CHAPTER 1 EMBODIMENT AND THE ARTS IN CONTEXT

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1 Plotting a course

Gabrielle Goliath's 'This song is for …' (2019) (displayed on the cover of this book) is an interdisciplinary artwork that combines a pre-recorded musical performance projected onto two large screens with vinyl text applied to the walls of the exhibition space. While this work has travelled extensively across the globe, I encountered it at the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg in September 2019. The emotive sound of a familiar song captivated me even before I had walked up the stairs to the main gallery. At the same time, I noticed that the beautiful tune was interrupted by an annoying repetition similar to when a vinyl record gets stuck. Both intrigued and mildly irritated, when I entered the main room upstairs I was confronted by two enormous screens that displayed a musical ensemble performing the familiar song I had heard. Other songs I recognised later included REM's 'Everybody hurts', Sia's 'Unstoppable' and Rachel Platten's 'Fight song'. The videos themselves jerked repetitively, just as the music did.

With a visual frame of reference to help make sense of the oddly disjointed music, it soon became evident that the interruption was not at all accidental. Searching for more clarity, I moved deeper into the gallery to read the texts on the walls. Each block of text recounted a horrific ordeal of sexual abuse and rape. Whilst some accounts were detailed and elaborate, others were brief, leaving my imagination to flesh out the details. The discordant music that played while I read the sickening stories cloaked the gallery in a sombre, almost chilling, atmosphere. One could not leave the exhibition unaffected. The combination of sensual voices, evocative (yet unsettling) music, carefully constructed images (in which stark colour and high-definition close-ups were key elements) and poignant stories elicited affective responses in those who encountered the work. Some people sat on the cushions placed in front of the screens, listening intently to the music; others sat on benches placed in front of

the narratives so that they could contemplate each painful word. I noticed their glum expressions and soft whispers and slowly became overwhelmed by the solemn ambience in the gallery.

The arts can potentially provide us with comfort and encouragement, inspiration and stimulation. However, they may also challenge and shock us, leading to discomfort and unease as in 'This song is for ....' (2019). In other words, the arts rub up against our bodies, sometimes literally, at other times metaphorically, sometimes comfortingly and at other times awkwardly. This volume is about the body and aesthetic experience. It takes the body as its methodological starting point and insists that an encounter with the arts – which, in this volume, includes visual art, visual culture, photography, film, music, performance, the digital arts and design – is not merely a meaning-making event but also a deeply-felt bodily experience. The contributors to this volume recognise that the meanings that arise from encounters with the arts often result from intimately-felt somatic effects.

In research on the arts in the Global North, bodily modes of engagement between creators, the artworks or performances they produce and their viewers or audiences, is a topic that has attracted increasing attention over the last decade. A prominent example is Francesca Bacci and David Melcher's book titled *Art and the senses*.[1] In that publication the authors bravely included essays by 'scientists, architects, art historians, a cultural anthropologist, musicians, visual artists, a chef, [and] a choreographer', among others.[2] At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, *Art and the senses* provided an overview of the status of what, at that time, was a burgeoning field of enquiry. However, with its strong focus on sensory perception and Western art and culture, the volume included no contributions by (South) African scholars or any topics that dealt specifically with the arts in (South) Africa. Moreover, apart from isolated and dispersed research on this topic in the South African academic landscape, no volume has yet attempted to open up a dialogue around embodiment and the arts with a particular focus on the *South* African context. This volume, titled *Embodiment and the arts: Views from South Africa* thus redirects the earlier conversation opened up by *Art*

1 F Bacci & D Melcher (eds) *Art and the senses* (2011) 1-7.

2 Bacci & Melcher (n 1) 1.

and the senses to focus on the South African context and revitalise those debates by foregrounding insights gained from the latest research in the field.

In South Africa, scholarship on this topic, until recently, has tended to be rather scattered with discursive analyses of the arts enjoying the spotlight. A notable exception is Catherine F Botha's volume *African somaesthetics: Cultures, feminisms, politics*.[3] As Botha rightly notes in her introduction, the volume is 'unique in bringing together original research on the body in African cultures, specifically interrogating the possibilities of the contribution of a somaesthetic approach in the context of colonization, decolonization, and globalization in Africa'.[4]

