Is it me, or is it mine?

By Maria Magas

When does an object become a subject?

The attitude shift towards a thing and the resulting human – non-human empathy

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Submitted to
Master Institute of Visual Cultures, St. Joost School of Art & Design, Avans University of Applied Sciences, s' Hertogenbosch the Netherlands
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art & Design s' Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands
May 2022
Wordcount: 6003

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank you for your constant support and for pushing my thinking process further and further. I appreciate you for sharing the knowledge and encouraging me to think bigger, smaller, outside and within.

To Alison Sperling, Adriana Knouf, Mark Ijzerman, Xandra van der Eijk and Emma van der Leest

Contents:

Abstract

Whenever I am using a coffee cup, I always think 'Does the cup like to be held this way?'. My work focuses on how through interaction with design we can experience a nonhuman-centred perspective. This paper researches human attachments to objects, often possessions, and reveals the interconnectedness between humans and nonhumans. The questions of what constitutes an object are of significant political, ethical and environmental concerns. I am looking into the theoretical works of Viktor Shklovsky, Graham Harman, Katherine Behar, Jane Bennett and Stacey Alaimo to seek out the connections between our minds and the objects. In this thesis, the topic of human objectification is also analysed, with focus on dehumanization through racism and human instrumentalization. Reflecting on all above issues, I am speaking from the perspective of a product designer, influenced by the works of artists and designers such as Lauren Kalman, Alessandro Mendini, Donald Norman, Geof Oppenheimer and Rebecca Horn. In this thesis, I look into methods of disturbing human-centred design and the resulting shift of attitude towards objects and consequences.

Introduction

I knock at the stone's front door "It's only me, let me come
in.
I want to enter your insides, have a look around,
breathe my fill of you."

"Go away," says the stone. "I'm shut tight.
Even if you break me to pieces, we'll all still be closed.
You can grind us to sand, we still won't let you in."

- *Conversation with a Stone*, Wiesława Szymborska, 1998

In the poem *Conversation with a Stone* the person insists on being invited inside, begging permission for intimacy with the stone, but the stone refuses. They want to "enter [their] insides," to be one with the stone. Later on in the poem, the stone explains that as a human, the person lacks the senses to cross the threshold. The stone suggests that the person cannot simply wander inside since "You [the person] lack the sense of taking part. No other sense can make up for your missing sense of taking part." I understand stone's 'taking part' as a receptiveness to see and engage with non-human oriented values. Human-object intimacy exists in this sense of taking part. The person seeks unseen beauty and empty halls inside the stone, whereas the stone finds those superficial and unimportant. The differences in perception prevent the person from seeing the stone for what it truly is. By purposely calling the threshold of the stone 'doors', it is indicated that a person projects human features onto the stone, using anthropocentric vocabulary, not opening-up for real encounter with the stone and its ontology. I trust that acknowledging the limits of human comprehension and revelling in the alien-ness - as Ian Bogost may put it - of things around us, may allow equation with other matter and objects to discover important ways to understand the entanglements. In this thesis, I am the person knocking at the stone's door, hoping to find ways to be invited inside.

Jane Bennett reminds us that humans are not no different from other animals, but rather that "there is no necessity to describe these differences in a way that places humans at the centre or apex of the hierarchical order" (Bennett, 2010 p. 96). This raises the question of subject/object binary exploitation that allows for object exploitation through instrumentalization. The questions of what constitutes an object are of central political, ethical and environmental concerns. Objectification is responsible for creating objects that we use and abuse, serving behaviours, instead of challenging them. Objectification of people strips them of their rights and equality. Even natural riches, when seen as mere objects, are depleted without environmental concerns. Meanwhile, natural sites like rivers in New Zealand gain rights by granting them subjecthood and agency (Evans, 2020). Object-Oriented Feminism, on the other hand, takes objects, things, stuff, and matter as primary. OOF considers all objects from the inside-out perspective of being an object itself, with all its political and ethical implications. It is then evident that the shift from object to subject has ecological and social consequences.

I wonder what's the intervention of art and design in this conversation. Especially regarding everyday objects, when I am involved in their creation as a product designer. My training led me to see objects for their two primary qualities: their function and their aesthetics. However, becoming more familiar with the writings of Viktor Shklovsky, Graham Harman, Katherine Behar, Jane Bennett and Stacey Alaimo, I started to realize just how much complexity objects carry. My designing process no longer involved questions of functionality and ergonomics, but rather worries about who am I designing for, worries about objects' long-lasting materiality and worries about bringing objects into existence at all. I wondered if my works function as mere commodities, or are they perceived as actants evoking new thoughts and experiences. Thinking as a designer of everyday objects, I ask myself, what impact on an individual mundane objects, like a cup in your hand, have? One can argue that matters of nonhuman subjects are of less importance than mentioned earlier political and environmental concerns. I would defend, together with writings from Jane Bennett and Rosi Braidotti, that new found respect for matter and its powers can inspire a greater sense of kinship, and the understanding that harming one section of the web may harm oneself. To become perceptually aware of nonhuman vitality has ethical importance for all.

My artistic work explores various forms of human attachments to objects and often, possessions, to realize the interconnectivity between them. By looking at factors that make up object relations such as familiarity, ownership, cuteness and anthropomorphism, I investigate the shift in attitude towards the object and resulting outcomes. Through the practice of engaging with objects, making as thinking supports the idea that we can only grasp the intrinsic qualities of a nonhuman by engaging with it through active touch and collaboration. In my practice, I experiment with interventions into designs (of drinking vessels, wearables and tools for object exploration) leading to newly formed experiences and therefore realizations about human embeddedness with nonhuman actants.

