OPEN SOURCE EMPATHY: HOW HANGING OUT WITH PSYCHOANALYSTS CHANGED MY APPROACH TO LIFE, LOVE AND DESIGN.

THIS IS ME.

THIS IS WHERE YOU SIGN.

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THIS IS WHERE THANKS ARE DUE.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents my hypothesis that by drawing from the psychoanalytic technique to objectify subjective experiences, I can better understand myself, my users, my medium and the way in which they connect. My case studies represent an approach to facilitate empathic connections between members of a community by reminding them of the importance of personal reflection and storytelling. Each case study proposes a unique solution encouraging users to begin sharing their vulnerabilities publicly. By creating a range of solutions to engage community members in the self-identification process I hope to exhibit the distinct parallel between the uncertainty of human connection and the category of dynamic media. My own process, the interaction of others with my projects and the results of my facilitations reveal patterns in the resistance to interpersonal connection.

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THIS IS MY INTRODUCTION.

THIS IS MY WARM-UP.

As a warm-up exercise to our first Design Studio assigment, Jan asked us to map our path to DMI. Inspired by the Yasin Bey, né Mos (Def) / Massive Attack collaboration *I against I*, a song that conveys the story of the duality of man, I designed an emotional map of my life that compared the emotional influence that my positive and negative selves had during each year of my life.

I include this project as a foreward because it seemingly foreshadowed the eventual direction of my work at DMI. My instinct to map my life emotionally was no accident, and over the course of two years I have learned to follow that instict, developing a range of work that attempts to map the emotional experience of our lives. It is my opinion that a designer must trust his instinct. To be clear, doing so is not simply a choice. To remove assumptions or inhibitions takes practice. For instance, I could have dismissed the mapping exercise as such, but rather I allowed myself to understand my motivation to be open to the possibility that the small acts in my life mean something — that they make a difference.

The studies in this book cover a wide gamut of concepts from a number of disciplines including design, psychoanalysis, sociology and narrative. Admittedly the subject matter can be difficult to grasp at times but at the heart of it all I want you, the reader, to do two things. Listen to yourself, and don't take anything for granted. In Pixar's *Ratatouille* — the movie in which Remy the rat takes a role as head chef to successfully revive the reputation of a French restaurant — Chef Gusteau wisely says, "Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere." Although Gusteau's mantra refers to artists, we can extrapolate the metaphor to explain an approach to the creative process as well. Not all ideas are great, but a great idea can come from anywhere. For me, this project is my Remy the rat — an unexpected shot in the dark that inspired a revolution in my approach to creativity.

I against I: An Emotional Map of My Life

Years of Existence
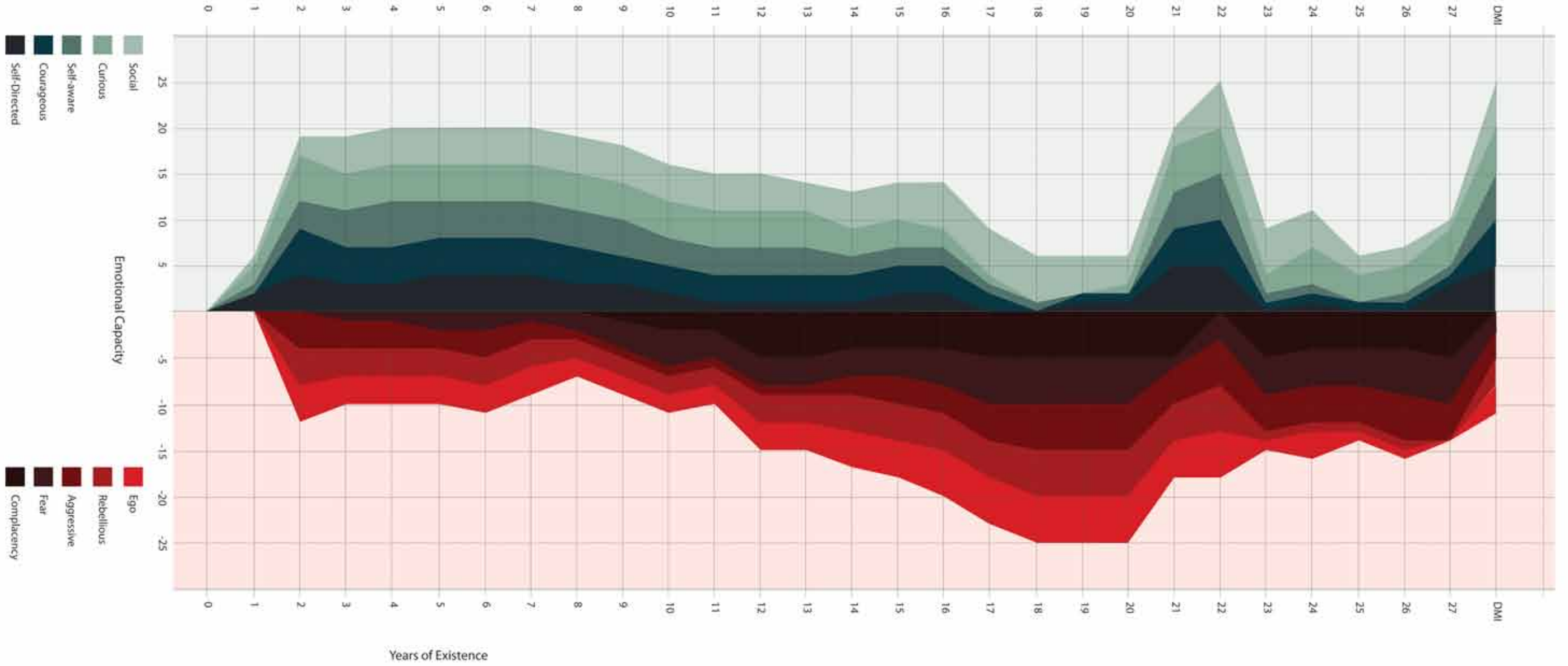
THIS POEM TORE ME APART.

LOCKING YOURSELF OUT,
THEN TRYING TO GET BACK IN
by Raymond Carver

You simply go out and shut the door
without thinking. And when you look back
at what you've done
it's too late. If this sounds
like the story of a life, okay.
It was raining. The neighbors who had
a key were away. I tried and tried
the lower windows. Stared
inside the sofa, plants, the table
and chairs, the stereo set-up.
My coffee cup and ashtrays waited for me
on the glass-topped table, and my heart
went out to them. I said, Hello, friends,
or something like that. After all,
this wasn't so bad.
Worse things had happened. This
was even a little funny. I found the ladder.
Took that and leaned it against the house.
Then climbed in the rain to the deck,
swung myself over the railing
and tried the door. Which was locked,
of course. But I looked in just the same
at my desk, some papers, and my chair.
This was the window on the other side
of the desk where I'd raise my eyes
and stare out when I sat at that desk.
This is not like downstairs, I thought.
This is something else.

And it was something to look in like that, unseen,
from the deck. To be there, inside, and not be there.
I don't even think I can talk about it.
I brought my face close to the glass
and imagined myself inside,
sitting at the desk. Looking up
from my work now and again.
Thinking about some other place
and some other time.
The people I had loved then.
I stood there for a minute in the rain.
Considering myself to be the luckiest of men.
Even though a wave of grief passed through me.
Even though I felt violently ashamed
of the injury I'd done back then.
I bashed that beautiful window.
And stepped back in.

THIS IS DYNAM-IC ME-DIA.

I remember the day Gunta gave me that poem — well I guess technically she read it to me. The semester had barely started but I felt a surge of energy from the stress of entering a year long thesis process I knew would stretch me to my limits. Gunta patiently listened as I spouted off project ideas, spoke in circles and chased narrative tangents. I was doing my best tasmanian devil impression, a look that Gunta loves to point out, comes naturally to me. In an effort to settle me for a moment, Gunta mentioned that she knew a powerful poem that she would love to share with me.

The situation described in *Locking Yourself Out, Then Trying to Get Back* In is one that I find myself in often. It's easy to do it — get locked out. Some lockouts have impacted my life more than others. Like a blacksmith beating and bending hot metal, lockouts have molded me into the person I am today. In a way, I think I need it. I have said on more than one occasion that failure is my prefered pedagogical method. I could never learn if there were no consequence, fear, or pain. Happiness seems so fleeting. It lacks impact. The happiest moments in my life are blurry, and become more blurry over time. They transcend visual memory, and are inherently somatic.

Dan P. McAdams, author of *The Stories We Live By,* calls these moments, *nadir experiences,* or the low points in life. (McAdams 258) McAdams, with his students, conduct interviews to research the concept of one's personal myth. Personal myth can be defined as the collection of stories of one's life. For example if someone asked you who you are, most often you would respond by retelling a series of stories that would help build your personally indentifiable context. Asked the same question I might say that *I grew up in Arlington, studied graphic design in college, played lacrosse and I love to cook eggplant parmesan.* But the positive experiences alone do not define a person. In fact, often times we can learn more about a person through their personal struggle. In his interviews, McAdams identifies nadir experiences as life-defining. He theorizes that by getting his interviewees to tell the story of nadir experiences so they might begin understand themselves better. This is a theme that I will explore later in my section called *Open Source Empathy*, a project in which I foster empathic connection through facilitated crowdsourcing of vulnerability.

Lock outs cause a deep sense of vulnerability, caused by one's realization that they have lost control. Although the poem uses a physical metaphor it is important to remember that lockouts also happen emotionally. In my own life I have experienced many emotional lockouts, but it was the emotional lockout I experienced with my ex-girlfriend Erin that most informed my thesis research.

The end of my relationship with Erin caused a traumatic halt in the emotional flow of my life. Similar to a physical lock-out, my emotions were restricted from moving freely between my own emotional space and hers. Until then both she and I felt free to share our emotional struggles with each other. She depended on me to carry the emotional struggle that could she not carry on her own, and I relied on her for the same. The moment our relationship ended we were simultaneously locked out of each other's emotional space. I felt trapped. I shut down. Like a computer program, I crashed.

Human beings have an inherent need to not only share themselves with an other person, but simultaneously support the needs of that other person as well. When our emotional support system breaks down, our survival instincts spring into action along with our defense mechanisms. To avoid confronting a emotional struggle I have resorted to indulging in an array of vices, all of them temporary, all of them fleeting. Without access to an emotional outlet, I turned inward, creating my own world safe from the outside world. This was a difficult time in my life, but ultimately helped inform one of my strongest projects at DMI. In my case study *The Robot* I will describe a project in which I designed a tool for Akaky, the main character of Nicolai Gogol's *The Overcoat*. Akaky also resists struggle by turning inward. Through the use of a cardboard robot, I created an object that the character could use to break out of his inner world and connect with those around him. By directing the attention away from Akaky, and onto the robot, I created an opportunity for Akaky to re-establish an emotional flow while avoiding the pressure he experienced during normal interpersonal connection. Dynamic media saved Akaky. That is when I realized I could use it to save myself.

As academics, we see the world through the lens of the subjects we study. When I studied graphic design I began to notice, understand and manipulate the nuanced layer of visual communication that penetrates every waking moment of our lives. A whole layer of my world suddenly became visible. It became clear. It showed me that everything is designed. From my living space, to my wardrobe, to the way I spoke with others, I had the power to design my life. But as much as I appreciated the ability to design the individual pieces of my life, I knew I wanted more. That is when the Dynamic Media Institute came into my life.

In the field of dynamic media, designers take a step back from the over-detailed creation of single pieces of data to gain a more global perspective on the problem at hand. Designers become more like choreographers in dynamic media, setting parameters by which interactions take place in a system. When designed correctly, dynamic media systems allow for new data to enter and create new stories from moment to moment. To choreograph a dynamic media experience is to embrace change. Dynamic media systems that resist change, crash. System that crash, lock users out.

Human beings are dynamic media systems. Our personalities are a complex set of rules that dictate our response to life's vast set of experiences. Personal conflict is created when experiences contradict our set of personality traits. We engage defense systems against experiences that pose a threat to oue emotional well-being. Defense mechanisms

block information from leaving or entering one's emotional space, creating a facilitated lockout. As we know from lockouts, stifling the flow of emotional energy can be dangerous toward a person's well-being. In the case of more serious breakdowns in the flow of emotional energy, often outside help, such as a seeing professional analyst, is recommended to regenerate emotional flow.

As you will see in my case studies, my projects at DMI are designed to facilitate the flow of emotional energy. By establishing a flow of emotional energy in a safe external environment I offer an opportunity for users to understand themselves. Dr. Sigmund Freud described the fundamental work of Psychoanalysis as *the talking cure*, a term originally offered by Dr. Josef Breuer in reference to an experience with his patient Bertha Pappenheim. Ernest Jones describes the experience in his book *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, "On one occasion she related the details of the first appearance of a particular symptom and, to Breuers great astonishment this resulted in its complete disappearance" (Jones 106). I use this same strategy in a number of projects including Open Source Empathy and *The Perfect Humans*. For instance, in *The Perfect Humans* I facilitated a conversation in which people described their perfect meal. However, just like the case Bertha Pappenheim, once my users began to talk about their perfect meal other surrounding concepts began to surface. One user even noted that she *didn't believe in that paradigm* and that she believed it was *fruitless to think that way, because if you set such a high standard you will never be happy*. Emotional flow doesn't come easy. You have to work at it. And just like a an old car, sometimes our emotional systems need a little kick start. My projects are that kick start.

My work at DMI educates users about the psychoanalytic process, and inspires them to use that process to understand their defense mechanisms and adapt to nadir experiences more gracefully. Through my case studies I will show you a range of approaches to objectifying The 'analytic third,' a hybrid subjective space commonly used by analysts to connect with their patients. I will show you that the 'analytic third' can resolve conflict and inspire empathic connection within communites, even between individuals and anonymous users.

My systems facilitate the self-identification process. This is an important point not only in life, but in design as well. In design I never want to provide all the information to my users. Often times I want them to work for it. I remember boldy declaring to my senior undergraduate design class that *if someone understands my poster in less than five seconds, I have failed*. Now I may have been a bit brash in that message, but the essence was there. It was important to me that rather than spell it out, I provide enough clues for the user to discover the message on their own. I wanted them to feel like they had accomplished something. I wanted them to have that feeling, because it makes a lasting impression. That's the way I have always learned. Remember that whole failure thing I was talking about? I had to discover that stuff on my own. The same goes for design. But the thing to remember is that the users are not completely on their own. We as designers are there to guide them. And that same principle goes for the self-identification of one's personal myth.

Nobody wants to have someone tell them how to live their life. This lesson especially rang true in the film *The Interrupters*, a *Frontline* episode about gang violence in Chicago. The documentary portrays the practice of a group called *The Violence Interrupters*, a collection of high-ranking ex-gang members from the Chicago area. While all of them lived the gang lifestyle, they have changed their lives for the better, using them to help free others from a preconcieved notion of what their personal myth should be. Many of the Interrupters have served time in prison themselves, giving them not only invaluable insight, but the credibility to talk to the young people that consider a prison sentence an admirable quality. Interrupters may be carrying the message of the after-school special, but they do it as a member of the gang community, in a language the kids understand. The main character Ameena, daughter of one of the biggest gang bosses in the history of Chicago and former gang captain herself, has a particularly effective way with the young community members. Watching her go off on the gangs is very humbling. It makes me realize that I could never go into that neighborhood and attempt to say anything to those kids the way she did. They wouldn't respect me. I didn't come from where they came from. Why should I give them advice? It can be a very daunting thought to wonder if I could do anything at all to help.

That's when another one of the *Violence Interrupters,* Cobe, comes into play. Cobe is also an ex-gang member who served time in prison. Cobe has a slightly different tactic that seems to be more fitting for anybody to use. When confronted with a case like the one with Flamo, a man Cobe met in prison, Cobe decides to let the power of listening steer he and Flamo in the right direction. When Cobe first goes to meet Flamo at his house, Flamo is drunk and irritable. He vents his frustrations to Cobe, throws his phone, and ultimately questions Cobe help. "What can you for me, right now? Huh? How you can you help me now?" It's clear Flamo is worried about lasting in his situation for much longer. Cobe's response? He tells Flamo, "The only thing I can do is try to get to know you better, spend a little time and work with you." He can listen. And for Flamo, that's enough. And personally, that's enough for a lot of people.

Each of us shares a need for that person who will really listen. We make a point to encourage others to listen because it is polite or an aspect of social code. I see listening as a responsibility, and it is necessary for each member of a community to recognize their responsibility to practice the art of listening. The University of Minnesota Duluth recognizes that responsibility. The University includes a section on listening in their student handbook, given to each incoming freshman. They even go as far as to attempt to identify the distinct differences between hearing and listening. The handbook passage reads, "Do you think there is a difference between hearing and listening? You are right, there is! Hearing is simply the act of perceiving sound by the ear. If you are not hearing-impaired, hearing simply happens. Listening, however, is something you consciously choose to do. Listening requires concentration so that your brain processes meaning from words and sentences. Listening leads to learning. Most people tend to be "hard of listening" rather than "hard of hearing"

THIS IS DIGITAL ROMANTICISM.

In the mid-eighteenth century a group of visual artists, musicians and writers began a movement that resisted the socio-political ideals of the Industrial Revolution. The Romanticists resisted the rationalization of nature, a scientific approach adopted during the Enlightenment, by exploring the aesthetic beauty of untamed human emotion. The Romantic movement can be distilled down to two major tenets — The focus on presenting the beautiful nature of human vulnerability and the shift from quantitative to qualitative data analysis.

Trepidation, terror and awe inspired the movement, an emotional landscape formerly avoided in popular art-making. By making art about private human emotion, the Romanticists offered an outlet for their viewers to explore a subject matter that is quintessentially human. In a way, they were doing the work of Dan P. McAdams, author of *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, over a hundred and fifty years prior. The Romanticists thrived on communicating the *nadir* moments in life, just as McAdams had structured his interviews. They rebelled from the need to define or fix who we were and embraced that which they could not control.

There are a long list of artists that rebelled against Enlightenment to the Romantic movement including musical composers Ludwig Van Beethoven and Fernando Carulli, writers such as Henry Wallis (*The Death of Chatterton*), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) and painters like Francisco Goya (*The Third of May 1808*), Théodore Géricault (*The Raft of the Medusa*), Eugène Delacroix (*Liberty Leading the People*) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (*Fire at Sea*). But Caspar David Freidrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* affected me most deeply and most resonated with my project work.

Friedrich was determined to create specifically German spiritual landscapes, deliberately turning his back on the homeland of the arts and the main source of pictorial inspiration. For inspiration he looked inward rather than outside of his self. Friedrich insisted that "the painter should paint not only what he has in front of him but also what he sees inside of himself. If he sees nothing within, then he should stop painting what is in front of him" (Sala 83). Through his internal reflection, Freidrich surpassed his ability to reproduce what Sala referred to as "Flemish exactitude," searching for hidden values in the landscapes rather than mere descriptive surface appearance (83).He knew that even the earth had a spirit. It was alive and he wanted to communicate it's feeling. In my own work at DMI, I too want to see more than just mere descriptive surface appearance in people. I want to draw out their inner spirit. I want them to teach us what it is like to be them. I want them to learn who they really are.

In *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, a young man stands on a rocky precipice, facing away from the viewer. The young man is wrapped in a dark green overcoat, and grips a walking stick in his right hand. His hair flowing in the wind, the wanderer gazes into a landscape covered in a thick sea of fog. In the middle ground, several other ridges, perhaps not unlike the ones the wanderer himself stands upon, jut out from the mass. The viewer can barely make out forests of trees atop the large land masses poking through the fog. In the distance, faded mountains rise in the left, gently leveling off into lowland plains in the east.

The message of the painting is true to the Romantic movement. The solitary figure gazing out into a sea of fog represents self-reflection and exploration. The fog is a symbol for the unknown future, which Freidrich uses to fill almost the entire canvas — a daunting realization. A dichotomy also arises in which the wandered has seemingly mastered a given task by reaching the top of the precipice in the foreground. However, his scale relative to the described space reminds the viewer of their perceived insignificance relative to nature.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud proposes that humans have certain immutable impulses, specifically the desires for sex and the predisposition to display violent aggression towards that which obstructs the gratification of one's impulses. Human beings are governed by the pleasure principle, and the pleasure principle is satisfied by one's instincts. I take note of Freud's ideas because often it is our impulses that we hide. If our instinct veers from the norm in any way, or if we fear that our impulse might affect others in a negative way we turn inward and build a defense around them. But in *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud postulates that it is normal to be mad at someone, or feeling a sexual impulse towards another. There is no shame in having a feeling, or expressing it as long as it is constructive and not destructive.

The scientific movement of the Enlightment sought to quantify the data in our lives. Quantifying data helps to create systems that can organize, filter and distribute data easily. Often we create these systems in order to more easily understand data for the purpose of predicting or controlling it. Medicine, weather and financial analysis are all examples of this process. However the Romanticists recognized that human emotion is not quantifiable, so they designed their own systems for sharing emotions qualitatively.

Through my case studies I have initialized a modern Romantic movement to resist the digitization of one's peronsal myth. Just as the Industrial Revolution succeeded a creating modular parts that could be fabricated and disseminated more efficiently, computers via the world wide web have done the same for information in the digital age. However these developments do present themselves as a proverbial double-edged sword. On one hand applications like Facebook provide a service through which its users can share stories more quickly, at greater distance and to larger numbers than ever before. It works. Eight hundred million people would agree. But the other edge of the sword tells a story rife with over-consumption, quantitatively-driven communication (how many Facebook friends do I have, how many likes can I get for saying this thing or posting this Justin Beiber video) the dissection and sale of our identities to the highest bidder.

Just like the product-makers during the Industrial Revolution, Facebook has started to take our personalities, break them down into segments and disseminate that informa-tion to various advertisers who are willing to bid for your information. The byproduct is the commodization of our identities. Like the craft movement during the Industrial Revolution, our identities are too degrading in modern digital environments. We no longer play the role of the master craftsman in forming our own identity. Rather we seek to feed the counting machines with higher quantities of information. Our online identities are judged statistically, a format dictated by the strength of computers which are essential really fast counting machines. My call goes out to the millions of people trapped in the systemization of our identities. Push back. Understand the beauty of untamed human emotion. Stop quantifying your emotional experience.

To the designers and engineers who choreograph our technological interactions, let's make computers more like people, and not the other way around. Remember that which makes us human. Participate in the self-identification process, not just individu-ally but as a member of the human race. Be aware of where you are in time, space and context. That we have a responsibility to evolve, with the caveate that we don't forget where we came from.

Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert says that "every psychologist must, at some point in his or her career, write a version of 'The Sentence.' Specifically, The Sentence reads like this: 'The human being is the only animal that _____.' Indeed, it seems that philosophers, psychologists, and scientists have been writing and rewriting this sentence since the beginning of recorded history. The story of humans' sense of self is, you might say, the story of failed, debunked versions of The Sentence. Except now it's not just the animals that we're worried about." (Christian 11)

Brian Christian reminds us to identify our distinct human uniqueness, an idea the Romanticists were exploring back in the 1700's. The self-identification process can be boiled down to three questions… How am I built? How do I function within that structure? How can I re-imagine that structure as I adapt to new experiences? Just like a dynamic media project, we must first acknowledge that process, but it is only through the sustained practice of that process that fosters the most productive environment for leaning.

Let me be clear. I don't have the answers. I will not tell you how to live your life. I want to propose a pause in the production line.

The summer after I graduated high school I worked in an ice cream factory in my home town Arlington, MA. It was a surreal experience. Each day I would change into my finely-pressed white suit, complete with name tag, before contributing to the process of manufacturing almost three thousand gallons of ice cream. The production process was complex, with up to twenty different jobs to do on the production floor at any moment. One of the most important jobs consisted of two main responsibilities. The first responsibility was to inspect the conveyor belt on the main ice cream packager for obstructions like fallen cartons. The second responsibility required me to inspect that the main filler dispensed the correct amount of ice cream into each carton. If either machine task was compromised it was my job to resolve the issue. Often I resolved the issue by pulling the problem carton off the line. Seldomly a carton would find itself lodged in the sidewall of the production line, or the ice cream filler would stray from its calibration. On these occassions I had to hit the emergency stop button, stopping the machine to assess it. At that point I could remove any vulnerabilities before starting the system again. These responsibilities extrapolate from my job on the factory floor to my role as a dynamic media artist. I survey the digital landscape just like the factory line worker. I am responsible for identifying flaws in our communication systems. Right now, I am hitting the emergency stop.

New technologies have a history of, to steal a term from HBO's *True Blood*, glamoring us with it's shininess and promised potential. We are guilty of turning a blind eye in the face of our new-fangled toys. Think about how quickly cell phones were assimilated into our lives. Now remember that it it took 10 years of mainstream adoption for somebody

to ask if the radiowaves were causing cancer. Hm… that seems like it would have been a good question to ask beforehand — and because there is no conclusive evidence we just continue using them! Like that scientist who finally raised the question to ask how cell-phone usage was affecting us, I want to ask how our modern forms of communication and connection are affecting us.

The Romanticists were my inspiration as the initial surveyors of the emotional landscape. They surveyed the conveyor belt of life during the Enlightenment. They observed that humanity was quickly moving toward a paradigm of quantitative thought, and they resisted the urge to follow along. The Romanticists, through their art, questioned the status quo, and created a platform on which others could explore their own emotions without the pressure to quantify their existence.

