

Transcription as a Devotional Practice
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Thesis Writings Presented to Pacific Northwest College of Art

In partial fulfillment of requirements for the
Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree, Printmaking, Spring 2021

Mentor, Rory Sparks

Proposal, Fall 2020

The image of the double helix evokes evolution, DNA, and epigenetics. I am researching the physiological nature of inherited trauma along with ways of activating epigenetic changes that promote healing and resilience. A lifetime of intense social anxiety rooted in complex PTSD from relational trauma that has made it difficult to live my values and connect with communities who center those values. I escaped into literature to avoid the discomforts of my childhood and adolescence, and through my reading choices I was able to vicariously experience and empathize with a broader range of cultural realities than was acknowledged by. Influenced by Resmaa Menakem's research and practices around racialized trauma, I recognize the functional lack of both racial/ethnic identity and intercultural exchange I grew up knowing within the insular whiteness of small-town Indiana. My own resistance to cisgendered heteronormativity drew me to books written from the perspectives of outsiders and culture-straddlers, especially women, queer, and Indigenous authors. Reading and journaling became a surrogate for the meaningful conversations I was rarely able to have with others when I was younger. I am now seeking new ways to express what is meaningful to me in order to invite and engage in a larger conversation of how to create just and sustainable futures.

All the books I've read, working in an academic research library for over a decade, and volunteering at a neighborhood community bookbinding studio have shaped my worldview as much as my cultural and familial upbringing. After the election of 2016, I chose to leave my career and complete my undergraduate degree as a BFA in the hope of increasing my creative capacity and ability to imagine life-giving futures. I entered Oregon College of Art and Craft as a Book Arts major in Fall of 2018, but their closure necessitated my transfer to PNCA the following year, where I am now a Printmaking major, working primarily with non-traditional book forms. Most of my influences are writers or multimedia artists who use text extensively in their work, often as a physical material in some form, as in Joseph Grigely's "Conversations with the Hearing" series, Ines Seidel's "Altering the News" project, and recent PNCA MFA graduate Sol Lee's "The Shape of Forgetting" thesis work.

For my own thesis project, I propose using folded paper double helix structures as my base. I will incorporate language into these objects with the use of typewriters, while experimenting with materials, size, color, and surface applications to create a large and visually diverse collection of sculptures. In order to evolve beyond the therapeutic nature of my journaling and the perfectionist anxiety I feel when writing for an audience, I will explore free-writing as a means of generating my own idiosyncratic phrasing, which I will rearrange through

collage and erasure writing practices into new poetic forms. My own writing can then be incorporated more intentionally onto the sculptures using a variety of surface application techniques. As my jumping off point, I am using fragments of quotes and notes I took while watching the documentary "Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival." I am typing those fragments onto the left side of a long narrow strip of drawing paper, turning it around and over so that the text flows around and across all 4 sides of the paper. By folding the flat page into a double helix structure, I transform it into an interactive, three-dimensional book object. In referencing the popular understanding of DNA as encoded language, this piece illustrates how I am shaping my personal evolution by folding one of my influence's ideas into my own understanding.

Following the model of evolution itself as an on-going experiment in emergence that relies on repetitive processes and random mutations, I will follow my curiosity and allow my interests and influences to find their way into conversation with materials and techniques. Many of the sculptures will be one-offs or iterations, which I can imagine in an interactive installation space, hung at different heights or strewn across surfaces, but would prefer to offer as takeaways, as they ultimately feel more suited to being integrated into personal spaces than being on display in a gallery. From spontaneously generated process work that plays with varying degrees of legibility, I will intentionally edit the text and design the aesthetics of eight distinct sculptures that will function as legible and editioned book works.

Artist Statement

Art is not separate from living. My creative work is in the service of healing, meaningful connection, and increasing my own and our collective imagination around how best to be human.

My love of reading led me to library work and then on to book arts; working at an academic research library allowed me to follow my curiosity down any rabbit hole that beckoned. I came to fine art school through craft, and am always seeking to join the hand and the eye, the heart and the mind. I prefer to make on a smaller scale, to use materials at hand, to employ methods that easily allow for shifts in form and understanding.

Abstract

transcription as a devotional practice

Part of what makes humans successful as a species is how we seek out patterns and create stories to make sense of them. These entwined processes help us understand how to navigate the world in which we find ourselves. Understanding this need for meaning-making as embedded in the intersections of history, family, and culture begins to explain why our perceptions as individuals or groups can be so different and at odds. If we pay attention to larger patterns, this understanding offers possibilities for imagining beyond the cultural traps we find ourselves caught in.

My practice is a personal one, my instinctive way of taking notes for re-story-ing our shared reality. I create ephemeral work, transforming everyday office and school supplies into conduits for meaningful contemplation by centering texts that have reshaped my understanding of the world and my place in it. By methodically transcribing the well-crafted words of storytellers whose worldviews resonate with my own, I transmute their meanings through my body, elevating and infusing them into temporarily sacred objects. This practice and its artefacts help me to remember what makes sense to me while navigating a world that often doesn't. The work I make is meant to be handled and examined, taken apart, reassembled, contemplated, and returned to, and is one of a kind. I don't make these pieces to sell or put in a gallery, but occasionally they emerge as a potential bridge to a conversation.

My thesis year coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic; the importance of virtual communication and documentation during this time cannot be overstated. While a website can't replace the experience of physically touching, interacting with, and manipulating the work, it is quite useful for making it accessible to more people over an indefinite time period. As I made choices to display these pieces virtually as simply and interactively as possible, the website itself became integral to my thesis work as a whole. Where I had originally imagined a physical library of the books included in a viewing, I have been able to embed external multimedia links for viewers to research further into these writers and thinkers. My hope is that the way I've engaged with these words aesthetically will allow a cumulative meaning to emerge across and among the voices included, whose work has profoundly influenced my personal evolution.

Thesis Defense Script

I am a Printmaking major and I transferred to PNCA in the fall of 2019 following the sudden closure of Oregon College of Art and Craft. I spent a year there as a Book Arts major. For 13 years prior to that I worked full time at Northwestern University Library, but after the election of 2016, an apocalyptic anxiety propelled me to uproot myself from the life I'd built in Chicago. I began this journey to completing a BFA not so much to become an artist as to force myself to evolve, by increasing my capacity to imagine life-giving futures, and finding ways to collaborate with people who share my values.

Most of my influences are writers and multimedia artists who work with written language. I read early and voraciously, and books became my primary means of entertainment and escape. My worldview was undeniably shaped by so many vicariously lived experiences. Over time, I gravitated towards realist speculative and experimental fiction and creative nonfiction by outsiders culture stragglers and many backgrounds, but especially women, queer, and Indigenous authors. When I moved from Indiana to Chicago at age 25, in the year 2000, I was finally able to connect with people from a wider variety of backgrounds in my everyday life. Working in an academic library for so long also broadened my awareness and curiosity exponentially.

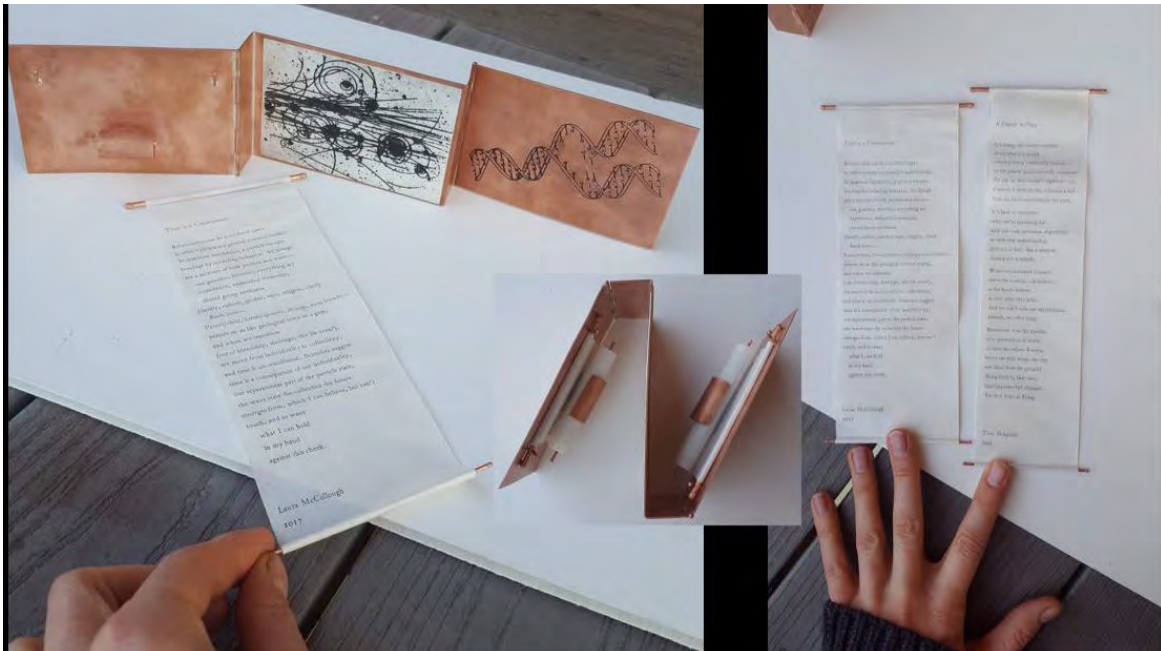
Now I am going to share my screen and talk a little about my process from proposal to now. These are most (though not all) of the books that have been central to my thinking this semester as I've been working on my thesis project, and I just wanted to quickly show them.



