ABSTRACT

The re-turn, like the repair, is a disruptive act. It pauses Azoulay's forward thrusting, carving out space in the present. In this, the return and the repair become co-agents for temporal relationships between past, present, and future. If we always configure that temporality with a forward motion, then we fail to consider ways in which the future influences that which is ahead of itself and we set it always in the service of its past. Positing an altered temporal framework based upon the repair allows us to consider a future that is a co-producer of knowledge, understanding, and community.

Here I want to use the practice of textile repair – the mend – to consider ways in which we might return to future art histories and thus reframe what we can understand by reparation. Rupture and mend are borne out of violence and hold the parts in tension.

Colonial notions of reparation are driven by an urge to hide this damage and thus fail to consider mending as productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective ways of being.

Here I want to propose the rough repair as an artistic practice, what Jack Halberstam terms 'murky resistance' (Halberstam 2020: 2), a space of alternatives, sometimes counterintuitive and refusing. The rough repair gives us scope to think of reparation through material entanglements that are wrought through violent acts and actions. Repair becomes an ethical space in which questions of differential edges, power structures, and the formation of art histories can become a point of re-turn. The wound and reparation are inherently violent and physical actions, and they are destructive. Within an ethics of care, this violence becomes necessary and important for future art histories. In this essay, I want to use this artistic practice to propose ways in which art histories can be regarded and observed, and thus entreat that repairs and reparations should not be rendered invisible.

keywords

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Return to Repair

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Introduction

Mending infers damage, which establishes a temporal fracture in which the past is presupposed from the present. Unlike many narrative forms, the mend involves looping forward and back across the temporal plane.

In this essay I want to take this idea of the fractured temporal narrative, the rupture and its repair, as a materially-driven, textile-focused metaphor for thinking and reframing notions of reparation, particularly in terms of damaged or absent art historical narratives, dominant power structures that enable hierarchies of practice and genealogies, and thus frame how we read and encounter artworks. In this, the repair is both a space of re-formation and one of rebellion; this is an ambivalent, uncertain action upon the rupture.

I further propose that this materially-led metaphor of the textile mend offers scope for considering ways in which we might challenge a forward-driven narrative in favour of one that has the capacity to look both back and forward simultaneously.

Reparation itself is a multifarious term, most commonly used to refer to acts of payment by way of recompense for wrongs previously wrought. Reparation formed a key part of the Slavery Abolition Act in the UK, but also following the First and Second World Wars, in 2003 following the South African Truth and Reconciliation process, and in 2013 when the UK government agreed to reparation payments for the torture of Kenyans following the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s. These examples demonstrate the ways in which reparation comes to be usually thought of in

reference to the brutality of colonialisation. I want here to consider the rupture and the mend in terms of the violence of their formation and their capacity to hold the past, present and future in a tensional relationship, and I draw upon the South African artist Mary Sibande's sculptural, textile-rich installations so as to open out the personal, political and metaphorical interplay. This serves to address narrative spaces where the repair is often driven by an urge to hide the damage of the rupture, and thus spaces which fail to consider mending as a productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective space.

The repair is thus allied to the return in the form of co-agents for temporal relationships. Jack Halberstam speaks of this in terms of not becoming repaired, being repaired, or doing reparation, but focuses upon the 'shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming and violating' (2011: 4). This serves to emphasise a surrender to 'a form of unbeing for which beginnings and ends have no meaning' (2011: 131). If repair infers damage, but damage does not imply repair, the temporal relationships between repair and damage are set in an imbalanced relational interplay. This potentially establishes the repair as an act of refusal, a refusal of temporal hierarchies that seek to subjugate the past in favour of the future.

By setting the repair as such a co-agent, we can set the past and future not as antitheses of each other, but in active dialogue. In the repair, linear narratives become disrupted and fragmented, potentially chaotic and dis-ordered. This speaks to the event of the rupture for which the repair has been deemed necessary. If we can understand the trauma that renders an event unrepresentable in terms of a linear narrative, in the impossibility of experiencing and remembering in discursive terms, the repair offers links and connections based upon radical fragmentation. Halberstam suggests a dismantling of the 'logics of success and failure' to make a case for 'losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing' as spaces for surprise and 'wondrous anarchy' (2011: 2). The ripped or frayed cloth is such a space of failure, a space where the threads disrupt what knowing might mean, offering a tangle moving in the wrong direction.

The tangled and frayed edge of woven cloth allows the temporal plane to become a place of meandering without direction, a place to lose oneself, a place to become unreliable. This space of muddled narrative and fragmentation is important because it offers a means to slip out of the usual linear narrative refusing individuality and singularity to embrace plurality and a form of discourse that transcends temporal relationality. The rupture approached from this angle can be construed as failure-in-resistance, offering textual unevenness, bias, and challenging fixed logics.

