

THIS PAPER IS MADE OF BOOKS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate value of the book as art and to highlight the power of narrative. To expose the archive of self, I pull from various theorists, ranging from Walter Fisher and Umberto Eco to Albert Camus and Julietta Singh: touching on a unique set of subjects creates a balanced space to ask new questions. This project pushes boundaries to prove a point, and reframes the book less as a literary form than a shifting cultural object. *THIS PAPER IS MADE OF BOOKS* is about many things, but is really about books, how we communicate and what we trust to hold that communication: not only the object but the oral tradition it intermingles with, too.

I will argue that books are special and unique, and irreplaceable: the book is both symbol and object, and needs to be reintroduced as such to demonstrate its actual value. First, this project uses autoethnography as a research framework and a methodology, which allows me to look inwards and share outwards, respectively. Second, from both object and print perspective, bookmaking is another methodology and lens through which I observe the book; and last, keep your mind open to seeing books in places you wouldn't expect.

This is a paper made of books, and therefore is a book itself. This book is broken into parts, each referring and expanding on one key idea: the book as self and as archive. This book's research is rooted in bookmaking and its evolving process, closely followed by Jewishness and its sharing nature. This book is balanced: it contains humour, seriousness, personal anecdotes, and theories; it is a clear refusal of obsolescence. This book embraces its reader, welcomes them, and invites them to participate. This book shares a softness, a sensitive and personal approach to a thesis, in a way that invites discussion, reflection, and welcomes all to the table.

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Dedication

To K+K, Z&Z, and my grandparents; for shaping me into the person I am, and giving me the space, permission, time, and help to grow

To my J; for giving me courage and an excited voice to talk to

To my mentor, Myungah; for introducing me to the art of the book and for encouraging me to explore

To myself; for starting this and sticking to it.

Table of Contents

- Abstract iii
- Acknowledgements iv
- Dedication v
- Table of Contents vi
- List of Figures and Illustrations vii
- i. Introduction 1
- ii. Formulas and the Book Object..... 4
 - The Book as Object*..... 5
 - In the Interest of Gatekeeping and in Defense of Fluidity*..... 7
 - Don't Think I'm Avoiding It, I'm Getting There: the Digital World*..... 8
 - An Obsession with Possession and Materiality* 16
- iii. Narratives and the Narrative Paradigm 18
- iv. Jewishness 23
- v. Humour..... 29
- vi. Searching for Meaning: the Archive 34
 - To Define the Archive* 34
 - The Cycle of Extension* 36
 - Constituting Usefulness: In Search of Meaning* 38
 - The Book as Survival* 39
- vii. Conclusion 41
- Works Cited 43
- Appendices..... 46
 - Appendix A*..... 46
 - Appendix B* 46
 - Appendix C*..... 47

List of Figures and Illustrations

FIGURE 1 FIONA BANNER.....	4
FIGURE 2 FORMULA PARTS ONE AND TWO.....	5
FIGURE 3 FORMULA PART 3.....	5
FIGURE 4 THE ANATOMY OF A BOOK.....	7
FIGURE 5 TEXT, AS CODE, AS LOOP.....	10
FIGURE 6 FLOPPY DISK INCLUDED AT THE BACK OF OGDEN'S BOOK.....	14
FIGURE 7 FORMULA PART TWO REMINDER.....	18
FIGURE 8 NEW FORMULA UNLOCKED!.....	18
FIGURE 9 ONE OF MY FAMILY'S SEDER PLATES.....	26
FIGURE 10 THE CYCLE OF EXTENSION.....	36

i. Introduction

The first book I ever made was a book of poems called “Pricked Fingers + Feminist Thoughts (a collection of poetry and prose)”, and it was a navy blue hardcover with ants crawling on it. I screenprinted the cover and pages, each made of chipboard – I wanted a thick book, despite having only twelve or so poems. I bound it with more glue than a bookmaker could ever need, and I remember sawing into the text block to get the thread in place to hold it together. I made “Pricked Fingers” as part of a small collection which I titled, *be a good sharer*: along with the book, there was screen printed turmeric-dyed postcards with a works cited page, laser-engraved pencils with sentences from my best essays, and sticks of gum in wrappers with different titles of feminist literature screenprinted on each. It arguably stands as my very first collection of books without the typical book form.

Like most things in my life, my bookmaking journey began as a “guerrilla” method of making. I taught myself, roughly, with little direction, and made my first book in a way that would make any bookmaker giggle. I grew to realize that what we know as a ‘book’ does not always appear in the same form every time.

In 2017, I fell head-over-heels in love with books. Wait, that’s not quite right:

In 2017, at the time of “Pricked Fingers”, I fell head-over-heels in love with *making* books. I’d already been in love with books for years.

Anita Diamant wrote a book in 1997 called *The Red Tent*, where she expanded on the story of a minor character in the Bible. Dinah, one of the daughters of Leah and Jacob, originally has an incredibly short story and is almost left behind by the other, larger characters and storylines.

I read this novel for the first time in high school, and was so touched by it; it will forever be one of the first Jewish stories I read that created a solid bridge between Jewishness and myself. I get emotional thinking and writing about Dinah, and the really hard life she lived, but mostly about the love and beauty that she felt and shared. Diamant’s version is told by Dinah, from beyond her grave, and ends among these words:

“I died but I did not leave them. Benia sat beside me, and I stayed in his eye and his heart. For weeks and months and years, my face lived in the garden, my scent clung to the sheets. For as long as he lived, I walked with him by day and lay down with him at night. When his eyes closed for the last time, I thought perhaps I would finally leave this world. But even then, I lingered. Shif-re sang the song I taught her and Kiya moved with my motions. Joseph thought of me when his daughter was born. Gera named her baby Dinah. Remose married and told his wife about the mother who had sent him away so that he would not die but live.... Egypt loved the lotus because it never dies. It is the same for people who are loved. Thus something as insignificant as a name – two syllables, one high, one sweet – summon up the innumerable smiles and tears, sighs and dreams of a human life” (320-21).

It is these last two pages that make me cry the most: not tears of sadness but of hope, that after our passing, we leave pieces of ourselves behind. This is why I feel so connected and responsible for the survival of books: they are the pieces and stories that we leave behind.

On my bookshelf, I have books by Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut, Ned Vizzini, Abbi Jacobson, Miranda July, Ben Tanzer, Ray Bradbury, Steve Martin, Marlee Grace, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and so many more. Alive or dead, each of these writers has left parts of themselves on my bookshelf. The books we choose, the books we make, the books we display tell us who we are. They paint a picture of the self; we can learn a lot about a person by reading what's on their bookshelf! Books live through the stories they tell, and exist past their writer's expiration. They communicate with each other, through their covers, within their pages, and refer to each other. Characters in Vonnegut's stories bounce back and forth between the books he has written; Camus and de Beauvoir have a personal and professional connection; and one of those authors on my bookshelf is my grandfather, who constantly referred to the existentialists.

My Papou (my maternal grandfather) published his first book at the age of 18, and was a very well-known and respected journalist in Lebanon. He worked at *La revue du Liban*, the largest French daily publication in Lebanon at the time... despite the fact that no one at the office spoke French. He was a point-person for important figures in Beirut, especially during the build-up of the civil war: heads of churches, activists, extremists, warlords-to-be, public and governmental officials. But not just people in the public eye: since he speaks so many languages, he could communicate and forge relationships with a wide variety of people. He became close with the printers (who spoke Arabic) in the basement of *La revue*, and learned all about printing presses and the process through which his stories were put on paper.

An Armenian himself, when he and my Jewish grandmother met outside a café in Beirut and began dating, the two of them faced many prejudices. In fact, it was the reason they left Lebanon in 1970 after my mom and aunt were born. They left everything behind because a mixed marriage was simply unacceptable.

Though I could keep telling his stories (and I know so many of them), this is not the point. My sharing these brief stories is for you to learn something about me, something about my family and who raised me: these stories live in my head; they have shaped who I am and who I will and have become. Through the coming pages, you will read stories about me, my stories, and more about my family. This is vital to understand who is writing to you, whose work and thoughts you are reading: I want this to be a frame through which you will read me, read my pages, and read my words.

This is how we'll be speaking to each other, you and I: I'll tell you what I think and the theories that support me, and then I'll tell you a story or two. We'll talk about the book object and its digital counterpart, the idea of narratives, the value of humour, Jewishness, and we'll finish by exploring the idea of the archive and archival processes. I suppose that sounds like I'll be doing all the talking: and that may be true, but in our relationship, your role is the reader. And then, it's

your turn to talk about it to someone else, or converse with yourself, or take it with you. Now, let's go ahead and get started.

ii. Formulas and the Book Object

I have begun to question several things: the first being trying to define the limits of what makes a book. I began to ask myself, “What is a book? Is anything I make a book because I say it is, simply because I am a book artist?” Thinking of Fiona Banner, who registered herself as a book, complete with an ISBN, I found myself asking, “am I a book?”



FIGURE 1 FIONA BANNER, *FIONA BANNER*, 2009-

I have always been very proud of my bookshelves and the way I display my books, both made and acquired. are all part of who we are: the archive of self. As a young girl, my father often told me that clutter is a bad thing, sometimes it blocks your brain from working properly; but I always had a tendency towards keeping things, no matter how small. In my very first desk, I had these small white wicker baskets with pink fabric, and they were full of things I didn't need, and sometimes didn't even remember why I kept them to begin with. I had a rock I named (I don't even remember what I named it, but it was because of a book I read in French class), single marbles, paper clips, articles my dad had cut out for me to read (not to keep), wrappers from candy my crush had given me, and so on. Clearly I had been archiving as of an early age. So, if we accept my father's advice, then archiving needs to be selective, collecting needs to be thoughtful and deliberate; it's what makes it different from hoarding or stock piling. I then came to the conclusion that:

BOOK = ARCHIVE
BOOK = VESSEL OF STORYTELLING

...therefore:

ARCHIVE = VESSEL OF STORYTELLING

$$\begin{aligned}\text{STORY} &= \text{NARRATIVE} \\ \text{BOOK} &= x(\text{STORIES}) \\ \text{BOOK} &= x(\text{NARRATIVES})\end{aligned}$$

FIGURE 2 FORMULA PARTS ONE AND TWO.

I am a maker of books: a book artist. But, what defines a book? Is a book a structure, or what it holds on its pages? Does it need to have pages to be a book, or a cover, a spine, or be bound? Can a book be a collection of things, an archive? Am I the one who decides, and why do I have the authority to define it? With all these questions in mind, I came to the following conclusion: I have studied and practiced hundreds of book forms, shapes, and types; therefore, I have the authority, as someone who has been trained in the ways of a book, to define what the limits of such structures are. Since there are so many different ways that it becomes almost impossible to put one's finger on, it is then fair to say that each individual book artist can define what their book practice can be. I have therefore defined myself as the book.

If I am the book, and I argue that I am, then I am an archive, as demonstrated by the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{BOOK} &= \text{ARCHIVE} \\ \text{BOOK} &= \text{ARTIST} \\ &\dots\text{therefore,} \\ \text{ARTIST (me)} &= \text{ARCHIVE}\end{aligned}$$

FIGURE 3 FORMULA PART 3. I SUPPOSE I NEEDED A SCIENTIFIC WAY TO VISUALIZE MY THOUGHTS.

