

Unbinding Objects

Exploring the practices of Naming and Jointing Things

Practice-based PhD

Department of Art

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Declaration:

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Yun-Ling Chen

Abstract

The aim of my thesis and practice is to examine how an artistic and literary practice can reconfigure our human relationships with objects, so that we a) have a richer and more caring relationship with things, and b) can imagine alternative present and future environments.

‘Unbinding Objects’ refers to the joint objective of my thesis and practice, which is to challenge the normative perceptions and relations that are produced through a human-centric behavior towards objects. My thesis discloses the unstable identities of subject and object, I then respond to and exacerbate this unstableness through my practice. For example, there is a supplementary relationship between artwork and artist which I exploit within the process of maintaining my practice in the space of the gallery. The relationship of replenishing organic and inorganic materials within the exhibition timeframe, exposes our accustomed relationship to objects as restrictive and proposes instead a more active and networked engagement between viewer, artwork and artist.

My thesis explores how Anthropocentric thinking frames objects and limits them through identification, definition, and allocated purpose. My practice responds to these limits through seeking alternative paths and enabling a more dynamic encounter between human and object, as well as the mechanisms behind the making visible of art. The thesis culminates in a call for humans and artists to unbind us from the processes by which humans are bound to a certain way of viewing the world and objects through naming, grammar and framing artworks. Therefore, my practice produces a new relationship with things through collective interpretation. I provide alternative access points to my writing and artistic process to enable a situated experience when encountering the text/artwork.

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Selected Works of Not Really Really Series



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Orientation Statement

This practice-based PhD builds research both in response to and through practice. In 2017, during my MA degree show, I first made public the series of *Not Really Really*. It is a series in which I deployed my intuition to assemble found objects with organic materials and to produce different assemblages to those that we find in manufacturing and maintenance processes. This was in response to my concern that humans had become habitual in our relationship to objects and their consumption, as we often take the end-product for granted, cutting off the object from its history or trail of becoming. Manufacturing processes are habitual and force combinations between both materials and humans, which I refer to as 'Binding'. In contrast, I propose the approach of 'Jointing', which attempts to 'Un-bind' this relation and recombine the materials, so that we can learn from material interactions rather than forcing them. It is an intuitive process that places materials in relation to each other in order to draw out properties or characteristics that may go unnoticed. Therefore, the process of Jointing is deployed in each piece of the *Not Really Really* series because each assemblage is stimulated by my lived experiences and encountered through the diverse array of audience experiences. This process 'Unbinds' both a) the artwork and b) the audience: a) by not forcing the materials together and b) enabling the audience to encounter and experience the work on their own terms.

The thesis 'Un-binding Objects' records the process/journey of allowing the practice and

research to emerge together but respond to practice based issues. My thesis starts by mapping the territory that governs human and object relations, through investigating the knotted theories of how humans relate to objects. This then becomes the platform that my practice aims to intervene on. The chapter *Naming* begins by analysing the restrictive relation as it is depicted in semiotics and maps the theories of Michel Foucault and Ferdinand de Saussure. It goes on to address Jacques Derrida's critique of the binary distinction that creates a hierarchy between master and servant or original and copy. In tracing alternative approaches to this relationship, it looks towards the theories of the Post-human by Rosi Braidotti and Object Oriented Ontology by Graham Harman. The chapter *Grumble* is a reflection on the research undertaken in *Naming*, as it plays out the interaction with Derrida's notion of the supplement relation. It is a written recording of my self-reflective thoughts based on what transpired during the making public of my work *Not Really Really (17-SS-10)*.

The chapter *Jointing* deepens the inquiry into restrictive social systems and explores the mechanisms deployed by humans to control our landscape. It considers Michel Foucault's argument that people should remain aware of the way institutions encourage self-discipline through his theory of the Panopticon. It also explores oppositional approaches to discipline and control, for example Claire Bishop's theory of antagonism, Sara Ahmed's queering of our human use of things and the practice of artists such as Oscar Bony. These are developed in order to pose an alternative methodology for making and viewing. After mapping out the

territory, *Backstage* highlights an alternative approach to viewing art in which the audience is brought into the backstage (hidden architecture and decisions) as well as the front stage (gallery space) operations of making art visible. It is also important to clarify that this thesis is not an end-product, but a springboard from which my practice emerges.

Call and Response

My MA project *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* was the catalyst for my PhD. After exhibiting *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* a lot of questions emerged that generated a need for analysis, self-reflection and more practice. This starting point gave me a sense that the urgency was driven by the artwork, which was calling for my reflective response. Therefore, I developed this thesis *Un-binding Objects* to respond to my questioning of the work and what it was activating in terms of my artistic process and inner monologue, as well as the audience's engagement with the works when no guideline for interaction was provided.

The methodology of my research builds on as well as pushes forward my practice. My practice calls to my concerns; therefore, I use this written thesis to respond to its call and then my practice can be pushed forward to ask further research questions (calls). For instance, I first focussed on achieving the assembly of *Not Really Really (SS-21-10)* (Fig.1) but overlooked calculating the process of maintaining it. When showing the work to the public, difficulties of maintaining the herb's freshness rang in my head and signalled an issue in my assumptions around maintenance. I followed this issue up by taking the decision that the

caretaker of the work (me) needed to replenish the herb twice daily to maintain its freshness.

Therefore, this evolution of call (issue) and response (resolving but also becoming) is part of my maintenance process.



Fig.1. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-10),
Plastic bag, Sparkling Water and Fresh Mint, 25 x 14 x 9 cm, 2021

In terms of the overall methodology of my PhD, my thesis and practice also follow a call and response model. My thesis calls for the territories that I deem practice should intervene on and my practice tries to provide alternative paths for viewing art so that we can reconsider our human relationship to objects. For instance, in the show *Unbinding Objects* (2021) there were three spaces with a total of 15 works. Each space could also be seen as one piece of work because the artworks in each exhibition zone were networked together.

Networked zones, included humans and non-humans, locations, durations, and sites. As both

actors and network, we (artist, artwork, architecture and viewer) are all part of the process of co-constructing the meaning of the work. This network of supplements leads to more supplements, as it is an additive process that constructs a range of plural interpretations because all the supplements and actors are connected and indispensable.



Fig.2. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.

Materials for the assemblages (or networked things) were considered in terms of a response to the site, formal considerations (such as the balance of colour) and the logistics of refreshing. For example, in Room 1 (Fig.2 & 3) there are six pieces including *Not Really Really* (SS-21-01~05) and (AW-20-06). Each of the works present different durations but overlap across the same space. The shortest duration such as the hot towels in *Not Really Really* (SS-21-01) required refreshing every three minutes. While the fresh asparagus of *Not Really Really Really* (SS-21-02) could last for a whole day without requiring replenishment. Each

room included works that called for different forms of care from the caretaker; as each assemblage of things had its own unique duration, each piece of work demanded specific situated care from the artist.



Fig. 3. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.

I identify the maintenance process within my practice as a form of a situated care, as opposed to general care, because each assemblage requires specific support. Through researching this form of maintenance, I found that my practice strongly resonates with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's notion of situated care. Bellacasa stresses that care must be situated and responsive to particular situations as opposed to a general notion of care. As general care does not include all potential users and often only produces one path for all users to fit in and

follow. In her book *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017),

Bellacasa stated that:

Interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal- it is a condition. Care is therefore concomitant to the continuation of life for many living beings in more than human entanglements - not forced upon them by a moral order, and not necessarily a rewarding obligation.ⁱ

I frame my practice as a situated response (care), as the demands of the materials within the work vary. Different assemblages require distinct modes of care, as I set up a situation in which I need to respond to each of the varying organic materials' situations/durations. These result in human and nonhuman entanglements that may not always be easy or comfortable to interpret.

Another instance of the way in which my research and practice call to each other, is that in the thesis my research responds to the general modes of manufacture and maintenance, that my practice located as an issue. The thesis pictures the normative terrain of our human relationship to objects, which is an issue I would like to intervene on. According to Ahmed, in providing a well-used path we become habituated by norms inherent in the infrastructure of our society, 'Used can mean previously used, shaped by comings and goings; becoming used can refer to how an activity has become customary. A history of use is a history of becoming natural.'ⁱⁱ A well-used path encourages habitual use that will only make it even easier to

ⁱ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2017), 70.

ⁱⁱ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 41.

follow. In contrast, I aim to highlight that society should not be governed by habitual structures/relations because this results in exclusion for some and an awkwardness for the many in the law of 'majority rules.' Minorities and intersectional voices, in particular, find that they have to shape themselves to fit this normative and majority mold or be excluded, rather than the structure being designed to support difference.

The thesis also goes on to explore the research and practice that are also attempting to rewire the well-used path of spectating. This enables me to draw on certain concepts but also to intervene in the lacunae I have located within artistic practice, through my own work. In the final show of *Unbinding Objects* (2021), there are three responsive installations that reflect Legacy Russell's notion of Glitch and Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space: 1) *Not Really Really* (SS-21-05), 2) *Not Really Really* (SS-21-11) and 3) *Not Really Really* (SS-20-00). For example, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-11) took its starting point in response to three screws that were difficult to remove along the corridor in which I chose to stage them. From the image (Fig.4), I repurposed the three screws that were an existing fixture in the space and used them to mount 90-degree pipes and oranges. These screws appeared as glitches in the functioning of an exhibition space but, instead of removing them, I decided to embrace this structural glitch and deploy it as part of the artwork. In considering the screw height and spacing, I saw it as an analogy for corridor lighting and deployed the found materials as an intervention which questioned the logic of the space.



Fig.4. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-11), Metal 90-degree pipes and Oranges, 2021

In the *Backstage* chapter we also find a response to the call from *Not Really Really* (SS-21-11), as *Backstage* draws on Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the 'Third Space'; as the artworks in the exhibition are awaiting a viewer to co-interpret them. In *Backstage*, I refer to the following assertion made by Bhabha that, 'this process of hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.'ⁱⁱⁱ Before being interpreted, the artwork is in a liminal space but when interacted with a hybrid mix occurs between artist, audience and surrounding. Through the encounter a third space is activated, in which meaning is produced as a mixture of elements

ⁱⁱⁱ Homi K. Bhabha, "By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in The Mid-Nineteenth Century". In *The Location of Culture*, 198-211 (London: Routledge, 2004).

and actors.

Both my practice and research aim to produce glitches, whether this is due to the endless maintenance of an organic material or providing alternative approaches to navigating a thesis and experiencing art practice. Glitches have always existed in our society, but they remain largely invisible as society aims to eliminate all glitches in an attempt to create and sustain the illusion that a platonic path exists. Following Ahmed's theory of the well-used path, we can also interpret the path as platonic (ideal) because it becomes the most socially accepted or idealized route, which is built to support the majority. I agree with Legacy Russell, that the glitches are positive additions to society. In *Glitch Feminism* (2020) she explains, 'Errors, ever unpredictable, surface the unnamable, point toward a wild unknown. To become an error is to surrender to becoming unknown, unrecognizable, unnamed.'^{iv} In contrast, to a society that interprets glitches and errors as negative terms, my practice sees them as a positive place from which to build alternative paths. Contemporary society requires the users of its systems to follow a standard well-used path. Although errors have always existed in society, they are not often seen as potential (other than in rare scientific discoveries) but obstacles that need to be ironed out in the name of efficiency. In overlooking the glitching process, we can become habitual in the way that we see (place value on) and interpret things. In response, my practice aims to reveal some of the processes often invisibly located in the black box of the art gallery

^{iv} Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 74.

(backstage) to the public in the white cube (by crossing the public and private spaces).

Artist's Care

The duration of each organic and found (inorganic) material are different. Found materials (e.g., antique tiles, wood shelves and oxidation metals) require less care than organic materials. Found materials rarely need the caretaker (artist) to refresh them over a short period, such as an exhibition timeframe. The found (inorganic) materials have a longer duration and, simultaneously, they can absorb time into their surfaces, becoming an index for the environment around them and assembling longer durations into their material. For example, when metal reacts with oxygen, its surface becomes coated in oxidation and these layers become thicker as time elapses (even in some cases leading to erosion of the metal).

When artificial ready-made materials react, certain elements combine and, therefore, they become a merged material that is both natural and artificial (as they are manmade and are registering the natural environment's effects, as well as being artificially staged). For instance, on finding the porcelain tiles in *Not Really Really* (SS-21-07) (Fig.5), their surface had produced a scar that reflected the material's experience. The reaction of the environment, temperature, and temporality had become evidenced through the tile's external scar and I chose to embrace this atrophication by staging them with these 'errors'. Their scars overlap across the tiles' surface, which also weaves both the present and the past into the same surface, which is evidence of the fusion between natural and artificial. This also echoes the

hybridity which renders us all actors and networks/networked.



Fig.5. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-07),
Antique Porcelain lustrous green Tiles and Little Daisy, 15 x 9 x 3 cm, 2021

In each of the above scenarios, rather than providing a general instruction (care), the caretaker (artist) must be present to observe, analyse and make suitable decisions for maintaining each material. As a result, the relationship between myself and the artwork is one of supplementation and co-dependence. The supplementary relation between artist and artwork, is one of interdependence, in which it is imagined that they are irreplaceable for the other. Much like the master/slave narrative in Hegel, we are in a relation that defines each other but in which the power dynamic can change. As the artist, I set the parameters for the work and, therefore, the work relies on this framework to be considered an artwork. On the other hand, throughout the duration of the exhibition I have to maintain the artwork and,

therefore, I become the servant that serves and maintains the master.

Labour as Process

In the thesis *Un-binding Objects*, I announced that the act of replenishing the materials is not a performance but a form of labour. In my past experience of exhibiting the series of *Not Really Really*, I could not predict how the public would encounter my work and the reactions of the visitor were unpredictable. I also avoided over-interpreting the artwork through text, in order to keep the viewer from following the predictable mediated path. Therefore, when viewer and artwork are on an unpredictable journey, they rely on how they encounter each other. Further to this, as the viewer's experience of viewing an artwork is personal, this type of encounter with an artwork demands contemplation through the situated care of the viewer.

However, in the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021) was experienced by a predetermined viewership and, therefore, acted more like a private show, as I knew who the viewers were and what time they would visit the exhibition. This necessarily entailed a consciousness in planning my movements in relation to the artworks and their care, which was based on a targeted viewer. When a specific viewer has been targeted, the act becomes more directed which can cause the maintenance process to come across as more of a performance. The caretaker (artist) now dominates the path of how the viewers can encounter the work. Therefore, I found myself creating an encounter, which induces the viewer to

witness the caring process in a particular way. Whereas, previously, the caretaker (artist) in my work could not predetermine the public's encounter with my work or 'care'.

In the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), each piece of work is an assemblage based on my lived experiences (gaze) and this informs what I choose to make. Understanding that my position is one among many and not an authoritative view, I leave space for the audience to assemble their own care to interpret and construct the work through their own lived experiences. The viewer enters the assemblage and becomes a part of it, as actors that are working to build the meaning of the work (to determine the uses of use). Plural interpretations of each object are produced by the audience, as they are dependent on each viewer's unique experience. Therefore, I do not provide a standardized path or interpretative framework through which the audience should read the artworks. Meaning is co-constructed by the network of artist, artwork, site, and the viewer, and this enables the building of alternative paths in reading the work. This resonates with Walter Benjamin's *Death of the Author* (1977), in which he asserts that the artwork should be read on its own (by the viewer) without consideration of the artist (author). There is no standard path for understanding artworks, and through this the viewer can interpret the artwork without being overwhelmed or directed by the author's intent. Every time when an artwork is being viewed, the work is being re-interpreted again.

Key Terms as Related to Practice

Object

A term that will be used to describe how objects are used in our human everyday lives. I assert that in the current anthropocentric system the classification ‘object’ is created by humans, as humans provide a name/function for each thing which turns the thing into an object.^v The above habitual and dominating relationship with the landscape exposes that humans have become rooted in ‘Anthropocentric’ thinking, which locates humans as the central figures in the world. Through this approach, humans have placed themselves above the realm of objects/nature and organise the latter from a distance. This process of constructing abstract universals is continued through anthropocentric systems, in which each object is given signification through a term and function. This term is relational, as it serves a purpose for humans and stands in for the thing itself. The human-object relationship is an infinite refraction between human and object, so the objects themselves are the reflections of human thought.

Thing

A term that will be used to describe when an object is not normalized through its assumed function. An object becomes, or is a thing because it is untied (‘Un-bound’) from, or does not have a direct use relation to humans, ‘Things: Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German words “bedingt”, we are the be-thinged...’^{vi} Heidegger’s distinction between objects and things posits that an object becomes a thing when it can no longer serve its common function. For example,

^v Anthropocentric - refers to a human-centered, or anthropocentric point of view. In philosophy, anthropocentrism can refer to the point of view that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing.

^{vi} Martin Heidegger, *The Thing, Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.181

when a hammer ceases to work because the handle has fallen off then it reveals its thinghood as distinct from its purpose for humans as a useful object. Graham Harman states in *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (2009) that, ‘...the real object is a unified thing, but not an empty unity. It possesses a multitude of qualities that it unifies in a highly specific way’.^{vii} In Harman’s assessment, a thing and object can exist at the same time in a single substance but Harman seems to be foregrounding that the things internal relations are complex and are unified through the object that appears to a subject. Therefore, things are able to be fully a ‘thing’ but objects cannot be fully an ‘object’ because an object appears to an external viewer who contributes to its interpretation and does not take into account its internal reality. As a result, an object is unified with an often predetermined (through social, political, economic and cultural systems) relationship to an observer/user. However, when an object’s existence or purpose is unknown it can break down into a thing. Following on from this notion of understanding the thing as an unknown, I assert that an artwork is successful when it presents a thing as opposed to an object. The unknown thing, as artwork, can present itself in its complexity and provide the space for the viewer to encounter it with their own personal experience/imagination, as opposed to interpreting it through an anthropocentric lens.

Jointing

An interrogation of the habitual use of combining artificially manufactured materials. Jointing postulates that through the unexpected joining of things, and alternative material combinations, a productive error (or Glitch) could be produced. Therefore, Jointing is a combination of interactions which produces a network of actors

^{vii} Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re-Press, 2009), p.218

and interpretations.

Glitch

A term taken from Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020). Russell compels the reader to try to consciously create a glitch in their habitual living. This is to liberate the reader from the limitations of social constructs. Glitches are productive errors for Russell, who states that they can provide an opportunity for creativity and alternative possibilities. As human society often aims to eliminate the possibilities presented by glitches, in order to prevent the out of control from occurring, a perfect path and end-product is offered instead. In contrast, I aim to embrace the glitches that exist in our lives through my practice, which frames errors as positive additions to society.

Situated-Care

A term that comes from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017). Bellacasa suggests that although society often renders care invisible, it cannot make the act of caring disappear as humans are interdependent (with each other and their environment). In contrast to general use, Bellacasa asserts the importance of a situated care, 'transforming things into matters of care is a way of relating to them, of inevitably becoming affected by them, and of modifying their potential to affect others.'^{viii} This care has to be situated, responsive to particular situations as opposed to a general notion of care, as things are as complex as their human counterparts. For instance, like process and glitch, maintenance of the environment (actors and networks) always exists but has often been overlooked by

^{viii} Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2017), 99.

society. Maintenance exists in everyday society but largely remains invisible, therefore, both my practice and research intend to make these processes of care tangible.

Chapter Outline

My Observational Writing is in a supplementary relationship with my Experiential Writing, which proposes (along with my practice) the way in which the issues of language and its relationship to things could be problematised. This intervention in the structuring of our relationship to objects/things, is an ongoing process but also doubles up as a conclusion to the thesis, which takes the form of an experimental writing practice that hands the baton on to my artistic practice. Each section of my Experiential Writing generates an open-ended possibility for a human relationship with the nature of things that does not accord with the well-used path of manufacturing. The Experiential Writing acts as a supplement to the Observational Writing, responding to the issues thrown up by convention. Together with my artistic practice, they build a non-teleological and non-hierarchical conclusion in relation to each other.

Naming (*Observational Writing*)

Explores the constituted relationship produced between human and object through language. It includes an historic analysis of how language has been deployed to control our human relationship to things by constructing them as objects for human consumption. Humans provide a name/function for each thing which turns the thing into a classifiable object. Whereas the thing (unlike an object) can be described as an entity that has not been

normalized through its assumed function. This chapter then goes on to examine the ability to exploit the loose relationship between thing and language. My practice aims to deconstruct the assumed coupling of the object's name and function, which distracts the viewer from encountering a thing but, rather, presents an object. In contrast, my practice creates a network between artist, thing, name, site, and viewer, in which each of these actors are equal. Therefore, language and function do not take over and frame the boundaries of the object but enable an encounter with the thing.

Grumble (*Experiential Writing*)

Records my self-reflective thoughts based on what transpired during the making public of *Not Really Really* (17-SS-10). In this work, I placed real egg yolks on a monocle plate which was attached to a wall at the ground floor of the Laure Genillard gallery in the exhibition, 'Forms of Address' (2019). This work required an intensive amount of my labour time, as the egg yolk needed to be refreshed in thirty-minute intervals throughout the duration of the show. In this chapter, I include a range of writing from my reflections on labour time to an internal monologue of my time spent in the gallery facilitating the artwork. This then enabled me to reflect on how this was the inverse of our usual human rationality and caused introspection on how a thing can control a human, as well as who sets the bounds of this relationship.

Jointing (*Observational Writing*)

In conjunction with *Naming*, the section *Jointing* interrogates our habitual tendency to relate to materials through combinations relayed to us through artificial-manufacturing processes. These processes limit our access to alternative relationships with things and their properties because these materials organise our uses of use (the way in which we use objects defines how we are used). In the name of efficiency and habit, humans often repetitively force heterogeneous materials to fit together to construct useful assemblages. *Jointing* will unfold through a close reading of Sara Ahmed's phenomenological thinking in *What's the Use?* (2019), in which she deconstructs and complicates the meanings of 'use' to reveal different uses and the political and social motivations that lie beneath them. This chapter continues with an interrogation and contextualization of the contemporary moment and again understands that we are living in an era of overproduction.

Backstage (*Observational Writing*)

It is a term that is figurative for the behind-the-scenes processes involved in making art public. Backstage can also be seen as a process that contains glitch and error. In general, the outsider to the system of production (audience/user) whose purpose is to witness (use) the end-product (onstage) has been blocked from accessing the backstage decisions behind this

making visible. Therefore, the form of the backstage is often unseeable. This chapter, *Backstage*, consolidates how the research and practice work together, as I re-think the processes available in our society and art practice. In response to this, I ‘unbind’ what I term the bounded relation between humans and objects. I do this by trying to facilitate the artworks and viewers' autonomy, by not providing a correct path to follow. The thesis should not be a strict guidebook for the reader to follow but a process that can be used personally and interpreted/deployed differently. This is also why I interpreted the written research into a website, so that the reader could move across the material horizontally and according to their own background interests.

Web-Thesis

In order to ensure the school awards a PhD certificate, research and practice students have been asked to fulfill their requirement of a specific thesis format. A practice-based thesis format is still often trapped in adhering to the formal academic dissertation model. I aim to challenge the ‘uses of use’ in my practice and research and, therefore, this methodology is also integral to the thesis format. I assume that a formal thesis provides a well-used and familiar approach to its content, although this makes it accessible, it also binds the reader to read the thesis in a general way. Therefore, as well as the formal thesis, I will be presenting another thesis in a website format that I will refer to as the web-thesis (Fig.6). The web-thesis

will provide the reader with different ways of navigating and interacting to that of the formal thesis. The address links for the web-thesis are inserted into the first page of the formal thesis file, which provides the reader with an alternative path to choose from before starting to read the formal thesis. The web-thesis has divided each section of the thesis up into separate pages, enabling the reader to take control of the text and forge their own paths through the research and practice.

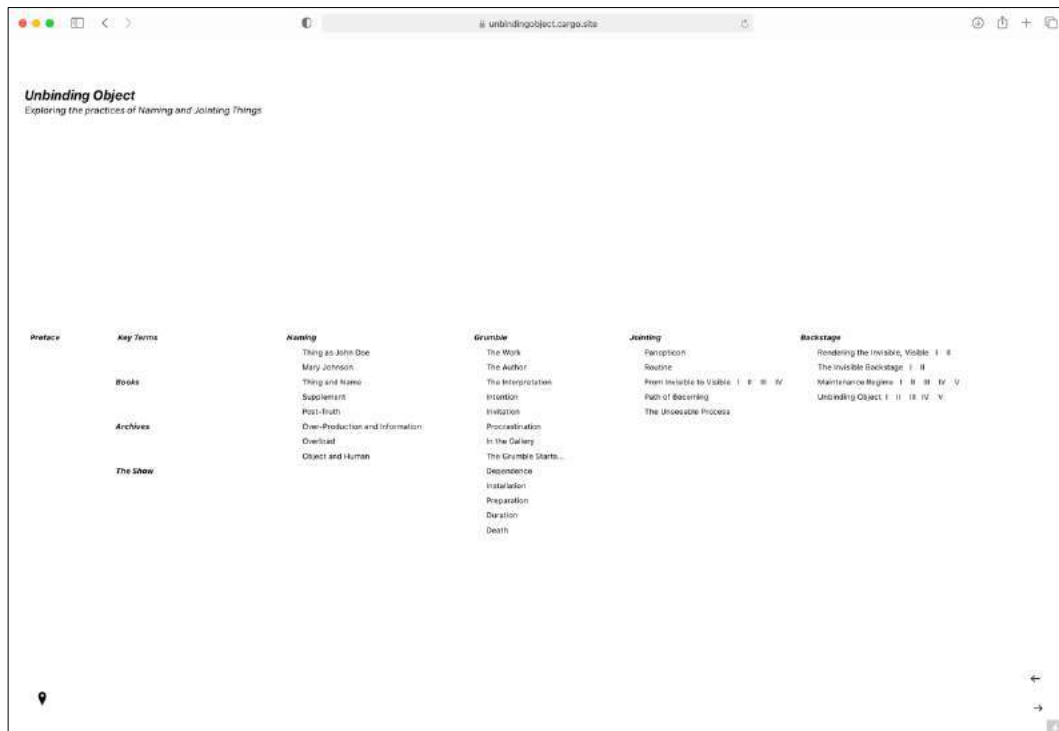


Fig.6. Screenshot of Web-thesis *Unbinding Objects*.

[Link to the Web-Thesis]

<https://chenyunling.com/unbindingobject>

Naming

1. Thing as John Doe

Suppose we try to recall a forgotten name. The state of our consciousness is peculiar. There is a gap therein; but no mere gap. It is a gap that is intensely active.¹

I have always puzzled over the seemingly secure or stable meaning that human subjects attribute to our relationship with things, through the designation of words and their assumed connections with an object's purpose. This relation provokes the following question; is the assumed stable meaning between thing and name the outcome of the repeated gestures of naming or are there some immanent connections between materiality and language? As William James highlights, in the above quote, there might be gaps in the operation of these repeated gestures and, therefore, naming is not such a stable enterprise.

In his book, *Things* (2004), Bill Brown states that; 'The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.'² Brown is asserting that human subjects provide a 'thing' with a name and function to allow the thing to become an object in relation to the human. Following Brown's statement, an object is the summation of a thing produced through assigning it a name plus a function. Brown describes how the word thing designates, '[...] functions to overcome the loss of other words or as a place holder for some future specifying

¹ James, William, *The principles of psychology*, New York: Holt, 1910. Quoted in McGilvary, Evander Bradley. "The Fringe of William James's Psychology the Basis of Logic", *The Philosophical Review*, 1911, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1911), 139 < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2177655.pdf> > (accessed 01. October. 2019)

² Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

operation'.³ The name 'thing' is unstable and, therefore, does not designate a strict framework for its nature. Thus, the name attributed to it gives the entity under discussion more ability to present itself. I describe a 'thing' as similar to a 'John Doe' (unknown person in a police inquiry); the thing belongs to itself, but no-one has ownership over it or its potentiality. The thing is an oasis, and no-one has a claim to its territory. The multi-dimensional potential or complexity of a thing is lost when the subject's definition of the object takes over because when the object is framed by the subject it represents the human perception of the world, as opposed to the thing itself. The thing represents the unknown side of the human-object relation.

The human subject produces an external layer to the thing by encapsulating it in a name, which also becomes its function. For example, imagine a gift that is wrapped in paper – this is similar to what a human subject does when we name a thing and designate its purposed within the anthropocentric order. A human covers the unknown with a layer that is known to them. Graham Harman states the following, '...the fact that objects withdraw from each other makes us ask how they interact at all. If fire only encounters a caricature of cotton, how does it burn that cotton?'⁴ He is highlighting that object must have their own internal reality and a set of real effects with other objects, a set of relations that exist outside of the human-object relation. Therefore, in my scenario, the entire gift represents an object, which means that underneath the gift (object) each of the thing's elements (which are captured and reduced to the gift) are active and open to infinite refraction within the universal abstract object. A thing will not individually appear to itself or other things, as it appears to humans. As a result, human subjects produce objects that hold within themselves the thing (an inter-relation of complex parts) but it is shrouded in a layer that simplifies what they are for human subjects. However, measuring

³ Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

⁴ Graham Harman, *Bells and Whistles-More Speculative Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), 62.

the distance between the thing and its name is difficult and the gap between its outside (which has been co-opted by the subject-object relation) and its internal reality (its inside or thing relation) is not easy to unpick.

In *Seventy-Six Thesis on Object Oriented Philosophy* (2011), Harman highlights that a thing's, 'Essence is the strife between the concealed real objects and the concealed real qualities that make them what they are. This tension lacks any foothold in experience, and happiness elsewhere.'⁵ In this statement, Harman is claiming that each thing has an essence and he elaborates on this reading, 'Each thing has an essence. A chair is what it is, deeper than all the events and surface effects through which it is manifest. To say otherwise makes change impossible.'⁶ However, it is easy to ignore the object's essence or qualities because humans assume that they dominate things through our naming and utilising of them as objects, as well as our ability to manufacture objects. Objects, as a result, appear to exist or be created for humans and all manmade objects are a copy of the original object; the original object having the most intimate relationship with the human who identified it. This process reduces our access to the object's essence and leads humans to forget that each object has its own essence (or thing-potential). For example, a chair could be reduced in science to its chemical composition or to its user as merely a seat. However, in Harman's manifesto above, the ingredients of a chair (e.g. 50% carbon, 42% oxygen, 6% hydrogen, 1% nitrogen, and 1% other elements) and its use cannot fully represent what a chair is. Harman reminds humans that each object has an essence, although its essence is never directly knowable through human experience.

Our human relation to the essence or thing is also, simultaneously, loose. In the everyday human treatment of objects, it is difficult to see this looseness in our relation to

⁵ Essence - An essence characterizes a thing or a form, in the sense of the forms and ideas in Platonic idealism. It is innate, permanent, unalterable, and eternal, and is present in every possible world.

⁶ Graham Harman, *Bells and Whistles-More Speculative Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), 63.

an object but, as Harman highlights, their essences are active, or else change would be impossible. For example, Joseph Kosuth points to the looseness of an object's relationship to the human subject in his work, *One and Three Chairs* (1965). In this work, Kosuth separated one object into three layers; a real chair, a photograph of a chair, and a name/definition of a chair (Fig.1). Kosuth juxtaposed these three different approaches to the object (chair) to show the differences within the object that the subject assumes is merely one entity (chair). Through this he also questions the consistency of the term/field of art, which also produces a human relationship to objects.



Fig.1. Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965,
[online]<www.moma.org/collection/works/81435> (accessed 09. October. 2019)

2. Mary Johnson

In contemporary art, it is the museological procedure that an artist labels their artwork with a title, dimensions, list of materials and year. As a result, the artwork carries this supplementary textual information to the viewer and the viewer assumes that these claims about the artwork are stable. There may even be a literary description provided for

the viewer in order to further aid their interpretation of the work. Kosuth's, *One and Three Chairs* (1965) successfully challenges the stability of these definitions provided for an object, but he does not look into interpretations of the thing itself (it's essence). Kosuth's practice lingers around the object, separating it into name and thing, but does not explore the thing's ability to self-represent.

To further explore this looseness between thing and name, we can look at the instance of the subject-object relation in a person's name. A common name, such as 'Mary Johnson' cannot and should not represent all people that are called 'Mary Johnson' in the world; each 'Mary' has a different life, age, hobby etc. It can clearly be seen, in this scenario, that there is a huge gap between the outer name and inner life of the person. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa states in her book, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017), 'Things are not one thing - like humans are not "the" human.'⁷ In this statement, Bellacasa highlights how looking at the inner life of humans allows us to access the inner life and difference between things. Bellacasa goes on to suggest that a better understanding of the nature of things does not require humans to over-care for them, as this would situate the human as the more powerful care giver. In contrast, Bellacasa suggests that we all share the same ecosystem and thus have to co-operate, 'Most of us need care, feel care, are cared for, or encounter care, in one way or another.'⁸ However, this care has to be situated, responsive to particular situations as opposed to a general notion of care, as things are as complex as their human counterparts. Things are also part of our human ecosystem; they are connected and inter-relational with humans. Humans and things (nonhumans either organic or inorganic) can help each other flourish and can also damage each other or the environment on which they all depend.

⁷ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2017), 144.

⁸ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2017), 1.

Humans are used to simplifying things into objects, to allow themselves to use them easily and without any emotional or complex thinking that would be required in a relationship with things. Kosuth deconstructed the object (chair) into three elements: image of a chair, a physical chair and the word chair but this is still analysing a chair from a human perspective. However, if you did not wrap the chair in the human interpretations that Kosuth does, the chair's thingness would have the opportunity to become even more complex. This situation produces a set of questions: what is the internal life of the chair?; With which non-human actors has the chair come into contact?; From which materials is the chair made?; By which factory is it assembled?; What is the ratio of human/machine involvement in the making of it?; Who has sat on the chair before?; Where is the chair positioned in relation to its environment? The chair is in a complex web of internal and external relations, which makes its solid definition difficult to ascertain. Moreover, why is the thing (chair) with the name (chair) of this object (chair) so certain? How can humans be certain that they represent the same thing, that this chair is 'the' chair?

