

EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK

Different approaches to observation and the attribution of value

BA Thesis

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Introduction

*Everybody needs a rock.
I'm sorry for kids who don't have a rock for a friend...
That's why I'm giving them my own TEN RULES for finding a rock....
Not just any rock.
I mean a special rock that you find yourself and keep as long as you can - maybe forever.¹*

This is an introduction of a picture book *EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK*, written in 1974 by Byrd Baylor, an American author of picture books for children. With her sparse poetic prose, she gives us ten rules for finding our own special rock. Here is one of the rules:

*When you are looking at rocks
don't let mothers or fathers or sisters or brothers or even best friends talk to you.
You should choose a rock when everything is quiet.
Don't let dogs bark at you or bees buzz at you.
But if they do, Don't worry.
(The worst thing you can do is go rock hunting when you are worried).²*

This book fascinated me in the way Baylor tried to change her reader's perspective, giving us hints to find something eternally special in an everyday object. The rules of the book are highly sensuous and propositional, so that they do not restrict readers to follow them. The rules rather become a kind of tool, to switch our mind and invite us into observing mode; they change our way of looking at things surrounding us. Through the invitation to observe neglected objects – in the case of this book, 'rocks' lying on the ground start to gain our awareness and appreciation. This awareness and the observer's eyes brings new value into existence. This value is perhaps not only applied to rocks, but also to anything ordinary around us. A piece of plastic rubbish on the ground next to the rock could also get the same attention as rocks, if the one looking, could appreciate it. In this thesis, I am therefore going to explore this particular kind of value which derives from the personal observation and appreciation of seemingly ordinary objects.

Next to the exploration of the value which derives from observation and appreciation of objects, I will also examine what happens if we share this value with others. In the book, Baylor says:

¹ Byrds Baylor, *EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK* (Aladdin Book, 1974), unpaginated.

² Byrds Baylor, *EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK*, unpaginated.

*If somebody says “What’s so special about that rock?”
don’t even tell them. I don’t.*

Nobody is supposed to know what’s special about another person’s rock.³

That is to say, in this context, the value which the discoverer finds in the rock does not need to be shared, but rather needs to be kept as a personal treasure; it is a value which can only exist on a personal level. But is this true? In the following thesis, I will also challenge this idea and consider the possibility and impact of sharing the value of an object observed and appreciated. How can we benefit from the value attributed by one person’s observation on a more public level? And lastly, I will ask, how does all this relate to jewellery practice which involves value as a daily concern?

In the first chapter, I take two case studies of different approaches to observation of the outside world. The first one is an art term ‘Hyperart Thomasson’, advocated by Genpei Akasegawa who observed neglected objects and structures on the street, giving them the value of intentional urban compositions or artworks. I will focus on how Akasegawa became aware of those objects and how he shared the ideas generated from his personal encounters with objects. The second case study is about a book *The Writing of Stones* by Roger Caillois, in which he wrote a prose piece, full of poetic imagination, based on his observation of a series of found stones. I will consider how Caillois developed an imaginative approach through his close observation of the stones, and how this speculative reading was utilized in his writing practice.

In the second chapter, I will dive into the process of creating value through observation, by subdividing it into three keywords ‘Sign’, ‘Gaze’, and ‘Write’, which come from Caillois’ own methodology. Besides reconsidering the case studies by using these keywords, I will also look at the works of Gabriel Orozco and Joseph Cornell in order to clarify the possibilities of observation and inscription within artistic practice.

In the third chapter, I will focus on the attitude taken by different jewellery makers to the process of creating value, taking a look at the works of Herman Junger, Lisa Walker, and Robert Smit, to examine how they deal with their materials and how observation operates as a central part in their creation processes. I examine the difference between the type of value I am trying to define in contrast to the monetary value which often accompanies jewellery products.

Last but not least, with the great inspiration from the book, *EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK*, I have created my own rules in my thesis. These rules appear between the chapters in relation to the contents of each section. These instructions are not something which you, my readers, have

³ Byrds Baylor, *EVERYBODY NEEDS A ROCK*, unpaginated.

to follow, but rather provide clues of how value might be created and shared with others, from my perspective.

In addition to these instructions, a number of images appear throughout the thesis without captions – with the intention that the images do not remain merely as information, but evoke the reader's own imaginative reading.







RULE NUMBER 1

Respect

the small curiosities

hidden in your daily life.

When you smoke

after a lunch

the moment comes

suddenly.

Be aware.

Don't dismiss...

but!

if you can't,

Don't worry.

Wonder

together with your friend

...WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

Chapter 1

Creating macro-value from micro-proportions

Hyperart Thomasson is an art term which was created by a Japanese artist, Genpei Akasegawa (1937-2014). Perhaps it is not appropriate to call it an art term, because the concept relies on the fact that the object being described is not a so-called artwork, but is something beyond art – ‘Hyperart’. One day, in 1972, Akasegawa was walking to lunch with his fellow friends, and he came across a staircase that went up and then back down but no door at the top. He simply wondered ‘what is this staircase?’⁴ At that moment, he decided to take a picture and then left. But the staircase still stuck in his head. He came back to the place again. And, interestingly, he noticed that a part of the handrail had been recently fixed. He wondered further, ‘Why does it need to be fixed, even though it is no longer functioning as a staircase?’⁵ Later, his friend told him that he found a similar kind of object on a street. It was a gate at a hospital. To be precise, something looked like a gate, which was completely sealed with concrete. However a lamp above it was still lighting the unfunctional gate. From this point, they started being aware of the existence of those mysterious objects on the street and started looking for them. The objects they found seem to be functional, but actually they weren't. Nevertheless, they have been maintained as if it is something useful or meaningful.

Akasegawa named these objects *Hyperart Thomasson*, which comes from the story of an American baseball player Gary Thomasson who played for one of the best Japanese baseball teams, the Yomiuri Giants in Tokyo. Gary Thomasson received the biggest baseball contract ever in the history of Japan. Despite this investment, he became infamous for his complete inability to contribute to the team at all. Nevertheless, he was kept on the team as an important hitter for quite some time. The crucial point in this story of Gary Thomasson is that even though he lost his function, he was treated as if he was useful. Akasegawa found a funny connection between this story and the objects which he found on the street, and coined the term.

