

22 Ways to Explore 203 Books

Piper Loyd

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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University of Washington

2020

Committee:

Annabelle Gould

Jayne Yen

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
School of Art + Art History + Design

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Abstract

22 Ways to Explore 203 Books

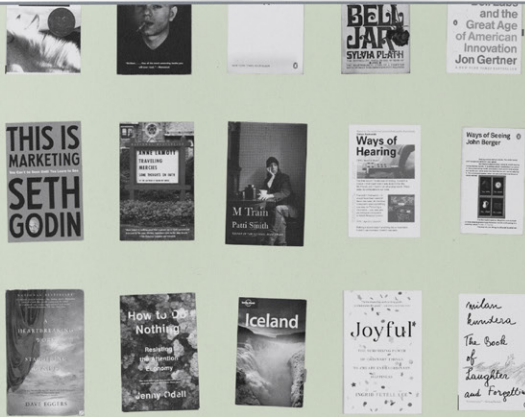
Piper Loyd

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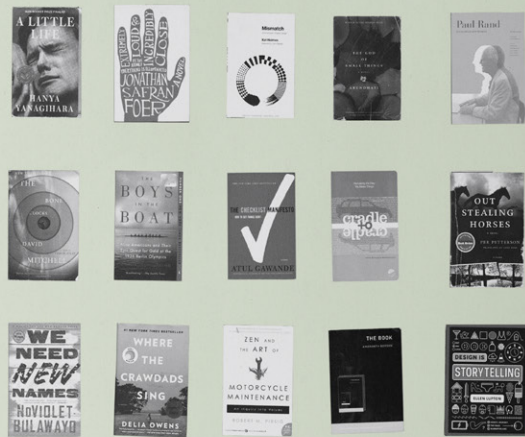
Annabelle Gould

School of Art + Art History + Design

A book can serve many purposes—from education to escape, aspiration to inspiration, status-symbol, sentimental, act of protest, or object of beauty. Although we now have the ability to hold the contents of an infinite number of digital books in the palm of our hands, many of us still prefer and cherish the physical book; perhaps now more than ever. We no longer need physical books, but I certainly need physical books. Why? This project broadly explores the ways in which books have played a role in my life, both the routine and unexpected. Through experiments in categorization and organization, visual examination, and conversation, I uncover the partial roots of a deep attachment to the physical book. The importance of the object lies in surprising places and has triggered memory in ways I couldn't have guessed. This exploration has been as much, if not more, about the process than it has about finding concrete answers within the pages of the 203 books on my shelves. What follows is a narrative of how this exploration ebbed and flowed across 8 months and what I learned along the way.



22 ways to explore 203 books

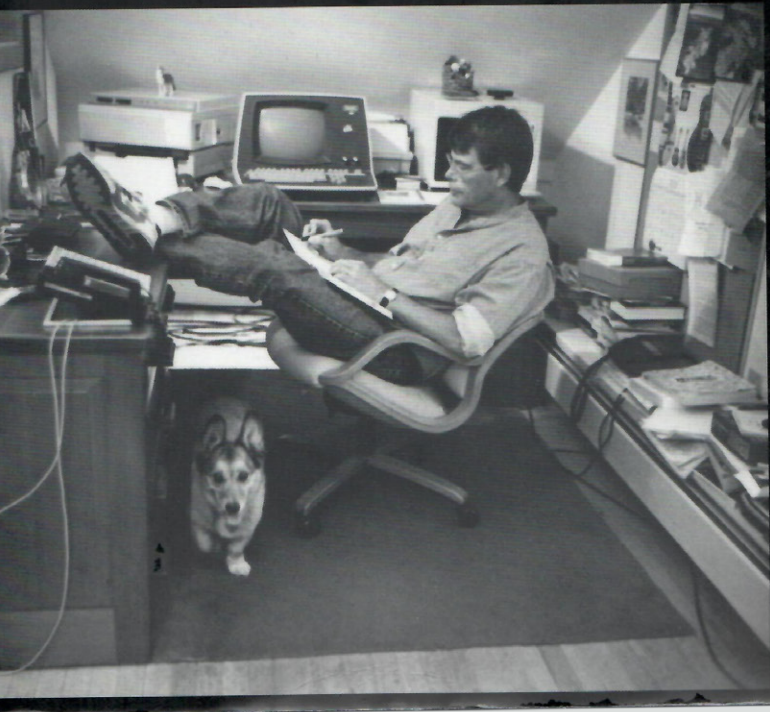


PIPER LOYD

Dedicated to
the long line of smart,
strong women
who came before me.

And to book lovers everywhere.

Stephen King | On Writing
A Memoir of the Craft



“
Books are
a uniquely
portable
magic.”

STEPHEN KING — ON WRITING

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PREFACE

It may have all started last winter when I decided to make a series of imaginary book covers. Really, though, it started long before then. Did it start when I added a column to a ridiculous spreadsheet tracking various bits of personal data that said, “If today were a book title...” which I based those book covers on? No. That’s not when it started. Maybe it was the weekly personal field trips to the bookstore in search of inspiration when my creative tank was low. Or the meanderings through the shelves of miscellaneous books in the reading room of Suzzallo Library.

The “it” I’m referring to is this master’s thesis. But I’m also referring to a lifelong love of books that has always been in the background; perhaps not fully articulated until I decided that books—everything about them—would be a good topic to explore for a year.

In second grade, I hosted a book swap at my elementary school, and 30-some years later it’s still happening. I can vividly recall how the children’s library in my hometown was organized, or what the upstairs of the local bookstore looked like, how the

ceilings were lower and the balcony opened up to the downstairs so you could hear other customers talking or the shuffle of books being pulled from the shelves.

Books I've kept from high school are filled with scribbles and underlines. My name is written on the fore edges of most of them. A detail that horrifies me now, but also brings me joy in the way it transports me back to 10th grade English class.

When I applied to grad school nearly two decades later, I mentioned that I had been, "geeking out over type—particularly in books—vintage logos, and quarterly journals." At the time, I was working on a physical, long-form publication. We were in the midst of battling decision makers about the importance of its physicality in the face of so much existing digital content.

Looking back, so many projects—personal or otherwise—have been book related. It turns out, I've been leaving breadcrumbs all along.

As this exploration of books is a personal one, the documentation that follows reflects a circuitous and non-linear path.

Book Fair Gets Under Way



Hemingway Elementary School students were winners in the 1988 Poster Contest promoting the school's book fair which is taking place today through Friday, Nov. 18. Front, from left, Kelley McClure (1st grade, 2nd place), Josh Chance (1st grade, 3rd place) and Lee Stoops (1st grade, 1st place). Back, from left, Piper Loyd (2nd grade, 1st place), Holly Webb (2nd grade, 2nd place), Taryn Wheeler (2nd grade, 3rd place), Brett Wells (3rd grade, 2nd place), Whitney Hogue (3rd grade, 1st place) and Erin Carnes (3rd grade, 3rd place). Honorable mentions went to Chris Hall, Maggie Acker, Andreas Scherthanner, Aja Dailey, Tess Carter, Paige Nelson and Casey Cogan. The contest judges were Deidre McLaughlin, Jane "Magoo" McGloin and Tom Van Slyke.

