

## DESIGNING SHIFTS: MAKING OF NARRATIVES

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Making of Narratives is a

practice-led design framework

for material practice that gives

tangible forms to narratives. It offers

context and conditions [scope |

structure] for making meaning and

sense of our relationship between

persons and things. Within this

framework, a method is suggested

to allow variations of models to

be built through iterative and

continuity between multiple  
iterations of this method.

This engagement also refers to the  
active use of the hand, the heart  
and the head in the process of

making. The use of this symbiotic  
relationship, along with embodied

knowledge, deep expansive thinking,  
and serious inquiry stimulates  
discovery during the very making

Understanding and embodying the  
importance of time in the making  
process is crucial to this practice.

This design method is meant to be  
practiced in continuous and iterative  
cycles. The longer time spent with

materials and objects in the simple  
acts of making, the more detailed  
relational structures become.

The more the practice is revisited,



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By

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## KEYWORDS

Generative Design, Practice-led Research, Material Practice, Self-Inquiry/Discovery, Storytelling, Participatory Design, Meaning-making, Sense-making, Boundary Objects, Tangible Visualization

## GLOSSARY

Where a definition is a direct quotation, quotation marks are omitted but the source is cited.

Adult third culture kid (ATCK):

An adult who has had cross-cultural experiences during their developmental years, in other words, TCK in his/her adulthood (Pollock & Van Reken, 2010, p. 22).

Binding material:

Material or substance that holds other materials together to form a cohesive whole, such as glue, tape, and clay.

Boundary Objects:

Objects that are plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds, but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable as a means of translation (Star & Griesemer, 1989, pg. 393).

Material culture:

The interaction between persons and things (Malafouris, 2013, p. 2).

Material Engagement Theory:

An interdisciplinary framework that incorporates materiality into cognitive sciences of the mind. This framework includes the world of things, artifacts, objects, materials and material signs into the cognitive fold. By recasting boundaries of the mind, it maps a cognitive landscape in which brains, bodies, and things play equal roles in the drama of human cognitive becoming (Malafouris, 2013, p. 2). *Material engagement* approach thus proposes a new way of thinking about the mind and things that can bring new understanding on how things shape the mind.

Otherness:

The result of a discursive process by which a dominant group ("us," the self) constructs one or many out-groups ("them," the others), by stigmatizing a real or imagined difference, presented as a motive of discrimination (Staszak, 2008, p. 2).

A sense of belonging:

Feeling connected or feeling that one belongs in a social milieu (Vallerand, 1997, p. 300); Feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in a social environment. Failure to have a sense of belonging may lead to feelings of social isolation, alienation, and loneliness.

Simple making:

The kind of making that is considered rudimentary and basic, such as ordering, sorting, assemblage, stacking, binding, and so forth. Simple making within this research allows for easy approachability for any person whether experienced or inexperienced in the creative practice of making.

Social sustainability:

The ability for all to live a safe, healthy and productive life in harmony with nature and local cultural and spiritual values (Plessis, 2002, p. 6).

Technology:

Broader meaning:

- The branch of knowledge that deals with the creation and use of technical means and their interrelation with life, society, and the environment, drawing upon such subjects as industrial arts, engineering, applied science, and pure science (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

Specific meaning:

- The use of science in industry, engineering, etc., to invent useful things or to solve problems and a machine, piece of equipment, method, etc., that is created by technology (Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary, n.d.).
- The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Thingness:

A way of understanding things and objects less in terms of their primary and secondary material or phenomenal qualities but through perceiving their ontological power (Malafouris & Danae, 2017, p. 291). For example, Heidegger (1975) describes the thingness of a vessel as its power to gather space and time which lies in the void that it holds rather than of its material (p. 169).

Third culture kid (TCK):

An individual who, having spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture other than the parents' culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any (Pollock & Van Reken, 2010, p. 13).

Transculturalism:

A new form of humanism in which cultural boundaries dissolve as recognizing one's identity as multiple not singular by sharing a reinvented new common culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4).

- Synonyms: cosmopolitanism, global village

Transcultural identity:

People who undergo a social and psychological transformation to create a different sense of self—identity as multiple—through experiencing the interweaving and exchange of human cultures. Includes:

- those who are mixed-race and mixed-ethnic;
- those who have resided in more than one country such as expatriates, immigrants, refugees;
- international students and sojourners;
- those carrying at least one other culture along with the mainstream culture such as children of immigrants or colonized people;
- third culture kids (TCK);
- those in inter-cultural relationships (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4).





## ABSTRACT

Our self-identities are shaped by two things—introspection and external influences. Who we are in terms of our personalities, perspectives, and beliefs is largely determined by how we see ourselves and how we see the world.

Globalization and technological advancement continue to provide us with unprecedented levels of access to this world. At its advent, globalization enriched us with other cultures and insights not previously available. It provided us with new opportunities in media, trade, and access to information and knowledge. Today there are concerns this may have been at the expense of our cultural diversity, which in turn has affected our sense and uniqueness of self.

Whether in the form of mobile lifestyle or through the cultural convergence of mass media and exchange of goods, individuals around the globe are affected by the often overwhelming pace of change in their surrounding social contexts. In consequence, the concept of identity and the need for a sense of self are critical.

<sup>1</sup> *Transcultural identity*: People who undergo a social and psychological transformation to create a different sense of self—identity as multiple—through experiencing the interweaving and exchange of human cultures (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4).

This study addresses, in part, a concurrent cultural context within which loss of identity and loss of belongingness have occurred. For instance, as a self-identified transcultural person, early explorations of this thesis began within a specific segment of *transcultural identities*<sup>1</sup>—a cultural group that emerged due to the complex cultural exchanges of globalization leading to such loss of stable identity and belongingness. This phase not only afforded the initial context of this research but also provided an understanding of self as relational to other people and things. Responding to this new understanding, a series of case studies were conducted to explore how design can help shift our perspectives on the way we think about making and the interaction between persons and things.

A generative approach provides new insights; in this type of inquiry, knowledge created from one study influences the development of subsequent research activities. The continuity of this responsive and reactive process led to the formation of *Making of Narratives*, a practice-led design framework delivered through model and practice. It is a conceptual framework in that it offers a context and conditions (scope/structure) for making meaning and sense of our relationship between persons and things. Within this framework, a set of guidelines are suggested to allow variations of models to be built through iterative and reflective practice.

<sup>2</sup> *A sense of belonging:* Feeling connected or feeling that one belongs in a social milieu (Vallerand, 1997, p. 300); Feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in a social environment. Failure to have a sense of belonging may lead to feelings of social isolation, alienation, and loneliness.

<sup>3</sup> *Simple making:* The kind of making that is considered rudimentary and basic, such as ordering, sorting, assemblage, stacking, binding, and so forth. *Simple making* within this research allows for easy approachability for any person whether experienced or inexperienced in the creative practice of making.

Modelling provides a site for narratives to be tangibly visualized, and practice affords space for introspection and co-creation. Together, model and practice constitute this framework as a tool to attain a deeper understanding of self and others; this, in turn, can lead to fostering a *sense of belonging*<sup>2</sup> and community. It emphasizes the value of gestural engagement—kinesthesia of the hand and body—in the *simple making*<sup>3</sup> process as a means to discover, impart and transfer embodied sensory-perceptual knowledge. *Making of Narratives* offers designers an alternative approach for generative design research and knowledge creation.

This design research explores the potential of storytelling through material practice, specifically through acts of simple making, as a means to help shift our perspectives and deepen understanding of self and others in the midst of the rapid changes in the current era of globalization.

## CONTEXT & FRAMING

According to cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1992), the scope and pace of transformation that surrounds our daily social contexts consequently places one's identity in a constant state of flux, leading to loss of a stable sense of self (p. 275). He refers to symbolic interactionists such as Mead and Cooley to explain that in sociology "identity is formed in the interaction between self and society"—between the inside and the outside worlds (p. 276). According to this view, while individuals have an inner core that is perceived as *the real me*, this essence is not self-sufficient but formed and modified in relation to the outside world one inhabits. An individual's identity is mediated by continuous dialogue with other people and cultural identities offered by the outside world. By projecting one's sense of self into these cultural identities, and in return internalizing their meanings and values, the individual can bring alignment between one's own subjective feelings and the objective places in the social and cultural world (Hall, 1992, p. 276).

Yet such sociological conception of identity is exactly what is now being altered. A sense of self that used to be unified and stable is becoming fragmented, sometimes contradictory or unresolved as a result of structural and institutional change accompanied by cultural globalization (Hall, 1992, p. 276).

Ernesto Laclau (1990) compares this change in society to *dislocation*. In a dislocated structure, the centre is displaced not with another, but by a *plurality of power centres*. Individuals within such a society, therefore, form a variety of different identities that are constantly de-centered and dislocated by outside forces. In other words, individuals continuously experience an unresolved understanding of self and others, resulting in an uncertain sense of belongingness (p. 40).

However, Laclau (1990) also argues that dislocation has positive features. Although dislocation disturbs the stable identities of the past traditional societies, it also opens up the possibility for new articulations of identities. Laclau refers to this as the "recomposition (of the structure) around particular nodal points of articulation" and this recomposition, "the action of 'centering' is only possible through dislocation and unevenness" (p. 40).

Based on the theoretical arguments presented above, the issue of identity in the contemporary era affords both a problem space and an opportunity for designers—

amongst many others—to reframe the way we make meaning and sense of self and others in this ever-changing world; this, in turn, can steadily strengthen a sense of belonging and well-being for members of the society to create a more *socially sustainable culture*.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, my thesis explores how a design tool, method or practice can help shift our perspectives and deepen understanding of self and others, with the intention of further addressing the following supplementary questions:

<sup>4</sup> *Social sustainability*: The ability for all to live a safe, healthy and productive life in harmony with nature and local cultural and spiritual values (Plessis, 2002, p. 6).

<sup>5</sup> *Thingness*: A way of understanding things and objects less in terms of their primary and secondary material or phenomenal qualities but through perceiving their ontological power (Malafouris & Danae, 2017 p. 291). For example, Heidegger (1975) describes the thingness of a vessel as its power to gather space and time which lies in the void that it holds rather than of its material (p. 169).

How can we better understand ourselves, others, and *thingness*<sup>5</sup> through tangible visualization of narratives?

How can designers reframe and recompose a person's sense of self and others in this ever-changing world, and in turn steadily strengthen a sense of belonging and community?

The structure of this thesis highlights a series of case studies, which are subdivided into the following categories:

In which...	:	Project Context
Looking ahead...	:	Project Scope & Objective
In and through...	:	Method & Process
Looking back...	:	Critical Reflection & Insight

## SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

The research contains early explorations related to *transculturalism*<sup>6</sup> and transcultural identities<sup>7</sup> as a way to find a context for this research and uncover design opportunities. It is important to note, however, that the research does not delve into a specific sub-categorical group such as refugees within transculturalism and its particular societal problems. Instead, the work takes a bottom-up approach, focusing on an individual's mindset and perspective—on the factors that will in time influence action and by extension bring positive social change. Taking upon a symbolic interactionist view, this research sees people as active rather than passive entities that merely respond to social conditions. As such, this research does not include developing solutions or systems for education, law or policies.

“design can address those very things that virtualization lacks—the real and the tangible, scale and weight, the textured and tactile, the patinas of age, weathering and corrosion, connection to Earth and the indefinable bond between the ever-decaying corporeal and the spiritual” (Walker, 2011, p. 175).

<sup>6</sup> *Transculturalism*: A new form of humanism in which cultural boundaries dissolve as recognizing one's identity as multiple not singular by sharing a reinvented new common culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> See glossary for the meaning of *transcultural identity*.

<sup>8</sup> See glossary for the broader meaning of *technology*.

<sup>9</sup> See glossary for the specific meaning of *technology*.

*Making of Narratives* highlights the active engagement of the hand and body as a crucial element to enabling shifts in perspectives to understand, reframe and recompose a sense of self. It is important to acknowledge that *technology*<sup>8</sup> in a broader sense and its relation to material culture enabled this research; however, *technology*<sup>9</sup> in terms of its contemporary understanding as ‘digital technology’ did not shape the inquiry. The physical, tangible, and tactile qualities embodied in materiality serve as key components in supporting the value this research holds (Walker, 2011, p. 175).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### HEURISTIC INQUIRY

Heuristic inquiry (HI) is a search through internal pathways of self using self-reflection, exploration, sift and elucidation to discover meaning and essence in significant human experience (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). Pioneered by American humanistic psychologist, Clark Moustakas, HI is directly concerned with human-knowing, especially self-inquiry. This approach explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher—the researcher’s lived experiences become the focus of the research. Throughout the HI process, the self of the researcher “experiences a growing sense of self-awareness and self-knowledge, promoted by self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery” (Given, 2008, p. 390). As such, the researcher can become fully immersed in the research as an active tool; an instrument to gather insights and meaning that are often tacit, hidden or denied (Moustakas, 2001, cited in Hiles, 2001). With its inherently personal and compassionate approach, HI embodies open discussion with participants and “allows participants to have their stories understood and their voices heard” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 106). Participants in heuristic research are not considered as subjects but as co-researchers who are integral to the process.

<sup>10</sup> *Thingness*: A way of understanding things and objects less in terms of their primary and secondary material or phenomenal qualities but through perceiving their ontological power (Jones & Skinner, 2014, p. 11). For example, Heidegger (1975) describes the thingness of a vessel as its power to gather space and time which lies in the void that it holds rather than of its material (p. 169).

The initial context of the research described in this thesis was situated within transcultural identities and their lack of sense of belongingness. As a self-identified transcultural identity, I used HI as a theoretical framework to first gain a better understanding of transcultural identities, the challenges transcultural identities face due to loss of identity, and to explore how design can help transcultural identities to strengthen their sense of belonging. The use of HI continues throughout the research to further shape the direction and scope of activities. As a relational-self and a designer, the process of self-inquiry and self-discovery through material practice enabled the concept of thingness<sup>10</sup> as described by Heidegger (1975, p. 169) to play a key role, which led to the development of *Making of Narratives*.

## SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

### **SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that originated from the teachings of George Herbert Mead in the early 20th century. He believed that the development of “individualism, consciousness and self-consciousness” is made possible through the exchange of significant gestures, in other words, peoples’ interactions with objects and other people (Collins, 2010, p. 41).

The interaction between friends can better explain social order and change in society than its institutions such as education or law. People are seen as actors in shaping meanings and actions, rather than passive entities that simply respond to social conditions. Reality is seen as social or developed interaction with others. As such, symbolic interactionism argues that experience and social phenomena must be understood from the perspective of the actor in any given situation (Collins, 2010, p. 41).

As a theoretical grounding, symbolic interactionism provided scope for this research. By setting a boundary that focused on intimate relationships between peoples and objects, I was able to navigate between different perspectives to conduct exploratory projects and gather new insights and knowledge.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH

Practice-led research is a conceptual framework for researchers to integrate creative practice, creative methods and creative output into the research design and as a part of the research output (Myers, 2017).

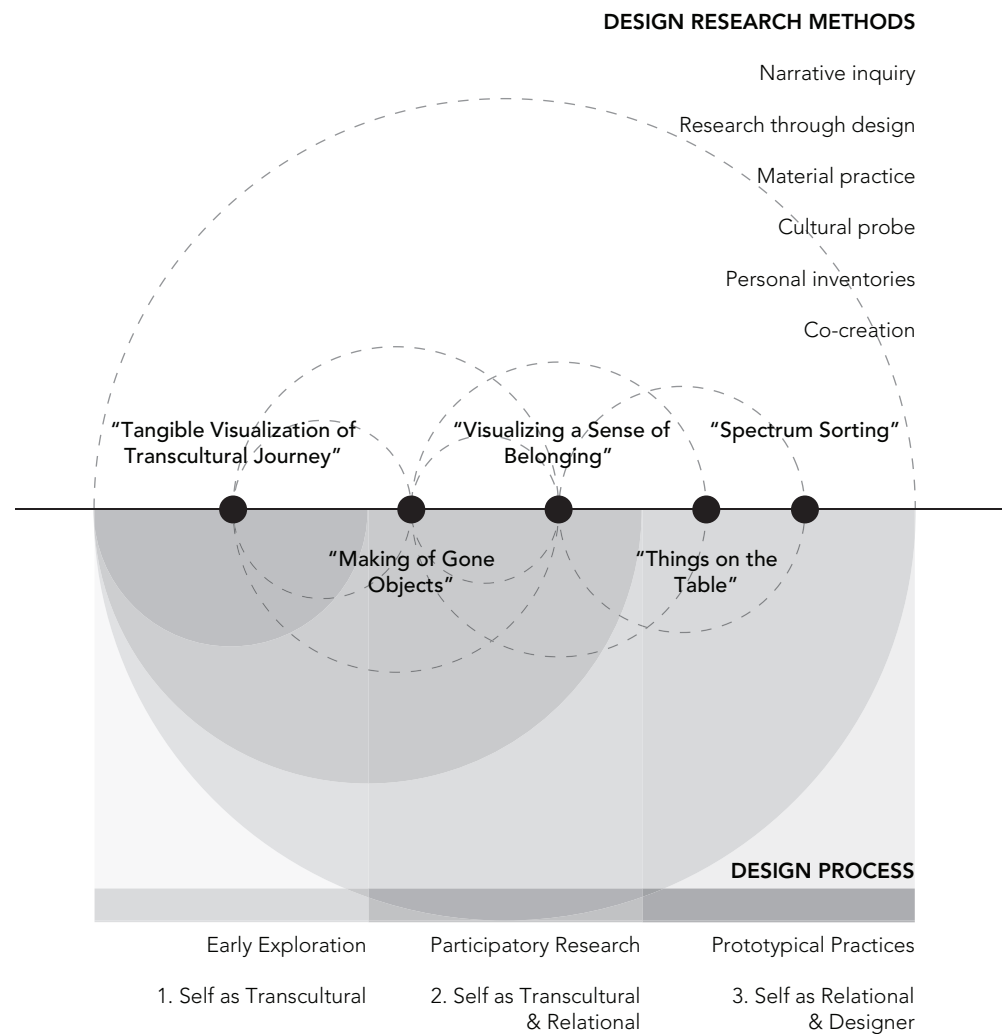
Known by a variety of terms (practice-based research, practice as research), practice-led research places emphasis on creative practice as well as the insights, conceptualization, and theorization generated by practitioners' reflection on their own creative practice (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 5). According to Smith and Dean (2009), the content and the process of creative practice not only plays a key role in opening new avenues for knowledge but also in redefining the meaning of knowledge itself.

