THIS IS THE ONLY WAY

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to track four major components of my artistic process (situation, action, unknown, and consequence). These titles articulate a vocabulary for art works that take behavior as a medium, where an unseen performance is at the center of many different materials and objects. The writing style shifts between analytical, narrative, observational, and poetic voice as I seek to understand the place that I am in, writing until exhaustion, where, with revelatory simplicity, I collapse.

The problem for ephemeral events and performance is that artifacts and documentation do not re-perform themselves entirely to those who were not present, thus relying heavily on discourse. I suggest that though this is a problem of education and information, it is more fundamentally and urgently a problem of embodiment in order for ephemeral art, and art practices that do not result in commodifiable objects, to sustain themselves and evolve as a living system. I conclude that stable things are comprised of ephemeral things, this document being a prime example, in which I perform intellectually until exhaustion to produce a text that will perform in my absence.
This document is dedicated to strangers.
Acknowledgments

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Fields of Study

Major Field:  Art
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Chapter 1: SITUATION

A term that suggests the environment in which a thing emerges, the situation is a complexity built up of knowable unities interacting in unpredictable ways, and as such, remains in flux. In a world without history, we still have situations, and a world without history is a world in need of a story. A story requires an event and an event requires a ground. With this perception of a global situation and my own personal situation, caught up in my perception of the global, I am imbedded within this world and must work with what I have: working on, with, and against the situation.

Call out whatever you have; your lint, your breasts, the breath you are yelling with.

Yes, I am predisposed. I have a predisposition. I tend to lend my attention to anything in the margins. I am paying attention to the ground, waiting for an event, wanting to tell the story.

I grew up in a church in every conceivable way. In high school, I lived inside of the building, my bedroom above the church offices, looking over the courtyard, into the stained glass windows, awakened by the pipe organ practicing. I was a runt running around the pews, the sacred space my stomping grounds. My father is a Presbyterian pastor, and as such, the church has played heavily in the way in which I have lived for the past 23 years. He felt called to serve as a minister in international churches, and we moved every three or four years from the United States to the Netherlands, to Japan, to the United States, to France, and while I moved again to the United States to begin my higher education, he still continues to work today as a pastor in Oman, still moving with the Spirit. As a community and as a body of people, I have felt a part of the international church. But, because of this, I have just as much felt foreign everywhere I go.
I mention all of this only to lay the ground to recount several events that figure in the story of the formation of my perception, itself again a ground on which I work.

- When I was in elementary school, every now and then, I would be woken up at 5 am and my family would go, with others from our church, to Shibuya train Station and a nearby park, where we would lay a small package of two onigiri (rice triangles) by the shoes neatly placed at the foot of the cardboard box of sleeping homeless Japanese persons.

- While I was on summer holiday from college, I would visit my family in Japan and we would often take a family vacation to another country. We would have frequent flier tickets, and backpack around, and chose to go to developing countries because they would be cheaper to visit, among other reasons, and this is how we managed to see over 50 countries. Vietnam and India, America and Henry Darger collided inside of me, and I was lost.

But it was here, in this confusion, that I began asking a lot of questions. The nature of being a tourist in another culture is that all your assumptions about the way things go are undone. You are almost never right, and in fact, you are also wrong. I think it is fantastic. And coming from a developed country to a developing country, the contrast of material wealth and metaphoric value that goes along with it cannot be greater. Based on these observations alone, I am at once so aware of the differences between places and at the same time holding my breath. I have instead only been able to ask what could be the possible value of the undervalued, marginalized, unwanted, forgotten, lost, and rejected? In other words, how does a social system come to recognize that which is outside of it, especially when we must ignore so much in order to see anything? In a hyper-real, media-saturated, consumer-driven, materially-rich and spiritually-impoverished, individually-based western culture, what could the role be for the toothless woman carrying a sack of potatoes down a dirt road in god-knows-where India? Or the gypsy street kids in Macedonia while I have an hour to wait for the bus? Or just as well, what is the role for the Street Speech vendor in Columbus, Ohio. What about a body that is full of life, but who’s meaning is in other languages? In post-modern fashion I would be ashamed to say anything but that these have everything to do with the other. I believe that they open up the space for transformation and becoming. I am further
compelled to make the connection because I identify with those things that are entirely out of place and because of this do not make sense, because I feel they have an immense social function and spiritual purpose.

Figure 1: Unnamed Performance Object, 2010-11

In my mind, the undervalued must find value because what is at stake for me are humans. And while this is simply an ideal that I hold — that all things have value somewhere — the question of locating that value remains elusive, and I feel it lies within its capacity to provide contrast to our assumptions. It finds value in finding its place, and this location may be contrary to my own. On the surface, those things found, discarded, on the street, are most often an anti-aesthetic and an absolute refusal to appeal to the senses. The perception that is at stake here is not the physical sensation that a viewer receives, but the interpretation that emerges from that lack, and specifically, whether that lack can be meaningful.

What does a lack — or a failure to perform to our expectations — render
possible? Mike Kelley in an interview about his exhibition of “The Uncanny” suggests that the impulse to collect is driven by a fear of death. Obsessive keeping is a fantasy of permanence and a displacement activity for the ultimatum to die like the thing we miss or to forget. Rather than lingering on the validity of an aesthetic refusal, what deserves attention in light of this meaningful lack is that I proceed making my decisions as negation. That is, the aesthetics of my works are consequential, a reprieve from visual sensation, and a remnant of a process of perceptual transformation for which I have given up my possessions. From 2008-2012 I did not purchase any material for my works; rather I used what I already had or happened to find, in a mode of self-negation, where an absence could set the condition for a desire.

In the process of negation, a sentiment of doing without material things in order to gain spiritual things is the guide, and this doing without works against a society of excess. There are some very clear paradoxes involved in this logic which takes a decision to not buy any art materials and produces a studio full of found material that simply waits as FREE POTENTIAL. But the thing must undo itself. And so collecting found material, found children’s drawings, found curiosities, is a way to work with my own sense of loss by caring for those things that seem to have also been lost. It might be worth recalling that famous phrase of Mary Douglas’ which correctly calls dirt “matter out of place.” By finding, or making, a place for those things that do not fit—social, linguistic anomalies—a new site of engagement is born. This is a site for those difficult things which we are free to ignore, but which restrain our freedom.

To negate an object of consumer society—disposable juice carton, cigarette, newspaper, magazine—I use it against itself, rearranging its parts, like a transformer, until its own logic is broken, and I see something new about it. What I like about discarded objects is that this process is often already half complete, and they are lying outside, confessing their weaknesses to passers-by, showing how they were made, revealing their structure. I enjoy that this breaking down process brings the icons of consumer society down to earth, back to its base materials, advertising something else, the reality of the dream, breaking down with it its name and the language that produced it. I enjoy that, while perhaps each manufactured item is slightly different, a broken item has a legible history, its particular brokenness, no longer one of millions, not a generic ideal, but with specific scratches, conferred by
the movements of humans. Mechanical reproduction has become hand made in the way that it was used.

Aesthetics in my opinion are the great depository of behavior. Beyond even what can be named and described, I believe that there is a lot that can be sensed without consciously seeing, including whether to trust the motivations of an art work. These things reveal themselves slowly. Perhaps you cannot tell if I built the wooden boxes in Low Earth Orbit while drinking coffee, but you may be able to see my coffee drinking habit in my attitude some days because this is a behavior that concerns my body and mental state. Equally, with matters concerning the physical manifestation of an artwork, I feel that behaviors like what this object means to the artist, whether they care about it, are registered in a successful piece. The artwork should perform or behave in the world in accordance with the content of the work that is the content of a person who has produced a work as part of their behavior in the world. I think about Robert Morris’s Boxes with the sound of their own making and hesitate to take this notion too far — as if what he was thinking about as he built these boxes affected their construction and the sound of their making and thus their physical presence — what is important is his behaviors alignment with the work.

It is easy to see how a gesture makes its way into abstract expressionism, but Jeff Koons, for example, gestures with a computer and a league of assistants. The means of production produces the manufactured look of his objects which is how they behave, as manufactured-looking objects that embrace popular means of production, low and high at once, the same way that politicians will appeal to the masses, which is a shallow, all-encompassing gesture that relies on spectacle and money to do its job and because of this, he is the perfect commodity artist.

I find a kindred spirit in Gedy Sibony who speaks of his work in relation to recycling, in putting objects back to work rather than in a landfill, but who is really more interested in how they evoke an emotional landscape of industrial or consumer society. He speaks of casting these objects as performers in an exhibition, who retain their qualities of having lived past lives, but whose poetics have seeped to the surface somehow magically, as if by accident, to reveal their wisdom. He speaks of not wanting to take up visual space, but to expand the space of visual perception, and with his works' intimate relationship to the space in which they perform, they are cast almost as invisible objects, which rather transform the space. This is a
quality that I aspire to — to not really have anything to look at, per se, but to feel you are in a new place. However, rather than being transported to a place that exists elsewhere, to feel that the place you are in is different. This is based in the material reality that produces the sense of being strange to oneself. In my life, this is an experience that I have highly valued.