If we follow this conclusion, then it becomes my job to be a storytelling vessel; to share, to explore, to collect, with intention. But, this is an important job, and one might ask themselves, what's the point of it? Art exists to add *something* to life: be it the viewer's life, the artist's life, the museum's life, and whoever comes into contact with it. Art exists to share, to explore, to visit, to extend: the point of art, dear reader, is to extend one's existence.

With this in mind, the goal of the book, as it is art, is to give us an opportunity to leave something behind or leave our mark. This then leads us to one big question:

How does the artist, as a form of book, make existence more extendable?

The Book as Object

Our typical understanding of "book" is as a physical object: it has a spine, a front cover, a back cover, and pages in between. Sometimes, it is a hardcover book with a dust jacket. Sometimes, especially if it is an older book, there are bits of hardware, like a headband, that are less common in books printed today. In terms of the construction of a book, there is glue, a glue brush, linen tape, linen waxed thread, book board (for the covers and spine) and book cloth to create the cover. These are only some of the tools and limbs that make up the body of the book

object. And though the construction and elements of the book object's makeup are relevant to understand it, this is not the sole point of defining the book.

The book as we know it is an object: something to take up space on a shelf, a table, a nightstand. In some cases, the books are rarely opened: like a coffee table book, existing simply as decoration. When this object simply exists to take up space, not to educate or share, it still acts as something relevant: a talking point, a point of interest.

I am reminded of all the times my siblings and I went shopping with my parents. While they would try on clothes, we would wander the store until we got tired. Our final stop before plopping down on the couches seemingly meant for bored children was the coffee table. There were very pretty books, but it felt as though they existed as nothing but decoration, not for reading. In this case, these strange books made my existence more bearable: I had pictures to look at while my mom and dad wondered which size fit better. This shared experience seems almost shallow, almost at a different level of intellect than what is coming next. Yet, a book is a book, and no book will be excluded from this exploration.

In his essay "The Book as Symbolic Object", Régis Debray, a French philosopher and journalist, writes, "...[Consider] sacred the body of the Book, Spirit made object, Word become papyrus or parchment. An author's soul made flesh" (142). This short sentence brings a new path to explore this *symbolic* object. Not simply an object or something to take up space, but a symbol: one of learning, sharing, possessing, understanding, exploring, and holding. We have now entered the space in which to explore the depths of what a book, in all its symbols and forms, can look like.

Before we shift to *what else* a book can look like, it is vital that we discuss the history of the long-living typical book structure as we know it today. In his book *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time*, Keith Houston walks his readers through the development of the book, and the components that make it up. Starting with the page, at its earliest existences as papyrus, parchment, and up to paper as is familiar to us; then the text, writing, the printing press, typesetting and the Industrial revolution; illustration; and lastly, form: scrolls, tablets, the codex, binding, and the modern book.

Consider the form and process of the book; as we know it, it is simple, and if you take the time to learn it, there are innumerable ways to bind a book. Coptic binding, the secret Belgian, the saddle stitch, flat back, drum binding, perfect binding, case binding... and that's just off the top of my head! Houston articulates, "For much of the book's history, the basic techniques of bookbinding were remarkably static. Bookmakers fiddled around the edges of their craft, refining methods, materials, and tools by degrees, but the basics remained the same. What changed instead was whom the books were for, and what they were supposed to look like" (310). The book, as illustrated in this passage, can be bound in countless ways because, at its core, it has remained static. It is a happy form: in its content configuration, the changes revolve around it, altering its visual experience but remaining constructed by the same components. Furthermore, the audience itself orbits around the book's core, joining the visual alternatives, which allows the happy form to reach new readers. When we are content to leave the base unchanged, we give ourselves room

to change what is most important: the way we interact with it, as it will always remain something with which we are familiar.

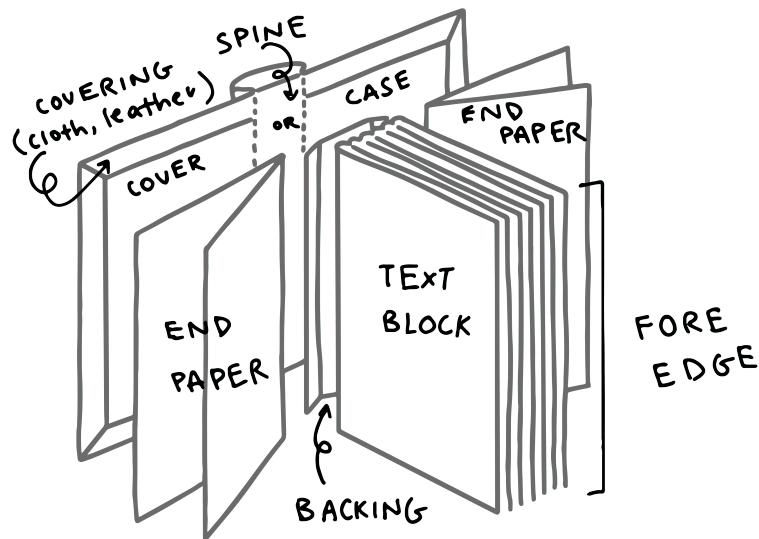


FIGURE 4 THE ANATOMY OF A BOOK

Houston goes on to explain, “It was clear that early bookmakers were aware of how their customers interacted with their products. Very few ancient books were wider than they were tall, helping keep the stresses and strains on their spines to a reasonable level; the vast majority had short, readable lines of text, broken into columns if need be...” (311). Indeed, the book mimics the body and the way we use it: the base form is so familiar to the human form that its kinks were sorted out early on. Part of the object of the book is the symbolism it embodies (pun intended), both the symbol of memory and the human (able) body. For some, the sight of a particular book evokes feelings without even having to open it. Seemingly an underwhelming object today, the book, as Xu Bing says about his emoji-language-based book, *Book from the Ground: from Point to Point*, “[Regardless] of a reader’s language or level of education, the books treat all readers equally” (though more accurately the able-bodied reader). Bing’s highly unusual writing helps us to understand the book as object: an unreadable book is no longer a book, but an object, to those who cannot read it.

In the Interest of Gatekeeping and in Defense of Fluidity

In working to define the boundaries or requirements of the book, the other side of the coin beckons: why do there need to be boundaries or requirements at all? Yes, we seek definitions so that we can understand things, but the artist’s book has a unique ability to challenge the very definition of what a book is. This heads-or-tails-like conversation has happened before: the now-defunct Bonefolder Journal was an online magazine that shared articles and essays about the art of the book in the moment. Originally presented at Pyramid Atlantic Gallery in 2004, “Critical Issues/Exemplary Works” is Johanna Drucker’s call for the development of a gatekeeping system in the book arts. She proposes her own critical models, which consist of a scientific and stern approach to the art of the book. For Drucker, establishing guidelines is urgent and immediately

necessary as “the field of artists’ books suffers from being under-theorized, under-historicized, under-studied and under-discussed...” and, as a result, “isn’t taken very seriously” (3). In outlining sets of questions, definitions, and record-keeping methods, she effectively boils the book object down to four and a half pages of terms and questions. The Bonefolder Journal published Drucker’s presentation and critical review model in their Spring 2005 Issue.

Not long later, in the 2005 Fall issue, the Bonefolder published a piece written in response to Drucker’s strict methods. Gary Frost’s “Reading by Hand: The Haptic Evolution of Artists’ Books” acknowledges and welcomes Drucker’s methods but invites a sense of fluidity to the conversation. Frost approaches from a haptic perspective, meaning tactile: touch! He reminds the journal’s readers that opening a book is not a simple experience: the cracking of the beeswax in the spine, the springiness of the page, whether the cover stays shut or lifts when the book is closed. The vastly differing tactile experiences had been omitted by Drucker, leaving a gap big enough for the book to fall through. Frost notes, “It can be difficult to assess [the book] as literature and it can be difficult to assess them as art and many readers despair before trying. If artists’ books are not particularly or critically regarded as literature or art, they should at least make statements and perform the somersaults that make them a book. A book is the one art object known to everyone” (4). In order to keep it as an art object known to all, it must be kept in a context all can understand and access!

I can understand the artists’ book through both Frost’s and Drucker’s perspectives. In fact, I welcome it. There is value in both; though a critical attitude invites important in-depth analysis, art often gets lost at sea, even if by accident. Where Drucker’s criticism is drawn from an art history background, Frost creates a space to encourage fluidity. A balance needs to be struck: otherwise, the art of the book would not result in a book.

Precision is vital in making a book: in order to make the haptic experience, scientific precision is required. Bookmaking is no simple feat! A bookmaker needs to have a proper set of tools, including at least two rulers, and a solid understanding of grain direction (the hardest part!). Measure twice, cut once: the ultimate rule of bookmaking. Though there is an impossible number of forms – or lack thereof – the book can take, the fluidity of Frost and the stability of Drucker need each other: the book is a fluid object in a stable space.

Don’t Think I’m Avoiding It, I’m Getting There: the Digital World

It’s simple. Being digitally literate is a must nowadays, especially in capitalist economies. Can you use PowerPoint to make a knock-out presentation? Can you quickly learn how to use a new scheduling software before starting your new remote job? Can you use Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, and can you use them to help make a brochure in InDesign?

In seventh and eighth grade, I took a required class in my high school called “Computers”, and it was taught in an often-dark room with at least 30 clunky desktop computers. It was always warm. One year it was taught by the music teacher, another by the geography teacher. The first year, I learned how to type: using a special program, I learned the home keys and how to type 80 words per minute. The second year was oriented around creating presentations and how to use the internet to do proper research. And yet, then, the requirements of a bibliography for a school

assignment were to include at least two non-digital sources – otherwise known as the physical book. Actually taking the time to go to a library and finding a real, tangible book to teach you something made it feel like you were taking the project seriously. The book was more reliable than the web (more specifically, sites like Wikipedia. But Wikipedia also demonstrated what a reliable source is).

It was then that healthy skepticism of the internet was instilled; it was encouraged to always investigate the validity of information shared online. Writing to produce a physical thing comes with more barriers that need to be jumped over: find a publisher, write, comb through the document, rewrite, get final approvals, design the cover, send to a printer, circulate. Though there are still barriers when publishing online, it seems to be a lot easier than having a book or research published. More time equals less risk: a reader can trust that the book they pick up and flip through in a book store has been proof-read and uses proper punctuation, for example. The self-published work of an otherwise unpublished writer does not ask the same as a publishing house and all those involved; in this case, the publisher is the one taking on the risk, which lessens the amount of risk the reader takes. Though, risk is not always a bad thing.

All this is to say that we cannot have a conversation about books without talking about the internet. We cannot talk about the archive without talking about the digital world. I would not be painting a clear picture without it. And, I'm a white-passing, city dweller Canadian twentysomething living in the twenty-first century; I think it's fair to say I use the internet and my phone and all the apps on it (please see Appendix A for a map of the population using the internet).

Why did my teachers place more value on a physical book than research done on the internet? Though the value in each is constantly shifting, text is always at its root. It is text, on paper, on a screen; in pixels, or in ink, they're all still words – and words come from oral history. We were speaking before we were writing, and before we were speaking, we were looking; the ways we communicate and the ways we soak in information are all connected.