Often characterized as generating experiential knowing, practice-led research also recognizes the sometimes tacit and elusive knowledge that emerges during the design process (Grocott, 2010, p. 18). As such, practice-led design is often flexible in its approach, allowing a variety of methodologies and methods to be incorporated.

Since the concept of self is hardly something that can be clearly articulated due to multiple hidden layers, practice-led research was an effective approach to employ in this research to generate new knowledge and insights around the development of *Making of Narratives*.



# DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS



*Figure 1.*  
Diagram of design research  
methods & process.

# 1. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL

## EARLY EXPLORATION

### IN WHICH...

Transcultural identity is a term used to describe people who undergo a social and psychological transformation to create a different sense of self—identity as multiple—through experiencing the interweaving and exchange of human cultures (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4). Although there are various terms used to describe such individuals, such as multicultural, cross-cultural, cosmopolitan citizen, and global nomads, I describe these people as transcultural identities in this paper.

<sup>11</sup> *Third culture kid (TCK)*: An individual who, having spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture other than the parents' culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any (Pollock & Van Reken, 2010, p. 13).

Transcultural individuals develop strong connections to more than one culture, whether it's a culture of their parents or of the past merged with the culture of their current residence. Transcultural identity is often exhibited by people of mixed-race, immigrants, refugees, international students, and *third culture kids (TCK)*<sup>11</sup> to name a few (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p. 4).

In Pico Iyer's TedGlobal talk *Where is Home?* presented in June 2013, he counted 220 million people living in countries not their own and referred to this group as the fifth-largest on Earth in terms of size (Iyer, 2013). Note that this number only includes one segment out of many transcultural identities listed above.

However, there has yet to emerge a general understanding of who transcultural identities are, even amongst themselves, thus proliferating consequential problems. For example, TCK—a subcategory of transcultural identities—is a vast, highly diverse group of new identities who have essentially been born out of the interconnectedness of modern life. Although there are many benefits to this type of upbringing that cannot be discounted, the nature of such upbringing does present a number of challenges for a child, which extends into the child's adulthood. Such challenges include social instability, cultural instability, as well as a tenuous sense of self, which results in TCK's low sense of belongingness (Self, 2015).

## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

<sup>12</sup> *Otherness*: The result of a discursive process by which a dominant group ("us," the self) constructs one or many out-groups ("them," the others), by stigmatizing a real or imagined difference, presented as a motive of discrimination (Staszak, 2008, p. 2).

In terms of societal problems, Amita Handa, the author of *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture*, criticizes the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, adopted in 1988, to have constructed a society that perceives ethnic minorities as outsiders in constant need of legitimation (Handa, 2003, cited in Grosu, 2012, p. 106). In many ways, our contemporary world continues to function with fear and ignorance of *the other* (Cuccioletta, 2002, p. 2).<sup>12</sup>

Such an altered sense of self or others is not a simple issue that can be solved solely through external changes in ideology or policy. Rather, it is an issue that needs to be tackled from within a person's mindset, both that of transcultural identities and members of the host society.

### LOOKING FOR...

"People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375).

During this early stage of research, I explored ways in which design can bring awareness to transcultural identities with the interest of providing or strengthening their sense of belonging.

When personal stories are told through words, often it is difficult to communicate ineffable elements such as emotions. Acknowledging this gap, I aimed to explore alternative ways to tell stories by expanding on *Narrative Inquiry* method. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), *Narrative Inquiry* is "the study of experience as story... first and foremost a way of thinking about experience" (p. 375). Based on

## 1. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL

### EARLY EXPLORATION

this approach, I employed the poetic capacity of storytelling to understand and interpret personal meanings behind one's experience.

Instead of conventional oral storytelling or written stories, I chose to tangibly visualize the story being told. The act and the process of making became *the story*, rather than using conventional techniques such as constructing personas, scenarios, and narratives through pictures and graphics.

"through stories, we can find, express and recognize meanings, and it is one way of endowing inanimate things with significance and value" (Walker, 2011, p. 9).

### "TANGIBLE VISUALIZATION OF TRANSCULTURAL JOURNEY"

#### IN AND THROUGH...

Utilizing *Research through Design (RtD)*, this project was "constituted by the design process itself, including materials research, development work, and the critical act of recording and communicating the steps, experiments, and iterations of design" (Martin & Hanington, 2012, p. 146).

Self-inquiry and material-based practice played a key role in this particular project. I acted as both the researcher and research subject by telling my own story as a transcultural identity through a generative making process. Here my story was of my personal journey moving and living through many different places in the world. The use of material culture in this project was prompted by a moment when I broke

## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

a mug my mother had given me when I last left home (see Figure 2). This event made me realize how we bond with objects and how we clothe them with meanings and stories. Reflecting on this event, I was able to recognize the significance of material culture—the interaction between persons and things—as a critical element in my design research.



*Figure 2.*  
Photo of the broken mug.

Using visual metaphors, mugs and vessels were adopted to represent each culture I once dwelled in (see Figure 3). With these, I tried to visualize my own transcultural life journey. It was a very intuitive and instinctive process based on a fuzzy memory of my past.



*Figure 3.*  
Mugs and vessels used in  
*Tangible Visualization of  
Transcultural Journey.*

## 1. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL

### EARLY EXPLORATION

The first visualization series consisted of basic assemblages without the use of binding materials, the second iteration used black tape as the binding material, and the third used non-drying soft clay. Such acts of simple making were consistently conducted in a fluid manner, in which each action performed parts of my personal journey as a transcultural identity. Each tangible visualization and its process was recorded to capture every movement and interaction between my hand and the vessels (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.*  
Still frames from the first  
*Tangible Visualization of*  
*Transcultural Journey*  
series recordings.



## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

Through the making process and upon reflection of each assembly, I was able to acknowledge unique metaphors not only for the thingness of the vessels but also for each action of assembly. For example, each vessel stood for a different cultural identity within my transcultural identity, while the instability or awkward placement stood for a low sense of belongingness or unresolved sense of self. The metaphor for clay, the binding material, indicated ways of conflict resolution such as seeking long-term friendships or communities. Also, the clashing sounds of the vessels amplified the enduring restlessness of my transcultural identity (see Figure 5).

Action of assembly:  
Transforming sense of self

Clay:  
Soft conflict resolution

Broken parts:  
Broken cultural influence



Figure 5A.

Metaphors found in *Tangible Visualization of Transcultural Journey* series  
(descriptions overlaid beside the image by the author).

# 1. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL

## EARLY EXPLORATION

Instability:  
A low sense of belonging

Falling apart:  
Struggling to find resolution



Clash of objects:  
Restlessness

Act of stacking:  
Establishing or hiding

Tape:  
Forceful conflict resolution



Figure 5B.

Metaphors found in *Tangible Visualization of Transcultural Journey* series  
(descriptions overlaid beside the image by the author).



## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

Based on the assembled metaphors, I was able to construct personas for each iteration. Taking the constructed personas, I created a minute-long video clip of the tangible visualization process, wherein a persona's narration was superimposed when presented (see Figure 6).

Narration:

"Immediately after feeling broken saying goodbye to all of my friends, I quickly tried to fit into this new culture that I never knew.

Then our family moved again, a bit more grown up, I wasn't sure where my place was in this third home. Some things about this culture didn't sit well with me. I tried to hide my old cultural habits, so nobody would think that I was an outsider. I found myself covering up my past cultural identities to catch up culturally in the place I was.

After stacking one upon the other trying to hide who I really was inside, (pause) there came a time when I felt like I lost myself.

Feeling socially and culturally unstable, I started looking for long-term friendships and communities that will hold me together to feel like I belonged to something, somewhere."

## LOOKING BACK...

My initial objective was to visualize memory through making. In other words, to give form to my memory. As in the narration, the act of stacking visualized the way I had resolved emotional conflict in the past by covering up and retreating to a safe place.



**Figure 6.**

Still frames from *Tangible  
Visualization of Transcultural  
Journey* video clip.  
See the full video at [https://  
youtu.be/SGipCAT\\_cKg](https://youtu.be/SGipCAT_cKg)

However, I noticed that being physically engaged during the slow process of simple making took a life of its own, driven by tacit knowledge. The basic and rudimentary nature of simple making allowed the movements and gestures of my hands to respond to the materiality of the mugs and vessels in their own way. Making in this sense provided no guarantee of a certain outcome as the process became inherently tied to my (the maker's) "judgement, dexterity and care" (Pye, 1968, p. 21). This tension between "certainty" and "risk" in the process opened up moments in which the tacit knowledge—the interaction between my hand and the material—spoke louder than the idea or the initial objective in mind. Which ultimately positioned making as "a process of growth" (Lambert & Speed, 2017, p. 105). As Lambert and Speed (2017) argue, "this is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in and amongst a world of active materials... in anticipation of what might emerge" (p. 105). Furthermore, the visualizing act of simple making unintentionally created a multi-layered sensory experience of sight, touch, and sound which created the optimal condition for fulsome immersion in the process.

The development of this project focused on introspection and reflection of self, based on my real-life experience as a transcultural identity. This intrapersonal approach provided an opportunity for me, as the research subject, to externalize and in return internalize my own story. Hence, there was a deep resonance and understanding of self. As such, this tangible visualization project elucidated the potential that an act of simple making has while positioning the use of material artifacts, as a demonstrative design method and activity for storytelling, self-discovery, and self-awareness. However, due to the nature of my own introspective approach to transculturalism, concerns arose as to how effective this manner of storytelling is to people other than myself. In order to answer this question, the scope of my next project was broadened to include other participants.

## 2. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL & RELATIONAL PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

### LOOKING FOR...

In Summer 2017, transcultural identities currently residing in Vancouver were invited to participate in two successive cultural probe activities and a co-creative workshop. Through participatory activities, I focused on exploring the effectiveness of simple making as an alternative storytelling method to open up discussions on the topic of transculturalism and promote cultural convergence.

### “MAKING OF GONE OBJECTS”

### IN AND THROUGH...

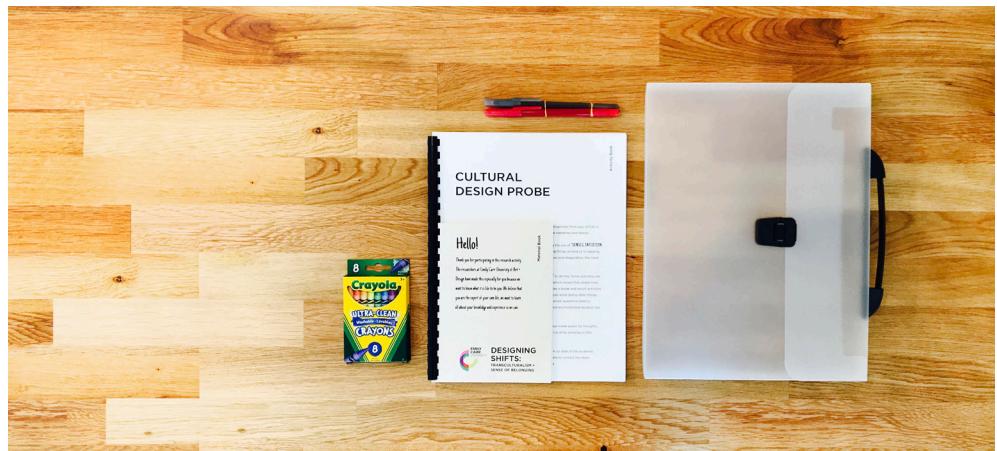
“Objects allude to the people who owned them and the social context in which they were used; evoking moments that once were—a particular place at a particular time” (Gallagher 2006, cited in Arlindo, 2010, p. 458).

Influenced by my own heuristic *Tangible Visualization* activity (detailed in the section above) and *Personal Inventories* method, a section of the cultural probe was designed to collect and survey participants’ transitional memories attached to objects. *Personal Inventories* emphasizes the role of material objects in understanding human life as according to Csikszentmihalyi and Halton (1981),

“one could never attend to all the feelings, memories, and thoughts that constitute what one is; instead, we use representations that stand for the vast range of experiences that make up and shape the self and enable one to infer what the object of self-awareness is” (p. 3).

## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

The first cultural probe activity was intended to understand the context and problem space through the eyes of participants (Mattelmäki, 2006, pg. 40). Through the probe workbook, participants were asked to recollect and reflect on their personal journey as a transcultural identity (see Figure 7). Gathered insights and stories from the cultural probe inspired the development of activities in the following co-creative workshop.



*Figure 7.*  
*Photo of Cultural*  
*Design Probe kit.*

The co-creative workshop was intended to be exploratory and generative, with aims to explore the idea of simple making in a collective setting and to fully engage participants in the process. Activities were organized with different conditions to test the malleability of the design framework under investigation.

Exercises included in the workbook asked participants to draw and describe objects discarded or left behind as moving from one place to another, namely *Gone Objects* they miss or regret discarding (see Figure 8).



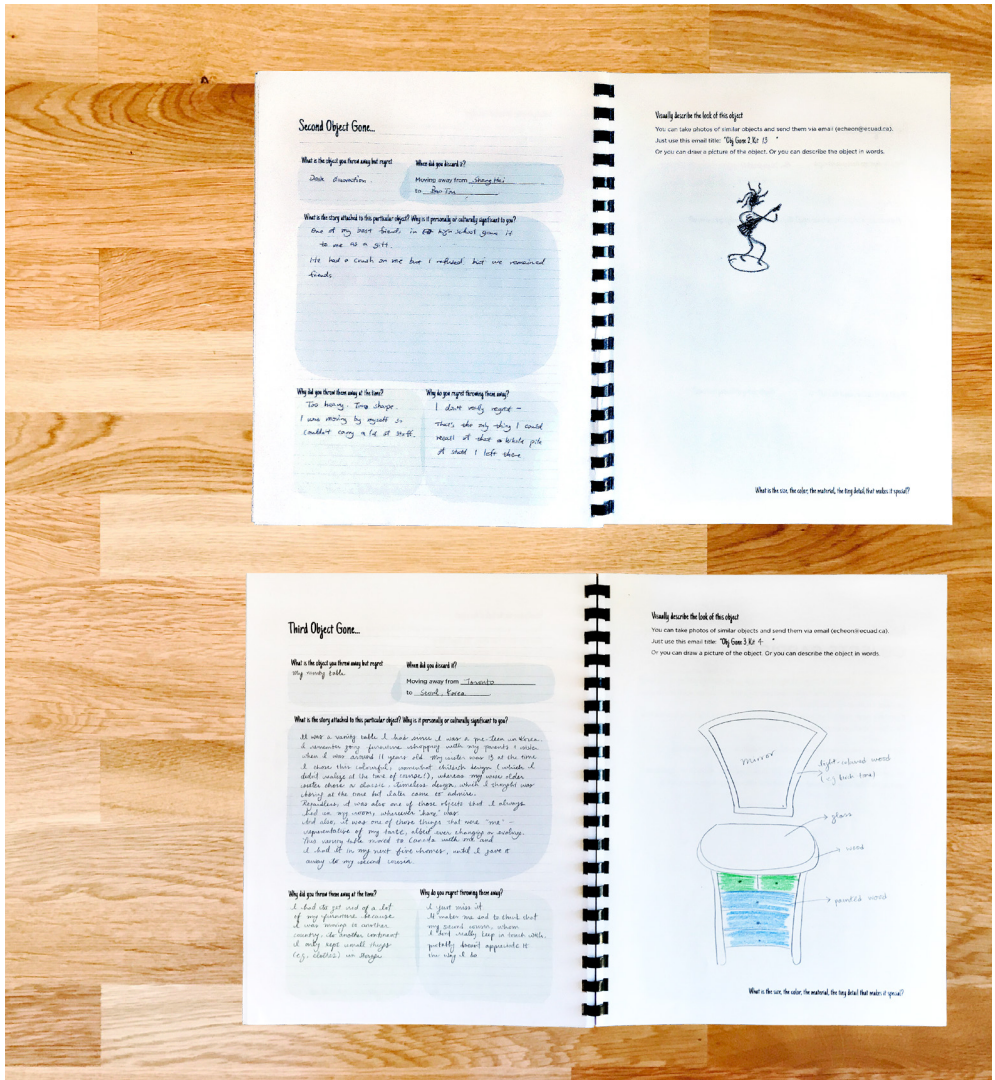


Figure 8.

Participants' responses for  
*Gone Objects* in the cultural  
probe book.

