

# Systems for Embodying Landscape: Dwelling and Movement

Nicholas Bauch







A Supporting Paper  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Department of Art,  
University of Minnesota

By Nicholas Bauch

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Fine Arts Degree in Visual Art

Minneapolis  
June 15, 2021

Committee:  
Jenny Schmid, Chair (Art)  
Jan Estep (Art)  
Douglas Kearney (English)

All text and images Copyright © Nicholas Bauch, 2021, unless noted otherwise

Systems for Embodying Landscape:  
Dwelling and Movement

## Photography

One February morning I woke up at 4,300 feet in the Mojave—on the high plateau of Lanfair Valley—and saw the best sunrise ever out the back of my vehicle, where I was sleeping due to extreme cold. What it looked like doesn't matter: you can't describe a sunrise or take a picture that puts a sunrise in a bottle [1]. I got thinking about sunrise pictures, though, and how in 2017 I wrote a piece which I opened by flatly, polemically stating that photography was dead. This was, in hindsight, wrong, not to mention a little sophomoric, if only because there are now more photographs being taken every day than the entire accumulated history of photography produced in its first 150 years. My stats might be off—again, it doesn't matter—but you get the idea [2]. When I wrote that photography was dead, though, sunrise and sunset pictures are exactly what I meant. They are the last stand of photography's long, tortuous cleaving from painting. These images are now, via access to phone cameras and being trapped in the symbolic complex of representation, thoroughly ubiquitous [3]. They are the kind of photographs that “paint with light” inside a rectangular frame. This kind of photography, I will now qualify, is aesthetically dead, conceptually dead, yet it is functionally very much alive.

I use the camera for something completely different. It is not a device of representation, but rather a prop in a series of performances I undertake during which I find, live inside of, and play out the tension between two core geographic and architectural themes: movement



Looking east down Goat Road. 02/28/21



Looking east down Goat Road. 06/16/17

[1] Penelope Umbrico toyed with this idea. See: Fitterman, Robert. 2011. *Penelope Umbrico: Photographs*. New York: Aperture.

[2] Musing on things that I think don't matter: how many years of total accumulated pictures taken since photography's inception would it take to match the number of sunrise/sunset pictures taken every day in 2021? Maybe the first 120 years? I don't know; that is a guess and it's more fun guessing than knowing.

[3] Percy, Walker. 1975. *The Message in the Bottle: How queer man is, how queer language is, and what one has to do with the other*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Chapter 2: “The Loss of the Creature,” pp. 46-63.

and settlement. The fact that cameras capture and fix light is handy, but not their primary function. My pictures are more like receipts, or residues, from this geo-architectural performance. The stage in my theater is landscape, and for me I mean two specific landscapes: the corporate landscape of the suburban Twin Cities, Minnesota, and the Mojave Desert, in southeastern California. As any actor knows, stages have personalities, they become alive and part of the performance; the flow of the peoples' bodies on stage and line deliveries will never be the same on another stage. That is also how I feel about landscapes: they are alive and we can communicate with them.

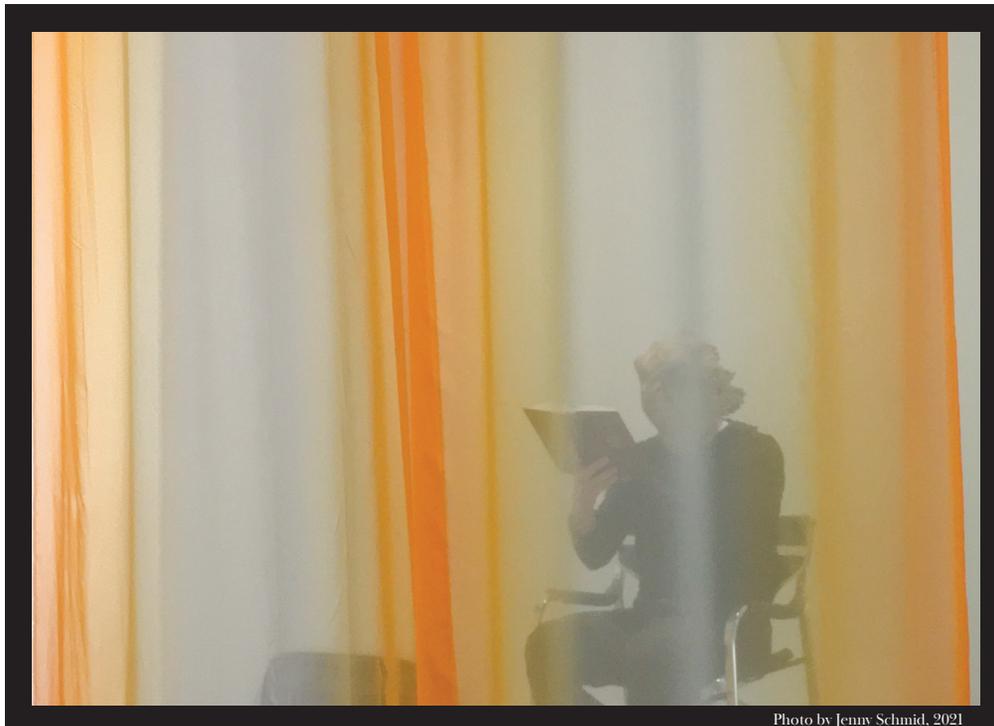


Photo by Jenny Schmid, 2021

## *The Unseen Landscape*

My art is conceptual and it is geographical. Specifically, I design and perform techniques that enable purposeful integration between me as an individual and landscapes with whom I choose to forge relations: the body and the built and/or quasi-natural environments of the surface of the earth [4]. The relationship between individual and landscape is neither dualistic nor non-binary. In short—in an entirely unsatisfying way—it has elements of both, existing in a mode of its own that is at once out of reach of words, and at the same time so familiar that it is in fact the core of our being in the universe. And here begins, as you can see, the search for words. This is where language stops and vision from the mind's eye begins, where journeying to the unknown—in order to match experience with language—will reveal something that is by definition unpredictable, maybe even non-sensical, but will pluck the strings of recognition, as if to say “I’ve been here before, I just didn’t know it,” or “oh, that’s what that is” [5].

What is the subject of my quest? It is setting up scenarios, or ways of being, or what I call “systems for embodying landscapes,” so that moments emerge for both corporeal and phantasmal human-ness to exist placidly in the greater context of the unseen landscape: to stop, to see what’s really going on, and to exist in that stream of reality without harming it; to be of it, and in it, but maintain agency and observational wit. I am trying, after all, to undertake one of the most foundational artistic acts: to see the unseen.



[4] The fictive pure endpoints on this continuum—artifice and nature—and what’s really in between them has been the subject of prolonged and fruitful discourse in the environmental humanities. For just a few examples, see: Cronon, William. 1996. “Introduction: In search of nature.” In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the human place in nature*, edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton. Whatmore, Sarah. 2002. *Hybrid Geographies*. London: Sage. Morton, Timothy. 2010. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

[5] Or—not the same, but interesting—to quote an advertising slogan from Air Niugini in the 1980s: “Papua New Guinea: Like Every Place You’ve Never Been.”

Intentionally putting my body into landscapes in codified ways is extremely architectural. Architectural “dwelling” and geographical “placemaking” are siblings. A question I ask myself as a tool for getting my head around these concepts is this: what is the minimal act one must take to make a home? In geography, this concept is akin to the move from space to place, that is, from an abstract plane where all points are hierarchically flattened (a colonial, or at the very least a newcomer’s invention), to a series of places imbued with human memory and meaning [6]. In architecture, dwelling is not dissimilar. It points directly to a widely-believed universal human right—the right to shelter—and explores the multitude of ways that people manipulate earth’s objects and organisms to achieve this end. Is the minimal act of dwelling to simply stand in place? Must there literally be a roof? Does it require rest and nourishment? Is it about ownership and maintenance of borders? Or does placemaking come before all that, in the first inkling of being somewhere else in a dream? In seeing a picture of a beach house or remembering the smell of the family’s traditional meals?



[6] Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

A number of people have recognized my art as closely allied with movement (e.g. walking), and so it is somewhat strange that I have started by focusing this discussion on dwelling. However, this focus is meant to highlight two opposite sides of the same coin—a tension—that has helped define the modern age [7]. This tension is the confusion and angst between settlement and movement. When I purposefully put my body into landscapes that are not “home-like,” there exist two basic options: maintain mobility, or figure out where, how, and why to stop. To put it simply, I have to move or I have to settle, and toggling among the various forms, scales, stresses, joys, and durations of movement and settlement is a good way to describe the experience of performing one of my systems.



[7] For a focus on mobility, see: Cresswell, Tim. 2006. *On the Move: Mobility in the modern Western world*. New York: Routledge.



