

STEEL:

THE WORK OF BODIES

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I respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people who are the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land on which this research took place. I recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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ABSTRACT

Steel, the material, acts as a tool in this research, providing a productive dialogue between practice and theory.

I work with the material in an industrial fabrication workshop, a space traditionally reserved for male hands and bodies. I use machinery, tools, equipment and vernacular specific to the material and the space—modalities of which were unfamiliar to me before undertaking this research.

As I spend more time in the fabrication workshop, I come to terms with the knowledge that its operations are not only associated with but tied to the male body. The size and shape of my hands strain to get a firm grip on the plastic contoured bodies of machines. The logical and methodical approach to making used in the workshop, utilising processes driven by practical outcomes, contribute to my sense of alienation.

I wrestle with the ramifications of these associations specific to the workshop, as I endeavour to follow its processes, tools and language. Following these processes allows me to join, melt, fuse metals, using gas, electricity, heat, muscle and machinery. I explore the gendered past of this workplace that women were historically excluded from, which, as a woman I now occupy.

Inhabiting the workshop space, causes me to reflect on how the creation, distribution and use of steel informs the shape and contours of the society I work and live amongst.

Making and working with three-dimensional forms, I explore precarious arrangements of modular and interconnecting shapes that morph and combine to make one image, one form. Each complete form, made up of a series of parts, reflects the operations(s) of a steel fabrication workshop, and its modular character.

I pay particular attention to the treatment of the surfaces of these abstract forms, utilising various tools and their capabilities. Texture becomes information, and the banal seriality of steel sheeting gives way to the experimentation of a novice.

Alongside my activities in the workshop, I foster my existing knowledge of paper and card. When public health orders bar me from attending the workshop, I explore and create three-dimensional forms using cardboard, tape and papier-mâché. I approach the construction of shapes using cardboard in much the same way as I have learnt to do with steel. Even though cardboard is easily substituted for steel in my home studio, I question their disparate material status. Leading me to wonder if they, like the bodies that form them, are caught up in normative pre-conceptions.

I explore the interchangeability that is possible between these “hard” and “soft” materials and use the divergent spaces of their operation to challenge the persistence of their separation and division, and by extension the ways in which the work of [gendered] bodies are differentiated and defined.

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INTRODUCTION

Folding joining, welding, gluing, sticking, filing, sanding, rubbing, colouring.¹

As someone who did not train in sculpture as an art student, or use steel until undertaking this research, I approach this material: steel, and the practice of making sculpture in metal, somewhat as an amateur.

Working on a sculpture, I grind, shaving off layers and layers of imperfectly joined steel to create thick beads of weld, which create fine filings. These thick welds are the result of the filler wire that is coiled within the BOC *Smooth Arc* MIG welding machine.

The wire unspools and exits from the tip of the welding hose, merging and melting alongside, and becoming a part of the steel form that is being fused. The thick beads form an excess that comes with prolonged pressure to the trigger, lingering over the same spot for too long, or simply furiously pumping and welding. There is a feeling of decisiveness with each squeeze of the trigger, provoked by the satisfying and loud crack—the spark of the metals connecting and electricity creating a green blue glint of light behind the mask.

I am welding in an industrial workshop. A friend is teaching me how to use equipment that is part of his profession as a steel fabricator. I build up a knowledge of protocols and ways of operating in this workshop, that is specific to the training I receive. This training requires a body to perform, in such ways that are in line with the operations and protocols of the space. My body adapts, performs and conforms, masquerading as an industrially trained body—this informs part of the research. I am forced to find a way of using tools and equipment that is commensurate to my physical abilities and the scale of my body. To work with a drill, a grinder, a welding machine, pliers, a hammer for instance in this industrial workspace, it is also important that I conduct myself in a way that is in dialogue with the other people in the space. It is through my actions that other people can recognise what I am doing in this space, as we move in reference to one another.

1. This title borrows from Richard Serra's *Verb List* (1967-68). I came to know of this work through American painter and academic Amy Sillman, who drew on it in 2016 when she presented a lecture using a series of verbs to describe what drawing meant to her.

The Menil Collection, "Conversation with Amy Sillman: Drawing in the Continuous Present" (online video), Published March 1, 2017, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BL0gc466nRk>

Sillman proclaims in her presentation drawing is: 'to mark, to stroke, to gesture, to scribble, to scrawl, to scratch, to hatch, to stain, to brush, to shadow, to silhouette, to layer, to synthesize, to interrogate, to record, to concentrate, to construct, to design, to study, to wash, to mark, to doodle, to demarcate, to sign, to signify, to line up, to scroll, to squeeze, to underline, to pattern, to emmesh, to thicken, to embellish, to adorn, to inscribe, to graph, to lay out, to compose, to re-jigger, to elaborate, to invent, to diagram, to map out, to point out, to plot, to plan, to envision, to configure, to enlarge, to spatialise, to slice, to mesmerize, to maximalise, to territorialise, to demonstrate, to stage, to choreograph, to animate, to profile, to instrumentalise, to perform, to recall, to narrate, to chronicle, to textualize, to exhort, to proclaim, to tag, to calligraphy, to alphabetise, to encrypt, to sublimate, to de-sublimate, to hallucinate, to echo, to imagine, to estrange, to express, to extrude, to intensify, to blow

In order to weld, to gain the skills to use welding equipment, I have plied myself with knowledge extracted from others. Steel fabricators, such as Ben who has been assisting me, provide a set of protocols to follow, although I don't necessarily adhere exactly to these instructions in the way I have been shown. Indeed, I willfully re-interpret the fabricator's instructions in order to find my own ways of working with the material. I do this to test the boundaries of compliance—to what extent do I acquiesce? Despite this question, and others like it, I know that without following correct procedure to a certain degree, I would be unable to weld, to get a connection, to raise a spark between metals. As I absorb the metal that makes its way into the pores of my flesh as I sweat and struggle, in the crisp coolness of the workshop in winter amongst the stacks of metal pipe, angle and offcuts I wonder, am I now different? Has steel, the material changed me?

The workshop also has a language that is specific to it, an industry vernacular, a way of talking that is exacting and demands detail. If you are sanding something, you are using a sander, if you are polishing something you are using a polishing wheel—buffing, buffing machine. Whatever the action—each activity has its own name and correspondingly specific process, tool or approach. Names for tools are associated directly with their use, they perform in the same way as an interlocking attachment—a battery pack on a cordless drill for example. In order to engage the function of the machine or tool—all the moving parts have to lock in and align. The same alignment is required in relation to the usage of the correct terminology for each piece of equipment. If one slips or mis-describes a process or action, referring to a different process or action when working alongside others, communication fails. The interlocking parts have no function without that click, turn, connect action that comes from a machine, or a term being approached and used correctly. Also incorporated into this vernacular, this way of speaking, this way of operating is one's judgement of what is safe. And what is possible. What can be realistically achieved in this space with these tools, this equipment, these bodies.

up, to liquify, to shine, to eradiate, to discharge, to pop, to cartoon, to illustrate, to jot, to interrogate, to remind, to puncture, to ponder, to outline, to frame, to alter, to rearrange, to cut up, to re-construct, to cover, to reframe, to edit, to attach, to pare down, to abstract, to delineate, to denote, to examine, to embody, to release, to suggest, to daydream, to sketch, to characterize, to picture, to portray, to depict, to observe, to describe, to show, to reveal, to project, to remember, to fantasize, to narrate, to erotise, to pornograph, to dimensionalise, to mimic, to repeat, to render, to freeze, to systematise, to evacuate, to ridicule, to exaggerate, to satirize, to laugh at, to mock, to fool, to baffle, to deform, to shame, to expose, to embarrass, to thwart, to eviscerate, to condemn, to face, to strike, to erase, to cut' (00:20:24)

Sillman describes herself as a 'desperately tactile person' to process thought, feeling, emotion, she says she 'needs to touch something that is moving...or needs some kind of tactile conduit' (00:40:12). This statement encapsulates my understanding and engagement with the drive for making—a need to be engaged with material in order to think, process, feel. These bodily connotations, of an involvement of the whole body in service of making, is a key concern in this exegesis.

Instinctively one asks, can I cut this piece of metal without clamping it into a vice? Can I lift this without assistance? Appearing inborn, innate—the responses to these questions are intuitive, created through an archive of bodily experiences—one considers what is OK, almost as it is done. The questions inherent to all activities that take place in the workshop are, how can I do this in the most safe, efficient and cost-effective manner? These questions and associated workshop modalities were foreign to me before inhabiting and utilising the contents and specific expressions of the workshop. The approach to achieving “outcomes” in the workshop, whether making an artwork or a utilitarian product, creates a dynamic where unproductive, illogical or unconventional methods are muted or seen to be ineffective within this space. Experiencing the buzz of following procedure to productive ends, there is a sense of tension that occurs at the same time as wonder. Does obeying procedure make me complicit and beholden to one way of working, one way of thinking?

The specific expressions of the workshop, that I acquire and re-perform as needed in the space, manifest and insinuate themselves within my body. Rendering my physical and psychic self an adaptable archive of experiences and effects. Through sheer repetition of movement, through muscle memory, I become accustomed to the specific and procedural way of operating in the workshop. I treat the machinery and tools with a level of respect and reverie I would not have been able to in the past. My movements around the workshop become more familiar, and each time I cut, weld, grind, sand, polish and finish a steel sculpture, it appears as though the tips of my fingers harden, my wrists become stronger, my level of endurance more sustained. I become more aware of my bodily movements in the workshop space. Treading over the same concrete floor, my steel cap boots make an infinite number of pivots. Each deed is recorded: within the archive of experiences and effects, my body remembers.

The libidinal sensations and effects of my body encountering and inhabiting the workshop, which is at first, an unfamiliar space of strange habits and bodily comportments, foregrounds the embodied experiences I focus on for this thesis.

The space of a steel fabrication workshop—a key institution of everyday commodity production till the late twentieth century², is now a refuge of a highly skilled workforce of laborers and fabricators who create and manufacture structural components for architectures of contemporary life. Agricultural machinery, mining equipment, bridges, pressure vessels, pipelines, buildings, architecturally designed mechanisms for houses of the wealthy, etc. In this way, the space(s) of the workshop exist outside the parameters of their designated workspace, filtering through a multitude of construction sites—residences, farms, towns, cities. The fabrication workshop that I occupy produces structural components for commercial and residential buildings, this is the space where I reflect on my experience of inhabiting my body. How I operate within it, and how I experience this industrial space, affects my movements and thoughts as I operate outside of it. It is these embodied experiences that have become the focus for this exegesis.

From Embodiment to the Political Archive

Embodiment has been a central concern in feminist philosophy from the outset. In the 1700s English proto-feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft positioned women as potentially differently abled, but no less equal to men, arguing for the importance of education for women in order for them to operate independently. “Women” were described by Wollstonecraft as a collective and were not distinguished by social groupings but conceptualized as a homogeneous mass, “woman”, as distinct from “man”, an equally undefined category. At the time women’s education was principally concerned with how one should present oneself and behave in society. This education involved the discipline and subordination of a woman’s physical

2. The ubiquity of steel in contemporary life is hard to quantify and thus hard to ‘perceive how deeply embedded it is in the infrastructure of the modern world’ as stated by Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, designers and theorists who have researched and written about the materiality and impact of steel on Western societies.

Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Wallis, *Steel: An Ecological and Design History*, (Norfolk, Fakenham: Prepress Solutions, 2015), 135.

They contend that due to the rise of the ‘immaterial economy’ as a creator of economic value, material production has not ceased, it has merely slipped out of view, becoming ‘increasingly decentered and mobile, migrating from “industrialized” to “newly industrialized” regions’ (13). In this way, even as industrial production is optically elided, steel as a material which produces key infrastructures for societies, remains relevant to contemporary life and [societal] development. ‘At the start of the twenty-first century, steel ranks only second after concrete as the most prolific material manufactured by human beings.’ (223).

body, and consequently women's psyche. Highlighting her concern with the lack of education for women, albeit middle-class white women, Wollstonecraft states in her 1792 text,

In the present state of society, a little learning is required to support the character of a gentleman; and boys are obliged to submit to a few years of discipline. *But in the education of women the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment.*³

Wollstonecraft drew attention to the separation of outward movements and effects on the female body in social life, from the thinking, feeling body. I understand this separation of the mind and body to be wrapped up in normative conceptions of how bodies should operate differently in social spaces, according to their outward presentation, according to their so-called gender or their so-called race. As the Indigenous Australian feminist writer and academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out, 'the articulation of gender as the primary form of identity and oppression became the basis of white feminist epistemology and political action'.⁴ Moreton-Robinson refers to Wollstonecraft and others⁵ whose theories were the result of an understanding of "womanness" based on their experience as middle-class white women, which they uncritically applied to all women. This thinking was influenced by their worldview, 'most visible to them from their privileged subject position'.⁶ Drawing on Moreton-Robinson I argue the body is a site of multiplicity, diversity and contradiction, emblematic of the contemporary body politic. I research and write from my particular "subject position". My concern in this research, is not with the argument of the essentialism of women and men and the "equality" between them, but rather the understanding of gender as a concept and as an embodied experience more specifically.

3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Feminist Papers: A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. (Newburyport: Gibbs Smith, 2019) <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=5642668> (accessed December 23, 2021). (Emphasis added)

4. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism*. (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 34.

5. Penelope Deutscher, "When Feminism Is 'High' and Ignorance Is 'Low': Harriet Taylor Mill on the Progress of the Species," *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 136–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810955>; John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill, "The Enfranchisement of Women" (1850: reis., 2021), accessed January 28, 2022, <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/jsmill/diss-disc/eow.html>; Kristin Käuper, "Harriet Taylor Mill", *History of Women Philosophers and Scientists*, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://historyofwomenphilosophers.org/project/directory-of-women-philosophers/mill-harriet-taylor-1807-1858/>.

Moreton-Robinson positions Harriet Taylor in relation to Wollstonecraft, stating that: 'they wrote as though gender could be isolated from other aspects of identity, and by doing so they made race and class invisible' Moreton-Robinson, 34. Taylor, an English philosopher and feminist, worked alongside fellow philosopher John Stuart Mill to write the

Spanish born queer philosopher, writer and curator Paul B. Preciado positions the notion of gender as a series of ‘political fictions’⁷ stating that ‘sexual binarism and the aesthetic of sexual difference *are just historical categories*, cognitive and political maps that frame and limit, normalize and hierarchize the proliferating form of our desire’.⁸ Using Preciado’s theories of the categories of sex, gender and desire, and his assertion that they are predominately manufactured and proliferated in society through “norms”: law, ritual, inscription, etc., frames how I understand the notion of “gender”, and its discussion in the unfolding pages. This thinking about gender extends to the way in which I think about how I approach making, and the conventional use of materials.

Alongside my development in the workshop and my growing muscle strength and knowledge of using steel, I retreat at times, to materials that are more familiar to me. I use paper, cardboard, glue, tape, and the processes of papier-mâché, using them as surrogates in place of steel, when public health orders bar me from continuing with my steel constructions at the workshop.⁹ I create maquettes and works on paper in a domestic garage space, one light bulb illuminates my activities. The difference in these working methods is reflected in the observation of American conceptual artist Robert Morris, who wrote in 1970:

What the hand and arm motion can do in relation to flat surfaces is different from what hand, arms, and body movement can do in relation to objects in three dimensions. Such differences of engagement (and their extensions with technological means) amount to different forms of behavior.¹⁰

Although both metal and paper impose their own form of “behavior”, as Morris puts it, how they perform and respond to my manipulation, unexpectedly intersect in such ways that force me to reconsider their apparent disparate materialities. My work in

landmark essay, ‘The Enfranchisement of Women’, published in 1851. He later became her husband. In this essay they assert that woman should have the same access as men to work and life, including access to education and equality in marriage. Taylor, and others like her such as Anne Doyle Wheeler, another English feminist writer who worked alongside a male counterpart in order further readership and notoriety, claimed that marriage was akin to slavery and that it was important to “free” women from patriarchal relationships. Their theories and writing dealt exclusively with the relationship between white women and white men.

6. Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to*, 33; xvii.

I elaborate further on Moreton-Robinson’s specific terminology in Chapter One. However, I will explain briefly that in the context of Moreton-Robinson’s research ‘subject position’ refers to a ‘socially constructed position whereby one’s behavior is significantly shaped by what is expected of that position rather than by conscious intention’ (xvii).

7. Ricky Tucker, “Pharmacopornography: An Interview with Beatriz Preciado”, *The Paris Review*, December 4, 2013, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/12/04/pharmacopornography-an-interview-with-beatriz-preciado/>.

the steel fabrication workshop filters into the way I work with the paper and card. Using the same processes for maquette making, as I had done to make pieces of steel sculpture, allow me to follow the procedural logic of working with sheets of steel, without having the actual material in front of me.

I experiment with these materials, (paper, cardboard, papier-mâché, steel) in the knowledge that they, like the bodies that make them can be caught up in normative pre-conceptions, which limit or create boundaries for their use. The normative pre-conceptions that I am concerned with are those that regulate bodies—gendered bodies that are marked in the space and operations of the steel fabrication workshop. Drawing on the writings of Michael Foucault, Australian feminist and bioethicist, Catherine Mills notes, 'in effect, the norm gives the law access to the body in an unprecedented way, that is, as a continuous regulatory force rather than as a repressive and constraining instrument of sovereignty'.¹¹ Norms by this definition operate beyond rules or conventional guides for the ways in which a body is expected to behave in different situations. Instead, norms frame the ways in which we experience situations. The constraining effects of these expectations can be most acutely experienced in social space. There is an analogy to be drawn between the normative expectations of bodies, and the materials used to make art, that I will explore in this thesis through the history and relationships that steel has to industrial uses.