Let's see if we can do the same thing today.
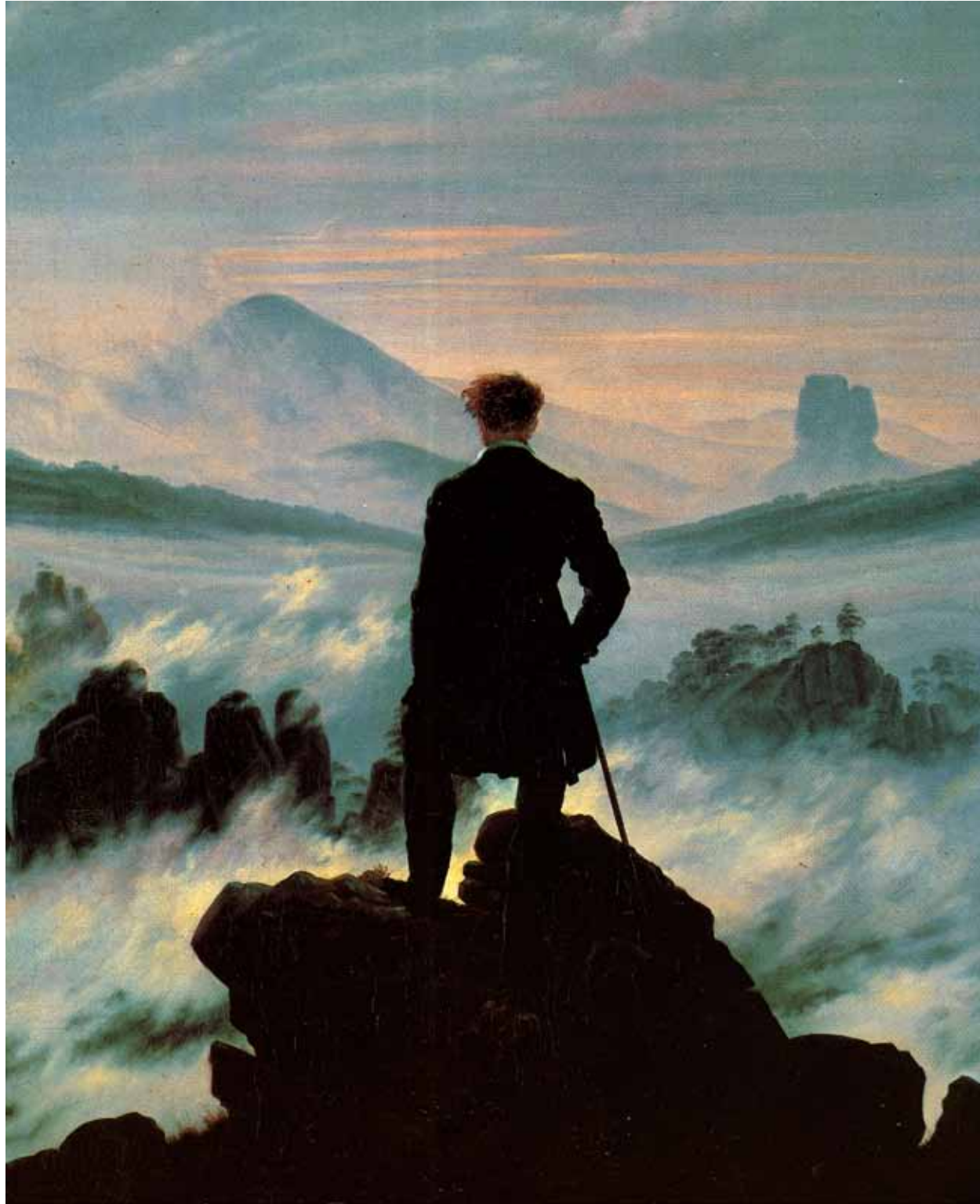
THIS IS MY SECTION ABOUT NARRATIVE.

THIS IS A GREAT STORY-TELLER.

(Daniel walks up to Jon's cubicle at WGBH Boston, takes a drag from his coffee cup, looks to the sky and begins his normal routine, pontificating to the young designer likening himself to a modern-day Yoda.)
Daniel: "It's all about stories Jon… write that down."
Jon: "Ok, Buckles."
(Daniel reaches deep into his soul, now fully amplified, desperate to inspire the young padawan.)
Daniel: "Nah man, seriously. It's all about stories. Everything we do. It's about telling stories. From a poster, to a website, to a film, we are communicating a story. It's the story that is the real project."
Jon: "Eh, you want pizza for lunch?"

THE CAROUSEL

I had an epiphany one morning, while riding my bike down JFK Avenue in Cambridge, on my way to WGBH Boston. Normally it was helpful to delve into some sort of deep philosophical internal discourse to distract myself from the fact that one of the busiest streets in Cambridge had no bike lane. Anything to keep your mind off the idea of being picked off by a Harvard Business School professor in his *Jaguar* XK. That morning I was ruminating over the episode of *Mad Men* I had watched the previous night. In the episode, Don Draper, our deviously handsome protagonist, presents a new campaign for Kodak's new *Wheel* slide projector. Although an all-around great episode, I obsessed over the scene that depicted the final Kodak pitch meeting in which Don presents his campaign for the product he renamed, *The Carousel*. If you haven't seen the episode, please go watch it. Put my thesis down right now. A quick YouTube search for "Mad Men Carousel" will do.

If we analyze the language Don uses in his presentation we can begin to understand how narrative can be used to describe the connection between the user and a product, in this case the Kodak slide projector. Furthermore we can extrapolate on Don's concepts in marketing to understand the role of the designer in the process of creating dynamic media experiences. I will interpret Don's words in the context of our modern technological experience.

Don Draper: Well, technology is a glittering lure. *(According to Moore's Law, technology doubles in production power each year while reducing its price by half. This concept was first established in Gordon Moore's paper on the rate of yearly semi-conductor integration but is still relevant to the modern rate technological evolution. Because of this high rate of turnover in the technology, it is easy to be seduced by the latest and greatest the industry has to offer.)*

Don: But there's the rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash, if they have a sentimental bond with the product. *(We can transcend the shallow experience facilitated by shiny new technology by understanding its affect on the people who use it.)*

Don: My first job, I was in-house at a fur company, with this old pro copywriter. Greek, named Teddy. And Teddy told me the most important idea in advertising is new. *(Don points out that often times the most exciting aspect about your product is the fact that it didn't exist before.)*

Don: It creates an itch. You simply put your product in there as a kind of calamine lotion. *(An amazing psychological transformation happens when new becomes need. Suddenly a void is created in users that they didn't know could exist before hearing about it.)*

Don: But he also talked about a deeper bond with the product, nostalgia. It's delicate, but potent. (*Emotion is a volatile ingredient when used haphazardly — it's the Saffron of design strategy — but when respected and implemented gracefully, it can deeply affect your users.)*

Don: Teddy told me that in Greek, "nostalgia" literally means, "the pain from an old wound." It's a twinge in your heart, far more powerful than memory alone. *(Don reminds us of the somatic sensation of emotional pain. Like the pain in your heart when you've lost a loved one, or the butterflies in your stomach during an unnerving situation.)*

Don: This device isn't a spaceship. It's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. *(Don creates context for the Kodak representatives by painting the fantastical experience of time machine.)*

Don: It's not called the Wheel. It's called a Carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. (*Now Don introduces characters into his story. The Kodak representatives fill in the gaps with memories of being a child, perhaps riding a carousel themselves.)*

Don: Around and around *(Don describes the parallel action of the large-scale carousel and the Kodak slide projector),* and back home again. To a place where we know we are loved. *(Like a newscaster at the end of a show, Don ties the story up with a neat bow, solidifying the emotional connection with the safe comfort of home.)*

The Kodak *Carousel* is a tool for telling stories, so it makes sense that Don's presentation is about how stories are told. He understands the motivation behind the product. He chooses the time machine as a metaphor becuase he is conscious of everyone's inherent desire to go back to a time in which created our fondest memories. That term desire is important. In stories each character has one, and in the really good stories, the reader adopts those desires as well. In his book *Making the Invisible Visible*, Hillman Curtis goes as far as to say that "everything is driven by desire" (Curtis 38). Curtis also refer- ences that Konstantin Stanislavski, the famous Russian acting teacher, always told his students that no matter what role they're playing, they have to know what their char- acter wants. Same goes for designers. Designers play roles just like actors every time we conduct user research, create a narrative user scanario, or test a prototype. We get inside the heads of our users and imagine what it might be like for them to use our product or service. But in order to participate in any of these activities, the designer must first understand their user's desires. Once the designer has identified their user's desires, they now have the answer to every question that will come up when designing their system.

The search for desire begins from the moment you meet your new client. Hilman Curtis says that when you meet with a new client, "you need to ask yourself not only what they want, but what you want… I want to understand what they believe, what makes them unique… I want to hear a compelling story, uncover the theme that powers that story, and be sold on it." (Curtis) Designers must identify the client's/brand's/user's desire, just as Don Draper figured out that the nostaligic experience of childhood memory was the key to delivering the *Carousel*.
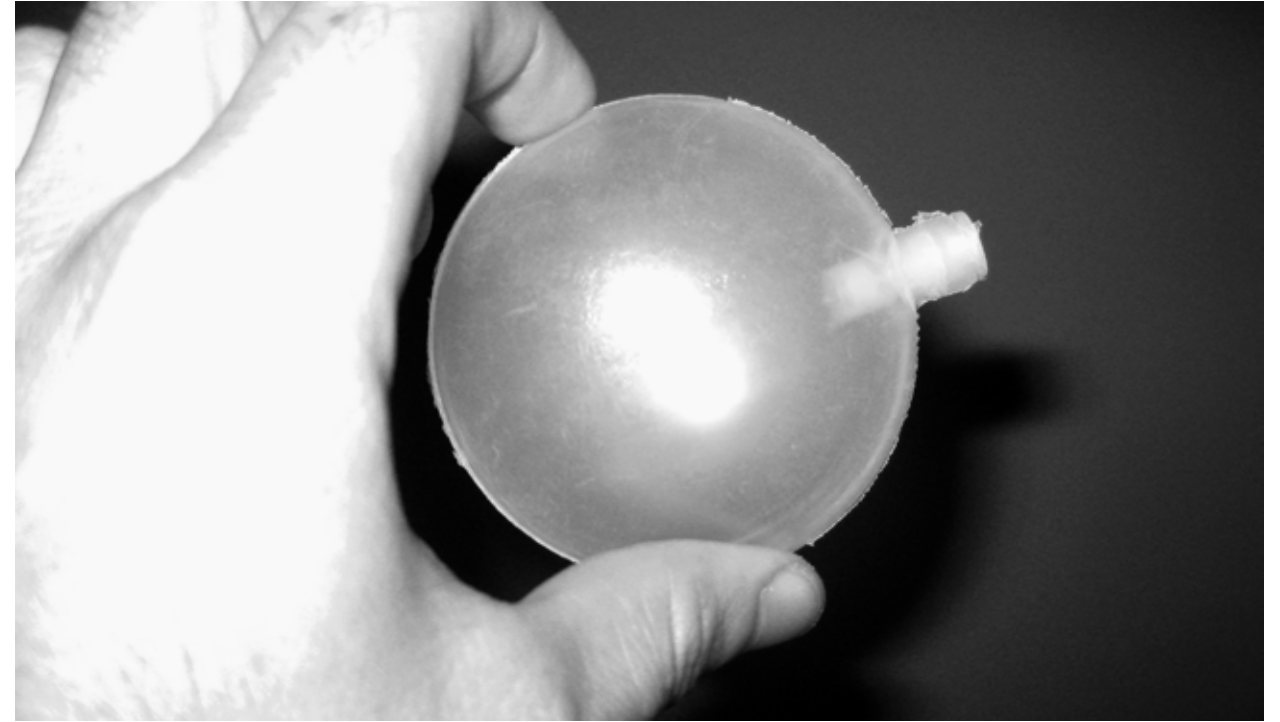
I love telling stories, especially through my projects. In addition, I love to create new characters and augment existing ones. One of my first projects at DMI, a visual response to one of Gunta's stimuli in *Design as Experience*, was a particularly fun story to create. On the first day of class Gunta handed us a brown paper bag that held a small translu- cent plastic vessel. When you squeezed the vessel, it squeaked. I wondered where you might find such an item. I realized that you might find this type of squeaker within the torso of a stuffed animal. The squeaker was symbolic of the stuffed animal's heart. It compressed and expanded to animate the stuffed animal with each movement. I asked myself why Gunta would have so many these stuffed animal organs. That was my a-ha moment. I created a backstory for Gunta in which she moonlighted as a stuffed animal organ repo woman. When the stuffed animals couldn't make the payments on their new organs, Gunta went hunting. That's why she had so many laying around all the time. For my in-class visual response I installed a series of fake stuffed animal crime scenes, evidence that Gunta had done her job. In each installation, I placed a stuffed animal that I had ripped open at it's stomache and sewn up with red yarn. Beside each stuffed animal I placed a fake reposession notice that included a description of the noice maker organ and Gunta's instructions to reclaim it for the lender.

ORGAN REPO WOMAN STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Initial Questions...
Vessel
Holds a liquid
water?
clear solution?
holy water?

took the lid off…
noticed there was an opening in the top.
a weird blue piece sticking out the bottom.

The package itself looks weathered…
I noticed its flexibility.
I squeezed it softly, slowly, then let go quickly. a sound.
repeat.
Then I squeezed it quickly. a sound.
Now quickly both ways.
This was a vessel alright. A vessel for sound.
Interestingly enough the life of this little trinket is proven through this pumping action.
It lies at rest until it is depressed. It is like a heart in this way.

The sound is interesting…
I could make an orchestra of funny noisemakers.
I could make a video compilation of people being scared by the noise.

moving on...
Where did this device come from?
Where are they used?
Toys.
Toys that kids squeeze.
Animals that are cute and cuddly that kids want to squeeze,
and in turn hear the funny sound.

But how did the life of this animal end up in a paper bag?
The only answer is that it was taken from them.
Gunta is a Repo Man.
These noise-maker organs were on loan, and the animals didn't pay up.

Creating the experience…
What do I need?
Stuffed animals with noisemakers, which I will take out, and then sew them back up.
*Evidence Bags = Gunta's Paper Bags.*
Bills.
Crime"Scene Photos
CPR Chart for Stuffed Animals

I include this case study because it is a great example of how identifying or creating desires for your characters (both real and fictional,) can help build a deeper relationship with your users, thereby telling a more compelling story. The process of creating custom narratives for each project is effective but can become cumbersome when scaled.

It is a trend in dynamic media to pass the responsibility of story creation and character development off to the users. By creating the rules by which people can share their own stories crowdsourcing systems can, but not definitively, provide a richer narrative experience. However, overly obtuse parameters can prohibit useres from creating contextual depth. Twitter is a platform that collects and broadcasst stories on a large scale. The problem with Twitter is that it is designed to generate a large quantity of tweets, not a deep quality of interaction. Consider the primary method of interaction on Twitter. Each message is limited to one hundred and forty characters. How deep can you get with that? Another obstacle to create contextual depth in Twitter is that its system allows you to talk about whatever you want at any time.
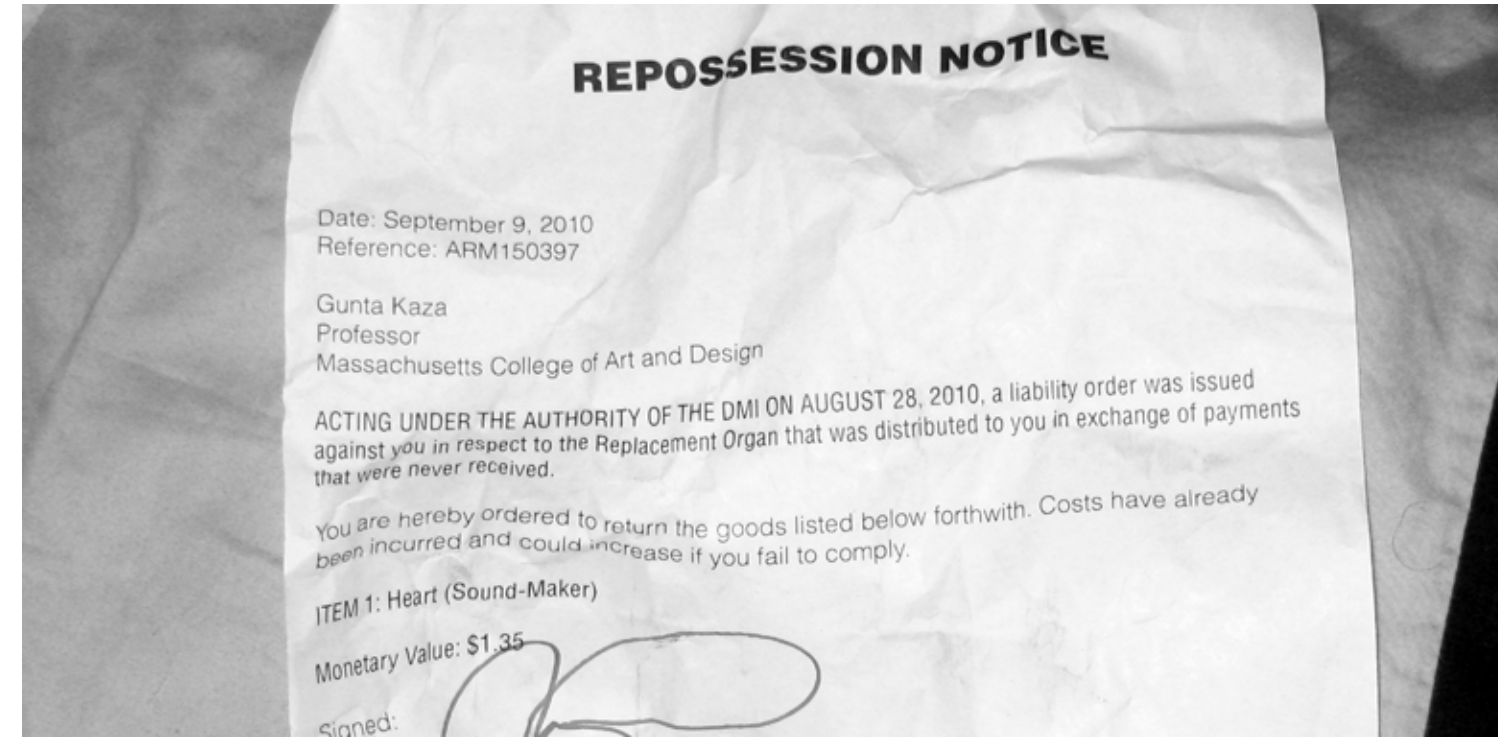
Conversely, a single curator can apply a focused lens to a story to create depth in character and plot development. A goal in my case studies is to combine the focused vision of a curated design experience with the expanded perspective of a crowdsourcing platform by designing questions. Later on I will exhibit this technique in my case studies *The Perfect Humans* and *Open Source Empathy*. In each case study I ask users questions to assist them to reflect on a specific experience in their life. By reflecting on specific moments in their lives my users achieve a deeper understanding of their experiences.

THIS IS ABOUT PERSONAL MYTH.

Ultimately, my case studies seek to inspire users to aid their fellow community members in the self-identification process. But before my users can help others, they have to help themselves. Community building starts with the self. It sounds backwards, but it's true. Furthermore participating in the empathic process requires a degree of narcissistic indulgence. Remember, empathy is identifying yourself in an other. How are you going to identify yourself in another if you don't know what to look for? When we engage in the self-identification process we are trying to understand the structural form of our personality. Which brings up the question, *how are personalities formed?*

We all start with a similar direction in life, a vector by which we negotiate the experiences outside the self. Freud calls that vector, the life drive. The life drive inspires us to survive, to procreate, to make something of ourselves. The life drive's opposition is the death drive. The death drive destroys. It fragment the self. It is believed, most famously by Freud, that our personalities are formed in our childhood. The personalities we form as children dictate the interface by which we interact later in life. When our life drive is threatened, we react by building defenses around it. The capacity of human potential is defined by what we are willing to sacrifice in order to defend our life drive. We call the manifestation of these reactions, defense mechanisms. Our personality structure is a complex set of defense mechanisms, which Freud famously describes in 1938. "An instinct differs from a stimulus in that it arises from sources of stimulation within the body, operates as a constant force and is such that the subject cannot escape from it by flight as he can from an external stimulus. An instinct may be described as having a source, an object and an aim. The source is a state of excitation within the body and its aim is to remove that excitation" (Freud). Like the dynamic media systems we create, our personality is built upon a set of rules that dictate our interpersonal performance. The rules dictate how we interact with others. Our life is a balancing act, keeping all of these impulses firing simultaneously. What information we allow to take in, and what we allow to be shared out. However it is my belief that we are too safe with our vulnerabilities. We have built our defensive walls too high. We have limited our ability to connect, deferring to external escapes rather than internal exploration. We need to rediscover ourselves through the stories of our lives. We need to ask questions about

those stories. Why did I react that way? Why did I think a certain thought? Why was that so scary? It is a scary thought to analyze the self but it is a necessary step in the journey towards empathic connection.

There is a name for this practice. Carl Jung began his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections by writing, "I have undertaken, in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth" (Jung 3). Autobiography is a common method for exploring personal myth. But more classically personal myth is a practice used in psychotherapy. The term *personal myth* was first introduced into psychoanalytic literature by Ernst Kris in his article *The Personal Myth — A Problem in Psychoanalytic Technique*. In his work, Kris describes the concept of the personal myth as an autobiographical story built around a family romance fantasy seen specifically in obsessive characters and serving a defensive function. Kris strongly encouraged psychoanalysts to consider personal myth as a valid strategy to attain effective and lasting change in their analysands.

I would like to share a story about my father as an example of how an experience can form our identity and therefore dictate our actions later in life. I originally told this story at a workshop given by Kevin Brooks, author of *Storytelling for User Experience: Crafting Stories for Better Design*. I am including the transcript from the recording I created that night in order to capture the raw experience. I had never told that story before that night. It was an emotional experience for me. The event clearly made an impact on my life as well. The story you are about to read depicts a memory of an event that provides insight into the development of my father's personal myth.

"So I've been focusing on vulnerability a lot over the past few months and [Dr. Mara Wagner] gave me and article about Oedipal complex. So I started thinking about my dad. He's a very old school guy, kind of just does his thing. Provided for us and just — I think Chris Rock says it well, all he ever asked for was the big piece of chicken. He never really wanted much else, and never complained. So I think that I try to take some of that within myself. So I saw him do this thing the other day with my niece when they came back from the store. He pulled into the driveway. They were getting stuff out of the back, and right before he went to close the hatchback on the car, he does this thing that he always does where he says "hands." And my nieces and nephews are all trained very well. They all hold there hands up over their heads and he closes the back door. And it's really weird for me when I see it because I know exactly why he does that. When I was a kid, I was riding in the car with him and we came back to my house, and he pulled into the driveway, just like he did with my niece that day. He got all the stuff out and… we had one of those station wagons at the time, it was that old Buick station wagon. Which is really funny even just to think about the context of the history of my family through cars. So we had these station wagons for me and my two older sisters as kids, and then we got older and they downgraded to these little cars, and now they have four grandchildren, so they had to get a bigger car again. So anyways, we had this sta-

tion wagon, and we took out all the stuff and put it to the side and he closed the door. Now, I only know that I screamed because I saw him react. Everything was really silent at that point. I remember looking up at him and seeing him more afraid than I have seen him in my entire life. And that's not something he ever does. He never gets afraid. So he took his keys and he's fumbling through them, and he must have gone through that key like five or six times before even realizing he had it in his hand. And he was was finally able to unlock it, get my hand out and run me inside. So when I see him do that now with the kids, I realize that he's not doing it to protect them, he's doing it to protect himself. I know that he's afraid to feel that again."

That event deeply affected my father. It was a lockout moment. He lost control. He was vulnerable. He knew that he had caused my pain. It was one of the most frightening moments of his life. He knew he didn't want to feel that again, so he created a system of checks that prohibits that event, and subsequently that feeling state, from occuring.

I played the recording to my father. He cried. But it was clear in the discussion that followed, that he was able to reflect on his emotional struggle that day. Furthermore, by us hearing the story of our shared experience, our connection grew stronger. Our relationship grew stronger.

A project that I drew inspiration from that used a similar strategy is called Before I die. Before I die is an interactive public art project created by Candy Chang, an artist, designer and urban planner who explores making cities more comfortable and contemplative places. Most importantly, Candy lives in New Orleans. Hurrican Katrina affected the community of New Orleans deeply. It took the lives of nearly fifteen hundred residents, and erased nearly every trace of the lives of the rest. When the evidence of one's life is taken so abruptly, it can be difficult to remember who one is. Candy created a way to provide a solution to that problem. By completing the simple phrase, Before I Die offers users the opportunity to share their hopes and dreams in public space. On her website Candy writes that "residents can write on the wall and remember what is important to them" (Chang). Whether the decision was conscious or not, the phrase "remembering what is important to them" harkens back to the process of identifying

one's personal myth. By recalling their drive in life, Candy's users begin to establish their identity again. For a community that lost everything that defined its identity, this is an extremely valuable process to understake.

In my case studies, specifically *Open Source Empathy,* I facilitate the sharing of stories as a means of unearthing a user's personal myth. By asking questions about emotionally-specific experiences in life, users begin to explore their own personal myth through the retelling of those experiences. In the case of shared emotional experience, like the example I shared about my father, my users participate in the empathic process and make building connections with members of their community.

THIS IS THE BEA- CHES PHENOM ENA

In this section I will share insight on the abiity to use narrative retelling and remembering to create cathartic release for audiences. Taking inspiration from psychoanalysis, history, literature and theater I will show how designers can use narrative to create platforms on which audiences can explore their own emotional struggle.

Have you ever wondered why a person will watch a movie knowing full-well that movie will make them cry? My sisters did that when they were kids. For them, it was the movie *Beaches*. They must have watched that thing twice a week for three years, and each time they would break down to tears at the end. I would watch in confusion as my sisters would wipe their tears and say "I love that movie." What? That just made you cry. How could you love that? My guess is that the director of Beaches wasn't aggressively targeting the five-year-old male demographic, but come on.

The movie follows C.C. Bloom, a young version'ish of Bette Midler, who is played by… wait for it… Bette Midler. C.C. meets Hillary Whitney, played by Marcie Leeds, under the New Jersey Boardwalk, a refuge from the emotional struggle of adolescent life. The two girls become close friends as they overcome romantic, occupational and health-related struggles together. They rely on the other for support, and no matter the physical or emotional distance between them, they stay connected. The film culminates when C.C. Bloom leaves her concert tour to join Hillary on her deathbed. C.C. Is there with her friend to the very end.

Watching *Beaches*, my sisters were exploring emotions that they didn't know how to explore on their own. Although the fact that C.C. and Hillary are much older than my sisters at the end of the film, the friendship described in the narrative is one that my sisters could easily recognize. My sisters had not yet experienced the loss of a close friend but the film provided a platform on which to understand what that might feel like. As my sisters watched *Beaches*, they watched Bette Midler's character struggled with overcoming the loss of her friend, and they struggled right along with her. It was valuable for my sisters to begin to process the idea of death and loss. The death of a friend is an inevitable experience, but being emotionally prepared for it can be helpful in the rehabilitation process. *Beaches* served as an aid to my sisters in their preparation.

In *The Stories We Live By*, Dan P. McAdams explores what may be happening in what I call T*he Beaches Phenomena*. Just as my sisters experienced the emotional struggle right along with C.C. Bloom, McAdams says that the protagonist of any story is the emotional guide for the audience. "We identify with the protagonist of a story, experience episodes vicariously and emerging from a narrative encounter happier, better adjusted, more enlightened, or improved in some way." (McAdams) According to McAdams, stories can actually make us better people. My sisters were stronger emotionally after watching *Beaches*. But as great an example as *Beaches* is, understanding the cathartic power of narrative began much farther back than the 1980's — it began with Aristotle.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines katharsis as "purgation of pity and fear" (Poetics). In *Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis* Richard Kearney helps us translate Aristotle's passage. Kearney explains that catharsis in narrative occurs "whenever the dramatic imitation of certain actions arouses pity and fear in order to provide an outlet for pity and fear." In *Beaches*, the portrayal of sorrow associated with the loss of a friend inspires sorrow in the viewer. Kearney states that creative expressions like movies, paintings or fiction-writing are impressive catalysts for emotional stimulation. He explains that "the recounting of experience through the formal medium of plot, fiction or spectacle permits us to repeat the past forward so to speak. And this very act of creative repetition allows for a certain kind of pleasure or release" (Kearney).