Defamiliar objects:
how the perception of an object can change our relation to it

In my practice I am drawn to hand-held pieces, usually made out of clay. My artistic method circulates the concept of defamiliarization (Russian: ostranenie). I was able to break out of the design constraints by embracing the concept of defamiliarization and create objects that spark dialogues instead of just serving their intended purpose. Popularized by Viktor Shklovsky (a literary critic and novelist) it is a technique that points to two actions: making strange and pushing aside (Oxford Reference, n.d.). Shklovsky reminds us that "[defamiliarization] is to make objects unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Shklovsky, 1917, p.2). Shklovsky points out that by purposely creating conditions where the spectator is forced to gaze longer, new engagement is created, more active and demanding participation. Peter Buwert, a graphic design lecturer and researcher, argues that both habitualization and defamiliarization are valuable and necessary for living everyday life. Habitualization is needed in Buwert's opinion, as a functional arrangement allowing everyday functioning without "the exhausting impracticality of having to be constantly aware of our own activity" (Buwert, 2016). He does agree with Shklovsky in saying that habitualization however, degrades many experiences to being familiar in our brain and therefore not significant (Buwert, 2016).

For one project that demonstrates my engagement with defamiliarization of the object, I used clay slabs, and moulded them to create a set of cups that didn't perform as expected (see fig. 1). The cups were difficult to drink from, therefore the person drinking from them had to focus their attention on this one activity. It was as if the person drinking and the cup were in dialogue.

Fig 1a. Unfired clay tea cups. Source: Personal archive

Fig 1b. Unfired clay tea cups. Source: Personal archive

Sherry Turkle, a researcher on psychoanalysis and human-technology interaction, published *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* as essays collection where scientists, humanists, artists and designers reflect on objects in their lives that inspire intellectual and emotional engagement (Turkle, 2007). Turkle sees an evocative object as one that stimulates sentiment and acts as a companion in everyday life. My experiments with objects suggested to me that defamiliarized objects can become these kinds of "evocative objects" in that they provoke engagement and further contemplation, even beyond objects themselves. I began to notice that when the initial function/shape of the object was put into question, so too did the user's relation to it.

As a product designer in an academic context, I often found myself too isolated from people's actual needs and object related behaviours. I tended to focus on my own expectations and generalizations. In order to uncover real habits and avoid assumptions in my research, I conduct interviews with prompts (see figure 2) that encourage honest, creative responses.

Figure 2. Few examples of prompts and results. Source: Personal archive

In the course of interviewing, the most interesting insight was when people realized how often they used the object they chose for themselves. The objects that are used every day seem to become invisible. This concept of object-blindness has been explored by Donald Norman. In his book, *The Design of Everyday Things*, he states that "Good design is actually a lot more difficult to notice than poor design, in part because good designs fit our needs so well that the design is invisible, serving us without drawing attention to itself" (Norman, 1988). In my work, I want to challenge the idea of "good design" and its invisibility through defamiliarization. Objects that perform their functional tasks are taken for granted, forgotten, and dissolved in our daily routines. I want to expose human dependency on objects. My work aims to see 'good design' differently, not as objects that serve human needs, but rather as objects evoking thought and realize human embeddedness in the net of things.

Rings are a good example of my experience with object-blindness - I put on a ring every day, only to forget about it until bedtime. My idea to upset this cycle of object-ignorance was inspired by pieces by artist Lauren Kalman, whose work combines functional, craft and wearable objects, with photography and performance. Her objects are distorting the body through actions that look painful, rather than following jewellery's task to make someone appear more attractive (see fig. 3). In my opinion, the disregard for pretty aesthetics, along with the brutality of the pieces, liberates the wearables from their intended function and expectation of being jewellery (as assumed through the use of gold, pearls, and beads).

Figure 3. Lauren Kalman's *Devices For Filling a Void* collection Source: https://www.laurenkalman.com

Influenced by Lauren Kalman's "misuse" of jewellery, I created wearable pieces for fingers that require physical support to keep them in place, such as slight grip or muscle flex (see fig. 4). Wearables' only intended function is to be supported by the wearer, contrary to the common rings that are consistently holding on to the person, providing support for themselves. Reversing the role creates constant acknowledgment of the object, which I think already forms a bond between the human and nonhuman object.

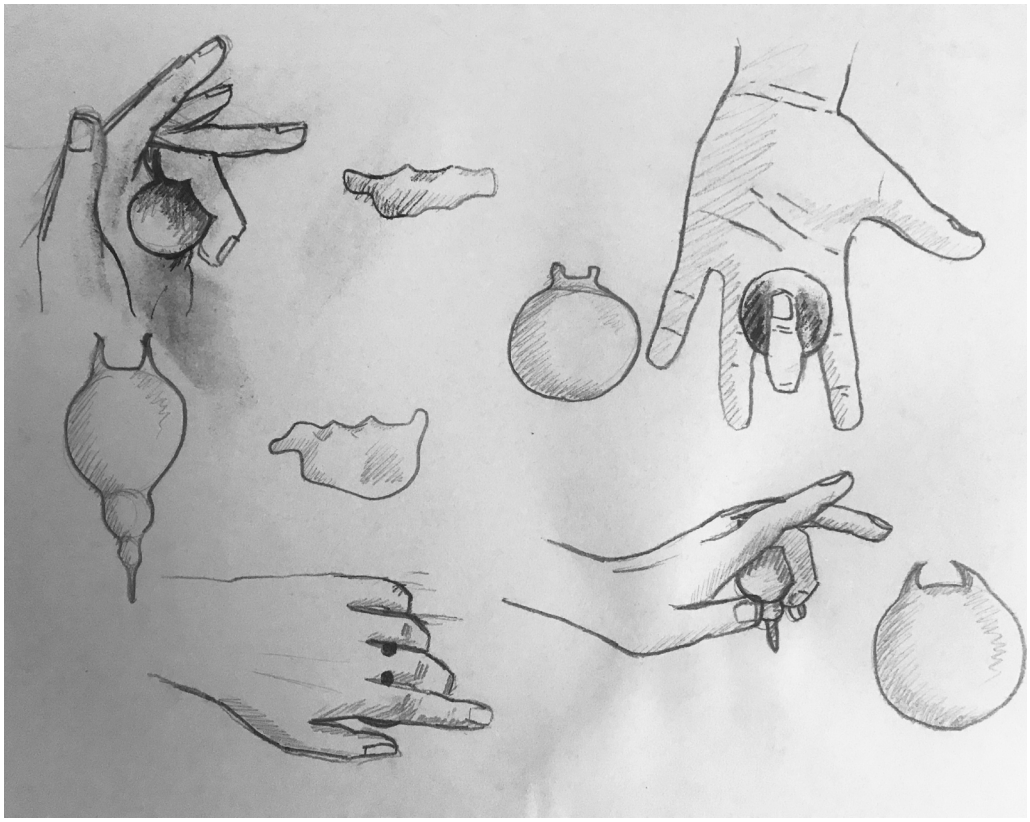

Figure 4. Sketches for the Wearables. Source: Personal archive

Figure 5. Wearables being used. Source: Personal archive

Figure 6. Wearables being used. Source: Personal archive

Fig. 8. Wearables used by a dancer in movie by Elena Denisa Lupoiu. Source: Personal archive of Elena Denisa Lupoiu

To see how the wearables would affect my daily routines, I decided to wear each piece for 24 hours, to again disrupt the jewellery-ness of the objects. I wanted to treat the Wearables as a daily companion, not just an accessory.

