

should one react against the laziness of railway tracks between the passage of two trains
A Multimedia Exhibition

by

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A thesis exhibition
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Studio Art

University of Waterloo Art Gallery, May 1, 2014 – May 17, 2014

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2014

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

should one react against the laziness of railway tracks between the passage of two trains investigates the everyday as experienced in the post-industrial landscape. Through the activities of walking and mapping, fieldwork is conducted during treks that follow the route of the railroad in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. I examine detritus as post-readymade artifacts of the industrial economy that has abandoned the area. Interventions of minimal gestures engage the inherent narratives of these discarded materials. Improvised assembled sculptures mark my route as a form of wayfinding that re-appropriates the neglected urban space of the railroad right of way. Online maps document these treks as open works of art to be completed by participants as self-guided walks. The activity of walking and assembling sculptures in these marginal landscapes is a playful strategy that resists the alienation of immaterial labour in our contemporary economic context.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my family, Don McMurrich, Marie Payne, and Jeff McMurrich for their continual support. I am indebted to Natalie Hunter for her encouragement, understanding, and tireless support.

I would like to extend my thanks to my committee members Bojana Videkanic and Tara Cooper for their guidance and sound critical feedback. Thank you to David Blatherwick for his support and invaluable efforts as Graduate Officer. Thank you to Ivan Jurakic for exhibiting my work at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery and the lessons of his curatorial direction. I would like to thank Doug Kirton, Cora Cluett, Lori Riva, Jane Tingley, and Joan Coutu for their contributions and advice. Thank you to Sharon Dahmer for her patience and administrative help and to Adam Glover for his technical advice. I would also like to thank all of my fellow MFA candidates for their camaraderie and respect. Lastly, my thanks to Melanie Manchot for her openness, support, professional guidance and example of what is possible when participating in community.

Dedication

I dedicate this exhibition to my family and to the memories of Gerald Gunshoner, Stanley Windrim, Ernest and Gary Payne.

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Introduction

Over the past year and a half walking has become fundamental to my creative practice. During this time I have walked approximately 200 kilometers along the routes of the Canadian Pacific, and Goderich–Exeter railways, from Elmira in the north to Cambridge in the south, and from Breslau in the east to the Township of Wilmot in the west. My walks are a part of an on-going in situ studio practice, and are structured to follow the everyday context of the railroad right-of-way. Sculpture making is a key element of this creative work where improvised assemblages made from discarded materials found along the railway tracks mark my route. These stacked forms of detritus or route markers re-appropriate the urban space. As treks and the territory covered accumulates, an internal map of the urban landscape begins to form. Mapping brings together both of my activities-walking and sculpture making-as each map depicts the trek via digital place markers and a photograph of each assembled sculpture.

Walking and sculpture making also critique alienated and immaterial labour by employing play and social engagement.¹ The play of assembly functions as a self-determined, non-alienated or non-instrumentalized form of labour. The subsequent abandonment of these ephemeral sculptures to become refuse again renders the creative labour useless through its challenge of the production of an art object. Yet these efforts allow for engagement with what Herbert Marcuse conceives of as labour's higher values of productiveness and performance.² At the same time, the uselessness of these efforts and lack of product resist complicity with what Maurizio Lazzarato classifies as

¹ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 4.

² Herbert Marcuse, "The Aesthetic Dimension," *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 195-6.

immaterial labour. Walking is neither repressive nor exploitative and therefore represents a creative, socially supportive form of labour. These resistant critiques achieved through play and walking provide a non-repressive space to experience freedom in the everyday.

The Diesel Spotter's Guide: A Visual Analysis of the Work

A system of self-imposed limitations directs how I assemble my sculptures while walking. This includes: (1) the site of each piece is limited to a location in or nearby the railroad right-of-way; (2) each site is discovered during the course of weekly walks; and (3) the work can only be assembled from materials found on-site. These everyday materials are the remnants of industry ie., spent, mundane objects that appear to have no further use. The work codifies my reaction to site and its materials, creating an ongoing conversation between objects, location and myself. Over the past seventeen months I have assembled 337 works along 85 kilometers of railroad in the Waterloo region. The following four examples of my sculptures represent the range of approaches, materials, and conditions.

0246. 43.367211 N 80.323375 W. 09.15.13, (Figure 1), is the aftermath of an assembly process resulting in collapse. At the bottom of a railway signal gantry mast lays a weathered, black panel of coroplast, on top of a wooden cross beam mounted with rubber insulators, a twisted length of sheet metal, and a flammable liquids hazard sign. All of these items are found beside the railroad tracks within ten metres of the assembled work. Chance is employed to determine the composition of the piece as its balanced structure fails and the constituent objects fall to the ground. In the case of *0267. 43.430658 N 80.558868 W. 10.05.13*, (Figure 2), an improvised, three-dimensional work is assembled alongside railway tracks. This includes a folded measuring tape that sits atop a shopping cart crushed by a locomotive and a tire sidewall. The use of a crushed shopping cart calls attention to the mischievous behaviors of those that amuse themselves by leaving such

obstacles to be destroyed on the railroad tracks. The site is located in a transitional zone between the city limits of Kitchener and the surrounding rural land.

