

WHY DO POTS MATTER?

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Preface

In this text, I begin by wondering about what a pot is by wandering around its multiple realities. The seed of interest with clay began with the ground in general, becoming the reason why I like to wander around. Grounds are a huge collection of memory; stones, minerals, bones, and fossils in the ground from different regions are like riddles of my planet. Soil as the beginnings of clay always keeps the mystery of emergence and passage. By ceramic making, I can build an extraordinary relationship with clay that takes me to different dimensions of sublime nature, micro-organisms, atomic chemical compounds, imaginary pots, my inner self, etc.

There are circumstantial moments of being tuned into something or someone. The tuning is an action of fusing and synchronizing to the same frequency. It is pleasurable and destructive. There is a magic in tuning in which the ordinary turns into the extraordinary. For me, making pottery through the throwing wheel is one of those experiences. A slightly cold and bumpy ball of clay on the spinning wheel soon turns into a magical bridge with my inner self. To me, the throwing process is like dancing with somebody who mirrors me or my subconscious. Two different individuals, inside and outside of me, dancing with each other. Constructing and destructing, loving and hating, and embracing and resisting each other. Dance and throwing on the wheel are like a process of fusion into a flow, a single phase, and the same breath. It is a sensual meeting with such earthy material. And the material confronts me with my most brutal, fragile, untamed, and vulnerable emotions and desires in my subconscious.

Pots translate not only the memories of lives, but also the psychological state of my mind. I see pots as indefinite states that are in a continuous transformation. They are ever-transforming lives rather than a solid and still object. Within the continuous circle of life, I am dissolved into the form of pots. As a maker, I am wanting to be part of this huge memory instead of being the dominating force on the pot. This became a turning point for me to re-think that pots are autonomous and independent objects instead of my creations, and how to build a new relationship with them out of the maker-artefact or subject-object relationship.

Introduction

My idea about the pot as an ever-transforming life that translates lives of my planet made me rethink what a pot is and my relation to it. What is the role of a maker if I am not the subject but a part of this object? I discover how these questions appear in my pot making process as an obsessional action. This obsession eventually led me to the main question; will I ever be able to discover the existence of an absolute pot with its multiple realities and why does it matter to me? Before diving into the main question, I would like to begin with the obsession and where it comes from. In my pot making process on the throwing wheel, I often face emotional conflicts. Love and resistance. Gentleness and violence. Attachment and detachment. Construction and destruction. As a result of these conflicts, my pots end up being cut open and suddenly the broken pots start to speak to me. What is the psychology behind the action? How does it connect to my ultimate question about the existence of pots? Furthermore, why do pots matter to me? Let me start with the reason of the obsession.

My experience with the throwing wheel resembles being in an intimate relationship. I must confess that the relationship between me and the pots made on the throwing wheel represents my psychological states to some degree. Being in an intensive state of love with something makes me possessive, obsessive, a control freak, egocentric and self-blinded. Therefore, there is sort of a tension between my ego as a maker and the object as an autonomous being. How does something I make become meaningful to me? I seek for meaning in what I make. It refuses to give the meaning to me but rather breaks my expectations every single time. I am in the fate of death, death of judgement, intellect, logics, and justification. What does it mean for me to make pots?

“Kant argues that beauty is an experience of coexisting with an object. In this experience, it’s as if the object and the subject suddenly fuse, like the space inside and outside a vase. ... Beauty is the end of an object, because in beauty, two objects fuse. Sound waves match the resonant frequency of the glass. When they reach a critical amplitude, the glass ceases to exist. It becomes its environment.”

To me, the action of cutting open the pots I create are a response to my love that blocks something (in/of) me fusing with the pot. Within my love, there are two desires fighting with each other. To dominate and to be spontaneous.

¹ Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (2013),
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/13106496.0001.001/1:9/--realist-magic-objects-ontology-causality?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

Why does knowing what a pot is really matter to me? The existence of pots beneath its surface feels paradoxical, ambiguous, and impalpable, which seems to refute my logic and intellect. They are attractive because their essence resists cooperating with my existence, my perceptions, my cognition, my expectations, and my definitions of them. For somewhat emotional reasons I have a curiosity to know what something is. This exists in a close and intimate relationship with me like my father and pots. Sometimes, the questioning what something really exists is a reaction on the insecurity in my subconscious to the unknown. Unknown things, conditions, people, and states of relationships touch on my curiosity and insecurity at the same time. It is like a Pandora's box that I must open. The paradox lies where it is not possible to know what something really is no matter how much I am eager to understand. In the end, I only crawl onto it but never get into it. What I find as a problem in my personal relation to pots is that it is always relational. Therefore, it is just another reality of the pots but not what it actually is.

Observing my father for 28 years up close and from afar, I figured out that my curiosity about who he really was and is began as an act of response to my insecurity of losing him. In this certain circumstance, my social expectations about him failed. I am his favourite child, and he is my epitomized male figure. We share an indescribable bond above and beyond our biological relationship. When our relationship shifted in a way that my social expectations of him did not correspond to his anymore, I realized that there was a desire in me to discover who he really was and is. After many years, I realized that whatever I had discovered about him was not his true being after all. Furthermore, it is not to be understood but to be embraced. I have learned from my father that a relationship is an indirect access to someone. It is like drawing a portrait of someone in a specific pose. By reminding myself of the portrait of him, I wonder if the man on the canvas was his true reality or my expectation.

