

THESIS

DRIFTING, MENDING

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## ABSTRACT

### DRIFTING, MENDING

I see my everyday life and my art practice as connected by the activity of walking. My art practice attempts to express poetic qualities of discarded (broken) objects found in my everyday life and in my walking (drifting). Overall, this practice is guided by a sharpened sensibility towards everything that is broken or bereft, including bereft-of-a-world. I gained this shift in sensibility after a car accident, in my teens.

My propensity for walking made it a preferred means to act on my sensibility for everything that is broken or bereft (from simple actions, ideas, and objects), enabling me to engage with concepts of space and place. The combination of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre's ontology and epistemology of space and place influenced my creative process. In addition, the Situationist practice of *detournement* – a method of appropriating and altering something (an event, or – as often in my case – objects) to create new meaning – is possibly as important as walking in my art practice. Walking is a method of research and *detournement* is an expressive action of that method.

In the studio I, in a sense, began mending, bringing them back into a world. With the small artistic gestures or simply articulating them into a space (on a wall, a floor) or into a combination with another. I strive for a sense of poetry in humble materials, creating works that exist in the present moment, reflecting the fragility of the world, and allowing for individual moments of viewer creativity, experiences, and perceptions.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about my artistic practice that is motivated by lingering effects from an accident during my youth. I became aware of my sensibility to everything that is broken or bereft as such. The sensibility for dejected objects became a fully artistic practice through my recovery. I found walking as a way to regain my life. Moving afoot made it easier to move in time as my mind wanders through reflections, memories, and observations. Walking, which started as a therapy turned into a basis for artistic method, both inward and outward oriented. The dejected objects, whose world was cut off, are given a new world, namely the world of art.

The approaches and theorizations of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre became a step stone for me to explore the creative practices of Guy Debord. There are also a number of contemporary artists (Francis Alys, Richard Tuttle, and Eva Hesse) who influenced my practice as well. It is these theories, practices, and artists that had an impact on my artwork and my conceptual understanding as I describe what I do in my practice.

## CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATION

Everyone has a unique lens and those lenses determines the meaning of everything we encounter: people, places, experiences, and even simple objects. The course of events within my life brought new perspectives into existence and helped sustain my growth (development) of self-discovery. There was a traumatic event during my youth that I have not entirely healed from. I still harbor resentment, guilt, anger, and many other emotions vis-à-vis this event. It pains me to realize how long I have been suppressing these feelings, but the thoughts, memories, and emotions returned all at once. As I pieced my memories together and as I was coming to terms with my experience, I understood how my perception of world changed in the aftermath of the accident.

On August 20, 2003, when I was eleven years old, I was injured in a bus accident. Due to a heat advisory on that Wednesday afternoon, my sister and I were on our way home from school. No longer than twelve minutes into the ride, a county dump truck collided with the left side of the school bus, forcing it off the road. Luckily, after rolling, the bus rested upright within a bean field 100 feet to the right of the initial contact with the dump truck.

The accident happened within seconds, but the physical and medical impact will last for the rest of my life. My body was tossed around like a rag doll, ricocheting off seats and landing in the aisle to have another body fall on top of me. It was instantly that I knew something was wrong with my body. The bus came to stop, and I was gasping for air, eyes watering, and chest burning as I slowly regained my breath. The pain trying to breathe after getting winded along with the excruciating stabbing sensation within the lower parts of my spine became unbearable.

After regaining my breath, I slowly crawled to the back-emergency exit of the bus. And with the help of others, I got out of the bus only to collapse due to excruciating pain after taking a few steps. Grasping my lower back and uncontrollably crying as the realization of my injuries became apparent to me. I could barely move my legs. In shock, I just lied motionless and speechless on the ground. I was then placed on a spinal board as the first responders arrived to restrict my movements and to reduce further damage.

At a young age, I knew the limitations of the human body and how fragile it can be. But I was naïve with the aftermath of my traumatic event and how to live with it. I struggled to accept and come to terms with my experiences as I recovered from my injuries. I've broken bones before, but this was different.... I felt hopeless. I remember feeling as if this isn't my body anymore.

