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By Sophie Norris ————— MDes



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— Abstract

'Furnishing a Narrative' is a contribution to the philosophy of furniture. The research employs a materially developed approach to philosophical exploration articulated in a particularly poetic guise. The philosophical texts of Gaston Bachelard are physically manifested in the form of 1:1 material makings, with Bachelard's 'Nests' providing (or furnishing) the theoretical underpinning for this project, the first thread in binding its structure. As key concepts, 'inhabitation', 'furnishing', 'trace' and 'memory' are reflected upon collectively to construct an interrogation of the interior. These concepts speak to the phenomenology of the home, commenting on presence and absence, or rather presence in absence.

— Introduction

Situated within spatial design, this research project explores philosophy through a materially developed approach. The outcome of this research intends to contribute new knowledge around the philosophy of furniture, articulated in a particularly poetic guise. The philosophical writing of Gaston Bachelard is brought to function in the form of 1:1 material makings, furnishing a physical manifestation of his texts. Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* provided the theoretical underpinning for this project, the first thread in binding its structure.

Poetics of Space is a unique analysis of the intimate spaces of inhabitation, embodying a phenomenological perspective. Bachelard poetically examines the spatial interior of various 'dwellings'. This research project examines the relationship between the 'nest' and the notion of 'dwelling' as established in Gaston Bachelard's text *Poetics of Space*, with the project's material manifestation residing most intimately to Bachelard's chapter entitled *Nests*. In *Nests* Bachelard continues his collection of metaphors, he writes: "A nest, like any other image of rest and quite, is immediately associated with the image of a simple house".¹ Bachelard establishes the house in previous chapters to be a "metaphor of humanness".²

Within the following chapters of this exegesis a proposition regarding the trace of inhabitation with respect to Bachelard's text, around the notion of 'nesting' and 'dwelling' takes its place within a spatial design context. Key concepts construct the following interrogation of the interior. The exegesis chapters entitled *Inhabitation*, *Furnishing*, *Trace* and *Memory* are reflected upon throughout collectively speaking to the phenomenology of the home, commenting on presence and absence, or rather *Presence in Absence*. The notion of trace and

1. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 98.

2. *Ibid.*, vii.

its emotional validity in expressing presence in absence through the means of a poetic inhabitation forms the basis and backbone of the following textual and visual explorations. Many theorists, artists, and architects across various disciplines are acknowledged with respect to the areas of enquiry residing within this research project. The chapters here after refine these bits and pieces that weave this narrative together.

The project title *Furnishing A Narrative* references both the theoretical underpinning and the materiality of the work. A specific materiality resulted from the desire to reference bodily memory, which employs the use of the metaphor (an approach Bachelard is famous for within his phenomenological texts) to reference the human body. Here, woolen fleece and traditional upholstery material such as hessian fabric represents human hair, whilst timber exists as a metaphor for skin and bone. It is then, no coincidence that the furniture chosen to poetically construct the narrative within this research project are the architectural elements that most intimately “serve our bodies”.³ These objects and materials exist as a vocabulary consistent throughout the narrative of this research project.

Throughout this Master of Design project, I found myself engaging in a similar process to that of my Bachelor of Design Honours spatial design project, which explored and communicated the theoretical underpinnings of my work through the use of 1:1 furniture pieces. Second hand furniture was employed again here, metamorphosed during the making process to explore the underlining concepts of this research project. This project progressed using a process of “body by analogy”,⁴ which employed objects found within a domestic setting to depict human presence, augmented by a specific materiality. In the essay *A house is Not a Home: The sculpture of Rachel Whiteread*, Lisa

3. Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design*, 80.

4. Dennison, “A House is Not a Home: The sculpture of Rachel Whiteread,” 31.

Dennison articulates the symbolic function of objects used in the work of Joseph Beuys and comparatively that of Rachel Whiteread, expressing Beuys's process of "extending the metaphorical possibilities through the sculptural additions of materials, such as felt and fat . . .".⁵ This exegesis continually lands on the artistic practice of Rachel Whiteread providing a place of comparison between her sculptural makings and those within this research project. This can also be said for the artistic practices of Ann Hamilton and Doris Salcedo who are both referenced throughout.

Each making within this research began from a didactic intention, with a narrative in mind, in which, the making process was a means to communicate. Judy Nesbitt's essay *On Entering 'Mneme'* documents the installation made by artist Ann Hamilton, while discussing Hamilton's artistic approach evident in her wider installation work, Nesbitt writes, "Her [Hamilton] installations have a sequential structure, unfolding in time as does a narrative, sometimes with density and complexity, latterly within a more tightly contained structure, like a poem, concentrated and spare".⁶ It is important to acknowledge that the following research project posits itself on the process of doing rather than making. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa's book: *Encounters: Architectural Essays* considers architecture from a diverse range of perspectives, including a phenomenological approach, Pallasmaa states, "... architecture is a means of philosophizing through the embodied act of constructing".⁷

The action of 'doing' that has been imperative throughout this research project exhibited likeness to the processes of performative work. Here after the project was indivertibly recognised for resembling performance

5. Ibid, 32.

6. Nesbitt, "On Entering Mneme," 35.

7. Pallasmaa, *Encounters: Architectural essays*, 173.

theory and practice, both, intervening into the discipline of spatial design. This realisation of a performative aspect reflected within the project became acknowledged alongside the influence of other disciplines particularly within the fine arts, such as painting, specifically still life theory. These disciplines are evidenced in a hybrid and final cumulative performance. Photographic documentation of the performative work has been taken in abundance from beginning till end. Images are nested within, assembled into their befitting place, each uncovering a visual narrative. Both works can be collapsed into a number of conversations that collectively, express the work in its entirety. These images do not mean to exist as representation but rather provide a mode of poetic enquiry following the activity that preceded or exists within each shot, a significantly edited selection of the hundreds recorded furnish the pages within the visual narratives that accompany this textual based document.

