

Where's the Criticality, Tracey?
A Performative Stance Towards Contemporary Art Practice

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Karakia Timatanga

Tukua te wairua kia rere
ki ngā taumata
Hai ārahi i ā tātou mahi
Me tā tātou whai i ngā
tikanga a rātou ma
Kia mau kia ita
Kia kore ai e ngaro
Kia pupuri
Kia whakamaui
Kia tina! TINA! Hui e!
TAIKI E!

Allow one's spirit to exercise
its potential
To guide us in our work as well
as in our pursuit of our
ancestral traditions
Take hold and preserve it
Ensure it is never lost
Hold fast.
Secure it.
Draw together! Affirm!

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Figure A-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/Tate, London 2018

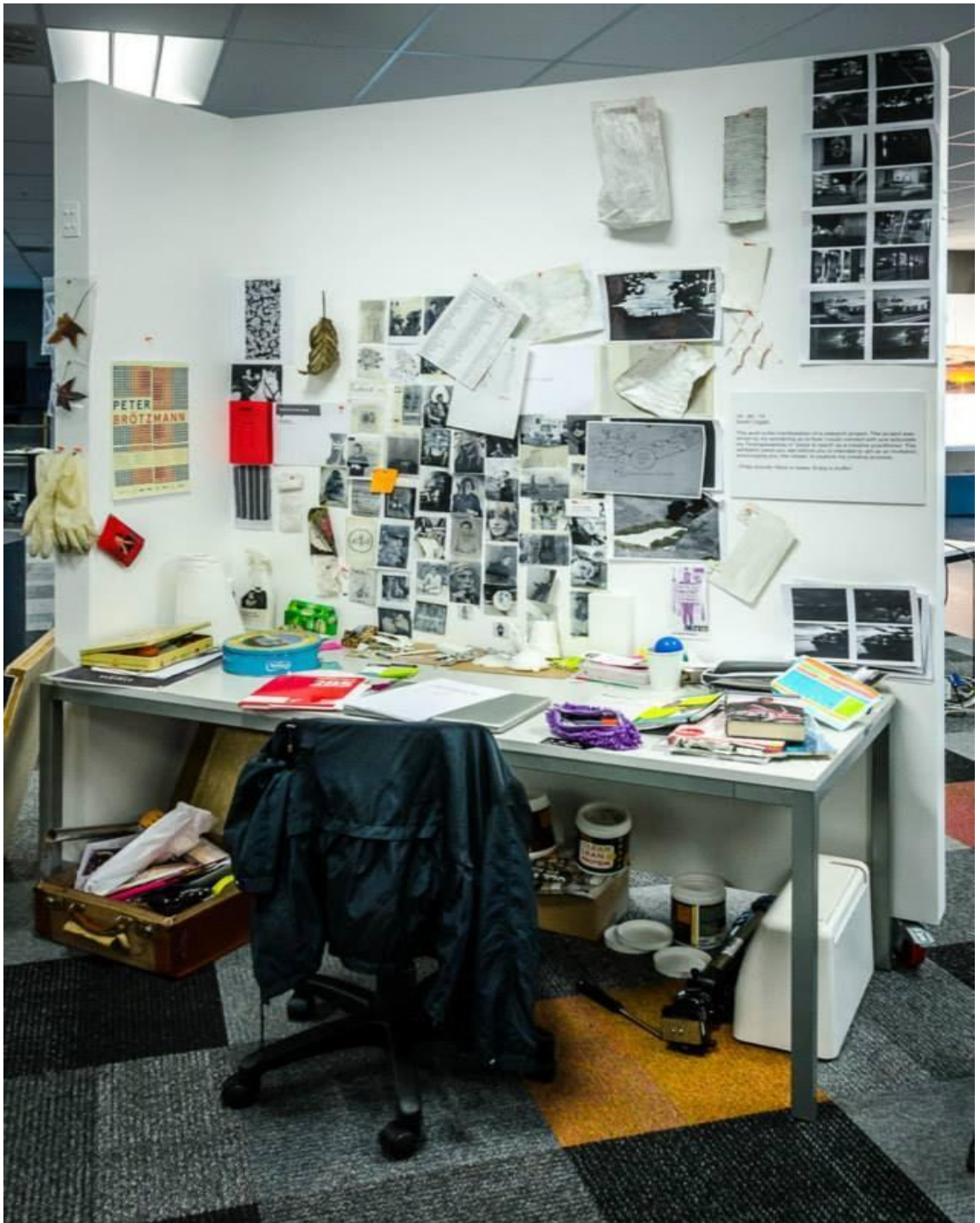


Figure B-1, 18-06-14, Sarah Loggie, 2014, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Abstract

Tracey Emin's bed is in the Tate Museum. Flanked by two portraits by Francis Bacon, *My Bed* (1998) is almost inviting. Displayed on an angle, it gestures for us to climb under the covers, amongst stained sheets, used condoms and empty vodka bottles - detritus of Emin's life. This is not the first time *My Bed* has been shown in the Tate. The 2015-17 exhibitions of this work are, in a sense, a homecoming, reminiscent of the work's introduction to the British public. Short-listed for the 1999 Turner Prize, *My Bed* made headlines: *How dare she put her bed in a gallery and call it Art?*

Yet dare she does. Emin shows what we repress - the repugnant entrails of her personal life are splayed out, exhibited for all to see. *My Bed* invites disgust. Its commonplace content provokes a visceral response. This work does not afford us the luxury of critical distance: *How do we come to be looking?*

I look to *My Bed* as a point of departure, a paradigm for exploring the exchange that takes place between artist, art object and audience. Performativity - the idea that things are only real to the extent that they are performed, acts as a theoretical frame for this discussion. Here, written, spoken, physical and material communication practices produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects that they involve.

Far from presenting a totalising theory of art, or for that matter experience, my aim is to contribute to efforts to position knowledge as situated within lived experience. This is my partial perspective; an iteration of my own practice. This document is an artefact, residue of my academic performance - no less ephemeral than the coffee cups on my desk nor the cigarette butts littering Emin's bed.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

7/07/2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a stylized 'X' or star-like shape at the top and several loops below.

Acknowledgements

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective

To: Rene Loggie, Anthony Loggie, Saaniya Saxena, Sanjay Saxena, Swapneel Saxena, Angus Loggie, Siddharth Saxena, Sai-Esha Jagota, Mary Reay, Muriel Kain, Carol De Kock, Tessa De Kock, Tom De Kock, Nic De Kock, Lola Kain, Stuart Kain, Marilize Venter, Alistair Kain, Clinton Watkins, Sharon Mazer, James Charlton, Kim Newall, Maggie Buxton, Frances Joseph, Miranda Smitheram, Yvonne Meachen, Andy Connor, Anna Tokareva, Antonio Esparza, Karen Esparza Glismann, Lisa Clist, Jenna Gavin, Jacques Foottit, Colin Woods, Jeff Henderson, Sam Longmore, Emlyn Williams, Graig Miller, Josh Helm, Kim Anh Chaudhary, Dinesh Chaudhary, Khushbir Kaur, Rattandeep Singh, Nivia Rattan, Vivek Sharma, Akshay Chawan, Manali Bhandari, Karen Barad, Judith Butler, Quentin Meillassoux, Tracey Emin and Julian Dashper. Thank You.

Introduction

While most artists these days wear their Derrida in their jacket pockets, I wear my art on my sleeve.

– Tracey Emin, 1994¹

The title of this thesis emerges out of a conversation I had with Daniel Rourke, who lectures in time-based media and has recently completed a PhD at Goldsmiths University, London. Our conversation took place within the context of a workshop facilitated by Rourke at Colab, Auckland University of Technology, when our discussion one morning centred on the role of craft in art. I mentioned I had been watching a video interview featuring Tracey Emin and had enjoyed her perspective on the tension between craft and mass production. As I began to elaborate Daniel interjected, exclaiming, “*Where’s the criticality, Tracey?*” Rourke’s response seemed to be reflexive, a knee-jerk reaction to the mention of Tracey’s name. He was not looking at Emin’s work at the time nor was he looking at the video interview in question. Rather, he appeared to be channelling a common sentiment about her works: that they can appear to be cheap tricks, gimmicks designed to elicit attention without being meaningful or socially relevant. Emin’s celebrity status reinforces this sentiment; her practice is often seen to be a money-making racket driven by an individual of questionable intent. The term criticality carries the notion of social critique: the extent to which an individual or artwork may be seen to be politically engaged. This perceived lack in Emin’s work provokes me. It may be that her works appear to be unmediated, confessional, self-serving expositions. But for me, they also can be seen to be radically reflexive pieces intimately intertwined with many complex social, political and philosophical issues.

In this thesis, I argue for an alternate reading praxis, one that acknowledges the performative aspects of Emin’s practice. This praxis runs counter to the conservative approach of modernist art criticism: I aim to incite discussion of the intersubjective exchange which takes place among artist, art object and audience.

¹ Emin as quoted in the press release for her exhibition; ‘My Major Retrospective 1963-1993’, held at White Cube, London 1993-1994

The term performative refers to the idea that discursive practices (written, spoken and physical communication practices) *produce, rather than merely describe*, the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ they involve. This concept builds on philosopher Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and emerges out of a formidable history within feminist and queer theory.

This thesis appears in two parts: creative work in exhibition: exegesis, practice: praxis. A sense of art practice as a performative act permeates my own approach to art making. This exegesis does not offer a complete overview of my practice; the site of research. It functions as a guide, to locate or suggest a particular theoretical, historical, critical and physical context for this work. It is seen to lead up to, to frame the art objects presented. Chapter one encompasses a review of key texts: the literature that informs my thesis. Here I show how performativity comes to act as a critical frame for this research. In chapter two I move to an analysis of *My Bed*: I consider how this art object may be seen to be performative. My methodology is outlined in Chapter three, I situate this thesis within the context of practice-based research. Chapter four then details some of the aesthetic/artistic concerns that arise in my art. The exegesis concludes with an overview of my thesis project. Here, I reflect upon my research. The stream of images interspersed throughout this document act to offer insight into the aesthetic/art historical context of this thesis; how I have come to position my work.

