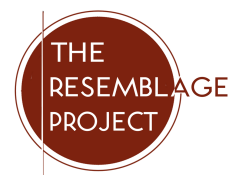# CRITICALLY UNPACKING THE RESEMBLAGE PROJECT
A Conversation

With Andrea Charise, Larissa Lac, Iqra Mahmood, Deborah Ocholi,
Celeste Pang, Mia Sanders, Xiaoli Yang

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Stories of Aging*. www.resemblageproject.ca [Date of download.]

Introduction
What is the potential of digital storytelling in age or aging studies? What can interdisciplinary work
do? What is the story behind your story?

This roundtable conversation took place following one month of intensive collaborative work on
The Resemblage Project in May 2019. Participants Larissa Lac (LL), Iqra Mahmood (IQ),
Deborah Ocholi (DO), Mia Sanders (MS), and Xiaoli Yang (XY) were all Jackman Scholars-in-
Residence during this period, with Andrea Charise (AC) as our project director. All were invited to
reflect on the process of critical making and digital storytelling through open-ended prompts.
Celeste Pang (CP), Project Manager and Research Assistant, facilitated and transcribed the
conversation, and all participants edited their contributions for clarity and public sharing.

This document captures the spirit of our group conversations, and provokes critical challenges to
age studies and digital storytelling: from issues of race and representation (the "Unicef-esque"), the
potentials of interdisciplinarity ("interdisciplinariness" and the sublime), to creative practice
("forced creativity", tips on storyboarding, the generativity of the unresolved)—and readiness, or
lack thereof, to decolonize these fields. It can be, we hope, a catalyst for further exploration. It
certainly was and remains for us.

Framing remarks by Celeste Pang, June 2019.

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CP: So really this is a conversation for the record, to do with what we will. It's an opportunity for
us to reflect on the process of what we've done this month. The prompts are grounds we can cover,
but feel free to just talk. And anything else at all you would like to add about our experience this
month, which we can edit as you see fit. Sound good?

(team nods)

CP: Okay. So to begin then, could you go around and say your name and tell us a brief description
of your story? What is it that you made this month?

IQ: My name is Iqra, my digital story was named [Growing Down](#)…And then the process of developing?

CP: Uh no, we'll go there. Just tell us a bit about it.

IM: Okay. Essentially, my digital story is about how aging feels like to a kid. It is about that moment when you realize you are aging, that everyone around you is aging. That nothing is static and no matter what you do, everything will continue to change. It explores the ways one may try to come to grips with these terrifying changes as a young person, and how they might try to maintain meaning in their lives despite these changes; a message that may resonate with a person at any age throughout the life course. In that sense, it tries to counter the narrative that young people don't think of aging.

CP: Great.

DO: I'm Deborah, and my digital story is called [Tethered](#). It focuses on a lot of different things, but I guess the biggest one is that idea of intergenerational connectedness, and how your aging is literally tethered, and influenced by that of your family. Who you grow up around, who is far away, who shapes what aging means to you.

AC: I'm Andrea. I made a digital story [Bleach] about a year ago that's included in this project. It's a contemplation of my relationship with my grandmother, who was in many ways a role model for aging for me; but I actually never thought of her as a role model of aging, it just so happened that she was old. So I was trying to revisit my memory of her, thinking about the fact I was in my early 20s and living with her that she was in her early 90s, and the things that marked her aging for me, and the different senses that I associate with aging now. One that is always there when I think of her is the smell of bleach. It actually has a very kind of domestic and comforting smell for me, as opposed to what bleach might smell like in other contexts -hospitals or otherwise.

LL: My name is Larissa. The title of my story is [Peaches](#). It highlights Chinese and Asian culture and what it means to grow up in Toronto through a personal conversation I had with my grandmother. What I wanted to capture was a sense of storytelling in its literal form through conversation – and in an artistic form through the visuals. Peaches sheds light on intergenerational teaching on the topic of "what it means to grow old".

XY: Hi, I'm Xiaoli, and the title of my digital story is called [A Bite of Time](#). It is a series of sudden thoughts that I generated when I was biting into a donut, and I figured that for some reason one moment is more memorable than another, which is exactly a sentence that appeared in my script. What I wanted to express using this digital story is that instead of considering aging as a process of time depletion, we can consider it as a process of accumulation of experiences. This casts a kind of positive light onto the idea of aging, instead of a process of getting closer to death which sounds a little bit negative. Yes.

