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“The problem with ideas is that they never come all at once. They emerge like prairie dogs. An edge of an ear, or the tip of a nose, and sometimes even the whole head. But if you look straight at an idea too fast, it can vanish back into the ground before you’re even sure of what you’ve seen. Instead, you have to sneak up on it slowly, looking out of the corner of your eye, and then and only then you might glance up to get a clear look.”

- Maggie Stiefvater, *All the Crooked Saints*, 2017, p.126

Introduction

I have always had a preference for fantasy stories. It seems I like my stories and my worlds best when human creatures are not the only agents of the stories. My favorite authors are not the ones who write epic fantasy sagas, though I do enjoy those as well, but the ones who write of landscapes that fall in love, objects that participate and words and ideas acting on their own. Authors, like Maggie Stiefvater, breathe life into landscapes and objects and evoke an everyday kind of magic. The kind of magic that feels like I could also be witness to, if I paid enough attention. I think these stories resonate most with me because I am often guilty of a more passive kind of agency that often gets overlooked. I think I recognized myself in these objects that feel and want so much but often get misinterpreted. The new materialistic school of thought is, in light of these stories, very appealing to me. They speak of the agency of non-human things as a thing of this world and not as something only to be found in books. I think with these theories, if I can liven up the non-human things around me, I could reconcile myself with the idea of my own agency. It is only in recognizing the influence of others on my work, that I could see what is truly my own influence on the work.

In my personal life, I have often caught myself taking over other people's words and gestures. I can clearly trace back the influence of others in these words and gestures, but then it poses questions of my originality and where what is my own begins. At some point do these words and gestures become mine? It also leaves me to wonder if I have at times also been influenced in this way by non-human others. I am interested in recognizing these influences and seeing how they have shaped my world.

In my creative process, so much happens serendipitously that I feel I can hardly call it my own. I have always noticed a struggle when I have complete control over the work. I am much more comfortable leaving room for the material to express itself. As of yet though, this happens mostly by chance. I am seeking a way of going about it more deliberately. I want to have a better understanding of how to give room for (non-human) others to take part in my work, how to create space to witness the magic of everyday things.

As such the question I seek to answer throughout this paper is what does the discourse around artworks look like, when the idea of the artist as sole maker is removed? For this purpose I will throughout this research take a look at the discourse of the place of the artist and their chosen materials in the artistic process. I want to discuss the discourse within the art world, because the problem lies not so much in how art is being made, as I had first thought. As I will show later on, through the process of making, many artists are already aware, to a certain extent, of the other forces at play while they are making. The problem lies in the language. We do not have the words and ideas to consider these truthful experiences

of the artist. Somehow they do not translate in how art and the artist is being discussed outside of the studio. While the artist experiences the work, welcoming other influences in the making of it, as soon as we step outside of that experience, the discourse shifts and all we have left to talk and speak about is the artist and their intentions alone. I want to remedy that and provide a broader context to speak from, so as to include all others involved in the artistic process

In the first chapter I will start with a historical perspective. In this I will discuss the changing concepts of the genius to exemplify how our conception of the artist has been framed historically. I will map how the idea of the artist as sole maker was constructed, so that I might later deconstruct it.

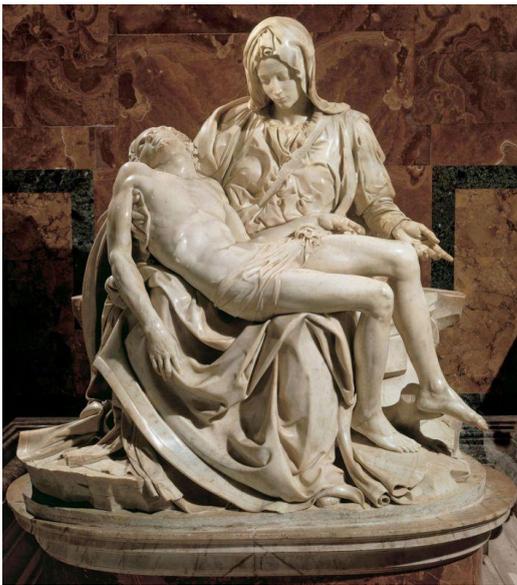
I will follow this up in chapter two by discussing the new materialistic theories and how they place the role of agency in non-human others. I will bring this into the context of the arts and the position of the artist to start mapping how we might change how we think and talk about the artistic process to acknowledge the different agents involved in the process.

I will then ground this discussion in existing (contemporary) artistic practices in chapter three. I will take a look at how artists make with 'others' and how the work is framed or discussed by humans. I will focus on the artist's original intention and their own discussion of the work, as they are the ones to experience the collaboration first-hand and their chosen collaborators are (mostly) not in the position to provide their own verbal opinion, due to their being non-humans. I will differentiate between different kinds of others to argue for how to change our discourse of the artistic process and its agents.

Chapter 1: On the artist as absolute maker

How has changing conceptions of the genius created the idea of the artist as absolute maker?

It is striking to me that, within my bachelor, I am asked to discuss my work in terms of my intent and the choices I have made. My work is discussed, under the presumption that I call all the shots and that the autonomy of *my* choices and the originality of *my* intentions is still central to the work. Yet this does not feel accurate to my experience of the work, and I would argue, to any artistic practice. “The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material.”¹



This is a famous quote of Michelangelo, that is usually used to prove his innate genius, but to me it sounds much more like the truth of the work: the material plays a part in the making of a work of art. But before I can get into that discussion, I must first contextualise historically how the human-centered view of art came to be. Much more has been written about our human experience of the world, and so I must start there before I can move on to a broader discourse of all involved in the making of art

The most important key concept I must highlight here is the idea of the **genius** and how it has evolved over time. In its origin the concept of the genius started in ancient Greek and Rome, where it was thought of as this spirit guide that lived outside of you and would at times intervene during artistic endeavors to help the work forward. [Gilbert, E.

(2009)] Even up to the 18th century this conception of *having* a genius remained to some degree, as the French still spoke of “avoir du génie”, alongside the more modern idea of “être un génie”. This genius was something separate from you that happened outside of your control, usually through godly interference, while you were working on a piece. Genius was something to attribute to the work with no repercussions to the image of the artist. [Dieckmann, H. (1941)] This is so hard to fathom now, with pieces of art often having value mostly on the premise of having come from a particular individual we call ‘genius’². Such ideas of *being* a genius, of attributing an almost supernatural ability to create to the person themselves, began to arise in the Renaissance, very much in line with a societal shift from the communal to the individual.

The idea of genius as a gift of God, as an inborn and uniquely individual creative force, the doctrine of the personal and exceptional law which the genius is not permitted to but must follow, the justification of the individuality and willfulness of the artist of genius – this whole trend of thought first arises in Renaissance society [Hauser, A. (1999a) p.61]

¹ Quote from Goodreads

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1191114-the-sculpture-is-already-complete-within-the-marble-block-before>

² Think Picasso and the like.