The spoken word, the things we see, and the word written all refer back to the same thing, and are, at their most simplified, the same thing: information. This reminds me of Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the theory of Forms; it all leads back to the same one thing. Plato illustrates his theory of Forms in the *Republic* as people chained in a cave, experiencing the world through the shadows reflected on the wall (749-50). He explained the Forms, or ideals, as the essence of things ("Beauty", "Justice"): what we see every day are mere shadows of the Forms existing on the other side of a fire. At the root of this theory is the fact that Plato believed the physical world, though beautiful, to be a simple copy of capital-t True Beauty.

To illustrate: the flower you see growing in a garden is simply a reflection of the Form of Beauty, not Beauty itself, and therefore will never be as valuable as Beauty. A drawing, painting, or any artistic interpretation of that flower is even less valuable: it is a copy of a reflection of the Form, one step further removed from the Form. Now, I want to be clear that this is Plato's argument; this allegory, though a staple in philosophy, is not held as sacred today. Beauty (capital-B or not) is in the eye of the beholder, anyways.

Our purposes are even farther from the Forms: the word “flower” references what we see, which references the word we speak, the smell, the texture: at the root of it (pun not intended), we are referring to a usually pretty and colourful plant that sometimes smells good. If these three ways of communicating or interpreting information become identical, if everything is referring back to each other – kind of creating a circle, or a loop, or a scribbled mess, any kind of path – by that token, anything can be a text.

COMMUNICATING + INTERPRETING INFORMATION

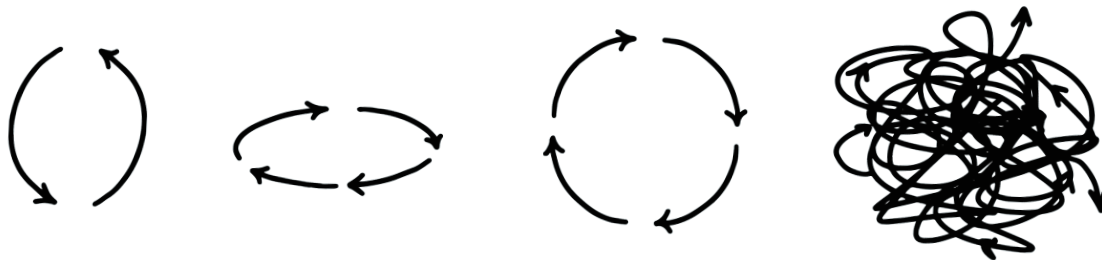


FIGURE 5 TEXT, AS CODE, AS LOOP

If everything is simply a shadow of a copy of the ideal, it seems that everything, save the ideal, is essentially useless, according to Plato (642-42). He deemed art as entertainment at best, and dangerous at worst. Was Plato a party pooper? Maybe he was a grump. The possibility that our imitations of the Forms are useless is a common worry for humankind. To continue making shadows despite being probably pointless means we have found beauty in the imperfect shadows and want to share that beauty with others, furthering the human experience. That, on its own, is beautiful.

Marshall McLuhan was an English professor, a Canadian philosopher, and is generally accepted as the father of communication theory. He coined the expression “the medium is the message” in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, which has found its way time and time again into conversations about the changing digital world. The medium delivering the message plays as much of a role (if not more!) than the message itself. McLuhan speaks of the technology we develop, and our use of it as archival; or, as McLuhan says, as an extension. The hammer, for example, is a tool developed to extend our arms and direct the force we can generate: it enhances one’s abilities. The book is indeed a tool, too, as it enhances our notion of memory, and our capacity to hold it. The book allows us to store things we need to be able to come back to: it is an extension of mind, of self. McLuhan notes,

“Printing changed learning and marketing processes alike. The book was the first teaching machine and also the first mass-produced commodity. In amplifying and extending the written word, typography revealed and greatly extended the structure of writing. Today, with the cinema and the electric speed-up of information movement, the formal structure of the printed word, as of mechanism in general, stands forth like a branch washed up on the beach. A new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them” (194).

Umberto Eco furthers this idea by presenting, in his afterword section in the collection of essays *The Future of the Book*, “For the same reason today I no longer need a heavy portrait painted by an...artist, for I can send my sweetheart a glossy and faithful photograph. Such a change in the social functions of painting has not made painting obsolete...” (300). In shifting this argument to a different comparison of mediums, Eco manages to laugh at the idea that a new technology automatically invalidates another. Indeed, each medium simply takes on a different purpose or context: where photographs can be quicker and “faithful”, paintings can be elaborate and decadent. Where the encyclopedia can be heavy with knowledge, the kindle version carries the same knowledge in a more travel-friendly way. Where the Kindle is light and new, the book is textured and familiar.

McLuhan predicted the development of the internet 30 years before its emergence: it was a medium he foresaw as inevitable. It is simply another extension of self – and though it does not leave the previous extensions in peace, it has become an incredible presence in our modern age, and a presence through which we archive ourselves. McLuhan raised the importance of understanding media and methods of communication so as to fully acknowledge its power.

Despite it simply being that – a text, a vessel of information, a method of communication – it is quite clear to me that books are, and have been for quite some time, deemed as a dying art by many. We have Kindles, eBooks, audiobooks: when a narrative can exist in literally any other way, someone finds a way to say this new technology is better than the typical book. In fact, Frank Ogden wrote a whole book arguing the imminent extinction of books in 1993, *The Last Book You’ll Ever Read*. The book comes with a floppy disk so that you don’t even have to read the book on paper: you can put it in your computer’s disk drive and have the computer read it for you!

I was going to leave it at that because it is simply hilarious. This has not aged well. Ogden was so confident that he had his work put on a disk he thought would replace the book it was placed in. And, let me add, how rude is that? He is literally talking behind the book's back, like a clique-y teenager. He literally wrote a book about how books are stupid.

But let me elaborate. Okay, take your time, catch your breath from all the laughter, and let me elaborate.

Ogden is adamant about all the benefits of the internet, the computer, and the technology being developed at the time. He deems the digital world as more inclusive, more accessible, and as a platform for the writer and reader to work together. To a certain extent, he is not wrong. The internet is available around the world; anyone can put anything on it: people define themselves through this thing we cannot hold or physically touch. Influencers, business people, students, activists, and celebrities all have a place.

Ogden describes the floppy disk as “virtually indestructible” (42), and though plastic is tough, it is not indestructible. Information stored on these disks is not forever: a short interaction with a magnet can erase the entire contents of the disk! Time alone can deteriorate disks, tapes, ribbons, and books, too, but the notion of “forever” in technology simply isn't so.

Before I move on, I want to ask you, dear reader, when was the last time you saw a book in the trash? Or at a junkyard? Maybe once or twice in your whole life (if even that), right? When one is done with a book, it is donated, brought to a library, a second-hand store, a friend, a used book store. People don't throw out books: they pass them on.

I wonder how many floppy disks there are in a junkyard?

Though Ogden has some good points, this text is, of course, dated. There was something he had yet to see, something new that shifts the scales: data mining. How can the internet be truly democratic? We let our computer collect data from us, and that data is sold and manipulated by corporate interests. A few months ago, as I was making dinner, I was playing music on my phone. My Alexa chimed in when I asked her to set a timer, and said, “By the way, you can ask me to play music for you. A good song makes time move a little faster.” Though this may seem harmless, it was actually quite scary: I am perfectly aware of my phone and my Alexa listening to me at all times – disguised as needed to be prepared for “hey Siri” or “Alexa, ...” – but I let them do it anyway. This tiny little machine had recognized a pattern: when I cook dinner, I usually ask Alexa to play me one of my playlists; but for the past few days, I had been straying from my pattern and playing music from my phone instead. Alexa, a corporate spy, was not receiving money from my music provider to play my music. There are unintended consequences that come with the things we develop, and the internet is no exception. Though Ogden may have been wrong about the floppy disk (and let's cut him some slack, everyone was so excited about it!), there are things he simply couldn't see coming from 1993... or his high horse.

It seems that the closest thing we have to ‘forever’ is the book: and though time can change its quality, the book acts as a vessel of knowledge, and it is not as changing as the culture it holds between its covers. Knowledge itself breaks in the frame of culture; as has culture broken the frame

of the book: the difference is the technology of the book is not so constantly changed that it cannot be restored. It can be decoded later. And, the physical book cannot be datamined. In one form or another, for one purpose or another, the book exists to teach, to display, to share. No matter what new technology comes next, this format, as it always has, will persist thanks to its familiar form with its familiar smell, and its familiar texture.

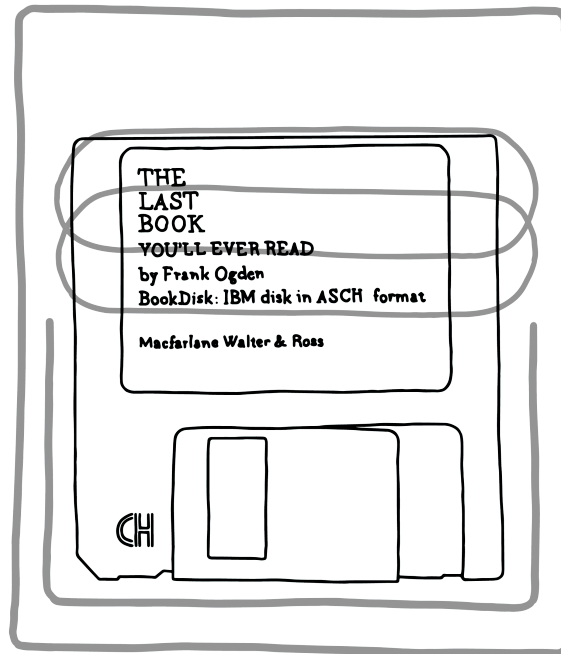


FIGURE 6 FLOPPY DISK INCLUDED AT THE BACK OF OGDEN'S BOOK

Along similar lines of Ogden's thought comes Hypertext theory. George P. Landow, a professor of literature and art history at Brown University, is thought of as a pioneer in this theory of electronic literature. In his 1992 book *Hypertext: The Convergence of Critical Theory and Technology*, he explains the basics of what this electronic language is:

“In addition to expanding the quantity and diversity of alphabetic and nonverbal information included in the text, hypertext provides visual elements not found in printed work. Perhaps the most basic of these is the cursor, the blinking arrow, line, or other graphic element that represents the reader-author's presence in the text. The cursor...provides a moving intrusive image of the reader's presence in the text.... In a book one can always move one's finger or pencil across the printed page, but one's intrusion always remains physically separate from the text. One may make a mark on the page, but one's intrusion does not affect the text itself” (44).

Though hypertext is just another language or code to learn, Landow describes it as a way to elevate one's experience with the absorption of information. Thanks to hypertext, the “reader-author's” presence is one and the same, unlike the printed word.

When we write or doodle in the margins of a book, it becomes a living manuscript; a collaboration between two (or sometimes more!) parties. Adding a small part of themselves onto the page does indeed change the experience one has with the book, whether it is the next person to read it, or that first reader revisiting. A reader's intrusion into a text absolutely affects the experience one has with it later on. Flipping through the pages of a second-hand book or borrowing from a library is often accompanied by these highlighted passages, or notes in the margins, or even handwritten dedications: it provides insight into the history of the object, and all those who have come in contact with it.

