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**Curation: A Multimodal Practice  
for Socially-Engaged Action**

# I'm Cleaning Out My Attic

By Barbara Schneider in collaboration with visual artist Ashley Pryor

## Part I



## “I’m Cleaning Out My Attic,” by Ashley Pryor

I am cleaning out my attic. I do this out of love for my children. When I die, I do not want them to have to tackle this task. I also do not want to hear their

comments as they look at the material remains of my life. Children can be unkind to mothers. I know. I have been a child. On the other hand, what do I care? I will be dead.

I am engaged right now in creating new piles out of old, arranging things by object category and survival odds. Is this process of selection for collection curation?

Curation is so trendy right now. My local grocery advises me that they have curated my meat selection: Frenched rack of lamb. Marbled rib eye. Butterflied pork. Indeed.com announces there are presently 16 jobs available for fashion curators, starting salary at \$10.24 an hour. Peach & Lily is willing to curate my makeup. I can buy an app to curate the content of my website to build site traffic.

If anyone can be a curator, and everything can be curated, does the term curation possess any explanatory power? Like the word rhetoric, its mundane use threatens to empty it of value. When someone says rhetoric in a mundane context, it is usually preceded by a pejorative such as “mere” or “heated.” Even in an academic setting, however, rhetoric as an explanatory term has been diffused by the multiple and overlapping meanings it has acquired through its historical use in multiple contexts, as Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg explain in their useful introduction to the discipline. Curation is now subject to the same multiplicity, as it is adapted to libraries, digital informatics, and marketing venues. Even in museums, its most established territory, curation as an explanatory term has been destabilized by questions of authority and public memory.

What is curation?

How might we define curation so that it retains some explanatory muscle? First, I propose we bracket off the use of curation to name marketing schemes as their purposes are unhinged from the curatorial aim of contributing to knowledge. Second, I propose we differentiate curation from other historical intellectual work such as archival organization, biographies and autobiographies based on archives, and digital informatics. Those pursuits are embedded in informational organization. Curatorial work, on

the other hand, is inextricably tethered to the material artifacts it has at hand. Curation, then, is first and foremost a material practice.

Secondly, curation is an exercise in authority. Curation's historical role, museum curator Sarah Longair notes, relies on authoritative expertise: "Intellectual authority — the command over knowledge — might appear to be a fundamental component of curatorship. . . . Indeed, much of museums' purpose (in the past, and in a variation of this form today as discussed here) rests upon their perception in the eyes of the public as institutions where experts in the field organize, validate, and convey knowledge. An element of such authority is the sense of trust in the museum and its curatorial expertise" (1-2). That trust in validated knowledge sustains the relationship between curator and public. As Susan A. Crane notes: "Museums are not supposed to lie to us; this act seems like a breach of faith. Assuming that our own memories are fallible, we rely on museums as well as on historians to get the past "right" for us" (qtd. in Longair 2). That museums serve to get the past right for us has been, however, the source of intense debate as museums have evolved from depositories of historical artifacts and high art displayed and interpreted with one authoritative voice to public spaces designed to engage multiple perspectives and audiences. It is important to note here that it is not the provenance of objects as validated by curators that has been called into question. In fact, curatorial authority over the provenance of a piece remains a central element of the material practice of curation. Rather it is the interpretive schema imposed by the curator's exhibition and accompanying texts that have emerged at the center of the debate. What is in question is who gets to decide what an artifact means.

What is curation for?

How one answers that question depends on the purpose of the curatorial work in the first place. If historically, museum curators contributed to knowledge by researching objects given to their care, exhibiting them in a way that was accessible to a public sometimes confronting artifacts foreign to their experience or knowledge, and providing an explanatory text, then what something means was an interpretive act exercised by one assumed to be an expert. As such, museums have served as the arbiters of public

memory, and it is that role that has been called into question. On-Curating.org, an international web journal focusing on curatorial theory and practice, examined the question of curating for social action in issue 18: “Social Curating and Its Public: Curators from Eastern Europe Report on Their Practises.” Its contributors turn a critical eye toward the practice of curating for socio-political purposes, interrogating their own ideological purposes as they work to resist the history of curation as propaganda as it was practiced under the old Soviet regime, but also as it is currently inflected by neoliberal politics and global capitalism. For these curators, social curating is a socio-political artistic endeavor designed to reform and reshape publics and must remain open to questions of ideological perspectives. The commitment among these curators is to work critically against the kind of public memory that requires erasures and silences in order to be sustained as authoritative knowledge. For these contributors, the point of social curation is the creation of public spheres ripe for political action.

Others, however, including Gregor Henderson, propose a different form of curatorial practice: that of creating public spaces that invite social interaction through the curation of shared cultural artifacts. Henderson proposes that through this practice, curators invite communities to greater well-being by allowing them to connect to each other through the memories, trajectories, and histories the artifacts evoke.

What they have in common, however, is a commitment to contributing not just to knowledge, but to the production of a public memory that is responsive to multiple voices rather than a single authoritarian voice.

