

[Bare] Witness

How electronic literature can facilitate critical empathy, convey complex narratives and bring us closer through the poetics of interactivity

By

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in
Digital Futures

Gallery at 49 McCaul April 16 – 25, 2013

49 McCaul, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 2013

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Acknowledgements

I offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to the people who have supported, honored and believed in me, as well as my work in the Digital Futures Master's of Fine Art graduate program. Without them, I would not have been able to achieve this monumental, life-changing success.

Thank you to Paula Gardner, my Primary Advisor, who oversaw my thesis work and supported me through the emotional, personal and academic endeavors it took to create *[Bare] Witness*. Thank you to David Cecchetto, my Secondary Advisor, for the support in my sonic work and learnings, as well as for honoring the delicate nature of my personal narrative. Thank you to David McIntosh for all of his guidance in demystifying the thesis writing and preparation process. Thank you to Tom Barker and Sabrina Lindo for helping me to access all of the available resources at OCAD U in my most trying of times. An enormous thanks to Faysal Itani, who stood beside me through thick and thin, the calm and joyous times as well as the most anxious and uncertain moments of my experience over the past two years and who offered love, wisdom and a warm heart. Thank you to all of my student colleagues in the Digital Futures graduate program: your support and comradery made a safe space for my work to live within the classroom and gallery spaces. Thank you to my mother, Gail Coleman, whom through her life-long sacrifices made the impossible possible; my sister, Sarah Jane-Pedersen; and my ever-present comrade, Rachel Meads-Jardine whom have either lived and borne through my traumatic history alongside me, carried my heart in their hearts, my hand in their hands and walked my path of recovery with me. Lastly, thank you to all of the women in my life who have witnessed me, offered me mentorship, friendship and facilitated elements and moments of my evolution through both professional and spiritual opportunities.

[Bare] Witness
Master of Fine Art, 2013
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Abstract

This paper contends that interactive eBooks designed for tablet devices promise new ways of reading, interpretation and imagination, which offer entryways to poetic and literary insights by providing affordances that support and extend complex narratives in multi-sensorial ways through engagements in witnessing and embodiment. I argue that storytelling needs to change in order to accommodate new digital literacies and the complexity of human experience. I deconstruct this claim by looking at supporting theories in digital storytelling, trauma and recovery, witnessing, spiritual activism, sound, and polyphony of experience. As a method of investigation, I examine the composition of *[Bare] Witness*, the multi-sensorial eBook I authored that portrays my personal trauma narratives, as a proof of concept prototype.

Key Words

Transformational Witnessing | Trauma & Recovery | Critical Empathy | Multi-Sensorial Reading Experiences | Digital Literacies | Sonic Art | Multimedia Storytelling | Tablet Devices | Memory | Personal Narratives

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PROLOGUE

My personal background with varied traumatic experiences allows me the insight into the ways in which trauma emotionally resides within the body, how memory and language are tied to one another in the aftermath of trauma and subsequently, how writing and language are components of healing and recovery. But, with trauma there is an element of “unspeakability”: the difficulty in vocalizing one’s trauma (fear of judgment and misunderstandings, feelings of shame, the worry of needing to care for the audience’s emotions and reactions, as well as the fear of one’s inability to accurately and fully convey the sensory, emotional and cognitive nuances of traumatic experiences through the spoken word). For me, writing was a first step at being able to present aspects of my personal trauma and the experiences of living with the aftermath of trauma from a somewhat “safe” distance.

* * *

I was born beneath a billowing curse of trauma that hung over my family so seemingly native and organic that from below, looking up, that dark flapping sheet with no moon and no constellations but smoke and faint traces like echoes holding us down, felt to belong as apart of the natural universe. Under this curse, our bodies played tricks on us where the emotion and fear was too heavy to bear and too big to dismantle: my sister was born suffocating by the stress she had gestated in, eating her own feces, feeble and weak placed in the neonatal intensive care unit for a seven days until her heartbeat was strong

enough to counter the timber of our father's wrath; my mother's body brewed sorrow, her breasts poured sour milk into my small mouth that I could not drink; my father's hands were wild and ferocious—his fists always open and pruning for my brother and dragging back closed fists with my mother in grip; my brother, with all of his loose pieces, beaten and dizzy, sprang in riotous flashes of anger or molestation at any moment. As for me, all I could do was listen, and watch and float like a lost ancestor drifting in and out and away from the doorway of my body. If money and hunger and poverty and no education and nowhere to go were not enough, we were starving on sorrow and fear.

Most of my first memories are of violence or sexual abuse. Before I entered elementary school, my experience with molestation began. I was terrified and confused—whether in waking or sleeping hours, my body was frozen and stiff. In first grade, I began silently refusing to use the bathroom, which resulted in an epidemic of urinating in my pants—standing in line in public, riding the school bus, sitting on the reading rug, during gym class or at my desk chair. I cannot remember if the pain came before or after these episodes and if they were a cause or a symptom of the urinary tract infections, but I did know—though it seemed as if no one else recognized—that they both were connected to molestation. The urinary infections progressed to visiting the hospital for appointments that involved catheters pumping saline and antibiotics into my bladder and me making necklaces out of blue beads for my mother while I waited in treatment.

I witnessed my brother viciously beaten and verbally abused by our father. Then after my parent's separation, witnessed him act out the same aggression and violence toward me, my mother and my sister for the following ten years. As a child I witnessed

my father terrorize my family, the walls and objects of our apartment, strangers on the street, and even our dog. My sister, in part from genetics and neurology, and in part from her traumatic experiences—our family history, becoming pregnant and having an abortion at fifteen, living through forcible incest, coping through self-hurt (cutting) and sexual promiscuity—was diagnosed with rapid cycling bipolar disorder. Being a secondary witness to her circumstances at times felt powerless and incredibly damaging by proxy—as again it seemed I was the only person outside of herself moved to act in her recovery.

Throughout my teenage years, I experienced a multiple-assailant rape that involved my boyfriend at the time; was sexually and physically assaulted at my workplace that ended in a reduced sentence of a Class C misdemeanor and minor penalties; and at eighteen, when my sister and I met my father again after many years, while he was driving us home he put a gun in my hands and proceeded to tell us that he had returned to finish a long-existing problem: his threat was that he was going to kill my mother, my uncle and my grandfather (and of course, he did not).

In my early adulthood, I spent nine and a half years in a relationship plagued with my partner's sexual affairs, emotional and psychological abuse in which I loved, mothered and lost my bond with his son as I sought emotional, psychological and educational recovery. What seems most present in my history, loss and sorrow, reemerged in my mid-twenties when my last remaining extended family—my cousins with whom my sister and I grew up and whom were more like sisters than relatives—cut off ties from us without any notice or conversation, feeling that our shared history was

too traumatic and damaging to recover from in addition to miles of unresolved displaced anger toward my sister and I. Again in my life, I deeply mourned the loss of multiple *someones*, as well as the loss of being seen, heard and witnessed.

All of these traumatic instances from childhood to early adulthood form a chain and compound upon one another. In the aftermath of these experiences, I am left with haunting remnants of the past that are classified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I navigate the world operating in a system skewed by PTSD. These experiences, unworlding notions and nuanced ways of listening, seeing and thinking have lead me to pursue the possibility of translating these experiences of trauma and recovery in my art practice though a multi-sensorial digital text: an enhanced reading experience based in witnessing, critical empathy, sound, language and multimedia interaction.

Living through trauma has informed my ways of seeing, ways of thinking and ways of communicating. I believe that dynamic eLiterature moves us one step forward in being able to more fully represent the nuances of traumatic experience at a distance while maintaining intimacy, vulnerability within the narrative and positioning the reader as an independent witness via the inclusion of media-based sensory and abstract detail that a writer can only hint at, but never directly call upon in text-only narrative.

1 // INTRODUCTION

I propose that a reader can better understand trauma narratives through multi-sensorial eBooks that transcend static text narratives because of their enhanced affordances in sound, motion graphics, images and video.

Contemporary eBooks and eLiterature transcend the capacities of text-based storytelling in ways natural to the reader's imaginative capabilities because of the embedded interactive multimedia content in concert with the text-narrative. Interactive eLiterature can better facilitate the understanding of poetic nuances in complex narratives, such as trauma narratives, by allowing an embodied reading experience through the integration of multimedia as modern literary devices. These capabilities increase the reader's imaginative engagement, which I suggest subsequently fosters empathy, knowledge, sensorial perception and transformational witnessing.

My thesis project, *[Bare] Witness*, is an interactive electronic text that translates deeply intimate, personal lived experiences and the associated emotional contexts to a broad audience through testimony and witnessing. By means of this dynamic narrative and new media forms of witnessing, *[Bare] Witness* seeks to explore my narrative of lived trauma and post-traumatic experience. This multimedia exploration facilitates insights beyond the standard text that enhances critical insight, empathy and complex knowledge.

* * *

Throughout history, humans have written and recorded our personal experiences. Our forms of communication have evolved from oral storytelling and cave paintings, to hand scribed texts and books, to manufactured books, to contemporary eBooks. We are at the cusp of the next evolution of text and storytelling: *enhanced reading experiences* (an industry term coined by ustwo™ studio Ltd/PaperCut). These texts are distributed and read on the platform of digital tablet devices that promise new ways of reading, interpreting and imagination within storytelling, which offer new entryways to poetic and literary insights by providing affordances that support and extend narratives in multi-sensorial ways.

Standardized texts progress alongside human culture. As we evolve, riding on the undercurrent of technology and ideology, we have learned to capture our languages, histories and narratives through platforms that are increasingly stabile, accessible and equitable, helping us to tell our stories more fully than ever before, but that also offer ease of production and dissemination and make accessible eBook publishing and design software to everyday writers.

The history of capturing and conveying narrative has been an endeavor in balancing language, technology and the human imagination. In the beginning, we passed down knowledge, stories and information through oral communication. Though this was an intimate and meaningful expression of archival practices, it was equally doomed by the imperfections of human memory. Each reproduction created a unique version of the initial story or linguistic archive, which made it impossible to fully honor the initial telling. Cave paintings told stories, affirmed histories and passed on lineal narratives

inscribed upon the earth and within one's personal environment. These paintings demonstrate the evolution toward a more stabilized narrative dating back 40,000 years. The oldest preserved written texts begin with Sumerian ledgers carved into stone and clay and have been traced to 2600 BCE. Gutenberg industrialized mass-printing and book production in 1450 CE and by 1500 CE, printing presses had spread throughout Europe setting on course the cultural shift of reading from an elite luxury to one of personal access to the masses—change that once in motion would jump cultural, political and economic boundaries thereafter.

