

THE POTENTIAL OF THINGS

From objects to sculptural things

Alexander Bartleet

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Figure 0, SS, two S-hooks welded together

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ABSTRACT

This project is a practice-based exploration of how a work of art emerges from within a field of signs that are givens brought to the art-making process. In particular it explores the use of utilitarian objects as sculptural materials, where the given signs relate mostly to their past utility. The art-making process then involves a clearing of such givens so that new modes of signification can emerge, as sculptural works of art. Here, the process of making is simultaneously the process of clearing. Various strategies for using these materials are explored, including means to rupture or attenuate associations that objects hold (that we hold for them) with the past. Consideration is given to how, through such means, fresh possibilities might emerge from any material used in the work of art.

INTRODUCTION

This project critically examines how habitual patterns in which we perceive and think about objects in the world become our dominant engagement with them and how this causes implications when making works of art. These behaviours stem from the established utilitarian uses objects have in the environments we move and live in, and so upon encountering objects we instinctively think of their function. We only perceive what is useful for us in these utilitarian terms. Living often becomes a practical matter, where our present perceptions of things are habitually based on memories from the past, the already established terms of reference, habits and clichés that we have learned. There is little vitality in this way of living. When we are preoccupied with the practical usefulness of things, our conception of their possibilities is constrained and our imaginative reach becomes limited. We are restricted by these habits. Habit requires no imagination and familiarity occasions no interest. However, in art, materials are capable of becoming part of inventions and so there is therefore a need to liberate objects from the adhesions of their past utility so that, through being perceived freshly, new artistic possibilities might emerge in the process of art-making. It is through the action of practice itself that this project explores the potential of materials, bringing them into new use in new works of art.

This study begins by investigating habits of thinking about materials that are often considered for their function or have degraded qualities that might be used as things to make artworks with new dynamic potential. Perceptions and dislocating existing conceptions will also be discussed. Then several approaches of art making that attempt to destabilise these static existing conceptions will be presented. The first of these strategies is that of physical rupture and disruption, applying material changes that disguises the objects or causes them to become unrecognisable.

The second strategy explores a rupture through new uses, which re-configures objects in new ways as an attempt to change the way we think

about them. And the third approach is a conceptual rupture that radically changes how the objects are thought about, as exemplified by Duchamp's 'ready-mades' such as the Bottle Rack. Strategies of sensing potential and latency in my art practice as well as sensing our affective responses are then discussed. These strategies are supported by an analysis of ideas from key philosophers and works from a range of artists, both historical and contemporary, which have influenced the ideas investigated in my practice. These theorists include Victor Shklovsky, Peter Shwenger, Timothy Morton, Barbara Bolt, Simon O'Sullivan, Gilles Deleuze, Boris Groys and Jan Verwoert. Artists I discuss are Marcel Duchamp, Gabriel Orozco, Richard Wentworth and Tomma Abts. This exegesis is in support of a practice-based project. My works in this exhibit are dispersed throughout the text and other relevant works have been included in the appendix at the end.

HABITS

Through habits of thinking and existing perceptions, we often consider objects for their functional and practical uses, and this limits our capacity to see them differently and use them as art materials in order to create something new. Describing this as 'habitualisation', art theorist Victor Shklovsky argues that the aesthetic visual qualities of objects are often ignored because of their practical uses and these perceptions can be hard to disrupt or change.¹ Peter Shwenger expands on the concept of 'habitualisation' when talking about Martin Heidegger's idea of a functional object being 'invisible'. He tells us that an object "can emerge more strongly when it is missing" or broken "than when it is invisible, as it is when work is going smoothly."² So when they are lost or broken they come to our attention but when they are functional they are likely to go unnoticed. Writer Timothy Morton explains Heidegger's concept of 'ready to hand' through an example of an everyday office situation where a paperweight is ignored and not noticed. He states:

"When a tool such as a paperweight is used, it disappears, or withdraws (Entzug). We are preoccupied with copying the page that the paperweight is holding down. We are concerned with an essay deadline, and the paperweight simply disappears into this general project. If the paperweight slips, we might notice it. All of a sudden it becomes vorhanden (present-at-hand) rather than zuhanden (ready-to-hand)"³

This habit of thinking can easily go unnoticed. For example, as I write this text I haven't stopped to appreciate the aesthetic quality of the looping shape that my power chord is currently making on the floor. Instead I am more concerned with it staying plugged into my laptop so that it remains

¹ Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." Russian formalist criticism: Four essays 3 (1965) 2

² Shwenger, Peter. The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects. University of Minnesota, 2006. 54.