African somaesthetics undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to scholarship in a field that, as yet, is under-theorised in the African context. *Embodiment and the arts: Views from South Africa* offers an extension of the debates and perspectives opened up by Botha's publication. However, apart from its specific focus on *South* Africa rather than Africa, this volume takes a different path in at least three other significant ways. First, instead of delimiting the discourse to somaesthetics, our point of entry is a wider range of methodologies (to which I return later).[5] Second, the publication traverses topics relating to a broader range of what we consider to be 'the arts'. These include visual art, music, performance, film, the digital arts and design. Moreover, whereas *African somaesthetics* addresses dance, but not music, *Embodiment and the arts: Views from South Africa* includes music but not dance. Finally, in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on arts practice and experience since 2020, some of the chapters in this volume specifically deal with the arts in digital environments. This in itself sets the volume apart from any other in this field. *Embodiment and the arts: Views from South Africa* no doubt will complement *African*

3 CF Botha (ed) *African somaesthetics: Cultures, feminisms, politics* (2020).

4 Botha (n 3) 2.

5 The American pragmatist, Richard Shusterman, is regarded as the father of somaesthetics. He set out the parameters of this field in R Shusterman 'Somaesthetics: A disciplinary proposal' (1999) 57 *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 299. Whilst a somaesthetic approach to aesthetic experience finds conceptual links with the body-centred methods we employ in this volume, our focus is not on art as a form of self-examination and self-cultivation as Shusterman's approach emphasises.

somaesthetics and will contribute to the newly-developing discourse in the field of embodiment, sensory experience and the arts on the African continent.

While the scope of this volume is broad in terms of what is categorised as 'the arts', the theoretical and methodological approach is narrow in that it takes the embodiment of both the producer of the arts and the audience/spectator/viewer/participant/experiencer seriously.[6] The contributors frame their arguments around theoretical paradigms that begin with the lived body – as both the domain of enquiry and research conduit – in order to understand how meanings are forged and how identities are produced in the encounter with the arts. To this end, the authors ground their explorations in subjective lived experience, with phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, embodied perception, ecological psychology, and insights gained from the cognitive sciences, to name only a few, framing their arguments. In this way, all the writers draw attention to the textures of embodiment and of being in the world as a valuable and significant way in which to understand the arts.

In the Western rationalist tradition that still pervades much academic scholarship on the arts today, scientific objectivity still is often prioritised over enquiries that focus on embodied and sensory experiences, emotions and feelings. The denial of the importance of bodily knowledge in academic scholarship is much larger than the arts, of course, and stems from a denigration of the body in Western philosophy and in social thought. Henri Lefebvre writes that 'Western philosophy has *betrayed* … *abandoned* [and] *denied* the body. The living body, being at once "subject"

6 Settling on the most suitable term to use when referring to the subject of aesthetic experience is not always easy. Audience/spectator/viewer/participant/experiencer might be accurate in some instances and reductive in others. Interestingly, French philosopher Mikel Dufrenne avoids referring to 'viewers' or 'audiences' at all, both of which privilege sight and hearing respectively. Instead, based in a phenomenological methodology that recognises that the whole body is involved in aesthetic experience, Dufrenne uses the term 'perceiving subjects' to draw attention to the aesthetic transactions that take place when people are actively engaged in appreciative experience of the arts. M Dufrenne *The phenomenology of aesthetic experience* (1973) trans ES Casey 443. Along the same lines, Amelia Jones argues that the term 'experiencer' aptly 'evokes all levels of interpretive engagement'. A Jones *Material traces. Performativity, artistic 'work' and new concepts of agency* (2015) 22.

and "object" cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the "signs of non-body".'[7] Lefebvre, of course, is criticising the Cartesian paradigm according to which the body is misunderstood as a mere instrument assisting the mind in producing knowledge about the world. According to this approach the 'brain in a vat' is unaffected by an experiencing, feeling body.[8]

Our actual experience of living in the world is multifaceted and multidimensional. It involves directly-felt sensations combined with memories of past experiences and the ideas we bring to these encounters. In other words, memory and the intellect combine with sensory stimuli to 'make sense' of our experiences. In the body-centred approach this volume takes, we deliberately set out to challenge the assumption that embodiment and sensory experiences are beyond the domain of a serious appreciation for, and understanding of, the arts. The emphasis on experiential forms of knowledge production is rooted in the 'corporeal turn',[9] the 'affective turn',[10] the 'ontological turn'[11] and the 'sensual revolution'.[12] Although each of these theoretical approaches takes a somewhat different track, the literature that has resulted from these turns in the social sciences and the humanities centres on corporeal experience in the social world. Following this route, the chapters in this volume investigate how the body (of the viewer and/or the artist) is solicited, performed, represented and experienced in particular encounters with the arts and what effects and possibilities these experiences might allow. In this sense, the underlying foundation of our approach is based in a conception of aesthetic experience as active and engaged rather than passive and disinterested. I shall shortly return to the way in which aesthetic experience can be understood as active. For now, however, I want to discuss the notion of embodiment in more detail.