Both metal and paper are produced as sheet material, available in a range of thicknesses and qualities. Made from a combination of elements that are drawn together to form an alloy and composite material respectively, both paper and steel are created from materials occurring in nature. Combined with chemicals, strengthening and stabilizing agents, these original materials such as wood for paper pulp, and iron-ore for creating pig iron are broken down using a variety of processes which involve heavy machinery, mechanical force and extreme temperatures.

8. Paul B. Preciado, Kevin Gerry Dunn, and Jack Halberstam, *Countersexual Manifesto*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/prec17562> (accessed November 24, 2021), 12. (Emphasis added).

9. This research took place during an unprecedented global pandemic. (2020-2022). COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions on movement and engagement were mandated by the Victorian Government. During these times I worked from home, that is, I was unable to frequent the workshop and had to implement alternate ways of making and continuing this research.

10. Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," *Artforum*, (April 1970): 62.

Morris was influenced by the writings of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was well known for his phenomenological approach to theorising. (First person perspective).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Donald A. Landes, *Phenomenology of Perception*. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=1433878> (accessed December 23, 2021).

Merleau-Ponty claimed perception was "bodily", arguing that human beings should regard the

Passed through various rolling machines, elongated and flattened, both steel and paper are squeezed and compacted in order to re-form as new material, which is then cut up, manipulated and distributed as needed. The raw material is now unrecognizable, undertaking a process of transformation throughout each stage on the route to industrial and uniform perfection. Produced in standardized sizes ready for use, this material lends itself to be cut up, manipulated, reconfigured in ways that imposes a new configuration on its past state.¹² Noting the physical force and the sheer infrastructure required to create these (everyday materials), I liken them to the social infrastructure that shapes and defines bodily movement in public and private spaces. According to Mills, the origin of power is not the law per se, but “the norm”. She goes on to elaborate: ‘and the mark of power is no longer interdiction but normalisation: not licit and illicit, but normal and abnormal’.¹³ In this manner, the forming of paper and steel, through a series of “normalisation” processes which feature actions of combination and compression on an industrial scale, parallel the treatment of bodies in social space.

Each material is suitable for commercial use and is seen as valuable only after the raw material undergoes this intense treatment. Although one is stiff, hard, immutable and stable, and the other floppy, soft, fallible and ephemeral, both steel and paper share this characteristic of being transformed in order to conform. And both act as an analogy for the ways in which social norms operate. In both instances a series of processes are performed on a mass scale. In the instance of social norms, they “legitimize” bodies in social space, and as processes they are legitimized in themselves, through repetition and force. Metal and paper are therefore bound in many ways, to their material existence, prior to being shaped or changed by human hands, as a product for use.

Through my growing knowledge of working with steel, I have come to realise that the material attributes of steel can be applied to the other material I use, paper.

body as not just a biological fact, but rather as an entity which structures one’s experience of being in the world. Merleau-Ponty claimed that ‘perception is both intentional and bodily, both sensory and motor, and so neither merely subjective nor objective, inner nor outer, spiritual nor mechanical’ (xii).

11. Catherine Mills, *Biopolitics*. (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=5089143> (accessed December 23, 2021), 26.

12. DS Smith, “How is Paper Made? A Step-By-Step Guide to Our Papermaking Process”, DS Smith company website, accessed November 24, 2021 <https://www.dssmith.com/paper/insights/blogs/2020/7/how-is-paper-made-our-paper-production-process>; Paper One, “How Paper is Made”, Paper One and APRIL International Enterprise, accessed November 24, 2021 <https://www.paperone.com/about-us/how-paper-is-made>; Sappi Tube, “The Paper Making Process”, (online video), published March 13, 2012, accessed November 24, 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4C3X26dxbM>; Cineistfilm, “Steel Factory, Steel Production, Steel Making Process, How it’s Made” (online video), published February 25, 2019, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2o8Dc5XYUc>; Fabricators & Manufacturers Association, “How Steel is Made video” (online video),

The capacity to be transformed imbues the material with the potential to gain power or an authoritative position similar to the potential Preciado ascribes to human beings. As human beings, Preciado states, ‘we all occupy a distinct place in a complex network of power relations’¹⁴, to such a degree that we both affect (power) and are affected by it. A reward for compliance or adherence to norms, is the promise of power. I place these materials (metal and paper) on equal footing in the exhibition space to unsettle any perceptions of the hierarchy between them, such as the permanence of steel that is privileged over the ephemeral nature of paper or cardboard. The materiality of objects and their perceived value in the exhibition space, mirrors more broadly the position norms occupy in social space.

However, power, whether social or physical, is not necessarily the problem. As Australian-born feminist philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz argues, power itself isn’t the problem, rather it is how it is conceptualised—as something to rally against, that is problematic.¹⁵ Grosz frames power as a condition of existence, and proposes that in order to disrupt norms, power must be redirected for it to be productive, particularly for feminists. Grosz writes:

Power must be understood more carefully as that which administers, regulates, and enables, that which flees and produces, as well as that which disqualifies and subordinates, limits, and contains.¹⁶

Conceptualising power as a force, as necessary, and as something to utilise, whether it is a social or physical force, melts and merges into how I view the processes of manipulating and welding metal to make steel sculpture. The processes of working with steel and paper bring into focus my interest in the relationships between the social and artistic contexts in which I find myself operating.

published February 13, 2015, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xajnSzbFMQA>; Alliance for American Manufacturing, “STEEL: From Start to Finish” (online video), published August 13, 2009, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l7JqonyoKA>.

13. Mills, *Biopolitics*, 26.

14. Paul B. Preciado. *Can the Monster Speak? a report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts* (Semotext(e): South Pasadena, 2020), 55.

15. Elizabeth Grosz, “Histories of the Present and Future: Feminism, Power, Bodies” in *Thinking the Limits of the Body: SUNY Series in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, eds. Gail Weiss and Jerome Jeffrey Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 19.

16. Grosz, “Histories of the Present,” 19.

Positioning the artist's body (my body), in this research as a permeable, constantly adapting and adaptable political archive, is informed by my understanding of my assigned or 'distinct place in a complex [social, political] network'¹⁷ and how I can question this position. I draw support for these claims using Grosz's theories of power, architectural space and the body, but also with the support of Preciado's positioning of a body as not just an entity composed of matter, but a living political archive. Preciado uses the term "somatheque" to explain this phenomenon. A somatheque as Preciado writes is a pre-existing archive in which a 'collage of historical and cultural codes'¹⁸ are embedded. Preciado explains: 'If you carefully look at it, you realize that your body archive is connected to the history of the city, the history of design, technologies, and goes back to the invention of agriculture'¹⁹.

The notion of a somatheque in Preciado's thinking and writing positions the body (a body) as composed of more than just physical and intellectual matter. Indeed, Preciado considers the living body as a fictitious entity, composed of an archive of experiences that originate from social norms. These experiences are then stored in the physical-intellectual body. Preciado states that he uses the term to avoid the anatomical, in order to 'focus instead on the production of living political fictions'.²⁰ Preciado eschews often limiting conceptions of the body that are centered on markers of physical difference and instead concentrates on discussing and exposing the "fictions" (norms) that constitute gender and/or the body in social, political and architectural space.²¹

Preciado has appropriated the term somatheque²² for his theories, and just as I repurpose cardboard packaging to make a sculpture, I adapt Preciado's somatheque to my own use. I consider sensation and embodied experiences in my understandings of a body's somatheque, in order to discuss how action and material meet to produce intention and meaning in art making, and in artwork.

17. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 55.

18. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, eds., *The documenta 14 Reader* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017), 130.

19. Preciado quoted by Tucker. Tucker, "Pharmacopornography," 2013

20. Ibid.

21. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013), 69; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2007), 192.

Preciado uses this term 'political fictions' repeatedly in lectures, interviews and writings. This term and concept first came to my attention in *Testo Junkie* where Preciado refers to sex, sexuality and race as 'three powerful somatic fictions', explaining that they are so because they rely on 'the performative repetition of processes of political construction' (69). Preciado references Judith Butler's notion of the 'construction of gender' when making this claim, however, Preciado takes Butler's theory one step further in declaring, as gender is constructed, i.e., created, a fabrication—then gender itself could be thought to be fictitious. Butler: 'If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural

Exegesis Outline

The collision of material and body in art practice creates opportunities to re-conceptualise the body (a body) and to elucidate the ways in which they can be reconceptualised. To explore the potential of this re-conceptualisation I analyse and compare the works of two female Australian artists—German-born Jewish sculptor, Inge King (1915-2016), and Melbourne based installation artist, Rose Nolan (b. 1959). I discuss their disciplined and singular approaches to materials and processes through the lens of my own practice, and my physical and sensorial experiences with materials. King is well known for *Forward Surge* (1972-74), which resides in Southbank on Wurundjeri country and for her other large public artworks. She worked with steel to make sculpture for over three decades. Nolan's work typically incorporates text and uses a distinctive palette of red and white. She utilises hessian, paper and cardboard in the creation of her 'paintings'²³, which move beyond the flat plane of a canvas into three-dimensional, immersive and experiential installations. I draw on the contrast between their approaches to making, in order to situate my own practice and the ways I have sought to understand how norms operate through the use of materials in art practice, and in society. This examination has allowed me to think through ways of overcoming, undermining or reproducing established norms or expected approaches of art making and thinking about artworks.

In Chapter One, I draw on my knowledge of the material properties of steel used to make sculpture to discuss the work of King and her use of metal to make artwork. My own experiences of welding, cutting and grinding metal informs my understanding of the body, my body and the mechanics of movement within the workshop. I use this experience as a reference point to gain insight into King's specific approach to making. I focus on her early works in steel which display an unconventional approach to steel sculpture. For example, through the use of

signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, *and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction*' (emphasis added) (192).

22. Preciado, Can the Monster Speak? 41.

Preciado claims his use of 'somatheque' is taken from Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. He states: 'In the same way that Freud spoke of a psychic apparatus greater than consciousness, so today it is necessary to postulate a new notion of the somatic (physical body) apparatus to take into account the historic and externalized modalities of the body, those that exist and are mediated through digital, pharmacological, biochemical and prosthetic technologies' (41).

23. MCA Australia "Step Inside Rose Nolan's work in The National 2017" (online video), published April 13, 2017, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxtOy0FypVM>.

Nolan explains in an artist interview on the occasion of her installation *Big Words – To keep going breathing helps (circle works)* (2016-17) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia

arc welding techniques, she makes volume and texture from flat steel sheeting, composing forms through processes of collage. Her way of making was contingent on impulse, chance and movement. In short, King's engagement with line and form was principally concerned with sensation and feeling. As King notes:

My ideas come from the life around me and within me, and I cannot pin one particular aspect down, but all I'm trying to do is to express these ideas, the impressions I have and the life I live in a certain material, steel, and to be true to that material.²⁴

King connects the substance of her work directly to her somatheque, her political archive. It is through an analysis of King's work that I demonstrate the visibility and legibility of Preciado's notion of a somatheque.

In Chapter Two I address Nolan's use of her body in producing artworks and in the documentation of her practice. Her body is a feature in these self-made images. She utilizes her body as a tool, its functioning in making artwork and as the subject and object of each image. In analysing her activities within the images, I understand that Nolan's process for making each work, is intertwined with her rationale for it being made. I further investigate these material connections, through the lens of my own practice. It helps to explain my own obsession with steel as a material to make artwork. In this way, although hessian is floppy and scratchy, with a warp and weft and steel is a thick, solid sheet material—I am able to elaborate on the logic of my making process, through my engagement with Nolan's works.

As with King, in my analysis of Nolan's works I incorporate my knowledge of working with paper, cardboard and papier-mâché, to make maquettes and paper-based works. Drawing on a shared material knowledge to investigate the work of King and Nolan assists me in understanding the idiosyncratic logic of my own expressions. The unfolding unofficial mentorship and dialogue I have established with these two

(part of 'The National' exhibition 2017), that her practice originated in painting, however she gradually became interested in extending the possibilities of painting to encompass spatial and architectural concerns. Nolan states: 'The work is really about extending the possibilities for painting, so primarily fundamentally that's where my practice started. But over time, painting has become more of an architectural sort of, pursuit. It's about extending the possibilities for painting beyond the singular object' (00:00:20).

24. Inge King, interview by unknown, December 3, 1965, State Library of Victoria, Ken Scarlett Archive, Inge King Australian Art and Artists Files. Accessed July, 14, 2021.

artists, who do not know I write about them, is captured in the words, sentences and insights on the following pages. In a matrilineal fashion, they somehow encourage and buoy my ideas and abilities.

Through a combination of subtle and overt operations, Nolan and King differently attend to, and express their subjective experiences within their art through process driven practices. I argue that they both utilise and push against norms and gender stereotypes, associated with how materials are used. These stereotypes operate as a series of 'political fictions'²⁵ that contain, delimit and define bodily movement and, by extension, artistic or personal expression. As Grosz explains

We need to think subjects in terms of their strategic placement within power networks; that is, in terms of what they are able to do, more than in terms of who they are.²⁶

Grosz neatly outlines the focus for my research: to privilege the capabilities of the individual, over their subjective identities—over the more easily assigned gender label. This seemingly subtle shift in ideology has a wide-reaching assertion which deals with notions of “the body”, and a body’s capacity to operate as a fluid entity, capable of growing, moving, changing and adapting beyond gender lines.

Although King and Nolan share affinities in their approaches and their ways of working, there is a significant difference between their two practices: the symbolic and material differences between metal and paper. King approached steel as a medium to work with, intuitively exploiting its materiality for her own needs. Whereas Nolan works with hessian, paper and cardboard systematically and methodically in order to transform it into something sculptural, three-dimensional. My practice converges at their point of difference. I incorporate steel, paper and cardboard into my repertoire of mediums, using them as sheet material from which form can be created.

25. Tucker, “Pharmacopornography”, 2013.

26. Grosz, “Histories of the Present,” 14.

The sculptural works I create from papier-mâché, cardboard and steel are segmented in nature and form a series of interconnected block shapes or boxes which rely on one another to function as an artwork and in space. The boxes or block-like shapes which make up the works, are arbitrary. These shapes echo the arbitrary character of the hegemonic norms, that shape individuals and groups in society. Each complete sculpture, made up of a series of individual sculpture pieces, depicts how I conceptualise social norms as composed of arbitrary values. The individual shapes that make up the forms are connected through gravity, steel pins or magnets, but they can also be separated, pulled apart and analysed individually. It is important that the work can do this, as it is through the scrutiny of individual components and their strategic placement that the work eludes to the potential of a reconceptualization of networks. There are no visual tricks or shortcuts in making the works. Part of the process of constructing these sculptures is building each two-dimensional shape that I draw on the page into a three-dimensional form.

The interchangeability between paper and steel, between these “hard” and “soft” materials, allows me to extend Preciado’s consideration of gender as a series of “political fictions”. Preciado uses this term to define what he understands as the social construction of gender—referring to ‘the regime of sex, gender and sexual difference’.²⁷ He regards these as no more than a theory of knowledge for human beings, an ‘historical system of knowledge and representation’²⁸ which confers a way of living, conceptualising existence of “us” and controlling reproduction. Gender, Preciado states, ‘is no more than an epistemology of the living, an anatomical mapping, a political economy of the body and a collective administration of reproductive energies’.²⁹ Considering this statement, I reflect on my experience of the workshop space and its potential, which has allowed me to inhabit a body and state of mind that I once considered foreign. This experience has proved to be transformative, and Preciado’s theoretical schema has allowed me to identify the political fiction to which he refers.

27. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 55.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

Designing each of my sculptures to be precarious—fallible—exposes the fundamental instability and interchangeability that I identify in established norms and their various inconsistencies. The work, has the potential to be toppled, re-ordered. Theorists and writing collective Gibson and Graeme position hegemonic social systems as '*only temporarily fixed and always under subversion*'.³⁰ This understanding reiterates the fundamental fluidity of contemporary existence. And this understanding of fluidity is consistent with a conceptualisation of gender as flexible, floating and liable to change. And the body as an adaptable, adaptive archive of experiences and effects, that records, remembers and transfigures bodily experiences and sensations into forms of knowledge. The potential of fluidity for destabilising norms is stressed by Preciado who highlights the importance of dissolving binary and normative conceptions of "the body". One of the first "laws" he learnt during his transition, was, as he writes, 'to free my thinking from these shackles and experience, [to] try to perceive, to feel, to name, beyond sexual difference'.³¹

I have been immersed in the silvery and contemplative surfaces of each steel sculpture, that I have pored over for hours. Working away at the surface with a 36 grit grinding disc, and gradually creating a refined and smoother finish with a 320 grit sanding pad on an orbital sander, this process has allowed me to engage with more slippery, reflective conceptions of my body in action, in motion, in the service of making artwork. Process becomes knowledge, theory becomes form and form becomes theory. And I now move with greater freedom and purpose through the world I inhabit. The workshop space has become a part of my political archive which I explore through this exegesis.

30. Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 15. (Emphasis added).

31. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?* 39.

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CHAPTER 1

Metal

If you want to successfully weld two pieces of steel together you must follow a procedure. The objects to be welded together must have a current running through them for the electricity to have somewhere to go (the arc—generated by two conductors of electricity). The welding machine requires a positive or negative charge depending on the welding technique. The act of welding, creating an arc, allows electrons and atoms to meet and fuse metals, creating a bond between two pieces or two parts of something.