### The relays between the public and the private

Most recent scholarship on the production of public memory, as Jane Greer and Laurie Grobman point out in their introduction to *Pedagogies of Public Memory*, draws on work from diverse fields, including museum scholarship, memory studies, American Studies, and rhetorical communication studies. Definitions of public memory emerging from these sources, therefore, are productively unsettled, but most point to a shared meaning arising from interactions, debates, and multiple iterations. In her work on the “contested memories” of the 1980 terrorist bombing of a train station in Bologna, Italy,

Anna Lisa Tota argues that the commemorative genre that has emerged for that event can show how “due to a specific group of agents of memory—composed primarily by the association of victims’ relatives and the committees of solidarity founded in the city during the last two decades—the structure of the commemorative ceremony has led to the public fixing of a specific genre of memorization in Italy for victims of terrorism” (132). Public memory, then, is produced by interactions among subjects consubstantial with specific events, places, and material effects. More than twenty years ago, in her presidential address to the National Council of Public Historians, Diane Britton warned about the way we tend to use our pasts to bolster our cherished identities and examined several instances where public memory of events contradicted disciplinary understandings of the same event. Still, she proposed, the only way forward for public intellectuals was to work to educate the public about how history is studied in hopes that it will inform public memory. But Britton also urged us listen to that public: “At the same time, however, if we choose as professionals to ignore the knowledge inherent in the cultural memories that surround us, our message falls on deaf ears, and we remain captives in an ivory tower, regardless of where we practice our craft” (23). Much current scholarship on curation, then, is focused on curation of the kind that produces public memory through the participation of multiple voices. A number of scholars suggest that public memory is an ongoing creation born of the interactions among material objects, private memory, and intersubjective exchanges that emerges as a stable-enough-for-now consensus on what some things mean and what actions those things might prompt.

This exhibit

But public memory begins in private spaces, and it is this moment, when private memory first goes public and then does or does not get taken up as public memory, that interests me here. My curation begins in the private, dusty space of my attic. In what follows, I propose, in answer to Crane, that the materiality of my artifacts serve as a corrective to a fallible memory by asserting through their solidity, shape, color, design, and functional capacities the certitude of their time and place. The material artifacts I confront in my attic activate memory, but these objects are not remade or

undone by that memory work, just as they were not made solely of perception in the first place. Instead, the pile from my child-hood—my father’s slide rule, the Geiger counter I got as a party favor, the jeweled cross that marked my first communion—participates in a dynamic interaction of consubstantiality. As Katrina Schlunke proposes, “[T]he remembered object is not simply the object of memory—it does not always stand apart from the memory of it or the embodied remembering subject but helps to produce both memory and subject” (253). Understanding memory as material, and material as memorial, makes these remembered objects, in Schlunke’s terms, “memory effects, . . . providing us with a more telling idea of why memory constantly exceeds any easy division between individual and collective and between the un-conscious and conscious—for ‘effects’ are not divisible into any binary nor curtailed by any linear order of time (254). The objects this exhibit lays before you are just such memory effects.

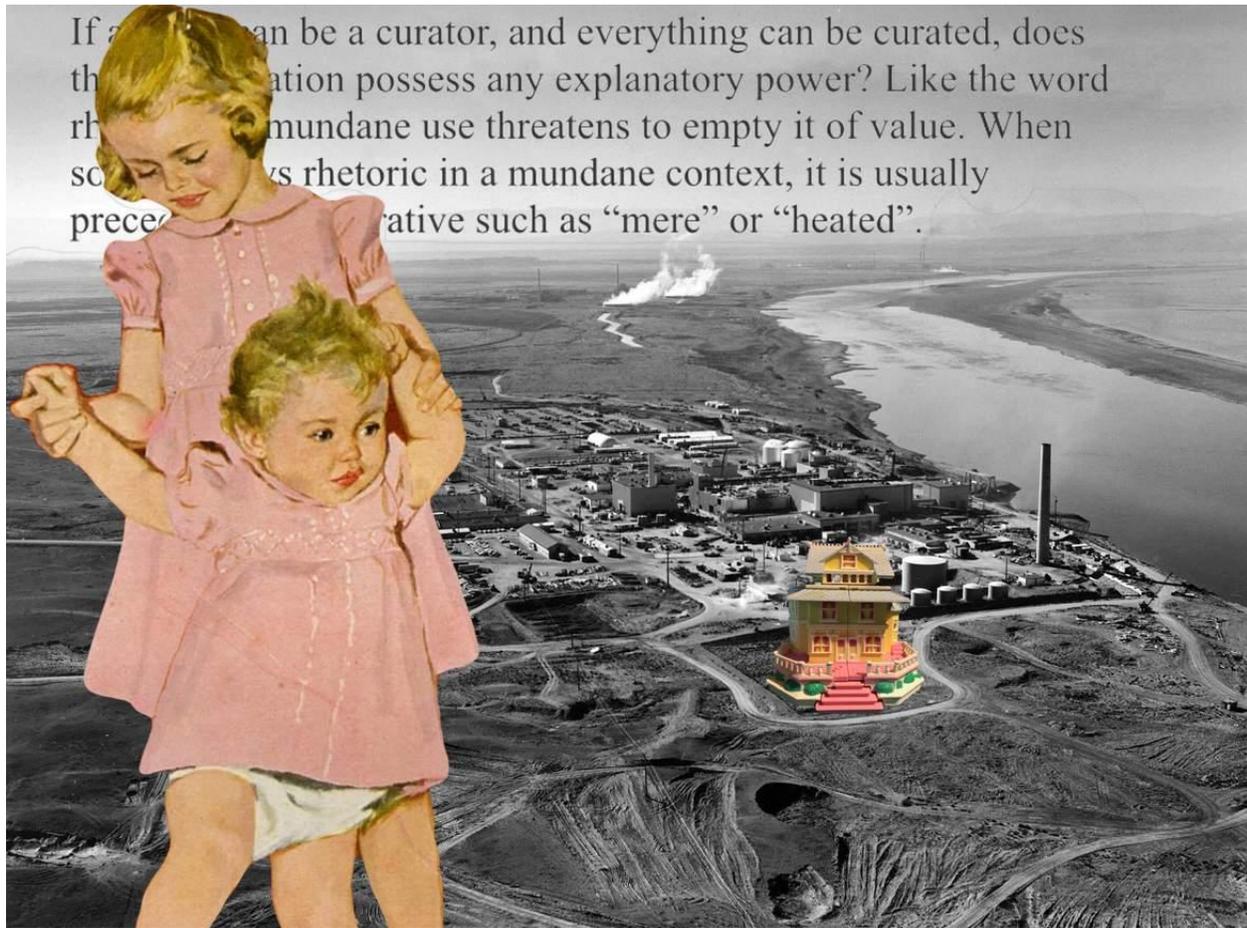
The stories I tell here serve as the provenance for these objects in my attic. This provenance tells the history of a piece from its relationship to me, but it also tells the story of how the object gathered value by its interactions with other times, places, and relationships. And I tell these stories through a kind of critical autoethnography. Creative-critical autoethnography is uniquely situated to contribute to production of public memory because of its temporal, material, and intersubjective contours. Material objects traverse time, coming into being as a thing from other materials that have a past, gaining significance from use over time, dynamically interacting with memory in the present, and confronting an unknown future. The memory work that objects evoke are sometimes easy to put to words, like lyrics to a melody. At other times, the object resides as muscle memory, not accessible by language, but felt in our interiors, visible in unthought muscle activity, as when my fingers move the slides on my father’s ruler, searching for the co-tangent. An autoethnography is a private memory looking for company, or at least a response from another. It is one person’s interrogation of a private memory as it intersects with a public arena that it simultaneously constructs, hoping to evoke other memories of a shared time or place to contribute to that construction. I propose, in support of my own claim that curation is a material practice, that a creative-critical autoethnography not only makes visible but works to reveal its tethers to a

