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# A Walking Practice: Lessons in Transience

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# A Walking Practice

## Lessons in Transience

### **The Abstract**

4/9/2020. It was ten years today that the first earthquake shook Ōtautahi awake at 4.35 am. In the light of the day that followed neighbours gathered to look at fallen fences and cracked roads. The second earthquake killed one hundred and eighty-five of us and shattered the lives of thousands. It is impossible to list the myriad ways an event such as this impacts one's life just as it is impossible to measure grief and on-going trauma; and it is proving impossible to forget; for me, for Matti McEachen's mum and others. On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, Matti ran from his tattoo studio at 593 Colombo Street only to be crushed by a falling wall which had been deemed safe after the September 2010 earthquake. It had been yellow stickered, indicating relative stability. Ironically, the other side of the wall had been deemed unsafe and was red stickered, such was the ludicrousness of those times. Matti was one of many but the only one for his mother, father and sister. Before the quake, he had spoken to me about his love for his mother. I can't even remember how it came up, and I wish I had told her but now it's too late. She is understandably full of wrath and sorrow and may never recover from the death of her son. So, this is in memory of Matti whom I barely knew, and others I knew not at all.

### **The Beginning**

I acknowledge the earthquakes as formative in terms of my art practice and life in general as they happened at a time when other milestones were being reached in my personal life; my mother had been diagnosed with a stage 4 cancer and my children were thinking about leaving home. It was a period of questioning, adjustment and re-negotiation that was dramatically pushed to the fore and suddenly required urgent resolution. Cataclysmic events have the effect of sharpening one's focus and suddenly an entire city had to focus on survival; it drew us together and it forced us apart. Like tens of thousands of others, I was cast adrift from my life; unmoored and floating in this new reality. One morning years later, I cycled down Cashel Street and looked across the river at the new town and could not see where my place was; I did not recognise the buildings nor did I see how I had chosen to live reflected in the glass and steel. I started collecting bits of ephemera, small things which seemed as lost as I felt and which I recognised. This exegesis looks at the way those objects have become placeholders for memory in lieu of demolished buildings and lost people, and is about coming to terms with deterritorialisation after a cataclysmic, reshaping event because when the army moved off the streets and we were allowed back into the city, I could not find my memories; they had somehow been demolished with the places I knew and without something for them to attach themselves to they drifted away. A memory needs a spark to ignite it and the blank spaces and cordoned off places effectively shut memory down. Everything that had been permanent was seen to not be so; buildings of "significance" were deemed "dungers" by MP Gerry Brownlee and gleefully slated for demolition (Chapman para 5). I almost felt that Ōtautahi (Christchurch) needed a new name

because it had become such a different city; overnight almost, the Ōtautahi that I knew had moved into the past and was now only available through the lens of time and past documentation. But what did that mean for those of us who chose to stay? The first thing for me was not to refer to Ōtautahi by its English name. That place was gone and with it a faux and unconsented hybridism that the dual name implied. As I recognise the earthquakes as being pivotal forces in shaping my current situation I also acknowledge tangata whenua, as any question of belonging in a European sense is tainted by our occupation of this place, and any notion of belonging that I try to establish is done in the knowledge that others have been unseated for me to have a place. There is an unease attached to the idea of belonging here and a feeling of impermanency, which is reflected in the objects I find as I walk in the city.

My exegesis discusses a practice of finding place through walking and collecting detritus which speaks of the people with whom I co-exist and walk alongside. I have found a way to reassert my place in my own life, and in the life of my city by walking the streets and re-engaging with this place, step by step. My exegesis also looks at how what has been termed behaviour “verging on obsession” (Keane 6) is just another way of acknowledging the small moments, like the first coffee of the day, and bringing some gravitas to rituals performed inside the home, a private performance, and the repetition that makes them so affirming. My work also looks at how much I feel my identity is tied to place and belonging, and where ownership fits in that contentious duo of ideas.

The objects I find are evidence of the ways in which people live in this city and by collecting their detritus I am linking myself to them and acknowledging our shared paths and experiences. The notion of shared paths is another way to acknowledge that others walk or have walked where we walk. Our footsteps are not the first, nor will they be the last as we are as transient as the objects I find and as transitory as the monuments to wealth and status that were toppled in the quakes. People do not seem to have learned from that though; monolithic builds continue to rise and block the sun as tributes to prosperity and power. I cannot identify with those edifices but recognise something of myself and my life in the objects I stumble across. They seem more authentic and as they are not intentionally placed seem truer evidence of the people who live here. I view them as more real and honest because they are there without an agenda unlike the odes to consumerism that have been erected and will stand as monuments to glory seeking egos for years to come; unless another earthquake flattens them. The lesson of transience has not been embraced by all people and the importance of the small gesture and quiet moment is not something most developers will concede to.

Through the accrual of detritus and underpinned by the extraordinary notion that an established city can be re-built from scratch acknowledging all the wants and needs of its citizens - an impossible task - this project investigates and acknowledges the lives of those of us on the periphery through holding and giving privilege to the small and forgotten objects and moments which mark our lives. I will pick up where Alistair Bonnett says the Situationist International failed to develop “an approach that abandoned avant gardism and

made itself vulnerable to everyday struggle” (Smith 25). This includes “researching the myriad ways” (Smith 25) people have mutated Ōtautahi during the rebuild, and through the lens of psychogeography looking at losses and gains and how the same people always seem to lose, and the same people always seem to win- depending on how one views winning, which in this case is equated to financial gain. My exegesis also recognises loss and longing, both of and for people and place and attempts to find self and hope through the process of writing and accrual. It recognises power and powerlessness and how that can be countered by small acts which do not necessarily need to be seen by others to empower the performer, because that is how I see myself when I walk. I love that behind this mundane activity is a subversive collecting of things, a quiet gathering of trace and evidence that talks to me about other lives; that grounds me and connects me to those who pass this way. By inserting myself into Ōtautahi with unnoticed performances that bend to my desire for anonymity, I bear witness to the masculine thrust and result of the rebuild and find a calm and female way to be in this place.

