At Work

Kylie Little

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At Work

by

Kylie Reece Little

Under the Direction of Christina A. West, MFA

Abstract

At Work examines internal and societal expectations of relentless productivity through an installation of simple yet absurd mechanical contraptions and sequences of actions. Each piece is a prototype that performs a useless task in a clumsy, inefficient way. I guide each machine through a monotonously repetitive series of motions that emphasize constant work and movement as if busy-ness, in and of itself, is a virtue. By questioning the value of busy-ness, At Work simultaneously forces me to confront the guilt I associate with idleness and to look critically at the sense of pride that comes with a hard day’s work.

Index Words: Work, Labor, Machine, Tool, Sculpture, Function, Purpose, The absurd, Futile effort, Busy work, Idleness, The body
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by

KYLIE REECE LITTLE

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AT WORK

by

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DEDICATION

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I love you all.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ROMANTICIZATION OF HARD WORK

Physical labor feels honest and pure. My perception of work is steeped in family history: my grandfather, one of my heroes, worked for various utility companies after returning home from World War II and eventually opened his own full-service Sinclair gas station. Although he passed away when I was nine, I still associate him with the garage, WD-40 and the scent of Lava soap. These memories are partially responsible for the origin of what I call the “joy of the mess.” I feel happiest coming home at the end of the day with stains on my clothes, dirt under my fingernails, and holes in my boots. My parents carried on this tradition of physical work: my mother is a cosmetologist and DIY enthusiast, while my father quit an office job after thirty years to become a school custodian. Growing up, I earned money by taking on physical work whenever possible, which led to an array of interesting jobs. Since the age of fifteen, I have been employed as a lifeguard, swim lesson instructor, denture delivery person, barista, cemetery groundskeeper, permanent collection assistant, hostess, server, bartender, shop monitor, teacher, and studio artist assistant. Every job I’ve had resists the typical American workplace environment of the computer screen and the cubicle.

Working with one’s hands is straightforward and uncomplicated: a job needs to be done, you do it, and the problem is solved. A thing is produced; the job is complete; the process yields the added benefit of new skills and knowledge acquired along the way. Progress gained through manual labor is tangible. I love working with my hands to make things, and I learn and communicate best through touch and action. This romantic notion of labor is further cemented by a childhood spent growing up in Elkhart County, Indiana, the RV capital of the world. My hometown is steeped in sturdy Midwestern blue collar values and “Rust Belt” economics, in
which post-industrialization and agriculture converge to form cities run by conveyor belts and “blood, sweat, and tears.” As I mature, I reflect on my relationship to work and labor and wonder about the inherent value of manual toil. Work, after all, is never actually done; in the words of Camus, “one always finds one’s burden again.”

Participating in athletics started me on the road to reexamining my Midwestern commitment to hard work. Growing up, I participated in several sports. Coaches proclaimed the benefits of hard work and the “practice makes perfect” mentality—evidence, again, of an oversimplified (romanticized) notion of work. Perfection was unattainable, no matter how hard I trained or the grueling hours I spent swimming, running, and playing volleyball. Swimming was the most intense. I swam competitively from the age of six to seventeen and the routine of wake/train/school/train/sleep/repeat consumed much of my teen life. This rigorous schedule seemed normal until my sophomore year in high school, when I realized that I held no long-term athletic aspirations. I began to hate the endless training cycle that treated my body like a soulless machine: input/output, pain/gain, practice/compete, win/lose. I finally quit swimming in my senior year of high school, despite feelings of guilt from abandoning my teammates. What was the result of all this hard work? Why did I put up with the pain? What would I do with all of my new free time? Who was I if I was no longer striving to be a great athlete? Although I worried about letting people down, I was more concerned about being judged as lazy or unmotivated. Being a hard worker was a central part of my identity.

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The consequence of putting so much emphasis on constant work and busy-ness is a crushing sense of guilt whenever I attempt to take things slow or downshift. I cannot nap, even to this day. Attempts to sleep during the day usually end with waking up startled, uneasy, reaching for the clock, feeling like I am missing something important. My heart beats fast, and I feel anxious for the rest of the day, even if I have cleared my schedule specifically for the purpose of rest and relaxation. To atone for my laziness, I run around performing pointless chores until nightfall, when my body’s need for rest finally overtakes me.

This guilt of not-doing is another part of my identity, a leech attached to my hard worker persona. I used to wear my non-idleness proudly like a badge of honor: I would recite my insane, mostly self-inflicted, schedule to others as if running around, stressed, having no free time was a great personal accomplishment. This constant busy-ness kept the guilt of not-doing at bay. It’s only within the last few years that I have been able to shake off this notion of busy-ness as a virtue and have started to embrace the idea of rest as a productive use of my time. I no longer strive to be constantly busy.

I had always been taught that being a hard worker was one of the more admirable traits an individual could possess. As I stated above, being a hard worker was a key part of my identity. This idea—that a strong work ethic is among the most positive qualities an individual can possess—is not unique to American Midwesterners; it’s a common theme throughout Western thought and culture. The Bible exhorts us to work by threatening us with damnation: “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” implies that the road to sin is paved with lack of industriousness.”

2 Proverbs 16:27 (The Living Bible).
the 18th and 19th centuries, the industrial revolution and controversy over socialism and communism as social systems drove many thinkers to examine work as a concept. The French enlightenment writer and philosopher Voltaire similarly believed in work’s transcendent power; he wrote that progress only happened through human effort, therefore working hard should lead to some type of advancement. The Italian philosopher, Adriano Tilgher, gets more specific, focusing on hard work’s immeasurable moral consequences:

It is in work that man of capitalist civilization finds his nobility and worth. His whole code of ethics is contained in the one precept, “Work!” It is through work that he embodies in himself the sacred principle of activity, another name for liberty, which keeps becoming more and more free as he gradually molds the world to his own ends, freeing himself from the tyranny of matter, transforming its brute resistance into a useful support for his tools.

Based upon Tilgher’s view, within a capitalist system, activity is good, and idleness is bad; this view is unique because it does not only associate work’s intrinsic value with its potential extrinsic outputs (productivity and wealth). Karl Marx, a German revolutionary thinker, also expresses work’s ability to bond communities as a benefit: all of mankind is united because everyone works. Other thinkers, like Hendrik de Man, ascribe to the broad view that there is joy in work and if that joy doesn’t exist, it’s because of some flaw or impediment around the work, not the work itself. De Man also believes that everyone has an inherent “work instinct,” and fighting it by being inactive is not only unnatural, but hazardous to our health. These beliefs permeate our culture, so it is logical to think that my commitment to being a hard worker is the byproduct of cultural conditioning.

These thinkers variously claim that hard work yields a more productive, disciplined, dedicated, honest, proud, and independent populous. Here, though, we already begin to see opposing ideas about the concept of work. Tilgher implies that work leads to a higher level of independence, while Marx believes in work’s power to unite us and create an improved sense of community. Which is it? *AT WORK* does not aim to determine once and for all if work is good or bad, helpful or harmful, but rather explores and reveals my own biases about work and questions the habits and internalized teachings of societies founded upon the forces of labor and production.
2  LABOR IN LANGUAGE

This pressure to constantly produce and be active is reflected in the English language through common phrases and idioms. I’ve always been fascinated with phrases such as: “Keep your nose to the grindstone” and “Work your fingers to the bone.” These rather gruesome, yet commonplace, phrases reflect and reinforce cultural values and ideals about work. As Hannah Arendt states, “Language is a repository of sedimented facts... about the human condition” that teach us about the world.  

Language is central to the debate regarding the difference between labor and work. Many philosophers use the terms interchangeably, but I side with Hannah Arendt, who believes there is a distinct difference. Arendt builds her argument on the fact that every European language has separate words for labor and work, therefore, there must be a distinction between the two terms. Labor and work are referred to, respectively, as ponein and erazesthai in Greek; laborare and fabricare in Latin; travailler and ouvrer in French; and arbeiten and werken in German. In the United States, we often distinguish between our job or occupation (how we earn money to live) and our work or calling (activities that add purpose and meaning to our lives).