3. Thing and Name

Francis Ponge minutely examines everyday objects, as he aims to reduce the external prejudices brought through his human consciousness to the object. In contrast, he approaches the thing with a deeper set of interpretations to consider its unnamed and unnamable aspects. Ponge describes a thing through a visceral encounter, in which his words enrich a more complex relationship with the object (in this instance an orange, the name of which I have blanked out so that the reader can focus on Ponge's description rather than the term 'orange'):

Just as in a sponge, there is _____ in the yearning to recover its content after having been subjected to the ordeal of squeezing. But whereas the sponge always succeeds, the _____ never does, for its cells have burst, its tissues have been torn. Whilst the rind alone, thanks to its elasticity, slowly regains its shape, an

amber liquid has spilled, accompanied it's true by delicate refreshment and odour, but often too by the bitter awareness of a premature ejaculation of seeds...⁹

Through his writing, Ponge questions his own preconceived ideas about the objects he encounters in order to ask, what is an orange? Instead of using the term 'orange' to include everything about an orange, he observes and narrates to the reader his experience of the orange. In place of choosing to describe a thing, humans often choose to refer to it by its name as an expedient shorthand. This simplifies the complex assemblage and discards the interconnected fragments that make up things, for example, texture, colour, taste and shape. Humans only see what they are looking for, but they only look for what they can see.

The human use of an object commonly begins with 'naming' and 'defining' the object. Then we recall the definition of the object through its name and then repeat this idea in relation to its assumed use. The production of 'Names', such as in a dictionary, is like a manifesto of representing the subject-object relation. This assumes that a triangular relationship between human, object and language (human-object-language) is forged and appears to be inseparable. As Anders Kreuger highlights,

The object is always already both image and word. This is ultimately because humans are defined by our use of language. There are no human communities today without language and no primitive versions of language reflecting previous stages of development.¹⁰

Therefore, a human relationship with objects does not exist outside of language, so we interpret material things through words, names and their associated meanings.

According to Ferdinand de Saussure's, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), a sign is composed out of the signifier and signified. For Saussure, even the root concept is malleable, as 'The connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary.'¹¹ The signifier

⁹ Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things*, ed. Beth Archer (McGraw-Hill Book Company: New York, 1942), 36.

¹⁰ Anders Kreuger, "What things mean," in *Documents of Contemporary Art: The Object*, ed. Antony Hudek (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2013), 158.

¹¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983.), 120.

is the sound associated with, or an image of, something (e.g. a tree's branches blowing in the wind or the silhouette of a tree). The signified is the concept of the thing (e.g. wood product, branches for nesting, shade to sit in), and the sign is the object that combines the signifier and the signified into a meaningful unit. I postulate that signs are predisposed with a set of functions that are assumed to convey and be used as a shorthand in a wider system. Objects are subjected to the same approach. Saussure explained that the linguistic sign unites not a thing or a name but a sound-image and a concept, so he divided the sign into two components: signifier and signified. Saussure states that, 'a linguistic system is a series of phonetic differences matched with a series of conceptual differences.'¹²

For Saussure, the combination of signifier and the signified is a positive unit that can be digested by the human subject. The signifier can be described as a physical existence; a material form, which translates things into objects that can be seen, heard, touched, smelled and tasted. On the other hand, the signified can be explained as a connotation or a mental concept. As in linguistics, the signifier and signified are two-sides of an entity that exists psychologically. The implication being that the signifier and signified are two sides of the same human consciousness. Thus, the two components together represent the complete object. One cannot be all, but all can be one. In response to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory and his static binary in semiotics, signifier and signified, Julia Kristeva emphasizes that language is a dynamic structure. Kristeva states that, 'To describe the signifying operation of poetic language is to describe the mechanism of conjunction within a potential infinity.'¹³ Kristeva claims that each text is unique but also open and un-finished and this reveals that there is a finite (individual text) in relation to an infinity (past, present and future texts) and this is how human language

¹² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Roy Harris (London: Bloomsbury, 2019.), 141.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams", in *The Tel Quel Reader* ed. Ffrench and Lack, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 29, <https://monoskop.org/images/f/fd/The_Tel_Quel_Reader_1998.pdf> (accessed 11. June. 2020)

develops. Therefore, language is an organic process that is kept alive through a constant dialogue and this is what produces language's dynamism, value and meaning.

Kristeva states that, 'The drives that extract the body from its homogeneous shell and turn it into a space linked to the outside, they are the forces which mark out the chora¹⁴ in process.'¹⁵ Kristeva identifies a reciprocal relationship between language and humans, which is more fluid than Saussure's structured and rigid semiotics. In the latter, the structure of language remains consistent and in the former, the structure of language is open to change. Kristeva locates an interplay between internal (psychological) and external (social text) forces that structure language. This means that humans are not limited to a language that structures us but that we can steer and deploy language differently. Humans require language to communicate and language needs humans to exist or to be kept alive.

Kristeva suggest that texts insert themselves into other texts, their valuation is based on the dialogical mode and what is kept relevant and alive; 'Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.'¹⁶ Within Kristeva's system, a single entity is never autonomous, as each unit is multi-determined and correlates or is integrated with another unit.

I identify with elements of Kristeva's Post-structuralist position, which claims that language could not independently exist by itself without human dialogue. In Kristeva's account, humans act like a bridge that links language to the outside social text. However, Kristeva's focus is on a language system centered around human perception and this

¹⁴ Chora - A term that Kristeva adopts from Plato's theory of 'a mobile receptacle of mixing, of contradiction and movement, vital to nature's functioning before the teleological intervention of God and corresponding to the mother. Kristeva situating the chora without any body in particular. Thus, the subject in process is represented by the semiotic chora, which is the place of perpetual renewal in the signifying process.'
<<http://www.signosemio.com/kristeva/subject-in-process.asp>> (accessed 11. June. 2020)

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams", in *The Tel Quel Reader* ed. Ffrench and Lack, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 29, <https://monoskop.org/images/f/fd/The_Tel_Quel_Reader_1998.pdf> (accessed 11. June. 2020)

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

could be interpreted to mean that objects (imbued with textual meaning by humans) are relevant and alive but things (self-presenting without immediate recourse to language) are irrelevant and dead. Kristeva's language as dialogue fluctuates between the internal (human psychology) and external (human society) without recourse to nonhuman entities.

Therefore, Saussure's structuralist theory actually allows more possibilities for 'things' because the gap between signified and signifier suggests that there is a space for a thing to self-present without language (signifying without a stabilized signified). A space of potentiality that isn't immediately related back into the interplay of human language but could affect the perceptions that inform language systems. Therefore, withdrawing the usual interplay of language between human and thing has the potential to alter the normative perceptive field of humans. Producing the following question: without relating my experience to an outside of societal norms, what will I see in things?

However, there is still room to doubt the stability of a sign within Saussure's theory, as an interval exists between signifier and signified. This is an interval that suggests that there can be errors or manipulation within communication, in the sense that the signifier may not be able to carry over its meaning (signified). For example, when a very young preverbal child is playing with their toys and then begins to cry, it may not be clear to their parents what has caused them to be upset. The parent receives the signifier without understanding what the signified is (the actual reason for the crying, or concept) and so they do not immediately understand how to react.

Saussure's theory highlights that human often neglect the distance between signifier and signified. Parent and child do not share the same idea of either signifier or signified, which leads to a gap between the thing and name. In effect, the thing and name have been pulled away from each other. In Saussure's theory, the signifier operates like a thing and the signified corresponds to the name. I think of the sign as an object; with the signifier

acting as the thing, which allows the viewer to experience it, and the signified as the name, which provides the viewer with the tools to recall and use it. The signifier and signified are related to each other in Saussure's theory but he also shows that neither one can be equated to the whole object, as the sign relies on these two differentials. Although, Saussure allows for this distance between signifier and signified they are both still related to the human subject, as Saussure has produced an object through two human orientated sides (signifier and signified). Saussure presents us with a distance between two poles of the sign, but they still rely on each other through their human receiver (the third position). This entails that the most ordinary things are not granted an identity without possessing a name. For example, an art critic who writes an article comprised of subject-specific words that are intended to describe the artwork perfectly, a process in which the writer has both the signifier and signified (name and thing) in mind while describing, assumes that the reader will be able to understand the work from reading their words. If the reader does not visit the show, they will only receive the description through the critic's or observer's words (signified/name and definition). This is an erroneous approach, as the reader is not experiencing the work and cannot feel, sense and intuit it. If they did encounter the artwork in person, then they would most likely realize that their original mental image, which is produced from the text, is very different to their experience. For example, while looking at an artwork in a gallery, there is either a gap or an addition after looking at the artwork's label (title). When looking at both the artwork and its title, there can be either: a) a lack of connection in putting both together, b) the title will seem to overpower the artwork or c) the title becomes another material within the artwork. Either the title is an addition (as in 'c') or a subtraction (as in 'a' or 'b'), for me they are often two individuals (title and artwork) and they are unnaturally forced to tied together tightly.

4. Supplement

According to Jacques Derrida in his book, *Of Grammatology* (1967), the binary oppositions in thought, such as subject versus object (nature versus society, active versus passive etc.) are assumed to have a hierarchy in which one of the terms is more powerful. Derrida uses an example of the binary opposition found between speech/writing but asserts that there is no stable hierarchy, as speech/writing makes an unfounded destabilising play between the two. As Derrida states:

If indication is not added onto expression which is not added onto sense, we can nevertheless speak in regard to them, about an original 'supplement': their addition comes to make up for a deficiency, it comes to compensate for a primordial non-self-presence.¹⁷

Derrida argues that writing has been considered as merely a derivative form of speech. Critiquing this relationship between speech and writing, Derrida suggests that written symbols are legitimate signifiers on their own—that they should not be considered as secondary or derivative in relation to oral speech. This hierarchical ideology between speech and writing can be traced back to the impacts of colonialism,¹⁸ as western colonisers tended to only recognise written languages that had a phonic alphabet. Therefore, the colonised peoples had to learn the coloniser's language to gain access to power. Frantz Fanon describes this power relation, in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), '...a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power.'¹⁹ Fanon is highlighting that the colonized body has to think

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973. Quoted in Robert Bernasconi, "Supplement". In Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts. edit. Claire Colebrook. 19-22. Oxon: Routledge, 2014. < <https://grattoncourses.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/derrida-key-concepts-the-supplement.pdf> > (accessed 11. June. 2020)

¹⁸ Colonialism - The policy of a nation seeking to extend or retain its authority over other people or territories, generally with the aim of economic dominance. The colonising country seeks to benefit from the colonised country or land mass.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2008), 18. < https://monoskop.org/images/a/a5/Fanon_Frantz_Black_Skin_White_Masks_1986.pdf > (accessed 05.

and operate within the language of power (colonizer) in order to access that power and, therefore, to decolonise requires a change in this power relation. As a result of the colonial power relation, other modes of language and, as we think through language, other modes of thought were written over (colonised) and lost. Walter D. Mignolo declares in *Cultural Studies* (2007) that, 'De-linking requires analysis of the making and re-making of the imperial and colonial differences and it requires visions and strategies for the implementation of border thinking leading to de-colonisation of knowledge and of being.'²⁰ Mignolo's idea of de-linking and changing the terms of the conversation, aims to fracture the dominance of colonial forms of knowledge and understanding (which still rule our current systems) to reconstitute other ways of thinking, speaking, living and being in the world.

The operation of this power relation is still very prominent within art practices and museum display strategies to this day. Subsequently to the museological models originally introduced by the Louvre and MoMA, visitors in museums and galleries have formed a habit of reading the descriptive label about the work in order to understand an art object. The museum's omnipresent knowledge and understanding (coloniser's language) suggests to visitors, through what is often interpreted as a neutral voice (coloniser), to believe that they are on the correct path to understanding the artwork. I aim to follow Mignolo's idea of de-linking within the context of the artwork's relationship to language, by de-linking from the dominant model for interpreting art and building up a subjective and experiential understanding of looking at and perceiving things.

In Derrida's, *Of Grammatology* (1967) he assesses Saussure's linguistic structuralism by starting with a quote by Saussure, '...language and writing are two

December.2019)

²⁰ Walter D Mignolo, *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge,2007), 459. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>> (accessed 19. December.2019)

distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first.’²¹ Saussure claims that writing is secondary to speech. In contrast, Derrida questions whether speech can be created before and after writing. He concludes that speech will always need its written text to assist and preserve itself in the present. Simultaneously, he asserts that writing can exist independently of speech. Derrida declares that speech itself is also a sign; speech and writing can be both absent and present, so they do not need to simultaneously be heard/read side by side. Therefore, the hierarchy associated with speech and writing is undone through the ambiguity and autonomy of their positions. Derrida claims that context is unbounded, ‘If meaning is related to context, there is, with respect to the very structure of language, no proper context to provide proof of a final meaning.’²² Both signified and signifier are related and irrevocably detached but this also means that words, phrases and sentences are able to be repeated in different contexts. Derrida critiques Saussure’s idea of signs and instead suggests that they are not only two-sided but also over-lapping. In Derrida’s thinking, the binary opposition has been deconstructed and this, ‘... has suggested a method in which we can subvert these oppositions only by showing that one of the opposite terms can only exist within another.’²³ As a result, the structures in language themselves begin to overlap and clash. For example, the binary oppositions of presence/absence and speech/writing are relational, as they can only express themselves in relation to the other. Each term in the relation is generated through the other and the one needs the other to prove its inverse existence. This overlapping shows that there is a co-dependent relationship of one relying on the other. In the signifier and signified, the two-sided and over-lapping relationships

²¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983.), 23.

²² John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 123.

²³ Ceren Yegen, *Derrida and Language: Deconstruction* (Turkey: Macrothink Institute-International Journal of Linguistics, 2014), 53.

are similar to the colonial construct as highlighted by Mignolo. The colonial position relies on the binary relationship it has constructed with the colonised to assert and affirm its power.

It is through the habitual behavior of rehearsal and repetition that humans have constructed generic objects. Human behaviour is often viewed as unusual because we can act and interact while having the ability to analyse each act. The contradiction between human naming (dominating) and the thing that is named (object), can be extrapolated through Derrida's term, 'Logic of Supplementarity'.²⁴ Through the Logic of Supplementarity, Derrida uses the term 'supplementarity' from *Of Grammatology* (2016) to represent his concept, which is that the original is created through its copies or supplements. The supplement leads to more supplements, which are needed in order to create the original. This process of copying (supplements) is then what makes the original, 'Original', as without the copies how is the original defined? Derrida states, 'Rather the supplement of origin: which supplements the failing origin and which is however not derived: this supplement is, as one says of a spare part, of the original make.'²⁵ Therefore, the copies assert the importance of the original and strengthen its position. Derrida appears to be asserting that in one way, it can be observed that the human-object relation positions humans as in command of objects because humans are the only ones that find things, create things and name things. However, it can also be explained that it is the objects which make humans complete, as without using and naming things the concept of the original or the copy (both as a result of the supplement) that humans rely on would not exist.

²⁴ Logic of supplementarity - It is a notion of the original is created by the copies, and that the original is always deferred – never to be grasped, meaning that the original, becomes a supplement which will then leads to more supplements needed to help explain (original).

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns poplins University press, 2016), 341.

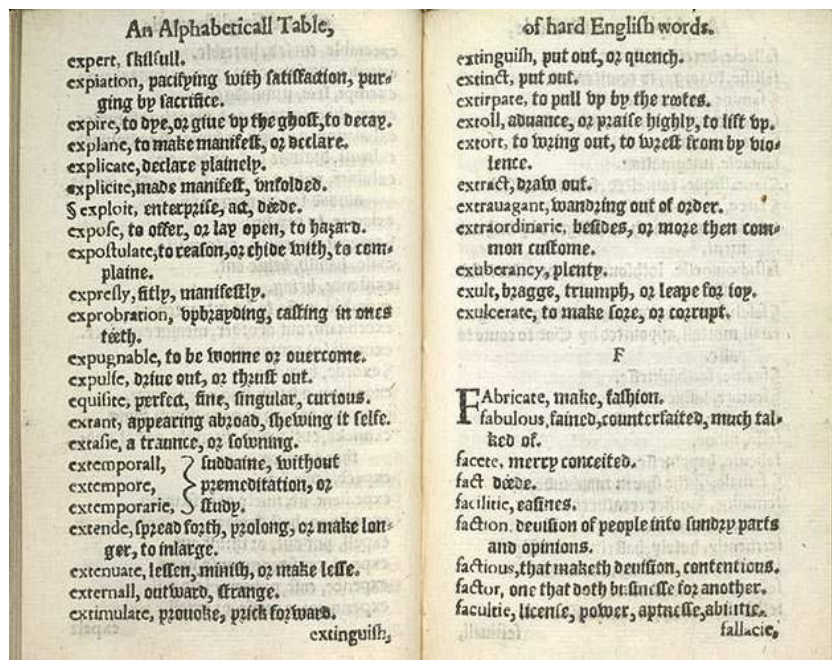


Fig.2 Robert Cawdrey, *Table Alphabeticall*, 1604

[online]<<https://abookadayinhay.com/2016/05/16/table-alphabeticall/>> (accessed 23. December. 2020)

Derrida highlights that the name/thing binary also has an unclear master/servant relation, which produces a chicken-and-egg conundrum. In a way, it does not matter if the answer is chicken or egg, both the former and the latter are like Saussure's idea of signifier and signified; they are two sides of the same coin. They need both to be complete; one cannot be all, only all can be one. From the human view, it is difficult to track back whether the name of the thing came before the object (through its conceptualisation/invention) or the use of an object (such as a tool) came first and then was named due to its purpose. It is difficult to clarify their different statuses, we often assume that the process is that a thing is created or found first, then humans name the thing and it becomes an object. Children name their toys, which is a taught behaviour in which we identify the toy in order to possess the thing. An example of this naming methodology is the classification model introduced by the production and use of dictionaries.

Dictionaries are the equivalent of a Bible but one that forges object identities;

through the narrative explanation (definition) it promulgates the object's (whether physical, conceptual or virtual) certificate to existence (name and function). From the human perspective, it is one such model that humans use to dominate and organise the objects (and subjects) we name. For example, take the definition of Orange in the Oxford English Dictionary:

Orange (noun.) The fruit of a tree, a large globose many-celled berry with sub-acid juicy pulp, enclosed in a tough rind externally of a bright reddish yellow colour. An evergreen tree, a native of the East, now largely cultivated in the South of Europe, the Azores, and in most warm, temperate, or subtropical regions; it produces fragrant white flowers.²⁶

Above is a common definition of what an orange is defined to be in a dictionary. In contrast, if humans came across an unknown variety or species of orange then they are unlikely to eat the unknown thing (or at least not until we have tested it on others). So, why do humans choose to classify their surroundings through the definition/name of an object (orange)? Does the definition process make the landscape safer and more reliable or does it restrict our human horizons and opportunities for knowing things?

A dictionary is a book with resources and information; it lists the words in a given language and allocates them with meaning, pronunciation, etymology and usage. It is a book of naming and defining objects. The function of an English dictionary was standardised through Robert Cawdrey's, *Table Alphabetically* (1604). Cawdrey aims to carefully list all the words in alphabetical order and defines each word through a brief description. Each word is written in order and is normalised through its function and identification (Fig.2). The dictionary has become a standard for the relationship between objects and humans; meanings are stabilised and used to defend the traditions of

²⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, *Oxford University Press* <<https://www.oed.com/oed2/00164396>> (accessed 23. January. 2020)

language. The dictionary is like a powerful chain that ties both the thing and its name tightly together for the human subject's easy consumption. By providing the reader with a taxonomy, pronunciation, provenance and function for each term, dictionaries construct a stable identity for each subject/object. All things have to have a terminology, to enable humans to recall them and to become perceptible or meaningful to humans. This system of learning language looks reasonable to humans because we are educated to explore and dominate things (through such tools as a dictionary). We are taught to search for an unknown object (thing) in order to name it (to find something new and then conquer it). This is a universal approach for humans to produce our own version of the world. We can also see this approach reflected in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), 'The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.'²⁷ Said highlights that *Orientalism* is produced through colonial discourse and analysis that represents the colonised cultures as radically Other, in order to create a stronger identity for Western cultures. Therefore, the colonisers present an ideology that defines itself against others to build up power. Said also questions one of William Robertson Smith's comments in relation to another culture in his *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1885), 'Yet many of the prejudices which seems to us most distinctively Mohammedan have no basis in the Koran... The Arabian traveler is quite different from ourselves.'²⁸ The word "us" and "ourselves" deployed by Smith in this sentence clearly defines the writer as speaking from a coloniser's vantage point. "We" are this, "they" are that, explicitly uses the binary oppositions of coloniser and colonised. This means that the colonisers are tied to the colonised through this relation. Therefore, each binary (Occident/Orient, Coloniser/Colonised, Presence/Absence to Speech/Writing)

²⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 236.

includes both oppositions and binds the two terms together.

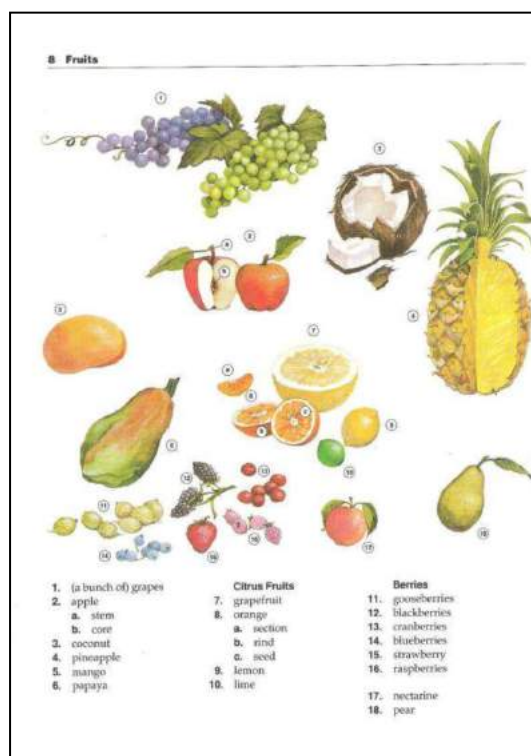


Fig.3. Fruits, The New Oxford Picture Dictionary, Oxford University Press: New York, 1988
[online]<<http://homepage.ntu.edu.tw/~karchung/OxfordPictureDictionary.pdf>> (accessed 20. October.2019)

5. Post-Truth

From my educational experience, I was taught through being shown words with descriptors.²⁹ For example, the content that students received from my history class during high school in Taiwan meant that we needed to only memorise the specific date, location, reason and result of the event in order to be able to achieve educational success. If you could memorise and recall the event or topic then the student would achieve good grades. This approach appears to be a common and normal learning system across many

²⁹ Spoon-Feeding Education - To give someone information in a way that requires or allows no further thinking or effort.

Asian cultures. However, the information students receive will unconsciously affect their political thoughts and decisions when they grow up. Information, history and knowledge are all manmade. Jean Baudrillard states, in *Simulacra and Simulations* (1994) that, '...we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.'³⁰ If all human knowledge and understanding is based on the manmade text, it is doubtful that humans have the ability to identify what the actuality of other existences outside of our colonial and anthropocentric knowledge systems. Following with Baudrillard's idea, human brain is similar with media corporations operating on the internet which is using multiple communications to import to one entrance. Rather than analysing the respectability of each source, humans use the most convenient way to absorb the information presented and we instinctually use what is most economic route in terms of time.

In correlation with this concern, Michel Foucault defines 'regimes of truth' as the historically specific mechanisms which produce discourses that function as 'true' in particular times and places.³¹ For Foucault, power is built up from a system that produces truth through current social discussions, knowledge production and historical narratives. However, simultaneously, when humans start to be concerned about the authenticity of the information that they receive, they assume that all power and authority is collapsing. Foucault, in *The Order of Things* (1966), clarifies this process:

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 79.

³¹ Regimes of Truth - Is first introduced by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), where speaking of the formation of a corpus of knowledge, techniques, scientific discourses that became entangled with the practice of the power to punish, he argues that a new regime of the truth has emerged.

moment of its expression.³²

The decisions behind the visible order are often invisible but these invisible operations define the classification of objects and by accepting the given language we often follow this historical model without questioning it. Foucault asks us humans to question how and why the laws of language have been artificially made up by humans to control their environment and themselves. This also produces the question; why do humans have to control the landscape and be controlled by a set of ordered relations to that landscape? Landscape here, refers to the fields of language, vision and knowledge production and how they organise the human relationship with the world. It is the aim of this thesis to explore whether these relations that are produced through language and knowledge are stable, or if they can be realigned. This leads to further questions; currently humans are living within their own constructed order, or the order constructed by a powerful elite, but what will happen when humans need to adapt their currently self-imposed order? What are the suitable systems for humans to produce in the future or, even, now? Foucault introduces the idea that truths can change throughout time, so they are historically situated in specific societal discourses and this means that truths are malleable. New discourses will produce new truths and, therefore, what has dominated so far can be reinvented. I aim to exploit the stability assumed between object, name and function through my practice and writing, by exploring the instability of the orders that govern the human relationship to things as highlighted by Foucault. Through my practice I aim to make space for the artwork to self-represent and for the reader to interpret by constructing a network out of language and thing, as opposed to a hierarchy. Roland Barthes states in *The Rustle of Language* (1989) that ‘...the reader is a man without history, without

³² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge: London and New York, 1966), xxi.

biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted'.³³ Barthes highlights that once the writer/artist publishes their work, the author should no longer interpret the work and it should be up to the reader(s) to create its meaning. Therefore, the creative process is located in the reading/viewing rather than writing/making.

Foucault's transitory and contextual social truths, or order of things, is also applicable to the current Post-Truth society,³⁴ which relates to, or denotes circumstances in which, objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotional and personal belief. In the book, *Post-Truth* (2018) Lee McIntyre states that, '... we arrived in a post-truth era, when "alternative facts" replace actual facts, and feelings have more weight than evidence.'³⁵ The 'facts' that are present in McIntyre's Post-Truth era are subjective beliefs. Whether facts are true or false becomes less important and decisions regarding which kind of belief is more acceptable have taken their place. Subjective beliefs become the 'truth' in place of the 'real'.³⁶ This is like watching a historical drama, in which the ability to distinguish fact and fiction is ambiguous and overlapping. The media does not say anything and, as Baudrillard states, '...meaning is lost and devoured faster than it can be re-injected.'³⁷

What the 'Post-Truth' society does show us is that the ambivalence between binaries (e.g. true or false beliefs), or the looseness between signifier and signified mentioned above, produces a space in which you can doubt the decision of calling an orange an 'orange'. Therefore, what to many of us looks like a negative situation (in which there are

³³ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, Trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1989), 54.

³⁴ Post-Truth – In relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

³⁵ McIntyre, Lee. "Post-Truth, MIT Press". < <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/post-truth> > (accessed 17. December. 2019)

³⁶ Real - Actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact; not imagined or supposed.

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), c79.

no facts) could potentially create an opportunity for us to use a different lens through which to look at our human relationships with the environment. In between name and thing there is gap but humans aim to decrease this gap by producing an object (combining name and thing to one reduced or human facing version) through education. An object is also produced through a process of reiteration, such as through the activity of learning a language. For example, when using Rote Learning students are exposed to a loop of learn-exam-forget-preparation-learn, which enables them to memorise the name of an object. In learning language, students often need to take a classical qualification exam, or Vocabulary Test, which is an obvious human behaviour of enforcing ourselves to memorise what an object is called. An object becomes the definition with which it is assigned or else the meaning of the thing would be in constant deferral; a continual and indefinite postponement which means that a single definite meaning could never be achieved or relied upon.

6. Over-Production and Information Overload

A		
a/an (det)	activity (n)	agency (n)
ability (n)	actor (n)	ago (adv)
able (adj)	actress (n)	agree (v)
• be able to	actually (adv)	ahead (adv)
about (adv & prep)	• She seems a bit strict at first, but she's actually very nice.	aim (n & v)
• about 500 students (adv)	• Are you actually going to take the job?	air (n)
• The film is about a small boy. (prep)		air conditioning (n)
above (adj, adv & prep)	ad (advertisement) (n)	air force (n)
abroad (adv)	add (v)	airline (n)
absent (adj)	addition (n)	airport (n)
absolutely (adv)	• in addition	alarm (n)
• The movie was absolutely awful.	address (n)	alarm clock (n)
accent(n)	admit (v)	album (n)
• She has a beautiful French accent.	admission (n)	alive (adj)
accept (v)	• charges/lost price	all (adj, adv, det & pron)
access (n)	admit (v)	all right/straight (adj, adv & exclamation)
• disabled access	adult (adj & n)	allow (v)
• internet access	advance (n)	almost (adv)
accident (n)	• took in advance	alone (adv & adj)
accommodation (n)	advanced (adj)	along (adv & prep)
accompany (v)	advantage (n)	aloud (adv)
according to (prep. phr)	adventure (n)	alphabet (n)
account (n)	advert (n)	already (adv)
accountant (n)	advertise (v)	also (adv)
accurate (adj)	advertisement (n)	although (conj)
ache (n)	advice (n)	altogether (adv)
achieve (v)	advise (v)	always (adv)
across (adv & prep)	aeroplane (n)	a.m. (adv)
act (n & v)	afford (v)	amazed (adj)
• in the second act (of the play) (n)	afraid (adj)	amazing (adj)
• to act in a play (v)	after (adv, conj & prep)	ambition (n)
• to act strangely (v)	afternoon (n)	ambulance (n)
action (n)	afterwards (adv)	among (amongst) (prep)
active (adj)	again (adv)	amount (n)
	against (prep)	amusing (adj)
	age (n)	an (det)
	aged (adj)	ancient (adj)

Fig.4. Vocabulary List, Cambridge English: Preliminary and Preliminary for School Vocabulary List, [online]< <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/84669-pet-vocabulary-list.pdf>> (accessed 14. October. 2019)

After memorising thousands of words from a school's vocabulary list, there is still a huge gap between this and the practice of typing the 'correct word' in order to find the object that you are referring to in an online search engine. For example, Amazon currently has 564 million products on their electronic commerce database but what 'name' should we type into the search bar in order to find the particular item that you want? In Google, the most popular result will become the most visible product. The most clicked item will register higher up on other customers' searches and this in turn will incur better customer ratings due to exposure to more people. In this instance, the most visible product becomes the 'truth' of the search as it becomes the item that we are enforced to believe is the best. On the online sales platform that is Amazon, the manufacturer/seller who uploads the product becomes the one who defines the object's

name and the parameters of the customer's search. The product's name on Amazon can be quite subjective (or colloquial) and site-specific affair and, as a result, can be quite hard to locate. An Amazon search can be like trying to hit a target with an arrow without necessarily knowing where the target's location is, so you have to keep on shooting until you hit something solid. This tests the customer's knowledge, logic and vocabulary in relation to the name of the product, as you have to be accurate and get your arrow (name put into search) right over the right target (match with the seller) to succeed. Your vocabulary is essential, as it is the list in your knowledge bank that you refer to in order to get to the object you aim to purchase. For example, if I want to find a specific flavour and brand of a tea, but I have forgotten its name, I will enter an unlimited amount of related terms; tea, black tea, purple box, strong flavour, smoky, triangular tea bag... and the more insecure I am in knowing the thing's name the more walls will obstruct me in reaching the object. On the online search engine, it has become an informal law that if the user does not have the correct name of the thing then the corresponding item will not turn up for you. As a result, the over-production of manmade things is now diminishing our human control in relation to recalling objects; there are too many options or possibilities for each product. Humans are in an era of over-production and information overload. Alvin Toffler describes the consequences of an excess of information in, *Future Shock* (1970):

[...] information overload occurs when the amount of input to a system exceeds its processing capacity. Decision makers have fairly limited cognitive processing capacity. Consequently, when information overload occurs, it is likely that a reduction in decision quality will occur.³⁸

³⁸ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), 350.

Humans are not able to absorb an overly complex array of information or thousands of options, so the information that each human receives will be subjectively filtered. Imagine that a group of people are trapped in a rainstorm, but they want to harvest the water. The amount of water each person is capable of catching in a single bucket cannot represent or harness the whole rainstorm. On the other hand, as the result of information overload, publications are not the only possibility for receiving information anymore. Information now has plural channels for obtainment; social media platforms, websites, news, e-books... However, due to the over-production of things, objects and products, there is an excess in the supply of objects. It is easy to drown in information if humans do not find navigational tools by which to frame their knowledge consumption, 'culture is perishing in overproduction, in an avalanche of words, in the madness of quantity'³⁹ says Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (2009). Humans are living in an era in which for many the number of consumables is increasing and overwhelmingly available, which causes objects to depreciate in value. For example, when a white shirt is damaged, instead of fixing it, contemporary humans are more likely to buy a new one and this exemplifies the unlimited duplication of the replaceable. This then produces a question around the value of a white shirt and the way in which we consume: what are we humans searching for?; What are we so anxious to discover or consume?; Do we want to, and more importantly can we, know or obtain everything?

