The Tactical Trail:
Sense of Place and Place of Practice

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Abstract

In the early 1980s, Michel de Certeau distinguished between the "strategies" and "tactics" utilized by the walker in a modern cityscape: the prescribed bounds for action within an environment and the resistive, independent movements of the individual. This essay complicates the distinction by recognizing folk practice as a category between strategies and tactics, both culturally guided and spontaneously innovative. Building from fieldwork conducted on nature/wilderness trails, it considers walkers not as independent nodes but as spontaneous communities, and promotes further understanding of the ever-recycling, mutual relationship between the sense of a place and the actions taken within it.

The American nature preserve is a place of reverence for the natural environment where visitors can pass carefully through a space preserved from development and construction, reflect on the beauty or value of the natural world, and, in moving through with a careful, temporary, and non-invasive gait, play a personal role in protecting and respecting the Earth and its ecosystems. The trails that pass through nature parks and preserves, conservancies, and arboretums invite visitors to view and appreciate the plants, animals, waterways, and terrain by curving gently around fragile elements of the landscape and animal habitats. They choreograph visitor movement through the space in a continuous line of motion from visitor center or parking lot to specific viewing platforms or educational plaques, then back again. Trailhead markers, signs, and visitor guides instruct visitors to attend to specific features in the environment and often explicitly prohibit actions that could harm the plants, animals, or broader ecosystem. The majority of visitors to such parks and preserves approach the trails in a similar way, with reverence and appreciation and a similar sense of the place and its worth. They follow the trails marked by maps and signs and Park Service instructions, knowing that to follow these trails is to perform their own respect for ecology and environmental preservation. And yet, at the site of a fallen log blocking movement along the sanctioned path, at a particularly muddy spot in the morning after a summer rain, or, perhaps, at a point where the parking lot or toilet facility in view lies just beyond an acre of open prairie, foot-worn dirt lines routinely divert from the sanctioned paths and cut across the preserved environment, adapting and compromising the sense of place as one of reverent preservation. "Desire paths," "social trails," or "goat tracks"—those improvised footpaths running alongside or explicitly apart from official avenues for movement—exist in a place of

nature preservation, at once infringing on the sense of place and allowing movement through it. And yet, the individual who walks along such a trail is not exactly breaking interdiction, wantonly tossing aside preservation for personal ease; rather, he or she is taking part in a communal performance of place, even in the absence of a shared community. That is, the visitor's transgressive, non-sanctioned movement along such a trail is excused because others have visibly moved in the same way through the environment before.

The uniquely visible case of the nature preserve social trail demonstrates how practice both adheres to social precedent and, in adhering, perpetuates it through performance. In selecting a path of movement by following the visible trace in the grass, snow, or ground left by others passing through at an earlier time, the visitor adheres to social conventions; by walking that path, though, s/he also literally carves the path more deeply, making it more visible and inviting to those who will in the future follow. This case gives observable, material form to a key concept in practice theory: structuration, the reproduction or, conversely, subversion of structures through *individual acts of repetition* (Giddens 1984).

This essay considers the case of park and preserve nature trails to illustrate how practice theory can inform cultural analysis of place-making and sense of place, and also to provide a model for thinking about how individuals play a role in place making. I argue that we should re-think common uses of Michel de Certeau's (1988) terms, "strategies" and "tactics," to more fully recognize the everyday foundations of place-making. The on-the-ground "tactical choices" made in any given location by others whom we may never have encountered nonetheless guide, encourage, and constrain our own subsequent choices, and this collective and collaborative tactical experience over time results in shared understandings in and of that location. I also present an initial framework for thinking about this everyday construction of place in so-called "natural" areas as such parks and preserves grow in popularity.

An "A-ha" Moment: Walking Sticks, Practice, and Sense of Place

As an American folklorist, I have spent the better part of my career working with and learning from hoofers, hikers, and wilderness enthusiasts—nature pilgrims in search of communion not necessarily with God but with the comparably numinous natural environment. My informants are self-described environmentalists, wilderness enthusiasts, backcountry campers, and, occasionally, modern-day wildmen. They journey on foot over rough terrain in search of that unsullied sublime location, that special *place*—whether it be a mountaintop or secluded valley, popular park or private plot—where humankind's thumbprint seems not so heavy, and where that elusive sense of purity, of clarity, of escape (however one might define it) can be achieved.