With the advent of the Internet, hypertexts began to scratch the surface of multimedia storytelling, which included many nuances that “flat” text could not conjure on its own. The first electronic reader was released by Sony in 1992 and named the Data Discman. Now, in 2013, nearly 50 predominant eReaders and tablets saturate the market. Apple's iPad is at the forefront of the tablet industry with its built-in sensors that support user-interactivity in concert with its processing and memory capabilities—bringing us closer to reproducing dynamic texts that hold true to the intended details of each story. Because of these advancements, the book itself and storytelling are expanding the potentials of human reading and storytelling experiences to tap into our emotional, cognitive, haptic and imaginative sensibilities.

Interactive eBooks forge deep, rhetorical, transparent connections between the content and the reader in ways that feel natural and unobtrusive. This relationship poses the potential to establish a new territory in which social and spiritual activism can take place in a climate of openness facilitated through imagination, empathy and witnessing:

all of this culminating in the reader's critical engagement with digital narratives, witnessing unfamiliar lived experiences as entry points of understanding the impacts on the individual and society—an engagement Gloria Anzaldúa termed *New Tribalism*. Critical engagement can lead to behavioral change and an experience beyond “polite empathy,” thus fostering within the reader deeper empathy, richer understandings, as well as emotional knowledge for those within the cultural context from which the narrative came.

This learning is beneficial to others outside of traumatic experience because it fosters transformational witnessing theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa in her work, “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces”—an extrapolation of theories on New Tribalism and the role of social change effected by imagination. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating note that personal and cultural narratives are engagements in resistance. Anzaldúa writes that “Bridges [narratives] are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (243). I offer that enhanced, interactive eBooks are bridges in New Tribalism that offer transformative solidarity, unity, witnessing and the preservation of othered human experience through narrative archival practices.

[Bare] Witness, the beginnings of a complete eBook I authored, conveys the incoherent, unworlding and spontaneous aftermath of trauma and its symptomatic implications presented through my firsthand survivor narratives. My aim is that the book will act as a catalyst in which those who have not experienced these forms of trauma and

the female experience are able to enter into and understand these intimate nuances by situating the readers as witnesses. Therefore, I extrapolate on Anzaldúa's definition of "witnessing" as a meaningful and active, vulnerable role undertaken by the audience—an engagement that relies not only on the power of understandings, but in the co-presence and acceptance of misunderstandings and shortcomings of translation: being present "together" in moments of chaos, discomfort and incomprehension. This form of witnessing is vital to the development of *[Bare] Witness*, because trauma, as I will address in a later part of this writing, is difficult to communicate not only to outsiders, but to oneself: making comprehension and clarity a sometimes impossible task. With this in mind, as an implement of witnessing, my research and practice is centered on ways of listening and observing, hinged on sound, motion graphics, video, image, text and spoken narrative that work in concert to convey the complexities and incoherencies of trauma and recovery.

[Bare] Witness ushers the audience through lived moments of trauma (memory), the aftermath of trauma (PTSD), how one exits and enters one's own body—evoked by sonic provocation, memory recitation, visual interactivity, haptic sensorial prompts and traditional notions of narrative. The multimedia aspects of this digital narrative will act as a secondary discourse (layered language) when in concert with spoken and text-based language (primary discourse) in order to communicate phenomenologically, metaphysically, cognitively and affectively. The embedded media elements will further act as a metalanguage that transcends literary and language boundaries—compensating for the shortcomings of traditional print. Sound and visuals will be employed to make

visible the invisible nature of emotion, experience processing, metaphoric-landscape design (soundscapes) and also as a tool of aesthetics.

I propose that multi-sensorial storytelling through digital media can convey the complexity of the human experience through embodied reading practices that foster transformational witnessing and social change.

At the heart of my thesis work lives the dilemma with strictly print-based text: the inability to convey nuances of narrative critical for deep understanding, which carry specific contextual reference. In these cases, the author must contend with the reader's (potentially limited) knowledge and subsequently, the audience's imagination possibilities regarding the literary subject and is responsible for presenting content that stretches the audience's literary and cognitive limits. For texts that contain and rely heavily on culturally specific and personally exclusive material—such as trauma narratives—the writer is charged with conveying every aspect of the detail being presented in printed word alone. This is an overwhelming task that not only forces the writer to bend to her/his audience's information levels and experience boundaries by writing her/his story in terms and ways that can be interpreted by the audience, but also detracts from the storytelling—replacing actual concepts and details with linguistic referential *simulacra* (idealized representations that do not correspond to the original “referent”). Therefore, the writer must substitute the specific features of her/his experience regarding her/his perception, interpretation, language and details in order to translate explicit contexts to the reader—redefining in suitable, digestible language, sacrificing the original authenticity of the concept for a general, easily accessible

representation of a reference. Instead of being able to call it exactly as she/he experienced it (saw it, felt it, heard it—abstract concepts), she/he must rely on concrete concepts presented through word to convey her/his story to the outside world.

Media integration into eBooks renders an inclusive gesture that offers up additional detail that leads the reader more deeply into the narrative through sensorial detail, but also keeps the reader invested without having to look outside of the provided text to gain a fuller understanding of the literary references written by the author.

Therefore, media integration as literary devices supports both the reader and the text.

Furthermore, the eBook's dynamic presence of media contributes to the mutual vulnerability of the reader and the writer: when more detail is freely and gracefully given (when the conversation transcends the clear boundaries of text and documentation), I believe a spiritual openness and transformational witnessing begins to grow. Because the reader is not cultivating and searching for the critical details of sensorial references, she/he is able to follow the path of the digital narrative with greater ease, deeper trust and a new willingness to listen, which in turn blossoms into new ways of witnessing and understanding.

In regard to highly-sensitive, socially, psychologically and spiritually charged texts, such as a trauma narrative, text-only or verbal storytelling fails to present the dynamic complexities of lived experience. Storytelling needs to change because the ways in which we learn, communicate, share and express ourselves (in pleasure or in purpose) has changed; we are living in a hypermediated society. As a part of the last generation of people who were raised in a fading analogue world and are living a digitally rich

adulthood, I have the privilege of comprehending the binary experiences of living in the pre-internet era and post-internet era. This insight gives me the ability to preserve what is marvelous about the physical, analogue world of objects, modes of storytelling and communication, while combining the tools and affordances of the digital era into one of the oldest practices of human history: storytelling. This delicate balance of analogue and digital, writing and multimedia, curation and creation is the climate in which storytelling and bookmaking innovation evolves.

Moreover, storytelling needs to change to meet the multi-sensorial nature of human experiences. In the case of trauma narratives, expressing these stories is often abstract, nonlinear, incoherent and troubled by the human brain's response of encoding and recalling memory during and after trauma. Judith Herman, in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, explains that in the instant of trauma, we react in similar but also individual ways of coping and survival—some of us disassociate from our consciousness, some of us freeze and shut down, some of us fight with only survival in mind—these moments do not allow for full comprehension, in part because they are incomprehensible experiences and moments outside of the standard human experience; therefore, our brains are unable to process and encode memory the way we would under non-traumatic instances.

In regard to retelling traumatic narratives, in the chapter “Remembrance and Morning,” Herman describes that often the survivor finds it difficult to make sense of the chaotic, unworlding, nonsensical and harrowing memories stored in nontraditional and somewhat abnormal pathways (177). Additionally, the survivor might find it a challenge to translate the sensorial, emotional or cognitive memories from trauma into word-based

language: shock and trauma transgress memory storage and processing. Multi-sensorial eLiterature bridges the divide between these diverging canyons of cultural language. With digital publishing and digital media technologies, one can now incorporate the sounds of her/his traumatic memory, attempt to recreate the visions flashing in her/his head in moments of PTSD or remnants and reflections of that traumatic experience so that the reader is now able to maintain walking side-by-side with the author in a much more accurate and dynamic presentation of her/his internal experience than written language alone would have allowed.

I honor the ritualistic, sacred beauty of human expression found only in the written word. Because I see the beauty that lay in the simplicity of word and language—the intimacy, the privacy, the one-to-one and internalized voice of reading—I see the potential to bring further enhancements to storytelling through the inclusion of media that honor the reader and the writer, not just merely the text, into contemporary reading and literature practices.

2 // EXPERIENCE & MOTIVATION

My background in sonic arts, writing and teaching leads me to an interesting space in which I want to trouble, investigate more deeply and experiment with the relationships between primary discourses (spoken as well as text-based language) and secondary discourses (the languages of sound, interaction and multimedia). As a DJ, a youth radio and audio documentary instructor, as well as a sonic artist, I have witnessed the profound and instantaneous effect that sound has on its listeners: the mesmerizing capabilities of sound. As a writer, reader, writing instructor and book-artist, I have experienced writing as a process, writing as testimony, writing as liberation, writing as culture making, writing as a practical means of communication and the book to be a scared object. In my work, I propose that multi-sensorial eLiterature has the potential to exceed the capacities of flat text in regard to trauma, recovery and witnessing.

Writing is empowering and gives strength both when written and when shared. I have witnessed the liberating and powerful strength writing offers. I witnessed writing's aptness to offer visibility to those who felt unseen, offer a moment in social space where room had been denied, and act as a gateway to internal power and self-love that rose from the place from where their words had come. These widely varying responses routinely demonstrated to me that words have the power to transcend our personal oppressions, doubt, fear and isolation. I recognize the duality of writing: the momentum of knowledge building and the vitality found in written expression. Writing is transformational: it changes lives, ways of thinking and fosters openness. Therefore, I believe writing is a critical element of spiritual and political activism.

In 2004, I began a job at one of the first community writing centers in the United States (the SLCC Community Writing Center). I spent the next eight years instructing community writers—everyday people with varied backgrounds—in the writing process, engaging in critical/practical, creative and civic writing. A component of my work was designing, compiling, editing and publishing the center’s bi-annual community writers’ anthology. This introduction to book design informed my future endeavors and contributed to my professional and artistic progression into physical and, eventually, electronic book design.

