THINGS THAT

by
Anne Macmillan
B.F.A. Intermedia
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 2009

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology
at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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SIGNATURE OF AUTHOR
Department of Architecture
May 5, 2015

Signature redacted

CERTIFIED BY
Renée Green
Professor of Art, Culture and Technology

Signature redacted

ACCEPTED BY
Takehiko Nagakura
Associate Professor of Design and Computation
Chair of the Department Committee on Graduate Students

Signature redacted
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the artistic practice of the author by investigating selected art work she has
produced within the last nine years. The writing avoids explaining, and instead aims to share with
the reader by exploring how divided attention has been a major topic of research for her visual
art practice.

Recurring forms in her practice are investigated: repetition, circling, tracing, and listing. The
writing emphasizes process over final product. This acknowledges that ideas about the work, and
the work itself, change in the process of creation, and when put into association with a larger
body of artwork.

By discussing her own work along side the work of other artists, writers and theorists, the thesis
explores a process of “attending to things” through an art practice. How can one’s attention
be absorbed by, reflective of, or projected into objects being studied? How might these different
configurations between subject and object cause a conceptual erasure of the observer, or the object
of study?

The artist is absorbed by the objects she observes when she conforms her body and her attention
to their specificity. Her process reflects the world as she samples and gathers empirical evidence
using various digital tools. She projects her own ideas into objects as she attempts to describe; this
process effectively erases what is unknown and unfamiliar about them.

Thesis Supervisor: Renée Green
Title: Professor of Art, Culture and Technology
COMMITTEE

Renée Green
Thesis Supervisor
Professor of Art, Culture and Technology
MIT

Rosalind Williams
Thesis Reader
Bern Dibner Professor of the History of
Science and Technology
MIT

Jan Peacock
Thesis Reader
Professor of Intermedia
NSCAD University
THESIS STATEMENT & METHODOLOGY

William James said that “each of us literally chooses, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit.”¹ This thesis considers my own art practice as a kind of universe, and the manner in which I “attend to things” as my process.

My interest in process-driven work runs throughout this thesis. The drawings featured alongside the writing are taken from my previous journals and sketchbooks, which I have turned to as a source of evidence and insight into my art practice.

My research interest is in divided attention, and I explore this topic by looking at work I have created over the past nine years. Recurring forms in my work are investigated; repetition, circling, tracing, and listing. There is an emphasis on process over final product, as I consider how ideas about the work, and the work itself changes in the process of making it.

I discuss my practice alongside the work of other artists, writers and theorists, this helps me explore different ways of attending to things through art. I ask, how can one’s attention be absorbed by, reflective of, or projected into objects being studied? How might these different subject/object configurations cause a conceptual erasure of the observer, or the object of study?

¹ James, William, The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1, pg. 424.
I notice I am absorbed by the objects I observe as I conform my body and my attention to their specificity. My process reflects the world as I sample and gather empirical evidence using various digital tools. I project my own ideas into objects as I attempt to describe; this process effectively erases what is unknown and unfamiliar about them.

My path of research in trying to find terms, ideas or related projects that might help me speak about my visual art practice has been winding and associative. My bibliography ranges widely in history, topics, and literary genres, and this is because I have found inspiration in diverse and surprising areas. The sources I offer in this thesis are ones that I feel can help express something about my art practice at this point in time.

I have been guided by my thesis advisor Renée Green, my thesis readers Rosalind Williams and Jan Peacock. I owe much to my peers in ACT, my friend Kathleen Tetlock, and my fellow conscious dreamer Lukas Steinman, whom I look forward to seeing things with for many more years to come.
THINGS THAT
By
Anne Macmillan
PG. 19  EYES CLOSED
PG. 27  EVERYTHING
PG. 29  SMALL STEPS
PG. 31  TRACING
PG. 35  INTERMITTENT STREET LAMPS
PG. 39  REFLECT, PROJECT, ABSORB, ERASE
PG. 57  EMPTY SPACE
PG. 65  REPETITION
PG. 69  CIRCLING

PG. 75  CIRCLE BACK, REPEAT
PG. 85  BIBLIOGRAPHY
The Hypnagogic state of consciousness is a period just before and leading to falling asleep. It is a transition between wakefulness and dreaming.

A. Lukas?
L. Yeah?
A. What kinds of things do you see?

L. I see a crab with oven mitts on.
A. I see the bottom of a boat.
L. I see... I see a penguin shaped seadoo.
A. I see these curvy lines that, kind of remind me of praying mantis arms, I think they are coming from the sand to the sky.
L. Yeah I see those.
A. And, there is a whole series of them.
This “observation is at a distance”\textsuperscript{1} and allows those experiencing it to see vivid images in their mind’s eye as though they were dreaming. Yet they are fully awake, and able to communicate about what they are seeing.

A. I see some chocolate chip cookies.

L. I see a tuft of grass on top of a stack of pancakes.

(laughs)

A. I see the number one in a candle form, its lying on its back, it’s not on a cake.

A. I also see a toy unicorn.

Blanchot said about the hypnagogic state, that the “real” enters into an “equivocal realm”\textsuperscript{2}. the images are real in that they are really being seen, but they are far from any sort of concrete reality.

L. I see the schedule board at the cartoon network head offices.

L. They have three colours on the board, blue, red and orange markers.

\textsuperscript{1} Schwenger, Peter. \textit{Writing Hypnagoga}, pg. 424.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, pg. 426.
A. I see some orange stuff now. At first it was a slapping down of colour, but now it is being stirred up in the bottom of a glass.

L. I see a couple keys that are chomping like an alligator.

When British philosopher John Stuart Mill found himself defending the “cultivation of feelings through imagination”, he said “the imaginative emotion which an idea, when vividly conceived, excites in us, is not an illusion, but a fact, as real as any of the other qualities of objects.”

A. They are chomping?

L. Yeah. They are just like... the teeth of the keys are facing each other and the head of the keys are held together with some sort of ... I can't think of it. I can't think..

A. It's ok, you can just stop there.

L. Ok.

The very “first clear evidence that our species had gained the

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3 M.H. Abrams: The Mirror and the Lamp, pg. 311.
capability of reflexive consciousness”⁴ was with the discovery of the cave images in Southern France. Over 45,000 years ago, within the dark echoic tunnels, Paleolithic humans experienced a shift in consciousness as their senses became deprived of visual and aural input.

A. I saw an alligator too.

L. I see a pretzel man.

A. I see lots of different characters like in the film we watched the other night, all sorts of characters morphing into each other.

