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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CHAIRING AN INQUIRY: AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION INTO AN ART TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE OF PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL BUILDING, by DONNA K. JONES, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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**CHAIRING AN INQUIRY:  
AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION INTO AN ART TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE  
OF PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL BUILDING**

by

**DONNA K. JONES**

Under the Direction of Dr. Michelle Zoss

**ABSTRACT**

This self-study research exists because of the pioneers in an arts-based research methodology, a/r/tography, those who provided an opening that included built-in affordances to recognize and support becoming as an artist, researcher, and teacher through a lens of three-dimensional space. This study explored the connections of an artist teacher's experience by examining an existing practice of woodworking through building a chair, and how the combined identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher reflect an evolving practice of becoming that leans towards making as knowing, to explore the connection between chairing an identity, physically building chairs, and connecting through knowing and building in a physical and metaphorical three-dimensional sense. During this study, I constructed 132 pieces of art, while metaphorically relating the process of building to my researcher and teacher identity. I then analyzed the data and the process of building through the renderings of a/r/tography while questioning the epistemology of artmaking and research as a singular experience. The rendering of metaphor provided an interpretive walk-through experience of building chairs as a process for becoming that informed knowing as an artist, researcher, and teacher. This study addressed the need for more arts-based educational

research that centers visual art as the question of knowing in a three-dimensional space, and how arts-based research counters the oppressive nature of scholarship in the academy, as a method of outreach that meets the needs of a diverse student population, and offers a loose guide for preservice teachers to follow as active participants in the process of art education.

INDEX WORDS: A/r/tography, arts-based research, arts-based knowing, sculpture, three-dimensional design, becoming, form, knowing, building, constraints, artist, researcher, teacher, self-study, arts-based educational research, chair, chairing, wood.



**CHAIRING AN INQUIRY:  
AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION INTO AN ART TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE  
OF PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL BUILDING**

by

Donna K. Jones

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

the Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2023

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Mom and Dad,  
two of the greatest people I have ever known.  
I love you both.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have written this acknowledgement page in my head about a hundred times since the first time I was assigned to read a dissertation years ago, and realized it was a thing. True to form, I resisted adding words to paper for many reasons. First, I want offer my heartfelt thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Michelle Zoss, the one that didn't bat an eye when I said I wanted to build chairs for my dissertation study. You just asked me what building chairs as a study looked like, and then kept asking and asking as I followed this path. I don't know what comes next, but I am thankful that we sit at this table together, in this moment, right now. No words I can say will ever be enough.

To my committee members—Thank you all for sitting at my table. Dr. Sue Kasun, you helped me see what is possible in education, how it can look different, how it should be different, and I will be forever grateful. Dr. Melanie Davenport, thank you for pushing me right back to art even when I tried to wander away. Dr. April Munson, thank you for the many years of support and encouragement because I don't know if I would be here without you.

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## Planting a Seed, a Preface

I started 2014 with a simple resolution: I would say yes to every opportunity that came my way for the entire year. I knew that whatever it was, I would say yes, and then I would figure out how to do the thing. This resolution was not a new concept for me because I spent most of my life overcoming and adapting to academic and social obstacles. What made this experience different was being intentional to saying yes and seeing the process through. The shift in my perspective, something as simple as a yes, had a profound effect on how I saw myself. The thing I find most significant about my year of yes was that in the moments when I willingly accepted different challenges by saying yes, it was the process of *doing* that changed me the most. I still find myself reflecting on the experiences of 2014, the year I applied to and started my master's program and created a change in my life through the simple act of saying yes. Saying yes to graduate school, saying yes to experiences, and saying yes to hard and scary things became significant to my path of becoming. Since this study is a/r/tography research, I briefly discuss my ways of knowing as an artist, researcher, and teacher. I end this preface with how I came to building a chair and how the idea of chairing, which was fueled by building a table, became the visual focus for my research.

### As Artist

I see art in almost everything, but my curiosities generally lead my mind to undoing and redoing what I see to figure out how something is made. I imagine what it is, what it could be, and most often, I imagine how it came to be. I also have the urge to touch everything. When I see raw material, I can see a form inside and can imagine and see what that material could be. I spend most of my time conceiving new art and visualizing the steps I need to take to realize these ideas. Since I am a woodworker, I spend most of my time planning and organizing how I will execute any given project. I make notes in journals, I read a lot, and I fill up countless sticky notes and scratch paper. There is little organization to my note taking, but the messiness of it all helps me to think through

whatever I am working on. The messiness and disorganization of materials gives me an opportunity to explore my thinking by rearranging and reordering my notes and drawings until I am satisfied that my thinking and planning are viable to create something new. When I have exhausted all possibilities and I begin repeating some of the similar steps with the same findings, I know I am ready to build the thing. I say all of this to convey my overarching interest in the process of making, doing, searching, rearranging, and becoming, all are a necessity in realizing a final product.

### **As Researcher**

Long before I applied to my doctoral program, I imagined myself as an academic and scholar like the way I see a form in raw materials. It was summer 2014, my first semester as a graduate student in an MAT art education program, when I knew that I could see a terminal degree in my future. Something happened in the classroom that I am not sure I could explain, but I will try here. During an Issues in Art Education class, I was challenged beyond anything I had ever experienced. It was the first time in all my schooling that I was assigned to read an entire academic book cover to cover. The process was somewhere between love and hate, and to this day I cannot remember the name of the text, but I do know it was full of educational theory. I also realize the name of the text is not as important as the opportunities I found in that text and in the class. I found myself searching for definitions, but layered into the definitions and meanings behind them, I began to see and become more aware of myself. In this moment I became aware of how much I knew and how much I did not know. I think it was the experience, the struggle, and the occasional breakthrough of knowing that intrigued me the most. I remember wondering if the true measure of the class and the information I had been exposed to would feed my curiosity. I wondered if *knowing* would come, as I began reflectively undoing and redoing my thinking, I also began a figurative rearranging of the sticky notes about the class in my head and my potential for ongoing learning in the academy.

## As Teacher

From my earliest memories, I have loved wood. My dad was a carpenter and a woodworker by trade, and as a parent he was a model teacher. Some of my earliest memories of him were during the summer months when he would load our family into the family car to return to his jobsite, after hours, to do whatever needed to be done to finish a job. My dad was always working on something during his free time too, building something, or repairing something around the house. I could often be found at my dad's side while he worked at home and can remember sitting on his sawhorse while he was cutting wood. I always wanted to help, but I mainly just watched and listened. I am the third born of my parents four children. Of the four children, I am the first girl, and I am the only child that took to woodworking and found a love in building things. When I think about it now, I can feel that gravity of my experience alongside my dad, the time he took to teach me about tools and safety, and the bond we shared through his work. When my dad passed in 2001, after a long illness, I was relieved for him and devastated for me. He was my teacher, my mentor, my parent, my protector, and my biggest cheerleader.

When I think about who I am as a teacher and how I come to know teaching, I think about my upbringing, my model of my dad as teacher, and the lessons I learned early in my life. I also think of my fourth-grade teacher, a teacher who intentionally made art part of the daily general curriculum. Fourth grade was the only grade that I did very well in school, I felt celebrated, and it was the only time I can remember excelling for an entire school year. In fourth grade I decided I wanted to be a teacher so that I could provide a similar experience for my students like my teacher did for me. I knew I could provide opportunities for students to learn, connect, understand, and know, just as my fourth-grade teacher did for me. I had no idea what I needed to do to be a teacher because I did not have any family members or relatives who were teachers. I just knew I needed and wanted to be on the path to being a teacher.

## Why a Chair?

I believe there is a need to explain what a chair means to me and how I arrived at a chair as a concept for a study. I have known what a chair is for my entire life. I grew up in a much different socioeconomic class than I live in today, and we have always had chairs. Chairs physically and metaphorically brought my family together every night for dinner, and for breakfast on Sunday morning. Chairs were foundational to family gatherings, we had extra chairs for holiday gatherings, and I bought a special rocking chair to rock my daughters in when they were babies. I have sat in chairs while I waited, and I have sat in chairs as I received some gut-wrenching news. I have made significant life plans while sitting in a chair, I purchased a home sitting in a chair, and I am sitting in a chair as I type these words. I have two beautiful chairs in my house that I bought because they were beautiful pieces of art, but I do not care if anyone sits on them. I would be willing to say that I have interacted with a chair every day of my life.

When I started to think about what a chair could mean as research, I immediately began to imagine the possibilities and potential meaning of chairs. My thinking also conjured up an image of my committee chair, who is a chair, but not a chair as I am describing. My chair, as my advisor, is a metonym for a chair, as a head of a group or a director. I feel like chairs are ordinary. Schwarz (2021) describes the commonplace of chairs and their direct relationship to the woods. This means that the wood carries a sensual or spiritual quality like the soulfulness of handmade art, and the wood is familiar to me. The function of a chair can be comfortable, but they can also be terribly uncomfortable. Chairs are made from many different materials. I have spent a lot of time taking notes about chairs, drawing chairs, and searching various media for images of chairs. I have imagined what possibilities could be opened because of a chair. I have heard of chairs described as feminine or masculine, while not as a person per se, but characteristics of a style of a chair and not as an indication of a gender that can sit on the chair. Chairs are not discriminatory, although the

position of a chair in a meeting could be used to signify a hierarchy. Chairs cross all social classes, ethnicities, genders, politics, and so on. I think about the chair as a site for creating equitable spaces, a chair as a place for contemplation, and a place to introspect. This study will be the first time I have ever built a chair and the prospect is terrifying. This is also my first time researching and writing a dissertation, which is also terrifying.

### **Artist's Note**

In my dissertation document, I have included photos of building a chair and written about how I relate the process of building to my practice as an artist, researcher, and teacher. I have constructed text to go along with my a/r/tographic process of making as a hybrid of visual and text. In doing so, I have fallen in line with forms of acceptable epistemology to make my entrance in the academy. I have taken some of the parts of my knowing, a knowing that is wholly based on the process of building and made it fit into research. Since the 1990's, arts-based research studies have seen tremendous growth, with findings that continually challenge how we know, what we know, and how visual representation inform the knowing (Graham & Zwirn, 2010; Hausman, 2010; Leggo, 2008). Despite the long-term development of research through the arts, little has changed in the way the studies are reported although there are solid examples of leveraging visuals in research (de Cosson 2003; Sousanis 2015). Additionally, preservice teacher education studies range from building with a three-dimensional material such as clay to articulate a teaching pedagogy (Groman, 2014) to conducting interviews based on collages created by teacher candidates (Hattingh & de Koch, 2008). Teacher participants in both studies were found to emerge with a stronger sense of self—a desired attribute for teachers.

To visually guide the viewer/reader of this document, I included a variety of images, including traditionally-sized and placed images embedded within the written text, as well as larger images that are not marked with language. The large, full-page images contained in between the chapters of this dissertation are further details and representations of my study. The intentionality of the full-page images is in reference to the existing studies mentioned above; therefore I created an opportunity to leverage images as an inclusive approach to knowing that aligns with artists who have questioned the value of knowing that is presented only

as words or text (Kosuth, 1965). The large-scale images are therefore not labelled. The images *are* the research and the doing and as such are a necessary step for honoring the process that marks this dissertation study as an a/r/tographic exploration of my experience. Moreover, they are all part of one figure that is located throughout the document in order to facilitate the reader's visual progression through the study. To attend to the form of APA, small-scale images of the full-page image plates are below and include a figure number and title. Below is the complete figure, Figure 0, *Untitled (seven parts)*.



Figure 0. *Untitled (seven parts)*.



## 1 Introduction

In graduate school I convinced the members of my cohort to develop an art education unit based on gears. It became a bit of a running joke throughout my time in the program, but it was also indicative of ways in which I think about teaching and learning. Just as time moves and people evolve, lesson plans are a guide for a life that is in a constant state of motion. One of the first articles I read about a/r/tography discussed how Irwin (2013), in the process of becoming, shifted from what an art education practice might mean to exploring what art education, as a “practice set in motion,” could do (p. 198). When I first read that sentence it resonated with me because it aligned with some of my own ideas. The motion and movement continued, and as I approached my own dissertation study, the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic and *dissertating* during a pandemic became a reality. In the aftermath of the March 2020 announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world began to shut down. In this time frame, traditional, face-to-face, elementary, and secondary schools closed their doors to students, teachers, and staff (Kaden, 2020). Over the next few months, school districts scrambled to develop contingency plans relating to the virus spread and the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year (CDC, 2020). Among the plans discussed were traditional face to face instruction, virtual remote learning options, and varying hybrid models in between. Around the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), continually updated recommendations to limit exposure to COVID-19 while calling the pandemic a “rapidly evolving situation.” Considering the abrupt shift in the education of K-12 and higher education students to online learning due to the pandemic, it became important to look at my own teaching. This global context, coupled with my commitment to authentic reflective practice, led to an embrace of methodology that supports research, art making, and the action research orientation of a/r/tography.



In this chapter, I describe how my process of building a table for a doctoral course combined with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced my thinking about building a study and completing my dissertation. I talk about the personal and professional growth I found to be significant in completing a self-study as well as how the framework of a/r/tography helped me think through the ways I approach the study. I end the chapter with a description of the significance of my study to myself and the broader education community as well as include an overview of the entire study.

### **A/r/tography: Building a Study**



*Figure 1. Decolonizing Education Table*

The beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic coincided with my third year in a doctoral program in teaching and learning. During that time, I was enrolled in a course called Decolonizing Education with Dr. Sue Kasun. The course ultimately shifted my thinking from a position of trying to adapt and fit into a doctoral space, to a place known as cognitive diffusion or deliterization as a way of knowing, which acknowledges the affordances of varying forms of representation through the senses (Eisner, 2008), where I saw an opportunity to build something with my hands as a way of articulating my own knowing. I built a table as my final project. (figure 1) The parameters for the project were clear yet vague; work on something educational that decolonizes the classroom. Little did I know, but building a table, my first, would challenge and change the trajectory of my planned course of study. In fairness, building a table seemed like play, and I marveled at the opportunity to earn credit in a doctoral program for building a table. I had no idea at the time how fruitful an assignment could be for my knowing and learning. My own making experience is something I have always enjoyed, something I am good at, but I had never made a connection between general understanding and my knowledge of woodworking. Sousanis (2018) describes a similar feeling of familiarity when he began drawing comics as a connection to his childhood, and where he could leverage the comics to convey complex ideas in a dissertation and beyond. Up until this course, I spent a great deal of time lost in the middle of the thinking, reading, and writing. I had experience with grappling many different points of view. I tried to relate to all the ideas I encountered, as if they were my own, but at the same time I resisted what I knew was not authentic to my experience, to my understanding, and to my ways of knowing.

In this third year of my program, I found myself completely uncertain of the work I wanted to do and questioned the viability and purpose of my ideas. When I registered for the Decolonizing Education course, I was challenged to take all my experiences and thinking in my courses and relate it back to my practices as artist, researcher, and teacher through something that I made with my own

hands and that did not have to rely just on words. Up until this point, I felt most of the coursework in my program did not embrace the arts as knowing. My perceptions of the Decolonizing Education course quickly shifted as we were instructed to develop our own learning opportunity, as in, learn something new and present the thing in class. Kasun and López (2017) describe this learning opportunity metaphorically as “studying a tree’s relationship to the forest rather than the individual parts that make it a tree” (p.3). The opening provided in this doctoral class setting was in such stark contrast to my own experience of class time devoted to memorization and testing. This was the type of occasional assignment that I thrived on throughout my own experience growing up in public school. I knew I could do things differently; I knew I could articulate my purpose, and I knew I could build something. Building something by means of wood construction was something familiar, although I understood the assignment also needed to be something I had never done. Building a table fit the course requirements and Dr. Kasun challenged me to learn by using my experience and knowledge as an artist and a teacher.

In March 2020, COVID-19 made headlines throughout the world. For the first time in my life, I found myself at home teaching high school art virtually for the remainder of the school year. My doctoral classes also shifted to a virtual format, and I found myself with the experience of having more time. While building my table, I began reading about an arts-based methodology known as a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). I was originally critical of the methodology because it sounded gimmicky and I questioned its relevance to the larger field of educational research. However, the more I worked to make sense of my own understanding of research in relation to building a table, the more I returned to a/r/tography and the work of de Cosson (2003, 2004). Gouzouasis (2008), Irwin (2004, 2013), Leggo (2008), Sousanis (2018), and Springgay (2004, 2008). I soon began to realize that a/r/tography was an opportunity, like building a table for a doctoral class,

to look beyond my own preconceived notions of research and to explore what knowledge construction and research could mean.

As I processed the experience of building a table and as I started to embrace a/r/tography as an opportunity, I turned my focus to building a study where the pieces of my understanding would function individually but would also work together to construct new knowing. For example, my experiences with reading and producing educational research were more fruitful when the descriptions and visuals offered me a way to visualize the work. If I could see what is happening in a study, even if only to imagine it in my own mind, then the meaning and importance becomes clearer. My understandings about research have always been filtered through this visual way of knowing that is sometimes in conflict with the ways that researchers describe their work. I thrived when reading research that showed ways of knowing that embraced embodied and visual means for communicating concepts and findings through more inclusive approaches to inquiry (Knowles & Cole, 2008). I found comfort and reassurance in scholarship that detailed the ways that language has become a conventional means for communication, but showed how language can also be insufficient for communication of the multifaceted ways people experience the world (Eisner, 2002; Sharafizad et al., 2020; Zoss, 2009). In other words, knowing and communicating are more than how we write or speak. I conceptualize the work of this study, then, as an a/r/tography and as a process of building that values the attempt to “construct the very thing one is attempting to make sense of” (Springgay, 2008, p. 159). I am making sense of what it means to communicate my knowing, through building chairs, in ways that provide a visual vocabulary to convey complex concepts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this a/r/tography self-study I examined my experience as a practicing artist, high school art teacher, part-time university instructor, and novice researcher who is making the transition to a

full-time university-level position of teaching future teachers while building a chair. As described in my introduction, it was during the making portion of a doctoral course that led me to look further into connections among my current knowing in relation to my experiences. Self-study research is about personal and professional growth (Knowles & Cole, 1998), and while the discovery can be individually significant it can also be informative to the broader teacher education community.

According to Zeichner (2005), we have a limited understanding of the nature of the instructional interactions of teacher educators and teacher education students. By looking at my own practices as artist, researcher, and teacher, I can begin to attend to the subtleties of my own making, researching, and teaching to discover *how it is made*, and begin to reassemble and reimagine my teaching and research experience as a chair and as a dissertation. I proposed a deliberate search for understanding of how we know, and through self-study expected a level of awareness of the complexities of teaching. The following questions, within the theoretical lens of a/r/tography allowed me to make connections between my experience as artist, researcher, and teacher.

My research questions are:

- 1) In what ways does my art making, researching, and teaching overlap and inform each other while building a chair?
- 2) What does a systematic practice do to help me think through all the aspects of my making, researching, and teaching?

## Building a Theoretical Framework



*Figure 2. My First, Hand-Built Continuous Armchair, 4/29/2022*

To build a chair, I needed a prior understanding of a chair: What constitutes a chair? I required an understanding of wood types, how the wood grain runs, and methods for making sturdy joints. I also needed an ability to use measurements to ensure stability, have knowledge of using tools, and a plan. In thinking through a plan for a study that allowed myself to explore knowing in relation to my experience and knowing my teaching practice, I proposed an a/r/tography study. To fully understand the ways I thought through knowing as an artist, researcher, and teacher, I discuss chairing as a process of knowing and how I use a/r/tography as a frame for my work.

### **Chairing as a Process, Not Product**

Before a chair becomes a chair, it begins as lumber, with an acknowledgement that before it was lumber it was a tree, and before that it was a seed in the soil. A chair is a seat typically having four legs and a back for one person. This means that a chair follows a particular shape, has

recognizable features, and serves the purpose of being a seat. Dewey (1958) tells us that “the presence of things of the generic form renders them knowable” (p. 210). The learned classification allows us to understand what a chair is when we encounter it. Similarly, objects become works of art based on an artist’s exploration of reality, where the objects become an expression of an idea (Hausman, 1967). By understanding what a chair is before it is a chair, and knowing that objects are an exploration of reality, we can see the process of chairing. Chairing, as a process of doing, is based on building a chair as part of a studio art practice while exploring aspects of research and teaching with a conceptual written maquette, this dissertation, created for research discovery. By interrogating my own practice through research aimed at disorienting the knowable existing structures of being, we can see what lies in between the identities or folds of the artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2004). While Orbe (2021) suggests that class and background frame a need to use everyday objects as a point of reference to discuss complex issues. The chairs are a knowable part of my experience where examining existing objects through knowing, literal and metaphorical, reveal an individual, overlapping, and relational parts of my practice as artist, researcher, and teacher.

In the rest of this chapter, I talk through the purpose for an a/r/tography study and the importance of focusing on an active studio practice and participating in the overall process. I discuss how a/r/tographers attend to making as knowing, and how the connections between the concepts of artist, researcher, and teacher are woven together. I also discuss the overlap of the research on experience and how different scholars arrive at similar ideas on how our experience informs and shapes knowing. Finally, I talk about the specific renderings relating to a/r/tography that researchers use for their inquiry, and how these renderings fit the ways I am thinking about this work.