7 H Lefebvre *The production of space* (1991) 407 (emphasis in original).

8 See Lakoff & Johnson's critique of the Western philosophical tradition and their model of the embodied mind in G Lakoff & M Johnson *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought* (1999).

9 M Sheets-Johnstone *The corporeal turn: An interdisciplinary reader* (2009).

10 B Massumi 'The autonomy of affect' (1995) 3 *Cultural Critique* 83.

11 C Hemmings 'Invoking affect' (2005) 19 *Cultural Studies* 548.

12 D Howes 'Introduction' in D Howes (ed) *Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader* (2005) 1.

2 Embodiment

The anthropologist Thomas Csordas distinguishes between *body* – as 'a biological, material entity' – and *embodiment* – as the 'indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experiences and the mode of presence and engagement in the world'.[13] But is it necessary to make such a distinction? Does the separation of body and embodiment not simply invert the arbitrary Cartesian dualism of 'pure mind' over 'simple sensation'?[14] Instead, we consider *body* to be at once *embodiment* without separating sensory experience from emotion and cognition. This means that embodiment acknowledges both the material body and the body's orientation in the environment – physically, psychically, emotionally, cognitively and intellectually. This spatial or environmental dimension of embodiment includes one's actions, moods, perceptions, personal experiences and the cultural contexts and personalities that shape them. The cultural embeddedness of somatic experience is thus taken as a given. As Csordas has argued, somatic modes of attention can be defined as '*culturally* elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others'.[15] Embodiment, therefore, refers to the condition of both being and having a body. Film scholar Vivian Sobchack explains the condition of the lived body as 'at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others'.[16]

Approaching the arts from the perspective of the lived body (thus, as simultaneously an objective subject and a subjective object) recognises that the boundaries between mind and body, subject and object, self and other are indeterminate. Moreover, considering viewers and audiences of the arts as at once sentient, sensual and sensible means taking the ways in which embodied subjects make sense of the arts seriously. However, philosophical aesthetics has not always held the experiences of an embodied spectator in high regard.

13 TJ Csordas 'Somatic modes of attention' (1993) 8 *Cultural Anthropology* 135.

14 A Berleant 'Aesthetic embodiment' Paper presented at the meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Boston, MA, December 2003, http://www.autograff.com/berleant/pages/recentart6.html (accessed 16 December 2017).

15 Csordas (n 13) 135 (my emphasis).

16 V Sobchack *Carnal thoughts: Embodiment and moving image culture* (2004) 2.

3 Aesthetic embodiment

The history of philosophical aesthetics by no means is straightforward, and the following brief excursion into some of its founding tenets does not attempt to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, for the purpose of situating the main stance taken in this volume, it is necessary to highlight a few important points that have led to what generally is understood as modern aesthetics. Whilst the philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762), coined the concept of aesthetics in the mid-eighteenth century, he ironically is also one of the lesser-known figures in the aesthetic discourse that developed towards the end of that century. In the two volumes of *Aesthetica* (1750/1758) Baumgarten appropriated the classical Greek concept of *aesthesis* which refers to sensory perception. Aesthesis denotes the experience of 'objects of sensory knowledge in general',[17] and not only those objects designated as 'art' or that are deemed to have aesthetic value. Thus, Baumgarten drew attention to the 'unity-in-multiplicity of sensible qualities' which amounted to aesthetic awareness based on sensory perception and not intellection.[18] Avoiding the intellectualisation of aesthetic perception, Baumgarten did not regard sensory experience as inferior to the clear and 'distinct ideas'[19] of the intellect as modern aesthetic philosophy would later suppose. Instead, he drew attention to the 'importance of feelings, imagination and sensory experience'[20] in aesthetic perception. Following subsequent philosophical approaches that intellectualised aesthetic perception, the idea of aesthetic experience mostly continues to hinge on the notion of a rational, distanced and suitably-detached individual who is able to enjoy a 'pure aesthetic experience' by 'exercising the proper form of judgement'[21] through the faculty of sight – and hearing in the case of music – and not the other

17 J Rée 'The aesthetic theory of the arts' in P Osborne (ed) *From an aesthetic point of view: Philosophy, arts and the senses* (2000) 58.