In *0346. 43.460464 N, 80.481049 W. 01.04.14*, (Figure 3), a discarded hooded sweatshirt blows as a flag in the wind from the top of a worn and broken section of a wooden transport trailer floor. In a nod to both Dan Flavin and John Chamberlain, the shape of this floor section is reminiscent of Flavin's "*Monument*" for *V. Tatlin*, 1966-9 leaning against the front of a Chamberlain-like wrecked car. *0316. 43.458904 N 80.487111 W. 12.08.13*, (Figure 4), sits at the door of a truck maintenance garage. Here a spent hydraulic hose and used shop rag are balanced atop an orange pylon. The entire structure of the assemblage is held in balance as it bridges two upside-down stacks of empty 20 L pails. The hose is employed to function as a drawn line within the work. The title of the work refers to the GPS coordinates that denote its location. The final component of the title is the date of execution and the preceding four-digit number is the sequential number of the sculpture within the archive of works.

The assembled sculptures serve as markers and thus proof of the re-appropriation of site. As interventions, they illustrate the potential humor inherent in the everyday and the possibilities of play. The contrast of assembled objects amongst the random disorganized litter of manufacturing also critique consumerism and its capitalist production founded on the precondition of disposability. The precariously balanced sculptures and their abandonment hint at the precariousness of life, or our futile efforts to put things in order. It also alludes to the economic precariousness of both my practice and the post-industrial economic context it is situated in. Despite these uncertain conditions, my sculptures serve to inspire persistence in the face of futility and collective societal apathy.



Fig. 1. Ian McMurrich. 0246. 43.367211 N 80.323375 W. 09.15.13. Found objects. 2013.



Fig. 2. Ian McMurrich. 0267. 43.430658 N 80.558868 W. 10.05.13. Found objects. 2013.



Fig. 3. Ian McMurrich. 0346. 43.460464 N 80.481049 W. 01.04.14. Found objects. 2014.



Fig. 4. Ian McMurrich. 0316. 43.458904 N 80.487111 W. 12.08.13. Found objects. 2013.

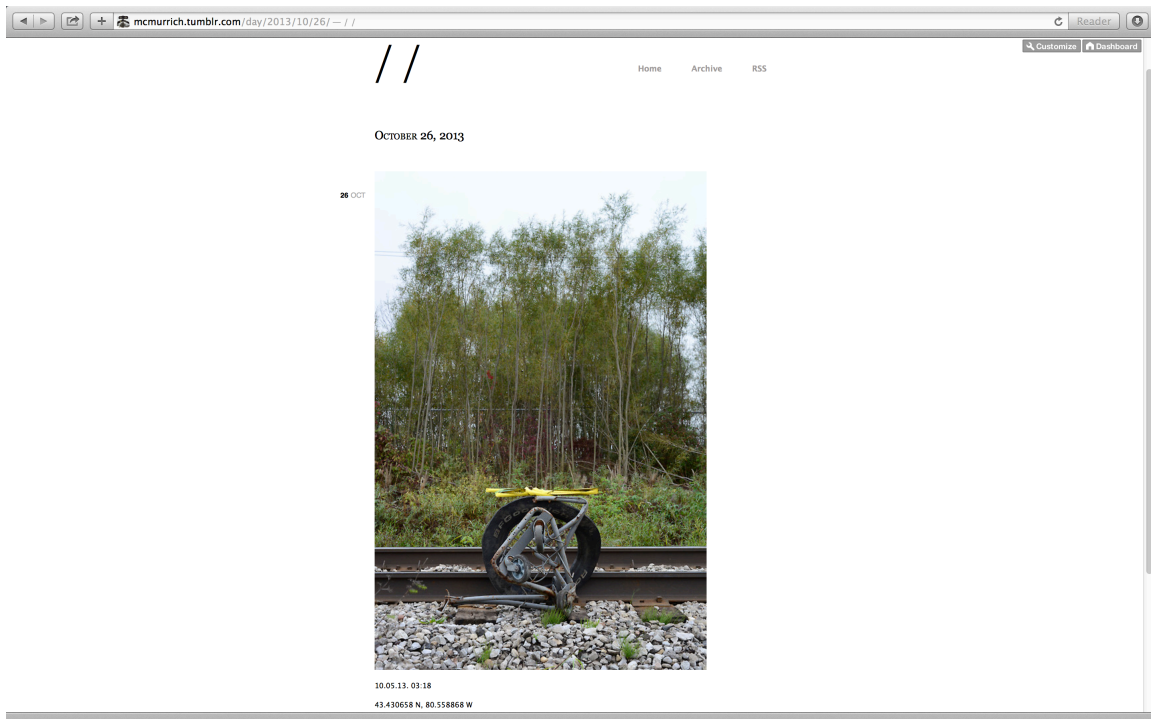


Fig. 5. Ian McMurrich. 0267. 43.430658 N 80.558868 W. 10.05.13, 2013. <http://mcmurrich.tumblr.com>. 13 December 2013.

