

**LEAF, TWINE, NAIL, AND STICK: Everyday Life in Composition,
Collection, and Creative Non-Fiction.**

By

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PREFACE

“Everyday life is the measure of all things: of the fulfillment or rather the nonfulfillment of human relations; of the use of lived time; of artistic experimentation; of revolutionary politics.” ~ Guy Debord [1]

In the spring of 2003 I was in a van with a handful of musicians with whom I was playing regularly. We were on our way to a performance in Petaluma, an old farming town about one hour north of San Francisco. We were all rather tired and generally weary from a long month of shows. There is always a certain ebb and flow of the live performer’s life, whereby s/he drifts in and out of excitement or frustration with performing. I would like to believe that this does not effect the work, but I’m quite certain that it does.

So I was sitting in the back of this van without windows amidst instrument cases and amplifiers and drums, chatting with the other players. I was mildly dizzy as was always the case riding around in the back of a van without windows, and I would often close my eyes and just listen to the other voices. The inside of the van was padded to protect any equipment that might fly around, though we generally tied everything down for our own safety. As we came out of the city into the farmland, the smell of earth and animals began to drift into the vehicle. I have always found these smells soothing and when others complain of cow manure, I feel a certain sense of calm. I have always equated this with using manure to fertilize rose bushes in my grandfather’s back yard, but also believe that it could be an

inherent part of my evolutionary biology; a long tendon reaching back into the nature of my past. As I look back on that night now, my memories are filled with a certain nostalgia and warmth.

I don't remember much about the performance itself, aside from the wine bar where we played being dimly lit by hundreds of red candles and sparsely populated. What I recall most is the time spent traveling there and back; the stop at a mediocre Mexican restaurant on the way home. I remember watching the streetlights cascade on the interior walls of the van, and reflect off of the shiny gear. I remember talking about redwood trees up on the hills above Berkeley and Oakland. I remember laughing.

And so we dropped people off one by one in some sort of directional arc from west to east, then south to north. I was the last to go, retrieving my car from the van owner's house and making the short, fifteen-minute journey home. I parked in front of my flat that was on a street mixed with residences, shops, restaurants, and felt compelled to walk up the street. It seemed to me for some reason that the night was not ready to close its eyes and slumber. And so I walked. As I was walking, something occurred to me: perhaps this walk, the drive to and from the show, the Mexican food, the back of the van, all of it, is just as important a part of the experience as the music itself.

Three months later, I rode my bicycle from Berkeley, California to Mexico. It was the first time in nearly a decade that I had stepped away from making music to devote myself to something entirely different. I had feared, that taking any time away from music would somehow diminish my work, but I discovered something entirely different and unexpected. I found that the documentation of my bicycle trip through words, photos, drawings, etc., and the experience itself, was equally as creative and profound as any experience I had previously had making 'art.' It was then, in the summer of 2003, that I began to immerse myself in the idea that everyday life was a valid and important component to art, and especially *my art*. It

was an awakening of sorts, and led me to begin incorporating daily life into all of my work, from music, to film, to writing and contextualizing found objects.

ABSTRACT

LEAF, TWINE, NAIL, AND STICK: EVERYDAY LIFE IN COMPOSITION, COLLECTION, AND DOCUMENTARY FILM.

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This thesis documents how my media artwork and process of using everyday life has developed. In my current work, I am exploring the broad intersection of fiction, poetry, history, documentary film, and sound; especially how all of them relate to our lived experience of daily life. I ask myself the questions: “What aspects of our daily lives are ‘fictionalized’ as they become our own histories,” and “How does an acute awareness of this become a part of what I create?” My art practice draws from a variety of disciplines including integrated electronic art, ethnography, musical composition and improvisation, poetry, fiction, experimental documentary, collection, observation, and routine. I combine these influences and means of working to inform both my process and the resulting work.

I have worked in music for over a decade, dividing my time equally between composition and improvisation. Much of my work has been informed by various pieces of fiction, poetry, or a combination of both. After discovering the work of Raymond Carver, I became increasingly interested in using daily life as a metaphor for the larger arc of “life,” with great effort to focus on the minutiae. Combined with a growing concern about the

degree to which humans are detached from the natural world, and their sense of 'place,' I look to observation, collection and documentation of daily life to form and guide my practice.

My goal is to illuminate the way in which I see daily life functioning as an artistic tool and guide for myself, and use that to make a creative body of work. By collecting objects, stories from other people, or sounds, from our lived experience, we become acutely aware of our surroundings. In *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick*, I visited the same place in the woods on a regular basis for four months. I collected objects, both 'natural' and human made, wrote observations in a journal, and made field recordings. I then took this 'data' of my lived experience and wrote a semi-fictional, autobiographical, narrative influenced by the objects and observations. The field recordings became a part of a larger, one hour composition which was presented on January 30th 2007 as a piece of an installation including the objects and writing.

This thesis further describes the significance of my process, and how it relates to daily life, and my thoughts on the human disconnect from nature. All of my work, and especially the work focused on in this writing, has had a profound impact on my perception of place and self. Through my work I have come to a greater understanding of how everyday life functions in the context of art, and I hope that viewers of my work will in turn begin to examine their own daily life through different eyes.

Part I. Introduction

“What’s needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we’ve been pillaging from others. Not the exotic any more, but the endotic.” [1] (pp. 177) ~ Georges Perec

What does it mean to consider the art of everyday life? How can everyday life *exist as art*? Is it simply a matter of recontextualizing objects and experiences? I cannot help but ask myself these questions as an artist. This thesis explores how I integrate everyday life in both my *process* of working, and how I use everyday life as a means to inform, define, and guide. I detail how my methods of working, especially in writing, composing, recording, and the collection of found objects, encompass my ideas about the simplicity and deep importance of daily life as art. Through observation of daily life, I have also come to focus much of my creative energy on the human disconnect from nature, as I have found the two inseparable. In finding ways to understand nature through the lens of everyday life, I then use this exploration creatively in specific works of art. My practice draws from a variety of disciplines including musical composition and improvisation, video, fictional and autobiographical writing, poetry, documentary film, and ethnography. By integrating these various mediums, I strive to appeal to multiple senses.

The piece that I will guide us through, *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick*, was a multi-layered installation, with visual, sound, and written components. First, I made field recordings of the location, and incorporated these into an hour-long electro-acoustic composition, intended to mimic my time in the woods. Second, were journal entries, which evolved over time into writing about memories based on my observations. The third component of the piece was a collection of thirty-two objects from the location, displayed in

jars, which were lit with small LED lights. (Images below in Figs. 1-4) The following pages will discuss briefly the artists who have influenced my work, detail my process of observing daily life, and explain how my work grew into its current state.



Fig 1. Photo of *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick* Installation



Fig 2. Close shot of isolated table with jars and writing in installation



Fig 3. Close shot of jars and artifact tabs in installation



Fig 4. Jars at night illuminated by LED

After a decade of working as a musician, spending much time in recording studios and on the road performing, I began to realize that the time en route was ultimately as valuable to me as the time spent ‘making music.’ The realization came to me that the driving and loading gear in and out of clubs and eating in bad restaurants was equally as important a part of the ‘art’ as the ‘art itself’. In other words, I began looking at the entire evening as important, not solely the ‘performance.’ In some way, the evening in its entirety became an extension or part of the staged performance itself.

In conjunction with the documentation of daily life, I am interested in exploring the ideas concerning the human disconnect from “nature” and how the disconnect impacts our *perception* of daily life. This topic, is also prevalent in all of my work, and forms another layer of depth to both my process and art. This new body of specifically installation work beginning with *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick* saw its inception in the summer of 2007.

Discoveries in Spain.

Last summer during a trip to Spain and Morocco, I found myself somewhat ill, standing in a bookstore waiting for a vacant restroom. Though I couldn't be entirely sure, it seemed my wife and I had acquired a parasite or bacteria of some sort, which wreaked havoc on our digestive systems. We had made our way from the African continent back to the Iberian Peninsula, and stumbled quite by luck into a "healthy vegan restaurant." There was a faint light in the bookstore, and ambient music floating in from a restaurant that was connected through broad, open doors. Everything was wooden and natural, and there was a certain elegant but genuine air to the space. Returning from Morocco, after some rather harrowing experiences, it was incredibly soothing to say the least. As I waited, I stood thumbing through a book about an ecologist's journey to find his place in the world, and found myself thinking about 'place'. Somewhere in the middle of the book (ironically, whose title nor author do I recall) he detailed an exercise that he suggested all humans, especially those living in cities should experience. The exercise was seemingly simple: find a place in the woods as close to your home as possible, and go there one hour every day for one year; and observe. I was struck with the realization that at some point in history, all people had experienced this, or at least something very close. So what had happened? How had we become so greatly distanced from "the natural world;" and what did this have to do with my work as an artist? Though the task seemed daunting, exhilarating, and nearly impossible to me, I felt a strong push to do this daily exercise. So my wife and I came home, weary and worn from traveling in an economically stifled country and bearing a North African parasite. The fatigue came on two levels, one physical and the other emotional. It was of course physically exhausting to deal with a parasite. Yet it was arguably more challenging to endure the reality that my daily existence is one of such great privilege compared to that of

people living in North Africa, though that encompasses a long explanation and discussion of economics, foreign policy, and many other smaller details.