One interesting aspect of things which fall under the category of *Hyperart Thomasson* is that there aren't any makers who created them as an artwork intentionally. Akasegawa says that:

⁴ Genpei Akasegawa, *Thomasson daizukan Mu-no-maki* (Chikuma Bunko, 1996), p.9, translated by myself.

⁵ Genpei Akasegawa, *Thomasson daizukan Mu-no-maki*, p.11, translated by myself.

This is us, people that are aware of Thomasson, we find it and value it: ‘wow, amazing!’. *These kind of things are living in obscurity, a sort of trash, unless they are observed. It starts shining only when we find it. When I walk around the city, discovering these things, I feel “ the wonder of looking at things”.* *Thinking about artwork, obviously the maker is the first audience. The maker might think to himself ‘hmm.. I managed to create a beautiful color’, while he is drawing. He might also think about his work: ‘this is amazing, am I a genius?’.* *However, in the case of Thomasson, there isn’t this ‘maker’. It is activated only when we recognise it.*⁶

In other words, the role of the discoverer, as an audience, is regarded as an important part in this concept. There is a man who sealed the gate with concrete, but the intention of his action was something completely detached from the concept of Thomasson. Only the unique sensibility of the discoverer can detect the value of his action. And through being recognised by the discoverer who has this unique sensibility, objects change their signification and obtain new value.

Initially, Akasegawa wrote columns about Thomasson in a magazine. In the column, he invited readers to send the pictures of their discoveries of Thomasson on the street. People reacted strongly to this invitation and he received many reports with pictures from readers. He also involved his students from an art school where he taught, and went out to the street together with them, in search of Thomassons. Thus the activity gradually expanded, and he collected many Thomassons from all over Japan (and even from abroad) through these collaborations.

Alongside this collection of images, the text from the volunteer reporters and the comments from Akasegawa made the observations and experiences of the city more interesting. Here is one example of a report from a reader, Hiroshi Ogiwara (a civil servant) in which he reports his discovery of a Thomasson in his town:

This photo is from the wall of a dry-cleaner’s shop next to a crossing. It looked like an ordinary wall, but there was a stud coming out of the wall at a strange position. When I got closer, I found that it was a door knob. It was shining dully. Oh? I widened my view, and I found that the material and style between right side and left side of the wall are totally different - it is obvious that it has been sealed. At some point since this building had been built, but quite some time ago now (I conjecture this, based on the growing weeds, the dirt on the wall etc.), this place managed to change its function completely, from entrance into wall. This lonely knob seems then to evidence a wish and geniality of the people from the cleaning shop that they want to keep a memory of the existence of the door. The guy from the dry-cleaner’s shop deserves to be a hyperartist. Inside, he was

⁶ Genpei Akasegawa, *Thomasson daizukan Mu-no-maki*, p.20, translated by myself.

*working hard on the ironing in silence, together with a wifely looking companion, serving as his assistant. Oh, and by the way, the knob turned properly.*⁷

The last sentence ‘*By the way, the knob turned properly*’ was settled on as a title of this discovery. Akasegawa said in his comment on this report, ‘This last sentence is beautiful beyond description. It feels as if the sound of his turning of the knob, just in case, reaches to my ear (...) Could I describe it as a beauty of the conscious gazing at the unconscious...?’⁸ The collected images and these dialogs are published as books and shared to a wide and diverse audience. In the process, Akasegawa changed the perspectives of his students and the readers of the magazine, and further, broadened the perspective of an even larger array of readers through the book he made out of these collaborations. One of the reporters, Hiromichi Matsumoto (a student), said in his report:

Hyperart...There has been nothing like this which attracted me so strongly. There must have been an hidden urge about it in my mind. (...) Normally I always forget what I wonder - ‘what is it?’ - after leaving a place. Therefore, the observation of Thomasson is very important as a way to review my town. I was surprised to find so many fresh and unnoticed scenes in the streets where I’m always passing by...⁹

Through these collaborations and dialogues with readers, the aesthetics of Thomasson have become more defined, a result which perhaps Akasegawa himself didn’t expect when he advocated for this term in the beginning. As Thomasson and the activity around them started to attract attention from a broader audience, exhibitions about Thomasson were held, and even sightseeing bus tours of Thomasson were created. Thus the concept of Thomasson had a kind of boom in 1980s in Japan. Akasegawa’s actions created a quiet but radical change to people’s interpretations of everyday life. Moreover, it brought new value to those anonymous objects that might disappear. Thomasson is fleeting. Just as Gary Thomasson had to be fired in the end, Thomasson on the street have the same fate perhaps – to disappear – due to our consumptive and rapidly changing society. However, thanks to Akasegawa and his fellow discoverers, the Thomasson were noticed and captured, instead of fading in silence. Although people couldn’t preserve them in a physical way, ‘the conscious gazing at the unconscious’ brought new signification to the objects. And even if many of the Thomasson are already not in this world any more, they are still attracting people like me through their reproduction in books, even until now.

⁷ Genpei Akasegawa, *Cho-geijyutsu Thomasson*, p.47-48, translated by myself.

⁸ Genpei Akasegawa, *Cho-geijyutsu Thomasson*, p.48, translated by myself.

⁹ Genpei Akasegawa, *Cho-geijyutsu Thomasson*, p.66, translated by myself.









RULE NUMBER 2

Research it,

so that you can understand it.

Even if you think that you already know it

Re-

Search it.

Dream with it.

and

Capture it.

That will let somebody

sympathize with it someday.

A great imagination

crystallizes behind the fact.