Though this exegesis operates on the premise that it does not attempt to re-represent the events leading up to its completion, the visual and textual imagery means to enable the objects and their remains to be transported from their "physical site to the locations in the imagination".⁸ These pages therefore exist as an aide-memoire to the physical work, reconstructing trace to be remembered or imagined, capturing presence in absence. What follows should be treated as a predominately poetic document rather than one of academic or analytical nature. The following chapters exist between analysis and "poetic contemplation",⁹ all the while returning to the oneiric quality of Gaston Bachelard's texts.

8. Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 1.

9. Wakefield, "Ann Hamilton: *Between Words and Things*," 11.

— Gaston Bachelard *Poetics of Space*

This research project pays homage to Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, evidenced within these documents in the form of a visual footnote, or perhaps acknowledged as his missing chapter, it is therefore important to first and foremost introduce Bachelard to the reader. Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* guides its reader through poetic contemplations predominately regarding the interior, an interior spoken to in each of his 10 chapters, discussing the likes of *Nests* to that of *Drawers, Chests, and Wardrobes*. Each of these chapters can be bought back to the image of the home, "the house serves Bachelard as the portal to metaphors of the imagination".¹⁰ The home is examined within *Poetics of Space* as a place of intimacy and the location of memory. Within Bachelard's writing the concept of what one means to dwell takes on an "enhanced and enchanted significance".¹¹ My own narration exists in a journey alongside Bachelard's thoughts, through which it means to arrive at its end having contributed new thoughts towards 'dwelling' within the context of the spatial interior, communicated through a poetic guise, analogous to that of Bachelard.

10. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, vii.

11. *Ibid.*, x.

— Inhabitation *Dwelling*

The act of occupation itself is dwelling. Philosopher Martin Heidegger's texts on 'dwelling' are acknowledged to accompany the writing of Bachelard within this research project. The significance of Heidegger's theories to this project lies in his conception that "to dwell and to build and inextricably interlinked".¹² Pavlos Lefas introduces readers to Heidegger's theories, examined with particular reference to his text *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1971). Lefas asserts, quoting Heidegger: "For building is not merely a means and a way towards dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell".¹³ This project frames itself within a poetic approach to 'dwelling', attained through the occupation between furniture and body, evidenced in the trace of inhabitation. The notion of dwelling is materially manifested in this research throughout a process of doing. This 'doing' exists during the poetic furnishing of domestic furniture, a furnishing that adopts a conceptual take on upholstery.

The items of furniture within this research project are acknowledged to exist in their own right as 'dwellings', a view established in recognition of furniture's intimate relationship to the body, an intimacy that has been drawn upon throughout my practice as a spatial designer in previous years. It was in reading a text by Bernard Cache that I recall this intimate relationship between furniture and bodies within an architectural context becoming instilled into my spatial practice. Within his text *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territory*, Cache considers furniture not only as "the interior replication of architecture . . . but also that immediate environment in which our bodies act and react, for us, urban animals, furniture is thus our primary territory".¹⁴ Within this research project Cache's assertion of furniture being 'our

12. Lefas, *Dwelling and Architecture: From Heidegger to Koolhaas*, 10.

13. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 146.

14. Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territory*, 30.

primary territory' I have related back to Bachelard's *Nests*, in which he writes: "... the entire tree, for a bird, is the vestibule of the nest ... for a bird a tree is already its refuge".¹⁵ Within this project I acknowledge the furniture to be the nesting territory of the body, a means towards dwelling.

Architect Juhani Pallasmaa is relevant to this research regarding his notion of the significance of the senses within the realm of architecture. However here I acknowledge his essay *Petrified Silence* in which he discusses the sculptural work of artist Rachel Whiteread. The artistic practice of Whiteread provides a place of comparison between her sculptural works and the material makings within this research project. Pallasmaa expresses the human body to be "the unifying measure of all of Whiteread's pieces".¹⁶ Whiteread is predominately recognised for her casts of the negative space of architectural elements such as the door, chair, bed and staircase. Pallasmaa acknowledges that these are the objects "we confront most directly with our bodies", and elaborates further "... the bed addresses the skin, the chair reflects the body postures, ... whereas the room speaks of the act of inhabitation".¹⁷ The evidence of inhabitation within this research project not only manifests itself within the materiality of the furniture, but also on the surface of the black cloth, that the furniture is perched upon. The composition of the black cloth was merely a means to document traces left behind during the body's occupation of the furniture. However, I soon acknowledged it to exist as a spatial metaphor for the bedroom floor and fore-grounded the black cloth as the architectural framework and the predominant area of commentary in relation to dwelling.

Otto Friedrich Bollnow studied philosophy alongside Martin Heidegger, his book *Human Space* translated by Joseph Kohlmaier, is concerned with 'dwelling' as

15. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 96.

16. Pallasmaa, "Petrified Silence," 27.

17. *Ibid.*, 27.

are those of Heidegger. His methodology, like that of Heidegger, is referenced within this research project. Bollnow's methodology like that of Bachelard relates to the phenomenology of architecture. Within *Human Space* Bollnow expresses what he believes it means to 'dwell', stating: "the room must . . . show that it is lived in, and this means that certain signs of life . . . should be recognisable in it", he continues, "Thus the dwelling becomes the expression of the individual who dwells in it, a piece of this individual which has become a space".¹⁸ Bollnow explains that " . . . the true dwelling is not artificially created, but gradually grows and takes part in reliable security of slow growth".¹⁹ The material manifestation of this research

*"The interior replication of architecture
.... but also that immediate environment
in which our bodies act and react, for
us, urban animals, furniture is thus our
primary territory."*

project, too, takes part in a gradual narration, evidenced through signs of inhabitation.

Art historian and critic Norman Bryson's book *Looking at the Overlooked: Four essays on still life painting*, found its way into this research project after seeing a compositional comparison within particular still life paintings. I found Bryson's chapter entitled *Rhopography* to be relative to the reading of this research project, in particular its analysis of Francisco de Zurbarán's paintings. Bryson describes Zurbarán's subject matter to engage with the "sense of touch and the action of hands upon matter".²⁰ Bryson continues, "Zurbarán first creates a scene which greatly

18. Bollnow, *Human Space*, 144 - 145.

19. *Ibid.*, 145.

20. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, 71.

*"What binds the space is gesture,
the habitual movements . . . "*

depends on ideas of touch and the memory of hands".²¹ The material manifestation of this project is also dependant on the evidencing of a human interaction through the means of touch. Here the entire body assists in this narration, a narration that can be likened to Bachelard's description of the bird and its construction of the nest, Bachelard writes: " . . . the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side, that it succeeds in forming this circle".²² This project evolves through a similar mode of construction, repetitive actions between the body and the furniture results in a material evidence of inhabitation, in this way the materials narrate the gestures that have gone before them.

Zurbaran's subject matter engages with artefacts that come into contact with the human body such as knives and plates analogous to the objects within this research project, that of the chair and bed, which undoubtedly reflect a human interaction. However Zurbaran's subject matter which symbolises a sense of human touch is soon dismissed through the use of light to flood the scene and thus "separates visual from tactile form, and offers the eye – alone - a spectacle".²³ Therefore to liken Zurbaran's still life work to that of this research project would eradicate the gestural presence this composition means to instill, where the evidence of touch is required to pronounce the presence of inhabitation. This removal of a sense of bodily interaction can also be recognised within Zurbaran's "calculated composition" that eliminates a "re-organisation of the subject matter".²⁴

21. Ibid., 76.

22. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 101.

23. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, 76.

24. Ibid., 91.

Comparatively still life painter Jean Baptise Simeon Chardin abandons this 'staging of the scene', Bryson states: "He [Chardin] shows no sign of wanting to tighten up or loosen the scene".²⁵ Bryson examines this 'anti-theatricality' citing Michael Fried's discussion in *Absorption and Theatricality*.²⁶ Fried writes: "He [Chardin] seems to want not want to disturb the world or to re-organise it before the spectator, as though to do so would be to keep the viewer at arms length and to push the viewer out from the scene, when what is valued is exactly the way the scene welcomes the viewer in without ceremony, to take things just as they are found".²⁷ Although the final performative work within the research project did begin with a 'staging of the scene' with the furniture placed in "accordance to their domestic function",²⁸ the actions of inhabitation that followed attempted to abandon this staged approach.

The final performative work of this Master of Design project follows the orchestrated placement of the furniture upon the black cloth. The bed head is situated against the cloths edge as if to represent being up against an internal wall, while an area to accommodate the movement of the body is accounted for on either side. The rocking chair is placed in the opposite corner, but is relocated continually throughout the work reflecting it's embedded mobility. However, this consciousness of composition became diverted as the process of inhabitation unfolded, valuing instead the nature of the material to fall where it may "to take things just as they are found".²⁹ Bryson speaks to this aspect of Chardin's still life paintings in saying "What binds the space is gesture, the habitual movements . . .".³⁰ Bryson's

25. Ibid., 91.

26. Fried, "Absorption and Theatricality", p 11 - 17.

27. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, 91.

28. Ibid., 82.

29. Ibid., 91.

30. Ibid., 93.

comment embraces the very quality this work means to instill, an image of bodily presence evidenced amongst the gestural trace of a poetic inhabitation.

In Bollnow's chapters preceding and in those that follow his commentary on Chardin's work he articulates 'nearness' to be the 'principal spatial value' of still life painting, a 'proximal space' established through gesture.³¹ Bryson's chapter entitled *Abundance* elaborates on the tactile presence of these gestural paintings, writing: "Still life is concerned with the issue of tactility because it is the hand and not only the eye which organizes its space, and the touch of hands in the everyday gestures of eating and drinking which confers upon its objects their human warmth and resonance".³² It is through the gestural 'doing' embedded in the inhabitation of this research project that builds the emotional validity in relation to bodily memory.

31. Ibid., 70

32. Ibid., 128

— Furnishing *Upholstering*

'Nesting' In the course of developing this project, the bird's nest became a powerful metaphor for expressing inhabitation, and the construction and assemblage that takes place within this work.

Bachelard's chapter entitled *Nests* makes continual reference to Jules Michelet's essay *Bird Architecture*, Bachelard quotes Michelet: "a bird's tool is its own body, its breast, with which it presses and tightens its materials until they have become absolutely pliant, well-blended and adapted to the general plan", Bachelard continues, "Michelet suggests a house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically".³³ Pallasmaa references the 'nest' under a similar light in describing the primitive man and the use of his body for constructing buildings, explaining that, "The builders of traditional societies shaped their buildings with their own bodies in the same way that a bird molds its nest by its body".³⁴ Architect Sarah Robinson's book *Nesting: Body Dwelling Mind* was discovered in the later stage of this research project, Robinson's text, like that of my own, expresses particular tribute to Bachelard. Robinson reiterates Bachelard's notion of the nest in relation to dwelling, saying: "The bird and her nest offer a potent metaphor, and like all rich metaphors its multilayered meaning unravels through time", Robinson articulates a physical dialogue between the nest and the bird that inhabits it, describing the bird's nest as 'boundary . . . interior'.³⁵

Gathering some knowledge around the construction of a bird's nests enabled a clearer understanding regarding what is being transferred in the metaphors

33. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 101.

34. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 34.

35. Robinson, *Nesting: body, dwelling, mind*, 18.

within this research project. Likened to that of a bird and its construction of the nest, a responsive conversation takes place between my body and the materiality of the furniture during its upholstery. Furnishing the space, and therefore, the works meaning occurs in the "cumulative gestures performed during the preparatory labour"³⁶ of the narration. The furniture's evolving form during the 'upholstering' indicates that a nesting of the body has occurred, reflected in the binding of materials. To look back on this image of the upholstered interior attained through a dependant dialogue between body and furniture, would be to conjure up the narration of the inhabitation that has come to pass, an image embedded with memory.

