Place in Exhaustion

By

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Abstract

This thesis concerns the everyday’s appearance in aesthetic performances. The analysis begins by defining the everyday and examining how it has appeared in art and music at the turn of the twentieth century. I demonstrate how Jennifer Ana Gosetti-Ferencei’s concept of ecstasis emerges from Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* and Pauline Olveros’s “Native” from *Sonic Meditations*. Ecstasis enables both *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* and “Native” to expand the subject’s concept of the everyday.

Blue Gene Tyranny’s “Taking Out the Garbage” reveals how aesthetic performance can transform the everyday while also being transformed by the everyday objects and actions it works with. Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja’s theory of playtexts shows that “Taking Out the Garbage” uses play to produce critiques of the everyday activities that happen within the video.

Finally, Sara Ahmed’s theory of disorientation, when paired with Gosetti-Ferencei’s ecstasis and Bohman-Kalaja’s theory of play, demonstrates that works that incorporate the everyday aim to reorient the subject to the everyday, expanding their appreciation for it, and by changing how they orient themselves toward the everyday as it appears in their own lives.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of how the quotidian and elements related to it appear in the author’s own compositional output while at Wesleyan University.
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Introduction

March 9th, 2012 was the day I realized I wanted to make performance art. Watching in awe a performance of John Cage’s *Song Books (Solos for Voice 3-92)*, I saw performers playing games of chess, drinking cognac, making tea and sandwiches, moving throughout the theatre wearing animal masks, and projecting inscrutable images on the far wall of the space. It was beautiful chaos. I did not know where to look, what to listen to, or how to begin to process it. I did not want to miss a single moment of any of it, feeling desperate to remember everything, certain that I would never see anything like it again. Here was a work by a composer, in which people were doing all manner of things, except playing “music.” It was the year of Cage’s centennial, and the performance at the Unruly Music Festival (curated by Christopher Burns in Milwaukee, WI) was one of hundreds across the country that celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Cage’s birth with concerts of his music.

What shocked me about the performance was its lack of artifice. Here were performers doing simple tasks. Each action seemed to be performed for its worth as an gesture. Though some of these tasks, such as the chess game, were amplified, it was clear that they weren’t being played as instruments, but instead being interacted with as objects that created sound through these engagements. I struggled for a long time with *Song Books*, trying to work out exactly how these actions worked, what constituted them, and why I found them so satisfying. I wrote a series of pieces in which performers would draw cards and be assigned actions to be performed. (One of these, *chimusicae*, was performed at the autumn 2016 Musicircus.) These pieces, though fun and
compelling in their own right, still failed to capture the restrained simplicity that I had seen in Cage’s *Song Books*.

Simultaneously with these compositional struggles, I learned about avant-garde and experimental art movements in the twentieth century, about Dadaism, the Surrealists, Fluxus, about happenings, mail art, net art, and Oulipo. Lane Hall, an artist and professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, introduced me to the writings of Georges Perec, and I read his work voraciously. Perec’s constrained writing, his acutely observational, gentle prose, and his commitment to concept resonated heavily in me. The first work I read by Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, exemplified all of these things, and I can still feel the shock of that first encounter. I remember feeling amazed by the sheer simplicity of the work – go to a place, write what you see – and the literature that Perec was able to draw out of such an experience.

I could continue with this genre of initial encounters that pushed me to where I am today. There are certainly more: seeing Alison Knowles perform in Milwaukee in November 2013, reading Yoko Ono’s *Grapefruit* in autumn 2012, embarking on my first soundwalk as a newly minted composer in September 2011, to name a few. I could unpack each of these in detail, explaining how they left me confused, pulling me deeper into experimental music and art. At each initial encounter, I felt these experiences resonate within me, with what I was learning and had already experienced. But I could not put each of these things together. I lacked the knowledge, the time, the experience and understanding to see how these artists connect with one another through philosophical lines.
When I started writing my thesis in autumn 2016, I did not yet know I was writing about the quotidian. Though I loved Perec’s writing and had been experimenting with Situationist-inspired wandering for years, I didn’t know there was a name for what Perec felt compelled to document, beyond his name for it (the “infra-ordinary”). In retrospect, it’s ironic that though I had a critical mass of interests pointing me towards it (Perec, the Situationists, Fluxus, Cage’s *Song Books*, the Surrealists, soundwalks), I was unable to see the everyday as it was right there in front of me.

Perhaps this is not so ironic. The everyday is slippery. In *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, Perec asks “how to see the fabric if it is only the rips that make it visible: no one ever sees buses pass by unless they’re waiting for one,” pointing out that we most often recognize the everyday only when it has gone.¹ I only began to dig deeper when I interrogated my definition of “the quotidian” and I realized that I could not pinpoint what I meant when I felt the urge to describe something as such. The word felt right, but I could not articulate what I meant. I was learning to speak.

Through my research, I have realized that my inability to speak precisely about what the everyday is did not merely come from a lack of knowledge of the word. The concept of the quotidian (which, throughout this thesis, will be used interchangeably with “the everyday”) is tricky to define, even for those who study it. In *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, Michael Sheringham, a French literature scholar, traces the inheritance of what he calls the Surrealist tradition of the

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everyday, noting that the Surrealists were dedicated to “tapping into the unrealized possibilities harbored by the ordinary life we lead rather than rejecting it for another life.”² Through surrealist procedures, the ordinary life was investigated and seen to contain more detail than expected; Sheringham notes “Surrealism does not aim to see new things, but to see things anew; to make the act of perception performative rather than merely constative.”³ But what things were seen? How did this performative perception work to create new things to see? Even here, with Sheringham’s foundational thinkers on the quotidian, we do not see much in terms of clear definition.

Sheringham provides little in the way of concrete definitions of what constitutes the everyday. Rightfully so, because what makes up the everyday is an intensely personal processes constituted by familial, institutional, and personal dynamics. Indeed, for many theorists, the quotidian becomes the site of where individuation occurs. The ways we choose to lead our lives generates who we are as individuals. Everything, from what we eat for breakfast to what clothes we choose to wear, and beyond, contributes to expressing what we call individuality. If that’s indeed the case, then there are as many everydays as there are people to be individuated.

For my part, I wish to keep the everyday as open as Sheringham does. Through prior research on posthumanism, anti-oppressive politics, and feminist and queer theory, I feel compelled to hold the space of the quotidian as open as possible for all types of everyday lives, for all types of individuals. Though I will be engaging with

³ Ibid., 82.
works that come from a small subset of possible everydays, there are more out there, and it is important to acknowledge that the quotidian, even the local quotidian we experience daily, is expansive and almost endlessly possible in variation.

This thesis seeks to tackle the problems I laid out earlier in the introduction. What about watching quotidian performances is so intriguing? Why do I feel compelled to perform simple tasks in the context of aesthetic performance, such as in film, theatre, and music? How do other experimental artists work with the quotidian in their own works, and how does the quotidian work when it is put into differently structured contexts than Cage’s *Song Books*?

In Part 1, I begin these investigations with an overview of the everyday and how artists and theorists have helped to develop it throughout the twentieth century. I examine strategies for working with concepts of the quotidian in musical work, contrasting techniques popular in the early twentieth century with ones developed later in the century. Looking at how Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller, as well as Pauline Oliveros engage with concepts of the everyday in their works, I unpack how their technical approaches of engagement differ from each other’s. From this analysis, I demonstrate how technical approaches dealing with aspects of the quotidian affect the meaning that is derived from these approaches. Then, I shift my attention to how everyday actions and objects can be integrated into aesthetic performances, such as those seen in film, theatre, or music. By examining Blue Gene Tyranny’s “Taking Out the Garbage,” I show how integrating aspects of the quotidian into aesthetic performances creates a complex web of meanings. I then examine how these complex
meanings arise, and how artists use them to expand our own understandings of the everyday.

In Part 2, I write about the four thesis events I created during my second year at Wesleyan, connecting my research on the aesthetic use of the quotidian to my own artistic practices. First, I identify common threads running throughout the three works created for the autumn 2016 semester. Then, I examine each of these three events in turn: *night walk*, which involved participants leaving their houses at 3:30 AM to walk around Wesleyan’s campus; *North College Lawn Clean-in*, which responded to an event staged fifty years earlier by the Japanese art collective Hi Red Center; and *Place in Exhaustion*, in which I measured the position of the furniture in the Music Studios lobby, then transported it to World Music Hall and set it back up as it had been, thirty yards away. Finally, I will examine my installation, *remnant // residue*, created for the spring 2017 semester, which used the architecture and furniture of the Samuel Wadsworth Russell House to diffuse sound throughout the space.

Because the quotidian, by definition, engages the local and the personal, thinking through it offers us the opportunity to see our lives in a different way. These investigations have been incredibly expansive for me to undertake. I have encountered much joy in working with the quotidian, which I hope translates through my writing on it. I wish that you find some joy through this brief study on the everyday as well.
Part 1
Approaches to Including the Everyday in Aesthetic Performances

The Everyday

Within the background of events that happen every day, objects may be entirely unremarkable, situations that are wholly familiar, and actions so well-rehearsed that we do not need to perform them consciously in order to complete them successfully. Putting on clothes, brushing one’s teeth, and walking around one’s neighborhood are nearly daily occurrences for many of us. Sheringham notes that the quotidian often comes with a connotation of insipidness, of triteness, and of meaningless ennui.⁴

For Sheringham, defining the quotidian is slippery business. Sheringham meticulously documents multifaceted approaches to defining and engaging with the everyday, drawing from numerous philosophers and scholars. For theorists like Michel de Certeau, the quotidian is best approached through ethnological observation; for the avant-garde Situationist International, the everyday is to be experienced first-hand on the street. For Roland Barthes, engaging with the quotidian looks like abstracting elements of it to their underlying structures; for Henri Lefebvre, the everyday is the site of each person’s struggle to attain individuation.⁵

Sheringham documents two tendencies: to either lambast the quotidian as mundane, or to elevate it so high as to lose its sense of realness. He cites Walter Benjamin’s animation of Heidegger’s Alltäglichkeit (everydayness) as being guilty of both of these tendencies, noting that in this usage, “the everyday is, at best, a catalyst

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⁴ Sheringham, Everyday Life, 8.
⁵ Ibid., 151.
for what must transcend it.” Benjamin’s invocation of everydayness came as a critique of the modernizing world, of machinery and social reorganization. For Benjamin (as well as Heidegger), everyday life existed as a drudgery from which we had short moments of transcendence. While these critiques of modernity and industrialization are vital to certain philosophical traditions, Sheringham identifies a historical frustration with their totalizing views of everyday life. He champions Hungarian theorist Agnes Heller as a philosopher who was committed to maintaining the ambiguity of the quotidian, the capacity for it to be both tedious and transcendental, and everything in between.

For Heller, the everyday is the site where we practice our lives. “Everyday life,” writes Sheringham, “provides the essential foundation for that which transcends it.” However, in comparison to someone like Heidegger, who thought we must find ways to escape the everyday, Heller challenges us to push deeper into it. Her concept of “everyday knowledge” demonstrates how we slowly rise out of the everyday into the non-everyday: ‘calcium is good for the teeth’ is an example of such quotidian knowledge, a snippet of science that holds no factual proof beyond its own insistent existence. Sheringham notes, “everyday knowledge is always opinion […] rather than truth.” As we correct our everyday knowledge, we slowly rise into non-everyday knowledge, which are abstract relationships that can be evaluated meaningfully for truthfulness or factuality. Paradoxically, we reach this form of knowledge wholly
through operations with everyday knowledge – the everyday acts as a “gateway to full human self-realization,” the way for us to organize our personal practices to create our best selves.\(^9\) Heller’s understanding of the everyday is in service of individuation. This is not far from the Surrealist and Situationist use of the quotidian in the service of revolution, of finding new ways to resist the totalizing forces of capitalism.

Like Sheringham and Gosetti-Ferencei, I have avoided in-depth discussions of what constitutes the everyday in order to sidestep issues of specificity and temporality. Instead of thinking about such local readings of the everyday, Sheringham concerns himself with how feelings of the everyday are constructed, how art and narrative work to (re)create a sense of a quotidian life that may or may not have ever existed. Writing about Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Shering notes “the here and now of the stream of consciousness is a fabrication. The hours of Mrs. Dalloway’s day are very different from our own.”\(^{10}\) Despite contemporary life looking much different than life in post-WWI England (as well as shifted conventions of narrative storytelling), we can still feel the everydayness of Mrs. Dalloway’s day.

Looking closely at how narratives create the quotidian, Sheringham posits that walking demonstrates both an activity that is itself quotidian, and represents many of the qualities that make up everydayness. It is “an activity at ground level geared to the aptitudes of the body, a practice involving rhythm, repetition, non-accumulation, an activity that is concrete, open-ended, private as well as social, limited to the here and

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\(^9\) Ibid., 36.
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 44.
now but capable of embracing distant horizons.” Walking highlights several elements of the quotidian. As I will show in the next section, these elements appear in both historical and contemporary Western music and art.

Music and the Everyday

From the street dialect of Janáček’s operas to the New England musical ambiance of Charles Ives, the Western classical music tradition has regularly engaged with concepts of the everyday. These composers sought to capture the everyday musically, through musical transcription of street dialects (Janáček used this technique heavily in his operas) and simulation of street ambiance (Ives’s crossing marching bands in *Three Places in New England*).

These approaches brought everyday life to the musical sphere primarily through transcription. Janáček and Ives were transcriptionists in their respective cultures, with Janáček notating speech rhythms and Ives collecting folk melodies for both cataloging and compositional use. In historical Western classical music, transcription appears a primary way to invoke the everyday. Transcribed, the slippery flows of speech on the street became rhythm and melodic contour, with eccentricities either captured or shaved away depending on the archivist. These everyday elements of musical life were

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11 Ibid., 57. Here we can immediately see problems with applying specificities to what the quotidian is – for many bodies, walking simply isn’t possible. Mobility may take place in other forms (using a wheelchair, crutches, or braces, for example), but still other bodies are immobile entirely. Those forms of the everyday are just as lived, just as embodied as an everyday defined by walking, but take a different form from what one might call a dominant experience of the every day. Sheringham doesn’t place walking as the totalizing example of the everyday, but his example highlights why he’s so cautious about defining a specific everyday in the first place. The everyday is continually eluding definition, and in order to most fully understand and appreciate it, one must be ready for whatever form it may take.
ported into a different context, where they came to stand in for the everyday as a broad field, for whole groups of people and ways of life.