Throughout the observations of my relationships to the world, often I find myself in a similar tension of reality and expectation that is driven by conflicting emotions. It also seems the way in which I try to seize the world around me is a way to make sense of myself. Therefore, the psychological states that appear in my pot making process came as an important issue to me, which is perhaps what I feel indispensable to figure out in life too. So, how can I know what pots are and who my father is?

In Korean, there is a saying, **역지사지** (yeog-ji-sa-ji). The characters from left to the right mean change, the ground, and think, which means universally "stand in someone's shoes and think". Since the olden times in Korea, **역지사지** has been an important virtue. In pursuit of altruism, I realized that standing in the other's shoes offers a vicarious experience. It is an attempt to grasp how it may feel but never can I truly understand what it actually is. According to the Buddhist perspective, things exist in their own sense but not for us in human logic. Therefore, there is no reason or an expectation of the existence and emergence of said thing. Both ideas imply that the central point is not us when understanding something or someone.

Frankly speaking, I acknowledge that I do not completely understand something or someone as what or who it is from their standpoint. It is simply not possible because I am not that. This problematic fact that there are realities of something, which I never can understand on the intellectual level, led me to the investigation on the philosophical theory called Object-Oriented Ontology developed mainly in western philosophy.

Before addressing the issue of this impossibility, I must inform the reason why I choose not to follow the logical structure of general text. Here through the text, I am trying to find an invisible and intangible pot. The one that I am looking for is non-relational to anything but rather absolute, which might also mean that it is impossible to find in my search. However, as a maker I do try to explore ways to find somewhere in between the reality and my expectations. Through my investigations, I do not aim to come up with a clear definition or a conclusion about my questions. Therefore, the three chapters do not build up connecting stories from one another towards a conclusion. But each chapter rather introduces different insights about the subject. As informed, a pot is not the object that I use in daily life. Therefore, I think it needs different angles to look at. For that reason, there will be three fragmented stories from three chapters that provide totally different approaches to being involved with pots. Each approach contains the pot as an object, an ecology, an in-between-space. Finally, as an indefinite end instead of conclusion, I attempt to describe the biggest matter of a pot in a poetic way reflecting on my struggle in the making process.

In the first chapter, the problem of sensing that something exists but not having access to its actuality will be dealt with by the philosophical theories called ontology and Object-Oriented Ontology. Through several philosophers' approaches to an existence of something and the limitations of its perspectives, different languages to communicate with an object are examined. In the hypotheses, I walk through concepts of an object existing somewhere out there and near me, myself as a subject to an object, and my relation to an object. In this chapter, the reason why I choose to bring quite complicated philosophical theories is that they give insights about the rift between the existence and the appearances that are simply not understandable and definable. Consequently, the impossibility to know what something really is from a human standpoint makes me ponder finding my own way to the object as a maker and why it matters even though it will be always indirect and indefinite.

The second chapter introduces the pot as an ecology. From my personal experience of the throwing wheel, I sense that there is a continuity between pots as a material and ecology. In this chapter, the central point is the invisible interconnectivity among objects and the arbitrary of its emergence. The question of where something exists brings an important issue about the entangled history of the objects to the pot that exists in a far bigger scale in relation to humans. What I aim through this chapter is to break down the human act of dividing the

properties that make up a thing and clarifying what a pot is, based on my own cognition and consciousness.

In the last chapter, I investigate how pots are involved in certain fundamental factors in life such as death, decay, and rebirth. The pot as an ordinary tool to preserve all dying lives is taken to an extraordinary ritual with the pot burial practice. By thinking through the life within a pot and what happens, there opens a strange in-between-space to me where a life transforms into another by translating its past lives. Here, an object is something that translates what it has gone through in the past. Therefore, the concept of transformation becomes the important factor in this chapter to understand the pot as an in-between-space that exists in a way bigger time scale than us as humans.

In the last, epilogue, my confessions about pots in a more poetic and abstract format describes the emotional relation to pots and my struggles in life as a person and as a maker. It is the beginning and the end of pots. The psychological state that appeared in my working process made me investigate pots and through this I find another me within pots. After going through numerous riddles about pots in the previous chapters, the epilogue reveals what actually matters to me during pot making. Here my question comes back. What kind of pot am I looking for?