The accumulation of material gestures within this research project is acknowledged to uncover similar handmade processes to those established within the context of craft in contemporary art, a subject discussed in Paula Owen's essay *Fabrication and Encounter*. Owen states: "In the self-conscious acts of touching, marking, assembling, repeating, stitching or mediating, the mind and body are interiorized".³⁷ Within this project each of these bodily actions are adhered to during the upholstery of the furniture, a construction of the image of inhabitation, an image likened to that of a bird's nest.

While Owen's essay concentrates on Nicolas Bourriaud's theories regarding spectator participation, it also reflects on a process of fabrication in which "the content is not wholly fixed but occurs – at least in large part – during production".³⁸ Owen relates this to the term 'process art'³⁹ which she recognises to have four different modes of enquiry. The first mode Owen describes as "an aesthetic

36. Wakefield, "Ann Hamilton: Between Words and Things," 15.

37. Owen, "Fabrication and Encounter," 95.

38. Ibid., 94.

39. Ibid., 88.

discovery evident in the result",⁴⁰ while the second is interpreted as work dependant upon the aspect of time, evidenced in its evolution or disintegration. The fourth emerges from a "process of performing the work".⁴¹ This research project resembles a particular likeness to the third mode of enquiry expressed by Owen, in which, the process of fabrication is profoundly significant to the narrations intent. Owen states: "... the process of making and the material from which it is made may be crucial to the content and meaning of the work".⁴² In the makings within this research project meaning and content emerge during the act of inhabitation and "materials replete with associations".⁴³

In abandoning a normal structural/upholstery relationship the furniture within this research project is acknowledged for its poetic functionality, assisted by the material metaphors. The use of furniture and upholstery with a specific materiality was a means to reference the body's membranes. The timber structure of the furniture acts as a metaphor for bone whilst the soft furnishings reference hair and or skin. The upholstering process of the furniture is treated like a skin wrapping around the body beneath. Ellen Lupton's book explains: "Skin is a two-dimensional surface that wraps around the volumes of the body. Sometimes it is taut, clinging tightly to the musculature beneath, and sometimes it is slack hanging loose in folds".⁴⁴ The upholstering of the furniture and subsequently the furnishing of the space is a process intended to poetically reflect the shedding of human skin. Although this shedding that occurs during the inhabitation is instead re-established as a poetic accumulation of bodily memory.

40. Ibid., 89.

41. Ibid., 89.

42. Ibid., 89.

43. Ibid., 89.

44. Lupton, *Skin: Surface, Substance and Design*, 208.

Juhani Pallasmaa's essay *An Architecture of the Seven Senses* recognises "a strong identity between the skin and the sensation of home" proclaiming that, "home and skin turn into a single sensation".⁴⁵ Within this research project furniture transcends its utilitarian purpose, with a poetic

"The pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as upon objects. Although the hand is paramount, the entire surface of the body is touch's instrument".

approach to upholstery exposing another dimension of our humanity. The process of upholstering was drawn upon within this research project in consideration of its tactile nature and soft furnishing a fundamental aspect evidenced in nest construction. The construction process embedded in Ann Hamilton's installation work, in which, "nothing escapes the human hand",⁴⁶ can be likened to the action of accumulation evident in a bird's nesting habits. Wakefield comments on Hamilton's process within her artistic practice: "Preceding and written into our experience of the work is an ecology of labour, manifest and resonant in the surfaces themselves . . . The tasks involved are often compulsive and repetitive".⁴⁷ Susan Stewart explains, "The pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as upon objects. Although the hand is paramount, the entire surface of the body is touch's instrument".⁴⁸

45. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 33.

46. Wakefield, "Ann Hamilton: Between Words and Things," 16.

47. *Ibid.*, 16.

48. Stewart, *Ann Hamilton: Tropos*, 31.

— Trace

The narrative embodying this research project is not found - it takes place and is left behind. Witnessing of bodily trace begins during the upholstering of the furniture, in which, inhabitation is evidenced in the materiality, echoing the body that inhabits its surfaces. The materiality of fleece means it is subject to leaving its trace on the body and the body leaving its trace on it. Beneath the furniture, lies a black cloth, revealing a mapping of traces, accumulating the material remains of this physical inhabitation. The ground, then, became symbolic as the surface where the narration explicitly takes place. The floor speaks of being grounded, literally grounding the narration of what comes to pass upon its surface. The material properties of the black cloth allows for an orchestrating of traces left behind, providing a degree of control over the visibility and permanent positioning of this trace. Here the floor is meticulously handled as the primary stage of traces, the furniture represents that found in a generalised domestic dwelling, furniture usually found enclosed by floors, walls, ceiling, and opening's. However here the components of such a structural framework are pushed to the side, out of the scene or view of concern, or rather, the floor is dragged to the centre, becoming a stage as such, upon which the narrative of trace takes its place.

The unfolding materialisation of trace within this research project imparts a sense that the inhabitation of "life is taking place before our eyes".⁴⁹ Architectural theorist Rachel Whiteread became attached to this project as a place of comparison concerning the notion of trace. Within the essay entitled: *I Dreamt I Was a Wall*, Beatriz Colomina comments on the significance of trace within Whiteread's artistic practice. Colomina states: "She [Whiteread] works with traces, patiently studying, recording, and eventually monumentalizing

49. Sidlauskas, *Body, Pace, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, 105.

them”.⁵⁰ Colomina’s account of this aspect of trace within Whiteread’s work can be likened to that evident in South American sculptor Doris Salcedo’s artistic practice. Nancy Princenthal a contributing author to the book *Doris Salcedo* reviews the sculptural work of Salcedo and its evidence of the notion of trace. Princenthal writes: “Salcedo’s calcified furniture makes a literal tactile trace”.⁵¹ If, both Rachel Whiteread and Doris Salcedo’s sculptural work is recognised for its role in literally concretising trace into a “incontrovertible physical memory”⁵² becoming images of absolute immobility, my own makings within this research project otherwise resemble trace through an unfolding dialogue, in which the story remains continual. While Whiteread’s makings hunt for a trace that already exists, this research project attempts to reflect a trace that takes place throughout the act of inhabitation during a process of accumulation. Both processes however result in trace being exposed upon a surface. In this project the black cloth acts as a repository for trace.