BESPECKLED WINNER OF
THE HEMINGWAY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL BOOK FAIR POSTER
CONTEST, 1988

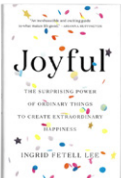
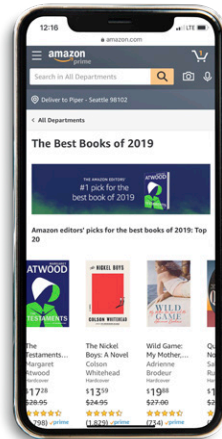
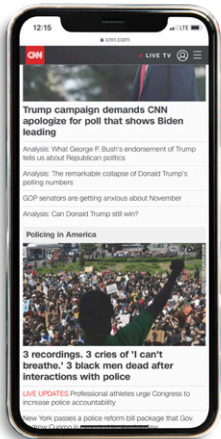
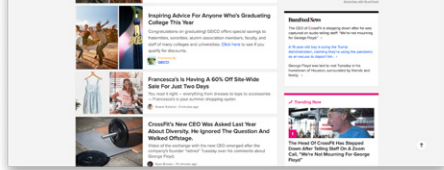
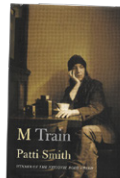
INTRODUCTION

A book can serve many purposes—from education to escape, aspiration to inspiration, status-symbol, sentimental, act of protest, or object of beauty. Although we now have the ability to hold the contents of an infinite number of digital books in the palm of our hands, many of us still prefer and cherish the physical book; perhaps now more than ever. Why? We no longer need physical books, but I certainly need physical books. This project broadly explores the ways in which books have played a role in my life, both the routine and unexpected.

Through experiments in categorization and organization, visual examination, and conversation, I uncover the partial roots of a deep attachment to the physical book. The importance of the object lies in surprising places and has triggered memory in ways I couldn't have guessed.

This inquiry has been as much, if not more, about the process than it has about finding concrete answers within the pages of the 203 books on my shelves.

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Charges filed 20 years after a Burien woman disappeared **NEWSMART - AP**
Can WSU keep winning streak over Oregon alive? **SPORTS - AP**



Judge rules impeachment inquiry legal

BOOST FOR DEMOCRATS Ruling says Congress can view grand jury material and that Trump's attorney is oversteering lawmakers' case

The decision comes as the U.S. House of Representatives is set to vote on whether to impeach President Donald Trump. The ruling is seen as a major boost for Democrats, who have argued that the president's attorney, Rudy W. Giuliani, is oversteering the process.

He moved into a homeless shelter in Seattle and was later charged rent



After a shelter received notice about paying rent on a vacant house, the landlord sued for the rent on the shelter's behalf. The man, who is homeless, was later charged with rent for the property.

Boeing's white-collar employees won't receive bonuses this year



Boeing's white-collar employees will not receive bonuses this year, according to a report. The company has faced challenges in the aviation market, leading to the decision.

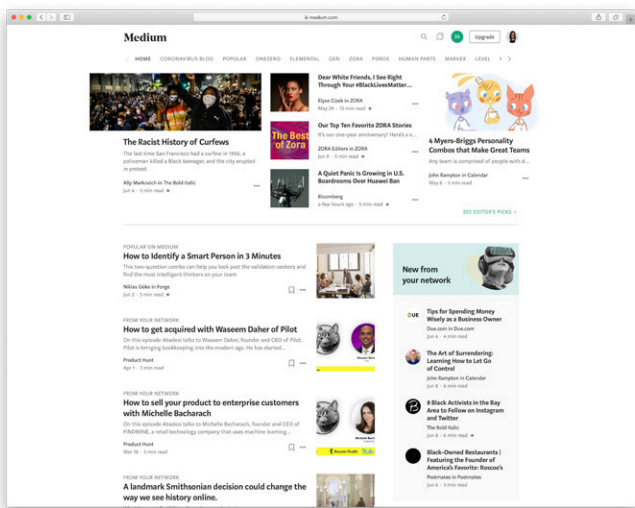
Microsoft thwarts Amazon, wins \$10B contract

Microsoft has won a \$10 billion contract to provide cloud services for the U.S. military. This is seen as a major victory for Microsoft over Amazon in the cloud market.

U.S. sending combat troops to guard Syrian oil fields

The U.S. is sending combat troops to guard oil fields in Syria, a move that has drawn criticism from some quarters. The troops are intended to protect American interests in the region.

CHAPTER 1 WHY BOOKS? WHY NOW?



DO YOU EVER FEEL as though you are chained to your phone? Pick it up without realizing it? Pull down on the screen to refresh the page, even though it's only been a few minutes and you know there isn't anything new? What about email: how many newsletters or mass emails do you wake up to in the morning? Do you stare at a screen while on the bus, in line at the supermarket, or while mindlessly watching television?

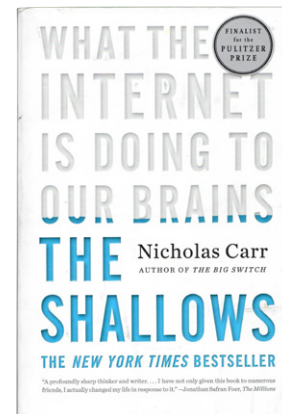
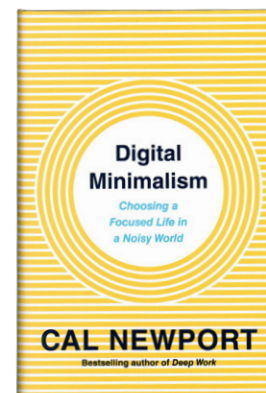
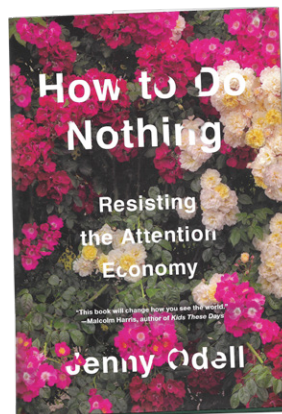
Most of us feel as though we're bombarded by information, specifically from our phones, computers, or tablets. For me, the endless scroll provides endless anxiety. Along with this information overload, our attention spans are shrinking and our brains are physically being rewired (Carr, 2011). So it's not just me? Whenever I take extended time away from my screens, however, I notice a perceptible change in my ability to focus.

