

Adelina Allberg

No Center Objects and Material Investigations

Bachelor's thesis in Fine Art

Supervisor: Jacob Jessen

Co-supervisor: Anne-Karin Furunes

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Abstract

In this essay I'm diving into material means. The text is based on the notion of objects and materials as possibilities and narrators. I will anchor my sculptural practice, which centers around material relations, with concepts such as Strange Stranger by Timothy Morton, Object Oriented Ontology and Ian Bogost's unit. All the terms are reaching for the porousness of objects, the multitude they can embody.

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I den här essän dyker jag in i materialens och objektens värld. Det är en text där de betecknas som potentialiteter och berättare. Min skulpturella praktik, som är baserad på materiella relationer, förankras här med koncept så som Strange Stranger av Timothy Morton, objektorienterad ontologi och Ian Bogosts unit. Det är alla termer som sträcker sig mot det porösa i objekt, till mångfaldigheten de kan förkroppsliga.

Chapter Choosing

It's in the periphery the objects I chose exist. At first I'm blind to them and when I find them I have no intention of doing so. Often they appear when I'm out walking. The objects are a direct response to their surroundings, a leftover piece from the city or the countryside that glimpse at a moment of trespassing. When they are shown, they evoke something in me, interest or an impulse to pick this certain thing. Whatever it is, is through this notion, now operating within me as well.

Jane Bennett has written about the moment when a thing shows itself. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, she describes her encounter with objects such as a glove, a rat, pollen and a bottle cap, and how they were shimmering back and forth between debris and thing, by being, on one hand, stuff to ignore and, on the other, stuff that commanded attention in its own right.¹ My work centers around waste and the idea that whatever used state something is in, it's still containing, claiming something. Bennett sees the capacities of things, in their individualities or as assemblages, and how they overlap with human beings. She writes:

When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street with, the weather that morning, with me. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noticed the bottle cap, and so on. But they were all there just as they were, and so I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert. In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.²

To acknowledge the vitality of objects, or overall, the cooperation of nonhuman forces in any human experience, has been of great use in my practice. I perceive sculptures as active, and they then open up as reactors to different kinds of states and contexts, which they also take part in negotiating. They turn to be carriers of, if not personality, so of characteristics, that respond to circumstances or are already

¹ Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4

² Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 5.

inherent in them. This intertwines with the ideas of Object Oriented Ontology, which puts things in the center and rejects their existence as dependent on human perception. I will come back to that.

When the found objects and materials are brought to the studio, they are piled up to a messy stack of savings. It's often a part and not a whole I've gathered, something fallen out of function, that now by being a fragment has another openness towards variations. They lay there with interrupted connections, like they have tentacles all over, and reach for possible extensions. The idea of linking separated parts and pieces together is a core value in my practice. I'm materially rearranging the objects, vanishing some of their previous identity, and am building up a new narration around them. This text stages my method of working, and what theoretical material I've moved with along the way.



Configurations, Manners and Linger. Varying sizes. 2023. Wood, metal and rubber in negotiation.

Chapter Tracing Interrelations

“Appearance is always strange.”³

It is at a point of wideness that objects and materials become interesting to me. When the bits and pieces I'm starting with manage to embody both the previous and the yet to come: their possible interpretations. It's a kind of reversed archeology, where I'm tracing them forward. What they have been used to before, or the context they come from, is not of top importance. Instead, their distortion is, when they no longer strictly belong to or follow their previous categorization, even if they aesthetically can hint at it. Loosened, the ambiguity of them are revealed. Objects seem to not be solid in expression or formula but rather be of changeability. This is what I'm interested in extracting, and to bring forward in my sculptures.

Examplewise, I do this by carving wood, twisting metal and pairing them with other undefined, but often industrial, materials. They go into new fits, invoked by the opportunities of the material itself. It's puzzlelike and about following one of many possible leads for where a new part can join. The objects and materials go into shifts and variations where they bend out of themselves, but not so much that they turn out to be of nonrecognition. At some point they loop back, and the piece is then found in a state where it is its former but still not its past. This is a balancing act between logic and intuition.

