

Some Things Bear Repeating:
Experiments in Performative Micro-curating 97 Years
After The Case of Mr. Mutt

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Abstract

I conduct a series of experiments culminating in a gallery exhibition, *I Never Stopped Being A Curator*, which investigate and reinterpret what it means to ‘care’ and ‘profane’ in the context of an expanded notion of curatorial practice. I call what I’m doing ‘performative micro-curating,’ a playfully performative practice with precedents dating back to Marcel Duchamp and The Richard Mutt Case. More specifically, I’m interpreting and practising performative micro-curating as a relational, meta-conceptual art practice that uses mirroring and repetition as a method for posing questions, making knowledge and forging social bonds, while, at the same time, dissolving the boundaries that customarily distinguish artmaking from curating.

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Introduction

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.¹

The thesis exhibition, *I Never Stopped Being A Curator*, is the culmination of a two-year-long exploration of ‘performative micro-curating.’ I coined the term to provisionally conceptualize my own liminal, loosely bounded ‘making practice,’ which is situated somewhere between curating, artmaking, conceptual writing and art as research.² Inflected with the concepts of care and profanation, performative micro-curating is characterized by the intimate scope of its audience, the modest means of its enactment and the conceptual boldness of its gestures. (An analogy: the micro-loan is to the bail-out of multinational banks what the micro-curatorial is to the Venice Biennale).

The Latin word, *cura*, which means ‘to look after’ or ‘care for,’³ is the root word of both ‘curator’ and ‘curiosity’ (Schaeffer 4). Profanation is an irreverent form of iconoclastic play poetically essayed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio

¹ This quote, in memoriam of Michel Foucault and written by Foucault, appears at the beginning of Thierry de Duve’s monograph, *Kant after Duchamp*, which contributed significantly to the development of my thesis.

² “In everyday parlance, ‘art research’ is a blanket term taking in almost all in its path: processes of making artwork; art practices that probe and test experience; thinking-doing as visual art practices vis á vis other knowledge systems; modes of thinking through the visual that are with, athwart, beyond academic methods. This apparent mishmash is a scene of unwieldy, unorganized possibilities—something we should hang onto to avoid defining artistic research simply along institutional academic lines” (Maharaj 39). “ ‘Canonicals’ such as Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and Duchamp amongst others described their practice more or less as ‘research and experiment’ ” (Maharaj 44).

³ As Heidegger wrote in *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, “The double sense of *cura* refers to care for something as concern, absorption in the world, but also care in the sense of devotion.” See “Cura.”

Agamben, who writes that “[t]o profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use.” (*Profanations*, 75) Performative micro-curating ‘cares’ and ‘profanes’ by intentionally enacting curatorial ‘category mistakes’,⁴ distinguishing it from ‘customary curating,’ the term I use for the practice of selecting, exhibiting and collecting artworks.⁵ Aimed at arousing curiosity and provoking doubt and uncertainty, the micro-curatorial asks questions about how knowledge is produced, value judgements are made and social bonds are forged in 21st century art and academic contexts.

More specifically, I am proposing mirroring, repetition and copying as compelling and productive means of performing (curatorial) devotion, making academic knowledge and troubling either-or-binary thinking. In the event-specific, site-contingent gallery exhibition, *I Never Stopped Being A Curator*, I put this theory to a rigorous test by attempting to reenact Duchamp’s readymade, *Fountain*, 1917.⁶ To this end, I use the MFA program itself as a medium—in particular, the thesis exhibition, oral defence and thesis statement—along with

⁴ This term, which issues from philosophy, is defined as “an error in assigning an attribute to something that can only be assigned to items of another category, e.g. saying an abstract object has a physical location” and/ or as “an error in the classification of something” (Dictionary.com).

⁵ My intention isn’t to establish an opposition between approaches to curating but to have at hand, at least for the duration of this thesis, a term that will facilitate communication with my readers.

⁶ Duchamp submitted *Fountain*, 1917, a signed and upended urinal, to the first Society of Independent Artists exhibition under the name of R. Mutt of Philadelphia. Opening in New York 9 April 1917, the exhibition was billed as having “no prizes, no juries” (*Sans jury ni récompense*). This practice was borrowed from the Paris-based Salon des Indépendants, founded 19 July 1884, an annual spring exhibition. Nonetheless, Duchamp’s pseudoanonymous submission was refused by the exhibition’s organizing committee, of which he himself was a member in his role as Head of the Hanging Committee (Société des Artistes Indépendants).

studio-based labour, found texts, art historical research and even my own previously established professional identity as a contemporary art curator. Situated within the tradition of (Eurocentric) painting⁷ and ‘made’ by way of a curatorial gesture⁸ (a form of making endemic to 21st century consumer culture⁹), Duchamp’s *Fountain*, 1917 is a canonical, collectively produced artwork that also hovers somewhere between artmaking, curating, ‘shopping’¹⁰ and art as research. My attraction to the piece’s conceptual brilliance and cheeky humour, along with my imaginative historical consciousness¹¹ and predilection for uncanny historical coincidences,¹² makes it *subjectively* compelling as well: inhabiting and

⁷ See Thierry de Duve, who argues that Duchamp’s *Fountain*, 1917 does not represent a rupture vis.à vis tradition; rather, it is a key work in Duchamp’s personal and professional history and identity as a painter; it is a statement concerning the conundrum of painting – of being an artist – after industrialization (150).

⁸ See Filipovic, who interprets Duchamp’s *Fountain*, 1917 as a “failed” curatorial act.