Cal Newport has written extensively about the importance of regaining control over our attention in his books, *Deep Work* and *Digital Minimalism*. Similarly, Jenny Odell dives into the cultural history of our current always-on society in her book, *How to Do Nothing*, encouraging her audience to examine their own behavior.

I began to think more about the connection between the physical book and attention as I read more and more of Craig Mod's work. A designer, storyteller and walker, Mod questions and rethinks how to use technology in a way that aligns with his values. While the physical book is, in fact, a form of technology, Mod recognizes that, unlike most screen-based channels, the book ends. A newspaper has edges. By consciously choosing the medium with which we consume information, we can start to regain control over our attention.

In my experience, books have helped me stay grounded and present amidst a world swirling with content and information.

RUNNING PARALLEL TO this information overload, is an increased interest in minimalism. Marie Kondo encourages us to let go of belongings that do not "spark joy." While

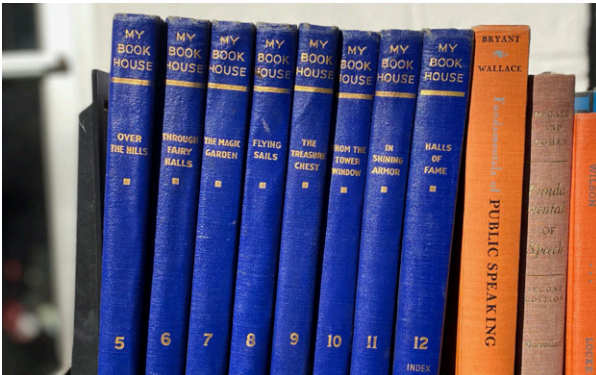
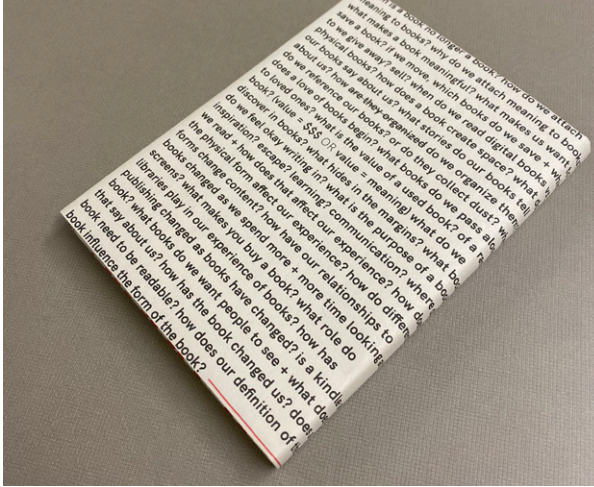


rising rent prices in cities push residents to live in micro-studios without much space for any belongings, let alone a bulky stacks of books.

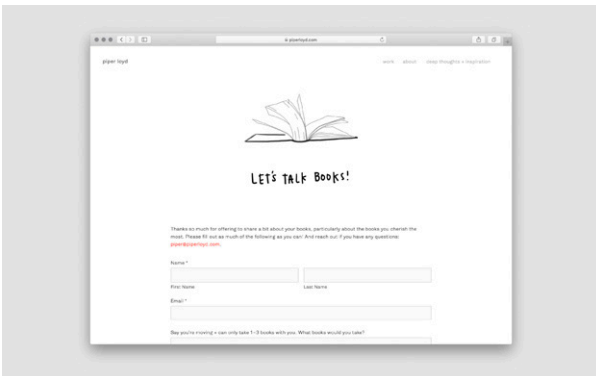
Unlike other personal belongings, though, books tell multiple unique stories simultaneously. There are the stories within the pages, but also the story They can be familiar and informative, nostalgic and educational. Digital books lack the physical wear and tactile reminders of context.

Although there are certainly numerous benefits to the digital, physical books and the printed page still provide a different level of memory recall and comprehension. "Most screens, e-readers, smartphones and tablets interfere with intuitive navigation of a text and inhibit people from mapping the journey in their minds," (Jabr, 2013). The ability to feel where you are in book based on the pages in your hands and the geographic mapping of where certain text lies on the page come easier in the physical form, (Jabr, 2013).

And for the purposes of this exploration, digital books lack the possibility of serendipitous discovery.



CHAPTER 2 CONVERSATIONS



IN ADDITION TO LOOKING at my own behavior and attachments to the book, I talked to individuals in various parts of the book industry. Designers, booksellers, editors, authors, librarians, a chef with a point of view about cookbooks in restaurants, and a number of self-proclaimed book lovers. Three conversations in particular helped clarify and narrow the focus on this project.

1. HEIDI

My interview with Heidi was an experiment, purposely left open ended and unstructured to see where and how the conversation would wander. A self-proclaimed book hoarder, Heidi walked me through the books in her “book lair” (an office-like area in the basement). What resulted was a personal narrative, an autobiography told through

books. There are the classics that she read in high school English class, placed prominently so that people can see them. Lower down on the shelf are the science fiction novels, the cherished books from her grandmother’s collection, and a smattering of other books from miscellaneous experiences, interests and people. A narrow shelf next to the desk holds design books—lots of them—and a stack of worn literature and poetry books from college. There is one book in particular littered with orange post-its, and it easily falls open to a page full of underlines and notes. It’s one of the books you save. If you like books, too, you know which books in your shelf look and feel like this one.

When we finished combing through all the shelves, Heidi mentioned that she’d never really looked at all of her books at the same time in that way before. It was illuminating. Talking to Heidi about her books and the books most

important to her made me think about my own books. What story do my books tell about me? And what makes me save the books I save? In other words, what makes my books meaningful?



HEIDI REVISITING HER PERSONAL LIBRARY IN THE 'BOOK LAIR'.

2. THE PRELINGER LIBRARY

Although I'd read about the Prelinger Library online, I couldn't fully grasp how the space functioned, how unusual and delightful it is until I looked down the first of three aisles filled floor to ceiling with books.

The library started in 2004 when Megan and Rick Prelinger combined their personal collections. Since then, it's evolved and continues to evolve with each person who visits. The books and ephemera are organized starting where you are geographically (San Francisco). Books relating to the earth are found closer to the floor and those



relating to space travel, birds and the sky are found at the very tops of the shelves. Though this organization is loose, it allows visitors to wander and discover as they look for certain subject areas. The organizational system is built to encourage unexpected discovery and the result is delightful.

3. BOOK-LOVER SURVEY

After talking to Heidi and leaning more toward an exploration of the book as a part of personal narrative, I put out an open call to book lovers on my social networks. Twenty five people responded to an online survey about their most cherished books.

Each was asked to list 3–5 books they would take with them if they had to move with minimal belongings. They then described the physical qualities, if there was a story behind the book, where the book lives (on a bookshelf, nightstand, in storage), where the book came from and how long they'd had it. There was space for participants to elaborate on any general feelings about books, and several mentioned that they recalled things they hadn't thought about in ages—a book lent to a boyfriend in high school filled with notes, remembering an author event, or how exams (multiple!) were missed because they were reading.