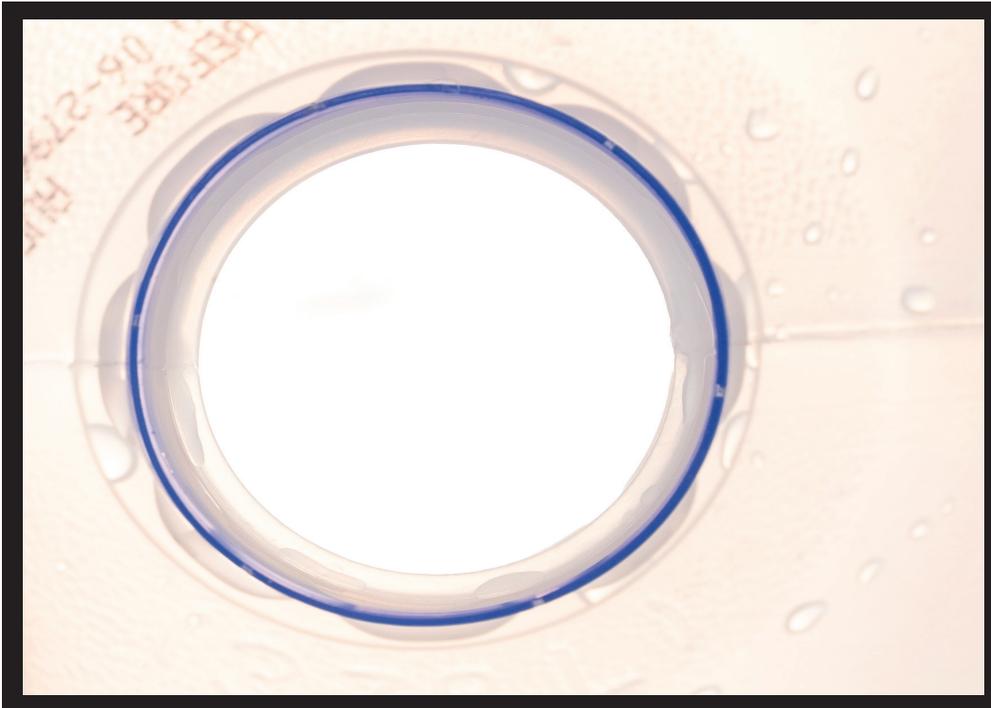
### *My Medium is Myself*

Photography for me is about possession, that is, me being possessed by the landscape, allowing it to act, to direct what I think and do next. I am trying to build circumstances where *I am the medium*, rather than the photograph as the medium for representing something [8]. If I can forget the subject-object binary in which my mind is trained for just a few seconds, the landscape uses me to speak—*I am the medium*—up through my feet and into my breath and out the lens of the camera. Light does not enter into the lens, but the land speaks outward from the lens, saying “this is who I am.” It is rudimentary communication, but nonetheless a sign of sentience. The pictures I take are the untranslated utterances of earth-as-being. The technics of the camera, as you can see, are virtually meaningless, my narrative of taking good pictures—itsself the product of cultural-historical custom—is ancillary. How to become possessed, to transform myself into the medium? This is where *movement* >> *dwelling* comes into play. Intentionally creating systems that put me inside the tension of these two motives begins to build a vibration, a tense string. To pluck the string is to listen, to lose logos and to let the land exist through my amplifier, the lens of the camera.



[8] Non-representational theory is influential here for me. See: Thrift, Nigel. 1996. *Spatial Formations*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage; and Wylie, John. 2013. “Landscape and Phenomenology.” In *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, edited by Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton, 54-65. New York: Routledge.

With each step I ask:  
What is your name? Are you alive, too?  
And each time my foot hits the ground  
the answer is  
less a word than a sensation,  
a wave not from my step,  
but the other way,  
up through my joints and into my lungs  
and out through the eye  
of the camera.



### *Thinking with Words*

Words are containers of meaning. Each one is its own slowly morphing universe of connotation, direction, and intention that has threads of connection with the material and/or epiphenomenal world. When I encounter a concept in my mind for which a word does not exist, there is cause for celebration. This is because at these moments I have ceased being an effect of language—a byproduct of sloppily tossing thoughts into loose containers—and commenced a journey into the unknown. To know exactly what is in one’s own mind in a given instance means, in my view, that a struggle for words is inevitable. For no number of words will ever cover the full range of human thought, imagination, and possibility.

Like most anyone, when an idea does not match an existing word in my vocabulary, I can at least arrive at approximations. I see and feel the phenomenon clearly in my mind, I hold it steady, then I, with great anticipation, visit the oracle of meaning. I feed her my approximation, then she describes for me what has been in other people’s minds when they have used that word [9]. Is that what I am now seeing, too? Or is this the wrong container, the wrong bank of expression for such-and-such a moment, feeling, observation, object, or action? Maybe there is no right and wrong, but “close enough” is to cut the journey short. Precision with language is to respect one’s own experience of dawning—a meta cognition—and the fact that existence is much less described than we let on in daily life.

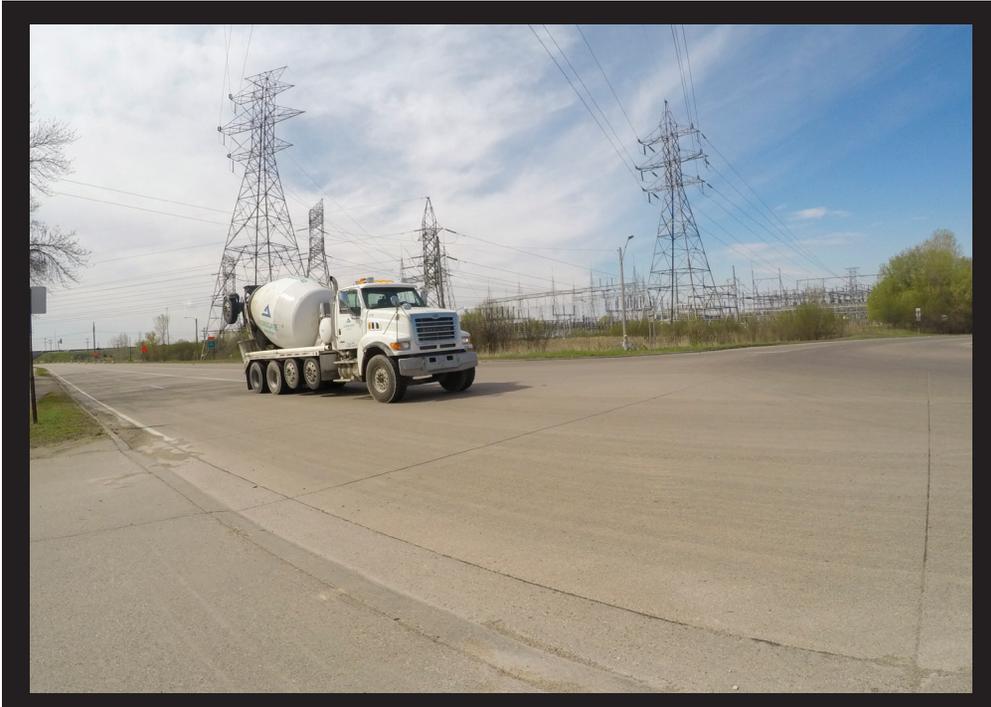
[9] The oracle of meaning, as I have called it here, is the Oxford English Dictionary. A fantastic history of the endeavor to catalog all uses of English words through time is: Ogilvie, Sara. 2013. *Words of the World: A global history of the Oxford English dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. I’m indebted to John McPhee for teaching me how to use the dictionary in the way I’m describing it here. See: McPhee, John. 2013. “Draft No. 4.” *The New Yorker*, April 29, 32-38. No single language—English, in this case—could hope to capture “all” human experience. To be able to so thoroughly decipher one’s mother tongue, however, has for me only opened room for more ambiguity, questions, and the quest for understanding how other languages work in other times and places. How people describe their land, for example, says as much about their values as it does the land itself. For insight into the relationship between words and landscape, see the following: Macfarlane, Robert. 2015. *Landmarks*. London: Hamish Hamilton; Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions; and Lopez, Barry, and Debra Gwartney, eds. 2006. *Home Ground: Language for an American landscape*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press.

Of course the right word does often exist, we just hadn't know it yet. These are satisfying discoveries. I am after something a bit different, though, which are the moments when I catch myself realizing something about life that I hadn't ever stopped to realize before [10]. In these moments, collisions happen; elements of experience that before were cataloged in the mind as distinct—each in its own meaning container—start to define one another in what I would describe as nothing less than magical. Possibility opens to see things in new ways with clarity and vision, rather than as negating reactions to undesirable things [11].



[10] To cite online communication culture du jour, it's "that feeling when ..."

[11] The status of how and for whom new realities are fabricated is of utmost political importance as I write this, in the United States, in 2021, in the presence of violent right-wing conspiracy theorists.



### *System #1: Walking Corporate Suburbia*

In system #1, Movement > Dwelling

When I do long-form walks, I often feel as if I am being carried by a pulse of energy toward settlement. Each step, each instantaneously passing scene, each photograph that my camera automatically snaps while mounted to my head is *so that* I can settle somewhere. And yet in this system of embodiment, movement is the essence. The little rest stops I take under a tree—or, in the winter, in a warm box store—only become interesting when they are understood as sites of temporary refuge from a greater journey. This interest is something like: “look where the weary traveler scratched out a comfortable break spot in an odd place.” The pulse of energy comes from goal orientation, the fact that I have set up the system exclusively for movement [12]. When I’m walking—on the clock, so to speak—the obsession with movement comes from the promise of achieving the goal, the way an animal like a horse or a dog walks faster when they can sense home. One aspect of this project that took me a long time to realize is that the locational goal (the headquarter building or complex) is little more than the material version of a concept. Unlike some artists who have also explored corporate headquarters in depth [13], I do not care much about the physicality or the inside of the structure once I’m there. I care much more about the fact that it exists in the first place, that it’s real, and that people are inside of it making decisions about how money and resources are extracted and transported around the globe. The headquarter is at once a symbol of the unevenness of economic



[12] I drive to a corporate headquarter, find a nearby parking spot, put on my GoPro camera, and start walking in the direction of the next corporate headquarter, using only a compass to navigate. When I am physically exhausted or otherwise run out of time, I call a ride (e.g. Lyft) to take me back to my parked vehicle. Then I drive home, and that’s a segment. I did 31 of these in about 18 months. Interestingly, there was never a time when I could not find the next headquarter, even without a map, even if was multiple segments later. The compass and the existing infrastructural channels of movement through suburban space are profound.

[13] Hassink, Jacqueline. 1996. *The Table of Power*. Translated by Trudi Klijn and David Alexander. Amsterdam: Menno van de Koppel. Here, Hassink shows photographic portraits of board meeting rooms at corporate headquarters in Europe, annotating who sits at which chair, and other power-related elements in the room like taxidermy or “rare” cultural tokens.

opportunity [14], and an architectural structure embedded in what is most often an entirely banal, unassuming landscape, the location of which remains unfamiliar to the majority of people affected by the decisions made within its walls.