Methodology

In this essay, I want to take a materially led approach in which figuration and personification are drivers for understanding and which takes an embodied reading of concepts, themes, and examples. This is to say, I do not intend to explain the works selected but to stand alongside them, to try to come into dialogue with them as materially and conceptually conceived works and with their maker(s). I have selected a few works in particular for the ways in which they demonstrate aspects of rupture and repair, either physically or metaphorically. Sibande's collection of 'Sophies' are drawn on particularly for the ways in which they speak to an escape from the apartheid and post-apartheid[1] restrictions on black women's bodies and the fettering that remains. Through this, I aim to establish a non-linear narrative that functions in partnership with the installations, entangling the viewer, the works, concepts, histories, and meanings. In taking the idea of the narrative as non-linear, I want to give it cyclical and plural forms. I want to take on the storyteller's mode in which multiple starting points are available and the form of the story changes from telling to telling; sometimes some elements become focal points, and sometimes they recede, depending on the context and audience. The storytellers themselves become embedded in the context of the storytelling, framing the narrative accordingly. This is to take a different stance to a singular authoritative narrative, something that has been critiqued in postcolonial thought[2] particularly for the way it disregards other perspectives and often presumes a hierarchical pathway. Since the 1980s, narrative has emerged as a major form within academic writing, but often seen in direct opposition to analysis (Abbott 2007). I want to suggest that this is rather reductive and does not bring into play ways in which the form, choice of language, materiality, and the stance of the author towards their audience can add meaning and understanding to the analysis of artworks.

To approach an analysis of artworks in this way is to actively and emotionally engage with them, placing the writer, here me, within their framing. This also sets up a framework in which the emphasis does not stop at describing the work and exploring the artist's intentions, but also includes this viewer's reaction to it/them. This is to draw upon Andrew Abbott's concept of 'lyrical sociology' (Abbott 2007), through which he argues that there is a legitimate place within critical analysis and rigorous academic thinking and writing for the author's emotional apprehension. A lyrical sociological approach allows for a space within analysis for positing and exploring human differences and the tensions that exist between them. Abbott (2007: 96) writes that 'it confronts us with our temporal and social spatial particularities in the very process of showing us those of others.'

[1] Apartheid is a term derived from the Afrikaans word for separation and is used predominantly in relation to the South African system of institutionalised racial segregation from 1948 to the 1990s. Black and coloured South Africans were forced to live in separate townships, no voting rights, and were denied access to most forms of political and financial agency, including the same kinds of educational opportunities afforded to white South Africans. Following F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandelas' new South African constitution, finalised in 1993, a framework for the reversal of apartheid law was established, restoring equality, racial integration, and the rights to human dignity. However, the reality of post-apartheid South Africa has demonstrated the complex and long lasting legacies of such regimes. We can see continuation from the past, ongoing inequalities based on racial profiling, and a messiness in relation to the promised new world order. This messiness is well articulated in Eve Fairbanks' *Inheritors* (2023) and Evan Lieberman's *Until We Have Won our Liberty* (2020), which offer up different perspectives on this period, highlighting the ways in which transition to democracy has taken place from social and moral and institutional perspectives.

[2] This is taken up more fully by Andrew Abbott (1991), Doreen Massey (in Massey & Denton 1993) and TJ MacDonald (1996).

In this sense, I am proposing a form of non-linear lyrical narrative for thinking through the activity of repair as a materially led metaphor within Sibande's artwork. This is to say, in this essay I want to draw attention to the ways Sibande's works are complicated and useful for thinking about repair and reparation beyond formal artistic frameworks. The concept of repair is thus not taken as singular universally positive action. I will approach repair and reparation from a number of standpoints: the mend, in which the repair is considered in terms of its capacity to disrupt temporal linearities; the rough repair, in which the damage is loosely bound, leaving it open to re-rupture; care-full mending, in which the edges are brought together within a tensional field of new possibilities; and, finally, reparation in which a plural and productive mode that disrupts processes of normalisation of violence and harm. These four, taken together, often contradict and cross over one another, forming a matrixial surface across and through which to move in the endeavour of understanding what repair and reparation can contribute to understanding art works and artmaking.

In focusing on the artwork of Mary Sibande throughout this essay **[Fig. 1]**, I recognise that there are artists whose work deals more directly with notions of repair and reparation and others whose work is more fabric-based than hers. Her practice takes multiple forms: photography, film, installation, and sculpture, and it is in this plurality and from this ambivalence that I want to take my departure. I am interested in the way in which, like textile, her work takes on a life attached to capitalist and geopolitical machinations. It is work that emanates from her preoccupations with failure, struggle and a vision for equitable freedoms. Her installations become self-portraits and thus vehicles to articulate these preoccupations. Whilst not exclusively textile works, textile features as a dominant voice across all of Sibande's works; there are excesses of clothing, tendrils wrought from stuffed fabric, headdresses, skirts, aprons, hair, and other rampant forms that flow and ooze out from her figures, taking up space unapologetically. It is these characteristics that I will be drawing upon as a textile-based framework, and through which I will offer a way of thinking about repair and reparation as material actions for addressing equity.

Fig. 1 Mary Sibande *Long Live the Dead Queen (2008-13),* installation. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

Fig. 2 *Mary Sibande The Purple Shall Govern (*2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

The Mend – return to form

As previously discussed, ripped, torn, or frayed cloth offers a space of failure, a temporal plane of past, present, and future which plays host to undoing, unbecoming, and unknowing. In the meandering of tangled threads, the notion of repairing the trauma of rupture becomes reframed as a form of re-turn. The ques-

tion here is a re-turn to what? The repair as an ambivalent, uncertain activity is both desirable and to be resisted.

