

Deep materialism and care-taking: A study of material relationships for the twenty-first century

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Introduction

In this chapter we develop the concept and creative practices of ‘deep materialism’ as ways to problematize Western relationships with matter, particularly matter deemed as ‘waste’ in modern consumer cultures. We use the terms ‘matter’, ‘materials’ and the combined term ‘matter/materials’ interchangeably to refer to *all* in the world: challenging and blurring the divides between organic and inorganic, processed and unprocessed. We seek to encourage relationships with matter which can resist toxic over-consumption and the ecocide this is unleashing on the planet.

People living in Modern/Western societies have become separated from the ecological nature and consequences of their material life by the stretched-out, opaque character of production, consumption and disposal of everyday materials. Western consumerism generates huge quantities of discarded matter which carries within it the ghosts of habitats and lives destroyed in its extraction and processing. Its abandonment causes further extensive environmental harms often far distanced from the consumers who have discarded it. Many warnings and statistics exist on the wastefulness of consumer culture and the environmental injustices this creates. Yet, despite all this evidence being available, consumer habits do not readily change. It suits the continuous and self-perpetuating structures of capitalism to describe so-called waste materials in derogatory terms such as garbage, trash, detritus, scrap, rubbish so that they will be cast aside, seen as unclean, unwanted, thus creating a space and desire for more and more matter to be used then discarded.

We argue that the artistic and creative practices of deep materialism can encourage the *noticing* and *valuing* of matter and a *sensing* of its *vibrancy* – a property often unapparent, overlooked by consumers caught up in the capitalist machine. Such attention to the liveliness of matter can disrupt repetitive linear processes of demand, use and discard. It can open existential moments which ‘penetrate the attitudes and sensibilities of mind’ (Guattari and Negri 1990:53) engendered by ‘integrated world capitalism’ (Guattari 1989 – capitalism so widespread that the sources of its power cannot be easily identified and opposed. This shift to a sensitivity for everyday material has the potential to empower, to generate, at the individual level, a *shift* from a consumption-based conception of self to a more ‘ecological sense of self’ (Guattari 1989). Such changes at the individual level can and do make changes in the world, affecting consumer demand at societal level as well as raising awareness of the ecocide caused by excessive consumption.

To make this argument we interweave ideas drawn from a range of thinkers including Bennett (2001, 2011), Braidotti (2013), Little Bear (2011) and the feminist ethicists of care Gilligan (2011), Tronto and Fischer (1990) and Puig de la Bella Casa (2017) with our own and others’ embodied creative practices including the artists Annie Albers, Mierle Ukeles and William Morris. The chapter begins with an overview of our own creative practices and our collaboration. This leads on to the need to challenge Modernist/Western mindsets. We then explore feminist thinking on ‘care’; Lanyon’s (1952) ‘involution’; Bennett’s conception of enchantment (2001) and new materialist and post-human thinking (Bennett 2001, 2011; Braidotti 2013 Barad 2007). We identify distinctive features of deep materialism. We explore how these conceptions can be experienced through creative practices to encourage relationships with matter which can *resist* Western toxic overconsumption and the creation of so-called waste and support the emergence of more sustainable ways to be and live together.

Introducing our practice

Alison’s practice

I am an artist and environmental activist. My work interrogates relationships with the material world that are so often taken for granted. This may be in the form of the ‘unpicking’ of discarded materials such as paper bags, crisp and coffee packets, single-use cups or in highlighting the particulate matter in the air we breathe. I believe that a dissociation from the qualities of matter can only lead