The placement of an earth clamp (a tool attached to the body of the welding machine which ensures the electrical current that is being conducted is a closed circuit) is critical for good welds, as the better the connection, the more consistent the current, therefore the quality of the weld. One of the most vital processes when fixing the earth clamp (which grounds or ‘earths’ the material) is ensuring it has a clean, strong connection—free of substances, such as oils and paints. A rusty or uneven surface can also weaken the connection. If the clamp isn’t attached properly the current can fluctuate, resulting in welding defects, such as a “lack of penetration”. This defect results in a weld which looks passable or sufficient to the untrained eye, however the metals may be unfused below the surface of the welding bead, rendering the join of the metals superficial. A welding bead is a deposit of filler wire that has melted and fused with the metal pieces that are being joined, they can sit flush with the material or appear bulbous and raised, depending on your abilities and technique. When the bond between the two metals is ineffective, it can be broken apart manually, or with very little force. The welding machine must be earthed in the same way as the steel object to be welded. The welding machine is grounded (earthed) through an electrical plug in the wall. This plug connects to the electrical system it is engaged with through a complex web of wires, which is grounded by a single piece of steel, driven into the ground outside the house or building it connects to. The earth clamp as part of the welding machine completes the circuit—forms a loop—and an electric current to create the arc to weld. If the

welding machine is not earthed, and the circuit is incomplete the current will move through your body instead, and you will receive a small sharp shock.

Inge King was very familiar with the fundamentals of welding, having utilised processes of welding and other procedures and tools of steel fabrication to make her sculptures from the 1950s on.¹ The way King chose to weld pieces of steel together, and more importantly her approach or method of cutting the steel—with oxygen acetylene (otherwise known as, oxyacetylene or oxy welding)—contributes to the absorbing texture and richness in the join lines and surfaces of her early steel works. Australian critic and writer Judith Trimble aptly describes these early forms as ‘encrusted with congealed metal’.² The edges of the steel clearly reveal that they had been cut with oxyacetylene, as they have a heterogeneous undulating texture, where ‘the cutting action of oxyacetylene’³ occurred.

Developed in the early 20th century, an oxyacetylene torch combines oxygen and acetylene, which when lit and adjusted can produce a temperature capable of melting and fusing metals. Augmented by jets of oxygen which burst through the hose connected to each gas bottle, the flame temperature is increased to allow for localised melting. The combination of oxygen and acetylene work concurrently to heat and cut metal, a gloved hand directs the torch freely, without a mechanical guide for direction. This can lead to human error, through the hand wavering slightly or a lapse in concentration. I imagine King passing a torch along the line to be cut—possibly it was pre-marked, maybe it was done by eye alone. This action creates a recognisable and irregular texture across each edge of metal, due in part, to the separate jets of oxygen and acetylene, which combine as the cutting occurs. The gnarled surfaces of these works, created through the use of oxyacetylene, and King’s welding techniques provide me with a reason to linger, to deliberate over each form. In 1969 Australian Art Historian Margaret Plant, described King’s treatment of steel as contradicting the conventional notions of the material, stating

1. David Hurlston, Jane L. Eckett, and National Gallery of Victoria. *Inge King: Constellation*, (Melbourne: National Gallery Victoria, 2014), 12; Inge King, Profile of Australian Women Sculptors, 1860-1960, Women’s Art Register Extension Project, 1978, Inge King: Australian Art and Artists Files, Ken Scarlett Archive, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. (Hereafter cited as IK Profile, 1978).

King’s earliest sculpture using metal and wire was produced in 1950, whilst still at the Abbey in London. In Melbourne in 1952, King also exhibited metal constructed works, alongside her husband Graeme’s paintings, in their second husband and wife exhibition in Melbourne titled: ‘*Exhibition of Painting, Jewellery, Constructions in Steel by Grahame and Inge King*,’ (12). However, she comments publicly that she didn’t begin welding until 1959. ‘1959: I started welding. Steel had fascinated me for a long time before I actually began using it’ (IK Profile, 1978).

2. Trimble describes King’s way of working with steel.

Judith A. Trimble and Inge King, *Inge King: Sculptor*. (East Roseville: Craftsman House in Association with G B Arts International, 1996), 39.

3. Hurlston & Eckett, *Inge King*, 44.

'The metal, cold and calculated, is contradicted by the insistently hand-made joints'.⁴ The confluence of the industrially produced hard metal, combined with the erratic and unashamedly unhewn welds and cutting technique, produces effects of vulnerability that engage me. I find the savageness (as in shocking) of these seemingly disparate textures and processes meeting, appealing and seductive.

A 1962 newspaper article describes King as 'drawing from endless angles'.⁵ After her student days in England, King appears to have disliked leaving a paper trail of drawings or plans and preferred instead to work directly in steel to develop her ideas through maquettes.⁶ King drew by composing with steel, collaging pieces of steel, tacking them together to create three-dimensional forms. Tacking is a term used in welding which involves connecting the pieces of steel that you wish to join together with one bead of weld, so that the two pieces of steel are held there but they can be easily broken or cut apart. Like the action of pinning a hem of a skirt, the overall structure can be easily altered upon reflection or measurement. Tacking also helps with even heat distribution around the form, so the work doesn't warp or buckle. Arriving at each final form through constant negotiation, King adds and subtracts, tweaks and reflects. She asserts that, 'Sculpture for me is still three-dimensional and you have to work in the round, so I have to plan for it in a three-dimensional way'.⁷

I work with card and papier-mâché to make maquettes for my steel sculptures, in a similar manner to King who worked by directly collaging pieces of metal to make her sculpture. Although the shapes that I make three-dimensionally come from prior mark making, both approaches incorporate processes of assembling and layering, returning over and over again to a beginning point, one or multiple anchors. It is through this layering that a mood, a feeling, is compiled.

An approach to composition via layering is most evident in King's early works, such as *Flying Form*, (1961, fig.1), *Italian Landscape* (1963, fig.2), *Euridice*

4. Inge King: Australian Art and Artists Files, Ken Scarlett Archive, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. Preface for catalogue for Inge King's, 'Maquettes for Monumental Sculpture', exhibition at Powell Street Gallery, November 1969.

5. Unknown, "Inge King—Sculptress", *The Architects*, Perth, March 1962, Inge King Australian Art and Artists Files, State Library of Victoria.

6. King in an interview, 'I like drawing but rarely used it for working. Putting ideas down on paper destroys them, as the material is part of the concept'. IK Profile, 1978, AAA File.

Jane Eckett, "Centre Five Sculptors: the formation of the alternative professional Avant Guard" (PhD thesis., University of Melbourne, 2016) (hereafter cited as, Eckett, Centre Five Sculptors, PhD thesis, 2016); Trimble and King, Inge King, 31.

Jane Eckett, Postdoctoral Research assistant in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, who has researched and written extensively on King, gains much insight into her thinking and influences by pouring over King's drawings and notebook sketches, in her early years as a practising artist, compiling her findings into a Doctoral paper. King's drawings act as archival material which replaces written and aural histories



Figure 1. Inge King, *Flying Form*, 1962, painted steel, 57 x 106 x 41cm. In Geoffrey Edwards and Judith A. Trimble. *Inge King: Sculpture*. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1992), 41.



Figure 2. Inge King, *Italian Landscape* 1963, bronzed steel, 33.3 x 30.3 x 17.3cm. In David, L Hurlston, Jane Eckett and National Gallery of Victoria. *Inge King: Constellation*. (Melbourne: National Gallery Victoria, 2014), 48.

(*Maquette, First Version*), (1964, fig.3), *Tenement*, (1964, fig.4) and *Observer*, (1965, fig.5). Although these works share a sombre presence, perhaps a manifestation of her experiences of war and loss before arriving in Australia in 1951, the layering effects used by King also contribute to a sense of energy and passion that appears embedded across each sculpture's surface. The layering of steel slabs and welds can be seen to signify the layering of memories, in three-dimensions. Appearing to be a product of their circumstances, as King was still learning how to weld at the time, each work carries a depth of emotion, produced by an unwieldy use of heat and gas that ran through, and out of the welding nozzle. King embraced the "messiness" of her process as her welding and cutting style produced imperfect join lines, haphazardly cut pieces of steel and lumpy welding. More and more, there is a sense of riotous expression as each work enters a new iteration. As time goes on, a sense of freedom in forging ahead using whatever means necessary appears as a sign of strength. As can be seen from works from 1961-1965, (fig.1-5), they compellingly progress in mood and scale. Thick beads of weld consume surfaces. Her approach to making involved haptic processes of chance and intuition. These observations are further supported by King's reflection on her process when she states,

Before I embark on any large-scale sculpture, I do a number of sketches. I do these sketches or maquettes in the actual material, that means in steel. I mainly keep to rectangular flat shapes which I join. I usually have hundreds of them cut up and lying around ready for use.⁸

As a mode of making, King's approach was highly contingent on her physical engagement with her materials. Compiling the work relied on her actively utilising her body to respond to, and with, the materials that surrounded her in the studio. King, as David Wynn notes had 'an intense feeling for her materials'.⁹ And as she reflects herself, 'I find by making small maquettes I can work very much more quickly and

that King was reluctant to share, exemplifying the stories and histories one can glean from mark making. Understanding King and her mode of operation, her way of moving through the world could be helped by reflecting on her experiences of WW2 and the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. Personal information in the public domain was dangerous and could be used to bully, intimidate, capture and ultimately kill. King had firsthand experience of the threat that information could pose. Her reluctance to share information publicly, or even to identify as Jewish, in Australia is important to note as it frames her experiences that lead her to being an artist, and how she arrived at making abstract steel sculpture. She once noted that abstract expressionism specifically, offered 'ultimate freedom' (31).

7. Hurlston and Eckett, *Inge King*, 61.

8. Inge King, interview by unknown, December 3, 1965, State Library of Victoria, Ken Scarlett Archive, Inge King Australian Art and Artists Files. (Hereafter cited as, IK interview, 1965, AAA File).

9. David Wynn, "Abstract Sculpture", scanned and printed page from publication, date unknown, Inge King Australian Art and Artist files, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

10. IK interview, 1965, AAA File.

more intuitively, without losing the idea I first had in mind'.¹⁰ However many of King's public works have been scaled up and necessarily altered to meet the requirements of an enlarged specification. This means that they are made from heavy and rigid materials that attempt to emulate the hand of the artist. The origin of each work relates to a series of kinetic and bodily engagements and these initial works produced in the studio respond to line and form. Indeed, Australian art historian and curator, Sasha Grishin describes works such as *Flying Form* (1962, fig.1), *Dark Angel* (1961-62), and *Gothic Figure* (1961), as part of a collective, their hallmark being King's 'concern with movement, where the heavy planes of steel are made to fly and create a sense of movement, suspension and tension as the material enters into a precarious relationship with gravity'.¹¹ These early interactions King had with steel and the works that she created as a result, have a dynamism that I suggest is lacking in her later, larger, monumental works. This dynamism has to do with her unstoppable enthusiasm for using this material, which, at the time, was new to her and indeed other local artists, such as Robert Klippel and Lenton Parr, a fellow member of the Centre 5 artist collective.¹²

King was not only part of the artist group Centre 5, she also helped build an audience for, and advocated for sculpture in Australia. Her participation in art scenes beyond Melbourne and outside of Australia gave her a worldly perspective¹³, from which she was able to extract something unique from her chosen material, steel. As well as being inspired by the landscape and artists working around her, she was principally inspired and motivated by the potentialities of steel¹⁴, a material which she had first encountered through the works of David Smith and other American and European artists¹⁵ while in New York in 1949.¹⁶

11. Sasha Grishin, *The Art of Inge King: Sculptor*, (Melbourne: Macmillan Art Publishing, 2014), 88.

12. Trimble and King, 1996, (32, 49, 50-54); Eckett, *Centre Five Sculptors*, PhD thesis, 2016.

Centre 5 was an artist collective. Its members exhibited together and supported their mutual interest in furthering the Australian public's engagement and understanding of abstract sculpture. They were active from 1963-1974. The majority of the members of Centre 5 were, like King, emigres to Australia—and had unique perspectives on the three-dimensional form through their European training and proximity to the history of modernism. These artists were Vincas Jomantas (1922-2001), Julius Kane (1921-62), Clifford Last (1918-91) and Teisutis Zikaras (1922-91) and Inge King. The Australian artists who were part of the group were Lenton Parr (1924-2003) and Norma Redpath (1928-2013).

13. Eckett, *Centre Five Sculptors*, PhD thesis, 2016. Eckett, Hurlston & Eckett, *Inge King: Constellation*, 11.

Undergoing art school training during World War II, moving from Germany, to England, to Scotland and back to England, King engaged with a multitude of artists and artistic styles—across genders, cultures and generations. King began her training in 1935 in the studio of



Figure 3. Inge King, *Euridice (Maquette, First Version)* 1964, steel and copper, 30.5cm high. In Sasha Grishin, 'The Art of Inge King: Sculptor', (Melbourne: Macmillan Art Publishing, 2014), 104.

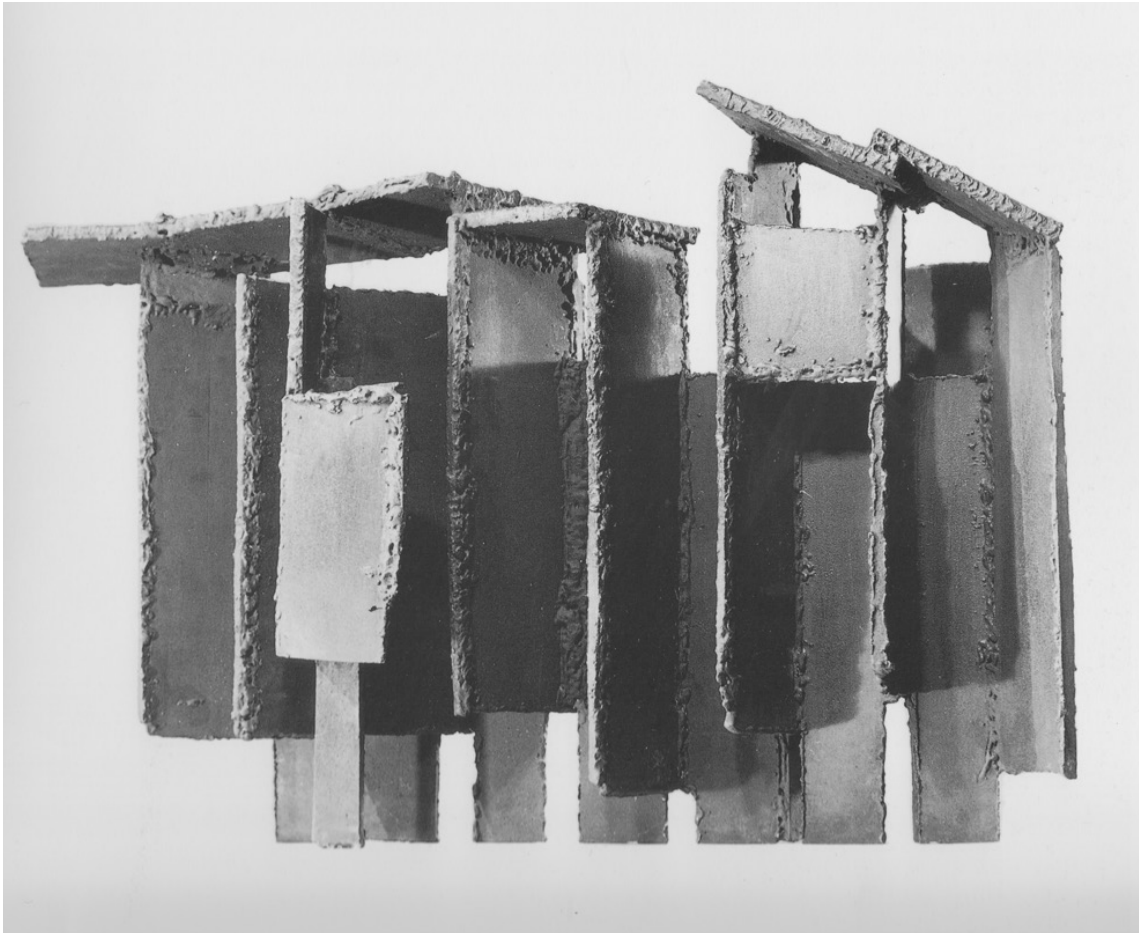


Figure 4. Inge King, *Tenement*, 1964, bronzed steel painted black, 57 x 89 x 33.3cm. In Geoffrey Edwards and Judith A. Trimble. *Inge King: Sculpture*. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1992), 47.

