TRIP REPORT: A FEW LESSONS IN LOVE

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TRIP REPORT: A FEW LESSONS IN LOVE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School
of Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Art

by
Jason Nathaniel Adams
May 2013

Accepted by:
David Detrich, Committee Chair
Christina Nguyen Hung
Dr. Beth Anne Lauritis
ABSTRACT

Can a work of art care for someone? Can it address a need for comfort or love? My research focuses on simple gestures and actions that seek to fulfill these questions. This research spans a wide array of sculptural and performative strategies in order to give breadth to these goals and to access a multitude of audiences in different contexts. The work importantly bridges both traditional art venues as well as more public venues in order to participate in multiple conversations pertaining to the role of socially engaged art practices. By utilizing both ends of the locational spectrum for the placement of the work, the projects are able to pressure the conversations within the institution of art by incorporating ideas of love into the academic dialogue, while also encouraging and challenging those outside of the art world to activate an attitude of love in their daily lives.

I generate experiences to engage the audience’s mind and body, whether by making a tea bag, as in the case of The Sipper’s Digest from 2012, or occupying a chair provided as an anonymous gift, such as in The Chair Incident from 2011. In other projects such as Love is a Verb from 2012, the audience is challenged to enact positive living through action rather than merely through words. Each project is rooted in the idea that we are corporeal beings with a need for something that transcends our physicality, and that our bodies are the conduits through which we experience these gestures as well as being the spaces in which we have the capacity to act in life-giving ways. Through these modes of working, audience participation is at the center of each project, with the
goal of promoting an exchange that is based on gifting without the expectation of
to provide
to serve someone other than myself not only
exist, but multiply and take on new formations.
DEDICATION

I dedicate my graduate research to my fiancé Blake Everhart, and my parents Tommy and Marilyn Adams, without whom I would not have been able to succeed. Their immense encouragement and faith in me during this portion of my education has taught me a lifetime worth of lessons. Their persistence, grace, and patience is unfathomable, and I am pleased to honor them through my endeavors. Thank you so very much.
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I would like to thank my professors and fellow students for the endless dialogue, encouragement, and wisdom with which they have blessed me. I would like to especially recognize David Detrich, Christina Nguyen Hung, and Beth Anne Lauritis for their efforts in serving on my thesis committee. They have committed to my efforts from the beginning, and I will always remember their guidance, support, and love for growth as an artist.

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Thank you fellow graduate students for all that you have done for me. Thank you for believing in me when I was struggling as well as when I was succeeding. Your consistency has not gone unnoticed, and I will always remember the times we have had in the studio. Thank you for being here.

To my family and friends, thank you for staying with me and for encouraging me throughout this process. Your love, wisdom, and patience has truly helped me to persevere. Blake, I am so thankful for your intense patience and understanding. Thank you for sticking with me through this tough path. Jesus, thank you for your endless love, without you I would not be here.
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With the enormous amount of habitable terrain, urban wilderness, and natural diversity, it is no wonder that this planet is an explorer’s paradise for those seeking engagement. At an estimated 7 billion people living across 15 billion acres, the social spectrum provides ample opportunities to discover challenging and unique trails that will generate consideration of our relationship to the world, as well as those inhabiting the land. While traversing the natural landscape, travelers develop skills that reach beyond the wilderness and into the everyday fabric of society. For example, you can test your courage and navigation skills by making eye contact and initiating conversation with a stranger, explore the historic doors of ancient buildings around the world by opening each of them for someone, or find a tree to climb and experience the enchantment of respect as you protect fragile limbs by supporting your weight on more established branches.

Choosing a strategy for navigating rugged wilderness requires solid preparation and a willingness to endure the potential hardships of any commitment. You will experience your physicality in the landscape through an overload of your senses, and apparent will be the beckoning reminder that you are therefore as tangible as the mountains or buildings, and as intangible as the whisper of the wind. Confronting the challenges of both aspects of self, as well
as those of other adventurers you may encounter, will greatly aid you along the way. Before you decide on a place to explore and things to do in those areas, take a moment to consider a few helpful travel tips. Waste no time as you begin planning your adventure to discover the possibilities awaiting you in this remarkable place we call Earth.