Arendt defines labor as “corresponding to the biological process of the human body.” Labor is essential; it ensures the survival or reproduction of the individual. Some examples of labor include eating, bathing, grocery shopping, childcare, dishwashing, industrial farming, and

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8 Ibid, 491-503.
extracting resources to heat homes. Labor is quantitative and moves in endless cycles: eat, sleep, repeat. Work, on the other hand, “corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence [and is] not embedded in the ever-recurring life cycle.” Work is distinct from nature; it creates an “artificial world” of durable things that can be used to create other things; tools are a clear example of this definition. Work, in this sense, is most easily understood through its outputs. Throughout the rest of this paper, I will use Arendt’s interpretations of labor and work for both clarity and concept reinforcement.

11 Arendt, The Human Condition, 78.
3 TOOLS AND MACHINES

A tool is any device that accomplishes a task. This definition is objectively accurate, yet broad enough to allow for creative discussion. Using tools was commonly held as the key attribute that distinguished humans from other animals until primatologists discovered ape relatives who use objects to achieve various tasks (i.e., tools). Chimpanzees, for instance, have entire specialized tool kits: sticks and long pieces of grass to reach termites and ants within deep mounds; rocks to crack nuts; and spears to hunt other primates. This tool knowledge isn’t a recent adaptation: at a prehistoric chimpanzee settlement discovered along the Ivory Coast, archaeologists found stone hammers that date back 4,300 years.\(^{12}\) Our closest living relatives are not the only non-humans to use tools; much of the animal kingdom has the ability to manipulate objects for use.\(^{13}\) Although my thesis work revolves around human problems, solutions, and bodies it’s important to note that tool use is not unique to humans because laboring to survive is universal among all life forms.

Even though humans have developed more complex tools and technology than any other species, our relationship with tools began as simply as the rest, when hominids began modifying stones to solve basic survival problems. To anthropologists, tools are cultural markers, examined as evidence of a past culture, along with language and objects like weapons, art, and dress. Tools offer insight into how our ancestors lived, worked, and thought. Through this lens, we see that tools are deeply embedded in our cultural identity.


Tools have become extensions of the human body. “[The] arm, however strong and supple it may be, can achieve but little unaided: to achieve greater things man requires tools and knowledge. Tools are additional muscles to the arm, and knowledge is new energy for his mind.”\textsuperscript{14} Tools make the impossible possible. We can move entire buildings in one piece, tunnel through mountains, and have real-time video conversations with family members in another country (or outer space). Tools are so essential to work that the two terms are often linked and used to cross-define each other. For instance, Herbert Applebaum, in \textit{The Concept of Work}, defines work as the use of tools, or “things and materials of nature to fashion tools with which to make objects and control the living creatures and forces of nature to satisfy human needs and wants.”\textsuperscript{15}

Because tools extend our bodies, they also distance us from nature; machines are more complex tools that increase this distancing. As Applebaum states: “the machine removes the man even further from nature than does the tool.”\textsuperscript{16} My thesis work incorporates some exposed natural elements out of a desire to reconnect work, tools, and nature. The disconnect between these concepts has not always existed; according to Hesiod, it is “through work, [that] man had contact with nature and divine power.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Applebaum, \textit{The Concept of Work}, 379.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, x.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 442.
\textsuperscript{17} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony; Works and Days; Shield}, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 780.
Machines are tools too, although we typically associate machines with their complex operations and moving components. Machines transmit motion, force, and energy in a predetermined manner, but the transmission is not always accomplished by a complex system of moving parts. Renaissance scientists determined that there are six simple machines: 1) lever 2) wheel and axle 3) pulley 4) inclined plane 5) wedge and 6) screw.¹⁸

Figure 1. Six simple machines for transforming energy into work.

These basic machines are elegant in their simplicity: they have few or no moving parts and use a single applied force to do work against a single load force. Most complex machines combine or interconnect many simple machines; for instance, a cylinder lock, an electric beard trimmer, a zipper, and a plow all take advantage of wedges. The pieces created for *AT WORK*, which I will cover in detail later in this paper, employ a selection of these simple machines as well.

No matter what a machine’s intended purpose is, “everything [it] does is in accordance with a set of principles or scientific laws.”

A machine exists to carry out a function. This function is its purpose, its reason for existing. A machine that has no discernable purpose goes against our understanding of what machines are. A useless machine calls into question the value of work: what, after all, is the value of a machine that serves no useful function? What is the value of work that yields no output? Artist duo Fischli and Weiss are masters of creating useless machines and other objects that have helped me critically examine my notions of work, busy-ness, and industry.

In their film, The Way Things Go, a Rube Goldberg-like contraption is set in motion within a warehouse. For thirty minutes, objects seem to exist independently of humans while they react to the actions of those before them. This series of chain reactions include air, fire, water, gravity, and chemicals to ensure the constant movement of worthless clutter. The lack of a beginning and end creates a world in which hierarchy does not exist. No one object is more important than another; roller skates, furniture, knives, ladders, trash bags, buckets, tin cans, tires, bottles, and balloons are equally essential. The major difference between The Way Things Go and a typical Rube Goldberg machine is functionality. Rube Goldberg machines are meant to complete simple tasks in an indirect way while Fischli & Weiss’ piece seems to be a meandering route to nowhere. Previously, I stated that the one thing all machines have in common is a purpose, but what if a machine’s intended function is to exist as a work of art? Is purpose solely defined by the completion of a task? Can something still be called a machine if its only purpose is to fulfill

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the (possibly pointless) desires of its creator? I find myself grappling with my role as a creator. Is the title of “artwork” or “artist” an excuse to exist in a perpetual state of purposelessness?

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**Simple Alarm Clock**

The early bird (A) arrives and catches worm (B), pulling string (C) and shooting off pistol (D). Bullet (E) busts balloon (F), dropping brick (G) on bulb (H) of atomizer (I) and shooting perfume (J) on sponge (K)—as sponge gains weight, it lowers itself and pulls string (L), raising end of board (M)—cannon ball (N) drops on nose of sleeping gentleman—string tied to cannon ball releases cork (O) of vacuum bottle (P) and ice water falls on sleeper’s face to assist the cannon ball in its good work.

Figure 2. Rube Goldberg, *Simple Alarm Clock.*

The elaborate system of reactions in *The Way Things Go* isn’t quite the seamless spectacle we see on screen. The artists stop, start, and build in between takes to present the illusion of continuity. Does that matter? Would it be more meaningful if they presented the truth? Through this work, Fischli and Weiss also praise the “pleasure of misuse” by forcing objects to function in contraindicated ways.20 This perversion of objects’ and materials’ intended purpose fits within my conception of art.

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Is the human body a machine? The body is miraculously complex, made up of tissues, organs, and systems harmoniously working to keep us alive. Its outputs are both tangible and intangible:
my body can produce art, but also the thoughts that lead to making the art. In *Treatise on Man*, Descartes claims that the human body is a “machine made of earth,” and asks readers to “consider that these functions [of the body] follow in this machine simply from the disposition of the organs as wholly naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the disposition of its counter-weights and wheels.”}

Capitalism exploits this notion of the body as machine to create even more complex systems that incorporate humans as part of the machinery. The invention of factories during the Industrial Revolution and Ford’s perfecting of the factory line production method shifted the worker’s role from human being to machine component. The worker’s body was no longer in control, but merely a unit of labor valued for its “ability to keep the technology flowing, [which] made the worker himself into an interchangeable part.” This process is dehumanizing; the human body is merely a quantifiable resource, a source of energy, not a person with thoughts, feelings, and intrinsic value.