## **The Walker**

...the rise of capitalism produced a cohort of rag-pickers on the margins; as history accelerated, they kept out of the way, strolling and noticing  
-Gideon Lewis-Kraus (Frieze, April 2015).

In April 2015 Gideon Lewis-Kraus wrote an article for Frieze (online) about the work of Paulo Nazareth, a Brazilian artist who walks to understand his identity and belonging, looking at himself through the eyes of the people of the countries through which he travels. There is little written about Nazareth, but he has been pivotal in my understanding of my own practice and moving towards accepting the broken, used, vulnerable and ephemeral aesthetic of my work. Nazareth is an epic journey maker, often travelling across countries, especially in Africa and the Americas and the results “are always presented as inconclusive, as what he’s cobbled together thus far, as if his gallery put an exhibition date on the calendar and, at the last minute, he offhandedly sent them what he happened to have” (Lewis-Kraus para 2). This light touch belies the seriousness of what Nazareth is attempting and the arduousness of the marathon walks he undertakes.

Paulo Nazareth. *Cadernos de Africa* (Africa Notebooks), 2013–ongoing, installation view at ICA, London. Courtesy: the artist and Mendes Wood, São Paulo; photograph: Mark Blower.

Part of being a walking woman is considering how my walking practice diverges from that of a man. Some men have completed epic walks- Paulo Nazareth, Francis Alÿs- but so have some women such as Linda Cracknell and Elspeth Owen (Heddon, Turner 229-230). Some men have walked into the outdoors and made it their own with physical interventions - Richard Long - but so have some women such as Eva Mendieta. I think the difference might lie in awareness. In *Psychogeography and Psychotherapy- Connecting Pathways*, Diane Parker discusses the difference in her somatic reaction to male and female offenders in her work environment, and how that is dictated by a gendered response to the environment which includes her walk to work (Parker 15-17). I too think about my morning walks; much of which are done so early in the morning that the streets and parks are clothed in black, much like I am. I do not consider I am at risk although it is naïve to assume that I am safe.

On 2/8/19 Marcel Geros attacked a mother of three in Avonhead. He was not jailed as Judge Neave thought intensive supervision might result in a better outcome for Geros and greater public safety (Clarkson). Geros has BPNZ (Black Power New Zealand) tattooed across his forehead and various other gang related facial tattoos. His is the face I imagine when I hear a noise behind me when I walk or a possum shrieks from a tree. I still walk in the dark, but I am always aware. There is a part of me that feels resentful that I need to be so alert but there is a part that is thankful because if I wasn't paying attention I might not notice as much as I do and perhaps my surroundings would not permeate me; they would not soak into my skin.

I think I might be trying to homogenise the way men may approach a walking practise; a need to walk epically; to be heroic. I am not sure that really is the case. I suspect the



difference is internal (Heddon, Turner 236) and, other than awareness, I am not sure there is necessarily a defining feature which separates the walking practices of men and women. Does a difference manifest in the outcomes then? Once again, I am not sure it does so is positioning myself as a woman who walks irrelevant? Am I just a walker? Is the fact I am female impacting on my practice? In many ways I think not but I cannot get past the need to be “on” all the time. Do men think about what they wear before they walk? Do men always make sure they take the chain lead for the dog rather than the nylon one when they set off in the dark of the morning? These are the differences; the things I consider every morning before I set out? It is awareness that makes me double back to collect the phone I have forgotten, and it is awareness that makes me cross the road when a man approaches me.

In the final paragraph of her text about psychogeography, “Feeling My Way” for *Psychogeography and Psychotherapy- Connecting Pathways* Liz Bondi says, “I am drawn to the field because it takes walking seriously... but I baulk at some of its assumptions, including its failure to trouble the white male privilege that has been inscribed within its theory and practice and its privileging of conscious intentionality over psychotherapeutically informed attention to routine” (Bondi 104). Bondi’s statement causes me to recall the Situationist International (SI), the mid twentieth century organisation of artists, intellectuals and social disrupters. The derive or drift was integral to their practice and took the form of walks without a planned destination or duration, the dual goals being “emotional disorientation” and “studying a terrain” (Waxman 118). Although the SI has played a part in locating my practice “they drank immense quantities of alcohol; smoked a lot of hash... and took ether” (Waxman 119), none of which plays a part in my life or my walking. As Will Self notes in *Necessary Steps*, “alcohol and drugs tend to keep you from taking walks, or at last the right kind of walks” (Waxman 125). The kind of walking I do holds none of the “inebriated ambulation” (Waxman 121) which formed the basis of the SI derive instead I try to “keep walking intently” (Waxman, 2017) which speaks more to the Fluxus process of ambulation than that of SI.

“Fluxus was less an art movement than an alternative attitude” (Waxman 199), and according to George Maciunas, “a way of life” (Waxman 199). I think the differing attitudes of Fluxus, and SI rather than practicalities are what draws me more to Fluxus. In 1982 Dick Higgins, a Fluxus stalwart, identified nine criteria for work to be termed Fluxus, this was updated and added to by Ken Friedman in 1989. The criteria are as follows:

- Globalism
- Chance
- Unity of art and life
- Intermedia
- Experimentalism
- Playfulness
- Simplicity
- Implicativeness
- Exemplativism

Specificity

Presence in time

Musicality (Waxman 200-201).

And while my work may not meet every criteria listed, I think most are applicable. In his text *A Child's History of Fluxus*, Higgins said "coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures" (Waxman 201). I believe this to be one of the founding tenets of my practice, and further, that making objects to reflect on everyday life is not as powerful as using the actual objects and encouraging them to speak for themselves. I also embrace routine and the everyday in all its forms from walking the same paths daily; to collecting used dental floss, soap scraps and soymilk skins; to listing what I see but cannot/will not pick up, and listing what I notice while I walk.