Yet this sense of nature place can also be problematic. For instance, when a bird flies across the boundary of a preserved natural space, it maintains its course of flight. When wind crosses the boundary and spreads fallen leaves or seeds, the leaves fall the same on either side of the boundary line. When water runs across the boundary,

it carries with it all the same sediment and plant life and animal life, regardless of the line. But when human visitors to the nature preserve cross the line, they often change their behavior, hushing their tones, turning off electronics, or approaching their surroundings in a nature-reverent way not as common in home or city environments. In recent years, American ecologists and environmental activists have wrestled with this problem, to make more people constantly aware that the ecosystem extends beyond the nature preserve or national wilderness and into the suburbs, the cities, and individual backyards. It is a matter of overcoming the popular distinction between "nature" and "culture" in the American tradition, one that historian William Cronon (1996) refers to as the "trouble with wilderness."

"Wilderness," Cronon notes, is more a state of mind than it is any actual place, but it is also a useful term for promoting ecological campaigns and articulating that mixed sensation of the unfamiliar and the awe-inspiring that many people feel when wandering through a forested hillside or desert expanse. The allure of "wilderness" and the need to protect it is celebrated by environmental organizations like the Wilderness Society and the U.S. National Wilderness Preserve System. It is memorialized in print and pop culture every time we talk about going "into the woods," "back to nature," or "into the wild." Yet there is trouble with wilderness, too. In Cronon's celebrated words, it "quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject" (1996, 80). That is, in perpetuating the term and a distinction between wilderness and civilization, nature and culture, wilderness and nature lovers may actually be keeping themselves from adopting more ecologically sound ways of thinking and acting.

Any "place" is ultimately interpreted through the words, stories, and other objects that surround it, but "wilderness" and "nature" are unique in the way the frames themselves seem to suggest *unfiltered* experience, free from human interference, definition, or constraint. In fact, in the United States, many official wilderness spaces (including the case example later in this essay) are explicitly groomed and maintained by human actions while the discursive frames that guide visitor experience suggest the very opposite. That is, sometimes a location explicitly labeled as "natural space" is also the explicit product of human actions, landscape restoration, planting, and preservation. As Kevin Michael DeLuca reminds us, wilderness "is not a natural fact—it is a political achievement" (2001, 645); it "does not preexist the human but instead is a human product" (637).

From and with my informants I have learned a great deal about how this human product comes to be, and about the relationship between place and practice. In years past, I have written on the role of storytelling in place-construction, sharing the legends, tales, memorates, and personal experience narratives that pilgrims to nature themselves exchange, and analyzing how those stories contribute to the creation and interpretation of wilderness locations—how for instance a misty wooded slope, just miles from the nearest town, can accrue a palpable aura of mystery and wonder through and by the narrative frames that surround it (Schmitt 2013).

Yet, over time, in my field observations, it became clear that some part of the cultural imagining of place and transmission of that imaging was happening outside of

immediate social interaction. That is, the deep wilderness locations that my informants revere are identifiable in large part due to their absence of other people. The experiences of the hikers and backpackers on the trail is frequently one of solitude. The stories and conversations alone could not fully account for how nature and wilderness practices continued over time.

And, so, with this new focus on what we might call folklore in absence of (a physically present) folk, I reconsidered the question of folklore and place from a slightly different angle. There have been excellent studies on linguistic place construction, exemplified by the work of Kent Ryden (1993), Mary Hufford (1992), and humanist geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan (1991), and other fantastic studies on the construction of place though communal practice. We are pretty much all in agreement that for the folklorist and ethnographer, what we call place is never merely a context or setting for expression; rather, it is a crucial component and result of the expression itself. So when I went out into the field again this past summer, I aimed to get at the nitty-gritty underpinnings of this relationship in a way I had not explored them before. Specifically, in my work with so-called "wilderness" or "natural" locations, I wanted to interrogate how folklore and sense or experience of place are related in locations where the folk community is not always evident, is not always explicit, is not always even physically present. I wanted to ask, in places understood as "natural wilderness," relatively separate from human or cultural mediation and clear-cut signifiers, how one's sense of place is ultimately developed.

