



CRAFTING IDENTITIES: FOLDING AND STITCHING THE SELF

Kathryn Grushka

University of Newcastle

Kath.Grushka@newcastle.edu.au

Michelle van Gestel

University of Newcastle

Michelle.Vangestel@newcastle.edu.au

Clare Skates

Clare.Skates@gmail.com

Kathryn Grushka is a nationally recognized fibre artist and tapestry weaver currently working in the Faculty of Education and Arts at The University of Newcastle, NSW. Since graduating as a visual arts educator in the mid-seventies, she has continued studies both in fine art and art education. In 2008, she was awarded a PhD from The University of Newcastle. Throughout her career as a practising artist, art educator and arts researcher, Grushka has been fascinated with art as narrative, and the reflective role of art in understanding identity, community and society. She is represented in private and public collections across Australia and abroad.

Michelle van Gestel is a visual arts educator with experience teaching and programming in a range of school settings including: primary, secondary, tertiary and special education. She currently teaches arts education at the University of Newcastle, Faculty of Education and Arts. Michelle has a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) (BAVA) and Diploma in Education (DipEd) and is currently a MPhil student at University of Newcastle focusing on the connections between embodied cognition and materiality in visual arts praxis.

Clare Skates graduated from the Victoria College of the Arts (Photography), Melbourne, in 2006. That same year, she exhibited her work in New York, USA and more recently was selected for the 2009 Cheongju International Craft Biennale, Republic of Korea. At the Cheongju Biennial, Skates was also recognized with an acquisitive “Outside the Box” Special Award. Alongside her art practice, Skates has worked in gallery administration in Australia and USA.

Abstract: This article tells the story of two fibre artists, Kathryn and Clare, who craft their intergenerational autoethnographic insights through the creation of textile artworks. It explores the collaborative journey of both artists, who came together to create an exhibition titled “Stitching Identities.” The artists have embraced the Deleuzian idea of the folding act in art-making as a process of continuous and complex revealing of narratives and intuitive insights about self, a bringing of the inside to the outside and into material aesthetic form. It also embeds the writing of a colleague artist/educator, Michelle, who worked with them on the writing of the article and in addition draws on the critical, reflective and philosophical writing of education theorist Inna Semetsky¹ who wrote the “Stitching Identities” exhibition catalogue essay. Their art-making is their method, a way of crafting for meaning, a way to research and explore the self and the formation of their current identities.

Keywords: craft as method; stitching identities; new materiality; folds; montage method; Deleuze; Semetsky

This article explores the crafting acts of two fibre artists, Kathryn and Clare and the work they produced for the exhibition *Stitching Identities* (Grushka & Skates, 2011) seen through the reflective and auto-ethnographic voice of Kathryn and Clare. It also includes additional writing and reflections of arts educator and researcher Michelle, and the writing of educational philosopher Inna Semetsky (2010). Art-making is Kathryn and Clare's craft method. It is a montage method that allows time to be abstracted, re-assembled, and viewed with greater complexity within the time-space phenomenon. It embeds the Deleuzian method which is one of intuition, going beyond the perception of something actual, or our limited forms of representing life, to recognizing that life has future imaginative potential forms and is always becoming. The method provides the artists with a way to research and explore the self/selves and a way to grasp an understanding of the formation of their shifting identities. Kathryn and Clare have embraced the idea that "truth is producing existence" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 134), that truth is activated through auto-ethnographic artful inquiry and is revealed through stitching acts. With each stitch or placement of an image, they encounter uncertainty, which is explored through their own crafting for meaning to reveal their folded becomings. Artworks carry imaginal and material qualities and in this article the fibre artworks of Kathryn and Clare summon up their future becomings through artful knowing. They ruminate about past and present family mythologies as auntie and niece, and investigate their shared and common past matriarchal worlds.

The article describes and explores examples from the exhibition, embeds and reflects on the theory that informed it, and attempts to provide insights behind the art-making acts and their products. The voices of Kathryn and Clare carry descriptive accounts of their artistic intentions as auto-ethnographic renderings. The renderings surface as making actions observable in the artworks. It also carries the critical, reflective voices of the artists, the new materiality lens of Michelle as arts researcher and the philosophical reflective voice of Semetsky who generously wrote the forward for the exhibition catalogue.

Crafting Artful Inquiry

The act of art-making as an inquiry tool is in quest of personal agency, inter-subjective insights, imaginal and relational ways of knowing. Artful ways of knowing or artful inquiry acknowledges that learning about self through making is an embodied act (Grushka & Bellette, 2016; Jevic & Springgay, 2008). It draws on memory work and the artists self-reflective capacities that surface within the creative crafting of images, materials and in the crafted production of ideas. Artful inquiry foregrounds uncertainty (Sameshima & Irwin, 2008) and it is positioned in the post-qualitative turn, wherein knowing is not privileged over being (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) and insights take a plastic form. When making art "meanings come from tangential connections and can be revealed through material

understandings" (Grushka, 2005, p. 357). Dewey (1934) advanced the notion that the process of *doing* or *making* art is complex, involving an intimate connection of the senses whilst in the act of manipulating materials. This intercepts with the concept of materiality in the current post-human epoch characterized broadly by a shifting and unfolding of prevalent humanist dualisms such as body/mind, self/other, human/non-human and so on. It allows for "spaces that have meaning potential" (Grushka, 2005, p. 355) to emerge. A new materiality considers fundamental questions about "the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans in the material world" (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 3). Fundamental to this position is the belief that materiality lies at the core of creative practice (Barrett & Bolt, 2013) and in this article Kathryn and Clare sense the force of things when handling and manipulating textiles and paint surfaces.

Materiality embeds an understanding of the vibrancy of matter (Bennet, 2010) that argues for a shift in perspectives; it sees humans as co-collaborators in the world, reflecting on the idea that the act of art-making is interwoven within and without, mapping a multiplicity of complex relations between self and other (human and non-human). For the maker/artist, it can be a way of knowing and being in the world. Being and process are valued over, the beauty or meaningfulness of the object produced (Boutet, 2008). Pleasure and wellbeing are gained from reasoning through materiality and in the production of new aesthetic forms. For Kathryn, who works with strong abstract and personally evolved symbolic forms, meaning is carried within the non-representational spaces (MacLure, 2013) that are created both within the artwork or are evoked because of the juxtaposing of symbols, materials and stitched and painted spaces that surround them.

