

Engaging Ethnography: creative fieldwork in the everyday

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Ontario College of Art and Design University

### **Abstract**

Through inviting the tacit and the intuitive to be components of my anthropological research, *Engaging Ethnography's* objective is to communicate, through corporeal and visually explorative means, the affective and aesthetic nature of the everyday. By projecting small-scale videos onto objects and spaces, my intent as artist-ethnographer is to highlight the embodied and expressive qualities of the liminal and transient spaces that characterize the everyday and our movement through it. Using creative production as a form of research, *Engaging Ethnography* uses anthropology and media art in order to create a hybrid form of engagement, that of 'creative fieldwork.' This interdisciplinary model is an attempt to bring the visual into the ethnographic in order to bridge the gap between research and representation while also expanding the range of materials and methods used to engage in ethnography.

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## Section 1: Introduction

### **1.1 Scope and Context**

My education prior to this Masters program at OCADU was in anthropology. During my undergraduate degree I became quickly aware – through lectures, readings and research – that most ethnographies, which are “the stud[ies] and systematic record[s] of human cultures” (Merriam-Webster) are text-based and that any included visual representation was presented in quite linear and prescriptive formats. As someone who is deeply connected to the visual, I felt a lack of space within the discipline for tacit, intuitive, or sensory engagement with culture and people. When I arrived at OCADU in the fall of 2013, I started to explore aspects of visual ethnography that took into account more artistic elements of documenting culture.<sup>1</sup> My intent was to move away from anthropology’s limited desire to go beyond the realm of the written and to engage in a practice that saw merit in communicating an experiential and embodied depiction of culture. For these reasons, I have sought to create my own way of observing and representing an aspect of culture that I am drawn to – the everyday – through what I am terming ‘creative fieldwork.’<sup>2</sup>

This fieldwork was undertaken in Toronto, Canada and Florence, Italy. My use of ‘everyday’ in the context of this project is one that positions it as a space of

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<sup>1</sup> The use of ‘more’ in this paper reflects my personal relationship working within these disciplines.

<sup>2</sup> Researching the everyday through the methodology of ‘creative fieldwork’ was a way I could reflect upon and ultimately acknowledge the identity of the work being produced. Finding a form that would speak to these interests meant creating a hybrid methodology.



corporeal presence; a space of public attachment and engagement where bodies and practices come together to form the motions and actions that make up daily life. By actively reflecting on this process, and through further research into these topics, my intent is to engage in a larger discussion concerning anthropology and its forms of ethnographic engagement and dissemination. The aim ultimately is to engage in an ethnographic pursuit that fosters personal and creative reflection through a different type of approach, and to posit on the place and import of such an approach in exploring culture.

*Engaging Ethnography*<sup>3</sup> is my attempt to address the everyday with a fluid understanding of representation. I want to see how ethnographic consideration and artist engagement can craft a depiction of these spaces of the everyday that speak to its embodied, aesthetic, and expressive qualities. As such, this pursuit and its visual outcomes are a means of capturing the everyday in ways that convey the obvious and subtle connections that I believe we have to spaces like the sidewalks that take us to work or the market that offers us provisions. This ‘capturing’ becomes possible by allowing the tacit and the intuitive to be components of this anthropological research. Being an artist-ethnographer<sup>4</sup> my intent is to

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<sup>3</sup> In focusing on an area of research, the repetition of words (ethnography, the everyday etc.) begins to seem inevitable. I kept being pulled to the word engage. I was *engaging this*, I wanted to *engage that*. *Engaging Ethnography* thus became an appropriate title for this work as I wanted it to engage ethnography in a different way while also engaging the viewer.

<sup>4</sup> I found it hard to call myself an anthropologist and difficult to label myself an artist, yet I am so drawn to the notion of artist-ethnographer. I was able to see myself as a mixture of these disciplines and I believe it was this convergence that offered me new routes to communicating beyond conventional boundaries of subject, content and methodology. It became necessary to use

communicate the affective and aesthetic nature of the everyday through corporeal and visual means; inviting the tacit into this process only contributes to my overall intentions of approaching representation in creative, intimate, and insightful ways.

My attempt to engage in this form of representation comes in the form of audiovisual installations where I project small-scale videos made during my fieldwork onto objects and spaces. One objective is to offer new (yet familiar) views of the spaces depicted, to highlight those implied and important yet not voiced understandings that contribute to our awareness of the everyday. Hence, these works are an attempt to convey a tacit form of communicating cultural spaces and look to affirm Michael Polanyi's seminal statement from *The Tacit Dimension* "we can know more than we can tell" (4).

By developing a personal relationship with the spaces I encounter, through extended contact and observation, my personal experiences of documenting these spaces are woven into the videos I make on a level that impacts its content and transmission. As such, I have turned to the reflexive in an attempt to position my practice of walking, observing, and documenting the everyday. This reflexive turn allows my presence to be in dialogue with the work I am undertaking. I am constantly reflecting upon, and continually discussing, my relationship to the practices I am undertaking rather than a mere observer of the everyday.

This exploration is not about adding filmmaking onto anthropology; rather it

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a concept such as the artist-ethnographer in order to convey what I was doing, and to carve out a space that would fit my practice and my research interests.

is an attempt to bring the visual into the ethnographic as a way to bridge the gap between research and representation. My intent is to suggest that such an interdisciplinary model may provide a way of comprehending a space like the everyday while expanding the range of materials and methods used to engage in ethnography, presenting a bolder and more experimental image-based anthropology (Grimshaw 18). I have positioned this intent and its practice as a form of creative fieldwork, which has allowed me to tap into ethnographic as well as artistic sensibilities and articulations. My intention is that these visual engagements provide an avenue for conversation concerning people and culture in ways that deepen our discussion on what ethnography can put forward and accomplish.

## 1.2 The Everyday

*The everyday is everything, including that which goes unnoticed. It is the totality of that which can be revealed as phenomena, that is, all that can appear. It forms the background to the whole world which can be accessible to us through appearances; it is both ubiquitous and unexamined.*

– Derek Mitchell, *Everyday Phenomenology* (2).

The everyday can be a difficult concept to grasp and attempting to represent it is not straightforward. As phenomenologist Derek Mitchell states above “the everyday is everything” which makes it a difficult place to locate. However, for this project I have located the everyday within a particular orientation in order to position it as a space where the creative and the ethnographic can merge to convey a tacit form of communicating research and representing culture.

I see spaces of the everyday as excellent locations to examine how the tacit can convey information and understanding. We are acquainted with these spaces and they hold personal associations and memories that allow us to tap into our own insights and feelings about what these depictions of them are and can impart. With this understanding in place, visually representing – rather than textually explaining – becomes possible as our grasp of what characterizes these spaces can be triggered by a visual engagement with them. As Michel de Certeau points out in *The Practices of Everyday Life*, it is our practices that make the everyday visible (xi). This means being aware of the fact that “ways of operating” or doing things characterize these spaces, and they can be known through their corporeal manifestations and our visual understandings of them (de Certeau xi). What Ben

Highmore, whose research is concerned with the culture of everyday life, notes about de Certeau is that his “attempt to fashion an approach to the everyday [came] from the material of the everyday itself” (145). He was poetic in his approach and used the everyday as the medium for his work (Highmore 151). With this sentiment in mind, rather than Henri Lefebvre’s – author of *The Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) – whose take was far more politically minded, I am advocating for a visual observation of these practices as a means of tapping into a tacit form of communicating culture (Highmore 150). If we are to situate this understanding within ethnography, which is important given the intentions of this project, and if we follow curator, teacher, and art critic Mika Hannula’s comments that “the purpose of ethnographic research is to describe different functional practices,” then we can begin to see how such an exploration of the everyday, which is predicated on capturing the practices of everyday life, can be ethnographic (93).

The practices/phenomena that make up the everyday, such as riding a bike or walking down the street, as well as how we interpret language and navigate interpersonal relationships can “be characterized in terms of knowledge, but at the same time might seem to involve something that cannot be (at least fully) put into words” (Gascoigne and Thornton 3). I believe the everyday communicates a form of knowledge that cannot be necessarily “told” but nonetheless can be known (Polanyi 5). But how does one represent such a form of knowing? Stephen Johnstone, editor of the Whitechapel anthology *The Everyday*, adds to this

predicament by stating that there is a sense that the everyday “exists below the threshold of the noticed and is everywhere and nowhere at the same time” (13), while designer Jamer Hunt notes that “nothing is easier to point to and yet nothing eludes analysis more immediately” (Hunt 70). George Perec, French filmmaker, novelist, essayist, and author who coined the term ‘infra-ordinary’ – referring to the things we do everyday – in his text *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1974), aptly articulates this situation by asking:

The banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual [...] How are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally speak of what it is, who we are. (206)

Through an ethnographic and artistic engagement with the everyday I hope to engage Perec’s proposition of thinking about “what it is, who we are” and to represent this engagement in ways that acknowledge tacit forms of knowing.

Ultimately, I see the everyday as aesthetic, embodied, and affective. These three orientations have helped me position the spaces I am filming as research, as they are vital components in imparting forms of tacit knowledge. My research and the form of representation I am using to communicate it – a visual arts practice – hence becomes a valid form of ethnographic engagement as culture becomes materialized, or physically represented in a way that actively seeks to create a bridge between research and representation by traversing the tacit through the creative.

### 1.2.1 *A note on the aesthetic, embodied, and the affective*

#### *Aesthetic*

I walk down the street, a street I've often walked and suddenly something catches my eye. I stop and look. I have found something that resonates for me; maybe it's the colour, the texture, the positioning of the objects involved. I may not be able to pinpoint why, but it speaks to me. Done looking, I move on and continue walking. This encounter, this type of engagement, is one worth noting because it speaks to our ability to be aesthetically affected. Part of my engagement with the everyday has been one that looks to capture these encounters, propositioning the viewer to reflect on their own aesthetic engagements with the spaces of their everyday.

#### *Embodied*

The everyday I am doing my creative fieldwork within requires my physical presence and I am very much drawn to documenting how others move and are present in these spaces. Thusly, I see the everyday as decidedly embodied. This involves, as Michael Sheringham, another scholar of the everyday discusses, seeing the quotidian "as a medium in which we are immersed rather than as a category to be analyzed" (145). Whether someone is walking down the street with groceries, or sitting on a park bench reading the newspaper, they are present, and the ways in which that person navigates their daily life is played out in these spaces. Fundamentally, the everyday necessitates immersion and to be enacted

and identified it requires both bodies and interaction.

### *Affective*

The everyday that I am examining – public spaces of interchange and movement – carries the capacity to affect those who participate in its unfolding. We are formed, shaped and influenced by the contact we make within these spaces, and they reverberate beyond any initial encounter. The visual allows us to see these forms of attachment and understanding as they illustrate (providing multiple possibilities for interpretation) rather than dictate (providing one account of) these spaces and their practices.

### **1.3 The Aesthetic**

I see the aesthetic as being the *texture* of the spaces and environments we encounter: texture being the feel, appearance, and the consistency of a surface or substance. The texture of a certain place/location can be discerned. For instance, the videos depicting Toronto have a different feel than those from Florence as they impress upon us in different ways. Their sounds, pacing, settings, and light convey varying senses of place and our intuition around them impacts how we feel, connect, and respond to these depicted environments. The myriad responses we have to any given experience are located in our perception and sense of that encounter. The same is true for the aesthetic, which exposes us to something that



generates an experience (Dewey 4). An aesthetic of the everyday can emerge precisely because the everyday generates experiences that carry those feelings, appearances, and consistencies (ie. textures) that form an aesthetic.

When one seeks out aesthetic moments in the everyday, “it is remarkable how much our seemingly non-aesthetic daily concerns are dominated by the aesthetic dimension” (Saito 92). Sherri Irvin, a scholar on aesthetics and philosophy, explains the pervasiveness of the aesthetic in everyday experiences:

Being in the room you are in right now, with its particular visual features and sounds; sitting the way that you are sitting, perhaps crookedly in an uncomfortable chair; feeling the air currents on your skin—all of these things impart a texture to your experience that, I will argue, should be regarded as aesthetic. (30)

Although my fieldwork and its research are visually based, its capacity to reverberate and make emotional and sensory connections moves it past the visual. Hence, I turn to the aesthetic – like the tacit – as a means of recognizing a type of knowledge that goes beyond the material. The aesthetic is thus used in this project as a means of connecting my videos to larger concepts around depiction, art practice, and representating culture. John Dewey, the well-known public intellectual, explores art as an affective encounter in his text *Art as Experience* (1934). Dewey speaks to how art, as an expressive object, can work beyond its materiality and present an ‘experience’ for its viewer. He writes:

A primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. (3)

This directive is what I am seeking to undertake: to find continuity between the work of art and the everyday “doings” that constitute experience. It is through the aesthetic that we can connect the artistic with the experiential, the creative with the everyday. The ensuing “textures” that emerge from these reflections and their tacit dispositions are what I am looking to explore in my research and convey in my work.

According to Ben Highmore, understanding what is meant by aesthetics requires “examining the way in which [these] experiences are registered and represented” (19).<sup>5</sup> Translating and transmitting these experiences has been the directive of both ethnography and art (Jungnickel and Hjorth 136), with the concerns about communicating a relationship with the everyday influencing the visual as well as the anthropological (Highmore 19). These aesthetic qualities are “implicit in every normal experience” and give shape to both our cognitive and corporeal understandings (Dewey 12). It is this characteristic of the everyday that allows a viewer to engage, remember, and interact with representations of it. My commitment to the everyday, and my attraction to it, is predicated on its potential for engagement and interaction, which I believe is aided by its aesthetic qualities.

The aesthetic plays a role in social discourse; it can act as a regulatory system determining what we choose to view and how we appreciate it. It also holds an emotional capacity, allowing us to understand on a sentimental level.

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<sup>5</sup> Please refer to my material practice section for a more in-depth discussion on how I am representing these experiences.

Thus, “the aesthetic dimension of human experience is an important social fact, to be taken seriously alongside such other facts as economic survival, political power, and religious belief. It is important because it often matters to people and influences their actions as much as anything else in their lives” (MacDougall 98).