In this Renaissance interpretation, we still see some aspects of the divine intervention that had also been a part of the idea of *having* a genius, however we can see here that it is much more closely tied to the individual. While *having* a genius could be a passing divine thing, the genius of the renaissance had his talents *bestowed* upon him at birth by God himself. As they were seen as a God-given gift, that somehow also seemed to bring a kind of obligation for the bearer to enact these gifts because of this godly provenance.

What we also see happen in the Renaissance is that the process and sketches start suddenly becoming more important to the public, and not just the 'finished' artwork. As more focus came to the artist as individual maker, the sketches were no longer only a part of the (invisible) creative process towards a finished work, but regarded on their own as valuable insight into the individuality of the artist. [Fleming, J. Honour, H. (2013), Hauser, A. (1999a)] Through the sketches one could see that what is expressed in the final work is not unique to the material or subject, but rather an amalgamation of the studies and choices made and done by the artist. The signature style of an artist can be recognized in such sketches. We see thus more and more towards the Renaissance that the emphasis does not lie in the work anymore, as it did previously in the Middle-ages, but on the individual artist as maker.

It is also in the renaissance that we see the importance of the artist for the artwork cemented in law through the rise of copyright laws and intellectual property. Copyright laws began with printing and giving the artist the exclusive right to make copies of their own work [Shore, R. (2017)]. Through these laws the work is not separate from the artist after being made, but still remains attached to the person. This somehow adds to the notion as well that the work might somehow be changed if it came from another person. That it matters which brain it was born from. Just look at the uproar when an unknown Rembrandt is discovered. Just by attaching a different name to it, its monetary value changes.³ Even this notion of intellectual property is closely linked to the concept of genius. "The development of the concept of genius begins with the idea of intellectual property." [Hauser, A. (1999a) p.62] Before the Renaissance, religion had a monopoly on spiritual expression and as a group they gave a unified interpretation. That was no longer the case starting from the Renaissance. The focus came much more on the individual and their differing intellectual expressions. Now that we could identify specific thinkers, through their individual attributions, genius could be recognized in a singular person.

Moving on to the Romantic era of art, we see this concept of the genius remain though it is changed ever so subtly. "For classicism and enlightenment the genius was a higher intelligence bound by reason, theory, history, tradition and convention; for pre-romanticism and the 'Sturm und Drang' he becomes the personification of the ideal characterized, above all by a lack of all ties." [Hauser, A. (1999b)] So while the *Renaissance* genius was gifted by God, he was still tethered to the world of man. In the *Romantic era* we see this tether loosen, as more emphasis is placed on emotion. The romantic genius is regarded as a maker of his own world, with laws of its own, that stands wholly separate from our everyday world. And in this the genius is even more closely tied to the individual rather

³ <https://www.nu.nl/cultuur-overig/6031520>

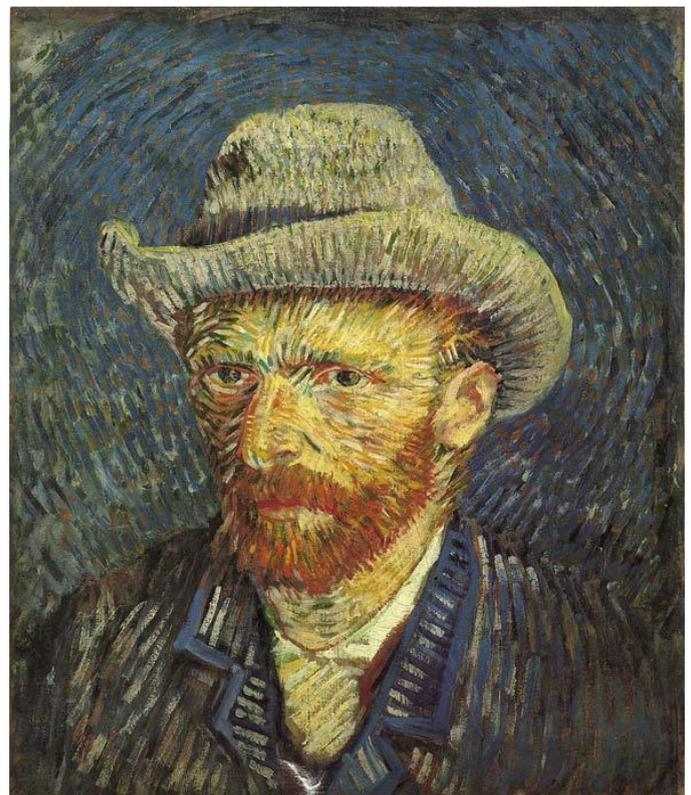
than their work. The genius is the one who walks in a different world, the work just a result of that.

The most important step in the development of the concept of the genius is from the idea of actual achievement to that of the mere capacity to achieve, from the work to the person of the artist, from the appreciation of full success to that of mere intention and idea. [Hauser, A. (1999a) p.63]

It is in this Romantic era, that the idea of misunderstood genius is born. It no longer is important whether 'genius' works are made or being achieved, starting from this time in history, a genius is a genius having only expressed intentions and ideas. While *being* a genius had begun as the 'highest possible achievement of the human mind'⁴ expressed through the work, by tying the concept of genius more and more to the individual, the work became more and more secondary. And this has been a lasting conception as we can see through the theories of Croce and Collingwood, also known as the CC-theory, that came much later. According to the CC-theory, "a work of art may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only existence is in the artist's mind" [Grant, J. (1987) p.244]. The work of art need not even be made to be claimed as such by the artist, it needs not even exist for anybody else. Through this specific discourse of art, the artistic process is a solely human-centered thing, with the artist being completely central to the existence of the work.

As a misunderstood maker of his own world, the romantic genius achieves an almost godly status of his own, and stands more separate from society. As if guided by an insight into the future, the romantic genius, and those that came after, is often shunned by his contemporaries for his revolutionary style, to be revered by later generations after their passing. The works of art worshipped as the only remaining insights into the world that only they could see. Think of Vincent van Gogh, as perhaps one of the better known examples. This conception of the genius has carried over in many ways in later eras.

When we look to the later era of modernism, we get back some of the unexpectedness, 'possessed' aspect of the original idea of *having* a genius. However it remains very much in the realm of *being* a genius as it is, after the remnants of the romantic era, more closely tied to the artist than a passing divinity. "Consciously or unconsciously, the whole modern conception of art is based on the belief that the most valuable elements of the work of art are the products of windfalls and flights of fancy, in a word, gifts of mysterious inspiration, and that the artist does best to allow himself to be carried along by his own power of invention." [Hauser, A. (1999c) p.37-38] It is in this era that we start to consider the spontaneity as a product



⁴ [Dieckmann, H. (1941)]

of the unconscious. It is very much a part of the artist though perhaps outside of the realm of understanding for the artist and onlookers. The artist may not know what they are doing, but modernist discourse reassures us it is the artist doing it.