Teaching digital storytelling (radio and audio narratives) in the classroom setting proved to be a liberating form of expression for the writers and for myself. The writers reveled in the potential of adding sonic inflection, tone, and even their own bodies (by proxy of their voices) as literary elements in their texts. The students demonstrated enthusiasm for the newfound opportunity to enter a text, as witnesses, in rich and dynamic ways than they had been accustomed to in comparison to their previous experiences with print texts. I valued my privileged position as an instructor that allowed me to observe from a distance these reactions as they occurred. This caused me to think critically about why people respond to digital narratives with greater engagement and feelings of connectedness than to traditional texts. With these observations in mind, I began experimenting with the inclusion of ambient sounds, music and the voice in increasingly visible ways in my art practice. I began to see, for the first time, that ambient sound and the recorded voice have the potential to function as critical literary devices in

as much as does crafting the written word to tell stories: sonic arrangement not only operates in support of the word, but also functions as an element of poetics.

From 2007 to 2008, I worked at Spy Hop Productions, a youth media organization, teaching audio storytelling, media production, and creative processes to teens ages 12 -18 years old. I remember sitting beside a female student as she edited her first audio narrative (a story about unresolved emotional hurt she experienced from her father). The two of us sat side by side in the editing bay listening to her completed piece for the first time. As I watched her experience her own story, written in her own words and spoken in her own voice, which included sonic embellishments that spoke to her internal experience, I was in awe of the range of emotions she experienced as she listened to her story. I observed us both moved to tears by the moment. This was my first explicit transformational experience with sound and narrative. Months later, her mother called to tell me that the young woman had employed her audio narrative as a transformational tool in her in-patient treatment and recovery program and that it had made a significant impact on understanding and entering into the girl's personal history.

In the summer of 2010, inspired by our personal experiences with trauma, recovery and the healing power we found in sharing our stories, my sister (Sarah) and I developed the idea for a community art project (*Voices: Stories from Survivors of Sexual Violence*) based in digital counter narratives. We collaborated with the Rape Recovery Center in Salt Lake City (where we had years earlier started our recovery processes) holding free, open to the public writing and recording workshops in which primary and

secondary survivors of sexual violence could write, record and share their stories in what would later comprise a public traveling audio installation.

Judith Herman, in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, writes that the final stage of recovery is sharing one's story and developing community, noting that memory and trauma are inherently tied to language. Sarah and I witnessed this profound power that Herman theorized. The women reported to us that in the simultaneously communal and individual acts of sharing their stories, reclaiming their experiences and positioning their narratives within public spaces offered restored feelings of belonging, which began with a transformation of their internalized personal narratives.

Knowing firsthand the personal change that is brought about when you write and speak your story of sexual violence and exploit the power of digital storytelling, Sarah and I hoped to forge empathetic pathways that occur when a viewer/listener, is alone with the sound of another's voice, sharing personal experiences through the privacy of headphones. At that time, we understood through our experience the capacity of this form of digital storytelling, but did not have the theoretical framework to support our instincts.

During my final semester at the University of Utah, I enrolled in an experimental digital literature seminar. The experimentation that I had loved in both my writing and my audio practice converged into a growing field of new media writing. My capstone project for the course (*The Language of Language*) was an ambitious undertaking: an art-book that aimed to put into context the semiotics and literary theory of language and the written word in parallel with my personal experiences of loss, love, and oneself in concert with theoretical notions of language.

In the summer of 2011, as part of an independent study course at Ontario College of Art and Design University, I revised *The Language of Language*, taking it to its next iteration: an interactive eBook made for the iPad. In this practice I experienced the process of converting a physical book to electronic literature. It became very clear to me that, in the case of the eBook, the medium is the platform that propels the content and media elevating its message, acting as the supporting ground from which the full significance of the work can arise.

This experiment proved to me that although physical print books and eBooks are of the same family, one cannot be interchanged for the other. Traditional elements carry gracefully over from print books to eBooks—such as play with text and typography, at times, page layout and structural, traditional book design elements offering grounding cues as rhetorical messages in the form of recognizable haptic gestures. eBooks offer a break away from the limitations of traditional print books—motion graphics, human centered design—allowing for deeper imaginative engagement: a less restrictive reliance on text, and a more competent translation of literary devices, poetics and subtleties key to writing/reading such as sensory detail, presentation of concrete metaphor and imagery (video, sound, animation, image) which convey deep, interpretable detail of a reference. These affordances allow the reader to immerse her/himself in the text, subsequently facilitating more extensive uses of imagination and cognition.

3 // LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of my research and art practice, I am considering the eBook to be the most current and prominent descendant in the genealogical line of the book. The eBook maintains classical notions of the print book, but offers deeper user engagement through rhetorical and interactive devices. The prevalence, accessibility and dynamic-presentation of electronic literature are all key to my investigation of hybrid new media practices—how words, sound and motion graphics transmit and develop the poetic nuances of a narrative and convey the power of the human subject (both reader and author) while honoring reading and storytelling traditions.

[Bare] Witness as an eBook will convey the unworlding, incoherent and chaotic aftermath of living with PTSD by representing emotional, psychological and embodied experiences and responses/symptoms supported through trauma and recovery discourse, theory in the fields of feminism, embodiment, spiritual activism, digital literacy, phonology and sonic arts undertaken through both self-reflexive and experiential methods.

3.1 // STORY TELLING NEEDS TO CHANGE

Kathryn Hayles argues that storytelling in the digital age needs to change. She theorizes the importance of media specific analysis (MSA) in the age of hypertext, targeting the significance of flat-text's deficiency in representing the ornate principles of text, medium and digital enhancements available in contemporary literature freeing both the reader and

the writer to investigate the text in new, meaningful ways in order to expand understandings within the text, the reader, the medium and its associated symbolisms. Hayles extrapolates, "...media constantly engage in a recursive dynamic of imitating each other, incorporating aspects of competing media into themselves while simultaneously flaunting the advantages that their own forms of mediation offer" (69). Forms do not replace forms, but rather absorb other forms to reinvent ideas that produce new themes, outcomes, literary systems, ways of thinking and representations in storytelling. Hayles goes on to state:

"...MSA moves from the language of "text" to a more precise vocabulary of screen and page, digital program and analogue interface, code and ink, mutable image and durably inscribed mark, text on a scripton, computer and book...If we restrict the term *hypertext* to digital media, we lose the opportunity to understand how a literary genre mutates and transforms when it is instantiated in different media. The power of MSA comes from holding one term constant across media—in this case, the genre of literary hypertext—and then varying the media to explore how medium-specific constraints and possibilities share texts. Understating literature as the interplay between form and medium, MSA insists that "texts" must always be embodied to exist in the world." (69)

Digital texts, then, and interactive eBooks, belong in the category of literature—and more, these texts perpetuate traits of print text while pushing the boundaries on what modern literature is capable of performing. As a conceptual thread of understanding that runs throughout my methodology and art practice, Hayles' claims, "a literary genre mutates and transforms when it is instantiated in different media": suggesting that the remediation process bridges the physical world with the internal world through, for example, multi-sensorial eLiterature. Text is: "immaterial verbal construction...an ideology that inflicts the Cartesian split between mind and body upon the textual corpus":

book and body influence each other inseparably. Attention to media-integrated, interactive digital texts promotes a connection between the reader's body and mind, furthermore the text construction and physicality forge a space for embodiment via reading.

Hayles proposes a list of nine “rules” through which this deeper investigation can take place:

“MSA operates not as much through a simple binarism of similarity and difference as through media-specific consideration of instantiation and simulation: *Electronic Hypertexts Are Dynamic Images*; *Electronic Hypertexts Include Both Analogue Resemblance and Digital Coding*; *Electronic Hypertexts Are Generated through Fragmentation and Recombination*; *Electronic Hypertexts Have Depth and Operate in Three Dimensions*; *Electronic Hypertexts Are Bilingual, Written in Code as well as Natural Language*; *Electronic Hypertexts Are Mutable and Transformable*; *Electronic Hypertexts Are Spaces to Navigate*; *Electronic Hypertexts Are Written and Read in Distributed Cognitive Environments*; *Electronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices*” (74).

Hayles' MSA theory laid the groundwork on which the primary principles of my thesis pursuit take root. The notion that “flat” text lacks the ability to compose a deep narrative in digital literature prompted me to look at the ways in which telling complex narratives (trauma narratives) takes place and through what modes of storytelling these dialogues speak.

3.2 // TRAUMA & RECOVERY

Judith Herman, MD notes the importance of telling one's story of trauma as the curial component of the second stage of recovery—she refers to this phase as *remembrance and morning*. Herman's ideas inform the function and power of testimony and narrative in

trauma and PTSD through feminist, spiritual and transformational practice that informs the building of this eBook and the interaction as witnessing.

In her book, *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman contends: “The major work...is accomplished, however, when the patient reclaims her own history and feels renewed hope and energy for engagement with life. Time starts to move again. When the ‘action of telling a story’ has come to its conclusion, the traumatic experience truly belongs to the past” (195). The work of *[Bare] Witness* places my memory, my own traumatic experience into a work outside of my body accessible to witness as readers through linguistic and emotional transformational engagement: the text works then as a format for witnessing and testimony.

In addition, *[Bare] Witness* is the manifestation of reckoning with my testimony and history: it is the remembrance and the mourning captured through language and media representation that best suits the incoherence of traumatic narrative. Herman notes, “[a] narrative that does not include the traumatic imagery and the bodily sensations is barren and incomplete” (177). Here, we can see that the enhanced integrated media of a digital narrative expresses the essential features of embodied traumatic memory.

Testimony and “truth-telling” is framed by Herman as a transformational, political and spiritual undertaking: a catalyst for personal, and also, socio-political transformation.

Herman affirms:

“The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism. In the process of reconstruction, the trauma story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic

work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling...the universality of testimony as a ritual of healing. Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial” (181).

In my creative and methodological process, *[Bare] Witness* is the gesture and representation of *ritual healing* that works to call out my history. It separates it from me, allowing it recovery and also generating the benefits of witnessing. My own transformation allows me to move closer to the *borderland* as Anzaldúa and Keating write, the “bridge” where I meet my audience—the other, my comrades, my transgressors, members of my community—where they, too, will engage with their own acts of transformational witnessing.

