

TAMAR MESKIN, TANYA VAN DER WALT, LEE SCOTT,  
CHRIS DE BEER AND KATHLEEN PITHOUSE-MORGAN

## 12. SHOES, SUITCASES, STONES

*Creative Engagement with Ourselves as Artist–Researcher–Teachers  
through Object Inquiry*

### PROLOGUE

We begin with ourselves: artists, researchers, and teachers. We excavate our memories, seeking the landmarks of our stories of discovery. Material objects operate as talismans, stepping stones that guide us from concrete materiality into self-reflexive abstraction, windows for new ways of seeing. We navigate our educational research journeys using these objects as compasses, leading us back to ourselves as artists, teachers, and researchers. Through telling the stories of our journeys, we uncover how and why this alchemical process occurs. We weave the object pieces together, creating a complex tapestry of knowledges and questions, the warp and weft crossing and recrossing to explore the connections between our stories. This tapestry is framed through the words and dialogues of shared thinking and communication. We exhibit it here as one possible representation of creative making, innovative teaching, and critically self-reflexive research.

### SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter unfolds possibilities for how objects can become material points of departure and material vessels for creative engagement with self in educational research within the domain of arts and design. The object pieces that converge in the chapter are drawn from self-reflexive research by four South African artists who are also researchers and university teachers (artist–researcher–teachers). Self-reflexivity in research entails making visible, questioning, and theorising the lived experiences and selves of the researchers (Kirk, 2005). Research methodologies that require self-reflexivity include self-study research (Samaras, 2011) and autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt’s collaborative self-study research is located in drama and performance studies, focusing on their own practices as higher education creators, teachers, and researchers of theatre (Meskin, Singh, & Van der Walt, 2014; Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010, 2014). Lee Scott is a visual artist and teaches drawing and illustration to fashion design students. In her self-study research, she explores how objects can reflect values in

her educational practice, and how these values can and do improve her practice as artist–researcher–teacher (Scott, 2014). Chris de Beer is a jewellery designer and artist whose autoethnographic research focuses on a cultural understanding of his creative design process, aiming to facilitate the creative development of his jewellery design students (de Beer, 2016a, 2016b).

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (the fifth author of the chapter) is a teacher educator and researcher whose work centres on the educational implications of professionals initiating and directing their own self-reflexive learning to enhance their continuing growth. She is fascinated by learning from artists such as Tamar, Tanya, Lee, and Chris about “the actual making of artistic expressions in ... different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining” educational experience (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). In her own work, she has explored poetry as a literary arts-informed medium for research and professional learning (Pithouse-Morgan, 2017).

We present the chapter as a performative, collaborative object inquiry, in which the five authors perform distinct roles in their relationships (Pelias, 2008). The four artists are the lead players, while Kathleen plays a mostly offstage role, offering poetic commentary at key moments. We have used dramaturgical analysis (Benedetti, 1985; Converse, 1995) as both method and methodology which (in)form the structure and layout of our chapter.

We analyse our journey using dramaturgy because it is relevant and cohesive, albeit unusual in an academic book chapter. Dramaturgy is essentially the analysis of plot structure. The plot structure outlined below informs most dramatic performances, where juxtaposed events communicate particular meanings. Using dramaturgy, we explore the meanings generated by juxtaposing our objects and our self-reflexive a/r/tographical<sup>1</sup> (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leavy, 2009) writing, revealing our artistic, educational, and research practices, processes, and products. As Leavy (2009) explained, “a/r/t is a metaphor for artist–researcher–teacher. In a/r/tography these three roles are integrated” (p. 3).

Generally, dramaturgical structure includes the

- Inciting incident: the catalyst that sets the play in motion, and answers who, what, when, where, why, how;
- Point of attack: where the play begins, usually connected to the inciting incident, revealed by the events of the play;
- Exposition: providing the audience with the information necessary to understand the inciting incident and point of attack;
- Rising action: which establishes and reveals tension-building events contributing to the conflict (in)forming the dramatic action, which holds the attention of the audience. These events include
  - complications: where difficulties are clarified and problems teased out
  - discoveries: of action-inducing revelations and possibilities;
- Crisis point: which is triggered by the rising action, demanding a choice of a course of action, which manifests different possible trajectories and resolutions;

- Climax: the high point of the play, the moment at which the conflict is most intense, and the action reaches its apotheosis;
- Resolution: of the conflict, which concludes the play, revealing the extent to which, and the manner in which, the world of the play has been altered.

*Cast of Players*

Director: Kathleen (teacher development studies)

Artist: Lee (fine art)

Artist: Chris (jewellery design)

Artist: Tamar (theatre)

Artist: Tanya (theatre)

THE INCITING INCIDENT: HOW DID THIS CHAPTER HAPPEN?