And now we move on to the postmodern and contemporary era where we see the culmination of the genius as we know it. While it could be said that the postmodernist artist wanted to break with their predecessors in terms of ideologies, they did little to change ideas about the genius and the idea of the artist as sole maker. In fact they might have enhanced the archetype of the genius more. In big part, this has to do with the fact that through the increase of media, first with the rise of the tv and later internet, our world became increasingly aestheticized. Image making was and is no longer the privilege of the artist. "Now, if an artist does manage to go beyond the art system, this artist begins to function in the same way that politicians, sports heroes, terrorists, movie stars, and other minor or major celebrities function: through the media. In other words, the artist becomes the artwork." [Groys, B. (2009) p.3] I think in this, we see the last step burrowing the person of the artist further as the sole maker of the work: they become the artwork themselves.⁵ This is quite literally true in the rise of performance art, where the artists themselves enact the artwork. They're presence *is* the artwork. Do we get any closer to the person than this?

We humans have been the main focus of our discourses on most things from the Renaissance up till now. It is somehow not a wonder that we have come to attribute all aspects of what we do back to human action or thought. I can see now that in the discussions about my work, it is this genius as sole maker of the work that prevails. I am no genius myself but I am asked about my conscious actions in the making of the work and any unexpected results may somehow be attributed to unconscious thoughts. I am asked to recount my story, because we have come to believe that it matters to the work. We know only of *being* a genius now. But what if while we in the past might have attributed the occurrence of *having* a genius to some godly entity, it is the (non-human) others we work with who grant us a moment of genius? What if it is in working successfully together with the material, matter, or subject we are working with, that genius happens? Would this then also not mean that any person we attribute genius to, can be praised not for their genius but their masterfull collaboration with others. Looking back to Michelangelo, I feel this could be true. It is not necessarily that he, as a 'genius', had the vision to see the statues in the blocks of marble, in his own words it sounds more like the statue was already in there and he was skillful enough to listen and chisel it free. It is time we change the discourse to give voice to these moments of genius, and the others who help us get there. Luckily, in recent years new theories have risen to help us do just that. In the next chapter I will delve into new materialistic theories and how they might help us understand how others take part in the work.

⁵ Think of Joseph Beuys and his peculiar back-story. What meaning is left in his work when you take the man or his story away?

Chapter 2: On new materialistic theories and the place of the agency of 'others'

What is the nature of the agency of materials and other others in the new materialistic discourses?

So if it is the material, matters and subjects we work with that grant us moments of genius, it is important then for us to understand how it is that these non-human others contribute to the work. For this I will look to new materialistic theories. New Materialism is a fairly new field of theory, with the term having been coined in 1990. Within **New Materialism**, or NM, there are many thinkers with differing theories, but what all these theories have in common is that they argue for a different way to relate to the material world. With these theories, they step away from an anthropocentric⁶ interpretation, that is our human-centered view, of our world, to theories on how things, objects, technology, materials play a role in the world. A key concept of NM is that *agency*, that is the ability to act upon or influence your environment, is redefined to include non-human others as having agency.

Some 10 years before NM became its own distinct branch of theory, there was the **Actor-Network Theory**, or ANT, that was a predecessor of sorts. Bruno Latour is one of the bigger names behind this theory. ANT is a theory through which we look at the world in terms of actors, actors being contributors, of the network. *Anyone*, or *anything*, contributing to a process is in equal parts an actor of that network. With this we see a sharp contrast with the sociological theories that came before and focused solely on the human aspect of our world. Key in the ANT is that there is no hierarchy between object and human in the network, as both have agency over the network. In this objects are not just passive things but also play their part. "But if there is an *instauration* by the scholar or artist, then facts as much as works come together, resist, oblige – and their authors, the humans, have to be devoted to them, which of course doesn't mean they act as simple catalysts for them." [Latour, B. (2011) p.310] If we translate this to the arts, then, for Latour, we can not speak of the artist as being the only actor of importance in the process. Rather any actor, human or otherwise, that played a role in the making of the artwork was equally important and active in its making. The artist is not just the vessel to make the work happen. But neither is the material just something onto which the intentions of the artist are blankly passed over. Any pens, paper, canvases, brushes, paints, printers, computers, involved need to be considered an equal part of this network.

Graham Harman is another thinker central to NM. While he builds onto theories such as Latour's, he also makes some important distinctions. He sees in his predecessors two kinds of theorists: underminers and overminers. The underminers on one hand take a scientific approach to the material world trying to define it by the micro-components they are made of. They mine down the surface of materials and objects to determine what they are by what molecules and chemicals they are made of. To use Harman's example of the tables, this first table is the scientific table, defined by what scientists have agreed are the basic components of a table. The overminers on the other hand step away from the surface of objects and materials and seek definition in their meaning and relation to the (human) world. In this an object or material is not what it is, but what it does and what use it has in our world

⁶ According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Anthropocentrism interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experiences.

⁷ This is a second table, the everyday table, the one that is a table because it holds things above the ground for *us*. [Harman, G. (2012)] In both cases some questions arise: if a table can be made from different materials and in different designs, how then can a certain object be determined as a table by looking at an atom level? And the other way: does the table stop existing as a table when we stop using it? Should we use a chair as a table, does it stop being a chair?



We can see in these undermining/overmining theories parallels in how throughout history we have given meaning to art. Taking a formalist approach, as introduced by Kant among others, we break down the separate components works of art are made of, trying to decide what component is meaningful and how. We break down what colours are used, what materials, how the composition is set up and other such undermined elements of the work. In this way we break apart every choice the artist might have made in the making of the piece to convey meaning. The meaning is extrapolated not from the whole piece but by determining how each element and material separately gives meaning to the piece. On the overmining end we have the iconographic approach, that traces back to the Greeks, but was fully developed by art historian Erwin Panofsky in the 20e century. With iconography, we float away from the artwork by discussing not what it shows but what it represents. In this we can understand what Susan Sontag speaks of in her essay 'Against Interpretation'. Since the Greeks, art has had to defend itself, to justify its meaning and relevance. As such we have become accustomed to scratching away at the surface of the work, to discuss grand stories of what might be the meaning *behind* it. And in doing this we step wholly away from the

⁷ We might consider Latour as an overminer, as his theories focus on the relational aspect of objects to humans.

