

# Material Transformations – Making as a Catalyst of Experience

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## Abstract

This paper examines my personal process of materializing lived experiences into a material installation, and how this process affected how I perceive those lived experiences. The process is investigated through to the image schematic structure of experience, in relation to the metaphoric nature of material substances, across a specific practice led research process, the *Edges of the Existent* installation. In this paper, materializing experience is seen as a form of transference, a catalyst through which lived experience is turned into tangible material artefacts, which perform, express and interpret the embodied, emotional and reflected content related to experiences. Through this transference, the artist is able to access their preconscious levels of experience and articulate them in a manner that is both embodied and experiential. The tangibility of materiality creates a multidimensional layer to conscious experience, through which the preconscious structures of experience can be reached. These dimensions add to the experiential value of the work of art, as embodied experiences evolve into more metaphoric and abstract processes of thought.

KEYWORDS: embodied experience, materiality, image schema, transforming experience

## Introduction

This explorative research paper investigates the process of materializing personal experience as a process of transference where the maker's structures of experience change form alongside the works formation (Dryden, 2004, p. 259). This transference is a process that involves layers of conscious, preconscious (Dijksterhuis & Meurs, 2006;

Raami, 2015, p. 36), tacit and embodied experiences and material thinking (Bolt, 2007; Mäkelä, 2007; Groth, 2017). In the context of this paper, I perceive experience as a phenomenon, which emerges through embodied experiences, from knowledge that is based on bodily perceptions and interactions with the world, objects and matters (Johnson 1987, Wilson & Foglia, 2017), and is stored in the region of preconscious knowledge (Raami, 2015, p. 37). Preconscious knowledge in turn, is understood as knowledge or experience that is implicit, and based on all lived and perceived experience that precedes conscious awareness. In other words, it consists of all the knowledge and experience we have access to at any given time, and where our conscious knowledge emerges from (Raami, 2015, p. 37).

In the artistic research praxis, embodied knowledge is a widely discussed topic and often discussed in relation to making and perceiving when creating material artefacts (Mäkelä & Routarinne, 2006; Mäkelä & O'Riley, 2012). Thus, it has also been recognized as an established mode of epistemology for research in the arts (Nelson, 2013, p.41-44; Nimkulrat et al. 2016, p.3). Furthermore, recent studies on art and design practices indicate that making is a form of meaning making which can lead to personal growth. For instance, in her doctoral dissertation for Aalto University, Camilla Groth (2017 p. vii) suggests that creating is a way of “negotiating meaning through interaction between the embodied mind and the material environment, thus it may affect intrapersonal growth”.

As such, this paper examines this intrapersonal growth, through my own perspective, in order to generate further knowledge on the experiential structures of consciousness that influence artistic expressions, and how these structures are transformed through the creative process. This subject is investigated through my personal experiences in materializing lived experiences into a material installation, which was shared through a public exhibition. *EDGES OF THE EXISTENT – An installation about the biology of time* was exhibited from August 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at Gallery Laterna Magica in Helsinki, as a part of my Master's Thesis for the degree program in Costume Design at Aalto University, Finland.

My approach to the investigation conducted in the thesis was a reflective and subjective, practice led process of research (Nelson, 2013, p. 44, 65; Nimkulrat, 2009, p.38; Nimkulrat et al, 2016). In which, I focused on examining the diverse modes of preconscious, embodied and tacit knowledge structures (Dryden, 2004; Johnson 1987, 2013; Raami, 2015) present in my creative process of making the installation. In addition,

I studied the interrelations and interconnections between material qualities and embodied perceptions (Bolt, 2004; Ingold, 2013; Johnson, 2015), which contribute to the processes of meaning making in artistic expression (Dryden, 2004; Johnson, 2015).

This paper focuses on one of the aspects of that research, the preconceptual and preconscious image schematic structure of experience (Johnson, 1987, 2015) and how my innate, intuitive and practice based knowledge of that structure (Raami, 2015, p.62), guided me to utilize diverse material qualities to create a multilayered and all-encompassing event, the *Edges of the Existent* installation. Additionally, the paper also examines how the preconceptual structures of experience are affected through the correspondence between the materiality and the maker (Groth, 2017, p. 172-175; Dryden, 2004; Ingold, 2013, p. 105).