My Bed (1998), Emin’s most (in) famous work, is my point of departure. Lodged in the Tate Museum, the work includes the artist’s own bed adorned with an array of her personal effects; stained sheets, worn panties, used condoms, empty vodka bottles, dirty slippers, a stuffed toy dog... Made in Emin’s Waterloo council flat, *My Bed* was first exhibited at the Sagacho Exhibit Space in Tokyo, 1998. However, the work’s notoriety proceeds from its inclusion as a finalist in the 1999 Turner Prize. Short-listed for Britain’s premier art award, Emin’s personal effects solicited significant attention: Media frenzy ensued, Emin shot to fame and the Tate’s visitor numbers soared to an all-time high. Renowned art collector and advertising executive, Charles Saatchi purchased the work (for £150,000) in 1999. Back on the floor after a 15-year hiatus from public view, *My Bed* continues to make headlines: Sold in 2015, to German Count Christian Duerckheim (for a sum of £2.54 million), the work is now on show as part of the Tate’s permanent collection. Despite its contentious reputation, *My Bed* is consistently read as

confessional; whether viewers commend Emin's candid self-expression, condemn its 'vile' content or deem the work to be lacking in artistic merit, *My Bed* is often seen to document a particularly harrowing episode in the artist's life. Here, I outline my alternate interpretation of this work. I contend that reading *My Bed* as performative allows us to see its potential to enact social (and aesthetic) critique; its criticality.

A dirty corner for academic discussion, this research will not sit quietly within disciplinary confines: my interest in discursive practices transcends the rhetoric of contemporary art. While this work will fall victim to any number of ironic maladies, I intend to contribute to efforts to position knowledge as situated within lived experience. Practice does not serve to illustrate theory rather it is the site of research. Exegesis and artwork are positioned alongside each other as correlates - contingent artefacts. There is a sense of reciprocity between theoretical and material modes of research.

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Figure C-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/Tate, London 2018

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Figure D-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/Tate, London 2018

Chapter One: Performativity

To define performativity, I look to the work of American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler. In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (Theatre Journal, 1988), Butler argues that “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is only real to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1988, p.161). She contends that gender “is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (Butler, 1988, p.154). Butler’s work explores *how* discursive practices; written, spoken and physical communication processes, may be seen to produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects they involve. She coins the term performativity to refer to this “aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names” (Butler, 1988, p.163; 1994, p. 33). For Butler, gender is constituted through “language, gesture and all manner of symbolic social sign” (Butler, 1988, p. 154). Gender is something we *do*, not something we are.

Butler shows us a way to think about art as a discursive practice; a kind of doing that constructs ideas of identity and the social. From this perspective, an artwork can be seen as a period of action: an exchange or negotiation that involves the viewer, rather than a passive entity: an object given to be looked at. Here, I engage Butler’s notion of performativity to reflect on this exchange that takes place between artist, art object and audience. How can Tracey Emin’s artistic practice – in particular, *My Bed* – be seen to be performative; to produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects it involves? What happens if we consider *My Bed* to be discursive, an encounter between artist, art object and audience rather than a static, representational form?

Butler’s notion of performativity enables me to articulate my alternate reading of *My Bed*. I contend that *My Bed* enacts a somewhat macabre social commentary. For me, this artwork exposes how discursive practices might be seen to construct our social reality. I consider the range of responses this work elicits to be a vital part of it: Emin is not the only one making her bed.

In writing about *My Bed* as a performative artwork I turn to noted art historian/theorist Amelia Jones. Although Jones does not write directly about *My Bed*, like Butler, she explores the theatrical, discursive dimension of meaning production. Jones rejects the dominant stream of modernist art history/art criticism that frames art works as static or mute objects “with a single prescribed signification” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.1). She contests the view that meaning in art is “communicated unproblematically and without default from the maker to an alert, knowledgeable, universalised viewer” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.1). Her extensive body of work interrogates “how art critical and art historical interpreters operate to legitimate their judgements as convincing or correct” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2). Taking her cue from art practice, she “proposes that the viewing or embodied reception of visual artworks is a process that can be engaged as performative” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2). Jones shows us how,

... Adopting the notion of performativity as a critical strategy within the study of visual culture thus enables a recognition of interpretation as a fragile, partial and precarious affair and, ultimately, affords a critique of art criticism and art history as they have been traditionally practiced. (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2)

In *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, Jones urges us to reflect on the process by which meaning is produced in art: If, “meaning is negotiated between and across subjects and through language, it can never be fully secured: meaning comes to be understood as a negotiated domain, in flux and contingent on social and personal investments and contexts” (p.2). Jones emphasizes, “this lack of fixity and the shifting, invested nature of any interpretive engagement” to “assert that interpretation itself is worked out as a performance between artists (as creators, performers, and spectators of their work) and spectators (whether ‘professional’ or non-specialist)” (p.2). Here, I show how *My Bed*, frames interpretation as an intersubjective exchange. I contend that this artwork may be seen to instantiate a view of meaning in art as negotiated: to reveal the “‘complicity of the audience’- in determining the meaning and social value of any cultural product” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2).

In *Art History/Art Criticism Performing Meaning*, Jones details how performative artworks and practices enact a critique of the dominant ideologies that structure art history and art criticism. Her insights inform my reading of *My Bed*'s, as well as my own, social, political, cultural and art historical context.

For Jones, "access to the position of making meaning is a crucial issue" (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2). She contests the power given to 'professional spectators' and insists that despite efforts to democratise art practice exclusive, modernist assumptions "continue to be structurally embedded in the practice of art criticism and art history, often even of the most seemingly enlightened and radical varieties" (p.3). Her argument exposes how these pervasive beliefs act to veil our personal, political, social and cultural investments as spectators; what is at stake in the activity of viewing art.

Jones contends that as spectators we often deny the partial, fluid and performative dimension of artistic interpretation: "While most art historians would prefer not to admit it, the practice of art historical analysis most often assumes certain values determined via an art critical model of a 'disinterested' judgement practiced by a learned interpreter who veils his investments in the service of objectivity" (Jones, 1999, p.39). Art history and art criticism are seen to "frame a set of practices via interpretive acts that are legitimated through the suppression of the investments - the desires- of the interpreter" (p.39-40). In other words, we often discount the highly subjective, personal nature of aesthetic experience in order to establish or maintain 'universal'; often western or Eurocentric, ideas of value in art. We repress the performative, discursive and social dimension of any interpretive act in order to preserve a system of aesthetic judgement that enables us to 'objectively' determine or categorise art as 'good' or not.

Jones questions our desire to remain objective in the face of aesthetic/artistic experience. She engages performativity as a critical strategy to contest this way of looking at art.

Locating her work within a tradition of feminist, post-structuralist academic/artistic practice, Jones asserts that art history and art criticism remain “historically, institutionally and ideologically linked through the enlightenment-based logic of viewing, classifying and hierarchizing (visual) objects according to a schema of relative values” (p.39). Conventional modes of determining value in art are seen to be loosely derived from German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant’s *‘Critique of Judgement’*: a school of thought that insists that “aesthetic judgement must, by definition, be ‘devoid of all interest’” (p.40).

According to Jones, Kantian aesthetic judgement must bridge ‘the chasm of contradictions’ art opens between the ‘subjective’ and the ‘universal’ (p.40). It must operate to regulate the highly personal, partial nature of any interpretive act. Kant’s model requires a ‘pose of neutrality’; as spectators we must distinguish “between contemplative, disinterested, aesthetic judgement and embodied, senate, interested, contingent and therefore individualised and non-universal judgements” (p.40). Practiced this way, art history and art criticism offer an ‘objective’, or at least ‘universal’, account of aesthetic experience - a way to secure the meaning and value of art.

Jones goes on to explore what happens to this prevailing system of judgement when it is met with a performative approach towards art practice: *What happens if we embrace, rather than bridge, ‘the chasm of contradictions’; the tension, art opens between the ‘subjective’ and the ‘universal’?* Her analysis of art critic Michael Fried’s famed essay *‘Art and Objecthood’* reveals how performative artworks/practices make it difficult for us to maintain the ‘pose of neutrality’ required to carry out conventional, modernist, Kantian modes of aesthetic judgement or interpretation. She re-reads a series of works defamed by Fried to show how performative artworks/practices exacerbate the discursive dimension of meaning production (p.42-51). That these works “overtly stage their relationship to the viewer as corporeal, invested, mutual and intersubjective” exposes a ‘powerful apparatus of repression’ that often informs our ways of looking at and making meaning from works of art (p.41). Performative artworks/practices entertain a view of the audience as complicit in determining the meaning and social value of any cultural product: they are ‘(like other feminine forms in patriarchal cultures) seen as something that needs control, even policing’ (Phelan, P 1997 as quoted in Jones, 1999 p.40).

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Figure E-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/The Guardian 2018

I am interested in *My Bed*'s status as an object. Frequently viewed as a self-portrait, *My Bed* is predominantly regarded as a confessional or representational work. Discussion of this work's material components; its medium, does not often extend beyond analysis of their relationship to Emin or reflection upon their status as cultural ephemera - this work is made from, among other things, condoms not latex.

Here, I explore the eliding of subject and object that takes place in this work: the extent that 'what it is made of' comes to be synonymous with 'what it is about'. I observe how *My Bed* exposes the cultural structures that mediate our experience of art objects. Although, this work receives criticism for its 'ready-made' content, *My Bed* is more generally seen to be an image of Emin; its subject. A 'self portrait of the artist as a young woman', the collection of objects that make up this work come to stand in for the body of the artist (Doyle, 2002).

The work of physicist, philosopher and feminist theorist Karen Barad informs my reading of this aspect of Emin's practice. I argue that *My Bed* enacts a critique of representationalist thinking. For me, this work positions the exchange that takes place among artist, art object and audience as a 'material-discursive'² experience rather than an act of interpretation (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2; Barad, 2003). The responses *My Bed* solicits expose our collective denial of not only the discursive but also the material, physical dimension of artistic/aesthetic experience. That *My Bed* is read as a 'self-portrait through objects'³ prompts me to reflect on the ontological assumptions underpinning such a view: are objects; material entities, only ever mere signifiers for subjects? Must we continue to experience art objects as static representational forms awaiting interpretation rather than active material entities?

