

Jackson Mills Smith

Through the Briar Patch:

Conceptualizing Rural American Subculture

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Roy Tomlinson

Kristin Bradshaw

Underlying concepts of memory, myth, and collective oral history are inherently bound to the cultural landscapes of the rural United States and its niche folkways I experienced growing up. From the bayous and spoil banks of my birthplace in Southern Louisiana, to the rolling cornfields and river bottoms of my home along the Southern Indiana-Illinois border, these notions heavily occupy the sphere of my existence, both then and now. Generational interactions between the personal and the natural are omnipresent, framed by notions of leisure and labor, communities rooted in tradition and ritual, and the generation of culture through each of these.

In the past, my work has revolved around the investigation of these concepts concerning my father's history as a young man pursuing carpentry in Southern Louisiana leading up to my birth. However, my current frame of reference has shifted to a related historical context shortly after this timeframe; the history of the family deer camp in the Pinkstaff River Bottoms of Southern Illinois, about 30 miles from my childhood home. By utilizing this source material, I'm able to conduct research and gather information in a way that's pertinent to the concepts I've continuously investigated in the past, while also uncovering new developments that have not yet been investigated within my creative practice. Research is conducted within this frame by gathering photographs, conducting phone call interviews, writing and receiving letters, and mining personal memories while also gathering academic sources and studying creative influences.

Some questions I hope to investigate moving forward include: How might a research-based writing practice contextualize or inform an ongoing series of object-oriented installations? Through direct configurations and manipulations, and in conjunction with other objects and materials, how might a series of banal objects convey a particular narrative, event, or cultural landscape? What role does oral history and tradition play in both "leisurely" and laborious activities within the rural cultural landscapes of the United States? In what ways does memory, both collective and individual, perpetuate myth within these landscapes? How do the above-mentioned concepts generate a sense of community and culture in the United States?

Existing within the scope of an ongoing experimental writing practice, the aforementioned concepts maintain relevant roles in conjunction with the investigation of the

perpetuation of myth through oral, collective history and memory within the cultural landscape at hand. This writing practice allows me to concretize ephemeral, emotive notions of remembering, while also preserving the unique language specific to this place and time.

Words and language occupy the space of a page in the same manner that objects occupy the space of a room. Both are disclosing information, redirecting the viewer's attention to an environment beyond the gallery. The ordinary, the banal, and the everyday are accurate descriptors of the objects utilized within my installation practice. I utilize familiar objects in a manner that breaks audience expectations. Through the constant reconfiguring and manipulating of these objects in conjunction with one another, audiences are offered a small glimpse of the roles they serve in the mythically poetic, rural American landscapes that are often overlooked or dismissed in the art institution.

A variety of artists, theorists, authors, and poets such as Josh Minkus, Marcel Broodthaers, CA Conrad, Frank Stanford, and Simon J. Bronner allow me to consider the various ways in which objects, gestures, and text can convey ideas or narratives in various combinations, while also being informed by a consistent research-based practice. Broodthaers is of particular interest in the way the artist consistently presents audiences with a lexicon of repeated objects, allowing interpretations to be designated over time and altered through physical reconfigurations.

¹ The collection of sources I'm researching encourages the further consideration of how words and their associations live on a page to generate meaning or interpretation, offering audiences and readers a glimpse into the folkways of the United States that are a part of my identity as an artist.

The shape I envision this project taking consists of a series of installation pieces that operate in conjunction with a personal experimental writing practice. Studio time will be equally divided among the two. New explorations of object configurations and installations will occur on a bi-weekly basis, resulting in a minimum of 3 to 4 installation pieces throughout the course of my second thesis semester. The final thesis presentation will consist of an installation piece that features the most successful aspects of the works created previously. Objects and writing will

¹ "Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective", The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, Accessed September 29, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1542>.

continue to inform each other and the way I consider the series of pieces in an overarching manner. While a select number of writing pieces will be integrated into the final installation alongside objects, a short perfect-bound book will also be created and presented with the final exhibition as a mechanism to present the culmination of writing created during the semester.

Jackson Mills Smith

Artist Statement: Thesis Defense FA2020

Often utilizing the pseudonym, “muggybrew,” Jackson Mills Smith (b. 1999) studies the language, history, imagery, and myth of various rural niche cultures and their associated activities within the United States. The artist and writer currently resides in Portland, Oregon.

Being born in Louisiana and raised intermittently between a small farm in Southern Indiana, the river bottoms of Southern Illinois, and the swampy backwaters of his birthplace, Jackson strives to navigate the cultural sphere that shapes his own current identity. In doing such, he is also introducing audiences to a cultural landscape that is often overlooked or not recognized within the institutional art world. Work often takes the form of installation, sculpture, photography, and performance. Jackson’s conceptual framework and experimental writing practice serve as the foundation and blueprint of his practice, no matter the medium.

Through oral storytelling, found family photographs, interviews, letters, collective and individual memory, and first-hand experience, the post-disciplinary artist brings forth and introduces a cultural narrative of rural America and the events that occur in these places in a unique lens. By consistently researching and questioning the values, traditions, and oral collective histories of these specific environments, Jackson’s creative practice regularly shifts and evolves through an exploration of materials and found objects which serve as reference points to his concepts.