## Section 2: Theory

### **2.1 Ethnography**

Ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall writes, “People live in a composite world, even though their paths through it have linear qualities. In analyzing and trying to represent that world, it is important not to let the impulse to disentangle its strands displace the effects of its complexity” (51). The everyday, in particular the areas I’m exploring – streets and public spaces – are aspects of that composite world and the impulse to disentangle, examine, and articulate this space carries with it the possibility of understating its complexity. This is not my intent; however, it is entirely possible that the complexity of its presence will be limited by my representation of it. My goal, nevertheless, is to position my theoretical frameworks to include the various (and interdisciplinary) modes of informing outcomes so that I can convey the extent of my creative and epistemological work in ways that speak to that complexity rather than minimize it. In departing from the comparative mentality employed by traditional ethnographies, this interdisciplinary pursuit seeks to expand its practice through exploration and experimentation, transcending established fields in order to build something that speaks to my specific desires of representing the everyday in fluid and creative ways.

Before moving forward it is important to note that anthropology is not ethnography and ethnography is not anthropology (Ingold). One must not conflate the two, as ethnography isn’t necessarily the key force behind anthropological

undertakings. Anthropology is a field – sociocultural, biological, linguistic, archaeological – and for social anthropologist Tim Ingold its objective is to seek a comparative and critical understanding of “the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world” (89). Ethnography, on the other hand, “is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience”; it is a method and a study concerning people in a specific place at a certain time (Ingold 69). French anthropologist Marc Augé writes in his seminal text *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995): “All ethnology<sup>6</sup> presupposes the existence of a direct witness to a present actuality” (8). Mika Hannula continues this thought by stating that ethnography “is a form of observation which takes place within the natural circumstances of the social reality” (92). To witness the everyday in its present actuality, and to partake in the type of observation that Hannula speaks about, is the kind of engagement that I believe links an artistic practice to the ethnographic (or ethnology, for Augé). Through her presence in social reality, the artist-ethnographer can begin to craft a depiction of “the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience” (Ingold 69).

### 2.1.1 *Ethnography as theory*

An ethnography will often rely on a theoretical framework to position its

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<sup>6</sup> Ethnology takes a more comparative approach to research than ethnography as it studies how different cultures relate or differ from each other.

postulations; from Structuralism to Feminism, and Marxism to Functionalism, anthropologists look to theory as a means of grounding their practices (including participant observation, data collection, and cross-cultural comparison) and as a means of contributing to larger sociological and academic discussions. But what if one was to look at ethnography as a theory in and of itself rather than as a method? I am hesitant to position ethnography as a methodology when reflecting on what role it plays in my research and practice as I am not engaging in methodological undertakings constitutive of ethnography; I am not undertaking participant observation, conducting surveys or gathering data in order to make an analysis or conclusion concerning my area of study. Upon further reflection I came to see ethnography, given the context of this project, as a theoretical approach rather than as a method. One of the reasons for this decision is that my intent is not to analyze using the practices of ethnography, but rather to use it as an underlying motivation. For “when we begin to describe, analyze, dissect and categorize, as philosophers will, we tend to lose sight of what we are looking at” and engaging in what *we are looking at* is of immense importance for this project (Mitchell 5).

Ethnography in this context influences but does not necessarily inform my outcomes. It is a field of inquiry that guides my intentions and shapes the way I engage with space; it affects the work I produce and has been an important means of framing subsequent writing and reflections. An example of this would be my use of the term ‘fieldwork’ as a descriptor of my practice. A phrase used in

anthropology that refers to the collection of information in the field (outside the institution) to gain first-hand information. I have used the concept of fieldwork to further frame my actions, in particular my methodology.

This reframing of ethnography is indicative of my intention to move away from the structural, textual, and analytical with the aim of focusing on the subjective, the artistic, the experiential; not to negate the disciplinary agenda but rather embrace it from another perspective. This is to support a study of culture that admits the intuitive and the interpretive, and acknowledges, even though subjective, those sensations imbued within spaces of the ordinary, such as a street corner. Nonetheless, the interests that drive my explorations into the everyday are very much rooted in an ethnographic desire to engage with – and depict – people and place. As such, the ethnographic in my work is located in my theoretical understanding of my practices rather than in how I implement them.

### *2.1.2 Envisioning an embodied and artistic ethnography of the everyday*

The researcher is an active and embodied participant in her ethnographic pursuit.<sup>7</sup> Physically situated within the environment she is studying, the ethnographer's presence is necessary in order to draw their conclusions and make their accounts. This presence, this need to be situated in order to generate knowledge and produce work, is an aspect of ethnography that can be reflected in an artistic practice; it is an explanatory framework that places ethnography as “an

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<sup>7</sup> Please refer to my material practice section for a more in-depth discussion on how I embody spaces of the everyday in my practice.

embodied part of creative, social practice,” which makes it both corporeal and artful (Hjorth and Sharp 129). Phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s central insight concerning perception, according to Taylor Carman in his *Forward to Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception* is that perception “is not just contingently but *essentially* bodily” (xiii). Here, perceiving means having a body, which means “*inhabiting* a world” (Carman x). Indeed, we cannot understand perception in abstraction from its corporal condition and experience (Carman xv), and as discussed in the translator’s introduction to this same text, it cannot be separated from our lived embodiment (Landes xxxi).

By deploying creative methods and by “approach[ing] the intensities of the ordinary through a close ethnographic attention to pressure points and forms of attention and attachment” (Stewart 5), my aim is to touch upon our “production of culturally inflected aesthetic values and practices” (Horst and Hjorth 125), which pervade everyday spaces such as Queen Street in Toronto or the Santo Spirito market in Florence. By paying particular attention to the sights and sounds of these cultural spaces, I re-examine and explore how ethnographic research can be expanded through artistic practice. Such a practice invites conversation “between art and visual culture research that highlights the participatory and sensory experience of knowing in and through different layers,” because when we engage with the interdisciplinary we have more tools that encourage other forms of knowing, such as the embodied and the perceptive (Horst and Hjorth 126).



## 2.2 Affect

*The ordinary throws itself together out of forms, flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost or found.*

*Or it falters, fails.*

*But either way we feel its pull.*

– Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (29)

*Phenomenology is simply the study of appearances and this makes it the appropriate method to use in approaching the appearing of the everyday.*

– Derek Mitchell, *Everyday Phenomenology* (4)

In attempting to represent a space – such as the everyday – one has to reflect on the ways in which a portrayal will be interpreted and understood. When contemplating this scenario one comes to think about affect, and how an experience reverberates and holds resonance beyond its immediate engagement. We look at something, we feel something, we depart from it, and yet we still hold onto *something*. That *something* “is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension” (Seigworth and Gregg 1). The outcome of these forces, according to author Kathleen Stewart, can be:

Experienced as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation. They can be funny, perturbing, or traumatic. Rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a

*something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion, they can be seen as both the pressure points of events or banalities suffered and the trajectories that forces might take if they were to go unchecked. (2)

The everyday holds an abundance of these forces and encounters – these affects.

*Engaging Ethnography* is an attempt to create work that *embraces* rather than *disregards* these affects and how they manifest in ordinary lived experiences.

When I speak about the everyday as an affective space, I am noting its ability to affect, shape and influence those within its presence, but I am also referring to the practitioner's/ethnographer's relationship to filming these public spaces, which works to produce a particular kind of engagement and reflection. The idea is to place the everyday not as an object of research but rather as a space to research with, and to acknowledge that 'affect' makes up life as well as art (O'Sullivan 126). The affective does not always deal with knowledge or meaning, but rather can operate on a different register (O'Sullivan 126). Such a statement reaffirms the potential position the artist-ethnographer has in exploring and representing culture, as their practice may tap into a different way of registering experience.

Kathleen Stewart, who is interested in an ethnographic engagement based on curiosity and attachment, speaks about the affective capacities of the ordinary. In her book *Ordinary Affects* she sees these everyday forms as animate circuits, "they're things that happen" that cannot be "laid out on a single, static plane of analysis," but are instead "emergent in disparate and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections" (3, 2, 3-4). These entwined attachments fascinate us because they "exert a pull on us," and a practice that

discusses how such spaces impart affect must also consider these ‘pulls’ when establishing a theoretical framework (Stewart 4).<sup>8</sup>

Some would argue that a work of art is never complete unless it generates an experience for others, that art is an external object that when put into communal spaces is meant to impact, transform, evoke, or influence its viewer. Simon O’Sullivan, a scholar on visual culture, agrees with such a claim writing that art “whether we will it or not, continues producing *affects*” (126). But how does this happen? French philosopher Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* asks:

How can an image, at times very unusual, appear to be a concentration of the entire psyche? How – with no preparation – can this singular, short-lived event constituted by the appearance of an unusual poetic image, react on other minds and in other hearts, despite all the barriers of common sense, all the disciplined schools of thought? (xviii)

This ability of art to “react on other minds and in other hearts” positions it as an experience, a *something* capable of generating connection beyond the physical. Theorist Sara Ahmed would see this type of engagement with an image as an affective experience, because according to her “affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (29). Art is an object, which if engaged, creates connections between the ideas and values it imparts within the viewer. These reverberate and make the work capable of producing affect, pushing art beyond its physical confines. Indeed, one cannot

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<sup>8</sup> The spaces I chose to film exerted a ‘pull’ on me. My decision to film a particular space/location was due to its ability to draw me in.

read ‘affects’; one can only experience them (O’Sullivan 126).<sup>9</sup>

Even though an artist or an ethnographer is ultimately making an object, her intention also lies in the work being able to reside beyond its physical state; that beyond the material there is “a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences” that impact us through “the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible” (Stewart 1, 3). Art has the capacity to reach beyond the immediate and to leave lasting impressions that not only embrace but seek out affect. For “while the world itself exists objectively (out there), we can know it only through our private subjective experiences (in here)” (Carman xi).

### 2.2.1 *Phenomenology*

According to phenomenological scholar Derek Mitchell, “only when we notice it does the everyday stand out and become something meaningful for us, that is, it appears in our world. This development of an everyday phenomenology is an attempt to see how we come by this world; that is, to show how it can appear” (3). Establishing a connection between everyday phenomenology and how ‘affect’ relates to appearance is important to reflecting on how art and ethnography can contribute to our understandings about being in the world.

According to philosopher Taylor Carman, “Phenomenology is an attempt

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<sup>9</sup> My work aims to provide that connection between impression/visual contact and understanding/feeling. My exhibition is an attempt to present not only my experience within these spaces, but also an encounter for the viewer themselves.

to describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding from a first person point of view” (viii). The idea is to be descriptive rather than explanatory or deductive, to reveal rather than frame or speculate (Carman viii). This philosophy of engagement is one that frames an artist-ethnographer’s practice and contributes to how the affective generates understanding. For Merleau-Ponty, “Phenomenology is the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences, such as the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness (xx). Essence, like affect, as discussed earlier by O’Sullivan, cannot be read, only experienced, and Bachelard believes that this capacity of the image to *react on other minds and in other hearts* can only be understood through phenomenological examination. As he writes, “only phenomenology – that is to say, consideration of the onset of the image in an individual consciousness – can help us to restore the subjectivity of images and to measure their fullness” (xix). The same object or encounter can affect many, yet it has a particular effect on each individual. We don’t just see art, we interact with art. Art allows us to explore the possibilities of being in the world and this directive is a valuable outlook to consider for the artist-ethnographer, in a discipline such as anthropology and a practice such as visual ethnography.

### **2.3 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity, as described by the anthropologist PC Salzman, is the

constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of their own contribution, influence, or shaping of their research and its consequent findings (806). Reflexivity determines what we can know and thus what we cannot know, positioning our limitations. Being reflexive of one's practice entails explaining one's motives, discussing the experiences undertaken, and speaking to the conditions of the research. In reflecting on an artist-ethnographer's practice, with its various creative components and disciplinary understandings, I believe no one element can represent the totality. Built on an interdisciplinary agenda, various pieces come together to form the motives, experiences, and conditions that create the work.

The intention is not to collapse art into ethnography but rather to explore how research can be more artful (Jungnickel and Hjorth 143). The aim is not aestheticize ethnography but to look at how the artistic can contribute to the ethnographic because "the process of making and thinking through art is an integral part of doing research" (Jungnickel & Hjorth 136). Through engaging in an interdisciplinary process, we can push the "boundaries between traditional and non-traditional" modes of making, presenting, and transmitting information to audiences (Jungnickel and Hjorth 136).

This intention emerged from my own experience. As an anthropology student I was taught to research social life using textually dominated methods. This approach, for me, denied the communicative properties of images and their ability to convey tacit knowledge and an experiential understanding of people and

place. James Davies, editor of *Emotions in the Field: the psychology and anthropology of fieldwork experience* (2010) works to show “how certain emotions, reactions, and experiences that are consistently evoked in fieldworkers... can more assist than impede our understanding of the lifeworlds in which we set ourselves down” and that one can count “these subjective phenomena as data to be translated through careful reflection into anthropological insight” (1, 2).

Anthropology is no longer about making objective claims or about positing a singular truth about self or other,<sup>10</sup> but rather is seeking to show a particular story, perspective of, or description of people and place. In maintaining a non-prescriptive framework, where the visual, like in life, is ambiguous and multi-dimensional, the aim is to provide space for individual interpretation and negotiation. The intent is not to record ‘reality’ but to represent one aspect of it – those aesthetic moments that linger in everyday spaces. These are captured visually and are ultimately given different meanings and various connotations based on who is viewing them. As the visual anthropologist Sarah Pink writes, “the meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective; they depend on who is looking” and on the spatial and cultural contexts to which they are situated (*Doing Visual Ethnography* 51).

A reflexive theoretical approach asks for a reflective relationship between

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<sup>10</sup> See James Clifford’s introduction, “Partial Truths,” in *Writing Culture* (1986); Clifford Geertz’s *Works and Lives: Anthropologist as Author* (1988); *A Crack in the Mirror: reflexive perspectives in anthropology* (1982), ed. Jay Ruby; and “Towards a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology” by Bob Scholte in *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972).

researcher and subject, between the methods employed and the technologies used, as well as between the academic and visual cultures that are drawn upon to convey outcomes (Pink, *Doing* 98).<sup>11</sup> Image production is not a neutral endeavor and any sort of representation, whether it is visual or not, needs to be aware of its limits while also acknowledging the intentions behind its use. There will always be embedded understandings and the choices made by the author/maker should always be addressed.

Work that is “covert” and observational in nature requires a reflexive approach. Decisions should be accounted for, and it is important to pay attention to one’s academic, personal, and creative intentions and how they inform one’s practice, research, and representations. Being conscious of how these intentions come together to frame the particular ethnographic knowledge one is looking to convey is important. The artist-ethnographer’s personal experience of filming, editing, and presenting work is a theoretical orientation because of the influence the emotional and the instinctual aspects of the work has on the disposition of her project. Because her work is a form of self-expression, it needs to be located in a theoretical understanding of the subjective in order to be positioned as a credible form of representation. Reflexivity allows for subjectivity, and embracing what the personal can contribute to research, creative output, and ethnographic expression shows how the emotional is an essential aspect of producing insight.