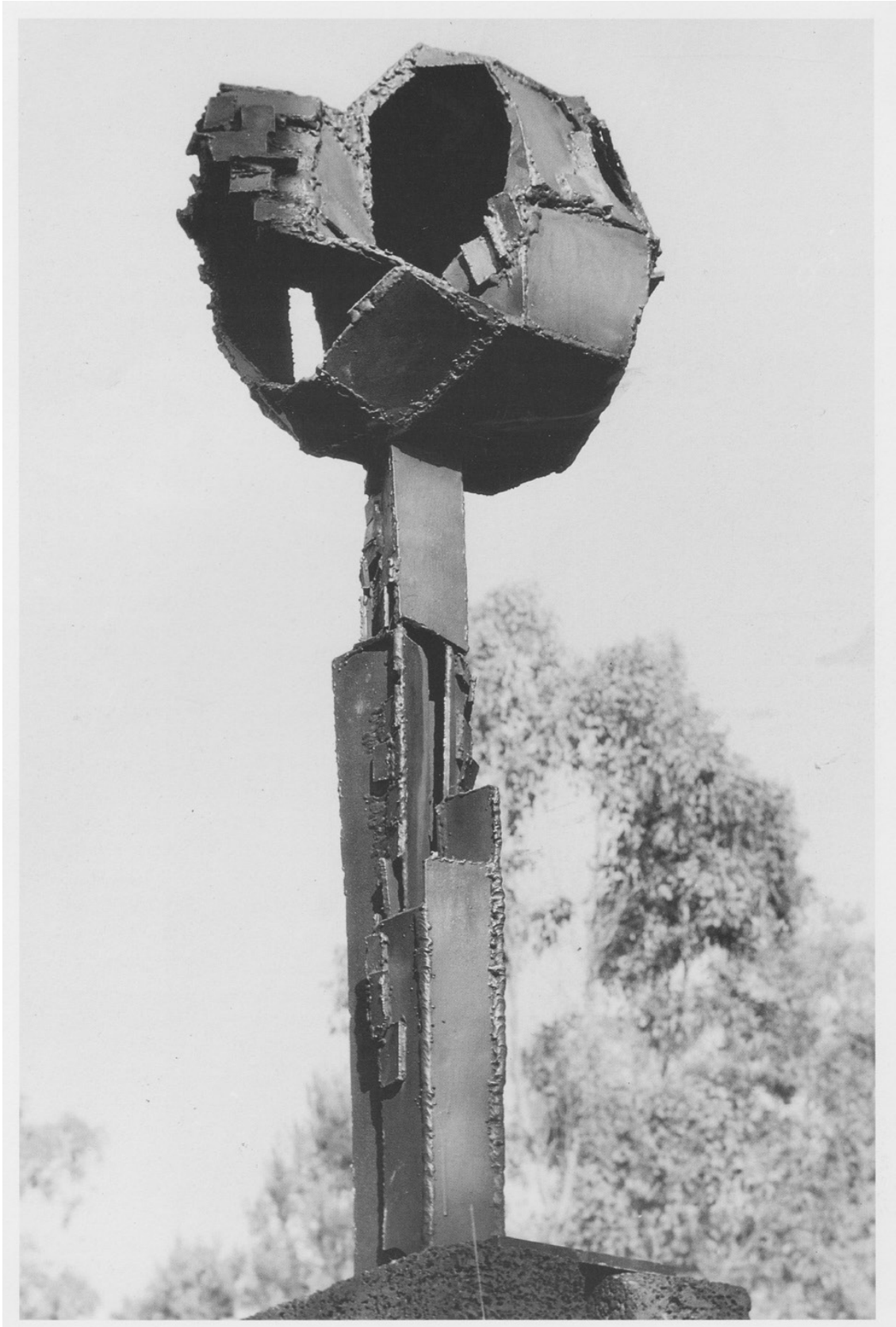


Figure 5. Inge King, *Observer*, 1965, bronzed steel, 175 x 95 x 50cm. In Geoffrey Edwards and Judith A. Trimble. *Inge King: Sculpture*. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1992), 55.

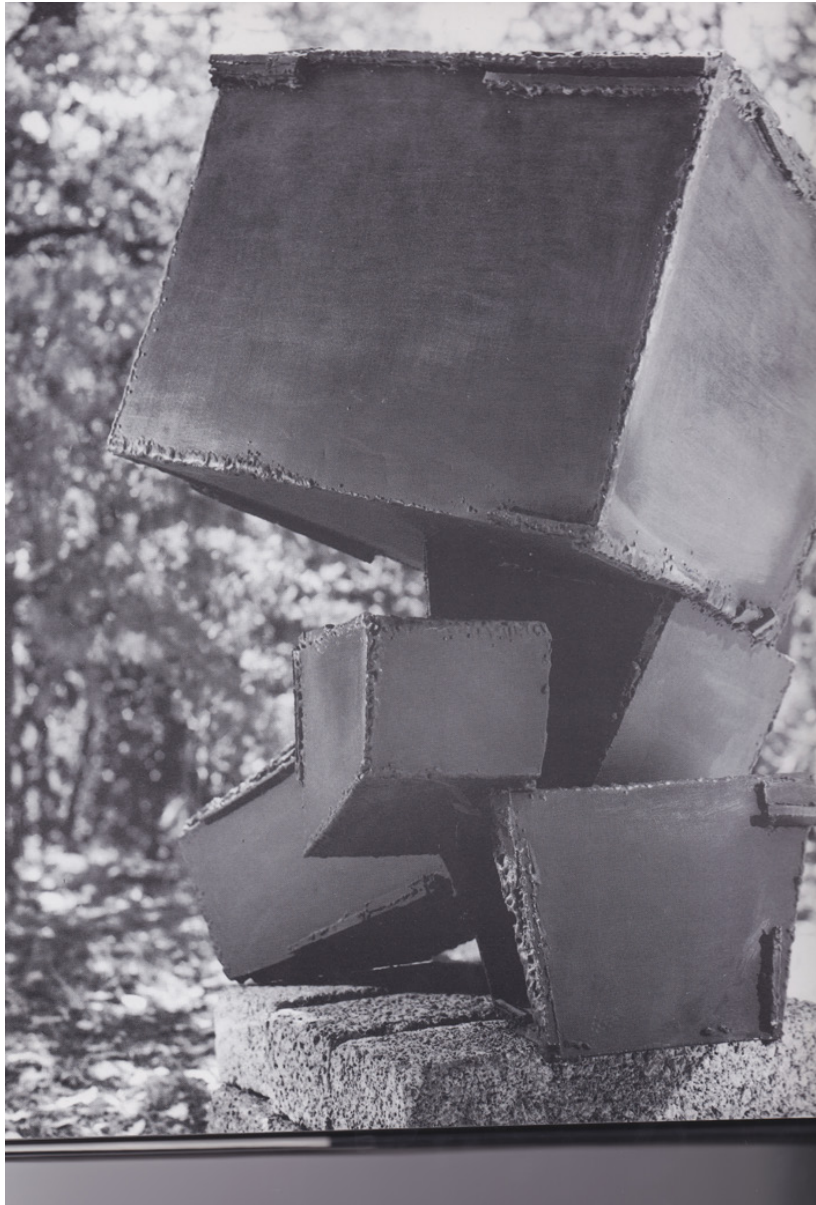


Figure 6. Inge King, *Boulder*, 1967-68, bronzed steel, 99 x 76 x 66cm. In Geoffrey Edwards and Judith A. Trimble. *Inge King: Sculpture*. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1992), 30.

The Logic of Steel

A key example of the intuitive dynamism of King's earlier works is evident in *Boulder*, (1967-68, fig.6). Created using arc welding techniques and equipment in conjunction with pre-cut steel sheet pieces, this work is distinguished by blobs of molten metal that mark the joins. Alongside other works mentioned above, such as *Observer*, (1965, fig.5) and *Euridice (Maquette, First Version)*, (1964, fig.3). The textural bulbous formations and distorted edges that result from the imperfect welding processes are on show, seen as ugly by professionals trained in welding, often referred to colloquially among fabricators (especially older fabricators) as 'bird shit'¹⁷, the molten metal that makes its way up and down, side to side, along each join line and then some, creates a sense of power which emanates from each apparently, "shonky" line of welding. There appears to be a level of audacity that presides over the work, giving it a combative but alluring aura. Enveloped in a black patina, the work looks as though it is doused in black paint. As though King accentuated the oozing, dribbly nature of welds by taking a can of black paint and pouring it over the body of the form, letting it slip and pool in crevices created as if for this very purpose.

King embraced the dirty, hot and haptic process of welding that I have described, as the "messiness" key to her early works whereby she incorporated the awkwardness of this activity into the work itself, through textures and imperfectly placed steel plates. In my experience, the buzzing of adrenaline combined with the complete black out at times of the welding helmet almost gives rise to an awkward sort of fixity. In 1968 she remarked 'I look like a spaceman when I begin work'.¹⁸ This is how I have also experienced the process of inhabiting the fabrication workshop. The discomfort of using implements, such as pliers, tin grips or magnets to hold steel in place while they are tack welded. The ungainliness of protective equipment such as gloves, which put the hands at a remove from the material—all this is

German wood carver and ceramicist Hermann Nonnenmacher, working alongside him for several years. She then attended the Berlin Academy (the Vereinigten Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst) from October 1937, until war broke out in 1939. King left Germany at this point, never to return to live there. King applied and was accepted to the Royal Academy (RA) in London, before the war forced it to shut its doors in December 1940. Determined to receive an art school education she applied to the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and was again accepted, ultimately moving to Glasgow in the spring of 1941. She completed her studies there in 1943. In 1947, she journeyed back to London, and moved into The Abbey Arts Centre, which was a living and studio space for artists, a place in which artists from Europe, UK and Australia merged and mingled. During her time at the Abbey, she also went travelling. Spending time in Paris, before visiting America, along with an introduction to Herbert Ferber, who introduced her to galleries and artists, among them Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

14. Trimble and King, *Inge King*, 36.

'She [King] wanted an art that would reflect the properties of her materials, and her special feeling for her own time and place' says Trimble of King's early use of steel.

15. King's visit to New York in 1949, altered her thinking significantly. She spent time at the Sculpture Centre (formerly the Clay Club) in New York City which housed a burgeoning art scene, contributing to the 'New York School'—action painting, Abstract Expressionism

embedded in the forms she makes. Works, (see fig.1-6) and other early works, are layered and bulky, their often-unaccommodating exterior, layer upon layer of molten metal, could be equated to the level of workwear required to sheath and protect the body. A combative yet productive state. And somehow each work, still contains a sense of majesty. Although in some instances, it is possible to see where the torch has simply melted the metal away. This is an example of “blow out”, whereby the heat of the torch has created a hole, or an area of melted metal. This is the opposite of a “lack of penetration” described earlier, rather it is an overabundance of penetrative energy. For example, in *Italian Landscape*, (1963, fig.2) one of the “turrets” has a large gaping corner, like a wound, which has been worked away by the torch being too hot or lingering for too long in this one spot.

In order to avoid these faults or blemishes, I deliberately follow the “logic of steel” to its most fundamental level, I follow correct workshop procedure as if it were a performance, a mimicry of masculinity. The logic of steel for me manifests in the process of adhering to procedure, which “allows” the act of welding to take place, as detailed in the opening paragraph. However, it also describes the logical and structured nature of the workshop in which a series of steps performed correctly is necessary for tools and machinery to function. In order to use the drill, it must have a charged battery pack attached and a sharpened drill bit in the diameter required inserted into the nozzle. For ease of access, a hole drilled in advance may be needed, before the pieces of sculpture are welded together. A powder coater might require drill holes to hang each work in the spray booth, as they dry out and to spray each piece of sculpture with a clear, protective coat. These holes must exist before the final sanding and polishing processes take place; they must be considered prior to the work being finished. The infrastructure of the workshop space forces a way of thinking that is logical, evolving in a linear fashion.

and a new Avant-garde. She exhibited at the Clay Club and Laurel Gallery. At the time, the culture in America was distinctly different from Europe or Britain in its approach to artmaking. New materials such as steel were being increasingly used and considered as a significant sculptural medium, and the cubist notion of layering was in full effect. King, instead of relating to American artists such as Louise Nevelson, who was engaged with assemblage and wood carving, a material King was also working with at the time, she appeared to have identified with the work and thinking of male artists such as David Smith, Ibram Lassaw, Theodore Roszak and Seymour Lipton, who significantly, were all working with metal at the time. Eckett, *Centre Five Sculptors*, PhD thesis, 2016, (297-305).

16. King: ‘My interest in steel sculpture was aroused during my first visit to New York in 1950... but I only started working in steel ten years later in Australia’ Trimble and King, *Inge King*, 36.

17. Ben, the steel fabricator who assists and teaches me how to work with steel, and how to weld tells me anecdotally, during his time as an apprentice in New Zealand, older welders would walk past an apprentice at his bench and make crowing/bird sounds. Bad welding, usually done by someone inexperienced is referred to in the industry as “bird shit”, as its appearance is dribbling and bulbous in some areas. This is regarded as an offensive comment. Ben and I both agree that King’s welding isn’t bird shit as such.

18. Author unknown, ‘Sculpting is a lot of heavy work’, *The Age*, November 19, 1968, Inge King Australian Art and Artist File, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Each step or process is a prerequisite for the next, however each step and how to get there must be formulated in advance, to ensure all are successful. In the space of the workshop mechanical processes occur concurrently with the ordering of mental thoughts, based on a replication of method and process. In this way, when first entering the space of the steel fabrication workshop, I felt alienated. As the combination of procedure and my ambition to perform in the space, creates a feeling within me that that I am estranged from the capabilities of my body, limbs unknowing and literally low in power. When first in the space, using a grinder, I hold it with two hands. The grinder can and does whirl into action in a heartbeat, ripping through the air with a high pitched whrrummurrrhhh. The circular motion of the machine in action contributing to its distinctive sound. Holding it and flicking the trigger to ON is a motion that requires familiarity and coordination.

As I smooth the edges of the sculptures and lean into my mistakes, I form a subtle soft resistance to the conventions of steel fabrication, whereby a maker or fabricator attempts to simplify their processes, to spend as little time as possible to achieve the end result, in the least number of steps. Instead, I create more work for myself, dragging the grinder over the entire surface of each sculpture: over and over again, taking the time needed to produce the result I want. The treatments (grinding, sanding, heating, beating) I apply to the surface of the steel sheeting, transform it from an imperfectly welded industrial product, into a new textured, imperfect, battered and undulating, unique finish. It is through this time and attention to surface that the work develops an imprint. It has been “acted upon” as American conceptual artist Robert Morris might say. He asserts the importance of describing and regarding the physical act of making just as much as the meaning of the work itself. He writes: ‘Objects project possibilities for action as much as they project that they themselves were acted upon’.¹⁹ Each sculptural form I make, the materials that make up each form, are “acted upon” by a series of repetitive movements—welding, sanding, filing, rubbing, etcetera. Morris’s notion that the forms incite and evidence

19. Robert Morris, “Sculptors on Sculpture: Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making; The Search for the Motivated.” *Sculpture* (Washington, D.C.) 13, no. 2 (1994), 28.

movement and action, are important to this research. Bodily movement with, for and against materials refers to what I understand as my body's somatheque, its political archive in effect. The process of making is comprised of a million imperceptible decisions made intuitively, reactively, astutely in the moment in which, when combined, culminate in a finished work.

The Body as a Tool

King's somatheque, her living political archive, as outlined in the Introduction using the thinking of Paul B. Preciado²⁰ is expressed in her early assemblages, in her early steel sculptures (fig.1-6), where the illogical nature of her expressions had yet to be fully digested and refigured within the context of an artist's professional and commercial evolution. Each sculptural form is heaving, laden and vibrating, evidencing bodily movement and connection with material and subject. In a statement from 1978, for a profile on Australian Women Sculptors, King reinforces this observation, saying 'one cannot stand still or repeat a formula; it is essential to find new venues and to add to one's vocabulary. To create requires the whole being'²¹

King's conceptualisation of the body as a complete entity, a whole being, that is comprised of a series of parts, echoes Preciado's theories on the body. He reminds me, 'the mind is not an invisible inside. The body is not a visible outside.'²² In making this statement Preciado claims that the body is not just a vector for the mind to communicate thoughts, but rather an entity which contains experiences and effects that operate alongside the mind (and vice versa). This notion combines the thinking body with the feeling body—a key concern I argue is evident in King's work, which I feel is best represented in these early steel works under discussion here (fig.1-5).

20. A somatheque, as Paul B. Preciado writes, 'is larger than the body and the psyche and new clinical techniques are needed (including queer-psychoanalysis, performance, art, media and political techniques) to reach it and transform it'. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, Notes for a Psychoanalytic Forum", *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 3–4 (2016): 24-25.

21. IK Profile, 1978, AAA File.

22. Preciado, "Testo Junkie", 24.

They are cantankerous in that they are both humorous and utterly serious, King plays with the staunch machismo associated with steel production and fabrication. She emphasises and makes explicit her lack of experience in welding and working with steel, choosing not to hide this inexperience nor allow it to curtail her expressions. She makes use of this (temporary) state to destabilise the material connotations of steel—related to masculine coolness, efficiency, sureness. King however, succumbs, later in her career, to the wealth of resources and means that result in her outsourcing to professional steel fabricators.²³ These later works seem to confuse the aims of these initial works in steel, which appear as insistent and independent expressions, occurring due to a series of fulfilled desires.

My conception of my body as an instrument that has the ability to move act and feel based on intuition and cognitive function, is based on my lived experience. Recognising that there is no “universal” body or bodies, I see the body as part of a diverse continuum rather than from the perspective of an oppositional dichotomy.²⁴ This conceptualisation enables a body to operate outside the limiting classifications associated with the division of the sexes into categories, the division of peoples based on race, appearance, ability. These categorisations, spring from inherited “subject positions” to which one is socially conditioned to adhere. This term is used by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, to describe how individual identity becomes tangled up in social norms and expected behaviours. Moreton-Robinson states that a “subject position” is a ‘socially constructed position whereby one’s behaviour is significantly shaped by what is expected of that position rather than by conscious intention’²⁵ and as such, only by taking steps to understand and accept this inherited “subject position” we can break down our conditioning to it. Preciado relays a similar sentiment in different words stating in an interview:

Our thinking is forced to organize itself around concepts which have been historically constructed and which also inscribe power relations:

23. Hurlston and Eckett, *Inge King*, 60.

King did not stay focused on blocks, or box shapes as her works progressed. She instead turned toward twisting and manipulating flat steel into open gestural curved forms and ellipse shapes, splicing pieces of smoothly cut steel sheet together. After King’s overseas trip in 1969-1970 with her husband Graeme, to America and back to Europe for the first time since her departure in 1951 (and arrival in Australia), she moved decisively away from her gestural and textural steel works, toward clean lines and refined finishes on her steel sculptures. Australian curator David Hurlston observes, ‘almost immediately upon their return, a change in Inge’s practice and working methods was apparent. Whereas her 1960s work was heavily textured and often overtly expressive, these new sculptural forms were simpler, more precisely constructed and their surface treatment more refined’ (60).

