

ART.HAPPENS

By

Julian Michael Majewski

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of Master of Fine Arts in the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art Media and Design.

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Abstract

The following thesis publication contextualizes my art practice as an exploration of the values that arise from creative process. Moving towards a relationship with sustainable practices, Generative Methodology activates my practice to experiment, interpret, and subvert materials, priming them for opportunistic displays of aesthetic realization. Rooted in material opportunity, my practice critically engages with the cultural implications of working with what may have been considered waste. By reemploying discarded and refuse materials, I investigate the power of art culture to influence and educate audiences. It is important to investigate the gallery as an influential site for critical reflection before projecting my artistic practice across new areas of research and commerce.

Key Authors: Arthur Danto, Philip Galanter, Steven J. Jackson, Gordon Monro, and Nick Zangwill.

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I dedicate this publication to Adam Majewski,
Happy Retirement Dad.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Questions

The following thesis publication provides research towards nurturing my artistic practice while exploring its associated theoretical and methodological applications. Inspired by my background with graffiti production, the aesthetics I valued were non-traditional and considerably controversial within institutional environments; where some professors would not accept my work due to personal indifference. Transitioning from acting upon creative desires as a graffiti writer towards embracing the institutional pragmatics of justifying artistic aspirations as an art student, I have positioned myself to investigate systems of value justification which champion artworks. Within a generative approach to a process of interaction, re-contextualizing, and subverting the materiality of everyday objects, challenges predicated functionality and proposes new use-values. I am drawn to materials and objects that are readily available to me. Within the urban setting of Toronto, there is a plethora of materials laying dormant. I personally stumble upon, scavenge, and hoard. Working with overlooked, discarded, and considerably non-aesthetic materials appeals to my interest with sustainable practices when pursuing fine art structures as an opportunity for creative exploration. Artistic production holds the ability to advance and justify value, if this ideal can be paired with sustainable practices through active engagement with discard materials, then that is something worth critically investigating for cultural gain. Embracing material opportunity with more sustainable practices is necessary in the wake of progress.

The following research will explore aesthetic theory paired with Generative Methodology. I will root my position within a literature review which will provide reference to a selection of relevant case studies of artists who display similar interests ranging from early 1900's to our current time. I will further provide documentation of the works that comprise my thesis exhibition which will highlight the application of my theoretical and methodological underpinnings; this methods chapter will elaborate on my three categories of artistic production: self-reflexivity with (dis) and (re) assembly, field research, concluding with studio experimentation and hoarding. Before further projecting my practice outwards, it was important to direct the investigation inward; learning to express and defend my practice in response

to researching my interests within OCAD University's Interdisciplinary Master's in Art Media and Design.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How can an exploration of process-based interaction with overlooked/discarded materials and objects suggest new uses? What is the context for this new use?
- 2) Does focusing on process over product challenge value systems?
- 3) Is humour helpful when critically exploring value systems?
- 4) Can an art practice effectively influence individuals to employ creativity as a method for practically engaging with sustainability?
- 5) Is acting with practicality more rewarding than acting out of necessity?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.i Key Terms

- Emergence – Something interesting and unforeseen will happen, that more will come out of a system than was put in.

- Generative Systems – Both artist and material maintain a degree of unpredictability within creative process, promoting autonomy within artistic production.

- Creative Insight – Individual discovery, it is the self-reflexive result of investing in an idea.

- Supervenience – The existence of necessities running from non-aesthetic to aesthetic.

Actively discovering then balancing the aesthetic within the non-aesthetic (Zangwill: Chapter 2.5).

2.1 (Dis) and (Re) Assembly

In order to re-contextualize a material or object or space you first need to detach it from your preconceived relationship to what it is. I use the words (dis) and (re) assembly to describe my predominant methodology. By visually detaching (dis) and (re) from the word assembly, I imply that the terms disassembly and reassembly have no fixed position within my art practice. These ideas guide production but do not predict the outcome. Denoting the prefixes in parentheses is also a deliberate choice to treat words as conceptual tools and apply the same working methods to language as I do in the studio.

(Dis) and (re) assembly allows me to pull apart and then work with the materiality of an object or site, where the goal is to allow creative emergence and not specifically to work towards an idealized finished product. (Dis) and (re) assembly stand in place for deconstruction; this is because I am not aiming to obliterate or erase a material, the intention is to work with my selected object or space, working with its materiality, leaving traces of what it was and providing reference towards what it could become.

2.2 Generative Methodology

Philip Galanter teaches graduate studios in generative art and physical computing at Texas A&M University. Within his 2006 publication *Generative Art and Rules-Based Art*, he defines generative methodology as “any art practice where the artist uses a system, such as a set of natural language rules, a computer program, a machine, or other procedural intervention, which is set into motion with some degree of autonomy contributing to or resulting in a completed work of art” (Galanter: 1). The key notion within this definition, for myself, is the term “procedural intervention,” which can imply a physical process occurring autonomously throughout the interaction. I push Philip Galanter’s generative systems into methodological terrains by working with studio-based processes that do not prescribe specific outcomes. A generative approach to making art allows for discovery because the materials have their own autonomy.

Example: *Overlay*, 2016.

By Julian Michael Majewski

Plywood, Cardboard, Drywall. 3x3x4ft.



Figure 1.

The abrasive action of carving those layers away was undertaken without a predetermined idea of what the table would look like. The guiding principle was that I would apply abrasive repetitive action towards

chiseling into the center of the layers, aiming to come short of completely going through the structure. I didn't know how the layers of materials would interact with each other before I started creating the hole. The materials carried their own autonomy that ended up working, however a possible outcome of working on that piece was that I would not create an artwork at all if it didn't meet my aesthetic goals. In the case of the table, I made art.

Galanter further states that to successfully produce generative art one must “transfer a part of the process to an external autonomous system, and surrender (in part) moment-to-moment intuitive judgment” (Galanter: 4). This is the defining aspect of generative art as methodology. Both artist and material maintain a degree of unpredictability within creative production allowing for new insights to surface, for materials or spaces to change along with my process. Materials have unique limitations which dictate or impose the levels of creative intervention possible. Forming a meta-relationship with the materiality of my subjects allows autonomous, unforeseen results.

2.3 Emergence

Gordon Monro is a digital media artist who has been practicing since 1968 and lives in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. He is currently pursuing his PhD in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University working on computer-generated art. Monro has published on generative systems through MIT press in his 2009 *Emergence and Generative Art*. Monro has further theorized on generative art, enhancing its definition prompting a methodological stand point. Championing Galanter's initial definition, Monro has emphasized the necessity of emergence for generative systems to have successful applications. Monro wrote that,

“The term generative art covers art practices where the artist creates a process that acts with some degree of autonomy to create all or part of an artwork. One of the motivations for such a practice is a hope that something interesting and unforeseen will happen, that more will come out of a system than was put in, that emergence will occur.” (Monro: 476)

A great example of simple-to-complex emergence is also provided by Monro, “Simple rules give rise to complex behavior... board games are a simple example of the emergence of great complexity from

simple rules or laws.... Chess and Go have enough emergent properties that they continue to intrigue us and offer new discoveries after centuries of study” (Monro: 476). Monro is suggesting that, with loosely prescribed procedural interventions, there will always be a degree of unpredictability. Within a generative system, there is a framework that provides structure but does not dictate an outcome.