The wearables are smooth in touch. Although my muscles are slightly tired, it is still pleasant to hold them. They are made of ceramics, so there's weight to them that makes them noticeable in my grip. When my palm sweats, I worry about the wearables slipping out, so I tighten the grip to protect them better. When I walk down the street, nobody knows that I am actively nurturing something in my hand, it is an exciting thought, almost like having a secret friend by my side, invisible to everyone else.

I realized that these wearables had become companions in these moments. They were surprisingly soothing in their presence, almost understanding of my daily struggles since they were there to share them with me.

My experience resulted in caring for the object, but only while I wore it. Since it is a fabricated bond, I question whether it is a genuine one.

Nevertheless, the 24 hours spent with the Wearables felt like an intimate encounter. Through my physical support, the objects were close to me and they provided me comfort. In my view, to share an intimate moment is to trust and soothe each other, allowing oneself to share a more vulnerable side.

Édouard Glissant, a philosopher and poet, demands opacity which functions as an ethical stand against imperial conquest and dominance. Despite Glissant's focus on postcolonial Martinique, opacity is increasingly referred to in political discussions, queer theory and art criticism today. Opacity means seeing differences without making the other transparent, but accepting the incomprehensibility, impenetrability and confusion that often mark cross-cultural communication. Thus, through comprehension, opacity seeks to avoid comparisons, judgments and reducing (Glissant, 1997) the other to be see-through, transparent and invisible at the same time. In my opinion, the creation of intimacy and relation can be achieved through opacity. Expanding on Glissant's thought, I wonder how opacity can be applied to nonhumans. I thought of objects containing beverages and how often they are made of transparent glass, or with openings for us to literally look inside, almost demonstrating the constant need to look through things, the need to control. I decided to contradict that and made a collection of drinking clay vessels, where the liquid is hidden inside (see figure 9). When in use, the objects and the person were positioned in quite sensual poses (see figure 10). These poses were not designed, but rather evolved from the object–human interaction. For me, it was intriguing to see such an interaction, where the result couldn't be foreseen. It was very refreshing to change the over-analysed design process and see how surprising the outcomes can be. During such interactions, not only the person drinking stated that they felt extremely present with the vessel, but also other people involved in the experience considered it a special, bonding moment.

Figure 9. Vessels. Source: Personal archive

Figure 10. Photos From the first encounter with the Vessels. Source: Personal archive

Close Objects:
how the use of cuteness and anthropomorphism influences object empathy

Often, the objects that I make have been described as cute and huggable. Or simply, how alive they look. The notes were meant as compliments, nevertheless I was always left with a bitter aftertaste. It evoked feelings as if my pieces were not serious, or rather too simple. Sianne Ngai, a cultural theorist and feminist scholar, delves into the notion of cuteness in her essay *The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde*. Ngai verbalizes my mixed feelings about this aesthetic by explaining that characteristics associated with cuteness like smallness, softness, simplicity, all bring representations of powerless: helplessness, pitifulness and also despondency. She explains how heavily cuteness depends on power dynamic, assuming that the cute is always underneath, as the weak and dependent one.

I find the concept of cuteness puzzling since there are so many contradicting feelings that it evokes. I see that cute things can be regarded as something that one can care for. However, cuteness can also be a signifier of powerless, primitive and simple (Ngai, 2005). For me, an especially intriguing part of the essay speaks of using facial features to achieve cute aesthetics. Ngai writes: "Yet while the object has been given a face and exaggerated gaze, what is striking is how stylistically simplified and even unformed its face is, as if cuteness were a sort of primitivism in its own right". The use of simplified facial features can be observed in design to achieve a humorous and inviting appearance. But it can carry the danger of objectification, reducing people to the function of the design itself. An iconic example is a corkscrew called *Anna G.* by Alessandro Mendini (see figure 11). The added face, to a rather sophisticated tool, anthropomorphizes the object, giving it an almost childish look. The design of Anna G. corkscrew has the features mentioned by Ngai: overly simplified (empty) eyes and mouth; all without complexity. It was named after the designer Anna Gili when Mendini and Alessi (Alessi company president) recognized Anna Gili's facial features in the corkscrew design (Kamp, 2016) which, in my opinion, is far reaching and objectifying in nature. A gendered object with only one function can be seen as a rather anti-feminist statement.

Fig.11. The Anna G. Corkscrew. Source: https://eu.alessi.com/products/anna-g-corkscrew-1

What is more, a cute object's blobbish shape, smooth textures, and size invite you to hold, hug it. Ngai notes how it can provoke aggressive and abusive behaviour. She warns about it by stating: "We can thus start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly and aggressive feelings, as well as the expected tender or maternal ones. For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumers' sadistic desires for mastery and control, as well as his or her desire to cuddle"(Ngai, 2005, p.816) . I wonder, is cuteness a feature of my work that allows for care and nurturing; or does it create a desire for objectification and mistreatment of the pieces that I create?

Fig. 12. Embracing a vessel since: "it looks like a cute chicken". Source: Personal archive

Noticing human resemblance in an object is a common phenomenon, especially in product design. Jane Bennett, political theorist, discusses anthropomorphism and sees potential in it as a tool to give voice to an ecological notion of agency. Bennett states that: "A touch of anthropomorphism can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations" (Bennett, 2010,p.388). I find beauty in Bennett's thinking, and see anthropomorphism as a medium one that (when used with caution) can grant us acknowledgement and recognition of other actors. If used to reveal the network between bodies, rather than noticing human-likeness, anthropomorphism can grant an object attention and curiosity (Bennett, 2010).