When I was in high school, we read Margaret Atwood's incredibly popular book, *The Handmaid's Tale*; instead of purchasing it brand new, my parents told me they had a copy in the basement that one of them used in high school so many years ago. I think it was my mother's copy, and it is filled with scribbles and notes, some in French, and it provided me with an insight into a version of my mother I had never met. This experience is just as valuable, if not more so, than being able to alter the contents of a Wikipedia page, for example.

In terms of visual elements, as Landow notes, these blinking arrows, lines, and other graphic elements are a visual representation of the reader's intrusion into the text. I would argue that these visual, moving elements distract from the text itself: they are foreign bodies that sit between letters, among the words, and act as a stark, obvious object, almost saying, "Hey, look, I'm not in the text, I'm floating above and through and around it." When information is digital, it exists in a place we cannot touch, or grab, or feel a change. Digital knowledge changes so often, so frequently, and often in new ways: it becomes so fragile that it can cease to exist. The value in paper knowledge is that it remains fixed: it marks a point in time, a particular mindset, and gives us the ability to possess it.

Reading a digital text, considering all the unseen layers it has, can feel like someone is reading over your shoulder. We are being tracked: algorithms to understand our habits are constantly being developed, our data is being collected and sold. These are privacy concerns to those of us being watched, but simply a money-making opportunity for advertisers. We may think the internet is free, but the user is being exploited: and sometimes, that user is you!

Both books and the internet have pros and cons; if we are choosing to look at the pros of the internet against the cons of the book, we should be able to compare the inverse as well. *The Future of the Book*, a collection of essays, does just that. Paul Duguid, a professor at the UC Berkeley School of Information, touches on the simplicity of the book in his essay, "Material Matters: The Past and Futurology of the Book". In considering the speed at which our culture changes, Duguid is of the mindset that the book will persist and always be something with more to tell us. The beauty of the book is that it will always be a book: when the internet adjusts and readjusts before our eyes, there will always be information to be found on the papers between two covers. The book will always have more to tell us. He notes, "Like an exasperated gardener, we snip triumphantly at the exposed plant [the book], forgetting how extensive established roots can be.... And for similar reasons, we may find that simple hinged book will prove as enduring. The closed cover, turned page, broken spine, serial form, immutable text, revealing heft, distinctive formats, handy size, and so on offer their own deep-rooted and resilient combination of technology and social process and continue to provide unrivaled signifying matter" (64). Who are we to

dismiss our own prior technological advances, and why do we feel the need to do so? There is a reason the book form has been around for so long!

As I sit here, writing on my computer, watching the words form from the letters I type behind my blinking line, I absolutely see the humour in this experience. I am doing something similar to Ogden, writing about my annoyance with this hierarchy of text forms on the precise machine I am saying has no more value than the book I sit next to. Our main difference? My love of paper knowledge does not blind me to the value and ease of digital knowledge. They are apples and oranges: both useful for a fruit salad. I am simply saying that though both have value, they are valuable in different ways, and each has their own benefits in different ways than the other.

An Obsession with Possession and Materiality

I have always loved libraries. But I have always had the need to own a copy of the borrowed book if I loved it. I want to have my own library, my own shelving system (most likely colour-coded), my own collection. As I grew older, I realized, upon divulging my shameful secret, that I was not alone in my desire to possess books. Owning a book I love is a comfort: I can treasure it and read it again, lend it to a friend (and maybe never get it back), suggest it in a conversation, or gift another copy of it.

Why is getting a book as a gift such a touching experience? For Christmas one year, my eldest cousin M bought me a National Geographic book on women photographers. It was one of the most touching gifts I ever received, and I spoke about it for ages. Thus began a kind of tradition with M; she would, every holiday season, buy me a book on whatever I was obsessed with at the time. The following year, she bought me a book on women and tattoos, as I had become enamoured with the art form (even though I was not allowed to get any tattoos). This continued with books on artists I loved, art movements I had spoken about, and most recently, a cookbook filled with modern twists on traditional Jewish recipes. My other cousin, D, began doing the same: last Christmas, he gave me two art books – one on Van Gogh and the other on Frida Kahlo. All these topics and artists had clearly become synonymous with me in my family's minds, and they thought, what better gifts to give than a book on the things Noa loves most?

Giftng a book is almost a risk, but it is also a really thoughtful present. I had a friend in college who gave me fiction books for every birthday and holiday we celebrated together. I always felt so special because she chose books that she had loved and thought I might, too. And, she was always right. Never once did I not absolutely adore the books she gave me. Once read, they sit on my shelf, a symbol of a friendship that no longer exists. Giving someone a book is more than just wrapping a book and giving it. It takes planning, examining the traits and patterns of a person you may know intimately. I liked this book, and I know X likes this thing that we have in common, so therefore, I think X would like this book. It means you took the time to find something they might like, and that means that you listen to them, learn from them, and spend enough time with them to know these things. That, dear reader, is no small feat.

So does the gifted book become a symbol of shared interest, a point of connection? Once it has been read, absorbed, loved or hated or indifferent, what does it become? It transforms from

a symbol, a gift, into an emotion, a softness; a book gifted becomes both book possessed, and book shared.

This is where digital text fails its readers: a digital text cannot be possessed. I can't hold it in my hands, feel the texture of the paper, or look at it from across the room without purposefully searching for it and let memories bloom. I can display my book on a shelf; I can put them in my office to remind me of specific ideas. I am interested in the physicality of books: they are not just vessels of information because then they would be no different than a billboard, or a radio advertisement, or a brochure jammed in your mailbox. The object itself is a technology, an extension of man, a physical experience. This is where paper comes in: paper acts as the bridge between the book and your fingers; its texture is one you are familiar with. When I write "paper", I don't necessarily mean white printer paper: I mean pages, and whatever material they are made with, and words, and whatever ink they are printed with.

When I was in my pre-teen years, whenever my family would go on a trip, I needed to bring at least three books with us. No matter how long the trip, even if it was only for four days. I used to gobble up books like they were the air I needed to breathe. Plus, I liked reading a few things at once for variety and to prolong the stories I loved diving into so much. I would like to illustrate that the books I brought with me were not small. No, weight was not an issue for me: 400-page hardcover books were neatly tucked into my carry-on backpack for easy access. I am suffering from nasty back pain in my adulthood – and take what you will from that – but I never regretted having all those books with me. They would give me a place to escape to if I was nervous, or if the travel was long and boring, or if I couldn't sleep. My books were a constant, a surface on which to fall back if I was uncomfortable. I still bring a variety of books with me, though now I bring softcover books and at most only two; I would always choose physical books (even if it comes with back pain) over an e-reader. No thanks, Amazon: my 12-year-old self can carry a backpack that feels like it's holding bricks just so I could have a variety of book options.

iii. Narratives and the Narrative Paradigm

We get to know each other by sharing stories. Since you, my reader, have started reading, I have shared several stories, and with more to come, do you not feel as though you know me, at least a little bit? You, so far, have read of my family and me, and you've seen a glimpse of my sense of humour – you are starting to gather pieces of me in your mind, and the picture of what kind of person I am is slowly becoming clearer. I am pouring out parts of my soul and self onto these pages, and you are reading them.

I know this is happening to you because it has happened to me too. No matter how different we are, we have one thing in common: we are both readers. We have both looked at a billboard, or watched a movie, or read a book; soaking in information is a form of knowledge, a form of reading, a form of knowing: stories are just another way of knowing. We are made of stories, we are books, and what are we if we cannot share or be read? What is a book if there is no reader to open it and soak in information from its pages: a simple object? Is it anything at all, or does it only get the chance to be a book when it is opened and read?

If these pages, now gathered and organized, create an image of me, the inverse is true, too: the “me”, in this physical, tangible world, has the ability to create pages out of the stories that live inside me. And, if you remember correctly, pages and stories are some of the parts that make up the form of the book.

Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action is a book by professor Walter R. Fisher, where he examines human communication and coins the narrative paradigm theory. The narrative paradigm acts as a contrast to what he calls the rational-world paradigm, which, in short, suggests that logic is what makes an argument more persuasive, and makes the world easier to understand. The narrative paradigm challenges the highly-regarded notion of rationality as more important than a good story but in quite a rational way.

The basis of this narrative paradigm is simple: “Humans are essentially storytellers” (Fisher 64). Storytellers share narratives, and if you remember our formula:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{STORY} &= \text{NARRATIVE} \\ \text{BOOK} &= x(\text{STORIES}) \\ \text{BOOK} &= x(\text{NARRATIVES}) \end{aligned}$$

FIGURE 7 FORMULA PART TWO REMINDER

...we can then create a new formula to understand the containers of narratives:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{STORYTELLER} &= x(\text{NARRATIVES/STORIES}) \\ &\dots\text{therefore,} \\ \text{STORYTELLER} &= \text{BOOK} \end{aligned}$$

FIGURE 8 NEW FORMULA UNLOCKED!

We put narratives *on* things, too; we assign stories to things, animals, pets. Our imaginations create narratives when we are missing information: history being a commonplace of this absence! “The winners write the story,” one of my high school history teachers explained, “there’s always someone else’s side missing from the history books.” Says Fisher, “[narrative] is meaningful for persons in particular and in general, across communities as well as cultures, across time and place. Narratives enable us to understand the actions of others ...because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives...” (65-66). It is as simple as that; the narrative adds order to the human experience, as it is part of human nature that has existed as long as we have. It means we need to tell stories; we need to be able to communicate a part of ourselves to others, to strangers, and to future generations. It seems as though humans have always known, no matter how far apart in time or culture, that we would need to communicate and share with other humans.

If the communication of these narratives is to give our existence order and extend our selves past our expiration, that indicates that we are relying on someone we don’t know, someone on the other side of the narrative: not communicating or sharing information, but ingesting it. In order for a narrative to have meaning, it needs to be both shared and absorbed. In other words, there are always at least two players in the pursuit of knowing: a narrator and a reader. A storyteller and a listener. Someone to tell and someone to listen.

When my great grandfather Paul died, each smaller family in our big family took turns going through his house and taking things that we wanted before selling it. I was only twelve at the time, but I remember being very uncomfortable walking through rooms and hallways I had never seen before, knowing my Papa Paul was not upstairs in his usual chair. I walked through the house with my father, who told me stories about the things he took with him: knick-knacks (like a mould of my great grandmother’s perfect teeth), a pair of sunglasses, a letter opener, books, an old game of Go, photographs, paintings, and some small furniture. My dad had the paintings refurbished and framed, and he kept some of the knick-knacks in a glass case in his office waiting room. He kept the sunglasses on his windowsill at home, and the letter opener on his desk. I don’t know where the Go game has gone. The furniture, however, my father offered to me. I’m not sure why, but there were two pieces of furniture that my father took that our house simply didn’t have room for: one, a small, wooden Lord & Taylor end table in dire need of some love. It has three drawers, two thin and one long, and two upright side compartments. My dad said if I could fix it, I could have it.

I suppose part of me felt guilty: I was a kid with no real understanding of the weight of loss, the weight of attachment. This end table meant something to my dad, and I didn’t want to say no. And though now he feels bad for my guilt (welcome to Jewish families), I am grateful for it. Silently asking someone to care for a thing he felt attached to taught me that inconspicuous objects have life and hold untold narratives. When I first explored the piece, I was able to rifle through a snapshot of the life of someone I had never known. Sewing notions, a button collection, fabric scissors, thread, tin containers; this had been my Granny Anita’s hobby desk.