The aim is to illuminate how complex and multimodal preconscious, tacit and embodied structures of knowing play a crucial part in the creation of artworks (Dryden, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007; Nimkulrat et al, 2016; Dijksterhuis & Meurs, 2006) specifically through our embodied understanding of materials as metaphoric substances (Jacucci & Wagner, 2010, p. 74; Johnson, 2015, p.29). The main argument is that our relationship with materiality is not merely embodied; rather it is multi-layered, consisting of both the embodied and metaphoric layers of perception, experience and interpretation (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.75; Johnson, 2015, p.29-35).

Since my artistic background is in costume design, I have gained years of practice-based experience in material and bodily expression, as costumes are material artefacts, which perform through and with a performing body. However, costumes are created for performances that are formed cooperatively and in connection to a context, which is produced by someone else (an author, director or choreographer). Thus, the whole process of creating the installation was a first time experience in creating a material and performative event on my own and solely out of my personal experiences and intentions. Therefore, it also affected me deeply, especially as I was working on an emotionally intense topic, my own perceptions and experiences of facing mortality and the fear its bodily aspects had caused.

Moreover, this experience implicated that the process of materializing lived experience into a tangible material artefact and performative event can be extremely potent and experientially transformative in its nature. Because the process seemed to shape my

structures of experience at a deeper level, which my conscious awareness could determine, I framed my research to examine some of the different cognitive structures present in that process.

As this paper will illuminate, the embodied and imaginative understanding of materiality is key (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.74), in how material expressions can alter the maker's patterns of experience (Dryden, 2004, p. 263). Because the acts of making are affected by the different aspects and qualities that materials innately have and the multi-layered sensory experience that tangible material artefacts and substances offer (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.80), the process of materialization becomes a transformation of experience in two perspectives. In this transformation, the experiences are not only externalized into material artefacts, but also simultaneously, these experiential structures themselves are affected. These structures are influenced, because material qualities constantly shape and contribute to our comprehension of the world and our experiences of living in it (Groth, 2017, p.162, 170; Johnson, 2015, p. 33, 36).

## The Image Schematic Structure of Experience

In this paper, I look at the phenomenon of embodied cognition primarily through the image schematic structure of experience, a theory on human cognition developed by philosopher Mark Johnson and linguist George Lakoff in the late 1980's. Image schemas are preconceptual knowledge structures that are based on embodied experiences, from which we form later abstract thought constructions, such as metaphors, images, language and so forth (Johnson, 1987, p. 98-100; Dryden, 2004, p.256). Because material expression is a form of language, which arises from the body, I find examining material forms art through the image schematic structure of experience beneficial in understanding the complex bodily connections underlying the processes of meaning making.

Johnson (1987, p. 29-30), defines image schemas as preconceptual and non-propositional structures of meaning that emerge from our bodily relations with the world and are learned without conscious reflection. This non-propositionality means that these structures are not definite or explicit; instead, they are broad and flexible knowledge structures that organize our experiences and perceptions at a general and abstract level, from which we form particular mental images. In other words, these constructions are based on the sum of the experiences through which we organize perceptions and

experiences at any given time.

As such, image schemas are what label the basic qualitative determinations of our everyday experience. Image schemas themselves are not conscious mental constructs; instead, they provide us with the underlying network of meanings, from which we form conscious and accessible concepts. These concepts are formed as language, images and other vehicles of thought that are required for recalling the past and imagining future possibilities. They allow us to reflect upon, categorize and refer to things according to their kinds and make choices (Dryden, 2004, p. 256).

Therefore, image schemas are also intimately connected to values, emotions and feelings and are essential to most of our abstract understanding and reasoning (Johnson, 2015, p.32). Image schemas are founded on the way we position ourselves and our bodies in everyday interactions. They are based on the orientations and motions and the makeup and situatedness of our bodies in relation to other bodies, objects and beings in this world. In other words, they arise from the different bodily perceptions that occur in and through time (Johnson, 2015, 30-31). The generality and flexibility of image schemas also allow us to implement an extremely large number of alternative realizations of specific schemas in varying contexts (Johnson, 1987, p. 30). For instance, the schema of in –out orientation (Johnson, 1987, p. 33-37), is learned through being inside clothing, in a bed, within buildings and so forth. These are all embodied events where we are surrounded by a material constraint. Likewise, we get out of our beds and clothing or walk out of rooms. Through this, we form different but related experiences of being in or out; therefore, we also know what it means when a situation is out of our hands, or we are lost in our thoughts and so on.