CHAPTER 1

Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO)

There is a mystery in the question 'of what?'. I personally like to ask, 'what is what'. For example, what is a pot? Where does it exist? How does it exist? Are they too obvious questions? Strangely, I find them quite difficult to answer. I quickly realized that I failed to put my finger on what a pot is or anything around me. Let us say that there is an imaginative pot, and the color of this pot keeps changing in between the spectrums of red and green. Do these qualities change the pot as it is? Despite the matter being uncatchable, I am quite thrilled to revolve around it. *Ontology* is a study in philosophy that fundamentally questions about the existence and essence of something. The *object* here means an absolute object that is unfortunately unseen. The seen, touched, felt, heard, thought, and describable qualities of an object are its withdrawn qualities making it a withdrawn object. There will be several approaches to an object to figure out what it is in the text later. However, the perspective of the ontology in that question about the matter of being seems to rather limit the reality of the thing based on the human relation to it. I disagree in the way of thinking about the existence when this crucial factor is taken for granted. From whose perspective am I looking at the matter? There is absolutely nothing wrong about describing pots in 1000 different ways from my standpoint. The problem is that it is not actually what it is about. Somehow that matters to me as a maker. I think that the standpoint of the human in that question of what the matter of being is differentiates ontology and Object-Oriented Ontology. Through the following texts, a number of ontological approaches to an object explore various realities of the object. What stands interesting in the perspective of Object-Oriented Ontology refuses human specialness and considers humans as objects. By repositioning human relation to objects, one thing becomes clear. The essence of the objects cannot be used up by any other objects, beings or means. Let us start with the ontological approaches with an example.

Arthur Stanley Eddington, an astrophysicist, introduced a well-known story of the two tables' paradox in 1928 at the Gifford Lectures. In the introduction to his Gifford Lectures, he explained there are duplicates of objects. "*I have settled down to the task of writing these lectures and have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. Two tables! Yes; there are duplicates of every object about me – two tables, two chairs, two pens.*"² I suppose that Eddington saw his table in two different ways. A table he encountered in everyday life and the other table as its chemical compounds. The former is sensible, and the latter is measurable scientifically. The former is tangible, and the latter is not. The former exists in our human scale, and the latter exists in the extremely tiny atomic scale. Which one is real? Both? Or are there actually more versions of these tables in existence past the everyday life and its compounds?

² A. S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (New York: MacMillan, 1929 [orig. 1928]), p. ix.

Is the sensible table more real than the other? To that question, I often doubt how much I am conscious of the sensible objects in my daily life. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger found an interesting relation between objects and humans, especially tools and users. He pointed out that we are not consistently aware of the appearance of an object until certain conditions occur, which he calls 'present-at-hand'. *"Heidegger counters that most of our dealings with things are not a matter of conscious experience at all. Blood circulates freely, and vehicles and floors function smoothly, until these malfunctions and thus gain our notice."*³ When daily objects such as the table in my living room becomes a part of the environment, the objects do not call for my consciousness like the first encounter. The early information about the table in my brain gradually starts to dominate its being. Hence, the potential real table hides behind it. Likewise, I am surrounded everyday by countless objects in my daily life and I do not even "really" see or sense them a lot of the time.

The second table is based on a scientific view of the object as its chemical compounds making up the table. This approach breaks down the table into the smallest particles that are invisible to the eye. This attitude according to Heideggerian terminology regarding the concept of 'present-at-hand' is as follows, *"Science itself is an attitude, one that attempts a kind of neutral investigation."*⁴ If our senses are more or a less biased measurement, will scientific measurement with the table make it more real? Scientific measurement is inherent in our social system. *"There are, in fact, no numbers and no letters. We've codified our existence to bring it down to human size to make it comprehensible. We've created a scale so that we can forget its unfathomable scale."*⁵ Even though science, in its "propositional statement about the subject matter"⁶, succeeds to engage us to what is invisible to our eyes, it is yet another word defining it. Therefore, a scientific approach to the table does not offer us a direct contact to what it really is.

Graham Harman, a contemporary philosopher whose expertise is in Object-Oriented Ontology(OOO) and speculative realism coined these two terms and approaches. Harman introduces 'undermining' and 'overmining' in his OOO theory with the actor-network theory and new materialism. Undermining is the downward reduction of objects into their physical components, what a thing is made of such as the scientific table no. 2 as referred to by Eddington. The table no. 1, the sensible table, is the upward reduction of objects to their socio-political effects, what a thing does. According to Harman, both perspectives have limitations. By undermining a table, what it is made of, the emergence its existence cannot be explained.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008 [orig. 1927])

⁴ Heideggerian terminology, Wikipedia

⁵ *Lucy* (2014) Directed by Luc Besson. Paris: EuropaCorp and California: Universal Pictures.

⁶ Graham Harman, *Graham Harman: Objects and Arts*, 19:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJoGR9bfoog>

“First, note that the table as a whole has features that its various component particles do not have in isolation. ... the table has an autonomous reality over and above its casual components, just as individual humans cannot be dissolved back into their parents. Notice that we can replace or outright remove a certain number of the table’s components without destroying the table.”⁷

Clay and the pot are in this strange relationship too. The substances of clay are just not logical enough to explain the emergence of what a pot is. In other words, the whole is different than the sum of its part.

On the contrary, Harman’s overmining approach of what an object does fails to explain changes.