Inquisition into the everyday, through subjective engagement with it, is an

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<sup>11</sup> This type of reflexive relationship is one I have actively sought to foster throughout my research and practice, and have aimed to address within this paper.



opportunity to re-imagine self and engage in the world in new and inventive ways (Blauvelt 22). Ethnographic and artistic motivations often call for reflection on the processes behind making, researching and theorizing. These reflections are fundamentally subjective; hiding or dismissing these personal influences would be to erase one's position and negate a major component of what drives a work and creates insight.

Being reflexive doesn't negate bias but rather it situates one's positionality; it establishes the fact that "all accounts are partial because any observer and commentator is positioned" (Salzman 807). This allows the ethnographer's work to be acknowledged as credible research as it provides the reader with her "position," allowing the reader to see the angle and viewpoint "from which the findings arose" (Salzman 808). Hence, reflexivity is not merely a mechanism that "neutralizes ethnographers' subjectivity as collectors of data" and the assumption that a reflective approach will aid ethnographers to produce objective data is a token and "cosmetic" engagement with the notion, one that wrongly supposes subjectivity could and can be avoided (Pink, *Doing* 19). "Instead, subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation" and I believe that incorporating the artistic furthers this type of engagement (Pink, *Doing* 19).

Ultimately as Salzman states "insights and impressions are not knowledge; they are paths of investigation" (808). *Engaging Ethnography* seeks to delve into those paths of investigation: this directive is what drives this project rather than

the creation of conclusions and assertions regarding the everyday.

## **2.4 Spatial Practices**

From the flâneur to the Surrealists and the Situationists, various commitments have been made to inhabiting and reflecting on these spaces of daily engagement. The city for many of these individuals/groups is positioned in “terms of its public spaces, movements and rituals,” a locating of the urban not unlike my own (Tester 11).

I see the artist-ethnographer as producing work and engaging in methods related to these fields of inquiry and action. However, I believe the general rhetoric and intent behind many of these theoretical approaches are dissimilar to my practice. Indeed, urban exploration and the act of walking connects to the psychogeography of Guy Debord and the Situationists, as well as to the meandering flâneur and to the investigations of the Surrealists. Nevertheless, their agendas were often critical in nature and highly politicized, which is not the case with my work. Their underlying motivations were crucial to their practices and thus positioned their directives within different mentalities than my own.

### *2.4.1 The Flâneur*

The flâneur was a meanderer of the city, and according to Francesco Careri in *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, an “ephemeral character

who, in his rebellion against modernity, killed time by enjoying manifestations of the unusual and the absurd, when wandering about the city” (73). This flâneur resides in the everyday and partakes in ‘flânerie:’ “the idle and considered strolling and observing” and “the observation of the fleeting and the transitory” through which he “hopes and believes he will be able to find the truth of his *being*” (Tester 12-3, 7).<sup>12</sup> The figure of the flâneur has been associated with a specific time and place – Paris in the nineteenth century – by Walter Benjamin in his book *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1983). Baudelaire positioned the flâneur as a type of poet-artist of the city while Benjamin used this character to represent the impact modernity was having upon the urban citizen.

Baudelaire’s poet as Benjamin’s flâneur was depicted in the essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) (Tester 6). According to Keith Tester, editor of the book *The Flâneur*, Baudelaire’s poet was a man “for whom metropolitan spaces are the landscape of art and existence” (2). The poet here “can reap aesthetic meaning and an individual kind of existential security from the spectacle of the teeming crowds” (Tester 2). This type of strolling and observing, looking to the urban and the crowd as a space for art and existence – aesthetic meaning – is a suitable conceptual touchstone in reflecting on my own construction of the artist-ethnographer. Having said that, this poet “defines the order of things for himself

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<sup>12</sup> Most texts characterize the flâneur as *he/him*. It is not my intent to gender the flâneur as male, but to stay consistent with the pronouns used in the text(s) I am citing I will refer to the flâneur as “he.”

rather than allowing things or appearances to be defining of themselves” (Tester 4). This is not the case for the artist-ethnographer; her intention is to seek out the opposite. This character also “waits to be filled because, in himself, he is utterly empty” (Tester 7). He is flamboyant and forward, often taking an active role in situating himself (and his social commentary) within his environment. I don’t see myself as this flâneur, and especially not as Benjamin’s conception of him; Benjamin saw “the hollowness of the commodity form and, indeed, the hollowness of the egoistic individual, of capitalism [as] reflected in the flâneur” (Tester 13). No longer the artist-poet, this postulation of the flâneur saw him as a more passive, soulless, and empty character who was duped daily by the spectacle of the urban city (Tester 14).

I connect more with Susan Sontag’s flâneur; in *On Photography* (1977) Sontag mentions this character within the context of street photography and how the camera has become a tool for the flâneur:

The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker, reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world ‘picturesque.’ (55)

With this in mind, the type of ‘flânerie’ I am looking to activate is one that looks to the everyday as ‘picturesque.’ The artist-ethnographer is a voyeuristic stroller discovering and watching, empathetic and armed with a camera. Other artists who have engaged in such reconnoitered walking have been Hamish Fulton, and Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller to name a few.

#### 2.4.2 *The Surrealists and the Situationists*

According to Lauren Hackett in "Fragmented City: The Intersection of Surrealism and Urban Reality," the Surrealists believe that "the physical space of the city aims to shape the society which inhabits it, rather than allow the society to develop according to its own will" (3). Emerging from this sentiment came a desire for absurdity "to be inherently present in the psychical space of the city and the social happenings that occur there" (Hackett 4). It was the city that could reveal a non-visible reality and thus the Surrealists sought out a "psychological exploration of urban reality" in order to tap into the invisible (Careri 87). They turned to walking as a means of investigating and unveiling these "*unconscious zones of the city*" (Careri 88). Walking could offer chance meetings and the Surrealists saw these encounters as the intersection between the physical and the psychological (Hackett 7). The city was "a field for discovery and the formulation of ideas and pure thought" and it is "up to the individual to establish them" (Hackett 4, 6). This kind of reflection, attachment, and effort in considering and ultimately engaging with urban space is noteworthy in its attempt to respond to the reality of urban living. To be present, to produce sensation, to reveal, to explore – these are all involved approaches that are useful to consider when traversing the urban landscape of the everyday.

The Surrealists acknowledged the psychological aspects of space and created practices that connected and tapped into "unconscious zones" in order to reveal ignored aspects of their environment. They saw the effectiveness of the

everyday urban sphere and reflected upon its disposition in ways that used the city as “a field for discovery.” The city became a means of generating insight and commentary and their activated understanding of space is an orientation and sensitivity I believe the artist-ethnographer should carry.

The Situationists were more interventionist than observational, as they engaged in a relentless critique of everyday life. They used the notion of psychogeography – “the urban affects of place and space” (Highmore 139) to realize their goal of “experimentation through concrete interventions in urbanism” (Debord, *Report on* 45). Psychogeography, according to Debord, was “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (*Introduction to* 23). This required the individual to give himself over to the pull of the urban environment in order to understand it (Highmore 139).

Part of this psychogeography was *dérives* (drifting), which was “an active urban exploration of environmental effects” (Kelly 2). This “drifting” around cities was “a form of urban ‘free association’ that [was] designed to reveal the hidden secrets of the urban everyday (Highmore 139-140). *Dérive* was first introduced by Ivan Chtcheglov and the first reported *dérives* were undertaken by Chtcheglov (under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain) and Guy Debord (141). It was seen as a means with which “to script” the city and a way “to construct a playful way of reclaiming its territory” (Careri 108). However, they were also quite political in nature and sought out a “realization of an alternative way of inhabiting

the city” (90).

The Situationists looked at our environments not as white noise, but as affective spaces. Through *dérives* they could attend to the everyday urban landscape in ways that acknowledged our environment/culture in more manifested and invested ways. Through the lens of art and aesthetics, I am hoping to foster this type of engagement of activating space. This is not a political orientation but a creative and culturally explorative one. Creative fieldwork in this sense is aligned with the Situationists, as it is a methodology that is conscious of our urban environment and wants to realize not only an alternative way of inhabiting the city, but it also wants to allow it to “finally speak of what it is, who we are” (Perec 206).

## Section 3: Literature Review

### **3.1 The Concept of the Everyday**

For many writing or creating around the topic, the everyday is neither a static nor mundane concept; it is ever-changing and has a presence that “both prevails on us and slips through our fingers” (Pink, *Situating Everyday Life* 14, 30). This nature of the everyday is a concept that is shared, yet it is also an individual experience. It is this spirited and complex character, as well as the connections and relationships it establishes, which has interested various individuals and positioned the everyday as an area of academic and artistic investigation.<sup>13</sup>

In beginning my own investigation and research, I asked myself why people over numerous decades and in varying backgrounds investigated the everyday. Why have people been drawn to exploring and representing the quotidian? Is it to see what remains hidden in our lives? To identify what we take for granted? Or does investigation into the everyday in some way seek to show us how to look critically and in doing so train attention on our own experiences (Johnstone 13, 14)? Such inquiries framed my reflections on the subject as I tried to position its presence and disposition along critical, social and personal lines.

In this review of the everyday I touch upon its interdisciplinary nature, its ability to be an affective space, and its propensity to be used by artists; I also

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<sup>13</sup> For me, positioning the everyday within the subjective and the personal was an important orientation in my articulation and representation of the everyday.



speak about everyday aesthetics and how ethnography and urban geography/space play into concepts of the everyday. Looking at these various outlooks has helped solidify the relationship I wish to establish with the everyday, and how my artistic and ethnographic use of the ordinary spaces of my urban environment speak to these considerations.

### 3.1.1 *As interdisciplinary*

Various fields of inquiry have explored the concept of the everyday, with scholars, artists, and writers alike solidifying it as a space of creative and epistemic interest. Ascribing attributes to the commonplace, making conclusions, and examining the involved and alluring nature of the everyday has long been in the interest of individuals such as the sociologist, the environmentalist, and the psychologist. Political and economic discussions (from Marxist to conservative) have emerged around concerns regarding the everyday and how people live their lives.

The everyday has also been used as source material. Filmmakers such as Michael Snow (*La Région Centrale* 1971) and Lucien Castaing-Taylor (*Sweetgrass* 2009) have used these spaces of familiarity to provide the content for as well as inform the aesthetic of their work. Individuals such as the street fashion photographer, novelist, and musician (to name a few) have also sought a connection with common life in order to further their interests/work. As such, one can rightly assert that authorities from a range of genres have looked to the

everyday for inspiration and material. Indeed, “the everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic” (Highmore 16). Those who look to the everyday and who take on theoretical approaches in order to understand how its contexts and understandings have influenced their practices “span a number of disciplines,” and thus the everyday should be regarded as a research context accessible and used by many (Pink, *Situating* 1-2).

### 3.1.2 *As an affective space*

In writing about the history of the everyday and how and why various individuals have come into contact with this concept, it is important to acknowledge that the everyday holds affect. It has the ability to strongly affect those who seek to understand its disposition, spurring people to create and to hypothesize and generate content, which is then both influenced by, and influences others. It is this affective nature of the everyday that propels people to create work that seeks to tackle this impressionistic space. For instance, Kathleen Stewart in *Ordinary Affects*, Michel De Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Georges Perec in *Species and Spaces* are just a few who write about the affective nature of the everyday. The everyday, as they position it in their texts, has influence; it impacts us through its reiteration and carries the capacity to transform. Thus, it should not be relegated as only a space of inquiry but should also be embraced as a category that inspires larger postulations about life itself.

In terms of the artist, according to Stephen Johnstone, turning to the everyday allows them “to bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility” (12). This *bringing* into visibility is an active way to respond to these common spaces and speaks to the desire to make perceivable these places of habitual encounter. This positions the everyday as an affective space and affirms its capacity to initiate reflection on self and other.

### 3.1.3 *As an artistic space*

Artists have appropriated and transformed the conventions of such mediums as documentary filmmaking and photography, as well as the protocols of ethnography, in order to “find a form of practice that stays immersed in the everyday” (Johnstone 20). This immersion has allowed artists to speak from inside the everyday and to generate material from their contact with these spaces. There is a “vast reservoir of unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions” that comprise “the common ground of daily life” that make the everyday a good space for artists to explore (Johnstone 12). Artists such as Sophie Calle in *Suite Venitienne* (1979), photographer Saul Lieter’s street shots and Peter Fischli and David Weiss’ in their work *The Way Things Go* (1986-1987) and *Visible Worlds* (1997 and 2003) have created from this proximity and exposure. Their work looks to daily life as the raw material for their artistic practice. In the process, they take the ephemeral nature of the everyday and turn it into different material forms that allow it to be consumed in a different and ultimately interesting way.

The making of art only takes place in the everyday, yet it is often not the subject of the work produced; hence, the assumption that “a turn to the everyday will bring art and life closer together” has been a driving force for some artists (Johnstone 13). For others, turning to the everyday is an experience capable of generating creative inspiration. In both respects, combining the materiality of an art practice with the experiences generated in the everyday create relationships between art and life. This process may not be straightforward or transparent, but it is what makes art interesting (Papastergiadis 68).

For instance, a painting of fruit in a kitchen, or a photograph of someone riding their bike are attempts to respond to one’s surroundings, of putting observations into material forms. I see this as a form of representation, but I think it is important to consider Nicolas Serota’s claim that “the difficulty for many observers of contemporary art is to understand that the everyday in art is in itself an insight rather than necessarily a representation” (Ross and Serota 76). To depict the everyday is to render it observable and artists play with this notion. They draw on themselves and their own artistic inclinations to bring to life specific portrayals. This is a different approach than that of the social scientist or historian; it is, as Serota claims, an offering of an insight, a vision that can speak to aspects of the everyday that other modes of representation may not be able to.

American artist Allen Ruppersberg, who often uses language in his work, describes a type of relationship or approach an artist may have to the everyday in this excerpt from “Fifty Helpful Hints on the Art of the Everyday”:

I want to reveal the quality of a moment passing. Where something is recognized and acknowledged but remains mysterious and undefined. You continue on your way, but have been subtly changed from that point on.

I try to set up a network of ideas and emotions with only the tip showing. The major portion of the piece continues to whirl and ferment underneath, just as things do in the world at large.

It is constructed to work on you after you have seen it.

The act of copying something allows the use of things as they are, without altering their original nature. They can be used with ideas about art on a fifty-fifty basis, and create something entirely new.