3.3 // WITNESSING & SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

AnaLouise Keating carries on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in the compilation, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. In Part 4 of the book, “Later Writings” Anzaldúa readdresses her work on bearing witness and New Triabalism. These two concepts are connected by spiritual activism that begin with imagination. *[Bare] Witness*’ transformational power is manifested through Anzaldúa’s notions of witnessing, the imagination and the transformation that is born from these vulnerable acts of narrative and history telling.

Anzaldúa claims that “to bridge” or to bear witness “is an act of will, an act of love, an attempt toward compassion and reconciliation, and a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing themselves to it” (246). She goes on to explain that this form of witnessing is a collaborative effort, a collaborative “border crossing” that

requires a willingness to heal and witness in vulnerability and in which a “[d]iversity of perspectives expands and alters the dialogue, not in an add-on fashion, but through a multiplicity that’s transformational” (246). This notion is what *[Bare] Witness* asks of its reader: to bare the weight of the narrative, of the history, without the expectation to repair the past, but rather to carry this knowledge into the future.

Anzaldúa positions the act of imagination as a crucial element in transformational witnessing. *[Bare] Witness* is an exercise in this very act of imagination, testimony and making of “historias.” My hope is that the audience can meet my narrative on the plane of technology and find empowerment through the risk of being present and open and vulnerable to reimagine the effects of trauma. Anzaldúa writes: “Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to re-imagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times.” With this in mind, I hope for my readers an intimate experience that stimulates resistance, questioning and transformational activism in which re-imagination rises from imagination. At heart, *[Bare] Witness* is an act of simply listening and witnessing with raw openness.

3.4 // NEW DIGITAL LITERACY: MULTIMODALITY IN READING & WRITING

Colin Lankshear and Michelle Knobel, in their article, “Sampling ‘the New’ in Digital Literacies,” contextualize the ways in which we engage with contemporary digital

literacies. This work situates *[Bare] Witness* within modern reading and communication practices based on a socio-cultural model.

I took Lankshear's and Knoble's theory on "primary" and "secondary discourses" as a foundational element in my design, process and creative work. As I evolved the text and multi-sensorial interactivity of *[Bare] Witness* throughout my production cycle, I ritually employed this digital literacy discourse framework to guide the reader's experience, as well as the semiotic rhetoric of the devices I employed. Lankshear and Knoble explain, "Understanding literacies from a sociocultural perspective means that reading and writing can only be understood in the contexts of social, cultural, political, economic, historical practices to which they are integral, of which they are a part" (3). This notion of interconnectivity, lineage and socio-cultural theory ties back into my efforts to express complex narratives through multi-sensorial media while honoring the historical and cultural reading and literacy practices associated with print literature. I needed to establish the meaning of the layered media and text narrative composition in order to fully engage with their literacy potentials—for myself as an artist, but also for the benefit of my readers.

The most striking feature of "Sampling 'the New' in Digital Literacies," was Lankshear's and Knoble's approach to deconstructing the multiple ways of reading a text in combination with "encoding" and "decoding" the information at the heart of technology and literacy. They define literacies as "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses" (4). To demonstrate the

levels of reading and engagement with a digital text, they reframe Gee's theories of discourse suggesting that there are two primary levels of discourse at play in digital literacy practices: "primary" and "secondary" discourses.

I extrapolate on the theory of primary and secondary discourses, applying the concept to my thesis work that language, both spoken and text-based, comprise the primary discourse of my text in concert with media and interactivity, which comprise the secondary discourse of the work.

3.5 // SOUND

We make sense of the world around us through sensory perception—sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Through senses and cognition we process information—cultural, scientific, basic, complex, inherent, transparent and obvious messages. Media (in this case, specifically sound) are the cognitive and sensory detail captured and represented in literary and narrative forms to extend the capabilities of storytelling. In capturing and resituating sound, sonic reference assumes a new embodiment: a longer lasting, navigable object that holds space continually in the physical world. Sound becomes a cultural object born of the physical world—read, deconstructed and examined as a practice of memory, culture and meaning making—in the service of this multi-sensorial reading experience. In an effort to understand the function of sound, both emotionally and cognitively, in relations to the human experience, I turned to research in sound and phonology.

Incorporating sound in a digital narrative asks the audience to bare witness...to *bear* the weight of the narrative experience in encompassing ways: we hear the voice of

what can be assumed to be tied to the author of the narrative itself, conjuring the body associated, bringing them into the experience as we process the soundscape (space) and comprehend, alongside the given sensorial cues, bearing witness. The listener is not asked to resolve the injustice or alter the “text” but rather to walk along with the artist as she/he restages a narrative in experiential form for the reader.

Sound, according to Brandon LaBelle (2010), in *Acoustic Territories, Sound Culture and Everyday Life* is:

“...an itinerant movement that immediately brings two together; it suggests the intensity and grace with which sound may create a relational space, a meeting point, diffuse and yet pointed; a private space that requires something between, an outside; a geography of intimacy that also incorporates the dynamics of interference, noise, transgression. From one body to the other, a thread is made that stitches the two together in a temporal instant, while remaining loose, slack, to unfurl back to the general humdrum of place. Sound might be heard to say, *This is our moment*” (xvii).

LaBelle addresses the emotional and instant connection that sound constructs between two people. In my work, I implement sound to forge a connection with my reader, to demonstrate in acute terms, the sonic language of my trauma and my internalized feelings that I negotiate when I experience a post-traumatic symptom. I also call upon sound to situate the body of the listener within a spatial plane in order to orient the reader into a representation of a lived space I have occupied and in which the conditions stage the order for both my physical and internalized experience. On the intimacy, space and emotion that sound summons, LaBell writes:

“[S]ound is a significant model for also thinking and experiencing the contemporary condition, for as a relational spatiality global culture demands and necessitates continual reworking. It locates us within an extremely animate and energetic environment that, like auditory phenomena, often exceeds the conventional parameters and possibilities of representation...It is based on *empathy and divergence* allowing for careful

understanding and deep involvement in the present while connecting to the dynamics of mediation, displacement, and virtuality. (xvii)”

My hope is that the reader can be transported by way of imaginative concentration to the literary, auditory and visual environments where critical witnessing can take place. Therefore, as LaBelle suggests, sound and integrated media are languages adequate to transcend the boundaries of time, space, language, culture and even the boarder crossings of our bodies.

3.6 // Phenomenology of Sound & Polyphony of Experience

Don Ihde writes in his chapter on “Polyphony of Sound” about the spatial and embodiment qualities of sound and language noting that, “Voice is the spirit of language” (Listening and Voice, 118). He demonstrates the connections between visual and auditory imagination in terms of “the polymorphy of imaginative ‘thinking’” arguing that imaginative thinking is weighted “inward thinking” that takes place when “perception and imagination” are co-present. His ideas on “perceptual awareness” and “imaginative awareness” support the primary and secondary discourses of *[Bare] Witness*: the primary discourse (relating to his concept focal awareness) the secondary discourse (relating to his concept of “fringe” awareness) (125).

Sound coupled with language (written and/or spoken) builds a context of empathetic and imaginative understanding that summons both the body (along with its sensory perceptions) and the mind to process a narrative supported and expanded through the presentation of the artwork environment in its entirety. Ihde theorizes that through

focused imaginative perception, the reader engages on a deeper level with the work imbuing a heightened attention to text, voice and sonic media holding the reader's attention within the work so that it will not wander into its subconscious distractions and imaginative directions.

Ihde's theory solidifies my claim that sound and media can be integral literary and imaginative devices that facilitate deeper perception of the content of a complex narrative—functioning beyond the limitations of text-only storytelling. To further clarify his work on the process of perceiving and imagining in the same dimension, Ihde writes: “a complication must be added that in turn serves as a further indirect index for locating the role the auditory plays in ‘self-awareness.’ The resistance posed by a synthesis in the same dimension of imaginative-perceptual experience is also a preliminary index for locating at deeper levels the roles of the dimensions of ‘inner’ imaginative activity” (127). Meaning that the presentation of text, spoken word, sound and media in a balanced combination, will direct the reader's perceptual and imaginative awareness into a dimension upon which the reader can acutely engage with the full multi-sensorial trauma narrative.

Thus, sound (as we can consider all digital media forms I am implementing), is an entry point to intimacy and deep connection to a narrative: a critical engagement that fosters vulnerability, embodiment and witnessing. New media and electronic reproduction can act as conduits in which bearing witness can happen deeply and authentically because the media situates the reader within time, space, place, emotion, and perception.

Therefore, I propose that the narrative composition of multi-sensorial eLiterature facilitates empathy through a rich, immersive engagement by pulling the audience into the work by the strings of their own memory and that because of this, the active audience responds to this fusion of media, natural senses and digitization.

4 // METHODS

I employed Experiential and Self-Reflective methods to guide the production of my thesis work. Because the nature of the composition executed in *[Bare] Witness* is based on personal trauma and recovery narratives derived from lived experiences, my process required self-reflection in each stage of my creative and technical process cycles. These methods informed my work by allowing me to focus and meditate on my lived experience, history and memory, as well as embodied instances of PTSD in critical ways so that I could interpret and translate their significance to my audience through the dynamic elements of the eBook.

My practice within these methods was both challenging and inspiring. I made it a habit during instances of PTSD (panic attacks, moments of intrusive memories, sensations of disassociation, after waking from haunting dreams), to write with pen and paper, type on my laptop or take notes on my iPhone (depending on my location in which these experiences took place) in order to archive and later deconstruct the narrative I was both physically feeling and emotionally undergoing. This was an exercise in observation and awareness that allowed me to critically understand my experience so that I could translate my sensorial, cognitive and emotional behavior through technical production (sound, image, visual text). At times, these experiments produced abstract, incoherent narratives and at other times, the narrative was clear, linear and relatively easy to transfer into my composition.

I explored media-specific archival methods to document my post-traumatic experiences through the use of my Olympus LS10 mini audio recorder, iPhone (audio

recording and video functions), and capturing footage on a GoPro camera. As I noticed that I was beginning to feel the onset of a PTSD symptom or found myself in the onset of a panic attack, I reached for one of my recording devices and sat with my experience—be it on the streetcar, walking home, staring at my reflection in the bathroom mirror or riding the subway—recording and feeling and being in the moment of my discomfort, anxiety or chaotic sensation. The content from these media devices allowed me to examine my sonic and visual landscape, as well as my body during these moments of chaos.