The image schematic structure is also directly connected to the varied qualities we perceive in every subject and matter, as our patterns of perception arise from the change of degrees within experiences. According to Johnson (2015, p.29), “qualities provide the most primordial meaning available to us prior to and underlying, any conceptual abstraction or conscious reflection we might engage in.” Therefore, the aesthetic experience is a fundamental factor in the human meaning making process, where the aesthetic ability to read patterns, qualities, images, and relate them to our past and present perceptions and experiences, is a deeply rooted and innate part of human existence. This means that aesthetic experiences are not a matter of purely aesthetic reflection, but rather embodied experiences, which live in the body as well as in the mind (Johnson, 2015, p.

29).

Through everyday experience, it is apparent that these preconscious structures of experience are present everywhere and at all times. Organizing things, meanings, objects, and subjects according to their qualities is instinctive to human nature. 'Adjectives' are our tools in determining our surroundings and our relations and interactions with our surroundings, ourselves and everything in the world. However, much of this organizing is preconscious, existing only on an embodied level, as it would be impossible to be conscious of all that is sensed at any given time (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.9). What grasps the attention of the conscious mind, with the exception of very high sensory stimuli, are the qualities within events that motivate us to notice and reflect upon them. In essence, it is our preconscious structures of pattern and quality recognition, which organize the sensory stimuli we receive (Johnson, 2015, p.29; Di Benedetto, 2010, 5-7). Through this, our awareness catches on and we can begin to make sense of our emotions and feelings accordingly.

## The Experiential Nature of Art

All artists and designers use the logic of image schemas, and their innately aesthetic nature in their creations and designs. We create material expressions, which are received as embodied experiences. Through these experiences, our image schematic understanding provides us with later abstract thought constructions, metaphors and images. We use colors, shapes, sounds, spaces, light, materiality, surfaces and structures to create qualities, patterns and rhythms, which in turn evoke recognition or confusion, emotions, thoughts and so on. In essence, we employ the embodied spatial logic and felt qualities of image schemas (Johnson, 2015, p. 29).

By combining different structures and patterns, we create something that has a form of unifying quality. Unifying qualities in turn are what sorts the myriad web of experience into comprehensible patterns of experience (Johnson, 2015, p. 29). Moreover, they give each event or situation we find ourselves in their own specific distinctiveness and meaning. This meaning is preconscious by nature; it is felt before it is known. Our ability to process, determine and create abstractions emerge from these unifying qualities (Johnson, 2015, p. 29). Alternatively, by violating these patterns, our attention can be caught in another manner (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.11). Furthermore, even though each

individual's layers of experience are unique, we do share the same basic biology. Therefore, we can be certain that we are able to assert some form of biological and schematic responses to our works (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 7). What varies is how those responses are understood (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 8)

Therefore, all forms of art can act as facilitators, through which we shape and alter our patterns of experience (Dryden, 2004; Di Benedetto, 2010, p.8). Moreover, because our patterns of perception arise from the different qualities within experiences, the value of arts is in the condensation of experience that the arts offer (Johnson, 2015, p.34). These concentrations and / or alterations of experience can offer us with meaningful experiences that are not available to us in our daily existence and that can be hard to capture in words and concepts (Johnson, 2015, p.34).

This is partly because experiences are layered in their nature. New experiences are built upon earlier ones, creating a web of experiential intertwining that connect in myriads of ways. Therefore, one reason why material forms of art can have such a profound impact on us is in the manner, which it can both intensify and expand the possibilities for meaning making (Dryden, 2004, p.259; Johnson, 2015, p.30). Moreover, part of these vast interconnections can be made visible in manners that language cannot reach (Dryden, 2004, p.259). Furthermore, because of the linear structure of language, it can never address experience in a manner that is as all-encompassing as perceived and embodied experiences are (Nimkulkurat et al, 2016, p.5); the multilayered patterns and qualities within works of art, open up possibilities for its own kind of a language that speaks to us at a deeper level of consciousness (Dryden, 2004, p.263-264).