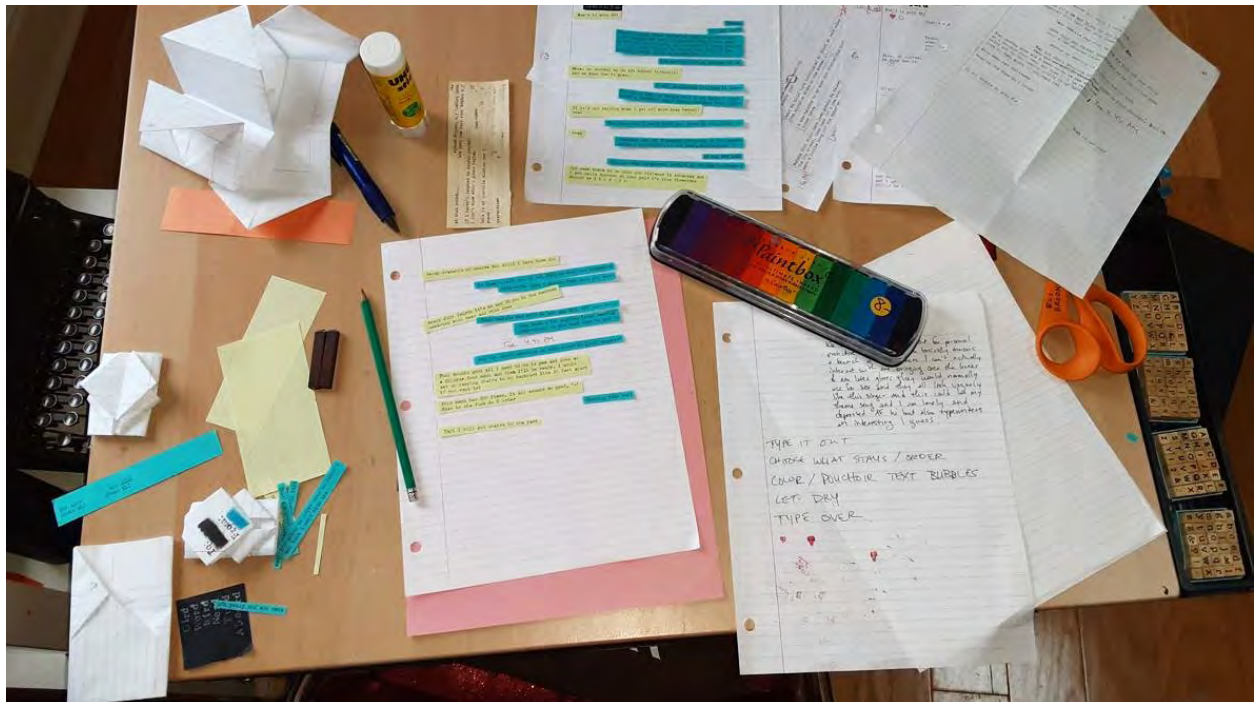
My proposal was based on this piece, which I actually made in my mentor Rory Sparks' Book Arts class last semester. It's called "recombinant DonNa harawAy" and is a sort of conversation with text from Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble* and a documentary that Fabrizio Terranova made about her around the same time. Obviously, there is a visual link to DNA, which I was working with through the idea of epigenetics, and how this person and many other influences in my life, especially writers, have helped to update the information I was given so that I have reshaped who I am and how I understand myself in relation with the larger world.



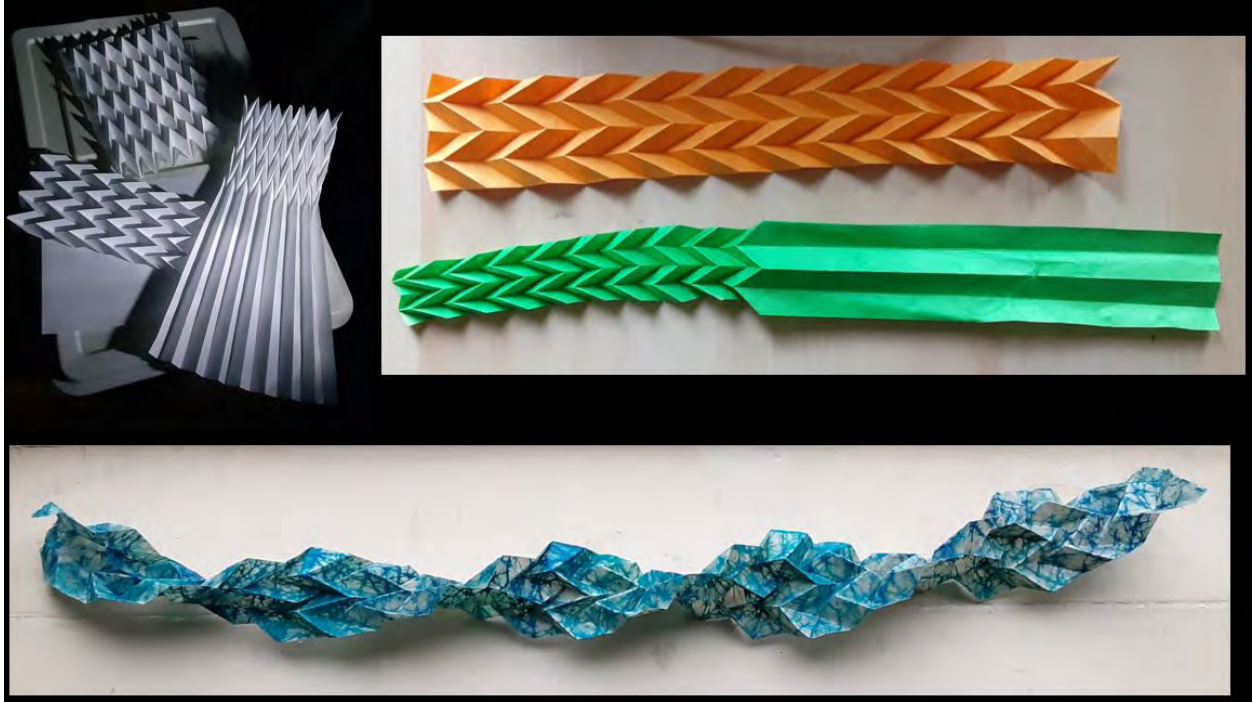
In my proposal, I said that I would make eight more of these. I didn't do that, but I did do a lot of other things. But before I show you newer experiments, I wanted to go back to some older work.



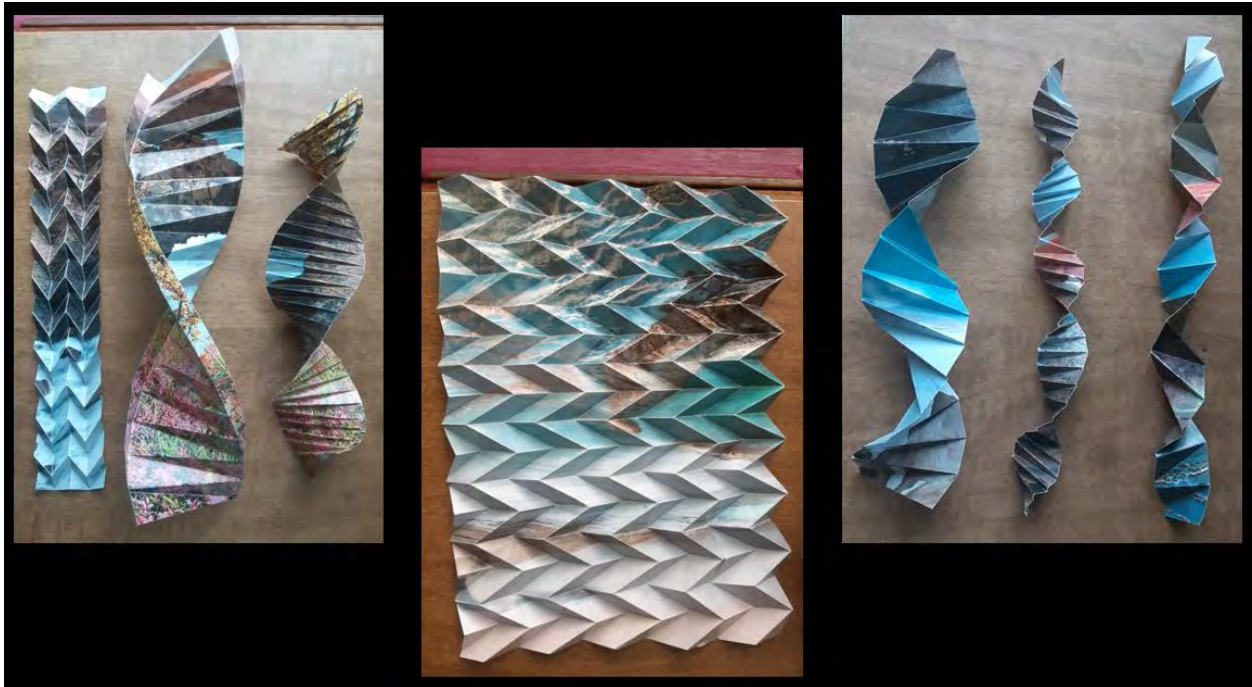
I made this piece my first semester at OCAC. It was very ambitious; the idea was to take these two poems that have really deep meaning for me and put them in conversation with each other, where I felt like they belong, together in this sort of vessel that holds them, elevates them, and gives them an equal weight, because this hinged dos-a-dos structure there is no front or back, and it can be displayed or interacted with in multiple ways, but it's small enough to fit nicely in my hands. This was my combined final project for my first book arts and what turned out to be my only metalsmithing class. I'm really grateful I was able to create such beautiful container to hold these poems, that allowed me to share them with others, but it is really the meaning within the poems that informs the beauty for me.