24. Riki Lane, “Trans as Bodily Becoming: Rethinking the Biological as Diversity, Not Dichotomy” *Hypatia*, Summer, 2009, Vol. 24, No. 3, Transgender Studies and Feminism: Theory, Politics, and Gendered Realities (Summer, 2009), 136-157.

25. Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to*, xvii.

human/animal, inside/outside, man/woman, white/non-white, false/true, national/foreign, etc.²⁶

In this way, re-conceptualising these normative and socially constructed behaviours from binary and static to more flexible, viewed as liable to change, allows “the body”, a body to be viewed as porous and adaptable, an entity that exists through time and space.

In thinking of “the body”, a body as adaptable, a transformation in thinking can occur through the reviewing of histories, through accessing the past in the present moment, thrusting the past into the future. Elizabeth Grosz positions the re-writing of history, in this case, my re-examination of King’s initial engagements with steel, as also part of a non-linear continuum, rather than part of a static and unbroken history. How I choose to examine King’s practice and ways of making is affected by how I perceive my body, in relation to her body. In this manner I engage with the past in a way that propels the past into the present, as Grosz states, ‘in virtual form, in a state of compression or contraction, to futures beyond the present.’²⁷ Drawing on Grosz, I argue that through my analysis of King’s techniques for making, I am able to experience social norms which re-inscribe gender and sexual difference as temporary and instable, liable to kaleidoscopic variations. I understand why Preciado describes gender and norms as ‘political fictions.’²⁸ Refiguring my encounters with King’s oeuvre opens up veritable wells of connection between movement and intention, which assist me in understanding the importance of her early works, and the possibilities they invoke.

As I am making my work, my attention is repeatedly drawn back to King’s *Boulder*, (1967-68, fig.6), a fine example of her early steel work. I study this work, or rather, the image of the work, which I find amongst King’s artist file at the State Library of Victoria. This image is from a booklet accompanying her 1973 exhibition at

26. Micha Barban Dangerfield, “Paul B. Preciado”, *Exhibition Magazine*, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.exhibition-magazine.com/articles/a-discussion-on-deconstruction-with-micha-barban-dangerfield>.

27. Grosz, “Histories of the Present and Future”, 17.

28. Tucker, “Pharmacopornography”, 2013.



Figure.7 Augusta Vinall Richardson, Box Sculpture (X), 2021. Polished stainless steel, square hollow bar (coated mild steel), plastic packers. (Fabricated with assistance of Ben Stratton), 101 x 25 x 10 cm. Image courtesy of Lucy Foster. Copyright Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021



Figure.8 Augusta Vinall Richardson, Box Sculpture (Teeter), 2021, polished mild steel, clear protective coating
171 x 35cm x 40cm. Image courtesy of Izzie Austin. Copyright Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021.



Figure.9 Augusta Vinall Richardson, Maquette 2, 2020. Foam core board, cardboard, PVA glue, tape, clear glue, recycled tissue paper, acrylic paint, 265 x 195 x 60mm
Courtesy of the artist. Copyright Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021.



Figure.10. Augusta Vinall Richardson, House, 2021, cast aluminum (from papier-mâché maquette)
228 x 278 x 45 mm Courtesy of the artist. Copyright Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021.

Powell Street Gallery, South Yarra, titled “Maquettes for Monumental Sculpture”.²⁹ Maybe I am drawn to this work, because it is composed of a series of voluminous boxes. Rectangles, squares, angled squares, wedges—forms I am interested in for their implied regularity, continuity and ability to be stacked, organised, ordered, to fit together, to be homogeneous. These forms resonate with that of a body, also a conglomeration of parts which work together to create layers of cognition. These layers ultimately build to function as part of an individual’s “body image”—a combination of inherited affects and socialisation. The phenomenological experience of body image, as philosophers Veroniek Knockaert and Helena De Preester assert is, ‘the free-flowing experience of the motor body (that) differentiates into conceptual, perceptual and emotional layers that each exhibit a specific structure and in turn structure the body’.³⁰ In a similar way the segmented and layered nature of *Boulder*, and works of mine (fig.7, fig.8), operate through their presentation as a collection of irregular shapes, oscillating and layered they become a structure which evokes the body as the thinking feeling body: a fluctuating, hesitating, shifting temporality.

The transformative and sensorial experience of discovering the endless attributes of a box arose through my experience of creating papier-mâché maquettes for steel sculptures in my makeshift studio garage during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. I also worked with foam-core board, glue, tissue paper and tape. Made up of six sides, my experience of making a box is through arranging groups of two flat forms so they meet one another. To create a three-dimensional box shape, three pairs of flat forms consisting of two sides, join along each of their four edges. A box facilitates order and suggests containment and capacity through its economic shape and empty interior. They can be stacked, be recognised as useful, utilitarian. The physicality and allegorical nature of a box suggests containment. To “contain” someone or something in a normative shape, such as a box, is a limitation imposed on that thing or person. I understand the “capacity” (ability and potency)³¹ of such a

29. King stated herself in 1975, ‘I have always wanted to work large and since 1970, most of my sculptures are models for monumental works’. IK interview, 1965, AAA File.

Forward Surge, (1972-74) which cemented King’s public sculpture career, was part of the same exhibition as *Boulder*, (1967-68), (Maquettes for Monumental Sculpture). *Forward Surge* was commissioned by the state government, and although realised in 1974, was not installed in place until 1981. This commission followed many others – not all were informed by these initial exhibited maquettes, although as with *Red Rings*, (King, 2008), commissioned by Heide Museum of Modern Art, the maquette that *Red Rings* was modelled on was part of this initial group of “Maquettes for Monumental Sculpture”, after which this important 1973 exhibition is named.

30. Helena De Preester, and Veroniek Knockaert, *Body Image and Body Schema: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Body*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005),5.

shape, through the various units of measure that I learn to work within and outside the workshop.

Graph paper, boxes, rulers, levels. Guiding my mark making during this time is the simple satisfaction of modular and interconnected shapes fitting alongside one another in their assigned box shape. Terms such as “contain”, “assign”, “box”, “useful” and their associations in the English language direct me like commands. Conforming to a modular shape, I appreciate the “assigned” role of the box. I not only make each shape of the maquette using the measurements from graph paper which is made up of many hundreds of boxes meeting each other on every side, I also utilise the crisp interior of a box from an online shopping order, to contain pieces of papier-mâché sculpture. (See *Maquette II*, (2020, fig.9) and *House*, (2021, fig.10)). I fill the “unfilled” spaces of the box, as I would an “empty” space in a drawing, with more pieces of sculpture, gradually building up the contents of the box.³² After lockdown I set foot back inside the workshop space, using steel again to make sculpture. Informed by my initial material research into box shapes I build this knowledge into the composition of newer works. (See *Box Sculpture (X)*, (2021, fig.7) and *Box Sculpture (Teeter)*, (2021, fig.8)) which follow the outline of a box, without the shape itself containing the collection of forms.

Box Sculpture (X), is composed of a series of forms that fit around an X shape. They are connected by small steel pins which keep the structure together when gravity is not enough. The shapes that make up this sculpture (and other works), operate as puzzle pieces. This is not how I first thought of them. However, their association proves to be important in thinking of the humble puzzle as ‘a way to make something whole out of something disordered’.³³ I question this desire to somehow “finish” or “piece together” what remains and will remain, incomplete. The conflation of the two operations: making shapes to fit into a box shape and containing forms within this same (box) shape, creates tension in the work, which

31. These attributes contribute to the already effective and therefore popular nature of box shapes, which through their constant use and practical nature are somehow “powerful” in their infinite variations and ability to be homogeneous. As I become familiar with workshop modalities, I begin to see these attributes as useful, and not inherently negative or merely one sided.

32. Beginning as papier-mâché, I later underwent the process of casting the maquette in aluminium at Mal Wood foundry, in Coburg. I prepared the shapes for casting, dipping them in wax, I also assisted with the pouring. This process of transforming the piece from paper into metal deserves more explanation, however the limits of this thesis preclude a full discussion. I will explore the process of casting in my practice in the future.

I consider to be productive. The imperfect negotiation that exists between these operations I regard as part of a larger contradiction around the meaning of order. Is ordering and categorising the same as containing? Does this kind of behaviour create clarity or does it just mask disorder? The indeterminacy of these actions alludes to my understanding that concepts, people, statements and ideas are neither one thing nor another but a merging of multiple contradictory things.

Absorbing and identifying these multiplicities in my own work through the forms I make and how I make them, I move onto thinking again about King's work and how she deals with this friction. The early works of hers that I have been discussing (from the late 1950s to early 70s) are of the most interest to me as they manifest a similar reluctance to be one thing alone: they are many things at once. The works from this time which are composed of thick steel plates, ugly and satisfying welding that has been left as is, not ground down, minimised or hidden, belie a desire to be read as steel sculpture, and at the same time disregard normative welding procedures. King's process suggests a relationship to metal work that includes expressive joins, and "unnecessary" or "illogical" additions of steel to the work which reveals a negotiation, of addition and of layering. This observation supports my earlier remark that her way of composing sculpture is closely aligned with my process of collage. Through using arc welding techniques, she creates volume and texture from the flat sheet. She approaches both the welding and oxy torches unconventionally, as not tools exactly, but rather as another material to work with, alongside the steel.³⁴ The oxy torches are thoroughly engaged with the process of creating line and form, just as sticky tape, glue, rips and tears all become part of the compositional language of collage I develop. What is most interesting to note about *Boulder*, (1967-68, fig.6) and other works such as *Tenement*, (1964, fig.4) and *Observer*, (1965, fig.5) which were made around the same time, is the technique King employs to construct her pieces.³⁵ As she comments:

33. Michelle Law, "The Power of Puzzling: 'When everything feels out your control—piece A fits with piece B,'" The Guardian. Accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/10/the-power-of-puzzling-when-everything-feels-out-of-your-control-piece-a-fits-with-piece-b>.

34. Eckett notes that King, in the works from a 1962 exhibition at Argus Gallery, in Melbourne, 'using her arc welder effectively as a modelling tool, she dripped molten metal along the joins creating impasto effects that offset the smooth industrial nature of the medium'. Hurlston and Eckett, *Inge King*, 15.

35. 'The roughness of her earlier sculptures wasn't the result of bad welding, or rather 'clumsy craftsmanship', it was deliberate and calculated'.

W.A. Edwards, "Gothic Figure by Inge King: an appreciation of the statue recently purchased by the University for the new arts building," Inge King Art and Artist Files, September 1962, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

36. IK interview, 1965, AAA File.

I use sheet steel for my constructions, or my sculptures, but I join them together with an arc welder. Well arc welding is one of the newer types of welding. It is a rather crude tool because it shows a very heavy texture through the welding mark, you can't use very light metal with this method, you have to use fairly heavy sheet or plate, and that requires a certain way of thinking. Well, what fascinates me about this is the sheer flatness and perhaps unattractiveness of the material; that to me is a challenge.³⁶

King refers here to the physical properties of sheet metal, however in this reference to the challenge that the material presents, and the crude tool she utilises to reach these ends, I suggest she is also referring to the embodied, physically demanding experience of making sculpture with steel. Contrasting the heavy and flat metal sheeting with the lumpy forms she creates, heaving with texture, King refers to the challenge of transformation, of transforming the material and marking it as her own. Of transforming the perception others may have had of her at the time, as a woman artist making steel sculpture. Of transforming her historical future. As she states herself: 'steel was a way to overcome my history'.³⁷

King didn't allude to any kind of struggle she may have faced as a woman artist who worked with industrial materials, however King's use of steel happened adjacent to, and pre-ceding an important and epic protest and legal battle of a group of women in Wollongong, New South Wales. Women living in the region wanted to work for its largest employer, BHP. This meant working at the Port Kembla steelworks. Many of these women were migrants and had previously worked in heavy industry before arriving in Australia.³⁸ Part of the importance of working at the steel works was to have secure work, which included standardised wages and union representation, and notably, to be paid a higher wage than working in more conventional jobs for working class and migrant women in the region, (which was predominately

37. Ibid.; Wayne Anderson, "American Sculpture: The Situation in the Fifties" *Artforum*, Summer 1967, (60-67); J.K. Gibson-Grahame, *The End of Capitalism (as we know it): a Feminist critique of political economy; with new introduction*, (Minneapolis: 1st University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 7-8.

Wayne Andersen, a professor emeritus of History, Theory and Criticism of Art and Architecture at MIT, notes that in 1949, (the same year as King was in New York) Clement Greenberg regarded Ibram Lassaw, Herbert Ferber and Seymour Lipton (along with others) as 'promising young sculptors' perhaps more than painters of a new and exciting generation of practitioners engaged creating the most 'original, ambitious and serious' sculpture, using metal as their medium and welding as their process. Anderson notes in his article; 'Lassaw, Ferber, and Lipton, though all mature sculptors, entered the fifties with important changes in style, caused in part by their having begun welding'.

In this way, the feeling in New York must have influenced King's desire to turn to metal, not only in order to break free from the influence of Moore as she suggested she was attempting in Australia in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and was already doing, but to be in dialogue with the new medium of the moment, possibly observing it as the 'bearer of the future, of modernity, of universality,'(8). Gibson-Grahame makes this statement in relation to capitalism as a whole; however, I am using their observation specifically in relation to industrial materials

clothing factory work). They fought against gendered workplace discrimination, beginning a Jobs for Women campaign in 1980, arguing for the right as women to work alongside men at the Port Kembla steel works. The group's resistance began in 1980, when 34 women lodged complaints with the New South Wales (NSW) Antidiscrimination Board under the new Anti-Discrimination Act.³⁹ BHP and its subsidiary company, Australian Iron & Steel (AIS), had instrumented Section 54 of the Factories and Shops Act, which prevented women from lifting weights above 16kgs. This legislation was described as "protective legislation", however the Act simply made it easy for companies like BHP to discriminate against women.⁴⁰ There were 473 women involved in the class action against BHP, and they finally won against the multinational in 1994. The case lasted 8 years, their struggle to work 14 years (1980-1994).⁴¹ The campaign and the ways in which these women desired to work within the steel industry for a better quality of life and the way King utilised steel as a material to make artwork cannot be compared. However, the link between these different experiences of the material, I argue, is a shared desire to harness both the physical and structural attributes of steel and the financial benefits working with steel can offer, that were historically the preserve of men.

King and Vulcan

Self-taught in welding outside of an industrial workspace, King's way of dealing with steel developed through a relationship that wasn't informed by formalised training based on industrial processes, needs or outcomes. Although it irks me in some way to defer to 'Vulcan'⁴², American sculptor David Smith, as a way of thinking through King's approach to metal, it must be acknowledged that Smith contributed substantially to the reframing of sculpture in America (and Europe, Australia and beyond) through his innovative and persistent creative energy and sustained use of metal in his sculpture making, so of course one cannot help incorporating him into discussions of steel sculpture. Also, interestingly, not too dissimilar to King's way

and production—an integral part of the capitalist mode of production and its expansionist agenda. The full quote from the writer collective is thus: 'Capitalism appears as the "hero" of the industrial development narrative, the inaugural subject of "history," the bearer of the future, of modernity, of universality. Powerful, generative, uniquely sufficient to the task of social transformation'. (7-8)

38. Joanna Horton, "The Wollongong Jobs for Women Campaign Shows the Power of Working-Class Solidarity", *Jacobin Magazine*, accessed December 23, 2021, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/03/wollongong-port-kembla-women-of-steel-film-review>.

39. The women who spearheaded this campaign for equality in the workplace were Robynne Murphy, Yasmin Rittau, Donka Najdovska and Slobodanka Joncevsk. Robynne Murphy made a documentary about their struggle and ultimate triumph, titled "Women of Steel" which was released in 2020. The film was crowdfunded and was a long time in the making due to lack of funding. I organised a screening in Melbourne to show the film, so I could watch it myself and share it with other women. *Women of Steel*, directed by Robynne Murphy (Fan-Force Films, 2020).

40. Louise Thom, "The places Migrant Women found work in Wollongong: 1943-1990", Migration Heritage Project, 2007, accessed December 22, 2021, https://www.mhpillawarra.com.au/pdf/places_migrant-womens-work_essay.pdf.

of thinking, Smith situated art practice as physical and sensorial: 'If there is a key to understanding [the art object], it is simply that sensory power called perception, possessed by everyone, used constantly but in varying degrees'.⁴³

Of importance to this discussion is that during his career as an artist and a sculptor, Smith not only undertook paid work as a boilermaker, but he also undertook formal training in welding.⁴⁴ Through his technical proficiency, Smith had full control of his output. He didn't need to work with fabricators to realise his sculptures, and he had the freedom to experiment within the space (of fabrication) in a way that I imagine would have been difficult for King, especially once she began making large public works. King's one point of reference to working with steel, prior to welding in 1959, came in the form of jewellery making.⁴⁵ Indeed, her early constructions (1950-1952) using metal are described as being soldered. Soldering is a method in jewellery making of joining two pieces of metal using solder (another metal that has a lower melting temperature than that of the pieces of metal being brought together).⁴⁶ In this respect it is very similar to welding, whereby the welding wire that is melted and merged with the pieces of metal to be joined, acts as the "solder". However, the two processes clearly vary in scale. For Smith, the combination of his on-the-job training and his formal education regarding welding and welding techniques obviously created a different relationship to the material compared with that of King. King's lack of reverence, or concern toward practising "skill" in her early welded sculptures was unburdened, undercutting the '*penetrating phallic dynamism*'⁴⁷ of steel sculpture prevalent at the time of Smith and carrying on to the time of Caro, Serra and beyond.⁴⁸

Smith's way of working was steeped in his expert, industrial mode of making, which as I mentioned, was marked by experience and familiarity with steel, prior to its consideration as an artmaking material. Smith emphasises and situates his knowledge of how to use, and handle steel as originating within the factory, with the

41. Robyn Murphy and Yasmin Rittau, "The 'Jobs for Women' campaign at BHP Port Kembla, 1980-94", Australian society for the Study of Labour History, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/vol-2-no-4/port-kembla/>.

