

The body is absent: A filmic and performative presentation

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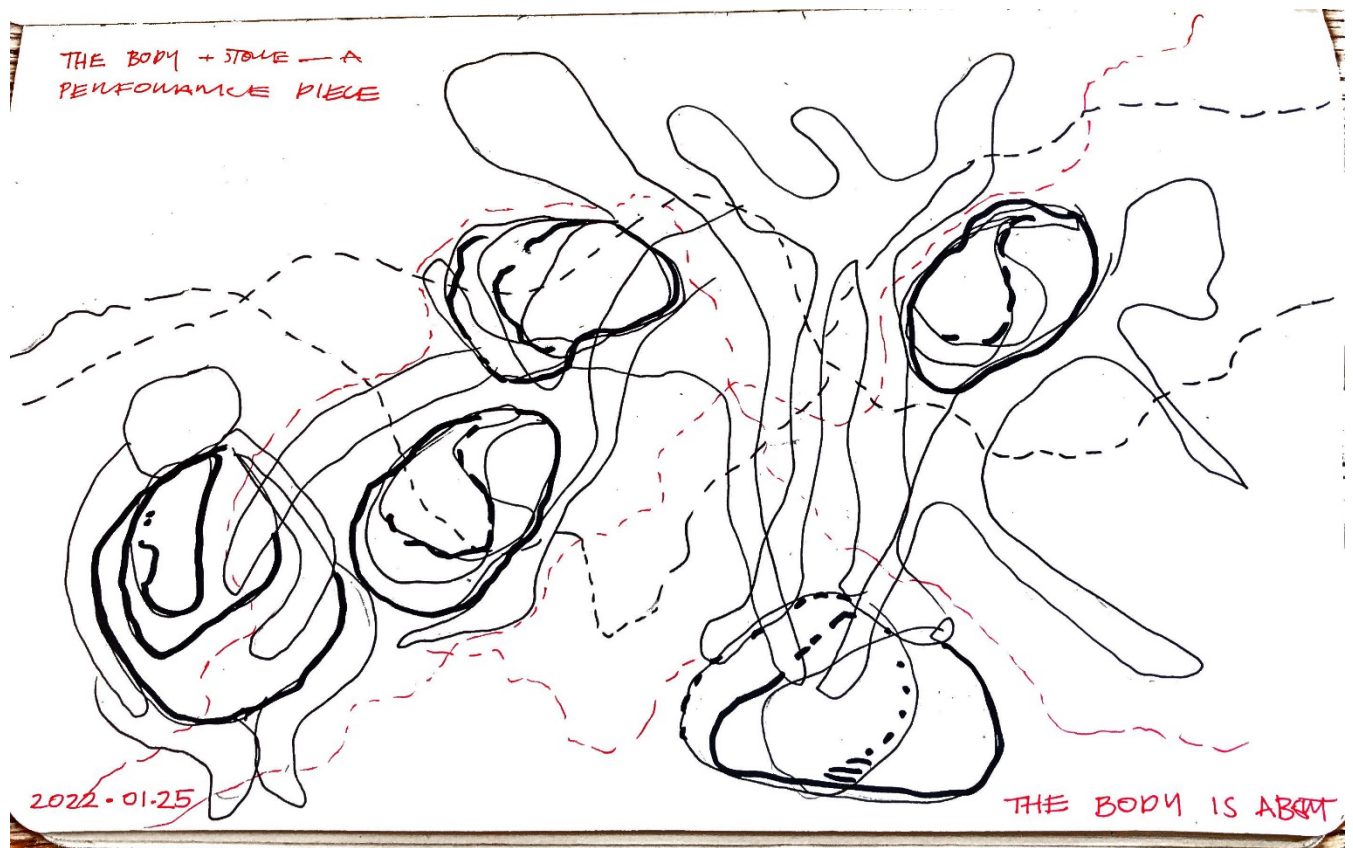


Figure 1. Sketches of the proposed performance

In my early work on my PhD, which explored stone as a vibrant material within the urban terrain formation, I allowed myself a period of unstructured learning. In which I attempted to engage instinctively with the stony materials, to learn about the terrains stony materials outside of the ways my formal education in architecture had instructed me that I would come to know. I was guided here by my own memories of formative encounters with stone within the terrains of my youth. As a child, I was given access to both formal written information and

interesting ecological and geological terrain to learn to understand without much interference from the adult world, learning about stones materiality through touching, gathering, carrying, shifting stones in the veld. In my early research, I employed a similar approach. Beyond walking and looking, my knowledge developed next through physical explorations of materials, such as going for a walk, gathering and looking as my material research developed, beyond walking practices. The body remained a critical site of investigation within the work, but as in many material practices, it remained absent from the final work.

Tim Ingold, the anthropologist, describes this way of coming to know materials as kin to weaving and growing. Practices in which the materials traverse the body in the process of becoming. Ingold suggests that we learn about the materials from which we make things through engaging with those materials within a material world that pushes back. Reminding us repeatedly that material knowledge is created through bodily experience, with materials, in a weathering world. Within his work, he examines the work of crafting, making and designing through the lens of art, architecture, anthropology and archaeology (Ingold, 2013). Ingold emphasises that making a thing from raw materials within this body of writing is coming to know through a haptic encounter. Be that through weaving, designing a house, making a handaxe, or forming a mound. He suggests that when we make things, maker and material are in conversation through gesture. Physical acts of making incorporate the whole body and forge an entangled understanding of materials agencies, which labour to produce, the final emergent form. In an essay entitled techniques of the body (Mauss, 1973) in discussing actions that generate material knowledge, Marcel Mauss describes these as 'bodily habitus (Mauss, 1973)'; what was interesting to me in Mauss essay is that many of the techniques he describes are techniques in negotiating material as a medium; bodily techniques of walking, climbing, tramping, stomping, tiptoeing, sloshing are techniques to navigate the complexity of earthly terrain and air, as wind, Swimming – Water, Dancing, however, becomes not a mode of navigation, but the transcendence of it. And of course, still, other general techniques, are employed in navigating matter, pulling, pushing, throwing, holding, along with techniques of the hand, touching, rubbing, squashing, are bodily techniques for, discovering things about the world and its material qualities.

In much of my work, I speak about learning to work with materials as bodily flow. In a casual Instagram conversation, recently. A casual observer noted that perhaps my thinking of material as a medium inflow Stemmed from different bodily habits. That perhaps, as a person who has swum my whole life, I was accustomed to navigating water as a medium, which requires the body to flow with the medium, in order to move through the medium, the swimming is perhaps a form of gestural being with water as a material medium, which requires flow.

I would like to propose a filmic and performative presentation for the conference, which explores the notion of the body and the haptic in gesture as a site of material research in creative practice. The presentation would be composed of 3 filmic pieces, entitled shifting matter – recoded in the creation of material pile work. In front of

which, a performative piece would take place. The performance would entail – an embodied exploration of a stone extracted from – the Witwatersrand ridgeline.

Given the need for the online requirement of the conference, I will develop this idea into a short filmic exploration – to accompany a short paper for publication, which aims to explore the notions of the haptics of the body as a site of material knowledge production in creative practice.



Figure 2. Stills from the filmic investigations – ‘composting with, 1 and 2.’

References

Ingold, T., 2013. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 1 edition. Routledge, London ; New York.

Mauss, M., 1973. Techniques of the body. *Economy and Society* 2, 70–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003>