Still Life with…

Arrangements of Vibrant Things

by Stephen Severn

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media, and Design.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2022

Creative Commons Copyright Notice

Stephen Severn 2022©

Copyright Notice

This document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode

You are free to:

Share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format), Adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material)

Under the following conditions:

Attribution (give appropriate credit, provide a link, indicate if changes were made),

Noncommercial (you may not use the material for commercial purposes)

Abstract

Still Life with… investigates an ontology of *vibrant things*; a conceptual framework that recognizes all matter as active and fluid non-hierarchical elements in relation and orientated to an open futurity. I am positioning the objects in a still life, and the still life itself, as *vibrant things*. My work seeks to engage with a vibrancy that, despite its not always being perceived, can be found in our relation with things, and between things: in *arrangements* comprising multiplicities of active and vital participants — human, non-human, object, place, affect, event — interacting in relation.

I am situating a theoretical framework for *vibrant things* in Bill Brown's "thing theory" and Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter," while aligning Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology with research-creation to form a methodological framework for working with *vibrant things*: what I am calling a "research-queeration" methodology. To experience the vibrancy and animacy of the world involves an orientation to things' *thingness* — the ability of objects to act, produce effects, and to form fluid relations. To orientate oneself to *vibrant things* opens up possibility, potentiality, and different ways of being in the world. I aim to see what this renewed form of engagement can reveal about an ontology of *vibrant things*, about how art can participate in this shift as a special mode of relation to matter, materiality, and *things*.

My practice-based research endeavours to register *arrangements* of *vibrant things* as generative fluxes that are orientated to an open-ended futurity. Objects, assemblages, place, and time are investigated through photography, assemblage, video, prose, and installation. This exegesis examines how making comes to matter in a relation of theory, methodology, and the writing and practice of artists who engage with an energetic materiality. The combination of an art practice together with philosophical and theoretical inquiry forms an interdisciplinarity of media and an interdisciplinarity of thinking and making: an arrangement of objects, materials, artworks, and media together with philosophy, theory, literature, and art — an *arrangement* of *vibrant things*.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

Thank you to my Advisors Nicole Collins and Keith Bresnahan for your support, expertise, and contribution; this arrangement of thinking and making was made more vibrant through the relations we formed.

Thank you to my friends and family — particularly Zoran Dobric for enduring a deluge of things over the past two years.

Thank you to Louise Franklin for starting my education in arranging things and for her continued support throughout this thesis. Thank you to Antonia Akai, Marianne Petroff, and the team at Judy Inc. for enabling me to make a living arranging things.

I want to acknowledge the land on which this research project was conducted: the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat. This project is a relation of *vibrant things* and, as such, I also want to acknowledge the Indigenous lands that contributed to all objects, materials, and/or thoughts exhibited and arranged in this research or by cited artists and researchers.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for funding this project through the Joseph Armand Bombardier grant.

I dedicate this project to all my *things*. Thank you for your wisdom and generosity.

And to Tommy and Peter.

Table Of Contents

Creative Commons Copyright Notice ii
Abstract iii
Acknowledgements and Dedication iv
List of Figures vi
Introduction 1
Solid Things 6
Vibrant Things 7
Queer Things 11
Cast Things 18
Arranging Things 26
Gathering Things 27
Arranging Things 33
Relating Things 37
Fluid Things 53
Animate Things 54
Virtual Things 62
Effluescent Things 67
Conclusion 85
Bibliography 90
Further Reading 93
Appendix A: An Exhibition of *Solid Things* 95
Appendix B: An Exhibition of *Arranging Things* 100
Appendix C: An Exhibition of *Fluid Things* 112

List of Figures

Figure 1. Beeswax Cast 19
Figure 2. Gypsum Cast 20
Figure 3. Resin Cast 21
Figure 4. *A Kno*t 42
Figure 5. *A Network 1* 44
Figure 6. *A Network 2* 45
Figure 7. *A Thing 1* 47
Figure 8. *A Thing 2* 48
Figure 9. *A World* 50
Figure 10. *1361.99m: A Study in Object Oriented Ontogeny* 55
Figure 11. *Vanitas in Blue* 63
Figure 12. *Urn* 70
Figure 13. *Armature 1* 71
Figure 14. *Armature 2* 72
Figure 15. *Urn* 74
Figure 16. *Urn: Saturated* 75
Figure 17. *Urn: Inverted* 76
Figure 18. *Urn Walk* 77
Figure 19. *Alphabet of Verbs* 79
Figure 20. *Alphabet of Verbs* 80
Figure 21. *Alphabet of Verbs* 80
Figure 22. *Vibrant Matter* 82
Figure 23. *Vibrant Matte*r 83
Figure 24. *Vibrant Matter* 83
Figure 25. *Solid Things* 96
Figure 26. *Solid Things* 97
Figure 27. *Solid Things* 98
Figure 28. *Solid Things* 99
Figure 29. *Solid Things 2* 101

Figure 30. *Solid Things 2* 102
Figure 31. *Tactile Compositions* 103
Figure 32. *Tactile Compositions* 104
Figure 33. *Thing Power — Quartz* 105
Figure 34. *Thing Power — Geode* 105
Figure 35. *Thing Power — Optical Calcite* 106
Figure 36. *Thing Power* 107
Figure 37. *Thing Power* 108
Figure 38. *Armature* 109
Figure 39. *A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World* 110
Figure 40. *A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World* 111
Figure 41. *Fluid Things* 113
Figure 42. *Fluid Things* 114
Figure 43. *Fluid Things* 115
Figure 44. *Fluid Things* 116
Figure 45. *Fluid Things* 117
Figure 46. *Fluid Things* 118

Introduction

The root of the English word ‘object’ is a compound of the Latin prefix, *ob*, meaning in front of, and *jacere*, meaning to throw. This applies to the word both as a verb: to oppose, I object to [x], and as a noun: a “tangible thing, something perceived with or presented to the senses.”[1] In both cases, the definition of ‘object’ invokes a *relationship* between ourselves and the thing itself, in our sensing or perception of it. Perhaps because of this, it is easy to infer a human-centred definition in which the object is defined by our perception and exists for us; physical objects stop us, present *ob*stacles for us to manoeuvre around, much like an *ob*jection: an argument presented in opposition. But what if objects are not obstacles, are not in opposition to us, are not primarily defined by our sensing or perception?

My preference is for the latter half, the thrown-ness, *jacere*, of this etymology; objects present themselves to our senses, they throw (*jacere*) themselves in front of (*ob*) us. This definition accentuates an animacy in materiality, and an energetic lived relationality to all matter — if objects throw themselves in front of us, they arrive at us just as much as we arrive at them.

I feel this vitality in my relationships with objects in my creative practice as a still life photographer, and in my professional practice as a display artist, set designer, and

[1] “Word,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.etymonline.com/word/object.

prop stylist. My interactions with objects and materials, despite being considered inanimate, so often feel like a partnership between two or more acting agents, like a relationship with living coworkers. This relation extends to my object compositions and sets, which I see as living worlds, rather than static arrangements of mute matter.

My research project aims to investigate the vitality of still life arrangements through, what I am calling, an ontology of *vibrant things*. I am defining *arrangement* as **multiplicities of heterogeneous elements,** and I am defining an ontology of *vibrant things* as **a conceptual framework that recognizes all matter as active and fluid non-hierarchical elements in relation and orientated to an open futurity**. I am suggesting that all *things* — objects or humans, living or non-living — are vibrant; and, further, that orientating ourselves to the perpetual flux of our relations to *things* (and *things*-in-relation) reveals an animacy. I aim to reveal this animacy through my creative practice and through the theoretical, methodological, and artistic precedents related in this support document.

In Chapter 1: “Solid Objects,” I build a theoretical base for *vibrant things* by positioning Jane Bennet’s theory of animate materiality (in her book *Vibrant Matter*) and Bill Brown’s thing theory alongside Virginia Woolf’s short story “Solid Objects.”[2] Here, I examine, through our relations with objects, how *vibrant things* are active, fluid, and

[2] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1, (Autumn 2001), Virginia Woolf, “Solid Objects,” in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*, ed. Sandra Kemp (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019), 61-67.

non-hierarchical. Woolf's story highlights human-object relations, which I read through the lens of Sara Ahmed's concept of queer phenomenology.[3] Ahmed's ideas about queer human-object relations provide a framework for a creative practice working with vibrant things; a methodology in which I combine queer phenomenology with research-creation: what I am calling a *research-queeration* methodology. This chapter concludes with the examination of a rather *queer vibrant thing*, in which I ask the question: *what can my art practice reveal about an ontology of vibrant things?*

In Chapter 2: Arranging Objects, I ask *how can my art practice engage with things to reveal them as vibrant things?* I look at methods for working with *vibrant things* and look to artists and writers employing similar methods. I examine the methods of gathering, arrangement, and relation in my creative work and alongside Martin Heidegger's theory of *the thing*, Thomas Nail's assemblage theory, and my expanded definition of ekphrasis (respectively).[4] Arrangement forms a large part of my creative practice in how I combine elements in still life compositions. I have based my definition of *arrangement* on Nail's description of (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's term) 'agencement': a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements.[5] I see *arrangement* as a gathering of active and vital participants – human, non-human, object, place, affect, event.

---

[3] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[4] Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013), 160-184; Thomas Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", in *SubStance* 46, no. 1, (2017).

[5] Nail, 22.

In Chapter 3: Fluid Things, I look at the potential in *arrangements* of *vibrant things*. I start by exploring how the idea of flux in Indigenous onto-epistemologies and quantum physics highlights the animacy and fluidity of all matter and indeed *vibrant things*. Then, using Gilles Deleuze's concept of the virtual, as interpreted through Brian Massumi, I examine how we might find the vitality of *vibrant things* in the fluidity of their transformations.[6] I am suggesting that the animacy is in the potential of this fluidity, and that the potential is an orientation to an open futurity.[7] *Vibrant things* are orientated to an open futurity in their possibility, in what Massumi says is their "still indeterminate variation," in what I believe are relations or arrangements yet-to-come.[8] In this chapter, I am asking *how might creative engagements with vibrant things be orientated to an open futurity?* I show aspects of my creative work that engage with a vibrant thing through different media, times, places, and events to discover if the transformations of the work reveal its vibrance and animacy.

This exegesis is an arrangement of thinking, making, philosophy, literature, art, writing, and studio experimentation, organized by theme and reflecting the non-linear trajectory of my practice. As such, you will not find sections devoted explicitly to

---

[6] Brian Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," *Hypersurface Architecture, Architectural Design,* 68, no. 5/6, (May-June 1998): 16-24; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation,* (Duke University Press: 2002).

[7] Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, "The Promise of Non-Representational Theories," in *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 19. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison describe non-representational theories as open to futurity, a claim that I have borrowed and applied to support my conceptual framework for an ontology of *vibrant things*.

[8] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 8.

methodology, methods, or critical theory, but discover them weaving in and out of the writing, much the same way they have moved through my praxis over the last two years. The combination of a studio-based art practice together with philosophical/theoretical inquiry forms an interdisciplinarity of media and an interdisciplinarity of thinking and making. I work with *vibrant things* through assemblage, casting, photography, video, prose, and installation, in relation with philosophy, literature and art. *Arrangements* can take the physical form of a still life, a studio, or an exhibition, or can take the form of a poem, a praxis, or a thesis support document.

Arrangements of *vibrant things* are, I propose, brimming with potential — appropriately, this exegesis will conclude by offering potential directions the research could take as it continues to orientate itself to an open futurity.

To propose such a view of *things* is to speculate on a world of animate elements: to reveal the un-stillness in the still life.

> "…still working his fingers in the water, they curled round something hard—a full drop of solid matter—and gradually dislodged a large irregular lump, and brought it to the surface. When the sand coating was wiped off, a green tint appeared. It was a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape, so that it was impossible to say whether it had been bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a precious stone."
>
> – "Solid Objects," Virginia Woolf [9]

1

Solid Things

Our senses are constantly being presented with objects, whether we register them or not. John, Virginia Woolf's character in "Solid Objects," is presented with objects (beach glass, broken porcelain, meteorite) that influence the course of his life. My practice engages deeply with objects, and, like John, objects have influenced the course of my life. For this reason, object-theory resonates with me, as do stories like that of Woolf's character for whom life is, in a sense, a series of object-relations.

[9] Virginia Woolf, "Solid Objects," in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*, ed. Sandra Kemp (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019), 62.

In this chapter, I describe what I intrinsically already knew — that all matter is active, fluid, non-hierarchical, and in relation — through the formation of a conceptual framework for an ontology of *vibrant things*. I describe a shift where I theoretically and physically orientate myself to objects as *vibrant things* and how these relations are registered in my art practice and methodology. I ask:

What can my art practice reveal about an ontology of *vibrant things*?

1.1

Vibrant Things

A Theory of Vibrant Matter and a Theory of Things

My conceptual framework for an ontology of *vibrant things* is rooted in Jane Bennett's theory of energetic materiality and in Bill Brown's thing theory. To start, I want to clarify a distinction between objects and *things* made by Brown, among others. In his 2001 article "Thing Theory," Brown describes *things* as concrete and yet ambiguous, and as exceeding their materiality and function; the *thing* is in excess of the object.[10] His thing theory focuses on human-object interactions; *things*, according to Brown, are

[10] Brown, "Thing Theory," 5.

objects that present themselves to us through fluid human-object relations.[11] He describes the fluidity in our relationships with *things* as a shift from object to subject and provides an example of this when a *thing's* common function as an object ceases and it becomes "…physically or metaphysically irreducible to an object."[12] Brown uses examples of your car or drill breaking down to highlight one kind of changed relationship.[13] This change in relation, I believe, includes a shift in our perception to experience objects, now *things*, in new ways, rather than based on their conventional role. *Things* are more than mere objects, and their excess is in our fluid relationship with them.

In his later writing, Brown disintegrates dichotomous categorizations (subject versus object) by describing our relation to the world of objects as a "mutual constitution and mutual animation of subject and object…" [14] This is important because it again highlights the fluidity of our relations with *things*, but also removes hierarchical categorization. He describes thing theory, using support from Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, as a shift to thinking beyond subject–object and human–non-human binaries, adding that he wants to "dislodge the binary" between the animate and the inanimate.[15] Jane Bennett also invites us to think beyond a binary that divides the

---

[11] Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

[12] Kathleen Stewart's interpretation of Brown's "Thing Theory;" Kathleen Stewart, "Tactile Compositions," in *Objects and Materials*, ed. Penny Harvey et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 119.

[13] Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

[14] Bill Brown, *Other Things*, 19.

[15] Bill Brown, *Other Things*, 5-6.

animate and the inanimate.[16] In her aptly titled book *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett reinvokes a history of energetic matter in Western philosophy, while crediting developments in natural sciences and bioengineering as blurring the binary between life and matter and, subsequently, advocates for a politics that includes the agency of non-human participants.[17] Both thinkers offer a non-dichotomous non-hierarchical view of matter.