⁹ See Rosenbaum, an entrepreneur who equates curating with shopping in his monograph, *Curation Nation: How to Win in a World Where Consumers are Creators*, a populist text that implicitly makes every consumer into a Duchampian artist of sorts.

¹⁰ See Filipovic, who states that for art historian and curator, Dorothea von Hantelmann, Duchamp’s act of choosing begins what von Hantelmann refers to as the ‘curatorial paradigm,’ which coincides with the transition from a production-oriented society to a ‘selection-oriented society’; a society in which choosing is regarded as a creative and expressive act in and of itself.

¹¹ See “Definition of Historical Consciousness.”

¹² *Fountain*, 1917 has an unexpected place in Manitoba history. While most accounts have it that Duchamp and his friends, Joseph Stella and Walter Arensberg, purchased a porcelain urinal from J. L. Mott Iron Works (William A. Camfield 68), Irene Gammel makes a convincing argument that the plumbing fixture was a gift from Duchamp’s friend and model, a New York-based Dada performance artist, the Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven. At the time of this incident, the Baroness’s estranged husband, Frederick Grove (known to her as Felix Greve), was the principal of Gladstone School located 150 kilometers east of Winnipeg (Goldsborough). Grove/Greve, a German-born immigrant, made significant contribution to Canadian literature, in particular, ‘prairie realism’ (Gammel 223-228).

being inhabited by *Fountain*, 1917¹³ has been an unforgettable adventure, an intellectual joy ride.

But traces of numerous other makers and practices are also evident in the exhibition including the Brazilian conceptual artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988), Italian-born philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942–), the Dada performance artist Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven (1874–1927), 18 Winnipeg-based artists whom I count as friends and colleagues, named and anonymous manufacturers of various goods and services, and producers of architectural structures and infrastructures. All of them come together to give this project its distinctive form and feeling tone.

My intent is to show (a word customarily associated with curating) how the concept and practice of performative micro-curating offers a way to sidestep the troubling binaries—making/interpreting, affect/intellection, practice/theory, artist/audience, reading/writing, intimate proximity/critical distance, romantic/analytic, yours/mine, private/public—that continue to haunt our pedagogical and cultural institutions well into the 21st century. In doing so, I am imagining the art academy “as a location of care and curiosity” (Loveless 101); an intellectually generous ‘holding environment’¹⁴ in which diverse and ever-evolving approaches

¹³ This is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud’s description of how “a path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is, to the comprehension of the mechanism by which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life” (140n).

¹⁴ D.W. Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst, used this term to refer to the interpersonal, social and cultural environments in which infants are nurtured into existence and humans live out their lives (111). I am reinterpreting this amenable term to refer more specifically to the contexts I currently inhabit as a student-researcher-artist-writer-curator.

to art and knowledge making—including my own—can productively co-habit and converse with one another.

Chapter 1: How To Make Things With Words

Three components comprise the exhibition, all of which use ‘found text’ in some form or another. This situates the project within conceptual writing, an approach developed by early 21st century poets whose practices have in turn been influenced by 20th century conceptual visual art practices.¹⁵ Conceptual writers—like curators in general, and many contemporary visual artists as well—playfully and strategically relocate and/or ‘repurpose’ existing or found text(s), often working within formal and/or procedural constraints they set for themselves. Their work generates a diversity of effects, but generally it implicitly or explicitly addresses the unprecedented predicament of writing in an era awash in words; a culture in which writing can be digitally generated, reproduced, altered and globally circulated in the blink of an eye (amongst those of us affluent enough to have access to digital technologies). Referencing the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler,¹⁶ Kenneth Goldsmith, the author of *Uncreative Writing*, writes, “The

¹⁵ The Denver Museum of Art organized a touring exhibition on the relationship between conceptual art and writing in 2013; it opens at the Power Plant, Toronto on June 21, 2013, the same day as my thesis exhibition. It is described as follows: “*Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art* features the work of over fifty artists and writers exploring the artistic possibilities of language. Presenting works from the 1960s to the present, the exhibition includes paintings, sculpture, installation, video and works on paper that raise questions about how we read, look at, hear, and process language today. A major current underlying the exhibition argues that the field of literature known as ‘conceptual writing’ can be seen as engaging in a provocative dialogue with the field of contemporary art, producing new insights into the meaning of both literature and art. Co-curated by Nora Burnett Abrams and Andrea Andersson, *Postscript* is the first exhibition to examine the work of conceptual writing, investigating the roots of the movement in the art of the 1960s and 70s and presenting contemporary examples of text-based art practices” (Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art).

¹⁶ Huebler stated that “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more” (Goldsmith 1).

world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more (1).”¹⁷

Many of the works produced by conceptual writers are not written to be read, but rely instead on a “larger idea outside of the text” (Fitterman 2). For example, Kenneth Goldsmith’s book, *Day*, 2003, consists of everything printed in the Friday, September 1, 2000 edition of *The New York Times* — retyped, reformatted into 9-point font and published as an 840-page book. Rob Kovtiz’s work, *Ice Fishing in Gimli*, is an eight-volume, 4,750-word ‘novel’ comprised entirely of quotations purloined from every kind of publication imaginable. Which is to say that conceptual writing aims to cultivate a ‘thinkership’ rather than a readership (Fitterman 4).

Chapter 2: From Readymade to Readywritten (Exhibition Component #1)

Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917), 2013, the cornerstone of my thesis exhibition, is a ‘readywritten’—an anonymously authored, made-to-order, 15-page ‘thesis’¹⁸ entitled “Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.” I purchased it from a (presumed) off-shore,¹⁹

¹⁷ This monograph is a key text in the theorization of conceptual poetry.

