

Seminário de Metodologia de Investigação

A agência dos materiais

Observação, reflexão, afetação



excertos para discussão

Seminário de Metodologia de Investigação
Mestrado Artes Plásticas | 2ª ano | 2º semestre | 2024
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Petra Lange-Berndt (2015)

How to be Complicit with Materials [excertos]

Material generally denotes substances that will be **further processed, it points to the forces of production at the time**. From a critical perspective, the term 'material' describes **not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change**, be it through handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions. It is therefore a **political decision to focus on the materials of art**: it means to consider the **processes of making and their associated power relations**, to consider the **workers** - whether they are in factories, studios or public spaces, whether they are known or anonymous - and their tools and paces of production. (p.12)

Thus, to address processes of making is still associated with formalism, **while materials are thought of in terms of concrete, direct and inert physicality, carrying imprinted messages**. Although objects and things have been much investigated, this field has not received the attention it needs. For some, **to engage with materials still seems the antithesis of intellectuality**, a playground for those not interested in theory, while material studies are defined, at best, as an auxiliary science. **Materiality is one of the most contested concepts in contemporary art and is often sidelined in critical academic writing**. (p.12)

Get Dirty

[Na **abordagem modernista** dos materiais] the goal is to overcome any remnant of the everyday in order to **arrive at pure form and transcendence**. **Material factuality** is only a **springboard for leaping into abstraction and visuality**, realms understood as being less physical (...). In fact, the legacy of this version of modernism is not a focus on materials, but quite the opposite: **their elimination**. (...) **materials are not allowed to be vagabond, dirty and contagious, they are only used to think about or to think with, and again act as the indicator of something else**. The societal characteristics emanating from materials (...) and above all their histories, are largely ignored; in this respect, these discourses remain within the realm of the white cube. (p.13)

I would therefore like to propose a methodology of **material complicity**. What does it mean to **give agency to the material**, to follow the material and to **act with the material**? For a start, materials are neither objects nor things; if one considers a broom, for instance, the broom is a thing while the material might be wood or plastic. Materials are far less anthropocentric, and this is one reason why this category has been neglected. (p.13)

To **follow the material** means to enter a true maze of meanings, where one encounters terms such as matter, material, materiality, Stoff, substance or medium. (p.14)

Act with the Material

[Nesta abordagem pretende-se] 'enable the material to talk' (...) already defining **material complicity as an analytical tool within art practice, art criticism and art history**. This research into *Produktionsästhetik* (**the aesthetics of production**) and the changing semantics of materials discusses how content, or factuality, is produced; in short, it analyses **the conditions for discourses and ideas to appear in the world**. At the same time, **the materiality of an artwork is never completely absorbed into representation**. **Material complicity** is more than basic research (*Grundlagenforschung*) and has a **clear political agenda**. (p. 15)

In this context, rather than material production leading to the fabrication of consumer goods, the possibilities of materials should be set free without turning them into commodities. (p. 15)

The category material has also been defined as natural or subaltern. **Therefore, to act with the material and to be complicit means to investigate societal power relations**. Are there languages beyond those of philosophy, beyond the official and sanctioned system of the written knowledge game? **Clearly materials have agency**, they can **move as well as act and have a life of their own**, challenging an anthropocentric post-Enlightenment intellectual tradition. **And those who have been listening to them, who are not intimidated by materials**, have not predominantly been academics but artists, designers, architects, conservators or technicians. (p. 16)

To **follow the material means not to discuss aesthetic issues of quality, expressiveness or symbolic content but to investigate transpersonal societal problems and matters of concern**. Within this methodology it is paramount to situate artistic practices within historical perspectives and to open the meanings of the materials used to their everyday or non-art connotations: **'To understand materials is to be able to tell their histories.'** In order to engage critically with the meaning of gasoline in Romuald Hazoume's installations, chocolate in the work of Janine Antoni, or garbage in the projects of Mierle Laderman Ukeles one needs a **reformed set of art-historical tools**. Complicity with materials means not engaging predominantly with peers who operate in the same system, but rather, **becoming involved with other disciplines** according to the topic: botanists, for example, if considering an art practice centred on plants; technologists, if it engages with smart materials; or if it is centred on trash one might want to interview workers in a sanitation department. **The path one takes when 'following the materials' is thus not linear, not clearly divisible into avant-garde, high modernist, postmodern, and so on. Rather, one encounters entangled, anachronistic layers, incorporating references that point beyond canonical art-historical boundaries**. (p. 16)

Make the Materials Laugh

Focusing on the moments when **materials leave behind the confines of the white cube, become wilful actors and agents within artistic processes** and enmesh their audience in a network of connections, these texts for the most part avoid the palatable materials of academic art, **exploring instead the substances that artists have engaged with to expand notions of process, time, contingency or participation**. The texts address where and how materials obstruct, disrupt or interfere with social norms, allowing for repressed, messy or unstable substances and impure formations to surface.

excertos retirados de:

LANGE-BERNDT, P. 2015. "Introduction: How to be Complicit with Materials", *Materiality*. London/Cambridge: White Chapel/MIT, pp. 12-23.