Thus, the flow of street speech became purely sonic. Gone was the physical street, the busyness of the modern world going by. The sonic representations certainly carried these contexts with them and listeners familiar with these things would understand those contexts, but the representations lost the concrete, physical experience of living them. However, transcription represents one tool in engaging with the everyday, among many others.

Alternative models to working with the everyday began to emerge in experimental Western music in the mid-twentieth century. Methods of engaging with the everyday became more explicit and more direct, giving rise to the works of contemporary composers and artists such as Hildegard Westerkamp, Pauline Oliveros, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Yoko Ono, and Alison Knowles and many artists from the Fluxus tradition. Present-day artists often acknowledge the body’s role in mediating our experience of the everyday and are aware and inclusive of traditionally non-musical objects that accompany our experience of everyday life. Transcription still functions as an important practice and is now augmented with other approaches.
Contemporary Artistic Approaches to the Everyday

Consider Janet Cardiff’s and George Bures Miller’s *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*. Users hold up portable digital media players, looking at the device’s screen and listening to it via headphones, while Cardiff instructs the participant to walk through a space (most often a city), slowly unfurling a narrative tied heavily to the train station in Kassel, Germany, using the narrative to inform the listener about the place they’re traversing (see Appendix A.1 for stills from the video). Cardiff introduces the iPod or phone as a mediating body to this art form, splitting the participant’s attention between the simulated place and the physical one. Cardiff and Miller describe this splitting as a “confusion of realities,” between the digital screen and the physically experienced reality.

Cardiff’s attention to the details of the site she is working with demonstrates a keen attention to how objects, and their histories and arrangements, form places. In *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, Cardiff and Miller bring the participant to a glass case filled with rolled pieces of paper in gray plastic bins. These papers documented stories about the Jewish people sent to concentration camps from the train station during the Holocaust, as told by local schoolchildren. This case sits in the public train station as a memorial, functioning as a locus of collective memory. Passersby would be familiar with it, and if they were regular commuters, would come to see it as part of the everyday form of the station.

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13 Ibid., in the project description.
Again, thinking about the *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, the opening of the piece has the performer walking through the train station, while the simulated space in the video player shows a series of fantastical events – a marching band coming through the station, a ballerina dancing to the music – but the video quickly dissolves this situation. All the while, physical reality continues in whatever capacity it had been prior to the video’s imagination of the ballerina and band. Cardiff and Miller describes this as “an alternate world [opening] up where reality and fiction meld in a disturbing and uncanny way,” where “participants watch things unfold on the small screen but feel the presence of those events deeply because of being situated in the exact location where the footage was shot.”\(^{14}\) Amazing, impromptu moments emerge in the video, but they recede into memory as the participant continues through the piece.

How Cardiff and Miller play with memory also functions similarly to these moments. The narrator builds the story of the piece by referencing the history of the train station, in particular its role in the Holocaust as a station that deported Jewish people to concentration camps. Musing on these supposed memories, the narrator pushes the participants to imagine the events, activating a sort of imagined memory space. Memory and the fantastical both arc away from the quotidian, both being developed entirely by the audiovisual simulation the participant experiences on the media device. When the marching band stops or when Cardiff breaks a contemplative moment in a memory’s narrative to instruct the participant to walk, the participant re-enters or re-engages with the physical world. These layers emulate the experience of

\(^{14}\) Ibid., in the project description.
the quotidian in our own lives, how beautiful, remarkable moments emerge, how memory and daydream pull us away from our presently lived experiences to imagine other ones.

According to Sheringham, Certeau calls these fleeting moments of place-bound memory “practical memories,” memories “whose knowledge cannot be dissociated from the time of [their] acquisition … nourished by a multitude of events among which [they move] without possessing them.” Sheringham notes that French author Georges Perec further develops the concept of practical memory, stating that it is “experience grasped at the level of the setting in which your body moves, the gesture it makes, all the everydayness connected with your clothes, with food, with travelling, with your daily routine, with the exploration of your space.” Cardiff and Miller emulate real moments of memory and daydream by directing the participant to observe certain elements of the space, such as the Holocaust memorial, or a train platform that Cardiff remembers standing on. These observational asides function in response to space, such as a section where Cardiff discusses how Nazis herded Jewish people onto Platform 13 to board trains to the concentration camps. These sorts of place-bound, contextual memories that are not necessarily based on lived personal experience, but instead on physical, affective, and intellectual engagement with a space, are precisely the practical memory that Certeau outlines.

16 Ibid., 276.
These moments of distraction from the physical also emulate how many of us experience digital media, which Laura Bertens describes as hyperreality: “the simultaneous resemblance and deliberate discrepancy between external reality and the video allow the viewer to consciously experience this transition from a perception of reality to an immersion in hyperreality and to linger on the halfway point between these.”\(^\text{17}\) Bertens posits that by shifting so often between hyperreality and physical reality, Cardiff and Miller work to allow the participant “to simultaneously observe this experience of taking the walk, within the walk itself, and in the external reality of the train station.”\(^\text{18}\)

Cardiff’s instructions pull us in, out, and through physical reality. As Anamarija Batista and Carina Lesky observe on Cardiff’s approach to narration in her Walks, her “voice presents an explicit persona of a first-person narrator outside the narrated diegesis, but still within the plot portraying her subjective perceptions. [...] The overlapping spatial reality allows us to perceive the transformation of the places we encounter while being invited to share the situational memories and thoughts of someone else.”\(^\text{19}\) Cardiff’s narrator is both a character and a conductor, pushing imagined memories into the participant’s head and directing the participant to stop daydreaming and move on. Her interventions in the piece’s flow do more than mimic the thoughtful wanderings of a character in the space – they are precisely Cardiff’s own

\(^\text{17}\) Laura M F Bertens, “Playing and Dying Between the Real and the Hyperreal: Processes of Mediation in Mroué’s The Pixelated Revolution and Cardiff and Bures Miller’s Alter Bahnhof Video Walk,” in Third Text 30 (2016), 98.
\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 98-99.
thoughtful wanderings. Batista and Lesky point out that Cardiff writes her scripts on-site, walking through the spaces she works with, tuning the movement to her narration so that the participant may lock step with her.\(^{20}\)

Batista and Lesky connect Cardiff’s Walks to the Situationist International’s dérive, as well as to Certeau’s concept of walking as “creating” the city.\(^{21}\) For Batista and Lesky, however, Cardiff’s narrative impulse prevents these works from being about the drifting, vast potential of a walker in urban space. Instead, Batista and Lesky propose that Cardiff’s narrative and spatial directions control the participant’s experience. Cardiff’s works are hyperlocal, focusing on the history and affect of a specific, well-bounded place.\(^{22}\) Cardiff works on-site to create the pieces, speaking the narration to measure the space and recording on site when possible.\(^{23}\) It’s plausible that Cardiff’s works represent multiple layers of dérives, where the primary layer is

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 516.

\(^{21}\) The dérive is a technique developed by the Situationist International designed to chart the “psychogeography” of an urban environment. By observing the city, moving within it, and observing its cues, people undertaking a dérive can form a psychogeographical understanding of the city. Psychogeography refers to how urban environments influence people who navigate them, how cities are designed to flow and lead walkers to certain places and away from others. As far as Batista and Lesky are concerned, “the users of the city space actually create it through their everyday activities taking paths and turns,” (Batista and Lesky, 516). Sheringham describes Certeau’s understanding of walking as “multiform, resistant, tricky, and stubborn,” (Sheringham, 224) and likens it to the way a reader progresses through a text, noting that “to read is to expose oneself to difference and thus to be changed as well as change,” (Sheringham, 224). A city is “created” through a walker’s itinerary, as it intersects with the city’s own cues about where to walk and what to see, intersecting with the walker’s own desires and ambitions. This is in contrast with the Situationist dérive, in which the city is attributed more agency over the walker.

\(^{22}\) Christina Ross has an excellent analysis of the way Cardiff and Miller use multimedia to transmit affect in *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*. Reflecting on the section of *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* in which the participant visits Platform 13, the specific place where Jewish folks were made to board trains to the concentration camps, Ross notes that physical motion paired with historical awareness and historically-similar motion bring affect to be felt more intensely. Christina Ross, “Movement that Matters Historically: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s 2012 *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*,” in *Discourse* 35 (2013).

\(^{23}\) Batista and Lesky, “Sidewalk Stories”, 516.
Cardiff’s own psychogeographical mapping of space, and the secondary layer is the participant’s own experience of the space, which has been superimposed with Cardiff’s prior mapping. Though Cardiff’s narrative is directive and specific, that does not preclude its genesis from a drifting approach, and perhaps she and Miller assembled the trajectory from precursory wanderings that were transcribed and edited into the final narrative draft.

Eirini Nedelkopoulou notes that Cardiff and Miller use “the communality in the narrators’ and spectators’ perception of the same mixed-media world” to place the participant in “a spatiotemporal relationship with a haunted milieu.” She attributes this immersion to ecstasis, noting that this ecstasis “enables the audience’s physical bodies to merge with the absent virtual bodies of the audio recordings. Indeed, it is the process of ecstasis that enables different bodies to access the dramatic world of the walks by creating a fold of experiences where audience and performer converge in space and time.”

Here, Nedelkopoulou’s performer is Cardiff herself, as narrator and disembodied character. She posits that the participant takes up Cardiff’s body when Cardiff recounts her own experiences in the space, resulting in a heightened immersion and awareness of space and the participant’s body within it.

Nedelkopoulou’s observations echo those of philosopher Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, who writes on the experience of ecstasis within aesthetic interactions with the quotidian. Gosetti-Ferencei expands Heidegger’s concept of ecstasy, which she defines

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as “stepping outside the ordinary (sense of) self.” In her book, *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature*, Gosetti-Ferencei explores how the everyday appears in painting and literature, and how these works reflect thought back onto the everyday. To help illuminate ecstasis, let us consider another work.

“Native,” from Pauline Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations*, has a simple text score: “Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that your feet become ears.” Instead of using a piece of electronics as a mediating technology, Oliveros uses this score to prompt the participant to reconceive of their relationship with their body. Through tuned attention, the feet become ears, and the body itself becomes a listening device. The world around the participant opens up — not just the sonic world, but also the world of physical sensation, of the body’s interaction with the ground. Many of us walk every day, but Oliveros’s composition allows us an opportunity to expand our understanding of this quotidian activity to fill it out into a space of new sensation. This expansion of sensation is the ecstasis that Gosetti-Ferencei writes about, demonstrating how phenomenological thinking (such as Oliveros’s instruction to treat our feet as ears, to give them attention and feel them differently) can bring about heightened awareness through quotidian experiences.

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27 Gosetti-Ferencei, *Ecstatic Quotidian*, 7. Not only heightened awareness: as Gosetti-Ferencei notes, “art and literature are manifestations of [the quotidian’s] capacity for self-renewal […] they have something to offer in revitalizing capacities for renewing or reinvigorating everyday life.” (Gosetti-Ferencei, 246). Oliveros writes, in the introduction to *Sonic Meditations* that healing can occur through
Note the differences between Cardiff’s and Oliveros’s works. Cardiff’s *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* is hyperlocal, uses common objects like iPods and smartphones to mediate a participant’s experience (which she has curated to tell a narrative); Oliveros’s works, on the other hand, highlight how the body itself is a mediation device between the everyday world and our perception of it, and how we can affect these perceptions through directed attention. Both artists engage with the everyday specifically in how it informs our understanding of place, but where Cardiff’s places are precise, specific, and tightly-coordinated, Oliveros’s places are dependent on context, the participant’s own hearing and selection of where to perform, and are more fluid or improvisatory in nature. Further, Oliveros’s work lacks a narrative and the relationship built with place is constructed in a completely different manner. Where Cardiff explores a place for aspects to highlight via narrative, Oliveros encourages participants to immerse themselves in the sensory richness of a place, which works to refresh an old place that the participant is familiar with, or to meet a new unfamiliar place that the participant has not yet felt.

These works by Cardiff and Oliveros demonstrate a shift in working with the everyday. While transcriptional approaches such as those used by Janáček and Ives are

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28 This is not to say that Cardiff’s works are stiff or non-responsive to different participants. Part of the fun of Cardiff’s Walks is how she plays with the way media devices and smartphones pull us out of present-time, and instead place us into some other time and space, even if the space is the same space we are seeing represented on the screen in front of us. The participant’s relationship to such devices informs how they respond to and engage with such pieces. But Oliveros’s works, through their emphasis on improvisation, listening, and attention to immediate sensory detail promote a less pre-conceived, more open approach to sensation.
still present in contemporary art and music dealing with the everyday, works by Cardiff and Oliveros show contemporary artists engaging with the everyday are much more comfortable deploying the actual specificities of the everyday to act for themselves. These sorts of hands-on, livable experiences are what Fluxus scholar Hannah Higgins calls “primary experience.” Primary experiences are in contrast to secondary experiences, which are our thoughts about, abstract understandings of, and representations of primary experience.29 Where Ives represented two marching bands playing simultaneously, Cardiff coordinates a marching band to walk through a train station and records it. Where Janáček might transcribe the tones and rhythms of public speech, a person performing Oliveros’s piece might choose to perform in a public space and incorporate overheard speech into their performance.30

Cardiff’s piece highlights the physical world that surrounds the participant, foregrounds how memory and the fantastic interface with our daily experience of life, and puts the participant in motion. Oliveros, on the other hand, highlights the body and its role in mediating our physical experiences, prompting us to reevaluate what it means to walk and to hear in our daily lives. Contemporary artists and musicians use all of these practices, as well as transcription, to deal with the quotidian in their works.

We have discussed how Cardiff, Miller, and Oliveros expand on our understanding of everyday life through their works, but now we will explore how

30 The development of Western art and music over the course of the twentieth century plays a crucial role in making these techniques available to creators like Cardiff and Oliveros. Perhaps Ives wanted to take people to hear two marching bands simultaneously, but such an activity would not have been seen as a musical practice during his time.
everyday actions and objects function within aesthetic performances, such as film, theatre, and music. Placing quotidian actions and objects into aesthetic performance recontextualizes these elements of the everyday, but as will be shown, does not remove them of their meaning. Instead, the actions and objects use bring some of their own context with them, which produces meaning. Further, the aesthetic performance brings its own context to the elements of the quotidian in play, producing work that critiques and expands our understandings of the everyday.

