Quotidian Spaces: Sustaining Creative Exchange and Dialogue Through Lived Time

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QUOTIDIAN SPACES: SUSTAINING CREATIVE EXCHANGE
AND DIALOGUE THROUGH LIVED TIME

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A THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
(in Intermedia)

The Graduate School
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August 2020

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QUOTIDIAN SPACES: SUSTAINING CREATIVE EXCHANGE AND DIALOGUE THROUGH LIVED TIME

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Susan Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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The following thesis explores dialogue and creative exchange as artistic practice. Through community-based work rooted in participation and collaboration, art emboldens and empowers practitioners of the everyday experience that informs who we are and how we communicate. This work has been informed by our current societal crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. A time where our lives have become as virtual as they are rooted in face to face interaction. Though we as a global community face monumental uncertainty, significant obstacles to overcome and the experience of loss that has impacted so many aspects of our lives, we are also presented with the opportunity to imagine and redefine what life will be moving beyond this experience. Here, in these spaces, is where the strength and courage of artistic practice may realize its potential on behalf of change.
DEDICATION

For B, F & M

With my whole heart. Every day. All the time. Forever & Ever.

- Mom
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Parents:
I have only ever known your love, support and encouragement to think and live creatively. Thank you for modeling the courage to run towards opportunities that help one learn and grow.

My Brothers:
You’ve always shown me how to find the magic in every day. I never could have achieved this goal without your amazing presence in my life.

The IMFA Community:
Thank you for your spirit, your commitment to this field and your investment in our community of artists.

My Committee:
Thank you for your practice, your time and your engagement with my work.

My Collaborators:
You have changed my experience as an artist and a friend. Thank You.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Learning to speak about the times we are living through is vital.”
(Purves, T. & Selzer, S. A., 2014)

We live in a time when the sincere act of listening has never been more valued in its potential to create change. Over the past four months, the word “essential” has brought a harrowing definition to our lives with the engulfing COVID-19 pandemic. Across the world, we have lost friends, neighbors, loved ones and our sense of normalcy as cities, states and countries have been brought to their knees in its wake. The knowns that what we have come to rely upon, what we have impetuously dismissed in the urgency of our former reality has now changed. Many of our former ways of life now feel as though they could fill the pages of a book we once read. We grieve as a global community, thunderously applaud the courage of essential workers and we realize that in order to heal and redefine “normal” we must continue acting not just for ourselves, but our communities and beyond. We inhabit this time and space collectively. Now, in cohesion we are called upon to be more than we have ever been; through listening, learning and speaking out against that which deprives us of our capacity for empathy and our sense of humanity.
Time

Thinking about time in a linear sense allows us to build narratives, posture outcomes and contextualize experience; all the while feeding perceptions of ourselves and the world enveloping us. The medium of time is put to use by everything in existence, every minute, of everyday. This deeply ingrained understanding of relationships on macro and micro levels is where the outcomes of work rooted in conversation and exchange germinate.

The work presented in this thesis began quietly, cautiously and in certain instances quite unexpectedly. I knew that working this way was necessary for a number of years, however, in recognizing its existence as rather nebulous. I initially lacked the confidence and vocabulary to declare the experiences that I wanted to generate as “Art”. I have come to rely on time to build my narrative with the requisite collaboration of concept, experience and tangible object.

Nebulous Work

Expanding on the foundation of mastery of skill sets to generate objects of art, the transition into working with collaboration and human interaction as my primary tools felt, for a good amount of time, as though I was trying to run through heavy wet sand. Just reading about the history of contemporary art in order to
effectively (or confidently) argue that the work of “Participatory Art” was indeed intermedial… indeterminate and built upon potentials - proved gravely insufficient and required being in the work itself to truly understand what it is and what an artist can do with its presence in their practice. In the words of Dick Higgins, “This is the intermedial approach, to emphasize the dialect between the media.” (Higgins, 1966) How better to recognize these “dialect” than from immersive engagement? Over and again, my intentions to bring conversation to the forefront of the art objects that I was making seemed as though the outcome was just ahead of my pace. These conversations needed time. Time to share, reflect and bring new to my initial offerings. In developing that bridge between the objects I was making, and the experiences I was inviting people to participate in, I grew to see that I had not yet discovered the vocabulary I would later employ to build this practice. Pablo Helguera speaks of art practice within a social context in truly beautiful terms:

“It is when we position ourselves in those tentative locations, and when we persist in making them into concrete experiences, that interstices become locations of meaning.” (Helguera, 2011)

These “locations of meaning” (Helguera, 2011) were in fact, the other thing I repeatedly circled around and spoke of as my goal. After three years of engaging in critical dialogue with a creative community, I have witnessed firsthand that this
other thing can only be reached through a willingness to listen, participate and collaborate.

The Artist. The Collaborator & The “Other Thing”

That elusive “other thing” is the entirety of this presented work. Where art practice and everyday existence inhabit the same space, lies a transformative departure from what is fully known and understood into a space of potential.

