

**Lost, found  
Within, without**

Andrew Testa

Presented on:  
September 13, 2017 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity  
University Arts Association of Canada  
Panel discussion:  
*Being With: Intimacy + Empathy in Creative Practice*  
(Hosted by Alexandria Inkster)

## **Abstract**

As an artist, archivist, collector, and gleaner, I become slowly acquainted with various objects and fragments that seem to call my attention. Within my collecting, objects experience a dislocation but also an introduction to other like things, an attempt to find/create a 'truthfulness' not gleaned from the singular but from the many, not seen in the actual-ness of place and space but from the symbolic relationship to that of the collector. When I began this practice, the sense of intimacy and empathy existed solely between the collected object and its relationship to myself, the collector. Although this still holds true, as my collections grow and shift from photographs found in family shoe boxes to sea glass, stones and other various treasures found along the shores in Newfoundland, I realized what I am interested in is not the object itself but the translations and transformations that surround its acquisition and life thereafter. Speaking about my collections and picking things up alongside others became an invitation to a dialogue where I no longer simply gathered objects but personal tales and anecdotes. My attempts for a sense of 'truthfulness' began extending past the object, and into the culture of Newfoundland storytelling and craft. Through collecting, an often lonely experience, I began cherishing and exploring what was shared between myself and those I encountered in this practice. These intimate moments, not sought after but simply emerge in my excursions, have allowed me to begin reflecting upon how collecting has become an invitation to unexpected moments of intimacy and closeness with both strangers and objects. This paper will explore accounts of such stories, how they emphasize a sense of closeness and loneliness, and how the resulting art shifts and alters such unexpected intimate experiences.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	iv
Lost, found, Within, without	1-7
Appendix	8-10
Bibliography	11

## List of Figures

- Figure 1:** Image of two cups filled with collected stones, Torbay, NL. May 31, 2017 \_\_1
- Figure 2:** Testa, Andrew. *A stone left in one's pocket gathering traces of intimate encounters*. 2017 (ongoing series, until abandoned) \_\_\_\_\_2
- Figure 3:** Testa, Andrew. *Composition (cobalt blue, 1)*. From the collection, 'A Casual Encounter: This time I'm told.' Photopolymer chine-collé, 11 x 15", 2017\_\_\_4
- Figure 4:** Testa, Andrew. *A Causal Encounter: This time I know*. 2017 (ongoing series, until abandoned) \_\_\_\_\_5
- Figure 5:** Testa, Andrew. *Walking* (spread and image detail). Toner on paper, Zine, 8.5 x 5.5", 2017 \_\_\_\_\_6
- Figure 6:** Image of crow tracks, Kamloops, BC. September 18, 2017 \_\_\_\_\_7
- Figure 7:** Image of Torbay's rocky shore, Torbay, NL. May 31, 2017 \_\_\_\_\_8
- Figure 8:** Testa, Andrew. *A stone left in one's pocket gathering traces of intimate encounters (17 days, left front pocket)*. Watercolour, graphite, and gesso on kozo, 8 x 6", 2017 \_\_\_\_\_8
- Figure 9:** Testa, Andrew. *Composition (forest green, 1)*. From the collection, 'A Casual Encounter: This time I'm told.' Photopolymer chine-collé, 11 x 15", 2017 \_\_\_9
- Figure 10:** Testa, Andrew. *A Causal Encounter: This time I'm told*. 2017 (ongoing series, until abandoned) \_\_\_\_\_9
- Figure 11:** Testa, Andrew. *Composition (folded, plants, 7)*. From the collection, 'A Casual Encounter: This time I know.' Photopolymer chine-collé, 11 x 15", 2017 \_\_\_\_\_10
- Figure 12:** Testa, Andrew. *All the other things: Collected in Newfoundland (August 2016 – July 2017)* [spread detail], Toner on paper, 80 pages, 8.5 x 5.5", 2017 \_\_\_\_10

Lost, found,  
Within, without

As I walked along the shores of Torbay Newfoundland, I became immediately taken by the melody of the water: first pushing, then pulling upon the palm-sized stones that decorated the coast's edge. The ocean's swell would carry the stones up and over others before pulling them back down—the sound of water rushing, in between, over, and under tumbling stones illuminated my surrounding. Before walking this coastline my stomach seemed to be squeezed and twisted by my mind's racing thoughts of the many uncertainties that were near. But the sound of the water, stones, and the chatter and clatter of every footstep I took, seemingly echoing with instability as stones gave way and rolled to this side or that, I was reminded of a story shared by a family friend.

