).

Elam & Pielak (2018: 75) examines cremation in the context of aesthetic practices and
they argue that, "aesthetics controls the twin forces of desire and imagination." Therefore,
when we encounter materiality such as a decaying body, we re-imagine the material object
by transforming this undesirable materiality into aesthetically acceptable materiality. If
one thinks of flowers, an elaborate coffin, an embalmed body, earth or ash sprinkling that
occurs during the process of burial, or formal funeral rituals, all these material qualities
are, to an extent, aesthetically pleasing, and function as a replacement for the decaying
body.

It is important to note that human bones, while not being typically aesthetically pleasing
or acceptable to interact with in the modern era, were considered as much from the midst
of the medieval period until the eighteenth century, as well as later in Brittany, Naples and
Rome, when ossuaries were in use (Ariès, 1991: 92). According to Ariès (1991: 92), bodies
were often buried in mass graves and close to the surface of the ground and therefore,

it was not uncommon to see bone appear above ground. These bones were then at times exhibited in an aesthetic manner, for example over the galleries of the charnels, the church porches and small chapels next to the churches that were specifically designed for this display of bones.

Figure 3.2

Ossuary under the Church of St. James, founded in 17th c., expanded in 18th c. Human Bone. Dimensions unknown. Brno, Czech Republic. Source: image by Kirk (2010) from Wikimedia Commons.

Ariès (1991: 92) describes the institution of ossuaries such as the Brno Ossuary in Figure 3.2, to be a "macabre practice" which often indicated little concern for the identity of the deceased person, especially when bones were displayed *en masse*. The practice of dis-

playing bones stemmed from the need for storage areas for the exhumed bones, however, after the 14th century there was an interest in the spectacle for its own sake which came about through the influence of a sensibility towards the macabre (Ariès, 1991: 92). The corpse was initially buried in the ground for a period of time until the flesh rotted away, which enabled bones to be exhumed and displayed as sterile and acceptable objects; this formed part of daily living without being repulsive.

As with bones used in ossuaries, cremated bone changes from being an unstable, decaying organic object into a stable, sterile, seemingly inorganic object. Elam & Pielak (2018: 76) explains a need to separate, as well as to hold close, during a mourning process. This contrast comes about in an oscillation between repulsion and attraction, especially apparent in cremation. The difference in the material character between humans and animals such as cows, sheep or pigs, are minimal in the sense that the same changes that would occur to a human body during cremation, occur to an animal body. The cremated fragments of animals have strong resemblances to human bones that have been through the process of cremation (Elam & Pielak, 2018: 78).

Christopher Tilly (2004: 31) suggests that material objects or substances, as well as places and landscapes, can be regarded as "agents" rather than "signs". Agents "actively produce", instead of simply reflecting social identities in various ways. Because the object produces meaning in an inwardly rather than outwardly manner, the "character" of a material substance or of an object can be very important (Tilley, 2004: 33). This phenomenological perspective moves away from considering things as "representing the world to us" but rather towards observing things as "producing the world for us" (Tilley, 2004: 33). Tilley (2004: 31) explains this as "a move from the cognitive sign value of things to the

embodiment of things, from the code of the world to the flesh of the world, from symbols to actions". In this way, the physical properties and overall character of animal bone ash is able to reference that which it is not, namely experiences associated with human cremated remains and the human body.

Similar to the material endurance prevalent in cremated human remains, lint, as a by-product of tumble drying clothing, also suggests endurance in spite of heat. Lint is the result when very small particles and fibers from human or animal bodies and from what those bodies come in close contact with, like clothing, towels and bedding, detach from material items and cling together during a processes of air being heated and forcefully passed through the material items in order to dry them. Therefore, lint consists of textile fibers, human and animal hair, skin cells, plant fibers, pollen, dust and microorganisms. All of these particles have a low surface area and are prone to static cling, which is what keeps pieces of lint together and why, as a large piece especially, lint is so fragile. There is no compression or weaving found in a piece of lint, unlike in felt, for example, which is produced by matting, condensing and pressing fibers together. Lint is made up of particles which, like dust (which is also part of lint), can be described as being "brought into existence by a constant process of death, degeneration and decay" (Dziuban, 2017: 281). Comparable with dust, lint is able to testify to a "continuous transformation of things and bodies, their slow but unavoidable disintegration into indistinguishable particles within a shapeless and amorphous substance" (Dziuban, 2017: 281).

Figure 3.3
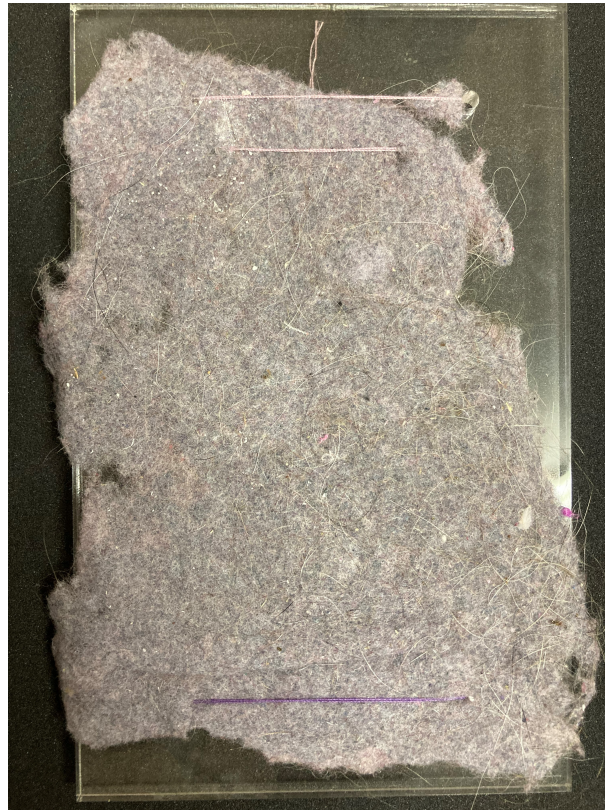
Adelheid von Maltitz, piece of lint used in
artworks, 2021. Dryer lint. 160 × 100 mm.
Photograph by Adelheid von Maltitz (2021).

Unlike bone ash, however, lint embodies particles which are suggestive of death, degener-
ation and decay in the personal space of, for instance, my own home. The particles which
make up the lint which I use in my artworks consist of my own family's hair, skin cells
and even my family's DNA, as well as the DNA of those with which my family comes
into contact. While most of the DNA may well have died over time or due to the tumble
dryer's heat process, it is possible that mitochondrial DNA could still be found in a strand
of hair, for example. On the other hand, bone ash which has endured heat above 1000
degrees Celsius would contain no more living DNA. Therefore, lint could still contain and
represent life, as well as loss and decay.

The polyester resin which I use in my art-making can also be suggestive of life. Resin is able to preserve 'living' DNA-containing materials, such as breast milk, hair and nails in my artwork. The materials which I place into silicone moulds before casting the resin, or which I sprinkle directly into the resin while it is still in a liquid form after casting, becomes closed up and sealed once the resin hardens. These enveloped materials are completely contained and preserved.

Preservation using resin is assumed to date back to the Third Dynasty of Egypt, *circa* 2600 BC (Elam & Pielak, 2018: 34). During the Egyptian embalming process or mummification, the corpse was dried out and filled with preservatives including salt, sawdust and resin. Linen soaked with resin was stuffed into the torso emptied of organs, except for the heart, and resin was also used to seal the body that was wrapped in hundreds of meters of linen (Elam & Pielak, 2018: 35). Unlike the polyester resin I use in my work, this resin was a natural gum resin found in plants and often in trees (Spielmann, 1932; Baumann, 1960). In a similar manner to polyester resin, gum-resin is a liquid before it becomes a solid, it is insoluble in water, and it is transparent or at least semi-transparent. However, the gum-resin used during mummification becomes darker with age.

Resin's material quality, of solidifying and preserving, enables control over organic objects or substances. Like for the preservation of a corpse, in my work resin allows the of preserving breast-milk which would otherwise be impossible to protect from deteriorating and rotting or essentially succumbing to natural processes of degeneration. Note that resin slows down natural processes; even Egyptian mummies will degenerate completely one day. During mortuary rituals it is especially important to control the deterioration and decay of the corpse in some way or another. This control need not be through

preservation; it could also be by arranging a burial, cremation (*i.e.* speeding up natural processes), funeral service, or other structured and organised processes.

Figure 3.4

Adelheid von Maltitz, *Invisible threshold*, 2019. Site-specific earth, bone ash, resin and Plexiglas. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. 2215 × 1910 × 145 mm. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

The solid resin casting in my artworks allows for light to shine through it. Resin can make typically solid materials like earth, bone, ash or hair, visibly change their opaque material quality into a more transparent sight or picture. For example, the use of light behind a triptych of screens in my work *Invisible threshold* (2019) (Figure 3.4) enhances

material qualities and material possibilities. Like the screen door or iconostasis between the nave and the sanctuary in Eastern Orthodox Churches, or between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, thresholds over which only the priests or even high priests have restricted access (Walker, 1982: 165; Wescoat & Ousterhout, 2012: 339), light in my work enhances the separation between the mundane and the sacred. However, the light also allows entrance by means of imaginative transgression. Unlike the restriction in the aforementioned churches or temple, the threshold in my work is enhanced by the qualities of light, allowing a shift from one perspective to the other by means of which contrasting aspects such as life and death are referenced and may be transgressed by the viewer in their own imagination.

Figure 3.5
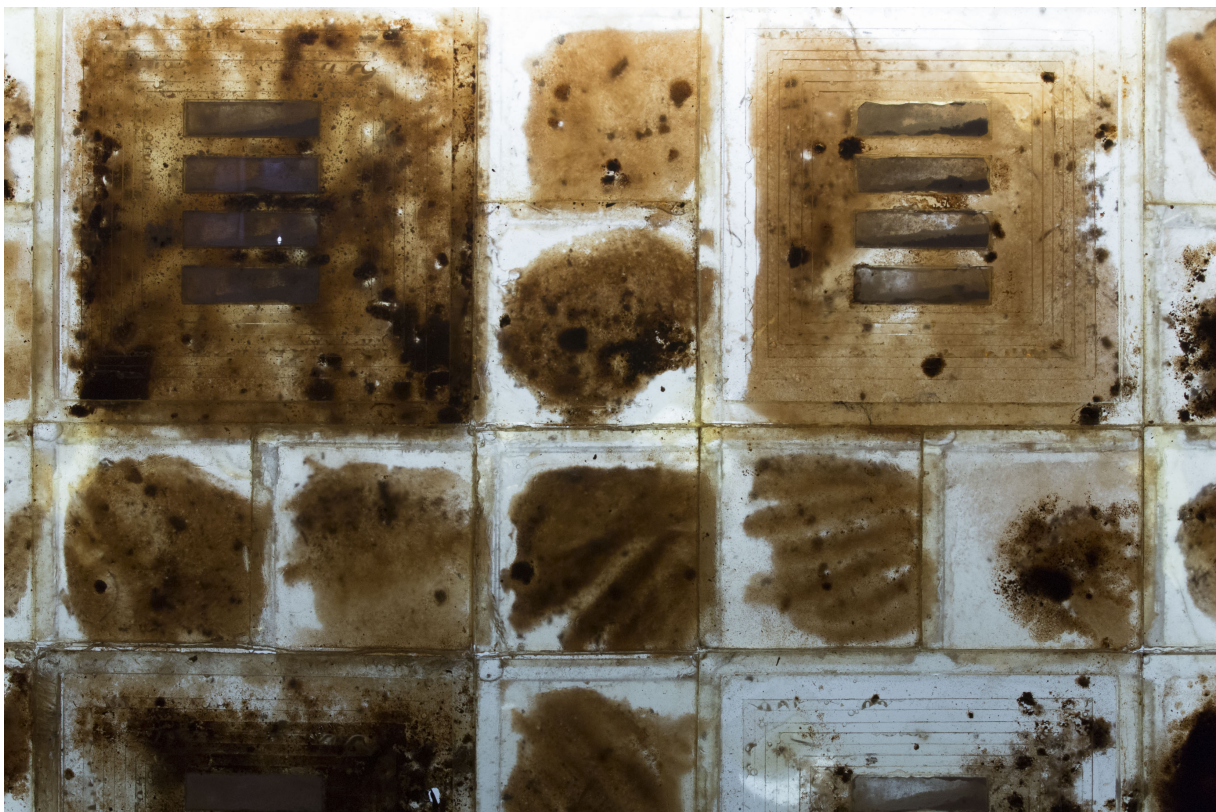
Adelheid von Maltitz, *Invisible threshold* (detail), 2019. Site-specific earth, bone ash, resin and Plexiglas. 2215 × 1910 × 145 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

For me, bone ash, lint and resin manifest a material means by which I interact with death and loss. The materials in varying ways are enlivened and have agency in merging physical objects and imaginative conceptualisation through my art-making processes. Along with this personal understanding it is further necessary to contextualise the use of materials from both historical and modern perspectives in death studies, with regard to the ways in which material and material objects have been used to endeavor to imaginatively shape the threshold between life and death. This enables me to define the nature of what I call "edge qualities" of materials.

3.2 Historical perspective

In this section I argue that the changing historical functions of materials and material objects as they imaginatively impact the threshold between life and death reveal a connection between practices across different fields such as memorialisation, mourning, and art-making. In order to explore the very ancient human need to utilise materials and their materiality when engaging with death and loss, I situate my argument in a more common historical context with reference to research by Carlo Ginzburg (2002) and Hans Belting (2011). In this context I attempt to bring to light how, throughout different eras, the material object has been used to attempt to imaginatively challenge the boundary between life and death. I argue that attitudes to materiality in terms of places and things have shifted from an earlier attachment to accessorising, through to the substitution of the body of the deceased, towards an avoidance of the corpse due to changes of attitudes toward death in Western societies, as explored by Philippe Ariès (1975).

I argue that the imaginative use of materials and materiality in the modern era of corpse avoidance, where reference to the body is hidden and silent, does continue to achieve an effective means of imaginatively challenging the boundary between life and death. In this section I interrogate the use of materiality in cultures with contemporary mourning practices that embrace the avoidance of the body, by comparing ancient Egyptian material properties, processes and techniques to a modern memorial and cemetery, and to contemporary artworks, including my own. I substantiate that in each example which I analyse there is a transfer between the imaginative agency of the deceased body and the material objects. This transfer comes about in creative ways and brings about a neutralisation of subject and object inequalities. I rely on Cara Krmpotich's (2010) research as a springboard for my argument. I further suggest that this process of transformation, where the object becomes enlivened, may be a result of sensory interaction with materials and material objects in a phenomonological sense. This argument is underpinned by the work of the phenomenologist researcher Tilly (*e.g.* 2004), who examines how an active interplay is created, resulting in material objects changing from being passive to being animated, alive and active imaginative agents.