### **A/r/tography**

The last several decades have seen an increase in the interest of arts-based research through applying artistic approaches to qualitative research (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Published handbooks

on qualitative research now contain chapters on arts-based research and there are several publications based entirely on arts-based research, such as *Arts-based Research* (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Rolling, 2013), *Method Meets Art: Arts-based Research Practice* (Leavy, 2015), and the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Some scholars define arts-based research by dividing it into three distinct categories: a studio-arts practice, a social science inquiry, and therapy (Siegesmund, 2012), while others point out the ongoing commitment from arts-based researchers to shift dominant views in the academy to connect researchers and research reports like dissertations to the actual, lived, and embodied life of the research and researcher (Cole & Knowles, 2008). My study can be categorized as a studio-arts practice inquiring into my embodied experience as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Essentially, arts-based research has been credited with disrupting and extending the qualitative paradigm to include ways of knowing that include and go beyond language and printed words as the only way of communicating research (Leavy, 2015) where the arts provide insights and understandings in ways that linguistic methods alone cannot touch (O'Donoghue, 2009). This shift in thinking creates openings to explore new ways of knowing and being in the world.

Building a framework for chairing an a/r/tography study requires an understanding of a/r/tography. A/r/tography research is a way of knowing and a way of explaining a phenomenon within the folds of research, and a way of re-imagining or uncovering layers within the social world (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). The folds of the research are the seams where the overlapping parts of the identities of the artist, teacher, and researcher come together (Springgay, 2004). Moreover, the folds are recognized through perception, or the senses, as they relate to the three identities of the artist, researcher, teacher, and are known only in totality where there are no independent identifying parts (Springgay et al., 2008). Simply put, the slashes in the word a/r/tography might suggest a separation of the artist, researcher, and teacher but they instead point to the figurative relational



folds of these identities that scholars explore. For example, when building a chair, each piece of wood is identified by the naming of the parts such as an arm, a leg, or a seat. In totality the object is known as a chair and accordingly the folds are literally the *unseen* mortise and tenon joints, or the felt experience of touching, sensing, and interacting with the chair. The relational overlap and how the *thing* is connected becomes an ongoing question. It is through a perceptive understanding of multimodality, where each individual part of an inquiry, or metaphorically a chair, serves as representation for the connectedness (LeBlanc et al., 2015). This exploration of knowing can be seen in the chair, but shares spaces in the folds with the senses and words.

Beyond the act of building a chair, the research process becomes a weaving of concepts, activities, and feelings that reveal the language of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004). The relational connections of the individual pieces of wood create the object of a chair, while the research and the writing serve to connect the overall process of chairing. If language is inseparable from education, visual language as communication such as chairing as a process can then provide a clearer picture for knowing within a complex system of understanding (McCarty & Lee, 2014). This means that by building a chair, interacting with the chair, thinking about the building process for a chair, and writing about chairing can reveal new patterns of knowledge (Springgay et al, 2008). A/t/tography research is a not a bridge to, but a rupture where new actions can unfold in the borderlands (Springgay et al., 2005). Kasun (2016) uses the metaphor of a chain to discuss ways of knowing and the limitations of borders where the chain only works when the chain is whole. In this sense, the borderlands are a site for learning and development that acknowledges the value in the ways of knowing throughout a search for an unknown.

A/r/tography is built on the theory of the rhizome, which describes how the learning process is presented as knowing while the research grows. Within the idea of the rhizome there is betweenness, which can be described as a slow and purposeful transition of change. As previously

discussed, a/r/tography is built on the sense of betweenness, which has also been called the folds of the research (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). While there is no explicit definition of betweenness, it can be understood through the process of a/r/tography in a few different ways. For one, the notion of betweenness can describe the rhizomatic nature of inquiry, and the growth of the rhizome that occurs in multiple directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This means that there is more to know within, throughout, and beyond the visualization of the growth of the rhizome or the connection of parts of a chair. Secondly, the betweenness refers to the liquid quality of an inquiry that is created through continuous forms of reflectivity (Springgay et al., 2005). Thus, the understanding of reflectivity is of a process that can inform and inspire new directions based on thinking through what has occurred or what might occur. Finally, a/r/tographic research refers to the betweenness as a concept of *métissage*, which is the nature of weaving in various identities, theory, practice, and poesis that allows for a deeper understanding over time (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). The significance of betweenness is the isolation of the relationships within the folds of a research practice that reveal how an art practice can lead to a knowing between the researcher and the environment or phenomena.

A/r/tography is a post-structural form of research and an arts-based education practice methodology that is grounded in reflexive and reflective acts of inquiry (Gouzouasis et al., 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Reflexivity is the researcher's ability to refer to themselves in relation to the production of knowledge, or in this case chairing, where reflection is thinking about the chairing process with no interest or regard for the *other* (Roulston, 2010). Simply, the knowledge that comes from a borderlands experience is contextually bound to the artist, researcher, and teacher at work. Both reflexivity and reflection are important because they help intentionally align the process of chairing to articulate the lived experience. A/r/tography is not bound by established positions but is positioned to rupture existing worldviews (Irwin, et al. 2006). This means that a/r/tography, as a

living inquiry, is an embodied engagement within the world that includes forms of writing intertwined with interpretation and representation that produce conditions meant to explore a person's identities relationally and in totality (Gouzouasis et al., 2013). In knowledge production, words generate a common understanding, but the arts are guided by an emotional or sensual understanding (Eisner, 2008; Springgay, 2004). This means that a/r/tography provides openings for multiple forms of knowing and expression where chairing also involves writing about the process, but chairing is not dependent on it. Next, I discuss ways of knowing that a/r/tographers employ in their conceptual renderings.

### **Conceptual Renderings**

To fabricate, to make, to assemble, and to build are words used in sculpture to describe the process of what is happening when the artist is at work, and when these words are applied to research, they carry a similar meaning and speak to the relational quality of a/r/tography. Relationality is the way that two or more things are connected through an overlap, or when building a chair, a connection, or a joint. Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe renderings as “embedded in the process of artful inquiry...and writing” while acknowledging and cautioning that the notion of rendering is not a set of criteria for a/r/tography but an opportunity toward “rendered possibilities” (p. xxvii). The six renderings of a/r/tography are all considered relational aspects used in theory, practice, process, and as data analysis to make meaning (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). These relational qualities are conceptualized as a set of renderings used toward knowing. A/r/tography synthesizes findings into renderings but does not explicitly define what the renderings should be. The focus on process that is revealed through the conceptual renderings serve as the basis for constructing new knowledge (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). This means that knowledge construction, art construction, and pedagogical constructions are woven together where one part is not privileged over another. Below is a description of each of the a/r/tography renderings.

### *Contiguity*

Contiguity is a place or state of bordering or direct contact. In a/r/tography, the rendering of contiguity represents an understanding of the real or theoretical interconnectedness of the artist, researcher, and teacher throughout and along with each of the identities (Springgay et al., 2008). In terms of building a chair, contiguity is found in the mortise and tenon joint that connects a leg to the seat, or an arm to the seat. Each piece of the chair is connected to, dependent upon, and structurally supportive of the next piece. In terms of an experience, which could also be imagined as the connections of a chair, Dewey (1938) discusses the contiguity in the quality of experience as having two aspects, where “there is an immediate aspect of agreeableness and disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences” (p. 27). To build a successful chair, there must be an agreeable joint and angle of the attachments to support the overall function of the chair. Regardless of the outcome of agreeable or disagreeable, such as the mortise and tenon correctly being sized to each other, the influence of experience to future experiences becomes continuously connected through drawing, maquette, reflection, and building a chair. Springgay et al. (2006) also note that the relationship between art and writing stand as an example of contiguity where one is directly related and acts in support of each other. According to Siegesmund (2014), contiguity remains adjacent, juxtaposed, and likely unresolved, which can mean that in each build of a chair contiguity will live near the physical and conceptual structure of a chair and act in support of a form and an idea. Contiguity in chairing an inquiry is directly connected to building a chair, building research, and teaching as each step is planned through prior knowing and informed by the previous step.

### *Living Inquiry*

The a/r/tography rendering of living inquiry is a way of knowing and looking at self, and self in relation to others. “Living inquiry is a life commitment to the arts and education through acts of inquiry. These acts are theoretical, practical and artful ways of creating meaning through

recursive, reflective, responsive yet resistant forms of engagement” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix). Chairing in this study is a living inquiry. A/r/tography research is a living inquiry where the constructing of physical objects is based on an active and embodied experience that builds upon a personal effort to question and imagine new possibilities (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In other words, we know what we know based on our past knowing, our current experiences, and the ways we reflect or resist afterward. In the most basic sense, a/r/tography is a way of living, inquiring, and being in the world (Irwin & Springgay). It is the place where the artist, researcher, and teacher can explore the spaces of making and doing.

A/r/tography is built upon the theory of living inquiry which has also been termed a process in motion (Irwin & de Cosson, 2008), where theory is no longer an abstract concept, but lives as an embodied experience (Irwin, et al., 2006). This description is based on an intentional life lived while also examining the process of being as a way of knowing. Gouzouasis et al. (2013) suggest that living inquiry is the pursuit of becoming that requires a commitment and courage to seek a level of change. By going through the chairing and dissertation process as an act of living inquiry, I essentially made a commitment to change as a documented and recorded experience and as evolution toward a new understanding.

### ***Metaphor/Metonym***

A metonym is an idea that is used to refer to another idea, such as a chair as a noun changed to chairing as a verb, an action. Chairmaker perfect, in terms of building a handmade chair, is a metonym that refers to the slight differences within a set of chairs that convey the perfect handmade quality. A metaphor on the other hand is a phrase that describes one thing as another thing, where the similarities are unmistakable, such as take a seat being a metaphor for a sitting down. Greene (1995) tells us that, “it is in the world as it *appears* to us that we look for resemblances, seek out connections, identify possibilities, go in quest of meanings” (p. 12). This means that by relating to

the potentially unseen thing, we can use metaphorical words to unmistakably describe what something is or how it is. To further understand and come to meaning within the process of making, and chairing, I look to metaphor. Metaphor, following Goatly (2007), is defined as a linguistic device used to compare two things, whether seen or unseen. The emphasis in connecting metaphor is less about the conventional application, but a focus on thinking about how the metaphors interrelate (Goatly, 2007). In a/r/tography research, and in an art practice, the use of metaphor and metonym can be used to explain relational qualities, uncover new knowledge, or generate new meaning.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) use an ordinary example with the concept of argument. The conceptual metaphor of *argument is war* describes how we often use metaphor to explain things in everyday life. Presenting a metaphor this way creates a *picture* of a win or lose argument directly related to images and concepts of war. By the same notion, an argument presented as a dance will evoke a different kind of feeling, a joyful image of people dancing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). Both metaphors here conjure up images of what happens in an argument, but one stirs images of life or death while the other suggests a fun, cultural experience. Sousanis (2018), an arts-based researcher describes his own work of physically drawing comics as *research as play*. The metaphor of play evokes images of excitement and fun, but knowing that his dissertation study was later printed as a graphic novel conjures up a completely different image. That is, comics as dissertation shifts the metaphor to a space of complexity and seriousness. Lastly, some scholars present the metaphor in arts-based research as a discourse of danger where *danger* is framed as a cautionary measure, a desirable frame of danger that is desirable, and a danger that presents loss to legitimacy as a method (Greer & Blair, 2018). My self-study does not present facts as an authority in research methods, teacher education, or as a chairmaker, but does align with an a/r/tographic self-study where I relate my knowing through an experience of learning, presentation of rich descriptions using metaphor, and finally making connections for understanding through my experience as artist, researcher, and teacher.

Metaphor thus acts as a bridge for connection by using words to describe the visual processes or the physical object. Additionally, metaphors offer distinct similarities between concepts that can reveal inherent connections through conceptualizing, creating, and connecting to build support between making, writing, researching, and teaching. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed what I need to know to build a chair. For my study, chairing becomes a metaphor for teaching, or the teacher as a chairmaker. The use of chairing or chairmaker as a metaphor for being an artist, researcher, and teacher disrupts the systems of containment established by the literal use of language (Springgay et al., 2005). This means that while I attend to things as they happen, I can write about them in a metaphorical way while also remaining true to what I already know and how the knowing frames my experience.

### *Openings*

A few years ago, when I first started researching chairs and a/r/tography, I was convinced that I had a good idea of where this journey would go. A few years later, sitting here, and developing an understanding of what it means to research, I think of the rendering of opening. When a wave spreads and encounters an obstacle, it changes directions, and this is known as a refraction. Those small refractions, or waves, becoming openings. A significant purpose of a/r/tographic research is to open conversations and build relationships that become more significant to the research than informing others of the findings or what has been learned (Springgay et al., 2008). By setting out to build a chair, I come to a/r/tography research with the chair as a question or chair as an inquiry that serves as a tangible object for creating new openings and building new connections between my artist, researcher, and teacher self.

### *Reverberations*

Reverberation as a rendering serves to describe the fluid movements between artmaking, thinking, and writing. In a/r/tography, reverberations are used to describe the community of

practice and the relational aspects of teachers, students, and society, but can also describe the relational aspects of artists, audiences, and institutions (Springgay et al., 2008). Reverberation can be a sound, a previous artwork, or a body of research that informs the next thought or idea. The reason a/r/t has the forward slashes implies that each element is individual but also connected in a way that one informs the other. Siegesmund (2014) adds that reverberations “require the research to shift” (p. 5) and shifts in a/r/tography are seen as opportunity. As previously mentioned, I thought I had a good idea of where chairing an inquiry would go. I believed I could detail my process of building a chair and describe the doing in relation to researching and teaching. What I did not expect was seeing the rendering of reverberation present in the planning stage of this study. I look at chairs differently when I see them now. When I sit in a chair, I think about how it feels and how it was made. When I see antique chairs, I try to imagine who may have sat on them, and the context of when, where, or who sat on them. I have had personal conversations with numerous people about their experiences with chairs: Some people have expressed sentimental connections to chairs, and some interesting stories have come from people regarding their interactions with chairs. Reverberations are meant to bring attention and an awareness to movements that shift meaning (Springgay et al. 2005), and it has been in those moments that I can already see the depths of reverberations being created by conceptualizing the space of chairing.



## *Excess*



Figure 3. *Wood Necklaces, Excess*

Excess, the last of the six renderings, simply means having more than desired. As a woodworker, I never set out to make wood jewelry, but I ended up doing just that (figure 3). In woodworking there is a lot of waste or excess wood leftover after using the part of the wood needed for any project. A/r/tography offers more than a traditional research method, because it offers excess, but excess in the form of a forced isolation to allow for a meaningful exchange between “producers and consumers of social research” (Leavy, 2012, p. 8). This means that excess raises questions about more than a material by focusing on how things come to be and the existence of making meaning (Springgay et al. 2005). It was possible that knowing the parts of chairing in an individual and independent sense, in addition to the connections experienced with chairs could reveal excess that could be turned into something tangible like the jewelry I crafted from the excess wood. In my own building, the excess chair pieces provided an opportunity for practice drilling or a chance to visualize a final fitting. A/r/tography opens opportunities to tackle “the wasteful, the leftover, and the unseen, as well as the magnificent” (Springgay et al., 2006, p. xxx), which can hold and provide new paths to discover new meaning.

## **Studio Practice as Knowing**

I looked to the way researchers use the arts to explain or describe a phenomena through a studio practice. Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe how the transformative power of practice pushes the methodological boundaries of specificity and objectivity toward a place of openness and contemplation. By being open and intentional in the studio, I was open to the ways I have an experience but also how the experience works to change me (Dewey, 1934). To fully grasp the idea of research as a studio practice, Sullivan (2005) tells us that reclaiming the studio space in arts-based research, both theoretically and practically, leads to constant experimenting and questioning that are the basis for all understanding and significance for a/r/tographers. Words are used to generate a common understanding while the arts elicit an emotional understanding (Eisner, 2008). As such, an active studio practice is a place where the mind, body, and art come together through a series of steps that are focused on improving and refining ideas and actions (Sullivan, 2005). By thinking through and within a studio practice, the physical act of chairing, and the emotional connection to artmaking, I could embody my inquiry in a/r/tography and then express it in multiple renderings to provide access to understandings in new ways.

## **Significance**

A/r/tography, within the broader field of arts-based research, comes together as a methodology that can weave through each of the categories of artist, researcher, and teacher. Education researchers use a/r/tography as a way of accessing the arts to enhance their own understanding of ideas and practices (Irwin, 2004), while simultaneously being concerned with the accessibility and openings the arts provide to understand and express complex ideas (Sousanis, 2018). While Sullivan (2002) compares the pursuit of inquiry in furniture making as the testing of materials and how the process challenges the limits of the materials to that of quality research in art teacher education research. As I searched through literature focused on a/r/tography or a hybrid

version of a/r/tography, I only found three instances of sculpture, or the notion of three-dimensional space and form being used to help researchers think through their process of knowing. Discovering how researchers are approaching the use of sculpture as a way of knowing, while finding no studies that link self-study and constructing three-dimensional forms as knowing, has fueled my own interest. Jeff Koons and Richard Serra, both contemporary artists, build sculpture as a process that challenges viewers to consider more about their work than the final object. While Koons constructs almost kitschy or lowbrow artwork as a means for connecting complex concepts, Serra is known for his massive sculptures that require a viewer to physically walk through his steel sculptures in a search for knowing. Both artists rely on the various senses of the viewer to interpret what they are looking at, walking through, and metaphorically touching, to uncover meaning. By building a chair as an object in an educational research study, I can then present the chair as an object of knowing the parts of myself as artist, researcher, and teacher. Generic and everyday objects such as chairs create openings for the ways we can know (Dewey, 1958). Kosuth (MoMA, 1965) presented artwork as a cohesive set of chairs, *One and Three Chairs 1965*, with a physical chair, a photograph of a chair, and a printed definition of a chair, as an opportunity to experience a chair as an act of art through three different contexts. Kosuth also invited viewers to consider how we come to know what art means in different contexts and explored *when* objects become art. Within the context of my study, then, this idea meant that building an ordinary chair and using the theories of a/r/tography became an important step for understanding my teaching because I asked for leeway to explain how a chair reimagined can be a chair, and also how chairing can create openings for researchers, teacher educators, or future teachers to better understand how to teach or why they teach the way they do.

### Overview of the study

My research into my professional identity as an artist, researcher, and teacher, relates to my inquiry of chairing and the implications for a K-12 teacher moving to a college level position as teacher of teachers. Following this inquiry required an approach that allowed me, the researcher, the latitude to navigate the spaces of my being, professionally and personally. Latitude in arts-based research is known as the breadth of research, as opposed to the length, where opinions and actions disrupt the boundaries of traditional inquiry (Sinner, 2019). By seeking information in the borderlands, breadth, and beyond *the* boundaries, a/r/tography opens spaces for researchers to find meaning in the things they find important. Managing tensions of in-between spaces, and taking risks are significant to building connections (Kasun, 2014) between what is known and what could be known. To that point, chairing as research, align with Eisner's (2002) beliefs on the arts as an integral part of education, where "education is a process of learning how to become the architect of your own experience and therefore learning how to create yourself" (p. 24). In this study, by working in a way that was familiar to me, building a chair with wood, I could uncover ways that my making, researching, and teaching overlap to reveal relationality. I could also look to the places of uncertainty within the three identities and articulate the knowing as a metaphor for chairing. A/r/tography methodology supported my position of chairing as a living inquiry situated in an understanding of becoming. The process of living inquiry found in a/r/tography became a process of continually asking questions that most often created new questions (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Dewey (1938) describes the understanding of simple and complex experience, as found in living inquiry, as a product of time and space and part of the function of everyday daily life.



## 2 Literature Review

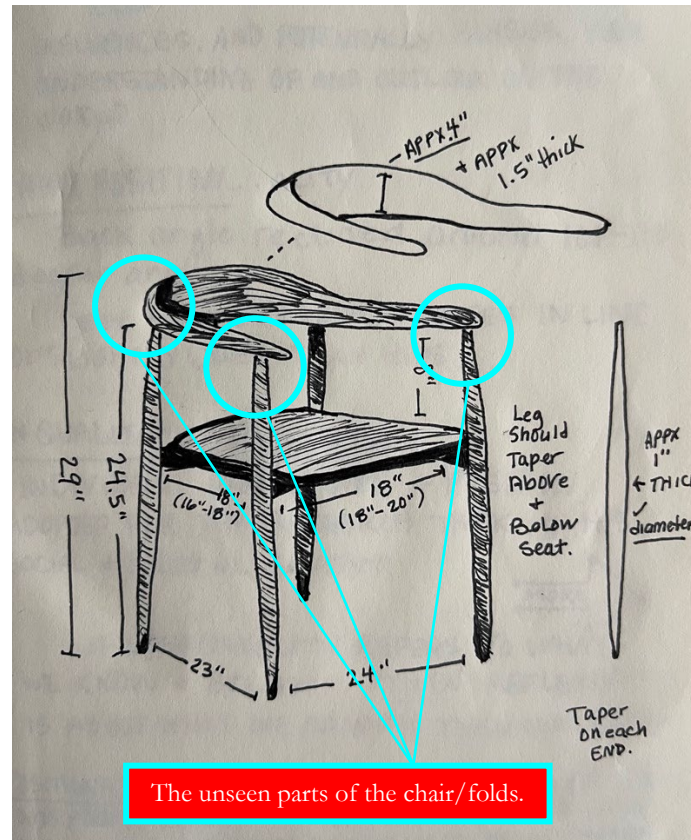


Figure 4. Drawing, *Thinking through Chairing*

In chapter 1, I began to discuss how I conceptualize the building of a chair as way to understand my research and teaching practice. I gave a brief overview of my study and began to discuss my theoretical maquette of a/r/tography as the framework for my study. The two questions I posed in chapter one served as a guide for my study while I remained open to the notion of living inquiry and the continual process of asking new questions (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In chapter one, I also discussed how I understand a studio practice and how the action of making a chair is relevant to knowing as a visual language. I then talked about how I framed this study using the theories of a/r/tography and how those theories were supported through the concepts of the artist, researcher, and teacher. Finally, I discussed a/r/tographic renderings, including the rendering of metaphor, how it relates to chairing, and how I will use metaphor to explore my questions. Figure 4,

is a sketch of a chair I drew as I started thinking about the type of chair I was interested in building. It also illustrates how I think through things by looking at the individual parts of the chair to imagine how things connect and how I make, write, and draw ideas as a process of getting to a final design. Metaphorically, the design of the chair is illustrative of the concept of the rhizome, as each part of the chair shares a liminal connection to the seat and shows how the folds of the research are ultimately a hidden component in the final object of a chair.