¹⁸ I asked the anonymous ‘text trade writer’ I hired to follow the School of Art, MFA thesis statement guidelines.

¹⁹ Based on the aesthetics of the company’s website and the hours when company representatives attempted to contact me, I am speculating that the company is located offshore.

on-line, essay-writing service for \$354.18.²⁰ As with Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain*, 1917, I make minor changes to my purchase, sign it with names other than my own and present it as an artwork to a committee representing a legitimated (and legitimizing) cultural institution.

My alterations consist of inserting the name 'Text Trade Worker: ID 29068' on the upper right-hand corner of each page (where I, as the thesis purchaser, would customarily insert my own name and where the anonymous writer had originally written 'surname'), adding a title page to the text, enlarging and distorting the page/text dimensions to fit a 40" x 28" black IKEA RIBBA frame and inviting 18 artist colleague-friends to each sign their own name in red ink on the lower right-hand plexiglass surface of one frame. (The 18th framed page functions as a museum label for the piece.) The frames are arranged in a tight grid, producing a structure whose monumental presence is in keeping with the ambitious dimensions of the School of Art gallery. The latter decision is significant: performative micro-curating relishes collaboration, as well as modest approaches to production. It makes use of whatever is at hand—particularly the holding environment²¹ in which it is embedded. Thus performative micro-curating also willingly runs the risk of being transformed by what it appropriates and by the contexts it inhabits, in this instance, a generously sized exhibition space. As Isabelle Graw writes:

²⁰ There are literally thousands of essay writing businesses around the world producing custom-ordered texts for university students at all levels, including some located in Canada. See Jeraj, and Heather McRobie. See Tomar, as well as Dante (Tomar's pseudonym) for first person accounts written from a "text trade writer's" perspective.

²¹ see note 14 for a definition of this psychoanalytic term.

Thus I would propose an interpretation of artistic appropriation that allows the appropriated material a certain momentum, and in which the possibility that the artist is enthused by this dynamic is feasible. This material can also have the form of an institution with which artists see themselves confronted, if for example they have an exhibition in a gallery. Institutions have particular specifications, especially for practices that are circumscribed with terms such as “institutional criticism” or “location specifics” A person who appropriates an object is also faced with something that emanates or appears to emanate from the object. The object infects the person and something transfers from it to the person ... here appropriation becomes a process in which the artistic subject bargains with something that has unpredictable consequences.(54)

It generates dependency and amounts to a surrender to something. Being infected by something leads to a loss of control (55).

Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917), 2013 is accompanied by two additional components which together form a 3-dimensional triptych of sorts. *Statement of Facts*, 2013 is a black, box-like archival binder that contains documentation (screen captures, correspondence, etc.) detailing the process by which the thesis was purchased; it rests on a floating wall shelf immediately adjacent to the framed thesis. The work’s title is borrowed from legal practice; it refers to a lawyer-written document that lays bare the facts of a case, without presenting an argument. *Statement of Facts* is also the title conceptual writer Vanessa Place has given to a body of work in which she presents, as poetry, legal

documents she prepared on behalf of clients in her job as a criminal appellate attorney.²²

The third component, *The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre)*, 2013, makes visible the institutional intent of the MFA thesis exhibition²³—the presentation, defence and adjudication of a candidate’s ‘masterpiece.’²⁴ It consists of a 15-foot-long table surrounded by seven black chairs, one for each of the official participants: myself, the four members of the examining committee, the Director of the School of Art (who chairs the defense) and a visitor’s chair, which stands in for the general public who are welcome to attend oral defences at the University of Manitoba. Each place setting is fitted with a bottle of water labelled “Curator Aquarium,” a copy of my written thesis statement personalized with the participant’s name, and a red pencil. The oral defence is subtly and simply theatricalized by situating it within an improvised stage of sorts—a rectangular space demarcated by a line (a frame) drawn on the floor using a strip of adhesive

²² Vanessa Place has performed excerpts from this work, installed it on gallery walls and published it in book form.

²³ School of Art regulations state that “[a] written thesis statement and thesis exhibition that shows that the student has developed an original contribution to knowledge in visual art is required. Thesis students must pass an oral examination on the subject of the written statement and exhibition. The exhibition is the primary component of the thesis. This course is graded pass/fail.”

²⁴ “The concept of the Master presupposes a certain institutional reality. One ascends to Masterhood through stages, and by presenting a masterpiece to prove one’s mastery. There is an implicit educational institution, the rules of which are well defined, and one’s acceptance of the rules is the precondition for entering the system and emerging as Master...This system lives on in the graduate system of education... where the dissertation is the prescribed masterpiece. Rarely is a dissertation, in any further than a licensing sense, a masterpiece—it is supposed to be ‘a contribution to knowledge.’... As the work that defines being a Master, the masterpiece would have to be the kind of work a reasonably instructed person can achieve if sufficiently industrious. (Danto 120-121)”

black vinyl; the work's title is embedded within this line. A collection of 'props', which serve as mnemonics for my thesis defense, sit on the table.

Chapter 3: Staging Profanation (Exhibition Component #1 continued)

Every art exhibition or exhibitionary act implicitly takes the form of a *call* or *invitation* issued to a public(s), "Come look at this; let's have a conversation." But the thesis exhibition (in combination with the thesis statement and oral defence) is special because it's actually a *response* directed specifically to an institutionally appointed examining committee—an intimate audience of five officials—that has invited or called a candidate to present their work solely for the purpose of delivering a judgement situated in two traditions: academia and art. A thesis exhibition is a test that most art professionals will only take once.