The first judgement was passed in 1986, then in 1989, the High Court ruled that AIS (subsidiary of BHP) employment practices amounted to unlawful direct and indirect discrimination, awarding the women \$1.4 million. After challenges in the high court, it was in 1994 that the case finally came to an end and the plaintiffs' received damages.

42. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979) 6-7.

Vulcan is the name of the Roman god of fire and metalworking. I first came across this description in Krauss's book about Smith, *Terminal Iron Works*, (1979), where she stated that. 'A colossus astride a scrap pile of heavy industry Smith was pictured as the artist-welder who could bend steel to the dictates of his individual will. He was a Titan. He was Vulcan'. (6-7) Krauss asserts that Smith's characterisation in the media and the popular imaginary limited and oversimplified the scope and meaning of his impressive oeuvre.

43. Susan J. Cooke, ed., *David Smith: Collected Writings, Lectures, and interviews*. (California: University of California Press, 2018), 142.

training he received through the welding and fabrication he did as part of various jobs.⁴⁹

Throughout his career, through his writing and public speaking Smith consciously situated his work as existing between industry and art. For a time, he even made artwork out of a commercial factory, called Terminal Ironworks (later giving his private studio, or rather “factory” in Bolton Landing, the same name), leasing a corner of the machine shop that was set up there in 1934.⁵⁰ In the same way, I work alongside tradespeople in the workshop space I inhabit, with all the access to tools, time, machinery, assistance and specialist knowledge that this co-habitation implies. Taking my experiences into account, I can imagine that Smith was able to advance his technical skills through use of the most updated technology and would have had access to a wide range of tools, and, to the ear of the men that worked alongside him in the factory.⁵¹ As he states himself, once he had his own “factory” space:

The equipment I use, my supply of material, comes from factory study and duplicates as nearly as possible the production equipment used in making a locomotive. I have no aesthetic interest in tool marks or surface embroidery or molten puddles.⁵²

These “molten puddles”, eschewed by Smith, I argue are noteworthy in King’s early use of steel (1959-69), and particularly interesting within the context of my research. King saw steel in a way a practised welder or fabricator could not. King was able to harness potentials embedded in the material. King’s use of the arc welder and thick steel slabs, which created the luscious, congealed silhouette and texture of her early steel pieces displays a unique use of the material, which not only contributes substantially to the content of these forms, and their communicative potential, but also demonstrates her alternative way of thinking about the material. Underlying this different approach to making steel sculpture, is a refusal to be beholden to

44. Karen Wilkin, *David Smith: Abbeville Modern Masters* (New York: Cross River Press, 1984), 117-118.

In 1941 Smith enrolled at a wartime government school in Warrensburg New York, and in 1942 he studied welding again, at Union College, Schenectady, New York. (117-118).

45. Trimble, *Inge King*, 19 and Eckett, *Centre 5 Sculptors*, PhD thesis, 308.

Having observed close artist friends overseas such as Alan Davie making jewellery to support their art practice and projects, when King and Graeme moved to Melbourne, she took up jewellery making to supplement their shared income. King had learnt silversmithing as a student in Glasgow, at the Glasgow school of Art. Her pieces were quite popular, and she sold to a few outlets in Melbourne, notably Georges, an up-market department store. In these early days King used equipment from RMIT to complete some of these pieces, however it has been recorded that most of them were made at her Bourke Street studio.

46. Polly Kobbs-Larue, “Soldering 101”, *Rings and Things*, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://www.rings-things.com/Learn/Soldering-101/>.

the conventions (of steel fabrication). Through this refusal, King destabilizes the normative assumptions of how to work with the material. Through her intuitive application of riotous texture, she recontextualises steel as a hard, cold, practical and calculating material, into an expressive substance with endless potential. King demonstrates, through her process, that the boundaries to making with steel only reside within the practical limits of its use. Key in discovering new ways of working with the material, through the art object, and the process of making, is a way of thinking. This way of thinking resides in the expression of one's "whole being" as conveyed by King.⁵³

The following chapter's discussion meditates on the effects of the workshop on my thinking: how my body responds to, and against the strictures of the workshop environment, and how paper is the starting point from which my forms unfold.

47. British curator, critic and writer David Anfam, suggests this term as emblematic in Smith's output.

David Anfam, *David Smith: A Centennial*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2006), 20. (Emphasis added).

48. Andrew Russeth, "Greener Pastures: The Storied Dealer Richard Bellamy Steps Out of the Shadows" ARTnews, accessed December 23, 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/greener-pastures-the-storied-dealer-richard-bellamy-steps-out-of-the-shadows-6728/>; Barbara Rose, "Dick Bellamy: The Man Hiding at the Center of Everything", New York Times, accessed December 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/arts/design/dick-bellamy-the-man-hiding-at-the-center-of-everything.html>; Richard Serra and Hal Foster, *Conversations about Sculpture*, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2018); Michael Fried, 'Anthony Caro: Middy', *Artforum*, Vol. 32, September 1993, (139).

Anthony Caro and Richard Serra used steel to make sculpture in an innovative and exciting way, however both enjoyed early critical success and utilised the conventional traits of steel and working with metal to support their image as masculine, virile and potent male artists who were

questioning the very substance of sculpture—from their privileged position. The masculine and phallic symbolism present in the works of Serra and Caro cannot be denied and observing the sprawling ownership of space and incorporation of professional engineers (another male dominated industry) demanded by the production of works such as Serra's, *Tilted Arc* 1981, and Caro's *Prairie*, 1967, support this claim. Serra began working with metal in the late 1960s. *Strike: To Roberta and Rudy*, 1969-71 was one of the first of Serra's installations, using hot rolled steel plate. Caro began working with steel in 1960 with *Twenty-Four Hours*, his earliest known steel work. Caro used pieces of scrap steel, manipulating the metal, but only to curve or bend it, desiring to leave the t-section and offcuts recognisable as such. To create each piece Serra initially used lead for his constructions, responding to his *Verb List*, 1967. He then moved onto using industrial steel sheeting to create works that would exist outside the gallery, involving engineers and teams of tradespeople to realise his visions. Prominent art critic and supporter of Caro's career from the beginning, Michael Fried characterised an early work of his, *Midday*, 1960, as 'nothing less than a masterpiece' (139). Serra also enjoyed similar critical support. From the very beginning of his career he was invited by Richard Bellamy to show his work at Green Gallery, in New York. The Green Gallery only ran for 5 years (1960-65) however virtually all the artists it supported went onto be famous names—Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Donald Judd, Tom Wesselmann, Yayoi Kusama and more.

49. Judy Collischan, *Welded Sculpture of the Twentieth Century* (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2000), 21; The Art Students League of New York "The History of the Art Students League of New York", accessed December 13, 2021, <https://theartstudentsleague.org/history-art-students-league-new-york/>.

For example, Smith was ranked as a first-class welder in his role assembling tanks and locomotives at the American locomotive company, where he worked from 1942-44. Prior to WWII, in the summer of 1925, he worked as a welder and riveter at a Studebaker plant in South Bend, Indiana. (21) Throughout this time, however, Smith was also living in New York and studying at the Art Students League, becoming a full-time student from 1927-1933. Smith moved to New York in 1926. The Art Students League was founded in 1875 by a group of artists, many of them women. This American art institution was instrumental to advancing many famous artists careers and would have been an important point of contact with contemporaries for Smith.

50. Wilkin, *David Smith*, 117.

51. Julio Gonzales, 'the father of modern metalwork' received his education in iron and steel from industry. This education was initially from his father, who had his own metalworking shop where Gonzales undertook an apprenticeship and learnt the basics, becoming technically proficient in everyday objects. He then learnt how to weld with oxyacetylene through his work in the Renault factory during World War I. In this way, we can see these male artists utilising their technical skill and (transient) professions in the industry as foundational and feeding their practice and thinking as artists. Collischan, *Welded Sculpture*, 12.

The associations between masculinity, the male body and steel the material is re-inscribed by the normalisation of the male body working with the material, and existing within industrial spaces. In this way, the first artists to use steel were men. Women artists working with the material are noted in the pages of history to have begun working with steel during World War I & II, which makes some sense as women during the war, were permitted to do "men's work", and many worked in factories producing steel products such as ammunition and arms across Europe and America. A specific instance of an almost all female work force was at Sopwith Aviation Company, Kingston UK, between 1914-18, where there were more than 13,000 aeroplanes produced, leading to the establishment of the Society of Women Welders UK in 1918. This normalisation and accumulation of knowledge by women regarding metal work, I assert, created more opportunities for women to work with steel.

Fabio Tagra and Giuliana Crocco, "Women and welding: notes for a historical path in emancipation between stereotypes and professionalism, WWI and WWII. A reserve army of soldiers without guns", *Rivista Italiana della Saldatura*. Issue. 6, (December 2020).

Smith credits Pablo Picasso and Gonzalez for showing him how one could use steel, an industrial material for making works of art, 'from them I learned that art was being made with steel—the material and machines that had previously meant only labour and earning power' Cooke, *Collected Writings*, 148.

52. Ibid., 158.

53. IK Profile, 1978, AAA File. (As referred to on page 10).

CHAPTER 2

Paper

Making work, making maquettes and plans for sculpture using paper, cardboard and papier-mâché, using the idea of steel, rather than the material itself, became a strategy to keep my thoughts moving and capturing them, in a material form, during the extended periods of COVID-19 restrictions on bodily movement and activity.

Rose Nolan, whose practice is the focus for this chapter, appears to have productive solutions to the problems of 21st century environmental and economic instability, exemplified by the ongoing unknowns of pandemic life. Working from garages, living room floors, friend's studio spaces, Nolan is no stranger to precarity.¹ Her ability to make use of transient workspaces alludes to other contingent factors that direct the making of each work, which includes (but is not limited to) the type of exhibition space, the material and time parameters and, or geographical distance.

How Nolan arrives at each final form is influenced by these factors and their possible contingencies, which are intertwined and blended with her final works. The specific and deliberate way in which Nolan displays and hangs each work, highlights the way in which each work has been composed. Nolan remarks in relation to *Big Words – To keep going breathing helps (circle works)*, (2016-17, fig.11), that she is 'very much interested in exposing the process of making the work for the person that is experiencing it'.²

I understand that Nolan's process for making each work, is intertwined with her rationale for it being made. Nolan operates to 'enfold process and object' as suggested by Blair French.³ In this way, each work's materiality appears to be directly related to each work's concept. For example, when analysing *Big Words* I observe how the materiality of the hessian against the paint that covers it, exposes its simple warp and weft structure. This acts to expose its nature, but also operates to link each circle together, through its humble materiality possibly allowing "us", the

1. Rose Nolan et al., *Rose Nolan: Why Do We Do the Things We Do* (Woolloomooloo: Artspace Visual Arts Centre, 2009), 15.

Melbourne based writer, artist and curator; Michael Graff confirms: 'Nolan has rarely made work in a purpose-built studio. Domestic spaces and various garages have been requisitioned on demand' (15).

2. MCA Australia, "Step Inside Rose Nolan's work in The National 2017" (online video), published April 13, 2017, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxtOy0FypVM> (00:00:59)

3. Nolan et al., *Rose Nolan*, 47.



Figure 11. Rose Nolan, 'Big Words—To Keep Going, Breathing Helps (Circle Work)', 2016–17, synthetic polymer paint, hessian, velcro, steel, 425 × 600 × 515 cm. Courtesy of Rose Nolan and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, accessed 02 January, 2022. <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/the-national-2017-new-australianart/>

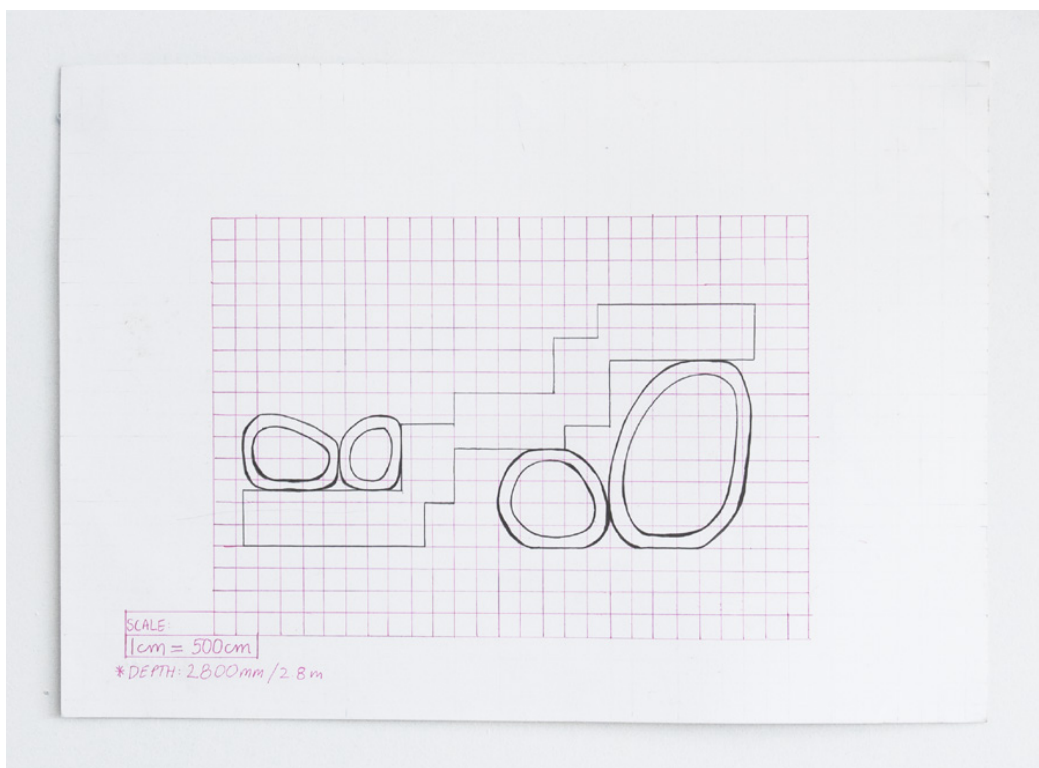


Figure 12. Augusta Vinall Richardson, Scaled drawing, 2020 ,pencil, pen and fineliner on paper, 297 x 420 mm. Curtesty of Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021. Copyright Augusta Vinall Richardson, 2021.

viewer to see ourselves as one circle, part of a larger structure which has the ability to organise and be greater than the sum of its parts.

This loose weave hessian Nolan often works with, presents as coloured by paint on one side and on the other side to which the paint is absorbed, as an uneven, patchy and mottled surface. This side makes it clear it is hessian that has been marked. Imprinted by a substrate, it is halfway between hessian and a painted surface—it behaves as neither one. Creating a sense of grandeur and emanating power, the once flimsy and delicate warp and weft of the round pieces of cut hessian are stiffened and stuck in place by this thick application of acrylic paint. Forming an almost plastic surface, the paint seeps into and binds the threads that overlap each other to make their structure. Each circle created ‘flaunts its bare and fragile anatomy’ as described by curator Max Delany.⁴ The humble materiality that I have mentioned, is set against the enormity of the combined number of units, (8,000 to be precise).⁵ In this way, the monumentality of the work creates a deliberate juxtaposition between its scale and its materiality. This acts to destabilize our (the viewer’s), understanding of hessian as an artmaking material, as it is transformed through Nolan’s unique use of it. It is elevated from a material that was once used to carry and measure potatoes and coffee, into an artmaking material that is able to command the same “space” (the space of the gallery) as conventional sculpture/ painting materials. The work suggests at a collective whole—made up of multiple single units.

United by gridded mesh system, *Big Words* exists as an object, a process and an artwork. The stitching that holds each circle in position is neatly sewn down horizontally, and then, vertically. The horizontally orientated stitching intersects with its vertical counterpart. The intersection of the stitching in the middle of each circle, creates a crossing over of the stitching—performing in much the same way as the

4. Rose Nolan and Max Delany, *Rose Nolan*, (Melbourne: Arts Victoria, 2001), 7.

When making this statement Delany refers to earlier works of Nolan’s, (written in 2001) however I feel it applies perfectly to the thin and almost (?)fragile nature of the pennants in ‘Big Words (Not Mine)— Read the words ‘public space’ 2013, to which I refer. (7)

5. MCA Australia, “Step Inside”, (00:01:09).

intersecting lines on graph paper. It operates as the material conditions in which meaning, and form can be arranged.