For Brown and Bennett, it is *thingness*, not objecthood, which registers an energetic materiality.[18] What Bennett contributes to my understanding and usage of *vibrant things*, is the idea that all matter is enmeshed in action and process bred from relation. She describes actants (also relying on Latour) as any source of action — human or non-human — and asserts that an actant does not act alone, but in collaboration with other forces, actants, *things*; we are "in a dense network of relations…in a knotted world of vibrant matter."[19] She describes this force of action as 'thing-power': "…the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."[20] Although she includes 'human-power' in 'thing-power,' her goal is to support neither a hierarchy nor an equality of actants; her goal is a politics that encourages communication between all actants towards a better understanding of

[16] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, vii; Brown, *Other Things*, 5.

[17] Bennett, viii, xviii, xix.

[18] Brown, *Other Things,* 5, Bennett, xvi.

[19] Bennett, 9, 13, 21.

[20] Bennett, 6.

our shared participation in world-building.[21] Or, in my case, artmaking: I aim to see what this renewed engagement with things in a shared practice of artmaking-as-world-building, in Bennett's sense, can reveal about an ontology of *vibrant things*, or even about how art can participate in this shift, as a special mode of relation to matter, materiality, and *things*.

Brown and Bennett have not helped me redefine objects as *things* but have helped me to undefine *things* as objects; that is, rather than understanding objects based on my definition of them, I am perceiving of the *things* themselves and my relation to them as having agency and fluidity. Earlier, I asked what if objects are not obstacles, are not in opposition to us? An ontology of *vibrant things*, rooted in the conceptual frameworks of vibrant matter and thing theory, provides a theoretical base for humans working with objects that traverse a dynamic world of action, fluidity, and relation outside of hierarchical categorizations and subject–object, animate–inanimate, human–non-human, and living–non-living binaries.

[21] Bennett, 10, 104.

1.2

Queer Things

Research-Creation and Queer Phenomenology as Methodology

An ontology *of vibrant things* that views human-object relations as active, fluid, and non-hierarchical requires a methodological framework that supports this animate, energetic, and relational collaboration. A research-creation methodology does just this and accurately describes a lot of my process.

A recent roundtable conversation, “The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation,” conducted by Sarah E. Truman in *Knowings and Knots*, helped in the formation of my methodology and aided in my understanding of the intricacies of this term.[22] The panel consisted of Canada’s leading research-creation scholars (Natalie Loveless, Erin Manning, Natasha Myers, and Stephanie Springgay), who look to define the problems not only in identifying but also theorizing research-creation.[23] Some points of connection between my practice and the methodology include Manning’s description of research-creation as challenging the separation between thinking and making, and Loveless’ description of research-creation as the combination of form and content.[24]

---

[22] Sarah E. Truman, et al., “The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation,” in *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research-Creation*, ed. Natalie Loveless (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2019) 221-249.

[23] Truman*,* 221.

[24] Truman*,* 228, 230.

Manning and Loveless' description provides a framework for the application of thing theory, which Brown describes as a relation to the world of objects in "mutual constitution and mutual animation of subject and object…" [25] The fluidity of human-object relations in Brown's thing theory can be seen in, what Manning describes as, the connection between "thinking and making" in research-creation. Research-creation foregrounds action and relation between, what Bennett calls, actants. Prioritizing action, I believe, supports a non-hierarchical model where artists' materials, objects, *things*, are collaborating in Bennett's 'thing power,' just as much as human thought or 'human power.' Springgay highlights the action in research-creation in her repeated declaration that research-creation is an *event*. Myers' suggestion that the event leads us to new research questions, has been evident in the trajectory of my research questions and in my art-making events: those moments of material creation interspersed between long bouts of sitting and thinking with objects.[26]

Like John, Virginia Woolf's character in "Solid Objects," I sit for hours with my objects, just staring at them and thinking about them. In fact, the bulk of my time spent on this thesis research project has been spent looking at and thinking about objects. As with John, this engagement has involved a substantial time commitment to the detriment of our professional careers; in Woolf's story, John gives up a promising

---

[25] Brown, *Other Things*, 19.

[26] Truman, "The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation," 227, 232, 237, 249.

political career to gather and contemplate objects; while I have, in effect, quit my day job arranging objects, in order simply to sit and stare and think about them.[27]

This contemplation/observation frequently involves disorientation, which frequently involves questioning the existence of the object: what is it telling me, what does it want, how can I engage it in a creative practice, what will that reveal? Sarah Ahmed's theory of queer phenomenology has provided me with an understanding of how these moments of disorientation can contribute to my overall methodology, which (to coin a neologism) might be better described as one of *research-queeration*.

In her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed strives to do two things: to queer phenomenology and to incorporate phenomenology into queer theory.[28] She describes phenomenology as a turn towards objects, or 'orientation,' which affects how we inhabit space and what we do.[29] Objects, she asserts, allow us to do things.[30] Ahmed uses the concept of 'lines' to illustrate how objects direct "what we do, and how we inhabit space."[31] Lines make some things reachable, while putting others out of reach; she argues that, in a heteronormative society, the reachable things allow the body to be extended into spaces and to continue along a straight line, putting yet other things

[27] Woolf, "Solid Objects." 66.

[28] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.

[29] Ahmed, 2, 28, 46.

[30] Ahmed, 46.

[31] Ahmed, 23, 28, 52, 66.

within reach, and placing others out-of-reach.[32] The out-of-reach things fall into the background.[33] Ahmed claims that queer subjects deviate in straight culture: they turn away from, do not orientate themselves to, objects on the straight line, opting instead for an oblique line where they 'reach' objects that are "…not points on the straight line."[34]

Queer phenomenology is a productive failure to extend oneself into spaces through objects that favour straight (heteronormative) and/or white-centred dominant lines of force. It is a turn towards objects that are outside the normative, in the background, or not typically visible; these may be experienced as disorientation, yet have the potential to extend a person's line in new and unpredictable ways. In the following section, I want/attempt to connect this queer phenomenological lens to a reading of Woolf's "Solid Objects."

John, a member of the British Parliament with a promising career in politics, discovers a piece of beach glass while his companion, Charles, is skimming stones.[35] After exhausting the beach's supply of flat stones, Charles notices John's discovery but dismisses it because it is not flat or suited to skimming.[36] John stays with his orientation to the beach glass, questioning its existence, while Charles turns away from the object,

---

[32] Ahmed, 14-15, 16, 51, 56, 84, 87.

[33] Ahmed, 26, 29-32.

[34] Ahmed, 71, 92, 161.

[35] Woolf, "Solid Objects," 63.

[36] Woolf, 63.

returning it to the background of his perception, as he reanimates their political debate.[37] At home, John gives the beach glass a function as a paper weight, but his eyes keep returning to the object — he is constantly turning towards it, orientating himself towards it.[38] He starts orientating himself to similar objects in shop windows: "…china, glass, amber, rock, marble…," and to items on the ground: orientating himself to what would be perceived as garbage, as the background, and overlooked by others.[39] He collects more objects and uses them as paperweights.[40] He finds a broken piece of half-buried china, which is even more obscured from regular view, even more in the background; all the objects he has collected have been hidden from regular view.[41] He starts to frequent places where discarded broken china might be found, places on the fringes of human society like refuse sites, railway lines, and demolished houses; the objects and the search for objects extend his body into new and strange spaces.[42] The things he discovers are no longer used as paper-weights — they do not have a purpose beyond ornament and collection.[43]

The shift away from the usefulness of his objects mirrors the shift away from his career; he is orientating himself away from a straight line of a normal life and career

---

[37] Woolf, 63.

[38] Woolf, 63.

[39] Woolf, 63.

[40] Woolf, 64.

[41] Woolf, 64.

[42] Woolf, 65.

[43] Woolf, 65.

trajectory.[44] He finds a meteorite, something alien to earth.[45] He becomes obsessed with his search for more objects, and his interest in his political career recedes.[46] Charles visits John and touches the objects "without once noticing their existence"; for Charles, the objects remain in the background.[47] Their conversation is confused when John talks about his pursuit of objects and Charles misunderstands him to be talking about his political career — Charles "…had a *queer* sense that they were talking about different things."[48] Charles experiences disorientation in the presence of John and his objects; he leaves, reorientating himself to the straight line of politics and society, while John remains orientated towards strange objects that extend him into strange spaces.[49]

In this story, Woolf's character loses a lot in his pursuit of *things*, and I am not suggesting that a queer phenomenology means abandoning society. John's sexual orientation is not addressed in the story, so this is not explicitly an example of a queer (read homosexual) body extending itself into queer spaces; but it does show how John's orientations to objects create an oblique line that diverts from the expectations of his straight life and career path. I am very much interested in the potential of his oblique path, and where it might lead: what a sequel to the story might hold.

---

[44] Woolf, 65.

[45] Woolf, 65-66.

[46] Woolf, 66.

[47] Woolf, 66.

[48] Woolf, 66-67; emphasis mine.

[49] Woolf, 67.

Referencing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Ahmed states that bodies can reorientate themselves to the strange but suggests that staying with the disorientation creates a different kind of orientation – a queer phenomenological orientation.[50] It is here, she suggests, that a vitality exists.[51] In my work, and in this support paper, I seek to intersect this vitality with Brown's energetic *things* and Bennett's "dense network" of collaborating vibrant materiality.

A research-queeration methodology provides a way for me to extend myself through objects into spaces, where staying with disorientation can transition into research-creation making events that are open to the possibility of new trajectories. In the next section, I orientate myself to a some rather queer objects and vibrant things.

---

[50] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 4.

[51] Ahmed, 4.

1.3

Cast Things

Thinking and Making with Vibrant Things

> "Set at the opposite end of the mantlepiece from the lump of glass that had been dug from the sand, it looked like a creature from another world – freakish and fantastic as a harlequin. It seemed to be pirouetting through space, winking like a fitful star. The contrast between the china so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative, fascinated him, and wondering and amazed, he asked himself how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone to stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room. The question remained unanswered."
>
> – "Solid Objects," Virginia Woolf [52]

After sitting with these casts for a time, I experience a similar amazement as Woolf's character (figures 1-3). Like John's things, mine appear to have their own personalities, despite being cast from the same object. The mould was created from a plaster rattlesnake that I found at an antique market. The burn marks at its centre indicate its previous function as an ashtray, but I have used it as trinket dish and, on occasion, still life photography subject.

[52] Woolf, "Solid Objects," 64-65.

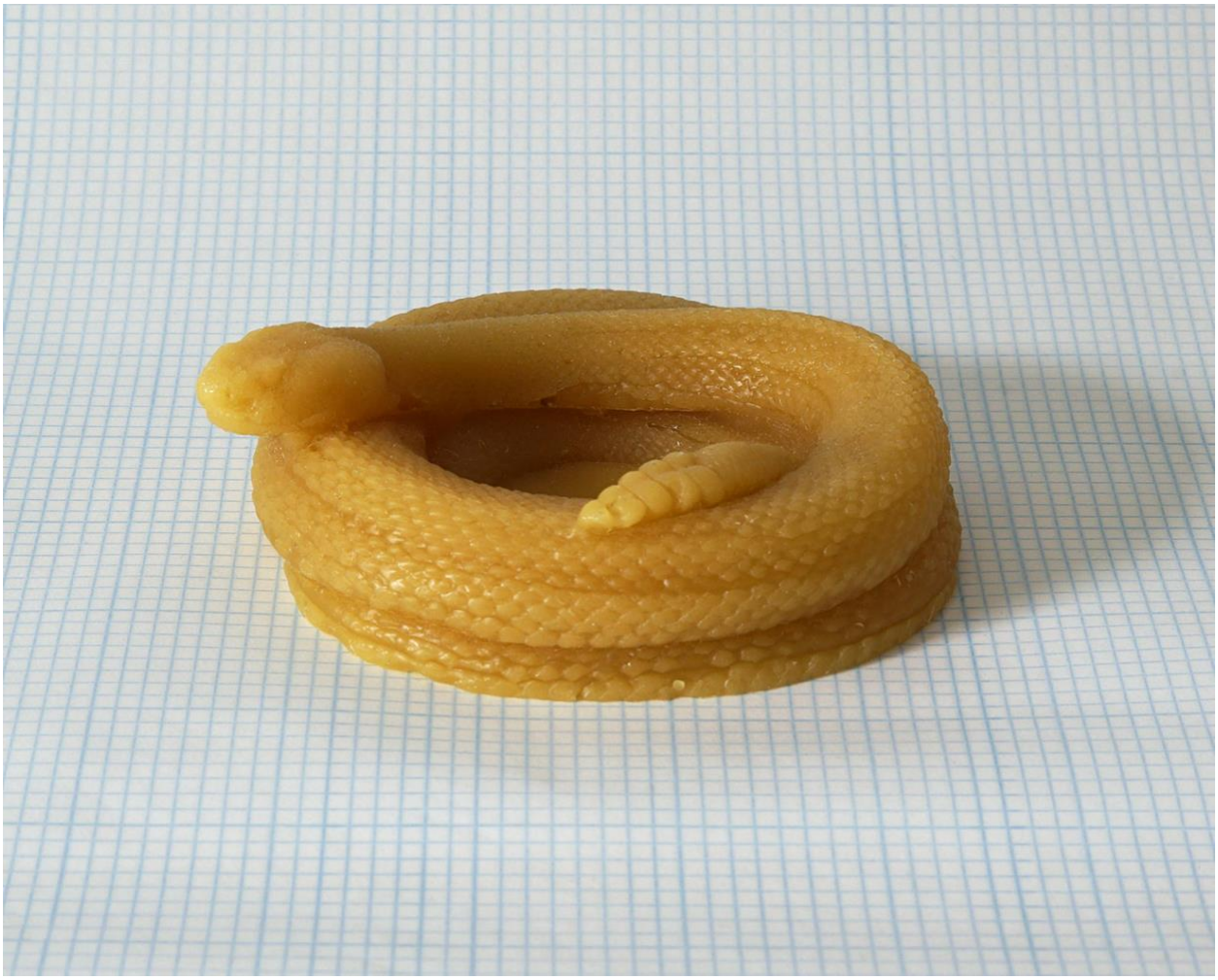

Figure 1. Beeswax Cast, Stephen Severn, 2022.

The beeswax cast is organic matter reformed; it feels natural, of the earth. Its materiality greets you with its waxy texture and a familiar scent that remains on the skin after touch. Although it has hardened to a cool solid, it contains a warmth that seems to remember the apian energy of its creation and the heat of the molten fluidity of its formation.

The gypsum plaster cast also went through a process of heating during formation, but this is not evident in its form. It feels cool and dry and running one’s

fingers along the scaly chalky surface creates a high-pitched sound that vibrates through the thing, echoing a hiss. Like the beeswax, the surface stays with you, but unlike the unseen residue of wax, the plaster adheres to fingers as a visible white dust.

Figure 2. Gypsum Cast, Stephen Severn, 2022.

The resin cast is smooth and silent. Its plastic boundary and clinical tactility feel impenetrable. Although it gives you less than the other two materials — it does not linger on my skin or in my nose — it reveals itself in its transparency. It has shed its skin, revealing the interior of its mass and form.