Last year I went on a walking art tour guided by Dr Reuben Woods, an art historian, writer and curator. Woods is part of "Watch This Space" (WTS), a collective which formed after the earthquakes to celebrate the street and urban art that sprung up in car parks and on the sides of derelict buildings in Ōtautahi. In 2014 and 2015 two exhibitions were launched in Ōtautahi by Oi You, a group inserting Street Art into festivals and staging exhibitions in Aotearoa and Australia. The earthquakes did more than destroy bricks and mortar in Ōtautahi, they gave the city an opportunity to take a good look at what it had been and what it wanted to become.

The first exhibition that Oi You organised in Ōtautahi was *Rise*, which was hosted by the Canterbury Museum. It was interesting because of the art involved but also because such a rebel force seemed to have invaded the hallowed and revered halls of the museum. *Rise* was followed in 2015 by *Spectrum*, which took over the Hereford Street YMCA. On the heels of these exhibitions, and due to the more open mindset of the Ōtautahi City Council, street art began to be commissioned and soon blank walls and buildings were attractive and yet rarely compelling. Due to the commissioned nature of the work nothing controversial made its way onto walls, so street art, that rebel child with the potty mouth and terrible manners appeared to have joined middle-class society. For example, Chimp, a street artist from Wellington, was commissioned to create a large work beside Te Omeka (The Justice Precinct). When interviewed for WTS by Dr Woods in August 2018 Chimp had this to say about the process: "Throughout the design process, I find it easiest to see what the client is wanting in terms of the topic of the design and the aesthetic they want within the design. From there I create a design and send it through to my client and we alter it back and forth" (Woods para 7).

While street art may be created mostly by young people, it is financed by older, perhaps more conservative, people and the result is homogenisation. When I was looking at Chimp's work, I thought how easily it could have belonged to Flox another commercial "street" artist who focuses on birds and flowers. There was nothing subversive about the work. And while I appreciate the artists must eat, I find it disappointing that a whole genre appears to have

been silenced by commercialisation. There was such an opportunity available to stir things up and no one seems to have risen to the challenge.

After the mass slayings at Al Noor mosque in Ōtautahi on March 15, 2019 another Wellington artist, Ruby Jones, came to attention via wheat-pasted work she put up in Ōtautahi. Jones was one of the few women whose work was prominent at this time and its modest size provided a contrast to the large-scale work male street artists were producing. One image was shared around the world and Jones was invited to design a cover for *Time* magazine as a result (Chumko, para 1). Jones had pasted up other images around the city, all installed with permission of the building owners. I question the effect this constant seeking permission has on an artist's work, and how reterritorialisation can ever be achieved unless one is prepared to make space for oneself, with or without permission.



Ruby Jones. Cover of *Time* magazine, 2019.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/christchurch-shooting/111491780/wellington-artist-ruby-jones-designs-time-magazine-cover>

It is worth noting that most of the street artists who were commissioned to produce public work in Ōtautahi were men. Is that important? Yes, because the way men and women responded to the challenges of the rebuild was completely different and somehow it seems that the men followed the money while the women followed the feelgood.

Antony Gough  
Richard Peebles  
Mike Percasky  
Nick Hunt  
Phillip Carter  
Tim Glasson

The men listed above were the prominent developers who will forever be linked to the new Ōtautahi.

Where were the women? They were creating the collaborative spaces and community-based projects which focussed on people:

Coralie Winn  
Camia Young  
Grace Ryder  
Audrey Baldwin  
Sophies Davis and Bannan  
Lily Cooper  
Amy Burke

Thinking about street art made me realise I didn't want to have to seek consent and approval. Is it not enough that I must be aware when I walk? I do not want the same feeling of constraint to impact on my work. The art I was assembling comes from the wild; untamed and given freely, the objects take up residence in my home. Overtaking may be a better way to phrase it and although I generally embrace my hoarder tendencies, I was starting to feel the pressure of clutter. More on this later as I search for a non-place and investigate how the notion of gifting applies to the objects which have given themselves to me, and how I can continue the cycle.

I am wary that I am making the project sound far more linear than it was; as if each idea flowed seamlessly from the one that came before it. This was not the case at all, and I had to listen very hard to hear what the objects wanted to say and notice clearly when something jarred. When sharing these "found" objects with my university classmates I was told that I was not giving the pieces enough value; that by placing them on a table in a noisy basement corridor I was failing to pay them respect. My concern about place for the objects centred around a feeling that a gallery space encouraged a certain institutional, sanctioned, consented location and modality of viewing whereas I believe the objects come from and belong in a "holey space" (Smith 6) or a "non-space" (Augé 77-80); this was what I was exploring; how the context of place reflects on how the objects are seen. So, if they are placed in a commercial gallery, this is how they are judged. I feel the objects are vulnerable; they have already been discarded once and to subject them to a critical eye that tried to place commercial value on them was surrendering them to judgement they hadn't asked for. My job is to protect them, not to further demean them.

One of my first ideas with this project was to redistribute the objects I find on my daily walks throughout the city in a guerrilla move that undermines the considerable planning that seems to have overtaken progress in this place. This move would have bypassed the consent process and driven a small stake through the heart of the conservative work that is being installed in and painted on the city. I thought I would be able to place the objects back within the city for others to find but I feel these found things may walk too fine a line

between object and trash and therefore risk being discarded. I also struggle to let go of things; my natural tendency is to hoard and as I have recognised something familiar in the objects, I feel a duty of care. I have a connection to these “poor” things because when you are in danger of losing everything, it becomes important to hold onto even the smallest things - for example chewed gum and used tea leaves; everyday things which are none the less intrinsic to the people who used them. These are things which carry little value other than an emotional attachment and a shared moment. In other things I have found like broken road cones and single shoes I recognise my aloneness, my brokenness and the damage of those from whom I stem.

