

HOLDING A CONVERSATION WITH THE NARRATIVE

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Abstract

In the centre of my artistic practice is the need to communicate. Throughout my life, there has been a primal need for what I am expressing to be understood and valued. I desire to articulate a balance between conveying the personal with a larger need to communicate to the broader public as the personal connects with my audience.

In my thesis I describe how integral and important language is for respectful and mindful interactions with people we already know and people we do not yet know. The nuance of language consciously and unconsciously shapes how we respond to each other and how we relate within power dynamics. Many of the mechanisms that hold power-dynamics in place are reinforced by language. Ultimately, language reproduces and supports implementing and maintaining discrimination and subordination.

My practice engages with the process of surfacing repeated discriminations and closed-minded actions, both of which are often hidden and ordinary. The insidiousness of these kinds of actions sustains ongoing racism, sexism and overarching patriarchal standards that divide and categorize people into a value system. In raising an awareness around how we interact and speak with others, we are able to slowly and arduously dissolve these discriminations. The conversation becomes integral to changing the structures that are in place. This is the starting point for what we all can contribute to the value of humankind and how we can start to reconsider how we treat each other.

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Glossary of Terms

Care- the act of understanding someone else's needs, knowing they are different than yours and respecting that they are that way. It is important to know one's boundaries and to what capacity one can offer care. When applying care, one must be gentle and tender with your actions and it must be done with great consideration.

Collecting/Gathering- Artists are always described as people who collect objects for their art practice and production. I am a collector of moments. These moments are often overheard in public and demonstrate microaggressions and injustices that I can later use in projects. The moments do not leave me after I hear them, instead they are collected or gathered to be used in the undetermined future.

Conversation- The internal dialogue that happens when reading text-based work and the echo response that reverberates back and forth to and from your being. It is the dialogue that occurs inside. This type of conversation can also occur with reading a particular piece of writing that assists in transforming thoughts and ideas. This form of conversation may also influence concrete/literal conversations to happen.

Conversational Activism- I was at a residency in Zürich, Switzerland and was invited to a party at one of the studios. It was 2013 and the current topic at the circle I was sitting in was what they nicknamed Oprah-gate. I asked them what Oprah-gate was and Corinna, who is a fashion designer, turned to me and explained that a high-end shop refused to show Oprah an expensive handbag when she requested a closer look at it and that Oprah feel like she was denied access to shop as a regular person at the store. This saleswoman, who didn't recognize Oprah, was reacting to her based on her physical appearance. The headlines were commenting on how this was blatant racism so this was the core of the debate that was discussed this evening. One of the guys at the party was spouting out exasperatedly about Oprah, "Who does she think she is? Why would she get offended by that? Just because she has money she thinks she can do anything she wants!?" The Saleswoman was helping her save money." Someone else said, "Well a good salesperson would have tried to sell the most expensive bag no matter what". *The subtext was that any woman who was not a woman of colour might have been treated like a regular customer. After all, how could a black woman afford the expensive handbag in a French clothing boutique in Switzerland?* We continued to discuss the topic and it boiled down to who is allowed access to be somewhere or denied access. I asked the same guy if there was ever a time that he wasn't allowed into a place and he easily replied to me, "Yes, I wasn't allowed in a night club because of the shoes I was wearing." I responded back to him, "The difference is that you can change your shoes".

Discomfort- An internal shift and uneasiness when a particular view is being challenged. The state of discomfort isn't what most people want to attain for fear that their minds will change. Discomfort is important for transformation to occur.

Holding the conversation- The act of being present in the conversation and being able to hold the energy and experience of the conversation and to engage fully within it. Holding a conversation may also express maintaining a position or idea, but also being flexible in adapting to the changing conditions of the path the conversation takes along with how the mind might change and adapt within the conversation.

Humour- Humour is the expression that comedians rely on as their language specialty. The most profound comedians can take the darkness that we encounter and source from the world and make the humour a medium to the message. They are able to make the darkness more palatable for the common human to be able to digest.

Narrative- mid 15 c., narrative, "biographical historical," from Late Latin *narrativus* "suited to narration," from *narrat-* stem of *narrare* "to tell, relate, recount, explain". Narrative encapsulates the story but it is also interwoven throughout our histories and helps to intersect moments and create memories. Not all memories are recalled as they were. In my practice, Narrative is influenced greatly by whomever is telling the story, whomever has power, and in turn, can impact how history is written and interpreted. Narrative can also be used indirectly in helping to transform closed mindsets and in educating people on difficult topics.

Recite- early 15 c. Old French *reciter*. Read aloud, read out, repeat from memory, declaim, "from re- "back again" = *citare* "to summon". This act of summoning or summoning back again is integral to reaffirming a particular position.

Surfacing- Surfacing allows for what is already existing under the surface to rise above the layer that is hiding it. Surfacing often reveals the darker underbelly of any given idea or subject. Surfacing also states what is already there by plainly describing facts. This allows what is surfaced to be more clearly observed.

The Poet- A person who observes and witnesses the codes and sees the symbols and signs which later become stories that reflect history. The Poet is able to concisely articulate the state of the world and often does so with eloquent imagery and language. Artists also have the ability to do this and often use purely symbols. A synergy between the artist and the poet can conjure both strengths.

Witness- I noticed a woman of colour who was tending to her job at the car park. Suddenly a taller man came driving up in his car and proceeded to park in a location that he was not allowed to take up. The woman went up to him to ask him to move his car. She was much shorter and more petite as she approached him. The man started by telling the woman he wouldn't be there for long. When she repeated that he still couldn't park there, he started to get louder and developed a more offending posture. I watched and stood there as I had nowhere I needed to be at that moment. I chose to stand there witnessing this evolving aggressive behaviour in a manner as to ensure the woman was safe. The man proceeded to get more and more upset and red in the face, but out of the corner of his eye started to notice that I was plainly watching the incident unfold. He kept looking over while I stood there witnessing. There was that quiet moment when he retreated his aggression while he realized, I was standing there and I was not leaving. He got back in his car and sped off aggressively. The woman didn't notice anything in particular but her body language displayed relief that the man had finally left. She went back to her job, sweeping up trash at the car park and I walked away.

Preface

I started out on the journey of my graduate work with unsteady legs. As my artwork became personal throughout the process, I also recognized how many particular instances of injustices I had witnessed and observed throughout my life. As a child, I had a sense of when people were treated differently and had a curiosity about why they were treated that way. I was able to watch this from a relative distance as it was rarely directed towards me. However, this distance didn't shield me nor keep me from experiencing some of the feelings indirectly. I just walked a parallel pathway, which afforded me a sense of safety in my actions and responses against injustices.

The pathway of witnessing comes with its own difficulties: What does one do with the experiences one has observed? Journaling facilitated moving some of these experiences to outside my body and psyche. After writing about what I observed, most parts of my journals became poetry (at least the key moments did). I collected many moments and then made intuitive decisions about which ones to shape into a short story or poems. Often it felt as if the moments chose me to write about them instead of the other way around. I went to school to pursue a visual arts career and during that time I mostly wrote poetry alongside my art practice. I felt it was the most direct way to carry emotions into words that still contained the original emotions that had been felt.

Upon deciding to begin the journey of a masters of visual arts, I made a clear decision to attempt to fuse my visual arts and writing practices, but I had no idea I would tackle the

difficult themes of race and gender. I was hesitant in handling both of these topics, but the topic of race was particularly uncomfortable. While I am of mixed background, I had always passed as white and felt I had not experienced racism at all. In comparison, I had lived all of my life with gender inequality. I had been repeatedly mistreated because of my gender long before I was even considered to be racialized.

During the last portion of my master's program, in March 2020, Vancouver, BC, where I reside, went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Leading up to this shut down, there were many other countries that had already been in lockdown and the spread of the virus seems to have claimed arrival to Western Canada much later than in other parts of the world seemingly due to luck and geography. It took longer for the outbreak to reach Vancouver. At this time, in the United States of America, there were messages from their President totally denying of the dangers of this strain of flu and pushing to keep the economy open. The impact of the virus on the health care system and of its contagiousness and danger to the people were ultimately being dismissed. In contrast, Canada's Prime Minister initiated lockdown and social distancing and much of our country actively contributed to our country's safety.