The visualisation of trace exposed throughout the act of inhabitation within this research project is imperative in conjuring up a visual narration of ‘dwelling’. The imagery of trace within the domestic interior is examined within Susan Sidlauskas’s book *Body, Place, and self in Nineteenth Century Painting*. Sidlauskas discusses the strategy of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie’s “need to leave material traces of their presence on their intimate environment”.⁵³ Sidlauskas substantiates this observation in reference to Walter Benjamin, who inferred, “to dwell is to leave traces . . . In the interior these are emphasised. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases

50. Colomina, “I dreamt I Was a Wall,” 71.

51. Princenthal, “Silence Seen,” 77.

52. Ibid., 77.

53. Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, 4.

is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their traces on the interior".⁵⁴ Benjamin's account of the evidence of trace within the interior can be referred back to the writing of Bollnow, who recognises the positive value of 'traces of wear' within the context of dwelling, stating: "... gradual building is an expression of a life story; every object in it is a reminder of something".⁵⁵

Benjamin's account of what one means to 'dwell' reflects a similar approach to that of Martin Heidegger. Pavlos Lefas's examines Heidegger's essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* in which Lefas reiterates Heidegger's notion of dwelling proclaiming "we dwell in an environment that bears the visible traces of our active presence".⁵⁶ These signs of active presence are uniquely recognised within Georges Perec's book *Species of Space and Other Pieces*. Perec offers contemplation towards the overlooked activities of our everyday lives and the locations in which these activities take place. Perec's text exists as a series of reflections towards these "infra-ordinary"⁵⁷ happenings. In discussing *The Uninhabitable* Perec writes, "Space is a doubt: I have to constantly mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it".⁵⁸ He then mediates in saying "My spaces are fragile; time is going to wear them away, to destroy them. Nothing will any longer resemble what was, my memories will betray me, oblivion will infiltrate my memory".⁵⁹ Perec relates this concept to his lifetime dedication to writing, stating, "To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive, to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as

"To dwell is to leave traces . . . In the interior these are emphasised. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their traces on the interior"

54. Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the nineteenth century," 74.

55. Bollnow, *Human Space*, 145.

56. Lefas, *Dwelling and Architecture: From Heidegger to Koolhaas*, 41.

57. Perec, *Species of Places and Other Pieces*, 91.

58. *Ibid.*, 91.

59. *Ibid.*, 91.

it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs".⁶⁰ The space of the black cloth within this research is an attempt for the work to survive, much like the blank pages upon which Perec writes. An area marked by the unfolding of traces.

In time, the space of the black cloth evolved into a mapping of its own making, writing another step of separation into the projects narrative. Removing the furniture from its perch upon the cloth allowed it to communicate the notion of trace on its own account. This final action reestablished the cloths protagonistic role, revealing the trace in its purest manner whilst relocating its spatial existence into a memorialised context. This final condition allowed the black cloth to exist as a "silent witness to the fleetingness of existence".⁶¹ The bird's eye images photographically acknowledge the floor surface as the primary concern of the trace, likened to that of discovering a bird's nest, these images are found to hold a visual narrative of the inhabitation that took place within, or rather upon, its surface. The removal of the furniture but the remains of material activity indicates "the trace of what was",⁶² the scene now speaks of someone who was there, but is no longer and vacates the likelihood of return. This image resonates with that of an abandoned bird's nest, conjuring up the intimate experience of discovering such a home, within which the signs of inhabitation are no longer, an encounter that sets forth a mode of enquiry into what bird may have been there, when, and why, accommodating an interrogation of the interior. Bachelard expresses such an interrogation in relation to the nest, writing: "Indeed, the nest we pluck from the hedge like a dead flower, is nothing but a "thing". I have the right to take it in my hands and pull it apart".⁶³

60. Ibid., 91.

61. <http://www.museomadre.it>

62. Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art*, 40.

63. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 94.

— Presence in Absence

The physical manifestation of this research project lies in the evidence of inhabitation. Bodily traces of furnishing our domestic interior are conceptually materialised. Behind the trace lies a poetic reflection of presence in absence. It was evident the body continued to be alluded to within this research project, despite remaining physically absent in its documentation, a framework that now needed to be questioned and answered. The answer was revealed through acknowledging the absence of the actual performance but the presence of the implied performance, expressing itself through the gestures of bodily existence. Once again the project can be reflected back on the Artistic practice of Whiteread. Within her book *Losing Site* Sally Horstein recognises Whiteread's artistic work to be empty of the inhabitant, "...we are left only with our own imagination and empty spaces. Almost desperately, we try to somehow create or re-create a fiction or daily life to fill the void".⁶⁴ Acknowledged under a similar light this research project cues its discoverer to sense the gestures gone before them between the absent body and the abandoned furniture, a conversation that unravels amongst the material traces.

Photography has been employed to document this research project through the means of the inhabitant remaining behind the lens, leaving the evidence of bodily existence amongst the traces of inhabitation left behind. The photographs where the furniture is still present promise something - they don't just document what is, but express the potential for something more to take place. Yet the photograph fails to possess the intimate relationship between the body and the object that exists during the performance and amongst the physical manifestation of the work. There is a distancing inherent in the photographic

⁶⁴. Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 11.

"A silent monument to its own existence"

process: the camera is set at a certain distance in order to take a photo that shows the space in its entirety. Within this narrative the photograph fails to hold a memory in the same way the physical materials do through their relationship with the body. When the furniture within this research project becomes removed from the black cloth it reestablishes the reading as "a silent monument to its own existence",⁶⁵ while "...the photographs counter the projects accelerated logic of evanescence, arresting and recording".⁶⁶ This speaks alternatively to Walter Benjamin's various texts around memory and loss. Benjamin's writing speaks of a lament, in which when somebody leaves a place that memory is a sort of nostalgic housing, it does not catalyze the next thing to happen, which is already happening because they left.