My Granny Anita was a Montrealer. She came from a family of boys, most of them orthodontists. She was strong, confident, and independent. She decided to become an orthodontist too, and

became the third woman in Canada to obtain her orthodontics degree from McGill in 1939. She had a perfect smile, so she made a mould of her own teeth for her office. She met my Papa Paul, an immigrant from Odesa, Ukraine, and they got married at city hall in New York City in 1939, after trying once before but arriving after city hall closed. Paul could only afford to pay for one two-person train ride to get there – it cost a nickel – but still wanted to treat his bride-to-be to a comfortable way to get home. So, he walked instead, but it took too long, and they had to come back another day. Though she was an orthodontist, Anita had many other hobbies. She had a keen interest in fabric arts, like sewing and embroidery, and taught herself to stitch. I don't think I will ever know if she was organized or messy, but I do know what kinds of stories this small piece of furniture holds.

I fixed the end table, and now it holds my odds and ends, and sits proudly displayed in my hallway.

The other piece of furniture is an art-deco coffee table, which was offered to me when I moved to Toronto. This time there was no guilt, just excitement and pride that I would have this beautiful piece in my apartment. There are stories embedded in this table that I will never know: the specifics are out of my reach. I can, however, fill in the blanks based on what I know about my great grandparents as a couple. The coffee table, like the drawers, needed some love and time. Over time, the wood changed, the stain rubbed off, the edges became harsher, a paint stain appeared. There are also markers of interaction: rings left from glasses placed on the surface without a coaster, overlapping, varying degrees of fadedness. I later learned that this coffee table was in the waiting room of Anita's orthodontist practice; the markings on this table tell stories even further removed! Countless patients, visitors, anxious parents: people who even knew my great grandmother for longer than I ever will.

The coffee table now holds some candles, a plant, and some coffee table books (that I have actually read).

But let me make one thing clear: the narrative paradigm “does not deny that the ‘people’ can be wrong” (Fisher 67). There is such a thing in literary codes and conventions known as the unreliable narrator. A first-person narrator is not omniscient: they only tell their experience. And though that may not always be the case, a not all-knowing narrator will always have a bias. I would like to take a moment to address that though I am a first-person narrator to you, I will always share with you information that I believe to be true and fair.

Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* tells the story of a fireman, in a dystopian version of our Earth, whose job is not to stop fires but to start them. Specifically, a fireman’s job is to burn books. In this world, humans are glued to their elaborate television sets, which take up an entire room: their friends are mostly characters in shows, and the only point of connection with the few that are real is the television! The knowledge and stories that are in these illegal books are burned to discourage and disallow information that could put those in power at risk. Our main character, Guy Montag, spends the duration of the novel secretly becoming more and more interested in these outlawed symbols despite being a fireman: he researches, collects, and finds an old professor willing to help him on his quest. At the end of the novel, when Guy narrowly escapes his end, he joins a group of other men who have had the same experience as him. But, these men are not simply that: they each are a book or several books: they have each read specific stories numerous times until they have imprinted in their minds; no matter if every single copy of Plato’s *Republic* has been destroyed, there is one man who is that story. One of the men Guy meets, a man named Granger, says: “We’re nothing more than dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise” (146). We are a collection of the stories we have lived, of the things we have changed, of the people

we have known and have been. Like Dinah, there are pieces of us that are left behind when we pass, and that is what makes passing easier to swallow:

“Everyone must leave something behind when he dies.... A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you’re there. It doesn’t matter what you do,...so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched into something that’s like you after you take your hands away.... The lawn-cutter might just as well have not been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime” (150).

And, though we are not even half-way through this journey together, I would like to say thank you for reading and holding one of my things that will be left behind.

iv. Jewishness

My book is made in part thanks to being Jewish.

Jews are known as the “people of the book”; we were handed a set of rules, and we followed them (Shurpin, “Why Are the Jews Called ‘People of the Book’?”). But, more than that, books, for the span of the diasporic Jewish existence, took the place of temples, monuments, governments and collective memory. Books and studying Jewish literature became a way to connect with God for those who had nowhere to pray when Jewish temples were destroyed (and boy, were they often destroyed). The Torah (and other sacred Jewish texts like the Talmud) is more than a guide or a rulebook: for Jews, the book is a partner, a person with whom conversations and information are shared. Books and stories are embroidered into the fabric of what it means to be Jewish.

When I think of Jewish storytellers, I think of my father.

Among other things, my father has always been the more Jewish-oriented parent: though my mother is just as Jewish and just as proud, her tactic was more of a let-you-come-to-it-on-your-own-when-you’re-ready. My dad, on the other hand, was more of a you-need-to-know-right-now-what-your-people-have-been-through-and-also-know-the-value-of-our-history.

One of the best-known names in modern Judaism is a young girl named Anne Frank. Throughout my entire life, I avoided reading her published diary: I know how it ends, and I’ve always rationalized this avoidance with the thought that I don’t need more sadness on top of the sadness I already feel.

In 2017, I went to Amsterdam for the first time on one of those teen tours around Europe. Anne’s home and hideaway still stand there, and have been turned into a museum. Guests can visit where she endured the Holocaust and see the objects preserved from her time there. I refused to visit. Though most of my friends on this tour (who were not Jewish, I might add) went to the Anne Frank House, I vehemently declined their invitation to come with them. I never gave it a second thought.

Exactly a year later, my father took me on a surprise trip to Amsterdam, just the two of us. We visited all the museums, and he had planned a really thoughtful and incredible trip around all of my interests. One of the museums he had booked was the Anne Frank House, and I was very unhappy about this decision as I had mentioned to him a year earlier than I had refused to go with my friends.

Because my dad is the way he is, he had included the Anne Frank House because it is just as vital as it is emotional: it’s part of our history. The storyteller does not only tell stories, you see; his job is also to encourage others to tell their stories, and show listeners that some stories, though incredibly emotional, are not scary. All stories are meant to be heard, seen, read: we learn from every one of them, and take something unique and unexpected from each.

We walked through the House together, read every blurb, listened to every audio clip, and admired every found piece. At the end of the tour was Anne's diary, perfectly preserved in a glass box, and my dad then bought me my first and only copy of *The Diary of a Young Girl* at the gift shop.

All this is to say that no matter how terrible and horrific the story, it is meant to be learned from: Anne Frank, though so young and living almost to the end of the Holocaust, took this situation and found beauty in it. She found a boy to have a crush on, she found hope to look towards, and found goals to set when she was allowed to leave their hidden, protective prison. It is the beauty in her story that is meant to stay with her readers.

I am led from Anne Frank to Viktor Frankl, a late Austrian doctor, who was interned in four different camps over the course of the Second World War, with Auschwitz being one of them. Over those long years, Frankl learned a lot about human behaviour, and humanity's search for meaning, as the title of his ever-popular book suggests. Throughout *Man's Search for Meaning*, he tells his readers surprising stories about life in the camps, including the events of cabarets and plays that, somehow, often lengthened the lives of some of the imprisoned. Frankl recounts,

“To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider, but he may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humour there as well; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humour was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds” (43).

Frankl speaks a lot of humour and how it made his internment even a slight bit easier. As a Jew myself, reading about the Holocaust is painful – and reading how Frankl managed to find and grasp onto something slightly less horrendous than what he was living is something that has stayed with me since closing his book.

Our holidays are all about suffering: when we escaped from Egypt, where we were slaves, we suffered through years in the desert, we suffered attacks on our temples which forced us to rebuild in the dark, with only one day left of oil which somehow turned into eight days and nights... the countless stories one could tell about all the suffering and horrors we as a people have faced. And yet, our holidays focus on the stories, yes, but mostly about the suffering; and that, in itself, is a sad kind of funny.

I once picked up a book in a big bookstore chain in Chicago. The book was a small, hardcover book, with a beautiful illustration of a seder plate on the front. When you open to one of the first pages, it says, “A note to Episcopalians: you have opened the wrong book.” This book is called *For This We Left Egypt?* and it is a humorous retelling of the classic Passover story. Passover, or Pesach, is the most ‘suffering’ oriented holiday. For eight days, we omit anything that rises from

our diets; no pizza, no bread, no wheat: instead, we have matzo, which is essentially a large saltine cracker (without the salt). When we gather our families together around the table to tell the story of Passover, the centerpiece is a seder plate: ‘seder’ means ‘order’ in Hebrew. The plate holds a shank bone, an egg, the maror and chazeret (bitter herbs), charoset (a sweet paste), and karpas (parsley in Hebrew), all of which are representative of something in the story. We share the story while sitting all together at the table, by reading something called the Haggadah, the text that sets the order of Passover: it outlines the prayers to say and when, when to drink what wine, the story itself, when to ask the Four Questions, and so on and so forth.

The story of Passover is long, but I feel the most important part to note is why it is called “Passover”: After asking the Pharaoh for freedom nine times, being told no nine times, only to have nine different plagues sent by God, it was the tenth time that finally gave the Jews enough time to run before the Pharaoh changed his mind. The death of the firstborn was the final plague, and in order to prevent death from coming to the firstborn sons of the Jews, they had to mark an X over their doors in lamb’s blood. The angel of death then *passed over* those homes. Though this is when many gentiles say, “but then the Egyptians suffered, too!” (aka, the Passover story’s “not all men”, or “all lives matter” for Jews), it is important to understand that this was not easy for the Jews. They mourned with their Egyptian captors. Since we know suffering so well, we can often recognize it in others quite quickly, and we lend our experience to those new to suffering by holding their hands and crying with them.

To represent all the tears our ancestors shed, we dip the maror in saltwater. The funny thing? That’s my favourite part.

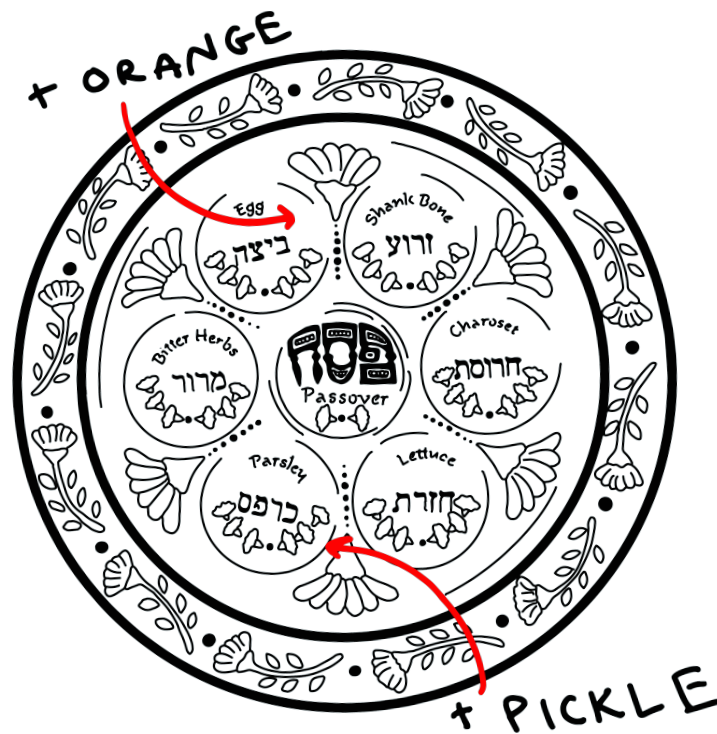


FIGURE 9 ONE OF MY FAMILY’S SEDER PLATES. (see appendix A to understand why a pickle and orange!)

