

Past visions of the future and other stories

An exploration of narrative and material culture through jewellery

Research Article

Sophia le Roux van der Walt

Master in Object & Jewellery

PXL-MAD School of Arts

Academic Year 2019-2020

Supervisor: Bert Willems



Abstract

In this Master project I investigate the process of narrative construction and the fundamental role it plays in the formation of our individual and collective identities and world views. I also explore the relationship between the human subject as material being and our material culture. More specifically, I critically engage with the fragmented and ever-shifting system of meaning that we need to navigate in order to understand our world and with the fluid way in which personal, cultural, historical and indeed all formative narratives are created and perpetually adapted to account for changes in our views and world. In my art practice I compose non-prototypical visual narratives, inspired by science fiction films from the past century, on traditional, second-hand items of ceramic ware which I fragment and then transform into wearable items of jewellery. I interfere with the traditional images and patterns on the ceramic, subverting the viewer's expectations and creating new meanings and constructing new narratives. My work means to expose the dialectical relationship of mutual transformation and transference of meaning between past, present and future, as well as between us as material beings and the material world around us. Through making jewellery from my narrative artefacts I celebrate the fragment and the creative power of narrative construction and its potential to keep up with changing times and perspectives while accounting for a past that keeps on informing our present. As jewellery objects, my work also ties this process of narrative construction and the artefacts themselves intimately to human subjectivity and materiality.

Contents

Introduction	7
The Importance of being Narrative	11
Object Stories	21
Conclusion	27
Bibliography	29
List of Figures	30

Introduction

What will a typical breakfast scene look like in a thousand years? Through the window you might see a synthetic atmosphere or perhaps an underwater landscape. Perhaps we will be synthetic ourselves, with microchips in our brains and robotic limbs and organs. Or breakfast might be served by a friendly robot. Will we still have ceramic bowls for our porridge or will all our every-day objects be electronic, like a spoon that tells you the temperature and calorie intake of each spoonful? We might even have solved the problem of intergalactic space travel by then and have a guest from a far-away planet. Will the discussion at the table be of discrimination against synthetic humans or just intergalactic politics? Perhaps none of the above will come to be since we will be extinct! And all the (other) creatures of Earth can live happily ever after. There is of course no way of knowing. The only thing we can say for certain is that it will be unrecognisable to us for the most part. Our political and social orders will change, our moral values will certainly change and technology will, as it has exponentially done for the past millennium, completely reshape our material and social reality. Life is flux, everything changes, and we are, together with the rest of the world, caught up in this perpetual motion that can never be arrested, predicted or even fully understood in its totality. We can, however, follow this constant flow and imagine countless possible futures by means of the incredible human ability of story-telling.

Story-telling, or narrative, is without doubt the fundamental mechanism by which we create and make sense of ourselves, our history, cultures and our world. We cannot, however, talk only of narratives of the future, but need to pay our due to narratives of the past, of life lived. It is after all through memory, both personal and collective, that we are able to learn and gain any significant level of understanding of ourselves and the world. Without memory, we have no socio-historical or political context, no technology and no identity. Memory is built up of narratives that we construct and reconstruct, thereby creating and recreating ourselves and our world-views. This process of reconstruction refers to how narratives of the past are constantly influenced by present views and future projections, often being adapted and distorted to suit our ideologies and agendas. There exists a dynamic and dialectic relationship between past, present and future where past narratives inform our present understanding of things and our present views, ideas and biases, including views of the future, influence and change our narratives of the past as well as of the present. We are perpetually rewriting the past to account for new insights and views, superimposing present ideas onto past narratives. Rather than erasing a past narrative and replacing it with a new one, the process is more akin to creating a palimpsest, where the old narrative is still visible underneath

the new one. It is a dynamic process whereby each side equally influences the other in a perpetual back-and-forth exchange. Fragments of each side are arranged and re-arranged to compose different narratives and new fragments are constantly being added while old ones are covered up or discarded. It is important to note, however, that we do not have total control over this process of construction, for we have almost no control over the vast and complex network of meanings in this world of material things and narratives. We can pull the strings of this network and use it to adapt existing meanings and create new narratives from existing fragments, but our own views and identities are also made up of strings that are being pulled by other forces, so we create from *within* this dynamic network. We cannot throw the existing network out and create meaning and narratives from a blank slate. So, we construct half blind, or are *constructed by* the world even as we take part in constructing it ourselves; either way we can only follow the flow of meaning, not control it completely.