I incorporated into *[Bare] Witness* some of the original sound files directly from my embodied practice and took inspiration from remaining sound recordings to reproduce sonic works inspired from the original sound clips. Through this practice, I was able to craft authentic and meaningful soundscapes into the book's final narrative.

The original film footage that I gathered from the experience-based method was more often than not incoherent, poor recording quality or did not suit my artistic standards and therefore was not incorporated into the final narrative. Although, having this footage inspired additional film work with proper recording equipment that honored the initial experiential footage while extending the emotional and cognitive poetic metaphor of the embodied moment.

My creative writing practice has long been, by natural instinct, an embodied practice. Until my thesis work, I had not earnestly taken on the task of embodied writing

to communicate or document PTSD experiences, but rather to convey concrete thought, emotion and experience. This undertaking was intimidating, but substantially rewarding.

When working in the comfort of my own home, I was free to write, shed tears and cry in unsightly manners being completely free and engaged with my emotions. During this process, I found myself faced with examining and processing unresolved emotions and reactions to experiences from my past trauma: reckoning my history. Many times immediately after a difficult writing session, I ran to the bathroom, kneeled on the ground and cried with my head between my knees or after an emotional release, found myself feeling momentary panic, disassociated and nauseous. I found comradery in Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" in which she speaks about the need for women writers to put themselves into the text, to write through their movements and experience in order to reclaim their identity and dispel patriarchal confines of shame and ridicule: "She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (880). Cixous' work on embodied writing gave theoretical backing to my embodied writing practice.

These experiences provoked within embodied writing were cathartic and yet, strangely scientific: allowing me to write from within the present situation and afforded me a sense of distance from the work when I returned to them later for revision, rewriting, deconstruction and placement within the body of the *[Bare] Witness* text. I found great insight into the ways in which I would then communicate my embodied

experiences through narrative and the reader's imagination. I included much of my embodied writing into the three chapters (panic attacks, disassociation, intrusive memory) that I am presenting in thesis work.

The difficulty I found within the experiential, self-reflective methodological models was the occasional accompanying bouts of increased anxiety and depression that tended to last a few days to a week. In an effort to remain present and continue work in my methodological framework, I engaged in yoga and meditation, which benefited my thesis undertaking in its own right. In the end, I found this cycle of experiencing, processing, feeling and translating to be therapeutic and strengthening, rooting [*Bare*] *Witness* in authentic embodiment and lived experience.

5 // Concept Design

[Bare] Witness is an exercise in embodied reading through multi-sensorial eLiterature working to convey my personal experiences with trauma and recovery. As I have established, by nature, trauma narratives are complex stories to tell. I have dedicated my thesis work to composing an interactive eBook that facilitates deep understanding and critical empathy through imaginative provocation in order to facilitate spiritual activism. Themes in my work include counter-narratives, poetics, semiotics, ceremony, the body, intimacy and memory along side theories in sound, phenomenology, trauma, feminism and perception: making visible the invisible through modes of digital storytelling.

I present three chapters of a larger work in progress under the title *[Bare] Witness*. These chapters showcase three specific symptoms of PTSD: intrusive memory, disassociation and panic attacks. My intention is to create an immersive text that captures and retains the reader's imaginative focus providing entry into embodied reading that honors storytelling and reading traditions while expanding contemporary reading practices.

[Bare] Witness begins on the title page with the fading sounds of an urban city sonic landscape interrupted by sounds of singing bowls and meditative bells guiding the reader into a sense of calm openness and a clear mind. The sound of the bells is employed to signal to the reader that they are embarking on a sacred, ritualistic and emotional journey akin to a spiritual testimony. I begin the book with a spoken phrase that I use repeatedly in my audio narrative work, *Let us pray*, which functions in verbal support to

the meditative auditory cues. The reader then turns the page and enters a progressively encompassing phonologic composition that includes my voice and ambient sounds. The content of this chapter is based on intrusive memory.

My research in traumatic memory, incoherent narrative, sound and integrated media in balance with my background in literature studies inform the composition of the chapters in this work. To begin, I wanted to find a way to convey the unworlding, incoherent and chaotic essential features of trauma narratives. As I established in my literature review, these are complex narratives for the survivor to understand and interpret fully, which means that for an outside reader, these stories would be substantially difficult to comprehend.

Tomas J Jasinski, in his work, “Language, Culture and Psychological Communication,” proposes: “As far as philosophy attempts an insight into the nature of the world, language is both a means to get others to reflect on one’s own experience and the object of reflection as well” (22). His concept aligns with the reflective principles of empathy—reflection on one’s own experiences on which to base an empathetic response. Jasinski goes on to theorize that people can unite in states of “shared misunderstanding...in not knowing something,” and that “psychological communication is the deepest possible meeting at this level of uncertainty” (22).

Instead of trying to make rationalized sense of these experiences, I decided to take them head on and portray the narratives by means of their incoherencies as best I could through the sensorial interpretation of which I experienced them (i.e. sound/hearing, video/visual, emotion/animation). This aspect of my work required composing a narrative

with sufficient sensorial and imaginative techniques to honor the complexity of the post-traumatic experience. I hope for the multi-sensorial text to meet the reader in a shared space of misunderstanding where empathetic and critical knowledge building can take place.

To convey the emotional force and omnipresent historical past of one's trauma, I employed animation. A verbal and literary theme in *[Bare] Witness* is a red string of yarn woven around the body to represent ties to trauma and memory that pull the survivor around like a kite or leash or anchor and rope. I animated a red thread that winds and weaves throughout the book visually to mirror the literary metaphor.

In the chapter on disassociation, I utilized text animation to convey the unworlding chaos one feels when she or he enters and exits her or his body. I played with falling, disappearing, flashing and moving text to draw associations of the boundary amid the physical world and the metaphysical world of drifting between states of presence and absence. To extend this thematic metaphor, I experimented with censorship—covering and suppressing portions of text with visual blackouts preserving portions of the narrative in tact so that the reader is able to distinguish some words in the narrative but are unable to piece a coherent, complete narrative together when they come up against “black holes.” Here, my voice (the spoken portions of this work) carries the storyline away from the eye and into the body, again a play on entering and exiting the body, being in states of presence and disassociation.

I devoted especially close attention to the sonic detail in *[Bare] Witness* because of my personal and creative alliance with sound and language. I designed *[Bare] Witness* specifically to be experienced through headphones. The subtle nuances and layers of sound reflect the complexities in my sensorial perception with post-traumatic experience. Not only is sound employed as a means to situate the reader on a dimensional sonic landscape and to present the auditory cues of my experience, but also as a tool of poetics imparting metaphysical and phenomenological components of my narrative.

The immersive qualities of media and eLiterature situate the reader face to face with themselves, as they inhabit an intimate story of the body, memory, presence and trauma. As they sit down, put on headphones and begin the reading engagement, the reader is immediately isolated, the story finds its way into her/his body—they are asked to experience, contemplate, and negotiate the reality of a trauma as if it were a memory of their own and in a way, it is, because they are part of the universal community where such acts take place, often go un-pursued in which there is not form or shape to justice.

On each page, the audio begins automatically without any prompting from the reader. This situates the audio as an integrated component of the narrative. In the chapter on disassociation, there is an embedded “button” element that requires the reader to touch and hold down a visual element of the narrative in order to hear an additional facet of the narrative and sonic composition of the story. This “touch and hear” interaction speaks to how touch from another human can provoke a PTSD reactive symptom (positive: bringing me back into the body with a comforting touch or negative: exiting my body through traumatic sensorial and muscle memory stored in my body), which opens up

another layer of interpretable narrative. The audio transcends the physical boundaries of the body and provokes memory and cognitive responses in the brain. The listener hears the sound, texture and language of my story told in my voice. The voice the listener hears gets intertwined with the sounds of her/his own voice and memories: the story becomes wildly vivid and immense.

To summon my body into the text (as well as the bodies of important characters located in fixed time), I implemented video and photographic images. The photographs stand to represent a memory or a fixed point in the timeline of my memory—at times this functions as an archive or record. I depict a self-portrait through video because I want to make reference to active, ongoing experience: a note that I am not frozen in time, but continue to evolve into the future though I am often pulled into the past out of the present by post-traumatic symptoms. Here, in my self-portrait video, I embody the thematic and metaphoric red string detail running through the text as the reader and I share a moving visual of how I see myself: wound in the red string of trauma.

My main endeavor was to translate the poetics and subtle tones of my experience through the presentation of digital media affordances. This was an act in both artistic and technical literary experimentation to position my claim that sound, motion graphics, video and image are interactive, poetic devices for new digital literacies that extend the imaginative limitations of text-based storytelling.

6 // Process & Prototyping

All three facets of my practice—technical, conceptual and creative—are based on a cyclical model. I work in iterations created through paper prototypes; text-based notes on design, writing content, functionality and thematic structure; and media-specific rapid mock-ups. As I outlined in my concept development, I worked in an embodied methodological practice that enlisted the use of capturing and documentation through digital audio, video and text archival practices: each iteration worked to gather more detail and information that then fed into the next iteration of my work. To generate the production of the eBook, I researched various design software programs as I searched for the appropriate tools to create and disseminate *[Bare] Witness*.

My conceptual development required great investments of time in self-reflection to determine what portions of my narrative I wanted to present and in what ways. I next moved my ideas onto paper. I sketched out paper prototypes of the interface, interactive features and page designs alongside written conceptual notes and creative writing segments. This practice functioned as a framework in which to build, design and layout the eBook while simultaneously developing the overall production in concert with the three main areas of my workflow ensuring consistency and interrelated themes throughout the narrative.

To begin, I decided to launch *[Bare] Witness* on Apple's iPad/iOS platform because of my previous knowledge and experience with publishing through Adobe's Digital Publishing Suite (DPS) to the iPad. Furthermore, the iPad's prevalence in the

marketplace, positioned as the leader in the tablet technology industry, solidified my decision to design on this platform.