Artist Goef Oppenheimer poses the question of anthropomorphism when creating his sculpture *Embarrassing Statue* (see figure 13) that brings together materials like a leaf blower, a brass plated armature, and a pair of pulled down pants. Is it the statue that is embarrassed or is it the looker? By anthropomorphising objects from daily life, one can wonder longer about own behaviours, seen from a perspective of a thing. While using anthropomorphism as a tool, recognition of the thing's significance in everyday life can be noted. With that, one can consider this method as a medium for creating relation with objects, however dangerous to the true narrative of objects themselves.

Fig.13. *Embarrassing Statue* by Geof Oppenheimer. Source: http://inthisdayandage.net/embarrassingstatue.html

Being Object:
how transformation into an object influences the self

In thinking about objectification, it is necessary to address works by thinkers working in feminism studies into how marginalized groups are forced into a form of an object against their will. Katherine Behar, an interdisciplinary artist who studies gender and labour in contemporary digital culture, talks about issues of new materialism and objectification in her edited collection *Object-Oriented Feminism* (OOF). Behar writes: "The 'object' in OOF connects with past and present engagements and experiments including non-anthropocentric art practices, queer/postcolonial/feminist critiques of objectification and marginalization, and psychoanalytic critiques of relation" (Behar, 2016, p.10). She introduces theory and themes in OOF, that I believe, were missing in Object-Oriented Ontology. Behar brings up famous words from Franz Fanon, where he stated "I came into the world imbued with the will to find the meaning of things, (…) and then I found that I was an object amid other objects. Sealed into that crashing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others" (Fanon, 2009) After being forced into the form of an object, Fanon describes the search for other's affection and realizes the paradox of the situation: he, as a Black person, is both seen and not seen. He is being watched on a street, simultaneously, he is not seen as a human, not with the same rights as a white person, but present as an object (Ekotto, 2020). I consider Behar's choice interesting: to include the text of Fanon, who is against objectification, whereas OOF invites to think of oneself as an object. In my practice, I often wonder how objectification is usually negatively connotated and how changing this association would impact human-object relation.

Behar explains that OOF which may seem to disregard the concerns of real subjects does not abandon feminist attention to interiority. She states that "This world of tools, there for the using, is the world to which woman, people of colour, and the poor have been assigned under patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism throughout history" (Behar, 2016, p.7). It is made evident in OOF book that Object-Oriented Ontology's primary authors (who have decided to not engage with topics of politics), created a gap which OOF tries to fill in. Behar asks, what does it mean for feminists to objectify someone who is already an object? When Franz Fanon searches for a way out of objecthood, Katherine Behar suggests a non-anthropocentric theory of population of objects, in which humans are objects no more privileged than any other (Behar, 2016). I fear it would take a lot to believe that being an object presents equal rights and opportunities for all. Irina Aristarkhova, whose work *A Feminist Object* is present in the OOF publication, explores this threat as well. Aristarkhova names the reasons to be cautious in the exploration of the feminist object, she challenges the principles of applied OOF. She wonders about the redefinitions of objects and subjects (that aim to complicate their complementarity) since they "lack changes in the context of the relations between subjects and objects: subjects continue to be subjects, and objects continue to be objects for the use of subjects" (Aristarkhova, 2016, p.57). She states that that would require subjects to give up their power and control over objects, allowing objects to exist independently. Together with Aristarkhova and Behar, I agree that assigning agency to objects isn't futile, but rather necessary. But I also wonder how accepting objects into feministic values in applied practice will look like for nonhuman, non-living beings.