7. Object and Human

Humans have constructed a gap through creating a hierarchy between ourselves and others (nonhuman entities), across which we are unable to communicate. Anthropocentric humans legitimate their authority through the ownership of things. This

³⁹ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, (London: Faber and Faber), 53. <https://www.msjeeler.com/uploads/1/4/0/6/1406968/milan_kundera_-_the_unbearable_lightness_of_being.pdf> (accessed 04. December. 2019)

leads humans to believe that they have the sole rights and power towards the Earth's resources because only we can name the unknown. This also partly fuels the desire to know everything. Current human behavior is largely based on a unidirectional force that aims to tame and control its environment. In, *The Vanishing Book of Life on Earth* (2006) Eric R. Pianka, an American herpetologist and evolutionary ecologist who focuses on the factors that influence the evolution of biodiversity, states that;

The biggest enemy we face is anthropocentrism. This is that common attitude that everything on this earth was put here for "human" use, to be used any way we want. An example of an anthropocentric human is a man with a chain saw cutting down a redwood tree that's a thousand years old. That is audacity and that is anthropocentrism and that is wrong.⁴⁰

Anthropocentric thinking supplements and defends the human use of our environment through constructing others and objects that rationalise our privilege and approach. The anthropocentric relationship with a thing is to dominate it; creating a name to recall it and then utilising it through its defined function. After giving the thing a function, humans have crowned it with a name that promotes the use of the object. This is to say that when humans declare that a thing and a name fit through the creation of an object, they become chained together and the dominating system of the human-object relation begins. Throughout the Anthropocene (beginning with industrialisation) humans have persisted in trying to institutionalise a whole system; we categorise everything including ourselves. Industrialisation produced an illusion that enabled humans to believe that we are the creators of things, which confirms our human control over nature and the use of its materials to create products for humans.⁴¹ At the start of the Anthropocentric era, humans continued to distinguish humans from other species found within nature and

⁴⁰ Eric R. Pianka, *The Vanishing Book of Life on Earth* < <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/courses/bio373/Vanishing.Book.pdf> > (accessed 22. October. 2019)

⁴¹ Industrialisation - A process that based on the manufacturing of goods. Individual manual labor is often replaced by mechanised mass production, and craftsmen are replaced by assembly lines.

accelerated their mining of nature as a resource.⁴² This helped to cultivate the belief that humans are located at the centre of the world. Humans are currently anxious to name things and to own things. When things have not been categorised by humans we think that we have a responsibility to explore the unknown and define all things. Humans tend to not be able to leave things alone without a name or to be able to exist alongside the unknown. Bill Brown in, *Things* (2004) states:

For A. S. Byatt protagonist, the quest for things may be a quest for a kind of certainty, but things is a word that tends, especially at its most banal to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figural and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable: Dr Seuss's Thing One and Thing Two.⁴³

Humans aim to name all things in the cosmos, which allows humans to convince themselves that owning things through knowledge equates to owning everything in the universe. In contrast, Brown is concerned with not-knowing as a human as well. He raises up the unnameable, unfigurable and unidentifiable to an equal status with the nameable, figural and identifiable. This process proposes the possibility of re-looking at things. Humans tend to think that they can look through objects to find their essence but actually we usually only catch a glimpse of the object, which often ends up reflecting our own views. In response to this situation, Anti-humanism as a theory tries to problematise what is defined as human and non-human.⁴⁴ French philosopher Louis Althusser defined Anti-humanism as responding to the issue of Humanism, which was based on the universal figure of the white western heterosexual male and that relegated anyone outside of this

⁴² Nature - A term that be used to describe creation that made from the nature, have not been reproduce by human. For example: sea, wild animals, snow.

⁴³ Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

⁴⁴ Anti-humanism - Louis Althusser argued that there is no such thing as intrinsic humanity, humans are all the product of external forces. Apart from the necessity of human beings to engage in productive relations with other human beings and with their environment in order to produce their means of subsistence, there is no human nature or essence.

universal to the realm of the sub-human. He states in *Reading Capital* (1970) that, 'This investment of knowledge, conceived as a real part of the real object, in the real structure of the real object, is what constitutes the specific problematic of the empiricist conception of knowledge'.⁴⁵ Living under an anthropocentric society and education, we mistake our interpretation of the object with the actual object/thing itself and tend to not be able to separate the two. Althusser asserts that humans need to alter this universalist ideology, in favour of an absence of human nature. For Althusser, there is no such thing as human nature because humans do not have an essential or universal nature. Therefore, Althusser emphasises the importance of economic and social structures that forge human behaviours and this allowed him to frame Anti-humanism as a structure that does not aim to serve man, but society and its variations as a whole.

Humans are made by their society, as they do not exist in a void, and as a result their perceptual lens is cultivated by a society that is not natural or neutral. A person's view of themselves as a subject is not given at birth, as their beliefs are imposed on them and by them through society and its ideologies. Foucault's ideas in relation to Anti-humanism can be found in his, *The Order of Things* (1966) in which he states that, 'Man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge...As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.'⁴⁶ He asserts that humans are a relatively young species and only self-defined from 1650 until now. During this era of knowledge/power, humans aim to reinterpret themselves through psychoanalysis, anthropology and linguistics. Althusser also highlights that we are still in a relatively new period in which research and analysis is trying to explore what makes a human, human.

⁴⁵ Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (1970) <<http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/RC68i.html>> (accessed 19. January.2020)

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge: London and New York, 1966), 421.

Both Althusser and Foucault agree that we are yet in an early stage of raising our consciousness in relation to defining what a human is. Therefore, how can human beings be certain in the meaning applied to objects that humans have created?

The Posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti states that there is an alternative approach to the Anthropocene:

As a brand of vital materialism, post-human theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the 'exceptionalism' of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of zoe (non-human), or life in its non-human aspects.⁴⁷

Braidotti explains how anti-humanism began in response to the Twentieth Century World Wars and that the universal human (white heterosexual western male) within Humanism enabled those who were not regarded as fitting this universal model to be mistreated as subhuman. Contemporary Post-humanist theory tries to transform this approach not only by overhauling the category of the human but also the realm of non-humans. They challenge the notion that non-humans should be defined as lesser than humans because of the anthropocentric thinking that constructs the default human subject as having more value than other entities on the planet. Posthumanism is not a unidirectional force but a complex subject-object relation, suggesting that humans and non-humans are entangled together. Maria de la Bellacasa claims in her book, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017), that in a human-soil relationship:

... soil is not just a habitat or medium for plants and organisms, nor is it just decomposed material, the organic and mineral end-product of organism activity. Organisms are soil. A lively soil can only exist with and through a multi species community of biota that makes it.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK), 66.

⁴⁸ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Making time for soil: Technoscientific futurity and the pace of care* <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282399460>> (accessed 25. October.2019)

The complex relationship that Bellacasa identifies in human-soil systems is also connected to Bruno Latour's, *Actor-Network-Theory* (1996).⁴⁹ Latour argues that 'Power is always the illusion people get when they are obeyed... people who are obeyed discover what their power is really made of when they start to lose it. They realise, but too late, that it was 'made of' the wills of all the others.'⁵⁰ Human, as an actor, absolutely needs other human and non-human (tool, thing or object) to work with in order to do 'action'. Latour asserts that any entity (nonhuman or human) in Actor-Network-Theory is defined as an 'actant', which means that nonhumans are also active in the construction of our worlds. Therefore, human and non-human materials are both equally actors within our networked society. Latour argues that humans often identify non-humans (especially those that are inanimate or non-sentient) as being inferior to humans and assume that non-human elements are only materials and resources for supporting humans. Latour points out that humans should treat all actors as equal, whether they are a human, animal, architecture or a smart phone. Human and non-human are integrated through our contemporary technological society and each entity is an actor that is constantly networking with other actors. This also enables each actor/actant in the network to continually redefine themselves and the network itself. Graham Harman's theory, Object-Oriented-Ontology, also highlights the nuances within and between things; 'Real objects are units, but not empty poles of unity, since this would make all things identical. Things also have qualities that belong to them while differing from them.'⁵¹ The looseness that Harman describes as occurring within the internal organization of things allows us to see the awkwardness present in objects when restricted by human parameters. Harman

⁴⁹ Actor-Network Theory - a framework and systematic way to consider the infrastructure surrounding technological achievements. Assigns agency to both human and non-human actors.

⁵⁰ Latour, Bruno. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1986. Quoted in Cressman, Darryl. 'A Brief Overview of Actor-Network Theory: Punctualization, Heterogeneous Engineering & Translation'. Canada: Simon Fraser University, 2009, 5.

⁵¹ Graham Harman, *Bell and Whistles-More Speculative Realism* (Zero books: Winchester, 2013), 62.

advocates that human should see themselves as one object among many, instead of maintaining absolute faith in human experience and its domination in relation to the cosmos.

In, *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler highlights that even our bodies have been restricted through a process of naming and that our genders should be far more fluid:

Are there ever humans who are not, as it were, always already gendered? The mark of gender appears to “qualify” bodies as human bodies; the moment in which an infant becomes humanised is when the question, “is it a boy or girl?” is answered. Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanised and the abject against which the human itself is constituted. If gender is always there, delimiting in advance what qualifies as the human, how can we speak of a human who becomes a gender, as if gender were a postscript or a cultural afterthought? ⁵²

Butler highlights that the Anthropocentric ordering of our environment also includes the classification of our human bodies. The assignments that we construct for bodies, such as boy and girl, limits what we can become. Therefore, this system of naming limits both the human and nonhuman ability to self-present. The traditional perspective of Humanist values is classified through the processes of identification, qualification and morality. In *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault classifies the episteme through three stages, *Renaissance Episteme*,⁵³ Classical Episteme and Modern Episteme. Especially, in the first episteme, humans are characterised by resemblance and similitude. Particularly since the Renaissance, our human sense of purpose is produced through the search for fitting ourselves into a group, gender, company, society etc. We are in pursuit of a qualification to prove that we are normal or a sanctioned part of the universal Humanist

⁵² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 111.

⁵³ Don Quixote - A negative of the Renaissance world; writing has ceased to be the prose of the world; resemblances and signs have dissolved their former alliance; similitudes have become deceptive and verge upon the visionary or madness; things still remain stubbornly within their ironic identity: they are no longer anything but what they are; words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness; they are no longer the marks of things; they lie sleeping between the pages of books and covered in dust.’(Foucault, 1966)

subject. During the eighteenth century, instead of seeking religious or mythical idols beyond the scope of knowledge, humans started to self-identify the 'I' as the most powerful arbiter of knowledge. For Immanuel Kant, the principle end goal of God's identification that humans are naturally moral beings was that the world was created according to our human moral needs. Art was first created for praising or representing the power of God or wealthy patrons. However, during the Enlightenment period, humans changed this to a celebration of self-identity and the human ability to morally judge and reason. The notion of Human was transformed and relied less on religious or mythical idols. Instead, humans believed in their own divinity or 'genius' to create or select and own art. For Kant critiquing is a never-ending activity inherent in reason, he explains that, '...it was the duty of philosophy to destroy the illusions which had their origin in misconceptions, whatever darling hopes and valued expectations may be ruined by its explanations'.⁵⁴ Kant also asserted that through critiquing and identifying the limits and opportunities within the creativity of human thought, it's development and refinement would become the ultimate goal of human destiny. There is a Humanist and Anthropocentric drive that searches for identification, qualification and definition in the face of increasingly chaotic situations. In contrast, to this drive for human control over all things, the architect Louis Kahn states that even a brick wants to be something:

You say to a brick, 'What do you want, brick?' And brick says to you, 'I like an arch.' And you say to brick, 'Look, I want one, too, but arches are expensive and I can use a concrete lintel.' And then you say: 'What do you think of that, brick?' Brick says: 'I like an arch'.⁵⁵

In Kahn's version, even a common brick wants to be something more than it is; it

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (University of Adelaide: South Australia), p.6<<http://fs2.american.edu/dfagel/www/Philosophers/Kant/The%20Critique%20of%20Pure%20Reason%20%20Immanuel%20Kant.html>> (accessed 11. May.2020)

⁵⁵ Nathaniel Kahn, *My Architect: Louis Kahn: Himself* (New York: New Yorker Films, 2003)

wants to be something better than a brick or just to be a brick that is part of something great. Kahn asks a brick what it wants to do and through this suggests that the brick has the capacity to think and speak. Therefore, Kahn projects onto the object a form of anthropomorphic agency. It appears as though Kahn is having a conversation with the brick; discussing and collaborating in order to make a decision. However, Kahn is most likely talking to himself or his reflection, so the brick acts as a critical device as opposed to an actor. To anthropomorphize an object, is to take human thought as the standard logical principle and then project this onto the object. In contrast, in Harman's object-oriented-ontology, humans should not attempt to try to ask opinions from an object (brick) as its internal reality is very different to human understanding and consciousness.

In the Anthropocentric approach, humans have the opportunity to 'decide' what to see and what to use because they have positioned themselves above other objects. Baudrillard asserts in *Cool Memories* (1987) that, '... we are condemned to social coma, political coma, historical coma.'⁵⁶ In this statement, Baudrillard positions all humans as controlled through social, political, economic and historical systems, including language (hence the emphasis of the word 'coma').

Baudrillard defined hyperreal in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) as, 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality'.⁵⁷ He states that because human contemporary time exists in these systems, it is impossible to see the real 'real' and the hyperreal has replaced the real.⁵⁸ Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly mixed together so that there is no clear distinction between real and fiction. Humans no longer believe in an original or pure realm of the

⁵⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories: 1980-1985*, translated by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1987), 5.

⁵⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Glaser (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

⁵⁸ Hyperreal - Jean Baudrillard defined as the generation by models of a real without origin or reality; a representation, a sign, without an original referent.

real, if they ever could, because the mediated information that we receive is more reliable than any unknown things that we might encounter. In the Post-truth era, humans have lost our faith in concrete or original truths and instead we are relying on the satisfaction of selecting from a 'choice' of mediated options (what can be seen and what can be used). Foucault claims that in the modern episteme humans are at the beginning of uncovering themselves. After being used to receiving and accepting all information from a third-person, Foucault asserts that we are beginning to question the act of receiving identification, qualification and definition from others. Simultaneously, this process reflects that humans are also seeking self-qualification and questioning their own identity. For example, the process of naming provided humans with an ownership over things and anthropomorphizing objects allowed humans to look at themselves reflected in an object. Foucault suggests that this will be different when the superiority of humans is erased, like a footprint drawn in sand that disappears in the waves of time. Humanity's print is present on things, but as time goes on, it will be erased.

Naming as a key human process still persists but it does increasingly appear (even if subconsciously) to contemporary society to be an old, unstable, fragile forging passage that attempts to bridge the gulf between things and humans via the identified and named object. However, perhaps we have not yet made it into the era of uncovering and repurposing human relations to the future world that Foucault predicted. Naming is still a prevalent and generic process that aims to simplify the complex interconnectivity of things. Therefore, I propose the following questions towards my research and practice: what will happen if all names are flexible and easy to displace? What will the art viewer see if the thing's name is left blank or put into a network with words that do not attempt to classify its purpose/intent? Will the viewer have a different relationship to what they are looking at?

Grumble

In 1965, when Hesse found herself in a difficult creative place after a year in Germany, LeWitt wrote his friend a long letter of encouragement: Just stop thinking, worrying, looking over your shoulder wondering, doubting, fearing, hurting, hoping for some easy way out, struggling, grasping, confusing, itching, scratching, mumbling, bumbling, grumbling...grinding, grinding, grinding away at yourself. Stop it and just DO.⁵⁹



Fig.1. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, 2017, egg yolk and monacle

1. The Work

Not Really Really (17-SS-4) is a piece of work that I made in 2017. For this work, I placed a series of real egg yolks on a monacle plate that was mounted on the wall. Egg yolk is extremely fragile, in order to keep it fresh it needs to be changed every 30 minutes. Failing to do so results in the size of the yolk shrinking and the surface becoming dry. One of the aims in the series of *Not Really Really* is to erase temporality in the organic material (egg yolk). Through this methodology, I aim to deploy the egg yolk

⁵⁹ Marcie Begleiter, director. 2016 *Eva Hesse* Documentary Film, bdks productions, In.

in *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* to reiterate - with a difference - the anthropocentric activity of treating potential lives as manipulatable material. Chickens are reared by humans to create eggs that are cracked, whisked and fried towards different human ends. This often erases the meaning and life of both the chicken and the egg by treating them as expendable materials. *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* raises a concern with this treatment by framing the egg yolk with the possibility of becoming an extraordinary and uncanny form.

Henri Bergson wrote in *Creative Evolution* (1911) ‘Every moment, in as much as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible.’⁶⁰ Bergson states that duration is indivisible, as it is similar to a stream which is always changing and becoming other; undergoing metamorphosis at every moment. Therefore, the stream (as a metaphor for time) includes the past, present and future within the ebbs and flows of its current. Although each entity lives within its self-duration, everything is inter-durational because entities and their durations act on each other. In my practice, I treat time as inherent in everything on the planet and claim that things have independent durations that are different to human durations. When narrowed down to a particular entity, the different lengths, or timespans, rely on the temporality of the thing’s medium and this can affect a thing’s lifespan.⁶¹ We can understand Bergson’s duration to be a narrative without a chronological order, in which the cause cannot be tied neatly with the effect. Bergson’s author writes with an overlapping tense, one actor and another are all intertwined with each other. As an author of art when I encounter a thing, there is a very sensitive moment

⁶⁰ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory Chapter 3: Of the Survival of Images. Memory and Mind*. <https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Bergson/Bergson_1911b/Bergson_1911_03.html> (accessed 10. May. 2019)

⁶¹ Thing - A term that will be used to describe when an object is no longer normalised through its assumed function. An object becomes or is a thing because it is untied from its, or does not have, a relation to the subject. Martin Heidegger describes in *The Thing, Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971) ‘Things: Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German words “bedingt”, we are the be-thinged...’ Heidegger provides us with a distinction between objects and things, which posits that an object becomes a thing when it can no longer serve its common function.

in which both thing and I share an overlapping and active duration. In this moment, in which the thing and I enter, I feel the past, present and future between me and the object has expanded or frozen. In my practice, I want to freeze or distil a specific set of durations to assess the becoming of this specific temporality in the artwork.

My practice aims to question whether freezing or decreasing time in relation to a thing's medium (in a sense, to make a chronological or ordered time withdraw from view in relation to the thing) will entail that the real thing becomes unreal? What frames things as authentic or fake? Will a conscious illusion occur, for example, as a real apple transforms into a plastic apple? Or when, what appears to be a manufactured metal gate perceptually turns into a mixed organic material due to time's effect on its chemical makeup (rusting, lichen, or structural breakdown)?

When an organic object has a Platonic form will it evoke a mistrust of the perfect form in front of us? ⁶² Will the viewer doubt their perception of the object so that the natural organic perfect object becomes unnatural, fake and unreal? Will this ultimately entail that the viewer will lose confidence in their perceptual field that is forged through anthropocentric thinking?

In *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, during the process of silently changing the egg yolks, viewers can often reject the assertion that the egg yolk is real and deem it to be fake because it looks too perfect. This is similar to the psychological experience of the 'Uncanny' in Sigmund Freud's theory.⁶³ Freud describes the experience as follows, 'an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred,

⁶² Platonic Form - Plato's *Theory of Forms* asserts that the physical realm is only a shadow, or image, of the true reality of the Realm of Forms. So, what are these Forms according to Plato? The Forms are abstract, perfect, unchanging concepts or ideals that transcend time and space; they exist in the Realm of Forms. For example, we can say that both the sky and the sea are blue, even though they are different shades. Plato would say that we are able to identify both colours as blue because they remind us of the form of "blueness". According to Plato it is that distant memory of forms that allows us to identify things for what they are.

⁶³ Uncanny - In Freudian thinking is the psychological experience of something as strangely familiar, rather than simply mysterious. The term was first used by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906)

when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary.⁶⁴ Freud claims that the uncanny is a class of frightening things, which are counter-intuitively connected to what is known and familiar. In correlation with Freudian thinking, the familiarity of the egg yolk when placed on a monocle and framed by a white wall, straddles the border of recognizability and strangeness. The ramification of which means that the work and the viewer can hover between the familiar and unfamiliar.

However, in *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* the egg yolk is in the present moment, but its authenticity is doubted, and this disrupts the eggs natural temporality. It is similar to a reality that exists in fiction and, simultaneously, a fiction that exists in reality.

We are living in a kind of continuum of past, present and future, where anything is possible. The whole distinction between fiction and reality is turned on its head. The external environment now is the greatest provider of fiction. We are living inside an enormous novel, written by the external world, by the worlds of advertising, and so on and so forth. The one node of reality left us is inside our own book.⁶⁵

In a series of interviews, *Extreme Metaphors* (2014), J. G. Ballard highlights that fiction is tied to reality and can also inform reality by producing new narratives that reflect upon and are taken up in the real world. Therefore, fiction has real effects, much like the virtual realm of the Internet has real-life effects. If we consider *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* in terms of Ballard's theory of the novel, then we realise that fact and fiction are hard to distinguish. Therefore, we can reflect on the construction of both reality and fiction. Through disrupting the above distinction, I aim to reflect on and present the object's situation between a destabilized reality and fiction to the viewer. This situates both the subject and object as unstable entities that lack an internal consistency (space)

⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (Penguin Classics: London, 2003), 150.

⁶⁵ J. G. Ballard, *Extreme Metaphors, Interviews with J. G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. Simon Sellars, (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), 6.

and external constancy (time), as they are subverted and exchanged. In *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4), I am claiming that the subject will not always be a subject as they can be inverted into an object. This has historically had traumatic effects, such as the male and colonial gaze turning women and ethnic minorities into ‘othered’ objects. However, in *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) I explore this in relation to all subjects having the potential to become objects and all objects to become subjects through their thing-hood. For example, as the artist I become the object and facilitator of the artwork. Through this I present to the viewer a change in the relationship between artwork and artist. The artwork becomes the subject, controlling the object (artist) and the artist in turn becomes an object serving the subject (artwork). In this sense, any object can claim a subject-hood but this relies on the system of relations changing to facilitate this transformation.

In Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978), ‘The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.’⁶⁶ Therefore, he claims that Orientalism is the discourse through which the West constructs the otherness, in which colonized bodies are reduced to stigmatizing stereotypes, and creates its own superior identity in relation and opposition to them. This thereby artificially produces one subject as having the right to dominate the other, which becomes its correlative object. I am interested not only in the result of when a subject and object are subverted but also the process of them overturning each other. I aim to explore whether this can produce a counter-methodology that can activate different subjectivities and things.

⁶⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 5.

2. The Author

Rather than amplify the making, I aim to minimize my making technique and focus instead on the underside of the relation between artwork and artist. I focus on the process of assembling several things into a constellation of actors and this requires a balancing act between nonhuman and human actors. The resulting performative assemblages also require me to nurture a different set of relationships. This entails a notion of balance and, as opposed to forcing things together through binding, nailing, drilling or gluing materials, I enable the things to enact their own forces on each other.

On reflection, my background history has informed a subconscious intent for the self-dissolution of my authorship or presence due to my childhood experiences. Throughout my childhood in Taiwan, I was taught by social structures to become a good and obedient citizen. This has caused me to live in a way in which I consider my personality (sense of self) as less important than the well-being of society. For example, in my high school, the class was considered to be a totality rather than a selection of individuals; we were a collective or whole. Each student in the class had to behave well so that the whole class of students (each a supplement of the other) could be imbued with the status of the best class in the whole school (a well-oiled machine). I became an 'object' (student/number) that was not myself, which minimized me into a material reality. This made me consider my 'thinghood' (or essence/self) and how that can be brought out within a system that tries to identify, name and minimize. This happens similarly in society's relationship with objects, as humans tend to force them to execute their presumed function only. Therefore, I feel a connection to the objects that I collect and try to return to their 'thinghood'. An attempt to assert a space or arrangement in which they can self-represent.

In my practice, I continue to erase my identity subconsciously. I am used to

battling between individualism and collectivism in my mind and, most of the time, I am living in a situation in which I prioritize the group over the self. In responding to this, I aim to withdraw my overdetermination of the object from the materials that I deploy, in order to avoid my human authority over things. This enables the thing to self-present and the viewer to communicate with the material based on the thing's terms and the viewer's own experience.

In my practice, there is no permanent form and no traditional pronouncement of when an assemblage actually performs as an artwork. This is because my work usually acts silently in the gallery and is often ignored. For example, as an experiment I placed a spoon purposefully in the corner of a restaurant (Bao Fitzrovia, 11. November.2019) but, when sitting in the restaurant, customers barely noticed the intention of this act. The spoon is activated as an artwork if the viewer notices that there is a different framing, or the spoon remains just a spoon. This relates to *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* because, although it is set in a gallery and is framed as having material intent, the egg yolk often remains unobserved. In correlation with this, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* becomes an artwork if framed and interpreted by the viewer as such.

The above asserts a similar concept to Roland Barthes's, *Death of the Author* (1967).⁶⁷ Barthes proposes that the author should create the medium (e.g., writing or artwork), which allows them to communicate with the world but then the author should not cross the line further and subsume the medium into their own intent. Barthes' framework entails that the author keeps a balance with the reader or viewer and does not over-interpret the medium. Barthes claims that 'Literature is that neuter, that composite,

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1967) states that the author should not overinterpret their work to the audience but allow for the work to become autonomous from the author so that it can produce new meanings/interpretations through its reader. His argument emphasizes that the author is the vehicle through which the literature is related but the author does not create but rather transmits the story which is built out of a set of linguistic structures that already exist.

that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.’⁶⁸ This indicates the loss of the body or identity of the author within writing, enabling a space in which the reader is also an actor in the interpretation of the text/artwork, not just the author. I translate this to mean that the author inherits a language and is a mediator of these found materials. Therefore, an author or artist gestates and feeds the text or artwork but should do no more than this.

Not Really Really (17-SS-4) acts as a bridge that connects the artist and the viewer. Firstly, I assume that artists can only communicate with the viewer through the artwork, as opposed to secondary written materials or verbal contact that exists outside of the artwork. Therefore, when the viewer can hold together an overview of the thing as an artwork, then this builds up the relationship between viewer and artwork. Through this the viewer can interpret the artwork without consideration of the author’s intent. As Barthes asserts, the artwork should be read on its own (by the viewer) without consideration of the artist (author). Secondly, as an artist, I draw a strict line under not using the artist’s authority to overinterpret the artwork’s purpose/functions to the audience, by doing nothing more than simply focusing on serving the artwork so that it can self-present.

3. The Interpretation

Not Really Really (17-SS-4) can be seen as describing a scene that has been covered by a gossamer curtain. It acts like a landscape that fades or withdraws behind a curtain. Viewers can barely see what is behind it and only get a glimpse if they take the initiative to draw back the curtain.

⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* (London: Fontana, 1977), 142.



Fig.2. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Loverboy)*, 1989
 [online]< <https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/works/untitled-loverboy2>>
 (accessed 03. March. 2020)

The term ‘curtain’ brings to mind Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ work *Untitled (Loverboy)* (1989) which is pictured above.⁶⁹ *Untitled (Loverboy)* is difficult to recognize as an artwork in a gallery space, even though it has been announced as an artwork on the label and through the context of the white cube. After reading the text it still needs the viewer to sense the meaning behind the artwork. In the work, Gonzalez-Torres digests his life experiences and ruminates on using materials to speak about these experiences. At the same time, he does not overinterpret the works so that they relay this exact same experience but provides viewers with an evocative set of materials that they can interpret into their own life experiences.

I am amazed by the way that the fabric Gonzalez-Torres uses has far exceeded the

⁶⁹ Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996, Cuban) was an American visual artist. Gonzalez-Torres was known for his minimal installations and sculptures in which he used prosaic materials such as candy, sheets of paper, light bulbs and wall clocks. Gonzalez-Torres’ exemplary importance in providing a subtle and often intentionally cryptic language of queerness, one that foregrounds romanticism, and recasts the language of minimalism and conceptualism as vehicles for affective content, is one of his most important contributions to the canon.

way in which a curtain usually appears. Gonzalez-Torres' curtain becomes not just a curtain anymore, it changes according to the different experiences that it provokes in each viewer. The curtain becomes not just an object but also taps into the viewer's memories. For example, when the fabric quivers in the wind this could evoke subject-specific interpretations. A curtain is not just simply a curtain.

Correlating with the above approach, if I tried to describe the scene behind *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) it would become a contradictory or paradoxical situation because it would reinsert a dominant authorship and not leave the work open to audience interpretations. In contrast to the former approach, I attempt to overlay the mystery of the blurred scene even further. For me, this is more attractive than uncovering the curtain to explicitly describe the scene of the refreshed egg yolk to an audience. Imagine that the experience is similar to the way in which audiences interrogate a painting; different interpretations occur if the painting is observed from far away or whether the viewer engages with it up close and focuses on its details. The closer the viewer looks at the egg yolk, the more blurred it will become because their interpretation may evolve not to be just about the egg yolk but their self-experience in relation to the effects evoked by the egg yolk. From a distance, the viewer may not interpret the egg yolk to be an artwork and could dismiss it on this premise.

There is a similarity between Joseph Kosuth's, *One and Three Chairs* (1965), and Michael Craig-Martin's, *An Oak Tree* (1973), as both works are not just discussing the object (artwork) itself but wondering about the effects a thing may have if it exceeds or goes beyond the artist's/viewer's expectations. Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* has loosened the object's relationship to the **human(s)** subject. Kosuth separated one object into three layers; a real chair, a photograph of a chair and a name/definition of a chair. By juxtaposing these three different approaches to the object (chair), Kosuth took apart the

object and its definition.

Furthermore, in the work of *An Oak Tree*, a glass of water is undoubtedly categorized as a tree by the artist. The uncanny label below the artwork troubles the viewer's familiarity with a glass of water and encourages them to imagine that the glass of water is an oak tree. As a result, Craig-Martin suggests that we should question the methods and stability in naming objects. On the other hand, as an object the tree is extremely familiar to most viewers, which will cause the viewer to see another object inside the institutional label. However, the gaps, produced between name and object, are too deep and broad for the viewer to see one thing in the place of the other. Craig-Martin's claim (label) and image (tree), produces an obvious crack between name and thing. This breach subverts the stable identification of a glass of water and in its place creates an unlimited potential definition of what a glass of water could be for the viewer. In contrast, anthropocentric thinking frames objects and limits them through identification, definition, and allocated purpose.



Fig.3. Michael Craig-Martin, *An Oak Tree*, 1973
[online]< <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?IRN=116226&PICTAUS=TRUE>> (accessed 03. March.2020)

Humans are too familiar in following this framework that chains objects to their identification and function. It is a reductionist approach for expediency (immediate recall or smooth running) but there is not necessarily just one effect or reading that can be generated by things. There could be several ways of identification and function, which can be produced through the thing itself and in relation to a different reader, viewer, or user.

Ready-made objects can be found everywhere in our human ordinary lives. When a viewer encounters a ready-made object in a gallery it is framed as an artwork due to its surroundings (institutional context: gallery, exhibition, artist's signature, installation, literature etc.) and this disconnects it from its everyday meaning or interpretation. In a sense, it provides a spotlight for the object and our usual assumptions in relation to it. It can also provoke confusion in the viewer, who may struggle to identify the familiar ordinary ready-made object in front of them depending on how it is framed or put to use. This enables the artists, institutions, and viewers to challenge their habitual encounters and the way in which they deploy objects. For example, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), is both an actual vitrine and symbol of a fountain. Duchamp famously tested the boundaries of the art institution by attempting to introduce a readymade latrine complete with a fictional artist's signature into an exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists at The Grand Central Palace in New York, 1917.⁷⁰ Through this he questioned the parameters of what makes an object an artwork. Duchamp deployed the *Fountain* to reflect on the institutional strategies that validate and frame objects as artworks; the artist's signature, its staging (on a plinth), the inclusion in an exhibition, as well as press and literature. He held the object up to examination so that viewers could critically look

⁷⁰ *Fountain* (1917) was rejected by the committee, which went against the Society's own rules that stated all works would be accepted by artists who paid a fee to be exhibited, but the work was never placed in the show area. Marcel Duchamp withdrew from his position on the panel organising the exhibition as he did not agree with this decision.

at the society which configures and authorises objects. *Fountain* (1917) also challenged the symbolic meaning of the toilet and undertook the conceptual challenge of placing a readymade in a gallery, in order to enable the viewer to question their habitual reading of the object and to provoke their imagination.



Fig.4. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917),
[online]<<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>> (accessed 16. April.2020)

Both artists, Joseph Kosuth and Michael Craig-Martin emphasize this block while, simultaneously, playing with the language and identity of an object. The awkward friction between language and object is similar to describing the view outside of a window which has a curtain in front of it. The scene is present but absent as well, it exceeds itself through what is imagined by the viewing subject and its openness to projection and interpretation.

In the above scenario, the artwork becomes not only relational with the artist's

interpretations but also that of the various audience interpretations. An object becomes not just an object when the evocative material encourages the viewer to hover around the artwork with their own thoughts. These thoughts connect with the viewer's own life experiences and emotions, which are provoked by the effects of the artwork toward the viewer themselves. This again relates to Roland Barthes' concept in *Death of the Author* (1967), in which the interpretation (often produced in written form - title or description - to supplement the artwork) should not narrow down meaning but open itself up to interpretation. Barthes declared that '... each of us has their own rhythm of suffering',⁷¹ there is no standard and the weight of suffering is dependent on the individual as well as the gravity of external effects. Every work is rewritten again, every time when being viewed.

4. Intention

I would like to invite viewers to go on a journey that has no designed destination. I want them to enjoy wandering around the gallery. I deploy the invisible gossamer, which I imagine existing between my artwork and the audience, to blur the viewer's sight and I aim to incite the viewer to always doubt what they are looking at. This provides the viewer with an experience of the many contradictory facets present in a thing, which may be confusing as they shift between the edge of both the seeable and un-seeable, fact and fiction.

Not Really Really (17-SS-4) aims to provoke the viewer to take another look at what appears familiar - similar to a sideways glance that allows a different perspective on the object - which enables the viewer to make up their own mind about what they see in a work/thing. For example, when a viewer is looking at *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, their

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), 19.

body often hovers around it as if figuring out what this thing is. They tend to be curious about what this potential object is; perhaps it is a yellow stone, a plastic replica of a yolk, or they question whether it is a soft or hard material. Some viewers will even blow on it and quite a few times the egg yolk falls off the monocle plate. Usually the viewer then runs away in a panic. I am fascinated by the effects that the artwork has when it is presenting itself to the viewer, which is registered in the reaction and emotion emanating from the viewer as they respond to its call. *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* tends to encourage viewers to operate differently from their usual habits in the gallery, as shown through the decision to blow on the artwork. This seems to suggest that the artwork arouses different emotions and thoughts in the viewer, which gets them to break the frame or rules of the space in which it is presented.



Fig.5. Three images of capturing the motion in viewer taking picture of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* in Art Dusseldorf, Germany

5. Invitation

On 17 April 2018, Tom Benson, a curator and an artist, sent me an email asking if I was interested in participating in a group show at Laure Genillard Gallery at the end of the year. He told me that he would like to include the work *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* but he was concerned about how to show this work over a long period of time (37 days). As I mentioned above, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* is extremely fragile and this became

central to my discussions with Tom. We spoke about the schedule of changing the yolk, and the possibilities of giving this maintenance work to the gallery (so having the gallery assistant change the egg yolk instead of myself). The following questions were provoked: Who was going to change the egg yolk and how often did it need to be changed? When would the changing of the egg yolk start and finish?

Before the exhibition began, I admit that I had only thought about the external situation, which included the install, schedule, logistics and communications with the gallery staff. I did not think through the psychological effects of the maintenance of the work; the mental stress of repetitive labour and how the show would affect my everyday life. I also became increasingly concerned that I might disrupt the running of the gallery during the work's changing process. Therefore, as the preparation of the work developed more elements surfaced that needed to be addressed. This also highlighted that *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) was a site-specific work that required me to respond to the environment in which it was located.