Back to the future now. The future has never seemed as important to think about than in today's day and age. Amidst threats of pandemics, global warming, artificial intelligence and nuclear warfare, we are acutely aware of the fact that if we carry on as we are, we will ruin our habitat and possibly wreck our chances of survival, let alone that of the planet. We need to change our present way of life drastically if we want to see a future that is not a dystopian nightmare. Perhaps it won't be so dramatic and I have just watched too many dystopian science fiction films, but nonetheless there is widespread unease of what the future may hold. Narratives about possible futures can and must, therefore, also impact and inform our present narratives and actions more than it ever has before. There is a constant interplay between past, present and future in constructing the philosophical, social and political narratives that shape our views and identities, both personal and collective. It is this interplay of narratives, the process of narrative construction and story-telling and the impact it all has on our identity formation and social fabric that fascinates me and that I have pursued in my work.

In my art practice I compose visual narratives on ceramic ware which I will then transform into wearable items of jewellery. I draw on the age-old tradition of using household ceramic wares such as plates, cups and bowls, what we call "breekgoed" or "break ware" in my home language, Afrikaans, as bearers of cultural imagery, myths and historical or contemporary narratives. The ceramic ware I use as the bases for my work are old, used items that I collected from second hand stores and antique markets and that, for the most part, have traditional motifs and images on them. I interfere with these traditional images and patterns by painting and drawing contemporary images over and around them, thereby reviving them and pulling them into the contemporary

arena and ultimately into the future.

For my images I draw from one of the most prominent sources of contemporary cultural imagery: film. More specifically, I use imagery and characters from science fiction films of the past century, past visions of the future as it were, thereby bringing past, present and future narrative parts into conversation with one another. The pieces thus become palimpsests, layered artefacts, a kind of reverse archaeology where I investigate the dynamic and continued life of cultural artefacts and the stories they can tell. Instead of trying to study an object or narrative as though it is frozen in a time gone by, which is how archaeology traditionally operates, I wish to communicate the way in which objects and narratives have lives of their own and we can merely follow the flow of their continued life and the meanings they carry. Furthermore, I wish to illustrate how through story-telling, we can say something meaningful about the world. To quote Tim Ingold: "It is precisely where the reach of the imagination meets the friction of materials, or where the forces of ambition rub up against the rough edges of the world, that human life is lived." (2013:73).

The ceramic items I use have a manifold importance in my work. Firstly, they are everyday utensils we use, thus bearing significance to our corporeal existence. Secondly, they are cultural artefacts, communicating something about a people's everyday habits, history, stories and beliefs. Thirdly, these items are by definition breakable and indeed I work with fragments of the objects, carefully separated parts of the 'original' object, which symbolises the fragmented nature of the narratives we construct and reconstruct around ourselves and our understanding of the world. More importantly it refers to the incomplete, or unfinished state that everything is always in. Everything is in a process of becoming, nothing is "already locked into their final forms...To *inhabit* the world...is to join in the processes of formation. It is to participate in a dynamic world of energies, forces and flows" (Ingold 2013:89). Every story is made up of fluid parts and is furthermore only a part in itself, only one perspective, one temporary variation. My work will thus have a two-fold exploration of narrative construction and material culture, tying together two absolutely formative elements of cultural and personal identity. As jewellery items they strengthen the connection to human corporeality and subjectivity, being worn close to the body and designed for the body, as well as point to the theme of value in material culture. Turning fragments of "breekgoed" into valuable pieces of jewellery is a metaphorical celebration of the fragment or part and the process of narrative construction, which is always the piecing together of fragments into a meaningful story.