Having worked with Adobe InDesign to create print books and my first eBook undertaking in the summer of 2012, I knew the limitations with InDesign CS5.5 in its embedded interactive media content offering. I did not want to simply make an interactive PDF nor did I want to create an eBook that showcased embedded video and audio as its main media offerings. Most of all, I did not want to create an entirely animated narrative that resembled an animated movie, a children's animated picture book, a web-based hyper-text or a videogame; my goal was to embed a balance of classic notions of book reading in concert with enhanced media performing as extensions of literary devices. I investigated other means of eBook production in Adobe's Creative Suite offerings, as well as Apple's *iBooks Author*.

I began searching out integrated media software that allowed me interactivity, easy dissemination outputs, various types of media integration (video, sound, animation) and offered text formatting animation options for the iPad platform. Because I am not a developer, a program that relied on writing code was not a suitable option for me. I researched Adobe *Flash*, Adobe *Fireworks* and Adobe *Edge Animate*.

Flash is a common animation tool, so my first instinct was to invest research into these design possibilities. I was leery to use *Flash* because the iOS operating system does not support *Flash* animation directly, but requires an additional export process. I knew that I could create animations and features in *Flash* then import them into *InDesign*, but I believed that there must be another way to design in one main software application rather

than multiple applications culminating into one design package through an encompassing software program that housed the collection of design elements in order to launch the eBook. I had hoped there was a slightly simpler way to create the look and functionality of *[Bare] Witness* than to design in *Illustrator*, *Photoshop*, *Flash*, *Premier* and *Audition* dropped into *InDesign* before launching to the digital publishing venues.

iBooks Author provided a simple publishing route to Apple's iTunes Store, but did not offer the control and advanced features I was looking for. I next looked to Adobe's *Edge Animate*, which appeared to offer the most cohesive range of interactivity, animation and media integration within one software application to suit my design needs. It also offered a workaround for issues with publishing to the iOS operating system through the Adobe *AIR* deployment application. Despite watching hours upon hours of tutorials on Lynda.com, I realized that designing through *Edge Animate*, would require me to quickly learn animation processes, timeline features and the basics of animation design in addition to the workload of my creative undertaking.

Adobe *Fireworks* offered many complex design elements, but to perform the tasks I wanted to execute, *Fireworks* posed many of the same hurdles that *Edge Animate* did. *Fireworks* required multiple export processes and the use of CSS coding and JavaScript. Immediately, I realized this was a far more complicated process than I was able to take on within the time limitations of my final semester. Not to mention, I would have to export the eBook as an app through both *Fireworks* and *Edge Animate*.

Finally, I retuned to *InDesign and the Digital Publishing Suite (DPS)* because after researching the new CS6 features, I realized that I could execute the design and

production elements of the eBook with moderate difficulty on my own through *InDesign's* DPS folio builder, overlay and embedded animation features for text, illustration and video. I would have to create the various media aspects through their respective Adobe applications, but could easily integrate them into *InDesign DPS*. Moreover, *InDesign* is the industry standard for book and publication design and now offers streamlined publishing features for iOS and Android platforms. I decided to work through the technology I knew in order to achieve my artistic goals knowing my strengths and weaknesses in the Adobe Creative Suite.

I used the features available in *InDesign* to demonstrate my creative ideas by experimenting with altering the ways I employed the functions based on how they are used in standard practice. I created a flashing image with color differentiation by creating multiple versions of the same photograph with minor changes in appearance in *Photoshop* and then imported them into the “folio overlays” function. I used the “object states” and “button” features to create reader interactivity. To embed sound, I imported audio through the “folio overlays” function. Because *[Bare] Witness* is a work in progress, I did not publish the eBook through Apple’s bookstore, instead I published through Adobe’s *Content Viewer* feature so that the eBook can be distributed and viewed at the gallery exhibition (and to my select audience) through the free app, *Content Viewer*.

The largest hurdle that I faced in using *InDesign DPS*, was that many of the *Flash* interactive functions and .swf files are only viewable once the eBook has been fully published through an app store, meaning that because I did not intend to publish the

eBook right away, all of the text animations I programmed through *InDesign DPS* are not visible on the Adobe Content Viewer application. Because of this difficulty, I used the workaround of creating motion text elements in Adobe *After Effects* and then imported the text videos into *InDesign DPS* as a page rather than programming the motion text directly into the text located within the *InDesign* page content.

7 // Reflections and Conclusions

[Bare] Witness is an endeavor in transformational reading. It is an experience in mourning and remembrance negotiated through the act of witnessing. The multi-sensorial composition of the narrative acts as an entry point to increased intimacy in seeing, reading, hearing, touching and imagination that facilitates the reader's engagement in critical empathy and spiritual activism. *[Bare] Witness* is built within a socio-cultural digital literacies framework that accommodates contemporary multimedia and electronic reading practices, which blend age-old modes of storytelling—pictorial, verbal, textual and performance—to meet 21st Century literacy conventions.

[Bare] Witness stands to prove that proclaiming one's narrative is a form of activism. The work demonstrates that reading can be an engagement of spiritual and social activism when both reader and author meet in the vulnerable space of a complex narrative composed in multi-sensorial storytelling. The benefit of multi-sensorial storytelling is a transformation in social, cultural, spiritual and personal beliefs that begins with the reader and extends through their future behavior and communication having new insight and critical empathy for the subject matter/narrative.

As I navigated from the conceptual development to the production stage of this work, I realized that this undertaking would be best executed by a team of artists with specific skills and strengths in graphic design, development and coding, animation, and sound, photography and video production. For multi-sensorial eLiterature to be successful in the publishing industry, not only does storytelling need to change, but also ePublishing practices need to change. Ideally, a team of artists will work closely with the

writer throughout the production process because, as I have proposed, the enhanced media and interactivity components function as literary devices that honor the poetics and complex details of the writing in order to extend the narrative. From my prospective as the artist, writer and designer of *[Bare] Witness*, it would be an enormous venture to produce a flawless, dynamic and complete multi-sensorial eBook of this nature on one's own. What I have composed in *[Bare] Witness* is a prototype, a proof of concept, to demonstrate the construction, power and potential of interactive eLiterature. My intention is that the reader engages with my narrative through the practice of immersive, embodied reading, claims the role of witness and leaves the experience with greater awareness and appreciation for the complex details of trauma and recovery experiences.

I would be doing a disservice to the field of literature if I neglected to mention that through my research and my art production, I clearly realized that multi-sensorial digital storytelling is not appropriate for every narrative. I do not foresee a complete shift in publishing—print, as well as digital—turning to dynamic texts and doing away with current modes of storytelling; although, I do anticipate a monumental move toward multi-sensorial publishing as a publishing and literary genre when the writing and media co-support the narrative. There will always be texts that are best read in utter privacy, in simple form where the power of the engagement lies within the intimate space between the page (electronic or print) and the internal voice of the reader.

8 // Future Directions

I will next take up the task of completing *[Bare] Witness*. The first upcoming chapter will focus on the boundaries between primary and secondary experiences with trauma—which includes survivor’s guilt and the sometimes blurry distinction of firsthand trauma opposed to being one who witnesses the event in its moment or in its aftermath. Another chapter will probe sensorial stimulations of trauma—smell, sound, sight, taste, external environments, and muscle memory—framing their distinct and unpredictable provocations of PTSD symptoms. And in a third chapter I will look at time—how nonlinearity shapes survivor narratives, impacts dissociation and fosters unworlding sensations—in conjunction with the defiant states of time (past, present and future) in the aftermath of trauma.

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Appendix A: *[Bare] Witness* eBook Presented as Images

This appendix includes the sequential images from *[Bare] Witness*. All of the pages below are the static page images for contextual reference. To view the eBook in full interactivity, see the included DVD, which includes both the PDF version and the *InDesign* file.



*Dedicated to my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, my sister and my niece
because I write with their hands.*



DESIGNED FOR HEADPHONES

THIS BOOK MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR SOME READERS.

[Bare] Witness

© 2013 Elizabeth Eva Coleman

Artist Statement

Elizabeth Eva Coleman is a multi-sensorial narrative artist working in electronic literature. Uniting age-old storytelling practices with digital literacies, sound, spiritual activism and literary practices, her work aims to create transformational embodied reading experiences that convey complex narratives. Liz employs multi-media components and interactivity as literary devices to extend the poetics and imagination of storytelling beyond the limitations of static print narratives. Themes in Liz's work include the body, memory, ceremony, making visible the invisible, critical empathy, trauma / recovery, and personal narratives.

Statement of Work

[Bare] Witness is the beginnings of a multi-sensorial eBook that conveys complex, unworlding and incoherent trauma and recovery narratives. I translate my personal experiences with trauma and PTSD through three initial primary chapters: Intrusive Memory, Disassociation (entering & exiting the body) and Panic Attacks. [Bare] Witness promises new ways of reading, interpretation and imagination, which offer entryways to poetic and literary insights by providing affordances that support and extend complex narratives in multi-sensorial ways through engagements in witnessing and embodiment. Spiritual-Activism, Witnessing, Phenology of Sound, Phenology of Experience and Digital Literacies construct the theoretical backbone to this work.

PREFACE

I was born beneath a billowing curse of trauma that hung over my family, so seemingly native and organic to me from below, looking up, that dark flapping sheet with no moon and no constellations but smoke and faint traces like echoes holding us down, felt to belong as apart of the natural universe. Under this curse, our bodies played tricks on us where the emotion and fear was too heavy to bear and too big to dismantle: my sister was born suffocating by the stress she had gestated in, eating her own feces, feeble and weak placed in the neonatal intensive care unit for a seven days until her heartbeat was strong enough to counter the timber of our father's wrath; my mother's slowly brewed sorrow, her breasts poured sour milk into my small mouth that I could not drink; my father's hands were wild and ferocious—his skin always open pruning for my brother and dragging back closed fists with my mother's grip; my brother, with all of his loose pieces, beaten and dizzy, sprang in riotous flashes of anger or molestation at any moment. As for me, all I could do was listen, and watch and float like most people, drifting in and out and away from the doorway of my body. If money and hunger and poverty and no education and nowhere to go were not enough, we were starving on sorrow and fear.