6. Procrastination

Thoughts are always spinning around in my head when I facilitate *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4). Ideas and emotions evoked by the work are unpredictable, complicated and fragmentary. The longer I hover around the work, the more concepts and challenges it brings up in my mind. Procrastinating, while waiting for the next time to change the egg yolk, has led to the following question: what is my position at this specific time; an artist, a performer, a facilitator, or an object? I assume that when I am waiting for the next change in egg yolk that instead of acting, I am actually nakedly exposing my thoughts through my posture and movements in the gallery.

I treat myself as part of the medium of the work but, simultaneously, I also need to

provide for my own everyday ordinary life needs. For example, eating, reading, chatting and sleeping. But none of these behaviours belong to the work. Even though I don't want to, I cannot but have to separate my life when working with *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* into two halves. It is a conflicting period of internal and external time and through being subservient to the work I can become confused about whether I am truly alive. The lack of living in the habitual everyday world transforms me, in part, into an object.

In contrast, during the relatively short period it takes to exchange the egg (which has now become the subject) my life is made significant. However, during the endless pauses, I am inactive and constantly provisional, waiting for the next changing of the egg yolk. As a result, I am experiencing the swapping of roles between the subject (often the human in the artwork and subject relationship) and object (usually pictured as the artwork) during my performance of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*.



Fig.6. Tehching Hsieh, *Time Clock Piece (One Year Performance 1980-1981)*, 1980
[online]< <https://www.skny.com/ct/zui-xin-xiao-xi/tehching-hsieh-in-time-life2> > (accessed 13. April.2020)

No doubt the work has affected my life and caused me to think about various human and object relationships. However, the endurance I face is not as extreme as the durational piece, *One Year Performance 1980-1981, Time Clock Piece (1980-1981)*

produced by the artist Tehching Hsieh. For one year, from 11 April 1980 through 11 April 1981, Tehching Hsieh punched a time clock every hour on the hour. Each time he punched the clock, he took a single picture of himself with a 16mm movie camera, which together yielded a 6-minute film animation. He shaved his head before the piece, so that the growing of his hair reflected the passage of time. Hsieh dedicated himself to the strict discipline of a time clock; during a whole year, as a labourer, he stamped a timecard in a time clock every hour.⁷² During the whole year of performing this work, he acted as an object in service of the concept of labour time and its organisational structures. In this work, Hsieh is no longer a labourer who produces facilities and/or commodities but the servicer of the time clock itself. His labour has been displaced from the factory and is centred around the maintenance of the instrument (object) itself. This can be interpreted as questioning the parameters of the structuring of labour, as well as Hsieh's artistic labour, and the objectives of capital. Perhaps while showing *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, I am more like a part-time labourer. I service and maintain the work (changing the egg yolk during the gallery's opening hours) and outside of this I am also maintaining myself (going to work and classes). During that time, the boundaries of both subject and object are blurred, both are transformed from a clearly defined role to an uncertain position. I become a split subject/object, which problematizes the binary distinction between these two positions.

⁷² Tehching Hsieh (b. 1950, Taiwan) is a Taiwanese performance artist who moved from Taiwan to the United States as a stowaway in 1974, living as an illegal immigrant until he was granted amnesty in 1988. For *One Year Performance* 1980-1981, Hsieh rigorously punched a time clock every hour for 366 days from 11 April 1980 to 11 April 1981. The resulting installation consists of letters, statements, uniforms, photographs, punch clock and a timecard. Between 1978 and 1986 Hsieh made five-year-long performances, followed by a thirteen-year performance of making art but not publicly showing it.

7. In the Gallery

8.December.2017

The work is being shown in the ground floor space and I am sitting in the basement. I have been separated from the work, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*. I will soon need to walk upstairs to refresh the egg yolk. And every time I walk back down into the basement, I worry about the egg yolk. Is it still perfectly placed on the monocle plate? Has it fallen off? Has it broken? Should I go and take a look? Will I cause the gallery inconvenience while I am sitting here? Questions and suspicions echo nonstop in my ears.

The gravity of my life is shifting to give priority to facilitating *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* in the gallery and I feel unstable. I am confused about the reality of my current life. I can't have other plans during the gallery open times (Wednesday to Saturday, 1 pm to 6 pm) because I need to be in the gallery. No one has asked me to be in the gallery all the time to change the egg yolk, but I have an imaginary enemy telling me that I have to stay and make these changes. I am looking at myself as a victim, a tragic labourer for the artwork. I am telling myself that I have no choice but to stay in the gallery. I also convince myself that I am a very important element of this piece of work, mumbling that I am the only person who can replace the egg yolk. But maybe the truth is that I don't allow myself to be replaced. I feel awkward about disliking the experience of showing this work but, at the same time, I believe there is a part of me that deeply enjoys the uncomfortable nerves and questions this produces. At times this even extends to a migraine, which keeps punching my mind, adding to the form of the artwork but one that is not directly exposed to the viewer.

I situate myself in the basement of the gallery because I want to separate my presence from the work on the ground floor. This separation allows me to not act as a

performer for the work, who is always present and, in contrast, to be more like a servant for the work. However, even when acting as an object (servant) to serve the subject (master object - artwork in this instance), I still retain my consciousness, and this is what facilitates the split subject. So, in the gallery, the servant (myself) will need a private space for dealing with my personal life but when the master (artwork) rings the bell, I will immediately throw away who I am and go to serve the master. This chimes with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master-slave dialectic (1807), 'It felt the fear of death, the absolute master. In that feeling, it had inwardly fallen into dissolution, trembled in its depths, and all that was fixed within it had been shaken loose.'⁷³ In *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4), an uncanny master-slave dialectic relationship has built up between myself and the artwork. I am a servant attending to the master (artwork) and my life is chained to the absolute master through this servile and preoccupied consciousness. I am forced back into viewing myself, searching for who I am.

The term/concept of master relies on the term/concept of a servant, for without the servant the concept/position of the master will not exist. This master/servant narrative in *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) exposes that the assumed binary distinctions between subject/object are actually a relation, which can be manipulated and changed. This relates to Edward Said's concepts in the book *Orientalism* (2003), which claims that through colonial discourse and analysis the colonisers represent the colonised cultures as radically Other, in order to create a stronger colonial identity. The colonisers are tied to the colonised through this relation. Therefore, each binary (Occident/Orient, Coloniser/Colonised, Master/Slave to Subject/Object) includes both oppositions and binds the two terms together.

⁷³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* - *Galaxy Books* 569 (London: Oxford University Press Inc, 1979), 115.

Said questions one of William Robertson Smith's comments in relation to another culture in his *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1885), 'Yet many of the prejudices which seems to us most distinctively Mohammedan have no basis in the Koran... The Arabian traveler is quite different from ourselves,'⁷⁴ The word "us" and "ourselves" deployed by Smith in this sentence clearly defines the writer as speaking from a coloniser's vantage point. "We" are this, "they" are that, explicitly uses the binary oppositions of coloniser and colonised. Within an anthropocentric environment, human has unconsciously treated things in relation to humans as existing in this master/slave dialectic. However, when we realise this a constructed relation, we can ask ourselves: what if a human is just a thing? I aim to subvert this master (human)/slave (object) narrative, by taking away the usual markers of classification in order to bring the human and thing onto the same plane in the encounter. When viewers are lost in the unknown of *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) that is the moment which brings both human and thing stands equally side by side.

I accept my nerves that continue to surface and disrupt my thoughts, as a process of transforming myself from a subject into an object. During this process of transformation I feel uncomfortable and lost, as I am flooded by an uncomfortably anxious situation. My daily life becomes centred around *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) and all of my activities, decision making and emotions, are affected by the work. This also often leads me into losing my self-confidence and identity, of not believing who I am. During the period of showing the work, I rarely think of myself but rely on *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) as my emotional support. I make most of my decisions based on the master (*Not Really Really* (17-SS-4)).

⁷⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.236

8. The grumble starts...

17.December.2017

Head spinning

I want to know where this dizzying stress has come? What am

I fearful of?

I do not think

that I am afraid of the egg yolk falling off the monacle plate because it has happened so

many times before And

I understand that this affects one part of the artwork

Even if it is not intended Maybe

I am afraid of not showing the work perfectly Each individual egg

yolk is different

and so they might not always fit perfectly on the

monacle plate

I cannot and do not want to control it

to be

perfect

I remember the first thought that I

had about this piece of work

That it is plain A simple idea of using an organic object

with colour

to fit within a plastic plate that

I had set up on the wall The starting point is so

simple that I even feel ashamed in speaking it
out loud
mouth becomes dry
But then the more I
gulp of saliva
spend time with this work
the more questions and concepts the work brings up and asks me
It seems like this work will never end
it keeps progressing day after day
asking a lot of questions
my body grows heavy
The more
I spend time with this work, the more questions I have with
it
I assess and respond to its materiality

I feel emotionally conflicted on
opening night...
I am extremely tense during the whole evening
My jaw clenched Body stiff Eyes alert
I have to watch out for
and
take care of the master
I set an alarm for every 30 minutes
to remind me to change the egg yolk On the one

hand

I feel relief as this helps me to escape from

socializing at the opening

but on the other

hand

I feel trapped as I simply can NOT spend time

having conversations with friends

I am not a subject

and this feeling

of contradiction

has also continued in my behaviour towards

changing the egg yolk

I

set myself as a medium for helping the work

I

change the egg yolk

I

am not here as a notable performer

I

secretly hope that no one will notice me

but the truth

is

the entire changing process proves interesting and is attended by a curious

audience

I walk through the audience

handling the egg yolk with care, palms clammy with

anticipation and

keeping the egg yolk away

from any potential

danger

Full concentration is required

a furrow appears in my brow

to protect the egg yolk in my hand

again

and again

I feel my cheeks redden from the awkward situation

Palpably

in touch with the audience

hairs on the back of my neck

prickle

I enjoy it when some of the

audience notice me and

others do not Over the course of the exhibition

I force myself to stay in the gallery to change the egg yolk during

opening hours This is where

I start this Grumble

sitting

in the gallery

writing Somehow

now

this is the only time that
I feel secure because
I have the responsibility of checking and changing the egg yolk
which is something
I can
do on my own
I do not need to bother others for help with this
but at the same time
another pressure arises from sitting in this space
which feels as if it exists out of time Hearing the gallery assistant
working on the phone
typing emails
body tenses
feet tap the floor
I strongly want to ignore visitors
as they walk around the gallery
head bowed
concentrating on the weight of my body
Or
a breath
I would personally rather become an object in this white cube
convincing myself again and again that
I am part of the work
I am only a medium a nobody
Nobody

I shrink myself into the sides of the seat

Hunch over

Turn my face away from the visitor

I whisper and mumble to the visitor, the gallery staff again and again

‘Please ignore me

I do not belong in this space You can’t see me

please just ignore me’

As should now be clear, I worry a lot every time I exhibit this work. I am anxious that I will interrupt the staff working in the gallery because my presence is required for the work. I am concerned that I have already disturbed them. I am worried that maybe I just think too much.

These emotions are similar to what I usually face in social contexts. I worry. I overthink. I am full of indecision, awkwardness and stress. All these emotions are squeezing into the work. I worry that the other artists who are exhibiting in the show will be distressed during the run of the exhibition, as my presence in the gallery could be seen as writing over the top of their installations. This leads me to question whether I am the only one in this group exhibition who is trapped by my work...

The only time that I do not worry about the work is while I am in the process of changing the yolk. In this moment, I feel like a security guard who needs to keep their eyes on the target at all times. When the work is in my sightline, I feel that everything is in my control. But this can also be read as the artwork having control over me.

9. Dependence

After the changing process, the echo of worry comes back again and again. My

responsibility never ceases. In contrast to this, most paintings can be installed and then left on their own to be encountered by an audience. As a result, the painting's independent period is longer than that of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*. The painting's dependence on human actors is limited and mostly absent from the exhibition, so remain underneath the audience's radar. Invisible maintenance, such as hanging the painting on the wall, lighting, de-installing, repair, conservation etc. I aim to limit *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*'s independent period and extend its dependent period. For example, I change the egg yolk every 30 minutes to maintain the continuity of the work. As a result, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* will always need a person to take care of it and cannot exist independently in a gallery space.



Fig.7. I am changing the egg yolk in process, *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* in Art Dusseldorf, Germany

I am the person who feels the need to shoulder the responsibilities for these worries because the artwork will definitely change if someone else is tending the work. The anxiety of the practice would also be projected onto another individual. One of the ways that I read this work, as the artist - and this is not necessarily conveyed to the audience unless they can read my body language - is by connecting the reflection of the object/material with my inner emotion. For example, the performance of renewing the egg yolk needs to be undertaken in total concentration throughout. I hold my breath and carefully place the fresh egg yolk onto the monochrome plate. Bubbling in the back of my mind, is the assumption that the viewer will share the same apprehension about what

might happen when a fragile egg yolk moves from my hand to the monocle plate. This is why I become so nervous during the renewing process, as I project the anticipation and pressure of the change-over of yolk as existing in the viewer as well. In tune, myself and audience, are in a similar mental state; anxious, nervous and worried about the transition of the egg yolk.

10. Installation

A fragile egg yolk that needs to be changed regularly

A blocked, unfunctional monocle that cannot magnify the egg yolk

A work placed at a height of 120 cm

All these elements entail that the viewers need to bow down to engage with the artwork

This installation concept came from my experience visiting museums that display historical objects. Museums often exhibit artefacts in a vitrine or transparent cabinet and when visitors want to look at an object more closely, to see the artefact in more detail, their bodies cannot avoid bowing down before the object. The performance of bowing in Asia is symbolic and deeply rooted, in order to show respect and love. For example, when meeting a person that you admire and respect your body automatically reacts with emotion through a bow that has been habituated into your bodily reflexes. My installation intends to encourage the viewer into a bowing motion and through this I aim to raise up the human's perspective in relation to a thing. Their body bows to the artwork in a signal of respect.

I am fascinated by the relationship between the visitor and the object, even though this might not be directly read into the work. For example, I am intrigued by how the viewer's body will react when they see objects that they are curious about. Some may start to crane their neck, or frown, or their body may invade the space of the object.

The visitors to the Laure Genillard Gallery are very polite, and this surprises me. I didn't put any sign on the wall because I refuse to announce that this work is untouchable. I welcome all visitors to do anything to this piece, from being intimately curious (touching) to missing/ignoring the work altogether (walking away).

I am the medium that cleans up the result of public engagement. I tidied up quite a few broken egg yolks when showing *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* at an art fair, Art Dusseldorf in Germany (2017), but I never needed to clear it up during the exhibition at Laure Genillard Gallery. In the fair, visitors touched and even blew on the egg yolk. I guess that this was to double-check if it is real. I was mesmerized by this behaviour. It is very interesting, as I have 'egg yolk' listed as my work's material on the label but to test is to believe. Viewers can also observe me frequently changing the egg yolk during the show. However, many audience members still refuse to believe the information I provide for them. This notion can bring us back to the Post-trust society that I mentioned in *Naming*.⁷⁵ In this section of writing, I declare that we are currently inhabiting a contemporary Post-truth society in which the objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotional and personal belief. Due to this Post-truth frame, humans take more concern over trusting the thing in front of them, for example, a yellow stone or egg yolk.

11. Preparation

To prepare the egg yolk, I start with cracking the egg into a bowl and then I use my right hand to pick up the egg yolk and place it into my left palm. I then slide it around my hand to separate the egg yolk and egg white. Slowly and cautiously I slide the yolk onto a spoon. I then bring the spoon with the yolk upstairs, wipe away the previous egg yolk,

⁷⁵ Post-truth-relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

clean the monocle, and then hold my breath while gently placing the egg yolk onto the slippery monocle. I handle the egg yolk with care and adjust it for the perfect balance. The egg yolk and monocle rarely fit perfectly together the first time. Therefore, most of the time I will need to adjust the egg yolk to find the perfect position for it to keep its balance on the monocle. This process does not exist as a unified formula because each egg yolk has a different consistency (shape and weight). Therefore, the 'perfect position' does not exist and the result depends on each specific egg yolk that spins its own twist on the final result.

12. Duration

During the two-month-long exhibition, I wanted to be lazy as well. Don't get me wrong, I aimed to build up a hundred percent passion in the activity (e.g., presenting *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*) but, in reality, I had both positive and negative emotions during this period. I battled with this positive and negative situation in both my ordinary life and in my practice, as they impacted on each other. However, Tehching Hsieh's attitude when producing *One Year Performance 1980-1981, Time Clock Piece (1980-1981)* prompted me to resist lethargy. As a result, I feel that *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* and the process of the artist being present within the work is strongly influenced by Hsieh's work. *One Year Performance 1980-1981, Time Clock Piece (1980-1981)* is about the artist punching the timecard every hour of every day for a whole year. Hsieh set up this work in his studio in New York and a ramification of this is that his time clock became the centre of his ordinary life. For example, he could not travel to places that were more than thirty minutes away because he was always required to go back to the time clock each hour. Hsieh tries to live in this limited time and space every day for a year.

Throughout undertaking the maintenance of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, I realize

the difficulties that the artist Hsieh faced when making *One Year Performance 1980-1981, Time Clock Piece* (1980-1981). Both of our pieces have imposed structures that pressurize and alter the way in which we usually experience time. *One Year Performance 1980-1981* became an obstruction to everything else in Hsieh's life. Similarly, during *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* I can neither have a proper conversation with people nor travel too far. Everything that I am used to doing in daily life becomes limited when showing *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*. My emotions are trapped in the work and it is difficult to express this in positive language because most of the emotion I digest while undertaking the work is negative. It becomes an invisible and heavy chain that is always with me. It is like a work that is never finished and the work keeps reminding you all the time that it is there.

13. Death

In Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (1977), he closes his critical analysis with the line, '... the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author'.⁷⁶ He claims that once a writer publishes their work, the author should no longer try to control its interpretation as it is up to the reader to create meaning. Continuing with Barthes' thoughts, the connection between the author/artist and the writing/artwork becomes stronger day by day but their connection will only last until the writing/artwork is separated from the author/artist. This necessitate as that the writing/artwork has to be shown alone to the reader/viewer. From here, it is no longer about the author/artist anymore, but the writing/artwork's becoming in relation to various readers/viewers. Following on from Bergson's statement about his concept of pure duration, in my artwork there are various tenses intertwined with each other. I aim to freeze the organic material

⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* (London: Fontana, 1977), 148.

in *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, in order to invite the audience into an encounter with the thing's duration that hopes to generate unsuspected becomings.

When I present the artwork in the gallery, I am taking care of the artwork. My identity is excavated in service of the artwork and the artwork's self-presence, which is intermingled with the audience's interpretations, becomes the meaning of the work. As a subject and author, I cannot exist outside of the social conditions and concerns within which I am cultivated. Therefore, I mediate the artistic language that I have inherited through my concerns but then after the process of making, I hold back my personal authority in an attempt to enable the artwork (thing) to manifest itself to the viewer.

1. Panopticon

In Sara Ahmed's *What's the Use?* (2019), she brings up the term 'Panopticon' in order to introduce the way in which we are disciplined by systems and in turn perpetuate them. Ahmed cites Foucault's theories on the Panopticon as a historical model of power and how its notions of discipline have become embedded in our everyday behaviors. Ahmed describes how different uses produced by systems of power can have specific operations; 'use can be restrictive as well as a directive or restrictive by virtue of being directive. If the same paths are used more, the fewer paths are available to be used.'⁷⁷ As a physical architecture and system, the Panopticon includes elements that restrict by being directive in quality. Foucault developed a theory that expands on this notion of social control, through Jeremy Bentham's design and conceptual apparatus for the Panopticon prison. Foucault describes Bentham's Panopticon as a symbol of social control that is not just based in the prison system but has extended itself through social conventions. Bentham's prison model invented a mechanism of social control that was used to discipline, as opposed to punish, prisoners. The Panopticon design consisted of a circular architecture with an inspection tower at the center. From the tower, guards were able to watch the prisoners but the prisoners could not see into the tower, so they did not know when they were being surveyed. As a result of not knowing when they were being watched, the prisoners were motivated to act as though they were being watched at all times. Foucault refers to the architect of the Panopticon and his writings on the disciplinary apparatus, in order to describe the infrastructures and mechanisms that

⁷⁷ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 42.

distribute power within a prison complex and wider society.

Foucault describes the Panopticon as, ‘a way of organizing space as series, a way of ensuring the prisoner is always seeable without always being seen such that the prisoner takes on the gaze of the prison guard by seeing himself.’⁷⁸ In the Panopticon, the prisoner is living in a well-serviced interrogation chamber that is encircled by what could be described as a one-way mirror. A mirror that appears opaque and reflective on one side but as transparent on the other, similar to a one-way mirror found in police interrogation rooms. The prisoners are conscious of the potential gaze that is looking at them through the mirror and imagine it as there all the time. However, what they are really looking at is a reflection of themselves or their imagination’s idea of how power wants them to perform.

In the Panopticon, prisoners do not know the exact time and direction of their monitoring. They can only see themselves in the reflection of their minds, so they imagine the monitor and in doing so monitor themselves. Foucault asserts that for the prisoners there is a continual desire to want to look through the mirror, to find out who or what is behind it. Therefore, this mirror is causing a continual introspection in the prisoner, in which the prisoner mirrors what they think they are being asked to perform. Foucault states that, ‘...the Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects.’⁷⁹

Ahmed draws a link between Bentham’s Panopticon and the plan he made for a school based on useful knowledge, ‘Bentham’s treatise “Chrestomathia,” which also

⁷⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish-The Birth of the Prison*, Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1975), 203.
<https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf>

makes use of the panoptical principle among other principles in its design of a classroom.’⁸⁰ Bentham’s Chrestomathic school used the Panopticon as its architectural organizing principle to keep middle-class students under constant inspection. The best students were to be appointed as master (or monitor) in the class. Alongside the teacher, the masters from the student body were to monitor and educate as many other students at one time as possible. In this model, the education system also draws on the inspection or introspection principle but in the prison complex the monitor is a ruling person (guard) and in the latter they are a more like a mole or spy (student from within the class). Ahmed notes that Foucault clarifies the role of the student master, ‘The monitor’s task is to give assurance, and is understood not to detect crime or deviation but to prevent it.’⁸¹ In the case of both the Panopticon prison and Chrestomathic school, there is a system that pre-empted behaviour in order to channel it and guard against misdemeanors even forming. At the heart of each model, there is an economic motivation that speaks to capitalist concerns. Both systems streamline the staffing structure to make it cheaper to run the prison or school and, therefore, rely on the instrumentalization of students or prisoners (as opposed to paid staff). Model students and prisoners are encouraged to provide examples of self-discipline in order to limit misdemeanors, so that it would only require a small number of guards and staff for the controlling mechanism to operate efficiently. Therefore, punishment received from the outside (teacher) is turned inwards into self-discipline (student monitor) and is promoted to the rest of the class.

Ahmed points out that Foucault also describes the educational system designed by Joseph Lancaster, which was envisaged as a training ground to turn the poor into the useful working-classes, to further clarify the disciplinary instrumentalization in educational institutions. Lancaster’s educational system was similarly designed to be built

⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, *What’s the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 104.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

up ‘cog by cog’ or ‘cell by cell’, in order to be efficient through the modelling of self-improvement (another mode of self-discipline). In this instance, Foucault highlights that student have become cogs in the educational machine, as they become mechanisms for their own self-development. Foucault suggests that through producing student monitors, the disciplinary regime is inserted into the student body. Foucault states that education in the Monitorial School in the nineteenth century rested on a notion of self-improvement, ‘The machinery is, however, about more than the freedom to master. The machinery works because of how becoming monitors affects the students in a moral sense by improving them.’⁸² In this instance, the school structure became a machine for instructing how to refine and divide labour; according to ability or level, every student in the class is profitably employed to instruct or follow. This monitorial system also binds students tightly together, through the awareness of being observed and the aim for self-improvement (to become a monitor), as well as the fear of being caught out or punished. Lancaster’s monitorial system was implemented with the objective to stifle individuality and create conformity, enabling students to be accepted by others through normative performances.

Although we are born and will die alone, our society trains us to live collectively. Expanding on Ahmed’s notion of the well-used path, we can also interpret the path as platonic (ideal) because the most socially accepted or idealized route, which is built to support the majority. However, this one size fits all approach means that the path is not bespoke so it will fit the general (those that fit within the general bounds of what is assumed to be the universal human body) public quite well but not perfectly. So, we have to shape ourselves to fit this collective and majority mold, rather than the system being designed to support difference. In the previous chapter, *Naming*, I reflected on my own

⁸² Ibid., 116.

experience in Taipei, Taiwan as a student in a classroom and the depersonalization that I felt was produced through the coercive control of the educational environment. Similarly, to Foucault's cog, as a student in the classroom I was made aware that I had to be responsible for contributing to something larger (such as the entire group of classmates) as opposed to the self.

The classroom required synchronicity, which meant that everyone had to be moving in the same direction and in unison. This style of education imports a form of soft power into the classroom; it does this through wiring the students' modes of thinking towards collective development. This is enforced through the very same impetus towards collective development because this plays on the students' fears that any out of joint actions could cause their classmates to disown or shun them.⁸³

Ahmed states that paths can direct use and when used regularly in one particular way then they become easier to use, so the use of use encourages more use of use. Ahmed elaborates, 'The incentive to create new paths, to do what does not come naturally, derives from the pressures of environmental change. Gradually, over time, a path becomes easier, which is to say, the effort required is lessened.'⁸⁴ My education was designed to create well-trained students that followed the path most used by the majority, and to obediently, or even desire, to follow that path. This circuitous process relates to Ahmed's claims that the path most used is the easier one to follow and will, as a result, endlessly encourage the next user to follow this smooth well-used method. As a result of ease and efficiency, the well-used path is the one that is repeated, and an incentive is required to alter or create new paths.

These historical narratives of discipline through the unknowable surveyor, can be

⁸³ Soft Power in politics (and particularly in international politics), soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce (contrast hard power). In other words, soft power involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction.

⁸⁴ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 73.

compared to people surfing on Social Media [SM]. The territory that an SM user approaches is based on the user's personal interests and these interests are constantly being monitored (or mined for data by corporations). As internet users, we can only see ourselves through the one-way mirror, so we focus on building up an image of who we are through our consumer decisions and SM posts. However, as users we can only see ourselves in the reflection of the screen's mirror, so we project a virtual image of ourselves to an imagined audience that we think will view our profile and/or consumer choices. When conscious of being watched, users begin to self-monitor. Therefore, we reclaim our behavior and decision making (as we are conscious of it and are acting as prosumers – producers and consumers simultaneously) but it becomes highly stylized towards potential monitors. Both the Panopticon and the spreading of its form across education and society, enacts a perpetual self-monitoring. In a sense, we mostly attempt to present good behaviour to the unknowable but all knowing Other, which concurs with Jacques Lacan notion of the Other/other. In Lacanian thinking, the big Other forms a radical alterity and an otherness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan suggests that symbolic and omnipresent Other produces a, '... gaze [that] I encounter..., not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.'⁸⁵ Lacan equates the Other with language and the law, and hence the Other is inscribed in the symbolic order. The Other also has the potential to 'other' individuals who do not uphold its unwritten social rules. Therefore, the imagined Other is perpetuated through the fear of being othered. However, a negative result of encouraging this enactment of artificially good or cultured behavior, is that the disciplinary system could trigger the loss of difference in the prisoner, student and user

⁸⁵ Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1998. 84. Quoted in Mats Carlsson "The Gaze as constituent and annihilator," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* Vol. 4, 2012 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3402/jac.v4i0.19481>>

population.

Fig.1. Panopticon, Isla de Pino, image by National Gallery of Canada
[online]< <https://www.thepolisblog.org/2013/07/reversing-panopticon-designing-for.html>>
(accessed 10. November. 2020)

2. Routine

Returning to the discussion of the Post-Truth⁸⁶ Society in *Naming*, power systems under capitalism remain largely abstract because corporations and systems, such as the Internet, build up an illusion that all information is open and that there is a universal transparency within the construct of contemporary society. However, a lot of the institutional decision making is invisible and hidden by narratives that corporations and governments tell the public and from behind these they set the invisible rules that govern the spaces of people's everyday lives. In Anna Minton's, *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the twenty-first century* (2009), the author provides evidence of how the privatization of public space is often invisible but is very much there and in turn causes fear. Minton refers to Anthony Giddens work on Modernity to convey the effects of a society geared towards security:

In his book 'The Consequences of Modernity' the sociologist Anthony Giddens says that life is not 'comforting and psychologically snug'. By retreating into safe havens, which substitute physical security and complex technological systems to meet emotional needs, this new way of living is in danger not only of dividing the

⁸⁶ Post-truth: Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

landscape but of stymieing people's emotional lives in the process, by creating the false illusion that life is 'psychologically snug' and perfectly safe. When forced to venture out of these environments, the danger is that people are far less able to cope with the ordinary risks that are part of healthy life than they were before.⁸⁷

In *Ground Control* (2009), Minton provides evidence of how gated communities actually create more fear of the outside than communities built without security in their design. Therefore, the more security that is built into the town planning of modern cities, the more fear that they can create. It may appear difficult to refuse the government when they offer citizens a clean and safe city, through the 'secured by design' model, such as creating gated communities because they promise a safe environment.⁸⁸ However, can every environment be completely safe and is a sanitized community enabling of difference of stifling? The principle here is much like that of the prison and/or classroom design in that the system aims to design out disorder or misuse. All of these designs are a form of pre-determined policing, as they programme out a suspected disorder in advance. They also construct a fear of the unknown or irregular by creating an illusion of safety or normative path.

Society is being shaped towards this monitorial model and education is used to make people fit into the shape that these disciplinary forms have created. We may think that we are able to shape who we want to be, but we are, simultaneously, surrounded with one-way mirrors.⁸⁹ We imagine and project how we think we should perform, as we are fenced in by these humanmade technologies and monitored through our use of this

⁸⁷ Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty First Century City* (London: Penguin, 2009), 81.

⁸⁸ In Anna Minton's *Ground Control*, she mentions the idea of crime prevention and neighborhood safety was based on the American principle of 'defensible space' a term that coined by architect and city planner Oscar Newman. As Newman argues that architectural and environmental design plays a crucial part in increasing or reducing criminality.

⁸⁹ One-way Mirror - In the previous paragraph, I analogy Panopticon as staying in an interrogation chamber encircled by one-way mirror. Prisoner could only see themselves through the one-way mirror, it becomes a self-suppression medium.

informational environment.⁹⁰ Like the CCTV in capital cities, this expanded monitorial system is used as a form of crime prevention, but it can also be used to record and keep data on our private everyday lives. This monitorial and security-based system produces a landscape of fences that are organized by invisible rules, with only the stories attached to these systems being made visible by corporations. As a result, we may be aware that the truth of these systems is being created and have to imagine what they require from us. This is because it is difficult to clarify the level of intervention from the outside and the motivations of the external forces that are relaying and framing the information that is being circulated.

In the interrogation chamber of the Internet, we encounter ourselves as we project them to be what we imagine our identities should be. On the Internet, we are represented by a projected identity that is mediated through materials, such as an online portfolio, social media selfies, consumer choices, curated experiences and lifestyle. These representations create an artificial image of ourselves on the Internet and this is partly why we are aware of the production of a Post-truth society, as we are party to our own construction of the 'truth'. As Foucault has revealed, the contemporary moment is subject to a mechanism of social control, which he tracks as gaining momentum during the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle classes. In his book, *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault names four particular strategic unities that he considers fundamentally important to social control: a) the hysterization of women's bodies (hysteria was considered to be caused by a travelling womb, so women were likely to be more emotionally vulnerable), b) pedagogization of children's sex (policing of children's

⁹⁰ Men-Made Artificial Information - At term that I had discussed in Chapter 1, that Jean Baudrillard states, in 'Simulacra and Simulations' (79:1994), '...we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.' If all human knowledge and understanding is based on the manmade text, it is doubtful that humans have the ability to identify what the actuality of other existences outside of our colonial and anthropocentric knowledge systems.

connection with sex, coinciding with children having separate bedrooms to their parents), c) socialization of procreative behavior (reproduction as being the sole purpose for sex) and d) psychiatrization of perverse pleasure (if you divert from normative heterosexual practice then you would be deemed a pervert). Foucault suggests that the policing of sexuality is a form of soft power by introducing a moral code. A code or stylisation that people used to self-discipline their sex and sexuality in advance of a judgment being passed, and sanctions being made on their bodies. This is in part due to the rise of middle classes, which began to define themselves through a moral and ethical code, in order to separate themselves from the masses (as unlike royalty they did not have a bloodline). An ethical codes centred around hygiene, sex for reproductive purposes only and the cultivation of the appearance of being cultured and educated. The momentum produced during the Industrial Revolution, has continued to be perpetuated through the rapid twentieth century expansion of artificial images, texts and knowledge systems which further spread the modes of self-moderating explicated by Foucault. These systems are often presented as natural, neutral and reasoned, which is why they are perpetuated. According to Ahmed, such systems provide a well-used path, 'Used can mean previously used, shaped by comings and goings; becoming used can refer to how an activity has become customary. A history of use is a history of becoming natural'.⁹¹ A well-used path encourages habitual use that will only make it even easier to follow. This can trap users deeply inside this pattern of use and it becomes hard, and even discouraged, to locate an alternative path in a world which is built by repeating one point of view/path.

⁹¹ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 41.