## **The Other Beginning**

My waka is Te Arawa. In about 1948, my grandmother, mother and aunt left South Africa, and my alcoholic grandfather, and sailed to New Zealand on Te Arawa to live with my grandmother Sarah Tracey. I think a lot about that journey and the three women who made it. I think of hardship, bravery, sacrifice and love and it makes me proud to be one of them. We are and were women steeped in broken marriages, alcohol abuse and I don't want to say poverty because that is like calling a headache a migraine. Our financial status has always been fragile. Sailing close to poverty brings a new appreciation for what you have, a determination to use things wisely and avoid waste. I can remember having to duct tape the uppers of my children's school shoes to the soles to make them last longer. Things like that tend to leave their mark and become forever a part of you. I think about the familial histories which framed our growing up and contribute to how we behave, what we hold dear and how we see ourselves. How much of who we are is tied to the past? Much like the objects I find and accrue, they are tethered to a past they had no control over and a future much the same. Reusing; recycling; repurposing all these activities are being celebrated and encouraged now as we hurtle towards a future so warm that it will not be able to sustain life as we know it, where reusing and recycling take on a very different hue when they are done by necessity instead of desire. Using found objects in my work comes from a deep-seated want to use what is at hand, that which is informed by past need; to recognise potential in the cast aside and a need not to consume.



Gabriel Orozco. *Chicotes*, 2010.

<https://www.faurshou.com/beijing/past-exhibitions/gabriel-orozco-chicotes/installation-view-of-exhibition-chicotes-by-gabriel-orozco-1/>

Gabriel Orozco works within the context of everyday materials which he manipulates only lightly. For *Chicotes* Orozco collected pieces of blown out tyres from roadsides, arranged them and melted aluminium over some of the pieces. What is it about detritus that draws us in? Partially it is recognising something familiar. We have all seen pieces of rubber on the road and we all know the danger that a blowout can cause. I think this goes through my mind when I look at that work, but mainly I think “I know you” and that is a powerful gift to bestow upon a thing and an empowering thing to be the recipient of.

I know you small stick with fabric and seeds, you look like a flag.

I know you broken road cone; you will forever be part of the earthquake experience and in an act of remembering people will continue to put flowers in you on the anniversaries.

I know you soymilk skin; I see you every morning when you help wake me up and share the ritual of coffee making.

And I know you small pieces of lino which steadfastly tolerated the wear of many feet over many years until you lost your building and with it the right to reside on that exposed concrete slab.



Tracey Osborne. *Cone of Remembrance*, 2020.

The foundation for my practice is walking and this project is informed by the art and act of walking. This sounds so simple, but it is as diverse as the people who walk, and how they choose to do it. Sometimes when I walk early the mist is down to the ground and city lights glow dully through the murk; buildings are lumps which seem to shift as the mist rearranges itself. I relate to the city when it is like this. There is an erased quality to my surroundings, like a cloth has been rubbed across a blackboard, outlines are indistinct, and concrete seems to soften. At these times the darkness of the morning and the closeness of the mist seem to reflect how I see myself and the blurriness that is my presence. My walking practice steps away from ideas of ownership, possession and consumerism which also describes how I try to live my life.

Seeing or noticing is also an integral part of my project and like walking, they are part of the foundation on which my exegesis is built. The remainder of this writing will be divided into two sections; the first covers objects like those listed above, and the second discusses the written word. There will not be a strong dividing line between the two sections because as any walker knows, the joy of reaching a destination is fuelled by meanderings and distractions. These different modes of practice bleed and feed into each other; they overlap and underpin. On a day that I cannot conceive of fitting one more found thing into my home, I will write a poem or make a list. On the days when the written word is not physical enough to hold my thoughts and I have a need to be part of something else, I will pick up an object, perhaps a crushed can with the imprint of the road on its surface and a sweet sticky residue clinging to it and think about who drank from this can. I consider what it is I see in these found things, what it is that enables me to see and accept these gifts and what I do with them.

## The Objects

In *Vibrant Matter, a Political Ecology of Things* Jane Bennett muses on “thing power” (Bennett 4). While out walking she notices:

One large men’s black plastic work glove

One dense mat of oak pollen

One unblemished dead rat

One white plastic bottle cap

One smooth stick of wood

(Bennett 4).

Calling it “stuff that that commanded attention in its own right, as exists in excess of their association with human meanings” (Bennett 4). The stuff “issued a call” (Bennett 4). I hear this call too.

During 2017 my home was rebuilt so I was living in an area very different to my usual haunt and my walks changed as a result. Haunt is a deliberate word here and refers to *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* written by Virginia Woolf in 1930; “the hour should be evening and the season winter...” (Woolf para 2). Those very words make me want to lace on my shoes and head outside; to smell winter; feel it, see it in the bare branches and the well-insulated people; to watch the dog, tongue lolling and steam huffing. In this piece of writing Woolf explores the notion of “street haunting” as on the pretext of buying a pencil she could “indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter-rambling the streets of London” (Woolf para 1). It could be argued that this is not psychogeography as identified by Tina Richardson (Bondi 94-95) because Woolf heads out with a definite purpose but I would argue that when Woolf admits that shopping for a pencil is a pretext and she heads out having shed the “shell like covering” (Woolf para 3) her home affords her and all that remains is “a central oyster of perceptiveness an enormous eye” (Woolf para 3), she is in a psychogeographic state, ready to absorb what the walk offers her. Woolf’s walk doesn’t fit the derive in Situationist terms either as walking from A to B and back to A again does not constitute drift; the destination has been chosen and her purpose is clear. Yet there is so much in *Street Haunting* that does align with psychogeography. Woolf is affected by the atmosphere of winter and evening saying, “We are no longer quite ourselves” (Woolf para 2) and having been gifted “irresponsibility by darkness and lamplight” (Woolf para 2). Having encountered strange people and goings-on Woolf returns home with her pencil pleased that “the self which has been blown about at so many street corners” (Woolf para 18) is now home, “sheltered and enclosed” (Woolf para 18). For every derive and street haunting adventure there is a place from which you leave and a place to which you return, and how you leave them and how you return all affect your psychogeographic self while walking.