As teachers and self-reflexive practitioner–researchers in the arts, we—Lee, Chris, Tamar and Tanya—share an understanding that to educate ourselves, and others, better, we need to interrogate our own creative selves and practices, constantly and critically. We understand that the why, what, and how of our lived experiences and our creativity as artists colours the why, what, and how of our effectiveness as teachers and researchers.

At the “*Not Just an Object*”: *Making Meaning of and from Everyday Objects in Educational Research* symposium and exhibition in 2016,<sup>2</sup> we each showed our objects pictorially on posters, and then playfully improvised interactions with them eliciting meaningful visceral responses. We further explored poetry-writing techniques to unpack the value of objects as meaningful expressions of our artist–researcher–teacher practices. Our personal ideas about our objects prior to the symposium were challenged and enriched in dialogues with other people’s objects, stories, and poems. Thus, we realised that the object, in and of itself, is not the point; rather, its significance lies in the empowering self-awareness harvested from creating, sharing, and relating the story of the object.

THE POINT OF ATTACK: FINDING A WAY OF TELLING

After the symposium, using prompts<sup>3</sup> provided by Kathleen, we wrote self-reflexive a/r/tographical arguments about the role of the objects in our educational research journeys. We shared these writings, and then met with Kathleen to interrogate how our stories were affecting us and what we were learning. We realised that our written object pieces are themselves works of creative art, which motivate three relationships—first, with our object, second, with the objects of others, and third, with each other—and simultaneously prompt artistic expression, creative teaching, and effective educational research. These discussions revealed, significantly, that our creative impulses are mercurial and idiosyncratic, and influenced by our preferred forms of artistic expression.

Here, we present the first part of our “play”, consisting of three acts that together offer the exposition, providing the audience with the information necessary to understand the artists’ varied engagements with their chosen objects. In order to construct this section, each artist looked at one of their coauthors’ original written object pieces as well as later self-reflexive writing, and produced an edited version, using the dramaturgical structure as an organising principle. Later, the two rewritten pieces for Tanya and Tamar were edited into one piece for cohesion because their objects are shared. Subsequently, in dialogue with Kathleen and two peer reviewers, all the edited pieces were then further edited and narrowed down to form three cohesive acts.

Each act of this first part of the play is written using the first person voice to communicate the unique perspectives of the particular artists. Each of the three acts is introduced by a tanka poem<sup>4</sup> that was composed by Kathleen to communicate her reading of the artists’ original object pieces. The object images are accompanied by texts that encapsulate the artists’ core thinking about the objects.

EXPOSITION: OBJECT VARIATIONS—A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

*Act I: Unpacking That Damn Suitcase (Lee Scott)*

Memory Hold-All

The dusty suitcase

Unbuckled, unzipped and flapped

Memory hold-all

Carries a burden, sadness

To show my past is my now. (Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, 2016)

*The stage is set as up as an art studio. Centre stage, there is an old, tatty, green suitcase, open, with various objects inside and falling out. A woman at an easel paints a picture of the suitcase and speaks.*

I Feel Too Full

Too full of lives

Packed squashed I kneel on it everyday

And try to contain this hold-all of my memories

(Under wraps, beneath straps)

The pleather with its tearing eyelets and torn edges might burst one day

Then what will I do?

So, today I unpack my suitcase

I leave it open in view

I leave it open for people to wonder (why?)

I leave it open to show that my past is my now. (Lee Scott, 2016)



Figure 12.1. Still life: "Hold-All" (by Lee Scott, 2016)

*The suitcase as a cultural probe, as a memory hold-all, prompts visceral responses in me. Upon reflection the suitcase evokes a number of layers of meaning, firstly, of feeling too full, and that in turn makes me realise that often I feel overwhelmed, not too sure of myself, fearful of opening up (to criticism?), of taking too much on. Secondly, that I will always have stuff to unpack; my past is my now, is what the suitcase tells me. Thirdly, although I may be hesitant to unpack my suitcase and wary of opening myself up, the suitcase is undeniably symbolic of new journeys and therefore is also emblematic of discovery.*



Figure 12.2. "I haven't unpacked yet" (by Lee Scott, 2016)

The Polish poet, Wislawa Szymborska, pointed out that “you can find the entire cosmos lurking in its least remarkable objects” (as cited in Roberts, 2014, p. xix). The least remarkable object I discuss is my portrait painting (Figure 12.2) of a green pleather suitcase with the words, “I realize that I haven’t bloody well unpacked yet (well, not properly ...).” The suitcase is my visceral, poignant memory hold-all, prompting awareness of the interconnectivity of my personal, artistic, educational, and research personae and practices.

The 2016 symposium led me to physically reexamine the suitcase itself, which is now my primary resource for my reflections (Figure 12.1). Following Riggins’ (1994) suggestion that objects can contribute actively to analysis, I find the green pleather suitcase actively influencing my analysis of it. It prompts me to create personal, artistic, educational, and scholarly meanings that demand actual changes in my practice, rather than merely discussing the idea of change.