³ Morton, Tim. "Objects as Temporary Autonomous Zones." continent. 1, no. 3 (2011) 149

charged. As with the paperweight, if my charger were to detach from the laptop I would notice it, so it would go from being 'ready to hand' to 'present to hand'. Once the power chord becomes 'present to hand' it is no longer a functioning object, but a thing with aesthetic visual qualities and new possibilities.

Artist and theorist Barabara Bolt conceives of 'representationalism', which she describes as a habitual and conventional mode of thinking. For Bolt, objects are already categorised by function and given specific meanings. While this is perhaps necessary for society to function, it does not facilitate imagination or invention. She states:

"Representationalism is a system of thought that fixes the world as an object and resource for human subjects. As a mode of thought that prescribes all that is known, it orders the world and predetermines what can be thought. Representation becomes the vehicle through which representationalism can effect this will to fixity and mastery."⁴

This habit of thinking about things tends to lock them in place as functional objects and allows little room to be reconsidered or thought of differently. Theorist Simon O'Sullivan also discusses how conventional objects are fixed in their representation and how this constrains interaction with them stating, "with such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place."⁵ Bolt and O'Sullivan suggest that the visual reminders of an object's function predetermine our understanding of them and therefore, can limit the possibility for them to be understood in new ways in the context of art and life.

⁴ Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. I. B. Tauris, 2004. 12-13

⁵ O'Sullivan, S. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 1



Figure 1⁶

Gabriel Orozco's work *Elevator* (Fig 1) was salvaged from an old building and was recontextualised in a gallery as an artwork, and yet habits of thought and existing perceptions linked to its function persisted. When viewers entered the confined box they responded with immediate sensations of movement. Usually not subject to consideration when functioning in everyday life, Orozco's elevator, out-of-order and in a gallery, activated these routine responses. Orozco noted that when an elevator "goes up and down you feel it in your stomach, so when you go into this elevator you remember that feeling..."⁷ The concept of 'the elevator' was strong enough to produce a physical response from users, even when divorced from its context and function by being presented in a gallery as an artwork. This shows that conventional perceptions of things are hard to shift, even when an object is re-contextualised and repurposed.

⁶ Figure 1, Gabriel Orozco, *Elevator*, 1994

⁷ Temkin, A., G. Orozco, B. Fer, M.M. Art, Ö.K. Basel, and C.G. Pompidou. Gabriel Orozco. *Museum of Modern Art*, 2009. 101

Deleuze refers to these habits and existing perceptions as ‘givens’ or ‘clichés’ that become an obstacle when attempting to create a new work of art. Even traditional art materials come with a range of habitual conceptions; Deleuze explains, “it is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface”, and that a “whole category of things that could be termed ‘clichés’ already fills the canvas, before the beginning.”⁸ It may be a white canvas but it is not blank. It is coloured by all the expectations the artist has and all the images that have already been painted onto a canvas in the history of art. Although the canvas may appear to be a clean white surface it is not a *tabula rasa*, but is already teeming with images.⁹ In fact, one could argue it could be just as difficult to use a canvas as an art material as a conventional object, because the canvas has been used as an art material for thousands of years. In fact it is impossible to clear habits and existing perceptions from the viewer’s mind completely. To remove these thoughts we would have to clear ourselves of all consciousness and past memories and experiences. Our perceptions of things are recollections of what we have remembered from past experiences. These ideas of clearing ‘cliches’ and ‘givens’ are discussed further in the strategies section.

⁸ Deleuze, G. Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Bloomsbury Academic, 2003. 86

⁹ A *tabula rasa* is a latin phrase translated in english as ‘blank slate’. It was a tablet covered in wax, used to keep notes. which were cleared off by heating it and smoothing the surface.

OUR PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions of things are not inherent to the material object itself but are defined by each spectator’s existing conceptions and their own history with that object. If someone’s past experience with an object is different to another spectator then each will understand it in different ways. For example, when held up to the light, the photographic slides illustrated below (Fig 2) invokes two pasts: the past of the person who initially took the slide but also the past of the person who looks at the slide. We see the past of the image within in the slide, but the material itself also has a particular utilitarian association with the past that we retrieve from our memory when we look at it. We understand how the device of the slide functions, because we know that the slide holds an image when we hold it up to the light. We know how to use it because we have seen it or used it before in past encounters.