As mentioned above, for myself, my generative process resides within (dis) and (re) assembly. I am aware of how I approach and work with materials and spaces but a specific outcome or desired aesthetic is not my intention. My interest with generative methodology allows me to subvert and re-contextualize whatever I am working with while searching for new uses or values.

This methodology allows me to focus foremost on the structural qualities of a material while secondarily considering the cultural implications of the materials I work with. I champion the optimism placed within a process that negates the necessity for a premeditated outcome. Mitchell Whitelaw, an Associate Professor in Design at the Australian National University, who researches generative design, wrote about generative systems as a methodology in his 2005 *System Stories and Model Worlds: A Critical Approach to Generative Art*. Whitelaw certainly pushes generative art as a methodological pursuit by further appealing to the grandeur of systematic approaches to creative production. Whitelaw refers to generative practices as developing “system stories” where he further wrote,

“a system story, is a translation or narration of the processual structures, ontology, entities and relations in an [artistic] system. Such stories are useful devices for opening up these systems to discussion and critique. System stories are not singular or objective; each one is a particular and situated reading... system stories that engage, in detail, with that formal object, and draw out its implications.” (Whitelaw: 140)

What resonated with myself from Whitelaw’s input on the theory is that generative methodology is the development of an ideological systematic approach towards critically exploring materials and their implications within our cultural systems. Materials, objects, and spaces within our developed contemporary ecosystems can be explored for new value past the predicated role of passive consumer or uninformed user.

I apply generative methodology as a way of framing my "system story" of interaction with materials, objects, and spaces that may have compromised functionality. Re-contextualizing what may have been considered wasted spaces, materials, and consumer by-products, my practice exploits the plethora of inactivated materials laying dormant within urban settings. My process of (dis) and (re) assembly allows me to discover new use values, with a specific focus on aesthetic realization to direct my creative insight. I employ the institutional language of fine art systems and theory based approaches to problematic materials in order to elevate, prototype, and display the products of my process.

2.4 Aesthetic Realization

Professor Nick Zangwill within the faculty of Philosophy at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom has extensively published on the topic of aesthetic discovery, focusing on the power of art and aesthetic displays. Within his 1999 publication *Art and Audience* he wrote: "we need to take seriously the view that a work of art is something that has, or is intended to have, a disposition to affect human beings in certain ways, or that a work of art is something that has the function of affecting human beings in certain ways" (Zangwill: 318). Zangwill believes in the relational conditions that art puts forth to an audience, allowing artists to promote their various dispositions, goals, and messages. Within *Art and Audience* there is strong reference to the artist's ability to create and provoke value through their displays of creative insight. In his 1995 work *The Creative Theory of Art*, Zangwill promotes aesthetic discovery as a theoretical pursuit separate from focusing on what the final artwork will be. He clarifies that art production cannot exist entirely in the realm of whimsy and accident. Although it is important to maintain a degree of autonomy within my creative process, I must remain guided by my personal insight into what and why I am making an object that will potentially become a work of art. Insight as a term appeals to the process of individual discovery; it is the self-reflexive result of investing in an idea. As Zangwill wrote "I cannot share my insight with you. But aesthetic ideas are public and shareable. I can share my aesthetic idea with you. Ideas are public, insight is personal" (Zangwill: 310). Creative / artistic insight is

effectively a generative process of personal discovery. Similar to a musician, one can improvise, but with respect to the limitations of their instrument.

Although the application of these statements could be broadly applied, for myself, this application lies within working with waste and undesirable materials. These materials could be the scavenged remains from commercial printing processes, a neglected parking lot tenant's booth, industrial waste from Toronto's Leslie Spit dumpsite, or reclaimed scraps of OSB plywood from temporary barriers. My intension is to elevate what may have been wasted spaces or materials, subverting and re-contextualizing them, promoting the discovery of new use values, but never completely deconstructing or losing reference to the past form of those materials. The content of my thesis exhibition within my Methods section will provide literal references towards demonstrating my generative process.

My generative process of working with materials that are readily available within my environment strongly appeals to Zangwill's creative theory of art. "Something is a work of art if and only if someone had an insight that certain aesthetic properties would be determined by certain non-aesthetic properties; and because of this, this thing was intentionally endowed with the non-aesthetic properties envisaged in the insight" (Zangwill: 307). My practice appeals to working with the discarded and abandoned, applying my artistic insight to objects and spaces in order to develop new intrigue and encourage viewers to reconsider the overlooked.

2.5 Supervenience

In respect to the generative nature of aesthetic discovery, Nick Zangwill further provides the term "supervenience" which he defines as "the existence of necessities running from non-aesthetic to aesthetic properties" (Zangwill: 307). He further states that "according to creative theory, works of art bear a relation to an intention that certain aesthetic properties will be realized by an object or event with certain non-aesthetic properties ... that is: we intend to realize certain aesthetic properties; we intend to realize certain non-aesthetic properties; and we intend to realize the aesthetic properties by realizing the non-

aesthetic properties" (Zangwill: 308). Within Zangwill's roundabout wording, he is implying that for successful aesthetic realization from properly exercised supervenience, one must start with something that isn't already regarded as having inherent aesthetic qualities. The discovering and elevating of aesthetic properties within the considerably non-aesthetic encourages me to investigate the generative qualities of aesthetic creation that can work towards recycling and sustaining the undesirable, compromised, overlooked and mundane materials which already reside within our immediate environments.

In closing, philosopher Arthur Danto who has published on the topics of history and aesthetics acknowledges the role of artistic theory as one of the divisions between everyday objects and fine art. Danto believes that to see something as art requires something that cannot be seen, an application of artistic theory, a knowledge of art history; an artworld. Danto relishes in the power of the artworld to legitimize objects and ideas within gallery or institutional settings. I feel that Danto is essentially acknowledging the pretention of art culture, however, encouraging artists to use those associations with prestige in order to evoke conversations about heightened value perceptions. Not masking the undesirable properties of the materials I work with, but provoking a new form of aesthetics, gives my work a kind of creative authority which is further emphasized within a fine art context. If something that was waste can become associated with high culture, then that is a powerful position worth critically exploring for cultural gain. Exploiting the fine art context of the gallery system can create a platform for promoting sustainable social and cultural practices at large.

In 1964 Danto published *The Artworld* which explores the integral relationship of theory with fine art. Danto encourages readers to consider the flexibility of art culture to adapt, develop, and absorb artistic movements as part of arts progressive history. Danto advocates that artistic insight fueled by theory is what makes process art, and the resulting product an artwork. To quote the philosopher,

"Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of recent New York painting. It could not have been art fifty years ago. But then there could not have been, everything being equal; flight insurance in the Middle

Ages, or Etruscan typewriter erases. The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one." (Danto: 581)

I leave you with this:

Q: What is the difference between Walmart and Warhol's Brillo Boxes?

A: Art Theory.

Chapter 3: Literature Review and Case Studies

3.i After Progress: Towards Sustainability

I am personally exploring the potential of discarded materials and overlooked spaces for new uses and contexts. I align my research with key ideas from Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Information Science at Cornell University, Steven J. Jackson from his 2014 *Rethinking Repair* provides reference towards the necessity for sustainable practices. I view working with wasted materials or spaces as a form of reuse and recycling that probes larger conversations of sustainable practices, allowing what we may consider to be waste to become re-contextualized into something that can hold new uses and new value.