to yet further disconnection, in Western thinking, from an understanding of the forces and qualities that make a human an ecologically entangled being (Harper 2017). I do not see my practice as a disposal or recycling system for discarded materials. Rather, I see it as a way to raise awareness of the current shortcomings in the Western relationship with the material world: a need to become closer to it, engage with it and respect it. Laing (2020: 8) highlights that whilst art practices ‘cannot forcibly induce a change in behaviour’ they can provide us with ‘radiant material’, ‘a route to clarity’ and ‘a force to resist an ‘unconscious assent’ (Guattari 1989) to capitalism and consumption. My creative practice, in searching for the ‘radiant materials’ in unexpected, overlooked places opens questions as to their provenance, production and indeed the need for their very existence. By rescuing and reinserting them into view I interrogate the very definition of ‘waste’ and highlight that ‘we have to stop exploiting and discarding’ (Latour cited in Watts 2020). In my practice, industrially processed material is unmade, largely by hand, and becomes the hand re-made. Relationships too are altered. I see the *doing* of my work as an attempt to repair relationships with the material at hand and an invitation to others to enter this process. The preparation for the creative reimagining of these discarded materials, washing and drying them in my kitchen: unpicking, exploring, spending *time* and *care* with them could be seen as absurd. However, I argue that these processes of ‘hand-unmaking’ can open pathways to disrupt existing patterns of consumption and offer opportunities to develop more ecologically orientated mindsets. These altered materials, now remade, for example, as a little book or a sheet of paper remade from a single coffee cup or ribbon made from crisp packets, sit outside any art market. If they were ‘for sale’ then they would again become commodified and a part of the capitalist system that produced them.

Embedded in my practice is an awareness of the carbon footprint of my actions and of the materials I use in making and exhibiting my work, leading to a self-imposed ‘low-impact practice’. My intention is to do as much as I can with as little as possible. No added inks, dyes or paints are used. I make tools from ‘scrap’ materials and use thread from an already-amassed store. On a personal level this creative reduction in material and energy use seeps through to other aspects of life: to food, to furniture, to travel, to clothing.

Sarah’s practice

As a teacher and researcher I explore practices informed by complexity theory, decolonization and feminist thinking to open spaces for emergence of more

ecological ways to be and to live (Chave 2021). For me, this is an essential move in this era of ecocide when opening possibilities for new futures is urgently needed. Education needs to be a place which, to cite Arendt ([1961] 2006: 193), does not ‘strike from the hands of children [and all learners – my addition] the opportunity to undertake something new, something unseen by us’. Creativity has an important part to play in opening such spaces of emergence. Creativity opens possibilities for learning which exceed analytical thinking and the reduction of learning to ‘very narrow or restricted modes of cognitive processes’ and a ‘reductivist strategy of knowledge building’ (Suzawa 2013: 232). Creative activities including art, poetry, prose and music can encourage more holistic learning which involves one’s mind, physical senses and emotions.

Our collaboration

Together, we argue that the resourcefulness needed to live more ecologically requires an expansive, responsive and exciting world view – one which challenges the ‘existential contraction’ and ‘narrowing of the limits within which we think and feel’ (Guattari 1989: 9) in modern life. We met during our respective PhD programmes where Alison first generated the term ‘deep materialism’ (Harper 2017). We continue to collaborate and develop ideas through an ongoing arts-based research project *Deep Materialism and Care-Taking: A Study of Material Relationships for the 21st Century* which we began in 2018, supported by the University of Exeter’s Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI).

Our approach celebrates Bauhaus weaver Anni Albers’ emphasis that ‘we must come down to earth from the clouds where we live in vagueness and experience the most real thing there is: material’ (1938). Albers foregrounds the importance of not losing connection to threads and materials, seeing making as a spiritual as well as a practical undertaking. For Albers, ‘material is a means of communication’ and ‘listening to it makes us truly active’ (Tate Modern Exhibition 2018). The maker co-makes in relationship with the materials through this ‘listening’ process. Albers believed the proliferation of mass-produced goods affects one’s ability to listen to the material they are made from. Alienated from materials, one loses touch with both the material and oneself.

This ‘listening’ to the qualities of the matter is described by Adamson (2018: 28) as a ‘two-way street’. This is more than listening in an acoustic sense.

It is an interaction involving head, heart and hands. The maker interacts with the material. There is a sense of ‘flow’: one pays attention, fully absorbed, not distracted by oneself or other thoughts. The material responds, is changed, as is the maker in their response, in their gathering information and experience as the making continues.

Event of a Thread (Figure 4.1) is our collaborative response to Albers. It is an entangling of sheep’s wool yarn handspun by Sarah (sheep’s wool is often identified as a ‘waste product’ in Western markets¹) and ribbon/yarn made by Alison from crisp packets and paper bags. For us, this is an acknowledgment of Albers’s (1965:15) insistence that ‘to see a particular yarn as an object is not the whole story’. The thread is precursor to what it may become in *reciprocity* with its maker. There is a spiritual, recursive relationship. A thread holds *potentia*. It opens processes of material beginnings and becomings, emphasizing the ‘ever extending relationships’ present in ‘the event of a thread’ (Albers 1965: 15).