18 D Howes 'Hearing scents, tasting sights' in Bacci & Melcher (n 1) 167.

19 Howes (n 18) 168.

20 P Duncum 'Visual culture and an aesthetics of embodiment' (2005) 1 *International Journal of Education Through Art* 11.

21 Howes (n 18) 168.

bodily senses.[22] For David Howes, modern aesthetics ultimately amounts to the 'disincarnation of aesthetics'.[23] We could put it differently and say that modern aesthetics has tended to *anaesthetise* experience by privileging sight and hearing and avoiding other bodily experiences, such as taste, smell and touch altogether. Moreover, because theatre and dance 'played to more than one sense at once'[24] they posed too much of an intellectual conundrum to be considered appropriate for aesthetic debate.

In contrast, the body-centred interpretative approach we follow here highlights experiential forms of knowledge production and the role of the whole body in the experience of the arts. This means that we pay just as much attention to sensory perception as we do to the meanings that arise from reflecting on particular aesthetic encounters. Following Arnold Berleant, I refer to our approach as one that prioritises an aesthetic of embodiment. Aesthetic embodiment highlights the interactions between people and their environments. Berleant supports a '*participatory* model' of aesthetic experience that transcends all division between subjects and objects.[25] In other words, he considers the conscious body and the world to be bound up with each other in a continuity of experience. Accordingly, 'every vestige of subjectivity disappears and the irreducible continuity of person and place becomes the fundamental term in grasping the meaning of environment'.[26] Furthermore, Berleant contends that experience – not only aesthetic experience but also our experience in the world – is always immediate and direct. This does not mean that such experience is cut off or separated from other 'modes of the human realm'[27] such as the social, political and moral, for these are the modes through which direct experience is mediated. In other words, mediated experience simultaneously is direct experience. Without suggesting that the arts encounter is not a mediated

22 Immanuel Kant's theories of aesthetic perception occupy an ambiguous position in the discourse of aesthetics. Whilst rejecting Baumgarten's notion of pure sensory knowledge, Kant did not completely discount sensible intuition in his conception of the relation between the faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason. See P Osborne *From an aesthetic point of view* (2000) for a nuanced interpretation of Kant's ideas regarding aesthetic perception.

23 Howes (n 18) 168.

24 As above.

25 A Berleant *Art and engagement* (1991) 89.

26 As above.

27 Berleant (n 25) 208.

one then, the research focus in this volume is on the direct experience of the arts. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht refers to this type of experience as 'a presence-based relationship' to the arts.[28] In taking the material 'presence effects'[29] of the arts seriously, like Berleant, Gumbrecht is interested in the environment or space in which human subjects and material objects meet. This means that the ontological character of art – exploring what art shows, rather than what art says – is given attention when we take an approach that is embedded in aesthetic embodiment.

4 The sensorium

Just as this volume takes an interdisciplinary approach to the arts, it also takes an intersensorial approach to sensory perception. This is in contrast to the Aristotelean formulation of sensory experience, according to which sensory information is processed along discrete channels with each sense organ 'assigned to a specific object of perception'.[30] Moreover, Aristotle assumed that humans possess only five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch – and that these are hierarchised in order of importance.[31] While each sense is unique with regard to the information each processes, contemporary research in psychology and philosophy takes a far broader approach.[32] Actual lived experience is multisensory in that our brain combines different sensory inputs and combines this information with our own personal history, memory and culture.[33] Moreover, it is now accepted that the perception of space, movement and temperature count among the senses meaning that 'there is no exhaustive list of the number of senses'.[34]

28 HU Gumbrecht *Production of presence: What meaning cannot convey* (2004) xv.

29 As above.

30 R Jütte *A history of the senses: From antiquity to cyberspace* (2005) 38.

31 Jütte (n 30) 39. Note that sight and hearing – which were assumed to give rise to objectivity – vie for the top rung in this hierarchy. See Jonas's discussion of sight and hearing as ideally distancing senses in H Jonas 'The nobility of sight: A study in the phenomenology of the senses' (1954) 14 *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 507.