I was also excited to get a few responses from book lovers who no longer read physical books. The reasoning was expected. Books are too heavy to move if you are transient. They are too bulky to travel with.

Overall, the responses and enthusiasm allowed me to turn back to my own personal library. I hadn't yet thought about my own 3–5 cherished books.

“

I LOVE USING THE LIBRARY BECAUSE I LOVE THE CRINKLE SOUND OF THE PLASTIC BOOK JACKET.

“

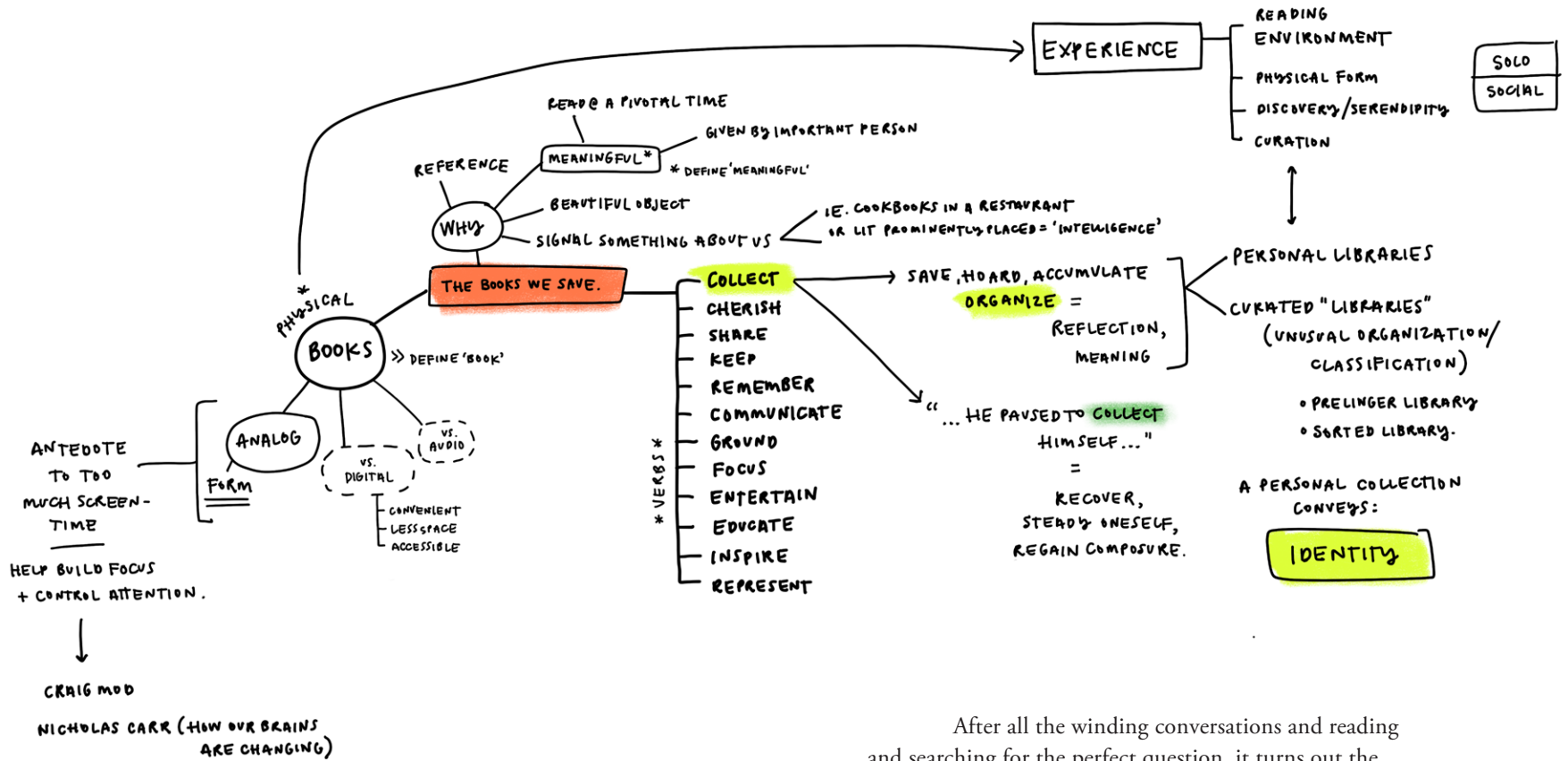
I GET PANICKED IF I DON'T HAVE A BOOK ON ME AT ALL TIMES.

“

A STANDARD HARDCOVER IS WHAT I LIKE TO SEE ON MY SHELVES, BUT THAT'S NOT MY PREFERRED TRIM SIZE OR FORMAT FOR READING.

“

I HATE PAPERBACKS! BOOKS DESERVE RESPECT AND I FEEL THAT PAPERBACKS JUST CHEAPEN THE EXPERIENCE.



After all the winding conversations and reading and searching for the perfect question, it turns out the most important conversation for me to have about my books was with myself. Although I'd mapped out my thinking and process previously, I started a new map (above) from scratch. When prompted to think about verbs describing books—specifically from my point of view—the idea of *collecting* provoked a series of visual studies and experiments documented in the next section. This idea resonated with my original, nagging question: *Why am I so emotionally attached to my books?*

Letting go of any expectation beyond experimentation allowed me to let one exercise unfold into another. →



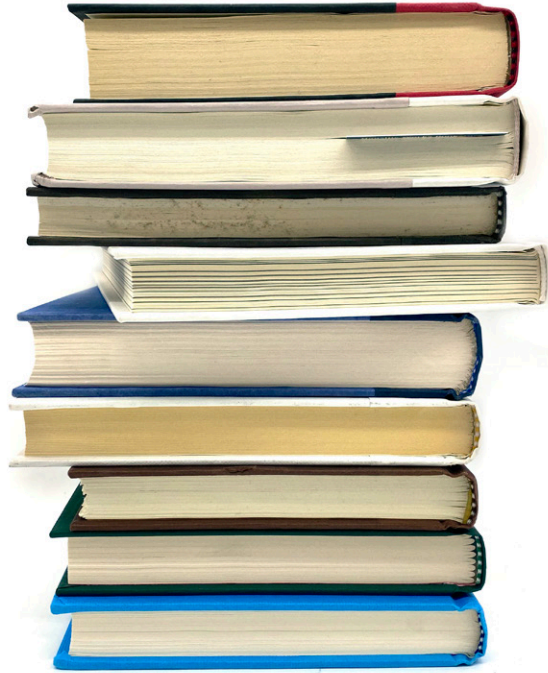
STILLS FROM TIMELAPSE VIDEO:
COMPILING ALL BOOKS INTO SEVERAL
TALL PILES IN ORDER TO START
ORGANIZING AND REORGANIZING.