It operates on a basis of missing parts. The formal structure, a minimalist strategy of viewer contemplation and involvement, is one of fragment, space, fragment, space, fragment, fragment, space, space, space.

The form of each piece is determined by the nature of its subject [...]

I'm interested in the translation of life to art because it seems to me that the world is just fine as it is. (56)

I think that Ruppertsberg and other artists see the everyday as an authentic space to create from, that to confront things in the world “suggest[s] that what is at stake in such a gesture is the extent to which an artist is able to get close to things, to be immersed in the world, as opposed to judging from afar” (Johnstone 13).

#### 3.1.4 *Everyday aesthetics*

There is also a field of academic interest situated in the aesthetics of the everyday. Leading scholars in this area include Kevin Melchionne, Sherri Irvin, and Yuriko Saito, who speak of the importance of recognizing the pervasive presence of the aesthetic in everyday life (Irvin 40). They argue for a rethinking of the aesthetic beyond the strictures of art and work to highlight our over-reliance

on the fine arts to position our understandings of what the aesthetic entails (Melchionne 437).

Within everydayness and the patterns of everyday life lies an aesthetic experience (Melchionne 438) that is accessible beyond the limiting scope of the art world (Saito 88). An example of this would be the process of cleaning a window, which may stir little interest but ultimately speaks to what they believe is at stake in everyday aesthetics, which are the larger concepts of contemporary life, such as, in this case, domestic practices or homemaking (Melchionne 439-40). The thought here is that “everyday objects and activities provide another way in which the aesthetic surface acts as a vehicle of communication and expression, different from the way in which art functions as such a vehicle” (Saito 93). The argument here is that we should not be relegating our ability to engage with the aesthetic to art alone, nor should we be seeing the practical/habitual as neatly separated from the aesthetic, because our “current art- and spectator-centered aesthetics [looking, sitting quietly] cannot adequately account for our equally important aesthetic experience of everyday objects and activities” (Saito 92, 89). Ultimately, the goal of scholarship on everyday aesthetics is “to establish that the experience of everyday moments may have an aesthetic character” (Irvin 39) and ignoring this would be to impoverish the scope of aesthetics (Saito 88).

### 3.1.5 *Ethnography and the everyday*

Anthropologists see life as complex and in need of investigation.

Ethnography then, as a mode of describing the customs of people and culture, is employed by anthropologists as an “interpretive account of a group’s everyday life” that is not meant for the people studied but for an audience of outsiders (Caughey 224). Ethnographers thus enact a particular role; they are purveyors of cultural knowledge recruited to convey the disposition of others to their own people/culture.

This directive relies on the everyday to provide its content. Trying to discern the particular disposition of a given society can be approached in various ways; however, the everyday often provides keen insight for the ethnographer into how people live their lives. Participant observation, which sees anthropologists gain first-hand accounts by spending an extended period of time in the spaces they are researching, is encouraged within the discipline in order to accurately grasp the information needed to make their conclusions. This anthropological method, which looks to daily life to find social patterns and practices, has helped anthropologists to determine information regarding kinship, work, governing structures, education, and much more. Situating themselves into spaces over time, these anthropologists use the everyday as a resource. As fieldworkers, they carefully explore “the conceptual systems by which the members of the community understand and construct their worlds,” not just in an abstract way but by looking at a set of individuals and their everyday lives (Caughey 230). This was a phenomenon that had to be observed first hand and on a daily basis, in all its actuality, to be fully understood. De Certeau speaks about this when he refers

to the everyday as having practices. These ongoing daily situations, which we find ourselves habitually moving through – whose actions when repeated allude to larger mentalities and constitutions – contribute to the disposition of a society and make up what we call ‘the everyday.’

Anthropologist John Caughey in *The Ethnography of Everyday Life*, asks, “why should we engage in ethnographic studies of everyday life?” – to which he provides three answers (242). The first is that ethnography can contribute to a better descriptive understanding of society and its complex and pluralistic nature. Secondly, it is crucial to cultural theory, as an ethnographer’s contact with communities, institutions, and social scenes can develop, modify, and even refine our theoretical constructs (242). Lastly, the fieldwork done by an ethnographer not only provides the benefits of gathering data on culture, but also offers an affective and self-transforming experience for the ethnographer himself. It is through this in-situ, contextual positioning of the ethnographer that one “can best frame an adequate understanding, not only of particular human groups, but of human thought and behavior generally” (Caughey 222).

### 3.1.6 *Urban geography/space*

When exploring space, in particular an urban setting, embracing what the everyday can offer to our understanding can be rewarding. Various individuals who speak about geography, place, or location address the everyday as a means of exploration. Joe Moran’s *Reading the Everyday* (2005); Helen Jarvis, Andy Pratt



and Peter Cheng-Chong Wu's *The Secret Life of Cities: The Social Reproduction of Everyday Life* (2001); and the well-known text *A Social Geography of the City* by David Ley all explore such concerns.

Since the everyday is ongoing and continually experienced, our cultural relationship to it will always carry with a level of familiarity that impacts how we understand the village, town, or city we are living in. Raymond Williams speaks to the notion that 'culture is ordinary' by stating that culture may change from place to place with certain acts having different meanings based on their particular setting, but that the 'culture' people are engaging in will always be ordinary, for them (93). This nature of the quotidian, which "stresses an eternal present" and is conceptualized in the intellect is nonetheless realized in the physical (Maffesoli 78). "Existence does not become meaningful in some yonder world, but is embodied in the here and now" and this embodiment requires a corporeal presence (Maffesoli 78). Connecting the everyday to geography and space allows one to ground the concept in a physical presence or material existence. With this presence comes the ability for a concept such as the everyday to find an existence, for it to become continually experienced, and as Williams states, eventually 'ordinary.'

Many have looked at geography and the everyday in order to flesh out ideas concerning people and culture (Virilio 108). For instance, in Georges Perec's *Species and Spaces*, we see a chapter devoted to his considerations regarding "the street." From basic descriptions of what constitutes a street – "the parallel

alignment of two series of buildings” – to his own observations – “I saw two blind people in the Rue Linne. They were walking holding one another by the arm...one of the two was a women of about fifty, the other quite a young man” – we see him engage with the physical properties of the everyday as well as the people who inhabit it (46, 49). He then presents “practical exercises” for the reader, such as, “observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps. Apply yourself. Take your time” (50). This call to action is an appeal to be aware, to be conscious of the spaces that constitute our daily lives. Much of Perec’s writing was an attempt to record everything, especially the ordinary and the habitual that we so often fail to notice. This ability to turn the banal into the remarkable and “how an ordinary sign can become extraordinary” is what, according to cultural theorist Paul Virilio, interested Perec (109).

Ultimately, this poetics of noticing goes beyond the physical; as according to de Certeau “the everyday has [a] certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible” (93). It is this capacity of the everyday to go beyond the surface that makes it a complex area of interest.

I believe all these different modes of exploring and situating the everyday tie into my practice. I have looked to each of these fields of inquiry to better develop my own understanding of the everyday as well as to establish the type of rapport I’m looking to build between myself, my art and research, and these familiar spaces of encounter.

### **3.2 Visual Anthropology**

Anthropologists seek to record, map and classify peoples and cultures, and as such draw on various methods to gain insight into these pursuits. One of these strategies has been to use images, which has served as a form of data in ethnographers “construction of ambitious speculative theories about the development of human society” (Grimshaw and Ravetz 4). An example of this would be E.E Pritchard’s famous ethnography on the Nuer (1940), in which we see numerous black and white photographs as well as maps and diagrams detailing life in Southern Sudan. These visuals, as is the case for most ethnographies, act as a means of contextualizing claims and also further convey the anthropologist’s representation and conclusions on the peoples and cultures under study. This use of the photograph has long been in the repertoire of anthropologists; however, photographs were not employed as primary data and were not credited as being stand-alone documentation until the emergence of visual anthropology.

Visual anthropology is a subfield of social anthropology and is concerned with the use of photography, film, and new media as it relates to the discipline. The reason behind using ‘visual anthropology’ rather than ‘ethnographic film’ as a section here is because it encompasses far more than just film; it acknowledges all forms of visual representation and attempts to address its modes of production and as well as its reception in holistic and disciplinary, or anthropologically, mindful ways. Ethnographic film on the other hand, while associated with

anthropology, is nonetheless more aligned with documentary and non-fiction filmmaking. I am aware that my discussion around video seemingly falls along the lines of ethnographic film. However, I think it is important to contextualize this ethnographic art practice within the framework of visual anthropology, as it positions it within the disciplinary agenda in more comprehensive ways. Visual anthropology is also the starting place for any visual documentation in ethnography and hence is a good point of reference in my attempt to position my own practice within the discipline's literary scholarship.

In anthropology, photographs of individuals doing work, engaging in community events, spending time with their families, or providing sustenance were sought out in order to build a comprehensive depiction of the culture under study. In conventional ethnographic representations anthropologists sought to portray the cultural 'Other' – presenting in particular the differences between said culture and their own. Often these texts carried ethnocentric viewpoints and today their use of photographs would be regarded as an objectifying practice (Pink, *The Future* 9). Traditional ethnographies also employed images in linear ways and with explanatory narratives (Schneider 174). Photographic captions were often used, which has the effect of making a photograph's meaning contingent on the written text (Pink, *Doing* 125). This type of visual anthropology, for the most part, uses images as illustrations rather than as an analytical or methodological tool.

Some anthropologists began to see this limited use of the visual as an issue and began forging new territory when it came to employing the visual in their

ethnographic accounts. Through this emerged visual anthropology, which worked “to break away from the scientific paradigm to produce works that were subjective, reflexive and that offered new visual routes to ethnographic knowledge that challenged those of mainstream written anthropology” (Pink, *The Future* 38). The main goal/argument was that “some elements of human experience are best represented visually, and that the visual brings the fieldwork experience directly to the context of representation” (Pink, *The Future* 16). By focusing on the visual one offered the viewer the ability to engage with the various modes of conveying information that are present in a visual rather than textual account.

Early proponents of visual anthropology were Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, who in their study of Balinese culture (1939) took a vast number of photographs, in the thousands, in an innovative attempt to produce ethnographic media that could further inform their fieldwork and documentation of the Balinese (Jacknis 160). This was one of the first uses of photography as a *primary* recording device and not as mere illustration (Jacknis 165). One of the many publications that would come out of this fieldwork was *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (1942), which was an ethnographic account made up almost entirely of photographs.

Film would also become a form of ethnography in of itself; replacing text, films became part of the discipline’s canon as they were made by anthropologists (for the most part) and/or were viewed in the context of an anthropology class or

research setting. These films often attempted to create something educational while also being entertaining and aesthetically attractive; an element of visual anthropology still present today.

For some steeped within the tradition of anthropology, this type of ethnography lacks scientific rigor and an objective pursuit (Pink, *Doing* 7). However, the ethnographic turn in the 1980's, which saw George Marcus and James Clifford's *Writing Culture* (1986) shift the anthropological agenda away from the empirical to a more subjective ethnographic engagement, saw visual anthropology gain more ground. The adjustment here was to further acknowledge the ethnocentric nature of ethnography and its tendency to conduct research *on* rather than *with* people (Pink, *Doing* 23). Visual anthropologists, on the other hand, had already sought out reflective and empathetic ways of conducting research by employing and seeing the visual as a more collaborative approach to producing knowledge (Pink, *Doing* 37).

An ethnographic practice that incorporates the visual not only brings to the forefront ways of researching and representing people's experiences but it also presents acquired knowledge in ways that are comprehensible and accessible to others (Pink, *The Future* 143). The unique capacity of the visual, according to sociologist and photographer Douglas Harper, is its ability to express information and to evoke "deeper elements of human consciousness" than words; this is because the areas of the brain that process visuals are "evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information" and thus resonate for the viewer on a

deeper level (Harper 13). This can be hard to acknowledge given that the majority of information, in particular the humanities and social sciences, are beholden to the word and the writing skills of scholars (Macdougall 116). However, visual anthropologists have always dabbled in both spaces. Having said this, there has been a call for a more exploratory and less textual relationship to representations of culture. As David MacDougall states:

To describe the social role of aesthetics properly (its phenomenological reality) we may need a “language” closer to the multidimensionality of the subject itself – that is, a language operating in visual, aural, verbal, temporal, and even (through synesthetic association) tactile domains. To me, this suggests a new line of approach to what has long been inadequately called “visual” anthropology. It is an approach that has the potential to restore to anthropology the material world within which culture takes its form. (116)

What lies beyond visual anthropology? How can we use this sub-discipline and change it into something that further speaks to the culture it is trying to represent?

### **3.3 Post-Visual Anthropology**

Visual anthropology, as discussed above, looks to the image as a primary data source. However, according to some, it still relies too heavily on text and prescribed wording. The desire to move away from these linear narratives, captioned photos, and narrated videos caused some working in the field to venture into new ways of approaching the visual. An exploratory form of visual anthropology thus emerged, which, according to Sarah Pink, suffers from a lack of published discussion and serious consideration as a method or medium of

representation in anthropology (Pink, *Doing* 77).

Nonetheless anthropologists, artists, writers, directors, and designers are expanding upon what visual anthropology has done for the discipline; going beyond traditional forms of visual ethnography, these individuals are calling for a “new engagement with visual forms of research and representation beyond the sub-disciplinary confines of visual anthropology” (Schneider 172). Embracing the multidimensionality that David MacDougall wrote about, these individuals are operating not only within the visual but also the verbal, temporal and tactile domains to describe more appropriately the “phenomenological reality” of aesthetics (MacDougall 116).