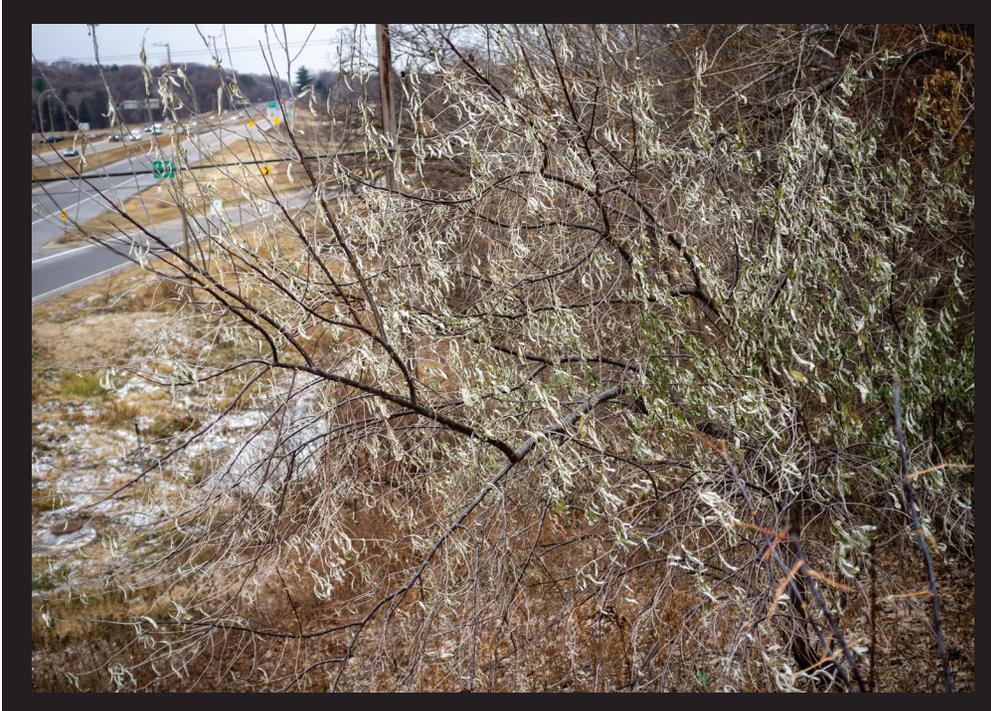
When I walk through the suburbs, en route from one headquarter to the next, I carry a backpack. Its contents include water, snacks, plastic bags for collecting, a rain poncho, extra camera batteries, a clothing layer, notebook & pens for sketching or notes (not used), garden clippers, wallet, and official-looking business cards. I'm always ready with the business cards. They're for cops, front desk people, and HOA guards mostly, meant to be used to diffuse their otherwise in/out border mentality. The only time I used one, though, was when a delivery person in a big truck pulled over and asked about my camera. He said he was interested in photography and wanted to learn more. That was somewhere near the REI store in Bloomington; he just stopped on the side of the busy road and chatted me up. I gave him a business card and said to get in touch; he never did. Hopefully he's out there taking pictures on his route, Godspeed. One time I collected a rusted hub cap, bent it, and walked with it in my backpack. That was a mistake. Another time I got a bag full of winter blue ice salt that someone spilled in a big pile on the sidewalk of an apartment complex. The whole sidewalk was icy except for right around that one pile; a misadventure in broadcast sowing.



[14] A classic in geography on this theme is: Smith, Neil. 1984. *Uneven Development: Nature, capital, and the production of space*. New York: Blackwell.

One of the most annoying reasons for stopping is when I need something from my backpack and I have to stop to take it off. Usually in this case I feel that I have not arrived somewhere yet, and there is a pain in breaking the body's gait and pace. It's as if a timer is ticking, waiting for me to start moving again. Why? This is an opportunity, a mystery, a journey into a clear feeling for which I can't quite find the right phrasing, and don't fully understand. But I have a hunch it's something deep, something historical, something that lots of people have experienced, something for which there's a single word in some language that's foreign to me, something that has to do with land and dwelling and surviving and searching.

Paging Oracle of Meaning. Let's open up to the entry for *settle*. In this system of embodying landscape, "to settle" for me poses uncertainty and evokes discomfort, a necessary relative of movement, but not the main goal. It's almost as if I want settling, a point on the pendulum of life, to disappear in this project, only to find it constantly returning, reminding me that I, too, am a settler, whether I want to be or not.



Here are some uses of *settle* in the OED:

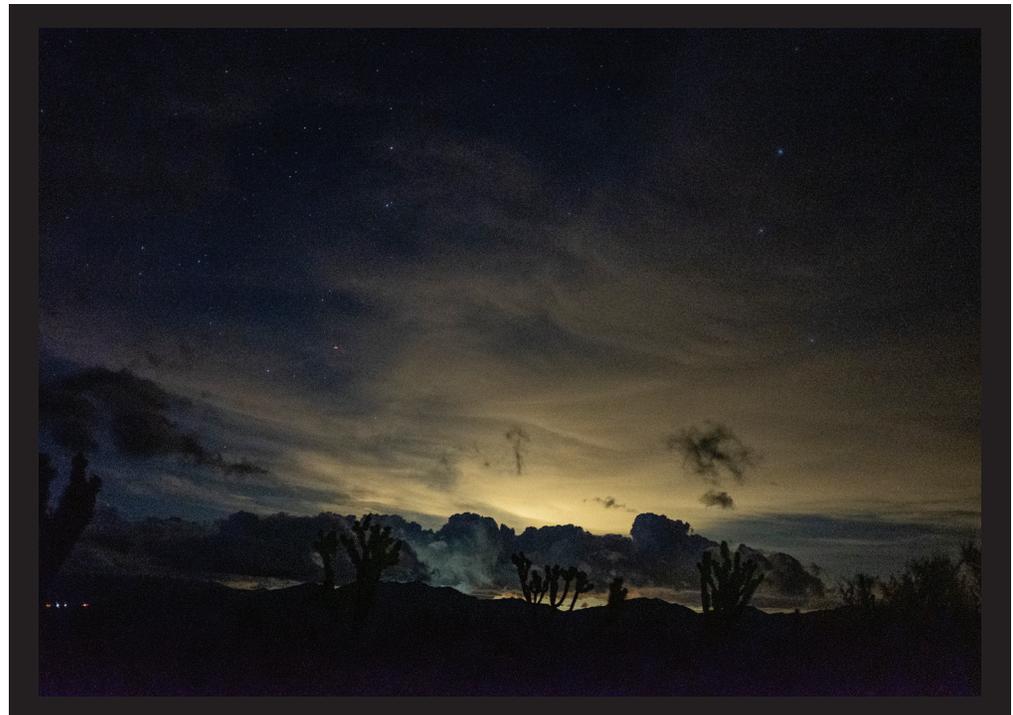
- desired position
- attitude of repose
- to be undisturbed
- installed in residence
- to have completed one's arrangements for residing
- intention of remaining
- to become established in a new home, hence to become accustomed to a new abode or to new surroundings.

Then it gets weird:

- flying or floating objects of darkness or silence that come down and remain (this from the year 1380)
- come together from dispersion or wandering
- hounds keeping steadily to the scent

Then it goes from people and spirits full-circle back to architecture:

- structure sinking downward from its proper level, sinking gradually by its own weight.



The pre-modern use—the flying objects of darkness that come down from the sky and remain—suggests that settlers are creepy, a reading that makes sense from the perspective of the colonized, which would not become widespread in early Atlantic modernisms for another few generations. If I may leap, then, settling is dark, and puts us on edge. It's attractive, a "desired position," smooth and "undisturbed," full of community, an antidote to being "dispersed" and lost in the world. This attractiveness belies its bite, though. It's a forced look inward, as the diversions of movement—the dynamic sensory fireworks, the feeling of *doing* something, the chilled-out tranquility brought on by increased exercise dopamine—go away. Home-making, placemaking, the domicile, each ensnares us in our own dreams of comfort, a foolish longing in the first place. Boredom, routine, flat-lining: these are no ways to live.

Then the pendulum swings. Home draws me in, then suffocates and heaves me back out into the world. I stop to sit in the shade, to fix my backpack, then I get up and put my hat back on. This move from dwelling to movement is exhilarating; back on track, to something. My walks have a series of pre-determined guideposts, in between which is the subject that interests me. The guideposts are medians, midpoints, not really endpoints. Nothing happens when I reach them except that I continue on to the next one, sometimes without even stopping for more than a few seconds. The ether, this is the space in between, all the places I'll never know, all the lives being led I'll never even fathom [15]. Some insect experienced great joy in that tree, some bird was eaten alive in that gutter by a snake, a city



[15] Miller, Andrew H. 2020. *On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of our unled lives*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

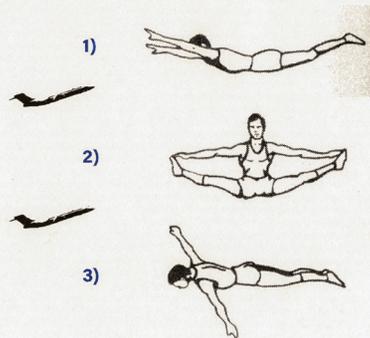
SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR NAVIGATING CORPORATE SUBURBIA ON FOOT

hostile environments

As you approach a headquarter, remember: you are being watched.



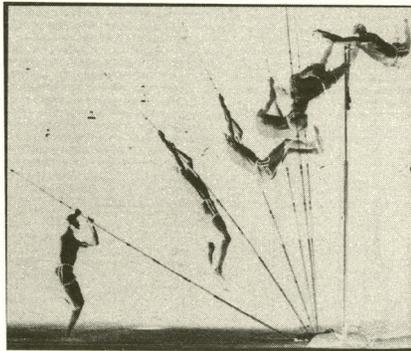
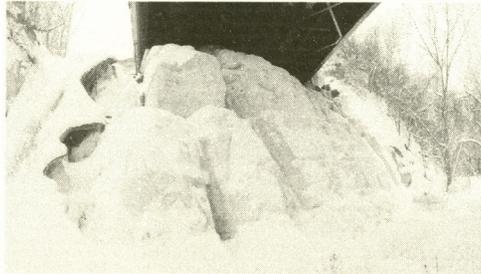
Take the following ACTION SEQUENCE if you see an interceptor.



SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR NAVIGATING CORPORATE SUBURBIA ON FOOT

climbing

Do not let vertical obstacles impede your progress.



pole caches in field

SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR NAVIGATING CORPORATE SUBURBIA ON FOOT

foraging

TPOLOGY of edible items.