Their daughter was quite ill, creating a sense of anger within her, and so, she began placing this anger upon those around her due to the circumstance of one's now limited time. My friend, her mother, understood a need to displace these feelings so her daughter's remaining time could be filled with happiness. As she reflected upon this at a beach near their home, the mother recalled a childhood of collecting and stacking stones in her room. She began searching for a stone to bring back as a gift for her daughter. When she arrived home, she presented her daughter with the carefully selected treasure. The daughter, initially confused, was told to take the stone and express her anger to it—an inanimate object—to let the stone bear her negative emotions opposed to the people around her. Additionally, she explained, that whenever she saw the stone, or touched the stone if left in her pocket or bag, she must remember it as a gift and be happy to possess it.



Figure 1

The chatter and clatter of each footstep I took in Torbay prompted me of this, and with it came a reminder to settle my wandering mind and to displace my energy. My now empty coffee cup, as well as my partners, that were with us for our initial meanderings became filled with carefully selected treasures of our own. My pockets soon after became full, as these cups could no longer bear another. The stones collected were weathered in their travels through the heaviness of elapsed time and smoothed by the many moments

of contact from other stones moving overtop, beside, and underneath them, an abundance of encounters polishing their surface.

I began keeping one stone, two, sometimes three, in my pocket as I went through my daily routines. I presented some to my partner along with this story, and asked her to keep them with her as we transitioned from one chapter of our lives to the next. At the end of each day, I would empty my pockets, placing them on my bedside table. I noticed as each day passed, the other objects within my pocket began leaving their trace. The stone was now recording its new brief relationship without my asking, but with my pleasant surprise. As my partner and I cycled through them, I began drawing each of the stones likeness: their surface, colour, texture, particularities, and the markings of intimate encounters. An attempt for a growing sense of awareness and understanding; a closeness; a particular kind of intimacy placed upon, in one sense, an inanimate object, but also, an object that can speak, has agency, that can signify.



Figure 2

I begin my practice in quietness—I pause, look, move, stop, walk, pick-up, touch, smell, listen, move once more, and repeat. Although I admit that it may be naïve, I attempt to develop a sense of awareness and appreciation for my immediate surroundings; what is beneath, in front, behind, above, to my left, and to my right. Tim Lilburn, a Canadian poet and essayist, speaks about such an awareness as an ‘act of courtesy.’ Lilburn, upon moving back to Saskatchewan after being away for many years, explains, “[w]e must start again learning how to be in this place, or at least I must. We begin from scraps. We should learn the names for things as a minimum—not to fulfill taxonomies but as acts of courtesy, for musical reasons, entering the gesture of

decorum.”<sup>1</sup> To learn their names is a beginning in my quiet understanding, a ‘gesture of decorum.’ A practice that when in Newfoundland extended to the robin, the blue jay, the raven, and osprey; the coltsfoot, fiddlehead, marsh marigold, and dandelion.

I begin with these ‘acts of courtesy’ but I do not yet feel intimate with such named things, but rather feel myself...slowing, noticing, looking—an invitation to know intimately. As I sit and pause on a bench or upon the ground during a daily walk by the shore, and after many moments pass as I wait, the robin, finch, and jay return to their eating, no longer seeing me as a threat, the dandelion still stands at my side, the wind dances across the water, but the piece of white sea glass stained in a yellow glow in front of me is picked up. I begin to caress it, to understand its pitted and fogged surface, to look at its colouring, to become aware of its ‘oneness,’ to understand it in the present as a singularity—an attempt for objectiveness. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s book *Objectivity* defines objectiveness as “[aspiring] to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving...seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence.”<sup>2</sup> For me, the awareness of an object in this regard, an awareness that is fully present and free from a drifting mind, is where one first begins to know an object, it is where intimacy begins.

When I first began collecting these little glass bits scattered upon the shores, I would later drift into narratives of glass bottles lost at sea, a bottle of perfume dropped unknowingly, perhaps an overturned vessel, or bottles of prohibited alcohol tossed to the sea—the sea now hiding the ship’s secret. But these stories, seemingly signified, were an extension of the collector and not the collected—the object was not talking, I was. I started to lose interest in my own narratives as it began promoting a drifting mind, distracting me from a knowledge of the place and space that I was attempting to be courteous to.