This photo should give you a sense of my working methods, how I tend to use school and office supplies, more everyday and non-archival materials. Part of that I've realized is that these materials and tools were part of my habitat for most of my life, first as a student and then as a person who worked in offices, especially at a University, in an academic research library. It was also just a way that I just to decorate my workspace which tended to be very drab, but I've carried it forward. I like to use these materials in a way that sort of reclaims them, repurposes them, uses the recognizable utilitarian aesthetics of what they are, but then elevates and infuses them with meaning.

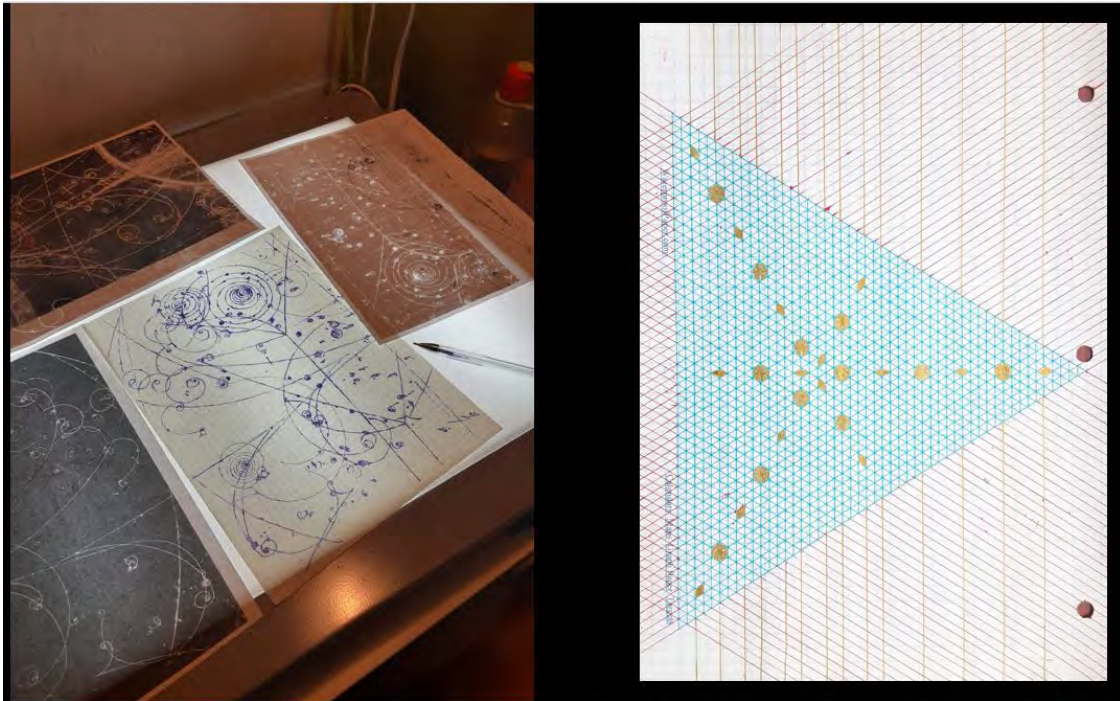


Right after my proposal, I started exploring other ways of representing the helix, and I need to give credit to my friend, Sam Caruthers Knight, who showed me how to do this type of folding technique which I use quite a bit and one of my projects.

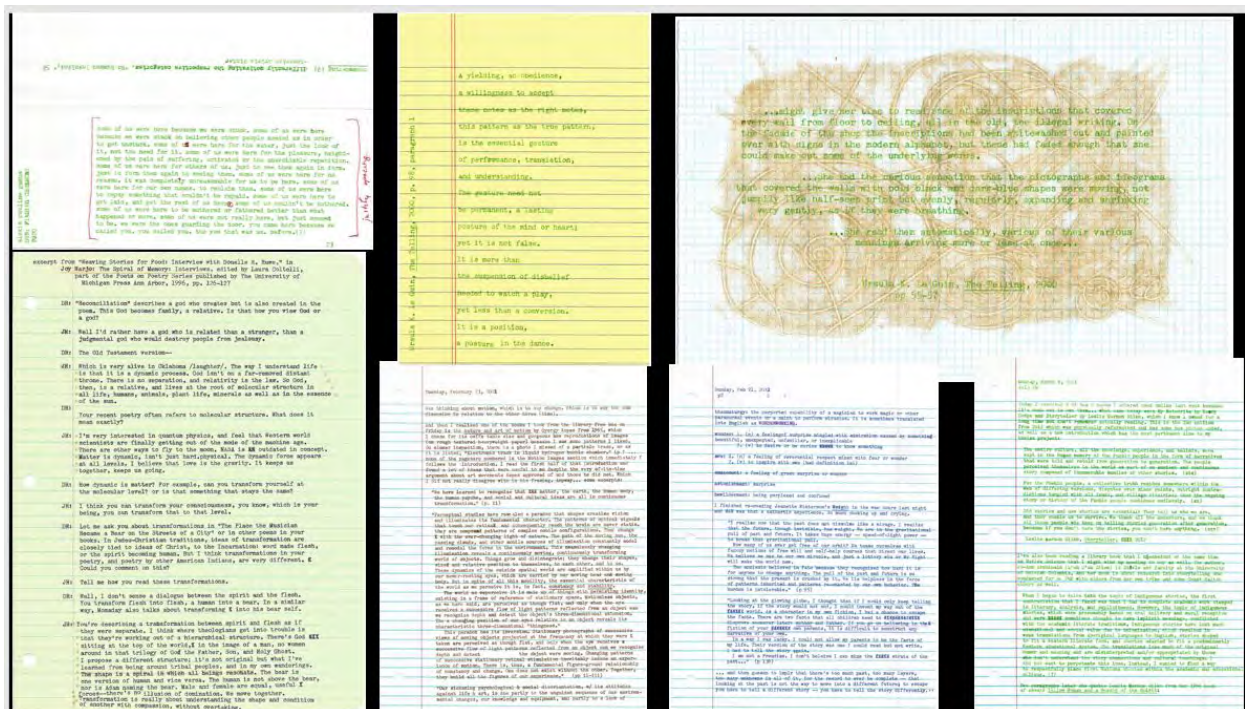


Then I started working with imagery, because the Donna Haraway piece was just black text on white paper. These were all experimenting with photo spreads from National Geographic,

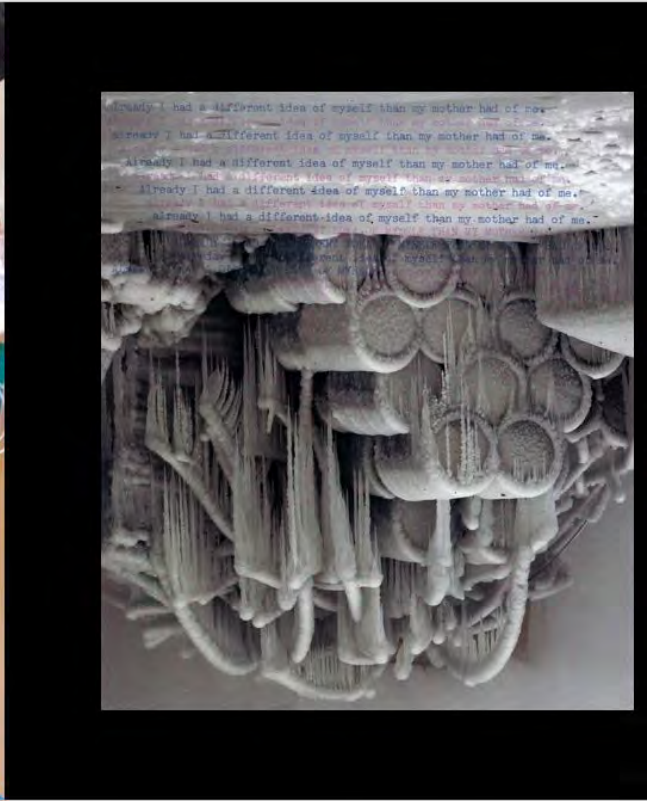
looking at how color, shape, and form can be transformed by these different folding techniques. Getting a sense of what can happen, and what the possibilities are for using imagery.



I also did a sort of series of tracings and drawings or riffs on scientific imagery. On the left I'm literally tracing particle traces, and on the right these are more abstract improvisational drawings I made on mathematical graph paper superimposed on to the same kind of everyday papers I was talking about earlier.