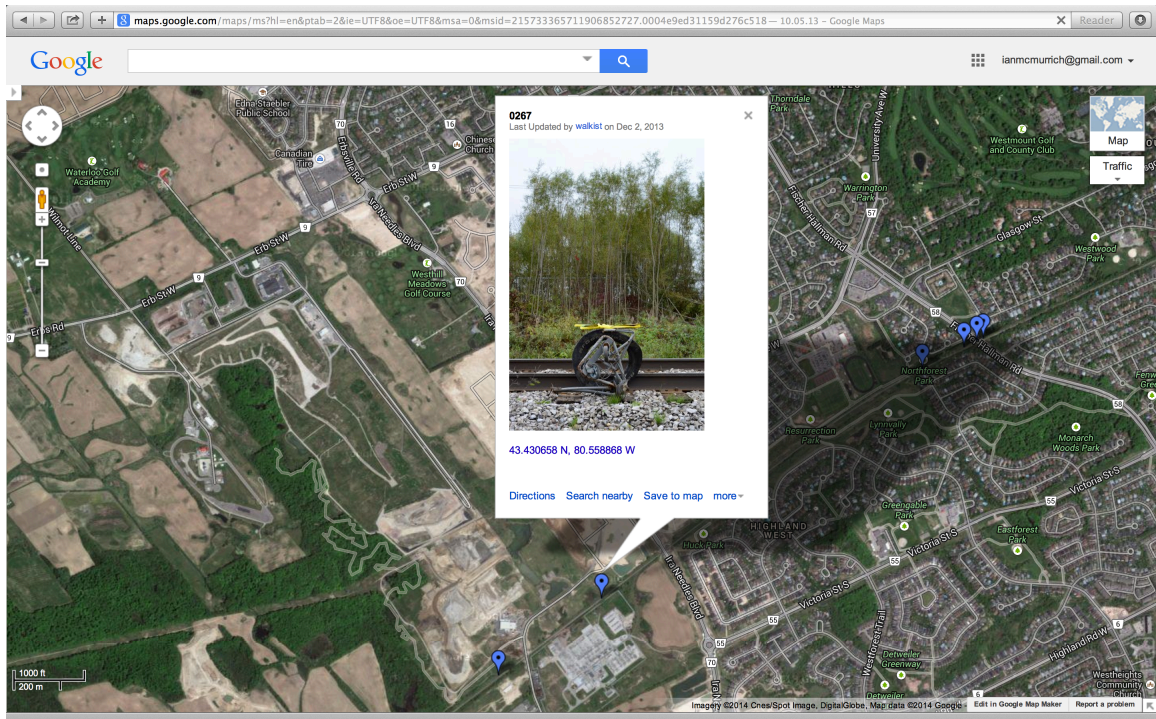


Fig. 6. Ian McMurrich. 0267. 43.430658 N 80.558868 W. 10.05.13, 2013. My Places shared Google Map. <https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=en&ptab=2&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=215733365711906852727.0004e9ed31159d276c518> 13 December 2013.

Photographic documentation of the assemblages in situ is stored as a virtual online archive (please see the Tumblr blog, titled // <http://mcmurrich.tumblr.com>) (Figure 5), and the photo-sharing website flickr <http://www.flickr.com/photos/66996457@N03/>). These digital means of distribution display the image accompanied by its respective GPS coordinates, date and time of execution. An image of my work appearing on the blog is hyperlinked to a view of Google maps, displaying the location of the original work. The course of a trek is plotted on a different Google base map to be shared with the public eg., <https://maps.google.com/maps/user?uid=215733365711906852727&hl=en&ptab=2>. Blue place marks set according to GPS coordinates indicate the beginning, end, and individual sculptures assembled along the way. Photographic documentation of each assemblage is also inserted at its corresponding place mark. The resulting map, such as the one generated from the route and works of October 5th, 2013,

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=en&ptab=2&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=215733365711906852727.0004e9ed31159d276c518&dg=feature>), (Figure 6),

documents the walk as an open work of art. The map is both documentation and invitation—a call for the online viewer to follow my route outdoors and experience the work in situ.

Track Plan: A Visual Description of the Installation

The work in the gallery is presented as a pseudo-sociological research installation that documents the activities of my fieldwork concerning the everyday. The 247 photographs on display sequentially catalogue the objects I encounter on site, and the sculptures that I create. These photographs are presented as standard 4” x 6” cheaply produced prints to reflect the vernacular of amateur photography. Videos offer an experience of site and my creative process as play whereas the sculptures serve as material remnants (a haptic experience) of my interventions. The placement of sculptures and photographic groupings are spatially mapped in the gallery to communicate both the course of a trek and how these treks cumulatively map the landscape. Functioning more like souvenirs than unique art objects, the works on exhibit reflect my experience and philosophical activity in the everyday. The gallery therefore functions similar to Robert Smithson’s non-site works of the 1960s, where various materials, maps, and photographs were presented within the gallery in place of the actual work located off-site. Thus the sculptures represent the original assemblages, but are not the original works. Removed from the context of site, they cannot function as intended and therefore become decontextualized artifacts. As surrogates they are poor stand-ins to experiencing the sculptures on site. As such they are displayed without reverence, directly on the floor (i.e. there are no plinths, platforms or customized mounts). The objects that constitute these assembled works are not permanently fixed and will be returned to the railroad right-of-way at the conclusion of the exhibition so that their relationship with site is restored. The installation also includes a large monitor at the back of the gallery, featuring a video of the post-industrial sites I typically encounter. These stationary shots provide a distilled,

documentary record of the railroad right-of-way. Two smaller monitors display footage of me at play/work, as I assemble sculptures on site. The assembling videos can be viewed online at <<https://vimeo.com/user25879692/videos>>. Collectively, the archive of photographs, maps, sculptures and videos suggest a metaphoric walk within the gallery's space—a compressed, three-dimensional map of the larger outdoor site.