Frankl writes, “But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete” (67). The Jewish people, more than many others, have understood this. Without all the suffering, the things we have won would not be so sweet – charoset, anyone?

When I lived in Chicago, I faced my first Passover without my family. My father, being the connected man he is, met someone at a conference who was not only Jewish but also lived in Chicago! When they parted ways, his new friend offered a Passover table for me to join if I ever wanted. Indeed, what I expected to be a lonely evening wound up being lovely and full of strangers, other Jews, and full of an entirely different family with entirely different traditions – but they were Jewish traditions nonetheless. And, though I never saw them again, I will remember that Passover fondly. They welcomed me into their home, invited me to sit with them and tell them my interests and my stories, just for the sake of sharing their Passover with someone who had no one to celebrate with.

The point of stories is to pass along and share pieces of ourselves and our history, no matter the form that sharing takes. Jewish stories are no exception; in fact, this sharing is present in all of

our traditions. Jews are never meant to do things alone: when you're alone, you're more likely to be taken advantage of.

For example, a Bar and Bat Mitzvah is meant to introduce a young man or young woman into adulthood. Though this clearly seems to be something experienced by an individual, this is no feat accomplished alone. With the help of a tutor, the soon-to-be young adult learns their Torah portion. With the encouragement of their family, they work hard for a whole year leading up to the Mitzvah. With the synagogue's rabbi and team, they learn about the history of the event to take place. At the end of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, as the new adult walks down the synagogue aisle holding the Torah, everyone kisses it as they congratulate the newly appointed adult person. Yes, the Torah is sacred, but that sacredness is meant to be shared and experienced together. "Mitzvah" means "good deed" in Hebrew. A good deed is not for yourself or for an underlying reason, but simply to help others and share goodness.

As Frankl states, "The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent" (44). Though suffering has been omnipresent throughout our history, Jews have developed a sense of humour that allows us to laugh at our suffering, to make it a less heavy burden to bear. It allows us to remind ourselves of our pain but not let that pain linger. It allows us to find our happiness.

v. Humour

Humour is not something you would typically associate with the art world, so why does it matter if we include it now? Nothing changes if we continue to omit – or disallow – humour. That, however, is unacceptable. Humour lightens the anxious weight on our shoulders, and anxiety hangs around the museum-white-cube like a bad smell. Always worrying about touching and getting in trouble, worrying about speaking to whomever you're with (it's always so quiet; what if someone else hears and judges you?), anxious about not understanding what is being portrayed. Why, if art is meant to be for everyone, is it so scary and unattainable?

This could be the beginning of a conversation about several parts of the art world; unattainable, unreachable, inaccessible. To see art, you have to pay money to get into an institution filled with white people, older people giving younger people the stink-eye, security guards watching your every move.

In these serious spaces, like the art world, humour is deemed as something that diminishes the value of what is being laughed at: I argue it is the opposite; in fact, it shows value! Art is meant to incite a response, bring emotions to the surface, connect with viewers: artists express the conditions of human life in order to connect with others, to share their stories and narratives. So who is anyone to judge the emotion that art provokes?

I made a pizza dough the other day. It didn't really rise, and it was tougher than doughs I've made in the past. I wasn't sure what had happened, what I had done wrong, so when I left it alone for an hour to rise, and my partner J came over, I explained that the "dough was funny," and it's possible I would have to remake the dough.

"Funny like 'ha-ha'?"

Just like love, there are different types of humour. The love you have for your mother is different than the love you have for your partner. Humour comes in such a variety of forms that it can be attached to anything. Something can be surprising, so we laugh. Something that makes us feel awkward makes us laugh to relieve tension. We laugh at idiots, at strangeness, at awareness; humour is not just one thing.

Humour gives me the courage to have an existential moment. Jean-Paul Sartre, unlike Albert Camus, was so serious about the human condition that he became miserable. Camus looked at the ridiculousness of the human condition with a sense of humour, and explained it to others in a way that was more accessible: Sisyphus and the boulder.

According to Camus, human existence is like the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Once a king, Sisyphus was punished for his behaviour and forced to roll an enormous boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down the other side, over and over again, until the end of time. For Camus, this is ridiculous, and acts as a metaphor for the human condition: content to roll a boulder up, watch it roll down, and do it all over again. When thinking about this concept seriously and literally, it is quite depressing; but thinking about Sisyphus doing it with a smile on his face, proud of having gotten the boulder up the mountain, or admiring the weather, changes the way we hear or read the story. Picturing the story in this way is actually more relatable: life is indeed a series of ups and downs, climbing and falling, but always getting back on one's feet and trying again.

Humans search for their happiness outside of themselves: "if only I had that job...", "if only I had that car...". Happiness is contagious: if you're happy inside, finding something to appreciate even when pushing the boulder uphill, you have something attractive to others. We are attracted to suffering just as we are attracted to humour and happiness.

Yet, humour does not always mean happiness; humour is simply a way to cope with the world. A positive outlook is useful; a negative one is useless! In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, being unhappy is illegal. I have every right to be funny, just as we have every right to be unhappy.

Eugène Ionesco wrote a play in 1959 called *Rhinocéros*, in which inhabitants of a small town in France become rhinos, one by one. It is an absolutely ridiculous play, filled with lines that make no sense yet have a starkly clear message. Ionesco's play is an explanation of fascism and mob mentality, in a way that seems so odd and out of place that you can't help but laugh. The rhinos are clumsy and destroy everything in their town, and the one character who does not morph refuses to change to join everyone else (Ionesco). Though a very scary phenomenon, especially in reference to Nazism and fascism, Ionesco makes a mockery out of fear; and, when you think about it, it is kind of ridiculous.

Humour is a kind of power. It breaks down barriers; it is a very powerful bomb to throw into a conversation (as is seriousness, I might add): but in a world of seriousness, a serious bomb

does not make much of a difference. Humour makes something complicated easier to understand. That in itself demonstrates value, but that is not all it can offer. Humour is a coping mechanism, similar to Ionesco and Camus; it allows one to lighten something scary, like pointlessness in Camus' case. Interestingly enough – and I'm sure this transition is a *huge* surprise to you, reader – there is a people in particular that uses humour to laugh at themselves, their history, and process ancestral pain: Jewish people!

The People of the Book are a people of storytelling. We have originated some of the world's most widespread stories: we are God's chosen people, we were handed the Ten Commandments, and we wrote the Old Testament. But, in more modern times, there seems to be an abundant presence of Jews in comedy. Jerry Seinfeld, Iliza Shlesinger, Larry David, the Marx brothers, Abbi Jacobson, Ilana Glazer, Billy Crystal, Gabe Liedman, Sandra Bernhard, and so many more. But, even gentiles like John Mulaney make jokes about Jewish humour. Mulaney often shares stories of his Jewish wife, who he says never makes him second-guess what she is feeling. In his first comedy special, "New in Town", he says:

[With] My Jewish girlfriend, I don't have to guess what's wrong. She comes in the room, and she's like, "My stomach hurts!" Then we can move on from there. That's what I mean, she's very focused, she's very in the moment, you know? And that's a good thing in a significant other, she's very present. Jews don't daydream 'cause folks are always after 'em, and they gotta stay sharp, you know what I mean? They have to be there. They haven't let their minds wander since Egypt.

While following this Jewish humour path, I found myself wondering if Jews were always funny. When they were wandering through the desert for forty years, were they cracking jokes? Did they laugh or chuckle when Moses dropped the Ten Commandments? I'm not the only one

asking these questions. In a 2017 New York Times article by Mark Horowitz, called “Why Are Jews Funny?” he opens with:

Were Jews always funny? For most of their history they had a reputation, at least among their gentile neighbors, for being humorless and glum. But in 1978, Time magazine claimed that 80 percent of all stand-up comedians in the United States were Jewish. So either Jews got funnier, or they were just funny all along and nobody noticed.

There are plenty of theories to explain Jewish humor — most devised by Jews. Saul Bellow...thought Jewish humor combined “laughter and trembling.” Freud believed Jewish humor was a defense mechanism: a form of sublimated aggression that lets victims of persecution safely cope with their condition. Or as Mel Brooks put it: “If they’re laughing, how can they bludgeon you to death?”

Humour and suffering, though both opposing things on a spectrum of emotions are two things that bring people together. Jews have used our past and present suffering as a point to connect with others, and with total strangers: suffering, no matter how different we are, is a thing we share. Whereas humour can be subjective and vary by taste, Jewish pain – no matter the kind – shares the same roots. And if Jewish humour stems from pain, then it simply is a culturally and socially specific phenomenon: we are no longer talking about “Jewish” + “humour”, we are talking specifically about “Jewish humour”.

I feel the need to distinguish Jewish humour from Jewish + humour because they are not one and the same. We are referring to a specific type of humour, one that is unique to Jews. It is an unusual mixture of self-deprecating and a paranoid superiority, as Dan Ben-Amos’ article “The ‘Myth’ of Jewish Humour” points out, as the two work together in creating an outward-facing mask that is not a true and accurate reflection.

We’ve already talked quite a bit about suffering, but I want to remind you that the opposite of suffering is not laughing; that would be bliss, happiness, or elation. Laughing is something done in spite of suffering, in defiance! It is seizing control, and releasing a truly all-natural cry!

It is widely thought that the self-deprecating quality of our humour is “the one feature of culture which enabled the Jews to overcome the tribulations which continue to haunt them historically” (Ben-Amos 114). In fact, this self-depreciation is a staple of Jewish humour, but it does not come from a want to assimilate. Self-hatred in Jewish humour is linked to a sense of ambiguity to alleviate the often painful experience of existing in the margins; others simply heard it and laughed alongside us. No matter the tribulation, Jews have always found a way to laugh at their situation, whatever it may be, or find some way to laugh despite it.

A perfect example of this is outlined in “Ethnic Humour: Subversion and Survival”, an article by Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson. Jews have harnessed stereotypes to make perpetrators laugh until they say, “Okay, you’re pretty funny; you can have a seat at the table.” Indeed, as described by Boskin and Dorinson, “[Jews] freshened up old stereotypes and injected doses of Jewish comic wisdom into American life. Their message was strong and clear: mir zeinen doh (we are here)”

(90). In using insult as an advantage, Jews made have made their presence known and their power clear. Laugh with us!

To wrap up this chapter, I'd like to share Immanuel Olsvanger's *Röyte Pomerantsen, or: How to Laugh in Yiddish*. The Hebrew translator and outspoken Zionist jokes:

When you tell a peasant a joke he laughs three times; once when you tell it, once when you explain it, and once when he understands it.

When you tell a land-owner a joke he laughs twice; once when you tell it and once when you explain it-he'll never understand it.

When you tell a military officer a joke he laughs only when you tell it. Because he won't let you explain it and of course he does not understand it.