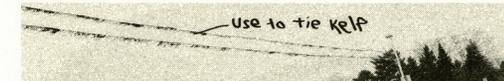
Dirty ice and snow under bridges



*Alaria Esculenta* (brown kelp) in standing waters



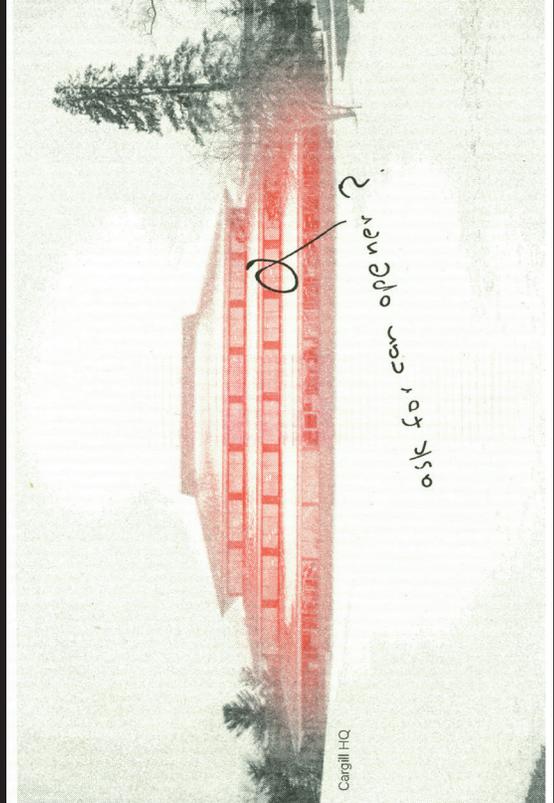
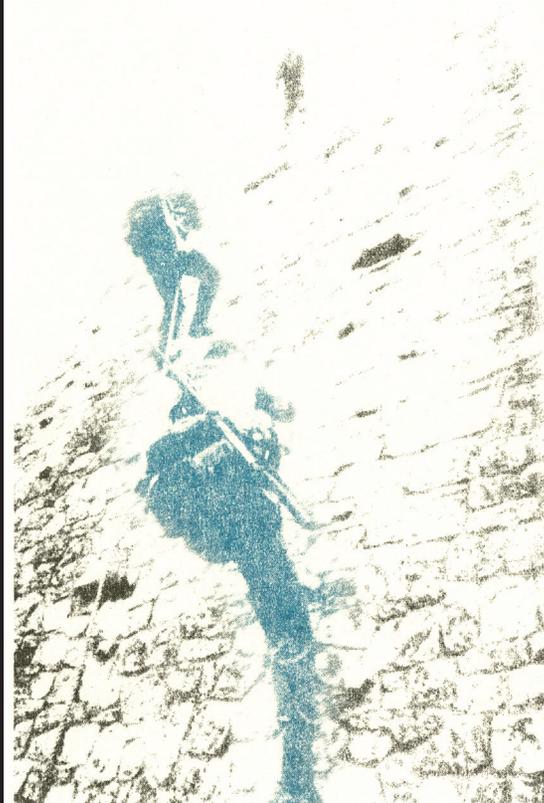
Bee honey under window sills



Streamers



Cardboard



machine painted a line over an old lotto ticket that found its way to the street, the last hope of a crushed laborer. Those were sentient beings making effects in the world, ones that make our worlds, too, what they are.

I handicap myself by refusing to use a map when I walk. This leads to some amount of wandering. The thing I'm going after is to be inside the essence of the ether, the semi-urban space in between my points of departure. Ether, for me, is in the same metaphorical family as topology, both of which are ultimately concerned with the cause & effect relationships among points and objects in space [16]. What happens at one point, say, at one of my steps, is connected by invisible strings to every other potential point in the landscape. This is not undifferentiated, but nonetheless it doesn't matter which point you're at, so why bother with a map? Why not get myself lost for a while and soak in whatever urban formulation has evolved from global capitalism? There's a defeatist sensibility to this, as if I'm saying "you win, your oppressive economic strategy that funnels resources into fewer and fewer hands every day is what I am trapped inside of, so let me see it in all its glory; me struggling doesn't do anything, so at least let me gawk; and btw, fuck you." I'm saying this to something invisible, the thing that art is good at seeing; I know it's real, and I know it's listening. I say things like this when I walk, in my head usually, though some sort of chorus could be fun.



[16] There is some great thinking on topology in human geography. See especially: Secor, Anna J. 2013. "Urban Geography Plenary Lecture: Topological City." *Urban Geography* 34 (4):430-444. And: Fletcher, Angus. 2016. *The Topological Imagination: Spheres, edges and islands*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

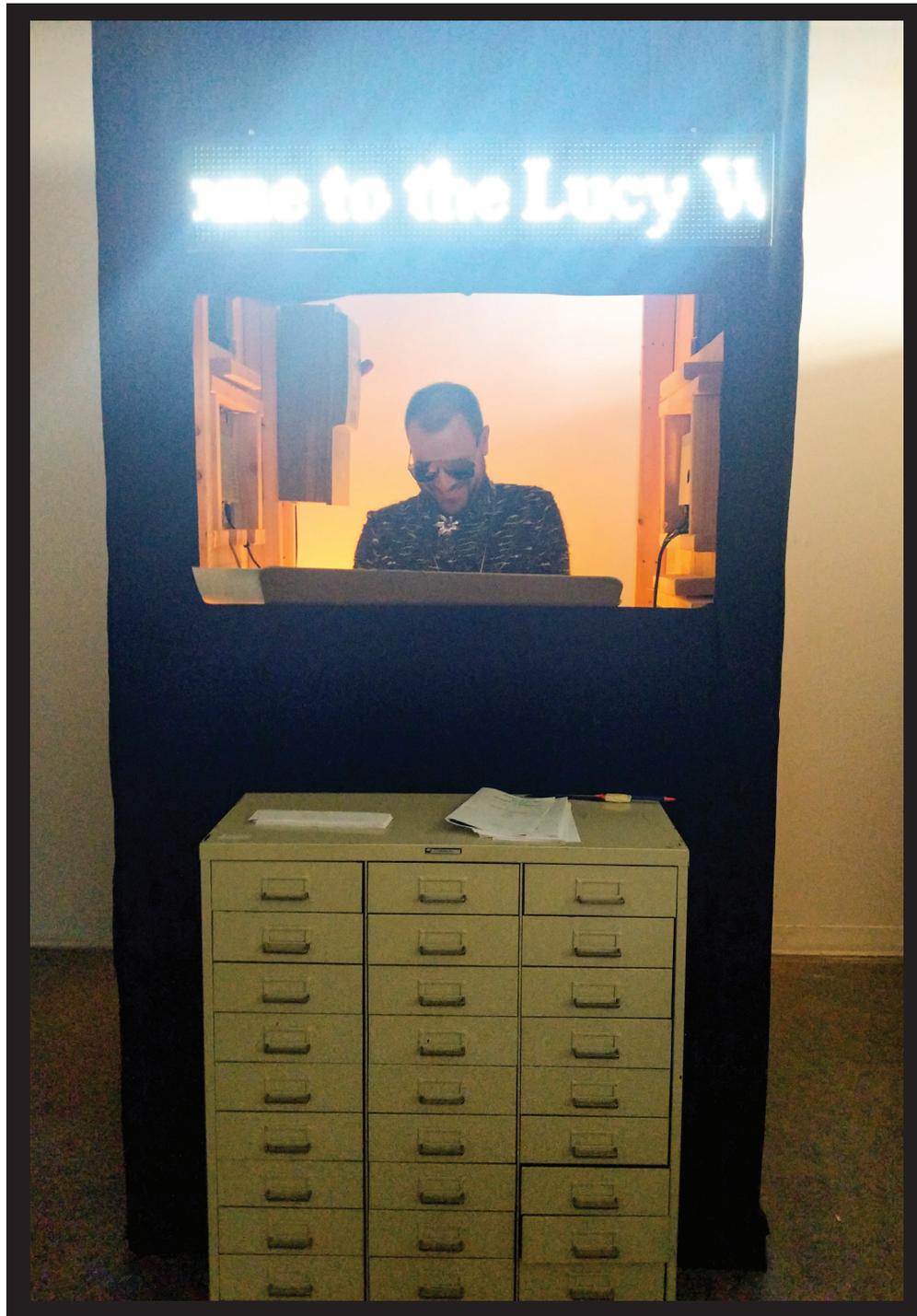


Photo by Rini Keagy

I find myself blanketed with a goofy joy when I'm walking pseudo-aimlessly and see little micro hamlets to temporarily settle (to temporarily colonize?). The quintessential version of this is the space inside the cloverleaf freeway interchange [17]. I desperately want to set up a lemonade stand in one of those things amidst the trash and the unkempt grass, or any booth, really, that offers things to passersby, to regular old citizens just walking to the bakery to pick up a baguette and tomatoes for dinner, who happen to stumble upon a photo archive! Or a window drapery sample shop! There's something about the forbidden nature of these spaces—et tu, picnics?!—that draws me in. It's the ultimate re-imagining, what urban space could become if we dared to act differently. Alas, I built a booth, but did not install it in the crevices of suburbia yet.

[17] Micro-sites have been held by urban humanists as an entry point into achieving spatial justice. See: Cuff, Dana, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Todd Presner, Maite Zubiaurre, and Jonathan Crisman. 2020. *Urban Humanities: New practices for reimagining the city*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

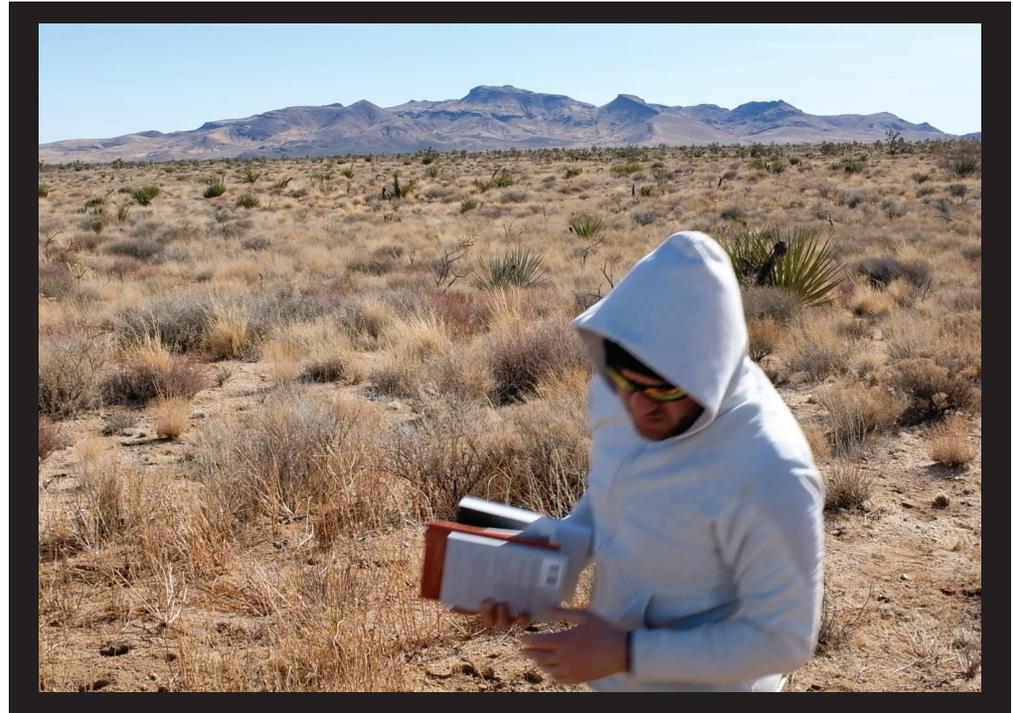
## System #2: Consultations with Mojave

### In system #2, Movement < Dwelling

Getting situated in the right spot—to be “installed in a desired position”—is to impose limitations, to burn various potential futures, to succumb, to *settle* for the inward gaze. I believe there is a way, however, to install a temporary residence such that the site becomes a transistor, an attunement to the comingling of human artifice, geologic heaving, living beings, and the ghosts of all their past iterations and desires [18]. In other words, establishing repose, if done with attention, can open channels of consultation with landscape.