In the private darkness of caves, in the farthest depths, humans covered rock walls with images of extended hands, and they scraped delicate flute marks into the soft clay with their fingers. They made floating images of bulls, equines, and stags, not to represent images from the outside world, but to merely capture and make contact with what was seen in the mind’s eye. There was a desire to fix in stone these drifting images, to try to visually describe what was floating in front of them.⁵

L. I see an underwater garden.

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⁴ Page, J. F. *Dream Science*, pg. 3.
⁵ Lewis-Williams, David. *Mind in the Cave*, pg. 193.
A. I see some architecture in a mall. It's inside the mall and it is a mixture of places I've seen before in video games and videos that are animated.

A. I see a bunch of chairs sliding together, around an office floor, like there is an earthquake happening.

L. Oh my gosh.

L. I see all of the blue Disney characters at the same time.

As a writer, Frances Ponge has a desire to describe things, yet he senses there is always much more than what he is consciously able to put to paper. Peter Schwinger quotes Ponge saying, “here is the definition of things I like best: they are what I do not speak about, what I would like to speak about, and what I never arrive at the point of speaking about.”

A. I see a lacrosse.. like.. what is that called even?

L. The lacrosse stick?

A. Yeah, the stick.. I see the lacrosse stick .. at the pizza place in Harvard Square, on the ground.

Schwenger, Peter. The Tears of Things, pg. 28.
American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne once made an attempt to sit and record to paper all of the observations he had during an interval in the Concord forest. Hawthorne's results disappointed him, and he described his work as a “shallow stream of recorded thought”, because it is “distinct and expressed thought” which somehow missed the emotions, ideas and associations that had been flowing all the while somewhere at the back of his mind. He is left wondering who would ever try to capture the world in this way when “we see how little we can express.”

A. I see a bunch of cardboard boxes that are more or less all aligned, neatly arranged.

L. I see pizza slices flying through the sky like jet fighters.. at an airshow.

Filmmaker Trinh T Minh-Ha chooses to approach life and art through indirect and poetic means, rather than directly. In an interview, she discusses her approach of *speaking nearby* which is for her not just a methodology or technique, but actually a way of being. She says speaking nearby is an “attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world” and that it is “...a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object

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as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it.\footnote{Ibid, pg. 87.}

A. I see that you have a patch on your new jacket with eyes and a mouth.

L. Scary.

A. And it has a weird face.

Trinh says that “these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language.” Her approach to filmmaking is poetic, she works with ambiguity so that the work may remain alive in its interpretation, opposed to becoming communication as an “instrument of thought.”

A. Maybe just one more?

L. Yeah.

A. I see a fork. But it is also a pear.

L. I see a banana that rocks back and forth in perfect second intervals.
In the spring of 2006, I decided to try to document everything in the apartment I was subletting. For the project *Everything in 6236 Chebucto* (2006), I photographed tacks, crumpled pieces of paper, t-shirts, books, an apple, fish food, a remote control, a Polaroid, a love letter, a pencil, a shoe, the other shoe... etc.

I wondered if I should document the individual kernels in a bag of popcorn, the electronics embedded in the telephone, or the bolts in the table. The undefined criteria “to document everything” caused me to struggle to make decisions when I started seeing the specificity of the material that composed my apartment. The more effort and attention I put into the process, the more my apartment opened up into an infinite number of things.

This one open-ended “rule” caused me to struggle with the awareness of my subjective decisions, uniquely, for everything that I photographed. It made me aware of my own bias, my impatience, and my reluctance to carry out a task that was exponentially growing more difficult.

I recall this project because it was the first of many where I designed a process that tested my stamina and attention to detail while trying to capture something. I created an awareness
of my surroundings by making everything isolated. It involved removing the context of everything by photographing it against a white background and scaling everything down to the same size. I was treating all of these different things as though they were the same. I could get lost in the collection of photographs I took. Deconstructing my apartment in this way did not help me see or understand it better. Things were less clear and more cluttered, but the process of photographing made me more sensitive to each thing, at least this was what I thought. How can one measure one's own sensitivity to things?
In Benoît Mandelbrot's paper, *How Long is the Coastline of Britain*, he describes how the recorded length of a coast depends on the unit of measurement used. A coast measured in kilometers will be shorter than a coast measured in centimeters. I like to think of the implication of this idea in relation to the body, and one’s own physical and observational stamina. I think about the speed of walking as a measure of sensitivity, that slow walking would allow one to see more of what lies beneath one’s feet, which would make the experience of walking the coast much longer. I think about how the most sensitive walker would hardly move at all. In *Coastline* (2009), I invented an iterative process of drawing that was designed to slow me to a stop, over time. It followed these rules:

1. Fill the drawing surface with one straight, horizontal line.
2. Mark a point on the center of the line.
3. Move this point N-increments into X or Y axis.
4. Connect lines from this point, to the start and end points of the previous line.
5. Repeat for the new line segments.

The drawing was made on a twenty-foot wide wall. It began as one twenty-foot straight line, and then I procedurally divided this length. I rolled a die to randomly generate numbers, and
I flipped a coin to determine X and Y values. It seemed to get “crumpled up” with triangular peaks and valleys as I worked. It was a tedious drawing process, and it became exponentially more tedious the longer I drew, but the process accounted for all of the individual lines that composed the entire drawing. It also slowed my progress until I could not add any more information to the line, and was required to stop.
In the drawing series, *Contours of Near Earth Asteroids* (2012), I attempted to get close to many asteroids that were catalogued as "near earth" by various scientific institutions. I collected 3D model data of asteroids from NASA and the Astronomical Institute of the Charles University for this drawing series.

I traced the edges of these asteroids onto paper with pencil, copying their outlines as they spun. Each asteroid was centered on its own square of paper, and I recorded a dizzying series of slightly varying loops, capturing their shape and movement over time.

I thought about the asymmetry of this relationship, where I was able to observe every angle of the asteroid. I imagined that if the asteroid somehow had eyes all around itself, and if the paper acted as a window between us, it would see my same flat face staring back at it over and over again.

Does the repetition of my image in the view of the asteroid, mean that it doesn't get to see as much of me as I of it? Does that mean I am closer to it than it is to me? Can I really be that close to something if the proximity is not reciprocated?
For me, a trace is about trying to be sensitive. When I trace, I have to mould myself to whatever it is I am tracing; it is a way of trying to get close to something that is otherwise distant. The material that I trace onto becomes a window for me to nearly (but never completely) come in contact with the thing.
Drawing is different than tracing, as I do not necessarily have something I am trying to get close to. When drawing, I like looking for something that I do not yet see. One way to do this is to look intensely at the thing, so that I almost look right through it. I am good at resisting looking at the page, I look only at the thing, I stare at it, I draw without really seeing what I am doing. I wonder if finding something new naturally accompanies not seeing what I am doing, or where I am going.