Figure 4.1 *Event of a Thread*, 2019. Sarah Chave and Alison Harper. Media: Wool, crisp packets, carrier bags. Courtesy Sarah Chave and Alison Harper.

Challenging modernist mindsets

Central to our conception of deep materialism is that attending to the liveliness, value and beauty of all matter/material challenges mechanistic Western framings of the world. These were introduced by thinkers such as Descartes, Newton and Boyle in the seventeenth century and heralded a new vision of the 'natural world' which continues to shape thinking today. These mechanistic ideas replaced earlier framings which had understood the world as constituted of lively, vibrant, agential matter (Bennett 2001; Bilgrami 2014). Broadly speaking, in mechanistic thinking, the world is constituted of 'brute and inert' matter (see discussion in Chave 2020). The world is a clockwork process with 'man' as master of the mechanism. Moreover, this is a particular notion of Western man: white, European, able-bodied, in charge of women and children (see Braidotti 2013 Chave 2021). The Western (European) Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century and the concurrent development of Modernism which deliberately rejected ideas of the past emphasized autonomy, rationality, innovation and scientific developments. This reinforced mechanistic thinking in which matter is 'brute and inert'. All these ideas combined to enable capitalism to prevail (Klein 2015). Moreover, the demand for the materials needed by capitalism was and is a key driver of European colonialism in which some countries dominate and exploit others to supply industrial processes: practices that continue today.

This had and *has* the effect of exploiting and dehumanizing peoples (Jackson 2013); extracting resources for the financial gain of transnational corporations; destroying habitats and their other-than-human inhabitants and spreading around the world particular Western religious, cultural and philosophical ideas and capitalist mindsets of insatiable consumption and destruction (Guattari 1989). The creative practices of deep materialism invite a reconsideration of the inertness of matter; a questioning of Western mindsets which see matter as something 'just there' for exploitation, and an opening of opportunities to reconceptualize possible ways to be and flourish together in our shared planetary home.

Feminist ethics of care and webs of relations

Craft and artistic practices, encompassing elements of thrift, resourcefulness and the domestic drew our thinking towards the (problematic) role of care and caring relationality in feminist ethics of care. Many forms of care, very often performed by women and people of colour, are often unpaid or low-paid and

eco-feminist economists argue that capitalist systems rely on this exploitation (see Nelson and Power 2018). The American artist Mierle Ukeles highlighted this devaluing of care by drawing aspects of her domestic life such as childcare and cleaning into her art practices. In 1973, at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Hartford, Connecticut, Ukeles brought this into the public domain. *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance – Outside and Inside* documents her washing away visitors' footsteps from the staircase and hallway using mops, rags and buckets of water, making visible the labour of maintaining the museum usually carried out by low-paid workers when the museum was closed. In *Touch Sanitation* (1979–80) Ukeles shook the hands of the 8,500 refuse workers employed by the New York Sanitation Department (DSNY): a group somehow deemed 'unclean' and largely unrecognized for their part in keeping the city clean. Feminist ethics of care exists at the intersections of science and technology, economics, feminist ethics, environmental humanities and post-humanities. It provides a route to resist Western/capitalist devaluation of care and its placing of the highest value on autonomy: a getting on, getting more, which can only happen through 'making invisible' the exploitation of cheap labour *and* the plundering of materials/matter (Nelson and Power 2018; Shiva 2005). A feminist ethics of care 'starts from the premise that as humans we are all inherently relational, responsive beings and our human condition is one of connectedness and interdependence' (Gilligan 2011). Tronto and Fischer (1990: 40) broaden this out to include the other-than-human by reminding us 'that the world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web'. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues for the importance of the sensory, especially touch (the haptic) to respond ethically within the life-sustaining web of life in which humans are intrinsically entangled. The sensory opens ways to shift from abstraction and detachment towards engagement with the supposedly mundane and every day. It can open potential to transform both our present and the futures we want to co-create. In this line of thinking 'the sensory', including touch, 'is not aimed at more accurately knowing a "real" world, but at more involvement and commitment to it' (Ticktin and Wijsman 2017).