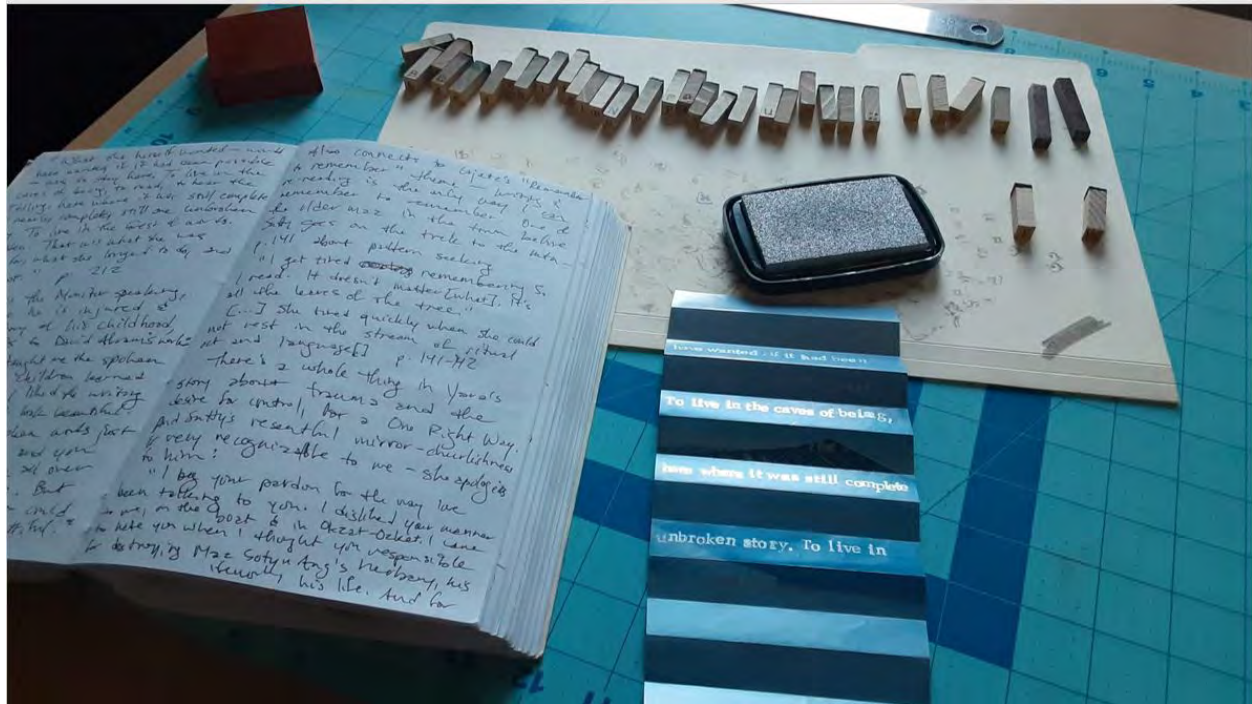
A black and white photograph showing a vintage typewriter on a green cutting mat. A smartphone is propped up behind the typewriter, displaying a document titled "A School for Many Villagers". A wooden frame is visible in the background, and a small, dark, irregular object lies on the mat in the foreground.



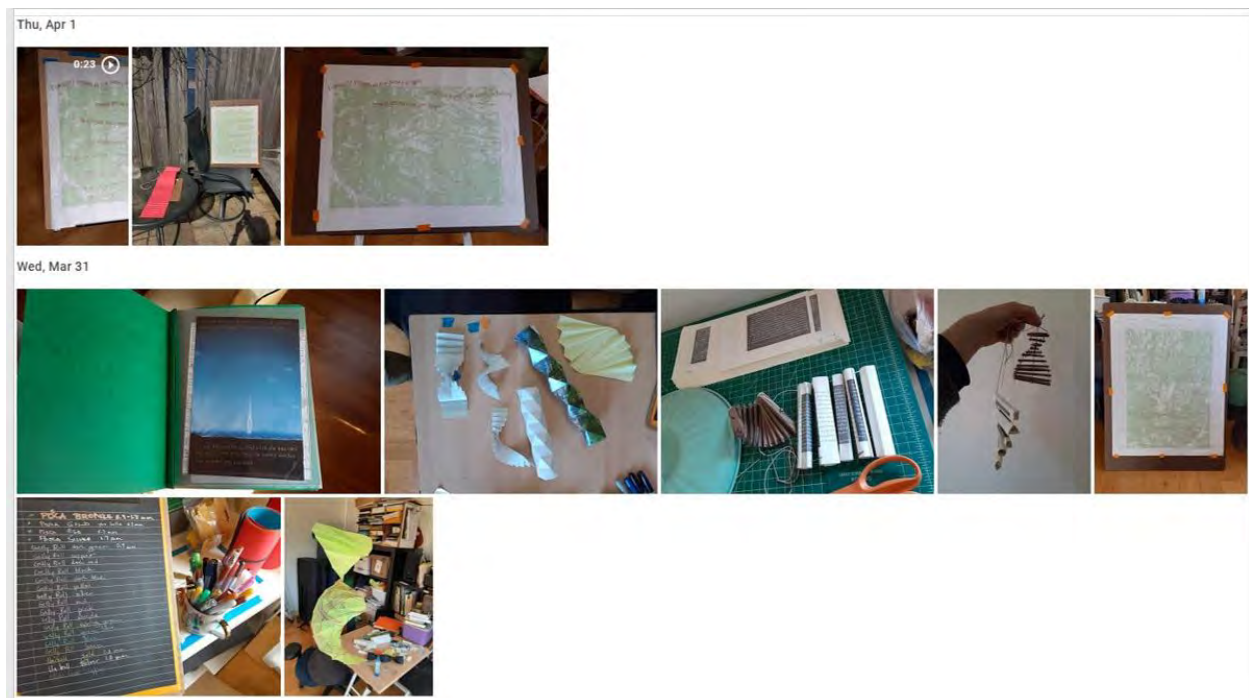
Meanwhile, I was still thinking about the structure of the helix and how to get more information in larger chunks because, on the original twisted paper form I used, you can only read a few lines at a time. This shape on the left is based on those wooden wood spinners that are often in people's yards or front porches. From there I realized I could make little accordions folded pieces that take up the same shape and volume, so they could fit in those slots, but I was having a hard time figuring out how to make that manageable because it just explodes.



I finally hit on this form, which is a series of boxes, the one on the left is actually made out of repurposed file folders. I liked the concept of that, but it isn't obvious enough visually for most people. I brought this to my midterm review, and the main feedback I got was that it's a nice structure but the double helix is also a very recognizable form, so what can I do to make it more mine and more interesting.



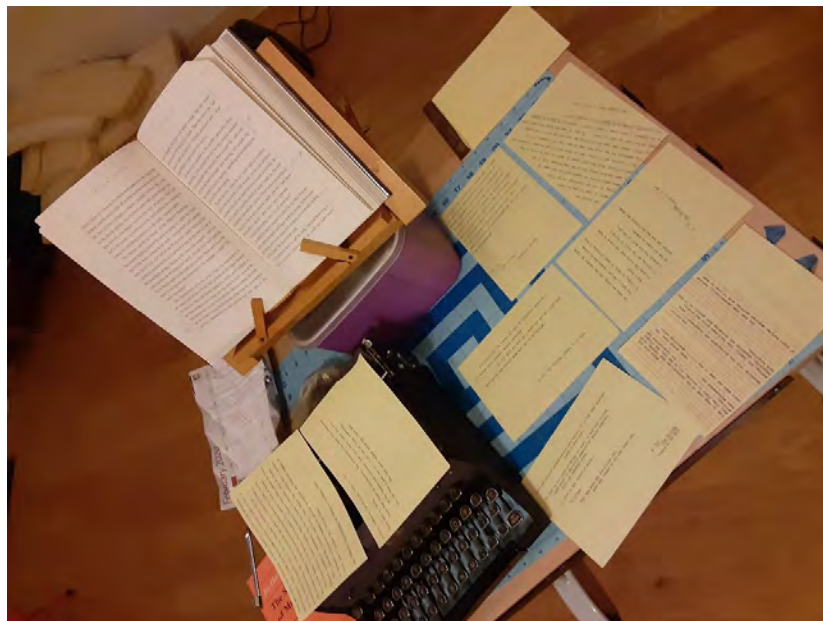
So that was something I continued to think about but meanwhile I went back to this practice of using other ways of applying text. This is an in process shot of using rubber alphabets stamps. It creates a really meditative experience for me, and this is a piece that wound up in in the final project that has a kind of transcendent quality for me. Part of that is in the very slow process of making it, which is not necessarily obvious in the end to the viewer.



I wanted to say also that about ad 85% of my process is reading, thinking, making connections,

A top-down view of various school supplies scattered on a light-colored wooden floor. The items include several colorful folders (blue, green, yellow, maroon, dark blue), a stack of white paper with a black clip, a clear plastic folder labeled "Report Covers", a box of Scotch tape, a box of Kwik-Stick glue sticks, a ruler, a stapler, and a small metal object.

I had some flat pieces that I made this semester that I was really happy with and didn't want to alter further, by folding or any other way. And a few of them were double-sided, so there's this challenge of how to simultaneously display and protect them. This brought me back to a project that I was working on in Abra's Artists Publications class last fall, which involved putting excerpts I had solicited from friends together into report binders. So I went to Scrap, and I went a little bit crazy in their office products section, but that was the key to a significant portion of what I'm going to show you today.