The suitcase has an origin and a history. It was given to me, as an adult, by my mother-in-law when I was moving house. Many years earlier, when I was 14 years old, I experienced the distress of leaving the only home I had ever known. In that move, we packed our belongings in the same style of suitcase, except they were ochre. By attaching my personal connotations to it, the suitcase transcends its least remarkable object status and becomes the symbol of my personal grief, loss, and even bereavement (Kubler-Ross, 2005), and a metaphor for my loneliness in leaving, my journeying with sadness, and my travelling bearing the burden of my painful memories.

I believe that my values of creativity, playfulness, inclusion, and integrity inform and influence, holistically, the what, the why, and the how of all aspects of my artistic, educational, and research practices. Because of my own wounding social and educational experiences—which have impacted positively on my practice—I now understand and value the holistic dynamics of self-awareness and learning.

My poem about the green pleather suitcase ends with “my past is my now.” Kathleen’s poetic interpretation of my object piece has reenforced the symbolic magnitude of the unpacking and understanding of my teenage, heartbreaking homesickness and the impact it has on my practice. I have come to acknowledge that I am the being that I am now because of my memories of all my lived experiences (Whitehead, 2009) and my emotional, spiritual, and intellectual responses to them. These memories and responses all inform the narrative around how I am simultaneously artist–researcher–teacher.

Self-reflexively, I ask: What evidence will I discover through unpacking my suitcase? Why is the process of unpacking, specifically, valuable? How can objects reveal evidence of my values and their impact and influence on my practice as artist–researcher–teacher?

*Act II: The Object Is Not a Sandal (Chris de Beer)*

Point of Departure

The black-and-white strap  
Crosses over the sandal

Point of departure  
It led me on a journey  
Where all is not as it seems. (Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, 2016)

*A jeweller's workspace: many objects and numerous images of pieces of jewellery.  
A man holds a sandal with three black-and-white straps as he speaks.*



*Figure 12.3. Izimbadada, a traditional Zulu sandal made from recycled whitewall car tyres  
(Zulu sandal made by Mnengwa Dlamini; photograph taken by Chris de Beer, 2001)*

*The object is not the sandal: it is the black-and-white patterned strap that crosses over. It is an object that was strange to begin with and then it became the point of departure for a whole range of objects, each one elaborating on a slightly different aspect of patterned strap. I was fascinated by it because I saw a craftsman busy making it to use in the manufacture of a sandal. I realised that the strap by itself could be used for making jewellery such as bangles and necklaces.*

*Izimbadada* (Figure 12.3) are synonymous with the dances of the Zulu migrant workers who brought the sturdy sandals, made from recycled motor car tyres, to the city during Apartheid. Maskanda and Mbaqanga musicians popularised *izimbadada*, the name being onomatopoeic for the sound the rubber soles make during walking and performing vigorous, athletic, traditional Zulu dances.

I teach jewellery design at a university of technology. While the main educational focus is learning the skills required by the jewellery-manufacturing sector, developing

a South African design idiom is also significantly emphasised. Consequently, I have explored and promoted local design influences and indigenous and traditional crafts and skills to guide student design practice. Even though I discourage stereotypical curio-type jewellery, my students tend to denigrate and disregard indigenous and traditional crafts and skills, and are attracted to making jewellery from gold and gemstones. So, latterly, I have focused on developing a rationale to influence young designers to draw on the authenticity of their personal stories and their cultural contexts to inspire and inform their designs.

While visiting the Dalton Road Traditional Market in Durban (in about 2001), I noticed a young man cutting at a long strip of black rubber, revealing a white underlay which he cut in a black-and-white geometric pattern. I instinctively recognised that he was making traditional sandals—*izimbadada*. Until then, I had not really thought about how the straps used to make the sandals were crafted. I believe I had unthinkingly ascribed the manufacture of the straps to a semi-industrial process. So when I saw the top layer of black rubber being removed with a kitchen knife, it was a shock—a very pleasant shock. I was delighted to discover that the “perfect” commercial-looking, crisply patterned straps are produced by the inventive minds, creative hearts, and skilled hands of traditional craftspeople, using discarded whitewall tyres and rudimentary equipment.

When Bongzi, a Bachelor of Technology student, translated the process of cutting the black-and-white straps from a whitewall tyre into a drawing (Figure 12.4), he demonstrated that modes of (re)presentation are most effective when they are context relevant and sensitive. Bongzi’s drawing captures the form, line, shape, and colour of the carved black-and-white sandal strap visually in such a way that it surpasses the representation of the object and suggests the creative process of the making of the sandal strap clearly and beautifully. Bongzi’s drawing tells us what any verbal—written or oral—research report of the same process and product cannot.