Beginning the journey into the wilderness of my own small part of the world, I was not certain how this daily exercise would manifest in my work, though the everyday life focus appealed to me greatly. Gary Snyder cites the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss: (he) “once said something like ‘Art survives within modern civilization rather like little islands of wilderness saved to show us where we came from.’ [2] (pp. 42) This idea is compelling, for it seems that those “islands” Levi-Strauss was speaking of have become increasingly smaller and less accessible to most people. This is a dangerous predicament. What happens to a culture that has lost its connection to the landscape or the places that we come from? This notion became a central theme in my work, and the more time I spent in the woods, the more it became evident *what* I would make from this time. An installation, with multiple media seemed the most fitting way to explore what was a multi-sensory experience.

In realizing the piece as an installation, it was important to consider what it is that makes an installation successful. There are a number of ways that installations combining multiple media work well. Many sound artists and visual installation artists have kept their work simple by presenting something direct and focused. Annea Lockwood for example, has recorded the Hudson River in numerous locations over many years, and then presents the recordings alone, with nothing more than the sound and a physical map. This piece titled *A Soundmap of the Hudson River* is effective precisely because of its simplicity. This is difficult when using multiple media as the elements must all connect to one another. With *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick* it was not my intent that the connections be obvious, for that would leave little room for the viewer to place him/herself into the work, making their own connections. Instead, the goal was to push the boundary of connectedness. This was a concern of mine as I began the process of observing and gathering. How was I to connect the various elements of this work, and still allow room for the viewer to participate emotionally?

The project began simply by going into the woods every day for a week or two, until a location was found that felt good. My goal was to visit the same place, in order watch the changes over time in one isolated location. This would give me a better sense of the change on a microscopic level.

One of my initial goals was to learn all of the flora and fauna that existed there, being able to name them and identify their tracks and droppings; to observe and to collect. I wanted to discover and define my own small piece of ‘wilderness,’ and understand what it meant to my artistic practice. My initial intent was to teach myself about the intricacies of ‘nature’ in the traditional usage of the word. Three things quickly became clear: first, it is incredibly difficult to do this *every day*. Second, there are many interesting things in any given place when one looks carefully, not all products of the ‘natural world.’ And lastly, in my case, that this acute observation sent all of my thoughts inward. The time spent simply sitting in the woods functioned as a sort of mnemonic device or mirror, which brought forth the history of my own lived experience. In this way, there is a certain reflexivity in this work. I think of the folding as a fist curling inward, touching new places on itself. It was through the process of observing and collecting items from this one place in the woods, that I came to question my notions of “the woods” and the accepted definition of “nature,” and consider what the written component of this work would encompass with regard to the natural environment.

PART II. “Nature.” Or, “What is Nature?”

Although in common English and American usage ‘nature’ is sometimes used to mean ‘the outdoors’ and set in opposition to the realm of development, the word ‘nature’ is best used in its specific scientific sense, referring to the physical universe and its rules --the ‘laws of nature’ in this use is equivalent to the Greek ‘physics’. In

other words, nature means "everything", the agricultural, the urban, the wild mountains and forest, and the many stars in the sky are all equally phenomena. 'Nature' is our reality. [2] (pp. 47)

Gary Snyder, here suggests that nature goes far beyond the 'accepted definition or use' of the word to imply the woods, but extends to everything. Having studied Zen Buddhism for many years in Japan, Snyder is perhaps saying is that all things are connected, and so all things are 'nature.' There is a long history of what have become defined as 'nature writers' immersing themselves in a natural setting, which then informs and inspires their writing. In this section, I will briefly discuss several canonical texts of the nature writing genre, and explain how my work draws from and builds on their writing.

Perhaps the most obvious example is *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau spent two years and two months living "alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts." [3] (pp 3) Thoreau then wrote extensively about the natural world in which he was immersed, as well as numerous aspects of his daily life. Both descriptive and personal, he observes and interprets his experience in his writing.

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is Earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluvial trees next the shore are slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging eyebrows. Standing on the smooth sandy beach at the east end of the pond, in a calm September afternoon, when a slight haze makes the opposite shore-line indistinct, I have seen whence came the expression 'the glassy surface of a lake.' [3] (pp 176)

It is clear in this quotation that Thoreau is both observing and expressing his personal thoughts on his experience. His writing inspired mine a great deal, in the way that it is moved by the personal experience he was having at that time. His observations of nature, are intrinsically linked to the outcome of his work, for essentially the two are inseparable.

There are a number of recent authors who have also written about their everyday experiences in nature. The most notable for me are Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* and Rick Bass,' *Winter*. In the introduction of *Desert Solitaire* Abbey writes: "About ten years ago I took a job as a seasonal park ranger in a place called Arches National Monument near the little town of Moab in southeast Utah. Why I went there no longer matters; what I found there is the subject of this book." [4] (pp xi) the book then goes on to examine personal experience in a natural setting. There are passages where Abbey is simply describing his experience:

I was sitting out back on my 33,000 acre terrace, shoeless and shirtless, scratching my toes in the sand and sipping on a tall iced drink, watching the flow of evening over the desert. Prime time: the sun very low in the west, the birds coming back to life, the shadows rolling for miles over rock and sand to the very base of the brilliant mountains. [4] (pp 42)

Then there are other sections, where he writes more about his opinions on wilderness and the natural world.

Wilderness. The word itself is music. Wilderness, wilderness.....We scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound of it draws all whose nerves and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned, deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination. [4] (pp 166)

Without prior knowledge of Abbey's body of work, it is clear to the reader that Abbey had strong feelings about the human disconnect from nature. Rather than write in any form of objective manner about his experience and thoughts regarding the natural world, Abbey is unrelenting in his criticism of society's degradation of the natural world. During the first iteration of my writings, I too was including such ruminations about the cultural shift away from the natural environment. I decided although that it suited the installation better to allow the viewers to make their own conclusions about our relationship with nature, based on the stories and observations I made.

Rick Bass approaches writing a bit differently in his book *Winter: Notes From*

Montana. Writing in the tradition of a modern day *Walden*, Bass recounts his journey from the city to the Yaak Valley in Montana, the most remote place he can find. Moving to a small cabin, he finds out quickly just how little he knows about living in this harsh, new environment, one where the natural world has a strong presence. As he adjusts, he discovers a new life where only the bare essentials are needed to survive. Except for a handful of neighbors and the regulars at the Dirty Shame tavern (the lone establishment anywhere within fifty miles), Bass shares his valley with various wild animals, lots of snow and silence. Like *Walden*, he suggests that tremendous value exists in the wilderness away from the roaring crowds.

It's not like we're total hermits, only that most of us want, as Thoreau said, to examine our lives, as well as the world we live in—a world that, up here, is not controlled by others as much as by, believe it or not, one's self. We all get such letters from family, and even friends, saying: It's too cold... But you need a telephone... How do you get by without electricity... What about the animals... You're losing your share... You're missing out. .. About moving away from things in order to examine other things, Jim Harrison says it well too: 'The woods can be a bit strange. It takes a long time to feel you belong there and then you never really belong in town. [5] (p 116)

Different from *Abbey*, Bass never really directly addresses the subject of detachment from nature through the lens of cultural criticism. Instead, Bass simply tells his story, and allows the reader to draw from the writing whatever they may.

Although I initially intended to write in both ways for the piece, it became clear at some point that to better accentuate the connectedness of the elements, I should choose to focus on one aspect of writing. My writings seek to reference these works and use them as a leaping off point for the other elements in the installation. In my case, as I sat in the woods each day contemplating both the natural environment and the roads and trees surrounding that environment, I was led into my own personal history and consciousness. My investigation of place led directly to a deeper level of personal writing.

To be honest, this personal exploration in the midst of a meditative and “natural” environment did not surprise me. R. Murray Schafer speaks in his book *The Soundscape* of how we as beings have an inherent drive to classify information.