Becoming familiar with some simple preparatory information will help ensure that you have an enjoyable and fruitful time during your trip. The examples of adventurous engagement presented within the pages of this guidebook are part of an ongoing artistic practice of connecting with people and places, in which each project is aimed at encouraging others towards a recognition of how love is manifested in one’s life. While this type of language is often disregarded as an over simplification of interaction, the critical position of love as a strategy for negotiating obstacles along a path empowers willing travelers to oppose destructive relationships in all of their endeavors. (Hooks 244) As you continue to navigate this theoretical map of my artistic research, keep in mind that the shelters (installations), supplies (sculptures), activities (performances and participation), and trip photographs (project documentation) have been provided to help orient you as explorers, and familiarize you with the goals of the exhibition that accompanies this trip report.
In 2009 I was having a conversation with another artist and was expressing frustrations with the idea that art would never hug, feed, or love anyone. The artist looked me in the eye and asked, “Why not?” Very confused by his casual yet poignant response, I began to research this idea and make some decisions about what would later become my graduate research. A brief analysis of the similarities between hugging, feeding, and loving reveals that all three require a level of action. If art making could operate as a platform for connecting with people in these ways, active participation would therefore be a necessary component within such a practice.
During my first week of graduate school, I was sitting on my front porch trying to come up with ideas for the first artistic adventure of this new research. I was experiencing all of the fear and anxiety one might embody while taking risks during a mountain ascent, or a desert traverse. In these moments of struggle, the city bus stopped in front of my apartment and I watched three men exit onto the sidewalk. Obviously intoxicated, one of them urinated in the street while the other two stumbled through the parking lot and onto my neighbor’s stoop. After kicking a chair off of their porch, they decided to take the chair and proceed down the street. I did not really know the neighbors yet, but wanted to retrieve the chair, therefore preventing a robbery. I had assumed the men would get bored after a short while and leave the chair for someone else to deal with, which is when I had planned on stepping in and taking action. After following them for half of a mile, I realized they were not going to release the chair, so I returned home.

I sat thinking about how my neighbors were going to wake up in the morning and realize someone had violated their space, and how I was unable to do anything about it. I was thinking not of art making, but of love and respect, and how the incident represented a deep disregard for those living next door. After another while it occurred to me that the incident also represented an opportunity, an opportunity to respond in ways that would stand counter to what had happened that night. I knew I could not undo the robbery, but that through
calculated actions I could create a positive experience to combat the negative one of being robbed. As a result, I decided to make them a new chair, one that would represent love rather than violation. *The Chair Incident,* from 2011, was intended to be a social gesture of kindness, a way to challenge the effects of someone else’s negative actions through a type of “reverse robbery,” in other words, an anonymous gift.

The old chair was made of plastic, manufactured without regard for the specific person who would later purchase the object, and was produced as a generalization of anonymous sitters. In the same way, the thieves’ disregarded the personal ownership of property through the act of robbery. To honor my neighbors as specific people, I crafted a wooden chair from pine, the common material of construction, something soft, and local to the area, to reflect care for them through the object’s handmade quality. An explanatory letter was then written, put in an envelope, and attached to the chair along with a yellow bow. The chair was then placed on their porch in the middle of the night so that the object would enter their lives the same way the old chair was taken, creating the exciting surprise of a gift, and therefore overshadowing the theft.
Figure 1: *The Chair Incident*, 2011

Pine Wood, Brass, Ribbon, 3'x18"x2'
Dear Neighbors,

A few months ago I witnessed three men get off the bus in front of our duplexes. Obviously intoxicated, they decided to steal the chair on your porch. I followed them down the road, hoping to retrieve it for you, but was unable to do so.