During this time, racist actions started occurring in public spaces based on the initial blame of the virus' origin of China. The American president made a derogatory joke calling the virus "Kung-Flu" and thus targeting and pointing the blame on China and the Asian demographic. There was a surge of targeted aggression towards Asian people in many countries. A Canadian friend of mine who is visibly Asian explained to me that she carried

around a 'rape whistle' because she was concerned she would be a visual target of the violence that was perpetuated from this blame. I decided to research the closest and most similar pandemic to COVID-19 which was the Spanish Flu to try and understand what this time period had potential to be. I discovered the Spanish Flu was not named after its origin location, which was sourced to be in the state of Kansas in the USA. The reason for the naming of the 1918 Influenza pandemic the Spanish Flu was because Spain was neutral during the First World War and could report about it. The label stuck within history with very few people understanding the origin of the name. It is interesting how much ignorance naming something can provide.

As COVID-19 continued, I felt fortunate to live in Canada where we had social support for people who were not able to work during this time. The United States of America had a contrary experience as many people suffered economic hardships and job loss without any social support in place. Within the States, people of colour were already divided by class and the ripple effect of COVID-19 contributed to further this divide.

On May 25th 2020, in Minnesota Minneapolis, USA, a defenseless black man named George Floyd was murdered by police officers. This incident was recorded and was accessible to anyone to witness. It has since been called a public lynching. The stage was set to ignite a much broader support of the Black Lives Matters movement protesting systemic violence against Black people. There is a mass awareness and movement of the underlying issues at hand and yet, there is so much to address.

We are in the midst of this.

It is not resolved.

How do we discuss topics like racism and sexism with thoughtfulness and with being informed, alongside the uncited histories and the trauma that accompanies it? The challenges that I am aware of is how I might address these issues with the care and mindfulness of how I use language. The topics of racism and sexism themselves, request their own level of sensitivity and engagement in discussing their histories. There are still horrific injustices and violence directed towards people of colour and women. In this present time, in this time of a global pandemic, there is a history that is being created with an unknown resolution. The unsteady legs I began with are standing on unsteady footing of the current world. Even though the work I am producing is personal in nature, I can't stop thinking about how many other personal histories are existing at the present moment and how many of them will continue in silence and how many of those voices will be heard.

Language and Power

Language is gray. Language has the ability to take many forms, it can hold a variety of expressions and be used to coerce and influence. The way that people use language can express hidden meanings or be direct and explicit. American philosopher Judith Butler highlights the power that language has in her opening paragraph of “Excitable Speech: On Linguistic Vulnerability.” “ We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the object of its injurious trajectory.... Could language injure us if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings who require language in order to be”(1)? We constantly use language, but how aware are we of its inherent power to affect others? In my artistic practice, I am exploring how Art can facilitate an intervention in relation to the language of discrimination and power. Through an amplification of specific language, I am engaging the viewer so that a transformation can occur by challenging and shifting their perspective. The act of conversation can greatly influence the transformation of a narrative that is caught in a holding pattern. The conversation can encourage negotiation of closed mindsets and allow the narrative to be more mutable. My artistic practice is inspired by reflecting on and examining my own and others’ personal experiences as catalysts for exploring larger social issues. In this way, the personal narrative is presented and enriches the visual within the artwork. I am curious about how the verbal/written word can amplify and impact the visual. Through viewing particular text, the audience engages with the words that are being used, and ultimately their own position is confronted by use of the verbal (use of text) and non-verbal (use of visual).

The inspiration for my work is derived from encountering and observing the long-term, ongoing problems that power dynamics present. French philosopher, Michel Foucault notes that power dynamics derive from action upon action that causes harm and is not based on consent; it is intrinsic to our social make-up. Foucault argues in his article *The Subject and Power* (1982), "...power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus...to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon action is possible and in fact ongoing" (791). These power dynamics are present in the mundane and regular aspects of everyday living and are often dismissed or are not clearly observed for what they plainly are. Many of these problems exist without easily accessible answers or solutions and so they have to be resolved through multiple engagements on a continuum. This continuum is where all forms of power dynamics have existed from the past to the present and will continue into the future. Foucault describes them as transversal struggles. They are not restricted to one location and not confined to a particular ideology. They exist intersecting at all points of time.

My text-based artwork activates an implied conversation that pushes against dominant narratives and power structures. The pre-existing transversal struggles provide a lens to view and engage with the text. The viewer reads the text and then responds to the text internally as if in a conversation. Through this strategy, I aim for the artwork to activate more than one conversation: the conversation between the aggressor and sufferer; the conversation between any viewer with the implied aggressor and the implied sufferer; the conversation between a viewer who has been an aggressor with the artwork and in turn, with themselves; the conversation between the sufferer with the artwork and in turn, with

themselves; the conversation between others who have suffered similar things with the artwork and with other aggressors. These conversations extend beyond the audience and the artwork into imagined conversations between the audience and the world around them.

Throughout my everyday life, I notice how people talk to each other and how topics of racism and sexism are either concealed or explicit and that both ways of expression are often accepted, excused or dismissed. The overall effect is that this largely accepted dismissal of insidious behaviour allows for the continuity of this discrimination to maintain its status. Through the process of highlighting the hidden forms of discrimination and bringing them to the surface, I hope to allow others to engage with the work and observe how they might be complicit within power inequality. Foucault suggests that power itself and the maintenance of power is concealed, while the character of power keeps secret and wears disguises, which allows it more agency to assert more power. Foucault states, "...one must seek the character proper to power relations in the violence which must have been its primitive form, its permanent secret, and its last resource, that which in the final analysis as its real nature when it is forced to throw aside its mask and to show itself for what it really is" (789). The act of disclosing the mask that hides power is revealed in my series, "*When...Then...*". I am surfacing phrases that are commonplace within male/female power dynamics. These phrases are of consequence to each other. 'When' this happened... 'then' this happened. Language is repeatedly used to promote closed-minded structures both intentionally and unintentionally. What exists are the power dynamics that are used in language and how we communicate or how we do not communicate or how we refuse to

communicate as well as how it is certain people who get left out of the conversation. In Sarah Ahmed's book "Living a Feminist Life," she points out the imbalance of who is excluded by acknowledging that people of colour and women are the ones who are most pushed out. Ahmed writes, "Feminist and antiracist consciousness involves not just finding the words; but through the words, how they point, realizing how violence is directed: violence is directed toward some bodies more than others" (35). The use of words activates a particular level of aggression towards particular types of people. Repressive power dynamics, which are already deeply embedded within society, are preserved by a continued and repetitive use of particular language and acting behaviours that support closed-minded thinking and cultural categorizations. This system is continually reproduced and repeated through maintaining the familiar by those who are in power positions. Those in power instill and reproduce the familiar systems that they want to keep as the status quo.

Ahmed states:

"Sexism and racism as citation practices are also a catering system; justified as a form of reassurance, a way of keeping things familiar for those who want to conserve the familiar. They are a way of keeping acquaintance, a friendship network, a kinship network, something that white men do on behalf of other white men, to reassure them that the system they reproduce themselves will be reproduced" (Ahmed152-153).

The act of keeping white men in leadership roles who help other white men into similar positions, the derogatory joke that is repeated and passed on as a way of making sure the

joke continues to do harm, and the action of reiterating certain phrases that reinforce stereotypes, are all ways to keep cultural and stereotypical bias and hierarchy in formation. They also prevent social change from occurring. Judith Butler in her essay “Excitable Speech” describes how language has the agency to cause damage and is rooted from past injury: “As an invocation, hate speech is an act that recalls prior acts, requiring a future repetition to endure” (20). An invocation is repeated and spoken from a place of power to take over another. Hate speech derives from seeds planted in the past that are continually nurtured in the present and unfortunately can continue strongly into the future. This repetition furthers racist and sexist mind-frames and does not view a person as an individual with human with equal rights, freedoms and perspectives. Instead it keeps them in a repressive cycle of subjugation. Butler states, “Speech does not merely reflect a relation of social domination; speech enacts domination, becoming the vehicle through which that social structure is reinstated” (18). Language that takes the role of disconnecting people from each other perpetuates hatred. This disconnection contributes to the creation of an ‘other’ and of people actively participating in separating these people due to difference.