One of my most sincere inquiries has been into the aesthetic dimensions of radical difference in part because of several experiences I have had of culture shock and reverse culture shock in my youth, and also because I have felt incredibly affected by absolute strangers who I will never meet, know, or again see. I am riveted by these as being unintentional experiences in the aesthetic dimension — despite being consequences of conscious decisions. Similarly, one may make decisions to go to a new place, to go to a recommended restaurant, to try a famous dish, and receive an upset stomach. There is always an amount of chance that interrupts the most detailed plan, and this disconnect opens a space for transformation that I have built into my process. I want to be sure to state that my interest is not in eroticizing the Other or looking from a comfortable distance. Many of my works take discomfort, a more visceral interaction, as their basis for this very reason. Discomfort is not such a radical behavior, but it is counter-intuitive to passive consumption, and may prove to be a sustainable way of being and a needed mode of conduct in a community of dissonance.

The distances that language, economic class, geography, etc. produce between people are often palpable despite our best intentions. These are the distances, I feel, that we are trying so desperately to span; distances built into the problem of life as an ephemeral event, and distances that generate its continual reoccurrence. However, physical circumstances, such as riding in the same small car together, arising out of larger situations (I am on my way somewhere for some reason and she is on her way elsewhere for reasons of her own) produce a shared space and field of attention when we draw near. The space of difference is also the space of creative potential. A community of dissonance must be creative to sustain itself. It must be strange to itself in order to stay alive.

I have been fortunate to take several classes at The Ohio State University that have helped me to process my experiences in new ways. In Theorizing Performance, a reoccurring theme of the class was that humans are always
performing: performing our gender, our social class, our politics, and other facets of our identity. Performance in this sense can be called “doing,” as differentiated from performances in which one says 'Ok, now I am going to perform,' which can be called “showing doing.” (Schechner, What is Performance?) Often saying that 'now I am going to perform' can be translated as 'Ok, now I am going to exceed the script of social behavior.' In a scenario of being unfamiliar with the social scripts, such as visiting a new place, potentially anything might exceed the social script, and if something does, a stage is raised, framed by our attention, for its performance.

In this course, as well as Ethology & Art, and Plasticity, Vision, and the Neurological System, both in the Department of History of Art, I have also been exposed in various ways to 'the porosity of the self', a feedback loop between self and environment, and a dialectical relationship that constitutes self-formation, all of which help to complicate and therefore also problematize binary thought; inside/outside, self/other, mind/body, man/animal, etc. By extension, I have found these thoughts useful to articulate for myself a more complex relationship of art/life (or meaning/context) in which they are clearly not separate, but intimately linked, producing each other. I believe that ultimately humans make whatever they need to make in order to make themselves meaningful. As such art is always already site-responsive in terms of the situation from which it arises. The sort of art that I will make will depend on where and when I am living but also on how I live, and it is this sort of performance that I have been focused on intentionally in order to see its ripple effect in the work.

I have characterized my recent work as being unified in my behavior. Though I am consistently the intersection of desperate looking things, I instead mean that I have been investigating habits of behavior as the medium of producing my work. Along with the intentional formation of various habits for specific works (sweeping, collecting, twining, carrying) are more general habits of attention. Taking a cue from Carry Wolf, in a chapter titled "Meaning and Event or Systems Theory and the Reconstruction of Deconstruction", from his book What is Post-humanism?, my ability to filter what comes into myself — that is, what I choose to give my attention to — may be the sole location of agency. As much as my head may be in the clouds, my attention has been fully occupied by the ground.

In the most literal sense, I pay attention to the ground as I walk, looking for
cues into the activities of a place that I am not yet familiar with. It is a habit that formed in my youth, picking up things from the street and putting them together in a way that tried to unify the seemingly disparate elements. I would find various formal relationships, forced to innovate due to the strict limitations, and I gained a lot of pleasure from seeing these unrelated elements 'make sense' together, at the very least as a single form. This was, by circumstance, one of my first investigations into how the materials that happen to exist in a place compose what that place is, speak back to the activities that have happened there, and present the possibilities of what can be made with it. To this end, the phrase “a place presents possibilities” (source unknown), resonates deeply with my experiences and is confirmed and even extended by many theorists. The phrase “The body is a site with a history,” though without a fixed location, and various post-modern projects to extend the subjective experience in lieu of objective knowledge also confirm. My attention to the ground, and to what materials were available to be found there, is founded on issues of responsibility to the environment, responsibility to the radical other and the complete stranger, anti-consumer sentiment, entire curiosity, and the formation of a kind of Situationist game. My attention to the ground and use of found materials was also necessitated by my own economic limitations, its wide availability, and a desire for an art of and for the everyday. This last desire co-mingles with a desire to find the spiritual in the everyday.

*Desk Drawer, 2007-2011* and *Walking Sculptures, 2009 – 2011*, were projects that used an amount of material found within a certain time and place. While I searched for something that the material alone might be expressing, almost as if I were an anthropologist rather than an artist, I became frustrated that all of my interpretations and conclusions involved my own subjectivity in the process. In fact, I actively worked on *Desk Drawer* for two years and yet it failed to meet my expectations. I felt it found completion with this realization that I could not remove myself. Likewise, in realizing a tendency to anthropomorphize my *Walking Sculptures*, I recognized that I was projecting myself onto the place and needed to involve myself in the conception of the score. Though I had thought that I was searching to find out about a place, I came to realize that I was searching to find my place in that new location. Rather than a portrait of a place, they were a document of a particular interaction between a specific person and a specific place, which tended to manifest as portraits of myself made out of the materials of different places.
Directing my attention toward the ground has other dimensions. Much like the traditional figure/ground relationship, I am interested in appearances, happening, happening-upons, that are very much the figure of an event, that takes place against a ground of repetition, wondering how something can happen within history. In the case of encounters with others, I think people are grounds of repetition (perhaps ways of being), where one appears like an event on the ground of the other. I understand that this is dangerous territory if I am not articulate, but I do think that cultivating radical difference holds much potential for art as life. Though I have not read the book, I agree with Gergio Agamben's premise that the ideal community is one of dissonance. Rather than harmony, which could encourage complacency, dissonance can maintain active engagement with others.

To this end, I have been actively trying to form and reform habits of behavior to keep myself at odds with myself. I think much of this stems from my recent ongoing questions about my relationship to the Christian faith, with which I have decidedly been trying to dis-identify, to become a stranger to it in order to see it in a new way. Rather than rejection, dis-identification opens the possibility of a renewed relationship. My first act of dis-identifying was to attend a new church in Columbus every week and to see the great variety of them available even in a small geographic
region. My second act was to begin to participate differently by viewing the service as a performance. Though this evolved over time, I was conscious of how I was recontextualizing the experience with my attention and therefore also distancing myself. At the same time I am constantly wondering about slave dialectics of Christianity that chooses to give its attention to the marginal and finds nothing less than the promise of heaven there.

I have been eating breakfast as much as possible because I feel that this year I am slowly waking up from a daydream. I have never before lived in the same place for more than four years, nor been part of a community of artists, and over this past year I think I have assimilated, which is really the strangest thing for me, coming to understand the role of certain normative behaviors in American culture which my parents were eager to leave.

I have formed the habit of blacking out my drawings, and especially of my notebook pages while riding the bus. These are all repetitive acts which accumulate into a ground, some literally become a black field on paper, and others are a ground of experience; a history from which an event may emerge.

The composition of these works, or beginnings of works, is very simple. Translated into a pictorial field, they bear the same composition that can be found in drawings, photographs, and linoleum prints that I have made for several years now, which have been intended as studies for a project and also function as posters which are announcing an event. In general they are portrait-oriented rectangles of standard dimensions, book sized or poster sized. In all cases there is one very strong focal point that takes the immediate attention of the eye. In the case of the drawings and linos-prints, the focal point remains untouched paper, while the rest of the rectangle is entirely filled in with various applications of black ink, investigating process based and laborious markings. The ground has received much more attention in these images, however, it is overshadowed by a looming bright apparition in the shape of a circle. In the photographs, this bright spot is the appearance of a camera flash or a reflection of a light fixture. Though by very different means, the bright lights function in the same way as the focal points in the drawings, and again the white area is approaching the color of the white paper, snapping back from the virtual realm into the material of the photograph and giving attention to the act of taking a picture. They are all instances of a single act that is surrounded by a structure composed of
single acts. In my view, this brings the behavior of its making to the fore and in so doing the ethics of making is questioned. A single act that is extended to infinity is a Kantian notion of morality. But extending this single act into all contexts undoes the meaning of the act, because context provides for the very possibility of meaning. The posters were made on stolen paper, with found ink, and on machines without permission.

Figure 3: This Is The Only Way (Posters), 2011

In the context of this thesis, nearing the end of my terminal degree in art and taking stock of what has happened over the past two years, I want to complicate context, in the same way that context complicates and therefore also gives depth to meaning. I find myself in a position always between contexts, which tend to cancel each other out rather than expand upon each other. I think this is a distinctly post-modern condition that has led to apathy and confusion, rather than vibrancy and
complexity. **A world without a history needs a story, a story requires an event, and an event requires a ground.** It is in this situation that I have sought to create a common ground out of the ground to prepare myself for action. Although I have been using found objects to manipulate their meanings, I am not interested in subverting the old anymore, especially when that subversion only works by the old logic. I am rather interested in a reconstruction of the human spirit — a community of absolute dissonance — and have turned to address my subjectivity. With this recognition, I have allowed myself to mutually recognize others and open my process. In order to recognize my subjectivity, which is my situation, I must recognize those things to which I habitually give my attention. I feel a responsibility to that and those that give me the ability to respond. My brother took this photograph, and I was its witness.
Figure 4: *Cat With Eyes of the Sun and the Moon*, 2010
Chapter 2: ACTION

Action (singular) and activity (plural) prove ambiguous enough terms to treat an immense range of making, researching, and living processes. Based on my analysis of situation as the environment or context, it is still unclear to me what their exact relationship to each other is. What is clear, though, is that they are in dialogue and dialectic tension. Although context is never entirely stable, and therefore meaning is also fragile, they each set the conditions for interpreting the other.