Jackson Mills Smith

Project Statement: Thesis Defense FA2020

By conceptualizing the history of the family deer camp, non-disciplinary artist Jackson Mills Smith presents audiences with a multifaceted body of work in the form of both a publication and installation. The language and imagery of a rural cultural landscape specific to the United States are ever-present in the concepts and ideas at hand. In studying the overarching notion of a collective oral history, while also considering how memory and remembering perpetuate myth, a body of work is created in a vocabulary pertinent to the artist's background. The conceptual pathways presented in *Thicket* and *The Cocklebur Archive* serve as glimpses of a world steeped in ritual and tradition, a world where notions of leisure and labor are interchangeable and fluid. The relationship that language and text maintain with the page in *The Cocklebur Archive* is also applicable to the objects presented in *Thicket*. There is no hierarchy of form or media from the gallery space to the page. Language oscillates between sparse, minimal configurations and dense, descriptive masses of prose that lack punctuation or formality but capture the saturated imagery and unique vocabulary embedded in the subject matter. Each facet of the installation is a vessel, a reference point for imagery that redirects the viewer's attention to environments and instances beyond the gallery. The multimedia nature of the work allows for several audience entry points, whether it be in objects, language, images, or sounds. By acting simultaneously as an artist, curator, storyteller, and poet, Jackson's flexibility in making allows him to consistently pursue a variety of mediums and materials that will best serve the concepts at hand. The artist and writer aims to facilitate a space of open dialogue with audience members, where their stories are shared and brought to life by association.

Jackson Mills Smith

FA2020

Thesis Defense Oral

Introduction

- Hello everyone! My name is Jackson Mills Smith. I'm an Intermedia major. Welcome to my Thesis Defense Presentation. I really appreciate the fact that you all took to the time to log on and make an online appearance.
- I'd just like to take a moment to personally thank my Mentor, Kristin Bradshaw. You've been a wonderful, warm, guiding light and inspiration not only in my Thesis journey, but pretty much throughout my entire college experience. I'd also like to thank my community and my friends, both at PNCA and elsewhere. I'm sure you know who you are. None of this work matters if I don't have the opportunity to share and discuss it with you all.
- My beautiful, wonderful partner Isabella also deserves immense amounts of praise for constantly being my support, my caretaker, and my best friend.
- Lastly, I'd like to thank my family. Words can't begin to assign meaning to the sense of gratitude and appreciation that I feel towards my parents, my little sister and brother, and my grandparents. I definitely would not be where I'm at right now if it weren't for the massive amounts of love, support, and encouragement I've received from them.

- My time at PNCA has been an incredible journey, a journey full of personal and artistic growth, community building, and excitement. Thank you all so much!

Personal Introduction

- From the bayous and spoil banks of my birthplace in Southern Louisiana, to the rolling cornfields and river bottoms of my home along the Southern Indiana-Illinois border, the various spheres I lived and grew up in as a young person were drenched in notions of a unique rural culture that's relatively common in the United States.
- It wasn't until I moved out and headed out here at age 18 that I realized how misunderstood and misrepresented this way of life was in the setting of the urban, institutional art world.
- As I continued to find my footing as an artist during my time here at PNCA, I began to come to terms with my own lived experiences in the scope of this culture that, in my mind, was never a political weapon or an opposition, but rather a world of shared experiences rooted in tradition, storytelling, and oral history. This world has a language of its own, a language that doesn't live in the gallery or the museum, but in the environment, the spaces, the events, the objects, and the people that surrounded me as a young person.

- My practice begins with the discovery of what it means to simultaneously exist as the son of a deer hunter, a poet, a storyteller, and an artist.

Project Introduction

- The world I navigated as a younger person was introduced to me by my father at a very young age. Activities like hunting and fishing flooded my daily life and would later directly influence my relationship with and perspective of the natural world, labor, culture, and art.
- From the months of November to January, from the age of 6-12, my winters were spent in the quarters of a small room constructed of plastic tarps and an assortment of hocked furniture and appliances. The guests included my father's Cajun family friends, men who make their living as carpenters, and maintained a passion for the outdoors and all the activities it had to offer. These men mentored my father prior to my birth. The childhood and life experiences I grew up with are very much owed to them as they are to the rest of my family. Everything my father and I learned about deer hunting, fishing, and building was passed down by them.
- This time was spent squatting in an old metal pole barn in the Embarrass River Bottoms just outside Pinkstaff, Illinois. Although my father and his friends were leasing the land to hunt on, the barn was a bonus feature, lagniappe (as they would say), and eventually became the deer camp for

several years. We were accidentally deemed a “High Power Hunting Club” by a curious farmer one season, the sarcastically humorous title has stuck with us ever since.

- My final thesis project is a conceptualization of the family deer camp that takes the form of a publication and an installation that operate in tandem with one another.
- Some of the key concepts associated with my work include the overarching notion of a collective oral history. From here I’m able to consider how memory and remembering perpetuate myth, while also studying notions of tradition and ritual, and how that ties to concepts of leisure and labor within the rural cultural landscape.

Conceptual Framework

Line of Inquiry

- Some questions I continuously investigate in this work include:
 - How does an experimental writing practice contextualize an object-oriented installation?
 - Through direct configuration and manipulation, and in conjunction with other objects and materials, how might a series of banal objects convey a particular narrative, event, or cultural landscape?

- What role does oral history and tradition play in both “leisurely” and laborious activities within the rural cultural landscapes of the United States?
- In what ways does memory, both collective and individual, perpetuate myth within these landscapes?
- How do the above-mentioned concepts generate a sense of community and culture?