A major entry point in my practice involves listening to language used in public spheres or engaging in conversations with a range of people. These contribute to the genesis of my work. Much of what I am compiling are collections of phrases and tonality around language usage. The act of listening supports the voices beyond my own in order to access a more universal range. Essayist and poet, Claudia Rankine employs similar devices within her writing practice. As I am focusing on how text and poetry functions within my art practice,

Rankine's form of lyric essay was influential to my artistic practice that developed throughout my master's work.

In her book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Rankine created a compilation of prose poetry, artwork and easily cited historical references to expose both microaggressions and structural racism within America. Rankine uses listening as a method to collect examples from black friends and acquaintances that provide everyday narrative that would otherwise not be told¹. Rankine explains that *Citizen: An American Lyric* is written in a second person so that it opens up the writing and becomes a collective experience. She explains in an interview, "There's no private world that doesn't include the dynamics of the political and social world. When I am working privately, my process includes a sense of what is happening in the world." Her sensibility of listening and collecting particular phrases and texts are a similar method of collecting that I encounter when confronted with a situation that moves me. I have a collection of moments and narrative that span my life. Rankine states, "When a moment enters me that profoundly, I know I can wait to write because I'll forever be in dialogue with the moment. That part of the process I don't interfere with. I will be surprised and ready to begin when her voice makes its way into a piece." In this way, by transforming and disclosing everyday verbal discriminations into

¹ Rankine states in an interview: "...we know about structural racism. We understand how it goes top-down, institutionally, structurally. But when you understand that it's coming from your friends, your so-called friends, and it's coming from your colleagues, and it's so unmarked—so the writing of *Citizen* was really a project in how do you get language to mark the unmarked? ... The examples in *Citizen* aren't (mine)— some of them are mine, but for the most part, they're not mine, intentionally, because I didn't want people to say, "You should get new friends." [laughs] Or, "You should make better choices with who you hang out with." So, I called other friends who are, for the most part, African-American and said, "Can you tell me some ordinary thing that you were doing, and then somebody in your life said or did something to make you realize, in their eyes, you are no-one?"

something material and visual, they are made explicit and more accessible to others. This will either engage people in a conversation or confront people to consider their own bias.

At a more concise level in my work, by taking the private or hidden discrimination and exposing it to the public, the artwork elicits a conversation-like engagement that invites the audience to reconsider their perspective. This response may not have an immediate effect as it challenges and chips away at the transversal struggles; however, it can challenge the viewer and create a discomfort that could contribute toward later change which ultimately can have a more lasting impact.

Language of Discomfort

In *Two Sentence Stories- a nod to Jenny Holzer*, I displayed two LED screens scrolling side-by-side sentences in repeat. Use of commercial screens was a foundational method that Holzer became known for and that she used throughout her artist career. It fed the audience a quick consumption of words by media format and relayed messages succinctly. Her series *Truisms 1978-87* are a series of statements involving big ideas distilled into easily palatable phrases that hold more intention and meaning than they seem. She wanted these messages to appear like they had no particular source, even though she did author all of them.

She composed her language to reflect the kinds of grandiose language used by world leaders and philosophers. One of Holzer's ground-breaking artwork from *Truisms 1978-87* was displayed on an advertising building in Times Square that states: *ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE*. Holzer amplifies text in a blatant manner, yet the works are full of nuance and insight. In response, I created two text-based artworks on LED signs that I titled *Two-Sentence Stories*. I wanted this particular work to say as much as possible in a more minimalistic and simplistic format, similar to both Holzer's work as well as my background in poetry. The coherence of the text itself allowed the message to be easily palatable for the viewer and the complexity of the message and content created challenges that the viewer had to grapple with. The series was also the first time I used LED screens

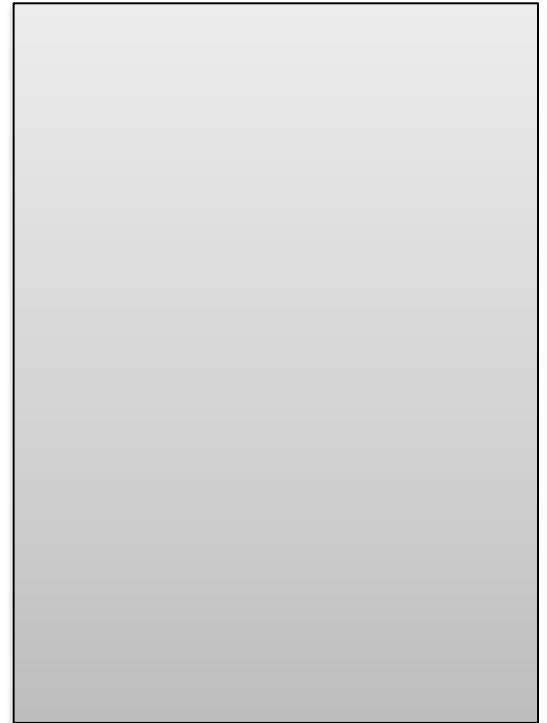


Figure 1. Jenny Holzer, *Truisms* (1978-1987) Times Square New York. Figure removed due to copyright restrictions. Image can be viewed at: <https://canadianart.ca/essays/dirty-words-no/>

and purely worked in text. In working with the scrolling LED signs, I was able to adjust the size of the text and the speed to be simultaneously engaging and agitating to the viewer. The text also loops, allowing it to be easily consumed while it portrays the repetitive nature of discrimination.

The first of the *Two-Sentence Stories* is titled *Assumption* and it displayed the sentences :

“The Asian woman was their nanny... The woman was their mother.”



Figure 2. *Assumption*, LED lights on video screen 2018

<https://vimeo.com/436531290>

The dialogue that happens between these two sentences asks the viewer about their own potential for discrimination. It confronts them and simply asks them where they are situated within the statements. Which of the sentences are true? What assumptions do we automatically bring to the narrative? The word ‘Asian’ can be retrieved from the viewer’s assumption of a common racial category for a nanny. However, as much as the woman could be their caretaker, she could simply be their mother. There were two sources that inspired this work. One source is growing up with a mother who is of Asian background and witnessing how often people would ask if my sisters and I were her children. This happened particularly when we went across the border to the United States. My mom later explained to me that she always felt like the border guards would look at her and then look at us as if we were being kidnapped by her because her role was in question. The other source for this art piece is an incident

where BBC journalist Robert Kelly in 2017 was reporting in his home when both of his children entered and interrupted the broadcast. His wife promptly came in and pulled the children out of the room. Immediately afterwards, there were multiple reports in the news and headlines that said, “Nanny Saves the Day”, as his wife was of Asian background, and was assumed to be the nanny. These experiences in my childhood as well as the news report were the source for creating this work. The audience becomes participatory in their engagement with the artwork and then are invited to examine their own perspective in relation to the Two-Sentences story.

The alternate artwork in *Two-Sentence Story* is entitled *Dismissal* and again displays two sentences: “Boys will be boys... He is a good guy, he wouldn’t do that.” By placing the two congruent phrases side by side, their proximity reinforces and amplifies the dismissiveness that exists daily. This is intended to trouble the viewer in how they have either used or ignored these phrases, or have been complicit in encouraging particular behaviour by



dismissing it. The statement of “Boys will be Boys” is commonly used as well as “He’s just being a boy”, as if gender is an excuse for unacceptable and sometimes aggressive or violent behaviour.

Figure 3. *Dismissal*, LED lights on video screen, 2018.

<https://vimeo.com/436531343>

As Ahmed states about dismissive language, “When these words are dismissed, we are witnessing a defence of the status quo: it is a way of saying, there is nothing wrong with this; what is wrong is the judgment that there is something wrong with this” (157).

Language is a primary source experienced and collected throughout my life and used in ongoing projects. In the final year of my Bachelor of Fine Arts, we had a professor who was encouraged to take a sabbatical and there was rumour that he had pursued and possibly dated a few younger students within the program. This year he was back as one of our teachers. Many of the males in my program would regularly defend this professor. When the topic came up around his interactions with the female students, I remember a few of them had proclaimed, “He’s a good guy, he wouldn’t do that!” This was one of the first times that I felt this large divide between myself and this group of males who I considered my friends and colleagues. This professor displayed behaviour that made myself and other women uncomfortable. He was requiring his students to have private meetings in his office, to which a few of the women in the program were saying that they would only go if it was required for them to pass, and only if he kept the door open. One day we had studio visits and he came by to see what we had been working on. He came into my studio and we briefly talked about my artwork before he turned to me and said, “I really like what you have been doing with your hair lately.” That made me realize how his behaviour that was being dismissed by the others was also emerging through explicit things like talking to me about my hair during my individual critique. I was really upset and I didn’t know what to do, so I avoided him as much as I could. Our final critiques were coming up and I displayed some drawings that I had worked hard on. It was a series of empowered female figures.