**Blue Gene Tyranny’s “Taking Out the Garbage”**

Let us consider “Taking Out the Garbage,” a short video produced in 1976 by composer and performer Blue Gene Tyranny. The work consists of two sections. In the first section, the scene features the corner of a light yellow house, an overgrown yard buffeted by wind, and an added frame that slowly changes colors from green, to teal, to blue, to violet, and finally to magenta before the end of the scene. Two people enter the frame: performer 1 from the right, who wears a hat and large overcoat, coming down a set of concrete stairs, carrying a bag of garbage; and the other, performer 2, from the center back, wearing a light blue button down, carrying a silver garbage can, coming around the back corner of the house. The two walk forward, performer 1 moving from left to right, and performer 2 coming from the back of the frame to the front.

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This gesture happens four times in the first scene. The first time, the two do not intersect, and when they fail to connect, a small yellow circle is overlaid on the screen (see Appendix A.2 for stills from the film). Similarly, the second time the gesture occurs, the two fail to meet again, and a small green circle is overlaid near the previous circle. On the third repetition, the two performers enter and meet at the corner of the house. Performer 1 places the bag of trash into the silver trash can and a small orange asterisk overlay appears where the two had met, joining the two circles from the previous failed gestures. Both continue in their respective directions, with performer 2 carrying the silver trash can off screen with him. The two meet again on the fourth and final repetition of the gesture, and a small purple asterisk appears and joins the previous symbols on screen as the performers walk off in the same direction.

In the second section, the duo stand in an overgrown yard, wind blowing bushes and grasses to and fro, while a house stands in the background of the frame. The overlaid color frame has been replaced by a dark blue outline of the frame from the previous scene. Now, performer 1 holds the silver trash can, while performer 2 holds the bag of trash. The two stand with their backs to one another, about eight feet between them. Performer 1 turns to face performer 2, but performer 2 hasn’t moved and his back is to performer 1. A magenta circle appears near performer 1, again representing the gesture’s failure to create connection. A red filter appears over the whole screen, intensifying the sense of defeat. Performer 2 turns now, but performer 1 is already standing with his back to performer 2 again. Another small circle appears on the screen near performer 2, while the color filter shifts from red to yellow. Performer 2 turns his
back on performer 1, and the two wait. This time, they both turn and face each other. An orange asterisk appears in the center of the screen, and the two walk towards each other. Performer 1 lifts the trash can’s lid, and performer 2 drops the garbage bag into it. The film fades to black while the overlay remains, showing the dark blue frame, two circles, and one asterisk.

The film’s soundtrack consists of ambient noise divorced from the actual film (wind, traffic sounds, a dog barking), Blue Gene Tyranny’s famed piano playing (easy-going and gentle, here), and a synthesizer that enters at each near-encounter. The synthesizer is noisy, playing even beats in a tempo unrelated to the piano’s languid, casual pace. The synthesizer works to intensify moments of near-encounter, emphasizing when the two performers have the opportunity to connect. In the second scene, the color filter that enters with the failure of the first gesture compliments this intensification.

“Taking Out the Garbage” evokes the quotidian most immediately with its title. In his 1979 pamphlet describing the performance, Tyranny describes the performance as “a trashy song and dance contrasting the language of large-scale Brownian motion (coincidence) and the feeling-space taught by the art of *aikido*, which is neither offensive nor defensive, voluntary nor involuntary.”32 *Aikido* is a Japanese martial art that uses an opponent’s own movements to disarm them while simultaneously protecting them from harm. A practitioner listening to life energy that gives cues about

32 Blue Gene Tyranny, *Live and Let Live / Taking Out the Garbage*, transcribed by Todd Kabza, (Lou Robinson, Letterpress, 1979), back cover. The pages in the pamphlet are not numbered, so my numbering begins on the first page following the copyright.
what to expect from an opponent’s movements. By listening to life energies, the performers in “Taking Out the Garbage” try to coordinate their meeting points without any verbal or gestural cues. They leave the orchestration of their intersections to coincidence. Tyranny, who studies these sorts of energies, explains that he performed this piece “in the spirit of art and fascination,” and that he “simply wanted to do these experiments and see what happened.”

The life energies that push the performers to move share a similarity to philosopher Roland Barthes’s concept of *idiorrhythmie*, which is the “individual rhythm, based on a free and fluctuating balance between solitude and community.” Sheringham tracks the construction of the word, noting that the suffix *rhythmos* (as in rhythm) reminded Barthes of *ruthmos* (being fluid, improvisatory, or mobile). For Barthes, through the connection to *ruthmos*, *idiorrhythmie* “has to do with the subtle forms of the way one lives: moods, unstable configurations, phases of depression or elation; in short, the exact opposite of a brusque, implacably regular, cadence.”

Contrast *idiorrhythmie* to the following excerpt from *Live and Let Live / Taking Out the Garbage*. Tyranny describes the live performance of *Live and Let Live (Aikido Performance)* which was performed on April 13, 1978 at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. The performance involved Tyranny and John Bischoff performing a

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33 It is worth noting here that the title, “Taking Out the Garbage,” becomes a double entendre, simultaneously referencing the act of taking out the garbage, as well as a colloquial description of beating somebody up.
36 Ibid., 202.
similar *aikido* dance as seen in the second section of “Taking Out the Garbage,” in which each stands with their back to the other and tries to turn around when they sense the other facing them. When Bischoff and Tyranny make eye contact, pianist Kathy Morton and speaker Phil Harmonic change the music that they produce as their duet. Describing the way the music works, Tyranny states,

“We don’t have any rhythms [sic] we’re not counting anything whatever happens and whatever parameters are set up are occurring just at the moment and as we don’t know why these things happen sometimes when you start you try to trick yourself into starting rhythmic patterns. You notice you start turning every 3 seconds or you’re doing these things you know the thing is to try to relax all those patterns to relax all those movements all those necessities. And then when it really happens you get this blast which is really nice where you actually move & turn to each other for no reason at all you don’t know why.”

Tyranny describes the impulse to attempt to constrain the coincidental, to reduce it to patterns that return control to the performer. However, when one releases said control, Tyranny notes that coincidences as they occur are much more satisfying, much more organic. There’s a sort of magic in unexpected intersections, even though these intersections are the point of the piece. When not actively controlled or coordinated, these coincidences can live on as coincidences, rather than being subsumed into pattern or rhythm.

These sorts of negotiations are similar to the feeling-out of *idiorrhythmie*. Always in tension between the personal and the social, *idiorrhythmie* is the careful balance struck between the personal sense of what should be done at any given moment.

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38 Ibid., 3-4.
and what the community suggests should be done. An example of this tension is the meal cycle — when we feel the urge to eat, versus when society has decided meal times are. Though *idiorrhythmie* describes the lived quotidian and not necessarily the aestheticized version seen in “Taking Out the Garbage,” they both share a commitment in exploring how time and action is negotiated between an individual and within larger social groups.

Like much of Tyranny’s work, the piece celebrates (or at the very least doesn’t ignore) the constituent relationships that led to its creation.\(^{39}\) An important aspect of *idiorrhythmie* is how individual rhythm coordinates with rhythm demanded by community. Similarly, in *aikido*, one must balance one’s own will to action with another person’s energy in order to complete a move. Throughout “Taking Out the Garbage,” there’s a relaxed tenderness, in the music, in the way the characters move, and in the gestures themselves.

“Taking Out the Garbage” explores the connections two bodies can make when they move according to their own impulses. Through the film overlay that counts the performers’s successes and failures, viewers are led to hope for connection, to see the completion of the task, and to want the garbage to be taken out. Both *idiorrhythmie* and *aikido* require interfacing with others in order to complete tasks. When paired with an

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\(^{39}\) *Live and Let Live*, “Taking Out the Garbage,” Tyranny’s album *Just For the Record* (which consists of pieces written for him by his friends and fellow musicians), as well as his extensive work with Robert Ashley on projects such as *Perfect Lives* highlights both Tyranny’s dedication to creating music, as well as his transparency and willingness to recognize the communities that he works with to enable these projects to come into being.
action as domestic as taking out the garbage, one begins to imagine the context in which the garbage is taken out.

“Taking Out the Garbage” acts as a structural reduction of the act of waste removal. In the first section of the work, “taking out the garbage” becomes the intersection of two bodies. In the second section, “taking out the garbage” is a question of orientation and simultaneity. First, Tyranny has taken a task that is familiar to a wide group of people and abstracted it into a sort of dance, removing the specificity that we associate with doing daily tasks. The act of taking out the garbage loses some familiarity when considered as two intersecting lines. Though we recognize it for what it is, we do not feel the sameness we might feel if we had watched a film of ourselves taking out our own garbage. This personal specificity is how we best know the quotidian. We know “taking out the garbage” on an abstract level, but we rarely think of it as a line we follow, or as a point of coordinated action.

We have the concept of “taking out the garbage” on a broad level, but it is a vague form. While some may take the garbage out to city-distributed garbage cans, others may take the garbage to the landfill themselves. Still others may burn their own garbage. Though the vague form of trash disposal exists through the demands of society, it is left for the individual to produce. This negotiation is idiorrhythmie again, leading individuals to decide when the best trash removal time is for themselves.40

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40 French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s understanding of the development of the everyday is also useful here. Sheringham notes that to Lefebvre, the quotidian was subject to “uneven development” because of its socially-determined nature and its relationship to family practices and cultural norms. For Lefebvre, “the human being becomes a person” by “confronting the social and the individual within himself” (Sheringham, 150).
Through society’s abstraction of everyday tasks, we can compare experiences of the quotidian. Part of the intimacy of the film comes from the sense of witnessing a moment from another life, seeing someone perform everyday tasks, and feeling a sort of distanced familiarity when you realize you both do the same things, yet differently. While watching “Taking Out the Garbage,” I find myself comparing how I do the task to how the performers do it. Witnessing the performance in the context of the suburban yard leaves me imagining these performers as actual people, possibly implying that what we are seeing is how these people actually take out the garbage.41

Part of this abstraction comes from the addition of the screen overlay, which transforms the performance from a simple documentation of a work into an explicit game. Though we are never given a “final score,” so to speak, the accumulations of circles (failures) and asterisks (successes) lead us to think about the stakes of the game are. In her book, Reading Games: An Aesthetics of Play in Flann O’Brien, Samuel Beckett, and Georges Perec (2007), literary critic Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja theorizes playtexts, works of literature that “exploit novelistic and dramatic conventions by using them against readers,” that “change rules and defy expectations, and demonstrate that ‘As in any game, knowing the rules is absolutely not the same as knowing the game.’”42

41 Of course, this is a performance of trash removal, so we don’t know whether it is being dressed up. Considering the commitment to coincidence expressed by Tyranny, as well as the self-admittedly experimental approach taken, I believe that the garbage hauling should be read in earnest. Tyranny’s community-oriented music making, as well as anecdotal stories surrounding the experimental music scene in the Bay Area in the 1970s also leads me to believe that this film can be read as a document of the relationships that Tyranny had with the people involve with its making, as well as with people in the Live and Let Live project at large.

“Taking Out the Garbage” plays with the familiar, individual, and quotidian conventions behind taking out the trash. As noted earlier, these conventions are common – many people take out the garbage – but they are also disparate. While Bohman-Kalaja theorizes playtexts on the grounds of literary convention, Tyranny constructs a playtext in response to social convention. This playfulness comes across in the piece, through the overlay, the music that indicates when failures occur, and the overall tenderness transmitted by the piece.

Writing on what is at stake in playtexts, Bohman-Kalaja notes that “the stakes of literary Play are very real, but lie beyond the realm of material gain. […] All material motivation for Play, such as physical fitness, military intelligence, a desire for demonstrating physical or intellectual superiority, or financial gain, is removed from Play-Texts.”\(^{43}\) Bohman-Kalaja posits that this is why a common facet of the playtext is a failure of chronological time, citing the works of Georges Perec as a particularly compelling example of this suspension of chronological force. Bohman-Kalaja then goes on to quote from play theorist Eugene Fink:

> “We conceive of life as a “task” … We live in anticipation of the future and experience the present as a preparation, a way-station, a transitional state. [...] Every human answer to the question of the meaning of life assumes the existence of a ‘final goal.’ Unlike other activities, play does not fit into this style of life...play is characterized by calm, timeless ‘presence’ and autonomous, self-sufficient meaning.”\(^ {44}\)

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 45.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 46.
We experience this “calm, timeless ‘presence’” in “Taking Out the Garbage,” reinforced by Tyranny’s piano soundtrack, the sounds of nature, and the dedicated yet casual resolve the performers have for their task. Further reinforcing this calm timelessness is the setting in the backyard of a suburban home and the timing of what seems to be an idyllic summer afternoon, which never progresses to night or the next day. This suspension of chronological time is critical in viewing “Taking Out the Garbage” as a playtext. The piece progresses only upon reaching the end-state of the game, in which the garbage is either taken out or not. There is no chronology in the work, no dependence on previous attempts at taking out the garbage.

Most importantly, Bohman-Kalaja emphasizes the importance of discarding preconceptions of what play is, referencing in turn the Marxist dialectic of play versus work, the dialectic of play versus seriousness, and the dialectic of play versus reality. Again, she quotes from Fink:

“If we define play in the usual manner by contrasting it with work, reality, seriousness, and authenticity, we falsely juxtapose it with other existential phenomena. Play is a basic existential phenomenon, just as primordial and autonomous as death, love, work and struggle for power, but it is not bound to these phenomena in a common ultimate purpose. Play, so to speak, confronts them all – it absorbs them by representing them. We play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death – and we even play play itself.”

By being playfully oriented towards certain objects, we acknowledge the rules underlying their state. However, we also acknowledge that the object’s current state

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46 See Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* for an in-depth discussion about what it means to be oriented towards objects.
is not its limit, and through play, we seek to demonstrate other states the object can occupy (often emphasizing creativity or novelty as optimally playful). For “Taking Out the Garbage,” this involves transforming an everyday task into a game of chance, which leads us to consider how and why we take out the garbage the way we do. It also leads us to imagine other ways to take out the garbage that expand our appreciation of what would otherwise be a task we do without awareness.