As the image schematic structure of experience is deeply connected with our actions and embodied understanding of the word, it also underlies the acts of making and creating through material qualities and substances. One of the most meaningful aspects of creating is in the way it allows an access into diverse levels of experience (Dryden, 2004, p.263-264). Moreover, through material creation, different layers of implicit and intuitive knowledge about subjective experience can be transformed through the work (Dryden, 2004, p.263). As such, the arts allow us to shape and guide our imagination, and thus influence the varied forms of conscious experience. In other words, our preconscious patterns of experience and their image schematic nature, find their expression through arts (Dryden, 2004, p.264). The metaphoric understanding of material qualities that the image schematic structure of experience provides is key, in the acts of transforming experience

into tangible and performative artefacts.

As the image schematic structure of experience is deeply connected to our actions and our embodied understanding of the world, it also underlies the acts of making and creating through material qualities and substances. In essence, because embodied experiences are converted to more abstract thought constructions through our image schematic understanding, the acts of making can be seen as a form of thinking through and with the body, and in correspondence to material qualities (Groth 2017, Ingold, 2013, Mäkelä 2007).

This correspondence can be seen as a dialogue between the maker and material, which bring together diverse materials and combines or redirects their flows in the anticipation of what might emerge (Bolt, 2004, p.178; Ingold, 2013, p. 105). In this correspondence, the flows of materials and matters, tools and forces, the material actions and behaviors guide the maker's actions and motions just as much the maker's motions guide the acts of material behavior. Through making, things evolve in unforeseeable directions, as materials reveal unexpected possibilities (Bolt, 2004, p.53, Ingold 2013, p.24-29). As such, making is a process of growth, of transformation, where the maker "joins 'forces' with a world of active materials" (Ingold, 2013, p. 21). In my personal experience, what follows this material correspondence for the maker is a constant motion, an inward and outward interaction, a cathartic act, through which an in-between of conscious awareness and can be reached. In this in-between, words are not needed for thinking, but the 'thinking' seems to happen on a bodily level. Moreover, this correspondence does not only shape the maker's bodily motions, but also the inner motions. Therefore, the preconscious structures of experience are altered without conscious awareness. This experiential nature of making in correspondence is what allows us to bring forth the abundance of preconscious experience when making.

## Material Metaphors – Transformations of Experience

Materials and matters, surfaces and forms, motions and movements, sounds, lights, scents and tastes engage us and perform through our senses (Di Benedetto, 2010; Jacucci & Wagner, 2007). In essence, all of these different substances can be regarded as material sensory provocateurs that perform (Di Benedetto, 2010). They catch our attention, and consciousness through a variety of sensory stimuli (Di Benedetto, 2010; Jacucci &



Wagner, 2007). As materiality is, in essence, any substance that has the qualities of which ‘things’ are made of, light, sound and scents can also be defined as material things alongside material artefacts. They may not be tangible; rather they are ethereal, perceived through the waves of sound and light, or in the case of scents, aromas. Nevertheless, they provide us with boundless sensory cues, information that more often than not, affects our preconscious structures directly (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 6).

In the context of this paper, material metaphors can be translated to mean the manner in which a material substance performs, that is to say, how material carries out actions and patterns of behavior that transform to expressions of experience through the specific qualities of that material. As such, material metaphor is a concept, which functions through the combination of embodied cognition and the preconscious structures of experience described earlier. The notion of material as metaphor is directly connected to our image schematic structure of experience. Through this understanding, materiality transforms into metaphors from the way, which the essence of each material performs through the behaviors and the qualities it possesses, as materials are directly linked to our emotions and values (Groth, 2017, p. 162; Johnson, 2015, p.32) . Therefore, whatever thought or experience is expressed, the medium utilized brings its own set of matters, essences and qualities into the equation. The medium itself inevitably affects and changes the way these thoughts are observed, reflected and experienced.

The essence of tangible material artefacts in works of art is their ability to entice us in a variety of ways, as we perceive them, not only through our eyes, but through our bodies as well. Through our eyes, we can sense the diverse structures of any material substance. Seeing becomes touching, as we recognize the different qualities in materials and how they feel on our skin (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.5; Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, 75). Moreover, these different haptic qualities are crucial for our interaction, experience and comprehension through which they add an “experiential dimension to our actions” (Jacucci & Wagner 2007 p. 75). Therefore, material qualities bring forth movement as well. They create motion through the in-betweens and interrelations of balances, directions and dynamics, which point to diverse motions between form and force.