Myth, Memory & Remembering, Storytelling & Oral History

- By embracing the faulty nature of memory and remembering, new pathways unfold. As stories, oral histories, and personal accounts are passed onward to the next listener, details are lost, or in the case of my family’s deer hunting stories, embellished and exaggerated perhaps.
- As a story continues to travel its course, the embellishments and lost details become just as vital as the main content of the account itself. This in turn, allows for a form of modern myth to take shape.
- These ideas are all operating within the framework of a deep tradition that allows for the continuation of an extremely labor intensive activity disguised as leisure. Although I have little desire to trace this tradition and its ritualistic properties back to the source, I’m still aware of the underpinnings

and meaning behind an activity such as deer hunting that is now deemed as an unnecessary activity by contemporary and urban, capitalistic standards.

- This relationship between myth, oral history, and memory play a major role in the objects I utilize within my installation and the language present within the experimental poetry of my publication.
- Author and theorist Simon J. Bronner has served as a valuable source of information when researching and studying the implications of tradition, storytelling, and the role of various folkways in the generation of culture in the United States. In particular, his book *Following Tradition* has allowed me to consider the larger implications and overarching connections of my concepts.

Methodology & Final Works

Publication: *The Cocklebur Archive*

- My writing practice allows me to concretize ephemeral, emotive notions of remembering, while also preserving the unique language specific to this place and time.
- I look to poetic work like CA Conrad's *Marsupial Afternoon* for formatting and structural inspiration. Conrad consistently challenges the conventions of concrete poetry and the limitations of the page through the use of unique letter patterns and experimental poetic structures.

- I often think of the relationship that language and text has with the page in the same way that I consider objects in a physical space or environment. There is no hierarchy of form or media from the gallery space to the page.
- *The Cocklebur Archive* is a collection of experimental poetry embodying and contextualizing the concepts that serve as the foundation of my body of work. There are 15 copies in the total edition.
- The publication is 8.5 x 11 inches, coil bound, and contains 19 poems, 6 of which have unique letterpress embossments. The size of the publication allows readers and viewers to consider the limitations and implications of “the page”. The metal coil binding allows for a less restricted or directed interaction with the piece. The viewer/reader maintains a sense of autonomy. The front cover is foil stamped with a single, silver antler, and the back cover similarly presents a line of barbed wire, symbols that often occupy the mind when navigating personal memories.
- On the back of each page of the publication is a single line of dots and dashes, morse code originating from a long list of around 50 significant GPS coordinate locations marked by my father and friends over the course of several years. By concealing the actual series of numbers pertinent to the location, the family’s hunting spots remain confidential. This also

encourages the reader/viewer to interact with the publication in a more elevated and engaging manner.

- Language oscillates between sparse, minimal configurations and dense, descriptive masses of prose that lack punctuation or formality, but capture the saturated imagery and unique vocabulary embedded in the subject matter.
- A variety of cuts and symbols are also present within the poems themselves. These are chosen and presented in a manner that either connotes the symbolism present within the writing itself, or serves as a stand-in image for objects or scenes pertinent to the memory, story, place, or time. This relationship also exists with the objects and media present in my installation piece *Thicket*.

Installation: *Thicket*

- *Thicket* is an object-oriented installation investigating the cryptic and mysterious nature of memory and storytelling within the context of the family deer camp. Each facet of the installation is a vessel, a reference point for imagery that redirects the viewer's attention to environments and instances beyond the gallery.
- The ordinary, the banal, and the everyday are accurate descriptors of the objects utilized within my installation practice. However, the various

configurations, manipulations, and arrangements guide the mind towards situations and circumstances that exist elsewhere. By making assumptions about the objects' relationships with one another, audience members can then begin to further understand the contexts that the work is stemming from.

- By utilizing an array of found and gathered objects, I'm able to break the viewer's expectations and perceptions of the material's original function or context. The objects in my installations are recognizable and somewhat familiar. With the use of juxtaposition, repetition, multiplicity, and light fabrication, the materials and objects take on a different likeness that blend notions of the everyday and the folkloric or the mythic. This encourages a different sort of interrogation than audiences typically have with visual work.
- Viewers don't feel the need to question what this object is or how it functions, but are instead investigating how the objects operate in conjunction with one another.
- The work and practice of the conceptual installation artist and writer Marcel Broodthaers provides several examples of how objects, language, gestures, stories, and ideas can coalesce into a multifaceted installation or assemblage.

I've spent a great deal of time this semester researching the artist, which has heightened my personal vocabulary of language and ideas.

- **Bootjacks**

- The 25 handmade wooden objects present within *Thicket* are boot jacks, a useful tool for removing one's tall, muddy boots with ease after returning from the fields or the forest from a hunt.
- These objects are made in the same likeness as the bootjacks present in the deer camp, a replication of an extremely simple, utilitarian object created by my father and his friends.
- This series of objects has a more direct relationship with the object-oriented architecture of the camp. The rugged, unfinished appearance provides viewers with a direct, physical example of the ad-hoc nature of building and making so often associated with my family's activities.
- Five of the bootjacks are carved with the names of deer stand locations and other pertinent sites on the acreage my family owns and leases in Crawford and Lawrence County. These locations also correspond with the previously mentioned morse code conversions present in *The Cocklebur Archive*.

- The objects carry a conceptual weight not only specific to notions of the deer camp, but also to the grounds we called home as well.