The Mojave Desert is my friend, one that for me is far wiser than human friends. When I'm there, it is not alone time. The camera for me becomes a listening device. The pictures I take are less reproductions of scenes as the action of nodding, as if to say “CLICK,” I hear you. The camera is a record of embodiment, of a physical positioning of oneself in the land at a certain time in a certain place for a certain reason. My camera becomes an object in the toolkit of being, alongside water jugs and maps. It is a radio fine-tuned to the frequency of deep time.

In establishing repose, I am reminded that words are containers. Or rather, ideas are boxes, the sides of which are words, all motioning inward, choreographed to explode with precision and possibility. I pack exactly ten books in order to visit Mojave. I slash and swirl their



[18] To connect geologic processes with earthly vitalism and feminist materialism, see: Dixon, Deborah. 2019. "From Becoming-Geology to Geology-Becoming: Hashima as Geopolitics." In *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and the Making of Life*, edited by Adam Bobbette and Amy Donovan, 147-165. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.



authors' words in my mind, taping together idea boxes with them. The reading goes slowly; it's not unusual for some sentences to hang in the air, me mostly motionless, for an hour. During this time I sit in my minimalist dwelling—my orange tent—and listen, CLICK [19]. The sentences are still there, written across the visual scene. They float downward, objects of silence that come down to settle. They permeate into the fir tannins, the fallen and dusted chaparral leaves, the abandoned rat middens, the bitter juniper berries. My mind empties as my nose fills. I can smell its response before I can hear it. Later in the day, the idea boxes come back, inside of which have been placed rare and sound judgments, creaky and futuristic. CLICK. I know what to do now, thank you my friend.



[19] I am inspired by the work of Andrea Zittel, an artist who has worked for years attempting to construct the type of dwelling in the Mojave Desert that accommodates a stillness of being. See: Zittel, Andrea. 2011. *Lay of My Land*. Munich: Prestel. I am also inspired by Janet Cardiff's ways of being with landscapes. See: Schaub, Mirjam. 2005. *Janet Cardiff: The walk book*. Vienna: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.





Dry books in a hot desert are tinder.  
They might catch a sharp sun ray  
and flare up, and disappear entirely.  
Then I learn about how a book burns.  
Then again, I might open a page  
at random  
and catch a spark.  
These books are, in the end,  
not statements, but a collection of pathways to somewhere else.  
Could be a page, or a word alone,  
gates to memories, sometimes,  
or beacons to the future to see if it's listening.

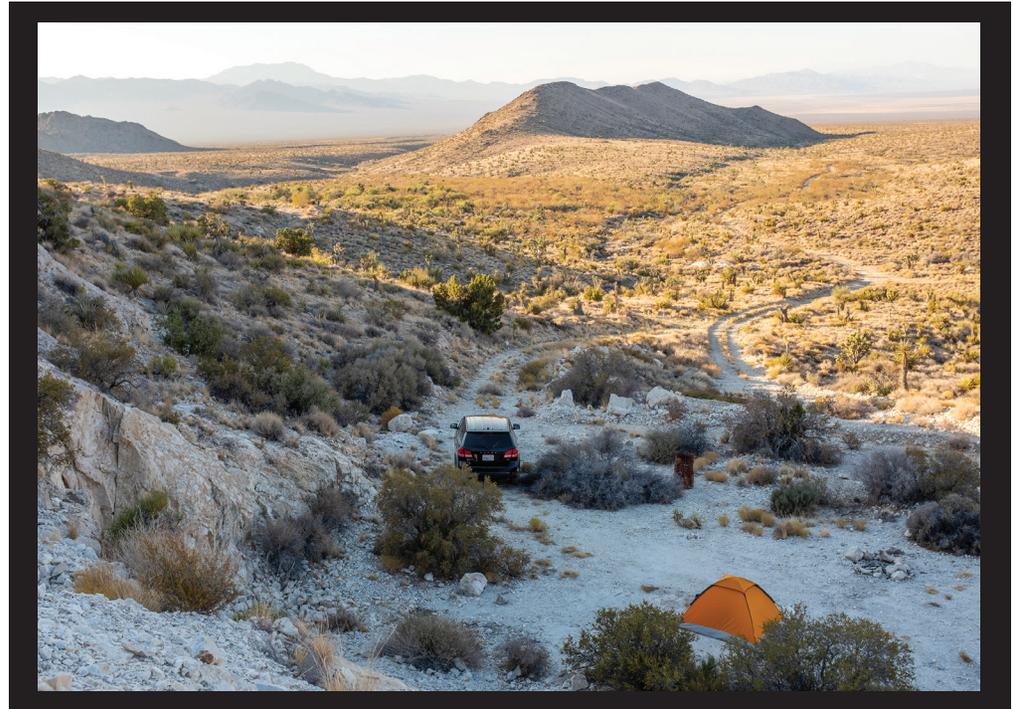
It's like a whale as it gives a kick  
deep under water  
that nothing could stop.  
Take in a sentence,  
put the book down,  
glide for a league of emptiness.  
Wait but don't act.  
What you'll learn is about to appear  
where the sun's rays stop flickering and  
give way to water that is black.

You'll see it. It has eyes looking back at you.  
It's something new, a species,  
if it's showing its teeth, let it bite you.  
Bleeding to death there's nothing lost,  
as you've only fertilized the ether,  
the bluest-black heavy depth of mind.



Then I go to sleep in my orange tent, and the next day I disassemble my reading station. The Mojave is a friend with many moods; to catch more than one of them you need to consult with different scenes. Movement returns, the unsettling. I have become adept at the practicalities of navigating this landscape. It involves paper maps, a GPS, a vehicle with high clearance (4WD is not mandatory, though), memory, patience, and experience. Like any gained skill, my experience comes from mistakes. Arroyos are not hiking trails, and despite their soft and flat sand, are certainly not places to set up a listening residence. (Floods. That's why they're arroyos. Yes, it rains.) When driving I try to keep the conversation going with the desert. One way to do this is to don a smell strap. This is a strap that fits around your face—kind of like a mask—into which is placed *Larrea tridentata*, also known as Creosote Bush [20]. The odor of the resin first makes me wonder if the back of my sinuses are bleeding; *it is* sharp enough to cut. Then it gets all over, all over my face and hands, and then I realize that it's infused in my thoughts and in how my eyes interpret light. *Homo tridentata*. I will burn with the flashy hot vigor of the Creosote Bush, awaiting rebirth next time the rain hits my own ashes.

After packing up, I don't know where I'm going next. In consulting with Mojave, navigation does not follow site selection. I navigate away from and into, steering a course through the possibility of desert space, gauging the passibility of the dirt road exactly as I manipulate the vehicle through litterings of rocks and plants [21]. Why drive at all? What happened to walking? This is a different system of embodiment than the headquarter system. Namely, here I lack the reliability of survival elements, the most crucial of which is



[20] Baldwin, Bruce G., et al., eds. 2002. *The Jepson Desert Manual: Vascular plants of southeastern California*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Thanks to Jim Andre and Tasha La Doux, directors of the University of California's Sweeny Granite Mountains Desert Research Center, who have guided my knowledge of desert botany.

[21] I drive on rough dirt roads, but I do not drive off road. Driving off road is a) illegal in most places in the Mojave, and b) one of the worst things one could do for the fragile ecosystem. I don't want to hurt my friend!



water. This is not a landscape that freely gives water at any time, and especially when you need it most. This means I need to carry water for three or four days at a time. I also need to carry the catalysts for communication with Mojave, which are the ten books. Water is irreducible, you can't dehydrate it. It is 8 pounds per gallon. Books are heavy, too, and their very materiality is integral to the communication process. Then there's the unperishable foodstuffs, layers of clothing to accommodate temperatures that can range from 30F to 80F in a single day, the tent and other camping gear, and camera equipment. This is not backpacking, this is movement with a vehicle full of tools and materials.