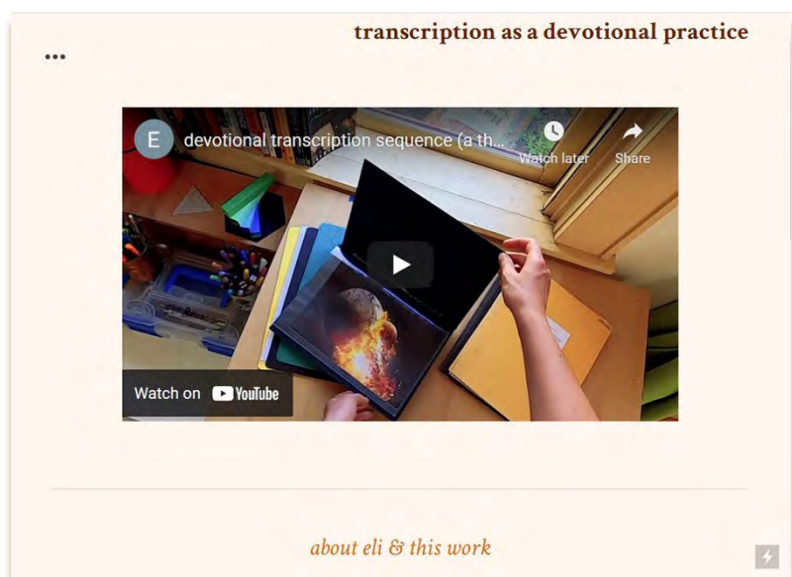
And that freed me up to focus on just one series of excerpts from one particular book that I decided to put in the box helix structure, which I wound up making out of actual library catalog cards from my old workplace that had been given back to the central supply room. So these last two photos bring us to the end of the slideshow portion of my presentation.

Website Building and Navigation

Now I'm going to switch over to the website I built to display the work as interactively as that virtual platform allows. Luckily I had also done quite a bit of coding, updating, and overhauling of in web stuff in the early 2000s, which made finessing this process a lot easier than it would have been otherwise.

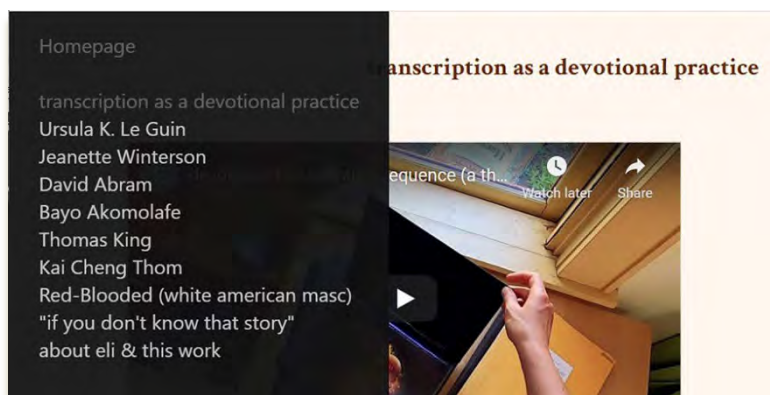
Here is a link to the website (elibrooke.cargo.site): [transcription as a devotional practice](https://elibrooke.cargo.site/transcription-as-a-devotional-practice)

In a minute I'm going to play this [first video](#) which is the centerpiece of the homepage, and acts as a sort of trailer for several of my pieces that are displayed in a similar way. I'll play it while I talk, and because of zoom and connection speeds and your devices, that might be a choppy experience for you as a viewer, so Rory will share the direct link to the video in the chat and you can watch it that way if you like, and then come back when I let you know it's

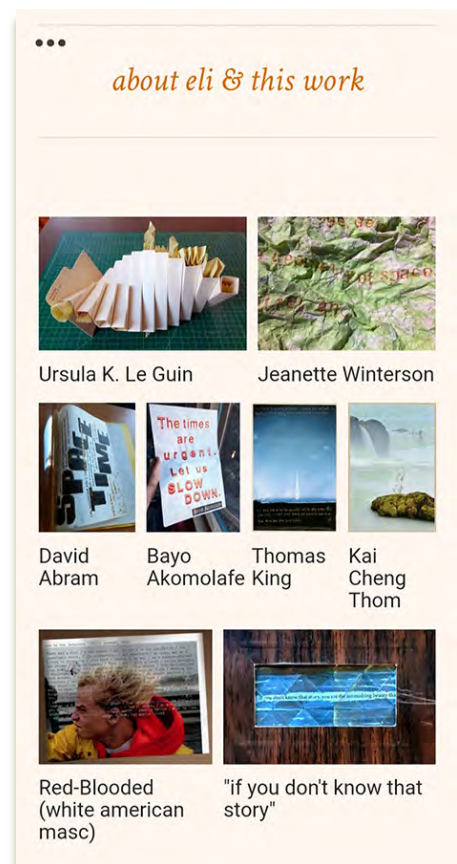


time, and I'll go on to how the rest of the documentation is laid out. While it's playing I want to talk briefly about how the website itself became a part of the work. I'll pause here for a bit for you to [open that video](#) and get it started.

The work I make is meant to be handled and examined, taken apart, reassembled, contemplated, returned to, but is also one of a kind. I don't make these things to sell, or to put in a gallery; I honestly do just make them for myself, but occasionally they turn into something that I see can be a bridge to a conversation. And that is when I want to share them, but I generally do that in a smaller, more direct way. So while a website can't replace the experience of actually touching, interacting with, and manipulating the work, it is quite useful as a way to make it accessible to more people over an indefinite period of time. There are videos of the more three-dimensional pieces, as well as stills and scans of each piece with text that is legible if zoomed in, whether on a phone or a bigger screen. I can't expect every viewer to take the time to read every word, but my intention with the work is to offer a cumulative meaning to emerge across and among the voices I've included, and to encourage people to research further into the writers and thinkers whose words I'm sharing, who have shaped my own worldview.



You should be coming to the end of the video now. I'm going to scroll down and talk a little bit about the fact that the website itself has become part of the work. I tried to make it as simple to navigate as possible, in that each of the main texts or projects has its own page, and there is a pull-down menu at the top left as well as image thumbnails for each project at the bottom of every page. It looks a little different on a phone than it does on a laptop, but in both cases the majority of images with text should zoom enough to be legible. So if we scroll down to the bottom now you see thumbnail links to each page, which are in most cases named for the person whose words I am incorporating into my own work. So we'll click on the link for the first project page, [Ursula K. Le Guin](#), to start.



And now I'll play this [video of me interacting with "The Telling \(helix\)"](#) while I'm talking about this first project; again come back when I signal and I'll continue showing you around the website.

Something that's really wonderful about book arts is that it inherently pushes back against the idea that you're not allowed to touch art. Books are generally meant to be handled and interacted with, but here I have morphed the idea of what a book is structurally to the point that people are more likely to see it as a sculpture, and you have to be given permission to touch sculptures in most contexts. So I have to give explicit instructions when showing this piece to someone in real life: PLEASE DO



touch the work, that is its purpose. Everyone I've shown it to in person has interacted with it very carefully, taking one page out at a time, paying attention to it like a piece of a puzzle, making sure they can put the pieces back exactly as they found them. And everybody starts at the front and goes methodically backwards, which makes sense for interacting with it the first time, making sure you don't miss anything and it all goes back where it came from. And I like that, because one of the things I want to do with this work is make people slow down and really take in the meaning of the text, which is what happens subconsciously for me at least when I slow down and interact with a material substrate in this really attentive and methodical way. The activity and the haptic engagement with it is a way to entice people to do that but really the point is the content, the language itself and the meaning it carries. The quotes of course have a specific meaning in the narrative of the book that is decontextualized when they are excerpted, and recontextualized as they interact in the overall piece. These quotes are nonlinear, they're not in a chronological order in the structure, and they don't retell the story of the novel. Depending on the choices the reader makes when interacting with them, they begin to tell a story that the reader infuses with their own experience and understanding. A lot of the quotes I chose because they spoke to me in a way that felt really personal; they resonate strongly with my own understanding and experience. So it became a way of using this other story to tell a part of my own story.