Figure 2¹⁰

¹⁰ Figure 2, Image of two photographic slides

However with varying factors, such as time, the signification of things and how we know and perceive them can change. Our references with the photographic slide are not stable. For example, the image on the slide (Fig 2) is of a man wearing a shaving jacket. That moment in time was significant to both the photographer and the subject. But, for us looking at it now, it is indicative of 1960's fashion. A whole range of other perceptions that have come about only from being here now and looking back into the past are attached to the slide. The man wearing the shaving jacket becomes less important, while the whole image becomes a representation of an entire era. Through time this image has changed. Through time the image accumulates a whole lot of new signs as others attenuate or become detached. Therefore, depending on the individual and their own experiences and memories with a photographic slide and the images it contains everyone's perceptions are likely to be very different. This shows that signs are not inherent to the object itself. These signs are our own conceptions that we attach to the object.

For example, the signs that are attached to the object illustrated in Figure 3 hold no utilitarian reference for me, and I see it as an aesthetic object.



Figure 3¹¹

However for Marcel Duchamp in 1914 and anyone who lived in Europe at that time, its function would have been familiar as a rack to dry bottles. Duchamp moved the bottle rack into the gallery context translating it in *Bottle Rack* the artwork. Just as with the slide, recontextualised the junk shop, when viewers first encountered the *Bottle Rack* in the gallery, it had utilitarian signifiers attached to it. It was only in the change in the site in which it was encountered that made it radical and destabilised the conventional signs that resided within the viewer. Some may have assumed that it had been left by accident in the gallery or that it had been reframed as a work of art. Its use was no longer practical but was now symbolic. We could argue that objects have signs attached to them but the reality is that the signs are actually within in us and their meanings are defined by our conceptions of them. If we encounter an object through practical function or we encounter it in an art history lecture changes our conception of an object entirely. Later on in this text I refer to Duchamp's re-conceptualisation of objects as an act of art making.

¹¹ Figure 3, Marcel Duchamp, Bottle Rack, 1914

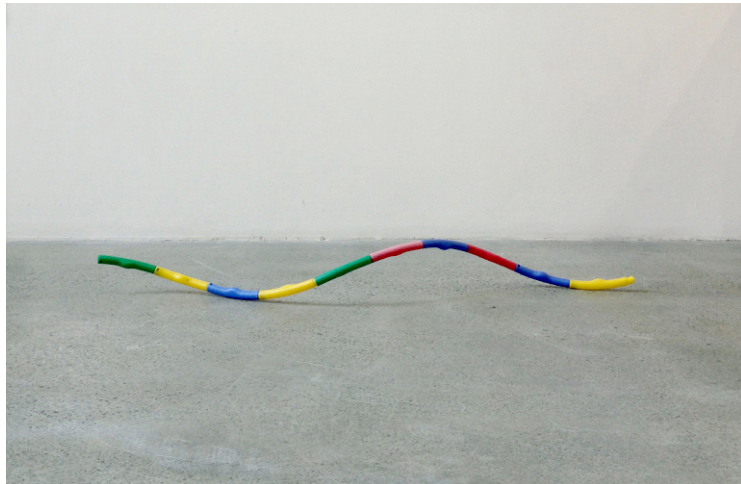


Figure 4¹²

MOVEMENT

In order to start thinking differently about material objects, these habitual conceptions need to be destabilised and unsettled through approaches of art making. Bolt discusses the idea of beginning to break habits of thought by moving things forward so that they do not become trapped by one singular understanding or association so they instead are flexible and are capable of being realised in several ways. She states, “practice creates the movement and movement provides the key to breaking open the fixity of representation.”¹³ Through the practice of art making, ‘inert objects’ can be disrupted and set onto new paths of understanding as visual aesthetic things. For example my work *Forward Spiral* (Fig 4) was made from a discarded hula-hoop. However, when the hula-hoop structure broke at one of the joints, the elastic core of structure pulled together and all of the sections naturally twisted into a new shape. Through this simple and unexpected change of form the object’s prior function became less important and the visual aesthetic qualities came to the fore. It was no longer ready to hand but instead was present to hand and had the potential to move forward and take on other possibilities as an art material. Through witnessing this change in a familiar object, I became focused on achieving this similar change with other material objects.

¹² Figure 4, *Forward Spiral*, 2015

¹³ Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. I. B. Tauris, 2004. 31



Figure 5¹⁴



Figure 6¹⁵

¹⁴ Figure 6, *A Hundred Small Ideas*, 2015

¹⁵ Figure 7, *Projecting the New*, 2015

PHYSICAL RUPTURE

This first strategy that is employed in my practice explores processes that attempt to rupture, disrupt and clear habits and existing perceptions through a physical visual manipulation of material objects, that causes them to become unrecognisable and therefore able to be perceived in new ways. In the work *A Hundred Small Ideas* (Fig 5) I explore hundreds of different methods out of a process of physically manipulating conventional objects. They have been employed in different ways, but are all linked together by the strategy, which is a process that attempts to rupture and clear the conventional signs and habits that attached to them. These processes include that of: cutting, intercepting, layering, painting, covering, joining, twisting, shattering and tearing. Through these processes the objects become materials that can be seen for their visual aesthetic qualities with new possibilities for invention as opposed to being seen and used for their practical functions.