But when you tell a Jew a joke, he tells you that he's heard it already-and, besides, you're telling it all wrong.

vi. Searching for Meaning: the Archive

To Define the Archive

The word ‘archive’ was intimidating to me. It sounds like a library, or something like it, with shelves and a filing system and someone to say, “shh!”. But it’s actually not what you think – the root of the word comes from Greek, “arkheion,” meaning a house or residence of the archones, those who were in charge. In other words, those who were trusted with knowledge. Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* explores the archive through a psychotherapy lens, pulling from Freud, and speculates on potential future archives. The archive fever is the need to preserve, the feverish obsession with understanding ourselves. But what do archives and books have in common? The book, my reader, is a cultural archive, a connection that bridges past, present, and future: it breaks the barrier of time and the frame of culture.

We humans rely on archives to keep us safe, to keep our history intact. As Derrida says, “There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression” (19). The archive is reliant on our finicky memory: we are forgetful. There is always the very real possibility that a story, an object, a symbol, or a discovery could be forgotten and lost to the passing of time. The archive holds a thing, to the best of its ability, in the same state in which it entered the archive, and it does so because time and space are needed before understanding. Before being able to understand a thing’s significance, context is needed: and it is difficult to see the big picture when you’re still in it. It is only once the picture shifts that a previous context becomes clear. The process of archiving is both precise and imprecise: we collect and save “...without knowing why. The archive becomes more refined later, through selectiveness and reflection” (Derrida 19).

Even more so, the archive depends on collaboration. Where the book awaits to be opened and read to become a book, the archive is still an archive if it is not yet revisited: their similarity, however, is that they reach their potential when interacted with. The archive asks for a consideration of both the individual and the many; while the process of archiving is sometimes done alone, the goal of the archive is to be shared and learned from. Often, like the book, there are always at least two players: someone to tell and someone to listen.

The symbols of “book” and “archive” meet at an intersection of past and future, and again at public and private. Though different, both represent then (when it was written) and now (when it is being read); both have a private (putting thoughts on paper) and a public (when you are reading the author’s private thoughts) experience. They are both symbols of time passing, complete with definitive markings of its inception. A high schooler today can tell how different the time Shakespeare’s works were written based on the language used at the work’s conception, just as a bookbinder can identify a time period based on the construction of an archived book at its birth.

The journal or diary plays an interesting role, embodying both archive and book – it raises questions about its placement: which is it? The diary or journal is a reflection of self. It is literally pouring the writer’s daily experience and reflecting on it in the pages of a blank book. But, as it is meant to communicate, it is also meant to be kept private: though fulfilling qualifications of a book, it effectively erases the reader, the other player. Or, at the very least, it shrinks the importance of the other player; perhaps the reader is just the writer. But what is a book if it cannot be read or

opened? What is an archive if it cannot be used to understand? On the other hand, it is missing the one thing it needs to become both: time! With time comes clarity of context, which then changes the usefulness of the diary. No longer is it an externalized version of its writer; it becomes an archive of emotions, thoughts, and feelings from a past version of its writer. It is both archive and book, keeping pieces of an earlier you safe and preserved, and holding your stories. Derrida, in fact, notes, “There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside” (11). Whether “outside” is referring to distance or time, there is no archive without either. Time allows for the archive to archive, and distance is needed to gain perspective.

The archive, as a concept, is unique for many reasons, my favourite being that it is an act of kindness. It is peace of mind, and comes from a need to equip our future selves with tools. To wonder about the archive is not “a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida 36). We are trying to be selfless by being a little bit selfish, hoping that whatever we can share of ourselves may help those who come after us.

The Cycle of Extension

I started on this archive path for a few reasons: the first being that I noticed a correlation between my mental health and the state of my bed. I noted that when I felt depressed, I would not make my bed, and when I felt okay, I would make my bed. From there, I decided to take photos of my bed, using it as a marker of time passing, and mental health's natural ups and downs. I learned something through these photos; not only did my bed act as a reflection of mental health, but also of loneliness. The archiving of my mental health and how it affected my day-to-day life wound up showing me times when I was alone and when my partner had been there, something I would not have noticed without the archive fever. The archive is not just meant to capture or preserve: in doing so, however, we are given more time to sit with the archived material, to learn, observe, and form narratives. Archiving is a form of research, it requires that questions be asked and curiosities be formed. It is a way to collect information, and a method that aims to understand before being shared or read. It is a book before it is published, as it is being written, thought of, or considered: a book before it is a book, a book unread.

Julietta Singh looks at the archive as something with emotion and thought, with intentions of its own. *No Archive Will Restore You* reads as though Singh is exporting her archived data onto these pages as a method of displacing what was archiving within her. Simultaneously, she takes the time to advance the archival process by analyzing and understanding the stories that live in her archive, re-examining everything she had stored. This book, for Singh, is an extension of self, a piece she will leave behind, and is followed by the development of another piece. Upon the completion of *No Archive Will Restore You*, she is simultaneously at the beginning and the end of the Cycle of Extension.

Now, I know that you have a whole life, an entire library's worth of narratives, that I will never know; you may be someone I know or someone I don't, but either way, we are both independent bodies with memories, stories, families, and lives. Despite that, I know that at the most simplified version of each of our journeys, we are following this same cycle. The Cycle of Extension is my response to my own frustrated question, "what's the point"?

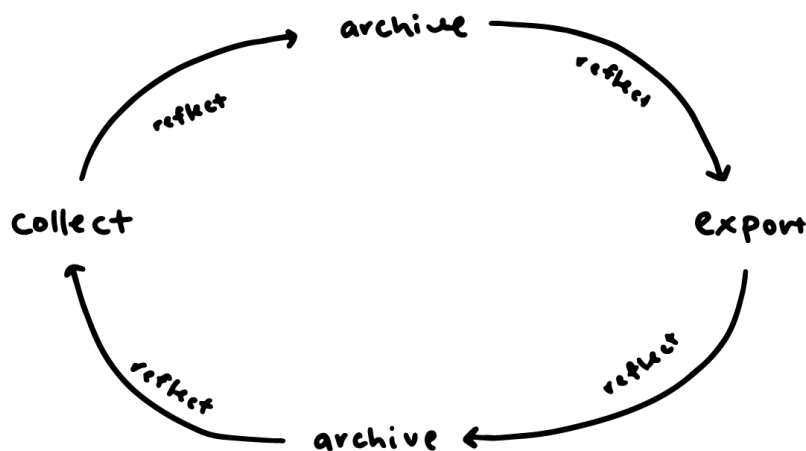


FIGURE 10 THE CYCLE OF EXTENSION

Our human experience boils down to four components: collecting, archiving, exporting, and reflecting. As we experience life, we collect moments and stories and convert them into narratives. We sit with those memories, and as we continue to collect, bridges and patterns form between them. As we collect, we archive, letting those memories slowly become narratives: sometimes it can take a while! With the conclusion of this first archiving comes the export, where, in one way or another, we put a piece of ourselves – containing this finished archive – out into the world, detached from our body. It could be a book, a child, a painting, a joke, a letter to a friend, a note to a lover, a thesis – a rumination of your collections. It exits, breaks off, and we are left with more space to collect, and as we archive this experience, we begin the cycle over. Singh is right: no archive could ever restore you: but it isn't meant to; it is meant to give you the room to constantly restore yourself.

There is one component that is not limited to the cycle's order, simply because it is one that happens simultaneously, all the time, but especially in quiet moments: reflecting. While we archive a previous collection (sorted however you want: years, colour, characteristic, smell, etc.), we reflect on those narratives: and that becomes part of what we're in the process of collecting. We are constantly making, constantly copying pieces of ourselves to put out into the world, and while we do that, we think and consider, which begins a new string of narratives to be archived later on.

When we allow ourselves to spend time admiring the structure of the bridges or the formation of the patterns, we begin to understand ourselves and our circumstances more: we get to know ourselves better. As we do so, we gain a sense of confidence and ease, and grow wiser (even just a little bit), contributing to how we then navigate the world, only leaving behind pieces of ourselves that don't need to take up permanent residence anymore.

The importance of the cycle rests not only in healing and in sharing but also in extending. Those pieces are proof of our existence, proof of our interactions. They hold a version of ourselves to reflect on, for others to learn from, and for people to remember. We remember and share and smile, thinking of all the individual bricks from which the bridge is made.

The best part of this cycle comes when deep in thought, when comfortable, with someone you love, or just simply out of the blue: it is the acknowledgement of self. It is truly a gratifying experience to be able to acknowledge where in the cycle you are, and know perfectly well that it will simply repeat again, and again, and again, and maybe you wouldn't mind that if you spent those cycles with someone you love. Or if some cycles touched people you knew or didn't know. Or if part of a cycle included an opportunity. Or if a couple of cycles resulted in a piece of artwork, or an object, or a product. Or if, every now and then, something came along every now and then to make you feel like it's all worth it. As Bradbury writes, "But that's the wonderful thing about man; he never gets so discouraged or disgusted that he gives up doing it all over again, because he knows very well it is important and *worth* the doing" (146-47).

Constituting Usefulness: In Search of Meaning

Part of the archiving process comes with a need to be selective. Not only on the part of the archivist but the archive itself, too, needs to be selective. If it had its way, it would be filled to the brim, forever expanding, and no one would be able to find anything. In order to fulfill its inherent need to teach, it needs to be legible.

I mentioned to you a while ago how I used to keep baskets full of things I didn't need, or clutter as my dad called it. Clutter can take up space in an archive, preventing other (potentially more important) things from being kept, and often, clutter comes from a worry. A worry of forgetfulness, a concern about importance; so, how do we decide what to keep or not? How do we pick what has value in its meaning? How do we constitute usefulness?

The archive is independent and unique, tailored to its expected audience. I say "expected" because as an archive aims to be listened to and explored, it is, therefore, crucial for the archivists to assume, or expect, a particular audience. The archive is not selective or meant for only a specific group of people; no matter who it may be meant for, it is meant for someone in the future. It exists not only as a place to preserve but a place to learn and be together, and *togetherness* is more important than *who* is getting together.

To collect for an archive is the same process as making a book: and just like writing a book, intentionality is a key consideration. And with the vague "future humans" as an audience, it is difficult to decide what may be useful and why. Each archivist does their best to constitute usefulness for their expectation of the future, and therefore leaves a piece of themselves in their determination of usefulness. The decision to omit or keep a piece of water-sanded glass from a beach walk in the dead of winter gives the future a hint at who was the archivist in charge: a lover, a sentimentalist, a collector. This is why the archive is an overwhelmingly human and bodily thing: humans stray, bodies change, we are unexpected and shifting every second. We cannot be written or anticipated, and it is precisely this uniqueness that makes intentional archiving defined by the individual – the archivist decides what is relevant, making it relevant to another no matter what. It is intentional as it has been intended by the archivist to be protected.

Of course, technology gets bonus points for providing ease and access to archives, especially in an institutional setting. Computers and developments in archival materials make the process easy to store and easy to keep in the same state (or at least slow down decay). Yet, a cell phone holds photos and conversations you maybe wanted to forget; Singh reflects on being able to scroll back to the earliest texts between her and her partner, and asks, "Has this device archived my romance, or imprisoned it?" (82). Inside the device, I wonder if social media has normalized

the public ‘exporting’ of the personal archive, expanding the number of players interacting with it. Like with the book and the analog archive, technology has both pros and cons as archive.