Artist Janine Antoni plays with this industrialized notion of the human body in her piece *Gnaw* (2002). In this piece, Antoni not only uses her body as a machine for making art, but also as an Archimedean tool for discovery. She cast two solid, six hundred pound cubes, one of chocolate and one of lard, then chewed on the cubes, leaving visible teeth marks. Antoni used the discarded mixture of chocolate and spit to create twenty-seven heart-shaped candy packages and a mixture of the chewed lard, spit, beeswax, and pigment to create one hundred and thirty-five tubes of

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23 Ibid, 457.
lipstick. By using her own body as the means of production, Antoni highlights the erasure of humanity in mass-produced consumer culture, laying bare our complicity in the dehumanization of workers. Her actions may seem absurd, but I don’t believe that gnawing on a block of chocolate is, at its core, that different from our everyday habits of consumption. Our body is not only a machine for art-making and eating, but also for purchasing and using.

Figure 4. Janine Antoni, *Gnaw (Installation View)*, 1992.

---

I am funneling all these aspects of work, tools, and machines into *AT WORK*, using the questions I have outlined here to guide my understanding of my own work ethic. As it turns out, I have something in common with ancient primates, Fischli and Weiss, and Janine Antoni: we all use tools to achieve our goals. While the goals of the artists mentioned above are slightly more abstract than the chimpanzee attempting to extract termites from a mound, there is still something raw, primitive, and inherent about creating and using tools or machines. We began using machines and tools as extensions of ourselves, a necessary tactic for survival, which ultimately led to us becoming machines ourselves. Every piece in *AT WORK* exists in the form of a machine that requires my body as an essential component. Each machine functions to complete specific, designated, and seemingly useless tasks, but I also use these machines to question their own (and my own) perceived meaninglessness.
4 FUNCTION, FUTILITY, AND THE ABSURD

Labor and futility have been key components of my work for years. In my first year of graduate school, I created over 130 handmade adobe bricks in three different sizes using simple, also handmade, wooden molds. To speak to the commodification of nature, these bricks were shrink-wrapped as individual, consumer-ready products, but each was unique with the mark of the maker’s hand visible. Adobe bricks were my focus in the studio for roughly eight months. I never found a way to “complete” a piece using the bricks as components, perhaps because I had misaligned the piece’s meaning: I thought the meaning had to do with nature (the material), but it actually was about effort (the process). I used soil partly because working with it was physically demanding and partly because the finished pieces retained the marks of my labor.

This is the process I used to create a single batch of bricks (usually 20-24):

1) Wait for a sunny day and then gather all necessary materials: wooden molds, shovel, gloves, cement mixing container, hose/water, sand, straw, clay, soil.
2) Change into clothes that can get dirty.
3) Set up wooden molds on flat surface (ground).
4) Shovel sand, straw, clay, soil, and water (in correct proportion) into the cement mixing container.
5) Use shovel to mix until thoroughly combined and correct consistency.
6) Use shovel and hands to transport mix into the wooden molds. Fill completely.
7) Use hands to press and pat adobe mixture down.
8) Allow bricks to sit in molds for 24 hours.
9) Remove the molds and let bricks sit in sun for another day or two.
10) Clean and re-coat molds for the next use. Begin another batch while others dry.
11) Flip each brick on its side to allow for more even drying.
12) Let bricks dry for a minimum of two weeks. (Cover or bring inside if it rains).

After each batch, my body was sore from bending down, lifting, shoveling, and mixing. I could have used an electric mixer, but I did not. I could have used a worktable so I could remain upright, but I did not. I could have avoided doing most of this work in an uncovered parking lot during a hot Atlanta summer, but I did not. I could have easily avoided this project all together,
especially since I had no end in mind. Why didn’t I? This was (in part) a reaction to the guilt I felt when doing nothing. I needed the mess, soreness, and mindless busywork to remind myself that I was producing, that I was contributing to something. I benefitted from the function of busywork: I was rewarded the gift of distraction.

This futile process allowed me to deal with the concept of labor for labor’s sake on its own turf: through physical action. Ideation and action must exist simultaneously to gain a deeper understanding in both body and mind.

Figure 6. Kylie Reece Little, *Ready-To-Use*, over 130 handmade adobe bricks, soil, clay, sand, straw, water, shrink wrap, 2018-2019.
The following year, I began to explore the concept of purpose through the creation of work that appeared machine-like and utilitarian but did not actually carry out a function. In the piece *Rig No. 2*, a handmade wooden cage-like structure surrounds a five-gallon jug partially filled with water. The water jug is connected via a clear plastic tube to a small, shallow hole in the wall. *Rig No. 2* alludes to fulfilling a basic human need (water), but the way it functions to fulfill this need is unclear and ultimately nonexistent. Instead of housing and transporting water, the functions that are visually implied, this piece provokes us to think about utility and purpose. This takes me back to questions prompted by the art of Fischli and Weiss regarding the usefulness of art. While it is futile to attempt using this “machine” for its purported function, aren’t provoking thought
and stoking imagination also valuable, life-sustaining functions?

Figure 8. Kylie Reece Little, *Rig No. 2*, filtered water, plywood, paracord, plastic jug, polycarbonate tubing, PVC, hardware, 27x27x42”, 2020. (See Appendix C for detail photos.)

Many artists and philosophers have addressed the purpose of work, but this complex issue’s strongest illustration is contained within the pages of *The Phantom Tollbooth*, a fantasy adventure novel by Norton Juster. This story follows Milo, a constantly bored boy who is magically transported to another world after driving his toy car through a mysteriously received, enchanted tollbooth. Milo goes on a quest to rescue the Princesses Rhyme and Reason, who once ruled this land but were kidnapped. Milo and his crew (Tock the Watchdog and Humbug) must
climb the Mountains of Ignorance to reach The Castle in the Air, where the princesses are being held captive, but their path is riddled with demons who attempt to halt their progress.

One of these demons is the Terrible Trivium, the “demon of petty tasks and worthless jobs, ogre of wasted effort and monster of habit.”25 He assigns Milo and his two friends simple yet monotonous, interminable chores: Milo must move a pile of sand, grain by grain, with a pair of tweezers; Tock has to transport water to a well using only an eyedropper; Humbug is required to dig a hole through a cliff using only a needle. After toiling away for some time, Milo calculates (with the help of magic) that, at their current pace, it would take eight hundred and thirty-seven years to complete these jobs. He questions whether these activities are worthwhile or just wasted effort. The Terrible Trivium reassures them:

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Think of all the trouble it saves...if you only do the easy and useless jobs, you’ll never have to worry about the important ones which are so difficult. You just won’t have the time. For there’s always something to do to keep you from what you really should be doing, and if it weren’t for that dreadful magic staff, you’d never know how much time you were wasting.  

As the Terrible Trivium points out, when our hands are occupied with menial, pointless tasks, it prevents us from putting our resources, time, and effort into important work and difficult issues. I think back to my teen years, when I furiously worked just for the sake of being perceived as a hard worker. What important work was I avoiding by wasting time doing chores similar to the ones the Terrible Trivium gave Milo and his friends?

The ideas Juster writes about in *The Phantom Tollbooth* have been rooted in the real world since the Ancient Greeks roamed the earth. According to Aristotle, repetitive, mindless drudgery—sometimes referred to as a “mechanical life”—leads to weariness and a has “a degrading effect on body and mind.”  

This phenomenon became apparent among factory workers, especially after Ford applied the ideas of continuous flow and interchangeable parts to the production of Model T automobiles in 1913. Factory work placed the worker in one position performing a single task, day in and day out, just like Milo moving sand with tweezers. Karl Marx called this dehumanization the “alienation of worker” and described its effects as a series of paradoxes:

> The more value he creates the more worthless he becomes; the more refined his product the more crude and misshapen the worker; the more civilized the product the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the work the more feeble the worker; the more the work manifests intelligence the more the worker declines in intelligence and becomes a slave of nature.  

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28 Ibid, 444.
Mechanical work does not require (indeed, it discourages) curiosity, problem solving, or even general interest from the worker. Hegel states that workers under these conditions have “Their consciousness… reduced to apathy.”  Apathy was the Terrible Trivium’s goal; by turning his victims into mindless drones through futile, repetitive gestures, he could control them and build an army of obedient worker zombies. Enticing Milo to stay and join him, the Terrible Trivium argues in his soothing voice, “If you stay here, you’ll never have to think again—and with a little practice, you can become a monster of habit too.”