In the work *Projecting the New* (Fig 6) which is part of *A Thousand Small Ideas*, I explore Deleuze's principle of the diagram as a process used to disrupt and rupture the 'cliches' and 'givens' we think of before making an artwork.¹⁶ Deleuze talks about Francis Bacon's method of painting as an example of an attempt to shift from habitual thinking: "One starts with a figurative form, a diagram intervenes and scrambles it, and a form of a completely different nature emerges from the diagram."¹⁷ This principle of the diagram (in Deleuzian terms) is a strategy used to disrupt and rupture any recognisable features that remind us of the past function of an object. The diagram sets a series of new rules and systems that challenge how we usually respond and treat these objects. This system of working can be unruly or chaotic, but can lead to unexpected results and realise new possibilities. Deleuze talks about the challenge of embracing chaos, and the "attempt to emerge from it." By welcoming unpredictability, the artist's work will never look like what they aimed to achieve, but instead could open up something more interesting. I started with a variety of recognisable objects including

¹⁶ The diagram is a visual model and device that Giles Deleuze uses as a way to disrupt the 'cliches' and 'givens' that already exist before you make a work of art. It is a device is used as a means of disrupting and clearing 'cliches' and 'givens' but as a way of bringing rhythm and new order to things.

¹⁷ Deleuze, G. Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Bloomsbury Academic, 2003. 103

plastic toys, a used wooden painting frame and wine corks. To get around those 'clichés' and 'givens' I cut the plastic toys into pieces and glued them onto the wood off cuts. I shattered the wooden frame, which once held a canvas, and positioned it into new forms. Even though the wooden frame is still slightly recognisable, it suggests that its previous function and history has been rejected and the work can be considered differently. It is still an art material used to make art, but has changed from a habitual practical functioning object into an art material used in a new way.

While creating his work *Painting* (1946) Bacon found that embracing chaos helped free his mind of 'clichés' and 'givens' that limit art-making. Deleuze wrote that Bacon had originally wanted to paint a bird descending from the sky onto a field, but "the lines he had drawn suddenly took on a kind of independence" suggesting "something totally different."¹⁸ Being open to new possibilities and unexpected developments of an idea can change the original idea for the better. Bolt, for example, uses a very systematic painting strategy when making an artwork, "blocking in the shapes, establishing a composition, paying attention to proportion and the shapes of light and dark."¹⁹ These very controlled applied systems of painting could be seen as limiting when trying to create something new and unexpected. However, she goes on to describe how through the repetition of these systems of painting there was an "undefinable moment, the painting took on a life....the 'work' (as verb) took on its own momentum, its own rhythm and intensity. Within this intense and furious state, I no longer had any awareness of time, of pain or of making decisions." Once in this state of momentum, less thought was put into decision-making and instead more consideration went into her affective and aesthetic response to the materials, shapes, and forms being created and realised. The past conventions and systems she would have previously considered that she felt limited the outcome of the painting lost importance. She states, "The painting takes on a life of its own. It breathes, vibrates, pulsates, shimmers and generally runs away from me." The work no longer illustrates her habits and strategies but rather, explores the idea of movement and dynamics, revealing new ideas and potentials. She says, "In the performativity of imaging, life gets into the image."

¹⁸ Deleuze, G. Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Bloomsbury Academic, 2003. 156

¹⁹ Bolt, B. Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image. I. B. Tauris, 2004. 12



Figure 7²⁰

²⁰ Figure 7, Image of studio

Whilst the chance and indeterminacy can be an unpredictable and chaotic method used in my art practice, they are a successful way of disrupting existing perceptions and offer up new ones. However, it is also very important to have an element of logic in my art practice. Deleuze writes about Francis Bacon's use of chance and taking advantage of mistakes in his art methods, but also points out the importance of the diagram as a way of harmonising his unruly methods, stating, "The violent methods must not be given free reign, and the necessary catastrophe must not submerge the whole." Deleuze argues for a balance between chance and "figurative givens" that "Not all the figurative givens have to disappear; and above all, a new figuration, that of the figure, should emerge from the diagram and make the sensation clear and precise."²¹ It is necessary to find balance between loose dynamic spontaneity and an overarching logic that creates a clear message and idea. The element of chance in the making of the work allows for unexpected realisations, but logic keeps the work from becoming overcomplicated and confusing. My installation *Rhizome* (Fig 8-9) may have initially appeared illogical and disordered, as it incorporated hundreds of different combinations of objects and ideas placed throughout the exhibition space. However, by repeatedly used clear PVC tubing throughout the installation, the objects linked together as one cohesive work. This repeated use of one type of object created an overall rhythm to the work and brought all of the objects together as one consistent idea. In this case, the diagram was used as a method for disrupting their past functions as well as reconfiguring the way we perceive each individual object, by linking them together through pattern and an overall balanced work.