I then started encountering others in my searches. Some told stories, others collected silently along my side, some collected to acquire, and others collected for craft. Through these unexpected encounters, as a practice of collecting through walking, looking, listening, and waiting, is typically a lonely experience, I began understanding the sea glass: its past, present, and future. I quickly learned my narratives were unlikely. The more common story of origin would have been the many communities along the bay breaking their unwanted glass, paddling out to sea, and disposing it. The sea then, over the following decades acted upon the glass, smoothing its surface, leaching from it, fogging it, creating its tranquil glow. I learned of the jewelry items made, the drawings, the mosaics and glass windows, as well as the many children that partook in this activity of gathering. Many of my students even found it funny that something they grew up doing as children, which they have since grown out of, had become a regular activity in my weekly routines. Jean Baudrillard explains that “[f]or children, collecting is a rudimentary way of mastering the outside world, of arranging, classifying and manipulating.”<sup>3</sup> The urge to collect, he explains, returns after puberty and later on in life, as a way to attempt controlling mortality.<sup>4</sup> I often wonder about Baudrillard’s thoughts of collecting post-puberty as an attempt to control one’s own mortality by suspending the

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, (Toronto: House of Anasai Press Inc., 2008), 182.

<sup>2</sup> Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, (New York: Verso, 1996), 93.

<sup>4</sup> ---. 104.

mortality of things in a frozen moment to be looked upon. In a sense, the collector may see such objects in need of saving from the cruelty of time and maybe are then empathetic towards them? Scared of the parallels made between a forgotten object and one's own life after death?

My initial re-introduction to collecting as an adult first began in antique shops and flea markets, taken by the scent, touch, and sight of nostalgia. However, I have since returned to his so-called 'rudimentary way of mastering the outside world' upon moving to Newfoundland, a place that seemed to quietly request me to notice, slowly. It was not simply the landscape that announced its spectacular glow, but the pebble, the brush, and the dirt on the side of the road.

Through the unexpected encounters I experienced during my collecting, I no longer spoke for the sea glass, however the sea glass began to speak through the collected stories of others. It began to signify its origins, its timeline, and the many different lives it may live through. An empathetic relationship to the object was slowly achieved through the now speaking object—empathy reached through the subjective projections of others. I oscillate between an objective and subjective relationship with the object as I both dwell upon its 'oneness,' looking towards the present, but also the object's ability to signify, calling upon the past and looking toward the future. The experience of intimacy for me is then related to a physical knowing, an understanding, and a respect for it as a singularity, whereas empathy becomes the subjective experience of an object now animated by the stories that circle both the collector and collected—an understanding beyond its immediate being.

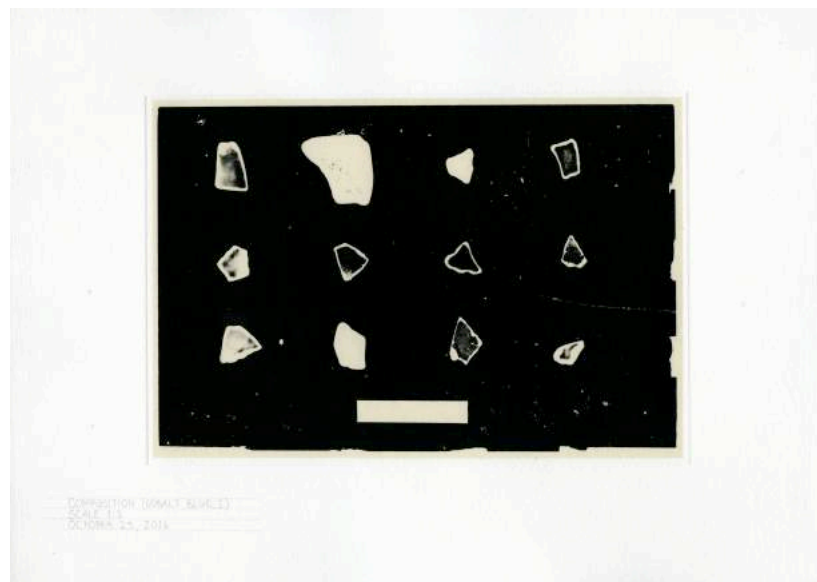


Figure 3

This practice of collecting on walks and hikes in the areas surrounding me became an introduction to a collection that was much more near. I began picking the weeds, grasses, and plants that decorated the property I was temporarily invited to live upon—a space that began knowing me intimately before I paused to return the favour. Each species of weed, grass, and plant, as the surrounding property was more field-like



than lawn, was picked and brought into my dwelling. Both collections, the plants and the sea glass, were then recorded and translated, turning into printed images.