32 P Duncum 'An eye does not make an I: Expanding the sensorium' (2012) 53 *Studies in Art Education* 183.

33 Bacci & Melcher (n 1) 1.

34 Duncum (n 32) 184.

Since the senses operate as parts of perceptual systems,[35] and since the senses are now understood to work in consort,[36] it is more accurate to refer to 'the human sensorium' than to sensory perception. The sensorium refers to 'the total character of the sensory environment which together includes sensation, perception, and the interaction of information about the world around us'.[37] At various times and in different contexts, different sensory modalities come to the fore more strongly or recede into the background. Some scholars now argue that our experience of the world is synaesthetic as the input received from various sensory stimuli quickly mix and blur.[38] Even if not all experience is synaesthetic (at least in the scientific view that regards synaesthesia to be pathological), much contemporary literature in sensory studies stresses that all experience is at once multisensory, intersensory, or cross-modal which means that our senses are understood to be interconnected and working together.[39] Our perception, therefore, is at once 'a variable blend of visual-spatial-haptic-kinaesthetic-proprioceptive-interoceptive-auditory-emotional modes. The word may suggest boundaries, but the senses do not live within them.'[40] Of course, experiential encounters with the arts, understood through aesthetic embodiment and the workings of the sensorium, might exceed linguistic expression. Therefore, the contributors to this volume use carefully-selected methods to bring their insights to light.

5 Too deep for words?

Humans possess an innate 'desire to make sense of things'.[41] Sobchack describes this as our 'sense-ability',[42] or our ability to make sense of both our subjective sense perception as well as the objective representation of our

35 See JJ Gibson *The senses considered as perceptual systems* (1966).
36 Duncum (n 32) 186.
37 Duncum (n 32) 183.
38 S Ede 'Foreword' in Bacci & Melcher (n 1) xvi.
39 Duncum (n 32) 183; S Pink 'Multimodality, multisensoriality and ethnographic knowing: Social semiotics and the phenomenology of perception' (2011) 11 *Qualitative Research* 261; Howes (n 12) 9.
40 R Driscoll *The sensing body in the visual arts: Making and experiencing sculpture* (2020).
41 Ede (n 38) xi.
42 Sobchack (n 16) 7.

lived body. However, validating how meanings emerge carnally from the encounter with the arts is not an easy task. For, how do we express aspects of our experiences that are indistinct, diaphanous, or simply inarticulable? Since bodily experiences are mostly intuitive and unconscious, how do we communicate those feelings that are too deep for words? In her foreword to *Art and the senses*, Siân Ede acknowledges that although expressing the nuances of 'the felt physiological experience' of an object in language is complex, it is not impossible.[43] She explains that

> [w]e translate the input from discrete sense organs into a blur of embodied sensation and, because we are more than unself-conscious diatoms or zoophytes, we bring or 'bind' a range of associations acquired from memory to make sense of the prelinguistic experience, translating it more reflectively into what emerges as thought, and eventually even into self-conscious awareness of thought ...[44]

For this reason, phenomenology provides a useful theoretical approach for researching embodiment and the arts. As Don Ihde succinctly notes, phenomenology is 'a philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human *experience* and that, in particular, concerns *perception* and *bodily activity*'.[45] One of the ways in which phenomenology might usefully describe those aspects of experience that are difficult to articulate is through the use of metaphor. Metaphorical or imagistic language can be used to great effect in this case because it helps to 'come closest to an adequate description of our lived-body experience' for which appropriate words are not always ready at hand.[46]

In film studies where embodiment is a key topic of concern, the American film and media scholar Vivian Sobchack is often cited.[47] Sobchack's analysis of embodied encounters between films and viewers

43 Ede (n 38) v.

44 As above.

45 D Ihde *Technology and the lifeworld: From garden to earth* (1990) 21.

46 J Hanich *Cinematic experience in horror film and thrillers: The aesthetic paradox of pleasurable fear* (2010) 43.

47 See for instance Hanich (n 46); T Elsaesser & M Hagener *Film theory: An introduction through the senses* (2015); J Barker *The tactile eye: Touch and the cinematic experience* (2009).

relies heavily on 'autobiographical and/or anecdotal experience' as a starting point.[48] Her method is explicitly personal and subjective and she qualifies this stance as follows:[49]

> Grounding broader social claims in autobiographical and anecdotal experience is not merely a fuzzy and subjective substitute for rigorous and objective analysis but purposefully provides the phenomenological – and embodied – premises for a more processual, expansive, and resonant materialist logic through which we, as subjects, can understand (and perhaps guide) what passes as our objective historical and cultural existence.

