

# **Folding and Unfolding: Artmaking as a Process of Interconnection with Material and Immaterial Worlds**

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**Abstract:**

This practice-led research project explores generative, material processes of folding and unfolding in a textile-based art practice. It asks how art can explore the more-than-human interconnections driven by folding-unfolding processes and can express multiplicity. Through an exploration of the Deleuze's writings about the fold in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993), and an analysis of the characteristics of the Baroque and Neo-Baroque styles, the exegesis draws links to a non-hierarchical and non-anthropocentric ontology, which is open to the agency and performativity of matter and materials. It explores art as a "bloc of sensations", aligning the affective quality of artmaking with a practice of listening to materials. The project proposes a methodology of co-creation which allows the materials to "speak" through an attunement to the agency or tendency of materials.

**Statement of Authorship:**

Except where reference is made in the text of the exegesis, this exegesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the exegesis. This exegesis has not been submitted for any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Pamela Dorothy Isaacs, 19 October 2021

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**Acknowledgement of Country**

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which I live, work and study, the Dja Dja Wurrung People. I recognise their continuing connection to the land, waters, mountains and creatures of Djaara Country, and acknowledge that they never ceded sovereignty. I pay my respects all Elders past and present of the Dja Dja Wurrung, and to all First Nations people of this country. I respect their knowledge of how to care for the land and their ancient and ongoing culture and traditions. I express my gratitude for their sharing of this land and my sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing, and I hope that in the future there will be a greater justice for, recognition of, and learning from the Aboriginal peoples in this country. This continent always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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## Introduction

As I stir the creamy mixture of turmeric in water boiling on the stove, I admire its smooth, rich, deep golden yellow. I hope that this will be the colour that will emerge after I have soaked the metres of felt for a day or two. But when dry the colour is uneven, mottled, stronger in some parts with a vibrant deep yellow, and in other parts, pale, barely even lightly golden. I am disappointed, but there is nothing I can do about it. That is how the colour has taken. However, I decide I like the uneven, mottled hues which create a visual texture and an interesting, organic, swirling pattern, vital in its sense of motion. It is at that moment that I realise that I cannot control everything in the course of making. I recognise that I have to acquiesce to the vagaries of the process, and work together with the materials; I have to give them control, and listen to and enable their creative powers, rather than trying to dominate them and force onto them my own flawed and limited vision. This then becomes a defining element of the methodology of my project, allowing things to unfold in their own way.

In my textile based, practice-led research I explore folding and unfolding visually and as a methodology in artmaking, as a way to explore more deep-seated understandings of the world, of life processes and interconnected ecologies. This is not only a methodology, an investigation of the visual potentialities and powers of folding and unfolding fabric, but also an exploration of the implications of folding and unfolding in a broader sense — in the natural world, in bodies, minds and souls or consciousnesses. The fundamental question I ask is: What can an exploration of folding-unfolding contribute to an understanding of the world, of life processes both material and immaterial, and how can I engage with and interrogate the expressive potential of folding-unfolding in artmaking?"

This focus on folding-unfolding has emerged out of an interest in the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze, particularly his philosophical work *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993). Reading this work inspired me to explore processes of folding and unfolding, which, as Deleuze observes, are present in change, growth and evolution in

complexly interconnected and interdependent ecologies. Deleuze's understanding of the fold encompasses fundamental life processes as well as its manifestation in culture and human society. Key expressions or exemplifications of folding-unfolding processes for Gilles Deleuze include entanglement and interconnection driven by both internal and external forces, the production of subjectivity, and the Baroque style.

Through my research I wish to challenge anthropocentric and hierarchical thinking. I investigate how art can explore, through an engagement with folding-unfolding, understandings of the agency of matter and ideas of multiplicity, inter-relationality and interconnection through a practice which is expressive and non-representational, rather than engaging with representation's encoding of anthropocentric and hierarchical relationships. I consider whether art can provide an affectual, embodied experience of connecting, of interconnectedness. I explore ways in which art may express that sense of complex inter-relationality, that multiplicity, that vitality of processes of change and unfolding of potential or becoming, which is so beautifully articulated in Deleuze's writings. I engage with the very material nature of art practice, exploring how it can become expressive of the immaterial, the sensed and felt, intimating a realm of resonating, vibrant life beyond a human, rational, controlling, exploitative way of being in the world.

In this exegesis I trace ways in which the concept of the fold has brought about a fundamental shift in the way I work with materials and has enabled a far-reaching reassessment of my relationship with matter and the non-human world. My investigations explore the possibilities of comprehending and relating to the non-human world in a way that is based on a respect for and acknowledgement of the lively presence and communicative powers of all matter.

These considerations and concerns have emerged from a nebulous, hinted-at sense of possibility as I gather together thoughts and ideas into relationships of connection and association. The mode of writing I employ is not linear in its progression and does not lead to one encompassing conclusion, but is more Baroque in its cumulative

meanderings<sup>1</sup>. Through the range of my discussions, I wish to build a picture of the complex of ideas, thoughts, feelings, sensations and intimations that lead and inform my making and which I collect into a conceptual cluster.

My choice of material — cloth and stitching with yarn, printing onto fabric — is in some ways determined by the subject of my research project — the fold. I have worked sculpturally with prints on paper in the past, however I feel that fabric can potentially provide greater scope for exploring folding-unfolding, hence the predominance of its use in my project. I feel that the use of textiles in artmaking has great potential in terms of its resonance as an everyday material, together with its capacity to be given new meanings and a rich expressivity through a completely different, “impractical” application in art. Working with fabric and thread is a way of thinking with my hands. Their familiarity draws on both personal histories and associations as well as broader, social or gendered histories and associations, and the making process develops ways of being, which are attuned to materials.

Reading Deleuze’s, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* speaks to my imagination, particularly the descriptions of the folds of matter. Deleuze’s exploration of folding-unfolding in relation to the Baroque style has opened my eyes to the vitality and multiplicitous, expressive potential of the Baroque/Neo-Baroque. The sensuous, dynamic quality of the Baroque, its visually haptic impact, is something I draw on in my art, and it has a profound influence on my making. The Baroque, I argue, has the power to express, in a non-hierarchical way, the complex multiplicities, the dynamism of an ever-changing world, its folding and unfolding. There are three primary aspects which I wish to explore through my research: the fold or processes of folding and unfolding; the traits of the Baroque; and the power of materials, my engagement with materiality and the expressive potential of art itself. I devote a chapter of the exegesis to each of these areas of inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> A more circular, or circum-ambulating methodology or structure is part of my tactic of countering an anthropocentric, Cartesian conception of “rationality”.

In Chapter 1, I explore Deleuze's concept of the fold, the subtle meanings underpinning this concept, including its engagement with processes of change, processes which bring the virtual, the potential into becoming and transitional being. I examine folding-unfolding in the works of some artists discussed by Deleuze in *The Fold*, including Jackson Pollock and Robert Morris. Deleuze uses these artists' work to think through folding-unfolding as a response to forces of compression and extension, elasticity and plasticity in the production of a Baroque style. I then relate this to the exploration in my own practical research and making of the expressive potential of folding-unfolding.

In Chapter 2, I turn to a more detailed examination of the Baroque spirit, as elaborated by Deleuze in *The Fold*, as well as contemporary texts on the Neo-Baroque by a range of scholars including Angela Ndalians, Omar Calabrese and Kelly Wacker. I identify key qualities of the Baroque from these texts, and apply them to an examination of a sculptural work by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, an Italian artist of the historical Baroque, and to the work of contemporary Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto. I also explore connections between my own work and the Baroque, looking at its underpinning ethos and its influences on my making through an inner attraction to its sense of motion, vitality, extravagance, and its engagement with multiplicity.

In Chapter 3, I consider the importance of materiality in my artmaking, including a discussion of the associations and personal connections with my materials. I discuss the pivotal turn in my work towards developing methodologies that enable me to work *together* with materials to create artworks. This has involved a greater consideration of the affective nature of all materiality and the potential of a more-than-human agency in art making. I discuss my practice of "listening to materials", and my attempts to give voice to the materials themselves through co-creation and the affective nature of the way I work together with materials to co-create artworks. In these discussions I investigate Deleuze's understandings of sensation and affect, examining ways in which these are intensified in the work of art. I also examine the fibre-based *Quipu* works of Cecilia Vicuña, discussing the deep connections she draws to history, politics and the ethical, and her feelings for the non-human world imbued in her work.

The final body of work I have produced reveals an explorative investigation of the expressive potential of folding-unfolding processes and an engagement with materials which has allowed for an increasing relinquishment of control to the materials themselves. The fold itself has an innate Baroque quality and I have increasingly allowed this to flow into my artworks.

Through the process of my art-making I wish to develop a practice that acts respectfully towards all matter as lively beings in the world. I hope to enable the reverberation of such an ethos through the expressivity of the materials and the artworks themselves. I wish to engender sensations and feelings that allow an openness to and valuing of materials and their affective potential in art. Perhaps this can communicate the need on the part of humans for an altered relationship to the non-human world, a relationship which is non-hierarchical and non-anthropocentric, and so needed at this time. This is an ambitious aim, and I hope my project can play its own modest role in such a seismic shift, for I can attest that the effects of my research have been significant in reorienting my own thinking and making.

## Chapter 1: Folding-Unfolding

If there is one constant in the world it is the constant of change. In this world of flux, processes of folding and unfolding are integral to the multifarious workings and multitudinous matter and life forms of the planet. At the core the fold is activity and a process of change— as a process of folding-unfolding — rather than the representation of folds and folding. In his philosophical work *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze applies this process to all manner of flows, forms, phenomena, structures, events and developments occurring in the world. Folds are there in waves and wave-forms; they are present in the breathing (the expansion/unfolding and contraction/folding of the lungs), in the beating of the heart, the pulsations of the arteries and digestive system. Folding-unfolding can be found in the structure and functioning of the brain and in processes of thinking. These processes are present in both growth and decay — the unfolding of the seed into a continually unfolding plant, which when it reaches its zenith, refolds back into the earth to provide nutrients for new unfoldings in a continuous cycle. The growth of many plants seems to follow along a fold line where pleated halves of seed pods open out to enable growth and distribution, a kind of unfurling of potential. Folding and unfolding are involved in human learning and the development of the subject, where suffering may cause a contraction, an introspection, followed by an evolution of the inner being. Processes of folding and unfolding are at the heart of many geological formations. In weather systems there is the folding and unfolding of clouds as they swirl in the folds of the winds. The waxing and waning of the moon, the flux of the seasons can be seen as wave-like processes of flow involving unfolding and folding. The wings of birds unfold for flight and fold again upon landing. The biological process in living beings of moving, walking, jumping is also one of unfolding and folding of muscles, sinews, skin. All of these phenomena speak of waves of expansion and contraction or intensification, unfurling and furling, unfolding and folding.

In this project I expand these ideas into processes of artmaking, reflecting upon human relationships to the world in all their intricacies, complexities and interdependence. I ask: how can artworks express such notions of complex interconnectedness. Can

artworks speak to this intricacy, the hidden complex non-human worlds, the unseen and unknown interconnections linking matter and life forms? Can artworks express this immanent complexity, which extends beyond prior thought or conception?

Arriving at alternative ways of viewing the world — rather than through the prism of western thought, with its hierarchic understandings of human superiority, its gendered, racialized and class-based hegemonic world view, its notions of universality and transcendence — may be able to contribute to a shift in thinking and behaviour towards a greater respect for and consideration of the non-human and natural world of which we are a part. For without such a shift it seems that the future of the entire planet and its complex ecosystems, its life-sustaining capacity will be further endangered. The philosophical writings of Deleuze, alone and in collaboration with Guattari, and those of Leibniz channelled through Deleuze, have much to contribute to such a shift in thinking. Translator of *The Fold*, Tom Conley, suggests that Leibniz is “a philosopher of habitat and ecology” with his “extraordinarily delicate filigree of concepts, winding through organic and inorganic worlds” (Deleuze 1993, p. xiii). Conley emphasises the challenge posed by both Leibniz and Deleuze to hierarchical thinking:

That humans stand as triumphant subjects among inert objects no longer holds. They no longer own things as they had in the world of possessive individualism. Now it must be asked how humans select and designate what they call ‘living’ or ‘inert’. If organic life cannot be easily demarcated from inorganic matter, it behoves subjects to look at all matter from a different angle. Leibniz points toward an ethics that appends the science of ecology. In his turn, Deleuze suggests that an at once abstract and tactile sense of matter must figure at the crux of any social practice. (Deleuze 1993, xiv)

Like Leibniz, Deleuze’s is a philosophy of multiplicitous interconnections, interrelationships, inter-twinings, with repeating and divergent generative structures, a philosophy which enfolds life-affirming factors of genesis, creativity and evolution, capturing the complexity of the world. Thus, the concept of folds and folding as characteristic of connectivity and interconnectedness can be instrumental in opening up pathways to a more ecological world view.

Drawing on Leibniz's concept of the monad, Deleuze sees monadic perception as an infinite number of points of view all of which are infinitely folded. He states that, "it is the soul that has folds, that is full of folds" (Deleuze ND, p. 27). Processes of folding-unfolding occur not only in the external world but also in the internal being, mind or consciousness. Thinking is folding-unfolding and the potential of thinking is infinite. However, Deleuze considers the notion of the soul as not confined only to humans — "there are souls everywhere in matter" (Deleuze ND, p. 10) — and as matter unfolds so also does the soul. Deleuze notes that in all forms of organic life there is a consciousness which perceives, feels and thinks according to its nature: "when an organism is called to unfold its own parts, its animal or sensitive soul is opened onto an entire theatre, where it perceives and feels in accordance with its own unity, independently of its organism, yet inseparable from it" (Deleuze ND, p. 10). The two levels of matter and soul are seen by Deleuze as present in everything, infinitely interconnected and enfolding infinite potential. Such an understanding necessitates a greater respect for the "soul" or consciousness in every aspect of animate and non-animate life.

Taking a lead from Deleuze's practice of exploring other philosophers' and artists' ideas and concepts and rebuilding them for his own use, I think with Deleuze's concept of "the fold" in my research and making. I draw on aspects of his writings which fascinate me, which push me towards a speculative engagement with his ideas and an experimental exploration of these concepts through my artmaking. There are three key aspects of the Deleuzian fold which relate most directly to my artmaking processes. These are ideas of firstly interconnection and multiplicity involving texture (smoothness or striation) and states of fluidity or solidity; secondly the fold as expression of the virtual, the operation of forces to create potential and becoming; and thirdly the political and ethical dimensions of the fold. I will explore each of these aspects which will then be unpacked further in my analysis of the work of a number of artists as well as my own practice. It is however necessary to first give a general, and by no means exhaustive, introduction to Deleuze's understanding of the fold.

*A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), written together with Felix Guattari and prior to *The Fold* (1993), develops or explicates a complex set of ideas envisioning the world as made up of ubiquitous forms and processes that draw on multiplicities of potential, underpinned by a connectivity made up of flows of matter. Flows range from quasi-chaos at the chaotic, unstable end of a spectrum to order and stasis at the other end. Their solidification is to a greater or lesser extent governed by tendencies towards, or degrees of, sedimentation into the “molar”, which involve stratification, territorialisation, coding and striation of texture. The other end moves towards the molecular, towards deterritorialization, decoding, smoothness and “lines of flight”. This is not a binary system, but one whose interconnections and processes of becoming vary according to degrees of fluidity, intensification or solidity and one which follows an additive rather than dualistic, or oppositional, hierarchical logic. Aspects of multiplicity and interconnectedness include not only the rhizome or rhizomatic structures of the assemblage with their non-hierarchical interconnections, but also the stratum and the fold with their interior and exterior connections becoming complexly multiplied and interchangeable. (Parr 2010, Radomska 2016, Grosz 2008, Van Tuinen 2009).

Deleuze extends this notion of the fold further in his monograph, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Deleuze associates the fold with the Baroque, not as a historical period in art, but as a style which can contribute to understanding the fold and processes of folding. Deleuze also links the concept of the fold to the philosophical work of Leibniz and his concept of the monad. For Deleuze, folding and unfolding are aspects of multiplicity and becoming, of territorialization and deterritorialization, of flow and flux that go on to infinity. Properties that Deleuze singles out in the third chapter of *The Fold* as important to the Baroque nature of the fold are: “expressive matter”, the inside and the outside, the two levels of matter and soul or the high and the low, the unfold, texture (“passive forces or the resistance of the material, the texture” [Deleuze ND, p. 54]), and the paradigm or model such as the fold of fabric in the Baroque, with simple and composite folds and the variable curve. I will examine the concept of the Baroque in more detail in the second chapter of this exegesis, exploring both the historical Baroque and contemporary manifestations of its style. Below I discuss some of the implications of the fold for art in relation to the abovementioned key aspects.

## Interconnection and Multiplicity Creating Texture

At the heart of Deleuze's concept of the fold are ideas of connectivity and multiplicity. For Deleuze the multiple is not only manifold, that is with many parts, but is also complexly structured or "folded in many ways" (Deleuze ND, p. 1). Deleuze observes a pleating or coiling in matter and a folding in the soul or subject (the Leibnizian monad<sup>2</sup>), linking these to the "operative function" or "trait" of the Baroque to "ceaselessly produce folds" (Ibid):

The characteristic of the Baroque is the fold that goes on to infinity. And from the beginning it differentiates them along two lines, according to two infinities, as if the infinite had two levels: the coils [or pleats] of matter, and the folds of the soul. (Deleuze ND, p. 227)<sup>3</sup>

Likening this folding-unfolding to the labyrinth as a multiple containing many folds, Deleuze speaks of labyrinthine forms on both the level of matter and also on the level of the "soul". There is "a communication between the two levels, between the two labyrinths, between the pleats of matter and the folds of the soul" (Deleuze ND, p. 3). Deleuze posits the fold as a site of potentially infinite connectivity and relatedness, with an interchangeability of inside and outside through folding. The Baroque curvilinear line of the fold, unfurling "all the way to infinity" is contrasted by Deleuze with the "rectilinear trajectories" of Cartesian thinking, while the "labyrinth of freedom in the soul" is opposed to a Cartesian "rectitude of the soul" (Deleuze ND, p. 2). The split between mind and body, as articulated in the work of Descartes, has resulted in the creation of hierarchies and the imposition of a sense of order and rigid morality on what is essentially a world in flux. This opposition to the dominance of Cartesian discourse and ideas in western thinking underpins the political aspect of Deleuze's thinking which will be explored later in this chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze describes the monad or the soul/subject as a unity enveloping a multiplicity "in the manner of a series" (Deleuze ND, p. 28). The world is then an infinite series "enveloped by an infinity of individuated souls each of which retains its own irreducible point of view" (Ibid)

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze uses both pleats and coils to describe matter's folds and this may be due to problems for the translator in finding an equivalent word in English.