Radios & Gravel

- Also present within the gallery are several radios of various sizes and types, all of which are dispersed on the floor atop multiple piles of gravel, a material readily abundant and familiar to the cultural landscape in discussion. Each radio constantly emits the sound of white noise and static throughout the space.
- Radio static is essentially a loss of information, absent of recognizable sounds and communications. Much like the act of remembering, flipping through radio dials allows the user to pinpoint a specific moment in time, a familiar echo in the dense thicket of memory.
- By utilizing residual media and technology such as radios, I'm also transporting viewers to a place in the United States that's not so obsessed with what's new or "happening." This exemplifies the sort of nostalgic, technological and cultural gap between the rural and the urban.
- Looking to Charles Acland's "Residual Media," I'm offered a look into the history of media and the socio-political, artistic, and economic implications that surround it. By discussing the consequences of

constantly pursuing the “new” in a hyper-capitalistic society, Acland studies the various functions of outdated or “residual” media.

Projection, Shelf, & Targets

- An experimental short film, titled *Soma Ffog: Site 6262* is displayed in the form of a projection within *Thicket*. The video is thrown from a high vantage point directly above the doorway entrance of the gallery. The projector equipment rests on a hand-made shelf, which was created in the physical likeness of a typical deer stand, high above the viewers line of sight. The shelf is painted with what I call “gallery camouflage,” encouraging viewers to consider ideas of the “seen and unseen,” a concept heavily embedded in the activity of deer hunting.
- The title of the piece originates from a personal discovery on the family property. A number of oil wells have been steadily operating throughout a variety of locations near my family’s hunting sites. One of the main oil tank batteries, a common meeting place for returning from the forest or field, has the name “Amos Goff” sloppily written on it in white paint. The mysterious nature of the name has always piqued my interest. Most often it’s the little things or markers we leave behind that last the longest. Amos Goff’s mark is an artifact of the past, a hidden existence only recognized in this specific place and instance.

- This is how the title of the experimental short film came to exist; Amos Goff spelled backwards.
- The film itself is a kind of map; a survey of text, language, environments, sounds, sights, locations, objects, and people. Focus is placed on the often overlooked or forgotten attributes of the architecture of specific places and instances in photos, allowing a new perspective to be revealed of the whole. This project utilizes a collection of both familiar and esoteric images and coordinates. By mining familial photographs, while also utilizing technology such as Google Earth, a deconstruction of the family deer camp is presented.
- The projection surface that the looping film appears on consists of a large brown and blue tarp with multiple tears and rips of various shapes and sizes. Bits and pieces of the film are seen through the tarp in a distorted manner. The audio of the piece is also heard amongst the continuous radio static, and features the distorted sounds of an oil well pumping, along with a short, edited excerpt of my father's voice telling a familiar story.
- The fragmented visuals are caught on the surface of two storm windows, which have been treated with wheatpaste and multiple targets.
- These large, suspended panels link the physical denotations of targets and their actual use to the conceptual idea of pinpointing a modern myth. Oftentimes the act of telling a story or recalling an instance requires several

attempts, until one's able to hone in on the meat of the story, or the bullseye, so to speak.

Resin Cast

- The small resin sphere in *Thicket* is a cast of a wad of thistles and cockleburs. The individual piece maintains a more personal conceptual relationship. My uncle Dalbert would often hide cockleburs throughout the camp as a prank on the others. There was no scarcity of cockleburs in the fields, food plots, and treelines we navigated in Southern Illinois. Dalbert would simply relocate them, perhaps in your cereal, on your pillow like a mint, in your hat, or on your shower towel.
- After Dalbert passed away unexpectedly several years ago, the recurring instances of hidden cockleburs served as a constant reminder of a man much like a father to my own father and to myself. I still find cockleburs in my jackets, on my shoestrings, and in my truck from time to time.
- Jim Harrison wrote once that “Death steals everything except our stories.” I find this rather applicable.
- By casting them in resin, the cockleburs become a type of conceptual memorial, a concretized idea of a man who moved from one mythic, unique existence to another.

Personal Role

- In order to complete this body of work, I took on a variety of roles as an artist. At times I act as a curator, deciding which objects and materials to utilize. In some cases, a sculptor, wheatpasting targets or filling resin molds, or making bootjacks. Other times I'm a poet, a writer, a storyteller, and a publisher. When installing the work I'm an art handler, learning various gallery and display tactics/applications to achieve my curatorial and artistic vision. But, in the larger scope of things, I'm a non-disciplinary artist, a jack of all trades willing to utilize a variety of methods and means that will best serve my concepts.

Audience

- My intended audience is the urban viewer, the art instructor, or the gallery/museum goer. It's not my goal to educate anyone on any given topic or to change anybody's mind, but rather to offer up a glimpse into a different world, a unique perspective not presented in the art institution or the gallery. In telling my own story, I hope to facilitate a space of open dialogue with audience members, where their stories are shared and brought to life by association. In the endless expanse of memory, remembering, storytelling, and culture, audience connections and interactions are nearly unavoidable.

Shifts From Proposal

- In the proposal stage of my thesis project, I originally set out to create several varied installations that would eventually culminate in one final piece, along with a publication. Due to the various obstacles that presented themselves throughout the year, I found myself reshifting my focus to one single installation and a specific series of objects.
- Some of the components of the installation were already clear in my mind, such as the presence of bootjacks, gravel, and radios, while others were born out of necessity, research, or just daydreaming in my studio. Being back in the Midwest over the summer also allowed me to write, gather my thoughts, and sketch out several installation configurations.
- Deciding on the number of objects, their display tactics, and their arrangement/configuration was reliant on both physical and conceptual aspects. For instance, the smaller, more readily available objects such as radios, gravel, and bootjacks allowed for large numbers to be made and acquired. While others, such as the tarp and the target panels maintain more relevance in their solitude and size.
- Realizing and finalizing the publication was also a task that occurred over the course of this semester in an Artist Publication course. Although I had plenty of writing and ideas on the content of the book, I spent much of my

time editing, formatting, and deciding on the physical appearance and quality of the publication.