Here I want to think through the lens of tangled temporalities to scope out a more nomadic model for making meaning. I want to suggest a fragmented form of thinking that refuses the logic of resolution. Following Halberstam, this could be framed in terms of queer failure, where meaning and understanding are encouraged to inhabit the shadowy, murky spaces.

Mary Sibande is a South African post-apartheid artist working in a variety of forms: installation, photography, textiles, sculpture, and fashion. She creates the quasi-fictional character, Sophie, to embody a dream of liberation **[Fig. 2]**. Her clothes and their extensions and excesses become a site for such reinvention, tracking and tracing a passage from domestic worker to mistress. The Sophies, necessarily plural, act out yearnings and inner desires. Sophie was named after Sibande's grandmother and the series includes mannequins that have been modelled on herself. The series was initially developed for a solo exhibition in 2009,[3] *The Purple Shall Govern*, in reference to Sophie's namesake but has evolved into a lexicon of expression of a South African collective consciousness, operating as conduits for other selves and expression of the psyche.

When I see the work of Mary Sibande, I am reminded of what she calls 'the gesture of naming',[4] an action that functions like the mend to direct the gaze toward the damage or rupture that moves ahead and yet remains afterwards. Sibande, through this naming of her forms, calls attention to the failure of divisive systems, drawing the viewers into their chaos. Sibande's work is majestic and ceremonial; the installations and photographs are part fantastical, part advertorial, part yearning. In the sculptural installation *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2009) she presents four Sophies: Elsie, Marica, Valucia, and Ntombikayise; the first three genealogically linked to her along the matrilinear line, and all connected through a history of bondage **[Fig. 3]**. In this she reaches into the fissure of ways in which so many women remain bound up within cruel and violent systems of control. What Sibande achieves in these portraits is a demand to attend to the ways in which the world fails to be deterred from actions that maintain such systems of abuse. In so doing, she offers a vision of something different, an honouring through a storytelling that emanates from a powerfully calm surface. Ashraf Jamal notes that Sibande chooses to take the audience 'through the artist's body as memory-trace, ideal, familiar … re-rout[ing] the past, transmit[ing] it, and thereby mak[ing] it a stranger to itself' (2017: 53). In this sense, these figures and their stories perform an act of repair, pointing to the ruptures, demanding attention, and prefiguring reparation.

The notion of re-routing the past in this way creates an extended system of connectivity in the majestic presence of the installations, its bodies and the ghosts

[3] Mary Sibande at Iziko South African National Gallery (9 July to 3 August 2009).

[4] Artist statement, 'Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams', Somerset House, October 2019-January 2020.

Fig. 3 *Mary Sibande Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

or spirits it evokes. We can see this in the configuration of Victorian costumes interpenetrated with activities and signifiers of a domestic worker. In her artist statement, we read: 'My interest is not in looking at the negative of being a domestic worker, specifically in post-apartheid South Africa, but rather in the humanity and commonplace of people despite the boxes we find ourselves in.'[5] This provides a useful pivot point in the temporal sphere in which Sibande rethinks the black body, her black body, shifting its aesthetics to establish different rules of engagement. 'Sophie' becomes her projected and imaginary other and yet there are

[5] Artist statement, 'Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams', Somerset House October 2019-January 2020.

Fig. 4 *Mary Sibande The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

multiple (four) Sophies, an unsettled plurality that privileges uncertainty. Their energy is both latent and released upon the viewer, and it is within this uncontrolled force-field that the clothing, the exaggerated forms, and wildly flailing cloth/body parts revel in their excessiveness. She was influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1980) concept of the bifurcating rhizome and their explication of the generative and creative power of schizoid thinking. These concepts don't pivot around a principle core, but invoke an openendedness, a refusal of finite meanings. This leads Jamal to speak of Sibande's work in terms of a Baroque practice that 'lives in a wondrous sense of hope and play' (2017: 59). He continues to reflect upon how she constructs a self only to shatter it, rejecting prescriptive narratives, and it is here that we again see Sibande shifting the temporal field, reordering repeatedly past, present, and future. She ruptures the temporal frame, allowing its edges to tangle. If repair was demanded, it would be one that can be held in Sibande's hands – it breaks away, re-rupturing. Sibande's Sophies are dangerously and endlessly prone to rupture and re-rupture [Fig. 4].

Sibande's works present the rupture as an open wound, a space of and for troubling, and with the potential for refusing the originating structures. She plays between the tangled edges, refusing an essentialism that the urge to repair configures. In the rupture of the temporal order, the unravelling threads and stitches create a space of excess, outside of organising structures and principles. Homi Bhabha considers excess to be a form of differentiation that gives rise to a doubling, a mimicry of colonial practices and slippage of meaning (1984: 127). However, Mary Corrigall, writing on Sibande's work, sees her excessiveness as a tool through

which to enable dislocation from reality and uniformity (1994: 148). Taking both together, we have in the excess of the rupture a space set aside. Sibande deploys this rupture through her interpenetration of domestic worker with Victorian bourgeoisie, exaggerating the excessiveness and drawing attention to the absence of social mobility within the supposed democratic context of post-Apartheid South Africa, for both parties. In this sense, she plays with the rupture, pressures for repair, and the burgeoning out from the tangled edges.