Now that I have explained how I came to the idea of chairing and how I *found a/r/tography*, I transition to the ways the literature supports building three-dimensional artwork and what it means for self-study and educational research. I end with the different ways arts-based researcher as using art to connect past experience to knowing in teacher education. I became interested in *a/r/tography* as a methodology after realizing it provided the openings that I needed within the research space to explore the ways I know and exist in the world. What I did not expect was that I would find a methodology that was so expansive that it could align with how I think of undoing and doing to see how something is made, or how I value the experience of touch as a way of knowing. While I only metaphorically touch the words in this review of literature, I did intend to take them apart to see how they were made and put them back together through discussion. Throughout the process of conceptualizing this study I have found how significant touch, as a sense, helps build and enhance our ability to know (Eisner, 2008; Springgay, 2002). I begin by discussing existing literature where physical and metaphorical ways of knowing are developed through creative acts of making (de Cosson, 2004; Groman, 2014; Lasczik Cutcher & Cook, 2017; Roupp, 2019; Sousanis, 2015, 2018). To build on the work of scholarship that explores three-dimensional space I discuss three specific studies that incorporate knowing based on the principles of three-dimensional design (de Cosson, 2003; Groman, 2015; Sousanis, 2015, 2018). Each of the three studies I review in this chapter approach sculpture in a unique way, which I then translate to a maquette for my work focused on

building functional chairs while exploring my a/r/tographer self. While a/r/tographers tend to make a case for study based on the work of arts-based research that includes narrative, performance, theater, and poetry (Irwin, 2004), I was only interested in studies that explored knowing related to art research incorporating three-dimensional construction. Visual art programs tend toward a separation of two-dimensional work from three-dimensional, and as such I have built this literature review for my study as an extension of what is already known three-dimensionally. With that understanding, I bring in elements of making and ways that researchers incorporate knowing through various three-dimensional methods that include data collection as a lived experience of walking (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin, 2017), but the bulk of this discussion is framed by a knowing that is based on making in three dimensions. I discuss the relational aspects of the studies, the overlap within the studies, the support for my work, and how teacher education researchers use a/r/tography and arts-based research to expand a dialog about what is knowing and how we come to know, which were all a catalyst for this work.

### **Ways of Knowing**

One of the few recent studies I found incorporated a sculpture-building activity for preservice teachers and detailed how touch as a method of knowing was used to help preservice teachers discover and articulate their teaching pedagogy (Groman, 2014). Although the study was described as arts-informed, it shares some of the spaces of a/r/tography such as a connection of mind and body, through touching clay, and the overlap of building sculpture to help students translate words used for building to describe a teaching pedagogy. Eisner (2008) described knowing as an awareness of the relational aspects, which means that constructing something by touch becomes relationally significant for talking through different aspects of teaching. In other words, building and touch are the reason I make three-dimensional functional work because I can sketch and draw, but when I make three-dimensional woodwork, I can relate the building process to how I



know, how I see things, and how the construction process in itself is how I know. Further, I can see how my knowing through the connections of making are tied to how I think about my teaching and researcher practice. On the other end of the spectrum, one of the first a/r/tography dissertations, if not the first, was a self-study where the researcher, a sculptor, crafted a sculptural installation of words that he further described as a textu(r)al, *a hybrid of text and texture*, sculpture installation (de Cosson, 2003). De Cosson employed different fonts, font sizes, and line positioning on each page of his dissertation that were centered, flush right, or flush left, and there was bold font throughout as a proposal for a visual walk-through written word. Finally, I discuss the work of Nick Sousanis (2015) and his dissertation turned graphic novel, *Unflattening*. I include Sousanis's work in a discussion of three-dimensional work because, as the title *Unflattening* suggests, Sousanis uses the metaphor of three-dimensional space, as he builds a theory counter to the fixed viewpoint of traditional research and to awaken the possibilities of multiple entry points for knowing. After I discuss how each of these research studies claim their space as a study in the arts, I discuss the overlap and overarching significance each has contributed to research and how all of them support my work.

### **Process as Knowing**

To roll, to crease, to split, to chip, to cut, to sever, to force. These are just a few of the action verbs found in the historically known *verb-list* created in the late 1960's by American sculptor Richard Serra (Solomon, 2019). Serra is best known for his massive COR-TEN steel, sight-specific public art installations. For Serra, the work of art and any of the inherent properties within the work are the work, and any metaphor they might suggest are accidental and irrelevant (Solomon, 2019). Serra, a process art movement artist, shares a conceptual space with process writers in that the focus is put upon the process of writing and is less concerned with the product (Emig, 1977). Process writing, an approach within a performance-oriented teaching program was initially bound by the four proposed steps to writing: planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Seow, 2002). This intentionality toward

form and medium in artmaking, or freedom of interest in the writing process, blurs the boundaries of art and writing, but shares the liminal space similarly afforded by a/r/tography. It is the spaces, or the folds of the work, where the artist, researcher, and teacher can uncover and define meaning. It is through building and creating, where the process opens new perspectives for what is known, or what could be known. The process of making or writing are the work and new discoveries can be made within the process and acts of doing.

Like Serra, Roupp (2019) immersed herself in self-study within her studio practice and described her work as “nonsensical sense making” with the understanding that the purpose of a/r/tography is to create tensions in search of the unknown (p. 8). This means that by working through a process, connections can be revealed through new and unexpected ways of knowing that are built on the acts of doing. Roupp describes a knowing, based on her studio practice study, that ultimately revealed a search that has no end. This exploration can be described as a quest to understand the unknown, or within functional woodwork, can describe a search that may or may not ever end. A/r/tography recognizes the development of the connections generated by the a/r/tographer through the questioning of their own practice and the work of other artists, researchers, and teachers (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). One study conducted by researchers that examines the lives of high school art teachers through an a/r/tography lens revealed a strong link between maintaining an art practice and being a teacher, where the process of making served to inform aspects of the teachers’ teaching practices (Graham & Zwirn, 2010). Leggo (2008) tells us that studying a creative process through a/r/tography can present an opportunity to research the rhizomatic connections and the contiguous relationships that shape our ongoing living inquiry. A significant finding in the Graham and Zwirn (2010) a/r/tographic art teacher study revealed that “learning is not always about the product, and it often requires time, experiment[ation], and perseverance” (p. 223), which they directly attributed to maintaining an on-going and active

engagement with an art practice. Making and knowing filtered through a process signifies a shift from theory to a place where things can only be known through the process of action (Eisner, 2002). This means that each part of being an artist, researcher, and teacher should be equally active in the process of doing to develop new forms of knowing. Process as knowing is significant to my study because building functional chairs provided time and space for me to think about the connections between the way I build work, and the ways I work as a researcher and teacher.

### **Walking as Knowing**

Walking as knowing might suggest a predetermined destination or knowing in advance. The following section details how walking is significant in the construction of a chair, is necessary to building a self-study, and is a metaphorical walk to knowing without a specific destination in mind. Walking describes an active movement that can be a verb or a noun. Walking as a verb is an action of movement that provides a metaphorical experience related to a walking through, between, or within. Walking as a noun is a figurative way to explain a cognitive process to know, such as walking to build connections between concepts, which is like chairing an inquiry, or a walk-through of questioning. Researchers describe walking as a way of knowing in several ways, such as *being with or being there* (Williams, 2017), collaboratively walking (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017), and as an invitation to *walk* through a metaphorical sculpture installation of words (de Cosson, 2003). Self-study is a metaphorical walk through the practice of self, and self-in relation to others (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Additionally, chairing an inquiry is a process of walking through the steps required to build a chair, to be or work in a studio space, to research, and to know and to enact teaching. Finally, living inquiry, as previously discussed, is a way of being in the world (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), which also implies a walking with others, objects, spaces, and places.

Williams (2017) describes making or viewing art as a dialog that could also be considered a figurative walk with material, thoughts, and others encountered through the exploration of the

connections between what is seen, sensed, and experienced. In this example, dialog as a walk is the action of what is happening, like building or sitting, where the terms are interchangeable expressions used to explain and to reach a knowing. Moving-through, writing, artmaking, documenting, reading, and thinking are also ways to describe the process of walking in relation to knowing (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin, 2017). Walking essentially becomes a path to knowing that is formed by the intentional choices that are informed by previous knowing.

Doing something unknown creates an unpredictable opportunity for personal agency and self-awareness (McKay & Sappa, 2020). This means that a metaphorical walk through an unknown of building chairs created a condition as an opportunity for knowing. One collaborative self-study between two researchers walking through places they had never been while each documented the experience through photo and journaling (Lasczik-Cutcher & Irwin, 2017). The study concluded with daily painting session in a shared studio as a means for painting the physical movements as a way of orienting the experience in scholarship. Although I am chairing an inquiry in my own home, the physical building of chairs is helped me notice the unknown places in this research that I have never been. Recognizing qualities such as noticing and trusting within an intentional experience of walking through unfamiliar places provided details and nuances to knowing (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin) that might not otherwise have been revealed.

The first a/r/tography dissertation by de Cosson (2003) provided another way to experience walking as knowing: “through a process of literal, metaphorical and metonymic cutting I build a sculpture/installation out of text. This is textu(r)al, a hybrid of text and texture, built from words and fonts” (p. ii). This quote illustrates that the walk, while not a physical walk, was meant to serve as a place for transformative artistic knowing within a living inquiry. Rich details that described walking combined with the literal structure of building through textural sculpture opened an imagined space for de Cosson to walk through and discover. Walking as knowing is significant to

chairing an inquiry because it metaphorically related to being in the space of building chairs while also walking between ways of knowing.

### **Touch as Knowing**

If walking is an intentional or unintentional path for doing, touch can produce a similar knowing where the outcomes cannot be predicted but are left open to possibilities. A/r/tographers walk with their work, but they also work through their preferred craft as a method of physical engagement (de Cosson, 2003; Irwin, 2004, 2008; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sousanis, 2018; Leggo, 2008; Gouzouasis, 2003). Building chairs required me to physically touch the wood. Researchers and teachers metaphorically touch their work by crafting written research, building lesson plans, and interacting with study participants and students. Touch is a sensory experience that provides access to ways of knowing through the objects we encounter (Springgay, 2004). For example, sitting in a chair becomes a consensual relationship between the chair and the person (Schwarz, 2021) that is best described as a bodied encounter of active engagement, in this case, with the chair (Springgay, 2004). This means that physically touching something, as in building or sitting in a chair, provided data or an opening to knowing that can only be revealed through the method of touch. Further, touch becomes a bodied sense that builds on the ways of seeing that extends beyond any knowledge created purely through sight (Springgay, 2004). For example, Groman (2014), a researcher and teacher of future teachers, conducted a study based on the manipulation of clay as a physical means for general teacher education students to express their developing education philosophy. Touch provides a mode of knowing that challenges Western thinking where perception is based solely on sight (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, 2004). By challenging perceptions, touch becomes a powerful and engaging tool to think through embodied encounters as they happen (Springgay, 2004). Further, the Groman (2014) study detailed how a sculpture activity was used to elicit knowing, thinking, and understanding among preservice general

teaching students who might not otherwise be inclined toward an artistic process. The findings revealed how the opportunity for the participants to touch and build with clay provided a tactile experience that in turn helped them to articulate their teaching philosophies. Touch is a sense that is consistently being refined when building sculpture, when building chairs, when sitting in chairs, and becomes a way to envision and speak about things that cannot be seen (Eisner, 2002). The Groman (2015) study clearly demonstrated how touch as visual language overlapped or folded with written words, and how expression was strengthened by this multisensory approach to knowing and teaching.

### **Play as Knowing**



*Figure 5. Doughnut Challenge, Student Work*

In chapter one, I detailed how my experience of building a table for a doctoral course felt like play. I have always been drawn to learning experiences that engage students in thinking that might not feel like learning. Some examples of playful learning I have used include making sculpture out of candy wrappers, or creating an artwork based on the student's choice of a doughnut. The only limitation I set for the challenges were that students must recreate a doughnut, or that the candy wrappers were the only material that could be used. I was often surprised at how many students built a doughnut instead drawing a doughnut (figure 5). Zoss and White (2011) shared similar details of play in their study of a teacher's approach to a classroom activity that linked the

teacher's prior knowing to a teaching opportunity for an actual production of a play. Play, literally and metaphorically, became a shared learning experience that was accessible and simultaneously reinforced concepts of knowing as teacher.

Similarly, Sousanis (2018) described his path into the academy and his arts-based approach to research as playful acts of discovery that led to surprising directions. Play as knowing, as found in *Unflattening*, claimed a space of disruption. Sousanis (2015) used play as knowing, play as found by visually presenting a “contraction of possibilities” (p. 8) that led to the production of comics as a dissertation, then graphic novel. This work created an opening for scholarly work in the arts to challenge traditional research. Building chairs was my way to construct a similar knowing through acts of building that felt like play. Sousanis (2018) steadfastly defends the opportunities afforded by arts-based research to provide a space for play and discovery that lead to new possibilities for knowing. Furthermore, and why this play is significant to my own making, Sousanis made work through an approach to comics that consistently existed in his life; likewise I have always constructed functional woodwork based on my own experience and connection to my childhood. Both prior knowing and making work reveal the innate and intimate personal connection to knowing, which is not consistent with language, but expresses how visual knowing allows for an understanding that transcends verbal or written word (Eisner, 2002). In an effort to reframe complex information. *Unflattening* (Sousanis, 2015) opens possibilities for academic research to challenge traditional ways of knowing and representing the known through various visual forms. This echoes a theater instructor's pedagogical approach through a/r/tography as a means for helping students make connections between complex theories and theater (Carter & Beare, 2011). Chairing an inquiry then becomes an opportunity to play, explore, and build based on my past knowing, lived inquiry, and ongoing art making.

## Questioning as Knowing

A/r/tography is an exploration of self through the three identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher. Leggo (2008) raises questions related to identity based on the way self-identity is mirrored and shaped by the dominate culture in a society. Meanwhile, artist Marcel Duchamp coined the term, *readymades*, to describe a series of factory made objects he named art in order to question the artist's role in the production of art. jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) state, "One wonders whether art is 'research,' which is *knowledge* creation through an epistemological methodology?" (p. 25). Accordingly, is art the skill of the artist, an object just an object, or is art not art at all? Graeme Sullivan (2015), wrote an editorial titled *A chair raised to the level of a question* (p. 195). The full context of the question was posed by Ed Weinberger (Weschler as cited in Sullivan, 2002) a furniture maker and designer, who stated, "it is just a chair, but a chair taken seriously as such—a chair truly interrogated, a chair raised to the level of a question" (p. 195). One of the hallmarks of a/r/tography is the active engagement of continually asking questions. By testing, challenging, and questioning our notions of making, as a process of knowing, added to what is considered knowledge, it becomes possible to grow what we know and how we know.

## Knowing in Teacher Education

Research studies, like the above mentioned studies, explore the use of form and three-dimensional space are personally significant to my knowing and provide support for this study. In addition to the previous studies, the following examples highlight some of the ways arts-based research supports building knowledge by leveraging art to enhance, convey, or expand opportunities for knowing in teacher education. Irwin (2004) states, "art is the visual reorganization of experience that renders complex the apparently simple or simplifies the apparently complex" (p. 31). This means that an art practice, inclusive of multiple forms of knowing, provides an accessible opportunity to support learners. Further, Tyler and Likova (2012) consider research that explores



the relationship between learning in arts education, as well as the science of literacy, to be of the utmost concern considering what they describe as an “inadequate level [of art education and scientific literacy] even in economically advanced countries” (p. 1). As such, and although my study directly related to knowing through building a chair, the following studies further establish a need for the arts being leveraged to support knowing.

One point that appeared across multiple studies in teacher education is how the use of metaphor, a rendering of a/r/tography, is used to guide student beliefs and practices of artmaking and writing, through multilayered thinking (Günes, et al, 2020; Zhu & Zhu, 2018; Zoss et al., 2014). The use of metaphor through a/r/tography as a pedagogical approach provided openings for preservice teachers to conceptualize a professional identity, create works of art and write, all based on prior knowing. The use of metaphor helps others to feel what we feel, and also helps us to notice our own feelings (Eisner, 2008). One study focused on a methods course designed around a/r/tographic practices where the students were identified as artist, researcher, and teacher-learners (Günes et al., 2020). Throughout the course, students wrote personal stories based on their lives, generated meaning from the stories through metaphor, and then used the information to create artwork. Although film making was mentioned, there were no other descriptions of the types of artwork created or media used. Instead, rich descriptions of the connections between the creation of work to meaning construction was discussed, as well as the ways the practices of a/r/tography supported more difficult tasks like writing. Thus, the Günes et al. (2020) study is an example of the ways a/r/tography supports teacher education development through situated knowing that builds on past experience.

### **Knowing in Self-Study**

Self-study as knowing is a personal experience, but the purpose is to acknowledge experience and how the experience shapes the things we know. Spatial notions of self can be linked to activities

like making art, and can symbolize a shift in imagining self (Hannigan, 2012). This means that making art can provide a space for knowing, where knowing is an understanding of relationships, and how the disclosure of the relationships signifies the knowing (Eisner, 2008). One self-study describes a self-portrait that connects professional identity to personal life as a metaphorical self-portrait (Hickman, 2010). Instead of an physical painted portrait, Hickman (2010) described detailed vignettes of childhood that culminated in a heightened sense of awareness of a professional practice as an artist teacher. I have described how I related chairing, a self-portrait of my past, to building a chair as an object of knowing through a self-study. In the next chapter, I detail the ways I have built the methods for my study through a/r/tography research and how I consider my past knowing as it informs my actions as artist, researcher, and teacher.



### 3 Methodology



*Figure 6. My shop space*

For this dissertation I did a self-study from my home shop while also working as a full-time high school art teacher and part-time university instructor (figure 6). When I initially conceived this study I planned to be home daily building chairs in my studio while writing about the relational aspects of being an artist, researcher, and teacher. I did not expect to be physically living within the folds of my research as an artist, researcher, and teacher while simultaneously writing and reflecting on my experience. In August 2022, I ended up starting a full-time high school art position, a position that I had hoped would open years earlier, and while the timing was not ideal, I could not let it go. Thankfully, arts-based educational research recognizes the possibilities afforded by the folds of research as continual openings to render new ways of knowing (Springgay, 2011). This means that working on my study while teaching two different levels of education, high school and college, in two different settings has provided continuous openings to my process as artist, researcher, and teacher.

In early 2022 when I found out about the high school position; I had not anticipated returning to high school teaching. After accepting the position I decided I needed to keep my part-time university position as well despite knowing that my schedule would be incredibly *painfully* full.

My new school agreed to provide flexibility in my schedule, providing substitutes as needed, so that I could continue my work with preservice teachers. I am grateful for the way each part of my life has flexed because it has made me realize how important mentoring and working with new teachers is to me. However, saying I have been busy is an understatement. I suspected a return of previous challenges that limited my artistic pursuits, but I could not have predicted how intense the learning curve of stepping back into a full time school setting while negotiating part-time work combined with a self-study would be. During my first experience of *becoming* a teacher, I will call this time prior to 2020, pre-COVID, I knew I had to focus on being a teacher while developing my teacher identity. My pre-COVID teaching experience left little time for me to maintain an active art practice. The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 created an opening for my artistic practice to resurface. I built the table for the decolonizing course and over the next year had completed several more building projects. In this chapter I discuss how I used a/r/tography through a self-study of chairing an inquiry to better understand my practice of being artist, researcher, and teacher.

### **Research Design**

To fully explore my studio art practice of chairing in relation to being an art teacher, preservice teacher educator, and being a researcher, it was important to identify a methodology to provide a frame of support to guide my work, but also flexible enough to allow conceptual interpretations to stretch or bend the boundaries of what is known and how it is known. A/r/tography literally translates into three identities of a/r/t or the artist, research, and teacher and is an education methodology that is based on the “three roles and three forms of thought, not only as separate entities but also as connected and integrated identities that remain ever present” (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004, p. 28). A/r/tography is loosely prescriptive but allows space for exploration and growth throughout the research process. A/r/tography thus affords researchers the opportunity to make discoveries within their own practice that can inform the larger education community.

A/r/tography is a methodology for the artist, research, and teacher to question their practice through different streams of making meaning, to find alternative ways of exploring relationships, and to discover the openings in the spaces between (Springgay et al., 2008). While I do not think my studio process is much different than any other art educators' practice, I chose a/r/tography as a methodology because of the foundations in artmaking and writing. I could not make a case for a self-study where I examined my own practice without the element of making afforded by a/r/tography.

### **Walking with Wood**

Connections are the relationships between human, object, time, place, and setting. Connections exist in building a chair through a mortise and tenon, dowels and biscuits, or dovetails. Connections through building with wood can be described as a walk through the building process. I come to this work as an artist; while constructing a learning experience of chairing I examined how I know teaching through a/r/tography. I did this work while contemplating the words of Maxine Greene (1995), "to learn and to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new" (p. 20). While I have known teaching and I have known woodworking, this study was a figurative walk through an unknown. Greene (1995) described how we build upon previous experiences to uncover new knowledge, which describes how I moved beyond my previous knowing through wood, my experience with woodworking, and with teaching into a place that was unknown. The thinking through became a way of walking through as a verb, or an action to show the ways we deal with the situations in which we find ourselves (Dewey, 1934). Put another way, mind is an action that is the result of being that is both physical and mental (Eisner, 2002). Art as a verb, then, became a way of communicating and being in the world that is both meaningful and aesthetically engaging. Chair as a verb means to carry, and a/r/tography serves as a verb of becoming (Irwin & de Cosson, 2008). To teach, is also a verb, that means to explain or

show. Building a chair, and building a dissertation study, while becoming, are all part of teaching and educational research. Conceptualizing and building three-dimensional functional sculpture serves as a place of knowing that builds upon my prior knowledge and satisfies my need to understand the way things are attached, adhered to, or manipulated through various processes and serves as a basis for understanding what it means to know.