- Although it was unclear to me when I proposed, I was initially interested in the idea of utilizing projection in the work, but was unsure of the actual content. Luckily, a project from a class I took this semester allowed me the proper headspace and platform to create the experimental short film that included in *Thicket*.

Research & Influences

- The collection of sources I'm researching encourages the further consideration of how words and their associations live on a page to generate meaning or interpretation, offering audiences and readers a glimpse into the folkways of the United States that are a part of my identity as an artist.
- A variety of artists, theorists, authors, and poets including Josh Minkus, Marcel Broodthaers, CA Conrad, Frank Stanford, and Simon J. Bronner allow me to consider the various ways in which objects, gestures, and text can convey ideas or narratives in various combinations, while also being informed by a consistent research-based practice.
- For example, a text like Daniel Lichter and David Brown's "Rural America in an Urban Society: Changing Spatial and Social Boundaries" provides readers with a contemporary analysis of the often misunderstood or

misinterpreted connections between rural and urban life and culture within the United States. The two authors identify and explain the prevalence of rural-urban interconnection within day-to-day life, while also discussing the sociopolitical, spatial, environmental, and symbolic commonalities that rural and urban America maintain.

- On the other hand, projects like Eleanor Antin's *100 boots* exemplify successful documentation and display of a large scale work that considers the influences of location and environment on how objects are perceived. Through a variety of object manipulations and arrangements, Antin is able to communicate an idea that remains consistent through all facets of the work.
- Each one of these examples, along with a multitude of others discovered in personal research, has served as an extremely important asset of inspiration, knowledge, and comprehension as I continued to pursue my thesis project this past semester.
- This research has heavily shaped the vocabulary of concepts and language that are so intertwined with my Thesis Project.

Conclusion

- Once again, I would like to thank you all for joining me online today, and for fostering a sense of community, especially in a current state of extreme distance and uncertainty. This year has perhaps been one of the most

surprising, enlightening, exciting, and stressful years I've ever experienced. However, through the wonderful support and encouragement of my community, I've been able to create a body of work I'm extremely proud of and excited to share.

- In the future, I hope to continue writing and publishing, while also pursuing submissions to literary magazines and experimental film festivals.
- Documentation of *Thicket* can be viewed on my artist website, muggybrew.com.
- *The Cocklebur Archive* will also be available for purchase, and will hopefully soon be available through the library here at PNCA.
- I hope you all move forward in life thinking of the ones that came before us, in hopes that their memories, traditions, and stories are kept alive by our words and actions.
- Thanks again! I believe it's time for questions.

Jackson Mills Smith
Fall 2020: Thesis Defense
Bibliography

Acland, Charles R., ed. *Residual Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Charles Acland's "Residual Media" offers readers a look into the history of media and the socio-political, artistic, and economic implications that surround it. By discussing the consequences of constantly pursuing the "new" in a hyper-capitalistic society, Acland also studies the function of outdated or "residual" media. As technology is left behind in pursuit of something more innovative or functional, residual media is freed from its initial basis of functionality, allowing more experimental contexts and functions to occur.

In the scope of personal research, residual media and technology plays a large role in rural cultural landscapes within the United States. By studying the socio-political implications of technology accessibility in rural landscapes, larger connections between personal work and research are identified. The use of residual media and technology as an artistic media/material is also of great personal interest.

Benjamin, Walter . "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, 217–251. Ed. H. Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1969 [1936].

Canadian philosopher and theorist Marshall McLuhan provides a deeper understanding of the underpinnings of communication in "The Medium is the Message." By exploring ideas surrounding human connection, the author offers several key insights on the role of medium and content within communication. According to McLuhan, a message is strictly reliant on its carrier, the medium with which it travels. Without the medium, there can be no message. These notions are at the foundation of McLuhan's research.

The aspects being discussed within Benjamin's text can often be translated and analyzed within my writing and installation practices. For example, my use of found objects, the

written word, and the configurations present within my installation practice are each applicable in their unique manners. How does my reliance on objects and language affect the perception of concepts and ideas? McLuhan provides much information linked to this question, and remains an important figure in the minds of many post-disciplinary, conceptual artists.

Brautigan, Richard. *Trout Fishing in America: A Novel*. London: Cape, 1970.

Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* is a collection of experimental short stories and poetry in the form of a novella. The work doesn't present its readers with a clear or concise storyline, but instead consists of a series of brief, often humorous anecdotes. The only component of the literary work that provides any sort of cohesiveness is the use of the phrase "Trout Fishing in America." The phrase continuously reappears as character names, places, the act itself, or as an adjective.

In relation to my own practice, I'm particularly interested in how myth, specific to a place, activity, or a culture, can be manifested through experimental writing practices. By utilizing my own lexicon of language, objects, and imagery centered around specific activities or events within the rural United States, I'm also able to reveal a mysterious facet of the culture I was raised in a similar way that Brautigan does in *Trout Fishing in America*. The language that Brautigan utilizes in his work often offers up entry points to the creation of spaces and objects that live outside of the literary realm of making.