“After all, even the table encountered in practical use does not exhaust the table’s reality. In one moment it reliably supports paperweights and our midday meal; in the next it collapses to the ground, shattering everything. This shows that just as the table could not be identified with the one we saw, it was also not the same as the one we used. The real table is a genuine reality deeper than any theoretical or practical encounter with it. And beyond this, if rocks or other weights slam into the table, they fail to exhaust its inner depths as well. The table is something deeper than any relations in which it might become involved, whether with humans or inanimate entities.”⁸

Consequently, qualities of an object are not equal to the object itself. For instance, dementia occurs as a result of retrogression of the brain. Over 50 million people have dementia worldwide and around 10 million new cases are reported every year. It often involves changes in one’s personality, memory loss, social and thinking disabilities. These physical and psychological changes may be represented as different qualities of a person. Can one person as a true being be defined with his or her qualities? If one loses his or her memory completely and behaves differently as a result of brain dysfunction, where do we have to draw a line when identifying that person?

Object-Oriented Ontology, Harman’s contemporary theory in ontology, urges us to step away from the popular human-centric view on matter and life and introduces including ourselves in and as objects. *“The most striking point in Harman’s position is not only that the golden age of the Homo Mensura (there is no objective truth) is over, but that the human relation to the world, the for-us, is rejected as ontologically significant.”⁹* What does it mean to think of object relations without hierarchy? Is it not that some humans as objects leave bigger and more impactful consequences than other objects in their ways? Furthermore, aren’t some objects more independent than the others? For instance, the relationship between parasite

⁷ Graham Harman, *Graham Harman: The Third Table: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 085* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 7-8

⁸ Graham Harman, *Graham Harman: The Third Table: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 085* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 9-10

⁹ Niels Wilde, *Burning Bridges: The problem of relations in object-oriented ontology-a topological approach* (2020) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0406-7>

and host. “*The OOO (Object-Oriented Ontology) approach to flat ontology means that all objects are equally objects, not that all objects are equally dignified or valuable. Ontological equality does not mean political or moral equality.*”¹⁰ Based on this view, my being is as equal and independent as candle wax, double paned glass, a cigarette, a slug, hailstone, a plastic straw, mud, and my father. Object equality here means something different than object interconnectivity or its values. Especially when marking an object with its values, it becomes tricky. Describing values is as relational as describing qualities. The reason will be explained further in the text.

Graham Harman suggests a possibility of the Third table. “*Yet the third table lies directly between these other two, neither of which is really a table. Our third table emerges as something distinct from its own components and also withdraws behind all its external effects. Our table is an intermediate being found neither in subatomic physica nor in human psychology, but in a permanent autonomous zone where objects are simply themselves.*”¹¹

According to Harman, objects are in constant contact with each other. The sensible qualities (SQ), in other words, the demarcations, of the real object (RO) are always withdrawn realities.

*“Namely, it is not just human relations to objects that cut them down to size by reducing them to outer contours and profiles of their inner reality. Instead, relationality in general does this. It is not some special feature of the human psyche or human deeds that turns a thing into a caricature. This reduction belongs to any relation between any two objects in the universe, no matter what they may be. My perception of fire and cotton fails to use up the total realities of these beings, since they are describable at infinite length in a way that I can never approach. We have seen that the same is true of my use of these objects for practical tasks. But more generally, the fire and cotton also fail to make full contact with each other when they touch, despite their uniting in a bond of destruction that takes no heed of the colours and scents that humans or animals may detect emanating from both of them. In other words, objects withdraw from each other and not just from human. In this respect, human beings are just one more type of object among trillions of others in the cosmos.”*¹²

What strikes me in his description is the sentence, “*fail to use up the total realities of these beings*”. In other words, I, cotton, and fire are only possible to use the probabilities of the partial realities of each other’s being. The probabilities of the partial realities of these beings do not exist without each other. Quentin Meillassoux, a French philosopher, mentioned at the very beginning of the introduction of his book called ‘After Finitude’ when we “*Remove*

¹⁰ Graham Harman, *For a Thought of Objects*

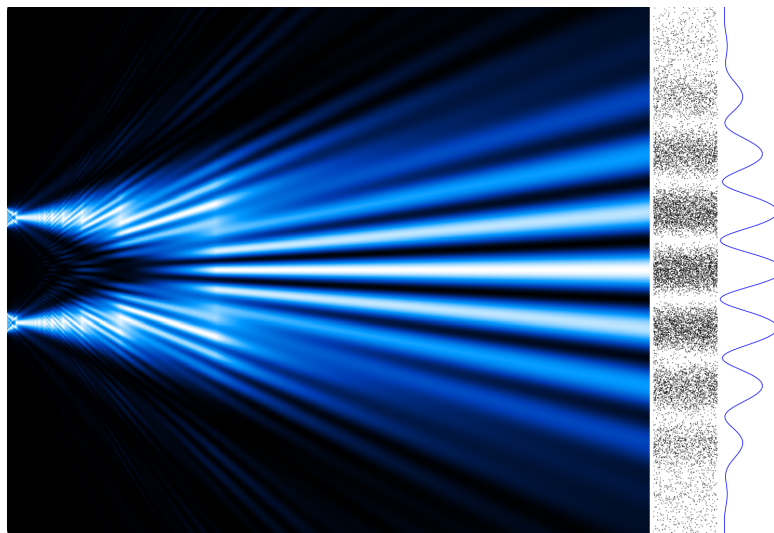
<https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/graham-harman-for-a-thought-of-objects-89>