²¹ Deleuze, G. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2003. 110



Figure 8²²



Figure 9²³

²² *Rhizome*, Installation detail, 2015

²³ *Ibid*

NEW USES

Even after major manipulation and physical ruptures, these habitual thoughts and existing perceptions never completely leave the object – that is they never leave our perceptions of the object. They may initially appear different, but after investigation we are still able to link them back to their past function in some way. While it is clearly possible to disrupt our habits of thought, it became apparent to me that it wasn't the manipulation of the objects that changed how we saw them, but how they were used that changed our perceptions of them. By focusing attention on inventing something new, the artist is longer absorbed by their previous functions and our past associations with them. O'Sullivan suggests that "the artist is simply he or she who has seen 'beyond' those already given signifying formations and affective assemblages – and is able to offer up new ones."²⁴ Unlike Bacon's chaotic use of the diagram, O'Sullivan's concept does not encourage the artist to physically disrupt the recognisability of the conventional object, but rather to purposefully re-configure it in order for it to take on new meaning. With this new realization in mind, my understanding and methods of going about rupturing habits and existing perceptions changed. The art making process became much more dynamic as I no longer had to concern myself with abstracting the object, but instead could focus on inventive ways of using these objects to make something new.

²⁴ O'Sullivan, S. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 55

MULTIPLES

When objects are considered individually they are often perceived for their functional past, but when in multiples they have the potential to collaborate and allow new possibilities to emerge. Morton uses an example of a coral reef to talk about the importance of the collective of multiple individual things being considered as one. He states:

“A coral reef is made of coral, fish, seaweed, plankton and so on. But one of these things on its own doesn’t embody part of a reef. Yet the reef just is an assemblage of these particular parts. You can’t find a coral reef in a parking lot. In this way, the vibrant realness of a reef is kept safe both from its parts and from its whole.”²⁵

If the right combinations of individual objects are placed together, as a whole they have the ability to become something new. ‘Inert objects’ placed in multiples have a much greater chance of being perceived in new ways and have agency as art materials. Art critic Jan Verwoert talks about how a singular or distinct quality emerges from a combination of multiple things. Using water as an example, he states: “Water is wet, a single molecule of water is not. The quality of “wetness” is therefore emergent, because it only emerges from the interaction of many molecules of water.”²⁶ The beauty, qualities and characteristics of water rely on millions of individual water particles which collaborate together to create a whole. Without this interaction of these many individual elements the qualities of water would not emerge.

²⁵ Morton, Tim. "Objects as Temporary Autonomous Zones." *continent*. 1, no. 3 (2011): 150

²⁶ Verwoert, Jan. "Emergence: On the Painting of Tomma Abts. (2005). 3

Verwoert also talks about the idea of “deriving new structures and qualities from the interaction of elements in a complex system.” Through the clever combining of multiple objects, potentials become possibilities and completely new unexpected combinations and patterns emerge. For example, in my work *Autonomous Things* (Fig 10) six individual photographic slides were combined to create a cube. This process was repeated many times and the cubes were stacked on top of each other. In multiples and no longer considered as individual ‘inert objects’ they took on a rhythm and life of their own as an aggregate. This simple reconfiguration utilised a hidden potential and also opened up the prospect of new perceptions and possible outcomes. Just as water can reconfigure to become ice, the photographic slides were reconfigured to change the way they structurally behaved without disrupting their recognisability. By exploring new possibilities and characteristics of recognisable things through multiples, our conception and understanding of the objects begins to change. Associations with the objects’ individual past function become less significant as the multiple configuration encourages the viewer to see them as art materials, combining to make a whole artwork.



Figure 10²⁷

²⁷ Figure 10, *Autonomous Things*, 2015

CONNECTIONS

The way in which multiple materials are physically connected together is a vital part of the strategy for changing habits of thinking towards them and reconfiguring the way we think about and use these objects as art materials. By connecting things together in new and inventive ways, existing perceptions can change and new potentials and possibilities will emerge.

