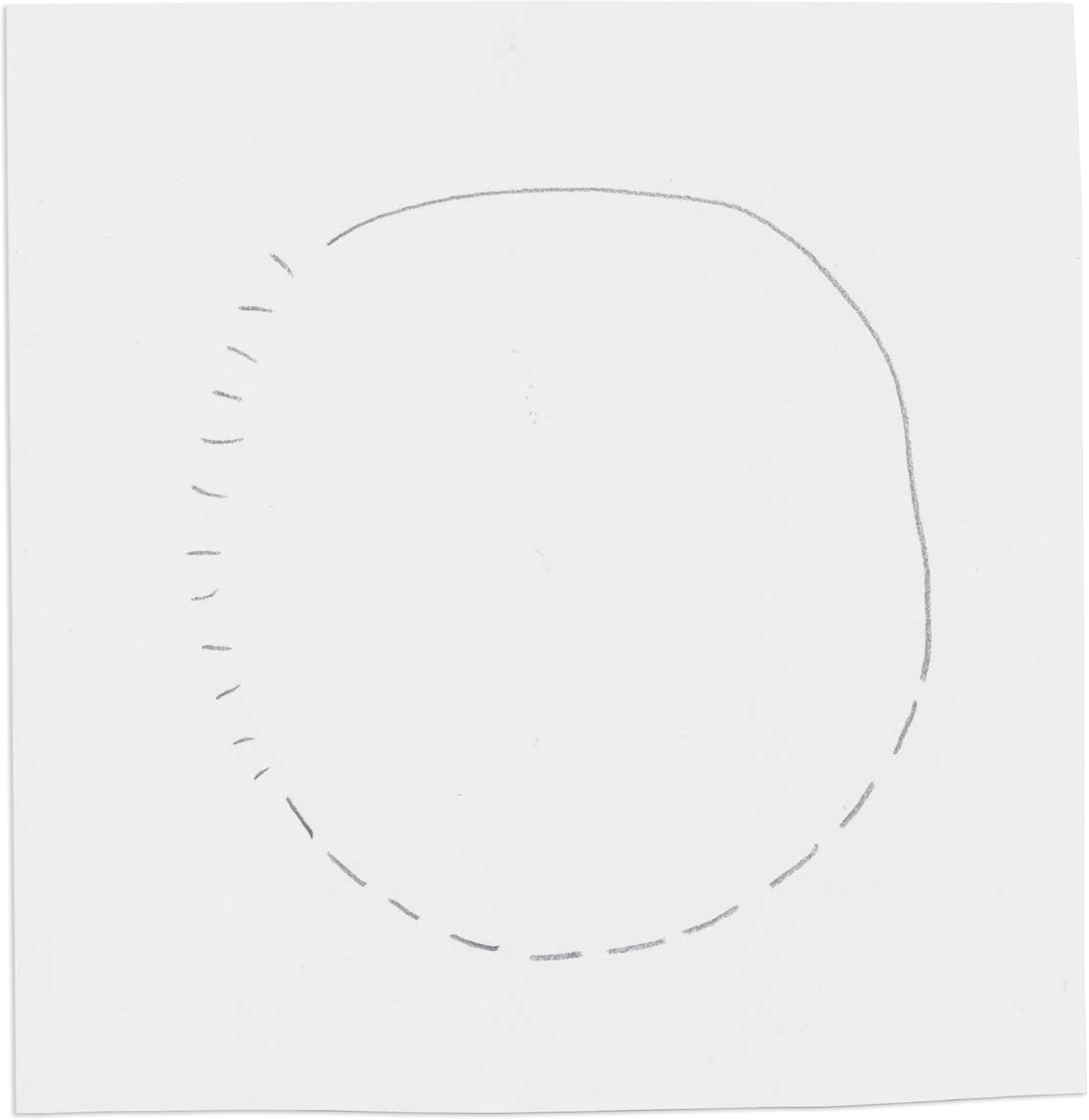
Propositions for a place-based practice:
Implicating the designer in care and relationality



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Abstract

This thesis reflects on the role of the designer within a place-based practice, exploring the implications of being knowingly and intentionally embedded within community and building a design practice rooted in relationality and reciprocity. Propositions for a place-based practice emerged from a methodology of material and collaborative making, as examined through three case studies (two completed, one proposed) within Prince George and Vancouver, Canada.

Keywords

place-based design, participatory design, relationality, communities, care, making

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Contents

Glossary

agency

The ability or capacity of a being or thing to act, influence, or create intervention (Agency, 2012).

care

This thesis attempts to engage in an understanding of care beyond a moral stance or sense of affection, moving towards Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher's definition: "Care is everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

collective

A flexible network of people with independent practices converging to create and/or produce a shared experience or intervention. "Collectives allow people with common goals to come together, produce, act, and then disband, reform or continue as needed" (Simpson, 2017, p. 217).

community

A group of interdependent beings and things growing or living together in a specified habitat (e.g. the community of neighbourhood or city); A group of interdependent beings and things sharing particular characteristics or values (e.g. a community of people concerned about the environment); Jeannette Armstrong's Okanagan teachings describe community as a "living process that interacts with the vast and ancient body of intricately connected patterns, operating in perfect unison, called *the land*" (2005, p. 13).

making

Within this thesis, making is understood as loose, sketch-like, potentially ambiguous physical assemblages, often exploring materials, tools, and techniques unfamiliar to the maker. Making in this sense is seen as a reaction or alternative to the refined processes and deliverables within a traditional commercial design project.

making conversation

Making conversation can occur in spaces of collective making with others, where the intention is not to reach one presumed decision or direction, but to invite a space for a plurality of views, allow for contradictions, and sit in relation with each other (Fior et al., 2017, p. 160).

modernity

A historical period that arose after the Renaissance; A philosophical tradition of reductionism, extractivism, anthropocentrism and radical individualism entwined with the belief that only measurable phenomena are valuable; Modernist epistemologies rely on assumed universality and dualist understandings, and create stark splits between subject and object, sensing and thinking, mind and body, humankind and nature. The result is an objectified vision of the universe. (Boehnert, 2018, p.51; Fletcher et al., 2019, p.14).

participatory design

An approach to design that aims to involve prospective users or those impacted by the design project as co-designers during all stages of the design process (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014).

place

Local conditions encompassing complex and interwoven economic, environmental, cultural and community dimensions (Markey, et al., 2012, p. 13).

place-based design

A design practice that is highly relational to place; A design practice that acts collectively with and within place-based communities.