Attention to materiality, as in my own use of it, but also in mortuary rituals, is a means to make sense of or engage with death. This connection stretches far back into history. Therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of features of the constant and changing attitudes towards death, before examining historical and modern examples of the use of materials in this regard. Ariès (1975) extensively examines the ways in which attitudes to death have changed over history in the European context, up to the modern era, which he calls the "Forbidden death" period. This period is preceded by three periods: "Tame death", "One's own death" and "Thy death", respectively (Ariès, 1975). In order to con-

textualize the modern attitude of Forbidden death in which I produce my art, I will give a brief survey of Ariès consecutive periods.

The first period, "Tame death", which is prior to the 17th century and as early as the 11th and 12th, is described by Ariès (1975: 1–25) as a time when people were aware of their own impending death. The attitude during this time was that "all men must die". Death was seen as a very normal part of existence. The usual protocol for dying would be for the dying person to be lying down in bed at home and presiding over their own death (as he/she understood the rituals and protocols), and to summon the priest at the necessary moment. Family and friends would be present, as well the relevant children. There was little to no concern about what happened to the bodies after death. Ossuaries were common and it was believed that graves need not be permanent, especially the graves of the poor.

The second period, according to Ariès (1975: 27–52), "One's own death", was defined as being especially different because of the personalisation of death. This period over-lapped with the "Tame death" death period as it started from the 11th and 12th centuries and, while it started with subtle modifications of the previous period it "gradually gave a dramatic and personal meaning to [humankind's] traditional familiarity with death". During this period the event of death was less important than the individual. This change is explained by Ariès (1975) as due to the "Last Judgment" taking on a new meaning. Rather than the previous beliefs that Christians would ascend to paradise during the sec-ond coming of Christ, judgment on the soul would now be passed directly after death and the deserving would immediately be admitted into heaven. As a consequence, deathbed behaviour became especially important as it could influence the processes of being admit-

ted into heaven. Family and friends who were present at the deathbed were there now to witness the moment before judgment rather than simply witnessing death. During this era, personalisation of tombs became popular as death reflected an awareness of a personal place in the world.

The third period, "Thy death", which Ariès (1975: 55–82) observes, started by the early 18th century, was marked by death becoming dramatised, exalted, feared, and sometimes even worshipped. Death was seen as a break from the ordinary and it was no longer normalised (Ariès, 1975). People were less concerned with their own deaths and more concerned with the death of another, "whose loss and memory inspired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the new cult of tombs and cemeteries and the romantic, rhetorical treatment of death" (Ariès, 1975: 82). Even though friends and family still attended the deathbed, the purpose had changed from witnessing death, or witnessing the moment before the last judgment, to mourning.

Processes and rituals of mourning are thus relatively modern phenomena. Mourning became less regulated as a ritualised social obligation and instead more spontaneous with excessive emotional displays. Because death was a rupture from the norm and it was no longer accepted as part of life, people consoled themselves by preserving the memory of the deceased. Thus, memorialisation became an important new feature of this period. There was a renewed interest in markers of graves as well as of burial grounds. Bodies, by the 18th century, were buried in cemetery plots where it was easier for the bereaved to attend to the grave and commiserate with the death in order to cultivate their memory. This era directly preceded and prepared for the modern notions of death, and rituals and customs which still persist today.

The fourth period, "Forbidden death", for Aries begins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; Ariès (1975: 85–107) describes this period as growing out of the sentimental era of "Thy death" and continuing into our own time. Death during this contemporary period is considered shameful and forbidden and a failure of medicine. Shielding children and even the person actually dying from the reality of their impending death has become a norm. Therefore, the person dying no longer presides over their own death. Ariès (1975) explains this change as being due to the introduction of hospitals and the growing sentiment that, above all, life should be happy. During this period, the place of the moment of death also changes from the deathbed at home to the hospital bed. The moment of death is now also difficult to distinguish, as it may occur in the hospital after the person has lost consciousness. Because the predominant ideal emotional state is to be happy at all times, and because death and dying is sorrowful and ugly, Ariès (1975) explains that it is therefore, in a way, denied.

From the understanding gained by Ariès' (1975; 1991) examination of the changing attitudes toward death, I analyse in a comparative manner the materiality of Ancient Egyptian mummified remains, the votive statue and fragile wooden, wax or leather effigies as they imaginatively impact the threshold between life and death.

During the modern era the corpse shifts instantaneously from subject to object during death (Elam & Pielak, 2018: 2). However, this has not always been the case. The Egyptians for example, as Belting (2011: 100) explains, believed that after death the deceased "lived on as a kind of spirit, nourished by sacrifices and embodying itself in images in the tomb". The preserved remains as a mummified body was one such image. Statues, along with the "indestructible" body, reassured the Egyptians that their life force as a "*KA*",

which is the life force of a king, or a "*BA*", which featured from the "Middle Kingdom"

onwards as a life force of citizens other than the king, would continue to live on after

death through materials (Belting, 2011: 100).

Figure 3.6

Tomb of Wahtye, c. 2415–2405 BC. Sandstone. 10 × 3 m. Interior view, necropolis at
Saqqara, Egypt. Source: image from Attia (2020), from a virtual tour of Wahtye's tomb,
created as a Matterport model in NAV3D.

The material objects that were created, or preserved in the case of the deceased body,

were not meant to "impress the beholder", and they were not artwork or images that were

meant to remind a viewer or visitor of the deceased (Belting, 2011: 100). The material

objects were meant for the deceased to re-embody, so that the deceased would live on. The

prerogative of continued life though material objects was so important for the Egyptians

that it was not left to only one object. Belting (2011: 101) discusses that the continuation

of life after death through the material objects was so important that it was exaggerated;

material objects were accumulated in an attempt to ensure that the afterlife would never

be placed under threat. As a result, some statue chambers have been found to house as

many as thirty differing statues of the deceased. The statues and the mummy that were means for re-embodiment can be understood in every way as functional objects.

However, it was not enough that these objects were produced and put into place; they needed to become functional through an "animation ritual". Belting (2011: 101) describes the "mouth-opening ritual" as a ceremony which required more than seventy-five different processes and incantations which were performed. Belting (2011: 101) goes on to argue that it is therefore not the physical production of the objects which are to be re-embodied that is important, but rather the "magical act that qualified it for embodiment". Through these processes, mundane materiality became a sacred medium that was believed by the Egyptians to transcend the boundaries between life and death. This is in contrast to current mourning practices of remembrance, where material objects are focused more on the experience of the bereaved than on those who have passed away.

As shown in the Egyptian example, through ritual, the material object becomes a means to transcend, cross over, engage with, or challenge the normally rigid border between life and death. This experience of the "edge" between life and death differs from contemporary experiences thereof. These ritualised processes or actions, I would argue, need to be even more inclusive of sensory experiences than in the case of daily living, because of this border's especially impenetrable quality. When combined with materials, ritualised processes attempt to compact and pull together psychic edges. The "edge-world" is, as Casey (2017: 21) says in general, "a world of co-presences". As mentioned previously, for the Egyptians to animate the mummy, changing it from an uninhabitable material object to an inhabitable material object, the lengthy and complicated "mouth-opening ritual" is performed (Belting, 2011: 101). Roth (1993: 57) explains that this ritual "re-enacted the

transition of birth and childhood in order to render the reborn dead person mature enough to eat an adult meal". During a ritual like this, the different and contrasting edges of liminal life experiences, such as birth and death, are pulled together and channeled through or into the material object (like the mummy) by means of the ritualised process. This process brings together sensory perceptions very thoughtfully and specifically. However, I would argue that the ritualised process brings together these perceptions in a manner which, while referring to everyday life, stands in contrast with it as well.

Unlike the everyday "process that affects the way a child receives nourishment" the "mouth-opening ritual" acts out this process (Roth, 1993: 60). Specific attention and thought is given to each movement and interaction, which changes the natural process that would have occurred through necessity alone. The process of a child being born and nourished is transformed into a process that, through symbolic actions, is about a symbolic event. Normally, the birth of a child will bring about processes of nourishment, but in the case of this ritual, the processes suggesting nourishment bring about birth. This is a reversal of the natural process. This sequence and the the specific nature of the action of this ritual are important. The nature of the action, while referencing a normal life activity, is only an image of the activity. By creating each image, for example, the ritualised action which suggests the severing of the umbilical cord, or the action which suggests nursing — sensory perceptions are emphasised, exaggerated, and separated from each other.

This, I argue, stands in contrast to the phenomenological perspective explained by Tilley (2004: 14), that in daily life perception, namely "sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste", are used simultaneously and not separately. During the mouth-opening ritual however,

sensory perceptions are separated from each other as Roth (1993: 60) explains. One ritual task or process, like the specific opening of the mouth of the corpse with a specific tool, is performed during a singular moment. This is unlike daily life, where often things happen in a more overlapping manner and happen while requiring only one or two perceptions, like sight and touch. Moreover, in the Egyptian ritual, there is a very specific sequence, from start to end, and each event, such as the action representing the cutting of the umbilical cord, is separated from the next.

If one thinks of birth as an edge, the ritualised process which symbolically brings about birth, moves towards this goal by approaching the edge from a different direction; the processes which would have come after or from birth now instead leads to birth. Additionally, by emphasising perception rather than naturalising it, the imagination is left to complete the picture. Birth occurs imaginatively, and in doing so, the material object is enlivened and the belief in transcendence is enabled.

Other than the material object changing its status from dead to alive when being re-embodied, the material object may also become enlivened as a substitution in other historical and cultural contexts, as in the case of the Mesopotamian votive statues (see Figure 3.7). Belting (2011: 104) explains that the votive statues of the kings in Mesopotamia were powerful objects which could function as a "medium between two worlds'," because they were "consecrated to a divinity whose aura was attached to it". The statue was not embodied by the dead but it was enlivened, nonetheless by this belief. This change of the material object only comes about through power dynamics which rely on and interchange between the edge, separating the living and the dead in a different way.

Figure 3.7

Votive sculptures, Early Dynastic period c.
2800–2400 BE. From the Square Temple of
Abu, Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna), Iraq.
The Iraq Museum in Baghdad, Iraq. Source:
image by Amin (2019) from Wikimedia Com-
mons.

For this interchange to occur it is essential that there is an acknowledgment of power
which supersedes the otherwise impenetrable edge between life and death. In the case
of votive statues, this acknowledgment comes about by means of speech; speech as a
ritualised process that is transferred from the living to the seemingly dead object. Belting
(2011: 104) describes that a votive could get orders from a king to "speak to the divinity
in his name" and that this order is "contained in a text". Belting (2011: 104) further

explains how the communication between the living and the image is then mirrored by the communication between the image and the divinity. By imaginatively transferring the ability to speak to the votive statues, the rights and duties of the living sovereign could thus be transferred. This transfer could come about as a command written in text, often on the statues itself, or as a "mouth-opening" ritual (Belting, 2011: 106). Belting (2011: 106) describes this transfer as a means in which the statue is freed from its previous reticence.

Egyptian concern for the afterlife and the materiality connected to it further indicates a belief that the edge between life and death is not rigid but rather flexible and porous. However, votive statues are different in this respect; they are not believed to transcend the boundary between life and death in this way. The votive image challenges the boundary between life and death differently by being a medium which communicates through this boundary. The edge is therefore still porous, but not flexible to the extent that the deceased are believed to be able to move freely from life to death, and the afterlife, by means of material objects.

If one thinks of the edge between life and death, I would argue that the Egyptian use of materiality lies predominantly on the death side of this edge, or the side of what the Egyptians perceive as the afterlife. On the other hand, the votive statue is enlivened and enabled to transgress this edge through speech, yet remains on the living side of this edge.

Representatives of image objects within death rituals can be considered as effigies. If one considers votive statues to be entrenched on the living side of the life-death edge, effigies may remain even more present, functional and influential on the living side of this edge. This is because effigies challenge the edge between life and death by means of

representation. Ginzburg (2002: 64) explores the oscillation between representation and substitution which comes about in the fragile "waxen, wooden, or leather effigies that were placed on the royal catafalque during the funerals of French and English sovereigns". Ginzburg (2002: 64) explains that the figurative effigies used in the funerals of sovereigns, specifically those of Edward II, which dates back to 1327 in England, and Charles VI, which dates back to 1422 in France, were fragile objects that were meant to be of service for a short duration. These effigies, other than being substitutes for the body of the king, also "gave palpable expression to the legal doctrine of the king's double body", and as such, the effigy substituted the king in his formal capacity as a "public institution (*dignitas*)". The corpse remained the king's "ephemeral body inasmuch as he was an individual" (Ginzburg, 2002: 64).

The split between the king's personal and social identity is further made apparent by the ritual of "double burial" (Ginzburg, 2002: 66). Ginzburg (2002: 64) describes how this ritualised process of burial, mummification or cremation is utilised for disposing of both the corpse and the effigy separately. He further acknowledges that this process "transforms the biological event into a social process" (Ginzburg, 2002: 64). Thus, a social function and use of rituals involving the corpse are distinguished from one another.

The effigy, while being a substitution of a public identity, is enlivened in order that it may be acknowledged to die. The ritualised processes by means of which the effigy is enlivened may include stationing a slave to keep the flies off the effigy, being visited by doctors, retaining earthly possessions rather than allowing them to be inherited, and being offered food or water while present at a banquet.

Figure 3.8

Funeral effigy of Edward III, 1377. Wood and plaster. Life size. Westminster Abbey, London, UK. Source: image by McMahon (2011).

Effigies as material objects challenge the edge between life and death socially, in that they retain a part of the monarch which temporarily stays alive. This part, the public persona, is important for the stability of the society which they ruled, and in a way, continues to rule through their effigy until another ruler is instated.

The use of materiality in effigies, in contrast to its use in the Egyptian mummification example, is to the benefit of the living and not the deceased. However, similar to both the Egyptian death cult and votive statues, ritualised processes are used to enliven and thus enable the material object to perform its diverse functions. Similarly, the modern art museum may be argued to provide a ritualised environment in which materials and media have agency as artworks, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

From my historical re-interpretation it becomes apparent that the edge between life and death is challenged through differing material qualities and diverse interactions with these materials, especially when considering the Egyptian death cult, votive statue and the fragile effigies of rulers. Using materiality, there is an imaginary transformation of the edge between life and death. While this transformation is assisted by specific material interactions, with for instance skin, hair, bone, wax, leather, stone and wood, the transformation is also revealing of how there is a shift away from the edge itself. The Egyptian death cult shows an extensive consideration for the deceased and life after death, while votive statues and effigies both show more consideration for the living.