The area I was living in during my rebuild was close to the Bealey Avenue end of Manchester Street-one of the “4 aves” loved by “boy racers” who use the tree lined avenue to race their



cars, which are very noisy. The boys were generally gone by midnight to be replaced by the girls; girls who attracted other boys; boys who thought they were men. The girls stand on the cold corners of Manchester Street while cars file by assessing them. They stand at discontinued bus stops in trackpants looking like someone's grandmother with a drug habit to feed; they stand in front of City Church in an age-old relationship and they stand in the middle of the street shrieking while high. These girls leave evidence of their work in the streets and outside people's houses; sad deflated condoms dripping with juice and sometimes streaks of blood. Nameless women; nameless men. Except the women refuse to be nameless. In a gesture I find heroic they have painted their names in nail polish on an iron fence on the corner of Manchester and Peterborough Streets. Some of the names are followed by R.I.P - Nga, Susie and Renee.



Tracey Osborne & Bridgit Anderson. Video still, 2020.

I put the condoms I collected from these forays in test tubes and bundled the lot together with a rubber band and named it *Clusterfuck*. This is sometimes how I think of walking practices all being bundled together under one heading. The practices are as disparate, and the outcomes as dissimilar as the people who attend to them, but it strikes me that walks all end with the result of connection, both physical and mental/emotional. Why condoms? Because they were there, and they called me and sometimes it is necessary to consider gross things. Not everything in life can be packaged hygienically and disposed of organically. As humans we makes messes, we make mistakes; sometimes we exercise our power over others and sometimes we need to be reminded of all of this, sometimes the bubble of complacency in which we all dwell from time to time needs to have a little air let out of it.



Tracey Osborne. *Clusterfuck*, 2016 ongoing.

*Maverick and the Underdog* is a piece made from a stick I found with a small scrap of fabric loosely stuck to it; seeds and bits of dirt had embedded in the fabric. It looked like a small brave flag and as with the condom piece raised questions of power for me. I could not bear that it should be left lying near the path to fall into the blades of a mower or under someone's shoe. It seemed that somehow the two elements, the stick and the fabric had found a way to get together and, when exhausted by their efforts, could do no more. Later, on another walk, I found a maverick can and the they all came together.



Tracey Osborne. *Maverick and the Underdog*, 2020.

There is something of the gift in the spirit of these small discarded things; I feel I have been entrusted with something special and it is my remit to take care of them and maybe to find a companion object to ease their aloneness if that is what they want. In *The Gift* Lewis Hyde discusses gifting from the perspective of the ethnographer investigating gifting tales from various cultures. In a Scottish folk tale, *The Girl and The Dead Man*, from the nineteenth century Hyde tells of a mother with daughters who all behave differently as they set off out into the world with the gift of some bread. One daughter shares her bread with other creatures; abides by other demands of the gift and finds wealth and happiness, which of course she shares with her less giving sisters (Hyde 6-8). The point of the story and the essentialisation of the idea of gifting is to recognise that a gift becomes something less when it is not shared or moved on. Hyde likens it to a river that continues to flow, but if that river is dammed the “gift loses its gift properties” and “it will stagnate, or it will fill the person up until he bursts” (Hyde 9-10).

So, what are the properties of a gift and how are they recognisable in the objects I find? “The gift is property that perishes” (Hyde 10). In one way the objects I have found have already perished. They have been consumed and discarded or are quite simply lost. They are no longer perceived to hold any value or have a purpose, and perhaps the reason I see value and sense connection is because I look for it. As previously mentioned when your memories and history are founded on unstable ground and tethered to unstable buildings they can

easily be dislodged, shaken off and lost so the objects that are gifted to me become receptacles for memory; they become vehicles to hold emotion and recognition. I know this is how I see them, but can I trust others to see them the same way? They have entrusted themselves to me; I have become their caretaker so I must take care.

## The Words

all these other yellow things

as i walked  
i noticed  
drifts of yellow leaves  
which no one had collected  
and bundled into bags  
with holes punched in the bottom  
so they turn into leafmould  
in a year or two or three  
it seemed such a waste  
of a free resource

because of the plague that  
holds us hostage  
streets arent being swept  
although I thought I heard  
a street cleaning truck  
the other morning  
and was bummed about leaves  
i had missed out on

winston said  
never waste a good crisis  
so i have  
written every day  
made 2 more compost piles  
collected 14 bags of leaves for leafmould  
walked and walked

as i walked  
i noticed  
the café on the corner of  
bealey avenue and colombo street  
has changed its name  
from pepperry  
to afogato

with one f  
and wondered  
if its busier now  
i think about changing  
my name sometimes  
declaring i am  
under new management  
but what would  
i change it to  
that would also change me  
because thats  
what its about  
isnt it  
a new start

i started a walk there once  
at pepperry  
not afogato  
with one f  
and counted my steps down  
colombo street until  
i reached  
yellow markings  
on the footpath  
which looked alien  
a strange destination  
which wasn't a destination  
but was

i cant remember  
how many paces it took  
but i had to do it twice  
because i lost count  
and it was important  
to be accurate  
otherwise  
why count at all

today  
after I turned left at afogato  
with one f  
i noticed  
a golden gingko leaf  
on colombo street

almost plastic  
in its perfection  
i photographed it  
and shared it on instagram

i noticed  
other yellow things then:  
#1 hard rubber tiles on a pavement corner  
#2 two dandelions  
#3 a piece of wood nailed to a red fence with a black heart painted above it  
#4 a courier van  
#5 a triple painted line on the road  
#6 an m&ms poster in a dairy window  
#7 a child's chalk drawn potato person on a driveway  
#8 a surveillance camera in use sign above the street number  
1019  
#9 yellow markings on the pavement corner of canon street  
the same ones i had seen  
on the walk with the paces  
that wouldn't be counted  
i still don't understand the message  
but i'm probably not meant to  
#10 an ROT tag on a green utility box

i photographed them  
all these other  
yellow things  
labelled them yellow thing  
with a number  
and posted them on instagram  
you notice when you walk  
and all the yellow things  
lent a glow to the day  
but i don't think  
i'll do another colour  
sometimes once is enough  
don't you think