Drawn lines are like a mirror for how I see. A record of seeing that is displaced to a page. Something happens when I refuse to look at my own lines while drawing. I don't want to think about what I am doing, because it slows me down, it dumbs down the whole process. It doesn't teach me anything when I keep “checking in” every time I put the pencil to the page. I want lines that do not know what I think about them as they are being drawn. They have their own secret agenda to carry out (in the creation of the drawing) and I don't want to interfere with that plan. Sometimes the artwork can appear to have a mind of its own, if I refrain from interfering. This requires holding back judgment in order to give ideas a chance to materialize.

I think about all of the visual information my eyes see, reduced to a narrow line, made using a single, sharp point. It is a selective process; usually the edges are first.

Incomplete lines are suggestive of more, opening up the
imagination. Complete outlines seem definitive and final. I am interested in outlining, but in a way that disrupts this confident idea of finality. My drawings are derived from something, and yet aim to open up the incomplete nature of how the thing is seen.

I have found the drawing tool to be interchangeable. I draw with a camera, with GPS, with 3D tracking data. They are all digital tools, so they inherently sense the world in a very selective way. They have resolution, a built-in factor for disregarding information. They will never fully resolve what they record, and this makes for a suitable drawing tool. I like to explore when I draw, and to do this with a tool that is inherently selective allows for much to be explored. I am interested in emphasizing and taking advantage of the gaps between what is “known”.

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Recently, I started to catalogue the moment street lamps turn off as I draw near to them. I thought to keep track of the date, time and place when they turn off. I didn't think much about them, just that the sudden absence of light was noticeable, and a bit funny in how it seemed to highlight my presence.

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:51 PM</td>
<td>Sept 9 '14</td>
<td>Outside Kendal train station Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:18 PM</td>
<td>Sept 9 '14</td>
<td>Tesla St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40 PM</td>
<td>Sept 11 '14</td>
<td>Outside Kendal train station, Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:09 PM</td>
<td>Sept 11 '14</td>
<td>Tesla St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:43 PM</td>
<td>Sept 20 '14</td>
<td>Edison Ave. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:29 PM</td>
<td>Sept 20 '14</td>
<td>Tesla St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:46 PM</td>
<td>Sept 29 '14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:02 PM</td>
<td>Oct 6 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:48 PM</td>
<td>Oct 8 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:52 PM</td>
<td>Oct 15 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:02 PM</td>
<td>Oct 23 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. at Conwell Ave. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>Oct 25 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. at Conwell Ave. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<td>Oct 29 '14</td>
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<td>Holland and Wood. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<td>9:45 PM</td>
<td>Oct 30 '14</td>
<td>Holland and Claremont. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<td>9:50 PM</td>
<td>Oct 30 '14</td>
<td>Curtis St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<td>Curtis St. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:50 PM</td>
<td>Oct 30 '14</td>
<td>Curtis Street and Conwell. Boston, MA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:33 PM</td>
<td>Oct 31 '14</td>
<td>Dexter Street. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:47 PM</td>
<td>Oct 31 '14</td>
<td>Boston Avenue. Boston, MA, USA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Keeping a list is a way for me to trace this event, and as my list grew, the lamps became more present in my thoughts. They stood out more, and then in relation, so did I. I tried to understand how I felt when they extinguished as I came close.

The idea of coincidence creates a moment that feels special. I thought about how any banal thing could be considered a coincidence, and wondered why I felt excited to witness this particular event.

Author Hilary Evans coined the term SLIDER (Street Lamp Interference -der) to describe those who believe they have some sort of power to interrupt the flow of energy to street lamps within their close proximity.\(^\text{10}\) There is currently no scientific evidence to back up this theory. SLIDERS have been unable to reproduce this phenomenon on request.

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\(^{10}\) Evans, Hilary. SLI, pg. 4.
My visibility was reduced as I drew near to these lamps. It suggested to me, that I might only view something that is illuminated or enlightened at a distance. I wondered how “drawing nearer” to something could obfuscate instead of providing clarity.

Last summer, I read *The Tree* by John Fowles. In the book the author recounts his experience of coming across a rare plant in the woods. Excited by his find, Fowles explains how he spent a long time measuring the plant, photographing it and observing it in detail. After leaving, he recalls “I knew I had just fallen, in the stupidest possible way, into an ancient trap. It is not necessarily too little knowledge that causes ignorance; possessing too much, or wanting to gain too much, can produce the same result.”

For although he had observed the plant, he had no memory of actually experiencing it, or of really seeing it, as though he were a kind of tourist, absorbed by mere information. He says he “set the experience in a kind of present past, a having-looked, even as [he] was temporally and physically still looking.”

I think the intermittent street lamps are a bit like Fowles’ rare plant. The catalogue reflects a series of occurrences that actually took place, but I don’t really see the lamps. I see past these experiences, as I project my own ideas into their darkness.

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12 Ibid, pg. 69.
In his book, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams discusses how the Romantics changed the understanding of literature. Their passionate imaginings projected and illuminated the world with their own ideas, like a lamp spilling its light into a dark room. Before this movement, writing was thought to present the world as a kind of direct imitation or reflection.

Abrams discusses science and poetry at odds with one another, but also provides an interesting account of their mutual respect, which complicates this clean divide. Certainly there were poets like Keats who believed that Newton had “destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colors.” Others such as Wordsworth, felt that “poetry has nothing to fear” from scientific research.

Wordsworth said that although “some are of the opinion that the habit of analysing, decomposing, and anatomizing is inevitably unfavorable to the perception of beauty... We are apt to ascribe to them that insensibility of which they are in truth the effect and not the cause... The beauty in form of a plant or an animal is not made less but more apparent as a whole by more accurate

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insight into its constituent properties and powers."^{15}

My own artwork investigates a certain way of being in the world. I explore the analysis of isolated elements, through a process that sequences, sorts and labels things. And I explore a relaxed kind of meandering and improvisation within structure.

I wonder about erasure; of myself, as I conform and mould my effort, my body, and my attention to that of the thing. I also wonder about the erasure of the thing as it is isolated, hollowed out and filled up by my own ideas of it when under scrutiny.

When considering that the thing is overtaken by the gaze of the observer, I think of the premise of Schwenger’s book, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Schwenger says that the “Thing” is a psychic state. It is not in the world, it is in the observer, even though it is the discovery of the world that creates this psychic state. Habit is something we use to try to ignore that fact that the things of our psyche are separate from the things of the world.\(^{16}\)

Schwenger says that objects seem distant, so we formulate appearances (ideas) of them that make them familiar to us. We are comforted by familiarity, but this is an incomplete

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16 Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things*, pg. 10.
understanding of the thing, which also holds what is unfamiliar, and non-human within it.¹⁷

Artist Jan Peacock speaks of an inevitable “emptying out” of the thing, and a “filling up” with one’s own conception of it. She says that it is in “the act of representing, through language, that the thing is lost.”¹⁸

Jan introduced me to the poetry of Wallace Stevens, in particular, his poem titled, *The poem that took the place of a mountain*. By this title, Stevens suggests how his own creative practice is a process of replacement. As he writes, he describes away the unknown, replacing it with his own thoughts and feelings in the act of expression; there is a sense of longing in such an idea.