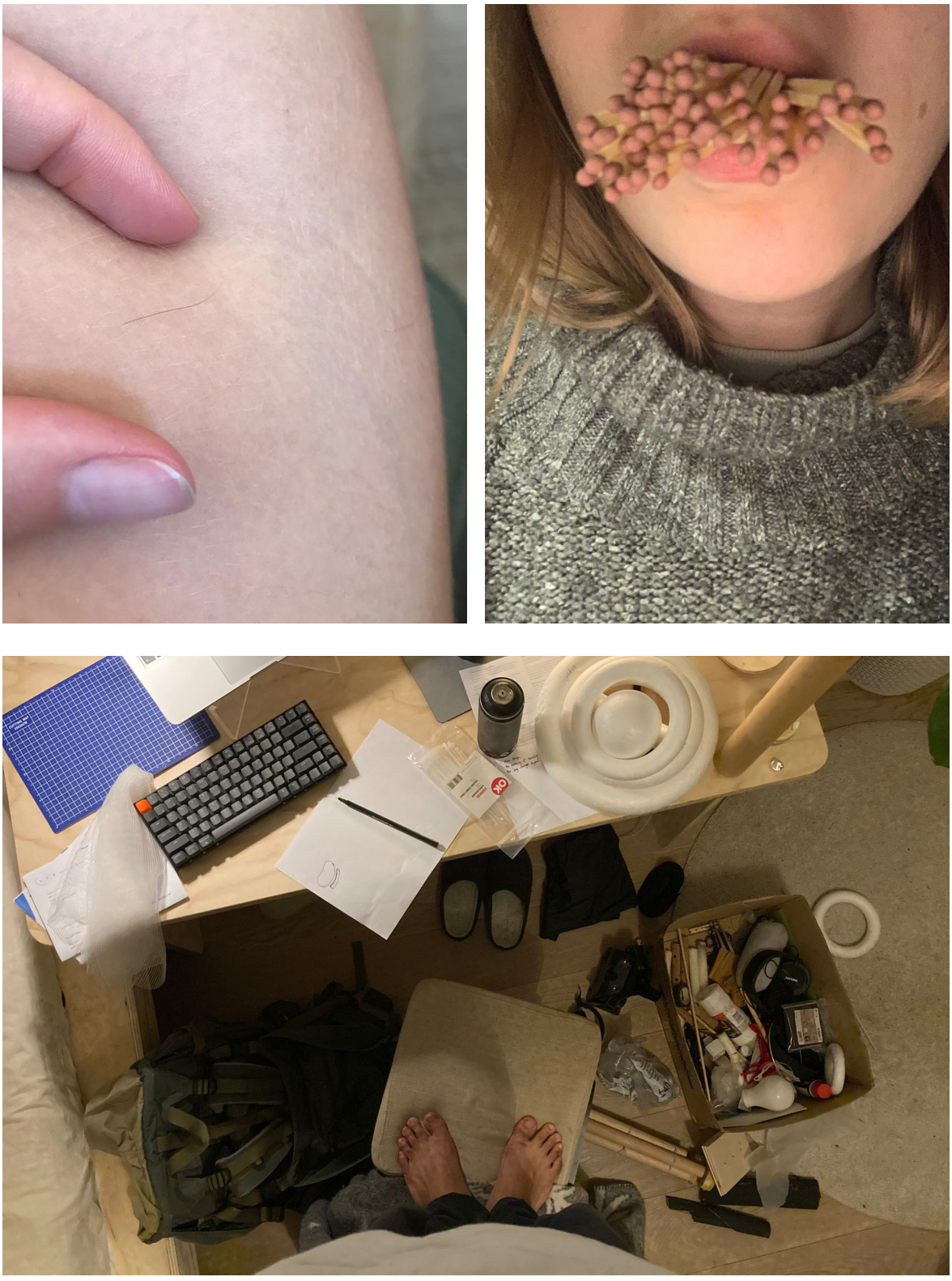

Fig 14 Workshop with exercises and prompts. Source: Personal archive

My Objects: how possessions can shape the extended self

My design practice expanded from designing objects into organizing workshops, that operated on interview's basis, while also performing actions of craft. Before the interviews I would ask people to prepare to be speaking about a thing that they share emotional attachment towards. I found this method of combining interviews and craft to be a great way of including other people's views and sentiments to objects, while also establishing a creative atmosphere, one that offered bonding of the participants, and hopefully a fun and engaging experience. So far, I have subjectively selected all the participants of the workshops/interviews. These were people who I knew before, and I recognized that they either share sentiment towards objects, or have none at all. People who I talked to were art and design professionals, biomedical engineer, architecture and interior design alumni, a four-year-old, an electrician and a product designer. In my future plans, I hope to engage with people from different settings, to avoid generalizations and be able to challenge myself in design approaches that I am already comfortable with.

During the interviews, people who were asked to talk about the object that they feel the most attached to, almost everyone chose an object that belonged to them already. We tend to care and value more things that are already ours. (Jarrett, 2013) And here, I am speaking from the WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) society's perspective. Feeling of ownership is also evident with self-created objects. I tend to become quite quickly attached to things that I have made and hence, consider ownership over. Attachment towards objects develops early in childhood and is described as an endowment effect, invoking value for an object by possession (Jarrett, 2013). The endowment effect (which is a cultural phenomenon, present mostly in western society) explains favouritism of an object, as soon as it becomes owned. Endowment effect supports a person's belief that their special object had a unique essence in its existence (Jarrett, 2013). This essence of the object can also be observed in approach to heirlooms, celebrity memorabilia and artworks.

One of my interview questions asks the participants if their objects are replaceable. The answer was mostly "no". When asked why, the majority answered *"Because it is one of a kind, it's been with me forever"*. I see this aspect of relation towards the object as the notion of "aura" introduced by Walter Benjamin. I understand the aura not as the thing itself, but rather the atmosphere surrounding the original, a feeling that is experienced when in its presence. By learning about aura, I was able to later formulate questions that challenged interviewees to think of what is their relationship based on. Similarly, to us not wanting to replace our beloved objects, Benjamin also worries about the lack of aura present in the reproductions of art. Benjamin explains aura's qualities: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (Benjamin, 1936, p.3). He explains that aura derives from the uniqueness of the object, where has it been, what has it experienced, and where has it been. The object carries aura that is specific to them, that is influenced by our experiences, we were involved in the creation of this specific object in the form that it exists now. The aura explains human attachment to objects that were a family heirloom, associated with a special place, gifts from loved ones and objects that be-

longed to someone they admire.

Through the interviews, I have found that the objects that are chosen as precious ones vary in their meanings from sentimental (a father's trumpet element, a key to a closet from a childhood home, a grandmother's ring) to objects describing an individual's autonomy (a car, a self-bought guitar, a DIY object, clothing item). It is worth noting, once again, that the interviews were conducted with people that I have subjectively selected, knowing a person's character and having expectations about their answers. Regardless, I was still amazed by our conversations, discussing individual ways of being attached to an object. The different interpretations of questions were vital for discovering the human–object relation. Very different responses were given to the question about showing affection for the chosen object.

Several people were amused by the mere idea of speaking to an object. Others indicated they do share physical touch with things or show appreciation by taking care of them. When asked about the value of their object, some people responded with price that they paid for it, in contrast to people who told the origin story of the objects and the emotional attachment the objects carry. One thing in common throughout the interviews was that the fear of participants losing their object, as if losing a part of themselves.