The purpose of the *Gone Objects* section in the probe book was to see if there was a particular material culture around transcultural identities and distinct cultural signifiers embedded in objects that participants had formed a strong bond with.

DESIGN  
RESEARCH &  
PROCESS



*Figure 9.*  
Making of Gone Objects  
artifacts by participants.

## 2. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL & RELATIONAL PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The responses from this exercise, however, did not point to specific material culture as assumed. Rather, it was identified that personal sentiments and memories engendered certain objects with the capacity to hold a special place in individuals' hearts, evoking a sense of nostalgia.

In the subsequent co-creative workshop, participants were asked to individually pick one of their *Gone Objects* and make a replica using materials provided (see Figure 9). Craft supplies and tools were provided; these included a variety of materials—clay, wood, and found objects such as glass tubes, mirrors, bulldog clips, plates and more. The selection of these probe elements was intentionally elementary, enabling participants to easily engage in the making process.

Although this activity was more directed than the previous work, it was an exploration into whether such material practice allowed participants to dive deeper into their memories and act as a more effective way for storytelling in a collective setting.

### LOOKING BACK...

The act of simple making provided participants the time to contemplate, immersing themselves in memories attached to their *Gone Objects*. As a result, a much vibrant and descriptive set of stories emerged (see Figure 10). Compared to the entries in the probe, stories shared in the workshop revealed hidden aspects of individual's memory associated with emotions, senses, and relationships. In other words, the objects were anchored to details in people's memory, acting as a key to their memory box, and enabling a much deeper reflection of self.

Beyond the introspective aspect of this activity, the social and collective setting naturally supported a dialogic flow among participants enhancing the storytelling experience, and a breath of empathy was present in the space.



## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

"So what I have here is a miniature vanity table. I used to have this really colourful, funky vanity table since I was 11 or 12, even when I lived in Korea. This was my first vanity table I picked out myself and my sister picked out something much classier timeless but the 10-year-old me; I think I was actually 8 in Canadian age, I thought this was really pretty! With this unique shape, the mirror and the colours. So I picked it out, and we brought it to Canada when we moved here, and it was in my room. We moved so many times in Canada across the country and through every transition this survived, and this was in my room in every home that I lived in until I moved to... I don't know... Toronto or when I was moving to Korea briefly to pursue something..."

"Anyway, when I look at pictures of my friends hanging out in my rooms, it's always in the background. And it is something that I remember my childhood by, and my friends from my childhood all remember this. I just wanted to have a little miniature in my room, so I want this back! Haha"

"So you would keep it in your room?"

"Yeah! I wanted to keep the same material, and I wanted to make it semi-functional, so I have these little tubes to put jewelry."

"Can I take a look?" (grabs it and examines; pointing to the glossy metallic sticker) "Oh wow, you can actually see yourself!"

"I just made it, and it is a new object but feels so familiar. It's not the original object but the memories attached to what I lost..."

"When during the making process do you think you started to feel familiar with this new object?"

"When I was colouring it. The colours are the exact match of the colours that I had (in my old vanity table). So I was like "Oh! This actually looks like the one that I had!"



**Figure 10.**  
*Making of Gone Objects*  
artifacts by participants  
(dialogues transcribed and  
overlaid within the image  
by the author).

## 2. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL & RELATIONAL PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

### “VISUALIZING A SENSE OF BELONGING”

#### IN AND THROUGH...

One of the questions asked in the cultural probe was to elaborate personal meanings of a sense of belonging. However, many participants either did not respond or merely reworded the question for their answer; this was understandably so due to the abstract nature of the term. To better gain participants' insights, I once again asked participants to provide their interpretation of a sense of belonging, however, this time, through the process of tangible visualization.

As a facilitator and a bystander, I was able to observe the participants' simple making process. Participants first verbally collected, discussed and negotiated (see Figure 11). At this point, there was a lot of dissonance and confusion, and it was hard to understand the consensus. They tried to elaborate but found it difficult to explain.



**Figure 11.**  
Photo of participants making  
during *Visualizing a Sense of  
Belonging* activity.

However, the collective acts of simple making gradually created an opportunity for participants to better articulate and understand the term, a sense of belonging, as a group. Compared to previous activities in the probe workbook, this collective setting afforded responses and means for framing an interpretation of belongingness as a

## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS

concept. The tangibly visualized narrative was not of an introspective personal story, but rather a collectively defined concept.

After making, the group sat together to explain their interpretation of a sense of belonging using the visualized artifact. This time though, their articulation was much clearer and organized. As they held up or pointed to certain parts of the visualized artifact, their insights were easily transferred, and I was able to understand better (see Figure 12). Unlike what was mentioned in the probes or other conventional definitions, a rather atypical interpretation emerged.

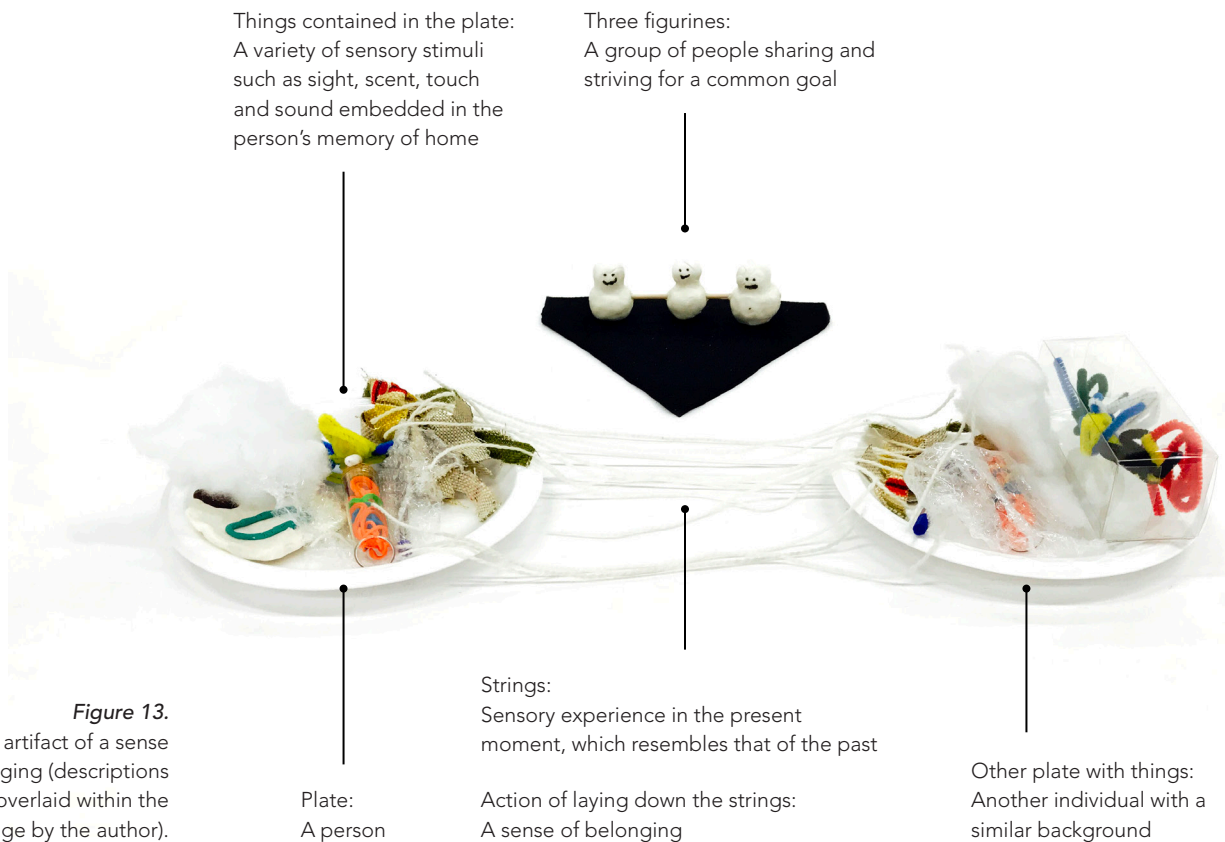


**Figure 12.**  
Photo of participants sharing  
after *Visualizing a Sense of  
Belonging* activity.

As shown in Figure 13, the participants' visualized artifact of a sense of belonging was an assembly of things on two plates connected with strings, and another component with three figurines.

The participants explained that the plate signified a person, and the things contained in the plate stood for a variety of sensory stimuli such as sight, scent, touch and sound embedded in the person's memory of home. The other plate

## 2. SELF AS TRANSCULTURAL & RELATIONAL PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH



**Figure 13.**  
Visualized artifact of a sense  
of belonging (descriptions  
overlaid within the  
image by the author).

and things stood for another individual with a similar background. The strings signified sensory experiences in the present moment, which resembles that of the past, provoking individuals to recall memories of home. The action of laying down the strings represented a sense of belonging, which occurs when individuals connect based on a shared understanding of the sensory experiences and a shared empathy around stories of their past homes. Also, participants explained that a sense of belonging could also occur when a group of people shares and strives for a common goal as shown by the three figurines at the top of the assembly.

**LOOKING BACK...**

“critical making as the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between thinking and making, referring to embodied knowledge as that which emerges by working with your hands: ‘The very process itself opens up new possibilities for deep expansive thinking and the serious enquiry that stimulates discovery’” (Lambert & Speed, 2017, p. 105).

Through the co-creative workshop activities, it became increasingly evident that the act of simple making enhances introspective reflection of one’s inner self. More importantly, the collective setting and the mutual negotiation of creative tensions allowed each person to examine themselves as an outer individual in relation to the gained understanding of others.

Furthermore, the familiar and banal craft materials had set the condition for simple making. The outcome of the material practice and the visualized artifact was not refined but rather, rough and unpolished. However, the easy approachability, playfulness, and malleability of the materials allowed participants to freely externalize their thoughts and ideas, endorsing the process of discovery.

The observations revealed that the narratives being told through simple making were not restricted to one’s memory or experiences but can include abstract concepts. Tangibly visualizing abstract concepts was especially effective as the discursive space enabled synergistic brainstorming, analysis, synthesis, sense-making, and meaning-making. For example, I was able to discover an aspect that I did not realize alone before the workshop; how sensory experiences or stimuli can trigger memories, and in extension, a sense of belonging for transcultural identities.



### 3. SELF AS RELATIONAL & DESIGNER PROTOTYPICAL PRACTICES

#### IN WHICH...

The previous case studies were situated in a personal and relational space to gather insights around the idea of simple making as an alternative way of storytelling.

From the co-creative workshop, it was evident that this design model and practice offered many capacities for designers when conducting participatory research. This learning thus inspired a pivot away from a specific segment as delimiting context leading the following case study to be explored in the perspective of a designer and design researcher.

Unbinding some of the contextual boundaries that were implicit with transcultural identities allowed a broader space for exploration concerning the way all people as human beings in our contemporary world—including those who are not explicitly influenced by transculturalism—interact with things and others.

#### LOOKING FOR...

“Within such [creative] practice, many decisions and actions are made intuitively, via discriminating judgements that are based in contemplation of the emerging aesthetic of the work” (Walker, 2011, p. 164).

Building upon the *Research through Design (RtD)* method, especially its generative approach to knowledge creation through material expression (Walker, 2011, p. 25), I aimed to delve into how memory and sensory engagement can elicit tacit or hidden meanings behind the intuitive decisions or actions made in material practices. And whether such meanings can incite new understandings of self, others and things in a co-creative setting.

## "THINGS ON THE TABLE"

### IN AND THROUGH...

According to experimental neuroscience research, emotional responses to sensory engagement not only enhance and rekindle memories but also foster imagination and creativity. Findings also revealed memory as a vital part of our ability to make sense of our human experiences (Treadaway, 2009, p. 194). In cognitive psychology, memory is understood to have other functions aside from storing and retrieving information. Sutton (2010) describes such broader functions as "maintaining our sense of self, regulating emotion, motivating and directing future action, and helping us to promote and maintain relationships with others" (p. 213).



Figure 14.  
Things prepared as props for  
*Things on the Table*.

Based on these findings, the initial exploration began by gathering, appropriating, reanimating and making things that can enhance sensory stimulation. The prepared things included an old rattle from a thrift store, seashells, and pebbles collected from English Bay, a pine cone that was carefully cleaned and oiled, hand-woven circular textiles, scented wooden pieces, a candle holder that was faceted and sanded, and more (see Figure 14). Some of these things were familiar and easily identifiable as objects, whereas other things were obscure and hard to categorize. It was evident that there was a relational tension between these things— “Is it an object, an artifact, or a material?”, “Is it natural, crafted, or ready-made?”



**Figure 15.**  
Photos of *Things on  
the Table* activity.

With such questions in mind, I brought an assortment of these things and conducted a participatory activity with my cohort where I asked, "What do you see, feel, hear or smell?" to have them first engage with the things using their senses. Afterwards, I asked, "What can this be?" From this question, I received a variety of responses.

Frequently an individual thing evoked a range of different speculations and responses (see Figure 15). For example, participants identified a birch and oak wooden piece as a “hair comb,” a “guitar pick,” and a “tool for separating strings.” For the thing made of rawhide, participants wrote down terms such as “drum” and



"tablecloth." For a thing made of cement with embedded stones, one individual simply responded "cement"—the material, whereas another person responded with "sandy beach"—a place. Also, many of the responses were not of another physical thing but rather, what it reminded them of. For example, the hand-woven circular textile reminded one participant of his grandmother, while the wooden sticks reminded someone else of music, and the seashells reminded a person of a beach.

#### LOOKING BACK...

It was interesting to see how people engaged in sensory experience with things and projected their own embodied knowledge that presumably stemmed from their individual personhood, life experiences and their understanding of selves. These responses elicited a key aspect that *Making of Narratives* was covertly exploring—the "permeable boundaries" between persons and things and how the brain, the body, and things all equally contribute to the "human cognitive becoming" (Malafouris, 2013, p. 2).

<sup>13</sup> See glossary for the meaning of *boundary objects*.

Also, the assortment of things inherently served as *boundary objects*<sup>13</sup> in this activity. The boundary nature is reflected in these things as they are "simultaneously concrete and abstract, specific and general, conventionalized and customized" where constant negotiation, reconstruction, and re-appropriation inevitably occur (Star & Griesemer, 1989, pg. 393).

## "SPECTRUM SORTING"

## IN AND THROUGH...

“Even the ‘I think’ is a process occurring in time and space, involving a transaction between subject and object, between self and other. Self-awareness occurs when the self becomes the object of reflection—that is, the self takes itself as its own object. In other words, even self-awareness—self-knowledge—is inferential and not direct” (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton 1981, p. 3).

I conducted a subsequent activity called *Spectrum Sorting* with the same group where I asked them to lay out the things in relation to one another according to a given spectrum. This was to see how the mind perceives things in relation to the other surrounding things.



Figure 16.  
Photos of Spectrum Sorting.

One end of the spectrum was identified as closed-ended; here participants were asked to place things that were recognizable, explicit, or prescriptive to them. The other end of the spectrum was for the open-ended; participants were asked to place ambiguous or novel things close to this area (see Figure 16). In this activity, simple

## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS



Figure 17.  
Photos of *Spectrum*  
Sorting activity.

### 3. SELF AS RELATIONAL & DESIGNER

#### PROTOTYPICAL PRACTICES

making was through the act of ordering or sorting. Participant's perception and sorting of things provided the narrative within the *Making of Narratives* framework.

For this activity, I specifically employed a theoretical model called the *Categorical Motivational Model* proposed by Whitfield. According to Whitfield (2005), this model is developed based on the notion of aesthetics as a sensory-perceptual knowledge, as a form of knowing that comes before linguistic-based knowledge (p. 8). Such understanding of aesthetics as pre-linguistic knowledge functions "to elaborate the categories by which we understand the world by attaching emotion to sensory perceptions" and such function results in the creation of "affective knowledge" that motivates appropriate action to objects in the external world (Whitfield, 2005, p. 5). Whitfield describes this model by highlighting the two opposite extremes; "at one extreme are categories that largely are formed and closed to further articulation, while at the other extreme are categories that are ill-formed and open to further articulation. The concepts of "closure" and "openness" are crucial" (Whitfield, 2005, p. 8).

For this *Spectrum Sorting* activity, there were two groups, each with two participants collectively making to assemble and organize the things. During the activity, there were quieter moments when each participant took their own time, touching, smelling, playing with the things and individually placing them within the spectrum. But there were also times when the two negotiated through dialogue. "Why is this here?", "Shouldn't it be there instead?", "Oh yeah, I see what you mean.", "Not as much as these other ones.", "But, it's not an actual thing but a representation.", and so on (see Figure 17). These dialogues influenced the final placement of the things. This activity elicited the plasticity of the mind and how it perceives things not only in relation to surrounding things but also to oneself, and to other people.



## DESIGN RESEARCH & PROCESS



*Figure 18.*  
Photos of Spectrum  
Sorting activity.

Later, I asked another participant to engage in the same activity but with an added condition; I asked this individual also to consider how things trigger memories. For example, things that trigger a specific memory could fall under closed-ended, whereas things that trigger vague, no or multiple memories could fall under open-ended. This was to see whether the explicit or abstract forms of some of the things worked toward or against enabling a vast range of perceptions, thus allowing multiple entry points to trigger memories.

After carefully arranging, the participant shared some of her memories. Certain things triggered highly specific memories while other things triggered vague or no memories. But the most interesting thing was when she quietly returned to the table after a while and rearranged the things (see Figure 18). She then explained,

### 3. SELF AS RELATIONAL & DESIGNER

#### PROTOTYPICAL PRACTICES

“Invariably, when you have these things, in terms of design, I end up rearranging... I think about them in regards to storytelling; not so much as telling my story but letting the things in relation to one another tell a story as a design process of sorts.”