Deleuze provides myriad examples of processes of folding and unfolding, material and incorporeal, microscopic and macroscopic, inorganic and organic, geological and biological: “One goes from matters to manners, from soils and terrains to habitats and salons...” (Deleuze ND, p. 53). In the words of interdisciplinary academic Angelika Seppi, “the fold extends itself, from philosophy to mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry, from the arts to art history, and so on” (Seppi 2016, p. 2). Deleuze does however make a clear distinction between folding in matter and in the soul, mind or subject: “Folds of matter under the condition of exteriority; and the folds in the soul, under the condition of closure.” (Deleuze ND, p. 53). Art theorist Simon O’Sullivan observes “relationships of capture” involved in the enfolding of “smaller and smaller parts” in the Baroque conception of matter (O’Sullivan 2005, p. 123).

Texture is an intrinsic characteristic of folding-unfolding, with densely folded matter creating a highly textured surface, while processes of unfolding bring with them smoother surfaces. Deleuze states that, “as a general rule the way a material is folded is what constitutes texture” (Deleuze ND, p. 36). The “falls and rises” and the resulting striations evoke the complexity of lines of interrelationship. Such a notion of texture is made manifest in abstract art in that:

The Baroque is the abstract art par excellence: on the lower floor, flush with the ground, close at hand, it comprehends the textures of matter (the great modern Baroque painters, from Paul Klee to Fautrier, Dubuffet, Bettencourt ...). But abstraction is not the negation of form: it posits form as folded, existing only as a "mental landscape" in the soul or the head, up above: hence it also comprehends the immaterial folds. (Ibid, p. 53)

Abstraction thus traces the folds of matter and the soul suggesting a complexity of interconnection. This can be seen particularly in the work of Jackson Pollock and Deleuze comments at some length on his work in *The Fold*. He notes a “line with an infinite inflection, covering an entire surface” (Ibid, p. 32) in the works of Pollock. He is referring here to Pollock’s performatively curved and squiggly drips and splatters of paint which are layered over and over, almost infinitely, to create a densely textured surface and an interweaving of colour. Surface, texture, colour and line speak in folds, in foldings and unfoldings, intensities and flows, creating the all-over fold or “unity of the

arts as performance” in “modern or abstract art” (Ibid, p. 169). Art historian Rosalind Krauss considers the complexly interwoven lines of paint as a clear expression of horizontality in Pollock’s work as challenging or “resisting” the normative focus on the vertical, and hence the anthropocentric, in art of the time:

The power of Pollock’s mark as index meant that it continued to bear witness to the horizontal’s resistance to the vertical and that it was the *material* condition of this testimony — the oily, scabby, shiny, ropey qualities of the self-evidently horizontal mark... (Bois and Krauss 1997, 97)

The horizontality of abstraction is “flush with the ground”, and “comprehends the textures of matter” (Ibid, p. 97). It provides a non-hierarchical, non-transcendent view of the world.

*Blue Poles* (1952) is an example of a detailed mass of lines creating an interconnected surface, expressive of multiplicity, dynamism and fluidity, with a network of splashes of colour and finer lines of paint curling and flowing in all directions in “lines of flight”.

<<https://bluepoles.nga.gov.au/artwork/blue-poles/>>

Figure 1: Jackson Pollock *Blue Poles*, 1953, oil, enamel, aluminium paint, glass on canvas, held at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra © Pollock-Krasner Foundation. Licenced by ARS/Copyright Agency

The black underpainting highlights the profusion of lines, while splashes of colour push forward, developing clusters of solidification only to escape in fluid tendrils in an intermingling of figure and ground. The surface texture itself is undulating with thick layers of paint, shards of broken glass, even shoeprints. The colours are intense reds, oranges and yellows, with a network of fine white lines forming a shimmering layer, and it all seems to vibrate with an energy of matter which Deleuze attributes to their

distribution “according to the concavity and convexity of the rays of light” (Deleuze ND, p. 55). The texture of interlacing colours operates as a meshwork of layers, for as Deleuze states, “texture depends not on the parts themselves, but on the strata that determine their ‘cohesion’” (Deleuze ND p. 56).

The poles themselves emerge from the mass of folding-unfolding figure and ground. The eyes adjust to the vibrant complex of lines and shapes to discern the almost parallel, dynamic movement of the poles, as they point at similar angles towards the edge of the canvas. The heavy Prussian blue of their gnarled lines emphasises by contrast the interconnections of the colours behind them, while the eye, at closer inspection, sinks into the hollows and vortices, discerning layer upon layer, finding new depths behind other depths in the rich texture. The dynamism of the poles creates a kind of folding-unfolding, where the dark lines recede, become deep hollows, and the fabric of the painted surface seems to curve or swell forward. Then viewed again the poles step forward and the textured surface of the rest of the canvas recedes into the background in a visual interplay of foreground and background.

Pollock’s work speaks to the Deleuzian concept of the Baroque fold. The folding-unfolding of matter (of surface texture and as visual texture, of the body in the making) connects also to the folding-unfolding of the mind in conscious and unconscious decisions about colour, line or placement. Pollock’s paintings unfold as a memory or trace of the action or event of the folding-unfolding in the making of the work and as an expression of human interactivity with the material.

My own works, particularly the printed lengths of cloth, are underpinned by the notion of folds as multiplicity and evoke a texture of interconnectedness. Not merely depicting an image of dynamic folds and flows, they encapsulate the active processes of folding of both matter and the body in their making. The folding and scrunching of the fabric in the construction of the collagraph plate moves beyond the merely representational, recording the action of folding and gluing the cloth and other materials to the substrate of the plate. The layers on the plate suggest areas of flow and sedimentation. Their form and flowing movement together with the print itself all record the actions of the

body as I bend over the plate, apply the glue, attach the various materials and layers and smooth them into the glue, preparing them for the application of the shellac varnish, and the subsequent inking-up. In the printing process my body is folded over the plate, which lies on the floor, whilst I rub the cloth placed over the plate, encouraging it to take up the ink. I reink the plate with the roller and reprint on a new area, repeating the process until the full extent of the cloth is printed. The printed fabric itself holds a trace of this action. As I print it undergoes a transformation, an emergence whose full potential outcome is unknown to me, an outcome which unfolds without my conscious control.



Figure 2: Pamela Isaacs *Flows*, 2020-21, photo Ian Hill, exhibited at Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021

The print is on taffeta, whose surface has little texture, yet the print itself comprises a visually textured complex of flows, stratifications, territorializations and deterritorializations, forms of folding and unfolding present in matter. A central fluid structure is accompanied by more solidified forms and textures in a meshwork of detail and patterning, while the repeated print is never completely the same. Under conditions of display, the fabric itself can be folded, pleated or gathered. Numerous sheets or layers of fabric can also fold into each other to create multiple relationships of folds flowing into folds, as they hang on display.

Deleuze states that “multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organisation belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity to form a system” (Deleuze 1994, p.182). This conceives of folding-unfolding processes as systems of fluid, multiple interconnections and interrelationships inherent in matter, human and non-human life, connections which are inextricably complex, without transcendent order or unity. This can be seen in the work of Jackson Pollock with his mesh-like patterning of the drips and swirls of the multiple. In my printed works on cloth there is an analogous dynamic interplay of flows and solidifications in the patterns created by the textures on the plate, repeating in rhythmic fluidity. The printing process has the possibility to continue endlessly, limited only by the length of the fabric, a potential infinity of flow. Evinced in the horizontality of the printing process on fabric is dynamic, gestural movement and unfolding flow.

### **The Fold as Expression of the Virtual, Potential, Becoming**

Embedded within Deleuze’s concept of the fold are ideas of change, growth and becoming, together with the hidden, enfolded virtual, with its still-to-unfold, multiple potentialities. In processes of folding there develop “caverns”, invaginations, hidden from view, the between-folds, “an internalization of the exterior, an invagination of the outside” (Deleuze ND, p. 7) “always another cave inside each cave” (Ibid, p. 3). This is a fractal-like repetition in endlessly reducing size. The enfolding caused by the fold is an envelopment of potential: “what is folded is the included, the inherent. One might say that what is folded is only virtual and only exists actually in an envelope, in something

that envelops it” (Ibid, p. 26). Philosopher Sjoerd Van Tuinen describes the fold as part of a “general topology of Being” with the fold as potentially “expressive of forces that upset and destabilize us and that form the vital matrix for ever new events” (Van Tuinen 2009, 155). It is this hidden potential, this unfolding of the virtual which gives an energy and vitality to Deleuze’s concept of the fold. It suggests the presence of infinite, yet unrealized potential hidden in all matter and life forms, and it prizes processes of becoming which are constantly occurring. Folding-unfolding thus creates infinitely multiple relationships between things and beings and expresses unlimited potential. There is a field of unrealized potential enfolded in everything and from which becoming emerges.

For Deleuze, folding and unfolding are parallel developments, as “unfolding is [...] not the opposite of folding, but follows the fold until it reaches another fold” (Deleuze ND, p. 4). According to Deleuze, forces are what moves the fold into the unfold and vice versa. Material and machinic forces are at work constantly to create novelty, movement, processes of change and life itself <sup>4</sup>. Deleuze notes the elemental forces of fire, water and wind in geological processes, however he enumerates further forces as those characterised by compression, extension, intensification, cohesion, stretching, plasticity and elasticity, as well as forces of involved in difference and repetition (explored in detail in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*). For Deleuze these forces operate in life processes, in genesis, development, evolution, decay and transformation: “in Leibniz the curvature of the universe is prolonged in three other fundamental notions: the fluidity of matter, the elasticity of bodies, and the spring as a mechanism” (Deleuze ND, p. 3). Embedded in these processes, and evidence of the operation of these forces, are manifestations of folding and unfolding, not only in matter, but also in the soul or subject: “The fold is Power. [...] a power, that is the condition of variation.

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<sup>4</sup> “Generally, ... ‘force’ means *any* capacity to produce change or ‘becoming’, whether this capacity and its products are physical, psychological, mystical, artistic, philosophical, conceptual, social, economic, legal or whatever. All of reality is an expression and consequence of interactions between forces, with each interaction revealed as an ‘event’ (in Deleuze’s specific sense of the term).” (Stagoll 2010, p. 111). Philosopher Brian Massumi describes force as “infraempirical”. He states that, “no scientist has ever observed a force. Not even Newton saw gravity. Only force-effects are observable. ... A “force” is the set of invisible, untouchable, self-renewing conditions according to which certain effects can habitually be expected to appear” (Massumi 2002, p. 160).

Power itself is act, an act of the fold.” (Ibid, p.22). The fold as “Power”, or force implies the potential of change, growth, “variation” inherent in all matter and being. More than literal folding, it is essentially process and *modus operandi* rather than form, with undulating, vibratory power embedded within life itself.

Forces are both extensive and intensive, organic and inorganic. Deleuze sees organic folds as complex forms of genesis and metamorphosis:

Folding-unfolding no longer means simply tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution. The organism is defined by its capacity to fold its own parts to infinity, and unfold them, not to infinity, but to the degree of development assigned to the species. (Deleuze ND, p.7)

Folding is a self-generating process intrinsic to the organism and it “envelops an interior site” containing other species of organisms, which in their turn contain further organisms. The organic fold is “composite”, “mediated by an internal milieu” (Ibid, p. 8). In contrast, Deleuze sees the inorganic fold as “simple and direct” based on repetition together with difference: “it is the inorganic that repeats itself, is repeated — in its difference from the next dimension...” (Ibid, p. 8). Yet difference itself can be seen as a kind of force of mutation driving change, growth and unfolding of potential.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze talks of dynamic and static forces of firstly “repetition of the same” and secondly of difference, in the “heterogeneity of an a-presentation”:

One [repetition] is negative, occurring by default in the concept; the other [difference] affirmative, occurring by excess in the Idea. .... One is static, the other dynamic. .... One is extensive, the other intensive. One is ordinary, the other distinctive and singular..... One is revolving, the other evolving. One involves equality, commensurability and symmetry; the other is grounded in inequality, incommensurability and dissymmetry. (Deleuze 1994, p. 24)

It is clear here that for Deleuze the generative power of difference is preferable to the more static, unchanging repetition especially on a political level. The implications of these forces for my understanding of the fold in art, and in the

political/social/environmental ideas which I have drawn from Deleuze and explore in my art, will be further discussed, however it is important to conceive of these forces, particularly that of difference, as drivers of change, development and unfolding.

Two artists whose works are expressive of the forces and processes involved in folding and unfolding are Simon Hantaï and Robert Morris. Deleuze engages in detail with the paintings of Hantaï, observing a movement away from an early, more representational mode: “Hantaï begins by representing the fold — tubular and swarming— but soon he folds the canvas or paper” (Deleuze ND, p.53). Deleuze notes here a methodological change towards actual processes of folding canvas or paper, before their exposed surfaces are painted, unfolded and dried, then refolded and painted a number of times. Elastic and compressive forces are thereby indelibly recorded on the canvas. Most of Hantaï’s folded works have a white gesso ground which is left to speak as a background visible through gaps in the colour, or which moves forward to engage in an active interplay between painted surface and ground:

Sometimes the surface is locally or irregularly folded, and the external sides of the open fold are painted, so that the stretching, spreading and unfolding cause the fields of colour and the zones of white to alternate, each modulating the other. [...] Sometimes the colour is made to vibrate in the folds of matter; sometimes the light is made to vibrate in the folds of an immaterial surface. ... The painted and the non-painted are not distributed like a form and background, but rather like the full and the void in a reciprocal becoming. (Ibid, p. 53)

Here Deleuze aligns Hantaï’s work with the fold’s sense of potentiality and becoming where “the full”, the larger blocks of colour, interacts with the white ground to emerge or recede, press forward into a solidity or recede into an emptiness. Hantaï’s method of folding is seen by art historian Paul Rodgers as the canvas becoming a “participant” in the process. Rodgers argues that:

Rather than being a passive surface onto which the artist projected an energetic, unconscious drive, as in Pollock’s case, the canvas becomes a participant with the artist in making the painting. The canvas begins to move and take on a life of its own. (Rodgers 2017, 145)

This dynamism of relation between artist, canvas and paint can be seen in Hantai's painting *Blanc* (1974) (Figure 3). The painted sections reveal through their interspersed blocks of colour the connections which held them together in the folded state, with their potential concentrated in intensive form, and released in the unfolding to create new connections, building together a kind of all-over fold. Painted areas and white negative space come together to express complexity, interconnection and becoming. Compression and release are recorded as active, dynamic forces driving creation. Even in the single colour works, such as *Étude* (1969) (Figure 4), reveal a dynamic interchange between canvas and paint where background and foreground are indistinguishable in the vital play of shape, colour and visual texture:

< <https://www.parisselectbook.com/en/simon-hantai-at-centre-pompidou/> >

Figure 3: Simon Hantai *Blanc*, 1974, acrylic paint on canvas, 205x182 cm, Larock-Granoff collection © Adagp, Paris 2013.

<<https://www.artforum.com/print/201208/molly-warnock-on-simon-hantai-s-etude-1969-34521#>>

Figure 4 Simon Hantai *Étude*, 1969, oil on canvas, 108 1/4 x 93 3/4". From the series "Étude," 1968–72. (Warnock 2021b)

Art historian Molly Warnock observes a kind of automatism in Hantai's process, emphasising a "procedural blindness" in their making, a "mark of something beyond the self, beyond one's intentions", more of an engagement with the "material contingencies of Hantai's process" (Warnock 2012a). Traces of the process are evident in the "borders" between paint and gesso, in the "longer and shorter drips that spill from the former into the latter", and in the "ridges and irregular pools of red paint that had previously marked depressions and now protrude slightly" from the stretched canvas. The fine lines or cracks in the paint or gesso surface act as "a kind of negative map" of the areas hidden from the paint by folding (Warnock 2012a). These effects are a result of Hantai's assigning control to a process, a visual record of his folding methodology.

Hantai's is a process of engagement with the tactility of materials and the dynamic physical activity of folding and unfolding, one where the actions of the body are left as marks over the whole canvas. The process disrupts the traditional figure-ground relations of verticality, and in its all-over fold exemplifies and actualises the workings of generative forces and processes of becoming.

Robert Morris's felt works also employ folding as a methodology. These works combine the plastic and fluid forces of materials with the compressive ones of gravity to create an uncontrolled mass of folds of felt. Morris' process involves cutting flat sheets of felt in lines which, once hung, lose any sense of organisation and become a conglomeration of curves, curls and irregular gaps. Art historian Maurice Berger considers the felt works as challenging "the hegemony of the formalist art object" (Berger 1989, 19); Deleuze sees them as a "confrontation with the Baroque" (Deleuze ND, p. 160), while Rosalind Krauss suggests that an antagonism to logical structure lies at the heart of Morris's felt sculptures. Krauss notes a logical coherence of cut pattern on flat plane when the felt is stretched out horizontally, prior to hanging. Yet once hung "gravity would pull apart their surfaces into gaps of disturbing irregularity" where the "gaps would become the index of the horizontal vector" (Bois and Krauss 1997, p.98), with the vertical force of gravity opposing and disrupting this horizontal coherence.



Figure 5: Robert Morris Untitled, 1967, MOMA.

The material is thick industrial felt in a nondescript grey or brown, and for the construction of one of his felt pieces (*Felt Piece* 1968) Morris even removed the hand and mind of the artist in the cutting process, giving written instructions for students to cut the felt sheets:

Hire 7-8 kids to cut felt into any kind of pieces they wish. Pay them for this by the hour. Supervise for safety — (get some electric carving knives or it will take forever). Heap the pieces in a corner or against wall and onto wall by putting in a grid of nails. (Robert Morris *Felt Piece*, 1968)

Morris observes a play of forces in the materiality of sculptural production with the “compression-tension principles” generally involved in “the compound curve of the organic form” (Morris 1995, 27, 38). Morris’s *Untitled* (1967) (see Figure 5) evokes a kind of chaos of unregulated flows. As if extruded from a point in the wall of the gallery, the strips of felt cascade unevenly to the floor, where they writhe in sensuous curves, expressing territorialized intensity and compression, flowing from deterritorialized lines of flight — the falling ribbons of felt. Morris’s felt works reach beyond the anthropocentric, making visual the processes of folding and unfolding of change, capturing them as if suspended in flight, so that the dynamism is held for a moment in time.