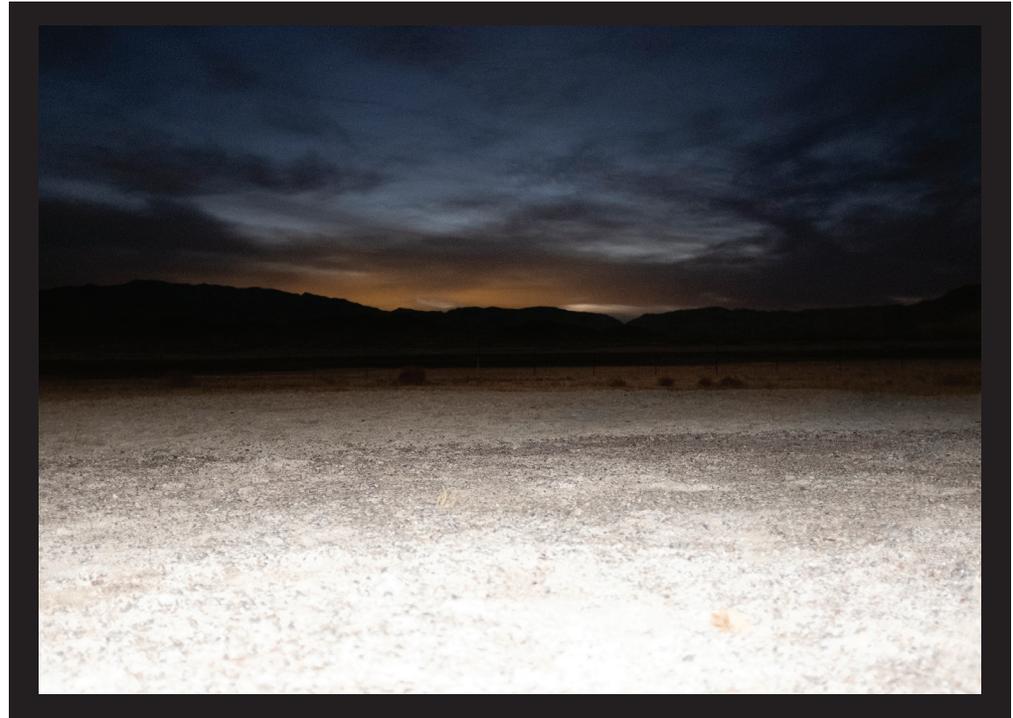
Around here, maps bear scant resemblance to the dense, and utterly unmaintained network of old mining roads. A road ceases to be a road when the vehicle you're driving cannot use it any longer for movement, not where it ends or begins on a paper map. Likewise, fancy GPS base maps, freshly downloaded from reliable sources, are riddled with outdated information. Like showing the existence of routes from decades ago, long before the institution of the wilderness land designation (which forbids motorized vehicles). Or the National Park Service—current owner and caretaker of where I go most of the time—which, with only three exceptions, does not mark campsites on its Mojave maps. This for a territory that is 1,542,776 acres, the third largest unit of land in the Park Service's holdings.



Existing cartography, therefore, is simply a teaser, an opportunity for groundtruthing, which for me is the activity definitive of movement in the Mojave. Driving toward the next consultation site, I pull over all the time to make notes on my GPS. I have a campsite ranking system for potential futures based on protection from wind, scenic vistas, flatness, and density of vegetation. I have labels for vehicle requirements, notes on where one could walk on a path and, on rare occasion, find above-ground fresh water (active springs are almost always near the base of a mountain). I also mark intersections—i.e. where to turn to enter a different road network—which are seldom obvious on the map or with the naked eye.

While in my grand scheme settlement is weighted more heavily in the Mojave than in the Twin Cities, the act of groundtruthing here points toward a deeper insight: that in each of my systems for embodying landscape it is the apex of the pendulum swing between movement and settlement—inside the tense, breathless pause—where I see demons and feel myself swirling through the Milky Way. The apex is the truth of where I live: longing, nostalgic, desirous, discontent but not without moments of joy and beauty. It's not about wanting more, it's about missing the other way, where I've been before [22].

The rocking of the pendulum is what's grinding me from youth to death. My systems—my art practice—is nothing more than training a consciousness, a granting of acceptance and a naming of this inevitable path, scuttling around the surface of the earth, settling for a while, swaying for a lifetime with melancholy back toward the cosmos, where I belong until I re-emerge as something else entirely [23].



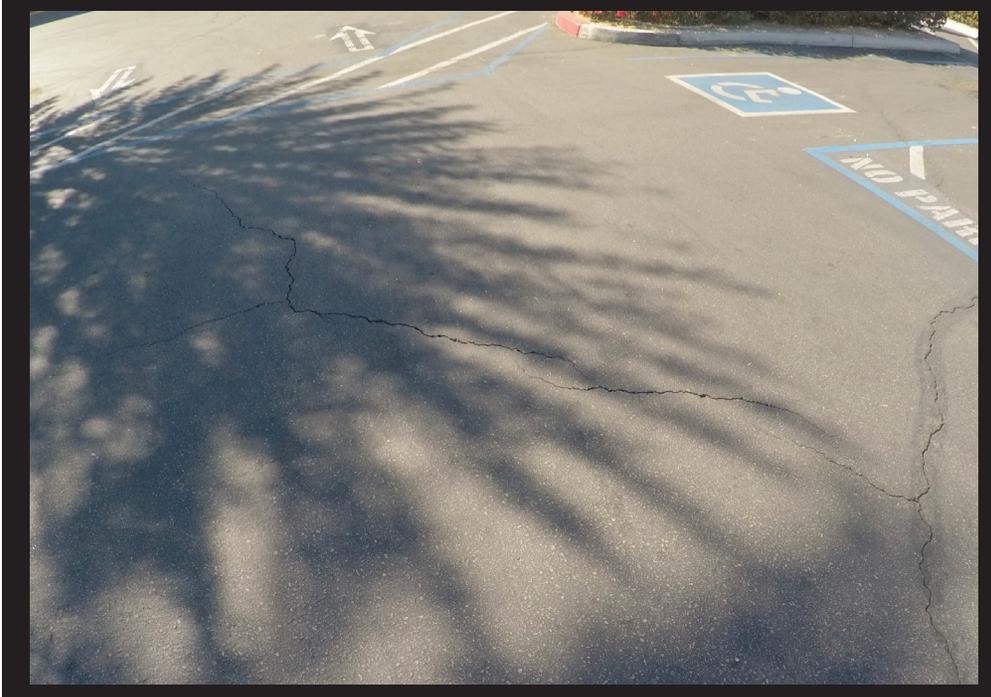
[22] Of the places I have lived, five of them I have left and moved back to: Madison, Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, northern Italy, and southern Minnesota. I have only lived in two places that I left but did not return to: Denver and Oklahoma City.

[23] A significant portion of the Buddhist philosophy in which I've been trained is captured in: Gyatso, Tenzin (The Dalai Lama). 2015. *The Wheel of Life: Buddhist perspectives on cause and effect*. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins. Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications.



### *Recap*

My systems for embodying landscape are the artistic expression of a tension that has defined much of my life experience. This is the tension between movement and dwelling. Once one of these is attained—once the pendulum makes its infinitesimally small pause—it feels natural to me to strive toward the other way. For me, the core of the entire project is about the attempt to live in that infinitesimally small moment, to make that resting spot the expansiveness of life. It's being in motion, or being safe in dwelling, and simply pressing pause. It is a spiritual ambition, to let the pendulum swing as it will without me riding it.





# Exhibition Photos

April 27 - May 14, 2021  
Katherine E. Nash Gallery  
Minneapolis



Photo by Christopher Selleck



Photo by Christopher Selleck



Photo by Christopher Selleck





All photos on this two-page spread by Christopher Selleck



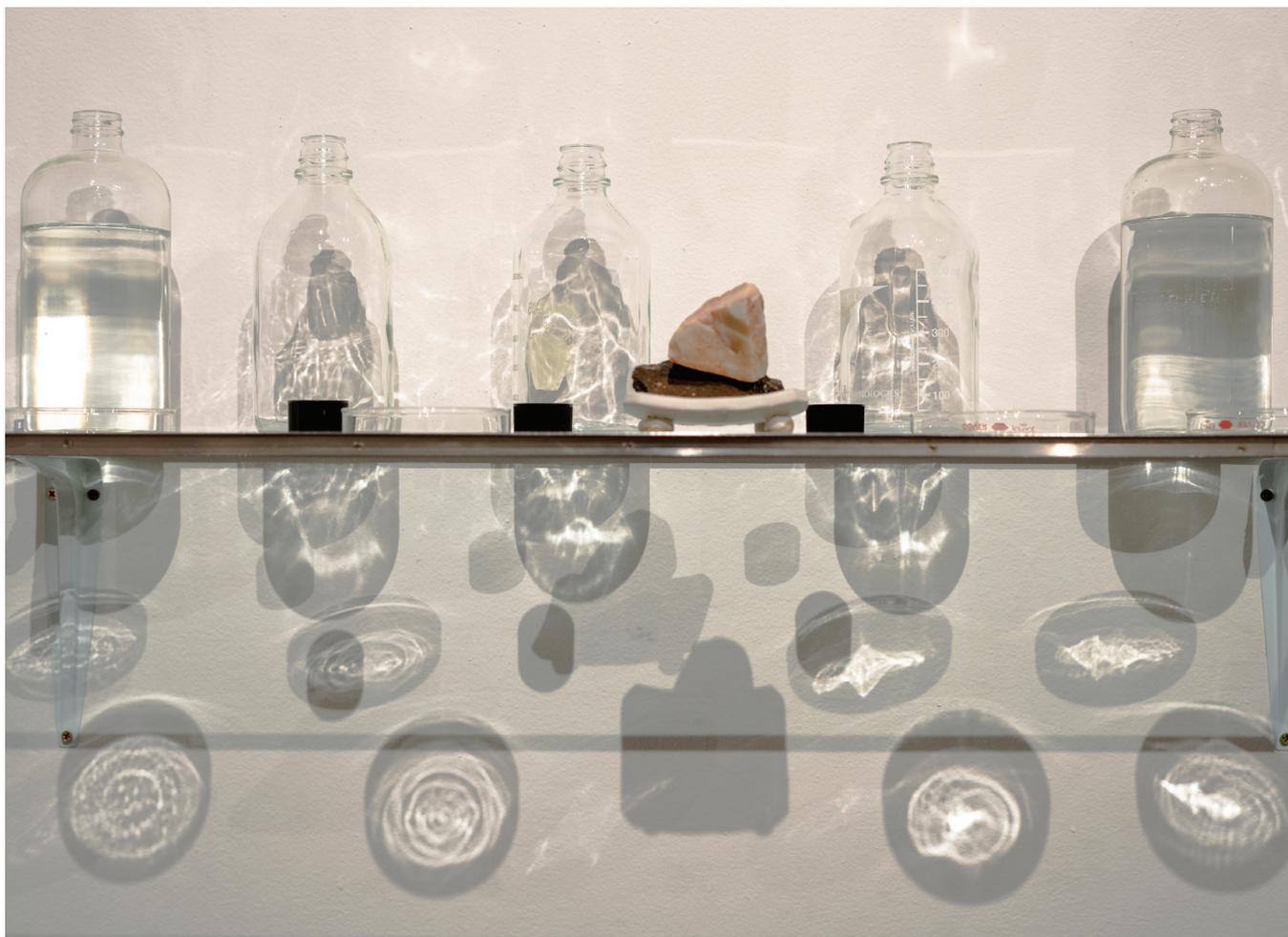
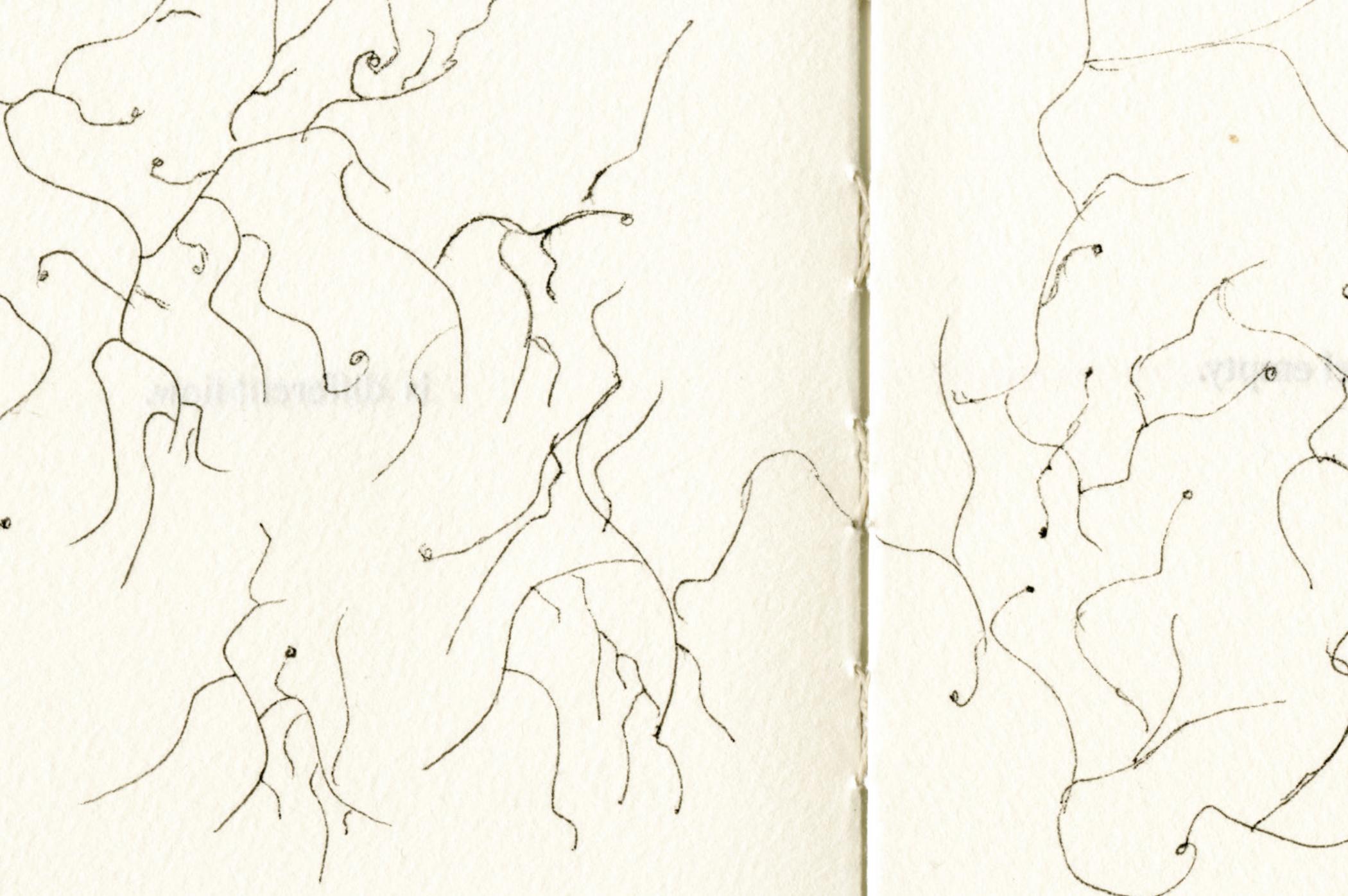