The machines that comprise my thesis exhibition experiment with these concepts of work and futility, helping me examine my own ideas about work, labor, and productivity. Each machine functions as intended. It does its job. It performs its task. The job or task it performs, however, is illogical and superfluous, like moving water with an eyedropper. Sweeping requires me to hold a handle and walk in a continuous circle while three brooms clean the same paths over and over again. Painting forces me to bear its weight upon my shoulders and squat repeatedly while five paint rollers intermittently slide along a wall and leave entire areas untouched. I created Filtering with the clear objective of filtering dirty street puddle water. Along with some pushing and pumping, this piece mostly involves waiting as single drops of water make their way through the device and back into the puddle.

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29 Applebaum, Concept of Work, 442.
30 Juster, Phantom Tollbooth, 213-214.
5 PARTICIPATION RIBBON GENERATION

Filtering is a portable, six-wheeled filtration system that can be pushed across the city from puddle to puddle. Water enters the four-step filtration system through a bilge pump manually operated by Filtering’s human component. Water travels from the puddle, through the hose, into the filtration system, and back into the same location on the road or sidewalk. This process can be repeated infinitely, either in the same spot or at another puddle. Using the machine gives rise to new questions. Is filtering puddle water any more absurd than common daily tasks? We are constantly moving things from one place to another, tidying spaces that inevitably become untidy. We only achieve temporary change through chores like these, just as Filtering only momentarily makes puddle water slightly cleaner.

Cleaning puddles is a Sisyphean effort, since every rainfall creates new puddles and every sunny day dries them up. The machine’s purpose is also of very little utility or value, since there is neither a market nor a consumer for semi-clean puddle water. From a capitalist viewpoint, the futility of this task means that it is a complete waste of my resources; I am expending energy and time that would be better invested in producing goods or services that meet market demands. But does performing the futile work of puddle cleaning yield other, less tangible results? The piece has a secondary, unintended purpose; it is a tool that helps me question the culturally mainstream ideas of work and busy-ness as noble and virtuous. Unlike the factory floor apathy described by Marx, using Filtering forces me to meditate on my labor. Ultimately, the piece’s conceptual function is a dual act of protest against capitalist values: by using (‘wasting’) my human resources on ‘mind-work,’ I create nothing marketable and contribute nothing to the economy. I also draw attention to the futility of repetitive manual labor. I create no profits, only ideas.
While I worked, I collected these ideas and observations in my cellphone’s note application (Appendix B). Anything unique about each puddle, location, or day were informally noted; I later transferred my notes into log books and compiled each day’s work with photos, route maps, and water testing strips. These musings ranged from comments on the weather to short stories of interactions with passersby. I filtered a total of twenty-five puddles on nine routes to meet my self-imposed quarterly quota. Each route was labeled with a letter (A-I) corresponding to a log binder of the same letter. This record-keeping is one of my solutions to the problem of measuring effort. By tracking my movement, time spent, and “progress” made, I was able to not only share a snippet of my experience as a worker, but also reward myself with tangible proof of my work. The proof is mostly for my benefit, because: 1. It doesn’t actually prove anything to anyone; and 2. I thrive on this tangible evidence. As it turns out, I need a receipt. I need some sort of physical acknowledgment that I did what I set out to do, whether it needed to be done or not. I filtered that puddle. I checked that box. I can keep these physical manifestations of my lack of idleness and look at them with pride, possess them as keepsakes, wear them as a hard-worker badge. The great irony is, of course, that these “souvenirs” of my work are equally meaningful whether the work achieved something useful or not! Apparently, I did not entirely avoid the effects of being a member of the “participation ribbon generation” as I previously assumed.
Figure 10. *Filtering (Field View)*, Worksite: Puddles; Route A, 2020.

Figure 11. Kylie Reece Little, *Filtering (Installation View)*, Worksite: Puddles; steel, particle board, PVC, hose, chalk line, safety flag, hand bilge pump, fired clay, charcoal, sand, funnels, caster wheels, tarp, water test strips, clipboard, pen, 2021 (See Appendix D for detail photos.)
Francis Alýs has been a constant influence on my artistic practice, but especially this year, as I embarked on these new (to me) issues relating to work. Much of Alýs’ artwork exists as performance or action. These works often require mundane or repetitive movements that have no particular end and/or a seemingly absurd goal. His work *When Faith Moves Mountains* has been my favorite piece of art for some time. *Faith* is a durational work, starting with over five hundred volunteers gathering in a line at the bottom of a sand dune in Lima, Peru. (Although, I consider the piece beginning with idea formation.) The volunteers are tasked with moving the five-hundred-meter-long sand dune ten centimeters from its original position. Luckily, unlike poor Milo, the volunteers were given shovels, not tweezers.

Figure 12. Francis Alýs, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, Lima, Peru, 2002.
The driving principle behind the work was “maximum effort, minimal result,” a concise turn of phrase that often replays in my head as I develop my own ideas.31 Unsurprisingly, the volunteers were able to move very little of the sand dune. This lack of any discernable result was disproportionate to the massive expenditure of human resources, which intrigues me because the artifacts of the project’s existence are the only tangible evidence that the task was ever attempted. Seeing these physical remnants of Alýs’ project helped me to understand why I make objects AND perform tasks.

When Faith Moves Mountains and other works by Alýs lean so heavily on concept, one wonders why he enacts the proposed events at all? Would anyone even know the difference? For instance, in his work Song for Lupita (1998), why not simply say “woman pours water continuously from cup to cup?” To create The Loop (1997), why not just state that the “artist travels from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the Mexico/United States border?”32 Why actually perform these easily imaginable actions? I believe the answer lies in the absurdity of doing the actions. People don’t usually choose to perform actions that are unlikely to yield some benefit as a result (i.e. labor without pay). Alýs has devoted his practice to doing things most people would consider a

complete waste of time. Therein lies the power of the work. By creating a “sensation of meaninglessness,” he reveals the true absurdity of a situation.\textsuperscript{33}

Figure 13. Francis Alÿs, \textit{When Faith Moves Mountains}, Lima, Peru, 2002.

I am currently grappling with similar questions. I spent 22.75 hours filtering 25 puddles and I passed 20 waking hours sweeping a circle on the floor of my apartment. I recorded this time and effort through log binders and timecards that could’ve much more easily been falsified than honestly enacted. The visual result in the gallery would have remained nearly identical. No one would have known but me; in fact, no one knows for certain that I actually performed these tasks at all (to the extent I claim). So why did I? The machines felt incomplete without the labor and the labor felt incomplete without the machines. The specific physical effort could not exist without the guidance of the tools I created, but it is less clear to me why those tools needed to be used. Why did I require that of myself? In this situation, I have no boss. I set my own quotas and assigned my own shifts. I toiled for no pay and dealt with the exhaustion, soreness, frustration, 

\textsuperscript{33} Medina et al., \textit{Francis Alÿs}, 39.
injuries, boredom, and elemental exposure that came along with it. Just as Antoni gnawed chocolate, Alýs moved a mountain, and Humbug dug, I filtered and swept and painted.
6 ENDURING QUALITIES

Endurance art is not new. Since the 1970s, artists have purposefully placed themselves in painful or uncomfortable situations. Often, these performances are durational and involve isolation, exhaustion, or deprivation, but not all come from a desire to suffer. One pioneer of endurance art is Chris Burden. In 1971, Burden performed *Shoot*, wherein he arranged for a friend (and trained marksman) to shoot him in the arm from 13 feet away using a small-caliber rifle in an alternative art space. The piece was documented with informal clips and photos.