Drawing on Morris’s methods and materials I experiment in my own work with a similar engagement with materials and their pliable character, harnessing forces of gravity, compression and extension, plasticity and elasticity. My work also references the Baroque texture of repeated and variable folds. I constructed the large gathered fabric

work, *Folds and Flows #1*, 2020 (see Figure 6), from bamboo and wool batting, repeatedly folding and stitching the folds to hold them in place. The red and orange threads act as stabilizers and guides, allowing the folds of fabric to be moved up or down the lines, extended or compressed. These lines of stitching are structurally essential to the work, acting like flows of matter or lines of flight which intermingle with the more solidified folds of fabric to create a kind of machinic assemblage.<sup>5</sup> The work can be extended or shortened depending on the conditions in which it is displayed, concertinaing or loosening the folds to change its dimensions. This dynamic potential embedded in the work suggests the vital play of forces, of folding and unfolding which Deleuze writes of in *The Fold*.

When folded densely the fabric is reminiscent of geological strata, forming an intensification of material flows, and the lines of yarn are almost hidden. When opened out more the lines become visible, fluid and active, and operate together as downward traces flowing onto the floor in a chaotic tangle. These lines may lead the eye to move vertically, while the folds ripple horizontally in a reciprocal engagement of forces in the interaction between material and thread, highlighting the compressive or extensive interconnections in the flow of material. The soft and pliable texture of the batting, its cream colour, and fluffy surface, all speak to me of a kind of enfolding in its warm and yielding feel. Thus, viewers are potentially enfolded in the relational quality of the materials. Through this work I aim to suggest processes of folding as an intensification of potential, and unfolding as its release into actuality, such as when the seed, released from its husk or pod, germinates into growth; an unfolding of potential. The folds of *Folds and Flows #1* (Figure 6) have the potential to unfold and refold, to change and move, without any final static resolution to the work's unfolding.

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<sup>5</sup> Assemblages are “processes of arranging, organising and fitting together” of multiplicities (Livesey 2010, p. 18). Graham Livesey states that “an assemblage transpires as a set of forces coalesces together, the concept of assemblages applies to all structures, from the behaviour patterns of an individual, the organisation of institutions, an arrangement of spaces to the functioning of ecologies.” He sees machinic assemblages as productive, a kind of temporary working together: “Assemblages emerge from the arranging of heterogeneous elements into a productive (or machinic) entity that can be diagrammed, at least temporarily” (Ibid, p. 18) Deleuze and Guattari state in *A Thousand Plateaus* that “an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 23). Machinic assemblages are thus central to the functioning of any kind of process of genesis or operation of production. In *The Fold*, Deleuze observes that “the plastic or machinic forces are part of the “derivative forces” that are defined in relation to the matter they organize” (Deleuze ND, p. 11)



Figure 6: Pamela Isaacs *Flows and Folds #1*, 2021, bamboo batting, woollen thread, photo Jessie Boylan, exhibited at Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021

Implicit in the notion of the fold are localised intensifications of potential, while the unfold suggests processes of becoming, which go on to infinity and are creativity itself. Drawing on Leibniz's philosophy of the monad, enfolding infinite possibilities, Deleuze's fold is a kind of compression or intensification of potential which is released or realised in the "unfold" or in processes of unfolding. Material and immaterial forces drive the unfolding of potential as the virtual becomes actual. The works of art discussed above can all be seen as engaging with the complex of ideas around the Baroque fold as expressed by Deleuze, especially in their challenging of human control — of hierarchical thinking and anthropocentrism.

### Political and Ethical Factors

Philosopher Simon O'Sullivan sees political and ethical dimensions in the fold's "self-production of one's subjectivity" and suggests that each culture and era develops its own form of subjectivity:

...and it might be said that our own time has its own folds, or even that it requires new ones. This imbues the fold with explicitly ethical and political dimensions, for as Deleuze remarks, the emergence of new kinds of struggle inevitably also involves the production of new kinds of subjectivity, or new kinds of fold (here Deleuze has the uprisings of 1968 in mind). (O'Sullivan 2010, 107)

Perhaps we need a new kind of subjectivity, an expanded understanding of the "soul" in all things, which can acknowledge the intricate, interconnected, multiplicity of the world. The underlying processes of the fold and the forces that drive its functioning link matter and beings in an intricate web of interconnection, which we humans seem to forget or ignore, are blind to or even deny. The implications of this more intra-active, symbiotic, ecological world view espoused by Deleuze are wide-reaching on a socio-political level. Exploring the inner folds of being is important in developing an ethical framework which acknowledges these interrelationships and interconnections.

In conclusion, Deleuze's concept of the fold and its processes of folding-unfolding and enfolding have far-reaching implications, not only in art but also in understandings of

matter and material processes, of organic genesis and growth, and in understandings of the self, of thought and of human relationships with the rest of the multiplicitous world. Some of these implications will be explored further in the following chapters. The artworks of Pollock, Hantai and Morris reveal aspects of folding and unfolding both visually and conceptually, pointing in some cases to the flows, interconnections and entanglements created by processes of folding and unfolding. In my work there is an underpinning awareness of the complex interconnectedness of life and the need for the development of new subjectivities and relationships with the animate and inanimate world. The process of my making is a kind of feeling, sense-based engagement with the world of matter and materials and seeks to express complex connectivity in its visual and sensual, affective emanations.

## Chapter 2: The Baroque and Neo-Baroque — Prefiguring Multiplicity

This chapter will explore broader ethical questions of how the Baroque and Neo-Baroque styles engage with multiplicity and are underpinned by a flat ontology. I survey some of the current research on the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque, asking what are the component elements of the Baroque “enterprise”, as Deleuze describes it (ND, p. 32). I examine the research of a number of art historians who write on the Baroque and Neo-Baroque, noting their inclusion of such traits as pluralism, dynamism, spectacle, the use of the haptic and sensate, and the challenge to Enlightenment aesthetics and politics in their analyses (Ndalianis 2004, Calabrese 1992, Jay 1988, Kaup 2012, Snikare 2012, Wacker 2007). This more detailed discussion of the Baroque as a concept explores some of its subtle influences on my making, and reveals its propulsion of my thoughts and feelings. This vibrant, chaotic world of multiple interconnections, part of the creative genesis of folding and unfolding characteristic of the Baroque, is what has drawn me to an investigation of the Baroque fold in my own artmaking. I find its complex inter-relationality congruent with a non-hierarchical, non-anthropocentric ontology.

Deleuze observes an essential quality of the Baroque and Neo-Baroque in its expression of exuberant and pullulating life forces, forces which drive the teeming of life, and he captures this aspect of the Baroque through his discussion of folding and unfolding processes, featured in the previous chapter. My discussion of the Baroque/Neo-Baroque focuses initially on contemporary theoretical understandings of the Baroque/Neo-Baroque, following which I discuss Deleuze’s summation of the characteristics of the Baroque which are intrinsic to his fractal-like vision of infinite folding and unfolding processes underpinning the genesis of matter and life.<sup>6</sup> As an example of the historical Baroque, I look at a sculptural work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, focussing particularly on his marble folds. I also briefly investigate scholarship on the

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze states that the spiral (a form of the fold) is a “turbulence that is never produced alone, and its spiral follows a fractal mode of constitution, by which new turbulences are inserted between the initial ones” (Deleuze ND, p.19).

Latin American manifestation of the Neo-Baroque, and through this lens, discuss the sculptural installations of Brazilian artist, Ernesto Neto, as expressive of Neo-Baroque characteristics. I then explore traces and resonances of a Baroque quality in my sculptural work using felt and printing on fabric, and I consider how thinking through the Baroque and Neo-Baroque in terms of the fold contributes to my project as a whole.

Scholars writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries on the concept of the Baroque, view it not as a stylistic period in the history of art, architecture and music, but as a more general cultural form with a range of characteristics common to its various manifestations in the arts and contemporary popular culture (Ndalianis 2004, Beavan and Ndalianis 2018, Wacker 2007). Deleuze's influence on this scholarship can be observed and his understanding of the Baroque, expressed in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, is perhaps the broadest, encompassing not only architecture, painting, sculpture and music, but also mathematics and philosophy, together with his analysis of Leibniz's philosophy of monadism as Baroque in character.

Art-historical understandings of the Baroque range from a view of the Baroque as a much-maligned era in art history at the time of the Counter-Reformation, to a more general concept of the Baroque as a recurring style or trait, which appears during times of political and social upheaval, expressing this sense of instability.<sup>7</sup> Swiss art critic and historian Heinrich Wölfflin was among the first to define the Baroque in stylistic terms. His writings shed new light on the Baroque, resuscitating it from its previously negative status as extravagant, excessive and purely decorative in comparison to the Renaissance which preceded it. Wölfflin contrasts the Renaissance, and its characteristics of harmony and balance, to the Baroque's sense of movement, vitality and affective impact:

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<sup>7</sup> Snikare (2012) considers that certain eras are underpinned by "classical tendencies" which operate to "establish norms and stabilize centric systems" while other periods are more "characterised by baroque tendencies to break existing norms, stretch limits and experiment with excess" (2012, p.34). Calabrese (1992), Beavan and Ndalianis express similar notions of the appearance of a Baroque style in times of great change or political upheaval (Beavan and Ndalianis 2018).

Renaissance is the art of calm and beauty... Its creations are perfect; they reveal nothing forced or inhibited, uneasy or agitated... Baroque aims at a different effect. It wants to carry us away with the force of its impact, immediate and overwhelming. It gives us not a generally enhanced vitality but excitement, ecstasy, intoxication. (Wölfflin 1961, 1964, 38)

This contrast is also observed by contemporary theorists who see the Baroque as offering a challenge to Enlightenment rationalism, harmony and stability.<sup>8</sup> Writing on Baroque and Neo-Baroque tendencies in contemporary art, art historian Kelly Wacker considers the Baroque style as characterised less by any homogeneity, than one demonstrating a general diversity, attributing this diversity to part of its appeal in the millennial period, with its “pluralistic culture” (Wacker 2007, p. 3). Wacker analyses Omar Calabrese’s (1993) definition of the Neo-Baroque as “a search for, and valorisation of forms that display a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favour of instability, polydimensionality and change” (Wacker 2007, p. 3). Calabrese conceives of a “universal baroque” (Calabrese 1992, p. 44), and understands its component parts as “organised variation, polycentrism and regulated irregularity, and frantic rhythm” (Ibid, p. 43). Cultural historians Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup consider the resurgent interest in the Baroque over the last hundred years as accompanied by a “scepticism towards Enlightenment rationalism and realism”, where:

the waning utility (not to say bankruptcy) of the Enlightenment principles of scientific reason, progressive history, individual agency, and stable identity (cultural, national, personal) made alternative modes of expression attractive. (Zamora and Kaup 2010, p. 5).

Such opposition to Enlightenment ideas and ideals also underpins Deleuze’s philosophical theories.

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<sup>8</sup> Edouard Glissant describes Baroque tendencies to challenge rationalism’s “ambition to master reality”, (Glissant 1997, p.77) and suggests that “all human cultures have experienced a classicism, an age of dogmatic certitude, [...]. And every culture, at one time or another in its development, has contrived baroque disturbances against this certainty” (Ibid, p. 79).

Cultural theorist and Baroque scholar, Angela Ndaljian (2004), observes fundamental Baroque traits in her analysis of contemporary film and entertainment media, drawing on Deleuze's conception of the Baroque. Ndaljian notes a myriad complexity at the heart of the Neo-Baroque, which "combines the visual, the auditory and the textual in ways that parallel the dynamism of the seventeenth century form", expressed in a variety of cultural and technological modes. She observes a loosening and abandonment of the frame, with closed forms being "replaced by open structures that favour a dynamic and expanding polycentrism" (2007, p. xii). She describes a "visual and sensorial seductiveness", "spectacular illusionism and affective charge", the virtuosic, and "seriality and intertextual playfulness" as elements of a Neo-Baroque style (2004, pp. 15-16). Ndaljian writes also of the sensual appeal and visual challenge of the Baroque:

The baroque confronts its viewer/participant: being plunged into a polycentric world that's driven by a serial logic, we're continually challenged by our interpretive and sensory capabilities to make order out of chaos. (Ndalianis 2007, p. xii)

The affective relationship of viewer to work is of paramount importance to the Baroque, which generates an interplay between viewer and artwork required to complete the work itself. Writing with art historian Lisa Beavan, Ndaljian argues that "the baroque relies on its reception for its creation, and more explicitly, on the senses to make sense of it", dubbing this aspect the "baroque sensorium" (Beavan and Ndaljian 2018, pp. 7, 9). As I examine in the third chapter, these haptic and sensate aspects of Baroque creation and reception have influenced the practical research for this project, both in terms of the process of making, and in the consideration of the relationship of the works to the viewer.

Ndaljian weaves the various aspects of the Deleuzian fold into her exploration of an "all-encompassing Baroque rationale" (2008, p.266) in contemporary culture. She draws on Deleuze's notion of the labyrinth, an aspect of the fold, stating that "the labyrinthine complexity that characterizes Baroque form is visualized by the metaphor of the fold, or rather, that of endless folds that double over one another in continuous motions" (Ibid,

p. 266). Multiplicity and interconnection, characteristics of the fold, reveal themselves in the Baroque labyrinth, which Ndalianis sees as “planned chaos”, embodying “a temporal and spatial complexity that presents multiple, if not infinite, motions and possibilities” (Ndalianis 2004, 78, 81).<sup>9</sup> This chaos is reminiscent of Deleuze’s understanding of chaos and its generative affirmation of rhizomic multiplicity and productive difference, an antidote to representation and transcendence (Toscano 2010, pp. 47-49).<sup>10</sup> Ndalianis also speaks of the interchangeability of outside and inside in the Deleuzian fold, where:

...the frame perpetually disintegrates, embroiling the viewer in a series of baroque folds that present the possibility of a limitless scope of vision. The outside becomes the inside and the inside out [Deleuze 1993,35]. The shifting nature of the world endows it with an ephemeral, fluid quality: illusion can reveal itself as reality, and reality as illusion. (Ndalianis 2004, p. 198)

Such an interweaving of inside and outside, of illusion and reality, of façade and interior, which Ndalianis relates to a discussion of virtual trompe l’oeil effects in contemporary film, is also characteristic of the Baroque fold as discussed by Deleuze. This is all part of a “baroque ocular regime” (Ibid, p. 204) or as art historian Martin Jay terms it, a Baroque “scopic regime”. Jay sees the “explosive power of baroque vision” as providing an alternative to the “hegemonic visual style” of Cartesian perspectivalism (1988, p. 14). Citing the writings of Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Jay states that “the baroque self-consciously revels in the contradiction between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any one coherent essence” (Ibid, p. 17). Deleuze similarly proffers both his own writings and those of Leibniz as an alternative to Cartesian rectilinear, geometricized, logical and rational world views.

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Richard Reddaway (2007, p. 116) likens a Baroque style to the fractal forms of the Mandelbrot Set and chaos theory, a comparison which Deleuze also makes in *The Fold* (Deleuze ND, p. 19).

<sup>10</sup> Toscano states that, “chaos designated the type of virtual totality that the philosophy of difference opposes to the foundational and self-referential totalities proposed by the philosophies of representation, and by the dialectic in particular” (Toscano 2010, pp. 47-8).

Parallels to Deleuze's writings on the Baroque in *The Fold* are, thus, evident in contemporary theoretical writing on the Neo-Baroque. Neo-Baroque characteristics embody a "Weltanschauung"<sup>11</sup> which can account for the dynamism, vitality and polymorphic, polycentric, poly-dimensional, poly-everything of an ever-changing world. These are aspects which I endeavour to draw on in my own making: the sense of dynamism and movement expressing constant change and connectivity, the curvature characteristic of folding and enfolding processes as opposed to "rectilinear" lines, and the architectural scope.

### **Deleuze's Baroque/Neo-Baroque**

Deleuze defines the Baroque as "the fold to infinity". In his chapter of *The Fold* entitled "What is Baroque" (Deleuze ND, pp.32-60), Deleuze observes six characteristic traits of the Baroque: "the fold", "the interior and the exterior", "the high and the low", "the unfold", "textures", and "the paradigm". Many of these characteristics have already been discussed above in the analysis of the Baroque and Neo-Baroque. The sense of dynamic movement, rhythmic variation and poly-dimensionality can be observed in texture for example, and in the intermingling of interior and exterior through processes of folding and unfolding there is a loss of the frame — the ornate façade takes inspiration from interior decoration and the trompe l'oeil brings the exterior inside. The dynamism of "the high and the low" is evident in Deleuze's conception of the Baroque house with its vital energy in the push and pull between the lower floor of matter and the upper floor of the soul, for "the Baroque world is organised along two vectors: a downward push and an upward thrust" (Deleuze ND, p. 37). This dynamism can be observed in a movement towards or pull between heaven and earth often portrayed in Baroque painting, which Deleuze also links to a dynamic interconnection and interrelationship between matter and soul, body and consciousness. The dome features for Deleuze as "the Baroque figure *par excellence*" (Ibid, p. 170), reaching at its lofty apex "a summit as a closed interiority" (Ibid, p. 170) similar to the closed interiority of

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<sup>11</sup> The German word "Weltanschauung" means a philosophy/ view of life, or world view.

the “soul” in the Baroque house.<sup>12</sup> Deleuze’s list of Baroque traits contributes further to scholarship on the Neo-Baroque in that he ties Baroque characteristics to a different way of viewing the world, one underpinned by a Baroque “grammar, in which the predicate is above all relation and event, and not attribute” (Deleuze ND, p. 75). In other words, Deleuze’s Baroque is relational, active and eventful rather than characterised by static attributes. As a way of viewing the world it is underpinned by a complex relationality and connectivity, which has serial outward-rippling effects, both intra-active and “interindividual” (Deleuze ND, p.144).

A key characteristic of the Deleuzian Baroque is texture. Matter is draped or “clothed” in a general “texturology”, or as Deleuze states, “matter is a carrier surface, a structure covered with organic fabric”, with the fabric or coating being “the texture enveloping the abstract structure” (ND, p. 144). As “expressive matter, with different scales, speeds, and different vectors” (Ibid, p. 34), matter is textured by dynamic processes of change, folding and unfolding, for “it is the way that material is folded that constitutes its texture” (Ibid, p.54). In his description of folding-unfolding processes Deleuze describes a vision of a complexly enmeshed world:

Ceaselessly dividing, the parts of matter form minute swirls within a swirl, and within these are even smaller swirls, and still more in the concave intervals of swirls that touch each other. Matter thus presents a texture that is infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous, without a void, always another cave inside each cave. (Deleuze ND, p. 3).

