

CTL Fellowship
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Sustainability Beyond Humanity Mid-Year Report

Overview

This period focused on research and the development of a theoretical framework, alongside the implementation of one course project. The research examines cultural and artistic discourses on sustainability and environmentalism, integrating Taoist philosophy and my own artistic concepts. Within the context of Foundation education, the project proposes two pedagogical directions: cultivating curiosity toward the natural environment through sustained observation, and engaging eco-conscious materials and methods with philosophical awareness.

Work Accomplished

- Sustainability definitions
The research began with an overview of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which address interconnected issues including conflict, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation. Within Pratt Institute, sustainability is similarly framed across environmental and social dimensions.
- Literature review: sustainability in cultural and artistic discourse
The literature review examines different conceptions of environmentalism and the human position within ecological systems. Bruno Latour critiques the separation of human society and nature, while Donna Haraway emphasizes multispecies entanglement. Posthumanist thought intersects with eco-humanism, deep ecology, new materialism, and object-oriented ontology, and engages ongoing debates between “reformist” and “transformational” sustainability.

Within this context, I introduce Taoist cosmology as a parallel non-Western perspective, particularly its notions of process ontology and anti-teleology. In addition, my artistic concept of *Metaphysical Kindness* describes a non-instrumental relation to being, grounded in ontological humility and an acceptance of finitude.

Historical figures such as John Cage engaged extensively with Taoist and Zen Buddhist thought. Artists addressing sustainability more directly include Robert Smithson, Tacita Dean, Pierre Huyghe, Agnes Denes, and Mel Chin, through practices involving ephemerality, recycled materials, geological time, and nonhuman agency.

- *Sustainability Beyond Humanity: propositions*

Conventional sustainability frameworks often assume that systems can be optimized and that humans function as responsible stewards of ecological balance. In contrast, I propose a shift from sustainability toward coexistence, and from continuity toward finitude. This does not abandon ecological responsibility, but reframes it through interdependence and limits. In pedagogical terms, this leads to two propositions:

Proposition 1: Cultivation of curiosity toward the natural world through sustained observation

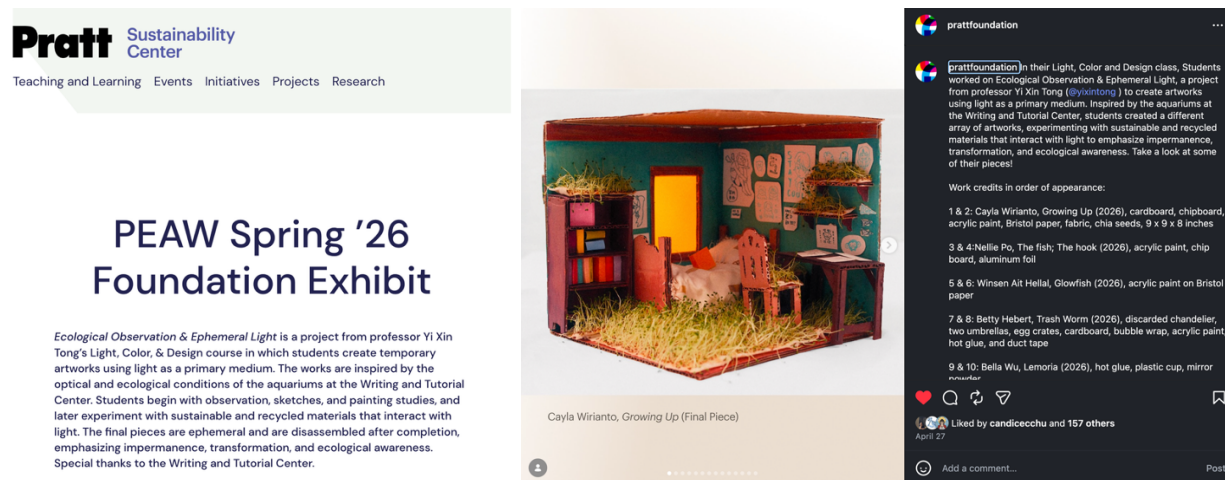
Proposition 2: Engagement with eco-conscious materials and methods informed by philosophical awareness

- Participation: Partnership for Academic Leadership in Sustainability (PALS) Summit, Feb 26–28

Themed “Transformational Teaching for Empowerment and Action,” the summit this year examined how art and design education can move beyond awareness toward agency. Working groups focused on pedagogy, material practices, and interdisciplinary approaches across science and humanities. The event provided relevant bases for situating my research within broader educational practice and exchange.



- Course project and exhibition: Pratt Earth Action Week (PEAW), Apr 6–11
Based on Proposition 1, I developed *Ecological Observation & Ephemeral Light* for the Light, Color, & Design course. The project focused on observation of small-scale ecological systems (the aquariums at the Writing Center), and students produced temporary works using light and sustainable materials. An online exhibition was organized through the Sustainability Center as part of PEAW to present the student work.
<https://prattsustainabilitycenter.com/peaw-spring-26-foundation-exhibit/>



Reflection

A key development during this period has been the translation of complex theoretical research into clear pedagogical propositions and course projects applicable to Foundation education. This process supports expanded approaches to sustainability that emphasize long-term observation, ecological imagination, and temporal awareness.

Next Steps

In the coming period, I will refine the research and develop a second course project addressing Proposition 2. In the fall semester, I plan to use the BioMaterial Lab, a new pilot initiative in the Foundation Department, and the classroom as experimental sites for exploring ecological material practices and conceptions of biology and humanity. *Sustainability Beyond Humanity* ultimately frames sustainability as a condition of interdependence within geological finitude, rather than a project of optimization or resolution, and as a site for imagining human futures.