The act of stitching and re-stitching is understood by both Kathryn and Clare as the continuous and successive folding of the artists' encounters with the world of contingencies, which are shaped by the events in their lives. Fibre art as a montage craft method of inquiry holds opportunities for literate and metaphoric references and multiple interpretations. In this sense, art-making holds opportunities to explore new "divergent durations, different rhythms or pulses of life which we can think or intuit" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 42). To the viewer and reader, the images represent burgeoning forms that may act as personal triggers into their own lifeworlds and they are always open to interpretation without fixed meanings.

Fibre art as a montage craft method of inquiry holds opportunities for literate and metaphoric references and multiple interpretations.

“Stitching Identities:” Crafting Subjectivities as Folding Encounters with Materiality and Image

The exhibition *Stitching Identities* (2011) reveals how both Kathryn and Clare have come together to communicate their unique, multiple and intersecting subjectivities (Jones, 2009) and to communicate how discrete past and present experiences can be folded and shared through unique and collaborative aesthetic explorations. For Deleuze (2006) making art is a crafted folding act. The metaphor of the fold and its associated textile materiality was not lost on Kathryn and Clare. Folds can divide into folds, they can be present within other folds and they can unfold onto the outside in ways that only the drapery of cloth can do. The fold being the inside of the outside, the *in-between*.

The folding act in art-making is a process of continuous and complex revealing of insights about self through artful ways of knowing. Folding is the act of intuitive subjectification and the metaphor of the fold underpins the material and theoretical insights that have shaped the exhibition. Folding is an artistic activity “distinct from and lying outside, knowledge and power” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 114). It is produced through memories and by the affective and adaptive telling and re-telling of the artists personal narratives. The concept of the fold offers infinite possibilities in the movement from the inside to the outside: “the infinite fold separates or moves between matter and the soul” (Deleuze, 2006, p. 39). To unfold is not opposite to the folding act but a continuation of the folding manifestation, “when the fold ceases being represented in order to become a ‘method,’ a process, an act, the unfold becomes the result of the act that is expressed exactly in this fashion” (Deleuze, 2006, p. 40). Kathryn and Clare’s artworks as unfolded insights are revealed through material forms.

The *Stitching Identities* exhibition was conceived of by Kathryn and Clare as a folding act, in order to contemplate their unfolded aesthetic collisions, that occur when two generations of fibre artists, auntie and niece are combined. Aesthetics in this sense rises up from sensations within intentionality. It is a practice, or method: “as affirmative play of conceptual experimentation and novelty, not as tribunal or judgement” (Rajchman, 2000, p. 119), and “involved in a kind of intra-philosophical struggle” (p.116). The exhibition presents the experiment of exploring their intergenerational exploration of identities and family events. For Clare the preparation for the exhibition began as follows:

The preliminary starting point for the *Stitching Identities* works was gathering the recollections and memories of family members about my grandmothers (Meyer and McGowan) when they were living. I quickly established that these memories although real to those narrating the story, were not part of my history or story and therefore not grounded in a reality or certainty I could easily access. I became aware that particular

bits of the information shared would awaken my thought processes and imagination. It was this component that chiefly informed the direction and the overall presentation of the final works.

For Kathryn:

These works bring together my very personal memories of remembered life events that involved my mother and my sisters. Being one of four girls, my journey to adulthood was complex and often agonizing, at least for me! So, I worked with symbols that had currency in my other works such as flowers, the transparency of organza and the stitched ritual of creating floral forms. Flowers were central to my mother's life, she arranged flowers as her hobby and she also worked to arrange her girls' lives. Floral compositions were forever changing and ever present and I endeavoured to reveal this complexity as it shifted over time.

Running through the artworks in the exhibition are both individual and shared symbols, in particular flower and landscape. Both artists have their own personal interpretations of these symbols. Clare and Kathryn agreed to work with floral forms and landscape as both resonated for them. They worked to marry both these symbols, to build a shared and common intent as well as a new aesthetic. The artists commenced by exploring their identities from opposite perspectives. Auntie, as she reflects on her experienced



Figure 1. Kathryn Grushka and Clare Skates: *Stitching Identities* Exhibition Installation, 2011. Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.

matriarchal childhood looking back from an adult and mother perspective. Niece, as she researches the past identities of her father's mother and projecting them forward. Both artists shared one common matriarchal line which affected their adult identities, but it was Clare who chose to link to past traditional mythologies, tarot cards and other symbolic landscapes.

While both Clare and Kathryn have been trained with different art making aesthetic orientations, they have shared a love of textiles, which has connected them beyond aesthetic material differences and family ties. Kathryn derives her aesthetic encounters with fibres informed by her original training as a painter and etcher, who later became a fibre artist. Kathryn's orientation to this medium commenced as a small child who had a textile technician father and therefore had access to an extraordinary world of threads and fabrics, from colourful cottons, to sheeting and stretch fabrics. Clare, trained initially as a photographer and in her final year of her degree shifted to fibre arts. She approaches her crafted inquiry very differently to Kathryn. Yet, as fibre artists, they are both connected at the deepest level to the materiality of fabric, thread, and are captivated by the many forms threads and stitches may take when shaping artworks. These different forms are present in the exhibition *Stitching Identities* (Figure 1, above). This image demonstrates the diversity of the forms, from sculpture to fine silk embroidery.



Figure 2. Kathryn Grushka, Possibilities series 1 (black) [detail], 2011. Hand embroidery, cotton & silk thread, hemp silk, oil pastel, 4 pieces, each 24 x 15 x 15cm.