Visual anthropologists such as Amanda Ravetz, Arnd Schneider, Christopher Wright, Peter Biella, Sarah Pink, Larissa Hjorth, Leslie Devereaux and Anna Grimshaw have all explored the concepts and boundaries of visual anthropology. Their discussions on multimedia and digital ethnography; experimental and non-linear filming; new sites and forms of presentation (the gallery, installation, performance); time-based and interactive ethnographic media; and use of hypermedia and the Internet have expanded the conversation. This has all happened in the past three decades since anthropology’s “crisis of representation” (See Clifford and Marcus) invited, or even demanded, anthropologists “to engage in experimental forms of writing” and inspired new ways of representing aspects of culture (Pink, *The Future* 14). We see this in Katrina Jungnickel and Larissa Hjorth’s statement that:



As ethnographic researchers within cultural studies and sociology, the process of making and thinking through art is an integral part of doing research. Through the interdisciplinary process we seek to push boundaries between traditional and non-traditional modes of making, presenting and transmitting to audiences. (136)

Artists, whether intentionally or not, have also engaged with the ethnographic in ways that question its academic and disciplinary boundaries. The encouragement of a cross-disciplinary engagement with the arts, from many of the anthropologists mentioned above, has solidified this post-visual anthropological rhetoric. Seeing art as offering “models for revealing what is hidden in the everyday,” some anthropologists believe art can give new perspectives on the human condition and our understanding of cultural patterns (Johnstone 17). For instance, David Rokeby’s *Watch: Richmond and Spadina* (2008), which is taken from the perspective of a surveillance camera, depicts a street intersection (Richmond and Spadina) which certain movements or non-movements of the people and traffic moving across the screen are blurred. This aesthetic treatment of an exterior public setting presents an interesting look into visibility and motion, and the use of long duration shots of the same setting explores notions around perception and seeing. As a site of “cultural production, social interaction and individual experience,” in that it represents a component of cultural life, depicts urban (social) interaction, and is to be viewed and experienced individually, this work can be seen as ethnographic (Pink, *Doing Visual* 1). Works of art such as Rokeby’s provide ways of reflecting on cultural reality and on issues of cultural importance such as urban surveillance, and as such can add to anthropological

discussion. By allowing such modes of expression to not just be examples of a culture's artistic practices but by also seeing them as forms of anthropological data, we can begin to speak that "language" David MacDougall was referring to (MacDougall 116). A language that can bring us, as stated before, "closer to the multidimensionality of the subject itself," and in the process "restore to anthropology the material world within which culture takes its form" (MacDougall 116).

Visual anthropologist Sarah Pink has been a great resource for this project. Her thoughts on what constitutes ethnographic insight has been valuable in my own understanding and construction of what an art practice can bring into discussions concerning visual anthropology and the everyday. For instance, Pink sees the relationship between the visual and our other senses "as key to understanding how everyday experiences and identities are constituted" (Pink, *The Future* 17). She believes that we only benefit from including sensory approaches in our studies of human culture and that this allows us to move away from "the idea of privileging vision or visual knowledge," instead recognizing that how we produce and view images happens "in multisensory environments and are experienced in ways that are embodied and multisensory" ((Pink, *The Future* 42; Pink et al., "Walking" 5). It is through this incorporation of elements outside of the very limited use of images in visual anthropology that we can begin to explore new ground when it comes to the task of examining culture. Although my work doesn't employ the senses to the degree that Pink is calling for, I was

influenced by her rhetoric and affected by her take on visual anthropology.

Arnd Schneider, author of *Experimental Film and Anthropology*, *Anthropology and Art Practice* and *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* writes that “hardly any anthropological film-makers and visual anthropologists have engaged with the possibilities of film as explored by experimental film-makers and visual artists” (172). By incorporating different modes of communication and depiction, we can explore these anthropological concerns in new and potentially interesting ways.

As technologies advance, film and video offer “different possibilities in ethnographic research” and “these developments, combined with shifts away from a scientific approach, imply that the specificity of video needs to be engaged with anew” (Pink, *Doing* 77). A post-visual anthropology sees the potential in incorporating new modes of engaging and disseminating cultural information. This positioning may allow someone like the artist-ethnographer to adequately attend to social phenomena (and its changes) through a practice that *sees* and *creates* as its mode of interpretation and dissemination – or, translation and transmittance – rather than *hypothesizes* and *records*. The resulting artistic practice can then further ethnographic inquires because it can, through the techniques of the post-visual, illuminate and reveal in ways that text alone and traditional forms of visual anthropology cannot.

### 3.4 Reflexivity and Anthropology

Research and data require interpretation and such undertakings are inevitably contentious: different people read the same information in different ways; two ethnographers can go to the same place and come away with different studies and conclusions. Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) would have had a completely different orientation had it been carried out by another anthropologist. The areas she decided to focus on – young women and sexuality – were pursued because of her own perspective and insights. Knowing that her ensuing book would be marketed and consumed beyond the discipline's regular scope of attention, Mead's interest in using Samoan culture to reflect upon adolescent girls in America was an intentional choice. This decision influenced what questions she asked, how she framed her intentions and what methods she employed. This capacity for the personal position of the ethnographer to influence an ethnographic work so greatly has been a major issue for the discipline of anthropology. One resolution has been to incorporate an element of reflection – a self-awareness and location of the self – into one's ethnographic undertaking.

Reflexivity can be described as a “style of research that makes clear the researcher's own beliefs and objectives” (Gilbert 512); maintaining a reflective practice means positioning “where the researcher is coming from” and how this impacts the knowledge being produced (Pink, *The Future* 35).<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> My motivations, being both ethnographic and artistic, influence greatly my desire to reflect on my process of making, researching and theorizing. These reflections are fundamentally subjective and I have no desire to hide or dismiss these personal influences, as they are imperative to my

researcher/anthropologist is an authority figure. As such, her personal characteristics and opinions, political and economic tendencies, and intellectual outlooks may influence her behaviour and possibly create research biases. This affects how the people/culture involved react and/or alter their behaviour around the anthropologist, impacting the outcome of the ethnography.

### **3.5 Artistic Practices: Chantal Akerman, Amie Siegel and David Hoffos**

Two artists who have taken the seemingly mundane and presented it in ways that are resonate aesthetically for their viewer are Chantal Akerman and Amie Siegel. Both artists explore culture through the use of video, and although they don't call their work ethnographic, I nonetheless see their practices as anthropological in nature.

A film without any particular narrative, Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (1993) consists of tracking as well as stationary shots that document Russian life in the 1990s. There is no music or dialogue, no explanation or commentary – just the sounds of the settings are audible. The camera observes, documenting faces, bodies, and gestures in ways that work to convey a sense of being in the world. Abigail Solomon-Godeau calls Akerman's work a series of "long looks" that are seemingly passive and nonselective yet nonetheless produce "a kind of knowledge, a certain kind of truth. It is a kind of truth that is perhaps best characterized as a

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work. To not be reflexive would be to speak away my position, thus negating a major component of what drives my work. It is my intent that this paper speaks to where my research is coming from and how it impacts the knowledge being produced.

truth of appearance” (202). Slow and unfolding, Akerman weaves together, through her choice of imagery, an account of the everyday; her use of film shows us how mundane yet beautiful the movements of daily life actually are. There is a texture and aesthetic to her work, a consistency that is familiar yet new and imaginative; one feels slightly removed, like an observer, yet also intrigued and affected. Akerman’s aesthetic is well-suited to my interest in finding creative ways to explore the ethnographic nature of the people and character of the everyday.

In *Hotel Monterey* (1972), Akerman takes the hallways of a hotel and turns them into an affective space. We move forward and backwards through these halls, and without sound we are left to ruminate on the journey we are being taken on. Reflections, textures, and patterns emerge as we look at, and eventually feel, the space. Although a mundane subject, through her pacing, use of shadows, and camera height, Akerman enables the viewer to see something more, something interesting, and something beautiful in the hallways.

Amie Siegel captures space and a story through a very particular aesthetic sentiment in *Provenance* (2013). She presents narrative through visuals in a way that captivates and moves the viewer, even as no words are spoken. *Provenance* depicts the journey of Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret’s furniture that he had designed for some buildings in Chandigarh, India. Through long takes, panning shots, and beautifully captured scenes we see the furniture's journey from deserted factories and Indian office spaces, to the cargo ships they travel on and the

upholsters who mend them, and finally in the auction houses where they are sold and the wealthy homes where they are displayed. This slow and unfolding film reveals a network of movements that highlights the market, culture, design, and consumption in a different and interesting way.

My exposure to this piece was fortuitous in that I saw it twice, once at the MAXXI gallery in Rome on my way to Florence in the spring of 2014 and again at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the fall of 2014. On both occasions I sat and watched the entire 40 minute film, captivated as Siegel told a story whose visual texture resonated for me both aesthetically as well as ethnographically.

Canadian artist David Hoffos' hybrid sculpture and low-fi video installations use illusion and motion to create a dynamic representation of a setting. Experienced in a dark room, each work emits its own sound that blends together from far away yet becomes distinct upon closer viewing. As one walks through the show, each piece offers an intricate scene that encourages the viewer to look in and get close. Hoffos uses mixed-media and projected figures to create particular illusions that the viewer has to approach in order to appreciate its nuanced and complicated construction, creating a level of intimacy and rapport between the work and the viewer. These embodied representations activate space, memory, and environment in ways that offer access to the tacit, experiential and intuitive knowledge's that I was so eager to explore.

## Section 4: Methodology

### **4.1 Creative Fieldwork: practice-led research into the everyday**

In establishing a methodology for this project, I incorporate the disciplinary concerns of anthropology with artistic approaches in order to produce a creative form of fieldwork.<sup>15</sup> As a methodology, the ensuing ‘creative fieldwork’ is an approach that allows me to support a tacit and expressive form of representing and perceiving the everyday. The creative, the artistic, the expressive – these are all forces and orientations that can contribute to fieldwork; they are modes of engagement that support the ethnographic goal of becoming aware of and familiar with cultural spaces and then conveying that knowledge to others. My practice uses this sense of the creative to build the type of ethnographic considerations I am looking to communicate; this requires the seeking out, observing, and recording the social actions and relations that make up the everyday spaces I am exploring such as the street or the market. However, I do this work through using an expressive form of examination and portrayal. By embracing an aesthetic approach to documenting, and by being imaginative in the modes of presentation, I believe that fieldwork, as a methodology, can become more experiential, offering new insights into not only how we *understand*, but also into how we *feel* and *connect* to these places.

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<sup>15</sup> Fieldwork is often considered as an essential undertaking in anthropology, a defining element of ethnography (Amit 1). To be “in the field” means being present in one’s location of study, gathering information first hand in order to glean detailed and intimate understanding - as opposed to ‘arm-chair’ anthropology, which relies on second-hand information.



This process is one that uses both the body and intellect as research instruments. As an experiencing subject who is reflective of her being-in-the-world, I see myself as a phenomenologically inclined artist-ethnographer, aware of how my own embodied experiences filming in these public spaces form a particular viewpoint (Pink, *The Future* 43). My presence behind the camera shapes the videos I make and I work towards approaching my filming with an open spirit. Kathleen Stewart articulates this spirit well in *Ordinary Affects*, when she “gazes, imagines, senses, takes on, performs, and asserts not a flat and finished truth but some possibilities (and threats) that have come into view in the effort to become attuned to what a particular scene might offer” (5). This way of approaching “what a particular scene may offer” is one that moves beyond mere documentation and towards expressing encounters in potentially more palpable ways. This articulation by Stewart supports the concept of ‘creative fieldwork’ and its commitments to gathering cultural information in intuitive ways.

This approach to embracing the imaginative and the performative aspects of ordinary spaces in order to become better attuned confirms the interdisciplinary status of the artist-ethnographer. Ethnographers place themselves in a location in a particular way; they spend long periods at a time observing a place and are mindful of how they are situating themselves within these settings. The videographer, on the other hand, approaches a space for shorter periods of time; however, they are deeply mindful of their visual understanding and representation of it. The artist-ethnographer is committed to both of these orientations and

embracing an approach such as Stewart's helps to support a practice that contains a physical and a creative presence.

When I start the process of exploring the environments in my work I use walking and observational video as a means of enacting my methodological agenda. The intent is to employ a corporeal, aesthetic, and experiential form of fieldwork that conveys a more tacit form of communicating culture, and to document using the artistic in order to expand the possibilities of what a fieldwork practice can achieve. This means using my camera and my body in particular ways: whether its how I frame my shot, the focus I use, or at what height I hold the camera, these are all decisions I make in the field to create the desired effect and my intended outcomes. Hence, as a methodology this 'creative fieldwork' influences what I am examining (by placing me within the spaces I film), how I approach it (with an aesthetically-minded camera), and where I, as artist-ethnographer, locate myself conceptually (as an imaginative wanderer observing and filming).

Like in other ethnographic undertakings, observation begins with being 'in the field'; this has an immense impact on how I make the work. The choices I make while filming are not predetermined and because I am not creating narrative or trying to depict a certain event or cultural tradition, the rules that govern how I capture, edit, and present the material are done through exploring, experimenting and ultimately through intuition. Because of this, the research questions and objectives I have for this project have emerged through the making of the work.

When I began filming in May 2014, I hadn't yet determined the direction of my thesis. I began with the exploratory and intuitive impulse to film people, their movements, and their interaction with spaces I deemed the everyday. It was only upon reflection that I came to see that undertaking as fieldwork, but I knew it was by no means a conventional form of fieldwork. I felt I was drawing upon the ethnographic as I was encountering, selecting, reflecting on, and generating material concerning people and place, but I was also relying heavily on the creative to execute the work. It was both anthropological and artistic, a hybrid form of engagement, a 'creative fieldwork' that made this form of creating research possible.

#### 4.1.1 *Reflexivity in practice-led work*

Maintaining a practice-led project means welcoming a process that is built on discovery rather than a predetermined narrative. Working this way means embracing the potential for chance encounters, allowing for unforeseen possibilities to emerge as the practice-research itself produces new experiences through its deployment (Hannula 44). As visual anthropologist Amanda Ravetz writes, "the making of social objects demands the ability to reflect and communicate from a perspective forged from within social experience itself" (70). Although I do my editing in the studio, all the work is made in location and as such, as Ravetz states, the work is made within the experience itself. Being reflexive allows me to discuss these encounters in ways that point to my

representational choices, the disciplines I am working within, and the larger goal of representing the everyday in tacit ways.

Since I control what I film of these experiences, and since conveying in experiential ways is part of the fabric of this research project, I must be reflective of my own experience within it and my position as practitioner. But this is not without complications. The balance between ethnographic exploration and art making, between walking and observational video, is not always there. They weave together, each supporting each other, but often they intertwine in ways that become messy entanglements. Katrina Jungnickel and Larissa Hjorth, ethnographic researchers within cultural studies and sociology, speak to how research methods emerge from entanglements between the social world and the researcher herself. They write about how this very interweaving and re-entangling may in fact enact the very messiness that is the everyday (137). Embracing the messy nature of both method and maker through a reflexive acceptance of the potentiality of entanglement is something I am attempting to do in allowing these two disciplines to blur. The hybrid methodology of ‘creative fieldwork’ is not a 50/50 split, but rather a convergence that may offer new routes to communicating beyond conventional boundaries of subject, content, and methodology.