Narrative can be a powerful tool for facilitating the purgation of negative emotion, but a storyteller must reach a balance between subjective and objective stance. In *Poetics,* Aristotle warns that the inability to reach a subjective/objective balance can have a negative affect on the audience. He provides Greek tragic drama as context for exploring this concept. Aristotle understood that the audience's emotional response to the theatrical action on stage is central to the aesthetic experience. Conceptually Aristotle's understanding of the audiences role in the theatrical experience foreshadows John Dewey's writing in his book, *Art As Experience*. Dewey describes the esthetic experience, as a two way process. "The word *esthetic* refers… to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer's rather than the producer's standpoint. It is Gusto, taste; and as with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer, as in gardening there is a distinction between the gardener who plants and tills and the householder who enjoys the finished product" (Dewey). Dewey clearly states that the esthetic experience is not complete until the consumer applies their own subjective experience.

The theatrical director choreographs the emotional part performed by the audience. He must not allow pity (*pathos*) for the characters to become *bathos* (an abrupt transition in style from the exalted to the commonplace, producing a ludicrous effect.) Kearney warns that "there was always the danger of a pathology of pity, a sentimental or histrionic extreme where the spectator loses his/her wits and becomes blinded by excessive passion. Empathy might veer towards an over-identification with the imaginary characters unless checked by a countervailing movement of distance and detachment" (Kearney). According to Aristotle and Kearney the designer must be cautious not to draw the audience too deeply into the subjective nature of a story. An extreme example of this phenomena might be an instance in which a subject avoids staying in hotels after watching the sixties thriller Psycho.

To avoid the transition from pathos to bathos, Aristotle implemented the chorus, which "cut across the fictional pretense of the drama and interpolated the message of the story" (Kearney). Kearney explains that upon the introduction of the chorus "the audience thus found itself thrown back on itself as it were, suddenly removed from the heat of the action, reflecting on the hidden cause of things." (Kearney) The break in action created distance between the subjective experience of the audience and the action on stage. One the distance was created the audience could contemplate the story objectively. Again, a successful experience is created by the application of a balanced system. If at first you pull the audience into a subjective experience, you must wisp them away to safety before they get too deep.

Cathartic narrative can also resurface memories suppressed in response to a traumatic experience. Richard Kearney explains, "folkloric tales can serve to heal deep psychic wounds by allowing trauma victims or other disturbed persons find some expression for inhibited feelings. Myths enable us to experience certain otherwise inexperienced experiences — that is, events that were too painful to be properly registered at the time but which can, apres coup, be allowed into expression indirectly, fictionally, 'as if they were happening" (Kearney). Helen Bamber demonstrated one of the most inspiring examples

of this specific phenomena in her work in concentration camps at the end of World War II. Bamber sought to use the cathartic power of narrative to encourage Holocaust survivors to convert their traumatic experiences into stories in order to find release from immutable paralysis. She collected the impossible stories that had to be told.

The emotional state of the members of my community is not nearly as extreme as the sufferers Helen worked with in the war, but we can all become stronger people. For those who are already emotionally strong, this practice of exploring cathartic narrative can be helpful in sustaining that balance. The value of the stories I have collected can be measured by the impact that the stories had on my users. Once the stories had been shared shows their In the vain of John Dewey, the stories I collect do not reach their full potential until someone else has explored them for their cathartic potential.

THIS IS MY SEC-TION ABOUT CON-DUCTING DESIGN RESEARCH.

THIS IS ABOUT FLEXIBILITY.

"Because all any study can do is to approximate knowledge of phenomena as they exist in the real world, the process of study itself must be an object of study."
Anastas and MacDonald (1994)

## IT WORKED FOR GEORGE COSTANZA, WHY NOT YOU?

Since it's inception, people have turned to the World Wide Web as a platform for self-expression. Today users have real-time access to content from around the globe and therefore demand systems that are flexible enough to adapt to that content and present it seamlessly. As dynamic media artists we learn to design more flexible systems that allow for exploration and experimentation on the part of our users. However we must not limit our flexibility to application, but rather instill a flexible approach to all phases of the design process. This section focuses on the value of applying flexibility to the research phase of the process, as well as provide the key steps to conduct your own flexible design research.

Flexible design research has been an important movement towards making qualitative research a legitimate source for data collection. Groups of researchers have embraced this method of research as a complement or replacement of a more critically realist approach. In critical realism, according to psychologist Colin Robson, emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Huddersfield and author of *Real World Research*, "theory, rather than data or the methods used to produce those data, is essential to explaining reality" (Robson). This approach is fully consonant with the approach used in flexible design research. In fact, in flexible design research, it is the approach that matters most. In the same work Robson explains that "it is the research questions which drive the design of a study, whether it be flexible or fixed" (Robson). The movement to make the questions themselves the primary focus is the key to flexible design research, however theory is not completely left behind. The questions must be linked to theory, whether it be a pre-existing theory which is tested by your research, or a new theory which is generated by the process of research. The descriptions used by Robson are reminiscent of the mantra of Richard Saul Wurman. Wurman has spoken and written extensively on the subject, stating that design is truly the art of crafting questions.

In his article, Hats, first published in Design Quarterly, Richard Saul Wurman describes how good questions lead to good answers. "In asking a question you set up a structure for learning; in looking for an answer you learn; but when answering the question, since you have already found the answer, there is no learning — there is no expansion of your knowledge" (Wurman). Wurman clearly states that the purpose of practicing design is to learn, and the way you learn is to ask questions. When you stop asking questions, you stop learning. Wurman then extrapolates his mantra outside of the realm of design and into everyday life. "The goal in life isn't to answer questions, but to challenge yourself by asking good questions and to let those questions guide your learning." (Wurman, Hats) To exemplify his premise Wurman shares a story that's shows the relationship between learning and the act of asking questions. "If two people meet on the street and one says to the other, 'How do you feel?' and the other replies 'My leg hurts,' then who's doing the learning? Obviously, the first has learned something about the second by asking a question and getting an answer. By answering the question the second person hasn't learned anything. He already knew his leg hurt" (Wurman). Wurman's ideal should be the first step in any project. The designer's first job should always be to identify and ask questions that will help enlighten then rest of the process.

There are immense pressures on the modern worker to exhibit high levels of expertise in a given field or skill set in order to show value. Our resumes list experiences, skills and education in order to express our competence to potential clients. Richard Saul Wurman ignores this trend. Rather than try to prove his expertise, he sells his ignorance. Wurman believes that by acknowledging all that you do not know, you open up an infinite amount of possibilities for what you can learn. The key to knowledge is admitting that you know nothing.

So let's say someone actually hires you after you tell them everything you don't know. Then what do you do? How do you exhibit your un-knowing-ness? Wurman suggests that you begin to look for opposites of what it is you think you should be doing. It worked for George Costanza in Seinfeld, why not you?
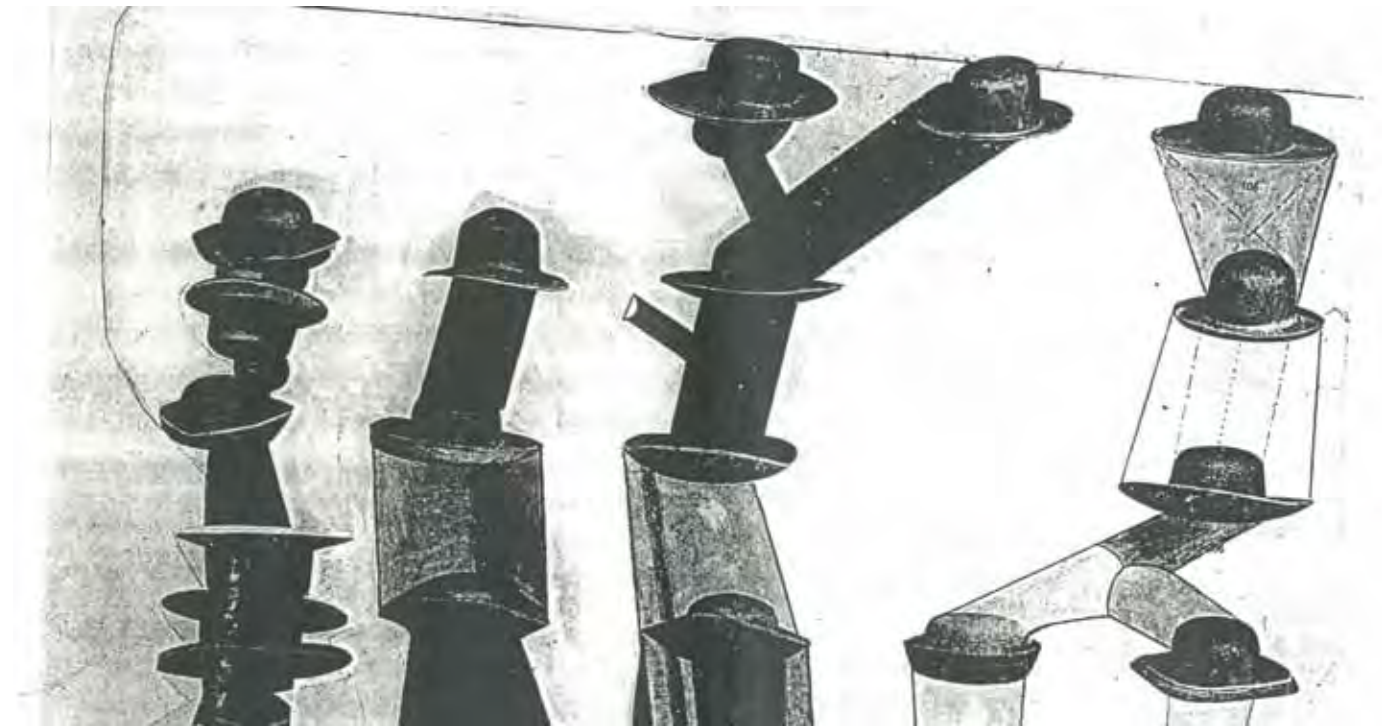
(A waitress comes up to George)

Waitress : Tuna on toast, coleslaw, cup of coffee.

George : Yeah. No, no, no, wait a minute, I always have tuna on toast. Nothing's ever worked out for me with tuna on toast. I want the complete opposite of on toast. Chicken salad, on rye, un-toasted ... and a cup of tea.

Elaine : Well, there's no telling what can happen from this.

Jerry : You know chicken salad is not the opposite of tuna, salmon is the opposite of tuna, because salmon swim against the current, and the tuna swim with it.

George : Good for the tuna.

(A blonde looks at George)

Elaine : Ah, George, you know, that woman just looked at you.

George : So what? What am I supposed to do?

Elaine : Go talk to her.

George : Elaine, bald men, with no jobs, and no money, who live with their parents, don't approach strange women.

Jerry : Well here's your chance to try the opposite. Instead of tuna salad and being intimidated by women, chicken salad and going right up to them.

George : Yeah, I should do the opposite, I should.

Jerry : If every instinct you have is wrong, then the opposite would have to be right.

George : Yes, I will do the opposite. I used to sit here and do nothing, and regret it for the rest of the day, so now I will do the opposite, and I will do something!

George: Excuse me, ah, I couldn't help but notice that you were looking in my direction.

Beautiful Woman: Oh, yes I was. You just ordered the same exact lunch as me.

George: My name is George. I'm unemployed and I live with my parents.

Beautiful Woman: I'm Victoria. Hi. (Smiles)

(George is stunned)

Wurman also encourages designers to "ask yourself something ridiculous or implausible. You may find an answer that provides clues to your ultimate solution" (Wurman). By exploring the details of an outrageous situation "you may find a completely new direction or discover that your previous assumptions were wrong. It is very often in the opposite of things that we learn the most about them. The negative space leads us to new views about the positive" (Wurman)

The flexible design research process includes pushing the "fundamental characteristics such as an evolving design, the presentation of multiple realities, the researcher as an instrument of data collection and a focus on participants' views" (Robson). Normally projects using flexible design research start with a single idea or problem that the researcher seeks to understand, rather than a casual relationship of variables or a comparison of groups. Though Robson does indicate that relationships might evolve later in the study, they should not be the driving force at the beginning of the research phase.

The three most influential methods of research, and the methods which I focused on in my own thesis research are case studies, ethnographic studies and grounded theory studies. In this thesis I will focus mostly on the work in my case studies. The thesis, as form, is actually a great medium to communicate flexible design research because of its inherent focus on qualitative data. It is often found that the most efficient way to prepare documentation for flexible design research is through writing, specifically stories. According to Robson in his chart describing "Characteristics of a 'good' flexible design," (Robson) he states that "writing is clear, engaging, and helps the reader to experience being there. The story and findings become believable and realistic, accurately reflecting the complexities of real life" (Robson). This is great news for me considering that I am capturing stories as a study of the dynamics of human self-identification. Sharing stories collected through my research experiments seem like a natural connection.

Every breed recognized by the American Kennel Club, from the smallest to the largest of man's best friends, appears in the two diagrams shown here.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD DESIGN RESEARCHER?

Flexible design researchers must identify that they are the hero in this research scenario. Margaret Chesney describes the approach as *researcher as instrument*, rather than relying on external tools or instruments. I liken it to a stand-up comedian. The comedian is completely exposed on stage, without protection. The stand-up comedian knows that only he can save himself.

Flexible design requires a flexible design researcher to be… well, flexible. There are few hard and fast procedures. Having no formula makes the research process more difficult but ultimately creates a completely unique experience each time. Robson describes the process as "soft" (Robson) in that sense. There is no template to the process of design research. It is a more organic approach. It must be open enough for researchers to inject their own style into the process. I find it very similar to my approach as a musician. Since the day I started playing guitar I have written my own music. When I could only play two chords or weird abstract sounds, I thought about how I might arrange them in new and interesting ways to make compositions of my own. Granted, those early compositions were probably terrible to most, but I understood early on that there was no template to creating music. You just play what you feel.

WATCH FOR THREATS TO VALIDITY

Removing bias is essential to conducting legitimate flexible design research. You can be the greatest listener in the world, but once you introduce a bias or preconceived notion to the subject of research, you compromise the validity of your study. Other threats to the validity include what researchers call description, interpretation, and theory — each subtle offshoots of bias that present themselves during the documentation phase of your research.

The personal qualities of a design researcher require "an open and enquiring mind, being a 'good listener', general sensitivity and responsiveness to contradictory evidence" (Robson). In other words flexible design research is not for the stubborn. In order to question the status quo and conduct your own flexible research you might need a dash of stubbornness, but there is no room for it once the research process has started. It is impossible to push your research into unknown territories if you are constantly sticking to your guns, denying the validity of your discoveries. Music grows organically, just like the flexible design research process.

The main ways I have been able to fight description issues is that I am a ferocious on-site documentarian. Through the use of photography and digital scanning equipment I have been able to capture all of the visual responses I have collected in my experiments as well as the environments in which they occurred. Digital audio recorders and iPhone Voice Memo software, have allowed me to record all of my field interviews, every advisor meeting with Gunta or Dennis and every feedback session with a classmate. I highly recommend this practice. I have learned immensely, especially during the thesis writing process, from reflecting on past conversations about my projects. You never know when those perfectly worded tidbits will be spoken. So I say, record everything. Video cameras and time lapse laptop software have helped me create video documentation of community members using my installations as well as installation techniques. As each of these methods solve a specific documentation needs like reviews or my thesis document, they also help me avoid invalid description. As Robson explains, "the main threat to providing a valid description of what you have seen or heard lies in the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data" (Robson). Direct audio or visual documentation does decrease the threat of validity, but be careful not to rely too much on that alone. It's also important to recognize that "the simple fact that you have a tape does not mean that it must be fully transcribed" (Robson). Like any resource, it is important to invest only in the sections that will help you build a defense. In the case where audio or visual documentation is not possible, the quality of your notes is very important. You won't always have access to the greatest equipment to document a test, especially when it begins to happen more organically. The researcher must be flexible to work with whatever documentation tools are available. When even a pen or pencil is out of reach, you might find it useful to collect items in the area. Your research environment is like a crime scene. It is your job to gather as much evidence as possible in order to prove the validity of your research.

In flexible design research it is important to resist your inherent human need to form connections between data during the collection and documentation process. A threat to providing a valid interpretation of your research is to impose meaning on what is happening rather than let it emerge from what you learn during your experiments. This mistake is common. I can't tell you how often I see designers enter a research project with assumptions about the type of results they will collect. These designers are inhibiting their ability to learn by drawing conclusions before they start their project, negating the purpose of research in the first place. By the very nature of the term, interpreting should occur at the completion of the research phase. Robson agrees, stating that "validity of interpretation in any form of qualitative research is contingent on the end product, including a demonstration of how that interpretation was reached" (Robson). This means that you should be able to, and be prepared to, trace the route by which you came to your interpretation. This is exactly how I like to form my presentations in DMI In their presentations, some designers jump right into what their platform is and how it works. Although it is important to your audience members to understand the function for your work, I have often found story of the journey by which you discovered your idea more engaging. I want to understand the logical steps of a designer's process. Like a mind map I want to comprehend the conceptual connections drawn early in the project. Seeing a designer's approach tells more about them than a final product ever could.

Once an interpretation is made at the end of the documentation process, it is important not to become too attached to that single interpretation. Rather design researchers must continually chart and justify the steps through which their interpretations were made. This does not mean a researcher must avoid assumptions entirely at the beginning of a project, in fact an inkling of a direction is necessary in order to begin — but the researcher must be willing to forfeit those assumptions as new information arises. The last main threat to validity occurs in the theoretical approach to the research process. By not considering alternative explanations for the phenomena being studied, the researcher runs the risk of rendering their research moot in a defense presentation. This threat of validity can be countered by actively seeking data which are not consonant with your theory.

Now that we have identified the common threats to presenting valid research, I would like to share some ways for researchers to combat them during their own process.

COMBATTING THREATS TO VALIDITY

Strategies I recommend include prolonged involvement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis and audit trails. Although I used each of these strategies at various points in my time at DMI, I will focus mainly on the strategy of triangulation in my case study Open Source Empathy.

I am fond of the triangulation method. Triangulation has implementations outside of the design research forum, including applications in technology. When first introducing the iPhone, Apple came up with an ingenious fix for identifying the global position for their sans-GPS devices, such as an iPod touch. For this method Apple used the wireless internet antenna on the device to communicate with at least three local wireless sources. Once the device had identified three wireless IP's, Apple's software averaged the global positioning of the wifi networks in order to identify the estimated location of the device. So cool! The triangulation method in design research is very similar to the methods used by Apple to identify global positioning in GPS disabled devices. The design research method of triangulation requires the researcher to use multiple sources to enhance the rigor of their research. Specifically data triangulation calls for the collection of "more than one method of data collection (e.g. Observation, interviews, documents)" (Robson). For *Open Source Empathy,* a case study I will discuss later, I implemented the practice of data triangulation by collecting data through interviews, public observation, physically interactive installation, voice recording and psychoanalytic research. Methodological triangulation became a main focus in *Open Source Empathy* and drove many of the formal decisions in my interactive installations. By creating a series of installations, each of which I differed in their method for collecting data, I tested the strengths and weaknesses of different methods to conduct flexible design research. Methods that I formulated and observed included interactive table top surfaces in intimate cafe settings, post-it notes in public window space, dry-erase story walls in emergency stairwells and phone audio interfaces. Each interface exhibited a distinct set of challenges and advantages, and ultimately elicited a distinct set of data.

Although design researchers are encouraged to work without assumptions in order to implement strategic changes along the way, it is important to start somewhere. This can often be the most difficult idea to grasp of all. I have witnessed students invest so heavily in an assumption that even when they receive contrary results, time restraints force that student to pursue that path anyways. The most common reason for this type of error to occur is caused by a students resistance to failure in the process.

Michael Jordan's "failure" commercial has both inspired me personally and influenced my approach to the design process for years. A simple search on YouTube for "Michael Jordan Failure" should suffice — I highly recommend it. The commercial depicts the walk Michael Jordan makes from his car to the players entrance at the Chicago Bulls arena. Fans and reporters cheer and shoot photographs as Michael exchanges *dap* with arena guard. The sound of the crowd is muted, soft music plays low in the mix behind Michael's narration. "I've missed more than nine thousand shots in my career. I've lost more than three hundred games. Twenty six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Michael would be a great design researcher. In his statement he describes the mantra of the successful design researcher. It is only in failure that we learn. If we are successful, we gain nothing. Michael learned from missing all of the big shots. He learned how not to position himself in front of the basket. He learned how not to release the ball. He learned what mental state makes him most susceptible to focal breakdown. He asked for the big shot, knowing that failure was an option. He risked his pride for the good of evolution. Designers should wanna *be like Mike*.

Failure is extremely important to me. I can't imagine a more important endeavor as a designer. In The Perfect Humans, which I will discuss in more detail later, my classmate Zachary Kaiser and I learned that our imperfections define us as human beings. The way in which we fail makes us unique. The way in which we fail defines the way we approach the design process. I see a future in which designers will sell themselves by describing the way in which I fail.

Although an important first step, designers have two more steps to facilitate once they have accepted failure. First designers must understand what caused that failure. Often designers distance themselves from the project for objective questioning. Finally, designers must use that causation as a stimulus for advancing their project. In this way, failure is the life force of the project. It is the momentum. It is the fuel on which the design process sustains.

Successful failure is fresh. It is challenging. It is frustrating. It is confusing. In successful process there is no finish line, only forward motion. In successful process there are no backward steps, only new vectors. In this vain, failure is a privilege. Failure is a right for which designers should fight. Failure is immunity from the template-oriented nature of our lives. Failure is a benefit enjoyed only by a designers beyond the advantages of most others.

It is important for design researchers to remind themselves of the value of failure during the research process. It is a humbling experience. Design researchers must remain humble in their process, especially when they are interacting with research subjects. Researchers must foster an environment that remains flexible, but it must also feel comfortable for the research subjects. In the next section I will share details on the methods of working directly with research subjects to collect stories, with specifics on the interview process.

THIS IS ABOUT LISTEN- ING.

Years ago I watched a video which documented a question and answer sessions between bass player Victor Wooten and a group of Flecktones super fans. First question? What sort of scales do you practice? Victor responded, "How did you learn to talk? Did you recite a list of words over and over again? My guess is no. I learned to talk by talking to other people — you jam. And that's the way you learn music. You speak the language of music, and you speak it with other people."

I'M THERE FOR YOU

In the spring of 2012 I attended a Philip Glass talk and performance at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. After rambling through a seemingly endless collection of tangents, Glass finally expressed an idea I could grasp. He attempted to relate the process of composing music to the process of composing space. The architects in attendance ate it up. Glass expressed an opinion that music is informed by listening, that painting is informed by seeing, and that dancing informed by moving. His idea reminded me of something I had heard years before from another musician, Lisa Simpson. Although originally credited to Miles Davis, Lisa's quote reads as follows, "It's not the notes you play, it's the notes you don't play." For non-musicians this idea can be difficult to understand. But the basic idea is that every time a musician creates a note, they also destroy silence. Silence is just as much a part of music as sound. This mantra can be extrapolated and applied to the design process. The design process is not defined by the things we make, but rather what happens during the time when we are not making things. During those times I listen to people.

In a technologically advanced culture like most of the United States, many people live their digital lives on platforms that encourage them to constantly tell their personal story. Focused on telling their own story, users of these platforms forget the value of listening to others. Listening is not completely ignored on these platforms, but the rate at which information is shared challenges our capacity to digest it. In an attempt to sustain the fast-paced rate of consumption, we rush the listening process. Our presence is compromised, creating distance between ourselves and the one with which we are attempting to connect. Presence is essential to the practice of listening. You must not only be present physically present, but mentally present as well You must be there.

In this particular Seinfeld scene Jerry and Elaine discuss the importance of being there for someone while devising a strategy for each of them to connect with a member of a recently broken relationship.

(Elaine and Jerry sitting across from each other in a restaurant booth)

ELAINE: So, now, what is our move? What do we do?

JERRY: I don't know, but we don't have much time.

ELAINE: (Agreeing) Mm.

JERRY: The city's probably teeming with people who've been waiting out that marriage.

ELAINE: Right.

JERRY: It's like when someone dies in a rent controlled building - you gotta take immediate action.

ELAINE: Yeah, but David and Beth are going to need their grieving time.

JERRY: Their grieving time is a luxury I can't afford. I'm calling Beth tonight, and if you want a clean shot at David, I suggest you do likewise.

ELAINE: (Nodding) Yeah, yeah..

JERRY: But we gotta make it seem like we're not calling for dates.

ELAINE: Then why are we calling?

JERRY: Good question. Why are we calling?

(Both start chanting "why are we calling..", thinking deeply)

ELAINE: (Loud) Oh! I've got it! I've got it! We're calling just to say, "I'm there for you."

JERRY: (Nodding, trying it out) "I'm there for you."

ELAINE: Then, after a period of being "there for you", we slowly remove the two words "for you", and we're just (Makes a "ta-da!" gesture) "there".

(Scene ends)

Although used in a comedic context, the idea behind the joke rings true. Human beings have an inherent desire for connection, for support, for someone to listen to them. Being able to provide that support for someone puts you in a uniquely powerful position, but ultimately a position of responsibility. It is important to remember that the information in this section should be used wisely. Once you enter into a relationship in which your partner trusts you with their vulnerabilities, you must not be careless with those vulnerabilities. Treat them with respect. I had an interviewee tell me once that Just because she had told me a secret, didn't mean that I had to do something with it. The stories that people will share with you are theirs, and they have been kind enough to share them with you. But even though you now have access to them, they still belong to that person. Act accordingly.

W.H.I.G.
WHILST HEURISTICALLY INTERPOLATING (YOUR) GROOM
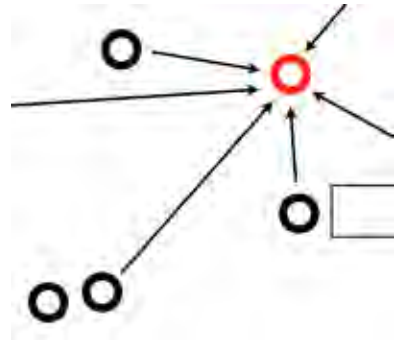
Once you are there for someone, what do you do there? You can listen, but what can you do to be a good listener? In their book *Storytelling for User Experience: Crafting Stories for Better Design*, Kevin Brooks and Whitney Queensberry point out a Web Site called *Mind Tools* that lists five elements to good listening. I find this list extremely helpful and I often refer it during my own research practice.

1. Pay Attention. Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message.

2. Show that you are listening. Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

3. Reflect back. Show that you understand what is being said by paraphrasing and summarizing periodically.

4. Defer judgment. Allow the speaker to finish. Don't interrupt.

5. Respond appropriately. Be candid and open in your response.

A common problem in the practice of listening is not knowing what to listen to. It is equally difficult to identify what to listen for ahead of time. It may sound silly at first, but I encourage designers to listen to everything. We never know where a good idea or inspiration will come from. In the beginning, try to identify themes in conversations. It can be easier to identify larger themes rather than specific moments in a conversation. I find that the more pressure I apply on myself to analyze what the interviewee is saying the harder it is to listen. Rather I try to relax and let the words pour over me. I let the words speak to me, rather than reach for them.

It is important to be conscious of the delicate balance of subjective and objective experience taking place between interviewer and interviewee during a session. Similar to Aristotle's attempt to balance his audience's subjective and objective experience in Greek theater, an interviewer must remember to periodically create distance between themselves and the subjective experience of the interviewee. As Aristotle warned about, failure to achieve that balance can cause the interviewer to over-empathize with the interviewee. If the interviewer over-empathizes they can compromise the validity of the interview.