![Figure 14. Chris Burden, *Shoot*, F-Space Gallery, Santa Ana, California, November 19, 1971.](image)

![Figure 15. Chris Burden, *Shoot*, F-Space Gallery, Santa Ana, California, November 19, 1971.](image)

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Tehching Hsieh is another endurance artist who is known for his year-long durational works. In *One Year Performance (Cage Piece)*, the artist built an 11’6”x9’x8’ wooden cage and placed himself in solitary confinement within his studio from September 30, 1978 through September 29, 1979. The cage was furnished with a wash basin, a pail, lights, and a single bed. During this time, he did not allow himself to converse, read, write, listen to the radio, or watch television. His friend, Cheng Wei Kuong, took care of Hsieh’s food, clothing, and refuse. Hsieh documented this piece in a typed statement, a typed certificate authored and signed by an attorney, carved tally marks on the cell wall, and daily photographs taken by Kuong. The artist also allowed the public into his studio to view the piece approximately once per month.


Figure 17. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance (Cage Piece, Detail)*, New York City, September 30, 1978-September 29, 1979.
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I HEREBY CERTIFY:

That on the 30th day of September, 1978, I did personally observe Mr. SAM HSIEH enter a cell constructed of pine dowels and two-by-fours and located in the second floor premises at 111 Hudson Street in the City, County and State of New York; that I then and there did observe the door to said cell locked immediately upon Mr. HSIEH’s entry and each and every joint of said cell sealed with a paper seal inscribed by me that day;

That on the 29th day of September, 1979, I did personally observe Mr. SAM HSIEH within said cell and each and every paper seal inscribed by me as aforesaid then and there still complete, intact and unbroken; and

That based upon said observations aforesaid, I hereby certify that Mr. SAM HSIEH remained within said locked cell continuously for a period of ONE YEAR from September 30, 1978, until the door thereof was opened for him and he did exit from said cell on September 29, 1979.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 30th day of September, 1979.

[Signature]

Robert Projansky

Even more relevant to my current work is Hsieh’s piece *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece)* created from 1980-1981. This performance is initially less shocking than *Cage Piece,* but nearly as restrictive, as it requires Hsieh to clock in every hour on the hour in his studio and leave the room immediately after. This severely limits his sleep, daily activities, and freedom of movement. Each time Hsieh clocked in, a 16mm movie camera captured one frame; this film was then hung on the wall below each corresponding timecard. The artist’s actions and the artifacts he displayed rely heavily on repetition as a way to measure time. Throughout the duration of *Time Clock Piece,* Hsieh wore a personalized uniform and allowed his hair to grow out naturally—another way to illustrate time’s passage and its effect on his body.

Hsieh kept a strict record of any hours missed and the reasons why. He also had a witness sign each of the 366 timecards and assure that the film was unedited. It seems to be of great importance to the artist that his actions are honest, and the viewers know this to be true. Hsieh’s concerns bring me back to the questions sparked by Alýs’ work regarding the necessity of truth. Does carrying out these actions actually matter? Or would falsified evidence of action, an illusion of truth, elicit similar questions and reactions? In *AT WORK,* and for the entirety of my artistic practice up to this point, I side with Antoni, Alýs, Burden, and Hsieh: The truth is powerful. Actions carry weight.
Figure 19. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece)*, New York City, April 11, 1980-April 11, 1981.

Figure 20. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece)*, New York City, April 11, 1980-April 11, 1981.
June 11, 1981

To All Concerned:

I, David Milne, on April 11, 1981, verified for signature and authenticity the 366 time cards Sam Hsieh used in his one year performance of April 11, 1980 through April 11, 1981.

I also confirmed on June 10, 1981 that the film Sam Hsieh made of this one year performance was in fact unedited.

As witness,

[Signature of David Milne]

David Milne

Figure 21. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece, Witness Statement)*, New York City, April 11, 1980-April 11, 1981.
Endurance artists like Chris Burden and Tehching Hsieh have influenced my practice by demonstrating the universality of the body and the extraordinary power that simple actions can hold. I’ve also learned from the ways in which they documented their performances. How did they share their work with viewers? How did they make these fleeting moments last? In what ways did they demonstrate the passage of time? I believe it is important for me to examine the connection between my work and the work of endurance artists since we share many similar qualities; however, I do not consider the labor involved in creating *AT WORK* to be endurance art. This distinction stems from a singular thought: I am not pushing my body to or near its limit and at this point it does not seem important that I do. I give myself reasonable requirements to perform unreasonable tasks. I also do not consider the labor of *AT WORK* to be performance art. The audience is not essential to my actions. I would carry out the work with or without viewers, public access, or an exhibition. Also, my actions are ordinary in and of themselves. Although the same is sometimes true of performance art as well, the audience or context often make ordinary things seem out of place, atypical, or uncomfortable. My work is site specific and created to function only in the spaces for which it is created. The completed tasks are merely slight variations of normal jobs and routines. The inefficient machines and their lack of purpose are what make each piece absurd. My body squats, twists, lifts, pumps, pushes, and waits just as most bodies do every day.
AT WORK

My thesis exhibition, *AT WORK*, examines internal and societal expectations of relentless productivity through an installation of simple yet absurd mechanical contraptions and sequences of actions. Each piece is a prototype that performs a useless task in a clumsy, inefficient way. I guide each machine through a monotonously repetitive series of motions that emphasize constant work and movement as if busy-ness, in and of itself, is a virtue. By questioning the value of busy-ness, *AT WORK* simultaneously forces me to confront the guilt I associate with idleness and to look critically at the sense of pride that comes with a hard day’s work.

*AT WORK* consists of three pieces: *Filtering* (which has already been discussed), *Sweeping*, and *Painting*. Each of these pieces are titled after the task that, with my help, they aim to complete. They’re made up of many elements including the machines, uniforms, labor, and physical records that document my time and effort. My labor is a major component of this body of work and I view it as equal in importance to each sculptural device. The tools begin as imperfect solutions to existing problems; as discussed earlier, the same is true of most tools. In the process of creating these solutions, more problems appear.

*Sweeping* was created to be used in the living room of my current apartment, so it fits this space both dimensionally and aesthetically. The first machine component is a ceiling-height pole I created from hand-turned cherry wood (stained and waxed) that sits on a rotating base. *Sweeping* has four arms of different lengths, situated at different heights, that function as broom holders and an operator’s handle. These three brooms were passed down to me from my parents and grandparents just as my work ethic was. Shipping the brooms from Indiana cost more than
purchasing three brand-new brooms, but it is important for me to know the brooms’ histories as _Sweeping_ incorporates me into those histories. Just as the body holds muscle memories from past work it has performed, so do tools of physical labor hold memories of their use. These brooms carry the grip and sweat of my family, and traces of their homes now exist in mine, despite the gaps in years and distance. Not long before I started this project, my grandmother died. These brooms are irreplaceable.

The entire piece is modular and consists of twelve parts that make it simple to install and deinstall for my weekly two-hour shifts. The practical aspect of modularity is overshadowed by the piece’s overall uselessness and the fact that nearly every piece of furniture in the room has to be rearranged in order to accommodate setting up the machine. The brooms sweep three separate, circular paths, but only those paths. Dust, debris, and dog hair collect in visible trails on the floor; some dust clings onto the brooms’ bristles. I did not remove or discard any of the accumulated dirt. To demonstrate this dysfunction in the gallery setting, I collected the contents of my vacuum and dryer’s lint filter and arranged this ersatz dirt in a circular “sweep” on the gallery floor. Now the gallery holds traces of my family’s labor as well.

Operating _Sweeping_ is simple: hold onto the handles and walk in slow, small circles. The brooms mimic my motion. Although technically easy, the work proved mentally and physically difficult. The most challenging aspect was overcoming the intense boredom of walking for two hours (or roughly 6,000 steps) continuously in a tight circle—definitely not the most intellectually stimulating activity. I found myself making up little games, just as I had done in all those menial jobs previously listed, as I desperately sought to occupy my mind and get through each Sunday
shift. Walking in a slow, uneven fashion left me with sore hips and calves each Monday. I attempted to switch directions and alter my gait, but to no avail. Before and after each shift, I clocked in and out by stamping times on timecards. Each timecard also noted my self-assigned Employee Identification Number (KL-0502394), the date, shift number, and total number of hours worked. The cards are placed into a timecard holder on my living room wall next to a broom organizer which holds the brooms and arms when not in use. At the time of my exhibition, I had completed ten shifts, totaling twenty hours.