I have come to think that accumulation of behavior is the real consistency of my making. This is almost like saying that I am always doing different things, but at the very least I am always doing something. I have likewise come to enjoy the thought that by moving from medium to medium I could remain a perpetual amateur, and yet be a professional artist. This would keep me honestly engaged with the content (perhaps specifically with thoughts like pluralism) while keeping my work entirely stupid. While I continue to debate with myself whether this is responsible or irresponsible, I find myself and many of my contemporaries tending to work in and between many different art forms. I like the word behavior, though, because it stresses my performance as an artist even if I am not making performances, and it also places my interest in an ongoing process, where I am a figure acting in a story, in which I cast myself as a believer/seeker/explorer.

The first behavior, which I described under Situation, is that of my attention. It is habitually focused on materials that are culled from the base of ordinary
experience, even brought up from the ground of inattention and neglect. In part I desire to make sense of unwanted materials as anomalies of living a meaningful life; things that seem out of place in an ideal world. In other words, I am looking at trash and asking how it might be meaningful. I am looking at homelessness and wondering if that is a “useful” position (in the same sense that art might be “useful”). How does it function socially? How does it speak back to us? And if there is a positive social function at all, does it function despite us?

I am eager to withdraw the role of an artist in many circumstances where an unmediated encounter might occur. For me there is something sublime in an entirely unintentional event, and this might be the overarching characteristic of the materials to which I am drawn. A material that finds unintentional purpose complicates my authority as an artist. Likewise, an intentional gesture on my part whose outcome is unknown also undercuts my authority. I am looking for risks worth taking.

Because of this, rather than making with an expected outcome, I have begun to focus on my actions — intentional actions which I follow through until the thing that I could not predict manifests itself. To me this is always a humbling experience because I encounter, in a positive sense, that which I had previously been unable to see.
Figure 5: I Kiss A Stranger, 2011

I have come across this quote from Antone Vidokle that resonates with me and with what I am trying to communicate about my active role. He says, “If art is produced as an outcome of certain conditions (rather than simply an act of genius, which is not interesting or possible to discuss), then creating such conditions would actually produce art. If the ultimate conditions of production are the world and life (rather than a studio or art museum), it would then follow that a certain way of living, of being in the world, would in itself result in the production of art: no work is necessary.”

This is not to say that nothing gets done, because I have to do things just to stay alive, and, further, we are being asked to set conditions. The question is about whether my doing is 'work' per se. To me this translates into whether there is a feeling that pulls me through it, like a vision or an intention. Is there something that makes the work worthwhile or, more, not feel like work? The work being done, I believe, is not done by humans, but is a consequence of living a meaningful life.

Without prior knowledge of Vidokle's quote I have based my recent work on the thought of art being a “consequence of living” in which I prepare a stage on top of which something may happen, rather than forcing something to happen. I am willing to do whatever it takes, by any medium necessary, to be fully alive, and this is what I find myself doing:

- For a time I collected materials from my immediate surroundings. In the summer I happened to be eating a lot of grapes, so I left the stems on the windowsills, decorating them in the sun until they were dry. Someday, when I feel compelled to, I might dip them all into candle wax (three blocks of which I found in the basement of my old house) leaving the tips of their branches to burn the slow burn of a miniature forest.
I happen to have washed my clothes in a washing machine for the past three years and have dried them in clothes dryers and collected the lint produced out of this process. It is a great material that has some of these connotations of being dirty, lowly, worthless, but when it comes out of the dryer it is extremely clean and soft and often has vibrant color. I have made some sort of casts with the material by stuffing my pockets full of it and letting it solidify in there for a few days while I wear my pants. Perhaps nothing will come of this, but I have felt compelled to pay attention, as if this was already setting the conditions for work to make itself.

I have been collecting my hair when I cut it, which is not often, since I've come to enjoy its length and the ritualistic significance I can attach to its shearing after certain events in my life. I have taken that hair and begun to twine it, making a fragile rope that extends somehow the length of a period of time: the time that I held a Starling bird in my hand as it died, until the time that I held a premature kitten in my hand as it died. These lines are sentences that do not speak, but sag from end to end. It may become a strong rope, or a warm blanket, but for the time it sits patiently determining what it can’t not become.

I have been collecting my fingernail clippings in a jar labeled 'clock,' and my loose change in a jar labeled 'rent.' I have collected Q-tips, dental floss, bread ties, clothing labels, and splinters. These materials evidence the margins of my body and accumulate into a visually apparent existence through time, which mark a waiting.

Adrian Piper began a project in 1988, the year I was born, to collect all of her hair and her fingernail clippings into jars, with a final jar for her eventual cremated remains. And with this she asks, in the title, “What will become of me,” as if a
statement and a question all at once. And I think of the Ice Princess, Juanita, in Arequipa, Peru, who was sacrificed to the Incan mountain gods and promised a place in the afterlife. And surely she is alive in the minds of the museumgoers who stare at her mummified body in a refrigerated museum case, but is that all? I may soon construct a small building with these materials that have grown out of me, one that is small enough to fit inside of my body. **Because that is what a house is for — a house is for the body.** A time of waiting sets the stage for a time of action.

- I have been collecting synthetic flowers that I find on my walks around the neighborhood in Columbus. I have found some in Japan and some in Bolivia as well. They are machine-made, and however convincing, one can almost always point them out from a distance. Simply by collecting them, in all of their variety, into one place, they undo each other as representations of plants because they do not agree on what sort of plant they are trying to represent. They are not even a convincing bouquet because they do not work together. And yet I ask them what their possible value might be. In many of these cases the single act of picking up a single thing has become the activity of collecting, repeatedly, which has accumulated into a habit of behavior. The habit is an activity that exceeds the social script because I give my attention to that which cannot ask for it. **A habit of behavior solidifies into a ground upon which I can choose to act again.**

What will I do with this mass of fake flowers? If I make them into a literal ground, laying them as a carpet, what sort of event can take place there? What action makes sense of this almost arbitrary habit I have created for myself? More importantly, what do I feel compelled to do? I do not even like these flowers, but I am curious about the people who love dead things that still appear to never die.

- I have been collecting my shoes, the old ones that I no longer wear, because they are free material that evidences the margins of my body and the
activity of walking that I like so much as an act of resistance in an age of mass transportation. I am keeping them for the off chance that someday I will pile all of them together into one great heap that will strike me like those piles behind glass walls at the concentration camps where my grandparents barely lived for a while. This image of the shoes is an intensity of accumulated marks piled upon each other that form a ground of what could have been upon which I happen to arrive and they happen to me as that very possibility of life imbued with the historic truth of death.

I have created another habit for myself which is carrying two wallets and now, after about a year of it, now that I can put it in my back pocket without noticing, now that I am trained in the art of wearing two wallets, I might start collecting photographs from other people’s wallets, fold them into fourths and carry them with me everywhere I go. I wonder about the possibility of caring for a complete stranger. The folds might be cross heirs that disrupt the image or a blessing that marks it as protected. I sit on the wallet but the wallet also disrupts my comfort of sitting. I choose to stay uncomfortable in order to keep these strangers in mind. Folded and underneath my weight, they do not appear visually but are apparent in my discomfort. Against all of this intention, I refuse to act against compulsion, however long it may take.

A work of striking resemblance is pictured on Page 10. A cardboard box I slept on for roughly half a year, where a situation of physical discomfort provided the continual reminder of an ephemeral experience, producing both an object in which I store my memory and also extending the memory of the event to include a body memory of the situation I had originally seen. The image was one of awe when I came upon a homeless man sleeping on an incredibly intense hair stain, like an immaculate blurry sphere that punched through my eyes and into my gut — so fast — as I kept walking. He may or may not have been performing on purpose. I
presume he was being forced to on some levels, because most likely he did not choose to be homeless, and yet, a stain so hard must have required an intentional act of sleeping in the exact same position for an extended period of time. In my recreation of this, I was in one sense drawing with my eyes closed and making art as I slept, which evokes the utopian hope of a total life/art union, but is grounded as a meditation on real and undesired living conditions. As such, Unnamed Performance Object functioned as a ritualization of an ephemeral event, extending the discomfort, whereby I become the body that relives the memory. The box is a kit for remembering this man and this moment, which requires you to look away from the image in order to make it and accumulate your neglect.

- I have been sweeping, so very purposefully sweeping. I have been acting as if I am taking care of the world. My roommate mentioned off-hand one day that sometimes she sweeps to pretend that everything is okay, because it is a soothing act. Perhaps she is massaging the back of the earth, to tell it and herself that this is the case. And if things are not okay, at the very least it makes her feel as if she can do something about it. I think this is absolutely the sentiment that I am interested in. Though rather than making a mess disappear, this peacetime activity might be used to make the mess legible, that is, more visible than before.