Care, creativity and craft

To encourage sensory creative experiences which can open caring involvement, responsiveness and commitment to materials we introduced the Japanese craft of momigami to participants at various free events organized during our

collaboration, including at a conference, a virtual seminar and a residency day. Momigami, an accessible and tactile craft process, is an established part of Alison's practice. It involves the repetitive act of crushing and smoothing a piece of (pre-used) paper which both breaks down and also thickens its fibres. The paper gets smaller. The process produces something counterintuitive. The 'momi'd' paper is soft, appearing fragile but has an unseen strength. What is undone to some extent is the industrial process that the material has gone through: it is the hand un-made. The relationship is altered, through a process of *being* remade, as is the paper. Qualities of the material previously unexperienced are revealed. Momigami was central to a free University of Exeter webinar we facilitated in November 2020. Participants from a range of UK and Canadian universities created two virtual collaborative collages. These explored and celebrated how, whilst we were isolated from human contact during the Covid-19 pandemic, we could still touch, interact, appreciate and learn with and from other matter. We propose that participating in and reflecting on experiences such as momigami open opportunities to question how discarded materials are unacknowledged, denigrated, uncared-for. 'Rescuing' these materials from diverse fates such as incineration, landfill and occasionally recycling respects their being in the world. Through the haptic, the sensual and relational engagement, dignity can be restored to them and indeed potentially to humans living in capitalist cultures since – as all is made of matter – humans in these cultures are also denigrated.

There is, however, an important paradox to note here. The restoring of dignity to so-called waste – be that a discarded sheet of paper or a crisp packet – is *not* intended to celebrate that all this discarded matter exists in the world. Rather, getting to know the materials better opens ways to be saddened and angered that they have to be in the world at all in this form. It also provides time and space to reflect on the environmental devastation which the extractive and industrial processes used to bring the materials into their current form has generated. Engaging with these artefacts invites an imagining of what it could mean if all in the world were to be treated with dignity rather than as fodder for a capitalist machine endlessly spewing out surplus. It is also an invitation to seek active ways to help this 'imaginary' come into being.

Involution, entanglement, enchantment

As we explored *deep materialism and care-taking* we were drawn to the work of the Cornish artist, Peter Lanyon (1918–1964), intrigued by his exploration of the concept of 'involution'² (1952) Lanyon's work both developed

within and reacts against Western (male) conceptions of landscape painting in which ‘Man remains apart’. For Lanyon, ‘the divisions of dualist thought have become inadequate ... They are static conceptions’ (1952:). He calls instead for ‘involution ... The person previously apart from nature now becomes the bearer of a whole journey, a complete experience. Involved in the process, his identity is only meaningful in relation to the whole, in this case a natural process of which he is part’ (1952:). Engagement with Lanyon’s work encouraged us to explore how involution and embodied entanglement through a range of creative practices can open ways to recognize that all in the world, including all matter, ‘speaks’ to us if we recognize and are attentive to its *vibrancy*. Rachel Carson (1962, 1965) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the delicate balances and interconnections within ecosystems. In *Silent Spring* (1962) Carson highlighted how birds and insects are being silenced by pesticide use and habitat destruction. We seek to broaden this out to consider the silencing by Modernist thinking of *all lively matter*, which might appear to those with a Western mindset as inert – just there – available for human use and misuse. Here we include so-called man-made material which began life as matter within ecosystems.

Reflecting on Lanyon’s and Carson’s perspectives helped us to develop further our thinking on deep materialism and care-taking. Our ideas seek to draw on and contribute to feminist, new materialist and post-human thinking such as that of Bennett (2001, 2011), Braidotti (2013) and Barad (2007): thinking which breaks down boundaries between the self and the other and acknowledges the vital materiality which runs through and across bodies, both human and other-than-human. Bennett (2001, 2011) highlights how such ad hoc configurations of human and other-than-human produce an agency (which is not solely the province of humans) that can motivate the cultivation of ecologically aware responses. An important part of this process is ‘enchantment’ – a ‘momentary immobilising encounter’ in which one is ‘transfixed, spellbound ... struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and every day’ (Bennett 2001: 4–5).