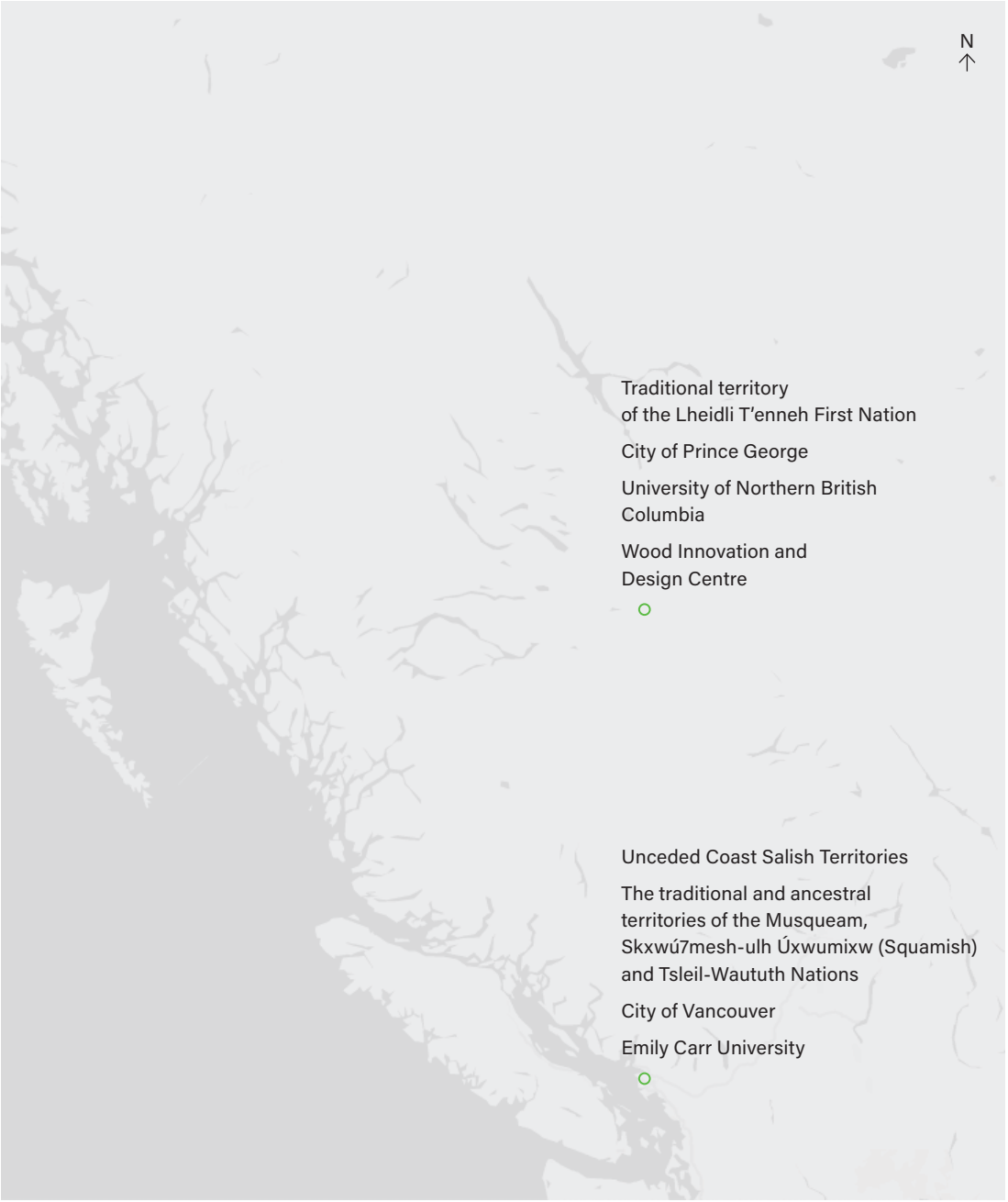
reciprocity

The practice of exchanging gifts, objects, or actions with other beings or things for mutual benefit and flourishing.

relationality

Living in recognition of our interconnectedness with other beings, things, and environments. “All living, human or not, takes place within a relational matrix” (Escobar, 2017, p. 12). Often seen in contrast to reductive and extractive modernist worldviews.

Land Acknowledgment



[Figure 1] Map.

This thesis was researched and written on several unceded Indigenous territories within the colonial structures of British Columbia and Canada, specifically: the area of Vancouver, located within Musqueam, Skxwú7mesh-ulh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh territories; and the area of Prince George, located within the traditional lands of the Lheidli T'enneh. Within this thesis, I refer to these areas by their colonial names, Vancouver and Prince George, and recognize these communities were created through organized dispossession and colonial violence. Through continued acknowledgment, learning, reflection and action, I hope to contribute to the Indigenous-led movement working to trouble these colonial structures, and support Indigenous resistance, Indigenous sovereignty and decolonial practices.

Introduction

first, a note on writing; or, personalizing the practice.

This thesis is an exploration of place and our relation to it; specifically, how designers might work in and with places and communities; more specifically, how I as a designer might work in the places I consider home.

Given the contextual implications of such a relational and place-based exploration, I have attempted to write this thesis in a way that reflects this research appropriately: this work is personal, so it feels fitting that the writing should be as well. In using first-person narrative and reflection throughout this document, I also hope to echo two key themes found and felt throughout my research process:

The first theme is a response to and interrogation of the passive, authorless, and implied authority implicit in many universalized design and research methodologies. Navigating the role of my voice and values in my practice has been a journey filled with self-doubt, learning, and empowerment (multiple times over, and not always in that order). To continue to ground this work through first-person narrative is not intended to celebrate my particular perspective, but instead shift focus to the subjective, close, and personal learnings that exist in any research, whether implicit or explicit. I speak in first-person not to enlarge the singularity or individuality of my experiences, but to find comfort, community and agency in their smallness.

Notions of care emerged as a second theme. I write to share what I care about; what motivates me, and what sits with me uneasily. While more will be said about the qualities and complexities of care within this thesis, I'll begin by using the word in its most instinctual and emotionally resonant form, as a manifestation of moral stance and affection. Caring in my practice has been the impulsive force that has propelled me forward and stopped me in my tracks, ripped my heart wide open and knit it back together. I chose to do my graduate degree because I care about the power of design, and I wanted to find ways to be a designer and make positive impacts in the world. I care about our eroding ecosystems and the many systemic injustices that have led us to this troubling time, systemic injustices that frighten me because I know I am shaped by and benefit from them. I care about the places I call home, I care about what kind of futures they might have, and I care about being a part of that future. These statements are not meant to imply that other designers do not share these concerns; I am sure every designer cares about creating change in some way or another, for better or worse. But

my understanding of how my values and worldviews shape how I care and how I might care has evolved throughout this research, and I am grateful to the designers, artists, writers, activists and thinkers who have inspired me throughout this thesis.

This thesis falls into two parts. *Part One*: a reflection of my theoretical groundings. Beginning with a short survey of contemporary design research regarding systemic transitions, this section attempts to understand the role of the designer in a practice that is rooted in a relational understanding of place-based design. *Part Two*: a reflection of three case studies (two undertaken, one proposed). These case studies engage a methodology of making and making conversation, critique conventions within participatory design practices, and explore the implications of agency, reciprocity and relationality in a place-based design practice.

Part One

A call to action / A turn in practice

> "What is the role of design experts in building a collective design intelligence, one that cultivates diversity and critical sense to catalyze the necessary positive resources required to take us out of the environmental, social, and cultural catastrophe we are falling into?" (Manzini, 2019, p. 128).

Ezio Manzini, a prominent design academic and founder of the international DESIS (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) Network, ended his latest book *Politics of the Everyday* with the above question. As a designer[1] completing a graduate degree in the subject of design, this felt like the most pressing and worthwhile question in my research. What is my role in addressing the multiple, entangled crises of our time: the destruction of natural ecosystems; entrenched and growing forms of inequality, discrimination, and erasure; and the emboldening of toxic ideologies across the globe? And what should or could my role be, knowing that my chosen discipline is often seen as relevant only within post-industrial or consumer-driven systems of production?

Manzini leaves the question unanswered (passing the buck to a future unwritten book), but several other design thinkers have offered suggestions: Drawing from Latin American traditions, Arturo Escobar describes *autonomous design* as a way to empower a diversity of place-based cultures and support complex, sustainable, and just living networks (2017); Terry Irwin, Gideon Kossoff and Cameron Tonkinwise propose Transition Design, a practice which promotes a new mindset where "designers are asked to examine their own value system and the role it plays in the design process" (2015, p. 9); Paola Antonelli argues for a practice that is "critical, activist, organic and political; about problem finding and framing more than problem-solving" (as cited in Escobar, 2017, p. 34); Mathilda Tham offers "dirty design," a practice that is deeply rooted in the contextual complexity of place where the designer is understood to be *a part of* (2019, p. 141); Manzini himself has written extensively about a collective design intelligence, a diffuse practice of design "where everybody designs" (2015).

While these propositions for new design practices share some broad commonalities—a nuanced and working understanding of localities, a humble and reflective mindset within the designer—they felt elusive when I attempted to chart a clear and post-marked path for my own design practice. Context got in the way.

[1] I define designers in this thesis as "design experts," people who "are trained to focus, develop, and use the culture and tools of design" (Manzini, 2019, p. 126).

> "Dirty design is searching. When asked a question, it no longer says 'it's this' and 'it's that'. Instead it says, it depends" (Tham, 2019, p. 141).

My thesis research explores what these propositions could look like as a practice that is hyper-local, small-scale, and community-led. It takes place within the places I currently call home: Vancouver, British Columbia, located within the unceded and traditional territory of the Musqueam, Skxwú7mesh-ulh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh nations; and my hometown of Prince George, British Columbia, located within the traditional lands of the Lheidli T'enneh. These places, and the collaborations and conversations I have had within them, have shaped my research and my practice in innumerable ways. My reflections may resonate with other designers also searching for a new kind of practice; in writing my own propositions all I can offer is my own searching, but I take comfort in knowing that might be enough.

Design as care / caring as design

Citing Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Matilda Tham speaks to the "noninnocence" of care (2019, p. 138), and how this seemingly inoffensive, affectionate, and virtuous act is, in fact, inseparable from power hierarchies: the act of caring demands a lack or removal of care towards something else. To care is to give attention, to energize a subject, to create spaces of regeneration and protection, but in doing so we ignore other subjects or realities, and ask them to wither in the interest of our chosen values and actions.