What I fundamentally mean to touch upon in my work is at once the complexity of our lived experience as physical beings in a physical world and the immense creative power of narrative construction as a means of making sense of the world and of ourselves. I want to play with metaphor, truth and imagination, to highlight the way meaning and ideas are constantly shifting and changing. History and identity, personal and collective, changes perpetually as people realise what had been left out or framed in certain ways to represent a preferred perspective. I thus also mean to problematise the way we construct the narratives that shape us and our world, illustrating their fluid and malleable nature, which means that they can never be taken for granted as totally reliable. We must always approach these social, political, moral and philosophical narratives critically, but we do not despair, for there lies immense creative power in that process. I celebrate the fragmented nature of the subject and the complex, ever-shifting system of meaning that we need to navigate in order to understand our world. Through my work I wish to illuminate the creative potential of narrative construction and how it can enable us to account for the countless smaller subjective narratives that make up our society, history and hopes for a future. I want to tell imaginative and playful stories about possible futures as well as say something about our contemporary world, its politics and socio-environmental concerns, on the foundation of our material culture and then display it on a body, thereby also paying tribute to our corporeal existence. It is perhaps truly a celebration of transformation, of the self and our world. For, to quote Ingold again: "What value lies in transformations of the self if they end there, if selves do not go on reciprocally to transform others and the world?" (2013:13).

The Importance of being Narrative

The first question we need to ask ourselves is why narrative is such a powerful and pervasive force in our lives. I have already made a few claims about the important role it plays in the formation of our personal and cultural identity, but even more than merely playing a role, I will argue that narrative structure is fundamentally tied to our material existence in the world. According to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur our temporal existence, in other words our experience of being-in-time, is central to our material existence and thus to the human condition as such (White, 1991:142). This claim can be tested quite easily by just trying to imagine experience outside of time. It is a futile exercise. We can theorise about time in a philosophical or scientific framework, but it becomes impossible to relate any experience without reference to some form of a timeline. Even if one is able to imagine such an a-temporal experience, it would be very far removed from our lived reality and it would be impossible to relate. This view is in line with the New Realism in Philosophy, which rejects a purely scientific world view where knowledge must (and can) be totally objective. It also rejects a constructivist world view where all meaning in the world is constructed by the human subject, thus where knowledge and meaning is purely subjective and exclusive to humans. We are inextricably part of the natural, material world and are thus subject to the constraints of time and space as everything else is. Our experience of time can furthermore be said to have, fundamentally, a narrative structure. It is indeed instinctive to relate memories and history in a narrative form and Ricoeur goes on to claim that historians do not merely choose to chronicle historical events in a narrative structure where they could have chosen otherwise, but rather that history unfolds in a narrative form (White, 1991:142). This makes total sense if you take into account that history is nothing more than the collection of individual human experiences and memories, so if the individual experience is tied to a narrative structure, so is history.

If we look further into narrative structure it is clear that it does not refer merely to seriality, where events follow one another in an endless chain devoid of emphasis. Rather, a narrative structure is a story with beginnings, middles and endings, as certain events bear more or less weight than others and form part of causal networks that have varied significance. Hayden White explains how “in historicity events appear not only to succeed one another in the regular order of a series but also to function as inaugurations, transitions and terminations of processes that are meaningful because they manifest the structure of plots” (1991:148). It therefore follows that in order to narrate a satisfactory account of any history one must convey the variation in meaning and significance of some events compared to others. We do not experience our lives in a chain of seriality

where all events are equally significant, therefore we cannot capture or communicate the world of human experience without a structure of plots. White explains further that “this mode of discourse alone is adequate to the representation of the experience of historicity in a way that is both literal in what it asserts about certain events and figurative in what it suggests about the meaning of the experience” (1991:149). A narrative is therefore “more than the sum total of the sentences that it comprises”, because it communicates the weight of meaning (White, 1991:143).

There seems to be a lot of emphasis on ‘history’ in the above exposition of narrative, but it is important to understand that this history can be a personal history and refers broadly to the lived human experience, it does not only refer to collective history. If we look at memory, we see the same narrative structure in place and in memory we can really look at the core of our identity formation. As mentioned in the introduction, without memory we have no means of learning, understanding symbolic representations or even organizing our minds. We would certainly have no capacity for intellectual or hermeneutic exercises like the one we are currently busy with. Memory is not merely the mechanism by which we recall past events, but is rather the central axis of understanding and therefore of human behaviour as such (Groenewald, 2015:21). Another important aspect of memory for the purposes of my work is the capacity of objects to have memory in the way that they contain knowledge and meaning, but this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Memory is by no means perfect, it is in fact rather unreliable and unstable as an accurate source of knowledge about past events, but it is the only means we have of accessing the past (Ricoeur, 2001:22). We never remember anything with absolute, unchanging clarity; our memories are always fragmented and subjective. In particular the weight of *meaning* in our memory narratives tend to change depending on our present context and viewpoints. We are constantly *interpreting* our memories and the past from a given perspective, using a whole network of supplementary information to inform that perspective. In this regard Brigit Neumann states that “our memories are highly selective and...the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer’s present, his/her desire and denial, than about the actual past events” (cited in Groenewald, 2015:22). Our memories are thus constructed narratives that always have the potential to be changed to suit our present views and views of the future, but it is also our memories that significantly inform these self-same views. Here the dialectic relationship between past, present and future is evident. This complex and creative process of memory (or narrative) construction serves to ground these narratives contextually and render them intelligible and meaningful. Ricoeur positively relishes how this “inno-

