

Keeper of Industrial Memory

UConn University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Fine Arts

by Angie Arsenault
April 2017

The Beaton Institute's Steel Project

by ELIZABETH BEATON

Annotated bibliography iteration 1

Wayfinding Through Waste:

A Collective, Living Archive of Coastal Plastic

Signy Holm

April 16th, 2025

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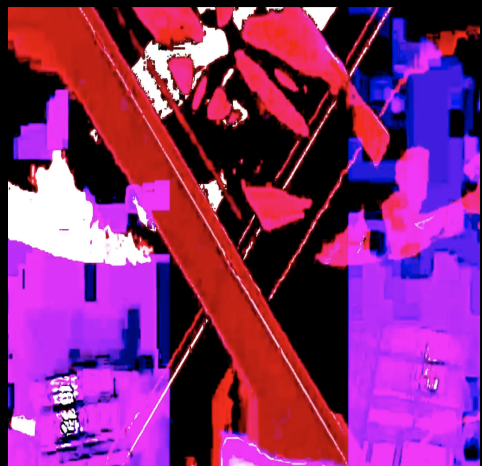
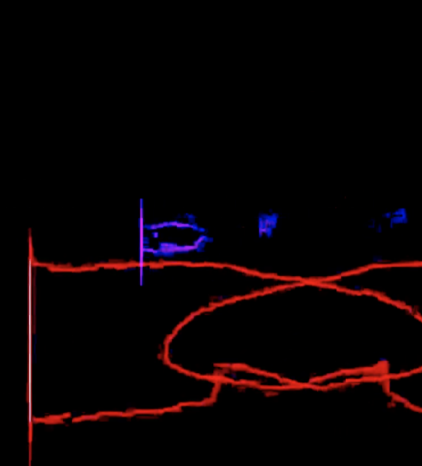
Abstract

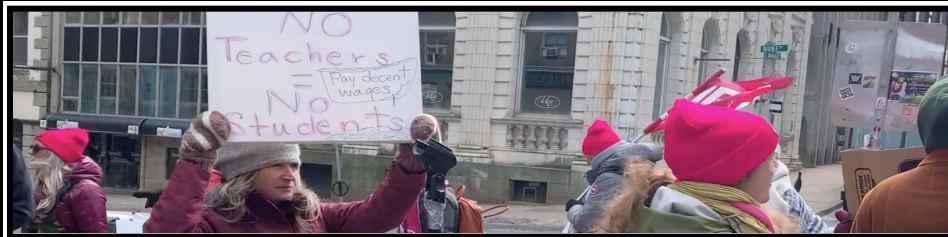
Through the transdisciplinary lens of feminist materialism, this research uses counter-archiving to reconsider human-plastic relations and find new ways to live-with the ubiquity of plastic marine debris. Emerging from my solitary practice of beachcombing as an embodied research-creation method, I sought to transform plastic waste into unique artifacts. Through two participatory gallery installations, participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended, affect-driven prompts encouraging a deeper curiosity towards these artifacts, and in turn they contributed to a collective 'living' archive of marine plastic. A responsive postfoundational framework was employed, resulting in a new form of inquiry I refer to as 'speculative narrativization'. This unconventional methodology led to a collaborative re-storying of each artifact and the emergence of previously unpercieved meaning. This thesis advocates for the use of affective participatory counter-archiving to re-examine our entangled relationship with plastic pollution and proposes the potential adaptation of this model within environmentalism, citizen-science and other cross-disciplinary contexts.

Artifact Image	Archivist Name	Artifact Name	Why did you choose this artifact?	How does it feel against your skin?	What do you think it's made of?	What do you smell? (either from the object itself or from its surroundings?)	Describe the artifact to the best of your ability.	Imagine a past life of this artifact	Imagine a possible future for this artifact
	Cassie	Salt pepper rock	Attraction to the thought of what it might be	Soft	Styrofoam	Dead air	Bumpy Soil Veins Flat bottom	Under water	Under water!
	Maria	Displaced part	Chose randomly, wanted to feel it	Smooth, but rough in places	Plastic	Does not have a strong smell	Jagged part of a previously well structured object - extremely worn, jagged edges	Previously belonged to some type of vehicle	Maybe as plastic? Or as a key holder if you drilled holes. Somewhat resembles CBI
	Jameelah	Dried up dough ball	It looked like something it wasn't	Dry	Styrofoam	Nothing	Old piece of foam yellow from time and broken	Part of some insulation or a piece of something bigger	Don't know what it could be used for but I'm sure it could be used to build a puppet, something that needs soft but defined object that holds shape
	David	Duck Boat	Striking relief sculpture, evocative of industry + nature + play	Rough, weathered, chewy	Plastic	Smells warm and bready	Looks jagged, soft edges, red, rough + weathered "L"	Part of a buoy? A wakeboard? Something that once floated	A shovel, tilling soil, embedded in rich dark earth after a life at sea
	Em	Shell	It is familiar	Rough, dry	Plastic	The sea / outside dirt	-red - was once cylindrical but now flat - negative space - empty - 2 inches	Lived in gun, shot from land or sea. Potent smell, potent strength	Recycled