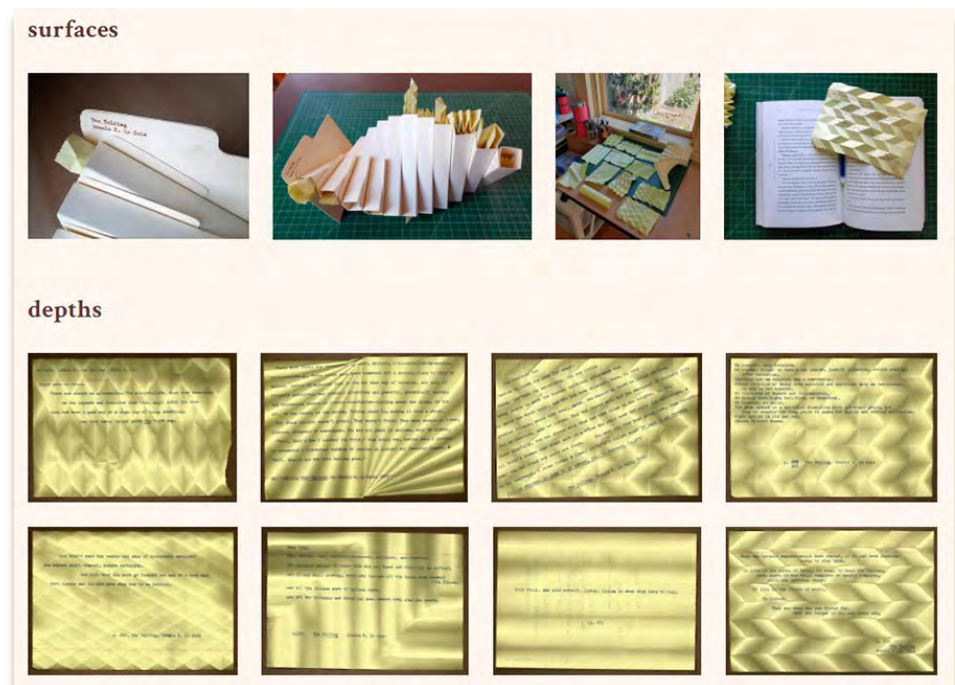


In this video I take the papers out more or less at random, and I lay them out around the structure. This was a way I could show it most fully in a time efficient way, because I am more familiar with the whole of it, and I am confident about playing with it more. The beauty of this structure is that you can take all these pieces out and move them around, see the connections both physically and conceptually, and put it back together in a way that makes sense to you. I've found myself putting them back in a specific order that makes sense, but it's more to do with the physical interaction of all the components than the story itself. And because I actually live with it, I can continually re-engage with it, reference it, forget about it, come back to it, and more and more layers of meaning emerge from and embed themselves into the

piece. So it has this potential to continue evolving, and this is the process by which it becomes a kind of sacred object. It can act as a kind of trailer for the novel and for Le Guin's work as a whole, but the real point is to show how her story has become part my own, and offering this experience to others as a way to think about how we are shaped by the stories we take in, and in turn shape the stories we tell ourselves and one another.

The video should be done by now, and if it's not that's okay, but please come back while I show you more of the website, and talk about how it became a part of the work. The "surfaces" section is a way to display aspects and potential ways of viewing this work through still photographs.

"Depths" includes legible scans of each excerpt in a way that really plays up the beautiful way that light and shadow interact with the folds. Even though people can't handle the pieces physically, this allows them to take time read the excerpts and look at how the light hits them in different



ways. It allows people to come back to any text that resonates with them. Again, I don't expect everyone to read every word, but some will.

Below the documentation for the helix on the same page is a separate section for "if it had been possible," a piece that I actually made first, from the same source text. I'm not going to show [the video](#) for this one right now, but you can watch it on your own time if you like. When I made it, I thought it would go in a helix, which is why I folded it into an accordion, but it became its own thing, very strong on its own, and so is displayed in this very different way. These are two of the quotes that are in the helix that are resonant to me as someone who identifies primarily as a reader, observer, and listener. They're about this lingering desire I have to do nothing but read, because stories are both an escape and a means to understanding, empathy, and meaning-making. To be able to read everything, or not even everything, but just all the things that *I'm* interested in, is of course not possible.

The substrate is section of a magazine page; it shows mountains in two very different color schemes on each side, with text applied by rubber alphabet stamps using metallic inks. Visually it connects more to the imagery and narrative of *The Telling*, the novel by Ursula K. Le Guin that I'm referencing. Spoiler alert: I'm going to give a short plot summary. The story is set on a planet where humans have evolved on one landmass with one overarching culture, which has developed this long history of storytelling, in which no story is more or less sacred than any other. Much of it has been written down at different times, but there are multiple written and oral versions, none of which is considered authoritative. A recent capitalist revolution, initiated by contact with humans from other planets, has resulted in the banning of this ancient system of understanding because it impedes so-called progress. In the course of the story, it is revealed that there is a vast library of these stories in book form that is hidden high up in some mountains. It becomes clear that books have always lived alongside an active oral storytelling practice, but stories are told and retold, and change over time and with context. While they describe "right" ways people have gone about doing things in the sense of staying in harmony with the larger world and living a meaningful life, at the same time they are never used to give a prescriptive or binary list of what is right or wrong. In essence, these stories aren't meant to be interpreted in a static way. They don't tell people what to do, but rather are a way to help people think about how to behave in any given situation they may encounter in ways that are life-giving. And this is really what I'm interested in, and want to communicate, but I'm attempting to do it by offering up these works and creators who are much more articulate than I am.



So that's a good segue to click over to the [Thomas King section](#). It starts with the piece "Once told..." and I'll read the quote to you, at the top it says "Once a story is told, it can't be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world." At the bottom, "So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told." This piece basically made itself. The substrate is a page from a National Geographic magazine; I couldn't have come up with such a perfect layout or juxtaposition on purpose if I tried. I actually wouldn't have thought of trying, but the imagery itself pulled that section of the text, which I'd been re-reading and transcribing in larger chunks, to the forefront of my mind.

Thomas King is of Cherokee and Greek descent, born in the US and a long-term resident of Canada. I was first introduced to his fiction book *Green Grass, Running Water*, which I love, in a Native American literature class in 1997, just before I dropped out of college the second time. (Just so we're clear, that's an example of correlation, not causation). It is his book of essays *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, published in 2000 that really helped me understand what about the worldviews I was given in my upbringing and education *didn't make sense*, and how harmful the purveyors of that worldview have been in doing their damndest to wipe out every other way of being human that they come across. Those are my ancestors, and this monoculture is the unwanted legacy I carry as a white midwestern american of exclusively european descent. As I re-read *The Truth About Stories* earlier this semester for the first time in several years, I realized how much King's work had crystallized my understanding, which had already been re-shaped by the time I first read it. There's a refrain at the end of each chapter of this book that inevitably chokes me up when I read it aloud, where King says, "Don't say you would have lived your life differently, if only you'd heard this story. You've heard it now." This very forthright call to letting your understanding be changed by learning from people whose experiences have been different from your own really underpins what I'm trying to do. I do not have the temperament of a front-line activist; I am often tongue-tied when trying to explain the nuances of my understanding even in low-stakes situations, but my work is a way I can offer something forward in an effort to get people, especially white american people like myself, on the same page. (pun intended)

Now I'm going to click over to [the section on Jeanette Winterson](#), whose work has also been hugely influential on me since my 20s. There is another [video](#) here that you can watch on your own time if you like. This first piece, "straightforward is not the geometry of space," was originally a flat map, and my intention was to fold it into this really intricate shape that involves precise 60-degree triangular folds, and I messed it up on the third row. I had just been looking through a book of folding techniques and seen a section on crumpling paper, and so I figured, what the hell, I can always find another map and start over. But as I worked with it, it turned into what looks like one of those molded plastic topographic maps, but because it's paper, and I crumple it up in a ball for storage, its topography is always changing, and never actually relates to what is depicted on the map. This very much relates to the larger excerpt which reads in part "the lines that smooth across the page, deceive. Straightforward is not the geometry of space." The text comes from Winterson's novella *Weight*, which is a retelling of the Greek myth of Atlas wherein he finally realizes that so many centuries have passed that the entire framework of the reality in which he was forced to accept this punishment has become an ancient myth, and

quantum physics has shown that reality is in many ways shaped by our interaction with it. And I'm sorry for the spoiler but in the end, Atlas is able to leave the world hanging in space on its own as he now understands it can do. So he is able to move into a future where he is free, without harming himself or anyone else. Once again, the idea is that changing your worldview allows for an entire shift in what you can imagine is possible, necessary, and meaningful for yourself as well as your engagement with the world.

So I'm going to show you one last piece, the last and biggest one of the pieces in a binder on the site, ["if you don't know that story"](#). It's a collection of transcriptions, drawings, and folded objects I made over the course of the semester that hadn't yet turned into something standalone, but which are all in conversation with each other in my mind. I'm able to use the format of a report binder with sheet protectors to create this temporary arrangement that is aesthetically interesting, using meaningful influences that are likely to eventually find their way into more standalone work. It's really meant to be temporary, to be something I can change going forward, but also by documenting it right now I can see a particular set of connections that I was making at this particular moment in time. Similarly, this website itself, with all of its content and supplemental links for further reading and research, is meant to be a temporary archive that can and will change over time. In fact it will very likely disappear at some point because I have to pay for it to stay available. So the ideas of evolution, temporality, and ephemerality are intrinsic in the materiality of the original pieces as well as in this way of sharing them in a less tangible but more widely accessible way.

One of the things that I have come to understand is that a huge part of what makes humans successful as a species is our need to seek patterns and create narratives around them, which work together to help us understand how to navigate the world(s) in which we find ourselves. With this work, I'm using texts that remind me of deeper truths that aren't part of the dominant story that I (and we all) have to navigate all the time. It's a way I've found to remind myself and others to remember that there are so many other ways of being human than domination, extraction, and control. This work is a way of taking notes and disseminating ideas for re-storying the world.

Bibliography

Abram, David. *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

In *Becoming Animal*, Abram explores the idea that consciousness is entirely dependent on the body, via the senses. Convincingly argues that the Western idea of the separation & supposed superiority of the human mind/soul is born out of a fear of the body. Invites humans back into experiencing the mystery of engagement with the larger consciousness of the living world perceivable through the senses.

———. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

In *Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram explores the fundamentally different orientation to the world in oral (animist - the entire world is conscious) v literate (humans are uniquely conscious) cultures. Presents the idea that this was due to the development of phonetic writing, which focuses the senses and attention we developed evolutionarily to be in conversation with the larger world, and made abstract thought and human isolation possible (often misinterpreted to mean that writing is bad, which he rejects, saying instead that writing is a kind of magic, and can be used in different ways).