² I borrow the term material-discursive from Karen Barad. Barad applies this term to in order to draw awareness to the material dimension of discursive practices. I explain this term in more detail in the paragraphs that follow. See page 24.

³ See ("Tracey Emin's *My Bed* to return to Tate", 2014).

Writing in *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter*; an article for *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, Barad challenges us to account for the material dimension of discursive practices:

What compels the belief that we have a direct access to cultural representations and their content that we lack toward the things represented? (Barad, 2003, p.801).

She proposes “a posthumanist notion of performativity—one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors” (Barad, 2003, p.808). For Barad, material and discursive processes are inseparable. Her argument outlines how Butler’s theory of performativity, while radical, effectively maintains a (Cartesian) divide between sensing body and knowing mind. She contends that Butler’s theory fails to adequately address the material dimension of any discursive exchange. Noting that performativity has a “distinguished career in philosophy”, Barad traces a lineage between Butler’s notion and French Philosopher Michel Foucault’s analytic of power⁴. She points out that although both Butler and Foucault link “discursive practices to the materiality of the body”, their respective accounts forestall “an understanding of precisely *how* discursive practices produce material bodies” (Barad, 2003, p. 808). For Barad, this oversight instantiates an “implicit reinscription of matter’s passivity”,

Crucial to understanding the workings of power is an understanding of the nature of power in the fullness of its materiality. To restrict power’s productivity to the limited domain of the “social,” for example, or to figure matter as merely an end product rather than an active factor in further materializations, is to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity. (Barad, 2003, p. 808)

⁴ As Barad notes,

Performativity’s lineage is generally traced to the British philosopher J. L. Austin’s interest in speech acts, particularly the relationship between saying and doing. Jacques Derrida is usually cited next as offering important poststructuralist amendments. Butler elaborates Derrida’s notion of performativity through Foucault’s understanding of the productive effects of regulatory power in theorizing the notion of identity performatively. (Barad, 2003 p. 808)

Barad's call for a Posthumanist variant of performativity details how matter plays an active role in the workings of power. She theorises the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena to arrive at her notion of *material-discursive* practices⁵. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Barad defines discursive practices as,

... the local sociohistorical material conditions that enable and constrain disciplinary knowledge practices such as speaking, writing, thinking, calculating, measuring, filtering, and concentrating. Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the "subjects" and "objects" of knowledge practices. (Barad, 2003, p.818)

She couples this concept with insights from the work of Danish Physicist Niels Bohr to rework the notions of materiality and discursivity "in a way that acknowledges their mutual entailment" (p.818). By Barad's account,

Discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted... (p.821)

Barad acknowledges that matter is discursive, just as discursive practices are always already material,

Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated... But nor are they reducible to one another. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulate in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. (p.822)

From a posthumanist perspective,

Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. (p.822)

⁵ This relationship is usually described as a divide between discursive and 'non-discursive' processes. See Barad, 2003, page 818.

In this thesis I explore the tension between discursive practices and material phenomena within the context of my academic/artistic praxis. Barad's insights enrich my experience of the objects I encounter in practice. I embrace her call for a posthumanist variant of performativity. Here,

A *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real... (Barad, 2003, p.808)

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Figure F-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/Saatchi Gallery 2018

Chapter Two: My Bed

My Bed (1998)

Tracey Emin's bed, the one she slept in for a period during the 1990s, is in the Tate museum. Her box frame, mattress, linens and pillows reside amongst a mass of personal paraphernalia; dirty sheets, stained panties, used condoms, a half empty bottle of Orangina and a stuffed toy dog are some of the various objects featured in this artwork. Made during a particularly desperate period in the artist's life, *My Bed* (1998) can be seen to document the aftermath of a break-up, the demise of a romantic relationship. As Emin tells it,

I had a kind of mini nervous breakdown in my very small flat and didn't get out of bed for four days. And when I did finally get out of bed, I was so thirsty I made my way to the kitchen crawling along the floor. My flat was in a real mess - everything everywhere, dirty washing, filthy cabinets, the bathroom really dirty, everything in a really bad state. I crawled across the floor, pulled myself up on the sink to get some water, and made my way back to my bedroom and thought, 'Oh, my god. What if I'd died and they found me here?' And then I thought, 'What if here wasn't here? What if I took this bed with all its detritus, with all the bottles, the shitty sheets, the vomit stains, the used condoms, the dirty underwear, the old newspapers - what if I took all of that out of this bedroom and placed it into a white space? How would it look then?' And at that moment I saw it, and it looked fucking brilliant. And I thought, this wouldn't be the worst place for me to die; this is a beautiful place that's kept me alive. And then I took everything out of my bedroom and made it into an installation. And when I put it into the white space, for some people it became quite shocking, but I just thought it looked like a damsel in distress, like a woman fainting or something needing to be helped. (Emin as quoted in Ellis-Petersen, 2015)

The 2015 - 2018 exhibitions of this work are in a sense a homecoming reminiscent of the work's introduction to the British public in 1999. 16 years on from its initial appearance at the Tate, *My Bed* still seems to suggest Emin has just popped to the loo, or perhaps the kitchen... Often described as a 'self-portrait through objects' the work has a nostalgic quality about it ("Tracey Emin's *My Bed* to return to Tate", 2014). It

may, as mentioned in a recent interview with the artist, be seen to be a time capsule, a record of the life of a young(er) woman (Ellis-Petersen, 2015). Emin's relationship to this artwork produces an outpouring of emotion: that *My Bed* is made up of ephemera from her life is controversial. Its intimate, ethereal content elicits an emphatic response.

Mandy Merck presents an overview of popular responses to *My Bed*. A reflection upon the 1999 Turner Prize Exhibition, her article documents the perspectives of professional and non-specialist spectators alike. Beginning with a walk-through of the Turner Prize show, Merck suggests that the positioning of *My Bed* (in the first room of the exhibition) achieved a “literal foregrounding of sex...” that served to compound the media furore resulting from this exhibit (Merck, 2000 p.252). She describes my bed as the show’s “central and controversial object... an installation including the artist’s bed, soiled sheets, bloodied underwear, used condoms, empty vodka bottles, discarded tissues, fag ends and other post-coital detritus” (p.252).

Launching her discussion with a summary of Emin’s biography, Merck asserts that ‘*My Bed*’ operates to cement Emin’s status as “a prominent figure of personal sexual suffering and public exhibition” (p.253). The remainder of her article documents how “critics have duly thematized the public and the private in response to her work” (p.253). Merck’s insights are useful here as they locate (still) dominant responses to *My Bed* within the context of the 1999 Turner Prize Exhibition. One of the few critics to suggest that *My Bed* has more than shock-value, Merck reflects on the cultural and social significance of this work; *what did My Bed mean in London - circa 1999?*

Riffing on an article published in the *Independent on Sunday* (24 October 1999), Merck structures her essay as a catalogue of responses to the question: “Would you show your bed to the public?” She begins by recounting the remarks of the ‘vox populi’:

A designer for Better Homes declared that her ‘worst nightmare would be putting my bed on display . . . I’ve moved house recently and I’ve no storage space yet in my bedroom so all my clothes are piled up on two chairs’; while a journalist for Living Etc. magazine enthused: ‘I always make my bed in the morning and I’d say it was pretty passable . . . I think people should be prepared to show their bedroom off at any time and always keep it tidy.’ Two high school students replied to the question with similar meditations on their personal cleanliness (or lack of it), going on to challenge the exhibition of Emin’s bed in an art gallery: ‘putting your bed on display for ‘art’s sake’ is a waste of time and money. Art should evoke emotion or thought’, and ‘I wouldn’t put

my bed on display as a piece of art . . . I don't think there's anything artistic about being a messy person.' (Merck, 2000 p.253)

Diverting her attention from the “surprisingly literal take” of the general populous, Merck then considers artist/critic Matthew Collings' lamentations on *My Bed*. In an article for *The Observer* (also published on Sunday, 24 October 1999), Collings wonders if anyone's bed could be a work of art? He affords four beds an aesthetic defence: Emin's, video artist (winner of the 1997 Turner Prize) Gillian Wearing's, playwright (author of *Live Bed Show*; a play that takes place entirely within the characters' bed) Arthur Smith's and his own (p. 253). Though his reflections on the “colour-field pulsations” of his duvet are compelling, Collings concludes that Emin's bed is different, more convincing than the rest (p.253). He argues,

... there's a little culture of “Tracey Emin” that she's worked on over the years, and this is what makes it possible for her bed to make the leap from lifestyle into art'. In Collings' description, that culture consists of an unacknowledged economy of expression allied to Emin's ‘emotional maximalism’, ‘cheap shock content’, ‘torture and anguish’ (Merck, 2000 p.254).

Deftly matching Collings' penchant for parody and satire, Merck contends that “a typical example of these characteristics is Emin's *Love Poem* (1996), in which she turns to the textiles reworked by feminist artists since the 1970s and appliqués cloth letters to a sheet” (p. 254). Merck notes that *Love Poem* (1996) can be seen to document Emin's rape. Her statement shows how perspectives such as those expressed by Collings may be seen to trivialise the social issues and personal trauma referenced in Emin's work. She goes on to trace a linkage between Emin's biographical outpourings and feminist critiques of heterosexuality. Ultimately, Merck concludes that *My Bed* invokes a state of paradox in which ‘the subject is evacuated and elevated at once’ (p.255). She borrows this phrase from Hal Foster's work on the aesthetics of trauma: reflecting on abject art produced during the 1990s, Foster expresses his scepticism towards “the ascription of truth to abjection, noting that it relies on two incompatible presumptions: the psychoanalytic account of trauma as that which shatters subjectivity, and more popular views that grant the sufferer the authority of ‘witness, testifier, survivor’” (p.255).