For me, these patterned straps are significantly valuable because they demonstrate how discarded tyres are transformed into beautiful, useful objects by the mastery of traditional craftspeople. When manufacturing my own straps, I explored making a variety of black-and-white designs. My interest in pattern making per se grew, and since then I have focused on creating patterns and prints using various media and processes. I now produce simple geometrically patterned artworks and jewel-like objects by laboriously removing what is immediately visible to reveal the beautiful pristine layers below. My office walls are lined with prototypes, test pieces, half made, and unusable objects—all results of my playful investigations.

The objects I make are multiply significant, not only in themselves but also in relation to my other pieces. None stands in isolation. All are linked in an elaborate network of idiosyncratic connections that generally tie my creative work together. Access to this network is possible via any single object, in this case, the black-and-white sandal strap.





*Figure 12.4. Cutting the rubber straps (drawing by Bonginkosi Tshabalala, 2004)*

The black-and-white sandal strap is more than it seems. While the sandal initially appears merely exotic, closer examination reveals its familiarity and then, excitingly, a whole new range of possibilities opens up. Its exotic appearance distracts from its premier everyday function of holding the sandal on the foot, enabling many hours of walking considerable distances.

Similarly, my educational research is more than its academic appearance, and is multiply significant and elaborately connected. The premier everyday function of my educational research is to explore the who, what, why, when, and how of my own learning and its influence on me, my learners, and colleagues. Initially, a research object requires persistent curiosity to reveal its dense, multifaceted characteristics, which suggest a variety of approaches, angles, and directions of examination leading to idiosyncratic developments and outcomes. The black-and-white sandal strap is my symbolic educational research interconnector, which suggests further effective learning prompts using interpersonal, dynamic, oral–aural–visual interactions such as games, demonstrations, arguments, and telling and acting stories, *inter alia*.

The serendipitous discovery of the patterned rubber strips has enriched me with a number of significant discoveries of skills, techniques, materials, and visual inspirations. Discoveries of things being other than what they seem, continue to direct, (in)form, and excite me as a practising artist–researcher–teacher.

*Act III: If These Stones Could Talk... (Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt)*

Markers of Ideas

The stones, shoes, suitcase

As material vessels

Markers of ideas

A way to tell the stories

In past, present, and future. (Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, 2016)

*An empty stage covered with pieces of paper, and a large pile of stones. Two women are on stage collecting the papers against a backdrop of three different image sets. The women speak alternately, placing stones on various pieces of paper.*



*Figure 12.5. Stones that keep the pages safe (photograph by Tanya van der Walt, 2009)*



*Figure 12.6. The room of shoes at Auschwitz Museum (photograph by Tanya van der Walt, 1999)*

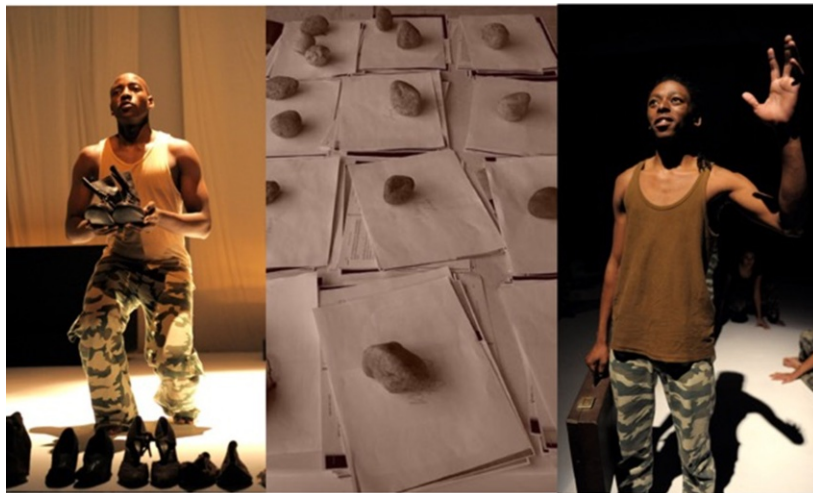


*Figure 12.7. Suitcases in the Auschwitz Museum (photograph by Tanya van der Walt, 1999)*

T. MESKIN ET AL.

*What do the objects—the stones (Figure 12.5), the shoes (Figure 12.6), the suitcases (Figure 12.7)—say? They tell stories, about process and product, about inspiration and manifestation in action, about memory and about creation. They speak about moments of serendipity, moments of connection, about finding ways to tell untellable stories. They tell about friendship and shared vision, and about honouring our dead, and inspiring our young.*

The objects examined here belong to a theatre piece we made—the *Front Lines* project (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2009, 2010, 2011, see Figure 12.8). *Front Lines* chronicled the narratives of 20th- and 21st-century wars and conflicts and the consequences of those conflicts on all those involved, including combatants and civilians, journalists and historians, among others.