MS: I'm Mia, my piece is called [Heartlines](#), and it's an intergenerational story about my relationship with my grandmother. It's about how time and space coalesce in this particular moment in both of our life courses, and how our timelines are wrapped up in each other's, but also about how that moment changes, and all of the things that structure that change—geography, ability and disability, race, queerness, gender, and trauma.

CP: So I think you've all touched on it already, but Iqra, you used this word "counter-narrative". Would anyone like to say more about what were these counter-narratives you were attempting to present in your story, or grappling with through your process? From here on out you can just jump in whenever you'd like.

DO: For me personally mine was focusing on the intersection of immigration and how that can affect your aging. Like if you, when you drop everything to move to a new place, how that can affect you different than if you were always in one place.

LL: I think for me, coming from a very scientific background, we learn what aging is as deterioration, mental health conditions arises when you're aging, so one of the largest counter narratives in mind is that that was never part of our conversation. It was really, in a way, that that redefines what aging is, and it kind of gave me lots of insight to see what aging meant to my grandmother. And in the end, I have this line, using the three words that came up from the story, and added my own element. Kind of my own conclusion to what aging is to me, that embeds what aging meant to my grandmother as well. So that was a new revelation of what aging is. For me.

MS: Something that Deborah I were talking about yesterday was this idea of reframing the language of counter narrative. Framing it like that centers the dominant narrative around decline, instead of turning it inside out. I don't know if this makes any sense, but thinking about how, through digital storytelling, we can help people kind of inhabit our positionalities, even for a very brief moment, and understand aging through those axes of identity, as opposed to having a dominant narrative, and then…it's [the mic] not going to pick up this hand gesture.

(group laughter)

CP: There's a hand currently gesturing.

IM: It's kind of like an alternate narrative. Instead of seeing something as a "central narrative", it would be better to view it as if it was just, like, another side of an experience. I also think this idea of alternative narratives less privileges those central, more prominent narratives.

MS: Yes.

CP: And how do you think digital storytelling, what does it open up, in those terms? More specifically?

IM: It's an easy, convenient, more easily spreadable way to have people take their narratives and put it out there. Other art forms may seem very privileged, or require extensive skills and training to accomplish. Like painting, people might think, "Okay I need to take lessons now, I need to buy material…". Painting is like, an expensive hobby. Movies are hugely skill-oriented and require a lot of training, money and planning to accomplish. Digital stories are a very easy medium. Not as easy as a zine, but perhaps more spreadable in this age of the Internet. I think that it's convenience and its ability to broadcast alternative narratives makes it very valuable.

MS: I also think there's something about the brevity of digital stories that is particularly generative. There's not actually that much time to build a narrative arc that kind of peaks and then resolves. So

I think that as a result there's quite a bit of tension that's introduced through the digital story, but because it's not resolved, it forces the audience to become more implicated in the story. Instead of leaving with a sense of relief, a sense of "Oh, I know exactly what happened and what's going to happen," it forces you to project yourself onto the story, and then question what the digital story opens up and what it explodes as opposed to what it answers. I'm seeing a lot of nods— does anyway else feel similarly?

(group nodding and laughter)

LL: I think other traditional forms of storytelling might not have the creative and artistic aspects that digital storytelling lets the storyteller do. Like the clips they choose, the imagery, and perhaps using home videos it tells a very intimate story. And different elements, for example, title uses, when to fade out, saturation, contrast, all of that: those are very particularly thought out by the storyteller. And when we pay attention to these little details throughout the videos, it helps the audience really think about what these elements add to the story. And, find out, develop reasons why the artist decided to use these elements.

AC: One of the things that excited me, just listening to you talk, Larissa, is you started off introducing yourself today as, "I'm a science student, I have this particular background." But it sounds to me in what you just said that you identify, at least for a moment, as an artist. So I think there's something very special about a media form like digital storytelling that's accessible—you used the word spreadable, Iqra. That's media scholar Henry Jenkins's amazing term, which I love, because it describes media that is easy to disseminate, or get out there. But what digital storytelling spreads is not just the message of, "oh, these stories are accessible to anyone with an Internet connection." I think digital storytelling also spreads out the idea, distributes the idea, of who can and who should make art. At this time in 2019, when there's all these forces telling us why making art is frivolous, or "just" a hobby, or for other people who don't look like you: all of these reasons that art is something for other people to do… instead, here we are. Some of us here identify as science people, science folks, who nevertheless now have access not just to make these things, but to make really compelling stories of ourselves, and the people that we interact with. We can now use these spreadable stories to think differently about our own aging. That to me is one of the really exciting aspects of digital storytelling: it's not just about spreading the media outwards, but spreading out our ideas about who has the right to make things.