A choice of attention rests at the heart of design too. Herbert Simon defines design as a devised "course of actions aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (as cited in Escobar, 2017, p. 33). Tham also reflects on this likeness between care and design:

> "My pen traces certain ways of seeing, ways of doing—and not certain others. Harshly, design, in its immediate and expanded sense, is a war against ontological and epistemological diversity" (Tham, 2019, p. 138).

"War against ontological and epistemological diversity" could certainly describe the global modernist project the design industry has serviced since the Industrial Revolution, feeding not only colonial and capitalistic objectives, but also the emerging role of the "expert." Arturo Escobar notes "only with modernity, particularly after the end of the eighteenth century, did societies become thoroughly pervaded by expert knowledges and discourses, and transformed by them" (2017, p. 32). These forms of expert knowledge attempt to categorize and sanitize our complex living networks into something controllable and profitable.

Looking back at Simon's definition of design, it feels necessary to emphasize the role of the designer: design is a devised course of actions *by designers* aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones. When designers like myself are "design experts," educated within and implicitly perpetuating modernity, how might we move away from these ontologically and ecologically destructive practices? How can and should designers reconsider our own expertise, and support place-based transitions to diverse, complex, sustainable, and just cultures and ontologies?

Turning back to care, Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher offer an alternative definition with ethical, social, political, and cultural implications:

> "[Care is] everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

Parallels again can be found to design definitions and objectives, but the emphasis on maintenance, relationality, and reciprocity offers an important redirection from the functionalist, rationalistic, and post-industrial traditions that modernist design experts have grown and upheld (Akama et al., 2019). Understanding design as care (and potentially care as design, to iterate on Manzini's collective design intelligence proposal) radically shifts the role of the designer to someone wholly a part of and invested in their community.

A more critical and political interpretation of design believes design practices should emphasize problem finding and framing more than problem-solving. Care, like design, can also be seen as a provocation:

> "The question, then, is not 'how can we care more?' but instead to ask what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of 'how to care?' is insistent but not easily answerable" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 7).

In attempting to explore the role of the designer in supporting transitions to complex, sustainable, and just living networks and ontologies, these questions and practices must be made personal: What is *my role* as a designer in supporting transitions to complex, sustainable, and just living networks and ontologies? What is *my relation t*o the places that I care about? What preferred conditions does *my work* seek to create, and do I understand the values and biases determining those preferred conditions?

Understanding design as care invites new kinds of "design experts:" Designers who acknowledge and understand their relationality to place, who see themselves as part of a collective working with and within a community, and who recognize various kinds of expertise across all kinds of community members; Designers who can see themselves in a multitude of roles, as facilitators, participants, supporters, citizens, makers, or artists; Designers who flexibly and willingly move in flux within hierarchies, knowing when to lead and when to be led by; Designers who practice self-awareness and reflection, and recognize when their skills as a "design expert" may not be needed at all, and instead find other ways to support community-led transitions and emergence.[2]

[2] In the summer of 2019 I visited Unist'ot'en Village. The village is an action camp protesting and preventing the Coastal GasLink pipeline, and a place to practice and embody traditional Wet'suwet'en ways of living. During my stay, I quickly realized how little my expertise in design was needed. But helping with day-to-day activities, including cooking, cleaning, gardening, digging fire lines, and preparing materials for construction was welcome and needed. Rather than searching for ways to practice my design knowledge within this space, I asked what was needed I asked what was needed, and supported Unist'ot'en through acts of care and maintenance.

The radical implications of place-based design

I initially began my research with an interest in systems. I thought if I could only get a handle on all the translucent, human-made structures—the economies, governments, and cultures that shape our lives—then patterns might start to reveal themselves. I could say "Ah Ha! Right there! There's one small crack where I can help pick these harmful systems apart." I could study systems thinkers like Donella Meadows and her influential paper *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (1999), decide which of her nine intervention options seemed most appropriate,[3] and hit the ground running. And, as a communication designer, I might be able to create some lovely and informative graphics along the way. This is a simplistic summary of my initial intentions; I always knew that designing community-based transitions would be more complex and messy than this. But starting with systems felt like a viable first step.

Place to me is where abstract and complex systems manifest themselves, where broad power structures are made real, where their implications are seen and felt and lived. Often the connections between lived experiences and the systems that shape them are obfuscated, with multiple degrees of separation and incomprehensible layers of influence confusing the relationships between ideologies and impacts. I hoped to untangle some of this obfuscation by understanding how these systems impact the places I know and live in. But in giving attention to these particular places, I would also see how the reverse was true: how unique landscapes, cultures, and people create their own ways of being in both subtle and radical ways. And through this attention to place and the interactions between top-down and bottom-up systems of influence, I hoped to better understand myself: how my values and actions work to support or dismantle the things I claim to care about.

[3] Donella Meadows' list of places to intervene in a system, in increasing order of effectiveness:
9. Constants, parameters, numbers (subsidies, taxes, standards);
8. Regulating negative feedback loops;
7. Driving positive feedback loops;
6. Material flows and nodes of material intersection;
5. Information flows;
4. The rules of the system (incentives, punishments, constraints);
3. The distribution of power over the rules of the system;
2. The goals of the system;
1. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system—its goals, power structure, rules, its culture—arises.

entanglements of home

The places I chose to ground my practice are not happenstance or insignificant; they are places I care about, where I participate in deep relational routines. Places I have lived in, walked through and felt the seasons change. Places I went to school, made friendships, and found communities. Places I call home.

I grew up in Prince George, a small city of 78,000 people in the centre of British Columbia, Canada. The official municipality of Prince George is just over 100 years old, with the forestry industry driving much of its economy throughout the 20th Century (Markey, 2012). The city sits at the meeting point of two large rivers, the Fraser and the Nechako, and

is the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh, "the People from the Confluence of the Rivers" (Gottschall, 2016). Like many other Canadian communities, Prince George's history is one of colonization, displacement, and violence ("Lheidli T'enneh Historical Timeline," 2014). The area's economic prosperity is strongly tied to the boom and bust cycles of resource-extraction industries, such as forestry, mining, and natural gas, and the city's downtown has endured disinvestment and neglect, while suburbs and accompanying big-box shopping centres have expanded over the last 20 years (Markey, 2012). While these generalities have no doubt defined Prince George in numerous ways, they have also fed disparaging stereotypes about the community: everyone is redneck and drives big trucks; the city dirty and smelly; the downtown is empty and unsafe. My lived experience feels different.

Both of my parents were secondary public school teachers, and so were many of their friends. I grew-up in a middle-class home in College Heights, a suburb on the west side of town. We lived near a forested greenbelt, and my sisters, friends, dog and I would frequently walk alongside the creek towards the Fraser River. We would wade its (likely polluted) water, climb trees, build lean-to shelters, and run away from the occasional black bear. My parents were active in their teachers' union, and taught us that public services like education, health care, and parks were worth supporting and defending. I attended the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George and studied English and Political Science. I took a course on Northern BC literature, and I remember being so excited that local authors, poets and artists were giving a rich and nuanced voice to a place so many others seemed willing to write-off and disparage. I worked in the public library and a locally-owned, female-run tattoo shop. My friends put on concerts in downtown bookstores, bars, and church basements. I made posters for them, and exhibited my artwork in galleries and shops. I witnessed the impact small but dedicated groups can have on local cultures. My experience of Prince George is a place where grassroots action can be seen and felt, despite the global antagonistic forces weighing on the city and other hinterland communities.

I moved to Vancouver in 2011 to study at Emily Carr University and work as a communication designer. Vancouver, population 2 million, is nestled between sea and mountains in the scenic southwestern corner of British Columbia, on unceded and traditional Musqueam, Skxwú7mesh-ulh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh territories. The city presents itself as a home to innovation and sustainable ways of living, but its high cost of living increasingly privileges the highest bidder. Living here, I have found a community of designers, artists and activists that both reminded me of Prince George and offered me new

opportunities for learning and growth. Both Prince George and Vancouver are home to vibrant communities attempting to carve out spaces for self-expression and preservation, constantly butting up against economic and socio-political systems that limit their efforts.