Socio-culturally, the rupture invites repair in the same way that repair presupposes rupture and damage. In the rupture, excess abounds and the temporal sphere is distorted. Societal forces come into play to try to re-order and return the whole to its former self, to maintain the status quo. As Sibande's Sophies remind us, the status quo is wrought with inequalities, and it denies social mobility – the domestic worker cannot become lady of the house. However, she further reminds us that both are social institutions, and in combining them in her work, she is collapsing the syntax. In this space of rupture, between mimicry and differentiation there is excess and slippage, and a fragmentation of power structures; in the case of Sibande, a fragmentation brought about by an imaginative pleasure-seeking, a space for hopeful imagination.

Returning to the metaphors of mending, frayed cloth, we can consider that when cloth is torn or frayed, an invisible repair requires painstaking retrieval of the loosened fibres and threads back into their woven structures alongside the introduction of new threads to seal up the tear or fray. This repair returns and re-forms the cloth and behaves as if the rupture never took place, preventing fantasies of liberation, returning and re-locking each to their socially allotted space and associated dichotomies.

In Sibande's works we repeatedly see Sophie resist this form of mending **[Fig. 5]**. Her hybrid garments retain her at the borderlines, at that frayed, torn edge where there is doubling over and back of the syntax of status, where imaginations can flow and entangle. In this excessive space, Sophie appears lost in her imaginings and suspended between the temporal sphere, and Sibande's clothes become increasingly fantastical with extreme proportions that appear to be trying to escape her bodily form as well as entrap her further.

I want to suggest here that these expanded garments, with their fantastical forms and increasing excessiveness, drive the fragmentation of the temporal plane yet further, denying the stasis of simply arriving at a new social status, leaving the balancing act between need and desire in a precarious state. To do this, I want to move away from notions of rupture and repair as actions of making good, returning to wholeness and sense-making within existing structures, and move further into a non-sense-making realm exemplified through the rough mend or the bind.

Fig. 5 *Mary Sibande Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

This is to follow writers such as Kader Attia (2018)to adapt and survive in new environments. From an ethical point of view, there is reappropriation because there has been dispossession. African objects that have been repaired using Western leftovers, or overexpressive repairs are kept aside in the collections of Western museums as inadequate. Since the Age of Reason, the Occident has always categorised and ordered the world, following its own cultural criteria and beliefs, which led to a misunderstanding. Western human sciences, like ethnology, were developed to analyse the non-Occidental world, in order to control it. The unexpected aesthetic of 'antemodern' repaired objects from non-Western cultures, which have been colonised, embodies a sign of resistance. It happens from an act of a cultural otherness, which reappropriates the cultural space that it was taken from (and taken over by a foreigner occupant and ideology, Julia Bryan Wilson (2017), and Patricia Stuelke (2021), who collectively unpack notions of what it means to repair from non-Western standpoints, the forward thrust to put ruptured objects back in their initial state. Stuelke ends her book *The Ruse of Repair* with a 'Conclusion: Against Repair' (2021: 215-218) in which she refuses a vision of repair, suggesting that to do so is a 'category error.' Her approach is to trace reparative logics and point to the ways in which the will to repair without trace has helped to bring about something worse. Meanwhile, Bryan Wilson reflects upon the persistence of textiles and the way in which their significance becomes enhanced as they unravel and reveal their structure. Attia looks at the in-between space that broken non-Occidental objects occupy within Occidental aesthetics and ethics of repair. This is to say that in the process of rupture and fray, the conditions for

repair are formed as an expanded and ambiguous space. In the excess of the fray, the repair becomes an agential and temporally ambiguous space.

The Rough Repair – Binding

One of the most dominant features of Sibande's artworks is the ways in which she embodies critique and possibility of the promise of new freedoms within post-Apartheid South Africa.[6] In this she focuses viewers' minds on an argument of a form of world-making that is an agential, performative enactment of imaginative possibilities, set outside of temporal and colonial constraints. She takes on a sense of futurity or a process of becoming that moves to and fro between pasts, presents, and futures. Her artwork encompasses and speaks to the past at the same time as opening out new possibilities and thus new histories.

In the Sophies' progression, Sibande speaks of generational trauma, something anthropologist Henrietta Moore considers in terms of inverting psychoanalytical approaches and the capacity of embodied experience. Sophie refuses a life lived through such generational trauma, refuses to repeat, and shifts the emphasis onto how to imagine (and realise) differently. Moore suggests there is a capacity to destabilise making of the self, social relations, and imaginaries. She frames this as 'being oneself and being beside oneself' (2011: 13). In taking on her alter-ego-self, Sophie, Sibande foregrounds her matrilineage, rupturing the naming practices white employers used on the South African people they employed. In an interview, Sibande makes it clear that she is aiming for a form of world-making that is not 'a simple reaction to social and political conditions' (Eyene 2013). She argues for a doubling back and folding forward, a way of being other than the past presumes. In this she makes of the rupture a rough mend, a mend that holds the parts in tension whilst repeatedly calling attention to the ruptured surface. The new surface formed is definitively not taken back to its previous state, but rather allowed to take on its own future trajectory, its frayed and entangled threads allowed to break away from the woven structure.