This is not enchantment understood in a ‘fluffy’ or romantic way. Rather, it can occur ‘within any object of experience’ be that ‘a dead rat’, a ‘glove’, ‘a piece of wood’ in a storm drain (Bennett 2011: 4) once they are perceived in their ‘singular thereness’, their ‘decentering potential’ and ‘ejected from the realm of everydayness’ (Bennett 2001: xxii). It is a sense of ‘being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition’ (2001: 5). Enchantment can induce responses ranging from pleasure to horror. The *enchanted world*

'sings' (as in the French verb *chanter*), be that harmoniously or discordantly. Its 'living music' (Carson 1965:1) generates 'existential refrains' (Guattari 1989 which 'turn back on themselves', 'open onto themselves', revealing 'until-then unheard-of potentialities, entering into other connections, setting [things] ... adrift in the direction of other assemblages' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 348 cited in Bennett 2001: 6).

Enchantment can 'hit us by surprise', but one can also foster certain strategies, including playful, attentive art and creative practices, to cultivate it. For example, Alison has noticed that in engaging with her work people are often 'struck' that so much material is encapsulated in one small item such as a paper cup, and they are often 'enchanted' by the new artefacts that emerge through processes of deconstruction and re-creation. Rather than 'viewing' material, participants enter into reciprocity and involvement: they are 'torn' from their habitual perception and guided towards altered states and relationships. Carson ([1965] 1998: 67) argues that children are born with an innate sense of wonder and enchantment: an ability to attend to 'the little things seen all too seldom'. Adults can support the maintaining of this sense of wonder and enchantment through patient companionship as the child explores the world and through these processes adults can also re-discover their own.

An important aspect of enchantment is that it does not end in passivity or adoration. Rather, 'the *intensity* of the compound mood of enchantment' (Bennett 2010) generates 'the energy or motive force needed to render human bodies capable of jumping the gap between mere conviction that a course of action is good and the actual doing of the deed': energy to challenge and change one's own mindset and also work for macro-level resistance to the extraction, production and consumption processes contributing to ecocide.

Why 'deep' in deep materialism?

Our thinking and practices acknowledge Carson's 'sense of wonder' and Bennett's and other new materialist, post-human and contemporary thinkers' focus on the vibrancy of matter and entanglement in the web of life (e.g. see Haraway, 2016; Braidott 2013; Barad 2007). Why then have we chosen to use the term 'deep'?

Firstly, using 'deep' rather than 'new' makes connections with the philosophy of 'deep ecology' (Naess 1989). Deep ecology is a philosophy of equality, care and compassion which emphasizes the intrinsic value of all 'life' and the importance of deep questioning, right down to fundamental root causes of ecological destruction. It opposes the current dominant anthropocentric status of humans

in Western thinking and the silencing of the vibrancy and voice of the other-than-human. Exploitative practices of contemporary destructive capitalism are unacceptable to a state of deep ecological consciousness where all life, however seemingly inconsequential, is to be cherished equally (Naess and Sessions 1984). In foregrounding the interconnection embedded within ecosystems, deep ecology also highlights how the ecocide generated by capitalism *includes the human species*: our so-called supremacy may be short-lived. We do recognize critiques of deep ecology. For example, ‘deep ecology is constrained by political attitudes meaningful to white-male, middle-class professionals whose thought is not grounded in the labor of daily maintenance and survival’ (Salleh 1993). In our work we seek to entwine feminist foregrounding of care with the ideas of deep ecology highlighted here.

Secondly, ‘deep’ rather than ‘new’ emphasizes and values how the conception of ‘lively material’ is already integral to many Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems (Little Bear 2011). ‘Deep’ acknowledges the hubris of contemporary Western ways of thinking which call something ‘new’ which has long existed but been unacknowledged, denigrated and othered by dominant cultures (Andreotti 2016, Jackson 2013). Rosiek, Snyder and Pratt (2020) identify ways that Indigenous ways of being and knowing and new materialist thinking can be respectfully brought into conversation and how such respectful engagement can open up for new ecologies of mind.