This unknown, or an “abyss” as Francis Ponge describes it, urges the artist to cope with it restlessly, as they may attempt to fill it all the while knowing that their work is a mere construction. To cope with the abyss Ponge says:

“Instinctively one looks at what is near at hand.... One gazes at the nearby step, at the pillar or the balustrade or any fixed object...One attentively regards the pebble in order not to see the rest. Now it comes about that the pebble gapes in its turn, and

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¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 3.
¹⁸ From conversation.
also becomes a precipice... No matter what object, it's enough to want to describe it, it opens itself up in its turn, it becomes an abyss, but this can be closed up again, it's more manageable; one can, by means of art, close up the pebble again...”

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Choreography for shooting *For the Trees*:

1. Approach tree with camera in hand.
2. Once the trunk fills the view of the camera, circle the tree while facing it.
3. After 360 degrees, look beyond it by shifting to the left, walk in a straight line to the tree directly behind it.
4. Repeat.

Pre-production for *For the Trees*:

1. Photograph 60 still images of the detailed surface of each tree that you filmed walking around.
2. Take these images and create high-res computer 3D models of each trunk.

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Post-production for *For the Trees*:

1. At the moment the hand-held footage gets very close to the tree, and before it begins to circle it, insert the 3D model of the corresponding tree.
2. Make sure the 3D model is integrated well. Check the lighting, the alignment, perspective, scale, focus and match the visual noise.
3. Create a digital camera to circle around the digital trunk 360 degrees.
4. After the circling, cut back to the hand-held footage to the point where it has just finished its own rotation, and is about to repeat the process.

*For the Trees* (2013) erases both the body and the tree at the moment of nearness. The trees are conceptually erased by how they are seen through. They are just objects used to contemplate the idea of observation instead of really being seen. They might as well be replaced with any repeating object; rocks, asteroids, lakes...

The video is compulsive in its repetition to examine one tree after another. Each tree is attended to in the same way, each trunk is equivalent, yet different. An entire forest to become lost in, nearly large enough to guarantee an uninterrupted cycle of systematically observing every angle.
The body is erased when the physical camera switches to the software camera, and artificial stability is inserted. The imperfect body returns only during the moments when the camera *travels between* points of focus.

I wonder if by looking at many different things, and by aligning myself with them, this “leaves me with less me, and more not me” as Robert Louis Stevenson expressed when contemplating the “depths of his abstraction”. 20 I think about my gaze projecting from me as if it were like audio, and I think of it reverberating against and absorbing into surrounding materials.

This past fall at MIT, I was able to witness *I Am Sitting In a Room*, and listen to artist Alvin Lucier smooth out the irregularities of his own stuttering voice in this live sound performance. Lucier began the work by speaking into a microphone:

“I am sitting in a room the same as the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this

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activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have."

In an interview before the performance, Lucier said that the language was “Nothing aesthetic... I wanted to tell people what I was doing”.21

The audio is recorded as it is projected in the live space, and then this version is played back through the speakers into the room and it is recorded again. This process repeats, and the resonant frequencies of the room are included in each recording. Eventually his stutter and all of his words become unintelligible as the repeated interaction of sound waves and room space cause them to be muffled.

During the performance, someone suddenly coughed and I was gripped by the presence of the audience. I knew the live microphone would pick up this interrupting sound. But eventually it was absorbed into all the murky, shadowy, glittering sounds that were reverberating in the room.

Because of this cough, we as an audience became aware of how we were part of Lucier’s work, and aware of the potential of our

21 This interview and performance were part of the CAST symposium at MIT in 2014, titled Seeing Sensing Sounding.
own presence in a way that none of us were a moment before. More people coughed; there came a succession of three sneezes, a crumpled plastic cup, the shifting of bodies, fabric and papers - the natural awakening of an audience that had been previously unmoving.

All of our sounds together became abstracted, the specificity erased as they were absorbed into the space, along with Lucier’s stutter. This work highlights and calls attention to sound and how we hear while it acts to erase the sounds we make.

Can I become absorbed by the things that I observe? If my own body and perception intensely try to follow whatever it is I am focusing on? Does that leave me with “less me?”
LIMINAL. From the Latin word limen, meaning “a threshold”.

LIMNOLOGY. From the Greek word limne, “lake” and logos, “knowledge”. The study of inland waters - lakes (both freshwater and saline).

The project, Little Lakes (2012), came out of a residency called Fieldwork, which called for projects to be carried out within the boundaries of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) in Nova Scotia, Canada.

The landscape of Nova Scotia was largely formed out of the tremendous glacial activity that occurred over 2 million years ago. The forces of grinding into and snatching up of the bedrock caused the landscape to be pockmarked with numerous lakes. When looking at the map, and the index of land features, I noticed repeating titles. I counted twenty “Little Lakes” within the HRM alone.

The surprising number of lakes with the generic name “Little Lake” was the first thing that attracted me to them, but I then became interested in the way their outlines were visualized on the maps. The smooth, vectorized shapes were as generic and final as their name, lacking in specificity.

From June through August of 2013, I visited all twenty of these Little Lakes. I drove, hiked, canoed, trespassed, and pushed my
way through dense brush to access these remote locations.

Wearing a wet suit, flippers, and goggles with a waterproof GPS device to record my swim path, I traced the lakes by swimming each one; hugging the perimeter as closely as possible, lily pads tangled around my legs, rocks scraping my arms, hidden boulders thumping into my chest unexpectedly.

As I swam, I always felt like I should be closer to the edge, that as hard as I tried, I was being inaccurate. Some lakes had prominent inlets and outlets, one of which was so large, that I was swimming down it before I realized it was clearly no longer part of the main body of water. I swam around fallen trees instead of going under or above them. I decided to avoid depths where I would not be submerged, so sometimes I would swim ten feet from the edge of the land, other times I would be close enough to touch it by hand. In some of the larger lakes I needed to take rests, perched on rocks. I felt my body was a limited and insensitive unit of measurement in this way.

I recorded individual points in time with the GPS. These coordinates related somehow to me, the lake, and the tool used to record it. But nothing about the coordinates was conclusive, the relationship between these three factors was obscure. This collection became evidence of a fiction: an individual's indeterminate path, more expressive and honest than the definite outlines of the mapbook.
I swam the lakes instead of walking around them, because I felt the need to be on the inside looking out, rather than on the outside looking in. I thought it was important to allow the lake itself to alter my regular mode of movement. Immersing myself in the water was a way to get as close to it as I possibly could, a way to absorb myself fully in it.