Akomolafe, Bayo. *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences: Letters to My Daughter on Humanity's Search for Home*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2017.

I could listen to Akomolafe speak all day and never tire of it, but I had a heck of a time getting halfway through this book, and realistically I might never manage to finish. His deep, deep knowledge of Christianity, Western philosophy, colonial history, combine with a love of descriptive language in a way that gets overwhelming at times, but his thinking is pushing in directions that make sense to me, and I have followed his references to find the same. I included links to the following two websites on the page with “let us slow down;” they include his personal and collaborative work.

———. Bayo Akomolafe (personal website). <https://bayoakomolafe.net/>

———. Emergence Network (organization website). <http://www.emergencenetwork.org/>

Alliance for Wild Ethics. <https://wildethics.org/>

“The *Alliance for Wild Ethics (AWE)* is a consortium of individuals and organizations working to ease the spreading devastation of the animate earth through a rapid transformation of culture. We employ the arts, often in tandem with the natural sciences, to provoke deeply felt shifts in the human experience of nature. Motivated by a love for the more-than-human collective of life, and for human life as an integral part of that wider collective, we work to revitalize local, face-to-face community – and to integrate our communities perceptually, practically, and imaginatively into the earthly bioregions that surround and support them.” Director: David Abram.

Archibald, Jo-ann (Q’um Q’um Xiiem). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

I only got through the first two chapters of this book, which I checked out from PNCA’s library just before midterm review, but it is very much in conversation with Harjo, King, Silko, and Cajete – literally quoting them and coming after the majority of their works that I have engaged

most deeply with, making an argument for re-integrating oral storytelling and not discounting written storytelling when used in an oral way. Really pivotal in helping me understand the links between the overarching but separate and hyperlocal worldviews of the authors I'm working with who are Indigenous to this continent, as well as Le Guin and Winterson, two white authors whose work employs aspects of oral storytelling and a more fluid and holistic understanding of humans' place in the world.

Becoming Animal, directed by Emma Davie and Peter Mettler. (2018, Maximage / SDI Productions Ltd.), DVD / streaming. <https://www.becominganimalfilm.com/film>

Cajete, Gregory. *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Books, 2000.

A thorough presentation of the structural foundations of Indigenous knowledge ways, acknowledging the umbrella term is defined by differences based in a deep and hyper-local engagement with the non-human beings and environment within which each specific Indigenous culture is situated. The author is Tewa (Santa Clara Pueblo) and a Western-trained scientist and educator who. I checked this book out from PNCA's library in February, and was so taken with it I ordered my own copy within the week, despite that it was out of print and overpriced. It was "like new" when it arrived, but now no book in my personal library is more marked up. Cajete's way of focusing on Indigenous ways while acknowledging Western ways of knowing without giving undue energy to comparative analysis is a model for me in letting the beliefs I want to promote speak for themselves through the authors I've chosen. The concepts of a "packed symbol" and "remembering to remember" also resonated deeply with me. Excerpts from the conclusion to the first chapter are included in "if you don't know that story."

CBC Radio. "The 2003 CBC Massey Lectures, 'The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative.'" Nov 07, 2003. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870>

Audio files of Thomas King reading what became the book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, given for the CBC Massey Lecture in 2003. Included as a link on the "Once told..." piece on my website, a direct way to access the material for anyone who doesn't have immediate access to read the book and/or wants to hear King deliver the content in his own voice.

Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Incredible work of creative non-fiction that weaves together so many threads of lived experience in all of their messiness. I am particularly indebted to Clare's summarizing and rejection of the Western idea of the body/mind split in his introduction, "Writing a Mosaic."

Coffield, Michaela. <http://www.michaelacoffield.com/>

Creative influence. Graduated from OCAC shortly before I started attending, her work is text heavy, handmade, anti-fine art, incorporates aesthetics of early education.

Coltelli, Laura, ed. *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory, Interviews*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

Joy Harjo's poem "fire" was the first piece in an anthology of ecological writing by women that I was gifted at age 16; I began collecting her work soon after, and her writing and its direct channeling of her life experience and worldview as a contemporary Mvscogee woman influenced my understanding of the world more than I fully understood until a month or so ago. I was not

interacting with her work as part of my thesis except as a longterm influence, but a little after midterm review during my thesis semester, I pulled this book of her collected interviews off my shelf and noticed all the dog-eared pages, which turned out not to have any other markings, so I spent some time skimming. In the course of doing so, and noting the date of publication, I remembered I'd used it in a paper I had written for a Native American Literature class, one of the few I've kept from earlier attempts at college. Re-reading that piece of my own writing from 1997, literally half a lifetime ago, helped me remember how long I have been promoting the work of authors and thinkers whose words have shifted my own worldview. This was a catalyst to the direction my thesis took in the end. Excerpts from "Weaving Stories for Food: Interview with Donelle R. Ruwe" included in "if you don't know that story," evidence of how deeply her perspective and worldview shaped my own.

Curry, Arwen, dir. *The Worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin*, 2018. <https://www.pbs.org/video/worlds-of-ursula-k-le-guin-w1ddef/>

Also available on DVD, I was able to watch this documentary on the PBS website sometime in late 2020/early 2021 while it was briefly available to watch without a PBS membership. Made in conversation with the author over the course of 10 years, Curry's treatment shows how Le Guin's opinions changed and became more nuanced over time, and how she incorporated her own evolution of understanding into her work over time. I was particularly struck by an offhand comment in the film that her book *Always Coming Home* was set in the far future because otherwise it would have felt appropriative of Indigenous cultures of Northern California... which I have not had time to research more, but was a reason I was uncomfortable with it when I read it a decade or so ago, as there was no credit given to that influence. Thomas King writes about Le Guin's anthropologist/writer parents and their involvement with Ishi and other Indigenous individuals and groups who Le Guin has written about as having a personal influence on her... there is a tension there that could use more investigation. All in all, though, this film highlights something I really appreciate about Le Guin, in that she is a model of how to responsibly address the changes in her understanding of her own privilege and larger structural oppressions and clashes of worldview in the larger world over time, writing forward with honest and critical essays and adding nuance in her later novels rather than rewriting revisionist versions of her own work or history.

Dodge, Harry. *My Meteorite: Or, Without the Random There Can Be No New Thing*. New York: Penguin Books, 2020.

Memoir in non-linear format: all entries date-stamped but narrative weaves back and forth through time, gathering and looping together occurrences and coincidences. Dodge, who is transmasculine, considers himself a materialist, very invested in the experience of the body, but also has a whirling mind, and is becoming increasingly interested in artificial intelligence. Quotes from his engagement with the idea of transhumanism, ethics, and solidarity across difference wound up in my piece "if you don't know that story."

Grigely, Joseph. *Exhibition Prosthetics*. (Bedford Press, 2010).

Creative influence. Curation of personal ephemera, disability aesthetics, language / translation, incorporation of everyday materials at hand.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Mind-blowing, sometimes difficult to follow because she is pushing both ideas and language. Ideas about humans needing to reinvest in the living world and companion species in order to survive what we have done to the world. SF: speculative, scifi, scifact, etc. Chapter about Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia Butler was especially relevant in bringing me from proposal to finished thesis.

hooks, bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Washington Square Press, 2004.

Series of essays by Black feminist cultural critic whose work is both radical and popular in a way that often gets discredited as “self-help.” This book speaks directly to the way institutionalized gender roles are passed down within families and reinforced across racial divides, such that the dominate cultural practice of both “women” and “men” in families is to train “boys” that they have no right to their innate need to give and receive love, or process or express complex emotions beyond a very young age. While the language feels very binary and cis- and hetero-normative, I agree with her overall assessment and think this is a blind spot in our culture that really needs to be examined and addressed with a balance of both compassion and responsibility if we ever hope to grow up and stop sabotaging ourselves. Link to book and author website under “Red-Blooded (white american masc)”.

Igloria, Regin. <https://www.reginiglioria.net/>

Creative and personal influence. Creator of North Branch Projects where I got my start in book arts and community engagement volunteering for most of 2013. Really big on diverting materials from the waste stream and incorporating pre-produced aesthetics into his own work.

Isbara, Jiseon Lee. <https://www.jiseonleesbara.com/>

Creative influence. Fiber artist whose work recreates, references, and incorporates books, office / school supplies, and focuses on language and translation. Became interim president of OCAC just as I arrived and therefore inaccessible to me as a student, which was a big disappointment.

Jackson, Paul. *Folding Techniques for Designers: From Sheet to Form*. London: Lawrence King Publishing Ltd., 2011.

Basis of most folding techniques in “The Telling (helix)”. First encountered in Ryan Burghard’s Object / 3D foundational class at OCAC, and re-introduced to me by Sam Caruthers Knight who taught me to make the herringbone fold I explored over Winter break that led me away from the original twisted helix form I used in my proposal.

King, Thomas. *77 Fragments of a Familiar Ruin: Poems*. Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 2019.