Writer Simon O’Sullivan uses a rhizome root system as a diagrammatic example of the connectivity, paths and the network of potential outcomes. He describes a rhizome as a “flat system in which the individual nodal points can, and are, connected to one another in a non-hierarchical manner.” A rhizome structure serves as an illustrated diagram to show the variety of potential possibilities objects can have when connected together. O’Sullivan goes on to explain: “The rhizome is a paradigmatic example of the invention of a concept. In its expanded sense it might also be understood as the presentation of a new ‘image of thought’ in as much as it allows us to think thought differently, in this case to think differently”²⁸ In my art practice each object in an artwork is a nodal point of a rhizome, and I see the potential for them to connect together in new and unexpected ways as the lines between the points. I use the process of art making to experiment and test out concepts and potential relationships to see if interesting possibilities may arise and if more potential ideas are realised. For example, in my work *Connect Four Hundred* (Fig11), I used clear discarded PVC respiratory hospital tubing as a visual device to create an amalgamation of things. These tubes behaved like a network of stems on a rhizome that linked objects together in the hope that new dynamic concepts and relationships emerge.



Figure 11²⁹

²⁹ Figure 11 *Connect Four Hundred*, 2015

³⁰ Figure 12 *Ibid*



Figure 12³⁰

²⁸ O’Sullivan, S. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 12

By exploring the permutations of the object the variety of possibilities that the image/object can follow becomes almost limitless. Much like a rhizome, exploring one possibility opens up a network of other potential possibilities and understandings. For example in *Ten Thousand Individual Works* (Fig 13) Allan McCollum explored the potential of things by revealing all of their possible outcomes. He employed a range of found circular objects such as bottle caps, tap handles, snow globes and jar lids. He replicated the individual objects and then combined them together in different orders and combinations to create ten thousand different objects. *Ten Thousand Individual Works* is a literal example of all the permutations and countless variables that are possible with only a few objects.

Another example of a system that connects different things together to bring about new thoughts and ideas is the internet. This network of information and ideas works similarly to a rhizome as it has the ability to connect things together which would normally never be connected.



Figure 13³¹



Figure 14³²

³¹ Figure 13, Alan McCollum, *Ten Thousand Works*, 1991

³² Figure 14, *Ibid*

O'Sullivan states: "The Web remains a space of creativity, invention and expression. It allows for a certain amount of individual freedom, or simply self-organisation (open source software developments would be a case in point). It is in this sense that the Web is paradigmatically a rhizome."³³ As with the rhizome, the Internet is also an example of a network that provides conventional images and ideas the opportunity to connect or be considered together in new ways. The Internet creates the possibility for objects or images to be easily repositioned and reconsidered as aesthetic art materials with new potentials. Art materials like glue and paint are becoming problematic my art practice, because they fix things in place and no longer allow for movement. Once something appears finished or complete it becomes static and likely to be seen in only one or a limited number of ways and the object or artwork is unlikely to move forward with vitality and be reinterpreted in new ways. For example, In my work *Connect Five*, the artwork was made without any glue. The structure holds itself together and stands freely on its own. These items continue to have the potential to be detached and become a part of completely new ideas with new possibilities, much like images can through rhizomatic networks over the internet.



Figure 15³⁴

³³ O'Sullivan, S. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 13

³⁴ Figure 15, *Connect Five*, 2015

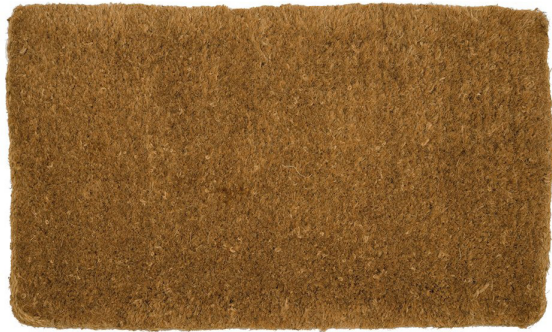


Figure 16³⁵

³⁵ Figure 16, Image of a doormat.

CONCEPTUAL RE-FRAMING

The third strategy explored in this project is a process of re-framing the way in which we conceptualise objects - a change in how we look at them and think about them. This strategy relates to the idea of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* 'ready made' and his reconceptualisation of functional objects by shifting them into the context of art. A simple shift of an ordinary functioning object from its usual context into a gallery space forces a conceptual change in the way we think about the signs attached to the object. This strategy explores how to change existing habits of thought and degraded associations without changing or disrupting the recognisability of object itself. This is not a material manipulation or a physical change, but a 'conceptual transformation'. Artist Richard Wentworth states that,

"We become accustomed to natural patterns - the door and its doormat. When their positions are disrupted something fundamental happens (commonplaces such as the ruck-and-jam method of holding a door open with a mat). The displaced doormat has a new identity, a shift of an inch or two changes it from passive to active."³⁶

This shift may only be a slight adjustment of its position, but becomes a dramatic change to how we conceptually understand the doormat. It shows the importance of our perceptions as opposed to its physical presence and appearance. As discussed earlier by O'Sullivan, the doormat goes from being 'invisible' (ready to hand) to 'visible' (present at hand). This change in thinking shifts the doormat from its functional use as an object and positions it in a new way conceptually as a thing that could be used differently with new possibilities.