As a participant, you readily identify the presence of something...not unlike walking through the mist on a humid August morning at the oceans edge. It clings to you as you move with a sensation not easily overlooked or forgotten. Ephemeral as it may be in form, it has a history that you are now part of. Claire Bishop explains that the practice of participatory art:

“tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness.” (Bishop, 2011)

It is in these entities that new and shared histories are formed and communities are developed as time, yet again, serves as the binding agent. As more voices join vital discussions that contextualize and inform the ways in which we come to understand one another, I do not wish to restate the question of why we should continue working this way. Instead, I speak from the point of view that asks how could we ever afford not to.
CHAPTER 2

STORYTELLING

The Threshold

Studio 8 is located at the end of the hallway, filled with light from the tall rectangular windows that look out towards the river. I had inhabited a studio before as an undergraduate art student and this was much of the same - bare walls, a work surface, a space to make. Yet, at the same time, this was very different. It had an expanse that was daunting. It seemed as though I was in a sea without my bearings, needing to build oars and a sail before I could pick a direction to move. So, in this space, I started making, for sake of making in hopes of finding one day that I had built myself a vessel and all of its trappings.

Paper

I love paper. I always have. Likely, it has everything to do with drawing. I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue a degree in fine arts focusing on illustration, throughout which I spent most of my time with figures and the spaces they inhabit.

Naturally, (at the time) it made sense to embark on graduate studio work that reflected my interests in human form, building cut paper figures with articulating
joints, curving spines and breathing abdomens. It was here that for the first time I began to share my own story which was indeed a departure from the intentions I had laid out in the weeks before opening that door at the end of the hallway. The paper figures evolved and began to navigate the vastness of my studio, all the while sharing my own narrative of feeling disoriented and a sinking suspicion that my love for stories, worlds, costumes and characters didn’t… maybe even couldn’t, belong in this space. I now understand how absurd that notion was. This concern reflected a fixed definition of “art” and “art processes” revealing that I had not yet unpacked what “intermedial” means in context of my practice. I stood in a place of not yet understanding the rules of engagement, which in turn resulted in not initially seeing that intermedial was the name of the scaffolding with which I would need to expand my own art practice.

Several weeks into this adventure, I began to realize that I was generating small sculptures from materials that I had in my own life. The paper products that accumulated in my home with my family; bags, calendars, cereal boxes, cardboard tubes… It was me. It was my experience embodied in these fibers, this personal ephemera. From an utterance of the reality that I need to figure out how to complete an MFA without making “fine (or expensive) art”, a practice began to emerge and there was growth I had not yet seen but felt. It was more than
repurposing, more than redeploying, more than reflecting… it was lived material
telling its own story, I could hear it, I just didn't speak the language.

**Inter - ME – dia.** The earnest presence of SELF required for a successful work
is no easy task for the artist to achieve. The point of dynamic problem solving is to
communicate and the idea of starting with common ground is a key component of
this methodology. From the corporeal experience to the abstractions of our cerebral
evolutions, we are never without subject to make commentary on. As a teenager I
had been introduced to intermedial art through the work of John Cage. Sitting in
McLean’s wing of my high school as luminous orange reflected off the art covered
walls, I was completely drawn in by the galvanizing description of Cage’s 1952
piece: 4’33”. An artist sitting silently at a piano on the stage of a symphony hall in
New York City, the audience growing restless as the orchestral elements of daily
life performed the score. That description nestled deep into my memory and was
one of the first times that I had recognized experience as Conceptual Art. This
realization led to many small experiments and investigations throughout my fine
arts training, yet without that critical vocabulary in hand, I was not fully
articulating what I was making and why.
**Lines and Lines.**

Book illustration is the superlative realization of the homonyms: Lines, both written and rendered. This symbiosis in the practice of storytelling is inexhaustibly exciting as an art form with an audience that instinctively understands this pairing as a powerful tool for communication. Illustration is defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary as: “an example serving to clarify or prove something.” I found very quickly in my experience as a student of illustration that it draws upon elements of communication, design and fine art - yet resides in the spaces between those fields. As a result, I grew to be very comfortable working between fields – now, it was just a matter of identifying what those fields were.

The work of artist and illustrator, Oliver Jeffers introduced a formalized method of working that I was aiming for in my own practice. Already familiar with his library of illustrated books, I then found this work and everything began falling into place. *The Dipped Painting Project* (beginning in 2014) brings together shared knowns in art; Painting, Performance and Audience to meet the shared experience of Loss, Grief and Healing. This is a series that brings a practice of dialogue to the center of the work, resulting in the handwritten transcript of time and conversation between artist and collaborator to accompany a portrait that will be largely “obscured” (Jeffers, 2016) by a coat of enamel. The finished portrait and
the dipping process are seen only by a select number of participants that will
together experience a moment in time. No photographs are taken of the portrait and
no phones are allowed in the performance space as Jeffers explains “then the way
in which that’s remembered is entirely up to them. There's no way to prove
or disprove anything they recall.” (Jeffers, 2016) This “shared loss” (Jeffers,
2016) generates a new history among the participants of each dipped painting, a
connection and an empathy. This is an art using “Fine Art” to reach something
deeply embedded and emotive. This structure that informs Jeffers’ work gives it
the footing needed to take off in ways that call out to our need as a species for
connection, not only the artist but the collaborators and participants.