Why classify? We classify information to discover similarities, contrasts and patterns. Like all techniques of analysis, this can only be justified if it leads to the improvement of perception, judgment and invention...Any classification system or taxonomy is surrealistic; for surrealistic art also depends on bringing together incongruous or anachronistic facts, which nevertheless somehow snap together to illuminate new relationships. [6] (pp. 133)

So as I sat each day watching the forest change slowly over time, I became intensely aware of my self and began thinking further about nature writers, and how they too became quite personal and internal with their writings. Gary Snyder even writes that:

For a writer or an artist to become an advocate for nature, he or she must first stumble into some connection to that vast world of energies and ecologies....(unfortunately) almost all of later ‘high civilization’ has been a type of social organization that alienates humans from their own biological and spiritual heritage. [2] (pp 44)

I take this to mean quite simply, that we have become detached from the natural world.

Keeping in mind my earlier definition of nature, this would suggest that we have become detached from much of our own lives. He later writes in the same article that:

we must see the organic world as a great feast, a *puja*, to which we are invited guests, and also, sooner or later, a part of the meal. We can be grateful for that. We can enter into that process, but with gratitude and care, not an arrogant assumption of human privilege. This cannot come from “thinking about” nature; it comes from a being *within* nature. [2] (pp 45)

The idea that society as a whole became more interested in sensational things, rather than the simplicity of daily life, underlined culture in Guy Debord’s, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Though the book was arguably more about economics, market economy and the impact this had on governance, it also called into question what it might mean to disrupt the stupor of modern society, much in the same way that the Canadian publication “Adbusters” is doing today. [7] Debord was suggesting that the lives of the general public were so

entrenched in routine, that small spontaneous acts could easily help to shift society in major ways. In essence, he was asking people to stop paying such attention to the ‘spectacular’ in society, and to notice the seemingly mundane beauty of everyday life. The Situationists were interested in situations, and the movement in France influenced number of artists working with the everyday. One of the most notable from the decades following , was the novelist Georges Perec . He states that:

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extraordinary: the front page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist...behind the event there has to be a scandal, a fissure, a danger, as if life reveals itself only by way of spectacular, as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal...The daily papers talk of everything but the daily...What’s really going on, what we’re experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? how should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? [1] (pp 177)

This idea was at the front of the French Situationist movement in the late sixties, and has become in vogue again in North American arts culture. I am interested in how moving our gaze from the spectacular to the ordinary might again shift culture. As media has slithered into a more homogenous role in North American culture, we are presented less of the ‘ordinary.’ This in turn greatly impacts our cultural perception. The homogeneity also has a numbing effect on culture. Many people have become interested *only* in the spectacular.

Were we to find a means of encouraging people to pay attention to the simple and mundane, this would have the effect of waking people up. The term the Situationists used for ‘waking’ people from the predictable hum of life was *Derive*. They felt that acts which shook people out of the cultural stupor and back into the dizzying beauty of daily life, would have a profoundly positive effect on culture. In my work, I seek to do this in more subtle ways. Rather than create acts which cause people to look at their lives differently (this is arguably yet another form of the spectacular) I am interested in simply looking at my daily life and

sharing it with others. I believe this will open people to looking at their own everyday life in a different way. As I began my journey into the woods, I was quite aware that in some way, this was my own response to the Situationists: this was my own means of attempting to shift the important elements of my existence and my gaze from the sensational to the ordinary.

So I wondered why no one else was in the woods. It seems odd to me but if I were to drive to the mall right now, there would be huge crowds of people; yet if I were to walk a mile to the woods, the vast parcel of land there would likely be empty. What does this say about the values of our society? It says to me that our priorities have left the wonder of daily life and the natural world, and fled to the shopping malls and television screen. As a means of freeing culture from the limitations of consumerism and sensationalized media, I propose that we pay more attention to the minutiae of our lives. Author Ben Highmore explains this well, when speaking about novelist Georges Perec: “(The) everyday requires a ruthless systematic attention that, while it can be read as simply eccentric, suggests the possibility of an anthropology that has yet to differentiate between the significant and the insignificant.”

[1] (pp. 176) The shift from everyday life to the sensational, has thrown us far from nature. But in order to understand our detachment from nature, we must first consider what nature is, the role that it once had, and the role that it plays now in North American culture. Ultimately, we must question what impact this is having and will continue to have on the function of culture.

Part III. Collection and Communication

“Collect items you fancy and that for different reasons attract your attention. Remember also to collect and study things that seem for the moment to be meaningless or irrelevant. The twists and turns of the creative process may lead you back to an important encounter with something that at first seemed quite neutral, or

even something that made you feel repelled or exasperated.” ~ Maja Solveig

Kjelstrup Ratkje [8] (pp. 216)

Through history, collecting as a means of investigating the natural world and everyday life stands as a vital inspiration for a wide variety of artistic genres, from music, literature, installations, to visual arts. Some of them include collected materials in the work itself, while for others the artifacts and themes of nature are more philosophical or political. These artists seek an investigation of lived experience and the relationship to place, through collecting. By recontextualizing objects and sounds from the natural world, many artists have raised questions about the definition of “nature,” and how objects and sounds are culturally perceived across sensory modes. This section and the next focus on the use of collected materials from nature, in the form of field recordings and found objects, with examples of artwork from a few artists creating in various mediums for whom collection and nature is central to the pieces they make.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, art, and especially the art of the everyday and collected objects, saw a profound shift because of the Dada movement. The term “ready-made” was used by the French artist Marcel Duchamp in the early 1900s to refer to manufactured (mass-produced) objects, as used in the context of art (as opposed to their original intended uses). [9] Duchamp often used ready-made items in his work and signed them with a fictitious name (R. Mutt), most notably his piece “Fountain” an overturned urinal (1917) and “The Bicycle Wheel,” an overturned wheel attached to a stool, (1913.) These pieces began a dialogue, which continues today, about what art is and who determines what art is. Duchamp stated, “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He *chose* it. He took an ordinary article of life, and placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for

that object.” [15]

Duchamp’s work has had an immense and lasting effect on art, and especially on the display of objects in museums. The notion of display is a longstanding one in Western culture; in fact, humankind has pilfered the earth looking for artifacts to put into our museums, such as the British Museum, which displays the treasures of Egypt. While horrifying to many, this paved the way for greater inquiry into the notion of mass produced objects.

Duchamp’s challenge of what art is has continued to resonate throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. By taking an ordinary, everyday object such as a urinal, Duchamp posed the idea that the most mundane of things could be seen as “art” when displayed in the proper gallery context. Furthermore, “high art” appeared under fire in this display of the banal. Duchamp opened the door for the presentation of an art that was *collected* and not *made* by the artist. The Dada movement, may have been the beginning of a long history of artists who collect and display their collections in gallery settings.

In the mid-twentieth century artists such as Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and Robert Rauschenberg continued to challenge the high-low art edge, incorporating found objects in their work. Picasso and Schwitters both worked extensively with collage. Schwitters is best known for his work wherein he took found materials and made collage out of them. Though the arrangement is solely his, the objects and artifacts were simply items he found and collected. This work began for Schwitters in the early parts of the twentieth century and he called them Merz. This Merz, or collage, has had a profoundly wide reaching influence on artists. For example, Rauschenberg’s “Monogram” (1959) used a taxidermy goat, a rubber tire, and a tennis ball, something that was unprecedented in the high art world. Without the work of Schwitters, it is unimaginable that Rauschenberg’s work would have been taken seriously.

If we leap forward to the last third of the twentieth century, collection becomes more

widely practiced and artists, arguably through the influence of Duchamp, and those who followed began working with found objects more. There are a number of artists who have gained prominence in the last few decades, (1990's-early 2000's) who have made collecting ordinary, found objects, the central focus of their work., from Karilee Fuglem's photographs of dust bunnies, titled "Fluff" (1997) to Susan Coolen's collection of found paper airplanes titled "Pliez" (2006). In *Fluff* Fuglem collected numerous samples of 'dust bunnies,' which she then photographed very close-up at a high resolution with a macro lens. The result is a group of images of colorful and beautiful landscapes, relatively indecipherable without previous knowledge. In this piece, Fuglem directs our attention to the most mundane of everyday life, and ask that we perceive it, or at least think about it in different terms.

Similarly, Coolen's collection of found paper airplanes has the same effect. Often, these are items that we see as trash to be discarded. Coolen then presents them in a way that brings beauty to the paper airplanes. What I find most compelling about this work, is the extent to which it allows me, the viewer to enter into the work and place my own thoughts and memories in with the gathered airplanes. An object that is easily seen as ugly, becomes beautiful simply by volume and context.