As another archival element of the show, I have created a series of trading cards that depict a small selection of my assembled sculptures. As an item that originates in childhood, these cards allude to the notions of amusement and play. Labeled on the back as part of an Art Collector Series, they playfully hint at the questions, “What of any of this is art?” and “Is it in fact possible to collect it?” The trading card also represents another vernacular format, this time employed as a collectable photographic document. Displayed on a shelf, viewers are invited to handle the cards and packs are available for them to take. The collection is divided by individual treks, where the five to seven cards included in each pack represent, in order, the assembled sculptures executed during the walk. There are four treks represented in all. As the viewer looks through a pack of cards in sequential order, they metaphorically go on that walk as they encounter each route marker. A QR code included on the back provides a link for viewers to a Google map that plots that particular trek. Each map presents a prescribed route for people to consider walking. This demonstrates the crux of the installation: to move the viewer from non-site to site by way of a self-guided trek or an artist-facilitated walk where I take two to three people along one of my previous routes. Viewers can sign-up online for an artist walk. In an effort to respond to each participant, the guided treks are more open-ended than

scripted. I am a facilitator or fellow traveler, someone who walks alongside offering information and, if asked, my own stories and experiences.



| | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| ☆ | NO. 243 | ☆ | 0243. 09.15.13 | ☆ |
| | | Assembled: Cambridge, ON, September 15, 2013 Dimensions: 39 x 21 x 8 | | |
| 0243. 43.371353 N, 80.312010 W. 09.15.13 Plywood with reflector, plastic cap, rag, plastic panel. | | | | |
| LINKS | | | |  |
| http://www.panoramio.com/photo/104311171 | | | | |
| http://mcmurrich.tumblr.com/archive http://www.flickr.com/photos/66996457@N03/ | | | | |
| © | ART COLLECTOR SERIES | | | |

Figure 7. Ian McMurrich. *0243. 43.371353 N 80.312010 W. 09.15.13*. Trading card. 2014.

How to React Against the Laziness of Railway Tracks: Methodology

My methodology is based on play, chance, and a system of self-imposed limitations. For example, site is limited to a location along the railroad right-of-way and the work can only be assembled from materials found on-site. Stacking has become the predominant assembly method but I also try to subvert this standardization by incorporating contrary processes such as leaning, suspending, or tossing. I have also adopted strategies that work against conscious control of composition. I may leave an accumulation of objects as they are initially set on the ground while I rest, or document sculptures as they fail and fall apart of their own accord. Play lies at the heart of my process as I combine intuitive, improvisational assembly based on free association with more traditional, formal aesthetic decisions based on colour, form, mass, scale, and materiality.

The selection of a route is the first step. Routes are chosen after considering things such as the weather, season, and how long it has been since I last walked a particular route. I rely on the local transit system to get to my selected route, walking to a rail crossing or other point of access to the right-of-way from the closest bus stop. GPS coordinates are taken with a smartphone app to mark the starting point and the walk begins. I survey the entire right-of-way for discarded objects to assemble into sculptures. Thus, site determines what constitutes my work. This process of active looking represents the foundation of my experience while walking. Sight becomes the dominant sense. Yet, at the same time, I am also always listening for warnings of potential rail traffic.

I walk and look until I find three to five objects with which to assemble something, followed by, the intuitive act of making and playing. I tend to assemble a sculpture near the railway tracks, or wherever I happen to find the last of the constituent objects. As

soon as an assemblage is complete, its GPS coordinates are recorded and it is photographed from a variety of angles and distances. Once documented, I resume the walk and the process of active looking, leaving the ephemeral sculpture to the elements. As a result of having covered all of the railroad routes within my range, I am now returning to areas where I have previously assembled work. I often find and document the remnants of previous sculptures that have been overgrown by weeds or blown over by seasonal storms.

Once a completed work is documented, I immediately resume the process of active looking in search of new objects for the next sculpture. The length of a walk is determined by executing a threshold number of assemblages. Seven is often the maximum that I can assemble over the course of a four or five hour walk. This number is governed by the amount of discarded material available. Thus, chance intervenes again in my methodology to govern how many works are executed and how long a day's trek might be.

Following the completion of a day's walk, I begin the processes of photo editing, virtual archiving and mapping. On Google maps I verify all GPS coordinates-the beginning and end of a walk, as well as those of each sculpture. All photographs are viewed and edited. The best representative image of each assembled sculpture is digitally corrected with the adjustment of exposure and colour temperature and retained for the archive. The image is then uploaded to my virtual archive and also inserted on shared Google base maps. Throughout the past year, I have loaded one image each day.

Engine Roster: Conceptual Underpinnings

My creative practice has developed from conceptual experiments with sculpture meant to challenge expectations of meaning, production, commodification, and the material presence and permanence of the art object. Five conceptual underpinnings that frame my practice have emerged from my early experiments. They are: (1) the use of the minimum gesture that constitutes a work of art; (2) the use of the notion of the *post-readymade* as it relates to post-industrial society; (3) the engagement with the inherent narrative of *post-readymades*; (4) the encountering of the everyday as studio practice; and (5) the use of ephemerality as a strategy to challenge the production and permanence of the art object.

The formal, philosophical, and aesthetic basis of my creative enquiry can be considered as belonging to Neo-conceptual art practices. Neo-conceptualism emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a movement representing the evolving legacy of Conceptual Art. Some of the Conceptualists' interests in anti-commodification, institutional, and socio-political critique are of importance to me. Both Conceptualism and Neo-conceptualism also maintain the fundamental principle that "no matter what form it [work] may finally have it must begin with an idea" and that this "idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work".³ Thus for both movements, the idea takes precedence over aesthetics. In fact, according to Sol Lewitt the "idea becomes a machine that makes the art".⁴ All of these concerns are of interest to me.

³ Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1992), 834.

⁴ Ibid.

My practice therefore borrows from Joseph Kosuth and Sol Lewitt by using the idea of the work as a “machine for making art”.⁵ The initial idea that prompted my practice was an exploration of the threshold that defines the minimum gesture required to constitute a work of art. This proposition is “presented within the context of art as a comment on art”.⁶ Artists’ self-imposed limitations constitute what can be considered “the basic form and rules that ... govern the solution of the problem” and thus design the work.⁷ My practice also engages with the Conceptualist drive toward reductivism through the limitations I impose on gesture, materials, and spaces used during production. Reductivism is featured through the challenge I pose to the notion of permanence of the art object. This challenge is reinforced by my engagement with ephemerality through the strategy of abandoning assembled sculptures on site.

My use of the post-readymade and its engagement with the Duchampian readymade operates within his legacy as the forefather of Conceptualism. This strategy adheres to the principle of employing selected manufactured objects as raw material for creative activity. The readymade is also employed by Joseph Kosuth in his *One and Three Chairs* and later became a fundamental strategy of Neo-Conceptual artists such as Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst.

My engagement with the everyday as studio practice incorporates objects and the activity of walking as the basis for creative work. This engagement also locates studio on site to follow in the footsteps of conceptually-based artists such as Richard Long and Robert Smithson, as well as contemporary Neo-conceptual artists such as Gwen MacGregor, all

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1992), 845.

⁷ Sol Lewitt, 835.

of who base their practice on walking. The primary Conceptualist concern for the dematerialization of the art object is reflected by the distribution of my work through the Internet. Other Conceptual and Neo-Conceptual strategies that I employ include a drive toward deskilling as exemplified by my simple process of stacking, ephemerality of both the work and its documentation, and the production of printed matter as a multiple.⁸

My ephemeral works represent a re-appropriation of discarded post-industrial artifacts. Employing these objects engages with Marcel Duchamp's notion of the readymade. But the Duchampian readymade belongs to the now outdated social and economic context of Modernity and its celebration of the machine. Duchamp's gesture of employing aesthetic indifference to select and thus elevate an everyday manufactured object to the status of art derived its radicality from its presentation in the gallery context. I move beyond this gesture to the everyday where *Fountain* is reduced to its origins as a urinal and rendered a potential component of an assembled sculpture. Rather than newly manufactured consumer good, the *post-readymade* is scavenged from the detritus of an era of industrial production that has abandoned the region. With these objects I translate Duchamp's gesture into the language of the post-industrial sites encountered. It is here that I temporarily designate discarded manufactured objects as playthings for assembly into sculpture that is then left to exist in the terms of the everyday. Before my play with them adds a third narrative, *post-readymade* objects carry both the industrial tale of their initial manufacture and the post-industrial account of their previous use and disposal. My engagement with these stories takes the form of their adoption as readymade content for the work. They are raw material as I re-present these forgotten, story-laden objects in the

⁸ Hal Foster et al., "1968b," *Art Since 1900*, 2nd ed., (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 574-575.

present. Objects are not consciously selected based on their stories or the nostalgia that one may project on them. During the assembly process objects are simply building blocks. Nostalgic meaning can be attached to a work after it has been assembled. Yet the danger of such misplaced nostalgia projected by the viewer is that the critique that highlights the alienation and repression of our current economic context may be missed.

By understanding the everyday environment as ultimately creative, I locate my studio on site. This injects artistic practice into the world. The creative act of collecting and assembling the objects that I encounter connects me to their environment and contexts. My practice therefore represents a means of becoming fully engaged and integrated with the everyday. Another manifestation of this is my alignment with the imperfection and provisional nature of the everyday context in and near the railroad right-of-way. Imperfection automatically becomes part of my work, as it is inherent to the nature of conducting my practice on site. This precondition of imperfection renders the work always imperfect; it also calls attention to the failures of a post-industrial, disposable society.

Sculptures are left to the whims of nature or passersby in an attempt to preserve the integral relationship of each with its site. This gesture also engages with ephemerality as a strategy of resistance that challenges the production, permanence and preciousness of an art object by promoting its dissolution. For as long as they remain, my assembled sculptures become markers that state “I was here” and function as a form of three-dimensional graffiti. My use of the trading card and the 4” x 6” photograph to present documentation of these sculptures also engages with similar notions of ephemerality. The vernacular formats I employ mimic the ephemera of disposable material culture,

suggesting that they be viewed in the same light as a throwaway. The innate disposability of the objects I create plays with the tension that arises between such items and the assumed preciousness of the art object.

As mentioned earlier, my assembled sculptures are a means of marking the route of production. The marked route connotes my underlying activity of walking by recording and displaying the path that I take. I recognize individual walks as works of art unto themselves. Authoring a trek as a work of art, its route now exists as a physical and geographical score within which viewers may participate and interpret. The trek represents what Umberto Eco terms an *open work* or *work in movement*.⁹ By providing participants with a map that prescribes the route of the trek, or by leading them on an artist-facilitated walk, “the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee, a work *to be completed*”.¹⁰ Thus, the participant completes the work when they experience the walk. This dimension of my work engages with participatory aesthetics of Conceptualism. It is the promotion of this individual internal experience of the walk that is a focus of my current creative production.