It later dawned on me that my inability to come in contact with the edge of the lake was because I was already thinking of myself as separate from it. Instead, I considered the idea that I was in contact with a medium that already had full contact with its surroundings. By being in the water, I could think of my body as suspended and extended, dissolved into, and part of.

Victor Turner says the attributes of liminality are “necessarily ambiguous”\(^{22}\). In a liminal state, one's identity temporarily dissolves. Being *between* concrete states may cause one to become disoriented, but it also brings the possibility of new perspectives. But, he suggests that this liminal experience cannot sustain; “...it is a state of great intensity that cannot exist very long without some sort of structure to stabilize it.”\(^{23}\)

The swimming experience was a way to suspend my body in a liminal space, as I searched for an edge that didn’t really

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exist. But I could not remain floating for too long, eventually I needed to return to shore. I cannot, however, remain on "concrete ground" for too long either. My attention continues to oscillate between fixed and meandering states. In *The Psychology of Attention*, Théodule Ribot states that focused concentration too long sustained has the paradoxical effect of leading to daydreaming, "a kind of intellectual vacuity."\(^{24}\)

I think about my alternating attention like the back-and-forth action of taking steps while walking. My feet support my body, as they make contact with stable ground, but they spend just as much time flying through the air before they are grounded again. As I walk, my consciousness flickers as I "shift from outward-directed to inward-directed states. From being attentive to [my] environment to being withdrawn into contemplation."\(^{25}\)

Thoreau acknowledged that his thoughts sometimes moved separately from his body when he walked, and that he could be in a place physically, yet his mind could be elsewhere. "I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit," he says "I am not where my body is, I am out of my sense."\(^{26}\)

Another walker and thinker, Danish philosopher Søren

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Kierkegaard, is an example of someone who needed the frequent, yet isolated, inputs from the outside world to aid his private thinking process. He walked alone in the city streets because he was unable to concentrate in total isolation. He relied on the minor interruptions of casual contacts with other pedestrians as a useful form of distraction.\textsuperscript{27}

Can distraction really aid as a method of concentration? In his article titled, \textit{Why the Modern World is Bad for your Brain}, Daniel Levitin writes: “Although we think we’re doing several things at once, multitasking, this is a powerful and diabolical illusion. Earl Miller, a neuroscientist at MIT and one of the world experts on divided attention, says that our brains are “not wired to multitask well... When people think they’re multitasking, they’re actually just switching from one task to another very rapidly. And every time they do, there’s a cognitive cost in doing so.”\textsuperscript{28}

In the late 19th and early 20th century attention was an intellectual problem across disciplines. All sorts of questions about attention emerged; what it was, how it was produced, when was it needed, how to sustain it, how it related to education, temperament, discipline, physiology, environment\textsuperscript{29}. These questions were important in order to maximize efficiency

\textsuperscript{27} Solnit, Rebecca. \textit{Wanderlust}, pg. 24.
\textsuperscript{28} http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jan/18/modern-world-bad-for-brain-daniel-j-levitin-organized-mind-information-overload
\textsuperscript{29} Arata, Stephen. \textit{On not Paying Attention}, pg. 196.
of workers in the new industrial workplace. Not paying attention when working at an industrial job-site during this time was not only unprofitable but also dangerous. But the monotonous work seemed impossible to stay attentive to; the nature of the work was mind-numbing.  

Robert Louis Stevenson and William Morris understood the popular, modern idea of attention was created in order to produce a certain kind of industrial worker. They opposed the virtue of attention as understood to focus the subject upon the task at hand. Reading and writing in the Victorian era were valued for their “hard work” to interpret or create difficult texts. “True attention is undivided, it is fixed, and it is intense” wrote James L. Hughes in his book from 1887, How to Secure and Retain Attention.  

What was read had to be difficult, but also the manner in which one sat when reading was included in this ideology. One would sit in a cushion-less, straight-back chair and engage in reading as a form of character building or self control.

Morris’ retaliation against these ideas was to write simply. He was already interested in multitasking, in dividing his time, and de-centering himself over many different activities. Distraction was a strategy he utilized in his writing so that his reader would

30 Ibid, pg. 156.
31 Ibid, pg. 198.
not have to pay such close attention to his text. He would write while doing other things, such as weaving.

In *Suspensions of Perception*, Jonathan Crary described attention as being on the same continuum as distraction. "The more one investigated, the more attention was shown to contain within itself the conditions for its own undoing. Attentiveness was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance." 32 He explains how attention and distraction are not two completely different states, but instead they represent a dynamic process, a shifting and heaving like the ocean, "according to an indeterminate set of variables." 33

*RIPS (2014)*, an animated video, became an opportunity for me to *project* my own ideas, rather than *to be absorbed* by the objects of my attention. The video is a construction for a kind of harnessed cloud-gazing; it resists clarity by providing continuous and changing descriptions and labelling.

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33 Ibid, pg. 47.
To make this work, I started by spontaneously making small objects out of materials lying around in the studio: glue, paper, rubber, tape, metal, plastic, string, and wood. They were a mixture of tight bundling and loosely frayed dangling bits. I scanned these things in 3D, then labelled and diagrammed them for the animation. Each little thing in *RIPS* is interpreted and re-interpreted over and over again; things are never *known* because they are endlessly *described*.

I interpreted them as biological, mechanical, historical, underwater, useful, moving, and troubled...

[Intake/Outtake/Pleated Bellows/Ball joint]

East Crater

It had been safely excavated
Troubled false rib
It reached top speeds when upright
Expiration lead to starchy reactions
Forward movement gathered grit
Mountain-range roller press
Reduced cut

The images in this animation remind me of a list: they crowd together in time and space and they are related yet separate things. The white space around them is important and is used to transition from one image to the next. The video relies on the mechanism of the gap, which is also a feature of lists.
The camera takes sudden steps forward or back as it zooms with jump-cuts. Because of the drastic jumps, the viewer does not see how change has occurred, it just appears and they are left to make sense of the break in continuity.

Between these frames, these jerky steps of movement, lies the opportunity for change to occur. Like a magician's sleight of hand, I make use of this short amount of time *between things*, which is rich in potential, and freeing for my imagination.

From one frame to the next, an image is replaced with a different one. Change also happens when the camera is zoomed far in, or when there is distracting diagrammatic movement happening elsewhere. The video depends on the disorienting white space of the void as the setting of this animation.

The multiple interpretations were liberating for me to make. Instead of worrying what I did not know, or could never know in a process of observing, this project was an assertion of what these things could be.
When I was swimming the Little Lakes, I started to question what the function of the digital record was. I wondered how well the GPS device needed to work, and how the manner of the evidence it recorded was different than my memory, or my physical experience.