vative power of imagination...[t]his power, to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the possible theatre of one's liberty, as a horizon of hope" (Kearney, 2004:39). It is this creative power of narrative construction and its potential to keep up with changing times and perspectives while accounting for a past that keeps on informing our present that forms the backbone of my art practice.

So now that we have established the fundamental position of narrative structure in our experience as material beings in the world, it becomes easy to infer the far-reaching effects narratives can have on the formation of our identities and world views. Besides our memories and historical narratives, we are surrounded by political, moral, philosophical and fictional narratives from the moment we learn how to interpret and understand them. Just as we seem to process our own experiences in narrative form, we also easily absorb narratives that we are exposed to. Through advertising, news (fake news included), social media, religion and entertainment, we are exposed to narratives that can be and are used to control and coerce as much as to emancipate and empower. It is no accident that young children respond particularly well to stories when being taught what and how to think and act and these very stories become the groundwork for our interpretation of the world and our place in it. Fictional narratives or stories play just as big a part in shaping our views and behaviour as narratives grounded more securely in reality. For instance, if all the stories you grow up with are about a heterosexual princess who falls in love with a prince and they live happily ever after it will certainly have a subconscious effect on how you perceive romantic relationships and their importance in living a fulfilled life. The values and norms of a society are always clearly visible in the stories of that society. And subsequently the vicious cycle of normalisation and othering commences. The stories of a society espouse a certain viewpoint, which shapes the people of that society and they in turn create more stories that maintain that same viewpoint. It is thus of vital importance that one be critical of the narratives we are exposed to and that there exists diversity in the stories you expose yourself and others to. We must nurture a polyculture instead of a monoculture in the stories we tell and the ideals and views they communicate.

In our technologically rich society, some of the most influential stories are on television. Most people spend an enormous amount of time in front of a television or computer screen and gather most of their information and ideas from on-screen sources. For the purposes of my study and art practice I will focus primarily on fictional films, in particular science-fiction. While it is positively cringe-worthy how much of what we see on screen is drenched in conservative, patriarchal ideology, there is a notable move towards a more inclusive and diverse branch of story-telling today which is very promising. Scien-

ce-fiction has traditionally been a very progressive genre of story-telling compared to other genres, either through challenging current issues in society or by showing us a better, more inclusive alternative. I believe this is because stories about the future invite people to engage more readily with the boundless freedom we truly possess with regards to our views and norms. In stories set in the present there is more pressure on being 'believable' and adhering to present social norms and codes, whereas in future narratives, the audience expects things to be different, so they accept new ideas more readily. It is thus a wonderful genre in which to expose audiences to more inclusive and progressive ideas. Here Ricoeur's idea of "construe(ing) the future as the possible theatre of one's liberty, as a horizon of hope" becomes central (Kearney, 2004:39).

In my practical work I use images from science-fiction films that have inspired me and I subsequently create new micro narratives by combining these images with the old images on the ceramic wares I use or, where there is no prior image, filling in the blank space on the ceramic object. One of the first pieces I created for my Master project, *This is a love story*, portrays an astronaut and an alien in a lover's embrace (Fig 1). The original underlying image is of a white heterosexual couple in a country setting; a very traditional European scene commonly seen on antique ceramic objects. I changed the traditional narrative into a futuristic one by turning the man into an astronaut of unknown gender and the woman into an alien, presumably female since she is donning the dress from the underlying image, but not necessarily, for who says the alien race is bound by the same genders as us? Although the figures I drew are not from a particular film, they are based on traditional images of an astronaut suit and a green, humanoid alien as seen in various on-screen stories. By interfering in the image, I turn the common, traditional image into something new, thereby challenging the traditional portrayal of a love story. I create a juxtaposition between the prototypical, traditional image and the non-prototypical image that I add myself, thereby subverting the viewer's expectation of what images are found on traditional tableware and creating new meanings. By using old science-fiction characters and past visions of the future I open up a discourse about gender, technology, time and cultural values while at the same time exposing the process of narrative construction. It is meant to stimulate the viewer's imagination and invite them to construct their own little narrative of the scene before them and what it might mean.