To do this, I went once more into the woods, this time along the southern edge of Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin, to the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore (AINL). The Lakeshore is a federally protected recreation space and home to the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness, a 35,000-acre federally designated wilderness area as of 2004. The Nelson Wilderness makes up roughly 80 percent of the AINL territory, which also includes twenty-one of the twenty-two Apostle Islands. The area is home to hundreds—perhaps thousands—of trails for visitor movement and at the entrance to each, visitors are instructed to stay on these trails in order to both 1) provide passing human access to the "wilderness" space and 2) ensure that this access is indeed only passing, physically disrupting as little as possible by constraining human movement to the prescribed trail course.

It is a place where the "folk" are few and far between. In fact, in rustling around and looking for field subjects, it was not unusual on some days for me to see more deer than people, and, more often than not, when I did find people, I would not see others again for an hour or so.

It was on about the third or fourth day, just at the entry to the wilderness trailhead at Meyers Beach, that I had one of those "a-ha" moments you occasionally get in the field—one of those realizations that in retrospect is perhaps painfully obvious but that also allows a kind of crucial insight into the questions you have been asking all along. It happened as I approached the trailhead entryway, marked by the Park Service with a large sign, map, and several instructive warnings (Figure 1). At this point near the Meyers Beach parking lot, institutional markers abound, guiding visitor understanding

Figure 1: A stack of walking sticks left behind by individual visitors leans against the National Park Service sign at the Meyers Beach entrance to the Lakeshore Trail, June, 2013.

of the location. There are any number of readable objects, telling visitors what this "place" is supposed to be. There is a gravel trail with linear 2-by-4's directing visitor movement and attention, and a nicely mowed section of grass, letting visitors know that this is the *limen*, this is the official border between civilization and nature, as if to materially mark the site by saying, "Beyond this point lies *wilderness*." But there is also something nonofficial and non-institutional at play that jumped out immediately to me as an example of folk practice and folk culture.

It was a pile of walking sticks, discarded and leaning in a makeshift stack alongside the official sign. It was a textbook example of what we mean when we describe everyday modes of practice that are not institutionalized nor formally learned but which people pick up and perpetuate all the same. When I arrived at the trailhead that morning, I noted five walking sticks, leaning against the official trailhead map sign, left behind, it seemed, for others to take up before embarking into the woods. When I returned from the trail, hours later, just before sunset, there were four more sticks in the pile, making a total of nine. These sticks were not mentioned on the sign and their haphazard arrangement was not sanctioned by the Park Service. They were rather left by the people who passed through the trailhead, aggregating folk culture in absence

of a physically contemporaneous community.

Now, we could talk about the material aspects of the sticks themselves as folklore—and this has been done, by F.S. Burnell (1948) back in the 1940s, or in passing by any number of writers, like Zora Neale Hurston (1935) or Paul Bohannan (1961)—but I was interested in how this bit of folkloric practice contributed to the experience and sense of place. Here, I realized that even in the "wilderness," even in this supposedly remote location, folklore is constructing place and place is constructing folklore. I saw, illustrated in this moment, that folklore and place are in a relationship of constant and mutual re-formation. In something as simple as a pile of walking sticks growing in number throughout the day, I recognized how collective or cooperative actions taken in or at a specific location can guide, promote, or constrain subsequent avenues for action and expression. I may not have seen the other hikers in the woods that day, but their presence and the traces they left behind influenced my experience. First, by seeing the sticks upon my arrival, I was reminded that this so-called "remote" trailhead was not entirely free from other human visitors, and that I would potentially find others walking in those woods. At the same time, the placement of the sticks contributed to the sense that this trailhead location—this particular *place*—was distinct as a stopping point or transition point, between nature and civilization. The collective placement of the sticks at this spot echoed the suggestions of the sign and curated trailhead landscape, implying that beyond this point, in one direction, the walking stick tool might be needed, while beyond this point in the other, it would not be as useful and could be left behind. A distinction in spatial perception was implied. And, of course, the actions of others in this physical spot encouraged me and any other visitors that day to take similar actions, either grabbing a walking stick before setting off into the forest or leaving our own behind upon our "return to the civilized world."

I say this was my "a-ha" moment because with this in mind I began to see the traces of wilderness visitors everywhere I looked, even in the densest areas of the forest, miles beyond the trailhead itself. And it was here that I hit upon my core argument for this essay: the choices made by people in any location, collected over time, resonate and aggregate, constraining, encouraging, and otherwise guiding the subsequent choices of others in that spot, and this collection of choices over time, even in absence of any physically contemporaneous community, contributes to what Barbara Allen (1990), Elaine Lawless (2011), and Kent Ryden (1993) have all called a "sense of place."