The existentialist branch of phenomenology, which has its roots in the mid-twentieth century work of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, assists in circumventing a reductive and essentialist account of subjective experience and embodiment by emphasising that the personal is always socially and historically mediated. According to existential phenomenology, the carnal body-subject is always embedded in a specific historical and cultural context which informs experience.[50] Thus, a phenomenological approach seeks to understand the meaning of a given experience as it is lived in a particular context by a subject who is not a trans-historical spectator looking down on the world from a distanced vantage point. It is useful then to distinguish between 'individualism' and subjectivity; the latter being 'a socially mediated process that is always a collective enterprise, "external" to the self while it mobilizes the self's in-depth structures'.[51] Phenomenology, therefore, is not a non-critical celebration of human individuality; instead, this philosophical approach recognises the social and intersubjective character of individual life.

Owing to their embeddedness in the social and cultural contexts in which the research was conducted, I must point out that the chapters submitted to *Embodiment and the arts: Views from South Africa* were written against the backdrop of a pandemic that swept across the globe with far-reaching effects. Owing to COVID-19, a number of themes relating to this

48 Sobchack (n 16) 6.

49 As above.

50 M Merleau-Ponty & JF Bannan 'What is phenomenology?' (1956) 6 *Cross Currents*.

51 R Braidotti *Metamorphoses: Towards a materialist theory of becoming* (2002) 7.

broader context are either explicitly confronted or linger just beneath the surface of some of the contributions. These include personal experiences of pain, fear, loss, turmoil, isolation, intimacy and compassion. Similarly, some authors take the consequences of digitality on arts practice and experience into account by critically engaging with the new practices that were initiated as a result of restrictions on peoples' movement and ability to hold gatherings in 2020 and 2021. Some of the submissions are intimate expressions of the authors' personal awareness of the fragility and vulnerability of their own bodies and those of their loved ones. Many of the chapters were conceived and written amidst constant and unexpected disruptions that threw the authors' usual routines out of kilter. I point this out as a defining characteristic of the chapters gathered in this volume because I want to express my gratitude to the authors for their tenacity in seeing the project to its end despite the hardships that many of us endured.

6 Overview of chapters

This volume is divided into four parts. Each part brings together scholarship that reflects on a particular aspect of embodiment and the arts. In Part 1, the authors explore important terms and concepts that relate to embodiment. Marc Duby's chapter 'Enactive cognition in improvising musical ensembles: A South African perspective' provides a deeper discussion of some of the concepts I touched on in this chapter. Duby takes us through the literature on embodied cognition that emerged as a challenge to Cartesian cognitive science. Thereafter, he discusses various conceptions of 4E cognition, whose four pillars – embodied, extended, enactive and embedded – are valuable concepts in understanding how human beings come to know the world. In considering how enactive cognition might be applied to musicking, Duby draws on his own experiences while teaching and managing ensembles. He finds that the paradigm of enactive cognition can enrich the ways in which musician-researchers interpret and report on their research-based arts practice as creative outputs.

Part 2 focuses on sensory scholarship in the arts. In 'Sight/Site-specific recording: Embodiment and absence' Marc Röntsch continues the investigation into musical ensembles by analysing the embodied relationship between musicians and their instruments, and musicians and

their environment. More specifically, Röntsch is interested in ensemble performances that take place in the digital realm where performers are denied the opportunity to make music *with* other people and where the sense of connection with fellow performers as well as audiences is compromised. Using a self-reflexive methodology, he analyses a recording project undertaken virtually during 2020 where both the performance *site* and the deployment of *sight* were complicated. Röntsch explores how embodiment is experienced in the digital realm when interpersonal musical communication and intimacy are absent.

My chapter, titled 'The art of touch in remote online environments', picks up on the theme of (dis)connection in digital environments. Drawing on views from selected philosophers, psychologists, media and communication theorists, as well as designers and artists, I explore the ramifications of going online to connect with others. I ask the following questions: What forms of touch are afforded by digital communication technologies? To what extent might the digital screen be considered an interface for embodied interaction? How are embodied perception and touch presented, performed and experienced in selected remote digital environments? Finally, I draw some conclusions about the future of touch in the digital landscape, particularly as these ideas find expression in the work of South African visual artists.