sensorial experience of the work. [Sontag, S. (1966)] Too busy undermining and overmining artworks, we forget to experience it as its own thing, creating its own sensorial experiences by being just as it is. Luckily for us, Harman proposes that there is a third table. "Our third table *emerges* as something distinct from its own components and also *withdraws* behind all its external effects. Our table is an intermediate being found neither in subatomic physics nor in human psychology, but in a permanent autonomous zone where objects are simply themselves." [Harman, G. (2012) p.10] The 'real' artworks exist somewhere between what we hope to scratch at beneath the surface or whatever we might add floating above it. They exist autonomously, separate from whatever we might want from them. And this is essentially what the new materialistic theories are about. They are emerging now out of a need to step away from a human-centric perspective, where the artwork serves as a window into the mind of the artist. With New Materialism, we shift perspective to viewing art pieces in their own right, relating to the world not through the meaning we, human-artist, imbue in them, but through their presence in the world and their own wants. To exemplify this we can look to Balthus, a painter whose career predates new materialistic theories. For his retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1968, he refused to send his biographical information insisting that his work should be seen and not read about.⁸ Instead he send the following telegram:

"NO BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS. BEGIN: BALTHUS IS A PAINTER OF WHOM NOTHING IS KNOWN. NOW LET US LOOK AT THE PICTURES. REGARDS B." [Tate Gallery]

Balthus, it would seem, wanted to distanciate himself and his life from his work. He is the maker, but his life has no bearing on the work or how one should experience it. The work was to stand autonomously from its maker. In this Balthus places himself and his work directly opposite to the 'genius' approach of the work. In museum Insel Hombroich, opened in 1987, we can see a whole museum of this. "All labelling, signposts, captions under works of art" have been disposed of in this museum, highlighting the fact that works of art create their own sensory experience. [Museum Insel Hombroich] I am not arguing here that we need to remove labels and captions everywhere to be able to experience the 'third' artwork in all artworks. The artworks as they stand are already the third artwork, and acknowledging the human who played a part in its making does not take that away. But these examples highlight how much importance we place on the human maker, to give the work meaning and value.

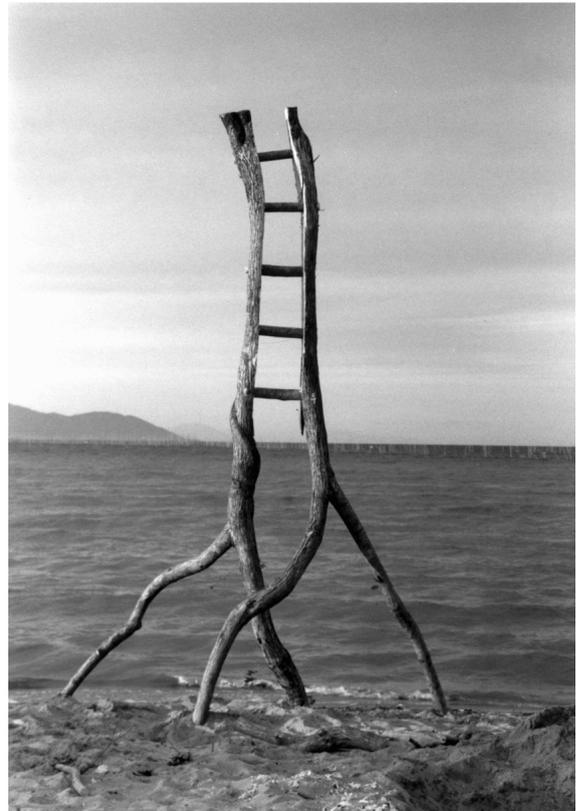
Even for the materials and things that come to be without our interference, our focus has still been on the human. We disregard the processes they take part in to become what they are, and are only interested in what happens once we humans start meddling. "[I]t is significant that studies of so-called material culture have focused overwhelmingly on processes of consumption rather than production." [Ingold, T. (2007) p.9] Blind to the different processes they take part in before and after our intervention, our focus has been on how we humans have use of these material things. We think that materials and objects

⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/balthus-689>

achieve a 'finished' state through our handling, not realising they are still part of the continuously cyclical process of materials.

In reality, of course, the materials are still there and continue to mingle and react as they have always done, forever threatening the things they comprise with dissolution or even 'dematerialization'. Plaster can crumble and ink can fade. Experienced as degradation, corrosion or wear and tear, however these changes - which objects undergo after they are 'finished' - are typically attributed to the phase of use rather than of manufacture. [Ingold, T. (2007) p.10]

Once a product has been made we are accustomed to think of it as 'finished', that is that at this stage it is in its most optimal and valuable condition. We remove it from its cyclical process, choosing instead to, where possible, remove traces of wear and tear, to keep it stagnant in what we view as the valuable stage of the object. It is in this so intrinsically tied to its use to us, humans.



And that is why we need Harman's third table. By undermining or overmining things, we cannot account for change. [Harman, G. (2012)] Just like the computer crashing for no understandable reason, no matter our mastery over things, they still continue to wear and tear, to break and behave in unpredictable ways. They still surprise us. How can we then still speak of the artistic process as a thing solely based on the human-artist's decisions?

We do not shape these works alone, the materials indulge and resist our intentions, they exert their influence on the work we make. It is time we stop regarding material as passive, it is time we stop undermining and overmining the artist, the material and the work. I truly believe we would place more meaning in the work of the artist by acknowledging all the collaborators and their agency on the work. We should move beyond the first and second artworks and let the third artworks be experienced. In the next chapter we will delve deeper into how this might be achieved by looking at the art practices of artists who work with different collaborators, knowingly or unknowingly, and bring to light how the work is being talked about by the artist.

Chapter 3: Artistic practices in collaboration with ‘others’

How is art being made and talked about in collaboration with ‘others’ in (contemporary) artistic practices?

To help us further understand how art is being made in collaboration with others, I will discuss the art practices of several artists through their own words. As I am assuming that there is a collaboration that takes place in the artistic process, a collaboration that has up till now been absent from the discourses in the arts, I am relying heavily on the words of the artists to shed light into the mechanisms of this collaboration. While I might like to be able to give these other collaborators their own voice, as most are not capable of speech, I have only the artist's words and their intentions at my disposal. By mapping the intentions of the artist first, we can then start pinpointing where the intentions of the work and the material might differ from those of the artist. I will here and there also relate these artists' words to theories and other thinkers to further highlight how we might view, interpret and speak of these collaborations in the future. I will be dividing these artists into different categories to highlight the different collaborators that one can work with. With each category I will gradually step back from the human artist and highlight key concepts that are at the heart of these practices.