I search for this crosspoint by spending time with my material. They are all around me in the studio, and I flip them by chance, until they somehow turn out right, and can be positioned as a sculpture. I don't consider them finished or somehow locked just because they become settled into the context of art. A sculpture is not a fixed state but rather one of openness and suggestions. The more investigation of the pieces I'm working with, the more I know them, materially or as possibilities, the stranger they seem, since they widen. If I start with a piece of rubber I end up with a piece of rubber anchored in a new story. By going up close, their labeling seems to dispatch, and other values than from the beginning are embodied. It's a process of

³ Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2016), 6.

material alienation where the previous categorization breaks and spills into something else.

Timothy Morton has written about the bond between intimacy and strangeness, which I experience in my practice. Morton is a writer and lecturer of ecological philosophy and in his book *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* he brings up ecological awareness as the interconnectedness of all life forms, human as nonhuman, in every possible aspect. Ecological thinking is then: “the notion of sharing and having non humans installed at every profound level - not just biologically and socially but in the very structure of thought and logic. Coexisting with these nonhumans is ecological thought, art, ethics and politics”.⁴ This weave-like thinking resonates with something my practice deals with. Especially, his term *strange stranger* caught my attention. It's only briefly mentioned in the book but described as the notion of a life form that is itself, and weirdly not itself at the same time. This is because of its many components, the other life forms it's intertwined with. He continues, “A human is made up of nonhuman components and is directly related to nonhumans. Lungs are evolved swim bladders. Yet a human is not a fish.”⁵

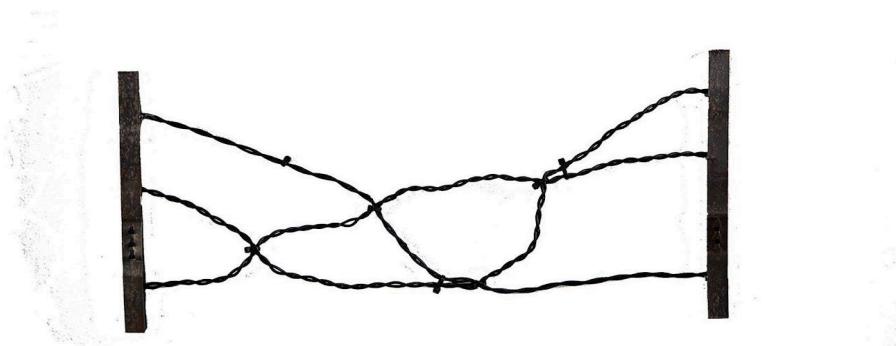
One entity is not protected from taking part in others, and a life form should then be understood as a mishmash. Essentially, it's the closed system of the biosphere where everything by time shapeshifts to take on new variations. Like an ever changing game of appearance which can be traced in objects as well. Even if they wouldn't go under the label of a life form, I would like to invite them to the arena of being one. I know there is some creatureness over them. The bacteria on my head pillow and the small small textile particles I breath during my sleep makes up a sharing experience which questions where center and where edge is, mixing entities up. I see the sculptures lend and borrow from one another the same way, sharing something. The material rearrangements they go into can be read as a manifestation of this. I perceive my sculptures as both familiar and strange, and further this strangeness has something familiar that can be found at other places too. This computer I'm writing on, I don't know of its material origin or how its components machinate to make up its functions. Though, I know it zoomed out, as the finished

⁴ Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, 159.