The folds and unfolds that are at the heart of processes of existence, create surfaces which touch, which are constantly changing relative to other surfaces, which come together or move apart on a variable scale from a gross to an infinitely fine level, from a macro to a micro level. This process of generative folding and unfolding of matter creates an infinite multitude of connections, an aspect of multiplicity, and which give an undulating, vibrating texture to matter which Deleuze sees as Baroque in character. In defining Deleuze’s concept of multiplicity, Jon Roffe observes that the world is made of

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<sup>12</sup> There are also parallels here between the shape of the dome and the skull where the soul, mind or consciousness is housed.

multiplicities and we are ourselves multiplicities (2010, p. 182).<sup>13</sup> Inherent in the complexly textured nature of matter, organisms and bodies, in their multiplicitous forms, is an intricate web of connections between all matter, both living and non-living, constantly forming and reforming, creating texture.

Texture is inherent to the surfaces of bodies and things, but is by no means superficial. Texture is a means and a form of connection and relationality. It connects both physically or externally and internally or at the level of being/consciousness, thus texture has, to quote visual arts and media scholar, Giuliana Bruno, “a dual sense of haptic mediation and emotional connection” (Bruno 2014, p. 13). This haptic way of seeing and viewing occurs as we visually scan the surface, feeling with our eyes. We are then induced to touch, in order to verify the suppositions we make, about how things might feel. The more differentiated the textural qualities, the more we might feel a necessity to touch.

Much has been written on haptic visibility and haptic aesthetics, especially in scholarship on the Baroque. Deleuze draws on the writings of art historians Alois Riegl and Henri Maldiney in his book *Francis Bacon* to link the “asignifying traits of material texture” (van Tuinen 2014, 177) with a haptic way of viewing commensurate to the flat plane of Egyptian art as opposed to an optic visibility characteristic of Renaissance art. Philosopher Sjoerd van Tuinen analyses Deleuze’s understanding of the character of haptic space as evident in the Baroque and in Mannerism:

Mannerism denaturalizes the organic-transcendental regime of classicism by setting up a “haptic” space in which there is only a “shallow depth” or an almost sculptural “thickness” that simultaneously separates and intertwines foreground and background. (Ibid, p. 173)

This intertwining of foreground and background not only creates texture but prevents a detached, distant and transcendent view characteristic of Enlightenment rationalism.

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<sup>13</sup> Roffe states that: “Since we live among actual multiplicities (and are ourselves multiplicities), we are always elements and actors within the world. In this sense, both philosophy and human existence are eminently practical. The virtual counterparts of our actual multiplicities also make possible continued movement and change, even at the points where the world of actuality seems most rigid and oppressive.” (Roffe 2010, p. 182).

The viewer is enfolded within the Baroque spectacle. Media theorist, Laura Marks, has also examined “haptic visuality”. Marks suggests that a greater appreciation of the “proximal senses” has led to a reappraisal of “minor or decorative” arts, where close vision is required, bringing about a revaluing, for example, of crafts. (Marks 2014, unpaginated). In reference to cinema, she states that haptic images “delay resolution, figuration and meaning, insofar as these require mental distance”. In a similar way Martin Jay contrasts Baroque haptic visuality with the “persepectivalism” of the Renaissance, where viewing from a distance allows one to mentally create a sense of the picture as a whole (a kind of mental transcendence), as well as to perceive depth imaginatively (Jay 1988, p. 8).

In concurrence with Martin Jay, Saige Walton (2016) in her writing on Baroque cinema, associates haptic visuality with the Baroque, formulating a “distinctly baroque haptics” (Walton 2016, p. 194). Citing Derrida, Buci-Glucksman and Lacan, Walton suggests that “much critical thinking on the Baroque foregrounds mobility, multiplicity, and spatialized dispersal” (Ibid, p. 193). This aligns with Deleuze’s reading of the Baroque and its infinity of active folding and unfolding, its texture and its multiplicitous character enacting an unceasing connectivity. Walton links tactile or haptic visuality with movement as well as patterning:

Movement, space, and time are essential [...] components to touch as they are to baroque flesh. [...] Movement is implicated in the sense of touch because touch requires time to occur and reveal patterning (Walton 2016, p. 194).

Walton suggests there is a kind of “serialized perception”, a Baroque haptic visuality as the eye moves over the visual field, unable to register to the eye “in one coordinating glance” from a distanced position, as is available to the viewer in classically representational artworks (Ibid, p. 194). Texture and patterning can be rhythmic, a repetition with variation or difference, never exactly the same, but pulsing with a visual beat, entwining the viewer in their constantly moving point of view. This is the action of hapticity in the Baroque as it creates its powerful affective force.

Deleuze also observes the operation of dynamic forces in the Baroque. Philosophy scholar Alex Tissandier draws out three principles or ‘material traits’ of the Deleuzian Baroque: “Curvature, pressure and internal dynamism” (2018, p. 129). Tissandier sees curvature as linked to the “non-uniform motion of bodies” due to the influence or pressure from their surroundings, as well as the pressure of natural or supernatural forces (“Baroque forms strike us as being compressed or squashed by an outside force”) (ibid, p. 129), and he understands a “blurring of edges” as a kind of restless, “quivering” dynamism — “the blurring of edges occurs not just between forms, but between light and darkness” (ibid, p. 128), as in chiaroscuro effects. The blurring of edges relates to the loss of the frame or the proliferation of frames, resulting in a multiplicity of monadic viewpoints. The dynamic forces of elasticity, plasticity, compression and extension exert both internal and external pressure, driving processes of folding and unfolding and creating texture. This dynamic operation of invisible forces is of interest to me in my artmaking, particularly in my relationship to materials and how they behave in relation to such forces.

The Deleuzian Baroque comprises a multiplicity of singular or monadic points of view, or subjectivities that together make up a kind of collective unity — “the collective character of the multiple as a composite unity, a crowd or a mass” (Deleuze ND, p.176). Deleuze also detects a conic trajectory of movement towards an apex (the high and the low) in seventeenth century Baroque paintings such as Tintoretto’s *The Last Judgement* (1560-1562) and El Grecco’s, *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (1586-1588). The eye is made to circle between lower and higher levels in both these paintings, the lower level of earthly life or hellish damnation and the upper level of the divine realm. This parallels Deleuze’s description of the Baroque house with its upper level of interiority, the soul or the subjective “point of view”. Whereas Leibniz places God at this apex, Deleuze places a general subjectivity with the world becoming a multiplicity of points of view, constantly folding, unfolding and refolding – a chaos of constant change in a complexly interconnected world.

O’Sullivan observes a “general *texturology* of the world” (2006, p.123) in the Deleuzian Baroque, while scholar of philosophy Lorenzo Chiesa suggests that Deleuze sees a key

distinction between the Baroque and Neo-Baroque as the “end of any possible theodicy, which is replaced [...] by ‘a world without principle’” (Chiesa 2016, p. 150), a world operated not by chance, but through “the absence of any principle”. Chiesa states that:

Deleuze also calls this Thought-world ‘chaosmos’ and proceeds to sketch what has rightly been defined as a neo-baroque ‘metaphysics of chaos’, indebted to Whitehead but also highly original. (Ibid, p. 150)

What appeals to me in Deleuze’s concept of the Baroque is not only its vision of a dynamic, textured universe in constant flux, but also its understanding of the intricate connections and complex forces that drive change. The Baroque encompasses a whole world view and is based on notions of constant change creating mutable rhizomic assemblages characterised by dynamic interconnection and inter-relationality, and driven by fluctuating processes of territorialisation and deterritorialization, folding and unfolding. Deleuze envisions powerful forces, which drive movement autonomously. The Baroque world is comprised of complex forces of change operating on both matter and within the consciousness of each subject, human and non-human, propelling the unfolding of the virtual. My artmaking project explores aspects of the Deleuzian Baroque such as folding as texture, the effects of forces of compression and extension on fabric, and the dynamic push and pull between “the high and the low”.

### **Bernini’s Sculptural Folds**

Baroque folds seem to take on an independence of movement in many of Bernini’s sculptures, there is a sense of a dynamic force driving the folds of clothing worn by the figures he depicts. These folds reflect an inner state, often emotionally extreme, as seen in *The Ecstasy of Santa Teresa*. (1647-1652) (Figure 7). This is one of Bernini’s most potent depictions of emotional rapture, exemplifying, through the power of the fold, a physical, emotional and spiritual intensity of agitation, or of movement in its widest sense. The motion of folds seems to be driven almost autonomously or from within. Here the folds are almost ecstatic, pushing the transfixed body upward, operating as

“forces that render sensible an infinite spiritual force” (Deleuze ND, p.165). The “stretching of limits and exceeding of borders” (Snikare 2012, p. 41) of the Baroque is evident in Bernini’s stretching of the limits of stone. His sculpting of folds is paradoxical — the fluid movement, flexible, soft-appearing form of the (carved) fabric is actually marble. Art historian Robert T. Petersson observes a hapticity in Bernini’s ability to tool “the textures of marble to represent skin, hair, fabrics and metal, also exposing the textures to touch – if not actual touch then a tactile made of perception” (Petersson 2002, p. 23). Petersson suggests that there is a culmination in Bernini’s expression of the “ecstatic state” reaching “something like absoluteness of expression” (Ibid, p. 23) in the sculptural complex of *St Teresa*. The expression on the face, the position of the head as opposed to the body and the complexly fluid folds of sculpted cloth reflect a state of intense feeling, a movement of emotion similar to Deleuze’s description of the Baroque autonomy of folds which “express the intensity of a spiritual force being exerted on the body, [...] to agitate it and to mould its interior” (Deleuze ND, p. 165).

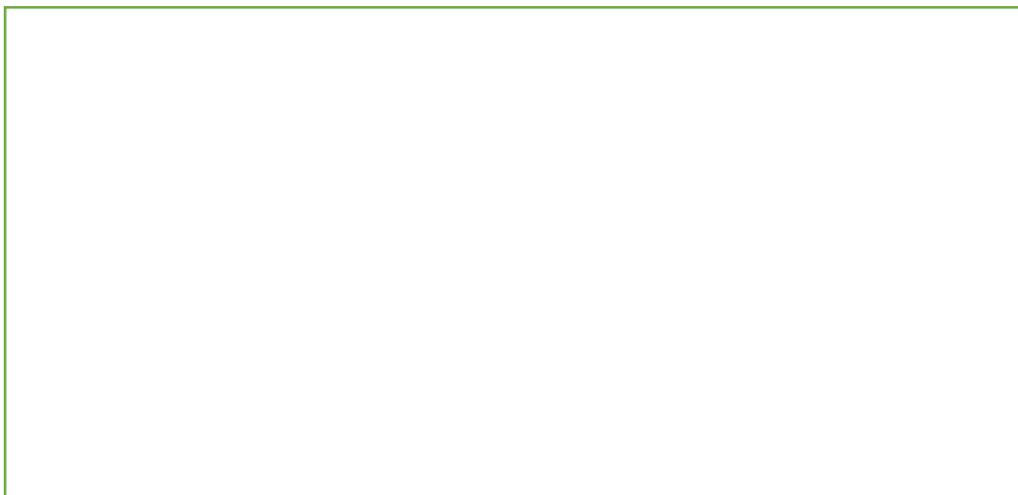


Figure 7: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Santa Teresa*, 1647-1652, (Deleuze ND, p. 158)

This intensity is continued and further expanded through the other components of the sculptural group of *St Teresa*. The golden shafts of “divine light” are directed downwards yet also lead the eye upwards towards a hidden apex, a movement which Deleuze sees as characteristically Baroque. The architecture itself, the stage-like space wherein the sculpture is positioned, flanked with columns acting almost like the stage’s

curtains, is lit from a hidden window in the ceiling of the recess illuminating the golden rays. There is a theatricality present in the tableau-like scene presented by the sculptural group, as well as a sense of dynamic movement and intensity of feeling. Deleuze observes in Bernini's sculptures a liberation of folds where they "no longer simply reproduce the finite body", but introduce "a third party" "between the clothing and the body" (Deleuze ND, p.164), the forces of the "elements", in this case a "fire" of ecstasy.

A restless flow and sense of powerfully driven movement in Bernini's sculptural folds express dynamic, spiritual forces affecting bodies and cloth, and seem to push marble beyond its static limits. This paradoxical combination of appearance and actuality suggests that the world as it appears is not all there is, that the human point of view on the world, the human-centred conceptions of the world fail to conceive of the life of stone (and of matter in general) and its potential. Bernini's sculptures seem to return stone to its fluid, magma-like state, expressive of change and intensities of connection and flow. Bernini's folds express the power of folding and unfolding processes not only through the folds in the cloth, but through the intensity of feeling in the soul unfolding within the person of St Teresa herself. Bernini's folds move beyond the purely representational to become abstract, expressive of powerful, mysterious forces driving physical and emotional life.

### **Latin American Neo-Baroque**

Unlike the historical Baroque, the contemporary Neo-Baroque ranges over a broad range of cultural expressions including film and digital media, and absorbs many different localised cultural influences and modes of expression wherever it appears. One instantiation of the Neo-Baroque can be found in the vibrant profusion of Latin American Neo-Baroque. Ndalianis observes that over the last few decades "multiple Neo-Baroques", manifesting a "Neo-Baroque logic", have "taken root within a global, postmodern context", displayed particularly in Latin American art, where there is also a political dimension evident (Ndalianis 2008, p. 269). According to cultural historians Lois Zamora and Monika Kaup, the historical Baroque, accompanying Catholic Europe's

colonization of Central and South America, functioned poorly as a “colonizing instrument”, since its visual forms were “dynamic, porous and permeable”, thereby allowing it to be itself “colonized”. In colonised Latin America “the cultural perspectives and iconographies of the indigenous and African labourers and artisans who built and decorated Catholic structures” (Zamora and Kaup 2010, p.3) were absorbed into its style. This amalgam of cultural influences and adaptive reconfiguration provided a complex and vital foundation for the development of the Latin American Neo-Baroque, which demonstrates the flexibility and malleability of the Baroque, and its underpinning ethos of dynamic openness to change, mutation or, in Deleuzian terms, territorialisation and reterritorialization.

The Latin American Neo-Baroque<sup>14</sup> replaces colonialist domination with an elastic absorption of influences. Literary and cultural theorist César Augusto Salgado sees the Latin American Neo-Baroque as having a “counter-colonialist” intention. He suggests that to evolve from the European Baroque into the Latin American Baroque was to “move from a hegemonic, diffusionist and acculturating conception of the term to an emancipating, autochthonous, and transculturating one” (Salgado 1999, p. 316). The Latin American Baroque enables a vibrant multiplicity of viewpoints and hybridization. Literary and cultural critic Monika Kaup, writing on the Latin American Neo-Baroque, sees it as having a transnationality and inter-ethnicity not present in even contemporary European or North American Neo-Baroques. She notes “a complex interplay of colonial and indigenous concerns” (Kaup 2006, p. 128). The Latin American Neo-Baroque is therefore an expression of hybridity, of the “transhistorical and transcultural power of the baroque formula” (Beavan and Ndalianis 2018, p. 11), with a range of instantiations appearing in Brazil, Mexico and Cuba among others. Zamora and Kaup (2010, p. 317) observe its counter-colonialist potential, applying the Brazilian term *anthropophagy*<sup>15</sup> to its functioning, which reflects a kind of cannibalising or appropriation of external influences to make them one’s own. This term was used by the Brazilian artists of the

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<sup>14</sup> “The “return of the Baroque” in the 20th and 21st centuries, then, is often explained, in part, as an artistic and ideological reaction to the unfinished and continuing production and performance of identity in Latin America.” (Horswell, 2013, p. 1).

<sup>15</sup> This term originated from the writings of Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago (Cannibal Manifesto)* 1928.

Tropicália or Tropicalismo movement, including Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, who saw in Brazil's hybrid origins a "history of cannibalizing other cultures ... its greatest strength" (Tate ND, unpaginated). It is also accompanied by a "discourse of 'counter conquest'" (Ndalianis 2008, p. 274).<sup>16</sup>

Both Oiticica's and Clark's works have had a powerful influence on the work of contemporary Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto, and one can find in Neto's work distinctly Neo-Baroque aspects. Describing the influence of Lygia Clark, Neto states:

She called the transition point between the frame and the canvas the organic line, and touching that limit was exciting to her. She conceptualized for all of us this thing that existed, this organic limit, and those skin limits are clearly one of the subjects of my work as well. (Arning and Neto 2000, p. 84)

Moving beyond the frame, something that Neto performs strikingly in his art, is characteristically Neo-Baroque.<sup>17</sup> Many of Neto's installations create spectacular, immersive environments, where the viewer is invited inside to experience the visual, sensual and haptic impact of the surroundings. The scale dwarfs the human; there are dome-like roofing elements or walls of cloth enfolding the participant, and the sensory and emotional impact is one of awe and wonder. Although Neto sees his work as sculpture rather than installation, there are highly immersive aspects to his work, on a physical, bodily and sensorial level. Speaking of his 2010 exhibition *The Edges of the World*, Neto expresses his "desire to occupy the space as if it were a habitat" and says,

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<sup>16</sup> Ndalianis observes the inclusion of these two artists in the 2000-2002 exhibition entitled *Ultra Baroque! Aspects of Post Latin American Art*, which "travelled from San Diego's Museum of Contemporary Art to Fort Worth, San Francisco, Toronto, Miami and Minneapolis" (Ndalianis 2008, p. 277) and they can be counted among the formative influences in the development of the Neo-Baroque in Brazil.

<sup>17</sup> Neto also attributes some influence to his work from Arte Povera, particularly Giovanni Anselmo (Rugoff and Neto 2010, p. 22, Arning and Neto 2000, p. 84). In her discussion of the Baroque nature of Arte Povera, art historian Laura Petican (2007) traces a "distinct baroque-centric expression" in this art movement, with a commonality of Baroque traits that she identifies as: "an interest in space, time, nature, a preoccupation with the energy or dynamism associated with materials and the theatrical expression of emotion and sensation" (Petican 2007, p. 15). Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev sees the artists of the Arte Povera movement as disrupting "the traditional boundaries between the real and the fictional, the natural and the artificial, the past and present, the historical in art and the 'new'" (Christov-Bakargiev 1999, p. 82). One can observe similar traits and preoccupations in Neto's work which evince a Neo-Baroque influence also via the Arte Povera movement.

“I want to create a place of fantasy, for the abstraction of the world in which we live” (Menzies and Neto 2010, 4). A Neo-Baroque blurring of boundaries between illusion and reality, a pushing beyond the frame, is evident here.