I resist a passive consumer existence and promote forming a conscious relationship with the life cycle of our objects and materials. To be wasteful is a privilege of more developed countries but within our current global setting it is important to take a personal responsibility to reduce the impact of our consumption and re employ problematic materials before they become waste. Ultimately, not just focusing on the results of sustainable practices, it is important to contextualize Jackson's promotion of repair as not the back end of innovation and progress but a process that must be championed in the forefront of our thinking when redeveloping relationships with our objects and spaces. Where breakdown is applicable to discarded consumer objects along with the by-products of its production. Jackson proposes that "breakdown disturbs and sets into motion worlds of possibility that disappear under the stable or accomplished form of the artefact" (Jackson: 230). This statement encourages me to embrace breakdown and waste as materials for revisiting. Breakdown can result in repair, but repair can also appeal to reusing objects and not literally restoring them to their original function. Reuse informs my production interests where undesirable objects and materials can be put through a process of aesthetic discovery; creating a form of interest beyond what the object initially was, now providing implication towards the potential for new use values.

Although my art practice is heavily rooted in a contemporary relationship with my current environment, largely influenced by the excess of consumer culture, my production methods and conceptual approaches echo throughout art historical platforms. I find the strongest intersections with New Realism. I will further provide three complimentary artists references who work with similar interests and aesthetics ranging from the 1960's to current times.

Working towards aesthetic value is an approach to production which negates the use of materials that already hold inherent value. An example of inherent value would be gold, whether it be the color or material itself. Gold holds a historical relationship to prestige, power, and an unwavering association with high value. When pursuing artistic production, I personally like to employ my creativity to find aesthetic value opposed to working with materials that already hold inherent monetary value. I will now provide reference to past art practices which propel my working knowledge. My arguments work towards practically reducing my waste as a moral necessity. My position is not unique, there is a history of artists who work with waste as a form of practical cultural critique. The power of art resides in the ability to justify creative value, these acts of value justification can enhance sustainable practices and hold the potential to project them into the everyday situation. To preface my historical references, I would like to provide a quote from design historian Victor Margolin's 2005 *Reflections on Art and Sustainability* where he wrote, "Imagination is an artist's greatest asset. It can produce bold visions of what a sustainable future might be like. People can be moved and aroused by powerful environments, innovative designs, and practical demonstrations of active engagement. With open minds and a willingness to collaborate, those who seek a place in the culture of sustainability must move forward" (Margolin: 26). This quote pays reference to the fact that artists can create spectacle in which they obtain the ability to influence and educate their audience. This position of creative authority encourages me to pursue conceptual practices where the product is merely a reference towards a larger concern with exploring sustainability. My art practice and aspirations do not end when I have realized an artwork; where the artwork acts as an elevated relic of what the material or object used to be. The following artists and references promote Margolin's

sentiments towards art being a bridge for engaging sustainability, where the material interests of the artists place strong emphasis on material reuse and re-contextualizing of the considerably undesirable. These case studies reference production tactics of interest to my personal practice, opposed to functioning as a clear lineage through art history.

3.1 Back to the Artworld

Avant-garde practices paved the way for new considerations towards advancing conceptual and material approaches within artistic production. I find inspiration when looking to everyday objects and materials with a new sense of intrigue and wonder. I enjoy working with materials, objects, and spaces in a practical way, allowing me to conceptually build a critical relationship with them, detaching familiarity and preconceived functionality. In relation to fine art and creative production, this idea provokes opportunities to re-contextualize materials to become something with heightened value beyond their previous form of existence. I believe that the following artists display tactics for re-contextualizing materials and objects, applying their artistic insight and facilitating their creative process. New Realism paired with the art practice of Mimmo Rotella challenges fetish commodities when investigating the gallery as a site of influence on value justification. Thomas Hirschhorn interrogates aesthetic value with a large-scale installation created out of everyday objects – championing his process of spectacle over prescribed result. Tom Sachs employs his DIY sensibilities to inform a process of material elevation which now rival the high-end products he initially set out to replicate. Lastly, Georgie Dickie provides a contemporary reference as a Toronto artist who also works with found raw materials.

3.2 New Realism

Professor of Art History and Cultural Theory at the University of Hawaii Jaimey Hamilton explores the New Realism art movement within his *New Realisms in the 1960's* and initially draws on the parallels between New Realism and Dadaism, but ultimately differentiates between the two movements' conceptual underpinnings. Despite their aesthetic similarities of working with ready-made objects and the

materials that result from consumer culture. Critic Pierre Restany was the founder of the movement, *Nouveau Realisme*, brought together a group of artists whose work addresses the movement. Within Hamilton's review he characterizes Restany's 1960 manifesto as art that affirmatively summons sociological reality, the common good of human activity, the large republic of our social exchanges, and commerce in society. Restany believed New Realism took the readymade beyond negativity or polemics of Dadaism, encouraging a positive term within a new approach to the effects of commerce (Hamilton: 117). The underlying intention of New Realism was to continue probing into consumer and spectacle culture by literally employing the physical by-products of capitalist culture's commodity objects and the advertisements that promoted them. New Realism presented new production opportunities to artists who began disrupting traditional modes of production and challenging traditional aesthetics by interrogating the gallery as a site of luxury fetish. There was a critical exploration towards the materiality of consumer culture which embraced consumerism as an abstract ideal of cultural production (Hamilton: 118). Within New Realism's efforts to contradict the assumed function of gallery culture, the movement's aesthetic actively challenges and seeks to employ the gallery's ability to justify or create value. Negating materials of production that already hold inherent luxury or fetish value, New Realism provokes the power of the gallery to establish a critical form of spectacle through their artworks. Rotella displays this within their use of torn strips of advertisements that he would source from the public sphere. Spectacle can be understood as using the galleries influence over commodity value and subverting the influence so that audiences can now critically engage with conceptual art as a response to society and circumstance. It strongly appeals to my intentions when using fine art structures to promote sustainability, by focusing on aesthetic considerations, in order to re-contextualize what may have been considered waste, non-aesthetic, or holding little to no value.

3.3 Relevant Artists and Concepts

A central member of the New Realism art movement was Mimmo Rotella. Rotella was influenced by his everyday situation and strongly desired to both creatively and critically interact with materials that he passed on a daily basis. Rotella is credited with the development of *décollage* techniques, which implies the opposite of collage. An example of the artist's work is *With a Smile* created in 1962 and was acquired by the Tate in 2008 from an anonymous donor (see figure 2). Rotella created the work by, opposed to building up an image, he layered torn, ripped, and scavenged pieces of posters that he gathered on his walks. Within Rotella's obituary posted by The Guardian in 2006 they defined his practice as "he relished the physical processes of making art, creating so-called *décollages* by tearing layers of film posters stuck on canvas to recreate the appearance of peeling billboards.

Nothing could evoke more potently the ephemeral glamour of the modern city" (Masters: TheGuardian.com). The artists' obituary pays reference to the philosophical underpinnings of Rotella's work while reflecting on the process as a form of critical engagement, opposed to misunderstood public mischief resulting in arbitrary assemblages of found materials. For the obituary to reflect on the grandeur of Rotella's practice apart from the details

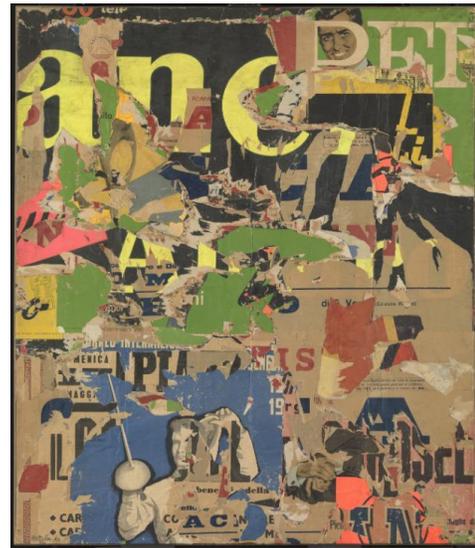


Figure 2.

of the artworks that he created, displays how artists can effectively employ the gallery as a site for provoking critical engagement amongst the viewing public.

