

Thinking like a yeast spore

How a focus on materiality can provide a context to re-evaluate our relationship with the environment.

We have come to a point in history when we must re-evaluate our relationship with the world around us. Humankind can no longer be seen as something separate from our environment; rather we are entangled within it. Our environment includes not only animate and inanimate forms but also our stories, our systems and our beliefs. A central motivation of this master's thesis is to explore how a focus on materials can provide ways to reconsider our relationship with our environment. This discourse comes at a time when rapid advances within science and technology and impending ecological crises force us to re-evaluate our ontological relationships with the material world.

This thesis is an integration of a new artistic work within a philosophical framework. My final artwork comprises hand pinched ceramic vessels of various sizes filled with sourdough at different stages of leavening. Both materials are ubiquitous. Both are entrenched in human history and thus create a solid platform to investigate current discourse around materiality, nature versus culture versus subject versus object and the act of making as a form of growing. In Chapter one, I introduce the field of New Materialism, a field of thought that raises philosophical questions around the nature and function of matter and I outline its major themes. In Chapter two, I explore strategies of "recuperation" put forward by Donna Haraway who urges us to be "response-able" and adopt a multispecies perspective. Haraway introduces the concept of "tentacular thinking", the act of think-feeling, inspired by the tentacles of invertebrates and encourages us to think about "thinking" and telling "SF stories". I also discuss sympoiesis¹, the concept that we evolve through, with, of, in, and because of one another rather than in isolation or independently.

In Chapter three, I return to materials and the intimate relationship makers have with them. As an artist and future art teacher, the making process is key to understanding materials and materiality. This investigation has led me to the concepts put forward by Tim Ingold who views making as a form of growth and the maker-material interaction as an ongoing "conversation". From this solid theoretical foundation, I reflect on my own making process in Chapter four and explore the "conversations" I have with the materials I use (sourdough and clay). In the final chapter, I describe my experiences of adopting "tentacular thinking" and "SF" to approach and get closer to the materials I use in the final artwork.

This investigation has led me to conclude an important tenet is that, in order to ensure ongoing survival, humankind needs to understand and acknowledge her interdependence and her entanglement with her environment and the entities therein. Materials offer a context to investigate ecologies; to open up the story and re-evaluate relationships. I have also come to recognise the importance of materials; that our relationships to these materials matter and that we must acknowledge that our current anthropocentricity must be de-emphasized and greater credence awarded to nonhuman entities (animate and inanimate) operating within ecologies. A further conclusion I have reached is the recognition that sympoiesis; the growing-with, through, of, and in each other, is central to species survival. Throughout this thesis the philosophical concepts found within New Materialism have informed my making process. Making is complex, dynamic and an entangled ecology whereby different forces merge. I believe that looking at the making and learning process in such a way is beneficial, not only as a maker of things but also as a future art teacher.

Exam literature

Ingold, Tim (2018): *Anthropology and/as Education*. London: Routledge. P. 20 - 35

Black, Karla, Hans, Annette, and Migros Museum Für Gegenwartskunst (2010): *Karla Black: It's Proof That Counts*. Zürich: Ringier P. 166-169 / 170 - 174

Morton, Timothy (2012): *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. P. 1 - 13

¹ After M. Beth Dempster, who suggested the term for her 1998 master thesis in Environmental Studies; Haraway 2016, p. 61