3.3 Modern perspective

It is imperative to connect the experiences of engaging with death and loss by means of materiality in the historical context with comparable behaviours of modern societies. I start by analysing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, before examining the transformation of the threshold between life and death as an imaginative process which comes about through a combination of especially contrasting edge qualities. I go on to define my notion of "edge qualities" of materials according to Edward Casey's (2017) definitions of edges in the context of the historical examples and Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I draw comparisons between the storage of objects surrounding Egyptian mummies and the storage of objects left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In both cases the "edge qualities" of materiality are exploited, although more personally during the modern era. Lastly, with this understanding, I explore the materiality of human ashes and its "edge qualities" at the Majdanek Memorial, in Carl Hausswold's ash paintings, and in my own

work *Cleansing/Entombing.*

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a 20th century memorial which for me elucidates the ways in which interactions with material and material objects indicate an avoidance of death. I will argue that the materiality of this memorial, *i.e.* the material quality of the memorial itself, and the objects which are left at the memorial by the bereaved, replace contact with the corpse. This materiality further indicates a transformation of the psychical, inner image of the edge between life and death to become conflictingly porous and rigid.

Figure 3.9

Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982. Granite. Two sections, each 75.21m. Street view, Washington, D.C., USA. Source: interactive image from Google Maps (2021).

In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, two walls of thin, black, highly reflective granite form a 'V' shape which is nearly 500 feet long (Sturken, 1991: 119). The granite at the point of the 'V' shape is approximately ten feet tall, and tapers down or shortens to both ends. Maya Lin conceptualised the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to be a wound in the earth, as the memorial seems to cut into the earth like a laceration. The material qualities of the polished granite however, are stark, hard and not in any way fleshy or bloody, like a

wound; the qualities are exploited in order to avoid horror or gore. Ochsner (1997: 156) describes the memorial as "one of the most controversial architectural designs of the recent past [which] has become the most visited of all memorials in Washington, D.C.".

Ochsner (1997: 156) argues that the memorial "is a powerful case of a *space of absence*" in which the "simultaneous experience of both the absence and presence of the dead" is possible. Absence in this regard is part of avoidance; the wall has no figurative references to the body or the corpse at all. It is important to mention however, the lack of figurative reference was originally seen as problematic and subsequently the realist sculptor Fredrick Hart was commissioned to create a traditional bronze sculpture (Sturken, 1991: 125). This figurative sculpture consists of three soldiers looking at the wall and is placed in a grove of trees near the wall (Sturken, 1991: 125). The figurative sculpture is not aesthetically linked to the wall as a memorial today, and the original criticism of the minimalist quality of the wall vanished once the wall was experienced as extremely meaningful in its own right (Sturken, 1991: 125) when the public and the bereaved responded by offering personal objects at the wall.

The highly reflective surface quality of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial induces a means by which the visitor may imaginatively negotiate the edge between life and death. Mirror-like reflections of light offer observers a "virtual" view; a view which is "not where [it] seem to be" Miller, Mendes & National Gallery (Great Britain) (1998: 11). The view as a reflection is in contrast with that which it is reflecting; the "actual" view.

Figure 3.10

Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial (detail), 1982. Granite. Two sections, each
75.21m. Washington, D.C., USA. Source: image by Sherry Talbot, published by En-
cyclopædia Britannica (2021).

The reflective luster of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is due to the polished surface

reflecting light and it is this surface edge quality of the material which mediates opposites.

The "edge quality" of the material, however, mediates between the avoidance of the body

or corpse and the invisible, ineffable nature of death. Surface edges of materials, while

being tangible, physical and stable, come in contact with a "psychical edge" (Casey,

2017: 236), which is not tangible, physical and stable. It is this contrasting dynamic

pair which characterises "edge qualities" of materials. This is especially apparent in

the historical and modern contexts of how materials and material objects are utilised

to imaginatively challenge the edge between life and death, a "psychical edge" (Shapiro,

2013: 205; Casey, 2017: 236). I would argue this is due to the edge between life and death being the epitome of psychical edges for human beings.

Casey (2017: 236) explains the "psychical edge" in general, as the "crux" in his examination of edges. He maintains that the "psychical edges are perfectly real and an integral part of ongoing human (and doubtless animal) life." He argues that these types of edges occur because human beings have "cognitive powers of anticipation and reflection as well as a range of feelings and emotions". According to Casey (2017: 237), these edges are malleable, flexible or fluid, just like our psyches, and that these invisible edges, while standing in contrast to the physical edges in the outer world, are the edges which are the closest to us, as we experience them in an inwardly rather than outwardly way. One of the most defining characteristics of these invisible edges is that they are especially temporal. Casey (2017: 238, 239) describes them as "edges of and in [this] temporal stream" which are "radically temporal in character" and "ineluctably temporal" because they "unfold continuously". These edges do not "close off", "define" or "terminate" as edges of outwardly material objects may do. The edges within our minds are fluid, while the edges of materiality are often rigid.

In contrast to these edges within our minds, death as a biological occurrence has not changed over time. However, the response to and the way of engaging with the occurrence of death and loss have changed. The edge between life and death which forms part of our beliefs is able and is even likely to change because it is a fluid psychical edge. Parallel to Ariès (1975), I argue that the during modern era the avoidance of death contributes to the way in which material interaction evolves historically, and how this very development reveals the transformation of the psychical edge between life and death.

The most overwhelming material quality of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a singular structure is its highly polished granite surfaces and its reflective nature. The names of the men and women who died in the Vietnam War from 1959 until 1975 are inscribed chronologically on these granite surfaces. The highly reflective granite implicates the viewers/bereaved when reading the names of the dead. The bereaved simultaneously find the names of their loved ones and see an image of themselves along with the name on the surface of the memorial. The materiality of the highly polished granite surface brings together contrasting edge types in a cohesive manner, namely physical and imaginary.

The edge which the memorial references in its material qualities is suggestive of the edge between life and death, and it is artificially created. Casey (2017: 115) defines artificial edges as edges "that have been made by human beings or, if not outright produced by individual humans, [and] are recreated, reshaped, or otherwise bear the mark of human intervention". Furthermore, Casey (2017: 116) explains that such edges can include "those that are accidental by-products" which stand in contrast with those that are intended as such.

The highly polished granite surface of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a purposefully produced artificial edge in the terms of Casey (2017). However, it is also especially inclusive of all the non-artificial edges, such as the edges between the landscape and the visitors, and the edge between the monument and its immediate surroundings. These edges also create a dialogue between the border and the boundary, as they aspire to be both at once. The memorial is a sealed off edge, or border, between the living and the dead, however, due to its reflective material quality it also appears to be less of a sealed border and more of a boundary which has movements occurring across it or through it.

It cannot be permeated in a spatial sense, but in an imaginative way it is permeated by images.

The experiences of the bereaved or visitor is mediated by the material "edge quality" and because there is an avoidance of the corpse during modern times, the importance of materiality to enable this mediation has increased. Other than the surface quality of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial's polished granite surface, the objects which are left at the memorial also have an "edge quality" which mediates by means of imaginatively challenging the edge between life and death.

Since 1982, material objects, which could be understood as "personal artifacts", have been left at the wall by the visitors and bereaved, and have been collected by the National Park Service (NPS) and stored at the Museum and Archaeological Regional Storage (MARS) facility (Sturken, 1991: 135). These objects include "photographs, letters, teddy bears, missing-in-action (MIA) and prisoner-of-war (POW) bracelets, clothes, medals of honor" and many more objects ranging from a motorbike to a tin of beer, to boots (signifying absence), as seen in Figure 3.11. Not all objects left at the wall are collected; only the objects which fall under the scope of collections, as defined by Anderson & Donlin (2016: 2).

The objects left behind are often meant for the deceased; in an imaginary way, they are meant to be received by the deceased. For example, Sturken (1991: 135) explains how the letters left behind are addressed to the dead, and furthermore, that the curator of the MARS facility says "these are no longer objects at the Wall, they are communications, icons possessing a sub-structure of underpinning emotions." The objects, in their widely differing material qualities, sizes and shapes, endeavor to move through the psychical edge

between the living and the dead, and thus as icons or image objects imaginatively shape

this edge. Unlike objects which may be left at a shrine to degrade and age and finally

be thrown away, these objects are made to disappear into a storage facility, reminding of

Egyptian tombs.

Figure 3.11

Boots left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Stored at the Museum and Archaeological
Regional Storage facility, Washington, D.C., USA. Source: image by National Memorial
Day Concert Series (2021).

This process of collecting and storing the objects is as much part of, or induced by the

unique character of the memorial as the physical memorial itself; the process demonstrates

a use of materiality in the modern era which is comparable to the use of materiality and

material objects during the ancient Egyptian death rituals.

The memorial — the reflective marble surface, with the thousands of names of the deceased inscribed into it — is the imaginary edge between the living and the dead in front of which the bereaved can congregate and peer into or almost through, while the archival storage facility is theoretically beyond the edge of the living. This storage space reaches imaginatively into the realm of the dead, where life, albeit a different type of life, still occurs.

Figure 3.12

NPS curating staff cataloging items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Washington, D.C., USA. Source: image by National Parks Service (2021).

Once the objects for the deceased are in storage, they are not accessible to the public any longer, except during short exhibitions of selected objects. These objects are explained as being "offerings" that are "preserved", for "long-term care and storage" National Parks

Service (2021). The storage of these objects in a closed storage facility is comparable to

the storage of the Egyptian mummy which Belting (2011: 100) explains were "hidden from

view in a sealed burial chamber situated at the end of a subterranean shaft, a chamber

that was accessible only to the spirits of the dead". While the objects left at the Vietnam

Veterans Memorial were offerings, they are not believed to become enlivened or animated

by the deceased. The offerings are merely to be accepted by the deceased as a means of

communication between the living and the dead. As such, these offerings challenge the

edge between life and death.

3.4   Cremated human remains

To reiterate, I argue that the transformation of the quality of the edge between life and

death is an imaginative process which comes about through a combination of especially

contrasting edge qualities: the edge as it occurs within us, as a "psychical edge" (Casey,

2017: 236), and the edge as it occurs outside of us, as the spatial edge of materiality.

There is an oscillation between the physical visible material and the invisible creative

and imaginative thought processes, and this oscillation may differ between historical and

contemporary experiences of death.

In this section I will argue that cremated human remains (and the suggestion of cremated

human remains) and objects which are subjectively enlivened, especially as they occur

at the Majdanek Memorial, in Carl Michael von Hausswolff's paintings and lastly my

work *Cleansing/Entombing*, show that imaginative thinking stimulated by material "edge

qualities" has become more prevalent in modern times and is a development in the way

in which society constructively engages with death and loss.

The major material object evident at the former Nazi concentration camp at Majdanek in Poland, near the city of Lublin, is an enormous heap of cremated remains which is housed in a mausoleum. These human ashes are from the victims who perished at the Majdanek concentration camp. Majdanek is unique with regards to housing such a large amount of human remains. Other than the mausoleum, the memorial consists of a large monument at the camp's entrance. I believe that the materiality of the heap of cremated human remains becomes a subjectively enlivened object and thereby challenges the boundary between life and death due to its overwhelmingly inwardly human material quality. This quality is understood not because of what it looks like, but because of how it is endowed with meaning and how it is imaginatively 'felt' or experienced by the visitor, from a bodily perspective.

This same notion of subjectively enlivened objects and the means by which such materiality imaginatively shapes the threshold between life and death can be further extended to the personal belongings of inmates which are housed at the Majdanek Memorial. I examine this subjectively enlivened materiality as bringing about "edge qualities" according to the "materialist position" of Tilley (2004: 2); claiming that everything is experienced and perceived from the vantage point of being a living body in the world.

The Majdanek Memorial was created by Wiktor Tołkin, a Polish sculptor and architect who had first-hand experience of being incarcerated at Auschwitz during the World War II. This memorial was dedicated during the 30th anniversary of Germany's invasion into Poland in 1969 (Young, 1993: 124). Young (1993: 121) explains that the aim of the memorial is threefold: "to preserve the buildings as material evidence of the crimes committed

[there]; to analy[s]e the facts of these crimes; and to present analy[s]ed facts to the public".

Figure 3.13

Wiktor Tołkin (sculptor and architect), entrance of Majdanek Memorial, 1969. Height approx. 15 m. Near Lublin, Poland. Source: image by Alians PL (2008) from Wikimedia Commons.

Majdanek's large amount of cremated remains are openly displayed. The materiality, or the most striking material quality (which to a large extent defines this memorial), is that of these cremated human remains. Upon death, a human corpse may be argued to become an object. However, the deceased human body or human remains is considered to be different from any other object. I would argue that the living body, as the place from which all human experiences stem, recognises, observes or experiences human remains in a profound and bodily manner.

Everything is always experienced from a "materialist position" which runs counter to "any form of idealism or intellectualism that would try to situate and understand the world from the perspective of a disembodied mind somehow outside of the body" (Tilley, 2004: 2). For this reason, Tilley (2004: 2) argues that there is no outside vantage point; we essentially perceive and experience the world because we are intertwined within it as we live in it. The living body experiences the deceased body, or bodily remains, as something already familiar due to our own lived experience. This familiarity of the human body is unlike any knowledge or experience of other object types. Knowing one's body is a matter of knowing it on the outside, as a physical form, as well as from the inside, as one's consciousness. Tilley (2004: 3) explains this way of knowing as a "perceptual consciousness" which arises from the "body-subject" which is a "dynamic combination" of both subject and objectivity. This same complex way of knowing and experiencing our own bodies is transferable to human remains — so much so that human remains are not just objects, but seem like subjects as well.

Figure 3.14

Wiktor Tołkin (sculptor and architect), Majdanek Mausoleum, 1969. Majdanek, Poland. Source: image by Geider (2007) from Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 3.15

Wiktor Tołkin (sculptor and architect), mound of cremated remains in Majdanek Mausoleum, 1969. Soil, human ash, human bone. 1300 m^3. Majdanek, Poland. Source: image by Majdanek (2008).