Given that Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917 is also a 'speech act' that initiates a call-and-response regarding the judgement of art, the MFA thesis exhibition and oral exam offers a unique opportunity for reenacting Duchamp's readymade. Thus I've chosen to echo his seriously humorous baptism²⁵ of an indifferent, 'whatever' object (a urinal) by baptizing an indifferently written, 'whatever' text whose contents verge on the comedic.²⁶ Duchamp pronounces, 'this is art'; I pronounce, 'this is an artwork that makes an original contribution to visual art knowledge.' Duchamp's submission foregrounds the issue of judgement in an exhibition that was billed as having "no juries, no prizes" by testing the

²⁵ de Duve uses the word 'baptism' in relation to Duchamp's readymade (103), as does Austin in his discussion of performative utterances (24,31, 35).

²⁶ Examples include the sentence, "Duchamp is nothing special. He just went shopping at a plumbing store."

organizer's values: are they as embracing of progressive art as they claim to be? My submission tests what and how art can 'do' in the context of the academy (even while my work and my knowledge are being tested). I pose the question: under what conditions does a purchased, inadequately researched and poorly written scholarly work²⁷ about an artwork that was "named the world's most influential piece of modern art" (Higgins) make an "original contribution to knowledge in visual art"? As my thesis demonstrates, it does so when it is implicated in the ruthless care (read: repetition) of an existing artwork; that is, when it is made to perform micro-curatorially. Duchamp shows us the predicament and potentialities of art after industrialization (de Duve 167); I show how art can make visible the predicament and potentialities of making academic knowledge after post-industrialization, that is, in a globally networked, text-saturated, neo-liberalized culture.²⁸

Playfully toying with institutional rules, regulations, practices and rituals—and using them for purposes other than their intended use—is an apt description of *Fountain*, 1917, as well as my reenactment of the same (and also writer Vanessa Place's *Statement of Facts*). It is also the essence of profanation, as theorized by Giorgio Agamben:

²⁷ The writers who work for essay writing companies are sometimes referred to as 'academic mercenaries' (Dante).

²⁸ *Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917)*, 2013 could be interpreted as a symptom of neo-liberal economics. See Dante, a former "text-trade worker" who writes, in a first person expose, that his clients represented three groups 1) students who simply did not have the skills to function in university due to drastic cuts endured by the education system in America 2) students whose wealth and privilege have always given them easy access to 'short-cuts' 3) foreign students whose language skills leave them ill-equipped for study in graduate schools that are eager to collect their fees but unable or unwilling to give them the help they need to actually succeed).

Children, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract becomes a toy This, however, does not mean neglect (no kind of attention can compare to that of a child at play) but a new dimension of use, which children and philosophers give to humanity. It is the sort of use that Benjamin must have had in mind when he wrote of Kafka's *The New Attorney* that the law that is no longer applied but only studied is the gate to justice so the powers [*potenze*] of economics, law, and politics, deactivated in play, can become the gateways to a new happiness. (*Profanations*, 76).

Chapter 4: Mirroring Agamben, Again (Exhibition Component #2)

In the work, *gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me* 2013, excerpts from "Tiananmen," a chapter in *The Coming Community* written by Giorgio Agamben is reproduced using 7/8", dark red matt vinyl letters with the spaces between words removed and the text mirror-reversed. Installed at eye-height to form a 53-foot-long line, the text is rendered virtually illegible. It serves to articulate an existing triangular, architectural structure formed by a massive, strikingly empty (gallery) foyer bookcase whose trajectory meets up with an adjacent gallery wall. The thin edge of this wedge-shaped form touches the door frame where the public enters the exhibition space. A mirror, installed at an angle on the opposite gallery wall, situates the viewer in relation to this edge and renders fragments of the text readable. In effect the installation translates into a

three-dimensional, phenomenological experience what Agamben has written. Here I take Agamben at his word; I ruthlessly toy with his text while simultaneously paying close (curatorial) attention to his ideas.

Chapter 5: Getting There Is Half The Fun (Exhibition Component #3)

Retrospectively speaking, I have come to regard my first performative micro-curatorial act—represented by the work, *I Am Here (after Walter Hopps*²⁹), 2012—as registering in the MFA Program itself (another instance of a work dependent on a call-and-response exchange). As mentioned earlier, performative micro-curating enjoys the playfulness inherent in making intentional category mistakes. As someone with an established professional practice as an exhibition curator, this is not the graduate program I would customarily be expected to pursue. In being inappropriately out of place (here) rather than properly in place (there), I toy with the idea that identity is necessarily a useful, unproblematic basis for determining belonging. This is also the subject of Agamben’s monograph, *The Coming Community*, which is quoted in the installation work, *gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me*, 2013.

However, the first time I consciously used the term ‘performative micro-curating’ was in 2011, in regards to the act of reading. In *The Performance of Reading*, 2011- (ongoing), I inserted into my studio a long reading chair I made

²⁹ Walter Hopps (May 3, 1932 -March 20, 2005) is an American curator and museum director recognized for his extraordinary contribution to exhibition making. In response to his ‘elusiveness,’ the staff produced buttons that read, “Walter Hopps will be here in 20 minutes” (Obrist 10).

by repurposing a work table; a chair inspired by the chaises on which artists' models recline in art historical paintings such as Manet's *Olympia*. This was my way of naming and claiming 'reading' as an intimate, private performance; as a form of cultural production in which the reader produces or makes something for an audience of one – herself. I subsequently discovered that the philosopher Peter Kivy had written a monograph on exactly that subject, also called *The Performance of Reading*. So I repurposed a copy of this book to make a museum label for my piece.