Little Bear (2011) provides a clear introduction to the centrality of constant change, animacy of all matter and the centrality of energy waves³ in Indigenous thinking, commenting as follows:

Those energy waves are very special because it’s those energy waves, not you, that know. All of us are simply combinations of energy waves. Spirit is energy waves ... Everything is animate, those rocks, those trees, those animals all have spirit just like we do as humans. If they all have spirit, that’s what we refer to as ‘all my relations.’ Such relationality brings with it ethical responsibility.

Little Bear (2011) acknowledges that whilst he draws on the philosophy of the Plains Indians there is enough similarity amongst North American Indian philosophies and beyond to apply the concepts generally, even though there may be individual emphases. The KARI-OCA 2 Declaration (2012) made by approximately five hundred Indigenous people from across the world highlights how ‘our lands and territories are at the core of our existence – we are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories.’

In making these points we acknowledge the risk of appropriation and ongoing failure to acknowledge harms this has caused and causes to Indigenous peoples. We recommend Sundberg's (2014) toolkit to approach Indigenous knowledge and ways of being respectfully. The first step is what Spivak (1993) calls 'homework': a 'self-reflexive activity of becoming aware of one's own ontological and epistemological assumptions' (Sundberg 2014: 39). Secondly, Sundberg proposes the Zapatista movement's *preguntando caminamos* (walking as we ask questions) to address the problematic ways Indigenous knowledges are portrayed as magical, primitive, methodologically naïve – somehow 'other'. *Preguntando caminamos* requires a shift from a 'will to know' towards a 'walking with', 'asking as we walk' and 'learning with and from'.

Thirdly, deep materialism highlights the need to reappraise the value of *all* matter, to see no matter as 'waste', to deepen connections and thus repair relationships. These processes also highlight that since we too are made of matter, it follows that those who denigrate the material world are themselves diminished. 'Waste' is therefore the focus of the next section.

Deep materialism and 'waste'

Central to our conception of deep materialism is an acceptance of the responsibility and micro-political agency of each individual to seek out the provenance, destination and ecological impact of the material goods they often take for granted, whether these be paper cups, clothing, food, phones, computers or furniture. Implicit in this thinking is a concern for 'post-use' materials, commonly called 'waste', opening questioning of what 'waste' is. As Kennedy (2007: 5) provocatively comments, 'Like beauty, it appears that the phenomenon of waste belongs to the eye of the beholder.' This raises the question, if one and the same thing can simultaneously be both waste and not waste, does 'waste' exist at all?

Current Western production and consumption creates 'waste' which is polluting rivers, destroying habitats, producing toxicity and causing illness and death. Moreover, this 'waste' and the destruction it creates is often exported to countries which have not produced it (Toxiclinks 2021). However, the phenomenon of 'waste' can also be understood in a different way. Waste is not an 'ontological' category. Instead, it is matter which has been extracted, exploited and needlessly discarded. Capitalism thrives on in-built obsolescence which prevents reduction of demand through repair and reuse. Using advertising, capitalism generates mindsets which demand the newest model, be that a car, a computer

or clothing. It also generates demand for single-use items such as bottled water and energy drinks (often under a false assumption by the consumer that the container will be recycled). This produces vast amounts of discarded material which is often then exported to countries in the Global South which have not produced it. This is not, however, the whole story. ‘Rubbish tips’ in the Global South provide ways to engage with how some materials discarded by the Global North are identified as valuable materials by those who pick over it. This is not to celebrate this practice – it is dangerous and generates serious health conditions and pollution. Indeed, countries in the Global South are increasingly refusing entry to such materials, thus forcing countries which produce it to reconsider its generation (Toxiclinks 2021). The practice does, however, highlight that the material is not ontologically ‘waste’.

To challenge categorization of discarded material as ‘waste’ Alison’s practice includes the unmaking and reworking of found single-use ‘paper’ cups using domestic ‘tools’ such as her kitchen sink, bowls and a hand-held liquidizer. Discarded cups are washed then soaked in warm water to soften the paper, enabling it to be gently peeled away from the polyethylene liner. Few realize that many of these cups have a plastic lining, making them generally unrecyclable, not recoverable. Even cups promoted as biodegradable rarely meet a sustainable end. In addition, paper is not a ‘harmless’ material as chemical and energy-heavy processes are used in its manufacture. The paper from the cups is then torn into small pieces and liquidized in the water to form a paper pulp. The main extra ingredient in working with the paper cups is water, making it malleable and pliable, teasing out its qualities.