I argue that many aspects of Neto’s work conform to a Baroque aesthetic. Like the conic form of the historical Baroque with its upward movement, Neto’s sculptural installations *Leviathan Thot* (2006) (Figure 8) and *While nothing happens* (2008) (Figure 9) lead the eye upwards, following the suspended forms to their source. The dramatic scale of the drip-like forms engages with linear motion, a rising upward, lifting the sights and the spirits, while the downward “droop” of the shapes create earth-bound, sensuous curves, obeying the forces of gravity and cohesion, of surface or textural tension. Here is an echoing of “the high and the low” which Deleuze considers as characteristic of the Baroque. The smooth texture of the forms acts as a kind of skin or membrane, holding things together, connecting the parts, functioning almost like surface tension in water in the cohesion of the droplet. This is the texture of unfolding.



Figure 8: Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Thot*, 2006, Pantheon, 35th Festival d'Automne, Paris, September 15 – December 23, 2006.

< <https://www.macroasilo.it/mostra/ernesto-neto-mentre-niente-accade-while-nothing-happens>>

Figure 9 Ernesto Neto, *While nothing happens*, 2008, Macro Hall, Rome, May 2008 – February 2009.

Another Neo-Baroque feature, the dome, which Deleuze describes as “the Baroque figure par excellence”<sup>18</sup> (ND, p.170), features in Neto’s *The Wisdom of Parts*, (2008) (Figure 10); and his *anthropodino* (2009) (Figure 11). His “habitats” have dome-shaped ceilings and almost church- or temple-like architectures or structures. They draw the eye upwards, creating “architectures of vision” (Ibid, p. 25), with the structural elements visible and revealing an engineering of operational dynamics, which defy gravity and mobilize the forces of plasticity, elasticity, compression and extension, which are part of folding-unfolding processes and which Deleuze conceptualises in *The Fold*.

<[https://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/vogue-arts/2010/06/ernesto-neto?refresh\\_ce](https://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/vogue-arts/2010/06/ernesto-neto?refresh_ce)>

Figure 10: Ernesto Neto, *The Wisdom of Parts*, 2000, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 11 October – 15 November, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze states “the law of the dome [...] is double: at its base is a vast continuous ribbon, mobile and agitated, but which converges on or tends towards a summit as a closed interiority.” (Deleuze ND, p. 170)

<[https://www.armoryonpark.org/photo\\_gallery/slideshow/ernesto\\_neto\\_in\\_the\\_wade\\_thompson\\_drill\\_hall](https://www.armoryonpark.org/photo_gallery/slideshow/ernesto_neto_in_the_wade_thompson_drill_hall)>

Figure 11: Ernesto Neto, *anthropodino 2009*, Park Avenue Armory, New York, curated by Tom Eccles.

Neto's interwoven nets of thread or fabric have a dynamic sense of movement between the intricate parts. The linking mesh of fibres echoes an interconnected world of Baroque multiplicity. There is a feeling of theatricality in the scale of his works and the way they invite participation from the viewer, and appeal to the senses. The openness of his structures and the visibility of their structuring elements reveal a self-reflective acknowledgement of their own contrivance — they are spectacular whilst openly displaying the artifice behind that display.

<[https://www.armoryonpark.org/photo\\_gallery/slideshow/ernesto\\_neto\\_in\\_the\\_wade\\_thompson\\_drill\\_hall](https://www.armoryonpark.org/photo_gallery/slideshow/ernesto_neto_in_the_wade_thompson_drill_hall)>

Figure 12: Ernesto Neto, *GaiaMotherTree*, 2018, Zürich Main Station.

The participation of the audience in his habitats exerts bodily, sensory appeal and connection, the response of the viewers activating the work. The borders between art and life, between illusion and reality are challenged through their experiential nature. Neto says of his exhibition *The Edges of the World* (2010):

I was interested in the idea of transparency; the viewer on the outside has a contemplative relationship with the piece, but there is also a visual interference with the internal viewer who has a different experience: sensory, immersive, atmospheric. (Rugoff and Neto 2010, p. 20)

The space between art work and viewer becomes complicated by the participatory nature of Neto's works. The changing perspective of the viewer as they move around the space suggests a multiplicity of viewpoints (reminiscent of the Leibnizian monad's multiplicity of individual points of view), while drawing the viewer in through an emotional response. Playwright and scholar Leo Cabranes-Grant sees in the Neo-Baroque, "a style of becoming" (Zamora & Kaup 2010, p. 468) and Neto's work provides the participant with an alternative mode of becoming through the immersive, experiential effect of the environments he creates.

At the same time Neto's use of biomorphic shapes and organic forms (with a predomination of a curvilinear aspect or stretched, elongated curves) references the natural world, the body, science, cellular structures, trees, vines, and the texture of lichen (Figure 13, *The Serpent's Energy Gave Birth to Humanity*, 2016).

<https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/exhibitions/168-ernesto-neto-the-serpent-s-energy-gave-birth-to-tanya-bonakdar-gallery-new-york/>

Figure 13: Ernesto Neto, *The Serpent's Energy Gave Birth to Humanity*, (detail) 2016, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

Some of the sculptural works are almost like living beings that become part of the space-time of the spectator (*Leviathan Thot*, 2006). He sees his work as speaking of “the finite and the infinite, of the macroscopic and the microscopic, the internal and the external” (Arning and Neto 2000, p. 81). These Baroque or Neo-Baroque traits that Neto activates in his work resonate with the Deleuzian fold and Deleuze’s descriptions of the various characteristics of the Baroque.

Neo-Baroque aspects of Neto’s work include an expression of material, bodily and organic flows and topologies. They are polycentric and convey a dynamism and vitality that is highly sensual. His use of spices to create scents, his complex interweaving of string, thread or fabric to create intricate nets, the finely detailed or gross connectors expressing forces which resist or bow to gravity — all these speak of a sensually and emotionally communicative, interactive, complexly interconnected world, which is Baroque in character. Neto’s work shows the potential of the Neo-Baroque to embody an ethics of multiplicity and care or concern for the enmeshed and intricately interdependent environment. Neto states that he believes “we have forgotten that we are inhaling and exhaling and thus are living in communion with our surroundings and other living beings” (Langhammer and Neto, 2015, unpaginated). Neto asks us through his sculptural works to “develop a more balanced view with regard to our place in the world and embrace ‘planetarism’ to grasp ourselves as part of the world” (Ibid). Neto’s non-hierarchical understanding of human/non-human relationships manifests a Neo-Baroque sensibility of vitality and multiplicity.

I regard some of the more organic aspects embodied in the Neo-Baroque as underpinned by a concern for our environmental future, and as potentially driven by a sense of the interconnectedness of the world, its multiplicity, its processes of flow or folding and unfolding, its dynamism, its Baroque complexity. My work too is underpinned by an interest in a non-hierarchical engagement with materials and matter, where a different relationship with the non-human world is required, a relationship which works together with the powers and tendencies of materials rather than imposing my will or control over them. I explore this in detail in the third chapter. I

see my work, like Neto's, as engaging with multiplicity and interconnection and a Neo-Baroque world view.

### **Neo-Baroque Dynamism: Utilising Multiplicity and Flows of Energy**

My first encounter with the Baroque was when I was nineteen during a gap year in Austria. While living there I was shown many Baroque churches with their rich embellishments, painted ceilings, plump putti, golden rays and highly carved altars. My most memorable experience of the overpowering impact created by Baroque art and architecture occurred when I visited the *Wieskirche* church in Bavaria. Its interior decoration seemed alive with movement and I was struck by the vision that met me upon entering the church. The decoration led the eye upwards towards the complex dynamic imagery on the ceiling. I felt immersed in a dizzying array of swirling shapes, decorative images and lively figures, all competing for my attention. It was quite disorienting and overwhelming. It showed me the potential for art to create a powerful bodily, emotional impact.



< <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wieskirche> >

Figure 14: Wieskirche, Bavaria.

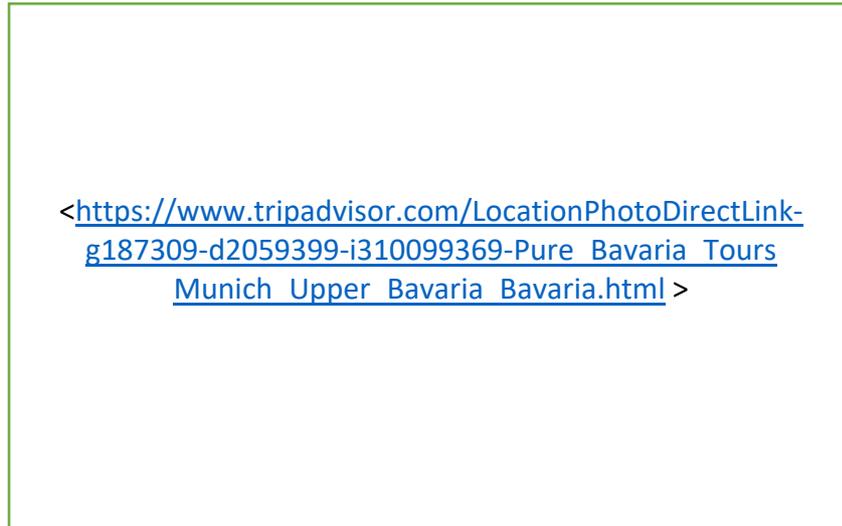


Figure 15: Wieskirche, Bavaria.

My work does not aim to elicit such a response; however, there is an architectural quality I would like to draw on in the display of my work, particularly my printed work on cloth (see Figure 16). Hanging from ceiling to floor in a kind of pillar, the movement of the print is potentially enhanced by this vertical stretch, the polycentric motion of the print and its structural reach drawing on a Baroque “architecture of vision” which Deleuze elaborates.<sup>19</sup> Hung multiply as a colonnade they engage with the architecture of the gallery space as well as with Baroque architectural features.

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<sup>19</sup> Deleuze observes in the Baroque the need for a different way of viewing, one which has moved beyond Cartesian perspectivalism: “in a world of infinite or variable curvature, which has lost all centre the importance of substituting point of view for the failing centre; the new optical model of perception, and of geometry in perception, which repudiates tactile notions such as contact and figure in favour of an “architecture of vision”” (ND, p. 25).



Figure 16: Pamela Isaacs, *Marmoreal Drift*, 2021, photo by artist, installation view Phyllis Palmer Gallery, May 2021

I am interested in the metamorphic potential of the fold's processes of interconnection and multiplicity, processes of generation and decomposition, all part of complex flows and solidifications operating in the world. Through folding, my work attempts to explore ways of enacting a different kind of connection to the world, one which hints at the

fragility of the delicate balance present in ecological systems, the mysterious complexity of their ecologies and networks of interdependence. The folds and flows in my work, the continuum of flux between the intensity and compression of folding, and the discharge of energy, the smoothing of flows in unfolding, is part of the structural, topological forces operating in my fabric-based work entitled *Folds and Flows # 1* (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Pamela Isaacs *Folds and Flows #1*, 2020, photo Jessie Boylan, exhibited at Newstead Arts Hub, February, 2021.

Like an interconnected ecosystem, the folds can move up or down the strings of connection, which act like a skeletal structure or connective tissue, holding the fabric gathered. Different layers are thus formed, whether compressed or opened out, and they operate in a kind of machinic<sup>20</sup>, interrelated movement of compression and expansion. One change in position of the folding affects other folds in a rippling effect. There is a kind of circulation present in the lines of thread flowing onto the floor, a sense of motion, and the work is imagined as a segment of flow, an excerpt from the middle of a much larger continuum going on to infinity. The work points or imaginatively moves beyond the frame of its limits towards an expanding and contracting, pulsating, continuous flow.

Drapery and folds in the Deleuzian Baroque have a fluid, sensuous and expressive function, a linking function and an almost architectural one. The multiple interconnections created by processes of folding and unfolding are underpinned by a flat ontology where all beings are part of an interdependent ecology, a lively world of intra-active change. Through the fluidity of the drapery and folds I use, I aim to express vitality, energy and the flow of change, suggesting change's inevitability and unpredictability, as much as we humans might like to control it. The relationship of my work to the architecture of the gallery space, reaching from floor to ceiling, speaks of Deleuze's Baroque "high and low" of mutually interrelated worlds of matter and soul, mind or consciousness, of forces which raise or lower, expand or compress, driving unceasing change, taking the virtual into becoming. Thus, the Neo-Baroque has become for me expressive of multiplicity, liveliness and vitality, embracing the constant change we live with, but often want to hold back. It is expressive of flows of feeling, of our being part of nature, our sensuousness, our bodily energy, our co-relatedness with other beings of nature, of the power of the inner being to move and be moved. This is part of the sensory impact I hope my sculptural works can have on the viewer, to influence their imaginative becomings in some way.

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<sup>20</sup> Machinic denotes for Deleuze (and Guattari) the functioning of complex interrelationships such as described by Tamsin Lorraine: "an assemblage of a book [...] and reader is a 'machinic assemblage of actions, passions and bodies reacting to one another (paper, print, binding, words, feelings, and the turning of pages)" (Lorraine 2010, p. 148). I feel this work operates in a machinic way not only in its variable and fluid structure, but also in its affective relationship with the viewer.

The Deleuzian Baroque or Neo-Baroque is on a trajectory away from the historical Baroque with the centrality of a Christian God at its highest apex, towards a decentred, multiplicitous universe of forces and flows. In the Neo-Baroque the “hypothesis of an infinite universe, which has lost any centre as well as any assignable figure, has just begun to be elaborated” (Deleuze ND, p. 170). Neo-Baroque thinking thus lends itself to encompassing an ecology of interconnectedness and interdependence, and to providing a critique of the wholesale destruction of ecosystems enacted in the plundering of the earth’s resources by the blind egocentrism of humans. Such a view speaks to me of the need for humans to step beyond anthropocentric self-interest and conceive of an infinitely complex, interconnected and dynamic world, a world almost beyond the power of humans to fully apprehend. In an inherently chaotic world, we can never know the full consequences of our actions. Complex systems of interconnection and interdependence can have unpredictable inter-workings and interrelationships. Such an understanding of the world can more readily accommodate multispecies environmental justice, so necessary at this present moment. The work of Ernesto Neto conjures up such thoughts and feelings through his immersive, interconnected, inter-relational and performative habitats.

Although the historical Baroque is perhaps tainted by its associations with the colonizing hegemonic interests of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Neo-Baroque goes beyond the bounds of those power structures in its capacity to evolve and adapt, allowing it to absorb other influences and new cultures and evolve new ethics. Its polycentrism, its exuberant absorbing of a variety of influences has allowed the Neo-Baroque to become a global phenomenon, not just in the visual arts but in many modes of expression in contemporary culture. The Neo-Baroque is underpinned by a flat ontology and allows for multiplicity and vibrancy, a teeming of the potency of life forces. For me the Neo-Baroque is a powerfully generative style, dominated by curves and flows, which link and connect in multiple ways, and it speaks of a non-hierarchical world filled with a sense of vibrant life, fluid and adaptable. It allows for mutation, transference, reworkings in new iterations and novel ways which can speak to the times in which it is made.

### Chapter 3: Matter, Materials and Artmaking

As a child I went through a phase of making paper doilies. I would fold the paper sheet in various ways and cut out shapes: semicircles, diamonds, triangles, for example. Then I would unfold the paper, fascinated by what resulting patterns would emerge. It was magical and they were never the same, each cut sheet was unique. I loved the sense of not knowing, of just cutting with excited anticipation. Such was the feeling when I made the first folded and red-threaded work, *Folds and Flows #1* (Figure 17). I did not know how the whole thing would look in the end, I just folded and stitched, hoping that what would emerge would be worth the effort. There was a kind of symbiosis that came to the fore when working on that piece, with body, mind and materials working together in a harmony of unknowing, exploring with a sense of expectancy. When I finally opened out the folds, I was amazed; it was as if the result was not something I had made, it was not mine, it was its own self, a dynamic form with a life of its own.

In this chapter I want to engage with notions of matter and materials as agential and intra-active, and explore the intensification of the agency of materials in art. I ask, how can I work with materials in a way that acknowledges and follows their flows and forces to co-create artworks; how can I enable materials to communicate, through sensation, through a visual and tactile expression? I want to posit ideas of art as a work of co-creation between materials and maker, and through my practical research to trace this evolving co-creation. Drawing on Deleuze's notion of art as a "bloc of sensations", I investigate how the artwork can intensify and become something more than the sum of its parts. Bringing together materials and the sensing body is essential to my project: how can materials evoke feelings and memories, and in particular sensory and haptic resonances which engage with the nervous system, generated partly through visual texture with its rhythmic, vibrational, affective impact as a point of contact between material and sensing body? Through my engagement with materials, my project explores ways of being with and relating to materials, which are more attuned to the interconnected ecologies of which the human and the non-human are intertwined,

interdependent parts. In this chapter, I trace the development of my own works as they engage with materials, and I look at the fibre-based *Quipu* works of Cecilia Vicuña, observing a mutual engagement with non-hierarchical understandings of matter and materials. This chapter gives practical and praxical expression to the ideas explored in my first two chapters, those of life processes of folding and unfolding explored in the first chapter, and the multiplicity and vitality inherent in the Baroque with its visual hapticity examined in the second chapter. These twin concepts have enabled me to develop a process of material-centred co-creation.

Materials are always in flux in one way or another. In the making process they are open to change through both visible and invisible processes — through their handling by the artist, through their interactions with the environment and other materials, through the minute processes of degeneration or chemical reaction, and even through the varied and varying, changing and changeable interactions with the viewer.

Materiality is a complex concept when viewed from the perspective of recent theory related to practice-led research. Anthropologist Tim Ingold contrasts an Aristotelian “hylomorphic model” of making, where “form can be seen as imposed by an agent with a particular design in mind”, to an approach where, following the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, processes of formation are given primacy rather than the final product, and “flows and transformations of materials” are more important than “states of matter” (Ingold 2011, p. 210). Such a way of viewing materials takes account of their agency and relationality in the making process, or as Ingold states, “if persons can act on objects in their vicinity” then objects can “act back”, giving “shape to the forms of thought” and connecting in “relational networks” (Ibid, p. 213). Some theoretical understandings of matter in the West have in recent years moved away from a view of matter as inert substance, neutral, lifeless and senseless, and towards a new materialist view of matter and things as “vibrant” (Bennett, 2010), communicative and expressive

(Barad 2007, Braidotti 2019).<sup>21</sup> Artist and theorist Barbara Bolt links this change with a move from an “instrumentalist” view in which the artist is “one who exercises mastery over his/her tools to produce an artwork” towards the notion that “humans participate in conjunction with other contributing elements in the emergence of art” (2007, p. 1). This changed understanding of materials and matter from one of scientific rationalism to a more nuanced view of materiality has been accompanied by a questioning of dualism and binary thinking — the Cartesian cogito (“I think, therefore I am”) with its separation of superior mind and inferior body, which, together with Hegelian dialectics and Enlightenment Humanist anthropocentrism, have all held such sway in European thought. An understanding of matter as expressive and active is fundamental to my practice and my experience of the world. It provides an alternative view to that which is so prevalent in Western thinking and drives the ruthless exploitation of materials under capitalist agendas, ignoring and silencing any consideration of matter as “lively” (Bennett 2015). In the making process I attempt to work together with the materials, open to their suggestive powers.