Working from reproductions while conducting text-based research, I began to remake and alter well-known existing art works, focussing primarily but not exclusively on canonical conceptual artworks from the 1960s and '70s. I described my practice as 'meta-conceptual.'³⁰ Works by Sol Le Witt, Joseph Kosuth, Lygia Clark and Martin Creed were subject to my curatorial affection and my (sometimes) clumsy studio experiments, which took the form of playful mimicry. It quickly became apparent to me that materially remaking a work—no matter how amateur my efforts—enabled me to establish a relationship of an unprecedented kind with the work under investigation. At the same time, I began to see (really see) how minimal interventions or alterations to the 'original' work—whether intentional or accidental—could radically shift a work's meaning, something Duchamp (and many others) had already tested with his altered readymades.

³⁰ 'Meta' is a preposition of Greek origin with many meanings including "with," "by means of" and "in company with" – which is how I interpret my practice in relation to conceptual art. See "Meta."

As a result of the intimate, boundary blurring nature of my research process, concerns pertaining to relationality were increasingly foregrounded. The value of intellectual friendship, the nature of the gift, conversation as a form of making, the relationship between theory and affect, artist-model collaborations, hysterical merger and group power dynamics are just some of the ideas that I experimented with, ruminated on and/or set adrift as I worked. Gradually my dairy barn studio transformed itself into a semi-public/semi-private cabinet of meta-conceptual art curiosities, a site where research, production, exhibition and reception took place in the company of a small audience of fellow students, faculty members, university staff and other visitors

My interest in copying took me to Michael Boon's work, *In Praise of Copying*. Boon, a University of Toronto professor who teaches a course on copying, offers an interpretation of appropriation and mimesis inflected by a Buddhist perspective, a position that challenges western notions of intellectual property; concepts which he claims are sustained by insufficiently examined philosophical premises.

"Depropriation" here means indifference to possession. It indicates a willingness to relate to the world without imposing conditions of ownership in doing so, an ethics of care that does not require ownership, that requires an ethos other than that of ownership in order for there to be caring. It means allowing to circulate according to context, and therefore to remove from the logic of appropriation, and from enslavement to a particular context that is naturalized as "what must be." (224)

In *Park Avenue Reading Room*, 2012, I ‘cared for’ a book that had become subjectively significant—*The Critique of Cynical Reason*, 1983/1987 by Peter Sloterdijk, a German philosopher who is also the chancellor of the Karlsruhe College of Arts and Design. I did so by creating an installation in my studio, a ‘reading room,’ which echoed the book’s ethos and concepts without relying on illustration or the literal reproduction of the text.

In *Limitations*, 2012, a site-specific installation produced specifically for the 50% exhibition,³¹ I moved my practice out of the studio-cabinet and into a classroom in ArtLab. There I returned to a canonical Canadian conceptual artwork, *Horizons*, 1980, made by another prominent art educator, Garry Neill Kennedy. Like Kennedy, who had installed his work at the National Gallery as part of the *Pluralities 1980* exhibition, I chose to make a site-specific installation that addressed the institutional allocation of space by using various ‘remainders’ or leftovers. I chose to work with 1) the window, floor, support pillar and wall space that the other two artists in the exhibition did not want or need 2) found text in the form of an online database cataloguing works in the National Gallery’s collection 3) discarded (mistakenly produced) commercial vinyl letters 4) a page from my thesis proposal which was repurposed to serve as an artist’s statement.

Conceptual writing came to play an even more significant role in this work; in response to aspects of Kennedy’s *Horizons*, I wrote a poem of sorts limiting myself to using the titles of works found in the National Gallery’s

³¹ 50%, MFA student exhibition, ArtLab Room 370, 4-7 September, 2012.

collection. This text was printed on museum identification labels and installed as a single (dotted) line on the windows of the exhibition space.

Following this project, I began thinking about the limits of my mimicry-based method. For example, how is one to copy, mirror or reenact a work that doesn't take the form of an object, text, bounded performance or precisely described action? And further, how is one to reenact an event-specific, situation-contingent work when the conditions in which, and for which, it was produced have long since passed; especially when those very same conditions are integral to the work itself? Grappling with these conundrums laid the groundwork for my MFA thesis exhibition.

Chapter 6: Fellow Travellers

Countless artists (including the conceptual writers previously mentioned) have used strategies of copying, mimicry, repetition, appropriation and recontextualization including Elaine Sturtevant³² (1930-) and the Danish collective, SUPERFLEX,³³ both of whom have reproduced other artists' works with a high degree of virtuosity, claiming these reproductions as their own artwork. Indeed, the object, *Fountain*, 1917, has been reproduced, repurposed and recontextualized by countless others besides myself,³⁴ including Duchamp himself.³⁵ As well, in a recent curatorial project, *The Life of Others, Repetition*

³² For details see Sturtevant.

³³ For details see Berndes, Esche, McClean, and SUPERFLEX.

³⁴ See Minissale, who discusses dozens of examples, including the commercial repurposing of *Fountain*, 1917.