Dried up Dough Ball







Solidarity forever

Solidarity forever

Solidarity forever

For the union makes us strong

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run

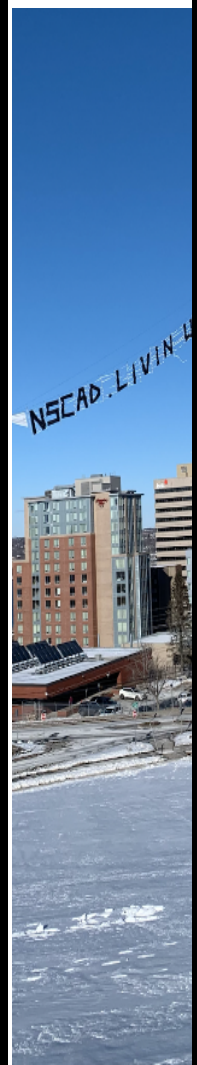
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun

Yet what force on earth is weaker than the lonely voice of one

But the union makes us strong

Solidarity forever

Solidarity forever



In 1987, the Nova Scotia government began to modernize the Sydney Steel Plant. Constructed at the turn of the century, the plant has been one of Canada's major suppliers of steel rails, and played a significant part in the nation's war effort in two world conflicts. In the next three years, it will be transformed from an outdated, inefficient operation to a new complex of modern buildings with a significantly scaled-down work force. The modernization will necessitate the demolition of early buildings and will eliminate "traditional" processes of making steel. The closure of the coke ovens operation in 1987 marked the first stage of the demolition; other buildings and equipment will follow in the next year.



The Steel Project's objective is the documentation of the historical, social, and economic importance of all aspects of the Sydney Steel Plant. The project will provide a connection between Sydney Steel, the Cape Breton industrial community, and the University College of Cape Breton. The documentation of the plant and the process of modernization will emphasize the centrality of the history of Sydney Steel and will provide a link between the past and the future of the workers and their community. This nationally important archival project will stress the joint involvement of the steel workers, the community, business interests, and government in Canada's steel industry.

I excavate "historical constructions of place"²² pertaining to Cape Breton's industrial past, and explore the ways in which our sense of place shapes us as individuals. In an act of artistic and

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CONTAINER	667888410149	1.50
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AMOUNT: \$ 18.81

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Richard Serra makes his home on **Cape Breton** Island. He has invested himself in that iron rich soil. I wonder if the production of steel on the island influenced his choice of locations to settle. I find myself wondering if Richard Serra thinks about the loss of industry on **Cape Breton** Island? I

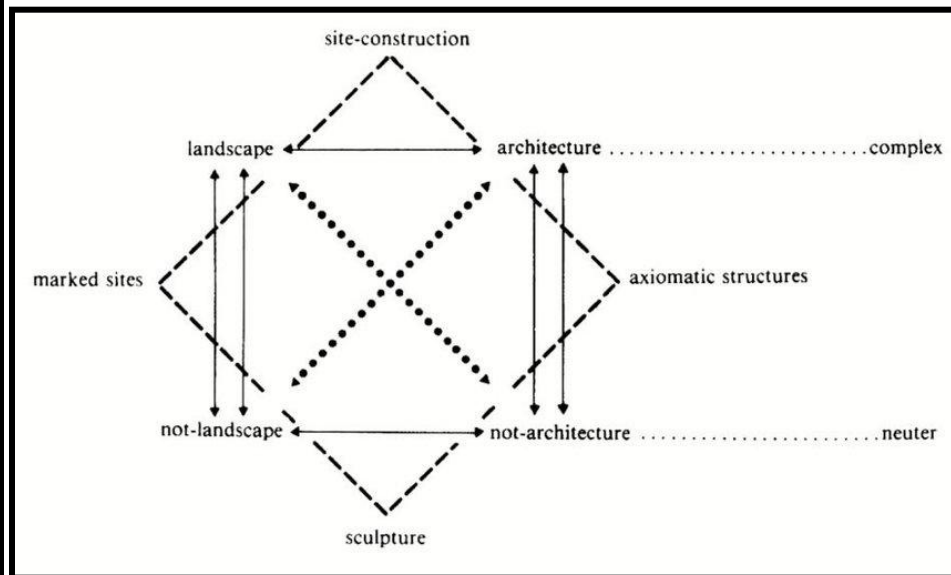
In 1987, the Nova Scotia government began to modernize the Sydney Steel Plant. Constructed at the turn of the century, the plant has been one of Canada's major suppliers of steel rails, and played a significant part in the nation's war effort in two world conflicts. In the next three years, it will be transformed from an outdated, inefficient operation to a new complex of modern buildings with a significantly scaled-down work force. The modernization will necessitate the demolition of early buildings and will eliminate "traditional" processes of making steel. The closure of the coke ovens operation in 1987 marked the first stage of the demolition; other buildings and equipment will follow in the next year.