With regard to the materiality of artmaking, art historian Petra Lange-Berndt observes a number of theorists who see art as a method of enabling “the material to talk”, a view which considers “material complicity as an analytical tool within art practice, art criticism and art history” (2015, p. 15). Artist and audience involvement or “complicity” with artworks are influenced by art’s engagement with the body, sensation and unconscious feelings, and by its “infinite potential for staging meanings and actions” (Hölling et. al. 2019, p. 1). Lange-Berndt takes this complicity into a more overtly political dimension, where materials can reference the “natural” or the everyday, and can be seen as interrogating the commodification of capitalism or colonialist histories

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<sup>21</sup> New Materialism brought a “resurgence of materialist theories at the beginning of the twenty-first century” which was first theorised by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (Barrett and Bolt 2013, p. 2) and Spinoza in the seventeenth century. Barrett and Bolt argue that “new materialism aims to return to matter the vivacity denied by social constructivist theories that posit all social processes and, indeed reality itself, as socially and ideologically constituted” (Ibid, p. 3). Feminist theorists such as Bennett (2015), Barad (2007) and Braidotti (2019) have contributed greatly to a reconfiguration of understandings of matter and materiality and I will briefly discuss each of their varied approaches to matter and materiality in this chapter.

and female work (2015, p. 15). Materials have therefore very present powers of expression, evinced both prior to the making and in the artwork itself.

My practical engagement with materials in this project is based on a history of memories, associations, connotations and conventions, which stimulate a complex of ideas and feelings and involve hapticity, sensation and emotion. Humans and materials are intricately entangled, especially in the context of artmaking. There is a kind of embodied, unconscious, physical and emotional engagement to be had with materials, an engagement that can draw on personal memory, on shared experiences common to the physicality of living, being born and growing up, the unfolding of our beings “intra-actively” through our living enmeshed with matter. Each type of material comes with its own limits and constraints as well as its possibilities and propensities, which are part of its “co-forming” potential. Art historian Henri Focillon (1942) views materials as “subject to a certain destiny” or “formal vocation”, which calls forth, limits or develops “the life forms of art” through their predispositions towards being handled in certain ways or creating effects, and for “the usefulness they contribute to whatever service art renders to the needs of life” (Focillon 1942, p.361).<sup>22</sup> Materials have a life of their own and they can interact dynamically in their engagement with makers. Thus, one can argue that materials are to be respected as agential, communicative, participatory and full of their own unique life force. Not only do materials and materiality bring with them a broad terrain of concepts, traditions and ideas, but they access a transmissive, energetic dimension of proto-linguistic perceptual qualities of affect, emotion, feeling and inner, unconscious sensation and response, as Deleuze and Guattari explore in relation to the affective power of materials and art. In my project it is a given that materials are inter- and intra-active, that they participate in the making and that my task is to enable their expressivity.

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<sup>22</sup> Henri Focillon in his work *The Life of Forms in Art*, observes a lively interdependence between art and materials: “Thus, their (different kinds of matter’s) form, in its raw state, evokes, suggests and propagates other forms, and, [...] this is because this form liberates other forms according to its own laws. [...] all these highly individual and suggestive varieties of matter, which demand so much from form and exert so powerful an attraction on the forms of art, are, in their own turn, profoundly modified by these forms. (1942, p.361)

## Deleuze and Guattari's Conception of Art

*Let's assume, for example, that what is given, I'd say, at the extreme, could always be called a flow. Flows are what are givens, and creation consists in dividing [découper], organizing, connecting flows in such a way that a creation is drawn or made around certain singularities extracted from flows. (Deleuze 1980)*

My project has taken inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (1994) which describes art as a "bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p.164).<sup>23</sup> While the *concept* is a being of thought (with an agency of its own, a unique power to change the world), the *artwork* is a being of sensation that can only exist as actual events in the world, as agential, outside of and separate from subjective opinion or judgement. They are no longer tied to their reception, as:

Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. [...] The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself. (Ibid, p. 164)

For Deleuze and Guattari art as a "bloc of sensations" is composed of percepts and affects, that are embodied in the material or in the event of making or perceiving, where intra-active forces come together, and express a reality of their own. Blocs of sensation, being the inhuman or more-than-human affects and percepts that make up art, dramatically exceed the force of perception and affections available to us in our habitual existence (Roffe 2021). This ties art to an embodied, sensate impact, a flowing through the senses yet independent of them, a bringing together of perception and feeling, as they move through the body and become thought, idea, association, memory, attraction — stimulating or producing response. Writing from a Deleuzian perspective, feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz views artworks as "composed of blocks of

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<sup>23</sup> "Percepts" are an impersonal form of perception without the perceiver, or are points of view inherent in things themselves.

materiality becoming-sensation"; art intensifies, producing sensation which transfers to bodies, and "is transmitted from the force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the action of this being back onto the world itself" (Grosz 2008, p. 71). Grosz shows here a complex connection between material agency, sensation as an entity in itself and its affective powers which impact the body. Art moves materials into sensation which enables their agency to become intensified.

Art is also a deterritorialization<sup>24</sup> of components of a milieu, allowing the reconstruction of these components in a new territory. Art introduces the infiniteness of dynamic thought to material, taking the material components from their habitual milieu in order that they become expressive. As Deleuze and Guattari state, "sensation is not realized in the material without the material passing completely into the sensation, into the percept or affect. All material becomes expressive" (1994, p. 166-7). Art opens onto or joins up with the dynamisms of sensation itself. Art has an "enterprise of co-creation" (ibid, p. 173). Thus, artworks become independent of the maker, according to Deleuze and Guattari, and are able to stand on their own as independent events in the world. How then they communicate their percepts, affects and sensations moves, it seems, beyond the purview of the artist into events in their own right. The artist's realm is therefore in the making, in the sensations created through and entering into the artwork in the making, rather than in the artist having any clear idea in mind of, or being in control of the impact of the work. The completed work becomes potentially eventful, when released into the world, as it were, to make its own way. Artworks have

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<sup>24</sup> Deterritorialization is a facet of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory: "Assemblages, as conceived of by Deleuze and Guattari, are complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (Livesey 2010, p. 18). Deleuze and Guattari see deterritorialization and reterritorialization as processes and forces that drive change, creating new assemblages and interrelations or interconnections or as Adrian Parr states: "Perhaps deterritorialization can best be understood as a movement producing change [...], to deterritorialize is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organisations" (2010, p. 69).

an intensified power to affect and be affected through their agency in the world. As Grosz observes art “enables matter to become expressive” through an intensification which resonates and becomes “more than itself” (Grosz 2008, p. 4). Grosz states, artworks are not “frivolous”, but instead, “the most vital and direct form of impact on and through the body” with the formation of “vibratory waves, rhythms”, which travel through the body, connecting it to “forces it cannot otherwise perceive and act upon” (2008, p. 23). Such vibrations and rhythms are fold-like and can be attributed to some extent to texture as an aspect of haptic visuality. My project aims to aid materials to move into that realm of sensation and intensification through a cooperative interaction with them.

### **Lively and Agential Matter**

My practice and my engagement with materials has also been shaped by a number of theorists who consider materials not as inert, but participating in a reciprocal malleability, responsive, and engaging interactively with the artist (Lange-Berndt 2015, Barad 2007). Political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett’s writing has brought me to a greater awareness of the affective powers of materials through an examination of the vitality of matter and materiality in her concept of “thing power”.<sup>25</sup> She suggests understandings of matter as “lively” can be found in the “Hylozoism” of early Greek philosophy and in the beliefs of the Jains in India, which hold that “all matter has life” (2004, p. 353). Bennett links this understanding with Deleuze’s concept of “nature as matter-flow” (ibid, p. 349), a view that underpins his descriptions of processes of folding and unfolding in organic and inorganic matter, in human and non-human bodies and

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<sup>25</sup> Bennett describes her book *Vibrant Matter* as a “philosophical exploration of the strange agency by which “inanimate” (sic) things somehow produced real effects on and in living things.” (Bennett, 2015, p. 72)

souls.<sup>26</sup> Bennett speculates that an attentiveness to the non-human, to matter and materials — “with their power to addle and rearrange thoughts and perceptions” — may foster an appreciation of the agency inherent in “natural and artificial things” and an “awareness of the dense web of their connections with each other and with human bodies” (ibid, p. 348/9). This, Bennett observes, can lead to “a more cautious, intelligent approach to our intervention in that ecology” (Ibid, p. 349). Bennett’s enthusiastic embrace of the affective power of matter is inspiring, revealing the potential of things to have an influential impact on and relationship with human bodies and minds, an understanding which resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of art as “beings of sensation”.

Feminist theorist and contemporary continental philosopher Rosi Braidotti also explores notions of the non-hierarchical and the non-anthropocentric in relation to matter. She voices ideas which counter hierarchical and dichotomous thinking, and I have found an affinity with her ontologically flat understanding of the world. She challenges the assumptions of human superiority inherent in Enlightenment Humanism, universalism and transcendence, colonialism and advanced capitalism in her writings on the “Posthuman”. She describes the “pivotal function of the human/non-human distinction within European philosophy” (2019, p. 14), which fostered the development of the exploitative and extractive systems of colonialism. Braidotti considers the posthuman as non-hierarchical, involving a “convergence of the posthuman on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other”, and sets this against “anthropocentric exceptionalism” and “species hierarchy” (Ibid, p. 13). The human and non-human all suffer as a consequence of the unquestioned, all-pervasive ideology of anthropocentrism and hierarchical thinking. Like Bennett, Braidotti points out that many cultures do not

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald Bogue in his discussion of the important influence of philosopher Raymond Ruyer on Deleuze’s “philosophy of biology” (2009, p. 300) notes: “Every form, from atoms to molecules, viruses, bacteria and more complex organisms, is a self-sustaining configuration of forces of connection. Each of these forms, according to Ruyer, is a consciousness. [...] Ruyer’s point is that not all the attributes of human consciousness are present in atoms. Rather, he argues that human consciousness is merely a complex, highly developed, self-aware version of the primary self-forming activity that manifests itself in varying degrees of complexity throughout the physical world.” (2009, p. 304) The notion of self-forming form or consciousness opposes the mechanistic view of classical science and Ruyer’s notion of the actualisation of potential inherent in self-forming processes links with Deleuze’s concept of the virtual, an aspect of the fluid, unformed potential of life.

conceive of a binary distinction between the human and the non-human, observing an “indigenous perspectivism” described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro that “posits a ‘multinatural’ continuum across all species, all of which partake of a distributed idea of humanity. This means that they are considered as being endowed with a soul” (Ibid, p. 13)<sup>27</sup>. Braidotti notes the inextricable interconnections of humans and the material world and a relatedness together with a differing at the heart of relations within and between the human and non-human world which she terms transversal:

We are structurally related to one another, to the human and non-human world that we live in. We are after all variations on a common matter. In other words, we differ from each other all the more as we co-define ourselves within the same living matter – environmentally, socially and relationally. (Ibid, p. 38)

Braidotti calls for a “middle ground”, where the multiple perspectives of “heterogeneous multiplicities, both human and non-human” (Braidotti 2019, p. 43) are recognised. It is encouraging to find in contemporary theoretical and philosophical approaches to matter and materiality a broadening of understanding, and an acknowledgement of and respect for the non-human world, similar to that which has been part of traditional Indigenous knowledges handed down and practiced over generations. I suggest that an enactment in art of materials and their expressive potential, their vitality and relationality, may in some way draw attention to or even help to redress the power imbalances inherent in human/non-human relations as they currently stand.

The writings of feminist, and posthumanist philosopher and physicist Karen Barad, that radically critique the human/non-human binary, have shaped my ideas about materials. They draw on ideas from theoretical physics and poststructuralism to observe a sense of agency in materials, speaking of “matter’s dynamism”, its being “produced and

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Skafish, in the introduction to his translation of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s *Cannibal Metaphysics*, writes that the Amerindians “who live in intense proximity and interrelatedness with other animal and plant species, see these nonhumans not as other species belonging to nature but as PERSONS, human persons in fact, who are distinct from ‘human’ humans not from lacking consciousness, language, and culture — these they have abundantly — but because their bodies are different, and endow them with a specific subjective-‘cultural’ perspective. [...] Thus, the idea that culture is universal to human beings and distinguishes them from the rest of nature falls apart, as we are faced here with what Descola once called “the society of nature”, a collective in which humans, animals, plants, and even minerals, tools, and astronomical bodies are all agents...” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, p.12)

productive, generated and generative” (2007, p. 214).<sup>28</sup> Barad sees matter as “not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency [...] a stabilizing and destabilizing process of intra-activity” (2007, p. 151). Materials then are not as static, but influential, connective and agential or in a wider sense, or as Barad states: “The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming” (Ibid, p. 215). Rather than an interactivity (between formed objects and individuals), Barad’s notion of intra-activity (that is, complex systems of co-forming, inter-relationality and interdependence) relies on a shift in understanding of matter giving it a completely different status, a shift which has taken root in my own practice.

In their writings, Barad engages in a critique of representationalism with its focus on language, semiotics and culture, and which blinds us to the world of matter, arguing that consideration is due to matter as “an active participant in the world’s becoming, its ongoing ‘intra-activity’” (2008, p.122). Barad regards an intra-active understanding of matter as one which moves away from “linguistic representations” towards a broader than human or a non-human notion of performativity, thereby questioning the binarization of human and nonhuman. Barad proposes an “agential realist ontology” (Ibid, p. 129), in which bodies and matter are viewed as intertwined in processes of becoming and knowing, as an alternative to representationalism. They posit this “intra-activity” as a kind of “reworking of traditional notions of causality” (Ibid, p.133). In an interconnected ecology, causality has a highly complex meshwork of effect. The dynamism of becoming is part of the intra-active quality of the processes of a world in constant flux, with matter (“not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency”) being the “materialization of phenomena” (Ibid, p.139). Humans are thus not separate or removed from an observed world, but “part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity”, a view which destabilizes hierarchical notions of human superiority and places us within a multiplicitous, complex world of becomings and intra-actions. These three theorists provide a conceptual basis for my engagement with materials in artmaking where I explore ways of relating to materials which acknowledge their agency and listen to their potentialities.

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<sup>28</sup> Barad defines posthumanist as questioning the “givenness” of the differential or binary categories of human and non-human (Barad 2010, p. 154)

The expressive powers of matter and materials join forces with the immaterial forces of sensation in the artwork. They impact on the body and mind. Matter and materials are active participants in the artwork, creating a vibrational “texturology” which incorporates multiplicity. The constant processes of perception, affection (in the Deleuzian sense) and sensation are on-going activities of relation in the world, and are to a great extent independent of our conscious control. Grosz states that “sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, [...] but directly on the body’s own internal forces, on cells, organs, the nervous system” (2008, p. 73). Through a fine-tuned awareness (which I am aiming for in my dealings with materials), we can trace the movements and sources of these processes, however, the constant nature of their production (their intra-action, their folding and unfolding) becomes an infinitely complex textuality in life itself. As I propose in the section on my own making, textile-based artworks that work with repetition, optical movement and rhythmic foldings and unfoldings, may seem to be active, to vibrate or almost pulsate. The use of fabric and thread can engage with an embodied, affective domain through memory and association, as well as with a Baroque haptic form of visuality which appeals to sensation and affect through rhythmic texture. The fibre-based works of Cecilia Vicuña also draw on such entanglements of energies between body and materials.

### **Cecilia Vicuña’s *Quipu***

The work of Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña feeds into and draws on notions of material power and expressivity. I find a sympathy or affinity of making and materiality in the fibre-based works of this multimedia artist and poet, and her quipu works reveal a deeply layered relationship with materials. They are made with long strands of finely textured unspun wool, which reference the original Pre-Columbian quipu made of woven and knotted fibres, used as a means of communication, record keeping and narration. For Vicuña there is a powerful political level to her use of quipu which forms an important part of her motivation in making work:

The interaction between weaver and cord creates meaning. The knot is witness to the exchange. [...] Language itself is seen as weaving, so they “wrote” with threads. After the conquest, when new authorities seized the land, the khipu (quipu) system of knowledge had to be destroyed because it represented the cultural identity of the people and contained the record of the communal ownership of the land. But the communal sense of space embedded in quipu remained. (Cecilia Vicuña 2009, pp xxv-xxvi)

This mnemonic function is built into the very structure and being of Vicuña’s work. The historic aspect of the quipu addresses the sufferings and silencing of the indigenous peoples under Spanish/Portuguese colonial rule, where their whole world of knowledge, language and culture was lost, destroyed. This disappearance is paralleled by the twentieth century disappearances of citizens under a number of South American dictatorships. The title of her installation *Disappeared Quipu* (at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston 2018-2019) was named partly, Vicuña states, “to honour the disappeared from Latin America, the prisoners that were kidnapped and made to disappear by the dictatorships in South America” (Cited in Langsner 2018).



Figure 18: Example of Traditional Quipu.

With titles such as *Quipu Menstural* (2006), *Quipu Visceral* (2017), *Quipu Gut* (2017) and *Disappeared Quipu* (2018), the alignment of her works with bodies both present and absent is clear. The bodily references are also visually obvious in the long strands of blood red wool.



Figure 19: Cecilia Vicuña, *Quipu Womb (The Story of the Red Thread, Athens)*, 2017, dyed wool, installation view, Tate Gallery.

The body of the viewer is drawn into their tactile emanations through their sensory, visual appeal and in Vicuña's participatory works with the long woollen strands, each body becomes an integral part of the quipu, forming an enfolding knot in the downy lengths:

for many decades now, I've been creating collective weavings where people's bodies are knots of an interconnected web, which is the quipu, to remember all these layers and dimensions. (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p.107)

<https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/artes-visuales/el-arte-de-cecilia-vicuna-conecta-con-el-espacio-escultorico>

Figure 20: Cecilia Vicuña *Quipu da Lava*, photo: Iván Stephens.

The quipus also connect beyond the human body with the flows of life processes including the life-giving flow of water and other connective matter. Vicuña says in an artist statement that quipus are “a metaphor for the union of all” (Cited in Langsner 2018, unpaginated), and embody metaphysical properties for her – “the cycle of water has been the thread of my life. The thread, blood, and water are really the only guides we have” (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p.108). Vicuña’s early quipu works were unknotted, which she suggests was reflective of the forgotten art of the quipu language – “My first quipu was the quipu that remembers nothing” (Op cit.). As her quipu works unfolded, more knots emerged, knottings where the “thread turns around and sees itself” (Cited in Langsner, 2018, unpaginated). The action of knotting, a kind of complex folding, thus invokes a looking inwards and outwards, creating a bump or point of delay or reflection in the smooth flow of the woollen strands.