³⁵ See De La Durantaye, for a complete, itemized list.

and Survival, Mexico City-based Alexjandra Labastida offers a reinterpretation of appropriation very close to my own, bringing together the work of 17 artists who use strategies of “translations, covers, reprises, recreations, re-appropriations.”³⁶ The announcement for the exhibition states:

[W]hat all of them [the artists] share is repetition as the conduct of a vital relationship with the original. It is not just about postulating a reconstructed and reanimated body, but rather about making it present, for the first time, a second instance.... These works of art may therefore be inserted into a horizon where mimesis is understood not as representation but rather as a ritualized actualization. (Akbank Sanat)

However, so far I have not come across any curators who *practise* copying as an intimate, sensuous and engaged form of materially based intellectual care. Or ones that use ‘sympathetic magic’³⁷ as a hybrid curatorial-artmaking process. Although the Victoria-based curatorial collective, Noxious Sector (Doug Jarvis and Ted Hiebert), did hold seances with Alfred Jarry to help them select works for an exhibition they curated for the Richmond Art Gallery (More Often than Always/Less Often than Never A Noxious Sector Project November 26, 2010 – January 23, 2011.).

³⁶ This exhibition, which was on exhibit at Akbank Art, Istanbul from 19 February - 27 April, 2013, included work by artists: Rossella Biscotti, François Bucher, Tania Bruguera, Jeremy Deller, Leticia El Halli Obeid, Jon Mikel Euba, Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, Mario García Torres, Sanja Iveković, Martin Jenkinson, Magdalena Leite, Jorge Méndez Blake, Fabio Morais, Vicente Razo, Danh Vo, Ming Wong, Artur Zmijewski. See Akbank Sanat.

³⁷ Sympathetic magic is “a type of magic, based on the belief of affinity between things or actions, that seeks to achieve an effect by performing an associated action or using an associated thing.” (Sympathetic Magic)

But there are two artists whose research-oriented processes and relational and care-focussed practices resonate with my own. Chicago-based David Schutter researches works by ‘old masters’ such as Constable and Chardin to make paintings. After choosing a work, he thoroughly studies its physical makeup, as well as documents pertaining to its purchase, restoration, etc. (Hartley). He even examines where the work is situated in the gallery that is its home such as the wall colour, lighting and works installed nearby. After a time, he sets aside his copious research notes, and working only from memory, makes a number of paintings using canvases exactly the same size and type as the ‘original.’ He refers to these as ‘rehearsals’ rather than copies. While he uses the same palette as the original, his process invariably results in a grey-hued painting (Hartley). I interpret Schutter’s work as an example of a ‘curatorially informed art practice’ in that his process involves paying close attention to an existing work and the appropriation of practices associated with customary curating.

Using collections and printed matter to produce installations, Canadian artist Cathy Busby practises a hybrid form of making situated between artmaking and curating. In a project entitled *About Face*, 2012—developed during a residency at the the Institute of Art, Religion, & Social Justice, part of Union Theological Seminar in New York—Busby removed from public view portrait paintings of founders that usually hang in the institution’s dining hall, as well as locating other ‘lost’ portraits hidden away in various storage rooms. The dining hall portraits were replaced with to-scale silhouettes painted directly on the wall, a gentle reminder that the paintings would someday return. A catalogue in the

form of an artist's book included reproductions of the portraits along with stories about the persons depicted; stories Busby collected from individuals associated with the seminary whom she met during her residency.³⁸

Conclusion

Then again, there are those who anxiously ask, 'Is [s]he serious or is [s]he joking?' Perhaps [s]he is both! (Norton, 6)

According to de Duve, Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain*, 1917, wasn't actually completed until the Society of Independent Artist's organizing committee had replied to his call; until they (and subsequent generations of artists, audiences and institutions) took his test and confirmed that anything 'whatever' could, in fact, be made art. So if *Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917)*, 2013 is to reenact *Fountain*, 1917, it must patiently await the examining committee's reply — it's far too early for me to write a conclusion.

I offer, instead, another statement in the form of a work, *I Never Stopped Being A Curator (after Lygia Clark)*, 2013, a printed, computer-ink-on-canvas paper work that does triple duty in this project: as signage for the show, as a design format for the exhibition invitation and as an artist's statement of sorts. The phrase is based on Lygia Clark's declaration that "she had neither ever stopped being an artist, nor had become a psychoanalyst" (Rolnik, 78), when questioned about her psycho-therapeutically oriented work, *Structuring of the Self* (1976-1988).

³⁸ Cathy Busby discussed this work at a public lecture at the School of Art, University of Manitoba, March 6, 2013.

As I discovered during the past two years, performative micro-curating partakes of many approaches with many different names and histories. It could conceivably be enacted anywhere at any time by anyone using the most ordinary and indifferent means imaginable. That's because micro-curating is not synonymous with a visual style, media-specific approach, professional identity or institution. Rather, it is a difficult-to-define "mode of enquiry."³⁹ Because performative micro-curating denies us the convenience afforded by well-worn, familiar terms and categories, it implicitly insists that we approach all makers, events and things-made as singularities. It challenges us to care for our own and one another's practices by paying close attention to what and how we make, as well the contexts in which we choose to do what we do.

³⁹ I borrowed this phrase from Dr. Miranda Wallace, who used the term in a talk given in conjunction with the exhibition *Surrealism: The Poetry Of Dreams*, 23 July 2011 at Brisbane's Museum of Modern Art (McNamara).