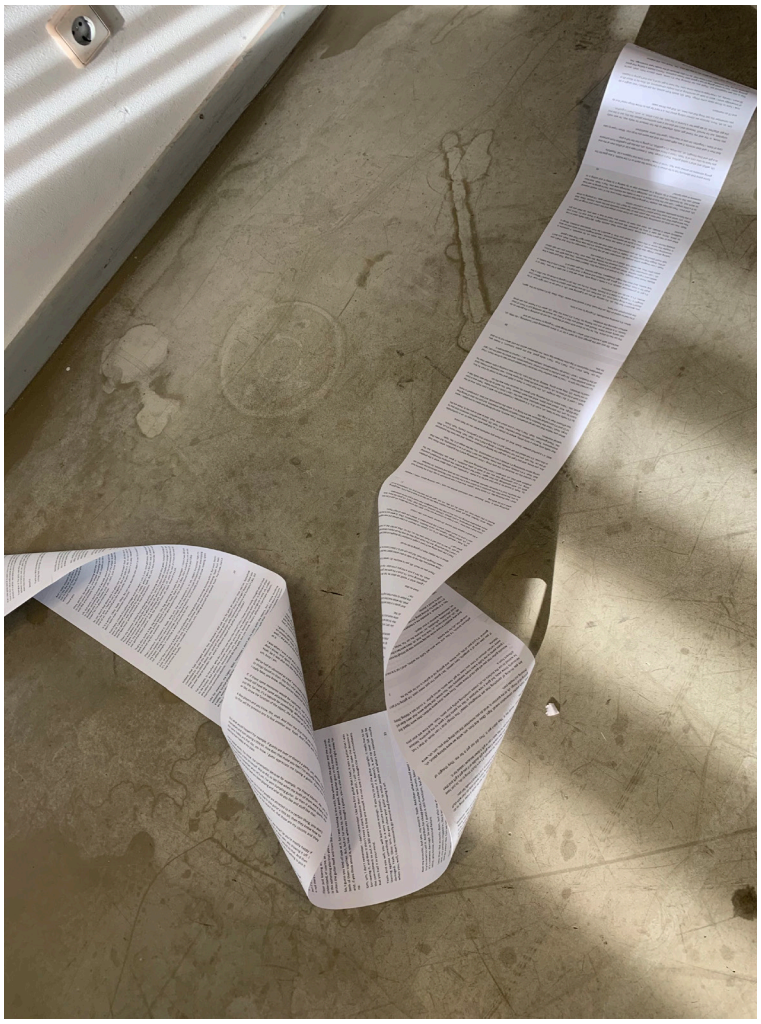

Figure 15. Transcripts from interviews. Source: Personal archive.

Entangled Object:
how to think as things and to "knock at the stone's door"

Wiesława Szymborska's poem that began this thesis explores human-object relation. Human seeks to be invited inside, but the stone disapproves. The stone says that humans lack the senses to wander inside and appreciate it. The stone tries to prove that a human is simply unable to understand non-humans, even the ones growing on one's scalp. The stone finally explains that there is (both metaphorically and literally) no way for them to recognise each other from the inside in the last dialogue verse of the poem:

I knock at the stone's front door.
"It's only me, let me come in."

"I don't have a door," says the stone.

After such an exchange, one can speculate what Wiesława Szymborska meant while writing this last verse. In my understanding, the poet is referring to human inability to know what is it like to be a non-human. Author in the environmental humanities - Stacey Alaimo - criticizes approach of the OOO thinkers who are posing questions such as: What do objects experience? What is it like to be an object? (Alaimo, 2014). Both Szymborska and Alaimo point out that, as humans, we can never enter the object and fully understand its existence. Alaimo suggests not to separate the object from its environment and human subject in order to study it, but to begin "from a material feminist sense of the subject as already part of the substances, systems, and becomings of the world." (Alaimo, 2014, p.14). I agree with the assertion not to consider isolated objects for their being, since it's their environment and interactions that make them. This together with understanding, that it is impossible to fully grasp the essence of a non-human, only encourages me to study and focus in my artistic practice on the relation that humans have with the entangled others, in contrast to imagining what the others 'feel'. These topics Alaimo targets in her book *Bodily Natures*, where she states in the introduction that "[the book] explores the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures" (Alaimo, 2010, p.2).

I was introduced by Alaimo to the term "trans-corporeality". Alaimo explains that the posthumanistic concept of trans-corporeality means that we are all entangled with multiple material agencies, flows, and processes, which connect human bodies and animal bodies to ecosystems and technologies (Alaimo, 2014). The notion of trans-corporeality was a thing that interested me for a very long time, but I couldn't find the words to describe it. It is realizing that what we do locally influences the global and that the global influences the individual. What mark will it leave?

I sense the notion of trans-corporeality in artist's Rebecca Horn work. Young Horn was experimenting in her art practice with fibre-glass, without the necessary protection mask, and got sick with lung poisoning. She was confined to a bed in sanatorium for a year, forced to give up on her practice. Later on, she created works, that by shaping new, human anatomy, would allow to touch and feel objects without getting close to them in fear of poising, and literally not being able to get out of bed (Green, 2020). The artist's work *Finger Gloves* poses questions about the connection between body and environment, and how materials and technologies can enhance or disturb human abilities. The work (and it's context) portrays how the environmental entanglements have an influence on the individual.