Photo by Ellen Mueller

*Consultations  
with  
Mojave*



**Let your pen do something it wants.**



Photo by Ellen Mueller



Photo by Ellen Mueller



Grape Kool-Aid, Country Time Lemonade, and Tang. All drinks I've used in the Mojave when water becomes boring.







Photo by Christopher Selleck

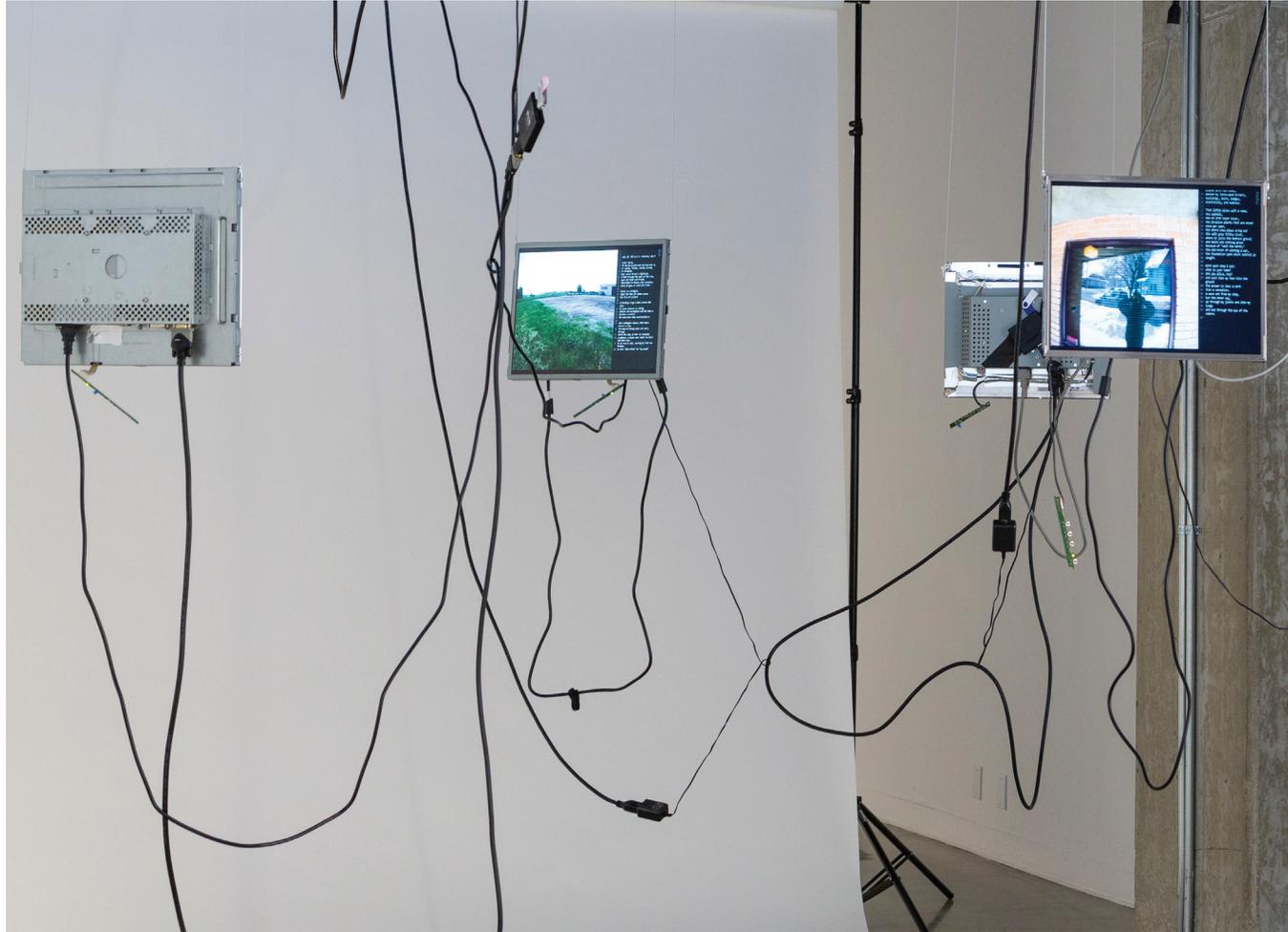


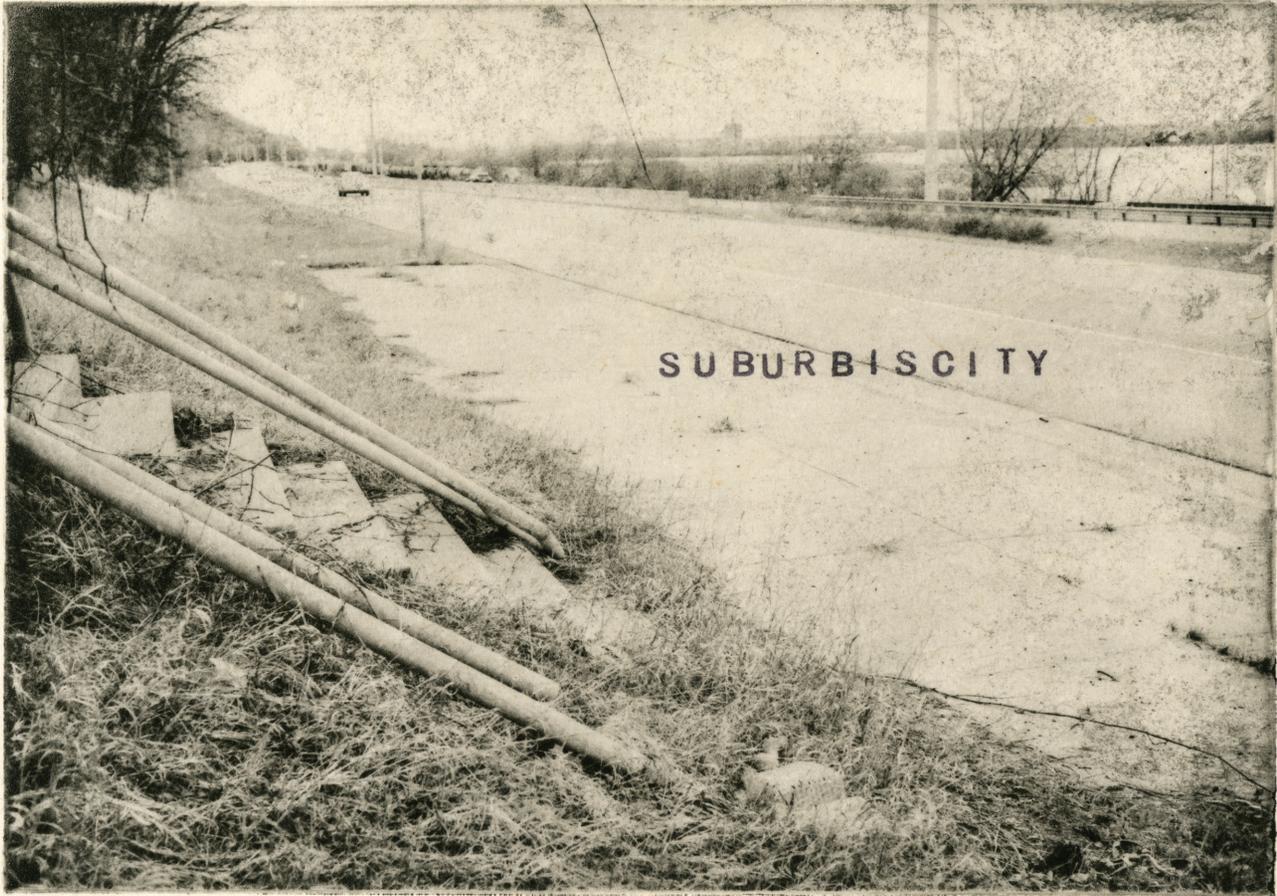
Photo by Christopher Selleck



Photo by Xavier Tavera



Photo by Ryan Fontaine



Day N. 8

Phenomena used by the state as excuses to engage with pedestrians:

skin color

peeing

drugs

guns

jaywalking

trespassing

picking locks

clothing

loitering

after hours

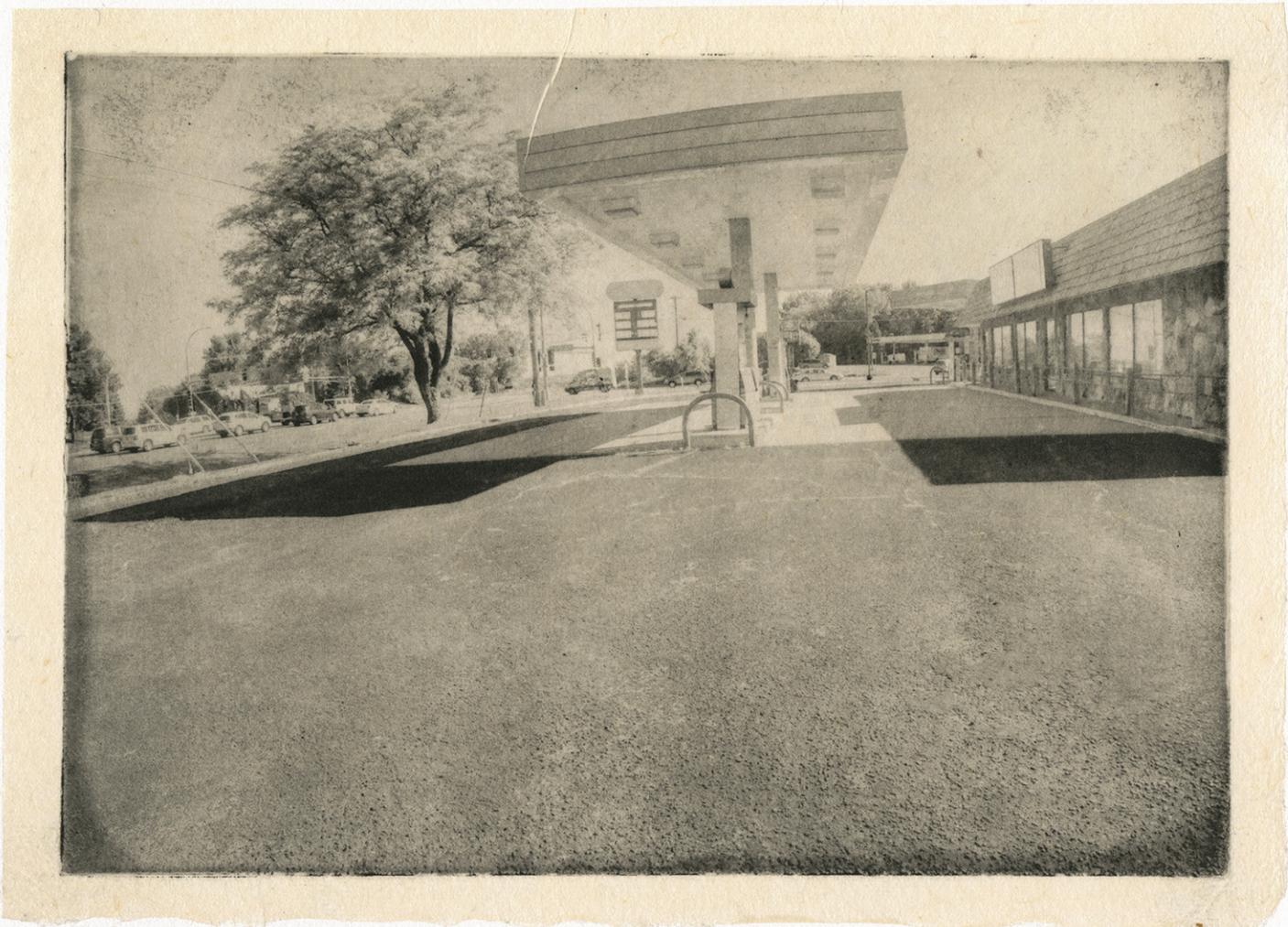
(Who has a room and a key?)



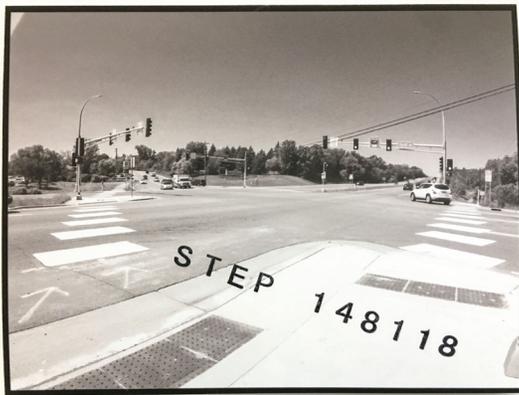
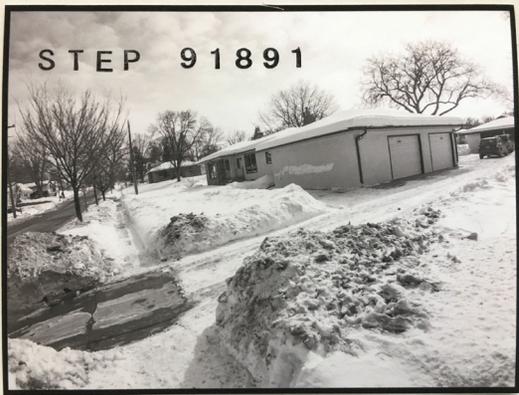
STEP 62370



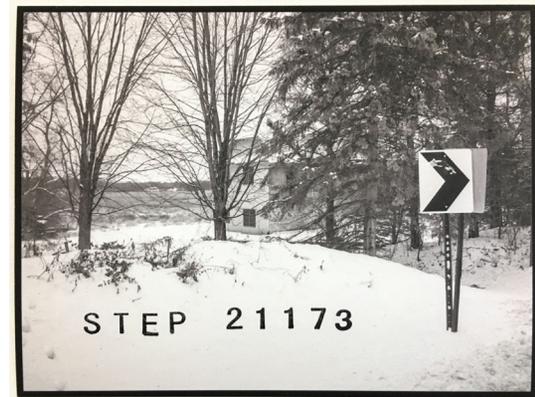
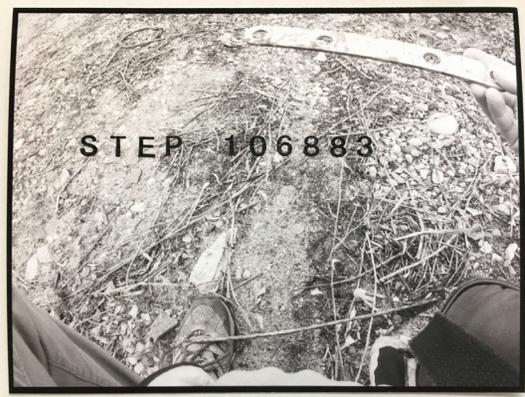
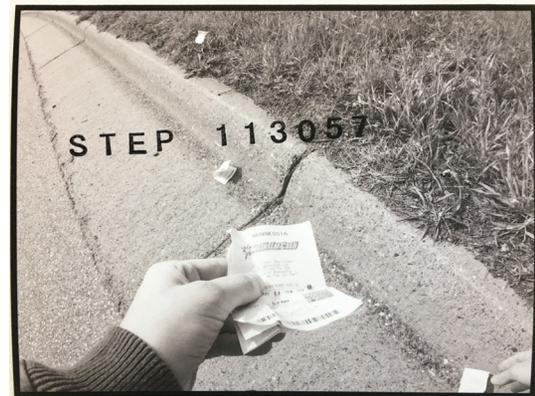
Spread from artist book *Suburbiscity*.



STEP 176295



Takeaways from the exhibition. 3x4 inches each.



ARCH

FLYING AI

# Acknowledgements

In alphabetical order, with sincere apologies for every omission.

Christine Baeumler  
Sayge Carroll  
Brandon Chambers  
Beth Dow  
Jan Estep  
Monica Moses Haller  
Karen Haselmann  
Pao Her  
Teréz Iacovino  
Taylor Johnson  
Brad Kahlhamer  
Rini Keagy  
Doug Kearney  
Chris Larson  
Stephanie Lindquist  
Lynn Lukkas  
Steven McCarthy  
Grant McFarland  
Ellen Mueller  
Howard Oransky  
Roger Ourthiague, Jr.  
Lela Pierce  
Steve Rowell  
Jenny Schmid  
Christina Seely  
Paul Shambroom  
Caitlin Skaahrud  
Caroline Houdek Solomon  
Kim Stringfellow  
Xavier Tavera  
Corinne Teed  
Rick Tibbott  
Deborah Ultan  
Diane Willow

A special debt of gratitude goes to Brenda Bauch, whose commitment to her job and to our home life made this journey possible for me. I dedicate this work to my children, Evelyth and Simona.





Racquet Club Cottages, Palm Springs, Calif., 2021. Designed by architect William Cody, 1960.



I had the privilege of writing this thesis in one of Cody's Racquet Club units during winter 2021.