time, a place, a lived experience and its material residues. In that way, it participates in the material practice of curation. Creative-critical autoethnography does not attempt to produce an authoritative interpretation that asserts the meanings of these things, but instead aims to open out to others a telling that invites a response.

I imagine these stories as an invitation to readers to interact through shared interrogations of our own stories—our histories and herstories—and see what kinds of social actions those interactions produce. Even the writing of these stories has required social interactions. I had to ask my sister Patty, the last one born in Seattle, for the precise dates of my parents' move to Richland. And since she was only two months old at the time, she had to draw on stories from her own childhood to fill in the gaps. I had to consult with my children on the ongoing status of the toys in my attic. And as this project took shape, I shared my story with my artistic collaborator, Ashley, and she shared some of hers with me. All of these interactions took place over months, in bits, fits, and pieces. I have taken those bits, shorn off some edges and added seams, and imposed my interpretive frame to create a narrative that provides a reader with some sense of coherence. Everything here is a curation of a series of social interactions.

I imagine the space of this journal as an opportunity for further social interaction based on our encounters with the materiality of memory. When I show you what's in my attic, do you recall what's in your own attic? Your basement? How do my memories activate yours? How might your memories contradict, confirm, or challenge mine? What have you kept against the erosion of memory? What necessary losses have you incurred? What happens to our stories when we share them? What happens when other people share our stories? How do private memories become part of a public story that becomes the basis for collective action? My aim here is to provoke storytelling as a contemplation on how memory serves action.

## Part II



If a man can be a curator, and everything can be curated, does the curation possess any explanatory power? Like the word rhetoric in a mundane use threatens to empty it of value. When someone uses rhetoric in a mundane context, it is usually preceded by a modifier such as “mere” or “heated”.

### “A Very Catholic Cold War,” by Ashley Pryor

In one pile in my attic are the few things that I have held onto from my childhood, including the jeweled cross I got for my first communion, the bright yellow Geiger counter I got as a party favor, and my dad’s slide rule. Other people would have archived other things, but these are the powerful emblems of my childhood.

I was raised in Richland, Washington, a town that mushroomed after the US Army Corps of Engineers bought out the towns of Fruitvale, White Bluffs, and Hanford, and strung barbed wire around more than 580 acres of high desert as part of the Manhattan project. There, isolated by both desert and barbed wire, workers hired under strict orders to keep their mouths closed about what they were doing built nuclear reactors to produce the plutonium that fueled the Nagasaki bomb. The Corps also built dorms and houses in Richland to accommodate those workers, many of those homes

prefabricated. Since it was built as part of the war effort, most people expected the town to fold once the war was over. There was a brief lull in beginning in late 1945, and the future seemed uncertain, but construction and production ramped up as the US pursued a policy of containment of Soviet influence under the Truman Doctrine. That doctrine was announced in 1947, developed throughout the next year, and served as the basis of the NATO alliance formed in 1949. The Cold War was hot and getting hotter.

My dad, whose college career was postponed while he served as a Marine pilot during WWII, moved there in 1950 with a brand-new chemistry degree, leaving my pregnant mother and the first two children, Mary Kay and Joe, with her parents on Puget Sound. He lived in one of the dorms used to house workers during the war while he waited for his name to come up in the house lottery. In the meantime, child number three, my sister Patty, was born. Finally, in March of 1951, my parents were allowed to buy a Y house where they would live for the next ten years and through the addition of five more children.