### **Building as Process Toward Chairs**

The production of a chair serves to provide an action for knowledge creation and interpretation, but the process of doing presents opportunities of being and doing. A/r/tography is an inquiry of action research where the action of making can reveal what was once hidden (Irwin, 2004). Therefore, the process, experimentation, and practice of research, the kind that involves reading or making, leads to seeing and articulating the experience as knowing. Artistic methods, such as the process of building a chair, are part of the flexible systems aimed at generating meaning (Rolling, 2013). Generating meaning is different than seeking an explanation, and making provides an action toward an exploration of the underlying meaning, or the relationship formations, as knowing. Making and walking with research also differs from the conventional assumptions that all research will arrive at a final understanding within the social world and instead will arrive at a persuasive argument about the how or why of a phenomenon (Barone & Eisner, 2011). A walk with wood becomes a metaphor as the process of action meant to generate new ways of knowing, explaining, and understanding what it means to teach, make, and do research.

Building a chair has taken on new meaning in my life. I have experienced chairs through different senses and through seemingly random conversations with people. I have looked at thousands of different chairs over the past three years through conventional encounters, and I have visited museums from Georgia to New York, where a walk with chairs has encompassed all my senses. In 2020, I started drawing the chairs I was interested in when I first conceptualized this

study. My initial drawings were of chairs that had an aesthetic quality I found interesting, but I had not considered what it takes to build a chair. I have since come to know things about building chairs and working with wood that helped me reimagine the chairs I built. For example, many chairs built today are based on old chair designs such as a Windsor chair. Some chairs are ornate, some are simple, and both simple and ornate old chairs can be seen in museums and through online searches.

Stick chairs, as the name might suggest, have simple designs that were historically made by amateur woodworkers (Schwarz, 2021). While reading *The Stick Chair Book* I learned about a lowback stick chair: “Lowback Forest chairs – sometimes called ‘Captain’s chairs’ or ‘firehouse Windsor’s’ – that seem to lurk in every sketchy seafood restaurant in the U.S.” (p. 491). The reason the chairs were described as being made by amateurs and sometimes called forest chairs is because they were literally created from local wood, in the forest, to fulfill a functional need of having a place to sit. The sketchy seafood restaurant description speaks to my youth, my current interest, and the remembering of occasional summer family trips to the ocean where I visualize myself in a chain seafood restaurant. The restaurants were usually hot, sticky even, and filled with the most delicious smells of fried seafood. And I can picture the chairs. I remember the chairs being stained very dark, and they looked very heavy. Moving the chair satisfied my knowing that the chairs were visually and physically heavy. The lowback chairs also remind me of the kitschy oceanside souvenir shops of my youth, of those precious family beach trip memories, and the wonder I felt as a young girl picking out a souvenir to take back home with me. My family, my dad, and me together at the beach, eating at the hot restaurant and my exposed legs sweating or sticking to the clunky chairs is how I arrived at building lowback chairs. These chairs might appear as nothing special, but in recognizing the inherent connections between wood as necessity for my family, the remembering of the chairs of my youth, and my current path to knowing have made them the only real possibility for my style of chairs. Schwarz (2021) describes the lowback chair as his worst seller of the various chairs he makes



and designs, but he continues to build and refine them to his own personal liking but does not elaborate on his reasoning. I am drawn to lowback stick chairs for the reasons mentioned here, for the functionality, and probably many more reasons.

### **The Chairs**

I built chairs based on the plans I found in *The Stick Chair Book* by Christopher Schwarz (2021). Schwarz built his first stick chair in 2003 and has spent the past two decades refining and building on his knowledge of chairs. I started building the chairs last summer while I was buying wood and tools. Most of the work done on the chairs was done in my home shop space. I built these chairs as part of my process for exploring who I am as an artist, researcher, and teacher. I still intend to take my chairs to my dissertation defense as another way to explore how I teach, how I build as a process, and how I come to teaching. My committee is made up of my dissertation *chair* and three committee members. I built chairs as a way of building community with my committee and a way toward building my defense. My chairmaking process is indicative of the way I work through ideas, imagining, and through a process in which the process is a combination chair, dissertation, and defense.

### **Data Collection**

In this self-study, I am the sole participant. However, Springgay et al. (2008) describe a connection of community within a living inquiry that exists between the inside and outside of a researcher, where a relationship that is an outside to one is simultaneously an inside for another. While collecting data based on my experience of building chairs, my conversations with others, my teaching experience, and the relationality of my life have become inseparable part of my data. The lived experience within my process for making has become central to growth and the ways I look for meaning (Eisner, 2002). Hence, my walk through, building of, conversations with, teaching, and my movements through space and time have been collected as part of my discovery and knowing. My

data collection started long ago, specifically when I proposed this study and then engaged in the process of doing by building my first chair. I have found new meanings of chairs for knowing through the personal stories shared by others and my experience building my own chairs. In the space of my living inquiry, I continually sought to grow my own understanding of chairing and how chairing is part of my artistic, research, and teaching practice.

While I find the path of self-study in research significant and contextually bound to my own experience, Dinkleman (2003) described how self-study as a systematic and deliberate approach to an individual practice can provide further evidence to ways of knowing that will ultimately strengthen the argument for self-study in teacher education. Likewise, Pourchier (2012) argued for a structured inquiry within artmaking to move beyond full immersion in the creative process to collect and process the work as data. While I agree with a systematic and deliberate approach to data collection, I also remained open to the ways a/r/tography is concerned with knowing through experiences, and is intentionally not bound to established methods of “codification and systemization” (Springgay, et al, 2008. P. 87). I also argue that too much structure has the potential to deteriorate the walk-through rhizomatic nature afforded by a/r/tography. Therefore, the act of building chairs, as a making experience, as a sensory experience, and as knowing myself as artist, researcher, and teacher has aided in data collection that informed what I know and how I know. Because I consider myself an a/r/tographer, I used the textural, visual, and metaphorical processes of chairing to integrate, understand, inquire, and share my personal lived experience (Irwin, 2004). This means that my process of building a chair as data was an integrated extension of my experience of knowing, through relational connections, that were the basis of my data collection. The following sections describe the research setting, how I collected and organized my data, a loose timeframe for when I collected data, and the ways I have used the data to write my experience.

## Studio Setting

My shop at my home, in my basement, was initially conceived as the primary research setting for building my chairs. It is not an ideal shop space as it is an open framed-out basement with no actual walls. I have added industrial strength plastic along one wall to help contain the sawdust in my shop. The other three walls of the shop are poured concrete that have been treated with a masonry product that is a paint and sealer for concrete. The floors have been coated with epoxy. My shop has no windows on the side of the basement where I have carved out my space. I have a dust filtration system and a micron dust collector that looks like a fan but collects the wood particles that are so small they are undetectable to the eye until they are *whole* as a collection inside the filter.

I use power tools in my shop, and building chairs required me to purchase some new power tools and hand tools that I did not previously own. I will briefly discuss the tools I have in relation to being part my physical shop, but will define and detail specific uses for the tools when I talk through building a chair in chapter 4. Based on the class I attended in April 2022, I purchased several hand-tools to build functional wood chairs. I bought a scorp, a hand tool I used to remove large pieces of wood from the seat of a chair by using a scraping type motion. I also purchased a travisher and a drawknife I used for removing wood from different parts of a chair to include the seat. I purchased tenon cutters to cut a standard size tenon for the sticks and legs. I bought a tapered reamer to convert the straight cylindrical mortises to a conical shape to seat the tapered tenons I cut. I built a shave horse that I used for holding different pieces of wood while I worked with some of my new hand tools. I used hand-tools every time I could to build my chairs, which gave me the flexibility to move around my shop and outside on a nice day. The ability to move, as mentioned in chapter 2, became part of my walk with and through my studio, my work, and became a place to slow down and to be intentional within my making and thinking.

## Timeline

I began formally collecting data in 2022, but I started my research much earlier than that. However, as soon as I built the table for the Decolonizing Education class, with Sue Kasun, I started to think about what was possible. I informally proposed building a chair as a self-study to my advisor, Michelle Zoss, a few months after building the table. It was a short discussion that manifested into this study. I started researching and making notes after the first discussion, and after each discussion thereafter. I made drawings of chairs and relentlessly pursued different ways to build a chair. I gathered all the information I could find relating to building a chair, building the first chair, even the easiest chair to build. I found there was not an *easy* way to build a chair that is meant to hold an adult body, but I still searched. I searched the internet for artists that built chairs and looked at brands of chairs that were made in a factory. I went to furniture stores to investigate chairs, looked at chairs everywhere until I started seeing chairs in everything. After realizing that a self-study would not require IRB approval, I started collecting data immediately, and by collecting I mean I started to keep track of my notes, drawing, photos, and building maquettes.

I attended a chairmaking class in April 2022. The amount of information I obtained in that class gave me the time and space to fully think through the things I needed for this dissertation. I began to formally collect data following my Prospectus defense in August 2022, and the data collection continued while I wrote. My artistic process relating to data collection started with drawings and creating a maquette, thinking, and eventually building with wood. After I made several drawings, I built a paper maquette based on the initial design of my chair. I participated in a chairmaking class in April, 2022, where I built a continuous arm Windsor chair (Figure 2). During the chairmaking class I was able to build a chair made of a seat, legs, spreaders, sticks, and a curved arm bow. My timeline for building started when I returned from the chairmaking class, but I still had to source the tools and wood I needed to build a chair. I worked in my studio each time I had time

during the week and some weekends starting in July. I had planned to start with one chair to use as a working and finished maquette, but instead I ended up working in a production style where I made all of the particular pieces of a chair at a time. I thought about these chairs for over two years, and during that time I built various models out of paper based on my drawings, but I never made a full size maquette. I thought through building my own chairs more times than I can count, and I regularly reflected on my experience of building the chair at the class in Tennessee. I have cut and shaped all of the 132 pieces for six chairs. I will delivered five finished chairs to my defense at the end of March 2023.

### **Electronic Collection**

Digital photo and video were collected throughout my study. I photographed my studio when I had all the tools I thought I would need. I took photographs and videos during or after each working session. I only made one recorded reflection video after a studio work session, but after reviewing the video days later, discovered that my words did not convey the same breadth of information I could see in my photographs and process videos. For the remainder of my study, I used my iPhone to record time lapse videos, regular speed videos without sound, and to take photographs that I have used as data to analyze as the renderings of a/r/topography.

## Sketchbook(s), Journaling, and Post-its



*Figure 7. My sketchbooks*

Building sketchbooks helped me think through the figurative and metaphorical three-dimensional spaces of my work. I built several lotus fold sketchbooks throughout this study. I wrote short notes in the sketchbooks, drew pictures of chairmaker terms throughout this work, or filled the pages with marks, as seen above (figure 7) where I documented my walk, as in the actual number of steps I had taken during a certain time. Building sketchbooks helped me think about different aspects of the chairing process, filled a need to *see* a physical connection, and helped me connect the process of building to my identities. Building the sketchbooks helped me locate think the words that eventually filled my electronic Google Doc journal. It is important to note that I switched my journal entries from a word document and notes in my phone to a cloud based system for the ease of access as I moved between my job, studio, and my writing space in my home. I originally planned to build parts of my chairs in my space at work, hence the need for an accessible journal, but that never happened.

I was not able to make work while I was at my job as time and space did not allow, but I did use some of my time to write in my journal. Keeping an online journal helped me to organize my

data and gave me the freedom to record my thoughts no matter where I was. I continued to jot my immediate thoughts on paper and Post-it notes, and sometime the notes helped me start a journal entry. However, most of my paper notes continued to be lost within *my office space, studio space, and the place I teach*. For the purposes of writing this dissertation, I had to make concrete adjustments to the ways I think and write, but also to the ways I maintained journaling and record keeping. Leggo (2008) describes the personal way we write as being always woven into our professional, artistic, academic, and social self. My paper notes aside, I was able to find an ongoing system for my writing, journaling, building sketchbooks, and collecting data that helped me see and build the connections of my experience to my artist, researcher, and teacher self.

### **Calendar**

I keep a physical calendar for school, appointments and deadlines, and for this study I added a separate calendar to record my workdays, conversations, or overarching ideas and thoughts for the day. I maintained the separate calendar in my studio for a few weeks before I realized I was troubling myself with adding dates and details in a physical calendar as well as my online journal. I started using the physical calendar to document facts and figures of my chairmaking process. For instance, on September 4, 2022, I made a note of the resultant angles for the front and back legs of my chairs. In the margin of the month of September, I made a list of the parts of the chair, what size wood I needed for different parts, and the total number I needed for the entire set. I also took a photo of the calendar entry to help me remember what I would be doing when I reentered my shop. Although I planned to use my calendar to track my process with words, it ended up being a place to track numbers, measurements, and to-do lists. While the calendar did not end up functioning the way I anticipated, it served as an important reference for the steps I was taking throughout each part of building. Further, since the calendar stayed in my studio, I could easily return to the previous work each time I entered the space.

## Intentions

Last year I walked into an elementary classroom as part of my duties as a student teacher supervisor. I watched about two dozen first graders enter the classroom and quietly take a seat on a small patch of carpet at the front of the class. I then watched as the teacher led the students through an established mantra based on the word *a.r.t.i.s.t* as a way of setting an intention for their class that day. Following the ritual, I watched a well-behaved group of students happily engaged in a period of learning and making art. I realized that this practice was something I could take into my studio and something I wanted to have as part of my own process. I made a poster with the questions listed below just like I had planned and I took the poster into my studio in the fall of 2022.

1. What do I need to do today to achieve my short-term goals?
2. What do I need to do today to achieve my long-term goals?
3. How is chairing bringing me to my most authentic self?
4. How does chairing inform how I am making decisions as I move forward?
5. How can I use what I am doing today in my research and teaching?

A few days later, I proceeded to use the poster to make a few patterns that I needed so I could trace the pattern onto wood. I needed poster board to make the patterns and this was the only poster board I had. I did think about the questions while I worked in my studio, but they were not as helpful as I had anticipated. I had hoped that being mindful of my daily intentions would provide me with systematic data that I could analyze and write about later. After I repurposed the poster, I copied the questions into my online journal so that I could read the questions whenever I opened the document. Seeing the questions each time I opened my journal made a way for me to visualize them, in relation to working and writing. The questions reverberated to my thinking as I worked, but when I tried to respond to the questions in my journal, I felt like I was trying to fit a description of



my experience into the questions instead of recording what had actually happened. I answered the questions in my journal a few different times until I realized the questions were driving my process into a reductive and responsive collection of words, somewhat useless, and laced with some frustration. Although I stopped referring directly to the questions posed above, I did not forget them all together. For example, I often considered question 4, and the ways chairing was informing my decisions as I moved forward. The original questions guided my search as an internalized dialog throughout my process of working through building chairs and writing.

### **Data Analysis as Conceptual Renderings**

In chapter one, I discussed the six conceptual renderings of a/r/tography and how the renderings are used in an inquiry through relational aspects of theory, practice, process, and analysis to make meaning (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Although I previously discussed each of the renderings separately, Springgay et al. (2005) describe how the separation is intended only to clarify the words and that the renderings move together and within each other simultaneously. I will not break the renderings down again in this section, but discuss how I used the renderings to support and inform my discovery throughout my process of analysis. Discovery in this study refers to the act of chairing filtered through my lived experience, or what de Cosson (2004) describes as an embodied understanding of becoming. As I planned and made work throughout this study, each rendering helped me to visualize contiguity between the things that I might have otherwise missed. Although Springgay (2002) discusses how the art becomes the analysis, I believe the art is part of the analysis and part of the data. The physical pieces of my chair as analysis are a rhetorical tool that I use to explain how the parts of the chair connect to the things I know. I have already discussed how metaphor is used to describe chairing that is relational to knowing. Chairing as analysis is based on the theory of a lived experience rather than a finite knowing based on collected data (Springgay, 2008). In chapter 5, I explain why I choose to separate reverberation, excess, and metaphor into

their own categories and how the separation is helping me explain the concepts of chairing relating to my research and teaching.

### Quality

Stake and Munson (2008) discuss the notion of *quality* relating to assessment in art education programs as the experience of many to what is happening in the program, rather than a superficial assessment of quality through standardized objective criteria. Similarly, quality in an experiential study of building chairs as a learning opportunity to better understand self, can be shown in the production of artwork as well as a description of what is happening through the process of experience as it occurs. A/r/tography research as self-study is based on examining and embracing tensions as they are revealed through the identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2008). Self-study, according to Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) requires a balance of tensions between self and practice in relation to others and to a practice setting. While the notion of *self* is a significant function of self-study, the research must involve established methods that support the position of how and why a story is told (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). For instance, a/r/tographers write as they live and describe the conditions through the use of dialectical relationships where each category is equal (Irwin, 2004). Throughout this a/r/tographic self-study I have been guided by the process of building chairs and detailing my process through journaling, photos, and drawings, while thinking through the ways each of my identities connect. Leggo (2008) describes the forming of these rhizomatic connections in quality, through the acts of living inquiry, and how writing about personal experience is always connected with the professional self. The development of self can then be interpreted to make meaning in larger educational settings. However, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) warn, self-study research requires a balance between self and traditional research to assist personal practice, but more importantly, to move scholarship and teacher education research forward. In thinking through the practice of self and the larger education community, I describe the

ways I learn, and how the learning could extend to teacher education programs. Therefore, this research is for the betterment of the education community and is not exclusively in service of any personal objective. My research is built on the theory of a/r/tography and is supported by the three main sculptural studies I discussed in chapter 2 (de Cosson, 2004; Groman, 2014; Sousanis, 2015). So, while I sought to better understand my own practice, this self-study is relational to the three-dimensional studies, and as a way to visualize support for three-dimensional learners while moving toward more inclusive ways of knowing.

Self-study in writing, or *graphy* in a/r/tography essentially becomes a narrative to describe events and happenings as they occur. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) metaphorically describe the thinking that goes into writing as a form of knowing like the way a lathe functions as a woodworking tool. Like writing, the lathe is a tool that can be used by different people, in different contexts, and in different locations. This means that a lathe can be used in different settings and will do the exact same thing no matter where it is used. Wood is first centered on a lathe as it spins, and is shaped to a cylindrical round form. The product is what the woodturner makes, and the product is determined by what it will be used for, which can be a specific need. If the tool of chairmaking is a lathe then the gouges are the renderings that are used to form the wood or the writing. Further, this means that the chair itself is the implications for knowing and for teacher education. The purpose of building a chair was to connect my knowing through writing and to complete a dissertation. The quality of a chair is determined by the stability of the chair, and the importance of quality self-study to the larger education community is built on the tools used to complete the task and the overall stability of the chair. Trustworthiness is formed by the description of the tools, using the tools, and how the tools would function in different contexts within and outside the education community.

## Researcher Subjectivity

One aspect required of social science research is acknowledging and becoming aware of instances of personal histories that influence our interactions in the world. Peshkin (1988) described a person's subjectivity as "a garment that cannot be removed" that is part of a researcher's entire life (p.17). I am not sure if I should write all of this here, but since this is a living inquiry, the following is how I have experienced moments and events that have shaped who I am. I gave some history in the preface of this work, but this rendering gives an overview of who I am and how I arrived here.



*Figure 8. Potato box my dad made in the 1980's.*

I grew up with wood, and the irony of that start is not lost on me. I was not born as trees were planted, tree lifecycles ended, and while others were in the middle of the cycle. My life began, as a seedling, while the wood I was surrounded with sometimes ended. My dad worked with wood to financially provide for our family. My experience with wood was a means of heat for our family home. Occasionally my dad would build wooden things for my mom, to help her organize the kitchen, such as this potato box (figure 8), and he built wooden shelves in our bathroom and our outbuilding to hold various things as a means of storage. I only remember my dad building functional things that were rarely, if ever, turned into anything that could be considered art. I believe my upbringing drives my desire to craft functional woodwork. Roulston (2010) tells us that

researchers write subjectivity statements to examine our interest and background on a particular topic. The following statement details the parts of my life that began with my woodworking exposure and moving into a house that was only heated by a woodburning stove. I also discuss how my socioeconomic upbringing influenced my youth and adult experience to include the path I followed into higher education. I discuss parts of my youth that bring perspective to my views now, and how marrying an unfaithful man led to me being a mother, a college-educated woman, and a widow. I end with how I was able to reclaim love, find support throughout my doctoral journey, and raise independent daughters.

When I started this dissertation journey, I had no idea how thinking through chairing in relation to my researcher and teacher self would influence and inform how I think about who I am. In the preface, I wrote about my experience with amazing teachers, including my dad, from an early age. I had an exposure to woodworking early on that has continually shown up in various ways throughout my life. Once I was accepted into the fine arts degree program during my undergraduate years, I declared my major as graphic design. I spent the first two years in graphic design, and I enjoyed working with type and working on a computer to create things. I also believed that getting a degree using computers would lead to a decent job with good pay and benefits. This security was something my upbringing told me I needed to consider. The first time I stepped into the sculpture studio, I realized I was trekking down the wrong path in graphic design, and I was working for a sense of security that I believed existed if I got a degree in *something useful*. I might have felt a little reckless abandonment as I shifted my focus to a degree in sculpture and ceramics. At the time, I could not explain the sensual experience of knowing that was present in the sculpture studio. I also could not explain why I closed the art building at 2:00AM daily, for years, while I finished my degree, but I knew I was exactly where I needed to be.