During critique, he said in front of the class that my work was unoriginal and he felt that I hadn't really explored anything meaningful. Despite the comment, I kept the work and it wasn't until twelve years later when I was hesitantly showing the series that an artist friend of mine whom I deeply respect exclaimed, "Wow, this work is so beautiful and powerful, you need to show this work." This comment transformed the sexism I felt from the professor into validation as an artist based on equality and support.

The greatest importance of the *Two-Sentence Story* series is that it initiated my focus on text-based artwork. It also presented the two majorly recurring themes of race and gender in my work. These are two thematic perspectives that have shaped my life and have deeply influenced my trajectory and direction.

Language of Alterity

My position of not having a fixed identity of either Asian or Caucasian allows for me to have multiple identities (as I physically, culturally and personally do), whereas my mom is still dealing with the one visual identity that is repeatedly placed upon her by those in her community. After marrying my father, my mom moved to the small farming town where my dad grew up. Throughout my childhood and up until the present, I witnessed my mom being given gifts by some of her close friends. These gifts were thematically Asian-style and although they were offered in kindness, they unconsciously expressed to her that she is and always will be a visible minority in the community. Throughout the time she was given these objects, her emotional responses ranged from appreciation to agitation. My mother understands that the objects portray cultural stereotyping and she has no need or want for these objects that people find at thrift stores and second-hand shops. She does not know how to deny her friends the giving of these gifts and has simply kept the gifts out of obligation. The title of the work, *Objects given to my mom because she is Asian*, additionally enacts the right to opacity.² The objects exist in an unclear cultural locale which challenges the viewer into not knowing what specific cultural background my mom is akin to.

Witnessing all of this while growing up made me recognize the trouble with these polarities

² Transcultural English Studies website describes French Philosopher and Literary critic, Edouard Glissant's concept of Opacity: The "right to opacity" (le droit à l'opacité) constitutes an important part of Glissant's poetics of relation. As an antonym of transparency, this notion questions the possibilities of intercultural communication. In a multi-relational world, recognizing difference does not mean understanding otherness by making it transparent, but accepting the unintelligibility, impenetrability and confusion that often characterizes cross-cultural communication. Opacity thus tried to overcome the risk of reducing, normalizing and even assimilating the singularities of cultural differences by comprehension.

and that with a mixed-race background, I was positioned somewhere in the middle and in fact embody a form of opacity. By not being accepted on either side, I also have the privilege of being able to move between them as well. I was never burdened in the same way my mother was by any racial profiling or stereotyping because I am not easily identifiable as Asian. My mother was stuck with what to do with all of the gifts. Had she donated them to the thrift store, it would have exposed to others in the small community that she didn't want them, or the object may have made its way back to her overtime. There was the constant unconscious oppression in keeping the unwanted gifts, the repeated reminder that she was, in fact, visually and presumably culturally different than the white people who gave her the gifts. Once I asked my mom to send me the objects, she felt no



Figure 4. *Objects given to my mom because she is Asian*, c-print, 104" x 40", and collection of objects in vitrine, 2019

qualms about letting these objects go. In fact, she communicated that it was a relief to give them up. She would no longer be confronted with these objects that reminded her that she was of Asian background within a predominantly Anglo community.

Objects given to my mom because she is Asian, was exhibited at the Emily Carr Interim Graduate Exhibition in July 2019. In this installation, I exposed the objects that people gifted to my mother

from 1970 to present day. These objects were presented in a large-scale photograph showcasing a display of objects. Beside the photograph was a vitrine holding the actual objects placed on the floor both haphazardly and carefully. The installation of this work came with its own set of difficulties, as I had originally wanted to present them as they were: objects on a table. The main obstacle was that I was unable to display the objects at the University gallery because the organisers were concerned that the objects would get stolen and because they could not have someone to sit the gallery and watch them. My solution became producing a large-scale photograph of the objects. Prior to the exhibition, I requested that my mom send me any objects that were gifted to her that fit the criteria of my project. In response, my mom sent me a photo of the objects arranged in a display so I could take a visual inventory of them before proceeding with the project. The arrangement of the objects in my final photograph is a restaging of this photograph. The manner in which they were displayed expressed the objects having some value and yet evidently there was an equal distaste for them. This indirectly expressed my mom's sentiment. I wanted to keep this exact affect, transferring the relationship my mom had with the objects onto the final work. This arrangement was what I recreated in the large-scale photograph of the objects, while squishing the actual objects into a smaller vitrine on the floor beside the photograph. The objects themselves convey the complexity and layers of the racial gifting.

Race is a complicated theme for me as someone who passes as white. I recognized my own racial 'passing' after reading Adrian Piper's "Passing for White, Passing for Black (1991)" which was incredibly influential in my exploration of topics about otherness and alterity.

My subject position comes from complicated roots. I am working from a position that stands at multiple intersections. I have passed as white my entire life and I hold an Anglo-Saxon last name originating somewhere in Sweden. After my Grandfather moved to Canada, the name was smoothed out, letters were added and it was made even more ambiguously white. I am constantly in the dichotomy of both passing and not passing; I am not included in any particular location or cultural group, and therefore constantly residing at the crossroads. When my mixed identity is revealed, it then becomes the focus for some people. This has been something that is uncomfortable for me to discuss as a topic as I do not want to be seen in only one way and only as my non-white background. The exploration of this theme in my artwork is personal, but it exposes the greater theme of unintentional racism or hidden racism. This is congruent to Adrian Piper's artwork. She challenges people's views on what race means to them and how they can be complicit in racism.

Piper's ongoing Art performance, *My Calling (Card) # 1 (Reactive Guerilla Performance for Dinner and Cocktail Parties) 1986-present*, explicitly engages with this type of hidden racism. Piper takes these cards to parties and give them out when there was a moment where racism was exercised in front of her. Her appearance is lighter skinned and she often passes as white, which in itself challenges people when they cannot clearly identify her racial background. In his article, "On Racial Etiquette: Adrian Piper's My Calling (Cards)", David Marriot, professor of History of Consciousness at University of California, discusses the social implications of Piper's *My Calling (Cards)*. As an ongoing performance, the cards themselves bring focus to the latent racism that exists behind closed doors. Marriot states,

“...what these cards signify: acts of negation and denial, the incipient hypocrisy when white people—innocent or not, unwittingly or not, imagining themselves unobserved by blacks, give vent to barely repressed forms of conscious and unconscious hatred” (2). The cards themselves call out that moment when people, unaware they are in the presence of those they are racist towards, socially reinforce the racism they feel privileged to hold. Piper presents these cards as a way to facilitate an equal discomfort to the recipient of the calling card by making them reflect on their responses to xenophobia. By turning the comment back towards the offender, she engages in an interaction that exposes the offender, however privately, to sit with their own judgement. Although this interaction is seemingly personal in appearance for Piper, the card inherently challenges the recipient to consider their lifelong racist perspectives and their sharing of such racism. For Piper, the work becomes bigger than defending merely herself and speaks to the larger problems of the spread and affirmation of racism.

My artwork *Objects Given to my Mom because she is Asian* is not about my mother’s or my own personal history, nor is it an autobiography. I am addressing, yet again, the hidden aspects of discrimination and bringing it to be decontextualized and framed for others to be faced with. I am disclosing what is commonplace, familiar and repeated in the everyday, that which circumvents and hides what is racist. These actions exist in multiple epochs similar to my mother’s experience and therefore her story connects to a greater perspective outside of narrative of both our lives. The reading of my work encourages people to contend with their own behaviours and tendencies that are unknowingly racist, and leaves them with questions about how they conduct themselves. Piper’s work

activates the same method of bringing the viewer's perspective beyond the personal application of her message.

John P Bowles articulates this in his article "Piper as African American Artist" : "Piper makes a distinction between autobiography and personal content in her artwork—the former would take the artist for its subject, while the latter provides Piper with the means to address viewers and make them realize their responsibility for the perpetuation of racism"(113).

