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Master of Letter's in Fine Art Practice

Sculpture & Performance Pathway

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Postgraduate Research Methods & Methodologies in Practice,

Summative Submission

*Artist as Voyager: Methodology.*

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### Critical Evaluation:

Pages 2-3.

500 Words outlining the key aspects of research.

### Research Exposition & Small Portfolio:

Pages 4-13.

A two-part submission which combines a 1500-word statement alongside a small portfolio of images.

Word Count (Excluding Quotations): 1495

### Bibliography:

Page 14-15.

List of sources.

## Critical Evaluation

Over the past several weeks, my research journal and accompanying exposition begin to cohesively culminate fragments of my artistic research into two singular unifying manifestos.

*Manifesto* is a key word for me in terms of this Research Methods & Methodologies in Practice Submission. The word iterates my writing as a directly honest organization of intent, views & actions. A preposition or methodology in practice, but most importantly as a stimulus for future making & research.

My Research Journal: Has been a vital tool in visualizing, organizing, summing, and describing my own thoughts towards creative research-By compiling my interests and feelings into a singular compendium document, albeit abstracted, I was then able to transform this information linguistically into the research exposition.

My journal takes the format of a ten slide PDF document which includes hyperlinks and references to all sources discussed. Admittedly, digitalizing my research would not typically be my first choice of formatting, I have enjoyed the aesthetic culmination of textual and visual sources into singular slides- something which a research folder or ring binder cannot achieve as proficiently. My journal adopts a *bricolage* style in terms of the presentation and attempts some linearity in its spotlighting of specific sources and commentary. I viewed this journal submission as a summated identification of key themes/ issues/ context relevant to my current practice and the slides move through these in thematic order.

My Research Exposition: Successfully brings some language to my artistic methodology and journal, drawing on information from primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. I adopt more of a *visual essay* style when formatting my exposition, merging a small portfolio of images from my own practice alongside relevant textual referencing, and accompanying discussion. By formatting my methodology in this manor, I was able to successfully identify salient points between my own studio making and that of New Materialist Theory, conversating key issues regarding the materiality of sculptural practice with questions regarding the conduct of creative research.

Harvard 'in text' citations, accompanied with a reference list towards the end, allows the document to flow much more naturally, meaning that sources can be extracted easily at the reading stage- I often find MHRA to confuse the core writing of the work by separating source from information.

*Artist as Voyager*: I believe to be an exciting, relevant methodology for creative practice which challenges our contemporary engagement with the material, visual world. It takes into consideration Ethical, Environmental and Philosophical implications of making sculpture in a world of mass production & over consumption. Prompting us to consider questions of Agency & Relationality as everyday objects come into dialogue with processes such as casting.

It works as a manifesto for future artistic practice & research, by allowing for the vast generation of artworks in the studio, as I ponder my own subjectivity and view of the world. It situates itself within a contemporary framework and relevant philosophical debate regarding our current classification and treatment of materials, an exploration which in itself far surpasses the MLitt Postgraduate Programme.

My *Artist as Voyager*, Methodology is not solely specific to the visual arts-

*Writer as Voyager*

&

*Dance as Voyage*,

suggest alternate paradigms or Methodologies which are transferable, adopting a similar lens or approach when navigating our place in the world...

The aim of this research exposition & portfolio is to reflect, expand upon & frame linguistically, research undertaken for the Research Methods and Methodologies in Practice Postgraduate Module alongside happenings from the MLitt artist's studio. In this 1500-word submission I begin to mark out the ever-expanding boundary of my own sculptural practice by reflecting upon a selection of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources in relation to my own research methodology. My initial attraction into the field of visual and material culture stems from a desire to explore the liveliness of the visual world which surrounds me. I am in awe of the remoteness of rural Landscape in which my mining, Post-Industrial Scottish town resides. There is a question of agency and of materials, in which Ingold observes- "Often get caught up in such currents of the lifeworld." (Ingold, 2007).

My exposition regards the practice led Methodology termed: *Artist as Voyager*. *Artist as Voyager* is methodological approach to conducting artistic research which situates itself under the handle of *New Materialism*. A term coined in the late 90's by cultural theorists Manuel Delanda and Rosi Braidotti, New Materialism (NM) ultimately questions the distinction between mind and material, "Opposing transcendental and humanist (dualist) traditions that continue to haunt cultural theory amidst the Postmodern era". (Dolphijn et al., 2012).

My methodology, *Artist as Voyager*, employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. It resonates with notions of *speculation* by asking questions and using artistic practice to answer them. Touching upon some key themes including Post Industrialism, Scottish Cultural Identity, Material Agency, Nature & Landscape.