Fig 1. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *This is a love story* (work in progress). 2020.
Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, silver.

In various other pieces I use specific characters from science-fiction films such as C-3PO from Star Wars (Fig 2), the Maschinenmensch from Metropolis (Fig 3) and the Draags from Fantastic Planet (Fig 4). The use of these characters is meant to refer to the stories they come from and their underlying themes as well as to suggest that film and pop culture characters have become the new mythology. Instead of an image of Hercules on an Athenian vase, we see a Godzilla sized C-3PO towering over the city-scape from Metropolis (Fig 2). I once again invite the viewer to make their own inferences about the meaning of the narrative I composed. By referring to the underlying themes of the films the characters come from I do, however, hope that the viewer engages with those themes. In Metropolis the main theme is class divide, in Fantastic Planet it is our relationship to animals and more broadly to power. These are highly important issues we need to face and that are indeed widely discussed, but by no means solved.

On another thematic level, in *Fantastic Planet* (Fig 4) the small figure reading a book is meant to create the sense that the figure is surrounded by the narrative as well as to make the ceramic pot seem gigantic, thereby emphasising the role of our material culture as well as narrative in our lives. Turning these objects into jewellery furthermore ties into the theme of our corporeality; being worn on the body, jewellery has an intimate relationship to the body and thereby highlights our material existence. Jewellery also has an underlying reference to value, being traditionally made from valuable materials and generally being considered valuable objects. The settings of my pieces will refer to traditional jewellery, being made from silver and referencing traditional design forms, such as milgrain and the use of gemstones and pearls, and thereby point to this theme of value. By turning my objects into jewellery, I thus confer value onto them and elevate the status of these objects and the stories they tell. Moreover, jewellery is also conveyor of personal and cultural identity. We wear jewellery to convey or perform something about ourselves and how we wish the world to see us, so on the whole jewellery is also closely tied to our identity. By creating "wearable narratives" I mean to show how the process of narrative construction, as well as the narratives themselves and the artefacts they are painted on, are fundamentally tied to the formation of our identities and to our lived experience as material beings. In the next chapter we will explore this theme of materiality and the central role our material culture plays in our lives.



Fig 2. Sophia le Roux, Neckpiece: *C-3PO-zilla* (work in progress). 2020.
Repurposed ceramic, permanent marker.



Fig 3. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Maschinenmensch* (work in progress). 2020.
Repurposed ceramic, permanent marker



Fig 4. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Fantastic Planet* (work in progress). 2020.
Repurposed ceramic, porcelain marker, plastic

Object Stories

Our material culture arguably plays just as big a role in the formation of our subjectivity and identity as narrative does. The first and most fundamental encounter we have with the world is after all as physical beings that sense a physical world around us. To quote phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty: a "body is a thing among things" (cited in Brown, 2001:4). Human experience is irrevocably rooted in the material world of objects, things, spaces and other bodies, all of which form part of a complex system of relations and meaning that shape our experiences and understanding of being human (Thomas 2006:46). Objects are even created as extensions of the human body and can form part of a person's bodily schema, enabling us to perform certain tasks we would otherwise be unable to execute (Warnier 2006:186). Many seemingly insignificant every-day objects we take for granted, such as eating utensils, play a vital role in our daily lives and would render us quite hopeless if they were taken away. In this regard Jean-Pierre Warnier states that "[a]n acting subject is always a subject-acting-with-its-incorporated-objects" (2006:187). Tim Ingold goes even further to "soften any distinction made between organism and artefact. For if organisms grow, so too do artefacts. And if artefacts are made, so too are organisms." (2013:22) This is not to say that there is no distinction between organisms and artefacts, but rather to say that the way meaning flows through organisms and artefacts and the way either can influence the world around them is similar.