———. *Green Grass, Running Water*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

———. Dead Dog Café (author website). <https://www.deaddogcafe.com/>

———. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

———. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Excerpts from *The Truth About Stories* are featured in “Once told...” and “if you don’t know that story,” that title has been the most influential of his books for me, but all of these contributed to my understanding as well. I only found out about his most recent published work, *77 Fragments of a Familiar Ruin: Poems* while researching him this semester, and ordered a copy. This poetry book reframes some of the same tales used in *The Truth About Stories* but in its fragmented brevity and repetition of the phrase “there is no hope” highlights the sarcasm and resigned bitterness that was always an undercurrent but seems to have settled into his assessment of whether his work has made any difference. I hope my own efforts can counteract that on some level.

Le Guin, Ursula. “The Carrier Bag of Fiction.” The Anarchist Library. 1986.

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ursula-k-le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction>

In this essay Le Guin puts the Hero’s Journey in its place as only one of many stories that are of human interest, and points out that there is a lot more to being human than killing and conquering, and if we want to evolve rather than wipe ourselves out and take everything on this planet with us, we’d best start telling those other stories and making them compelling.

———. *The Telling*. New York: Ace Books, 2000.

The basis for the most intricate piece in my thesis work, *The Telling* is the 7th and last of the novels in Le Guin’s Hainish Cycle, and allows her to incorporate influences of Indigenous-to-this-continent and Chinese/Taoist worldviews into a speculative narrative set in a world where humans evolved on one landmass with a single overarching culture that was unchanged for millennia until capitalism was brought through contact with humans from another planet, resulting in the suppression and outright banning of that ancient worldview and oppression of people who held onto it. Especially interesting to my project is the intersection of these ideas with those of Abram, King, Cajete, and others about the clash in worldviews between oral versus written cultures – Le Guin imagines a world in which they were able to coexist and inform one another without writing having the effect of taking humans out of the conversation with the larger world that I believe is the root of the problems we face at every scale.

Leonard, Keith. “Ode to the Unsayable.” *Ramshackle Ode*. Mariner Books, 2016.

Poem included in “Red-Blooded (white american masc)” as a way to help the viewer see what I was trying to highlight with the disturbing but remarkable found imagery of the piece and what happens when it is held up to the light. The poem is a reclaiming of the word “love” and its practice from its traumatic erasure in children perceived to be boys through the maladaptive, intergenerational, and institutionalized rituals of toxic masculinity in white American “culture.” I further excerpted Leonard’s phrases “when I did / lift” and “to a bath of light” in the same configuration they fell on the magazine page when I typed them to serve as a subtle instruction to the viewer to remove the piece from the folder and hold it to a light source, to see the superimposition of the imagery on the two sides and what it implies about how this particular intergenerational trauma, which as Resmaa Menakem would say “looks like culture,” is invisibilized and perpetuated by the people with the most power to end it. One of two projects in my thesis work not named for the author, because I have not been hugely influenced by his work generally. “Red-Blooded (white american masc)” aligns more with my readings on gendered and racialized trauma in the work of bell hooks and Resmaa Menakem, but Leonard’s poem haunted me from first reading, and helped me use the found imagery of “Red-Blooded” to speak to the

underlying trauma-as-culture problem of toxic white american masculinity without having to get into the weeds of explaining it.

McKegney, Sam. *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014.

I specifically quote from “Repairing the Circle: A Conversation with Tomson Highway” in the piece “if you don’t know that story,” but this entire group of 22 interviews gave me so much insight into how some First Nations leaders and communities have managed to hold on to traditional, expansive, non-hierarchical understandings of gender that remain within living memory despite the impact of intense cultural violence and trauma intended to wipe out those very understandings and the overall worldviews within which they emerged. These voices gave me hope that we can negotiate our understandings of gender and relationships differently going forward.

Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017.

Multi-degreed somatic therapist Menakem’s theory addresses how unresolved trauma on cultural and intergenerational levels have come to look like family or cultural traits, but are actually learned bodily triggers that we have to consciously work with as individuals and members of particular communities to make real progress. Link to book and author website under “Red-Blooded (white american masc).”

Parente, Maria Clara. “TIMES ARE URGENT, SO LET US SLOW DOWN - Bayo Akomolafe.” THIS IS NOT THE TRUTH, June 8, 2018. <https://youtu.be/bBVAYzBteIo>

Included on my website as a video link with “let us slow down,” this short, edited excerpt from an interview is titled with the catch phrase in almost every stand-alone video I’ve found of Akomolafe’s work, and does a good job of giving a quick introduction to the thoughtful and wide-ranging imaginary thinking behind it.

“Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto.” Indigenous Action Media, March 20, 2020. <https://www.indigenoussaction.org/rethinking-the-apocalypse-an-indigenous-anti-futurist-manifesto/>

Perhaps the single most resonant piece of writing I’ve ever read, in terms of my understanding of what has gone wrong with the reality we find ourselves in, and how best to resist and transform it. What we give our attention to, we give power to. Similar ideas are present in the quotes I pulled from Cajete, Harjo, Highway, and Silko in “if you don’t know that story.”

Robinson, Ricardo Iamuuri. *La’Vender Freddy*. <http://lavenderfreddy.com/>

Creative influence with whom I have been in conversation since the middle of Fall semester. In his current /ongoing performance and multimedia project, Robinson’s alter ego La’Vender Freddy promotes research, critical thinking, love, and vulnerability, while navigating both personal and cultural trauma and resilience. La’Vender Freddy allows the artist to employ trickster tactics of hiding in plain sight and leaning into conspiracy theory & performative madness in order to speak truth to power – or maybe behind its back.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller: with a New Introduction and Photographs*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012.

Excerpts from the introduction in “if you don’t know that story” include a reference to storytelling as cultural inheritance, and the idea that the Pueblo people understood themselves “part of an ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories” was a remarkable moment of synchronicity in linking to how I’m using DNA and the double helix as a symbol for storytelling. It reinforced my feeling of being on the right path, as I read it just after beginning to work on the box structure that became *The Telling (helix)*.

Terranova, Fabrizio. *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*. Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016.

This documentary of interviews with Donna Haraway in her home was the basis for the notes that became the text for “Recombinant DonNa harawAy,” my final project for Book Arts in Fall 2020 and the prototype for my thesis proposal. The interview portions are interwoven with slow close-ups of moments that focus on non-human beings or environments, where the audio is turned up. The interviews themselves seem straight forward at first but Terranova slowly introduces surreal elements, switching backgrounds and showing Haraway herself in other moments in the background, playing with the flow of time and notions of reality in a subtly transformative way.

Thom, Kai Cheng. “A School for Storytellers.” *I Hope We Choose Love: A Trans Girl's Notes from the End of the World*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019.

Excerpts from this essay are featured in the piece “story-listeners,” which point to and resonate with my experience with education over time and in art school specifically these last 3 years. Again and again, I have witnessed unresolved trauma in instructors who mean well become a source of further trauma in their students, forcing them to engage with, intellectualize, and/or make work about material that affects them on a deeply somatic level. Understanding what trauma is does not translate to trauma-informed practice, especially in liberal arts classes that center discussion of difficult topics. This problematic dynamic is difficult to address because of the nature of the institution, which operates in a hierarchical way and remains entrenched in Western notions of justice which involve blame and punishment rather than encourage healing for both instructor and student, and the taking of responsibility by all parties for continuous learning and change. I especially appreciated coming across this story from Thom, whom I have been following on social media because she is a multi-degreed therapist involved in individual trauma recovery and community transformative justice work, very much informed by her positionality as a Canadian transwoman of the Asian diaspora. I include links to her websites, listed below, on the page for “story-listeners.”

———. Kai Cheng Thom (author website). <https://kaichengthom.com/>

———. arise embodiment: somatic coaching, consulting & conflict resolution (website). <https://ariseembodiment.org/>

Vaughan-Lee, Emmanuel. “The Ecology of Perception: An Interview with David Abram.” *Emergence Magazine*, July 20, 2020. <https://emergencemagazine.org/interview/the-ecology-of-perception/>

Recorded early in the pandemic and published shortly after the murder of George Floyd and resultant uprisings last summer, this recent interview with David Abram references the content of both of his books which I have excerpted in “SPACETIME (unified field of phenomena)” and “if you don’t know that story,” grounding his philosophy and work in the fast-evolving consciousness of our current cultural moment. Both an audio recording and a full text transcript

are included in the link, which I included on the David Abram page on my site as an easy intro to his work.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Weight (The Myth of Atlas and Heracles)*. New York: Canongate, 2005.

The basis for two works in my thesis, unlike most of her earlier work, I never bought my own copy of this novella, but copied out a series of excerpts the first and only time I read it back in Chicago, and used them for a straightforward letterpress project at OCAC in Spring of 2019. Winterson's incantatory prose in concert with her characters and personal backstory have long held a strong personal resonance for me as a genderqueer person, which is not something that I really speak to directly in my thesis work. This novella directly engages with the concept of re-writing the story of one's trauma as a means to healing and moving beyond it in a way that is particularly strong. In re-reading the entire novella this semester I realized how perfectly it informed my own ideas about storytelling as a way to move into a different and more life-giving future. It also reminded me that Winterson's fascination with and inclusion of both mythology and quantum physics in her work generally was a strong formative influence on me that is also strongly present in Joy Harjo's work. I include a link to the biographical portion of her website below and on my own website as a resource for further understanding of why her work resonates so strongly with me as an individual. Interestingly, I am not a fan of her newest novel, *Frank Kiss Stein*, which is a side conversation for another moment, but the reason I chose not to use the main page (which currently promotes it) as the link on my own site.

———. Jeanette Winterson (author website). <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/about/>