Figure 22. Kylie Reece Little, *Sweeping*, Worksite: Artist's Apartment; hand-turned cherry, inherited brooms (modified), timecards and holder, broom organizer, dust and debris collected from the artist's apartment, 2021.
Figure 23. Kylie Reece Little, *Sweeping (Installation View)*, Worksite: Artist's Apartment; hand-turned cherry, inherited brooms (modified), timecards and holder, broom organizer, dust and debris collected from the artist's apartment, 2021.
The final piece I created for *AT WORK* was designed to assist in one of the most common tasks of gallery upkeep: painting walls. *Painting*, in part, is a wearable contraption created from PVC pipe. It consists of a padded body box, five paint rollers, protective splash shields, and a clip-on extendable paint brush. While not in use, it rests on a steel wall hanger that allows me to slip in and out of it as needed. To operate the device, I place it on my shoulders, grip the handles, and squat. As I squat to move the painting device vertically, I move my body horizontally parallel to the wall in order to reach unpainted areas. If done correctly, all five paint rollers contact the wall at once. Five paint rollers applying paint simultaneously might sound more efficient, as if this machine allows me, one artist, to do the work of five, but that is not the case. The work is physically demanding, and I can only perform about twenty minutes of work at a time. In fact, the process is slowed down even more as the rollers dry out. To reapply more paint, I become a clumsy middleman between paint and brush, brush and roller, roller and wall. In a small PVC cage, I mounted a quart of white paint on the adjacent wall where I dip my extendable brush before reapplying. This step is messy. White paint splatters and drips around me.

*Painting* was designed specifically for Gallery 130 at the Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design; its height (while on my person) is just under 9’9” so that when standing on my tip toes, the highest roller can reach the top of the wall. In preparation for my thesis exhibition, I painted the back wall of the gallery “Accessible Beige,” taped the corners, and covered the floor with a plastic drop cloth. This setup allowed me to easily track my progress (or lack thereof) while returning the wall to white, just as the logbooks did for *Filtering* and the timecards did for *Sweeping*. The contrast in paint color was another tangible, yet imperfect way to measure time and effort. *Painting* creates an unintentional pattern on the wall. Gaps between painted areas
occur due to the limitations of my body and the inefficiency of the paint application. I cannot lunge low enough to obtain full wall coverage. Although mostly serendipitous, this combination of machine and action resulted in a staticky pattern like visualized white noise, which I interpret as a visual manifestation of monotony and sameness—characteristics that often accompany tedious physical labor. Laborers keep the world running. We are the steady, dependable background buzz in the ears of people in power.

I painted daily after gallery closing, Monday April 5-Thursday April 8. The gallery changed from the week’s beginning to end. Once my work for the day was done, I covered each roller in cling-wrap, put the lid back on the paint can, hung up my uniform, and left my mess.

Figure 24. Kylie Reece Little, Painting (Installation View), Worksite: Gallery; PVC pipe and insulation, zipties, paint brush and rollers, extendable handle, paint, plexiglass, cling wrap, 2021.
Figure 25. Kylie Reece Little, *Painting (Monday-Friday)*, Worksite: Gallery; PVC pipe and insulation, zip-ties, paint brush and rollers, extendable handle, paint, plexiglass, cling wrap, 2021.
Each piece in *AT WORK* includes a uniform to be worn on the job. The uniforms keep my body clean, safe, and as comfortable as possible, while allowing a full range of motion. Along with those practical goals, uniforms also connote sameness (“uniformity”). I custom-altered each uniform, by hand, to fit my body and needs; each uniform also fits its intended work. I cannot speak of uniforms without speaking of uniformity. The laborer is not meant to stand out. Even wearing the reflective neon of *Uniform #1*, I blend into my environment. The uniform is essential to the capitalist agenda of disposability: by dressing every worker the same, the workforce is populated with anonymous, interchangeable, non-unique workers (dehumanized, as Marx would say). Because no individual has any remarkable skills or talents, everyone is replaceable. Just cogs in the machinery.

Clothing also connotes status. A uniform may cause sameness amongst peers, but it causes separation amongst classes. A white coat is perceived differently than a navy jumpsuit. A blazer and tie are perceived differently than overalls. Blue collar/white collar. I am reminded of Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece)* and his decision to dress in a grey, collared work shirt and matching belted pants every hour for 366 days. The shirt was affixed with a simple patch, embroidered with his name, Hsieh—its only identifying feature. Hsieh’s uniform did not serve the same practical purposes as mine, but it did place him in the same context.

*Uniform #1, #2, and #3* all began life as a Kolossus Deluxe Long Sleeve Cotton Rich Coverall (in Khaki). *Uniform #1* retains something of its original form but was altered with the addition of appliqued sections of a safety vest, kneepads, and a steel belt loop. These enhancements allow
me to kneel while pumping water and to feel safe while filtering puddles on or near busy city streets. I transformed *Uniform #2* into a short-sleeved, knee-length dress, which I dyed blue and finished with white accents, buttons, and a tie-belt. The alterations keep me cool and prevent pant-legs from dragging on the dusty floor. The dress and the style I chose for it also acknowledge my role as a woman and the link between gender and the invisibility of domestic labor—a topic large enough for a whole other research paper. I modified *Uniform #3* into a pair of white painter’s overalls. Instead of dying the fabric, I sewed on two layers of the paper from disposable painter’s coveralls, added a central, front pocket, and buttons and hooks. These adaptations allow me to keep paint off my everyday clothes and to change easily in the gallery space.

I sewed each uniform by hand; this labor adds to each piece as yet another example of unnecessary effort. I do not wash the uniforms after each use in order to maintain a visible record of the labor performed while wearing them.

Figure 26. Kolossus Deluxe Long Sleeve Cotton Rich Coverall (Khaki).
Figure 27. Kylie Reece Little, *Uniform #1*, altered khaki jumpsuit (for filtering), 2020.
Figure 28. Kylie Reece Little, *Uniform #2*, altered khaki jumpsuit (for sweeping), 2021.
Figure 29. Kylie Reece Little, *Uniform #3*, altered khaki jumpsuit (for painting), 2021.
8 CONCLUSION

*AT WORK* feels more like a beginning than an end. Although my interest in physical labor is not new, the three pieces in my thesis exhibition represent the first time I have dug deeply into this topic. Initially, this work felt shockingly different from my previous work, but I no longer feel that way. Every piece I made in the first two years of graduate school led me to this point; I just became more open to all the forms in which my art could exist. I plan on continuing this research and this work. Of course, the artwork will take different shapes as time passes and I gain more knowledge, but I have a long way to go. The best part is: I am excited to go there! Everything created for *AT WORK* was intrinsically motivated, relating to me and my relationship with physical labor. Everything began with questions I wanted to ask myself. The pride, guilt, joy, and frustration felt while searching for answers to these questions belonged to me.

*Filtering, Sweeping,* and *Painting* required a lot of futile effort. At times, I felt like Sisyphus pushing a rock up a slope, only to watch it roll back down and start again from the bottom. Of course, my pushing was entirely self-inflicted. I stood in the rain for hours watching single drips of clean water drop back into dirty puddles. I walked in tiny circles to push dust around my living room floor every week. And I repeatedly squatted in an attempt to return a wall to the color it was before I got my hands on it. Was it a preposterous waste of time and effort to reach for such nonsensical goals? Yes. But this is precisely why I feel that *AT WORK* was successful. Achieving these ridiculous goals led me to reactions I did not expect. The wasted time often ended up as a time for introspection, a guided meditation on wasted time. Certainly meta, but not worthless. During one of the many meditation/work sessions, I thought about what Isabelle Graw stated while reflecting on the work of Fischli and Weiss: “[artists have the] privilege of doing
something seemingly senseless, something playful that leads to no verifiable outcome” because “the modern artist, unlike the wage laborer, answers to no employer that would dictate labor time or labor’s goal.”35 Obviously, there are many people who consider themselves artists that do have to answer to an employer, so this point could be argued, but in general, I believe it holds true. I have the privilege of doing the absurd. I have the privilege of “wasting time.”