*Figure 12.8. Images from the production of FrontLine, featuring performers Nhlakanipho Manqele (left) and Sfiso Ndlovu (right) (photographs taken by Val Adamson, 2010)*

Our creative process was prompted by our observation that the South African Border War<sup>5</sup>—a war fought by most of the South African white men of our generation—has largely been erased from recorded history. The *FrontLines* project grew as we discovered many voices that needed to be heard in the letters we collected between soldiers and their lovers, parents, siblings, and friends. These letters of longing and grief, hope and fear, formed the bulk of the play text but we also included eyewitness reports, journalistic material, poetry, and personal reflections of those affected directly by conflict. These reflections included subject matter that was profoundly personal: three of our grandfathers fought in World War II, two were prisoners of war, and one had been in Auschwitz. All these writings were objects infused with layers of meaning and metaphor shaped into a theatrical script.

Unlike the other art forms described in this chapter, theatre is a dynamic art that produces no direct material product for interrogation, rendering research of any theatrical event idiosyncratically and uniquely challenging. Theatrical events exist in the personal and group memories of the interactive lived experiences of theatre artists, their audiences, and critics. While the memories and feelings generated by the theatrical event can be explored for deeper understandings and insights into our practice as artist–researcher–teachers, they are themselves difficult to research—presenting a lacuna of direct evidence. This lacuna can be partially addressed using objects; understanding that shoes are not just shoes, recognises the profound power that resides in objects in the theatrical context.

In *Front Lines*, the objects—the shoes, suitcases and stones—were multifaceted and multi purposed, serving as

- the tellers of the stories of all the participants in the theatrical event;
- both material markers of creative catalysts, and carriers of multiple interpretations of intangible and complex ideas during performance;
- material vessels for much of the work’s emotional weight and power, holding the memories and feelings connected to the theatrical event;
- touchstones for the performers, facilitating empathetic connections with material that was chronologically, geographically, and emotionally largely outside of our students’ lived experience;
- primary signifiers of our teaching and the learning of our student participants, both informing our educational insights;
- lenses for reflective exploration and interrogation of the making of *Front Lines*, our influence on the event, and its impact on our self-study research personae.

The objects lift the work from the general into the particular. Their physicality opens the gates of remembrance for unseen faces and unheard voices lost in the sensory cacophony of conflict. The index of items—the detritus of lost lives—refreshes and reimagines the horror, transcending the words we speak and write.

By rethinking these objects as vehicles for our educational research journey, we see that they have symbolic connotations derived from our own lived experiences of historical images and artefacts in sociocultural contexts. Objects capture the visceral, personal, entangled, emotional layers necessary to express the inexpressible; but they are not simply metaphoric theatrical devices to serve as a point of inspiration. The shoes, suitcases, and stones also occupy (im)material spaces, becoming anchor points from which to remember, to narrate, and to unpack our acts of creation.

Much of our self-reflexive process grapples with a variety of dynamic interpretative multiplicities subject to context and perspective. The interpretations of those involved in the production have an emic view, those viewing the production have an etic view, and all have an idiosyncratic view reflecting their personal lived experiences. Our resonances reflect our personal memories and family histories, the process of our researching and writing, directing and performing, our friendship and collaboration, and our individual thinking about teaching and learning and research.

In connecting the theatre-making project and our teaching process, the production and the objects, specifically, work to make the obscure familiar. In the production, the discarded shoes of unknown and unknowable ownership are active complex representations of multiple individual past lives and their reimaginings in our present, and potential future; the empty, battered, bruised, stained suitcases are redolent with memories and stories; the stones are grave markers, reifying innumerable tragedies and resonating incalculable loss.

As shown in Kathleen's poetic summation, all objects are markers of ideas, offering nodal points for reflection, inviting the student actors and, later, the audience to walk in others' shoes, generating empathetic understanding of human, social, and educational imperatives: A way to tell the stories/In past, present, and future.

*Act IV: Rising Action, Crisis, and Climax—Coffee Conversations*

During the writing of this chapter, we—Lee, Chris, Tamar, and Tanya—met together over coffee with Kathleen to share and audio record our object-inspired explorations and writings. Our discussions revealed our passionate (dis)agreements as a/r/t/ographers, generating new meanings and connections, learning and understanding, and awareness of how and where our object pieces and their narratives might lead us. In our conversations, we demanded better explanations of our objects from each other, resulting in us each gaining insights into our own perspectives, and enabling us to recognise and appreciate our commonalities and differences as artist–researcher–teachers.

The audio recordings of these discussions, as well as further written responses, were used as material for this fourth act of our play, in which our self-reflexive thoughts are represented in rising actions, crises, and climaxes. Tamar composed a first draft of the act, which was then revised and condensed in dialogue with the authors and two peer reviewers. Each of the four scenes that follow reveals our novel insights into how and why we use objects in our artistic, research, and teaching processes.