Figure 1. Oliver Jeffers: Dipped Painting no. 10 (2015).
Source: https://www.oliverjeffers.com/oliver-jeffers
**Rules and Creativity.**

When points of orientation are set in place, one may find that once acknowledged, one can navigate the surrounding space, not simply reside within their structure. In an interview with Art21, Andrea Zittel shares when speaking of her creative practice that “things you think are controlling can actually give you a greater sense of liberation in the end”. (Zittel, 2001)

Engaging in art practices inherently brings research into view. Whether empirical, iterative or theoretical, it is no surprise to find that you are completely reliant upon developing a set of rules, even if the rule states that there are none. This helps define audiences, outcomes and attitude. Rules are as instinctual in art as they are in communication, it is how we position ourselves in relation to what we are speaking about. They are the context from which we embark on our explorations.
Not unlike approaching a traffic circle where it is not just your own actions that will determine how the space is navigated. The structured flow of movement intended to accommodate the interests of its users provide an understanding that actions will occur in this space and decisions will be made by everyone that comes across it. I was invited to collaborate with the Uprooted Collective for a participatory event that took place in 2019 at the {Re}Happening festival in Black Mountain, North Carolina. This collaboration followed the formula of:

Site + Material + Action = Experience.
The rules were the space, the time and the materials available for mark making and the transcendence occurred in the actions taken by participating members. These actions ranged from gestural painting to art history references where someone had taken the rocks that were holding the fabric down and panting circles around them.

Figure 3. Painting with natural brushes. Photo taken during bio:graph, a collaboration with Uprooted Collective at {Re}Happening 2019.
This was also seen in the six-foot embroidery hoop that accompanied the three collaborative paintings. A simple invitation to make a mark with a needle and thread at one point, turned into an impromptu embroidery lesson drawing in the participants for an experience within an experience.
Defining your environment is your context, part of your identity. I have found within my own practice, an extraordinary amount of material and direction can come from acknowledging that its history and yours are intrinsically linked. Using the living material of one’s surroundings to document or even illustrate a site-specific history is found in practice of ecoprint\(^1\), developed by India Flint, working out of Australia. Flint discusses “the love of place”

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\(^1\) “The ecoprint is an ecologically sustainable contact print that transfers leaf dyes to cloth, clay, wood, stone or paper”. (Flint, n.d.) https://www.indiaflint.com/
(Flint, n.d.) in her creative practice that dwells within the experience of everyday life. The acknowledgement of place, time and what reside in it becomes the environment from which this practice is sustained. Attention to material, the ethical use of resources and resulting impact is a sustainability study in and of itself. As Flint shares:

“I try to step lightly on the land while being nourished by it, and plant trees for the ecological impact of my wandering.” (Flint, n.d.)

Several times throughout this thesis, you may gather from my writing that I enjoy being on the coast. It is home to me, though I have lived in many locations throughout the state of Maine. This connection to place has always influenced my work, I have countless books filled with drawings of trees, rocks, dwellings and color studies throughout the seasons. The urge to capture a place within the time one inhabits is no new song, however for me, learning about this print and dye process afforded me the opportunity speak about place with a tactile rendering that embodies the time it was made in.
As I am now aware, my investment in work that is built from time is only enriched and enhanced by sharing it with others, whether in classes, workshops, performances, events or even a walk.
Work that develops through time, reaching beyond the material and into the history from which it has arrived at this new juncture, has become a defining method employed by my own practice. The contrast between the physical material as an object and the artifact it will become through critical investigation, situates the work in the significance it holds to the artist as well as the audience.
The materials and methods used to assemble this apron are put to use by the previously stated combination. A set of table linens and saved scraps of apparel

Figure 8. Remnants. Boro stitch and linen.
that have previously been worn through, share a new history while reflecting their origins in gathering to share in conversation. Using the Japanese method of boro stitch, I assembled this garment from material that had led previous lives.

Bringing their histories together to generate a new artifact of a new history, occurred in the company of a group of colleagues. The time shared in making these conceptual garments are filled with personal stories and memories that coalesce in new significance when seen together as a collaborative series. This, yet again as seen in many of the works discussed thought this thesis, is a point where relationships developed affording a gain in creative momentum for later work. Looking into the time that followed this work, further instances transpired where trust was employed in order to share perspectives that ultimately brought people together in a time where community was of the utmost importance.
Earlier, I described how paper goods from my own life quickly became the material that was used to establish my work as a graduate student. These shoes are
made from my children’s lunch bags, cereal boxes from the breakfast we share, the
craft paper that I wrap our table in for when we sit and draw together. These shoes
are made from the most cherished moments in my life, these materials take the
form of items of adornment… a shared language of value.

**Community & Impact.**

Art that invites play, humor, or even a feel-good lightheartedness
has an important role in these ways we strive for connection through practice. The
levity it provides can be necessary, not just in its ability to include and invite
participation but potentially make accessible something that previously sat
unconsidered. The “multidisciplinary collective” Assemble, takes into account this
element of human emotion and its role in building connections with their practice
of “making things and making things happen” (Assemble, n.d.) in existing
communities while also developing communities along the way.