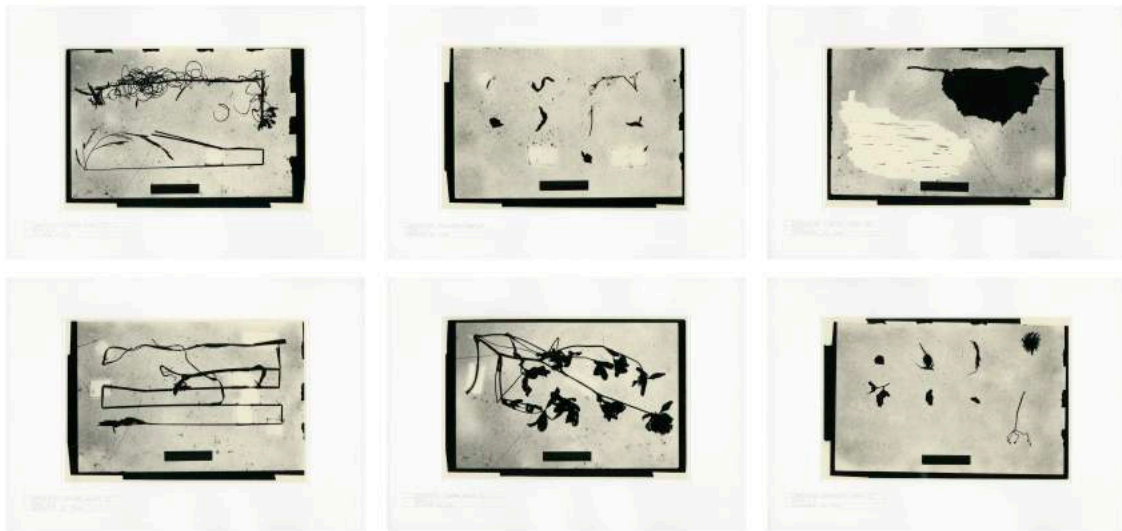


Figure 4

These printed assemblages emphasize the many within the collection. It arranges them, classifies them by colour, type, date. It is a reproduction of their size and informs the viewer of their properties, an understanding through similarities and differences. The sea glass becomes gridded into collections of comparisons. The plants become folded, a ritualistic experience within my practice that exhibits a quiet preciousness towards the object, not wanting to allow the frame of the image to fracture the object, but instead fracturing the object to be contained within the frame. Each image is a shadow of its counterpart, quite literally, as the images are created by using the objects as interference of light exposed to photographic film, and figuratively as they are a casted version of the original no longer present. They point towards themselves as an object of attention, presented as a singularity to be studied, but also as a space to project one's imagination.

The knowledge gleaned from these artworks made are a result of the labour and slowness involved. I begin with walking, slowly investing time that places my body in the landscape, in direct relationship with the ground I travel. I search and look, find and pick-up, and then the objects become images, an invitation to a shared experience of looking that may bear conversation, but does not require one.

As I further dwell upon these collections and encounters I become taken by the importance of walking and looking as the most primary moment in my practice, the most intimate and empathetic moment of my making—an inquiry into the object-ness and within-ness of things. Rebecca Solnit in her text entitled *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, explains:

Walking as art calls attention to the simplest aspects of the act: the way rural walking measures the body and the earth against each other, the way urban walking elicits unpredictable social encounters. And to the most complex: the rich potential relations between thinking and the body; the way one person's act can be an invitation to another's imagination;

the way every gesture can be imagined as a brief and invisible sculpture; the way walking reshapes the world by mapping it, treading paths into it, encountering it.<sup>5</sup>

Walking and looking in recent works has become an end in itself. I collect the walk: the sounds of my footsteps, the sound of others that pass me by, the sound of birds, trees that flux and stretch in the wind, a kicked stone, a stream to my side, the heaviness of my breath, a changing ground stepped upon again and again, over and over, the sound of a pause to look, to notice, to be still. I also collect names—the names of things as ‘acts of courtesy’ and ‘gestures of decorum.’ My attempt, which is doomed for failure, is to name each thing that I pass by in my daily walk: the trees, the birds, insects, rodents, grasses, flowers, weeds, objects, discards, sounds, etc.

There is an inherent intimacy in such gestures of admiration of things. Within these walks and listed names there is also a small collection of physical objects taking place. Opposed to one of classifications, it is one of vibrancy—picking up only a select few objects that seem to speak with one another, my presence a witness to the existing relationship now noticed. And with these walks, walks that do not seem hurried from one place to the next, I pass others who tend to offer up their words, sometimes a hello and sometimes a story. During one walk through a park dotting the shore in Curling Newfoundland, a gentleman began sharing his story. A slowness in both our demeanors prompted elongated conversations: of thoughts of home, of importance of place, and of giving new chances to others.