The production of each element of my practice resists the fine art system by attempting to work around its tenets. My sculpture making and trekking maintain the core of my practice outside of the gallery or market contexts. The virtual distribution of photographic documentation, videos of sculpture assembly, and maps that present treks as open works, operates democratically, beyond the exclusive context of the gallery and is perhaps oblivious to the art market. Despite resisting the production of an art object

⁹ Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” *Participation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 36.

¹⁰ Ibid.

through my activities on site, I have produced multiples of their documentation that also engage with a more democratic form and distribution of an art object. Trading cards and photographs are not unique objects but reproducible as open-ended editions. As such they resist the notion of the preciousness of the art object and the exclusivity of the high-end art market. These items can also be distributed through alternative avenues outside of the gallery. Thus this activity is in tandem with the rest of my creative practice.

Bill of Lading: Theoretical Departures

The fundamental theoretical departure of my practice is an engagement with the everyday. Henri Lefebvre describes the everyday as a level of social reality that defines human existence. He states that it is from everyday life that genuine works of creativity are achieved.¹¹ It is in the immersive, creative environment of this level that I locate the site and engage with the materials of my work. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau states that, “to practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood”.¹² My treks along the everyday context of the railroad right-of-way represent such a practice of space that connects me to the experience of joyful childhood walking with my father along the railroad. Lefebvre touches upon what he terms “a sociology of the dustbin”, stating that what society discards comes to characterize it.¹³ This notion suggests a perspective from which to consider my practice of walking through the post-industrial spaces of the city and assembling found objects as pseudo-sociological fieldwork.

Contemporary art practice represents a form of immaterial labour as Maurizio Lazzarato argues.¹⁴ As with all work of this nature, it produces a commodity designed to distribute informational and cultural content. The artist responsible for its creation is an intellectual proletarian recognized as such only by those in control of the distribution of their work.¹⁵ Lazzarato characterizes the context of this immaterial labour by stating:

¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, 31.

¹² Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984), 110.

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, 31.

¹⁴ Maurizio Lazzarato, 1.

¹⁵ Maurizio Lazzarato, 4.

It is not simply that intellectual labor has become subjected to the norms of capitalist production. What has happened is that a new "mass intellectuality" has come into being, created out of a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the forms of "self-valorization" that the struggle against work has produced.¹⁶

A struggle against alienated work, as described by Lazzarato, is embodied in the efforts of my practice to resist complicity with immaterial labour. Strategies that seek to minimize the effort of artistic gesture subvert the production of fine art objects intended exclusively for the collector market. They take control of the distribution of creative work by operating outside of the gallery context, which enacts resistance. Through my practice of useless labour in a post-industrial setting, I resist participation in the cultural economy and its alienated labour.

Play also lies at the heart of my strategies of resistance. It represents the most constructive course of action available to resist the demands of the current economic context. Both in the aesthetic dimension and in the everyday, it serves as a source of pleasure. Herbert Marcuse speaks of Friedrich Schiller's belief that the strategy of play can address political concerns, "in order to solve the political problem, 'one must pass through the aesthetic, since it is beauty that leads to freedom'".¹⁷ He further goes on to say:

It must be understood that the liberation from the reality which is here envisaged is not transcendental, 'inner,' or merely intellectual freedom...but freedom *in* the reality.¹⁸

By realizing such freedom, play counters the repressive constraints of society and the demands of its economic hegemony. Marcuse acknowledges that, "play is *unproductive*

¹⁶ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷ Herbert Marcuse, 187.

¹⁸ Ibid, 188.

and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labour and leisure: it ‘just plays’ with the reality”.¹⁹ But he maintains that the higher values of labour and leisure cannot be sacrificed or the potential for a free society would be lost. By applying Marcuse’s logic, the absurdity of assembling refuse into ephemeral art only to leave it to fall apart and thus resume its designation as refuse can be viewed as resistant play, as a form of desublimation. As an alternative to alienated, instrumentalized labour, this engages with the higher values of productiveness and performance that are the criteria of freedom currently alien in our economic context. My play is simultaneously useless and debases the higher values of alienated labour. In doing so, it both critiques and resists the repressive and exploitative labour of immaterial production demanded by a post-industrial capitalism.

In contrast to such socio-economic concerns, the historical figure of the *flâneur* as a privileged dandy operates beyond the conditions and context of alienated labour. His interests lay in being seen by others as he strolls through the new everyday context of the arcades of nineteenth century Paris. Here he observes the goods made available by the emergent consumer culture. He “is a figure who moves through the city in an anonymous fashion and whose primary activity is looking”.²⁰ His process of walking and observation is known as *flânerie*. This “consists of strolling at an overtly leisurely pace, allowing oneself to be drawn by intriguing sights or to dawdle in interesting places”.²¹ The

¹⁹ Ibid, 195.

²⁰ Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 271.