Roger Caillois (1913-1978) was a polymath, an aesthetic philosopher, a historian of science, and a social analyst of ritual and belief. He was also well known for having a wonderful collection of rocks and stones, meteorites and crystals. And this interest in stones brought with it his book, *The Writing of Stones*, in which he observed stones and captures them with his imaginative words. The stones appearing in the book are not precious stones such as diamonds and rubies, but more modest stones such as dendrites, agates, jaspers, limestones, and so on. The prose generated by his deep observation of the stones is almost like a poem which is crystallized out of his imagination. Here is an extract from the book:

*Partly metalized deposits suggest underwater fishermen in harness and helmets brandishing the catch still transfixed on their harpoons; floating phantoms; tightrope-walking demons with eye on stalks; a whole chilly sabbath of spirits, harpies, and bacilli.*¹⁰

This is a part of the text about one of the stones which is called septaria; however it seems to have nothing to do with the stone if we didn't know of this connection. There is a quote on the cover of the book, 'The sign that the stone left us inside of itself, leads me to explore a response to it. I stand in front of the sign, gaze it, and write.'¹¹ 'Then the game starts to occur. The game which is an invention, and at the same time, awareness.'¹² Through the deep observation of the 'sign', he developed his imagination, opened up a beautiful dialog with it, and wrote it down as a poetic documentation of observation. This imagination and the act of writing is what he meant with 'response' and 'game' in this quote. However, he was not simply a dreamer. Here is a part which shows the complexity of the way he dreamed:

*However much I tell myself I am only looking at some irregular blue streaks crossing the agate like the tracing made by a seismograph or barometer gone mad, they still seem to splash up almost to the outer surface of the nodule with the transparency of mead or urine. However often I remind myself that the black undergrowth in the lower part of the cross section is only the usual ramification produced by dendrite of manganese, even while I am reducing things to their chemical constituents I cannot help desecrating swatches of arctic light shining meagerly on inky lichens, a puny, struggling vegetation exhausted by rough winds and burned by frost.*¹³

¹⁰ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones* (University Press of Virginia, 1985) p.55

¹¹ I will elaborate upon the three keywords included in this sentence, 'sign', 'gaze', and 'write' in the next chapter.

¹² Roger Caillois, *L'écriture des pierres* (Edité par Skira, 1970) on the cover of book, translated by myself. (This quote only found in the original French edition, and the Japanese edition.)

¹³ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*, p.63 - 64

This tells us that he was not only living in an imaginative world and ignoring the ‘scientific’ facts, but his imagination was indeed founded on the knowledge of the object’s chemical basis. The famous story about the quarrel between Caillois, who was actually at one point a member of the surrealism movement, and Andre Breton (1896-1966), a leader of this artistic movement, clarifies Caillois’ credo about imagination. The quarrel occurred when Caillois and Breton were shown some Mexican jumping beans, which suddenly twitch and leap into the air. Caillois assumed that there was a worm or larva inside of them, and he wanted to cut one open to find out. But Breton was totally against this idea, and denounced Caillois as a low-grade positivist, who refused to develop his own mind-expanding imagination by wanting concrete explanations.

Breton was an advocate of the Surrealist movement, and what he cared about was the enhancement of subjectivity in society. We can see this policy particularly in the automatic writing which he promoted. Automatic writing is a type of creative technique. Its aim was to create text that reflects the unconscious world in our brain by writing in a half-sleeping mode or writing without planning and under time-pressure. It was regarded as a sort of magic, which made Surrealist writers able to create something that showed the surreal world existing inside or behind of the reality where people lived. This practice was one of the most characteristic of the movement and is present in the work of Breton and his colleagues.

In particular, Breton explored the imagination which is detached from reality by dealing with the unconsciousness and irrationality. Therefore, the scientific basis, the physical basis, and any kinds of ‘official’ knowledge were nothing more than obstacles. Cutting open the Mexican jumping beans was definitely contrary to his philosophy. However, Caillois was indeed using his imagination to create the luminous poem in *The Writing of Stones*. He was not the thick-headed positivist who hated the unrealistic and imaginative world at all. Then why did he want to open the Mexican beans? Why did he have to know the source of their action in order to inflate his imagination? He explained in a letter to Breton after the clash as follows:

I want the irrational to be continuously overdetermined, like the structure of coral; it must combine into one single system everything that until now has been systematically excluded by a mode of reason that is still incomplete (...) You will say that I am basically consecrating what is a de facto state of affairs. I do not deny this, but you must admit that such consecration is probably a good idea.¹⁴

He definitely did not deny the splendor of imagination itself, but he just wanted ‘research and poetry’¹⁵ together. In other words, he wanted to know and to dream at same time. He believed that there was still a space to open up a great imagination behind the facts. His investigative

¹⁴ Claudine Frank, *The Edge of Surrealism* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2003) p.83, 84