People’s memories and perceptions were fluid. When trying to make meaning and sense through engaging with boundary objects, things shifted.

#### LOOKING BACK...

“‘There you go again, thinking with things.’ The phrase stuck: That is exactly what we do. The “thinking” of this process is at a deep level not available to consciousness, as if there is an inner self smarter than the conscious one—a self whose mode of operation is nonverbal and on things. This thinking deals with crucial issues of identity and relation to others and the cosmos” (Pasztory, 2005, p. 21).

The observations from *Spectrum Sorting* revealed how perceptions and understandings could be shifted. The relation and tension between things and their placements constantly influenced participants to project their own perception onto things, thus making sense of meaning. Also, the freedom to move and reset boundaries, in other words, the frame of thought, enabled different interpretations and shifts in their understanding.

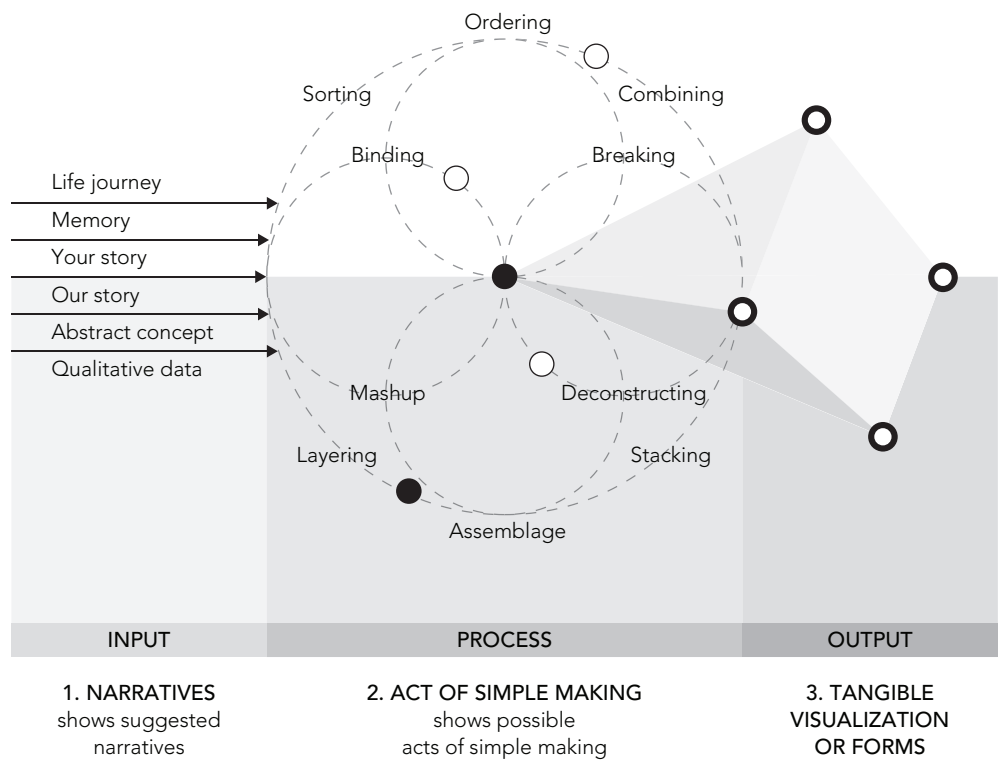
As Malafouris (2013) describes, “things like minds, become very hard to define. They remain formless and plastic, waiting to take the shape of our embodied projections, which inevitably vary in different times and places” (p. 8). It is when we project our own perception onto things, they take shape and make sense and meaning.

## MAKING OF NARRATIVES

“This clarity of understanding and insight maps onto an exploratory, sometimes impulsive or deliberately risky approach to creative practice, and it has helped to further endorse and validate making itself as an important research method... Increasingly, ‘the doing’ (the process) seemingly yields more new knowledge and insight than ‘the done’ (the outcome)” (Lambert & Speed, 2017, p. 105).

Based on the insights and processes from the case studies, *Making of Narratives* is developed as a design framework to bring an expansive and deep understanding of self, others, and things through reframing and recomposing people’s perspectives. However, it is not only intended for individuals interested in gaining such understandings, but also for designers interested in alternative research methods.

**Figure 19.**  
Three components of  
*Making of Narratives* with  
suggested narratives and  
acts of simple making.



## DESIGN FRAMEWORK & APPROACH

*Making of Narratives* is a practice-led design framework for material practice that gives tangible forms to narratives. It offers context and conditions (scope/structure) for making meaning and sense of our relationship between persons and things. Within this framework, a method is suggested to allow variations of models to be built through iterative and reflective practice. There are three components to this framework—1. narratives (input), 2. act of simple making (process), and 3. tangible visualization or forms (output/outcome)—all of which are integral to generating new insights and knowledge (see Figure 19).

“Instead, we can express design, both as process and outcome, in terms that suggest a quite different sensibility. If we understand design as a continual process of exploring and probing possibilities, then we begin to see its discrete outcomes not as ‘solutions’ but as temporary, tangible manifestations of ideas that offer only fleeting benefit” (Walker, 2010, p. 165).

<sup>14</sup> *Material Engagement Theory*: An interdisciplinary framework that incorporates materiality into cognitive sciences of the mind. This framework includes the world of things, artifacts, objects, materials and material signs into the cognitive fold. By recasting boundaries of the mind it “maps a cognitive landscape in which brains, bodies, and things play equal roles in the drama of human cognitive becoming.” *Material engagement* approach thus proposes a new way of thinking about the mind and things that can bring new understanding on how things shape the mind (Malafouris, 2013).

Based on *Material Engagement Theory*<sup>14</sup> developed by Malafouris, *Making of Narratives* acknowledges the significant role physical things play in our lives as they “conspicuously envelop our everyday thinking and sensory experience” (Malafouris, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, the use of things, objects, artifacts, and materials are essential to this method.

Another key aspect of this method is the gestural and sensory engagement in the making process. The engagement focuses on the way the actor (facilitator in this case) closely interacts with things and their materiality. Moments of interactions are the nodes for incremental knowledge building, and sequential knowledge creation is possible through continuity between multiple iterations of this method.



## MAKING OF NARRATIVES

This engagement also refers to the active use of the hand, the heart and the head in the process of making. The use of this symbiotic relationship, along with embodied knowledge, deep expansive thinking, and serious inquiry stimulates discovery during the very making process (Lambert & Speed, 2017, p. 105). Hence, *Making of Narratives* is a flexible practice-led design framework and is exploratory and generative in its approach.

### CONTEXT & CONDITIONS

Context is integral to how we understand things. How we set boundaries, where we place things, how we see them through their placement—all of these enable us to see ourselves, others, and things in different ways, which in turn allows meaning-making and sense-making.

“Moreover, the aesthetic experience of the developing work will be a product of the sensory experience of its intrinsic properties combined with contemplation of it as a thing of significance and value; that is, as a thing considered worthy of attention within a particular culture” (Walker, 2011, p. 164).

With a broad range of applications and associated processes, there are a variety of ways that *Making of Narratives* can be used to serve different design objectives. Depending on the context, the content of the narrative is interactive and changeable; it can be of one’s memory, a shared memory amongst a group of people, or an abstract idea or concept.

Following are the three contexts in which *Making of Narratives* can be applied:

### **INTROSPECTIVE CONTEXT**

<sup>15</sup> Individuals who have experienced a *sense of loss* can include but are not limited to transcultural identities.

The first context concerns that of intrapersonal space where *Making of Narratives* can be practiced individually as a way to explore an introspective self. Whether the narrative involves one's memory or the way they interact with things, this practice opens an opportunity for an individual to navigate their sense of self through the simple making process. This context may be especially relevant and useful for people who have experienced a *sense of loss*<sup>15</sup> in their lives and merits further study.

### **COLLECTIVE CONTEXT**

The second context places *Making of Narratives* in a collective setting where individuals can co-create together through material practice. In this case, the collaborative quality of the simple making process enables negotiation, discussion, and conversation among participants; which opens another arena for deeper understanding, not only of others but also of oneself in relation to other people. Through such gained understanding, *Making of Narratives* can further promote a sense of belonging when individuals discover and share empathy, especially when the narratives are of mutual or similar experiences.

### **DESIGN RESEARCH CONTEXT**

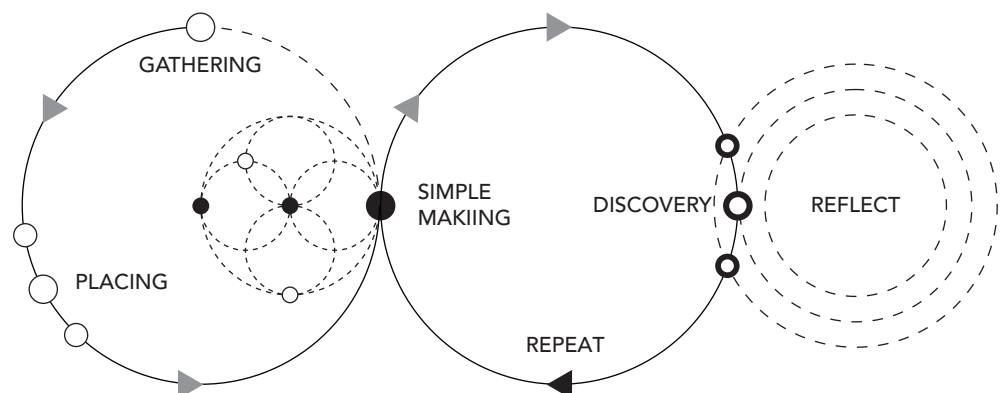
Lastly, *Making of Narratives* can be used in the context of design research. The innate use of materiality and thingness in practice provides an alternative approach and way of thinking for designers who seek generative research methods for qualitative ethnographic research, brainstorming, analysis and synthesis, material and form explorations, meaning and sense-making, and participatory research. By elucidating nuances of thingness, boundaries, and gestures, *Making of Narratives* affords persona building that is true to one's personhood, which is fundamental to participatory research methods.

## MAKING OF NARRATIVES

### PROCESS & GUIDELINES

“To be a place, every somewhere must lie on one or several paths of movement to and from places elsewhere. Life is lived, I reasoned, along paths and not just [in] places... It is along paths, too, that people grow into a knowledge of the world around them, and describe this world in the stories they tell” (Ingold, 2007, p. 32).

Like paths and places in life, the design outcome and the processes are intricately connected (Lambert & Speed, 2017, p. 106). As such, time plays a key role in *Making of Narratives*; the time that passes during the simple making process is connected to and reflects one’s own journey and growth in life. Understanding and embodying the importance of time in the making process is crucial to this practice. This design method is meant to be practiced in continuous and iterative cycles (see Figure 20). The longer time spent with materials and objects in the acts of simple making, the more detailed relational structures become. The more the practice is revisited, the deeper the knowledge and insights become—to revisit means to practice single-pointed attention accompanied by the contemplation of its significance and value (Walker, 2011, p.164).



**Figure 20.**  
Diagram of Making of  
Narratives process.

Suggested guidelines for *Making of Narratives*:

1. Acknowledge and gather physical things—objects, artifacts, belongings, materials—that are significant to the actor. Note:
  - Significance can be measured in personal ways; however, depending on the context, the scope can be modified. For example, if the objective is to seek a deeper understanding of self within the *Introspective Context*, the things can consist of artifacts with special memories or belongings used every day;
  - This stage can run parallel to the rest of the process and is flexible in terms of scale and duration.
2. Place the gathered things on a table where one can easily revisit. Note:
  - In the *Collective Context*, *Making of Narratives* as a method can begin from the current step, and things should be prepared in advance for participants to place them on a table.
3. Perform the act of simple making such as ordering, sorting, assemblage, stacking, binding, and so forth to tangibly visualize the narrative. Note:
  - Simple making stands for the kind of making that is considered rudimentary and basic, such as ordering, sorting, assemblage, stacking, binding, and so forth. Simple making within this research allows for easy approachability for any person whether experienced or inexperienced in the creative practice of making;
  - Again, depending on the context and objective, the type of simple making and narratives can be flexible;
    - In the *Collective Context*, this step is encouraged to include discussion and negotiation among participants;

## MAKING OF NARRATIVES

- Actively use intuition and instincts as they are core to surfacing tacit and embodied knowledge.
4. Discover through the process of simple making. Note:
- Pay attention to the gestural engagement of the hand;
    - For example, consciously acknowledge and think about the way you handle things—how you pick up, move, place, and grab things. Watch the gestures you and others make—is it a slide or a tight hold of objects? Does your hand make abrupt interruptions in the process?
    - Identify the meaning behind the gestural engagements you make in the process.
  - Metaphors are key to this practice. Actively use metaphors to make meaning and sense of the things and your actions;
    - Although there are no set metaphors for each action, I have identified metaphors elicited from my own acts of simple making;
      1. Ordering: hierarchy, ranking, grading;
      2. Sorting: categorization, division, selection;
      3. Assemblage: association, convergence, addition;
      4. Stacking: combining, juxtaposition, structure;
      5. Binding: merging, integration, harmonization, reconciliation;
      6. Breaking: disconnection, separation, damage.
  - Pay attention to sensory stimuli such as sight, touch, scent and sound—how they affect the mind and emotion to discover new knowledge and insights.
5. Reflect on the making process. Note:
- Leave the table for a while and observe it from afar;
  - Identify the boundaries and relational tension among the things. This step is useful for synthesizing patterns and groupings;

- Lines and shapes can be set up in order to physically create boundaries for the actor(s) to play with the idea of relational tensions (e.g., spectrums, circular boundaries, etc.).
- Document the findings and insights before moving onto the next iteration.

6. Revisit and repeat the process.

The presented guidelines are suggestions and should be considered permeable and flexible in order to fully benefit from the exploratory and generative approach of *Making of Narratives*. It is encouraged for the actors to adapt and reframe appropriately to the nature of the context and inquiries in study.

## CONCLUSION

This study addressed, in part, the current cultural context within which loss of identity and loss of belongingness have occurred. Originating from studying transcultural identities, this research has unbound and evolved to include a broader scope of contemporary identities in its exploration.

“Creative activities demand deep immersion in process. These concentrated forms of engagement have been referred to as focal practices or flow and they are akin to spiritual exercises that cultivate single-pointed attention, and ‘at-one-ment’” (Walker, 2011, p.164).

The study focused on the way we think about making and the interaction between persons and things as a way to deepen one’s understanding of self and others, which in turn, can lead to promoting a sense of belonging and community.

Material practice-led activities were central to a series of case studies, and as such, offered a means of direction, critical reflection, and momentum for generating new insights and knowledge. It enabled a valuable recognition and incorporation of gestural engagement—kinesthesia of the hand and body—in the act of simple making as a way to induce discovery, impartation, and transference of embodied sensory-perceptual knowledge. It showed the significance of the making process—the moments of interactions between the maker and things—as nodes for incremental knowledge building. When narratives were introduced in the making process, the meaning of objects revealed to be malleable beyond their functional uses and served as projections of one’s personhood and signifiers of our perception.

This material realization was key to conceptualizing a new design framework, *Making of Narratives*. With its three interrelated contexts—*Introspective*, *Collective*, and *Design Research*—*Making of Narratives* offers an exploratory and generative approach that affords practice of intuition, flexible ways of thinking, and opportunity-seeking mindsets. It is my hope that continuous practice of this framework in different contexts will offer alternative ways to reframe and recompose meanings to generate new knowledge—whether it may be of oneself, others, things, or the world.

## FUTURE DIRECTION

“ethical understandings not only pertain to societal well-being but also to an individual’s sense of spiritual well-being, which is associated with the affirmation of life in relationship to self, community and environment, as well as with one’s sense of the transcendent” (Walker, 2011, p.165).

In the earliest phases, transculturalism and transcultural identities were studied as a way to understand the initial context for this research and uncover design opportunities. However, this research does not remain exclusive to transcultural identities or its sub-categorical cultural groups.

Nonetheless, early explorations of *Making of Narratives* do afford a deeper understanding of transcultural identities and awareness of transculturalism. As such, *Making of Narratives* has potential to be used as a design method for future investigations of sub-cultural groups of transcultural identities such as, but not limited to, immigrants, international students, children of colonized people and their related societal problems.

Finally, the integral relationship between social and environmental sustainability presents a potential opportunity space for *Making of Narratives*. According to Rogers (2010), “healthy, happy individuals with a strong sense of place, identity and hope are more likely to make a healthy environment a priority” (p. 3). As such, *Making of Narratives* can be further developed to bring awareness of one’s action and their influence on the environment based on a deeper understanding of self, others and things in this world.





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## **APPENDICES**

The following is a detailed description, process, and reflection of my other generative projects including earlier explorations and primary research activities.

Each project provides valuable insights, opening up junctures and new arenas for further inquiries that lead to the next exploration. This section best illustrates my approaches, processes, and ways of thinking, as a designer and design researcher.

## APPENDIX 1

### REFLECTIVE SHADOW STORYTELLING

#### Directed Storytelling & Participatory Activity

This project aimed to explore storytelling as a tool to open up discussions concerning the idea of home and sense of belongingness, as well as spatial design in which people can feel safe and encouraged to share personal stories. Based on *Directed Storytelling* method (Martin & Hanington, 2012), I conducted a participatory activity where participants were asked to draw a scene that evokes a feeling of home or gave them a sense of belonging on a transparent sheet of paper.