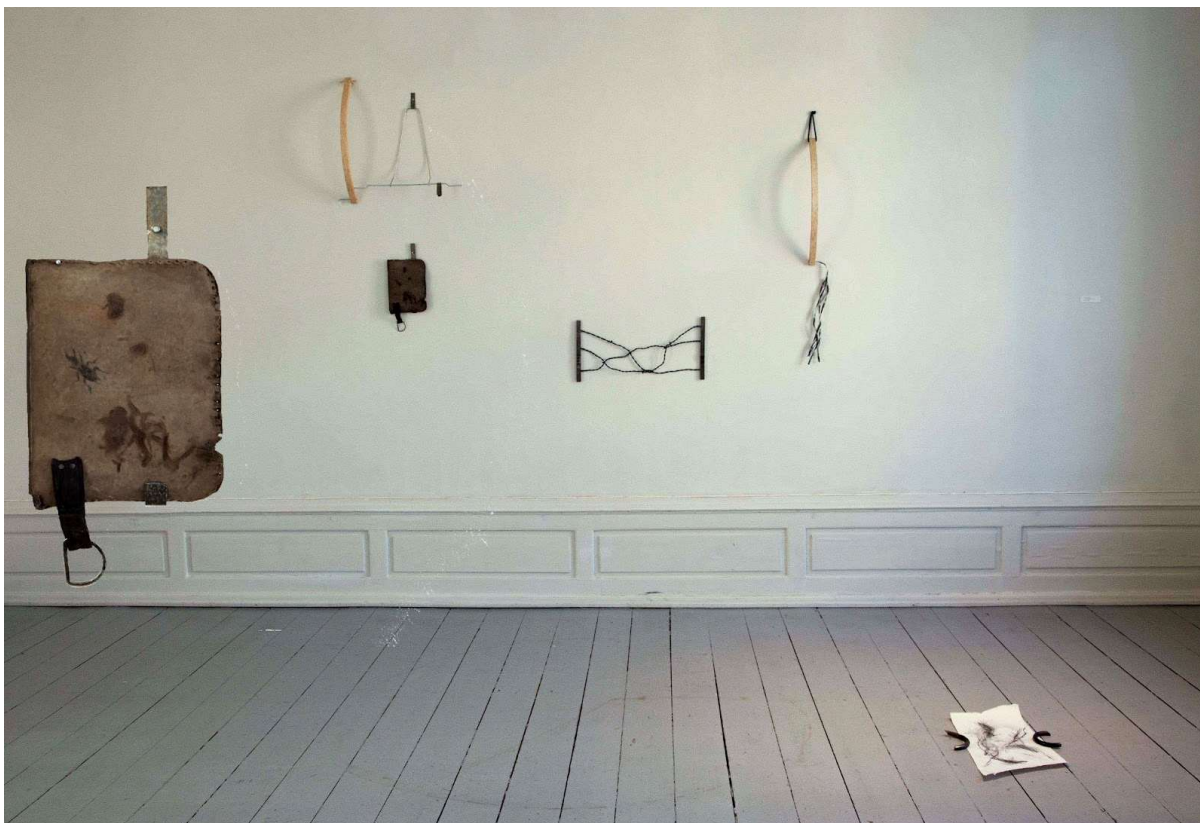
⁵ Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, 18.

product. The closer up one goes, the harder to frame or pin down what something is. Placing objects in between familiarity and strangeness, their categorization is called into question. They lean toward being object, by uncannily being, and not being, something at the same time.

This goes for when building stories around and through objects and their materiality. I experience them as porous when they have the possibility to grow into and represent a storyline that isn't theirs at first. I have written generally of my method of working but here I will dive into a piece, to crystallize the context I'm thinking from. *Ways of The Beetle: Instructions* can be understood as a map piece. It's mainly a wall-installed work of four sculptures, and then a drawing placed on the floor. It's about material connections that are built up into a system. Where one piece stops another enters to take the lines further. The wood, the metal, the rubber, the leather and cables, are all there as pure signifiers of their materiality. Here, the objects they have functioned as before aren't of importance. Instead the condition of the wood, the ways it bends, is of, and not its previous life as an armchair. When the cultural connotations aren't too heavily in mind, I perceive the material as more of a surface that can pick up on and cultivate narratives other than its own. Through this work, a message from the Bark Beetle can be traced. The pattern from the tunnels it builds can be found on the leather piece. Maybe it has been there for many years. Now, it is functioning as a kind of manual into this work, as a storyline the other pieces can mirror. It's the way of material adaptation where unexpected information can outburst through unexpected surfaces. If you look close, a playground for the Beetle is created, but the work can also be read without this narration. It's the material's ability to carry a double meaning.



Network from *Ways of the Beetle: Instructions*. 70x25cm, 2023. Cables and cable ties, camouflaged metal.



Ways of The Beetle: Instructions. Varying sizes. 2023. Wood, metal, rubber, cables, tunnel system from the Bark Beetle, leather, drawing.

Chapter Alien Gaze and O.O.O

This ambiguity of the sculptures evokes desire. They are halfway open, for suggestions and interpretations, and halfway closed, already stating something. Indeed, they carry a plurality: one hand digging in reality, one hand grasping for fantasy. By being not fully outspoken they become a surface for projection, and so maintain interest. I myself am not sure if they are lacking, or if something is fulfilled during the twists they go into. When a previous function is taken away, its certain role also becomes clear, and my point of interest is to exchange it with another context, material or meaning. I'm doubting whether it brings the material to a more "true" state or not, but certainly to something other. This often makes my sculptures into shape shifting signifiers. To not fully grasp what they are is a beautiful way to bring authority to the material. It's nonhuman in action.