A "sense of place," Allen explains, is not only "a consciousness of one's physical surroundings" but also "a fundamental human experience" that "seems to be especially strong where people in a neighborhood, a community, a region, possess a collective awareness of place and express it in their cultural forms" (1990, 1). It is the collectively shared concept of an area or landscape constituted through individual experiences. At the same time that "one space" can act as "many places" for many groups and individuals (Hufford 1992), we can also trace how "many places" simultaneously act as "one space," or how plural experiences in one location come to compound as a single, referential and symbolic location.

Carving a Trail for Action: Rethinking Strategies and Tactics

The wilderness trail is both a good case example and a good metaphor for this idea. The footsteps of hikers, repeated over time, literally carve and wear out a trail for action where there was no trail before, a trail that others are then, by its mere presence, inclined to also follow. This illustrates literally how the patterns in movement through the wooded space develop *and* figuratively how any patterns of movement are haunted and guided by the trace of other movements before them. The shared experience of movement through a particular physical environment—of following this rise in slope rather than that one, of rounding behind the fallen tree instead of beneath it, of steadying one's steps with a walking stick instead of slogging along without one—leads to a shared experience of the environment, a shared sense of place, and this shared experience leads, as Gregory Clark (2004) has noted, to shared culture. Walkers on any given trail, whether in the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness or just between buildings on campus, for example, are not independent nodes of completely original spatial experience but rather, through their combined and repeated actions, I argue, they are spontaneous diachronic communities of shared practice in a specific location. This notion pushes us toward a phenomenological approach to folklore, and the idea that our experience of the world—including our experience of place—is filtered always through the frame of custom, culture, and vernacular practice. Our shared aesthetic, exchanged, adopted, and adapted not through official channels but through everyday actions, often without explicit reflection, provides foundation for a common sense (or *doxa*), predisposing us to make some choices over others, to see some aspects of our physical environment and overlook alternatives.

In the early 1980s, Michel de Certeau illuminated this interplay between macro-level custom and individual experience by discussing the "strategies" and "tactics" for spatial engagement and action. Using the example of the walker in the modern cityscape rather than the hiker in the wooded wilderness, he explained that strategies, on the one hand, provided prescribed bounds for action within an environment, while tactics, on the other hand, were resistive, independent movements taken and lived by the individual.

These are valuable concepts, but in spite of de Certeau's own writing, they can sometimes lead to a kind of either-or method of thinking about actions and culture; that is, in distinguishing between the community's guided "strategies" and the individual's innovative "tactics," we frequently run the risk of promoting a false dualism between the two. In practice—and de Certeau does point this out—the two often overlap. In folklore and folk practice, though, we can all see a category between pure strategies and pure tactics, where choices and actions are both culturally guided *and* spontaneously innovative.

De Certeau described the practices of everyday life as a constant negotiation between his two abstract poles, noting that all daily activities are developed through some degree of strategic constraint and tactical invention. Strategies are the rules of system and law, never fully visible to the individual inside the system but constantly influencing perceptions and encouraging certain modes and avenues for action.

Tactics are the in-the-moment, on-the-ground choices of the individual in the system. De Certeau referred to the actualization of spatial possibilities through individual acts of movement as "enunciation." Of course, de Certeau envisioned this push and pull within the modern cityscape, not the supposedly unmediated expanse of a national wilderness. In de Certeau's cityscape, tactics are exemplified by the individual who takes a shortcut through an alleyway or outside of a sanctioned crosswalk, curving against the structured grid. Yet in this respect the social trail running through a park or preserve is analogous to de Certeau's tactical city shortcut, simply without the *explicitly* or hyperbolically ordered structure imposed by omnipresent signs, sidewalks, and urban design. A trail walker and a city walker are both enunciating their environments. Analyzing the push and pull along a wooded or desert trail disrupts de Certeau's initial conception of the tension but in the park or preserve strategies and tactics are still always simultaneously at play.