In some cases, the GPS captured nothing at all, so I decided to re-swim the lake. Making the decision to swim the same lake a second time made it clear to me that this project required the digital trace of the swim as much as it required my experience of swimming it.

Having no digital record was for me unacceptable. However a corrupt digital record was very interesting to me. I was intrigued whenever the GPS recorded clusters of sporadically plotted points, or when the signal dropped out. This recording was creating a new fiction, in which appeared that I occasionally swam on the land in jagged lines, or in a loop that somehow did not match the beginning with the end.

My embrace of these digital mistakes opens up a very important aspect of my work, which is to explore the potential that may exist between what is thought to be known, and an empty unknown gap, from which something new can emerge.
The path recorded by the GPS is not a continuous line, but a series of plotted points. Software takes these points and connects them with lines, imagining and filling out the space between. I ignored how the software drew connections between the points, and was interested in making my own relationships between them. I used them to structure writing for a series of books (and webpages) that would become the final form for this project.

The GPS data was used as a framework for writing that recalls my memory, feelings and thoughts from the experience. I created a book (and a webpage) for each of the twenty lakes, and my experience of swimming them.

The number of coordinates determine the number of words for each lake, as well as the position on the page. The layout for the writing is designed in GIS software, as a map of words. The book incorporates visual devices (such as a scale bar to indicate zoom level) from mapping conventions. I was thinking about written description as constrained, limited or approximated. The reader follows my swim as they read the words that are positioned in relation to the GPS points. Page by page, the changing level of zoom moves the reader closer or farther from this new lake edge, and it controls the punctuation and flow.

The pages are mainly empty white space, with a string of words that can either read up, down, left or right. I am interested in how memory and history could be (and is) compressed into a
limited list of words.

In his paper, *The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction*, Walter Ong discusses this idea of compression in history, since it would be impossible to write what "really happened." He says:

"It is impossible to tell everything that went on in the Pentagon even in one day; how many stenographers dropped how many sheets of paper into how many wastebaskets when and where, what they all said to each other, and so on ad infinitum. These are not the themes historians normally use to write what really "happened". They write about material by exploiting it in terms of themes that are "significant" or "interesting". But what is "significant" depends on what kind of history you are writing."^{34}

What was included as "significant" in the writing for the *Little Lakes* books, was made to fit into a specific structure (the quantity and position of the GPS points). As limited as this structure was, it didn't restrict the ideas that the writing inspired - the sparse and controlled writing leaves room to imagine.

This project explores mapping, but also the form of a list. A list is structured and systematic yet contingent on openness between items; there is empty space for more to be inserted and added.

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I think it is rather poetic that encyclopedias and dictionaries are deemed a form of authoritative knowledge, while they rely on massive conceptual chasms that exist in the space between terms.

Maps are necessarily approximate, a 1:1 map is utterly redundant. I have always loved the paragraph-long story from Jorge Luis Borges, *On Exactitude in Science*, that imagines a map the size of the kingdom.

"...In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some Pitielsness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography." 35

The Jubilee Atlas, published in 1887, featured maps of Britain's growth as an empire and human conquest of the world. However, because of the rapid expansion and accelerated mapping of the unknown world, by 1904 the Atlas started issuing its maps separately, as inserts to be collected. As Williams writes, "for all its weight and authority, the atlas admits its own imminent obsolescence. It can no longer keep pace with the expansive bounds of human empire." 36

I love this example of an enormous undertaking not fully realized in its early stages, for how ambitious it really was. The limitations of the materiality of the Atlas was discovered to be impractical and "imminently obsolete". These weighty books (atlases, encyclopedias, and dictionaries) form a categorized way of seeing things that "create the sense of ordered, authoritative knowledge," but as Schwenger puts it, this "must be provisional, incomplete, and to that degree delusory." 37

It is not the incompleteness that is the delusion, but the mistake of forgetting this incompleteness. This is why works of fiction are much better at telling truths than so called objective accounts. The subjectivity of the artist is fully disclosed, and the audience is invited (not expected) to consider an individual's perspective.

36 Williams, Rosalind. *The Triumph of Human Empire*, pg. 16.
37 Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things*, pg. 119.
The Codex Seraphinianus is an imaginary encyclopedia by Luigi Serafini that embraces this structure regarded as authoritative. Serafini exposes the structured look of information while emphasizing the delusion Schwenger speaks of, by populating the encyclopedia with the hallucinatory imaginings of a single man.

This tome is completely hand-illustrated and written in an undecipherable language. Every page of this book offers other possibilities for looking at things. The book features surreal diagrammatic explanations for chemical, astronomical, biological, social, linguistic, ritualistic, and architectural proposals. One page features a variety of tree that grows naturally into a chair.38 There is a species of fish that seem to move in pairs and appear as a set of eyes and eyebrows at the surface of the ocean.39 The light from street lamps are suggested to be composed of hundreds of tiny swarming creatures.40

The very last page of the Codex is a trompe l’oeil, an image of writing on a page that is peeling away from the Codex. Behind this page is a hollow area with the bones of a hand, as though the encyclopedia had a secret compartment in it: a “crypt that underlies the cryptic”41 as Schwenger put it. This final page seems

38 Serafini, Luigi. The Codex Seraphinianus, pg. 124
39 Ibid, pg. 121
40 Ibid, pg. 114
41 Schwenger, Peter. The Tears of Things, pg. 123.
to suggest the futility of a process that attempts to exhaust the world in its entirety. The image of the skeletal hand signifies the exhausted creator himself, as though his attempt to thoroughly document the world (or his imagination) continued until death. For “the real as we see it cannot contain everything,” revealing this impossibility seems to be Serafini’s final word in this project.

The majority of the content in dictionaries and encyclopedias is designed to be skipped over. They are references for specific information, so all the rest of the book becomes a heavy inconvenience when navigating to a single word. The surreal nature of the organization of encyclopedias might be revealed if read linearly, from front to back. The arbitrary structure of alphabetical order keeps a reader from becoming overwhelmed by the selection of what is presented.

Ian Bogost tells us that the listing format “refuses the connecting powers of language, in favor of a sequence of disconnected elements.” The connecting power Bogost is referring to is the joining syntax a writer uses to put the “signs that represent things into definite relationship with one another.” Without connecting syntax, lists work to “divide, or leave divided the things that they include”. The gaps between terms give room to imagine how they may connect, if at all.

42 Ibid, pg. 123.
44 Ibid, pg. 39.
I am inspired by the writing of Georges Perec, member of the group Oulipo. Founded in the 1960's, members of Oulipo, an acronym for the “workshop of potential literature,” systematically imposed constraints and rules on their writing process.