The aspect of an active presence with this research project can be associated back to the architectural theories of Pallasmaa. Pallasmaa describes the notion of 'action' in architecture and the 'promise' that is embedded in this 'action', stating: "There is an inherent suggestion of action in images of architecture, the moment of active encounter or a promise of use and purpose".⁶⁷ This notion of the potential re-presencing of the body within this research project can then be referred back to Bryson's writing on the subject of still life painting, in which he writes: "Removal of the human body is the founding move of still life, but this foundation would be precarious if all that were needed to destroy it were the body's physical return: the disappearance of the human subject might represent only a provisional state of affairs if the body is just around the corner, and likely to re-enter the field of vision at any moment".⁶⁸ This potential of the body's return within this research project is eradicated through the removal of the

65. Schneider, "Constructing the Ephemeral," 9.

66. Trotman, 126.

67. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 35.

68. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, 60.

furniture from upon its perch. Likened to that of discovering an abandoned nest the viewer now knows not to anticipate the occupants' physical return, rather its presence remains in the form of traces of inhabitation.

However whilst the furniture remains upon its perch the narration of a physical inhabitation continues to be told. This connection between furniture and its indication of a bodily presence is acknowledged in the writing of various theorists in the context of architecture and the interior. Princenthal aptly accounts for furniture's frequent role within recent art in association with its "bifurcated significance".⁶⁹ Princenthal writes, "It both stands for the absence of the body, by so clearly indicating a place where it might be (but isn't) and at the same time anthropomorphically represents that missing body, particularly in the case of chairs (with their backs, seats, and feet) and beds (head and footboards)".⁷⁰ Salcedo's sculptural works exemplify this condition expressed through the furniture's materiality, "the furniture seems most indicative of absence when it is most literally flesh-like, that is, when its figurative skin and bones are most exposed, vulnerable and frail".⁷¹ Stanley Abercrombie's book *A philosophy of Interior Design* advocates the context of the interior within architectural discourse. Abercrombie dedicates a chapter to the subject of furniture within the interior in which he not only speaks to the relationship of furniture pieces to one another, but also the intimate relationship between furniture and its inhabitants. Abercrombie makes reference to Author Mario Praz, citing a 1981 interview in *Abitare Magazine* in which Praz states, "... The living space becomes a kind of museum of the soul where the occupant sees himself reflected and ever re-reads what has been. And a good

69. Princenthal, "Silence Seen," 77.

70. Ibid., 77.

71. Ibid., 77.

"The living space becomes a kind of museum of the soul where the occupant sees himself reflected and ever re-reads what has been. And a good deal of furniture is a plaster cast of the body, the body's receptacle . . . "

deal of furniture is a plaster cast of the body, the body's receptacle . . . ".⁷²

The bodily connotations embedded in this research project's materiality stands (or rather falls) as a metaphor for the perishability of human existence. The material shedding that occurs during the inhabitation of furnishing the work is a poetic construct for the shedding of skin and or hair throughout life. Many theorists across various disciplines have acknowledged a connection between hair and memory. This content is readily evident in Marina Warner's essay *Shearings*, which discusses an installation work of Ann Hamilton. Within the work entitled *Tropos* Hamilton has "woven a carpet out of horse hair".⁷³ Warner describes Hamilton's use of hair within the work as a means to conjure up associations between memory and loss. Warner writes, "For hair, more precisely, betokens parting not death, and within the concept of parting, the hope of a permanent bond, a pact that even death cannot sever. The rituals that appear to be confronting loss deal in a language of presence and possession, too, when they bring hair, in all its material substance, into play", Warner continues "Hair keeps the most intimate record . . . ".⁷⁴ Another connection acknowledged in Hamilton's work is that of skin and trace. Mario Codognato gives credit to this connection in reading Hamilton's work through its material detail. In recounting Whiteread's 1994/95 work *Untitled (Floor)* in which the negative of an original floor is cast in synthetic resin, Mario Codognato articulates this connection, ". . . these proofs of wear and tear of time which spectrally emerge like abrasions on the skin, showing the surface to be something tangible and sensitive. The transience and frailty of the human being are voiced in the erosion created by our

72. Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design*, 78.

73. Warner, *Ann Hamilton: Tropos*, 89.

74. *Ibid.*, 97.

transit, and by the traces we leave on matter".⁷⁵

The connection between hair, skin and trace is constructed through the use of metaphor within this research project. Although this trace exists in a shedding of sorts during the upholstering and subsequent inhabitation of the interior, it is the accumulation rather than the desquamation of this trace that signifies the notion of presence in absence. Following the removal of the furniture from upon the black cloth another reading of presence in absence takes place, leaving only the trace of their previous existence remaining. This final act of removing the furniture from upon its perch, re established the narration of this research project from a sculptural to a pictorial reading. In doing so, the black cloth becomes linked to another dialogue of presence in absence, re-established for a two-dimensional reading analogous to the project's photographic representation.

The project's narration becoming reworked into a photographic context is befitting to photography's association with death. Art critic Nancy Princenthal is of relevance here in regards to her account of French structuralist Roland Barthe's study of photography. Princenthal quotes, "The photograph represents the very subtle moment when . . . I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object . . .".⁷⁶ Princenthal's reference to Barthe's is made relevant in her account of Salcedo's work entitled *Atrabiliarios* in which Princenthal acknowledges this subject-object relationship. Princenthal states, ". . . the death of the subject is prefigured not only in every innocent snapshot, but even in the act of composing oneself for the camera", continuing with a quote from Barthes' in which he

75. Codognato, "The World is the Totality of Facts, Not of Things," 38.

76. Princenthal, "Silence Seen," 50.

states: "photography is a kind of primitive theatre".⁷⁷ This theatricality Barthe's speaks to could not be freely detached from the image of inhabitation constructed within this research project. Such as the moment between each brush stroke of still life paintings, the moment behind the camera lens allows for a "self-reflexive attention of the scene".⁷⁸

This theatrical vocabulary also emerged within the narrative in association to the black cloths reading as a stage. The cloths placement, drawn away from the existing architecture dissociates itself from the walls, constructing its presence as a stage. However this initial act was as an attempt to nullify the spatial setting of the work, for the furniture to exist separately within their architectural surrounds, and in doing so, becoming the elements that act to signify and give meaning to the work. The small but nonetheless significant gesture in displacing the black cloth from the edge of the white wall not only provided disengagement to the architectural surrounds, but allowed the spectator a literally grounded reading of the work, approached from a undetermined perspective. The materiality and blackness of the cloth bound an area to be traversed by the gaze.