Though I maintain my house (and my interest in sweeping has helped with this) I have refused to move into it. This is not my room. My room is not a place with a fixed location. These are not my things. I think I am thinking of heaven — a no place — beautiful. Last year I performed an act of sleeping with all my windows open in the middle of winter, and wrote this about it: "I sleep with all the windows open/without telling all the house/opened sucked the heat all out/until I woke myself/cold and all and windows bowed/I sleep dead winter inside out."
I have been sweeping the floors of my house, and my studio, and other people's houses, and soon the streets; so very purposefully sweeping. All the lines moving in one direction make clear the formal presentation of dust. They kiss three walls of a studio space and extend to the shoes of those on the exposed fourth edge. Not perfect lines, or razor sharp, the dust rests in distinct estimations of evenly spaced parallel marks. Not balanced by color or thickness or any particular characteristics of the marks varying quality, the field of lines is rather an all-over pattern of happenstance placed on top of the concrete floor that has its own history. The gesture repeated to such an extent as to fill the cove of a room is highlighted by the absence of any other furnishings, and because of this the mark that usually goes unnoticed has been intensified to a level of visibility.

The mark of sweeping has a direct relationship to marks made with other traditional drawing and painting tools. Various artists have employed it as a very large paintbrush, to apply glue for large posters, and in its more common use has the function of a sort of eraser. Sweeping, and other forms of cleaning purport to erase the various residues of ephemeral activities that have taken place, the very activities that make a space particular. As an ephemeral piece itself, it seeks to document activities that would otherwise be forgotten to an official history of a place (in this case the location of the piece in my studio at Sherman Studio Art Center in Columbus, OH) because rather than imbedding themselves into the architecture, the lines of dust casually lay, patiently awaiting their death, hoping only to imbed themselves as an image into a visitor's memory, or onto a photograph. The work as a whole is in fact an accumulation of negative marks, subtracted from the surrounding area and deposited into layers of waste. In this way the image also suggests a cross section of a landfill, which would also tell the history of a locations use of materials. And if the landfill is brought to mind at all, then the question of this
work's assumed ephemeral status is brought into question, since the landfill may arguably be the next level of inattention accumulating into a critical mass of visual appearance. To make this clear, the work will be swept up into a final, single gesture of depositing itself into the trash. A negation of one space becomes an addition to another. The work is simply moving material around to find an organizing structure in which its base material might be appreciated. As an image of a cross section of a landfill, or perhaps sedimentary rock, or an image of rows of crops, or even as a drawing of a wood floor, or closer, an impression of floorboards made by the dust that has seeped between the cracks, it is actually none of these. It bears close resemblance, it even lies like the lay of the land, and has a simple geometric structure that might confuse it for a miniature work of land art. But it is not the land, or the ground, or the floor. It is the very least that is needed to comprehend a floor as a specific site. It lies on the floor, giving the surface a new pattern, texture and quality with the passing of time. The last structure that it might be comparable to is a lined page or a written history. In this case it is a document of material use over a period of time that can be read. In Richard Serra's *Gutter Corner*, beam-like casts of the room’s structure are laid out on the floor, revealing the process of physical labor involved in its making. His rows of spattered lead do not explain the context against which they have aggressively thrown themselves and yet the tension between action and situation is here solidified.
Much of my action has been choosing what to focus on and then creating a new habit based on this object of attention. These habits are ways to study my subjects. Instead of drawing the object, I am finding a new way to use it. I am interested in habits specifically because they address the creation of artwork from its very origins. Echoing Anthoni Vidokle, I am focusing on my way of living, especially my attitude towards material use, while questioning and trying to form new conditions from which my art works can be made. I see myself as making artistic decisions in everyday life, and artworks as being direct consequences of these decisions, even though it may take a long time for them to become manifest. I find this long-term commitment absolutely necessary for projects that are entirely unlikely. Because there is no specific technique to, say, carrying two wallets, and, in fact, in this case the skill set involved is to become unaware of something that I originally did on purpose, the only way for it to develop is to be absolutely committed to a whim and completely open to how it might change.
These various activities can be brought together by looking at my making strategies in earlier found object works completed during my undergraduate education. I feel as if I am still using strategies that I found then, however I am applying them to different 'objects.' Works such as *not pure, but true*, 2010, started with a single object and I asked myself to change the object as much as possible with as little physical manipulation as possible. I wanted to be able to track what had happened in order to change my perception of the object, in this case a door. After a period of living with the door and considering the door, I decided on a single action: to cut it in half down the center. On the ground of the surface of the door, an event took place, a cut, much like Lucio Fontana cutting the canvas, which cuts through the history of the object as well. The cut is to arrive at a new situation — to open a door and find yourself to be inside of the door. And beautiful as that thought may be, I did not intend to stumble into this. Keeping myself an amateur allows me to cast myself as the fool, who is always stumbling across the fourth wall to reveal what we are pretending to ignore. I love this antidote that Vic Munez tells about how he paid a lot of money to see a professional play of Othello, but for $10 he got to see an amateur rendition where he saw two plays at once: one of Othello and one of the actors trying to play Othello.

I still employ mostly found material as conceptual ground and physical limitations to work against. However, when that material is a base material (wood, fabric, metal) rather than a specific object (door, shirt, hanger), projects may be conceived on their own terms, rather than being weighted by the burden of knowing that the material had a domestic past life. The 'object' which I find myself working with now is more elusive and invisible — a social or psychological state — which I am calling the situation. So what do you do to it?
In several of the works in the portfolio with which I applied to graduate school, such as *not pure, but true*, and in the heritage of found object work generally, the emphasis is not on making a thing, but on changing a thing; changing our (my) perceptions of a thing, or employing that thing in a different way. In my conception of the term 'situation,' it works perfectly well to call an object a 'situation'. An object is a scenario, a set of relationships set up within its material existence, which registers its relationships that exceed its physicality. (A door hinges on a frame; it hangs between two spaces, it functions because it permits mobility between relationships). An object can be a site of engagement, have a history, and be a place. And because of this, it is possible to consider a social context (a site of history, political situation) as an object of sorts, albeit a living system, which is always being shaped. Because society is always being made, and employs the 'every day' in its continual construction, there is rich content already imbedded in these materials and tools. It is only by careful selection, framing, and intense reiteration that this content surfaces to the eyes, though, it is always there. In forming habits I am appropriating the mode of making which everyone uses to make their world, however, I hope to call for intentional living at the same time that I search for it.

And the stark contrast that emerges when the background for everyday events becomes an event itself is a poetic moment. To cultivate this, my activities have involved trying to undo my assumptions. If they are subversive, then, they subvert myself. This is at once self-destructive and self-forming, and because of this they seek to transcend the everyday, which brings to mind a long tradition of contemplative and simple living that seeks the spiritual in daily tasks. I would hate to say that my process is a form of meditation. **I seek a form of contemplative action.**
It works perfectly well then that when I form a habit, when I have learned to do something unconsciously, I must be interrupted by something that I did not expect, which is something outside of my plan. This is what I am hoping for by willing a behavior to begin with: to have an encounter with something other than myself. By being so much of one thing, I become a background upon which to see something that is different. A figure-ground relationship takes place between two figures, and I work as if I am laying myself as a ground, as if I as a ground sets the stage for another, as if the performance is already taking place and I am simply framing it in a specific light, as if the light alone would give you a reason to see. As if the formless can only be recognized as the formed and so we must show how the form is formed. The only way is to place the viewer (situate the viewer as the site) where the coincidence of the formed and the forming might happen. This would be in a literal sense making a difference. Though I could in my proudest moment only claim to have provided a situation in which a difference was made, I want to write a story with objects, I want those objects to be events in the story of others. I want to arrive at an understanding of living as writing a story where I do not provide the words, but maybe flesh out an image that instigates its telling.

If none of this makes sense then I have accomplished my goal in part by doing the same thing to the point of rendering my mind incapable of connecting line for every line into immaculate sense. If that action is performed intensely enough and repetitively, then I have provided the ground for something else to take place on top of me. If I set myself into the motion, then I become a trance happening. If a trance happening happens upon a person, then I as a ground am also a figure of an event upon the ground of another figure. If I am going in circles then we have reached the moment of a radical break that I believe is possible and for which my
every action yearns. If I have learned the habit of holding my tongue forever then now is the time to breathe the single word.
Chapter 3: UNKNOWN

An unintended underlying structure.

A desire for events.

A turn to making from the ground up.

A desire for collaboration.

I bought frames.

Silver paint on my nose and hands, which paints whomever I touch.

A geodesic figure can hold itself up like networked architecture.

The best thing cannot hold itself up which is why it is the best thing.

I exist when others exist.

The violence of beauty.

The place from which I run approaches.

Not knowing what anything means anymore.

Blushing.

The coincidence of the forming and the formed.

A story must be performed.
Having invested a great deal of time and energy in impulsive behavior, and contemplating as I work to resist the temptation of meaning, I must wait for something to speak back to me. The unknown is an encounter with unpredictable factors, which exposes something about the material or process I am involved in, or about myself that I could not foresee. At some point something will become clear, it will appear, and I will see it. I cannot find any overarching characteristic for this unknown element except that it is exactly what I do not expect. Although, in many ways, this is the thing that I am looking for, it comes despite my devotion. Devotion does not mean that I am worthy of a chance appearance, but that I might be better prepared to recognize it when it comes.