¹¹ Graham Harman, *Graham Harman: The Third Table: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 085* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 10

¹² Graham Harman, *Towards speculative realism* (Winchester and Washington: Zero books, 2010), 124

*the observer... [then] the world becomes devoid of these sonorous, visual, olfactory, etc., qualities, just as the flame becomes devoid of pain once the finger is removed.*¹³

The observed realities of an object means that there are probabilities of many more realities of the object. For example, in the Schrödinger's cat experiment, a thought experiment to demonstrate a paradoxical nature of quantum superposition, a hypothetical cat is in a sealed box with a radioactive sample. After an hour, the chance of the cat being killed is 50 %. Unlike common expectation, the state of the cat in the box after an hour is both alive and dead before the box is opened instead of either alive or dead according to quantum physics. Quantum theory tells an unbelievable story that all particles such as electrons exist in all the possible states called superposition until they are measured or observed in certain ways. It means that once the particles are measured, they choose one state to be in. The quantum phenomenon of superposition is a consequence of wave-particle duality. For example, light behaves both as a particle and a wave as the dual-slit experiment demonstrates. *[Image 1]* How does it work with our everyday objects? Our everyday objects look like stationary particles. We do not see this wavelength in everyday objects because the wavelength is decreased as the momentum increases. By stretching a subatomic electron to a bigger object, which was succeeded through experiments at a certain level, an object's realities exist in all states at the same time before being measured in a certain way. If by a certain contact between this object and me derives to one stationary condition, the emanated qualities of the object to me means one of many realities of the object.



[Image 1] Dual-slit experiment with electrons.

Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Interference_electrons_double-slit_at_iocm.png

After the investigations, my question is how will I as a maker discover the other probabilities of the reality of pots other than what are emanated to me? And what does it mean to me?

¹³ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 1

CHAPTER 2

Clay as a Massive Object

When the pottery wheel spins, the clay turns into mountains. Clay to me is not a separate material from this world. Clay is mountains. Water streams had carved their ways along the mountains in a continuous drying and wetting and provide playgrounds and shelters to wild animals. Tiny atoms of carbon from the breath of living organisms were absorbed into the ocean water, lakes and ponds and became nutrition for micro-organisms. These particles in the water nurtured the soil and became a part of sedimentary rock. Meanwhile, the dead organisms and feces of wild animals coincidentally happened to be there and contributed to the nutritional sources for material.

Every autumn, trees shed leaves and mountains do not waste a single one of these leaves. Mountains with their endless patience waited for leaves to finally decompose so that the end of something transforms to the beginning of something new. Mountains are the staging areas for migratory birds every year. Mountains are the hosts. Clay itself is a massively accumulated stratum. I paraphrase clay as mountains not because it is excavated from mountains or because of its earthy qualities. Mountains hold every marginal trace of organic and non-organic materials that are incidentally passed by. Thus, mountains are the collected records of lives. It is not to romanticize clay as a sacred material of nature but rather the opposite. The interconnectivity of the object, clay, with an abundance of other objects is far more complex, imperceptible, and arbitrary. Me as a human, wastewater, chemical waste, fish mutants and more are engaged in the entanglement. The interconnection transcends sites, cultures, and general notions of the natural and synthetic, the good and bad. All contributors are bound up symbiotically. Thus, clay to me is ecology.

Clay is a massive object. Clay is more than a combination of chemical compound. Its higher dimension is simply not sensible to my human scale. When a kilo of clay starts to spin on a diameter of 35cm metal wheel a magical encounter happens between the two worlds. Vigorous resistance between the clay and myself does not simply represent physical friction but a clash of two different dimensions merging with one another. There are more and more moments that I experience myself fusing into this object's space through the attunement. The sensational experience of different dimensions may sound utterly delusional and ridiculous, but this encounter happens unrealistically as the existence of global warming crawls onto us invisibly. Global warming is invisible by itself like a ghost. We only understand the consequences by its trace in numbers showing the sea level rise, the temperature change, photos of endangered Arctic animals, sinking islands, and so forth. Unfortunately, what appears to our vision is the effects but not the thing itself.

Timothy Morton, a follower of OOO and a writer of the book 'Hyperobjects', named a phenomenon of the hyperobject. The term denotes "*massive objects distributed in time and space as to transcend spatiotemporal specificity.*"¹⁴ According to Morton, hyperobjects are defined with five characteristics; viscous, molten, nonlocal, phased, and the interobjective. Among all the characteristics, I have brought neatly formulated descriptions of three characteristics summarized on Wikipedia: molten, phased and interobjective.