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Appendix I: *I Never Stopped Being a Curator* - List of Works

Component #1

Sigrid Dahle

Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917)

2013

18 IKEA RIBBA frames each 40 1/4" x 28 1/4", 18 artists' signatures, red felt marker, purchased thesis, enhanced matte paper, printer ink

Sigrid Dahle

Statement of Facts (after Vanessa Place)

2013

15" x 15" x 2"

archival binder, plastic archival protector sheets, printed matter, wooden shelf, commercial vinyl letters

Sigrid Dahle

The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre)

2013

size variable

tables, chairs, thesis statements, name cards, altered bottled water, adhesive vinyl, commercial vinyl letters, pencils, miscellaneous found objects

Component #2

Sigrid Dahle

gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me

2013

altered found text (excerpts from Giorgio Agamben, "Tiananmen," *The Coming Community*, Michael Hardt, trans., Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993. 85-7), dark red commercial vinyl letters, bookcase, wall-mounted portrait mirror, door frame, gallery wall, two museum identification labels

Component #3

Sigrid Dahle

I Am Here (after Walter Hopps), 2013

16" x 32"

picture frame, document (letter of acceptance), commercial vinyl lettering

Sigrid Dahle

I Never Stopped Being a Curator (after Lygia Clark)

2013

16" x 13"

printer ink on stretched canvas paper

Sigrid Dahle

SD to MD: Seeing Eye Paint for the Blind Man

2012

3" x 5"

index card, acrylic paint, googly eyes, nails, Lee Valley Rare-Earth Circular Magnets

Appendix II: *I Never Stopped Being A Curator* -Exhibition Images

I Never Stopped Being A Curator

21 - 28 June, 2013

The School of Art Gallery University of Manitoba

Photo Credit: Larry Glawson unless stated otherwise



Installation view - north and east gallery walls; *Order #3882018366 (after Fountain, 1917)*, 2013 [framed work on the wall, far right]; *Statement of Facts (after Vanessa Place)*, 2013 [black box on floating shelf, far right]; *The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre)*, 2013 [centre space]; *gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me*, 2013 - detail [far wall]



Installation view - looking north towards the gallery entrance



gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - gallery foyer detail



gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - gallery foyer



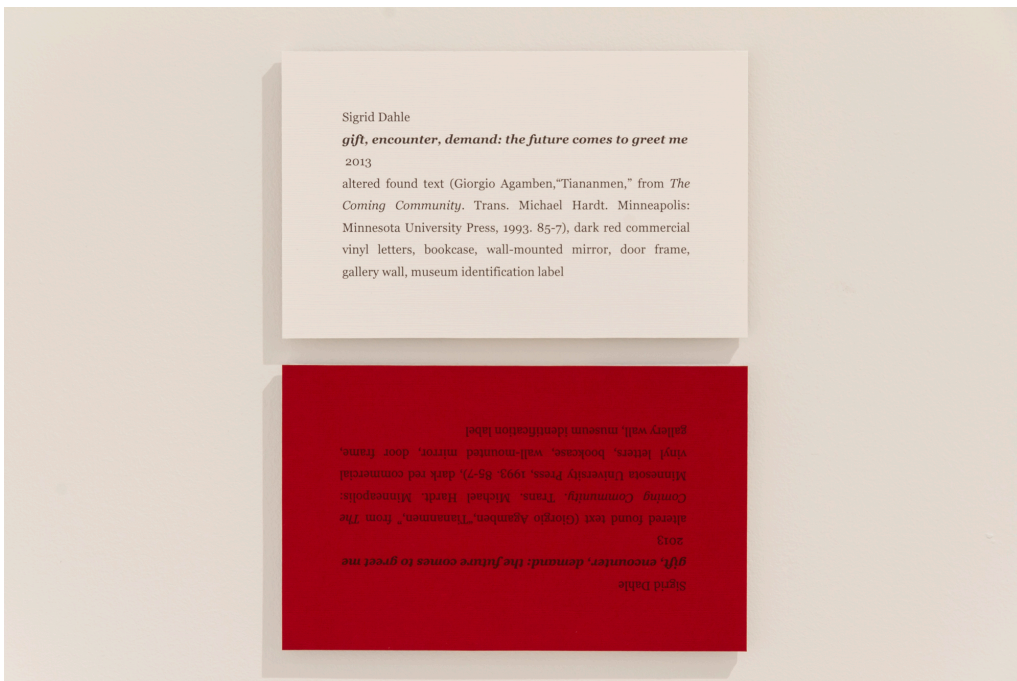
gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - gallery foyer, entrance to gallery and north gallery wall