My lived experiences in Prince George and Vancouver do not feel especially unique, but I also recognize how my privileges shaped my relationships to these places, and the way I understand and experience the world. I emphasize place in my practice to recognize the people I design for and the land I design on. This recognition feels particularly significant when considering places that exist outside of "the centre," smaller cities like Prince George or other hinterland communities that often go unseen by the larger design community. These are places where the impacts of resource-extraction economies are made visceral, defining physical environments and peoples' livelihoods. Grounding my design practice to the places I live in and care about means being accountable to people in my own community: to people I have relationships with, and to people I have never met but who hold just as much claim (or more) to these places as I do. Grounding my practice to place means recognizing that I live on stolen land, that our history holds (and continues upholds) the violence and trauma of colonization, and that my presence as a white settler on these lands is a legacy of these injustices.

to be a part of

Place-based design (together with *participatory design*, discussed in *Part Two*), seemed like the obvious starting point to form the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my research. Contemporary design frameworks define place-based design as being "informed by a deep understanding of local ecosystems and culture," and should ideally amplify and connect to local perspectives and grassroots efforts (Irwin et al., 2015, p. 10). But in my attempts to turn these notions of place-based design into an applied practice within Prince George and Vancouver, gaps emerged and concepts started to unravel. Place-based design is often listed as just one element within a comprehensive design practice (Irwin et al., 2015), and in some ways can feel like an extension or reinterpretation of *human-centred design* methods. Human-centred design advocates for an in-depth understanding of how people are or will be impacted by design, often creating consultative or collaborative processes with said people to inform projects. But in the same way human-centred design is often instrumentalized to serve the interests of the stakeholders who hold the most financial power and institutional influence, I am concerned that place-based design is also at risk of slipping into a tokenizing practice of lip-service that once again places the designer outside of the community, designing *for,* rather than *a part of.*

I am still attempting to understand the systemic forces that need to be dismantled to support diverse, just, and sustainable ways of living. And I still take great comfort in reading Donella Meadows, in knowing change can happen in many ways, by many different kinds of people. But in attempting to understand systems and practice place-based design, I found myself entangled in a web of relationships: with people, with buildings, with parks, with land. While the idea that a designer could be a neutral, objective translator of community or stakeholder needs has always been an illusion, a place-based design practice seems like the opportunity to wholly implicate ourselves as designers in place, to shift our attention to our relationships with community and the environment, to understand our responsibilities as designers, citizens, and inhabitants of this world. Re-orientating place-based design to focus on and practice *relationality* supports the original definition of deeply understanding local ecosystems and culture, but has many more radical implications:

A place-based practice is contextual: It is rooted to many irreplicable and converging factors, making this work feel both large and enmeshed, but also small and unscalable. Answers and explorations belong to the context they emerged from, and cannot be parachuted out. This thinking disrupts the universal, replicable, and scalable qualities often sought in many modern design practices.

A place-based practice is commitment: Conditions of projects will ebb and flow, and timelines will be created, met and altered, but this practice demands commitment outside of these organizational parameters because it must be rooted to relationships with people and places. This practice requires listening, building trust, responsiveness, and a willingness for personal and potentially life-long attachment. A place-based practice offers a commitment to evolve, to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016). Attuning ourselves to different conceptions of timelines, projects, and work are necessary to prepare ourselves for the task of sustainable transitions and transformations.

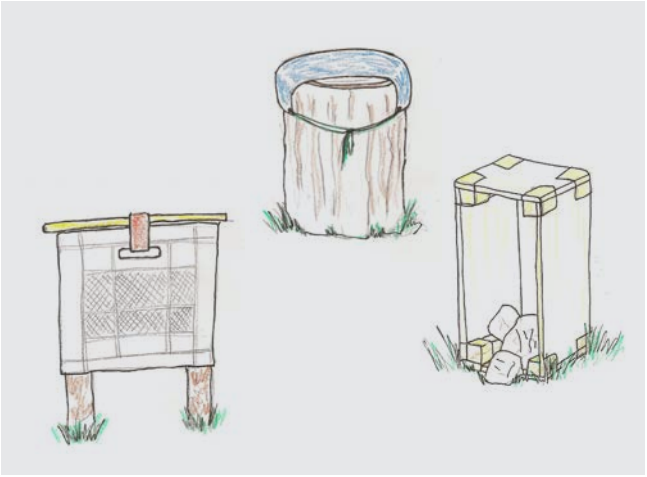
A place-based practice is reciprocal: Although modernity may have led us to believe otherwise, humans are very much a part of the earth's living systems, a part of nature. The naming of the anthropocene[4] is both proof of this interconnectedness and modernity's rejection of it; it is easy to exploit ecosystems if you believe you are separate from or in control of them. We must consider how our work impacts all of our surrounding relations, not just "stakeholders" or "users." Reciprocity must be at the heart of all place-based design, and work to support sustainability and mutual flourishing of all beings.

[4] The Anthropocene is the current geological epoch wherein human kind is responsible for altering the functions of Earth's ecological systems (Boehnert, 2018, p. 8).

In practicing this understanding of place-based design, I need to be responsible to my communities, and understand the effects and consequences of why I care and how I practice. I am still grappling with the implications of this practice, and I have no neat and tidy design solution or directions to conclude my research. Instead, I offer a collection of explorations, conversations, and reflections that speak to our relationship to place and what it might be.

[Figure 2] *BOX.* Research into an institutional partnership transforms into a performance and public critique of the very institutions I was embedded in.

[Figure 3] *Story Ropes.* A personal reckoning with complicity informs a collective gathering, and the space to both lead and be led by.



[Figure 4] *Seats.* Sketches for proposed gathering attempts to sow rhizomatic relationships between communities.

Part Two

Making and making conversations / A place-based methodology

I began my thesis research with the assumption that participatory design methods[5] would be the core of my methodology. These methods felt essential to the work of transitioning communities towards ecological ways of living. By inviting community members into the design process, they are able to define processes and outcomes in place-specific ways, which would ideally support community engagement and buy-in of any project or intervention (Iversen & Dindler, 2014). Although this conception of participatory design has its roots in Scandinavia's 1970s labour rights movement (Ehn, 2012), its methods have been instrumentalized and universialized,[6] often perpetuating the hierarchies and dominate power structures of the Global North and continuing colonial acts of ontological displacement and erasure (Akama et al., 2019). An over-reliance on the assumed effectivity and virtuousness of participatory design methods actually reduces a relational place-based practice by "further perpetuating the view of practitioners as culturally neutral, objective, interchangeable, and a-geographical" (Akama et al., 2019, p. 62). These methods of community consultation can feel tokenistic, whereby 'design experts' consult with local stakeholders in ways that are over-simplified, and input opportunities lack flexibility or influence because the project's output and timeline are predetermined (i.e., this site will be a park, and it will be completed by next fall) (Bratteteig & Wagner, 2014).

Yoko Akama, Penny Hagen & Desna Whaanga-Schollum note that "mutual learning is central [in participatory design], but it is underplayed within conventional representations of design thinking" (2019, p. 71). While I still believe that some version of participatory design is essential to my practice, I have reflected deeply on my different roles as a participatory designer: as a facilitator, where I direct or withhold information from the group; as a collaborator, where traditional hierarchies between participants and facilitator might be subverted; or as a solo-actor, where I design independently and then share my work for public consideration. In practicing any of these roles, participatory designers must move towards respectful and reciprocal approaches, understanding "who we are and our relationality in the world, and how this manifests through our practices" (Akama et al., 2019, p. 62).

While I don't doubt many other methods may be used to explore questions of relationality and responsibility to place, I began navigating the power structures inherent in participatory design practices through a methodology of *making* and of *making conversation*.

[5] I define participatory design as an approach to design that aims to involve prospective users or those impacted by the design project as co-designers during all stages of the design process. This definition and my understanding of participatory design has been informed by Tone Bratteteig and Ina Wanger; Pelle Ehn; Carl DiSalvo and Christopher A. Le Dantec; Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers; John Thackara; Terri Wada and Pamela Napier. See bibliography for further reference.

[6] Popular "portable methods and replicable processes" from Stanford d.school, IDEO design thinking toolkits, and Human-Centered Design and Double Diamond models are a few examples of this trend (Akama et al., 2019, p. 60).

Coming out of the graphic design industry, I have always believed that design has enormous power to shape the ways we live in and understand the world, but that my skill set within this influencing force rested in thoughtful and accessible typography, art direction, copy-writing, or space design. My experience of design was to answer a brief, whether from a client or myself, and then journey down some exploratory paths before hunkering down and producing the finished product (although, pending deadlines and budgets, those exploratory paths were usually short and familiar). I recognize this experience represents only a narrow expression of the many forms and interpretations of design, but it was difficult for me to shake these associations with and obligations to productivism, refinement and solutionism so entrenched in our modern post-industrial workplace.