Each participant was then invited to hold up their drawing to cast a shadow of it on the wall; this was intended to magnify the drawing to life-size proportions so participants can see their own shadow on top of the casted drawing—creating a sense of coexistence with the past. While facing layers of casted shadows, guiding questions were asked to assist participants to tell stories about their drawings.

The spatial design was explored, as I attempted to create a space that was inviting for participants to share their personal stories comfortably. I used thick black fabric to enclose the hollow space above, which then became a dark room. Participants later shared that this type of private space influenced them to openly share their emotional and personal stories related to their casted drawings.

<sup>16</sup> Participants in *Reflective Shadow Storytelling*: Master of Design 2018 students from Emily Carr University of Art + Design.



**Figure 21.**  
*Reflective Shadow  
Storytelling in action.*



Draw a scene of  
 "what makes you feel at home" or  
 "what gives you a sense of belonging"

Magnified shadow of the drawing—life size

Creating a sense of coexistence with  
 past memories

Guiding questions were asked to ease  
 participants to tell stories about their drawings

Enclosed studio with thick black fabric to  
 create a dark room.

Trust between the participants



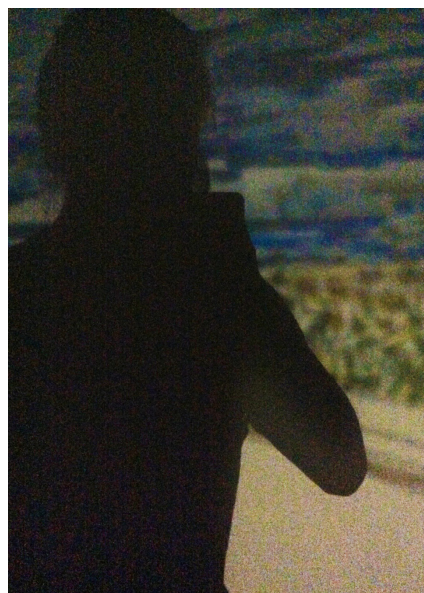
**Figure 22.**  
*Reflective Shadow  
 Storytelling* in action  
 (descriptions overlaid beside  
 the image by the author).

## APPENDIX 1

### REFLECTIVE SHADOW STORYTELLING

This process was documented using video recordings. After the activity, I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants to gather in-depth qualitative data and constructive feedback for future explorations. It was astonishing to see the level of willingness and openness on the part of the participants.

Personal stories of their pasts, relocation from one home to another, and personal meaning of home associated with certain people and things were told. Some participants grew emotional during the session as they shared their life experience of being detached from home. Space played a crucial role in terms of creating an atmosphere of intimacy and inclusion among the participants.



*Figure 23.*  
*Reflective Shadow Storytelling*  
*in independent action.*

## COFFEE MAKING MOCK UP HOUSE

Creative Toolkit: Co-creative Participatory Activity

<sup>17</sup> *Creative toolkit*: A generative research method where a collection of physical elements is presented to participants to facilitate various creative activities such as modeling, visualization, or creative play (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Participants in *Coffee Making Mock Up House*: Master of Design 2018 students from Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

<sup>19</sup> As a transnational item, *coffee* is the second most traded commodity and is widely popular in our current era.

<sup>20</sup> *Props* of ice cubes, coffee filters, cups, pots, stoves and other coffee-making tools made out of low fidelity materials such as cardboards.

Based on the *Creative Toolkit*<sup>17</sup> method, I aimed to gain insights on how to provoke and facilitate storytelling in a participatory activity (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

Participants<sup>18</sup> were asked to act out and explain how they make coffee back home.

The meaning of home was not defined for participants but rather left open for them to explore for themselves.

I specifically chose *coffee*<sup>19</sup> as a medium to induce storytelling and dialogue as many people commonly carry stories around it. By using coffee as a common denominator, I was indirectly inquiring about participants' ideas around cultural convergence, similarities and differences of cultural practices, and personal interpretation of transculturalism.

I laid out an assembly of low fidelity *props*<sup>20</sup> instead of real ingredients and tools to test if these props promote a festive and fun atmosphere. Along with these props, post-it® notes and pens were provided for participants to creatively improvise other tools needed to recite the way they make coffee back home.

During the activity, I found that transcultural identities among my peers often referred to more than one home and explained how their cultural experiences had shifted and altered moving from one place to another. As a collective, participants also noticed similar and different ways of coffee-making amongst various cultures. It was during these moments of recognition that triggered the most exchange of stories, affording space for everyone to gain a new or deeper knowledge of other cultures, including transcultural experiences.

The types of coffees mocked up during the session included Greek frappe, southern Indian filtered coffee, New Zealand flat white, Korean mix coffee, South African instant coffee, and Vietnamese coffee.



## APPENDIX 1



Figure 24.  
Coffee Making Mock Up  
House in action.

## COFFEE MAKING MOCK UP HOUSE

As mentioned before, since the term, home was not defined prior to the activity, each participant was able to interpret their own meaning of home. Many of the participants associated home to the culture they most identified with. This association came in many different forms. Some referred to their home from the place they were born, while others identified home with their ethnic culture. Some referred to home as a place they spent the most time, while others it was their most recent dwelling.

In reflection, this activity fostered an environment for participants to immerse in the topic of transculturalism. Storytelling and dialogues emerged throughout the session, and both myself and participants were able to recognize cultural convergences as well as differences. The performative aspect of this acts of simple mock-up making cultivated a fun and engaging dynamic to the overall experience for both the actor and the spectator. Through the exchange of stories, the group was able to bring attention and awareness to transcultural experiences.

Naturally many propositional questions on the concept of belonging, transcultural identities, consumerism, and sustainable society arose during dialogues:

- Does cultural association and identity shift or stay the same as you moves from one place to another?
- What happens when you return to your home culture? Does life back home remain as you remember or do you feel alienated?
- Why are certain memories associated with senses such as aroma of coffee, the sound of grinding coffee, and the taste of coffee tend to be more significant and last longer in our minds?
- For how long do you carry cultural habits or ways of life in a new culture? And why is there a difference in the degree of these tendencies between individuals?



## APPENDIX 1

### FLUX MAPPINGS

#### Exploratory Mapping Exercise

<sup>21</sup> Secondary research on the topic of transculturalism, transcultural identities, and third culture kids (TCK) based on published interviews, books, and popular media scan of online communities.

*Flux Mappings* were a series of mapping exercises conducted in order to explore various ways of visualizing qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, I aimed to find new and alternatives ways for analyzing and synthesizing data that can stimulate shifts in perspective to foster new insights.

Based on the observations and insights gathered from previous explorations and secondary research,<sup>21</sup> I chose to map out the following inquiries:

<sup>22</sup> See glossary for the meaning of *adult third culture kid* (ATCK).

<sup>23</sup> *Cross cultural kids (CCK)*: A person who is living or has lived in - or meaningfully interacted with - two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during childhood (up to age 18) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2010, p. 31).

- Explore target group and tangent cultural groups of transculturalism—third culture kids (TCK), *adult third culture kids* (ATCK),<sup>22</sup> and *cross cultural kids* (CCK)<sup>23</sup>;
- Challenges vs. benefits of growing up as a TCK.

From the onset of this project, I planned a series of exercises utilizing visualization methods such as *Mind Mapping*, *Venn-Diagramming*, and *Affinity Diagramming* (Martin & Hanington, 2012). I intentionally took a generative approach and left the process to be malleable in attempts to learn alternative ways of analyzing and synthesizing data.

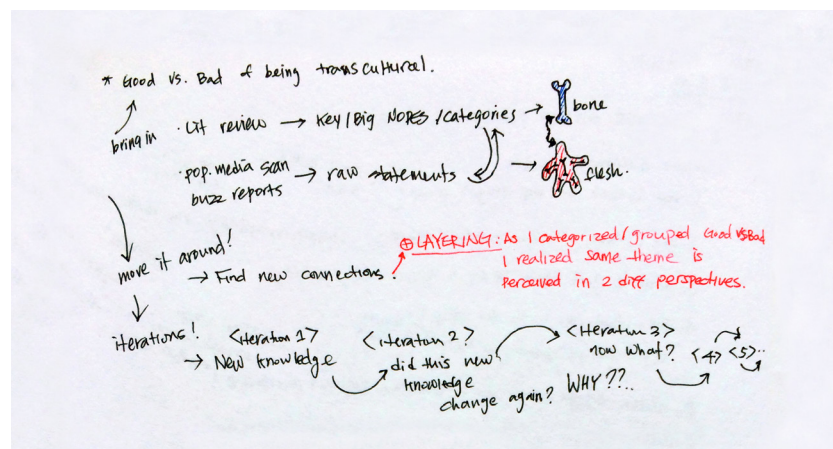


Figure 25.  
Brainstorming for  
Flux Mappings.



## APPENDIX 1

### FLUX MAPPINGS



Figure 27.  
Floor Mapping iteration 2.

Then I prepared a separate deck of coloured cards, which I had written unfiltered statements or memes gathered from TCK communities online. By adding this layer on top of the cards with distinctive characteristics, I attempted to emphasize their actual voices and emotions over their characteristics.

It was crucial to identify the cultural landscape of transculturalism and cultural currents of TCKs, in other words, to understand what they experience on a daily basis and how they perceive their experiences. The placement of the coloured cards was in relation to the major nodes. For example, I placed “you feel more foreign in the country you hold a passport from than any other place in the world”



near "off balance in own culture." Also, "having to say goodbye to an entire way of life" was placed near "unresolved feelings."

As I was placing and moving around these cards, I recognized how TCKs possess multiple perceptions of who they are and how they feel about being a transcultural person. Even within the same cultural landscape, I found that some identified with positive effects while others related to negative traits. For example, some transcultural identities express themselves as having 'friends everywhere' while others see themselves as having 'scattered, unreachable' friends. Similarly, some "form deep relationships quickly" while others have "social skills issue."

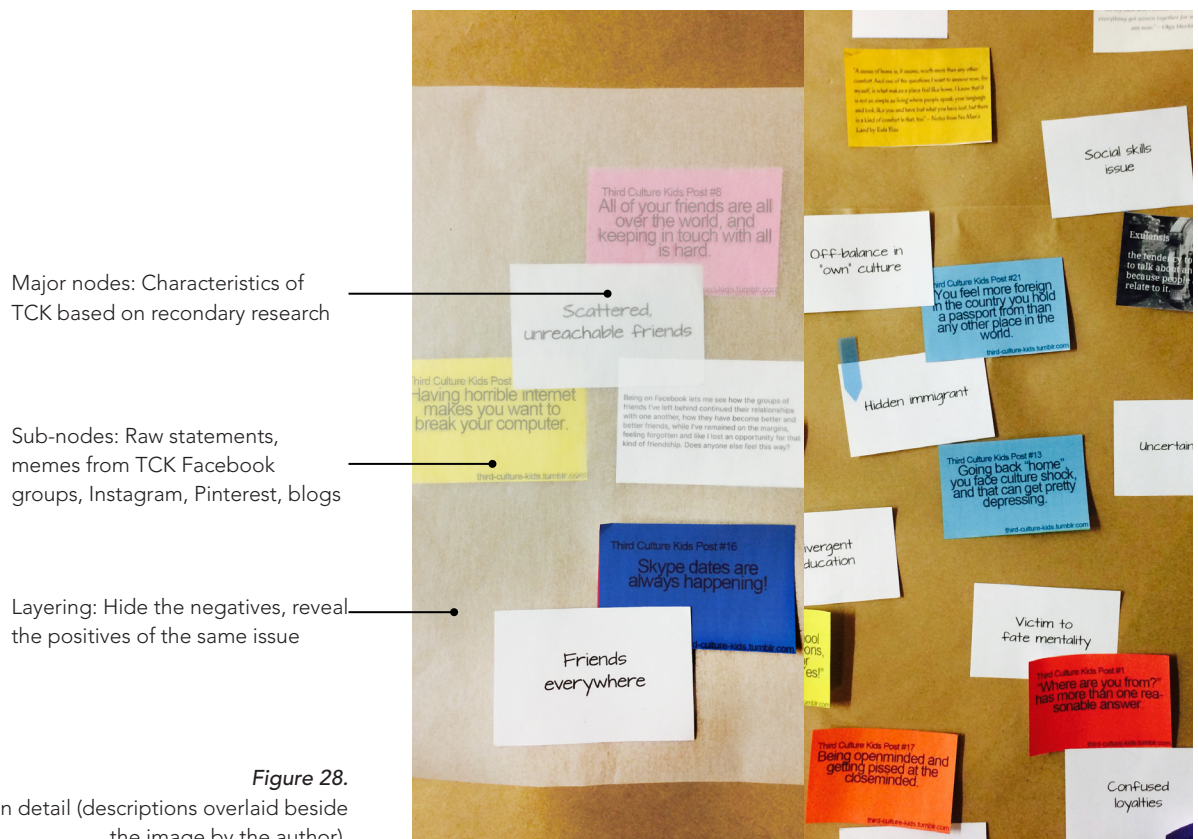


Figure 28.

*Floor Mapping* in detail (descriptions overlaid beside the image by the author).

## APPENDIX 1

### FLUX MAPPINGS

As soon as I saw these conflicting perceptions, I pulled out a sheet of translucent paper to add a third layer on top of the white and coloured cards. I covered up the negative perceptions and instead exposed the positive one.

Afterwards, I took a step back to observe the multi-layered cards. At that moment, it occurred to me that the translucent paper was serving a purpose, a role of subduing the negatives and highlighting the positives. As a result, I saw the translucent paper analogous to a potential design outcome of my research—to reframe one's attention from the negative to the positive through shifts in perspective. This realization was a critical as it afforded a direction for my design research. It was clear that the goal of this research was not to solve a problem but to encourage or strengthen a sense of belonging by revealing what was already existent—the positive effects and benefits of being transcultural—to those who carry negative perceptions of themselves or a low sense of belonging.

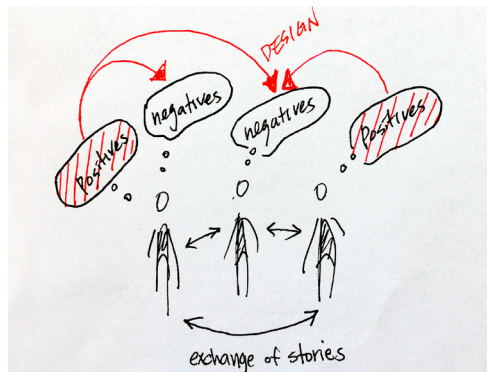
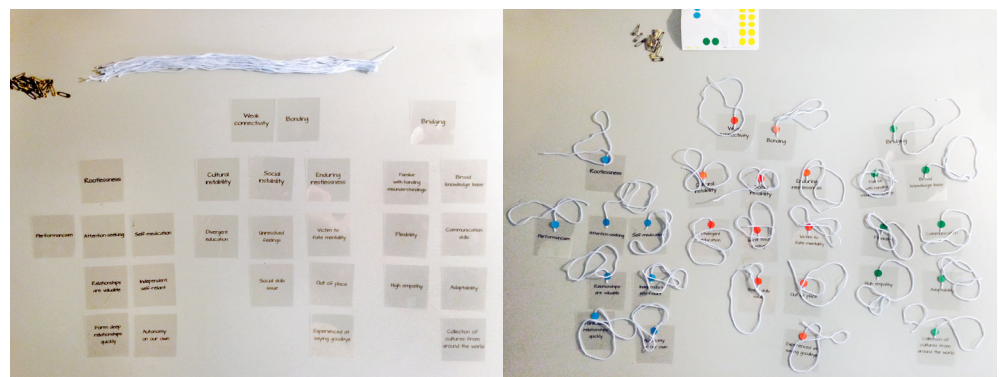


Figure 29.  
Reflective sketch on  
Floor Mapping.

Simultaneously, I conducted another mapping exploration called *Mobile Mapping* where I lifted the cards off the floor to link and hang them from the ceiling. Again, I incorporated the same major nodes from the *Floor Mapping*.

This time though, I printed these major nodes on transparent film papers and then first organized them into three categories—*Rootlessness*, *Weak connectivity/Bonding*, and *Bridging*. Afterwards, I placed the consequences or outcomes of the three categories and marked them with coloured stickers. This draft iteration provided me with the necessary structure for how to hang the cards. Also, this structure later enabled me to better synthesize new insights by correlating them with their original categories and cross-referencing the sub-categorical nodes.