When the objects reveal themselves outside of their familiarity, they are positioned in a valley of uncanniness, as I've mentioned. The feeling of matter moving outside of my grip can be described through the philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology, where the mystery of things/objects is acknowledged. In *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be A Thing* Ian Bogost gives an introduction to the movement fronted by Graham Harman, who with Heidegger's tool-analysis as backdrop, where things are impossible to understand as such, but through their purposes, states that "objects do not relate merely through human use but through *any* use, including all relations between one object and any other."⁶

It's a viewpoint of equality where objects don't need human interface to exist. It states their performances behind any cultural connotations and then not just through their physicalities. Something else is also suggested. Bogost lifts Harman's position against scientific naturalism, where he states that "things are not just their basic components, be they quarks or neurons. Instead, stuffs enjoy equal being no matter their size, scale or order."⁷

This non-hierarchical ontology requires speculation to be in use, which I also receive as a core value for this movement, since it demands a shift from a human centered perception. It reminds of the many different views inhabited and present in the world, though inaccessible for one self. This crosses with my interest in searching for the "inner" of objects, which in addition, seems to continuously withdraw or go into variations. Rearranging objects materially is a way of bringing forward their possible contents and dispositions. I consider them objects of no center, or more accurately, as objects whose centers entangle in properties beyond my imagination. Bogost suggests that the communication technologies of objects escape us, that they function on another level. He speculates, maybe the alien isn't about another lifeform but could be a title for objects, since, the alien could be considered the "inaccessibility of any particular region of experience or sense."⁸ My view of objects is fronted by this, the shell of objects as graspable while maybe the multitude they

⁶ Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be A Thing*. (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2012), 6.

⁷ Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be A Thing*, 6.

⁸ Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be A Thing*, 34.

can embody being hard to receive, simply because they communicate differently. Using other language, having “body functions” I cannot imagine, they occur alien like. As this goes, they come through as both concrete and abstract, both ordinary and strange.



Hallway/Everstate of Beginning, 2024. Varying sizes. Wood, aluminum, bicycle lock, threshold imitations- in steel, rubber and mdf-panel, gravel.

Chapter Heavy Linking and Placement

Coming through installed, the sculptures put heavy marks through small attunements and shifts. They are silent speakers. In many senses they are relational, and truly revealed when they are presented in an assemblage. They reach outside of themselves, are non boarded in a way and come to life side by side, measured by the similarities or dis-similarities found amongst. I mount them on the wall and let some be standing on the floor. The empty space between them activates and responds to their placements. It's an area of tension. The sculptures are placed with distances but not too much, they should stay in touch and friction, to manage the transfer of information between them. Importantly, the installation is built upon a system like joint. Continuing with Bogost, the term unit is helpful here, which he suggests as a more accurate description than object. This is because it doesn't lead the thoughts to a direct opposition to subject. Unit, instead, writes the interactions of objects, and positions them as players with each other. They can then be understood as operators, in the sense that "things constantly machinate within themselves and mesh with one another, acting and reacting to properties and states while still keeping something secret."⁹

This is the scene of the installment. It's a place where the works are put into their right circumstances and are allowed the distance or contact craved. I can hear their low frequent buzzing and relational talks, their communal activation spilled out on the walls. Here, an object isn't limited to its shell but acknowledged as interrelational.

Conclusion, end time story, the knots I've made

In this text I've suggested some of the thoughts and materials I'm aligning my practice with. All of the ideas work widening of objects, and there seem to be endless ways to put vibrancy to this matter. My practice is based on the idea of objects and materials as agents. May it be a metal chunk, a wooden stick or the screws holding them together. Regardless, I'm interested in the unexpected outcomes of material narration that can occur from combining differentiating characteristics and

⁹ Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be A Thing*, 27.

physicalities. Simply, to read the sculptures through one another. I think of the line of Donna Haraway, which puts forward how the identification of something changes based on what eyes brought to look, what tools brought to tell:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.¹⁰

In the studio I go into the world of fully capable objects, thinking they have a willingness to tell, and arrange them heartfully. Hoping they like their new constellations.



¹⁰ Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

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