My interest with Rotella's work resides in his use of neglected, discarded, and undesirable materials in order to develop aesthetic assemblages. I understand Rotella's artistic process as a method that re-contextualizes his chosen materials as aesthetic devices through a process of arbitrary juxtaposition, in which the art crucially results from the process. Rotella's work itself was concerned with a larger critique towards the commerce of public spaces in response to advertising and commercialism; acting upon

instances of public phenomena (such as torn advertisements), investigating them for aesthetic value, and pushing their findings into gallery systems.

I will now shift to the 1990's and focus on artist Thomas Hirschhorn, whose practice strongly resonates with the inquisitive nature of the avant-garde while also employing New Realist terminology. Hirschhorn is a Swiss artist born in 1957 whose practice is directed by the belief that every person has an innate understanding of art. The artist is said to resist exclusionary and elitist structures within his art practice, focusing on the dynamic principles of energy and coexistence to guide his aesthetic criteria (Art 21: Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument). Hirschhorn's artistic sensibilities and conceptual investments resonate with my personal practice; in which the artist critically engages with mundane and considerably non-aesthetic objects through a generative process of interaction. His process allows him to develop works that probe towards avant-garde conversations by questioning aesthetic value. To further quote the artist's bio from Art 21, "Hirschhorn presents intellectual history and philosophical theory much as he does everyday objects and images, and poses questions about aesthetic value, moral responsibility, political agency, consumerism, and media spectacle" (Art 21: Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument).

In 2013 Hirschhorn created the *Gramsci Monument* in the Bronx, New York City. The site-specific process-oriented investment lasted for two and a half months and was maintained by the artist everyday along with the participating local non-profit groups and community members. Hirschhorn's monument maintained an ephemeral presence in which it changed and adapted to the needs of the community that interacted with the space. At the root of the project's functionality, I can acknowledge that through active engagement and collaboration, the spectacle of the monument confirmed the power of art to progress conceptual ideas and sustainable practices. Within the simplicity of the materials used to create the monument, such as plywood, 2x4's, tarps, and found objects, Hirschhorn created a practical method of re-contextualizing materials, objects, and the physical space through artistic exploration. Within the two and a half months of the monuments existence it adapted to facilitate the needs of the community, allowing various levels of community involvement to coexist in a day-by-day habitat. With aesthetic aims being

reformulated by unpredictability, Hirschhorn's monument critically engaged with the community by using art and institutional structures as a platform for exploring the impact of a biomorphic monument. Hirschhorn was ultimately supported to execute his creative desire, however, this resulted in the need to accommodate a generative process where the monument would be realized with respect to the mutual interests of those involved. After all, Hirschhorn holds an association with the prestige of fine art and institutional support - if a local member of the Bronx community started to build a shanty tower out of plywood, 2x4's, and tarps, they would most likely not obtain the same positive experience. Despite an idealized end product, the development of the monument created a space to merge community engagement with fine art structures. In 2016, I was funded to produce an installation for the historical

ArtPark in Lewiston New York. Given that the surrounding area of the state park was largely composed of industrial landscape with scattered dump sites and scrap yards I wanted to work with materials that would reflect that reality. Therefore, I aimed to create a piece out of majority PVC tubing and 6x6''



Figure 3.

pressure treated lumber (see figure 3). My conclusion was to create a large teeter-totter which would be made out of a 10'' round and 8' long industrial PVC tube which would be further filled with nails, air gun brass pellets, marbles, and gravel to mimic the sounds of an approaching rain storm as participants teetered back and forth on the anchored installation; off cuts from the teeter-totter would be further employed to create free standing interactive rainmakers. Something that I naively overlooked was that both Canada and the USA are actively working to dismantle all public place teeter-totter for they have been deemed unsafe, posing threats of government liability. ArtPark, residing in a state park runs under strict rules and by-laws of which the idea of installing a teeter-totter is wildly audacious to propose. However, given that the ArtPark has a long-standing history of facilitating public sculptures that hold

interactive components, the executive director was able to over rule state law and get my project approved under the guise of an interactive sound sculpture, with immense focus on safety precautions, – opposed to a teeter-totter that makes sound. When the piece was opened to the public the response was positive and it was very rewarding for spectators to actively reflect on the aesthetics which resulted from the ingenuity of reuse; where the artwork itself was approachable and the elevating of unconventional materials remained evident. The teeter-totter as an art installation will now permanently facilitate community engagement at ArtPark.

I will now discuss American artist Tom Sachs whose practice resonates with my material interests while holding different conceptual considerations. To quote Bomb Art Publication, which conducted an interview with the artist, “Tom Sachs’ highly personalized use of materials and process is rooted in bricolage, a French term for do-it-yourself. His work addresses a wide range of issues including appropriation, branding, consumerism, globalization, entertainment and functionality” (Kessler and Sachs: 69). Sachs is widely known for his use of raw everyday materials such as plywood, duct tape, and recycled packaging to create his artworks. He performs a process of interaction where he elevates the materials by replicating luxury and fetish objects which already exist in the world, examples being the aesthetics of designer products such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Within his work, the artist’s sense of humour is also on display, never hiding evidence of his process or attempting to completely mask the materials. I approach DIY sensibilities as a method of production which inspires the viewer but resonates with the creator. Displays of DIY innovation can be informative and empowering but most importantly the act of creating those objects puts the maker through a process of self-reflexive inquiry where individuals work within their skill set and surrounding environment to realize an idea. My use of undesirable and discarded materials, such as OSB plywood, cinderblocks, empty spray cans, and recycled vinyl scraps, appeals to Sachs’s practice by appeasing the powers of institutional value, allowing me to elevate materials beyond what they were. Where I use aesthetic realization to progress a material past its

mundane existence, Sachs does the same by focusing on his material transformation towards the likeness of existing luxury and consumer products.