It is not humans who encode materials and objects with meaning, but rather that both human and material encode each other in a reciprocal process. The material has meaning without the human subject to encode it. They have full and complex lives of their own, from the formation of the raw material in the Earth's crust to what it may become in the future. So, in short, materials are alive and "[p]ersons are just like pots" (Ingold 2013:94). People and their material culture, as well as the natural world for that matter, are all moving parts of the same flow of life and meaning, and we do not have much control over it, but we can follow this "matter-flow" to create new meaning or gain new understanding (2013:25). Rather than theorising about the agency of objects and people, consider that we are all and everything "possessed by action" (2013:97). People do, however, interfere tremendously with their material surroundings, and I believe there is much to read into those things we make and change around us. The concept of 'material culture' is still useful to demarcate those things we had a heavy hand in making from the natural world.

It certainly follows from the way we are inextricably linked to our material surroundings

that one must investigate the material culture of a society in order to achieve any real understanding of it. Archaeology as a field of study is testament to the fact that one can glean a staggering amount of information from a society's material culture. The same can be said for the individual; the objects people surround themselves with, use and cherish, divulges a lot of information about their identities, daily rituals, cultural practices, beliefs and priorities (Tilley 2006:61). Our material culture and how we interact with it can also be seen as a performance of our chosen identities as well as of social scripts we unconsciously follow. We shop at certain supermarkets and wear certain clothes or jewellery to acquire social status or broadcast our identity and thereby reveal the way we wish to be perceived by others. Many consumer products serve to naturalize and initiate struggles for status and prestige and most people buy into the constructed hierarchies of value, judging others and themselves by the objects they possess, or that possess them (Tilley 2006:67). Social scripting can be defined as behavioural patterns we adhere to in the present that were shaped in the past as a means of dealing with the unpredictability of the future, so it ties in quite nicely with my concept. Objects that are not broadly considered valuable can also nonetheless become extremely valuable to an individual through the memories and particular, personal meanings they are imbued with. Janet Hoskins states in this regard that: "Within this framework, things can be said to have 'biographies' as they go through a series of transformations from gift to commodity to inalienable possessions, and persons can also be said to invest aspects of their own biographies in things" (2006:74).

It becomes clear how our material culture, our object worlds, whether looking at consumer products, cultural artefacts or biographical objects, can be said to have a significant narrative function in how they tell stories about our lived experiences and individual, as well as cultural, identities. In the same way that the stories of a society serve to reflect the ideologies, social norms and symbolic orders of that society, so our material culture can do the same. As with stories this is not, however, a mere mirroring process, but rather a dialectical relationship where the human subject and object world inform and transform one another. Tilley describes how our material culture serves as "the very medium through which these values, ideas and social distinctions are constantly reproduced and legitimized, or transformed" (2006:61). In my body of work, I am tapping into this complex network of meaning and engaging reciprocally with the narratives and materials or objects I work with to transform the fragments I use into new narratives. My use of old ceramic objects is meant to evoke the sense that these objects have lived a life, having witnessed people's daily lives and can therefore tell stories about our cultural identity, the values and norms of society and our material existence. It is, in Ingold's words, an "archaeology of perdurance, ... the ability to follow things through in their

temporal trajectories from past to present" (2013:81). My work thus means to tap into the vast network of meaning and associations that these objects are part of, follow these and draw a line, figuratively speaking, from the past through the present and into the future.

In *Ashoka Tano and Robocop* (Fig 5), *Queen Amidala and friend in a Japanese garden* (Fig 6) and *Aayla Secura in a Japanese Garden* (Fig 7) this archaeology of perdurance is clearly visible. As with *This is a love story* (Fig 1) the original image is still visible around my drawings where the former are traditional scenes of Japanese woman busy with their daily rituals. The use of Japanese cultural objects opens up a fraught and complex discourse surrounding cultural ownership and appropriation as well as the interesting history of the movement of porcelain between the East and West. I do not intend to offend anyone or to be controversial at all, but rather to engage in the discourse by posing the question of what it means for a Euro-African to use mass-produced Japanese porcelain in her art practice and tamper with the image? It certainly is a complex scenario. Also, what will cultural appropriation mean centuries into the future, in a time when Intergalactic Empires could exist? Then the human race would be but a small, intimate community, as though coming from the same small town. I also once again reference the formative role film plays in our cultural narratives. Ashoka Tano, Queen Amidala and Aayla Secura are all characters from the Star Wars franchise and Robocop has his own franchise. Each film and character come with their own mass of associations and meanings, from cultural diversity, Jungian psychoanalytic theory and gender roles to questions of what the future may hold regarding technology and our every-day lives. I invite the viewer to engage with this complex, fluid system of meanings and associations that span a temporal distance of millennia, and to make their own inferences and conclusions.