Collecting and displaying has been widely accepted in the art world. In her book *Evidence*, Candy Jernigon writes:

In 1980, as I set out on my first trip to Europe, I decided to make a book that would contain any and all physical proof that I had been there: ticket stubs, postcards, restaurant receipts, airplane and bus and railroad ephemera. On successive trips, these collections grew to include food smears, hotel keys, found litter, local news, pop tops, rocks, weather notations, leaves, bags of dirt--anything that would add information about a moment or a place, so that the viewer could make a new picture from the remnants. Objects emerged for me as 'icons' for particular cities and these objects became the material for *Evidence*. [10]

Jernigon not only collects ordinary objects, but also documents her daily life as a source for art. By collecting objects and using these objects as a mean of documenting everyday life, the process of placing this documentation in a gallery setting questions the cultural definitions

of nature, and furthers Duchamp's challenge to the definition of art. Jernigon highlights that there is a blurring of disciplines where the collected items begin to function as a roadmap of one's existence. Similarly Peggy Diggs' 2006 piece *Recollection 2*, displays objects that she collected, in over 200 jars with small pieces of writing on the jars. Through visual and written allusions, her work triggers metaphors and personal associations, which allow the viewer to witness the transformation of ordinary objects into something compelling and extraordinary. The objects were all mundane items gathered from her life. The stories, which were generally unrelated to the objects in the jars, brought a wonderful complexity to the piece, and invited the viewer in, showing us that things found are often deeply valuable.

Artist Duncan Cameron displays found objects in his work and writes:

My work looks like science, and if you walk through the door of the sort of exhibitions I'm having at the moment, it looks like a real archive a careful collection of, say insects. But all these collected insects have been killed on car windscreens, or swatted in kitchens, or found underfoot, or in cob-webs and lamps. I write about where I found each one, so where you'd expect to see a Latin name you find a little story - for example, found on a sunny road, or a tree in France. And so the stories of these little lives that have been lost is what the works about. And then you begin to hint at the passing of time, the death of all these things around us. [17]

Through observing the world and collecting, artists transform what they gather, from discarded objects to field recordings to garbage and more, into something unique. No longer are the objects of our landscape trash, worthless, or even ordinary. Instead they are all ripe with the possibility of being recontextualized, organized and placed in this long continuum of art incorporating found objects. Because of their placement in the art world, found objects change form and draw forth questions about the culture in which we live and our perceptions of nature. In the book *Trash*, which is about the re-contextualizing of garbage, Gay Hawkins writes:

The problem with environmental critiques of commodity culture is that they assume a clear separation between culture and nature. No matter how they configure the relation between culture and nature, they are seen as ontologically and materially distinct from each other. This dualistic thinking inhibits any serious consideration of the specificities of trash and our relations with it. [11] (pp 57)

By collecting and placing discarded artifacts in a museum setting, artists begin to question changes in the natural world, contrasting with human-made environments. Gary Snyder perhaps says it best when he states that “nature is our reality,” [2] I therefore suggest that all of the artists mentioned in this section share a common theme, which is that their collecting and recontextualizing of objects functions as a means of investigating the natural world and everyday life. In doing so these artists are investigating our lived experience and our relationship to place, by taking objects from the natural world, and re-contextualizing them, whether those things gathered are field recordings or sticks, or pieces of plastic, the outcome is more or less the same.

I have collected for as long as I can remember. By gathering and holding onto things that I have encountered and selected from my surroundings, I feel more directly connected to *my* sense of ‘place.’ This connection helps me to develop a greater understanding of the world around me, and my place in that world. My current work began when I read an author in Spain, as mentioned earlier, who suggested that to better develop a relationship with nature, one should visit the same place in the woods every day for one year. I have attempted to visit the same place in the woods every day, and the exercise has had a strong effect on my perception of this specific place near my home, and furthermore has helped me to develop a greater understanding of why I collect.

In 1937, German intellectual Walter Benjamin, began to question what art meant in an age of mass produced goods.

In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new. [12] (pp 218)

What happens when we view the artifact as no longer being a unique object? What does it then become? I would like to examine that thought, and ask what art means in a world where the art of living, the art of nature, and the art of everyday life have become distant to us, and objectified. As things become commodities in a culture that values the sensational and the sameness of mass-produced goods, collecting then becomes a means of identifying with artifacts as unique objects, and as priceless commodities – as in the antique and high art world. As soon as we begin to see a stick in the woods in Troy, New York as being different than a stick in the woods in Muir Woods in California, we have begun to develop a relationship with place.

As my work began with my walking slowly into the woods every day to observe, I really had no idea that I would begin collecting. Initially I felt that my purpose there was to observe; to listen, see, touch, smell, and possibly even to taste. I was at the time, re-reading one of my favorite books, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, by David Abram. In the preface he writes: “Direct sensuous reality in all its more-than-human mystery, remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically generous vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us.” [13] (pp. Preface; x) It was precisely this “direct sensuous reality” that I was (and am) seeking. As the changes in society especially after the time of the Industrial revolution have brought us further and further away from an agrarian lifestyle, we have collectively lost touch with the sensual pleasures of living. As more humans have moved away from rural living and into the cities, our sensual reality has become less mysterious and with that increasingly more predictable. It is my belief that in order to reconnect with the “more-than-human” mystery of the world, I would have to observe it as closely as possible, acutely focusing my attention on one location. I felt that with regards to

my time spent in the woods, the most important aspect of that time was for me to connect with the natural landscape.

As I became accustomed to the place I was visiting, I began noticing the minutiae and small details of what was taking place. I noticed for example that there was more than one type of orange spider, when all of the months previous I had thought them the same. I noticed the different behavior of mosquitoes based on temperature and humidity. And so I would sit and watch. After about a week of just sitting and watching/listening, I felt compelled to write about the experience. My first journal entry below:

September 3rd, 2007. A warm morning. Today, as much as I would like not to, I focus my attention on a lawnmower in the distance. It is incredible to me how reliant we have become on convenience and comfort in this world, at the cost of so many other valuable things. The crows begin to chatter loudly (as always) and draw my gaze upward. A diesel truck, or so it sounds, passes on a road nearby. Yellow leaves fall as the wind flexes, and one lands lightly on my lap. For some reason I resist the urge to touch it, telling myself that I will wait a while to do so. Mosquitoes hover around me this morning, likely the cause of a rise in temperatures and though they bother me terribly, I resist the urge to clap them, as I am recording for the first time today. I wonder why mosquitoes eat blood? Do they eat anything else? So many spiders, though seemingly all of the same type. Although wait a second...I just noticed a larger, black 'daddy-long-legs' type, which with the orange one, and I just remembered the tiny little, iridescent red one, makes three. There are an incredible amount of them. I am just mesmerized by the spiders. Touched I could even say, by how differently they, the ants, and the caterpillars move. This difference is a beautiful thing. I think I would be a spider, my legs rising and floating over leaves, like weightless ships on the broad and violent sea.

As I mentioned previously, I began to notice the vast variety of biological differentiation present in the woods, and began asking myself questions such as: “I wonder why mosquitoes eat blood?” These questions lead to a desire to investigate further through writing. This was my way of processing the sensory information I was gathering immediately. It quickly became clear to me, that some sort of dialogue (even if it was a dialogue with myself) was an important part of this process. While I knew from the inception of the idea that I would make recordings of the woods, I had no previous expectation regarding writing. It was a natural progression, for as I mentioned earlier, I agree that it is basic human nature to organize any system that we pass through. To some degree, writing about my time there was a way of organizing the experience into something that I could understand and later incorporate into art. I certainly noticed lives, albeit animal and insect, happening on a level which I had never been aware of to that extent.

After noticing a type of spider that I had not seen before, I sat and watched this spider for some time. It first seemed to be moving a minuscule stick out of the way, and then began working on making a web. Every so often the spider would leave the area where it was working and then return. I became somewhat obsessed with why the spider would leave and what it was doing. Of course there was no answer for me. I believe that my writing about these observations was a means for me to organize my ideas and come up with my own answers. Of course these are not answers in the traditional sense so perhaps I could call them resolutions.

So here I began to see the reflexivity inherent in this work. This also applied to inanimate items such as the broken glass and other pieces of garbage strewn about the woods, as well as recently living items such as sticks. I then began to ponder the connectedness of all of these things. For example, how and to what degree did the broken glass affect my perception of the woods there? I can say that it certainly brought to mind the possibility

(among many others of course) that perhaps teenagers went there in the warm months.

Perhaps it was not so empty in the summer.