Making, for me, became the space to resist those obligations. Throughout my thesis research, making has appeared in many ways, including loose, sketch-like, physical assemblages that often explored materials, tools, and techniques unfamiliar to me. Within this unfamiliarity, I was drawn to create forms that could be undone, using knots, tape, clips and other non-destructive methods. These methods could transparently display how forms were made, and offer the opportunity to take them apart and reuse materials for future making. In embracing these accessible, informal and temporary characteristics, I gave myself permission to simply try, which supported my own empowerment and agency (Langley et al., 2018).

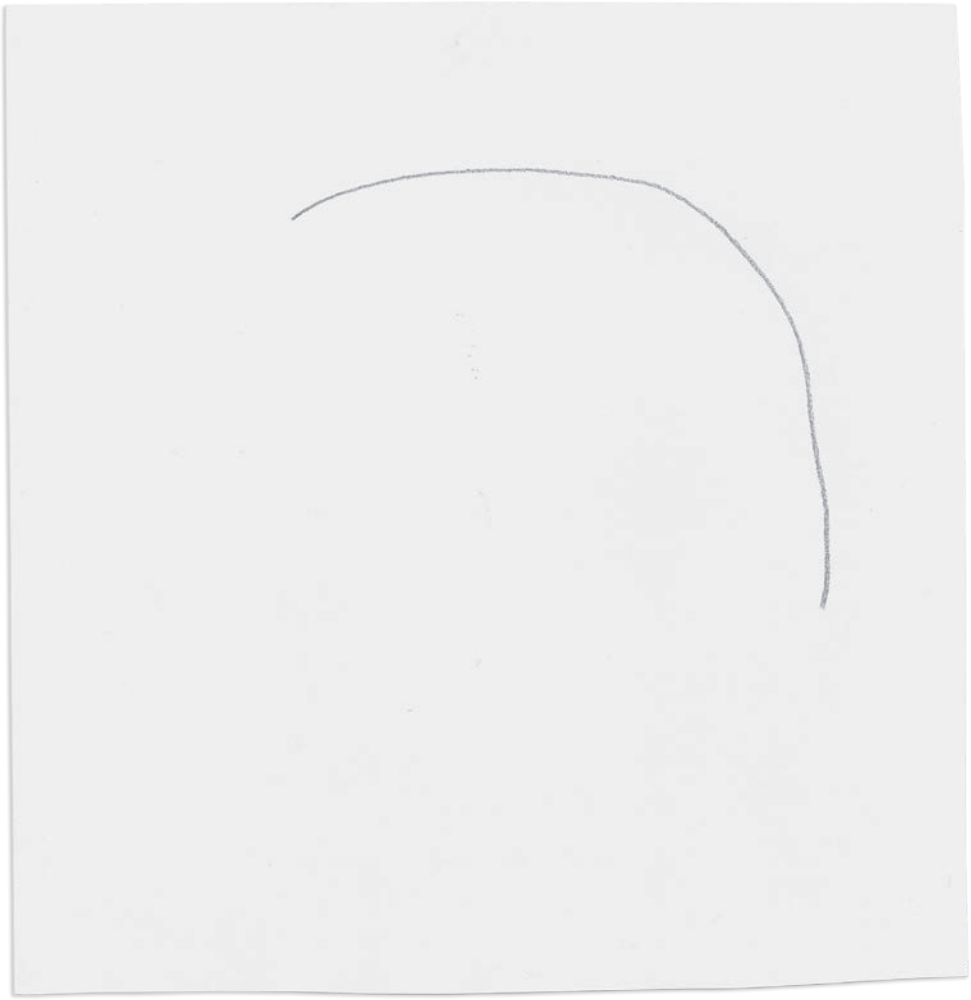
Making in this sense may be used to subvert conventional participatory or consultation methods. Often, participants are asked to describe a known situation or experience, which tends to yield predictable responses and demands participants use specific skills and expertise that the designer views as valuable (e.g. draw your idea for a future park) (Day Fraser, 2017, p. 5). This process tends to instrumentalize and tokenize participants, rather than understanding how unique, place-based skills and expertise could contribute to the process and open up new discussions. If we invite a process of *making with* participants, unexpected materials and accessible techniques can provide prompts to share our *own* stories, values, and knowledge with each other.

I understand collective making then as *making conversation*. Although the designers may offer unfamiliar materials, ambiguous prompts, and incomplete spaces, collectively the designers and the participants make artefacts that are not simply functional objects, but also "thinking tools" that can invite more meaning, honesty, and surprising personal expressions and conversations (Day Fraser, 2017, p. 4). Hierarchies move in flux in these spaces; even though I might at times play the role of facilitator, I am also able to be a collaborator, an artist, and a citizen. Within making

conversations I can listen, reflect, respond, and be heard alongside others. Making conversations creates a shared meaning, where "individual experiences can be shared, common experiences can be generated, their quality can be examined, and situated knowledge can be gained" (Janssen, 2017, p. 155).

Conversations belong to daily life: they might be meandering or appear expendable. Giving ourselves time for open-ended and open-minded conversations runs counter to modernity's evaluations of work and productivity. Liza Fior, Elke Krasny, and Jane da Mosto advocate for the conversation as a mode of resistance, where the intention is not to reach one presumed decision or direction, but to invite a space for a plurality of views, allow for contradictions, and sit in relation with each other (2017, p. 160). In this light, making also feels like an action of resistance, especially if we fold in a practice of care that maintains, continues and repairs our communities. Imagine a practice that includes making meals for one another, sending invitations, setting tables, planning walks: these makings do not need to serve some clearly defined future objective, but can be enough in themselves.

As I attempt to reflect and summarize the work that formed my understanding of a relational place-based design practice, it becomes clear to me how that nagging feeling of always being in between projects, ideas, questions, places and people will never fully be resolved, and the growing acceptance that that's probably okay. Definitive beginnings and ends never seemed to materialize, instead each project faded in and out of focus, bleeding and overlapping into the next. The following case studies attempt to share the unexpected outcomes and small impactful moments that continue to stay with me.



drawing a line

Case study one: BOX / Making agency

> "It starts in the middle of things. Care practices don't suddenly begin; they are already ongoing. Just as in democracy, there are always disagreements, messy distractions, and complications. The trick is to determine the best ways of caring in a particular time and situation... Everyday life is political because all caring, every response to a need, involves power relationships" (Tonto, 2015, pp. 3-4, 9).

I remember coming home and crying in my bed. My partner kept asking me what was wrong, and I didn't know how to explain that I was crying over a building. Over some administrative decisions that didn't really have anything to with me. Not really, not directly.

The Wood Innovation and Design Center (WIDC) sits in the heart of downtown Prince George, an eight-storey timber building highlighting local forestry resources and innovative design.[7] Envisioned by the provincial government[8] to house joint programming from the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and Emily Carr University, the building has been a source of contention and confusion since its conception in 2009 and completion in 2014. By 2019 collaborative academic programming around design and wood innovation had failed to materialize, and rumours of leadership disagreements between the two universities circulated. Emily Carr began funneling their efforts (and government mandated funding) toward building community partnerships and projects.[9]

I have always believed Emily Carr, with its acclaimed faculty, resources, and reputation, needs better and more robust ways to serve hinterland and rural communities. Any work towards sustainability and decolonization needs to be informed by the lived experiences of communities directly impacted by resource-extraction industries. Having lived in Vancouver for nearly 10 years, I feel the strain of trying to be a part of two communities at once, constantly feeling like both an insider and outsider. What kind of citizenship, authority or identity can I or should I hold? The idea of an Emily Carr satellite campus in Prince George felt like a tether between these two places, one that might support me personally and professionally. But this collaboration also felt like a definitive statement that Prince George matters, that people making things in this place matters, and we should be learning, sharing, and creating with this community.

[7] WIDC is officially 6 floors, but is the height of about 8 storeys, making it the tallest modern timber structure in the world at the time of its completion in 2014 (UNBC, n.d).

[8] The project began under Gordon Campbell's BC Liberal government, and was originally envisioned as "a $161-million, 10-storey block-long highrise that would be the focal point for educational programs housing 420 students" (Penner, 2014).

[9] Some of these projects include the *Neighbourhood Time Exchange* (2016-17), *Float School* (2018-19), *Along a North-South Axis* (2016-19), and Emily Carr partnerships with Omineca Arts Centre, the Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George, and Two Rivers Gallery (Living Labs, 2020).