A good example would be Tom Sachs' 1996 *Victory Boogie Woogie* which is a replica of Piet Mondrian's 1942 *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Sachs wanted to own a Mondrian painting but decided that he would never be able to afford one, therefore he made his own. In a 2014 interview with *Border Crossings Magazine* Sachs is quoted while reminiscing on his interest with Mondrian,

"I take different things from different sources to make things that represent me and those are made out of duct tape, a material that is an American birthright. Painting isn't mine but duct tape is. When I left school I really loved Mondrian and I realized I was going to have to dedicate my entire existence to the world of money to get one. I knew right away that was a compromise I was not going to make with my life, So I went to the museum, studied one and made mine out of gaffer's tape. I got to enjoy being a student and I realized I was probably spending more time with this particular painting than Eli Broad who paid many millions of dollars to buy his." (Enright and Walsh: Issue 130)

(See Figure 4 - Right Side: Sachs, Left Side: Mondrian)

Sachs stayed true to his personal skill set and materials of interest, which resulted in his replica not being made out of oil paint on canvas but made of colored gaffers tape on plywood. This act of DIY ingenuity coupled with self-reflexive investment resulted in a work that Sachs ultimately valued more than the

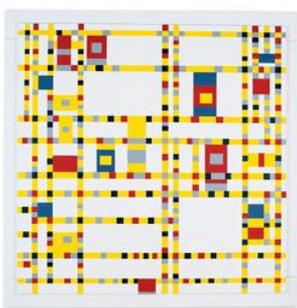


Figure 4.

actual Mondrian he set out to copy. He personally elevated materials that hold low value though his active engagement towards re-contextualizing and building a new relationship with his materials. With this example being a mere reference point within

Sachs's practice at large, he continues to entertain audiences with his studio actions when prototyping inquiries towards artistic and commodity value. Reflecting on our differences, within my practice I do not strive to copy or replicate existing works that hold value and prestige but I do wish to explore the ability of art institutions to justify or confirm value. Sachs set out to copy a famous multi million-dollar painting with inexpensive materials such as gaffers tape and plywood; the most evocative result is that through the

practicality of his production methods often paired with simplistic execution, he has defended his artistic insight as creating value through the emergence of these production methods. By nurturing his creative insight, Sachs developed a stylistic approach to material subversion, in which his artworks have now excelled past the monetary value of the fetish and luxury commodities that he initially set out to replicate.

Lastly, I will discuss Canadian artist Georgia Dickie who is a contemporary to myself. Dickie is currently represented by Toronto's Cooper Cole Gallery and I find strong similarities between our practices when considering the materials that we use. Discussed by writer Forrest Perrine in their 2012 article for Art and Design Publication *Beautiful Decay* "Georgia Dickie makes sculptures by assembling found objects, most of them large, heavy, and industrial. They seem to be as much about object culture as they are about form and clutter" (Perrine: Beautifuldecay.com). Dickie uses found objects and works towards aesthetic assemblages in response to her considerably non-aesthetic found materials. There is a strong emphasis placed on exploring her artistic insight when she approaches her chosen materials as readymade objects. Dickie does not mask her materials, but elevates them through a process of working with the inherent qualities of what is readily available to her. Finding a sense of balance amongst the clutter that arises from collecting waste and discard is evidently a strong asset within Dickie's art practice.



Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows Dickie's 2013 piece *BBQ Lean* comprised of aluminum, paint, and rubber. Never hiding material reference and embracing the inherent qualities of the materials at hand, Dickie's process of exploring objecthood displays creative emergence which champions aesthetic devices in respect to shape and compositional balance. In 2012 Toronto Star critic Murray Whyte published a review on the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art's exhibition

trans/FORM. Whyte praised the ingenuity of the exhibition which included Dickie and seven other artists:

“[Director David] Liss’s conceit of identifying a loosely-associated movement among young artists here, to embrace workaday materials and cast-offs as the raw material of art-making, is bang-on with my own. Echoes of the 20th century’s great “isms” abound here: Georgia Dickie’s playful ingenuity with material and proportion - an iron rod lies propped by a tangle of chain link, a perforated brass cylinder dangling from the end; a rusted iron hoop balances precariously on a ridged plinth of wood that surely served some useful light-industrial purpose at some point” (Whyte: TheStar.com)

Whyte provides insight towards his opinion that this show does not define an art movement but does loosely assemble a group of similar artists in order to create a platform for critically engaging with artworks made with raw, found, and everyday materials. Similar to myself, Dickie actively searches out materials that are readily available within the urban setting of Toronto. The way she uses fine art structures to critically engage with what may have otherwise been considered waste is what ultimately inspires me to parallel our practices. Her work references the familiar while aesthetically charging objects and materials and elevating them.

The main difference between our practices, despite similar material and object interests, is that my generative process is invested in working with my materials intrinsic properties. Actively finding and then balancing the aesthetic within the non-aesthetic through studio based material interaction. I feel as though Dickie’s work is strongly directed towards treating her materials as readymade sculptures. Her generative process of material elevation results from arousing displays of composition and balance. In light of sharing similar motivations what further distinguishes our practices is that Dickie’s work establishes aesthetic values within her approach to composition which pays compliment to her raw materials of choice. As for myself, I use raw materials to deliberately create commercial objects. Within both of our practices, I believe that our materials of interest promote sustainable relationships within our immediate environments while holding the opportunity to influence others through the spectacle of artistic displays.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter promotes my overarching theme of encouraging an ethics of care within our immediate environments that we interact with. “Ethics of care, predicated on a baseline moral relationship that linked, bound, and shaped ethical responsibility in chains of mutual entanglement and dependency” (Jackson: 231). This term specifically advocates the development of a more conscious role within the life cycle of materials, objects, and spaces that we interact with, both individually and collectively, expanding past the simplicities of producing and consuming; encouraging repair, re use, and sustainable relationships. To quote Jackson further, “What if we can build new and different forms of solidarity with our objects? And what if, beneath the nose of scholarship, this is what we do every day? ... attention to maintenance and repair may help redirect our gaze from moments of production to moments of sustainability” (Jackson: 233-234). One may be confronted and overwhelmed by a call for responsibility towards the necessity of consciously developing reactive sustainable relationships. Where similarly, the same impressions can be obtained and the ethics of care are promoted through art historical references when artists practically work with waste and discard materials. To care is to form a moral relationship with your environment, its commodities, and their by-products; working with materials past their expected functionality and embracing the innovation that can arise from revisiting breakdown or compromised use value.

My interests reside in working with what the environment has to offer, resulting in a form of reuse through bricolage. Personally focusing on the urban setting of Toronto, sustainable practices can provide global implications but can also be rationalized by the efforts of the individual or participating communities. Repair and reuse combined with avant-garde practices prompts a new intrigue with materials as an extension of their life cycle. Working with aspects of breakdown, whether it be the neglected by-product of industrial production or a mundane object with compromised functionality, produces generative results that can appeal to various levels of accessibility and expertise. Within Jackson’s writing he expresses “zone of proximal development” in which our proximity and relationship

to objects and spaces should not be considered as creating barriers on a producer consumer level, but rather appealing to our personal investments, interests, and abilities as dynamic resources and engines of change towards blurring the relationship between commodity and value (Jackson: 230). This informs and encourages my practice to potentially ripple across larger platforms, where sustainability is the connector but production methods can vary across personal interest, various disciplines, areas of commerce, and history.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.i Preface

I work with a variety of production methods which all influence and build upon one another. My methods mainly consist of self-reflexivity, which informs my process of (dis) and (re) assembly, field research, studio experimentation and material hoarding. I have been greatly inspired by Director of the School of Visual Arts at Penn State University and Professor of Art Education, Graeme Sullivan's 2010 *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Art*. Sullivan received both his PhD and MA in Art Education from The Ohio State University. Since the early 1990s his research has involved an ongoing investigation of thinking processes in visual arts and studio-based research practices. I enjoy Sullivan's relaxed attitude towards the potential breadth of research interests where one must not be overwhelmed by their task at hand. To quote Sullivan,

"In our daily lives we encounter big theories that deal with the larger issues of life and the universe, as well as little theories that service our practical need to explain and understand everyday occurrences in addition to grand theoretical proposals, and commonplace practical reasoning, we construct theories that describe how to plan and implement policies, programs, and practices... The promise of new insights and the possibility of more compelling theories is why we do research, because this holds the prospect of improving the structures and actions we put in place to conduct our lives." (Sullivan: 65)

In a simple gesture, Sullivan promotes creative exploration throughout his publication as part of a process towards nurturing ideas and developing impactful actions.