The Y house, or ranch house, was just over 1,200 square feet built on a concrete slab. Almost 300 of those square feet were allocated to the coal bin and the utility room, which housed the coal furnace and the washing machine. That left 900 square feet for the ten of us that eventually lived in it. The house was designed, as were almost all of the houses in Richland during the early years, by Spokane architect Gustav Albin Pehrson, who was given 90 days, according to site historian David Harvey, to design the entire town: streets, utilities, commercial district, churches, schools, and homes. The house designs were assigned letters of the alphabet, organized into blocks and neighborhoods, and often allocated according to income or job priority. As a young lab chemist, my dad did not qualify for the biggest houses, but he did get a shot at a slightly bigger house than others as he already had three children. While some people complained about the uniformity of the housing stock, I found it quite convenient. When I visited friends, I always knew where the bathroom was. The uniformity of the houses also flattened the gradations of wealth and prestige. A few of the house styles were built only along the Columbia River, and they were reserved for ranking officers and high-level managers. But since the difference between a Y house and an S house, a Q house, or a G house

was just 300 or 400 square feet, the differences were not that obvious to children.

My sister Susie was born in 1952, and there was a pause before I was born in 1954. My brother Jack showed up in 1956, and then there was another pause before Betty was born in 1959, and Carole followed in early 1961. The size of our family, in an era when there were lots of big families, still was enough to set us apart from our immediate neighbors. Most of the families on our block had just two or three children. We understood that this was because they were Protestant. We were resolutely and devoutly Catholic. We donated money at church for the “propagation of the faith.” The term was a bit opaque for me, but I had learned about propagating seeds from my kindergarten teacher, so I figured it out. I honestly believed my parents were bound for heaven when numbers nine and ten, Theresa and Julie, came along.

By 1960, the Cold War was escalating, nuclear weapons production was in full swing, and Richland was a critical source of weapons-grade plutonium. It was not about to fold, so the government released land for building, and my parents were among the first to buy a lot and hire contractors. They built a ranch house behind the public school we attended for just kindergarten. I started grade school by walking across that schoolyard and then on for another mile to Christ the King, the Catholic school I attended from first through eighth grade, singing this song:

We march along together, with our banners held on high,  
The regiments of Christ the King, true loyalty our cry.  
Our steps will never waver, as along life’s path we trod!  
In honor of our own dear school, our country, and our God.

Christ the King! Our voices ringing, pledging loyalty anew.  
Happy hearts will ever praise thee, and our colors gold and blue.

The years 1960 to 1963 represent for me the crystallization of what it meant to be Catholic, American, and on the front line of the Cold War. John

Kennedy beat Richard Nixon to become the first Catholic president of the United States, and, from a public relations point of view, a perfect antidote to a long-held suspicion of Catholics in America: a decorated war hero, married to a fashion icon, Harvard educated, and deadly charming. Being Catholic was suddenly a little edgy, a bit cool.

Being Catholic also meant that we had a double stake in the Cold War. The spread of communism meant not only the growing threat of nuclear war, but also the ongoing persecution of Orthodox Catholics in the East-ern Block. The Soviet Union was as much a moral enemy as a political enemy. John Kennedy became not just the leader of the free world, but also a defender of the faith. During the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, school hours were devoted to praying for our president, our country, and for peace. For us, dedicated children of Cold War warriors, there was no irony in praying for peace in the town that made its living making weapons.

Being the daughter of a scientist was also cool. Scientists, after all, were to the Cold War what fighter pilots were to the air war, and artillery divisions were to the ground war. But scientists were also going to save the future of the country by converting nuclear energy to electrical power, giving us a peacetime mission as well as a wartime mission. The status of scientists as the founders of a new era free from reliance on foreign oil was confirmed when John Kennedy himself came to Richland for the opening of the N-Reactor in September of 1963, just eight weeks before he was killed in the Dallas motorcade. The N-Reactor was a dual-purpose reactor built to produce plutonium as well as generate electricity. Squinting into the desert sun from a platform set above the tumbleweeds on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, Kennedy congratulated the Hanford workers for their contributions to maintaining the peace.