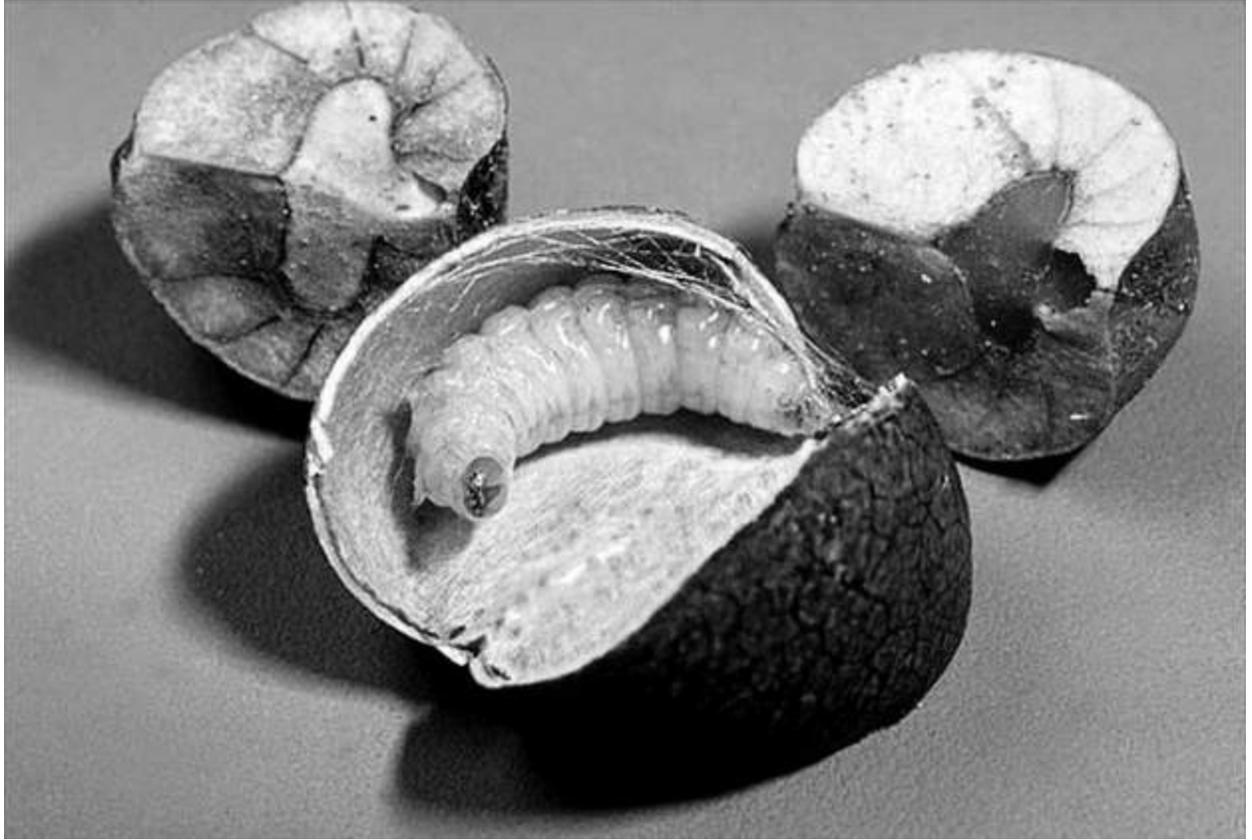
¹⁵ Claudine Frank, *The Edge of Surrealism* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2003) p.82

methods did not follow the scientific spirit of empirical inquiry that opposed dreaming. His attention on the magic of imagination was equal with, or perhaps even more than the that of the Surrealists, but he wanted to explore the things beyond the subjectivity, which is phenomenally marvelous. We can also see his philosophy of looking at things and imagination in *The Writing of Stones*:

*The vision the eye records is always impoverished and uncertain. Imagination fills it out with the treasures of memory and knowledge, with all that is put at its disposal by experience, culture, and history, not to mention what the imagination itself may if necessary invent or dream.*¹⁶

The development of empirical science has proven a lot of phenomena in the world rationally, and it has greatly affected how we look at things. Why does this stone have this color? That is due to the presence of the S_3^- radical anion in the crystal... Why does this bean jump around like a living creature? That is because there is a larva inside... Thus, there are often preconceived ideas around us and it interferes with the development of one's imagination about an object. Therefore, Breton did not want to face the facts and tried to exalt the imagination which for him ran against reality – a kind of utopia. But in Caillois' case, it was the opposite. All the memories, knowledge, experience, culture, and history did not bother him; it rather helped him to evolve his rich imagination. Dreaming and reality stayed together and interacted with each other. This is a very interesting aspect of his practice. He was not seized with prejudice, but explored the gray-zone hidden behind the facts, through his imagination. Caillois' investigative attitude did not simply produce a documentation of his observation on the stones, but created marvelously poetic texts. These are precious fruits created via his unique observation. Nobody could create such a book simply from looking at stones. His belief about imagination coexisting with reality created a new lens through which we have a new way of looking at stones.

¹⁶ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*, p.78



RULE NUMBER 3

What you gaze at

is what you want to gaze at.

That is where

you'll find a sign.

Don't be hampered by common eyes.

Decode the sign

with your eyes.

Write your answer down

which responds to the sign

that is to say,

Record your sign.

That is what you'll give to the world.

Chapter 2

Transition of significance – the dominance of the eye of an observer

To clarify the process of creating new value through observation, I am going to dive into three key words from Caillois – ‘Sign’, ‘Gaze’, and ‘Write’. Especially ‘Gaze’ will be a main focus, since this is a crucial act of observation. And considerations of ‘Sign’ and ‘Write’ will help us to understand how these elements relate to observation and support the creation of new value.

Sign

What is a sign? In terms of semiotics (the study of signs and symbols), as the visual semiotician Daniel Chandler says in his book *Semiotics; the basics*, a sign is anything that stands in for something other than itself, which is therefore able to communicate information to the one interpreting or decoding the sign. In other words, nothing can be a sign unless someone interprets it as something significant. It can be words, images, sounds, smells, acts, object etc...¹⁷ As long as it signifies something to somebody, it is a sign.

But, how do we interpret these things as signs? How do we recognise something as other than itself? Here, the terms ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’ become keywords to deal with the question. According to Chandler, the term of denotation in semiotics refers to the literal and common meaning of sign.¹⁸ Let’s take a diamond for example. The denotation of ‘diamond’ can be described as a clear stone of pure carbon, the hardest substance known, which is often used in jewellery and also in industry. It is totally based on scientific and physical facts. And this is the literal way of interpreting ‘diamond’ as a sign, which you can find in the dictionary. On the other hand, the term of connotation in semiotics refers to the social and cultural association of the sign.

¹⁹ Suppose if a big diamond is placed on someone’s body as a piece of jewellery, the diamond can be interpreted as a symbol of ‘wealth’ or ‘status’ instead of a sign of ‘clear stone of pure carbon’. We can assume that people wear diamonds not to celebrate the stone of pure carbon, but

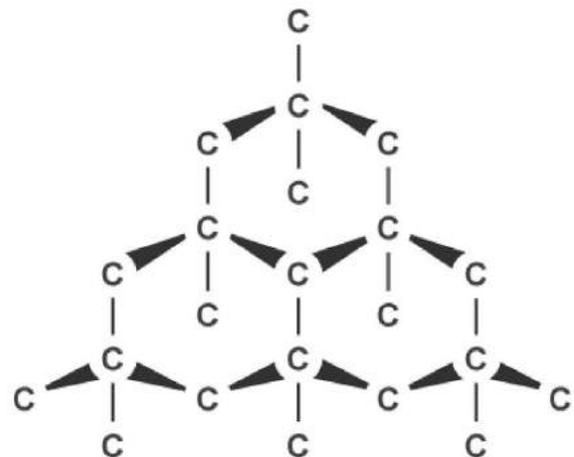
¹⁷ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics; the basics, Second Edition (Routledge, 2007)* p.2

¹⁸ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics; the basics, Second Edition*, p.137

¹⁹ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics; the basics, Second Edition*, p.138

to show off something more. This is because of the cultural association that diamonds cost a lot and only wealthy people can afford such luxuries.