In Figure 1 above, you can see that Kathryn loves to combine fabric and thread with sculptural materials such as sticks, plaster, canvas and paint (See Figure 1, foreground and Figure 2, detail above). Her folding processes combine sewing with cloth, cutting, knotting, binding, wrapping and painting to create both sculptures and low relief artworks. Her art-making over the years has become more sculptural and free formed, emergent, as she stitches and creates shapes and images. In Figure 2 (above) the “egg of possibilities,” which has a very direct symbolic link to motherhood and nurturing has been constructed by sewing initially, they have been over worked and finally shaped by detailed over-stitching, textures, pastels and paint.

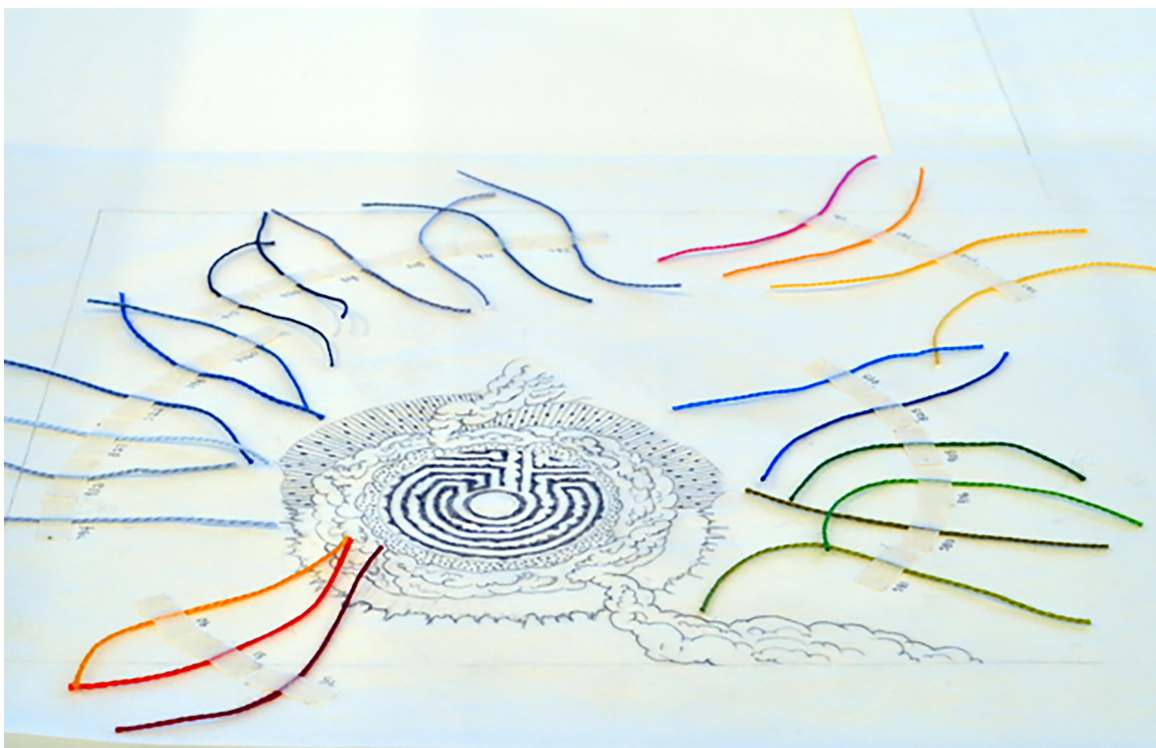


Figure 3. Clare Skates: Planner detail, extract from the artists diary, 2011.
Pencil thread and tracing paper.

Clare on the other hand (Figure 3), prefers to work with the more traditional illustrative approaches which lend themselves to fine stitched works. Clare begins to create meaning by sourcing, interpreting, analyzing and re-imagining the memories and narratives of her living relations when thinking about her father's mother in conjunction with her own lived recollections of her mother's mother. The folding and layering of images and symbols is central to her artistic process. Her initial planning and mapping of the works is multifaceted and lengthy. She slowly refines her images and gives them linear form. To do this she overlaps and reworks traced memories captured on paper (Figure 3). As she manipulates these tracings and their different elements, symbols are emphasized within the overall design until her desired level of meaning is attained. The process of colour and thread

selection and the physical stitching is her method or means of connecting affectively to her reflections on matriarchal ancestors.

Clare describes her process as follows:

I typically start with a foundation image and build up the layers. In *Topographic Bricolage 2011* (Figure 6, below), I appropriated source elements from my previous body of work, which focused on anatomical illustrations and featured the female reproductive system as the grounding image. From there, layers were built up by incorporating, and in a sense, manipulating the information collected from family members about each of my grandmothers. Geographical markers or landmarks became the most identifiable anchors I could align myself with, so I embarked on a journey to uncover images and themes that intuitively fit with the memories that had been shared. By embracing this approach I was able to take personal ownership over another's lived memory and reinterpret it as my own.