Additionally, my artwork presents the viewer with the challenge of having to unpack their own forms of discrimination in the same way that Piper's work does. Piper continues to address similar personal issues around these behaviours and through her art, she is able to transform them, allowing the viewer to be a participant in the process. As John P. Bowles writes about Piper, "She performs her role as artist to alienate her personal life from her work. By relating personal experiences through art that clearly stages and theatricalizes the viewing experience, Piper encourages the viewer to become self-conscious about his or her role in completing the work." (114).

In Piper's installation work *Cornered (1988)*, Piper uses the same strategies of taking the issues under the surface and amplifying them to challenge the audience. Her installation features a TV behind an overturned table. On either side of the table are two separate birth certificates of her father. One presents him as black and in the other he is presented as white. The one birth certificate claims he is black based on the one-drop rule in The United

States.³ In between the contradictory birth certificates, Piper is presented on a television screen stating: “I’m black. Now, let’s deal with this social fact, and the fact of my stating it, together. Maybe you don’t see why we have to deal with it together. Maybe you think this is just my problem, and that I should deal with it by myself. But it’s not just my problem. It’s our problem.” (“Everyone’s Problem”)

This accusation of how complicit everyone is in racism is powerful. Piper speaks on the television, with an upturned table barricading it. In front of this display is a set of arranged seats pointing like an arrow towards the screen. We are reminded that we are all faced with the problems of racism and that the problem is not just that of the artist presenting it, but also that of every human who may contribute towards it. The seats are dynamic in both inviting people to be a part of the artwork and making the viewers the focus of the issues at hand.

In his book, *Adrian Piper: Race Gender and Embodiment*, John P Bowles further explains:

The artist’s recollections of her personal experiences offer testimony in the form of direct address, assuring viewers on an intimate and personal level that racism continues to be a problem. As (Piper) has explained: “The personal plays the role of the concrete, immediate, and specific. . . . I use my own experience—my own selfhood—when it seems strategically the best way to make concrete those thoughts, sentiments, or beliefs that might be dismissed as being too theoretical or abstract (11).

³ The one-drop rule means that a single drop of "black blood" makes a person a black. This is a social and legal principal that exists in The United States of America.

Personal accounts of acts of racism are a testimony to the real and undebatable existence of racism. Presenting personal narrative of racism can perhaps be difficult to express and for others to be confronted with, but it plays a role in lifting the mask from the deeply known reality that is being contended with. My own work, "Objects given to my Mom because she is Asian " activates many of the same principles through the objects that were gifted by well-meaning people who were additionally unaware of their discrimination. The gifts given in jest as something in kind, yet reminding my mother and through the artwork, the viewers, that these were hidden discriminations.

Language of Domestic Oppression

Language frames not just social relations at the public or societal scale, but also at the scale of the domestic. The kinds of violence we see play out across our communities also exists with greater complexities within our homes. The context of the home took center stage for my combined photographic and video installation titled *Sweet talker/Domestic Icing* during the MFA Interim Exhibition (2019) at Emily Carr University.



The installation begins with the viewer encountering the video *Sweet Talker* on the outer wall displaying brightly coloured birthday cakes with text written on them. I positioned this video on the outer wall to mimic the façade of the exterior of the home environment. Each image presented text written on the cake saying frivolous phrases such as “*I’m so lucky*”, or “*please don’t leave*” and “*You are the only one*”. The initial presentation is seemingly sweet and even pleasing to the point of being humorous. As the viewer turns the corner into a more enclosed space, it is contrasted by three

Figure 5. *Sweet Talker*, video, 2019

photographs that are more jarring and aggressive when juxtaposed with *Sweet Talker*. The simplicity of this temporal movement changes the tone dramatically. The photographs titled *Domestic Icing* show vignettes around the home where phrases are written with icing in locations that are commonplace and relatable. In the photograph of a kitchen sink the phrase 'don't talk back' is written in pink icing beside a pile of dirty dishes stacked in the gloom of the dirty water. The tap is running and yet the words cannot be washed away. The second photograph is of an open bed revealing the words 'don't you dare lie to me' scrawled across the pillow in icing. It presents a place normally reserved for rest and comfort and with the addition of the text it becomes threatening and accusatory.



Figure 6. *Domestic Icing Series, c-prints, 2019*

The sheets beckon a welcome, but the pink words are positioned aggressively to confront. In the third photograph, *'You've done it this time'* is hastily scrolled on the pristine plate on a table-setting made for one. One might encounter this setting faced with a feeling that one has stumbled on something that has happened or is about to happen. There is something sinister that is felt as the chair is approached. The table setting is laid out perfectly, but is also sparse-looking and cold. The perfection of the home setting is chipped away by the abusive phrases that echo throughout these spaces. The artwork is experienced by the



Figure 7. Domestic Icing: Don't talk back, c-print, 30" x 40", 2019

viewer walking back and forth around the wall. First engaging with the sweet words, then experiencing the reality of what is behind the surface and then returning to the initial confronting façade. The words seem less sincere and more manipulative. They invite the viewer into the discomfort of the domestic landscape. The phrases express the tone of language inside the home. There exists latent power dynamics in domestic relationships; behind the structure of the home, words can be used for oppression. The surface level of relationships often masks the unhealthy undertones of abusive language and actions. In this way, the exterior of the relationship is presented to the public as pristine. Manipulation manufactures hidden actions so they are not easily revealed. When words are placed in unexpected locations it is evocative and engaging. It leaves traces of what happened, what could be happening, and hints towards unrevealed narratives.



Figure 8. You've done it this time, c-print, 30" x40", 2018

I see a similar approach in the way in which Louise Bourgeois tackles a sense of time and narrative in her work. Through addressing the temporal narrative Bourgeois' work contains a concealed reality that is strongly supported by storytelling throughout an infinite time.⁵ There is a story that is just beyond grasp of the viewer, yet the information is presented in a way that allows the viewer to enter the work and then struggle with the narrative. The viewer then has to piece together the story by investigating all of the fragments and, like a detective, has to attend to the mystery of the aftermath. Nothing concludes: the interplay with temporality; the sense of the sinister; the echo of events repeating the unrevealed narrative. The viewer is jolted into taking notice; the temporality and the narrative are experienced simultaneously. There is a notion that there is not a particular time that something happened. That perhaps what is happening is transversal, occurring at all points in time and in many different domestic locations before completing their journey into the echo chamber of the mind of the person that the harsh words were spoken to. This interplay between what is intrinsically hidden and what is surreptitiously disclosed is evident as they occur in my own practice. It becomes equally about what I am revealing and what I am leaving out. The absence resonates more strongly and builds the narrative. The sensory experience and psychological reverberation around my art are foundational in how they are intended to affect the viewer; they disallow any easy escape, and prevent the words from being translated too quickly.

⁵ Mieke Bal states about Bourgeois' work: If viewing is an act deployed in a process of interaction, then the account of that process takes a narrative form. For if narrative in an account deployed in time of a series of related events, which, in turn, occurred in time, then the process the viewer stands before- or, where the (artwork) sculpture is concerned, walks around, being infused by the effects and affects it emanates- can only be reconstructed, analyzed and criticized in a form that renders that movement through time(48).



Figure 9. Domestic Icing: Don't you dare lie to me, c-print, 30" x 40", 2019

Sweet Talker/Domestic Icing also derives from the home of my childhood and an unexpressed difficulty in handling the past. During the creation of this series, it wasn't obvious at first that the work was influenced by my childhood. It was a place where I thought things were perfect and harmonious. The harshness of the words spoken in my childhood home informed this series and became a realization after the installation of the video and the photographs. The wall separating the two aspects of this series, mimic the wall between the kitchen and the living room where my parents separately resided within our home. Their conversations happened, more often than not, with a physical wall in between them. *Sweet Talker/ Domestic Icing* plays a similar roles by creating a disconnected relationship. This subconscious creation and installation of this series alluded towards my work being driven by my past and my childhood.

In a catalogue of Bourgeois' work in 1993 for the Moderna Musett in Stockholm Sweden, catalogue editor Muller-Westerman states:

"Bourgeois talked about her work as a confrontation of the past in order to achieve self-knowledge in the present... as the suppressed feelings experienced in her childhood emerged. Bourgeois regarded these feelings as driving forces behind her art and her need to express herself"(11-12).