Early in my interviews for *Open Source Empathy*, I made this same mistake. I did not foresee that I would feel so connected to my interview subjects. Naively I sacrificed my own vulnerabilities to foster a safe environment for my subjects to share. I exposed myself. When my subjects shared their own stories, I imagined what it would feel like to be in their position. I did so repeatedly without periodically distancing myself from the experience. I over-empathized with my subjects. I interviewed two subjects on Thursdays and Fridays for three consecutive weeks. I would feel physically ill for days after, drained of my energy.

Dan P. McAdams has run into this same problem in his own research. He explains the struggle his students often have to manage the relationships they form during the collection of their subject's personal myth. McAdams says that he and his students "cannot help but develop strong feelings of affection and intimacy for the people we interview, and it seems that they form strong feelings for us, as well" McAdams 252). Because of the intimate nature of the self-identification process, it is common for the storyteller and listener to form strong bonds. It is as if the interviewer and interviewee persevered through a shared struggle. To share one's personal myth is to put one's self in a vulnerable position. Though it is cathartic as well. McAdams reports that at the end of most interviews, "most people report that the experience of telling their stories was profoundly satisfying and enjoyable, even if they shed tears in the telling" (McAdams 252). Though it may seem difficult during the process of sharing one's personal myth, the cathartic experience begins a process of healing in the subject.

These tools will help you become a better listener, a mandatory skill for designers. Like musicians, the best storytellers are also the best listeners. We have now looked at storytelling from both the storyteller and the listener's perspective. In the next section I will use the psychoanalytic concept of the 'analytic third' to bridge the gap between the two perspectives.

Kevin also shares a chart created by *MathWorks* employees, Donna Cooper and Michelle Erickson, for a workshop on active listening. For the chart, they compiled 10 skills based on research by Marisue Pickering and the University of Vermont. According to Kevin Brooks, "These skills are all good listening behaviors that you can practice in your work, as well as during any kind of user research" (Brooks 40).

TABLE 3.1

10 SKILLS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

Skill	Behavior	Do	Avoid
Attending, acknowledging	Provide verbal or nonverbal awareness of the other person.	Face the speaker and maintain eye contact, nod, etc.	Looking around the room or fidgeting.
Restating	Respond to the person's basic verbal message.	Repeat the phrase you would like clarified.	Changing the subject.
Reflecting	Reflect perceptions of content that are heard or perceived through cues.	Listen for what is not said. Respond with phrases such as, "So you feel that…"	Discounting or downplaying the speaker's feelings.
Interpreting	Offer a tentative interpretation about the person's feelings, desires, or meaning.	Keep an open mind about what you are hearing; try to picture what the speaker is saying.	Assuming you know what the speaker is trying to communicate without listening.
Summarizing, synthesizing	Bring together feelings and experiences to provide a focus.	Repeat back what you heard briefly but accurately; paraphrase.	Elaborating on what the speaker is saying.

TABLE 3.1

10 SKILLS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING (CONTINUED)

Skill	Behavior	Do	Avoid
Probing	Question the speaker in a supportive way to request more information or clear up any confusion.	Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions; try "dangling" or open-ended questions.	Interrogating or challenging the speaker.
Giving feedback	Share perceptions of the person's ideas or feelings, disclosing relevant personal information.	Wait three seconds, and then respond with phrases such as: "So you feel that…", or "I felt that way when…".	Interrupting or offering solutions; preaching or teaching.
Supporting	Show warmth and caring in one's own individual way.	Pay attention to what isn't said—to feelings, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and other nonverbal cues.	Judging the speaker or rehearsing your response in your head while they are speaking.
Checking perceptions	Find out if interpretations and perceptions are valid and accurate.	Check the accuracy of your perceptions with phrases such as, "I think that you are saying…"	Making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.
Being quiet	Give the person time to think as well as to talk.	Try to understand what the speaker is feeling and have empathy for the speaker.	Filling pauses; instead, let the speaker set the pace.

The next time you are in a situation where you need to listen to other people, try observing yourself. See what happens when you consciously turn on good listening behaviors. You might be surprised.

THIS SECTION IS-
ABOUT OBJECTI-
FYING SUBJEC-
TIVE EXPERIENCE.

THIS IS ABOUT MARA'S WINDOW

The window in Mara's office is magical. Though humble in appearance, it is capable of doing things that other windows can't do. Like a magician uses his enchanted hat, Mara uses her window to facilitate the regeneration of emotional communication in others. At the beginning of each session, Mara invites her patients lie down on the couch that rests along the wall opposite the door. Mara's analysand faces the full length window on the street side of the Boston School of Psychoanalysis. Mara pulls her chair alongside the couch and joins the patient in a focused gaze out the window. Often the shades are drawn from foot to shoulder height that leaves a rectangular opening at the top of the window. The space provides the perfect opportunity for the analysand meditate on the intricately woven branches of the oak tree that sits outside. Mara listens. Mara listens and is alert to the moment. The patient talks. They may explore their feelings, through discussing their experiences. They may remain silent, or share current events. The magical component to Mara's practice is that each of the participants directs their focus on the window. Mara's window is an objectified version of what psychoanalysts call the 'analytic third.'

In The Analytic Third: Working with Intersubjective Clinical Facts, Thomas Ogden describes the 'analytic third' as representative of "the development of an analytic conceptualization of the nature of the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the analytic setting and the exploration of the implications for technique for development that these conceptual developments hold" (Ogden 1). The 'analytic third' is a hybrid subjective third space in which the analyst and analysand combine their individual subjective experiences to form an "intersubjectively-generated experience of the analytic pair" (Ogden 2).

Before Ogden's paper, analysts were trained to dismiss their own subjective experience during analytic practice. The analysts were expected to approach the analysand's experiences as completely objective, distancing their own subjective experience from the matter. Ogden's paper The Analytic Third: Working with Intersubjective Clinical Facts called for a paradigm shift in the analytic community's stance on how the analyst should perceive their subjective experience during analytic sessions. Ogden proposed that

analysts must lift the restrictions on their subjective selves. They must begin to allow their own subjective experience to inform their process. The paper reads like a manifesto, a stimulus for a revolution in the psychoanalytic community.

Ogden responded to the established expecations forced upon analylists by stating that the subjective experience is "often viewed as something that the analyst must get through, put aside, overcome, etc, in his effort to be both emotionally present with and attentive to the analysand" (Ogden). Ogden defended against the accusation that a moment when analysts explore their own subjective space is a moment when they are not doing their job. He suggested that adopting this view "leads the analyst to diminish (or ignore) the significance of a great deal (in some instances, the majority) of his experience with the analysand" (Ogden). Ogden stated that to ignore the subjective experience of the analyst is to faciliate a detrimental effect on an analyst's ability to practice analysis effectively. He pointed out that not only can this type of self-restriction work against an analyst's practice, but it can also be detrimental to the psyche of the analyst as well. Ogden felt that "a principal factor contributing to the undervaluation of such a large portion of the analytic experience is the fact that such acknowledgment involves a disturbing form of self-consciousness" (Ogden). Ogden proposed that the contemporary psychoanalytic approach to subjective experience during analysis inhibited a psychoanalyst's potential to do their job. Analysts limit their capacity to understand an analysand when they exert energy to remove themselves from the subjective experience at hand.

Ogden offers an example session to help describe the way in which his own experiences as an analyst are "contextualized by the intersubjective experience created by analyst and analysand" (Ogden). It is important to remember during this example that the 'analytic third' can not be successful without participation from both the analyst and the analysand. Both parties must contribute their own subjective experience towards an intersubjective experience. The newly formed intersubjective experience is reminiscent of the individual subjective experience of each party, but it is a distinctly unique experience. Ogden explains that "no thought, feeling, or sensation can be considered to be the same as it was or will be outside of the context of the specific (and continually shifting) intersubjectivity created by analyst and analysand" (Ogden). Like a dynamic media system, the 'analytic third' is an experience that is constantly evolving as new content enters the intersubjective space. The 'analytic third' requires each party to be open to adaptation.

Ogden's example describes a session in which the analyst allows himself to indulge in "a series of narcissistic, competitive thoughts concerning professional matters, which began to take on a ruminative quality" (Ogden). Ogden's thoughts digressed to focus on his realization that his car, which was in a repair shop, would have to be collected only ten minutes after his last session. Ogden laboured to understand what the analysand, Mr. L, discussed. He had tired of his incessant need to discuss the same stories over and over. Mr. L carried on about "his brother-in-law's financial reversals and impending bank-

ruptcy; and an experience while jogging in which [he] was involved in a near accident with a motorcyclist who was riding recklessly" (Ogden). Mr. L continued to share his stories, none of which seemed to penetrate the disconnect Ogden felt. He was frustrated. He tried not to intervene, because he felt that if he were to offer an interpretation of what Mr. L was discussing, he would just be repeating himself. He felt he would be saying something for the sake of reassuring himself that he still had something to say. Rather Ogden allowed himself to drift further from conversation.

Next Ogden remembered that his answering machine had clicked on earlier in the session. At the time, Ogden was not concerned with the reason for the call or who had made it. However after hearing Mr. L retell his typical stories during the session, Ogden "felt relieved to think of the sound of a fresh voice on the answering-machine tape" (Ogden). He focused on these thoughts for only a short time before he fixed his attention on an envelope lying on his table. The envelope had been lying on his table for over a week. It had happened again. Although previously uninterested in the envelope, Ogden resisted engaging with Mr. L, and allowed his mind to wander into possibility. Ogden felt trapped. He searched for anything that would allow him to escape the Mr. L's stories. He eventually couldn't take it anymore. Ogden told the patient that he thought that their time together must feel like a joyless obligatory exercise. He said it must feel like a factory job "where one punches in and out with a time card" (Ogden). Ogden then expressed that he had "the sense that [Mr.L] sometimes felt so hopelessly stifled in the hours with me that it must have felt like being suffocated in something that appears to be air, but is actually a vacuum." This is a magical moment. Ogden was finally listening to himself. This is the breakthrough moment he described in his manifesto. He had been resisting acknowledgement of his subjective experience, ignoring the fact that it was he who felt suffocated.

Upon hearing Ogden's remarks, Mr L responded in a much louder, more alive voice than before. He explained that he often felt suffocated, especially in the analysts office. He expressed that although he had often felt overheated and confined in the office he had never acknowledged it until Ogden brought it up. Ogden's experience in the analytic setting aligned with his patient's experience and gave him insight on how to be with his patient.

We learn from his example that by allowing himself to drift into the 'analytic third' — a hybrid subjective space formed by merging the patient and analyst's subjective experience — Ogden uncovered an underlying message that spoke to the nature of the pair's relationship. Ogden's urge to seek refuge in distraction, such as the answering machine, the envelope or car repair garage symbolized his resistance to the feeling of being constricted by Mr L's stories. However Ogden couldn't have made the leap to understanding without Mr L's stories. Ogden states that the fantasy involving the closing of the garage was "created at that moment not by me in isolation, but through my participation in the intersubjective experience with Mr. L" (Ogden). There is a

symbiotic dynamic in the creation of the 'analytic third'. The 'analytic third' is simply not achievable by one person alone.

Can my project *Open Source Empathy*, in which I objectify a place for subjective expressions, be a kind of 'analytic third'? Can it leverage a dynamic process to create bonds between members of a community? Can my public installations form an 'analytic third' space, and provide a safe environment for people to create intersubjective experiences?

Mara's window represents an original objectified 'analytic third' space. In no way does my work hope to replace the in-depth analytic work of a psychoanalyst fully engaged in his or her profession. Rather, my interest lies in the engagement of individuals who seek to find common ground– a physical space that joins two or more members of a community through empathic exchanges. What do we call this physical space? I'm borrowing the term 'analytic third' from Ogden's article, and using it to explore my projects. Can community members exchange meaningful communications in an objectified third space? The 'analytic third' provides a degree of separation from both the storyteller and the listener. Can users feel more comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities with another through a mediator? In Mara's office, rather than sharing their vulnerabilities directly to Mara, the patient shares them by looking through the window, and distancing themselves from the immediacy of the telling of that experience. Mara's window is magical — it provides a safe environment for her patients to tell their life story. My goal is to steal a bit of that magic and bring it into everyday environments.

THESE ARE MY CASE STUDIES.

THIS IS ABOUT HUMAN INTER-FACES

In the fall of 2011 Jan Kuba asked our Design Studio class to create a dynamic media re-interpretation of the film *The Perfect Human* by Jorgen Leth. My classmate Zachary Kaiser and I realized that we were heading in a similar direction when we both showed interest in the way people percieve the idea of perfection. As I mentioned in the section on *Digital Romanticism*, Zach and I were interested in how technology has impacted the human perception of perfection in a technology-saturated society driven towards efficiency.

But soon it was apparent that our project was more personal than that. The final deliverable was a project that facilitated the self-identification in our users through a pair of interfaces — one physical, one digital. The first interface was the human interface. For this phase Zach and I explored two areas of interest, the dynamics of interpersonal connection and the design of questions. The questions we designed were used in video interviews in our community. The interviews produced content that we analyzed and tagged for use in our second interface — the digital interface. Users could filter our database of stories along with analytic descriptions, created by Zach and I, and transciptions of the interviews. The range of content provided multiple ways in which users could empathize with our interviewees. By hearing the personal myth of an other, our users could begin to identify their own personal myth.

Zach and I hypothesized that many human beings felt pressured to uphold a prec-edented personal myth associated with their respective cultures. We hypothesized that the common human perception of perfection manifests itself as a prescribed destina-tion rather than a pursuit. We wanted to reverse that. Zach and I found solace in the words of designer, artist and activist Stephen Lambert who says that we need to view utopia not as a destination, but rather as a DIRECTION. We decided that we wanted our project to provide an experience for our users that might change their perspective towards the notion of perfection, even if only for a moment.

This is where *The Superhero Project* by Abner Preis came in. In this project, Preis convinces everyday people to wear superhero costumes while they pretend to exhibit their superpowers. Preis is a storyteller. He uses social interaction, video, installation, performance, photography and audience participation to develop characters that educate people on the aesthetic language of the human experience. By augmenting one's perception of reality through role-play, Preis creates a narrative layer of reality that allows the audience to examine their own personal myth. His techniques are similar to those I discussed in *The Cathartic Power of Narrative*. Like Helen Bamber who facilitated the rejuvenation of personal myth in Holocaust survivors through narrative, Preis's work empowers his audience making them feel larger than life. This interview with the artist from Warholian.com, describes how he came to his idea.

"I was invited to do a video presentation at a class for severely handicapped people. The teacher invited me to give a talk about my work and discuss ideas about a video project that they had planned to do. Every child was really handicapped… a class full of Stephen Hawkings, but all were super cool. Their idea for a movie was to make one of the kids a super hero who could fly… a slow motion smile settled on my face… "Fuck it! Why not? Yes, we can all be heroes!"
That's when I realized my magical equation of "I equals S."
I = Imagination
S = Superheroes
If you have Imagination, then you can be an Superhero."
(http://warholian.com/2011/06/13/abner-preis/)

Preis's art enables regular people to open up in simple ways. The question we designed for our interviews, "What is your perfect meal?" was simple, yet universal enough that anybody could answer it. More importantly the question allowed users to express something in which they were interested, and in turn learn something about themselves.

IPH: Do you have an idea of what your perception of perfection is?

Perfect Human #1: "Ahhh, Perfection. Maybe, so I think it might be, when you have a vision and that you try to execute the vision and it matches to that exact vision. I think that might be perfection.

IPH: So it's a state of mind?

Perfect Human #1: Yeah, a state of mind, or ummm, yeah, I think itsa state of mind. Like so for instance, you know, these books right, they're not really perfect, you know uhhh, im sure we could find mistakes in the writing, im that there's little dents in the cover but im sure that the authors as they were writing the book had something in mind and by the time they were done working on the book and uhh working with the editor uhh by the time the deadline came, no, hopefully they worked on it until it was perfect for them and it was ready to go and then uhh maybe, it was only perfect for a short amount of time and when it was printed and manufactured and distributed im sure little imperfections happen along the way.

IPH: Do you have an idea of what your perception of perfection is?

Perfect Human #2: Definitely. I think Perception is like, Perfection is like beauty. so, one finds perfection. So something that I would say is perfect, is perfect, to me. and maybe to others, but its, its gonna perfect to me if I find it perfect, because perfect is one's own, one's own, one's own perception. right? it's almost as if, it's like, let's say perfection is like beauty in... it's like beauty in a person. right? and especially with uhhh, with partners. like uhh, romantic partners. so you, you perceive them, as beautiful. They might not necessarily be ob-, objectively beautiful, but you will see them as beautiful in the same way you'll see something as perfect. Now it might not be perfect if you were to press them... if someone were to press you. but... I mean perfection is what you decide. See, I think we have to... In the way that I define perfection, and I would suppose that maybe perhaps some or many others do, yes. In so far as, it's my decision. So, if I find my lover... perfect... she or he is, perfect. Now whether or not, you can take that perfection and.... take that perfection and sort of extrapolate it, to all minds, well certainly no. Because perfection isn't like, it's not, its not an intensive trait. It's like green. You know, grass is green. but green, you can't treat, green the concept of the word, in the same way that you treat perfection. It's.... different. Like beauty. Grass is beautiful, well, to who?

IPH: Can you describe your perfect meal?

Perfect Human #3: Well my perfect meal - Oh my goodness, how would I begin? First I would like to be able to go up to the cage that the animal is in, or the tank, and select it. Or if it's under a tree, just crawling there, the snails and the mushrooms to pick them. My perfect meal would start very fresh with me saying I want that and that and that. Anything that's fowl, I love - you know? Anything that's gamey. My perfect meal would be from soup to nuts - you know? And it would be, you know, a long encore, um, whattya say, a, it would just be a long course - several courses. And it would sorta seem like the meal that would never end, because I love to eat (laughs).

IPH: Can you describe your perfect meal?
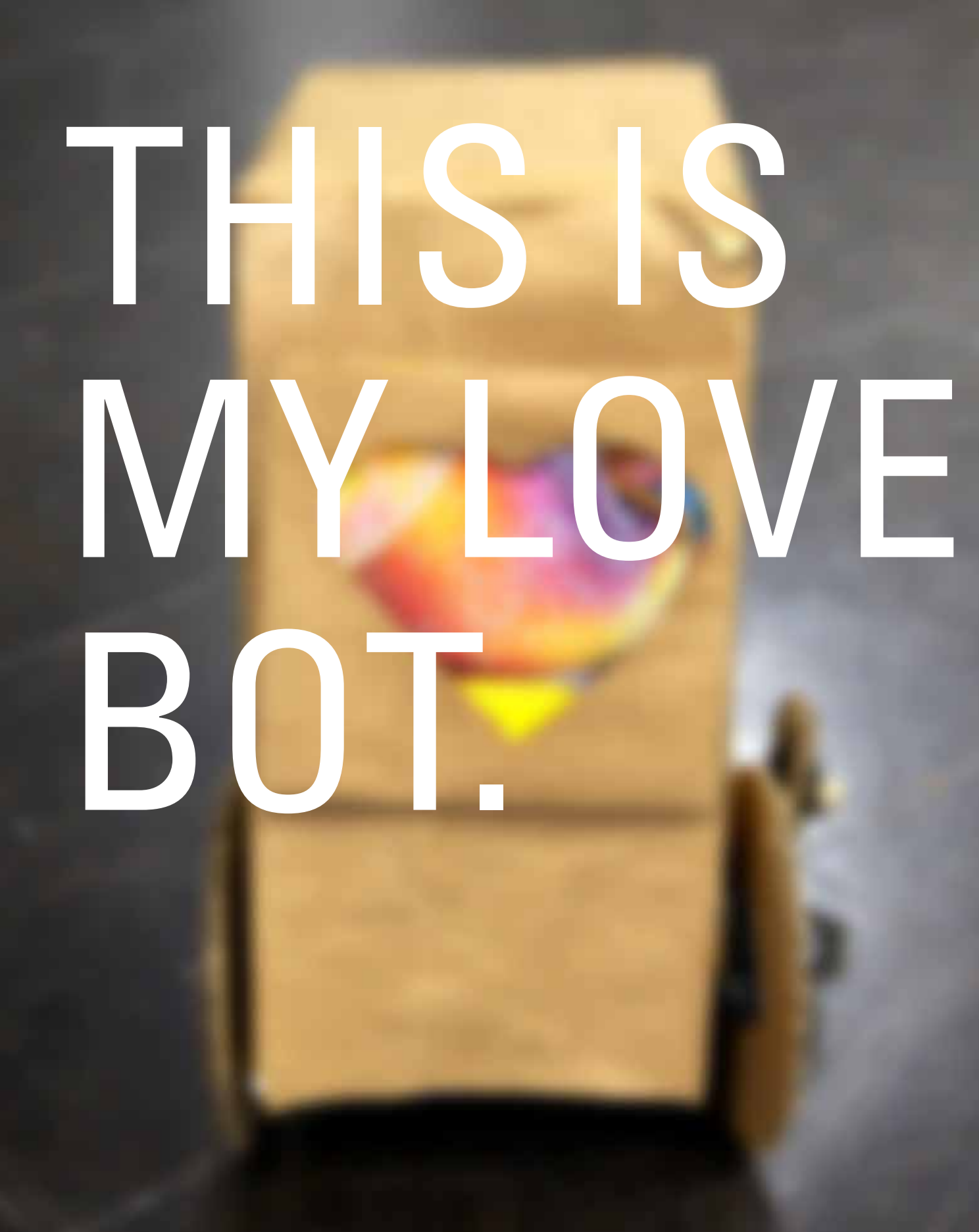
Perfect Human #4: So I believe there is no such thing as the perfect anything. That's an absolutist notion and that's not how the world works. And it's fruitless to try to live that way because you'll never achieve happiness if you're always looking for something that's impossible to find.

IPH: Can you describe your perfect meal?

Perfect Human #5: On one hand, I don't think there is any one perfection; that's like saying there is one ultimate truth and I don't believe in that paradigm. However, I do think that you should have lower expectations because things can be perfect, even if they're imperfect to someone else - it can be what you want at that moment, and that might be perfection at that moment.

The Perfect Humans project quietly defined my thesis direction. It fueled my interest in the dynamism of the human interface through research and qualitative data collection. It showed me how challenging, yet rewarding, the process of facilitating the sharing of stories can be and that human beings are the most dynamic media.

THIS IS MY LOVE BOT.

"I thought about this book for you. I figured you could relate to it." I blinked. My eyes refocused on the cacophony of misfit artifacts that hung, cherished, part of a shrine to all that was once forgotten, but now mulled over, analyzed, and exhaustively pontificated about by graduate design students in the Dynamic Media Institute program at MassArt. I turned my head to re-establish my gaze on Gunta, her arm extended towards me. A small, hip'ly, designed book in her hand. She had that look on her face. You know the one. She smiles, but your intuition warns that she may have an ulterior motive. My fear is that Gunta's psychoanalytic mind is constantly doing whatever it is that a psychoanalytic mind does. Even so, I accepted the book and in hindsight, this was a great decision — I can be so wise in my ability to neglect my pleading mind.

The Perks of a Wallflower is the story of Charlie, a teenager caught between engaging in his life and observing from the outskirts. We learn about Charlie through a collection of intimate letters written, in the vein of diary entries, to an anonymous source. Charlie's letters facilitate the nostalgic experience of remembering the growing pains of American teenage life. I was determined to understand author Stephen Chbosky's methods to make me feel so deeply affected. Charlie's struggle penetrates our being. We connect with Charlie because he exposes his weakness when confronted with the challenges of growing up. Chbosky understands that by exposing the vulnerabilities of his main character, he creates an intimate relationship between Charlie and the viewer. Vulnerability garners empathy. Empathy is what allows us to relate. In an attempt to understand Chobsky's approach I reflected on the experience of conducting my own flexible design research, specifically for designing empathic experiences.

Empathy is a powerful sensibility, especially to those responsible for designing human/computer experiences. It has certainly been a consistent theme in my work at DMI, and over the past two years I have identified a small list of effective methods to create empathic connections. That list includes role play, anthropomorphism, humor and story. One example that uses a combination of all of the methods in this list is *The Lovebot*.

The Lovebot is a child of the fall 2010 Design As Experience class (DAE.) Each week we received an object from Gunta that stimulated a visual response. Throughout the class Gunta provided a wide variety of stimuli including noise-makers, ropes, quotes and ripped book pages. The item that stimulated *The Lovebot* was a chapter from the Nicolai Gogol story, The *Overcoat*. *The Overcoat* tells the story of Akaky, a kindred spirit to Charlie, the protagonist in The Perks of Being a Wallflower. An impoverished government clerk and copyist, Akaky often escaped to a small world within himself where felt emotionally safe. His inner world protected him from the anxiety he felt from connecting with his peers. Akaky spent almost all of his time copying documents, the one task in which he felt in control. When he attempted to have his coat repaired the tailor explained to Akaky that he must commission a new coat. The fear of freezing to death in the looming winter drove Akaky to agree to a deal he could not afford. Akaky worked harder than ever. He copied documents into the wee hours of the night. Akaky dove deeper into his inner-world. He further separated himself from his surroundings. He was alone.

After our class read the story we discussed the dynamics of Akaky's character with Dr. Mara Wagner from the Boston School of Psychoanalysis. With a new understanding of what caused Akaky to resist interpersonal connection, Gunta asked us to design a tool that might help Akaky manage his resistances. As I always do with my projects, I immediately attempted to understand what it might be like to be Akaky. I felt a personal connection to his character. I have also felt alone. I too have resisted reaching out to others when I felt that way. I too have turned inward. I too have felt alone.