This altered my perception of that specific place. And with the altering of my perception, I began to consider that I should somehow document more than just the sounds. I had been making field recordings (which I will detail further in the section on sound/music) but it suddenly became clear to me that I should have a visual component to accompany the sound I was gathering. And so I began collecting. In his book *Participant Observation*, anthropologist James Spradley writes on the first page that “rather than *studying people*, ethnography means *learning from people*” [14] (pp. 3) While ethnographers generally document living people, I began to look at these artifacts in much the same way that an archeologist might. Rather than making assumptions at first I was acting as renegade scientist, making deductions from these ‘natural’ artifacts. I inspected leaves and attempted to decipher what tree might have produced them. I sat and watched insects moving on the earth, trying to draw some conclusions about where they might be going, and what they might be doing. Though it was certainly an informal scientific investigation, this examination gave my time in the woods a much greater depth. Again quoting Spradley, he writes that “the ethnographer sees artifacts and natural objects, but goes beyond them to discover what meanings people assign to these objects.” [14] (pp. 7) Though Spradley here is most certainly speaking about a traditional means of ethnographic study, by applying his ideas to my artistic practice, I was able to uncover another layer of complexity in my collecting.

The layer that I uncovered was that ultimately my collecting functions as a portal into memories and stories for me, which began to align itself with the writings I was doing. At first I was only collecting items that came from the natural world, such as sticks, rocks, leaves, etc.



Fig. 5 Close up of “natural” object (leaf) in jar.

The leaf in Fig. 5 was the first item that I collected. Trees and leaves have interested me for a long time, and I felt as though I should document the shift of seasons. I am also interested in the way that a leaf from a tree so far from the place I define as my home, can feel familiar. Fairly quickly I began collecting items which were human-made. I believe that this gave me a more complete understanding and interpretation of the place. Again, this mode of thinking was largely inspired by the ethnographic model. Ethnographers work very hard at being certain that they are considering all variables in order to interpret data collected in an unbiased and thorough manner. While my desires and needs were not driven by ethics in this case (something terribly important for ethnographers regarding the making of a complete study) I felt that it would most certainly add a much needed element to the work.



Fig 6. Close-up of human made string in jar

The string pictured in Fig. 6, is suggestive to me of life occurring; in other words a human most likely (though possibly a bird or other animal) either on purpose or by accident, brought the string to my spot in the woods. This example of found string ultimately returns me to the quote from Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje about collecting things without knowing *why* we are collecting them, that began this section. I started collecting objects that I was *drawn* to. Some I would define as beautiful like the string in the above image, other things I would describe as quite undesirable, which is exactly the point. If I am to look at everyday life and place it in the context of art, I must look to ALL of everyday life. Broadening the scope of objects not only expanded my process of visiting and observing in the woods everyday, but it had a great effect on what I made.

As I began to contemplate the installation in greater detail, I realized that it should be something that allowed viewers to have their own personal experience. My hope was that their experience with the installation could in some way mirror my experience in the woods.

There was a way in which visiting the woods each day felt nostalgic to me, and so it should feel somehow nostalgic to the viewer. I believe this nostalgia came simply from the memories that were inspired by the time and the objects. While I wanted the viewers to understand the connectedness of the various elements of the work, I ultimately wanted them to make many of those connections themselves. Along with my belief that I should embrace all aspects of daily life through the intuition of my collecting, I felt that including other non-natural objects would give a clearer picture of the place I was visiting.

Therefore I began arriving home with items that were less appealing to me and yet appealed me nonetheless, such as the stop-smoking patch in FIG 7. I was lured by them because they provided a clearer and more honest picture of the place I was experiencing. I had begun to feel that I was giving a very biased picture of the woods, by excluding objects that I found somehow repulsive, or indicative of things I didn't like, such as smoking. Of course I understand that at the core of this work is *my perception* of the experience that I in turn impart to others, but I wanted to be aware of the degree of my biases.



Fig. 7. Close-up of Stop-smoking patch in jar

The decision to include artifacts outside the traditional definition of the natural world, then had a direct impact on the writing and music, the other components of this work. I then had to consider how I would reveal this information, these discoveries, to an audience. My intent was to reveal the experience of being there through my art, in a variety of sensory modes. As I have worked with a number of mediums over the years including painting, composition, video, performance, theater, and others, I had to make some decisions about how I would communicate my experience of observing and collecting.

As I began to consider imparting this experience, I found myself with something of a conundrum. Though I was indeed some form of ethnographer, I am aware of the moral issues in what is ultimately a rigorous scientific methodology. How was I to impart personally emotional elements of this experience, and allow these artifacts to inform a fictionalized world making up my own historical fiction, without degrading the very idea I was proposing?

As my collecting functioned as a portal into memory and a fantasized world, I see the connection here as inescapable. I felt compelled to rewrite my own history, based on the incomplete memories stirred by the collection of objects. It was as if the artifacts themselves were an extension across time; a vein that connected the everyday life of my past to the everyday life of my present. In the pages that follow, I describe my explorations into the observation of objects, place, fiction, sound, and everyday life; including the motivations behind the process inherent in the work, as well as the resulting art that I make, and how I came to integrate these various media.

I see my work as a continuation of these forms. Essentially, I am interested in exploring nature by looking at everyday life in all of its ordinary-ness. By combining various media, I look to expand upon the work of all artists I mention in this section. Through this process of amalgamation, I am able to explore these topics in greater depth and complexity, adding layers of juxtaposed ideas, emotions, and themes. My collection of found sounds from a specific location, and of both natural and discarded artifacts, stands in the long tradition of using found materials in art.

Modes of Communication

As an artist working in various electronic media, I have become interested in how different modes of expression can be used as a vehicle for creativity. I wish to examine making art with writing, video and sound in relation to everyday life and the detachment from nature or authenticity. I have for many years worked along the broad intersection of fiction, poetry, history and music or sound. I have asked the questions: “what aspects of our lives are fictionalized as they become our own personal histories? In other words, I’m wishing to

examine personal memory through my artistic practice. Where does poetry come from? What forms the images that then form the words? Is there a sound component to all of this? To this end, I have long been interested in historical fiction. In *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick* I began the process of creating a semi-autobiographical historical narrative, based in the art of everyday life. The thoughts and writings were all informed by my time in the woods, the memories and fictions, associated with the various objects collected, and ultimately by the field recording and composition. I feel as though the observation and collection of everyday life informed my work, and in some way the work is therefore about the process just as much as the resulting 'finished' piece.

My personal motivations for exploring the art of the everyday came directly from the disconnect that *I* was feeling between music and the rest of my life. I continually asked myself, "how can I incorporate all of these other aspects of living into music?" My art practice draws from a variety of examinations including integrated electronic art, ethnography, musical composition and improvisation, poetry, fiction, experimental documentary, collection, observation, and routine. I combine these influences and means of working to inform both my process and the resulting work. This path I am currently exploring was first influenced by the short fiction of Raymond Carver, which is about fairly non-eventful, 'endotic,' events in people's lives. I began by creating music based on the classic novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway, and set off on a new journey from there. I believe it was to some degree inevitable that my work would eventually turn inward, and with the acute observation of one place in nature, this introspective journey began. My work has become more interdisciplinary over time as I have noticed a need in myself to express these ideas across different media to fully express the impetus behind them. It is a way for me to attempt to synthesize the great differences in what it means to be alive.

For example, in some of my earlier work it occurred to me that I had stumbled upon a process that I had been seeking for many years: the relationship between language, stories,

and sound. I wrote, recorded, and performed a number of compositions based on specific pieces of fiction. I collaborated with musician Christian Kiefer on a recent project titled *To All Dead Sailors* (released in October 2007, by the Australian record label Camera Obscura). I used field recordings and guitar-driven soundscapes to illustrate the ideas or themes I saw present in the work of a handful of writers; specifically, Jose Saramago, Pablo Neruda, Jane Urquhart, and Seamus Heaney. Previously I had released a project titled *I am not in Spain*, the entirety of which is based on Hemingway's novel set in the Spanish Civil War of the late 30's titled *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. There is a direct link between this earlier work of mine, and my current work exploring the sound in my own writing.

Part IV. Writing

The decision to include a wider variety of human-made artifacts opened the written part of the work to an entirely different set of ideas. New concepts emerged. In short, I began writing reflexively about my own life, influenced by my experiences in the woods. This inclusion seemed a natural and fluid path, especially when encompassing the greater breadth of human experience. If one only writes about that which they find and seek in nature then one must ignore the non-natural components of daily life. The fact is, I spent a very small fraction of my daily/weekly/monthly time in the woods, and so it seemed logical that I would expand the writing about this time to include other aspects of my life, or memories which were associated in some way with the artifacts and experiences collected.

The first iteration of this work did include a number of writings that were directly about nature (as defined by the natural environment) and more specifically my thoughts about how human carelessness is rapidly destroying the environment. What I discovered was that

this approach was too forceful to those viewing the work, as I did not allow them to develop a personal relationship with the work based on *their* experience and perceptions. In developing writings that were more deeply connected to my own *experience* rather than *observations*, I was able to touch people in a deeper way, or perhaps even function as a form of spokesman for the woods. Gary Snyder mentions how there is a history of humans acting as spokespeople for various aspects of nature.