In fact, it is hard to envision a nature trail without some combination of prescription and individual action in perpetual tension, especially in explicitly maintained National Parks and other nature preserves. Along the outdoor nature trail, there are frequently no signs or rules, no official strategic instructions for how to move or in which direction. Any individual walking through the woods has, from a tactical perspective, the choice of making any one of an infinite number of movements. And yet, the vast majority of hikers will follow the worn trail, formed by the footsteps of those who came before them. They might make this choice because it is physically easier than walking through the flora. They might stay on the trail because they feel they are "supposed to" or that there must be some non-explicit law at play. They may even pass through without consciously reflecting on their movement at all. Yet in each case, the individual experience of place is contingent upon the movements already taken in that place by others, and the end experience of the place ends up echoing the experience of those others who moved through it in a similar way.

In this performance of precedent, folkloristics and practice theory become one. Both are concerned with how individual performances perpetuate, adopt, and adapt traditional forms. And this focus also leads to the real meat of any folkloristic analysis of place: the recognition that when an individual is situated in a location, that location is simultaneously situated through the interpretive frames of the individual, simultaneously put in traceable relationship to a web of other places and meanings. Places and landscapes invite visitors to assume particular subject positions (Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki 2006, 30) and, in enacting those positions, individual visitors promote their inherent viewpoints as *doxa*, as "common sense" (Schein 2003, 217). As Timothy Cresswell writes, place is "produced by practice that adheres to (ideological) beliefs about what is the appropriate thing to do" but place also "reproduces the beliefs that produce it in a way that makes them appear natural, self-evident, and common sense. [. . .] Thus places are active forces in the reproduction of norms in the definition of appropriate practice. Place constitutes our ideas about what is appropriate as much as it is constituted by them" (Cresswell 1996, 16).

Humanist geographers and theorists, like J.B. Jackson (1984), Edward Relph (1985), Anne Buttimer (1985), and Edward Casey (1993) have recognized this mutual and

ever-cycling relationship between sense of place and experience in place. The idea and impression we have of a location tends to guide our actions in that location, and those actions lead to experiences which affirm or challenge previous understandings, leading to a new sense of place that in turn guides other actions in the future. One always already informs the other, and the cycling relationship never ends.

Case Example: The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Thus, looking again at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, I began to document any and all ways in which the actions taken by others guide, encourage, and constrain actions taken by the individual. After reflecting on these findings, I can identify at least four ways in which the action of situated self in and through a place is a moment of folk transmission and cultural influence on choice and perception.

Social Guides for Sense of Place in Relatively Unpeopled Locations	
Face-to-face social interaction	The observed behaviors of others, even if brief, provide a model for visitor practice in the space.
Narratives of place and other "intertexts"	Popular stories about, images of, and associations with place provide expectation and frame for practice even well after they are first told or encountered.
Trace of others that guides subsequent visitors' interpretations	The physical trace of how others have behaved in the place before a visitor arrives become interpretable elements of the environment.
Trace of others that guides subsequent visitors' movement and actions	The physical trace of how others have behaved in the place before a visitor arrives provide a model and invitation to action for those subsequent visitors, whether adopting, adapting, or rejecting existing paths.

Table 1: In places devoid of contemporaneous social community, social precedent and practice still guide interpretation and action in at least four traceable ways.

First, we have those moments in which experience in place is guided by actual, direct, face-to-face social interaction. While people on the trails in early summer were few and far between, they were not completely absent. Over several months, I documented what happened when two or more parties encountered one another in the wilderness or natural trail space. Here, almost invariably, there seems to be an unspoken code of conduct. Upon crossing paths in the woods, hikers nod briefly to one another, exchange one or two quick salutations of acknowledgement, then continue on their way. In over a hundred observed occasions, hikers avoided stopping or breaking their stride, infringing on the other's trail experience as little as possible. The one notable exception was when hikers met at a slope or bottleneck and the hiker moving upslope stopped briefly to allow the downslope hiker ease of passage. In cases when small groups encountered one another on the trail, both hushed their conversation and entered into a brief silence when passing the other. None of these behaviors, to my knowledge, are

taught officially on any trail, but across Northern Wisconsin I observed them time and time again. My informants confirmed that such conduct is more or less understood as proper hikers' code, much like the practices documented by communication scholar Samantha Senda-Cook (2012; 2013). In these cases, glancing face-to-face interaction encouraged a sense of park or preserve as a space of quiet reverence and removal from human activity. These brief, hushed interactions, performed while consistently moving forward through the environment encourage a common sense of place as one for temporary, careful, reverent recreation.

