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*“she touches herself in and of herself without any mediation”*. Irigaray, 1997:

a reflection on the silent knowledge of trauma.

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Time, space and labour frame the materiality of cloth. This materiality is more than the agglomeration of matter interacting with itself to form a whole. It is the physical conveyor of the memory of making, holding and wearing, and is capable of capturing a moment of emotion. In 2021, I wove Silence a series of six wall hangings which explore the small spaces in between things: interstices or what I experienced as moments of ‘quiet’ knowledge. Threads of fine silk and paper yarn move under/over in a tight/loose interlace. Their journey creates floats, unwoven sections quietly jumping over the original structure. Light, air, and silence passes through the transparent layers and recount the intimate, unknown proximity and emotional connection of human/material exchange.

Drawing on Irigaray's (1997) This Sex Which Is Not One, this paper explores the intangible space a thread creates at every crossing point, one that "touches (it)self without any mediation". My thinking is informed by Nora Bateson's theories of aphanipoeisis which ask "how do we let seeing change in unseen ways?" as well as Catherine Dormor's writings on a fold and its ability to simultaneously touch and be touched (itself and by itself).

Playing with transparency and opacity, *Silence* explores weaving beyond its visual and tactile aesthetics. Engaged with the embodied sense of trauma, the piece opens a critical dialogue around my practice. The 'silent' knowledge that weaving and trauma share interrogates unknown and unseen data. What is in the unseen? And in answering that question, what is being revealed? This paper explores and suggests that encoded emotions might live in the 'small spaces in between', spaces that reveal the silence of elusive traumatic memories passing through.

key words: silence, weaving, materiality, interstice, emotion, memory, trauma

Ingold explains the idea of in-betweenness as: “Where between is liminal, in-between is arterial; where between is intermediate, in-between is midstream. And the in-between is the realm of the life of lines” (Ingold, 2015). Lines, and threads form the skeleton of weaving. Neighbouring each other and interlacing at perpendicular angles, lines create holes which together, constitute the “realm of the life of lines”. In between two things, this space of emptiness carries more than it can tell. In light of Ingold’s reflection, ‘between’, supposes a linear and static division of two separate things, whereas it is flux and itinerant movement from one thing to another that depicts ‘in-between’. The interstice, a transitional stage, a place of passage, an ever-changing site of exchange asks, what is being exchanged? As a commodity, the emotional narrative of my story is being exchanged, an exchange occurring between me (the maker) and it (the cloth).

Interstices also reveal gaps or breaks in something continuous. Heavily influenced by Paul Klee’s words “an active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal”, Anni Albers writes “a weft thread moves alternatively over and under each warp thread it meets on its horizontal course from one side of the warp to the other; returning, it reverses the order and crosses over those threads under which it moved before and under those over which it crossed”. The weft’s journey is continuous, always in flux although creating ‘small space in between things’ at each crossing point. But the inevitability of these breakage might represent the silent knowledge trauma holds. Breaking up the continuity of life, trauma leaves gaps in the autobiographical memory of its carrier. Although ruptured, the line of life continues its journey diversion after diversion.

When I wove the piece, silence wasn't part of the experience. The mechanical noises of the loom in action, the sounds of the shuttle brushing against the warp and the tone of the reed caressing each thread all played in unison. What was muted was the voice of the story recounted, its meaning and significance to me, the maker. The language I used, refusing words, was in the repetitive action of my hands and gestures; the cloth I was weaving acted as a material portrayal of memories, a kinaesthetic archive of constant bodily repetition. Continuously shifting from closeness to farness, the exchange occurring in the spatial distance in-between maker and cloth goes beyond the human realm.

This space, a transparent area of exchange, reflects unseen knowledge. With my visible body movements and hand gestures I question: what is in the invisible space of passage? Although I believe that the moments of 'quiet' knowledge, these instances of experienced emotions, reside in the holes created by warp and weft interlace the cloth retains, they do not only reflect my (human) interaction with the material. They also encapsulate the emotional connection of a material/material dialogue. As such, closing this relational exchange to human/material interaction shadows another relationship. How does this distal/proximal relationship manifest itself within material? And can the emotional connection of human/material exchange occur in material/material exchange?

Above or under, side to side or criss-crossing, the dialogue between lines and here, threads is multidimensional. Threads, both matter and medium, act simultaneously as messengers and as

elements of the message. While language fails to deliver, they mediate and maintain the articulation of the story being told.

For centuries, textiles and text have shared not only a Latin root (*texere*) but also ways of expression. Sophocles' phrase "the voice of the shuttle" is depicted in the story of Philomena, who wove her rape into a tapestry because her attacker had cut off her tongue, preventing her from talking. Her voice was in her shuttle and her story was both mediated and carried by warp and weft. The proximity which maker and cloth share mirrors the material communication occurring in-between threads. That closeness and the liminal intimacy of such a relationship elicit the subtlety of material/material interaction. Here, the tacit knowledge of materials allows a cloth to behave in certain ways. In Barad's words, "matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers". When worn, held or looked at, cloth – and by extension matter – speaks louder than our own voices. This knowledge doesn't require words nor humans to express its state of being. Through folds, creases, crumples and wrinkles they broadcast our thoughts, feelings, memories and behaviours despite us being aware of it. In her reflection on creases, Ellen Sampson (2017) portrays them as traces of daily life, implying that creases act as containers of experiences. Although unintentional, they draw the act of wearing, holding, touching or sitting on a fabric. In much the same way, the scarring of trauma, those creases embedded in the skin, open and close as the story is being told. Indelibly marking their presence, scars mediate emotions and leave traces through which meaning can be altered. However, always in action and never quite standing still, folds, subtly imprint their passage before continuing their course. As such, silent and kept secret, passing

traumatic memories might manifest themselves in those moments of quiet knowledge. Loud in what they recount, quiet in their action.