The “joy of the mess” and the need to work with my hands will never leave me (I don’t think I want them to), but those aspects have now become a tiny piece of a very large puzzle instead of the box holding the whole thing. Although I had many “Aha!” moments along the way, there is no big, resounding, final position here. One year is not enough time to change the way my mind works. Still, I feel different. My relationship with busy-ness has certainly changed. I no longer crave meaningless work to avoid idleness and I no longer feel guilty when I am idle (although the guilt has not been fully eradicated). I am more patient than ever. I still feel proud after a long, productive workday and relief when I lie down at night. I still believe my grandpa and I would be best friends if he were alive today. I still feel incredibly thankful that my parents have worked their entire lives to provide for my sister and me, but I still hate that they must work quite so hard. I am still resisting the cubicle. I am still deeply embedded within the capitalist system, despite my realization that it produces most of the negative feelings I have about myself. I am still working on how I relate to work. Me and Labor. Our relationship will always be complicated.

35 Spector and Trotman, Peter Fischli David Weiss, 350.
REFERENCES


http://www.janineantoni.net/#/gnaw/.


Appendix A

ROUTE MAPS (A-I) FROM FILTERING

Figure 30. Route Map A (Prototype Test), 10/29/2020.
Figure 31. Route Map B, 01/01/2021.

Figure 32. Route Map C, 01/26/2021.
Figure 33. Route Map D, 02/06/2021.

Figure 34. Route Map E, 02/11/2021.
Figure 35. Route Map F, 02/13/2021.

Figure 36. Route Map G, 03/01/2021.
Figure 37. Route Map H, 03/17/2021.

Figure 38. Route Map I, 03/25/2021.
Appendix B

FIELD NOTES FROM FILTERING

Figure 39. Field note from 10/29/2020.

Note from Oct. 29, 2020
Prototype test run. found a giant puddle running along trolley tracks in the road. also testing documentation. weather=overcast, cloudy, warm. pushing the machine is harder than I thought, the wheels are a little small for the potholes/cracks. everything works as planned, but too much charcoal in level #2--remove some. MARTA worker came and talked to me for a while & wanted to know about the project, he left because the water was filtering too slowly. by a stoplight-some people looked and yelled out of their car windows. Most people had questions about what It did and who I worked for.

Figure 40. Field note from 01/01/2021.

Note from New Year's Day
Took longer to pump than usual. Tried two other puddles before I found the right one. Passerby:s: I stopped to let me take my video, lots of looks, one female asked out car window-- "is this a science experiment? That's hard" 8 people walked right by-- no 2nd look, raining. 3 people asked for money, have nothing with me, met Joseph-canvassing for the election from san fran. Also makes sculptures out of processed dirt turned into clay. Mentioned rube goldberg.
Note From 1/26/21

Sunny now and blue skies now. Stormed really bad last night. Found the dirtiest puddle I've seen in a while, right near the studio. It's surrounded by trash and mud. Had to lift my machine into the ditch. Some of the water splashed on my face while I was pumping. A bunch of construction workers are staring at me from across the street. There's a corresponding drip from a pipe sticking out the side of a building that's creating a rhythm with the drips of my device. LOTS of traffic on this corner. Guy walked by and bugged me. This spot smells bad. Like the smell when someone in the room has something stuck to their shoe but you don't know who or what. The person that parked next to me is having a lot of trouble figuring out how to pay for all this help them when they make it back over here. Stayed at 1st puddle for 1 hour. Found faces next to me. Much harder to lift out of ditch than in.

More puddles in lot right across the street. These are less muddy and smellier. Guy trying to photograph john lewis mural area. Am I in the way? I asked, I wasn't. Someone asked for change. 2 cars pulled into the lot. Got close to hitting me. Pigeon hanging out super close to me eating some discarded food. Tossed a piece into my puddle and grabbed it back. Same guy took photo of his child in front of mural and asked what I was making. Cops kept stopping at lights and watching me. More cars trying to get out of the parking lot. I feel in the way. Woman walking by asked what I was doing and I told her I was filtering puddle water and testing it. She said “well, I guess that’s cool. Have a good day.” Taxi van honked at me and waved. Lady yelled from balcony and asked what I was doing. Took me a while to find her. She said “cool, good luck.” Someone else in a cute green sweater walked by and asked if I was testing water. I said yes. Stayed at puddle 2 for 45 min.

Some excess water from 2nd level split as I moved to third puddle. This one is in the same lot and very small, starting to get cloudy. Person in car rolled down window and asked if I was doing covid tests. Man walked by and asked what I was doing. I was on the phone so it took me a second to answer, then i started to and he said “I’ll let you figure it out.” And walked away. Stayed at 3rd puddle for 30 min.

Streets are quiet now. Another small puddle Past lunch time? I’m hungry. Grey skies. Quinnley stopped and talked to me. Said he’s done what I’m doing before and asked for change. More people taking photos around me. Stayed 30 min at 4th puddle.

Figure 41. Field note from 01/26/2021.

Note From February 6, 2021

Raining. Consistently and cold (37°). Busy Saturday night at an intersection. Lots of car traffic, little foot. Big puddle w/ petroleum swirls. Wearing my grandpa’s coat & menards hat. Now tiny hail. My machine has an awning but I do not. Lots of police and ambulances. Puddle continuously growing with rain runoff from road. 50 min. at 1st puddle.

2nd puddle right across the street...actually feeding the 1st. Over a grate. Puddle so deep I can't see the wheels. 6 construction workers walked by. Talked curiously about me and the machine but not to me directly. Right hand starting to go numb. Guy said “shit, they got you workin in the rain?” Me-yeah. “Is it polluted or something?” Me-probably. Getting too cold and wet. Penn was compromised. Heading back. Filtered until 6:15.

Figure 42. Field note from 02/06/2021.
**Figure 43. Field note from 02/11/2021.**

**Note From Feb. 11, 2021**

Rainy, heavily. White, overcast sky. Much warmer than last time though. This puddle is midstream so it is continuously flowing. Better dressed in bucket hat, raincoat and rain sneakers. Not a lot of walking traffic today (probably because of the weather.) Lot next to me is pretty full of film crew vehicles. Near highway on-ramp so cars zip by without notice/noticing. Very angry guy yelling and changing clothes near his car to a person in another car. Stayed 30 min. At 1st puddle.

2nd puddle is big and really close-just downstream from 1st. Next to the right rear bumper of a grey acura. Basically stopped raining. I think the security guard across the street is starting to get curious. There are lots of pennies on the ground here. Angry guy is gone. Person walked by with food & stared at my device so I said hi and they walked away. More people out and about since rain stopped (joggers, construction workers, delivery drivers, consumers, film crew, etc.) should I bring folding chair along next time? There are some REALLY good puddles in the middle of the road but...they are in the middle of the road. The machine just got a great long turn and stare. Filtered puddle 2 for 45 min.


**Figure 44. Field note from 02/13/2021.**

**Note From Feb. 13, 2021**

43° currently raining. Rained all night too. Lots of puddles. 1st one is in the dirt near a tree on the sidewalk. Muddy but seems like one of the cleanest yet. Lots of car traffic at this intersection. Glad I saved kneepads in this uniform—it's easiest to kneel while I use the pump. Overcast. Person in big pickup wearing safety gear almost missed his light because he was staring at my machine. Some students have been passing on their way to the gym. I should workout. Cars give each other a lot of space here. The puddle is extremely cold. Spent 45 min. With puddle #1.

Puddle 2 in lot near parking garage. In front of downspout, fire dept connection & sprinkler room of a grady business I can't remember. Deep. Remember machine malfunction upon return. Towed away but no quieter here. Switched 2nd rain to a mist. Stayed 40 min.