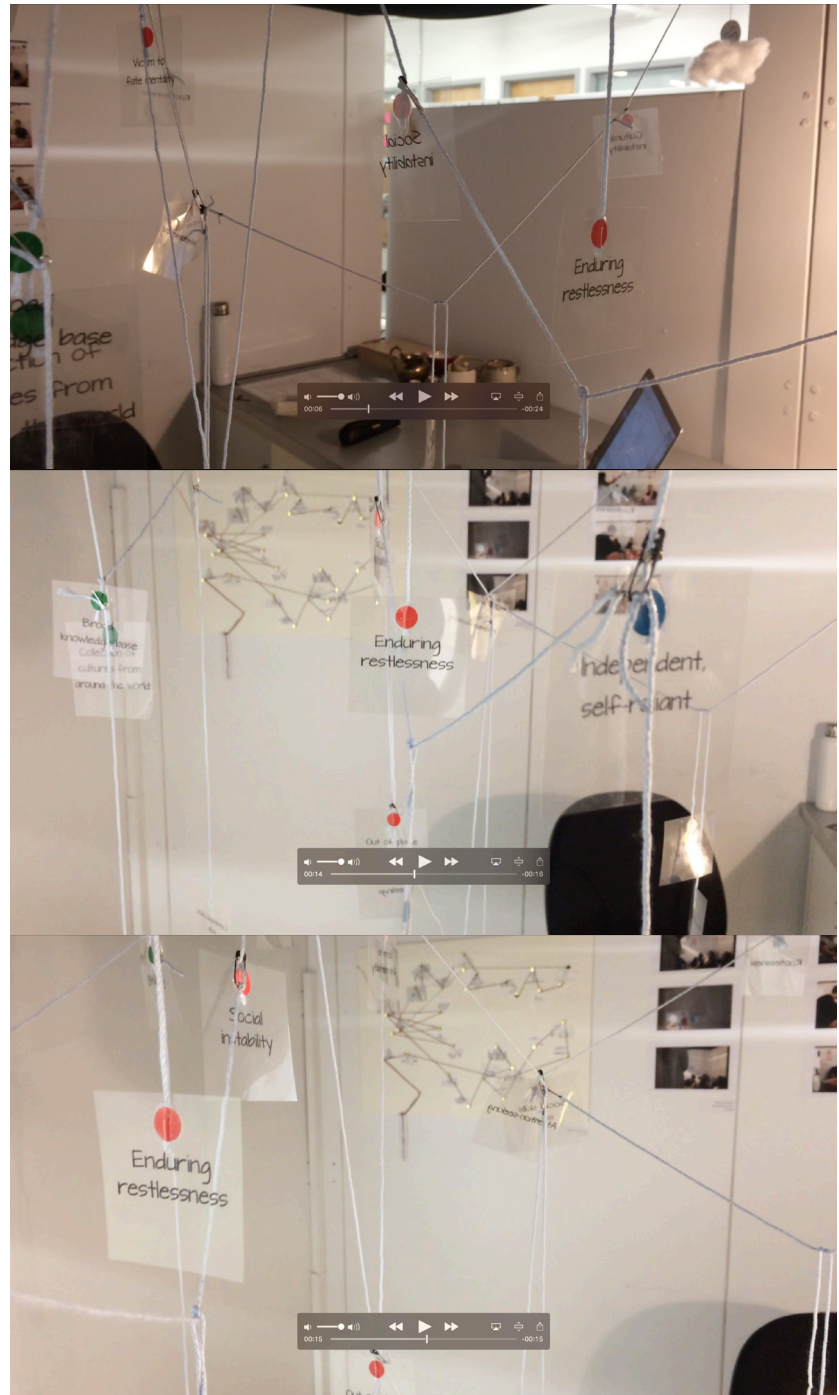
Figure 30.  
Preparation for  
*Mobile Mapping*.



Walking through and around the mobile web, I was using my whole body as a way to observe the map from different viewpoints and proximities. Through this exercise, I found new connections between nodes that were not noticeable before (when placed on the floor). For example, I was able to ask questions such as “is TCK’s attention-seeking characteristic caused by being a victim to fate mentally?” And also, “is divergent education a cause for TCKs weak connectivity?”

## APPENDIX 1

### FLUX MAPPINGS



**Figure 31.**  
Still frames from *Mobile Mapping*  
video recording. See the full video at  
<https://youtu.be/x76isL9mGYw>



## TRANSPARENT VENN DIAGRAM

The third mapping exercise, *Transparent Venn Diagram* was specifically aimed to map out the relationship among different categorical groups of people within transcultural identities. Keeping a generative approach, I once again used transparent papers to add malleability to this exercise. Explored categorical groups consisted of CCKs, TCKs, global nomads, mixed race, bi-cultural, international students, multicultural, immigrants, minorities, and refugees. This particular exercise helped me to gain a better sense of who I can design for—target group—and how transferable my design research can be to other tangent cultural groups.



Figure 32.  
Transparent Venn Diagram  
iterations.

## APPENDIX 1

### FLUX MAPPINGS

All three mapping exercises and their iterations were performed simultaneously to interweave all the insights and inquiries to generate further explorations. This non-linear process allowed a more cohesive exploration and was especially effective in synthesizing qualitative data gathered from different sources, which in turn, allowed a broader and holistic understanding of the topic.

As the project progressed, these mapping exercises became an opportunity to explore and speculate different types of mapping methods and strategies. Moving away from customary mapping strategies, I was able to explore different ways of mapping such as layering, visually externalizing information using physical interactions—hanging and linking cards, and walking around and through maps. Such experiments offered fresh and different perspectives and helped reveal hidden affiliations among different nodes.

Also, by focusing the design intent to insight speculation rather than problem-solving, these mapping activities created a site for raising awareness and insightful conversations on various topics of transculturalism, identity, design processes and method.

As such, I was curious to extend such activities that required physical engagement to actual transcultural identities. Such activities from card sorting to mapping showed potential as a tool to gather real-life experiences, traits, and perceptions that form transcultural identities' sense of self. One of the insights I aimed to explore further was how transcultural people's identities transform as they go through numerous transitions in life.

Documentation was mainly done in the form of photographs and video recording. Photographs were used to capture different iterations, which later enabled me to notice changes in the maps. On the other hand, video recording was an effective tool to capture my movements and corporeal relationship to the maps.

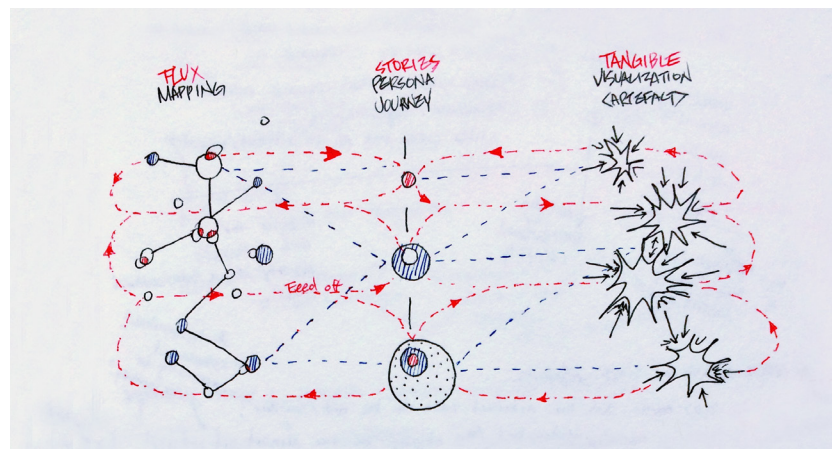


Figure 33.  
Interconnectedness of all  
mapping exercises.

## APPENDIX 1

### FORM & MATERIAL STUDY

#### Material Research & Participatory Activity

The last project was intended to gain insights to shape the direction for the next primary research phase. This project first started with material practice which allowed visceral learning of materials and their materiality.

The materials used include paper, cardboard, aluminum foil, plastic, fabric, cotton stuffing, wood, air-dry clay (water-based polymer clay), and non-drying clay (oil-based soft clay). Depending on the materiality of the materials, I chose different methods to manipulate and achieve desired forms and shapes. Contrary to what was expected, the air-dry clay dried up quickly making it easier to subtract or carve out details. On the other hand, I was able to build up volumes when using the non-drying clay allowing later modifications possible.

Overall, I created 25 objects and included five extra manufactured objects to provide as prompts in the participatory activity. I invited a couple of my cohorts at a time to participate in two successive activities, and there were four of these activities in total.



Figure 34.  
Sketch and ideation of  
prompts.

The first activity focused on the study of form. Here I aimed to explore forms and materials that best trigger memories and enable better storytelling.



Also, I intended to examine the extent to which object identifiers such as logos, colour, function, and size could be erased while still triggering memories.

Regarding the prompts, I have selected objects that are fairly universal in order to gain enough participant responses. With the selected items, I have made three variations of each. Some varied in material and others varied in the level of abstraction or obscurity of the form.

Cup variations:  
paper/take out,  
fabric/abstract form, clay/mug

Remote variations:  
clay, plastic, styrofoam

Computer mouse variations:  
paper, fabric, clay

Phone variations:  
card board/flip phone,  
clay/smart phone,  
styrofoam/analogue phone

Pencils variations:  
wood, real object, card board

Shoe variations:  
styrofoam, clay, real object

Candle variations:  
wood, clay, plastic

Cassette variations:  
clay, paper, plastic/case

Key variations:  
clay, aluminum foil, card board



**Figure 35.**  
Materials and form variations of prompts  
(descriptions overlaid beside the image—clockwise from top-left—by the author).

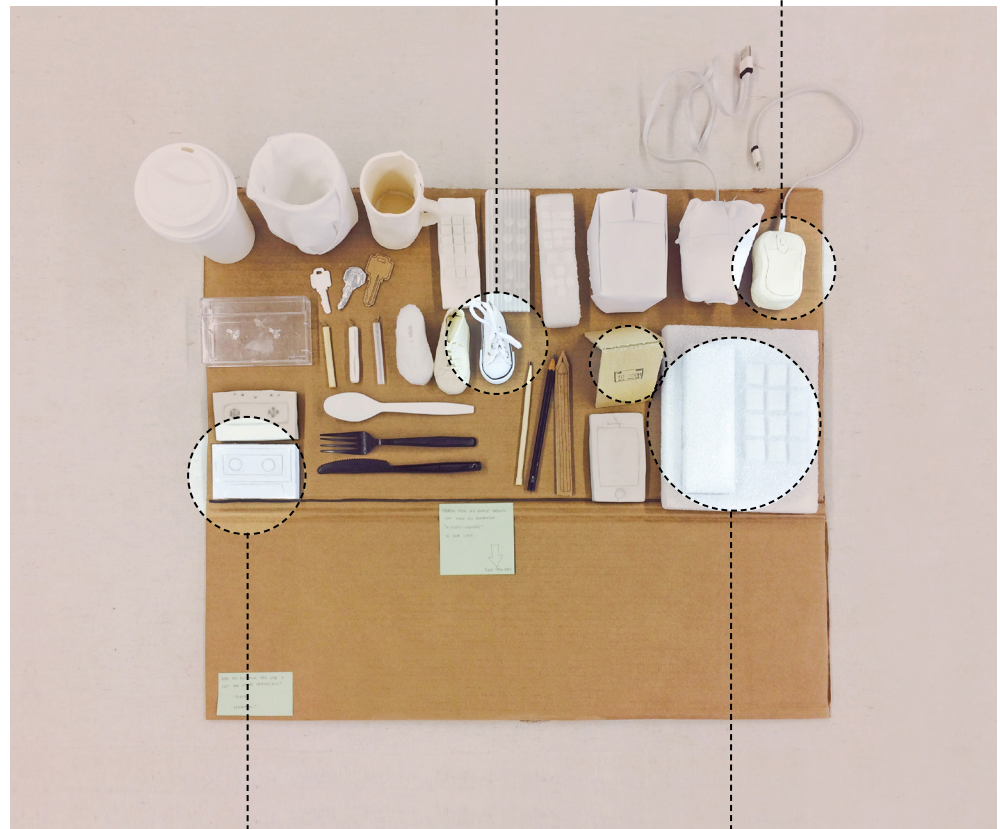
## APPENDIX 1

<sup>24</sup> Participants in *Form & Material Study*: Master of Design 2018 students from Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

I asked participants<sup>24</sup> to pick as many objects that triggered stories or memories in their life and to place the selected objects in front of them. Then I inquired why they chose those specific objects when there were other variations of the same item; and whether it was the form or the material that influenced their decision.

Realistic shoe:  
Realistic + detailed objects were picked most often. However, white (no colour) objects abled participants to project their own object in the story

Weight of objects:  
Objects that resemble the  
weight of the actual object  
triggered most memories



**Figure 36.**  
Participant responses and  
discoveries during the first  
*Form & Material Study*  
(descriptions overlaid around  
the image by the author).

Paper cassette:  
The materiality of paper evoked  
emotions attached to the  
participants' story of cassettes

Old objects:  
Objects that are no longer used  
but were common in the past  
triggered a lot of responses

Although the responses to the inquiry were not uniform, there was a general agreement that fairly realistic forms best triggered specific memories. However, many participants claimed that the absence of colour and printed identifiers helped them project the object in their memory onto the prompts in front of them.

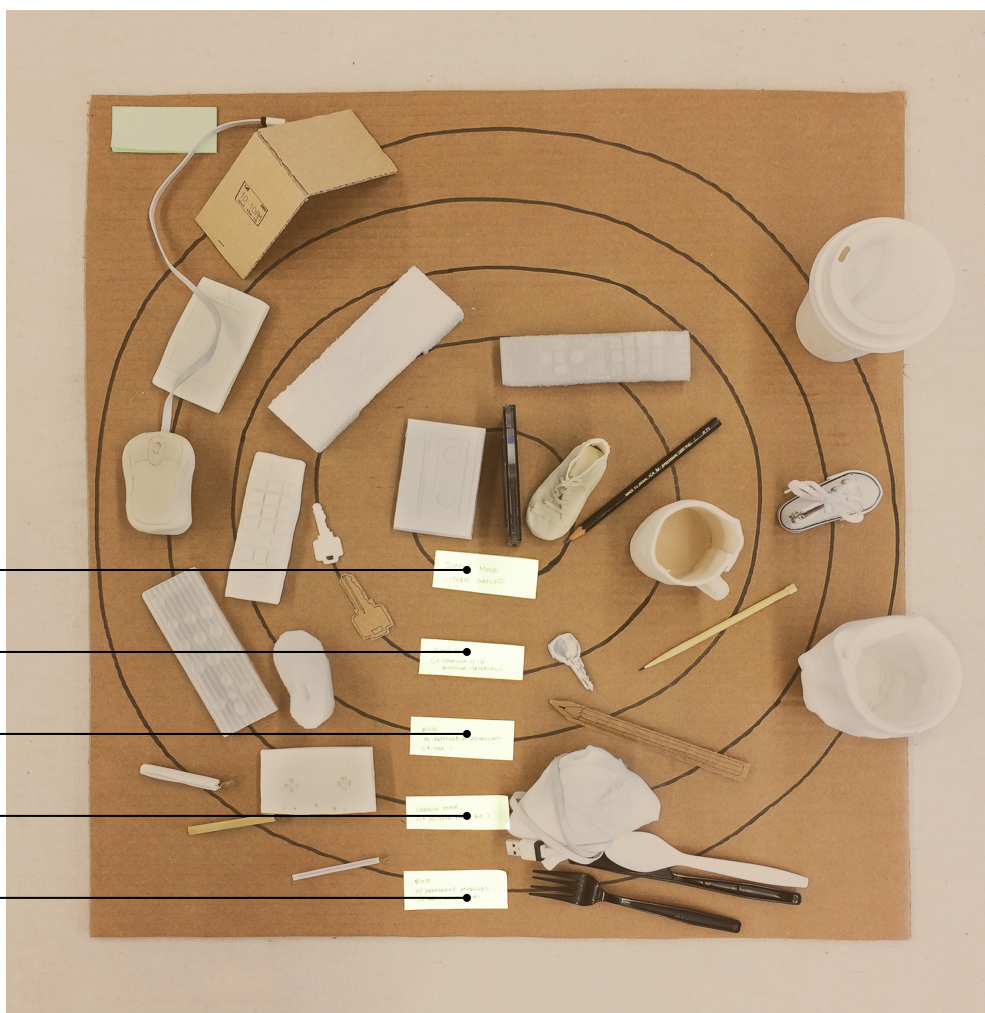
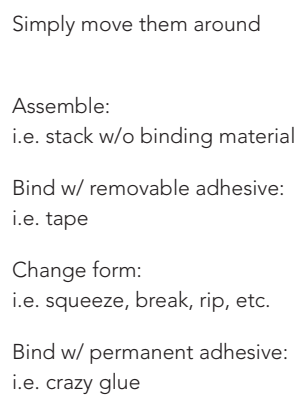
Other interesting responses were related to the materiality of the objects. For example, the clay mouse weighed similar to an actual computer mouse and was relatively heavier than its other variations. For some, this similarity in weight was a key factor in triggering memories attached to a real computer mouse. Others commented how the materiality and the texture of the paper cassette tape had stimulated emotional responses as they provoked memories of their childhood.



*Figure 37.*  
First Form & Material Study  
in action.



## APPENDIX 1



*Figure 38.*  
Different levels of manipulation on the target board.



The second activity involved material study using the same prompts. In this material study, I intended to explore materials participants felt comfortable to play and manipulate the forms. Using a target board where each ring stood for different levels of manipulation, I asked participants to imagine a situation where they were asked to mash up these models and to speculate how much they could manipulate the prompts. Then, I asked them to place each model accordingly on the rings where the centre of the target represented the least malleability.

Each of the workshops produced different outcomes. However, there was a consensus that low fidelity models made out of familiar materials provoked most playfulness, making it easier for participants to manipulate their forms. Such materials included paper, cardboard and also non-drying clay (oil-based soft clay). Many of the participants felt the urge to squeeze the clay mouse since it was perceived to be unfinished.



*Figure 39.*  
Second Form & Material Study  
in action.

## APPENDIX 1

### FORM & MATERIAL STUDY

Some of the feedback I received was to diversify the prompts. Since all prompts lacked unique elements such as colour and patterns, participants shared that it would be interesting to see what will happen if these were incorporated. Also, objects that best triggered memories in both activities included analogue phones, flip phones, and cassette tapes—old technologies no longer in use. Things of the past intrigued participants to strongly reminisce their past stories and brought a sense of nostalgia, which was then commonly empathized by others. As such, it would be effective to broaden the spectrum of prompts to include coloured, detailed, obscure forms, and objects of the past.