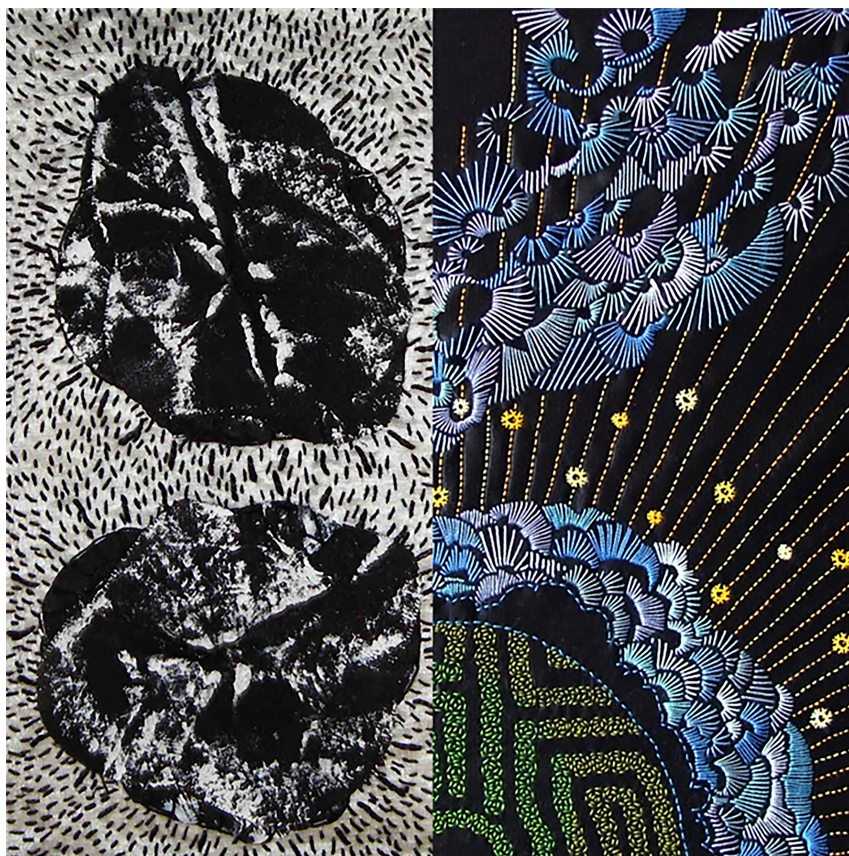


Figure 4. *Stitching Identities* catalogue image: Kathryn Grushka and Clare Skates, 2011. Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Australia.

Kathryn and Clare's aesthetic and making journeys are different and in stark contrast, illustrated in the juxtapositioning of their catalogue image (Figure 4, above). While they share some symbols, their colour palettes and stitching acts expose different crafting methods in order to reveal discreet stitched subjectivities. Stitching to create forms is slow, focused and emergent for both. Clare describes the act of the slow and lengthy physically of repetitious stitching as "synonymous with journeying or the emergence of the feminine past, culminating in an arrival of understanding about her lived experiences and identity." In Figure 4 (above), a sliced construct of the artists' two aesthetics from the exhibition catalogue demonstrates their unique approaches. The stitching qualities reveal aesthetic sensibilities and the different ways they approach stitching as method. Kathryn, symbolically and abstractly constructs with strong affective and stitching acts, while Clare is more considered, stitching over tracings to painstakingly reveal detail, then slowly and carefully crafts stitches and colour to bring her vision to fulfillment.

Kathryn's Art-making Intentions: Coming to the Past from the Present

Kathryn's artworks explore the events that shaped her through the matriarchal lens. It is a reflective stance taken from when she herself had become a mother. She interrogates her own subjectivity by connecting her lived experiences to her evolved symbolic image repertoire emergent over a lifetime of image construction. She says:

My symbols link to my deeply felt experienced past and associated family and social mythologies as they have impacted on my present subjectivity. I use my art to help me make sense of my world and support me in my quest for meaning about life. My works are full of "hints" into events in my life, but as I revisit these events, I approach them from the present, which always ensures that my recollections take on a different perspective. I hope that these new insights support me in my quest to transgress established life scripts to find new possibilities for myself, new ways to understand my own journey. I always return to reoccurring symbols such as birds, flowers etc., but in this exhibition I added very specific family codes, such as birth dates and the heart beat graphic, both constant yet fragile. I also wanted to add other hints to feminine identities, such as the organza flowers. Flowers are very powerful cultural symbols, so I hoped that audiences could connect to the feminine through them, but also find meanings in dates, the reoccurring different relationships between the number 4 and its possible forms. All these were juxtaposed in order to set in motion the process of colliding time, cultures and family narratives, which allowed me to revisit family beliefs, ask questions about the dominance of particular mythologies that were told to me and how they have continued to shape my adult life.

In Figure 5 (below), “White Family Mythologies” the 4 quadrants represent the four sisters. White is for purity, chastity and the feminine, with each quadrant linked by the symbolic cross-stitched presence of their mother. Cross-stitching is a very dominant craft method referenced from family linen heirlooms. The stitching works in each piece foregrounding different mythologies about the girls, offered up through different artistic vocabularies (Hickey-Moody, 2016), in particular the contrast of black and white. The contrasting artworks to this set are titled: “Black Family Mythologies” (Figure 8, below). White Family Mythologies speak to illusions of constructed mythologies of harmony and femininity and contrasts with the blackness of the estranged relationships within Kathryn’s family. All the artworks reference personal tensions, but Kathryn uses her abstracted representational forces to ensure they are not bound by the cultural terrain of her own existence, or personal family narrative, but are able to resonate and speak more generally to others. It is her affective stitching methods which allow her to dwell in the wider possibly of infinite spaces, to collective cultural memory, where our embodied memories linger. We are not alone, stories are shared across time.