Tracey Osborne 2020

Oftentimes when I walk it is dark and I do not see anything to pick up which doesn't mean there is nothing to see. Sometimes, like Virginia Woolf, I take home feelings and experiences which I put into words. Sometimes these words take the form of poems like the one above, sometimes they are lists like the one below by David Merritt. Merritt is the owner/author of LandRoverFarm Press. He writes poetry, makes chapbooks from old Reader's Digests and

distributes them from park benches and hastily erected stalls under shady trees. In a 2016 article in *Stuff*, Grant Smithies described meeting Mr Merritt where he had set up his books on a bench under a tree, as he continued to fold and staple more (Smithies para 1). These small treasures were for sale, created by a man who “makes stuff out of other stuff and hopes his stuff is better” (Smithies para 12). Mr Merritt is also The David Merritt Poetry Experience a performance which involves this process and their presentation on sidewalks, but not the recitation of his poems. Mr Merritt wants to bring poetry to people who might not otherwise be able to afford it, and as he says, remove the mystery (Smithies para 12). It is a generous notion and denies power to publishers as he is (mostly) his own publisher. In *Crisis and Duplication*, a 2017 chapbook by David Merritt was the following poem:

I still go to sleep with \$42 or \$48 in my pockets & in the morning I spend  
\$6 on photocopies  
\$7 on coffee  
\$18 on smokes  
\$3 on a gluestick  
\$10 on food, often tinned tuna, mayo, oranges, bananas, chocolate, bagels.  
During the day I make 5–15 books. I give away some, I sell some.  
Each night I go to sleep with \$42–\$48 in my pockets.  
(Merritt 20).

I read this poem and wonder how Merritt conjures magic from the simple recording of what frames his day, and I realise that the magic is lodged in the banality of the list. It is recognising and acknowledging these moments and perhaps giving privilege to them as they are what form our structure. When everything else collapses and we are reduced to a minimum existence these are the things which remain and hold us up. I think they deserve to have poems written about them, odes to the fundamental foundations that they are.

As I sit here in my new home on my old velvet sofa, I look around at what is familiar- the objects and animals I choose to share space with. I know them and they know me; we share lived experience. There is the lamp M gave me which I use at night to work by, the small concrete houses H and another M made for me one Christmas, the copper Turkish yogurt container my mum gave me also for Christmas, my electric bike. I think about Ōtautahi and how I no longer recognise it, how I struggle to find the sense of belonging I feel at home, the sense that we know each other. Sometimes I ponder what David Byrne of *Talking Heads* said “You may ask yourself; well how did I get here? And you may ask yourself, how do I work this?” (Byrne).

I have shaped a place of belonging in my home but managing it in a newly constructed and somewhat alien city is a different challenge, one imperilled by the realisation that people like me are not the people for whom this new city has been built. I am trying to find a way to make my words count, not because I have written them, but more, because I feel they have their own presence and have a right to find their place. Perhaps if they find their place, I will find place also.

Like with the objects, I initially planned to place the words in Ōtautahi for anyone to gather/ see/ experience. Like with the objects I felt like I was abandoning them; that I was not keeping them safe. So, in searching for where the words and the objects belonged perhaps, I would find where I belonged too; by somehow finding a safe place for them I would recognise my own safe place. Is this reterritorialisation? I think of reterritorialisation as a way to reclaim place, not necessarily a place but just place, especially somewhere you have been or felt excluded from; to find somewhere you can be a part of, where you feel your voice can be heard and you can live the life you choose.

Initially that was how I considered this project; as a reterritorialisation. That the sequence of events that was determined by the earthquakes, which through physical and metaphorical dislocation had so undermined my sense of belonging that a whole new way to be had to be negotiated; that was a deterritorialisation. The more I think about it the more I realise that I am deterritorialising what came after the earthquakes. I am not trying to undo what has been done, as much as, offering a disruption, and that disruption takes the form of unnoticed performances of walking and accruing, of writing lists of what I observe, and of constructing poems which also tell of the day to day forays into the unknown which is Ōtautahi. I believe the work is a contradiction and contrast to the way Ōtautahi has been re-created; to the capitalist and consumerist overview which has formed and informed the city. The city is shiny and new; the pieces are old and broken. The city has been created with a vision towards a new and sparkling future; the pieces look to the past, to memories and brokenness, and as such they suggest an alternative future which doesn't need to be based on wealth and waste. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss "refrains that collect or gather forces, either at the heart of the territory or in order to go outside it" (Deleuze, Guattari 327). I hope my work belongs to the latter; the outside work. Why? Because part of this project was to find ways to operate a practice within the limits of a commercial environment and a consumerist culture. This project needs to find a voice that speaks outside of the circle but still finds a way to be heard. Deleuze and Guattari go on to say, "these are refrains of confrontation or departure that sometimes bring on a movement of absolute deterritorialisation: Goodbye I'm leaving and i won't look back" (Deleuze, Guattari 327).

What am I leaving?

I am leaving the rules you have set up for art to be accepted.

I am leaving the ideas of where we should gather and how (pre and post-lockdown of course).

I am leaving the disregard for people who contribute nothing "of value."

I am leaving behind the notion that anyone else can speak for me.

I am leaving behind authorship.

I am leaving behind consumerism.