I am a white woman. It took me 10 years to complete my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. I have two biological daughters, one in college and one finishing her senior year in high school with college acceptance letters and scholarship money in hand. I have a grown stepson and stepdaughter. I was raised in a lower middle-class family by parents who were married for almost 40 years before my dad passed away in 2001. Neither of my parents finished high school, but both completed a GED. My dad joined the military at 17, but only served three years before meeting my mom, leaving the service, and getting married. I am the third of four children, 3, and I am the first and oldest daughter. I am the only child that found a place in woodworking. I am also the only child out of the four to have a four-year degree. I am the only child to have a master's degree. I am the only person in my family that is a teacher. My mother and father had four children over 17 years, and my mom has been a housewife and stay-at-home mom her entire adult life. My mom is still living alone, 22 years after my father passed, and she is so much stronger than I ever knew.

I would like to expand on my lower middle-class upbringing. I grew up in a house full of love and a commitment to family. We had dinner at the exact same time every night, and we spent time together outside or watching television. We had a big garden every year and were all expected to work in the garden during summer. My parents canned a lot of food. I never had many extras, as in the latest clothing and shoes. My dad was the sole provider. My dad paid the bills. Our family never went hungry, we never had a utility turned off, and we were never without a roof over our heads. Sometimes I could feel the stress from my parents' financial situation as they navigated a life together, but they never intentionally placed their burdens on their children. My parents were usually very careful about discussions unless times were too tough and too tight. My mom worked tirelessly to make our house a home, and a few times she went out of the home to try and make a little extra money. We rented homes until I was almost 12, and then my parents were able to buy a house. By the time my parents could own a house, my oldest brother had moved out, and their second child,

also a brother, was very close to leaving home as well. We moved into the worst house I had ever seen. My parents drove across Georgia to so many houses that I can remember, and when we got to the one they ended up buying, I stayed in the car. I can remember looking at so many houses that I loved, but this one was terrible. I was embarrassed to live in this house. I was not upset to leave our rental home, but I did not want to live in that house. My mom still made it a home. I eventually felt *at home*, but not in a way where I ever wanted to acknowledge it was where I lived.

Years later despite all the work from both of my parents to make the house a home, I was still so unhappy we lived there. We lived in Georgia, and we never had an air conditioner. We never had central heating either. The main part of our house was constructed in 1905, and there were additional rooms added over the years before we moved in. Our house was old, it had little to no insulation, and it was hot in the summer and very cold all winter. I could not wait to grow up and move out. I also had no idea at the time how much I would miss home. I wore layers of clothing for warmth, and I helped my mom and dad chop wood for our woodburning stove. Somewhere along the way my dad did buy an engine powered log splitter, and then I was really able to help with the wood splitting. I miss a lot about those wood splitting days, cutting wood, smelling the wood, and building beautiful stacks of wood. The stacks of wood looked more like a fence of wood as it needed to be enough to provide heat over the entire winter. Sometimes, the heat from our wood stove would be too warm to stay in the same tiny living room with the wood stove, but the heat would never reach my very cold bedroom. All the windows in the house were old and original. In the winter you could hear and feel the cold blowing inside. My parents eventually got a local grant to bring the house up to some county codes, and this included new windows and central heat. My parents were also able to scrape together enough money to add air conditioning to the house because air was a luxury not included with the grant money. Between heat and air, and all new

windows, the house became a decent house, a livable house. I moved out shortly before the upgrades were completed.

Around the time the house renovations were taking place, I met an older man that had a college degree and a very good job. I was 21, had a job and a car that ran well. Shortly after meeting this man, I moved in with him. Around the same time, I left my job. A short time later we were engaged and when I was 24, we were married. My husband did not have any children when we met, and having children was a priority for him, which became a priority for me. After we were married, we tried to have a child for about a year. I found myself frustrated and I think he was frustrated as well. Through my uncertainty and frustration, I applied to college. I was accepted to my local university, and I started in the fall. I found out I was pregnant the same October. I was so conflicted. I completed fall and spring semester before welcoming my oldest daughter in June. Over the course of the next few years, I found out I was pregnant again, but miscarried around the two-month mark. Several months later I ended up pregnant again, and I welcomed my second daughter a few months after my oldest turned two. When my youngest turned two I started planning to enroll again at the university. I was a mother of two daughters, and I had no job. I had a husband who loved the security of having a wife who was raising his daughters and keeping a home, but I soon realized he still lived as if he were single. The realization came slowly at first, but once I found information, I found more information. There were a few red flags along the way, but I chose to ignore them or make excuses. I was so young, and I did this, or I did that. I never placed the blame where it belonged. I stayed and I felt trapped but was not sure what I could do. I had two young daughters and I lived in a financially secure place. Education became a beacon of light for me to follow. I knew that my education would be mine, and that nobody could take it away. I knew that what I had experienced was not something I had caused. I knew that I was young and naïve.



This is the part of the subjectivity statement that could possibly take a feminist turn because my husband paid for my college education, although we were married, but it does not. It took years for me to finish my undergraduate degree, and after I finished, my daughters and I moved into a house a few miles from the only house they had ever known. My husband moved into another house we had purchased a few years prior, and our family house remained vacant for the next year. A year after moving out of the family home we sold that first house. By this time my husband and I were living apart but were still connected, financially and otherwise. Our daughters lived with me but spent every other weekend with their dad. My husband and I ended up having a great relationship and were very good at coparenting. I eventually went back to college for my master's degree and then before finishing that degree I started teaching full-time. I found a love for teaching. My husband had several long-term relationships over the years while we lived apart, and we all spent holidays together. Eventually I even met a man and he was welcomed into our lives. We lived a peaceful and unconventional blended life. My girls were getting older, and I began picturing a life with this new man. My husband and I started to discuss getting a divorce. We had discussed divorce before, but after I moved out of our family home the discussion stopped, and we took to the roles of parents while I worked to secure my own financially independent future. Things were going well until I realized I wanted more in my life, and part of that meant that I was sure I wanted to marry this new man. I also applied to college one more time, and eventually was scheduled for an interview. Two days before the interview for my doctoral program, my children's dad, my husband, passed away.

Death has reframed the way I exist in the world. I had not felt a death so hard since I lost my dad 15 years prior to the passing of my late husband. We were on a path to an amicable divorce after over 20 years together, friends, but it still hit hard. I had two daughters who lost their dad before they even made it to adulthood. I felt their pain as a daughter who lost her own father when I

was young. I was in my early twenties when my father passed, and that remains a hurt that never goes away. I cannot even imagine the pain they must feel from losing a parent so young.

I have learned so much about myself over the past six years since my husband passed. For a while I was mom and dad to my daughters. I picked up where he was no longer available, and I did everything I could and everything I needed to do for my daughters. I also knew that I was still planning on going back to school. I learned to trust people, and to be grateful for things that I might not have noticed before. In some ways, without trying to sound so cliché, I learned to live again. This study was a place for me to remember who I was, but has also given me a place for me to figure out who I am now. Leggo (2008) discusses how his remembering the past was a form of pedagogical engagement that enabled him to remember and let go of the past. I have ideas of who I would like to be, and I have a lot of remembering of my history, but the flux and in between is somewhat a mystery. I wonder why I was drawn to teaching and why I was insistent on getting a PhD, and I also wonder how my experience shapes what I want for my life and how I go about getting to that *place*, as if it is some mythical walk to a physical destination. I suspect it is another step and another decision just like all the rest I have made before where the path to and process is actually the life, my life.

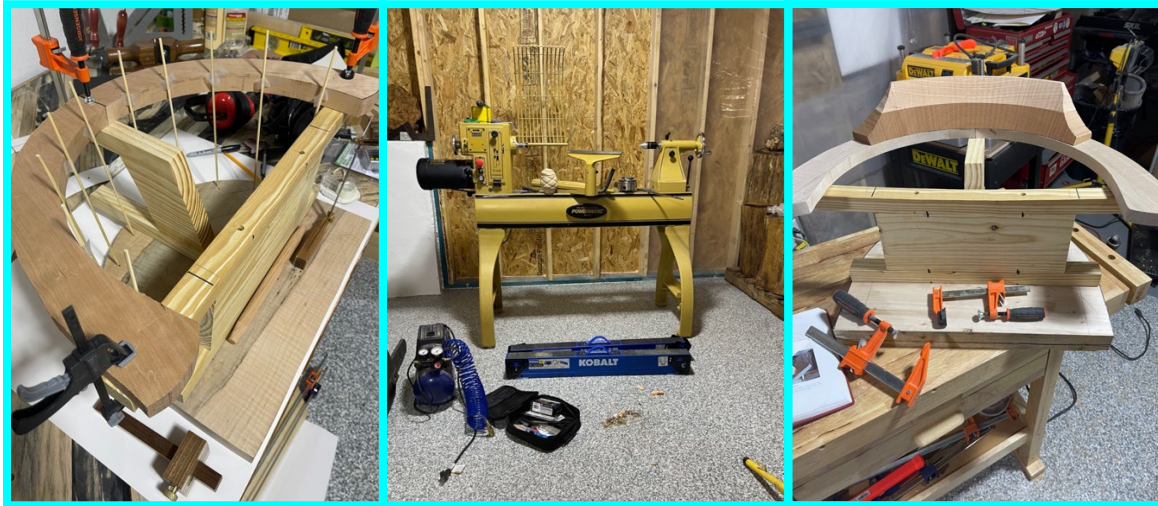
### **Conclusion**

Over the first three chapters I have shared my view into my world as an artist, researcher, and teacher, and I have established my process of building this study. I also shared how I have come to knowing through the medium of wood and how my experience growing up with wood informs the choices I made with this study and as an a/r/tographer. I addressed my subjectivities of my youth, my relationships, and how death has shaped my understandings. For my literature review in chapter 2, I focused on the research relating to three-dimensional space. Although there are many a/r/tographers and arts-based researchers that focus on painting, collage, poetry, and other various

two-dimensional means, my work acknowledges a need for more research that explores knowing through forms that occupy a physical or imagined space. This research was my experience of being an artist, researcher, and teacher, through chairing an inquiry. By using the term chairing, a concept I described as my process of doing, I have metaphorically built an understanding of my researcher and teacher self through the process of building chairs.



#### 4 The Parts of the Chair



*Figure 9. Seat blank with jig for arms and skewers (left).  
 Figure 10. My lathe in my shop (center).  
 Figure 11. Seat, back and arms with jig (right).*

I made 132 pieces of art for my study, not including the drawings and all of the practice pieces I have made along the way (figures 9 & 11). I cut, shaved, turned, scorped, and scraped 132 different pieces of wood. I transformed 2-inch thick boards of kiln-dried, rough-sawn lumber into artwork that resembles the parts of a chair. When I say shaved wood or scraped, it can be imagined as removing a thin outer layer; while chairmaking, I used a thin, flexible, flat piece of metal to remove the outer layer of wood. I used a lathe to turn wood by placing a piece of wood between two points called a headstock and a tailstock. This configuration allowed the wood to spin in place and with a gouge, a woodturning hand tool, I carved the wood into a desired form. While researching different ways to make chair legs I made a jig to hold the wood where I could cut the wood into repeatable leg shapes with a bandsaw (figures 12 & 13). I was not satisfied with the legs I made with the jig so I ended up turning the legs on my lathe (figure 10). Once I was satisfied with a design, I made 23 more chair legs (figure 14).

A scorp is a chisel-like tool used by chairmakers to remove large strips of wood. *Scorped* is a verb that describes the action of removing wood while using the tool. I have heard the word scorped used by chairmakers, but it is not a word that can be found in a dictionary. In my case, I used the scorp to saddle the seat of the chair, and saddling the seat for a chair means to carve wood to the general shape of a rear end, buttocks, bottom, or butt. When I say I have made 132 pieces of art that statement does not include all the extras pieces I made, the drawings, photos, and all the learning opportunities I had—but it does acknowledge the 132 pieces of art that when joined together will create six forms of a chair.



*Figure 12. The jig I made for making chair legs (left).*

*Figure 13. Middle leg made with jig (center).*

*Figure 14.. Final legs after turning 24 (right).*

The purpose of this self-study ultimately evolved due to circumstance, time, and the realization that I did not fully understand all of the parts involved in producing an entire body of work with a set of six lowback stick chairs while working full-time as a high school art teacher and part-time as an adjunct university instructor. My study continued to shift and in December 2022, I was faced with a untimely albeit necessary surgery that I had pushed aside for too many years. My living experience shifted, my constraints now included restricted movement of my upper body thus

hindering my immediate ability to create chairs. I have intentionally decided to use the word *constraint*, known as a restriction, rather than a limitation because I associate the word constraint with an opening to opportunity and a catalyst for creativity. Constraints that occur in a physical or material way provide developmental opportunities to learn (Eisner, 2002). This means that following my surgery I learned and discovered what was possible within my new physical constraints. This chapter details how my experience and constraints provided space to feel the reverberations between my thinking, building, reflecting, and planning. I also discuss how the graphy, or the writing, although sometimes difficult, has provided ~~excess~~ access to the ways I work, teach, and know. Below is one example from my Google Doc Journal detailing how I was thinking about my work and what was unfolding. As I analyzed my journal notes through this chapter I realized I needed to make some adjustments to my words to provide clarity within the entries included here in the dissertation. While my words made sense to me, I knew that they could be confusing to others, so I hope that the revision will be helpful to anyone reading this work. Essentially my journal notes included my sketches, a collection of my post-its, and my written wanderings throughout the process. The Google Doc was a place to record my reflections based on the making in my studio.

### **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2022**

I meant to do some work today, and I did work, but it was not on my chairs. I find myself contemplating ~~these~~ my chairs more than I expected. I tend to finish things, almost anything, with a deadline in the last days, hours, and minutes. I am not proud of this fact, but it has been this way for as long as I can remember. For a while I thought this was related to being an artist. Now I think it is how I give myself the space to thoroughly think through whatever I am working on.

I proposed this study in 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past three years I have experienced a shift from a full lockdown environment with remote, online teaching to a hybrid teaching environment in late 2020, where I was in-person full-time with students both in my classroom and online, to 2023 in environments that seem to align more with a

pre-pandemic life than I had expected. I recalled passing conversations that started early during the pandemic about a new normal, but aside from the regular sightings of masked individuals, things feel more pre-pandemic now in 2023 that I ever thought they would be. I do realize that we are technically still in a pandemic, but based on my daily experience, it is much different than the months of isolation I spent in my home. Sadly, I have returned to a pre-COVID life where artmaking is again reduced to weekends and occasional days off. Being back in a high school classroom this year has been an on-going reminder of how much work is required for teaching, and how hard it is to be connected to an artistic practice when I get home in the late afternoon. In addition to my professional commitments, I have a family, a home, and the responsibility for a life that, according to Irwin (2013), is all relational to my living inquiry.

As described in chapter 3, I planned to build five lowback stick chairs. Somewhere along the way my panic set in and I decided to build in intentional excess by adding one more chair for a total of six. It was a combination of factors that led me to add another chair, and below is my reflection after making the decision.

#### **Thursday, September 29, 2022, 4:06am**

I have I have made some significant steps toward building my chairs. I also decided to make 6 chairs instead of 5. Why? Because I need to have 5 chairs so I am building a cushion, figuratively and literally. I decided to turn the legs for the chairs instead of the faceted legs that were recommended/used in *The Stick Chair Book*. Turned legs are a part of woodworking that I already know as I have used a lathe for more than 12 years. The funny part was I had never turned a spindle or a leg, but after the first one, I felt like I had always turned legs. That made me happy, or probably confident. I will take confidence since this/these are my first chairs I have ever built alone. I did make a chair as part of a class, but that was supervised by a very knowledgeable woodworker. He is not here.

I started the physical process of learning to build chairs in April 2022 at a chairmaking class in Tennessee. I spent a week splitting wood, shaving spindles, and bending wood. I also drilled holes, reamed the holes, scorped my chair seat, and then pieced together a beautiful continuous arm



Windsor chair. I learned about mortises and conical tenons versus straight tenons, and how to blend straight tenons with entasis versus blending a conical tenon (figure 16). The *mortise* is an opening, or cylindrical hole, created to hold a tenon. A *tenon* is the projecting end of a piece of wood that is cut to fit into a mortise. A mortise and tenon joint is one method for building strength in a joint when attaching wood together. Holes can be reamed with a tapered mortise cutter to transform a cylindrical hole that would seat a straight mortise to a tapered mortise to hold a conical tenon. Chairmakers use *conical tenons*, a cone shaped tenon, and they also use a *straight tenon* with entasis, which means cutting a straight tenon that connects to a more bulbous piece of wood (figure 15). *Entasis*, a Greek word meaning to stretch, is a type of tapering used in columns in ancient Greek architecture. Entasis is an aesthetic choice that means the diameter of a cylindrical form has a bulbous shaped curving line in decreasing circumference from the bottom up. Chairmakers use this technique for aesthetic reasons and to counter a possible optical illusion of weakness in the legs of a chair. Figure 17 shows an early turned tapered leg that looks weak relative to the seat. Finally, a mortise can be cut to accept a *through tenon*, where the tenon goes from one side of the mortise and through to the other side. In the instance of a through tenon, a thin slit is cut on the top of the tenon. After the tenon goes through the mortise, a wedge of wood is driven into the slit to lock the tenon in place. A *blind tenon* is a tenon that is inserted into a mortise cut into a single side of a surface but does not go all the way through.

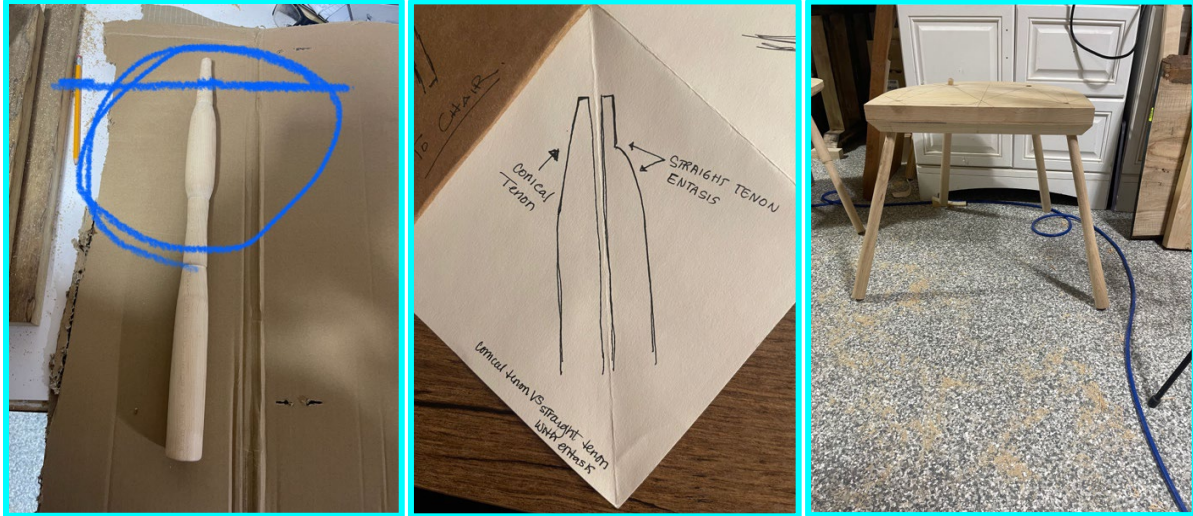


Figure 15. An early turned leg with entasis and a 2" conical tenon. The blue straight line shows where the tenon would be cut after being put into the mortise (left).

Figure 16. Drawing: 1/2 profile view of a conical versus straight tenon with entasis (center).

Figure 17. Turned straight tapered leg (right).

I have built a vocabulary of chairmaking terms that, over time, are now part of the chairmaker language I use. I have a background in woodworking and learning from my dad, as well as an undergraduate degree in sculpture, but I was not familiar with many of the words or terms that I have learned since the chairmaking class. For instance, I vividly remember the first time I heard *chairmaker perfect* and I knew that this was a metaphor for doing something during the chairmaking process that might not be perfect, but it also signified a quality that can only exist with something being done by a person and by hand. I have since applied this same terminology to different things, and *dissertation perfect* comes to mind now.

Taking a class in something I had no experience with gave me insight to the way students learn and, more importantly, how I teach. For instance, after being in the classroom as a teacher for so long, I forgot what it was like to be a student, my doctoral classes notwithstanding. Over the course of the week at the chairmaking class, I went through a rush of different emotions from being giddy to being frustrated. When I reflected on my first chairmaking experience I thought about the ways my students can feel frustrated by completing some of the tasks I assign them.

I remembered a recent discussion with a student, where they had finished a project, and the way they finished it was not up to the standard I was expecting. They looked directly into my face and said something along the lines of just give them the grade and we can move on. This moment was frustrating to me and instead of letting it go, I sat down and asked how I could help. It turns out finishing the project was not about the project, and we talked about what they could do to correct a few things, but I also learned about some other things that were going on in the student's life. If I had assigned the grade and kept going, I would have missed an opportunity to understand the context of the frustration with this student.

When I was in the chairmaking class I wanted to do my best, I wanted to learn, but I had also had a fear of failure and imposter syndrome constantly looming over me. There were several times throughout the week I just wanted to take the grade and move on, but this was not a graded experience, just a familiar sense of frustration. I was there to be in the space to learn, and I was terrified of the big thing I said I would do for this dissertation project.