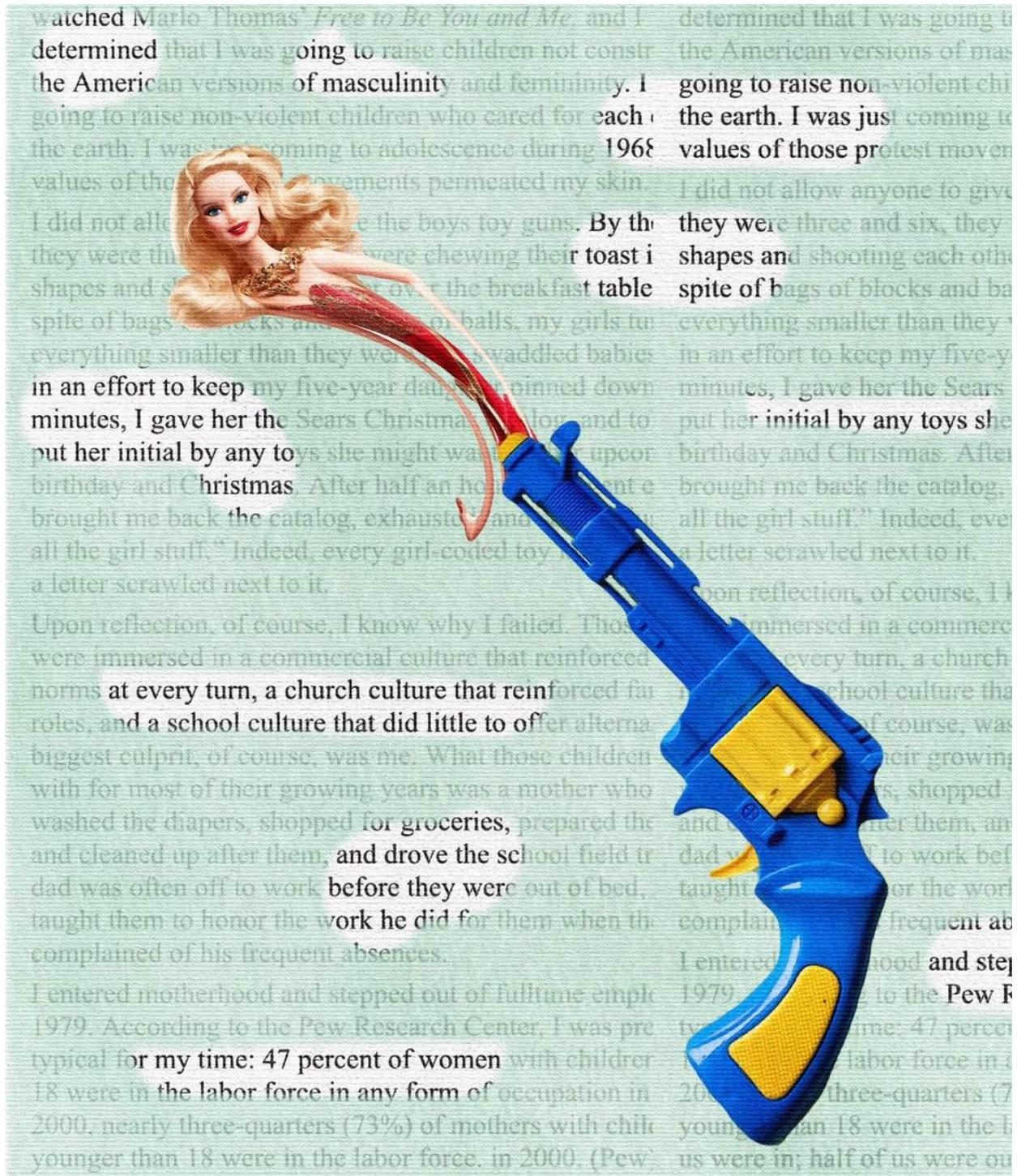
By the time I reached high school, cracks began to appear in a system forced open by all of those oppressed by that system. The civil rights movement; the protests against the Vietnam War; growing concern over what we were doing to the environment; and reinvigorated calls for the rights of women, gays, and lesbians called each of those entities and the relationships among them into question. Even those of us raised in the system began to question the values that informed the choice of a bomb as

the mascot for our Richland Bombers teams, and the wisdom of a mosaic of a mushroom cloud in the middle of the high school mixing area.

By 1971, the only reactor still operating at the site that once hosted nine reactors was the N-reactor dedicated by Kennedy and which produced electricity. One, added later as part of the disastrous WWPPS project, still operates and generates about 10% of the electricity produced in the state of Washington. Still, the town of Richland began shrinking, but it has managed some economic diversification, and the work of clearing the site continues to provide jobs.

That ideological constellation of the bonds among science, the military, and religion is still visible in the pile of goods in my attic, in the architecture of my hometown, and in many of our national debates. It is a constellation hard to escape from where I stand. Is that constellation visible from your location in time and space? Does it still hold, is it transformed, driven underground, or unraveling? What do the material artifacts of your own childhood tell you of the overarching discourses that shaped your interactions with the world as you grew in it? Did you grow up as I did with an expectation that the next civil service drill would be the real thing, the last thing? Or did you grow up with the uneasy sense that we were slowly kill-ing our planet in a childhood peppered with mutants and space travel toys? What does your attic tell you about your own life and time and place? Do you have anything left?

Part III



**“Engendering Children,” by Ashley Pryor**

Aside from some gently used mattresses I cannot even give away because of the fear of bedbugs, a couple of moth eaten braided wool rugs that need to go the dump, a desk, and some cases of canning jars, the bulk of my

attic is given over to my children's toys. As each one left me, they packed up their toys and left them in my care. There are five of those children, so the piles are deep.

When I confront those toys now, I experience a mixture of longing for the children who once loved them, delight in treasures I thought lost, and confoundedness. What am I supposed to do with the Barbie swimming pool and two Corvettes, the model gunship, the scattered pieces of the Polly Pocket castles, the random He-man characters, and the bags of stuffed lions and tigers and bears?

But even as I sort through those emotions, I am confronted by the very genderedness of those toys. The toys are clearly encoded girl toys and boy toys. The girl toys are predominantly pink and pastel, the boy toys mostly green, tan, and brown, camouflaged. The girl toys are mostly associated with homes—castles, doll houses, miniature appliances—and childcare—baby beds, highchairs, strollers. The boy toys are associated with movement—matchbox cars, sewer systems, fighting vehicles for land and air—and building things—Legos, dump trucks, hammers and saws.

I read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* when I was in seventh grade and it helped me name my own sense of something wrong. The eighth-grade boys got to use the gym all fall and through the winter for basketball practice. The girls were relegated to the asphalt playground with rubber balls for foursquare and yellow vinyl jump ropes. The boys got to watch the world series on a TV wheeled into Sister Martin Mary's classroom, while the girls were supposed to sit in the other room and read. Inspired by a nascent feminism, I circulated a petition demanding equal gym time for girls. It went nowhere. I then used the time we spent loitering on the playground bored by foursquare to write alternative lyrics to Christmas songs. That got me sent home from school. I led a protest march around the gym during music class against the sexist nature of the songs we were rehearsing for eighth-grade graduation—"Faith of Our Father" and "Onward Christian Soldiers." As a consequence, the girls were banned from singing or receiving any prizes during graduation. The boy who won third place in the state speech tournament got a trophy; I had taken first place and got no mention.