In a way, nature even borrows the voices of some writers and artists. Anciently, this was a shamanistic role where the singer, dancer, or storyteller embodied a force, appearing as a bear dancer or a crane dancer, and became one with the spirit or creature. Today, such a role is played by the writer who finds herself a spokesperson for non-human entities communicating to the human realm through dance or song. This could be called “speaking on behalf of nature” in the old way. [2] (pp. 44)

By writing about my everyday experiences in an open and often oblique way, I invite the reader to then place themselves into the continuation begun by the ‘spokesperson.’

The way that I wrote the final pieces of text for the work, was simple. I would place the found artifact in a jar and sit looking at it. Sometimes a memory would occur long before I placed the item in the jar and would write with that as an established base. Other times, I would sit looking at the jar for quite a while before anything would come to me. I believe that there is a connection, however oblique between the everyday objects in the jars and my writings about everyday life. Some are very clear. For example, the below piece of writing, displayed on what I called the “artifact tag,” accompanied a rock:

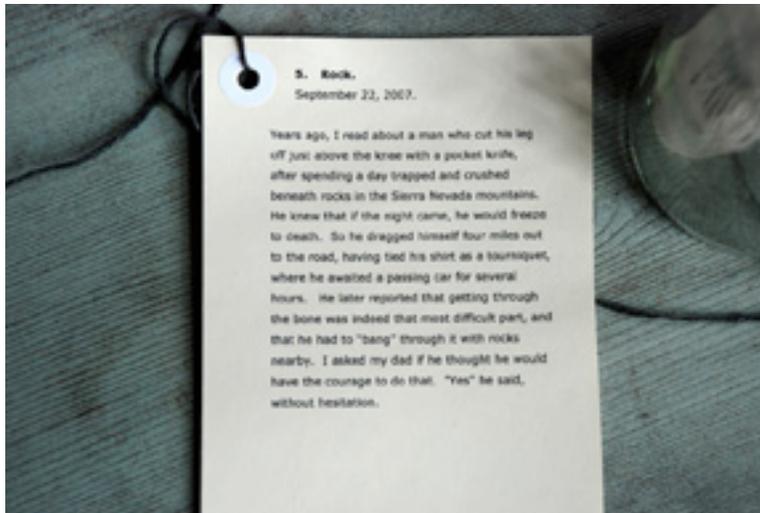


Fig 8. Close-up of Artifact Tag



Fig 9. Jars with objects and tags

5. Rock.

September 22, 2007.

*Years ago, I read about a man
who cut his leg
off just above the knee with a
pocket knife,*

*after spending a day trapped
and crushed
beneath rocks in the Sierra
Nevada mountains.
He knew that if the night came,
he would freeze
to death. So he dragged
himself four miles out
to the road, having tied his
shirt as a tourniquet,
where he awaited a passing car
for several hours. He later
reported that getting through
the bone was indeed the most
difficult part, and that he had
to “bang” through it with rocks
nearby. I asked my dad if he
thought he would have the
courage to do that. "Yes" he
said, without hesitation.*

Though not directly connected to this specific rock , the above story or recollection was clearly inspired by the object placed in the jar. Whereas the next example, shows no clear connection between the object and the writing:

18. *Milkweed Seed Pod*

Seed . November,2007

*On November 16th, 2007
my cousin Beth killed
herself. She dressed her
two young children (Glenn:*

*7 and Shannon: 5), drove
them to school, pulled the
car into the garage, and
rolled down the windows
leaving the car idling.
Upon finding her, the
detail that will not seem to
leave her husband's mind,
were the garage windows,
the edges of which were
sealed with duct tape. The
coroner found that she had
also injected herself with
poison, and taken two
bottles of pills. I cried, but
have such difficulty
understanding this as it
seems so distant. My aunt
calls my mother every
morning and weeps. Most
days, she can hardly speak.
Then I look at this thing, so
light and effortless, so
hopelessly simple.*

The juxtapositions of stories and objects can lead viewers to a variety of interpretations. For me, this juxtaposition is a means of composing. By using my memories and stories, I am accessing the viewers' associations and making compositions with the material. This means of composing, where some elements are left to complete improvisation, while others are the work of exacting and laborious thought on my part, is essentially at the center of my work. The lack of clear connection exists at times partly because improvisation

is an important part of my process, and these writings are for the most part improvised. It also serves to allow the reader (or viewer of the work) to draw his/her own connections and bring forth his/her own memories. It is important to me in this work especially, that the viewer be an active participant. By that I mean that I want the people experiencing the work to define their own role in that experience. I purposely chose to make the connections between the writing and the objects either somewhat vague, or seemingly not connected at all. By doing this, I invite the viewer to make their own connections. My hope is that this will ultimately function in the same way that good fiction functions. The reason that fiction functions, is because readers insert *themselves* into the story. Scholar Michel de Certeau states in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

The reader cannot protect himself against the erosion of time (while reading, he forgets himself and he forgets what he has read) unless he buys the object (book, image) which is no more than another person's text the ruses of pleasure and approbation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's own body. Ruse, metaphor, arrangement, this production is also an invention of the memory. Words become the outlet or product of silent histories...The viewer reads the landscape of his childhood in the evening news. The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader's) spills into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories...as do pedestrians in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals. Reading thus introduces and 'art' which is anything but passive. [15] (pp xxi-xxii)

I imagine that all of us have at some point fallen in love (to some degree) with a character in a book. It is the immersion and empathy that brings us into stories and makes us an active participant in their development. The *time* and *place* that we read a story, is elemental in the way that we process, understand, and connect with that story. It is my belief that one of the main reasons writers like Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner are generally lauded as brilliant, is precisely the fact that they leave a great deal of space in their writings for the reader to insert him or herself into the work. In this way, the reader becomes an active participant in the work, which is ultimately what I am trying to accomplish. This is

a way in which historical fiction becomes a part of our own fiction and our own reality. The two aspects of our lives blur together to form one narrative.

Part V. Music

“Is musical phenomena equivalent to living phenomena, like an insect camouflaging itself, transforming itself into nature- into a leaf for example? When you make music, it is your interpretation of nature...and the more you try to create, the more it becomes nature, just like an insect. By making music you are actually sending the sound back to its origin.”
~Yamataka Eye [8] (pp. 276)

One of the first notable examples of selecting a broader spectrum of sound came in a letter from the Italian futurist painter Luigi Russolo written in 1913. This letter became known as *The Art of Noises* or *The Futurist Manifesto*. Russolo urged that drawing inspiration from the urban and industrial soundscape was needed in composition to better express the increasing modernity of the world. He proposed that “We must break out of this limited circle of sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds.” [16] (pp 11) Russolo presented concerts of his ‘noise instruments’ in London, though unfortunately the recordings of those concerts were lost in a fire during World War II. [16] The idea that music could be more than pitched sound was groundbreaking at that time, and opened the idea that sound could actually be collected from everyday life rather than written and performed only on standard musical instruments. This shift was elemental in shaping the future of sound art and field recording.

Shortly after Russolo’s *Futurist Manifesto* was publicly released, composer Henry Cowell wrote about deconstructing the binary opposition between music and noise. [16] (pp

22) Cowell was a great proponent of experimentation in music and not only began exploring the use of extended piano techniques, but also published radical compositions by Edgard Varese. Though Varese was more directly in line with Russolo's interest in some form of 'sound making machine,' his work and interest in noise, primarily the way in which he focused more on timbre, texture, and space, had a lasting and profound effect on the generation of composers that followed. [17] (pp 87) Though he was not collecting sounds from everyday life per se, he did have a direct influence on Pierre Schaeffer. In 1948 Pierre Schaeffer presented his first piece of *musique concrete*, [16] (for further reading on *Musique Concrete* see citations 10 and 13 for further reference) which was a drastic departure from what was culturally accepted as music at that time. Pierre Schaeffer was most certainly collecting sound and Alan Licht wrote: "Music concrete, developed in France in the late 1940's and 50's by Pierre Schaeffer (a radio engineer, naturally) and Pierre Henry, took documented recorded sounds and processed them to the point of unrecognizability...so as to divorce them from the object that made them." [18] (pp 38) The idea that music could be made up of something other than pitched instruments, namely field recordings in the case of *music concrete*, lead to a paramount shift in the very perception of music. Though different theoretically from many sound artists working with field recordings, as many attempt to present the sounds in a completely undistorted way, *music concrete* opened the door for a new art form.

