3.2 There have been numerous class demonstrations that have elucidated the concept of material intelligence, and I find that the examples that stick with me most are those that have the most “human” attributes. While the use of intelligence in this way, i.e. as related to the human, does go against the point Tripaldi attempts to make, these anthropomorphic transformations of materials come to my mind most vividly because they clearly acknowledge the connectedness that exists amongst all living (and even nonliving) phenomena that populate our planet. For instance, I was very much in awe with the water droplet and food dye experiment. Here, the complexity exists in the chasing and merging that occurs between different droplets depending on their density of food coloring. This beautiful dancing motion spoke to an act that typically feels explicitly human and tied to a body with limbs and a mind that admires artistic expression. To assign a highly conceptual practice such as dance to something as seemingly ordinary as water and food coloring is to make explicit that through proper manipulation, so much is available to us in the form of revolutionary design, and as an extension, a revolutionary way to create and exist in a world that goes beyond the ordinary.

3.3 Following this thread (pun somewhat intended), the idea of clever manipulation to foster material intelligence as opposed to the reliance of industrial technologies leads me to speculate on a world led by designers. The first and most powerful difference that I think of in such a world is that beauty trumps efficiency. Comparing spider silk to steel is so overtly poetic: the strength and toughness of a material like steel being equated to a gossamer and organic material like silk visually makes me think of silken planes and silky buildings: a world that is tactile and delicate as opposed to cold and stern. While there are of course limitations to using silk over steel for these objects we rely on, could we then reimagine what a plane is to fit the material form of silk rather than steel? Could this plane be constantly shifting and evolving, a non static object that reflects the hysteresis that is intrinsic to spider silk? It is this way of almost recursive thinking that a world led by designers would toy with, one wherein structural form takes a backseat to material consideration.

However, in this world where constant ideation and creativity is applied to form, context, and need, and where material consideration comes before structural norms and profit-driven bottom-lines, costs are the biggest limitation. In this world led by designers, profit would not override beauty and material intelligence. It is this aspect of this reimagined world that seems more impossible to overcome than even a building constructed from silk: the care, time, and money it would take to ethically source enough spider silk to create this building would outweigh our current society’s values that lean towards the cheapest and quickest options available to us (even if they might not be the best options). Yet, we as a society cannot know what the positive repercussions of living in a material driven, beauty inspired world may do for us. It very well could be that sacrificing immediate profit for beauty and sustainability may actually lead to a more profitable option in time. What could existing in beauty do for us in terms of our health and social norms? Prioritizing material could solve many problems that seem currently unrelated, but could eventually show direct correlation.

3.4 The tensions Tripaldi discusses ultimately exist within a single grounding thought: can we as humans re-conceptualize how we perceive of the world through use of materials, in order to design a better one? The way I analyze paradoxical tensions in my design work is typically through unconventional multi-sensory explorations, similar to Tripaldi’s nod to cephalopods as “seeing with their skin”. For my MS1 project, I wanted to reimagine what a classic and centuries-old tool like a map could be, inspired in part by the digital map's ability to dissociate us from our environments rather than engaging us in them. We read these digital maps by looking at our phones and following a pre-ordained path, ignoring the spontaneity of the world in favor of efficiency in arriving at our destination. To combat this, I wanted to create a map that was more of an art piece, an interactive experience. I 3D scanned and modeled different bits of NYC, and recorded sounds of those same places. I printed these scans into boxes which housed speakers that played the recordings I collected. The premise of this “map” was that it was to be touched and listened to, as a meditation on NYC as an experience

rather than a one-dimensional grid that directs you from point A to point B. This project was itself a poetic observation of a very rudimentary and everyday tool.

Tripaldi's insight makes me understand this previous work in a new way, and inspires me to push the limits even more, to abstract the already abstracted even further, to discover if practicality and epiphany can come out of unconventionality. Through this class I have definitely gained an interest in unlikely materials, and as part of my creative process already plays with juxtaposing paradoxical or unlikely notions together, I may want to directly combine seemingly oppositional materials moving forward. What could the combination of multi-sensory paradoxes with out of context materials result in? For example, a pillow (another classic design) is meant to be soft and comfortable, our sense of touch as the dominating motivator for such a design. What if, however, I wanted to use a substance like chewing gum, sticky and somewhat tough, to redesign a pillow? What could inverting standard notions of how we perceive materials and their uses alter what new objects we can come up with?

3.5 My understanding of physical phenomena has been challenged throughout this course, and more than anything I have been struck by the poetics of our demonstrations. While I mentioned the example of the water droplets and food dye initially, in my own explorations I came to a fascinating observation that was emotionally resonant (again, pun somewhat intended). When visualizing sound through my resonance material exploration, I felt a kinship to swirling water and jumping beads; I literally felt empathy for these inanimate objects, harkening back to the blurring of animate vs inanimate that Tripaldi touches upon. More specifically, the idea that material reality exists even in its invisibility is so beautiful and inspirational to me, and really motivates me to push myself to find these moments of hidden material in the world, to bring them to the level of human perception, to reconfigure how I and others understand and perceive of the world. I am including here a journal entry from 2019 that I came across a few weeks ago in a forgotten notebook, as I believe it ties together my sentiments completely.