Sampson herself differentiates creases from folds, the latter being the outcome of an intentional action and expresses that “creases are [...], the resultant trace of an action rather than its aim” (Sampson, 2017). I would argue that a crease is a form of fold, but the difference lies where folds might or might not create marks. The experience of folding might reflect “channels between visible and invisible realms” that “situates textiles as active mediators rather than as containers” (Golda, 2019, p.408). As mediators, holders and carriers, textiles allow materials to scaffold the memories and experiences of both the story to be told and the story of making. Despite textiles’ role of carrying meaning instead of containing it, they also act as vessels of remembrance, a gateway to connect inner and outer sensations.

In weaving, the interlacing of warp and weft inevitably creates an empty space. Although empty of matter, this site isn’t deprived of meaning. It contributes to the tactile and textural realm of cloth and lets the fabric breath, feel and sense. Loose or tight, tension only plays a role in reducing or increasing the size of that interstice. Even at the infinitesimal level, when a microscope is almost required to see it, this hole, an area of nothingness, exists. Barad (2012) writes beautifully about the absence of matter in her paper *What is the measure of nothingness?*

“Nothingness. The void. An absence of matter.

The blank page. Utter silence. No thing, no

thought, no awareness. Complete ontological

insensibility.” (ibid, date. p.2)

As I weave the map of my silent actions, creating void, holes and simultaneously a whole, I realise that without acknowledging the undeniable presence of empty space, wholeness cannot exist. As such, I consider *the unseen* as a site of exchange, that is a hole, an empty space that *reveals* wholeness.

In her study of aphanipoesis, Nora Bateson describes the concept as a coalescence of experience becoming unseen. For her, nothing is hidden but everything is unseen. Although we are aware of the unfolding of our experience, we do not see the merging of one into another. In the same way, trauma might have created a void, an area of emptiness, a rupture that stopped the thread of life carrying its course, but also reveals that unseen data might in fact carry the silent work and quiet knowledge of recovery. Nothingness and here, an interstice, might in fact be unseen matter. To use Victoria Mitchell’s word, ‘to textile’ is to entwine nothingness into the whole.

In her chapter *Folding*, Catherine Dormor (2020. p.14) reflects on warp and weft’s choreographic “process of exchange and change”. Etymologically, change and exchange share the Latin ‘cambiare’ (change) meaning ‘to barter’. This linguistic root implies a mediation that, here, at the intersection of warp and weft, negotiates the boundaries of the ‘space in between things’. The author continues by linking together process and meaning as “always present and always integral parts of the whole” (ibid. p.13). She compares the agency of a fold – able to simultaneously touch and be touched (itself and by itself) – to Luce Irigaray’s thinking on women’s genitalia that “are formed of two lips, continuously in contact” (Irigaray, 1997 cited in Dormor, 2020 p.13).

I consider that, occurring at the structural level, the intangible space a thread creates at every crossing point, one that *“touches (it)self without any mediation”* (Irigaray, 1997), is where the ‘silent’ knowledge of human/material and material/material interaction appears. The tactile dialogue in-between materials require no tool or mediation to both touch and be touched.

As “we touch things to assure ourselves of reality” (Albers p.44), we can wonder how a space deprived of matter can be part of a tangible reality. My reflection on ‘silent knowledge’, refers to the idea that silence is the unspoken story of trauma, implying that textiles speak a muted language. Matter touching matter or the act of creasing, folding, draping and so forth create sound with and without the help of a hand. Then, silence or the ‘quiet knowledge’ of my unspoken words might reside in the voice of material / material interaction.

Then again, the human tool, the hand, allows us to touch and be touched simultaneously, and encloses a universe of knowledge, experiences and memories. Classen accurately states “A world of meaning can lie within the simplest gestures, a kiss, or just the touch of a hand” (2012. p.xii).

Although the hand acts as a mediator between cloth and maker, its know-how can grasp more than we can comprehend. Leader (2016) metaphorically exposes the instrumentality of the hand by presenting it as a figure of knowledge: “the hand, symbol of human agency and ownership, is also a part of ourselves that escapes us” (Leader, 2016. p.4). As instruments and extensions of ourselves, hands act as translators. Translating thoughts into gestures, feelings into movements, the mechanical actions of our hands reflects the multidirectional trajectory of our actions, ones without rupture or interruptions.



The meaning of 'silent' or 'quiet' knowledge might go beyond the human realm. The absence of spoken words, elocution and verbal articulation is mapped in both the human/material and material/material interactions. Simultaneously transparent and opaque, *Silence* archives a multitude of interstices. With agency, they evoke the emotions my hands contain, emotions that both live in the 'small spaces in-between' threads and in the unseen space between human and cloth. These spaces and sites of exchange reveal the silence of elusive traumatic memories in making, holding and wearing, passing through.