STILLS FROM TIMELAPSE VIDEO:
 REORGANIZATION BASED ON PHASE
 OF LIFE WHEN ORIGINALLY
 PURCHASED OR ACQUIRED.

FOLLOWING SPREAD:
 STACKS OF BOOK FORE EDGES
 THAT PROMPTED ABSTRACTION OF
 INDIVIDUAL BOOKS INTO UNIQUE
 OBJECTS TO BE EXPLORED.





DETAIL PHOTOGRAPHS OF BOOK
FORE EDGES, DUST COLLECTING,
STAINS, POST-IT NOTES AND
GENERAL WEAR.



ARUNDHATI

ROY

"Dazzling. As subtle as it is powerful."

—MICHIKO KAKUTANI, *NEW YORK TIMES*

EXAMPLE OF A ZOOMED IN DETAIL
OF EACH UNIQUE COPY OF A BOOK.
THIS VERSION OF A GOD OF SMALL
THINGS IS DIFFERENT THAN ANY
OTHER VERSION.

hazy, comfortable, smooth, memory, somber.
- colors: gray, dark, dim, gloomy
Red clouds, blood
- sun setting or rising
- November → end of something

* adjectives *

THE CANDLEFLAME and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door. He took off his hat and came slowly forward. The floorboards creaked under his boots. In his black suit he stood in the dark glass where the lilies leaned so palely from their waisted cutglass vase. Along the cold hallway behind him hung the portraits of forebears only dimly known to him all framed in glass and dimly lit above the narrow wainscoting. He looked down at the guttered candlestub. He pressed his thumbprint in the warm wax pooled on the oak veneer. Lastly he looked at the face so caved and drawn among the folds of funeral cloth, the yellowed moustache, the eyelids paper thin. That was not sleeping. That was not sleeping.

It was dark outside and cold and no wind. In the distance a calf bawled. He stood with his hat in his hand. You never combed your hair that way in your life, he said.

Inside the house there was no sound save the ticking of the mantel clock in the front room. He went out and shut the door.

Dark and cold and no wind and a thin gray reef beginning along the eastern rim of the world. He walked out on the prairie and stood holding his hat like some supplicant to the darkness over them all and he stood there for a long time.

As he turned to go he heard the train. He stopped and waited for it. He could feel it under his feet. It came boring out of the east like some ribald satellite of the coming sun howling and bellowing in the distance and the long light of the headlamp running through the tangled mesquite brakes and creating out

↳ darkness/light ↳ * concentration

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* adjectives *

↳ darkness/light ↳ * concentration

FIRST PAGE SCAN OF ALL THE PRETTY HORSES. PROCESS OF REMOVING TEXT IN ORDER TO LEAVE JUST MY MARKINGS FROM HIGH SCHOOL.

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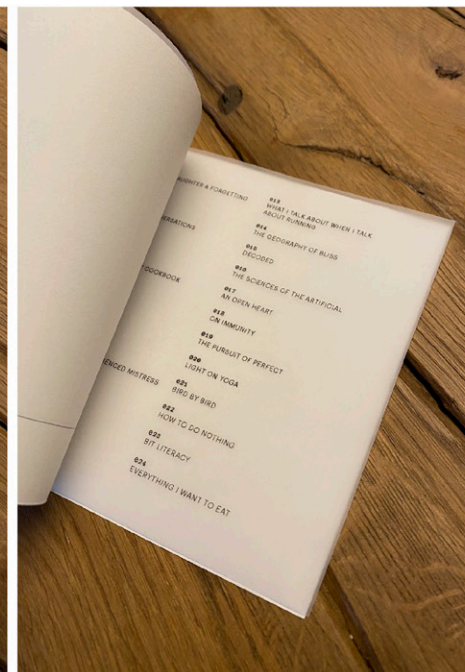
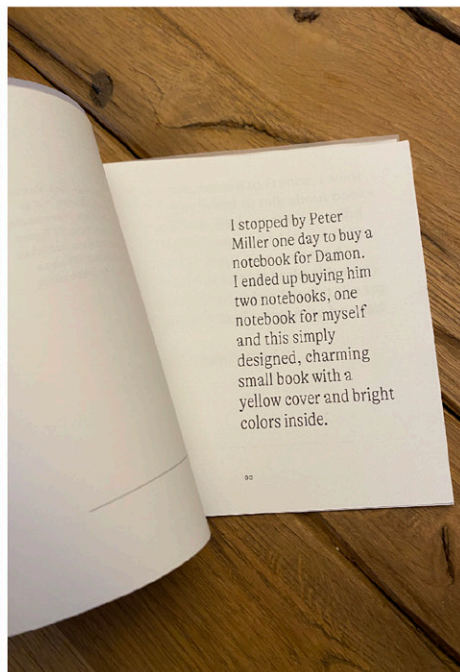
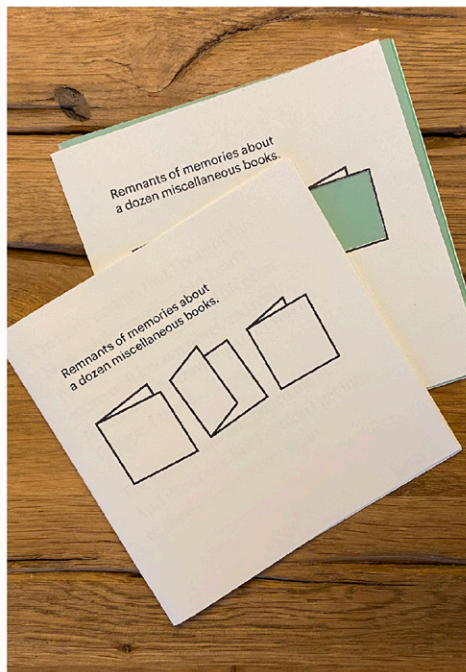
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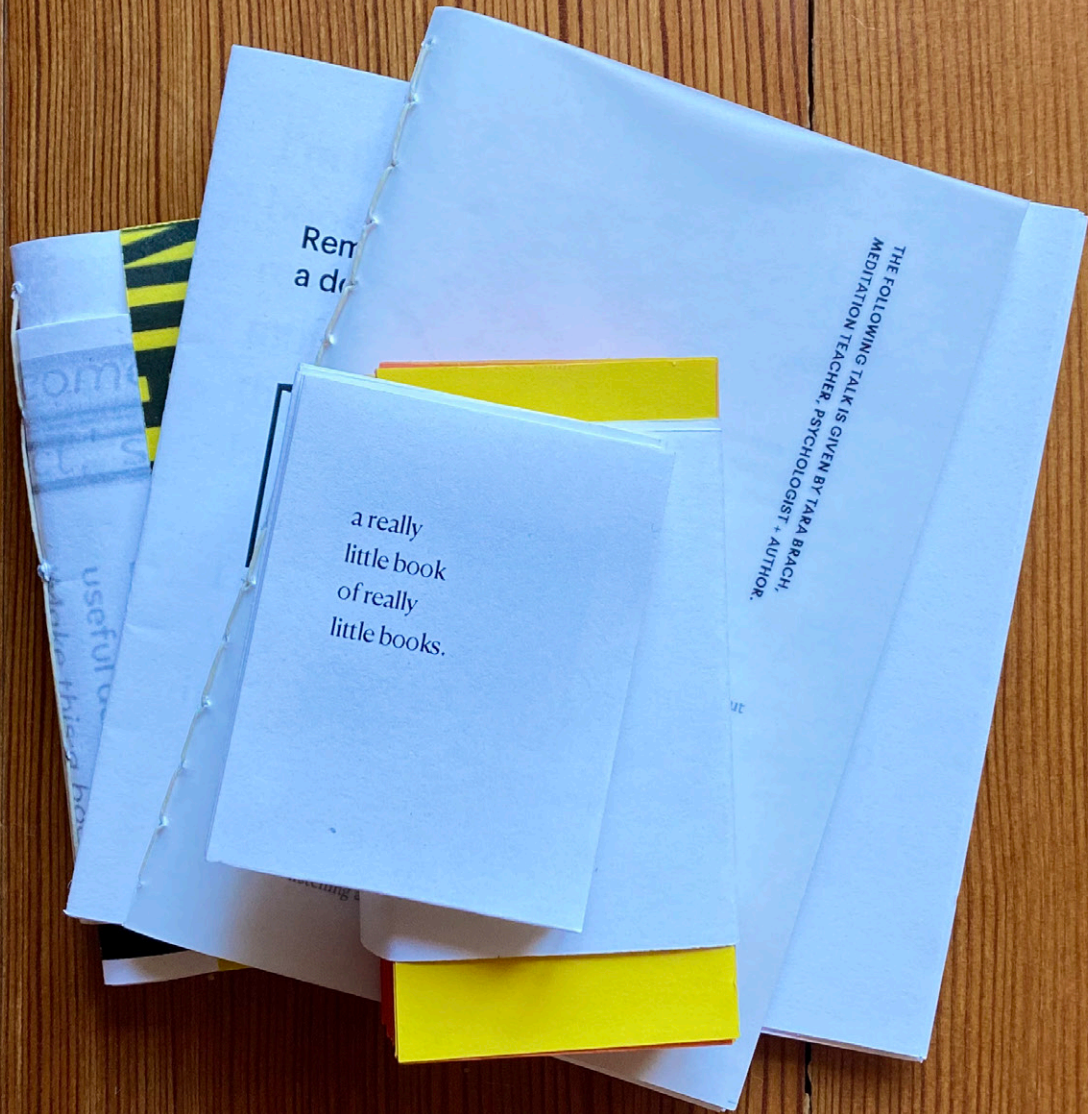
OBJECTS FOUND IN BOOKS WHILE SCANNING INCLUDE RECEIPTS, BUSINESS CARDS, BOARDING PASSES, AND BOOKMARKS.