The rough mend could, in many ways, be said to not be a mend at all in that it draws together the broken or frayed edges with stitches that bind over and around. It has no intention of returning the surface to its original state or wholeness. It is, at best, pragmatic and functional; it is often made for reasons of urgency or because that which is being mended does not warrant more time or care to be spent on it. It could also be carelessly formed by someone unskilled.

bell hooks, writing with frustration about how little has been committed to print about the ways in which living within racial apartheid affects the psyches of black

[6] As previously noted, the process of dismantling South African apartheid systems and cultures is a continuous process and many of the freedoms afforded have not been realised as imagined. For example, with the freedom to participate in retail and social activities come the capitalist and cultural structures that exclude on the basis of unwritten knowledge systems and affordability.

people, a fear rooted in unresolved trauma that is intended to keep black fearful of white (2009: 56), speaks eloquently of transgenerational trauma. I am interested here in the effect of this trauma in terms of the rupture and the rough repair. hooks discusses the role of images in world-making and the perpetuation of racial segregation. Mass media could be said to be the source of most people's understanding of other groups and communities, and mass media proliferates stereotypes and biases, requiring the enquiring mind to break out of the closed loop of thinking, to become curious about the formation of ideologies. This is a space where the rough mend, as a hiatus in the social fabric, offers scope for such curiosity, to become awakened. If the rupture is made visible, its entangled threads laid bare, without the intention to return the surface to its original state, then there lies greater scope for exploration and understanding the causes of the rupture and the nature of the tensions surrounding it.

The invisible mend aims to render the surface as new; it requires skill and dexterity to manipulate the broken and new threads back into an orderly formation **[Fig. 6]**. It is formed consciously to draw attention away from the rupture, to arouse no further interest. Should any interest be placed upon this mend, it is to admire the skill of the repairer. The rough mend, on the other hand, borne out of pragmatics, leaves edges and threads free and tangled; it holds the parts together, but repeatedly calls attention to the rupture. The edges double over each other, press together, reveal their intimacy on the outside, with loose threads escaping.

Returning to the idea of the second chance, however, is useful here in contemplating mending, but particularly the rough mend, its brutal and raw formation, and its utilitarianism, but also a certain defiance in the stitcher and surface. In this defiance, the concept of repair and reparation emerges, cutting across timelines, calling into question how we should or can read the material forms in front of us. With this in mind, we need to think carefully about Sibande's Sophies, her use fabrics and forms. Are these being repaired or undone? Are the fabrics new, repurposed, or pre-used? This cuts against concerns of authenticity. We know she uses her familial narrative, the matrilineal struggle, alongside metaphors and storytelling techniques within her artworks as a means by which to explore the marking of time, a fear of dying and her own fragility; these all become part of the Sophies' narratives. The Sophies become simultaneously the articulation of the rupture and their own rough repair.

Thus, the rough repair, its volatility and provisionality, offers a space of order within disorder, balance within imbalance, a doubling back and over the temporal zones. In this entanglement, the bound edges of the rough mend remain visible. In this sense, through the forms, marks, and traces, we can understand a story that sets not just a staging of her response to contemporary concerns regarding

Fig. 6 *Catherine Dormor Rough Mend* (2023)
Photo: the artist

post-apartheid South Africa and post-Black Lives Matter contexts,[7] but a capacity to reach forward and back simultaneously, a capacity to form a robust and yet delicate web that is rich in ambiguity, a threshold between the visual and the sensual.

Within this web there is a play across the temporal structures, something that bell hooks refers to in her book *Belonging: a culture of place* (2009) as a 'psychic archaeological dig' (p. 67), as she searched for a sense of belonging within her home state of Kentucky some thirty years after leaving it. She speaks of revelling in a piecing together of her world in such a way that she can be whole and holy (p. 68), which tacitly references a form of mending that refuses to remain invisible and, in that refusal, denies the invisible mend, with its imperatives to move forward. For hooks, whole and holy are aligned but do not mean seamless or unruptured, but reference the fragmented self within the world. What we see in hooks' homecoming is how she grapples with her past lived experience of that state and its segregations alongside her genealogy: a long line of farmers and the stewardship of the land that that implies and evokes. The reparative work of hooks aligns with Sibande's fantastical structures. hooks draws upon Scott Russell Sanders' phrase in relation to how we belong within a landscape as 'a knitting of self and the world' (1994: 49) and, in terms of rough mending, it is this same kind of materially led binding of edges and pieces, without the finesse and attempt to disguise the rupture, that the invisible mend offers. Like hooks, Sibande's Sophies are searching for a sense of belonging, grappling with what belonging might mean for a newly liberated population.[8] She draws out the fantasies and ambitions, recognising the constraints that a house servant, even liberated, still faces. Sophie performs hooks' 'psychic archaeological dig' (2009: 48) through her tendrils, her falling form, her unbalanced lurching forward **[Fig. 7]**. We are not presented at any point with a static, resolved Sophie. She is constantly in flux and change, the visible, rough mend holding things together. For now.

Thus in Sophie the rough mend allows for her genealogies to remain at risk of failing. I want to consider what this might mean and consider an organisational principle for the mend in the next section, focusing my thoughts around the mend as an ethics of care within which being lost is a vital aspect and being found is finding oneself.

Care-full Mending

bell hooks, speaking of her return, addresses the ways in which black farmers were 'gifted' parcels of land by the white occupants, observing that 'healing begins with

[7] The Black Lives Matter movement coalesced in 2013 around a number of murders of black teenagers in the US where the perpetrators, in some cases state sanctioned police officers, were acquitted or not investigated fully. The movement has expanded internationally and seeks to highlight ways in which black people are treated unfairly both in society, but also through institutionalised racism by agencies such as the police.