*Scene 1: Using Objects in the Artistic Process*

*Tanya:* Our discussions reveal that we differ on why and how we make art, yet we agree that the art-making process transmogrifies objects, revealing layered and textured meanings, which are metaphoric, pivotal, and personal. As metaphors, the objects catalyse our creativity, revealing a range of contextualised meanings. Viewer perspectives of the object or work reveal idiosyncratic interpretations, all valuable and valid, nonetheless. None is worthless.

*Tamar:* As pivots, the objects present changing perspectives for learning and reflection. As personal signifiers, objects infuse our work with memories of our lived experiences.

*Lee:* My pivotal realisation that symbolic and metaphoric meaning could be induced from an object grew out of my playfully painting a portrait of the suitcase. I saw that it is in the act of playful art making that the created object gains status. My playfully giving the suitcase the status of the subject of a portrait importantly exemplified the value of play in my creative endeavours. My painting the portrait revealed to me the holistic magnitude and significance of the suitcase—my memory hold-all—as an artistic/educational/scholarly prompt.

*Chris:* I realise I operate creatively and purposefully in numerous ways and on numerous levels. I explore for the sake of exploring. I find exploring helpful to see, make, and use the objects in my immediate surroundings to make conceptual connections. Playfully exploring the qualities and capacities of materials, and making artistic objects, helps me initiate conversations and engage with the world—in the present and for the future. I find that my artistic processes and products reveal the gaps, overlaps, and divergences that I have with the people around me and within myself.

*Scene 2: Using Objects in the Research Process*

*Chris:* A number of factors pertinent to the role of objects in the research process have and are emerging from my investigation into the black-and-white Zulu sandal strap, which has oscillated from explorative play to focused deadline-driven research activity. Consequently, I realise that an object becomes research worthy because it piques interest and prompts questions. I have also recognised that objects can play multiple research roles, depending on the participants involved. If I am the lone researcher, the object-informed research process might be seen purely as personal exploration or therapy; however, where a group is involved, the object can prompt conversations and catalyse action. Objects can be researched in ways that trigger and facilitate cultural insights and interactions, contributing to empathetic understanding of the other. Because I have experienced the black-and-white strap patterns from various cultural perspectives, I now understand that culture as context plays an important—if confusing and sometimes even contradictory—role in relation to the research of an object.

*Tamar:* As dramatic artists, we occupy a strange space within the academy because it is difficult to locate us or our work within the paradigms of conventional academic research. Perhaps it is because art invokes an infinite variety of seemingly irrational and irreconcilable characteristics in its forms of expression, processes, products, and interpretations that makes it inimical to the restrictions and demands of academic research. We find that using objects provides us with a point of departure in the research process to address the “messiness” of artistic creativity.

*Tanya:* The object, chameleon-like, changes according to the space it occupies: on the one hand, the artist's studio, classroom, and workshop, research seminar, and, on the other hand, the space of the relevant critical reflection perspective and lens. The objects, seen through the telescopic lens of our research, empower us to move between the world of making and the world of thinking, zooming in closely to examine nodal moments in our creative and educative practices. However disparate the process may appear, the object remains the tether between the artist self, the artwork, the collaborators, the learners, the viewers, and our reflection-engendered, prism-like perceptions of our artist–researcher–teacher journeys.

*Lee:* Objects are useful self-study research prompts in that they can facilitate both insider and outsider views and the relationship between them. When I use the object self-reflexively, I, as self-study researcher, find meaning inside and outside of my self, so that the insider and outsider views of my self-(un)awareness become mutually complementary. I think this happens because the object is both a hold-all of the insider tacit, embodied, and lived/living self-(un)awareness, and a conduit that can shift from the insider view of my self-(un)awareness to the outsider view of my self-(un)awareness, to (in)form my research practice in a balanced way.

### *Scene 3: Using Objects in the Teaching Process*

*Lee:* I realise I have used objects extensively in my teaching practice without ever considering the objects' educational influence and research potential. Through the symposium, our conversations, reflections, and shared ideas, I have shifted from seeing only broad conceptual connections to being aware of conceptual intimacy, trajectories, and implications. By travelling the object-driven path, I have discovered anew the symbiosis of my artist–researcher–teacher practices. Working with the suitcase as metaphor has alerted me to key qualities in my teaching: empathy with feelings of exclusion, integrity to encourage students to value trustworthiness both in themselves and in others, an intuitive insight into my students' receptivity and my ability to modify my communication accordingly. When I teach, I realise that I am simultaneously seeking to (1) demonstrate a technique, skill, or principle to effect student learning and competence, (2) influence students to believe in their ability, and (3) aid students' understanding of the mutual relevance of (1) and (2) to the task at hand.