It is important to note however that similar to cremated human remains, personal objects like empty used shoes, as seen in the army boots placed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Figure 3.11), Doris Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios* (Figure 4.11) and the shoe rooms at Majdanek (Figure 3.16) or other concentration camps such as Auschwitz, are also experienced by the living body as something familiar. These personal objects become subjectively enlivened material objects. While personal objects are not experienced as something we are familiar with from our internal bodily experiences, they are familiar to us because of our external bodily experiences. For this reason, I would argue they may come to replace a body, or bodily remains in certain scenarios. This is especially true if the person or corpse is

missing, as is the case with the shows in Doris Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios*, to which I will still refer in Chapter 4.

By replacing the body, an act which is becoming more relevant during the modern era of avoiding death and the corpse, personal objects may stimulate an oscillation between the physical edge (the visibly worn and used personal object, for example the shoe) and the psychical edge of imagination by means of their material qualities. This oscillation leads to the production of an image. This image is then not only understood within the body Belting (2011), but as a replacement of the body as well.

Figure 3.16

Shoes confiscated from the Majdanek prisoners. Majdanek Memorial, Majdanek, Poland. Source: image by Memorial (2017) from Twitter.

However, while personal objects of this nature may bring about an image through the material "edge qualities" which allow them to be imaginatively experienced as a replace-

ment of the body, cremated remains may be imaginatively experienced not as a body replacement but as a body, in its own right. From this comparative perspective it becomes evident that human cremated remains may close the current gap of avoidance of the corpse during modern times, to some extent.

While Ariès (1991: 85) classifies cremation as the ultimate type of avoidance behaviour during the current "Forbidden death" era, because cremation processes often lack ritual, formalities and permanent location, I would contrastingly argue that cremation and cremated remains signify how imaginative thinking has become more necessary and relevant in the modern era, simply by means of the materiality of the cremated remains. As such, cremation is not an avoidance behaviour, but rather a development in the way in which we constructively engage with death and loss.

Majdanek exists in opposition to all that may be considered "normal" about cremation in the era of avoidance. Cremation typically changes the deceased body from something that is relatively large and certainly not manageable, into quite a small amount of residue that is less obtrusive. One could carry cremated remains around in a container, and store, sprinkle or even bury them easily. However, the cremated remains at Majdanek are overwhelmingly visible, of a considerable volume, and housed in a large mausoleum structure. Furthermore, cremated remains are typically representative of, and occur from a singular and identifiable deceased body, whereas the cremated remains at Majdanek are the material remains of cremations of thousands of mostly unidentifiable bodies. Therefore, the materiality of the Majdanek Memorial challenges and overturns the typical unobtrusive material qualities associated with cremation during the "Forbidden death" period. As as a result the memorial elicits an overpowering experience.

The materiality of human cremated remains, even in a small or suggested amounts (as is the case in my own work) are able to produce a strong response because it is "endowed with power" (Dziuban, 2017: 284). Cremated remains are further able to be endowed with creative power due to an activation of imaginative conceptualisation, creating material images or artworks, especially of images of human beings, which is argued to be a "dangerously godlike activity" (Mitchell, 2005: 246).

This is exemplified by the following turn of events. During a visit to the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland, in the winter of 1989, the Swedish sound and visual artist Carl Michael von Hausswolff collected a matchbox full of human ashes at the crematorium site. More than twenty years later, in 2011, the artist made a series of nine paintings with these human remains, titled *Majadanek* (1989), and exhibited them in a gallery in Lund, Sweden (Dziuban, 2017: 261).

Figure 3.17

Carl Michael von Hausswolff, *Majdanek III (1989)*, 2010. Ash on paper. Dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Source: image by the artist for Dziuban (2017).

According to Dziuban (2017: 261), after a review of the exhibition, which featured in the Swedish daily publication *Sydsvenskan*, strong disapproval of von Hausswolff's paintings was voiced. There was an international outcry condemning these works and the actions of the artist for both removing human remains and creating art from them. This resulted in the exhibition being prematurely taken down.

Dziuban (2017: 263) explains that Von Hausswolff himself described the human remains as "emotionally charged" and as "talking to [him]" — not surprising since von Hausswolff is known for "giv[ing] voice to the material memories inscribed in objects and landscapes" (Dziuban, 2017: 263). The "voice" that materiality has in this context is nothing like the voice materiality had during the Egyptian death cult or in either the votive or effigy examples. The way Von Hausswolff explains the cremated remains were "talking to him" is, I believe, in an individual, creative and imaginative way. He sensed them as the imbued presence of those who were exterminated; it is possible that he felt himself being moved by the material to create art.

What enables such imaginative thinking, which Von Hausswolff and some viewers or visitors in the gallery or memorial may experience? Where does this imaginative thinking stem from? Dziuban (2017: 263) pays special attention to the way in which human cremated remains pressure the collapse of the distinction between person and thing, and contributes to the "power the dead exert over the living" due to the "emotive impact they have". I would argue that the collapse or the oscillation between person and thing, or subject and object, is due to a shift in thinking towards that which is prevalent in Ariès' (1975) "Forbidden death period".

The imaginary edge between life and death is thus engaged in new and changed ways,

including more individual creatively imaginative ways which are now focused on the living, and how to assist the living to accept death happily. According to Dziuban (2017: 262), when creating the artwork from the ashes, Von Hausswolff was trying to "restore the dignity of those exterminated and burned at Majdanek and to confront his own haunting memory of the visit to the concentration camp". Even though this is not the way in which the artworks were received, the reason for making them was an imaginative process in an attempt to bring about some sort of personal transformation resulting in a positive effect.

Consider for a moment my own major research question: how does site, materiality and ritual in art-making potentially contribute to constructive engagement with death and loss? It is apparent that a positive outcome is very important, and not the negative reaction that was observed in the context of Von Hausswolff's work. It is important that we are at all times supported to be healed and not hurt, even when encountering or engaging with things that we ultimately believe are, and experience to be hurtful. I would suggest that for this reason, materiality and the way in which it supports imaginative conceptualisation through its "edge qualities" bringing about an oscillation between the physical and the psychical, is an important development. "Edge qualities" allow for individualised experiences and beliefs.

My own art-making and the material considerations provide an example through which "edge qualities" encourage individualised experiences. While making *Cleansing/Entombing* (Figure 3.19), I was considering the Holocaust death and loss as one of the worst types of death and loss to engage with. As a child I was told stories related to the Holocaust by my grandmother who came to South Africa from Belgium. She had not escaped or fled from a concentration camp like her husband, my grandfather. Therefore, these stories

were not personal accounts of events that were experienced by her or even by my Polish grandfather, but I felt they were stories that would have been circulating between reliable sources in Europe at that time.

Europeans like my grandparents were living during extremely difficult times, and many of them feared for their lives and futures; so much so that many of them, like my grandparents, escaped or left Europe to settle and start new lives on other continents. These stories were very disturbing and made a lasting impression on me.

The most horrifying were stories specifically about soap. According to my grandmother, bars of soap were used as a means of pacifying concentration camp inmates who were about to be gassed. This soap was used as a means of attempting to convince these people that they were going to have a shower and be disinfected before taking up residency in the camp. Soap was used for its power to symbolise hope, and in this way, control crowds by pacifying them. Ultimately however, soap became an object of fear and death. Furthermore, in these stories, my grandmother would say that even though people knew that they were about to be gassed, mothers would tell their children that the soap was proof that they would be fine. Mothers tried to keep their children in the dark about what was going to happen, but out of love, not hate. These mothers wanted to spare their children extra fear before they died. Thus, soap becomes a complex symbol that can be used to open up imaginative thinking born from either hate or love, and it can result respectively in possible fear or comfort.

The inner picture of mothers being killed with their children in the most cruel and painful way, even while the mothers typically continue to protect their children by telling them that everything would be fine, is what I find to be one of the most difficult and horrific

things to imagine and think about. Comparably, for me, to visualise a decaying corpse of a loved one, is impossible, indescribable or inexpressible. Therefore, for me the soap, is a means to think about, deal with, or incorporate such horror indirectly and creatively into my life and art. This is similar to the materiality closely linked to mourning rituals practiced by the bereaved throughout history. The transparency of some of the soap bars and the light which is thus able to emanate through the resin, as well as the preserved materials visible in them, all become a powerful means to metaphorically traverse imaginary thresholds.

Figure 3.18

Adelheid von Maltitz, *Cleansing/Entombing* (detail), 2021. Site-specific earth from Poland and Germany, cremated bone, ash, nail clippings, breast milk, hair, lint, resin and Plexiglas. 850 × 4450 × 2010 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

Other than this passed-on account of the supposed use of soap during the Holocaust, soap

further has meaning for me in that it, like the animal bone ash and the lint, imaginatively signifies the human body: as a corpse, or as degenerating, or as continuously on its way to death. It has been widely believed, published and even taught in Polish schools that "Germans boiled the victims of the extermination camps to make soap stamped with the letters 'RIF', supposedly meaning *Reines Judenfett* (Pure Jewish fat)" (Neander, 2006: 63). While Neander (2006: 80) disproves this belief, it is, just like the stories my grandmother told me, relevant in that it was indeed believed.

The experience of extreme death and loss during the Holocaust perpetuated the imaginative thinking that quite possibly stemmed from other similar factual events, such as the use of Holocaust victims' hair and skin for items such as dolls and lamp shades. In this way, soap becomes a personal object as it can be understood from the bodily perspective of either being used on the surface of the body for cleansing purposes, or as having been made from bodies. Thus, soap becomes a subjectively enlivened object which, similar to personal objects such as shoes, may function as a replacement of the corpse.

In the work *Cleansing/Entombing*, I combined the use of soap, the lint towel, and the shower-like Plexiglas space, with a bone ash ground surface. This bone ash, unlike the other bone ash which I closed up in resin casts, is bare and exposed and available for the viewer to walk on, should they move into the shower space. By walking over the bone ash, one further contributes to crushing or grinding it into an unrecognisable white substance, so unlike the bodies it comes from.

Figure 3.19

Adelheid von Maltitz, *Cleansing/Entombing*, 2021. Site-specific earth from Poland and Germany, cremated bone, ash, nail clippings, breast milk, hair, lint, resin and Plexiglas. 850 × 4450 × 2010 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

This personal pulverising and destruction is associated with my experience of working through the fact of my own existence, is spite of, or maybe at the expense of, the death of so many others. This experience of guilt is expressed in the story of Colette by Arnost Lustig in *A girl from Antwerp* (1991). This story is based on true events. Lustig (1991: 8) writes how Colette, the main character in the story, thinks about her own life as being at the expense of other people who were killed; not killed instead of her, but killed while she managed to survive. This is evident from the phrase, "who had been killed to keep her turn from coming?... [W]ho am I living instead of today, right now? [W]ho was I living instead of yesterday? [W]ho might I, perhaps, be living instead of tomorrow?" (Lustig, 1991: 8).

Even though I had no personal experience of the Holocaust I came to understand that my own existence or birth in South Africa was in part due to the Holocaust, as this is the reason my grandparents met and moved to South Africa. In this way, psychological effects of war or inter-generational trauma may be passed on (Allara, 2017).

Comparable to my own personal realisations of being born due to horrific incidents of death and loss during the Holocaust, I find that the material qualities and specifically the processes of continually pulverising and crushing cremated bone, allows me to reflect on my place in South Africa, as a person of privilege. By opening up the possibility of stepping onto, either physically or imaginatively, what I believe to be the most subjectively enlivened material — cremated human bones — in a space of privilege, such as the art gallery, I share my experience with the gallery visitors. I can only accomplish this through the "edge qualities" of the materials in my work.

The materiality of soap and of bone ash in *Cleansing/Entombing*, by means of their "edge qualities", aids in imaginatively shaping or challenging the psychic edge between life and death for me. For many centuries, materiality has assisted human beings to think through and deal with difficult experiences, like death, as part of mourning rituals. In the modern world, art provides an imaginative and creative space and means to re-direct and work through disturbing realities with reference to material "edge qualities". "Edge qualities" enable an oscillation between the physical and the psychical and may support healing by means of individualised imaginative conceptualisation and therefore can be understood to function in a contradictory manner as both tangible and intangible.

From this chapter it is clear that "edge qualities" of materials may be exploitable in specific contexts, such as death and loss. By highlighting the evasive way in which we experience

death and loss in the modern era, I have drawn attention to the need to activate, exploit or utilise the "edge qualities" of materials in this healing context. Further possibilities of exploiting "edge qualities" in other healing contexts are suggested in conclusion of this study.

Chapter 4

Ritual

In this chapter I explore how personalised repetitive and meaningful ritual processes, as found in my own and others' art-making, may be a constructive means with which to engage with death and loss. I compare mourning rituals — as they commence at the onset of death in parallel to the degeneration of the corpse — to the way in which personalised, often repetitive, artistic processes function. I analyse the ways in which these parallel biological and socio-cultural processes in mourning rituals interplay across the fields of mourning practices and ritualised art-making concerned with death and loss.

In order to begin this comparison, one should review why the processes found in formal mortuary rituals and in more modern personalised mortuary rituals are so meaningful. I analyse formal ritual and personal ritualised processes in the era in which the corpse has been determinedly avoided, in the modern era, as well as in earlier eras when this was not the case. I substantiate that both mortuary rituals and personal ritualised processes — both those which avoid the corpse and those which do not — negotiate between attention to the degeneration of the corpse, and the focus on the continuation of life, in the

'hereafter' and as social reputation, or status.

Although death rituals and personalised ritual processes in art-making (such as my own) in the modern "Forbidden death period" (Ariès, 1975: 85) may tend to avoid the decaying body, I argue that the decaying body becomes even more prominent in this era by means of the imaginative conceptualisations which are required to make such ritual processes meaningful.

Essentially, as the decaying body gradually features less in mourning rituals, more individual and unique imaginative processes emerge. This is especially evident in the examples and analysis of ritualised art-making processes concerned with death and loss. Art-making related to death rituals and ritualised processes about death and loss, like my own, may therefore appear to be hygienic and controlled, while the undercurrent of death persists as an organic process running in parallel to all death rituals. This undercurrent may even become more activated through the fertile imagination.

I explore Paul Emmanuel's *The Lost Men France* (Figure 4.2), Wim Both's *Scene from The River 2*, (Figure 4.3) and their own unique artistically ritualised processes. These are compared with Late Medieval and Early Renaissance *transi* tomb sculptures (for example, Figure 4.4 as well as a paragraph in Karl Ove Knausgaard's ([2013] 2019) *A Death in the Family*, all being direct references to the degeneration of the corpse. I explore the way in which all of these works point to the realities of the corpse while enabling the imagined continuation of life after death as well as the continuation of reputation in the social sphere.