3. From Invisible to Visible

In her book, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), Claire Bishop tries to challenge the mechanisms, as highlighted by Foucault, of habitual and natural power structures through suggesting that art should provoke audiences to respond to these often invisible social and political systems. In the aforementioned book, Bishop provides the case study of Oscar Bony's *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968), as it is an artistic practice that aims to amplify the ambivalence which power structures can create. Bony renders visible the class structure within Argentinian society and constructs a provocative encounter between performers and audience from different classes. *The Working-Class Family* was first exhibited in the group show, *Experiencias '68* at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Argentina.⁹² After, the work was recreated in 2004 which exhibit at the Houston Museum of Modern Art, America. Bishop is interested in the way that systems can be ambivalent towards their users and thus produce a series of simultaneous conflicting reactions. This, in turn, is similar to feeling both more secure and fearful when in a gated community. Bony stages this ambivalence in part through the work's structure and his decision to use the exhibition budget to pay a working-class family to sit on a set of plinths in the gallery for eight hours a day; an act that both reveres the family and constructs them as a specimen of curious observation. This staging of ambivalence, through producing positive and negative connotations or readings of the work, recalls Edward Said's theory mentioned previously in my chapter, *Naming*. Said stated that in order to highlight a stronger identity for Western cultures, orientalism is constructed by colonial discourse and analysis in order to represent the colonized cultures as radically other and lesser than

⁹² Exhibition 'Experiencias 68' - At the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Removal and destruction of all the exhibition by their own artists after the closure by the police of the art piece called 'Bathroom' by Roberto Plate, to protest against censorship and the wave of political repression in Argentina.

the colonizer(s). The plinths heightened the performers away from the audience, to separate their identity from that of the viewers and to offer the working-class family up for speculation. This inversion of the class hierarchy aimed to render transparent and test the ambivalence that is inherent in class structures. Bony recorded sounds of the family's home life and played this throughout the gallery space, which further constructed an intimate encounter that could not ignore the personal lives behind the class system.



Fig.2. La Familia Obrera-The Working-class Family, Oscar Bony, 1968
[online]<<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/187729>> (accessed 08. October. 2020)

Bony's ambitious hiring of an actual working-class family, to whom he delegated the performance for which they were instructed to go about their ordinary daily lives within the gallery, showed that he wanted to highlight the geographically imbalanced class system in Argentina. Bony chose to highlight the unequal distribution of wealth between different classes by staging a working-class family in what was assumed to be a gallery frequented by the middle to upper classes.

However, through bringing the everyday into the artificial gallery environment,

Bony constructed an artificially real performance. As a result, the performer, gallery space and audience are all surrounded by an almost authentic but doubtable circumstance. This feeling of doubtfulness is due to the blurred edges between the performer, who is representing their realistic ordinary daily lives, and the artificial staging, as the gallery space separates the performers off from the everyday world outside its walls. When everyday elements are pulled out of their environment and placed in a gallery context, they are both available for observation and altered by this move. In a sense, Bony's work goes to the edge of what is considered realistic, and this means that the audience could refuse to believe what they have seen.

The instruction that the artist gave to the performers, which was to live their daily lives in the gallery, could be interpreted as uncanny, awkward, and unrealistic. Freud claims that the uncanny is a class of frightening things through which the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred; 'An uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now thought imaginary.'⁹³ Therefore, the uncanny is counter-intuitively connected to what is known and familiar; it needs to closely resemble something that exists for it to seem uncanny or out of place. Bony's decision could be seen as having an uncanny effect, as an object (performer, artwork etc.) will not keep its entity intact (identity, meaning etc.) when removed from one context to the next. In this instance, the move from a private living room to a public gallery renders the effect, of 'ordinary' life, uncanny. As a result, the working-class family's everyday lives remain unrepresentable to a certain extent and are only available to be acted out in the realm of the everyday.

...Bony tried to shock the public into an awareness of the great disconnection that existed between high elite art and social reality. To do this, he brought a

⁹³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 150.

representative of the neglected, oppressed, and repressed (it was a time of military dictatorship) into an arena where this individual would be seen, noticed, and registered by those in power. By bringing a family from the outside world into the gallery system to serve as the subject for aesthetic enjoyment to those who were “in,” he hoped to shock the art power elite into a reexamination of the purpose of art and the circuits of distribution.⁹⁴

Instead of taking the art (object) to a working-class audience (subject), Bony chose to bring members of the working-class into the gallery as both subject and object. This further increases the spectacular staging of the working-class and it can be considered as a bilateral move because it affects both working and upper classes, by asking them to reexamine their own positions in conjunction with other identities. Therefore, there is an assumption made here by Bony that the viewers to the gallery would be of a middle-class or upper-class status and would be shocked by the encounter with the working-class family from Argentina, which may counteract stereotypes. As a result of constructing the working-class family as both subject and object, Bony turns the middle to upper class audience into a quasi-object too as their reactions are placed onstage in relation to the artwork.

The purpose of Bony’s provocation, produced through the encounter between the classes, is referred to by Bishop in her account of Guy Debord’s theory and practice, ‘For many artists and curators on the left, Debord’s critique strikes to the heart of why participation is important as a project: it rehumanizes a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production.’⁹⁵ Bishop’s provocation is realized by Bony through the juxtaposition of the different classes, which produces a confrontation, or in Bishop’s words ‘antagonism’, through participation. As

⁹⁴ Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 177. Quoted in Daniel Quiles “Between Organism and Sky: Oscar Bony, 1965-1976”, Caiana, 2020. 1-14. < https://www.academia.edu/9850546/_Between_Organism_and_Sky_Oscar_Bony_1965_1976_Caiana_4_primer_semestre_2014_ >

⁹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 11.

Bishop claims, ‘Artists and works of art can operate in a space of antagonism or negation vis-à-vis society, a tension that the ideological discourse of creativity reduces to a unified context and instrumentalises for more efficacious profiteering.’⁹⁶ Bishop’s ‘antagonism’ is active and changes according to the context. In most instances, it also requires an alternative subject position or backdrop that it is pushing against another. Therefore, these two (or more) different positions bring to the surface differing views on ruling social, political, economic and cultural realities or ideologies. This both stages these alternative views and enables their differences to be encountered through their staging. However, these counter-positions may wish to also diminish themselves and their responsibility in relation to the performance, as they may not want to reflect on being complicit with this system that is perpetuated by the construction of the nuclear family (private sphere, class and gender politics etc.).

On entering the gallery, Bishop describes a sense of being confused by the encounter that has been constructed through the work. Bishop explains that the blurring of the artwork’s boundaries (the distance and distinction between performer and viewer) occurs because the family did not stay strictly within the bounds of the plinths, so:

... in reality, their gestures were less contained: they were constantly shifting position in the middle of the exhibition hall – eating, smoking, reading and talking amid the audience’s largely adverse and horrified response; the child in particular found it hard to stay put on the plinth and often ran around the exhibition.⁹⁷

Therefore, the artist’s predetermined premise and rigid plinth structure unfolds with the unpredictable agency of the performers.

The gallery space, the form of which Bony exacerbates, could also be compared to a Panopticon; it is designed spatially for a social phenomenon that is regulated to compel a specific type of user behavior. In contrast to this, the work staged an unruly participation

⁹⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 114.

within the bounds set up by a Panopticon format. In the Panopticon, there is a psychological awareness of being watched and a fear of being caught or punished for unruly behavior, so people often end up stifled and conform to an ideal or norm. In Bony's work, the working-class family members both conform and transgress the plinths. They have an awareness of being watched by people and so inevitably act an ideal or performed self, which is depicted through the family's stylized and idealised 'good behaviour' in the photographic documentation above (fig. 2). In contrast, they also broke out of the confines of the cell, or self-disciplinary staging on the plinth.

From the experience I had of exhibiting my work *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, I have attempted to enter the psychological position of the performers in Bony's artwork. As described in *Grumble*, I was required to frequently replace the egg yolk for the piece and so could not avoid encountering visitors in the space and, therefore, was on-stage as a performer. Like Bony's working-class family, I had nowhere off-stage to go during the exhibition hours, as I needed to be in the space waiting for the next time slot to replace the egg yolk. This decentered my experience of self and confused my self-identification, which produced the following questions: where does the performer end and the self-begin? Does this distinction even exist? A short excerpt from my grumble in *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* exemplifies the internal quandary that the piece produced in myself:

I would personally rather become an object in this white cube

convincing myself again and again that

I am part of the work

I am only a medium a nobody

Nobody

I shrink myself into the sides of the seat

Hunch over

Turn my face away from the visitor

I whisper and mumble to the visitor, the gallery staff again and again

‘Please ignore me

I do not belong in this space You can’t see me

please just ignore me

During the exhibition, I realized that I had several identities that were overlapping, an externalized facilitator, performer, artist, visitor, and staff member all of which I had to negotiate with an internalized self. As a result, I undertook a conversation with myself so that I could identify with the role I was inhabiting at that time. I was hazy of my own identity/role in everyday life and confused of where ‘I’ was, as my identity shifted through the requirements of the performance and its use value to the egg yolk. I became disorientated and confused about who I was and which role I should act in the present moment. Therefore, according to my experience of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, if I were in the position of the performers in, *The Working-Class Family* (1968) then I would have felt lost in identifying who I was during the performance. I assume that Bony’s performer could not totally be themselves, as their familiar identities could not entirely appear in this context and in front of a public. However, Bony is possibly postulating that our identities are never consistent and inevitably change due to context.

The confusion surrounding the performer’s identities could have started from the unconscious bias of the viewer, in which one thinks the other is moving outside of the bounds of the work and, therefore, not in the correct place. Bony’s decision to withdraw the performer from their familiar environment to an unfamiliar place, shifts their backgrounds which highlights a contradiction and awkwardness, they appear like fish out of water. The working-class family could be interpreted as misfits and this evokes Ahmed’s writing on Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial project in relation to colonial India.

In 1994, India's colonizers produced an elite-class within the body of the colonized people through encouraging native citizens to become 'mimic-men',⁹⁸ in order to mimic the colonizers. As Ahmed states, 'Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in moral, and in intellect...almost the same but not quite, almost the same but not white.'⁹⁹ Correlating with this move, Bony placed the working-class family in a gallery to be observed by the middle classes and to encourage a social phenomenon which would compel the working-class family to mimic (as we see in Fig. 2) either the elite-class or produce an ideal image of themselves. This was intended to challenge class assumptions but also, it could be argued, perpetuated them.

This brings up the following questions: what are the working-class family in Bony's work actually performing? Are they acting out a virtual image of themselves (an ideal working-class family), an instrumentalized version (what Bony wants them to look like) or a rebellious version of themselves (breaking out of the bounds of the work)? Ahmed continues with the potential of the misfit, as the, 'Misfit provides an incentive to change; good fit provides non. The failure of things to work creates an incentive to make new things.'¹⁰⁰ The consequences of the working-class family bursting out of the bounds of the work could be understood as an error and can be linked to Ahmed's notion of use. For Ahmed, a misfit is a twist in form or habit that means certain things cannot follow the formal instruction that has been set up by the past and which is usually perpetuated by the habit of the well-used path. This twisted form or operation becomes an error, but Ahmed's error is a generative opportunity in which unpredictable possibilities start

⁹⁸ Mimic-men - This term refers to Sara Ahmed's *What's the use?* (2019, 123), as she is drawing on Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Minute on Education* (1835) which he declared that the purpose of education in the colonial is to allow the colonized lead to the production of a mimicry that presents itself. As like the colonizer require colonized in behave as their master (colonizer).

⁹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 123, quoted in Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Minute for Education* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 237.

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 25.

creating new paths.

The error presented in Bony's work is evidenced through Daniel R. Quiles assertion, in his account of the work in, *Between Organism and Sky: Oscar Bony, 1965-1976* (2014):

Given that the family in these images is missing the child and clearly consists of a different man and woman than the one pictured in the canonical photographs of *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968), is it possible that the artist hired more than one family to participate in the work in the few days before *Experiencias 68* was destroyed? ¹⁰¹

Artists in the 1990s were continuing the conceptual tradition of the 1960s, in aiming to overturn the traditional relationship between the artwork, artist and audience. Bishop states that due to this concern with an alternative relationship with art a different encounter is pictured by the artists when producing the work (including Bony). In particular the notion that the viewer is a participant in the meaning-making of the work, 'the audience, previously conceived as a "viewer" or "beholder"', is now repositioned as a co-producer or "participant".¹⁰² This relates to Quiles' questioning of the authenticity of the participants (both audience and performer) in Bony's *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968), which is interesting because in doing so Quiles evidences a belief in an original and authentic family.¹⁰³ However, this original family (if at all possible) had already been tampered with by the artist through moving them from their home and into the gallery. Quiles is perhaps misinterpreting the piece by not noticing that Bony's own constraints (plinths) are being broken out of by the family. In Bishop's account, visitors merged with the working-class family/performers, which could be why

¹⁰¹ Through Daniel R. Quiles, *Between Organism and Sky: Oscar Bony, 1965-1976*, 7.
<https://www.academia.edu/9850546/_Between_Organism_and_Sky_Oscar_Bony_1965_1976_Caiana_4_pri mer_semestre_2014_> (accessed on 08. November. 2020).

¹⁰² Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 2.

¹⁰³ Participant - As participants includes both the audience and performer, it is a distinct term. In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), Claire Bishop defines that the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.

it appeared that the piece was made up of different performers. An intermingling between performer and audience, suggests a breakdown in the observer and observed model towards a participation of all human subjects in the gallery.

The use of a real family as artwork makes the interpretation of the practice or performance more complicated. Bishop writes, 'This double presentation of the family, on display both symbolically (as representatives of the working-class) and literally (as the singular Rodríguez family) was conceptually reinforced in the father's double pay.'¹⁰⁴ In correlation with Bishop's speculation, Bony provided a label to accompany the piece that explained the following economic transaction, 'Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a professional die-caster, is earning twice his usual wages for just staying on show with his wife and son.'¹⁰⁵ In using the term 'just', Bony is suggesting that the work the family is undertaking in the gallery is not as difficult as the father's usual labour. Bony could also be announcing that this working-class family's income is cheap to the public it assumes will be viewing and that the artwork makes the family more valuable. Bony's ambivalence, therefore, could be read as suggesting that the family's operation as an artwork, an educational tool to the middle-classes, is more worthwhile than the father working as a professional die-caster. Through the artwork, Bony acts as an imparter of value and this provokes questions about the working-class's valuation in society via its labour and/or income. This presents the ambivalence of the class power structure, by staging the working-class family in many different and conflicting ways.

Through proposing that the value of working-class family as an artwork is worth double than the father's usual work, suggests that the working-class family is worth more as a labour of art as opposed to the labour of the father's industry or the mother's

¹⁰⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 114.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 113.

domestic labour (the latter of which remains largely invisible within the framing of the artwork). Bony produces a provocation that the audience is asked to consider; is the labour of the working-class family valuable and in what form? It also highlights the inequality in the structure of the family and questions the valuation of income for a working-class family. Through this act of announcing the father's wage, Bony also draws attention to the unpaid labor of wives/mothers by only recognizing the salary of the father and doubling it. In both these instances, Bony's decision is ambivalent because he could both be provoking a response to this inequality or repeating patriarchal operations by only doubling the father's salary and subjecting it to the economy of the art world. For example, by raising the family up in value through the plinths, Rodríguez (the father and breadwinner in the family) could appear to be presented as the model patriarchal figure of a working-class family.

Bony's artwork did achieve a political provocation, as it eventually attracted the attention from the authorities and the Argentinean government asked the gallery, *Experiencias '68*, to remove the artwork from the group exhibition. In response to the Argentinean government's intervention, the other artists in the show began to withdraw or destroy their own artworks out in the streets.¹⁰⁶ This was in order to make visible the injustice and announce their declaration against the government's censorship. In response to the overly repressive stratocracy in Argentina during the 1960s to 1970s, Bony aims to represent the government policy on the minimum wage to the middle-class and upper-class citizens that are also complicit in perpetuating the mechanisms of inequality. Through this Bony drew attention to how low the wage is for working-class families in Argentina and enraged the government. The subsequent controversy perhaps did more to

¹⁰⁶ *Experiencias '68* - a controversial exhibition held at Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITTD) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in May 1968, curated by Jorge Romero Brest. It included artwork by artists including Oscar Bony, Delia Cancela, Roberto Plate, and Roberto Jacoby. With this exhibition, the Institute was joining a growing movement among artists to make artwork that would challenge the government under Juan Carlos Onganía.

render visible the invisible social and political issues within the class and geographical regions of Argentina than if the work's meaning had remained within the walls of the gallery. Bony's making visible of the inequality in the class system provoked a political response because the Argentinean government censored several of the artworks that criticized both the government and the President within the exhibition.

Bony created a predetermined premise and structure for *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968) but what he could not control were the actions of the performers and visitors (or participants as Bishop would describe them). These were variables that would have been hard to predict because each person has their own subjective decision making when creating or reacting to the work. Furthermore, Bishop describes the posturing in the performance through an analysis of its documentary material, 'In photographic documentation [fig.2] of the project, the Rodríguez family are shown self-absorbed, reading books to pass the time of day while visitors examine them.'¹⁰⁷ This description alerts the reader to the concept of the piece, which takes as its assumption that middle to upper class families are the ones to visit art galleries and it is their encounter with the working-class family (performer) that is to be provocative, as the classes are not pictured as mixing much prior to this contact in the gallery. As Bishop states, 'The Worker's Family clearly plays on the conventions of figurative art in a socialist realist tradition: elevating an everyday family to the dignity of exemplary representation or ideal.'¹⁰⁸ When looking at the image that Bishop is referring to (fig. 2), there are two families depicted and the heightened plinth separates the identities of performer and audience. The plinth is represented as a stage and it is this device that raises the figure up, so that whoever is on the plinth becomes the object of observation,

¹⁰⁷ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 114.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,114.

an artwork. While the middle-class audience functions as the observer, who examines and analyses the working-class family. In a sense, when abiding to the logic of the plinths the working-class family are onstage and the middle-class family is separated off-stage. However, these onstage and offstage distinctions merge and blend within both Bishop's and Quiles' accounts of the work.

Traditionally, the viewer follows a model of observation (as opposed to participation) created by the space demarcated by the plinth or frame (inside and outside) and treats themselves as an outsider who observes the artwork, which in this instance is the performance. Therefore, the audience often sees themselves as separate from the object and able to judge the artwork. In this scenario, the lines between performer and audience are clear; the stage is a place that is clearly demarcated and asks the audience to remain separate from it in order to observe the material. In contrast, through the piece *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968), Bony set up a stage-like plinth to raise the performers physically and metaphorically. Its function was to elevate the everyday and working-classes by separating off the two envisaged classes, performer (artwork) and audience (viewer). This idea of audience engagement was only possible if the audience felt alienated (distanced) from the performance and were able to think critically about what they were seeing. In this sense, Bony's work is consistent with Bertolt Brecht's breaking down of the fourth wall in theatre practice, in which the performer directly speaks to the viewer from the stage. In her book *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (2003), Griselda Pollock states that Brecht complex,

... the use of different registers such as the comic, tragic as well as a confection of songs, images, sounds, film and so forth. Complex seeing and complex multilayered texts were the project. Distanciation is therefore the theoretical and practical result of this critique of realist representation and a device for achieving a different form of realist knowledge actively involving the spectator in its

production and its translation into action.¹⁰⁹

Pollock suggests that the Brechtian audience should have an active role that liberates them from passively absorbing the interpretation of the artwork. Therefore, in Brecht's approach, the viewer is both active and responsible for their reactions to the contents of the performance but also must remain alienated and not drawn into the artifice. This is so that the audience can maintain a concept of reality, in order to go away and change their lived conditions.

The term 'fourth wall' comes from the theatre and is used to describe the conceptual barrier that separates the audience from the action but the barrier itself remains invisible. It is an imaginary wall that separates the narrative of the play from the real world, so the fourth wall could also be the cinema or computer screen. However, when actors in Brechtian plays interact with the audience by directly speaking to them through the fourth wall, they highlight the real world by nodding to the fictionality of the play. Pollock states that, 'For Brecht the audience was always imagined as socially specific, a concrete social group in relation to whose position and needs pleasure and instruction would have to be calculated.'¹¹⁰ Therefore, Brecht includes a consideration of the audience within the very structure and content of the play. This also correlates with Bony's address to the middle-classes in *The Working-Class Family* (1968) by picturing a concrete set of social groups. In this instance, Bony has also expanded on this concept by taking into consideration both the onstage (working-class) performers backgrounds, as well as the offstage (middle-class) audiences' backgrounds. Brecht chose to keep the audience at a distance, as they were not performers, but, simultaneously, invited them to interact critically with the work. Therefore, they were brought into the story by way of

¹⁰⁹ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 226.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 244.

decision making and this could make them feel provoked by the play, as the spectator becomes not just an observer but an accomplice to the plot. Brechtian plays broke down the fourth wall through directing the actors to speak to the audience and, in a sense, appear to go off the artificially scripted narrative. This gives the audience a space to think critically about the society that is being staged. Brecht encourages the audience to realize that the play is artificial, while asking the audience to be critical of the reality that the play is presenting and to take that into the politics of their everyday lives. In *The Working-Class Family* (1968), Bony artificially separates the performer and audience, with the aim of arousing the audiences' curiosity especially in the elite and powerful classes who came to see the exhibition. This was so that they could recognise the family as a representation of all those who were oppressed and neglected during the military dictatorship of Argentina.

Brecht and Bony aim to hold up aspects of society and politics to the audience but also to speak to its members directly, so that they feel implicated in the situation and may want to do something about it.

In Bony's work, it could be argued that the fourth wall is broken down even further as there is an ambiguity between who the performers are, where the artwork ends and begins, and how each relate to the structure that has been set up by the artist. At points in Bony's work, neither performer nor audience (as it is not clear where one ends and the other begins) have the critical distance in the work to judge (accept or disagree) with what the artist aims to express in the artwork. Bony's participants (performer and audience) who are standing within the white cube of the gallery, are inside an uncanny environment and due to this immersion may not be able to distinguish between fact and fiction. Due to the ambiguity of the space and the roles of the subjects within it, the consistency of a stable identity is hard to maintain. This doubtfulness towards one's

identity is connected with the white cube environment and the contents of the performance that has been allowed to morph and change, as Bony relinquished the performance decisions to the family. He also chose to place the participants in a space that functions for display, which already sets up a process of combining fact (authority and frame of the gallery) and fiction (displaying humans themselves as an artwork). When participants act as an artwork inside the gallery space, the boundaries between the art world and the 'normal' world begin to blur. By choosing to label the classes and categorize the two groups, Bony also encourages them to be introspective of their own identities and backgrounds. Perhaps Bony not only broke down the fourth wall that traditionally exists between performers and audience, but also broke down the walls that are assumed to separate us as autonomous individuals and instead presented the audience with the notion of their fragility and connectedness. As well as drawing attention to the way in which our minds are never fully our own, as they include subconscious and unconscious areas that nevertheless interact with our conscious faculties.

Instead of placing this piece of work in a labour union or domestic setting, Bony withdrew the working-class family away from their everyday context and placed them in an art gallery that only the middle to upper-class people were expected to visit. By excluding the public and private domains of the family (the labour union or home), as venues at which to present the working-class family to the public, Bony demonstrated a wish to further separate the working-class family from their social, political and economic context. Simultaneously, through separating the family from their context and placing them in an unfamiliar place, there is a sense of misplacement and an awkwardness in the order of things. It appears that the artwork and space are part of what I describe, as an unexpected 'jointing' together. I define jointing to be an interrogation of the habitual use of combining artificially manufactured materials, as this assumed joining

(as opposed to jointing) limits access to alternative structures because these materials organize what Ahmed describes as the normative uses of use. As Ahmed stipulates, ‘A world might seem open if it was open to you. When we describe the world from the point of view of those not accommodated, a different world appears.’¹¹¹ Jointing postulates that through the unexpected joining of things, and alternative material combinations, a productive error could be produced. An error that Ahmed describes as providing an alternative path.

In this sense, Bony’s stage becomes an awkward platform and the body of the person onstage speaks of both an ideal, which is ultimately an artificial image of the performer, and a slippage or error in their lack of adherence to the boundaries. Onstage the participants (performer and audience) could consciously or subconsciously depersonalize their background and become another, more stylized, identity. The performers are instructed to act out their ordinary daily lives onstage (plinth) but their ordinary daily life on the plinth becomes different to their home lives and the family even spilled out of its confines. This created an uncanny moment between the over-embellished and the out of control. The over-embellishment of the work can be identified in the photographic documentation cited by Bishop (fig. 2), in which the working-class family elegantly sits on the plinth and reads concentratedly and ignores the audience observing them (constructing a fourth wall of separation). Its’ out of control elements can be seen when the fourth wall is broken and the child performers in particular run around and burst out of the demarcated frame (as stipulated in both Bishop’s and Quile’s accounts of the work).

An exhibition operates similarly to a school, not only through being an educational tool that aims to provoke criticism, but because it consists of a complex

¹¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *What’s the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 220.

interweaving of actors. A school is made up of not only human participants but architecture, hardware and software that all organize the path for users to follow. Similarly, to a school, a gallery is also made up of a mechanised structure and policy. A show includes both the artists and/or curators' instructions alongside the artwork and its interpretation. These, along with a gallery's architecture (financial, physical and administrative), contain the hardware and software that comprises an institution such as a white cube (in which Bony's work was hosted). These embedded, and often soft, instructions, usually orientate a clear path for the visitor to understand the exhibition. Institutions and curators can be understood as persuading the audience to understand and follow their mediated path. We could also interpret Bony's piece as reiterating the practices of constructing a well-used and generally endorsed path, by including a stylized family who are aware of being monitored. Bony's work is situated in the specific educational architecture of a white cube gallery, as well as the hardware of the plinths and the software of the programme/script he gave the working-class family. However, Bony twists this Panopticon format by not controlling the performers' behaviors. His designs are only fulfilled up until the point of placing the performers in the gallery. After this point, the performer and audience divert from Bony's path. What follows, is dependent on the complex interweaving of actors, which includes the human actors (participants) that are both architected by and refuse these monitorial (Foucault's usage of the term) conditions. Bony's participants produce an error within this environment, as they do not always cohere with the structure and through this challenge the operations of the gallery, work and classes through either pushing or blurring the gallery, domestic home and artwork's meaning and boundaries.

In *The Working-Class Family* (1968), Bony stages the conflicts between the location performer and audience. This three-party enactment, simultaneously, effect each

other, pushing and pulling against each other to form an ambivalent definition. They consequently transform the boundaries of the work, which even expand into the social and political fields, by causing a response from the Argentinean government that then closed the exhibition down and caused further provocation and action from the artists involved.

Ahmed expands on the way in which spatial structures inform the bodies that are produced within their context, 'Spaces can be organized around what they are for. Spaces might have to be organized even more tightly the more are required to be accommodated.'¹¹² In this sense, everything in the classroom (including gallery as classroom) is designed for teaching many students at the same time. For instance, tables are set up in one direction towards the front and this setting forces each student to face forward in the same direction, to face a blackboard/podium and the person at the front who is giving the instructions. In a similar way, Bony's plinth architecture encourages the audiences' curiosity to analyse the difference between the people on the plinth and themselves (the people who are looking at the people on the plinth). The plinth acts as a medium for separating the different classes of audience/performer (middle-classes/working-classes).

In both the classroom and Bony's work, the hardware(equipment/building/object) is designed in advance for the user to follow the designer's instruction. When Bony's user (participant) fails in following the designed instruction, the object can become interpreted as unable to be used. We can see this particularly in Quile's criticism of the artwork, as he assumes that it is only by following Bony's instructions or staying faithful to the family unit that the artwork can be authentic and in correct use. Quile's response also supports Foucault's claim that the Panopticon in society creates a people either in fear of being

¹¹² Ibid., 124.

caught out (for not conforming) or aware of being observed (in order to conform). In the latter instance, people may well choose to stifle their individuality in order to conform. Bishop stated that, 'This desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order – be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship.'¹¹³ This concurs with Bishop's interest in artworks as provocations because this proposed format is meant to prevent an immediate consensus (as consensus fails to challenge the norms in society). We can indeed observe, within contemporary democracies, that the popular vote and consensus (majority rule) have held sway in elections, which in turn has produced social and political configurations that tend to ignore the voices of minorities and assume that they do not fit the mold of the well-used (and correct) path.

Bony's work can be interpreted as producing another point of view to that of the well-used path, in which participant(s) can provide an unpredictable story, or a glitch in a formal space or system. This 'glitch' is similar to the way in which Legacy Russell depicts errors as forming. In her book *Glitch Feminism* (2020) Russell states that, 'A glitch is an error, a mistake and a failure to function.'¹¹⁴ However, it is her assertion that a glitch also provides an opportunity for a new story to begin. It is through his decision to juxtapose participants from different backgrounds that Bony constructs a glitch in the social order of the gallery and the class system. If Bony had not created a confrontation, then the work would have had a very different impact. For, if both audience and performer had come from the same background (middle-classes), then the encounter in the gallery could have resulted in a bit of a non-event. Viewer and performer could have

¹¹³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 275.

¹¹⁴ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 7.

ended up looking through their subject specific one-way mirrors (which mimics the Panopticon format), overlooking their differences by imagining an Other (Lacan) in their place and, in the process, each other's social positions.

Bishop states that in *The Working-Class Family* (1968), '... the viewer's self-consciousness in front of the family is not simply the heightened awareness of a phenomenological encounter – as one ideally experiences in relation to minimalist objects – but a shared embarrassment.'¹¹⁵ Phenomenology can be understood as a theory that is concerned with how we observe, reason and seek to explain the phenomena that we encounter in the world. It suggests that the way things appear depends on the entity interpreting those appearances. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty states, 'I will never know how you see red and you will never know how I see it. But this separation of consciousness is recognized only after a failure of communication, and our first movement is to believe in an undivided being between us.'¹¹⁶ Phenomenology intends to provide a direct description of human experience, as the outside world appears and is filtered through our perceptual faculties. It is only through individual experience that we can gain a picture of appearances, as the world appears differently to every entity. In Bony's work we encounter a scenario in which these different experiences confront each other with an aim to co-construct future appearances.

4. Path of Becoming

'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,'¹¹⁷ is a phrase famously stated by Simone de Beauvoir. We are not born to be who we are but are born into a scripted path

¹¹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 117.

¹¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology*, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p.17 <<https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-primacy-of-perception-by-Maurice-Merleau-Ponty.pdf>>(accessed 18. December. 2020)

¹¹⁷ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 12.

for becoming a socialized and culturally marked body. This can be linked to Ahmed's description of the well-used path, in which following a traditional path provides a route that is smooth and easy to follow, 'each time a path is used, it becomes easier to use, such that over time we can call it well used or even used well.'¹¹⁸ The Panopticon is a social, legal and cultural system that is deployed to address errors, which designers predetermine could occur within the system. This also produces a long-term process of self-regulation that is built up from quotidian society (as occurring in everyday or ordinary social functions), and through which we apply the knowledge and ethics from everyday life to sculpt what we think we should become. This is the emergence of the well-used path. Prior to our entry into society, we have been placed on a standard path that has already been artificially set-up in advance by the institutional complex (nuclear family, school and social conventions). In *La Familia Obrera-The Working-Class Family* (1968), Bony suggests a possible route for altering this path. In an interview with Bony for *Instituto Di tella Experiencias 68*, the artist states that *The Working-Class Family* (1968):

... wasn't a performance, because it hasn't got a script, it isn't body art, there's no clear category for this work, and I like that very much, the fact that not even I can find a precise categorization. I find extremely important the fact that there is a certain feeling of being on the limit.¹¹⁹

Bony set up the premise for this piece of work, as he selected the necessary participants, made the economic decisions (as well as choosing to render them visible through a textual blurb) and designed the strategic staging of the working-class family on plinths in the gallery. However, when the exhibition opened to the public Bony's work was able to take on a life of its own. This was due to its unpredictable performance and the chemical reaction that was produced through the intermingling of participants (performers and audience). Moreover, what happened in the gallery became a 'glitch' in

¹¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 42.

¹¹⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 117.

Argentinian class construction because it provided the setting for a social confrontation. This confrontation, or glitch, provides a possibility for a more varied subject to begin its development. Russell's glitch again provides an analogy for this slippage in the expected order. In contrast, to framing the glitch as an error that needs to be cast out or subsumed by the system, Russell describes it as compelling us to find liberation, as she argues that we need to embrace the glitch in order to break down the rules and limitations that construct contemporary society. A glitch might be produced, for instance, by the out-of-control child performers who 'misbehaved' amid the audience and, therefore, confused or even troubled the audience.

The ambivalent situation that Bony sets up for his performers and audience alike, is linked to my research and its concerns with the attitudes and properties emanating from materials. In *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, these materials included the body of the performer, as well as the egg yolk, monocle, gallery space and audience. The 'Grumble' abstract quoted above, records the unpredictable context that I found myself in during the exhibition due to this multi-variant context. I repeated negative words to myself, such as 'I am only a medium, a nobody', 'I hunch over' or 'Please ignore me' until they perpetually whirled around in my mind. Interpreting these thoughts, I understand their documentation as a glitch produced by my work that encouraged me to question my own sense of identity. It speaks to how the frame and bounds set up by a piece of work is able to make the artist/performer feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, I treated the audience as either spectator or participant within the work and the position they took up (either spectatorial distance or participatory interaction) depended on their relationship to the work. The audiences' position depended on whether they noticed the work and chose to interact with it or not. When a viewer is looking at *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*, their body often hovers around it as if they are concentrating on figuring out the identity of the

yellow substance. I have witnessed several viewers directly blowing on the artwork to test its material configuration. On a few of these occasions, the egg yolk has even fallen off the monocle plate. In these instances, the audience member usually runs away because, similarly to Bony's performers, they have stepped out of the bounds of the scripted relationship with the artwork and/or gallery.



Fig.3. A splash *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)*
left on the wall which has been interactive by the audience, Yun-Ling Chen, 2017

Both 'performer' and 'participant' are terms used by Bony and Bishop, which could either constitute an individual human, material, dancer, architecture, or a networked combination of these positions. In a sense, these performers are always becoming in relation to each other, which means that they cannot lose their identities through the encounter because their identities were never secure in the first place and are always produced in relation to a network of actors (similarly to Lacan's Other/others described above). In Bony's artwork, the performer's and audience members' identities are

constantly shifting from here to there. They are circulated between both the demarcated plinth, public floor of the gallery (the wandering of identities onstage/offstage in the gallery) and the offstage of their daily lives. For the audience, the onstage of the gallery is what is usually made visible to them, whereas the offstage (decision making of the gallery, from installation to economic decisions) is rendered invisible. Bony aims to make socially, economically and politically structured elements (which are often invisible) visible to the performer and audience (participants in the experiment); such as discrimination, valuation and behavior.

The onstage elements of the exhibition could be pictured as being in the spotlight or inside the psychology of the Panopticon. This is because they produce a feeling of being watched, which in turn influences the participants' behavior. The offstage of the exhibition, could be understood as the time and operations that are invisible to the public, the processes behind becoming visible.