Most of my first memories are of violence or sexual abuse. Before I entered elementary school, my experience with molestation began. I was terrified and confused—whether in waking or sleeping hours, my body was frozen and stiff. In first grade, I began silently refusing to use the bathroom, which resulted in an epidemic of urinating in my pants—standing in line in public, riding the school bus, sitting on the reading rug, during gym class or at my desk chair. I cannot remember if the pain came before or after these episodes and if they were a cause or a symptom of the urinary tract infections, but I did know—though it seemed as if no one else recognized—that they both were connected to molestation. The urinary infections progressed to visiting the hospital for appointments that involved catheters pumping saline and antibiotics into my bladder and me making necklaces for my mother while I waited in treatment.

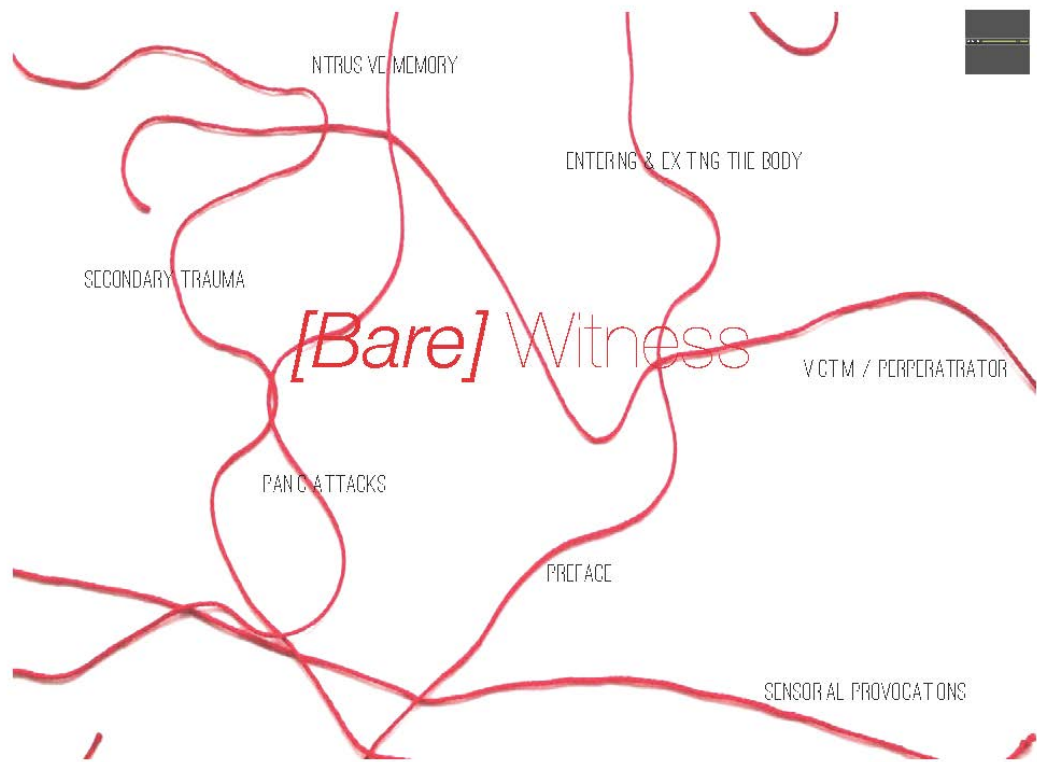
I witnessed my brother viciously beaten and verbally abused by our father, then after my parent's separation witnessed him act out the same aggression and violence toward me, my mother and my sister for the following ten years. As a child, I witnessed my father terrorize my family, the walls and objects of our apartment, strangers on the street, and even our dog. My sister, in part from genetics and neurology, and in part from her traumatic experiences—our family history, becoming pregnant and having an abortion at fifteen, living through forced incest, coping through self-hurt (cutting) and sexual promiscuity—was diagnosed with rapid cycling bipolar disorder. Being a secondary witness to her circumstances at times felt powerless and incredibly damaging by proxy—as again it seemed I was the only person outside of herself allowed to act in her recovery.

Throughout my teenage years, I experienced a multiple-assault rape that involved my boyfriend at the time; was sexually and physically assaulted at my workplace that ended in a reduced sentence of a Class C misdemeanor and minor penalties; and at eighteen, when my sister and I met my father again after many years, while he was driving us home he put a gun in my hands and proceeded to tell us that he had returned to finish a long-existing problem: his threat was that he was going to kill my mother, my uncle and my grandfather (and of course, he did not).

In my early adulthood, I spent nine and a half years in a relationship plagued with my partner's sexual affairs, emotional and psychological abuse in which I loved, mothered and lost my bond with his son as I sought emotional, psychological and educational recovery. What seems most present in my history, loss and sorrow, reemerged in my mid-twenties when my last remaining extended family—my cousins with whom my sister and I grew up and whom were more like sisters than relatives—cut off ties from us without any notice or conversation, feeling that our shared history was too traumatic and damaging to recover from in addition to miles of unresolved displaced anger toward my sister and I. Again in my life, I deeply mourned the loss of multiple someones, as well as the loss of being seen, heard and witnessed.

All of these traumatic instances from childhood to early adulthood form a chain and compound upon one another. In the aftermath of these experiences, I am left with haunting remnants of the past that are classified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I navigate the world operating in a system skewed by PTSD. These experiences, unworlding notions and nuanced ways of listening, seeing and thinking have lead me to pursue the possibility of translating these experiences of trauma and recovery in my art practice through a multi-sensorial digital text: an embodied reading experience based in witnessing, critical empathy, sound, language and multimedia interaction.

* * *



INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS



The Intrusive Thoughts chapter begins with motion text, which is not visible as an image embedded here.

CHOICE



LOVE



ENTERING & EXITING THE BODY



PANIC ATTACKS

It happens when I least expect it.
It happens when I expect it.

In an instant, a little flash of bright light catches the corner of my eye and I see it coming on the horizon, racing toward me full on like a bull to a matador. I am trapped and there is no way to avoid it. More often than not, a panic attack takes me off guard. Although, I usually experience symptoms of elevated stress and anxiety and feel myself becoming more irritable, it is difficult to distinguish if these feelings are the precursors to an attack or if I am merely experiencing my average anxiety sensations. I try to calm myself; I hear a distant chuckle somewhere behind me.

Suddenly, it's already too late and I'm out in a crowd or in the middle of an engagement. My little beast stirs inside of me, twisting and turning, hungry and arisen from a deep sleep. I am ripped back by angry ancestors pulling me into a black hole. Traces of my trauma float to the surface. The world is spinning too fast and I fall off my axis. I get vertigo. I am wild and dizzy gripping for the world. I feel it coming like a shadow under on the horizon, each clap striding closer and closer until I am face to face with this stormy ghost who looks something like me. I feel the earth quake beneath my feet and I wish there was a hand to hold because now it is out of my control: I go where it tells me to go.

My tongue begins to tingle, my heart pumps heavy fists in my chest

so strong I can feel it in my throat. I feel like everyone is staring in my direction and the world is closing in on me without it's even noticing. It feels like I am trying to make my way through the center of a thick crowd in the street. At my stop, I can feel myself slipping out of my body.

Suddenly I'm that 7 year old self of me, laying on the cold metal hospital table with a catheter, desperately alone, I'm here at home with a burning vagina sitting on the toilet while my mother slowly pours a cup of cold water between my legs trying to soothe the pain so I can pee. My skin feels a million tiny pin pricks. It's the feeling you had watching your father pin down your 13 year old brother and punch the shit out of him. The feeling you had when your little sister told you she was raped by your brother when she was 12 years old; the feeling that followed immediately when you realized he tried it on you, but you didn't think he'd go to her...and you feel awful, like you could have helped it more somehow. It's that feeling that feels like it is going to explode.

I feel it all right behind me. I feel it like a ghost.

With one sudden thought, all out of the sudden, I am a piece of paper crumpling.

Appendix B: *[Bare] Witness* Audio Narrative Transcription

Table of Contents

Let us pray.

Chapter: Intrusive Memory

Familial Trauma

No, no, no, no, no. OK. OK. Enough. Stop. It's fine. Everything's fine. It's OK. It's OK. Everything's gonna be OK.

In a flash of explosion like an electrical line above my head spitting out golden sparks, the memory of the last time I saw my father enters my mind. It's me back in his truck: the right side of my sister's body pressing firmly against the left side of mine, and him telling me to reach under the seat to grab something and feeling the unfamiliar weight of the gun in my hands. I feel the confusion of wondering why he'd bring a gun 2000 miles across this country to us—that you'd have to be crazy to plan such a thing. The gun is now resting in my hands and he tells us he's here to end a long problem once and for all: that long problem, him calling by name my mother, my grandfather, my uncle...and I can only assume us too and he can't even remember the numbers to my birth date. And with another hot, bright flash it's me sitting on my brother's couch three days later and my father walks in on his way out of the city and sees me sitting there silent and frozen. Then he looks at me, turns his head and acts as if I'm not in the room, as if I don't exist...but that I am a sound that he thought he heard, a name come out from a mouth in earshot that made his lip raise in a silent growl and I feel dizzy. Then like a vacuum sucking from behind I fall into a rabbit hole, I am spinning with vertigo, falling. My heart feels like a wrinkly deflated balloon.

All of my memories, all of my trauma comes rushing back to me in an instant without care of where I am—sitting in a work meeting, squished between two strangers sitting on the subway, presenting in class, broadcasting live on the radio, looking at my face in the mirror, in the middle of a conversation, buying groceries, walking down the street, waking up in the morning, falling asleep at night, washing my hair. I wince and shout out loud to myself: *stop, stop! Enough. Enough.* Before my memory can make it past the start of the story.

A flash and I remember Sari. I am standing at her bedroom door, coaching her over her loud wails: coaching my little sister waiting and sobbing and terrified. Telling her to insert the abortion medicine into her vagina. The sound of my own words echo in my head. Through the door, I said, *be brave and not afraid.* I told her that it would be ok, that *it would be better this way, breathe, you can do this, I can help you if you let me in...*but she wouldn't. And I stood there on the other side of the door silently crying until the sound of her sobbing drifted away like a train passing in the distance. In that eerie silence, I imagined the shape of her body lying on the floor, the medicine crawling up her

uterus walls, entering her blood and turning the tiny seed of a baby inside-out. I pictured her finally drifting to sleep. The next thing I remember is returning to my room and drinking 3/4ths of a bottle of tequila, crying myself to sleep, feeling so sad for her and waking up with the same heartbreak pouring out me at 4:30am and driving still drunk to my uncle's bakery to show up for work where I dipped donuts in silence for 2 hours before the customers arrived.