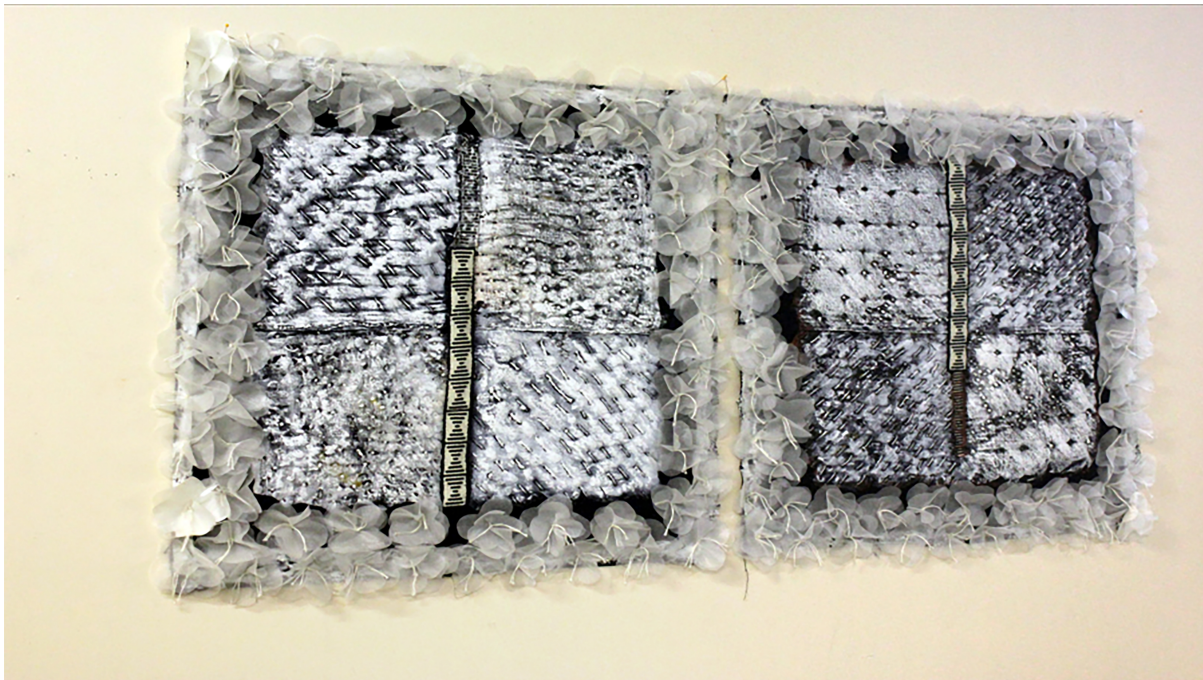


Figure 5. Kathryn Grushka, White Family Mythologies (Grushka, 2011). Hand embroidery, painted and drawn, cotton, organza cotton, silk thread, synthetic polymer, oil pastel.

Clare's Intentions: Collected and Imagined Experiences Shaping the Present

In the absence of a solid experience or collective memory by her relatives of her father's mother McGowan, Clare began a journey to explore the territory or to intuitively map her Irish heritage (See Figure 6 below). This artwork is Clare's fusion or bricolage of multiple sources of symbolic materials re-imagined through mapping aesthetics and its stitched construction. In this work she stitches memories and past identities, events, and celebrations, as they link to specific geographical and symbolic locations. The act or process of map-making overlays the sensitivities of both her matriarchal pasts. Clare describes the process in the following way:

The thought of using geographical markers in the works naturally lead me to embrace map-making as a way to represent and explore my matriarchal ancestry. Many of the elements are shaped by actual locations such as the Giant's Causeway in County Antrim, Callanish Stones in Scotland, Lindau Mangturm (Rapunzel tower) in Germany and the Presbyterian Church in Rutherford. Others are formed around more general environmental or topographical characteristics such as mountain ranges, forests and waterways that are present in these areas. When interpreting the information and making it my own, I was also drawn to signs and symbols as a way to philosophically explore who these women were and express what they represented in my life. In this respect, elements including the southern and northern hemisphere star charts, mandalas, the tree of life and the Eye of Providence, informed the work.

Analyzing the detail of Topographic Bricolage the viewer can see it as an imaginal, assembled landscape, referencing fairy tales. It includes family narratives, geographical markers, historical references, topographical maps, genetic inheritance, signs and symbols, alchemy, tarot and mysticism. There are multiple source materials such as the tree of life, with representations of family homes each side of it; there are the Callanish Stones in Scotland surrounded by references to constellations. If one looks closer one can see the reference to the feminine as the uterus shape stitched into the landscape in the top centre. Read together one begins to capture Clare's symbolic world of family mythologies. Clare describes herself as a bricoleur of her phenomenological experienced world. She layers and constructs her personal and shared memories of her mother's mother, Meyer, and the McGowan families. Both matriarchal lines can be interpreted as colliding influences that combine with her own life experiences to shape her subjectivity.

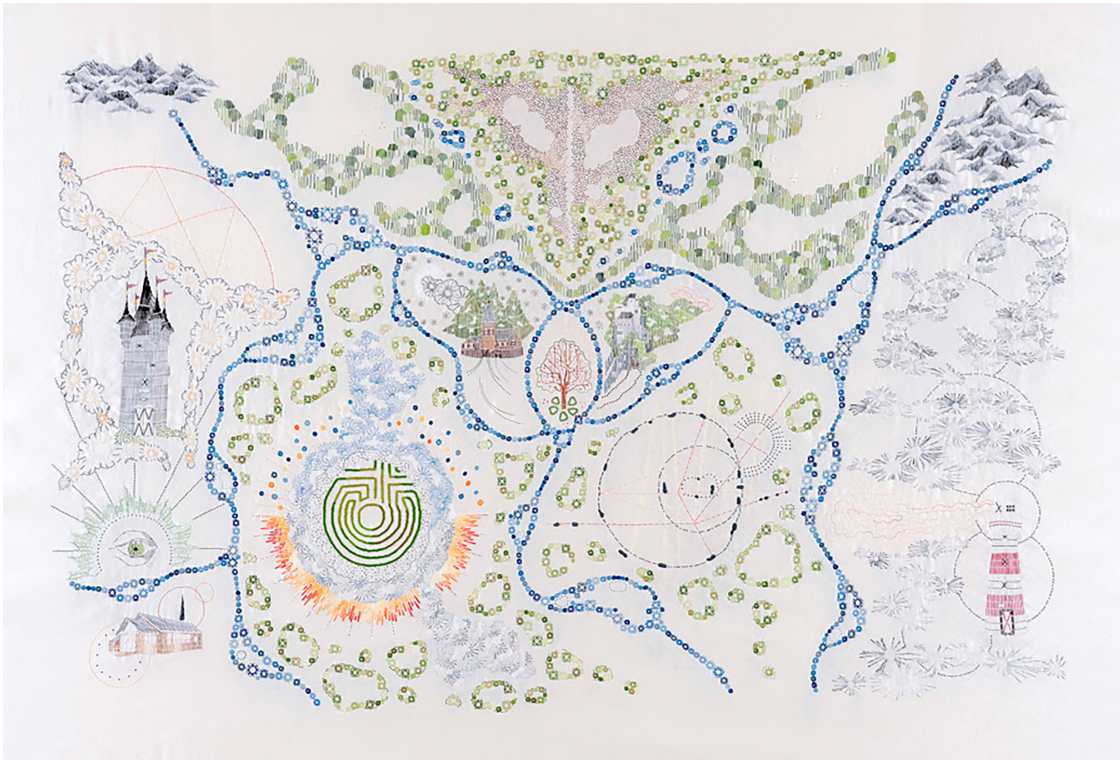


Figure 6. Clare Skates: Topographic Bricolage (detail), 2011. Hand embroidery.