When I was in my early teenage years (a tween, if you will), I communicated with my distanced family and friends via email. I loved email, and it was the first thing I got to create that went out into the cyber world: I got to pick my email address, I could pick the colours of the inbox interface, and I could even sign up for coupons from my favourite stores. I would send photos of dresses I liked to my friends at school, and I would stay in touch with my great-uncle Bobby who lived in the United States. Our uncle Bobby, my grandmother’s oldest brother, was funny and cool. He would make my siblings and I laugh, and he always sent us birthday cards with some American money inside, and the note was always typed on a typewriter.

Not long ago, I was looking for some email – I don’t even remember what it was anymore – and typed in some keyword in my search bar. One of the first emails to come up was from my uncle Bobby. The server had archived one of the last emails I got from him; Bobby died in 2015. It was jarring and unexpected: an unpleasant way to revisit the past. There is a certain degree of risk involved in technological archives: sometimes, what is deemed useful enough to collect is not in your hands but in the formless hands of a digital brain. Should I have been feeling nostalgic, at the right time and in the right frame of mind, I would have revisited the typed birthday cards he sent me, safely tucked away in my memory box in my parent’s basement.

But why is this important? What is the point of me relaying all this information to you? This is just a small blip in some part of your larger story, maybe even only a foot of the hill you are pushing the boulder up or watching it roll down. Maybe you’re not pushing at all right now; maybe you’re admiring the sky, or the grass, or the change in wind direction. Maybe there is no point at all, maybe this is you witnessing me push my boulder up a hill, and maybe it’s a pretty big hill this time.

The Book as Survival

Alberto Manguel is known as the writer of writing; his career has revolved around books and libraries. Above everything else, he is a reader and a booklover. In *The Library at Night*, Manguel shares an intimate glimpse into his mind: in defence of literacy, the importance of libraries, and the personalities of private libraries. He speaks very fondly of the book, as both

symbol of survival and questioning: a book has survived up until the point you hold it in your hands and hopefully continues to, and in exchange it helps us to be curious, to ask questions about what “we have never suffered and have never known” (247). Manguel has a softness for libraries, which draws out that same softness in his reader.

In the chapter “Library as Survival”, Manguel writes: “After the Nazis began their looting and destruction of the Jewish libraries, the librarian in charge of the Sholem Aleichem Library in Biala Podlaska decided to save the books by carting away, day after day, as many as he and a colleague could manage... it was an act of rescuing memory per se” (237). The book is survival: it is a memory that does not rely on the fickle human mind. It is a memory that exists as a separate entity, an individual body, outside of ourselves. The book is memory, and sharing memories from a variety of perspectives is how the curious understand and process life. The book is narrative; it is someone else’s Cycle of Extension; when you hold it in your hands, open its covers, and read its words, you are giving space for that narrative to speak and to teach. The book is survival not only for the winners who usually write the story but anyone who chooses the sit-down and write it. The book is survival for both writer and reader, and they cannot exist without the other: a catch-22.

This whole thesis, at its roots, is about answering and asking questions: and not necessarily only the “research question” guiding us through this process. Both the writing and the reading are acts of memory, and only in reflecting do more questions come up. In fact, I wonder if this thesis could be successful without raising more curiosities, more questions and paths to follow: I think not. This is not a capsule: it is a mirror, peering backwards to reflect a different cycle. As this part of the cycle comes to an end, another is beginning again; without the end of one, there is not beginning of another: another catch-22.

All this is to say that I don’t know if there is a meaning to the cycle, or to extendibility, or to archiving, intentional or not. And I don’t think you do, either, and I also don’t think it’s important. But if we keep following this cycle, searching for meaning, learning from each other, sharing our stories and archiving with intention, that will matter more than understanding the *why*.

vii. Conclusion

When we first met, I told you all about the first book I ever made. As we say goodbye, for now, I want to tell you about the last book I made.

Before the pandemic put us all into lockdown, I made a book called *the pieces that make me up are the things you leave all over my apartment*. It was a large piece of ¼” thick acrylic hanging from the ceiling on clunky chains. It had two acrylic shelves built into it, and the piece itself was laser engraved with bitmapped images of teeth. On the shelves stood glass vials filled with various things from sock fluff, strands of hair, thread to my baby teeth. It came from my new fascination with archives, and sought to explore and understand the intersection of book and archive. When I began to think of my apartment not only as a reflection of me but as an archive of the people who have been in my home: a beer tab, a teabag, or whatever it may be that is being displayed acts as definitive proof of the existence and presence of the people I love.

Let’s try to answer the question I posed earlier: How does the artist, as a form of book, make existence more extendable?

Perhaps a simplification: How does art extend life? I’ll show my work, like in math class: the artist is simply an extension of their art, and the artist is as much a book as the book is an art form. Existence is fleeting, and art is the mark that existence leaves on the world that stays in your place when you’re gone. The book extends the artists’ life; the artist gives life to the book: it is a balanced relationship, and one that gives as much as it takes. Art is a story, which is made up of other stories, and it acts as a container for them, too.

My book is about the book structure in all its forms, the question of technology, and curiosity about archives, Jewishness, humour, and narrative. No matter how different each of these sections may feel on their own, they collectively create a culmination of me up until this point. I have become a cultural object to archive myself. You are holding me in your hands or following me on your screen. You have read me, cover to cover, but you have also been with me from the start. Since before I started writing, you have been there, helping me choose words and deciding how to format, directing me towards theorists, comedians, and helping me see when it was time for a story. We’ve never met, and you’ve not even seen this, and yet, I’m writing to you, for you, in the hopes that you may find something moving and useful in it. I am archiving for you, and you have learned who I am as an archivist, a bookmaker, a human, a lover, and a funny Jew (hopefully).

You may have noticed several blank pages or odd spacing throughout this book. It’s not you; it’s me: I wanted to create a silent space for you, my reader, to move through, a place to let what you just read sink in. It is essential to me that you have a space in the text you can claim for yourself or make your own. A collaborative space, if you will. Plus, keeping with my Jewish roots, there are no paragraphs or lines that find themselves alone on a blank page.

But, this is not it, my reader! This paper is a hypothesis; it is a question that propelled me towards the artwork I made. The objects are a proof of my thesis; I mean proof from a printmaking perspective. Not something to back up the existence of something else (though, arguably, that

sense of the word is also true), but a test, a first print. The first few prints from a freshly exposed screen, or a block, or a plate; an introduction! From this paper comes an exhibition, called THIS ROOM IS MADE OF BOOKS, and, you guessed it, it is a room made of books. These books, as objects, are symbols of self: this room is made of books because it is made of me!

The exhibition is one that requires interaction and a willingness to find yourself in the work. The space resembles rooms of a home, and may feel a bit intrusive at first, but will quickly change into an exploration. A bedroom, and a living room, but every single object inside the rooms has a story that it wants to share: and they want you to offer them a chance to listen, learn, and reminisce.

I feel as though we are closing only a chapter of this book together, my reader, my friend, and so I invite you to one day, maybe even now, take stock of your narratives. What have you decided is worth saving? What does it say about you? What would you like to share? And perhaps, most importantly, what kind of book are you?

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Appendices

Appendix A

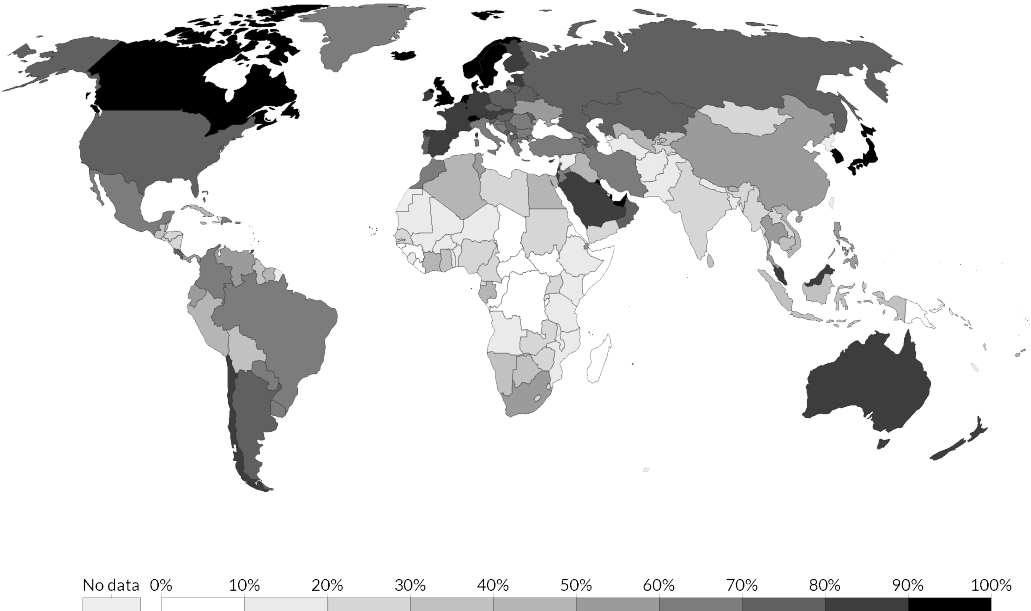
Orange: Not originally part of the seder plate layout, oranges have found their way onto the Passover tables of many families. Susannah Heschel, a professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth, was the first to include an orange: “in recognition of gay and lesbian Jews, and others who are marginalized in the Jewish community” (Appell, “Why do some people include an orange on the seder plate?”). The story has gone through a game of broken telephone, creating an urban legend that most believe is the reason Heschel began her tradition. While lecturing, Heschel was apparently heckled by a man saying “a woman belongs on the bimah (where the rabbi stands when giving service) as much as an orange belongs on the seder plate”. Though untrue, it does represent the rareness of women rabbis – but it is becoming more common!

Pickle: At this point in the evening, my father will turn to my sister and ask, “Can you please tell us why there’s a pickle on the seder plate?” To which my sister will respond, “Because the Jews were in a bit of a pickle.”

Appendix B

Share of the population using the Internet, 2017

All individuals who have used the Internet in the last 3 months are counted as Internet users. The Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV etc.



Source: World Bank

OurWorldInData.org/technology-adoption* CC BY

Roser, Max, et al. *Internet*. 14 July 2015, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-of-individuals-using-the-internet>.

Appendix C

All photos [here \(website page, gallery, info\)](#)

Video tour [here \(youtube video\)](#)



(above)
an exercise in self-reflection, 2021
mirror, mirrored acrylic letters

drawer book, 2020-2021
granny anita's hobby desk, clay, resin, buttons, dried flowers, paint, plaster of paris

(bottom right)
good night, sleep tight, don't let the sad bug bite, 2021
pine bed frame, acrylic, flat sheet, fitted sheet, pillow cases, film photos



(above)
poems he doesn't know i write about him, 2020-
resin, silicone mould, powdered paint, alcohol dye, dried flowers



(top right)
qui-suis-je? OR: the proof is in the soup (an investigation), 2019
clay, resin, dried mint, alcohol dye, paper, typed on a red typewriter

(bottom left)
one for me and one to share, 2021
ecru paper, cat food can, typed on a red typewriter

(bottom right)
the mezuzah that was swept under the rug and disappeared, 2021
monk's cloth, yarn, carpet glue

