In Spring 2014 I received a Faculty Development Grant in support of production costs for the publication of a book project featuring my writing and the art of Soo Kim. Otis Books/Seismicity Editions will publish this collaboration in April 2015 as part of its Chroma Series.

This book project developed out of my admiration for Soo Kim’s work, my interest in pushing the boundaries of the mass-produced book, and my desire to develop a narrative in conversation with another artist. Kim’s pieces often incorporate narrative elements or make reference to literature, so she struck me as the ideal person with whom to have this conversation. I was also excited by the book that was featured at her most recent solo show, an oversized, limited-edition book assembled from 25 hand-cut photographic prints titled In Light of the Moment, the text of which was written by the poet Joshua Clover.

Our book project explores the sculptural possibilities raised by In Light of the Moment but in a very different form: instead of being large-scale, hand-bound, and hand-cut, this project is paperback-sized, mass-produced, and machine-cut. For this book Kim has created 16 images of the urban environment in which various architectural planes (walls, roofs, windows, signs) have been excised. Each image is layered over a similarly extracted cityscape, and in some cases glimpses of text are visible through the cut-out pages. The act of flipping through pages of excised images and text creates an interactive and three-dimensional experience for the viewer/reader that will, I hope, provoke questions about how we read, how we interpret photographic images, and how we look at the cities we live in.
The text that I’ve written in response to Kim’s excavated images is called “The Burglar.” Kim’s use of cutting and layering in order to introduce areas of absence or disruption prompted me to write in a similarly layered and disrupted fashion: my narrative is comprised of very brief sections, no more than 150 words or so in length, that jump rapidly among the consciousnesses of several characters over the course of a single morning in which a botched home burglary takes place. Inspired by Kim’s photographs, my story explores the penetrability and impenetrability of urban spaces, fantasies about privacy and property, as well as problems of race and visibility.
Over the past year, we have explored various options for mass-producing Kim’s fragile cut-outs, including both die-cutting and laser-cutting. Laser-cutting allows for greater precision but leaves a “burn” on the page, a brownish halo around the edge of the incision. We had to run multiple tests on a wide variety of paper stocks to figure out which type of paper would mask the burn the most effectively. Another challenge was finding a printer willing to work on the project; several printers, including Thomson-Shore, the company Otis Books usually works with, said they were not capable of incorporating Kim’s work per our specifications. Fortunately, we found a boutique print house in Marina Del Rey called Capitol Press that was not only willing but enthusiastic about taking on this unusual project. However, the technical challenges involved in its production means that the book is considerably more expensive to publish than a typical Otis Books title. The Faculty Development Grant has been crucial in making this project a reality; without its support Otis Books simply would not have been able to bring our collaboration into print.

Upon the book’s publication in April 2015, the Graduate Writing Program will host a public reading and conversation as part of our Visiting Writer Series during which Soo and I will discuss the project. Free copies of the book will be distributed at the event to graduate writing students, undergraduate writing minors, and fine arts/photography students. The book will then be available for sale through Otis Books’s distributor, Small Press Distribution, which provides stock to both bricks-and-mortar and online bookstores.

This project marks an important moment of growth in my career; it’s the first chance I’ve had to collaborate with a visual artist and it’s been such a rewarding experience that I hope and plan to pursue other such collaborations in the future. I also hope that this project will inspire my graduate writing students to take full advantage of being at an art and design college by seeking
out potential collaborators in Otis’s Graduate Fine Arts, Public Practice, and Graphic Design programs.