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Figure G-1 *Love Poem*, Tracey Emin, 1996, Photo: © Tracey Emin 2018

I find some congruence between Merck and Foster's ruminations on the action of abject art and Butler's theory of performativity. Both reflect on the generative power of discourse - the extent that discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects they involve. As Merck notes, "such art is read to register the despair generated by systemic poverty, disease, death and an abandoned social contract" (p.255). Yet at the same time,

... Rather than simply dissolving individual experience into a symbol of collective suffering, these practices serve to elevate the authority, the social status of the subject. The identity of the individual is cemented: "the woman artist can barter private grief for public notice (p.259).

In the final part of her article Merck expands on this observation to show how the performative dimension of abject art compels us to reflect on the "privatising impetus of contemporary identity politics, including feminism" (p.258). Drawing on the work of anthropologists Marc Auge and Wendy Brown she argues that "the paradoxical product of mass similitude is solitude" (p.258). Asked to consider whether *My Bed* may be seen to characterize the 1990's, Merck identifies "the expansion of capital and the bureaucratic state, increasing secularism, the disintegration of communal institutions and the increasing production of individuated identities by consumer capitalism and social regulation" as key markers of this decade (p.258). She notes that these forces 'combine to produce an utterly *unrelieved* individual',

All too often the consequence of such suffering has been the political vindication of suffering itself: personal trauma as the source of superior knowledge and moral standing. But in a moral economy that so values suffering the subject must cling to her subjugation in order to be recognized as a subject, an 'I' steadfastly imagining itself to be cast out from the community of 'we'. (p.258)

Turning back to *My Bed*, Merck contends that this work sustains the "political momentum lamented by Auge, Brown and Foster" (p.259). Whether seen, by its harshest critics, to be complicit with a "long tradition of confessional art in which women 'strip off and cry to get noticed' or, celebrated for the way that "it affirms another self, that of the spectator", Emin's seminal piece encapsulates the political climate of late modernity: "isolation is assuaged by narcissism and identity affirmed in lieu of the strategies or sustenance of collective existence" (p.259).

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Figure H-1 *Tracey Emin and Jonathan Jones with the copy of the Guardian she used in My Bed,*
Photo: © The Guardian 2018

You'll find I have more in common with Georgia O'Keeffe...

Jonathan Jones has been writing art criticism for The Guardian since the early 1990s. During this time, he has had numerous opportunities to comment on Emin's work. In a recent article Jones reflects on his initial response to *My Bed*; he contrasts this with his current perspective on the work and Emin's practice. Noting how his perception of *My Bed* has changed (significantly) with time Jones refers us to an article published in The Guardian on the 23rd of October 1999. Written by arts correspondent Fiachra Gibbons and titled *Controversy over bed will not rest*, the article catalogues public outrage over Emin's installation. Jones indicates that his perception of *My Bed* was very much in line with the sentiments expressed here. Choice quotes from this article include art critic Adrian Searle's dismissal of the work as "an endlessly solipsistic, self-regarding homage to yourself ... Tracey, you are a bore"(Gibbons, 1999). Roughly 20 years on, Jones has changed his tune. Having recently spent a weekend with Emin at her house in the south of France, Jones recalls a conversation that captures the shift in his thinking about Emin's work:

Tracey is self-sufficient here. She grows vegetables in a little valley where she has her studio and cooks them in the cosy cottage kitchen of her half-chateau, half-hobbit-hole home. She potters about in the vast, semi-cultivated garden in gold sandals, writing letters, reading, drawing, painting. I told her she reminds me of Andy Warhol, by which I meant she's a great pop artist. She replied, unexpectedly, that when I saw her life here I'd find she has more in common with Georgia O'Keeffe. And it's true, she does. (Jones, 2017)

Unpacking his current view of *My Bed* and Emin's wider practice Jones states:

When she was shortlisted for the Turner prize in 1999, I was horrified that the infamy of *My Bed* seemed to be eclipsing what I saw then as more serious contemporary art. Now I think *My Bed* is one of the most enduring and poetic works of our time. I also think the drawings and paintings she's always done alongside her conceptual works are powerful and expressive. She draws with the raw energy of Basquiat and the sensuality of Egon Schiele. Her nudes are explosions of sheer life. (Jones, 2017)

He expands on this view in an earlier article. *Tracey Emin makes her own crumpled bed and lies in it, on Merseyside* chronicles Jones' experience of watching Emin install *My Bed* at the Tate Liverpool in 2016. Here, Jones contends that the appeal of *My Bed* rests in that it documents "all our yesterdays" (Jones, 2016). Citing an anecdote from Emin, he asserts that this work remains an enduring icon of the 90s,

The power of *My Bed*, it strikes me hearing this, has everything to do with time. Other famous readymade works of art are either coldly timeless – no one thinks of Marcel Duchamp's (remade) porcelain urinal as old, even though it has the date 1916 scrawled on it, and Carl Andre's bricks could have been bought at a builders' yard yesterday – or, like Hirst's animals in formaldehyde, age in a way that weakens their impact. *My Bed* has instead turned into a Proustian time machine. It precisely preserves the stuff of Emin's life at a very particular moment, and this means it gets ever more atmospheric, resonant and mysterious. It is gradually turning into the Pompeii object of the 1990s. There's even a yellowing copy of the Guardian from September 1998. All our yesterdays. It goes into the accumulating wreckage beside the bed, along with an Orangina bottle whose contents are so brown and murky I thought it was diseased piss. (Jones, 2016)

Jones ties up his reflections on *My Bed* with a glance at its relationship to expressionist painting - for this show *My Bed* is juxtaposed with works by William Blake:

It looks "baroque", she comments as she drops a pair of tights in – and she's right. It looks like a bed painted by Caravaggio. Emin thinks of great sex as being like a crucifixion, she tells me, and she insists the art handlers hang Blake's Crucifixion near the bed. It is finished. Stuff has become art. And not some dry intellectual work of conceptual art, either. *My Bed* is a visceral monument to being alive. It is a mirror of its maker. Emin is pleased: she reckons this is the best bed she's done. On the wall, Blake's sinners in hell swarm and suffer the torments that her magical readymade suggests with burnt-out fag butts and a tube of K-Y Jelly. (Jones, 2016)

The shift in Jones critical opinion of *My Bed* offers insight into how this work has been staged over time. His treatment of the work, immortalised in The Guardian's extensive back-catalogue of commentary on *My Bed*, compels me to view these responses as part

of the work. As Amelia Jones suggests, the act of “interpretation itself is worked out as a performance between artists (as creators, performers, and spectators of their work) and spectators (whether ‘professional’ or non-specialist)” - the audience can be seen to be complicit in “determining the meaning and social value of any cultural product” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2).

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Figure I-1 *Tracey Emin presents her remade 1998 installation My Bed at Tate
Liverpool, Photo: © The Guardian 2018*

Chapter Three: Methodology – Approach to Research

Practice-based Research

This thesis fits within the realm of practice-based research. Practice does not serve to illustrate theory rather it is the site of research. Exegesis and art object are positioned as correlates: contingent artefacts. There is a sense of reciprocity between theoretical and practical modes of research.

Practice-based research interrogates the relationship between knowing and doing, action and thought. Knowledge here is seen to emerge: to be gained, in practice and through the outcomes of that practice. The context of the research is demarcated, described in words. However, a full experience of the work may only be obtained in direct reference to or, awareness of the artefacts presented (Candy, 2006, p.3). Practice is a distinctive site for research; academic and artistic paradigms are brought into dynamic tension.

Practice-based research traverses disciplinary boundaries:

How we manage our reflexive experience and learn within these settings offers considerable potential for artists... For meaning can be seen to take place through enactment and action... the learning space disrupts distinctions among artist-object, viewer-audience, and time-space, such that the encounter is direct and engaging. (Sullivan, 2010, p. 219)

Meaning here is seen to be contingent: to take place, through enactment and action, in particular material-discursive conditions. As Graeme Sullivan (2010) notes, practice-based research allows for performative (re) interpretations of academic and artistic processes (p.219). It may be seen to “open up the process of meaning production” (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p. 2). That practice-based research encompasses a performative stance towards meaning production renders it a position of philosophical, ontological and political consequence. In contending that meaning takes place in action, practice-based research exposes how dominant practices of knowledge production may operate to maintain a divide between knowing and doing; body and mind; action and thought.

In the context of this thesis, recognition of the performative dimension of practice-based research compounds the dynamic tension this methodology instantiates between academic and artistic processes. This work is at once embroiled in the politics of a performative stance towards art practice and a performative stance towards research. It can be seen to enact, to exacerbate, a sense of dissonance between academic and artistic paradigms: art and research.

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Figure J-1 *My Bed*, Tracey Emin, 1998, Photo: © Tracey Emin/Tate, London 2018