Collective Work: Folded Trio-Maitland Topography

The large collaborative work titled Maitland Topography (Figure 7, below) saw Kathryn and Clare work together. In this work they shared their love of landscape and symbolic forms. Running through the work is the Hunter River, a place of significance across the lives of both artists. It was the river that flowed through Clare's mother's life and its memories are shared with Kathryn. The centre white circle is a detail of the street location of the house shared by both Clare's mother and Kathryn. The magnolia (symbol of shared mother/grandmother) is carried behind the large triptych that explored the topographical family region and the bricolaged world of Kathryn and Clare. Kathryn reflects on her magnolia symbol:

The magnolia grew in the front garden, it was often stark and bare yet in Spring it blossomed to reveal its true beauty, but it was always prone to westerly winds which quickly saw it return to barrenness. It is a work that represents the physical outcome of a continued dialogue between auntie and niece through stitching acts.

Both artists see their work as a "healing and learning" experience in which the authentic and relational self is shaped by a sharing of conversations about their families. The artwork as



Figure 7. Kathryn Grushka & Clare Skates: Folded Trio-Maitland Topography, 2011. Hand and machine embroidery, cotton and silk thread, cotton.

folds of experience embed personal understanding as temporal, spatial and socio-cultural insights.

The artworks by Kathryn and Clare for the exhibition *Stitching Identities* represent enfolded life-experiences that they unfold, stitch by stitch, through the medium of textiles and fibre. The exhibition links Kathryn and Clare's histories and female experiences in ways that connect philosophical theory with artistic practice. The artists' histories are united by what I would like to call "the maternal factor," following contemporary philosopher of education, Nel Noddings (2010). Noddings explicitly argues, in the narrative form, for the recognition of women's histories and women's experiences across theory-practice nexus in education. The language of expression of both artists is however visual and *implicit*, hiding in the constellations of images and the variety of patterns. Via multiple dimensions and directions the works comprise, in the symbolic form, a rhizomatic *network of relationships*. It is through the multiplicity of relations that the artists' individual and collective subjectivities are constituted (Semetsky, 2010, p. 1)

Kathryn and Clare have thought carefully about the triptych and what stories they needed to tell. The triptych represents the expression of their present selves and how they were able to share two common crafting processes: mapping and symbolic representation, to craft a bricolage of their personal insights about their identities through the representations of their colliding worlds. They allowed these worlds to be re-imagined and creatively branch according to the intensity of their feelings and the power of their shared narratives. Together they constructed the river, its landscape and the location of their mother/grandmother's house. They filled the landscape with red magnolias, the flower of mother and grandmother. The flower symbols of sisters and femininity used by Kathryn in her artworks are also present and together Kathryn and Clare stitched using Clare's stitch repertoire.

Crafting for Meaning: Encounters with New Materialism

Art contains material qualities that summon up sensations of "things to come, a people to come, worlds or universes to come" (Grosz, 2009, p. 87). While art works can contain philosophical concepts, they are about affects and percepts (Deleuze, 1994), about the creation of new experiences. Both can come together to transform one another (Colebrook, 2002). For Clare and Kathryn, art is beyond words and allows them to bring forth new sensations beyond the familiar, to re-imagine the connections and differentiations between time, place, and gender, thereby sustaining meaning-making within their crafting acts. Artful inquiry presented in this paper foregrounds crafting as a method which produces subjectivity insights as the act of researching self. Fibre artists, like all artists, utilize their full range of different sensory experiences to harness affective memory. Fibre materiality is linked to modal specific memories such as visual, auditory, touch, and in particular motor sensory acts of stitching through which conceptual memory and subjectivities emerge. It is a method that accommodates materiality as a driver of creative thought that surfaces as an affective pulse triggering the recall of memories within each active construction of a stitched sequence. It is a process that brings forth the creation of new representational forms that produce new repositioning lenses as future possibilities. Their material acts are about communicating their identities, through expressive and intuiting means, to audiences in order to engage in the world imaginatively and reflectively – to connect with self and with other – enabling a sense of meaningful presence, of belonging.

Crafting as Method: Folding Time, Affect and the Imagination

Crafting as method foregrounds the significance of being in the world through artistic ways of knowing. Ways of knowing that reveal affective insights, the significance of the

imagination and how material acts focus the qualities of things (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Making art heightens what the aesthetic experience brings to our understanding of the world as embodied and performatively generated for personal agency (Semetsky, 2003). Crafting as method acknowledges Deleuzian method to be one of intuition, going beyond the perception of something actual, or the limited forms of life already represented, and recognizing future potential of all life in becoming. By harnessing intuition, the self-reflective space is expanded (Semetsky, 2010).

As Kathryn and Clare create images they stitch them onto floating cloth surfaces and explore the symbolic qualities that emerge when their imagery is abstracted, shaped by the material restraints of stitches and applied within present day montage practices (Stafford, 2011). The artists have embraced the idea that “truth is producing existence” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 134); truth for them emerges from within their crafting methods and is activated by their own unique folded becomings. A stitch or a completed form transformed them back in time travelling to the inside of past family mythologies or moved them from this inside spatiality to the outside, offering up new possibilities and opportunities to abstract time, reassemble and view the spatiality of their mythologies and experiences with greater complexity. The refinement of their stitched symbolic assemblages created through the sensed stitching experience allowed them to explore more positive and possible new insights that transgress established life scripts with new possibilities. As they crafted these new assemblages and transformed them into textures and shapes, they were mindful that each stitching act, each stitch repetition, reveals something new. Dewey refers to these art-making acts as processes of doing and *redoing* (Dewey, 1934), processes that require penetrating and intuiting modes of thought that engage both imagination and reason. With repeated stitching acts, the artists’ new subjectivity insights take on new time-space realities that are future oriented.