I fractured my L3 vertebrae of the lumbar spine (lower spine). I experienced various back and neck pain, numbness, muscle spasm and tingling from the spinal fracture. Today, I still have muscle spasms and numbness within my lower spine and right hip area. I wore a turtle shell or a clamshell back brace to hold my spine in the correct position and for protection as it healed. Even with the clamshell back brace, I had other injuries that restrained my range of movement. With the massive swelling and the fracture bone compressing on the spinal cord's other nerves, I had numbness and pain affecting my right hip and leg. The loss of balance, lack of coordination, and weakened legs and lower spine affected my ability to walk. I also experience muscle fatigue from my spine and body being misaligned. For my rehabilitation, I was recommended various treatments ranging from aquatic therapy to osteopathic manipulative treatment. Aquatic therapy is a low-impact treatment involving various exercises to reduce pressure on my bones, joints, and



muscles as I adjusted to walking again. It was during this therapy that I realized; I wasn't going to be same as before the accident. My body was broken.

As I started walking again, I became aware of my sensibility to everything that is broken or bereft as such. The positions and conditions of objects (materials) in my environment became something I questioned a lot. Why do I notice these particular objects? Why am I attracted by or curious towards them? Do they bring me joy? Do they make me feel accepted? Why is my interpretation of them different from my interpretations of other objects? Are they not equal to other objects? Why were they abandoned? Do I feel sorry for them? Do they make me feel alive? Do they remind me of people? Or myself? This attitude slowly began to turn into a sixth sense. It did not take hard looking; it was almost natural. I didn't realize but my perception or a sharpened sensibility for broken objects (materials) or self-reflection was coming through as a subconscious lens. My thoughts, memories, and emotions started to slowly become expressed through the way I saw or experienced the world. Before long, this attitude boiled over into a fully cooked artistic practice.

Nowadays, I am fully aware that my artistic practice is (and has always been) guided subconsciously by the shifts in my sensibility towards dejected objects and materials. These dejected or disposable materials remind me of my pain of being alone, feeling worthless, abnormal, and, worse, broken. Being lost in my own mind made me sensitive to objects that seemed lost in their world. My walking became more than therapy, it evolved into a subconscious studio-method. In other words, my practice of engaging with objects bereft of a world became analogous with my feelings of becoming a shadow. My practice is both outward oriented, towards these dejected objects, and inward oriented towards a subjective processing of experience.

Walking in circles is the sight of one being disheartened. But I was slowly changing that into an artistic method where my walking in circles led me to pick up some of these objects and bring them to the studio. In the studio I, in a sense, began mending them, bringing them back into a world. With the small artistic gestures or simply articulating them into a space (on a wall, a floor) or into a combination with another, equally dejected object creating a network of relationships. This network or world may not have been their initial world – that of function, utility, but the art world – where their meanings are, in a sense, set free (definitely free from their prior functionalism).

### CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

My propensity for walking made it a preferred means to act on my sensibility for everything that is broken or bereft (from simple actions, ideas, and objects), enabling me to engage with concepts of space and place. The categories of space and place are broadly conceived as anthropology, geography, environment, the city, the body, the mind, as well as landscapes of the imagination. This led me to pursue a course in geography and to engage with readings about processes that related to this intuitive re-worlding that I am subjecting the found objects to.

I want to acknowledge the multiple discussions and theories of space and place, but the most important of these that influenced my perception of space and place was the combination of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. Michel de Certeau's post-structuralist theory of space as a practiced place and Henri Lefebvre's theorization of space as a trialectic (a triple dialectic) between three different forces, got me to begin thinking of creating an arsenal of tactics and strategies of artmaking that are based on everyday life practices (like walking).

The notion of space and how it can be produced, experienced, and altered, allows me the opportunity to question and reference the default readings of place opening to a sense of discomfort with past histories loaded in de Certeau's notion of place. These are the past histories of the objects themselves and my own past histories in the sense of my own understanding of place which I constantly seek to activate as space, as the location of some action, gesture. De Certeau argues that place is stable, static (solid) or a distinct location.<sup>1</sup> Envision a grid. The

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<sup>1</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

multiple lines intersecting each other create many different points, different opportunities to traverse throughout the grid. These points are locations, corners, trails, roads, departures, and destinations. For example, Colorado State University's Art Department on the corner of Meridian Ave and W Pitkin St in Fort Collins is a place, as is Edora Community Park. In addition, the house where I live is a place too. It is the physical attribute that forms the idea of place. While place is concrete, space is more abstract. Space is characterized by more fluidity.