From (dis)embodied experiences in virtual environments, to sensory deprivation in outer space, the next chapter considers what happens to human embodiment and sensory experience in interstellar voyages and in the habitation of exoplanets. In her chapter titled 'Outer space and sensory deprivation (or why is outer space so bland?)' Amanda du Preez draws together research in the space and astronautical sciences, documentation and testimonies from people who have been in outer space, fictional cinematic representations of outer space, and philosophical ruminations on Martin Heidegger's notion of the fourfold. Weaving together fact and fiction, she explores varied accounts of what outer space smells, tastes and looks like, as well as how the vestibular senses of movement, balance and proprioception are affected in deep space travel.

In 'The typographic sensorium: A cross-modal reading of letterforms' Kyle Rath brings us back down to earth and to typography, in particular. Linking with the previous discussions of the sensory dimension (or lack thereof) of virtual environments and outer space in the preceding chapters,

Rath interprets the visceral effects and communicative value of a variety of sense-based letterforms. In so doing, he challenges the dominant (modernist) understanding of typography as primarily a neutral tool by means of which one can convey the content of language. Instead, Rath discusses an extensive and impressive range of recent experiments with letterforms to show how they connote different (sensory) meanings.

In Part 3, each contributor thinks through the materiality of the photographs and artworks they analyse. In 'A haptic and humanising reading of the subjects of studio portraits and asylum photography in colonial South Africa' Rory du Plessis interprets a selection of photographs through a haptic and sensory lens. Challenging the 'lovelessness' implicit in the ways in which South Africa's colonial photographic archive has typically been analysed, Du Plessis draws our attention not only to the intimate, tactile relationships represented in these images, but also to how the photographs themselves were displayed, handled, fondled and caressed by their owners. By imagining himself in the image, and by enacting a 'gesture of care' in his approach, Du Plessis formulates a reading that is sensitive to the materiality of the images as fragile objects and that imaginatively empathises with the embodied experiences of the people they represent.

The next chapter continues the focus on the multisensory, material dimension of art and visual culture. In 'Athi-Patra Ruga's politics of disorientation: Queer(y)ing threads' Adéle Adendorff explores Athi-Patra Ruga's fascination with embroidery and its potential for subversion. Through a close, phenomenologically-informed reading of a selection of works by the artist, embroidery is positioned as a carnal activity that simultaneously is highly gendered. Adendorff shows how the artist's use of slanted stitches weaves narratives that challenge – or *dis*orient – socially condoned norms of gender and sexuality. In this way, she proposes that Ruga *queries* embroidery by *queering* its material, temporal and spatial dimensions, thereby imagining a future where acceptance and understanding of those considered to be 'out of line' might be possible.

Sikho Siyotula's chapter titled 'Seeing an image at the University of Pretoria's Africana collection in context' reflects on Charlotte Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* (1990). Siyotula shows how the location of this poster behind several layers of security that includes booms, gates, biometric scanners and guards, serves to control the body's

movements and access to a very particular visualisation of South African peoples. She then draws connections between the general inaccessibility of the artwork in the educational complex, the socio-political context of the time when it was created, and the subject matter it portrays. While a cursory interpretation of the image might conclude that it represents ethnic belonging and the right to space, in a closer, embodied examination, Siyotula reveals the problematic ways in which the picture visualises and performs certain fictions about 'tribe' and tradition.

In Part 4, the embodiment of performance and composition take centre stage. Èmil Haarhoff, Marth Munro and Marié-Heleen Coetzee discuss the concepts of embodiment and bodymindedness more closely in order to understand why actors sometimes experience anxiety when performing fictional characters. In their chapter titled 'Navigating dissonance: Bodymind and character congruency in acting' the authors assess the multi-bodied processes involved when actors 'enflesh' fictional characters. These processes, they argue, might be hindered when there is a disconnect between the actor (as bodyminded being) and the imagined bodymind of the character resulting in the actor experiencing tension or distress. The authors maintain that by actively heightening bodymind awareness, actors can effectively avoid dissonances, thereby improving the believability of their character representation as well as their own well-being.

While Haarhoff et al take a theoretical approach to actor training programmes, Wium and Lewis take a qualitative and quantitative approach. Their chapter, 'Advocating the importance of nonverbal communication in multimodal actor training' reports on the findings of a study that investigated performance training strategies to enhance embodied acting. The authors argue that focusing on the training of posture, gesture, spatial relationship and breathing patterns affords actors the skills to communicate emotion, thought and feeling as they interpret and perform a fictional character. Their research shows that the implementation of nonverbal communication strategies in actor training programmes (instead of only cognitive acting methods) greatly improves performers' ability to understand and convincingly express emotion, thought and meaning when portraying fictional characters.