I carried that feminist sense with me right into mothering. I watched Marlo Thomas' *Free to Be You and Me*, and determined that I was going to raise children not constrained by the American versions of masculinity and femininity. I was also going to raise non-violent children who cared for each other and the earth. I was just coming to adolescence during 1968, but the values of those protest movements permeated my skin.

I did not allow anyone to give the boys toy guns. By the time they were three and six, they were chewing their toast into gun shapes and shooting each other over the breakfast table. And in spite of bags of blocks and baskets of balls, my girls turned everything smaller than they were into swaddled babies. Once, in an effort to keep my five-year daughter pinned down for ten minutes, I gave her the Sears Christmas catalog and told her to put her initial by any toys she might want for her upcoming birthday and Christmas. After half an hour of diligent effort, she brought me back the catalog, exhausted, and said, "I just want all the girl stuff." Indeed, every girl-coded toy in the catalog had a letter scrawled next to it.

Upon reflection, of course, I know why I failed. Those children were immersed in a commercial culture that reinforced gendered norms at every turn, a church culture that reinforced familial roles, and a school culture that did little to offer alternatives. The biggest culprit, of course, was me. What those children lived with for most of their growing years was a mother who daily washed the diapers, shopped for groceries, prepared the meals and cleaned up after them, and drove for school field trips. Their dad was often off to work before they were out of bed, and I taught them to honor the work he did for them when they complained of his frequent absences.

I entered motherhood and stepped out of full time employment in 1979. According to the Pew Research Center, I was pretty typical for my time: 47% of women with children under 18 were in the labor force in any form of occupation in 1975; by 2000, nearly three-quarters (73%) of mothers with children younger than 18 were in the labor force (Geiger and Parker). Half of us were in; half of us were out. The work I shared with millions of other women was largely invisible, and, I would argue, still is. Sisyphus' frustrated labor is really just a metaphor for housework. The routine work of keeping food stocked and prepped, clothes clean, permission slips signed, homework reviewed, and floors vacuumed comes undone overnight. The

woman who has assumed the work of keeping the family running pushes the same damn rock up the same damn hill day in and day out. Nothing is ever finished, and no prizes are handed around. No one notices. The invisibility of the labor attaches itself to the laborer. The woman becomes as invisible as the work.

The other work I did around them was invisible as well. I worked for many of those years as a freelance journalist, earning Society of Professional Journalist awards and a reasonable share of our family income. The earnings were made even more profitable because I incurred no daycare costs and purchased no household help. I conducted interviews by phone during naptime, and occasionally in person while the children stayed with one of the mothers in the babysitting co-op. Of course, every hour cost me one credit per child, so I often had to repay the pot by watching several children at once. I wrote at 4:30 in the morning while the children were still asleep. I thought everything was going well enough until I found out it wasn't.

We moved across the country for my husband's work and to save a marriage that ultimately could not be salvaged. When my children graduated one by one from high school, they left me not just for college, but for their father's house. I think every mother who has worked so diligently to pre-prepare her children for the day she will not be there feels some sense of abandonment when children embrace their emancipation. But since they left me as they did and left behind the toys I had tended for them—finding the lost Barbie shoe, rescuing the Lego block from the vacuum cleaner, sewing the tail back on the stuffed dog—my sense of abandonment was compounded.

Why I ended up with custody of the toys is a matter of some dispute. Memories are indeed individual and fallible. One son says he only took what he needed and had no place to store the toys. Another says he left them for his little sister. Another had already handed on most of hers by the time she left. And yet another says she's just not sure. This much is true: all of them were in that liminal space between childhood and adulthood, and none of them had a place to plant the roots that had been uprooted by the divorce. And I suspect that in putting away their toys they were putting away pieces of their childhood as they took the painful first steps into

adulthood. The youngest did not leave in the same fashion. Many of her toys ended up in the attic anyway. We moved when she was in sixth grade, and many of those toys, packed in boxes and stowed by the movers, just never made it back downstairs.

Those same children are now raising children of their own. And fortunately, time does heal many things. They have, happily, reclaimed me. This does not mean they have come to claim their left-behind toys. At least not all of them. Part of my desire to clean the attic is to get these abandoned toys back into the hands of their original owners while their children are still children. These chosen few toys might have a second life. But time flies. I mailed one big box to my oldest son when his son was getting old enough to play with Legos. A couple of my daughters, in a second curation, came and selected a few of their collected toys. All of them swear that they are going to come some day and sort through the rest. We live in different cities now, in different regions, and every single one of us is fully occupied.

And so, I sort. And so, I think of what I might mail away, and what I might toss. And as I do, I wonder what a full generation of feminists did right that our daughters are school directors, CEOs, and medical professionals, and our sons are soldiers and scientists. I wonder what we did wrong as my daughters call me in those few spare moments as they leave work for the grocery store before they have to get home to start dinner. What do you think?

Part IV.