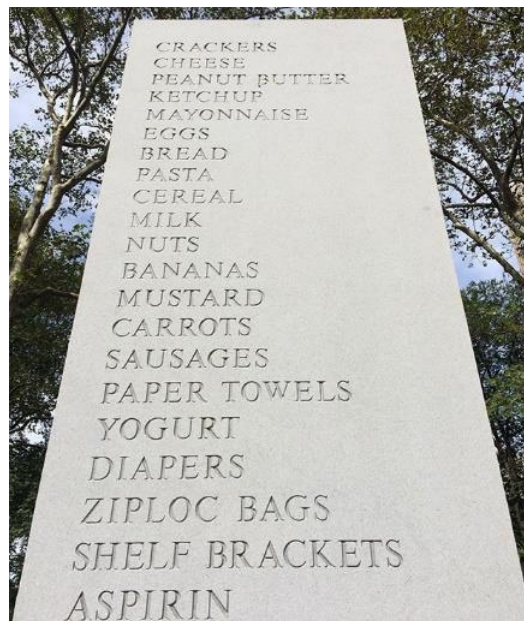
In July 2020 *Shared Lines: Pūtahitanga* put out a call for sixty artists to create individual works which would then be joined to form a river of work; a shared pathway. As I once again sat on my old velvet sofa thinking about how I could contribute I considered the things



I share my space with and wondered how many of these things other people would also be living with. So, I listed them:

Double sided tape  
Used dental floss  
Shopping voucher  
½ eaten bag of peanuts...  
and made the resulting list into a monoprint.

In 2016 *Memorial* was erected in Central Park, New York. The work by British artist David Shrigley, is a “monument to the mundane” (Mufson para 1) and is a 5-metre granite shopping list which celebrates a throw away artefact familiar to us all. *Memorial* acts as a reminder of a basic household chore but is also an homage to, and celebration of that same task. The list holds something for everyone, from tampons to Nutella, which renders it both personal yet generic.



David Shrigley. *Memorial*, 2016.

<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/september/07/shrigley-goes-shopping-in-new-york/>

Dan Adler resorted to list making as a way into Hanne Darboven’s immense and sprawling work *Cultural History 1880-1893* (Adler 2). As well as list making, Adler speaks of Darboven living at home with mannequins which form part of the work and how that “signals the personal significance of the project, of Darboven living with the contents of *Cultural History* before releasing it..” (Adler 4). Our homes are our personal spaces and the things we chose to live with are privy to our unguarded moments. I look at the image of Hanne Darboven below and I see a little of myself; a need to be surrounded by things and an urge to be needed by things.



Hanne Darboven in her home-studio, Am Burgberg, Hamburg, ca. 1987–88.  
<https://www.artforum.com/print/201702/on-longing-the-art-of-hanne-darboven-66062>

During the *Shared Lines: Pūtahitanga* process it became apparent that I am a very untidy person, a trait I really need to address. It also showed that, in this case, listing is an effective way to give voice to voiceless things; by just naming them I was conferring some importance on them and recognising the part they had played in my life; my everyday. And by transcribing their names onto the paper I was in a way gifting them, passing them on. For although they still linger on my table, they are also somewhere else now and have been seen and acknowledged by others; they no longer just reside at home with me, much like some of the things I have seen on my walks but not picked up. I wanted to record these things, acknowledge them and our shared place, mark them having shared space with me. So I started listing what I found but leaving the objects where they lay. Not picking up the things, I found, became the only option as coronavirus took hold of the world. Walking all the time and noticing became something more people seemed to engage in, as the skies cleared, and birds and other wildlife came back to the cities. On 9 April 2020 Joel Maxwell wrote an article for Stuff.co.nz on how people were coping with lockdown. He had these words to say:

“As Tafeamaalii drives home and awaits the results, there is a man on the old highway road picking up rubbish. He was there on the way down too. Has this guy always done this, she wonders, or are we just noticing the little things more now?” (Maxwell para 18).

Some things I found out walking:

white plastic straw  
crushed blue plastic cup  
piece of green twine  
yellow tennis ball half wrapped in black tape  
empty zigzag packet

black buckle up shoe  
golfer's white glove  
child's plastic stethoscope  
keys on a pink and white lanyard  
half full bottle of Johnsons baby oil  
yellow pacifier  
pale green washcloth  
broken purple laundry basket  
turquoise frisbee  
2 x dumped black rubbish sacks  
blue and yellow striped pompom hat  
white plastic takeaway spork  
orange dome for holding a sign  
pile of dumped clothing  
running shoe on the road  
pair of walking sandals  
squashed orange ball  
pink patterned glove  
upside down sneaker

child's pink sunglasses  
full pottle of KFC potato and gravy  
duck which couldn't fly  
pair of black socks  
straw hat with blue band  
orange pencil  
red takeaway teaspoon  
coffee scales  
black takeaway coffee cup  
green sock  
small wooden takeaway fork  
black drink bottle lid  
white biro  
child's black and white striped sock  
blue and white striped plastic straw  
blue jandal  
long black knitted cardigan  
pair of reading glasses

Early twentieth century philosopher, Michel de Certeau refers to “a gift economy as a transgression in a profit economy” (de Certeau 27) and as I try to find place for the gifts I have been given I explore this idea of undermining a “profit economy” and I find I like it very much. By refusing ideas of profit, consumerism and commercialisation I am carving out a safe space for objects and words that have no place being attached to those words; objects

and words that are somehow diminished by association with money and acquisition; objects and words that having been given freely must continue to be given freely in order to disrupt a system of greed and power.

In *An Attempt At Exhausting A Place In Paris* Georges Perec listed things which would normally not be listed (Perec). As he explained in the foreword to the book he wanted to “describe the rest” (Perec 3). The “notable” buildings had already been “described, inventoried, photographed, talked about or registered” (Perec 3). Perec wanted to pay attention to that which is seldom attended to; that which mostly goes unnoticed:

A half-full 96 goes by  
New lights turn on in the café. Outside the dusk is at its height  
A 63 goes by, full  
A man goes by, pushing his Solex  
(Perec 24).

So very ordinary yet so recognisable that although I live in a different time and place those humble words evoke such a strong sense of place, I can almost smell the fumes of the 96 and the 63.