Furthermore, the tangibility of materiality is directly linked to our imaginative understanding of the world and ourselves. In other words, material qualities are often perceived in relation to perceptions that are more abstract (Dryden, 2004, p.258). Thus, the experiential nature of material qualities supports our intuitive being as it activates the

preconscious structures of tacit and embodied experiences (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.73). Therefore, materiality continuously brings forth, ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.74). It is this multidimensional nature of material artefacts that turns them into sources of abundant experiences (Jacucci & Wagner, 2007, p.76). In other words, as bodily people living in a material world, we are inherently connected with material expression and communication.

## Biology of Time

To explore how my personal experiences were transformed in the creative process of making a material installation, I will take a closer look at the materialized concepts of time, used in the *Edges of the Existent*. My journey into creating the *Edges of the Existent*, begun as an artistic quest to conceive the morbid aspects of life. To fathom the biology of time, which is mortality. Out of this quest, the installation was born. It was a highly personal, transformative and embodied process of making that evolved in an extremely organic manner. The key concept within the installation was that corporeal life exists through *the biology of time*. This was represented through two time related concepts: *the movement of time* and *the circle of life*.

I perceive my own biological time as a vast phenomenon, which is experienced throughout life and from various points of view. It is a concept that begins to take shape well before conscious memories form, and has an ending that is undetermined. If I look at how we understand time, it is evident that time is a phenomenon that is inherently embodied. We experience time through the changes of degrees in nature and our bodies. The quantitative notions of time: minutes, hours, days and years, are concepts, which we learn through our daily experiences. We sense time through the changes of night and day, the seasons of nature, the aging of our bodies and the social constructs we take part in. The bright light tells us that it is daytime, like darkness relates to nights. In essence, light regulates our daily being (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 67). Spring in turn, implies to qualities such as fresh, young and new, as we watch the nature around us come to life, whereas fall is understood as our evening years. In other words, we use nature as a metaphor that refers to our own cycle in life (Hakola, 2014, p.76).

Experientially time is also closely related to the movement, which arises from the change of degrees in pace and tempo. We understand time as a forward going movement that

consists of smaller, repetitive cycles of movement. In language, time is also movement: time passes by, ticks forward and it exists as the past, present and future. In addition, we are constantly connected to time through sounds, as we hear clocks ticking around us, the different soundscapes of night and day and so forth. Moreover, we also use sound as an alert system, through which we locate ourselves within spaces (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 33,127). Through this, the different tempo in the sensory information we receive, such as sound or light, also create indications that guide our behaviour. The fast pace of a traffic light ticking implicates there to be very little time, so we need to move fast. In other words, our relation to time is a bodily relation, which is experienced through growing, aging and daily existence. Furthermore, because time is essential in our perceptions and recognitions of sensory stimuli (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 10), it is inherently connected with the bodily processes of meaning making.

## Edges of the Existent

In essence, *Edges of the Existent* was a spatial and material meditation on the biology of time. An attempt to create a sanctuary for the ephemeral quality of life, where people would be allowed to stop, be, breathe and witness. A place where time, life and death would be present through the aesthetic qualities of stillness and motion, and in the delicate material beauty of the grotesque and decay. My intent was to create an art piece which was just as layered in experience as my original experiences had been, in the hope that it would create an embodied, unified and 'experiential experience'. A space for reacting through being, instead of merely evoking intellectual reflections and analyses. To achieve a tangible materialization of time that was both embodied and lived.

In order to achieve the concept of *the biology of time*, I worked with diverse forms of material and other sensory information to create different layers of time and life related experiences in the installation. As the material artefact within the *Edges of the Existent* installation, which I will be naming the '*existent*' hereafter, consisted of multiple tangible materials, the amount of visible and palpable information available for the participants of the exhibition was almost overwhelming, as many of the visitors pointed out.