I have been upset at their disregard for you, so I have upgraded your old, plastic, manufactured chair with a new, wooden, handmade chair. I built this chair as an effort to make up for the negative experience of being robbed by replacing that experience with a gift. I hope that all of you have a wonderful day.

Sincerely,

Jason Adams
A month or so later, I was unlocking the door to my apartment around 9:00pm when my two neighbors, of whom I had only been able to speak with a couple of times since moving in, called to me from their porch and asked me to come over. They had baked me a chocolate cake on which the words “Thank You” were spelled out in almond slivers. I was able to truly connect with them that night. We had a wonderful conversation about aspirations, India, and family all because of a bad experience being replaced by a good deed. The process of caring as an artistic medium, more than the making of a chair, is the main thrust of this project, and is what expanded how my neighbors and I relate to each other, how we understand each other, and how we operate as neighbors. I have been friends with Amrita and Asea ever since.
Considering adventure to be a term of navigation, responding to a crime in my neighborhood was an exploration of circumstance, trust, risk, and physical labor. Internal frustrations with the circumstances imposed on others prompted the idea of making the chair. Gladly welcoming the effort required to construct a piece of furniture is akin to that of a hiker pursuing a new trail. Within any adventure are aspects of trust and risk, in that you have to believe in your ability
to approach challenge, weighing the risks as you move through the circumstances. With desiring to give a handmade object to someone, there is a potential for the recipient to suffer anxiety over reciprocity. The goal of the letter attached to the chair was to describe the reasoning for the gift, so as to relieve the recipient of any bondage towards re-gifting. As it turns out, an unexpected return was made, which led to the creation of friendship that was different than the friendship that would have occurred had we simply spent time talking. In this way, the chair takes on a higher importance due to its function as a conduit for affection. Socially engaged art is often about removing emphasis on art objects for the purpose of highlighting the relational aspects within a project. (Kester 3) The chair however, became an important component, as did the cake, in quickly progressing our conversations and connections. I realized through this piece that the sculptural aspects were equally as important as the social activities, and that both parts could exist together in a socially engaged practice.
The Chair Incident operated as a bridge between sculpture and social practice, therefore engaging the theoretical basis behind the work of Simon Starling, an artist who utilizes a wide range of working methods including performance, sculpture, photography, and video. Starling’s work is important to my research in terms of how process and transformation can result in various commentaries on social issues. In his own way, Starling has figured out how to bridge the gap between object based art and social practices. In a performance from 2006 entitled Autoxylopryocycloboros, the artist and a friend drove a small motor powered wooden boat up Loch Long in Scotland to reinforce the self destructive nature of the nuclear military base positioned on the opposite shore from a peace camp. The boat had been resurrected from the bottom of Lake Windermere and given new life in this performance, only to once again return to the depths. Starling installed a wood stove onto the boat that was fed with pieces of wood that his friend cut from the boat while they traveled across the waters. As the boat went along, it became less and less functional until it eventually sank once again to the bottom of channel. The cyclical nature of the piece, from resurrection to self destruction, is analogous to the nuclear base and its historical practices of striving to protect while also killing. While Autoxylopryocycloboros has definitive political goals, it also speaks to the ongoing process of being human through its cyclical aspects. (Birrell, 2-3)
The Chair Incident I also sought to consider ideas of transformation, but rather than turn the piece back to its own demise, I allowed for the chair to operate as a new condition for other types of exchange, those that would take place in the progression of budding friendships.

During the same time I was making the chair for my neighbors, I was thinking about relationships as types of journeys that involve growth, struggle, and transformation. Like Starling, I was continuing to explore the idea of utilizing objects important to a specific social issue as a way to address and participate in that issue. With the chair I had transformed a negative experience into a positive one, but only for two people. To utilize the faculties of relational transformation in a manner that was more of a broadcast seemed to be an interesting point for further research. This caused me to consider my own transformation along a path of past relationships, which brought to mind a pile of old love letters I had kept from my childhood. Although mostly break-up letters, they were interesting to me as a material, in that they were hand-written, heart felt, and existed as documents of what I had learned about semi-romantic relationships over the years. I began surgically cutting individual letters from words in the love notes and then gluing them between clear acrylic sheets to spell out new words, and in essence, transforming old words into new ones with new meanings. At first the chosen words described things I love, such as “peanut butter” and “trees.” I enjoyed them as singular objects but wasn’t sure of what to do with them. The lacking aspect of this direction was that the words had nothing to do with the
ways I had learned to love and respect people through the critiques present in the letters.