This theme of trust and mistrust is repeated throughout the body of her work. These are influenced by her family, home life and perspectives from her childhood. Her sculptures

contain a concealed quality that reveals subtleties that range from the seemingly sinister to the highly symbolic.

An additional connection between my practice and Bourgeois' is that she produces her work with a range of materials and does not have a specific genre or category. Likewise, my method is to respond to what I am attempting to communicate and express the essential; I do not categorize my work in a particular genre or style. My overall practice consists of photography, social-engagement, painting, drawing, sculpture and text-based work. Sometimes these genres work together simultaneously and in conversation with each other. Similar to Bourgeois' creative method, my work draws from the personal and intimate that is then brought to the public arena. I am engaging with text and image by presenting a layered narrative. As Muller-Westerman explains, "Artists have the ability to derive their ideas from the private and in making them public, makes the artwork accessible to a greater audience" (12). Many of Bourgeois' drawings are often abstract and exaggerated, yet by juxtaposing the abstract with text they produce a greater idea, allowing the viewer to engage through a personal entry point. The text within *Sweet Talker/Domestic Icing* is activated in the same way. It gives an entry point into the hidden aspect of the domestic setting and the relationships that reside within them.

"I use text in my pieces when the text won't leave me alone: when I keep coming back to particular passages... When it persists in my head, constantly rising above the noise of daily life, that is when I think that I need to find a way to use it in an artwork." Glenn Ligon

Language of Re-citing

In my series *When...then* I am exposing experiences that women have personally endured and confronted when dealing with how language is used within power dynamics with men.

I am providing an example of the constant brutish behaviour that particular men use in situations where they are not given power and how they then attempt to regain power by subjugating woman through the act of

name-calling. This came about when I was having a debate with a man I didn't know well at an event. He stated that he had a particular background knowledge on the topic we were discussing, and when I addressed that I had an equally qualifying background knowledge on the subject, he responded by saying, 'Well you might be a princess, but...' then

continued with his argument. I stopped

him in that moment and stated, 'Just so we are clear, are we name-calling? I just want to

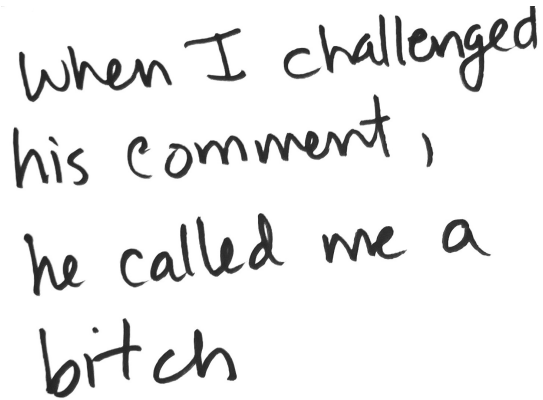
make sure I understand that is what we are doing.' At which point he backed down and we

dissolved the conversation. Later on, a phrase formed in my mind after thinking about this interaction: *'When he started to lose the argument, he called me a princess'*. After writing this

A photograph of a piece of paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The words are arranged in five lines: 'When he started', 'to lose the', 'argument', 'he called me', and 'princess.' The paper has a light, slightly textured appearance.

Figure 10. *Princess*, handwritten, 5 ½' x 5 ½', 2020

phrase down, many other ideas and words came to mind from women I knew had experienced similar situations where they were name-called or where a man attempted to subjugate them through language. These phrases hinged on the cause and effect model of something that happens which would influence a reaction. Examples of this cause and effect are: “When I challenged his comment, he called me a bitch” or “When I didn’t give



When I challenged
his comment,
he called me a
bitch

him the attention he wanted, he told me my art was unoriginal.” The words are confrontational as black ink scrolled on a stark white paper. There are eight phrases and their beginnings are small at approximately 5.5’ x 8.5’. During the process, I printed them as serigraphs that were the physical size of a human torso. This created a presence and aggression, while the text itself is presented as semi-cursive and more feminine. The artwork

Figure 11. *Bitch*, handwriting on paper ((5 ½’ x 5 ½’)) 2020

calls attention to the aggressor (any particular man who does this) to take notice of when they are complicit in such situations and to point out the actual cause of the response. In contrast, the artwork also attempts to connect with the person who is being attacked (any woman who has experienced this type of aggression) with others who have dealt with similar aggressions. In connecting with these phrases, it allows us women to feel like we are not alone and therefore, can commiserate about it. What happens when this kind of speech is repeated⁶ back to the oppressor and we refuse to acknowledge their point of power? We can collect many independent voices all communicating back the sentiment

⁶ see *Recite* in glossary of terms

that we *are* individual humans with rights, freedoms and perspectives. What if I speak the words that are used to oppress me in a way that points out the oppression? It merely states what is said as they were said. In repeating them back to those who use the words as weapons, we reveal the weapons. We can then connect with others who have experienced similar injustices and relate and stand in solidarity against the oppressors.

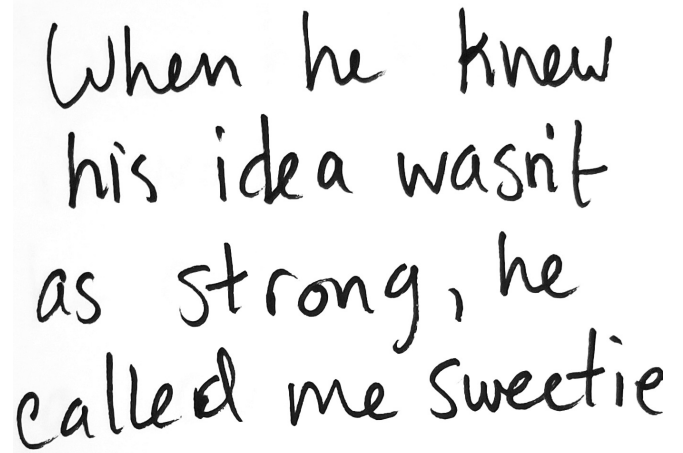
A photograph of a piece of white paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The paper is set against a light gray background.

Figure 12. *Sweetie*, handwriting on paper, (5 ½' x 5 ½'), 2020

The selection of words, exposed in a naked print form allows the audience to approach the sentences as they commonplace, thus making it palatable and transformational. This makes the text relatable and colloquial while facilitating accessibility to those who have not dealt with, nor lived with such language being used against them. This series is important because of its feminist perspective within my text-based practice. This series branches indirectly from the *Sweet Talker/Domestic Icing* series, where words are hidden and yet in this series, it is brought to light by expressing what is at stake within male/female power dynamics. I posted this series on Instagram and received both public and private messages from women who had similar experiences. Some women asked how I handled such situations. I responded by saying that one tactic that worked for me at times is to repeat back and recite exactly what the man had said or to point out what was happening in that moment. As commonplace as these phrases and experiences are, it seems that in public

they are excused or even forgivable and celebrated by other men. A friend explained to me that after her husband saw this series online, he disclosed to her about my work, 'She is attacking all men.' I have been considering what this means in context. There seems to be an easy dismissal in the comment that my artwork is 'attacking all men', as if it can be so easily concluded and thrown out as mere feminist aggression. I am attacking the power dynamic that is held by men when they feel they are being challenged, or when the attention is not on them, or when their behaviour is being exposed. Bringing Sarah Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* back to the table, she identifies the trouble with being the person who brings up issues of sexism and misogyny. Ahmed explains, "When you speak as a feminist, you are often identified as being too reactive, as overreacting, as if all you are doing is sensationalizing the facts of the matter; as if in giving your account of something you are exaggerating, on purpose or even with malice" (21).

In response to this comment which is equally dismissive and absurd, I created a dialogue piece within this series by commissioning a friend who is a calligrapher to create a diploma awarding me the privilege of getting credit for "Attacking All Men." The risk of creating such a response was incredibly satisfying and with this, I was able to include the element of humour I had wanted to develop in my graduate work. In addition, I hoped there to be a conversation between the *when...then...* series and this response. I imagined the discarded stockpile of the *when...then...* comments filling boxes and spilling over the archive of this collection. I imagined that alongside the diploma for Attacking All Men,



Figure 13. She's attacking all men (getting credit for it) Framed Document (8.5 x 11) 2020

that other women would be invited to enter the forum to write instances when they were personally affronted for either standing up for themselves or for being in a place that challenged the power dynamics with their male counterparts. The comment, “She is attacking all men,” is the only response I received to the series from a man and it was expressed covertly to another person before it made its way to me. In this way, the responses are hidden which alludes to Foucault’s view on how power operates.