Fig 5. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Ashoka Tano and Robocop* (work in progress). 2020.
Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.



Fig 6. Sophia le Roux, Earrings: *Queen Amidala and friend in a Japanese Garden* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.



Fig 7. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Aayla Secura in a Japanese Garden* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.

Conclusion

Through both story-telling and making material things we create something new from old, much used parts. The language and imagery we use to tell stories always carry the weight of prior meanings and associations. Just as the materials we use to create things, be they art objects or every-day functional items, have their own meanings and connotations. Everything is part of a vast, living network of meaning that is always changing, flowing and growing and that we can never arrest or understand completely, because countless people, things and processes (indeed everything) are simultaneously pulling the strings, thereby shifting it constantly. It is my intention to create narrative artefacts that are aware of, problematise and that indeed celebrate this complex system of meaning and significance and that tell playful and self-conscious stories about our world as it was, is and might be one day. My work means to expose the process of narrative construction and point to the central role it plays in the formation of our individual, cultural and global identities. By creating narrative palimpsests on fragmented cultural artefacts which I then turn into jewellery I explore the role of our material culture and cultural narratives in our lives and the stories they can tell us about ourselves. As jewellery objects, my work also ties this process of narrative construction and the artefacts themselves intimately to human subjectivity and materiality. Furthermore, and most notably, my work means to expose the dialectical relationship of mutual transformation and transference of meaning between past, present and future, as well as between us and the material world around us (including other people, who are material after all). My work thus pulls the strings of this vast web of meaning and is meant to inspire conversation as well as stimulate the viewer's imagination. If we are aware of the processes that shape our cultures, identities and world-views and of the fluid, changeable nature of those processes, then we can free ourselves to create our own narratives and, in Ricoeur's words once again, "construe the future as the possible theatre of one's liberty, as a horizon of hope".

Bibliography

Brown, B. 2001. Thing Theory. *Critical Inquiry*, 28(1):1-22.

Groenewald, J. 2015. Fragmented mnemonics: an investigation into contemporary jewellery as a means of externalising memory. (MA) Thesis. University of Stellenbosch.

Hoskins, J. 2006. Agency, Biography and Objects, in *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C Tilley, W Keane, S Kuchler, M Rowlands, & P Spyer. London: SAGE Publications: 74-84.

Ingold, T. 2013. *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. London: Routledge.

Kearney, R. 2004. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ricoeur, P. 2004. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Thomas, J. 2006. Phenomenology and Material Culture, in *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C Tilley, W Keane, S Kuchler, M Rowlands, & P Spyer. London: SAGE Publications: 43-59.

Tilley, C. 2006. Objectification, in *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C Tilley, W Keane, S Kuchler, M Rowlands, & P Spyer. London: SAGE Publications:61-73.

Tilley, C., Keane, W., Kuchler, S., Rowlands, M., & Spyer, P. (eds.). 2006. *Handbook of Material Culture*. London: SAGE Publications.

Warnier, J. 2006. Inside and Outside: Surfaces and Containers, in *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C Tilley, W Keane, S Kuchler, M Rowlands, & P Spyer. London: SAGE Publications:186-195.

White, H. 1991. The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and symbol in Ricoeur's philosophy of history, in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and interpretation*, edited by D Wood. New York: Routledge: 140-159.

List of Figures

Fig 1. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *This is a love story* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, silver.

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 2. Sophia le Roux, Neckpiece: *C-3PO-zilla* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, permanent marker.

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 3. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Maschinenmensch* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, permanent marker

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 4. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Fantastic Planet* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain marker, plastic

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 5. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Ashoka Tano and Robocop* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 6. Sophia le Roux, Earrings: *Queen Amidala and friend in a Japanese Garden* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.

Photo: Sophia le Roux

Fig 7. Sophia le Roux, Pendant: *Aayla Secura in a Japanese Garden* (work in progress). 2020. Repurposed ceramic, porcelain paint, porcelain pen.

Photo: Sophia le Roux