After researching these two key words, “love and respect,” I came across the song lyrics for Aretha Franklin’s version of R-E-S-P-E-C-T, a song that was recorded on February 14th, 1967, Valentine’s Day. The relationship between the lyrics, love, respect, Valentine’s Day, and my stack of letters, lead to the idea of creating a Valentine’s Day card; a re-contextualization of materials similar to that seen in Starling’s performances. Starling’s journeys are often simultaneously linear and cyclical, speaking to progression and rehashing, which seems descriptive of the way that I learn and operate. I generally revisit, as in a cyclical manner, while also progressing towards a better understanding of the issue at hand. In this way the simultaneity of Starling’s performances speak to simple ideas of the human condition, along with the more complicated political layers to the work. In this case, the letters represent advice that challenged me to grow in my relationships. By revisiting that advice, and transforming the letters into a new form, the Valentine’s Day cards would offer a challenge to a broader audience, one that would hinge on the idea that love requires action. In as much as the letters impacted my life, the project would be a cyclical repurposing of the letters to impact the lives of others.

The first stanza of Franklin’s song pinpointed what it is I had been so fixated on with The Chair Incident. It was the notion that people are important; they are specific individuals, with thoughts and feelings. The lyrics also relayed the simple idea that a relationship between two people succeeds when both
parties are giving, as opposed to taking. To give is to selflessly present something to another without expectation of return. To respect then, is to selflessly hold someone in high esteem - to give honor, without expectation of return. The obvious glory of two people then, who are both giving to each other selflessly, is that both also receive blessings from the other. The relationship created through *The Chair Incident* runs parallel to the cry of Franklin’s lyrics. All of this seemed to boil down to the idea that love and respect both require action, which is what the intention behind the love letters had taught to me as a child. These lessons are what motivated me to use the title, *Love is a Verb*.

Building from these connections, I extracted individual letters to spell out the first stanza of the song, which became the front cover of the card. On the inside leaf, was the inscription, “a card is a noun, but love... love is a verb,” and on the back was a QR code linking to a project statement. The original draft was made into copies that were planted in card racks of public stores prior to Valentine’s Day of 2012. To provide encouragement to the customers who would find the cards on the shelves, the handwriting from my past relationships was used to convey a counter-culture definition of love, therefore opposing the traditional messages of store-bought Valentine’s Day cards; messages that imply that a card enough to represent love. In this way, the project challenged the marketability of love through its intervention into corporate stores, by claiming its own failure as love through both its message and its object-hood.
Figure 4: *Love is a Verb*, 2011

Cut Paper, Photographs, Card Stock
a card is a noun, but love...

love is a verb.
As in *The Chair Incident*, the use of qualities associated with manufacturing and corporate sales relate the project’s form and distribution to daily life, yet by encouraging active individual care and attention, *Love is a Verb*, from 2011, sets the experience of searching for a card apart from the experience of being a customer, and instead situates the audience in a place of potential participation - of whether or not to respond to the encouragement, and whether or not to take on the adventure of loving through action rather than only through words.
Upon reflecting on the past two adventures, it became apparent that my own participation as an individual was important within the strivings towards community engagement. Ultimately both *The Chair Incident*, and *Love is a Verb* were about new paths. They were about providing opportunities for living in ways that challenge the status quo. Looking into my own experiences, I started to think of how this is similar to my interest in the sport of rock climbing. In climbing, there is a term called “off-route,” which describes the territory that the climber should not enter while on a route, whether it is due to dangerous terrain, or what qualifies as having completed a specific path. I took this notion and began considering the spaces that I move through the most; my college campus. The campus is comprised of a series of hills dissected by roads, sidewalks, and stairs. Around this network of designated transit routes are various walls and portions of architecture that function as retainers for the altered landscape. Each of these designated pathways imply that we do not deviate, which is not necessarily the most practical way to navigate the campus.