1. **Molten:** *Hyperobjects are so massive that they refute the idea that spacetime is fixed, concrete, and consistent.*
2. **Phased:** *Hyperobjects occupy a higher-dimensional space than other entities can normally perceive. Thus, hyperobjects appear to come and go in three-dimensional space, but would appear differently if an observer could have a higher multidimensional view.*
3. **Interobjective:** *Hyperobjects are formed by relations between more than one object. Consequently, entities are only able to perceive the imprint, or "footprint," of a hyperobject upon other objects, revealed as information. For example, global warming is formed by interactions between the sun, fossil fuels, and carbon dioxide, among other objects. Yet global warming is made apparent through emissions levels, temperature changes, and ocean levels, making it seem as if global warming is a product of scientific models, rather than an object that predates its own measurement.*¹⁵

Hyperobjects exist in the much bigger sphere than ours yet they seem to be hidden to us, no matter how close they coexist with us. "*When massive entities such as the human species and global warming become thinkable, they grow near[er].*"¹⁶ These massive entities actually are much closer to us than our recognition or consciousness about them. Thus, my instinct to what might exist beyond my senses, understanding, and knowledge is nothing less to be valued. What are the indescribable and illogical sensations about clay from the throwing wheel experience? It is as if the clay on the throwing wheel allows me to travel through its history by transcending time and space. And again, clay to me feels like this; viscous and absorbent. Clay sticks to us beyond geographical boundaries and anthropocentric structures. We are stuck to many forms of clay, everywhere and at every time. It collects time, memories, happenings, and traumas. As such clay is not nature but becomes an ecology. It absorbs cultures, the crisis of modernity, and artefactual materials magically and symbiotically. As one of the characteristics aforementioned, clay shows the interobjective, it is my job to figure out the connectors between clay and myself. The mysterious connectors whom I now vaguely call as clay.

If clay is an ecology, where does it exist?

¹⁴ *Hyperobjects, Wikipedia*

¹⁵ *Hyperobjects, Wikipedia*

¹⁶ *Timothy Morton, Dark Ecology (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 26*

*“Where is a thing? What is a thing? These two questions amount to the same thing.”*¹⁷ When I am asked about who I am, I used to list my geographical locations and cultural standpoints such as my original background and the passage after my name. “I am someone from South Korea. I am currently living in the Netherlands.” The indication of date and place of birth and death are often priorly informed in the summary of one’s autobiography as a quick review of someone’s life. In one’s life, the physical geographic passage implies indirect information about cultural, social, and political standpoints. Non-organic matters are described in this similar manner too, likewise, the geographical placement is often considered to manifest certain qualities of the organisms to a certain degree.

*“The “where” has a great impact of how animals evolve and what they are and become. But an animal’s “natural habitat” does not determine everything an animal is. ... This change of environment will affect who I am, but what I am is not exhausted by any of these shifts in locations.”*¹⁸ In that sense, the question of ‘where of what’ asks more than a physical placement when comprehending what something really is. “Where” in terms of a locational position is like a pinpoint and the withdrawn contact between the real object (RO) and sensible qualities (SQ). *“For Harman, objects are places, i.e. withdrawn interior realities (RO). Space is the tension between a negative and a positive “somewhere”, between the relation (the accessibility of the SQ) and the non-relation (the inaccessibility of the RO).”*¹⁹

Let me raise questions this way regarding Harman’s mysterious distinctions between place and space. Where am I? ‘I am in the living room of my apartment on the second floor located in Amsterdam.’ Does this answer convey that I exist within the interior of something? Harman addresses this by saying, *“we have a universe made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects”*²⁰. This way of answering might speak about space instead of place. ‘At the same time, I, the real being, am somewhere unknown in my flesh, through the blood stream, in my cells and in my conscious.’ Do I exist interiorly or exteriorly?

*“Everything is inside because in order to think anything whatsoever, it is necessary to ‘be able to be conscious of it’, it is necessary to say it, and so we are locked up in language or in consciousness without being able to get out. ... Consequently, consciousness and language enclose the world within themselves only insofar as, conversely, they are entirely contained by it. We are in consciousness or language as in a transparent cage. Everything is outside, yet it is impossible to get out.”*²¹

¹⁷ Garcia Tristan, *Form and object* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 78

¹⁸ Niels Wilde, *Burning Bridges: The problem of relations in object-oriented ontology-a topological approach* (2020) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0406-7>

¹⁹ Niels Wilde, *Burning Bridges: The problem of relations in object-oriented ontology-a topological approach* (2020) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0406-7>

²⁰ Graham Harman, *Guerrilla metaphysics – phenomenology and the carpentry of things* (Chicago and LaSalle: Open court, 2005), 85

²¹ Francis Wolff, *Wolff* (1997), II-12

By chasing the tail of the existence of clay, I end up with a temporal conclusion; I do not know where clay exists whether inside or outside, but there is an in-between-space that seems like a rift between the essence and the appearance. Clay constantly hides either behind the essence or the appearance. It is as mysterious as where death comes and goes. Does it begin from oneself or does it come from the exterior?

CHAPTER 3

Transformation

The words 'contain' and 'preserve' seem adequate for what pottery is for. The question here is what. What is actually contained and preserved in the potteries? Pottery such as pots and dishes have prior purpose as a utility. The evolution of the human has come along with cookery. By simply cooking ingredients, the molecular structure of ingredients changes. Consequently, humans are able to convert indigestible nutrients from the raw ingredients to easy-to-digest nutrients. Cookery opened up a much broader access to what used to be inedible to humans. There are various hypotheses if the very first pottery began before the settled life as a result of agriculture or after. However, one thing remains as an undoubted fact; pottery with its purpose has been connecting humans to dying things. Pottery and its overt appearance suppose its main function is to hold liquid or store foods in it. By avoiding direct contact with the air and the exterior changes, the contents are protected from contaminates. Most profoundly, decay of the contents is delayed. In the case of fermentation, pottery was a perfect container to slow down the procedure of chemically breaking down the contents. Pottery achieves a highly practical goal in something, controlling time. Pottery shows me that humans have been intervening with and around death. The main issue to someone like the human is gaining time from death. The very ordinary object like a pot secretly connects us to the What.