Within human emotion we routinely experience dichotomies, which is why
connectivity and a broad base of understanding is vital in work that extends beyond
gallery walls. This can be seen in the “ongoing community - led project”
(Assemble, n.d.), Granby Four Streets.
The urgency that so often accompanies need can open a dialogue that may not have otherwise had the space to occur. When collective attention, effort and action “finds its feet” if you will, the results can make way for the trending word of our time, *Innovation*.

Seeing and voicing the potential from a first-person point of view can bring with it a passion when it may impact what is known and directly experienced. In contrast, an applied or even prescribed answer to community-based needs can open an equally passionate response.
When it was announced that academic communities would be unable to continue operating in person, so much took place in the course of two weeks that it is now dizzying to revisit. This upheaval brought with it tremendous stress and a range of emotions that frequently burst to the surface with little to no warning and a clear disregard for who might see it happen. In this time, the world moved into learning, working, socializing, and keeping connections virtually. I rejoined my colleagues after the spring recess that was by no means a “break”. Our class met online for the first time for the usual four hours, however, when it was time to conclude, this time, it was so difficult. Seeing the emotion on the faces of everyone in that class, our community of creative practitioners, I was compelled to act. I then found myself doing something that I never imagined I would ever do in that context - I began to sing.

In that moment, we needed to feel connection, we needed to feel supported and we needed to bring our meeting to a close with hope for what the following week might hold. This gesture, became part of our time together each week, bringing with it smiles, tears, laughter and the occasional sing along. Most importantly, it acknowledged the value of the smallest and most sincere elements of interaction that are vital in our ability to feel connected… simple and light-hearted as they may have been.
I need to acknowledge here, that educators across the globe, took heroic and immediate action to keep the world learning, connected and engaged amidst overwhelming challenges and uncertainty. As a graduate student myself, as someone married to an educator, as a parent of two young students and also as a person with parents that are educators, I would like to say:

Thank you for all you do.
Figure 11. (Credit: SS) An Earnest Effort.
CHAPTER 3
AN INTERMEDIAl PRACTICE

As an Intermedial Artist:

The practice I have developed over the past three years draws upon material processes that are refined as tools to communicate through storytelling. In order to extend invitations to participate in building larger narratives that reflect the process of dialogue, conversation and exchange, I have found myself following the advice of a character from a favorite illustrated book, *SAM & DAVE DIG A HOLE* by Mac Barnett, illustrated by Jon Klassen. As the two embark on their adventure, Dave charismatically announces to Sam: “We won’t stop digging until we find something spectacular.” Along the way the two narrowly miss unearthing gems of ever expanding magnitude yet, forge on in their pursuit of “something spectacular”. It is only at the end of this adventure that Sam and Dave realize that the journey itself was the “spectacular” entity they sought the entire time.

Re- Defining: Illustration

Illustration will always feel like home within my practice. As a visual learner myself, I find that I have a strong need to share my thoughts in a way that one can see what it is that I am thinking. This is reinforced by my love for books that take you somewhere once you begin turning the pages. When there are
characters, I want to know where they got their shoes or how tall the trees are that they climb. This all reflecting my excitement for detail. Many times, I have needed to acknowledge that my level of excitement for rendering these details outweighs my own skill and I am required to learn new processes and merge them with existing know how in order to get my point across. This has encouraged me to examine what illustration means in broad terms, as a field of practice and what it means to me specifically.

Within my own practice, I have broadened my definition of illustration to encompass performance, use of materials and interaction with an audience to highlight communication and its relationship with the ways we connect and listen, how we perceive each other and our understanding of shared experiences.

An example of this is seen in a work that I completed in the summer of 2019, *In Collaboration with Pollinators*. This 36 x 48” piece is a botanical illustration made of plant-dyed textiles that embody the organic matter of a specific place and time. The process of making this work included sharing time and conversation while harvesting the plant material required to assemble bundles for printing and dying the fabric, ultimately used to create the climbing imagined flora that fills this large frame. Yes, it is a rendering of nature within a frame, but it is also evidence of time shared in a specific place.

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This act of investing time and intention into work where the resulting outcomes cannot be predetermined is at its heart, intermedial.

![Harvested Plant Material for Printing.](image)

Figure 12. Harvested Plant Material for Printing.

It is my intention to continue exploring what we hold as significant experience and how this shapes the way we are able to imagine new possibilities to engage in a relational dialogue and its outcomes over time.
Figure 13. In Collaboration with Pollinators. Botanical Illustration.
Audience and the Artist

Departing from work that is developed by a singular authorship into the space of creative collaboration where the work is contingent upon the engagement of its participants, has required a careful examination of my own role in the work. Pablo Helguera address this line navigated by artists using engagement within their practices by reminding us that “the artist cannot disappear…” (Helguera, 2011). The artist is still essential, but in a different role. Not in generating the centerpiece of conversation but rather, acting as a facilitator adhering to the mission statement or upholding the structure and intentions of the work.

Ted Purves brings up another important point of "the democratic gesture of redistributing your own privileges as an artist to an audience or community.” (Purves, 2005) This is supported by Andrea Zittel’s comment on the “privileged position of being an artist where you can do things on a more experimental nature simply to see what happens.” (Zittle, 2015) This privilege is informed by the experiences we gather through living and is exercised by our need to share.