For these reasons, I like to think of each work or set of works as a journey because I expect to take them in unknown directions, encountering unknown problems, and finding unknown solutions, and I hope this will give them the vocabulary to speak in unknown languages. As much as my work relies on language, I seek to find a silent core that does not follow the logic of any language. Someone recently told me that my work is full of strategies of resistance — which at best resists category and single meanings, but consequentially is sometimes unnecessarily confusing.

In my artist statement for the thesis exhibition I wrote that I have a plan, that I am steadily working on the plan, and at the same time I am anticipating that the plan will change. This is a very slow improvisation and a very discrete dialogue taking place. The situation is a current state of affairs which happens to me, upon which my action takes place, and which sets the condition for the situation to respond, most likely in a way that I did not expect. It runs into me, collides, changing the course of my intended direction, and I changing its. I met a guy today who sold me a sandwich, and as part of the exchange he told me about his life, about how even if you’re the best at what you do, if no one wants it, you’re out of business, and that it doesn’t matter what happens but how you respond to it.
It might be an interesting exercise to write down all the things that have happened that I did not expect, which are things for which I am the only witness. I have always been curious about the public form of confession that Christians sometimes perform which is their testimony of faith, where they witness the hand of God on their journey through life, all trials and tribulations, having, inevitably, brought them upon the stool in the auditorium to share their story of unabashed affirmation.
FLINCHES OF PERCEPTION

I thought a bug was buzzing, the cat was
I thought there was a puddle, a spider web was shimmering
I thought the fly stopped in midair, it landed on a leaf
I thought a nail was wedged under the concrete step, the step was placed on top of the nail
I could not tell if the clouds were moving or if the stars were moving because I was also moving
I thought it was my bag, it was the cat
I thought it was a bug, it was lint
I thought it was the bus sign, it was the leaves
I thought I was going to kiss the light, I kissed the shadow of my head
I thought he was begging for money, instead he shook my hand
I thought it was wires, I thought it was the rear end of a wolf, it was wires
I thought it was a dog falling down a sand dune, it was a black plastic bag falling down a sand dune
I thought it was a deep shadow, it was a black dog in the sun
I thought they were leaves falling, they were birds flying
I thought it was a wall, it was a mirror
I thought it was a human falling over, it was a bag of trash falling over
I thought it was a book, it was a vision
I thought it was a plane, it was the moon
I thought it was a frog, it was a leaf
I thought it was a cat, it was a plastic bag
I thought it was there, it was gone
I thought it was a trash bag, it was a cat stuffed under a car
I thought it was a girl in a summer dress, it was a spool of bubble wrap on top of a trash can, unraveling
I thought it was snow, it was light
I thought it had gone, it was still there
I thought it was on fire, it was a beer can
I thought I stepped on a kitten, it was a sock
I thought the garbage can was on fire, someone had thrown away a steaming hot cup of coffee
I thought it was a dying animal, it was a garbage bag in the road
“What happens when it is the making that instructs the maker? What happens when the art makes the artist? When I make a work, there is sometimes a turning point; a moment when the conceptual and sensuous materials bind in such a way that the composition begins to resist my attempts to shape it according to my original intentions, and develops, against my will, its own sense of what must be done in order to be itself. It doesn’t happen all the time. But when it does, I feel relieved, because it means the minutes, days, or years of working up to this point were worth the effort. But there is also a degree of despair, because the initial conception of how the work ought to be no longer holds sway in how it will continue to evolve. I am no longer the prime mover of the work. My directions are no longer followed. Beyond this certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached. “

-Paul Chan, A Lawless Proposition

The unknown

The possibility of encountering the spiritual

The thing that will change me with an event

Art making me and I itself simultaneously at points.

I am working towards events that I cannot predict.

I am making plans for a three-part durational performance titled “This is the only way.” It will extend over many years and necessitate documentation other than video: oral accounts, drawings, maps, photos.
The first part is driven by the image of a house that has been turned inside out. This may in fact manifest itself as architecture — sculpture — but what is more important is the emptying of self.

Much of my motivation comes from seeing injustices in the world, but I feel that the best form of activism does not seek to change others, but seeks to change the self. In this view, I’ve come from the tradition of found object work, where the transformation of my perceptions of the object necessitates changing the object. I have become interested rather recently in the possibility of reorganizing the relationship — in this case the viewer-object relationship — by changing myself in order to see the object in a new way. As far as art production goes, this line of thought may not bear much except by very indirect routes, and perhaps it holds the possibility of producing more interesting viewers rather than more interesting art objects. Nonetheless it is a philosophical line by which much of my work follows. Rather than making a thing, I am rearranging the relationships of materials that constitute our perceptions/interpretation of the thing, and thus can undo assumptions about the world. To undo a viewer’s assumptions, I must undo my own. The logic says that anything can be art, but one must still perceive it as such and this moment is an event, ephemeral as ever, extending a long duration in the story of a viewer-system, and is not the receiving of a message from the artist. Objects appear, they are durational, a work comes out of storage, and is available to be seen momentarily — an installation may be temporary, it may come back, it may not — exhibitions, like performances, happen. I am working toward events.

“In producing one-off events, performance art not only distanced itself from certain theatre traditions, it also felt that it had found a suitable means by which to divorce itself successfully from the economic laws of the art business. That said, it was precisely the principle of performing works only once and thereby preventing them from being passed on that promptly became a stumbling block. Pragmatic motives (such as the need to earn money) or those of art history (such as the artist’s desire to preserve his or her work from oblivion) eventually led to the production, collection and marketing, as something else, of documents and relics that can today be found in museums where they testify to the unique and fleeting events they accompanied. They became self-contained works of art, substantial reminders or deficient remnants, but in all events objective and protected artefacts. The history of
performance art is the history of this conflict between an art form in event mode, intended not to be purchasable and preservable, on the one hand, and, on the other, the documents and relics that are traded and archived in order to leave behind some kind of picture of these events. These documents and relics reveal the paradoxical about-turn that has befallen performance art’s self-understanding, testifying to the practices by which the performance artists sought to set themselves apart from the very structures that are now called upon to demonstrate both their attempts to demarcate and their failure to do so.” -Umathu, Given the Tino Sehgal Case

Tino Seghal, I follow your logic: The problem may not be the system, but how we use the system — a use that constitutes the building of that system.

The water jug is made out of a tire, the boys also wear sandals made out of tires, the liquor is sold in soda bottles, other children are wearing sandals made out of soda bottles. Like plants becoming medicine, becoming health, becoming movement, these instances of forced ingenuity bears witness to the continued life of materials whose meaning solidifies in the meaningful lives they support. The only consistency of a thing is that the thing can change. History is not a story but a recounting of the changing of the story.

A house is for a body — all of the objects correlating somehow to the people and their activities and behaviors. The problem, of course, is interpretation. When the house is turned inside out and the people are cast into the world, their bodies also spilling blood into the streets will die to their selves, like a god who sacrifices himself to himself and somehow frees the world from the bondage of their past. Not the living dead, but the dead alive — a death that sets the conditions for the living living.

The body and the self along with the house are porous. This undoes my authority.

I find a soccer ball that has been punctured and can no longer be used as a soccer ball (or I’m unwilling to use it). The game must change with the material decay like evolutionary design. I take it apart, trying not to manipulate the ball very much, and discover an interior that is softer, like a fruit, slightly stained by its use,
but more anonymous, lacking any written word, names, instructions, etc. It is quieter, one step removed from its name. I turn it inside out to reveal this to those in all directions, and reveal the structure of the sphere, its seams and edges, at the same time. It is a simple geometry with a soft touch, found minimal art, pleasing to my taste as something worth contemplating. I sit with it for a year until it tells me something less obvious about itself. It says, if it is turned inside out, what happens to the things around it? Its insides are gone, scattered, lost, discarded, hidden in the open, and the outside must then go inside. As if it was a black hole, sucking in the world around it. The body is porous; the environment goes inside and can now move. In fact, it moves you.

I go back to the place where I found the ball — a gravel lot behind the sculpture facilities — and delineate the pitch of a pick-up football match. A rolling delivery gate is the perfect width to be one of the goals and the other goal takes the edge of a dumpster and a line in the sidewalk as its posts. I sweep up this field to fill the ball with the materials of this place. The rectangle of play contains gravel mostly, but there is dirt, ice, nails, leaves, twigs, a dead worm, coins, string, sawdust, and broken glass as well. These various materials meet one another in the place that they produce.

The mouth of the wound still open and showing me its past, the ball sacrificed, the war that is the sports game, now won, eternally, amen, because it is dead to itself, buried in the open. The dichotomy complicated by the boundary that provides access between — the wound. That open wound leaves traces of its past environment as it travels to new ones, dropping pebbles along the way.
OPENING AND CLOSING

One of the more convincing definitions of art that I’ve heard comes from Heidegger. A work of art opens a world that did not exist before. I connect this with the language of Christianity that seeks a new, heavenly earth. The door is opened when knocked on, and yet your door is also knocked on.

We often speak of the world of a work of art, but his art works are only passages into new states of being. For Heidegger, art must make a difference in the being of a viewer so that their relationship to the world has changed and are thus in a new world — they see the world differently, they have a new world view and are thus a new person. Reinvented? Dead? Reborn? Born again viewer? Enlivened? Multitudes of metaphoric deaths.
I am invested in this conversation as it parallels religious thought and speaks to the sacred that exceeds both art and religion as institutions, as bookshelves full of knowledge, etc.