While ceramic pots have been exploited to turn various substances into food ingredients for survival reasons, there has been an extraordinary culture called the pot burial practice. The pot burial practice is found in multiple regions in ancient times and in different forms. The pot burial practice is a widespread ritual in the ancient world, which is a way of interment (burial) of the dead bodies in ceramic pots. The ceramic pots initially used to store foods were employed as a coffin for the dead. Often infants were buried in a small pot and a bigger clay box was built around an adult corpse. Depending on cultures and sites, the dead were often buried inside of a pot while some have been discovered near the pots with specific compositions.

Archeologists once believed that the pot burial practice was derived from poverty and influenced by the modern perspective on the used objects. However, there are voices suggesting different perspectives of the ancients about recycling and death.

“Recycling was an essential component of ancient economic and technological sustainability and does not necessarily represent a diminishment of value.” Unlike contemporary people, ancient Egyptians neither threw away food containers after using them nor did they see a “used pot” as something of lesser value. Indeed, a well-used pot may have taken on ritual value as the family treasured it over time – especially when you consider that the food items stored inside represented prosperity. Burying someone in a pot may have been a way to maintain a connection between the family’s every life and the

*dead. ... In other words, there are many reasons other than poverty that might have led people to recycle their food jars as burial vessels.*²²

What I find quite remarkable from the pot burial practice is that the ancients revalued the used (or useless) objects. This was applied to the dead in the same sense. The way how obsolete objects and bodies are treated seems like they had a special insight about death.

Buddhism and Hinduism share similar perspectives about time in regard to death, a much broader sense compared to the human scale of time. In their myths, the in-between-spaces exist where birth and death are not clearly divided in two distinctive stages like subject and object, virtue and vice, space and void, something and nothing, and alpha and omega. The in-between-spaces are like a bridge that enables objects to transmigrate into the next stage after the former life ceases. *“These transitional spaces are not just a void. ... OOO and Buddhism share something very interesting. They both hold that the interstitial space between things is not a blank void.”*²³ So, the in-between-space is a transitional space where objects keep transforming into something else. If an object’s life is stretched like a warped audiotape, it might look like an endless circle. In that respect, objects are continuous and undefinable. Describing an object such as how a pot feels rather than stating a very short phase in its transformation that is uncatchable by the human eyes. So, I come across the question of what the pot is once again.

Speaking about death, Timothy Morton in his book, ‘Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality’, approaches this matter through ecological relationships.

*“Dying is a sensual event that occurs in an interobjective space. Closure demonstrates how when one object comes into phase with another, annihilation is near. Death is when a virus, for instance, starts to replicate itself in your genome, using your cells like a photocopying machine. If the cells do this very efficiently, it is called death. Then your body disintegrates. Bacteria eat your rotting flesh. You become bacteria. The bacteria bacteriomorph your body, translating you into bacterian. ... The more complete the translation, the more complete the death of the object.”*²⁴

Therefore, my question about what a pot is conveys the thought about what has been translated to the pot. Pots are in transitional states forever translating things. It is as if a

²² Annalee Newitz, *Death history – Ancient Egyptian “pot burials” are not what they seem* (2017), <https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/01/ancient-egyptian-pot-burials-are-not-what-they-seem/>

²³ Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2013), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/13106496.0001.001/1:9/--realist-magic-objects-ontology-causality?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

²⁴ Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2013), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/13106496.0001.001/1:9/--realist-magic-objects-ontology-causality?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

ball of clay slowly turns into a pot on the throwing wheel, and I try to put a finger on the exact moment when the thing becomes a pot. At all moments, it is a pot while it is something else. “*The (superficial, given) appearance of an object just is its warping by another object, which is another way of saying that the “past life” of an object is its form.*”²⁵

In that sense, objects are present in absence and absent in presence. “*Existence disappears, but possibilities always accumulate. Even if everything disappeared, the extinction of everything would always be something more added to the past possibilities of what has been and is no more. ... No thing disappears absolutely. Objects disappear as much as they accumulate. If things appear, they never disappear.*”²⁶ For me, that is how the death of clay and pots feels like. Now, pots are constantly made and cut open in my hands, translating one of the many human conditions; giving meanings.

²⁵ Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2013), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/13106496.0001.001/1:9/--realist-magic-objects-ontology-causality?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

²⁶ Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 96

EPILOGUE
Pot, Another Me

I

I admire how strong you are after all the memories, clay.
With all that memories and traumas, you are forgiving.
You might be fragile but never vulnerable.
On the cold turning wheel,
You are fragile as my expectations, firm as my ego, sticky as my obsession.
You keep me vital.
Without you, nothing much on the earth could exist as they are.
You are fundamental, flexible, tricky, strong and fragile at the same time.
You are generous, straightforward, forgiving, honest, friendly, and reflective.
When I touch you, I am touched.
When I form you, my sharp edges are smoothed.
When I am against you, I am confronted with myself.