For Alison, unpeeling the paper from the discarded cups is a slow and painstaking process, giving time to connect with and consider the quantities and qualities of the materials being worked: a restorative and sensory experience. The amount of paper, compressed by huge rollers in an industrial process into a single cup, always astonishes. There is an ‘explosion’ of released materials. Using tools she makes from repurposed wire mesh, a sheet of handmade paper or a small book or ninety-nine paper butterflies can be teased from the paper pulp used in the manufacture of a single paper cup. One is ‘struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday’ (Bennett 2001: 4), disturbing one’s ‘sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition’ (Bennett 2001: 5). The ‘new’ paper artefacts are not for sale in capitalist art markets. Rather, Alison shares the processes and artefacts to remind participants at events of both the *intrinsic beauty* and the *quantity* of material in a discarded cup: matter unnoticed and uncherished in Western/Modern lifestyles. The compression of the paper,



Figure 4.2 *Little Books of Lost Knowledge*, 2019. Alison Harper. Media: Found coffee cups. Courtesy Alison Harper.

and its subsequent explosion when released, is a visual metaphor for exploring and challenging the ‘thinning out’ and the ‘process of existential contraction’ which integrated world capitalism imposes: processes which determine ‘the limits within which we think, feel and live’ (Guattari 1989: 9).

Alison’s work *Little Books of Lost Knowledge* (Figure 4.2) critically engages with another aspect of this ‘thinning out’ – how capitalism erodes ecological knowledges and ways of being. Three found cups have been undone, remade into three small books then placed in an identical cup: one cup equals one book. The books have no text. They represent lost knowledge: knowledge once handed-down from generation to generation of how to live in ways which enable mutual flourishing for all in the biosphere.

Our interest in ‘waste’ drew us to reflect on a shared reading of Miller’s (2011) article *Sustainable Socialism: William Morris on Waste*. Morris was remarkably prescient. As Miller highlights, ‘Struggling with the problems of overproduction and superabundance that characterise capitalism, Morris pinpoints capitalism’s ideological reliance on a faulty conception of “waste”, wherein material goods

are imagined to be capable of disappearing without consequence' (2011: 10). In Morris's (1915: 180) own words, 'The very essence of competitive commerce is waste.' Morris's vision, conveyed through the Arts and Crafts Movement, critiques the waste inherent in a capitalist system, attempting to 'lay the groundwork for what we might today call a sustainable socialism' (Miller 2011: 8). For Morris, unequal societies are characterized by overabundance and associated wastefulness for some, juxtaposed with want for many. Morris argued for careful making, more equal distribution and 'fighting environmental degradation and overproduction by thoroughly internalizing the values of craft, durability and preservation' (Miller 2011: 18). For us, the way Morris discusses issues of wealth and waste is inspirational. His thinking encourages questions such as: What is wealth? What is waste? Is waste 'unwanted' wealth? The mindset generated by 'integrated world capitalism' (Guattari 1989 points towards recycling of single-use items, technical solutions and 'fixing' problems. An 'ecological mindset', however, opens possibilities of addressing the issue of so-called waste through reflection on the provenance of materials and the harms their extraction causes; through reduction in consumption; through remaking and through finding alternatives to single-use items. Alison's work *Fool's Gold* (Figure 4.3) responds to our thinking about Morris and the 'disposable detritus' of everyday life in 'wealthy' countries. To create this work Alison undertook a reparative process of unmaking and remaking, drawing attention to the thick and shiny 'gold' plasticized foil material used for commercial coffee bags – a single-use material which has no obvious destination. *Fool's Gold* draws attention to objects and materials which are valued for superficial reasons: the consumer goods which are desired but once acquired, soon lose their 'shine' and apparent value. *Fool's Gold* also reflects how artists and makers hold materials and thus the world – the source of the material – in their hands: a position of privilege which is easily abused, coerced by the allure of commercialism.