**Figure 1. View from the doorway of the gallery space. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

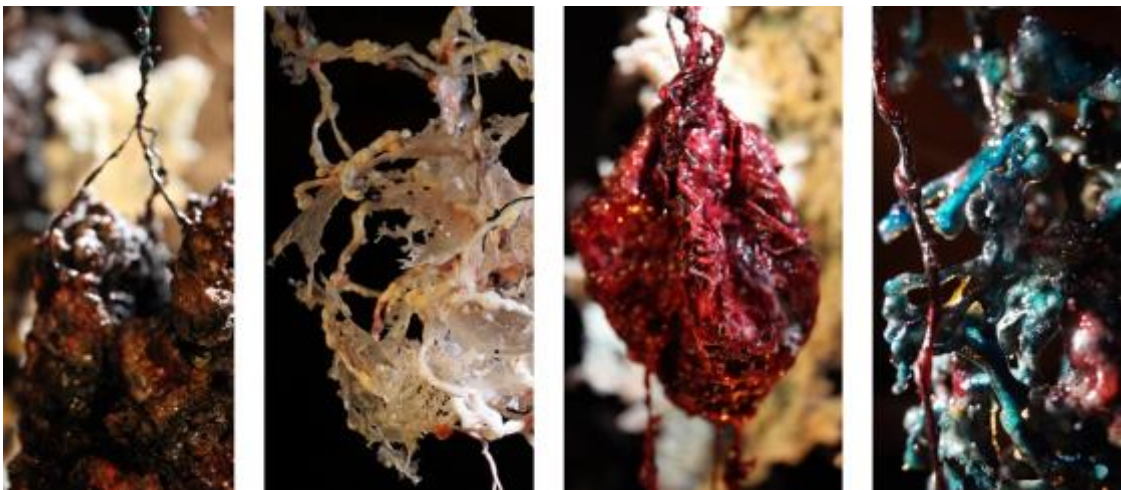
The 'existent' was formed out of three slightly enlarged organs, framed with a decaying skeletal corpse behind them. The heart, lungs and brain are all components of human life, without which it cannot be sustained. Through witnessing how fragile these organs are and the effects their decay can have, I had become scared of them. For me, these organs were representations of my own mortality. In my work, I needed them to be exposed, to become visible and present. Aesthetically, I was constantly pursuing to balance the authentic with the imaginary and metaphoric through them. Trying to find an equilibrium with the organic and fleshy materiality that was both obnoxious and beautiful simultaneously.



**Figure 2. The composition of the heart and lungs. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

Because in material beauty, I found a way to express some of the vulnerability of life I had witnessed, a way to express the corporeal nature of life, in a manner that was grotesque but still poetic and frail. This allowed me to create an interaction and rhythm between the destruction of the body and the fragility that exists in life. For me, the grotesque was not only about the death and anguish, but also about the fact that even dying matter has so much life in it. Life that is abundant and full of energy.

Exhibited at eye level and in proportion to the average height of a person, the 'existent' created a spatial connection with the viewer, which was the same as to a living person. The intent was that the positioning of the existent would create a mirroring effect, and the way the organs were presented would resonate in the body of those who saw it.



**Figure 3. Close-ups of the individual organs and their materiality. (Photos: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

Another important aspect of the installation was the space where the material artefact was suspended in. This specific space was crucial for the final form of the installation, its ambiance and connotations. From the first time, I visited the space; I had my heart set on it. As I wondered around the space, breathing in the stale air and sitting still in various places, I was filled with a sense of 'holy'. I knew I had to have that space because of that feeling. Through this, the notion of a sanctuary, of a temple of time arose. In addition, I knew that whatever would be exhibited had to be in between those pillars. For I saw the pillars as representations of both a temple and the edges of life. Therefore, the 'existent' would have to exist between those edges.



**Figure 4. The material artefact, 'existent' between its edges. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

The *circle of life* was present through the temporal cycle of life that exists in all nature and biological life, and perceivable through the seasonal changes of vegetation. On the material 'existent', living sprouts were growing through the decaying corpse. The circle of life was repeated by drips of 'blood' feeding a pool that watered the plants growing on its edges. The ground was covered with moss, a plant that has an agency of agelessness, as its lifespan is seemingly endless. These still elements of time, linked the ephemeral quality of human life to all life in a cycle that has a beginning and an end, linking it to the flows of time that go on before and after our existence. All of these temporal elements created patterns and unity to the material qualities, made them more alive and allowed for the thought processes and experience to be amplified. They become spatial and embodied, rather than just perceived through the eyes.