Pot, I am tired of swindles.
Can I hide inside you?
What are seen can't be justified.
Take me inside.
You are my shelter and cave.
Through your crystal-clear walls,
I see what is hidden beneath the surface.
You are the mirror reflecting me.
You tell me,
"It will be all fine.
Follow where your hands go,
trust your feelings towards the unseen world,
and listen to all your memories appearing on my skin.
There must be a reason why they spring up again and again.
Nothing much is a problem after all."
I admire your forgiveness after all traumas.

Clay, I struggle between the seen and unseen of you.
The invisible string binds us up together.
On the small metal wheel, you and I are reversed.
I am you and you are me.
You surround me and shape me.

I am an ugly bumpy clay ball, uncared and untamed.

I am thirsty.

For water and caress, I can cooperate with you.

From an ugly bumpy ball to a smooth hill,

From a smooth hill to a small lake,

From a small lake to a lethal lava tube,

From a lethal lava tube to the most secret cave.

We are in a tug-of-war.

At the end of the rope, your ego appears.

Don't be deluded by your vision.

I am not made by you.

I am always the cave you were seeking for.

What are you looking for?

An imaginary cave or a cave as I am?

I am not in your head.

I am out there right in front of you, here.

Set free who I am in your head

and let your expectations fail.

Press me, squeeze me, beat me, dry me out, destruct me.

Effortless. Did you find me?

You can't stop destructing your pots.

See, your shelters have been broken, shattered, cut open, revealed, and vanished.

Your confrontation, I am you and you are me.

The more you control me, the more you lose me.

Break, break, break.

How painful to lose yourself over and over to find me.

Embrace my irritating edges, uneven skin, leaking bottom, asymmetric flange, and swirled belly.

Embrace my silence, infinite waiting, unconditional love, loyalty, inconspicuous care, and trust in you.

I've always stood in front of you

in the small ugly bumpy ball of clay.

2

Inside a pot, there are little deaths that occur as precise transformations happen. During the process, there is a fusion between myself (an object) and the pot (another object), and this happens during the pot making without me noticing. As the little deaths have come to the

objects stored in the pot, I have confronted these little deaths during the throwing wheel process too. Is it a pot fusing into me or me fusing into the pot? The little deaths bring great pleasure. It is as if a wine glass at the perfect pitch dances. It is as if someone is shattered at the peak of the lovemaking. It is as if something in me is killed by the melody of Nella Fantasia without understanding a single word of the lyrics. Little deaths are pleasurable because they are destructive. “*When the inside of a thing coincides perfectly with its outside, that is called dissolution or death.*”²⁷ Thus, little deaths as transformations are somehow violent. The throwing wheel experience to me is like having the quietest deaths inside me. By throwing on the wheel, I do not simply aim to make the forms of pots but rather reach the potential reality of a pot. When I use the word ‘make’ in this context, I do not mean it merely as an act of expression. Instead, the word ‘make’ embodies my attempt to reveal what a pot is separate from my expectations of it. If it would be to simply make a shape of a pot, the reality of that pot would be merely dictated by my own hands. But I am to discover the space of the pots in themselves, separate from the action of creation. That is what I mean with fusing with the pots. For many years of discipline in calligraphy, one reaches the state of becoming the calligraphy itself. Beyond the beauty of the lines to the eye, the calligrapher appears identical to the calligraphy. I ponder how a maker could reach the level of being spontaneous and merge completely into it. How could the maker obtain such attitudes?

In the relationship with self-made pots, the pot alludes to my psychological states. As clay starts to look like a pot, I appear through it somehow. There are clearly conscious moments when I stand at the crossroads between the spontaneity and the authority in the making process. They are also terrific moments of ‘little deaths’ coming near us. In my personal practice, I discover myself being frightened to be shattered, dissolved, and fused into it. Leaving my own authority in the relationship with pots is as painful as genuinely realizing myself as one of the trillion objects in the world. Is my own reality of a pot ready to be broken by the nonsense of the potential real pot and discover its true reality?

At this point, I question what making means to me as a human. In the complex relationships with self-made objects, what does it mean for me to have the power to make objects, and how does it shift these relationships? My current pots strictly translate this issue; the hesitation and fear of being fully spontaneous from the deep-rooted desire for certainty and control. At the end, the outcome derived from the control in implicit attitudes intoxicates my ego with a sense of competence. Meanwhile, the real pot recedes like the ebb tide, like an oasis, like a daydream. In front of me, there is a beautiful and lovely pot standing only with its shell. The pot is as cold and gone as a corpse. The gone pot snaps me. I cannot help myself cutting it open. All my pots are cut, open, shattered, and abandoned. Once again, I sit on the lonely chair in front of the throwing wheel. Only an ugly bumpy ball of clay and me anew. I am ready to lose myself.

²⁷ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 31

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