Thus, the 'denotation' and 'connotation' are different from each other due to the perspective of the interpreter. But still, both are general ways of decoding signs. What if the sign is decoded personally instead of from these general points of view? Caillois wrote that he saw 'the sign that the stone left us inside of itself.'²⁰ But what did he mean with this? Could it be the sign recognised by common sense? This question takes us into the next term of 'Gaze'.



²⁰ Roger Caillois, *L'écriture des pierres*, on the cover of book, translated by myself.



Gaze

‘To look is an act of choice’²¹ as the British art critic John Berger (1926 -) said in his book, *Ways of Seeing*. In exploring our relationship with art objects and representation, he continued further to say that, ‘We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.’²² Perhaps we could understand this in relation to Thomasson. Thomasson is often neglected, and people even do not notice their existence sometimes. Even if it is noticed, people would regard it as a sort of trash which only remains because there are not enough money to break it down. However Akasegawa stopped and sensed something in that staircase. ‘Oh?’ he wondered and started to observe the abandoned stairs. This action is an unconscious choice; the choice which is made from his background as an artist, his thought, and his experiences of the world. And still more importantly, the choice in the end led to the creation of a new interpretation of the stairs as a Hyperart. This is his unique interpretation, which is made out of the act of looking at the relationship between the thing and himself. Thus the perspective of the spectator is so dominant that it changes the signification of the object.

Gabriel Orozco (1962 -) is an artist who used photography as a means of framing an encounter with something for another viewer. Take one of his works titled *Crazy Tourist* (1991) for example. It is a photograph taken in Brazil while he was traveling there. While wandering the street, he came upon an empty marketplace. It was already around 6pm and the vendors of the market had all gone home for the evening, and their rough wooden tables for sales were empty. Then he found some rotten oranges lying on the ground. This situation somehow triggered him, and he made a small intervention with it. He put one orange on each of the tables and captured the scene with his compact camera.²³ The locals who were watching him called him a ‘turista maluco’, which means crazy tourist, and this became the title of the photograph. He always made photographs with found situations and materials like this. This spontaneity is a crucial part of his practice. He said in an interview ‘The found situation in the specific time. That makes the work.’²⁴ He didn’t walk around there in order to make a work. The situation triggered him to interact with it spontaneously. As we can see in how the locals reacted to his action, the scenery of the empty market and discarded oranges on the ground is something banal and uninteresting. But his personal way of looking at things made the visual poetry out of the everyday setting. Thus, the signification of the thing for the observer does change through the act of looking at things from a personal point of view.

²¹ John Berger *Ways of Seeing* (British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 2008) p.1

²² John Berger *Ways of Seeing*, p.1

²³ Interview by Yuko Hasegawa (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo) 03:09 - 03:14
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYOJ2EzppC0>

²⁴ Interview by Yuko Hasegawa, 02:40 - 03:04
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYOJ2EzppC0>

*To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then and then only, does it come into existence.*²⁵

This is a quote from an essay by Oscar Wilde. Considering this insight in comparison to the quote from Berger, 'To look is an act of choice', in this context, 'seeing a thing' can be described as just the reflection of something on our pupil physically; there seems to be no choice. And to look can be seen as to gaze - an intense look based on an intention, which helps us to understand something from the object. There is a clear difference in the quality of attention.

Now I think back to the title of this section 'Gaze' and why Cailliois used this term instead of 'look'. 'Gaze' is a verb and at the same time a noun. It is a verb - an action, but it is also treated as a noun - an independent 'thing'. One dictionary defines 'gaze: (verb) as: look steadily and intently; (noun): a steady intent look.'²⁶ That is to say, it is not a simple look, but an intense look which contains attention. And the attention makes gaze different from a look. This point leads me to think of the value of attention, and to focus on an idea that brings up the value of attention as a controversial topic today, in the form of the so-called *Attention Economy*.

The *Attention Economy* is a notion that treats attention from people as a scarce resource²⁷ in a society with the problem of information overload, and therefore attention is regarded as valuable thing in this context. It is often applied using economic terms. As Craig Hepburn, a Global Director for Digital and Social media at NOKIA²⁸ said: due to the invention and the spread of internet, the amount of information in the world has been increasing infinitely. On the other hand, we as human beings are limited and don't have enough time to access all the information. Therefore providers are trying to scramble for the attention from people by finding niche strategies.²⁹ And this fact results in seeing attention as a valuable object like money. This is the main premise of the *Attention Economy*.

If we look at the fact that both of these perspectives regard the attention as a precious thing, we might be sharing some ideas. But, is this the value which I am exploring? No, because there is a total divergence between the two, which is the quality of the attention. In terms of the *Attention Economy*, the focus seems to be on the moment when something receives attention, and this moment has value rather than the attention itself operating as a commodity. In other words, the fact that something received attention is valuable, and the quality of attention is a secondary

²⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying: And Other Essays: And Other Essays*, (Penguin Books, 2010), p.36

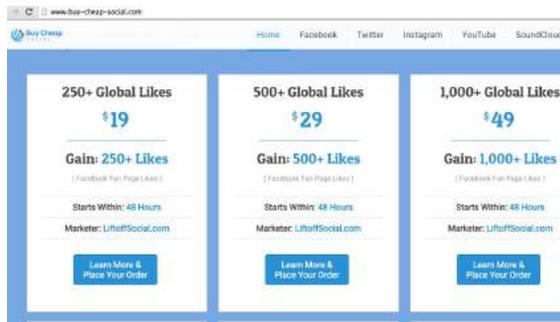
²⁶ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Eleventh Edition)*, unpaginated.