**The opening of a world appears like a sacred event.**

Heidegger is also sure that art opens up new worlds rather than worlds that already exist. I do exist, but in the world of someone very distant from me I may not, so I wonder if my presence could open up a world for someone else?

If an alien appeared to the earth, and it was well documented, believed, and certified, we would now live in a world in which aliens do exist. That presence would make the difference between this world and that. I say this in the way that people say we live in a post-9/11 world. Were it not generally agreed on — or if only I saw it — I would be living in that new world where aliens exist and the revelation of it to me would be held as a sacred event, but to me only. There are cults whose mythology is this exact case. There are people who carry burdens that no one can see.

The Unknown is this opening and Consequence is the wake of its closing, filled most likely with doubt, because of course it cannot be proved. Gianni Vattimo has written a book titled *Art’s Claim to Truth*, where he explains in a very Heideggarian sense that truth *happens*, it takes place.

Heidegger gives a lot of attention to boredom, as it is a place in which we find ourselves considering things that are not sensational, immediately appealing, and are 'closed' to us. As much as nature appears so beautifully to us it is its essential closedness that characterizes it. In vain, it is expressing itself without words — the silent scream. In boredom we find ourselves wondering about things that refuse to give us conclusions and it is here that one's being develops. In listening to silence, one opens themselves to that which is essentially closed, practicing negative capability, perhaps like you, to whom this writing is dedicated. And whatever it means, I must really mean it.
I think of myself as trying to listen to my materials to facilitate their voice.

This is what I would like my voice to be — a listening voice.

I do not want to tell people about myself but I equally don’t want to hide.

As I describe a work I call *Carrying the Field*, I have placed my logic onto a manmade object, which now, rather than being kicked around, or thrown away, is carefully carried so that its insides do not spill out, though, I fear this is inevitable, someday. It is more fragile, but also heavier. My logic manipulates the logic that others placed onto the material, but it is negating, rather than additive, taking one back to a state of rest, where there is less to look at, less understanding, less built up information about the object. It is taken to a state in which one must look, again. At the same time that I say I am negating the object, I am not refusing it all together, but have rewritten the score for what should be thrown away and totally negated. The linguistic elements function poetically through the materials and their inversion of space and still, it is silent, lingering, and profoundly boring. “Stara” in Icelandic is a word for when your eyes are stuck looking at something- even past something- with no particular reason. And the only essence of a thing is that it could have been something else, and yet it is not.

This quality that for me lingers in the soccer ball is almost all that there is holding a group of five objects together in a work titled *Low Earth Orbit*. They are like five stars in a constellation, which amateur astronomers may call a 'deep sky object.' Due to our singular vantage point, so subjective of us, they appear to make sense of one another, which stand out as groups that can help us navigate the infinite unknown. They move me, to the point of walking them five miles from my
studio to the gallery and around the downtown on several occasions. They are abstract feelings of beauty and power, and signify my subjectivity more than anything. Theodor Adorno brings art back to the body by asking it to yield the 'capacity to shudder' as a defining character (Adorno, *The Origins of The Work of Art*). What are these things that can make me shudder, if they were not, at least, at one point, art, which maintains that very possibility of doing the same? As a group, they are a proposition. They remain closed even to me, who they open up. I want them to remain as they are and give them the space to be misunderstood. I force my meaning on them in part because I have placed an invisible structure around the collection, closing them off, to allow us to open onto their closedness that must remain.

In order to enter the work I must show you how.

At Hope College there is a secret room in the basement of the art department building which I discovered and inside there is an art installation of sorts, which looks like a storage room full of categorically bad paintings and collaged assemblages. The whole thing was psychologically charged like I imagine Vitto Acconci's *Seedbed*, where he was hiding, but waiting for you. Can I allow you to be a voyeur?

Periodically, I would give tours to people who had heard about it.

The boxes in closed formation work for me like this because I am the only one with access to the deep crevices of myself (a building where I hide, everything including my bad paintings) and so I am the only one to give you a tour.

The tone of the performance of opening the boxes for an audience — a public event, rather than a private interaction — became ceremonial, and perhaps performances that pay tribute must to an extent, like formalizing my private performances to show the social body a state of daily performing beliefs and feelings whether or not I am being watched. Is this reverse voyeurism if I am staging a public moment of a private moment? I think of the paintings of Degas, of women tending to their own bodies, or of Dutch Renaissance portraits of women tending to materials, with their eyes engaged apart from the viewer, shedding their skin and
cleaning their bones for display. In my case, I show my private performance in public by my own initiative.

What I enjoy about these objects, apart from striking me aesthetically, is that they carry a total meaninglessness, despite their ordinary materials onto which I could project my interpretations and myself. Because they lack intentionality, they become objects of practicing negative capability, that is, for resisting the temptation of meaning. They are strange to people, even though they present very simple twists on ordinary things. They are so visceral to me and so impossible for others to feel. They are philosopher stones. They help me to resist a singular interpretation of the world. They undo me the same way that I had previously sought to undo my materials. These found objects have magically taken the materials that constituted my former self and manipulated them until I was different. The event of their happening appeared as an object that could be carried like the memory of the event of their happening. My body has a very physical, though fragile, and direct relationship to the boxes in which the objects are housed and on which they are displayed.

To me, the objects reveal the chasm between subjectivities and a limit to our systems of meaning. They have a capacity to shudder, which I hope to give voice to in my framing them stylistically, and with the performance that lends an air of certainty and calm as a comfortable formalism that consoles one in the face of mystery. At the same time, taking them for walks outside the gallery is an effort to perpetuate the unexpected aesthetic encounter that they represent.

To hear that the performance was moving from several people was great news that hinted at the possibility that I have passed on the feeling that the objects gave to me.

Although they were each presented on top of a surface as if on display as art, they would not do very well as art by themselves (and I do not think I would do so well as an artist without them). The world is a cruel judge, and in the end, having no artist or critic to vouch for them and with no intention of their own apart from me, without the ability to write an artist statement, much less talk, to write grants, or make their own website, how could they survive in this world? In order for them to
live socially, I must lend them my life. The point that they raise for me has to do with access and not really about subverting expectations of art. Does art happen outside of the art world and outside of the art market? Of course. Can it be made known without these forces? That is still a question for me.

How did they penetrate me? How did they get inside of the social body that rejected them before? By what orifice do they hold my attention when they are of no interest and also refuse me? How can we use the structure of art and my position as an artist to give attention to the outside, and how can this speak back to our mutual position as being outside of each other? The outside witnesses the breakdown of society and is therefore the site of its recreation.

How did they become understood enough to be allowed into a gallery show and why do I feel like sharing them with so many people?

"..[F]or a collector - and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be - ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them." – Walter Benjamin, Unpacking my Library
Figure 9: *Arriving with Low Earth Orbit*, 2012
I have become drawn to Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. I find them beautiful, no doubt, but I love the concept behind simply arranging things that already exist. I think that is all that we do: arrange atoms, sounds, colors, etc. (with love, in order to witness). But it is made so obvious and striking in Ikebana that it is considered its own form of art. The work is held together only by a set of arrangements, like the empty space that holds a constellation of stars together. A set of relationships that makes nothing appear like something.

In my thesis exhibition, this is multiplied again by another set of relationships among other works in the show — disparate, though working towards the same feeling — posters anticipating events, or hoping for, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, materialization. Again, they are studies or proposals.
On the wall, between the floor and the first floor windows, hanging slightly high and just as slightly angled toward the floor, are two white aluminum frames. The glass makes the black and white image into a partial mirror. The frames are hanging on the wall, their long edges touching in the seam they create. Inside of the frames, an image is presented, centered, and weighted by a thick margin of white at the bottom. The image is centered and in the center of the image is a single object framed in soft light against a stark charcoal-black background. It is a photograph that has been through some process, which has given it a texture, as if scarred by its technological mediation. The gray scale image is framed in black portrait-oriented rectangle and again framed by a white frame that protects the paper. Inside the white rectangle of protection is a white margin, surrounding a black rectangle, and the black rectangle surrounds a grey scale image of an arm being held high. A frame inside a frame in side of a frame, each one signifying a part of the process: the thing, the photograph of the thing, the poster of the photograph of the thing, the object of the framed poster of the photograph of the object. Inside of the arm, the
black and white image breaks apart into the elements of its production, the ink of its printing revealing specks of pinks and teals. The arm in this way is an opening inside the formal structure of presenting the posters, which opens onto the process of its making. The frames, creating a glare, open onto the fact of their being framed, the posters open into the process of making the poster, while the image of the arm, gentle, gracefully curving, sagging against its upward mobility, using only the necessary amount of energy to stand up, while releasing all other muscles for the situation to dictate, do not open onto the process of the performance.

The photograph does not explain that it was taken after approximately 40 minutes, after the arm had been drained of blood and had gone numb. Yet it asks the viewer to ask what the arm is doing. It is doing something, but the something necessitates the arm to release its ability to do anything. It is willed into immobility, imploding, symbolically reaching toward its death. The arm in this vertical posture acts like a representation of the whole of the body, where the hand is the head, the elbow is the torso and the shoulder is the foot. It is an arm set apart from the body — by what is seen and what is not seen — though also an arm that is rooted, like a plant, into the body lying down. Vertical is contrasted with horizontal. What is visible is contrasted with what is invisible. However, this image of the isolated arm — not entirely dead, but standing — is only possible because of what one does not see.