**Reorienting to the Everyday**

This expansion of awareness, of being made to think about the quotidian and what goes into producing it, resembles what Gosetti-Ferencei’s ecstasis is – a “standing out” from the familiar, which offers an opportunity to see the world in a new way, from a new perspective, or from a different orientation. Ecstasis, then, has much in common with Sara Ahmed’s understanding of disorientation, which “involves contact with things, but a contact in which things slip as a proximity that does not hold things in place, thereby creating a feeling of distance.”\(^47\) Ahmed’s definition of orientation is tied to the body’s occupation of and interaction with objects and space. Disorientation is what happens when something thought to be “in place” is actually elsewhere, such as when you miss a step going up or down a flight of stairs. The body expects a step in a certain location, but the sudden absence or presence of a step disorients the person who tripped.

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Where ecstasy leads to a “special fascination” in the surrounding world,\textsuperscript{48} disorientation begins with strangeness (either internal or external), which leads to objects that “threaten to get inside of [oneself], or spill what is inside out.”\textsuperscript{49} Disorientation is necessarily intimate, because it involves the body’s failure to connect (physically, mentally, etc.) with objects in what is supposed to be the “proper” way. However, disorientation is not inherently bad – Ahmed notes that one may intentionally become disoriented “as a way of enjoying the pleasures of deviation.”\textsuperscript{50} We might consider them the same experience, but oriented in different ways, with ecstasy being a specific manifestation of disorientation that results in attention being paid to one’s surroundings, while disorientation itself is a larger category of experiences that are unfamiliar and/or defamiliarized.

Ecstasy and disorientation are fruitful ways of thinking about the everyday because they enable a subject to step outside of familiar contexts to see the quotidian from a new perspective. Consider the three works discussed in this chapter. Cardiff and Miller’s video work, \textit{Alter Bahnhof Video Walk} places viewers in a state of ecstasy through a hypermediated participatory performance. As noted separately by both Bertens and Nedelkopoulos, Cardiff’s and Miller’s strategy of using portable media to create a layer of simulated reality that exists alongside physical reality draws the participant’s attention to both the physical world, what Nedelkopoulos calls being “sensorily immersed in real space, at the same time as being projected into an imaginary

\textsuperscript{48} Gosetti-Ferencei, \textit{The Ecstatic Quotidian}, 243.
\textsuperscript{49} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 165.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 177. Disorientation, however, can be uncomfortable, and as Ahmed points out, disorientation is distributed unevenly throughout society (Ahmed, 159).
world of historical fact and fiction.” Bertens notes that “the participants in the video walk are allowed to dwell in this intermediate state of the mediation process for an extensive period of time,” which allows the participant to reflect on the strange state the intermediation puts them in. Occupying these liminal positions, maintaining this disorientation, allows participants access to both the physical and simulated realities that Cardiff and Miller have curated and created. The participant cannot access one reality or the other, and instead experiences whatever the boundary state between the two of them offers.

Similarly, with Oliveros’s Sonic Meditation V: Native, the participant comes to understand their feet as more than only feet. Through directed attention, the participant extends their feet from physical sensation into aural sensation. The piece, however, stipulates that the participant is to continue walking, which means that the feet must still function as feet. The participant cannot give up the feet-ness of the feet in search of ear-ness (nor is it possible to). In the score, however, Oliveros insists that the participant walks so silently that the feet become ears, not that the feet become like ears. It is not enough to bring ear-ness to the foot; the foot itself must become an ear. The tension between the feet needing to remain functional as feet, and the insistence that the feet become ears (and not remain feet) implies that this sonic meditation is a continuing process, more than a discrete event that happens once in performance and then passes. Just as existing within the intermediation of Cardiff and Miller changes

the participant’s relationship with portable media and reality, Oliveros’s sonic meditation changes the participant’s relationship with their feet. These changes come about through occupying a liminal state (feet becoming ears), changing one’s orientation to one’s own sensory apparatuses, and observing what differences that change in orientation makes.

Finally, in Tyranny’s “Taking Out the Garbage,” the act of trash disposal becomes aikido, a dance of coincidence, and a game of chance. Taking cues from Bohman-Kalaja’s theorization of play, we must let “Taking Out the Garbage” be dance, game, and the act itself, all at once. Because of the piece’s closeness to everyday life, approaching “Taking Out the Garbage” in such a multifarious way suggests new ways of thinking about the quotidian. Analyzing how aesthetic objects approach the everyday can suggest new ways to reorient ourselves in relation to the quotidian. What if taking out the garbage were a game? What if my feet were ears? What if, as I walked through a train station, I passed through the history of affects that once filled that space?

We reach such reorientations through ecstasis and disorientation. By sustaining ecstasis and disorientation, we are able to observe multiple states of existence at the same time, which can provide us with new ways of seeing the everyday. Through such reorientations, these artists give us platforms from which to (re)consider everyday life and how we navigate it. These reconsiderations may lead us to form new relationships with the everyday world around us, to increase its depth and our understanding of what
it means to be in the world. Citing French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s writings on the quotidain, Sheringham notes that “to study the everyday is to want to change it.”

For Lefebvre, these desired changes were large-scale, aimed at recuperating everyday life following the French realization of the atrocities of the Holocaust. In order to enact these macroscopic changes (which were aimed at reducing alienation caused by capitalism, per Marx), Lefebvre believed that the site of resistance to such alienation was the quotidain. The everyday (which is associated with the local and the personal), is not subordinated by larger social structures such as capitalism and finance, but contains them by being the system in which large-scale systems are allowed to continue functioning. This dialectical relationship allows individuals to apply pressure on larger systems, which leads to change. More individuals applying pressure can lead to greater change, with the ultimate goal for Lefebvre being a Marxist revolution.

The reconceptualizations of the everyday offered by Cardiff and Miller, Oliveros, and Tyranny are not necessarily as literal as changing one’s diet in order to divest from cruel or exploitative practices. But they do not have to be less effective or less meaningful because of that. Oliveros began practicing her Sonic Meditations in order to heal from the violent, turbulent times of the Vietnam War and the protests that surrounded it. Oliveros notes in the introduction to Sonic Meditations that the pieces are intended for healing, and other works by Oliveros (such as The Heart Chant) overtly

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53 Sheringham, Everyday Life, 155.
54 Ibid., 153.
state this intention.\textsuperscript{56} Though these reimaginings of how to deal with the everyday seem to be small scale, through the foundational nature of the quotidian, little changes in approach begin to stack up.

As contemporary artists work include the concepts of the everyday in their works, the meanings and contexts of those concepts follow. Form and medium of the work both affect how those meanings and contexts are transmitted. The digital/physical split in Cardiff and Miller produces a different sort of meaning than the tuned attention Oliveros demands; similarly, the filmed game format of “Taking Out the Garbage” produces a different form of critique than the participatory walk in \textit{A\textsuperscript{t}er B\textsuperscript{a}hnhof V\textsuperscript{i}deo W\textsuperscript{a}lk}. The vast, indeterminate nature of the everyday calls for a broad selection of possible approaches in order to explore what many theorists view to be the most abundant part of our lives. As artistic practices have broadened in form over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (as what art is has expanded), artists have similarly expanded their collection of approaches to working with concepts of the quotidian as an artistic material. By emphasizing ecstasis prolonging disorientation, creators of aesthetic performances can bring viewers or participants to experience multiple states of being at once, leading the viewers or participants to forge new relationships with the quotidian materials used within the artist’s work.

\textsuperscript{56} Oliveros, \textit{Sonic Meditations}, 1.
Part 2
A Discussion of My Works

Overarching Themes in the Fall Event Series

Each of these events were conceived independent of one another, but common threads unite them all. Perhaps foremost is each event’s tangential, extended relationship to music composition. *night walk* most resembles a familiar form, following similar work by Pauline Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations* and Hildegard Westerkamp’s soundwalks. But even *night walk* was composed away from the concept of music, being thought of initially as a happening-style piece based on directed audience action rather than explicit sonic material or compositional ideas. For me, this tangential relationship to music and sound comes from the overt process-based nature of these works. Each work emerges from a relatively simple process (*night walk*: walk outside late at night; *North College Lawn Clean-in*: clean the lawn; *Place in Exhaustion*: move furniture from one building into another and reposition it exactly as it had been).

Part of my interest in performative acts came after seeing a performance of John Cage’s *Songbooks* in March 2012 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I became obsessed with Cage’s extension of music to all actions, through the framing of *Songbooks* and other pieces such as *0’00”*. *Songbooks* expanded music from exclusively the aural into the realm of any time-based process, action, or event. I created this series as an experiment to see how far I could reduce my compositional processes, to see how much I could create from minimal means. For each piece, but especially in *Place in Exhaustion* (which was an unadorned process), I worried that things had become too simple. Taking
inspiration from artists like Alison Knowles, whose pieces like *Identical Lunch* and *Make a Salad* push the boundaries of how simple a process can be while still being art, I decided to make works that were less explicitly musical. Instead, I focused on concepts of the everyday, like walking, cleaning, and observing public spaces. Higgins notes that “Fluxus modestly proposed the real value of real things and the possibility of deriving knowledge and experience from these things,” noting that the bulk of Fluxus work comes as “primary experience,” which is embodied in first-person, by doing an action or taking in sensory input.\(^57\)

Higgins uses “the Event” to discuss the musicality of both sonic and non-sonic Fluxus events. Citing the Event’s origin in John Cage’s 1958-1959 composition class at the New School, Higgins grounds “the Event” in musicality through Heidegger’s understanding of music as “radically visceral.”\(^58\) Mostly notably, Higgins suggests that this radical viscerality necessarily extends beyond the realm of analysis, into the realm of primary experience. Fluxus works, Higgins contends, are primarily experiential and secondarily associative. They exist to be experienced and while the associations and interpretations behind, around, and within these works do matter, they are not the primary focus of these works.\(^59\) I feel compelled to both distance these works from music, and conversely to insist that they are extremely musical. There is space for music to contain primary experiences – composers like Yoko Ono and Pauline Oliveros explore how it feels to make music, and how our bodies can contribute to music making

\(^{57}\) Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 36-38.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 51-55.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 59.
more than simply making sound. On the other hand, it feels powerful to come to the Wesleyan Music Department and to focus my thesis work on things that threaten to produce no sound.

Related to primary experience of these pieces was the concept of exhaustion in these pieces. In *night walk*, the exhaustion is fatigue from either staying up all night or waking up too early; in *Place in Exhaustion*, it is from the precise measurement of the lobby space, as well as my own exhaustion after measuring and replacing all the furniture into position; finally, in *Street Cleaning Event*, exhaustion might be the fatigue felt after physical labor and intensive cleaning, or the exhaustion of the cleaned surfaces, giving up their dirt (or rather, shifting their dirt around in an acceptable way).

Each piece wielded exhaustion in different directions. In *night walk*, nobody who experienced the piece did it without being fatigued, at least a little bit.\(^6^0\) The participants were exhausted by the demands of the piece. In *Street Cleaning Event*, the sidewalk and lawn experienced an exhaustive cleaning through meticulous focus, while the performers performed manual labor that would be exhausting were it to be continued longer. Finally, in *Place in Exhaustion*, the Music Studios lobby is exhausted through precise measurement, the performer creating the piece is exhausted through exacting focus, and the audience is exhausted through sheer monotony (which is not a judgement on the work, but a fact of the reduced means of the piece).

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\(^6^0\) Conceivably, a group of people who work the third shift would be able to perform the piece within the confines of their waking hours, but the majority of the Wesleyan graduate department does not typically run on the third shift.
Another aspect of these pieces was the concept of inconvenience. I will reference Ahmed’s phenomenology of racism to outline her theory of inconvenience. Ahmed, writing on how bodies are racialized to enable white mobility, reflects on how people of color are stopped by police officers, border guards, or other people with authority to suspend a person’s motility. Ahmed notes that “being held up” is most often the result of skin color or name, both of which are things that attach to the body. “Being held up,” writes Ahmed, “shifts one’s orientation; it turns one’s attention back to oneself, as one’s body does not ‘trail behind’ but catches you out.” Bodies that “trail behind” are bodies that go unnoticed, bodies that do not get in the way of one who is moving forward. When bodies fail to “trail behind,” they inconvenience a person simply with their presence. Ahmed notes that anger is often a reorientation tool used in response to being held up, writing that through anger over racism, “we create new spaces – we expand the very space occupied by our bodies, as an expansion that involves political energy and collective work. […] Collective anger about the orientation of the world around whiteness might reorientate our relation to whiteness.” Inconvenience forces subjects to reorient, to try to find a way past an obstacle. Through this forced reorientation, one can come to see, act, and move differently.

Each of these pieces was designed to be inconvenient in their own ways. For night walk, participants would have to wake up in the middle of the night and come to

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61 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 141.
62 Ibid., 155. Again, while Ahmed’s concept of reorientation in response to being held up provides a good platform for a theory of inconvenience, it is important to note that it comes from a critique of whiteness primarily and not an abstract discussion about theoretical inconvenience.
campus to participant. For the North College Lawn Clean-in, some sidewalks would be unusable while we cleaned them. For Place in Exhaustion, the Music Studios lobby lost all of the materials that made it a comfortable place to sit, relax, or study. Each of these pieces presented obstacles to participants, audience members, or the campus community in general. However, I was more interested in how we rationalize such inconveniences under the auspices of institutional events.

I played with the power structures present in our department by creating situations in which people were expected or obligated to attend or participate, due to their nature as graduate thesis events. This presence or participation came at a cost, whether that cost was feeling exhausted because of a disrupted sleep schedule, being made to move around a bunch of people cleaning a sidewalk, or having to watch me move furniture for an hour and a half. Though inconvenience initially helped me to choose forms for these pieces, I came to understand these works more as a meditation on dedication to communities and artistic practices. It’s certainly inconvenient to have to move speakers, mixers, and other audio gear, to attend rehearsals, to go to shows, but that we tolerate such inconveniences is a statement about how much we care about what we do and who we do it with.

Each piece left something behind: a pile of leaves, a feeling of fatigue the next day, an emptied lobby. As I developed and enacted these pieces, I began to think about the scope of a composition: how we can know when a composition has ended, versus how compositions can end and still leave us with something more than we started with. In night walk, for instance, all participants were tired the next day. A fatigue lingered
over the department. Beyond that, I had leftover cocoa mix, mini marshmallows, and coffee stirrers for months. While these materials were not a part of the participants’s purview, they were part of my primary experience of the piece. When the piece had ended and it only echoed in fatigue or memory, I still had leftover cocoa mix.