I began my research with an interest in how an art and design institution could create and support innovative and cultural projects in a community like Prince George. What did these collaborations look like? What kind of relationships were formed and what hierarchies were established or emerged? What was the impact of these projects on the broader community? What ultimately might this collaborative academic programming look like? I hoped by charting out the process and impacts of various Prince George-based Emily Carr projects I might find patterns and determine some best practices for how to design with communities.

In earnest, I studied news briefs and project reports.[10] I pieced together stories and my own memories of Emily Carr projects in Prince George.[11] I mapped out timelines and interactions.[12] I held interviews with some key stakeholders to help flesh out experiences and impressions of these projects and relationships.[13] And I struggled to pull out any patterns or solutions. Instead, I piece together a story of a broken relationship between Emily Carr, UNBC, and the Prince George arts community. Many arguments could be made about the flawed nature of the original arrangement: there was never enough money to do a collaborative program right; the WIDC building was built too quickly; communication between the universities was not clear. But the conclusion was the same: relations between Emily Carr and UNBC had broken down. A partnership between Emily Carr and UNBC represented something powerful to me, and to see it slip away felt like the continued disregard of a place that I was part of and cared about.

> "At the bottom of every important conflict is a sense of love having been betrayed... We are hurt most by the betrayal of those we had counted on to love us" (Fisher, 2019, pp. 102-3).

I felt hurt and angry about the way UNBC and Emily Carr's collaborative relationship disintegrated into rumors, disparaging comments, and blame-throwing. I felt uneasy about Emily Carr's subsequent community partnerships that emerged from the wreckage, torn between admiring the projects Emily Carr was bringing to Prince George and the support they were offering the local arts scene, but also sensing the power imbalance between Emily Carr (which controlled the funding and generally proposed/framed the projects) and people in Prince George (who may have felt compelled to support Emily Carr's initiatives, even when the projects did not reflect their own understanding of community needs). And looming over it all: when the funding runs out, what sustains? The precarious nature of this question is what broke my heart.

[10] See Appendix 1: Emily Carr + Prince George News Briefs and Project Reports Selections

[11] I personally know many people who have been involved in various Emily Carr + Prince George projects, and I have been privy to many conversations about said projects over the past 14 years.

[12] See Appendix 2: Emily Carr + Prince George Projects Timeline

[13] See Appendix 3: Emily Carr + Prince George Stakeholder Interview Selections.

> "We might remind students and ourselves to leave the big models and frameworks and even tools for now, and instead start digging where we stand and get dirty. It is so clear in design that the genuine love a project comes when we start digging deep, with our bare hands, getting out psyches and souls in there. Life does not reveal by proxy" (Tham, 2019, p. 139).

Attempting to understand the situation through infographics revealed no solutions or pathways, at least none that I felt like I could enter. The situation seemed too political, and I felt so outside of any space that could have any influence; it was paralyzing. It was hard to see any patterns from above, because I was drawn downwards to the specifics. My colleagues, teachers, peers and friends were embroiled in these projects, caught in the crosshairs of higher-level decision-making. And at the centre I saw a building failing to fulfill its promise, a confounding space that felt both excluding and binding.

What is lost when a space that was supposed to host collaborative and innovative thinking fails to do so? And what happens if you simply offer invitations to start using the space in creative ways?

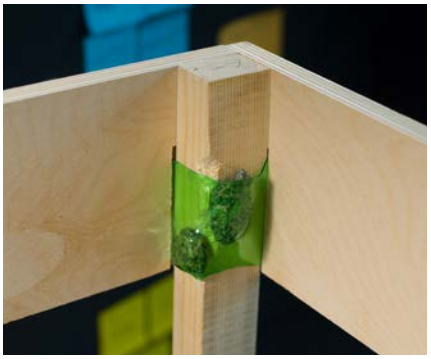
[Figure 5] The Wood Innovation and Design Centre (WIDC), Downtown Prince George.


BOX

I designed the *BOX* project (fig. 6) as a response to the way the WIDC building is (or isn't) being used, creating a proxy-place that would enable making and collaboration. I invited my friends to use *BOX* in a way that expressed their own creative practice. Using the limited resources we had available, we explored how something that feels awkward, confusing or unusable can suddenly become an exciting and creative space to form relationships around.

At first, making *BOX* felt like a release from the maps and pattern-searching. Wouldn't that be funny? To make my own beautiful but confounding space, but turn its ambiguity into an invitation. I thought of it as a performance, an alternate route towards saying what I thought should be said. After weeks of frustration, I felt relief as this new plan suddenly appeared to me. But making *BOX* was not quick, and required sketching, prototyping, and appointments in the woodshop. This slow making offered a focus and a sense of empowerment that drawing up infographics failed to provide.

Making *BOX* meant diving into unfamiliar territory, learning to work with new kinds of materials and tools. I researched joinery and tested methods I thought were interesting and felt accessible to me.[14] Plastic-bottle joints were appealing because of their ability to be undone (fig. 7-9). I have an aversion to nails and glue, and prefer to find ways to tie or bind materials together. I wanted *BOX* to feel strong and substantial, but also flexible and open. I wanted to be able to pull out the thread and unravel the pieces, maintaining their potential.



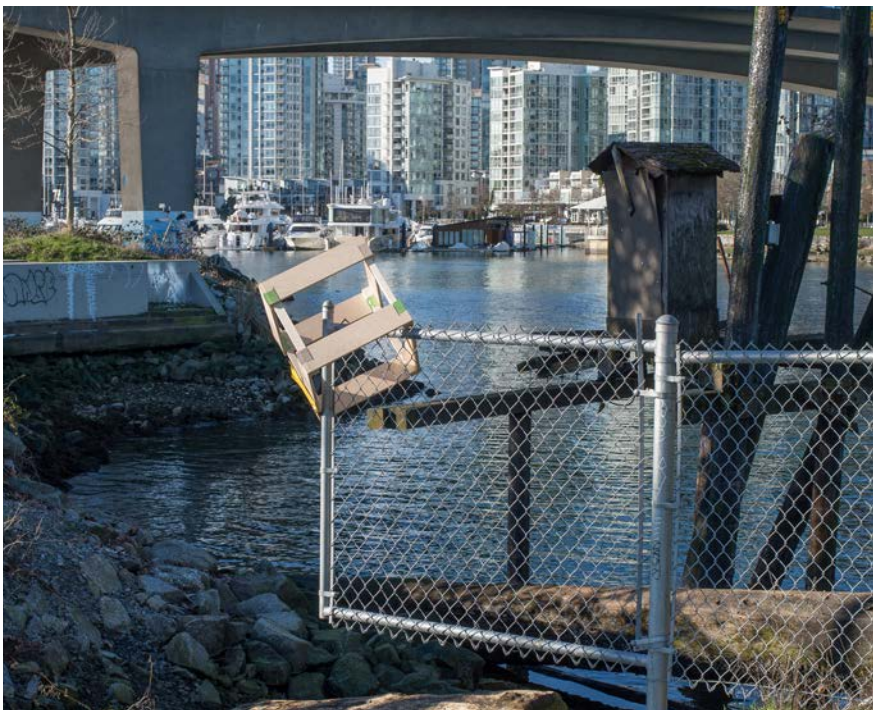
[Figure 6] (opposite page) BOX. Tag reads "BOX. Future site of craft, making, social engagement, performance, facilitation, innovation, provocation + collaboration. Contact me to create a project with BOX!"

[Figure 7-9] BOX is made with wood and shrink-wrapped recycled plastic bottles, using methods inspired by Micaella Pedros' Joining Bottles project.