DETAILS FROM 'BOOKMAKING LITE' EXPERIMENTS.

FOLLOWING SPREAD: MINI COLLECTION OF BOOKS ABOUT MY BOOKS.





Rem
a dr

a really
little book
of really
little books.

THE FOLLOWING TALK IS GIVEN BY TARA BRACH,
MEDITATION TEACHER, PSYCHOLOGIST + AUTHOR.

om
useful
Make this a bo

ID	Title	Author	Author First Name	Author Last Name	Female author?	Head Reference Preferral	Rebound	Content color of the cover	Secondary color of the cover	If partial, why did you stop reading it?	Story behind the book (object)	Fiction Non-Fiction	Signed	High-impact	Physical Experience	Why is the form about the glow	
14	Robert's Intersections: Theaunus	Billy Collins	Billy	Collins								NF					
17	Play Like Whistler	Courteney Hamester	Courteney	Hamester	X	Y		Yellow			Bought at the UW Bookstore because I needed to buy something to substitute my parking and it looked funny, which it was.	NF					
19	Where the Crawdads Sing	Delia Owen	Delia	Owen	X	Y		Orange	Black		Where's Fred? Give this to me for my birthday and I think I read it in one day. It was right when school was starting so and I probably had time to read a book. I discovered it.	F					
20	Design in Storytelling	Ellen Lutton	Ellen	Lutton	X	N		Black			Bought at the Design Lecture Series at the Seattle Public Library and had her sign it.	NF	X				
21	On Democracy	Eula Biss	Eula	Biss	X	Y		Black				NF					
22	My/Us	Ingrid Falvel Lee	Ingrid	Falvel Lee	X	Y					I love the premise of this book and am so drawn to Ingrid's work. She was I crossed paths briefly at SMO. Always felt like a kindred spirit!	NF		X			
23	How to be Working	Jonny Oball	Jonny	Oball	X	Y		Pink			Read it originally via library e-book. But I loved it so much and knew I would use it for my thesis so I bought the hardcover.	NF					
24	Everything I Want to Eat	Jessica Kinslow	Jessica	Kinslow	X	N		White				NF					
25	Misemon	Kat Holmes	Kat	Holmes	X	P		White	Black	Started in during summer, when I really just wanted to be reading something fun and fiction.	Got the book when she spoke at a PSL Friday Lunch.	NF	X				
26	A Manual for Writers	Kate L. Turabian	Kate	Turabian	X	N		Red	Orange			NF					
27	Such a Fun Age	Kiley Reid	Kiley	Reid	X	Y		Blue	Pink		KILEY REID WROTE THIS BECAUSE NOW, Sarah at Snowflake ordered it early for me since I know Kiley and she was so into it. I got it on the day I was in NYC when I was traveling and it's really certain I finished it before the trip was over.	F					
28	Barbara the Slut	Lauren Holmes	Lauren	Holmes	X	Y		Pink	White			F					
29	Salt Fat Acid Heat	Samin Nosrat	Samin	Nosrat	X	N		White				NF					
30	The Library Book	Susan Orlean	Susan	Orlean	X	P		Red			Highly recommended and the subject matter seems like something I would be into, but it's just not holding my attention. Maybe I should try again.	NF					
31	We Kiss the Screen	Tee Jipson + George Al	Tee	Jipson	X	N		Black	Blue		Digital/physical experiment - choose your own adventure online. Then they send you a physical copy. Had it was free (not), but I don't really get it.	NF					
32	Designing Interface Animations	Nic Head	Nic	Head	X	N						NF					
33	They Say, I Say	Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein	Gerald	Graff	X	Y			Red			NF					
34	Bookbinding	Francisco Morán + Miriam Hochleitner	Francisco	Morán	X	N		Red	Green		Beautiful book. John has had it in collaboration design as soon as I saw it, I ordered a copy for myself!	NF					
35	The Book of the Book	Frank Roperidge + Sara De Bonet	Frank	Roperidge	X	N		Green				NF					
36	Things are what you make of them	Adam Kurtz	Adam	Kurtz	X	N						NF					
37	How to be a graphic designer without losing your soul	Adrian Shaughnessy	Adrian	Shaughnessy	N			Grey	Blue			NF					
38	Creative Quest	Question (Abeir Thompson)	Abeir	Thompson	Y						Originally I got this from the library in Seattle, but I didn't finish the whole thing, and I loved it so I wanted to own it. I signed and bought it.	NF		X			
39	Graphic Design for Art, Fashion, Film, Architecture, Photography, Product Design and Everything In Between	Andy Cooke	Andy	Cooke	N			Black				NF					
40	Sketching User Experiences	Bill Buxton	Bill	Buxton	N			Yellow	Black			NF					
41	Ways of Hearing	Dawn Krowczak	Dawn	Krowczak	N			Blue	White		Bought this at Powell's last year when I went with Nelson and David. I loved the format, making audio into the physical. And I love that she worked SMO on the cover. I don't realize it was signed until I scanned it (or at least, I forgot that it was signed).	NF	X		X	(would) make for books doc organization	
42	The Heart Aroused	David Whyte	David	Whyte	N							NF					
43	Bill Roberts	David Thompson	David	Thompson	N			White		heard the author speak at a UW Communication Leadership lecture and was fascinated. That was two years ago and I still haven't read the book.	NF						
