

# WALKING AND DWELLING: CREATING AN ATELIER IN NATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper comprises a description of an exploration of how the author's daily walking reflected the emergence of an a/r/tographical living inquiry that engendered a profound sense of dwelling and lingering, and a deeper understanding of the nature of artistic invitation through a pedagogical aesthetic provocation.

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## BIO

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## More so...

I went for my habitual morning walk along a trail. There was a small bridge with a handrail, on which I spotted five small rocks.

They were lined up perfectly. The row of rocks was barely noticeable and yet it caught my attention. I wondered who had left these small rocks there and why. The five small rocks invited me to experience being in the moment and dwelling with the materials (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018). The provocation, in the form of these small rocks inspired me to explore, dwelling with materials as a living inquiry in the atelier of the forest.

"Dwelling" means being immersed in the moment (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2017). It is not just making something for others. Dwelling (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, and Kocher, 2017) means we are becoming a part of "the emergent processes of bringing something into being" (p. 9). I was curious to discover how others would respond to my process of creating with materials contained in the forest: of dwelling and experiencing being in the moment.

With these thoughts in mind, I began to incorporate my own living inquiry as an entry into a/r/tography



Figure 1 Five rocks

(Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). My walks, as an emergent project in a/r/tographical practice, were active and ongoing; they therefore required attentiveness to what was yet unknown (Springgay et al., 2005).

A/r/tography is about “lingering in the unknown, the unexpected, and the liminal events” (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018, p. 1). As I am practicing to become an artist, a writer and a teacher, I am committed to being in a process of artmaking, inquiring, teaching, learning, emerging, and becoming. This visual essay explores a specific practice over the course of many moments in my larger quest to become an a/r/tographer.



Figure 2 Forest



Figure 3 Golden leaves

The following question was inspired by my walking project of creating and recreating daily artistry in a particular place: Is it possible to provoke others to attentively stop and wonder at my invitations? Thus, this essay is an invitation to share my daily walking and artmaking through excerpts from the daily journal entries and photographs that are presented below. The daily journal notes on my walk are rendered in italics. In addition, the focus is on the artist/writer moving into the inquirer aspect of the a/r/tographer.

**Provocation 1: Being alongside sticks of wood**

Walking is not only a repetitive motion of moving my legs, nor is it just multidimensional body movements. I am recognizing it as also being an aesthetic experience that facilitates a new type of art practice (Triggs, Irwin, & Leggo, 2014).

*I collected sticks and placed them on a tree stump.  
As the tree stump was round, I made a circle with the sticks.  
The following day, there was no trace of the circle.  
Maybe wind?  
Maybe dogs?  
Maybe children who were jumping around the clearing?*

*I did not react to the situation immediately.  
I waited a few days before responding to the reaction and then reissued a fresh invitation on the same wood stump.  
What would happen to them next?*



Figure 4 Sticks on a tree stump



Figure 5 Sticks are gone

## Provocation 2: Dwelling in the midst of leaves

Any acts of engagement will occur in-between open spaces, whereas knowing is situated within the middle and on the edges (Springgay et al., 2005). Should I therefore regard these open spaces that occur within the provocative actions as invitations? As the in-between space that “leave(s) room for encounters between artist/researcher/teacher and reader/viewers’ entangling experience(s)” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 906)?

My attitude to artworks in nature has been largely influenced by Andy Goldsworthy, a British artist (Nakhnikian, 2018). In one of his interviews Goldsworthy asserted that being openminded meant always relying on our own curiosity, intuition, and intention, and then investigating what interests us the most (Nakhnikian, 2018). My intention with each artistic provocation was not to copy or mimic Goldsworthy’s artwork visually, rather, it was to have an encounter with the natural materials, and to emulate Goldsworthy’s ways of being and making artistry in a public open space.



Figure 6 Foggy day

## Provocation 3: Patterning acorn leaves

*I returned to the tree stump.  
The recent invitation was mostly still there.  
I passed by and kept walking.*

*I came upon an acorn tree.  
The ground was covered with brown leaves.  
I paid close attention to each leaf.  
I started noticing multiple autumn colors.  
I collected some.  
I retraced my steps.  
I came back to my tree stump.  
I decided to issue a fresh invitation.  
What could make?*



Figure 7 Acorn leaves forming



Figure 8 Acorn leaves falling

**Provocation 4: Returning to play with sticks**

*...The leaves were gone again.  
Not one of my leaves remained on the stump.  
How did it happen?  
Did somebody break my creation?  
Did the wind blow the leaves?  
Or did squirrels play with them?*

*Repetition of creating and recreating, actions and reactions.  
It makes me wonder whether something, or someone, is looking for more creations from me?*



Figure 9 Repetition

These modes of ongoing questioning, questing, being and dwelling allow me to continuously move to the next level of being an artist, researcher, teacher and learner, rather than maintaining the same perspective and position (Springgay et al., 2005). My aesthetic perspective includes my desire to create with a sense of color, rhythm and repetition. Barrett and Bolt (2013) supports my ways of connecting with materials and my walking. They argue that making representational art and craving beautiful representation are not bad tendencies. However, in this modern world, our problem is how representational art has dominated our ways of understanding art. While I was making these daily creations, it was not easy to maintain my focus on the process, rather than on the daily end product, but it was satisfying to have a final presentational creation every day. Based on wanting others to have an encounter of dwelling and play, my ongoing question became: how can I make my neighbors think more about process rather than the end representations?