I organize the rest of this chapter based on the seat of a chair, triangulation, and the flexible systems that are all parts of a lowback stick chair. This writing move is important because it helps me to categorize and visualize the parts of my learning in a way that I can explain what something is to me and how I know. Additionally, in keeping with my inquiry into my identity of an artist, researcher, and teacher, I provide an account of my process of building as *A(rt)* to focus on my making process and *a(RT)* to focus on my research and teaching. I made this decision based on Eisner's (2002) clarification of a "*work of art*" as the process of creating, and "*work of art*" in reference to the product (p. 81). As I introduce terms relating to chairmaking, I signify the word using *italics*, and add a definition, drawing, or photograph. I also add journal entries when I encounter explicit connections between the ways I think through building my chairs and how I make decisions when teaching. These openings create opportunities for me to know, but are intended to

offer an invitation to the reader to discover your own meaning. The writing below delves into the ways *process* permeates my living inquiry.

### **LATER THE SAME DAY.... 1:08 PM (Sunday, October 16, 2022)**

I have been thinking a lot about the process artist Richard Serra lately, and the part of my prospectus on process writing that I ended up deleting because I had not done enough research on process as writing. I think I am a process artist, a process researcher, and a process teacher. I am not exactly sure what that means, but something keeps driving my thinking back to the process. I think *a/r/tography* showed up right when I needed it because I needed a methodology that could help me see my process. I am a planner when I build something, when I teach something, and I am finding my process of planning showing up more now that I seem to be attuned to noticing these things. I guess the outcomes work out like they should as long as you are true to the process or if you plan and search deep enough.

Sometimes the knowing would be instant, as seen above, and other times I would not think about a connection until much later. In the next section I continue to discuss my process and the connections I made to building my chairs.

#### **The Seat**



*Figure 18. Maple Chair Seat.*

The A(rt)ist: The seat of a chair is described as the horizontal surface of a chair that is used for sitting. The seat of a lowback chair structurally and visually ties the entire chair together as each part of the chair is directly connected to the seat (figure 18). The design of a lowback chair is

different from a more common post and rung chair (figure 19), where the entire structure of the chair is built and the seat is added on top of the structure at the end of the making process.



*Figure 19. Post and rung chair, left, my chair from chairmaking class, right.*

During my first trip to the wood store for this self-study, in the summer of 2022, I purchased a very large piece of maple (figure 20) because it was thick enough and large enough to cut the seat blanks I would need. Woodworkers and chairmakers alike use the term *blanks* to describe wood that has been rough cut into the desired shapes for whatever project they are working on (figure 21). As soon as I got the wood into my shop I started cutting it into seat blanks. After the seat blank is cut, the seat is saddled, which means the top of the seat is carved away in a shape like a saddle to provide comfort for the buttocks of the user.

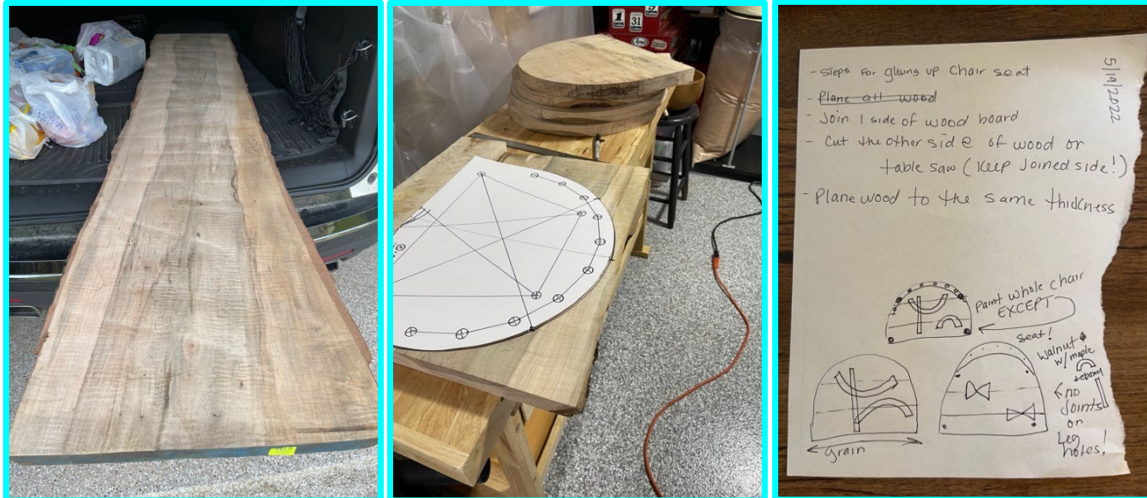


Figure 20. Slab of maple still in my car (left).  
 Figure 21. Mapping out seat blanks (center).  
 Figure 22. Planning for potential seat glue up (right).



Figure 23. Seat bevel practice and marking (left).  
 Figure 24. Finished practice seat bevel (center).  
 Figure 25. First seat bevel practice on glued practice seat (right).

I decided to build six chairs after my first trip to the wood store, and quickly realized the maple slab I purchased was not big enough to cut all six seat blanks. One end of the slab ended up being slightly too narrow for the dimensions I needed for a seat, so the wood slab yielded four maple seat blanks. The other two seats came from some additional maple I already had in my shop. I

also ended up gluing some wood together to make two extra seats to practice drilling the compound angles and to practice reaming the mortises (figures 22, 23, 24, 25).

I intentionally built in the excess with the extra seat blanks because the maple slab was very expensive, but more so because I get only one shot at drilling a mortise through a seat. Some adjustments to the angles can be made by reaming the mortise, a reclaiming of space, but the angle of the holes can only be a few degrees off. Chairmakers that work with dried wood often glue wood together to create a seat blank because sourcing dry wood that is 16"x20"x2" in dimension can be a challenge. I knew I wanted to use a solid piece of wood since the seat is central to the overall structure and aesthetics of chairs. I spent months thinking about and dreading drilling a mortise into the beautiful maple wood. I did not want to ruin the seats.

The a(RT) researcher and teacher: As I worked on my chairs I thought about how I relate the parts of a chair to how I research and how I teach. I thought back to the time I taught sculpture students to build full size functional chairs out of cardboard (figure 27), and how their grade depended on the chair holding them for an entire class period and critique. I taught this lesson twice, over two different school years, because the first time I went through this lesson it was such a failure. I say a failure because I had visualized this project in my mind for so long but I had no way to anticipate the outcomes for the students despite the objectives detailed in my lesson planning. For instance, I underestimated the time the project would take, how I could have provided better support and feedback for the maquettes the students created (figures 26 & 28), and at times I was overwhelmed by having 20 plus students physically building full size chairs from cardboard. Just imagine having high school students spread out through the halls, wielding box cutting knives, and the piles of every piece of cardboard I could possibly collect strewn about. I had also never built a chair myself so this added to the unknown and weighed heavily on my mind.

I reflected on the first time I taught the chairmaking lesson, changed the way I introduced the lesson, and included load testing for the initial maquette because I knew these changes would result in better outcomes for the students and myself. *Load testing* is a type of performance check used to test the ability of a form or structure to hold a certain amount of weight. One of the requirements of the project was for the full size cardboard chairs to support the weight of an student or adult. Since I had never done a load test or built a chair, the students and I experimented with their maquettes holding as much weight as possible. This step was something I had not done the first time I taught the lesson and was a contributing factor in several chairs not being successful. I never teach the same lesson twice because I constantly change lessons based on what I learn from student feedback and my own reflection. The second time I taught the lesson, which took about eight weeks of classes at five days a week for 50 minutes each, many students ended with successful chairs. Several students took their chairs home and years later I heard from one student who said the chair was still at home in their room. I scrapped the chair building lesson after the second time because I felt like I learned what I needed from the experience. I also felt deeply conflicted by having students build chairs they were minimally interested in, even if I believed in the wealth of cross curricular information the students had gained during the process. When I am teaching I make time to reflect on a particular day and lesson, and I am always trying to figure out the things that can be achieved collaboratively with students. When I think about the ways I teach, the ways I make, and how I research I can see how a/r/tography has always existed in my practice as a pedagogical strategy even if I could not name the thing. No matter the type of chair, as a class assignment in cardboard or a lowback chair in a study, the seat's purpose remains the same. No matter the assignment, my purpose as a teacher is the same.





*Figure 26. Maquette (left).  
 Figure 27. Finished student chair, (center).  
 Figure 28. In process chair with maquette, (right).*

I conceptualize my teacher-self metaphorically as a seat while also knowing the seat changes depending on who, where, or when I am teaching. I have also been thinking about what the seat has to do with my research, and how building lowback chairs has helped me know my researcher self. I am metaphorically building my seat at the table and my seat is the place where my knowing is the keystone. I reflect on building the table in the decolonizing education course, and how the table created an extraordinary opening for my knowing. I ultimately built a chair for myself and four chairs for my committee to sit in as I defended my work. I had planned to build a sixth chair as excess. I added the sixth chair to combat some of my worry of failure, but I was not sure if it meant something more. I believe that artists build in excess for more reasons than a fear of failure. I finished five complete chairs and had remaining parts. I ended up with eight seats, and found the excess parts that I made for the sixth chair as a necessary component to complete five full chairs. By default, my research can be described as a seat, connected to a chair as part of an experience at a table. I have established an artistic and teaching practice, and a/r/tography has provided the frame to structurally and visually tie each of my identities together.

The seats of chairs can range in materials from wood, to plastic, to metal, can have a cushion, or be covered in fabric. There is freedom in the design of a chair seat while the basic structure of the chair remains fairly unchanged. As an art teacher and teacher of teachers, there is a similarly structured flexibility in what and how I teach. Metaphorically I am consistently the seat, but I am carved or covered to fit the context and conceptual space of a researcher and teacher as needed. For example, sometimes I teach a lesson just the way I have imagined the lesson in my head. I rarely make an exemplar because I never want a series of student copies of my work. Having to rely on prior knowledge from the students, a clear explanation from myself of the contextual information regarding the lesson, and my words challenge me as a teacher. Building in this way provides stability. When the lesson works, I am excited and I reflect, and when the lesson does not work, I am less excited and more reflective. Other times, I have started a lesson that is not working and I scrap the lesson mid-teaching with a confession to the students that I share their frustration. Tossing a lesson, mid-lesson, has opened some of my favorite moments of being a teacher because it reinforces and humanizes the experience of being a teacher while simultaneously being open to becoming as a teacher. I learn more about myself in the most vulnerable moments. I own the moments of not knowing with my students, and I reveal a weakness in confession to them fueled by a drive to seek an unknown. A chair will reveal weakness by splitting or cracking. My teaching and research come from positioning myself as an a/r/tographer and building a lesson, teaching a lesson, and reflecting on the lesson with all of the parts connected to the seat: this is who I am, me being a teacher.

I have described the seat as central to the design and structure of a lowback stick chair without discussing the orientation of the seat that is a result of the *cant angle*. The *cant angle* of a seat is a term used to describe the position or angle of a chair seat in relation to the ground (figure 29). The cant or canted angle is a term used in different contexts including film where the camera angle

is tilted to create a visual tension, disorientation or uneasy feeling, or a part of the wings used on an aircraft that contributes to the performance of the lift and drag of a plane. A lowback chair has a cant angle where the seat is slightly higher from the ground in the front of the chair and slopes closer to the ground in the rear. The irony of the relationship of the cant angle to the seat is that the success of a chair design is determined by the front to back ratio of the angle, whereas the success for me is measured in terms of comfort. Therefore, a comfortable chair seat will always have a level of cant. The term cant has reverberated with me since I first heard the word. The contraction can't, is a shorter version of the word cannot, and a contraction is the process of something becoming smaller. I could focus on remembering the can't in my past, and the times I believed the cant or can't meant something negative or something smaller. However, the cant angle between my artist, researcher, and teacher self-have provided the opportunities that are the opposite of a contraction and result in a comfortably positioned seat.



*Figure 29. Drawing: Lowback chair of cant angle.*

### Triangulation that Resists Racking

The A(rt)ist: *Triangulation* means to determine a point by building a triangle from known points. The strength of a lowback chair is the result of the triangulated form built from points originating from the seat. This means that the triangular structure above and below the chair seat create an hourglass shape (figure 30). The lower triangle of my lowback chair includes the undercarriage that consists of four legs and three stretchers. The legs of a chair have a rake and splay. The *rake* is the angle the front leg extends forward or rear leg extends back from the seat to the floor. The *splay* is the angle the legs extend out left or right from the seat to the floor (figure 31). A combination of the rake and splay is called a *resultant angle*. The upper triangle of my lowback chair consists of the sticks, the arms, and the back. The sticks support the arms and back of the chair, and are also determined by the splay and rake, or resultant angle of the sticks. The sticks closest to the front of the chair, or front of the seat, have a more forward leaning resultant angle to counter the weight of the back of a person that would sit on the chair. Sometimes chairmakers rely on sight to drill holes in the seat for the resultant angle while others rely on math. The resultant angle in the triangulation of the leg to the seat, and the arms and back to the seat, is directly related to the stability and support of the chair.

Triangulation in chairmaking involves the resultant angles, but also requires thinking and planning for the potential movement of the wood of a chair. While anything built from wood will constantly expand based on moisture and humidity, or contract through drying or dry weather conditions, chairmakers must also consider a movement called racking. *Racking* is an uneven shift that is the result of unintentional or extreme stress. Racking is a word I remember from my youth and associate with a racking horse, which is a type of gait or movement common for a Tennessee walking horse. When I first heard of racking relating to chairmaking I was sure it had to do with a kind of movement, and since I am not building rocking chairs, I assumed a goal for racking meant

no movement. However, *racking* in chairmaking describes a chair that leans to one side. Racking is caused by uneven pressure that can occur immediately or can develop over time. The rake and splay of the legs for a lowback chair are part of a through tenon and mortise system. Drilling mortises through the seat for the legs, in the correct resultant angle, and subsequently reaming the mortises generate a supportive triangulated form that effectively resist racking.

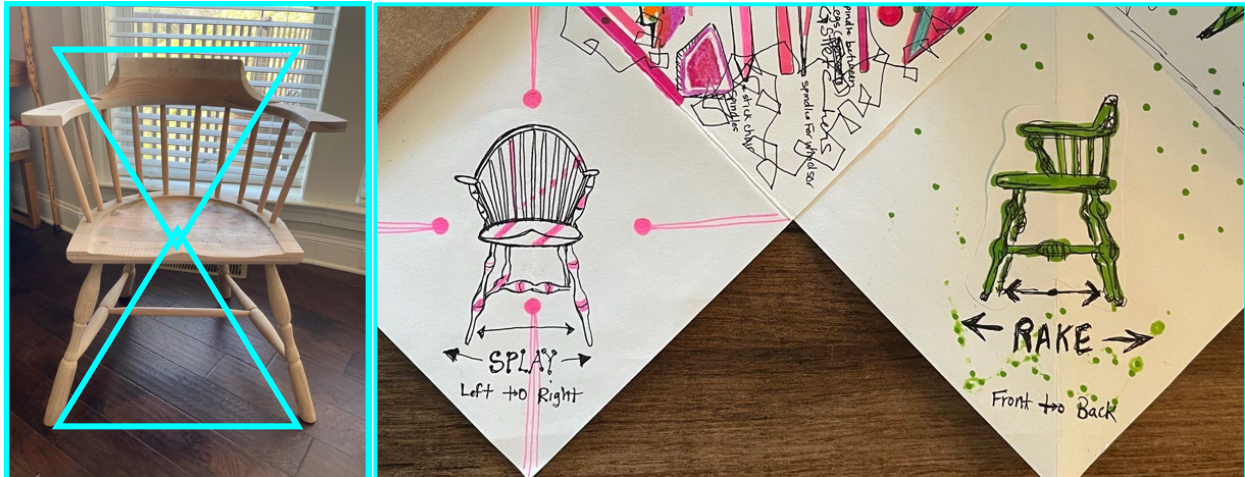


Figure 30. Triangulation (left).

Figure 31. Drawing of splay, left, and rake, right, from my sketchbook journal.

The a(RT) researcher and teacher: Triangulation in research is a term used by qualitative researchers to filter multiple methods of inquiry to understand something, and as a way to strengthen findings throughout multiple layers of data analysis (Wilson-Lopez, et al., 2016). In essence, the work of an a/r/tographer is the triangulation of the three identities of artist, researcher, and teacher, where each is strengthened by the connections throughout the collective whole. The three points of data collection from the chairs, photos, and journaling; the reference to identity of the artist, researcher, and teacher; and the three-point systems of a lowback wood chair can each be imagined as a triangle that is strengthened and built upon with the addition of more points, lines, and triangles.

When I think about the strength of triangulation and reflect on my public school experience a couple of things have made me mad and presented challenges to the emotional and rational parts of my brain. For instance, I struggled throughout school for most of my public school experience, did not make good grades, and had a counselor tell my ninth grade self that I would never go to college and I should be happy to graduate and get a high school diploma. I believed these words for a long time despite never failing a grade and also dreaming of going to college to do *something* I loved. As a first generation college graduate, I did not know what going to college meant in terms of being happy or employed because my parents were neither and both. I did think that getting an education was a place where I would not need to chop wood for warmth, where I would feel smart, and a place that could provide an opening to my seat at a table. When I started this study, I thought building a chair was a metaphor for building my seat at a table for a place I needed to be, but I realized it might have been a search that started long before my doctoral work, study, and writing. A triangulation of strength within myself was built from a knowing of lived experience as a child learning next to my dad, a first generation college student, and now an a/r/tographer researcher where each experience is built on and informed by the last.

When I consider triangulation between myself as an artist, researcher, and teacher, I think about that things I have known without even realizing I knew before I started this study. For instance, when I started thinking about buying dried wood for my study instead of using green wood, I had to plan my building around the way wood is processed and sold per *board foot* or *bf*. I did not have to research the math involved in planning because this was something I have known for most of my life. Bf as a measurement makes perfect sense to me, and could have been an opening to make connections in a classroom when I was a child.

Wood is sold by the bf, and the bf is a unit of measurement based on the volume of lumber, or the length, width, and thickness of lumber. One board foot is 12” long, 12” wide, and one-inch

thick, which is equal to 144 cubic inches. Lumber companies sell all types of rough cut lumber and what is called S2S, S3S, and S4S lumber at a bf price, and most wood is sold as; 4/4, 5/4, 6/4, 8/4, 10/4, 12/4, 16/4 and some other measurements as determined by the tree, sawmill capabilities and so on. For reference, 4/4 lumber is four quarters or one-inch thick, 8/4 lumber is 8 quarters or two-inches thick, and so on. The width and length of a board is measured on site to determine the total volume. Rough cut lumber means that the wood is cut with a sawmill and will need to be planed down smooth and flat, while S2S, S3S, or S4S lumber have already been planed down with two flat sides for S2S, three flat sides for S3S, and all four sides for S4S. Rough sawn lumber will measure close to the original 4/4, 5/4, 6/4 measurements, but will be slightly smaller when planed down. This measurement is an industry standard and all finished wood, meaning planed wood, is slightly smaller than the known and presented dimensions of the wood. The S2S, S3S, and S4S wood will be thinner based on industry standards, but will fall within an acceptable range.

Explaining how wood is measured and sold is important because it is something I knew before I was a teacher and became part of the ways I teach sculpture. I have taught my students about underlying structures in sculpture, including armatures, and how sculpture is built as a volume. For instance, I conceptualized a serial plane lesson that I taught a few times to reinforce the concepts of math, and how math translates to art (figure 32). I often included a description of a loaf of bread: When whole, the shape looks like a loaf of bread, but when broken down into slices it becomes a series of planes. Unintentionally the entire lesson revolved around math and how I understood making as a concept of math. My teaching between the chairs and serial planes, and building the chairs as an artist are a triangulation among who I am and what I know, what I teach and how I teach, and how I am now connecting all of these concepts and ways of knowing to my research.



*Figure 32. Student serial planes the first time I taught the lesson, left & right. Student serial places the second time I taught the lesson, added paint and stand the second time included paint and support options, center.*

### **Flexible Systems**

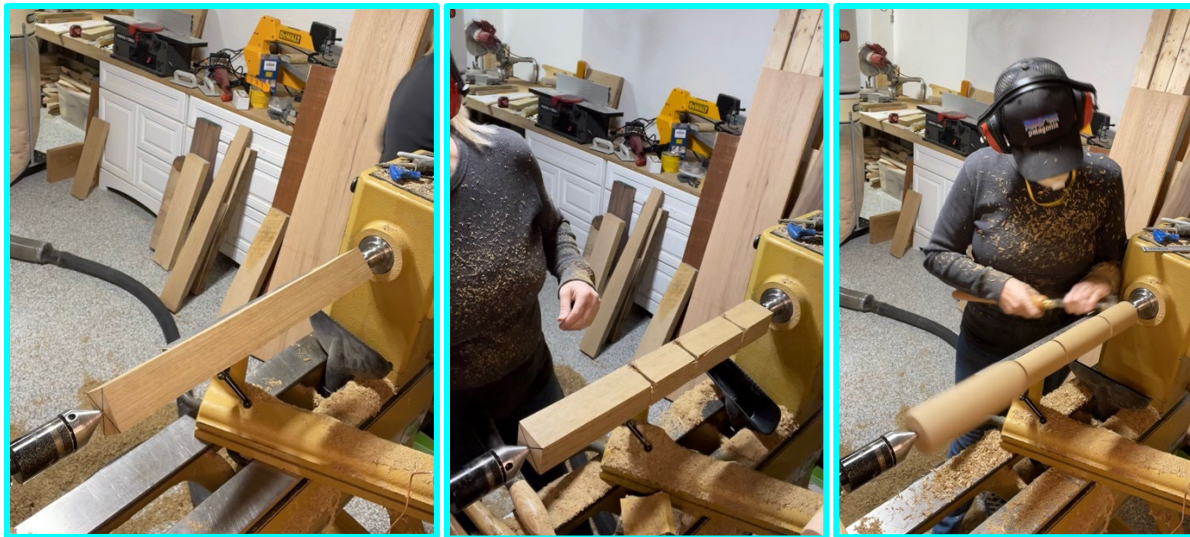
The A(rt)ist: One of the distinguishing characteristics of a lowback chair rests in the chair's ability to flex as necessary, which can be counter to the discussion of triangulation and racking in the previous section. The flexibility of wood is not directly connected to the expansion and contraction of wood, but exists in the properties of the wood to bend as needed without breaking. When I started planning to build my chairs I knew I wanted to use the same wood I used in the chairmaking class, which was maple for the legs, western pine for the seat, and oak for the sticks. The maple is used for the legs because it is strong and flexible, the pine is strong but lighter to help reduce the overall weight of the entire chair, and the oak is strong, flexible, and good for steam bending. I did not steam bend any parts for these chairs, but I like to work with oak and made that choice based on my previous experience working with oak.