All of this historically leads to John Cage who influenced contemporary musical thought and practice, especially the growth and development of collected sound, more than any other figure in music. Cage was a student of Henry Cowell. As early as 1937 Cage expressed an interest in noise stating:

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments. [16]

This writing would effectively signal the beginning of Cage's work with found sound. If we move forward from the late 1930's and 40's into the 1950's we find the singular composition that opened wide the doors to field recording and collected sound. In 1952 John Cage presented his piece titled "4' 33" that "aimed at allowing audiences to experience non-intentional sound as musical." [16] (pp 177) John Cage effectively re-shaped the definition of sound to include a variety of sources, evidenced not only in his attention to silence, but especially in the 1953 premiere of *Williams Mix*. This piece was comprised solely of recordings from a wide variety of sources including everything from cityscapes to animals in nature. This important work influenced many works in the late 1950's and early 60's.

Today, there are a vast number of artists using field recordings in gallery installations including Annea Lockwood, Francisco Lopez, Toshiya Tsunoda, Marc Behrens and Paolo Raposo. All of these artists share the thematic idea of recontextualizing recorded sound and placing them in a gallery. These works ask visitors to consider the relationship of the sound of specific places and our preconceived notions of nature. Both Lockwood and Lopez record specific locations in nature and present the recordings unaltered in gallery and concert settings. As I mentioned earlier, Lockwood is most well known for her work recording rivers, especially the piece titled *A Soundmap of the Hudson River*. (1982) By recording the Hudson river over the course of many years in many locations, and keeping track of the recordings made at each location, she literally creates a sonic map to accompany the standard visual mapping system. This is significant because of its very simplicity. Though Lockwood has done many sound art pieces over the years, her work with rivers communicates something profound to people; that simply listening to a river is perhaps enough. In the liner notes of the album Lockwood writes :

Since 1970 I have recorded rivers in many countries, not to document them, but rather for the special state of mind and body which the sounds of moving water create when one listens intently to the complex mesh of rhythms and pitches. Each stretch of the Hudson has its own sonic texture, formed by the terrain, varying according to the weather, the season and, downstream, the human environment whose sounds are

intimately woven into the river's sounds. By correlating the numbered sites on the map with the information on the reverse, you will be able to identify which location you are listening to, the date, and the time of day at which the recording was made.

Lockwood is clearly interested in state of mind, and the immersion of the listener to another world.

Continuing on this path is Francisco Lopez. Lopez is a composer best known for his ambient soundscapes made from processed field recordings. Alan Licht writes about one of his better known pieces in his book *Sound Art*:

One of his major works, *La Selva* (1998), is based on his recording of a tropical rainforest in Costa Rica. Instead of adhering to the traditional bioacoustic practice of foregrounding animal sounds against an environmental backdrop, Lopez puts equal value on all the sonic elements of the environment, from animals and rain and wind even to the sounds of plants not really audible. Lopez stresses that *La Selva* is an artistic version of the forest, not a document of it. [18]

This is where Lopez begins to diverge from Lockwood. The piece is no longer a simple document of place, but rather a *composition* of a document of place, which is quite different.

In line with this thinking are Tsunoda, Behrens, and Raposo who also make field recordings of natural phenomena, often by using contact microphones on isolated objects, as though they were a sonic microscope. In doing so, they are looking at one acute aspect of a place, and focusing our attention on that place, which calls into question our preconceived notions of the hierarchy of sound in any given location. By placing these found sounds outside of the place where they were gathered, we are inherently forced to question our notions of nature and everyday life. In the 2006 piece titled *Hades*, Paolo Raposo and Marc Behrens made field recordings of boats in Portugal. This piece is best described by Sirr/And Oar the record label who released it:

HADES is based on sound recordings made aboard Lisbon ferries and at the quays of Cais do Sodré, Trafaria and Cacilhas 2001-2005. Both artists had initially set out to record independently, being fascinated with the sounds of the ship hull and landing gear, as well as with the actual passage on the river, which gives a magnificent (maybe the best) view on large parts of the old city of Lisbon.

During the course of the work which took three years to complete, some more precisely directed recordings were made together. Understanding the actual crossing as a symbolic passage, and once it was reduced to sound and memory, it became associated to the crossing of the mythic river Styx to enter Hades, the ancient Greek underworld.

As the different sound recordings provide the artists with very diverse material (for example low frequencies from the ship's hulls and motors, high frequencies and beats from the gates at Cais do Sodré), they understand the composition as hovering on the delicate borderline between a soundscape portrait and a multi-strata arrangement, in which things happen in parallel, and individual layers move on more than one path simultaneously. [19]

Again, another example that shows how artists are not simply documenting the sounds of the boats, but are composing them in effect. By isolating certain elements and then mixing those recordings in a specific fashion, they are presenting an artistic interpretation of a specific place, which is again quite different from what Lockwood is doing. A perhaps more acute example of that is evident in Tsunoda's work. The sound work of Toshiya Tsunoda represents a radical rethinking of the concept of field recordings. Rather than being documentary or naturalistic, his pieces appear as unique music compositions concerned with the relation between space and cognition, rendering the vibration of objects audible, revealing the hidden beauty in each sonic detail. 'To render the vibration of objects audible, a piezo-ceramic sensor with a weak current is used to generate pressure. The vibration transmitted inside a solid is then changed into voltage, which can be recorded. With the meticulously scientific approach of a cataloger, Tsunoda captures the depth of the landscape, the vital breathing of things. By isolating the resonant frequencies of specific objects whose sonic qualities would often go unnoticed, Tsunoda is very clearly composing with the environment. On his 2005 *Hapna Records* release, *Ridge of Undulation*, Tsunoda records found and discarded objects such as "a small metal plate on the ground." In selective fashion, he too is composing the environment. A quote from the label's website, illustrates this well:

Through careful editing, Tsunoda can make field recordings sound artificial (e.g. the lock-groove loops within "Seashore, Venice Beach" that are achieved apparently only through volume editing). Thus, he conflates any "essential" difference between

the “natural” and the constructed. At the same time, his prepared sonic environments are so closely monitored and manipulated that they approximate and extend effects heard within the field recordings. [20]

It was this idea, that one could compose using the environment as an instrument or sound source, that sent me in the direction I went. My composition, and field recording borrows heavily from these artists. Though I do take ideas from Lockwood about nature and place, I am most directly influenced by Lopez, Behrens, Raposo, and Tsunoda. It is my aim, to make an artistic representation of the place I visited. Keeping that in mind, another great influence (both in sound and in philosophical application) for my current work is the composer and performer Brian Eno. As I was working on gathering field recordings for *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick*, I became conscious of the idea that perhaps the music I make for this installation should somehow reflect my experience of going to the woods each day. It seems obvious, but the concept was something I had not considered at first. It then became clear to me, that I was taking something from Brian Eno’s *Music for Airports*, and expanding on it.

Brian Eno says it best I believe:

In late 1977 I was waiting for a plane in Cologne airport. It was early on a sunny, clear morning, the place was nearly empty, and the space of the building... was very attractive. I started to wonder what kind of music would sound good in a building like that. I thought “it has to be interruptible (because there’ll be announcements) it has to work outside the frequencies at which people speak, and at different speeds from speech patterns (so as not to confuse communication), and it has to be able to accommodate all the noises that airports produce. And most importantly for me, it has to have something to do with where you are, and what you’re there for—flying, floating and, secretly flirting with death. [16] (pp. 96)

In the same way the Brian Eno’s “*Music for Airports*,” intentionally replicates the emotions of a certain space my music for the woods attempts the same. So as suggested in the quote at the beginning of this section, the music folds into the experience of observing nature, and in some way *becomes* nature. This is directly in line with the earlier suggestion that writers, artists, musicians are essentially the spokespeople for the natural world.

With the development of this idea, I began to approach my time in the woods differently both in terms of what I was thinking as well as writing and recording. On one of my visits to the woods I noticed a number of piles of deer scat. I then became increasingly interested in the idea that while I saw deer scat on numerous occasions, I had not ever seen the deer. Initially, I had intended to make dynamic music expressing the range of difference notable in 'nature.' Yet after noticing the absence of deer, other than what was left behind, I began thinking that the music should encompass *that absence*, for it was in some way the defining factor of my time there. The fact that I never saw the deer should somehow be if not evident, at least expressed in the work. What became especially clear to me over the course of visiting every day for months, was how little difference there was; how little change. Everything seemed to be happening on a level much smaller than I could observe, in a relatively short amount of time. There were of course major changes, especially the shift from fall to winter, but even that seemed so fluid and gradual. In terms of the life there (both plant and animal) the changes that I was able to observe were happening on a microscopic level; and so the music should follow.