XY: And also some random thoughts from me, that may not be very relevant to the question, are that compared to other forms of providing materials to the age studies, digital stories may be more incentive for common people to participate in. Because just as Andrea said: at the very beginning of our program, she said I hope you can all leave with a little thing that you can hold in hand and say I made this. So, for example, for an interview, the interviewer would have to design the questions to get as much information as possible from the interviewee, and would try to make the interviewee comfortable saying that. After the interviewee leaves, he or she may think that "oh, I just gave out a lot of information without gaining a lot". But in making the digital stories the interviewee can expose however much they want to expose, while gaining something and leaving them to think by themselves. So I think that's actually a more sustainable way to spread the idea of age studies. The interviewee has participated in this whole process, and they are able to keep thinking of that.

AC: It sounds like you're talking about consent, the idea of informed consent. And you're talking about the interview setting. That's a neat kind of crossing over of creative making and thinking about how we do research.

XY: Yes.

IM: And to add on to that, yes the interviewee gets a thing they can carry away, but they also learn practical skills at the same time. Because of this experience, I know more about editing video and audio now than I ever did before, and these skills may be valuable for some interviewee's in their own lives; both in the job hunt, or as a hobby. So, in this way, I think the research participant gains a lot from participating in this sort of research. Of course, it has its downsides, but this method also benefits a lot from the participant feeling an increased sense of agency.

DO: I think it also gives you more control over how your story is told. Which is something we've talked about throughout this whole process, the ethics of storytelling and how to take care of, how to tell someone else's story in a way that doesn't harm them, that doesn't take the integrity out of the story. And one thing that's really cool about digital storytelling is you're telling the story the way you want to. If you're not comfortable with something you can take it out, or put it in, as opposed to if somebody else is doing that. Those power dynamics can really affect how it turns out. If that makes sense.

MS: It's like the gaze is turned inward, as opposed to gazing out.

DO: Yeah.

CP: And as you said, I had the pleasure of watching this set of stories and you all drew from your own experiences, and shared your reflections. And you created these really wonderful narratives and moments of tension that allowed you to layer voice, and audio, and still images, and moving images. So maybe we can shift a little bit, and could you each walk us through, as you wish, this creative process? Like what was that process for you? Were there moments where things clicked, or moments where you found yourself up against a wall? For future digital storytellers…

(group silence)

DO: Uh, so one moment was—

(group laughter)

CP: Its lots of pressure, future generations are going to follow your example Deborah!

(group laughter)

AC: Let me get the microphone realllly close.

CP: Speak authoritatively.

AC: Put this in all caps, in the transcript.

(group laughter)

DO: Yeah. No, I was trying to figure out, how to, like there was a moment, I hadn't figured out exactly how to go about it. It's one thing to write what you want to say, but figuring out what story you want to tell with the images is different. So it's kind of like a moment where everything clicked, but it wasn't for a great reason. I was looking at the stock footage and trying to find people who could look like me. Like stock footage of a woman that would be me, or a woman that could be my grandmother, realistically, and so…the search bar is such a dangerous place. (group laughter). Everything that came up was very Unicef-esque. A lot of children looking into cameras, pans over the horde of them, a lot of fences and women looking through fences. It was all…and there was no way to make it look any less like that. So that kind of pushed me in the direction of using personal family photos which shaped my video a lot more. So it was a good outcome, but not really for a great reason. So it kind of limits you if you didn't have those pictures, or if you didn't want to put your personal information out there like that.

IM: Well, if you don't want to use stock images, or your own personal videos, you could…animate it like I did…

(group laughter)

MS: Hot tip.