In 2011 I started the *Alternate Routes* project by photographing these structural elements and looking for ways to climb them. I then completed a series of performance climbs that pursued freedoms and lessons achieved through going “off-route.” The freedom to move beyond confinement, whether in travel, or community, involves conquering perceived impossibility, problem
solving, and persevering through difficult circumstances, all of which are learned and experienced through climbing. In relating these individual goals to the idea of community, as in the case of a group of climbers, I used the documentation of the climbs as a starting block for creating a series of guidebook pages. The pages represent the access to freely engage with one’s environment on an extreme physical, mental, and possibly spiritual level, and also reflect the passionate shared experience among climbing communities throughout the world. Climbers willing to invite others into their community disperse thousands of guidebooks to various climbing destinations in stores and over the Internet. It could be said that the inward care of these climbers has been the catalyst for building community, by providing information on climbing routes and areas - all of which stems from their adventurous actions and willingness to risk engagement.
Figure 6: *Alternate Routes*, 2011

Performance, Cartography, Photographs
I. LEE HALL AREA • A. Switchback Stairwell

A. Switchback Stairwell
This set of stairs lead from the basement level to the ground level of Lee Hall. Look for this stairwell at the back of Lee Hall.

1. Straight Slipage V1
Sit start with feet on concrete column and hands matched on left metal beam. Scramble to lip to gain better holds.

2. Stairhetch V4
Sit start at back of stairwell. Stick a heel hook for a long move through roof and mantle to gain upper rail.

3. 45 Degree V1
Sit start the 45 degree beam on the right side underneath stairs. Work through greasy heel hooks and jugs to gain the final lip.

4. Switchback V2
Sit start left side of 45 degree beam. Make awkward move to gain upper 45 degree beam and finish to the top. Using lower handrail for feet is off route.

5. Watch Out Below V4
Sit start using handrail connected to wall to reach crimps on door casing. Keep you balance while making a committing move to the lip of the beam above. Finish to the top, but be sure to "watch out below" for those exiting the door!

*Left: Jason Adams on Stairhetch, V3 (problem #2, this page)

Figure 7: Alternate Routes, 2011
Performance, Cartography, Photographs
Figure 8: *Alternate Routes*, 2011

Performance, Cartography, Photographs
Using the commonly understood format of guidebooks, and infusing it with the unfamiliar depiction of struggling to navigate exterior architecture, the information provides options for willing participants. The challenge of climbing the portions of buildings allows adventurers to foster relationships between themselves, their surroundings, and those they may encounter along the way. Distributed online for free, the manuals describe only a few of the many climbable portions of campus. The "incomplete" or fragmentary design of the guide is meant as an invitation to others to continue the project and the process of discovery. It is left open for those who might create their own maps for going “off-route.” As in *Love is a Verb*, *Alternate Routes* encourages people to embrace the opportunity to stand counter to dominant culture and its preset parameters for living and interacting. By subverting the boundaries set on our navigation of the world, we learn about the capacity to move beyond constraints on certain freedoms. In a culture focused on the self, loving and serving others requires a commitment to living “off-route.”
After considering the physical experiences of climbing, I was reminded of the historical conventions of large-scale sculpture as applied to the recognition of our physicality. Traditionally, large-scale sculpture creates a scenario in which the viewer is made aware of their size due to the proximity of the sculpture being experienced. When climbing the retainer walls and peripheral portions of architecture, I had similar experiences. Climbing a wall emphasizes the importance of the body in performing the task. Along with the use of my limbs, my breathing was heavy, and my heartbeat grew rapidly, therefore drawing a correlation between my exterior body - spatially emphasized by the physicality of the building - and the interior functions of my body. I then began considering these functions and wondering how they too could become metaphors for going “off-route.”