What we as artist are working with today through methods such as this, brings to light, the relational elements of concepts we have been churning through
for ages. In this role as catalyst, we are able to step out of the way bringing the perspective of artist as a singular entity with the ability to transcend rules and existing knowns with us to make way for how the work happens in real time with people, not just audiences.

**Levels of Engagement**

A project operating on the levels of “nominal and directed participation” (Helguera, 2011) within my own practice, invited audience members at a performance to participate in the work by contributing personal, hand-written memories associated with clothing from their lives. As memories are added to the collection through each iteration of this performance, the piece grows as a new memory for the participants as well as bearing the evidence of each time it has been performed.
Figure 14. Layers. (Credit: Jim Winters, 2020)

Figure 15. Layers. (Credit: Jim Winters, 2020)
This sits in contrast to my presented thesis work, as this work operates on the level of “collaborative participation” (Helguera, 2011). which, “tend to develop over longer periods of time” (Helguera, 2011).

In the beginning stages of these collaborations, I knew the direction I wanted to move in however, I set out with the intentions of not prescribing actions or outcomes for the expectations of where the work would go with the involvement of my collaborators. This work was to unfold as it happened in real time, bringing the opportunity for both the artist and collaborator to find moments of growth and surprise.
What can be accomplished

These differences in methods of working with other people may at first seem subtle, however once in the work the differences are very clear. Both have an important role to play in the ways people connect, however the immediacy in application found in “nominal and directed participation” (Helguera, 2011) allows for a certain range of outcomes while the durational quality of work experienced in “creative and collaborative participation” (Helguera, 2011) can have a slow activation in the initial stages, yet the agency of the investment opens a depth of opportunity that may serve as the foundation for new enterprises. As we often discuss, each method employed by the artistic community at large still bears significance in our world today. Everything from painting to activist movements, inform how this field continues to evolve and the importance of acknowledging its history as a force of dynamic problem solving with interrelated applications for communicating ideas, is how we will continue to innovate and participate.

Purpose

The potential for art to be a binding agent for communities by creating opportunities for sharing stories and illustrating experience through participatory
and collaborative projects is the intended trajectory for the application of this practice.

Engaging in an art practice that has the ability to exist in quotidian spaces involves the ability to speak from a place that is personal. As this work is exploring the aspects of our humanity, what better place to begin. Speaking from the “Personal and Local” (Helguera, 2011) brings a depth and richness of authenticity. This is context that roots us in the present, in the reality of circumstances. Right now… what could be more crucial in our ability to move forward?

The Success of the Engagement and the Takeaway

Measuring the success of this work follows the same expectations of indeterminacy and unpredictability in what someone else will do by adding to or even taking away from “the work”. This is illustrated in the presented collaborations at multiple instances. As an example, I expected to have a dialogical exchange with my collaborators, and eventually an exchange of objects that I embarked with expectations of its context or form being altered or added to in some way. I never once anticipated that there would be a moment when someone would offer their own item to me. From a photograph, a piece of writing, to a plant or even a celebration of accomplishment. These diversions, these moments when as the artist, you can be taken by surprise within your own work from the
authorship of a collaborators actions is where the success and significance lie. When the work also becomes a vehicle for someone else to act decisively...is the success. The ultimate goal being the empowerment of taking on the role of a co-author in a work and that decision having the potential to serve as the catalyst for someone to try it out in other contexts. Propagating if you will, the spirit and intentions of creative engagement in dialogue in order to connect and build a greater sense of common ground. This is all well and good if the intentions come to fruition, however there are times when they don’t. It is not a so much a failure, as it is an opportunity to engage in a more critical discourse, perhaps one that pushes you into a space that challenges your own perceptions or willingness to compromise. This can serve as a site of potential. Potential for resolution, debate, action, reflection... for what is yet to be determined.

In a collaboration where the work did not go as planned within my own experience, seven collaborators were left with a rift that needed mending in order for the work to exist in the world. A variety of factors come into play for the work to come to fruition, anything from weather to group dynamics to a global crisis. In this work specifically, where this work was intended to be experienced was where the digressions began. Originally the collaborative project Everyone has Something to Share, 2019 was designed to take place outdoors, in a city among strangers.
Serving as a location for dialogue surrounding topics of personal significance such as “What was your favorite subject in school?” to “Are there any songs that you know by heart?”, participants would gather, sit and talk with friends and strangers. After re-evaluating the logistics of the endeavor, a decision was made to install and facilitate the work in the existing community we as a group were, at the time, immersed in.

Figure. 17. Everyone has Something to Share. Anna Martin, Aylah Ireland, Rachel Church, Arturo Camacho, Anna Soule & Susan Smith).
Though a major component of the work was altered and the reach of the work was what we at the time viewed to be condensed, the work yet again, began to define a place where creative dialogue and exchange would serve as foundations for work that had not yet been imagined. Grant Kester discusses methods of critique and evaluating the success of conversational work by stating:

"Criticism of dialogical practices should, in my view, be less concerned with arranging canonical hierarchy of works than with analyzing, as closely as possible, the interrelated moments of discursive interaction within a given project.”