*Chris:* As a teacher, I need to make my students aware of the contexts within which they operate, not just in terms of the jewellery they produce but also in terms of the spaces they and their objects inhabit. I want to guide my students to find ways of anchoring their creative processes in their daily personal lives. My students often see the creative design process as magical and inscrutable,



so I want to find ways to make the design process more transparent for them so that they can experience being creative and apply their acquired skills in the design and manufacture of jewellery. I have also realised that I make different demands of myself and of my students. My own creative work happens in one of two ways: in undirected play, or when I have to meet the deadline of a brief. Yet oddly enough, I do not provide my students the same space for play nor impose the same types of deadlines for creative work. Perhaps I relax these demands assuming that it will encourage creative behaviour. So I now feel it would be useful to allow my students to engage in apparently unfocused design activity on the one hand, and to impose deadlines on some of their creative endeavours on the other.

*Tamar:* As teachers, we want students to function as global critical thinkers. The object(ification) of the real shoes, suitcases, and stones gave them meaning and significance beyond the literal, allowing us and our students to explore their concrete manifestation during the theatre-making action, and to create complex novel stories. Thinking of objects as springboards in the making of further objects, we can see how, through the artistic process, they are transformed and transforming, nurturing new meanings and learning, understanding and awareness.

*Tanya:* The object helps to unpack the creative work so that it can be recontextualised, provoking alternative understandings and insights and simultaneously revealing the intersections between the multiple roles we play in theatre and in life.

*Scene 4: Climax.* In this scene, as peers and friends, we express the value of the links between artist–researcher–teachers, engaging three threads—a/r/tography, communication, and evolution.

*Lee:* As an artist–researcher–teacher, I believe that my practices are linked, that my artistry includes my being able to teach what I practise, practise what I teach, and reflect and report on the what, who, when, where, why, and how of my practices in my research. I consider the critical conversations with friends an important contribution, prompting me to reassess what I know (or think I know) and opening me to new possibilities and directions. Consequently, I am now becoming aware of my reception of multiple sources of information—simultaneously coming, going, and influencing each other—in my creating, teaching, and researching moments. This symbiotic, holistic, tri-interdependency dynamically (in)forms itself in three or possibly four dimensions. I visualise it holographically—an-all-at-once-from-every-angle-in-a-matrix awareness of myself as artist–researcher–teacher. Self-reflexivity provides an organic connection between the artist, the researcher, and the teacher—the reflexive a/r/tographer. Reflexive a/r/tography crosses our delineated role boundaries

and explodes divisive and deceiving categories, allowing us to identify our commonalities. Possible insights, understandings, and relationships then emerge in a holograph—a prism-like view existing on all planes simultaneously, but inviting critical dialogue revealing our particularities.

*Chris:* Critical conversations between peers and friends allow us to explain our creative processes in detail to establish the commonalities of our creative activities, which are, surprisingly, more than I suspected. This suggests that sharing our learning experiences in future interactions could broaden our understanding of what constitutes and influences learning. I enjoyed sharing my belief that playing with materials and objects is key to artistry, its teaching and its research, and my experience of producing a wide range of creative artefacts by alternating between playful and focused activities. I would value exploring further the roles in learning, and sharing others' experiences of learning, in relation to context and perspective, playful experimentation and focus, mistakes and serendipitous surprises.

*Tanya:* Making art comes from our gut, our intuition, which imperatively prompts the flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) of artistic expression. When we make theatre, we experiment and play with a strong sense of what the theatrical event, and we, should say to an audience but, as artists, we must beware being overly opinion sensitive lest we edit ourselves into paralysis. The object pieces demonstrate how objects, individually, can evoke significant evolutionary change and, together, can influence an ever-broadening audience. We filter what we see and feel from the perspective and through the lens of our individual art form, so we cannot generalise about how and why we make and use art. In thinking and writing about our theatre making, teaching, and researching practices, we are aware of the slippage between our artist–researcher–teacher identities and practices. In prompting the creative process, the object transmogrifies; it is not the suitcase or stones themselves that are significant but the how and the what of the ensuing journey.

*Tamar:* A/r/tographical perspectives are artistic epistemologies that enable us to translate our artistic practices educationally and academically. Making, teaching, and researching art operates variously and idiosyncratically in terms of mindset, context, purpose, and audience. The object pieces demonstrate that the artist–researcher–teacher aspects of a/r/tography are interwoven, providing useful perspectives for interrogation into role delineation, the elision between them, and the possible interpretations of objects, making explicit what is implicit and offering glimpses into previously opaque artistic ways of knowing. It is key to see the a/r/tographic triad as an opportunity for challenging and insightful educational research, a powerful precept for creative artists who want to make art but also want to excavate their own practices not just as artists but also as thinkers, teachers, and researchers.