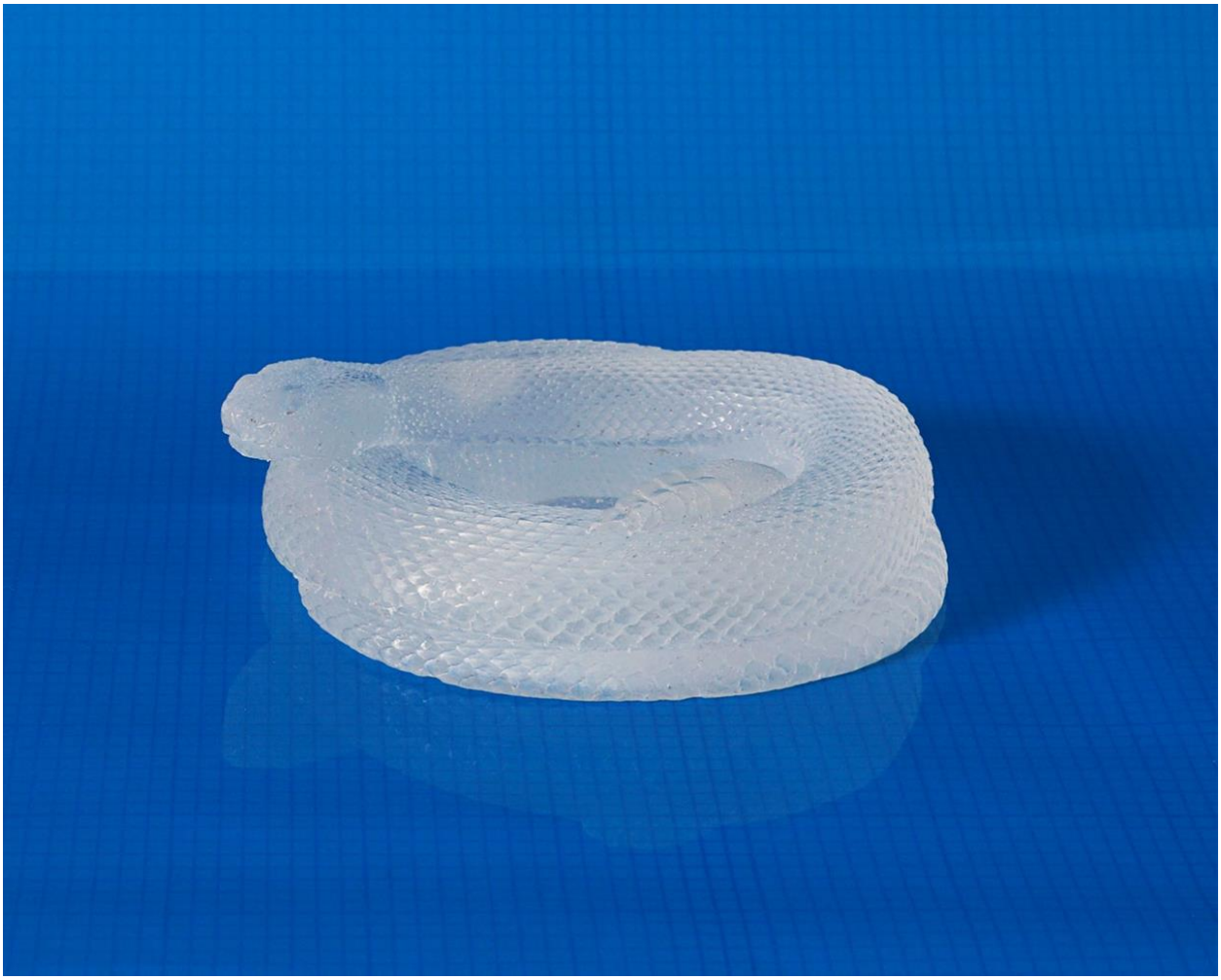

Figure 3. Resin Cast, Stephen Severn, 2022.

These materials are revealing their qualities through my senses and the transformation of material states and shapes. The beeswax must be melted to a liquid state and then hardened again in the mould. The gypsum plaster was formed by combining dry plaster powder with water, which increases in hardness when the crystalline structure of the mineral composition changes. The hardened plastic epoxy resin cast is a result of a chemical reaction between resin and a hardening agent.

These material transformations make me question the fluidity of these objects going forward: how the beeswax, made of honey consumed by bees and secreted as wax, can be formed and reformed (seemingly) endlessly, transitioning through solid and liquid states, while the plastic materiality of a chemical reaction will degrade at an extremely slow rate. This slow rate reminds me of Jane Bennett's assertion (using Manuel De Landa and Vladimir Vernadsky) that we humans are walking, talking minerals; viewed through an evolutionary timescale, it is the mineralization that made bones possible that has affected the evolution of life, and humans are merely the product — we are agents enabling the mineral processes of the Earth.[53] Seeing my human body in this light, how is the mineralization of the gypsum plaster snake so very different from my own evolutionary function on this planet? Is this cast not a relation/collaboration of *vibrant things*, of actants, of thing- and human-power, between mineralization on an evolutionary timescale (myself) and a mineralization that will set in twenty-five to thirty-five minutes?

Like the fluidity of their material transformations, engaging with these objects has influenced a fluidity of approach in my practice. By staying orientated to these *things* and our relation, new lines of inquiry have emerged. This reinforces Natasha Myers' suggestion that research-creation making events lead us to new research questions;[54] a research-*queeration* methodology has revealed new avenues of inquiry.

---

[53] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 10-11.

[54] Truman, "The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation," 227.

Are these casts queer? According to Ahmed, queer objects are those that facilitate queer gatherings and queer orientations into spaces.[55] The object itself is not queer; queerness is in the relation between queer subject and object and the possibilities this relationship creates.[56] I question these objects from the perspective of sexual orientation *and* as objects that diverge, uncomfortably, from the 'straight lines' of normative culture. These objects resist easy absorption into narratives of function and recognition, which is not queer as in being an identifiably LGBTQ2S+ "sign" — and yet, they will extend my queer body into a queer space when they will be exhibited at The Window, an art gallery in Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ community. Here, others may find familiarity or discomfort, may orientate themselves towards or away from them, or where the objects may fall into the background altogether.

Has the original object — the souvenir rattlesnake ashtray — fallen into the background? What has been revealed in this thing? Like the casts, it has also experienced a transformation in the process of being cast. The silicone mould has removed a patina from its surface and the thing has emerged as more vibrant; the colours of the scales are brighter, and a stronger snakeskin pattern has been revealed. On the underside, a stamp is now evident: "Sullivan Art Studio Rapid City S.D." Some of the grime removed from the object has transferred itself to the silicone mould and, in turn, transferred itself onto the plaster cast. I like to think, despite these casts and the

---

[55] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 167, 169.

[56] Ahmed, 3, 170-171.

original being objects in their own right, that traces of matter have been transferred between the objects. There is an interchange and relation between the physical objects.

The material transformations have revealed different characteristics of the casts. Woolf describes the differences in characteristics of John's gathered objects (mute and contemplative versus freakish, fantastic, and winking); these descriptions could be applied to my casts, although I am averse to using the word 'mute.'[57] Bill Brown, in his book *Other Things*, writes that the character of things is preserved in the way in which art and literature engage with things.[58] Have I maintained the character of these things, these casts, in this writing? There is an inherent challenge in describing *things* with words. At the beginning of this chapter, I cited Bennett's statement that her goal is a politics that encourages communication between all actants, a communication, she elaborates, that does not include words.[59] Notwithstanding the fact that words are required to write this exegesis, I fear that Woolf's and my descriptions of the 'character of things' are human-centric. Bennett alleviates this fear when she writes that "in a vital materialism, an anthropomorphic element in perception can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances — sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have a hierarchical structure."[60] My

[57] Woolf, "Solid Objects," 64-65.

[58] Bill Brown, *Other Things*, 11.

[59] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 104.

[60] Bennett, 99.

humanity is included in my relation to the character of things, and even in my tendency to anthropomorphize them.

John, the character in Woolf's story, ponders how his objects come to exist together in the world and indeed the same place. His question remains unanswered. I am still sitting with my objects, my little snakes, my *queer vibrant things*. I have explained how they have come into being through organic transition, mineral transformation, chemical reaction, and through my making. The disorientation of staying orientated to these objects has revealed new lines of inquiry and fluid relation. They are not obstacles, not in opposition to me, but our relation moves with transformation and agency into queer potential. Has *my* question been answered? What, if anything, has my art practice revealed about an ontology of *vibrant things*?

For the exhibition of works referenced in this chapter, please see Appendix A: An Exhibition of *Solid Things*.

> "Somewhere in the city of New York there are four or five still-unknown objects that belong together. Once together, they'll make a work of art."
>
> – *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, Charles Simic [61]

2

Arranging Things

In the previous chapter, I highlighted a shift in my practice of working with objects in excess of their common function. I looked at the fluidity of objects and the fluidity in my relationships with them. In this chapter I look at ways of working with *vibrant things,* methods that include gathering, arrangement, and relation.

Using Heidegger's theory of *the thing*, I examine how *vibrant things* presence in a gathering of physical and non-physical elements, and look at other artists' methods of gathering alongside Heidegger's theoretical foundation.[62] Building on this, I consider Thomas Nail's definition of 'agencement' as a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements, in

[61] Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell* (New York Review, 2011), 14.

[62] Heidegger, "The Thing," 171-2.

my definition of arrangement, highlighted in this chapter as a method.[63] Lastly, I examine multiplicities of heterogeneous elements in relation: as seen in my juxtaposition of ekphrastic prose and photography in my creative work. In looking at methods for working with *vibrant things*, and building on my question from Chapter 1, I ask:

In what ways can my art practice engage with things to reveal them as *vibrant things*?

2.1

Gathering Things

Gathering as a Method

In my professional practice as a prop- and still-life- stylist, I work with objects; I source and make props and photography backgrounds, and arrange them on set for the camera. In my career, I have gathered objects from prop houses, antique stores, designer boutiques, junk yards, artists' studios, specialty manufacturers, and more; and despite having a vast inventory of sources to draw on, I always feel a level of anxiety in

[63] Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", 22.

the challenge in finding the perfect things. The activity of being out in the world searching for objects, and gathering them on set, is similar to my method of gathering objects for my creative practice as a still life photographer. In both professional and creative practice, I am struck by how gatherings *gather,* in two ways.

The first way is how elements gather in an object/*thing*. Martin Heidegger, whose writing influenced the formation of Bill Brown's thing theory and Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, writes in "The Thing" that "the thing things…thinging gathers."[64] For Heidegger, things presence; they appear, and it is this presence, or being-present, in the world, that constitutes their thingness. At the same time, as expressed in this passage, this presence is a gathering, which brings elements or forces together in relation (paradigmatically what he terms the 'fourfold': earth, sky, divinities, and mortals), becoming a unity.[65] He uses the example of a jug to describe this relation; on Earth, mortals pour drink for themselves, or they pour wine as an offering for Gods in the sky, and in doing so Earth and Sky also reside in the pour (the 'fourfold').[66] These relations are present to us through the jug, whose presence instantiates them for us as such. This example, with its use of Gods and mortals, heaven and earth, does not resonate with me personally — but it does provide a useful theoretical base for thinking through/working out the relation between humans and object/*things* as incorporating non-human elements: time, place, event, etc.,…

---

[64] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 6, 20, 26, 40, 45-8; Brown, *Other Things*, 6, 19, 24-32; Heidegger, "The Thing," 172.

[65] Heidegger, 171-2.

[66] Heidegger, 171.

Beyond the gathering of relations within the *thing*, I am also interested in the act of composition, in which multiple *things* are gathered as photographic subjects in a still life. This is the second way in which I find gathering as a method fascinating. Further, I am interested in how other artists' practices have incorporated methods of gathering for working with *vibrant things*.

In Chapter 1, I looked at Virginia Woolf's short story "Solid Objects" and the relation between the main character, John, and a world of *vibrant things*. His method of finding and gathering his objects takes him to strange places on the fringes of human culture.[67] Similarly, the artist Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) mines places where the detritus of human life end up — junk shops, garage sales, "dime-stores" — for the material he then combines in his assemblages.[68] The opening quote in this chapter hints at Cornell's method of gathering objects for his assemblages.[69] Charles Simic, the poet and author of *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, describes Cornell's life, methods, practice, and artworks through Simic's medium of prose and poetry. Including Cornell's journal entries and artwork alongside Simic's interpretation, is an interesting way to engage with an artist's praxis, and one I have adopted in this exegesis of my creative research, which combines literature, philosophy, and theory alongside examples of artworks. In his preface to the book, Simic reflects on how

[67] Woolf, "Solid Objects," 63-65.

[68] Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy,* xii.

[69] Simic, 14.

Cornell's work, and presumably his mode of gathering, and assembling, became something of an obsession for him, inspiring his own methods as a poet and in composing his text.[70]

Thus, (presumably speaking of both Cornell and himself) Simic asserts that "you don't make art, you find it."[71] He relates Cornell's assemblages to Kurt Schwitters' art pieces, T. S. Eliot's poem *Waste Land*, and Ezra Pound's poem *Cantos*, describing them as collages, as collected scraps of pre-existing material.[72] This highlights a connection between Simic's writing and Cornell's shadow-box assemblages: both employ a similar method of gathering. Between appointments in his job as a textile salesman, Cornell sought out objects and materials from bookstores and junk shops, objects which might not be incorporated into one of his shadow box assemblages for many years.[73]

Cornell's method of gathering can, I suggest, be given a similar queer phenomenological reading as I did in the previous chapter with John, Virginia Woolf's character in "Solid Objects"; Cornell orientates himself towards objects on the periphery of society. Simic writes that Cornell "knew what he liked to see and touch. What he

---

[70] Simic, ix-x.

[71] Simic, 19.

[72] Simic, 19.

[73] Simic, xii, 14.

liked, no one was interested in."[74] These objects extend his body into spaces. The spaces his oblique line orientates him to include the art world, although one could argue that his relation to the art world remained queer because, despite knowing everyone in the New York art scene and exhibiting his art in prominent galleries, he always maintained a distance.[75] Simic describes Cornell's practice as "explor[ing] the unknown as much as it is possible for any artist and poet to do so."[76]

I have described how sitting in disorientation with my objects has revealed itself as a methodology. I cannot help but wonder if Cornell too experienced disorientation in the process of collecting and gathering objects and materials. Was he questioning their existence, their potential for collaboration, what a relationship outside their common use might reveal?

Cornell's relationship with his things, in this sense, may be like that of the contemporary Canadian artist Liz Magor's; in her *Art21* talk with artist Adam Milner, Magor describes how she had owned the titular boots in her piece *The Boots, 2017,* for a year before they "revealed themselves" to her.[77] Similarly, Milner incorporates "stuff" [his term] he has lived with for decades into his work.[78] Both artists describe their

---

[74] Simic, 30.

[75] Simic, xiii.

[76] Simic, 25.

[77] Liz Magor and Adam Milner, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner," December 8, 2021, Art21 Online, 57:42, https://art21.org/watch/specials/conversation-with-liz-magor-and-adam-milner/.