[8] For further reading on the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa has both changed and remains segregated along racial lines, I recommend Eve Fairbanks' *Inheritors* (2023) and Evan Lieberman's *Until We Have Won our Liberty* (2020), which take different methodologies and case studies to frame an analysis.

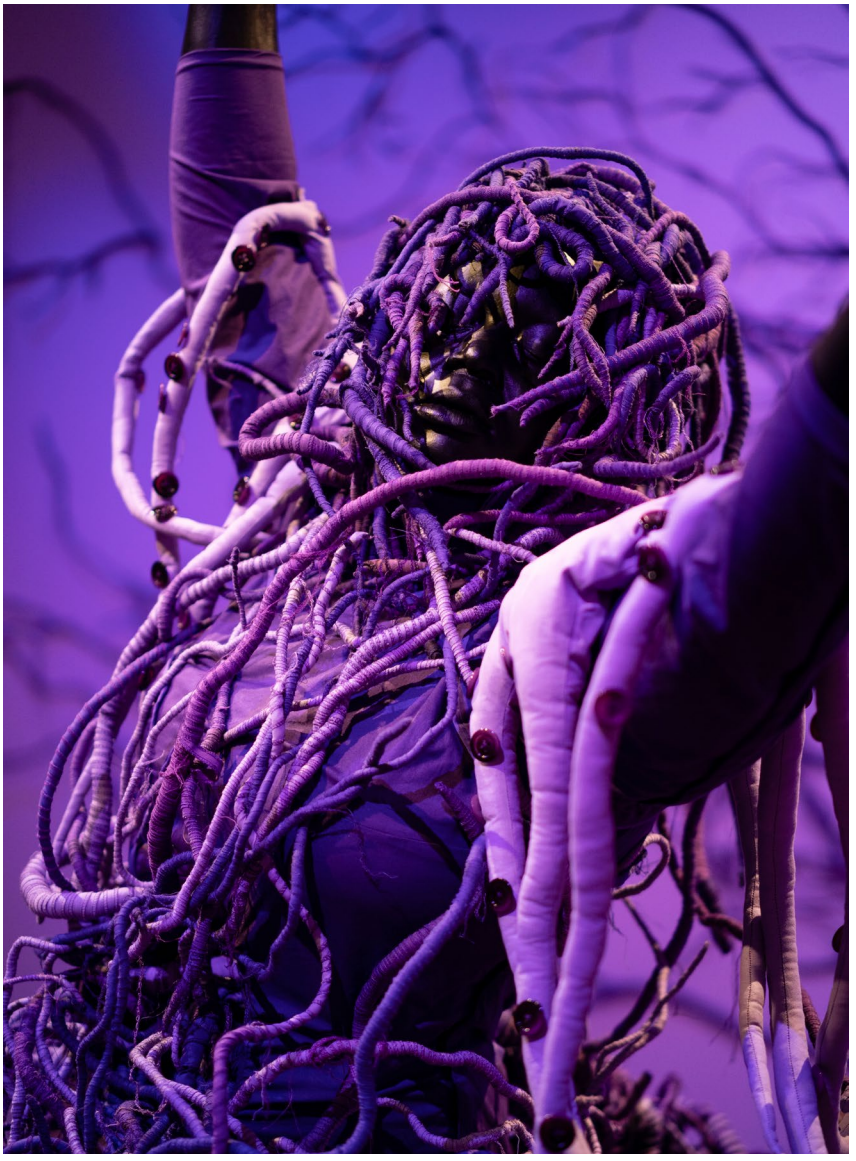

Fig. 7 *Mary Sibande The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

self-determination' (2009: 47). In this she establishes a space that draws together past actions, present circumstances, and future histories that are being made in the present. She further observes that one cannot be mended; one must make one's own mends. As she discusses what she found and what she had forgotten of her childhood landscapes, she quotes Wendell Berry, 'the body cannot be whole alone' (2002: 99).

These two observations might at first appear contradictory, but I want to argue here that it is both perspectives, the self-determination within and as part of a

Fig. 8 *Mary Sibande Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), installation. Photo: Somerset House, ®Anne Tetzlaff

community that allows mending and healing to take place. This draws us back to Halberstam and sets healing and mending as a care-full set of practices enacted through a process of losing and re-making across the temporal planes. Thus, the past becomes activated within the present, and the thrusting forward of the future loops back into this present.

Let us start by revisiting Sibande's artworks, this time to consider the excess, the overspilling and outpouring that are performed within them [Fig. 8]. Looking at the full collection of Sophies, it is immediately clear that her garments become more and more elaborate over time, as do their titles, reflecting her dreams and aspirations expanding. The progression appears to speak of a form of self-determination being constructed as the boundaries between the possible and the imagined break down and blur. Sophie begins to play with notions of excess stuff and being excess, and the associated waste, and in this she creates a rift between herself as imagined aristocrat and herself as servant. This excess, Sibande tells us, mirrors the conspicuous display of wealth seen in post-apartheid South Africa and notes that such behaviour became a form of hedonistic practice in which people

seemed to want to push the greater and greater extremes (Sibande quoted in Corrigall 2010: 6).