I have always found role play to be an extreme enlightening method in my process, and in this project it would prove no different. To begin the process I normally ask myself questions about the character I am attempting to understand. The stenographer in my head would most likely record something like, I know he feels anxious when he is around other people. I get anxious in public sometimes, too. How do I know I am feeling anxious? Are there signs? Physical even? What can I do to remedy the situation? Acknowledge that what I am feeling is all mental? Distraction?
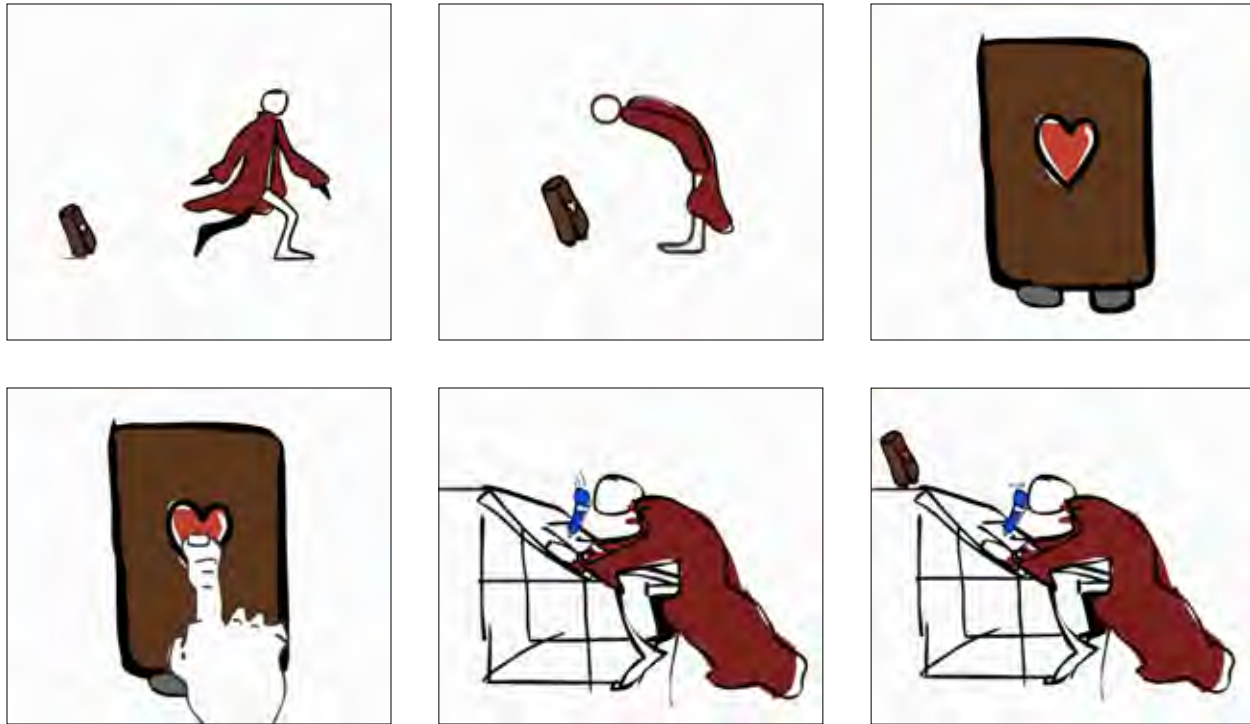
It is important to avoid feeling insecure during this phase. The creative process thrives on living in the unknown. It is our ability to withstand not knowing for extended periods of time that makes us creative. To chase the unknown is to avoid stagnation. The most effective way I have found to avoid stagnation is to brainstorm a list of questions about the experience before I attempt to provide answers. But remember that role-play is not simply a mental practice. The body plays an important role in the process as well. Many designers and researchers refer to this more physical way of thinking as body-storming. The experiential advantage of body-storming drove me to constantly sacrifice myself as the department beta-tester. I wanted to feel what it was like to experience all of the different projects my classmates had created. I imagined John Dewey was a beta-tester as well. I imagined he would interpret solely thinking about an interactive media experience as a waste of time. We don't just think about experiences, we feel them as well. Experiences are inherently multi-sensory, so our research must also be multi-sensory.

At the next DAE class I presented an animation of my solution, an anxiety-sensitive pen. When Akaky's anxiety level reached a level identified as un-safe, the pen's reservoir would obstruct the flow of ink. Akaky would no longer be capable of writing until he confronted the pen interface. In order to use the pen again, Akaky was required to verbalize his frustrations into a microphone embedded in the pen cap. At the end of each day, the pen printed a map that displayed the data it had collected for that day so that Akaky could recognize patterns in his behavior. I was proud of the pen, and looked forward to pushing it further. However at the end of class Gunta instructed to exchange projects with another member of our class. I received Jaturont Jamigranont's project, a robot.

Gunta and I have discussed the importance of periodically creating distance from my process. When I objectify my ideas I cease being dependent on an idea that could potentially hold me back. When I release my claim on methods or materials that I consider essential to the piece, I free myself to pursue unknown vectors. Designers must not let their methods define them. There are multiple ways to tell a story. The transition from pen to robot tested my ability to adapt.

Kid's idea was inspired by a cartoon he watched as a child. The cartoon depicted the strange relationship between a young boy and a robot sent from the future by an older version of that boy. The robot featured a magical kangaroo-like pouch that provided whatever the pair needed to fulfill their aspirations for mischief.

The anthropomorphic potential of the robot was very exciting. I had used anthropomorphism in the past and considered it a fun and effective method of facilitating empathy. I realized that if I could create a vulnerable character around this robot, it might then garner empathy from Akaky. The limitless functionality of Kid's initial model made the robot feel complicated and intimidating. It felt like the experience of visiting a restaurant that lists fifty items on the menu. I don't trust that restaurant as much as a restaurant menu that lists only 10 items. A simple interface seemed like a logical complement to Akaky's complex defensive systems. The threshold of investment on the part of Akaky needed to be as low as possible. I explored the idea of limiting the magical pouch to a single function.

For the second week I created an animation for Akaky's new robot which I now called *The Lovebot*. In the animation, Akaky's robot followed him around and occasionally interrupted him. At those moments the robot's heart shaped light on his front face, formerly the pouch, would light up. At that same moment, Gary Wright's *Dreamweaver* would begin to play. Akaky was forced to address the robot. Like the pen's functionality, Akaky was required to engage with the robot by touching the heart light. Only then could he stop the music and return to his work. Although humorous, this method was effective in facilitating a varied rhythm in Akaky's life. It forced him to acknowledge a world outside of his own. Even if he only engaged with the robot in order to deflect the attention being drawn his way, he still identified that he existed in a space with others.

On a whim, I decided to build a small cardboard version of the robot before class. The robot featured a cardboard box body, cardboard wheels and a heart-shaped envelope cut-out that I could fill with colorful pieces of paper to create the illusion that the robot's light was turning on and off. As much as people enjoyed my animation, they seemed to be completely smitten with my little cardboard robot. I followed that interest.

After class I tied a rope to the robot and began pulling it around the hallways at MassArt. It seemed strange at first, but to my surprise students began engaging in conversations to ask about the robot. Then I was really blown away. People actually talked to the robot. They asked me what his name was. They asked me where he was from. There was something very exciting about this. I wanted to venture out further. For the next phase of the project Maria, Kid and I worked together to document the experience of bringing *The Lovebot* out into the real world. We embedded a point and shoot camera into the body of the robot and hit the streets. I also borrowed an overcoat from Maria in an attempt to live the role of Akaky. We had a very similar experience to those we had at MassArt. Strangers on the street asked me about the robot. They crouched down to pet him and inspect him more closely. Some even asked me how he worked. One of my favorite moments in our film about *The Lovebot* documents a particular interaction in which a stranger actually attempted to press the heart button out of curiosity to see what the robot would do.

Although clearly not a fully-functional model of *The Lovebot*, the cardboard version I had built facilitated the connection between the user and the outside world — success. *The Lovebot* facilitated the connection between the user and his peers, fulfilling the original goal of our tool. *The Lovebot* acted as a mediator between the two connection points. Strangers may not have approached me randomly on the street to engage in conversation, but mediation tool created a reason to do it. Akaky's robot was an objectification of a meeting place, a safe environment for two people to connect. It was an objectification of the 'analytic third' a technique I would continue to use throughout my work as the basis for *Open Source Empathy*. This project allowed me to recreate the magic of Mara's Window. My installations in public space would attempt to recreate that same experience through the forms that already exist in our environments.

THIS IS ABOUT MY RIDE WITH PHIA

Some friends of mine got married on Cape Cod late in the summer of 2011. The event was especially relevant to me because I essentially introduced the bride and groom to each other. A few weeks before the wedding, the soon-to-be bride asked me if I might be interested in sharing a ride and room with one of her friends, Raphaella a.k.a. Phia, who was looking for some company and interested in saving some money. I took advantage of the opportunity and immediately began working out the details. It was interesting to be thrown into a close-quartered experience with a stranger. The idea of not only sharing a room, but driving two hours each way with someone I had never met before seemed daunting at first. I eventually embraced the experience, excited by the prospect of meeting someone new. Having only communicated via E-mail, I arrived at Phia's doorstep the morning of the wedding ready for an adventure. As I reflect on that morning, I try to identify extraordinary occurrences that might explain what would happen next.

It might have been caused by my particularly high feeling of vulnerability I had felt about day ahead of me. The groom had been one of my best friends, but we had experienced a falling out a few years earlier. Our failure to communicate with each other had created a divide between us and caused me to isolate myself from that group of friends. During a rare time when I was free to join the group for boxing, I found out that in a close-knit group of eight friends, seven of them would be included in the wedding party as ushers. I was the only one excluded. I was emotionally crushed. In addition my ex-girlfriend was a bridesmaid. These details made attending that wedding seem awfully daunting. However I took comfort in the fact that Phia, who only knew the bride from summer camp as children, would be an outsider as well. It was our opportunity to bond. So maybe that is why I said what I said as Phia and I pulled away from the house.

"So Phia, I just want to let you know that I really hate small talk. So if we could just disregard all that stuff and just get into it, that would be great."

I found it funny the way people reacted when I told them what I said to Phia. Some were horrified. They reacted as if I had done something terribly wrong. Others were jealous of my ability to be so straight forward. Whichever way they reacted, all of them said they would never have done it the same way. Maybe it was the brutal honesty. Maybe it was the intrusive nature of the statement. Maybe they were fearful of the chance that Phia might misconstrue my comment and cause us to spend our two-hour car ride together in silence. None of those circumstances seemed to outweigh the torture I percieved the ride would be like if I allowed us to get sucked into a black hole of small talk. Did I mention I hate small talk? I think the name says it all. It's small. It's insignificant. It's lazy. It eats at my soul. I feel like I learn nothing about myself or my partner in the process. "Crazy weather we're having." Aghh. Get away from me. Luckily Phia is an incredibly cool person. She replied, "OK, sounds good." And we were off.

To get us started, I shared something private with Phia. I shared the story that described why I was feeling particularly vulnerable that day. My hope was that by sharing something about myself first, Phia might feel more comfortable sharing something in return. I wanted to create a feeling of safety, a feeling of mutual sacrifice. I wanted to show her that I trusted her with my vulnerabilities in order to encourage her to do the same with me. It worked.

An hour into the trip I felt like Phia and I had transported through time. We joked, shared breakup stories, personal fears, aspirations, fantasies. We shared all the things that one would normally feel too uncomfortable to talk about with a person they had just met. Somehow this was different. The difference was that we skipped past the things we were supposed discuss and got right into the things we wished we could say. The rest of the weekend went smoothly. I had a great outlet with Phia. When I needed to escape a stressful situation at the wedding, she understood where I was coming from.
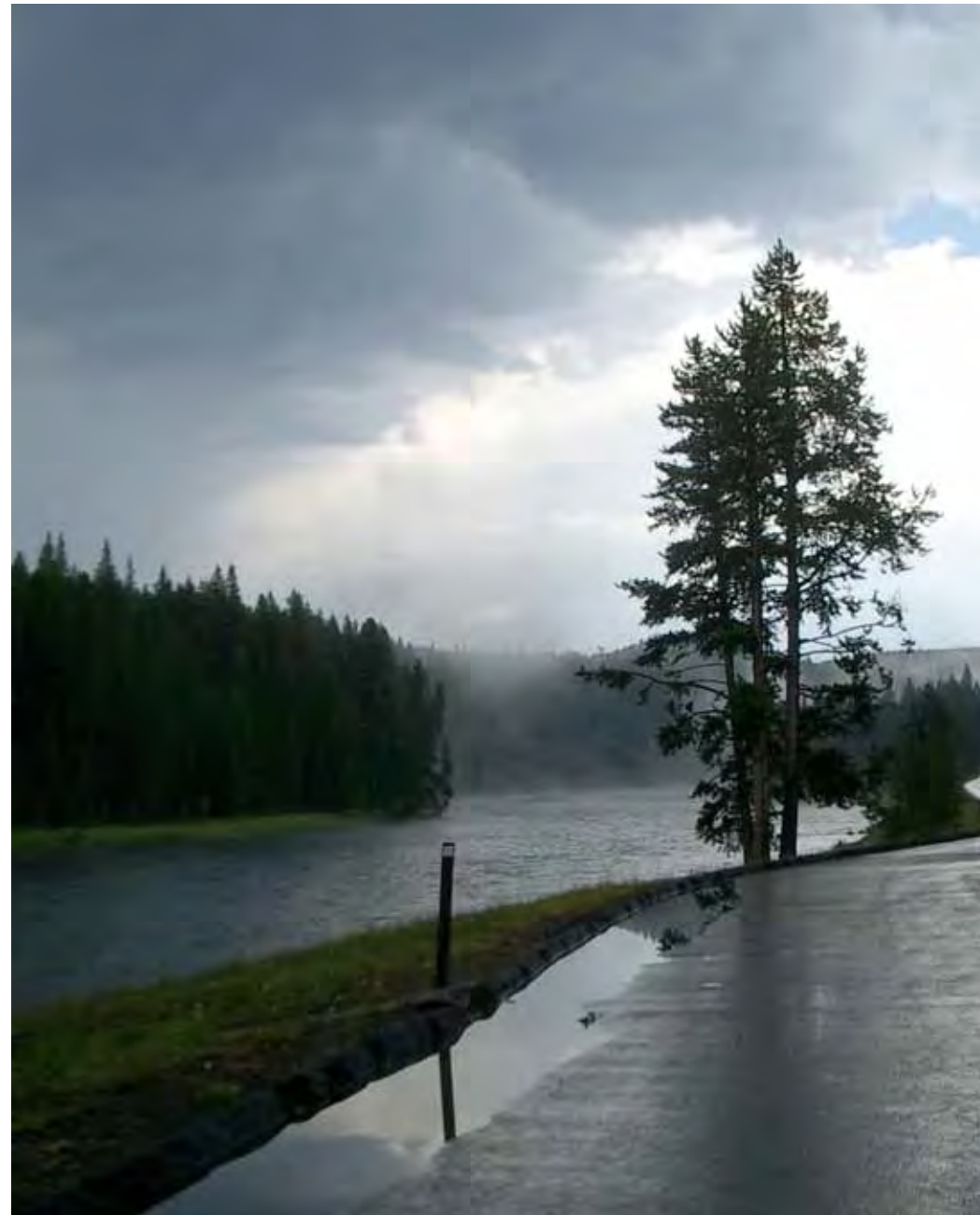
I was extremely excited about my new *no small talk* theory. I felt like I was really onto something. I wondered why every conversation couldn't be like the one I had with Phia. If we could skip past the mundane and get to the meat of the conversation, we could learn so much from each other. If we were more honest with others, we could learn more about ourselves. I obsessed with the idea of a society in which everyone walked around saying all the things they wished they could say. Eventually the thought of everyone being honest all the time became quite scary. It raised many questions.

What if we could strike a balance between saying everything we felt and our current methods for emotional communication? What if we discovered a way for people to experience what I had experienced in my car ride with Phia? What if we felt free to share our feelings safely without the lengthy lead up time? What would a system like that look like? How would people interact with it? Where would they interact with it? How much information do I need to give them up front? What sort of signs can I give them to make them feel safe to share without judgement from others? In what way could I begin to measure that type of engagement?

These are the questions that fueled my work on Open Source Empathy, and they were all inspired by that ride to the wedding this past summer.

Thanks Phia.

THIS IS ABOUT ENLIGHT-ENMENT.

Daniel: I am intrigued. Please keep me appraised of your findings and conclusions. I have a personal interest in your topic and look forward to your discoveries. Hope you are well.

Buckles! Quick question… just so I can take your survey in the best say. Is it completely anonymous or linked back to E-mail?

I hope it's anonymous because I got deep. Hope all is well and good luck with your thesis….

THINGS I WISH I COULD SAY

I was on a natural high for a while after the ride to the wedding with Phia. It was as if I pulled back the curtain on the *Wizard of Oz* or something. I wanted to figure out a way to provide that experience for others. To start the process of understanding how I would deliver that experience I returned to the practices of one of my design heroes, Richard Saul Wurman. As discussed in The Perfect Humans, Wurman reminds us that the true work in design happens in the design of questions. This thesis began when I identified a researchable question. Wurman believes that designers should begin every project with that very same step. Questions can be used even after we identify our research direction as well. In *Open Source Empathy* I used questions to tap into the hidden resource of emotion each of my subjects. I often prefer to use questions as the primary method of interaction in my projects because they allow my users to discover the answer themselves. I find that if I provide the opportunity for my users to discovery the answers on their own, they find the process more rewarding than if I had simply provided them with content to consume.

In one of my undergraduate design studio classes, my professor assigned an open project for which we were responsible to design a book with our choice of content. I think because I had recently watched *The Big Lewbowski* for the seven hundredth time, I decided almost immediately that I would make a book that poked fun at bowling culture. So after class, around 12:20 on a Tuesday, I jumped in my car and flew down route 88 into Fairhaven, MA to a local bowling alley I had researched online. The plan was to go in, shoot some photos, maybe do some profiles on some bowling regulars, and smash it all together into some super-stylized seventies graphic design catastrophe — it was going to be beautiful. As I pulled into my parking space I noticed that there were only two cars in the lot.

The facade of the bowling alley had a welded metal sign, bent and rusted from thirty years of New England weather. Having just finished a project on the subject of *Wabi-Sabi*, I appreciated the building for its experienced and slightly broken character. As I entered the lobby of bowling alley, I realized that I had clearly chosen the wrong time of day to do field interviews. At one o'clock in the afternoon on a Tuesday, I was the only one there. Not just the only patron. The only person in the building. After a couple of minutes of looking around the lobby, the owner, Rick, appeared from behind the counter. As I began to explain the purpose of my visit, leaving out my ulterior motive to design a satirical theme to the book of course, I could see a curious and eventually gleeful expression grow on Rick's face.

As soon as I finished my description, Rick said "follow me," as he rushed off down the hall. He led me down the walkway that ran the length of the lanes at far the end of the alley. Rick was leading me to the door that opens to the back room of the bowling alley, a room I had dreamed of entering ever since stepping foot inside a bowling alley for the first time. On the other side of that wall behind the alleys the pick-up truck-sized machines that set the pins roared as Rick set each one in motion. Across from the machines sat a hundred cardboard boxes bursting at the seams with extra bowling pins. If you have never held a bowling pin, they are extremely heavy. It's amazing how much force we generate to smack those things and send them flying through the air. Rick explained that the life-span of a bowling pin is about four years with regularly scheduled usage

rotation. Once a pin had fulfilled its duty at the alley, Rick donated it to the local police academy for target practice.

There was so much to see and learn at the alley. I spent another hour there exploring and taking photos. When I had filled my memory card, I thanked Rick for his hospitality and drove back to school to load the pictures onto my computer. Once uploaded I began browsing the photos to see what I had to work with. I was surprised. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I am no photographer. I can barely run my DSLR. The majority of my photographs are taken in Auto Mode. Most of the time I rely on my ability to crop to capture anything interesting. Even so, when I looked at my new photos, the bowling alley looked beautiful. I was confused. I had already decided that my book was going be a joke with the bowling alley as the punch-line. I had scoffed at bowling culture, however I found myself humbled by the symmetrical forms, angular lines, fabric patterns and eighties video arcade charm. Something had changed inside of me. I felt a sense of enlightenment on a personal level, but also on a professional level. I realized that my book was merely a vessel for the real project — having a humbling experience. It became clear that my job was to immerse myself deep in a cultural experience, then discover new ways for others to have that same experience.

For the bowling alley project I facilitated that experience via a black and white photo book. In the book I augmented my photographs through mirroring, severe cropping and repetition. My goal was to show the bowling alley as it had never been seen before. I removed the color to remove any preconceived notions associated with the visual aesthetic of most bowling alleys. By presenting the photographs in black and white I accentuated the formal aesthetics of the bowling alley, which is what truly sold me. Although almost entirely photographic, the last page instead showcased a piece of writing that I created to summarize the experience.

"This book has changed. This book started off as young, naive and full of itself. This book judged the cover of other books. This book knew all there was to know about the bowling alley. This book knew that itself was better than the bowling alley. This book confronted the bowling alley. This book became confused. This book saw things about the bowling alley that it had never seen before. This book saw things that were quite beautiful. This book began to question itself. This book thought that it might have been wrong to prejudge others. This book began to ponder the other things that it might have prejudged. This book found that it could find beauty in the places that it had least expected. This book will never look at anything the same again. This book has changed. This book is me."

This project defined a new paradigm in my approach to design From that moment I focused on creating projects that facilitated opportunities for enlightening discoveries. I knew that my approach to *Open Source Empathy* couldn't be any different. I needed to begin by immersing myself in the culture of vulnerability.

I returned to the experience I had in the car with Phia. I reflected on the stories we shared with each other and tried to understand why those stories had been kept private in the first place. I tried to identify which vulnerabilities had been exposed through each story and which defenses we constructed to protect them. After reflecting on the examples in that conversation, I began to identify similar occurrences in my daily life. I realized that I am constantly participating in that process. However it seemed as if the "no small talk" mantra was able to bypass all of it. We were able to skip right to the real stuff, the painful stuff. I decided that my questions needed to cut to the chase in the same way that my conversation with Phia did.

Wait… did I say questions? Yeah I guess I did. To be clear, I didn't design questions, I designed sentence starters. There is a subtle difference. I was worried that by using questions directed at the test subject I ran the risk of making my subject feel attacked. Any sign of threat might cause my subjects to protect themselves even more, leaving me with zero results. Instead I used sentence starters that focused the attention on the objects or actions associated with the emotions my users might be dealing with at any given time. By directing the focus away from the user I decreased the intimidation of answering a personal questions and increased my chances of garnering authentic responses. Once I had my set of sentence starters I created a form on *Survey Monkey*

(http://www.surveymonkey.com/). This application is a free and incredibly easy tool to create and share surveys and analyze their results. Easy Breezy. Then I ran into some trouble sending out the survey to my E-mail lists. For some reason survey monkey makes it a real bitch to add E-mails to a list. Fine… whatever. So then I tried to E-mail the survey to about one hundred fifty of my closest friends through GMAIL — no go. Apparently GMAIL has a limit to the number of different people you can E-mail over the course of a single day — that would be one hundred. So what I ended up doing was using *MailChimp* (http://www.mailchimp.com) to build an E-mail list, sending a link to all the members on my personal list. It cost me a couple bucks to run the E-mails through the *MailChimp* service, but it was worth it. The whole setup seemed like a bit of a hack, but sometimes that's the way things get done, especially in DMI.

I sent the E-mail out, sat back and waited. Before I received any survey responses I received E-mails asking me about the anonymity of the survey. My users were concerned with sharing their intimate answers with me directly. Some users expressed their discomfort with the idea through jokes, while others were very up front about their concerns. A particularly serious user asked, "quick question…just so I can take your survey in the best say. Is it completely anonymous or linked back to E-mail?" These user did not seem uncomfortable sharing their stories, however they did feel uncomfortable with me knowing the stories were theirs. My users were uncomfortable with the idea that I might form a personal myth for them that differed from the one that they had crafted as her own. That is a common resistance when asking others to share a personal story. By

definition, one's vulnerability is the point at which their defense is weakest.

When it comes to personal myth, vulnerability stands as the access point to our true self.

Here is a list of the sentence starters I used in the survey along with some corresponding responses. I received over fifty responses of each of the questions, but this list includes only ten from each response set.

1. When I get mad I…
Punch pillows and swear, Cry, Run, Meditate, Write, Mouth obscenities to myself, Close up, Yell, Shut Down, I change my environment.

2. My biggest regret is…
Not taking more risks when I was younger, Not achieving my all in athletics, Lost friendships, putting my needs below the needs of others, Not caring enough to change who I am, blaming myself too much, Not saying no when it was an option, Not furthering my education, Sleeping in, Wasting years in a relationship.

3. The last time I cried was about…
An inspirational TV show, The death of a family member, Feeling alone in a crowd, Missing my friends, Not being able to quit my job, How far my relationship is from where it once was, Realizing how much I care about my mother, A goofy pop song, Sex, Discussing with my wife how long we would want to be on life-support for.

4. I am afraid of…
Death, Heights, Snakes, Being vulnerable, Spiders, Being alone too long, Boys, Being burned by fire, Failure, Not living up to potential.

5. I lie about…
Money, Being happy, Being interested in people, My dad, Being in agreement when I'm not, My accomplishments because I never feel like what I have actually accomplished is enough, My weight, Who I really am and who I want to be, Never being stressed, How I really feel about my coworkers.

6. I would like to say I'm sorry for…

Not always having enough patience with the people who mean the most to me, Anyone I've yelled at or taken out my stress on, Looking at other girls, Telling my best friend in elementary school she was too fat to wear the purple princes dress, Wishing I were someone else, Not catching it when I stopped living my dreams, Being impatient with my coworkers and family

7. My least favorite thing about myself is…

Social awkwardness, My inability to relax and "see the forests for the trees", Too conservative, Being so judgmental, My bad moods, Lack of discipline, My teeth, Spending money, Laziness, Over empathy.

8. I fantasize about…

Being rich, Being a full-time artist, Quitting my job, Romantic love, Travelling the world, Money + Sex + Power, Running away, Being single, Women, Success.

It's hard to be too critical with my reflection on this section of the research.
At this point I was still curious about the overall possibility of what this thing could be.
However I did know that I didn't want my thesis project to be an online survey.
One limitation to using the online survey method was that I was the only person
that could see the responses to the survey.

On a positive note, I did learn that anonymity played a key role in the success of the experience. Although all of the users were people whom I knew personally, not knowing who each story came from made me realize that they could have come from anyone. Anybody could be hurt from anything at any time. When I took a step back I saw that the data set as a whole began to form its own identity, with its own personal myth. The personal myth evolved as the survey collected more data. It felt alive, just like one of my users.

Through my installations, under the moniker These Walls Listen, I explored this idea of community-wide personal myth. I used the questions I created for the Things I Wish I Could Say survey to garner responses in the MassArt community and beyond. Although I was learning as well, the questions allowed each community to discover something about itself in the process, just like I had learned about the bowling alley. The specific nature of the questions, which focused on one's vulnerabilities, dismissed small talk and skipped to the content which would facilitate connection more efficiently between my users — just like in the ride with Phia.

THIS IS ABOUT SETTING GOALS.

*BARRY SANDERS
AND THE SECOND MAN*

After creating, sharing and analyzing the Things I Wish I Could Say survey I formed a set of goals that would help me define my next round of research.

1. I want to design a platform which not only facilitates the sharing of one's vulnerabilities, but provides the opportunity for users to view an other's vulnerabilities as well.

As I reflected on the survey I initially focused on the problem of sharing the data I had collected with others. I realized that I had completely forgotten a step. The experience of empathic connection to the vulnerabilities of an other. It was as if I had become consumed by that first step of data collection. For some reason this revelation reminded of a Barry Sanders interview I had seen as a child.

It was a compelling interview in which Barry Sanders tried to explain how he did the things that normal people can't. At one point Barry attempted to convey his strategy for avoiding tacklers down-field. Barry explained that he never looked at the first closest opponent. He claimed that, in the heat of battle, he couldn't even see them. Even though the closest opponent seemed to be the most immediate threat, Barry focused on the second closest opponent. He cast his gaze further down field. Barry said that it was easy to avoid the first tackler. The real challenge was the avoid the second tackler. His goal was to manipulate the movement of the second tackler by the way in which he avoided the first tackler. I began to extrapolate that strategy as a metaphor for my approach to facilitating empathic connection in my community. Although it was important for me to engage my primary participant in the self-identification process through the sharing of stories, the challenge would be to successfully engage other members of the community in empathic response to the stories being told.

As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. The same goes for empathy and the Analytic Third. It is a partnership. Both parties must sacrifice something in order to reach a common goal. Until this point I had to bear all of the vulnerabilities of my users on my own. By creating an open source platform for anyone to access the vulnerabilities of the community, I could be relieved of the pressure to bear all of that struggle on my own. I did not want to over-stimulate my users, but I knew that protecting them from being exposed to such personal content led to the frustration that spawned this project.