[78] Adam Milner, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

method of gathering things from thrift and junk stores.[79] Magor looks for things that don't have importance, what she describes as "hapless" or "zero" things, things that have a quality that is not yet recognized.[80] In this *Art21* talk, Magor highlights the relativity of existence of all things in the world, adding that she is "…tired of the human version of events." [81] I cannot help but think that Jane Bennett would agree, as she includes the agency of non-human participants in her politics of world-building. [82]

Listening to Magor and Milner speak about their practices and methods of gathering object/*things* feels like I am hearing someone speak my language for the first time. Magor speaks to a non-human version of events, while Milner states that "objects can always be fluid and in flux and hard to pin down" — both statements aligning well with the theoretical underpinnings in Bennett's vibrant matter.[83] Gathering as a method engages with vibrant matter, placing *vibrant things* in relation, while also accounting for how, in the Heideggerian sense, objects themselves gather. I have written about *things*, their vibrancy, their ability to gather, to extend our bodies (or not) into spaces. As a still life photographer, I am also interested in what happens when they come together, when they are being arranged — and what arrangement as method might mean for my own engagement with the vibrancy *in* things.

---

[79] Magor.

[80] Magor.

[81] Magor.

[82] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii, xviii, xix, 10, 104

[83] Magor, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

2.2

Arranging Things

Arrangement as a Method

> "He shuffled a few inconsequential found objects inside his boxes until together they composed an image that pleased him with no clue as to what that image will turn out to be in the end."
>
> – *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, Charles Simic [84]

The previous section highlights gathering as a verb, as a method, but gathering can also be a noun, meaning an assembly — a gathering.

Earlier, I mentioned the similarity between Simic's and Cornell's method of gathering pre-existing material.[85] Simic describes the assembly of these materials as collage; for Simic, the material is assembled into poetry, while Cornell assembles his objects into shadow boxes.[86] Simic says the use of "found objects, chance creations, ready-mades abolish the separation between art and life."[87] These "chance creations" provide an example of a research-creation methodology that challenges a separation not just between art and life, but also between thinking and making, and which employs

[84] Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy,* x.

[85] Simic, 19.

[86] Simic, 19.

[87] Simic, 19.

methods of gathering and arranging objects; Cornell's practice, like my own, employs *arrangement* as a method.

I have been throwing around a lot of words (assembly, assemblage, composition) to describe my process, method, and theoretical base, but for a time, I want to focus on one: *arrangement*. Words are important, especially in an exegesis, and I have chosen the word *arrangement* to describe a method of working with *vibrant things* — in fact, I put the word *arrangement* right in the title of this thesis.

Thomas Nail, in "What is an Assemblage?", argues that the mistranslation of the French word 'agencement' to the English word 'assemblage' in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* does not accurately describe what he calls their "theory of assemblages", which "reject[s] unity in favour of multiplicity and reject[s] essence in favour of events."[88] If an assemblage is a unity, then I prefer the word 'arrangement,' which I am defining, using Nail's description of 'agencement,' as a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements.[89] In this way, the *thing* — an object or group of objects — remains vibrant in its presencing of gathered elements: human, non-human, affect, event, place, histories, or even the fourfold of gods, mortals, earth, and sky.

Nail's multiplicity of heterogeneous elements, his rejection of unity, is contrary to Heidegger's statement, (emphasized in the previous section) that the *thing's* gathering

---

[88] Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", 22.

[89] Nail, 22.

of relation becomes a unity, instead holding open the varied elements in an arrangement.[90] The word gathering can also refer to folds in fabric. As I discover theoretical supports, I am using some aspects and not others. Heidegger's *thing* as a gathering of relations suits my reasoning, whereas his idea of unity does not and gets tucked into the gathered folds, out of sight. A still life is a multiplicity of *vibrant things*; indeed, I can name it a *vibrant thing* too. I can unify it under the name 'still life,' but it remains a multiplicity of *things* in relation. Cornell, Simic, and I can take up the gathering of relations from Heidegger without privileging a unity.

Instead of *arrangement*, I could just as easily have used the word 'composition.' In musical terms, a composition is an original piece of work, whereas an arrangement is a reimagining of something that already exists. Considering Simic's assertion that art is not made, but found, I find *arrangement* to be a fitting word to describe my methods of gathering and piecing together still lifes.[91] 'Composition,' like Heidegger's unity, refers to how components form a whole; I prefer the openness of *arrangement*, which refers to the action or result of components coming together.

In her essay "Tactile Compositions," the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart lays the foundation for a compositional theory which brings together making, assemblage theory, affect theory, agency, thing theory, non-representational theories, and a generative

[90] Heidegger, "The Thing," 171-2.

[91] Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy,* 19.

potentiality to futurity. [92] Although Stewart employs the word ‘composition’, I believe her theory accommodates for multiplicities of active and agential elements. This essay, which has been one of the most influential texts for my own research, includes the following claim about compositional theory:

> [it] takes the form of a sharply impassive attunement to the ways in which an assemblage of elements comes to hang together as a thing that has qualities, sensory aesthetics and lines of force and how such things come into sense already composed and generative and pulling matter and mind into a making: a worlding.[93]

Stewart is describing an *arrangement* of *things*, as a *worlding* — “to thing is to world”, a notion that I have incorporated in my definition of *arrangement*, which includes all participants: human, non-human, object, place, affect, *things*.[94] Similarly, and significantly for my thesis, Stewart suggests the *thing* can take the form of “…a still life, or a scene of some potential.”[95] The potential, asserts Elizabeth Grosz, is the thing’s

---

[92] Kathleen Stewart, “Tactile Compositions,” in *Objects and Materials*, 119-127, ed. Penny Harvey, Eleanor Conlin Casella, Gillian Evans, et al (New York: Routledge, 2015). 119.

[93] Stewart, 119.

[94] Stewart, 119.

[95] Stewart, 119.

incitement to action.[96] I will be examining the incitement to action and generative nature of arrangement in Chapter 3: Fluid Things.

As an artist, I am interested in the still life as, to use Stewart's term, a worlding. I am interested in what happens to these gathered elements (physical and metaphysical) as they continue to exist in the world and form new relations with other *things*, other arrangements, other worlds, other *vibrant things*: new worldings.

2.3

Relating Things

Relation and Ekphrasis as Methods

> "The machine, like any myth, has heterogeneous parts. There must be gear wheels, cogs, and other clever contrivances attached to the crank. Whatever it is, it must be ingenious. Our loving gaze can turn it on. A poetry slot machine offering a jackpot of incommensurable meanings activated by our imagination."
>
> – *Dime-store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, Charles Simic [97]

[96] Elizabeth Grosz, "The Thing," in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (New York: Routledge, 2009), 125.

[97] Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy,* 29.

So far in this exegesis, I have been providing examples of theory, philosophy, literature, and art in relation to and accompanied by examples of my creative research, but the arrangement and order of this writing belies the actual research process. In Chapter 1, I began by talking about thing theory and vibrant matter as theoretical underpinnings and research-creation as a methodology, which, early on, were instrumental in constructing a thesis proposal. However, queer phenomenology as a theory and methodology did not enter my praxis until the time of writing the chapter. Queer phenomenology helped me to understand a methodology in which I had already been engaged for seventeen months. In my introductory meeting with my Primary Advisor Nicole Collins, she stated that, although they inform each other, theory should come out of the making in an art practice.[98] I have found this to be true; there is a recursive element in an art practice where theory can inform artmaking and yet emerge from and make sense of past and future making. It is frequently after artmaking events that I draw stronger connections/relations with my creative research and with theory, philosophy, and other artists — which in turn can influence future making engagements.

This process of reflection, relation, and connection can be seen in my photographic series "*A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World"* (figures 4-9).[99] This series was inspired by my interest in vessels while reading about Heidegger's jug in "The Thing." As noted above, Heidegger states that the jug's thingness is its void; the jug is

[98] Nicole Collins (Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor, OCAD University) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2021.

[99] Stephen Severn, "A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World" *Tba* 3, no. 1, (2021): 107-18.

formed to make present a void to contain and to hold liquid, which is then used in ways that gather together a series of relations; Brown asserts that it is in the void where the gathering occurs.[100] I became interested in the vessels in my apartment and how things had come to be gathered within them — even to the point of viewing my apartment itself as a vessel. I had accumulated these things over a period of years but had not always consciously gathered them into the specific vessels; they had somehow made their way there. Like Joseph Cornell, I have an inventory of gathered props/subjects on which I draw for various projects; for this project, I was more interested in the gathering than in the specific things gathered — a gathering which could contain, as Magor would say, "hapless" or "zero" things: commonplace or ordinary objects.[101]

I arranged these things for the camera. Arranging, for me, involves a gathering of participants — *things*, affect, time, place, event, human, and non-human — in what Nail refers to as a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements,[102] what Stewart calls a worlding.[103] Without her stating so, Stewart's compositional theory resonates with a research-creation methodology, "pulling matter and mind into a making,"[104] providing a connection for me between the theory, thinking, methodology, methods, and making in

---

[100] Brown, *Other Things*, 29; Heidegger, "The Thing," 167.

[101] Magor, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

[102] Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", 22.

[103] Stewart, "Tactile Compositions," 119.

[104] Stewart, 119.

my own praxis. Using the word ‘composition’ would have had a nice tie-in with photographic composition, but I am sticking with *arrangement*.

Following a studio critique where these images were described as poetic, I wrote responses — in both prose and poetry — to the photographs. It was at this time that more connections to theory emerged, resulting in the images’ shift from untitled to titled. The theories, which now accompany these images, describe arrangements of thought and matter, including Tim Ingold’s “knots,” Donna Haraway’s “tentacular networks of transformation,” Bill Brown and Elizabeth Grosz’s thing theory, and what Kathleen Stewart describes as “worlding.”[105] Despite being created eight months before I heard Magor’s talk, I am continuing to make connections between the images and Magor’s thoughts on objects. Even now, as I write this chapter, I am realizing how my engagement with my own photography through prose is similar to Simic’s engagement with Cornell’s shadowboxes, and also to the ways in which Stewart combines theory with prose. These connections, also seen in my creative work that follows, highlight how *arrangements* of *vibrant things* (for example, a still life) can form new relations with media, objects, *things*, times, places…

…new *vibrant things*.

[105] Brown, “Thing Theory, 3-5; Grosz, “The Thing,” 125; Heidegger, “The Thing,” 179-180; Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 14; Stewart, 119.

"*A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World":*

It is overcast and the light entering through the window casts soft diffused shadows. The table is positioned to capitalise on the available light; the curtain opens and closes to adjust to the changing light throughout the day. Living high up, the light enters in a different way, it feels more horizontal.

This apartment is a vessel. I'm not sure if it is a ship or a container but its cargo is life, matter, and affect thrown together. Objects are thrown together; the root of the word "object" is a combination of ob "in front of" and jacere "to throw" which applies to both the verb, to oppose, and the noun, a tangible thing perceived by or presented to the senses. Apartments, like objects, are deceptively not static.

This drawer is a vessel: a knot of objects.
This wooden canister is a container and a network of lines.
This incense burner is a thing and a holder of things.
This still life is a composition of rooms in an apartment: a world.

They are emptied of their contents and recomposed, each object repeatedly touched and moved. There is an easy precision to their placement: quickly considered with rote attentiveness to their relation in space and their performance for lens and shutter, window and curtain.

Figure 4. *A Knot,* Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

The drawer opens and the contents shift but remain together. This is not top-drawer stuff, but items relegated to the lower tier of randomness and infrequent use. Expired antacids and bright orange earplugs will be thrown away. The orange plastic case is a provocation of future travel and a reminder of past adventures, unpacked and repacked at each destination. The polaroid now lives in the drawer: an inaccurate representation of the drawer's current contents.

Figure 5. *A Network 1*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

Pebbles tumbled into smoother and rounder shapes wash up on the shore with shells formed from the mantle of mollusks. Some find their way into a hand-carved spalted wood vessel discovered in an antique store a stone's throw from their Fife Coastal home: a border between land and sea.

Spalted wood is also known as web wood because of the zone lines it contains. The dark lines are a result of a mycelial defence: a zone of interaction where the fungus protects its territory from its fungal neighbours. It is rare for this to occur in living wood. There are a specific set of conditions that enable fungal colonization and a short window of usability during the growth of the zone lines before the wood decays.

Figure 6. *A Network 2*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

The thing stands in goat-legged contrapposto: a slight leaning towards, owing to a missing bolt. A shiny modern replacement bolt wasn't helping, so it was removed but still lives within the vessel. Why does it have those holes in the lid?: an unspecific specificity. On one of the boy's visits, he lifts the lid expecting to find the scarab beetle encased in resin that he knows is always there, but a different object is revealed: a surprise. He is older now and no longer interested in its contents, so it is used to house a lighter and matches — a fitting function since its identification as an incense burner.

Figure 7. *A Thing 1*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

Figure 8. *A Thing 2*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

A photo, a spoon, some pills, an awl, a clip, a rock, a cube, a vase, dead leaves, a camera, the paper, the window, the curtains, the light, a table, a wall, a pandemic, an apartment, a human, a composition: "disparate and incommensurate elements (human and non-human, given and composed) cohere and take on force as some kind of real, a world."[106]

[106] Kathleen Stewart, "Tactile Compositions," 119.

Figure 9. *A World*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

It is overcast and the light entering through the window casts soft diffused shadows. The table is still positioned to capitalise on the available light: the curtains drawn wide to let in as much of the day as possible. This laptop sits in a red and blue paper scene amongst the detritus of compositions un-knotted, re-networked, and re-worlded. I have been sitting inside this still life world for a month now. The paper is frayed and creased, not in the pathetic fallacy of a decaying photography set, but simply in its service as a desk. The paper is covered in a pink dust that has eroded off a geode. Why have I not put these things away?

Did I need more time with these things?

The quote at the beginning of this section is Simic's writing about Cornell's *Medici Slot Machine* assemblage. I have included the quote here because it speaks to how a work of art evolves through the vibrancy of relation:

> the machine, like any myth, has heterogeneous parts. There must be gear wheels, cogs, and other clever contrivances attached to the crank. Whatever it is, it must be ingenious. Our loving gaze can turn it on. A poetry slot machine offering a jackpot of incommensurable meanings activated by our imagination.[107]

Simic's loving gaze, or loving words, have activated Cornell's assemblage — dare I say, *arrangement*? His is a method of relation, which plays out through *ekphrasis*, historically defined as a literary device which describes a visual work of art. Similarly, my accompanying prose in *A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World* employ an ekphrastic method of relation: one that, like Simic's writing, does not simply describe the works, but creates arrangements in the writing that include a space for the artworks, the still life photographs. I am interested in an expanded definition of *ekphrasis* as an artistic device which relates to another work of art, which may take the form of words, actions, objects, performances, or any*thing*. Here, ekphrasis is not simply words describing art objects, but any *arrangement* of artwork that relates to another *arrangement* of artwork: a participant in relation and in action in gatherings of *vibrant things*.

---

[107] Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy,* 29.

For the exhibition of works referenced in this chapter, please see Appendix B: An Exhibition of *Arranging Things*.