(Kester, 2004)

It is ultimately, neither the failure nor the success defined by anyone looking in from the outside of these experiences. The significance is the simple fact that someone stood, made an effort and then someone responded.
Figure 18. Everyone has Something to Share. Anna Martin, Aylah Ireland, Rachel Church, Arturo Camacho, Anna Soule & Susan Smith.)
CHAPTER 4

FINAL PORTFOLIO: THE ARTIFACTS OF EXPERIENCE
Figure 19. Acknowledging Here and Now.
A Time of Social Distance: March 14th, 2020 – Present
Figure 20. Life of the Party. Corresponds with 5,613 Seconds.
Figure 21. Detail: Life of the Party. Corresponds with 5,613 Seconds.
Figure 22. Life of the Party: Iterations. Corresponds with 5,613 Seconds.
Figure 23. From You To Me. Corresponds with One Growing Season
Figure 24. From Me To You. Corresponds with One Growing Season
Figure 25. 44.8861° N, 68.6689° W. Corresponds with 500ml of Air.
Figure 26. Book of Place and Time. Corresponds with 18 Minutes On Foot.
Figure 27. Vacuous Vessel. Corresponds with Five Mornings at 9AM.
Figure 28. Unexpected Writing. Corresponds with 5,613 Seconds.
Figure 29. Where We Meet. Corresponds with 226 Feet.
Figure 30. (Credit: K.E.) Singing to You. Corresponds with 18 Minutes On Foot.
Figure 31. A Healing Propagation. Corresponds with One Growing Season.
Figure 32. (Credit: F.M.) We Can Do This. Corresponds with 500ml of Air.
Figure 33. Book of Space and Time Returned. Corresponds with 18 Minutes On Foot.

Notes from across town: long distance friendship at close range. It lay there unused sitting in my backpack on the other side of the world. It lay there for a long time. Between then and now, everyone started baking bread.

Spring 2020.
Figure 34. Shared Thyme. A Collaboration for Closure.
Figure 35. [Credit: AC] Shared Thyme. A Collaboration for Closure. Corresponds with 226 Feet
Figure 36. [Credit: SS] Shared Thyme. A Collaboration for Closure. Corresponds with 500ml of Air.
Figure 37. Shared Thyme. A Collaboration for Closure. Corresponds with 18 Minutes On Foot.
Figure 38. Shared Thyme. A Collaboration for Closure. Corresponds with One Growing Season.
Figure 39. A Garden of Thyme.
CHAPTER 5
CREATIVE MEASURES

Experience

In developing this thesis, I engaged in durational creative exchanges with six collaborators, all of whom I have known for various timelines. These relationships share the common element of dialogue rooted in creativity. As the ways in which we know one another are unique, so are the definitions of creative engagement in each instance.

In choosing to include objects within the parameters of these exchanges, I now realize in a much more informed sense that there are two tracks running side by side within the work; the physical evidence of the time shared and then, the product of the exchange which is experienced in emotional terms. Though what I consider to be “the work” is the experience, the object remains a critical tool to communicate to anyone outside the work looking in as an indication of the events that transpired. In this thesis work, what transpired was the formation of dedicated spaces within relationships to think, share and be what makes us human in a time when our knowing of the world has been turned inside out.
In the development of a body of work that was at the beginning undefined, it was necessary to have a tangible “art object” to circle back to while mapping the area that was being explored. These objects presented are just that. Though the process evolved or took an entirely unexpected turn, there was at first that invitation and it is from there that the experiences were built.

**5,613 Seconds**

I spent fourteen years of my childhood living in the same home as my grandmother. An artist at heart, her sense of design and understanding of how to create an “experience” have influenced much of who I am today.

There are three words that define this relationship: Connection, Experience and Memory. Here, are the origins of my love for costume, character and their defining environments. Every exchange requires an initial offering to being, my offering was a celebration of spirit.

The cream and rose clusters of hydrangeas growing in my front yard are where this thesis work begins. Over the course of the late summer, I collected masses of hydrangeas & other cut flowers and herbs from my yard, bunching them into a towering couture powder wig worthy of a summer evening in the gardens of Versailles.
From the memories of visiting botanical gardens and estates with sprawling landscapes to the gatherings that were nothing short of magical as a child, there is a place deep within my heart for the details of an experience.

Originally, I had anticipated that this work may take the course of sharing memories of how to host events and the roles of friendship and time… yet, once I shared this initial offering, the work took off at an energetic and unexpected speed towards creative practices that include personal histories & poetry. The book I made and left on the coffee table, holds on the first page, the tiny handwritten verses that I uncovered by surprise months after this initial conversation. Again, I thought that I knew what needed to happen in order to share this creative exchange. Again, I was humbled to find that I alone, could not determine that outcome in the months that followed.

**One Growing Season**

There is a breathing history and knowledge encased by sun filled windows that peacefully enclose a world of green. It is a remarkable thing to observe a sophisticated understanding of the nurturing and investment required to sustain an environment filled with plant life. This exchange is built upon creating new narratives, new histories through the exchange of plants.
Walking through greenhouses and gardens where the third party of plant life suddenly becomes living memories.