## **The Beginning of the End**

Gedi Sibony. *Kissing Carpets*, 2005.  
<https://www.dailyserving.com/2009/02/gedi-sibony/>

Contemporary American artist Gedi Sibony uses materials from building and renovations; doors, gib board, plywood, pieces of carpet; mostly scraps and detritus he finds in the city

(New York) or through his own renovations and studio expansions. He refuses to throw anything away as he can't bear the thought of more stuff going to landfill. In a 2009 video conversation with SculptureCentre, discussed by Daniel Horn in Frieze magazine 2012, Sibony explained that as he moves the materials around in his studio he relies on "being able to catch things as they are coming through, catch them and gently turn them over; be aware of what's coming through without forcibly asserting anything" (Horn). Sibony has a light touch, nothing is overworked; and his materials do not drift far from their original form; they can easily be identified. Sibony goes on to say that he "doesn't want his sculptures to draw attention. He doesn't want them to make eye contact with the viewer" (Horn). I understand this.

When I was small my grandmother often stayed with us. She shared my room as it was the biggest and had twin beds. I would fall asleep to the sound of her wheezing and the ticking of her clock. After she died, I could still hear the clock. She and I always used to walk. Her long legs, my short legs, somehow working out a pace. We walked to a local park, small and basic. Even back then the walk was more exciting than the destination - from Bradnor Road down Idris Road and Straven Road, over a hill and under some trees into Royds Street. Halfway along Royds Street there was a large wooden house with a thick stone fence at its front, and along the wide top of the stone fence a small garden had been planted. Tucked in amongst the plants were mirror lakes, fairies and woodland creatures. As children, it was a wonderland to discover, and only visible if you were at the right height to see it; a child's height. Although the animals and fairies didn't change every visit, it always felt like a new discovery.

It is this memory that guided my thinking of my work and how to present it. Museums of the everyday are unusual and I try to think of my work in that context though somehow that is as awkward and contrived as the notion of an exhibition. Quite simply this is stuff that I have accrued and I think it will just sit where it sits now; the soy skins are in jars beside my bike; the tampon, reading glasses, box of matches and other small items are on top of the cabinet, the cigarettes are under the empty vintage birdcage. They are not arranged but rather, put in a place out of harm's way, where I won't trip over them and where they are not in danger of me standing on them. We are learning to live together; it feels right that it should be this way.

## **The End**

Psychogeography looks at the effect of the exterior world on the psyche and how we react to our surroundings. I think much of that effect is predicated by how we feel in our internal lives. The two lives are separate but what divides them is so porous, such that emotions and feelings flow between the two with less restraint than our physical self can measure. When I get called a "slut" while out walking the upset follows me home and becomes part of my interior life. Landscapers refer to "indoor/outdoor flow" and Virginia Woolf says in *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* that "we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers..."

(Woolf para 2). Woolf also speaks of the memories held within our homes “but when the door shuts on us, all that vanishes” (Woolf para 3). Does it though? I agree that I become one of the “anonymous trampers,” but what has been happening in the internal life comes with me into the outdoor life. I am not two different people one indoors and another outdoors flaneusing, it is a far more fluid situation with one life feeding into the other which is why I have chosen to discuss all the works that make up this project. I don’t think a line can be drawn to differentiate between them other than the internal and external and that line may as well be written in chalk for all the permanence and segregation it provides. That is how I feel about my work; and it reflects how I see myself. I pass by unnoticed, unless you look for me.

## **After the End**

So, where to now? Do I continue to fill my house with remnants from my own and other people’s lives; to protect them but never let them out of my sight? This defies the logic of the gift and implies an ownership of the objects that I simply do not feel. They were given freely to me and should continue to be given freely. I considered adoption, but fostering is more temporary and feels right; a way of maintaining contact with the objects and the people who wish to have them in their homes for a period.

There have been many “failings” on this journey to supposed mastery, and as always these are the places where the most is learned. I have learned where I am comfortable and uncomfortable and moving forward with my practice, I am going to have to confront the uncomfortable. This may mean making myself more obvious. Even the thought of that effort makes my stomach clench. I made a video at the beginning of this year. I walked from the Catholic Basilica in Barbadoes Street to a site of memorial on Manchester Street, sprinkling ash as I walked. It was a quiet grey morning, and, after a while, a fine drizzle set in and the wind picked up. A rabbit chewed grass on a vacant section and a black swan glided down Ōtākaro. A man called me a “cunt” as I walked past a giant mural of elephants. The wind picked up the ash and swirled it through the empty streets and as I walked, I contemplated, all that we have lost. I think about lists and how they would not be up to the task of tracking those losses and wonder if anything is. I think about the names of the earthquake dead which are listed on a monolithic stone memorial alongside Ōtākaro and how inadequate that seems; how naming is so easy yet in this case has achieved so little; I think how the traces and detritus that I have collected speak in quiet voices of our loss, all loss, and of people, all people. I didn’t end up using the video; it needed more time than I had to give and more skill than I had to offer so it can sit and wait its turn. For the moment I will continue to explore what I have learned. I have however included links to two parts of the video. I go back and watch them sometimes, but the first time I did all I could think was how exposed I look during that walk and how much fatter I was then than I am now, and I wonder if those are uniquely female wonderings, or, if a man would have made the same observations about himself.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rCid5yuea-gKPgoMKu0si-x8aMcca4Y-/view?usp=sharing>  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IGT4JTLQnByPUhvw0RRHEEMYhp2jqJUG/view?usp=sharing>

When I began this process of mastery, I was at a dead-end, much like the street where I grew up and Royds Street where enchantment lived. We used to refer to those streets as dead ends or blind but if you walk down one side and up the other you come out where you started but not exactly where you started, and you have experienced things on the journey. This process has been like that for me. I have learned that making is not a word that should be applied to my practice as I collaborate with the objects I find and with the detritus from my own life, I don't "make" them. I hesitate to claim authorship as I am no more important to the outcome than the objects. I am learning to find a place for the objects and myself and that is where this project began, with a journey to find place. I have learned that sometimes place is an idea or a feeling, not just concrete, bricks and mortar because after it is all gone, where is your place? So, like a blind street or a dead end this exegesis ends where it began; in Ōtautahi and of Ōtautahi. But also, not.



Tracey Osborne. Found sign 2020.

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