Within my practice, I employ my creativity to provide new insights towards aesthetic realization and how that can be applied to what may have otherwise been waste material. I am not prescribing a solution to the wicked problem of pollution and waste management, but I am employing creativity and artistic practices to render an opportunity to establish new values, which can encourage viewers to reconsider their relationships with the materiality of their consumer goods. Sullivan describes creative process as a form of "constructive theorizing" in which using theory as development towards problem solving is often rooted in moral reasoning (Sullivan: 66). Ultimately, I am appealing to the structures of value implementation that reside within the pragmatics of Danto's *artworld*, which provides a platform for

exploring my processes of aesthetic realization with undesirable objects and materials. The key idea put forth by Sullivan is that visual art practices have the ability to access a wide variety of positions and perspectives, however "to propose a variable way to conceptualize art practice as research requires the construction of robust and defensible frameworks for considering the relationship between the theories and practices that inform how art can assume its potential as a creative and critical form of human inquiry, agency, and production" (Sullivan: 99). Theorizing my art practice is what allows me to find theoretical parallels that help enhance my personal understanding of my production methods, developing my focus of inquiry, directing my sense of artistic and creative agency.

4.1 Self-Reflexivity with (Dis) and (Re) Assembly

The following methods are discussed in relation to the content of my thesis exhibition.

My explorations of graffiti production began in the late 1990's with interest placed on aestheticizing my personal interpretations of the written alphabet. My practice does not defend graffiti culture but emphasizes aspects of graffiti production that continue to resonate with me. I have always been inspired by the way graffiti practices encourage me to reactivate mundane and overlooked objects, re-contextualizing a material, object, or space to form new use values unique to the subculture. The outside of mailboxes host tags which would be layered ephemeral displays advertising what graffiti writers were recently in the area, white cube delivery trucks act as roaming bill boards which host tags and murals as they move throughout the city, overlooked alley ways and abandoned industrial complexes function as the graffiti artists' gallery. My favorite decrepit and neglected structure was Toronto's Brickworks before its gentrification. There was both an absurdity and tranquility towards the extensive size of the building, the graffiti productions that confronted and engulfed the space, while knowing that I could spend hours there risk free.

I approach graffiti as a method of applying aesthetic devices to re-contextualize a subject through active material engagement; where the development of my graffiti productions was integral to interacting

with the material, object, or space that is in front of me. Graffiti production itself, in my opinion, stems from aesthetic discovery placed upon customizing and disrupting the established systems of written communication. The same way graffiti writers reinterpret the written alphabet, they similarly reinterpret familiar settings and materials. With aims towards aesthetic discovery, graffiti is a reference towards the potential for ways of reconsidering our relationship with the materiality of space and language. Treating them as objects for revisiting and something that can be pushed past their predicated functionality.

Employing my graffiti roots as a source for production methods is referential to the act of self-reflexivity, which implies an art practice can act as a form of transformative research. As quoted by Sullivan from *Art Practice as Research* "a self-reflexive practice describes an inquiry process that is directed by personal interests and creative insight, yet it is informed by discipline knowledge and research expertise. This requires a transparent understanding of the field, which means that an individual can see through existing data, texts, and contexts so as to be open to alternative conceptions and imaginative options" (Sullivan: 110). I interpret this definition upon myself as the artist and researcher, which means that I can critically inquire my graffiti inspirations in correlation with my institutional fine art education; allowing me to maintain an open dialogue throughout my process which allows my insights to be directed but not prescribed, constantly developing new forms and outcomes.

Cut-Back, 2016-2017. By Julian Michael Majewski (4 video stills)

Recycled OSB Plywood, Recycled Cinder Block Base, Projected Images. Dimensions: 4x4ft.

(See Figure 6)



Figure 6.

The piece is comprised of framed oriented strand board (OSB) plywood which employs generic shapes that resonate throughout graffiti production such as, arrows, circles, rectangles, ovals etc. to compile the collaged statement “post no bills”. I define my method of creating letters and confining them to framing devices as *cut backs*. The term cut back, within graffiti terminology, implies the use of negative space to create a shape, which will further build a word. For example, if I was spray painting a blue circle onto a black wall, I can use black paint to match the initial wall color to erase or whittle down the blue circle to a desired circumference. The OSB plywood was waste in result of its previous function becoming obsolete. I often recover OSB plywood from temporary construction barriers which are being deconstructed and thrown away upon the conclusion of the walls functionality. I apply the graffiti term cut back towards my physical interactions with OSB plywood in order to create shapes which can be further complied to form words or statements. The abstracted phrase “post no bills” echoes back to the previous site of existence for the OSB plywood before it became re-contextualized as a material for my artistic production. In order to emphasize and aestheticize the ephemeral nature of OSB plywood wall’s and the interaction that they experience, I use my framed cut back as a projection surface where a large variety of material and color compositions are projected within the piece. The projections interact specifically with the physical attributes of the piece, further flushing out potential aesthetic directions that could be imposed or incorporated into the framed structure.

Creating a projection mapping surface out of my large scale cut back is complimentary to my generative process which aims for aesthetic realization. Working with the by-product of construction sites throughout Toronto, in the wake of progress, I have access to a material that is readily available and often holds no monetary value to the previous owners. Generally, if I can find it, I can keep it. I cut and sand the OSB plywood to draw out its inherent aesthetic qualities, which in my opinion resonates with the patched pattern look of granite counter slabs. There is an aspect of decollage in respect to working with scraps of wood and refining them from their standard form; but also, paired with methods of collage when the shapes are compiled into framing devices in order to accomplish a balanced placement of the

materials before they become fastened into place. Creating my cut back series out of recycled OSB plywood is a method of re-contextualizing what would have been waste by realizing the materials aesthetic attributes. My efforts towards working with materials that are readily available, can ideally influence people to reconsider what they may assume to be waste, discard, non-valuable, or non-aesthetic. Through artistic production I have reshaped my relationship to OSB plywood allowing the material to adapt towards new uses and therefore new values. Working with refuse and discard materials appeals to sustainable practices where the creative investment of working with a material can potentially result in an aesthetic outcome; providing a new economy and elevated form of existence. Through re-contextualization and material subversion I form intrigue that disrupts predicated functionality and promotes new interest.

4.2 Field Research

Within my artistic practice, I champion my artistic process of material interaction over result when working with refused materials that are sourced through my various production and research methods. Most notably, I reference working with what my environment has to offer. I am invested in exploring the potential to work with existing undesirable objects and spaces as refuse materials for artistic production or creative intervention. I actively explore, roam, and search out spaces and materials of interest. I acknowledge the need for fieldwork, as sociologist Kristin Luker argues “once you have found a data outcropping and managed to get entrée to it... again driven (or at least shaped) by theory, you think of all the time and places where the practices that you are interested in are likely to occur” (Luker: 162). For myself, these spaces exist within inactivated alleyways, post-industrial landscapes, dump sites, construction hoarding, along with neglected mundane objects readily available within our urban environments such as mail boxes, parking lot tenant’s booths, construction walls, and more.

Bundles, 2017. By Julian Michael Majewski

Recycled OSB Plywood, Empty Spray Paint Cans.