Recently I have found the inexhaustible nature of graph paper provides a solution and a temporary location for my forms to progress in such a way that is helpful for conceptualising volume and scale. Previously, I have found it difficult to create an ordered system through drawing for scaling and defining sculptural pieces. I have always thought of drawing to be a subconscious thinking space, rather than a space to deal with practical concerns. In part my mark making comes from the creation of drawings which have no arrival or destination—no agenda for their existence. This is in stark contrast to how I understand making drawings and plans for sculpture, which involves a different kind of consciousness. It involves a knowing application of line and form.

Although flat, graph paper can be used to map out and contain each form. Graph paper I've come to realise, is like a set square or tape measure, it's a transportable tool that has a universality and, consequently, a level of authority outside my working space, outside me. Based on the regularity of mathematics graph paper provides a sense of how the artwork might perform in three dimensions, and through its ability to be translated into other materials it can assist in creating a scaled version of the work. My use of the grid, the feature of graph paper, is informed by my intermittent workshop engagements, in which the procedural aspects of the space itself act in a similar manner to the gridded paper—both create boundaries or limitations on my impulse and propensity for free-flowing gestures. These limitations I begin to see as productive as they increase my capacity to make three-dimensional artworks as they help to organise and provide boundaries for my forms. In my home studio, I make my own graph paper using a ruler and grey lead pencil, tracing over these lines in coloured marker.⁶ (See *Graph paper plan I* (2020, fig.12). As I ruled the 1cm x 1cm lines vertically and then horizontally, they began to cross paths with one another.

6. During the pandemic lockdowns, there was often a delay of some days between purchasing and receiving goods. The lag produced as a result meant that often I found an interim solution, rather than waiting to act until I received the specific item ordered, whether that be tape, glue, graph paper, etc.

Each 1cm cube consisted of 4 lines crossing. The four corners mark the apices of connection. These are linear and logical connections that provide a framework with which to both explore, and direct forms that would have no mass, no scale on unmarked paper pages. As Paul B. Preciado remarks, ‘there are moments when you go beyond what is traditionally done, that you think you are losing your mind, but you have to give yourself a kind of reference of heroes’.⁷ I have found it to be useful to have a framework that guides, when attempting to think and act beyond conventions as outlined by Preciado. Throughout this research, graph paper and the practical continuity of squares and rectangles, not only provides this reference point, but it also offers a visual, physical and tangible representation of the assistance and support having a framework provides.

Nolan’s use of the grid in the organisation of the circles in *Big Words* provided her with a framework from which to practically construct the works’ form. In this way, it provides the same material structure as it does for my drawings, my plans for sculpture, which assist in the practicalities of construction.

However, graph paper is not only a practical object or tool, but part of what Preciado refers to as a ‘historical system of representations’⁸ in which its ‘dependant points of reference’⁹ concern a complex web of verbal and non-verbal practices. These systems of representation shape how societies operate. Preciado defines a “historical system of representations”, as encompassing ‘discourses, institutions, conventions, practices and cultural agreements, (be they symbolic, religious, scientific, technical, commercial or communicative)’.¹⁰ These discursive and ephemeral entities act as part of an invisible framework which assists people in making decisions; deciding what is “true” and what is “false”, what is “real” and what isn’t, based on this specific ‘epistemology’.¹¹ Whether in public or in private systems of representation act to inform an individual’s understanding and processing of information.

7. When researching and writing *Testo Junkie*, (published 2013), Preciado operated according to what he described as a “testosterone protocol”, whereby he worked under the influence of testosterone. Modelled on Freud’s “cocaine protocol”, this is one of the frameworks to which he refers. Tucker, “Pharmacopornography” 2013.

8. Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?* 55.

9. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to*, 52.

10. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 55.

11. *Ibid.*, 55.

Preciado refers to the regime of sex, gender and sexual difference as ‘no more than an epistemology of the living, an anatomical mapping, a political economy of the body and a collective administration of reproductive energies’ (55).

Using the concept of the grid, but not necessarily its recognisable form, I conceived a hanging sculpture, titled *Connect* (2021, fig.13). Originating in my makeshift studio-garage, I used paper, pen, wire and card to test my ideas. Back in the workshop I make its final form with 2mm stainless sheet sheeting, cutting it into abstract shapes.

The interesting part of the grid system to me is that it is systematic and mathematical, but also entirely abstract. It is self-referential. I come up with my own system of measurement in the form of uniform 18 x 50 x 3mm stainless steel tabs to which each abstract shape is joined. The shapes are evenly spaced apart using these uniform tabs. Through this rigid spacing the tabs hold the shapes slightly apart from one another, so each shape is able to be “read” as separate, as singular, but part of a larger network of abstract measurement.

The tabs and flat shapes are connected using small nuts and bolts, as I was interested in the work responding to movement of bodies in the space around it. I wanted there to be play¹² between the joined tabs of each sculptural piece, giving the illusion of movement, if not the actual ability to move. It was important to me that the work’s final structure could be reversed, repurposed, reconfigured. The works’ ability to shift and change with, and in response to, bodies in the same space, is in dialogue with some of the outcomes of this research. The understanding of the fundamentally flexible and fluid nature of “gender” and “identity”, which are conceptualised as stable, unchanging and fixed through the proliferation of “norms”.

In a manner similar to Nolan’s treatment of her circular hessian discs in *Big Words* (fig.11), I utilize the front and back sides of the steel shapes and their points of connection to communicate how the work came together, how it could potentially be refigured, and how it could come apart. It was intended for the work to be hung

12.“Play” is a word I hear in the workshop, it refers to a non-specific amount of space, usually a few millimetres which two objects to be joined, or connected have between one another. A small amount of room between materials that are intended to join or be part of a whole.

in the middle of a room, or on the threshold of a space, so a viewer can see all sides of the piece as they engage with it, encountering it from multiple angles.

After I have cut and smoothed the edges of each piece, before I put the sculpture together, I engage a highly sought-after metal polishing specialist in Heidelberg, who refurbishes coffee machines, to polish each large piece of the sculpture. At the same time, I polish each of the smaller stainless-steel tabs and bolts that are also part of the work. I spend days in the workshop alone polishing these pieces of metal. With stainless steel one must use specific polishing equipment and a polishing compound to shine the material, for it to be reflective. The machine I have been using to polish is makeshift, trying to be a bench polishing machine, it is instead a polishing wheel on a handheld grinder. Consequently, the small pieces of metal I am working from often get away from me, they go ricocheting in different directions: I have to hold the grinder in one hand, and use the other to manipulate the steel tab. Oftentimes the pieces of metal rest in my gloved palm, and I pass the polishing wheel up and down one face in vertical motion until my hand heats up and I have to shed the glove before it burns me. Pressing hard against the glove, monotonous, repetitive movements crumple the skin on my fingertips. Sometimes my hands must be unprotected to get the required grip. Still a tighter grip is required later as the material slides, under pressure, lubricated from the polishing compound as it melts and massages the steel I hold.

As I repeatedly polish the tabs, the shiny silvery surface of the stainless steel is evident through the blacked polishing compound. The compound comes in a pale green colour, but through use turns into somewhat of a black Vaseline, waxing and massaging the surface of the steel, leaving a dirty looking residue.

As I am engaged in this repetitive activity reflect on my earliest moments in the workshop where I was cautious of the reactions of the metal to my unrefined



Figure 13. Augusta Vinall Richardson, *Connect*, 2021, polished stainless steel, steel nuts, screws, washers, steel wire, threaded terminal adjustments, ceiling. Approx. 176 x 130cm. Courtesy of the artist, 2021.

movements. Wearing protective equipment was imperative. This protection for sanding and polishing metal as time went on, felt optional. Especially the gloves, as they dull touch and dexterity and frustrate the grip on the bodies of small sculpture pieces and tools. It is as if touching allows me to see better, oftentimes I use the gloves for an activity, pass my gloved hand over the work and reflect on the next stage, only to take the glove off and repeat the process with my bare hand. This kind of touching, seeing, reflecting, working routine was important throughout the process of making each work. When making *Box Sculpture (Teeter)* (2021, fig.8) running my bare hand over a newly sanded steel shape was the only way to tell if I was making progress, if I was ready to continue to a finer grit of sandpaper, or whether I should repeat the process I just went through. My hands were coloured grey by the finest of steel filings. Similar in appearance to graphite, I enjoy this skin to steel touch, the steel filings against my skin.

While the gloves are a conduit for making, at the same time they enhance, they diminish my capacity for working with steel. Opening myself up to the vulnerability of proceeding without protection is part of the process of learning how to weld and learning the limits and capacities of my body in the workshop space. Coming to terms with these awkward, painful, muscle building moments of vulnerability are inscribed in the surface and shape of the works themselves. Elizabeth Grosz positions the interactions between the social and the individual can be thought of in terms of the materiality of the body, rather than just the body as a vessel for the mind (for the psyche, for consciousness). She states: 'The effects of consciousness (and the unconscious), can be thought in terms of corporeal surfaces, in terms of the rotations, convolutions, inflections and torsions of the body itself'.¹³ The surfaces of the sculptural pieces reflect my engagement with the materiality and limits of my own body in motion.

13. Peter Eisenman and Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), 32.

In lockdown I imagined a space in which *Connect* could be installed. I conceived of a space I was unable to experience, unable to inhabit. I imagined it being installed in a nightclub, complete with a disco ball, a DJ, overpriced mixed drinks, sweat and smoke from a smoke machine scenting the air. The light of the disco ball catching the works' various shapes and dancers in motion at the mercy of the beat. They sense or notice themselves in the works' reflection. Bodies and shapes are brought together through collective, connective tissue. Analogous to a human body, each steel tab in *Connect* links each piece to one another, producing an interconnected network of shapes that are drawn together, in this instance, through stainless steel nuts and bolts. This foregrounds the connection of "the body" in relation to the city¹⁴ which Grosz describes as:

a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles and skeletal stricture which are given a unity, cohesiveness and organisation only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality.¹⁵

The nightclub as a microcosm of the city, which automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies, the dancefloor and the music performs the job of the steel tab. Pulling each body together in collective motion. In *Connect* the thin reflective stainless-steel sheeting is brought together by these uniform tabs. The tabs create an impression of a cohesive totality, that is nonetheless eschewed by the imperfectness of steel forms that upon closer inspection reveal grinding marks, divots and small scratches dispersed throughout its overall shiny and reflective surface. Designed for engagement, the hanging sculpture which remained in my studio, begging for an audience that was absent.

Dancing in a club is an experience that is heightened not only through feeling the music physically pulse through your body, allowing it to move, bend, shake, jiggle,

14. Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities". In *Sexuality and Space*, edited by Beatriz Colomina, 241-253 (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

15. Grosz, "Bodies-Cities", 243.

writhe to the bass, the beat, it is also about being a participant in a social exchange. Of being viewed, seen, acknowledged. Both affirm existence. Dancing alongside others, as they dance alongside you/me. As social, sensual beings participating in this exchange, bodies take the form of those with whom they have contact, and objects that move around their orbit. The complex interaction of bodies in space contributes to one's "body-image"—a combination of inherited affects and socialisation.¹⁶ Grosz explains, 'the body image is not an isolated image of the body but necessarily involves the relations between the body, the surrounding space, other objects and bodies, and the coordinates or axes of vertical and horizontal'.¹⁷

Grosz goes on to explain that the spatiality of a body's environment, also effects one's "body-image". In this way, the crossing axes of the grid in graph paper, reference the location of a body in social space, just as much as a shape on a page. Through proximity and exchange form is given to this abstraction.

As I create each sculptural form, I affirm my self-image. Taking this sensual and tactile experience as part of bodily knowledge and construction, I imbue the surfaces of each piece of sculpture with information. Through a need to connect and share with others unutterable experiences, bodily intuition, I inscribe the work with the residue of my movements as I labour over each stainless-steel fragment. I see the potentials of the body at work, refigured as erotic through the current social norms that prescribe stagnancy, and sitting as a prerequisite for meaningful work. As I am engaged in activity, as texture is transmitted through the sanding and polishing discs I collect and display, tactile and bodily intensity accrues in the surface of each piece of steel.

The sweat off my back produces an unquantifiable sense of pleasure in creating these textures, these forms. In the same way as Nolan, and Inge King before her, I can rely on my body's movements for effective address. As Grosz so adequately

16. De Preester and Knockaert, *Body Image and Body Schema*, 5. As quoted in Chapter One, 'A body, also a conglomeration of parts, works together to create layers of cognition. These layers ultimately build to function as part of an individual's 'body image'—a combination of inherited affects and socialisation.'

17. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Sydney: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=291631>, (accessed December 30, 2021), 85.

18. *Ibid.*, 190.

states: 'Our ideas and attitudes seep into the functioning of the body itself, making up the realm of its possibilities or impossibilities'.¹⁸

Breathing Helps

Nolan uses the functioning of the body as a tool in the creation of her works.

To keep going, breathing helps. This is a line of text which made its way into the fabric of *Big Words*. Appearing to be speaking to herself, just as much as any viewer, the self-referential nature of the title draws attention to the physical endurance one must have had to produce this large-scale installation (and by implication, any artwork). Although Nolan did not create, install and complete the work alone.¹⁹ The historical reference to "the artist" as sole author of their artwork, relates to the images she creates and sometimes exhibits alongside her 'paintings',²⁰ of herself alone, at work. However lo-fi the means and reproduction, these images which are grainy and sometimes blurry, appear to be produced in an ad-hoc fashion. Utilising the nature of photography, which acts to capture and record, Nolan's focus is not on the process of the means of capture, rather it is on the documentation of an event (that is important to her) taking place. It is proof of existence. Rather than being collateral in her practice, these images and image making processes are very much an important part of it.

Constantly and strategically performing the role of the artist for the camera, Nolan specifically creates these images to be distributed, for others to see. She ensures this through collating and publishing these images as artist books. A distracted flip through any one of the many Nolan publications could produce an opinion that the images appear to be about Nolan, as the title of one of her self-produced books, *ME WORKING*, (1999) suggests. However, Nolan performs as an archetype, her body functions as a prop in her own production, for example (See Nolan, no title (image #12) (1998, fig. 14) and Nolan, no title (image #13), (1999, fig.15)).

19. MUMA Monash, "MADA Artforum: Rose Nolan and Charlotte Day in conversation Wednesday September 13, 2017" (online video), published June 9, 2021, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/560719702>, (00:21:48)

In this interview she credits and mentions a young artist who worked with her to complete this work at a borrowed studio, Nolan: 'I get people in to assist me. Andrew helped me make an earlier iteration of the circle work, and in some respects that's actually a really nice opportunity, because we are learning from each other when we are working in the space together. There are times now, just to do with time limits, where I have to outsource some aspects of the work, so that I can actually realise the work, and that's not a bad thing either, to have discovered that' (00:21:48)

20. MCA Australia, "Step Inside", (00:00:20).

I reference the term which I used to describe Nolan's work in the introduction. The footnote to this term, originally cited on page 11–12 of the Introduction is thus: Nolan explains in an artist interview that her practice originated in painting, however she gradually has become interested in extending the possibilities of painting to encompass spatial and architectural concerns.

In the MCA video Nolan states: 'The work is really about extending the possibilities for painting, so primarily fundamentally that's where my practice started. But over time, painting has become more of an architectural sort of, pursuit. It's about extending the possibilities for painting beyond the singular object' (00:00:20).

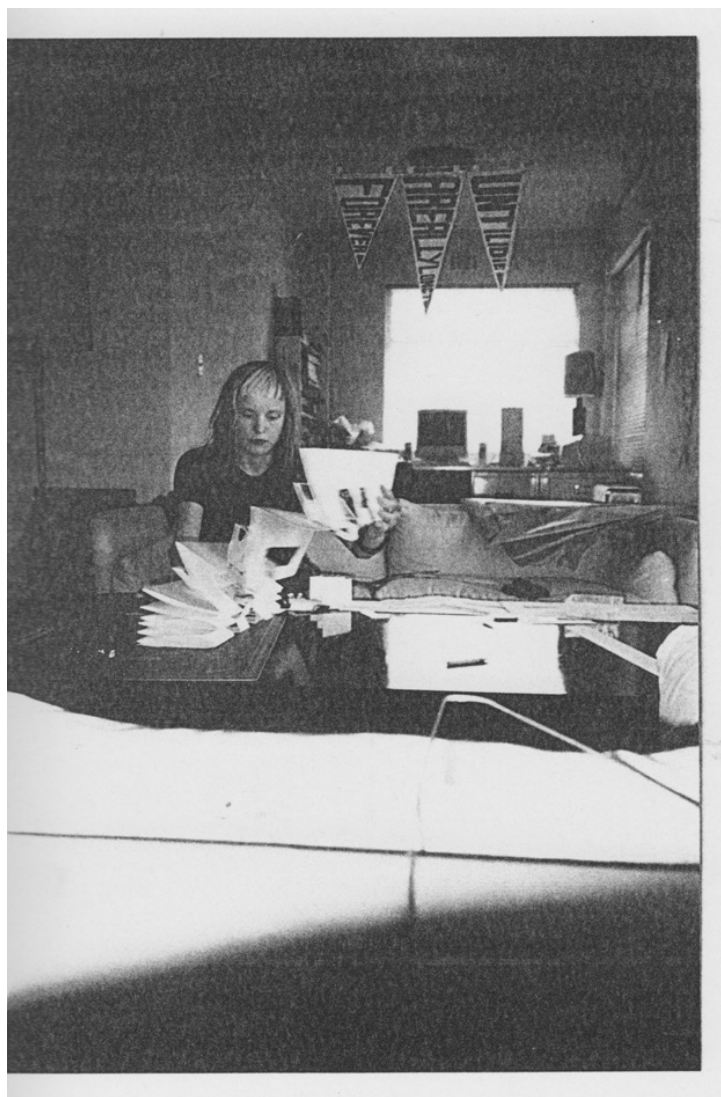


Figure 14. Rose Nolan, no title, (image #12), 1998 from 'ME WORKING' (Melbourne: Rose Nolan, 1999), 17.