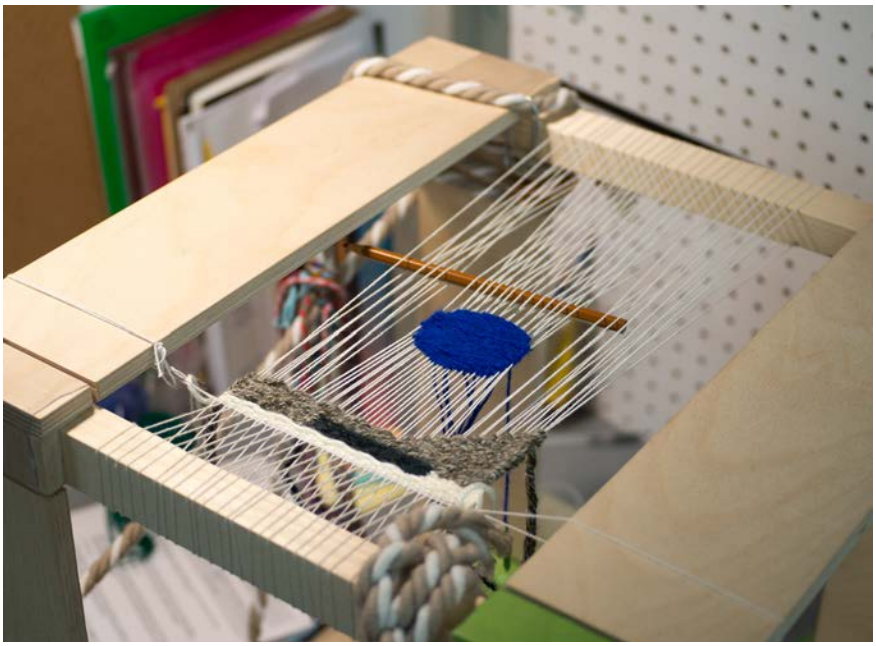
[14] I replicated Micaella Pedros' technique of shrink-wrapping plastic bottle segments with a heat gun to create strong joints that can be used to make a variety of sturdy forms like tables and stools. To learn more: https://www.micaellapedros.com/Joining-Bottles-The-project

I enjoy collaging, throwing together found materials, letting them dictate form and function. But to make *BOX*, some planning was necessary. I had to measure out wood slabs for cutting. I needed help using the power saws, and I needed to clearly articulate what I was trying to build. This same kind of necessary articulation was also needed in my collaborations; when I invited people to make things with *BOX* (fig. 10-16), I felt I had to explain why, to share the story of Emily Carr, Prince George, and the unused potential of the WIDC building. But in using *BOX* as a prompt and host for our own creative projects, we could begin to imagine what the alternatives might look like.

[Figure 10] A walk with classmates and *BOX*.

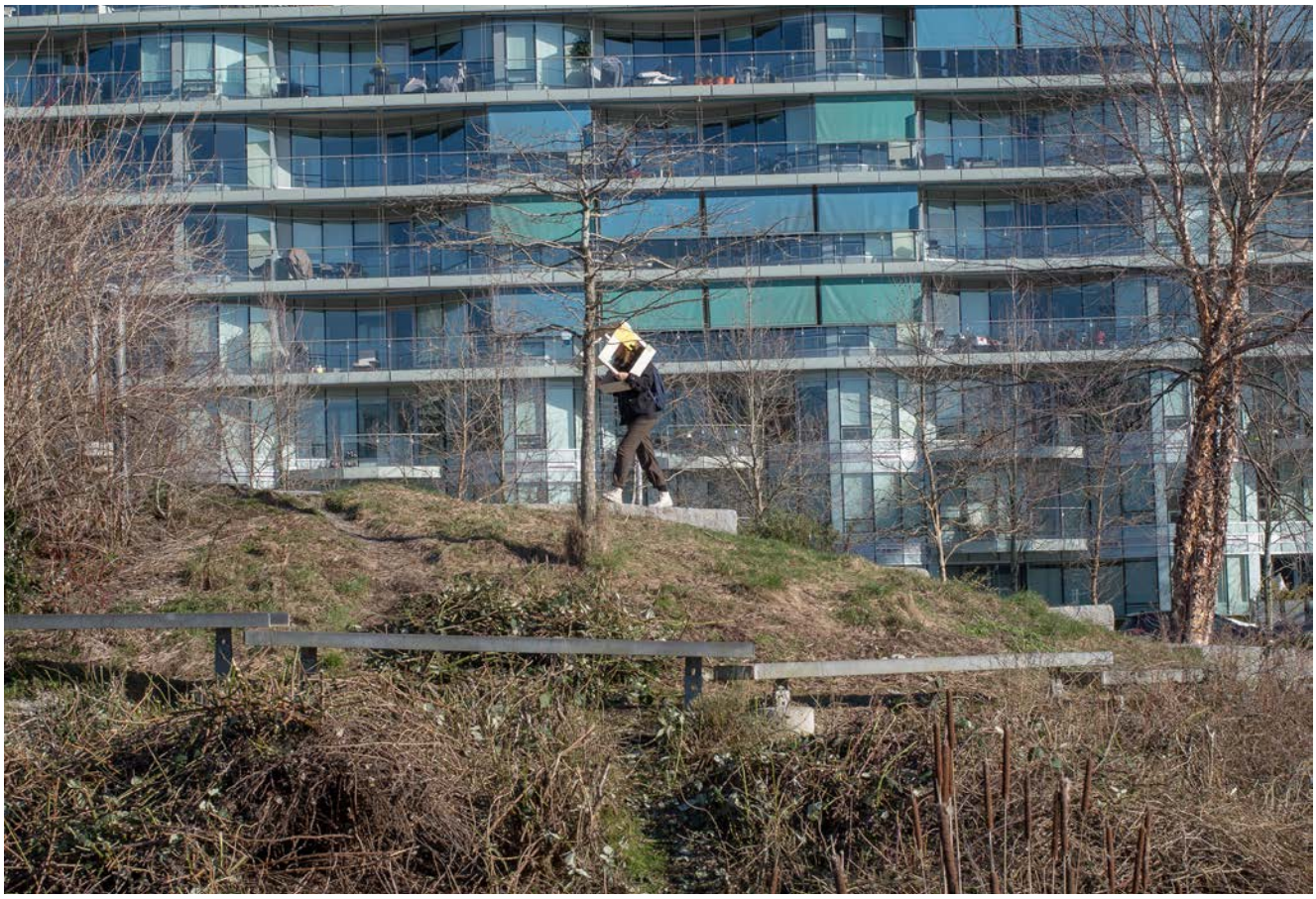


[Figure 11] Finding risky resting places for *BOX*.



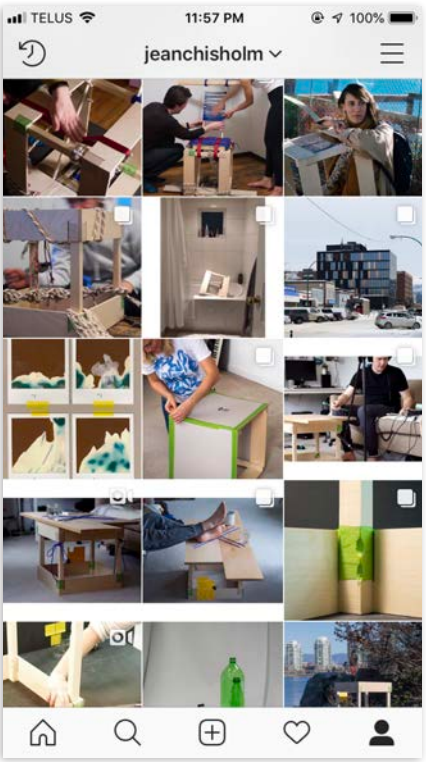
[Figure 12] Learning weaving and knot work on *BOX* with Seth Parker.

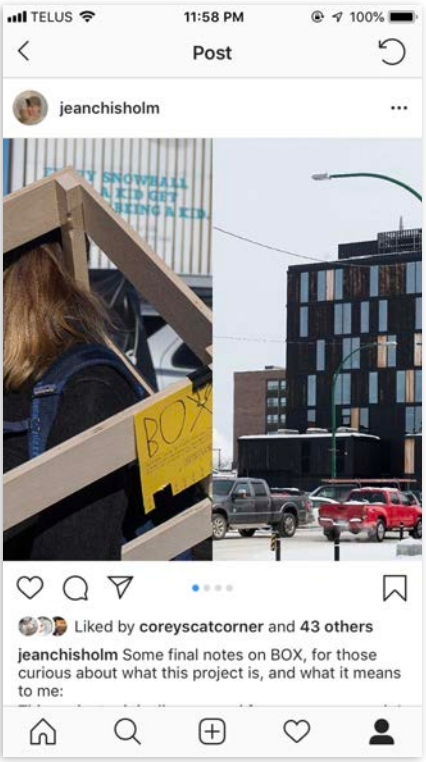
[Figure 13-14] *BOX* at home, turning it into a musical instrument and coffee table with my partner Corey Wintemute.



[Figure 15] (opposite page) Prototyping chair forms using found materials with Seth Parker and Char Kennedy.

[Figure 16] Learning to walk with *BOX.*





[Figure 17-18] Sharing *BOX* through my personal social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, pictured). My post from March 10th, 2019 led to an interview on CBC:

"Some final notes on *BOX*, for those curious about what this project is, and what it means to me:

This project originally emerged from some research I was doing into Prince George and Emily Carr collaborations, and *BOX* is my reaction to the way the Wood Innovation and Design Centre (WIDC) in downtown Prince George is (or isn't) being used.