²⁷ Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015) p.24.

²⁸ Until 2014, currently at Microsoft.

²⁹ Craig Hepburn, *On! The Future of Now: Making Sense of Our Always On, Always Connected World*, (Crowdcentric Media 2014) p.42.

focus. The demand of ‘Likes’ in Facebook might be a good example. They are regarded as quite important, and therefore some people even purchase ‘Likes’ in order to pretend as if they received much attention; it happens because the ‘Like’ is a symbol of people’s attention. But apart from if the ‘Likes’ are authentic or not, the attention on the ‘Like’ is not really substantial: it disappears quickly; it is not an intense look. On the contrary, what I am talking about is the value which comes from a special, ongoing attention; a special attention which can be generated only by an intense look in the relation between a specific person and specific object or situation.



Write

I have focused on the personal encounter and its value accrued through intense looking and the relation between the observer and the object so far. However, this leads to the question of how we can share the appreciation gained through this encounter with others. Thinking back to the Caillois’ linguistic approach, he wrote *The Writing of Stones* to inscribe his personal encounter with stones, and to document the imagination originating from his observation of the stones. His texts definitely go beyond physical description of features of the stones, because of his unique choice of words. Who could find the ‘underwater fishermen in harness and helmets’³⁰ in a stone? Who could find the ‘swatches of arctic light shining meagerly on inky lichens, a puny, struggling vegetation exhausted by rough winds and burned by frost’?³¹ His imagination and faculty of verbalizing it transformed the stone into a marvelous poem. And it offered the readers a means to share the excitement of his encounter.

However, the means of ‘writing’ does not always have to be linguistic. Here Gabriel Orozco’s photographic approach comes into focus again. As we could see with his work *Crazy Tourist*, Orozco inscribed his personal encounters with a specific object and situation into photographs. He chose angle, frame, and focus in photographs, as Caillois chose appropriate words with writing – a visual poem. Photographs circulate beyond the original experience and it opens up to

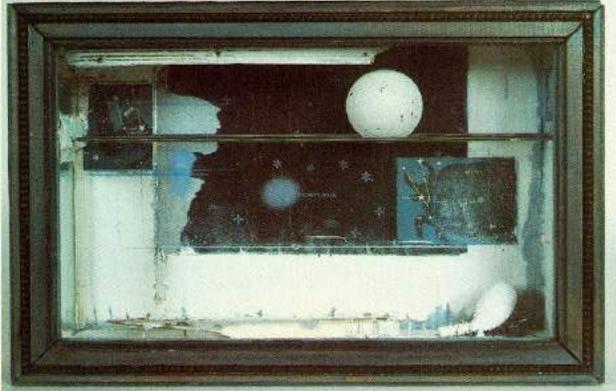
³⁰ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*, p.55

³¹ same as above

other readings, just as a text could also be published and offer a shared personal encounter with a specific object of interest.

Besides the two-dimensional approaches of text and photography, we can take Joseph Cornell's practice as a good example of three dimensional inscription. Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) was an American artist who was most famous for his art works of boxed assemblages created from found objects. He juxtaposed found materials such as glasses, clock springs, cutout pictures of birds, unglazed ceramic pipes, balls, spiral shells, photographs and so on, in small boxes. When we look at these fragments, it seems to be random and inconsistent. However, for Cornell, the glass was not just a glass, and the clock spring was not just a clock spring. Each element had a metaphorical meaning for him, and by rearranging the meanings, he inscribed his memories, dreams and imaginations in one box.

It is a somewhat different approach from that of Caillois' writing and Orozco's photographs, in the sense that Cornell mixed up each element, each one holding a different story of encounter respectively. However, this practice does indeed has same quality as the previous two, in that the material circulated beyond its original meaning and played a role to inscribe something.







RULE NUMBER 4

Don't abuse the indulgence

in a world of

ANYTHING GOES!

You can play with

anything but,

That has to be

something

which you can care for.

Stay open.

Be selective.

A real treasure will be born in your care.

Chapter 3

A jewellery attitude as 'material curating'

Seen in that light, a piece of brick or scrap of rusted metal or plastic has no less value or standing than some expensively worked artifact made of the most costly materials - provided of course that each possesses the power and expressiveness of a fully accomplished form.³²

This is a statement from a German goldsmith, Hermann Junger (1928 - 2005). He was born and raised in Hanau, Germany, a town known for its gold- and silversmithing traditions. In such a circumstance, he naturally started his career as a goldsmith. However, he has not grown up simply just as a skillful craftsman, but has developed a critical point of view on the practice. Even though he was technically proficient, he didn't aim at being solely a goldsmith, but tried to change the focus of the goldsmith profession from merely producing smooth surfaces and precision settings, to question the generalized sense of beauty and value in the field.³³ The consequence of his attitude led him to the point where broken switches and circuit boards would be transformed into gem-studded brooches, the colour and texture of a terrazzo floor tile into a series of brooches, and a twisted piece of scrap metal into a shimmering golden necklace. He was fascinated with these discarded objects from his childhood. When he was nine, he moved with his family from the centre to the edge of the town. In the spacious surroundings, he found a new playground. It was a broad meadow with a brook running through it. A narrow wooden bridge led over the brook; he had crossed this bridge many times. One day something lying in the water caught his eyes. It was a large glass tankard or goblet which was stuck in the tangle of roots and branches in the water. After retrieving it, he was convinced that 'I had found a real treasure.'³⁴ This encounter took hold in his way of looking at things and influenced his creative process. His precision and craftsmanship of the traditional goldsmith helped him to materialize his fascination in found objects.

³² Herman Junger, *Jewellery Found objects* (Verlag Hermann Schmidt Mainz, 2003) p.5.

³³ Ursula Ilse Neuman, *Hermann Junger - The Jeweled Meadow*
<http://www.ganoksin.com/borisat/nenam/hermann-junger.htm>.

³⁴ Herman Junger, *Jewellery Found objects*, p.4.