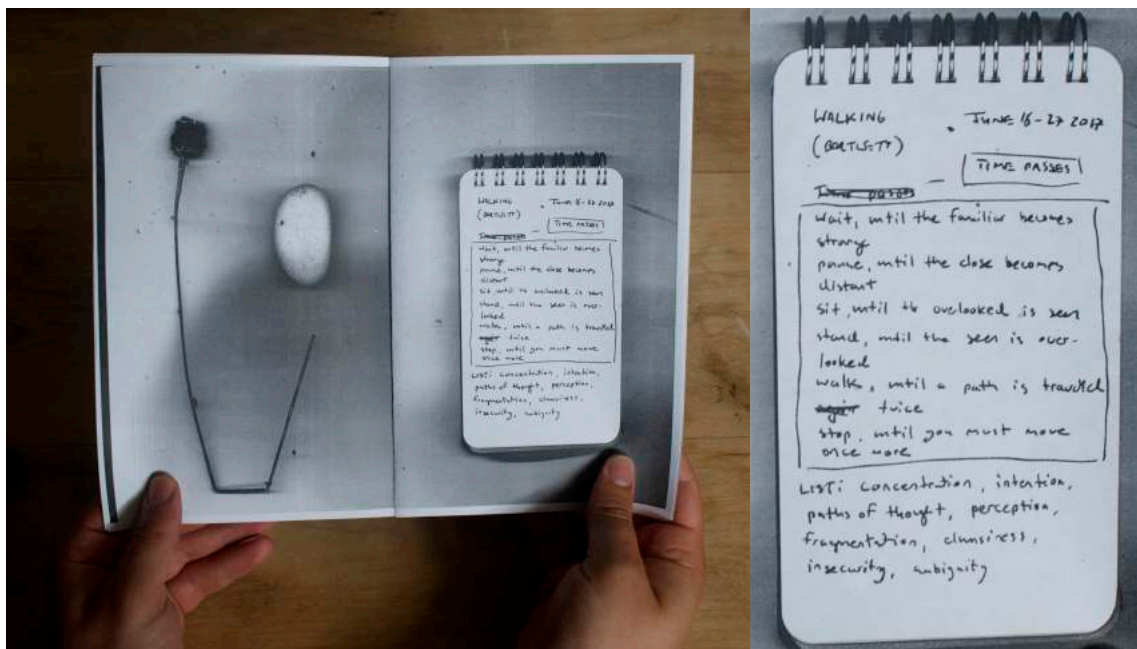


Figure 5

In my current place of residence in Kamloops British Columbia, I walk to get around. Four kilometers uphill to the university, and four kilometers downhill home. I

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 276.

walk to the park to view the meeting of the rivers, and I walk to the trail in the hills. My body moves directly over the earth, and I come to know it...slowly. I name things in my notebook when coming to know the spaces I travel upon in repeated journeys: a discarded children's toy now broken, text written in two locations upon concrete walls remembering the same individual's name who passed, the black-billed magpie alerting others as I near, the steller's jay who flies just a few metres in front of me into the bush on the side of the road, a broken glass whiskey bottle that looks as if it could be puzzled back together, and the remaining few bit and pieces of a plate decorated in blue; the sandstone and basalt stones, the timothy and foxtail grasses, the tansy, rabbitbrush and red clover on the side of the road, and the horse chestnut's spikey vessel that falls to the ground. And although language is not enough, as a name only begins to categorize the world around, I begin to converse with these objects.

Tim Lilburn proposes poetry is where one goes when wanting to know the world as a lover<sup>6</sup>, and I would argue this sentiment extends itself to the process of art making. In as such that it is an inquiry into the object-ness, the within-ness, the this-ness of something, to know something beyond a name, although a name is a good place to start.



Figure 6

---

<sup>6</sup> Tim Lilburn, "How to be here", *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, (Ontario: Cormorant Books, 1999), 17.



## Appendix

(Additional images from power point presentation in order of appearance.)