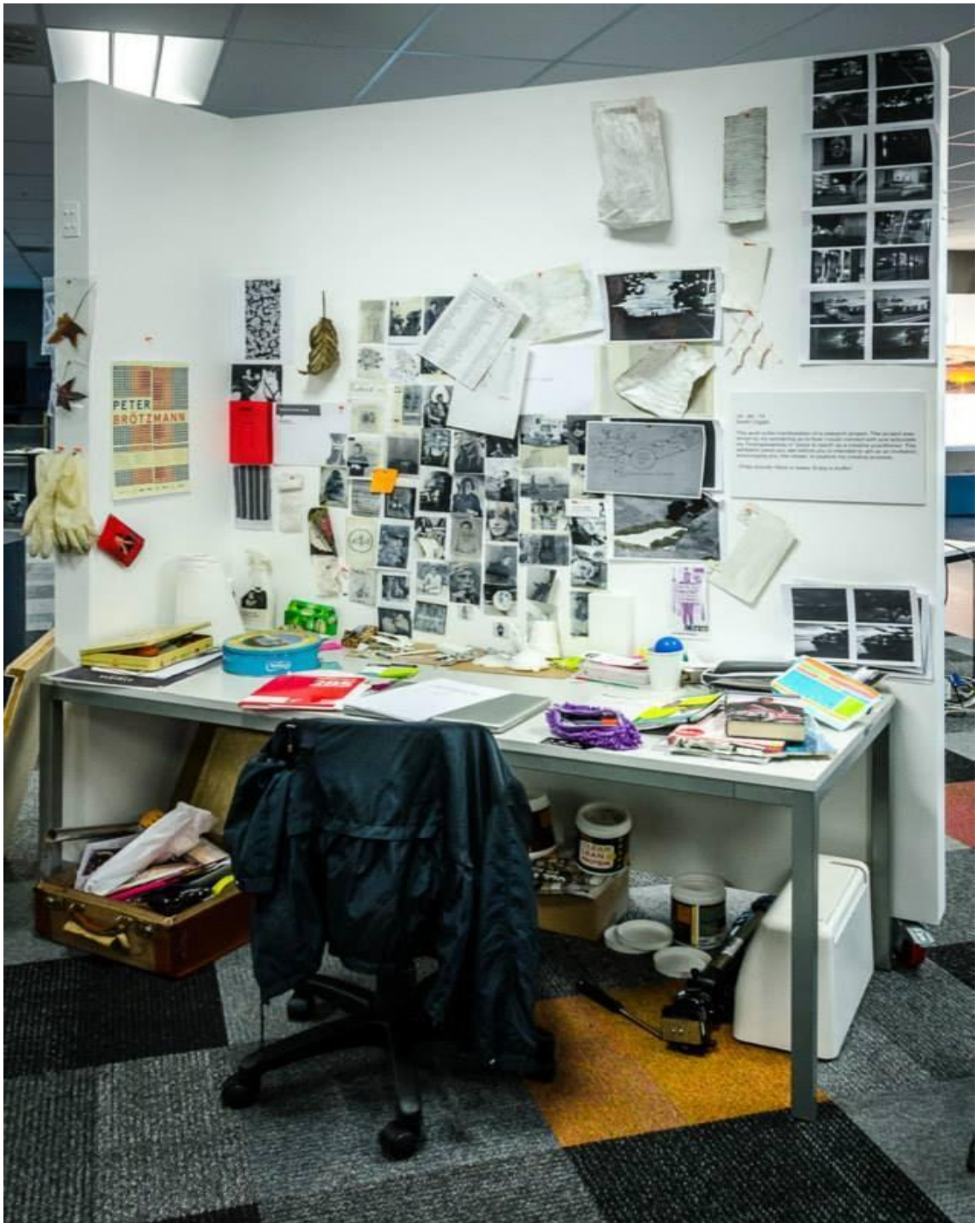


Figure K-1, 18-06-14, Sarah Loggie, 2014, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Chapter Four: Practice

As I allude to above, this thesis project; my concept of a performative stance towards art practice, emerges through making. This period of my practice may be described as an exploration of the tensions arising between: materiality and signification, object and subject, process and form. Works documented here act in the space between how things are and how they come to be.

Here, I reflect on some of the material processes and aesthetic/artistic concerns that surface in my work. Parts of this section are articulated in words while others are conveyed via images. The art objects presented here do not serve to illustrate the theoretical notions outlined in this text. Rather, they are seen to negotiate a similar terrain – to be correlated. Furthermore, the aesthetic/artistic concerns discussed here are not seen to eclipse or intended to categorise the art objects presented. My practice traverses a vast range of media and resists being pinned down to any singular medium, term or form - it may be seen to be in a constant state of flux.⁶ As discussed above, a performative stance towards art practice entails a view of meaning as contingent. This section is included to offer insight into some of the particular material-discursive practices/contexts I have encountered in this work.

⁶ See page 51 for a discussion of the mediums engaged.

Spanning a duration of approximately two years, this segment of my practice shares concerns with what is often termed ‘process’ or, ‘process-driven’ art. Process-driven art may be thought of as art “where the process of its making remains a prominent aspect of the completed work” (‘Process Art’, n.d.). Or, to borrow a turn of phrase from celebrated New Zealand artist, Julian Dashper ‘an art that makes itself’ (Dashper, 2010). In process art, emphasis is placed on the results and action of carrying out a particular process - determined by the artist. These results are generally considered in terms of the impact on materials involved in the process (‘Process Art’, n.d.).

Artist Robert Morris’ work *Untitled* (1967-2008) is often cited as an example of process art. As noted on the Tate gallery website,

Morris made long cuts into lengths of felt and then hung them on a nail or placed them on the floor, allowing them to take on whatever configurations were dictated by the interaction of the innate properties of the felt, the artist’s action and gravity. (‘Process Art’, 2018)

Closer to home, Julian Dashper’s series *Untitled* (1999 - 2000) can be located in, but not limited to, a similar tradition. To produce these works Dashper purchased a selection of square canvases in a variety of (standardized) sizes and painted or printed a square of a consistent size on them. The variance in the size of the canvas impacts the resulting work. In addition to this, Dashper’s work extends upon the paradigm of ‘process art’ to show how process does not only impact the materials involved but the significance of the work. Dashper engages two distinct mediums; photographic print and paint, to produce a series of what appear to be nearly identical images. The photographic print exists as a one-off; an original, while the paintings are multiple; reproductions. This inverts the dynamic traditionally instantiated between these two mediums.

As an undergraduate student, I worked with many of the same themes. Process was a central focus in my practice. Like Morris and Dashper, I produced works via structured, determined procedures. For example, cutting a strip of paper from the edge of a magazine and repeatedly pasting these strips onto an A4 page: the resulting work was complete when the page was full. Later, I repeated this process with lengths of cassette

tape. I then modified a Sony Walkman and used the tape head to play back the sounds preserved in the panel of cassette tape. Adjacent to this, I experimented with producing works via less-structured, determined or curated processes. Here I was interested in both the formal/aesthetic experience of the objects produced and the political action of such a gesture. I find the idea of producing work retrospectively, via an 'unintentional', cumulative process of action, compelling. In presenting my desk/studio space as a work, a finished art object for exhibition, I came to question why process is so often viewed as subordinate to product/artefact/art object. *Why do we deem it preferable to divorce a thing from its making?* Vice versa. *Why was this collection of objects any less of an 'art object' than one of the paintings scattered upon my desk?*

This concern led me to discover the work of Tracey Emin. I find that *My Bed* sets up many productive tensions between medium and meaning, process and form. That the work comprises of a collection of banal, everyday objects; an accreted mass of ephemera, challenges the gallery frame. This thesis can be seen to extend my practice of process driven art. Here I extrapolate on/instantiate a tension between process and artefact.

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Figure L-1, *Untitled*, Robert Morris, 1967-2008, Photo: © Robert Morris/Mitchell-Innes and Nash, 2018

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Figure M-1, *Untitled (2000)*, Julian Dashper, 2000, Photo: © Julian Dashper/ Te Papa
Tongarewa, 2018



Figure N-1, *Tape Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2014, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Ephemeral Objects

Ephemeral objects interest me. In practice I engage with these forms as aesthetic propositions: a starting point for experimentation. I approach ephemera as a medium, a material. I find it compelling how objects come to mark and be marked by use.



Figure O -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure P -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure Q -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure R -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Process

These art objects are objects. To produce the forms documented here I explored the potential of the material at hand, often amalgamating different mediums. Paint, paper, ink, photographic images and an assortment of everyday objects are involved in these artefacts. As indicated above I often work in a process-driven, iterative manner. I transform a variety of materials via a particular process for aesthetic effect. In the initial phases of this thesis I experimented with dipping objects in house paint. I then moved to a photographic process, creating images of forms I had generated or found. I used a photocopier to produce these photographs. The machine was a Xerox 7120.

Medium/Matter

As noted, my practice traverses a vast range of media. Some of the key materials (and processes) active in this research are discussed below. In this section I reflect upon how these materials have agency in the context of my practice, how they impact the research.

Object

Things, ready-made forms are integral to my practice. I constantly collect objects that pique my interest. This process of collection pivots around aesthetic concerns or experiences I encounter. I tend to iterate on particular concerns (often aspects of colour, line or form) for a period of time. Everyday or domestic objects also often feature in my work.

I am interested in the material potential of objects. The opportunities they afford. As noted, I work in an emergent manner, when working with objects the material qualities of the forms at hand impact my work. I integrate the forms I have collected into my sketching/drawing practice and often transform or combine these forms to generate works. At times, I also combine or transform objects with other mediums: I regularly engage paint, photographic processes and sound for this purpose. The material potential or qualities of the collected forms drive this iterative practice. I sketch with objects/forms to generate, instantiate or arrive at new forms. I enjoy this process - my practice is led by the material potential of the objects at hand and sustained by the material and/or aesthetic potential of the forms that emerge.

Sound

Sound is another medium I regularly engage with. Recording is a core component in and continuous aspect of my practice. I record sound on a regular, if not daily basis - maintaining this habit of field recording is a core facet of my practice. As with objects, I engage sound as medium in my sketching/drawing practice. In much the same manner as detailed in the section on objects above, to describe my way of working with objects, I iterate upon these collected soundscapes or sound objects, exploring there sonic potential to produces works. Again, I work with these sound forms in an iterative,

emergent manner: I combine and transform the recorded/collected sound objects to explore the sonic potential they afford. Throughout the course of this thesis project I have maintained this facet of my practice, my work with sound. Though not explicitly referenced/represented in the final works presented this medium and my field recording practice remains an integral part of my sketching/drawing process.

Paint

Paint is another medium I favour. I enjoy the material and aesthetic potential offered by its liquid state. House paint has been the core sort of paint employed in this research. Here, I approached paint as a readymade. An additional 'found' medium/material/form I could engage to facilitate my emergent, iterative mode of practice. I sourced a selection of discarded, unwanted and excess paints via opportunity shops or trading websites. Over the course of this thesis project, I have used this collection of paint to transform other media/materials and objects at hand. As documented, a series of sketches I produced through dipping objects in paint was integral to the development of the works I have presented for exhibition.

Photography/Photocopy

The works displayed for exhibition are in dialogue with or may be indexed within the medium of photography. Through my exploration of objects-at-hand (see above) I encountered a Xerox 7120 Photocopier in the studio space available to me. As with the other objects, media and forms discussed, I became interested in the material and aesthetic potential of this object. I was particularly excited by the generative, immediate nature of the photocopy. This ultimately photographic process emerged as an additional medium, a key process I could engage to facilitate further practice. I began to experiment with combining this form with other forms, engaging it to transform objects. I engage this medium to amalgamate, or exacerbate the tension between, object, process and image.