Rape Testimony

I am in a room at 17 with my boyfriend, Clarence. We're making out and something doesn't feel right. We're at his best friend's apartment. He's just through the closed door in the other room. I can sense him moving around room to room, near our door then back away. Clarence leaves the room, he says he he'll be right back. He returns and Khalil enters behind him. My stomach drops. I feel like scrambling, but I can't move. I want to yell, but as they get closer, my heart races and breaks wide-open making it so I can't move. I shift on the bed, look at my clothes on the floor and then back at Clarence. I can tell he can see that I am scared. He doesn't comfort me, but tells me to "be calm." Even though this has never happened to me before, the characters are different, there is more than one man in the room, I know what is about to go down. I think words, a million words, but I can't speak. All that makes it way out is, "No, no. Please, Clarence, no."

He tries to convince me of something, but I can't hear it, because once I hear the tone of his voice, and see the hungry look on Khalil's face, I know there's no talking my way out of this. I feel like a trapped animal. Clarence steps forward and touches my knees bent to chest, pushes me slowly back and spreads my legs. I look at his face for one second and it burns so I look away. Finally, some words come out of mouth, and I am begging that they use condoms. He puts one on, touches his dick to my clitoris, spits into his palm and wipes it on my vagina. This is the first time I feel myself leaving my body and being aware that I am hovering above myself from the corner of the ceiling.

I look at the clock to my right—3:49, I can feel him thrusting back and forth into me. I say nothing. I move nothing. I hold as still as possible. I think of Kemar, my first love, I think of how sad he'd be to see me right here. I think that he'd tell me that I knew better than to get myself in a situation like this—mostly because he'd be sad for what goes on outside of his control—(and I agree). I wondered if he could feel me pulling for him.

I look at the clock again—3:57. He pulls out, taps Khalil on the shoulder and I close my legs tighter than I'd ever closed them before, but he comes closer and forces them open. I think of my stupid matching underwear. I beg again for a condom and for a moment it seems Khalil isn't listening. I beg harder. He puts one on. His dick is monstrous. I am terrified of how badly I think it will hurt. But it hurts worse and nothing I can make out to say changes his mind.

I think of my mother. I think of her standing in our kitchen by the oven—I long for her. I am pushing against his stomach because it feels like his dick is ripping me in half, it burns. He moves my hands, pulls out, flicks off the condom and drives himself back into me. I feel like I am going to throw up. I close my eyes, and open them: everything is blurry. I can't see where Clarence is, but I can feel him. He's touching my breasts, then taps Khalil on the shoulder again. It stops for a moment, and I can hear children outside the bedroom window bouncing a basketball on the pavement. I hear the slapping of a jump rope. It feels like I am dying.

I look back at the clock 4:13. I think to myself that I am going to do something at 4:15, I am going to do something brave, but I don't. I can't stop looking at the clock. When it's over, Khalil asks if I want praline ice cream and I think of my grandmother. I say no. I look a mess; I can feel it. I get in my car, shaking. I'm trying to be cool in case they are watching me from the window. I chain smoke Newports on my way home. I am still not in my body. A few hours after I get home, I sit on the couch and call Clarence. I ask if I should go to Planned Parenthood tomorrow and get the morning after pill. He talks to me like I am a stupid bitch. He says yes, so I do. For days after my nipples are sore and aching and my vagina feels raw and beaten.

Less than a month later Clarence and I are seeing each other regularly: I go to his uncle's house where he's staying. We lay in his bed, I am already at the borderland of my body, but he doesn't know it. When he touches me naked, I slip gracefully the rest of the way out of my body and I am numb and buzzing. I begin to crave the way it feels when I am elsewhere. I don't know what it means yet, but I know it's not good for me. It feels like pressing the escape key or like pulling the plug from the outlet on the wall three feet away only gripping the cord. I don't think of my childhood, I don't think of my house that when you pass, you can hear screaming and crying and thuds spilling out through the windows. I don't think of how embarrassing it is when that nice Tongan guy I have a crush on from math class walks me home and hears it and asks what's going on. I don't think of losing Kemar—the one person who made me feel safe. I don't think of being scared. I don't think about anything. I'm half-in / half-out of myself dangling like a limp shadow.

Husband

We are still tied to one another. Across the North American continent, 2000 miles...slipping illegally beyond two countries' borders, brushing both land and sky, a string is sewn from your heart into a ventricle of mine. Many days I feel the ten spun cords shooting out like magic from your fingertips—red and black—flapping and pulling like loose electrical lines hanging low above our heads. I hear them hissing: the current hopping down the line in my direction: it burns this city's air all up. I imagine your hands cast out reaching forward, stiff like an evil magician, like a twisted piano player pounding angrily on the ivory keys that are not made of ivory but bone from my wild animal, the

keys are my ribs, my teeth are a far away piano. I get in the thick cord strung from your hands: I trip all day long on the memory of you, wound down between and around my ankles. I feel a tug and I am yanked back, drug in your direction west and south in a sweeping motion as you toss and turn in the bed, spinning yourself in sheets, spinning the woman beside you into a cocoon of rope and twine. I can feel you turning carelessly between the sheets: suddenly with every move, I am drug across dirty pavement, my palms scrape at the ground beneath me, my shoes scuff in a furry until they find their footing. I scramble up and for a moment feel as if I could run, but I fall onto my knees and I watch the city pass slowly by from a low sightline just above passing feet.

And there are three of us as there has always been. I close my eyes, feel you moving, and picture just you, your eyelids flickering in sleep...even now, I rarely think of the woman...any of them. I wonder: can you feel me pulling back, picking at the rope for an escape while you're not looking, do you feel me slip of loose cord that is like an escape key? Do you feel my weight vanish like a ghost standing over your bed when you open your eyes? Do you feel me wriggle free like a fish on a line swimming up stream to get away with a cut on her lip that never stops bleeding? Do you follow my blood in the water?

Son

I wish I hadn't yelled at him that one fall night, in our first home, when he hated me. It seems so stupid now, such a waste of anger. Such a waste of love. I remember waking him up from school in the mornings. I would walk into his room, gently place my hand on his back and give him a little gentle shake, calling his name: *it's morning*. I remember the sleepy look on his face. I remember washing his hair when he was still too young to wash it himself and how the water would drip down my elbows and land on my clothes. I remember setting out his clothes for him on his bed while he was in the shower...getting his breakfast ready and making coffee for Ryan. I remember dropping him off for school, setting up the house for his birthday and putting streamers on the wall. I remember the feel of his body against mine: it's like the feeling of a ghost—I am left with the feeling of something tearing out of me...like a black hole: an empty pulsing black space.

As I am standing outside on my back patio smoking cigarettes at night, I feel a slow ache for you. I wonder if you still long for me or if you've carried on as if you've woken into another dream. I look at the pictures of you two on the internet and I can feel you moving around 2000 miles away. I see your lives unfolding in front of me like dancers spinning on a stage and I can't reach you. This is the thing that no one talks about. I can't talk about this. Leaving him behind left a disgusting wound in the shape of his body where he used to be...though, I did not birth him, my body aches for him from the inside.

Entering & Exiting the Body

Video Portrait Narrative

God is whispering in my ear. No, it is me whispering into my own ear, telling all of the bad things about me back to myself. God is whispering in my ear while my sister turns into a shadow drifting on the water out to sea. God is whispering all of my history back to me.

When I look into the mirror, I see what everyone else sees: I see my face, I see my eyes, I look closely, I see my chin, my eyebrows, my hair, the color of my teeth, the shape of my lips. It's strange to wrap my head around the outside perspective of me, when I feel my internal-self always present...always stirring inside of me. The two—outside and inside—seem like separate entities: two bodies standing at the borderland. *This* is me. *This* is what people see. *This* is my face. *This* is what I look like. Some days I feel deceiving, that what's presented to the world isn't me at all. Or, if it is, it doesn't match the inside of me. My outside is lacking the whole story. It tells a different narrative. But, unlike everyone else, I see my history mapped on my body: trauma strung around me like a kite sting pulling me in any direction the wind takes me. I wear my trauma on my body even when it's invisible.

My body provokes trauma and traumatic memory. Touch is both a comfort and an assault. I look in on myself and feel far away. When I exit my body I feel myself slip away out of the top of my head like a loose balloon. And I reach, but I can't catch it. I can't catch me before I've gone and I am left calling my own name beckoning my own ghost back into its shadow. The mirror is only the mirror for the inside: it is not a doorway back in. I fall into a rabbit hole. I fall into a trance, hypnotized by my own history. There are things I cannot remember: black holes. Time jumps off of its lineal track and I am in another dimension. There are things I wish I could forget and when I remember them, it seems they push me deeper down in the well, into the rabbit hole, into the far off center of myself that leads to an empty space wide as the galaxy where the rules of the earth do not apply. I float in orbit around the lives carrying on around me. I don't know what's worse: entering or exiting my body. Before I used to lose track of days, weeks on end. I would be on auto-pilot going throughout my day doing what everyone else should be doing. But, not being able to be present—not remembering. Words and language were difficult to put together in my mind. I had a hard time communicating. I felt like that space between two radio channels on a dial: that noise that's not here nor there...a place in between two places. Not here or there, not present or away. Not alive and not dead. I couldn't remember what I did two days before. I couldn't remember what I did a week before. I feel like I've lost years of my life being outside of my body, not being present. All of my senses are dialed down when I disassociate.

When I feel it beginning to happen, I try to focus and keep myself here with me. I try to stay in my body. I focus on my surroundings; I make an inventory of everything I see: when I hear a sound like a bird chirping above me, I look up and I repeat to myself, *there is a bird chirping, there is a bird chirping, there is a bird chirping...* I look down at my

hands and think, *these are my hands, these are my hands, these are my hands*. I see all of the people around me and map colors: a red shirt, there is a red apple, there's a red bicycle, a red sign, there's a white jacket, a white car, a white building, a window with a lamp on. I try to place myself in the environment. That sometimes helps, but not always.

Panic Attacks

Sonic Loop

Grandmother: "Don't make him nervous. You know, don't say things that would embarrass him."

Mother: "There's nothing wrong! Please, don't. Don't..."

Appendix C: *[Bare]* Witness Archive DVD