"Objects can always be fluid and in flux and hard to pin down"

– Adam Milner [108]

3

Fluid Things

So far, I have looked at the vitality and animacy in *vibrant things*, together with a framework and methods for working with *vibrant things*. In this chapter, I continue this investigation by exploring the idea of flux in both Indigenous onto-epistemologies and quantum physics, and how this might resonate with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the virtual (as interpreted through Brian Massumi). These theories/models work to inform my assertion that the animacy of *vibrant things* is revealed in the *fluidity* of their potential and transformations, against a notion of fixed static objecthood. In this chapter, I also look at the evolution and growth of my creative work as it encounters ever-increasing arrangements of relation. This *vibrant thing* — the artwork — is in flux, brimming with potentiality and futurity. And so, I ask:

Are creative engagements with vibrant things orientated to an open futurity?

[108] Milner, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

3.1

Animate Things

Things in Flux

"All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion."

– Leroy Little Bear [109]

The format of this exegesis has been arranged to reflect my making practice; I have gathered my research into themed chapters that each engage with critical theory, methodologies, methods, media, makings, materials, ontologies, artists, writers, times, and places. This format was chosen to represent an animate practice in motion, where things are revealed at separate times and through different means, a process of revelation that also incorporates false starts and tangents.

I originally saw this research project as entailing a search for life within objects and was planning to use an interdisciplinary approach combining science with a creative practice to prove the vitality of objects. I assumed that physics could prove my hypothesis that objects are alive, and I wanted to start my research by demonstrating that everything is in constant motion by taking photographs of still lifes and documenting the imperceptible movement, which could be afforded, for example, by the expansion of

[109] Leroy Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. M. Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 77.

the Universe during the exposure time of the photograph. I quickly learned that this expansion only affects large celestial bodies (galaxies) moving away from each other and not tightly bound objects within the gravitational pull of a solar system (such as a still life).[110]

Figure 10. *1361.99m: A Study in Object Oriented Ontogeny*, Stephen Severn, still from stop motion video, 2020.

[110] Ethan Siegel, "This Is Why We Aren't Expanding, Even If the Universe Is," Forbes, February 19, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2019/02/19/this-is-why-we-arent-expanding-even-if-the-universe-is/?sh=9561fd75311e.

I was, however, able to engage with physics in my stop-motion piece *1361.99m: A Study in Object Oriented Ontogeny* (figure 10), in which I stitched together 50 images with a combined exposure time of 5 seconds. The objects in the stop-motion still life appear static except for the sand moving through the hourglass. My aim was to address our mis/understanding of time and movement both in objects and the medium of photography, and I highlighted this in the etching on the brick, which reads “1361.99m”: the distance the Earth had rotated at the latitude of Toronto (the location the photographs were taken) during the combined 5 seconds of exposure.

Through a research-creation methodology, new avenues of research emerged. I became interested in the life of the brick in the stop-motion: its material and existential transformations from clay (the very foundation of Toronto), to building material, to garbage (sourced through a Kijiji ad for free bricks), to art subject. This work led me to investigate objects, including their histories, more deeply. I discovered an interest in *place* as a component of still life photography and to question the brick’s role as a tool of settler colonialism.

The false start here was my assumption that science alone could prove that life exists in objects. Productive tangents emerged, which led me to expand my interdisciplinary practice to include philosophy and literature with a creative making practice. The transformation of the brick led me to research the ontology of objects

(*things*), and my interest in *place* led me to research North American Indigenous onto-epistemologies.[111]

The conversation between Don Hill and Leroy Little Bear in "Listening to Stones: Learning in Leroy Little Bear's Laboratory: Dialogue in the World Outside," which took place in the sandstone hoodoos of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park in Alberta, highlights the importance of place on Blackfoot physics and Indigenous science.[112] Little Bear describes a "native paradigm" which consists of "…constant motion or constant flux…", and is constructed of energy waves, which he describes as "the spirit".[113] He says that humanity is only tuned into a small band of waves, but that sacred places like Writing-on-Stone amplify other frequencies.[114]

Little Bear echoes similar claims in the quote at the beginning of this section and in his Banff Centre Talk "Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Contrasts and Similarities" when he says Blackfoot ontologies view everything as animate, in a state of

---

[111] It is important to point out that my research is not speaking for or defining any territorial or cultural Indigenous epistemology, nor does it claim the Indigenous thinkers with whom I am engaging are speaking for their communities or describing one holistic Indigenous ontology. The aim of this section is not to compare Indigenous ontologies with Western science, but to show the varying sources that have contributed to my research.

[112] Don Hill, "Listening to Stones: Learning in Leroy Little Bear's Laboratory: Dialogue in the World Outside," *Alberta Views: The Magazine for Engaged Citizens*, September 1, 2008, https://albertaviews.ca/listening-to-stones/.

[113] Hill.

[114] Hill.

constant flux, comprising energy waves (what he calls “spirit”), and in relation.[115] Little Bear’s description of Indigenous onto-epistemologies have contributed to my formation of an ontology of *vibrant things*: a conceptual framework that recognizes all matter as active and fluid non-hierarchical elements in relation and orientated to an open futurity.

As I have previously pointed out, this non-hierarchical ontology is seen in Brown and Bennett’s ideas and can also be seen in the essay “Making Kin with the Machines” where the writers state that “…Indigenous ontologies ask us to take the world as the interconnected whole that it is, where the ontological status of non-humans is not inferior to that of humans.”[116] In the writing, Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite look to Indigenous onto-epistemologies for an ethics in forming kin relationships with technology and illustrate Indigenous ways of knowing that highlight non-hierarchical interconnectedness.

Little Bear reiterates this interconnectedness in his comparison of Indigenous knowledge and western science, when he says that Indigenous ontologies view everything in relation, unlike quantum physics, which isolates everything into smaller and smaller pieces.[117] Little Bear does, however, affirm that quantum physics and

---

[115] Leroy Little Bear, “Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Contrasts and Similarities,” September 4, 2014, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Banff, Alberta, 21:32, https://www.banffcentre.ca/articles/challenging-chance-cheshire-cats-smile.

[116] Jason Edward Lewis et al., “Making Kin with the Machines,” in *Journal of Design and Science*, July 16, 2018, https://doi.org/10.21428/bfafd97b. For Bennett’s and Brown’s non-hierarchical views on matter, see Vibrant Things, Section 1.1.

[117] Little Bear, “Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science.”

Indigenous ontologies both view matter as animate and in a state of constant flux (citing the double-slit experiment).[118] In his talk, Little Bear asserts that native thought involves process, action, and transformation and, when the makeup of the universe is viewed as energy waves, the problem of physics' inability to arrive at a grand unifying theory becomes moot.[119]

Little Bear's comparison of Indigenous ways of knowing and western science reanimated my interest in quantum physics and what it might be able to contribute to my research. Kathryn Schaffer and Gabriela Barreto Lemos' "Obliterating Thingness: An Introduction to the 'What' and the 'So What' of Quantum Physics" helped me to understand what ontologies of quantum theory do and do not reveal about our understanding of the working of the Universe.[120] The authors introduce quantum physics for interdisciplinary use outside of scientific disciplines, specifically in the arts and humanities.[121] They highlight common misperceptions and what is known and unknown about the microscopic world.[122] What is known is based on observable data,

---

[118] Little Bear, "Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science." The double-slit experiment showed that quanta are in a state of flux and can exist as both particles and probability waves, where we can predict where they will be but not where they are, and further highlighted that our observation changes their behaviour.

[119] Little Bear, "Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science."

[120] Kathryn Schaffer and Gabriela Barreto Lemos, "Obliterating Thingness: An Introduction to the 'What' and the 'So What' of Quantum Physics," *Foundations of Science* 26, (2021): 7-26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-019-09608-5. Schaffer and Barreto Lemos use the terms 'microscopic' and 'macroscopic' to describe places for observing the dual behaviour of matter in the quantum realm and the physical world we can perceive, respectively.

[121] Schaffer.

[122] Schaffer.

but it is in the translation of the data from the language of equations, which can accurately predict the behaviour of quantum units, to human language where knowledge is mis/interpreted.[123] They state that there is no grand unifying theory, there is no quantum ontology, no one accepted explanation or interpretation for why observable quanta do what they do, because while quantum theory is successful as a tool, it does not, at present, answer questions about how the universe works.[124]

Schaffer and Barreto Lemos explain that the macroscopic is the realm of things that follow the rules of physics, unlike quanta, which are physically real entities, yet they defy description as things because they do not follow those same rules.[125] Although Schaffer and Barreto Lemos describe quanta as “obliterating thingness,” and I am advocating here for *things*, their account provides a scientific support for those same *things* being constituted by elements in flux and in relation. Quantum physics is unable to observe quantum units: only the *relationships* between quanta are observable.[126] This supports what Indigenous ontologies already know.[127]

If the translation of data from the language of equations in quantum physics to human language is unable to provide us with a unified ontology of the workings of the

---

[123] Schaffer.

[124] Schaffer.

[125] Schaffer.

[126] Schaffer.

[127] Little Bear, “Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science.”

Universe, I am nonetheless curious how our human languages interpret the animacy of the world. Robin Wall Kimmerer provides some insight when she describes the differences between the English and Potawatomi languages in her chapter "Learning the Grammar of Animacy" in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*. She describes how English is a "noun-based language" where only thirty percent of words are verbs, unlike Potawatomi, where verbs comprise seventy percent of all words.[128] Her writing shows how the Potawatomi language reflects the animacy and vibrancy of the world:

> To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. This is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us.[129]

Again, I am curious if the language of this exegesis reflects the animacy of my making practice, of working with vibrant things in a flux of relations that include media, methodologies, methods, makings, materials, ontologies, critical theories, artists,

---

[128] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 53.

[129] Kimmerer, 55.

writers, times, and places. This research project has itself been in a state of flux, consistently transforming, moving, and growing over the past two years.

3.2

Virtual Things

The Potential of Things

> "In this strange *vital* materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself aquiver with virtual force."
>
> – *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett[130]

Before arriving at a thesis proposal, this research project transformed many times. This is evident in my false start in the previous section and again when I became interested in digital objects that do not take material form. I began learning how to create objects using 3D modelling software Rhinoceros 3D and placing them in augmented reality. The work *Vanitas in Blue* (figure 11) shows traditional vanitas still life subjects that I rendered in 3D and presented through Instagram using the Spark AR augmented reality platform.

[130] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 57.

Figure 11. *Vanitas in Blue*, Stephen Severn, augmented reality, 2021.

This work looks at the incorporeality of digital objects as a more suitable medium than painterly modes of representation for the vanitas still life genre — a genre which traditionally highlights the transient nature of our corporeal bodies by contrasting objects symbolising wealth with objects symbolising death and ephemerality. However, like the smoke of a snuffed-out candle in a traditional vanitas painting, the novelty of creating virtual digital objects quickly faded for me, perhaps influenced by the longevity of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ever-increasing digitization of my everyday life during this

time. I have referred to this as my 360-degree digital turn: a turn away from and subsequent reorientation towards a world of physical materiality, a trend that Brown asserts is gaining importance due to the broader dematerialization and digitization of material culture.[131]

My regret over this digital false start lies in how seemingly perfectly the virtual digital objects would tie in with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *the virtual* in the form of a double meaning thesis title: Still Life with…*Virtual* Vibrant Things. There is also a false start in this thesis section; it is meant to be about *the virtual* as a concept that describes potentiality and the *thing's* orientation to an open futurity, not virtual digital objects. Further exploration into Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framing for potentiality (*the virtual*) alongside 3D digital modeling could uncover a red herring or some interesting results.

My understanding of *the virtual* in this exegesis has been formed by Brian Massumi's writings, which in turn draw on Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of this term. Massumi describes the provenance and meaning of *the virtual* when he writes: "Deleuze and Guattari, following Bergson, suggest that the virtual is the mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials."[132] Massumi elaborates on the "emergence of new potentials" when he describes "potential" in his book *Parables for*

---

[131] Brown, *Other Things*, 12-13. Brown cites Colin Renfrew to support a trend towards physical materiality spurred by the dematerialization and digitalization of material culture.

[132] Brian Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual."

the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation, as "the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation."[133] What I am describing as the *virtual* in *things* is precisely this orientation to a futurity that is open, not-yet closed: an opening to indeterminacy or possibility within the thing itself. For me, the *virtual* is the *thing's* potential, the *thing's* orientation to an open futurity.[134]

When I describe the *vibrant thing's* potential, I am saying that its *thingness* is an orientation to non-closure, non-fixity, or a potentiality that can also be described in other terms: quantum flux, ontological flux of 'spirit,' and above all as a relationality. This is the capacity of the *thing* to participate in a world, to form new relations, new arrangements, new *vibrant things* — an ontological relationality that manifests as flux, potential, indeterminacy. These new relations of *vibrant things* are present in Kathleen Stewart's description of the *thing* as "a still life, or a scene of some potential."[135] The vibrant thing is orientated to an open futurity in the possibility, the "still indeterminate variation," of relations yet-to-come.[136] A creative practice, or arranging a still life, helps it along by making visible this orientation to possibility and relationality, whereby *things* are still themselves and yet changed by being placed in relation — a placing that

---

[133] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 8.

[134] Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, "The Promise of Non-Representational Theories," in *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 19. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison describe non-representational theories as open to futurity, a claim that I have borrowed and applied to my conceptual framework of an ontology of *vibrant things*.

[135] Stewart, "Tactile Compositions," 119.

[136] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 8.

nonetheless does not exhaust the potential of the thing to be itself, or to be otherwise, and to form future relations.

Sara Ahmed articulates a variant of this orientation to relationality in her queer phenomenology, when she says the queerness in this concept is not in the object, but in human-object relations and the possibilities these create.[137] In this way, an orientation to an open futurity, to potentiality, is built into my methodology — both in how I orientate myself to the objects in my still lifes and how I engage my creative practice through a research-creation methodology that I am calling "research-queeration," which participates in relation and sustains a potentiality in arrangements of physical and non-physical materiality.

This chapter opens with a quote from the artist Adam Milner: "objects can always be fluid and in flux and hard to pin down."[138] In the next section, I look at how we might find the vibrancy of *things* in their potential, what I am calling their *orientation to an open futurity*, and a possible location for this in the fluidity and flux of their transformations.

---

[137] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 3, 170-171.

[138] Milner, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

3.3

Effluescent Things

A Flux of Vibrant Things Orientated to an Open Futurity

> "…the virtual is not contained in any actual form assumed by things or states of things. It runs in the transitions from one form to another."
>
> – Brian Massumi [139]

I have used Bill Brown's thing theory and Kathleen Stewart's compositional theory to uncover how, philosophically, objects become *things*, and subsequently, how arrangements of *things* (such as a still life), are also a *thing*. Through Jane Bennett's theory of vibrant materiality, I have looked at how *things* can be considered animate, or *vibrant things*. I have further sought to bring North American Indigenous ontologies and quantum physics, with their emphasis on flux and indeterminacy, into conversation with vibrant things, and to see how that fluidity manifests *vibrant things'* orientation — as arrangements, or still lifes — to an open futurity, or virtuality. This section will focus on aspects of my creative work where I stay orientated to a vibrant thing, an art object, and engage with it through different media and arrangements to discover if a vibrant animacy, potentiality, or virtuality, lives in the transformations of the work.