As I stated above, the points are sites and situations, but the network of lines is the possibility of activating space. Space (abstract) is the activation of place through the operations of people (dwellers). For example, as people move about a city that was developed by urban planning, this movement itself creates the opportunity for the place to be altered or transformed into a space, a locus of some sort of operations.<sup>2</sup> It is the actions and events of inhabitants of a place that triggers it to shift into a space. Everyday practices of talking, reading, walking, cooking, etc., are ways of adjusting our perspective on the world, constantly flowing between grasping an environment as a place or activating it as a space.

The movement of the individual is the space (abstract) within de Certeau's definition, while Lefebvre's theorization of space has different attributes that emphasized different functions or relationships an individual encounter. It is the mental conceptions that extrapolate from the places of direct perception into an abstract space that comes with certain feelings and emotions attached. And these can be new feelings, distinct from those feeling attached to (specific) places. Lefebvre explains that space is a trialectic between three different forces. Simplified for the purpose of introducing them, we might say that the first force is conceived space (*the design*); agencies like property speculators, cartographers, bureaucrats (urban

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<sup>2</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

planners) and architects are the exponents of this force.<sup>3</sup> The second force is lived space (*the experienced*); this is space as shaped by desires, the dreams, and the memories of us dwellers occupying a place.<sup>4</sup> And lastly, the third force is perceived space (*the networks*); the everyday social life and the rational perception of operations (actions) within a place.<sup>5</sup> In my work, I'm more interested in the objective and subjective qualities within the everyday experience that can be expressed through the second force (lived space).

In addition, Lefebvre's social space is intertwined with the Situationists and their concepts and practices of space. The organization, referred to as the Situationists, professed the idea of creating situations (environments) in everyday life that would facilitate revolutionary change. Their ambitions were not modest. Those artists embraced social experiments and artistic interventions (walking) as a means of critique and a means of undermining institutions. One of the founding members, Guy Debord (Lettrist International as well as, more famously, the author of the "Society of Spectacle") proposed psychogeography as a way to reveal how social engagement produces a blending of geography and psychology together. In 1955 he described Psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals."<sup>6</sup> The means of observing through exploring are best perceived afoot to understand the behavioral impact of urban places by activating them as generic spaces through a series of activities.

Thus, was born the technique of the *dérive*, or drifting along without a sense of direction, as a key word in the practice of psychogeography. In other words, a means of exploring the city through direct experience by walking...the "*dérives*" involve playful-constructive behavior and

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 38.

<sup>5</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 8.

awareness of psychogeographical effects and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.<sup>7</sup> It was an alternative way of reclaiming control over the city from the existing economic infrastructure of exploitation. Rather than being led by a destination, the person or group embraces the psychogeographical contours of the city and may become lost. The attractions of the terrain and the encounters one or a group may have become a form of speaking (communicating) to the place, thus transforming it into a space (according to de Certeau's definitions).

The organization evolved more and more towards a politics of critiquing the postwar capitalist value system as evident in the work of Guy Debord. Their goal turned into a Marxist and utopian goal, to create a new civilization by overthrowing the existing economic infrastructure of exploitation. While extremist activities do not appeal to me, I appreciate the creative aspects of *détournement*, or a method of hijacking and altering aesthetic elements to create new meaning. In the *User's Guide to Détournement* (1956) Guy Debord and Gil Wolman wrote:

“The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes...Since opposition to the bourgeois notion of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, [Marcel Duchamp's] drawing of a mustache on the Mona Lisa is no more interesting than the original version of that painting. We must now push this process to the point of negating the negation.”<sup>8</sup>

The Situationists used misappropriation by combining or collaging images and texts from mass media to create a new propaganda to subvert the commodity form and promote social protest.

Debord and Wolman categorized detournements into two categories, *minor détournements* and *deceptive détournements*. The first, *minor détournements* is the element that I seek to utilize as I place objects within the museum or gallery to create new meanings. They are *détournements* of

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<sup>7</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 15.

elements that in themselves are of no real importance such as a photography, a phrase, a press clipping, an everyday object which draw all their meaning from being placed in a new context.<sup>9</sup> The new alteration can be expressed through brochures, posters, or other handouts to uncover the ugliness of aesthetic experience constructed by capitalist production or consumption.