## RESOLUTION

Our play has demonstrated for us the value of working with objects in our a/r/tographic practice in one possible story of many. Here, we elucidate our collective self-reflexive learning drawn from the play, in terms of how such object-driven exploration can connect to our work in educational research.

- Despite material concrete objects being constructed, used, and researched variously in different creative pursuits, we believe working with objects is applicable to all creative arts, and argue that engaging with any work of art as object offers significant and profound research possibilities.
- The object acts as a tether for the research and an anchor for the researcher's epistemological approach. Because the object is a tangible and observable artefact, it provides a reference point for the self-reflexive work that research into educational practice demands. Using the object as the starting point for the self-reflexive process gives the researcher a tool to make a bridge between their artist and teacher practices and research.
- When applied in self-reflexive research methodologies, object work can mediate the core principle of such research, where the artist–teacher is both the researcher and the researched.
- Objects enable subjective engagement with the core of creative practice. Subjectivity is often deemed a barrier in a research project because of the challenges of objectifying the human condition and experience. The tangibility of the object facilitates research connections between the subject–object, shared memories of lived experiences, art, and teaching.
- The object can catalyse the making, researching, and teaching of art by providing a lens through which to frame and explore, reflexively, the artist self, the teacher self, and the researcher self.
- As creative artists and academics, we often feel a dissonance between the different aspects of our work. Using objects offers a way to ameliorate this dissonance, making the spaces between our art, our teaching, and our research more easily navigable. The materialness of the object provides a tangible thread linking the practice to the research, where both are equally significant. When we use the object to research the creative processes that produce the object, a methodological approach for the rigorous interrogation of that process emerges.
- Unpacking the multiple planes of thinking encoded in the objects provides a uniquely flexible and elastic approach to analysis that negotiates the slippage between our identities as artist–researcher–teachers.
- Our work with object pieces reveals complex, multi-layered, entangled responses that move between self and other, past and present, creativity and self-reflexivity, doing and thinking, practice and critique. This knowledge can be understood as a holographic matrix, an image that aptly captures the nonlinear, sometimes chaotic, often deeply personal process of creativity, as well as the challenge of negotiating such creativity theoretically in a research context. Understanding this

matrix-like structure provides a frame in which to position our work. We believe that the object work offers a key with which to unlock the a/r/tographic construct of visceral and intuitive research inquiry.

#### EPILOGUE: REFLECTING ON THIS PRODUCTION

We all work in different fields and yet we all work with objects. The improvisational journey the objects have taken us on has enabled a vivid dialogue and multi-vocal conversation that engenders an opening up of knowledge, a release from convention, and the potential to develop a methodology for creating, researching, teaching, and learning that engages with the multi-layered human experience. In this chapter, we have brought together different methods of working, making, teaching, and researching, and have allowed them to speak to and with each other through the objects. For us, this is an exciting and accessible process, offering ways to interrogate artist–researcher–teacher practice, engage in collaborative learning, and to move past the—often daunting—difficulty of words as a starting point. Overall, the object pieces in this chapter converge in a medley that reveals resonances between art and design, memory, story, and self-reflexivity, showing how creative meaning making through and with object inquiry can enhance personal–professional learning and stimulate new possibilities for educational research understandings within and beyond the arena of arts and design.

Shoes, Suitcases, Stones

Memory vessels

Material stories

Points of departure

Crossing over and over

Past, present, future, and past. (Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, 2016)

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As described by Sullivan (2006, p. 25): “A/r/tography references the multiple roles of Artist, Researcher and Teacher, as the frame of reference through which art practice is explored as a site for inquiry. A useful way to consider these roles as research practices may be to view the Artist as someone who en-acts and embodies creative and critical inquiry; the Researcher acts in relation to

- the culture of the research community; and the Teacher re-acts in ways that involve others in artistic inquiry and educational outcomes.”
- <sup>2</sup> The research symposium and exhibition took place in Durban, South Africa, on 3–5 February, 2016. The focus was on better understanding the personal and social meanings of everyday objects and the significance of this for educational research.
  - <sup>3</sup> The prompts were adapted from Samaras (2011, pp. 105–106).
  - <sup>4</sup> The tanka is a traditional Japanese poetic format that is increasingly being used in qualitative research to explore personally and socially challenging experiences (Breckenridge, 2016).
  - <sup>5</sup> Also known as the Namibian War of Independence.

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T. MESKIN ET AL.

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*Tamar Meskin*  
*School of Arts & School of Education*  
*University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

*Tanya van der Walt*  
*School of Education & School of Arts*  
*University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

*Lee Scott*  
*Department of Fashion and Textiles*  
*Durban University of Technology, South Africa*

*Chris de Beer*  
*Fine Art and Jewellery Design Department*  
*Durban University of Technology, South Africa*  
*and*  
*School of Education*  
*University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

*Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan*  
*School of Education*  
*University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*