**Figure 5. The sprouts growing through the corpse.**

**Figure 5. Close up of the sprouts growing on and through the 'existent'. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

To add to the spatial and embodied nature of the experience, sounds, lights and scents were employed to add sensory value to the aspects of the artefact itself, to create points of focus and over-all ambiance in order to achieve a unified spatial experience. Thus, they can be perceived as sensory guides to the installation, providing additional information on how to perceive it, as the sensory qualities within a performative event can influence the viewer into experiencing and perceiving the work in a particular way (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 81). Furthermore, in a multisensory experience the participants inevitably seek out inputs through their bodies, and explore the ways in which they interact and situate themselves in connection to others and their surroundings. Through engaging the full range of perceptions, they become active attendants and the sensorial responses makes the experiences tangible (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.121-122).

As the sense of smell is directly connected to the preconscious parts of our mind, it affects us at a deep level that we are partly unaware of. Scents are intimately connected to our feelings and recollections, and the experiences they can evoke are potent (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 6). Through utilizing the sense of smell in a performative setting, we can articulate a mood or ambiance in very concrete manner (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 6). Through the acts of making, I had become aware that biological life is not only material,

visible and tactile, but that it creates rhythms of scents. For me, there is sweetness in the rotten scent of death. It is born from how a dying person's breath smells, from the abundance of flowers in funerals and the open soil, and the unbearably sweet scent of over ripened fruits. By combining the sweet scents of licorice, jasmine, rose and mandarin, with the scents of the cellar, I was able to create a space that was alive, in a stage of over ripening. They also connected the spatial ambiance to places of worship, as the scent of flowers is common to them. Therefore, they also brought forth a sense of holy within the space. Since each smell was positioned in a different corner of the space, they also created movement, a biological space that changed as the visitor moved around in the installation.

The *movement of time* was present through the sounds; the backwards ticking clock that intertwined with the biological noises of living, heartbeats and varied inhales and exhales of breathing. The tempo of these sounds was slightly elongated throughout to bring a sense of calmness to the soundscape, creating a bodily connection to time that was at the same time peaceful, 'surreal' and even intimidating at times. Because we are innately tuned to sounds, they are an effective manipulation of our responses, providing stimuli that keep us attuned to our actions. As we listen to sounds, our bodies feel emotions and respond preconsciously to them (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 128, 141). The sounds used in the installation were intentionally manipulative. The aim was not only to create a spatial element of time with the sound, but also draw the participants' attention to their own bodies, as bodily sounds create proximity and intimacy that emerges from their familiarity and own bodily responses to them (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.131).

The movement of time was repeated both in the dripping 'blood', and shifts of light and shadow which created a unified pace of the motion of time in the space. Since tempo is essential to time related experiences, the changes of pace are important (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.45-46). Moreover, the space between things becomes significant as well, as rhythm creates spatial changes alongside it. Following this, also the objects within that space change (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.45-46). By creating immaterial and sensory rhythms of light and sound, the material artefact extended to a spatial experience. The three shadows reflected from the 'existent' merged the artefact with the space, making the shadows into extensions of it, and as the shadows moved with pulsating light, the 'existent' breathed with the space and became a temporal being itself.





**Figure 6. One of the three shadows emerging from the 'existent'.  
Figure 6. One of the three shadows emerging from the 'existent'. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

All of these temporal elements created patterns and unity to the material qualities, making them more alive and allowing for the thought processes and experience to be amplified. They became spatial and embodied, rather than just perceived through the eyes. A phenomenon of this kind is defined as a unified situation (Johnson, 2015, p. 30). In unified situations, the relationship between certain objects, people or events, as well as the qualities they possess, create points of focus, which in turn emerge as possibilities for meaningful interaction with and within an all-embracing situation. Following this, the meaning itself consists of an array of possible perceptions, concepts, and modes of interaction and feeling responses that the unified situation provides (Johnson, 2015, p. 30).

Furthermore, as each individual sense is entangled with other senses (Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 11), the combination of senses is what brings these unified situations forth to the realm of conscious awareness. Additionally, all-encompassing situations do not necessarily require the use of every sense available to us. Instead, they require a number of similar but varying cues of information. In other words, unified situations are what provide us with all-encompassing experiences, and since all-encompassing experiences are sensed as all-inclusive, we can find them extremely meaningful, providing we have enough sensory information to make sense of that situation.