As alluded to in the section above, there is a sense that the studio space attains a certain agency in my practice. My interest in the material and aesthetic potential of objects-at-hand is not limited to the materials, mediums or forms I bring into the studio space. Rather, the studio space is figured as active - a physical, material environment that has agency in this making process. As evidenced in my reflections on the role the Xerox 7120 Photocopier plays in my practice, the objects existing in and the particulars of the studio space are made available as mediums or materials. A performative stance towards art practice facilitates, and provides me with the language to articulate this approach to art making. In some ways egalitarian, this stance is a denial of the hierarchy often imposed between objects in a studio space. My reluctance to differentiate between 'art-objects' and 'object-objects', empowers me to incite discussion, to trouble, exacerbate and embrace the tension that exists between materiality and signification within a studio environment.

This thesis project maintains a dialogue with my work entitled *18-06-14* produced in the final year of my undergraduate degree. In many ways a catalyst for this research project, *18-06-14* conveys my desire to work within the space between how things are and how they come to be. This work not only cast or distilled, my studio environment as a work but also was presented in-situ for exhibition. The work; the studio space, is presented in the studio space. As noted, I was interested in both the formal/aesthetic experience of the art object produced and the political action of such a gesture⁷.

Reflecting upon this work, this is a concern I have carried forward through this thesis project, my final exhibition of creative work was again presented in-situ; in the space of its own making. This decision may be seen to extend my earlier desire to challenge the traditional gallery frame: *Why do we so often deem it preferable to divorce a thing from its making?*

Through researching, practicing and articulating my performative stance towards art practice, I have come to position the exhibition space as a framing device. All exhibition spaces are active. The site possesses agency, it may be seen to be a material-discursive practice: to produce, rather than merely host or describe, the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ it involves. My decision to exhibit my works within my studio space may be seen to build upon the politics of this stance; to locate it within and challenge the context of contemporary art practice. I conflate the distinctions often maintained between studio, art object and gallery space. The studio/gallery space is active, seen to produce, rather than merely host or describe, the art object. Furthermore, the studio as an exhibition space challenges us to reconsider the status of the art object: *Does the art object exist as a thing-in-itself or is it a relation; a material-discursive practice?*

⁷ See page 43.

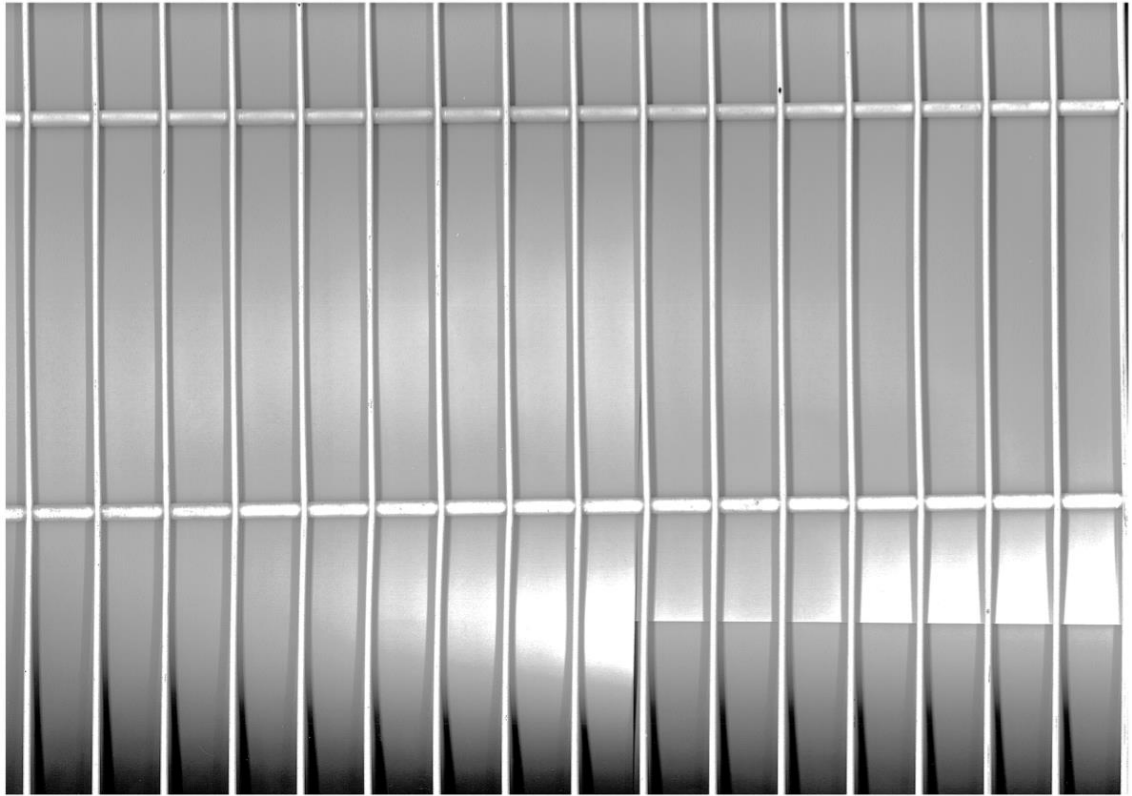


Figure S -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure T -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure U -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure V -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure W -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Two sorts of processes drive my practice: material processes and the processes by which value is ascribed to artists/art objects. The notion of performativity greatly enriches my experience of these two key tenets of my work and the relationship between them. From a performative perspective, art is a material-discursive exchange; that takes place among artist, art object and audience, rather than an act of interpretation. This stance acknowledges the radical contingency of any aesthetic/artistic experience: it is an argument for a rethinking of materiality and signification.

In embracing a performative stance towards art practice, I have become increasingly preoccupied with our collective disavowal of the material, physical dimension of artistic/aesthetic experience. Under the current conventions, (that serve to govern contemporary art practice) all too often we are too busy trying to understand; to make meaning from, our experience to have one (Dashper & Lett, 2010). Given this, the works shown here may be seen to present an alternate perspective, a performative perspective, on the place of matter in art - on *how* things are and *how* they come to be.



Figure X -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure Y -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Decay

Decay has emerged as another central motif in this body of work. Here I have explored the aesthetic potential of this facet of material existence. Many of the works documented here encompass bits of rotting organic matter and/or have been generated through the degradation/disposal of ephemeral objects. This aspect of the making process is manifest in the final works exhibited – these are not polished or static forms.