I then explore the notion of smoke as both a result and a part of my own artistic ritualised processes, for example in *Smoke* (Figure 4.10). Smoke, with its irrepressible and unman-

ageable movement and volume, embodies the imagined indestructible qualities of the corpse. I analyse smoke alongside the repetitive processes of stitching in Doris Salcedo's work *A Flor de Piel* (Figure 4.13), as types of processes which may imaginatively bridge between the degeneration of the corpse and the continuation of the social remembrance in life, or in life hereafter, by means of imaginative conceptualisation and by avoiding direct references to the corpse.

In conclusion, in a visual manner I clarify the imagined bridging which correlates the realities of death with the continuation of memory and afterlife. I do so by analysing European tomb sculpture in comparison with the African burial site Thaba Bosiu (Figure 4.20) in Lesotho, and by analysing my own work *Window* (Figure 4.18), with regards to the way in which ritual and ritualised processes can be understood as more or less figurative and imaginative.

As attitudes towards death have changed and continue to change, so too have mourning and death rituals (Ariès, 1975; Howarth, 2007). In the modern era mourning rituals, death rituals and funerary rites typically tend to focus on a devotion to the continuation of memory and afterlife regardless of death (Davies, 2017: 11). Thus, every effort is made to keep the realities of the decaying corpse out of sight (Davies, 2017). Davies (2017: 11) also clarifies that a "post-mortem identity of the dead" is important for the community's ongoing social existence and as such, death rites in general are focused on social continuity as much as they are on the practicality of respectfully disposing of decaying human remains.

However, in the past the realities of the decaying corpse have not always been kept out of view, and it is not always kept out of sight in the modern era either. The strange

phenomenon of *transi* tomb sculpture (Figure 4.4) is one such example from the past, where the corpse features as the subject matter for sculptures exhibited in churches. Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 64) describes this type of cadaver monument found in churches, as "showing the deceased as a mere corpse." Paul Emmanuel's *The Lost Men France* (Figure 4.2) and Wim Botha's *Scene from The River 2* (Figure 4.3) are contemporary examples of artworks which embrace the realities of the corpse rather than deny it. In both these examples the processes of imprinting and carving assist in bridging the reality of the decaying corpse with the continuity of life.

4.1 Rituals which point to the corpse

Paul Emmanuel's work, *The Lost Men France* (Figure 4.2), is a series of artworks engaging with the difficulties of mourning casualties of war; in particular, the installations engage with memory and collective grief in the context of World War I (Allara, 2017). The works reference Allied servicemen who died on the battlefields of another country, but draw particular attention to the exclusion of some who had died, for example Black South Africans, from traditional memorials such as the Thiepval Memorial in France. Paul Emmanuel utilises his own body — naked, fragile and superficially hurt or bruised by his ritualised process of imprinting — in order to reference bodies of those who did not receive proper memorialisation and inclusion into cultural memory after their deaths on battlefields abroad while serving their country.

Figure 4.1

Paul Emmanuel, *The Lost Men France* (detail of imprinting process), 2014. Source: photograph by Paul Emmanuel, from Sluiter (2018).

In order to produce the images displayed in these works, Paul Emmanuel would emboss, imprint or impress the names of the lost soldiers directly into his naked body and head, and then photograph himself (for example, Figure 4.1). These photographed processes were especially intimate and painful, as it is a similar process to letterpress printing.

Letterpress printing requires a movable type to be placed into a "bed", inked and then pressed against paper to create a transfer. Similarly, Emmanuel uses a body cast made from his own body as a "bed" into which he glues the movable type. Emmanuel's body, and especially his skin and the blood directly beneath his skin, then functioned as a replacement for paper and ink. This process required Emmanuel to lie naked in the type-inlaid plaster mould and have his body encased, almost as if in a coffin, and compressed by means of heated and weighted bags over the mould. These processes required significant assistance in studio, and were performances in themselves. After some time, Emmanuel was helped out of the mould and moved quickly to have his "embossed" and bruised skin photographed.

The moulds and videos showing these processes were an important part of Emmanuel's exhibitions. In this way, pieces of evidence of the ritualised processes were brought into the gallery as artworks in their own right. This ritualised performance, the evidence, and the final artworks in the gallery and elsewhere collectively function as a substitute for omitted mourning rituals. Emmanuel undertakes a ritualised bodily process of remembering, part of which is painful and bruising, to express and bring to light the corpses of the forgotten soldiers. By doing so, Emmanuel further demonstrates the significance of mourning rituals, however temporary they may be (Allara, 2017), and how they are related to the corpse itself.

Figure 4.2

Paul Emmanuel, *Lost Men France*, 2014. Printed silk banners. Dimensions unknown. Installation view, Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval, France. Source: photograph by Paul Emmanuel from designboom (2014).

The third phase of Emmanuel's *The Lost Men France* project was an installation of works produced in his studio which were installed adjacent to this memorial, on the extension of Rue de l'Ancre (Allara, 2017), as seen in Figure 4.2. In this installation, the images of body parts, as if mutilated and hung on display, are suspended in the fields on banners. These banners were further left to age at the site, after which they were exhibited as remnants during exhibitions held at various galleries, nationally and internationally.

Emmanuel's work points to the relationship between death as a decaying or decayed corpse, and the continuation in social life by means of remembrance, through his body in pain and healing. These ritualised processes imaginatively bridge between the degenera-

tion of the corpse and the continuation of remembrance in life.

Figure 4.3
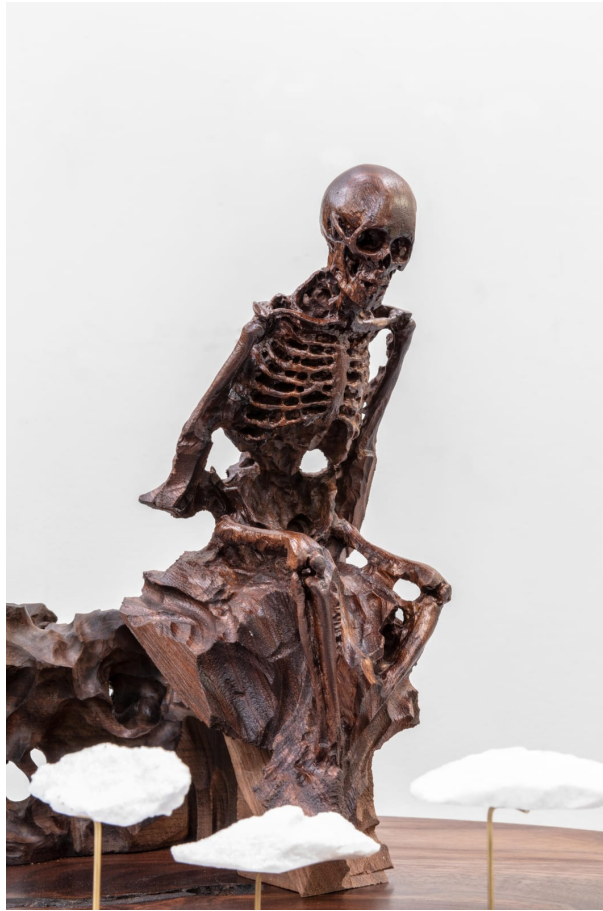
Wim Botha, *The River 2* (detail), 2021.
Walnut, marble and brass. 35 × 53 × 35
cm. Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg, South
Africa. Source: image by The Stevenson
Gallery (2021a).

The figurative works appearing as enlivened cadavers in Wim Botha's solo exhibition,

titled *The River*, suggest an afterlife "beyond linear time" The Stevenson Gallery (2021b).

According to the The Stevenson Gallery (2021b), Botha's exhibition attempts to "[b]lur

the distinction between inception and annihilation" by means of sculptural figurations

which allude to forms of existence such as the enlivened cadaver. Botha utilises carving

in this particular work as well as in most of the works in this exhibition. The process

of carving is significant and generates meaning in and of itself. Carving, as a form of reduction — and to some extent comparable to the process of degeneration — distils, removes and reduces, while simultaneously arriving at a previously hidden core idea.

This work acknowledges the temporary nature of human bodies while also suggesting continuity in the "eternity of formless presence" (The Stevenson Gallery, 2021b). Botha explains that while the skeleton or human remains are often represented in modern times as gory or unpleasant, he attempts to suggest the opposite by animating them in a manner in which he believes is true to their real character (The Stevenson Gallery, 2021b). Botha essentially brings to life the decayed corpse as an entity which, like a living person, has a life, and has feelings, thoughts and ideas. In this way, the reality of death of the physical human body is simultaneously counteracted, contrasted and incorporated into life, as something that extends beyond an individual human life or body. It is productive to compare Botha's individualised ritual process of carving and his use of the enlivened, but decaying corpse, with historical *transi* tomb sculptures.

Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 65) identifies *transi* tomb sculptures (for example, Figure 4.4) to have occurred in the Late Middle Ages and early Renaissance between the 14th and 16th centuries. Oosterwijk (2005: 72) describes them in her more recent exploration of cadaver monuments or *transi* tomb sculptures as "hav[ing] always been an acquired taste, both amongst medieval patrons and modern scholars", and furthermore she states that, "whatever their original intentions, these grim visualisations of death and decay still have the ability to shock, perhaps even more so in a world where death has been largely sanitised." Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 64–65) describes them similarly, as "grisly", a "deathly figure", a "disintegrating body" and a "rotting body".

Figure 4.4

Cadaver monument, *L'homme aux moulons* (Man eaten by worms), 16th c. Bronze. Boussu, Belgium. Source: image by Grandmont (2005) from Wikimedia Commons.

According to Cohen (1968: 13), the word *transi* "derives from the Latin verb *transire*: *trans* meaning *across* and *ire* meaning *to go*." The *transi* tomb sculpture very literally depicts the body in various stages of decay, not only by means of sculpture, but at times by painting the sculptures as well, "to make them look as realistic as possible" (Oosterwijk, 2005: 68). The bare stone *transi* sculptures still today look very death-like (even without paint), however, they may have been even more realistically death-like during the Renaissance.

The *transi* tomb sculpture was usually commissioned by its patrons to look specifically

like "one year after burial" (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 64), or "seven years in the grave" (Oosterwijk, 2005: 66). The *transi* tomb sculptures therefore appear in many different varieties, from "newly dead corpse figures to emaciated or skeletal remains" (Oosterwijk, 2005: 43). This form of tomb sculpture was quite an unusual practice and occurred for a relatively short period of time.

Belting (2017) suggests that *transi* tomb sculpture exposes the fiction of life as something everlasting, because the sculptures depicts the degeneration of the body in its most explicit form. Belting (2017) further points out that the materiality of the *transi*, often made from stone, is in paradox with that which it portrays, namely the "creeping process of putrifacation".

The reasoning behind the *transi* tomb sculpture is not easily explained by either Panofsky ([1964] 1992) or Oosterwijk (2005). However, both seem to agree that it is unlikely that there is a direct link between the Black Death and *transi* tomb sculptures, as there are several decades which separate them. However, they both do acknowledge that there was a general preoccupation with the macabre for an extensive amount of time after the Black Death. Oosterwijk (2005: 45) claims that the cadaver effigies, or *transi* tomb sculpture, could well be the "ultimate *vanitas* emblem" and a deterrent agings pride. The tomb sculptures shows the transience of life and the ultimate degradation and destruction of the human body that contrasts the immortality of the soul.

Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 64) mentions that the *transi* have most often been displayed along with so-called *gisant* tomb sculpture, which further precipitates the paradox of life and death. The *gisant*, in contrast to the *transi*, was "nearly always conceived as the portrait of a dead person", recumbent, with arms crossed, in the prime of their life. This con-

trasting sculptural visualisation of the dead effectively makes apparent the two processes which occur after death: the body decaying and the mourning ritual which focuses on a commitment to life and continuation of social structures.

Figure 4.5

Cadaver monument of John Fitzalan, 7th Earl of Arundel (d. 1435), date unknown. Marble. Fitzalan chapel, Arundel Castel, Sussex, UK. Source: Lampman (2009) from Wikimedia Commons.

The combination of the *transi* with the *gisant* is described by Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 64) as a "double-decker tomb". This type of tomb mostly consisted of the *gisant* sculpture being placed above the *transi* sculpture and thereby differentiating between the worldly body and the immortal social or institutional status (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 64).

While confronting the reality of the decaying corpse after death, most of the focus simul-

taneously remains on that which does not die, but is rather preserved. Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 64) explains this contradiction of placing a "deathly" effigy under a "stately effigy", as showing the idea that "the individual is subject to death and decay", whereas their "dignity, be it that of a nobleman, a prince of the church, or a secular ruler, enjoys a permanence."

Comparable to the visualisation of the decaying corpse in the Early Renaissance, and in Botha's *Scene from The River 2* (Figure 4.3), a further modern manifestation of such a display of the decaying body is in the opening paragraph of Knausgaard's ([2013] 2019) book *A death in the family*, in which Knausgaard explicitly describes — almost as a ritual act — the processes which commence in the body at the very moment when death occurs:

> For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as longs as it can. Then it stops. Sooner or later, one day, this pounding action will cease of its own accord, and the blood will begin to run towards the body's lowest point, where it will collect in a small pool, visible from the outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whiter skin, as the temperature sinks, the limbs stiffen and the intestines drain. These changes in the first hours occur so slowly and take place with such inexorability that there is something almost ritualistic about them, as though life capitulates according to specific rules, a kind of gentleman's agreement, to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape. By which point, however, the invasion is irrevocable. The enormous hordes of bacteria that begin to infiltrate the body's innards cannot be halted. Had they but tried a few hours earlier, they would have met with immediate resistance; however, everything around them is quiet now, as they delve deeper and deeper into

the moist darkness. They advance on the Haversian canals, the crypts of Lieverkühn,

the islets of Langerhans. They proceed to Bowman's capsule in the kidneys, Clark's

columns in the Spinalis, the black substance in the mesencephalon. And they arrive

at the heart. As yet, it is intact, but deprived of the activity to which end its whole

construction has been designed, there is something strangely desolate about it, like

a production plant that workers have been forced to flee in haste, or so it appears,

the stationary vehicles shining yellow against the darkness of the forest, the huts

deserted, a line of fully loaded cable buckets stretching up the hillside. The moment

life departs the body, it belongs to death.

The natural process of decay is as Knausgaard ([2013] 2019: 3) says, "simple", because

the body continues to follow natural laws and starts to break down at the very moment

of death. In contrast, the parallel cultural and social processes of death rituals could be

considered complex and continuously interrelated with the biological processes. As with

the *transi* sculpture which forms part of the "double-decker" tomb, there continues to be

a similar focus on life by an exploration of memories before the death of Knausgaard's

father in the rest of the book.