**Figure 7. View from the backside of the installation. (Photo: Susanna Suurla 2016)**

The descriptions of the aesthetic and metaphoric content of the installation provided above, are subjective and perceived from the point of view of the artist, me. To others, the content may have been different. However, as I was present at the installation during the entirety of its run, I was also able to observe and interact with its participants throughout the exhibition period. The discussions that I engaged in were extremely valuable in observing what sort of engagement it provided. Although I never consciously interviewed any of the visitors that took part in the installation, I did engage in many meaningful discussions which I noted down, either by writing or recording soon after those encounters, as best as I could remember.

What was evident through the feedback I received during the exhibition period is that the installation did provide an experiential experience on multiple layers to the audience. The most often occurring comment was that being within the installation was like taking an all-encompassing journey and many described their own levels of energy within the piece. Otherwise, the experiences varied, for others it was a space that invited to calm down and be, while others found it intimidating and violent. Overall, the feedback

provided me with valuable information on the ways, which the installation provided a variety of sensory and material perceptions, and how these transformed into experiential journeys and diverse metaphors to those who saw it. Moreover, it illuminated the fact that the value in any artistic expression is not on how it is perceived, rather it is in the way these perceptions move within the perceiver. These movements act create inner resonances in the person, inevitably affecting their past and present experiences.

## Conclusions

To conclude, I will examine how the image schematic structure shapes experiences, through the schema of in-out orientation, mentioned earlier.

On a personal level, the *Edges of the Existent* was above all an experiential space that implied to the vastness of my personal experiences and allowed me to perceive those experiences in a comprehensible manner. For me, this space was a material transformation of experiences, where I was able to experience all my emotions through inner and outer perceptions, such as the ache in my heart, which was externalized into the drips of blood coming out of the heart. This in-between state of experience and awareness (Di Benedetto, 2010, p.7) and the layered nature of perception made the experience extremely meaningful. In a sense, it became an abstract place, where I was inside my own experiences, while concurrently watching and sensing them from the outside.

Because of the constant externalization of my inner motions, the process of creation was a catalyst for a multitude of transformed experiences. All the sensory input that my body received within the process: the different qualities of diverse materials, scents, and sound, shaped me and my patterns of experience, and thus gave way for new insights. Creating make-believe, rotting, decomposing organs, fragile and beautiful at the same time, along with planting new life, led to a shift from horror to peace and acceptance. By combining patterns of beauty with patterns of grotesque, I found serenity. The repeated acts of material engagement with a matter that in its origins had terrified me afforded me a sense of familiarity. I was able to approach, touch and sense the things that had previously scared me. I was able to give my emotions outer qualities, thus redefining them, as I created consistent patterns of materiality, form and space. Through materialization, I was

in interaction with the very things that had haunted my memories, my memories became interrelated to my surroundings and what was once fragmented became a whole - my world a little more inter-defined. By creating tangible repetitions of experience through the acts of making and thinking through my body, I was able to access my structures of experience. This method allowed me to create an opening to my own experiences, enabling me to reframe, reclassify and reshape these structures themselves.

Therefore, I find that the preconscious or tacit and embodied structures of experience are vital in transforming lived experience into material works of art. As embodied experiences are partially non-linguistic in their nature, some ideas and experiences can be expressed more distinctly through embodied articulation, such as material artefacts. Furthermore, the image schematic understanding of both embodied and material existence illuminates why materiality has immense metaphorical potential when it comes to the expressions of experience. The image schema theory provides a structure of experience which sheds light on how our embodied being shapes our whole understanding about the world, and how through embodied experiences, we form more abstract thought constructions. This is key, in the acts of materializing experience into tangible and performative artefacts.

Therefore, further research on the theory of image schemas and their metaphoric value for meaning making in material expressions, would reveal valuable information on how material artefacts can provide imaginative, metaphoric and transformative experiences through the sensory information that they innately provide. It is evident that all artists use these structures of meaning making in their expressions inherently. Thus, understanding how embodied experiences shape our metaphorical understanding of the world, would allow them to add experiential layers to their work.

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