The second element, *deceptive détournements* occurs when already significant elements such as a major political or philosophical text, great artwork or work of literature take on new meanings by being placed in a new context.<sup>10</sup> For example, de Certeau creates an arsenal of tactics and strategies that is demonstrated by the Situationists through the various ways of artistic modes. These ways can be “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things” (like the Situationists enacting a burial ceremony in the Notre Dame cathedral for the death of God), “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.<sup>11</sup> If we understand the regular, normative, way of operating in the world as dominant/powerful, these strategies allow for small little victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things of an imposed order, etc.). I mostly attempt similar “feats” by deploying the simplest of strategies of artmaking (namely walking) as a mechanism for my creative process.

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<sup>9</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 118.

## CHAPTER 4: ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

I will discuss specific aspects of the work of artists such as Francis Alÿs, Richard Tuttle, and Giovanni Anselmo. These artists have been important to my studio process and my artwork. These aspects can range from dimensions of psychology, politics, and ethics that are intrinsic to my motivation and I hope they will become more manifest in future work. In addition, I will discuss Eva Hesse within the next chapter as she influenced my practice and artworks the most.

The political aspects or power relationships in the most direct sense interest me, too, and may increase their significance in my future practice. Social norms and activities of everyday practices, by being ossified, create a hard surface for me to push against. In other words, my strategy needs a place to force its power against. Our automatic way of taking the environment we move in for granted, is such a hard/static place. My strategy is calling into play the force-relationships. This becomes possible when a subject of will, power, and sensibility (an owner, a company, a city administration, a scientific institution, or – subversively - a walking individual) can be seen as acting-on an “environment” activating it as a space (that “does” something).<sup>12</sup> For example, Francis Alÿs’ artwork *Paradox of Praxis I, Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing* (1997) (fig. 1) is a performance in which he pushed a block of ice for about nine hours through the streets of Mexico City until it completely melted. In the beginning, he struggled with the rectangular block until finally it was reduced to no more than an ice cube, so small that he could casually kick it along the street until it was reduced to a mere puddle. This exemplifies an absurd expenditure of effort for a puddle which became nothing which can speak to the frustrated efforts of everyday residents trying to improve their living conditions.

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<sup>12</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.



In my own work, I found the encouragement from Francis Alÿs to experiment with the force-relationship through my game *Seeing like a State*, 2020 (fig. 2). *Seeing like a State* is a prototype that addresses the process of an authority force (like a state) deciding on how to evaluate the land. The participants are placed on a corner of a gameboard gridded into 24x24in squares that contains multiple rocks scattered throughout. The game board is just tape that creates a series of squares for the participants to move about. The participants will have a rock to begin with to illustrate the notion of resources land represents. The objective of the game is to complete a square with four rocks at each corner by taking turns either moving 1 square (no diagonal moves), picking up/placing down a rock, or battling (using rock, paper, scissors) to take a rock from someone. These instructions demonstrate the notion of conquering the land as a consequence of consumption. It can also be a way to represent the movement of a walker through a city that was developed by urban planning, which can be altered or resisted via a *dérive* – a way of drifting according to whim rather by following the rules (of, say, traffic in the city) or customs. To me, the *dérive* can be viewed as a game that positions the viewer to reinterpret or reimagine actions and behaviors through materials and through gestures.

Through researching Richard Tuttle, I found similarities in our abilities to see the poetic and imagistic value in all manner of things, but specifically in the kind of stuff one would normally discard: the littering of the workspace, the remainders from studio activity, outright trash - materials that would otherwise be lost were it not for the artist salvaging them.<sup>13</sup> The trash nature of these materials is also important to me ethically. My *dérives* take me close to materials that are discarded and ultimately would end up in a landfill. I see my gesture of lifting dejected materials out of their deject-context, symbolical as it may be, to be an intervention into this

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<sup>13</sup>Richard Tuttle and Madeleine Grynsztejn, *The Art of Richard Tuttle* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 20.

irresponsible circuit. This way of paying attention to the world around me was influenced by my work for the City of Vancouver as a Recycling Coordinator in the Solid Waste/Public Works Department. This happened through the Washington Service Corps/AmeriCorps Volunteer Program. I gained hands-on experience and understanding of the importance of recycling and sustainable living. I also became aware of the circuit of human practices and behaviors that trash is bound with and expresses. As I got my hands dirty, the amount of trash, recyclables, and habits of people (including mine) became a palpable reality to me, and not an abstraction. I noticed this throw-away and forgetful mentality, and it upset me viscerally. This idea of our actions or decisions presumably not impacting the world, a world which includes us, is disturbing to me. I feel one, myself included, needs to become sensitive to a circumstance before considering/wanting to understand it and possibly change it. In this understanding, I see my work as gently trying to pry sensibilities and perceptions.