Thus the relationship between the degeneration of the corpse and the commencement

of ritual retains a focus on life, even when comparing more formal death rituals to more

personalised ritual processes or to artistic ritualised processes, and even when the realities

of death are not avoided. It is important at this point to clarify why formal mortuary

rituals and personal ritualised processes concerned with death and loss may come to be

comparably meaningful.

In general, ritual is both an action and an idea, " a way of thinking and knowing"

(Stephenson, 2015: 3). Ritual includes "religious and nonreligious rites, the transitional and the new, the prescribed and the improvised, the human and nonhuman, and rubs up against a number of other cultural domains, such as play, games, performance, and theater" (Stephenson, 2015: 3). The action or process situated within ritual is therefore recognised across multiple fields, and it is the quality of these actions or processes which are important (Stephenson, 2015: 2).

Furthermore, there is a striking similarity between mortuary proceedings all over the world, as well as across different eras (Malinowski, 1974: 30). Hoy (2013: 13) explains that there is a universal appeal to incorporate ceremonies into death rituals and that, although "Euro-Americans" tend to avoid contact with the corpse and may be referred to as a cultural group which denies death, funerals continue to provide a structure and a sense of safety through which death is accepted and the grieving process is facilitated.

Formal ceremonies of this kind structure the passage of the deceased from a social order to another order and further attempt to assist the living to focus on the continuation of life and not the despair of death (Malinowski, 1974; Van Gennep, 1978; Smith, 1987). According to Malinowski (1974: 51–53), this focus on the continuation of life saves humankind from the surrender to death and destruction. However, Davies (2017: 11) explains that this focus on the continuation of life, perhaps in the form of belief in life after death as a spirit or soul, may be a form of "doubting death". He goes on to call this one of the most interesting facts about death, and further explains the contradiction by "drawing a distinction between the physical body and some other sort of dynamic element which may be called the soul, the life force, the social status or some other vital phenomenon." Therefore, the relationship between the two processes of the degeneration of the corpse

and the death ritual — whether or not there is an avoidance of the corpse — ultimately contributes to the way in which a focus on the continuation of life arises.

This brings me to the comparative exploration of ritual and individualised artistic ritual processes, including my own, when such rituals embrace an avoidance of the degeneration of the corpse rather than an inclusion of it. I argue that, as the decaying body gradually features less in mourning rituals and personal ritualised processes, unique imaginary processes emerge which bring about a bridging between the realities of death and the continuation of life. This allows for constructive engagement with death and loss which may appear to be hygienic and controlled, yet may allude to the organic process of death nonetheless.

4.2 Repetitive processes and the rituals of art-making

One of the first correlations which I noticed between my own work and the mourning processes associated with roadside shrines, was repetition. Even before coming to realise that site-specificity and materiality were other comparable qualities, repetition stood out, and by extension so did repetition as a key feature of ritualised processes. The consistent building, visiting and maintaining of roadside shrines by the bereaved made me think about my own repetitive processes more carefully. I came to believe they are especially meaningful in enabling me to constructively engage with death and loss by means of my art-making.

My repetitive processes developed and changed, shifting as I needed them to. Like the bereaved who construct roadside shrines according to their choosing in an individualised

manner due to the authority which is believed to emanate from the intensity of grief and the spiritual presence of the deceased as linked to the site (Clark & Franzmann, 2006), I too experience an individualised sense of authority in choosing to develop and change my repetitive processes as I imagine or feel they serve me and my art-making best. I would argue that this choice allows for personal ritualised processes to be especially dynamic and continuously evolving. In this way, the processes remain relevant, meaningful and potentially healing as well. While rituals do change as the attitudes towards death change (Ariès, 1975; Howarth, 2007), personal ritualised processes change more rapidly, in years or months rather than over centuries.

The first repetitive ritualised processes which I explored were casting and sprinkling (of earth), by means of which I connected the two polar oppositions which concerned me: the lack of control over death and decay, and understanding the attempt to control and focus on life, regardless. While suggestive of the ritualised process of sprinkling ashes, the degeneration of the corpse is uncontrollable. On the other hand, the casting process in resin as a medium — which contains and preserves — thus attempts to take control. Sprinkling earth led me to become interested in bone ash. Collecting, laying out, firing and grinding bones in an effort to produce bone ash became meaningful to me. I treated these processes with respect and dignity, not unlike the funeral ritual of the cremation of human remains.

By means of the personal ritualised processes of cremation to create bone ash, smoke is produced as a by-product. For me, smoke especially embodies the imaginative bridging between the degeneration of the corpse and commencement of death rituals. This led me to explore smoke and its especially uncontrollable nature by means of repetitive ritualised

mark-making, once again trying to control that which is not controllable.

The smoke is unlike any other material which I have come across. Of all the materials I have either explored or used during my study, smoke is the most ephemeral and imaginatively stimulating. Smoke is impossible to retain or control in any way or in any form. The smoke that billows forth during my art-making process of producing bone ash demands its own vast space in which to become present, and it further demands a specific time of day as well. Due to the smell of cremating bone, my cremation processes need to occur while the extended vicinity around the kiln is unoccupied and clear of human presence. For these reasons, I most often find myself alone on a weekend, engaged in the bone cremation process in a quiet, smoke-filled environment.

Figure 4.6

Figure 4.7

Animal bone cremation process in ceramic kiln. Department of Fine Arts, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Adelheid von Maltitz (2021).

Smoke in the ceramic kiln, during the cremation of animal bone. Department of Fine Arts, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Adelheid von Maltitz (2021).

The process of bone cremation further brings with it the sound of the kiln as it abruptly switches on and off when reaching the needed temperatures. I find this sound to be amplified by the quietness of the surroundings, comparable to the intensification of sounds in a church during a prayer. In particular, smoke elicits in me the illusion of animal and human identities. Even though the bones I burn are of animal origin, I imagine them to reference human bone and human bodies. Human bodies burning would have a very similar smell.

During one specific cremation activity I had left the bones in the kiln for a week, as I did not get an opportunity to start up the kiln. When I did finally start the process hundreds, if not thousands of flies (probably recently hatched from their pupae) started escaping during the early warming stages in the kiln. The fly larvae had obviously developed in the decaying flesh on the bones during the week, and their pupae were hatching or were recently hatched. These flies engulfed the whole area, like the smoke that comes later in the process. I have never seen anything like it before or since. The swarm of flies was then pushed out by the engulfing smoke that followed in the next few hours, reminding me of the contrasting, yet continually interrelated processes which occur at the onset of death: degeneration of the corpse and the onset of death rituals.

The presence of contrasting realities is not unlike those in the earlier examples which I have discussed, namely the "double-decker" tombs of Panofsky ([1964] 1992), consisting of the *gisant* and *transi* sculptures, and Knausgaard's ([2013] 2019) detailed description of the corpse in a process of decay, preceding the retelling of memories of his childhood before his father had died.

During the cremation of human bodies, it is usual to think of the smoke which comes

from this process to be imbued with the identity of the deceased individual, as with the ashes. The smoke in the painting, *The Funeral of Shelley* by Louis Edouard Fournier (1889) (Figure 4.8), is described by Elam & Pielak (2018: 75) as representing the "body of their friend [being] spirited away." During this cremation process, Elam & Pielak (2018: 75) explains that the "power of the corpse lives in persistence; cremation has come to stand in for the sanitised process of separation; it represents the transformation of signification from resemblance to essence that might yet bear the aura of the departed." In this imaginative way of thinking, as depicted in the painting, the "essence" and the "aura" remain as part of the materiality of both the smoke produced during cremation and the cremated remains themselves.

Figure 4.8

Louis Édouard Fournier, *The Funeral of Shelley*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 1295 × 2134 mm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK. Source: Fournier (1889) from Google Art Project and Wikimedia Commons.

Although not all events of cremation form part of death and mourning rituals, smoke

may nonetheless imaginatively signify human life or continuations of life after death, for those who imagine it as such. Cremation during the Holocaust for example was a practical, everyday business which consisted of needing to dispose of bodies after mass extermination. The cremation process and the smoke it produced were very much in contrast to the smoke produced in *The Funeral of Shelley*.

Cremation in the early 1900s in Europe was generally considered "unholy" (Van Baar & Huisman, 2012: 1037), especially in the Jewish religion. It is important to note that the word Holocaust means burnt sacrifice. The company Topf & Söhne produced crematoria from 1914 and advertised these ovens as "humane" and "dignified" because "no smoke or odour was produced by the cremation, because the fire would not touch the body...the high temperature would transform the body into ashes" (Van Baar & Huisman, 2012: 1037).

In 1939 the first crematorium from this company was delivered to the concentration camp, Buchenwald (Van Baar & Huisman, 2012). However, this oven was designed for burning dead animals, and not human remains, and as such Van Baar & Huisman (2012: 1037) explains that this meant that, "as estrangement from the previously held principles of piety and dignity regarding cremation; the bodies were directly exposed to the fire and were often not completely burned." Cremation of this kind prioritised "swift and efficient use of fuel" rather than "piety and dignity".

In videos documenting the oral history of the Holocaust for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection 1989 and 1992), Miso Vogel and Ruth Webber talk about their memories of the smoke produced during their imprisonment in the Holocaust death camps. Both remember the

smoke as it relates to the body and to human life and not as something arbitrary. Miso Vogel explains how the crematoriums at Auschwitz-Birkenau were positioned, and how the "whole camp could see" the cremation by means of the smoke and the flames. He further explains how flames from the cremation of a person meant that that person had fat on his or her body and that smoke meant that "people [who] were skeletons" were being cremated. In this way the differences of the flames and smoke represented different human body types.

Figure 4.9

Smoke from cremation at Auschwitz-Birkenau II, 1944. Near Oswiecim, Poland. Source: image by National Collection of Aerial Photography (NCAP) (2020) in Williams (2020).

Ruth Webber similarly explains how the smoke produced imaginative meanings; it was not merely smoke but it referenced what was happening to the body and to human life.

She said that they would see "the chimneys smoking continuously" and even though she did not know as a child what was happening, she knew that if you go into that specific part of the camp that "you come out the chimney".

Smoke which results from cremation may very well have a positive connotation, for example during mourning rituals such as the painting, *The Funeral of Shelley* by Louis Edouard Fournier (1889) (Figure 4.8), but in contrast, it can also carry with it extremely inhumane and horrifying associations, for example during mass extermination. Either way, the smoke remains an unrelentingly momentous reminder of human life.

In the drawing titled *Smoke* (Figure 4.10), I perform a personal ritualised process of repetitive mark-making by means of which I attempt to control and make sense of that which is unmanageable. Ritual studies, according to Stephenson (2015: 4), are transdisciplinary and usually involve creativity. One of the fundamental questions concerning ritual studies is: "[I]s ritual bound and conservative, or creative and transformational?" (Stephenson, 2015: 4). I consider my own processes to be modern, personal, creative, and ritualised, yet richly informed by timeworn traditions, consciously and unconsciously.

Stephenson (2015: 6–19) distinguishes between ritual and ritualisation by defining ritual to typically be associated with religion and the sacred. However, Stephenson (2015) clarifies 'ritual-like" character as understandable in terms of actions and ideas and therefore occurring in both ritual and ritualisation. Stephenson (2015: 7) bases his argument about ritual on a description of real phenomena rather than on ritual as an entirely scholarly construct that rests on Western assumptions and biases.

Figure 4.10
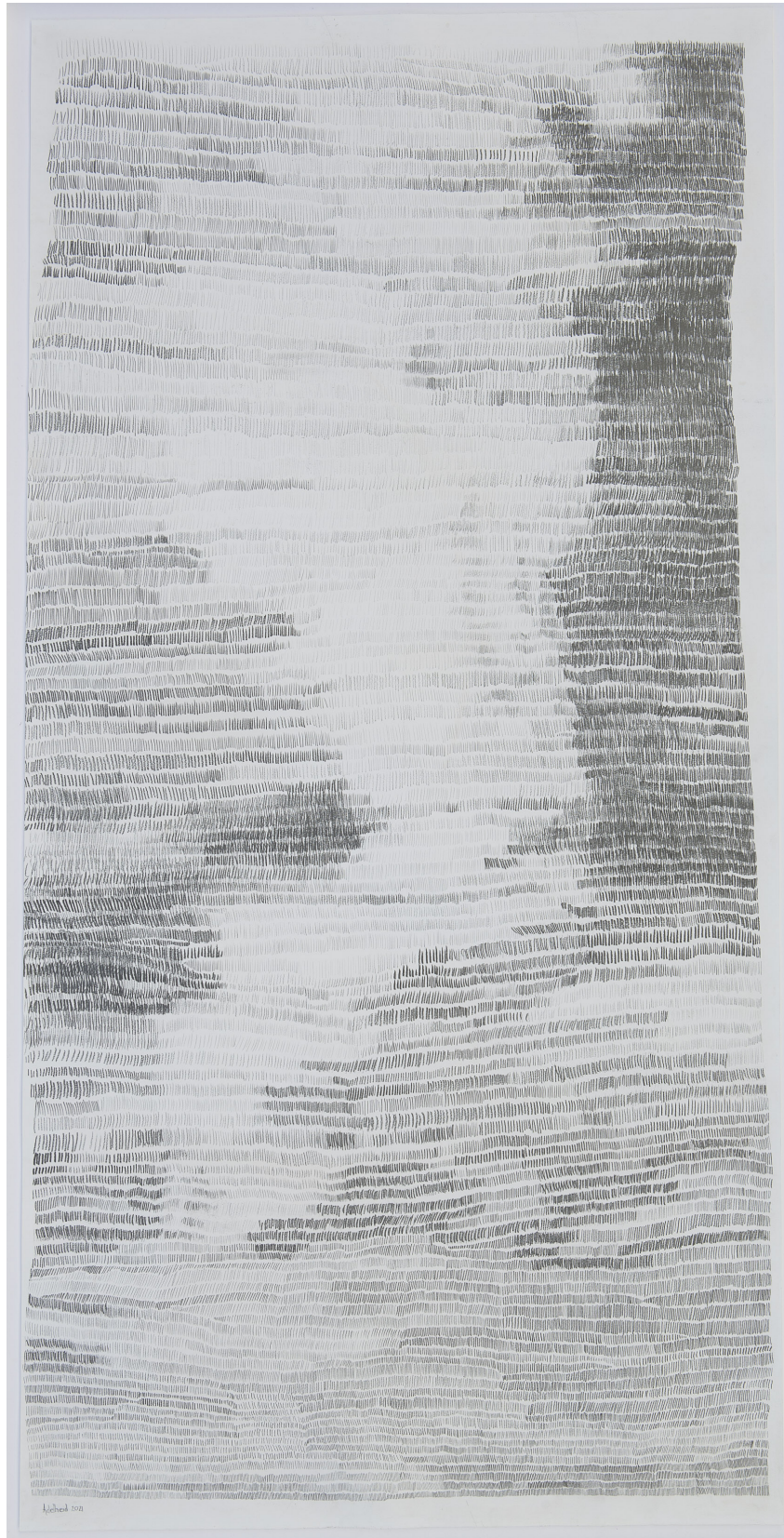
Adelheid von Maltitz, *Smoke*, 2017–2021. Pencil on paper, 880 × 1630 × 65 mm. Source: photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

In a more traditional sense, Stephenson (2015: 8) explains that the connection between ritual and ritualised action or processes is that both are essentially a means of communication and, as such, a form of discourse. Like ritual, ritualised action and process require "interpretation. . . and is subject to ambiguities, misunderstandings, and deceptions" (Stephenson, 2015: 8). Furthermore, both traditional ritual as well as personal ritualised processes may both include features such as patterning, repetition and stylisation (Stephenson, 2015: 19).