Another example of things left behind are the supplies for the *Street Cleaning Event*. Many of the tools were salvageable. I inherited eyebrow trimmers, mustache combs, hairbrushes, white coveralls, and all sorts of other leftovers from the piece. On top of that, while doing the piece, I got a nasty cut on my finger that needed dressing and which left a scar behind. The wound took about a month to heal fully, still painful every now and then, reminding me of the event. For *Place in Exhaustion*, the empty music lobby was the imprint during the performance, but things still linger on: the gash in one of the tables, my marks on each chair noting which table it sat at, and the blueprints that could recreate the piece at any moment.

As Higgins notes in the introduction to *The Fluxus Experience*, experiential works of art blur the lines of art and reality. The things that were left behind function as a reminder of the work that I have done, of experiences I have had, in the context of the community here at Wesleyan. Of the things left over, most of them I acquired in excess so that many people could participant. Purchasing food for others to consume and tools for others to use helped me to appreciate all the work that goes into doing community-located pieces of music and art. One unstated aspect of *Place in Exhaustion* was its role as a devotional piece to the Wesleyan Music Department. I consider the work to be a labor of love. It was completely exhausting to perform, but it required me
to examine a space that many identify as the locus of the Wesleyan Music Department, to occupy it and measure it, and to recreate it elsewhere. All of these pieces were done with the help of the other graduate students in mind, and my time at Wesleyan has been characterized by an increasing understanding of experimental creative practices as a community-centered entities. From Fluxus to the Surrealists, Situationists, and the Oulipians, the role of community in experimental creative practice is undeniable and I am lucky to have had the opportunity to work in such an enriching and supportive community.

**night walk**

In *night walk*, participants leave their houses or cars at 3:30 AM, walk for approximately 40 minutes, then converge on a given location at 4:10 AM. The score is as follows:

**Rules of night walk**
1. You must leave your house at 3:30 AM.
2. You must arrive at Memorial Chapel no earlier than 4:10 AM and no later than 4:25 AM.
3. You must walk alone, or with a partner who you feel comfortable sharing silence with. Keep in mind that this is not a particularly social event, but safety is important to remember.

On top of these rules, there are a few guidelines, koans, or things to meditate on while you are walking:
1. Manmade light holds an unstable attraction.
2. Darkness enhances the ear.
3. Everyone you see is operating independently of yourself.
4. Nighttime amplifies the quality of being alone.
5. Darkness blurs edges -- yours, and your path's.
At 3:30 AM, you will leave your house (if you are driving in for the event, or live in Milwaukee, I will follow up with a set of specific instructions for you). You are to walk with intention to a place listed below:

1. Somewhere you might go at this time of night
2. Somewhere you might not go at this time of night.
3. Freeman Athletic Center.

Note that you do not have to walk to every place on the list, nor do you have to walk to any place on the list. This is just to guide you in walking with intention to different places. Once you reach a destination, linger for a moment, then decide on a new place to walk to with intention, until it is time for you to walk to the Chapel.

The piece initially grew out of a desire to have a concert extremely late at night, to bring people together to hear music at a strange, under-utilized time. As my thinking about the piece developed, I realized that the allure of operating so late had nothing to do with the concert hall at that hour, but instead the differences between the daytime world and the nighttime one, and so the musical aspects of the piece fell away in favor of the simple experience of the late evening.

night walk is related to the Situationist dérive, Hildegard Westerkamp’s soundwalk, and most immediately, the act of being outside, alone, late at night, walking from one place to another. Sheringham tracks the practice of walking and its relationship to the quotidian through the Surrealists, to the Situationists, and to Certeau, noting that walking is often a primary mode of experiencing and representing the everyday. For the Surrealists, walking offered the opportunity to experience reality on a first-hand basis at street level. The Situationists inherited this form of walking,

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63 Sheringham, Everyday Life, 71-72.
evolving it into the dérive, in which one or more participants “drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.” The dérive is an aimless drifting, guided only by the city’s and/or surrounding terrain’s cues about where to go next. The premiere tool of the newly invented field of psychogeography, the dérive aims to uncover how cities are organized psychologically, how urban environments contain clues for how subjects are to engage with the spaces the city contains.

Certeau, theorizing city walking approximately ten years after Guy Debord theorized the dérive, notes that walking is “a mode of reading a spatial environment,” that walking itself is a “scrambling of established itineraries and landmarks” that reconstructs a city as a pedestrian walks through it. For Certeau, walkers have more initiative than in Debord’s dérive. They “read” a city as they would read a story, taking what they need from it, changing and being changed by the city as they fluently navigate to where they need to go. This “reading” of a place surrounding the subject interested me, and I aimed to capture the feeling of being awake at a late hour, of being solitary at this time, of being outside, and bring them together in a way that resembled experiences I have had in the past.

In order to achieve these goals, night walk avoids traditional Western classical performance practices. The event is at an inconvenient time, not on a weekend evening

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65 Sheringham, Everyday Life, 222-224.
or Sunday afternoon. It is not at a conveniently spoken-about time. The audience is not comfortably seated, but mobile. They are not indoors, but outdoors, and they are not an audience, per se, but participants. However, the instrumentality of ritual to the production of the event is unquestionable – the text score is methodical about what each participant is to do (leave their house or car at 3:30 AM, walk from one place to the next with purpose, and be at Memorial chapel between 4:10 and 4:25 AM). Through this list of tasks, a performance ritual is created and enacted, with the special context (late-night-ness) providing just enough intrigue to draw out activeness in the participants, making them aware of the world at a different hour than those to which they are accustomed.

An important aspect of the work is how the score directs a participant’s attention. There are five guidelines, or koans, or things to think about during the piece, which are designed to guide the participant to think about certain things and not others. In particular, they highlighted the darkness of the night (“Manmade light is an unstable attractor,” “Darkness enhances the ear,” “Darkness blurs edges -- yours and your path's”) and the solitary nature of the piece (“Everyone you see is operating independently of yourself,” and “Nighttime amplifies the quality of being alone”).

I decided to include these directives as a gesture towards alternate reality games, such as SF0, which aims to change our approach to everyday life through a series of game-like tasks. These tasks are simple prompts for action, such as “Leave clues,” or

I had to make many clarifications about when, exactly, 4 AM was. In the end, I wound up telling people that if they were to stay awake on Tuesday night, they would be able to go to the piece at 4 AM on Wednesday morning.

“Install a door in a landscape,” that drive players to act creatively outside of the bounds of what their everyday life would be. These directives were also to gesture at a role-playing game I had recently started playing, called *Chuubo’s Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*, which gives particular settings “properties,” which are simple axioms that are inviolate and can be involved to resolve conflicts and advance the story. Sample properties are “Cats may come and go as they please,” “You always have a home in Fortitude [a provincial town in the game],” and “Work must be fruitful.” In *Chuubo’s*, these axioms have a powerful effect on how players interact with the world and other characters. I was intrigued by the power such simple statements could have, so I incorporated them into *night walk* to direct the attention of participants.

These short directives also come directly from the soundwalk tradition as established by members of the World Soundscape Project. One of the guidelines directly references listening practices (“Darkness enhances the ear”), and while I did not think of this piece as an explicit soundwalk, that tradition was important to me and I wanted to include something of it in the work. Canadian composer and ecomusicologist Hildegard Westerkamp defines soundwalking as “any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment,” regardless of what the environment is (store, city, or natural landscape). Most notably, Westerkamp discusses the process of designing a soundwalk, which does not have to be a simple

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walk in which listening is the priority. Westerkamp writes a few possibilities for what a soundwalk might look like, such as:

“Choose a pitch-black night or thick fog and set yourself a goal you want to reach. Your eyes are of little help. Your ears are your main tools for finding your way around. With your voice or any other sound you produce you will be able to tell where you stand in relation to your environment. Take a friend. Or go for an orientation walk in the city, any city, asking people for directions. Besides not getting lost that way, you will also get to know a little of the character of a city by listening to the way people answer. Listen to the sounds and melodies in their voices, listen for accents. Ask all kinds of different people, young and old, men and women, children etc.”

Though these prompts are not as open-ended as the prompts I decided to use, Westerkamp demonstrates that directive scores are useful for bringing participants to tune their attention in particular ways, and her extensive practice as a soundwalker inspired me to conduct this event in the way that I did, even though sound was not the primary focus of the walk.

At the end of the piece, I supply hot beverages (cocoa, cider, tea, coffee) and mild snacks (plain nuts, marshmallows) to the participants. The participants gather and discuss their experiences, with some difficulty due to sleepiness. This exhaustion is a pun on the series title; in this context, exhaustion refers to the mental and somatic exhaustion of having stayed awake all night, or having gotten only a few hours of sleep before waking up for the event. The disparate walkers gather and acknowledge the underlying architecture of their evening collectively, perhaps share a few anecdotes, have some drinks and plain snacks, and experience the increasingly-familiar time

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70 Ibid., accessed April 30, 2017.
together. After the meeting occurs, the piece ends, but recedes into the past as people make their ways back home, still at a relatively strange hour, but with a more populated experience – commuters and travelers have gotten on the road, have begun to make noise, and are no longer absent from the world. The participants return home, begin to either prepare for bed (possibly for the second time that night), or prepare for the day, and the piece slowly fades into memory as other things take attention.

The staging of night walk in the early morning on September 21, 2016 had a strong attendance. Responses included observations about the night in general (how peaceful and pleasant it was), actions people had taken (accidentally pressing the crosswalk button and causing it to beep loudly), and specific things that had been experienced (seeing other participants, hearing nighttime sounds). I had not expected how tired everyone was at that hour, given that approximately half of the group had opted to wake up in the middle of the night for the piece. Those who had woken up were much bleaker, understandably, while those who had stayed awake were more talkative and energetic.

Because the event began at 3:30 AM in every participant’s own home, the event didn’t really feel like it had ever started. The piece seemed to arrive slowly, never quite “happening” but eventually coming into effect as I walked the campus, passing a couple people who were also participating, until it culminated with the group of participants arriving at Memorial Chapel, not as a whole party, but one by one, until we were all there. The piece’s temporality seemed to accelerate towards the arrival at Memorial Chapel, as I ran into continually more participants until everybody was present. We
chatted idly about the event and I encouraged people to take refreshments, until we acknowledged that it was time to leave. I cleaned up with a couple of people and then began the walk home, watching the sky lighten and hearing traffic increase. I came home, the sun rising, and brushed my teeth. I sat in bed and collected my thoughts about the night. The piece passing through me, slowly leaving my body until I fell asleep and left it behind.

The next day, I was late for composition seminar. I enjoyed the irony of feeling the exhaustive shadow of the night before, of my own creation compromising me. Everyone seemed drained, but there was something beautiful about us all having come together earlier that day, at a time outside the domain of classes, sharing the experience of the late evening. We hadn’t had the same experiences – part of what I enjoyed most of all about the piece was that people had vastly different experiences based on the paths they normally walk – but we acted together to ostensibly experience the same thing (the late night), and at the very end, we gathered and shared time, experience, and location together for a short while.

The idea for the gathering came from Professor Kuivila, who pointed out to me that the reason to do a more formalized thesis concert was to get busy people to come together. Initially, we were to meet at the beginning of the piece, but graduate student Jordan Dykstra suggested that I invert the structure and have people converge at the end, as night walk wasn’t about sharing specific experiences with people so much as it was about having individual experiences, and then coming together to acknowledge each individual experience happening contemporaneously.
Inconvenience is an intrinsic part of *night walk*. I liked the idea of having something as important as a thesis event happen beyond the bounds of respectable hours, to have participants be implicated in the event and the energy and disruption that must occur in order to attend the event. One person stayed the night in Middletown, even though they lived in New Haven. Three others drove in from out of town. I prepared hot cider and cocoa. Everyone put effort into the event, and though some of these things were inconvenient, they reveal dedication, or respect, or obligation, or some other thing. Inconvenience places the participants in a new context, which asks for a new sort of attention that perhaps would not be given if the context were more familiar, easier to access. By picking such an inconvenient hour, I ensured that people would either extend the length of their day, or disrupt their sleep schedule. Either way, the result is a group of tired people walking about at an hour when most of them would likely be sleeping, or at the very least, indoors.

Finally, there is the inconvenience of being exhausted the next day, of feeling your body remembering the piece. Again, thinking back to composition seminar, how everyone was drained, but that were we drained together. Feeling so tired, though fleeting and only felt for a day or two at the most, reinforced the memory of the event. This tiredness was the relic of a decision made the night before: the decision to participate in *night walk*. How curious it is that things we do not typically give much space to (3:30 AM) will take over and make us remember them if we are unfortunate enough to do it once. Throughout the morning, I thought about the shadows of the performance – the lingering sleepiness, the cocoa, the marshmallows, the coffee.
stirrers. Things left behind. If my body still feels the echoes of a performance, has the piece really ended?

Street Cleaning Event restaged: North College Lawn Clean-in

An appealing aspect of Japanese performance art collective Hi Red Center’s Street Cleaning Event is its simple score:

Performers are dressed in white coats like laboratory technicians. They go to a selected location in the city. An area of a sidewalk is designated for the event. This area of sidewalk is cleaned very thoroughly with various devices not usually used in street cleaning, such as: dental tools, toothbrushes, steel wool, cotton balls with alcohol, cotton swabs, surgeon’s sponges, tooth picks, linen napkins, etc.  

Hi Red Center originally performed Street Cleaning Event in 1964 on Ginza Namiki Street, in Tokyo, Japan, as a response to the government’s efforts to clean up the city before the 1964 Summer Olympics. The group distributed flyers announcing the cleaning effort, claiming to be sponsored by fake and real organizations, and then descended on the street and scrubbed with fervor (see Appendix B.1 for a photo of the event). The event was repeated on June 11, 1966 at the Grand Army Plaza in New York City through the organizational efforts of George Maciunas.  