2. I want to create a series of small experiments that will allow me to test lots of different variables quickly.

In the fall of 2011, Evan Karatzas and I sat down at MassArt to discuss how I might begin to package my thesis case studies. Evan wanted to know what my deliverable would be. I'm glad it was Evan that day. I'm not sure I would have come to the same conclusion otherwise. Evan tells you straight up what he thinks. He doesn't sugar coat a thing. It works for some, doesn't for others. I love that approach. No small talk. I tried to explain my thesis project directions to Evan, but was struggling to make sense of them. I was having difficulty deciding between two thesis ideas that I felt were strong but offered distinctly different advantages. The first idea was to create an augmented reality platform on which people could geo-cache graffiti. The other option I had was to conduct research around the topic of my survey *Things I Wish I Could Say*. Evan discussed the scale for each implementation. He explained that some DMI alumni had created a series of smaller experiments, but that he had opted for a single large-scale project. Evan's project, Proximity Lab was an "8-foot by 16-foot walk-able surface that tracks the real-time positions of participants and visualizes relationships between them." If I decided to go with the graffiti platform, it would have been a serious large scale project. I would have had to hire mobile web developers and 3D CAD builders. The scale was intimidating to me. We discussed how the emotion research might be a more open, nimble experience. I made the joke that I should make my own Empathy Lab. We laughed for a second, and then thought wait… that actually makes a lot of sense. What if there was a laboratory for empathic experiments? Rather than create one large project, we wondered if I could create a series of small experiments so that I could observe

different types of shared experiences? Working small and cheaply would allow me to try lots of different models rather than get too heavily invested in one large experiment. I wanted implement what I had learned about flexible design research and interpret that process for the purpose of creating dynamic media systems. It made sense that a flexible medium should have a flexible research process as well.

3. I wanted the platform to be in public space.

Creating the platform in public a space would provide the opportunity for more people to interact with the vulnerabilities that had been captured by my system. To publicly display vulnerabilities of a community begins to challenge the perception of where and when vulnerabilities should be shared. There is a stigma around injecting a personal message into the public arena. Once an idea is shared publicly, it can be challenged. This is a scary thought for a lot of people. Who wants to be challenged for being who they are? However we grow by challenging ourselves and those around us. Even an absurd idea can encourage discourse. Sharing ideas creates discussion.
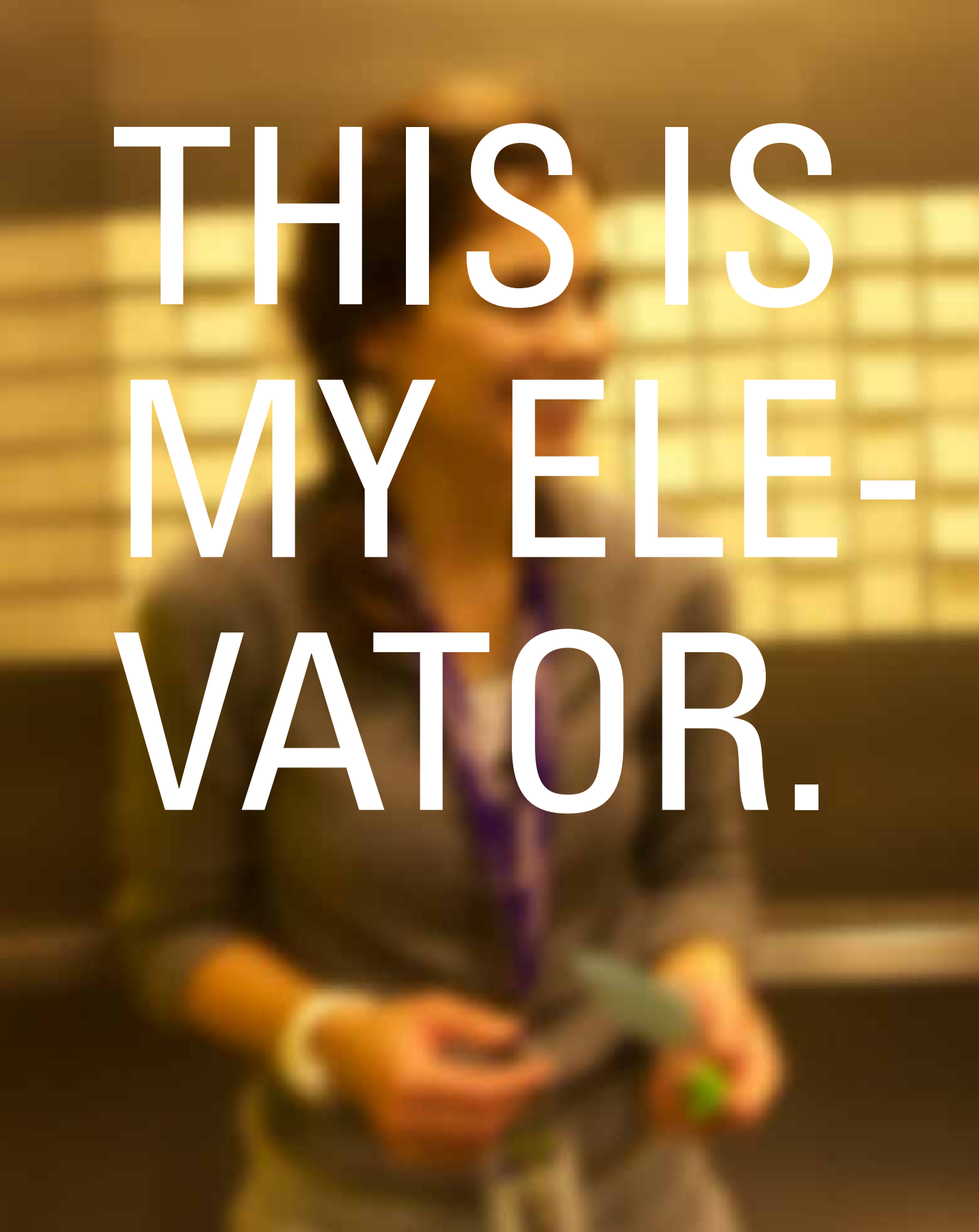
4. I want to provide an opportunity for people to explore the field of emotional vocabulary.

During this process I considered that people struggle to communicate emotionally because we lack the tools to do so. We simply don't speak the language. Anyone who speaks more than one language could tell you, when you don't practice a language you begin to forget it. It is my belief that we have simply been out of practice so long that we have forgotten how to communicate emotionally. Story grammar is an essential set of parts that anyone can combine to create stories, including setting, context, characters, plot etc. That set of parts acts as the language of narrative. It is essential to an emotional rebirth that we practice our ability to communicate via an emotional language.

In *The Superhero Project*, previously mentioned in *The Perfect Humans* section, artist Abner Preis explains his approach to building emotional vocabulary as similar to creating a composition with music. A smile, a tear and a laugh are all emotional vocabulary. He says that when you open people up and teach them how to use emotional vocabulary, you empower them.

When reading the rest of the case studies in this section, please keep these goals in mind. I will reflect on the outcome of each experiment through the lens of each goal. Although I was happy when I could provide opportunities that met at least one of these checkpoints, it was when I could meet all of the goals in one installation that I found the most success.

THIS IS MY ELE- VATOR.

The elevators installation was a collaboration with DMI classmate Marysia Stangel. One night at the beginning of the semester I escorted Maria to a Fullbright "shmoozefest" over at Northeastern University. It was a unique opportunity meet new people but overall the event was very boring. Maria and I ended up spending the whole time discussing out projects. What we realized was that the content of our projects complemented each other very well.

Maria, being the pure soul that she is (especially relative to me), was completely focused on the idea of creating joy in public space. This was great because I was concerned with what the exact opposite felt like. I focused on people's vulnerabilities. Simply put, Marysia was the happy one and I was the sad one. We realized our areas of study offered a nice balance and had the potential to create an engaging, fully emotional experience. With that in mind decided to work together to create a framework for collecting data that would balance our areas of study. As always we started with identifying our researchable questions. We each decided to pick one. I was able to pick one sentence starter from *The Things I Wish I Could Say survey* — "I worry about…" — and from there identify a complementary sentence started that represented Marysia's subject matter. We chose — "I smile When I See…" Once we had the questions confirmed, we needed to identify a location in which to conduct our research.

Coincidentally Maria and I were both TA'ing for the senior undergraduate design research class that semester. The class was broken up into three sections with Joe Quackenbush, Brian Lucid and Gunta Kaza each teaching a different exploration into the world design research. Per usual, Gunta was expanding the boundaries of what was expected in design curriculum. Now she had her students conducting field research in public elevators. First the students were asked to observe users in public elevators and document their observations. Once they had collected enough data, the students analyzed the data for patterns. Finally the students formed a hypothesis and created a stimulus for testing their hypothesis in the elevator environment. It was inspiring to observe the process as the students entered a new disciplinary space. As they experienced a cyclical process of resistance acceptance. The excitement we felt as we observed the process of our students inspired Maria and I to use the elevator as our own research environment.

The elevator turned out to be an extremely engaging space to work with. There were surprises we discovered when we considered the usage patterns of our users. There is a rhythm to the elevator in the way people enter the space, the way the doors open and close, the way the buttons light up that all inspired us to think creatively. Since this was a platform for data collection we needed a space for people to respond. We used post-it notes to line the walls which we divided into two halves. We used two colors of post-it notes to delineate the sections. Then we cut long sections of paper to the exact size and shape of the elevator doors. Each door panel was painted the color of the corresponding section of post-it notes. Then we stenciled one sentence starter onto each long section of paper. It was tricky, but we were able to attach a panel to each elevator door so that they were only visible while the elevator doors were closed and the elevator was moving. When the elevator reached a floor the doors would open and the panels would slide away, hidden to the users. The setup made for a surprising reveal to newcomers to the space. First users saw a grid of post-it notes and wondered about their purpose. Then they would turn around to see the doors close and have the sentence-starters revealed.

The set-up for this installation was time-consuming, but we actually learned a great lesson in how using the specific nature of a space can add to the overall experience. We used the space, rhythm and pace of the elevator to our advantage to create a unique experience.

Now for the unfortunate part. Naively we did all of this work, guerilla-style, without permission from the facilities department. After we finished installing the piece at about 11:30 PM, only about 5 people were able to use it before the facilities team trashed it at about 6 AM. It was crushing. All that work we had done didn't reach the potential we had hoped. However I was able to discuss the experience with the few people that interacted with the installation before it's removal. Their responses were positive and encouraging.

Although disappointing, I understand why the installation had to be removed. Howie Larosse, director of the facilities department would later explain to me that the elevators were not only considered a private space similar to bathrooms, but they were also his biggest budget item. This project taught me the value of working through the correct bureaucratic channels. I worked closely with Howie to understand the MassArt space more deeply during the process of my following installations. He was an amazing resource not only because of his in-depth understanding of the space but for his curiosity for student work and the potential for community-building projects as well. I highly recommend that every DMI student reach out to the members of the MassArt community who are open and willing to support you whenever possible.

THESE ARE MY TABLES.

On the same day we installed the elevator project, Maria and I also designed an installation at Peete's Coffee in the MassArt cafeteria. Our goal was to create a system that complemented the elevator experience, included more questions, used a different medium and explored the dynamics of a different social space. Starting with the questions we used in the elevator and my Things I Wish I Could Say survey, Maria and I each created a list of five sentence-starters. Creating a longer list of sentence starters forced to flesh out the area of focus we intended to study.

Maria's sentence-starters were "Today I Draw…" "Crowds Make Me…" "I am Full of Joy When…" "I Will Play if…" and "When I Was Small I Used to Play…" My sentence-starters were "I am Afraid of…" "The Last Time I Cried was About…" "I Feel Disappointed When…" "I Lie About…" "My Biggest Regret is…"

Peete's Cafe proved to be more controversial than the elevators due to social dynamics of the space. The cafeteria at MassArt is actually a shared by students from MassArt, Harvard, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services and Wentworth. In the elevator project we designed for use within a single community. The members varied in age, sex and social hierarchical status, but they all belonged to Massart. That common ground created an understanding amongst the group. However the Peete's space is inhabited by multiple communities at once. The intermixing of communities made for a tense atmosphere that was reflected in our collection system.

In order to create privacy in a more highly populated space, we installed on the table-top surfaces of Peete's tall cafe tables. The table tops provided an opportunity to re-contextualize a personal space that already existed. One does not simply walk up and disrupt a stranger at a coffee table. By making it a feedback surface, the table-top would provide a more private and intimate experience for user interaction. A user could inconspicuously interact with and digest the information on the table top at their leisure. The table-top experience could last for long periods of time because it disregarded the pressure of a formal exhibition space. In a gallery setting a user might feel pressured to move along after a short amount of time. By integrating the system into the table, users could spend as much time as they liked with the piece and it would appear as if they were merely enjoying a coffee.

INTERACTION

It was interesting being in the space and seeing people react to the piece. Some used the piece as we had anticipated, sitting at the cafe tables, writing or reading as they wanted. But surprisingly others experienced the installation as a gallery piece. Those in the latter party stood at the table to view one collection of responses. Some gallery viewers might write their own response before walking to the next table to repeat the process. Most often the gallery viewers took the time to experience all of the tables as a sequence. The table tops had become their own gallery space. Although it was not our intention to create a gallery, we were open to the ways in which our users might define their own experience. I often define the success interaction platform by its ability to cater to a range of user scenarios simultaneously. Using that metric, I considered the Peete's table installation a success.

RESPONSE

As with almost all of objectified Analytic Third pieces I have created, the range of responses that we collected at Peete's covered a wide range of content and authenticity. In response to a question like "I am afraid of…" I got everything from "Ghosts" to "My external hard drive crashing… oh wait, that just happened." The ghosts response seems more playful and less introspective relative to the external hard drive comment which

seemed more authentic. It's important to remember that there is no quantitative metric for measuring the authenticity of a response in any of my installations. Rather I rely on my own subjective experience to help me establish an opinion about each participant's response. Not to say that the responses needed to carry a certain tone in order to be deemed worthy. Although silly in nature, someone else might deeply connect with the ghosts comment and empathize with that anonymous member of their community. I consider that process just as valid.

Specific to this location, I did see responses that were used to create conflict between the various cultures represented in the space. On the "My biggest regret is…" table one user left the response "Not punching everyone who goes to MCPHS in the face. Get out of my cafe and out of my way!" Which instigated a handful of responses including, "Our name's on the cafe too! (It's above the door)", "You're jealous you're not making bank!", and "Fuck You, buddy!" This is a difficult correspondence to analyze. On one hand I was disappointed by the perceived insensitivity of the student who wrote the initial comment. On the other hand, I did ask the question in hopes of receiving honest responses, and that may have been the way that student had felt. By sharing their opinion about the MCPHS students, it created an opportunity for discourse and a platform for the MCPHS students to be open about their feelings as well. Ultimately the table contained my user group's frustrations rather than let them fester within them. In an even more unfortunate scenario those frustrations could have been communicated directly at the other students.

CONCLUSION

This was the only installation which I used to target multiple communities at once. All of my other installations were created and tested in single-community environments. If you are interested in conducting this type of experiment it is important to remember that multi-community experiments pose a greater potential for conflict than experiments within a single community. This is not necessarily a bad thing, just be conscious of how that will effect the data you collect.

I also conclude that these systems work best when they allow communities to work from the inside out, in parallel with the individual self-identification process. Communities have their own personal myths which means that they can also take part in the self-identification process. Just like individuals, the dynamics within a community are constantly changing dynamic systems. With that in mind a community as a whole must regularly reflect on its emotional well-being. My systems are designed to help communities in that process.

THIS IS MY DRY ERASE WALL.

DRY-ERASE WALL

The dry-erase wall installation was a collaboration with the director of facilities, Howie Larosse. Howie was extremely excited when I told him that I wanted to create a series of interactive installations to collect responses from the MassArt community. Howie knows how to take full advantage of working at a state-funded university, having completed a degree in architecture during his employment at MassArt. He understands how people navigate the MassArt space and he is constantly searching for ways redefine those practices. In our discussion about finding a location for my new installation I explained how that I required a space that provided privacy, safe navigation and sufficient wall space to create a large-scale dry-erase board. Howie suggested that I use the emergency stairwell in the MassArt Tower building. He had recently opened the stairwell for general use and he was looking for a way to promote its use. This was one of Howie's initiatives. Elevator malfunctions were a constant frustration and the maintenance to keep them running was expensive. Howie was interested in identifying ways to encourage students to use the stairs more. An installation like mine would provide students with a reason to use the stairs. The evolving nature of the installation would drive curiosity and encourage users to experience the space more often. The more people used the stairs to see my installation, the less they would depend on the elevators. That prospect made Howie happy.

In addition to helping me secure a space for a period of eight months, much longer than the normal installation period, Howie also donated two kits of Idea Paint to the project. Idea Paint is an extremely cool material that allows you to create a dry erase board surface wherever you want. For the purpose of my project it was a great solution that would allow me to collect, document and then refresh the wall as many times as I wanted without having to rebuild each time. As with all of the mediums I have chosen for my installations, the dry-erase board is a medium that people are comfortable using without instruction. The same can not be said for a piece of software, especially one created from scratch.

Howie and I identified the stairwell level between floors three and four as a potential option for its close vicinity to the computer lab, graduate studios and facilities office. The stairwell also coincided with my intuition to find a space for my next installation that opposed the social dynamics of the Peete's cafe space. The table installation provided a smaller private space for the user to interact in an extraordinarily busy environment. The stairwell garnered a much lower level of foot traffic, but provided little to no privacy for the user interacting with the piece. If you were reading or writing on that thing, others who entered the space would know it.

Another change I made to the wall dealt with the link between questions. In my other installations, the questions seem to live on their own. The each explored one area of vulnerability however they did not necessarily connect to the other questions directly. In the dry-erase wall installation I wanted to accentuate the connection between questions. I didn't know which questions I would use or how they would relate, but I knew that I wanted them to work together. Those details had never stopped me before, so like a good design researcher entering the unknown I started building anyway.

It's interesting to watch the time-lapse video I created during the process of installing the dry-erase wall. Using my laptop webcam I was able to capture roughly twenty-four frame a second every ten seconds. A program called *Gawker* captured the images and upon completing the session the program automatically converted those images into a time-lapse video. I started the project on the Friday of Thanksgiving break, mostly to contain the spreading of the Idea Paint's noxious chemicals to my fellow classmates. The holiday also gave me the freedom of time, space and mind to explore what that installation could be. When I completed the wall, I showed my buddy Cornbread the completed time-lapse video. When he finished watching the video, Cornbread turned to me and said "It's cool how you just made it up as you went along." I hadn't even thought about that until he mentioned it. In fact there is a critical moment in the middle of the movie where this is especially apparent. I had painted two arrows between the two giant question and answer blocks, which at that point were divided by a white bar. Each arrow extended from their respective question box to point at the adjacent question box creating a visualization of their symbiotic relationship.
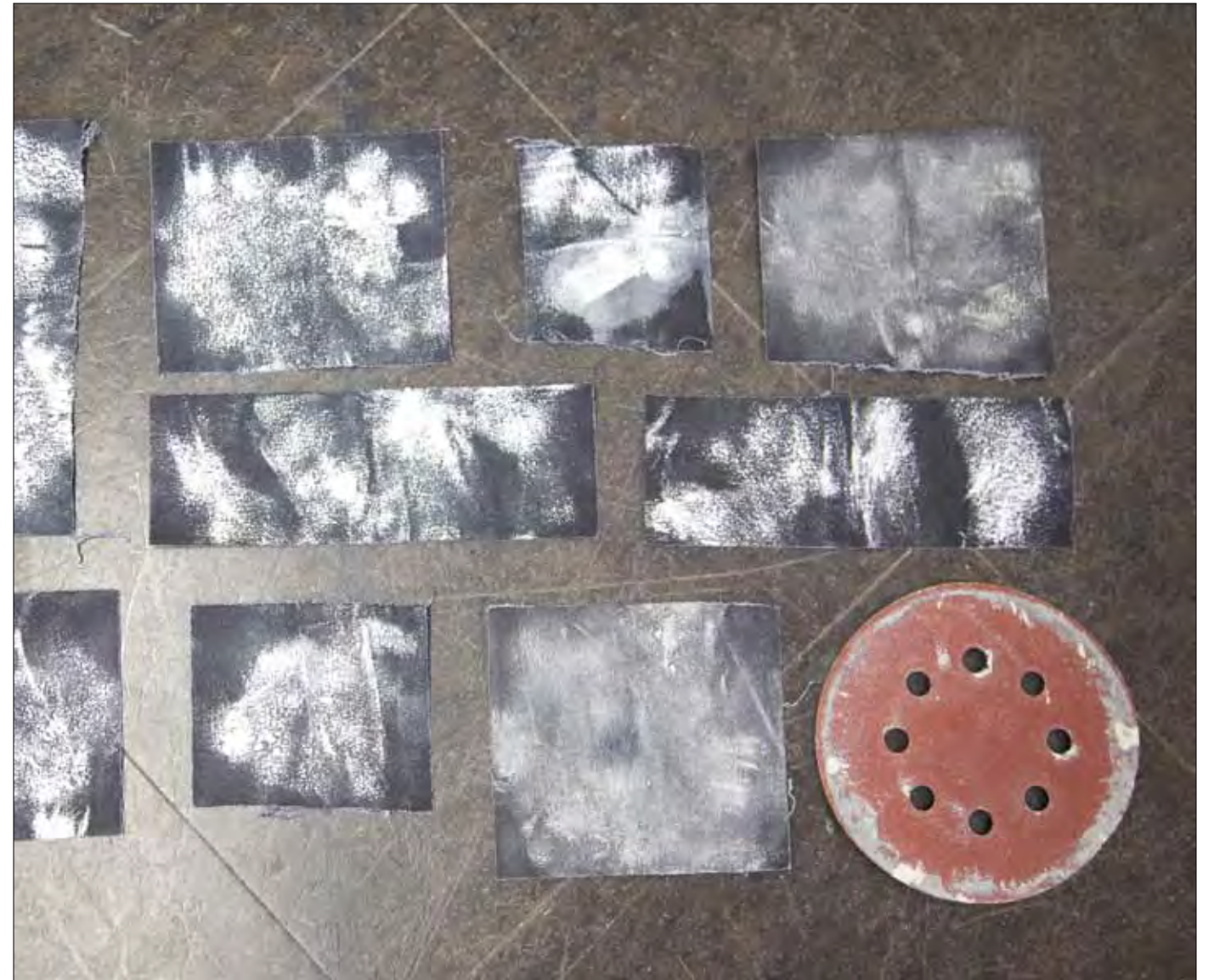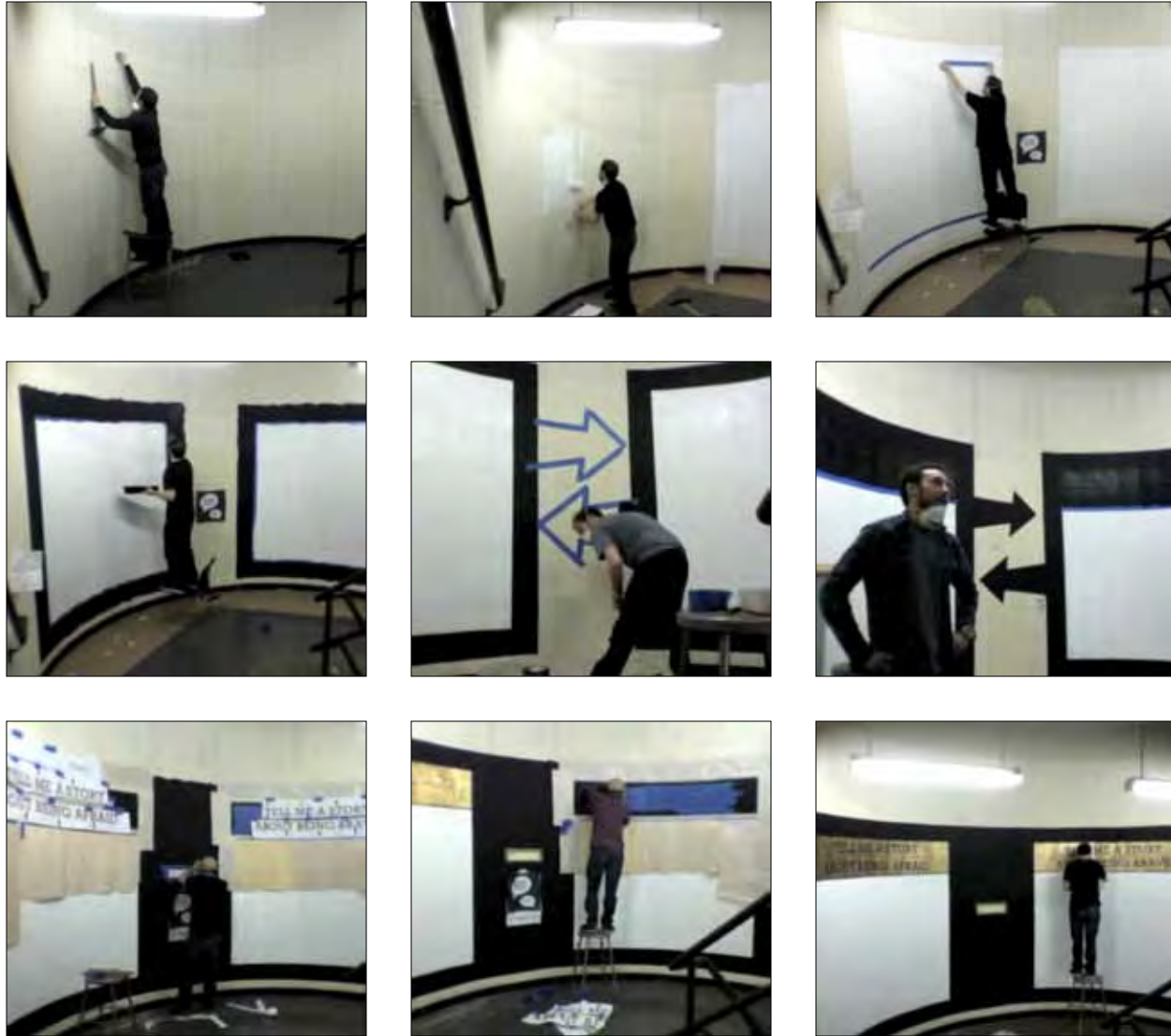
It was at this point that I realized that the walls were opposites but also support each other. I remembered my *I against I* project for which I created an emotional map of my life. The map had been broken up into the two categories of good and evil in my life. I wanted to create a similar metaphor for my wall but I needed to distill all of the emotions I had been studying into just two categories. I decided that all of the vulnerabilities I had been discussing were considered vulnerabilities because we feared what would happen if people discovered them. Fear was the drive behind all of it. I simplified that idea into my stimulus, "Tell Me A Story About Being Afraid." At that point the opposite drive fell into place, "Tell Me A Story About Being Brave."