Bronner, Simon J. "The Problem of Tradition." In *Following Tradition*, 9-72. University Press of Colorado, 1998. Accessed January 29, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt46nqtf.6.

In this text, ethnologist, historian, and author Simon Bronner discusses some of the key functions of tradition in the context of the United States. This particular article belongs to a larger publication by the author, *Following Tradition*. Throughout this particular chapter, Bronner analyzes and investigates the historical role that tradition has on culture

generation within the United States. The author argues that tradition is often problematic to pinpoint or define because of its “conceptual softness” and multiple meanings.

This chapter of *Following Tradition* is important to the research I conduct as a writer and artist as it pertains to major concepts I’m continuously working with. By taking into account both the history and the influence of tradition on American culture, I’m able to further contemplate the overarching concepts of my work, while also considering how it fits into a larger, historical/cultural context.

Conrad, C. A. *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon: New (Soma)Tics*. Seattle: Wave Books, 2012.

C.A. Conrad’s *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon* is a collection of poetry and short stories. The author is able to present readers with a book structure unlike any of its counterparts in that it seems to follow its own rules of punctuation, of order, and of structure. Conrad has created an organizational structure of writing and reading that follows the author’s own, ambiguous patterns. The subject matter ranges from the everyday to the otherworldly in a variety of fashions.

This collection of experimental writing allows me to consider the way in which various categories of writing might live together in the form of a publication. Conrad’s poems often seem to occupy the page in a similar manner that objects may occupy a room. *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon* is a prime example of an author’s unique vision and how that vision may be expressed in the form of a collection of works.

Franklin, Tom. *Poachers: Stories*. Harper Collins, 1999.

Poachers is a collection of fictional short stories by author Tom Franklin that take place throughout the Southern United States. The subject matter within these stories is pertinent to both the physical and the cultural landscape throughout the region. Activities and

concepts such as deer hunting, blue collar jobs, labor and leisure, tradition, storytelling, and notions of masculinity are often brought up throughout the collection.

As a writer and artist, I often look to the work of Tom Franklin as an excellent example of a glimpse into the mythic nature of the stories of the rural United States. Subject matter is often ironic and humorous, but also dark and haunting at times, which I often feel are prominent within my own work. Although I'm not much of a short story writer, the themes and language that Franklin utilizes within this book has a significant influence on my practice.

Harrison, Jim, and Mario Batali. *A Really Big Lunch*. New York: Grove Press, 2018.

This book by Jim Harrison encapsulates a very wide variety of storytelling, ruminations on food and cooking, hunting tales, memories of the author, and a family history rooted in the world of outdoor sportsmanship. Harrison often writes in a very sincere manner that deals with notions of contentment and pleasure in the little details of life.

Jim Harrison's style of writing, although quite different from my own, offers up a way of storytelling that's drenched in nostalgia and rich sensationalism. The way in which the author is able to maintain this style throughout all his work allows me to consider the way in which my voice as a writer is illustrated within the work I create. Much of Harrison's subject matter feels rather relatable and appealing to my own interests as well.

It Wasn't a Dream: It Was a Flood. Mill Mountain Press, 1974.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPS1tXOvoC8>.

It Wasn't a Dream: It Was a Flood is a 16mm short film that revolves around the life and poetry of Frank Stanford. It was created in 1974 courtesy of Stanford's publisher, Irv Broughton. The twenty five minute piece allows Stanford to tell his story in an especially

disparate and abstract manner. Much like his writing, the film oscillates between the reality of a Southern U.S. landscape and the dream world of the poet's own mind.

This film is yet another example of Frank Stanford's work that centers around the myth of our own existence and memory within a specific environmental and cultural landscape. In the same way that I often resonate with the imagery in Stanford's writing, the imagery and language within the film evokes several moments of recognition as well. It's also of personal interest to witness a writer pursuing other mediums aside from their primary practice.

"Josef Strau." Vilma Gold. Accessed November 2, 2019. <http://vilmagold.com/artist/josef-strau/>.

Josef Strau is a contemporary conceptual artist and writer based out of Berlin. His work often blurs the boundaries that exist between the literary world and the art world. The fictional nature of the artist's words and language choices are directly outlined by the objects they point to. Strau utilizes found objects, canvases, paper, and a variety of other commonly accumulated materials in order to redirect or even reject the viewer's preconceived notions of the literary narrative structure. The artist's inventory of objects and materials are often reused and reconfigured throughout his line of work.

This conceptual artist is of particular interest to me due to his incorporation of experimental writing practices within the realm of art object installation. The inventory of materials and objects he utilizes is in constant dialogue with the language at hand. As I continue to move forward in my own practice, I aim to interrogate this aspect in a manner that is specific to my own lexicon of objects and language.

Josh Minkus. Accessed October 9, 2019. <http://joshminkus.com/>.

Josh Minkus, a multidisciplinary conceptual artist based within the United States, is continuously exploring the arbitrary tenets that revolve around poetry, sculpture, and language/text. The artist navigates the idea of the ready-made object, the sculpted piece,

and the literary form, and often combines all three in unexpected ways. Text can often be seen applied directly onto objects and environmental surfaces in conjunction with the objects in the piece.

Minkus is another personal creative influence that promotes consideration of the relationship between object and language/text. I find myself particularly interested in the way in which the artist is able to elevate the language informing the objects within the work by directly applying it to the object itself, or in close proximity within the space.