IM: I already had an interest in animation, so I was drawn to that idea. But, I was also aware that there would be some sort of limitation in stock video as a woman of colour. And I wasn't completely against the idea of home footage, but I chose animation because I wanted to do something different and push myself creatively. I wanted my own little animation I could call my own and thought this project was a great opportunity to combine my health studies and creative sides. So, if that's something anyone listening wants to do, I would recommend being very organized, and very systematic in the way you carry out your project. I would definitely storyboard, because every piece depends on the previous, so if you mess up on one in the beginning you have to redo all the slides you did after it. Be aware of pacing, because that's something you can forget in the midst of drawing everything. Know when you want things to slow down, and when you want things to speed up in accordance with your message. Three slides in the same space of time will slow down the pace and emphasize what you are saying in your audio more than ten slides in that same period of time. Conversely, ten slides in a period of time will seem smoother, and more visually interesting than the three slides, so use that if you want to emphasize visuals. Of course, this is all up to you, so I would mostly recommend A LOT of experimentation before hand, and drawing and editing simultaneously when you are actually making the digital story. The latter will help you see how your visual and pacing choices are impacting the overall story you are telling.

CP: You also had some experiments with audio, be that music, be that voice, be that piano. I don't know if anyone else wants to speak to this…

XY: Okay.

(group laughter)

LL: Targeted.

XY: Um, mine starts with a very complicated story. At first I decided to stick with the stock images, because I thought would be the safest, speaking of the copyright, or identifiable faces on the online. And later, some technical problems happened, and I almost finished my first version and I ended up losing all of them. Actually it is a good thing looking back, because it gave me another chance to re-look at what I had created, and have the courage, and be forced, to start all over again. Otherwise I wouldn't have the courage to give up what I had done and start over. And I figured that might be a good idea to reorganize my images in the order of one's daily life. That would give the images more sense, and also encourage people to look into their everyday lives, expecting them to think about some moments, although very common and ordinary, maybe more memorable than another, and not all moments in our lives can be memorized clearly, and be stored in our memory. Also the piano pieces, I also decided to add it in after I lost everything. I figured that sometimes the thoughts just start like music. It starts unexpectedly, and it plays over and over again. It's kind of the idea behind this.

MS: For me it felt like a bit of a shot in the dark. I think an important part of it was having faith in the process, knowing that you could let go of some of the expectations that surround other forms of media. Digital storytelling—I forget how we phrased it at the beginning—but it's kind of collage-like, pastiche-like, it doesn't have to be so perfect. My entry point into it was very affective, very embodied. I was thinking about this piece Toni Morrison wrote called The Site of Memory, about memoir and historical fiction, and she writes that when she's in the early stages of her creative process, it all starts with something really fleeting. Like a faint image, or a presence in the corner of the room. Something that she can sense on the peripheries. The way she describes it—it's so beautiful, like flowing water. Like the path is already there and the water just flows into it. I thought about that a lot in the digital storytelling process. Like, usually when I'm thinking through something or making art I kind of have a vague idea of what it's going to be, and I whittle it down and shape around it, but with this it felt like I was looking into an abyss, and everything just kind of sprung forth. Which is a scary process. You mentioned the word courage, Xiaoli, and I think that's a really big part of it. Um, because even though a digital story is so short and you can say so little, it's so intimate, and people will be inhabiting your story, and I think there are risks involved with people inhabiting your story. So yeah, I think that we had a lot of courage in making them.

AC: [speaking towards the mic] Brackets. There's tiny claps!

(group laughter)

LL: I think the part in the whole process of me making this story, the biggest challenge I had I remember that one day everyone was sharing their feedback on their story, and I was sitting there and I didn't say anything. Because I was so, like upset and confused with my own story, that I kind of hit rock bottom at that point. I almost wanted to completely change my story and develop a whole new script and focus more on the intergeneration of Asian Canadians instead. And I kind of sat through there. But then a day after I went back to my old script and thought, no this is the one, I should start building on this script instead. But that was my greatest challenge. And after finally accepting and loving my script, and not picking at it so much, it was smooth sailing from there. Because then I just storyboarded everything, and I just captured all the videos and ideas I wanted to get in there.

CP: So at the same time you were each the creators and authors of your own story, this was also a group process, right, even by virtue of sitting in the same room and going through some of the same exercises. Any reflections about that?

IM: Yeah definitely. Having a good community, a good group of people is important. If you are doing it by yourself, and it's just a self-project, having someone that you trust to bounce ideas off of is very valuable. And even to just talk to. Like Mia was saying, it is a very vulnerable process. So, having someone there to support you creatively and support you emotionally, it can make a huge difference. In your own ability to drive the critical, or the digital, story, in a positive way. They may also give you insight into what you should go into. Rather than being isolated in your own head, about everything, they will give you a sounding board to bounce ideas off of.