I think of all the actions in my creative process as ritualised processes which continually occur for me personally at the onset of considering the trauma of death and loss. As (Stephenson, 2015: 8) explains, these processes form a discourse that requires interpretation and are "subject to ambiguities, misunderstandings, and deceptions".

Comparably, Doris Salcedo, a contemporary Columbian artist, utilises repetitive actions as ritualised processes. The ritualised actions in most, if not all of her works, bring about a shift from that which is real to that which is imagined, with a specific focus on death, loss and mourning. Many of her works, like that of Boltanski and Emmanuel, references and memorialises death and loss from political violence, where bodies were lost or unable to be found and, consequently, no proper mortuary rituals were performed. Huyssen (2003: 120) explains that Salcedo's artworks counteract the structures of forgetfulness in our modern society, whether those structures are from "obsolescence" of objects or even people, the transformation of a former communist society like Columbia, or an enforced forgetfulness due to the system of disappearance of people by the military state.

Salcedo's ritualised processes further culminate in a sense of overcoming that which seems impossible (Enriquez, 2021), and therefore has a healing effect in the face of death. The

processes in her work vary from making architectural structures appear to float (*Abyss*, 2005), or a concrete surface appear to cry (*Palimpsest*, 2013-17), or to creating softness from the hardest and most unforgiving of materials (*Disremembered*, 2014). Salcedo's artistic processes are not unlike the bridging effects of mortuary rituals, where the reality of the decaying corpse is superseded by the belief in the continuation of a spiritual life. At times, therefore, Salcedo's artistic processes replace the formal mortuary rituals which were partially or totally forgone, by means of opposing actions and metaphors of differentiating, as well as pulling together, that which should be possible and that which seems impossible.

In Salcedo's work *Atrabiliarios*, shoes of women who have "disappeared" are encased in holes made directly into the gallery wall and while the shoes are visible they are also partially obscured behind animal skins which are sewn or stitched across this hole (see Figure 4.11) (Bennett, 2002: 345). The shoes in this work are objects which are placed out of reach and cannot be accessed, rather than being signifiers of their owners who had disappeared (Bennett, 2002: 345).

The ritualised process of stitching seen in *Atrabiliarios* was developed significantly in her overwhelming work, *A Flor de Piel* (2013). The stitching in both of these works references medical sutures, and thus the body or the absence thereof.

Figure 4.11

Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios* (detail), 1992–2004. Shoes, drywall, paint, wood, animal fiber, and surgical thread. Dimensions variable. Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, USA. Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA. Source: image from Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015b).

In *A Flor de Piel*, by means of the laboriously meticulous ritualised process of stitching together thousands of fragile rose petals, Salcedo creates a shroud-like structure. The rose petals are preserved through a mummification process developed by Salcedo and her team in order to transform the organic, fragile petals into objects which, while still remaining

fragile, may withstand stitching, normal aging, transportation and being on display.

Figure 4.12

Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel* (test fragment), 2011–2012. Rose petals and thread. Source: photograph by Ingrid Raymond from Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015a).

The ritualised repetitive processes in *A Flor de Piel*, of both the mummification of the petals and their stitching, is meaningful in that the level of care and consideration which the materials in the work receive may bring to light the lack of care and the lack of consideration originally observed. In a lecture, Mary Schneider Enriquez (2021) explains that Salcedo's fastidious process of making, whether it is stitching, carving, pouring, hammering, cutting *etc.*, is a ritual, and is a part of how Salcedo connects to the people who are no longer here. Enriquez further compares this act of making to being an act of remembrance, and in this way the creative act of making is a "different means of speaking to, honouring and addressing" those deaths which occurred.

Figure 4.13

Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel*, 2014. Rose petals and thread. 1130 × 640 cm. Installation view, 2014, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan. Courtesy of the artist. Source: photograph by Kazuhiro Uchida from Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015a).

By overcoming the natural processes of nature — rose petals aging and disintegrating — Salcedo's repetitive ritualised processes of the preservation of very fragile matter in a sterile and abstract manner signify both extremes: death and loss, as well as a means by which death is overcome and life is continued. Ariès (1991: 603–604) makes a similar comparison between the realities of the decaying corpse, or nature, and death rituals, when he says that death rituals are the "defence of society against untamed nature" and the "ritualisation of death is a special aspect of the total strategy of man (sic) against nature".

Figure 4.14

Offerkast, 1928. Parish of Höör, province of Skáne, Sweden. Source: photograph by Albert Nilsson Eskerod, in Petersson (2009: 77).

Repetition as part of meaningful artistic ritualised processes, as in the case of my work, are also apparent in more general and earlier death rituals such as the Swedish *Offerkast* phenomenon (Figure 4.14). In this ritual, stones are continuously thrown on one pile and the pile grows over time. Petersson (2009) examines the *Offerkast* as a type of memorial

which precedes modern roadside memorial practices. The *Offerkast* consists mostly of a pile of stones or sticks which is built (or more specifically thrown in the case of the *Offerkast*) at or as close as possible to a site with significant meaning. The pile is left there to form part of public space. This is comparable to roadside shrines, though the roadside shrine is constructed mostly by a person or group of people affected by the loss of a loved one who perished during an unexpected fatal motor vehicle accident. The *Offerkast's* construction process would start in a similar manner to that of a roadside shrine, but would be continually contributed to by members of the general public.

The *Offerkast* continues to grow in volume as time passes. Once again, like the roadside shrine, the *Offerkast* is found mostly where death had occurred along the roadside. However, it could also have been erected on a site where shameful behaviour, for example adultery, has taken place (Petersson, 2009: 77). *Offerkast* refers to *offer*, which means "victim" or "sacrifice", and *kast*, which means "a throw" (Petersson, 2009). The primary motivation behind the *Offerkast* seems to be the belief that "the soul generally lingered on for some time after death, and that it had the power to trouble the living if the necessary precautions, prescribed by traditions to avoid this, were not taken" (Petersson, 2009: 79).

To an extent, the repetitive throwing of stones or sticks has an undertone of violence, especially in relation to marking a place of shameful behaviour. However, it is mostly understood as an offering that passing individuals would repeatedly contribute to in order to ensure that the soul does not bother the living. As the intention is to either weigh the soul down or give the soul an offering, the repetitive process of throwing a stone makes a connection between the imagined idea of the soul as a life force that extends beyond death and the physical world, of which the site and the stone is part.

4.3   Ritualistic processes and healing

In the previous two sections I have clarified that regardless of whether or not the reality of death — in terms of the degeneration of the corpse — is acknowledged or not, funerary rituals or personal ritualised processes remain an attempt to imaginatively bridge between this reality and the continuation of social status or memory. It becomes apparent however, that repetition in both formal rituals and personal ritualised processes may contribute to healing the pain caused by this division.

It should be noted that repetitive, ritualistic processes in art-making, as in Salcedo's works and my own, for example, may offer catharsis for the art-maker when engaging with death and loss, as is explained in the wide range of literature in psychology based on Freud's theories of "remembering, repeating and working-through" (Freud, [1914] 1953). It is not this aspect of ritualistic healing that is primarily referred to, but also the way in which viewers, visitors, and the bereaved are able to use ritual action to bridge the divide between death and the continuation of life or social remembrance beyond death.

This exploration of ritual thus continues with a comparison of two different types of ritual actions. I attempt to compare and contrast the rituals involved in the European tradition of tomb sculptures with an African grave and burial site, Thaba Bosiu in Lesotho, both as experiences of negotiating the edge between life and death. By means of this comparative analysis of the ritual phenomenon, when the corpse is laid in a grave, I show that repetitive embodied processes, for example walking, may result in layered experiences and, ultimately, healing.

As mentioned before, Panofsky ([1964] 1992) explores the changing aspects of tomb sculp-

ture over time and across Europe. Tomb sculpture embodies a figurative display of ideas during the time it was produced. Each part of the tomb sculpture is symbolic in one way or another, whether as a relief or three-dimensional sculpture, or as "fully-grown statues" (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 74). The sculptural effigies representing the deceased may take shape in different ways. For example, the effigies may take shape as decaying (*transi*), recumbent, reclining, kneeling or even as an activated effigy in an equestrian position.

It is also possible for the deceased to be represented by multiple effigies in the same tomb, all referencing different aspects of the deceased. Effigies could also be "elevated to a higher level" when the deceased is represented not only as recumbent but also as a "living human being" in his spiritual life, as in, for example Arnolfo di Cambio's tomb of Guillaume Cardinal de Braye (d.1282) in San Domenico at Orvieto (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 77).

In this majestic tomb sculpture, Guillaume Cardinal de Braye is presented to the Virgin Mary by his sponsored donor, St. Peter (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 77). Death, as a peaceful sleep rather than the reality of the decaying corpse, is connected to the spiritual life following death. This symbolism further extends not only to the deceased but to ideals during that time. "[V]ictory of Christianity over paganism", for example, could be suggested by the format of the equestrian statue (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 83), and the representation of marriages (and the cultural beliefs which such marriages stood for, including religious, political and legal agendas) could be suggested by depicting a husband and wife side-by-side (Barker, 2020).

Figure 4.15

Arnolfo di Cambio, Tomb of Guillaume Cardinal de Braye (d. 1282), after 1282. Marble. Tomb height 63 cm. San Domenico at Orvieto, Umbria, Italy. Source: Italian Ways (2015).

Virtues, as seen in Figure 4.16, which were freely used by laymen who could afford them and not just saints or "near-saints" (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 74), also referenced the deceased in terms of that which they stood for and their moral character. These impressive represented virtues in three dimensional sculptural forms could also further suggest the idea that the deceased were "under the protection of all the Virtues" (Panofsky, [1964] 1992: 75).
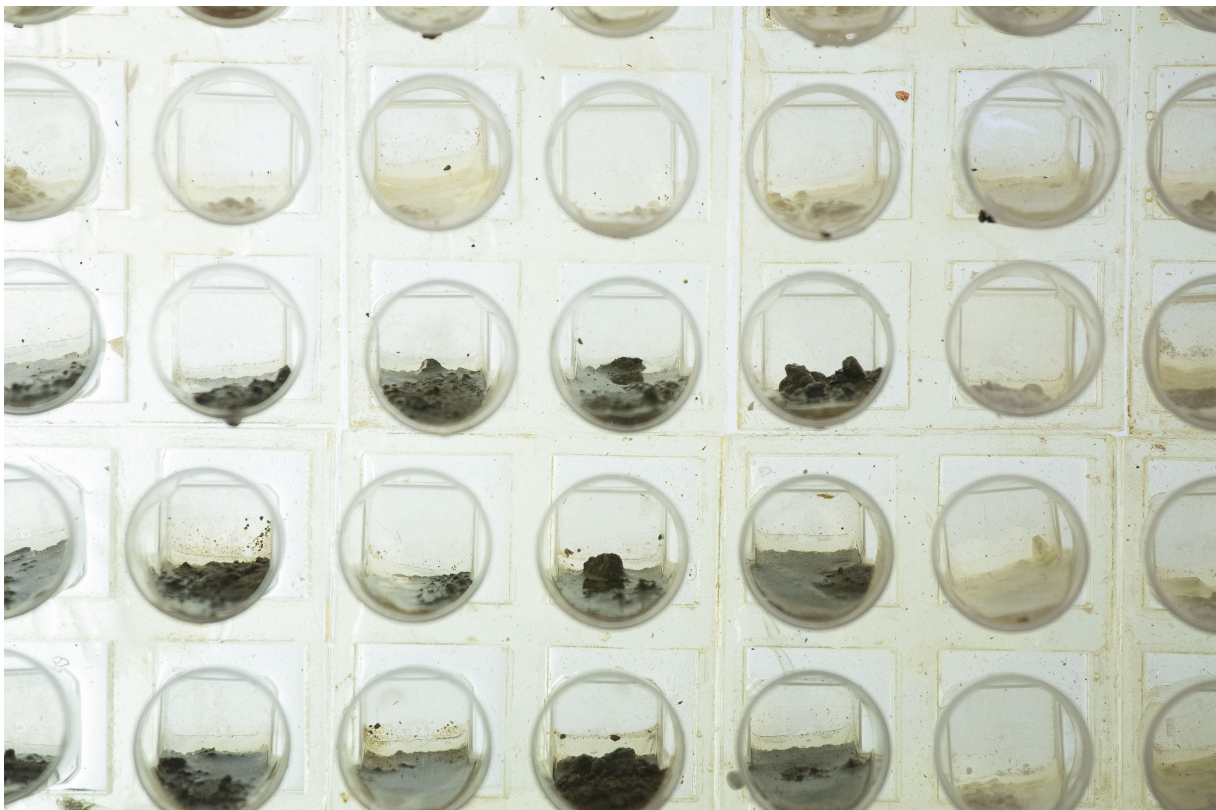
Figure 4.16

Germain Pilon, Tomb of Henry II and his wife Catherine de Médici, with gisant effigies by Francesco Primaticcio of Philippe V, Jeanne d'Évreux and Charles IV, 1561–73. Marble and bronze. Basilica of Saint-Denis, Paris, France. Source: image by Nieves (2015) from Wikimedia Commons.