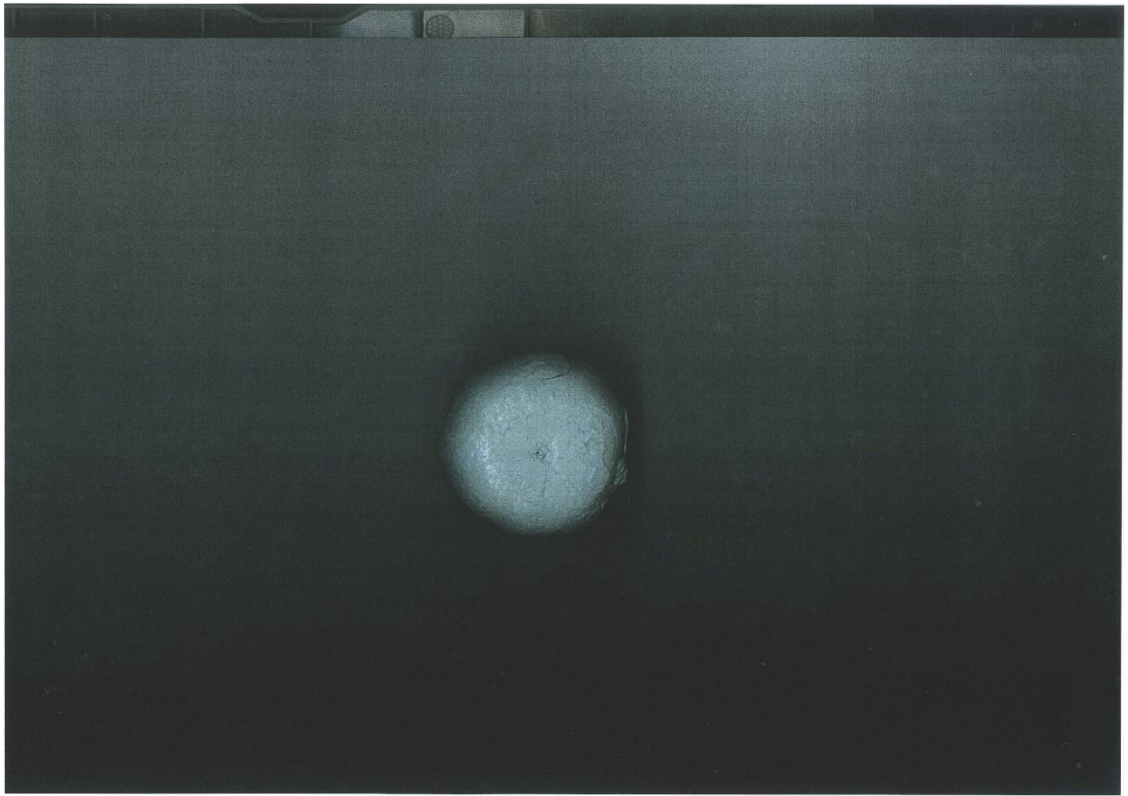


Figure Z -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

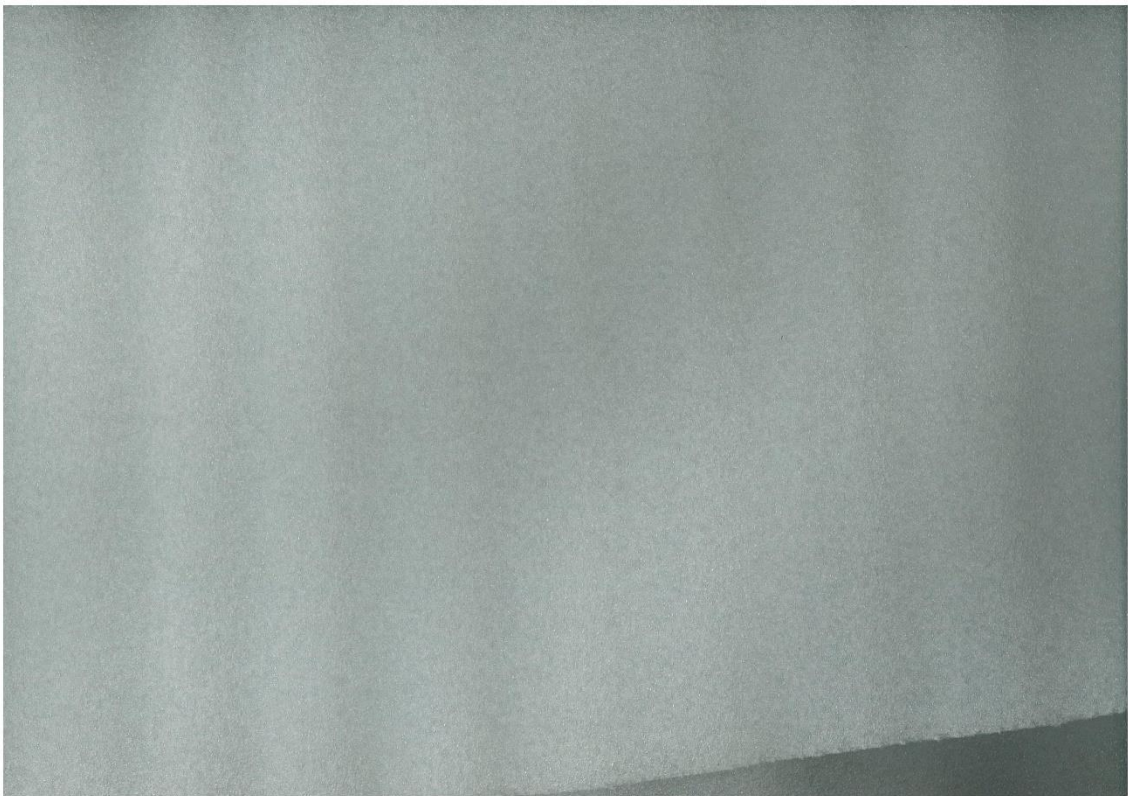


Figure AA -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

Colour

Upon reflection it has become evident that a somewhat consistent colour scheme has emerged in this body of work. A definitive grey/blue hue is imbued across many of the images produced here. This colour may be likened to that of the mould that tends to cover bread when it has been left in the fridge for a week. It may also be seen to reference a certain industrial aesthetic – the colour of paint often used to coat oil heaters, diesel engines and other utilities. However, despite my ruminations on what it may index, this colour scheme is not seen to have any direct symbolic significance or intended to represent anything in particular. It has emerged through iterative process - by chance.

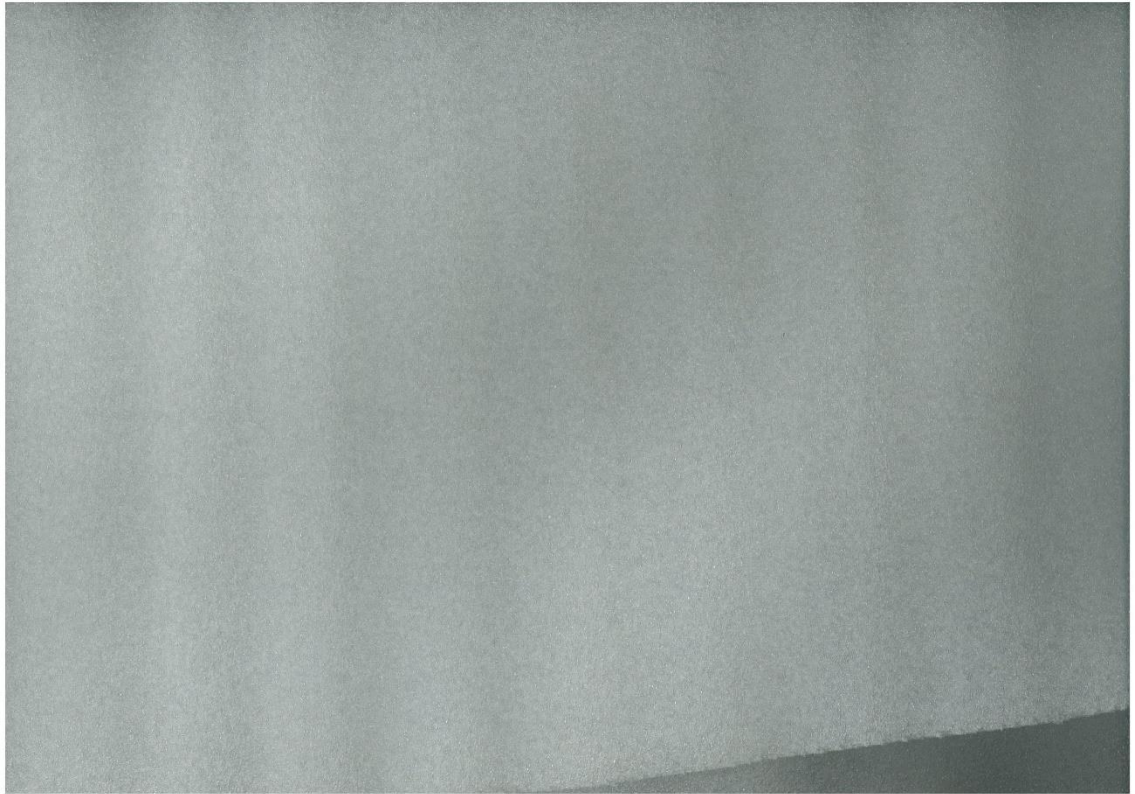


Figure AB -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

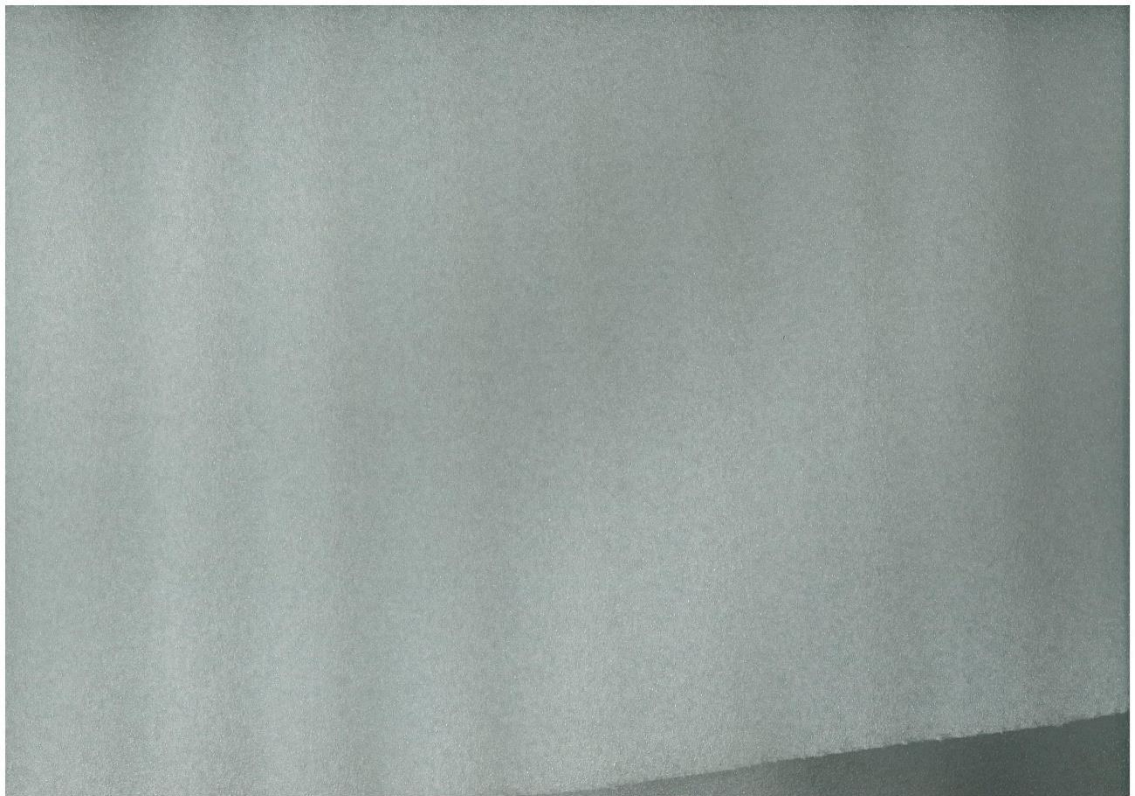


Figure AC -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

I have recently become very interested in the work of Julian Dashper. I find Dashper's notion of abstraction helpful for thinking about, with and through this work. Dashper talked of and practiced abstraction as readymade, a found object (Dashper & Lett, 2010). Given the trajectory of this thesis; its movement from 'loaded, readymade installations' to 'reduced, minimal forms', this notion is helpful for framing the works presented. As contemporary art writer and curator Robert Leonard notes, "Dashper did not see abstraction as something apart, but as a part of the world" (2015),

Here abstraction is presented as given. (Dashper & Lett, 2010, p.73)



Figure AD -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AE -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AF -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AG -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AH -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AI -1, *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Audio Foundation, Auckland
 Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

At the outset of this thesis I was excited by the potential of spending a period of time developing my practice. Through the early iterations of this work Tracey Emin's *My Bed* and the notion of performativity came to act as framing devices for this research. I found the term performativity useful for describing my experience of *My Bed*. At this point, my thesis was driven by my desire to articulate, to explore the way that this work renders the audience as complicit in "... determining the meaning and social value of any cultural product" (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p.2). Judith Butler's work on performativity impacted my thinking. As discussed above, Butler explores how discursive practices may be seen to produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects they involve. For Butler, performativity refers to this "... aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names" (Butler, 1988, p.163; 1994, p. 33). Here, I have engaged Butler's notion to show how *My Bed* may be read as performative; an encounter between artist, art object and audience rather than a static representational form. In doing so I have come to think about art as a discursive practice; a kind of doing that constructs ideas of identity and the social.