The participants in Bony's work are both effectively performers and artworks, they are laboratory materials that are becoming other. Ahmed highlights how the putting to use of use (the structure of use) gives us the ability to analyze our habitual behaviors, 'Use gives us a sense of things, how they are; what they are like'.¹²⁰ Ahmed's phenomenological thinking deconstructs and complicates the meanings of 'use' to reveal different uses and the political and social motivations that lie beneath them. Ahmed searches for a methodology that can help locate and activate alternatives to the well-used path. In my practice, I intend to locate and activate the less well used path in relation to our human treatment of materials. This process also takes place in-between the offstage and onstage of making art visible and activates Ahmed's claim about the agency of using things differently. However, usable things often disappear from view, whereas broken

¹²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *What's the use?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 21.

things or glitches will appear into view and often as problems to be solved by the existing system, as opposed to a window into a possible new system. Ahmed states that, 'Matter can be used in such a way that it vanishes into its uses.'¹²¹ Therefore, the everyday object often only comes into view when it is broken or refuses to comply with the system. It is when the object stops working or cannot be used that the thing itself is revealed. When a usable object becomes an unusable thing, it starts to bother the user; whether the user decides to fix or abandon it, an extra decision needs to be taken in relation to this specific unusable thing. In her first chapter of *What's the Use?*, 'Using Things', Ahmed refers to Heidegger's theory of the 'broken tool' to highlight the responses that stubborn tools encourage humans to make:

Martin Heidegger's discussion of the broken hammer suggests that when the hammer is working, it disappears from view. When something stops working or cannot be used, it intrudes into consciousness. We might call what cannot be used broken. A break can be how something is revealed: for Heidegger a break is how we are 'given any access to properties or the like' ¹²²

Expanding on Ahmed's thinking on the uses of use, which provides the reader with an incentive to use alternative paths and to deploy things differently, my practice will also be analyzed in relation to the plasticity of use and the alternatives I propose to the viewer through artistic practice. Whether onstage or offstage (visible or invisible), I aim to make all elements of the art process tangible to the audience. Traditional exhibition, or installation, practice often assumes that everything is finished from the artist's perspective after they or a curator/installer have displayed the artwork in the white cube (onstage) space. After installation, the artist is seen to relinquish their control of the work's meaning and hand's this over to either the performer, audience or gallery staff. In the externalizing of my internal thoughts through *Grumble*, I aim to render the invisible feelings that were triggered in my own body throughout the performance. *Grumble*

¹²¹ Ibid., 21.

¹²² Ibid., 21.

records how an artwork can create great anxiety in the artist, who remains responsible for the work, both mentally and physically, after it has been installed. In instructing myself with the responsibility of replacing the egg yolk throughout the duration of the exhibition, the work transformed the traditional relationship between the offstage and onstage in the gallery. By not announcing itself as a public performance but treating it as the artist's routine work which was to keep the egg yolk in the condition of appearing fresh, enabled the audience to take responsibility for their own interactions with the work. This intermittently brings to light the working process of maintaining an artwork in front of the audience onstage during the exhibition, as opposed to behind the scenes (out of hours) or through invisible means such as air temperature, humidity and light. I aim to confront the onstage with the offstage and offer up their circuitous operations to the audience via observation/participation. Similarly, to Bony, I aim to produce a glitch in the perpetual field of the audience and proffer them as participants in co-constructing the meaning of the work. This concurs with Bishop's interpretation of the relationship between artist and audience, 'The artist relies upon the participants creative exploitation of the situation that he/she offers – just as participants require the artists cue and direction. The relationship between artist/participant is a continual play of mutual tension, recognition and dependency'¹²³

Similarities can be drawn between mine and Bony's practice, in that they both aim to quietly place a misplaced medium inside the white cube in order to encourage a slip in perception or a glitch in interpretation. Therefore, we place, wait and let encounters unfurl and accept that the artwork's interpretation is produced through the encounter between both audience and performer/artwork. Also, like Bony, I also could not predict the way in which the audience would interact with the work, as a glitch had been

¹²³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 279.

switched on in the gallery and was waiting to be explored. This glitch depended on the visitors' interaction with the work. This decision reflects Roland Barthes's thinking in the 'Death of the Author'; that the audience co-constructs the interpretation of the text/artwork, not just the author. As Barthes declared, '[...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.'¹²⁴ Therefore, we should allow the reader or audience member to discover and co-construct the meaning of the work.

However, there is a distinction between my work and Bony's primarily in terms of the artist's own presence in the duration of the exhibition, as I continuously needed to be a performer in order to take care of my key participant the egg yolk. Through this act, I situated myself as having to be mentally and physically tied with the artwork; we (myself and the egg yolk) formed a supplementary relationship that relied on each other. As an analogy for this type of care, indoor plants usually need to be watered twice a week. Therefore, the maintainer will have to be on duty to water the plants in order to keep them alive. Thus, I assume that the maintainers are included within the object-relation, and neither plant nor maintainer could be taken apart from each other; object and maintainer are in a supplement relationship. Therefore, I put myself on-stage to support a performer (egg yolk) whereas Bony remains off-stage after the artwork is opened to the public. Bony himself, therefore, acts as a traditional audience member; an observer who is standing outside of the frame to observe the work from off-stage. While watching from behind the scenes, he sets up a provocation between two classes and directs the work towards a specific audience. This act could be thought of as providing a stage for two classes (artwork) to compare and interact each other, while observed by the artist and/or gallery. This is an interesting act of provocation because it takes the artist out of the arena of action. This then creates the artist themselves as audience and allows them the

¹²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author* (London: Fontana, 1977), 148.

observatory distance from the artwork. In contrast, *Not Really Really* aims to situate the artist on the same plane as the audience to see the type of relationship that these constructs and evolves.

5. Unseeable Process

Fig.4. Wonky vegetable [online]< <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/ugly-vegetable-food-waste-fruit-vegetable-a8825311.html>> (accessed 20. December. 2020)

In accordance with Ahmed's views, I also aim to provide opportunities for viewers to think and be stimulated by the combining of materials in such formations that could be seen as an error. It is often in the off-stage practices that errors are eliminated from the path, or the path is organized so that errors are limited and discouraged. For instance, root vegetables that we encounter in the supermarket are usually presented with a uniform or 'perfect' shape. Any root vegetables that do not concur with this standard are 'passed' over by the factory and, as a result, we never see the 'irregularly' shaped or 'wonky' ones on the shop floor. Human society is too used to the pre-erasure of irregular elements, which are deemed as useless and as errors that need to be eliminated in advance. As a result, it can be hard to question the operations that are making these elements invisible.

However, Ahmed's thinking is that society should allow and actually encourage errors to survive in what is a limited and ill-fitting template for many. Ahmed offers up a challenge to her readers, who are encouraged to identify the errors prohibited by the system. She also would like to encourage us to change our approach to errors and this ill-fitting system that fits the many imperfectly (popular vote). What remains invisible is the systemic decision making that delineates what is allowed in, or what should be produced/encouraged and what should not.

Our daily routines have become restricted by environments that have been built to factory standards. Therefore, we are controlled by object encounters that are constructed through routine assemblages that have been established by social norms. As Foucault revealed, humans build images, languages and information systems to communicate with each other. Undoubtedly, the artificial knowledge/object has the availability to control human society. As the well-used path has been set up for us to follow, our daily routines have become restricted and are controlled by an object encounter that is constructed through a routine assemblage established by social norms. Humans tend to want to be accepted by society and, if we do not follow the routine and habitual path then we face becoming deemed as un-useful along with the paths that we try to create or use. This can be expanded to include the tools we use to construct these paths, as they are deemed as unknowable and cannot be categorized within society. This is in part because we have that subconscious habit of use embedded in our actions/thoughts and restrictions are placed in our way if we divert from the well-used path. This concept concurs with the notion that language can act as a bridge between human and thing, as I explored in the previous chapter *Naming*. In this chapter, I proposed that the human use of language is one that institutes the disciplinary model in society and limits the paths we choose through providing an ideal frame for our discourse. Russell points out that, 'All this is

done in an attempt to keep things up and running; this is the conceit of language, where people assume if they can find a word to describe something, that is the beginning of controlling it.¹²⁵ Our human addiction to naming things, evidence how humans tend to desire to control each other and their environment. But by controlling others, we are in turn, being controlled.

When everything is surrounded by a Panopticon logic, we are all under control and an ideal path has been created for us to follow. Most things are now manufactured by an assembly line; each product is required to be built up to fit an ideal format or formula (or the best size to fit many but not all, and no one well). In reality, errors always exist in society, but because society aims to eliminate all errors in an attempt to create and sustain the illusion that a platonic path exists. I agree with Russell, that the errors are positive additions to society. As Russell explains, ‘Errors, ever unpredictable, surface the unnamable, point toward a wild unknown. To become an error is to surrender to becoming unknown, unrecognizable, unnamed.’¹²⁶ In other words, when the assemblage of objects transforms from established harmony to a conflicted combination, the invisible constraint becomes visible and a glitch/or signpost to an alternative path begins.

In Ahmed’s thinking about use, she claims that the user often follows the path that is already there but that this path can also be redeployed by the user. Therefore, there is a potential glitch in the existing path for the user to explore for themselves. Individuals may not want to follow the majority or well-used path, and indeed the route may be violent to some users who are deemed errors by the system. As users, we need to be consciously activating errors and supporting the continual use of these errors in order to effect change.

My practice aims to construct an ‘unknown’ path that then challenges the

¹²⁵ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 74.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 74.

user/participator to find alternative paths or systems for thought in relation to material combinations. Humans tend to perpetuate anthropocentric behaviour, by acting as the creator of both the social system and a humanmade world, or an assumption of a world made for humans. Thus, we are in the era of over-production and information overload, in which the creator is also the user (prosumer). We should try to admit that both the social system and humanmade objects are the paths that control our behavior in daily life and, instead, face the systems of language and humanmade combinations as to challenge the expansion of the Panopticon model. This is because these pre-designed structures provide architectural, verbal and material instructions, which are able to compel and regulate our behavior.

The ecosystem and humanmade objects could continue to survive in a world without humans. However, conversely, humans are unable to live without the ecosystem, so we need to rethink our relationship to the environment. We have become beholden to infrastructures and their cultural logics, as opposed to a concern with climate change for example. When we are too familiar in using a particular system or object, we can become blind to its mechanisms; our sensibilities are dulled by spectacle and repetition. In ordinary life, we usually only receive the end-product or a review of the product (the latter usually praise the product highly) which tends to only show us the one-dimensional face of marketing (rather than manufacturing or distribution). Therefore, users rarely receive a thorough picture of the processes of manufacture and distribution behind the product. The end-product is finely tuned and wrapped towards a consumer, which at the same time eliminates the unseeable production process. As a result, human society is now in a habitual process of fatalism of already forged paths. When the valuation of a thing only reflects on its end-product, its history and life become a vacuum. This presents the process of making and the afterwards of maintaining as worthless. For instance, the

process that vegetables on supermarket shelves go through are not implicated in their final presentation on the shelves. Vegetables are grown in large quantities, involve a variety of chemicals and industrial processes, are packaged and shipped before they reach the supermarket. All of this remains invisible to the consumer, who only receives the end-product itself without any of the vegetable's background information. This is similar to the way in which the process of art maintenance is usually invisible to the audience. The user/participator often receives the end-product (exhibition) as a pre-ordained path that has already been set-up and predicted in advance. This exhibitionary path, compels and regulates the user to consume the work in a particular way.

The intention of my practice is to question these above invisible, and often predetermined, processes by making them visible to the viewer. In *Not Really Really*, I continually refresh the egg yolk to maintain its freshness, which enables me to bring the unseeable process of art making and maintenance from the backstage towards the front stage of exhibition practice.

Backstage

1. Rendering the Invisible, Visible

Backstage, a term that is figurative for the behind-the-scenes processes in both making art and making art public. The backstage is a space or time, which is not often shown to the public. It is a space-time, in which art world practitioners produce the objects and decide which art is made public. In contrast, I refer to the practice of exhibition making most often experienced in the form of the gallery space (as opposed to the gallery offices, storage spaces, kitchen, artist's studio, financing, promotion etc.) as the onstage realm. In general, the outsider to the system of production (audience/user) whose purpose is to witness (use) the end-product (onstage) has been blocked from accessing the backstage decisions behind this making visible. The frontstage, in this instance, is like a fairytale that is conjured into existence. Whereas the backstage formulates the mechanisms behind the making visible in the space. In this sense, audience members are being created by the invisible mechanisms that take control to direct the audience to the frontstage aspects of production only.

In contrast, my *Not Really Really* series intends to activate the backstage processes of making visible. It does this through making the process behind the scenes visible and tangible to the public. This is so that the viewer can both explore the artwork and access the process of making art visible. Kim Grant states in *All About Process* (2017) that, “‘Existence’ (in any of its senses) cannot be abstracted from ‘Process’”. The notions of process and existence presuppose each other.’¹²⁷ Life is a long journey, as we walk within the present continuous tense; always under process or a continual becoming. An

¹²⁷ Kim Grant, *All About Process: the theory and discourse of modern artistic labor* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 173.

unexpected encounter can act as a tiny glitch, but even a tiny glitch is able to twist us to discover an alternative path. We usually examine our career through the results we have achieved throughout life, often disregarding the process in favour of outputs. This overlooking of the process can become habitual in the way we see (place value on) things.

When I have walked through one of the many white cube gallery spaces and viewed the artworks mostly displayed on the walls but also on pedestals, I feel that the artworks are losing some of their presence. When looking at an artwork under these conditions, it feels like I am observing a still life or a cadaver as I cannot find the spark that resonates with my lived experience. I often feel that the artworks on stage in the museum as mausoleum are in a long-distance relationship with the artist when they are presented in such a sterile environment. This does not resonate with my assertion that an artwork is like a mirror of the artist, as it will always reflect a moment of the artist's emotions or deep concerns that the artist may not even notice themselves (it captures a partial and subjective view). Grant quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Although it is certain that a person's life does not *explain* his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected. The truth is that *that work to be done called for that life*.'¹²⁸

I assert that when an artist is in the process of making, their background and attitude will affect (influence) the medium and form of the artwork. This correlates with Grant's statement that, '...the artistic process is hard to separate from their personalities, which give their process uniqueness and a means of explaining the exceptional qualities of the art they produced.'¹²⁹ Although this appears to formulate a figure of the artist as genius, Grant actually goes on to highlight that through exposing their process of making

¹²⁸ Kim Grant, *All About Process: the theory and discourse of modern artistic labor* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 112.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 112.

artists problematize the arts canon which so relies upon the notion of individual genius:

‘A completely natural artistic expression is a fiction even for the artist who has mastered a medium. Seeing an artist’s creative process will inevitably destroy many illusions, both perceptual and emotional, on which traditional and modern art rely.’¹³⁰ Therefore, instead of displaying this notion of the complete artwork, I aim to visualize my process-oriented practice that is built with the artwork and to present this durational relationship to the audience. Through this emphasis on process, the audience is also drawn into this artistic process as the interpreters (meaning-makers) within this scenario.

The organic materials that I deployed in series of *Not Really Really*, are important in setting up the relationship between me and my practice. At certain points, this relationship felt like a shackle because of my obligation (albeit self-imposed) to keep the organic materials in the series fresh. This maintenance was required in order that the viewer questioned the authenticity and/or nature of the substance. A process in which the viewer could interpret the work in multiple and additive ways. As a result of this stipulation, I needed to repeat the regular caring of the organic materials. This caring depended on the specifications of the organic material and how long it took to deteriorate, which varied from 30 minutes to every 3 days. As a ramification of this, all of my activities and emotions on the days that the work was viewable to the public was affected by my renewal of the organic materials in the artwork. When exhibiting the series, my daily life became centred around the alarms that signaled when I should renew the organic material. This means that in my *Not Really Really* series, one element of the working process cannot fully abandon the other; I cannot abandon the artwork and it is also beholden to my caring for it to function within the score I have constructed. However, in the white cube environment we rarely encounter the visibility of this

¹³⁰ Ibid.,189.

working process and indeed within *Not Really Really* series there is a chance that the viewer will miss the renewing process. Therefore, similarly to the white cube model, *Not Really Really* series could be experienced like a double-sided coin in which only one side can be seen at a time and often the side presented is the completed object or artefact. However, what distinguishes my practice from the normative white cube display mechanism, as described above, is that the viewer could catch the renewal process and even if the viewer misses the maintenance of the work, there is still the fresh organic material remaining as a trace of the caring process.

Maria Puig De La Bellacasa highlights how a caring practice that seems out of place can actually be an intervention on the normative designs of a system or institution, 'Potentially, matters of care can be found in every context: exhibiting them appears even more necessary when caring seems to be out of place, or not there-in technical design plans.'¹³¹ In *Not Really Really* series, the care of the artworks could seem out of place, as they were being visibly maintained throughout the duration of the exhibition. Preparation of the egg yolk began in the kitchen, which (depending on the gallery architecture) is usually off-stage (not available to the public). The domestic preparation and space are then brought through the gallery space and this pollutes the 'end-product' of the exhibition by establishing a continuum of continual preparation and the crossing of assumed spatial thresholds. This practice of the artist repetitively crossing through the gallery's private area to public stage, is quite unusual within a white cube context. Homi K Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (2004) describes the production of this transitional third space as disrupting normative readings that often construct a binary of space, such as the backstage and front stage:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the

¹³¹ Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care-Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 55

difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.¹³²

My passage as the facilitator of the organic material takes place through the public and private spaces of the gallery. This links to Bhabha's quote above, as I also see the passage as a metaphor for breaking down the polarities of space and its hierarchies. I was a supplementary actor to the artwork, often preparing the material in the backstage of the gallery and then walking through the liminal space towards the front stage of the gallery. This binary construction of space (frontstage and backstage) are presented as separate locations in the normative institutional architecture. However, I see them as existing on a continuum that is interactive and intertwining. As Edward Said highlights, the relation of the binary is that it connects the two terms that are constructed by it, such as coloniser and colonised, as they require each other to evidence their existence. Continuing with Said's thoughts, I assume that the binary relation between frontstage and backstage is reliant on their mutual relationship, which can be changed through the interactions between the two terms or spaces.

Ironically, by becoming a tool for the artwork, the practice becomes a 'broken tool' (Heidegger's term) in the gallery space. This is a journey of hybridity, as I am in transit through the spaces that confounds the notion of which space is the authentic one for staging art. Bhabha describes the problematising of authenticity through the shifting margins, which I liken to the thresholds that I cross within the gallery space:

I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement – that confounds any profound or 'authentic' sense of a 'national' culture of 'organic' intellectual – and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective

¹³² Homi K. Bhabha, "Fanon and the postcolonial". In *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure.¹³³

Reflecting on my presence in the gallery, specifically in terms of the viewer's interpretation of my role, a large part of my time is spent staying in a public part (on-stage) of the gallery waiting to refresh the organic materials. My transit through space is, therefore, back and forth rather than linear, which further pollutes my relation to space. I stay immobile in the front space, only to mobilise when going into the kitchen to prepare the organic material and then I move through the space(s) to where the assemblage is situated and awaiting the organic material. When immobile in the front space, I could be considered to be a gallery guard or invigilator who always keeps their eyes on the visitor in order to protect the artwork and therefore the institution's investments. In contrast, I maintain the artwork out of the need to keep it fresh. I do not monitor the visitors or the artwork for the whole time that it is open to the public, as I have even been situated downstairs in lower galleries with the work upstairs depending on the institution's architecture.

In facilitating the refreshing of the organic material, I also become visible (along with its maintenance) and could at this point be read as a performer, artist or invigilator that has been instructed to facilitate the work. My care for the artwork instead of the institutions, means that my care appears out of place for a variety of reasons because: a) my care lasts the duration of the exhibition rather than ending as it is opened to the public, b) it is a situated form of care, as each assemblage requires a specific form of maintenance, c) I am not caring for the organic material in terms of institutional or my own investment in the artworks protection/conservation and d) the artist becomes the facilitator of the artwork, as opposed to the mechanisms of the art world perpetuating this

¹³³ Ibid.,31.

care.

The traces of my care in *Not Really Really* series (the results, as opposed to the act of replenishing) are often interacted with as if it is a puzzle to be solved, with audience members having to test the organic materials in order to gauge their authenticity even though the materials are listed alongside the work. Although I have referred to the act of renewal as a 'performance', I do not strictly see this as an act of performing so perhaps the term performative is more appropriate. It is important to make this distinction because although I am performing the process, I am not a central character in the plot of the work. Therefore, I aim to keep the process of maintenance as part of the making process, as opposed to an advertised performance. It is a routine that always exists but can go unnoticed. Through this maintenance, I aim to question the historic backstage processes in making art public and intend to pull back the institutional screen that blocks the visibility of the continuum between backstage and frontstage within art practice. A visible continuum that situates the backstage as standing together with the frontstage, I propose that Jointing is like a space or continuum full of potential as opposed to being unidirectional (focussed on a single purpose).

Maria Lind's *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art* (2012) brings together a diverse volume of speakers, to seek for a softer way of performing the curatorial and art practice. The practices selected by Lind are brought together within a particular time and space-related framework. As Lind states, should curating be:

A way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space? An endeavor that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it? I believe so, and I imagine this mode of curating to operate like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions—owing much to site-specific and context-sensitive practices and even more to various traditions of institutional critique.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Maria Lind, Active Cultures-On the Curatorial, Artforum, October 2009, Vol. 48, No. 2 <<https://www.artforum.com/print/200908/the-curatorial-23737>> (accessed on 16. March. 2021)

I see the passage through the backstage toward the frontstage of the gallery, which the maintenance process requires, as providing twists and turns to the normative staging of artworks and thus questioning the relationship between artist, artwork and space. In *Not Really Really* series, the artwork and artist's identity has transformed the binary relationship between artist/artwork, because the artist becomes the facilitator of the object. This requires the artist to wait, prepare and transgress across the private and public spaces of the gallery in order to serve the artwork. Therefore, I aim to make the relationship between artist (subject) and artwork (object) visible. There is an assumed hierarchy between the two positions (artist and artwork), which I aim to flatten out and render a continuum by activating the ongoing process that the actors (artist, materials, performance, object, institution, audience etc.) are undertaking in making art public.

In the book, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* written by Peter Schwenger, artists are described as being able to use artworks to affect audience's view, 'those who explicitly call themselves artists can create works that reinforce the viewer's world, that present the "already seen". Or they can create works that bend and break the viewer's sense of "world", that reveal the gap that was always there.'¹³⁵ In my practice, I combine the unordinary with the ordinary through placing unexpected organic/inorganic material combinations or confrontations and assembling them across the gallery wall. I also reveal the maintenance process of artworks to the public, which often remains behind the scenes with the focus being on the final installation (in conservation, storage and loaning/transportation of works). This staging of the process of care towards these material combinations, is an unusual experience for the audience to encounter. Therefore, through my practice I aim to create a glitch in the viewer's experience of process within artistic and exhibitionary practice, as well as towards the

¹³⁵ Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1942), 56.

human relationship with ‘things’ and the wider environment. I aim to evidence care and labour, the time taken to support the material combinations, so that the audience might consider looking again and giving time to interpreting the work, which allows the viewer to find a new path from which to experience the object (a different point of view). Often exhibitions are seen as ends in themselves, a complete knowledge system that can be consumed. I intend to explore exhibition practice as an open-ended process that challenges the viewer’s experience of the gallery (its frontstage and backstage architecture) as well as its material combinations.

For example, the process in *Not Really Really* series does not really have an end in sight, which can be described as an open-endedness. Kim Grant states that, ‘This open-endedness is surely one of the reasons for the success of the term “process” and its related concepts.’¹³⁶ A process or passage cannot be separated or erased but is a continuously accumulated experience through process overtime. A continuum between what are often seen as oppositional spaces, backstage/frontstage, is similar to the binary oppositions set up between studio artwork/published artwork, studio visit/gallery audience, studio environment/gallery architecture.

We are accustomed to identifying objects and spaces through their definition and function; therefore, we tend to divide them up into clear categories and combinations. Through this normative process, objects and spaces will sometimes even seem disconnected. In my practice, I am claiming that the backstage and frontstage architecture are interconnected and change each other through their relationship, as well as the temporal transitions and encounters that occur within them. In expressing the indivisible relation that connects both sides of a binary, for instance the spaces of private studio/public gallery, or artist/artwork, I aim to express that they cannot represent

¹³⁶ Kim Grant, *All About Process: the theory and discourse of modern artistic labor* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 222.

themselves independently of their relationship to each other, because the one requires the other. For example, I assert that by taking the process of making outside of the context of the artist's studio and into the gallery, this stages the continuum between artistic practice (studio) and end-product (artwork/exhibition). There is no starting point and ending point for the artwork, as the entire process of collecting, making, selecting, transporting, exhibiting and maintaining are all included in the staging of the artwork.

From an external standpoint, both entities (for example, artwork and artist) could look like they are in contradistinction to each other but underneath or behind this appearance is a strong relationship of reliance. I refer to this indivisible relation, as a 'supplement dependence' because each element of the mixture relies on the other for its meaning. This supplement dependence is like a hidden substrate, similar to the binding of a book. In a book, the binding is a substrate that is rarely noticed even though the binding is the key technique that enables the pieces of paper to become a book. Therefore, using organic materials in my practice highlights that what appear to be binary identities are actually related and intensely rely on each other. Staging the supplement dependence shows that the artist needs the artwork, as a certificate to evidence themselves as an artist, as much as the artwork needs the artist. I do this through acting as a caretaker for the maintenance of the organic 'things' that I assemble and present to the viewer. In the traditional view, the artist is presented as a great master through the artworks that they produce, as a result the artworks become servants to the master's narrative. However, my maintenance of the organic materials in the series *Not Really Really* suggests that the artwork could actually be read as the reverse of this narrative. The artwork could be seen as the master and the artist the slave, as the artwork becomes the master that controls the artist who becomes its servant by taking care of their master. It could also be understood as breaking down this binary altogether, as the artwork and artist both become master and

slave through the narration of their interrelationship, or supplement dependency.

I propose that the audience only receives incomplete knowledge through the artwork as end-product because without seeing or experiencing how it has been made, we encounter a similar issue to that of the produce we put in our baskets at supermarkets which are presented without their history (which I described in *Jointing*). In recent museum and gallery practice, there is a trend towards providing this history of artistic production. It has become popular to present the artist's working process, often as video documentation, alongside the artwork. However, the documentaries are a presentation of the past towards an end-product (the result) and often are experienced as peripheral to the actual artwork (contextual material).

I agree with Claire Bishop's clarification of process in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012) that, 'This emphasis on process over product – or, perhaps more accurately, on process as product – is justified on the straightforward basis of inverting capitalism's predilection for the contrary. Consensual collaboration is valued over artistic mastery and individualism, regardless of what the project sets out to do or actually achieves.'¹³⁷ I treat my practice as a collaboration with both artwork and audience. In the first instance, I am a collector of found materials that I try to intuit in order to select and combine effectively. I then go on to make the assemblage public and collaborate with the artwork by serving and refreshing the organic material at intervals appropriate to the individual substance's maintenance. I invite the audience into this collaboration with the artwork, by enabling them to encounter this process and to interpret it through their own lens. As a result, the audience becomes a co-producer of the artwork's meaning.

In the series *Not Really Really*, I deliberately did not record the process through

¹³⁷ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso Books, 2012), 19.

documentation because I wanted to enable this active or ‘live’ collaboration. This involved enabling the viewer to encounter the maintenance process in person. I came to this decision, in order to reiterate the importance of staging the collaboration between artist and artwork but also to highlight the often invisible aspect to the caring process. For example, in everyday life we rarely encounter the people who clean the streets and are accustomed to our habitual walking on clean streets. What can amaze us, is not the result of the clean street or viewing the final artwork but the unexpected encounter with the people who maintain them.

Historically, and this has continued into the present, there has been habitual fetishisation of the end-product within art, with the benefits of being able to construct a notion of genius and to boost the art market in it’s financialization sense at least. When an artist’s working process is referred to, it is often still mystified in order to construct the notion of the suffering artist as genius. Artist’s studios or even desks are often preserved as traces of the ‘artist genius’, some will show the artist’s desks with the artwork in an exhibition. For example, this occurs as part of the Henri Matisse *In the Studio* exhibition at the Royal Academy (2017). In this instance, the curator’s decision has been to stage both Matisse’s painting and drawing alongside his desk and the objects in the studio that he has drawn. This kind of exhibition seems to be suggesting that the viewer can encounter Matisse’s working process by looking at his studio and the artwork produced. However, presenting Matisse’s working process as a ‘still life’ can only present the process in a frozen past state which means that the process itself remains a mystery that can only be imagined and often romanticised about by institution and public. In contrast, my practice aims to produce artworks as ‘moving lifes’, through making visible the labour involved in the production of artworks. Through this decision, the ideal of the end-product or a mystical process behind a genius master is dropped in favour of presenting

the artist, artwork and audience as labourers in the production of meaning making.

Through my practice and writing, I intend to present the value of the product's making process and to deploy this in order to counter our assumptions about the naming and joining of materials. This also questions the strategies humans have constructed to make a world for us, which impoverishes both the world (extracting resources and exploitation of life) and our human engagement with the world. Like treasures that are usually hidden, this overlooking of our habitual treatment of things veils a value in the process of caring for things that should be made visible to the public.

2. The Invisible Backstage

The backstage exhibition architectures, as highlighted above, are often invisible. This is similar to the infrastructures that manipulate our access to architectures, technologies, bodies and our interpretations of these elements. In Keller Easterling's *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (2016), she states that 'infrastructure space, with the power and currency of software, is an operating system for shaping the city.'¹³⁸ When translated into the gallery environment, this phrase suggests that the infrastructure of making work public has an invisible system for shaping the audience. For example, we could compare this hidden substrate, or system, to the binding medium that makes pieces of paper become a book (which I mentioned above). Most of the time humans do not notice the existence of these infrastructures because we are too familiar with living in this designed formula. As a result, it becomes more difficult to identify the agendas behind these familiar social constructions and to approach the invisible backstage.

Anna Minton in, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-first century*

¹³⁸ Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 13.

(2009), declares that, 'the desire for security is not a need which can easily be satiated: the more security people have, the more they want.'¹³⁹ When applied to the art world, Minton's theory suggests that the more the viewer relies on the system, the more difficult it is to see beyond the point of view provided by that system. In this instance, we are thinking about the art world system and exhibition practice that instill specific modes of behaviour in the audience that then get repeated once initiated.

Minton goes on to discuss the 'secured by design' model which began in the USA but is being applied to the UK. She explains that people are initiated into living conditions advocated and designed through the programme of protection that the government and private corporations deem necessary. Therefore, people assume that security is essential to their safety and in gated communities they depend on the visible facilities and technologies (CCTV, security gate, fences) to reassure them that criminals are kept out of the community. However, this belief in security can underestimate the amount that these visible mechanisms control everyone's behavior inside the community as well. Again, this can be compared to the art world system in which (especially in the UK) we adhere strongly to the rules of no touching or talking loudly and we look to the institution to guide us through the exhibition.

Taking the movie, *The Truman Show* (1998) as an analogy for the infrastructures that control subjects, the audience is aware that the protagonist 'Truman' is monitored through his community and the infrastructure of his environment. Truman also serves as entertainment for a wider public that exists outside the parameters of his world and, much like CCTV, monitors his movements. Truman, unknowingly to the protagonist himself, is kept within a large studio environment which enables the character of the TV producer in the film to keep Truman on a ready-made life path that the director has built for him. The

¹³⁹ Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty First Century City* (London: Penguin, 2009), 66.

assumption is that Truman will never question the oddness of the ready-made habitual living patterns that he has grown up with. However, when he does question this habitual path... a glitch in the holistic system appears.

In *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020), Russell compels the reader to try to consciously create a glitch in their habitual living. This is in order to liberate the reader from the limitations of social constructs that define gender, race and sexuality along rigid lines. Russell states that the glitches provide an opportunity, 'Errors bring new movement into static space; this motion makes an error difficult to see but its interference ever present.'¹⁴⁰ This notion of the glitch can be applied to Truman's steadily increasing consciousness of the oddness in his life's patterns. It might be difficult to initially discern his awakening but the interference of what it could entail is ever present. Truman finally decides to no longer follow the rules of the programme in part because Truman's concerns are confirmed by the character Sylvia. Sylvia finally reveals to Truman that the wider context of his life is to be an object of entertainment to an audience outside of his world. Truman is infatuated with Sylvia, which leads her to have a certain power to affect Truman's thoughts and to catalyse the glitch. Ultimately, Truman's error, which was not to follow the system but to instead reach the walls of his world, caused the world of the TV show to collapse. Through this glitch, Truman refuses to be the property of the TV show; not only successfully exiting the designed path produced by the director but also posing ethical questions for the TV show and its wider public.

Truman's life, which was directed by the designed path of the director, can be compared to the way in which visitors are directed through a museum or gallery space. We can read Truman's life in this way, as the Director (backstage) has set up a consummate world (front stage) for Truman to live in (unwittingly performing). Truman

¹⁴⁰ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 74.

found this world credible for quite a long period of time and accepted all the information and facts with which the artificial society had provided him. This is similar to our museum and gallery settings, with their designed facilities such as restrooms, book shops, and cafes and their signs of 'Do not Touch', 'Press me' buttons and lines/barriers signalling to the visitor that they should not get any closer to the exhibit. All of these elements are used to design a holistic environment that has its own set of codes that direct the visitor's behavior. The list of the educational procedures which create directional paths and modes of interacting continues; maps are distributed, visitors' guidance and exhibition statements/texts for each room are posted all around these spaces, invigilators survey the room, tours of the works are underway in some of the gallery rooms... Even for visitors that may want to determine their own direction around an exhibition, may find it difficult to not follow the directed path as too many obstacles prevent an alternative route from being accessible.

In the current art world system, there tends to be a trend in providing visitors with a comfortable experience in which we understand the complete message of the exhibition. This assumes that there is one way or path in which to engage with both artworks and exhibitions, as well as presenting them as easily consumable. Like Minton's 'secured by design', in which security makes people seek for more security, you come to expect this reassuring experience directed by the gallery. This experience encourages the audience to think that we have 'understood' the exhibition and without this being replicated in other spaces and exhibitions we (the public) can feel awkward or vulnerable. This can mean that many viewers rely on the texts provided by museums, galleries, curators or artists, as this is the habitual path that we have been placed on.

In our present capitalist society, people are habitually living in a system of pre-designed instructions, which precedes our use of them. These instructions are embedded

in a substrate, which is the infrastructure space or programme that runs the city.