Other as Human Subject and Collaborator

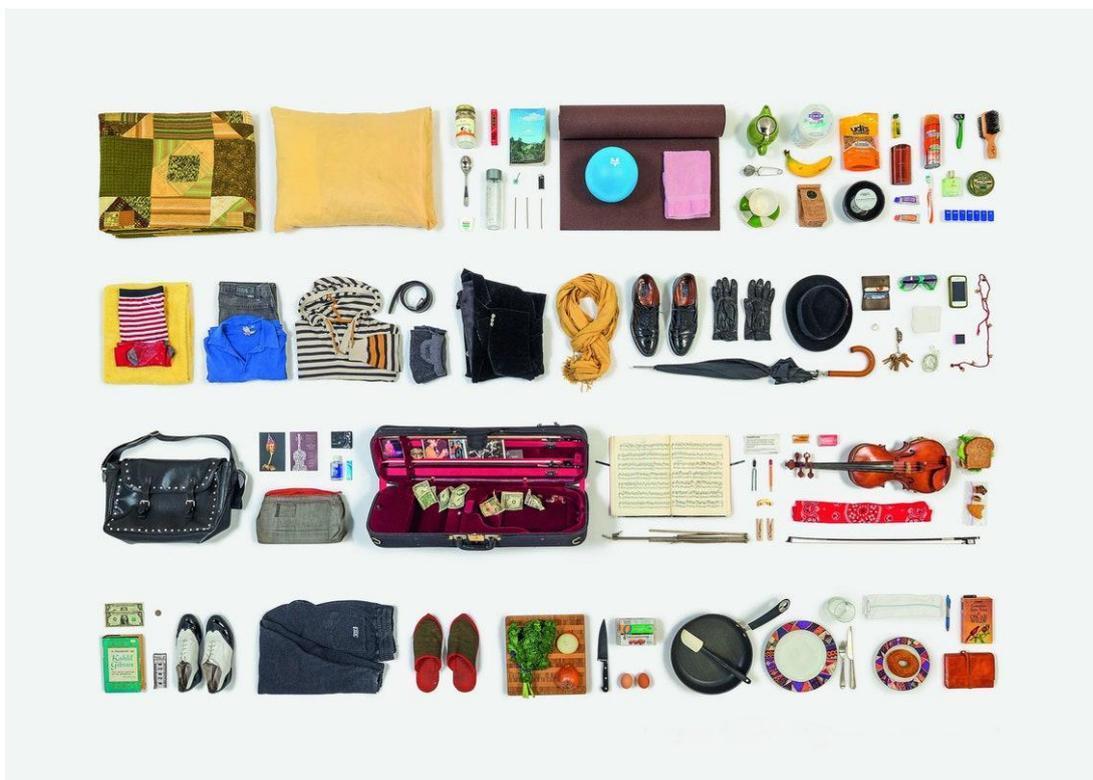


I will first start with discussing artistic practices in collaboration with humans as subjects or collaborators. While this might seem a step back from establishing that the world is not human-centered, I do this because it is in the first place easy for us to accept the agency of the other as human. If we can accept the agency of the human as subject of the work, we might step more easily into acknowledging the agency of any other ‘other’ as subject or collaborator of the work.

Sophie Calle is an artist who has worked a lot with other humans as subjects of her work. In her work, there is, to a certain extent, a clear line between the decisions she makes as an artist and where she relinquishes control and lets the collaborator take over the work. Let us take a look at her work 'Suite Venitienne' (1979), where she decides to follow a man, she had just met in passing, on his imminent trip to Venice, without his knowledge. [Calle, S. (2009)] Her choice is very clear in this piece, she makes the decision to follow this man, that is what *she* sets in motion. The rest of the piece however comes about when the man goes on about his business, doing what he does, and unknowingly moving the artist along. It is Sophie that is doing the following but as to where she goes and ends up, there she relinquishes control to this man she has chosen as the subject of the work, even if he is not aware.

Sophie is very aware of this control that she relinquishes to the other in her works. She sets things in motion but gives room for the work to take her where she could not have expected it. "So every time there is a lie, and generally there is only one in each work: it is what I would have liked to find, and didn't." [Calle, S. (2009) p. 55] She recognizes that she has expectations of the work beforehand, but that these expectations do not correspond to what she finds in her collaboration with others. Instead of making everything fit with her expectations, she acknowledges where the work took her and exposes her true findings, with just one lie to expose also what she had hoped to find in the work.

To give a different example, let's look at the project "Everything We Touch" by Paula Zuccotti. In this project, that became a book, Paula Zuccotti asked many people around the world to keep track of all the objects they touched throughout one day. She later asked them to collect all these objects, and she arranged them cleanly in chronological order on a white surface and photographed these one day portraits. [(2015)]



Again, in this work we can make a distinction as to where the artist sets things in motion and where she relinquishes control to her human collaborators (and perhaps we could later argue also to her object collaborators). Paula Zuccotti sets up the premise for the work: to have different people, from different walks of life, for one single 24 hours, keep track of all the objects they touched. To a certain extent, she also exerts control in her choice of the people she asks for collaboration. What she does not control however is the kinds of objects they touch. She can not and does not guide what they need to touch throughout that day's activities. There she relinquishes control. Later in her choice of how to capture these days in objects she regains some control, though not entirely as she decides to keep to the chronological order in which these objects were touched throughout the day. She is there again, reliant on her human collaborators to account for the order of the objects.

In her own words, Paula Zuccotti explains that the project had started with just two people living in London, and the contrast she saw there surprised her. Within the same city, the objects that people touched throughout the day already showed such difference which she did not expect. [LensCulture. (2017)] Even in the way other people surprised her later as the project expanded to further cities and countries, we can see how her expectations differed from what she got. And in this how she relinquished the control over and embraced the surprises of her collaborators, to create these telling pieces.

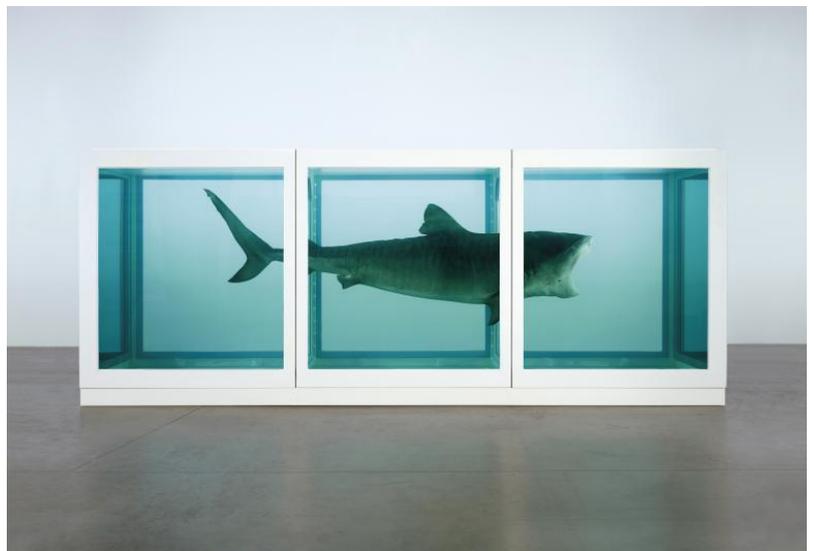
While we might not always credit the human collaborators as artists of their own, we can in human-human collaboration still make some distinction between where the influence of the artist on the work starts and ends, and where the collaborator takes over. It is still right to name the artist as the creator of the pieces, in most cases it is the artist setting things in motion to the creation of a piece, but I don't think we do the work or the artist justice by denying the (artistic) influence of others in the work. It in no way takes away from the artistic choices the artist did make in the creation of the work. Thinking of portrait photography, like the ones made by Rineke Dijkstra, does it do her work and ability injustice to recognize that the human she photographs play a part in making these portraits so poignant? It is still her choice to photograph these people. It is still her skill that captures the emotion of these people in her photographs. If this can be said of the human-human collaboration, could we extend this reasoning to the collaboration of the human with other others?