Street Cleaning Event is a special experience that draws from the quotidian experience of street cleaning. Hi Red Center’s historical performances make the piece

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72 I believe that the score cited above was written for or after the 1966 New York City staging. This is an unsubstantiated belief, but I have been unable to track the score in particular down outside of the Fluxus Workbook, which leads me to believe it is a post-facto documentation of the performances that had occurred before it.
into an event, with sponsors costumes, props, and a group performing actions together in public, while the act itself is simple – cleaning a sidewalk. This simplicity is complicated by the stipulation that performers use “various devices not usually used in street cleaning.”

In Tokyo, tools included hand brooms and dustpans, napkins, small brushes, and solvents. In New York: solvents and napkins.

Hi Red Center embraces the theatrical, absurd nature of using such poorly suited tools. These implements are too small (toothbrushes), too valuable (linen napkins), and incorrectly matched for the job (industrial solvents). These small, poorly suited tools expand the temporality of the work. The scale of the tools exist in contrast to the expanse of sidewalks (especially in a city as large as Tokyo). This pushes the viewer to imagine the potential scale of this work. How long would it take to clean every sidewalk as meticulously as Hi Red Center cleaned the small plot in Tokyo in 1964?

We can read the act of cleaning as removing that which does not belong. Abrasive tools, solvents, and prying tools are used to remove all foreign objects from the sidewalk, returning it to a “clean” state. But this clean state is culturally and politically determined — what the sidewalk is made of, who uses the sidewalk, and where it is located determine what “clean” means. Depending on the perspective one takes, the application of solvents dirties the public sidewalk further, while the use of dental tools and steel wool can damage the sidewalk with prolonged or violent use. The “clean state” of the sidewalk in Times Square, New York City has a wholly different form than that of a sidewalk in a small town in suburban Wisconsin.

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73 Fluxus Workbook, 49.
Embracing the absurdity of the performance allows the observer to understand cleaning not only as a caring, remedial action, but also as an action that has the potential for destruction. If Hi Red Center were to perform the piece every day for decades, eventually the sidewalks would wear away to nothing. The unsuited implements would eventually destroy the sidewalk itself.\(^74\) This potential temporality, combined with the microscopic scope of the performance (focusing on a small section of sidewalk in a humongous city) provides a criticism of what Satomi Tozawa identifies as the “mechanical banality and covert authoritarianism underlying Japan’s mass capitalist society.”\(^75\) From a governmental perspective, this minute scale is perfectly matched, as it is on the street-level that the government intended its street cleaning campaign to work. Hi Red Center satirizes this scale by alluding to the inefficiency of bureaucracy in how long such a cleaning process would take and how detailed the process becomes with the wrong tools.

The improper tools echo what the performers wear. By wearing lab coats, the performers create a distance between passersby, but also from homeless people who may be on the street, working-class maintenance workers, and businesspeople wearing suits. The garb creates a clinical atmosphere, implying a scientific approach mirrored by the meticulous cleaning of the sidewalk. These technicians will leave no blemish unscrubbed, no gum unstuck, and no hole unpatched. The lab technicians appear as foreigners to street life, as people with sterile authority. By acting with assumed

\(^{74}\) Maybe a better title would be “Street Eroding Event.”

authority, Hi Red Center demonstrates the government’s own assumed authority over
what Japanese streets must look like. Genpei Akasegawa, one of the founders of Hi
Red Center, notes that at one point, a police officer even thanked them for their
cleaning, possibly thinking they were associated with the government’s own efforts.76

Through Hi Red Center’s rigorous performance, Street Cleaning Event moves
from the quotidian to the absurd. This offers a humorous critique on the government’s
demand to clean up the streets for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. By
misunderstanding “cleaning” to be literal, meticulous cleaning, Hi Red Center
highlights the slippage between cleaning as care (what we do for objects that are dirty),
and cleaning as a call to remove foreign bodies from an idealized, “pure” subject.

Hi Red Center’s piece falls under Hannah Higgins’s definition of “primary
experience,” which is experience that one has first-hand, as compared to “second
experience,” which is abstract knowledge, one’s own thoughts about an experience, or
representations of that experience.77 With this in mind, Hi Red Center’s piece functions
as the physical interpretation of the government’s abstract call to “clean up the city.”
Though the government also launched programs to clean up Tokyo, Hi Red Center
responded to this initial, representational call by taking the government for their word
and cleaned the city by hand.

Through researching the work, I realized that restaging this piece in 2016
required an understanding of the political relationships that Hi Red Center was

76 Ibid., 38.
77 Higgins, Fluxus Experience, 36-38.
responding to: a governing force demanding that its subjects become respectable in order to please the gaze of the international community.78 Before I began researching deeper, I thought a literal restaging of the work would function well, but as I learned more, I realized that the work was bound in historical context, and that a better approach would be to perform what might be called an adaptation. Further, I did not want to lose the humor of the work through a reading that focused too heavily on politics — though the work is certainly political, it contains a fair amount of levity and is almost a satire of governmental processes.

With these thoughts in mind, I organized the Wesleyan realization of *Street Cleaning Event* around the scale of the piece. I decided to use personal beauty items such as cotton pads, hairbrushes, mustache and eyelash scissors, toothbrushes, toothpaste, tweezers, and eyebrow combs to clean the North College lawn. These items, which were all minuscule compared to the expanse of sidewalks on the North College lawn, captured the scale-based humor inherent in Hi Red Center’s original event. I also enjoyed the symbolic resonance between “cleaning” and “personal beauty maintenance,” how both actions are taken to maintain appearance, but performed in very different ways and with very different tools.

Part of the power of *Street Cleaning Event* comes from its inconvenience. The passersby who encounter the piece are forced out of their normal routines by this

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78 Sandra Wilson, “Exhibiting a new Japan: the Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and Expo ’70 in Osaka,” in *Historical Research* 85 (2012), 178. Sandra Wilson points out that the Japanese government took the 1964 Olympic games very seriously in order to recuperate their public image, which had been damaged by World War II. She notes that following the Olympic games (and all the programs the government enacted to produce them, including beautifying the city), “the Japanese state could now much more readily be seen as a benign entity devoted to the national interest and the people’s welfare.”
“service.” This interruption brings the passersby closer to examine what has disrupted their flow, bringing them within proximity of performers. Inconvenience allows Hi Red Center to create a platform for their performance, which otherwise might go completely unnoticed were it not for the occupation of public space.

Similarly, I wanted to use inconvenience to draw in observers. However, there are few routes on Wesleyan’s campus that are major thoroughfares that are also easily detoured from. I wanted to provide multiple routing options for passersby for reasons of accessibility. The event itself is not a confrontational one, nor is it about occupying space in a particularly violent way. I decided to stage the piece on North College Lawn, near one of the main sidewalks, which allowed pedestrians to see us working and which allowed us to block some sidewalks but not others. Further, as a way to bring forth some of the politics originally present in Hi Red Center’s piece, I chose North College Lawn because of its historical place on Wesleyan’s campus and its proximity to the president’s house.

Our event, called the North College Lawn Clean-in, was staged on November 2, 2016, beginning at 1:30 PM and ending at 2:30 PM. At 1:30, we gathered at the location and changed into our white coveralls out in the open on the lawn (see Appendix B.1 for photos of the event). When we began, classes were in session so only a few pedestrians walked by for the first twenty minutes of the piece. I began by cleaning a section of lawn using a hairbrush to pull leaves out of the lawn and an eyebrow brush to wipe debris from the surface of those leaves. A couple surprises I encountered: first, I was amazed at how effective using a hairbrush to clean and stylize the grass was. This
isn’t particularly astounding considering that rakes are effectively very large combs for grass, but I was pleased with the fact that something suited for an unrelated task could so easily become the perfect tool for a different situation. Second, I was amazed at how quickly I considered a toothbrush to be “ruined” with dirt after having used it to scrub a bare patch of earth in the lawn. Immediately, the head clogged with dirt, the white bristles stained an earthy brown. The toothbrush is such a specific tool with such a specific purpose, that I could not help imagining using the dirtied brush as an actual toothbrush, of rubbing all that dirt onto my teeth in an effort to get them clean.

Part of the humor of the piece emerges from the tools being so incorrectly suited for the task, of gathering up woefully inadequate objects and using them anyway, and having each tool’s context and semantic meaning being broken along with the tool itself. We can apply Bohman-Kalaja’s theory of playtexts here, noting how a playful orientation towards the rules of how we use these tools results in humorous disasters in which toothbrushes are rubbed in dirt, dead leaves get stuck on hairbrushes, and tweezers become bent and dull after moving pebbles. In the original performance, a playful orientation towards the government’s program results in a serious political critique of systems of power.

While looking for the tools needed for the Clean-in, I kept returning to the object’s intended uses, or our rules for how such tools are used. The objects expanded beyond their quotidian understandings, beyond simply being floss or cotton swabs, and took on the meaning of tools to be used to clean the earth. What could floss be used for in terms of sidewalk cleaning? How effective are tweezers for moving individual
pebbles? When one takes a playful orientation towards objects, these questions can have almost any answer.

Immediately upon beginning the process of cleaning, I was confronted with being unsure of what exactly to do in order to clean the grass. Without clear understandings of what “cleaning” meant for the lawn, I made arbitrary decisions about how to clean it. I decided that grass needed to be brushed in certain patterns with certain tools, while dirt was scrubbed in other ways with other tools. When I moved onto the sidewalk, I felt there were more obvious understandings of what the “clean” state of the sidewalk was. The world expanded (or perhaps contracted) to encompass this sidewalk square, or that square of grass, and these spaces unfolded as I focused on each in turn to clean them. I expected this expansion of detail, but I found the actual experience of pulling out tiny grasses with tweezers, of aligning minuscule pebbles, particularly joyful. I started to understand the event as a celebration of the vastness and beauty of the Earth (indeed, part of my decision to incorporate groundskeeping as a part of the Wesleyan event came about after thinking about how beautiful it would look afterwards, to carve out a bare patch of grass from under a blanket of leaves).

At the end, everybody agreed that the tasks were far more interesting than we had anticipated and that time had moved much faster than we thought it would. Though we were working contemporaneously, everybody was moving independently, occasionally swapping tools, but mostly working on their own to clean their own patches of lawn. Admittedly, my understanding of this work is immensely privileged by class. The fact that I do not have to do strenuous physical labor every day makes
this labor much more of a hobby, which allows me to relish in things that, when repeated, may become untenable, such as kneeling on concrete, repetitive wrist motions, and crawling on all fours. The decision to call this event a “clean-in” comes from “teach-ins” events held as protests on university campuses to spread awareness or information about a particular event or situation.79 Calling it a “clean-in,” as opposed to an “event” as in the original performance by Hi Red Center, felt more appropriate considering the context, but it also removed some of the intensity or seriousness around the clean-in. I was not holding the event in protest of a particular policy or action, and it felt melodramatic to stage an intervention without a clear message or demand.

As people watched us work, I handed out flyers I had made prior to the event (see Appendix B.1 for a scan of the flyer). These flyers proclaimed that we were the “Wesleyan Student Groundskeeping Club,” operating in partnership with the Sustainability Office, which manages Wesleyan’s grounds, and the Wesleyan Green Fund, which is used to purchase infrastructure that will make the campus more eco-friendly. To legitimize our operation further, I fabricated the “Clean Campus Initiative,” and noted that our event was one of a number of events operating within it. Here, as with the “clean-in” form, “Wesleyan Student Groundskeeping Club” served to undercut some of the seriousness of the event – clubs are often light, fun, and extracurricular.

79 The “teach-in” itself comes from the concept of the “sit-in,” which is an act of civil disobedience in which protestors occupy a space and refuse to leave.
The responses were positive: after explaining to observers that we were cleaning the sidewalk and restoring order following storms earlier in the week, one person thanked us. Another person asked us about our choice of tools, and I explained that we were beautifying the Earth. Overall, most seemed to understand and share in the humor, but they took us seriously. People avoided the patch of sidewalk where we were cleaning, but often stopped to watch us working. In the score, the objects listed are all hand-held, small objects, which imply a small scope. They are also objects that most consumers can obtain at a hardware store or drug store. Additionally, they are all small, hand-held objects which are easily unseen if one does not observe closely. The absurdity of the event, the spectacular nature of seeing five people in white coveralls crawling on the campus lawn, certainly drew in passersby, but the delicate and precise use of tiny tools to perform the cleaning helped to hold attention and to bring people to ask questions.

I am curious to know how much being present on Wesleyan’s campus affected reception of the event. Certainly, if the event were performed elsewhere in Middletown, there would be a different set of observers, but also a different set of historical contexts being entered. Wesleyan’s history as a progressive stronghold and as a place with a higher tolerance for weirdness leads me to believe that the event’s reception was tamer than it might have been if we had just descended on Main Street in Middletown and

80 “Because it’s worth it” became my favorite tongue-in-cheek reason for using beauty supplies on the Earth, referencing the L’Oréal brand of beauty products. I was the only member of the group that spoke to the public, and beyond the flyer, there were no further interactions between the public and us. The flyers were somewhat understated, but I enjoyed this because my personal explanation of the performance allowed me to improvise and refine the idea with each successive explanation.
started cleaning sidewalks. Given the differences between Tokyo in 1962 and the US in 2016, we probably would not have had a police officer thanking us for what we were doing.

**Place in Exhaustion**

*Place in Exhaustion* is a process-based piece. The score is quite short:

Move the furniture in one room to another room. Maintain the position of each piece of furniture in relation to one another. Pay special attention to small things: orientations each piece of furniture may have, where the legs of furniture are, any interesting non-furniture objects such as litter, leaves, or other things out of place, etc.

In the version of *Place in Exhaustion* realized on November 15, 2016, the furniture of Music Studios lobby was moved to the World Music Hall, then repositioned in the precise configuration it had in its original locale. The piece was inspired by Georges Perec’s *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, in which Perec sits at Place-Saint-Sulpice in Paris and writes down everything he observes while there.\(^8\)\(^1\) He primarily notes things he sees, but also the occasional snippet of conversation, what he is eating or drinking, or how the weather feels. His notes are at times impartial, humorous, and pensive, in that he is trying to conduct a pseudoscientific study, but is also aware of his own subjectivity as driving his experience.