In one of his books, Perec attempted to capture the world in point form. In *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (2010), Perec sat by the window of several cafés for several days, trying to record everything that fell into his field of vision. I can only imagine that in order for Perec to attempt to exhaust a place, he must have seen it consisting of a flow of frozen particles. These particles of car, dog, suitcase, woman, man, rain, cloud, music, bus, wind, lamps, watches, and garbage all fall in from the street, passing through the window flowing through him and out into his list.

Perec was attracted to the limitations of trying to record the infinite world in the form of a list. Reading this book, I do not evaluate his effort based on the success or failure of the results (what would success look like?); I focus instead upon the gesture. I am interested in considering process as performative in this way.
For the project, *Boxes for Rocks* (2012), I imagined multifaceted, geometric cardboard boxes that would be made to fit individual rocks. I thought of a typical six sided cardboard box. I wanted to suck in the empty space that lay between the object inside, and the outside surface of the box.

Each box was made to fit as close to the rock as possible, encapsulating it. That empty space between the outside and the inside was never eliminated, it just seemed to grow denser as the space reduced. Despite the reduced gap, the box was still missing the fine detail of the surface of the rock.

I started collecting rocks. I did not have criteria for how I would collect them; as long as I could pick them up and remember them distinctly, this seemed to suffice. They marked mundane occasions, like a bicycle race, a small salad received at lunch, someone walking their cat on a leash. There was an aspect of keeping track of my time and location as I collected and catalogued these rocks.

I scanned the rock digitally, in 3D, and unfolded this geometry into a flat 2D net. I laser-cut the design into cardboard and lightly scored the individual planes so that the flat cardboard could flexibly “wrap” the original rock. These boxes were
intended to help me analyze collecting as a process of knowing. I wanted the way the boxes were made to also reflect the collection of discrete units. Digitally sampled, they would become incomplete the moment they were captured by the scanner, stored on the computer as a cloud of collected points.

As I watched the digital scanning of each rock, I imagined the beams of the laser bouncing off its surface, back into the sensor to log and construct a model of it. I thought about my own process of collecting in relation to this digital process; of my hand extending down and sampling the ground, picking up rocks as though they were data.

This project was designed to be ongoing, since I did not give myself any specific criteria for stopping. I would aspire to collect all the rocks, this way there would always be more to collect.

I look at things that exist in multitude: the objects of my apartment, near Earth asteroids, trees, lakes, rocks, and man-made things. I rarely allow myself to feel like I have completed observing them, and restlessly search for a sense of accomplishment without concluding anything. I see the repetition in my work as a form of collecting.

Baudrillard says that collecting is an activity motivated by desire or by a sense of lacking, and that “the collection is never really initiated in order to be completed.” The act of collecting relies
on the fact that the current collection has a gap, that it is lacking something. I think of my practice as trying to remain in a state of moving toward discovery. My work often exhibits repetition while it moves from one thing to the next. My attention equally expends effort in the process of traveling in-between whatever I am observing, as it does when it is at rest.

I think that I repeat myself within a project because I am waiting for it to offer a new idea to me; I am waiting for myself to clue into something. Looking at it once doesn't generate an idea, but looking at it the 32nd time just might. Once an idea emerges, it seems as though it was there all along.

In an interview before his live performance, Alvin Lucier said that he was inspired by the idea of repetition and the accumulative process, and simple gestures of adding and repeating that he had seen from the Judson Dance Company.

He recalled that a friend once suggested that the repetitive way he worked might be boring, and that he should have the musician do something more than just play a single note. Lucier replied to his friend “if I do that, I would have to do it again.”

Lucier was not uncomfortable with the possibility of being

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45 This interview and performance were part of the CAST symposium at MIT in 2014, titled Seeing Sensing Sounding.
boring. He said that “when people are listening to the work, they are wondering how they are hearing - it is about their own process of attention, not about the object itself... it encourages the listener to think about themselves.” In working this way Lucier makes the objects of attention, (the musician and the music) as secondary. The audience, the observers and how they hear, are instead put into focus.
To circle relates to closure and enclosure, a way of knowing the object being circled. Moving around something stationary is a way to remove it from its own context and put it into one's own, as though seeing it from all of the angles is a way to perforate and “cut it out” from its environment.

I thought of *Boxes for Rocks* as a process of three dimensional circling around the surface of each rock. By the end of the process of encapsulating the rock within its box, sometimes little triangular gaps remained. These gaps indicated error in the process, an error which I made note of in the title of each rock as I listed its percentage of completion.

I wonder if that gesture to note the percentage of completion could be an alternative way of “filling the gap” that was created by accident. It might be a stand-in, to account for those annoying little windows that show flaw.
At the time I made the work, I thought leaving the gaps and indicating the percentage was a way for me to show authenticity in the process. I easily could have filled them in without explanation and the audience would never have known the difference. I think it is possible that the truth of my intention exists somewhere between those polarities, between a desire to exert control (in accounting for the “mistake”) and a desire to show vulnerability (by admitting the “mistake”).

When working on Little Lakes, I wondered about circling around the lake as a way to understand it, which is another form of possession. The idea of having been all around something is a way to place myself in relation to it, as an expert. This relationship seems asymmetrical; where the subject is privileged to all angles of the object, the object sees only the one, same side of the subject. (See TRACING, p. 31).

It is interesting to me that working with computer models and scanning in 3D (which I use often in my work, Boxes for
Rocks, For the Trees, RIPS), could be thought of as a process of “cutting out.” The process of 3D scanning collects many coordinates or points (called a point cloud) by sampling the surface of an object. On the computer, this point cloud can be used to generate a mesh - a hollow polygonal form which is derived from the original object. The process of 3D scanning also discards the background information. In the end, the digital object is collected and assembled into a void, a gray and white checkerboard pattern that is the software’s schematic for emptiness.

3D scanning pulls objects out of their environment and into emptiness in a way that reminds me of the hypnagogic images that flood my vision when I close my eyes before sleep. Perhaps circling around something (which is inherent to the process of 3D scanning) is a way to blind myself from seeing how it connects to the surrounding context - a method to focus upon and remove the object being investigated, as a way to see it differently, or as a way to see through it.

In the video, Open Seating (2015), I wanted to consciously return to the action of circling. However, in this project, instead of successfully circling around the object, the object persists to face the camera at the same angle, effectively blocking the camera from gaining access to it.

The objects in this video are chairs that continue to face away
from the camera, despite how the camera moves in a circle around each one. It is an uncanny effect which makes the chair unavailable for sitting.

These chairs, however, only appear to escape possession: the process in which the video is constructed has rendered them as mere puppets. The chairs are 3D models which have been composited into video footage and instructed to always face away from the camera. The angle, speed, position and rotation of the camera was tracked, based on the recorded footage, so that these models could integrate with the recorded environment.