[139] Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual."

The work of contemporary artist Liz Magor often involves the transformation of objects and materials. After describing her process of casting objects in her *Art21* conversation with Adam Milner, she was asked: why cast the objects at all?[140] Her response is one that resonates with my own interest in thingness in my work: "the thing gets moved over into another thing…the material of the [original object] is not there anymore; it's just the image."[141] Considering this quote, I became particularly interested in the *movement* of thingness in my own work: the thingness of the objects I cast moving into the casts, or the thingness of the objects I arrange in a still life moving into a photograph. Massumi writes that "…the virtual is not contained in any actual form assumed by things or states of things. It runs in the transitions from one form to another."[142] Drawing on Massumi's definition, I believe that the *vibrant thing's* potential in my work, its orientation to an open futurity, is found in these processes of transformation and movement between forms.

This object (figure 12) — this urn — experienced a process of transformation as it moved, like my gypsum snake, from dry plaster, to wet viscidity, to a solid state. Still intrigued by Heidegger's jug, I formed this material around a void — where Brown asserts a gathering occurs.[143] I used a wire armature to create the structure on which I layered plaster strips over tissue paper. Figures 13 and 14 show the armature for other

---

[140] Magor, "Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner."

[141] Magor.

[142] Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible."

[143] Brown, *Other Things*, 29; Heidegger, "The Thing," 167,

vessels I made using the same process, however the urn's wire armature is more evident in its form: a result of the plaster strips dampening the tissue paper foundation and shrinking. In the later vessels, I have corrected this "mistake," yet I feel that the urn, this first, flawed attempt, retains more of the character of its creation — it has more personality.

I am anthropomorphising the urn here, I know it: but, as Jane Bennett asserts, there is the possibility to uncover a non-hierarchical relation in this gesture.[144] In anthropomorphizing it, I mean to relay an animacy in the urn. As previously mentioned, Heidegger's *thing* presences in a gathering of elements and forces in relation: the 'fourfold'. My urn is a *thing* that presences, instantiating it as an art object, a trophy, or a funerary vessel to hold the remains of a life. This *thing* holds a potential to be many *things* and my orientation to its indeterminate variation can be read as a queer orientation to a *vibrant thing*: to our indeterminate variation. However, at this point in our relationship, I was not quite sure into where this queer phenomenological relation might extend my body.

[144] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 99.

Figure 12. *Urn*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper, 2021.

Figure 13. *Armature 1*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / wire, masking tape, 2021.

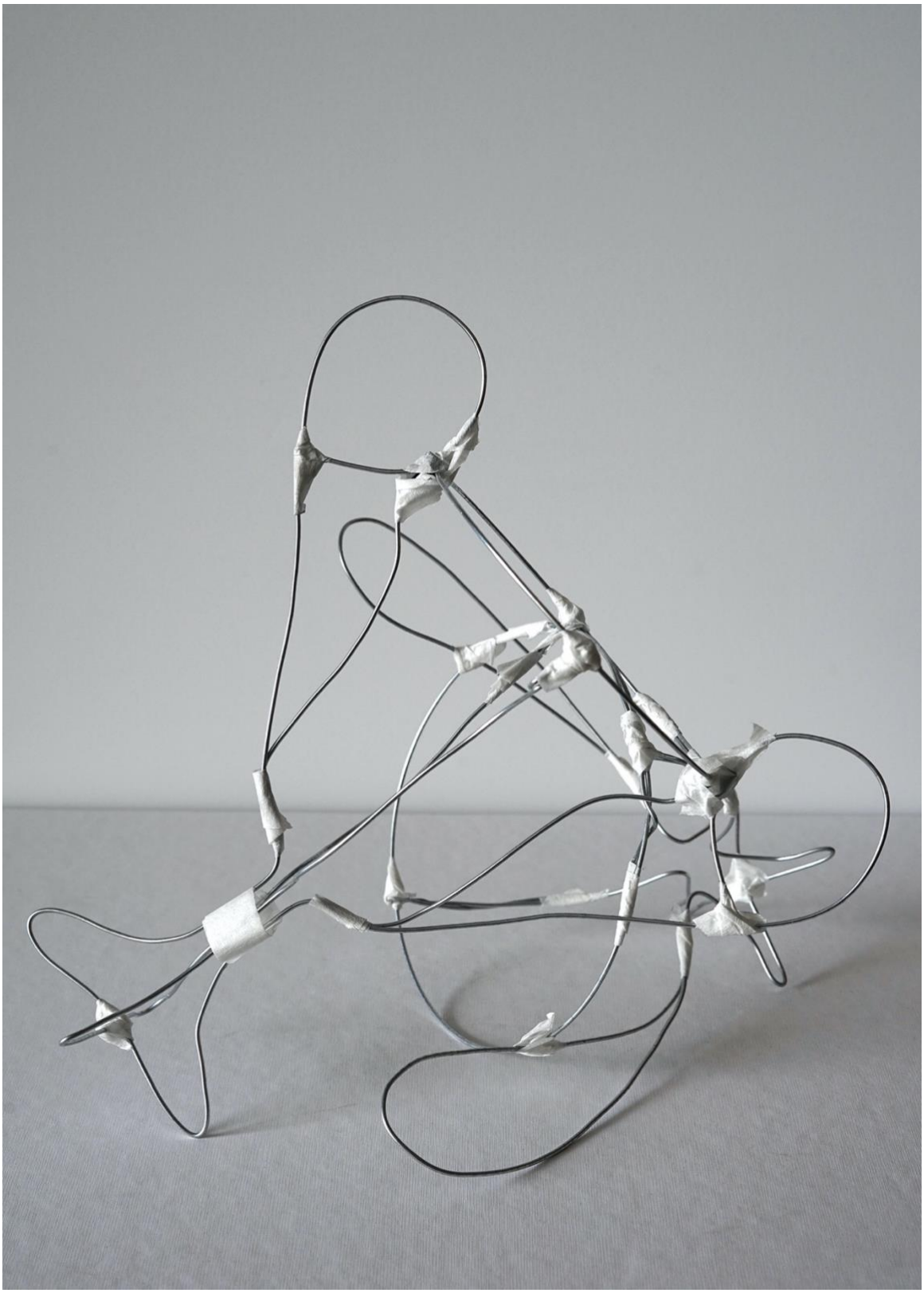

Figure 14. *Armature 2*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / wire, masking tape, 2021.

Many months after photographing it, I am curious if the *thingness* of the urn has been extended into this photograph (figure 15)? I kept engaging with the urn through different media to see how it lives through the transformations of different making. In doing so, I am relating the urn to itself in its different iterations.

The first photo of the urn appears black and white. When editing it later in Photoshop, I thought I had already altered it to black and white, so I increased the saturation to see if indeed it was a colour photograph. This action revealed a world of hidden colour: emphasized, yet emanating from where our eyes are unable to register (figure 16). During this editing experimentation, I accidentally inverted the lights and darks in the image and an internal vibrancy was revealed, which illuminated the texture and materiality, and seemed to hint at an internal source of life radiating from within (figure 17).

I took the urn for a walk; a kind of performance of the object and myself…and our relation. Figure 18 shows an image from this event. The urn appears a light teal in this photo because I had planned to embellish it using colour and vibrant reflective materials. I painted it back to white to maintain the tactility of its creation and its materiality. This is also a transformation; it is not the same as before — it is an urn that has been painted teal and then been painted white.

Figure 15. Urn, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper, antique frame, 2021.

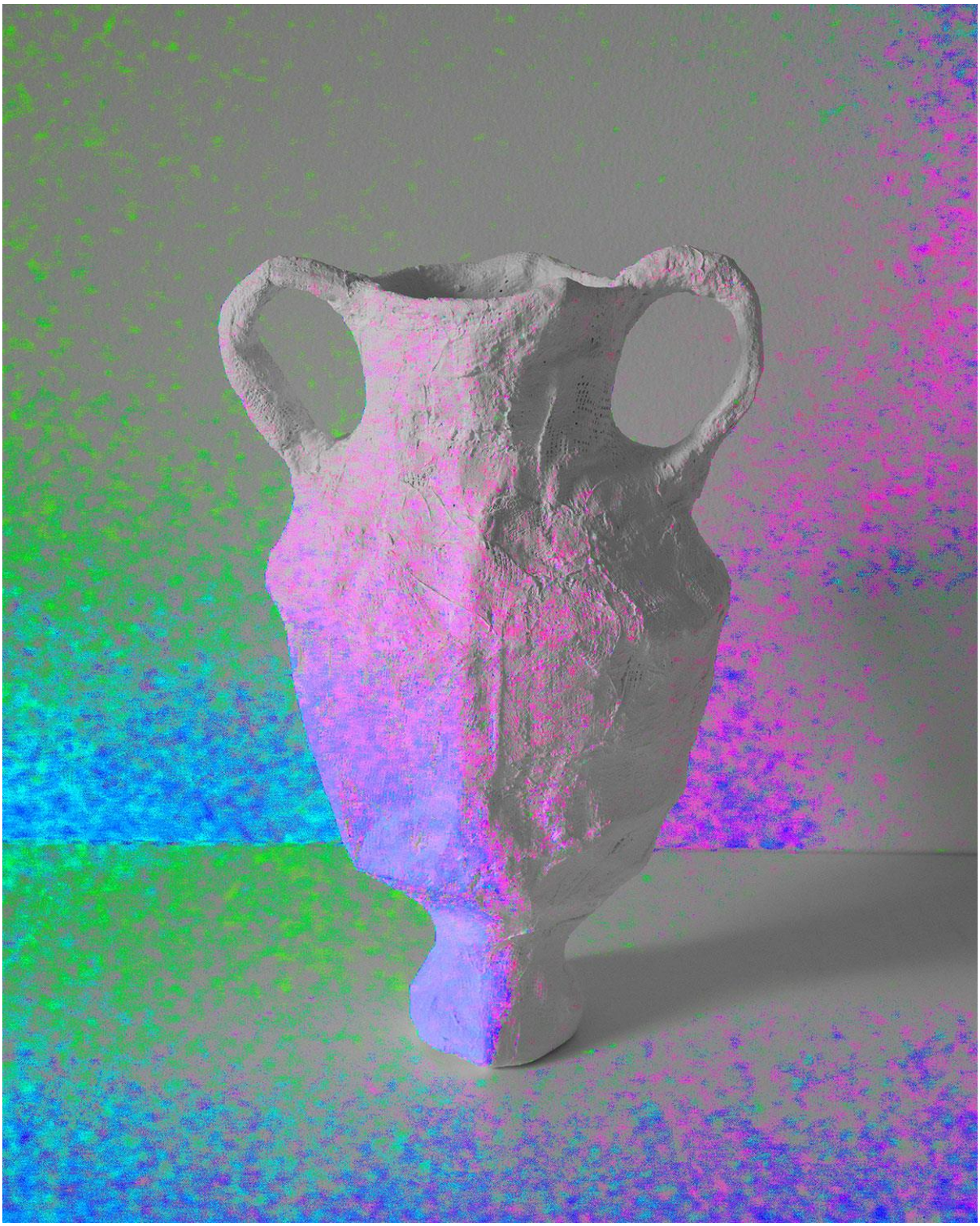

Figure 16. *Urn: Saturated*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / Photoshop manipulation / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper, 2021.

Figure 17. *Urn: Inverted*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / Photoshop manipulation / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper, 2021.

Figure 18. *Urn Walk*, Stephen Severn, digital photograph / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper / performance July 25, 2021.

I then included the urn in an installation titled *Alphabet of Verbs* (figure 19), in which I projected text (examples of text in figure 20) onto the urn using a homemade projector incorporating a smartphone, a shoebox, and a magnifying glass. The physical relation of the projected words and the urn was particularly challenging to achieve; the distance of the projector to the object being projected upon and the distance of the smartphone (source of light) and the magnifying glass (lens) all had to be very precise for any projection to appear.

Alphabet of Verbs made me aware of the fact that the projection was, in a sense, the opposite of photography. I was projecting an image (light) from a device and through a lens onto something as opposed to in photography when light travels through a lens into a device to make an image.

The words, which had to be flipped horizontally for projection (figure 21), were not all verbs. In presenting them as verbs, I was aiming to highlight the words and the urn as *vibrant things.* The British anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that *things* are in an ontogenetic state of becoming: to see them as active "is to bring them to life."[145] Here, we might hear echoes of Robin Wall Kimmerer's reflections on the animacy of the Potawatomi language — as Ingold states, *things* occur in the world as verbs and do not simply exist as nouns.[146]

---

[145] Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines,* New York: Routledge, (2015), 116.

[146] Ingold, 116; Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* 55.

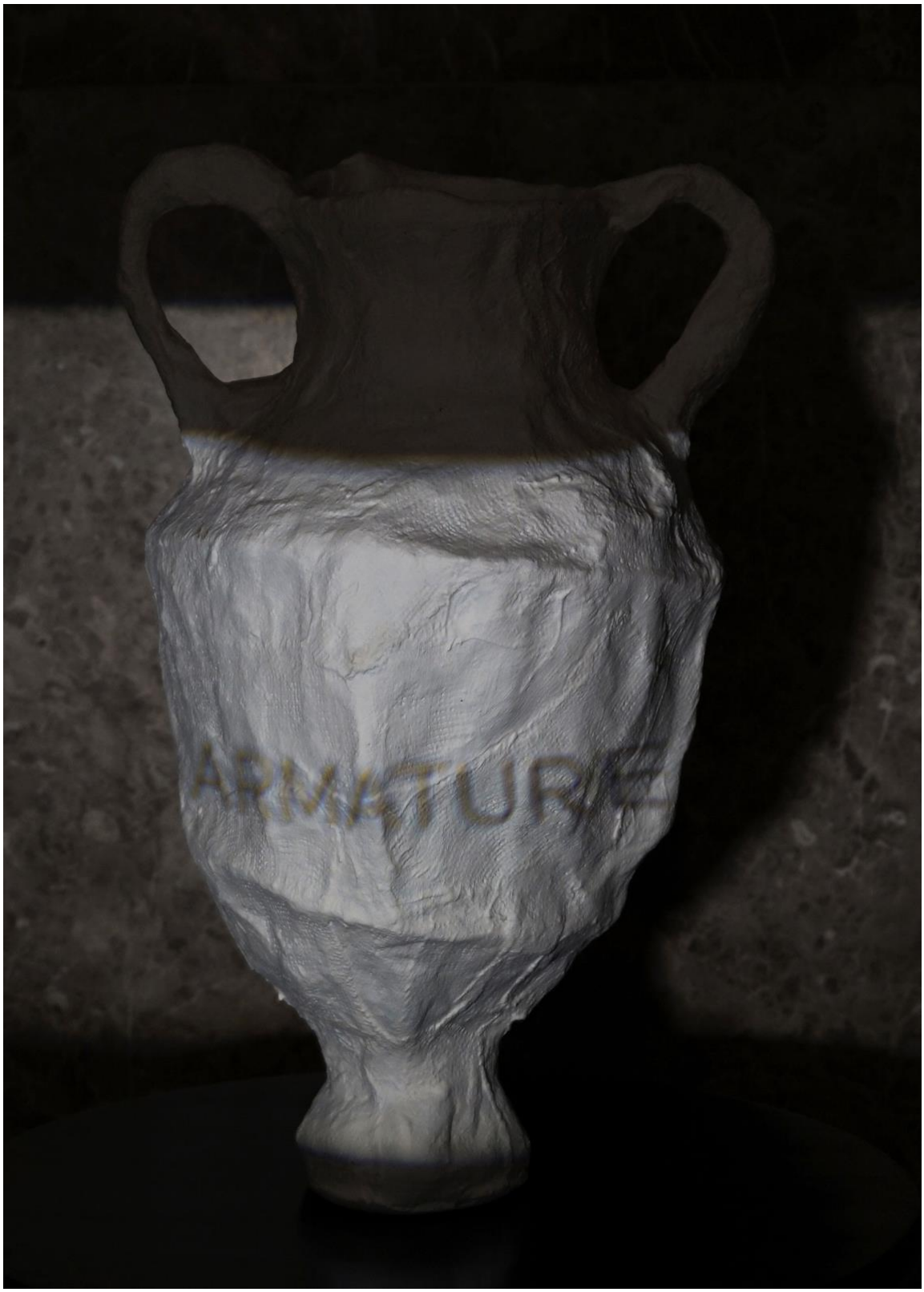

Figure 19. *Alphabet of Verbs*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph / installation / plaster, wire, masking tape, tissue paper, 2021.