Easterling states that, 'Far from hidden, infrastructure is now the overt point of contact and access between us all – the rules governing the space of everyday life.'¹⁴¹ The infrastructure is the ground that controls the system in action, which dominates users to follow the pre-designed path. As the system covers up or masks its operations through the stories that it tells, the dominion of infrastructure is directed away from the user. Unless the user is conscious of the actual governing behind the marketing narratives that are delivered to us, then the dominion of power will always be hidden behind the mask (backstage). Therefore, I consider this infrastructural substrate as correlating with my concept of the backstage in exhibition practice. If we take the theatre's architecture as a point of departure, then from the audiences' point of view we are restricted by the seating plan so we can only look toward the front where the stage is located. We can also not see behind the scenes; we have to wait for the curtain to be drawn for the stage to appear, the lighting rig is hidden from view and we do not get to see the crew managing the stage or the actors waiting in the wings. Therefore, in order for some things to be made visible others are rendered invisible in order to construct the narrative of the director. As a result, the backstage is usually hidden from the auditorium. Although it is invisible from the auditorium, we cannot erase the power of the backstage as it is the controller who operates the entire theater.

The auditorium directing the audience's engagement in theatre, can be likened to the way in which a visitor is directed to look in traditional art gallery spaces; through the distinct architecture (white cube) and the plinth/wall/frame directing their vision (the art gallery's equivalent of a front stage). Artwork and exhibition become the symbolic theme that continues the brand of the gallery to the public; this is dictated by the curatorial and

¹⁴¹ Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 11.

programming decisions, the gallery's marketing, and general art world trends (often informed by the funder's imperatives). Therefore, the visitor will only receive the information that the gallery has decided to put out (frontstage) for the public to view. The theatre's backstage is equated with the other private spaces and processes (not open or presented to the public) in the art gallery. The gallery's backstage or private spaces (office, storage, meeting room) are places that house (and to some extent dictate) anything from the lighting and display decisions to fundraising and spending calculations. These invisible operations and processes that are not made public, can be compared to Black Box Architecture. In Daryl Cressman's study of Bruno Latour's, Actor Network Theory, in his *A Brief Overview of Actor-Network Theory* (2009) stated that:

[...] from this perspective, Actor Network Theory attempts to "open the black box" of science and technology by tracing the complex relationships that exist between governments, technologies, knowledge, texts, money and people. It is these connections that result in science and technology, and by examining them it becomes easier to describe why and how we have the science and technology that we do.¹⁴²

The above Black Box Architecture is an invisible backstage for the public, as the public only thinks or has the ability to imagine about the seeable gallery spaces (front stage). The public is not intentionally exposed to the Black Box by galleries and, therefore, we have a habitual mode of receiving knowledge through these systems. Consequently, the public are not exposed and given the tools to understand the contents in the art world's Black Box system.

An artwork, as it is framed by these systems and structures, can also include elements of this invisible Black Box (backstage) within its processes and wider practice/context. The making process of an artwork is usually covered up and is hidden behind it's final and 'original' form. In traditional artwork, the art making process has

¹⁴² Daryl Cressman, *A Brief Overview of Actor-Network Theory: Punctualization, Heterogeneous Engineering & Translation* (Columbia, Canada: Simon Fraser University, 2009) <https://dphu.org/uploads/attachements/books/books_2726_0.pdf> (accessed on 23. March. 2021)

been wiped out by either the artist or the institution(s) in which it circulates. This then adds a mysterious and intriguing value to the artwork, due to its unique passage into existence.

Following this routine of looking, choreographed by galleries, can lead the public to be trapped in Ahmed's notion of the 'well-used path'. It creates an illusion that it is necessary to fit in with or follow the well-used path, in order to receive knowledge or the correct experience. With this lies the assumption that the path is made for a good purpose, so that it is not necessary to question how the path has been made. Not being able to access the Black Box of the exhibition you are viewing, is like driving without a sense of direction. If you rely on systems such as GPS (Global Positioning System) then your route toward the destination is programmed. The driver believes that the GPS's algorithms can bring them to the destination, but they do not exactly know how this process works and whether there is a more interesting or scenic route that they could follow. In a gallery, the end-product of knowledge is privileged over learning about the systems that choose and produce this knowledge. This means that we, as the public, are following well-used paths of which we do not necessarily know the intentions.

3. Maintenance Regime

The sound of trumpets died away and Orlando stood stark naked. No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace. As he stood there, the silver trumpets prolonged their note, as if reluctant to leave the lovely sight which their blast called forth; and Chastity, Purity, and Modesty, inspired, no doubt, by Curiosity, peeped in at the door and threw a garment like a towel at the naked form which, unfortunately, fell short by several inches. Orlando looked himself up and down in a looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went presumably, to his bath. We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements. Orlando had become a woman - there is no denying it.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), 87. Quote in Sally Potter, director. 1992, *Orlando*, Based on *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf, 1928. British Screen Productions.

In contrast to the habitual paths or routines above, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1990) challenges the notion of stability and routine life. The lead character, Orlando's life-span challenges the notion of a stable relationship to time (living for centuries) and sex/gender (the protagonist changes sex). Therefore, Woolf (via Orlando) queers the well-used path of characters and produces a fictional glitch in the traditional narrative structure. However, in life we tend to keep to a routine, as we believe it allows life to stay more stable, safe and in balance.

Routine is also a central term in my practice, but to differentiate my process and labor from the routine enforced by institutions, I will refer to this process as a regime when related to my practice. This regime is self-imposed, but the repetitive motions can make it look like nothing has changed, as the organic material remains fresh, but at the same time, there are actions that need to be done to prevent the display of decomposition by replenishing the organic produce. These actions can be observed by the audience, but they are not overtly performed, as described in my account of the series *Not Really Really* (which I mention in *Grumble*). During the refreshing process of this series, my main duty is to serve the (organic) materials, but I do not overtly present an identity or intersubjective encounter which would be acting more as a performance artist. Instead, I present the artist as a supplement to the artwork, so it is less about the individual actor but, rather, the process aims to articulate the network that governs the presentation of the artwork (artist, institution, the work itself and the audience's interpretation).

As Bruno Latour describes, we are living in an Actor Network society that means we have to consider inanimate objects as influential agents because they inform and direct human behavior. This informs my approach which situates maintenance as an indispensable medium in the presentation of art, as it is the uncuttable string that connects these actors (human, animate and inanimate). In the *Not Really Really* series, this

mutually beneficial relationship allows either human or non-human actors to reciprocally undertake the caretaking of each other. Therefore, this mutual relationship could also relate to the phenomenon of symbiosis. In *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution* (1997), Lynn Margulis states that ‘life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking.’¹⁴⁴ Margulis claims that evolution is strongly based on co-operation, interaction, and mutual dependence among organisms. The network in the *Not Really Really* series is assembled through the multiple partnership between artist, the materials I have assembled, institution and the public. This of course includes my active maintenance of the artwork throughout the duration of the exhibition and the architecture/crossing of thresholds in the gallery in which it is staged. Therefore, the actors in the work are netted together and would not function without each other. For instance, the organic materials in the series need to be taken care of in order to remain fresh, so I need to undertake the maintenance in order for the artwork to function and the gallery needs to facilitate this maintenance, which may disrupt the usual running of the space, in order for the artwork to function. Each actor (organic materials, artist, gallery and audience) places a demand on the other, in order to maintain the process of staging.

The above netting together of actors, is similar to the multiple relationships in our contemporary global society that are a form of mutual maintenance. However, this maintenance in society can become unbalanced in terms of workload and demands on the worker due to its invisibility and the stories that are told by governments and corporations. As society has become a complicated interwoven network, it is difficult to isolate ourselves from the environment in which we emerge. This is similar to Truman’s experience of being trapped in the TV show; in an environment which has been constructed for him so he adheres to its invisible structures and mechanisms. My practice

¹⁴⁴ Lynn Margulis, *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution* (California: University of California Press, 1997), 29.

aims, like Truman, to render these structures visible so that we can cause a glitch in the system.

Bhabha introduces the concept of a 'Third Space', to describe the liminal space that is an intersection between colliding cultures. He explains that, 'this process of hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.'¹⁴⁵ In Bhabha's account, culture's co-construct each other through an exchange or discourse that can create hybrid identities through their encounter. This is a form of netting, which increases through our contemporary global environment with a network of evolving identities that are produced through the mixing and shifting sands of cultures. When presenting my practice to the public, I aim to reduce as much additional information as possible in order to not prescribe the context and interpretation of the artwork. For example, when *Not Really Really* (17-SS-4) was exhibited in Dusseldorf, the egg yolk - which was placed in the centre of a white wall - when viewed from afar became like a tiny dot on a huge blank canvas. My intention was that in front of the immense white wall and without any literary contextualisation, the work offers the viewer more possibility to explore and interpret it for themselves. The purpose of this approach is to create an open-ended (as opposed to prescribed) path for the viewer, so that they actively weave their personal networks into their interpretation of the work.

¹⁴⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, "By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in The Mid-Nineteenth Century." In *The Location of Culture*, 1989-211. (London: Routledge, 2004), 211.

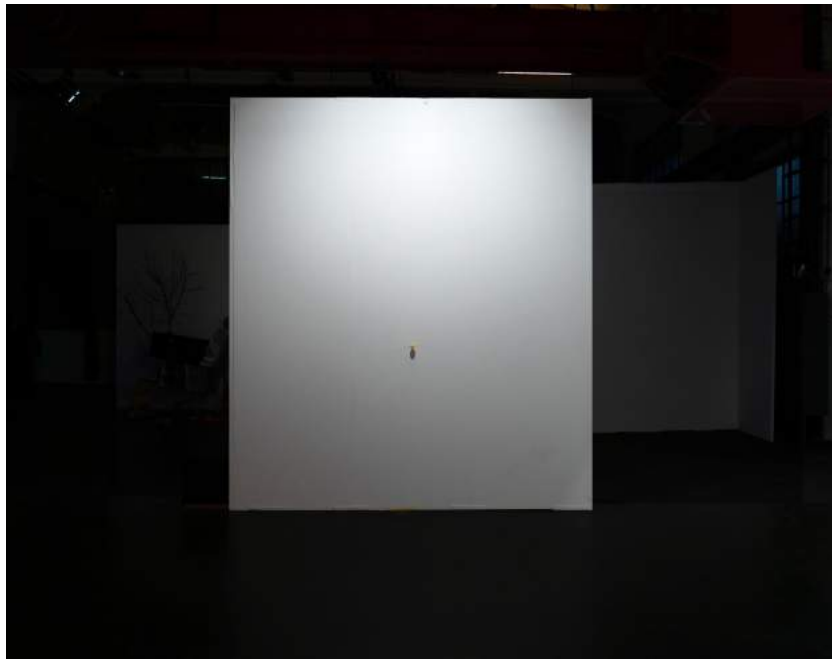


Fig.1. Installation view of *Not Really Really (17-SS-4)* on the white wall, in Art Dusseldorf, Germany, 2017

The master and servant narrative, which is a concept explored by Hegel in the section ‘Self-Consciousness in Master/Slave dialectic’ from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), in which the master/slave dialectic is a relationship as opposed to distinct positions. This concept is also connected with my earlier notion of the supplement’s master/servant relation in *Naming*, in which the supplement is needed in order to create the original. In a sense, the supplement completes the original’s identity but, simultaneously, destabilises the concept of the original. For the master/slave dialectic, each term fulfills the other through its definition but this relationship also puts both their meanings into doubt.

In the *Not Really Really* series, both human and non-human actors are interchangeably either master or servant depending on their relationship to each other. This links to Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, as the terms master and servant exist in a relationship of reciprocity, so the power structure can change through their interactions

and dialogue. This is due to the copies relationship to the original, as the copy itself could supplant the original or question the need for its recognition. Throughout my maintenance of the organic materials in the series *Not Really Really*, the caretaker's (myself) identity also becomes increasingly unstable. This suggests that I am not the originator of the artwork who is recognised as the sole arbiter of its authenticity. The power relationship of master and servant has shifted, and cannot distinguish a stable status between object and subject, or the traditional notion of a stable sense of self (the artist).

Maintenance is the process that renders visible my relationship to the artwork. Maintenance exists in everyday society but it largely remains invisible, therefore, my practice intends to make these processes of care tangible. Acts of maintenance are usually covered up and become unidentifiable in the end-product. Therefore, I aim to emphasize that this maintenance is essential to the production of meaning and this is the process by which we institute (create habitual practices).

I am not re-performing the labour or maintenance processes that we encounter in everyday life because, for some, the care I give to the assemblages of organic and inorganic could seem perverse and unnecessary. However, this highlights the importance of an act which questions which materials, combinations and interpretations these processes of maintenance keep in place. *Not Really Really* series does not adhere to the notion of efficiency (in terms of time and economics), as my labour is exponential in terms of the materials that I am maintaining. This would not be a model for a corporate manufacturing process, but it does render visible the labour that is often hidden behind the commodities we encounter. Although society made the labour invisible, it cannot make it disappear. We should be aware of thinking with care in everyday life, as it will affect the way in which we treat objects and the wider environment. It also suggests an alternative way of joining materials, which I refer to as jointing, that points to an

alternative path for our relationships to materials and our environment.

My everyday life and studio practice are a continuous interactive process, they are intertwined so neither aspect can be isolated from the other. For me, it is not necessary to partition a physical place off as a 'studio' because I see life, studio and gallery as on a continuum. In contrast, we are often educated (as artists) to require this private and distinct place called a studio: at art school it is often seen as indispensable to provide an art student with a studio. After art school, the artist will often dream or attempt to own a studio space. Every time that I stepped into the studio as an art student, I felt that I was being forced to modify my life into another mode; from a leisure identity to an in-work identity. Studio spaces are an active infrastructure, a medium that codes artists to behave as artists. This separate place of the studio actually aids the construction of an artist's public persona. This notion of the artist as 'genius' is set-up through the idea of a labouring and lone individual in a studio space that is separate from the everyday world. It is because the tortured artist is separated from everyday life that they can become the foreseers of a different world or way of seeing and, therefore, can produce masterpieces.

In High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture (2009) Isabelle

Graw states that:

The figure of the "artist as an exceptional being" implies two things: the assumption of an outstanding personality, and the attribution of an extraordinary life. Both of these also apply to the now omnipresent figure of the celebrity, whose life and personality are supposedly exemplary and worth talking about. The celebrity, too, rises above the mass of ordinary mortals, lending him an exceptional aura. It was the "legendary" artist who provided the blueprint for the celebrity, formed in his image.¹⁴⁶

Graw states that the artist as a 'genius' figure has paved the way for the construction of the celebrity and, similarly to celebrities, it is the artist's identity that can

¹⁴⁶ Isabelle Graw, "How Much of a Product Is a Person?". In *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, 161-163. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), p.162

affect the reading of the artworks that they produce. Artists who consciously cultivate their celebrity identity, such as Andy Warhol, actually affect the symbolic value of their artwork and render it priceless. The irony being that the artworks pricelessness is the very reason that it can achieve such high prices.

I propose that an equal relationship exists across the network of actors that make up the published artwork. Compared to this approach, celebrity artists tend to rise above the significance of the individual artwork and it is through the trace of their touch that the artwork is imbued with value. Therefore, the artist gives value to an artwork if the artwork is made by a well-known celebrity. Inversely, I propose that the artwork and artist are in a relationship that cannot be separated until the work is sold for example which would then put it in another network with the collector. However, the *Not Really Really* series could not easily be commodified and sold because as soon as the ownership is passed onto the collector, the collector would have to agree to the duty and labour of care that it requires to facilitate the piece (otherwise they would require a 'live in' artist). Due to my presentation of art as a process, the possibility of separating out the actors which make up the presentation of the artwork across different spaces is called into question.

In the normative set-up, when entering the studio an artist is often compelled to divide everyday life and studio practice, and act as a professional (often tormented and driven) artist. Similarly, to this artistic process, the viewer on entering the gallery is often seen as stripping themselves of related experiences (lived experience, memory and what has happened to you on the way to the exhibition) in order to appreciate art in its objective or 'pure' mode. In contrast, I suggest that we should admit that identities within the making and interpreting of art overlap with an accumulation of experience and the artwork is already impure through its contact with the accumulation of the artist's everyday experience.

In terms of my own identity and its reading within British society, I am an intersectional figure, as my body can be read as a hybrid of female, daughter, student, artist, viewer, foreigner, tenant and prosumer etc. I find it awkward that, when stepping into a specific place I must change the way I am read in order for my body to be taken seriously or to be translated easily; I must switch into a specific character, user, artist, viewer, labourer or even remain a distant passerby. As Robert D. Sack's has claimed in his article *The Power of Place and Space* (1993):

Imagining behavior in the absence of such rules leads to the second way in which place or space has power, for it emphasizes that people and objects interact in space and that there could be laws of behavior which govern these interactions. It forces the building of models of how distance and the relative locations of people and things affect behavior.¹⁴⁷

As Sack has stated, when people and objects are networked within a space, they will interact together and this relationship will affect all of the actors (human and non-human) and their behaviors. Moreover, Sack's argument continues with describing the way in which space becomes a specific place when it has been interacted with by humans or has been occupied by objects. I assume that the presupposed rules in using a place have the power to control the user's behavior and reaction. For instance, we are directed towards etiquette in different places as it is suggested within the architecture of the institution. This reminder to the user of how to behave, how to follow the script, are the mechanisms of turning a space into a place. Sack highlights that museums institute specific types of behavior, 'the museum has specific hours and regulations for the conduct of visitors because of what someone in authority imagined would occur if people were at liberty to enter and leave at will.'¹⁴⁸ Institutional rules are programmed from the start so that the user often becomes the follower, using the space as it has been planned and

¹⁴⁷ Robert D. Sack, *The Power of Place and Space*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Geographical Review, Jul. 1993, Vol. 83, No. 3, 326-329 < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/215735> > (accessed 01. May. 2021)

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 326-329 < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/215735> > (accessed 01. May. 2021)

according to how the museum asserts it should be used. In order to not be ostracised users conform to social practices and usually follow the institutional rules. The initiation process is most obvious when the museum is training elementary students on an off-campus trip to a museum. If you aim to perform as a good student, the only path is to follow the rules or etiquette of the museum. However, museums require their users to also invest in this relationship with their model, so it is not a unidirectional form of power but is cultivated through interaction. Therefore, users do not always have to passively accept the route or path laid out for them. If avoiding being on the passive side of viewing, it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of the place and its coding. Thus, the viewer has to decipher the place and their intended use of it when interacting with its contents, in order to create what Sara Ahmed would state are their alternative ‘uses of use’.

At gallery openings, the artists who have artworks on show in the space are highlighted, named and introduced to an important network of artists, directors, journalists, collectors etc. As can be seen at these events, galleries tend to crown the artwork’s creator in order to co-construct the celebrity identity of the artist in the show and to bolster the authenticity, as well as the value, of their work. In contrast, when I exhibit my practice in a gallery, I aim to maintain my intersectional and less identifiable figure in order to present the way in which the artist’s identity moves through different layers (spaces, people and materials) and shifts itself in relation to these contexts. This avoids acting or reconfirming a specific and clear identity of the artist as sole author or celebrity. The gallery is a medium through which (promotion) and in which (housing) an audience is gathered. This audience is gathered in order to comply with their duty as a viewer to contemplate the artwork. Therefore, galleries have to be aware of the information, statement, etiquette, signs etc. that they supply or model to the audience. This is because they aim to provide a place for the audience to experience the artworks

and this entails interactions with the work that institutions tend to try to direct or manage. In contrast, my practice suggests that it is necessary for the audience to be oriented by their own intuition and interpretation, as they co-construct the meaning of the work through their experience of the artwork as a process.

This direct interaction enables users to change the functioning of the space, much like Barthes' claims for the reader in his *Death of the Author* (1967). The space of a gallery, studio or home are not much different and it is the actor (human/object) inside these spaces that is the key who transforms a generic space into a specific place. A studio environment can inspire an artist but, without the artist working inside the studio, it could not entirely function as the artist's studio. It is where the artist is located that the studio appears or becomes active. In my practice, I collect inspiration and materials from my everyday life, experience and routine; every moment is a work in progress. I consider that my studio is not limited within only one specific place but is borderless and maintained through the endless collecting of materials. In terms of my practice, gallery spaces are the places that gather the public together and where materials are assembled together. My studio practice extends into this site by making my decisions and processes visible and tangible to the audience.

In this sense, the gallery becomes the site of my live studio that is open to the public. It is a space in which I uncover my interrelational network with the art material and gallery, as well as the several overlapping characters that I explore within my own identity, as an artist, labourer, overseer and viewer (of the wider exhibition and sometimes even the audience). The artwork materials are a language that I aim to listen to and speak with; to me these found objects talk about spontaneous networks, encounters and stories. This is similar to Grant's declaration that, 'It [artwork] is not meant to be viewed as an

object, a performance or even a goal-oriented activity, but simply as a perfect process.’¹⁴⁹

During my practice’s collecting process, my intuition and sensory faculties are deployed rather than an over-conscious determination of the end of product. This is so that I can present alternative formations or jointing than we usually encounter in society. I also try to encourage this intuitive process in the viewer, as I do not represent the assemblage as a end-product. Instead, I aim to embody the artist’s process and make this visible to the public, so that they can encounter, intuit and interpret their own experiences of the process.

A process is as ordinary as the processes of living and this is precisely why it is so invisible but also so pivotal to our uses or paths in the world. Jessica Stockholder and Joe Scanlan noted in their 2004 forum introduction of ‘Art and Labor: Some Introductory Ideas’ at Yale University that,

Now we are aware of very little, if any, of the making of the things we need. It happens elsewhere, often overseas...Where Marx worried about alienated labor... today we experience the opposite phenomenon of being able to buy things that we could not afford to make. It is... painful and numbing to be so divorced from the making of things and from the people who make them for us. Our art today reflects this distance. And so a lot of art, on the face of it, seems to be not about making but about choosing. Routine can be as a normal ordinary or typical pattern, but both are easy to overlook in our everyday life.¹⁵⁰

According to Stockholder and Scanlan, contemporary artists focus more on the decision making than on the process of making within their practice. However, the procedures behind production are what we are lacking within our highly-technologized and alienating society, so Stockholder and Scanlan feel that these processes need to be brought forward, through artistic practice, in order for the viewer to come into contact

¹⁴⁹ Kim Grant, *All About Process: the theory and discourse of modern artistic labor* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 238.

¹⁵⁰ Jessica Stockholder and Joe Scanlan, *Art and Labor: Some Introductory Ideas*, *Art Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, Winter, 2005, 50-51 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20068416?origin=crossref>> (accessed 01. May. 2021)

with what remains distant and even invisible. In my practice, process is a schema that always needs to be reevaluated but this is also easily overlooked in the ordinary making process.

Moreover, most current exhibitions reinforce the viewer's habit of experiencing the artwork as a consumable end-product. In contrast, I suggest that while looking at an artwork the viewer should be a part of the meaning-making process and thus multiple artworks occur through this communication between the artwork, artist, site and audience. What needs to be drawn attention to, through this audience interaction with the work, is that each end-product (in this instance the artwork) is built by a series of complex decisions, materials and making that are overlapped underneath its appearance and which are irreplaceable. Although the ordinary routine process is unseeable, it is not meaningless. Rather, it is the key that keeps the ordinary as ordinary or it can be the key that opens up to a glitch in the making/viewing of art.

Everyday activity that is part of a routine becomes a normal ordinary or typical pattern that is hard to identify as it is lived. Therefore, patterned behaviours are easy to overlook in everyday life. As previously stated, the maintenance work that supports these routines is usually unseeable. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017) states that, 'Everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair "our world" so that we can live in it as well as possible... this involves tasks that make living better in interdependence but are often considered petty and unimportant, unproductive, however vital they are for livable relations.'¹⁵¹ Bellacasa's statement suggests that although society often renders care invisible, it cannot make the act of caring disappear as humans are interdependent (with each other and their environment).

¹⁵¹ Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care-Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 54.

In our current society, while maintaining its capitalist approach which is production oriented, the matter of physical labour or maintenance has become ever more hidden away from the public in the UK. This is largely due to the way in which the capitalist economic system has shaped the working environment in the UK. The economic system can be roughly divided into three sectors: the primary sector is based on extracting raw materials, such as oil, farming and diamonds. The secondary sector is made up of factories that use the raw materials to create end-products, such as mobile phones, furniture, clothes and dishes. While the tertiary sector is focused on exporting knowledge of information, which includes online archives, museums, education or hospitality. In promoting work in services as opposed to products (tertiary-capitalism), the UK has managed to largely ship extraction and manufacturing off-shore and shift maintenance into the domestic/caring realms which more often than not fall onto the shoulders of women. Therefore, production and maintenance is pictured as low skilled and either is low paid or not paid at all.

Bellacasa states that because there is an asymmetrical approach to care within society, which upholds the sexed binary to exploit women, it needs to be addressed as a feminist issue:

Those considered as traditional carers—women generally—or as typical professional carers—nurses and other marginalized unpaid or low- paid care workers—are constantly moralized for not caring enough, or not caring “anymore,” or for having “lost” some “natural” capacity to care.¹⁵²

Bellacasa highlights that there is an assumption within patriarchal and capitalist society that women have a natural capacity to care. This constructs the artificial fact that care is an unrejectable vocation for anyone assigned female at birth. As a result of

¹⁵² Ibid., 9.

invisible care and the rise of the tertiary sector, the maintenance process seems to have been largely silenced and even erased from the public arena in the UK. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to address hidden labour by literally bringing it into the picture through an artwork, enabling the viewer to encounter the existence of labour.

In its staging of a situated care (a form of care that is specific and related to context as opposed to a general ethical approach that cannot respond to the differences in care), my practice strongly resonates with Bellacasa's notion of interdependence within care. Bellacasa states that:

Interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal- it is a condition. Care is therefore concomitant to the continuation of life for many living beings in more than human entanglements - not forced upon them by a moral order, and not necessarily a rewarding obligation.¹⁵³

Bellacasa believes that both (or more) carer and cared, affect the parameters of that care and therefore they are in an interdependent caring relationship. She also points to how this notion of an entangled caring relationship extends to more than humans as well. By staging the interdependency condition stated above, through a consciousness of care, my practice highlights that both caretaker and caregiver are in a network of care. A network of care that is also passed onto the viewer who encounters the work, if they wish to take it up, in terms of its interpretation. My maintenance of the artwork's organic materials is a process within my practice that is reflecting on the inter-subjective nature of the labourer/caretaker and cared for in the society. I am in a networked relationship with the artwork, in which we both become a supplement for the other and this highlights our interdependence.

Further to this interdependence, my maintenance of the artwork also presents an ambivalent aspect within my practice when it comes to the treatment of materials. In one

¹⁵³ Ibid., 70.

sense, I am questioning the overproduction prevalent in society and the purpose of producing more objects, with an attention to the way in which humans behave towards/use things. Instead of creating new materials, my practice reuses found, abandoned, and manufactured ready-made objects. I encounter these objects, which already exist in my surroundings, on the street and pick them up and carry them back home with me. I intuitively select the found objects, which means that I subjectively decide their 'uses of use' in a personal way under alternative objectives to that of capitalism. Also, in breaking with their familiar joining/naming into unfamiliar jointing/titling, this process echoes with Russell's notion of the *glitch*:

We can embody error by finding new ways to self-define, reclaiming the act of naming for ourselves. We bend the act of naming, fitting new forms through the process of naming and renaming, the embrace of poetic elasticity that refuses the name as static or definitive.¹⁵⁴

When back home (home is my studio, as previously stated I see work and life as on a continuum), I will sit with and puzzle over these found heterogeneous materials and try to listen to their un-emphasised qualities and properties in order to bring them out. I try to think about the ways in which they might be brought together in an assemblage and will best inform and draw out the materials with which they are put in contact.

On the other hand, the organic material that I use in my practice requires refreshment and, therefore, there is a lot of waste produced throughout the process. In treating the organic materials as disposable for a constructed (as opposed to natural) higher purpose (in this sense the artwork), I am drawing attention to the way in which humans extract natural resources and use animals for a proposed 'higher' purpose (humans). Therefore, there is an ambivalence or tension created within my process of 'care' for the assemblage and its multifarious actors. This ambivalent relationship is

¹⁵⁴ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 77.

interwoven with care and as Bellacasa states, ‘to care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress. It’s essential character to humans and countless living beings makes it all the most susceptible to convey control.’¹⁵⁵

Instead of staging the refreshing as a ritual or ceremony, I focus on taking care of the organic materials for the artwork in a more mundane act of maintenance. The schedule for this maintenance has been produced through what I have defined as the optimal staging condition for that material through trial and error. For instance, the organic materials in the *Not Really Really* series need me to maintain them, as without me they will wither (materials such as the egg yolk, leaves, fruit’s...etc.). In replenishing the materials, I have defined an artificial construction of the assemblage (of which I am a part) that challenges the viewers preconceptions of authenticity (as described previously, audience members have even tried to test the material in order to identify what it is). Therefore, I need the witherable organic materials to fulfil the artwork and my own function and meaning as the artist. This also relates to Derrida’s notion of the ‘supplement’, for if you take either the artwork or the artist away then you will impact upon the meaning of the whole. This means that the work also challenges our relationship with the notion of original and copy, as the artworks in *Not Really Really* series are always in a stage of becoming or multiple supplementations. Both the artist and the artwork are in an uncanny interdependent relationship and one in which it is imagined that they are irreplaceable for the other.

Alongside the artwork and artist, the gallery (site, staff and operations) and audience are also included within this multiple supplementation network. In maintaining the *Not Really Really* series, I repeatedly crossed and, therefore, blurred the threshold of the gallery's private and public spaces. This brought the site and its operations tangibly

¹⁵⁵ Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care-Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1.

into the network of actors that make up the work. The audience enters this network in relation to Barthes's *Death of the Author* (1977), in which the audience co-constructs the meaning of the work with the artist, artwork and site. Barthes states that in relation to a written text: 'The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'¹⁵⁶ Therefore, this network and the meaning of the work is built up in a specific environment and duration which will change each time it is performed; depending on location, site, audience as well as the artist and artwork. Barthes' reader becomes the viewer in this scenario and not only the viewer but a whole network of actors who are its destination through the process of acting and interpreting.



Fig.2. Jin-Hua Shi, *Pen Walking*, 1996-2015,
Pencil, canvas, document (video, text, inkjet prints, objects)

In contemporary art, the act of ritual in performance has gained momentum among numerous artists, such as Jin-Hua Shi's *Pen Walking* (1996-2015). In his *Pen Walking* series, the artist Jin-Hua Shi uses a pencil as his medium to track the performance and continuously draws a line, as he repeatedly walks back and forth across the white wall. The artist treats this performance as a repentance ritual to deal with pain,

¹⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author* (London: Fontana, 1977), 148.

solitude and/or the exhaustion and possible reincarnation of life. This series has been repeated 54 times for over more than 15 years. When looking at the relationship between the artist and material in this work, it appears that the artist acts as a master and uses the material (pencil) as a servant to achieve his goal. This relationship with the material is catered towards the end-product (final artwork) as documented process; a wall that fills with Shi's recorded walking line. The artist (master) forces the pencil and wall (servant) to serve him, in creating a repeated ritual that can be represented after the fact. This pictures the artist's relationship to the material as unidirectional, a user (artist) using the used (pencil and wall). Instead of treating the pencil as an actor and supplement within the practice, which would have brought a pluri-directional dynamic to the performance, Shi treats the pencil and wall as a support for the performance and it's tangible interpretation.

His performance uses a repeated routine to emphasise hardship as a result of durational labour. It is insinuated that the more he suffers in this performance, the more sacredness this performance will create. Shi presents his durational labour as sacred, which produces a set of mythologies in order to strengthen his personal sacredness. Through this sacredness, Shi is the artwork and far more important than the other materials that he uses in the performance. The pencil and wall are the medium that supports Shi's approach to practice but his sacredness is the artwork. His sacredness is extended to the drawn line, through the trace of his touch and presence. When an art performance is more focused on the human actor's repetitions, which are performed through using objects as opposed to working with them as actors, builds up the mythologies of the human being as the only active and, therefore, privileged agent. This betrays a human-centric behaviour within many ritualistic performances. Repetition and ritual can build a habit/brand that leads the audience to believe that this practice is

personal to the artist and therefore leaves a trace of their identity (e.g. Shi's line drawing on the wall). This trains the focus on the performer as opposed to the network of actors and meanings within the performance.

The definition of ritual provided by Tate is as follows, 'Rituals can be religious, ceremonial or personal... A ritual is an activity that usually sticks to a set pattern and typically involves a set of actions, words, and objects. Rituals are often repeated at intervals (whether daily, weekly, annually – or on certain special occasions).'¹⁵⁷ Although, *Not Really Really* series requires repetitive actions, they are neither for religious, ceremonial nor personal reasons. The work's motivations are more mundane than ritual and the act of labour more similar to the Fordist production line. Jeffrey Eugenides in *Middlesex* (2002) argues that:

Historical fact: people stopped being human in 1913. That was the year Henry Ford put his cars on rollers and made his workers adopt the speed of the assembly line. At first, workers rebelled. They quit in droves, unable to accustom their bodies to the new pace of the age. Since then, however, the adaptation has been passed down: we've all inherited it to some degree, so that we plug right into joysticks and remotes, to repetitive motions of a hundred kinds...¹⁵⁸

Within the Fordist assembly line, humans have to adapt to the system and through this lose their original identifications through adaptation. This adaptation highlights a strong interdependence between humans and the assembly lines that form them. This Fordist production is seen as an unskilled process that has been replaced by post-Fordist flexible labour in the UK and USA. In an act of inversion, I deploy this Fordist factory line or maintenance model for a skilled purpose (artwork) and, therefore, aim to frame the continued presence of the production line and physical labour within UK institutions. This is to bring to the fore both the processes of labour that have been sent elsewhere and

¹⁵⁷ Tate Student Resource, *Ritual Coursework Guide*, Tate. <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/student-resource/exam-help/ritual>> (accessed 14. May. 2021)

¹⁵⁸ Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (USA: Picador, 2002), 95. Quoted in Harmansah, Omur. "Modernity, modernisation and the body". Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology & the Ancient World. September, (2006) <https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/courses/architecturebodyperformance/444.html >

to make us think about the enforced material combinations that are produced through an assembly line.