Other as Nature and Animal Collaborator

My next step in stepping away from the human is to view art in collaboration with the other as nature and animals. While we recognize that animals and things in nature move and change, driven not by external forces, but of their own accord, we still don't necessarily recognize it as action because it is not (to our knowledge) 'based on rational consideration and conscious intentions'. [Weber-Krebs, D. (2014)] There is a certain duality in this statement that I need to address. We can recognize that animals and nature enact visible change, that goes against our intentions, on one hand, yet in many cases we would deny it as agency because it does not stem from rational thought. The fact that we would already deny agency at this step is a problem for me, as I will later on be moving away from visible change let alone rational thought.

Let me first start by taking a look at Damien Hirst's work. While he often works with organic material in his work, Damien Hirst stands decidedly on the side of those who deny nature and animals their agency. I specifically want to take a closer look at his piece "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" (1991) and the discourse around its deterioration and conservation. The work as it was originally made consists of a tiger shark suspended in a formaldehyde solution in a vitrine. Formaldehyde was used with the intent to stop the process of decay of the dead shark. While it did significantly slow down the process, the original tiger shark did end up decaying slowly in the glass tank. In 2006, as the work changed ownership, Damien ended up restoring the work by replacing the shark. [Lange-Berndt, P. (2016)] This raises some interesting questions. In his use of formaldehyde he wants to put a complete stop to the natural process of decay, and keep the tiger shark suspended in the moment just after death. "As the artist pointed out in an interview in 1993, his shark was always intended to suggest the physical impact of death" [Lange-Berndt, P. (2016) p. 40] The purpose of his work is to suggest and invoke death, and the *material* impact of it. Yet when the work, or the shark more specifically in this case, went against his intentions and continued to decay, embodying death even more I would argue, the work was altered to be brought back to 'optimal' condition. The shark was enacting its agency and influencing the work in a way that fit with the intention of the work, but still this agency was denied by the artist. It would seem that at the time there was nobody there to recognize the artistry, in the shark's intervention of the work, and acknowledge a collaboration.



Sema Bekirovic, contrary to Damien Hirst, embraces change and differing intentions in her work. She has often involved animals and nature in her work. "Animals and plants 'read', interpret and transform the world around them — meaning that they perceive the

world through their senses and use that data to make estimates and possibly intervene. They in some way or other process all the material that is available to them.” [Bekirovic, S. (2019)] She doesn't see the way that nature acts as a passive kind of action, where one is just overcome by natural processes. She sees in nature, careful listeners who participate in our world through choices, not at all that different from how we humans move about the world. This vision of hers has even culminated in her most recent project: a book highlighting a collection of art pieces made and attributed to nature, animals and natural processes. “The objects depicted in this book came to me through different channels. [...] The background stories of these objects and the people who brought them to me could fill a whole other book. But that would once again have placed man at the centre of the proceedings, which is something I have purposely tried to avoid.” [Bekirovic, S. (2019)] She very purposefully excludes human stories in this book, to give the artistic interventions made by nature center-stage. She brings attention to artistic processes happening around us, without our human intervention. Through her work, Sema seems to embrace the deterioration processes of materials. Where others might see wear and tear and the loss of value of an object, Sema recognizes the next phase of the natural process of all things. She sees no loss here, only beauty.



I am not saying, we as human makers do not get a say in the work, and must follow blindly where even unwanted change takes us, but there are voices and intentions at play that we should not be deaf to. I think Damien Hirst was too stubborn and blind to see how the deterioration of the shark, while it went against his idea of the work, did not go against the meaning of it. While he saw a mistake in the formula that did not accurately stop the decay of the shark, an argument can be made that the shark was listening as Sema Bekirovic suggests, and attempted to enhance the work. I think it is important that we have ears and eyes for the unexpected processes of change that are happening around us.

Other as Materials and Objects

This next step is simultaneously easy yet complicated. Materials and objects are such an obvious part of the artistic process, but they are largely discussed in terms of our mastery over them. We can recognize collaboration with others, as human and nature, because through change they can make differing intentions known. How then do we talk of collaboration with others when they are inanimate things? This becomes especially hard as the lines blur between the interventions of the artist and that of the other. Up till now we could still rely on certain visual clues to point out where the intention of the artist starts and where it ends. The agency of materials cannot really be recognized visually in the work, rather we must rely on the word of the artist to give us insight in the nature of the collaboration. The reason this collaboration is less visible, might in large part be due to the collaboration hinging so strongly on the physicality of the material. A much more intimate knowledge of the material is required to recognize their influence.

To better understand the nature of the agency of materials, I want to highlight Marc Boumeester's book 'The desire of the medium'. In this book he introduces the idea that mediums or materials might at times be working with and sometimes against our intentions, enacting their own desires. "This is probably why we so willingly embrace 'the ghost in the machine': the projection of a humanoid force with an active will which possessed an external object is much easier to accept than the thought of a passive, enduring and non-negotiable system of inaccessible matter working against our goals." [Boumeester, M (2017) p.185] In a way this draws back to the idea that we would rather think a matter haunted or an artwork ensouled by a human intenty, than this other resisting our intentions because of their own intouchable desires.