Second, I documented moments in which experience in place is guided by narratives and other cultural intertexts that guide individual interpretations. These are the stories about woods and wilderness that predispose people to experience those forests in particular ways. I have written on this phenomenon elsewhere—on how legends of wolves and bears and other threatening creatures make the forest seem foreboding, or how association with pop culture referents like Tolkien's Elven forests or, perhaps, the forest moon of Endor can encourage a sense of magic and adventure in even the most urban of wooded landscapes—but narrative intertexts can also take the form of family lore or personal experience narratives (Schmitt 2013). Many of my informants in the Apostle Islands explained that they associate specific locations with memories from their childhood and that they revisit these places to re-capture experiences they or their relatives have had before.

Third, we might look at how the mere trace of others left behind guides our subsequent interpretation and sense of any given place. Think, for instance, of rubbish on the trail, like soda cans or granola bar wrappers. These traces of past human interaction in a nature place elicit reactions in those who subsequently enter the same area—in some cases, perhaps, an urge to double one's own ecological efforts and, in others, perhaps, a justification for littering oneself. These traces of others that guide interpretation also included graffiti along the trail, like the words "It's Been a Hell of an Adventure" scrawled along a Park Service sign. Here the interplay between de Certeau's official strategies and rebellious tactics took material form, and the subsequent visitors to a location where initials had been carved or other graffiti left behind encountered something different than the pristine, natural landscape that they might have sought in concept. The trace of other human actions altered the objects and environments available for interpretation. Simply put, the trace left by previous visitors changes the environment and interpretive experience open to subsequent visitors.

And finally, I noted those instances in which the trace of others' actions not only guided interpretation but encouraged subsequent action. These are exemplified by the social trails running through areas relatively sparse of human modifiers, signifiers, and symbols. Even in the physical absence of others, the trace of human actions encourages the hiking community's repetition of those actions. The official strategy for action is defined by the Park Service trail, carved into the land. But prompted by some individual desire or obstacle, some hiker may tactically carve a new trail, walking around, for instance, a muddy or flooded area (Figure 2). A second hiker may

Figure 2: A social trail diverts from the Park Service path at a particularly muddy spot along the Lakeshore Trail, June 2013.

follow suit and, whereas there is rarely evidence for hikers breaking the official trail's strategic path for movement in other locations, in this instance, when the strategic trail leads through muck and mire, several hikers may eventually opt to take the non-official, tactical route. In fact, in some locations, so many other hikers have done so that the new, non-official path can rival the original in size. De Certeau's tactics and strategies are blurred here, as the individual hikers making individual choices over time have in fact made the same choice, influenced and spurred by the trace of the community's action.

This happens quite frequently along the trail spaces I have studied. Recognizing that others have taken a path is often enough for hikers to take the path themselves, even when it is non-official. Social trails are not the only available routes through the environment, but they are repeated and the repetition aggregates.

When an officially maintained Park Service trail-blazes forward and a ragged, smaller, foot-worn social trail veers uphill and away from the formal path, strategies and tactics are both physically imprinted on the land, materialized and manifested. This material manifestation, this record of movement, adds new complexity to de Certeau's initial cityscape model, as it shows that the physical trace of previous tactical

movements can function as future strategies, guiding and constraining the subsequent tactical movements of others. In a place where both official and non-official avenues for action are physically marked upon the land, it becomes especially clear that strategies and tactics are in constant interplay, mutually guiding and constraining subsequent actions and indeed *combining* to produce an ultimate interpretation of place.

In the AINL, as in most national park spaces, the social trails take many forms. On the AINL's Stockton Island, for instance, a line of foot-worn dirt splits from the mapped Park Service trail and curves beneath the aboveground roots of a massive tree, suggesting that trail walkers have passed and may still pass through an opening in the roots as if it were a doorway. Farther along the same trail in 2013, a line of footsteps veered sharply to the side to avoid a fallen pine that prevented easy passage along the sanctioned path. On the mainland, at a creek bed crossing of the Lakeshore Trail, several material elements—like three separate lines of rocks placed like stepping stones across the stream and a fallen log spanning the creek with its topside worn barkless and smooth by footsteps—suggested that visitors tactically split in various directions when passing by the obstacle. And everywhere in the Lakeshore expanse, countless social trails split off to allow walker access to beaches, rock outcroppings, and bluffs. None of these avenues for movement are designed or marked or even encouraged by the Park Service but they are manifested and maintained by individual visitor movements all the same.