Khalili, Hamid Amouzad, and Rahil Khodamizabihi. "The Role of Banal Objects in Developing the Artistic Expression of an Idea." *International Journal of Arts Theory & History* 12 (4) (2017): 12–19. doi:10.18848/2326-9952/CGP/v12i04/12-19

"The Role of Banal Objects in Developing the Artistic Expression of an Idea" by authors Hamid Amouzad Khalili and Rahil Khodamizabihi is an article examining the role of objects within the world of literary art, narrative and fiction. The authors develop two main categories for objects involved within the artistic expression of an idea: the main object and the banal object. After providing a brief historical summary of objects in literature, Khalili and Khodamizabihi also take the time to discuss and identify several characteristics that banal objects take on in stories and text.

Although the authors' primary focus revolve around the role of banal objects within literature, a majority of the claims relate to the way in which I consider objects as an artist. The categorization of objects that's discussed in this article raises several questions and could even be applied to the methodology I utilize.

Kuic, Vukan. "Work, Leisure and Culture." *The Review of Politics* 43, no. 3 (1981): 436-65. Accessed February 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/1406943.

This article by Vukan Kuic identifies and examines the relationship that exists between work, leisure, and culture throughout the history of Western Civilization. The author argues against the idea that leisure is the main generator of culture. Alternatively, Kuic

argues that leisure is rather an outcome of culture, which is inherently reliant on work activities. This idea dismisses the notion of an elitist “leisure class” and redirects cultural responsibility to the workers of the world. These points are continuously supported by a variety of scholarly articles, philosophy essays, and historical/real world examples.

Throughout my process as an artist and writer, I’m consistently researching, investigating, and representing notions of leisure and labor, and how these exist within a particular cultural landscape of rural America. I often find myself questioning the division of leisurely activities and labor, and attempting to represent the often inseparable pretenses that surround each one. Kuic is able to pinpoint and explain some of these key components within the above mentioned text.

Lichter, Daniel T., and David L. Brown. "Rural America in an Urban Society: Changing Spatial and Social Boundaries." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 565-92. Accessed January 30, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41288622.

"Rural America in an Urban Society: Changing Spatial and Social Boundaries" is an article by Daniel Lichter and David Brown that provides readers with a contemporary analysis of the often misunderstood or misinterpreted connections between rural and urban life and culture within the United States. The two authors identify and explain the prevalence of rural-urban interconnection within day-to-day life, while also discussing the sociopolitical, spatial, environmental, and symbolic commonalities that rural and urban America maintain. These are contrary to previous historical perceptions of the large divide between the two cultures.

The frame of reference I utilize within my artistic process is most often dealing with culturally and geographically rural landscapes within the United States. This article allows me to further consider the crossover that exists between rural and urban life in a time of modern technology and late capitalism. I often find myself questioning the carrying on of traditional rural activities in a time where everything can be bought or sold rather easily. Along with this, I’m also interested in what aspects of these activities are

maintained or discarded with the availability of certain modern technologies. These concepts are greatly influenced and informed by the crossover of urban and rural living as discussed within the article by Lichter and Brown.

“Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective.” The Museum of Modern Art. MoMA. Accessed September 29, 2019. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1542>.

Marcel Broodthaers, a postdisciplinary artist initially working within the field of poetry, transitioned into the three dimensional realm of conceptual art in the later years of his life. Broodthaers was particularly interested in the use of three dimensional objects as a way to embed language within the material world. The artist’s sculptural installations are rich in object-language metaphors and often humorous or witty cultural references.

I’m interested in the way that Broodthaers is able to create his object poems through the arrangement and creation of hyper-specific objects placed in vague proximity to one another. Audience members may arrive at various conclusions or embedded meanings, however, the references that these objects make to the everyday, to life, or to a specific narrative or poem, are nearly unavoidable. By utilizing, arranging, and manipulating objects that are seen and used on a daily basis outside the context of the art world, I’m also able to pinpoint certain instances or poetic situations that often occur within my creative writing practice. Through the juxtaposition of the ordinary, the poetic, and by making the explicit implicit, artists like Broodthaers and myself are able to test the limitations of language by pushing it beyond the book or the page.

Mike Calway-Fagen <https://mikecalway-fagen.com/>

Mike Calway-Fagen is a multimedia artist whose work often ranges from performance, installation, and sculpture. The artist often utilizes found and gathered objects in their work in order to serve their various concepts or ideas. Work often revolves around the myth of creative problem solving. Calway-Fagen is more interested in what he calls

“creative problem making.” By creating a work that poses questions rather than answers them, the artist is encouraging audiences to consider what lies beyond the work they’re presented with.

Calway-Fagen is of interest to me in the way he often utilizes materials referential to the natural world. The artist is investigating the various manners in which concepts and ideas are conveyed through human interaction within the natural landscape in several of his pieces. Calway-Fagen seems to be generating a sense of myth which often surrounds individual pieces or installations. I’m particularly interested in how the author poses new questions on the subject from within the work itself.

O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find: And Other Stories*. Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Flannery O’Connor was an author from Georgia who wrote a range of fictional short stories and novels throughout the late 1940s and early 1960s. Many of her stories take place in a world that she knew rather well; the Southern United States. Much of her writing has a dark sardonic tone and often deals with questions of morality. O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is one of her most popular short stories.

Flannery O’Connor is an author who’s capitalizing on the haunting, backwards qualities of rural America that many people have come to know. I’m concerned with how the author may have visualized her own mythic qualities of the cultural landscape she was raised in. Although her styles and tone are quite varied, O’Connor is yet another southern writer that provides some insight into artistic and literary interpretations of the rural United States.