²¹ Rob Shields, “Fancy footwork: Walter Benjamin’s notes on *flânerie*,” *The Flâneur* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

flâneur's process represents the historical roots that have since been transformed into the contemporary legacy of resistance that is the crux of my practice. As a general activity:

Flânerie is more specific than strolling. It is a spatial practice of specific sites: the interior and exterior public spaces of the city. ... While *flânerie* is an individual practice, it is part of a social process of inhabiting and appropriating urban space.²²

Like their historic counterpart, the contemporary, postmodern *flâneur* cannot choose to be idle but must re-appropriate and re-humanize their urban context. But unlike their predecessor, the postmodern *flâneur* is not privileged or free from the requirement to work. Such contemporary *flânerie* opposes consumer culture and takes on a political role of resistance. For the postmodern *flâneur*:

flânerie is still possible when one does not surrender to the Disneyland, when one does insist on questioning its paradisiacal character, disagrees with the commodity games' claim to be the ultimate utopia which is now finally realized.²³

These are the aims of the walking that is a part of my practice. They are also shared with my notion of the artist-facilitated walk in which individuals are taken out into the urban environment so that they may become familiarized with it. This re-humanizes the cityscape by means of mitigating urban alienation.

The practices of the Situationist International movement mark the transformation of the *flâneur* from the nineteenth century precedent to the contemporary, postmodern example of a political and aesthetic *flâneur*. Situationists posited the concept of psychogeography and developed their trademark activity termed *dérive*. These two precedents inform my practice of walking. Guy Debord defined the *dérive* as, “[literally:

²² Ibid.

²³ Stefan Morawski, “The hopeless game of *flânerie*,” *The Flâneur* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187.

“drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects”.²⁴ This playful, unplanned tour by two or three people through the cityscape serves as a means of engaging *psychogeographical* features and re-appropriating urban social space.²⁵ Debord defined psychogeography as:

the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective *psychogeographical* can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the spirit of discovery.²⁶

This form of investigation is inherent to my practice as I walk through the urban environment. This solo practice of *dérive* functions as a:

projection on to space of a temporal experience and vice versa ... a principle of pure mobility, absent the customary reasons for going places – a directionless mobility, unproductive, serving no purpose, which is open to the ‘enticements of the terrain’ and to encounters.²⁷

The *dérive* serves as precedent for my assembling treks. On these walks I move from the enticement of one found object to another looking for a place to assemble and document with the ultimate goal of being intentionally unproductive.

Karen O’Rourke states that mapping is rooted in wayfinding. She presents Kevin Lynch’s definition of this “as the consistent use and organization of sensory cues from

²⁴ Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” *Situationist International Online*. (Center for Digital Discourse and Culture at Virginia Tech, 9 December 2013).

²⁵ Vincent Kaufmann, “The Poetics of the *Dérive*,” *The Everyday* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 100.

²⁶ Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings* (Kelowna: Praxis (e)Press, 2008), 23.

²⁷ Vincent Kaufmann, 96.

the external environment”.²⁸ Wayfinding prompts an internal symbolic structuring or mapping of the landscape as we move through it. This process, known as *cognitive mapping*, structures and stores spatial information to produce a mental map. This map is a symbolic diagram of how perceived components of an environment fit together.²⁹ I have discovered during treks that as I move through the landscape and mentally connect previous routes, an internal map develops of the railroad as an alternative pathway through the cityscape. If urban alienation is partially due to the overwhelming challenge for most people to mentally map their local cityscape, then the undoing of this demands a renewal of one’s sense of space and place. This can only be achieved by mapping or reconstructing a symbolic organization of the landscape in one’s memory that reclaims urban space as one moves through it.³⁰ This notion offers a theoretical framework for my artist walks. They are designed as a strategy to take people back out into the urban landscape so that they begin to undo urban alienation through cognitive mapping.

²⁸ Karen O’Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 103.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 112.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 122.

The Train Crew: Relation to Contemporary Art Practice

Richard Long is a seminal artist who bases his practice on walking and it serves as the primary medium of his art. It is complemented by other gestures and is documented by means of photography, maps, or text. Long's *A Line in Ireland* of 1974, (Figure 9), depicts sedimentary rock assembled into a line on the plateau of a hill in Ireland. The artist arrived at the site by walking and assembled the sculpture from material found there. Thus Long employs the site as studio:

I like the idea that art can be made anywhere, perhaps seen by few people, or not recognized as art when they do. I think that is a great freedom won for art and for the viewer.³¹

My practice has evolved into a similar regimen. Although Long does not explore the urban environment, as his work is primarily situated in comparatively remote locations, the methodology he uses to make work, document it and exhibit it is important to me. By virtue of the mass of the rock employed in *A Line in Ireland*, the work is permanent, and yet also ephemeral at the same time, a tension that my work shares with his. Other works by Long made directly by walking, such as *A Line Made by Walking*, (Figure 8), share a similar methodology with my practice.

The assembled stone sculpture of *A Line in Ireland* may or may not remain undisturbed. Yet it is frozen in time in the photograph of 1974 that documents it. In the absence of experiencing the original in situ, the documentation becomes the work of art. In the case of *A Line Made by Walking*, (Figure 8), the photographic documentation is all that remains of the original event. Such a stance, “clearly belongs to

³¹ Richard Long, “Words After The Fact,” *Richard Long Heaven and Earth* (London: Tate, 2009), 145.

this anti-productivist, anti-commodity tradition in twentieth-century art”.³² I share this ethos, extending it to the degree that documentation of my work is primarily distributed through virtual media.