DO: Yeah. Like when I was trying to figure out if the pictures looked Unicef-esque. I said "hey guys, does this look Unicef-esque?"

(group laughter)

DO: And they said yes. Teamwork.

CP: So for sake of an outside audience, do you want to make your critique a little bit more explicit there?

DO: Um, I guess like there are moments when, depending on who you are, I'm someone who needs feedback at multiple points. It might be the smallest thing, like does this picture look right? Or it could be large things like what do you think I should do here. And knowing that everyone has different, everyone's different backgrounds really affect how they think. So they're always able to bring something that you didn't think of. Especially in the moments when you're doubting yourself, they can say no you can look at it this way, or have you tried this. It might be something you've never considered. Is that…better? (laughs)

XY: I think the support from my peers, and Andrea and Celeste, are really really important, because coming from, just as Larissa, the same as Larissa, I'm from a really science background, and haven't done a lot of critical thinking in my past few years. And no matter if it was a large problem like when I lost everything I've created, or a small problem like I didn't know if I'm expressing my ideas correctly, I got corresponding emotional and academic support from you. All of this support has very much shaped my way and logic when looking at a certain problem such as aging. And also other things in my life. It's a long-term game for me. Not only did I learn about the digital story process, I also gained a new way of thinking, for my future life.

LL: Claps!

CP: We'll have to illustrate this conversation.

(group laughter)

CP: Continue…

MS: This concept we were talking about of forcing creativity, which we touched on in the first day, really hinges on trust. And again, even on day one when we were first sharing the story of our names, that kind of required a degree of trust in other people to listen to and hold your story. And I think once you have the story, and you put it on the page, there's something very transformative

about that. So for me, at least, it continues to be a difficult process, but everyone is just such a good listener, and so attentive, and careful, and kind and passionate in how they listen. Not just listening, but activating knowledge, and building on it, and kind of—it sounds so cheesy—just like—

CP: Go for it.

(group laughter)

MS: (laughs) –growing together. Just like—yeah!

DO: Aging together?

MS: Aging together. Changing, over the life course.

(group laughter)

CP: I'll jump in for a minute, but I think also that exercise at the beginning [of telling the stories of our names], it encouraged us to get over any kind of creative block, or perfectionism.

MS: Yes.

CP: But it also did kind of deep dive into this very intimate space. I don't know if that once intentional or not—

AC: Oh, right, total accident. Never thought of it that way. (laughs)

CP: (laughs)—but by the end, but I do feel that even after the end of five days there was a very excellent—I think I said it to Mia in similarly cliché terms, but, like, awesome group dynamic. That I think kind of set the stage for the rest of the weeks.

(group silence)

CP: Okay, shifting from that, if we don't have further thoughts.

MS: How much time do we have by the way?

AC: Lots. It's 11:20.

MS: Oh, okay!

CP: We have tons of time. I'm keeping an eye.

AC: Lots and lots.

CP: So another point to discuss, that has been brought up already, is that we are deliberately an interdisciplinary group of people. What has this month taught you about the potential benefits, or

limitations, of interdisciplinary collaborative work? And, is this kind of work that you may be interested in pursuing in the future? Or you're kind of done?

IM: I definitely loved the interdisciplinary stuff this month. Because, I've always thought there needs to be more interdisciplinariness. Uh…

(group laughter)

CP: Creating new terms is definitely foundational to that.

IM: Because, you know, life is interdisciplinary! Everything interacts with everything. And by staying in silos, you just, you don't capture everything. And…so yeah, this month was more like a coming home than an exploration into the unknown. So…for some reason that's all I can think of right now, but talk, and maybe I'll jump in later.