It was while reading Jennifer A. Gonzalez's essay, *Autotopographies*, that I realized what I was doing with my collecting. While wandering the train tracks and coastlines of **Cape Breton** Island seeking out material links to a collective industrial past, I was actually searching for fragments of my own identity and creating "a spatial representation of identity"⁶ from the detritus of industry.

The random bits and bobs of an industrial nature that I have collected and compiled :

The project has several components: the organization of papers of SYSCO and DEVCO; visual documentation of processes, equipment, and buildings; further documentation through the oral testimony of those involved in steel production; and the appropriate dissemination of the material to the community, to scholars, and to those involved in the promotion of economic development on both regional and national levels.



Cape Breton, a small island on the most eastern edge of Canada, was once a Canadian industrial hub. As a people, **Cape Bretoners** hauled coal from the depths of the earth and used that fuel to make steel. For those reasons, it seems fitting and familiar to me that metal is one of my mediums of choice for my art practise. Another home. It's in my blood.



Cape Breton's textile industries began to decline following the adjustment of the textile industry. By 1967, the textile industry had declined to the point where the responsible government had to shut down the Siddeley Breton Corporation.

Amanda Blake

Sisters brothers kin friends

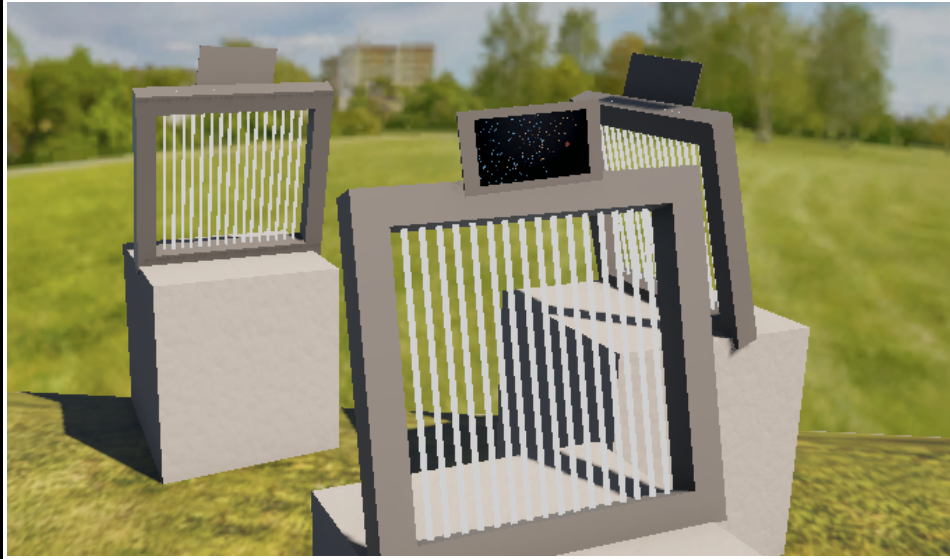
Melanie Evelyn

These updates are awesome

Logan

Sisters, brothers, kin, friends

- I (T)Arcadia
- II In the field
- III Rust
- IV A note on material
- V Collection
- VI Postcards and Souvenirs
- VII Labour
- VIII Coal
- IX Keeper of Industrial Memory
- X Conclusion
- XI Storytelling



In the 1970s and 1980s, the threat of plant closure hung over Sydney like the toxin-filled smoke billowing from its furnaces. The plant would go on losing money so long as it continued using outdated equipment and methods and failed to diversify its products. Furthermore, with a growing awareness of environmental issues and the political force to fight them, the people of Sydney demanded pollution controls with modernization. The indignity of trading jobs for health was at last brought to public discussion. Finally, in 1986 the provincial and federal governments agreed to spend two hundred million dollars on modernization and pollution controls.