77. Ibid., 60.

78. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, 82.

— Memory

The rigorous materialisation process of inhabitation occurring throughout this research project established a conversational experience between the furniture and the body, associative and responsive in nature. The furniture pieces become a material exploration of memory, evidenced through their evolution and erosion. For the most part of this project I regarded the length of time spent with the furniture objects to be a dependant factor in articulating the intimacy between object and body. This object-body relationship is acknowledged in Ned Holte's introductory essay *Getting to know you*, in which he outlines the practice of designer and furniture maker Roy McMakin. McMakin's furniture pieces, existing between art and design, express a dialogue between the object and the body. Holte articulates, "Objects are made meaningful when they are encountered by and used by bodies, over time. Meaning is transitory, ambulatory; it passes through and sometimes takes a seat"⁷⁹. Holte illustrates this object – body relation further, writing, "Getting to know a piece of furniture is like getting to know a body. Just as one remembers the eccentric grain pattern of a desk or dresser, the well-worn arms of a favourite chair, or the slightly sagging seat marking the preferred position on the old family sofa, the specific physiological details of a loved one or a lover – facial features, bodily proportions, the color and texture of the skin, birthmarks, scars, subtle asymmetries – can linger and even haunt the memory"⁸⁰. Within this research project the body and its engagement with the furniture becomes condensed. McMakin's furniture practice is acknowledged in this research to exercise a similar take on materiality, in which, the surface of this furniture (as

79. Holte, "Getting to Know You," 68.

80. Ibid., 89.

well as the surface upon which it is perched), evokes a physical memory.

Owen is acknowledged again within this research in relation to her essay *Fabrication and Encounter* which asserts a "de-emphasis of the actual object in favour of the activity surrounding it"⁸¹ proclaiming, "The object links us to thoughts, memories, sensations, histories, and relationships rather than being an end in itself with a predetermined meaning. It is instead a catalyst for any number of unpredictable effects".⁸² These 'effects' are spoken to in relation to Whiteread's artistic practice within Eckhard Schneider's introductory essay *Constructing the Ephemeral*, in which Schneider writes, "The man-object relationship, is . . . determined by emotional temporal latency. In an interior space, a person is surrounded by and moves around between protective walls. The room seems like a second skin, which forms a cocoon with the intermediate space around him or her. At the same time, it stores the personal story and aura of the people who live in it and thus becomes their physical psychological memory".⁸³ Within the context of this research project spatial recognition exists in the use of the black cloth to establish the floor surface of a domestic interior.

Marius Kwint's introductory text *The Physical Past* privileges the "relatively under-researched history of the domestic interior", expressing it to be "the environment which memory tends most powerfully to reconstruct".⁸⁴ Nonetheless Pallasmaa regards the architectural interior within modern discourse to abandon memories potential through a predominant emphasis on sight over the other senses. In *The Eyes of the Skin*, Pallasmaa, concerned with visions emphasis over the other

81. Owen, "Fabrication and Encounter," 84.

82. Ibid., 84.

83. Schneider, "Constructing the Ephemeral," 8.

84. Kwint, "The Physical Past," 11.

senses, as being taught and conceived in architectural discourse, states “modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination

“Modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless”.

and dreams, homeless”.⁸⁵ Pallasmaa continues, “The architecture of our time is a psychologically empty visual composition, not meant to arouse us any associations, memories or feelings”.⁸⁶ Pallasmaa makes reference to Bachelard’s phenomenology of the house in validating the “psychologically oppressive”⁸⁷ nature of such modern architecture. Pallasmaa summarises: “Bachelard states that the house is both an analogy, as well as an actual extension, of human memory”.⁸⁸ Here, it would seem, Pallasmaa makes reference to the following exert from *Poetics of Space*: “Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are “housed.” Our soul is an abode. And by remembering “houses” and “rooms,” we learn to “abide” within ourselves”.⁸⁹

85. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 19.

86. *Ibid.*, 19.

87. *Ibid.*, 19.

88. *Ibid.*, 57.

89. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xxxvii.

— Conclusion

The previous textual and visual documents retrieve the memory of a Masters to be remembered or imagined. This research project has drawn upon a predominately philosophical theory base, existing as an exploration and homage to Gaston Bachelard's text *Poetics of Space*, whilst seeking to make my own contribution of thought regarding the notions of 'dwelling' and 'nesting'. My response to the Bachelard's phenomenological theories materialised through a conceptual observation of his chapter *Nests*, evolving into a material manifestation of a poetic interior reminiscent to that of a birds' nest. This connection has been explored through an emotive guise, referencing the bodys presence in absence. This project therefore presents an alternative view of the power of material trace to invoke the memory of a former act of inhabitation, throughout a process of physical and theoretical enquiry.

The textual aspect of this research project, like that of its visual explorations intended to be experienced for its conceptual and tactile nature. The previous chapters exist as a poetic conversation, in which other voices from various disciplines have been engaged in support of the structure of this research project. The theorists, artists, and architects mentioned throughout have provided places to land in connection to the projects narrative. Contemplation regarding the comments of these various people nurtured my understanding and reflection of this research project.