What happens to your expectations when you care for the well-being of something on behalf of someone else? In this instance, it sparked a deeper investigation into the how and why of our living sculptures that mark the passing of time. The times where it went according to plan as well as the times where the best of intentions were unsuccessful. Most importantly, a beautiful reminder of the time required to develop relationships and understandings.

With this work specifically, recognizing one’s individual relationship with the passing of time and making peace with the fact that the time itself it is an active collaborator.

18 Minutes On Foot

This pandemic has pulled us from everything we have grown accustomed to and taken for granted. Our independence, our professional and personal spaces, routines and sense of time. Our ability to make plans. In an era defining crisis, we are finding at each passing day, that we need each other more than we have ever had the courage or humility to acknowledge.

Recontextualizing oneself in this new space, it is not unreasonable to find that which is familiar or constant, is valued in a way that it has never been before.
The constant and familiar in this exchange was always distance. Distance then, became what was turned upside down over the course of this spring. I receive postcards and have, for over 16 years from the dearest of friends. They are all saved, some serve as bookmarks for my go to recipes while others are proudly displayed in frames. A practice of sending art and receiving letters has been my constant throughout these years. I had never made art, sent it along on an adventure and received it back.

I could feel the warmth of the sun through the phone on what was an afternoon for me and a morning on the other side. There were bird songs filling the space between our words and together we realized that this might be one of the most important conversations we had ever shared. I found myself days later at the doorstep of a house down the road and for the very first time, we could not greet each other in the way that has, for over half of our lives, been customary. Instead, I stood in the road holding a sign with neon letters that read “welcome home”.

In the chaotic unfolding of this pandemic, there were two snowstorms and though that is not out of the ordinary for April in Maine, the weight of this snow was incredible. As was customary, I made some art and I brought it in person to its destination. With the assistance of a small speaker, I held up a cardboard heart and stood in the snow while singing.
Several weeks later, I received the book I had made for this exchange, filled with short verses that reflected the emotion of singing in the snow when the sky was pink and yellow. This exchange that has been built upon such a deep level of understanding and time, provides the space to revisit working ideas and build from another perspective.

**500ml of Air**

This exchange became a place to find my bearings. Sharing from a deeply personal space and being met with emphatic support resulted in a boom of confidence and clarity that has changed my perspective in countless ways. What happens when a gregarious artistic attitude is emboldened by a sense of community? Certainly, this takes time to establish. When earlier I spoke of this work beginning slowly, quietly and at times unexpectedly… I was speaking of this quotidian space. A space where expressing vulnerability is a tool of communication.

As previously mentioned, Pablo Helguera’s “Locations of Meaning” are central to this exchange as it was built upon unanticipated happenings. The first “location of meaning” (Helguera, 2011) was in the very first class I attended as a graduate student. This was a space that, as I entered, I understood that I would be different leaving.
Two years later, I faced another location that was filled with meaning and it stood as a barrier that I could not find a way over or around alone.

It is one thing to conversationally walk through spaces that bear significance in the life of someone, and then it is another experience entirely when breathing the air of that significance. The first of five walks together filled with the cold air of a January morning bore witness to redefining an element in someone's life from barrier to steppingstone. This air was canned in the volume of a deep breath and given as a gift in humble gratitude for the transformative experience that had just established a new “location of meaning” (Helguera, 2011).

Shortly thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic cast everyone into a sea of chaos and uncertainty. The radical adaptations and changes we have and will continue to endure have established within my own practice a call to action and an urgency to continue this work because of the potential impact it can make in a persons’ experience.

**Five Mornings at 9AM**

Reflection and contemplation are the most difficult components of most work. In fact, it is where the most work actually happens. The revelations needed for a meaningful success do not answer to any schedule, nor do they take into account how you feel on any given day.
Time, as discussed throughout this thesis, is critical. What happens in physical space, carried out by our tangible selves is only a component of our narrative.

Versions of we as living artifacts of our own experience are the inhabitants of this necessary space of reflection. When we engage in the practice of contemplation in the space of reflection, the ability to transcend former limitations can be unearthed. Though the details of this practice may never be fully articulated within any specific conversation, acknowledgement of the process is a constellation of this exchange.

**226 Feet**

When we speak about research many things come to mind, often times the thought of designated spaces for materials and minds to get to work. With a swiftness that is difficult to comprehend, our identities along with economies, society, the world at large came to a stop this spring. The shock and grief in losing our way of knowing the world and our place in it, we are painfully aware that we are now fundamentally changed. What we do and how we do it has now become a universally conducted experiment. Where we think, how we problem solve and what we need is being redefined at speeds never before achieved by humankind, even as I write this.
Andrea Zittel brings up an especially poignant item to consider within our current context stating “We’re obsessed with innovation and moving forwards, but what we really want is the hope of some sort of new, or improved, or better tomorrow” (Zittel, 2001). A better tomorrow is what we are tasked with today, here and now. Research is now happening in the most ordinary of places with a community of practitioners that see the stakes of what it at risk in the places we live not only our professional lives but our cherished and intimate moments.