It is the performance of this video that interests me the most. I try to watch it as though I did not create it. I feel like there is something just a little weird about the way the chairs move. I notice the strange way they sit in the space, and wonder if their shadows match that of the surrounding room. I suspect the artificiality of the chairs, imagining their insertion in post-production.

I think about the camera person, who recorded the video in one continuous six-minute shot. They would have walked alone in circles in the big empty room, just imagining the presence of the chairs. Their movement in the “real world” circles around and is guided by this image they hold in their mind’s eye.

This is the beautiful thing I recognize in making artwork: that
my ideas about the world can move and surprise me. I can find myself a stranger to myself by displacing my effort and attention into things. A strange place is carved out in the production of art, that is between a projection of my ideas and a reflection of the world.

I am unsure what exactly is produced from such endeavors, but the process of making art has generated a desire in me to be sensitive to the world, knowing I am not seeing things fully, and yet curious and compelled to continue toward discovery.
CIRCLE BACK, REPEAT

As artist Jan Peacock writes "...if you ever want evidence of what kind of artist you are, or even the kind of person, you need look no further than how you spend your time." I have had to remember, however, that the way I spend my time as an artist is not the same way I spend my time as a person, and that the work I make does not define the non-artist side of me. Even though the line between artist and person can become blurry, the work itself is a whole other creature.

As an artist, I spend my time alternating between intense focus and relaxed meandering, between inward looking and outward looking modes. Reflecting on my artwork, I can see I am a near expert on what neuroscientist Miller might describe as "divided attention". I consider this a strength, not a cognitive compromise. My work does not demonstrate a lack of ability to concentrate; the long durational videos, the repetition in process and the need to "perfect and redo" show my ability to patiently stay with something. Divided attention is my research interest, not my personal affliction.

In the case of the industrial worker, intense attention and a single-minded focus on a thing morphed into distraction

46 http://janpeacock.net/presence-
which caused a kind of blindness towards their task at hand. Stephenson and Morris purposefully embraced distraction by multitasking in order to lose themselves in things. I am very much interested in the connection between physical process, physiological attention and conceptually what this could mean.

Can one erase oneself by being absorbed into things and mirroring them in a way? Can one conceptually erase the thing one attends to by projecting one’s ideas into it? In art these ideas can exist, in the same “equivocal realm” that Blanchot places hypnagogic images. And Mill reminds me that ideas and emotions generated by art are not just illusions, “but a fact, as real as any of the other qualities of objects.”47

My artist self uses my everyday encounters and activities as potential source material for artwork, but this does not mean I am analyzing my life. Something new and different is created with the work in between a reflection and a projection. I am interested in using ‘evidence’ as a structure to elaborate upon. There is study, and there is invention and a desire for discovery.

Walking home, or sitting and reading, or lying in bed, are a few examples of times that I find myself aware of a particular arrangement that I have with things. These arrangements can be spatial, such as how I circle around a tree, how my eye traces the

perimeter of the ceiling, or how I alter my path to avoid worms on the sidewalk. These arrangements can also be temporal, like when I stop in my path to pick up rocks, or the coincidence of street-lamps turning off as I draw near.

One philosopher I look to as an example for generating material from his everyday life is Michel de Montaigne. Saul Frampton quoted Montaigne for the title of his biography of him, *When I am playing with my cat, how do I know she is not playing with me?* Other charming titles of Montaigne's own work include:

Of Sleep
Of Thumbs
Of Books
Of Names
Of the custom of wearing clothes
Of Quick or Slow Speech

These essays are inspired by Montaigne's own experience. Montaigne was working and living in the 16th century, and as Frampton put it, his interest in everyday encounters was relegated to the sidelines in the eyes of the great intellectual movements that encroached on his life, that of Christendom and 17th century Science. Despite these powerful forces, Montaigne maintained his curiosity for the everyday and his optimism for

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the power of the ordinary and unremarkable, “the value of the here-and-now.” 49

Although I work with constraints and structure, this does not mean the work is predetermined. I am interested in how my understanding of the work, and the work itself, changes throughout the process of creating it. The artwork emerges; it is not planned. And if it is executed as imagined, it always has something new to teach me, even years later. At the beginning of a process I cannot judge the ideas: I have to be open and flexible and curious because the ideas always surprise me when they are tested and seen materialized.

In front of the audience before his performance, Alvin Lucier spoke about how the final work, in his own process, is often unknown before it is complete. He said “in those days, you didn’t know what a concert would be like”... but it was the intention that was important. He said “I couldn’t have thought about structuring, putting a grid on it…” because, (especially pertinent to the work he was describing Music for a Solo Performer) “brainwaves just flow from your head.” 50

Process-driven artwork requires the artist to feel comfortable with a certain degree of “not knowing”, yet this is different than

49 Frampton, Saul. Montaigne and Being in Touch with Life, pg. 6.
50 This interview and performance were part of the CAST symposium at MIT in 2014, titled Seeing Sensing Sounding.
simple blind faith. It still includes a critical faculty. Process art considers the implications of every step. It is a critical process without being judgmental.

In her essay, *What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue*, Judith Butler summarizes that critique should avoid abstract judgment, and simple “fault-finding”. To support her argument, she looks to the terminology defined by Raymond Williams. In his text *Keywords*, Williams writes that we need to understand criticism as a specific response, “which is not a judgment, but a practice.”

I wish to avoid explaining, and instead share with the reader an exploration of my artistic process. To do this I have arranged the thesis around how my work “attends to things”, in the sense that James proposes, as a method to create the universe one appears to inhabit.

By exploring my own attentiveness, I think about methods that I use to select what gets my attention. I focus on certain forms that I often use when making work. I investigate repetition, circling, tracing, drawing, and listing. Repetition relates to collecting, circling is a way to isolate and excavate, tracing relates to nearness and alignment, and listing associates things, yet

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51 Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*, pg. 83-84.
keeps them divided with a gap in-between, which leaves room for more to be added.

I research the psychological effects of intense attention, its role as a perceived virtue, and its relationship with distraction as located on a spectrum of consciousness. I am interested in artists and writers whose works acknowledge a kind of lacking that results from trying to pin something down definitively.

I see some artists and writers as embracing a directness in their work, where others try to avoid directness in favor of poetic ambiguity. I am interested in what can be learned from a direct way of attending to things, and how this may also reveal an incomplete structure.

Alva Noë suggested that whenever we try to make observation itself the subject of contemplation, we end up just looking beyond it, at the things of the world. And so, prompted by James to consider my own art practice as a kind of universe, and the manner in which I attend to things as my process, I put into practice the inverse of Noë's statement. I place my attention on the things of the world and this indirectly reflects back on structures of observation and attention. It is a way to become sensitive to things, to understand the world I live in by indirectly and incompletely attending to things that...

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53 Noë, Alva. *Experience and Experiment in Art*, pg. 124.


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