The tactile nature of the traditional quipu, read perhaps in a similar fashion to braille, is mirrored in the present in Vicuña’s quipus and she calls her work “multilingual”, including “languages I don’t even know myself” (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p. 103), languages of the body, of feeling, touching, connecting. They communicate in a way that seems to go beyond words into a more supra-linguistic, sense-based, affective

realm, a receptive and expressive interchange. She talks about her work as interactions and relationships which are fluid, constantly in flux:

People ask about ‘your work’ [...] But I think *my* or *your* is relative because really what’s happening is always an interaction. You can own that interaction maybe, but it will always be changing. There’s a permanent impermanence to that relationship. (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p. 106)

Vicuña’s notion of interaction here has an affinity with Barad’s intra-action, a complex “mutual entanglement” (Barad, 2010, p. 267) that operates in more mysterious and multiplicitous ways from traditional understandings of causality. Anthropocentric ideas of ownership are countered here by the flows of change which radiate out a kind of rippling of intra-action, rather than linear causality.

Vicuña’s work expresses an underpinning notion of change and emergence, where even memory has a function as “a work for the future”, a “ground from which to move forward”, which becomes part of the “moral compass” on which the future is based, articulating this in her poem, “The Collective Quipu”:

The collective quipu is the quipu  
not yet born  
the union of all  
Blood, body, water and thread.

Erasing the memory, we erase the moral compass of our cells.

The memory of injustice and hurt.  
(Vicuña and Kan 2018, p. 107)

There is a recognition of Indigenous knowledges and their cosmological understandings of the interconnected world in Vicuña’s work, which resonates with Viveiros de Castro’s “multinaturalism”. As Lucy Lippard states:

Respectfully sharing a spiritual approach with her indigenous sources, Vicuña sees herself as a receptacle of ancient knowledge, which she then translates into a very contemporary idiom. (Lippard 2017, p. 35)

Vicuña describes the influence of Western thought on contemporary culture as a kind of “colonialization of the mind” (Vicuña and Johnson 2019). Substituting Western individualism with a kind of collective interconnectedness, she sees words as “multidimensional creatures” and cites scientific research into quantum theory, such as Barad’s, which shows that “bacteria sing to each other” and that “sub-atomic particles are self-aware and communicate and tangle with one another”. For Vicuña, “the universe is itself language, everything is speaking to everything else, in particular chemical, sonic and territorial languages” (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p. 104). There is a similarity here to Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of sensation and affect, which impact at the level of the nervous system. This interconnectedness is given visual expression in the formation of the woollen strands:

The wool can be pulled because the structure of the animal hair allows it to stick together. They are able then to be stretched and pulled ever so slightly as a collective. One hair will not stretch, but a group of them will bind together and become malleable. I’m interested in the exchange of energy between the fibers (sic). (Vicuña and Johnson 2019, p. 7)

Like the threads of the wool themselves, Vicuña’s work brings together the collective power of energy exchanges and the vocal and expressive power of “things” or materials in her interactive quipu performance pieces, which create “a state of mind, a consciousness, that can only be achieved collectively in ritual” (Vicuña and Kan 2018, p. 107).<sup>29</sup> The threads themselves attest to this interconnected state through their collective formation. The notions of weaving and knotting which run through Vicuña’s work, imply a vision of an entangled, interconnected world.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Vicuña’s *Quipu Gut* 2018, [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/calendar/event/performance\\_cecilia\\_vicuna\\_september\\_2018](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/calendar/event/performance_cecilia_vicuna_september_2018) and Vicuña’s *Living Quipu* performance at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8iu85YlpsM>

Their [the Indigenous peoples of South America's] systems of weaving, combined with the knot-making language of the quipu, conveyed their understanding of the sacred threads that interconnected all beings in the cosmos. (Langsner 2018, unpaginated)

The idea of “ancestral trauma” (Vicuña and Johnson 2019, p. 9) in Vicuña’s works refers not only to the colonised peoples of Latin America but to the environment itself — “everything has suffered – the sticks, the rocks – everything has endured pain” (Ibid, p. 9). It seems that Vicuña’s environmental concerns are deeply rooted in and linked to her Indigenous cosmological understandings and her view of herself as “mestiza” or mixed race, which gives her an ability to bridge the contrasting worlds of her Indigenous heritage and the sphere of contemporary art. Kay Whitney observes an animist essence underpinning Vicuña’s work where, “for her, no substance is inert, nothing is exempt from consideration or subject to hierarchical distinctions [...] All things — humans, rocks, animals and plants — possess spiritual and supernatural natures.” (Whitney 2019, p. 2). There is an obvious attunement to materials in Vicuña’s work and in the ideas underpinning it. Echoes of the agential multinaturalism of Viveiros de Castro, and Barad’s intra-active performativity are potent here too.

## Material Engagement in Praxis

*Praxical knowledge is not a priori, there to be discovered, but is knowledge as action or 'knowing' that emerges from both thought and biological or sensory interaction or [...] from aesthetic experience. (Barrett, 2014, p. 5)*

*These hands have their character and souls,  
They are a world in movement, so it seems;  
The thumb and little finger are the poles  
Between which flow strange magnetic streams. (Paul Verlaine, 2018, p. 3)*

The uses of fabric as a covering, clothing the body, as a warming and protective layer between us and the elements; the decorative aspects of fabric, pattern and colour; these are part of our everyday relationship with cloth in the Western world. The fibres that make up the cloth, the warp and weft of the weave, the jumble of matted fibres in felt, the fineness or coarseness, the way it hangs in response to gravity and its own weight, the way it moves in the air, the loft of its lightness or the “droop” of its weight — all these are factors that influence the making of my work. Does the fabric fold, retaining a rounded form, or pleat with a sharp edge to its folding? How do the forces of gravity, plasticity, elasticity, compression or expansion come into play through the particular expressive qualities of the fabrics I am using? My own personal responses, my memories and associations enter into my relationship to fabric. Working with the softness of bamboo batting fabric for example, reminded me of my own childhood associations, the comfort I drew from tactile experiences and how much the vulnerability or extreme sensitivity and awareness, present in childhood, is forgotten or silenced in order to exist in the world. Cloth makes intimate connections not only with the body but with the memory as well.

There is also, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), a political dimension to the structure of cloth. They compare the vertical and horizontal structure of woven fabric, its infinite length and yet limited width, with the altogether different construction of felt, an “anti-fabric”, which “implies no separation of threads, only an entanglement of

fibers (sic) obtained by fulling [...]. What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers (sic)". As a structure it is "infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction", without top, bottom or centre it "distributes continuous variation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 475-6). The political implications of this for Deleuze and Guattari are that felt is as a fabric, a structure, paradigmatically non-hierarchical, whereas weaving implies a "State apparatus": "Was it not these characteristics [the warp and woof] that enabled Plato to use the model of weaving as the paradigm for 'royal sciences', in other words, the art of governing people or operating the State apparatus" (Ibid, p. 475). This is one reason why I have chosen to work with felt.

In working with fabric and thread I have brought my years of experience sewing clothes for myself and others, as well as knitting, hand-stitching. That experience forms a body memory and knowledge of fabric which colours and informs the way I work. The pliability of cloth, its planar structure which must be cut, stretched or pleated to conform to the human body in clothing (as in darts for the bustline), the way it can form a rounded shape through pleating or gathering, the way it flexes more readily when cut on the bias — all these aspects contribute to my sense-based, non-linguistic interactions with fabrics (as my body moves with the fabric), to my feelings for the possibilities and ingrained potentials of fabric as it elicits my engagement with it. Likewise, there are the tactile qualities of fabric which we experience everyday as wearers of cloth and clothing — its warmth, smoothness, texture, its stiffness or flexibility, the way it gives or moulds to the touch, the way it absorbs or repels the heat of our bodies, the way it breathes or restricts the flow of air around us. Fabric can provide comfort or feel stiff and unyielding. All these qualities create unconscious or subconscious responses which come to the fore as I work with materials.

There is also an interplay between mind, body and materials in the making which travels through the hands and fingers. The embodied memory of sewing flows through my fingers, influencing the length of stitch, the gathering of folds. My works seem to almost form themselves as I explore the possibilities of fabric and dye, thread or print. There is an immanence to the ways the materials express themselves and the ideas form themselves in the making, rather than prior to the making; although much

reflection has gone into the whole concept of the fold and its connective potentialities. Rather than trying to control the material, I am attempting to explore with the materials, guided by their potentialities. As Barbara Bolt states, “our practical understanding of things comes before any attempt to theorise them or explain them” (2011, p. 23) and I have tried to develop a readiness to listen in me, an openness to the tendencies of the materials when I work with them. Materials are part of the “lively” world of things. I find myself living with some of my fabrics for quite a while, looking at them regularly, feeling them, holding them up to the light, folding or squashing them together, seeing how they behave, before I actually come upon any thoughts about making, sensing out rather than logically developing ideas for making by an imposition of my will upon the cloth. The sewing process itself, the threading, is in some ways an attempt to bring the material under my control, yet there is an element also of a desire to allow the materials to show their potential, to stand (or hang) on their own and voice their possibilities. As Bolt suggests, “understanding is the ‘care’ that comes from handling” (2011, p. 24) and my background in sewing brings an embodied memory which gives a familiarity and ease as well as a sense of care. Fundamental to my way of working is a reciprocity and relationality between materials and maker.

In my choice of fabrics one influential factor is finding a fabric that both resists and holds form, taking on the forces not only of the upward pressure of the gathering stitch but also the downward pressure of gravity in a kind of give and take, a material exchange or intra-activity. Felt provided a surface that has a density which holds loose fold, rather than lighter materials which tend to crumple together when stitched and hung. I have mainly used synthetic felt, however in one work (*Folds and Flows #2*, 2021, Figure 18), I used wool felt which is very light and brings with it a certain transparency, enhancing both optical and haptic effects. The synthetic felt on the other hand has a density and strength which resists the push and pull of the stitching, resulting in more sensuous flounces and a feeling of lively movement (*Rising to a Baroque Rhythm*, 2021, Figure 19). For my printed works the fabric I eventually select is a synthetic lining material, which takes the print clearly and hangs in smooth folds. Other fabrics I experimented with, such as muslin, brought a transparency and looser weave which

tend to resist the ink and introduce effects of light, which counteract the clarity of the folds themselves.



*Figure 21: Pamela Isaacs Folds and Flows #2, 2021, Wool felt, turmeric, cotton yarn, photo Ian Hill, installation view, Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021*



Figure 22: Pamela Isaacs *Rising to a Baroque Rhythm*, 2021, synthetic felt, turmeric, cotton thread, photo by artist, installation view Annex Gallery, La Trobe University, September 2021.

The development in my praxis can be observed in the changing degree of control expressed by the threads in my work. In experimenting with the power of the thread, I was asking myself: What would happen if I reduced the number of lines of thread, could this allow the material to flow more of its own accord? My earlier work (*Folds and Flows #1*, 2020, Figure 17) shows an intensity of folding (formed by the large number of vertically running red threads), which create lines of movement, ripples which repeat themselves in an uneven rhythm the length of the cloth. In *Folds and Flows #2* (2021) (Figure 21), I have reduced the number of threads, loosening and softening the folds and lengthening the stitch which holds the folds in place. This enacts a lessening of control, which enables a play of the forces of the materials, allowing the fabric to bend to its own rhythm rather than forcing a crimped structure onto it. In *Rising to a Baroque Rhythm* (2021) (Figure 21), there is only one single thread doing the work of the folding or gathering in each of the lengths of cloth, and this allows the fabric to fall and fold according to its own nature. This development is a process of gradually giving the materials a voice, of acknowledging their own potentialities and letting their powers play out. In some of my earlier experiments with making I used wire, sewn into the cloth to create and hold the folds (see Figure 23) or detailed stitching (see Figure 17). Moving away from the wire to a use of stitched threads and then the gradual relinquishment of the number of threads, was a kind of risk-taking and losing control which allowed my praxis to transition from representation to a more processual and relational approach. The stitched work in Figure 24 is representational in that its folds are recognisable as breasts in varying states of ageing, and the folds of Figure 23 were forced onto the long stretch of wired and padded calico, bringing it into a complexly curved form. Other works involved intricate threading of wool through cuts in packing paper (Figure 25) or the winding of silk thread around the cloth to hold the gathering in place (Figure 26). In my latest experiments I have abandoned the thread altogether, fixing the felt at a number of points in the ceiling and allowing it to drape and fall of its own accord (Figure 27). The folds form themselves in the downward drag of weight and gravity and, where the fabric touches the floor, in a meeting of horizontal and vertical pressure or forces.



Figure 23: Pamela Isaacs *Untitled 1*, 2020, calico, wire, synthetic wadding, ink, photo Ian Hill, installation view, Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021



Figure 24: Pamela Isaacs *Untitled 2*, 2020, calico, wadding, gumnuts, photo Ian Hill, Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021



Figure 25: Pamela Isaacs *Untitled 3&4*, 2020/21 pre-cut packing paper, woollen yarn, woollen fleece, photo Ian Hill, Newstead Arts Hub, February 2021



Figure 26: Pamela Isaacs *Untitled 5*, 2021, muslin, turmeric, silk thread, photo by artist



Figure 27: Pamela Isaacs, *Untitled 6*, 2021, synthetic felt, turmeric, photo by artist, installation view, Annex Gallery, La Trobe University, September 2021

The fabrics I use in the works are hand-dyed with turmeric. The dyeing process itself operates largely beyond my control and the way the fabric takes the dye depends on a number of material factors: the exposure to the dye through its position in the water, the uneven spread of the turmeric throughout the water, the length of time it sits in the water and the absorbent potential of the fabric itself. I have experimented with dyeing a range of fabrics including calico, muslin and synthetic and wool felt. The uneven density of colour is a result of the unpredictability of the dyeing process and evokes a textural feel.

A line of stitches is a line of force, a framework, a holding together, enacting a gathering or folding which is dynamic, depending on the pressure or tension embedded in the stitch.<sup>30</sup> A stitch can crumple fabric together or stretch it apart, stitches hold up what would naturally fall without their grasp, but like all matter, the threads of the stitch are beholden to the force of gravity. In my stitching and the use of thread, I see the stitch as a link, a line of connection, following an uneven path. Particularly in my later threaded works the technique of stitching shifts the weight of control and allows stitching to change over time according to the interactive dynamics of sewing body, mind and fabric. The multiple directions of the planes of folded and gathered fabric move as trajectories leading the eye towards various potential paths, creating a lively interplay of folds and planes which suggests independent motion. The lines of thread emerging from the fabric at the end of their gathering function, fall to the floor and reside there in a tangled maze. Once entangled they are almost impossible to untangle without forming knots which themselves join thread to thread, expressive perhaps of the interconnected world.

There is an overt textural element in many of my works, whether through the image's form itself, printed on cloth (*Flow*, 2020-21, Figure 2), or through the physical gathering

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<sup>30</sup> Feminist theorists have explored the politically charged implications embedded in cloth and the stitch as a "medium of the powerless" (Yuko 2013, p. 25). Roszika Parker, in her book *The Subversive Stitch*, observes the "dual face of embroidery" where historically "it has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint", by promoting "norms of feminine obedience" (Parker 2010, p. xix), while at the same time allowing women to generate income and find some measure of economic independence. Although I am not addressing directly this aspect of cloth and thread, it underpins my own relationship with cloth and stitch.

with stitched threads. The intention is that this texture of folds is held in place by the structural function of the threads, which are like the bones of the skeleton or connective tissue, sinews or ligaments, so that they might embody an expression of extensive and compressive forces which are at play in processes of folding/unfolding. The threads not only hold together, but also connect or link, whilst also reaching beyond that function in a flow of potential entanglement, drawn by gravity towards the floor, swirling and knotting themselves in a labyrinthine complexity.

Thus, the approach to the materials I use has been developed in order that these materials might begin to come together to interact on both a subtle and a gross level, creating sensations, affects and associations that move across and through bodies, generating energies and potentialities beyond my control. These tactics propose to activate the irregular rhythmic movement of texture, which pulsates visually, vibrating and reverberating within and through the bodies of maker and viewer, and to begin to harmonise or interact with the internal bodily rhythms such as pulse or breath, as well as mind and consciousness.

### **Drawing the Threads Together**

As a work of co-creation, the artwork is a product of relationality and connectivity between materials and maker. Art is produced in a process of not only anthropocentric thought-centred activity, but also in a process of interaction or intra-action between the human and non-human. Human and materials form a kind of symbiosis of creation, of newness, through a dynamic movement of expression between the material and the human, an unfolding which itself leads and which artist and material follow.

Underpinning my work and my way of relating to materials is a centring of “women’s alternative ethical and knowledge styles” (Plumwood 2002, p.138). Yet I do not wish to posit a gynocentrism, but rather a matter-centrism which gives equal status to lively matter and all nonhuman and human beings, much in the sense of an ethics of

interconnected multiplicity and continuous variation or genesis, of folding, unfolding and refolding.

The making in this project has been driven by a methodology or process — the Deleuzian fold and all it entails. In the development of a praxis, working with the materials has taken my understandings further and deeper. I now see folds everywhere and processes of folding and unfolding. Like Vicuña my practice seeks to explore notions of intra-action, entanglement and flows of energy, with the forces of interconnection linking, in unseen ways, everything — every living and non-living (but vital) being.

Becoming more attuned to materials is perhaps part of a methodology to redress the chasm that exists between the human and the non-human world. Sharon Blakey and Liz Mitchell (2017) express succinctly the nature of such an attunement in their notion of “material time”, as they explore a different way of being in the world, in places where they feel “at home” and time develops a different pace. They state that, “as such they are places where time seems to slow down — and as the urgency of its forward trajectory diminishes, so it appears somehow to ‘spread’, laterally, acquiring an almost viscous consistency” (Blakey and Mitchell 2017, p. 3). This, they suggest promotes a “heightened sensorial awareness in which the body — the self — also seems to ‘spread’”. An attunement with materials is developed, with “moments of apparent ‘oneness’ where boundaries temporarily dissolve” (Ibid, p.3). They call this “sense of slowing and spreading” in an encounter with materials, “material time”. Entwined within this notion of “material time” is a “concept (and ethics) of care” (Ibid, p.3), in which is embedded a developing of an increased capacity to just listen without thought or judgement:

It requires a paying of quiet attention to things easily missed: a listening not only to others and the external world, but also to one’s own minute and multisensory responses, through which the most powerful realisations may, occasionally, occur. (Blakey and Mitchell 2017, p. 3)

Such an attunement to and care for materials provides a way of bringing us closer to the non-human world, and of incorporating a respect for those other generative and lively worlds beyond the artificiality with which humans surround ourselves. Perhaps such attunement can become an antidote to human alienation from the world, of which we really need to consider ourselves an integral and interdependent part. It is a methodology which I find contributes significantly to my practice.