The first few times I went to the wood store, I quickly realized the wood stock was not as readily available as I had seen in past years. I ended up buying oak and maple for the seat, sticks, arms, and back, which are wood from the southeast and common to chairmaking. Accessibility



makes oak and maple a good purchase considering they can be sourced and milled locally, which helps keep the cost reasonably low. I was not able to find any of the western pine for the seats, so I used maple and oak. I intended to make the legs for my chairs from maple, but ended up buying black limba, an African hardwood instead. When I discovered the wood store did not have the maple I needed, I shifted my plan to a wood of similar weight and strength.

My lowback stick chairs are made with a straight grain wood that provides resilience in the wood's ability to bend under a load without breaking. The 24 chair legs I turned are made from the black limba (figure 33) that I purchased when I could not find the maple wood I originally planned to include. The flexibility to use a wood of similar hardness and density to maple, that had straight grain, meant that I could continue my studio work without interruption. The wood turned (figure 34) much like the maple I had practiced with, and there is no reason to think the longevity of the wooden legs will be any different by using a wood that is structurally very similar.



*Figure 33. Black limba wood leg blank with straight grain, left.*

*Figure 34. Turning a leg, process, center & right.*

The a(RT) researcher and teacher: As previously discussed, Rollings (2013) describes artistic methods as flexible systems within research that help generate meaning. The flexibility in a/r/tography exists as a way to bend the boundaries of research to discover and explain relationships (Springgay, et al., 2008). When I went to the chairmaking class in April 2022, I had never split wood using hand tools. I can remember watching my dad split wood, but I never had the strength to use a sledgehammer to drive a split wedge through a log. For this study, I did not try to source a whole tree locally because even if I had found green wood I could use, I do not have the proper tools, manpower, or space to break down an entire tree. I probably could have located logs large enough to make pieces of the chairs, but I could not find any reference for using green wood and kiln dried wood for different parts of the same chair. For perspective, *green wood* is any wood that has over 20% moisture content, and wood is considered dried if the moisture level is 20% or below. Live trees are around 50% water by weight. While green wood is ideal for constructing lowback stick chairs, a combination would leave portions of a chair to dry and shrink while other parts would remain practically the same. More specifically, if I drilled a through mortise in dry wood and made a tenon for the mortise from green wood, it is likely that as the tenon dried it would become loose which increases the likelihood of racking to the chair.

I wish I could have sourced my own local wood, split it myself, and built chairs in the most traditional way. Unfortunately, I had to use power tools, a table saw and a bandsaw, to split the kiln dried wood I purchased from the wood store into the rough cut shapes I needed. Additionally, and further to the point of flexible systems, handmade chairs made from green wood are split by hand in a way that follows the grain of the wood. Following the wood grain contributes to the low weight to strength ratio of a lowback chair. This means that a lowback chair can weigh under 10 pounds and can support a person of 200+ pounds. After learning how chairmakers split wood that purposefully follows the grain, and knowing that I would be using a saw to cut my kiln dried lumber, I built in

additional excess to each piece of my chairs by making them slight thicker to reconcile the potential of any grain disruption that occurred during the sawing process.

In Chapter 1, I made a list of things I needed to know in order to be able to build a chair. I knew about a mortise and tenon and other ways woodworkers attach pieces of wood together and even how glue is used to reinforce the connections between the wood pieces. I learned that chairmakers use a specialized glue called *brown glue*, a type of hydrolyzed collagen glue, or hyde glue for short, that dries as it evaporates and cures in 24 to 48 hours. Chairmakers use brown glue because it dries transparent, remains flexible to allow the wood to continually shift, but the glue itself can be reversed with heat and water. Using a flexible glue between a joint for a chair is an important factor should a portion of the chair fail or need to be taken apart and put back together for any reason. Flexible glue is also important to support the expansion and contraction of wood as discussed in the previous section.

I started the chairmaking class in April 2022 with an understanding of different glues, but this class had me imagining similarities between the actual hyde glue holding the pieces of wood together and the ways I connect my teaching to the way students learn. I find my teaching is more effective when I remain flexible, when I can figuratively take a lesson or my teaching apart, and when I can put it back together as a way for me to understand. For example, my teaching remains flexible so that I can change a lesson in the moment if it feels like it is failing. Sometimes the decision to make adjustments happens in the moment, and sometimes I can only see how I should have or could have done something different in the classroom when I have had an opportunity to reflect after the lesson is complete.

As an a/r/tographer I am leaning into being flexible in this work. For example, if I had not embraced the changes that occurred during my study to recognize how the completion of the chairs was only a product of this dissertation, and not the central purpose of the study, I would not

be writing now. However, after reading how Pouchier (2012) described her artwork *product* as a visual reference for documenting her process, and how she intentionally omitted the full artwork in her dissertation, or how Springgay (2004) describes the art product as a metonym for the folds of the art and text work, I realized that I have built a physical product as an experience and data to allow me to see how I build a lesson, teach, and research. While the central focus of my study examined my experience as an artist, researcher, and teacher, the building of my chairs has effectively opened ways for me to visualize the connections between building to the choices I make within and throughout each of my independent identities.



## 5 Building MY Seat at the Table

Before I applied to my doctoral program I remember the caution from individuals and online grad school forums offering a variation of the same kind of advice. It was pretty simple advice, and it suggested if you have a doctoral program interview at a university, do not say that your reason for wanting to get a PhD is because you want to teach college because they will never let you in. I wondered who they were, the professors, the university, the universe? I took the advice because it kept reverberating through different venues and my head, although I never understood why someone would say this. When I finally had an interview the only answer I could think of, but never said, was because I want to teach college students. My answer usually came out that I did not know what I wanted to do with the degree, which was also true, and that I wanted to see where it would go. Not knowing and not having the vocabulary to explain why I wanted this experience almost kept it from happening. When I say it now, I am referring to an access and depth of education that I could have never imagined. I was sure I wanted to have my metaphorical seat at the table, but I did not know what that meant and I still do not have the words. What I have now is an experience of learning that is all the parts of who I am built on the things I already knew.

In Chapter 1, I introduced my study, and shared the purpose of connecting my identities of an artist, researcher, and teacher while building a chair. I quickly realized a singular chair was not the goal, but building a set of chairs, one for each member of my committee made sense to me, felt right, and was how I wanted to proceed through this study. In Chapter 2, I discussed many studies including three foundational studies focused on knowing in relation to three-dimensional space. The studies provided a foundation of support for the three-dimensional work I have done here. In Chapter 3, I discussed how I built this work, the things that actually happened, and how I looked at quality in self-study to support the choices I made. I remember my excitement when I first read about self-study relating to quality and how Clandinin and Connelly (2000) metaphorically related

the use of a lathe to self-study in educational research, and how the purpose of the lathe is the same despite being used to make different products by different users. Before this study I had only made turned bowls on my lathe, and had not planned to turn the legs of my chairs. I realized, in the moment I connected to the Clandinin and Connelly text, that I *might could* do research. I still did not know what being a researcher meant. In Chapter 4, I presented the data I collected, my process for knowing, and the connections between the exploration of my three identities, the physical chair building, and how I connect the work I do as a teacher to how I research.

What began as a seed planted with words spoken to my advisor over 3 years ago, wonderings about building something familiar and unfamiliar, became a destination, or a product, while the connections, or process, to how I navigate my three separate and equal identities have become the work. In other words, my drive to build something I had never built was built on a desire to know that exceeded my drive to enter this program. For the rest of this chapter, I answer the research questions through the use of three a/r/tographic renderings. I made the decision to focus on only *three* of the six renderings of a/r/tography although I have thought through all of the renderings relating to my theory, practice, and process within this dissertation.

I decided to focus on three renderings despite previous research describing the six renderings as moving together and only separated as a way to describe and define them (Springgay, et al., 2005); I choose the three most salient renderings because each of them continued to manifest between my thinking about my making, research, and teaching. While the renderings of reverberation and excess have separate sections, metaphor appears throughout this chapter. Moving forward, I look at the pieces of data I analyzed in the same way I considered the pieces I used to build a chair. This means that each part of data, just like the parts of a chair, share a relational space that when whole, form my knowing as a dissertation. To that end, I discuss how I use the renderings of reverberation, excess, and metaphor to help me explain the things this work continues to teach

me. I discuss why this work matters and for whom this work can matter. I then move to recommendations and a short discussion. I begin by discussing how I my original questions.

### **The Form**

I began this study with two questions, and an understanding that a/r/tography is an iterative process that builds on the initial questions and continues to produces new questions (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). For this study the following were my initial research questions:

- 1) In what ways does my art making, researching, and teaching overlap and inform each other while building a chair?
- 2) What does a systematic practice do to help me think through all the aspects of my making, researching, and teaching?

Q1: As I think about the first question, I think about the connections I started building in Chapter 4 between my artist, researcher, and teacher self as I wrote about my experience and shared details of the data I collected. For instance, I discussed the chairmaking class I attended and how I felt frustrated at times as I struggled to learn, and how months later my teacher self had an exchange with a student where the student expressed a similar frustration. I was able to take my experience from the class and recognize that my frustration was not about learning to build a chair, but how it became an issue for me because I was learning to build chairs so I could build them for my study. The weight of my study was causing me a heightened level of frustration. When I was talking to the student, I recognized a familiar frustration over an assignment where the level of frustration did not seem to fit the tension I felt in that moment. A short conversation with the student revealed outside factors that were the catalyst to their response. If I had not taken the class, and put myself in the position of learner, I might have missed the cues during the exchange between myself and the student. Dewey (1934) discussed a heightened awareness as the keystone of a true experience, and in both of the experiences I mentioned, I felt an elevated level of awareness. I discussed *keystone* as



knowing in chapter 4, and still believe the tenets of knowing are of significance to myself. This moment with the students provided a snapshot of the ways I think through things and how I identified the overlap between my identities as artist, researcher, and teacher.

The chairmaking class provided a space of *touch* as a way of constructing new knowledge that informed my teacher self through a relational encounter during my conversation with the student. Although I built a chair, while not considering all the parts related to building a chair as I did in this study, I did relational work. These relational parts of the work, as knowing, are encounters as a process of exchange that transform knowledge (Springgay, 2004) where I was able to transfer my prior knowing relating to my frustrations in the chair class by recognizing a similar frustration in a moment of teaching. Vasudevan (2019) describes the radical potential of arts based research to accommodate beliefs and knowing based on emotion and memory. I still don't know if I would have recognized the connection of my frustration to my learning during the chairmaking class had it not been for the interaction that occurred later with the student. I also don't know if I would have acted in a different way towards the student had I not been in the chairmaking class; but I do know that my experience of making, and the time I spent in the chair class and interaction with the student were fundamental to me in developing the words to explain this experience.

The knowing I experienced in the chairmaking class was directly related to the studies I discussed in my literature review, and specifically the way Groman (2014) engaged preservice teachers in a clay sculpture building activity that resulted in the students articulating their teaching philosophy based on knowing through a sense of touch. I developed a similar sense of knowing through touch during the chairmaking class that I was then able to recall during this particular moment of teaching. Thinking through my experience of frustration gave me the words I needed to speak with the student. By recalling the information from the chairmaking class and relating the

experience through a moment of teaching, I can clearly visualize and feel the experience which allows my researcher self to write.

As I continued answering the first question about the ways my art, research, and teaching overlap I reflected on some of the decisions I have made throughout this study and throughout my writing. For instance, as I was writing in Chapter 4, I realized I needed a way to talk through my experience as *The A(rt)ist* and *The a(RT)Researcher and Teacher* that would provide a guide for the reader to know which part of my identities I was discussing. I conceptualized each identity as independent, but found that the more I wrote, the less I saw the word A/R/T and the more it became ART. This transition aligns with the notion of embedded identities where the separation is only intended as means of description (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), one which I fully experienced. Further, each time I think about how, when, or why something happened, I can rarely see the *thing* singularly as an artist, researcher, or teacher. Sullivan (2008) discusses the reflective actions within the intermingling of identities as a way of critically seeing new things in new ways. Building an inquiry as an a/r/tographer made me notice the ways my identities connect, and because of those connections, I stopped thinking about making art because I was good at making, or for any other reason I had ever thought. Instead, making a product and building something with my hands is something I do because it is who I am, how I learn, and how I can explain the ways things are.

Q2: The second question, and the ways a systematic approach helps me think through the aspects of my artist, researcher, and teacher self-were not as obvious at first. In fact, when I first started thinking about my study I wanted nothing to do with anything systematic: I'm an artist! I thought a systematic approach was equal to having a routine where I would go through a set of motions while I worked toward an established set of patterns. I realized, however, that while I enjoy thinking outside the lines, the way I work does have patterns and is systematic. For example, I like numbers because they are recognizable and they bring a sense of order to my work that I need so I

can calculate measurements and finish things. I am much more interested in numbers than I am with words, so I often categorize words into numbered groupings. When I first learned of a/r/tography I was intrigued by the slashes in the word and wondered if they served an actual purpose. When I discovered the slashes represented the 3 separate and connected identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher it helped me visualize how the methodology supports independent and connected identities. I know that in APA, numbers are written out if they are below ten, but as I am working to establish a pattern based on numbers, I feel the need to include the numbers as numerals.

I love math, I just did not realize it until I started building things and teaching students to build things. The first time 3 showed up during this study was based on the artist, researcher, and teacher. This realization was the first time I saw the number 3 during the study, although it did not have much meaning for me at the time. When I was deciding how I would break down Chapter 4, what I would add, and how I would tell my story, I decided to write about the parts of a chair. I did not want to just write about the general parts of the chair, and opted for the parts of a lowback chair that relate to a system, and how the systematic parts of a chair determine the success of the chair. At first, I thought about the ways lowback chairs support a human body through the flexibility afforded through wood grain and how the wood is processed. Next, I thought I about the seat and how the entire chair is connected to the seat through a triangulated 3-point system within a chair design that uses the 3 points to build strength into the chair. In my process of writing I choose 3 aspects of a lowback chair to present the data I collected and to analyze my process. When I started writing this dissertation, I started adding photos of my process and later realized I had inadvertently decided to add 3 photos at a time across the page as a triptic.

The number 3 became threaded throughout my work. My researcher self started looking for the connections between my research and the ways the number 3 was showing up. I had my first discussion about building a chair 3 years ago. My defense is scheduled for March, the 3rd month, on

the twenty-9th in the year, 2023. Not that big of a deal, and easily a coincidence, but I will add my birth month is September, the 9th month of the year, and I was born on the 3rd. A few days ago, I typed tree ring life cycle into the search bar of my computer, but I mistyped something and the prediction software searched 3-ring circus, and I am sure that was not by accident. The 3-ring circus search put me over the edge, the spectacle of it, but it became a reverberation to search for the connections to the number 3, to search through the reasoning for the multiple circus rings, and the ways numbers have shown up and surrounded me throughout this study.

Numbers show up in everything I do, like the times I count my steps while I walk as a kind of meditation. I have counted steps as I walk in my studio, and everything I am making is made in sets. I am building 6 chairs, with 24 legs or eight times 3, and at this point I have 132 pieces of art built for my study. Walking as knowing has shown up in how I have metaphorically walked between the relational aspects of this work, and how as a reader of this dissertation, walking is an invitation to explore the study through my chairs and my writing. De Cosson (2003) built a metaphorical installation of text with an invitation to the reader to walk through the words. While I also invite readers to walk through my work, I find my personal, metaphorical walk—throughout my trips to the wood store, my walks between my shop in the basement to my office, in addition to my walks to my new high school and my university—to be the most significant parts of my systematic practice.

I plan, I think, I draw, I work, I think more, I reflect, and eventually I finish. These words describe how I complete almost any task. For example, after I had exhausted my search of ways to build a wooden chair, following along the words above, I knew I needed to start building chairs. When I decided the part of a chair that I would work on, I practiced completing the part, and when I was satisfied that I could do the work, I made the number of parts I needed. My handmade chairing experience manifested in a line of production work, also a systematic practice. I started the

day with a goal of completing a particular step, and finished different parts of the chair, for all six chairs, within a certain time frame.

A quick look through my data shows how I systematically planned to complete the task of building chairs in my shop. The first thing I needed to do was decided on a chair I wanted to build, buy the tools, learn to use each tool, buy the lumber, mark the lumber, cut the lumber, and so on. Each step of my process was like a recipe that was informed by the previous step. I constructed each set of pieces for my chairs as a set, meaning, I cut and processed 6 seat blanks at the same time, although I used different species of wood. I practiced making chair legs until I made the one I was happy with, and then I made 23 more. I did the same thing for the arms, for the back, and for the sticks. As a teacher, I plan my lessons in the same way. I think about an objective, skills needed, techniques I need to demonstrate, additional information the students could need, and how I will convey the information to the students. Sometimes I plan for things when I teach that I do not need, and this can look like excess. As a researcher, when I analyze data, I think about the patterns in see in the words I am reading or thinking, and then I think about the other ways I know the word. For example, I think about the parts of my chair and how the parts are connected with a tenon and mortise, and how the parts are connected by proximal relationships, such as a leg to the seat. I use the word proximal because it can be used to describe parts of the body that are logistically connected, and the purpose of a chair is to hold a body. Visualizing how the words connect to other thing help me say the things I need to say as I write.

### **Renderings**

When I proposed this study, I fully expected to superficially and metaphorically connect my research and teaching practice to the process of building a chair. Instead, I saw how the renderings provide a perspective, an opening, to look for what is happening. For example, when looking through my drawings, or reading a previous journal entry, I find connections between the way that

the details and the significance of an experience appeared as encounters. The connections appeared as patterns between my current knowing to my artmaking, researching, or teaching through a remembering of my past. Davenport et al. (2020) describe therapeutic reasons people make art and how making metaphorically connects to underlying experiences. I expected to recognize my dad in my woodworking, but instead found a feeling of missing him and home that produced moments of knowing relational to others and my dad. Past experience takes a form within the things we do, and our experiences with others shape how we know and learn (Kind, 2008). I know that I make art and was drawn to woodworking because of the experience of my childhood and learning from my dad. However, throughout this study, there were times when I was in my shop, working on the chairs, that I felt immense sadness from missing my dad, and other times I felt joy wishing he could see how I am using what he taught me. The entire process has been a *walk*, as metaphorical meandering to a place where I have felt healing, a place of accomplishment, and a place where I have crafted an experience based on all of the moments of learning throughout my life that now *live* in this work.

There are other metaphorical moments of connection where I saw the ways I know, and the ways I teach, based on my past knowing or how I experienced a feeling of an unknown. For example, the metaphorical coding of my awareness between my frustration with my learning experience and that of my student leaning into accepting a grade were both based on underlying issues, where the learning and frustration did not seem to coalesce. Metaphorically, my teacher and researcher self-saw the connection between the underlying issues to the root of my frustration that presented when the students expressed frustration. In the experience, I was able to connect the pattern of my experience as a teacher to the experience of my student.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that “ideas don’t come out of thin air” (p. xi) which I now understand because of building a chair, are moments of ideas that are metaphorically built into the things we encounter or learn based on a prior experience. The ideas and knowing of prior

experience are relational to the current experience that manifest through new knowing. For example, when I was finishing my undergraduate degree, I answered a public call for art and was subsequently placed on a design team of students from different local universities instructed to create a design for the architectural enhancement concept of a future bridge. The physical bridge now connects foot traffic for university students to businesses located within walking distance of the university. I presented an idea to my assigned teammates based on my knowing of the area, we won the call, got paid a stipend, and the bridge, the Skip Spann Connector was built. I followed the same idea as I thought through my idea for a concept of a chair as inquiry, and how I metaphorically connect my idea of a chairing as a bridge to knowing and explaining my artist, researcher, and teacher self. Originally I thought about how a chair can be a bridge, and how a chair can connect my knowing to my identities of a/r/t as a bridge, and how a chair would connect me with my seat at the table. To fully consider how building a chair would answer my questions and provide a familiar space, I thought about the things I know about chairs, the ways I view chairs, and the ways chairs are systematically broken down and put together. I have since connected chairing as a metaphor to my past knowing as an artist to the ways I collect and analyze data as a researcher, and how I present lessons as a teacher. I came to this work with the full intention of finding answers to the ways I know, and decided that as an artist, building a chair would be the most logical path based on my past for me to do this work. However, I still think about the bridge when I am answering questions, and how the rhizome is not just about finding answers to the questions I started with, but realizing that knowing builds more questions and requires more seeking. The addition of questions through an iterative process of knowing is why the renderings serve as guide for a search and not a road map to follow. Designing the bridge has reverberated throughout my knowing for over 10 years, 13 to be exact, *13*, and now I can see chairing relational to the bridge, my dad, and why I am starting to question and reexamine the things I think about or already know.