Armature Breath Cuts Dispersal Embrace Fascia

Gathering Humidity Instrument Journal Kantharos

Layer Mess Network Offering Pace Quiet

Rhythm Solid Timbre Use Vibrant

Weave Xenograft Yield Zone

Figure 20. *Alphabet of Verbs*, Stephen Severn, text for projection, 2021.

Figure 21. *Alphabet of Verbs*, Stephen Severn, example of text for projection, 2021.

I was curious how the relation between the “verbs” and the urn would change if the words were spoken rather than presented visually. I placed a speaker inside the urn and played a recording of a reading of the *Alphabet of Verbs*. Hearing sound emitting from the interior of the urn added a vibrancy I had not yet experienced in working with the object. I was intrigued by the addition of another sensory relation and its implications for the future exhibition of the urn.

My research with the urn then led me to film it using a Rutt/Etra Video Synthesizer (figures 22-24). The Rutt/Etra machine, designed in the 1970s, applies real-time animation effects to a video feed that include changing position, size, intensity, and aspect ratio, and which can be applied in combination.[147] Not having a manual to understand how to use this analogue machine, I experimented using the different knobs and dials while recording the outcomes. The results were compelling in the amount of movement and action revealed in the video despite the camera and object remaining static.

The medium reveals this animacy with the directions, inputted by me, adding to the fluidity of the urn’s oscillations on the screen — yet another performance of myself and the object. At times, it appears as if the urn is in flux, that the Rutt/Etra machine has revealed the animacy of which quantum physics and Leroy Little Bear speak — at times it appears as if we are seeing the urn’s “spirit” (figure 24). It was not until I took a

[147] “Etra, Bill,” Vasulka, accessed October 7, 2021, http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Artists2/Etra,Bill/general.pdf.

screenshot of one of the videos that I realized the Rutt/Etra machine is creating this oscillating flux visual effect by alternating between various views of the object in quick succession — a flux between images that are not static in themselves, the images are always different based on what is happening live for the camera.

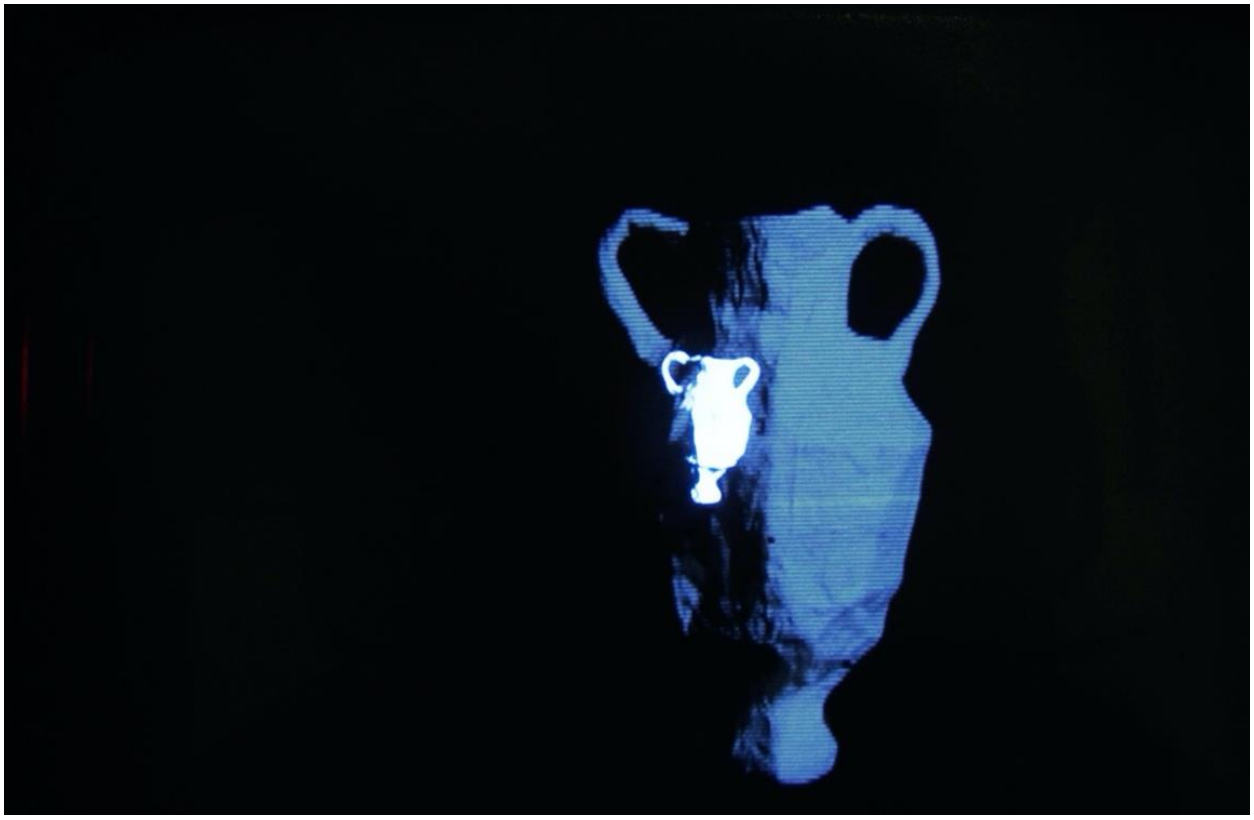

Figure 22. *Vibrant Matter*, Stephen Severn, still from single channel video, 2021.

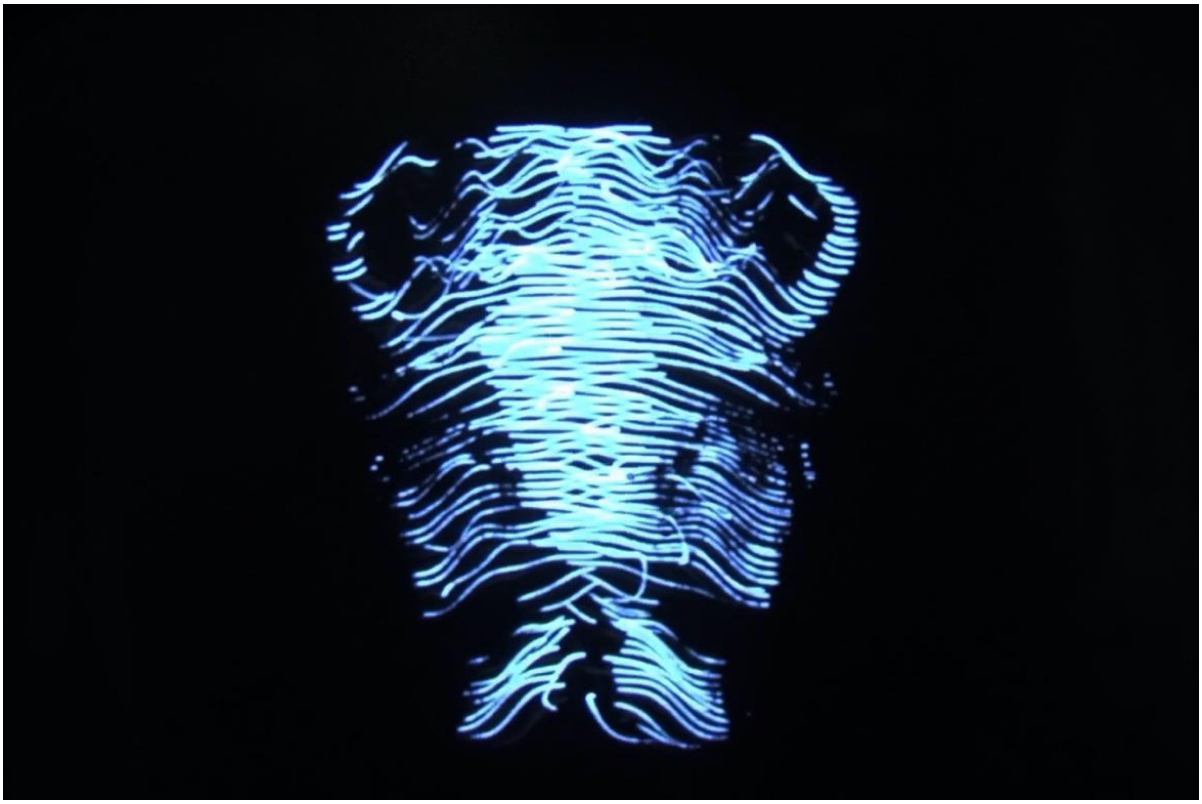

Figure 23. *Vibrant Matter,* Stephen Severn, still from single channel video, 2021.

Figure 24. *Vibrant Matter*, Stephen Severn, still from single channel video, 2021.

The photo editing, projection, sound, and video experimentation seem to highlight hidden qualities within the urn in the ways in which the different media engage with the urn. These transformations between media will build new relations with viewers when shown together as a gallery show titled *Fluid Things* at OCAD University's Experimental Media Space in April 2022. These new gallery relations will continue to evolve the animacy of the urn's potential through the installation of the different media and through the inclusion of a larger audience. These different ways of being with the urn, whether taking it for a walk or installing instances of its *thingness* in a gallery, actualise new relations — it is not static; all of its iterations and transferences of *thingness* reveal it as a *vibrant thing*.

For the exhibition of works referenced in this chapter, please see Appendix C: An Exhibition of *Fluid Things*.

> "The arts seem to have a material unconscious, by which I mean (most simply) that they *register* transformation of the material world that they do not necessarily *represent* or intentionally express."
>
> – *Other Things*, Bill Brown [148]

Conclusion

These *vibrant things* have introduced me to a way of being in the world that recognizes all matter as active and fluid and in relation, against the historical tendency of Western philosophy and science to categorize and separate the animate and inanimate, the living and non-living, the human and non-human. My work, like Jane Bennett's, emphasizes a non-hierarchical relationship with all matter that encourages communication between all actants (human or non-human) towards a better understanding of our shared participation in world-building.[149] My relationship with *things* has changed.

I entered this project with an interest in symbolism: how objects can be holders of meaning. What I did not anticipate was a complete shift in understanding and relation; I now see objects as agential and my relationship with them as containing a vibrancy —

[148] Brown, *Other Things*, 9.

[149] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 10, 104.

we are in vibrant relations with fluid things, a relation of potential to form yet more relation. Non-representational theories played a part in my ontological shift towards *vibrant things*. Nigel Thrift, in his book *Spatial Formations*, identifies non-representational models of the world that focus on an externalism in which terms and objects are "forged in a manifold of action and interaction."[150] This externalism places meaning in action and relation and not something that is inherently present in objects, *things*. Thrift describes this as thought-in-action, and Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison support this when they state that this "manifold of action and interaction" is the location where meaning is created, rather than in discourse, ideology, or symbolic representation.[151]

These ideas align well with an ontology of *vibrant things* that is rooted in

- thing theory, which foregrounds human-object relations;
- vibrant matter, which centres a shared participation between human and non-human actants;
- research creation, which combines thinking and making;
- queer phenomenology, which situates our orientation to objects as a lived experience.

An art practice that engages with *vibrant things* can be, as Anderson and Harrison describe non-representational theories, a recursive patterning — a feedback of constant

[150] Nigel J. Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London: Sage, 1996), 6.

[151] Anderson, "The Promise of Non-Representational Theories," 2; Thrift, 3.

relation involving multiple elements, practices, participants, and affordances.[152] This is where I situate my own practice.

In the quote given at the beginning of this conclusion, Brown highlights how a making practice registers material transformation, but does "not necessarily *represent* or intentionally express." [153] I do not believe he is stating that art merely embodies material transformation, rather it reveals fluidity. He claims that artists transform objects into fluid states where human-object relationships make more sense, and in which a potentiality exists.[154] This potentiality is echoed by Anderson and Harrison, when they describe non-representational theories as having a generative force "marked by an attention to events and the new potentialities for being, doing, and thinking that events may bring forth," and oriented to an open-ended future.[155] This orientation to an open futurity is a non-representational model that aligns with my research-queeration methodology, and has informed my conceptual framework of *vibrant things* and the direction of my research in this project.

In Chapter 1 "Solid Things," I introduced the theoretical framework for an ontology of *vibrant things,* in which all matter is active, fluid, non-hierarchical, and in relation. I discussed the vibrancy of human-object relations and in particular my

---

[152] Anderson, 7, 8.

[153] Brown, *Other Things*, 9.

[154] Brown, *Other Things*, 6.

[155] Anderson, "The Promise of Non-Representational Theories," 3, 19.

experience with casting what I described as a rather queer vibrant thing. Here, I believe the fluidity of staying orientated to these objects contains a fluidity and an indeterminacy, what Sara Ahmed describes in her queer phenomenology as a relation between queer object and subject and the possibilities this relationship creates.[156]

I further examined object relations in Chapter 2 “Arranging Things” by looking at *things* in relation in the still life, and arrangements of *things* in relation to other arrangements of *things* through my expanded definition of ekphrasis and through different media in my practice. These arrangements, these multiplicities of heterogeneous elements in relation, are, as Kathleen Stewart describes them, scenes of potential: emergent worlds that are mobile and generative to an open futurity.[157]

I investigated this open futurity in Chapter 3 “Fluid Things” by staying orientated to my urn object through different media and through theoretical inquiry into the *virtual*. My making practice participates in relation and sustains a potentiality in arrangements of physical and non-physical materiality; in this sense, I frame my practice as a generative force and orientated to an open futurity.

I can see further research into non-representational theories through my studio practice as a possible next step for my research. Of course, that exploration will follow a research-queeration framework that foregrounds staying orientated to *vibrant things,*

---

[156] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 3, 170-171.