From a performative perspective, an artwork can be seen as a period of action: an exchange or negotiation that involves the viewer rather than a passive entity or an object given to be looked at. Butler's assertion that discursive practices produce the subjects they involve led me to reflect on the material consequences/implications of such a claim. If as subjects we are produced through "language, gesture and all manner of symbolic social sign", *how* do discursive practices produce our physical form, our bodies (Butler, 1988, p. 154)? What sort of material reality does Butler's work suggest? As an artist working in a process –driven manner I am interested in the potential of discursive practices as a making process or medium. *How can discursive practices produce/modify material forms?*

My interest in *how* things come to be made through discourse led me to discover the work of Karen Barad. Barad's argument for a posthumanist concept of performativity expanded my practice. Her work spurred me to consider the philosophical and ontological implications of a performative stance towards art practice: *What sort of a relationship does performativity set up between words and things?*

By Barad's account Butler's notion of performativity fails to account for or brushes over the material dimension of experience. While a position such as Butler's, or that held by Amelia Jones, opens up the discursive dimension of meaning production, little is said of the material entities/processes involved. *How might we consider the material dimension of meaning production?* Just as Butler and Jones call for us to acknowledge the performative dimension of subjective experience; the extent that what we see is contingent upon how we look, Barad challenges us to account for the material dimension of aesthetic interpretation. She questions the ontology implied by a performative stance towards art practice concluding that, despite their often-radical intent and success in exposing meaning as contingent, views such as those espoused by Butler and Jones still function to maintain paradigms of representationalist philosophy. In discounting the material dimension of the exchange that takes place between artist, art object and audience, Butler and Jones ultimately frame the activity of viewing art as an act of interpretation rather than a material-discursive experience. Barad suggests that this oversight functions to reinstate a view of art objects as static entities; to reinvok a 'view from nowhere' that positions the viewer as a knowing, neutral observer existing independently of, or at a distance from, the situation at hand:

What compels the belief that we have a direct access to cultural representations and their content that we lack toward the things represented? (Barad, 2003, p.801).

For me, *My Bed* exacerbates the tension between material and discursive practices active in aesthetic experience. This exegesis acts to articulate, to argue for a reading praxis that acknowledges the performative aspects of this work. On beginning this thesis, I was intent upon outlining how *My Bed* may be seen to enact social critique: to expose the viewer as complicit in determining the meaning and social value of this work. In pursuing this objective, I have become aware that this work and a performative stance towards art practice encompasses, not only social critique but a distinct, particular philosophical and ontological position. To quote Barad,

Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real... (Barad, 2003, p.808)

Here, art is not merely a discursive practice, it is a material-discursive exchange; an act or experience negotiated among artist, art object and audience. This exchange is a radically contingent reality – only real to the extent that it is performed.



Figure AJ -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AK -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

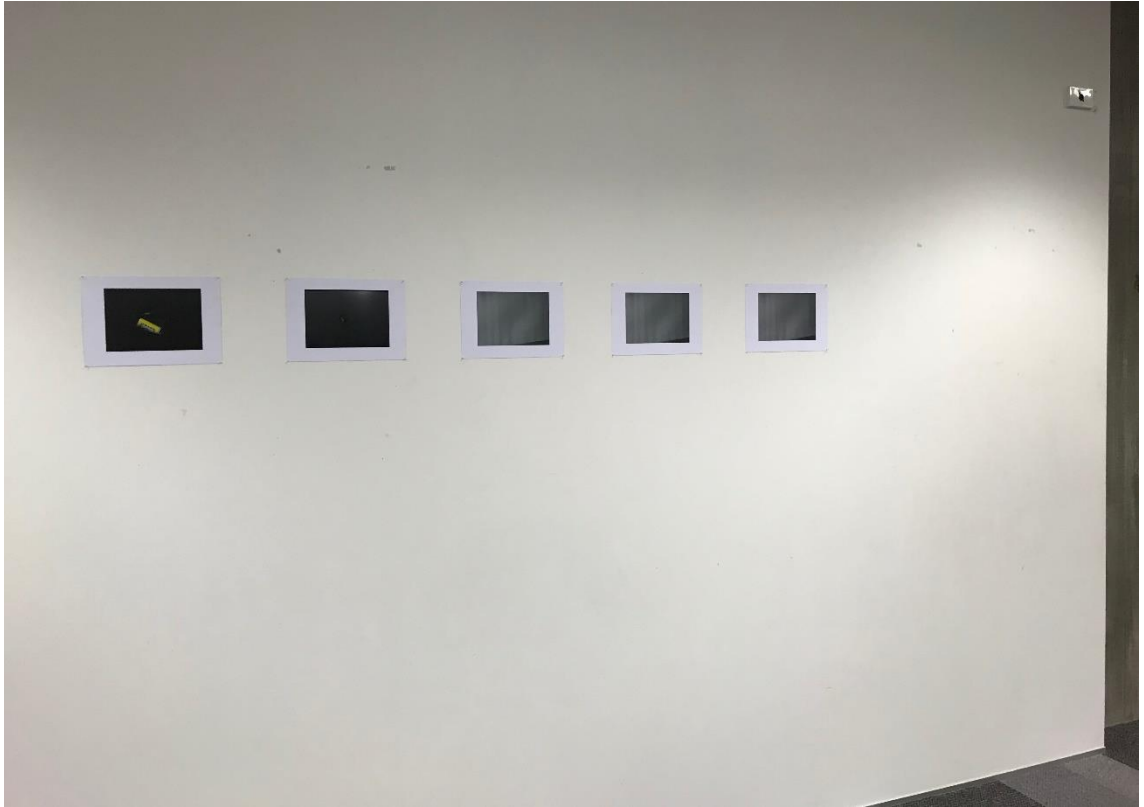


Figure AL -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AM -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AN -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018



Figure AO -1, *Object Studies*, Sarah Loggie, 2018, Colab, AUT, Auckland Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

At the culmination of this thesis project I exhibited my works for examination. I chose to install my works in-situ, within one of the studio spaces at Colab, AUT. I approached this exhibition as an opportunity to experiment *Ask Ma What She Thinks*, with an alternate exhibition format for these works. I presented a refined selection of the images presented earlier at my Audio Foundation show; 2017. On one wall of the large studio space I installed five images. The images were approximately A5 in size, set on A4 paper stock. On the opposite wall I presented a large, AO poster image, this image was at the same scale as those installed at the Audio Foundation show. The studio space is an operational teaching space so provided an alternate context for this show. I enjoyed the effect, both critical and aesthetic, of situating these art objects as just one, or a number of objects, amongst the plethora of things infiltrating the space. This approach may be read as a democratic attitude to form - a disruption of the hierarchy often instantiated between 'art objects' and 'object, objects' in a gallery space.

For me, the blurring of the boundary between art object and everyday thing enacts a doubling of the concerns explored in the works presented. As images/photographs, the series of object studies act to distort everyday forms; the everyday is edged with the object. An off-set depth of field (a mark and feature of the making process; the Xerox 7120 photocopier active in the production of these works) interrupts our reception of these objects, I intend to provoke an aesthetic experience of form: to detract from, disturb, and disavow a representational reading of these works. The emphasis here is on the material dimension of our exchanges with common-place objects.

Installing these works as detailed above has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on how a (semi-)traditional gallery space acts to frame audience experience: the difference between this iteration of these works and my earlier exhibition at Audio Foundation in July 2017. Looking back, I can see how the conventions of a gallery space offer an audience an entry point to the works: the location of the art object is made explicit. Alternatively, the context of the studio space, as an exhibition venue, may be seen to envelope or cloud the works. The audience must work to differentiate the art object amongst a sea of forms.

Conclusion

This body of work emerges out of a moment of discord between my experience of *My Bed*, an art object, and its discursive context. My intent here was to argue for an alternative reading praxis, one that acknowledges the audience as complicit in determining the meaning and social value of this cultural product. For me, *My Bed* is *only real to the extent that it is performed*.

In the initial stages of this research I came to see that my alternative reading praxis could be framed as a performative stance towards art practice. A performative stance (or sensibility) positions aesthetic/artistic experience as a material-discursive exchange, between artist, art object and audience, rather than an act of interpretation. A point of departure, *My Bed* has acted to anchor my research. I have looked to this work as a paradigm, a performative art object that acts to make evident; to draw our attention to, the material-discursive exchange involved in any aesthetic experience.

This exegesis document is presented as a guide. It locates a theoretical, historical, critical and physical context for this work. The literature discussed here, particularly those texts by Judith Butler, Amelia Jones and Karen Barad, has been crucial in forming my understanding of performativity. Here, material-discursive practices (written, spoken and physical communication practices) produce, rather than merely describe, the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ they involve. This critical framework has enabled me to acknowledge, to articulate, how I come to view *My Bed* as a radically reflexive work. Concurrent to this, I have moved to experiment with and analyse performativity within the context of my own art practice. The artefacts presented here (exegesis and art objects) navigate the social, political, philosophical and physical tensions instantiated by my exploration of a performative stance towards art practice.

In the latter part of this exegesis I have begun to reflect upon some of the aesthetic/artistic concerns raised in this work. As noted in chapter four, this period of my practice interrogates the relationship between object and subject, process and form. The art objects I have produced during this time traverse a trajectory from ‘loaded, readymade installations’ to ‘reduced, minimal forms’. This modification in the objects manifested in my practice is an area I intend to explore in further research. I would like

to go on to experiment with the points of congruence between performative art practice and a minimalist sensibility or approach to form.

This thesis appears in two parts: creative work in exhibition: exegesis, practice: praxis. It is an argument for a performative stance towards art practice. A stance that positions aesthetic/artistic experience as a material-discursive exchange rather than an act of interpretation. Here, art objects are *only real to the extent that they are performed*. There is a sense of interplay between materiality and signification. This dynamism between matter and meaning is manifest in the art objects presented; my attention to the status of the art object as an object. *How do we **perform** the material dimension of aesthetic experience?*



Figure AP -1, *Object Study*, Sarah Loggie, 2017, Photo: © Sarah Loggie, 2018

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