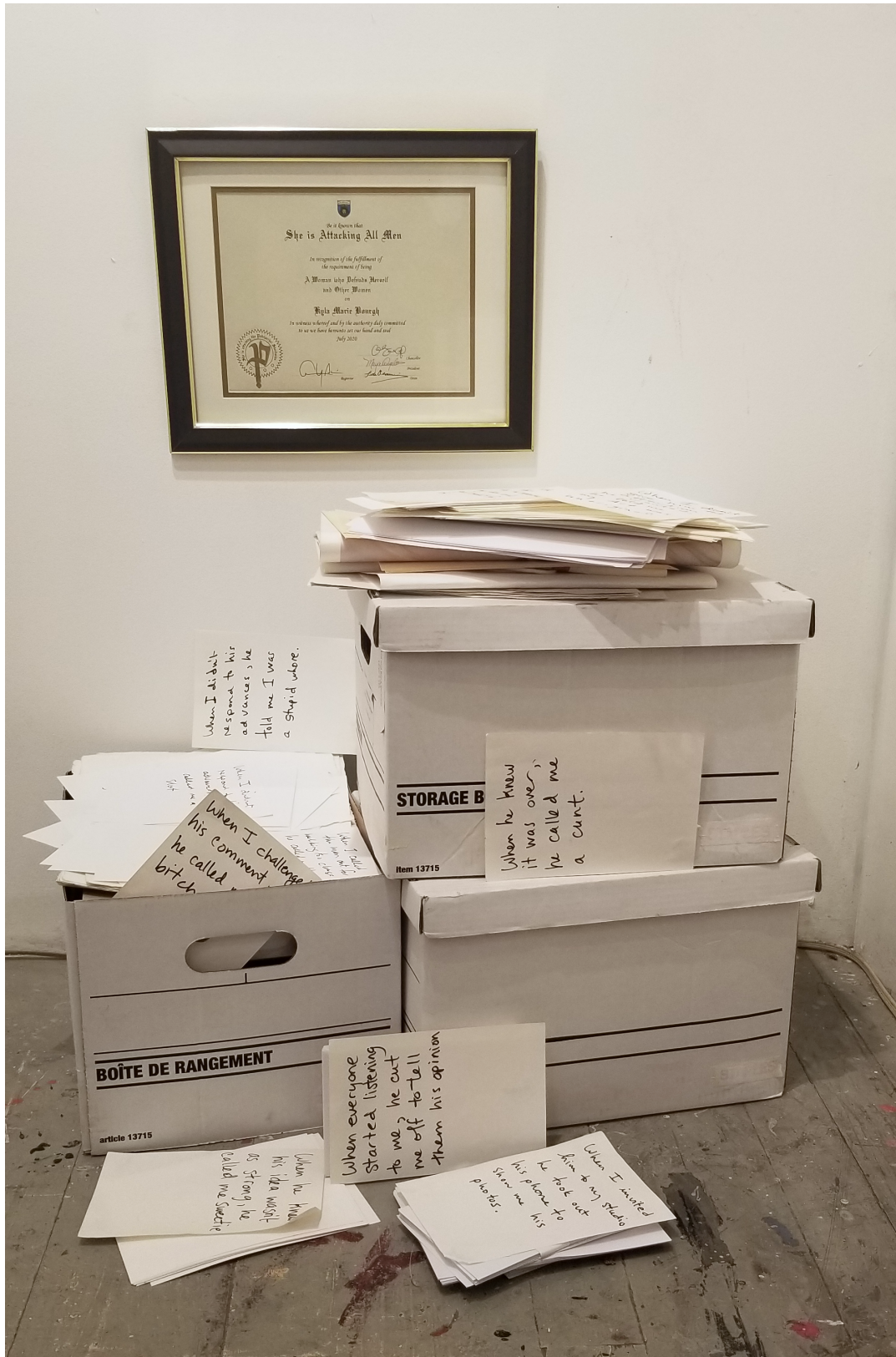


Figure 14. She's Attacking All Men (getting credit for it) Installation boxes and paper with document 2020

Consider that this series is not exaggerated but instead is commonplace and pointing towards the injustice of inequality. Ahmed additionally describes how the male-dominated structure works: “You point to structures; they say it is in your head. What you describe as material is dismissed as mental(...) And think also of what is required: the political labor necessary of having to insist that what we are describing is not just what we are feeling or thinking” (6).

I am aware that in speaking up in any situation, especially those involving racism and sexism, there is always a backlash in relation to the continuum that pre-exists. This is what I have come to know as a norm in these instances. I have lived with this aggression towards me, yet I refuse to allow for it to be excused or dismissed. I name it, and in naming it, people are confronted by their own use of language as tools to keep these forms of discrimination repeatedly reproduced. Ahmed goes further to explain that “sexism is justified as what is received because it is assumed as in what is received. Sexism becomes a received wisdom. Sexism, in other words, by being accepted as in the pattern or in the traditions is rendered not only acceptable but inevitable” (150). This cycle of inevitability is what needs to be challenged. Ultimately, I hope people will begin to consider how words are used to control and coerce others.

Language of Release

In my initial project *A Strangers Diary* I explored the interplay of trust through an exploration between the public and the private. In 2016 a diary was found in an alley by someone I am close to and he kept it for a number of years not knowing what to do with the journal and essentially feeling stuck between being a warden for the diary, yet not feeling ownership to it. He was unable to return it to the unknown writer as it was far beyond lost and he had no way of contacting the owner. In contrast, he felt unable to discard it as he felt he had no right to do so. This created a debilitating feeling for him. In 2019 he gave it to me and suggested that I may want to use it in my artistic practice. My initial response was hesitant because of the history of the diary and the burden the object contained from its interim holder, but as it passed hands from him to me, I could feel an immediate weight being lifted from him. I felt no obligation to make something out of this diary, the mere act of letting it be moved away from the person who found it was profound enough in the moment. It remained in my collage bin for months, sitting like a stone. The energy of this journal emanated a stillness and almost stagnancy of the holding pattern that the previous care-taker had felt. One day, I noticed the diary at the top of my collage pile and I felt that I needed to transform it into something else. That day I ended up shredding the diary since I no longer wanted the burden of being the keeper of the journal or its content. This action was an absolute relief. Through this act of shredding it, I didn't feel the sense of burden, nor did I feel trapped by the indecision of what I would do with it had it been intact. The remains of the shredded diary were both beautiful in its physical manifestation and yet

were compelling because of the mystery of the text that could no longer be accessed by anyone. The remnants of the stranger's diary were then carefully and almost ritualistically placed inside box frames which further abstracted them. The words are beyond the reach of the viewer. The cursive is enticing yet cannot be read. The abstract quality pulls at the viewer and invite them into an interaction that is contemplative and indirect, hinting that there is more to be discussed. The viewer is drawn in and then held at a distance as they cannot access the actual words and instead connect with the secrecy and how they may encounter the private aspects of themselves.



Figure 15. A Stranger's Diary, shredded found diary in frames, 11" x 17", 2019

My most recent iteration and series based on this is titled, *The Burden*, and it addresses the relationships between communication, trust and release. These factors are all necessary in helping lift burdens from others. The project involves receiving letters from my mother. In the past, I have been her confidante and have listened to many of the things that burden her. Seven years ago, my mom separated from my dad and has since returned to assist him

as he has terminal cancer. Every day she deals with the brunt of my dad's moods and his illness.