Fig. 8. Richard Long. *A Line Made by Walking*. 1967.
<http://www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/linewalking.html>
20 December 2013



Fig. 9. Richard Long. *A Line in Ireland*. 1974.
<http://www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/lineireland.html>
20 December 2013

In response to the natural materials and pastoral scenes of Richard Long’s work, Tony Cragg produces post-industrial assemblages of decidedly urban content. In his work, society’s consumption is made visible through his use of industrial detritus:

Opening one’s eyes means accepting the aesthetic and ecstatic gift of natural as well as artificial reality. Many artists, from Long to Smithson, have found this gift in meadows and mines; Cragg instead has discovered it in the urban detritus that accumulates ruined and unusable objects. In his work, the castoff sacrificed by consumption is reified – as difference and diversity –

³² Dieter Roelstraete, *Richard Long: A Line Made By Walking* (London: Afterall Books, 2010), 42.

into the castoff of art: the aesthetic sacrifice resacralizes the industrial sacrifice.³³

This same process of reification is at play in the layers of *Stack*, (Figure 10). Here Cragg has “gathered all the scraps of material in his studio, whether part of a preexisting work or not, and assembled them into two stacks, resembling configurations of geological strata”.³⁴ A staggering volume of material is organized into a solid cubic form. The scale



Fig. 10. Tony Cragg. *Stack*. 1975.
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/cragg-stack-t07428/text-summary>
8 August 2013

³³ Germano Celant, “Tony Cragg: Material and its Shadow,” *Tony Cragg* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 16.

³⁴ Lucinda Barnes and Marilu Knode, “The Interaction of Matter and Thought,” *Tony Cragg: Sculpture 1975-1990* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 30.

and mass of these works are arresting. Here Cragg conflates the expanse of Long's work to a dense aesthetic event. Layer of brick, stone, weathered or charred wood, straw, plaster, empty metal drums, foam, rolled woolen blankets, plastic pails, and plywood is stacked upon layer. Each of these items carries the story of its previous use. According to Cragg:

I do not disregard other materials. I use everything but preferably after they have been used by man. What interests me is the special critical appraisal which we apply to man-made objects and his activities.³⁵

The work's critique highlights the impact of humanity and the interaction of natural and cultural forces.³⁶

Stack literally and visually describes the basic process employed to assemble my improvised sculpture. Like Richard Long's *A Line in Ireland*, the mass of *Stack* counters its provisional appearance to suggest a permanence that is consciously avoided in my practice. Cragg's work is clearly not a minimal gesture and stands as the product of studio-based labour ultimately preserved in an institutional context. Yet *Stack* represents another seminal work that establishes a direct link between my assembled sculptures and contemporary art practices.

Abraham Cruzvillegas' *autoconstrucción* process is inspired by his family's construction of their own home, a context in which it is always changing as it is built and modified. The circumstances of this process on the southern outskirts of Mexico City determine that "the materials and the techniques we used were almost entirely

³⁵ Germano Celant, *Tony Cragg*, 110.

³⁶ Lucinda Barnes and Marilu Knode, 30.

improvised, based on whatever was available in the immediate surroundings”.³⁷ This describes my own means of assembling sculpture from everyday materials found on site. The consistency of Cruzvillegas’ *autoconstrucción* process produces an oeuvre that occurs in the same way in each example of production but that is different in each individual solution of the relations of objects.

In his *Fragment: Composta* of 2007, (Figure 11), Cruzvillegas appears to arbitrarily stack cardboard boxes that are broken down and bound for recycling atop a plastic crate.



Fig. 11. Abraham Cruzvillegas. *Fragment: Composta*. 2007.
Kim, Clara, ed. *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites*. p. 105.

³⁷ Abraham Cruzvillegas, “Autoconstrucción,” *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2013), 25.

These everyday materials are then surmounted by a weathered, dressed stone that is placed between four upright metal bars. The work's initially mundane, ubiquitous appearance is betrayed as the work suggests the head of a bull, linking it to the historical precedent of Picasso's *Bull's Head*. The work's stacked layers of material compost reflect the archeological layers of Craggs's *Stack*. The primary means of organizing found materials within my own sculpture is largely based on this same approach of stacking. Yet within this deceptively simple arrangement of objects:

There is something in that way of accumulating and of making unrelated objects coexist that, rather, reflects an unstable – and perhaps contradictory – condition between resistance and abandonment; a way of stacking that has more to do with keeping the remains of personal history, with preserving the tracks of an effort to survive.³⁸

Cruzvillegas achieves this condition at play within my own work: a practice of resistance rooted in the remains of my personal history connected to site that produces work to be abandoned.

³⁸ Verdónica Gerber Bicecci, "The Artist Constructs Himself," *Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2013), 189.

Conclusion

My struggle against work and avoidance of complicity with immaterial labour prompts minimal gestures. These gestures produced through my practice of walking and sculpture making seek to challenge and debase fine art as separate from the context of the everyday. By holding fast to activities rooted in the everyday, strategies emerge in the form of resistant play conducted in both the aesthetic and political dimensions. My practice locates studio externally on sites along the railroad right-of-way and internally through cognitive mapping. As an itinerant practitioner, I am an advocate for these marginal places that I come to know intimately through walking. Introducing such places to others by means of self-guided or artist-facilitated walks fosters connections between participants, these locations, and myself. These shared treks are opportunities for participants to become fully engaged in themselves and the railroad right-of-way. The sense of place cultivated through walking contributes to individual identity by means of what Miwon Kwon describes as a sense of belonging that is bound to the uniqueness of place.³⁹ My resistance to immaterial labour is conducted in the places found along the railroads where material labour once took place. Such sites continue to witness an unbroken history of the everyday struggle of labour. My creative practice strives to conflate art and life in an effort to liberate the culture worker and the everyday from their respective cultural ghettos.

³⁹ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 157.

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