The visual narratives presented here provide the reader with the means to conjure up their own tale. The photographs within the visual narratives presented here do not privilege a scrutiny of this research project in the same manner as one would experience during its physical encounter. The photographs, however, become another trace in their own right, crafting and editing a specific story about dwelling, nesting, and presence in absence. Here

photographic sequences reassemble the impression of gestures gone before, recounting the narratives furnishing thread by thread.

My response to Bachelard's *Nests* progressed through the means of various material explorations using domestic furniture and upholstery fabrics. Here furniture was employed as a vestibule to the nest, while upholstery fabrics replete with material metaphors framed the furnishing of these objects in relevance to a bird's binding of materials during the construction of the nest. The functionality of the furniture is to satisfy solely as poetic objects, through which they "achieve a kind of independent object hood as sculptures"⁹⁰. The handcrafted nature of the making throughout this process assisted in *Furnishing the Narrative*, expressing the emotional and intimate aspect of this research project, evoking an alternative view on what it means to furnish our domestic environment. This research project is acknowledged to grapple with the performativity of furniture, whilst all the while trying to divert becoming a performance project.

The pages found in each of the documents before you have now become the landing site/sight of the physical work gone before. This research projects enquiry has been acknowledged since its outset a means to personally reflect on Bachelard's conception of the 'nest', through *Furnishing A Narrative* of my own. However it can be noted that a narrative typically consists of a beginning and an end, which would suggest, that following what has preceded I would have located myself at a final destination. However this research project also provides the avenue for a continuing journey.

90. Noble, "The Meaning of What Remains," 73.

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Furnishing a
Narrative: *Spoke*
Shaven Chair



By Sophie Norris ————— MDes



“
*When the golden eagle nests in a tree, it
sometimes makes an enormous pile of branches
to which every year it adds others, until one
day the entire thing falls to pieces under its
own weight.*”

– Arthur Landsborough Thompson, *Birds*, cited
in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*





































Furnishing a Narrative: *Rocking Chair & Bed*

By Sophie Norris ————— MDes





Furnishing a Narrative ————— Rocking Chair & Bed





























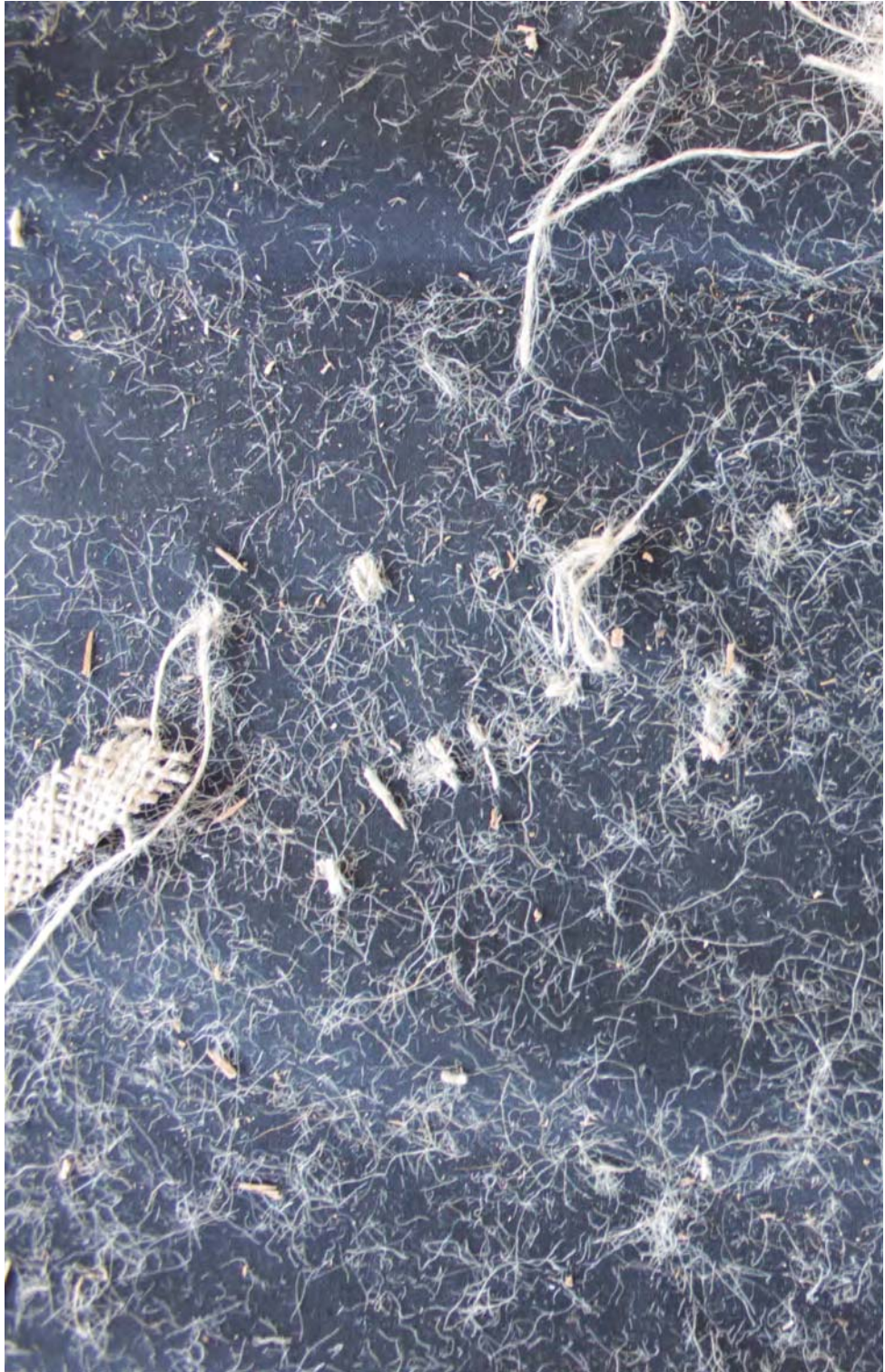






























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