#### 4.1.2 *Art as Research: the role of creativity in representing the everyday*

According to art theorist Graeme Sullivan, art “can be considered to be a site where knowledge is created and meanings are made” (71). In grounding my

inquiry into the everyday in aesthetically mindful ways, the methodology in such an approach should acknowledge its affinity to a visual arts practice (Sullivan 95). In asking for the visual to play a more expressive part in this work, one must be ready to see the subsequent engagement as an art practice. I say this because many visual anthropologists don't consider themselves artists, just as many artists don't call themselves anthropologists, even though their methods may be similar. In my case, by making the claim artist-ethnographer, I have to see the work as both art and as research. This means claiming its visualizing processes as texts, artifacts, and events that embody individual and cultural meanings and that reveal key insights (research) into how we recognize and comprehend our surroundings (Sullivan 119). However, this requires some sort of mediation for interpretation, and this negotiation of meaning both complicates and intensifies the work's status as images.

Situating the research undertaken, especially given the visual nature of the investigation, is key to creating an output that is both credible and resonant for viewers. Researching the everyday through the methodology of 'creative fieldwork' is a way to reflect upon and ultimately acknowledge the identity of the work being produced. This research looks to illustrate that distinctive consistency that makes the everyday familiar to us; it speaks to those understandings and feelings we instinctively know from our experiences negotiating these spaces of habitual encounter. This means seeing the artistic and the visual – with its affective and expressive capacities – as supporting a form of research that is based

more in the emotive than in a conclusive material analysis.

In conclusion, it is important to note that, as Ben Highmore states, “actuality always outstrips the procedures for registering it” (84). Although created via being within real environments, whether it is a market or walking down a street, ‘creative fieldwork’ nonetheless produces depictions and not ‘true’ accounts. Thus, many elements of what constitutes the everyday and our relationship to it cannot be captured. Fidelity cannot be achieved; being mindful of this fact is important to understanding what this practice-led project is and can do. This work generates an experience for myself as well as produces work that will create an experience for the viewer. It can communicate place, whether it be Toronto or Florence, in ways beyond the textual; yet it is also a construction, a built depiction that only exists in a particular time and place, acceptable because representation, methods and methodologies always have limits.

## **4.2 Walking**

Our lives are influenced by the rhythm of our actions (walking, sleeping, eating), and the way we move through various spaces contributes to our understanding of them. The act of walking allows me to explore my urban environment in a way that lets me be in its presence rather than experience it as a mere location. Streets are no longer the regular streets experienced by the pedestrian, but places of potential information about the everyday and how people

progress through it. This experience relies on the sensory and induces reflection; it is the environment that I document, as walking physically brings me to the locations I film.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes I intentionally seek out a specific location, but for the most part I don't know where my walking will take me or how long it will take. Walking in this regard is an affective experience as I allow to change where I go and thus where I film. It impacts my sense of a place and my position within it. It is a tool to support my methodological goal of partaking in an expressive form of exploring environment, my 'creative fieldwork.'

Both walking and the everyday have a speed and a pace that is both realized in motion and simultaneously unfolds. This fact gives my practice corporeality and helps me to establish a physical rapport with the environments I film, which contributes significantly to how I choose to capture these spaces. A relationship develops as I revisit spaces, and a practice emerges that consists of walking, looking, stopping, noticing, capturing - walking, looking, noticing, stopping, capturing, walking. This way of associating and connecting with the everyday offers me a tactile engagement with space, and these haptic encounters are the spirit of this project.

Walking presents physical barriers that directly influence the work. For instance, when I walk with my camera, I stop when something catches my eye. If I see it as a potential shot I hold up camera, frame it, choose the focus, and start filming. I often try to film for as long as my arms will hold out and other times the

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<sup>16</sup> Because I rely on walking, the spaces I film are all places I can move within and get to by foot. So interior spaces and private places were not part of the everyday I was filming.

shot gets interrupted and I have to stop filming. How much I film in a day varies and depends on what I come across on my walks and how long I have to film, which is usually no more than a few hours at a time. Sometimes I film sitting down, which changes the angle and height of the images captured. I made the decision at the start of my practice to rely so heavily on walking (and the physical limitations it carries) because I felt it would better situate myself in the environments I was filming.

#### 4.2.1 *Walking as ethnographic*

Walking is not attached to any particular discipline as it complements various modes of investigation. However, within ethnographic practice, walking has been conceived as a specific methodology, as anthropologists have seen it as creating new and embodied ways of knowing that are also capable of producing scholarly narrative (Pink et al. 3, 1). Walking, as put by Sarah Pink and others in “Walking Across the Disciplines,” is “not simply something we do to get from one place to another, but it is in itself a form of engagement integral to our perception of an environment. We cannot but learn and come to know in new ways as we walk, making walking an ideal means of learning as an ethnographer” (3). As an artist-ethnographer, walking provides corporeal ways of experiencing and knowing these spaces of the everyday, and I hope that the process of fostering of this type of encounter comes across in the finished work, even if just on a implicit level. Ultimately, I don’t consider myself a pedestrian, as I feel more



attuned to my physical presence as I move through these spaces. It is a mindful practice that requires not only environmental observation but self-observation as well.

#### 4.2.2 *Walking as research*

Michel de Certeau saw the act of walking and its relationship to the urban system as similar to speech and its relationship to language (97). Walking was “a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriated and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place” (de Certeau 97-98). Walking then is a space of enunciation and is capable of communicating (De Certeau 98). Through this ability to communicate place, walking is one of the ways in which I can position certain facets of the everyday as spaces of research; the environments I work in can both convey ethnographic information and offer an artistic encounter.

Movement is the encounter that further establishes my connection to these places, as my body and its progression acts as a mode of generating content and reflection on the everyday. Without this action there would be no work. As John Dewey writes “experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication” (22). It is this transformation that intrigues me, and I see walking as a research method that provides this experience, as it allows the interaction between organism and

environment to occur and my consequent communication of it to transpire.

Ultimately, there is interplay between the body and the visual that occurs within the everyday and this can be found in movement, for movement “is integral to the practice and experience of everyday life” and encourages us to recognize the visual as always present within it (Pink et al. 2). As Sarah Pink and others write:

Given the difficulty of considering visual practices, images or experiences in isolation from the other senses and narratives, consideration of the relation between the visual and the haptic experiences of walking remains a vitally important question. We hence suggest that a focus on walking and movement offers one way to situate the visual within social, scholarly and artistic practice. (2)

My practice of walking doesn't simply place my visual practice beside my ethnographic work, but rather brings them together into one practice of 'creative fieldwork.' The filming I do, the walking, and the ensuing videos are all one enterprise. When I am filming I am not just engaging in my art practice, and when I am looking for a place to film I am not just engaging in ethnographic observation – they combine together to produce one practice.

#### 4.2.3 *Walking as active engagement*

For the most part the everyday is seen as uninteresting in its repetitive and ordinary existence and our habitual engagement within it sees us as inconspicuous components passing through. However, according to Michel de Certeau this walking leaves a trace: what remains afterwards may be invisible but the act itself

was nevertheless a visible one (97). This action and reaction built into the framework of walking speaks to my desire to be an active researcher, where presence comes first and representation comes second. The final work may seem passive, as it documents the everyday in all its slow and mundane glory; however, it is nonetheless affording these spaces existence in its attempt to engage with the everyday in a personal and attuned way. Hence, there is a level of commitment that positions these works as active representations of encounters rather than as mere documentations of space.

This is both an extroverted and introverted experience. It is enacted by the self but is done in the company of others. It fosters personal reflection but it also requires public spaces. Although our experience with these spaces may be similar in many regards, we also have our own ways of negotiating space and moving through it. It was through walking that I was able to get a sense of Florence. Walking became the means of experiencing the city in ways that provided me with deeper knowledge of its spaces of everyday use. It was how I was able to come across the subjects I would capture. It became an artistic tactic and a decidedly aesthetic experience as my eyes darted around to capture the various spaces I passed, as seen in Figure 1. I relied on walking as it was corporeal and real and helped establish a rapport with the environments I was filming.



Figure 1: *Esterno*. Florence. Video Still. 2014

In Toronto, the city I grew up in, I would move down streets I had often walked before, further establishing my conception of these spaces as environments of the everyday. However, when I was with my camera I came to engage with these spaces in different ways. I became more attuned to the visual nature of the environments I was in. Looking for potential subjects, these spaces I had been habitually encountering my whole life became content for my art.

My walking became physically altered. I moved more slowly, I stopped more often, I looked up, and I looked down. Walking made the everyday an embodied space as well as a space to encounter aesthetically. Walking ultimately became a tactic towards achieving my goal of engaging artistically with the everyday, an example of which can be seen in Figure 2. It also allowed for an ethnographic mindset to emerge as people and their actions became heightened when I started looking at these spaces more intensely.



Figure 2: *Bloor Street*. Toronto. Video Still. 2014

### 4.3 Observational Video

Long a tactic of anthropology, observational video has been employed with the ethnographic goal of conveying and depicting culture. However, video has been acknowledged as exceeding normal observation by giving the viewer privileged viewpoints; from close-ups to focus points, video can heighten or defamiliarize everyday perceptions (MacDougall 26). These practices provide a distinctive form of communication that is nonetheless often considered to be an unfiltered, unmediated vision of the actual (Favero 67). Observational video attempts to represent culture in an accurate manner through depiction rather than definition; nevertheless, it can be limiting as it confines us to certain frames and holds onto images for particular durations. As such, the viewer is placed in a

distinct position that isn't necessarily true to their perceptive abilities or inclinations. However, these limitations can also provide interesting vantage points on a given topic/place, offering the viewer new modes of articulation that may contribute to deeper reflections and understandings.

#### 4.3.1 *Communicating the everyday through observation*

To observe is to perceive and creative work requires perception. The use of video as a medium to represent the everyday enables viewers to identify and recognize these spaces. Our ability to perceive, or according to John Dewey what “feeds” observation, is based on our memories, which may not necessarily be conscious retentions but are nonetheless “incorporated in the very structure of the self” (89). As such, we are continually observing and these observations contribute to how we make sense of the everyday. We imprint our own subjective understandings onto what we perceive, and this is why observational video is well suited to this project: it has the ability to be both artistic and anthropological in its ability to engage our perceptive capacities (Pink, *Doing Visual* 24).

The videos I make require filming that is situated in the observational. My practice consists of observing environments and documenting those encounters with my camera. This “observational cinema is not about a superficial, distanced encounter; rather it requires intense engagement with what is happening around the camera. It demands both courage and a willingness to admit the intuitive” (Grismshaw 23-24). What I choose to capture comes from my own instinctual and

aesthetic propensities and are predicated on my desire to further visualize the spaces I come into contact with. It is through observation that the textures of the everyday become apparent, that its pace and embodied nature become visible; and that I am able to imagine and consequently express how the everyday can aesthetically resonate.

However, assuming that the ‘observational’ approach can make reality visible and thus recordable can be problematic (Pink, *Doing Visual* 23). For Sarah Pink, reality cannot be captured by the visual alone, for if we record reality with video “the most one can expect is to represent those aspects of experience that are visible” (*Doing* 24). Vision has “a narrowly ocular strategy for knowing the world”; nonetheless, our vision is directly associated with our memories and previously established understandings, which have direct connections to other modes of experiencing and sensing (Grimshaw & Ravetz 15). Although the finished works are visual, they still tap into larger structures of knowing; they pull in understandings of touch and smell as the viewer attempts to contextualize the audiovisual representations within what one usually experiences with all their senses. When viewing these scenes one is not just seeing and hearing – one is also feeling out the various associated elements we are coming into contact with as viewers. There is a tactility to vision and working with observational cinema brings one into “intense engagement with the senses” in ways that expand *looking* at the everyday into *feeling* and *experiencing* the everyday (Grimshaw and Ravetz 15). For instance, a shot may refer to a unique time and place but it becomes more

ambiguous, complex, and multi-sensory in our external reflection of it (MacDougall 40). The simultaneous feelings that emerge from observation come to form a particular representation, and although they are audiovisual in nature they nonetheless represent larger conceptions of experience.

#### 4.3.2 *The responsive camera*

Ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall lays out three modes of observational filming. The first is the “responsive camera,” which “observes and interprets its subjects without provoking or disturbing it. It responds rather than interferes” (4). The second is the “interactive camera” that “records its own interchanges with the subject,” and the third is “the constructive camera,” which interprets its subject “by breaking it down and reassembling it according to some external logic” (4). I see my filming as the “responsive camera,” reacting to the environment rather than interfering with it. The lack of narrative in my videos is an attempt to avoid engaging in “interactive” and “constructive” filming and to stay away from a prescriptive ethnographic encounter. I see observational video, in this project, as a technique to capture and communicate environments in ways that *show* rather than *tell*, the latter long being the disposition of anthropological depiction. Since observational film presents a “sense of being inside experience” through its examination of space, the passing of time, its attention to detail, and its capture of social relationships, the film-maker can create an encounter that reveals rather than informs (Ravetz 75).



MacDougall also compares filmmakers to hunters in that they search out and acquire their materials (137). I often felt this way as I moved through spaces searching for the right spot, the right subject to point my camera at. Traversing my urban setting, my senses were heightened and my gaze enhanced as I sought out particular elements of the everyday to film. Immersed in the details of daily life through the act of filming, this project became more “an act of recovery than acquisition, gathering up what has been overlooked by everyone else” (MacDougall 137). Looking – really looking – at something that was so pervasive in my life became a means of ontologically and artistically reflecting on my relationship to my environment. This reflection is one that both anthropologists and artists seek out. This observing was almost like a form of re-seeing, a method of articulating something in a non-verbal way.

This led me to ask what the difference is between observing, recording, and documenting. Is recording and documenting just a mode of seeing while observing is a more active form of representing? Is what I was doing merely documenting or was it something more? The answers to these questions would become clearer as I produced the work, but also became more complicated as I moved the videos into the studio, making them into different forms as I projected them onto various spaces and objects. This re-articulation allowed the observational videos to take on a new aspect and allowed my practice to weave itself into these videos even further. Given this, the films produced became a form of experiential and creative practice, where the visual methods of researching and

communicating experience I used created a representation of the everyday that spoke to both personal and public understandings of these spaces. By employing this kind of observational video I was able to put into practice the creative form of fieldwork that positions this project as one that engages ethnography rather than enacts it.