Figure 6 (above) shows Clare’s stitched assemblage of her imagined ancestry. It carries topographic references that map her own subjective intensities triggered by her symbolic images. For example, in Clare’s mandala form in Figure 6, Topographic Bricolage, she references the elements, earth, fire, water, air and metals. Such symbolic references speak to existence, to dwelling on the earth, to evolution, to inhabiting the land, and to being and belonging. These images link to family origins; they reference her childhood and fairy tales (castle), geographical and spatial knowing and Tarot encounters. Lying deep within its symbols, the feminine self is revealed through the background of the female anatomy. When reflecting on the artworks of Clare, Inna Semetsky observes that:

By mapping the territory of the *imaginal* world, Clare learns of her Irish heritage through the repetitive unfolding of subtle traces left in the collective memory by her

matriarchal line, even if in reality she never knew her grandmother who had passed away when she was young. Clare also uses the diverse mythological elements derived from the symbolism of Tarot pictures. Her new self-knowledge is an emergent phenomenon foregrounded by shared family mythologies that she has re-created in her artistic practice, most notably in the work titled *Topographic Bricolage*. (Semetsky, 2010)

Crafting our Imaginal World

For Kathryn and Clare, as they craft their stitched and folded images, meanings emerge. For Kathryn, meaning is revealed as stitched forms that grow from within her personal intuiting energies and from the emergent material structures of the fibres, fabrics and paint. She intuits with her symbols and her expressive painting, stitching and assemblage work. For Clare, this process begins before the stitching act as linear drawings, traces that are manipulated to bring forth meanings which are finally revealed in full when stitched. While Clare and Kathryn use different crafting methods as ways to research and explore the self, both are engaged in a similar quest to understand their current identities.



Figure 8. Kathryn Grushka: *Black Family Mythologies*, 2011.
Organza, canvas, acrylic paint, linen thread, cotton thread and felt.

Their imagery is symbolic; while it carries a range of representational forms, they have no hierarchy, they remain rhizomatic, tangential, they are stitched and assembled to juxtapose events and experiences in order to bring forth subjectivity insights. They are non-linear, imaginal spaces. Semetsky (2010) refers to the term “imaginal” as relating to the intangible place that lies in-between one’s conscious intentions and physical actions. It produces an embodied knowledge. In Kathryn’s work this embodied knowing is held within her symbols of flowers, birds and their associated metaphors for life, energy and her material creative acts reveal as personal insights. Making is a space where the experienced past and the imagined future can contain multiple family mythologies and give them new concrete forms, a space where the healing and transformative effect of crafting one’s subjectivity through making is unfolded. As Semetsky writes, “It is via the embodiment of the artists’ creativity in material symbols that the artists’ imaginal world acquires reality” (2011, p. 1).

For both Clare and Kathryn, reality lies within their processes of making art. Once made, they can be shared, contemplated, accepted or rejected. Clare and Kathryn chose Inna Semetsky to write their catalogue statement because they could share their insights with her. Neither Clare nor Kathryn find their final works fully satisfying, as both know there is more to be revealed and this may emerge in the next intuiting crafted act.

Figure 8 (above) has been interpreted by Inna in the following way:

Kathryn adds to the multiple family remembrances by re-inventing her deeply felt childhood and adolescence experiences. She stitches together real events in the process of constructing her identity via symbolic representations that become interwoven within the larger family and cultural history at a deeper, symbolic level. In *Family Mythologies*, Kathryn’s montage of organza flowers – as four sisters surrounding a magnolia in the centre, as a symbol for the archetypal mother – carry feminine energies of biological growth. (Semetsky, 2010, p. 1)

Art is personal and art is contextualized; what emerges within the montaged making act often stems from deep unconscious wells, which may have no explanation even to the maker at the time of their emergence. Inna’s interpretations of *Family Mythologies* reveal the commonalities that are present in all human stories of life, family and demonstrate to an audience the universalities that present in the the contemplation of the completed works. While Kathryn and Clare’s artworks offer up the opportunities to contemplate and share family narratives, they also hold individual personal intuitions about family and humanity that belong only to the artists. The exhibition *Stitching Identities* was a conscious endeavour to create artworks that were situated in Kathryn and Clare’s personal life stories and in the feminine and matriarchal. They tried to find ways to tell their intersecting lives by sharing

their symbolic and aesthetic practices. At times they literally stitched surfaces together; in doing so they shared their intimacies about both being daughters and having common intergenerational matriarchal pasts.

The exhibition was unique in that it brought two artist together in an intergenerational creative act. While the exhibition told the narratives of these two artists, together they explored and imagined a new cultural territory of their family mythologies across time and space. In *Folded Trio-Maitland Topography* they locate themselves together in the land of the mother and grandmother, still carrying their ancestral immigrant pasts.

Crafting as Feminine Narrative

Crafting as narrative embraces post-qualitative theory in seeking to represent knowledge as an assemblage able to capture knowledge as non-linear, non-hierarchical, unstable, shifting, mobile and multiple (Deleuze 1990; Masny, 2013, 2016). This has been of particular interest to Kathryn, Clare and Michelle as they have come together to write this article and re-interpret the art created seven years ago. The materiality of art helps all three authors to understand how, when making art, they can challenge their own past and present narrated lives, critique the fictional constructs presented by others and work through the diverse array of narrative viewpoints they have attempted to represent in their artworks. They have considered the ideas of Heidegger (2006) who talks of “time-space” as “emerg[ing] in their mutual-belongingness as trajectories and expanses” (p. 268). The strength of arts’ affective spaces lies in their capacities to reveal, for the artists, their feminine narratives as unfolding and unfixed – enriched by imaginal and material insights and shaped by complex interactions with other. In this way the artists engage in “the process of becoming in which unity is dynamic and always interactive, and agency is diffusely enacted in complex networks of relations” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 13). In both the artists’ works, these trajectories are created through the retrieval of events, the representation of events and acknowledgement of their intuiting feminine selves that lie deep within the folds; their making acts enables them to harness new subjectivities. As they fold and re-fold they become aware of how these actions are re-shaping their subjectivities.