Dimensions: 1) 11x11 inches. 2) 9x9 inches. 3) 3x9 inches. (See Figure 7)



Figure 7.

I enjoy roaming and exploring Toronto, as a graffiti artist, one of the ultimate goals is to go *All City*. This term refers to leaving your mark within every area of the city you live; originating from New York where the goal was to have a piece in every borough. I have visited alleys, buildings, underpasses, and railroad-side walls across the city which are commonly associated with a heavy graffiti presence. I was always intrigued by the piles of empty spray cans that would be discarded at these sites upon becoming empty. I would look at the cans as relics with a history of production, empty objects with loaded pasts. I didn't look at the cans as problematic piles of garbage but as materials lying dormant. Paired with my piles of OSB

plywood scraps, I worked with the aesthetics of the cans themselves, placing focus on the color of the can and the drips that trailed down their structure. I have scavenged, gathered, and hoarded hundreds of empty spray cans. Given the expensive nature of graffiti brand spray cans, I will wait to obtain empty ones for free. Once I had gathered access to locations where the material was present, I had the opportunity to experiment with the cans by piling them, sorting them, stacking them, squishing them, and eventually bundling them.

When I would look at the cans in their masses they appeared as pixels which could be compiled to create aesthetic polychromatic gradients and complementary color compositions. I considered domestic application for my discard and waste materials. I used my OSB plywood scraps to establish frames which would contain bundles of empty cans, displaying grids of color. The OSB plywood itself was sanded down to provide traces of their layered coloring. Aiming to subvert these materials as artistic products, I

added an element of decollage to the sides of the frames where wall paper was applied and then arbitrarily torn away to unmask the raw faded colors of the plywood underneath. I believe that there is an interesting proposition for consumers to host relics of street art within the sanctities of their home; obtaining a head-nod to graffiti while negating it simultaneously.

Pickled Plywood, 2016-2017. By Julian Michael Majewski

Recycles OSB Plywood Off-Cuts and Pickling Juice.

Dimensions: Varying Jars (See Figure 8)



Figure 8.

Upon sourcing places to easily acquire OSB plywood, similarly to the spray cans, I was put in a position of material plethora which encouraged experimentation. For a while, I became so overwhelmed with piles of OSB plywood that I had to resort to strategically mounting the boards around my neighborhood, where I would double up the sheets onto abandoned buildings for safe keeping. I also stored my materials in the freight elevator of a closed car dealership next door to my place. I am addicted to revisiting sites of material opportunity and furthermore when the materials present themselves I cannot resist acquiring them.

I was able to abstract my associations with plywood as a material for construction and began to work with the

material as a site within itself, investigating the material qualities and aesthetic potentials. I completely (dis) assembled sheets of plywood into particles and dust before (re) assembling them into new shapes and bulky masses. I became invested in methods of material preservation with hopes of elevating these scraps of potential waste into aesthetic objects that provide new intrigue.

I began to consider the preservation of food through canning and pickling which directed me towards embracing the patience required for pickling my thin strips of OSB plywood. The process was challenging due to the composition of OSB plywood where its bonding agents would interact with the pickling substance often resulting in mounds of disgusting mold as opposed to preserved slices of plywood. The successful applications of material preservation would result in the can resealing itself as the wood suffocates where the plywood would also expand and form to the curvatures of the jar over time. To pickle something is to imply preservation for future use. To pickle plywood makes no sense but as an artwork it provides an approachable ad hoc opportunity to challenge viewers by reshaping their relationship with the materiality of their surroundings.

The ad hoc nature of pickling scraps of plywood is reminiscent of Canadian Sculptor Aganetha Dyck's 2008 *Beework & Honeycomb Figurines*. Dyck embraces a generative process of material interaction which maintains a degree of unpredictability when collaborating with Bee's in nature. The main difference between our practices is that my materials provide their own degrees of unpredictability when pursuing aesthetic realization. I work with materials, finding and then balancing the aesthetic within the non-aesthetic, as a method for developing a new sense of intrigue past their familiarity. Dyck's practice strongly employs generative processes of material interaction but is invested towards connections with nature and ecosystems when employing Bee's as a production method, actively engaging with third party interventions.

4.3 Studio Experimentation and Hoarding

Studio experimentation is an essential part of my practice when exploring my generative approaches to (dis) and (re) assembly. I often refer to my studio as my brain. Within the cluttered, messy, environment, I do maintain control over my space and I am able to establish more intimate relationships with my materials when exploring a process of aesthetic realization. In my Methodology Chapter I state that I work with loose structures which guide my production process but do not predict a specific outcome,

maintaining a degree of unpredictability and allowance for creative emergence. When working with process I do not believe in failure, but I do value my creative sanctuary that allows me to freely explore and interrogate material opportunities. Shaped by theory and executed by a hands-on artistic practice, I find support within the writing of Mika Hannula, a writer, curator, teacher, and art critic who has written several books on contemporary art. Hannula promotes artistic production as a form of research where the necessity for methodological frame works is what elevates artistic production, ultimately legitimizing its appeal as a form of research to different disciplines. Hannula's sentiments correspond with my methodological frame works which promote process over product. Quoted from their 2004 *River Low, Mountain High. Contextualizing Artistic Research*,

“What actually is artistic research? It is a combination of artistic practice and theoretical approach while aiming at the production of knowledge. Within that combination of theory and practice, I would argue, we need some kind of common ground, not implying strict rules, but basic guidelines for a continuously shifting methodology of artistic research. Methodology is the semi-solid base and the framework enabling outreach and experimentation. It is there to guide and to help, not to restrict or to limit. I believe that without such methodology, artistic research as an interdisciplinary field could become lost.” (Hannula: 71)

Hannula's writing references the importance of a guided, practice based approach, to artistic research. I could not become an artist in response to research, it is my self-reflexive approach to creative production which then informed a pursuit for larger applications. I consider artistic production, specifically studio experimentation, as an important site of exploration where I construct meaning through making. My practice is invested in the power of artistic production to re-contextualize what may have been discard or waste, encouraging the public to reshape their relationship with their surrounds, and ideally developing a more sustainable relationship with their environment. My mentality was specifically shaped in response to my life experiences and nurtured interests. My practice began as a form of bricolage through working with what was around me; when I began to develop my “style” or methodological frame work, this primed me to reflect on what my studio experimentations were appealing to within a larger social context.

Uniquely within the studio space and my interest with material reuse, I consider hoarding to be a primary method which provides a spring board for my artistic experimentations and eventual productions.

When I speak of hoarding, I speak to gathering and collecting objects and materials in excess with no monetary value. Sure, some people hoard magazines, baseball cards, rare commodities, newspapers and books; but I personally hoard empty spray cans, scraps of OSB plywood, Mylar and vinyl off cuts, empty lighters, Velcro straps, and many more materials that will most likely never serve any inherent value as far as monetary appreciation goes. Furthermore, I hoard in response to stumbling upon reliable sources where materials will be of consistent access to me. Voided of personal association and sentimental value, I just can't stop gathering what would have been waste when considering how it *could* become materials for artistic production.