“Writing a Life,” by Ashley Pryor

In her observations in “Curation in Chance Discovery,” Akinori Abe, a Japanese scholar working in cognitive science and artificial intelligence,

argues that chance discoveries are rare situations sometimes understood as a crisis and at other times understood as an opportunity. She traces her sense of the importance of chance discovery to her own experience of the discovery of rare overlaps and affinities afforded by various museum exhibitions that through their design but also through their juxtapositions prompted new connections and odd dissonances. Chance discovery, emerging as a research methodology that provides abductions and affordances in data curation to uncover anomalies, possibilities for rare occurrences available in existing data, and valuable chances for decision-making, seeks to know if design strategies can improve the potential for such chance discovery. This is a question I pursue in this work. How can what I write not only open out my own perceptions of the world but make possible new insights and perceptions for a reader? How does what I write contribute to the creation of a shared space where we might inter-act? How do I as writer and you as audience constitute a space of possibilities for chance discoveries?

That last sentence, when I name myself as a writer, is a brave one for me. I have often felt like a fraud when I claim to be a writer. When I confessed this to a friend of mine who was employed fulltime as a journalist, and therefore seemed more entitled to the title, she said, "Well, what is a writer anyway? I would say if a runner is someone who runs, a writer is someone who writes." I loved her for that.

In a certain way, the fact that I claim to be a writer now is a result of chances that often seem more like fate than choice. By chance I was born to people who saw language from entirely different perspectives. My mother had poems, and sometimes a tap dance or song, for every occasion. Children cranky? "The Children's Hour." Mad at your son? The guilt-inducing "Little Boy Blue." Finger painting on the walls? "It Takes a Heap O' Living to Make a House a Home." The woman who lays dying in the hospital bed across from me as I write this taught me the beauty and the playfulness of language. I keep her book of poetry as a legacy. My father, on the other hand, a nuclear scientist working for the UN during the SALT treaty negotiations, taught me the terrible power words can wield. When I asked him for career advice as I prepared to leave for college, he told me that since my only vocation was to be a saint, it probably didn't matter much what I did for a living. Not quite the job help I was seeking. So

I told him I thought I wanted to be some kind of a writer, and he said, “Well, then, you better get a good philosophical background because anyone who writes anything that leads anyone astray deserves a hotter place in hell than Hitler.” Scared me nearly speechless; talk about writer’s block. While my mother invited play and joy in words, my father instilled caution but also a sense of power. So, was writing a chance or a fate?

When I was young, I imagined writing short stories and novels, the kinds of stories I consumed like a junkie. I had not really clarified for myself how one went about that, but I figured if I could make a living reading and writing, I had it made. As a sophomore in college, I discovered by chance that the college paper provided scholarships for section editors, and I promptly applied. This was not the kind of writing I had imagined doing, but journalism worked for Ernest Hemingway and Ivan Doig; I thought it might work for me. That was a chance. What followed was what I made of it. I published my first magazine article when I was a sophomore in college, and my second as a junior. Since that time, I have written for magazines, newspapers, public relations firms, health care consulting firms, and of course, academic journals. I have written feature articles, industrial trend reports, personality profiles, a family life series, a food column, books, chapters, and journal articles.

As I look at the pile of clippings falling out of the bins in my attic that bear witness to my life as a writer, I find that some of them carry with them the residue of what it felt like to make those texts. Many of them feel like puzzles successfully solved. I called a lot of people, gathered a lot of information, took a bunch of material and organized it in a way that came across as coherent, as substantial, as informative, or as insightful. A few of them feel a bit like failure. The finished piece did not live up to its potential. A couple feel like easy money. They took little effort to write and returned money for ballet school. Some of them make me tired just looking at them. There are a handful that surprise me. I just reread some of my academic pieces, and the experience of reading them was completely at odds with the experience of writing them. A couple of them sound com-passionate, insightful, and read as if they were effortless. The experience of writing them was almost uniformly the experience of work, of intense labor, of hacked-togetherness. In every venue, writing always carries the incipient potential for interaction, but the most common kind of interaction my

academic writing has evoked are citations by other scholars working in the field, or a counter argument to mine. These pieces, however, are the ones that the academy values. These are the pieces that garner ten-ure and promotion.

The writing I am doing here has an entirely different feel to it. I am attempting to get at the meaning of curation by trying it out on in my own history and asking if my understanding of it resonates with you. I have abandoned a number of academic conventions in order to accomplish this. Look in any standard academic writing text and it will instruct you to avoid second person voice at every turn because it is too personal. Use first person only sparingly. Most of the writing I do these days creates a distance between writer and reader. My intent here is to bring you, dear reader, closer. The meanings I am trying to convey in what I write are actually made by the reader, reader who may discover in it connections and juxtapositions to which I am blind. I am hoping it creates a chance.

## Artist and Writer Statements

### **Ashley Pryor, Ph.D.**

I am the Associate Dean and Chair of Faculty and Associate Professor of the Humanities in the Jesup Scott Honors College at the University of Toledo. Whew! That's a mouthful! I am also a (largely )self-taught visual artist with a special interest in digital and analog collage (the majority of my published work appears under the name Ashley Geiger). While my doctorate is in Philosophy, I have always been an intellectual mutt. As an undergraduate, I majored in Art History and Philosophy, and as a graduate student my primary interest was in the relationship of Literature and Philosophy. Collage appeals to my innate disdain for fixed categories, genres, and aesthetics. It encourages endless juxtapositions, and playful reconfigurations --the more unexpected the better. It is an art practice that is open about its theft – ahem—I mean creative appropriation ( although we collage artists too have a healthy concern to stay on the right side of copyright law).

I have all but abandoned Photoshop. Instead, I do almost all my work on my Ipad using multiple apps (Icolorama, SuperimposeX, ArtStudio are

three of my go-tos). This practice stems from practical concerns. I have committed myself to a daily art practice, and the Ipad allows me to work between meetings and competing life obligations. You will never hear me complain about long waits in the doctor's waiting room. As mentioned above, I work in layers, so I can complete even the most complicated image in fits and starts, without waiting for paint to dry, or glue to set. I confess to be being endlessly fascinated by the many different filters that are offered through competing apps. And while all of these can be recreated in Photoshop, I like that I am never beholden to any one vendor. Call it artistic freedom.