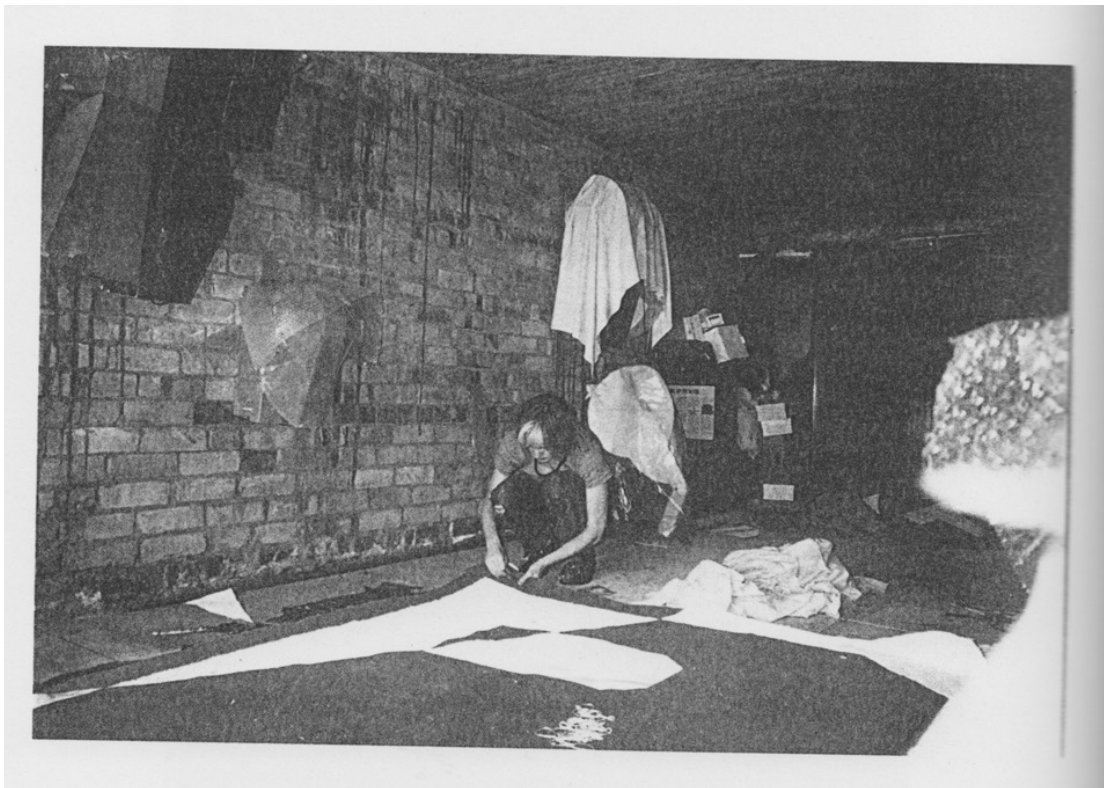


Figure 15. Rose Nolan, no title, (image #13),1999 from 'ME WORKING' (Melbourne: Rose Nolan, 1999), 18.



Figure 16. Rose Nolan, *Immodest Gesture #2* (proposition for a billboard), 2015, halftone screenprint on BFK Rives 300 gsm paper, 91 x 131 cm framed. Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, accessed 02 January, 2022. <https://annaschwartzgallery.com/exhibition/immodest-gestures-and-irrational-thoughts>



Figure 17. Rose Nolan, *Immodest Gesture #1* (proposition for a billboard), 2015, halftone screen print on BFK Rives 300 gsm paper, 91 x 131 cm framed. Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, accessed 02 January, 2022. <https://annaschwartzgallery.com/exhibition/immodest-gestures-and-irrational-thoughts>

Masquerading as coy, Nolan seeks to create a playful irreverence²¹ around classical and historical images of the “hero” artist at work, to challenge their authority and the authority of the images themselves. Nolan identifies that her image making is in part about displacing ‘the genius of the male artist’²² underwritten by mainstream documentation and historicization of images of “the artist” at work, predominately male or depicting masculine “heroism” as described by curator Charlotte Day in conversation with Nolan, at Monash University, 2017.²³ These images operate not unlike images of burly, muscular men at work in an industrial context, their bodies in service of their labour, sweaty and isolated in their activities as “men”. That is, the activities and traits the stereotypical man dictates, should or must occur for masculinity to be attained. These understandings of a body’s capacity, of perceiving masculinity as an “affect” of gender, rather than a “performance” of gender relates to an essentialist understanding of the body that is limited by conventional social expectations of the possibilities for change. In this way as Grosz suggests, conventions operate to ‘limit the possibilities of change and thus social reorganization’.²⁴

To extend this reading, I understand conventions or stereotypes to be manufactured from these static understandings of the characteristics that constitute “gender”. Preciado refers to these characteristics as ‘fictional artifacts that we have collectively constructed’.²⁵ These fictions are revealed as such, under Nolan’s treatment. In 2015, she merges two images that I venture, could have been the catalyst for this restless image making and cataloguing. One of two works, titled *Immodest Gesture #2 (proposition for a billboard)* (Nolan, 2015, fig.16), depicts a collage of two images. These images have been merged through alternating strips of each image. Spliced together is a photograph of her at work in the studio and a photograph of the famed action-painter Jackson Pollock in his studio. The latter image taken by the German photographer Hans Namuth in 1950, whose series of

21. MUMA Monash, “MADA Artforum”, 2021, 00:36:06, 00:37:18.

22. Ibid., 00:37:22.

23. Ibid., 00:36:19.

24. Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: The Politics of Bodies*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 48.

25. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 51.

images of Pollock at work, taken over a period of months have become seminal, which ‘forever changed the way the public viewed Pollock’s paintings’.²⁶ The person behind the camera depicting Nolan at work is unknown: a friend, family member or an automatic capture setting on her camera perhaps. Merging her image with that of Pollock, she asserts an equivalence between their activities. The sameness of their actions. In a room, they hurl, sweat and strive to create a perfect form, a perfect world of their own making. Through her titling of the works, Nolan suggests that her activities of merging her image with his, is “immodest”, however it feels as though she is playing the role of the modest female artist, in direct comparison to Pollock who was known as a heroic action painter.²⁷

Nolan’s understated gesture, to merge her image with that of Pollock’s, reveals her perspective on art history as debatable, able to be destabilised, as alive and ever shifting. I understand Nolan’s *Immodest Gesture #1 (proposition for a billboard)*, (Nolan, 2015, fig.17) and *Immodest Gesture #2*, as operating to question the dominance of the activities, motions and gestures of male bodies in artwork and artmaking, within the art historical canon. Working with her own body, and the materiality and presentation in which it forms, Nolan critiques the dominant Eurocentric, white male epistemology. In this way, Nolan attends to a category or social norm that has been conceptualised as “universal”.

Through the decision and opportunity to work with steel, to create my abstract sculptures, I have also been able to engage with physically, and therefore bodily, norms that have been conceptualised and treated as universal within their local context of the steel fabrication workshop. These seemingly “universal” norms relate to binary conceptions of materials, stereotypes in relation to the use of those materials and systems of standardised measurements, etc. In this way, through my experiences in the space of the workshop and with the material itself, I have

26. Hans Namuth: Portraits, “Introduction”, Hans Namuth: Portraits, accessed December 29, 2021. <https://npg.si.edu/exh/namuth/hnintro2.htm>.

27. Rachel Esner, Sandra Kisters, and Ann-Sophie Lehmann, eds., “Introduction, Part II” in *Hiding Making - Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2014), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=1773755> (accessed December 23, 2021), 124.

‘The 1950s devoted to the “heroic” artists of the New York School, perpetuated the myth of the ingenious artist, alone in his studio and in eternal struggle with himself. The culmination of such mystifying tendencies may be seen in the photographs and films Hans Namuth made of Jackson Pollock’ (124).

experienced a series of “norms” related to the material and navigated how an untrained person might overcome pre-existing or stereotypical conditions of its use.

During my physical, sensorial and tactile engagements I found that the material dexterity and multiplicities of steel, offer an expansive array of opportunities to create robust and expressive three-dimensional forms. I contend, just as there are stereotypical understandings and performances of gender, there are stereotypical associations and applications of steel, which are limited, and in my experience, limiting to the possibilities embedded in the material. There can be, in other words, a mental ‘limit on variations and possibilities for change’²⁸ attached to its use.

In acknowledging these limits on variations and possibilities for change, they become visible. In the same way as Nolan’s spliced images question the dominance and proliferation of certain kinds of images, through my attention to steel as a material to make sculpture I question the normative way in which we understand the material and its capacities.

28. Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 47-48.

To borrow a phrase from Grosz, mentioned on previous page. The limiting nature of essentialism is a concept that can be extended to stereotypical notions of “steel” and “metalwork”.

CONCLUSION

Surface and intention

Elizabeth Grosz, drawing on Brian Massumi's exploration of social space in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, (1993) states that 'it is movement that defines and constitutes boundaries'.¹ She emphasises that boundaries or rules are created in the process of traversing territory. Thinking through the writing of Grosz and Massumi, I understand boundaries as being created through movement, rather than arising in response to a pre-existing route or passage. Understanding boundaries as (self) produced and productive, I view the practical limitations of the steel as a productive boundary that acts to guide my making process. In this way, I recognise that these boundaries and forms of making arise from a set of self-made fictions. This understanding of the productivity of self-made fictions allows me to also understand what Paul B. Preciado describes as the 'steel bars of gender'² as a collective social boundary. This social boundary produces its own materiality, in the form of social and physical architectures, that informs behaviour and language (in both public and private space). Preciado suggests that as human beings we must radically broaden, or even abandon, certain social constructions and languages that have been accumulated through their constant re-inscription. He urges us to expand 'the democratic horizon to recognise all living bodies as political subjects' in order to do so without 'social and political recognition being contingent on sexual or gender assignation'.³ To achieve this transformation, one must recognise the social and political assignment of sexuality and gender as constructions that are abstract.

The steel sculptures I make mimic similar process to the layered and laboured drawings, sketches and line works that I make alongside them. I fulfill an urge to fill unfilled space within the boundaries of the shapes I have compiled on the page. Layers on layers of pencil or pen become tone and texture. Stroking the pencil lines I have created with more colour, more tonality, the drawn boxes begin to fill up and up. I forget why they are here. On the page colour is built up and rubbed out. Too much, not enough, constantly. I repeat shapes over and over, exhausting possibilities or paper pages—whatever comes first. Working from my imagination,

1. Eisenman and Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 65.

2. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 24.

3. Ibid., 92.

I make miniature constellations, groupings of shapes. The forms are arranged to be slightly apart from one another. Their slippery, unfirm, destabilised edges are rounded, not symmetrical and remorselessly display imperfections. They are precariously placed, and fit together, well enough, but not perfectly. These drawings give rise to blocks of sculpture that come together. In being part of a whole work, the blocks become their final form as each shape is slotted into position. Each shape has a specific role and place within the network of shapes, as they caress each other's sides. In works such as *Box Sculpture (X)*, (2021, fig.7), and *Box Sculpture (Teeter)*, (2021, fig.8), there is an illusion that the shapes can take alternative positions other than its existing composition. However, in reality this is not the case. Their deceptive appearance is useful, because although these shapes fit together in a specific way, the impression that their arrangement can be different allows the viewer to imagine other possible configurations. It is in this manner, just as Nolan utilises an onlooker's impulse or needs in order to connect and hold their attention, that I utilise what I perceive to be shared impulses or desires: to feel a sense of relatedness or ownership to or with an artwork. I maintain that this relationship to the work of art is necessary to experience its full effects. In so doing, the onlooker—the viewer—is given permission to override the existing structure, to find an alternate one. Through this process of exchange, the viewer's imagination can be active and mobile. As a participant in a social exchange, the viewing, and their understanding of the work is not contingent on comprehension of an already given understanding but arises from their exploration and interpretation of the artwork.

From Flat paper to Form

Translating the drawn texture that I achieve on paper pages, layers of pencil and pen in my drawings, onto the steel in the form of grinding marks, involves creating a roughness amongst the overall smoothness of the metal form(s). I pass grinding

wheels, then orbital sanding discs over the shapes repeatedly, monotonously, in the same way as my pen or pencil on paper. I do what is required to get the effect I am looking for. A change in direction is required for an overall smooth finish. The stroke of a pen, the slip of the wrist becomes the touch of the hand, the various grits of the flapper discs perform in the same way as grey lead pencils—from quite textured, rough and bold to soft, fine and subtle.

In the workshop 8B to 2H grey leads pencils are replaced by burgundy 36, 60 and 80 grit fibre discs and mid-blue 40, 60, 80, 120 grit flapper discs which are for use on a grinder. Then I use dark turquoise 60 and 120 grit steel sanding pads on an orbital sander, and lastly red and light yellow 240 and 320 sanding pads for wood (which I use for a fine finish on the steel), also using an orbital sander. This is just the beginning of my archive of abrasive consumables⁴. Flapper discs are the most interesting for me to collect, I keep variously used flapper discs in a plastic tub in order to re-use them, just like markers, because as you would expect, they lose abrasion once they are worn down and through utilising a range of new and worn-down discs, I can get different effects on the steel. These abrasive consumables, which create a range of effects on the surface of my sculptures become an archive. This archive that I have accumulated, extends to the inherited “affects” I have gathered through examining the practices of Inge King and Rose Nolan, mining their knowledge and looking for shimmers of mutual understanding.

I have argued that King and Nolan attend to embodied experiences in their way of making and this is inscribed on the surfaces of their works. The bodily engagement with materials, combined with the bodily engagement that the work demands, generate effect from which meanings are created. King’s use of collage in constructing her steel forms imbues the work with a sense of materiality. The steel dribbles, it melts but it is not a liquid form. It’s solid but bendable properties are considered and explored within the forms of each sculpture. In this way, steel as

4. Consumables is a term I often hear in the workshop. This term describes items that are used regularly in fabrication. These are known as items that are to be included in pricing jobs, they are quite expensive (sometimes \$5-\$20 a disc) and add to the cost of working with steel.

a material to make artwork becomes a medium, rather than just a material put to work in the service of making an object. As Grosz explains: 'It is only insofar as the object ceases to remain an object and becomes a medium, a vehicle for impressions and expression, that it can be used as an instrument or tool'.⁵ By attending to the materiality of steel as her primary subject, King demonstrates through her process that the boundaries to making with steel only reside within the practical limits of its use. In exploiting these boundaries, King deals with the material at face value, reacting to its responses to her treatment, rather than pre-empting or predetermining an outcome.

Both King and Nolan share an approach to working almost exclusively with just one or a couple of materials. In Nolan's practice this limitation is emphasised by the repeated use of hessian and cardboard, white and red paint. Nolan's rules or guidelines for practice assist her in finding new and different ways to work with the same materials. Through reducing the scope of the materiality she explores, Nolan expands the potentials of these specific materials, exploiting their fecundity in detail. The self-imposed limitations allow for the emergence of alternative thinking, ways of working or understandings about something that is apparently already known. Boundaries become productive for the creation of possibilities that exceed previous limitations.

Preciado positions conventions as "epistemologies" which situate (our) knowledge of one another in relation to a set of pre-existing, pre-established norms. He explains: 'An epistemology represents a closure of our cognitive system that not only offers answers to our questions but determines the very questions we can pose according to a pre-established interpretation of sensory data'.⁶ Preciado highlights that the effects of social conventions not only create the context for specific behaviour to occur but dictate behaviour through processes of inscription. Through their disregard for material epistemologies specific to art practice, King and Nolan attend

5. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 80.

6. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 24.

to material limits and destabilise conventions (of material use), which have been conceptualised as fixed and specific. Their practices allow for the norms of art making processes to be destabilised and new questions to be posed. In her writing on art, Grosz argues that feeling something intensely can lead to ‘the by-product of a kind of understanding’.⁷ It is through the intensity of their engagement with the materiality of their practices that King and Nolan produce artworks which attend to their discoveries, producing a new kind of understanding.

Through my own discoveries regarding the wonder of steel and some of its capacities for art making, I have been provided with a sense of clarity and ambition, as steel has endless potentials that demand exploration. My somatheque, my living political archive, ‘already dense, stratified and huge’⁸ as Preciado observes, had the inbuilt capabilities with which to work in the workshop, to make with metal. It was in the process of undertaking this research that it slowly occurred to me that these connections and relationships are here—there—within me. To inhabit the workshop space requires a state of mind, as much as it is a willingness to take the grinder in hand, to wear the mask, to weld the metal.

I am in the workshop, MIG welding hose in hand. Dirty and old clothing covers my body. Protecting and concealing. The welding helmet, the steel cap boots, gloves cover my extremities. These garments assist in providing me with purpose. My face is shielded and enclosed by a plastic sheath, a protective lens at shade number 11. Shielding my eyes and face from ultraviolet light. I am melting and merging metals.

Smoothing the edge of surfaces with a grinder comfortably in hand, I labour over the work and its surface. Connecting with the material and its purpose, my body is animated by possibility.

7. Sunday Morning with Julie Copeland, “The creative urge: Elizabeth Grosz”, 11:05, July 5, 2005. Radio National, ABC. Transcript of conversation. <https://www.abc.net.au/rn/legacy/programs/sunmorn/stories/s1381964.htm> (accessed December 23, 2021).

8. Tucker, “Pharmacopornography”, 2013.

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