*Artist as Voyager* asks 3 main research questions:

1. How can language and New Materialist Theory help us to better understand notions of *not knowing* within artistic research?
2. How do artists honour the imbued agency and vibrancy of materials through art making by acknowledging that objects exist beyond human perception?
3. How does the relationality of all things challenge our current modes of material classification or categorization?

My prevalence over or arguably *alongside* objects as they become artworks in their own right epitomizes Jane Bennett's notion of Vibrant Materiality. In her book *Vibrant Matter: The political Ecology of Things*, she explores this idea of *Material Vitality*, suggesting that everything in the material world holds its own unique form of agency. (Bennett, 2010) In suggesting so, Bennett challenges Anthropocentrism and instead invites us to reconsider the boundaries and discourse which exists between both human & non-human entities.

I merit such inclusive view on agency through my own material explorations in the artist's studio and through the methods which I employ. Figure 1. Is an image of my sculptural artwork titled *Pythons in the Studio* (2023), exhibited at the *Early Days* Exhibition in the Barnes Garage space in October. The artwork is made from air-drying clay, worked by hand, partially concealed with matt white emulsion. Layered with high viscosity pink acrylic paint.

Artist Florence Peak, one of the most recent speakers to the School of Fine Art Friday event series, discusses this entanglement between human and non-human discourse as she similarly engages with the material, clay. She tells- "Clay moves, is unstable, and requires constant negotiation...Clay is unbelievably bodily and creates a very direct link with my body as I connect with it." (*Sculpture Magazine*, 2022)

Therefore, touch becomes method, mediation of subjectivity becomes method, & equally the question of agency becomes context or situation for the work. Clay is a particularly transformative material, to work with it means to acknowledge its continual rebirth in the world, alike Bennett, my work begins to delve into the political implications of materiality. Exploring how the dynamics between things become prevalent through practice led research, particularly as found objects, here the children's toy plastic snakes, come into connection with natural gritty terracotta clay originating from landscape.

In bringing artefacts of the everyday into sculptural dialogue, processes of collection/ selection become method. I am working within the confines of our physical world, my processes of selection vary from found objects in which I encounter by chance, to those specifically acquired using digital suppliers. Karla Black is to name one artist that I resonate with who uses methods of collection/selection, in a way which defies the systemic hierarchy inherent to the materials she employs. She selects from the supermarket and makes up counter, often discounting the cultural connotations of the materials she uses for sculpture. (National Galleries of Scotland, 2016).



Figure 1. Artwork: *Python in the Studio* (2023) By April. Air drying clay, plastic toy snakes, white emulsion, pink high viscosity acrylic.

In bringing objects such as plastic children's toys into sculptural practice, I am often distorting them, mystifying or part removing their normative function in the world. Subsequently, *Rematerializing* becomes my second key method- A term that I am using to regard the physical alteration and re-situation of objects through relationality & context. Synonyms or similar terms perhaps include Phyllida Barlow's *Approximation* (Barlow, 2021) or Jessica Stockholder's *Confrontation Between Things*. (Stockholder, 2018).



Figure 2. Artwork: Close up image of *Python in the Studio* (2023) By April. Air drying clay, plastic toy snakes, white emulsion, pink high viscosity acrylic.





Figure 3. Artwork: Sweet Treats (2023) By April, Glasgow Art Club. Faux plastic cakes/ Ice-cream.

Figure 3. Is an artwork titled *Sweet Treats* (2023), which was exhibited at Glasgow Art Club for the GSoA Graduate show. The sculpture culminates a selection of found children's faux foods and uses clay to encapsulate them into the form of an ice-cream cone, plinthed on a green pillar alongside 'no smoking' signage.

This method of *Rematerializing* arguably comes with the territory of making sculpture which employs objects from the physical world, yet I claim that it is by engaging them with artistic processes of manipulation, such as casting, painting, or breaking, in which these objects transition. They *Rematerialize* under a new guise, dependant on situation, context & interaction. Thus, emphasizing New Materialist scholar, Karen Barad's notion of *Interaction Theory*, which she describes as 'the mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad, 2007) – Instigating a new mode of considering material relations which is extramental to making object-based sculpture.

Texan artist, Jessica Stockholder, disrupts the meaning of objects through her largescale sculptural reimagining's- plucking technology, furniture & household goods from their normative location and rematerializing them through assemblage art .

Which, alike the faux ice-cream toy encapsulated in a larger ice-cream, albeit witty and humorous, suggests an alternate paradigm, prompting the entanglement of mutually coexisting agential forces. I encourage the viewer to engage with the frictions caused by such materials, which far surpass that of the gallery walls in the Glasgow Art Club.