The collapse of boundaries, the rupturing of apartheid systems and the performance of excess and waste establish a frame that is all about the rupture, loss, and what might come next. In the dreamlike, fantastical installations, Sibande plays between the real and the imagined, drenching the viewer in intensified colour pallets syncopated by white servant aprons and their ties. As the series progresses the garments and forms become tentacular, breaking free from Sophie, challenging the audience before turning back on her, gradually subsuming her, monstrously expanding, and running ahead of her imagination from within the excess.

What we see in this series is an expression of unhealed rupturing, where agency appears to be in the process of being returned, only to be redirected towards an alternative system of suppression – capitalist excess and ostentatious consumption. Where Sophie seeks liberation, she finds material wealth and capacity, but it is not a psychic liberation. Sophie has become entangled and colonised by this system. Sibande's oeuvre starts messaging subtly and then with great volume that her garments are expressions of imagination, not reality, questioning whether the entangled interplay between self and clothing can ever really be taken as proof of social and/or political transformation.

If we take hooks' aphorism that 'healing begins with self-determination' (2009: 47), we need to take a step back from this apparent conundrum or unrealisable dream of freedom and look at Sibande's tentacular installations and sculptures through a slightly different lens, that of care-full mending. This involves not travelling down a consumerist fashion fantasy line of thought, but to focus upon the way in which Sibande, through the Sophies, establishes a site for reinvention of the self. Through this reinvention she can map her own transition from domestic worker to mistress through a process of care-full mending.

To speak of care-full mending here is to focus upon the body and its clothing not as a series of objects but, to follow Simone de Beauvoir, as a 'situation' (1966: 301). In saying this, de Beauvoir offers an alternative to the post-structuralist distinction between sex and gender of the late 1960s. In its place she proposes a more materialistically focused model of feminism, placing women and their lived experiences within social and historical framings. Thus to think of the body as 'a situation' is to consider it as a networked, bridging, socio-cultural phenomenon. Interestingly, she draws upon phenomenology in taking this approach, which highlights the point here about how social and political structures become produced and reproduced at the level of the body.

If controlling structures are produced at the level of the body, then this is most concentrated within the processes of incarceration which, according to Lisa Guenthner,

'conflates accountability with punishment' (2021: 16). Care-full mending requires this same tracing of structures, to make the elements visible and yet bound up with one another. Remaining with phenomenology follows Merleau Ponty's idea that humans are *in the world and at the same time the world is in us, something he illustrated through the rhetorical figure of the chiasm* (1964: 130-155). The chiasm allows for a shared space occupied by distinct entities without them becoming combined or elided; it is a space that prioritises relationality. Touching, as an example, cannot take place without being touched – there exists a reciprocity within the chiasm.

In this sense care-full mending performs such a chiasm: it has both distinct and overlapping elements, or what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls 'difference without separability' (2016). Where the rupture is formed, the care-full mend requires persistence and pervasive action, creating a tensional field between the concrete and the speculative. The stitch draws pieces together, re-joining broken edges. As the pieces are brought together by the stitching, a new sense of the whole is formed: edges, threads, stitches functioning within a chiasmatic relationship. As the needle and thread rupture the fabric to pass through before turning back and re-rupturing, they form holes within the structural integrity of warp and weft. The stitch causes a form of bleeding out and sticking to – sometimes a gradual seepage along the length of the stitching as the sewing thread becomes increasingly worn, or it can be more sudden, like haemorrhage or menstrual flooding. The care-full mend hovers and functions at the edge or borders, between clean and dirty, life and death, whole and fragmented. It is both the rough mend and the refusal of the reparative act. The matterly activity of the stitch or stitching can be understood through Judith Butler as 'a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter' (1993: 9). To consider mending as a process of materialisation gives scope for thinking through the needle, thread, fabric, and the action of stitching collectively. This is a collective becoming: both seepage and haemorrhage.

Hand stitching is a care-full act of pushing the needle and thread through the fabric in a repeated set of movements along the line of stitching: push needle into fabric, draw shaft, eye and thread through the hole formed, draw thread against thread. The body and fabric remember each stitch, each rupture of surface, gestures that leach out of the porous limits of body and cloth. Returning to de Beauvoir's body-as-situation, the stitch thought of in this way offers a refusal of subject/object divisions in favour of a framework in which consciousness is body-specific and gendered. That is to say, there exists a frictional relationship between body and subjectivity. As that body-fabric seeps and bleeds, it speaks into an intergenerational shadow, speaking into Sibande's unwanted histories,