This materialized trace of separate individuals moving through the AINL at different times makes the push and pull between strategies and tactics manifest on the landscape itself. As more and more trail walkers make individual choices over time, their visible, tactical enunciations become strategic in their own right. In the physical imprint of the social trail through the flora or on the land, the repeated tactical choices of multiple independent individuals over time are documented and, through repetition (contributing to the social trail's visibility and size), they become a kind of alternative "strategy" or folk "tactic," running away from the official Park Service trails but setting a strategic line for movement for others who then follow along the alternative route.

Thus, ultimately, on any trail the individual trail walker enunciates the trailspace by moving individually between the official and non-official avenues, sometimes sticking to the Park Service trail at a regular pace, sometimes slowing to view or hear part of the environment, sometimes speeding up, sometimes doubling back to re-trace steps, and sometimes veering off the official trail entirely to follow a social trail to a particular peak or landmark.

All of this relates to practice theory in that the individual action of walking along a nature trail encourages, over time, a common sense of moving through the location. As Senda-Cook argues, in hiking by the rules, hikers "rhetorically construct norms, values, and identities that seem natural and authentic" (2012, 138). In bending or breaking the rules by following the footsteps of others, hikers create an alternative set of norms and values, but not wholly independent improvisations. Walking the paths that others have walked creates merely a counterpublic or alternative social

path. As Scheiffelin (1985) notes, such performance constructs symbolic reality not by "presenting an argument, description, or commentary" but "by socially constructing a situation in which the participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are already doing" (709).

This matters because although walking along a desire path or social trail may seem, at first, rebellious or resistant, it can also be likewise a constraint to environmental perceptions, frequently perpetuating the same nature-culture divide that Cronon and other contemporary ecologists are fighting to dispel. This constraint is easily traceable in official paths and guides to movement, the "strategic" trails, in de Certeau's sense. The words and images surrounding the standard trailhead in the AINL, for instance, are designed to promote both visitor and environment wellbeing, but they are heavily prescriptive, with directions and rules and regulations posted at every corner. The signs, trails, and other human efforts—sometimes as simple as mowing grass in some areas and letting it grow freely in others—are explicitly crafted to direct the visitor's gaze, to prompt reflection on some aspects of the environment while overlooking others. In accordance with the U.S. Wilderness Act and National Park Service (NPS) wilderness management plans, the AINL is simultaneously a place for preservation of biophysical environments and public enjoyment/appreciation; the crafted experiential landscape, thus, is one of aesthetic appreciation from a respectful distance, of nature as spectacle object, viewed and revered but not engaged directly or for extended periods of time. However, official guides for movement in and through the space are by no means the only factor in determining that movement, and even on the unofficial paths a similar sense of place is encouraged. While it is no surprise to find that official NPS guides encourage interpretations and actions consistent with NPS goals, attention to material rhetorics of social trails demonstrates that individual hikers on the trail are complicit in the perpetuation of nature place as object of both careful reverence and aesthetic enjoyment.

That is, while they may appear to buck authority and challenge the system of NPS order, the vast majority of AINL social trails merely hug the official trail, never diverging more than a few dozen yards and, then, often only doing so to allow the walker to 1) avoid a temporary hazard in the existing official trail, like a fallen tree; 2) avoid disturbing some biophysical aspect of the official trail, like wildlife grazing alongside the path; or 3) access a particularly notable promontory or viewing location, almost exclusively along the bluffs and shorelines facing the expanse of Lake Superior. In these cases, the social trails do not radically depart from the NPS mission of simultaneous preservation and appreciation but rather extend and actualize it. Those trail walkers who stick along the official trail will enact and enunciate the removed yet appreciative gaze. They are simultaneously invited to compare their own movements to the implied others who have left the official path for the social trail and to recognize their own, obedient movements as less invasive. Those trail walkers who pass onto the social trail, however, are also invited to engage with the place at a spectatorial distance, as the material layout of the trail still invites the walker to disrupt as little as possible, view the nature place as fragile yet valuable object for viewing, and, when

occasionally invasive and departing from the prescribed ecological action, to do so primarily in pursuit of grander vistas, for wider views and more spectacular sights.