AC: I like that phrasing that you used. It reminds me of another drum I bang, and that's how health, illness, and especially something like aging: none of these are single sector problems, right? Of course there are many more issues— probably most issues of the human condition are never single sector issues. And yet, there are so many ways that those kind of big problems, or big issues, the real things that we ought to as individuals and as a society, we should be paying attention to, often get divvied up by sector. So something like aging becomes a biomedical problem. And of course there are very real biomedical aspects and facets of aging. But as those sectors start to coalesce, or tamp down, we begin to only think about health as a biomedical problem, for example. Or we get used to thinking about art as only a hobby or something that other people do for fun or something like that. That's then we get these silos. I think of them as ossifications, or calcifications, of our imagination, which limit our ability to problem-solve, and limit the ways that things at the policy level or even things like research funding are directed. So I think it's a very important point. If these past weeks have done anything to get those juices flowing for you, I'm very glad to hear you say that. It goes to show a complex issue like aging can't be addressed just by channelling our energies in one disciplinary direction. We've got to find ways to, um, accumulate, and welcome, and sustain, these complex and multi-vocal, multi-disciplinary ways of understanding what it means to grow older. Because without that, we just address one facet at a time. And once we've gone through all the facets, if indeed we do, those parts of the problems re-emerge, or emerge in a new way, and we won't be prepared to be ahead of these things. For me, which is why we're in a place like this. Why we should be thinking about this in a university.

IM: Yeah. And Cindy Tse [Jackman Humanities Institute Scholars-in-Residence Program Coordinator] is just doing a fantastic job in capturing the interdisciplinary nature of program implementation. She's brought a bunch of guest speakers that have highlighted the need for interdisciplinarity and communication in the industry. Communication between things- that is something I'm thinking more and more about. Like you were saying, calcification of certain areas- by divvying up academic institutions, knowledge calcifies. I imagine it more as try to solve a problem by, like, pouring into a mould, but then, as you pour into each section, there are gaps left in-between. People in "the industry"; it could apply to any industry, I think. As a health studies person however, I see this on a policy level, I see this on an institutional hospital, university, or mental health services level. You get psychology people and policy makers to work on a project, they will do there own thing. They might try to communicate with each other, but nothing really happens. I think people are realizing that there needs to be someone there who can do both. Who can be flexible, and communicate between groups with softer communication skills that are often,

like, ridiculed. Without someone in this role, the communication gaps that arise, people fall through them. Like when the policy people aren't completely informed by the science and the science people are not informed by the policy, and they remain calcified in their own institutions, it is the people they are all trying to serve who suffer. And health that suffers. Those are often the gaps in our health delivery nowadays. We've gone a long way with technology, and biomedicine has done a lot of good. But the problems that remain, like mental illness, or the delivery of services, are limited by the fact that we cannot communicate as well as we should. And that people don't feel heard, or feel isolated, and that people feel that policy is already as good as it's gonna be, so any problem you are experiencing is because of you.

AC: So a systems problem that gets translated into an individual problem.

IM: Yeah. Like, traditional biomedicine is very good. It does what it needs to do, and continues to save a lot of lives. But it has the risk of being interpreted as prestigious, maybe even elitist, by common audiences. It speaks in a way that gives more value to it's own internal processes than to an individual's personal experience receiving treatment. Of course, the internal processes of biomedicine are valid, but the way they are implemented may be interpreted by patients as a saying that, OF COURSE, the treatment is supposed to work, maybe you are the problem! So, again the silos between researchers, policy makers, policy communicators and patients leave people to fall through the cracks. Of course, researchers are doing what they think is best when they propose health care systems and programs there just needs to be more consideration in what is being said and what is being interpreted and that is done by closing academic and institutional silo's through interdisciplinarity.

CP: I think, picking up on part of what you are saying there, is this value given to solutions. Answers, and evidence-based solutions. And answers. And perhaps there's also room to present stories in and of themselves, or to ask questions and open these spaces. I don't think any of your digital stories offered an answer. Rather, they opened these spaces of tension, and I think they have the potential to have left your audiences with those tensions. I think often what can happen, including in interdisciplinary settings, is that a lot of value is given to a certain type of rational argumentation, which might then be "illustrated" by a story that is understood as beside, or supplementary to, the "real point". And I think there's a lot of space to give value to things that are not prescriptive. And ways of telling that don't give closure.

MS: Yeah I think there's this impulse to suture ruptures, whenever they occur, instead of just leaving them be. Which makes sense, because it can be overwhelming, and painful, and even existential, to exist in those ruptures.

CP: Yes.

MS: …Even talking about rupture and suture, and kind of underlying what you were saying, Iqra, is this idea about language and grammar, and if we're searching for a new grammar for aging, we need all of the vocabularies and languages that we can get in one room. *How* we get those in the room, that's another question. But even thinking about the metaphors that have been brought up over the course of this month—geological, poetic, neural, and so on—and thinking about the resonances among all those metaphors, for me has been pretty transformative.

(group silence)

DO: What was the question again?