I will use myself as an example: I sit here at my table writing this to you as I am surrounded by academic research materials as well as the daily functioning of my life in a space filled with the lives of several other people. Not in the early hours of the morning when people often made good use of quiet space and time in their dwellings before leaving to enter the world, but from the necessity of work needing to occur regardless of where and how.

We are, as a species, no longer standing at, but rather passing through an evolutionary crossroad and this existential realization is just one of many eggs in our proverbial baskets. To date, we have been encouraged to go for walks, listen to music, get up early, take breaks when needed, seek out libraries and use all that we have at our hands for resources in order to be our most capable selves in academic settings.
Now, we are working with completely new circumstances that in no way resemble years of established habits. Though we now dwell in isolation and distance, we are unable to turn off the sound of our lives. We are unable to take what we formerly understood as a moment within what now, often seems like an eternity of one moment.

The most ordinary of experiences such as walking through the grocery store has become a scene resembling what we formerly imagined as science fiction. Just one year ago, if anyone had told us that we would be entering grocery stores by following arrows on the floor and standing in clearly marked spaces while we picked up our essential items...we would have shrugged it off or even laughed. Now, we do just that, understanding that when we do get to the store, what we need might not be available as shelves have been cleared in waves of panic buying. This shock is slowly subsiding and the practice of sanitizing every surface, wearing masks and listening to pre-recorded messages that explain social distancing and its importance is largely expected in our new idea of “safe”. I share this set of challenges lived out by people everywhere in tandem with the realization that I am experiencing this upheaval with tremendous privilege. I have internet access, I have my living space, I have enough of what I need and among many other things, the ability and support to invest my time and effort into this work.
This has become the experience that defines this new reality. It is happening throughout the world in these spaces that people are navigating in the midst of virtual communication, isolation and social distance. This is a moment in time that has radically altered our understanding of human capacity and endurance.

**Documentation and Then What Happens in Real Time**

Documentation reveals the tone of the work, the place, the time, the context. The documentation of this presented thesis is comprised of images taken by cameras on phones rather than the robust capabilities of professional photography in a gallery. There are several reasons for this, the first being the nature of the work itself. It is personal, it is in real time and often the documentation follows the most important and poignant elements of the work itself. This calls into question: How do you document conversation? Exchange? Attitude? All while being IN THE WORK?

As this work was created with the intentions of being written about, documentation is essential in my ability to establish points of entry for the audience. Though, the “spirit” of the work needed no proof. It is self-evident in its importance and impact for the participants involved. Claire Bishop addresses this conundrum of the artist’s responsibility for these two entities: “The Work” and then “the documentation of the work”.

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“To grasp participatory art from images alone is almost impossible: casual photographs of people talking, eating, attending a workshop or screening or seminar tell us very little, almost nothing, about the concept and context of a given project. They rarely provide more than fragmentary evidence and convey nothing of the affective dynamic that propels artists to make these projects and people to participate in them.”

(Bishop, 2011)

The justification needed for work that falls under “participatory “or “social”-actively confronts the intentions of highlighting where creativity happens and who is allowed to experience it. This, combined with the role of the artist calling an audience to action while maintaining the “Art” in these new compositions, it is important to recognize how yet gain, we need the strengths of what many fields have to offer in order to set out in these new explorations. Andrea Zittel comments on “work that lives in the world at large” (Zittel, 2015). This work Zittel is referring to is what originates in those quotidian paces, where no one is fully able to predict what will happen. After all, if we were able to see the end before we began, what would be the point?
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In closing, this work is necessary in order to grow our understanding of relationships from a personal and common ground. As artists declare importance through gestures that elevate the experience of living, these declarations bring a heightened sense of awareness to the actions and conversations of the people involved. These spaces in between established ways of working reflect the creativity of the human spirit. If we continue to invite people to cross that threshold of dedicating spaces to think and engage in a creative dialogue that is enriched and emboldened by the spectrum of experience… possibly we will see a greater attentiveness to the actions we take in our own quotidian spaces.

In our current context, these methods of initiating and facilitating dialogue that can take place over time will be crucial in our ability to make decisions that will ultimately redefine our understanding of life as we experience it.

I believe that in order to truly see the potential of engaging in this work, there is a responsibility on the artist to continue educating themselves in the ways in which we communicate, as the goal of the work is to strengthen our ability to understand. There is no fixed endpoint, but a commitment to pursue and create opportunities for this work to exist in the world and be seen in its beautiful variations.
By offering our time to someone and listening in earnest to what they have to share, we step beyond ourselves, beyond art and onward into what we may never have otherwise known was needed.
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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Anna Martin was born in Portland, Maine on October 14, 1987. She was raised in southern Maine and graduated from Orono High School, in 2006. She received a BFA in Illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design, in 2011. Her interests in the natural world, costume design and illustration have led to a wide variety of projects and collaborations centered around activities that bring people together.

Over the course of her MFA in Intermedia at The University of Maine, Anna has incorporated performance and storytelling into her practice. These additions have become a cornerstone of her current work which is rooted in creating opportunities for sharing stories and illustrating experience through participatory and collaborative projects.

Anna is a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Intermedia at The University of Maine in August, 2020.