Texture, evinced in matter, materials and in artworks, is paradigmatic of multiplicity, interconnectedness and entanglement, as are the fractal-like forms of folds, their unlimited “folds upon folds”. Attunement to the non-human provides an ontology and an ethos that acknowledges the multiplicitous, interconnected nature of the ever-changing, generative, dynamic and creative forces of becoming that drive life processes. Through my engagement with materials in the making of my art I have tried to develop a way of cooperating with the materials, allowing the materials to talk and express their unique, vital and sensuous manifestations.

## Conclusion

This artmaking, art-thinking and -writing project has led me on a journey in which my thought and understanding has shifted in unexpected ways. At the start, I was unable to conceive of how to move beyond the purely representational in my engagement with the fold. Gradually through my reading and through the extended encounter with the materials which has been at the heart of my making, I have increasingly let go of control and opened myself to the materials I work with. This has resulted in my growing awareness of the forces of creation, generation and intra-action which underpin all life and which are fundamental to Deleuze's understanding of the fold. I now see processes of folding and unfolding everywhere. The concept of the fold embodies a flat ontology which is able to encompass notions of complexity, multiplicity and entanglement. Such an understanding of the world, life processes and subjectivities beyond the purely human is far more apposite for the times and conditions in which we currently live. Extended into the realm of studio research, the concept of the fold has offered me a mode of making that embodies an ethos and ontology of interconnectedness and non-hierarchical relationality, which I see as operating between and amongst the human and the nonhuman, if one is willing to become more attuned to those potencies.

Folding and unfolding processes are ubiquitous and operate in a kind of fractal universe from the minutest particle to the waves of the ocean, to geological features of mountains and strata, to coastlines and clouds. These processes embody the unlimited potentiality of becoming. They drive processes of interconnection and interrelationship on a physical, social and political level; they drive the unfolding of events in time and the growth of beings through reciprocal and interdependent exchanges of understanding, experience and learning. Folds involve texture, pattern and rhythm, such as in soundwaves or rock formations in a kind of repetitive visual, aural or sensory undulation. There is a communality of folding and unfolding in the development of the world, the universe, where everything affects everything else in a mesh of interconnections. Folding processes bring together and drive apart, working together with elemental forces to expand or contract, bend or straighten, complicate or simplify, compress or stretch, intensify or loosen. They are the texture of the universe.

Linked with the fold is the Baroque, a concept or trait which exceeds eras and regions, and which perhaps best expresses the multiplicitous, interconnected nature of things. It is a style that is capable of conceiving of a complex world in constant change and motion, full of vitality and creativity in its overflowing exuberance. The Baroque has influenced my making processes in terms of the implicit sense of motion or agitation in my work, particularly an upward movement or the pull between the high and the low, which Deleuze observed as characteristic of the Baroque. My work also engages with folds materially and sensorially. Texture, pattern and rhythm work together in a Baroque hapticity to leap beyond the purely physical to a level of the spirit, consciousness or whatever you might call that admixture of mind, body, awareness, sensory perception and “imperatives”<sup>31</sup> in continuous feedback loops, that is being in the world. Texture and folding go hand in hand, each creating the other. Their haptic impact goes beyond the conscious, communicating directly or immediately through the senses and the unconscious in a non-linguistic way, yet “speaking” powerfully at the same time.

What has particularly drawn me to the fold is its flat ontology. I wish to be more open to the presence of forces and powers beyond Western knowledge, to sentiences beyond the purely human, to the multiplicity and interconnection of complex ecologies. What

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<sup>31</sup> Philosopher Alphonso Lingis speaks of an interdependence of affective impact through the concept of the “imperative”: “A perceived thing is a pole which draws the convergent surfaces and organs of our bodies like a telos, a task. The reality of things is not given in their perception, but orders it as an imperative” (Lingis 1998, p. 63). Lingis speaks of perception of visible things, “intersensorial and real”, as “supported in their places by the ground” where our gaze is “refracted” to other things in a site and it “anchors the layout of a site”. He terms this the “perceived field”, however he describes the “consistency and coherence” we bring to this field as an imperative. Alongside this imperative coherence is also an “imperative fragmentation of reality in perception. Things each summon us into their own settings, and each summons us to forget the rest and devote ourselves to it” (Ibid, p.68). Art too, together with its materials, can be seen as forming a kind of summoning imperative when we think with Lingis:

No one makes himself a dreamer or a visionary; those we admire – perhaps everyone we admire – are men and women who came upon a field imperative for them, the field of a visionary imperative, a musical imperative, a nocturnal imperative, a passionate imperative (Ibid, p. 115).

Like Bennett’s thing power, things perceived provoke responses, thoughts, where “insights come as gifts from a contact with things where we give ourselves completely to them and they to us” (Lingis 1998, p. 221).

my practice is attempting to reach towards is an expression of the vital, positive forces of life, in a kind of tapping into the flows of meaning-seeking that every being and consciousness is driven towards, to unfold potential and to push beyond ignorance and habitual, colonialist, Western, dichotomous and hierarchical ways of thinking.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the artwork can be thought of as a being of sensation in itself that the artist cannot control in its reception or impact on the viewer. Here the artist can have thoughts and ideas that they would like to express, but there may be many more thoughts and ideas, feelings, sensations and reactions provoked in the viewer than ever entered the artist's conscious thinking. Both maker and viewer might sit with the work and allow it to express its own imperatives, especially if they are engaging fully with the power and performativity of matter from a non-hierarchical, non-anthropocentric perspective. For me there is a kind of allegorical power in both the fabric and the stitch, as both hint at connections and interconnections, at overt and hidden potentialities: textures, vibrations, rhythms, generative repetitions, multiplicities and processes of folding and unfolding, genesis, growth, decay and rebirth into something new, forces both seen and unseen which drive the unfolding of this amazing world. I am impelled by a sense of wonder and wish to communicate this sense of wonder. For the creative process manifests in an interweaving of forces — bodily and gestural, perceptual and feeling-based, inklings and sensed feelings, reciprocity with the stuff and process of making in a give-and-take of feeling and emergence beyond conscious control, a generous allowing of the expression of other forces, unknowable in their entirety but nonetheless sensed. It is an adventure of collaboration where research and making intersect to bring unforeseen results. In this endeavour I became a facilitator for the artwork's evolution in a process of co-generation.

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## Appendix 1

Documentation of my Masters Examination Exhibition (6<sup>th</sup>—17<sup>th</sup> December, Phyllis Palmer Gallery, La Trobe University, Bendigo)

As the exegesis was submitted in October 2021, six weeks before the exhibition, I was unable to include photographic documentation of the examination exhibition itself. Contained in this appendix are therefore, the room sheet from the exhibition and a number of photos of the exhibition.

Room Sheet:

## ***Unfolding***

Pamela Isaacs

6<sup>th</sup> — 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Phyllis Palmer Gallery, La Trobe University, Bendigo

This exhibition explores processes of folding various materials as well as creative practices such as printmaking, dyeing and sewing, to investigate the textural and sculptural possibilities of fabric. Unfolding and enfolding are involved in change, growth, genesis and decay, aspects of the interconnected world. Folding and unfolding create connections among the multiplicity of interconnections. These processes are driven by forces such as plasticity, extension and contraction, expansion and intensification or compression, creating intricately interlinked textures as well as more smooth and flowing surfaces.

The fold is also a registering of potential, infolded in any structure, and speaks of yet to emerge possibilities, extending from organic and inorganic matter to non-human and human beings, to the inner realm of the human psyche. Challenging anthropocentric and hierarchical world views, the work explores the expressive powers of the materials, their complex, intra-active interconnectedness and their enfolded potentialities.

Phyllis Palmer Gallery:

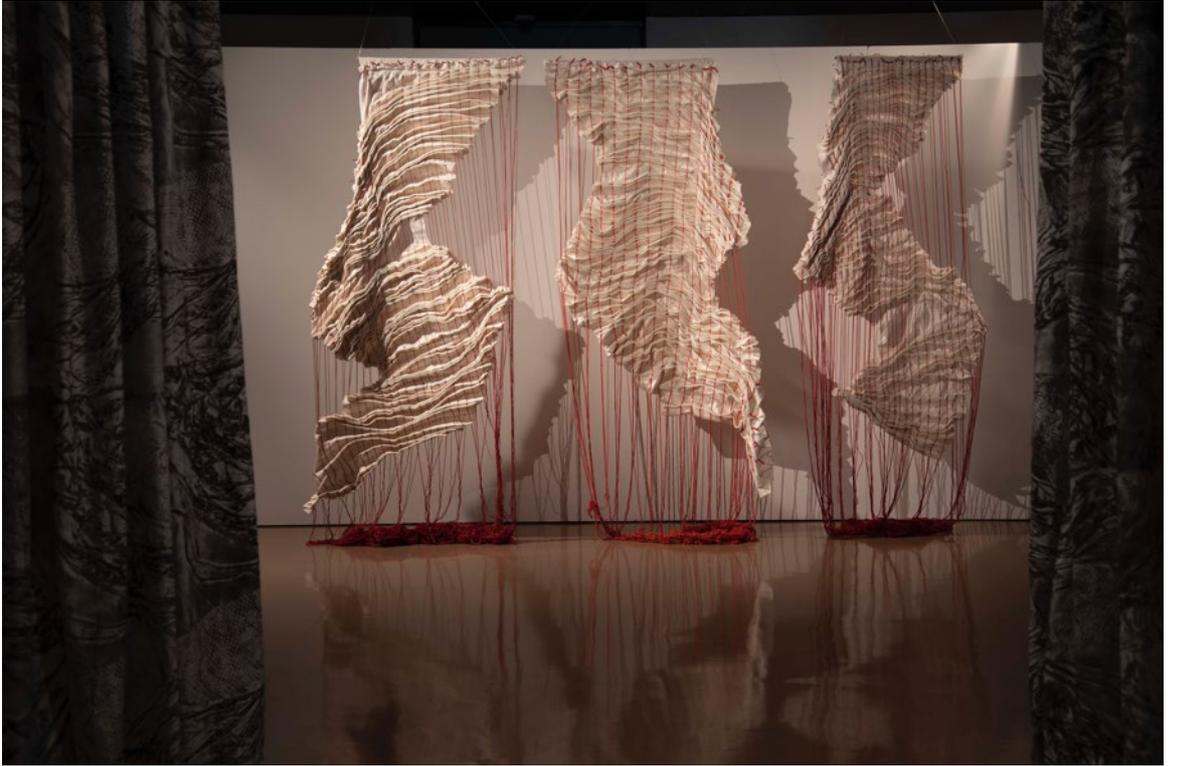
1. *Rising to a Baroque Rhythm*, 2021, synthetic felt, turmeric, cotton yarn, dimensions variable
2. *Marmoreal Drift*, 2021, polyester lining fabric, printing ink, aluminium wire, dimensions variable.
3. *Dance of Vital Matter*, 2020-21, bamboo batting, woollen yarn, dowel, dimensions variable.

Annex Gallery (Upstairs):

4. *Where Forces Meet*, 2021, synthetic felt, turmeric, dimensions variable.

**Pamela Isaacs, *Dance of Vital Matter*, 2021**, photos by Lisa Guazzardi and Andrew Goodman

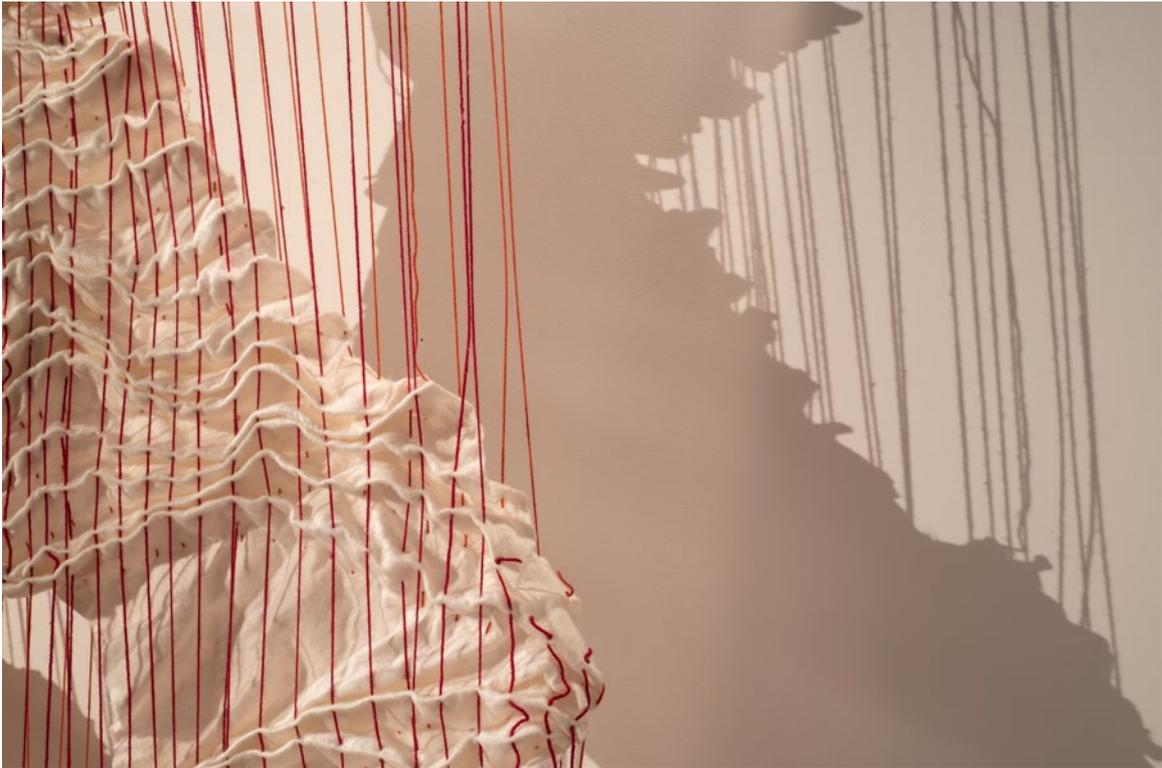


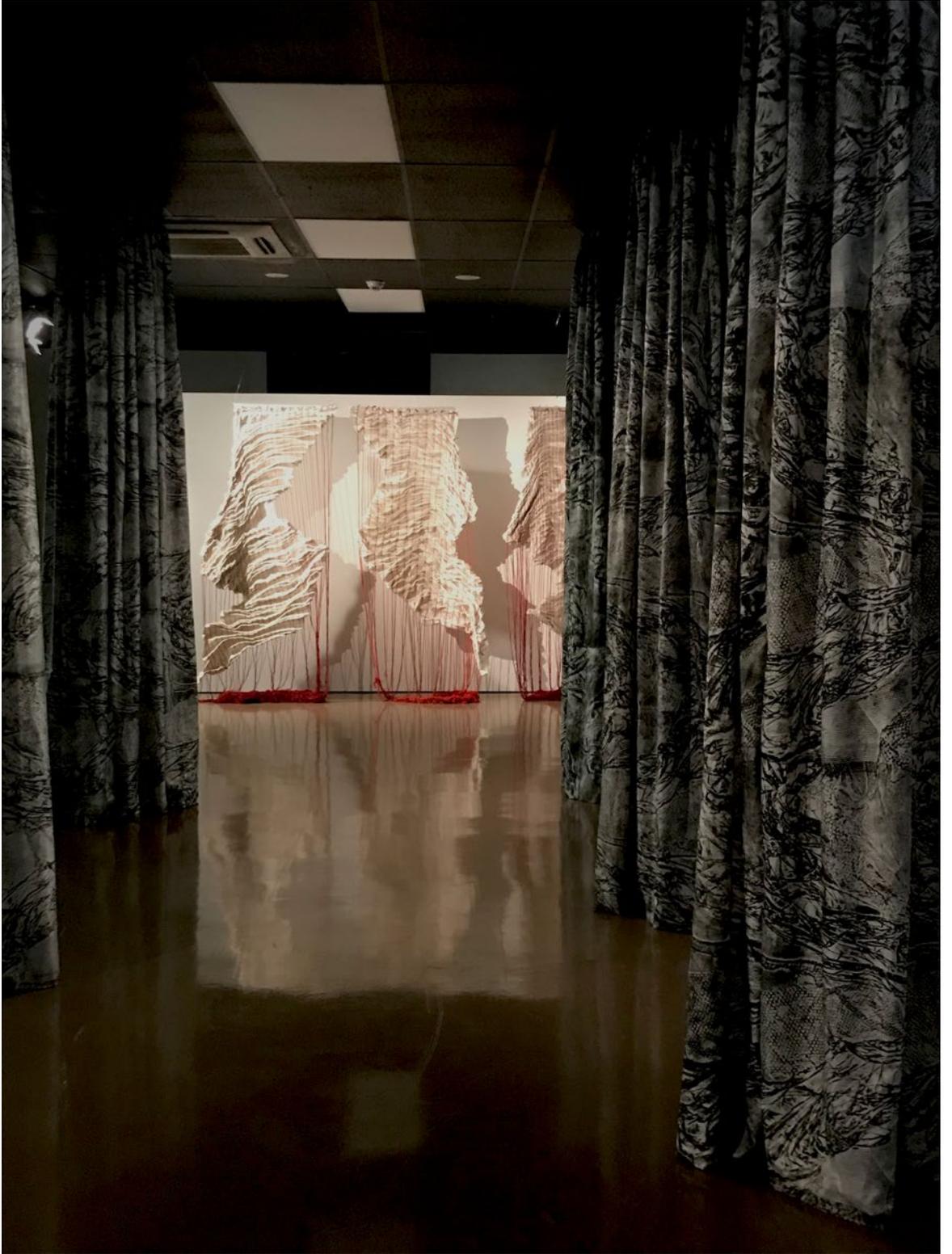












**Pamela Isaacs, *Rising to a Baroque Rhythm*, 2021**, photos by Lisa Guzzardi and Andrew Goodman























Pamela Isaacs, *Marmoreal Drift*, 2021, photos by Lisa Guzzardi and Andrew Goodman













Pamela Isaacs, *Where Forces Meet*, 2021, photos by Lisa Guzzardi