MS: Yeah I was just thinking…

CP: Oh just speak!

MS: Oh, interdisciplinary…

CP: Yeah, roughly about interdisciplinarity. But just, jump off.

MS: I don't know. Because we've all been saying this, like our backgrounds shape what we bring to the conversation, but I'm struggling, I want to get more specific about it. But I'm blanking.

DO: Yeah.

CP: And if you have thoughts further, we can also make a collage of a conversation.

IM: While I think the aim was to have our backgrounds coalesce together and shape our perspective, but I think the lesson is that we don't have a singular background. Yes, we may have studied in a specific area, but I think one way or another we're all artists all along; maybe not in its professional form, but in its truest form. Again, by nature we're interdisciplinary. …Yeah.

AC: Xiaoli, I'm going to put you on the spot. Because…

MS: Classic.

AC: Because I'm like that.

(group laughter)

XY: Okay.

AC: Because in your case, and even in your story, I think one way of reading or interpreting your story is kind of a reflection on your disciplinary home base. Your mathematics, your computer science, your interest in quantification. These are really significant and important areas of training. And yet your story was, in a sense, trying to imagine how to think about aging beyond the numbers – the very things that you're trained in. So I wonder if you might speak a bit to whether that something that you came into the project intending to do? Was that a happy accident? Where did your self-reflection, in that story, how did that come to be? If you're able to, give us a sense of that.

XY: It's actually a happy accident. Because I didn't expect myself to think like that, but it turns out I just can't help quantifying everything that I encounter. I just figured-

(group laughter)

XY: I just figured when I was thinking about age there are many different ways of measuring time, and we have different units for them, and they keep changing throughout the history. For age is all,

and appears to be all about time. Which is unfair. Because if we cannot give age multiple measurements than we might lose a lot of perspectives on interpreting aging itself. We could have seen aging like many different kinds of process. But if we do not have different ways of imagining age than we are constrained in our own perspective. So our thinking, if we can interpret age from another perspective, by simply changing its measurement, then it might open up a whole new world for us. So its' a happy accident I happened to think about that. And finally it turns out to be my own story.

AC: One of the things that I'm wondering, this is an interpretation, it's actually not forwarding the conversation at all, but.

(group laughter)

CP: It's okay, we don't need to forward.

AC: Phew! Because it occurred to me that the experiences that you describe in your digital story-- your love and attraction to numbers, and this sensuous moment of eating the donut--what those two things have in common are the sublime. This aesthetic category, the sublime, multiple cultures have their own iterations of this. The one I'm familiar with comes out of late 18th and early 19th century Europe, what's called the Romantic movement. Despite its name, "Romanticism" doesn't have anything to do with love: it has to do with registering the spontaneous overflow of feeling. The sublime in particular is an appreciation of either vastness, or its opposite, the minute. In each case there's a sense of almost overwhelming wonder. Examples of the sublime that would be often cited are seeing a giant mountain, or the enormity of the sea. But the sublime is also possible in any kind of sense experience, for example, of taste. Or numbers. The ever-repeating. What do they call it, when a number contains a decimal point that never ever ever stops repeating? Like an infinite…

XY: Something (laughs).

AC: [talking to the mic] We're going to do research and put that in (laughs). You know, that thing. [Edit: it's called a non-terminating, non-repeating decimal]. It seems to me that in a sense was what your background prepared you to do is to think about the sublime potential of aging: through the sense experience of taste, but also through your numbers. That to me is an opportunity where you're primed to listen to the interdisciplinary nature, perhaps, that we all have, as Iqra was suggesting earlier. That seemed to me to be one way of explaining, or resolving, if you will, which is the wrong word, but resolving well, what would make someone who's so interested in quantifying everything have this sense experience. It seems to me that these big concepts allow us to see these moments of transition between disciplines. And I think the sublime is one example of such a linking concept.

XY: Actually that also made myself wonder, because I didn't expect myself to have that kind of experience. Indeed at that time when I was biting into the donut, each of my feelings were signified- no, magnified—every sound that I was hearing, the horns on the street, and people walking across the window, and I was biting into the donut, each and every of the feeling felt so big. And also what is interesting is that I found the donut was about the number zero. A donut is a circular thing, and when I was first biting into the donut I started in one place, and when I finished it I was still in the same place. It's like, I start and end at the same spot. The number zero is also

like that. Zero in math indicates nothing, and all. It is the end but also the start. So it's an interesting relationship between number and the donut and also life.