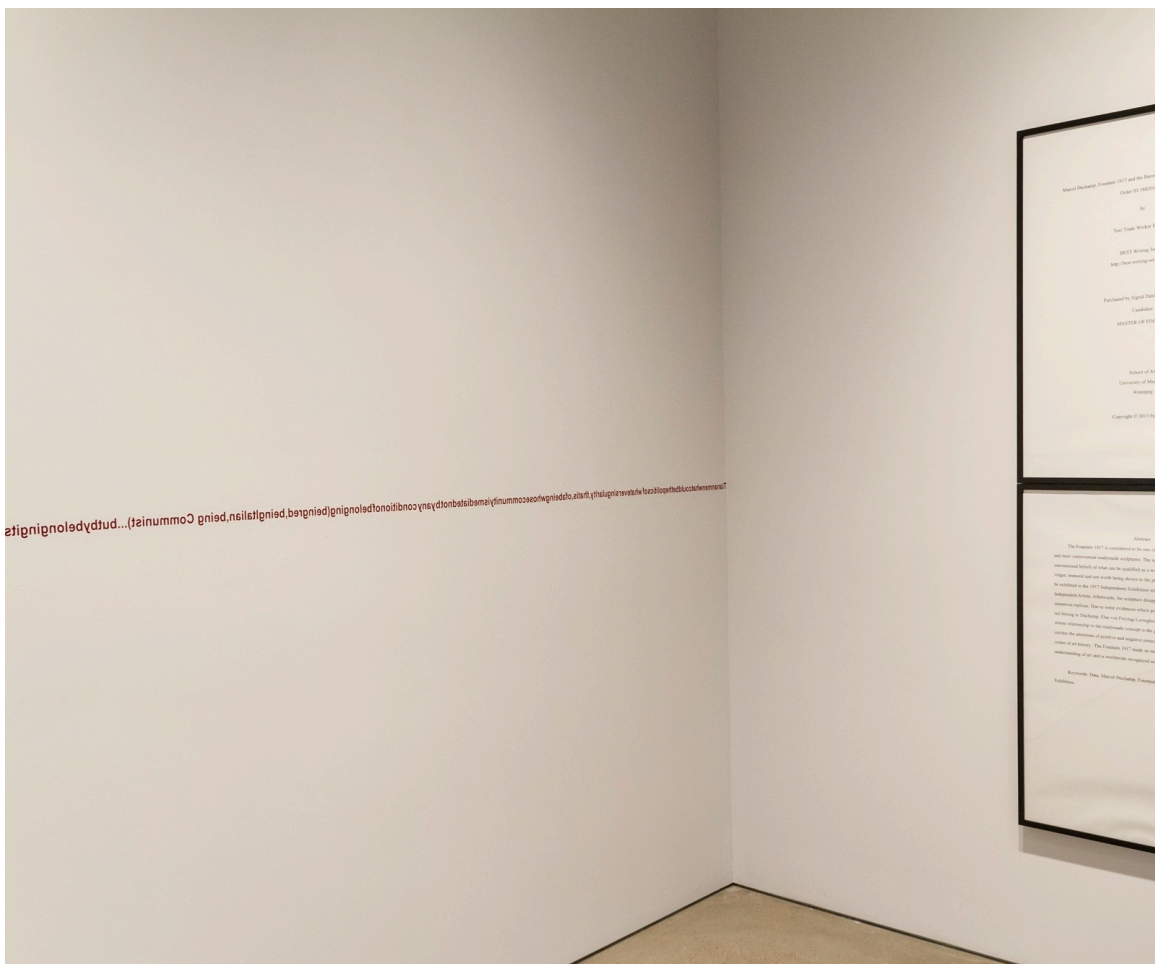
gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - gallery west wall
Photo Credit: Sigrid Dahle



gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - west and north gallery wall



gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - detail



gift, encounter, demand: the future comes to greet me, 2013; installation view - north gallery wall; detail



Statement of Facts (after Vanessa Place), 2013; installation view; detail



The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre), 2013; installation view; detail



Sigrid Dahle, The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre), 2013

The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre), 2013; installation view; detail



The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre), 2013; detail
Image Credit: Sigrid Dahle

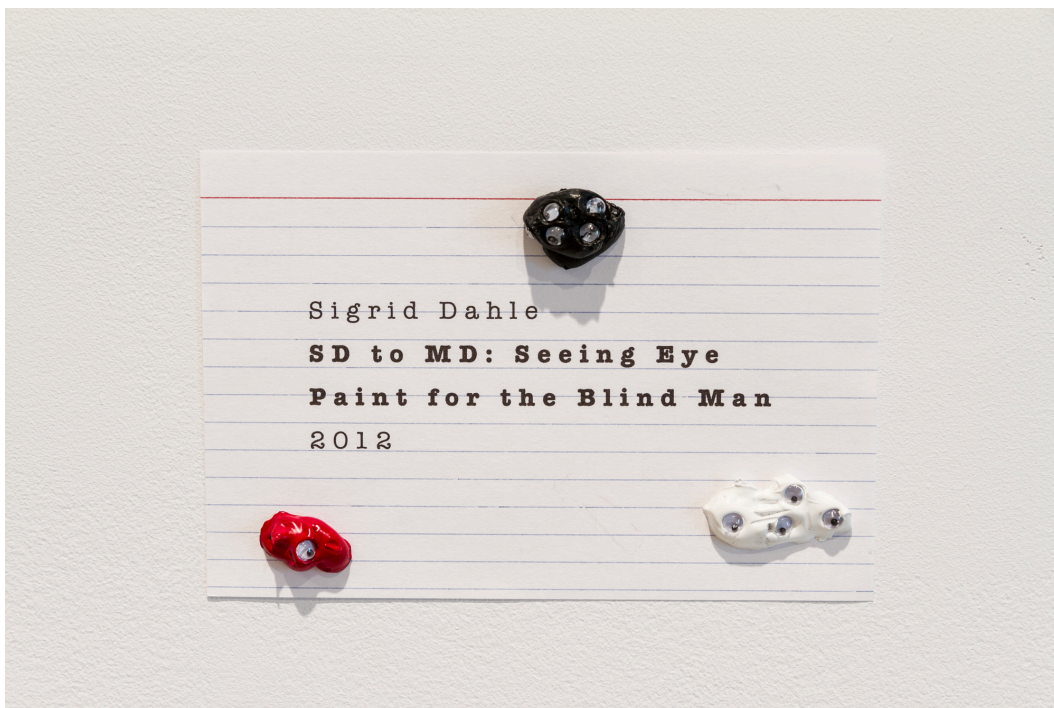


The Defense (Masterpiece Theatre), 2013; detail



I Never Stopped Being a Curator (after Lygia Clark), 2013 [left]

I Am Here (after Walter Hopps), 2013 [right]



SD to MD: Seeing Eye Paint for the Blind Man, 2012

Appendix III: *I Never Stopped Being A Curator* - Exhibition Invitation