The use of throwaway materials and organic materials like twigs has been demonstrated through contemporary neighbors that influenced my practice and artworks. I follow in the footsteps of various artist who were a part of Arte Povera. Simplified for the purpose of introducing them, we might say Arte Povera is an Italian art movement during the 1960-70s that resisted against the traditional/commodity form of materials and processes. The initial conceptualization of Arte Povera referred exclusively to art practices and their relationship to everyday life.<sup>14</sup> I acknowledge the various artists within the movement, but I found Gilberto Zorio and Giovanni Anselmo influencing the way I perceive and understand materials surrounding me in my everyday and through my drifts.

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (London: Tate Pub., 2004), 13.

The dialogue between the artwork and the human body within the space is a theme that runs through Gilberto Zorio and Giovanni Anselmo artworks. It is the experience of being in the here and now, I seek to explore myself. I found myself being attracted to reactions and tensions. For example, my piece *Bend* (2020) (fig. 3) is a thin metal rod embedded with concrete inside a broken plastic cable holder. The thin metal rod is bent at the middle, making it unbalanced and unnatural. The misalignment creates a feeling of instability similar to Anselmo's *Untitled* (1966) (fig. 4) due to the tension of the unseen force of gravity. In addition, the verticality of the piece shares the same situation of the viewer when standing creating a presence towards the human body.

## CHAPTER 5: MY PRACTICE

As I picture my practice, I'm continuously moving into various stages, experiencing, comprehending, perceiving, and eventually turning struggles into solutions for the artwork and further self-reflection for myself. My practice is daily, portable, and impulsive. And just like how a painter builds a stretcher and prepares their canvas before they apply paint, the technique of *dérive* (walking) has become an important aspect of my practice (a process of understanding the world). As I am drifting (walking) in my surroundings, I collect (objects, images, and ideas) through various encounters. Then I bring them into the studio space (as I mend them), while thinking about the various ways of installation (placement) through an exhibition space (flow).

It is something I try to do each day and is the reason why I make walking part of my artistic strategy. It became a maneuver for me to ground my thoughts in a personal and bodily experience that forms a relationship to my surroundings. Using the body (the sum of the senses, but also intellectual understanding), I make sense of my surroundings through the physical but also psychological parameters of the world. Walking offers adventure and discovery through observation, emotional reaction, observing people and built environment (urban landscape), and making spontaneous decisions. And this is why I activate walking as a phenomenological and psychological investigation and as a social practice including ethical implications.

What motivates me to continue in this practice is the fact that I see walking (and my adjacent practices, “*derive*” and “*detournement*”) as inviting us to consider and re-consider how we see and understand our surroundings. I am interested in this practice of *la derive*, but I am also interested in artifacts as such – objects that I encounter during parts of the activity of drifting. The Situationist practice of *detournement* – a method of appropriating and altering

something (an event, or – as often in my case – objects) to create new meaning – is possibly as important as walking in my art practice. Walking is a method of research and detournement is an expressive action of that method. This results in the artworks I refer to as “components”, which are assemblages of objects picked up during my walks (my “derives”) along with everyday objects and re-contextualized in the gallery space through a form of “detournement”.

A component is never permanent, it may go through various stages as I continuously change its function of new contexts or function of new ingredients brought together with it. As I live with the various components and objects, I found myself reflecting and finding inspiration from them. The studio becomes a space where objects and components incubate, similar to the time I spend thinking and reflecting about art. This allows me to see/feel the liveliness within the components (pieces), so I can understand certain operations that the components (piece/object) can enter with a room (gallery, wall, floor) or with a room and with other similar objects, and (on top of that) with added (usually subtle) additions/transformations that I do to self. In this process I can operate more like a shaman not for people (and their re-integration into a world) but for objects and their re-integration into a world, which (from where we sit as humans) is always a world of that involves affect (emotions).