genealogies, and legacies that epitomise female subjugation and an invisible workforce of enslaved and semi-enslaved domestic workers and clothing producers. In Sibande's work we see cloth and stitch let loose in a fantastical space for imagining. The works question what so-called self-determination might look and feel like. She breaks away from the lap-based, portable structures into vast swathes of cloth and cloth-based forms. She creates an excessive space that leaches out of the prim and tidy stitching, doubling over and over. Here the care-full mending is not so much about containing the broken edges, but about allowing the inner excesses to be relocated and set free. The stitching and mending here recognise that the clothing given no longer fits, the internal body is growing, expanding, and traversing its boundaries. This mend, then, allows for that growth and spilling out – further ruptures. It allows new forms to be stitched, in the form of tendrils and tentacles that can reach up, out, and around the body and its given forms. Where previously the white apron symbolised Sophie as a domestic worker, now her position within society has become ambiguous: she is oversized and overspilling, taking up more and more space and disrupting the excess dress of the aristocracy. Sophie's excess is not rows and layers of perfectly formed ruffles and pin-tucks, nor does she reference the dandy whose dress played with a wealth of styles and silhouettes derived from different eras. Sibande plays between stabilised forms and their destabilised imaginaries, dragging her needle and thread between the two to form a rhetorical chiasm – touched and touching, excess and exceeding, mended and ruptured. Here, in the care-full mending, worked from within the system of dominating powers and the syntax of dress, Sophie rebels and positions herself in a conflicted and duplicitous situation, to coin de Beauvoir. She points to a place of reparation, a way in which a new order might be imagined and in which more fluid identities might be given agency. The care-full mend creates a dialogic space within which the imagined can be realised through its capacity to function outside of the usual temporal and societal planes.

Reparation

Spending time with Sibande's Sophies presents a powerful, emotive, and psychologically difficult range of works, comprising different personas suspended between temporal planes and societal positions. Their interior imagination becomes channelled through these fantastical exteriors that challenge the notion of dress as somehow a superficial façade. The sculptures are beautifully rendered, meticulously crafted from elaborate fabrics. Through this we can read the language of oppression and subjugation, difficult lives and violent acts perpetrated against

them. Sibande's Sophies reach out towards the viewer and one another. They do not cower as victims, instead offering an empathetic space in which they hold fast to their own imagination for freedom; they speak to the viewer's own vulnerability – not as victim or one in need, but as co-constituent.

Sophie's bodies are chiasmatic; they are held as much as they hold, they make space as they take up space. This capacity to occupy the chiasm between bodily known self, imagined self and historical self, becomes an important motif across the body of works. The installation becomes an act of mending, binding between Sophies, Sibande, and viewers. This binding acts out a reparation that is as unlike fine embroidery or invisible mending as it is possible to get, using the same raw materials and tools.

Sibande, even within the beautifully crafted forms, privileges pierced surfaces, rough edges and fraying in the works, through their excess, their tendrils, and tentacles. The viewer is directed away from the pristine and notions of wholeness, pointed towards the chaotic, imbalanced, precarious, and broken. The bleeding from the ruptures is staunched, but only just, and the scarry repairs are paraded. These repairs destabilise the bodies' boundaries, speaking directly to the violence, enabling a discourse of reparation. Sophie is provocative and enlivening. In a time of historical reckoning, particularly in terms of colonial pasts, Sophie offers a form of future history-making based upon a repair that seems more urgent and vital than ever. I want to suggest here that repair and reparation are necessary because of violent acts, are borne out of violent actions of needle and thread, act through violence, and hold in tension a dynamic of anxiety. This is, I propose, a necessary condition of reparation. It is the only way to hold the temporality of violence and oppression to account.

What this means is that reparation and repair, operating within a dynamic of anxiety, are not established as phases to pass through to fixed wholeness, but as productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective ways of living. This involves meeting the past in the future and looking at the future through the past. It involves becoming lost within the repair and its excesses to find an expanded subjectivity.

Anxious living offers a way by which to understand corporal-affective materialisations of power structures that continue to enable racism, sexism, and coloniality, to occupy Sophie's tendrils and tentacular spaces. To approach repair from within anxiety is to refuse an invisible model of mending, because this tries to pretend nothing happened. The rough repair and care-full mending do not let colonial pasts and presents escape reckoning. There is no set of actions of payments that can make the rupture go away.

If the repair is made visible and care-fully rendered, if the edges can potentially re-open and re-bleed, then the mend or repair becomes a material and affective

enactment of, and challenge to, contemporary power structures. These are both individual and structural, sometimes painful and sometimes undesirable. This sets up a framework not as an alternative or desired way of being, but as a challenge to disrupt norms and processes of normalisation.

Sophie's manifestation of anxious living offers a terrifying space for contemplation. To live with the terrifying is an agentic dynamic that establishes temporary alliances, separations, and disruptions that deny solidified allegiance, identity, and belonging. The act of catching up the edges of fabric parts in the repair is important when the focus is upon anxious living as reparative because it cuts to the lived experience. It has the capacity to speak to politics embedded in the quotidian but experienced systemically and structurally. In this, anxious living holds the capacity to act beyond the reactive; it can enact a break and effect change. In the precarious act of pulling needle to and fro across the rupture, the needle and thread perform an acrobatics of change. The raw edges, held roughly and carefully, offer a model of murky resistance, 'counterintuitively, often impossible dark and negative realm[s] of critique and refusal' (Halberstam: p. 2).

The bedfellow of anxious living could be said to be imaginative living, enacted through affective materialisation of counter-power actions; that is, acts and actions that are ambivalently agential. Sophie performs non-normativity and refuses to conform. She is an open wound, roughly repaired. She is a space of pain and hope, disability and capacity, stasis and action. She is the act of catching fabric edges and performing the acrobatics of the turn before drawing the thread around and over, binding the edge, but leaving sufficient capacity for the excess within to emerge and spill over. She breaks the temporal plane, pointing to new kinds of futures in her histories.

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