One thing that I find problematic in Junger’s practice is his choice of material. Even though he has found inspiration from found objects, the material that he used to ‘inscribe’ his appreciation of them was always traditional material – mostly gold. The value which is generated from his encounter with the specific object becomes indistinct through the layer of intrinsic and monetary value of the precious materials used in the final product. From the late 1960s, in the jewellery scene, jewellers have been influenced by modernist movements across art, craft and design, and materiality became an essential aspect of jewelry design. Therefore, use of traditional techniques and material such as gold, silver and precious stones, which Junger used, started to be observed as something to be reconsidered.³⁵ Since then, the choice of material has become radically widened; industrial materials, cheap materials, and readymades appeared in the mainstream of the jewellery field.³⁶

³⁵ Liesbeth den Besten, *The Trouble with Beauty* / an article in a book *UNEXPECTED PLEASURES* (RIZZOLI INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS, INC., 2012) p.102.

³⁶ I will later consider the story of jeweller, Robert Smit who left the jewellery world for a while because of his aversion to this movement.

Lisa Walker (1967-) is a remarkable jeweller who has been working with nontraditional materials as an essential part of her creation process: no longer useful Macbooks, broken toys, mediocre paintings, souvenirs belonging to others, and disposable containers etc. They are parts, discarded - the detritus of modern life, of her own life.³⁷ In her studio, Walker has a huge shelf full of stuff that is waiting to be grabbed by her and used for her creation. When she encounters an object which draws here in she collects it and keeps it as a material on the shelf. Thus there is an accumulated world of junk on the shelf. She is a jeweller but simultaneously also a material curator.³⁸ She picks up materials from the shelf, assembles them, and tells a story in their combination. It sounds like a very spontaneous action, but she denied this in an interview as follows:

I think I have been misunderstood in early time when I started to exhibit the works. “Ah, anything goes!” “No boundaries!” “She is doing whatever”... That was actually opposite. I’m very, very selective. Every each thing I choose, it is not uptight anyway, but has a reason in someway. Even if it is about form or color. Or an idea I have been working on. Or an idea I had five years ago then I can see a new way of translation that idea with that material... And I grab it.”³⁹

The personal encounters with each object is carefully preserved on Walker’s shelf, and when it goes to her working bench, it starts to be activated as a new object with a new interpretation of it. Her shelf is a place like a waiting room, where the materials of her interest wait for new translation, through her careful observation and reflection.



³⁷ Kerianne Quick, *LISA WALKER: PUT A CORD ON IT* / an article in a webpage ‘ART JEWELRY FORUM’ <http://www.artjewelryforum.org/ajf-blog/lisa-walker-put-cord-it>.

³⁸ I will consider this word ‘curator’ later.

³⁹ *Interview with Lisa Walker*, (the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2011) 0:11 - 0:51 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36598_5iraM

Walker dares to make things odd and ugly. Her work is a study into the differences between an accepted notion of beauty or stereotype, and something else – the search for a quality that we hardly ever see, but nevertheless perhaps recognise.⁴⁰ Whereas Junger translated his fascination of found objects into the materials which already contain monetary value through a traditional goldsmith technique, Walker used the found material itself, and taboo techniques like glueing, consciously, in order to not blur the intrinsic value of the found object.

Jewellery as a discipline has a stupendously long and diverse history from the decades of ancient jewellery through to the contemporary, and monetary value has always accompanied it as an important aspect of its precious status. The monetary value is a value which comes from the physical scarcity of the object itself. However, on the other hand, the value which I have been exploring derives from a personal encounter in the relation between the specific object and the person. It is nothing to do with the scarcity of the object itself but rather it is based on a moment of attention and appreciation which can be shared. In this situation should the object being looked at always be something which does not have monetary value?

Here I would like to consider a story about Robert Smit (1941-). He is a Dutch jeweller and artist, who mainly works with gold. Due to his antipathy towards the new movements in the jewellery field that came about alongside the modernist movements across art, craft and design fields - which questioned the use of traditional materials and techniques - he stopped making jewellery in 1972, and started drawing and painting. After a while, he re-entered the jewelry world with an exhibition at Galerie RA in Amsterdam in 1985.⁴¹ At that time he thought ‘nothing could be added to drawing, the research was finished. Miraculously these ideas made it possible to start making jewelry again.’⁴² This exhibition caused a fierce controversy about gold or the taboo on its use. A well-known Dutch designer, Gijs Bakker accused Smit of re-establishing jewelry as a status symbol.⁴³ However he was not taken aback, because he was simply fascinated with gold, the same as the others were fascinated with discarded objects. He faced gold and discovered his own idiosyncratic use of gold, such as curling up, creasing, serrating, flowing, and oxidizing it, in order to share a value which is not a monetary one, but the one he saw in the gold itself.

It is the creation of this kind of value which I’ve focused on; whether objects are considered to be rubbish or gold is beside the point. To be sure, the objects I am interested in do not have to be

⁴⁰ Official webpage of Lisa Walker, Profile, <http://www.lisawalker.de/home.html>

⁴¹ *Robert Smit Ban on Gold SD*, (an interview by Marjan Boot / Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXiBxX3BpQc>

⁴² <http://www.robertsmit.works/>

⁴³ Information page of the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam, about an exhibition ‘*metallic yellow - gold for robert smit*’ (5 Nov 2004 - 30 Jan 2005) <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/metallic-yellow-gold-for-robert-smit>

discarded and without monetary value. The object being looked at can be a large glass tankard stuck in the tangle of roots in the water, but also a precious piece of gold. The crucial aspect here is the creation of value through how the viewer gazes at the object and how he treats it.

I mentioned that Walker was a jeweller and at the same time, is a ‘material curator’. The term ‘curator’ is perhaps interesting to explore. If we look up the etymology of the word ‘curator’, a dictionary states it derives ‘*from Latin: one who cares, from cūrāre to care for, from cūra care.*’⁴⁴ Obviously, ‘care’ is a word which seems to relate deeply to the definition of ‘curator’. And interestingly the word ‘care’ can be rephrased as ‘giving special attention to...’, which I found as an important factor in the creation of new value described in Chapter 2, the section of ‘Gaze’. Only a person who treats an object with special attention can create a new value which is not dependent on a monetary value.