The process was documented using photographs and videos. Photographs were used to capture the beginning and the end of each workshop and was not used during the activities in order to prevent disturbing the flow of the activity. Later viewing the video recordings, I was able to notice not only the moments of contemplation but also the time participants took to recollect their memories as responding to each prompt.

Paper + clay cassette:  
Easier to change form (break or rip) due to commonality and familiarity of the material

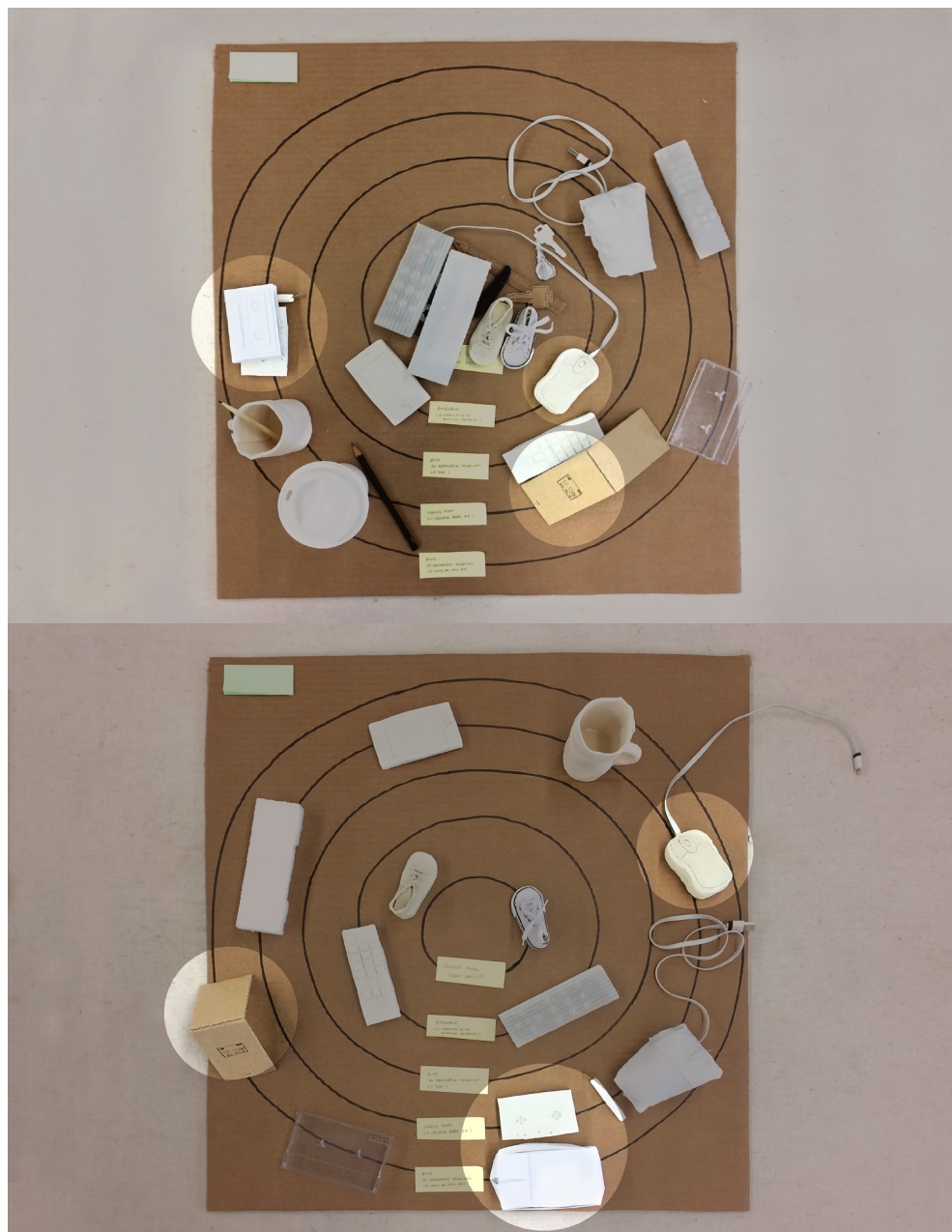
Clay mouse:  
Comfortable to assembly, but difficult to break it because of participant's unfamiliarity to using clay

Card board flip phone:  
Easier to change form (break or rip) due to commonality of the material

Clay mouse:  
Easier to change form and bind w/ permanent adhesive due to the malleable, unfinished, and undried state of the material

Card board flip phone:  
Floppiness of the folded form encouraged playfulness

Paper mouse + clay cassette:  
Easier to change form and bind w/ permanent adhesive due to familiarity and craftiness of the material



**Figure 40.**  
Participant responses and discoveries during the second *Form & Material Study*  
(descriptions overlaid beside the image by the author).

## APPENDIX 2

### Primary Research

In Summer 2017, two successive activities—first, the cultural design probe and second, a co-creative workshop—were conducted with transcultural participants in the 25 to 35 age-range residing in Vancouver.

Participants were recruited through the use of social networks, mass emails, university networks (students and faculty) and personal networks. With the approval of the Research Ethics Board, all communication was made clear that participation was voluntary, confidential, and can be terminated at any stage of the process. For the probe, I was able to recruit 15 participants and had 100% compliance and return. The cultural probe workbooks were distributed face to face, where I had the opportunity to review the rationale and purpose of the proposed activities with each participant. Also, I verbally went over the consent process and presented the informed consent form and media release agreement.

## CULTURAL DESIGN PROBE

This activity was intended to inspire participants to reflect and recollect their personal journey as a transcultural identity working through the provided cultural probe workbook. The workbook was designed for participants to answer questions, complete simple exercises, and document their process. The purpose of the probe was to gather richly engaging and genuine first-person data over a longer period which an interview session could not offer (Mattelmäki, 2008). By offering an opportunity to immerse in the cultural probes activity, I aimed to sensitize participants to my research topic and to prepare them for the co-creative workshop which they were invited to participate. Also, I intended to gather insightful primary data of real transcultural life stories.

The first three activities in the probe were to validate whether transcultural identities, other than myself, also struggled with a sense of belonging. I asked them to graph the level of their sense of belonging according to their transitional experiences and places of residence. At the end of the third activity, I also asked for their personal interpretation of a sense of belongingness.



Figure 41.  
Flip through video of the  
Cultural Design Probe.  
See full video at [https://youtu.be/NgTnm-z6\\_qM](https://youtu.be/NgTnm-z6_qM)



## APPENDIX 2

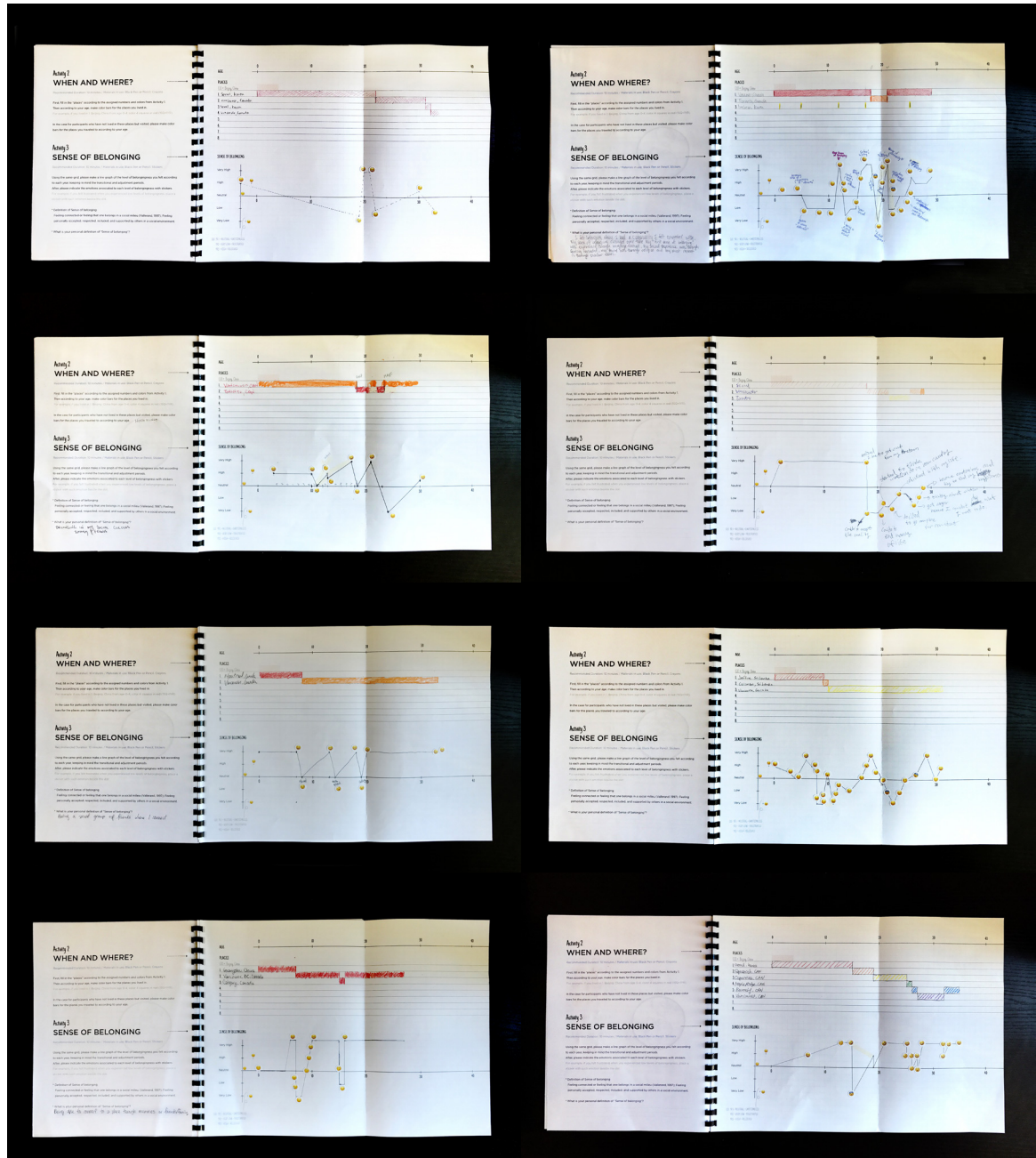
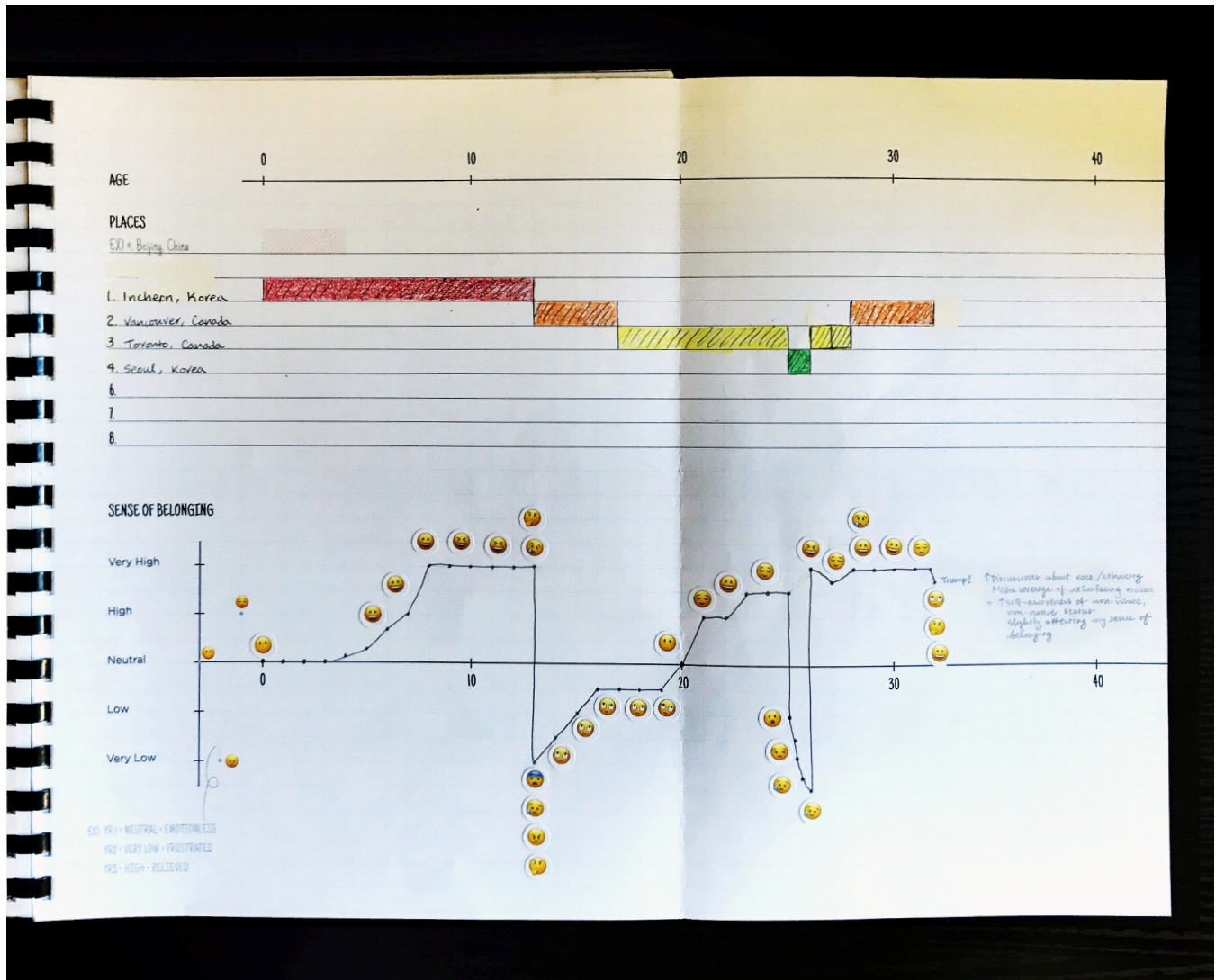


Figure 42.  
Participants' responses for When and Where? exercise.

## CULTURAL DESIGN PROBE



**Figure 43.**  
Participant's response for  
When and Where? exercise  
in detail.

As anticipated, there was a struggle. For most participants, there was a big drop in their sense of belonging after a major move. Participants, who had the chance to move back to their original home, struggled with an even lower sense of belongingness. Interestingly, many of the participants did not fill out their interpretation of a sense of belonging, and even the ones who did had very vague answers.

## APPENDIX 2

The next set of activities in the probe were intended to collect a wide range of stories from their past. Participants were asked to share their *Most Positive* to *Most Negative* transitions in moments of *Saying Goodbyes*, *Saying Hellos*, *Moving Away* and *Moving To*. Some participants wrote elaborate stories, while others had fuzzy memories of their past. It was also difficult to identify major patterns in the overall transcultural transitional experience. Although there were some broad similarities, the way they dealt with change was very personal and individualistic. Influenced by the previous *Tangible Visualization of Transcultural Journey* activity in studio class, I designed the next section to collect transitional memories attached to objects. I intended to see if there was a particular transcultural material culture and if there were unique cultural signifiers in the objects they bonded with.

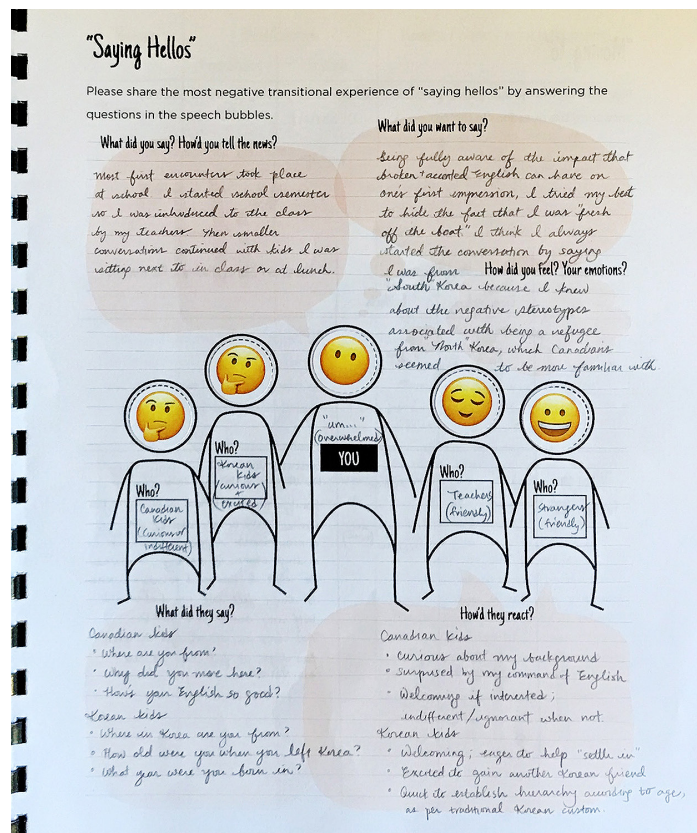


Figure 44.  
Participants' responses  
for Saying Hellos in Most  
Negative Transitional  
Experience exercise in detail.



## CULTURAL DESIGN PROBE



Figure 45.  
Participants' responses for Most Positive & Negative Transitional Experience exercise.