The posters do not speak for themselves. They are stereoscopic images which permit viewers, if they are able, to cross their eyes and see the two flat images as a single hovering, three-dimensional phantom limb. Materializing in the mind of the viewer, the theoretically possible though realistically improbable event that these posters announce, delivers the vision for the project to send two cast arms into orbit around the earth as sculpture satellites. With this work I am hoping to instigate movement toward its actual manifestation — either in the minds of everyone on earth or in fact in outer space.
In the open state, the objects in *Low Earth Orbit* are closed. I open the boxes to reveal something that does not reveal itself. In its closed state I am walking with it, but it is a sculpture trying to show itself. Light reflects off of those boxes and enters the eyes of people passing by. I perform like the objects performed for me in the beginning. I am an image displaced, like the objects in the gallery are now, and I make it available at the risk of my own deterioration, my arm being cut off from circulation and going numb, at the risk of casting myself out of society — dying in the world of the social body — or at least flirting with it to make its biology appear.

They perform for me as inspiration, which is the beginning and the end of the work. The object that I want to put into orbit around the social body is a complex feeling.

The major obstacle for art and images of utopia and futurists is not that things don’t look like art, or utopia, or the future, but that they don’t feel like art or
utopia or the future. Art feels like a commodity, utopia feels like consumerism, and I will only experience the future as the present. Art always looks different, utopia always looks different, and the future always looks different, but all of the feelings of desire and hope for happiness and joy and satisfaction are where they find unity. What if an unexpected thing, even an unappealing thing, produced these feelings? I am amazed at the ability for sentiment to transform the ordinary. All of the value that would be attributed to ephemeral events and performances becomes attached to very uninteresting objects as containers for memory. In fact they do not contain memory, but locate memory. **A rock is a hyperlink to a place in my mind.**

I think that if it were possible for everyone on earth to have the same feeling at the same time, a new world would emerge out of short-circuiting the old. A sacred event common to all — a memory shared. This impossibility, based in the impossibility of empathy, due to subjectivity, due to interpretation of the same feeling, is built into the work, like hoping for a miracle, and is the logic that tracks my interest in events like the moon landing, 9/11 and early performance art, alongside traditional accounts of sacred events.

The boxes themselves, bundled as a single object, lie long across my back. Unlike other backpacks, which may hide with only straps to be seen, these boxes overwhelm my body — extending to my left and right, making passage through doors difficult, passage between parked cars impossible, and walking on the sidewalk noticeable to say the least.

Open to the extent that one understands the task and challenge of carrying the boxes, which are heavy and also look heavy, and to the extent that one also wonders where, what, why? — the same questions I might have for anyone in transit forced upon an entire block of people looking at me — the same questions that I, traveling abroad, had asked about others, and that unanswered situation of displacement is what I am interested in, which means that if you’re confused, you have understood and at the same time what is there to be confused about?

**I am making an effort to be an image for you.**
My body is a container for meaning, the boxes contain my meaning and they remain a mystery even if I see them or show them to you. (No matter what I write, it will be tidily framed in typographic style and white margins, which is comforting for the institution as an object that can prove that something has happened in the event that the content is overwhelming.)

The self is porous, it has slippages and errors and in those imperfections secrets are told. Your book bag tears open and you perform your identity on accident. I am drying my hands in the bathroom using paper towels from the garbage, and someone walks in onto a performance all of a sudden. Apart from the projection of self that is exposing itself on purpose, trying to be beautiful, radiating outward, all the private performances still register. Your body documents them minutely, I think, a tone or quality beyond the moment. Your memories, your composure, simply need more attention. For example, how the time I spent living in Japan may come through in my general attitude or style or predispositions of attention, but is not particularly relevant in terms of my artistic statement, subject matter, per say, at this moment. It is not a bit of information that is necessary though it is true and colors the work sometimes. Perhaps it is in the ceremonial placing of the boxes or in some line quality of an old print I showed recently. There is no real proof of most of that time, not in video or photo documentation. It exists in my conviction that it happened, along with those who bear witness to their own memories which they must live with and make meaningful for themselves by agreeing that it did happen, and though vague and mutating, some facts find words and we repeat them incessantly like truth, re-inscribing the fictionalized past into the present moment, or perhaps only the things that we remember really happened and so proof of something forgotten is an anomaly which again reimagines the story.

I thought they were people shrouded in red and white sheets, they were tulips.
We are always performing (Goffman, *Presentation of the Self*). I think the development of this thought traces something specific about American culture at this moment — a hyper-real awareness of oneself (self-conscious) — in which our last line of defending our identity, our very bodies, has become the site of encounter and performance, again, finally. And the comparison between today and the '60s, or radical movement being left with nothing else, is made very clear. Yet we are left with our very bodies moving radically, frantically to secure the present with a future by documenting obsessively. We have disembodied memory.

*What do you want?.... NOTHING!* 

*When do you want it?.......NOW!!*

Perhaps to really exploit materials, including people, would be the best thing. It would involve understanding the materials in a way that challenges our short-term intentions, which is our selfishness. To really exploit something would be to forgo the short-term benefits for the greater long term and sustainable benefits. People do not take responsibility for things that they do not own, and we tend not to take ownership of things that we share. People are too selfish to own anything, but we can only exploit things that we own. People do not exploit things that we share.

The fact that we are always performing reveals something about the situation that I am working on, with, and against — the society that I am looking at as a sculpture — including myself and where our attention lies. We are looking at the surface of our selves. A denial of appealing to the surface, where my performance may happen without me, is a resistance to life without history. If we are always performing, we do not have enough video tape to record it all, nor time to make it and watch it, unless we are making and watching simultaneously, always caught looking at ourselves, we are on the surface, looking at ourselves in the mirror, performing for ourselves. No need for documentation.

A thing on the surface is a tactic of social survival when everything must be grasped in an instant. A visual culture demands a visual perfection, but a story brings value to the visually unappealing.
I seek images that, within that instant grasp and hold you closer in uncertainty, fascinated in the same way that many people experience nature. I am exploiting the fact that homogeneity in popular culture means that everyone has seen a bike, or a deck of cards, or a rock or paint. That is the original miracle of art, isn’t it? The transformation of something that I cannot “see,” know, understand, has no meaning — a rock, clay, paint — into something meaningful, useful, powerful-moving something from outside of me to the inside of me and then taking me and putting me inside of it.

I have written the UNKNOWN into the score of my general process of making, but I feel that this process is happening on many levels, these four elements fluidly overlapping in multiplicity. The most definite instance of the UNKNOWN is what happens when someone sees my work. All of my intentions may be compromised or enhanced or rendered incoherent by the personal history of a viewer, who is an ever-changing context inside of which my work finds itself.
Chapter 4: CONSEQUENCE

A state or situation that results after the event.

In the boxes there are objects that I found worth contemplating. The paint, white paint, off white paint that’s been grayed with time — Or was it always so off white pale and working like glue against the gravel? Gravel, medium gravel, larger than you want to fall onto gravel, with jagged edges gravel stuck together with the pale off white paint. It fell, the paint, as I was painting a thing, rather un-panting a thing, taking the paint off of a thing, soaking a door in paint thinner and scrapping the paint off and onto the gravel, jagged that you don’t want to fall onto gravel. Gravel with sticks and grass, gravel, that would all bunch together with glue, and the glove was rather a technical thing, having put the bunch onto it to move it and having fallen over, almost, onto the gravel that you don’t want to fall onto gravel. So I had a hand in it, the one with the glove, I had a hand in. But it doesn’t fit me, I didn’t do it, I apologize if I did, I wish I hadn’t, but at least I did not do it intentionally. It was just about how the mess fit itself back together, and I was just holding it and at least my hand in it is represented as a glove. My hand is the glove. And that’s the whole thing from the beginning. The whole problem to begin with is that my hand is represented as a glove. The glove is the absence of my hand. It is the glove and yet it represents the thing that it is not, but which it correlates to in my mind. The glove is not my hand and yet it means my hand. The glove does not mean the glove that it is, but I cannot get away from the human involved in this because I am speaking from my human sanity to say my hand in it is the glove.

In the boxes there are objects that I found worth contemplating, which I can hold in my mind, impure, as I walk around even without seeing them. They rather took me by the neck and made me do it. They were compelling me to try and pass it on across the bridge of infinity between the skins of anyone other than the subject
that they happened to me. There was the bark, so quiet. Again the bark holding the absent tree which is lost on me to find how it slipped on out. I guess that insects might have dug it, that it may have been loose and a lucky fall, but again, here, this one, too, falling, onto the ground, probably softer than the rest, probably by human hands, I can only guess, and learn that it is waterproof. White Birch bark is a valuable craft material from which one can make baskets, canoes, and water containers with because it is waterproof and you can move it like paper.

![Figure 13: Object in Low Earth Orbit](image)

And I am more concerned than ever trying to do it, to pass a long a feeling. All that I have learned is that this is maybe impossible and that I need to practice dying. I need to continue to practice dying because the first time that I did it was pretty good, but obviously one must use it or lose it, so I have to keep it up and
keep the ball in the air while I am lying on the ground practicing how to die. You know?

There was also the can much like the conglomeration with the glove. I'm using nouns much more than adjectives. The glacial melting zigzag of fluffy sweetness overflowing from the crevice of the mountain range suggested in the Coke can is a lush outpouring of something other than itself. It is an empty can that holds a foreign substance in its gut-punched chest. And again I find myself anthropomorphizing objects, but perhaps they hit me like punches, and punches come from people, and: is it morally abject to consider an object a person, the same way that it is to consider a person an object? An object that is animated is different than a reified living system.