Therefore, *Not Really Really* series also aims to change processes of joining to that of jointing. I define 'joining' as a habitual and forced combination of materials often produced through manufacturing processes. Whereas, 'jointing' is a combination of interactions (between artist, artwork, gallery and audience) which produces a network of actors and interpretations (which cannot be predicted). An act of manufacture or maintenance should not only be unidirectionally enforced (only one way of doing and interpreting) but should produce multidirectional communications (an act of care is a communication between more than one actor). Unidirectionality enforces compulsory obedience, whereas multidirectional communication cares more for networking and interactive feedback.

Ritual practices tend to focus on the human (producer and consumer) to produce a set of rules and repetitive patterns for personal or ceremonial purposes. This reproduces Anthropocentric behavior that aims for mastery through ceremony. Rituals, when staged in artworld institutions, which Brian O'Doherty reminds us are designed in a similar format to Medieval churches, act as a sacred form of secular communion. As O'Doherty describes:

A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light... The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life'.¹⁵⁹

Through this secular house of worship, the repetitive actions are transformed into a sacred performance rather than an everyday labouring. This sacredness endures within the

¹⁵⁹ Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986, 15. <https://arts.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/arc-of-lifeODoherty_Brian_Inside_the_White_Cube_The_Ideology_of_the_Gallery_Space.pdf> (accessed 19. May. 2021)

value that is placed on the repetitive actions that dominate the artwork. In *Not Really Really* series, the form of repeated gestures (which are required to maintain the organic materials) is similar to the performance of ritual but the process itself is not produced as a performance. I am not repeating actions as an end in themselves (performance) and am more like a servant to the artwork, as an assemblage of human (artist, gallery staff and audience) and nonhuman actors (artistic materials and architectural framing). In preserving the organic materials' freshness, I am serving the artwork and focussing on the demands of labour as opposed to ritual. Rather than a sacred process, I aim to reveal everyday maintenance and the systems that they support. This is so that we can start to question the 'uses of use' in our everyday systems and the paths that they set us on, in terms of our relationship to the materials and their use/interpretation.

Ahmed argues that social institutions have systemically restrict our 'use of use', which creates a funnel-like path that we must follow. Ahmed states that the, 'Use of use, is a restriction of possibility that has become material, use of use, a narrowing of the routes; the more a path is used, the less paths there are to use; more going through less.'¹⁶⁰ Rather than funnelling the audience through one path or approach to my practice, in the *Not Really Really* series, the audience encounters the process of maintaining the artwork by chance because it is not treated as a performance; there are no timeslots advertised for the refreshing of the organic materials. This creates an unexpected interlude or glitch, providing multiple paths (or chances) for the audience's interaction with the artwork.

¹⁶⁰ Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use*, (Croydon: Duke University Press, 2019), 185.

4. UNBINDING OBJECTS

Although infrastructure such as architectures, technologies, laws, education and contracts were designed to construct a flexible capitalist society, the above infrastructure actually can be seen as implementing a binding process that discourages society's development. This binding process is built in the name of efficiency and perpetuated through the habitual 'uses of use' that provide the path of least resistance. In *Capitalist Realism is there no alternative?* (2009), Mark Fisher stated that 'Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business.'¹⁶¹ Fisher highlights that the logic of capitalism has become accepted as a mode of being and this principle binds society through its operations.

Fisher goes on to observe that although this system idealises itself as efficient (and so should be paperless to a certain extent) it actually produces a lot of bureaucracy and because it is the latter which is monitored, many fields in the tertiary sector of capitalism are focussed on documenting rather than doing. This means that very little is actually done as the focus is on performing that it is done (emphasis on documentation), which also entails that nothing much can change in the field of ideology as everyone is busy trying to feed the bureaucratic machine with staged effects. Fisher argues that the capitalist narrative is a fantasy for running society as an efficient business with the only method being that of measuring success, which discourages society's development because the emphasis is on the measuring as opposed to creating.

I refer to 'joining' as the process of reiteration in which material combinations are assumed and only improved upon in the name of economic efficiency. An act of joining one thing to another and binding them into an enforced combination, is used so that a

¹⁶¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism is there no alternative* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 17.

production line of repeatable objects can be produced via an efficient and inexpensive blueprint for maximum profit. In contrast, 'jointing' is an intuitive process that places materials in relation to each other in order to draw out properties or characteristics that may go unnoticed. In working with and viewing these material combinations, you can also observe the environmental forces that are acting on them (such as gravity which holds these jointed materials in place). Furthermore, each of my artworks can be deconstructed into their constituent parts, so nothing is forced or frozen together forever but in a network that can be re-spun. It is through playing with the shifting combinations of materials, which often act in tension with each other, that the properties of things that are often under-appreciated in capitalist production are brought out. Therefore, 'joining' is a term that I use to describe the habitual combining of materials under the name of efficiency that knots them together. Whereas the term 'unbinding' refers to the process of releasing materials from their restraints, to untie the tied knot, and 'jointing' is to recombine the materials and learn from their interactions rather than enforcing them.

I see all the above terms as existing on a continuum, terms that define procedures which interact but that can also treat materials as bound, unbound or in a form of symbiosis/network in which they remain tenuously in touch. My practice reclaims objects and situates them beyond their assumed 'useful' material relations to untie the knot that is usually forced between an object's purpose and use for humans. Ahmed explores Donald Norman's design and usability of doors in his book, *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988). In this book, Norman uses the example of doors (which Ahmed refers to as 'Norman doors') for highlighting that such a simple yet integral device such as a door can, through bad design, become confusing to use. In contrast to Norman's concern of badly designed structures creating ill-use, Ahmed states that, '...misfitting is understood as an incentive for design; the misfit between an old thing and a function can generate a

new thing.’¹⁶² I understand the Norman door as an achievement that allows us to question ourselves and whether our knowledge of using things is restrictive, as opposed to constructive. Norman’s doors are a critique of doors that inadequately signal their operation, through their handles or other form of design, and so the user tries to push them when they should be pulled (or vice versa). This design form means that the built in designs cause confusion in the use and textual signs have to be added. In this sense the internal design of the door fails to provide an effective ‘use of use’. Norman also highlights that a textual instruction is not the only method of using things, as you might misinterpret what is being indicated by the design itself. Norman doors lack a relation between content and form, which produces a glitch and highlights to the user that there could be alternative uses and new possibilities. Therefore, a lot of our everyday objects could also glitch or misfit with their intended purpose. However, we tend to still habitually accept the use they direct because of using them for centuries in this way. It has been thirty years since Norman published his book, but nevertheless we are still making similar mistakes and can find a lot of Norman doors in our everyday lives. Rather than seeing this as an issue, we should make the most of these design faults to queer the well-used path and think about material/architectural combinations differently.

¹⁶² Sara Ahmed, *What’s the Use*, (Croydon: Duke University Press, 2019), 59.



Fig.3. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (17-SS-20),
Ricotta Cheese, Wooden Tray and Toilet Tissue, 20x14x14 cm, 2017

In order to consistently question these habitual and restrictive material and conceptual combinations, it is important to also interrogate the binding that occurs in academic writing. Academic writing, in its traditional form, maintains strict formatting in order to produce effective arguments and well referenced studies that can be measured. However, when a thing has been constructed along the parameters of an existing form it can become restrictive either physically and/or virtually. A predetermined format is the rule for the ‘use of use’, which not only binds the academic writer but also the reader into an existing logic system. However, we should spend more time rethinking the narrative and restrictive format that has been maintained or habitually used in a specific form.

As I am writing a thesis, it seems relevant to explore academic writing in relation to binding: texts are often bound in book form, which is negatively constrained to hold things together. A book usually relies on a classic form typically composed of many pages bound together and protected by a cover. Undoubtedly, the content in a book has been broken down to pieces/pages and this can be played with to a certain extent but readers habitually encounter this broken form and it becomes familiar and easy to navigate.

However, the chronology of the book often remains intact, which also tends to repeat the formula of progress or book as an end-product. On the other hand, a virtual book offers a different experience to that of reading a physical book and with it a set of opportunities that can be glitched. As the virtual books are unbound their navigation is different and the writer/reader can approach it in a non-linear manner. The reader can be responsive and active in their decisions, they can scroll up and down to read the different sections, they can interrupt one narrative with another and build a network across sections.

In response to the above, as part of my Practice-based PhD submission I will be sending out an invitation to the examiners (readers), to invite them to participate within this submission activity. This thesis is the invitation to participate, which intends to invite readers to start their journey into the network of my research and practice. I present each chapter as having a different landscape and, depending on the way you navigate the thesis, there are possibilities to generate new paths through the glitches that occur across the network of my submission. By encountering the landscapes, either one after the other (in the formal submission) or as jointed (as in the website submission), it is a journey of collecting encountered landscapes that you experience and interpret to forge alternative plural paths. I treat this thesis like a starting pistol which alerts the interpreters (readers/viewers) that the process of co-interpreting (or co-researching) has begun. Therefore, this thesis has an important duty of switching on the participants' awareness that they are to include themselves within the process of interpretation. Barthes states that, 'The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'¹⁶³ Therefore, it is important for the reader to understand their role in this

¹⁶³ Roland Barthes, *The Death of Author*, Image, Music, Text (London: Fontana, 1977), 148.
<<https://sites.tufts.edu/english292b/files/2012/01/Barthes-The-Death-of-the-Author.pdf>> (accessed on 21. May .2021)

intersubjective exchange across research and practice, as well as providing a plurivocal as opposed to univocal landscape of interpretations.

Alerting yourselves, the examiners, to your participation in the process of interpretation/articulation, also triggers a consciousness of your past/present experiences and that these will be brought to and inform your interpretation of my submitted work. For instance, your first action (if the examiner) on receiving this thesis in your inbox, presumably is to open it. This then leads to the physical process of reading the thesis, possibly taking notes (sipping from a cup of tea or coffee?), re-negotiating the examination date, considering transport options for the VIVA and subsequently (Covid restrictions permitting) travelling to the University of Reading, and encountering the artwork for the first time.

This hopefully activates your sense of embodiment and encourages you to interpret the material encountered in my submission through your own sensory faculties and experiences. You are also my audience, reader and viewer and are a part of the interpretative network of my writing and artwork. All the experience you have encountered prior to and after receiving this thesis as an invitation to participate, will overlap, interact and supplement other experiences within the network. In this network, our supplement relation will make the layers more and more rich but also inseparable, as one defines the other and so forth. Therefore, it is an additive process but one that is complex because it produces links or relations between interpretations, which require each other for their production.

In the examination, I will also install an exhibition to present my physical artistic practice, but it must be understood that within this submission context the thesis is also part of the network with the artwork. In interacting with the artwork, you - the examiner as reader - will become examiner as viewer, which brings the process of viewing and

reading onto the same plane. On receiving this thesis as an invitation, you will be aware that the thesis is not the end-product but is built in relation to a physical practice that is staged elsewhere. This thesis acts as a continuous protagonist within my practice, as it is a supplement to the artwork, exhibition, Viva and myself. I treat this thesis as a supplement to my practice, in the notion of Derrida's supplement which is referred to in the chapter, *Naming*. Derrida uses the relationship between speech and writing to highlight the function of a supplement:

Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech...Speech represents thought by conventional signs, and writing represents the same with regard to speech. Thus, the art of writing is nothing but a mediated representation of thought.¹⁶⁴

The supplement is additive and can refer to a void within the narrative that the supplement attempts to fill. In this sense, the supplement can come from the outside and enter a system that did not think it was missing anything but which benefits from this addition (glitches). The supplement can also be understood as combining oppositional gestures because it is additive rather than subtractive. I understand the supplement within the viewing of art to be that of oppositional interpretations that add to the narrative of the work. One cannot be all, only all can be one. In the *Not Really Really* series, the supplement relation between artist and artwork can be seen as the combining of the master and servant relation because the artwork is governed by the score I (the artist) have given it but then I (the artist) have to maintain the artwork. Therefore, we (the artist and artwork in *Not Really Really* series) are both masters and slaves, as well as supplementing each other in the staging of the work.

Through deploying this theory of supplements within my practice, we (text,

¹⁶⁴ Fragment Rousseau. "Prononciation," *Oeuvres completes* (Pleiade, 1964), vol.2, 1249; *Collected Writings*, vol.7, 334. Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Poplins University press, 2016), 157.

speech, artwork, viewer and examiner) are building up an actor-network, each actor acting as a supplement to the other. By including you (examiner/reader) within this network and speaking to you directly in this thesis, I am inviting you to participate in this supplement relationship. This network of supplements leads to more supplements, it is a process that is additive and constructs a range of plural interpretations. It posits itself in contrast to practices that try to enforce a universal approach to understanding, which limits interpretation. All the supplements and actors are connected and indispensable. Grant highlights the potentiality held within the activating of process over end-product:

To stop the working process and evaluate its products is to destroy the faith that forms the foundation of the artist's labor. The final product will never be as satisfying, as filled with power and potential, as the process of its making. Products, even great works of art, belong to the world of finite things; they have limits and deficiencies. Process, by contrast, is infinite.¹⁶⁵

Grant argues that a final product (end-product) only represents an easily consumable result which does not have much potential as it has already been circumscribed in the work. In contrast, what makes an artwork fascinating is the power of the production process behind it. However, the production process is usually treated as a trade secret and hidden away to the public, as marketing only focuses on promoting the fantasy end-product. Without exposing the making/maintaining process, we are only informed blindly through the habit of using the end-product in front of us. My practice aims to inject the existence process into the reader/viewer's habitual pattern of interpreting, this provides the viewer with extra paths for interacting with objects. Unbinding the bonds of habituated experience, supports us in being able to rethink each independent actor's (human and non-human) possibilities. For instance, Ricotta cheese can be confused with plaster filler (fig.3) and a peach suspended in water can be misread

¹⁶⁵ Kim Grant, *All About Process: the theory and discourse of modern artistic labor* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 246.

as a goldfish (fig.4). This produces a glitch in the effect of the materials, as we can interpret them as fake or take them as fact and vice versa. Interpretations of the work are not distilled but opened to the viewer.



Fig.4. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (07-SS-18), Wood, screw, plastic bag, rubber band, water and peach and air, 14x23x15 cm, 2017

In this thesis, I attempt to occupy the academic environment in a similar way to in which the birds occupy the postbox in Sara Ahmed's *What's the Use?* (2019), by queering its use or the way that we as artists and audience members use it. Ahmed's description of the postbox highlights an alternative use of structures, as it was originally designed to help circulate letters and parcels but has been re-utilized as a home by nesting birds. As a result, this 'postbox' becomes overlapped with the notion and practice of 'nesting' that disrupts the postal system for which it was meant to function.

Use is usually restricted to some uses and users, nevertheless Ahmed perceives that alternative encounters with the heterogeneous can create possibilities – such as the nesting postbox. We have two potential users using this postbox, human and bird. The postbox in this situation has become useless for humans because it cannot be

implemented in its original function, as the birds have occupied the postbox and it became a nest which is suitable for them to use. If the postbox is now used for posting it would disturb the birds, so one use had to be decided upon and it appears that the bird's use has been respected by the postal system. Through this analogy, Ahmed is showing that an object or system being used is reliant on the user, so the user can either restrict or open the possibilities of use. Only when the user introduces an alternative use, will the system then have an opportunity to become other or different from its previous workings.

Following on from my approach to making art and Ahmed's analogy of the nesting postbox, I am utilizing the format of a thesis but towards different ends because I try to use the thesis as a process not just an end-product. For the examiner, this thesis will be the first object for them to encounter. Therefore, it is important to clarify that the thesis is not an end-product, but a continuum and interdependent medium that is interconnected with my practice. I position the thesis as a bridge or node that builds up an interdependent relation, a relation that interacts with the reader and formulates a growing network. A practice-based thesis format is still often trapped in adhering to the formal academic dissertation model. I aim to challenge the 'uses of use' in my practice and research and, therefore, this methodology is also integral to the thesis format. The 'uses of use' that I set out in the thesis are also required to enable alternative pathways for the reader to be a part of the network of meaning making. The method I produce for the use of my thesis, should not be a strict guidebook for the reader to follow but a process that can be used personally and interpreted/deployed differently. I see my practice, research and writing as being on a continuum. As a result, in my Practice Based PhD, I have integrated and interwoven them, to reveal my process to the reader.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21), the format of submitting a thesis has been impacted by health and safety guidelines. Previously, the requirement for the thesis

submission was three printed copies of the thesis that were distributed to the examiners, but this has since been suspended. Instead, we have been asked to only upload a pdf or digital file to the university and examiners. This format has provided me with an opportunity to visualise an alternative path of writing and reading, or a different network of actors. Therefore, I have provided one thesis that follows the instructional and institutional submission requirements in pdf format for submission to the university. Even though I am undertaking a Practice-based PhD, I am still required to obey the institutional rule for academic written submission. According to the normative PhD submissions at the University of Reading, the following is requested: formatting citation styles and printing out in a A4 paper (20 cm x 21 cm), front size between 11 to 12 point, sufficient space between each line, with a margin of 35 mm at the side and correctly bound. This is a pre-designed guideline for the written aspect of the PhD that was set-up before practice-based PhDs came into existence and this well-used path moulds this different form of submission as opposed to the other way around. These thesis guidelines are designed towards a general use but no matter how wide the rules that have been set-up are, a general rule could block new research paths. In order to facilitate the academic system, the institution still encourages users to follow their designed well-used path. In this instance, in order to ensure the school awards a PhD certificate, research and practice students have been asked to fulfill their requirement of a specific thesis format.

In contrast to general use, Bellacasa asserts the importance of a situated care, ‘transforming things into matters of care is a way of relating to them, of inevitably becoming affected by them, and of modifying their potential to affect others.’¹⁶⁶ In order to provide a glitch in this general thesis format, I will be presenting another thesis in a website format that I will refer to as the web-thesis. The address links for the web-thesis

¹⁶⁶ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2017), 99.

are inserted into the first page of the formal thesis file, which provides the reader with an alternative path to choose from before starting to read the formal thesis. The web-thesis will provide the reader with different ways of navigating and interacting than that of the formal thesis. A formal thesis provides a well-used and familiar approach to its content, and this makes it accessible, but it also binds the thesis into a set format. The reader's path through a formal thesis's format is fixed, which helps the reader to more easily focus on its content. However, this constructed use of the path (reading thesis) may be easier but should not be seen as the only correct path. For the latter would mean that we become passively compelled to follow paths rather than finding new opportunities for paths to begin.

In contrast, the web-thesis provides more flexibility for my methodology to also be explicit within this format of the thesis. For instance, as a dyslexic writer I find following textual rules difficult and I am more comfortable in writing and reading in intersectional ways; producing points of contact between areas of my writing and practice that can be read and interpreted in a less chronological format. As an alternative for both myself and the reader, the web-thesis is one embedded with the reader's choices. For example, the web-thesis is plastic in its chronology (or lack of) so the reader can jump between sections, creating their own path. This second online format of the thesis enables me to take advantage of not being restricted to the traditional book binding form of a thesis. Its form allows the user to navigate the pages in accordance with their choices and you can continuously scroll up and down the screen. Classifying each section and dividing up the thesis into separate pages, enables the reader to take control of the text and forge their own paths through the research and practice.

The above plastic format does not surrender to the well-used path but has taken care in finding alternative paths and processes for its interpretation. A general format that is

well-used does not necessarily equal a suitable form for all researchers/readers. In this sense, the academic standards for a PhD link to the infrastructure space as described by Keller Easterling, ‘like an operating system, the medium of infrastructure space makes certain things possible and other things impossible. It is not the declared content but rather the content manager dictating the rules of the game in the urban milieu.’¹⁶⁷ Often these designs of use, are using well-used rules and re-produce the same uses within their programmed environments. Those that do not fit or cannot access these general systems of use are alienated from the environment.

We generally think, if we think about it all, that infrastructure spaces and systems are built up for positive use, but these systems also produce a misfit genre for those that cannot access them. For example, there are increasing studies into data and algorithmic bias because the people programming them are white males. In the American documentary film *Coded Bias* (2020) there is an interview with Cathy O’Neil, once professor of mathematics turned hedge-funder but now a critical author of mathematical influence in society. In the film O’Neil tells the interviewer and viewer, ‘what worries me the most about AI or algorithms, is power. Because it's really all about who owns the code. The people who own the code then deploy it on other people. And there is no symmetry there.’¹⁶⁸ In the book *Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2016), O’Neil warns of the following:

Yet I saw trouble. The math-powered applications powering the data economy were based on choices made by fallible human beings. Some of these choices were no doubt made with the best intentions. Nevertheless, many of these models encoded human prejudice, misunderstanding, and bias into the software systems that increasingly managed our lives. Like gods, these mathematical models were opaque, their workings invisible to all but the highest priests in their domain: mathematicians and computer scientists. Their verdicts, even when wrong or

¹⁶⁷ Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 14.

¹⁶⁸ Shalini Kantayya, director. 2020. *Coded Bias*. Netflix. <<https://www.netflix.com/title/81328723>> (accessed 21. March. 2021)

harmful, were beyond dispute or appeal. And they tended to punish the poor and the oppressed in our society, while making the rich richer.¹⁶⁹

People have become manipulated by computer algorithms, and rarely challenge their legitimacy. This is largely because most of us do not understand the process of code making and we are using the end services (or product) of technologies of which we do not know the mechanisms or make-up. This manipulation of codes that build social realities, not only corresponds with Easterling's concerns over infrastructure space but also Frantz Fanon's description of colonialism, as colonizers set up their system in the colonies to exploit the natives in that region. As Fanon highlights, colonial rule '...is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native'¹⁷⁰. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Fanon exposes how the French colonised the indigeneous population of the Antilles. To gain access to power Fanon, who grew up in the Antilles, had to learn the coloniser's language. Through his lived experience, Fanon describes the alienating effects of moving to the coloniser's motherland to gain access to education because on his return to the Antilles he was seen as white and in France he was seen as black. Furthermore, until the coloniser identified the Antilles people as black, the distinction of black and white did not exist to the native people, and they did not see themselves as black. It was the infrastructure that was put in place by the colonisers and the histories that it erased which cultivated and produced a system of use for the white people as opposed to those defined by the system as black (who were to be used). Fanon became a misfit in the system because he accessed the power that was meant to be denied to him and, therefore, he was neither seen as white nor black or was seen as both white and black because these were the markers of the users within the system. As a result, Fanon became a powerful

¹⁶⁹ O'Neil, Cathy, *Weapons of Maths Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, London: Penguin Books, 2017, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, 38.

< <https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Frantz-Fanon-The-Wretched-of-the-Earth-1965.pdf> > (accessed 21. May. 2021)

glitch within the colonial infrastructure. In *Towards the African Revolution*, Fanon asserts that, ‘...this book, it is hoped, will be a mirror with a progressive infrastructure, in which it will be possible to discern the Negro on the road to disalienation.’¹⁷¹

I am presenting my Practice based PhD as a misfit genre within the academic doctoral research system. Therefore, I have chosen to undertake this thesis in a way that it interacts with my practice but does not limit its potential through predetermining the interpretations that it could produce. Both my practice and research aim to produce a glitch(es), whether this is due to the endless maintenance of an organic material or providing an alternative option of reading my thesis/experiencing my practice. The overall decisions intend to provoke the reader and viewer to observe any contingent glitches that occur within their surroundings and treat them as opportunities as opposed to errors. This is an attempt at encouraging and instigating multiplicities of use, as Russell claims:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a body. And one is not born, but rather, becomes a glitch. The glitch-becoming is a process, a consensual diaspora toward multiplicity that arms us as tools, carries us as devices, sustains us as technology, while urging us to persist, survive, stay alive.¹⁷²

My research and practice aim to observe and provoke glitches in perception. We are living in a capitalist society and, as a result, we are trapped in a habitual path of treating objects in terms of neo-liberal valuing assumptions (from efficiency to rarity, and profit margins). We lack a connection to the processes behind the institutional systems that forge these habits (education, transport links, communications lines, manufacturing lines, maintenance etc.) and take the end-product for granted, cutting off the object from its history or trail of becoming. We are used to passively receiving end-products through

¹⁷¹ Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, New York: Grove Press, 1967, 183-184.
< https://monoskop.org/images/0/05/Fanon_Frantz_Toward_the_African_Revolution_1967.pdf> (accessed 21. May. 2021)

¹⁷² Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto*, (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 145.

systems, so I propose that we should spend more time and care in understanding these systems. This is so that we can build situated care in our society, which means rather than general or universal paths we construct alternative paths from the glitches that occur within the system itself.

In response to this generalised model that obscures its own mechanisms, my practice does not deliberately cover up the maintenance process and, simultaneously, it makes care tangible to the viewer. The viewer can encounter the process of me refreshing the organic material, but they also may not, which reflects the probability of encountering the maintenance process in everyday life. This infers the situation in which although we do not witness all practices of maintenance, this does not mean that they have disappeared, but they are habitual and have been programmed to exist off-screen (not to be noticed). In the art world, it can feel like the process of maintaining an artwork is taboo and that an attempt to put maintenance on-screen (publicly within the gallery) could risk humiliation, as the care for artworks is often hidden behind the scenes (in the gallery or art systems private spaces). It is as if exposing the labour behind the innocent and pristine end-product (artwork), is like catching the artwork with its knickers down and this tarnishes its sacred nature.

Therefore, my practice's treatment of maintaining organic materials has highlighted an alternative way of operating when presenting artworks to the public. The tangible process is produced as a possible antidote to the fantasy of the sacred artwork produced by various art world actors and institutions, as well as wider aesthetic, historical and political initiatives. As Brian O'Doherty states:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is "art." The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the

mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics.¹⁷³

O'Doherty points out how the gallery space is comparative to other spaces which are provided with a mystique or aura that is itself transferred to the artwork. The notion of ritual and preciousness or sanctity of the space is crucial here. This sanctity is not only produced through its approach to space but government agendas for the arts and their civilising purpose. Karsten Schubert refers to the importance of the French Revolution to arts purpose in *The Curator's Egg*:

The [French] monarchy fell on August 10, 1792, and only nine days later a decree was issued that turned the former royal palace into a public museum. From the outset it was intimately tied up with the aims and politics of the new Republic. The new museum was a symbol of revolutionary achievement and a programmatic statement of intent: it was to be the domain of the many rather than the few (aristocrats and learned gentlemen), promising all citizens a share of hitherto inaccessible private property of cultural value. Education and enlightenment were no longer limited to a privileged handful but were on offer to anybody who chose to enter the former royal palace.¹⁷⁴

Art, therefore, was asked to educate French subjects and give them a moral sensibility, as the monarch and his/her divine right (which was connected to the church) no longer represented power and punishment. The Republic presented these museums as secular places of worship in which to cultivate the self and to encourage their society to self-discipline.

In contrast, the *Not Really Really* series crosses the line of this sacred presentation of secular icons. This act could be interpreted as taboo for it not only exposes the unfinished artwork to the audience but travels across (pollutes) the private, as well as public space, demystifying the closed system by plugging it into an outside (the

¹⁷³ Simon O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999, 14.

¹⁷⁴ Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The evolution of the museum concept from the French Revolution to the present day*, London: Riding house, 2009, 18.

everyday administration of the office for example). The exhibition of the *Not Really Really* series enables the audience to not fully acknowledge the maintenance process, as they might not encounter the replacing of the egg yolk. This series is not stable, as it stages flows of power between the artist and the artwork, with a continuous change between master and servant. In breaking down the implied rules of the space and the relationship between artist and artwork, the work resists a stable identity. This suggests that new configurations and knowledge systems can arise out of this process.

Audiences are used to receiving didactic, authoritative, and unidirectional interpretations of art often introduced to this method via museums and this puts pressure on other art world institutions to follow this model (well used path). In the previous chapter, *Naming*, I proposed that an artwork's textual label, which provides the language for framing the artwork, has the power to direct the audience's path through the exhibition. As a result, the title and blurb about the artwork has become to matter more than the artwork itself.

In contemporary society, neo-liberal and technological mechanisms have separated processes from end-products. This is in part due to convoluted supply chains, so that no one company oversees the whole of the process and, therefore, is also not responsible for it. This obfuscated process is similar to the technological black box, in which we do not know how the systems we use operate. This internal process or system is often deemed too complex to understand and we are in the habit of ignoring them. In response, my practice aims to reveal some of the processes in the black box of the art gallery (white box) to the public. In my practice, the process and end-product are both in a supplementary relation and my practice highlights the overlooked process that is simultaneously present within the end-product.

Part of the way in which the artworld system remains a white box, is due to the

narratives and structures that it deploys. For example, the architecture and educational systems that are used in museums (such as the Louvre referred to above) are very similar to the Panopticon model described by Foucault. Therefore, museums may present themselves as aiding the public by providing them with access to art but they also cultivate and influence audiences through instigating their behaviour, knowledge systems and aspirations. Therefore, many of the operations that museums use actually produce subjects and their engagement as much as it supports them.

The term Panopticon initially described an architecture in which prisoners were housed in single cells that surrounded a central tower. However, the prisoners were not able to discern whether they were being watched or not because the tower was there all the time but the guards could not be seen. Therefore, the prisoners behaved as if they were being watched all the time. This in turn meant that the prisoners started to discipline themselves and performed to the central tower so that they would not be punished. This changed the penal system, from one of punishment from the guards to that of self-discipline from the prisoners.

Foucault goes on to describe how the Panopticon model is adopted by many social institutions such as schools and companies because of the ways in which these institutions educate their users to be useful to society. The aim of this Panopticon principle is to produce a society of people that is self-disciplined. The museum and gallery have also taken on this educational model. Many galleries provide the audience with a well-used path with which to access the knowledge that will deem them socially responsible individuals. Therefore, exhibition models largely encourage the audience to behave in a passive way (consuming rather than producing knowledge); to follow the forms of self-discipline that are being distributed through the exhibitionary complex. Any educational model that deploys this method will limit the user's ability and make them

reliant on the system.

In contrast, the *Not Really Really* series aims to decentralize disciplinary models and de-link from the institutional system to reveal glitches in staging and interpreting art practice. This also asserts the power of the audience's own experience and their interpretation of it, as opposed to ingesting someone else's interpretation. These interpretations may cause glitches, or cause the audience members to observe the glitches in their everyday surroundings. Then from these glitches some may propose alternative paths, so that we have multiple routes in society and not just one.

I am particularly concerned with the predominant method of presenting the artwork through text in museum practice, as this produces a singular and authoritative route for interpreting art practice. In response to this, I explore a particular process of making visible that occurs in galleries but is not often drawn to the fore in making art public. Through this process, I attempt to engage the audience in questioning the ways in which our relationships to artworks and exhibitions are mediated. It is also an attempt to engage the audience with a more experience-oriented interpretation of the artwork and exhibition.

The more we rely on the well-used path, the more we want an art that is easy to understand. An artwork which we understand and have gained knowledge of, but often we have understood a particular type of knowledge system. A system in which the artwork is often over-interpreted by the text. The over-interpretation of information provides us with a supposed universal language, and this creates a general text to provide general care to the audience. Audiences are initiated into the system of consuming art through text and must fit themselves into the system first, to be qualified in the use of general care. However, with this general care, many audiences cannot access the knowledge and this universal system of staging art writes over the top of a plural system

of multiple voices. I aim to advocate the importance of a situated care, as general care cannot include all people and will only produce one path.

To conclude, both my practice and thesis aim to not over-determine the information or path to be used by the audience. In treating the audience as co-interpreter of the artwork, their experience is additive and not subtractive; they can be active subjects that produce new paths rather than passive subjects that consume one path. I define this practice as a form of situated care, as each audience member can produce a positive glitch in the exhibition as an actor-network based on their own lived experience. This acts in contrast to the educational exhibition models that try to provide a general experience for all, which produces a universal or singular narrative for interpreting art practice.

By giving the power of situated-interpretation back to the audience/reader, my research and practice is dependent on your readings as supplementary to the work. No one interpretation is privileged over the other. Therefore, my practice facilitates participants in producing multiple readings and potential beginnings of paths to discover their own situated 'use of use'.

Unbinding Objects

- The Final Degree Show 2021 -

1. Installation View of *Unbinding Objects* in University of Reading, TOB1 at 16.07.2021



Fig.1. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.



Fig.2. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.



Fig.3. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.



Fig.4. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 1.



Fig.5. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Hallway.



Fig.6. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 2.



Fig.7. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 2.



Fig.8. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 2.



Fig.9. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 3.



Fig.10. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 3.



Fig.11. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 3.



Fig.12. Installation view of the final show *Unbinding Objects* (2021), Room 3.

2. Works of *UNBINDING OBJECTS*



Fig.1. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-01), Hot Cotton Towels and Metal, 20 x 14 x 4 cm, 2021



Fig.2. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-02), Fresh Asparagus and Metal, 11 x 11 x 5 cm, 2021



Fig.3. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-03),
Sea Salt Flakes, Wood, Metal and Frozen Clam, 7 x 23 x 15 cm, 2021



Fig.4. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-05), Plugs and Cable, 7 x 2.5 x 2.5 cm, 2021



Fig.5. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-04),
Jumbo Peppermint Candy, Matcha Candy and Peeled Lychee, 7 x 23 x 15 cm, 2021



Fig.6. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (AW-20-06),
Soldering Block, Copper Sheet, Rubber Band and Wet Notebook, 14 x 2 x 10 cm, 2020



Fig.7. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-11), Orange and Metal, 18 x 15 x 12 cm, 2021



Fig.8. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-06),
Wet Aluminium Textured Sheet and White Head Ball Pins, 21 x 40 x 1 cm, 2021



Fig.9. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (17-SS-10), Egg Yolk and Monocle, 4.5 x 5 x 3 cm, 2017



Fig.10. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-07),
Antique Porcelain lume green Tiles and Little Daisy, 4.5 x 5 x 3 cm, 2021



Fig.11. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-08),
Seaweed, Copper Nails and Copper Plate, 22 x 22 x 4 cm, 2021



Fig.12. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-09), Biscuits, 17 x 7 x 7 cm, 2021



Fig.13. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (16-AW-20), Metal and Printed Paper, 1 x 12 x 1 cm, 2016



Fig.14. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-20-00), Milk and Glass Mug, 11 x 9 x 9 cm, 2020



Fig.15. Yun-Ling Chen, *Not Really Really* (SS-21-10),
Plastic Bag, Sparking Water and Fresh Mint, 25 x 14 x 9 cm, 2021

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