Stopped raining for now but feels colder? Maybe just exposure time. Puddle #3 small and in same lot, near dumpster. Trash in water but really isn't as gross as assumed. Read signs/graffiti while here. Someone yelling in distance. Can't locate them. Checked out dumpster for treasures, don't see anything good, mostly boxes and kitchen trash. Top of dumpster burned. Patch of grass/weeds growing in puddle. 3 students came up to me and said they'd seen this around a lot and were curious what it was. What I was doing? They were very kind and asked about the goals/process. Feel like I should bring business cards along with me. Person walked by singing Redbone, loudly but really well. TONS of foot traffic now (assuming students due to backpacks & GSU masks). Had to lift device in and out of this space. Passing "hey beautiful, I like your outfit." Filtered for 30 min.

Puddle #4 by cape space. This one is in mud. So much so I made sure the hose and funnel were in it but left the wheels out because I thought they may get suctioned in forever. Tying in gloves. Parking garage provides a dry place to stand but the doors are insanely loud and there's a consistent low beep. Easier to hide *watch people's reactions here. Losing feeling in fingers/toes. Lush moss near puddle. Remained for 1 hour. :30
Note From March 1, 2021

BLong walk here. Rained a bunch last night, but not now. Biggest puddle yet. In an alley, Malik asked me a bunch of questions about what I was doing and why. Laughed at me. Helped me carry my tool over gravel/mud and helped me pump. Also dried my keys off after I dropped them in the puddle. He spit in the puddle and said it won't make a difference, then he wanted to test his spit so we did. It didn't have a lot of weird metals or anything but was either really high or really low in copper. Then he threw the test strip back in the puddle. 59° Breezy. Lots of birds chirping. I like being back from the road a bit. Malik doesn't like saying my name, said he'll call me kaylie. Asked me if I was married and told me he wasn't gay multiple times. Told me to go to ghost bar on sundays when he works. I said no because of covid and he said it doesn't matter. People are walking by but not really noticing like usual...probably since I'm not in their way. Starting to rain again at 12:440. on & off. Takes about 38 steps to get around the puddle. Malik came back and said I need to fix this and I'm slower than a turtle. I'm a slug. "I'm like your black, homeless angel." Said I'm the biggest dummy he knows and I look like a boy in this suit and said my welds aren't pretty. He made me laugh so hard. Stayed at puddle 3 hours. Malik helped me push it all the way back. I gave him $3 (all I had in my car).

Figure 45. Field note from 03/01/2021.

Note From March 17, 2021


2nd puddle larger and on side of street near a Georgia power site. Starting to sprinkle. Breezier. Got a nod from a passing worker in safety gear driving a cement truck and waved back. Fog. Waiting on power plant wall near sign that says ’hazardous voltage inside’. sweater pot across street near parking garage. I think it’s a memorial. Just realized it’s st. Patrick’s day. Uniform doesn’t allow green but there’s some on my shoes. Man looked at me curiously. I said hi and he kept walking but sat nearby. About 40 min. New. Until 1.

Next puddle in lot across street. Not busy. chose the only brown puddle. All the rest in the lot are clear. Appears just to be where the asphalt is basted all the way through to the ground below. Near paying machine. Couple asked me for help using it but it’s broken. Gave them directions and told them about the app. Starting to rain again. Harder. Coat & hat on. Workers nearby installing/fixing something on a ladder over barbed wire. 1 hour here.

Next one very nearby. Same lot. Part of a big, fast flow. Pouring. Put tarp up. Puddle water much warmer than rain. Singing to myself a lot today. Gasoline swirls. Cold. cops drove through left in truck and started. Used lot as shortcut to avoid light I think. Taking temp shelter under parking pay machine awning. 50 min at this one.

Figure 46. Field note from 03/17/2021.
Note from March 25, 2021

Just stopped raining when I went to work. Now breezy & the birds are chirping. I think I can meet my quota for the quarter today if they don't evaporate too fast. Puddle 1: lots of cars here not a lot of people. On fort street near highway ramp. Near 2 big piles of trash and a fuzzy, brown abandoned couch. It's about 68°. Someone yelling but paying me no mind. Lots of gasoline sniffs in this one. I'd say about 4-5 puddles and this started to really feel like work and I've had trouble bringing myself to do it since. I'm exhausted. Another man asked me how I was doing and if I was testing the water. I'm sitting on the curb next to a completely useless storm drain plugged with dirt, rocks and trash. Stayed about 40 min.

Puddle 2 right next to 1st. Same street. Very tiny but deep. This one is definitely in the middle of the road which worries me a bit but I don't think it'll take long. 1st car went around me and waved so I'm staying. This one is stagnant and has lots of pollen. Breeze has turned into a heavy wind. Got a rejection letter while waiting for water to filter. Someone asked me if it was a handwash station. That would've made a lot more sense. Don't know if this side street has a name. Gsu police pulled over right next to me for a couple min. Then pulled away. Lots of birds eating the trash. Here for 30 min.

Puddle 3 much bigger. Near corner of bell and john wesley dobbins. Even less people than other spot. Not as many cars either. One way. Overcast now. MITEC tech. Working on gate near me. Also near the place I take my recycling since my Apt. Stopped collecting. Sirens like usual. Surveyor in safety vest down the road. Picked some dandelions and decorated the machine. Even windier now. Literally had to hold onto my hat. Data usage warning for using my phone to record in the field too much. Here for one hour.

LAST PUDDLE OF THE QUARTER! honestly it was getting a little tricky to find puddles that I haven't filtered already that are within range and stick around. Back on corner of bell and auburn near pal's lounge and trolley track. Busier here. Medium size. Right at light so lots of waiting at reds and staring. Leaning against 'do not enter' sign. Also near storm drain. Trash flew into puddle. Atlanta ambassador went by on segway and stared. 3 workers came out of nearby businesses and watched during smoke break/break. 2 Randall men stopped by to talk to me for a bit. Judah and Aliyah. Very kind and interested. Interesting. I gave them my email address. People in a pick up laughed at me. Lady asked me what I was doing. I told her. She said "weird" and scrunched up her nose. Saw a person I saw at the 1st location. Worked here for 45 min. returned back to base.
Appendix C

DETAIL IMAGES OF RIG NO. 2

Figure 48. Kylie Reece Little, Rig No.2 (Detail), 2020.

Figure 49. Kylie Reece Little, Rig No. 2 (Detail), 2020.
Appendix D

DETAIL IMAGES OF *FILTERING*

Figure 50. Kylie Reece Little, *Filtering*, Worksite: puddles; steel, particle board, PVC, hose, chalk line, safety flag, hand bilge pump, fired clay, charcoal, sand, funnels, caster wheels, tarp, water test strips, clipboard, pen, 2020-2021.

Figure 51. Kylie Reece Little, *Filtering (Installation view)*, Worksite: puddles; binders and binder holders, 2020-2021.
Figure 52. Kylie Reece Little, *Filtering (Detail)*, Worksite: puddles, clipboard and log, 2020-2021.
Appendix E

DETAIL IMAGES OF SWEEPING

Figure 53. Kylie Reece Little, *Sweeping (Storage view)*, Worksite: artist's apartment, hand-turned cherry, inherited brooms (modified), timecards and holder, broom organizer, 2021.

Figure 54. Kylie Reece Little, *Sweeping (Detail)*, Worksite: artist's apartment; hand-turned cherry, inherited brooms (modified), dust and debris collected from the artist's apartment, 2021.
Figure 55. Kylie Reece Little, *Sweeping (Detail)*, Worksite: artist's apartment; timecards and holder, 2021.
Appendix F

DETAIL IMAGES OF PAINTING

Figure 56. Kylie Reece Little, *Painting (Installation view)*, Worksite: Gallery, PVC pipe and insulation, zip-ties, paint brush and rollers, extendable handle, paint, plexiglass, cling wrap, 2021.

Figure 57. Kylie Reece Little, *Painting (Installation detail)*, Worksite: Gallery; PVC pipe, zip-ties, paint, plexiglass, cling wrap, 2021.