My impulse to collect starts with the act of seeing and being aware of the presentness of these materials in my surroundings. What I mean by presentness is their quality of being present not only to my practical needs (as functional or formerly functional objects) but to my whim and aesthetic preference/mood, to my sensibility as a whole. It is the sharpened sensibility for everything that is broken or bereft, including bereft-of-a-world (of connections to a whole) influenced by my accident. The quality I am trying to capture is that of being present not only as

an entity with abstract geometrical attributes and placement. But also, as an entity we automatically endow with psychological attributes and which we set in mental relation to other objects and experiences, thus activating it place into space (according to De Certeau).

Understood in this way, space and place thus open the possibility of artistic practices that play on the dichotomy between the two. As I activate the place into space through the operations of drifting, the second force (lived space) of Lefebvre's understanding of production of space challenges the traditional forms of artmaking from my relationship of my everyday life and art. For example, I sample places by picking up items that are just "being-there" in those places and I also document my thoughts and the insignificant encounters that I observe within the urban landscape. It is through the arts and literature that we make lived space (second force) accessible and alive.

The constant flow between grasping an environment as a place or activating it as a space, permitted the Situationists to construct situations to critique consumerism and everyday life. The Situationists wrested daily activities from their normal associations and activated them as a sort of social critique. I wrest dejected objects and re-activate them as part of a feeling-evoking world in which they pair up or simply pair with a surrounding in which these emotion inducing qualities are emphasized. They are emphasized, yes, at the expense of their former utilitarian function (though not away from it, not rejecting that they are imprinted with a usefulness) and at the expense of their economic function. In a strange way, I'm trying to bring back into culture objects that have not only been thrown out of culture; they've never been consciously integrated into culture and, as dejected, they are on the brink of total obliteration (their identity about to melt into the background).

As I bring the various objects into my studio (which in itself is its own kind of a place - my definition of the studio is a space where we can fail safely, including the materials) I offer them a certain safety. The objects I pick up are (in parallel to my body after the accident) broken objects. With my sharpened sensibility for everything that is broken, fractured, twisted, worn, puncture, and deteriorating, these objects with their broken qualities can rest safely once in the studio. As I start doing (intellectual and emotional) operations to the body, it too becomes a space (second force). This parallel of body/brokenness/place to object/brokenness/space illustrates how my accident is connected with my practice now.

The propensity for discovering broken, dejected, and bereft objects yields my artistic interests in re-introducing some of those objects into a network of relationships. The accumulated objects from my walks or from my everyday life become the ingredients which I re-contextualize and assemble to create pieces that I call components. I begin to see and feel certain operations that the various objects can enter. The sequence of these two components *Internal* (fig. 5) and *Untitled* (or Not Titled Yet) (fig. 6) with one completed in September 2020 and one in January 2021, suggests the irregular procedure with reflection and making. Each piece is different, both seem to build upon found/everyday objects altered by deconstruction, sanding, and assemblage. *Internal* contains materials from a deconstructed table/bench, while *Untitled* (or Not Titled Yet) is styrofoam assembled with concrete and wire.

As I treat various components with small artistic gestures or assemble with different objects without a strictly rational logic. I consider the aesthetic elements of line, shape, space, form, texture, color, but I consider other affinities that are psychological and ethical in nature and are hard to quantify in words. It is this productive period that shared certain processes, but the collected objects through my walks and my everyday offered a range of varied scale, effects, and

potentialities. Similar to Eva Hesse, I seek to achieve a sense of absurdity in life or meaning, focused on feeling or intellect through the various stages of transforming various objects.<sup>15</sup> Through deconstruct or combine multiple ingredients together, I found my actions to be violent in nature. Whether its involuntary or impulsive, the use of removing, nailing, cutting, gluing, twisting, binding, hanging, painting, and sanding can exemplify the fragility qualities. The various objects found on my walks and my everyday are industrial materials like styrofoam, cardboard, wood, metal, tar, electric wire, paper, and rubber tubing. I transform the inherit qualities of various objects without allowing the viewer to settle into the certainty of knowing what they are looking at.

Changes occur when the components are moved to an exhibition space. My definition of this space is a sad room, rather cold, occupied only by emptiness. The physical parameters are an important aspect of my creative process. There is creativity in both creation and display. That is because the parts of my “components” are not only re-spatialized in relation to one another but also in relation to the space they are brought into. I try to find its “affinity” to that space and place it very precisely. As I fill the exhibition space with the various components to the brink of exhausting the space, I slowly remove certain components due to compositions and reactions. The significant qualities of architectural within the exhibition space becomes a factor for the various components. Influenced by the way Eva Hesse displayed her work through varied forms of hanging from beams or ceilings, resting on the floor and connecting to the wall, or they hang against the wall and extend to touch the floor.<sup>16</sup>

Occasionally a component can live by itself, without a specific articulation within a space. To me, it is more about how one component reacts with another creating some sort of

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<sup>15</sup>Eva Hesse, Griselda Pollock, and Vanessa Corby, *Encountering Eva Hesse* (Munich: Prestel, 2006), 38.