Through the gradual unfolding of this collective archive, my role has oscillated between artist, archivist, researcher, and more. However, despite wearing these many hats, most importantly, and

Collective Speculative Narrativization

				Beachcombing as an affective enactment of research-creation
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From Participatory Archive i: Unama'ki Cape Breton Cent

Craft & Design

Salt Pepper Rock

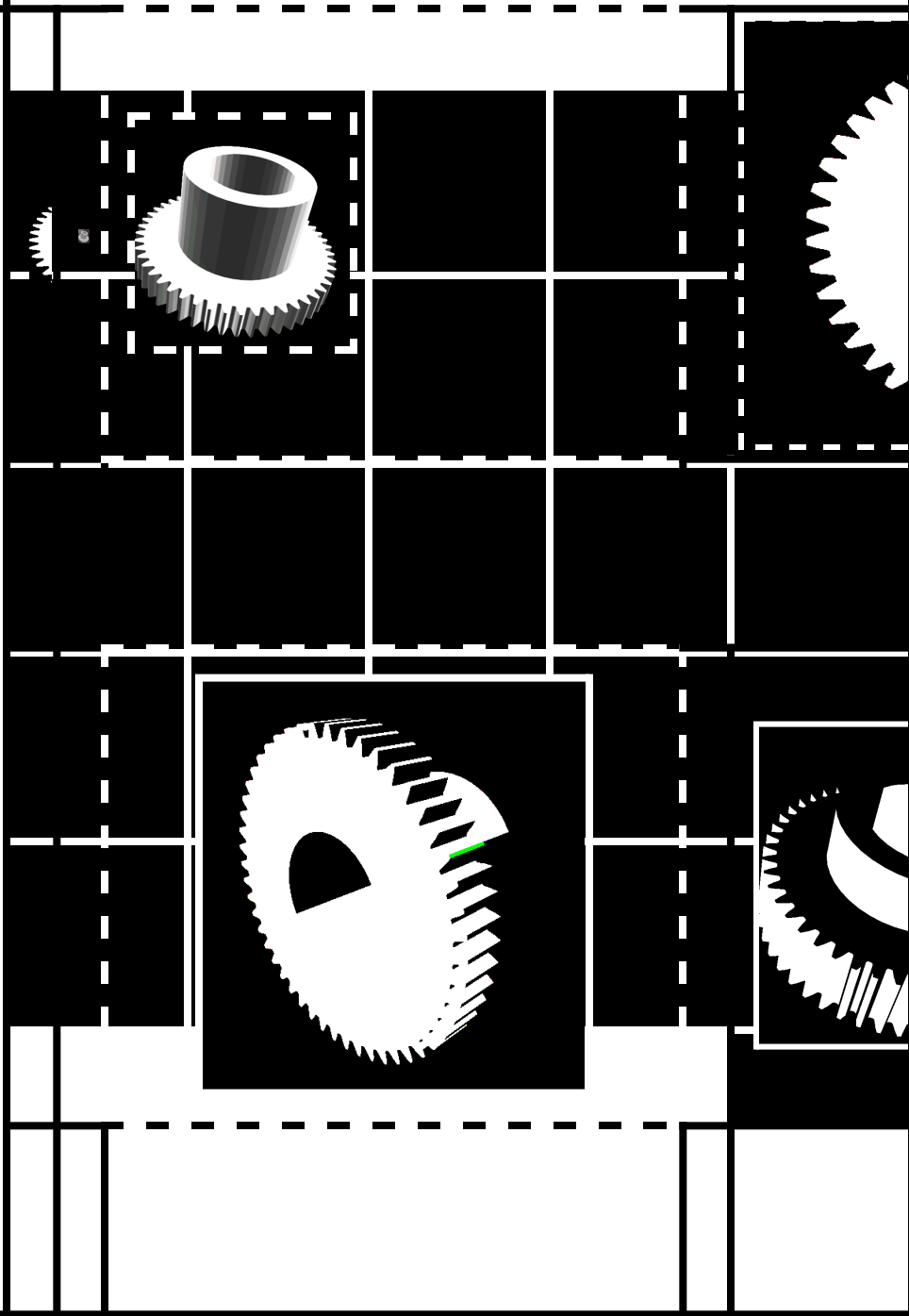


			My research methodology has unfolded as emergent rather than predetermined
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My installation contained plastic artifacts collected along the coastline of the National Park, and I invited gallery visitors to contribute to the project by counter-archiving an artifact of their choice. I was

	<u>Prompt: <i>Imagine a possible future for this artifact?</i></u>	
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Asking for pennys on the dollar for arts
workers from STEM workers is like pulling
teeth im loosing my mind





Sonic warfare!! That's us we're famous!