[157] Stewart, “Tactile Compositions,” 119-120.

that opens up possibilities, that leads to thinking and making through action and interaction. A more immediate future for this research project is the exhibitions, the installations of *vibrant things*. Each exhibition is in relation with a chapter of this exegesis (*Solid Things*, *Arranging Things*, and *Fluid Things*).

I am excited to see the fluidity of my relationship with these objects, *things*, this exegesis, continue in the exhibitions. It is a relationship that has shifted from one of stillness and order in my professional practice, to one of action and relation in my creative practice. I am curious how my body and other bodies will relate to the works, and how they may or may not extend or orientate themselves in phenomenological events. Staying with my disorientation to these objects, engaging them through different media, finding new ways of being, forming new relations: these *vibrant things* are not static, these still lifes are not still — they are throwing themselves in front of me and I hope to have met them at least halfway.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Anderson, Ben, and Paul Harrison. “The Promise of Non-Representational Theories.” In *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography*, 1-36. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. https://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754672791

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Brown, Bill. “Thing Theory.” *Critical Inquiry*, 28, no. 1, (Autumn 2001): 1-22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344258.

———. *Other Things*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

“Etra, Bill,” Vasulka, accessed October 7, 2021, http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Artists2/Etra,Bill/general.pdf.

Grosz, Elizabeth. “The Thing.” In *The Object Reader*, 124-138. Edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London: Duke University Press, 2016.

Heidegger, Martin. “The Thing.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 160-184. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013.

Hill, Don. “Listening to Stones: Learning in Leroy Little Bear’s Laboratory: Dialogue in the World Outside.” *Alberta Views: The Magazine for Engaged Citizens*, September 1, 2008. https://albertaviews.ca/listening-to-stones/.

Ingold, Tim. *The Life of Lines.* New York: Routledge, 2015.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants.* Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Lewis, Jason Edward, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite. “Making Kin with the Machines.” *Journal of Design and Science* (July 16, 2018). https://doi.org/10.21428/bfafd97b.

Little Bear, Leroy. “Jagged Worldviews Colliding.” In *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, 77-85. Edited by M. Battiste. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000.

———. “Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Contrasts and Similarities.” September 4, 2014. Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Banff, Alberta. 21:32. https://www.banffcentre.ca/articles/challenging-chance-cheshire-cats-smile.

Magor, Liz, and Adam Milner. “Conversation with Liz Magor and Adam Milner.” December 8, 2021. Art21 Online. 57:42. https://art21.org/watch/specials/conversation-with-liz-magor-and-adam-milner/.

Massumi, Brian. “Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible.” *Hypersurface Architecture, Architectural Design,* 68, no. 5/6, (May-June 1998):16-24. https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/244435/e6ffdaa2bd019b91f5ead128436d4170.pdf

———. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. London: Duke University Press, 2002.

Nail, Thomas. “What is an Assemblage?” *SubStance*, 46, no. 1, (2017): 21-37. muse.jhu.edu/article/650026.

Severn, Stephen. “A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World: Composition as Generative Meaning-Making in Still Life Photography.” *Tba: Journal of Art, Media, and Visual Culture,* 3, no. 1, (2021):107-18. https://doi.org/10.5206/tba.v3i1.13934.

Schaffer, Kathryn, and Gabriela Barreto Lemos. “Obliterating Thingness: An Introduction to the ‘What’ and the ‘So What’ of Quantum Physics.” *Foundations of Science* 26, (2021): 7-26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-019-09608-5

Siegel, Ethan. “This Is Why We Aren’t Expanding, Even If the Universe Is.” Forbes, February 19, 2019. https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2019/02/19/this-is-why-we-arent-expanding-even-if-the-universe-is/?sh=9561fd75311e.

Simic, Charles. *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*. New York: The New York Review of Books, 1992.

Stewart, Kathleen. “Tactile Compositions.” In *Objects and Materials*, 119-127. Edited by Penny Harvey, Eleanor Conlin Casella, Gillian Evans, Hannah Knox, Christine McLean, Elizabeth B. Silva, Nicholas Thoburn, and Kath Woodward. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Thrift, Nigel J. *Spatial Formations*. London: Sage, 1996.

Truman, Sarah E. Interview with Natalie Loveless, Erin Manning, Natasha Myers, and Stephanie Springgay. “The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation.” In *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research-Creation*, 221-249. Edited by Natalie Loveless. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2019.

Woolf, Virginia. “Solid Objects.” In *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*, 63-67. Edited by Sandra Kemp. London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019.

“Word,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.etymonline.com/word/object.

Further Reading

Ayub, Zulaikha and Daniela Gandorfer. “Introduction: Matterphorical.” *Theory & Event*, 24, no. 1, (January 2021): 2-13.

Candlin, Fiona and Raiford Guins. *The Object Reader*. Edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Chalmers, David and Andy Clark. “The Extended Mind.” *Analysis*, 58, no. 1, (1998): 7-19. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3328150.

Gibson, James J. “The Theory of Affordances.” In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 127-129. Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1986.

Grosz, Elizabeth. “Notes on the Thing.” *Perspecta*, 33 (2002): 78-79 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567299

Ingold, Tim. “Rethinking the Animate, Re-animating Thought.” *Ethnos,* 71, no. 1, (2011): 9-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840600603111.

———. “The Textility of Making.” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 34, 1, (2010): 91-102, https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bep042.\

Kemp, Sandra. “Introduction.” In *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*, ix-xxxii. Edited by Sandra Kemp. London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019.

Malafouris, Lambros. “Thinking as ‘Thinging’: Psychology with Things.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 29, no. 1, (February 2020): 3-8. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721419873349

Manning, Erin. *Politics of Touch Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Mathews, Freya. *For Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

O'Sullivan, Simon. “The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art beyond Representation.” In *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 6, no. 3, (2010): 125-135, https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250120087987

Popa, Vasko. *Vasko Popa.* Translated by Charles Simic. New York: New York Review Books, 2019.

Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006.

Stewart, Kathleen. "Mattering Compositions." In *Between Matter and Method*, 21-33. Edited by Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Turkle, Sherry. *Evocative Objects.* Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2017.

Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Beauty of Everyday Things*. Translated by Michael Brase. London: Penguin Books, 2018.

Appendix A: An Exhibition of *Solid Things*

The Window, 558 Church Street, April 4 – May 1, 2022

Solid Things explores the fluidity of human-object relations through the process of casting. The objects, cast in beeswax, gypsum, and resin, make present the voids formed by disposable plastic food containers and moulds of objects. Solidifying these voids actualizes a presence, inviting an orientation to the *thingness* of these objects — to fluid human-object relationships that morph across these material transformations.

Figure 25. *Solid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, beeswax, gypsum, resin, plastic containers, silicone mould, 2022.

Figure 26. *Solid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, beeswax, gypsum, resin, plastic containers, silicone mould, 2022.

Figure 27. *Solid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, beeswax, gypsum, resin, plastic containers, silicone mould, 2022.

Figure 28. *Solid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, beeswax, gypsum, resin, plastic containers, silicone mould, 2022.

Appendix B: An Exhibition of *Arranging Things*

Remote Gallery, 568 Richmond Street West, April 12 – 17, 2022

Arranging Things looks at the energetic lived relationality in gatherings of *things*. Arrangements are multiplicities of heterogeneous elements and can take the form of a still life, a poem, and an exhibition. Here, the fluidity of relation moves through photography, assemblage, and prose, forming ever-increasing relations of *vibrant things*.

Figure 29. *Solid Things 2*, Stephen Severn, assemblage / marble, plaster, plastic vase, glass vase (x2), amber, wood plinth, 2022.

Figure 30. *Solid Things 2*, Stephen Severn, assemblage / marble, plaster, plastic vase, glass vase (x2), amber, wood plinth, 2022.

Figure 31. *Tactile Compositions*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, marble, concrete, tile, urchin shell, wall treatment, cinder blocks, pins, 2022.

Figure 32. *Tactile Compositions*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, marble, concrete, tile, urchin shell, wall treatment, cinder blocks, pins, 2022.

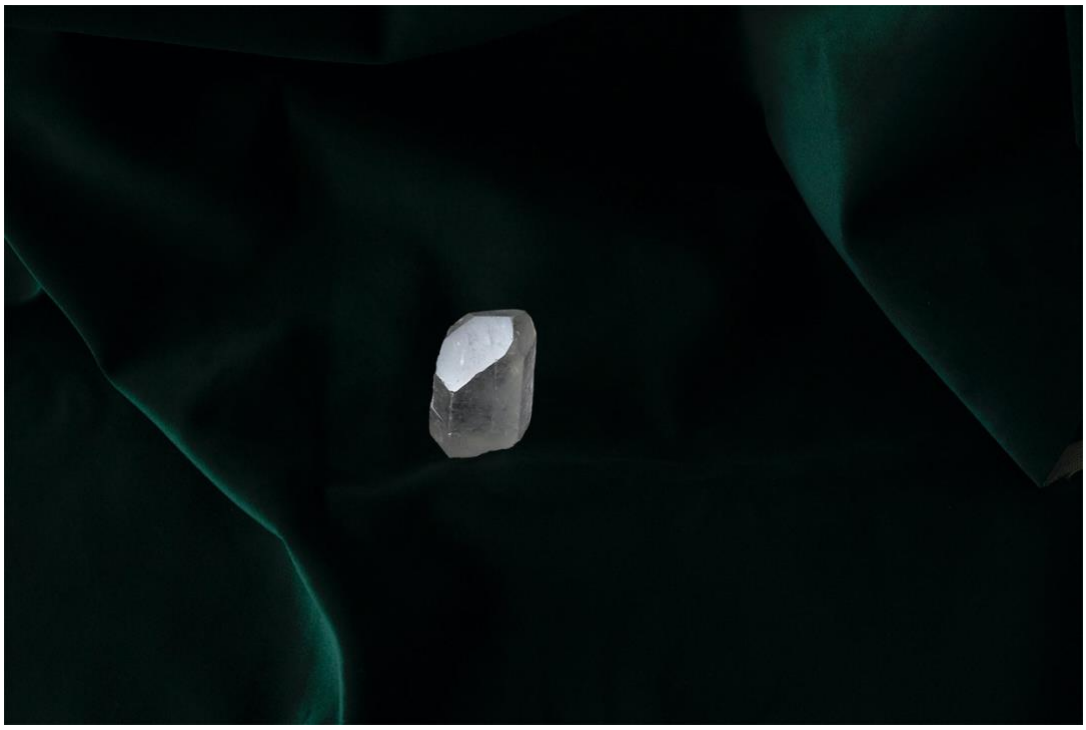

Figure 33. *Thing Power — Quartz*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

Figure 34. *Thing Power — Geode*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

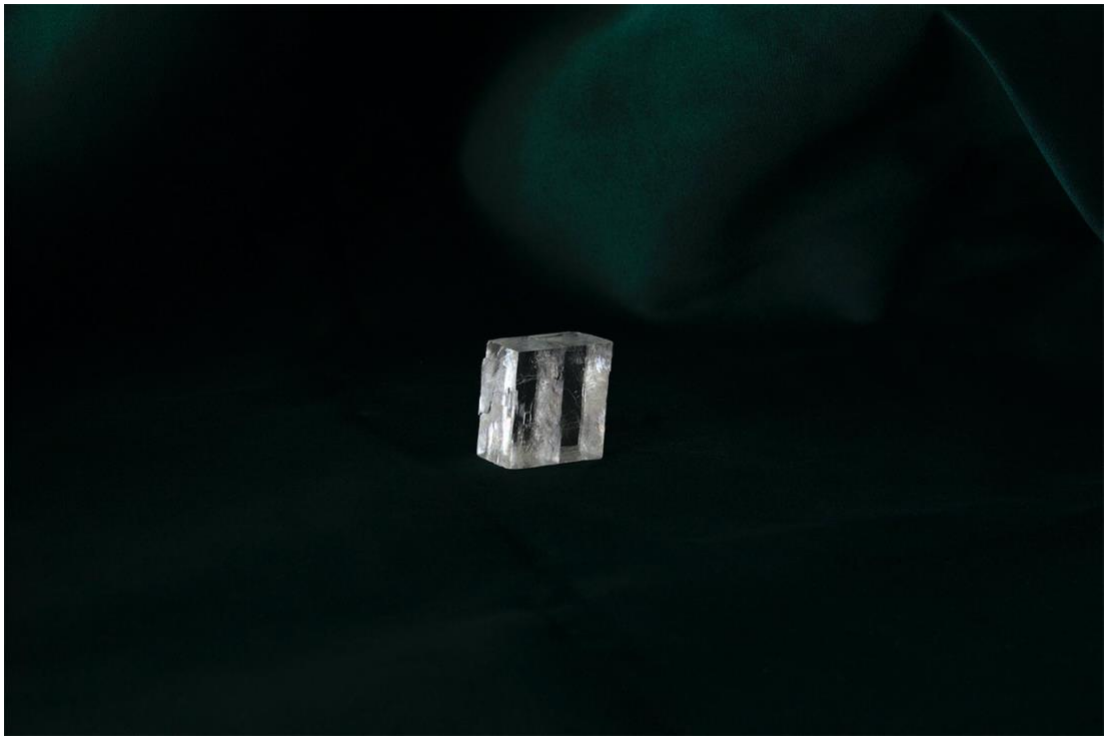

Figure 35. *Thing Power — Optical Calcite*, Stephen Severn, digital still life photograph, 2021.

Figure 36. *Thing Power*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, geode, optical calcite, quartz, table, marble, brass, fabric, c-stand, 2022.

Figure 37. *Thing Power*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, geode, optical calcite, quartz, table, marble, brass, fabric, c-stand, 2022.

Figure 38. *Armature*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, wire, plaster strips, wood plinth, 2022.

Figure 39. *A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World*, Stephen Severn, installation view / photography, objects, glass cloche, chair, plant stand, 2022.

Figure 40. *A Knot, A Network, A Thing, A World*, Stephen Severn, installation detail / photography, objects, glass cloche, chair, plant stand, 2022.

Appendix C: An Exhibition of *Fluid Things*

OCAD University Experimental Media Space (EMS), 205 Richmond Street West, April 20 – 21, 2022

Fluid Things considers how an orientation to objects as *vibrant things* is an orientation to flux and open futurity. The installation includes video projection of a vessel captured using a 1970s Rutt/Etra video synthesizer — an analogue raster manipulation device for real-time video animation — and photographic manipulation using the raster graphic digital image editing software, Photoshop, to engage with the *vibrant thing's* orientation to possibility and indeterminate variation.

Figure 41. *Fluid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / plaster, wire, wood plinth, antique frames, video projection, 2022.

Figure 42. *Fluid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation detail / plaster, wire, wood plinth, antique frames, video projection, 2022.

Figure 43. *Fluid Things,* Stephen Severn, installation / video projection, 2022.

Figure 44. *Fluid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, antique frame, 2022.

Figure 45. *Fluid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, antique frame, 2022.

Figure 46. *Fluid Things*, Stephen Severn, installation / photography, antique frame, 2022.