44	The Design of Everyday Things	Don Norman	Don	Norman	N			White				NF					
45	The Shape of Design	Frank Chabero	Frank	Chabero	P			White				NF					
46	The Richest Man in Babylon	George S. Clason	George S.	Clason	N							NF					
47	Designing for People	Henry Dreyfus	Henry	Dreyfus	N							NF					
48	Malden	Henry David Thoreau	Henry David	Thoreau	Y						Bought at Elliott Bay Books not long after I moved to Seattle. It's one of my high school and high school classmates' rereading it. It's lived on my night stand for about two years.	NF					
49	The Sciences of the Artificial	Herbert A. Simon	Herbert	Simon	P					It's denser I read a chapter for a graduate class and wanted to read more of it, but it will likely be a SMO read.		NF				It's an old IL gem, with a	
50	Fuck Perfection	James Victoire	James	Victoire	Y			Tan	Black			NF					
51	On Web Typography	Jason Santa Maria	Jason	Santa Maria	N			Red	White			NF					
52	Ways of Seeing	John Berger	John	Berger	N			White	Black			NF					
53	The Power of Myth	Joseph Campbell	Joseph	Campbell	N							NF					
54	What do you do with an Idea?	Kids Yarns	Kids	Yarns	Y			White	Green			NF					
55	The Brand Gap	Marty Neumeier	Marty	Neumeier	N			White	Black			NF					
56	Zag	Marty Neumeier	Marty	Neumeier	N			White	Black			NF					
57	Book Cover Designs	Matthew Goodman	Matthew	Goodman	Y						Found this while looking for inspiration for my book cover project at Elliott Bay. Had enthusiasm to see mine, but an interesting look into how different book cover designers work.	NF					
58	How to	Michael Beirut	Michael	Beirut	N			White	Black			NF					
59	How To Try Something Weirder	Michael Johnson	Michael	Johnson	N			Green	Black		Bought it at the UW Bookstore because I needed to say for parking and I also thought it would inspire me to experiment more with Sonobata + cover have been recommended to me.	NF					
60	Paul Rand: Conversations with Students	Paul Rand	Paul	Rand	Y						Met with Peter Heller to buy a notebook for Susan and ended up buying the one he designed, a notebook for water and this I don't design, charming small book with a profile cover.	F					
61	Out Stealing Horses	Per Petterson	Per	Petterson	N			Blue	Black			F					
62	More Graphic Design	Richard Hollis	Richard	Hollis	N			Red				F					
63	The Inventory	Richard Powers	Richard	Powers	P					I loved the first half of this book - operation of stories involving "reconnect" when the stories start to intertwine in the second half. I didn't want to finish it, but I just wasn't enjoying it at all, so I just did it. I don't remember which I hardly ever do. I read the first chapter for a semester.	F						

CHAPTER 4 REFLECTIONS, A SPREADSHEET + A WEBSITE

48

22 ways to explore 203 books

about experiments personal collection reach out

FILTERS ALL GRAD SCHOOL BOUGHT USED RECOMMENDED BY SOMEONE FEMALE AUTHOR COOKBOOKS BOOKS NOT READ

The image shows a screenshot of a website interface for exploring books. At the top, there are navigation links: 'about', 'experiments', 'personal collection' (which is underlined), and 'reach out'. Below this is a filter bar with categories: 'FILTERS', 'ALL', 'GRAD SCHOOL', 'BOUGHT USED', 'RECOMMENDED BY SOMEONE', 'FEMALE AUTHOR', 'COOKBOOKS', and 'BOOKS NOT READ'. The main content area displays a grid of book covers. Visible covers include 'All the Pretty Horses' by Cormac McCarthy, 'Among the Thugs' by Bill Buford, 'Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living' by Krista Tippett, 'The Bell Jar' by Sylvia Plath, 'The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation' by Jon Gertner, and 'The Bone Clocks' by David Mitchell. The interface is clean and modern, with a white background and clear typography.

AT THE VERY BEGINNING of the thesis process, I started a simple google spreadsheet to catalog the books in my personal library. The document tracked book title, full author name, author first and last name, fiction or non-fiction, and whether or not I'd read the book. There was also a column for notes to jot down any initial memories or stories attached to the book. Notes varied from "MDes" to "Gift from Sean and Amanda's wedding. Kara edited."

The initial version listed 193 books. When I reached the end of my pile of books, I remember thinking, *that's it?* It really felt like there should be more, but that was it—every pile and bookshelf and nightstand counted and catalogued.

Throughout the year, I slowly added and edited the columns. When I filled out the read/unread column, I realized that there were a handful of books I'd started, but never finished, so I added 'partial' as an option. Why hadn't I finished the book? I added a column about that, too—detailing why certain books didn't hold my attention, remembering the books I'd picked up instead.