These imposing tomb sculptures are especially figurative and representative, and embody their own unique symbolic languages which have changed and developed over time. Panofsky ([1964] 1992: 76), whose book is still authoritative today, decodes these images and tracks changes in their figuration over time and across different areas and cultures in Europe. The visual symbolism of tomb sculptures depicts ritual action in a physical form, and also very often suggests an imaginary form, such as life continuing after death.

To me, from a contemporary perspective, tomb sculpture is especially loud and busy, specific and direct, and it explodes outwards in its expression. In contrast my own work *Window* (Figure 4.17), suggestive of burial with reference to the expansive and natural African landscape, is not figurative in its meanings.

Figure 4.17

Adelheid von Maltitz, *Window* (detail), 2018. Site-specific earth, bone ash, resin and sample bottles. 690 × 885 × 145 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

Figure 4.18
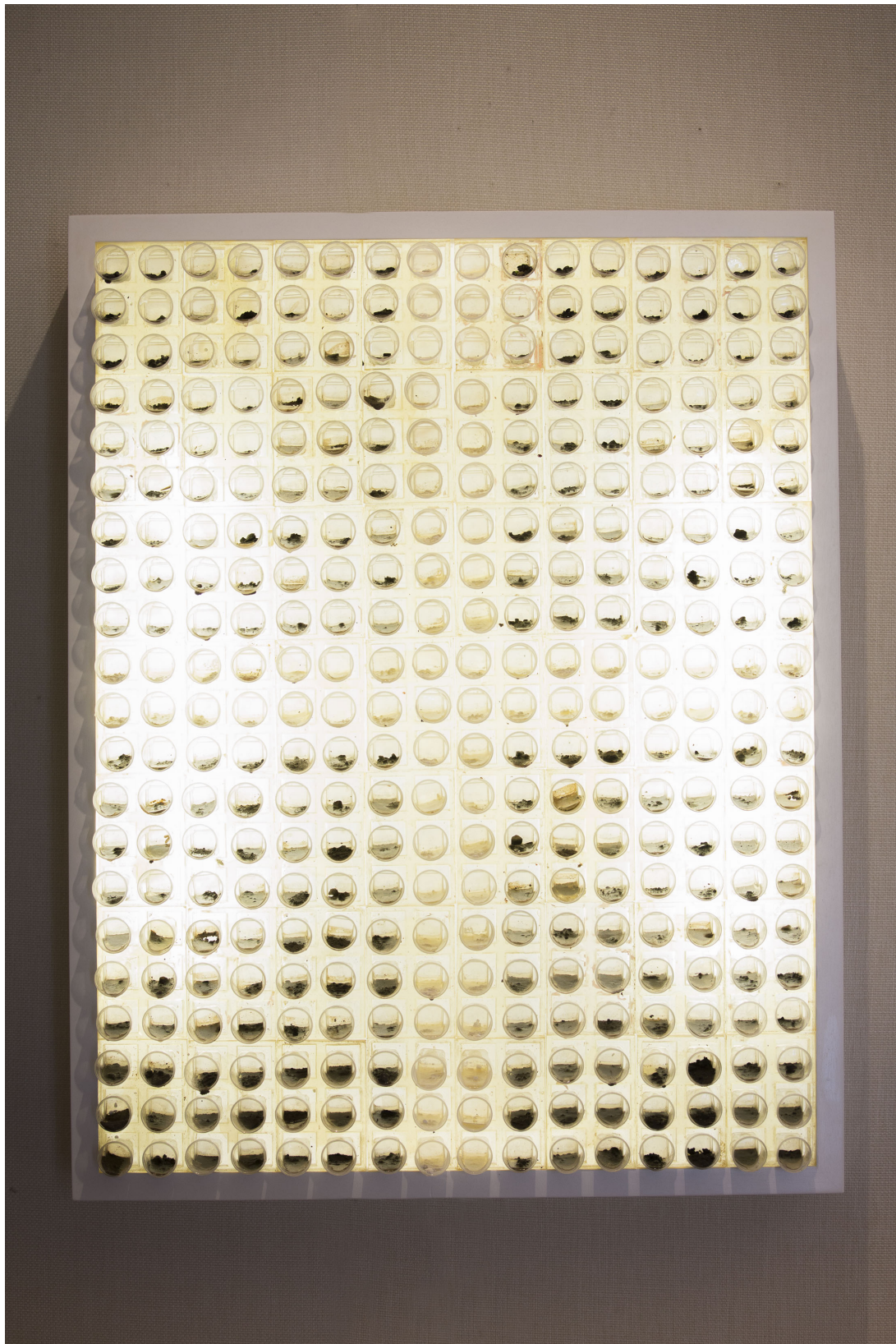
Adelheid von Maltitz, *Window*, 2018. Site-specific earth, bone ash, resin and sample bottles. 690 × 885 × 145 mm. Installation view, May 2021, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Photograph by Rian Horn (2021).

In *Window*, the repeated sample bottles hold micro-environments of site-specific earth or bone ash, which are mixed with resin and allowed to harden and dry while in an angled position, providing an illusion of pouring out. In this 'frozen' moment of pouring, what appears to be wet samples of earth or bone, once inspected closer, suggests the possibilities of larger graves and grave-like mounds in the landscape.

These very small objects require a viewer to come closer or lean in to discover the suggested graves, somewhat hidden in the larger landscape. In this miniaturised way, images of graves are as easily imagined to be images of hills or mountains; the surrounding hardened but wet-looking resin pools are as easily imagined to be rivers or oceans as they are imagined to be bodily fluid from a degenerating corpse.

The small samples of earth and bone, hardened, preserved and frozen in resin as moments of pouring without end, utilise the micro- and the macro-view to open up imaginative meanings. The process of moving inwards and closer to inspect the miniature scale — which may ultimately allow the viewer to envision the macro scale — is embodied.

Comparatively, I would argue, the means by which one experiences Thaba Bosiu, as a hike up the mountain to the grave site of King Moshoeshoe, is a ritualised process which requires the bodily participation of the visitor.

Thaba Bosiu, "the mountain fortress of Moshoeshoe", is considered a national monument in Lesotho (Mbalazi, Mushishi & Ramokhoro, 2000: 128). This mountain is a sandstone plateau with approximately 2km of farmable area. At one point in time it was considered the capital of Lesotho, while functioning as King Moshoeshoe's stronghold. However, today it is 24km away from the capital city of Lesotho, Maseru. As Mbalazi, Mushishi & Ramokhoro (2000: 128) explains, "there is a long history associated with Thaba Bosiu as

a national sacred space and symbol of the birth of a nation in Lesotho." Lesotho is one of only three countries in the world that is entirely surrounded by another independent country, and King Moshoeshoe's decision to lead his followers up the mountain and make it their home and fortress is what enabled the Basotho people to survive and hold onto their country (Coplan, 2003; Etherington, 2004).

Figure 4.19

Grave of King Moshoeshoe on Thaba Bosiu. Near Maseru, Lesotho. Source: image by Marduk (2011a) from Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 4.20

Thaba Bosiu, as seen from its northern slopes. Near Maseru, Lesotho. Source: image by
Marduk (2011b) from Wikimedia Commons.

The name "Thaba Bosiu" means "mountain of the night" as it is believed that the "sides

of this mountain would rise up at night to protect Moshoeshoe and his followers" (Mbalazi,

Mushishi & Ramokhoro, 2000: 129). The deeply cultural embedded beliefs and legends

open up to imaginative thinking, which in turn ensures the preservation of the iden-

tity of this mountain as sacred. The history of the mountain cannot be separated from

Moshoeshoe himself, who gave Thaba Bosiu its "special significance" (Mbalazi, Mushishi

& Ramokhoro, 2000: 129). This special significance is essentially that Thaba Bosiu is

a "sacred mountain, the matrix of the Basotho nation,. . . the source of political inspi-

ration, an emblem of Basotho nationhood [and] the only hope of spiritual and political

resuscitation" (Rosenberg, 1999: 57).

When visiting Thaba Bosiu and the burial ground of Moshoeshoe and the Basotho kings which followed in his footsteps, one has to walk up the mountain on a narrow footpath. This mountain fortress is still considered impenetrable, and it has no roads to access the top easily. In my experience of visiting the site, it takes at least an hour to hike up the steep and gravelly mountainside to the plateau. During this walk one is completely immersed in what I would describe as being a ritualised walking process. This process of walking is especially focused and also very site-specific and educational. The guide who leads you up the mountain (since it is not customary practice as a visitor to go alone) talks about the history of Thaba Bosiu and Moshoeshoe.

However, not only are you hearing and thinking about the history, you are also walking on the actual place where multiple battles were fought and won by the Basotho. Once at the grave site of Moshoeshoe, this burial place seems imaginatively connected to the mountain as a whole. The mountain, like a grave, blends in so well with the surrounding landscape, because it seems also to be a heap of earth and stones on a larger scale. The spiritual life and the continuing social identity of Moshoeshoe, as enmeshed in the land, became more clearly envisioned for me, due to the inescapable ritualised walk of reaching the plateau and burial ground.

Like other ritualised processes, the walking process aids in negotiating between the realities of death and the continuation of life, and thus may enable healing when engaging with the deaths that Thaba Bosiu is synonymously known for.

By comparing mourning processes in general with personalised and often repetitive ritualised processes, such as walking, stitching and pouring, it becomes apparent that whether

or not the realities of death — such as the degeneration of the corpse — are literally referenced, both these types of processes (one formal and the other personal), may assist with a focus on the continuation of life, and ultimately, hope. This continuation of life, unlike the more literal afterlife of the Egyptian cult, may be more imaginatively diverse, possibly including the belief in spiritual and/or social continuity through remembrance. Moreover, personal ritualised processes shift dynamically in their meanings and quickly over time. Thus, the creative space of art-making is a natural locus for ritualised processes, especially those engaging with death and loss, and those adding meaning related to healing.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

From the understanding gained by an exploration of site, materiality and ritual in works of art and funerary and mourning practices, I have identified and developed the characteristics of dynamic threshold qualities by investigating translation by transferral, the body as a site of translation, "edge qualities" of materials, and repetitive ritualised processes. I have come to situate my art-making practices within a complex, interdisciplinary entanglement between art and funerary, mortuary and mourning practices. Having embarked on this research related to my family origins and European descent, I may now be better equipped to more deeply explore my current cultural context and South African roots.

In Chapter 2 I have shown that the bodily processes of translation, or carrying meaningful materials across the thresholds of significant sites, contributes to constructive engagement with death and loss. As with burying a corpse into the land or the scattering of cremated remains at a specific place, the transferrals in my art-making are meaningful in their materiality, movement and location. These transferrals lead to the formation and translation of individualised transient inner images. These bodily images are enlivened, and

possibly healing, due to the new and personalised image events initiated by the corporeal transferral of materials from an original site of death and loss to an institutionalised site. The body as a site in itself is threshold-like, as defined by Casey (2017: 216), as it is simultaneously *"turned out"* and *"turned in"*. The body in motion — while transferring meaningful materials between significant sites — establishes site-to-site connections which may stretch over time and result in recurring translations and extended healing, even in an historical sense.

In the context of the experience of death and loss, I have defined "edge qualities" of materials by exploring historical and contemporary examples in Chapter 3. These examples focus on the means through which materials were and are used to imaginatively challenge the threshold between life and death. I show that "edge qualities" oscillate between that which the senses experience, and inner image-making. It is apparent that "edge qualities" of materials may be exploited in certain contexts — such as when engaging with death and loss, or in art-making processes — to enable healing. I thus conclude that materiality is able to function in a contradictory manner; it can function as something both tangible and intangible, as physical material enabling associated image-making to open up new horizons.

In comparing personalised repetitive and meaningful ritualised processes with mourning rituals in general, I showed in Chapter 4 that both will by some means or another focus on the continuation of life and hope, in the 'hereafter' and as social remembrance. This exploration of the interplay between the field of funerary practices and art-making processes clarifies the way in which ritual and ritualised processes comparably mediate the contradictory experience of the degeneration of the corpse and the need to embody

continuity. The conclusions reached in this thesis seem to point enigmatically to ways to address difficult local themes regarding, for example the discourse and issues of land ownership, appropriation and re-appropriation in South Africa. For this reason, I envision a future project that may ask the following questions: how can site, materiality and rit-ualised processes be utilised through landscape related art practices, to bring about new understandings of land ownership, appropriation and re-appropriation in South Africa? In what way may transferal of materials between places, the "edge qualities" of materials (with specific reference to earth) as well as newly discovered, everyday processes aligned with mark-making, digging and sprinkling, open up new perspectives in terms of healing divisions?

This project would reflect on the use of lines in order to organise, as was done in South Africa's political past in terms of social engineering, and would consist of a series of three works exhibited in the gallery. These three works would include: a drawing and two photographs (all 900 × 1600 mm); an abstract line drawing on paper (as in Figure 4.10); a stenciled line drawing by means of bone ash (or other materials) onto a tarred road; and a land-art piece of at least ten large lines, or furrows, dug out of a field.

While the use of repetitive lines could create a sense of division and dividing, I believe they could simultaneously counteract such notions by means of an imagined sense of traveling across surfaces. Coming to understand or contemplate lines of this nature in the gallery, in tandem with the experience of walking in the land, could bring about new perspectives on land issues and art by interrogating the nature of boundaries and thresholds. Surface qualities, as well as the material qualities (of pencil, earth, bone ash, salt or flour) may abstractly reference contested places by means of their own "edge

qualities". These would include the unforgiving tarred road surface which, like resin, is artificial, hard and man-made, but continue to erode slowly non-the-less. This surface attempts to preserve, harden and smooth out, while the earth contrastingly erodes and responds more quickly to natural processes. Paper and its surface qualities may possibly be explored as a privileged surface, in the same way that the gallery is a privileged place.

The variety of lines and of surfaces would further contribute to exploring notions of divisions especially in terms of the highly contentious topic of skin colour related to land issues in South Africa. Black graphite lines on a white page, white bone ash lines on a black tarred road surface and brown lines in a brown landscape may be suggestive of the ways in which the diverse South African population is referred to in terms of skin tones. Such colour usage and comparisons of lines being transferred over different surfaces may relate the living bodies and the edges of bodies (skin) to the land and the edges of the land in terms of land surfaces and maps, but also in terms of previous topographically evident land allocations and divisions.

Due to the augmentation of meaning by pictures and art, and the ensuing richness of exploring human actions and suffering through art and images — thinking back to my Polish grandfather who crossed the mountains by foot in his escape from Poland during WWII as well, as observing the movements and interactions of mourners constructing a Roadside Shrine — this research has been fruitful to open up new perspectives on the ways in which images stored in human bodies freely travel across borders and boundaries.

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