Professor of History at Harvard University, Daniel Lord Smail, pursues intellectual projects where he works towards identifying and developing new narratives for binding human history. Within our contemporary settings, Smail became very interested in hoarding as a current circumstance. Within his 2014 publication *Neurohistory in Action: Hoarding and the Human Past* Smail provides researched references towards the unsolved but highly debated nature of hoarding. For my own sake, I believe that hoarding is good. Smail states that hoarding is the result of “deficits in cognitive architecture” which implies that we are responsive to our environments and that our brains actively adjust to how we process our relationship to materials and spaces (Smail: 111). Hoarding is what provides me with a freedom of experimentation due to the lack of financial strain or fear of wasting precious supplies. (Can you *waste* waste?) Through this freedom, I do not gather materials due to emotional investments, but I do gain the opportunity to build intimate relationships with the materiality of my hoarded piles through creative process and studio production. I guide myself through generative structures of aesthetic realization, attempting to explore new values for my considerably undesirable materials. Smail writes that “The phenomenon of compulsive hoarding shows how difficult it can be for some people to create and enforce the hierarchy of use and uselessness” (Smail: 122). However, I would argue that in my case, paired with studio experimentation, the process of creative exploration with my hoarded supplies is what allows me to establish a relationship with the materials by considering their importance to my productions. I do agree

with Smail when he argues that our contemporary rise of hoarding stems from an increased presence of nearly identical things and in response to the situation, hoarding itself is partially influenced by a conscious awareness towards our economy of trash (Smail: 121). I started working with discard and refuse materials out of financial practicality. By pursuing my creative interests, paired with studio experimentation, I was able to reshape my relationship to waste materials and now consider them as invaluable influences on my creative process. It's not about simply displaying my efforts to subvert and re-contextualize what may have been waste, but to provide practical examples of active engagement with materials with necessity placed on avoiding them from becoming problematic.

***Off-Cuts*, 2016-2017. By Julian Michael Majewski**

Discarded and Damaged Shirts Designed with Recycled Scraps of Vinyl.

Dimensions: Varying Sizes, Monoprints. (See Figure 9)



Figure 9.

My series titled *Off-Cuts* was a serendipitous discovery of material opportunity. I maintained a part time job during my master's degree where I would produce custom t-shirts in bulk order format for various companies and events. Producing the orders always results with vinyl off-cuts that are shed away when applying the printed design onto the shirts. Within the industry, it is commonplace for a small number of shirts to be compromised due to arriving as damaged goods with rips and tears, mishaps when applying the designs to the shirts, and sometimes people just sincerely ordering the wrong design, which results in a bulk order of now useless inventory. I became accustomed to my training of throwing out the

vinyl off-cuts and tossing damaged and misprinted shirts into a lost inventory bin. The products simply couldn't be sold and also could not be donated.

Instead, I actively began gathering large bins of vinyl off-cuts and would rescue shirts from the lost inventory bin. Eventually, with a large plethora of free material to work with, I began experimenting with how the vinyl scraps could create new aesthetics and therefore new use values for these waste materials; strategically placing strips over stains or masking designs that were damaged in the printing process. Admittedly, the process of pursuing aesthetic intervention with the materials I had readily available were not all successful exploits. Certain colors would just simply not look good together, some stains could not be covered despite my best efforts. I maintained a sincere approach towards working with the materials as they were which confined me from forcing aesthetic interventions upon them such as image designs or letter work.

I applied a generative process of working with the material at hand in hopes of realizing aesthetic properties. The act of supervenience was strongly present for the shirts and vinyl were approached as piles of waste, where the new aesthetic value resulted from actively finding then balancing the aesthetic within the non-aesthetic of the discarded materials. The series is the result of practical material engagement. Waste that would have gone to the landfill have now been re-contextualized as production materials. In a tongue-in-cheek effort, I mounted one of the shirts within a sports memorabilia glass frame to further force ideas of material elevation and artistic prestige onto the textile series. Where preserved sports attire and the mounted *Off-Cut* similarly function as valued relics from a larger system of engagement. The shirts ultimately function as wearable monoprints. This series of over 150 shirts, in my opinion, is an example of pursuing an opportunity to develop a sustainable or environmentally neutral practice through my literal employment of waste and refuse materials. Within retail and custom printing industries, my efforts provide an outlet for lost inventory to be re-contextualized in order to recoup lost profits. For myself as the artist, I was able to make a large series of 150 textile monoprints where the only cost was \$7.00 in result of washing my printed shirts. The physicality and back story to my *Off-Cut* series

informs their aesthetic while further pushing the envelope of creative application when actively aiming for sustainable material relationships. For someone to simply desire to own one of the shirts is a success for myself and the materials.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Bibliography

My production methods work in parallel with an ethics of care, exploring material opportunity in response to what my surroundings have to offer. Generative Methodology frames my process of interaction with materials and guides my research. It is exciting to investigate aspects of graffiti production that continue to resonate with me, now positioning these interests as production methods which also direct my material investments. Graffiti conditioned me to reconsider my relationship with the materiality of my everyday surroundings. Mundane objects can host new uses within my art practice. I am extending my personal insight towards a more communal application for how to re-contextualize our relationship with the materiality of our existence. Within the wake of progress, waste becomes a problematic luxury. I am promoting, through artistic production, to creatively interact with discarded, undesirable, and non-aesthetic by-products of contemporary consumer culture. I perform low impact problem solving towards sources of undesirable materials, and through a process of active engagement I elevate and subvert these materials to create new values as objects beyond what they used to be. My practice obtains a platform to influence and induce creativity amongst viewers through evidence of my productions.

My exhibition is a display of artistic production, but I plan to continue to acknowledge the artworks as relics. To create value and new interest with materials that individuals perhaps pass by on a weekly basis is a lucrative position. My investments towards aesthetic realization, acting upon materials that were previously considered as discard, can influence the public to reflect on my practical engagement and adopt my actions into their own lives. As an individual, re-contextualizing the materials that I work with under the umbrella of artistic production provides an environmentally neutral impact which can further influence sustainable relationships. If individuals employ creativity as a form of active problem solving this enforces an ethics of care which will encourage the public to develop a new relationship with the materiality of their surroundings. My exhibition acts as an example of re-contextualizing what may have

been considered waste into material opportunity for artistic productions. For myself, the exhibition is a reference to the potential for similar applications within new creative endeavours. I do not limit myself to strictly working with OSB plywood, vinyl, discarded shirts, and spray cans but these materials play into the practical engagement of my practice when reusing what may have been considered waste. At large, the materiality of my practice interweaves with my personal interests and everyday activities; there is a freedom and simplicity in being more observant in order to become more aware of opportunities that interest me. My productions would not be as sincere and would be a lot more expensive to produce if I were not actively pondering and gathering materials throughout my travels in Toronto. My practice maintains a practical authenticity in which my productions sincerely take litter and discarded materials off the streets, reemploying them through a generative process of aesthetic exploration, allowing myself to discover what objects and materials could be while maintaining reference to what they once were.

The implication of my research and associated art practice is to provide the viewing public with examples as encouragement for them to embrace what shapes my considerations onto themselves. Where the examples can resonate with individuals to creatively engage with their own material opportunities in relation to their personal skill sets. Ultimately, I may never find concrete lineage amongst the intertwined nature of my artworks functioning as commodities, ideas, relics, aesthetic recycling, and/or optimistic examples. However, there will always be the potential for varying levels of success when my generative process produces aesthetic emergence. If people despise the work, at least I have personally accumulated and re-contextualized what may have been waste by appealing to my production methods and aesthetic interests. If viewers like the work, then there is a supported opportunity to continue producing with discarded materials, elevating them past the realm of problematic waste now functioning as artistic products.

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That was fun!

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