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This is Not Rubbish: Investigating Eco-materialism in Performance (Paper)

A number of theorists exploring the relational dynamics between humans and nonhumans have interrogated notions of sustainability through the concept of ‘vigorous materiality’. One area of particular interest is ‘vital materialism’ which views the concept of matter as vibrant and forceful – an ‘actant’ in human experience. Emerging as discourse in ecocriticism and new materialism, vital materialism dissolves the subject-object binary of the material world, incorporating notions of agency as a way of generating awareness of ecological issues. Deconstructing the binaries between humans and nonhumans may suggest a change in the way the scenographer approaches their practice, their choices of material and creative processes. The idea that materials are entangled across bodies, ecosystems and built environments is a key consideration of ‘ecoscenography’ – a practice I define as the integration of ecological principles into all stages of scenographic thinking and production – where creativity and expanded ideas of materiality are placed at the heart of sustainable practice. This paper investigates key conceptual thinking and theoretical ideas around contemporary notions of materialism, ecology and agency through the scenographer’s practice of ‘making’. I use a selection of approaches, including: Jane Bennett’s ‘vibrant matter’; Tim Ingold’s ‘making as ontogenesis’; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ‘matter-flow’; Stacy Alaimo’s ‘trans- corporeality’; and more populist ideas of ‘upcycling’. These theories converge to reveal how forms arise within flows of material and surroundings through our ways of finding, placing, transforming and re-using objects. Here I analyse, combine and test these theories using a practice-based research project that seeks to dissolve the boundaries between performer and designer, installation and costume, site and material. The work is part of *This is Not Rubbish*: a research investigation which explores the journey of a material rescued from landfill, and its capacity to create immersive performance spaces and wearable artefacts. *This is Not Rubbish* opens up possibilities for the scenographer to rethink the potential of discarded objects, not as ‘finished’ but instead as continuous avenues for becoming. It challenges us to embrace the potential of ecological practice; to think about what is possible in a world of increasingly limited resources, rather than what is not.

Tanja Beer is a stage designer and PhD candidate investigating ecological design for performance at the University of Melbourne Australia. Her PhD seeks to re-think traditional design practices, and re-interpret materials and processes to embrace the possibilities of ‘ecoscenography’ – a movement that integrates ecological principles into all stages of scenographic thinking and production. Tanja has more than 15 years professional experience and was recently ‘Activist-in-Residence’ at Julie’s Bicycle (London). She has a Masters in Stage Design (KUG, Austria) and has taught Design Research, Scenography and Climate Change at the University of Melbourne. Her work was recently published in *Etudes Online*: <http://www.etudesonline.com/feb2015beer.html>