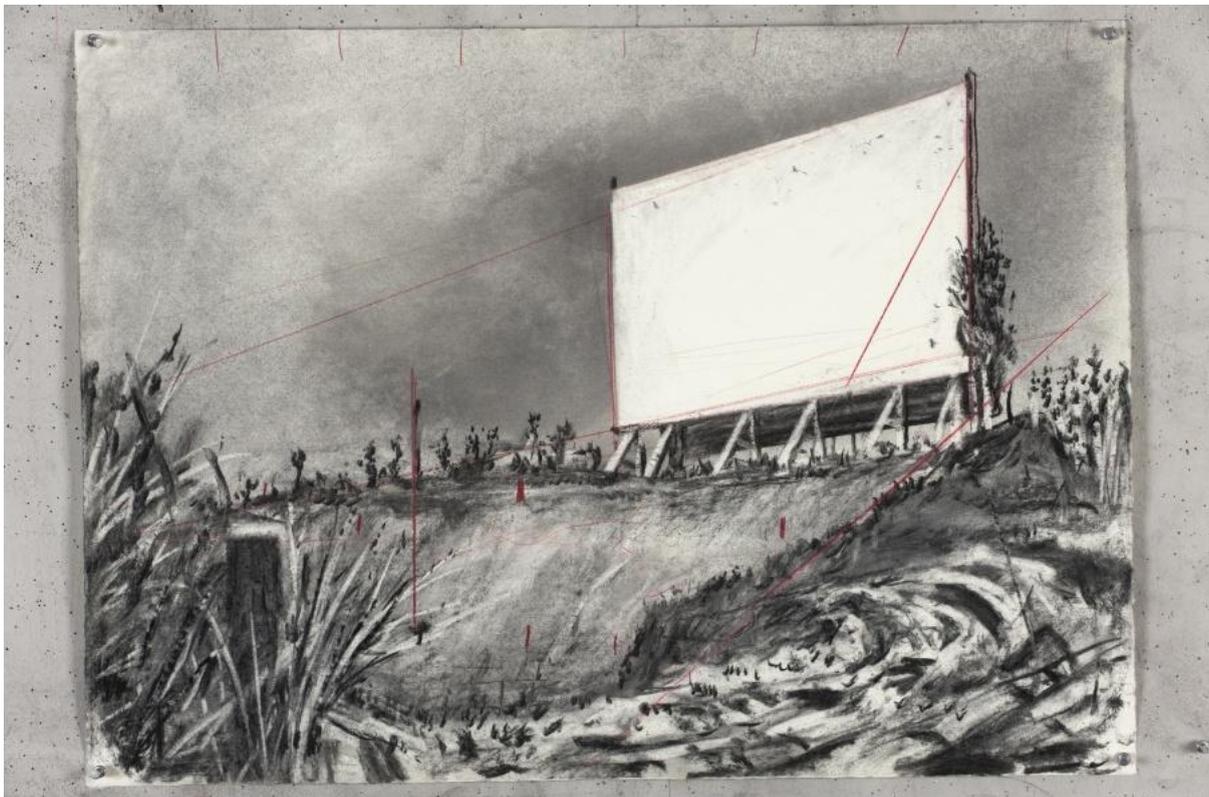


We can see how materials might work against us in how Amy Sillman, a painter, talks about color. "Each hue adds a nearly anthropomorphic character to the operation in a painting: a painter will know that Naples yellow will make things turgid, chromium oxide green is overbearing, flake white has a dry indifference, phthalo blue seems filmy but always ends up domineering, king's blue appears classy at first but is really kind of vulgar. By using oil paint, you quickly learn to distinguish and predict your materials by feel, all the way down to the brand: Williamsburg paint is grainy, Rembrandt is slimy, Old Holland is creamy, Gamblin is dull, Utrecht doesn't weigh enough, Lefranc & Bourgeois weighs too much. Managing all these characteristics is part of what you learn to do in

the act of painting." [Sillman, A. (2016) p. 105] She talks of paints as characters. Characters she has to negotiate with in the process of making. Paint might not do much on its own, in this it requires our intervention more, to squeeze it out of the tube and spread it on the

surface, but we can recognize in her description that they each require different handling, they each express different desires.

William Kentridge, a south-african artist, also speaks of a certain kind of negotiation in talking about his working process. He works often with charcoal on paper and makes animation through these drawings. In the way he talks about his process, he often mentions a kind of dialogue with the work and a recognition that the work somehow communicates where it wants to go. “You see when you draw, you get more and more cautious. Very often a drawing strats very [*drawing sounds*] loosely and very fast and then as you start to get towards the end, it tightens up. I spoke about this earlier, I think. At a certain point, it gets overworked and dies. When I started doing animations, one of the things I was interested in was trying to work out where the drawing dies” [Kentridge, W. (2017) p. 62] It is interesting that he talks of drawings dying, as they are not alive in any way we recognize as such. But his mention of death does suggest an aliveness and thus probably also a desire that was present before, but through his intervention was lost. There is a specific intervention then, taken by the artist, where the collaboration is done, and one can as a human artist go too far and lose the voice of the work.



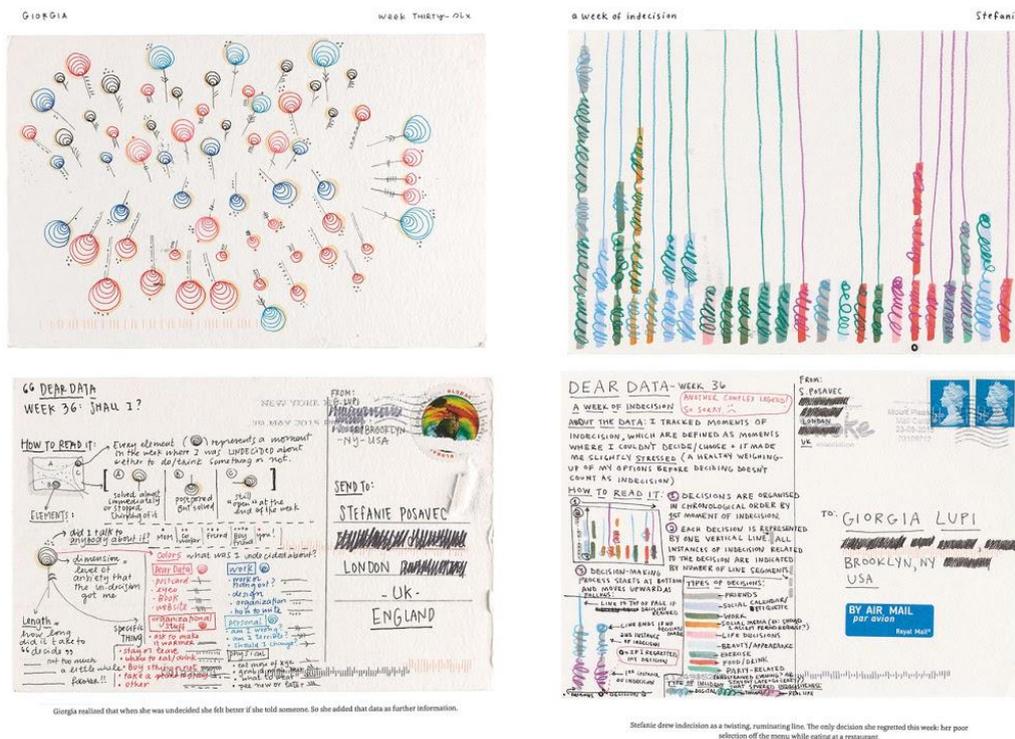
It is reassuring to me to see how William Kentridge talks of his works. It is not necessarily that he is familiar with the idea of medium and material having desires, but still very clearly in the experience of the work, these desires and the collaboration is there and is being felt. “[This] was a good idea that didn’t work and this was a non-idea that became an idea when it was actually seen. [...] I can only take credit for acknowledging it once it’s there.” [Kentridge, W. (2017) p. 93] There is an acknowledgment that the art pieces don’t really always start in the head of the artist, as the art-historical discourse might have thought before. There are, thankfully, things that happen outside of us that feed and influence the work.