#### 4.3.3 *Creating art: artistic video as ethnographic practice*

In bringing art and anthropology together the aim was to be both creative and ethnographic. Thus “the emphasis is not on art as a centralized fixed object but rather as a structure through which dialogue is encouraged” (Hjorth and Sharp 133). Visual media becomes the language of research rather than its tool (Loescher 63). However, this language is more about showing rather than telling, which leaves space for interpretation and continual exploration. If I want viewers/readers to engage reflexively, images need to be presented in ways that encourage reflection (Pink, *Doing* 127). This becomes possible in the videos’ observational nature and their depiction of the mundane and the ordinary; the viewer comes into contact with the images with a sense of familiarity and thus attachment.<sup>17</sup>

For visual anthropologist Amanda Ravetz, the observational method of filmmaking proved to be the mediating link between her experiences in anthropology and in art, and I believe observational video’s capacity to embrace

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<sup>17</sup> This in many ways speaks against the notion that photography should capture special moments or places.

an interdisciplinary mindset has helped it gain ground in both disciplines (75). For Peter Biella, one of the first visual anthropologists and a filmmaker, it “diversifies anthropology’s techniques for scholarly comment and interactivity” (163). Such a sentiment allows for a practice like mine, as an artist-ethnographer, to employ both an artistic eye while also recording culture. This shifting of ethnographic rhetoric in order to incorporate elements of the artistic is an attempt to build something that represents the everyday in interesting and dynamic ways. As a “technology that participates in the negotiation of social relationships,” video is a “medium through which ethnographic knowledge is produced”; because filming is a process that invites creativity, it initiates encounters that establish a means of conveying subject (Pink, *Doing* 138).

Video, with its ability to record “the movement of social process through time and space” holds the ability to communicate “the complicated interconnected elements of space, movement, expression, sound, and context for careful and repeated examination” (Collier 16). This ability to be continually examined, along with its capacity to have interconnected elements, makes video a dynamic and interactive form of representation that speaks to the active disposition of the spaces being captured. As such, my representations of the everyday are dependent on this form, as video extends research possibilities and allows for an examination of nonverbal aspects of communication and behaviour (Collier 17). John Dewey speaks of an “inflamed inner material [that] must find objective fuel upon which to feed” (Dewey 66). The everyday – for me – is the objective fuel that feeds my

creative drive and observation, and video has provided me with the means of achieving this.

We may consume the everyday but ultimately the everyday consumes us (Hunt 71). These videos all have an end, but the everyday doesn't – it carries on. It is this ongoing nature of the everyday that allows us continual access to exploring the visual within it. Pictures, although detailed, are experienced only upon viewing and ultimately are only partial records (Collier 20). The everyday, on the other hand, holds the capacity to be available at all times: whether or not one is recording it, one just has to choose to attend to it.

## Section 5: Art Practice

### **5.1 Intent**

Part of the intention of this project was to create work that spoke to the aesthetic nature of the everyday; accomplishing this required establishing a practice that moved beyond the anthropological. I see my practice – the habitual encounters, the dedication to capturing, the continual rendering – as a means of connecting with the everyday. These engagements are steeped in the creative and could not have been achieved through anthropology alone. Anthropology has a method, a medium, and an intention; however, it doesn't exercise the same interpretive and intuitive engagement with representation that an art practice does.

Incorporating the artistic allowed me a different kind of access to the everyday. Having said that, I was very keen on forming rapport between my artistic intent and my ethnographic inclinations. I found that this could be achieved through maintaining an interdependent relationship between the two disciplines, where the anthropological and artistic were in dialogue during the creation of the work. This intention, to seek out the visual and position it along side the ethnographic, is what constituted my art practice during this project. Because I have a range of practices, from video and photography, to writing and critical thinking, I have been able to establish, for me, an aesthetic way of engaging with ethnography; this synchronistic way of representing the everyday is what characterizes my practice and has framed the aesthetic disposition and

critical angle of my work.

The visual practice discussed below embodies ideas, whether they are mine, the viewer's, or representative of larger social and aesthetic dispositions, it is ultimately the materiality of the work itself that highlights the evocative nature of visual representation. Although the content may be uncertain at times, my attempt to recognize both the ambiguity and the pervasiveness of the visual meant letting go of ascribing particular meanings to the videos, which was difficult given the academic context of this project. What can be acknowledged is that the maintenance of an art practice is a performative act. In my case walking and filming became a form of lived rhetoric, a representation of self and work that had the ability to convey my own experience as well as the environments that my practice addresses. This artistic practice ultimately was a way of solidifying my level of commitment to these spaces of the everyday and I eventually came to embrace video as it allowed me “to communicate or express a certain vision, view, attitude, or idea” that a written ethnographic account could not (Saito 92).

John Dewey writes about a work of art being “the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies” (64). I believe this to be the case in my work. I am allowing for relationships to emerge from interacting with environments and inviting their conditions and energies to affect myself and my creative tendencies, and I have been able to transform this experience into an external materiality. This expression of the everyday becomes possible through my embodiment of these

spaces; this active and deliberate presence results in the formation of the aesthetic subject I represent in my work. Hence, the practice that emerged is inherently tied to, and ultimately only understood through the environments I was a part of/situated in (Pink, *Situating* 3).

Through commitment to one's practice one can begin to convey experience. The ability of art to create affinities is special; its ability to evoke, create metaphor, and express consciousness of not just lived experience but of feelings – the psychic experience of living – is necessary to expanding our understanding (Ross 76). The idea of *Engaging Ethnography* was to notice rather than to elevate the everyday. My goal was to create work that demonstrated the aesthetics of ordinary lived experience and to express it in ways that spoke to the depth of these spaces rather than through flat representations. This becomes a particularly salient objective given the context of the ethnographic textual paradigm of explaining through words alone. Hence, by looking to various modes of engagement – video, images, objects, writing, and careful assemblage of this documentation – my aim was to go beyond static representational depictions that only engaged in a single form of analysis and to present a more multi-modal form of documentation (Hjorth and Sharp 132). This interdisciplinary nature of the work, I believe, speaks to the inter-woven nature of everyday lives and identities (Pink, *Doing* 6). The installations are an attempt to be reflective of the ways in which we negotiate and understand the spaces of the everyday.

### 5.1.1 *A self reflexive visual practice*

My practice is self-reflexive; I start from my own experience of documenting the everyday in order to generate the culminating insights/work that make up this project. The idea is to explore what those visual nuances that are seemingly hidden yet always present in my daily surroundings mean to me, and how I can engage in a visual practice that expresses those connections. In the end I am realistically, creatively, and empathetically very much intertwined with my research practices. The auto-ethnographic directionality of this project – which acknowledges my personal experiences of making and examining within these spaces – has formed a relationship that contributes to how I convey the everyday. I believe that through personal engagement one can, by self-reflection, speak to research questions in ways that acknowledge the import of individual experience in understanding culture rather than solely accepting “holistic cultural systems” (Pink, *The Future* 41-42). And if we think “self-knowledge is worth striving for” then we should attend to those moments of experience, no matter how minor, as they “supply much of the texture of our lives” (Irvin 40).

By encountering these spaces of social and material inhabitation and through involving myself in their particularities I became part of place. Recognizing this is what makes my practice reflexive, and this tendency to always reflect on what informs my visual output is key to acknowledging its purpose and place within discussions of art and anthropology. This is particularly important as many view the photographer or the ethnographer as a subject that comes from the outside,



portraying the Other in ways that inflict some sort of violence or enacts a form of expropriation that is “a partial if not distorted view of the subject to be represented” (Solomon-Godeau 196).

## **5.2 Video: recording the everyday**

Marc Augé, in his book *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, writes: “more and more is being said about the anthropology of the near” (7). I am turning to spaces I know, but with intent. I am also not looking to a particular people or location (a tribe or a society), but rather turning to the everyday as a platform of exploration, as it represents people and place through its capacity to offer corporeal (embodied) and creative (artistic) insights

This project was produced in two locations: Toronto and Florence. Toronto is my hometown and Florence is a foreign city, yet one that is familiar to me.<sup>18</sup> I connected with these cities through walking, observing, and reflecting and I present these encounters through video, playing with montage, focus, and projection to tease out an expressive reflection of that encounter. The videos that make up *Engaging Ethnography* started from my desire to seek out visual encounters, frame them as aesthetic, and to generate some sort of creative output/object from the experience. Since I show these videos to an audience, I require the viewer to build their own understanding of their aesthetic qualities,

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<sup>18</sup> Having spent a year of my childhood in Florence and then a few months when I was sixteen, Florence is a city that I have a particular connection to. When I spent a month in May 2014 making work there I was immersed in a space that I knew (and was drawn to) and was still getting to know.

which must derive from their own experiences as well as from the work itself. My perception of how my work will be viewed plays a part in how I shape its aesthetic. The intent in many ways is to produce something that is enjoyed and I often find myself embodying the attitude of the viewer while I film (Dewey 48).

This process led me to see how every action had an outcome (whether intended or not) and this meant situating myself in spaces where I could film them. The street emerged as a space I could observe; its daily practices were communal and available to me. The street offered me movements and actions to capture, and buildings and signs as backdrops. These liminal spaces were in-between areas, spaces that took people from one place to another, and this transient existence became a dynamic space to attempt to represent. Moreover, many of the practices that make up our everyday lives occur in these spaces of interchange and movement, and these settings expressed an aspect of the everyday that I came to acknowledge as being both affective and aesthetic.

Movement became especially important as all the videos I make have people in them. It is bodies that make the everyday ongoing and active, they express the ebb and flow of how we carry ourselves through spaces. In the videos we see people walk, people sit, people stop – the physicality of their presence is what inhabits the everyday I film. Transient moments, paused engagements, and instances of encounter are at the heart of this project. We exist in the everyday and as French sociologist Michel Maffesoli states, “existence does not become meaningful in some yonder world, but is embodied in the here and now” (78). To

be in time and place is to have a physical presence in it, and it is our bodies that give form to that presence and these spaces. For “without external embodiment, an experience remains incomplete” (Dewey 51). Thus, *Engaging Ethnography* observes the movement of people, sound, and place, and expresses how the flow of a space represents an external dialogue that communicates beyond the physical.

These videos are not a dramatization of these liminal, transitory public spaces of the everyday, but rather attempt to preserve the traces of seeing and encountering that occur when coming into contact with place (MacDougall 54). The videos are not necessarily meant to be watched all the way through. Because they carry no narrative, one could approach one of the videos at any given point during its play – stay, don’t stay, watch twice, watch one scene – and not ‘miss’ anything. Since the duration of some of the scenes are long, they offer a different experience than our normal viewing habits. I often use long-take shots,<sup>19</sup> which I believe hold the capacity to represent the spatial, temporal, and acoustic qualities of the given space (Biella 154). These long shots were able to convey what that space offered, not in a moment, but over time as seen in the work *Storefront* (Figure 3), which depicts a store window at night, capturing people and sounds as they move in and out of the shot. As pedestrians we often pass through the everyday not stopping to examine it. Very rarely do we look at the same spot for an extended period of time. What emerges when we are put in this position? Does our aesthetic consideration of the space change when we spend more time in it?

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<sup>19</sup> Also sometimes referred to as a “sequence shot” in which I film an entire scene or sequence in one long shot.

Can we begin to see those textures that form the aesthetic world, and does this create a level of intimacy with these settings? These are all questions I asked myself as I filmed and put together the work that is included in my thesis show.



Figure 3: *Storefront*. New York City. Installation shot, projection onto wall, 2014

Throughout filming I carry with me a sensitivity to time. I am aware of the duration of each shot and the unfolding of the scene around me. I don't use a tripod because it hinders my movement and ability to quickly capture something. It also draws too much attention to my presence. As such, I hold the camera against my torso to make the shot more steady. Because I hold my camera at chest or stomach level with a small screen that tilts up towards me, I am able to look at what I am filming while also being able to see the surrounding environment. I can get a glimpse of who is coming into the shot and this awareness makes me feel a part of the space rather than simply documenting it. This contributes to how each scene is filmed, and when I look at each video I remember the experience of filming it, which works to further solidify myself as an embodied presence within it. Just as the ethnographer surveys a larger area of the location and chooses what

to focus on,<sup>20</sup> I feel I was observing beyond the lens in order to generate a holistic understanding of the environment before choosing what to capture.

Through the use of video I feel I can draw attention to the tactile and unspoken ways in which I experience and understand the everyday, as video allows these spaces to express their own character. By capturing these spaces as is, the idea is to reveal visual moments within ordinary spaces and to highlight the expressive textures that make them real, tangible, and visually appealing representations of the everyday. As photography and video are expressive mediums, they allow me to venture into creatively representing and depicting the everyday; they allow me to capture the rhythms, the sensations, the movements that make these spaces animate. Hence, video is my mode of engaging, allowing me to communicate those elements of everyday life that resonate for me.

### *5.2.1 Art practice as ethnographic exploration*

When I am on the street with my camera I'm capturing elements of everyday life that resonate for me. It is people and settings that catch my attention, in part because of my anthropological interests – my curiosity towards people, what they are doing and how they are doing it – and in part because of my artistic eye, which looks for light, colour, and composition. In reflecting about what this project is and what principles it is based upon, I have come to see my art practice

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<sup>20</sup> I would also assume that their reflection on making their ethnography contains personal anecdotes and memories.

as a form of ethnographic exploration and found that my ethnographic interests are realized in my visual practice.

Anthropologist Sarah Pink talks about how “no image or photographic practice is essentially ethnographic ‘by nature’, but [that] the ‘ethnographicness’ of photography is determined by discourse and content” (Pink, *Doing* 50). For instance, in my video of the Santo Spirito Market in Florence, a still of which can be seen in Figure 4, we see depicted acts of buying and selling. We begin to see socially established patterns of action as vendors and shoppers engage in a form of rapport contingent on the cultural standards known to them. Capturing different aspects of the market, we see how different people approach the setting, how they view items, and converse with others. The images are not inherently ethnographic but become positioned as such due to their content and my interest to do so as a maker.



Figure 4: *Santo Spirito Market*. Florence. Video Still. 2014

### 5.2.2 *The audiovisual*

It is important to note that “video is an audiovisual rather than visual medium,” especially given that the videos I take include the location’s surrounding sounds (Pink 57). By projecting my videos upon objects and small projectors, this project attempts to embody these sights and sounds in ways that invite the viewer to engage intimately with the work and its representations of the everyday. The installation pieces, especially given their scale, are trying to create a level of contact between the spaces depicted and the viewer. Including sound is important to this venture as together, sight and sound, contribute to the type of attachment I want to establish. Thus, by creating these visual, auditory, and spatial reflections I hope to present the everyday in expressive and palpable ways. I emphasize again that it is through cultivating a practice that aims to invest in *showing* rather than *telling* that I hope to express the depth and resonance that is situated in these spaces of the everyday.