It was a cascade of remembering. One detail would spark two more miscellaneous memories. Some memories made sense: *I bought this one at the bookstore down the street from my little studio apartment.* And some were more random and specific: *I remember carrying this book around New York City even though I really didn't enjoy reading it. There was a bit of comfort to have at least something to pretend read. I don't remember a single thing about the book, but I remember where I was sitting in that no-name café in Soho.*

I added a column for the first line of the book, and with each first line transcribed, I also scanned the first page. If I was going to the trouble of scanning the first page, I thought, I may as well scan the cover of the book, too. Then I started flipping through the pages. I found bookmarks and boarding passes, old shopping lists. Turning to pages with dogears or post-it notes, I would scan the page trying to remember why I'd bookmarked

TITLE	WHERE ARE THE PAGES CURLED
GENRE	STAINED
FICTION OR NON-FICTION	MORE THAN TWO TYPEFACES ON THE COVER
YEAR PUBLISHED	ORDERED ON AMAZON
NAME OF PUBLISHER	WRITTEN BY SOMEONE I KNOW
EDITION	UGLY COVER
HARDCOVER OR PAPERBACK	UNEVEN FORE-EDGES
ACCOLADES	BOUGHT FOR INSPIRATION
PHASE OF LIFE	WARPED
FEMALE AUTHOR	REREAD
READ, UNREAD, PARTIALLY READ	WANT TO REREAD
REBOUGHT	COOKBOOKS NEVER COOKED FROM
DOMINANT COLOR OF COVER	FROM THE BOOK PASSAGE
SECONDARY COLOR OF COVER	WANTED TO LIKE BUT DIDN'T
DIMENSIONS	BOUGHT USED
SIGNED	MOST RECOMMENDED
HIGH-IMPACT	LENT OUT
PHYSICAL IMPORTANCE	READ FOR RYAN WATERFIELD'S 11TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS
GIFT (BY WHO)	READ ON A PLANE
RECOMMENDED (BY WHO)	READ ON VACATION
JACKET COVER	SHOULDN'T HAVE PACKED WHEN I MOVED
POST-ITS	CURRENTLY ON A NIGHTSTAND
WRITTEN IN	MISSING JACKET COVER
FOUND OBJECTS INSIDE	PAGES TORN OUT
BOUGHT FOR A BOOK CLUB	YELLOWED PAGES
ABOUT DESIGN	NAME WRITTEN ON IT
BROUGHT DURING QUARANTINE	COLORED FORE-EDGES
MISSED DURING QUARANTINE	
FIRST LINE	
AUTHOR FIRST + LAST NAME	

* There might be more than 22 ways to explore 203 books.

that specific page. Was that just where I'd left off? Or did I want to remember something specific?

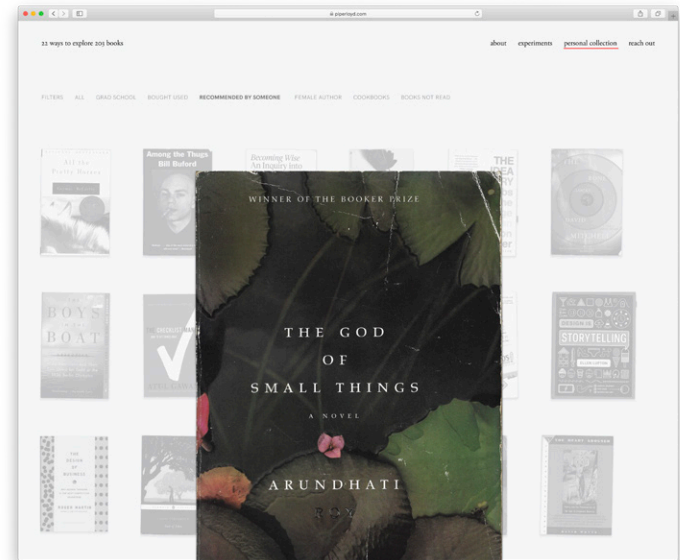
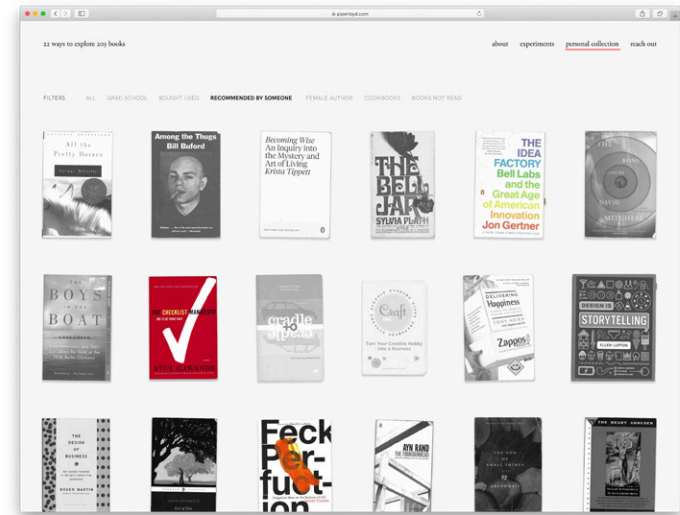
The spreadsheet became a tool I returned to again and again throughout this inquiry. I didn't expect it to play as big of a role as it did, but it became a way for me zoom out and consider the myriad ways my collection of books was—is—connected. Not only is the content important, the form of the books continue to provide visual reminders of the personal experiences attached to each. Like scars or smile lines, these covers and pages have aged, and tell stories all their own.

WHEN THE CORONAVIRUS hit Seattle and we shifted to remote learning, I had a hunch that my final outcome might be digital instead of the physical version I'd been picturing all along. Although it was still possible for me to make something physical—a collection of books about my collection of books—my motivation waned.

Mid-March, I drove to rural California with a duffel bag, my computer and a small stack of books, somewhat arbitrarily picked. It was strange to be so immersed in a project about my books...without my books. I continued to fill out the spreadsheet from memory and from the scans I'd done before I left. With the little supplies I had, I made scrappy, precious little books. I found the most solace and energy when I focused instead on editing the scanned images.

As part of an introductory web design class, I mocked up a website to showcase my collection. Having the ability to zoom in and out, sort the covers based on each of the 22 categories ultimately added to the spreadsheet, turned out to be a unexpected yet fulfilling pivot in my explorations.

Although not ready quite yet, the site is under construction and will be available on www.203books.com or www.athesisaboutbooks.com.



A VISUAL VERSION OF THE SPREADSHEET WITH BOOK SCANS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.203BOOKS.COM.

EPILOGUE

A personal note

Finishing this line of inquiry in uncertain and unsteady times, I realize that the physical book is more important than ever. Bombarded by the news and an endless feed of updates, opinions and upheaval, I believe a break from the screen is essential to our collective wellbeing. I know it has been for me. Although staying connected to current events online has been important, limiting that input and instead turning to the physical page has been a grounding presence to balance out the anxiety.

In the midst of all this, I moved and took all 203 books with me. The process of packing and unpacking made me long to sit down with certain volumes, to feel the weight of a book in my hands, to curl up in a chair, to find some calm within the pages. Revisiting the books on my shelves is a bit like catching up with old friends: they remind me who I am. We all need a bit of that right now, don't we?

Like any large undertaking, there are a million things I wish I would have done, but didn't. Thankfully, my thorough exploration of books won't stop here. Consider this a status update.

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Annabelle: I apologize for the rags.

[BACK COVER]