In the video the change happens in a matter of seconds, however the thought process took about a day and required an important conversation with Mara and Gunta. They were able to convince me that keeping the arrows there was too heavy-handed. They insisted that it is the user's responsibility to connect the two walls. They were right. My users did recognize the connection, often telling their stories across the lines of the two walls.

Once I had finished the wall, I filled it with a few starter stories. I was conscious not to instill the fear of the blank page in these installations. I have been adamant in my own practice, and when instructing others to install their own versions of *Open Source Empathy* installations, to seed the collection spaces with example responses. The best practice I have found is to recycle responses from previous collections. This method ensures that all of the responses are authentic. If you don't have access to previous responses my advice is to answer the questions yourself, but do so honestly. Often that is the best way to experience the project and judge its success anyway. If you don't want to participate in your experiment, there is a good chance others won't want to participate either. In this case I answered the wall myself on both sides, and we were off.

OBSERVATIONS

I noticed a bit of awkwardness when I walked into the space one day while someone was writing. I didn't bring any more attention to it than it needed. I just said "hello," and kept on walking down to the third floor, never mentioning that I had anything to do with the installation. In one particular instance it almost felt, by the reaction of the guy I walked in on, that I had caught him in some embarrassing act. I think the scale of the wall also figured into the way people shared. The wall was inherently larger and subliminally called for users to write or draw visibly larger than on the other platforms. Often the nature of the writing accoutrement, large markers and crayons, also deterred users from writing at a small scale.

Even with the intimidating scale of the medium, the installation was successful in collecting genuine responses. Although the post-it notes installation, which I will discuss in the next section, garnered a larger number of responses the dry-erase wall garnered longer responses overall. Many full paragraphs of text were shared, creating what felt like a deeper experience. I think this result is due to the more private nature of the space.

TELL ME A STORY ABOUT BEING AFRAID

I am afraid that no one will miss me when I'm gone.

ART SCHOOL

I cannot pay for classes I may have to leave.

I COULD GO TO PRISON ANY DAY NOW

I am afraid of mice I think they are going to crawl up my legs.

I'm afraid to show emotion but i'm getting better. :)

I'm afraid every time I check my bank statement

I was scared of my neighbor's haunted house. I find a bloody hand inside a box

I'm afraid of the dark, the needle...

I was afraid when I found out my boyfriend had bone cancer. We were 17.

WHEN I WAS MY TEACHER'S HUSBAND DIED. THAT WAS WHEN I REALIZED I WOULD DIE TOO

I was afraid of like from the furnace and I was scared would come up from...

I'm kind of afraid of robberies, they could steal me.

BOO

THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID OF GHOSTS FIND THEM

I'm afraid to show emotion. but i'm getting better. :)

I am afraid of mice I think they are going to crawl up my legs.

Im afraid of
thunder becase
I think there's
some one behind
me

44

me.   '41

two Years ago I lost a lot of weight I felt fine and happy,
but my family freaked out about my weight. They started to
pressure me to eat, at first, it was just just those family talks,
but after awhile my parents would get really hysterical about it,
it eventually ~~turned~~ turned into verbal abuse, and
my siblings would gang up on me. about it. It scared me to no end
I'm not thin anymore, but the fear still remains, that
they will corner me into being whatever they want me
to do, ~~just~~ just because they dont think its right
for me.

Im afraid
of not
ever being
good
enough

I Like

I was afraid when I found out my boyfriend had bone cancer. We were 17.

TELL ME A STORY ABOUT BEING BRAVE

I moved to Boston for a beautiful woman.

I fight to stay in school. I will not give up.

ART SCHOOL

This is really fun!

I AM AFRAID of the future of our capitalist country which is eating each other

I'm switching majors. My parents are angry.

I'm not brave.

I'm not afraid of thunder anymore. Ik now it's just nature

To not be afraid of a ghost is brave. But be afraid because they're not Real

I'm not scared of Zombies! They're not REAL.

I WAS BEING BRAVE WHEN I TOLD SOMEONE I LOVED THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME.

I'm switching majors. My parents are angry.

I'M ALREADY DRAWING, WHY SHOULD I BE AFRAID OF GETTING WET?

I WAS BRAVE
WHEN I FELL OFF MY
BIKE AND NEEDED
50 STITCHES ON MY
FACE
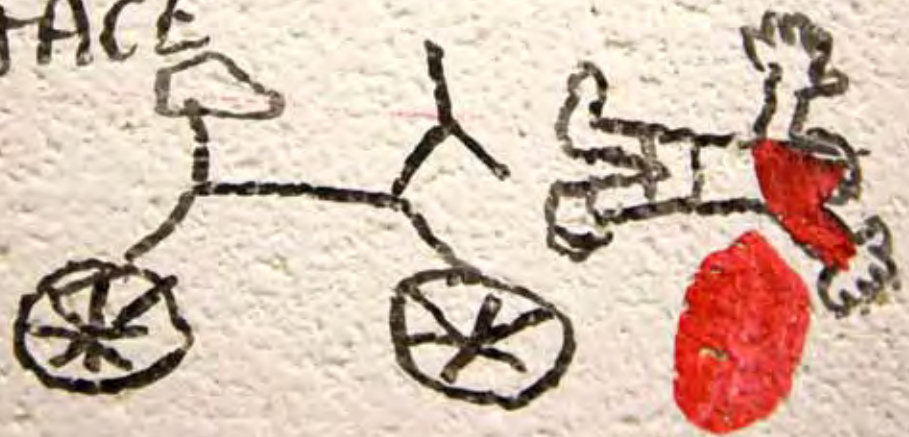
I Moved
to BOSTON
FOR A
BEAUTIFUL
WOMAN.

My boyfriend is in
remission now and
we have stuck
together for 5 years.
Commitment is
Bravery.

THE FUTURE

Because of its long-term potential, I am currently working to identify a student to maintain the dry-erase wall once I have left MassArt. Ultimately I would love to create a scholarship that could provide the resources for one student each year to maintain the installation and create their own on another floor in the stairwell. Ultimately with an installation on every floor the stairwell all of the level could be linked to create a gallery of responses.

THESE ARE MY POST-ITS.

Once I had successfully installed the Dry-erase wall, I again focused on how I could vary my next installation in order to test how space and medium can affect the types of responses I could collect. For the next installation I knew I wanted to venture out into a more public sphere again, but limit the experiment to a single community. I also wanted to find a space that was distinct to MassArt. I wanted to identify an architectural or cultural feature that only the MassArt community could provide. I identified the windows in the main lobby as my next location. Most of the light in the three main lobbies in the Tower building at MassArt is borrowed through the double height windows that face out onto Huntington Avenue and Evans Way. They are massive and beautiful.

Around the time I had started considering the new installation, I had begun experimenting with stenciling. Up until that point I had created stencils screen printing, spray painting and placing on windows. I am slightly obsessed with the texture that is created when the image in a window shows through the cuts in a stencil. The system constantly changes and provides a new aesthetic experience. It functions much like a dynamic media system.
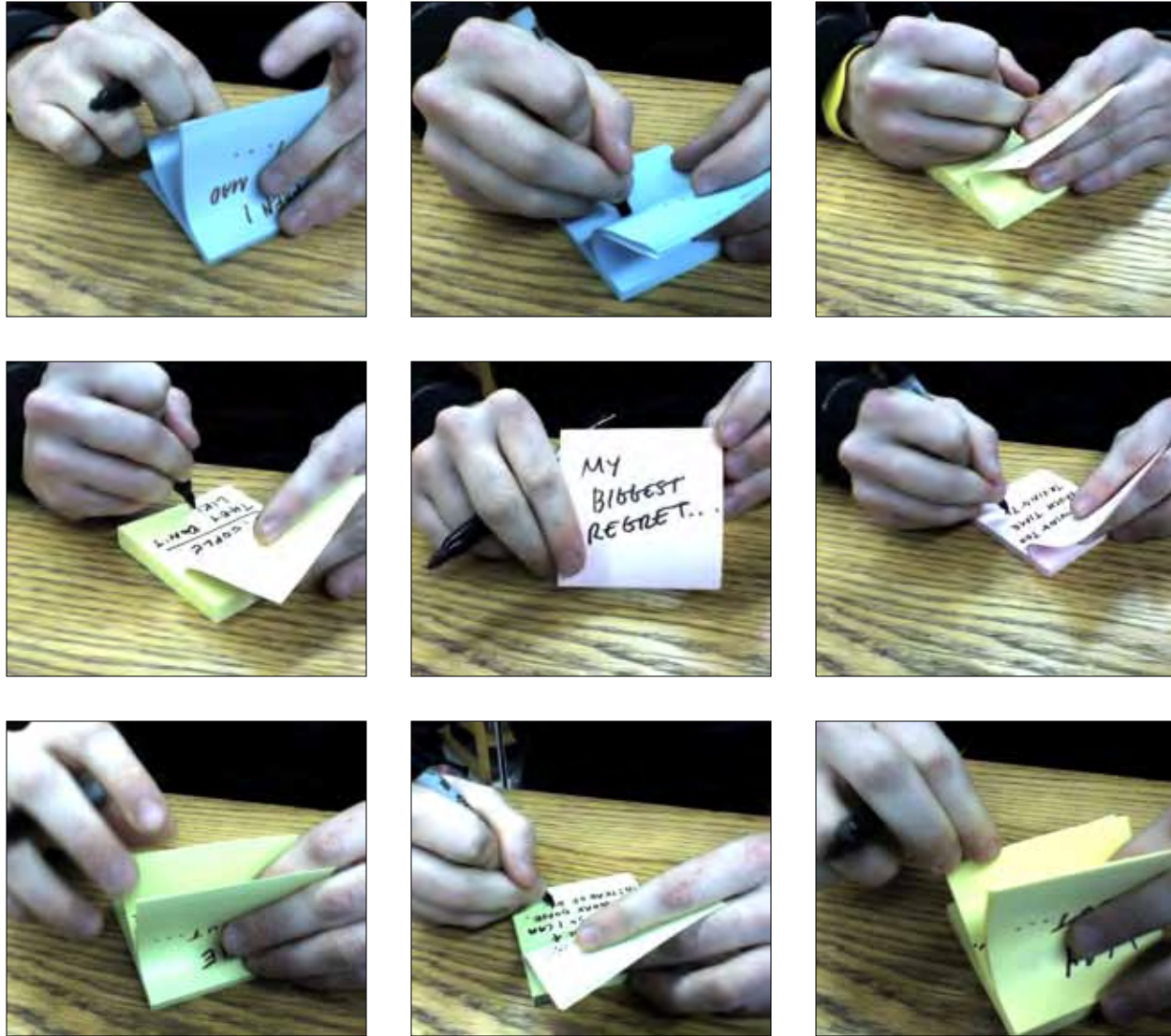
With the remaining post-its from the elevator project I handwrote all of the responses from the *Things I Wish I Could Say* survey. It was a cathartic experience. I felt as if I had experienced the same emotional release as the users who had provided those answers. When I had finished writing the collection of responses I returned to my studio with a spark of inspiration. By chance I arrived at my desk to find my a few of the stencils I had made. I immediately wondered if I could take what I had just learned from rewriting the responses on post-its and my newly discovered obsession with applying stencils to windows. What would the post-its look like on the window?

The next day I completed the necessary forms and installed my piece on the large windows in the MassArt main lobby. I started with the post-it notes I had copied over from the survey, to create a pseudo-grid under each question for my users to follow. To finish the installation I left a fresh pad of post-its and a sharpie for users to provide their own responses to my new series of questions.

OBSERVATIONS

The post-its went very fast. I installed on a Sunday night and the post-its were gone by Wednesday. The lobby space worked well. There was enough foot traffic that people were moving through at a good rate, but it wasn't overwhelming for users that were trying interact with the piece.

The scale was also interesting to observe. The piece was a bit of a spatial dichotomy. The installation was very large as a whole, but each individual unit of interface was actually quite small. The more intimate scale of the post-it note provided privacy for individual experiences while allowing for multiple users to access the larger piece simultaneously. In that way it functioned much like the table tops at Peete's cafe. It somehow created a private space within a public space.

Although it occurred in all of my installations, the post-it notes installation garnered the highest frequency of users linking their posts to the posts of other users. The connected responses were both constructive and destructive in nature. Some responses were used to support other community members who exhibited despair through their response. While one particular response was used to call out another user for being rude.

I CRY ABOUT...

BEING OVERWHELMED BY GOD'S GOODNESS AND MERCY TO ME.

LOVED nuch nit understand

FINALS

N THE PARENTS SERVICE MAN HONORED AT INS GAME. SON WAS TO GREET THEM.

RELATIONSHIPS.

how my body compares to the ideal

A GOOFY POP SONG.

How easily trust person again...

USIN wro pos

LOSING MY MIND.

I REALIZE MY RELIGION ISN'T MY RELIGION.

Bcin so I c

The end of LOTR Return of the King

Almost Anything!

my friend committing suicide. I always feel like I could have been the one to help if he didn't phone away.

Hearing my favorite song performed live

Oh god me too

THE THOUGHT OF LOOSING MY GRANDPARENTS...

Missing my Dad

last DAYS with OTIS

being a disappointment

MY MOTHER

I FANTASIZE ABOUT...

getting a JOB...
when I graduate

SEX

MY BOYFRIEND not being such a dickhole.

FUCK HIM!
I MEAN... DON'T
FUCK HIM I BUT
TELL HIM TO GO
AND FUCK HIM
SELF.

GIR

AVELING

SADIE

petting my dog

I LIE ABOUT...

minor things that shouldn't matter

HAVING TIME TO TALK TO MY MOTHER... SHES JUST A BITCH.

Being in t of people

Being content

Being content and happy.

EATING

FALLING OFF A MOTOR CYCLE

my eating disorder

What I eat. What I weigh. How much I obsess over my appearance.

MY BIGGEST REGRET IS...

Not getting "emo snake girl's" phone number in winter of 2007 at that Dunkie's in Newburport.

NOT TAKING TIME TO STOMP GRAPES IN A VINEYARD IN SWITZERLAND WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE.

All the times I didn't take care of myself

Not saying 'I Love You' when I had the chance

THESE ARE MY POST-ITS ABROAD.

In the preceding case studies I have shown a series of pilot installations conducted in facilities at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston, Massachusetts. The installations ranged in location, social precedence, physical media and levels of interactive user-investment. Facilitating a range of experiments helped me identify the most successful methods for providing community members with the ability to share their most intimate emotions publicly. In a short time collected thousands of responses to a range of questions focused on identifying emotionally subversive traits within members of the MassArt community. My users imagined what it might felt like to experience the vulnerabilities of another, and thereby participated in the empathic process. As much as I learneded from conducting my experiments at MassArt, I knew there was much to learn by testing in other communities. Through a contact in the graduate department I was presented the opportunity to test my installations within a college environment in Lanore, Punjab, Pakistan. By setting up my Post-it experiment in Pakistan I hoped to learn how distinct cultural differences would affect how people approached my installation, as well as the willingness to share.

I worked with a group of three students from the school to coordinate the installation. My top-notch group consisted of Mahnoor Khan, Zarah Zahir, Asfandiyar Ali Aga. After meeting with them through Skype and setting a few parameters for the installation, I encouraged them to take ownership over the project. I wanted the students to feel as though they could augment the experiment as they observed the interactions of their community members. This would end up being very necessary. Overall the experiment was not as successful in collecting a high volume of responses. The students were shy about approaching the installation. Those that did felt more comfortable joking about the responses. The questions seemed too personal. However the responses we did collect were very similar to those that were collected within the MassArt community. The members of the community in Lahore were frustrated by work, girls, friends, and they dealt with it by screaming, breaking things and sleeping. Sounds familiar. It is clear that the human struggle is consistently existent no matter where you travel on the planet. It seemed that the main difference between our two communities were an access to our feelings and a cultural acceptance to practice to share them with others.

THIS IS THE PRO- METHEUS CLOCK.

In September 2011 I began an independent study with Dr. Mara Wagner at the Boston School of Psychoanalysis. My goal in the independent study was to explore a sequel to *The Lovebot*. After my successful experience of building a tool inspired by a psychoanalytic patient case study, I was chomping at the bit to try it again.

In our first session Mara inquired about my interests — art, culture, people. I explained that I had always been extremely curious about those people who were extremely gifted at a specific thing, but for some reason found it difficult to assimilate into culture outside of their specific skill set. I had always been intrigued by these super-specific characters who allow themselves to reach amazing depths of one idea. I believe it has to do with my almost exactly opposite approach. I naturally gravitate toward an approach to learn a small amount about lots of different things, rather than a ton about one specific thing. Another note I made to Mara was that I had always been very much interested in prodigies. Our society seems to be obsessed with them. The ability of a child to perform at a level of maturation well above average breaks our perception of reality and drives hoards of people to understand them.

After explaining these ideas to Mara, she ended the session by giving me three case studies to look over, in hopes that I might find a character on which to base my research and prototype phases. The three stories were *Super Goat Man* by Jonathan Lethem, *Measuring the Jump* by Dave Eggers and the Greek myth of the god of fire, Prometheus. Although the themes in all three stories were relevant to the projects that would follow, I would like to focus on the relationship between *Super Goat Man* and the Prometheus myth.

We experience *Super Goat Man* through the lens of the narrator, Everett, a young boy raised in a commune in Brooklyn, NY. The reader enters Everett's life around the time that Super Goat Man, a retired superhero, moves into Everett's commune. The commune's inhabitants live in awe of Super Goat Man. He had an especially strong impact on the fathers in the community, "as though for them he represented some lost possibility in their own lives" (Lethem). This is an important description as it relates to the underlying theme of *Oedipal Complex* in both stories. Through his father's interactions

with Super Goat Man, Everett sees a vulnerability in his father he hadn't seen before. He takes note of this occurance by saying, "my father in particular seemed fascinated with Super Goat Man, though he disguised this interest by acting as though it was on my behalf" (Lethem). Everett recognized that his father felt shame in relation to Super Goat Man. His father's insecurity became more clear to Everett during a communal party at which Everett's mother danced with Super Goat Man. You can sense the disdain in his words as he describes the situation in this excerpt:

"Super Goat Man was there. He was dancing with my mother. She was as I'd never seen her, braceleted wrists above her head, swaying to the reggae — I think it was the soundtrack to The Harder They Come. Super Goat Man was more dressed up than he'd been in his room upstairs. He wore a felt brocade vest and striped pants. He danced in tiny little steps, as though losing and regaining his balance, his arms loose at his sides, fingers snapping. Mostly he moved his head to the beat, shaking it back and forth as if saying no-no-no, no-no-no. He shook his head at my mother's dancing, as if he couldn't approve of the way she was moving but couldn't quit paying attention either.

My father? He was seated on the rolled-up rug, his back against the mantelpiece, elbows on his knees, dangling with forefinger and thumb a nearly empty paper cup of red wine. Like me, he was watching my mom and Super Goat Man. It didn't look as if it bothered him at all" (Lethem).

Everett decided he had enough. Super Goat Man had stolen his father's manhood and therefore he had symbolically stolen Everett's as well. The dynamic between Everett and Super Goat Man is important to discuss because it is the same dynamic that caused Zeus to nail Prometheus to a rock for eternity when he stole fire and granted it to the human race.

The story begins, according to Clay C. Whitehead in *On Prometheus* "after Zeus's great struggle for ascendancy over the Titans" (Whitehead). Prometheus, whose name means foreknowledge, with the of his brother Epithemeus, joined and Zeus in defeating his fellow titrns. This action left Prometheus in good standings with Zeus, and put him in a "uinique position to be of help when a dispute arose between men and gods at Mekone (Place of Poppies)" (Whitehead). However Prometheus, being an extraordinarily mischievious character, used the opportunity to pull a prank on Zeus. To solve this confrontation about men and gods differentiating themselves, Prometheus invented the first sacrifice. Prometheus disjointed a bull and divided it up into two portions. From these piles Zeus would be forced to choose which parts of the bull the gods and humans would recieve in the future. In one pile Prometheus placed a selection of beef concealed beneath the stomache, and in the other he placed the bones hidden beneath a layer of fat. Zeus chose the latter, setting the precedent that henceforth the humans would keep the meat for themselves and burn the bones wrapped in fat as a sacrifice to the gods.
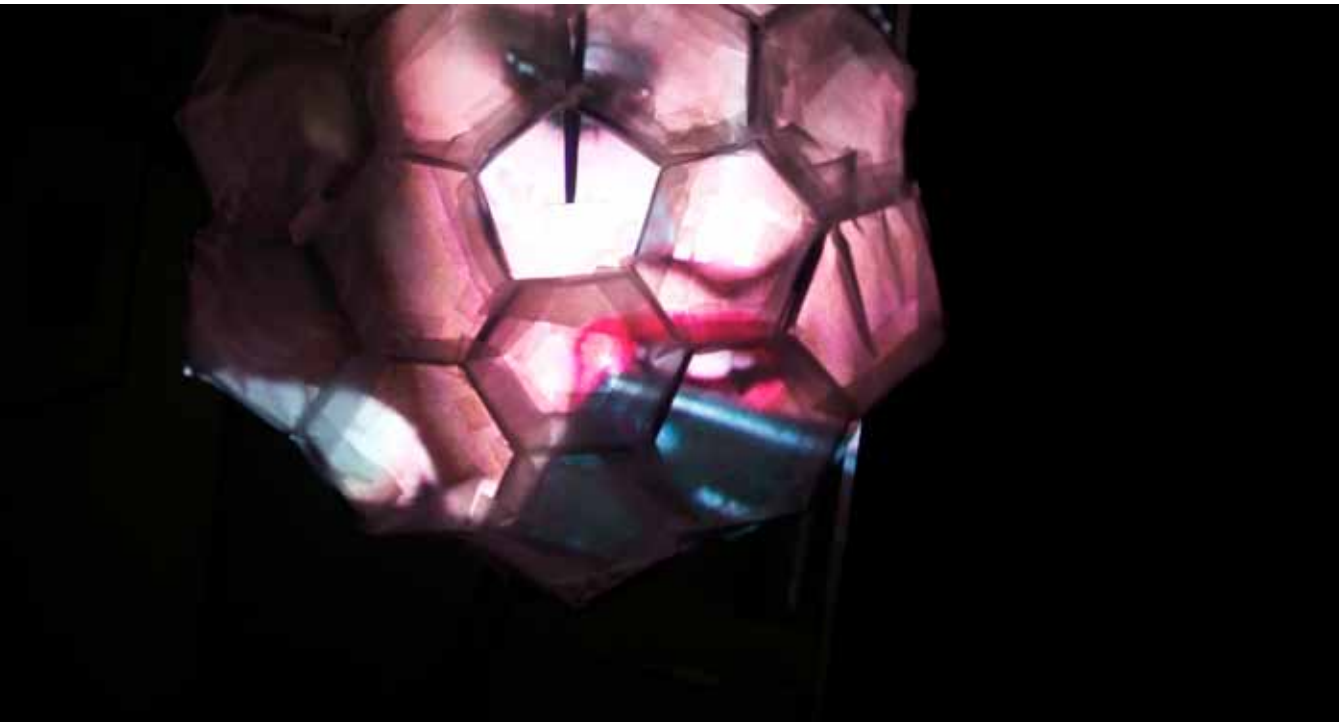
The omniscient Zeus was not fooled by the tricks of Prometheus, but chose the pile containing the fat and bones anyway — he would respond to the Prometheus's brashness in a different way. Irritated by Prometheus's prank, Zeus decided to withhold fire from man as a punishment and as a reminder of his power (a.k.a. - manhood).
This didn't stop Prometheus, but rather inspired him to commit another act of trickery. This time striking Zeus where it hurt. Prometheus gained access to Olympus and stole fire, concealing the embers in a giant fennel stalk. He presented his gift to mankind. In *Prometheus Bound*, Aechylus likens this gesture as not only the re-introduction of fire but also the provision of reason, brickmaking, carpentry, farming, numbers alphabet, tools, history, animal husbandry, medicine, divination, dream interpretation and metallurgy.

The glue between the two stories is more apparent when we look at them from a more Fruedian perspective. Both stories deal with what Freud calls the Oedipal complex. In this scenario both Everett and Prometheus play the role of the son, with Super Goat Man and Zeus playing the role of the father.

The similarities of the relationship between Zeus and Prometheus as a typical father-son relationship may seem difficult to see, but from a psychoanalytic perspective, their relationship has Oedipal Complex written all over it. Leon Waldoff, PhD explains the theory in *The Father-son Conflict in Prometheus Unbound: The Psychology of a Vision*.

"The theory of Prometheus represents the essential elements of an Oedipal conflict between father and son; the phallic impulses of the son (the theft), the threat of castration from the father (the punishment), and the wish to usurp the father's power (the prophecy)."

I liken myself to the character of Prometheus. If we go back to the descriptions I used in my first session with Mara, we can see that I was actually describing Prometheus. "I explained that I had always been extremely curious about those people who were extremely gifted at a specific thing, but for some reason found it difficult to assimilate into culture outside of their specific skillset" (Buckley). Like a god who can see the stream of humanity in his head at all times? A god who can't seem to relate to his own kind and rather spends all of his tie observing and empathizing with a group from the outside? A person that sacrifices himself for the good of the group he empathizes with, to his own detriment? The more I think about it, the more I realize I am actually describing myself.