Figure 10 Outdoor atelier

**Provocation 5: Becoming “a nature artist”**

*Walking in the rain  
Looking for life and cheer*

*Picking autumn leaves.  
The multitude of colors  
inspired me  
to paint the top of my  
wood stump.*

*My hand became  
a paintbrush,  
the leaves my paints, and  
the tree stump my canvas.*

*A lady walked by, looked at my painting and exclaimed,  
“From now on, I am going to call you, ‘a nature artist!’”*

*Am I now becoming an artist in residence?*



Figure 11 “Artist is here!”



Figure 12 Red carpet



Figure 13 Marching leaves

Shifting the knowing of myself to being an artist in residence moved me closer to what a/r/tographers practice in their need to share a sense of being with others, their learning processes, strategies, and sense of wonder (Irwin, 2008). Through this ongoing walking inquiry, I have shared my sense of being, which involves acting and reacting with others through my artistic creations. To my surprise, I have noticed both a verbal and invisible dialogue between the viewers and myself (Cutcher, Rousell, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2015).



Figures 14 - 17 Rainbows



### Provocation 6: Unfolding myself

We look at the same creation in a communal space.

Each person's encounter with each provocation is unique.

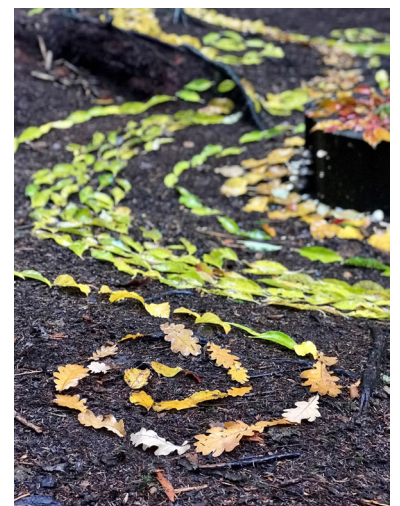
- ... art
- design ...*
- ... trace ...
- ... entertain*
- ... decoration ....

Through lingering with my neighbors' unique ways of encountering my creations, I have been coding and decoding my original intention for this project, which is provoking others as well as expanding my own definition of art.

I have become more focused on recording my ways of being a storyteller, artist and educator, and understanding my intentions toward my own artistic creations by folding and unfolding in and through practice and time (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018).



Figure 18 Floating



Figures 19 - 21 Layers of yellows

## The Story so far...

As a result of conversations and encounters with others, and my living inquiry, my understanding of daily provocation has been changing to evocation. My artistic provocations have now assumed the form of artistic invitations as communicable languages or walking propositions. My living inquiry of making daily artistic creations every day helps others to re-think the beauty of artmaking processes and how we artistically live and walk with nature.

Besides making artistic provocations/evocations with natural materials in nature, I keep photographing each creation. Each photographic image is not intended to represent art as a product or specific categories of artistic activity (Pink, 2007). I record each creation in a photographic image because I wonder how these photographs might be reinterpreted by the readers when they engage with the words that I write and the photos that I take (Pink, 2007).

Through this living inquiry, I have learned how an act of commitment and contiguity helps me to understand the importance of “the relationship between art and graphy” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxviii) through the encounter between the artistic practices and written forms within and through phenomena. Making art and writing about it in this visual essay has helped me to relocate myself “in the space of the in-between to create self-sustaining interrelating identities that inform, enhance, evoke and/or provoke one another” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxv).

Last but not least, this living inquiry began with a response to the small rocks placed in my path in the forest, which called me to make art. The rocks marked the beginning of an a/r/tographic inquiry through my shifting into poetic provocations and explorations of a/r/tographic ideas. In sharing this visual essay as a material-based teaching of a/r/tographic experiences and ideas for myself, I hope it invites viewers and readers into their own discovery of a/r/tographic inquiry.



Figure 22 Sending love letter



Figure 23 - 25 Winter and Spring

NOTE:

Figure 7, Figure 22, Figure 24 and Figure 25 will be published in the Mapping A/r/tography InSEA 2019 Exhibition catalogue

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