There are a myriad of bodily functions that, when broken down, reflect ways that we engage externally. One in particular is that our digestive system. Our digestive system processes and sends nutrients to the rest of our bodies. In a sense, digestion is about receiving, reflecting, and responding to the intricacies of interaction and exchange. To create a place for exploring personal and social processes, I fabricated a grandiose “stage” that operates as a work table. Using the work station and its contents, participants can explore a linear set of activities that metaphorically relate digestive processes to the act of making tea for
someone. *The Sipper’s Digest*, from 2012, is made of pinewood, the material used to build houses for the rich and poor alike. At 17 feet long and 11 feet wide, the large scale “stage” references the shape of a human stomach, and is enlarged to the point of encapsulating the participant during their activities. Representing an internal organ in an exaggerated scale allows viewers to consider the weight of what takes place inside of a person. With exposed screws and patchwork carpentry, the sculpture denotes a handmade do-it-yourself aesthetic related to common construction, therefore contrasting with the abstract quality of the form in order to create a relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar; the physical and the spiritual; the local and the global.
Figure 9: The Sipper’s Digest, 2012
Wood, Mint, Soil, Tea Bags, Thread, Needles, Green Tea, Cups, Envelopes, Tea Kettle, Water Cooler, 4.5'x11'x17'

Upon navigating the sculpture, the audience finds a cavity they can enter to access the interior contents of the structure. Contained within the “stomach” is a mint garden and a work surface with empty tea bags, envelopes, pens, and an electric tea kettle. Participants can harvest the mint, make tea bags, and can then consume a cup of tea. Mint was chosen for its function as a diuretic, a characteristic that causes the herb to aid in digestion by encouraging the flow of fluids throughout the body. Participants have the option of placing a tea bag in
an envelope and then sending it to someone else, therefore presenting them with a gift. The goal of the project was to create a place for considering materiality, nourishment, work, and relaxation that provides an opportunity to care for someone outside of the gallery - a way to further bridge object-based art with social practices. In this way The Sipper’s Digest uses the gallery’s function as a designated venue for experiencing art while reaching beyond its parameters and into the realm of the public.
Figure 10: *The Sipper’s Digest*, 2012

Wood, Mint, Soil, Tea Bags, Thread, Needles, Green Tea, Cups, Envelopes, Tea Kettle, Water Cooler, 4.5’x11’x17’
Figure 11: *The Sipper’s Digest*, 2012

Wood, Mint, Soil, Tea Bags, Thread, Needles, Green Tea, Cups, Envelopes, Tea Kettle, Water Cooler, 4.5'x11'x17'

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In continuing to explore internal bodily functions as metaphors for engagement, *Cardiac Comfort* was created in 2013. *Cardiac Comfort* is a large-scale portable sculpture that references a human heart in its form, and operates as a type of trail shelter that provides a space of rest and contemplation for travelers in a variety of locations. Our hearts occupy significance as centers through which blood enriches our various systems. Our hearts also exist as metaphors for our spiritual center, while performing important biological functions for our livelihood. Hearts and tents alike, are nomadic entities, meant for travel and the provision of reflexive protection to their owners. As such, the project implies that we embody the ability to provide and circulate care and shelter for others throughout our adventures. As an architectural organ, the space is designed to provide a path through which visitors circulate and experience the function of a heart, which is that of a center for distributing healing agents to the rest of the body. This particular space is meant to activate those healing agents - you the travelers - by providing a temporary platform for conversation that is meant to encourage you towards simple acts of kindness, both during your visit, and as you leave to continue your adventure. As a site for participation, the installation operates as a stage for sharing stories, interacting with other
travelers, and contemplating new life-giving expeditions that may be on the horizon.