O'Sullivan talks about Deleuze and his idea of 'art encounters' being used a strategy that shifts our thinking of material objects. In the context of an art gallery the viewer is forced to consider something differently from how it is seen or thought of in its usual environment. Through this shift in thinking

³⁶ Cook, Lynne. "Richard Wentworth: Per "I Due Maschi"." Lisson Gallery, 1984. 1

he argues that “...our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced through thought. The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack.”³⁷ For example, the work *Red Spotted Ball Bladder* (Fig 17) was an object found at a park that through my encounter with it, became an art object. For an unknown reason the stitching that holds the ball together had been split open, exposing the rubber bladder inside. There was something strange and confrontational about the positioning of the red dot that was on the rubber bladder. As Duchamp had done with the *Bottle Rack* when exhibiting this work, I had taken it from one site and transplanted into another site, and the contextual change reorientated the viewer’s response to the object. Through the agency of this simple translocation the object became something more than what it had been.



Figure 17³⁸

³⁷ O’Sullivan, S. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 1

³⁸ Figure 17, *Red Spotted Ball Bladder*, 2015

POTENTIAL AND LATENCY

In the emergence of new possibilities, potential and latency must be sensed when looking for objects that could become art materials. However they are fundamentally different and are sensed at different stages the process of my art making. Potential is a capacity that we sense. Its future and outcome is uncertain and inconceivable. When we sense something that has potential our sub-conscious picks up a variety of small signs that tell us that this thing is of interest to us. We cannot quite understand this feeling of potential but it is there. The longer you spend time with the objects the more potential you may uncover. Latency, unlike potential requires time and the right conditions in order to emerge. It is a term used in scientific studies to describe when something is dormant but eventually will happen at some point. For example, water that is being heated by a flame and is about to boil but hasn’t yet. For example, I encountered a yellow tennis ball sitting in a patch of tall grass. As I picked it up and looked at it I could sense a strong potential quality for the object. I couldn’t pinpoint exactly what it was that attracted me to it, so I took it back to my studio to investigate further. As I examined and thought about this object, I started to identify certain attributes and qualities could explain this initial intuition of potential.



Figure 18³⁹

The potential quality I sensed in this object was now becoming much more latent because I knew that I was close to revealing the reasons behind that initial sensation. I eventually realised that I was drawn to the white never-ending rubber line that curved around the ball keeping the two sections stuck together. I decided investigate further and separated the two sections by cutting along the white rubber line. This created an interesting cup like shape

³⁹ Figure 18, Image of tennis ball

to each half of the tennis ball. As I reconfigured them they began to couple together in an unexpected new way. I repeated this same method with several other tennis balls and combined them all into a new autonomous thing. The material began to take on a life and character of it's own.

But something had changed. The potential that I had initially sensed and the quality first drew me to the tennis ball was no longer there. The potential quality had now emerged, and become a possibility. This is the challenge of talking about potential. It can be sensed, but once you understand what that quality was, it is no longer there. Possibility has replaced the potential. However, as McCollum demonstrated with his objects, there must be other possibilities and ways of looking at, thinking about and using this tennis ball that have not yet emerged.

Verwoert talks about potential when discussing artist Tomma Abts approach to painting in relation to 'Emergence'. Verwoert describes Abt's attraction toward things that are unknown and his need to know more. Sensing a potential quality for something, but not completely knowing what that quality is, Verwoert describes these things as concepts that have "an inherent attractive indefiniteness of their own. In talking about something when you don't know what it is, nor how I am going to talk about it....A concept of this kind is what fascinates me at the moment because I don't understand exactly what it means..."⁴⁰ In this way potential does not exist within the object, but sensed by the spectator who intuits a potential for it. Abts senses potential in her practice but doesn't know what that potential is until she paints it and the work has been finished. She performs actions and paintings, and out of it comes something. The end work is a result of all these conditions, processes and changes, from which she trusted that something would emerge. The work emerged through the process but latency was only identified retrospectively after reflecting on how it had emerged.