Miles Warrington extends the focus on gesture in performance in his chapter titled 'Embodied composition ontologies, process and technology: Gesture heuristics and creative potential in music'. Warrington closely analyses the intersection between human-computer-interaction (HCI) and musical expression. As a composer of electroacoustic music, he relies on digital technology to perform his craft and in this chapter he analyses selected compositional models in order to shed light on how electronics informs musical thought, compositional processes and ideation.

While the topics addressed in this volume primarily focus on South Africa, the theoretical approach taken in these discussions is not uniquely applicable to the South African arts. In the Global North there already is a robust scholarly interest in the ways that meaning is produced through the embodied knowledges of spectators, audiences, participants and researchers. But even so, bodily modes of attention, feeling, emotion, affect and the sensorial (especially taste, touch and smell) tend to inhabit a 'theoretical blindspot'[52] in research in the humanities and social sciences. Instead, critical perspectives on the arts – such as semiotics, ideology, myth, discourse analysis, feminism and postcolonialism – are often deemed to be more acceptable analytic lenses owing to their assumed objectivity. In South Africa, in particular, there still is a deep suspicion of research that draws on the subjective and personal accounts of an author. In this volume, however, some contributors bravely confront rather than avoid their own personal interpretation of their subject matter, drawing on their own lived experiences of the phenomena they analyse.

Notwithstanding (or, perhaps precisely because of) the subjective nature of their arguments, the authors do not aim to sidestep the cultural, political, economic and temporal contexts within which the arts are produced, performed and experienced. The very fabric of the subjects addressed in this volume is uniquely South African in so far as it reflects the ways that South African situatedness is different from that of the Global North. The legacies of colonialism and apartheid are inscribed onto the bodies of South Africans and resurface in the representation of racial, ethnic, sexual and gendered identities. These, combined with the everyday lived experience of violent crime and horrific abuses of power against the vulnerable, are topics that find expression in the photographs,

52 S Best *Visualizing feeling. Affect and the feminine Avant-Garde* (2011) 1.

artworks, compositions, actor training programmes, research-informed arts and experimental music practices, designs, and advertisements that are discussed here. In as much as these issues affect the arts themselves, this unique context also grounds the authors' analyses, whether or not their accounts are based in the 'autobiographical and anecdotal'[53] or otherwise personal and subjective. As my discussion of Goliath's installation at the start of this chapter attempted to show, we may identify with other people's (sometimes traumatic and horrifying) experiences because we somatically, emotionally, intellectually and cognitively participate in the intersubjective experience of being human.

Finally, the national lockdowns imposed on South Africans as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic not only brought the human need for touch, intimacy and face-to-face contact into sharper relief, but also meant that the livelihoods of many artists hung in the balance as live performances and exhibitions were cancelled. Already recognised as a struggling industry,[54] the arts were pushed to a precipice in 2020 and 2021 with those fortunate enough to do so forging ahead on online platforms. However, while the pandemic is a global phenomenon, the way in which South Africa, as a developing country, is inscribed into what Manuel Castells called the 'network society' differs greatly across the varied socio-political and economic South African landscape.[55] From unreliable connectivity and, for some, unaffordable data, to load shedding and inadequate (and fickle) funding for the arts,[56] it became very clear that artists in South Africa do not have access to the same support systems as their global counterparts do. Having been conceptualised and carried out during this tumultuous

53 Sobchack (n 16) 6.

54 Mark Heywood, the editor of Maverick Citizen, notes that even before the pandemic struck, the arts were 'already broken' (S Hoek 'State of the arts. How the pandemic affected SA's art and culture scene' *Daily Maverick* 2021, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-24-state-of-the-arts-how-the-pandemic-affected-sas-art-and-culture-scene/ (accessed 13 April 2022).

55 M Castells *The rise of the network society: The information age: Economy, society and culture* (2000).

56 Artists were severely affected by the maladministration of the grants offered by the National Arts Council in 2020. See K Masweneng 'National Arts Council hauled to court as artists continue to picket' *Timeslive* 2021, https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-04-01-national-arts-council-hauled-to-court-as-artists-continue-to-picket/ (accessed 13 April 2022).

time in our history, we are confident that our research makes a valuable contribution to current discourse on embodiment and the arts in South Africa.

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