Jane Bennet (2010)

Vibrant Matter - A political ecology of things [excertos prefácio]

[to aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality]

This book has a philosophical project and, related to it, a political one. The philosophical project is to think slowly **an idea that runs fast through modern heads**: the **idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw; brute, or inert**. This habit of parsing the world into **dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)** is a "**partition of the sensible**," to use Jacques Ranciere's phrase. The quarantines of matter and life **encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations**, such as the way omega-3 fatty acids can alter human moods or the way our trash is not "away" in landfills but generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane as we speak. I will turn the figures of "life" and "matter" around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange, in something like the way a common word when repeated can become a foreign, nonsense sound. In the space created by this estrangement, **a vital materiality can start to take shape**. (...)

The political project of the book is, to put it most ambitiously, **to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things**. A guiding question: **How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?** By "**vitality**" I mean **the capacity of things - edibles, commodities, storms, metals - not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own**. My aspiration is to **articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans** to see how **analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due**. How, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or "the recycling," but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter?

I lavish attention on specific "things," noting **the distinctive capacities or efficacious powers of particular material configurations**. (...) I want to highlight what is typically cast in the shadow: **the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things**. (...)

Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of **dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter** feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. **It does so by preventing us from detecting** (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) **a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies**. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, **enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even "respect"**. The **figure of an intrinsically in-animate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable**

modes of production and consumption. My claims here are motivated by a self-interested or conative concern for human survival and happiness: I want to promote greener forms of human culture and **more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities.**

I need all the help I can get, for this project calls for the pursuit of several tasks simultaneously: (1) to paint **a positive ontology of vibrant matter**, which stretches received concepts of agency, action, and freedom sometimes to the breaking point; (2) to **dissipate the onto-theological binaries** of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic using arguments and other rhetorical means to induce in human bodies an **aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality**; and (3) to sketch a style of **political analysis** that can better **account for the contributions of nonhuman actants.**

(...)

My aim, again, is to **theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance. This vibrant matter is not the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God.**

excertos retirados de:

BENNETT, Jane. 2010. "Preface", *Vibrant Matter - A political ecology of things*. Durham-London: Duke University Press, pp. vii-xx.

| EXERCÍCIO 3 |

A agência dos materiais

Observação, reflexão, afetação

PARTE 1 | em sala de aula | **AULA 1** | 10:00-12:30 | Análise coletiva excertos do dossier

PARTE 2 | em sala de aula | **AULA 2** | 14:00-17:00 | Convite à experimentação coletiva de relações individuais com materiais

PARTE 3 | autônomo | submissão do ensaio visual

Partindo da reflexão dos excertos contidos neste dossier e da discussão desenvolvida em aula, o presente exercício propõe desenvolver-se em três fases:

- a) **PARTE 1 | Fórum:** Discussão coletiva em aula, com preparação prévia, das contribuições excertos dos textos constantes do dossier (Lange-Berndt, 2015; Bennet, 2010) para pensar sobre a relação de cada um com os materiais presentes no trabalho e na investigação em curso.
- b) **PARTE 2 | Por em ação dos materiais:** Preparação do lugar individual de trabalho no atelier como um pequeno laboratório ou espaço sensitivo apresentando um exercício de experimentação para todo o grupo com base na relação com os materiais individualmente utilizados na investigação.
- c) **PARTE 3 | Ensaio Visual:** Sintetizar a experiência num modo reflexivo e de registo em que imagens e texto/conceitos tenham a mesma importância. Ou seja, uma **reflexão inspirada nos modelos do ensaio visual** para desenvolvimento de um documento que reflita a experiência de trabalho em torno deste dossier.

NOTAS SOBRE O ENSAIO VISUAL: Um ensaio visual é geralmente um comentário "sobre processos visuais e ideias através da combinação entre imagem e texto em que o elemento visual do ensaio deve ser parte integrante do argumento ou das ideias expressas, em vez de servir apenas como exemplo, ilustração ou documentação adicional".¹

As imagens devem produzidas expressamente para a realização deste exercício e ser consideradas mais como "dados de investigação" do que como objetos estéticos autônomos. **As imagens a produzir e seleccionar devem refletir visualmente os argumentos que podem igualmente surgir em forma de textos curtos originais e/ou citações dos excertos analisados.** Pretende-se que, com resultado final, texto e imagem estabeleçam uma relação simbiótica ou espiralar.

¹ No auxílio da definição de ensaio visual foi consultada a seguinte fonte: <https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/VCI/VISUAL-ESSAY-GUIDELINES.pdf>.

Objectivos:

demonstrar capacidade de recolher, seleccionar e interpretar informação relevante através de métodos inspirados na pesquisa documental e reflexão teórica de forma a gerar ideias originais com vista a uma fundamentação sólida da sua prática enquanto artista plástica/o.

contribuir para o desenvolvimento de competências discursivas e processuais autónomas a partir da análise de estudos de caso e da pesquisa e investigação empírica aplicada à criação artística.

capacidade de inscrever desenvolver uma consciência prática e crítica dos impactos culturais, sociais e políticos da sua produção autoral.

Imagem da capa: Os Bêbados [detalhe] | José Malhoa | 1907 | foto: pedro cá / esad.cr