Reading *An Attempt* is almost like sitting beside Perec in Paris, watching people go by with him. Perec’s supposed impartiality necessarily fails — he cannot record

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everything there is to see, hear, feel, and experience, and the work becomes oddly personal through what he does communicate. In a work that seems to gesture at objectivity, Perec is conspicuously present throughout almost all of it. Sheringham posits that *An Attempt* is less about objectivity than about “the lived experience of an individual subject seeking to apprehend a dimension of his own reality that is inseparable from his participation in the wider currents of the everyday,” implying that Perec’s loud subjectivity is precisely the work.82 Perec, writing about what drives his focus on the quotidian, makes a call for us to “found at last our own anthropology, one that will speak about us … Not the exotic, but the endotic.”83 For Perec, he must be unavoidably present in his observational writing on the everyday, because it is him who is experiencing that which he is documenting. Placing himself so unavoidably in the work makes the subjectivity inherent in writing about the quotidian visible; Perec’s understanding of his work as locally anthropic makes his impulse to place himself in the work clear, because on some level, the work is about him.

The final document, the manuscript itself, intrigued me as something that occupied a strange space. It was the transcription Perec took of an experience he had, but it could also function as the point of generation for a new work that treated *An Attempt* as a script for a performance. The practice that Perec had outlined in *An Attempt* was quite interesting to me. By performing a series of simple initial actions (observation and recording), Perec generated a document that could then be used to

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83 Ibid., 250.
create subsequent works. I decided to emulate Perec’s strategy. I would observe aspects of Wesleyan and transcribe them, in service of creating a performance piece that would realize these transcriptions in real time.

*Place in Exhaustion* was initially conceived of as a transposition of different aspects of spaces I experience at Wesleyan. I intended to layer parts of perception (sight, sound, smell, etc.) from different spaces, but as I began to work on the idea, I worried that it would be too unwieldy, too multifarious. I wanted to undercut my “kitchen sinking” of my compositional process.84 I decided to strip away everything except the moving of the furniture.

The act of transposing the furniture from one space into another has several parts: measuring the configuration of the furniture in the Music Studios lobby; drafting a blueprint of the layout of the furniture based on those measurements; moving the furniture from Music Studios lobby to World Music Hall; using the blueprint to position the furniture precisely as it had been; and finally, moving the furniture back to the Music Studio lobby. At various stages in the development of the piece, I realized it was more involved than I had initially anticipated. “Moving the furniture from one space into another” became my way of explaining what I was doing, but it did not capture most of the piece.

I measured the furniture of Music Studios Lobby a few days prior to the performance. I completed a series of test measurements that allowed me to refine my

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84 “Kitchen sinking” is my term to describe the impulse to include too many elements in a composition so that the work becomes difficult to manage. It comes from the idiom of “everything but the kitchen sink,” meaning to include everything imaginable.
practice. I discovered that a given piece of furniture’s position needed to be measured multiple times from various points to determine angle and distance, since I only used straightedges to measure the space. I couldn’t measure angles reliably and needed to triangulate the position of legs. These measurements were transcribed into a set of blueprints, which I would later use to recreate the exact positioning of the furniture (see Appendix B.2 for scans of the created blueprints).

When it came time to move the furniture for the performance, the other graduate students and I found that moving the furniture from the lobby filled the space with an eerie emptiness. There were people working in the lobby when we came, and while we didn’t kick anybody out, they understood that we would eventually take all the furniture and decided to leave on their own. We reduced access to a public space that many students use for studying, rehearsal, and relaxing. We joked about Public Safety coming by while we moving the furniture, thinking we were stealing it. What was left was an emptied space, normally inhabited by the public, reduced to walls and what could not be moved.

After we moved the furniture into World Music Hall, we found it was necessary to arrange the furniture on stage purposefully to prevent legible spaces from forming, to prevent the audience from reading any part of the furniture arrangements as a set. The goal was not to create a set, but instead to create the implication that furniture was “out of place” and illegible, as the point of the performance was to take the space in disarray and to make sense out of it (see Appendix B.2 for photos of the event before and after).
At the beginning of the performance, the first action I took was to draw the outline of the music studio lobby’s walls. Then, I started in one quadrant and ordered the furniture, then moved on from quadrant to quadrant, ending with the corner where the couches and the tree sat, which are the most notable pieces of furniture in the lobby. In the program, I invited the audience to participate in the work by asking them to “feel free to watch me work” and to “feel free to move around the space,” calling the event an “installation-in-progress” as opposed to “performance” or “concert.” However, most of the audience remained seated, with a few members walking to the sides of the space, and three or four audience members actively wandering through my workspace. Three audience members sat on chairs during the performance, though they were chairs that had not been measured yet.

After the performance, asking audience members about how they felt about the space, many of them talked about how the first action I took was to create a space by drawing the chalk outline of the walls of the Music Studio lobby, and how that constructed “my space” versus “audience space.” A few audience members spoke about not wanting to disrupt what I had been doing, but talked about being curious as to what would happen if they did sit in a chair that had already been positioned. I had no plan of what to do if that were to happen, because I was focused on the reduction of the score into the simplest possible set of actions. I wanted to let the audience do what it would do, as part of the piece was seeing what exactly the audience would be made to do in response to the piece.
The audience’s unwillingness to interact with the furniture was partially because of my clear intention of using every object that I had brought into the room. Further, the fact that I was working alone may have forbidden the audience from interacting with the furniture or myself. Perhaps the dynamic would have been different if I were working with others; the audience may have felt comfortable touching the furniture if it seemed like positioning the pieces was a community effort. My decision to perform the work solo came out of a desire to somewhat restage Perec’s piece. Though Perec’s work is grounded in a rich community of writers and creatives (Sheringham notes that Perec was likely visited by his friend Paul Virilio while observing Place Saint-Sulpice), his observational techniques are executed in thoughtful, focused solitude, even when Perec is in a public square.85

I was not thinking of the audience as a consequential part, even though it was necessitated given the genre of “graduate thesis concert”. Part of the reasoning behind calling it an “installation-in-progress” was because I wanted to encourage the audience to move when I was doing minuscule adjustments, so that they could better see what I was doing. I did not account for the fact that when I drew a chalk box on the stage, I was effectively creating a space that few would dare violate.86

The performance was entirely about creating such spaces. Once the performance had ended, audience members moved through the reconstructed lobby space, walking through the “door” as they likely often did in the actual Music Studios

85 Sheringham, Everyday Life, 270.
86 It should be noted that those who did choose to cross the chalk line were people who have previously demonstrated an interest in subverting the arbitrary expectations that line-drawing makes.
building, gauging how familiar the space felt, how close to the original it seemed to come. One person sat at a table for a moment, staring ahead, while another “entered” from where the door would be and walked along the hallway, possibly as they did every day.

By going through the process of meticulous measurement, I surrendered the ability to sense the space outside of my interaction with it, so I was not able to feel the reconstructed space as anything other than four quadrants of furniture, relating to the blueprints I had drawn. Certainly, in some part of me, it resonated as correct, striking areas of my memory I associated with the Music Studios lobby, but mostly it had ceased to be that space and had become my own means of analyzing it. To see the audience recognizing the space and interacting with it helped reassure me that the original space had appeared in World Music Hall in some way.

Just beyond the space I created was the emptied Music Studios lobby, which many audience members talked about as a drastic and stark part of the piece. Many spoke of passing the lobby on their way to the performance, noticing the furniture missing, how different the space felt. Some spoke of passing the space after the performance, knowing the furniture was a hundred feet away, in the exact same configuration elsewhere, while the lobby stood bare. I could not resist walking through the empty lobby, taking in the space’s new shape, feeling the weight of what was missing. The furniture had sat so long that there were indents in the floor where many of the pieces regularly sat. Fellow graduate student Omar Fraire talked about feeling as though the space had been ransacked. For me, the space evoked the sense of moving,
of a space that once had meaning through what had filled it, but which now carried meaning only through absence.

The stark emptiness of the Music Studios lobby was disorienting. Sara Ahmed, a scholar who writes about cultural structures such as race, gender, and sexuality, notes in *Queer Phenomenology* that disorientation “can be a violent feeling,” involving “failed orientations” when “bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach.” When disorientation happens, it is because “such objects ‘point’ somewhere else or they make what is ‘here’ become strange.”\(^{87}\) The lobby was disorienting because the comfortable, welcoming furniture that normally resided there was missing, and the lobby itself was no longer “oriented towards” gathering, but instead towards transience.

For Ahmed, tracing orientation as a structure is useful because of the way the concept of orientation involves attention directed to and by objects that appear in our lives. In the context of *Place in Exhaustion*, the music studios lobby became disorienting because the objects that are always present, objects that have led us to construct a space from them, were no longer present. Reinforcing this disorientation is that these objects were almost all chairs and tables, all of which are oriented towards people who seek to use them. These objects “extend the body,” to paraphrase Ahmed above, by providing a surface to write on, or a place to sit. These objects make human habitation of the lobby space comfortable and welcoming because of their own orientations toward humans: how the chairs and tables are constructed to accept bodies

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\(^{87}\) Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 160.
on and at them, how the couches form a square around a coffee table to designate a meeting space. Because the body has lost these objects, the space loses its comfort, as well as objects that function in other ways to construct the lobby space.

The lobby became a shadow of the performance space, literally the negative space of the staging occurring a hundred fifty feet to the south in World Music Hall. This inversion of space occurred even on the level of action: while there was more action than normal happening in World Music Hall, there was a deficit of action in the Music Studios lobby through the dismantling of the public space. Here again, the question of inconvenience appears. The campus public was unable to use the music studios lobby for its conventional purpose. In *night walk* and *Street Cleaning Event*, inconvenience brings the one experiencing it towards the event, but in *Place in Exhaustion*, inconvenience appears as the disorientation the space creates. There was nothing left to reorient those inconvenienced towards my event, nor anything left to provide a normalizing force in the lobby, to assuage the evacuation of the space. People who were unaware of my event were able to experience it in a special way, as the audience knew where the furniture was. Though members of the audience talked about how strange the lobby looked, not even they could experience the disorientation that the lobby offered to those who knew nothing of the event.

*remnant // residue*

Keeping with my efforts to avoid traditional concert settings for my thesis events, I decided to create and install a new generative sound work for my spring
semester thesis event. *remnant // residue* is a house-wide, eight-channel audio installation that was premiered in the Samuel Wadsworth Russell House on February 25, 2017. The piece uses unconventional speaker placement to diffuse sound throughout each room. By hiding speakers under tables, in fireplaces, behind couches, and in the attic and basement, the equipment no longer operates as the focal points of sound, which reverberates around the furniture and off of the walls and floor, taking indirect paths to the listener’s ears (see Appendix B.3 for a floorplan of the speaker layout). These reflections impart the sound with information about the room. Such information allows us to sense a surprising number of details about the space — the size of the room, whether the floor is carpeted or wooden, whether there are people present, etc. *remnant // residue* explores the transmission of such spatial information through sound.

I developed the two modules of *remnant // residue* with the experience of sound in space kept in mind. The first module consists of short beeps in the frequency range of approximately 600 to 1200 Hz. These beeps are panned randomly to each of the eight speakers. As time progresses, the beeps can be augmented by or replaced with bursts of white noise. These bursts of white noise help to articulate the space each speaker is in, similar to how an impulse response activates a space through a sine wave sweep or a pulse. Over time, the tempo of the beeps slowly increases and decreases sinusoidally, expanding and contracting the sense of rhythmic activity. Occasionally, the beeps may speed up or slow down out of tempo in order to create variety in the
texture. When the beeps slow down, the sonic space opens up and the reverberation of each beep throughout the house becomes quite clear.88

What I found most satisfying about the beep module was how well the beeping and hissing meshed with the unconventional speaker placement to highlight the space. As I watched listeners moving throughout the space, they often lingered in doorways, where bleed from the neighboring rooms was strongest. Standing on the threshold between rooms, the listeners could hear the difference of each space most clearly. The beep module created an interesting sense of locality within each room — in most rooms, the high frequencies of the white noise made it to the threshold, perhaps just beyond, while the beeping transmitted quite effectively throughout the whole house. The loudest, clearest beeps came from the speaker that was concealed in whatever room the listener was in, but the other speakers, beeping in the distance, were still quite audible and created an excellent sense of the sounding of the rest of the house. I applied no reverb in the composition of the project. Diffusing the sound unconventionally throughout the space supplied the house’s own natural reverb, which obscured the crispness of distant speakers. Because this crispness was undercut, the closest speaker to the listener seemed to be “in focus” while the listener was in that room.

The beep module functions as a foil to the drone module, which is a series of sine waves built on top of a 75 Hz almost-triangle-wave drone. My inspiration for this module came from Convolution Reverb, an album released by German sound designer

88 Many thanks to Paula Matthusen, who suggested the presence of these spaces in order to hear the echoes themselves.
Dominic Ratzlaff on Lagerstätte Records. Convolution Reverb has twelve pieces, each of which consists of drones that shift and evolve over time. To produce these tracks, Ratzlaff would record himself playing an instrument and then use that recording as an impulse response for the digital convolution reverb technique. Lagerstätte Records writes, “the end result is a set of both enigmatic and profoundly moving drones — melancholy [sic], starkly beautiful and as intimate as a time-worn living room.” What I found particularly compelling about these pieces is that though they are drone music, they are dynamic and slowly change shape over time, creating an atmosphere that has a definite character, but which is distinct at any given moment in time.

The module consists of nineteen waveforms, each of which fades in and out at its own rate, creating a slowly morphing drone added together from each of these waveforms. I assigned each speaker four waves: the base of the drone, the 75 Hz oscillator, and three other, higher drones. There was no panning between speakers in this module; instead, the only motion present comes from the low drone fading in and out, leaving the upper partials behind to twinkle in the absence of the lower sound. The drone module engaged with the space through each room’s resonant properties, shaping the long tones through the inherent resonant qualities of each space. Certain rooms, such as the kitchen, had very few dampening qualities, and the high frequencies from the kitchen speaker were audible in many rooms, while the conference room’s

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80 Ibid., accessed on March 1, 2017.
91 Again, many thanks to Paula Matthusen for the suggestion to bring the bass drone in and out slowly, so that the higher partials could speak.
carpet and dense furnishing caused almost all frequencies coming from the speaker in that room to be absorbed. Other rooms, like the long northern room that the university uses as a presentation space, effectively resonated with the bass drone while the higher partials were far less prominent in comparison.