Figure 12: Cardiac Comfort, 2013

Steel, Tent Fabric, Carpet Padding, Bed Comforter, Lanterns, Journal, 9’x8’x18’

As with The Sipper’s Digest, Cardiac Comfort capitalizes on the notion of scale to bring awareness to participants’ physicality, both humbling them and inviting them into its interior. As participants enter the heart, they find a soft
padded floor, made of bed comforters and silky tent material. Once inside, they find a notebook; a journal representative of the notebooks one would find on a long distance hike such as the Appalachian Trail. On long distance hikes there are free shelters along the way, each of which contains a book for hikers to share their experiences. To amplify the participatory aspect of the sculpture, the journal operates in the same way as shelter logs. Participants are invited to write stories in the journal as a way to add to an ongoing document that contains the experiences of others, therefore adding to the history of the space while also creating a written portrait of the fluctuating community that travels through the shelter. In the same way that blood circulates through our hearts, as a way to benefit our bodies, the visitors circulate through the sculpture and share their stories in order to encourage and relate to others that have, and will, pass through the “heart tent.” It is by recording their experiences that their contribution becomes a vital portion of the project. In this way, the accumulation of adventures becomes a type of library for others to explore, as they receive the comfort provided by the interior of the space, and reap its benefits along their journey.
Figure 13: *Cardiac Comfort*, 2013

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The frame of the tent is made of steel that has been wrapped in outdoor fabric. The walls of the tent are sewn with ripstop fabric common to backpacking tents. Inside, lanterns hang from the ceiling to illuminate the space and reference the experience of camping in the wilderness. As participants sit on the padded floor, there is an open invitation to interact and converse with other visitors. While there is an apparent comfort provided, the fact that the sculpture is a temporary shelter insinuates that the visitors are meant to occupy the space
temporarily, therefore encouraging them to make decisions about how they will engage once they continue along their adventure.

An adventure represents the enactment of a person’s willingness to traverse various geographies and climates that are in opposition to domestic comforts. To embark on such a journey is to assume both an internal and external challenge. The finite abilities of the body must be weighed against the choice of applying pressure to those boundaries in an effort to overcome them. In this challenge there are elements of nature, of wilderness, pushing back and forming resistance, while also asking for gentleness during your visit. In these spaces exist an endless amount of opportunities through which adventurous experiences are formed.

In wilderness areas, visitors are challenged with the task of “enjoying the outdoors responsibly.” (LNT.org) The “Leave No Trace” principles of outdoor education invite the adventurer to take care not to damage the environment. The principles are crafted as a guide for decision-making. In essence, outdoor ethics is about not leaving a mark. This philosophical approach to exploration involves acknowledging our potential to help, as well as hurt, and then making positive decisions from that place of recognition. The principles promote the respect necessary to treat the landscape and its inhabitants as more important than yourself, therefore traversing an area with humility and a service-oriented means of adventure. Since these methods of interaction are such an integral aspect to the contemporary wilderness experience, an adventure is considered to be both climbing a mountain and offering a gesture of love to that mountain, both of
which have a reflexive effect on the other. As one avoids leaving a negative mark, they enact the positive effects of care, which in this context, is a life-giving gesture.

Wilderness as explained by the Wilderness Act of 1964 defines these areas in this way: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” (Public Law 88-577) An Adventure then, is about temporarily engaging a place so as to be a part of something larger than ourselves, where we are swallowed up and humbled through our lack of domination. While often considered as political and egotistical displays of control and power, adventure and exploration in the everyday context of “leave no trace ethics,” stemming from the Wilderness Act, is at its core, about humility, not making a mark. In this way, Cardiac Comfort re-calibrates the political connotations of adventure to suggest the heroic qualities of caring for others. So while a trail shelter is crafted to protect the landscape as well as the traveler, an adventure, in an idealistic fashion, is about committing to the positive engagement with yourself, your environment, and those around you. An adventure, as it is promoted in this research, is intended to positively impact others among all of our engagements.
Fostering positive social interaction also shares a strong overlap with the ethics of wilderness travel in that humility, and what Bell Hooks calls the “ethic of love,” are necessary aspects to the creation of life-giving and productive relationships. (Hooks 243) In her essay, *Love as the Practice of Freedom*, she
describes love as being a counterattack on the “prevailing values of [capitalism].” If the harmful effects of materialism are perpetuated by self-centered spirits living outside of love, then we are in desperate need of a new spirit - one based on a humble ethic, one focused on service oriented action as an adventure in the land of love. (Hooks 246) Service, in this context, is the activation of humility learned through respecting the areas we travel and people we meet, therefore creating opportunities for positive relationships to be forged. In a way, to serve is to love.