Figure 7

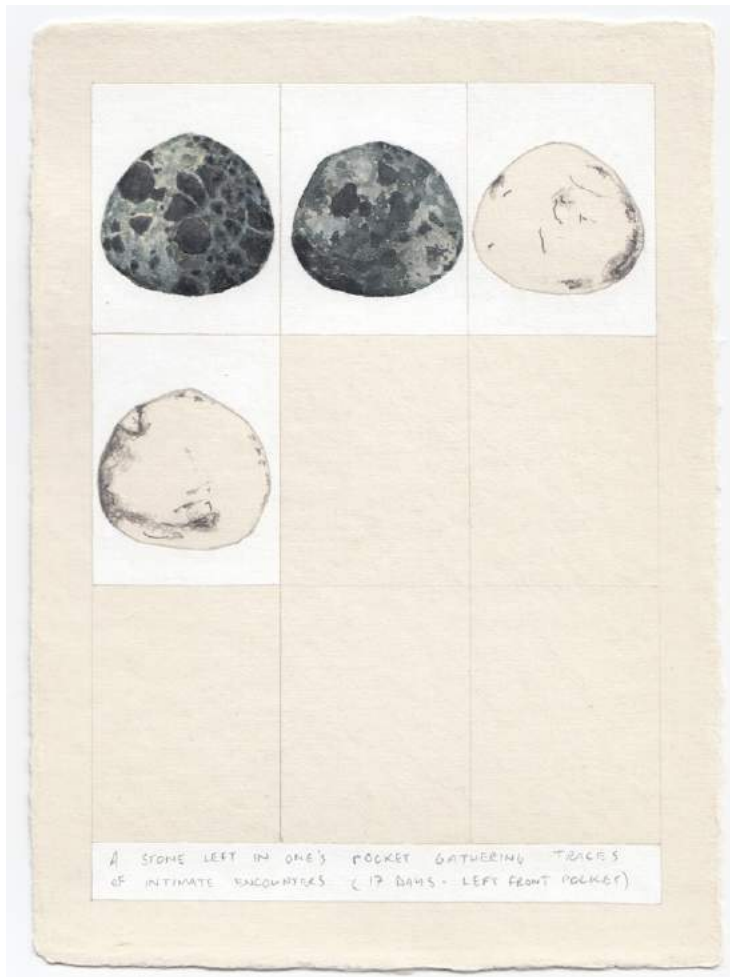


Figure 8

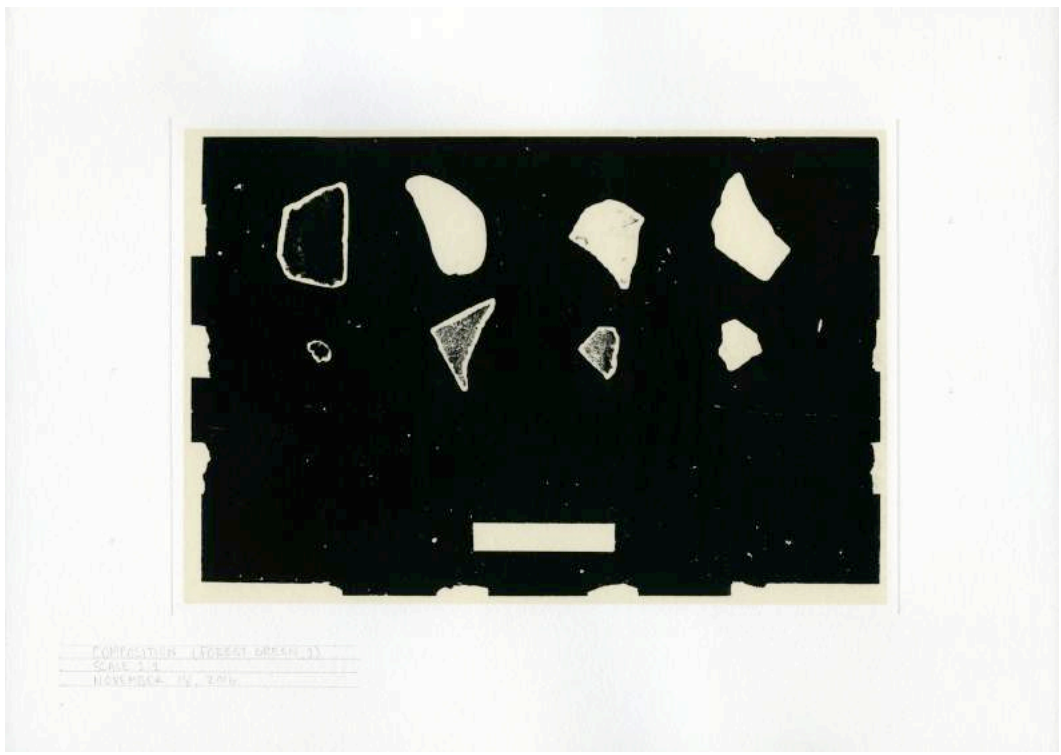


Figure 9

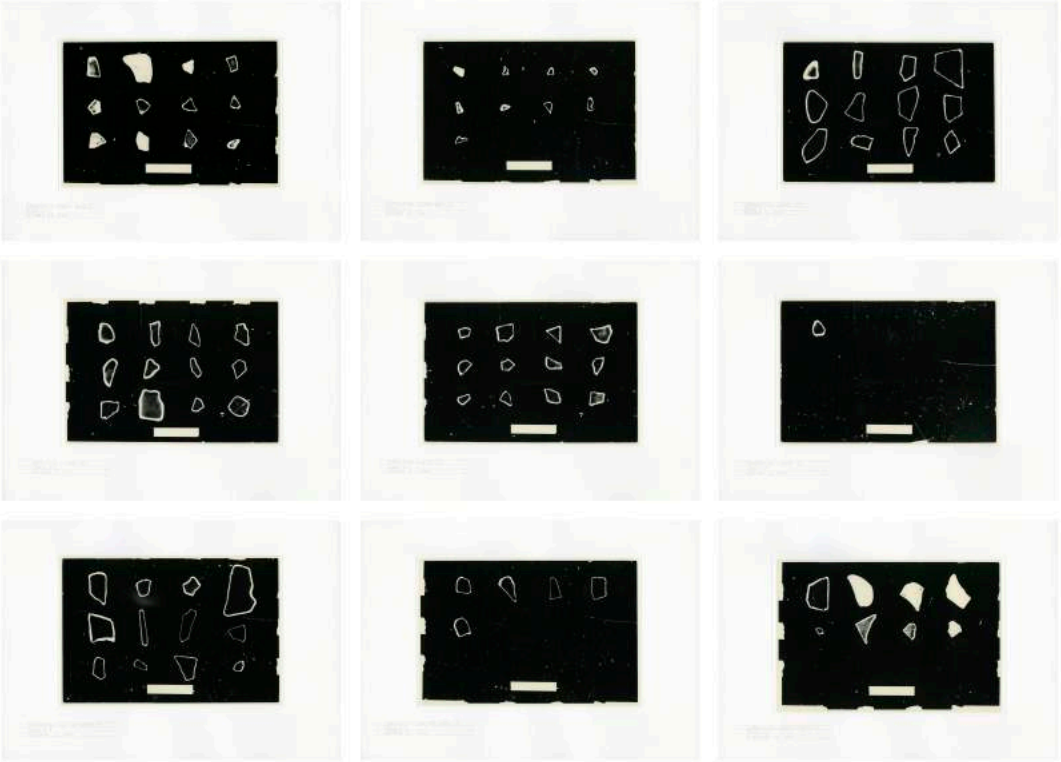


Figure 10

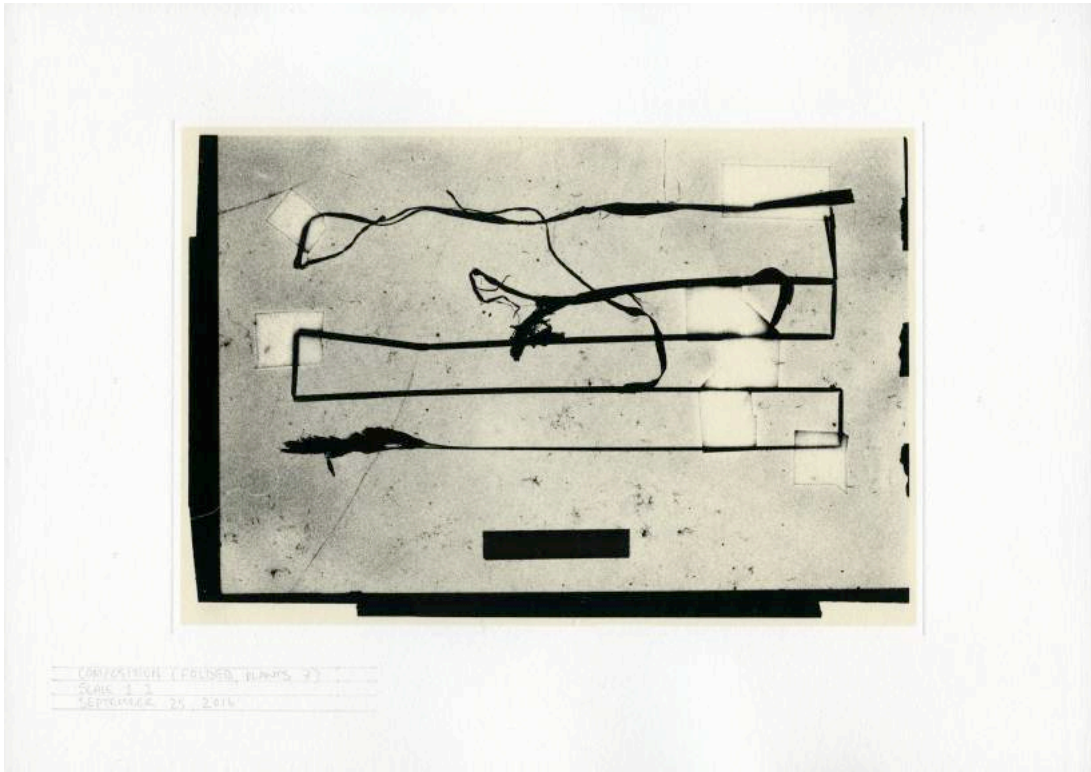


Figure 11