This is the case for the social trail on Stockton Island, weaving through the root-work doorframe, as it invites walkers to literally pass through remarkable aspects of the environment without touching or disturbing them. It is the case by the trail around the fallen pine, where the prescribed path is only amended to avoid disrupting the pine directly while still allowing the walker to pass. It is the case at the creek bed crossing, where an obstacle in the nature space is indeed disrupted (by placing stones and logs for crossing) but in the name of allowing trail walker passing and viewership of the spaces beyond. It is certainly the case for those countless social trails leading to bluffs and beaches, providing vista views of Lake Superior. Hundreds of social trails in the AINL point toward the shoreline, where the tree cover thins and affords trail walkers a greater vista view. Even when leaving the official path, a model of environment as spectacle object—meant to be seen and appreciated from a reverent remove but rarely disturbed or directly engaged—is encouraged.

When the representative avenues for officially sanctioned movement and individually inventive movement both encourage a similar mode of understanding the nature place, that understanding is powerfully reinforced and normalized. Social trails in the AINL do diverge from NPS paths, but rarely if ever with complete disregard for the official directives of NPS maintenance. When even the resistive visitor is inclined to take a social trail as an act of enunciation, very few AINL visitors are likely to interpret or experience the wilderness outside of the spectacle object frame. This is how folk culture spreads, but it also ensures a sense of common experience—a common sense of place and action in that place—for people who may never encounter one another face-to-face or online or communicate in any form beyond their shared tactical actions.

Conclusion

The uniquely visible case example of the nature park social trail provides a material model for understanding how the actions of others leave precedent for subsequent actors, and how individual adoption and adaptation of such precedented practice becomes normative, marked more and more clearly as the common sense means of passing through a space. It gives us a new outlook for considering the relationship between folklore and place. The four ways in which the individual's action in a place is a moment of folk transmission and cultural influence listed above extend beyond the wilderness hiking trail and into any other terrestrial environment. We ought always to remember that strategies and tactics are not dualistic opposites but rather modes of action that often if not always interact. We should embrace the idea of folk tactics—the collective and cooperative pattern of individual, tactical choices—as a key element in defining place and space. Attention to the official and unofficial (or, even, counter-official) elements of the material landscape builds upon de Certeau's initial concepts by making physical movement and the physical trace of movement available and accessible to cultural analysis.

Returning to the trailhead at Meyers Beach this past year, I again encountered a stack of walking sticks. This time there were seven sticks, on the ground beside the path instead of leaning against the trail sign. The place itself had changed, ever so slightly—as, in fact, every place always does. Like Dorren Massey (2005) points out, one can never experience the same place multiple times, as the seasons shift and the context of each visit differs slightly, but the repetition of choices makes the general sense of place for each visit and each visitor potentially similar and familiar. This may account, in part, for why my informants in more formal interviews, though never having met, attest to having such similar interpretations of wilderness and natural places, and having had such similar experiences when they got there. They are literally following in each other's footsteps while laying footsteps of their own. The practice ensures that the place is there for others to find and follow.

Just as in more explicitly structured environments, like museums, memorials, and cityscapes, parks, preserves, and national wilderness are likewise framed by human understandings, likewise constrain movement and direct attention, and likewise thus invite subject positions for visitors and viewers. As Zagacki and Gallagher suggest, parks and preserves are "spaces of attention" wherein "visitors are invited to experience the landscape around them as a series of enactments" that create "innovative opportunities for individuals to attend to the human/nature interface" (2009, 171).

Popular frames for "nature," ecology, and preservation—whether textual, visual, material, or otherwise—may at first seem innocuous or altruistic, directed at protecting the biophysical environment from harm, yet the very efforts toward environmental respect and sustainability that guide public understandings of so-called nature places and human relationship with them can likewise constrain them. Governing bodies like the NPS or any agency managing the physical and discursive layout of a biophysical place are in effect managing the social life within in it. The park or preserve becomes what McKerrow (1999) terms a "regulatory space" in which the discursive formations of the governing body authorizing actions within it are "seen as mainstream, appropriate, and hence unobjectionable; in this context, the people are complicit in the very structures that serve to regulate their lives" (278).

Attention to trailways as *doxa* materialized helps to deconstruct the tacit assumptions guiding and constraining movement over populations and time. Applying folkloristic study and practice theory to the environmental and geographic subject will help to illuminate, target, and alter or eliminate frames that hinder ecological well-being and sustainability while promoting a relationship between humans and biophysical surroundings that does not rely upon implicit assumptions like those encouraged by trails that lead to visions of nature as a spectacle object.

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