“100 Boots by Eleanor Antin.” The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed January 26, 2020. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2540>.

Eleanor Antin’s “100 Boots” is a mail art piece that documents the “journey” of 100 pairs

of black rubber boots from New York to California. The boots are staged in a variety of positions and scenarios before being photographed and made into postcards for audience members.

In relation to the work I'm pursuing, the way in which Antin both arranges and communicates objects within her practice is of great intrigue. The artist is able to successfully document and display her work on a very large scale while also considering the influences of location and environment on how objects are perceived. Through a variety of object manipulations and arrangements, Antin is able to communicate an idea that remains consistent through all facets of the work.

Portelli, Alessandro. "What Makes Oral History Different." *The Oral History Reader*, 2009, 32–42. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101395_2.

Portelli's "What Makes Oral History Different" identifies some of the key components that oral histories present to the world. By articulating oral history's relation to text, memory, events, narrative, and social structures, the author provides readers with an overarching analysis of oral history's role in society.

This source provides a context and vocabulary that allows me to speak about and consider the role of oral history in relation to my practice and on a personal level. Being provided a basis of language centered around the subject, I can continue to develop my own language around the subject and how it relates to my practice overall.

"Ritual and Controversy at Deer Camp." *Killing Tradition: Inside Hunting and Animal Rights Controversies*, by Simon J. Bronner, The University Press of Kentucky, 2008, pp. 27–98.

This text, a chapter of a book by Simon Bronner, revolves around the act of deer hunting within the United States. By analyzing the culture itself and the traditions that are in tact, the author is able to present and discuss an often controversial component of rural American life in a way that reevaluates several popular opinions about this specific

activity. Bronner is able to accomplish this by witnessing and documenting a variety of deer camps, hunts, the places they occur in, and the people involved in these activities.

Within the above mentioned text, Bronner is representing and dissecting some of the main facets of this cultural landscape that I experienced personally. The aspects that the author presents in his writing is quite pertinent to personal research and making. Bronner will continue to serve as a viable reference for the language and concepts present in my work.

Stanford, Frank. *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. Barrington, RI: Lost Roads Publishers, 2000.

Frank Stanford's *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* is a 15,283 line epic poem that was first published in 1977 as a 542 page book. The poem is completely void of stanzas or punctuation. The poem/book presents an often shocking and absurd mythological world that exists within the Southern United States somewhere between Memphis and the Mississippi Delta. The text presents a number of recurring characters, the main one being Francis, a 12 year old caucasian boy navigating the world of the Black, southern working class that exists within his father's levee contracting construction camps. The epic poem is believed to be loosely based around the author's own life as a boy.

This book/poem has remained important to me since I discovered several semesters ago. Although the story is chock full of violence, destruction, manipulation, and oppression, the author is able to paint a picture of a world saturated with myth just outside America's back door. I'm particularly interested in the way in which Stanford is able to allow audience members a glimpse into a world that feels both familiar and ethereal in place and time. I'm often attempting to accomplish a similar feat in my own writing about the cultural landscapes I navigated as a younger person.

Tallman, Susan. "The Ethos of the Edition: The Stacks of Felix Gonzalez-Torres." *Arts Magazine*

66 (September 1991): 13–14.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.libprox.pnca.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=505573639&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

This article by Susan Tallman discusses the overall practice of the Cuban-born American conceptual artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, while also maintaining a scope of focus on the artist's use of printed media and found/ephemeral materials. The author is interested in the implications of utilizing a vocabulary of extremely mundane materials and objects as a means of audience interaction and the embodiment of personal/emotional ideas.

Gonzales-Torres often created work with concepts related to his experience as a gay man of Cuban heritage in the United States.

Gonzales-Torres is able to transform commodities into individualistic expressions that often explore both extremely personal and more broad social/political topics. The extremely simple and effective use of both printed media and found/gathered objects and materials is of great personal interest. By assigning new and unique meaning and ideas to extremely recognizable objects, the artist is reframing the potential capabilities of found-object art, an important movement within the frame of my own practice.

Tate. "Joseph Beuys 1921-1986." Tate. Accessed January 2019.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/joseph-beuys-747>.

Joseph Beuys was a German Fluxus artist who pursued a wide variety of mediums including performance, sculpture, and installation. Much of the artist's work revolved around the myth of his own survival during a WWII plane crash. By consistently utilizing a recurring economy of objects, Beuys is able to generate meaning and narrative through gestures, manipulation, and arrangement of objects and sculptures.

Beuys seems to successfully blur the lines between myth, narrative, and reality. By studying the mechanisms the artist utilizes and the way in which he presents both his work and himself, I'm able to gain a greater understanding of what a non-disciplinary conceptual art practice might consist of.

“Tom Marioni: Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art.” Vimeo. Smart Museum of Art, 2012. <https://vimeo.com/37981379>.

This interview with Tom Marioni allows viewers insight into an ongoing project that conceptual artist Tom Marioni has been pursuing since 1970. The event grows larger each time it's held, as those who bartend three times are eventual members. Marioni also presents audience members with stand up comedy and a series of jokes. At the end of the evening, all beer bottles are displayed in neat rows on a shelf within the space. This is then the final form of the social sculpture.

Tom Marioni's project has allowed me to consider aspects of leisure and labor within the context of the art institution. I'm interested in the way that a simple action becomes an artwork over time. Also, Marioni is working in a manner in which an act becomes a part of a specific space. These are concepts that I consider within my own work.