## APPENDIX 2

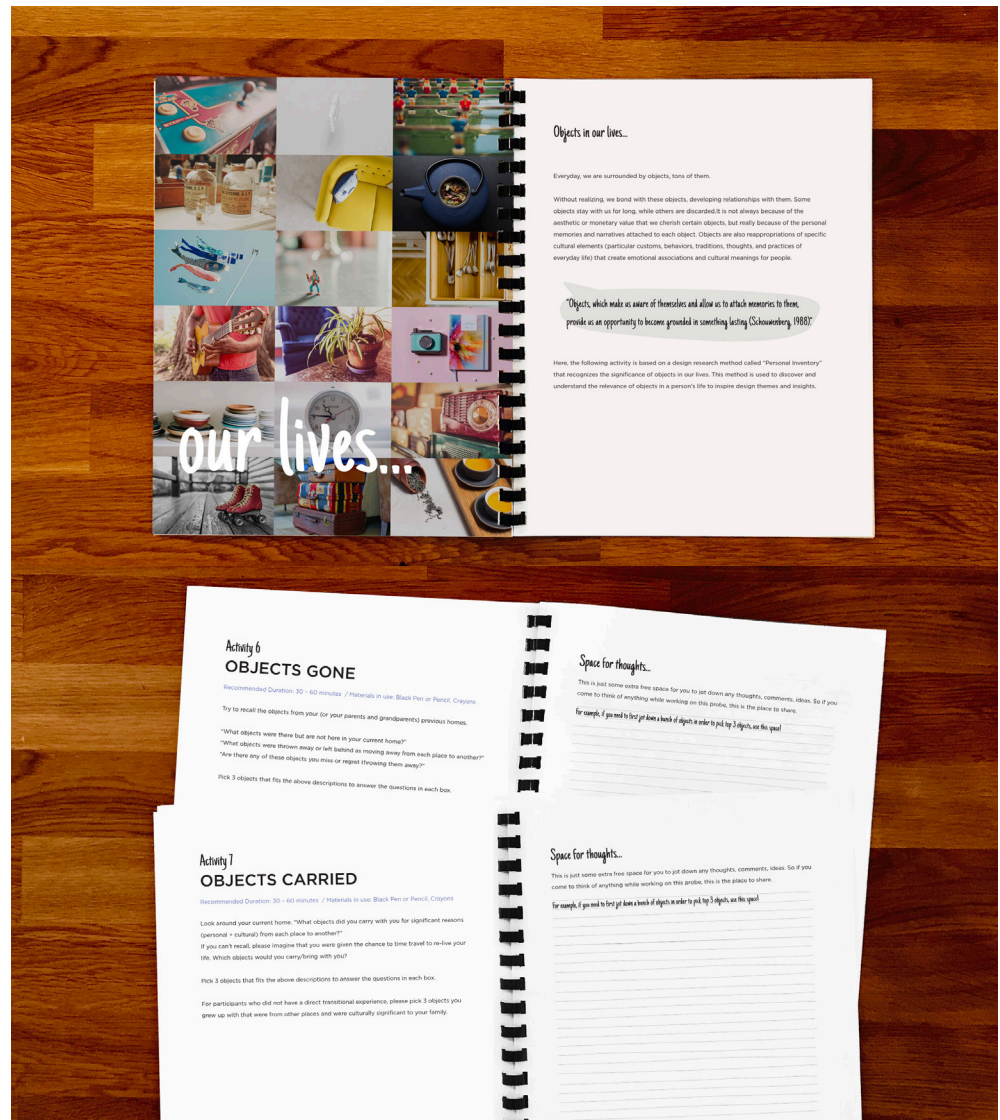


Figure 46.  
Objects Gone and Objects  
Carried instructions in detail.

This section was divided into two; the first asked the participants to share their *Gone Objects*, which stands for objects discarded when moving from one place to the next. The second section inquired on their *Carried Objects*, which stands for objects they kept through transition periods.

[illegible]

Counter to what I expected, there were no cultural signifiers that highlighted participants' attachment to these objects. Also, there was no distinctive transcultural material culture. Like everyone else, transcultural identities bonded with objects based on personal experiences and memories. Even within these stories, some were very sentimental, while others were plain practical.



## APPENDIX 2

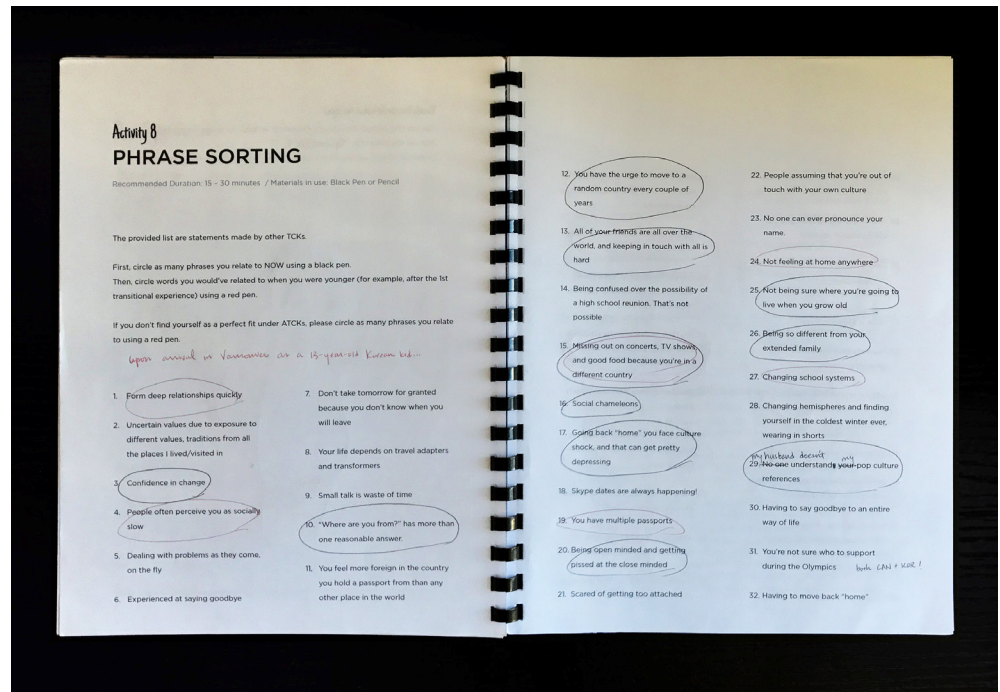


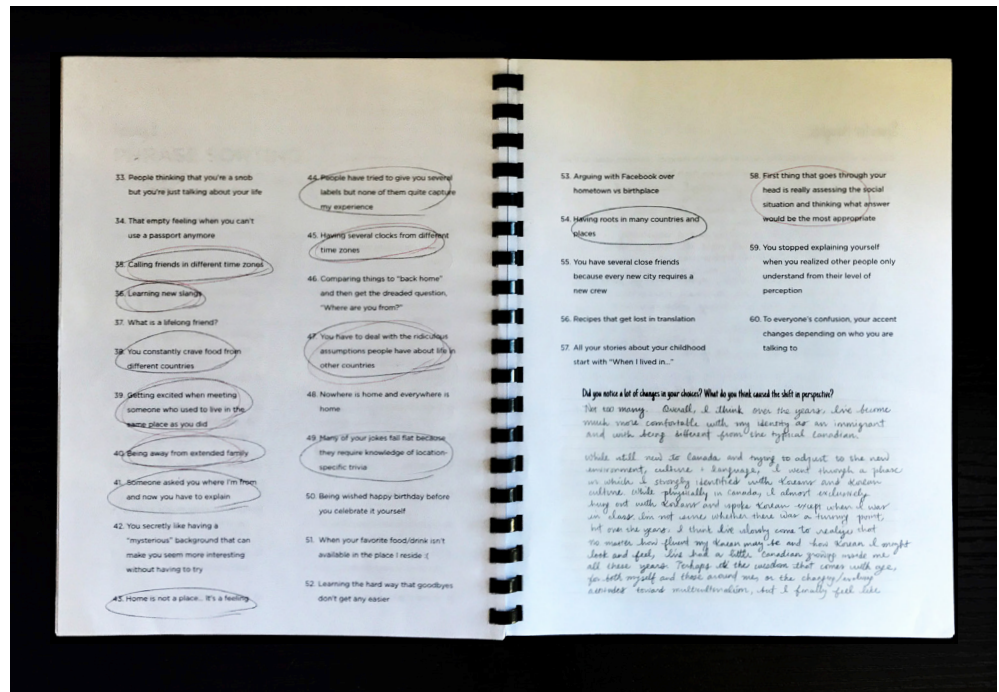
Figure 48.  
Participants' responses for  
Phrase Sorting exercise.

The last activity in the probe was to collect any common traits and perceptions among the transcultural identities. I placed an assortment of unfiltered statements and memes gathered from transcultural communities online and asked my participants to circle the ones they most related to.

Some of the most relatable phrases were:

- "Where are you from?" has more than one reasonable answer;
- Home is not a place... It's a feeling;
- All of your friends are all over the world, and keeping in touch with all is hard;
- Calling friends in different time zones.

## CULTURAL DESIGN PROBE



According to participants, this activity gave them an opportunity to reflect and deeply think about who they were and who they have become as a person living a mobile lifestyle. Also, they were excited to know that there were other people like themselves which normalized their experience and challenges as a transcultural identity.

The main things I learned from the *Cultural Design Probe* included:

- Some participants found it difficult to recall details from their memories;
- Participants do not share a distinctive transcultural material culture;
- Personal stories are much more significant than cultural associations;
- Participants had different and vague interpretations of the meaning of sense of belongingness.

## APPENDIX 2

### CO-CREATIVE WORKSHOP



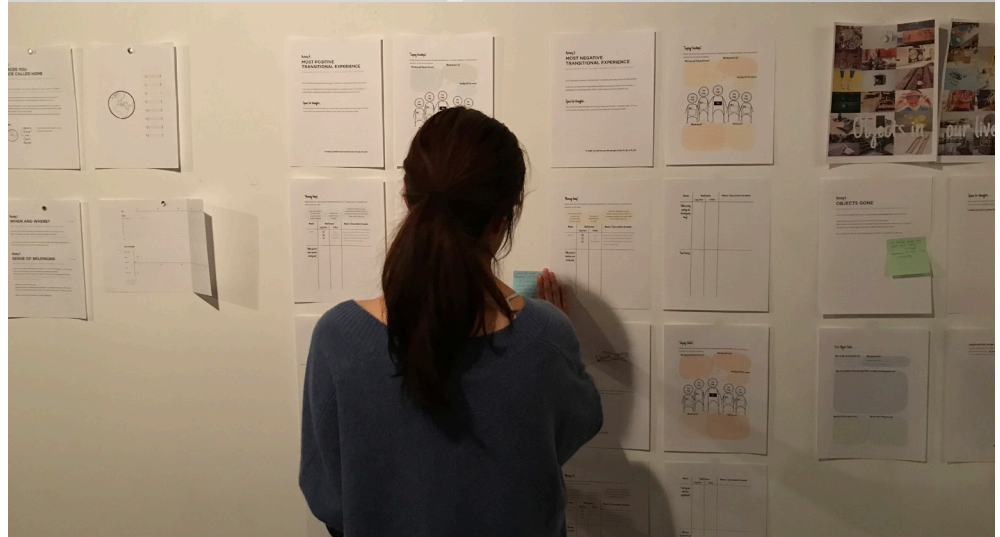
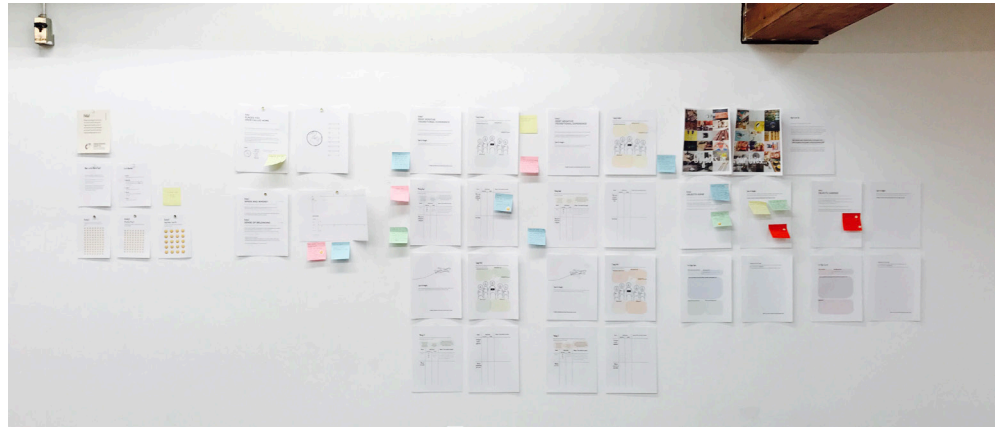
*Figure 49.*  
Participants during the  
co-creative workshop.

In response to the insights gathered in the cultural probe, I shifted and reframed the sequential co-creative workshop which included five participants from the probe activity. The co-creative workshop was intended to collect feedback on the probe book to test the potential of tangible visualization as a tool to aid in deeper reminiscence, the storytelling of self, and untangling difficult concepts. Here, the first activity called *How did you find the Probe?* is presented. The other two subsequent activities conducted during the co-creative workshop are introduced in the thesis body.

Through the first activity, I collected my participants' thoughts on the aesthetics, content, flow, language, experience, and emotion of the probe by using colour-coded post-it® notes. Interestingly, one participant wrote, "It is difficult to retrieve such small details about an experience from a long time ago." This statement, to a certain degree, validated the purpose of testing tangible visualization as a method for deeper reminiscence and storytelling of self.



*Figure 50.*  
Photo of How did you find  
the Probe? activity.



*Figure 51.*  
How did you find  
the Probe? in action.



## APPENDIX 4

### ETHICS CLEARANCE

June 07, 2017

Prof. Keith Doyle  
Other Research Centres\Material Matters  
Emily Carr University of Art and Design

File No: 100116  
Approval Date: June 6, 2017  
Expiry Date: June 7, 2018

Dear Prof. Keith Doyle and Eugenie Cheon,

The Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board (ECU-REB) has reviewed your application: "Designing Shifts: Transculturalism + Sense of Belonging." Your application has been approved. You may now begin the proposed research. The research ethics approval dates are June 7, 2017 to June 6, 2018.

Requests for modifications, renewals and serious adverse event reports are to be submitted via the Research Portal. To continue your proposed research beyond April 20, 2018, you must submit a Renewal Form before June 6, 2018. If your research ends before June 6, 2018, please submit a Final Report Form to close the ECU-REB file.

The ECU-REB file number should appear on all materials that are circulated to the participants in this way: "This project has Full Research Ethics Approval from the Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board (June 7, 2017, ECU-REB #100116). If you have any comments or concerns about ethical issues in the research, you are invited to contact the Emily Carr University REB Coordinator at [ethics@ecuad.ca](mailto:ethics@ecuad.ca) or (604) 844-3800 ext 2848."

For multi-site or partnered research, researchers are expected to comply with the appropriate external research ethics protocols or procedures. Researchers are expected to share notice of this approval with partners or sites of research. If further ethics approval is required or new partners or sites of research become part of the project, the ECU-REB should be informed.

If you have any questions about the REB review and approval process, please contact the ECU-REB at (604) 844-3800 ext 2848 or [ethics@ecuad.ca](mailto:ethics@ecuad.ca). If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the Research and Industry Office: [research@ecuad.ca](mailto:research@ecuad.ca)

Sincerely,

Dr. Glen Lowry  
Chair, Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board

*Figure 52.*  
Ethics application approval  
letter. Emitted by the Emily  
Carr University of Art + Design  
Ethics Research Board.



## *Certificate of Completion*

*This document certifies that*

**Eugenie Cheon**

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:  
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans  
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **3 November, 2016**

Figure 53.  
Tri-Council Policy Statement:  
Ethical Conduct for Research  
Involving Humans Course on  
Research Ethics  
(TCPS 2: CORE).  
Certificate of Completion.



EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

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A CRITICAL AND PROCESS DOCUMENTATION PAPER SUBMITTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF DESIGN



2. act of simple making [process], and  
3. tangible visualization or forms  
[output | outcome]—all of which are  
integral to generating new insights  
and knowledge.

Based on *Material Engagement  
Theory* developed by Malafouris,  
*Making of Narratives* acknowledges  
the significant role physical things  
play in our lives as they conspicuously  
envelop our everyday thinking and  
sensory experience. Therefore, the  
use of things, objects, artifacts, and  
materials are essential  
to this method.

Another key aspect of this method  
is the gestural and sensory  
engagement in the making process.  
The engagement focuses on the  
way the actor [facilitator in this case]  
closely interacts with things and  
their materiality.

Moments of interactions are the  
nodes for incremental knowledge  
building, and sequential knowledge  
creation is possible through

generative in its approach.

Context is integral to how we  
understand things. How we set  
boundaries, where we place things,  
how we see them through their  
placement—all of these enable us to  
see ourselves, others, and things in  
different ways, which in turn allows  
meaning-making and sense-making.

With a broad range of applications  
and associated processes, there  
are a variety of ways that *Making  
of Narratives* can be used to serve  
different design objectives.

Depending on the context, the  
content of the narrative is interactive  
and changeable; it can be of one's  
memory, or a shared memory  
amongst a group of people, or an  
abstract idea or concept.

Time plays a key role in *Making  
of Narratives*; the time that passes  
during the making process is  
connected to and reflects one's own  
journey and growth in life.