⁴⁴ Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition.

RULE NUMBER 5

Everybody needs a rock!

Find your own rock.

Not just any rock.

A rock that you can appreciate most.

Observe the rock

with your special attention.

Treat the rock

in an optimum way that you can think of.

The more you care for the rock,

the more the rock shines.

The brilliance of the special rock

does not know its end.

Conclusion

Introspection – my intentional plastic rocks

While writing this thesis, I started to look more closely at one of my own projects that I had been working on. A starting point of the project was a news article about a new kind of rock containing plastic debris.⁴⁵ According to the article, it was found in the Kamilo beach on the island of Hawaii by a sea captain and oceanographer, Charles Moore in 2006; it started attracting attention from 2012, and was researched by an earth scientist, Patricia Corcoran. The Kamilo beach is highly polluted, known for its accumulation of plastic debris. The plastic debris had somehow melted and fused with natural beach sediment, and the melted plastic bound together sand, shells, pebbles, basalt, coral and wood, or seeped into the cavities of larger rocks to form a rock-plastic hybrid. At first, people hypothesized that the heat of lava from the nearby Kilauea volcano melted the plastic debris. But since lava flows had not approached the beach for at least a century, this theory was reconsidered. Now it is believed that these new rocks are formed from heat caused by anthropogenic actions, such as campfires or the practice of burning plastic debris as a method for cleaning up the beach. Researchers think that these rocks could be future markers of humanity's time on earth.⁴⁶

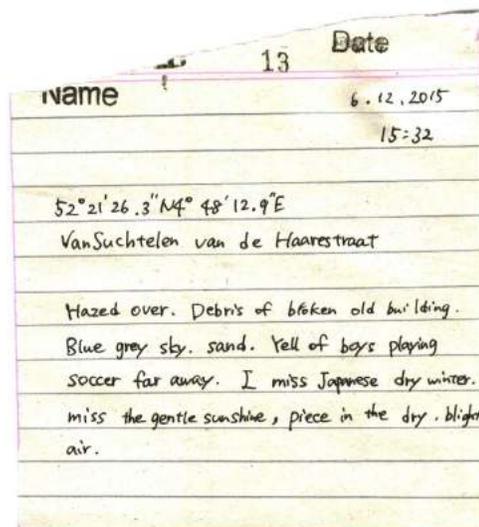


⁴⁵ Rachel Nuwer, *Future Fossils: Plastic Stone* (The New York Times web article, 9, June, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/10/science/earth/future-fossils-plastic-stone.html?_r=1

⁴⁶ Rachel Nuwer, *Future Fossils: Plastic Stone* (The New York Times web article, 9, June, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/10/science/earth/future-fossils-plastic-stone.html?_r=1

Rocks are memory devices, through which we can make conjectures about the historical background of a specific place, by observing the components and formation of the rocks present there. In that sense, the plastic rocks found in Hawaii reflect our modern culture and environment. They can be excavated and observed by people in future generations. This idea led me to the interest in making a rock that contains memories of the place where I am now, at this moment. And this urge let me to focus on plastic rubbish on the street where I always walk. I started collecting the plastic rubbish on the street together with natural materials surrounding the plastic rubbish, such as shells, pebbles, sands, and branches. I seal this plastic rubbish and neighboring materials into ziploc bags, and attach small diaries which contain the date, time, weather, address, and a short documentation of what I saw and felt at the spot. After collecting the materials, I melt the plastic fragments down, then put the other material collected in the same spot into the melted plastic, mix them, tamp them down, cut it off, and polish them to make an intentional plastic rock.

The news article gave me a special insight, allowing me to look at the plastic rubbish on the street intently, and literally mine them for my possible creations. I gaze at the discarded plastic as a raw ingredients for the plastic rock which could be a kind of memory device of our present time. And by melting and polishing them, I inscribe my personal encounter with the specific objects at the specific time.





Through the process that I created, the discarded plastic rubbish became something valuable for me. However, do my intentional plastic rocks need to be kept in a drawer as my personal treasures? Or should their value be shared with others? What kind of context do I want to give my plastic rocks? I have not been able to answer these questions, therefore my plastic rocks have been lying on my desk for a while. But the experience of writing this thesis gave me a crucial insight. As Caillois' observation of stones became a poem which fascinates people, I would like to share my personal encounter and its value with others by using my own language. And I would like to make people appreciate my plastic stones through my treatment – how I inscribe them. It became clear that my aim is that the plastic rubbish becomes something valuable for anyone, through my observation and my inscription.

Objects with high monetary value such as gold and gemstones have a limitation in their amount; therefore there is also a limitation in the number of people who can obtain them. This fact often brings jealousy and conflict amongst people and creates political issues. The fixed sense of value among people makes a structure of unbalanced needs in society. On the other hand, there is no limitation in the value which is derived from the relationship between a specific object and a specific person, or the gaze which occurs in the relationship, because it has nothing to do with the scarcity of the object. As long as there is special attention on the object, anything can be valuable. And as Matthew B. Crawford says 'Attention is a resource – a person has only so much of it;⁴⁷ everyone can use attention as a resource to create value.

Looking back at the word 'curator' which I mentioned in Chapter 3, I think not only of Walkers, but every jeweller who could somehow have a role as a 'material curator' – a person who has a special care for the materials in their hands or in front of their eyes. In such a role, one must detect something in a rough stone, observe it, and sublimate it into a piece of jewellery, through careful considerations of how it needs to be cut and polished, what kind of setting, in other words, what kind of context it needs. The more special the attention on the stone is, the more the stone shines and obtains value. To be sure, this value is not only the monetary value relating to the scarcity of object. And the rock that receives this care need not be a rock originally, but also any object or plastic rubbish on the street.

The original and essential role of a jeweller is perhaps not dealing with rare materials, but rather reading the signs in any material: gazing at and inscribing them through a process of making and caring. The jewellery attitude could be a way of looking at the world, and a way of creating new value that is not dependent on material resources, which are depleting globally. We might consider the careful eye of an intent observer and maker as a challenge to a consumptive society.

⁴⁷ Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, p.24.