⁴⁰ Verwoert, Jan. "Emergence: On the Painting of Tomma Abts. (2005). 2



Figure 19⁴¹

⁴¹ Figure 19, *Match-Point Fibonacci*, 2015



Figure 20⁴²

⁴² Figure 20, *Infinite Connections*, 2015

AFFECT AND INTUITION

To disrupt habits of thinking and actualise new possibilities for materials the mind must think intuitively. Making decisions without consideration delays our rational responses before the signs come crowding back in allow for new thoughts. Once the brain begins to rationalise by accessing the mind's library of memories and past experiences, the object will be connected back to habits of thinking and practical functions. For example, when making *Infinite Connections* (Fig 18) I was drawn toward a brass metallic object in the work, in particular its curving shape and the holes at either end, which allowed other things to connect to it. These connected well with the other materials to create a continuous loop around a concrete pole in the gallery space. I no longer thought about the past associations attached to the object but sensed it as an aesthetic art material. However, I eventually realised that the brass object was actually a safety rail to use when getting up and down from a toilet seat. At the time I only saw it for its potential as a sculptural material. It was this affective response that prevented my rational mind from considering its practical function. Instead the safety rail became an art material. Deleuze expresses the importance of affect in art. He states: "we need "...the writer's syntax, the musician's modes and rhythms, the painter's lines and colors to raise lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect."⁴³ He describes affect as the "the moment that the material passes into sensation."⁴⁴

As Deleuze did with his idea of the diagrams, as Abts did with the concept 'emergence' and as Duchamp did with his 'ready mades' these strategies that change our habits of thinking all rely on their affective responses to create their artworks with new possibilities. Bacon's use of the diagram in his paintings and Deleuze's use of the concept when regarding artworks was a strategy used to activate their affective responses and break away from existing 'clichés' and 'givens' that limited creative thinking and thoughts toward things. Bacon's disruptive and chaotic methodologies were an attempt to paint without thought, to be led by his affective responses and see where it took him. Even if the diagram led him to a dead end he

⁴³ Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* : Verso, 1994. 170

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 173

was able to splash another colour onto the frame and steer somewhere else. Abts employed a similar strategy, where she would set a system of painting in place, however certain decisions she called 'crises' needed to be made during the process that would change the outcome of the work dramatically. These crises relied on her affective responses to make decisions without thought as if this it was always the correct one and that the finished work was intended that way. Verwoert states: "the process was totally unpredictable, but viewed after the result was absolutely necessary and unmistakable." Similar to my encounter with the toilet safety rail, Duchamp's affective responses were likely sensed when he first encountered Bottle Rack before he deemed it a 'ready made' thing. Rather than using or sensing affect during the making of his work, it was an initial encounter that led to this work being made.

CONCLUSION

It is through the making of art, and through introducing new relations of materials, that habits of thought and signs of the past are ruptured so that new thoughts and possibilities can emerge as new works of art. While it is evident that these signs have a habit of returning, when a new work of art emerges the materials operate in new terms, and in this new agency fresh signs overwrite the signs brought from their past utility. The materials now have a new utility, with new signs attaching to them. It is the agency of inventive making that allows this to happen. While there are plenty of materials, which are much more, free from habitual signs to use, It has been my interest to attempt to work with materials that are difficult. In part I surmise because of my want to make things that both relate to but also can transcend our habitual ways of operating and thinking in the world. It is this fascination, how things in the world can transcend our habits of use and through the making of art operate as a new sculptural thing.

THE POTENTIAL OF THINGS

Master of Art and Design 2015 (Visual Arts)
Graduate Exhibition, Auckland University of Technology, 2015,
St Paul Street Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.
The Wallace Trust Premier Postgraduate Award.

The exhibition was comprised of three structures that were positioned in different areas of St Paul Street Gallery. The installation was determined by the individual material capabilities of each object used and by the nature of the gallery space. In this way, the works revealed themselves during their construction. The walls were used to support the structure, however no hidden glues or hooks were used to assist unless made obvious and incorporated as a material in the work.



Figure 21⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Figure 21, *The Potential of Things*, 2015



Figure 22⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Figure 22, *Philip*, 2015



Figure 23⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Figure 23, *Philip*, 2015



Figure 24⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Figure 24, *Noodles, Straws and Drill*, 2015



Figure 25⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Figure 25, *Noodles, Straws and Drill* detail, 2015



Figure 26⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Figure 26, *The Potential of Things*, 2015



Figure 27⁵¹

⁵¹ Figure 27, *The Potential of Things* detail, 2015



Figure 28⁵²

⁵² Figure 28, *The Potential of Things* detail, 2015



Figure 29⁵³

⁵³ Figure 29, *The Potential of Things* detail, 2015

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