Its first iteration is set within the context of a gallery. Galleries operate as spaces where everything but the artwork is removed, therefore highlighting the work itself, and excluding the noise of everyday life. Despite this noble effort, the institutional space of a gallery is politicized in a myriad of ways that deal with authorship, inclusion, exclusion, as well as other power relations. As a communal space intervening in this context, Cardiac Comfort challenges the gallery’s premise of conventional artist-viewer relationships by giving the audience the opportunity to insert their personal lives into the artwork through writing stories in the journal.

In as much as this project was first exhibited in a gallery, it is equally important to consider other possible sitings. Site-specific community-based artwork has long been produced to engage communities according to their political and economic situations, therefore becoming a vehicle for social advocacy. (Kwon 6) When a project is organized to respond to a particular venue, that venue therefore becomes part of the message delivered. At the
same time, that venue also determines the group of travelers that will embark on the journey being presented. The position of such work is often intended to create a voice for that particular group, therefore asserting that communities are fixed groups, while in actuality they are quite fluid and permeable. (Kwon 7) As a portable sculpture for social interaction, *Cardiac Comfort* is able engage multiple communities in a variety of places. Its construction from outdoor fabrics commonly used to make tents signifies its potential as a nomadic structure, and clarifies it as a space of refuge. It is a shelter for the world that offers opportunities for affectionate interaction to anyone willing to participate during the exhibition, as well as along future journeys.

Through its function as a place for sharing stories, a written portrait of the visitors is created and recreated throughout the duration of the exhibition, as well as through any future reiterations. While every site the piece will occupy has its own set of associations that change and shift subtle meanings of the work, its nomadic quality allows the project to extend ideas of love to other locations. The necessity for navigating the complexities of situational interaction in any location is an imperative challenge to face during your adventure. If destructive identities are enforced and reinforced, we run the risk of reflecting the harmful values placed upon us, regardless of whether we are leading or participating in an adventure. In the context of culture, this can result in our adoption of those identities and values, therefore creating resentment, and transforming perceptions into realities that perpetuate our inability to love.
Since we create culture as much as culture creates us, the endemic absence of love is innate to our identities beyond that of cultural persuasion; beyond that of conditioning. When our identity is determined by the powers of this world, we are prevented from knowing who we are, how to engage in life-giving ways, and are therefore essentially lost in the forest. If our flawed identity as humans prevents us from loving outwardly, and the cultural value systems are not the only aspects of our inability to do so, then it is evident that we are in need of an inward ability to love before we can genuinely subvert the cultural and economic systems that feed our desire to serve ourselves. As Hooks writes, “The absence of a sustained focus on love... arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit.” (Hooks 243) If love is the proponent for positive and productive interactions, and if the absence of selfless exchange among people is its opposite, then abiding by a culture of self-centeredness is in essence, promoting destructive relationships.

With this in mind, the research I have conducted has been a promotion of love throughout all interactions within the projects previously described. I view all of my work to be a collection of stories about love and transformation. In an effort to have a multivalent and fluid practice, the research completed often changes drastically from project to project, acknowledging the idea that we are corporeal beings with a need to transcend our physical presence. This takes
shape through many different avenues, but is consistently rooted in the notion that our bodies are conduits through which we experience love, and it is through this embodiment that we also have the potential to serve others in live-giving ways, regardless of the adventure at hand.
WORKS CITED