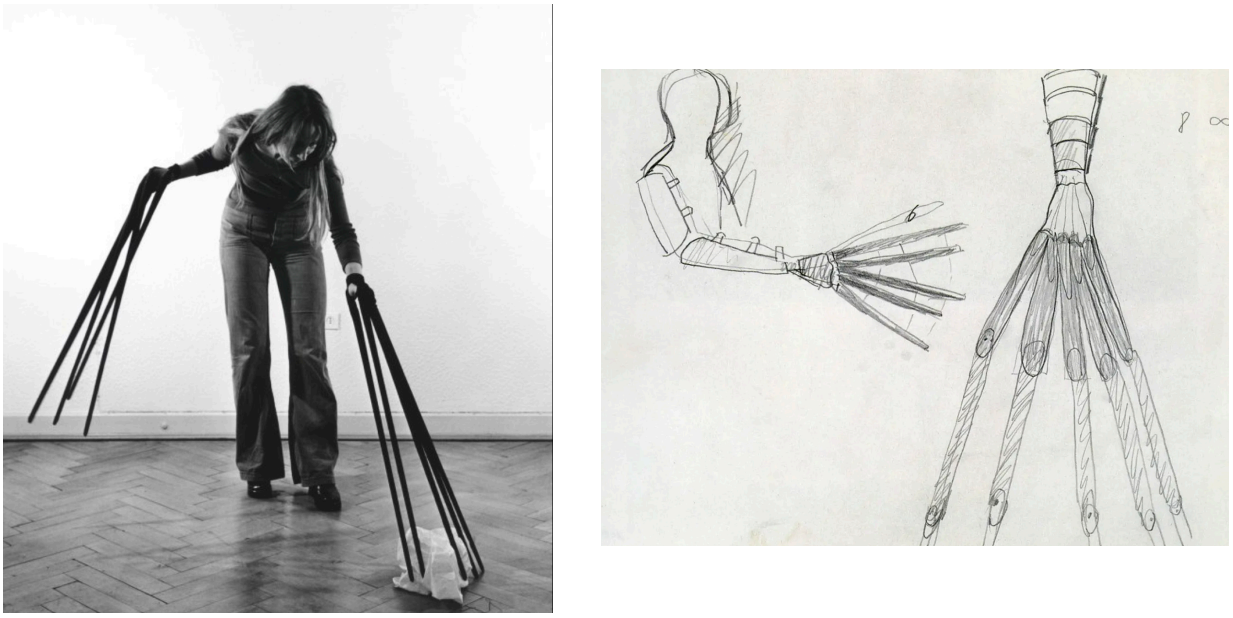

Fig 16. Rebeca Horn's *Finger Gloves* and sketch. Source: https://3x3artxwork.wordpress.com/2017/12/11/artwork-rebecca-horn-finger-gloves-1972/

I strive to realize Alaimo's trans-corporeality with objects of affection in my practice. How are the objects in my daily life affecting me? Will they leave a mark? Is it a physical mark or rather emotional? Throughout the series of workshops facilitated with people from inside and outside academy environment, I hope to deepen my understanding of trans-corporeality and ways of creating non-human relations. I hope to conduct the workshops outside academy environment, since young artists, designers, as well as lecturers already have certain knowledge and sensibility towards objects and theories, popularized in an academia. I wonder how universal the feelings of object attachment are and how one can nurture them? Using tools (see figures 17-21) and guidelines (open for participant's interpretation), I envision a space where theory thinking can be channelled into interaction and to operationalize the knowledge of posthumanist theories, which is not always accessible to everyone. I wish to avoid the blind spot of workshops of creating a sterile environment, where the participants are people already knowledgeable and comfortable with presented context; as well as facilitating the workshops only as sites for my gain and research. I aim that experiences like the workshops can expand the perspectives of viewing vibrant objects, as Jane Bennett might put it, and realize the changing ecology around people and non-humans. I believe that through submersion into objecthood and our relationship to it (through touch, remembering, movement, shape recognition), we became more attuned to objects in our surroundings. Not through fully understanding the existence of a nonhuman, but by discerning one's bonds and connections to it.