I use the microphone on my camera, which is a Canon T5i, and the sound is then played through the Pico projector rather than an external speaker. This is not the optimal way to record sound but it nonetheless conveys the depicted environment’s ambient sounds while also allowing me to be low-tech. The sounds in my videos are ambient and ordinary, however, they add to the “texture” of the work and impart a sense of place. Sound is an important element of perception, revealing aspects of a setting so that the viewer can make the connections needed to understand what is unfolding. The sound of a bird off screen, the noise of a

horn, or the chatter of a woman passing by – these sounds bring depth to the viewer’s understanding as sound triggers memories, evokes connections, and allows us to engage with what is being displayed. David MacDougall articulates this aptly when he writes:

A shot of a child’s fingers rubbing across the surface of a balloon evokes more than the actions and sounds involved: it suggests the way the balloon must feel, and even an imminent explosion. Sound and image together can generate powerful synthetic responses, creating a heightened sense of space, volume, and texture. What we see and hear taps into our prior experience of the world and stimulates the imaginative capacity that most of us possess to fill in the gaps left by the cursory acts of perception. (42)

Without sounds such as the wind, cars, or footsteps we find it hard to situate what we are seeing. To fully impart what the everyday is, one needs to account for the sounds and auditory gestures that are always found in its presence.

### 5.2.3 *Aesthetic Patterns: reflection and focus*

A common theme that has emerged in most of my videos is reflection as seen in Figure 5. By using reflective objects and surfaces I find that I can add depth to the image as it allows me to see beyond what the frame allows for. Windows, mirrors, and glass all act as ways to create interesting angles that add perspective. When your camera is stationary, any device that lets you add another layer of complexity is useful; reflections contribute to the shots in ways I find visually appealing.





Figure 5: *(Ma)donna*. Florence. Video Still. 2014

I often use a close focus, which makes some of the videos seem out of focus. This is an aesthetic choice as well as a means of not capturing faces.<sup>21</sup> I find that the lack of focus allows the viewer to focus on the movements, the shapes, and the colours of these scenes. I found that playing with the focus of the videos was a way I could add my particular artistic inclinations into the work. Rather than pointing my camera and depicting what was in front of me, by manipulating the focus of the camera I could exact my creative influence onto it, as seen in the video still below from *Bloor Street* (Figure 6). With this close focus, depth is added to the scene as people come in and out of focus depending on where they are in proximity to the camera; allowing me to further connect with representing a sense of the aesthetic as ‘textured.’

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<sup>21</sup> This was also to comply with OCADU’s Research Ethics Board stipulations.



Figure 6: *Bloor Street*. Toronto. Video Still. 2014

### 5.3 Exhibition/Installation

The question of how to show these videos emerged as I began to explore how to establish an experiential way of viewing these works. Because I was capturing bodies and movements, I wanted the viewers to be able to move around the pieces in ways that situated their own bodies alongside them. It thus became important to have the videos gain a physical presence rather than being just a projection on a wall. By projecting onto objects I was able to make the videos sculptural, and by using Pico projectors I was able to project them small-scale so as to make the work approachable and receptive to closer observation. Rather than be immersed, I wanted to encourage a different type of rapport and engagement with the work.

My practice is one that requires looking, an engaged form of looking, and I wanted to encourage that type of observation in the viewer. One has to look *into* the bag, one has to look *around* the paper towel. By requiring a certain level of proximity to make sense of the work, I felt I could invite a connection between the viewer and these aestheticized objects. It was through playing with scale, surface, height, and focus that I could express the corporeal and aesthetic nature of the spaces I was filming. I felt promoting this type of contact highlighted the aesthetic and affective qualities of the everyday and I wanted this work to express my practice of creative fieldwork.

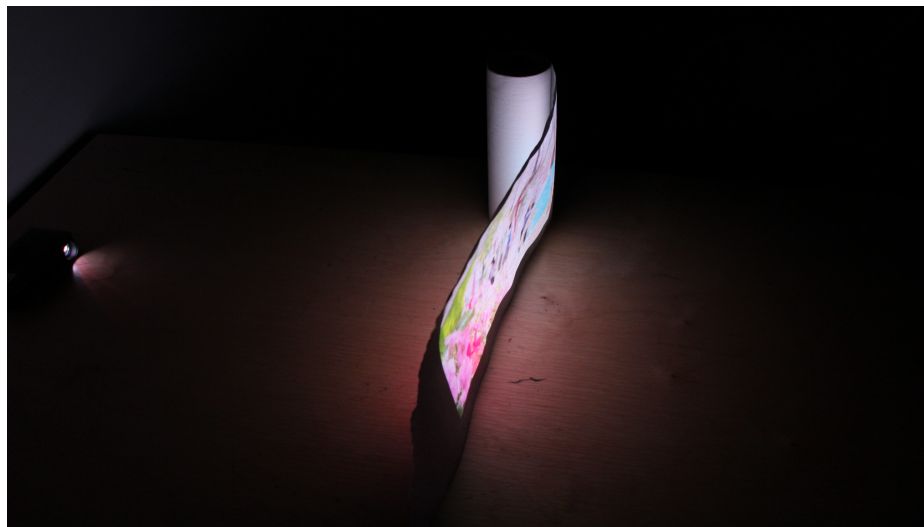


Figure 7: *(Ma)donna & Esterno*. Installation shot, projection onto paper towel, 2014.

The videos are presented in multiple different ways because I didn't feel confined to one way of showing them. You can see this in the installation shots of the exhibition (Figure 8 and 9). I wanted to explore and experiment and use

different modes of representation – so I did. I was considering the everyday in aesthetically mindful ways and this process lead me to make something material out of the videos produced from this engagement. It was only in this materiality that I felt comfortable representing the everyday. It was not a flat surface, it was a diverse space and I believe my exhibition supports this understanding of the everyday.



Figure 8: Thesis exhibition installation shot. 2015



Figure 9: Thesis exhibition installation shot. 2015

### 5.3.1 *The objects: the paper towel, the bag, the cup*

The objects used to project upon are commonly found, everyday items. A paper towel roll (Figure 7), a disposable coffee cup (Figure 10), a plastic bag (Figure 11) are short-lived objects that cross our everyday paths, usually unnoticed and discarded. By using them as surfaces to project upon, they materialize the videos and reflect back upon their content. I am taking the videos out of the two-dimensional to create something sculptural, embodied, and referential. The materiality of this representation makes the ethnographic take shape and was another means in which to respond to the everyday.

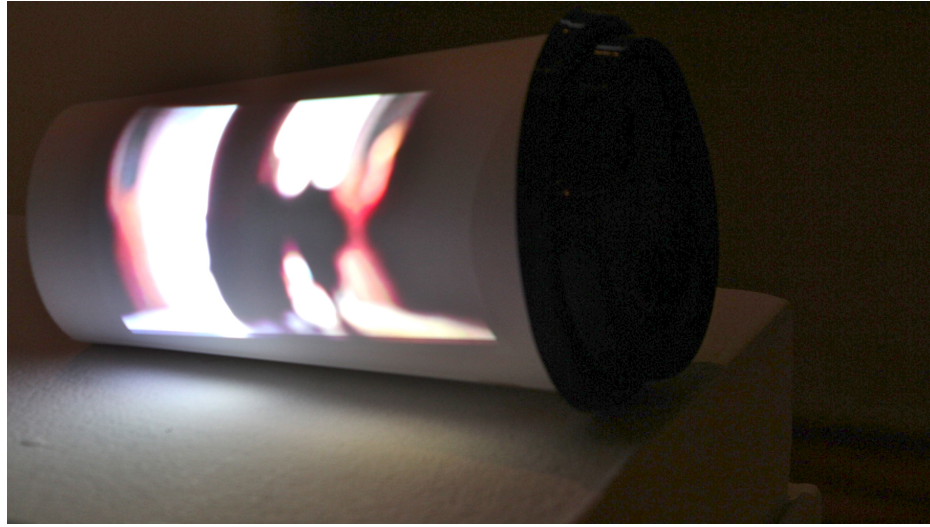


Figure 10: *Figures*. Installation shot, projection onto paper cup, 2014

Connections can be made between the plastic bag and the coffee cup with the pedestrians who inhabit the videos. Although not all the subjects in the videos carry these objects, the trajectory of their day and their interaction with these spaces may bring about the use of these items. There is no literal connection between the videos' subjects and the objects themselves, except that they require each other in order to materialize these representations of the everyday and that they both relate to the transitory and disposable disposition of the everyday.



Figure 11: *Bloor Street*. Installation shot, projection onto plastic bag, 2014.

The room is darkened to accommodate the projection. Although there are numerous videos playing, the sounds from each, because of their low volume, unite together to form an overall ambient sound. Yet, when approached, one can hear the specific audio from the video projected. The videos become less precious and prioritized in this context, which I like since it represents a more holistic understanding and encounter with the exhibit. By going beyond the visual, I think these installation pieces encourage a tacit form of communicating information. By physically being placed beside the work, the viewer moves and negotiates these depictions of the everyday in reflective ways. The work elicits an intuitive response, promoting a type of contact that highlights the aesthetic and affective qualities of the everyday.

## Section 6: Conclusions

### **6.1 Outcomes**

Although this paper discusses my visual practice, I believe that its scope reaches further. The topics under discussion, while grounded in the material work, can also be applied elsewhere. I believe the subjects addressed and the points made play into a larger discussion concerning art, anthropology, and how we can represent information beyond the textual.

Recording reality, or capturing a “true” depiction of an environment may not be possible. However, one can speak to an aspect of reality that a viewer can relate to and subsequently reflect upon in ways that offer a sense of connection and affinity that can be rewarding. Thus, the works produced from these observations are representational objects that are “not a surface copy of the original world but a new form revealed through its shapes and textures” (Grimshaw and Ravetz 15). Because of the subjective engagement we have to interpreting images, these videos have allowed me to transform shapes and textures into representations that I believe speak to the everyday in dynamic and unfolding ways. *Engaging Ethnography* therefore intends to present an ethnographic account that allows for different meanings to be generated, as the spaces represented within the work are understood in such diverse ways.

I wanted the viewer to move and negotiate these depictions of the everyday in reflective ways. I wanted the work to elicit intuitive responses and to tap into tacit ways of knowing. Many people recognized some of the places I



filmed, and theoretically they are drawing upon their own experiences and relationships to space and the everyday to comprehend these works and what they mean (to them). In this regard I think I'm looking to show rather than tell and that is where the tacit comes in. As Michael Polanyi states in *The Tacit Dimension* "we can know more than we can tell" and this form of knowing is an important aspect of comprehending culture and should be included in ethnographic accounts (4). Through allowing people to connect through sight and sound rather than text, we can express the depth and resonance of a space such as the everyday because we invite possibility and instinct in.

If anything, I hope that I have supported Michel de Certeau's aspiration of positioning the everyday in such a way that its practices (ways of operating) "no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity" (xi). De Certeau believes one can penetrate this obscurity through an engagement with "theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives," which as an intended outcome of this project, I hope I have achieved (xi).

Mika Hannula speaks of artistic research as offering a kind of map that informs the researcher as well as the one reading/viewing the work. This "map should convey the starting point, the progress, and the end result of the research. And the end result cannot be a direct reply to some pre-established question, or even a definitive success, but rather presents productive additional questions and a tentative yet brave untangling of failures (114). I hope I have engaged in such mapping in this thesis. I hope that I have raised further questions that can

contribute to future discussions on the explorations and propositions brought up in this paper and within the visual work.

## **6.2 Recommendations for further research**

There are theoretical implications to using artistic video as ethnographic method and as a means of researching the everyday. Ethnographic video can no longer be considered as simple documentation but rather must be understood as a means towards more imaginative and innovative ways of expressing culture, which can bring research and representation, text-based accounts of culture, and tacit ways of knowing together. This project has looked to my artistic practice as a way to re-imagine the everyday. Creative and expressive ethnographic video then – with its fragments, movements, and ambiguity – holds the potential to question established modes of representation, pushing anthropology beyond its customary parameters. By building something that falls outside the disciplinary boundaries, *Engaging Ethnography* has attempted to convey that some aspects of culture are best expressed through imaginative means; the work acknowledges that the written and the visual interpret and represent the human condition in different ways (Pink, *Doing* 143).

In my introduction I mentioned my experience of being an anthropology student and the lack of ethnographic studies being taught that engaged in this form of thinking. The discussions present within this text are issues that should bear

further exploration. Creative fieldwork should be taken into consideration as an acceptable form of ethnographic exploration for knowledge creation and dissemination and used effectively in both academic and professional settings.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

My objective was to use creative and observational methods to capture the aesthetic, affective, and embodied practices that make up daily life. I wanted to engage in an ethnographic practice that portrayed the everyday in ways that resonated for the viewer, moving them away from static representations and into an immersive and absorbing space of creativity, self-reflection, and insight. In the end I was more interested in the discourses that emerged from such a practice, in particular the opportunity for interpretive engagement with the videos, rather than in analyzing and drawing conclusions from their content. Here I embrace Kathleen Stewart's approach to collecting 'data': "Not to finally 'know' them- to collect them into a good enough story of what's going on – but to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate" (4).

The intent then was to engage in a project with a method and form that would speak to the everyday in ways that not only adequately addressed its disposition, but that would also *partake* (or perform, as Stewart writes) in what

made the everyday affective and aesthetic. My goal was to not just document but also participate in “re-examin[ing] the increasing intersections between practices of art, visual culture, ethnography and knowledge production” and how they find form in the everyday (Horst and Hjorth 125). Again, the material produced “does not find magical closure or even seek it, perhaps only because it's too busy just trying to imagine what's going on” (Stewart 5). The thought was to not focus on a final achievement, but to invoke the idea of what this practice could offer as well as the “range of actions conducive – in theory – to its realization” (Sheringham 144).

I believe creative fieldwork is performative; it requires a presence as well as an imagination and a artistic spirit. It is a practice that uses the creative to build a form of ethnographic engagement that requires a seeking out, observing and recording the social actions and relations that make up everyday spaces. I tired to do this in an expressive form of examination and portrayal. By embracing an aesthetic approach to documenting, and by being imaginative in the modes of presentation, I believe that fieldwork, as a methodology, can become more experiential, offering new insights into not only how we *understand*, but also into how we *feel* and *connect* to these places. That is why I turned to the term artist-ethnographer. This is why I have called for a post visual ethnography. This is why I used ethnography as a theory and established creative fieldwork as a methodology. These are what needed to be done in order to carryout my intended research and these visual works.

By incorporating this artistic practice into my ethnographic exploration I have set forth an agenda that looks to engage ethnography in material and experiential ways, emphasizing the creative ways in which people consume information and make meaning. Ultimately, *Engaging Ethnography* supports an aesthetic thinking about the everyday that fosters a reflexive connection to culture, highlighting the salience of these everyday spaces in our perception of self and other.

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