How the audience members interacted with the space was quite interesting. During almost every drone module, listeners were likely to find somewhere to sit and listen, closing their eyes, and becoming engrossed in the shifting drone. I placed chairs amply throughout the space in a non-disruptive way that was idiomatic for each room, which encouraged audience members to sit as they pleased. There were no restrictions or recommendations on engaging with the space, beyond calling the format an “installation,” which implied (among other things) that the audience should move throughout the space, to “visit” the space.

Though I envisioned the installation as portable to any space with at least eight rooms, I envisioned it as an installation specific for Russell House. Though not explicitly stated, the work had its origins in the creepy oldness of the building. There are many rumors on campus that Russell House is haunted (for example, see the university promotional video that interviews public safety staff about creepy things that

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92 Consequently, the conference room felt the most intimate of the spaces in the house. It was the farthest from the entrance, was the most dampened, and the most heavily furnished. It was not accessible from the main foyer, unlike almost all of the other rooms, and is least-often used as a public space when the house is rented out. All of these factors contributed to its removed, intimate feeling.
93 The antique couches were slightly imposing to some audience members, who asked me if they were allowed to sit on them. I said that they were, but that given how poorly maintained they were, they might not want to sit on them anyway.
94 I say “visit” instead of “explore” because of the timidity with which many audience members moved throughout the house. Even though Russell House is an academic building, few faculty, staff, and students have had time to explore it fully, and like all academic buildings, it comes with a set of etiquette that few often violate (for example, to not go snooping).
have happened to them in Russell House). The house was finished in 1830, commissioned by Samuel Russell Wadsworth, who made his fortune as an opium trader in Canton, China. The history of the house, coupled with its antique furniture, architecture, and generally under-utilized nature all contribute to the vague spookiness that pervades it. Even though I did not explicitly speak about having thought about the creepiness, talking with a few audience members revealed that the installation transmitted this feeling anyhow.

Many audience members tried to look for the source of the sounds, but failed to locate them. The speakers were well hidden – I used extra cable length to lead them along walls, doorframes, and under rugs so that the cabling would be minimally intrusive, and the speakers themselves were tucked behind and under furniture where possible, with only a few speakers being placed explicitly in the open. Though I would have liked to hide all of the equipment, the few speakers that were not hidden, such as the one in the kitchen, led visitors to realize that they had not seen other speakers. This made the hidden speakers even more effective, as some viewers then tried to find were the speakers were.

I was interested in how the house worked to project and contain the sound in different ways. As one entered and left the space, one had to adjust to not only the

97 To paraphrase how undergraduate May Klug explained this in a discussion afterwards, “It makes sense! Spooky sounds, spooky house.”
attenuation of outside noise, but also the presence of the installation itself. The piece articulated the house’s acoustics, which served as a contrast to the acoustics of the outside world. Some audience members reported this as disorienting, noting that the house’s whole acoustic seemed to be activated, as compared to when the house is silent and the space is barely articulated by the opening and closing of the front door.

In retrospect, much of my efforts in remnant // residue aimed to disorient the audience, whether through hidden speakers, large-scale spatialization, or through direct cuts in material meant to startle listeners. As Sara Ahmed notes in Queer Phenomenology, disorientation can be a useful tool for “enjoying the pleasures of deviation.”98 In remnant // residue, the deviation comes from articulating the house’s inherent reverberant space in ways that one is not generally accustomed to. When sounds seem to appear from nowhere, or when houses seem to fill with untraceable sound, we lose our bearings and need to reorient ourselves to the unfamiliar sensations we experience.

The idea of a house-wide installation is not new. Previous works by composers and sound artists like La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela (Dream House) and Maryanne Amacher (Music for Sound-Joined Rooms) laid the groundwork for large-scale architectural installations, and these artists in particular affected my approach to the genre. Dream House occupies one floor of a building in Manhattan. In each room, tone generators play precisely tuned sine waves chosen by Young to create acoustic interactions with the space and psychoacoustic interactions with listeners. These

98 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 166.
complex interactions, writes art theorist Brandon LaBelle, allow *Dream House* to create “the space of its auditory occurrence – that is to say, sound and architecture are no longer separate but interpenetrate to form a single entity, ‘creating its own dimensions moment by moment.’”99 By choosing frequencies that resonate in the space, as well as within what Maryanne Amacher calls “the third ear,” space, sound, and listener are brought close to unity through resonance across different bodies, be they architectural or biological.100 With Marian Zazeela’s light installations, the aural and physical sensory information meets visual sensory information to create a whole-body experience that helps to unify the listener with the space.

Amacher’s most-noted work in her *Music for Sound-Joined Rooms* series involved taking over an old Victorian mansion in St. Paul for a week to fill it with loudspeakers for the 1980 New Music America event happening there.101 Amacher brought in many loudspeakers and placed them meticulously throughout the house to create what Alvin Curran calls “an unforgettable drama of roaring, rumbling and shingle-shearing sounds that moved like mad armies of spectrally-filtered ghosts looking for food under every strut and beam and basement drain.”102 *Music for Sound-

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100 Amacher’s “third ear” concept is a psychoacoustic phenomenon in which specific frequencies heard by the ear cause the ear to emit its own sounds. Through careful selection of frequencies, the listener can perceive these otoacoustic emissions as tones which only they can hear (LaBelle, 173).


*Joined Rooms* leads visitors through the house, through constructed visual scenes, and develops an aural narrative through this directed motion.

LaBelle cites Amacher’s own reflections on *Music for Sound-Joined Rooms* and how her conceptualization of architecture changed after the initial project: “An entire building or series of rooms provides a stage for the sonic and visual sets of my installations. Architecture especially articulates sonic imaging in ‘structure-borne’ sound, magnifying color and spatial presence as the sound shapes interact with structural characteristics of the rooms before reaching the listener.” LaBelle suggests that Amacher’s work is “positioned against architecture rather than within” it, because Amacher’s sounds are located “in adjoining rooms, along a hallway, [...] travelling through walls, floors, corridors, and ceilings.” Though Amacher’s work involves resonance in much that same way that Young’s work does, Amacher seeks to use the spatiality of the house itself to create narrative, an idea that she calls “sound characters.”103

Both Young’s and Amacher’s works have left clear imprints on *remnant // residue*, both in materials of composition and in philosophical approach to dealing with the space of the house. In terms of the sonic materials that went into the work, Young’s careful tunings set a precedent that I followed in the drone section of *remnant // residue*. Each sine wave that constitutes the drone has a specific relationship to the bass oscillator’s root pitch and harmonics. Though my drone does not change pitch over time, various upper harmonics fade in and out throughout the space aperiodically,

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103 LaBelle, *Background Noise*, 172-173.
which creates textures that have similar character, but which are always different sonically.

Amacher’s discussion of how architecture colors sound outlines my entire initial approach to *remnant // residue*, and LaBelle’s assessment of Amacher’s approach being “against architecture” is particularly astute considering the positioning of the speakers designed to maximize reflection within the space. Further, Amacher’s attention to detail, for which she was well known, influenced my own approach to working with Russell House. Though I prepared my sounds beforehand, once I arrived in the space, I played with speaker placement to find the locations that would maximize reflection and still allow the speakers to be hidden. Whereas Amacher’s work brings architecture and sound together to lead visitors through the space, my approach in *remnant // residue* was to localize different sounds in different parts of the house, so that visitors would hear different sounds in different rooms, all occurring at once, to demonstrate each room’s acoustic properties.

Through my engagements with visitors to the house, it seems that the installation held their attention. In a preliminary discussion with sound artist Liz Phillips prior to the installation, there was concern that the temporality of the piece would be too expansive and that most visitors would not hear both sections of the piece. In practice, however, visitors seemed incredibly willing to give the house their time, with many visitors finding a place to sit and experience the space. Professor Paula Matthusen once told me a story about showing students Amacher’s *Head Rhythm 1*, in which loud, high-pitched tones cause the ear to generate sound on its own. Paula played
the piece for the students, and many immediately recoiled at the volume and the pitch. Nevertheless, as the piece progressed, their ears began to sing on their own, and their faces switched to wonder. By the end of the piece, they asked to hear it again. While *remnant // residue* did not seek to play with visitors’s ears in this way, I was flattered to see how people reacted to the piece and to how much time many were willing to give to it.
Conclusion

Though this study has been on the quotidian, there have been various strands of thought that reappear now and again, strands of thought which I felt deserved more attention or time than I could afford to give to them. One of the tricky parts about working with the quotidian is that it is easy to want to do too much with it, to include too much in order to try to capture a larger sense of it. It expands, if you let it. I find it important to acknowledge these strands of thought that seem local, for me, so that I may come back to them when I get the chance.

First, running parallel to the quotidian is phenomenology, as invoked through the thinking of Sara Ahmed and Jennifer Ana Gosetti-Ferencei. The experience of the everyday cannot exist without the framework in which experience itself exists, and I am not yet satisfied that I know enough about phenomenology to begin to consider how the everyday and phenomenology interact. My interest in phenomenology also helps to explain the presence of remnant // residue, a work that is less about the quotidian than about our sensory apparatuses and how we feel them. Similarly, Pauline Oliveros’s work belongs heavily to both the phenomenological and the quotidian.

Second, and increasingly on my mind, is how community functions in our lives. As acknowledged by Blue Gene Tyranny and Henri Lefebvre, our interactions with the communities that we are a part of heavily informs not only the art we make, but who we are and how we act. As I have become familiar with Surrealism, the Situationists, Fluxus, Oulipo, and now those who study the everyday, I noticed the trend of small communities that formed and shared meals, experiences, ideas, and work with one
another. But with the quotidian has come a new way of thinking about such communal activities. These groups organized everyday life into lives worth living by surrounding themselves with like-minded people, or at least with people who provided rich difference that spurred new works, new platforms for understanding, and new ideas.

Third, and related to community, is the concept of caring. Within these communities is a certain level of commitment to one another, to see each other do well and to care for one another. Two notable examples are Fluxus meals, in which many members of Fluxus would gather to share a meal, and how Paul Virilio visited Georges Perec while Perec was writing *An Attempt*. These simple actions are not only demonstrations of how these communities mattered to one another, but are described in the works that these communities developed. There are multitudes of Fluxus works that deal with food and communal eating, and Perec explicitly writes Virilio’s into *An Attempt* as one of these visits. Sheringham notes “the quotidian […] names this threatened and priceless sense of connection, which binds persons, acts, histories, and communities to each other, not in any fixed or predetermined pattern, but in that constantly-fluid becoming that Perec called ‘émergence.’”\(^\text{104}\) Caring and community necessarily appear regularly in works on the quotidian – these sustaining constructions make up part of the quotidian, so their overt appearance should not come as a surprise.

My own recognition of caring and community in my life has developed through my studying of the everyday. Though this study began in order to describe work I found compelling, it has enriched my experience of life beyond anything that I could have

\(^{104}\text{Sheringham, }{}^{\text{Everyday Life,}} \text{ 290.}\)
expected. I am eager to continue studying, working with, and thinking about the everyday, in anticipation of what else it will bring me. I will close with the words of Georges Perec (translated by Sheringham), who you may remember called on us “to found at last our own anthropology, one that will speak about us … Not the exotic, but the endotic,” who asked us to examine our lives and report on what we found. Perec was one of my entry points into the everyday, and his work continues to inspire me to create, examine, and write more. Here, Perec writes in an issue of his journal *Cause commune*, describing how to undertake “an investigation of everyday life at every level, in its folds and caverns that are usually disdained or repressed:”

“Interrogate what seems so self-evident that we have forgotten where it came from… Describe your street. Describe another. Compare. Make a list of what’s in your pockets, in your handbag. Ask yourself about the provenance, use, and likely future of each object you take out. Question your teaspoons!”

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Appendices

Appendix A.1

Fig. 1 -- A ballerina and tuba player appear on screen, but not in physical reality.\(^\text{106}\)

Fig. 2 -- A trunk full of documents telling the stories of Jewish people deported from the train station in Kassel, Germany.\(^\text{106}\)

Appendix A.2

Fig. 3 – Sam Ashley (left) and Blue Gene Tyranny (right) in “Taking Out the Garbage,” scene 1. Note the magenta frame overlaid on the still.107

Fig. 4 – Blue Gene Tyranny (left) and Sam Ashley (right) successfully taking out the garbage in scene 2. Note the color circles overlaid indicating previous failures, and the orange asterisk indicating this round’s success.107

Appendix B.1

Fig. 5 – A photograph from the 1964 Street Cleaning Event staged by Hi Red Center. Note the sign that reads “Be clean!” and the use of napkins, hand brushes, and other small tools.¹⁰⁸

Fig 6 – Graduate student Omar Fraire (left) and myself (right) participating in the North College Lawn Clean-in. Note the tiny eyebrow bush (in Omar’s right hand), and the toothbrushes, hairbrushes, and cotton pad (left). Photo credit: Lucero Alonso.

Wesleyan Student Groundskeeping Club presents the
Clean Campus Initiative
in partnership with the Sustainability Office
and the Wesleyan Green Fund.

North College Lawn Clean-In
1:30 PM, Wednesday, November 2, 2016

“No leaf unturned,
no blade misplaced,
no pebble unbothered,
to clean our green space!”
-- Henry David Thoreau
Poems of Nature

Fig. 7 – Flyer distributed at the North College Lawn Clean-in.
Appendix B.2

Fig. 8 – A view of the empty lobby.

Fig. 9 (left) – Another view of the empty lobby.
Fig. 10 – The stage of World Music Hall with the furniture from the lobby.
Fig. 11 – The completed Music Studios lobby layout in World Music Hall.

Fig. 12 – Blueprint showing the measurement of the stage in World Music Hall.
Fig. 13 – Blueprint showing the measurements of the Music Studios lobby. Note the notations, T1-4 that indicate where the tables were positioned, as well as the position of the garbage can to the right of the door, and the recycling bin to the left of the door.
Fig. 14 – Blueprint showing the detailed layout of each of the tables and chairs. Table bases are notated as ‘x’s and chair feet are notated as circles with dots in their centers. Cross-reference with Fig. 13 for overall positioning in Music Studios lobby. Note detail items on Table 4: the chess set and the sandwich container.
Fig. 15 – Blueprint showing the detailed layout of each of the couches. Note detail items: plant stand that holds the tree (left) and the plastic fork (center) underneath Couch 1.
Appendix B.3

Fig. 16 – The layout of the speakers in Russell House.
Works Cited