Fig 17. Interacting with objects via tools. Source: Personal archive

Fig 18. Interacting with objects via tools. Source: Personal archive

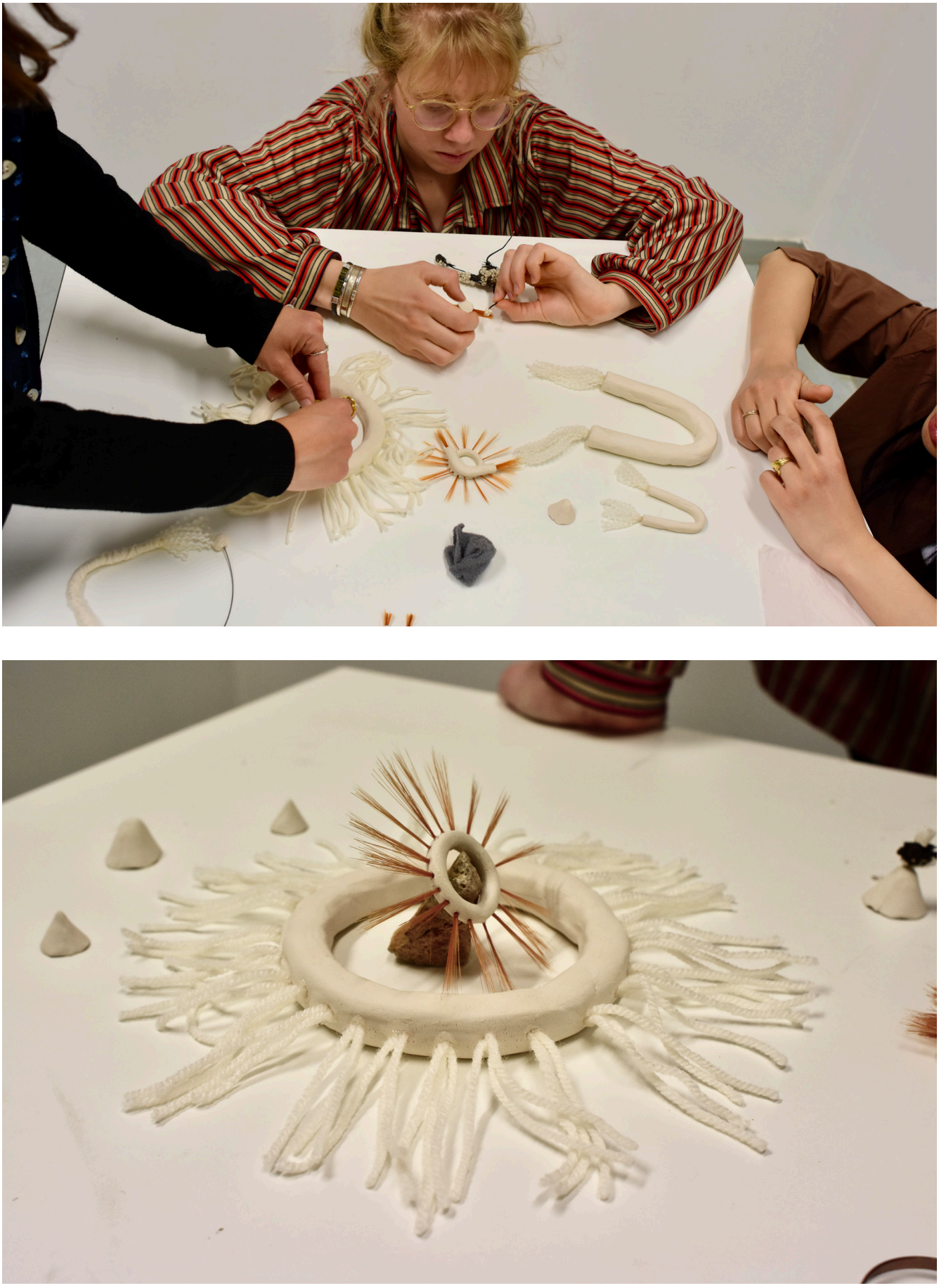

Fig 19. Interacting with objects via tools. Source: Personal archive

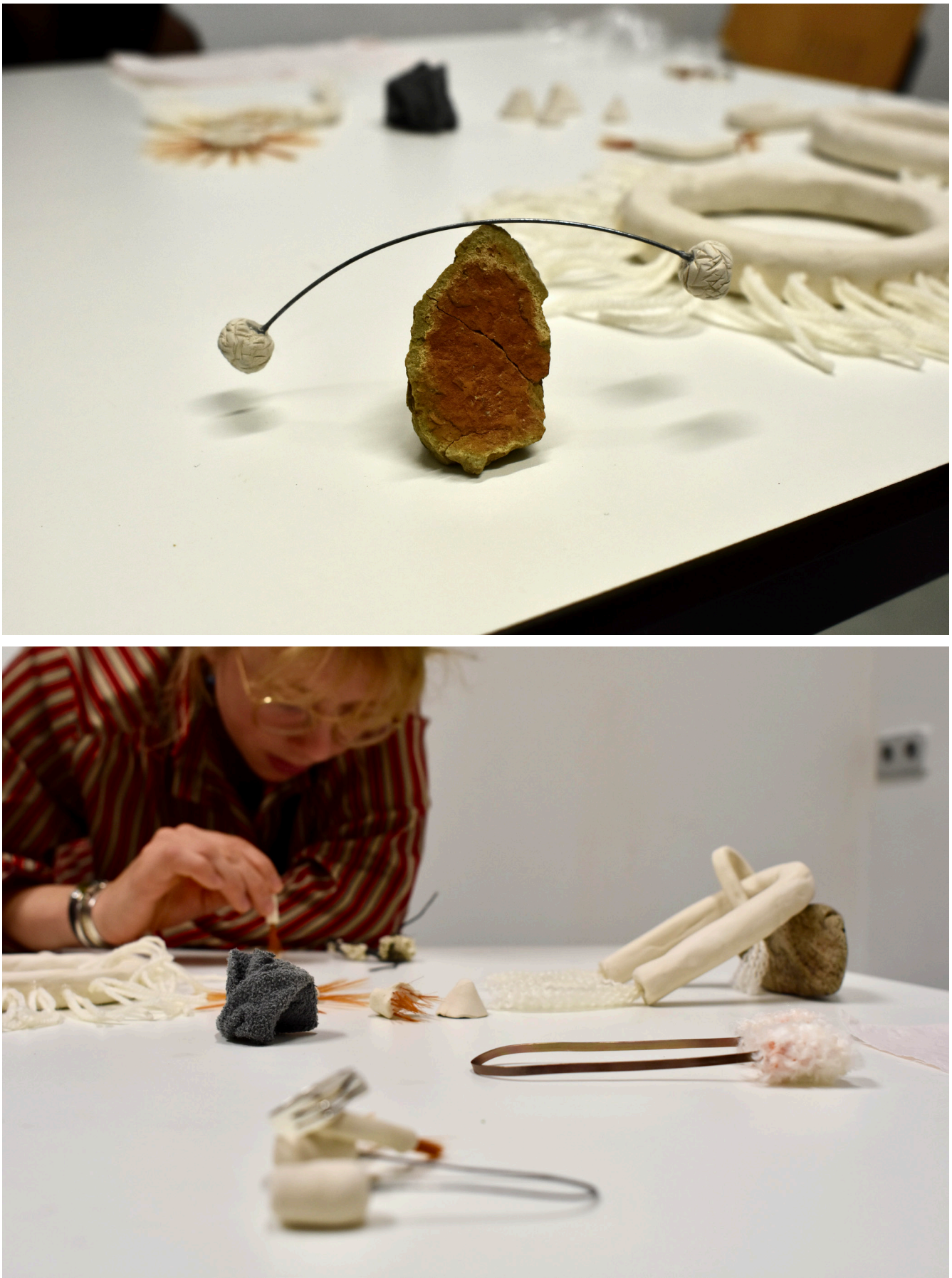

Fig 20. Interacting with objects via tools. Source: Personal archive

Fig 21. Interacting with objects via tools. Source: Personal archive

Conclusions

This thesis began by noting how human relations to an object can influence the perception of it, how it's meant to be used or abused, what rights does it have. As this thesis has shown, it is of vital importance for political, ethical, and environmental considerations to identify what determines an object.

As I have learnt, our embeddedness into the web of relations is dependent on how we view and regard objects around us. By disappointing myself in discovering that I would never be able to comprehend, what it is like to be a thing, I found comfort in knowing that the more stimulating task is to discover our relations in-between. Through recognizing the bonds, we learn not only about ourselves, but also about the trans-corporeality in which we exist. This can be simultaneously a scary thought, knowing that we are in entanglement with each other. Nevertheless, it is reassuring to know that no one exists alone.

Through this research I've come to understand that how all individuals interact with their environment makes it critical to take responsibility for the diverse systems we are constantly immersed in. I became more aware of how the direct contact between human and nonhuman corporeality offers powerful ethical and political prospects. Considering human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human always is intertwined with the nonhuman world, emphasizes how interwoven the human being is in "the environment". It's difficult to portray nature as merely a setting for human abuses since "nature" is as close as one's own body - if not nearer. Furthermore, thinking across bodies may help people recognize that the environment is a world of corporeal individuals with their own needs, claims, and behaviours, rather than a lifeless resource for mankind's use.

By exploring these direct contacts through workshops and using tools for discovering human-object bonds, I was able to challenge the notion of human and object binary assumptions. Through the conversations and my subsequent art projects, I gained an understanding of what constitutes objectness from multiple perspectives.

Finally, I found the motivation to further expand my understanding of the topic, where I would treat the words of Jane Bennett: "We are vital materialist and we are surrounded by it, though we don't always see it that way. The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it" (Bennett, 2010, p.106) as my guide for future practice research.

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