## Reverberations

My mathematical, systematic process began to feel like a reverberation when everything I did grew into something more. Reverberation is meant to bring awareness to something, to signify a shift (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) and in my research it meant bringing an awareness to a systematic process in the way I work and think through the work. A/r/tography initially appealed to me because the method allowed space to explore my own practice as an artist, teacher, and researcher. I didn't originally plan to do a self-study, and actually questioned the motives of others who chose self-study on purpose. However, no amount of learning can replace the personal and professional significance I have experienced while conducting this self-study. Throughout each step of this work I have identified systems, built upon knowing, and connected new ideas and new concepts: 3 points of reference, or series of dots that become a line, lines that create a plane are the product of this work. I had a hard time conceiving of reverberation in wood and have since imagined reverberation as the growth rings of a tree, *not a three-ring circus*, but knowing the history of a tree by looking at the growth rings. As I continue to understand the connections to wood as knowing, to teaching as an a/r/tographer, and how I know based on reverberations, I am thankful to have taken the time to listen, feel, and touch the reverberations in my work.

Another way reverberation appeared is in the way the words came with the multiple uses, contexts, and meanings. While sentences are not as readily available to me as are individual words, having the words allowed me the opportunity to search through the word, *and the wood*, to understand the meaning. This thought reverberated through my thinking and forced me to consider the ways words can be a barrier for students who struggle to understand the context or meaning and how visual information provides clues. For instance, I added drawings to this work to help describe what was happening. The drawings are meant to provide a visual for words that exist within chairmaking, but could mean something completely different outside of chairmaking. The idea was



to provide the very thing, a visual, that has supported my knowing throughout my life and throughout this study. Reverberations require a shift—where each decision informs the next idea or thought. After the years of thinking about this research, and curiously following the reverberations, I see how important time and space have been to my ongoing process of decision making throughout my teaching and artmaking. In other words, this research has confirmed my belief that learning can be present in many different forms. The form of my learning throughout this process was built on a chair.

When I started answering my second research question, I quickly realized how the number 3 kept appearing throughout my research and my life. The more I think about this number, the more I can see the reverberations that are happening in sets of three. When I started this work, I did not find a lot of studies based on three-dimensional concepts of building. Ironically, each time I conducted a search using various search words and terms, the same three studies typically appeared at the top of the search. When I wrote about these studies, it was not because I only wanted to include three, as that number was not part of my thinking at the time. It was actually because the three studies and the framework resonated with the work I have done.

### **Excess**

Another conceptual rendering of a/r/tography, the 3<sup>rd</sup> I will discuss, played a key role in my study is excess. I previously described its meaning as having more than desired, which could be a sign of abundance, rather than excess. I have experienced an abundance of wood, in reflecting on my teaching, and in the many rhizomatic connections that flow between my internal thoughts and ideas; but I have found my words do not flow with the same abundance. Each sentence that I am able to formulate is painfully carved out of the list of words I think about as I work, as I make, and as I live. De Cosson (2003) described a similar experience of writing that was so vivid within his experience, yet it all *sounded* so different when he actually sat down to write. Building chairs helped

me to articulate what I have discovered despite the words not being nearly as available, and as such, the words in this dissertation are not the whole of my experience.

The pages of this dissertation have also become so confining and the opposite of excess or abundance. When I ~~right~~ write, it is not in sentences on paper. I draw images and words, and I imagine experiences and situations throughout my senses. I spend a lot of time observing because being in or within something helps me to feel the nuances that words cannot provide. As a methodology, a/r/tography became a way for me to examine the overlap of my three identities through the ways I know and care. Writing this *thing* has been therapeutic in some ways as well. I now see the way language is used as a tool—it is how we write and the words we choose. And I hear words differently now. For instance, I got a text message yesterday letting me know there was an edited draft of my work in my inbox. I laughed for a quick second because I imagined a draft on tap at a bar, and then I thought about a big draft horse, and then sitting in a drafting class in high school. This excess, not abundance, of words has been happening more and more over the past few months. The context and application of the word or words we use matter, but then I think about what happens to a student that cant *can't* visualize a word the way I do or cant *can't* place a word because the way they understand a word is different from the way it is being used. I used cant instead of can't or cannot on purpose, in excess. However, I do think about how my knowing of words inform my knowing as the right amount of cant.

I started my study planning to build one and then five chairs, but eventually changed that number to six chairs with my reasoning as my fear of failure, and an unintentional building in of excess. As a woodworker I have an experience with excess and one thing I have always done with my excess wood is add it to my fireplace on cold nights (figure 35). Sometimes the act of burning excess after a failed attempt of making can be therapeutic, an aesthetic experience of abundance. Whereas other times, burning wood for necessity, for warmth, becomes a full circle moment of my

youth. My house will not freeze if we do not have wood burning, but the remembering of cold nights remains strong. Working in a medium of wood provided an opportunity to attend to the excess in the form of waste, to remember, that were simultaneously an opportunity fueled by a constraint. My constraint here was learning to build chairs.



*Figure 35. Excess of chair legs (left).*

*Figure 36. My first paper chair maquette (right.)*

### **The Why?**

Being able to visualize my chairs before I started this study was how I decided I could do this work *after finding a theoretical framework and supportive studies*. Drawing a chair multiple times helped me to visualize the ways I could build chairs, and truth be told, I am not great at drawing. When I started designing my chairs, my first chairs were my not so great drawings before I moved to building a few paper maquettes (figure 36). I knew that if I was going to build chairs I needed to *see* how they looked in three-dimensions because I needed to touch them in order to visualize them as a real thing in a real space. Building is relational to my ability to visualize and know.

Touching the maquette for my chairs became a tangible piece of work that helped me imagine how a chair would look in 3-dimension, but also served as a bridge that I could metaphorically connect to what this research would be and how I could experience building as knowing through all of my senses. Touching the parts of a chair bridged my imaginative capacity to picture the things I needed to see (Eisner, 2002). In Chapter 1, I wrote about touch as knowing, and how I have always observed the world through my encounters of touch. I teach high school sculpture and ceramics on purpose. Both of these disciplines are built on a sense of touch that share space with making in two-dimension, but rely more on touch to build, to decide, and to know. If something is hot, it has always made more sense to me to touch the thing and associate the word hot to how it feels.

This study, following in the metaphorical footsteps of scholars before me (de Cosson, 2003, 2004; Gouzouasis, et al., 2013; Irwin, 2004; Pouchier, 2012; Roupp, 2019; Sousanis, 2015, 2018; Springgay, 2002, 2004, 2008; Zoss & White, 2011), those who walked or played against the grain made it possible for me to build this work with chairs that structurally rely on following the grain. Somehow a student who struggled in school is now on the verge of becoming a doctor in teacher education. When I think about what that means, I have to give credit to my parents, especially my dad, for instilling a work ethic in me. However, I can't help but think about how everyone learns different, and instead of calling *it* a learning curve it should be called a cant angle, although it is still the opposite of cant. The cant is now familiar, set, and how I shaped the form of my learning to fit into an academic setting.

## **Recommendations**

I thought I would come to the end of this study and I would have the big words and big statements to make about what I did, how I did it, and some sound advice I could pass along. I think I might still be too close to this thing to recognize the contributions I can make. I also came to

this work with the full intention of answering my questions, seeing myself in this work, and finishing by knowing I had the answers I needed. I have wondered if I needed to make so many chairs, and if the same thing could be accomplished with a few chairs or a single chair. It is a numbers thing for me, the math, and thinking about the ways I work. One chair would require the same amount of work, almost, but one chair would not have accomplished my goals of spending a few hours at a table with scholars discussing my work, while they sit in the chairs I built. I do like to imagine my chairs bringing people to the same table. If I only had one chair, it would change the how I conceptualized this experience. I needed to build an entire set of chairs to fill my purpose. A chair would have given me the same amount of information, but the set was significant to my defense and being at the *table*, in community with my committee.

I did not come to this work with a mission to fundamentally decolonize the processes involved with conducting a study or writing a dissertation. I remember thinking that building a chair was different, but not something completely unheard of. I never imagined that my argument for learning could have implications for anyone that learns better when the learning is based on prior experience. I have spent my entire life trying to fit in, to recall the correct answer when needed, and to abstain from words, gestures, or ideas that would externally confirm my differences. After years of searching for sameness, and then building a table for a doctoral class, I knew that a study of art teachers or art education students by any means, would not satisfy my need to learn. I recommend a/r/tography as a teaching pedagogy and as a way to connect prior knowing to the way teachers teach and the way students learn. Further, I think it is the responsibility of teachers and teacher educators to examine the ways our own knowing shapes how we teach. Thinking through the various ways people learn can provide a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning.

## Discussion

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed my hesitance to even apply to a doctoral program and how confused I was by repeatedly hearing that if I got an interview *do not say you are pursuing this degree because you want to teach college*. I did not know what that meant, and now I look back and realize that teaching college students was not my goal. Five years ago I did not have the vocabulary and knowing to articulate my desire to find my metaphorical seat at the table. I did not even know what that meant. For so much of my life I have wished that I was the kid in school who could be told something, have dates and timelines thrown at me, memorize the answers to the test, and recite all of the things I had heard word-for-word. Many of the things I was told never held meaning for me because they were rogue facts and it was never communicated as to why they would matter beyond an exam. Now that I am finishing my five-year journey, I know what a chair is and what a chair can be. I know there is so much more to a chair that I will not be able to articulate on the pages of this document, but the chairs have provided an opening. Through chairing, I recognize the importance of valuing my past experiences and how those experiences are fundamental in helping me carve out spaces for knowing.

This work offers an example of putting the senses of knowing first, and waiting for the words until later, knowing that the words will come, but that they may not come at the beginning or up until the end. The words, like making and teaching are part of the thing- necessary- but by themselves insufficient-for the development of research. In the introduction to this work, I shared Irwin's (2013) question of what an art practice set in motion could mean, and have since read how Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) challenge arts-based researchers to reconsider "what art might do" (p. 9) in their critique of arts-based research practices, and how transforming the idea of art "from being to becoming" (p. 17) can be the step forward educational research needs. I have used writing all the words to discuss how my work has led me to investigate the deeper meanings behind the use of

words, and I apply to same thinking to the way the words connect, and how the connections act to change or evoke a new meaning. I think this is what Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) mean by the art being the *words* and *speaking for itself* to creating openings for making new meaning. When I first discussed an inquiry of building a chair as a way of knowing, I imagined writing the words of this dissertation over the form of a chair that I built. That idea was quickly dismissed, and I conformed to building chair and writing about the process as words in a document, a 5 chapter exploration, as a dissertation, because I just want to finish -a finish that simultaneously signifies a start.

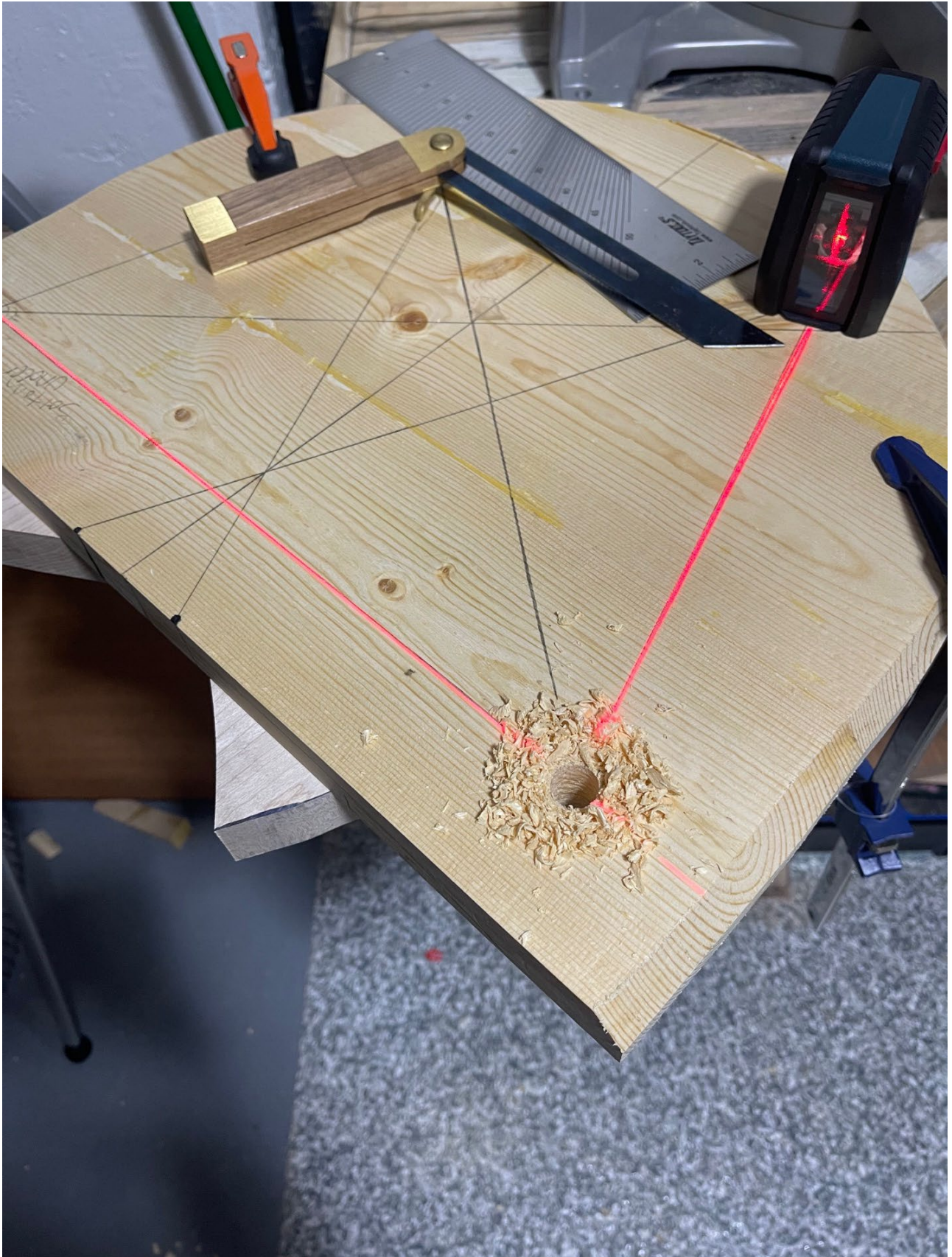
O'Donoghue (2021) describes the way artists, teachers, and scholars create conditions in order to see the world differently, and how the conditions become “a way of producing the world” (p. 109). As I write this, I can see how this study changed my walk with students and how I visualize building ideas together and supporting the ideas my students develop. Further, I can honor my own knowing and my students’ ways of knowing that they may develop through their senses. I keep thinking about sculptor and scholar, Alex F. de Cosson (2003), and how his metaphorical sculpture installation of words as a dissertation laid the foundation for me to do the work I needed to do, or how Nick Sousanis (2015) challenged the primacy of words over visuals in his dissertation as a graphic novel. These two examples of scholarship present knowing in the form of a dissertation, and connect to the ways I know and learn through past experience, and the ways I consider inclusive ways of knowing as a teacher.

To have an impact on our students is what we as teachers are interested in. We strive to have them see, through our eyes, a life worth living. We are called to the content that is behind, in front of, incorporated in, an artwork, we wish the transcendence to be life affirming and transformative. But the engagement must be there, there must be an interaction on behalf of the viewer, (our students as we teach) they must be drawn into that liminal space, drawn into that place that has meaning outside of self, and object found in-between in a hybrid space

that exists only as we exist with and in contact with the object, the event, the performative moment. (De Cosson, 2003, p. 106)

In simple terms this quote means that we, teachers, need an interest and love for teaching that exists to our core, and we also accept the responsibility to instill a similar appreciation for learning in our students. I can think of nothing more affirming than to uncover the layers of knowing to reveal the how and why of the ways things are done and how something is made. I never thought I would love teaching as much as I do. Much of my experience in public school suggested that I would not willingly choose to spend most of my life in a school, but here I am, right where I am supposed to be. In my introduction, I wrote about the art education unit I developed around gears, and how I believed the movement of gears connected to the ways I learn and think. As a researcher, I have confirmed my beliefs through support from past scholarship, evidence of photos and reflection fueled by my own making, and finally, by forming the words in this dissertation. I see the reverberations of my study from thinking about being at an imaginary table, to thinking about building a table, to building a table, to realizing I had no idea what table I wanted to be at, and so on. I also know what it is like to no longer reach for an imaginary table because I have built mine, metaphorically and physically, and I have the chairs to bring people to my table.





## Postface

When I wrote the preface to this work, I knew it was something that had been done before, and it felt like a natural way to begin my work. However, the personal introduction to chairing an inquiry in the preface also made me think about what happens during the defense or after the study is *complete*. I use the word complete to suggest an ending, but fully acknowledge this study as an opening to a becoming. I wanted to build my seat at the table by building chairs for myself and my committee. In my mind, this study would not be complete until I had the opportunity to sit and discuss my research. Knowing this, I conducted an internet search for *dissertation postface*, and to my surprise I only found the words epilogue or conclusion as synonyms to preface, but nothing relating to a postface, or a similar word, as part of a dissertation. Both a preface and a postface provide a space for me to talk through conceptualizing this study and an opportunity to reflect on the final defense.

I finished the chairs about a week before my defense (figure 37). I had planned and prepared enough parts to build 6 chairs. I marveled at the excess I had constructed even though I questioned myself for deciding to add another chair. I also made a few extra hardwood seats and some additional parts, just in case. I drilled, reamed, and dry assembled the undercarriage of the first chair to include the legs and the stretchers. With the lower half of the chair complete, I drilled the holes through the arms of the chair and into the seat. This was a huge step, one I had planned and stressed over for months. I then proceeded to drill and assemble all of the undercarriages for 6 chairs. After that, I started drilling the arms. Half way through drilling the second arm, the arm snapped. Right at that moment, I knew I would not finish 6 chairs, but I also knew why the arm broke. I learned, again. I continued drilling and assembling the chairs until the 5 were solid forms. I could not afford another mishap during the assembly as I had no more wood or time.



*Figure 37. My finished chairs*

## **The Defense**

I arrived on campus 2 hours before my defense. It had been a long time since I had travelled to campus and I did not want the time and rush hour traffic to make me late. I had done the work, I had finished the chairs, and I anxiously waited for my committee to arrive. I was excited to be in the same room with my committee. Things are done different now, since COVID, but being in the same room with Dr. Zoss, Dr. Kasun, Dr. Davenport, and Dr. Munson were part of the necessary conditions for this experience. I needed to deliver the chairs to the defense, and my committee needed to sit in them and touch them. I needed my committee to enter into a consensual relationship with the chairs. My defense started shortly after 9:00am.

I wanted to write about my defense a few days after it happened. I had planned to rest for three days and then write over the weekend. I kept waiting to remember what happened during the two hours of my defense, but much of the time remained a blur. It is 24 days later and I now have the words. My presentation was supposed to be fairly short, and I ended up taking twice the amount of time, although there was never an *announcement* of time. I went through my presentation, my throat was dry, but I made it to the end. The chairs were in the room, and were lined up along a wall next to a set of wall-length bookshelves. I had already decided which chair was meant for each person. After I finally finished talking someone asked if they could *see* the chairs, or explore the chairs, or however it was stated, which I took to mean as touching and interacting with the chairs.

Everyone spent a few minutes inspecting their chair. Finally everyone sat in their chair. It was glorious. I have no words that could explain that moment. Each member of my committee sat with my research, touched the product of my research, and I was able to witness the physical connection of my work and my knowing through the interaction with my committee. A calm came over the entire defense. A few minutes passed before Dr. Zoss suggested we get started with questions and even mentioned moving back to the table. At this point, each person was sitting in their chair, right where the chair was placed in the room. There was a short discussion of moving the chairs to the table for the questions and discussion. Dr. Kasun said we should remain in the chairs although we did move them into a half circle. I was relieved. I had imagined this moment, but nothing could have prepared me for the experience of sitting with my committee in the chairs that I built. My nerves subsided and something changed. The air felt light.

For over three years, I had imagined sitting at *the* table with my committee while we sat in the chairs I made. However, as I wrote in Chapter 5, I began to question the idea of the table I had originally conceived. I felt tension between the table I wanted to be at years ago, and how the idea of a table had been blurred so much that I was no longer able to recognize what being at a table meant.

I was relieved when the consensus was to remain in the chairs where they were at and not at the table that was in the room. I spent so much time thinking about an imaginary table or a metaphorical table, and here we were, gathered around a table that did not exist. We did move the chairs into the half circle as if we were at a table and this allowed each of us to see each other's face.

When we sat in the chairs things took a turn and then made sense in the best way. I was able to feel time, or the absence of time, and how the time of my defense no longer felt like a clock. I sat in the chair I built for myself. I knew this chair was *my chair* because it was the first. When I started to assemble the chairs I had to make decisions; I had to finally drill the resultant angles, I had to fit the legs, the stretchers, and all of the parts of the chair. I started with my chair before I moved onto the other four chairs. Each chair is chairmaker perfect in a beginner chairmaker kind of way, but each chair was built after I built my chair. Each chair was informed by the last. We sat in the chairs I made. I have declared myself an artist and a woodworker over the years, but most of my work has remained in my house. On that day, my work was in the room with me at the university.

My defense was an aesthetic experience in as much as I understand an aesthetic experience. I was in a room, sitting in a chair I built, with the members of my committee sitting in the chairs I built. My voice was shaky when I spoke, not because I was unsure of my work, but because of the gravity of the experience of defending the choices and decisions I have made. When we moved to the chairs, everything changed. I had the answers to the questions. The tensions I felt with presenting and talking were replaced by being in the moments to discuss the work I know. A formal setting was replaced by knowing that encompassed all of the senses. If I could imagine a decolonized dissertation defense, it would be mine. It takes courage to sit at the table. It takes courage to build a seat at the table, but it also takes a committee that is willing to walk through the knowing with you. I found that. I found my place, my purpose, my work, and the opening to my own becoming.



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