The music began to fold into the writings especially in terms of style. In other words, what began as a rather dense composition became much more minimal and spare, which was directly influenced by the degree to which the writing also became more minimal. Of great interest to me is the way in which the music and words, though not connected literally or sonically, make their own connections as the reader/listener experiences the work. As I mentioned earlier, the juxtaposition of elements and possibilities are what give a greater depth to the piece. What I like most about the display of the installation is the fact that one could have many different experiences with the work, as one could be reading something entirely different while listening to a certain portion of the composition, over many experiences. Composing with this possibility in mind, was a large factor in making decisions during the writing and recording process.

In one iteration of the work, aside from the music itself being quite dynamic, I began making field recordings of acutely isolated objects. I placed a microphone in the middle of wild grasses to record their swaying. I taped a microphone to a tree to record its movement. I placed a microphone inside of a drainage pipe, to record the whistling sounds it made in the wind. But this seemed too focused on the smaller elements of the experience. I felt that to encompass the trips to the woods every day as a whole, then the music should be directly in line with the shifts in both the woods and my own life during that four month period. I then made a list of what elements I felt the composition should possess:

1. The music should reflect the fact that I visit the same place every day. To that end, I wrote more or less in one key, and made an effort to repeat simple patterns throughout.
2. The music should change a great deal throughout the piece as a whole, but those changes should not be abrupt. I wrote short melodies, but also wrote longer melodies that would re-appear and change over the course of the piece. This also involved bringing certain instruments in and out, as well as repeating motifs.
3. The music should be fluid and ethereal. I found that sitting in the same place everyday was both of those things, and I attempted to replicate that by composing and improvising in a way that reflected those feelings and that experience as a whole.

The last critical aspect of the music was the way in which it was recorded and mixed. The main reason I am drawn to improvised music, and often find a great deal of composed music to be somewhat 'cold,' is best explained by musician Derek Bailey in his wonderful book *Improvisation*:

In 1968 I ran into Steve Lacy on the street in Rome. I took out my pocket tape recorder and asked him to describe in fifteen seconds the difference between composition and improvisation. He answered: 'In fifteen seconds the difference between composition and improvisation is that in composition you have all the time you want to decide what to say in fifteen seconds, while in improvisation you have fifteen seconds.' [19]

The immediacy of improvisation is to me an important part of my work. I feel that because much of life is improvised, my work must be improvised as well if I want to make work that reflects daily life. Of course much of life is composed as well, and so I present both of these modes of generating sound in my work. I wrote and recorded most of the composed portions first, and then had a number of musicians as well as myself, improvise freely along with the recording of those composed parts. I then went through and composed more to what was there at that point. I then invited more improvisation and then more composition and so forth. In this way, the resulting piece became an organic extension of daily life. I have long had an interest in this cyclic layering process as an artist. Though I will not discuss this in detail here, I have painted for many years and my process is identical. It usually takes me anywhere from three months to one year to complete a painting, and it is a process of layering. Often the finished piece looks nothing like how it looked after one month, three or seven. This means of working is also common in ethnography, which is perhaps no coincidence at all. In explaining fieldwork, Spradley mentions the "ethnographic research cycle." "While other social sciences tend to follow a linear pattern of investigation, the ethnographer tends to follow a cyclical pattern." [14] (pp. 26) Clearly, the ethnographic methodology applies across all media in my work.

I chose to do the final mixing as a 'static' six channel mix as I felt that too was more organic. Again, in an earlier iteration of the work I was experimenting with using a generative program to move the sound around the room at both random and or specified times. In some ways this seemed a more exacting way to reflect how we hear the world around us, and yet it was in conflict with my idea that the viewer should place themselves

into the work in the way that one does while reading fiction. I felt that if the music were mechanized more than it had to be, the listener would then become a more passive observer, as his/her awareness of the machine driving his/her own experience would become magnified. In other words, if the listener was aware that the sound was moving by force of some 'omniscient' thing, then sh/e would be less capable of entering into the work. By having a more active role regarding the way in which they experience the piece, would give them more autonomy. It is my opinion that if people are to relate this in some way to their own daily lives, then certainly they must be given ways to immerse themselves as if they were a part of something like a novel.

Part VII. Parting Thoughts

The main questions that arose as I uncovered my process were: where do I go next and how can I both expand this work and make it more clearly connected? As my process is largely improvised, it has become increasingly important that more elements of my work be composed. In other words, although I never *really* know where I am going, nor do I wish to know, I believe it would suit my work well to have some clear ideas of how things relate before getting too deep into any project. I tend to embark on long-range projects that incorporate an everyday practice understanding that making things is as much about the process of making them, as the resulting work. This fall, I will commence a new documentary film project that will take three to five years to complete. The story of the documentary will be determined by the flow of events as they occur during shooting. In other words, I know exactly how the film will begin, but have no idea where it will go from there, as it will be determined by the events that occur while shooting the first section. Arguably the most compelling aspect of this forthcoming project, is precisely that uncertainty. It has

taken me many years to understand this on a deeper level about my own work, and with that comes a great sense of calm in not knowing.

I also know that I will continue to explore the connections I have spoken of herein. I will continue to explore ways in which I might present everyday life, especially found materials, in the context of 'art.' I will for many years to come, and perhaps eternally, continue to examine the places where text and sound meet and forge a dialogue. I have several projects in mind that include the same methods, themes, and media, but in different settings, places, etc. I have recently applied for a number of grants to realize a project based in collecting both artifacts and sounds from the Nevada desert. My intent is to present these in a multimedia installation, much like *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick*. That said, taking into account some of the feedback I have received about the *Leaf, Twine, Nail, and Stick* I feel that I need to examine more work in a similar vein, to better understand how I might make my own work more cohesive. For starters, I have been thinking extensively about how to make the artifacts I gather relate more directly to any sound component, and I believe looking further into the work of artists like Lockwood and Tsunoda will benefit me greatly.

I acknowledge the criticism that the three elements of my piece, the music, the writing and the artifacts, needed to relate to one another with greater clarity. My intent was to make the work vague enough, so that viewers would place themselves into the experience, but I'm afraid I may have overcompensated. One of the ways that I have considered doing this, is to isolate the sound, by placing a unique sound source inside of each jar. This way, the sound that accompanied each artifact, could reference the artifact in some way. I have a number of ideas for how to accomplish this including using spoken word which includes elements of the writing with each artifact, or making a unique soundscape for each jar, including different field recordings that would reference the unique artifacts. I have also considered allowing the viewers to record themselves reading the material on the card, and then placing that recording into a loop, so that they could hear themselves *actually* in the

work. I also feel that it will be important in the future for the writing to correspond better with the artifacts especially. Though I'm not sure what it is, I will work to devise a way to have them connected, without the writing being *about* the objects in the jar. Perhaps the best way to make some of these discoveries and decisions is by looking at writing and works of a similar vein. I have considered writing a fictional short story for each artifact, in which the artifact itself is present. It may or may not have relevance to the story, but it would at least place the object into a context that is logical and understandable to viewers.

Of particular interest to me, is the *Cabinet of Curiosities*. The *Cabinet of Curiosities* was an eclectic means of organizing collected artifacts, long before scientific systems of taxonomy was developed. This has only come to my attention from feedback I received after the installation and the bulk of this paper was written, but a valuable place to investigate for sure. Certainly some of the ideas behind *The Cabinet of Curiosities* may provide a wealth of theoretical ideas to explore. [20]

I will most certainly continue to ask myself the questions that open this paper: "*What does it mean to consider the art of everyday life? How can everyday life exist as art? Is it simply a matter of recontextualizing objects and experiences?*" As I stated earlier, I do not believe that I can, nor do I have any desire to answer those questions. The posing of the questions is what motivates me. To a large degree, my thoughts and research on these matters, ultimately become an issue of gaze or perception. I have come to understand that my life is about process and the documentation in various forms of the passing of events, both large and small; both sensational and ordinary. There are two distinct and distinctly different forthcoming plans with this writing. First, I am currently in the process of putting together a book proposal that would include photos of collected artifacts, and both the more poetic writing, as well as both the personal writing about process and some of the historical background. As I revise and edit the writing for that project, I will begin separating it into chapters that I will then expand, with plans to seek publication of some smaller sections in a

variety of journals on electro-acoustic composition, found objects, and journals that include nature based works of art.

Considering that my work is ultimately about the process and examination of everyday life, I will continue to visit the woods and I will continue to use the ethnographic process as a means of gathering. As I embark on several new projects the summer and fall of 2008, I will remain tacitly aware of the various elements in the work and how they do or do not relate to one another, so that I may forge connections. The further I examine both my own process and the work and process of others, the more I will inevitably learn and mature as an artist. It is, I hope, a never-ending process.

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