We can relate these descriptions to my Open Source Empathy project. Through the creation of public installions, I observed my users as they shared their stories. My systems provided a stream of human interaction that I could observe from afar, as I learned about the people using them. I sacrificed myself, like Prometheus, when I pushed myself to the limit in order to create platforms on which members of my community understand themselves and become better people. I may not have been chained to a rock for thirty thousand years, but I did sacrifice a part of myself for my work.
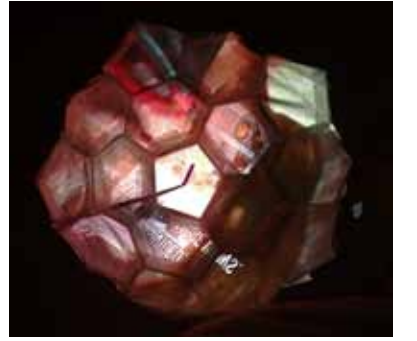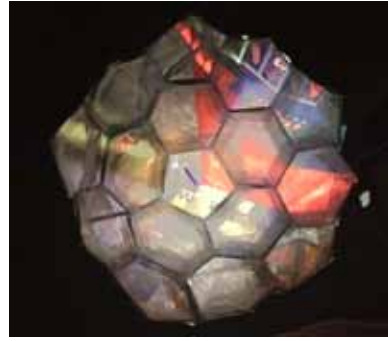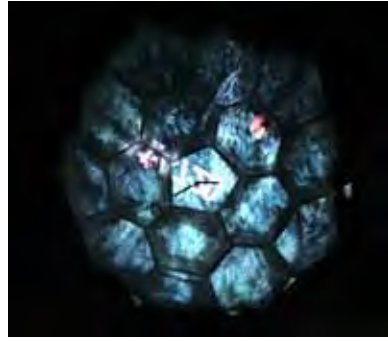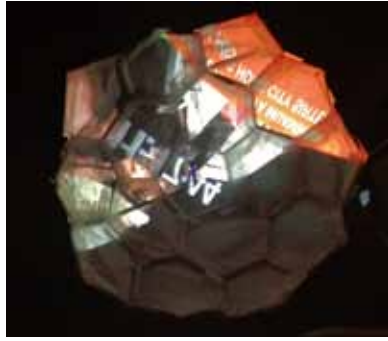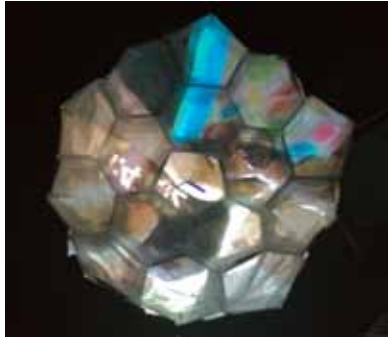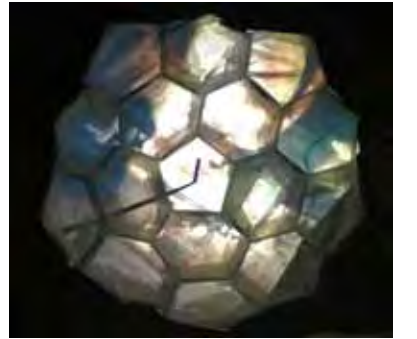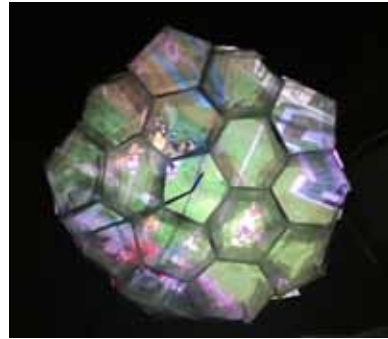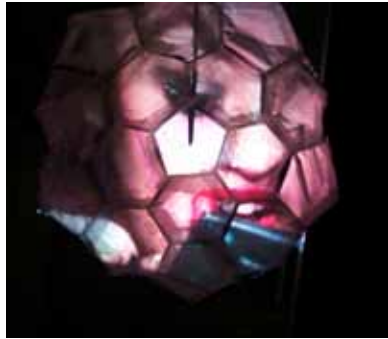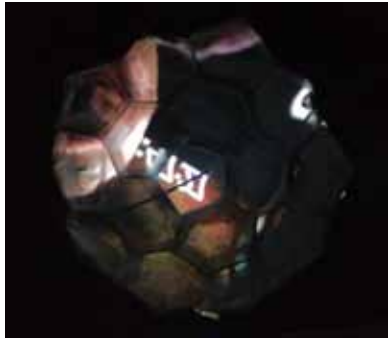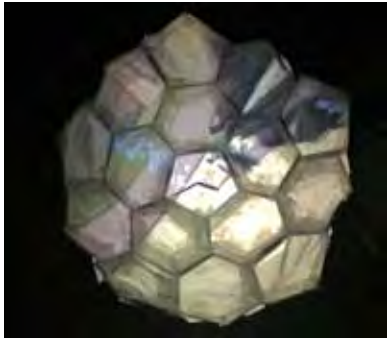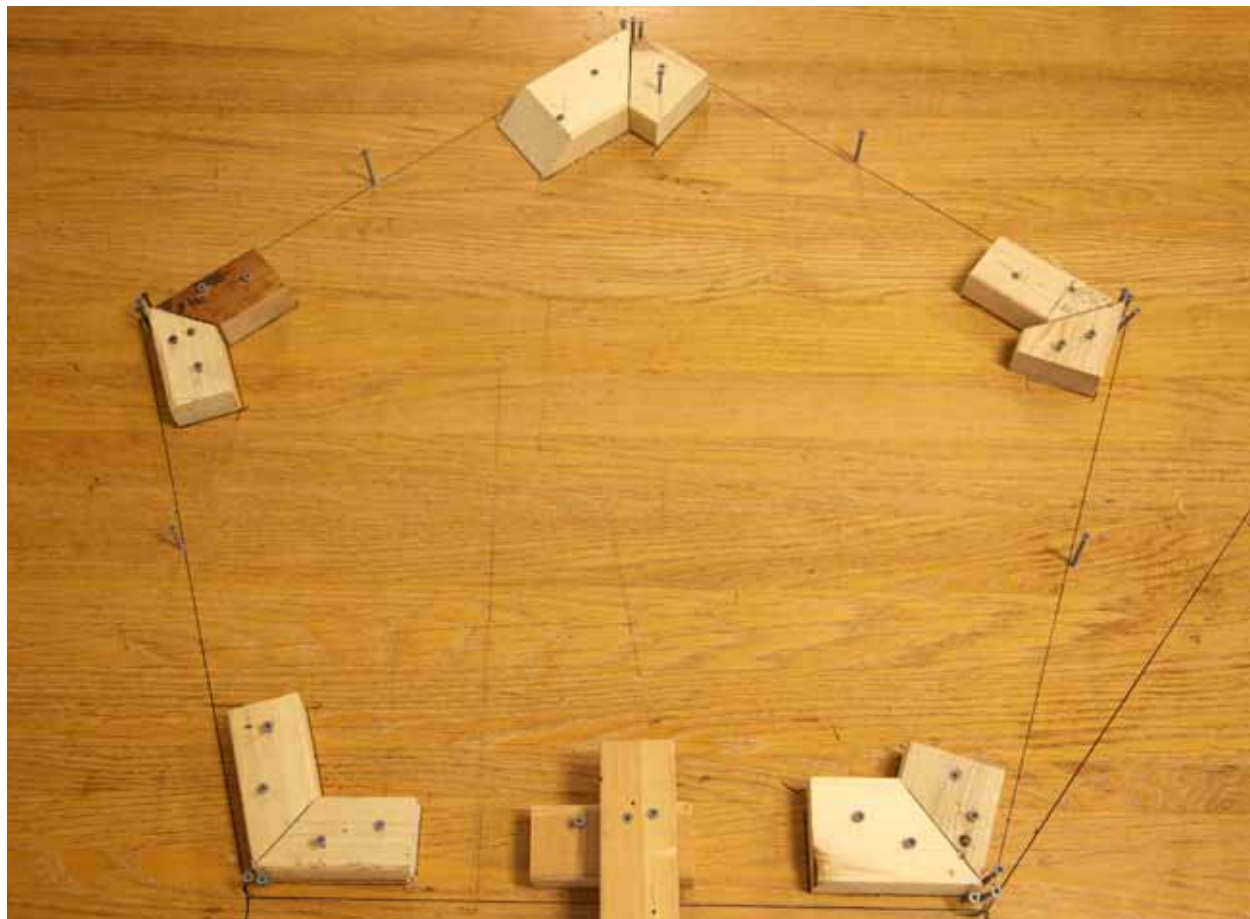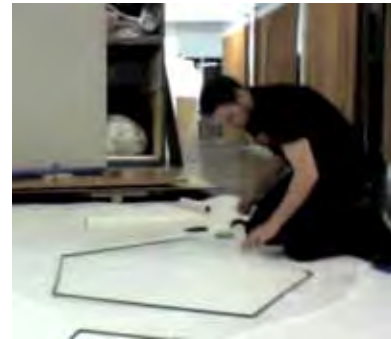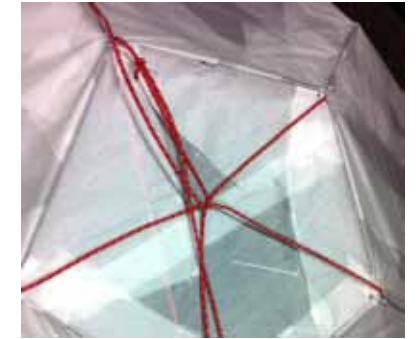
In response to all of this, I immediately went into the role-play phase. I imagined myself as Prometheus, with the combined experience of the human race running through my head at all times. I imagined what an anxiety-inducing experience that might have been. I knew that I wanted to share that experience with others. I hypothesized that if people coud experience what it was like to be inside Prometheus's head, they might begin understand why he would challenge Zeus the way he did. They might begin to understand why I do the things that I do. To provide this experience I created *The Prometheus Clock*.

The Prometheus Clock is a dynamic video-sculpture installation that creates a visual clock of the human experience. Using the YouTube API, my classmate Gabriel Schaffzin wrote an Open Frameworks application that requests the latest videos uploaded to the YouTube database and presents them in a four by four grid. A snippet of code allows us to then share those videos using the Syphon framework. Syphon is an open source Mac OSX technology that allows applications to share video and still images with one another in realtime. With the Syphon framework server running I used MadMapper, a projection mapping software, to map that grid of videos onto a geodesic dome structure. I mapped one video onto each hexagon and pentagon in the geodesic dome which creates an oversaturated multimedia experience. The feeling is similar to observing a bee hive.
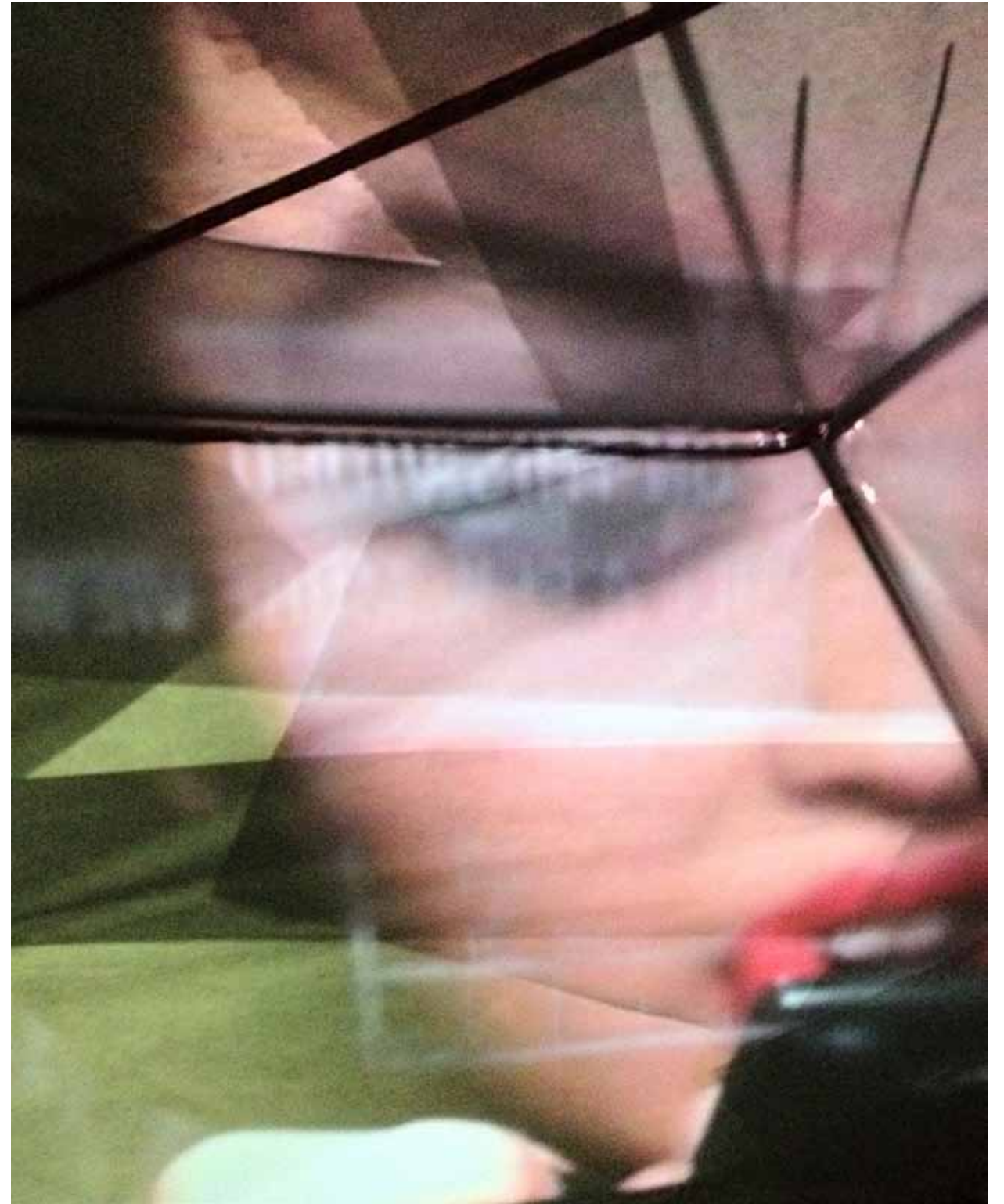
I often describe that I feel like an evil villain having built this tool for observing all of the humans on the planet. But I would actually rather describe it from the hero's point of view. Like the way Batman observes Gotham city from the tops of buildings, or the way Superman watches the human race from his fortress of solitude. The Prometheus Clock is symbolic of the way in which I like to practice design. I like to create experiences that facilitate interaction amongst community members, and then observe that interaction. I like to watch. I like to listen. I like to use the wisdom I garner from that experience to design my next experience. *Open Source Empathy* drew from my connection to Prometheus to provide an opportunity for humanity to grow. When Prometheus brought fire to humanity it expanded the capacity for human potential. I want my projects to do that as well.
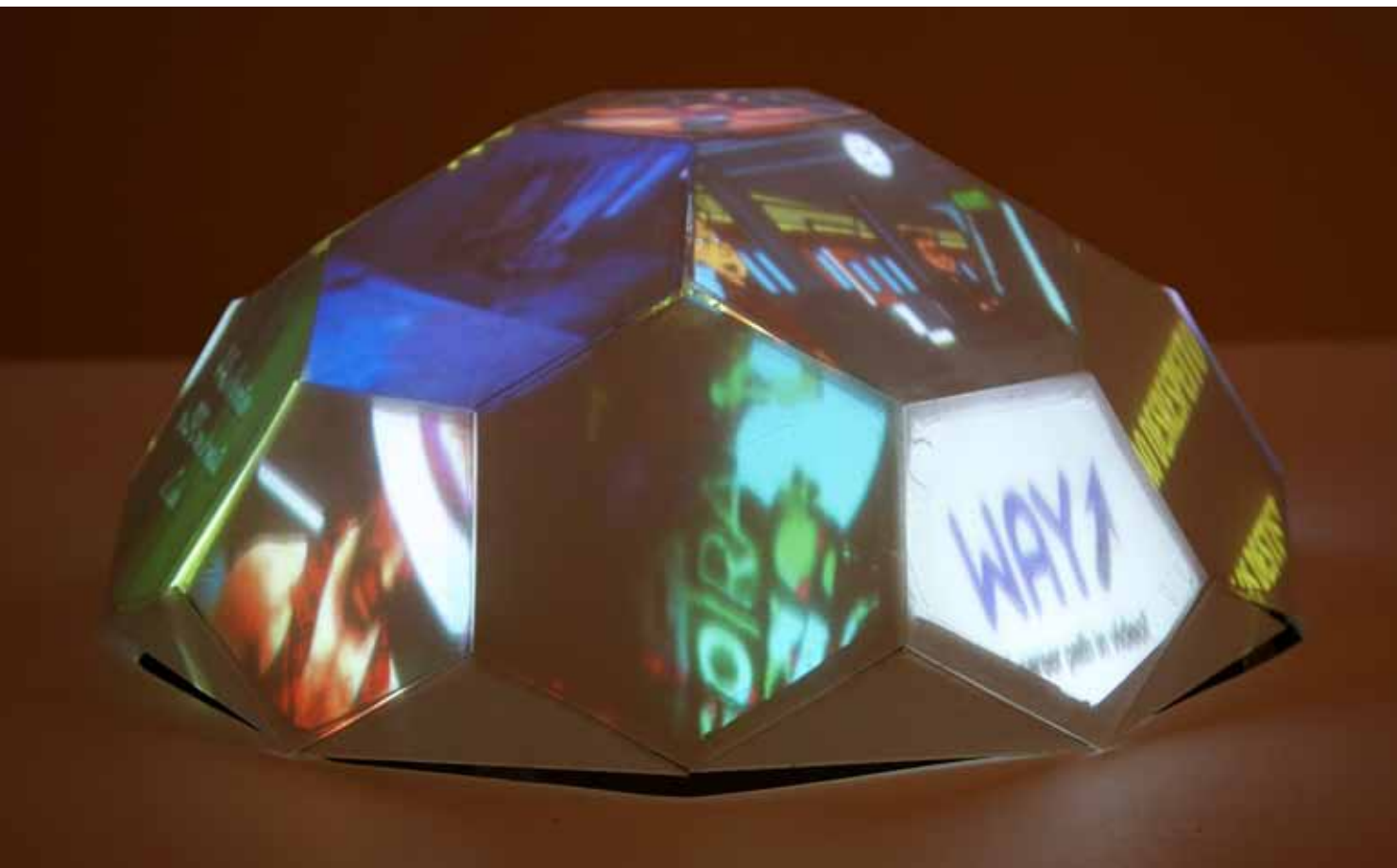
THIS IS OPEN SOURCE EMPATHY

The next paradigm of design will be defined by the design community's ability to draw from other disciplines and synthesize these pedagogies for use in the design process. Toby Bottorf, in his article *Love Child of Art and Engineering Makes Good* proposes that "One way to aim for more surprising work is to include more disciplines as influences and sources of inspiration… we've come to recognize hybridity as a defining quality of our discipline. We're not a stable hybrid of different fields; we are all about the ongoing mixture of things" (Bottorf). There is precedent to this approach. Design has been augmented by the practice of filmmakers, musicians, chefs and philosophers. But designers must continue to expand the palette with which they create. We must continue to search for new and unprecedented approaches to incorporate into our own. The DMI collective strives for diversity by recruiting students from a range of geographical locations, academic disciplines and cultural interests. Jan Kubasiewicz's interest in maps and mapping has had a lasting effect in my search to connections outside the design paradigm. In his article *Mapping the Experience of Dynamic Media*, Jan states that, "To adequately address the multiple aspects of dynamic media requires a combination of these expert points of view, accomplished through a difficult dialog along the borderlines of multiple disciplines" (Kubasiewicz). This thesis documents my hypothesis that by drawing from one aspect of the psychoanalytic approach, specifically the psychoanalytic technique to objectify one's subjective experience, I can better understand my self, my users, my medium and the way in which they connect.

My case studies examine a varied set of access points to the self-identification process. Projects like *The Lovebot* serve more inhibited users while the Post-its project creates opportunities for people with more confidence in their emotional communication abilities. I have experimented using mediums, stimulation and the social dynamics of space to engage people in the process of self-reflection. Like *The Prometheus Clock*, my projects invite people to be on fire, to express their passions, their fears, their desires and longings. My hope is that users learn about themselves and begin to identify what feeds their desire to connect with others.

Through sharing their fears and frustrations they participate in the cathartic power of narrative. Negative emotions are expressed onto safe spaces such as a cafe table, a dry-erase board, a robot, and a post-its note. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud asks, "What do [people] demand in life and wish to achieve in it? The answer to this can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so… We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay… which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men" (Freud).

It is generally believed that it isn't healthy to hold onto negative emotions. When we contain these negative emotions, it causes us great discomfort. When we expel them onto someone else, it causes them pain. My case studies provide an environment to safely express negative (and positive) emotions for constructive relationship purposes rather than destructive ones.

Human beings are advanced dynamic media systems. Each of us interfaces with our emotions differently. Consequently, we interface with each other in desirable and undesirable ways. My choice to expose my emotions or share them is different than someone else's choice. The process of revealing or defending against expressing vulnerable feelings has informed me that just like a human dynamic system, media systems need to provide an infinite number of access points. These challenge the experience of various types of users.

In the words of my thesis advisor Gunta Kaza, "Successful 'dynamic' media generates affective shared environments that become learning experiences" (Gunta). Inspired by Mara's window, an objectified inter-subjective space, my installations provide that shared environment. My hope is that users learn from themselves and others about what it means to be human.
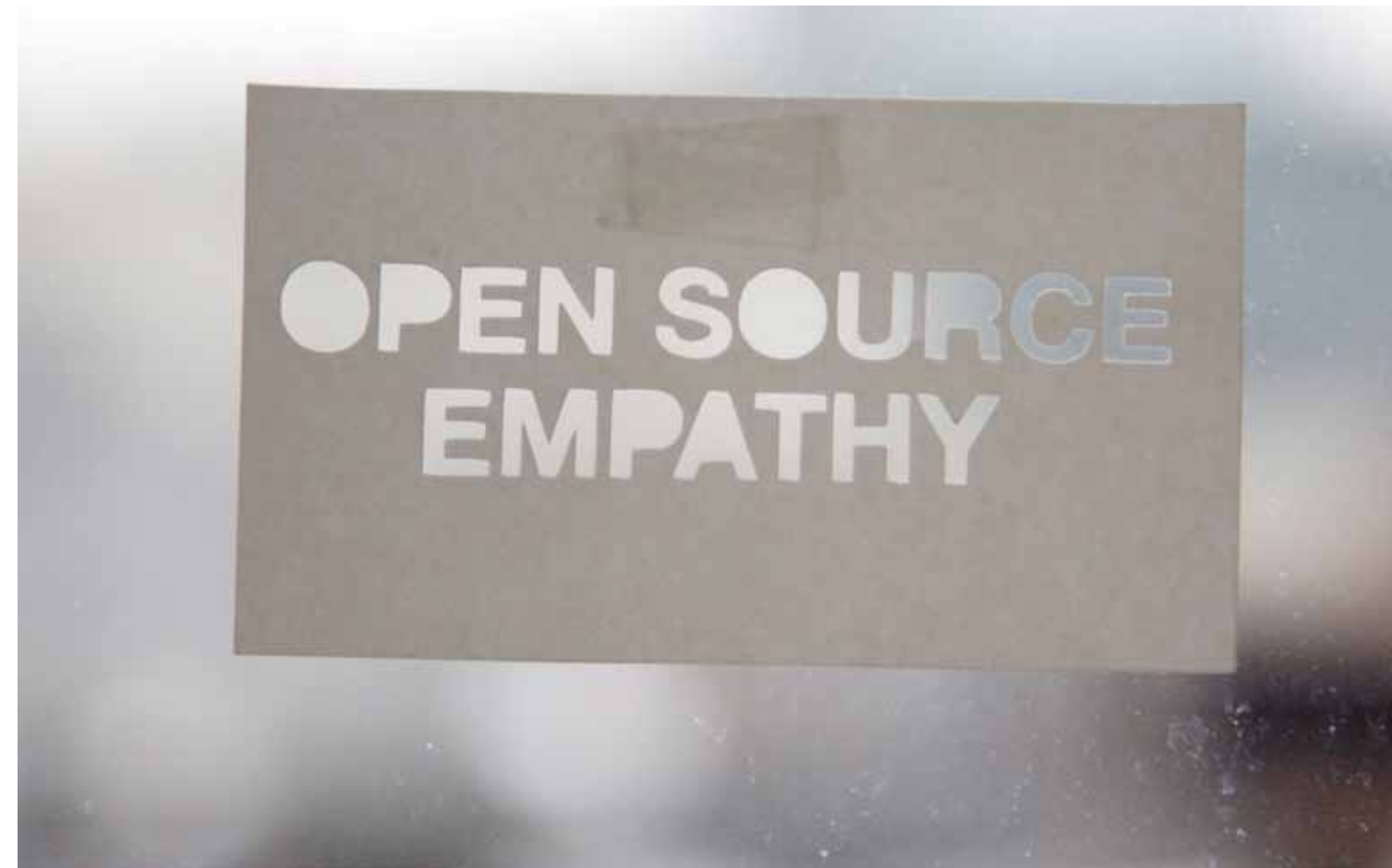
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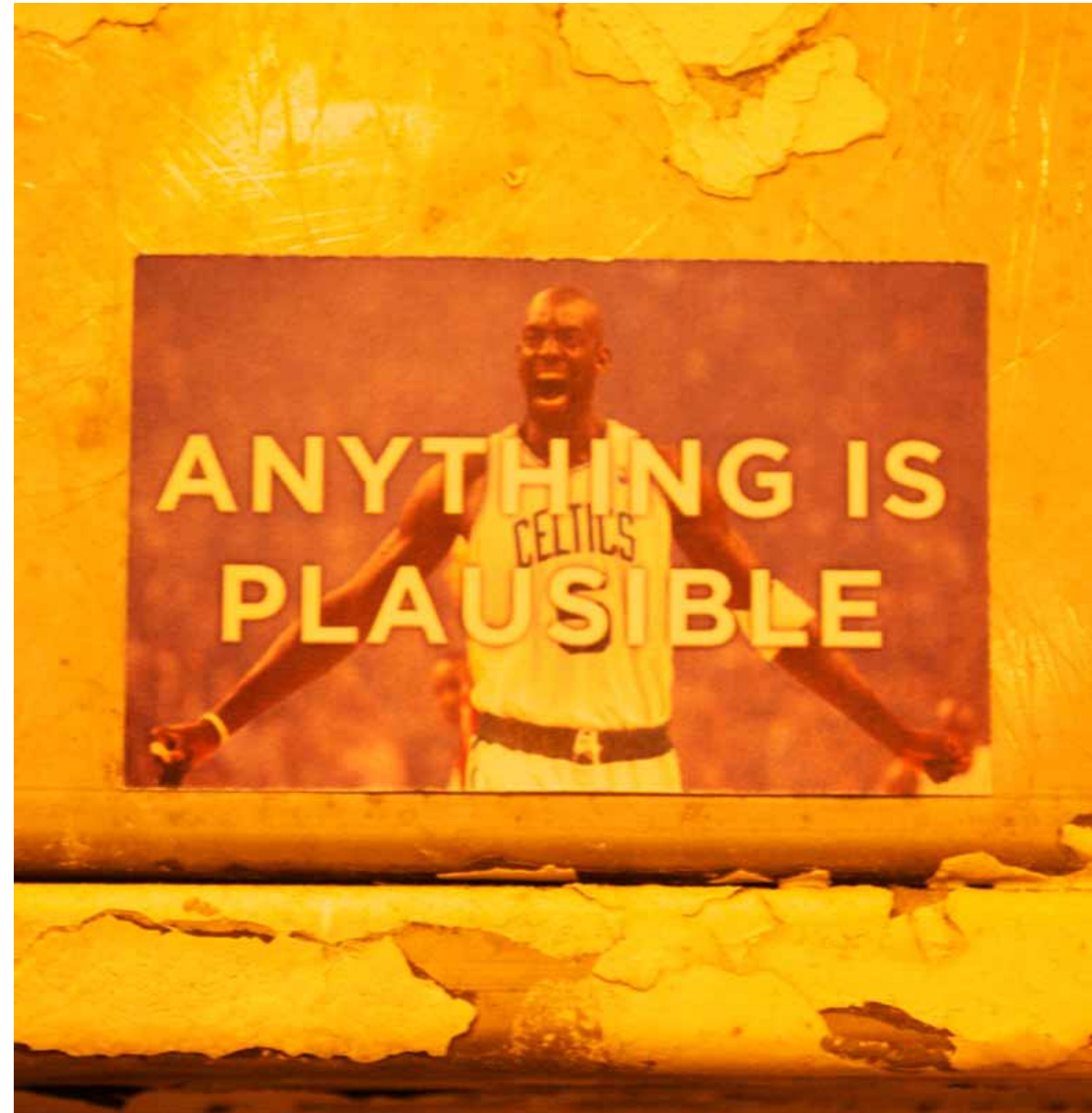
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THAT
WAS ME.