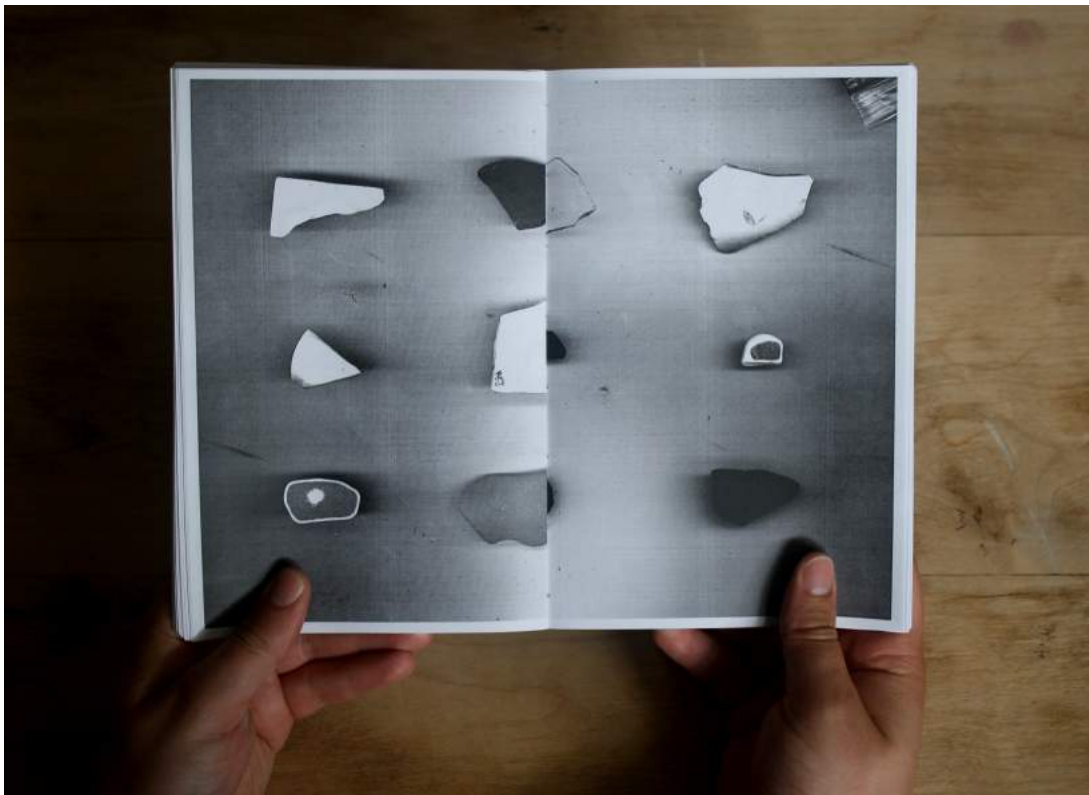


Figure 12

## **Bibliography**

Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, New York: Verso, 1996.

Daston, Lorraine and Galison, Peter. *Objectivity*, New York: Zone Books, 2010.

Lilburn, Tim. *Going Home*, Toronto: House of Anasai Press Inc., 2008.

Ibid. "How to be here", *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, Ontario: Cormorant Books, 1999.

Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, New York: Penguin Books, 2000.