Where is the conversation anyway? I am interested here in bringing something outside into the conversation, probably because I am trying to make myself part of the conversation. At the same time I am taking my own arm away from myself, to reject it. The frames are a way of rejecting my arms because I do not like the frames at all. When asked if I would ever do anything uncomfortable, the answer is yes. I bought frames. In this case, framing a human is a limitation on it, forcing it to be visible, whereas framing an object is a liberation of sorts because the frame permits visibility. At the same time, limiting myself is in a way a freedom for me, to say that at some point my art ends. That there may at some point be a distinction between my art and my life and that is the finale of it, the big hurrah, and I retire, having not been affected by it, going on to live like everyone else I know.
If these are strategies of resistance, of ways of being without, then the frames are ways of being without myself. If they are strategies of resistance, it is because I think of this work as being political in a counter intuitive sense — despite their boldness like a newspaper headline or propaganda — and they are looking for a new world to ring in perhaps the moment of a moment but no more than the perfect reconciliation of all things. Because what I really react to is my perception of injustice in the world.

One strategy for solving the injustices in the world is to change my perception of them as injustices. Another strategy is to change my perception of myself as being just, bringing the work of reconciliation into my own behavior. The string, which appears in One Thing You Can’t Do Is and Low Earth Orbit, seems important. Aside from ink, it was the first material that felt good to work with as a base material and not as a ‘found object’ per se. It happened that I found what I gather to have been a hammock, though it was knotted and cut apart a bit at that time. After several hours of untangling, a performance of tending to material that reoccurred in Low Earth
Orbit, I set about making a net in the shape of a projected beam of light that would catch light around it, rather than produce light. A four by four array of black screws connects the white string to the white walls. The piece gets rolled up into a plastic bag to be put away and is taken out when it needs to be used. The string, in regard to my behavior as an artist, is important because it breaks, to a degree, from my habit of using materials that register a familiar history of use, and as such I am giving form rather than appropriating form. My form is a frame for thinking about the ambient light of the room, the light that streams through each of the cubes without reflecting off anything. It was very much motivated by thinking of frames as containing a work of art, and the impossibility of containing the light and showing the light that is being contained simultaneously. It is diagrammatic and difficult to photograph. Light is being projected from a single point onto the wall, and the light emanating from a painting is also entering into a single point, held taught and weighted by a feeling in the stomach - a feeling in the stomach that is hung at head level, which is tangible to the eyes but difficult to see.

BLACK AND WHITE

The only color that appears in the work that I have been making is gray and brown and silver, which are the colors of the materials that I am working with. The only other color comes from posters, found photographs, or photographs that I have taken, in which the range of colors is still generally limited. I find the gray scale, or a limited range of color, to be quieter, asking the viewer to move into the muted shades, rather than having color that moves out and surrounds. It makes them cheaper, easier, perhaps more cerebral than optical. I don't really want anything to look at, per se. I appreciate light too much to mess with it at this moment and also the string was a cage for light. It speaks to necessity, to form, in blindness, to feeling without seeing.
Figure 15: Installation View of *One Thing You Can’t Do Is*, 2011
There is a funny relationship to Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973, in which the light emanating from a projector is taken as a sculptural form that is also a drawing and a film. In his work, visitors are invited to pass through the beam of light, interacting with the phenomenon, to break from the planar focus of cinematic space and even to look into the face of the projector. In my work, which is perhaps a drawing and sculpture that involves performative making, it is in the end not an immersive environment. It hangs overhead, attempting to catch your gaze.

The unknown opens itself to me and then leaves, closing again like unpredictable weather, and after the fact, I am left to do the work of recognizing — that is, life on purpose which remembers.

My problem as always: documentation

What is left over: no proof, but a witness, myself

of course, for me, the remnants, the dust, like a story, I can tell.

I am not against photo or video documentation, but realizing its limits as a device for proof, I do want to problematize its relationship to performance. To this end I have tried to make work that tells the story of a performance in the absence of the performers.

The early performances of Zhang Huan work for me particularly well as photographs because the performances involved in their making took place in relative isolation. In *12 m²*, 1994, he covered his body with fish oil and honey and sat naked in a fly-infested public bathroom for three hours. *To add one meter to an unknown mountain*, 1995, adds a pile of naked bodies to a summit, and in *To raise the level of a fish pond*, 1997, he and his assistants enter the water to do the act described in the title far from any audience. These photographs perform the telling in a visually stunning way, to audiences who may not speak Chinese and who could not
make it to the original event in any case. The documentation is still part of the performance in a larger sense and integral to a work without a public witness.

Figure 16: Zhang Huan, *To Raise The Level Of A Fish Pond*

In 2010, I started with a sort of investigation using video for a performance, to which I find myself thinking about returning. There was an image stuck in my head, sort of haunting me, of a place just outside my window. Instead of drawing or painting the image, I filmed the place, standing still for one hour in a snowstorm. The footage was sped up over and over again until the technology edited itself and only one image remained. Again, in this work I am not seen in the frame as a performer, but the process is very important to the sentiment attached to an otherwise underwhelming still image. What this produces is a situation in which the format of a journal, art review, or thesis, is the primary way to view the piece. The feeling that the landscape produced for me has been recognized, documented and validated, but is embodied only in part in the image. The other part is in the sensorial memory I have attached to this image, and which the image reproduces in me, who has that memory of its performance.
The problem with truth is the problem of representation. It can only show itself being doing happening. It comes unannounced, without preparation, without invitation.

When truth happens to you, like an event that produces a shiver, rippling through your skin, but not through anyone else’s, I cannot speak, but only follow, my trail a trail of walking beyond in such a way to recognize the image of someone walking. The invisible image appears as the image of me walking towards nothing. I see an image of someone walking and follow to again produce the image of someone walking. To stage a truth is of course a falsity.

But I am the magician, the liar, the saint, the con artist, and the storyteller. If my role is a storyteller, and my role is to change the story, then I can cast myself as something other than the magician, the liar, the saint, and the con artist, which in turn makes me the magician, the liar, the saint, and the con artist, telling the story.

The second image I have decided to pursue is that of a pilgrimage, a nomadic wandering pilgrimage, ending in a lucid liminal state of being. We will walk to Antarctica. We will walk towards a physical place without the burden of human history, a petri dish for sustainable international cooperation and World Wide Web of
peace, and globalized environmental consciousness and idealized living in impossibility where we are more aware of our bodies than ever before. This is my sort of leaping into the void — a void that brings me into contact with the earth.

Art hyperlinks you into a place in your mind of which you were not aware and proposes that you could live there as a way of being. You can make your home in the uncomfortable liminal state of becoming.

“The” “house” “will” “be” “turned” “inside out”.
“We” “will” “walk” “to” “Antarctica”.
“Objects” “will” “be” “put” “into” “orbit” “around” “the” “earth”.

What do the objects that I have found propose? They situate themselves between the manmade and the naturally occurring as unintentional consequences that undo humans. Might they be intentionally unintentional? They are assemblages that propose the sublime as a possibility within the deterioration of the beautiful and a misinterpretation that means more than the intended meaning. They propose to be objects as events where nature acts, participates, and performs within society. They propose a natural phenomenon of perceptual experience as art, of which these happen to be examples. They propose in a way a community of dissonance, in the same way that they resonate and yet refuse to harmonize with the other works in the show. I do not know if this sort of negative notion that the works do not work so well together, nor speak for themselves, should be co-opted into a positive point, but for me all of the works in my thesis exhibit follow a becoming together despite their difference: a single feeling that changes its form in response to its environment in order that it might reappear.
When I am finished the room will look like a cage of waiting. There will be lines that mark the floor like marks that pass the time. There will be ink that floods the pages like outer space that floods the mind. I can make anything sound interesting after the fact with talk. I have cultivated a taste for it inside of my mouth and now among the living I am sick. Alive I rise again and spend my year of eating breakfast to prepare myself to practice how to die.
I would maybe rather hide and say I’m lying on the ground to shape the ground, say I’m waiting for it to happen as if I’ve laid that perfect surface and I’m waiting for it to catch the perfect dust across my view. And though I think this happens, it’s really not the best way to document the wind or to prove I have a body.

I would maybe rather doze and drench my scalp until it combs my hair down with every muscle I have given up to gravity. And slow slow slow slow slowly prepare a breakfast in the morning noon and night to my sunrise eyes of waking.

Diagonal vibrant stripes that are named for their venetian blinds are shadows more alive than they are plastic. And I would rather frame the wall and hope we don't keep orbiting than let the shadow fade into my neighbor’s hallway.

While I was there, on the ground, waiting to shape the ground, I found a dream and I dreamt it.
All the rounds and all the rounds and all the circles going, round and all the
circles going, go the circle making hanging off the circle saying, saying all the
sayings of the people who had lost recovered, found and found, refound and made
and made again.

My head is all the circles and the saying goes like this: how the fours
recovered any of it is a mystery (to me) — and how the fours recovered (any of it)
was the mystery to begin with — the history of the mystery is itself the same,
whatever happens to be is how they let it be. They go beyond the three to being
knowless showing beings, dancing as they do their showing, hiding behind trees.
Figure 19: Outline
Because that is what art is for — art is for humans.
References