AC: You're describing in one way the experience of aging.

XY: Yeah. So it's also an interesting fact.

AC: I'm glad I put you on the spot.

(group laughter, and then silence)

CP: I don't want to put anyone on the spot, but, if you have further thoughts after we can also make a collage of conversation, so don't feel pressed. Unless it helps you.

AC: It is 11:42 [a.m.], just keep our eyes on that clock.

CP: I think we've covered most of the ground in terms of the group process…

AC: Did we have the question about authenticity?

CP: We touched a bit on that, we can go back to it if you like. We did talk a bit about this idea of counter narrative, or not. And representation. But someone had brought up a question on our Google docs about what authenticity has to do with digital storytelling. What this means. Perhaps how we can push on this idea…

(group silence)

AC: Just wanted to make sure that we got that.

(group silence)

CP: Okay. Or if there were any further thoughts on the group process, or the language of critical making, that you wanted to share…Or not!

MS: For me this process has been very unsettling. In a good way, not a bad way. Something that's been preoccupying me is thinking about how colonization fits into this, and where the decolonial is—and where it is not currently—in our thinking. We've talked about critical race theory as an intervention into age studies. But then there are also these ways we are describing time, and the philosophies we're implicitly drawing on, that really stem from Indigenous worldviews. Even this idea that Elder Wendy Philips brought up on the first day of our program: what does it mean to live well, to be good to each other, in relation with one another? I wonder how we might use intergenerational storytelling as a tool or model for that. I guess maybe that's a further line of inquiry. So yeah, I just wanted to offer that.

(group thinking/listening)

MS: That wasn't a response to your question, I'm sorry, that was a total…

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CP: Oh no! Again, you don't need to respond all together. It's the spark.

AC: These questions are provocations, too. I think—and if you're taking this in another direction, stop me, but: I certainly hope that as much as we're able to take away in our hands, these creative "outcomes", whatever they may be, I hope that there's also, shall we say, a bit of rubble to contend with at the end of this process. I'm evoking a bit the Gilbert Garcin image called "Work in Progress" that we discussed at the beginning of the month (http://www.artnet.com/artists/gilbert-garcin/work-in-progress-P0hHvUil1mjnlIdcjl42pQ2). For all that we build in a project like this, I think it's important to make space for, and understand, that in any building endeavour—if there isn't any rubble, that's a bit too tidy. If we end up with a big resolution, that's very easy…that's like imagining a complex problem like aging follows the tidy organization of an intro, methods, discussion, conclusion, like a research poster would have us believe. Being able to recognize what remains either unanswered by our work, what remains unanswered by the field, that the field is at the current time unprepared to answer. Any research that is done must be prepared in some way to think…ethically and practically about limitation. About its entanglement in, as you're suggesting colonial enterprises. Or how research ought to respond to a call to decolonizeage studies, for example. What would that look like? What are we prepared to say that could look like, as a result of the work that we've done?

I think that through the questions that Celeste has been asking of us here that we're highlighting maybe little moments where we might each continue to develop answers to this. Not only answers that we should just "think about", but maybe even to concretize this thinking that's needed. Maybe this is something that we can add to a later transcript. What might some of responses to these limitations look like? Deborah, you brought up the question of stock images and the matter of race. This is an issue, the iconography of racism, with a long theoretical lineage. So how does the work that we've done here prepare us uniquely to address that history? Maybe we take a small and meaningful concrete step to addressing these problems, by deciding: Who's the best person to do that? Can we act collectively to do that? We're doing it a little bit better here for the purposes of the future. A very close future. Because if we think about ourselves as aging beings, we're immediately, and intimately invested in these questions--or ought to be, because that's our future.

MS: Yeah. I also think it's important to say: "We're not prepared to do this kind of work yet. We're not prepared to decolonize age studies. But we need to be." This is something that's coming up as, like, a footnote in a roundtable discussion in the last week. So I think recognizing the ways we aren't prepared, and then, more importantly, thinking about how we can prepare ourselves…Yeah. I really appreciate that.

CP: This would be a beautiful, poetic moment to end amidst the rubble.

MS: Oooh.

AC: Oh. And we're at one hour and one minute!

(soft group laughter)

AC: We are just crushing. Shall I push the button? Literally and figuratively?

CP: Push the red button.