Other as Ideas and Concepts

This next and final step is perhaps the hardest. We have moved away from the human, away from nature and now we make the step away from the material, as we move on to the other as ideas and concepts. Now I say we step back from the material, but that is not quite true. I will explain this.

As we can see when we look back to the evolution of the idea of genius, we have across history had the tendency to separate what happens in the mind from what happens in the body. We separate the mental from the physical. The philosopher duo, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, disagree with this view and in 1980 introduced their theory on *conceptual metaphors*. According to their theory, we use metaphors based in the material world to process abstract thoughts. That is, the things we experience *physically* inform how we think about intangible matters. "Why can we use the phrase *a long way to go*, which is literally about distance and motion through space, to talk about the completion of a mental project (developing a theory), in which there is no literal motion whatsoever?" [Johnson, M. (2007) p.177] In this example we see that the way that we move through the world physically, influences how we think and move through abstract ideas. We add distance to things that are not spacial, we add the notion of time to things that are not necessarily temporal, we add physical limits to ideas that are not material and physical in nature. We do this because that is the reference point we have for understanding how things work together and interact.

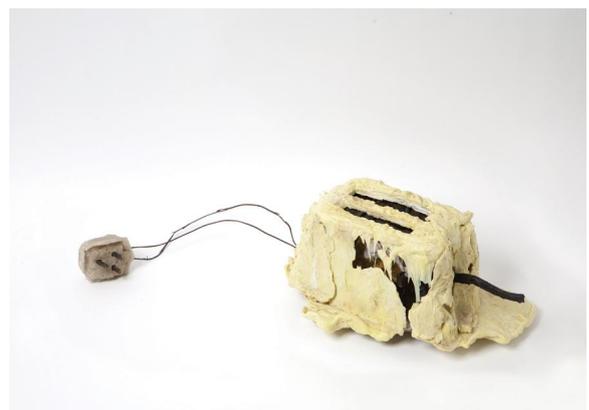
In working with ideas and concepts, we might think ourselves untethered from the work, but it would seem not to be the case. Even in working with ideas and concepts, materiality still plays a part. And thus, I would argue, also the intentions and desires of material as well.



For this I want to highlight a specific project by 2 artists, Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec. In their project “Dear Data”, they, over the course of a year, collected different sets of data every week, centered around a different aspect of their everyday life, and sent each other the results in a data drawing. [Lupi, G. Posavec, S.] The data they chose to collect each week are largely based very strongly on sensorial experiences, they collected data like a week of laughter, a week of complaints and a week of doors. These sensorial experiences matter and are very guiding in the processing of the information. It matters what the experiences were as that informs how the data has been expressed in an abstract manner later. But it matters also that they are working with the concept of data to portray their information. If we were to speak of the desires of data as a material, I think we could say that data desires to be categorized and quantified. The way I see it the data expresses a desire to be presented in a certain way. It wants to be made visual, show amounts and tell a story depending on which value these amounts are put against.

And it is these two things that are the driving force in how the data is visualized, the sensorial experience of the data, and the desire of data. The sensorial experience informs what categories are made, perhaps temporality was an important factor in the experience or the geographical place of the experience. This sensorial information informs how the data is visualized.

I think another example of a project where concept and material influence each other is Thomas Thwaites’ ‘Toaster project’. For this project he set out to make a toaster from scratch. So we start here with a concept set out by the artist, to start from nothing and through his own hand gather material, refine and mold it and make a toaster out of it. Next step was to dismantle a simple toaster to see what it was made of. Here he was confronted with the material reality that a toaster is made of much more than he thought. But still wanting to keep to his concept, he found 5 main materials that he would set out to collect and use for his project. And so on it goes throughout the project with Thomas Thwaites balancing between wanting to keep to his concept and having to adapt due to material obstacles. [Thwaites, T. (2010)] And this is to me where concepts start living a life of their own. Despite all the obstacles he faced in keeping to his original concept, he still made the effort to keep as close to it as possible. One could argue that he could have changed it at any time, seeing as how he had set up the rule himself. I would argue however, that this concept was part of the material he was working with, a material he chose to work with, that by challenging and restricting him drove the project further. It was by having to ‘cheat’ the rule a little bit at times because the materials at his disposal offered no other way, that offers the work a complexity of meaning.



Just as humans, nature and materials influence us, so do ideas. Despite what we might think, they aren’t as entirely our own or as separate from the world as we might like to think. There is, here, also a collaboration to take into account.

Conclusion

Throughout history, we have tended to be human-centric in how we have chosen to view art, artists and the artistic process. We have come to see the artist as the sole maker of the work. This has translated into how we value artworks and artists, the laws we have put in place to regulate artists and artistic expressions, and how we have approached the concept of genius. When looking at artists and how they speak of their artistic process however, we see a discrepancy with this human-centric view. Artists are aware and experience in their practice the desire and the agency of the others they work with, but as we step away from the artist the desire of the others gets lost in the discourse we have about the works. I think it is as Susan Sontag said, that we have stepped too far away from the sensoriality of the work. We try to zoom in and out too much, missing the work in the end. The theories already exist to offer us an alternative view when it comes to thinking about non-human others. New materialism already offers us the tools to see the artistic process differently and recognize the collaborations with others happening around us.

I had thought when I started this research, that it was perhaps a matter of how art is made, and if I changed my artistic process in a certain way I could better collaborate with others in my work. But, as these wonderful artists have shown me, the making already happens in collaboration. We do not make alone, we have never made things alone, the world, the things, the materials around us, influence our work, directly or indirectly. It is much more a matter of changing our view and the language we use to talk about the process and the work. Unlike in the past, we should again put more emphasis on the physicality of things. It is in the experience, in the weight, in the materiality of things, that we best grasp the reality of the collaboration and negotiation that happens in the making of an art work. Even in more conceptual art, the materiality of things matters, as have shown Markoff & Johnson.

So what does the discourse around artists and artworks look like, when the idea of the artist as sole maker is removed? In truth I am not sure I have the answer yet. This non human-centric discourse is in a way already happening, contemporary artists find the words somehow, to give credit to the others. But this discourse is still small-scaled, with older concepts of the artist as sole maker still prevailing strongly. Perhaps it will still take some time to get there, but slowly we might shift back to embracing the idea of *having* a genius, granted to us by the outside force of the non-human others around us. And I think perhaps that is enough for now, that with this idea I can walk about the world now more open-eyed to the magic of the things around me.

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