In August 2019, I wrote a proposal to my mom to encourage her to write anything she wanted about my father and what she endures through her role as care-taker and then mail them to me. Upon receiving the letters, I explained to her that I would not read anything she wrote but instead, I would shred the letters. This would allow her the opportunity to write to someone since she needed to send the burden somewhere. As her daughter, I did not want to directly carry this weight of hearing all of the negative things

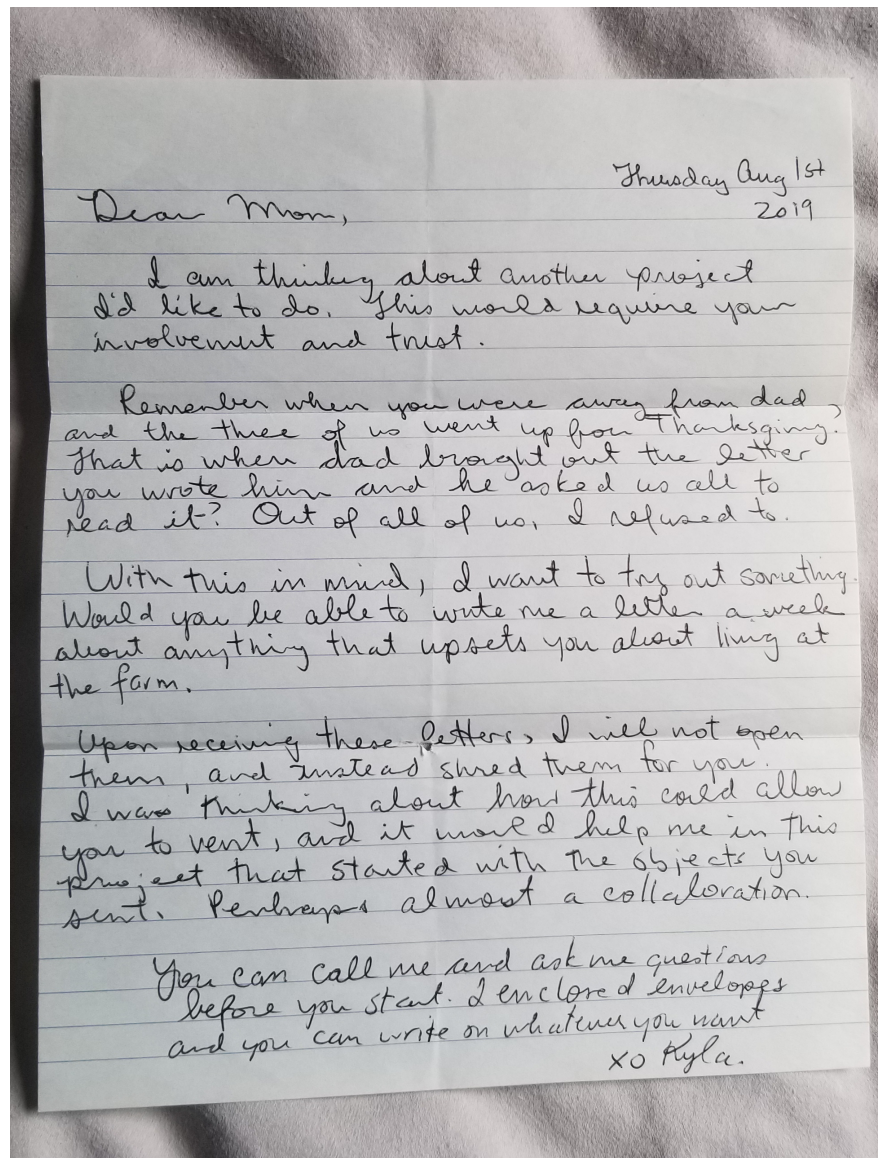


Figure 16. The Burden, Proposal letter sent to my mom August 2019-ongoing

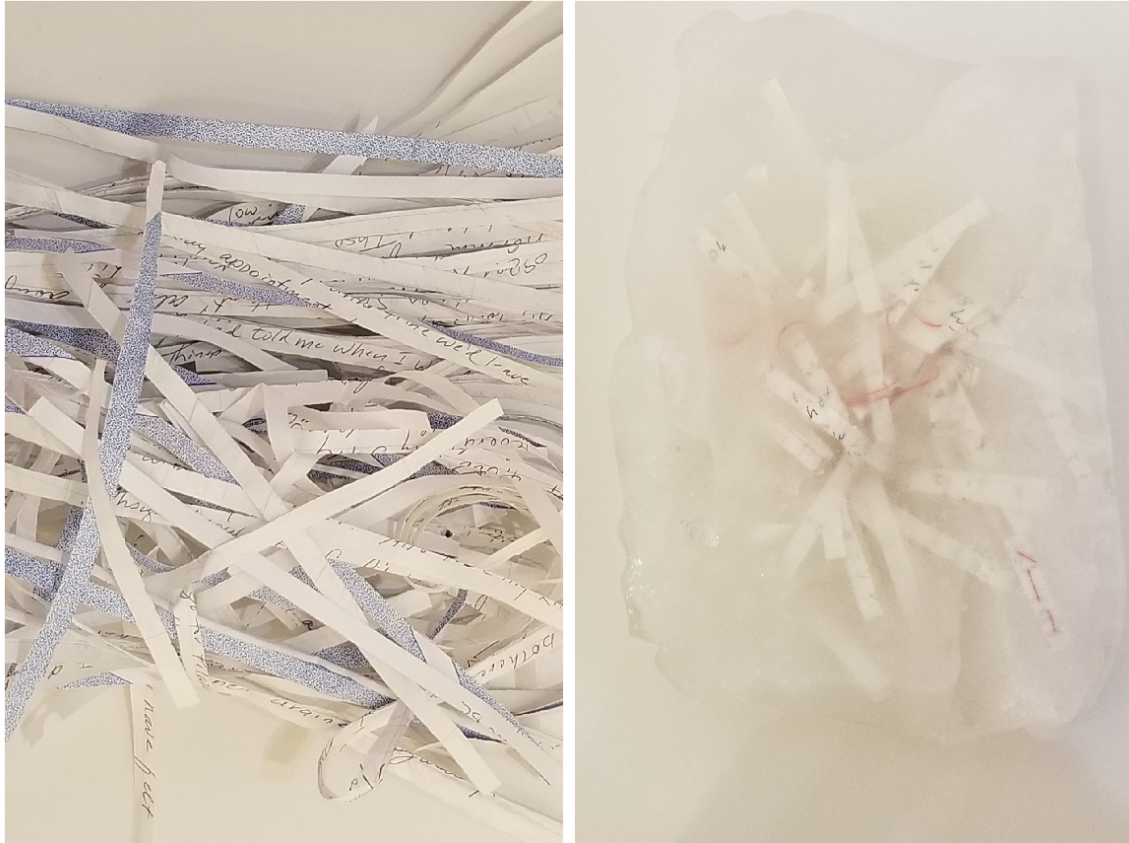


Figure 17. The Burden (Iterations), shredded letters sent by my mom until my father passes away, sewn together with red thread and frozen. 2019- Ongoing

about my father and his illness. About a month after I sent her the proposal, at the end of August 2019, I began to receive the letters. As was discussed in the proposal, I did not read them as I had no need or want to know the contents; as proposed, I shredded them. My intention is to receive these letters until my father passes away, giving an unknown timeline for this project. This is a simple act of love and trust between my mother and myself. The destruction of the letters wasn't something sentimental or elaborate. The act of release was done by the act of shredding the letters. Though this method, the inter-generational burden was halted by this action. We can lift people's burdens quite simply if needed. This part of the project is ongoing until the death of my father or when my mother

is less burdened. The theme of text in this transformation returns back to being secretive and obscured for the sake of respect and care. This reoccurring concept will continue in my work moving forward as I would like to create opportunities for people to send me their burdens from anywhere in the world. I might start with people who know me and who would trust me and then see if the project gets introduced to more people in an organic way. I recognize that everyone is going through some form of hardship and that the collective burden exists and I would like there to be less burden in the world. In this project, transformation and release are presented as the physical must die to go through change.



Figure 18. The Collective Burden, (ongoing)

The conversation continues...

My practice has flourished in developing meaningful content and themes to explore and I have been able to focus on topics that are important to me, and existed just under the surface of my previous work. The experience and my engagement with the master's program has allowed the process of surfacing to happen to myself. I realize that the stories in my life are deeply entangled with the creation of my artwork. The many seemingly commonplace, every day experiences are the ones that enrich and inform what I need to communicate in my work. Through the act of connecting, we as humans share many of the same difficulties and hardships. We are also able to heal through assisting each other to move forward. This adds to the narrative that is threaded through our lives. I am continuing to interpret different aspects of my own stories to understand how to situate my work between the personal and the public. By exposing the ways language is used, I hope to transform multiple perspectives in a more progressive and productive manner. I am trying to decode the stories that present themselves throughout life, by gleaning and gathering from these experiences to make use of them in my projects. By expressing them in a public platform and bringing them intimately closer, I aim for these stories to actively engage and hold the conversation with the narrative.

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