Drawing the 'threads' together

In this chapter we have highlighted ways to deepen connections within a vibrant world, of which humans are an intrinsic and entangled part. Lively material can 'enchant' (Bennett 2001). It can catch one unawares and shake one from mechanistic Western thinking in which matter is 'brute and inert' and a resource to be exploited (Chave 2020; Klein 2015). Moreover, enchantment can provide the energetic impetus to make the leap from 'mere conviction that a course



Figure 4.3 *Fool's Gold*, 2019. Alison Harper. Media: Found commercial coffee packets. Courtesy Alison Harper.

of action is good and the actual doing of the deed' (Bennett 2010). We have brought together feminist ideas of care (Gilligan 2011; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Tronto and Fischer 1990; Ukeles 1973, 1979–80), Indigenous conceptions of 'all my/our relations' and the ethical responsibilities this generates (Little Bear 2011) with creative processes such as momigami and the unpicking and hand-remaking of paper and ribbon from so called waste materials. Our aim has been to encourage ways to enter into reciprocal caring relationships with all matter. We have questioned what 'waste' is and how a repositioning of 'waste' as a lively, agential material can contribute to less destructive ways to be in the world. Inspired by Albers (1938, 1965) we have emphasized the importance of not losing the connection to threads and materials: seeing making as a wider spiritual experience as well as a practical undertaking. We have asserted how 'listening' to materials can make one 'truly active' and capable of engaging with matter in ways previously unthought of and unfelt.

Art has a powerful role to play in resisting ecocide. Artists and makers are curious and open to their materials and engage with them in a 'to-ing and

fro-ing' relationship. These processes can help unlock matter from its perceived (Western) state of inertia. Its mobility is revealed. Recognizing matter as vibrant in Western ways of being and knowing opens possibilities of 'new assemblages' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) and new relationships. It can encourage *shifts* from 'occupying a world' where (Western) man is 'master' and consumer of already-made, inert matter to new ecologies of mind which *inhabit*, with care, a lively world constituted from matter's 'continual coming-into-being' (Ingold 2008: 1797).

The collaborative act of writing this chapter took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. We have been moved by how the pandemic starkly highlights the urgent need to recognize the entangled web of life; rethink levels of Western consumption and address the damaging incursions these make into spaces of the other-than-human. Laing (2020) comments, 'If this virus shows us anything, it's that we are interconnected.' For Laing, art has also created a way to connect during the pandemic, commenting, 'We have to keep each other afloat, even when we can't touch. Art is a place where that can happen, where ideas and people are made welcome. It's a zone of enchantment as well as resistance, and it's open even now.' This was illustrated for us by the virtual momigami workshop explored earlier in the chapter. This workshop enabled participants to come together, to touch materials, to explore material's agency, liveliness and beauty and to discuss and reconsider their relationships with them.

The ideas and experiential practices which we have explored in this chapter are our personal and micro-political responses to living as creative practitioners in this era of climate change and biodiversity destruction. It is easier to ignore ecological concerns rather than confront the issues which can seem overwhelming, terrifying and immobilizing. One can feel despondent that as an individual one cannot make an impact. However, to be aware, to be creative, to make, is an empowering process, engaging with the world in a transformative way: transformative for the maker, for the materials and for others. As Alison reflects – if I can make a tiny book with twenty and more pages from a single industrially made disposable coffee cup, can I not also alter the world? Together we propose that to treat the material in one's hands with respect and care questions and resists current capitalist value systems and the illogical concepts of never-ending economic growth and consumption which are unleashing ecocide. Such individual acts of noticing and caring are capable of generating cascade effects which can open ethical pathways for multiple new ecologies of self which value, respect and care for all participants entangled within our shared planet.

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Notes

- 1 Fleece, especially from sheep grazing on higher land, achieve very low prices in current markets, often lower than the cost of shearing the sheep.
- 2 In his 1952 lecture Lanyon explored the ideas and terms used by L. L. Whyte (1948) in *The Next Development in Man*.
- 3 Recent thinking by some Western physicists (for example see Barad 2007) also recognizes that matter is composed of vibrating strands of energy. This opens ways for Western relationships to the material world to be experienced differently.

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