The fusion of the family stories through the explicitly feminine, intuitive and creative, modes of perception and expression is a rich assemblage in which diverse matriarchal lines, initially separated in space and time, collide in a novel aesthetic form. It is history itself that becomes *form* through the art that exceeds conceptual understanding but blends in the range of affects, which at once in- *form* and trans-*form* the artists’ subjectivities. As enfolded, such artistic subjectivity is irreducible to the *a priori self-conscious* subject. (Semetsky, 2010, p. 1)

Conclusion

Craft as method for Kathryn and Clare is a montaged folding act and summons up the matter of things at a personal level. It asks us to reflect on our understanding of the materiality of things, and with it “the myriad ways in which matter is inverted” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 3). As a method, it can reveal spaces that are in-between real events and contains qualities that are experienced as sensations, affects and intuition. This intimacy, of a personal subjectivity also belongs to others and other times as each viewer responds uniquely to the materiality, the imagery and the symbols of the artists’ works. Art is about creating difference and being conscious of differences that are emergent in ones own artistic subjectivity and carry traces of yet to be experienced and yet to be imagined events. “This is because artwork occurs within, and writes over, a specific cultural territory and thus possesses a political significance relative to the cultural geography it re-inscribes or reconfigures” (Hickey-Moody, 2016, p. 263). Kathryn and Clare together rewrote their own new family mythologies, which may or may not be shared by other family members. Kathryn and Clare, who have used their art-making to explore their unique subjectivities have expressed themselves not in verbal language but “through non-discursive, *visible*, assemblages of experiences . . . The landscapes created by the artists’ needles are the *meaningful diagrams* that construct a new type of experiential reality by virtue of the material medium, which becomes animated by the dynamics of folds as the outside projections of the deep internal world” (Semetsky, 2011, p. 2).

The act of stitching and re-stitching is presented as the continuous folding of the artists’ own encounters with the world of contingencies in the telling and re-telling of personal narratives through art-making. Through embodied action and material encounters the artists inhabit affective spaces. Through their creative acts they unfold the imaginal and envisage new possibilities.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Susanne Skates who supported the artists in the production of the exhibition and to Inna Semetsky for her generous catalogue text.

REFERENCES

- Alaimo, S., & Hekman, S. J. (Eds.) (2008). *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801-831.
- Barrett, E., & Bolt, B. (Eds.) (2013). *Carnal knowledge: Towards a 'new materialism' through the arts*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris.
- Bennett, J. (2009). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Boutet, D. (2008). Spiritual forms: Notes for thinking about art and spirituality. In D. Cecchetto, N. Cuthbert, J. Lasseonde & D. Robinson (Eds.), *Collision: Interarts practice and research*, (pp. 3-18). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Colebrook, C. (2002). *Gilles Deleuze*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Coole, D. & Frost, S. (2010). *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). *Negotiations, 1972-1990, Gilles Deleuze*. (M. Joughin, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2006). *The fold*. (T. Conley, Trans.). London, UK: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* (H. Tomlinson & G. Burchell, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Grosz, E. (2009). Sensation: The earth, a people, art. In E. Holland, D. Smith & C. Stival (Eds.), *Gilles Deleuze: Image and text*, (pp. 81- 103). London, UK: Continuum.

- Grushka, K. (2005). Artists as reflective self-learners and cultural communicators: An exploration of the qualitative aesthetic dimension of knowing self through reflective practice in artmaking. *International Journal of Reflective Practice*, 6(3), 353-366.
- Grushka, K. M. & Skates, C. (2011). *Stitching Identities*. Booragul, AU: Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.
- Grushka, K. & Bellette, A. (2016). Artful inquiry in the e-learning journal. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 9(2), 261-283.
- Heidegger, M. (2006). *Mindfulness*. (K. Thomas & E. Parvis, Trans.). London, UK: Continuum.
- Hickey-Moody, A. (2016). A femifesta for posthuman art education: Visions and becomings. In C. Taylor & C. Hughes (Eds.), *Posthuman research practices in education* (pp. 258-266). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holland, E. W., Smith, D. W. & Stivale, C. J. (2009). *Gilles Deleuze: Image and text*. London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Jevic, L. L., & Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as an ethics of embodiment: Visual journals in preservice education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(1), 67-89. doi:10.1177/1077800407304509
- Jones, S. R. (2009). Constructing identities at the intersections: An autoethnographic exploration of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development* 50(3), 287-304.
- Knowles, J. G. & Cole, A. (2008), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Lather, P. & Pierre, E. (2013). Post-qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 629-633. doi:10.1080/09518398.2013.788752
- MacLure, M. (2013). Researching without representation? Language and materiality in a post-qualitative methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 658-667. doi:10.1080/09518398.2013.788755
- Masny, D. (2013). Cartographies of becoming in education: A Deleuze-Guattari

perspective. Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers.

Masny, D. (2016). Problematizing qualitative research: Reading a data assemblage with rhizoanalysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(8), 666-675.

Noddings, N. (2010). *The maternal factor: Two paths to morality*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.

Rajchman, J. (2000). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Sameshima, P. & Irwin, R. (2008). Rendering dimensions of a liminal currere. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 5(2). Retrieved from:
<https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/tci/article/view/28>

Semetsky, I. (2003). The problematics of human subjectivity: Gilles Deleuze and the Deweyan legacy. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22(3-4), 211-225.

Semetsky, I. (2010). Forward. In *Stitching Identities: Kathryn Grushka and Clare Skates* (pp. 1-2). Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW, Australia.

Stafford, B. (2011). Crystal and smoke. In B. Stafford (Ed.), *A field guide to a new meta-field: Bridging the humanities-neuroscience divide* (pp. 1-63). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

ENDNOTES

¹ Inna Semetsky: <https://columbia.academia.edu/InnaSemetsky>.