<sup>16</sup>Eva Hesse, Griselda Pollock, and Vanessa Corby, *Encountering Eva Hesse* (Munich: Prestel, 2006), 42.



reaction, a conversation as they all become part of a system. The relationship of various works engaging through the space in front or behind others, creates a range of possible effects, shadows, and relations to the body. It is this relation to the body and how the body is mobilized by the works activating the place (museum or gallery) to space (according to de Certeau). Thoughtful consideration of placement eschews mere representation and hopefully can prompt the experience of presentness in the viewer herself; something psychological being either evoked or expressed.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Clumsy, uneasy, and unbalanced, the presentness that I initially feel toward objects I encounter in walking ends up transforming the way of relating to materials. It all starts with me walking (drifting, if you will), practicing observation. This observation is always guided by the way I orient my attention, picking up bereft materials, and it ends up in the studio, and then in the gallery space as an act of reflection, including self-reflection, complete with an ethical dimension. The question becomes not what the materials are useful for, or what their formal qualities are, or even what I want from them, but - rather - what they could possibly want from each other now that they have found a home. In the end, I strive for a sense of poetry in humble materials, creating works that exist in the present moment, reflecting the fragility of the world, and allowing for individual moments of viewer creativity, experiences, and perceptions.

## FIGURES



Figure 1, *Paradox of Praxis 1, Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, 1997, Francis Alÿs.



Figure 2, *Seeing like a State*, 2020, Zach Leonard.



Figure 3, *Bend* (on the left), 2020, Zach Leonard, concrete, plastic, and metal rod.

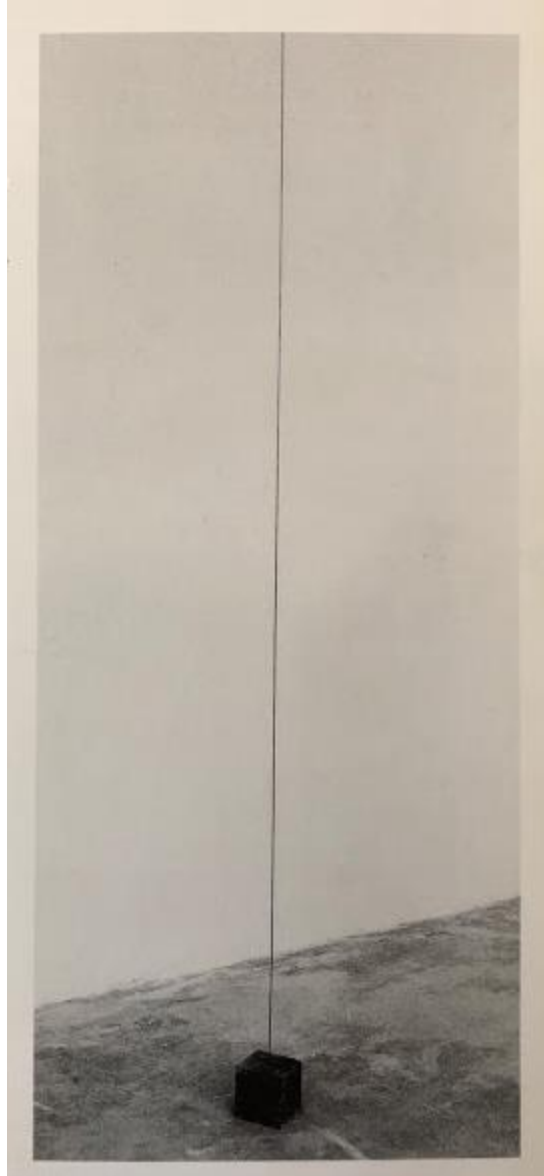


Figure 4, *Untitled*, 1966, Giovanni Anselmo, Iron rod, wood, and gravity.



Figure 5, *Internal*, 2020, Zach Leonard.



Figure 6, *Untitled*, 2021, Zach Leonard.



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