One of these days, I will create an online portfolio; until then you are welcome to follow me on Instagram at @ashcat7077 where you can see my daily art practice in action.

### **Barbara Schneider, Ph.D.**

I am the Associate Vice Provost for Assessment, Accreditation, Program Review, and Faculty Development at the University of Toledo. It's an awkward title for an introduction at a dinner, but a satisfying job. My doctorate is in English studies with a concentration in rhetoric and composition, so I served as director of Composition and director of the Writing Center for more than ten years before stepping onto the administrative track. I have successfully written numerous academic articles, chapters, policy statements, and a book. I sometimes enjoy reading what I wrote in those venues, but I rarely enjoy writing them.

Before I turned into an academic, I spent almost twenty years as a free-lance writer of whatever they were paying for---newspaper articles, magazine pieces, columns—a family life column in Spokane and a food column in Detroit...consulting reports, and public affairs before I enrolled in graduate school. Many of those stories, particularly the columns—which I mostly just made up as I went---drew heavily on my experiences as a mother. I have not written in this creative non-fiction vein since I left graduate school. I only now recall the sense of exposure I felt then, putting real stuff into words others might read. And I only now recall what fun it can be to just write what seems true.

One of these days, I will write more of this and less of that. Right now, I have new webpages to produce.

## Collaboration Statements

### **Barbara Schneider, Ph.D.**

I responded to the call for this project with a vision of capturing digital images of the piles in my attic to accompany the story that was writing itself as I sorted out the detritus accumulated there. As I began working with those photos, however, it quickly became clear to me that I had neither the requisite skill set nor the artistic sensibility that would bring to life what I was imagining. I had a sense that there had to be a way to create images that conveyed what words could not, and that could more clearly realize the material aspect of curation.

I have known Ashley almost since I started work here 19 years ago, as I think we were hired the same year. We were both members of the Humanities Institute in our early years, a forum that brought together senior and junior scholars around our scholarly pursuits. Some of our shared commitments, particularly to feminist practice, came to light during those early years. Over the years, we have at times worked quite closely together, sparking social engagements around that work, and there have been other periods where our work and personal lives overlapped very little. Most recently, she began posting images on facebook (yes, we're facebook friends), that I found compelling. As I struggled with how to bring this project together, I recalled her work, worked up the nerve, and asked her to collaborate on this project with me.

What perhaps was richest for me in the collaboration—aside from the deep pleasure of working with someone I so like---was that Ashley's reinterpretation of my text urged me to reflect on the my own history in a way I had not previously done. Her presentation of the 1950s family took me aback at first as I was mothering young children in the 1980s and 1990, not the 1950s. But as I considered the image, I realized that what I brought to mothering was what my mother had given me. I was incredibly lucky to have had the mother I did, and I think my children were blessed in turn by the way her sense of humor about the entire enterprise shaped my perspective. My mother raised me in a different time and context than I raised my own children, but like a palimpsest, her work shows through mine in ways I had not recognized.

## Ashley Pryor, Ph.D.

When Barbara first approached me to collaborate with her on a piece concerning curation, I was intrigued. Intuitively I knew that my work as a visual artist could be understood in terms of a curatorial process. I have begun doing a lot of work with digital collage of late. The genre appeals to my inner magpie. Like a magpie, I am always collecting bits and bobs of images that arrest my attention, to recombine and repurpose, and in so doing, create a new story. Imagine my delight when Barbara invited me up to her attic to play with her toys!

Our collaboration began in earnest when we met to discuss how we would together build a dialogue between image and text. In advance of our meeting, Barbara had sent me a few pictures of toys and other artifacts that sparked her idea to write about curation. I knew from our past exchanges that Barbara and I shared many similar experiences: the struggle to find a balance between the demands of being “a good mother” and a professional career woman, the process of ferreting out the subtle and not so subtle influences of our religious upbringings (she a Catholic, me as a Catholic-lite, Episcopalian) in shaping our sense of self, the project of reimagining oneself after a divorce, and finally, the act of reweaving a home once the children had left the nest. I was taken aback by how her photos triggered so many memories of childhood and the *Zeitgeist* we shared.

As we swapped stories about the meanings and associations the pictures evoked, we recognized that rather than merely retelling Barbara’s story through enhanced images, I would likewise be engaged in the act of curation. I would make very deliberate decisions about what aspects of her narrative I would be re-presenting and highlighting, but also, de-emphasizing, and omitting. The style that I chose to unify the pieces is a pseudo-collage. As the etymology, of the word reveals, collage work traditionally involves gluing (French: coller) disparate images together, often layering one image over another. As a digital artist, I first compose my images in layers using either Photoshop and now that I work almost exclusively on an Ipad, SuperimposeX. The digital layers effectively work as glue, enabling me to superimpose one element over another, masking off any parts of the original images that I do not want to be seen. Using this pseudo-collage technique, I was able to reference Barbara’s narrative

directly, letting elements of her text show through, and integrating some of her photos alongside images that I associated with the Zeitgeist she describes. Instead of sticking with the traditional look of analog, cut collage, with its hard edges, I decided to blend and digitally paint the images to create a more seamless look between the elements. This blended style better reflects the nature of our collaborative process. Through the process of exchanging our stories and associations with the images, we created something altogether new.

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