There is a generosity of humour from my selected objects- yellow rubber ducks and toy cars are embracing of their own material animacy through their relation to play, as well as the transformative nature of mass production. In a sense, I employ humour as method, as a way of offering a way of looking into the complexities of the work itself. By focussing less on making art which fits hierarchical assumptions of what contemporary sculpture should be, I begin to use tokens of Scottish social class such as the 'Mr Whippy cone' to think about class resistance. A similar sentiment can be seen in the artwork of *Beagles & Ramsay* at their 2023 GOMA Glasgow exhibition, *NHOTB & RAHD*, where the artist-duo display wooden cartoonish renderings of figures wearing office lanyards- An exploration of political tensions within consumerism and the contemporary workplace. (GOMA, 2023)



Figure 4. Artwork- Ducks (2023) By April

Designer & theorist, Anne Galloway speaks of a similar method, comparable to Karen Barad's notion of Interaction Theory. Galloway terms it *troubling* within her writing and speculative design practice, stating... "I make things and make things up. Things that do not exist yet and may never exist. In my research, I conjure individual relations and entire worlds. I try things on and see how they fit...Speculative Design- The more image-based version of playing dress up- can guise or rearrange the world as we know it and let us see it differently. It can introduce new objects and relations and allow us to explore their implications" (Galloway, 2019).

Such process of speculation is evident in my own research, which by employing an unruly number of methods, asks more questions than it ever can attempt to answer. Without directly stating, it is evident that I consider *reading* as a method, *writing/ notetaking* as method, *reflection* as method, perhaps *criticism or critical thought* as method. Identifying the ever-growing range of processes or methods and pinpointing my practice to this defining moment, is arguably a method in on itself..

This idea of being a reflective practitioner is evidenced through Graeme Sullivan's writing, particularly in his Essay *Artistic Cognition & Creativity*, in which he claims that- "Within [the] academic environment conventional research in general proceeds from the known to the unknown, yet it is important to acknowledge the benefit of inquiry that moves in the other direction – the unknown to the known – for fresh perspectives as much as prior knowledge are determinants in creating and constructing new knowledge. This is the trajectory of inquiry that characterises practice-based research." (Sullivan, 2011)

The curiosity of *not knowing* as is a key issue and epistemological debate within my own and others creative research, by undertaking indicative reasoning, I am committed to the garnering of knowledge and theory through both observation and reflection. Former School of Fine Art Head, Rebecca Fortnum agrees with Sullivan in her piece 'Creative Accounting: Not knowing in making and talking'. Where through similar visual and linguistic means, she brings thought to the *process* and *spaces* of the unknown within artistic practice, prompting us to take accountability and to articulate what we do in the studio, with the acknowledgement that an artist's knowing is never complete. (Fortnum, 2019)

I agree with Fortnum & Sullivan in that it is only by reviewing my own reflective accounts and decisions in which I am able to *retroactively* determine aspects of my current methodology. Such reflexivity of aesthetic or easily dismissible 'instinctual' decisions within my practice, such as the pairing of plastic toys with clay, actually begin to form the basis of a coherent methodological approach to research.

Figures 4-6. are testament to the ever-expanding range of processes in which my practice employs, Multimodal thinking prompts the materialization of ideas in the studio- By questioning artificiality within my work and reforming objects through their relations with the material of clay, I begin to poke at the futility of our current value systems- Arguably a triarchic approach. Such reinvention and breaking down of materials and their classification, as seen in my sculpture *Cars* (2023), unites my practice alongside NM theorists such as Delanda, Bennett, Barad & Ingold. Three orientations rapidly appear: Research into art, Research through art or research for, or as art.



Figure 5. Artwork- Cars (2023) By April

In conclusion, *Artist as Voyager*, is a speculatively driven methodological approach- a way of viewing the contemporary world by navigating objects in relation to notions of subjectivity alongside diverse sculptural processes.

This linguistic framing of artistic practice, albeit with its own temporality and embracing of the *unknown*, is a key feature in situating my making & research within a Contemporary Framework. By aligning my practice alongside the curiosities of New Materialist Theory, I too am invited to reconsider my current classification of and relation to the material world, exploring key issues regarding relationality & agency. In doing so NM turns from being an over mystified philosophical debate and becomes more of a methodological approach for artistic practice.

As Stacy Alaimo puts it- "Materiality is a vibrant, fluctuating force that refuses to be ignored or subjugated. New materialism insists on the entanglement of the human with the nonhuman, the material with the immaterial." (Kuznetski and Alaimo, 2020).



Figure 6. Artwork- Sweet Treats (2023) By April

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