Originally the WIDC building was meant to house collaborative, or at least mutually informed, academic programming from UNBC and Emily Carr around design and wood innovation. Obviously this joint programming hasn't happened yet, and instead the last couple years have been full of stories and rumors about people in charge not getting along, poor planning about where classrooms and workshops were placed, or just not knowing how to get the keys to the front door. While it's easy to brush off these incidents as standard bureaucratic bullshit, it's incredibly frustrating and upsetting to me that a potential student and faculty body, who could be creating innovative research and design projects in downtown Prince George, is being sacrificed because a couple of institutional heads can't figure out how to work together.

What's lost when a space that was supposed to host interdisciplinary collaborations and innovative thinking fails to do so? And what happens if you just offer up an invitation to start using the space in creative ways?

So I made my own *BOX*, which I thought was cool and interesting, but I didn't actually know what to do with it. I invited my friends to use *BOX* in a way that explored their own creative practice. I love seeing what we can make when we have limited infrastructure and resources, and when given prompts to think creatively something that feels awkward or confusing or underused can suddenly become a really exciting exploration, and space to form relationships around.

And it feels really shitty when institutions who have a lot of money, resources, and a half empty building sit on these kinds of questions for 2+ years. #waitingforanupdate #figureitout"

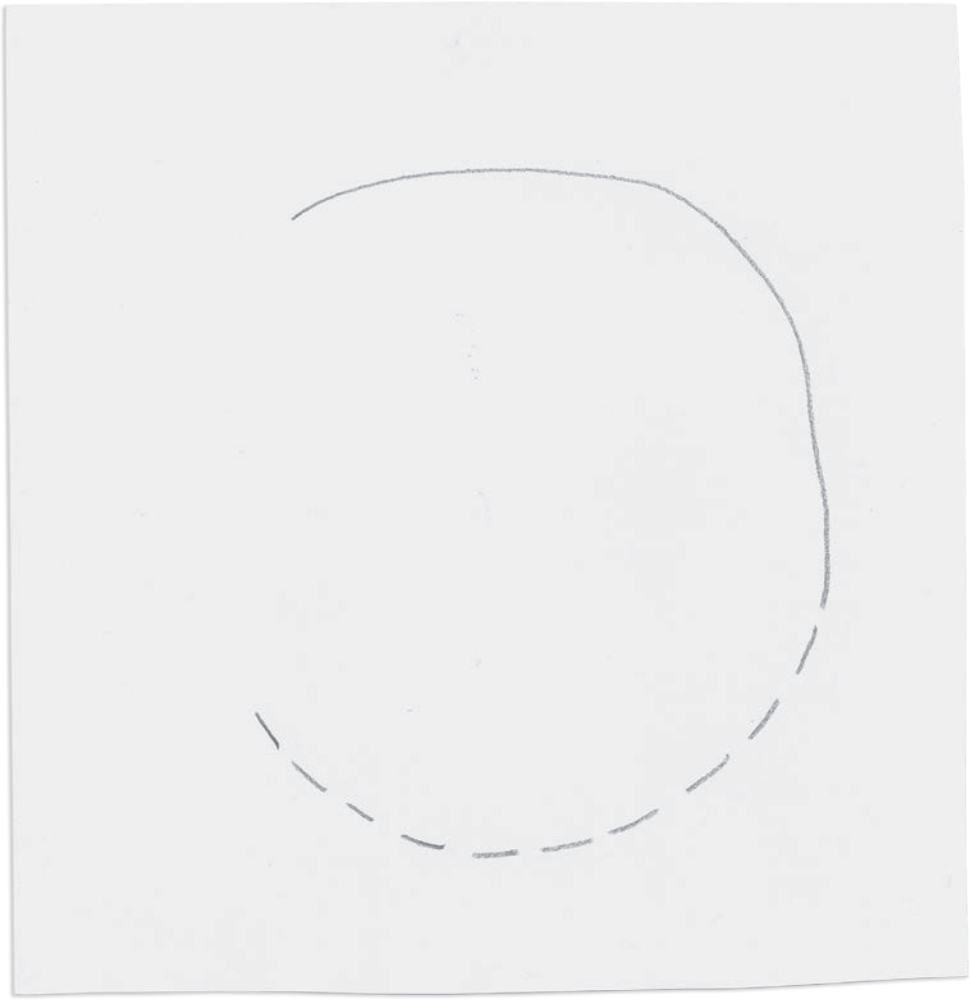
I gained enough attention from my *BOX* posts on social media (fig. 17-18) to warrant an interview on CBC's Daybreak North.[15] CBC reached out to Emily Carr to get an official statement on the status of the satellite campus: Emily Carr confirmed their plans to use the WIDC building have been put on hold indefinitely. This statement was not particularly surprising to the administrators who spent the last two year in the relevant boardrooms, but it was new information for the public and for me, who were still anticipating some kind of Emily Carr presence within the building.

Tim Ingold suggests that material artefacts emerge "within the relational context of the mutual involvement of people and their environment" (2000, p. 88). Although I had a preconceived idea of how the *BOX* project would unfold—the making, the collaborations, the performance and public postings—the final shape of all of these components was equally determined by the materials, spaces, and relationships around me. Over the course of making and participating in *BOX*, I also had to put myself out front and centre, share my frustrations and values, and react to whatever the world gave back. To end this project with a CBC interview felt incredibly validating, even though the official response confirmed the broken relationship between Emily Carr and UNBC.

I have always been fearful of putting something into the world that was wasteful or harmful, a tricky anxiety for a designer. Participatory design practices were in some ways a work-around for me, a crutch I could lean on because it was not about me; I was simply there to listen, interpret, test, and to try to empower others. But that kind of participatory design obscures the role of the designer, falsely rendering them invisible and apolitical. In making *BOX*, I was making a statement, drawing a clear line of what I stood for. Perhaps I could have made this same statement without making *BOX*, but I don't think I would have found my way there without it. Making *BOX* helped me find not only a path, but agency and voice.

Designers are not culturally or politically neutral; our socio-political values inevitably manifest through our design practices (Akama et al., 2019, p. 65). We are situated in place and in relationships, and embracing this relationality through a place-based practice might offer us the agency to address and act on the powerlessness we may feel in the face of systemic injustices. *BOX* emerged from my relationships with Prince George, UNBC, and Emily Carr, and was a critique of their entanglement with one another, and with me. I did not want that entanglement to fade away into a failed and forgotten project; I wanted to put a spotlight on it and help repair the damage, or find new ways for Emily Carr and Prince George to support each other and maintain their relationship.

[15] I appeared on the March 15, 2019 edition of Daybreak North .You can listen to my interview here: https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-109-daybreak-north/clip/15740089-designer-jean-chisolm-on-the-box-project-and-unfulfilled-promises-for-prince-george?fbclid=IwAR1T-3E0mgWsyou5gTghCCuWjm-RZfd9nLLVZONckf9Qb538GtHrMBQzD-KFA&share=true



to lead / to be led by

Case study two:
Story Ropes / Navigating agency

Over the course of *BOX,* I reconciled feelings of frustration and powerlessness through acts of making. My role as a designer emerged as someone who must understand and be situated in the relationality of place, and as someone who should use their voice and agency to speak truth to power within their communities. *Story Ropes* feels like a continuation of this learning, but one that complicates my understanding of agency. Through this project I attempted to navigate the legacies of colonialism and systemic injustices I am entrenched in.

Facilitated by Laura Kozak, Charlotte Falk, and myself,[16] *Story Ropes* brought together a group of 13 adults; 6 faculty and master-level students from Emily Carr University and 7 place-based knowledge holders, or "community stewards," from Prince George working in educational, public art, and social services sectors.[17] Over the course of a weekend the group crafted, collaged, and assembled rope segments representing our personal stories and values, and collaboratively led a walking tour to 'sites of care' throughout downtown Prince George.

In designing and participating in *Story Ropes,* Laura, Charlotte and I wanted to explore how designers might embed reciprocity, relationality and responsibility to place within community collaborations. We also examined how our own biases, privileges, and assumptions impacted this practice. As a research team, we knew we needed to re-examine and address the concept of public space in our work:

> "The concept of public space, often discussed through the lens of its vital role in democratic society, is defined within the premise of private land ownership. In Canada and elsewhere, this means that deeply colonial acts of dispossession are the substrate for public space" (Kozak et. al, 2019, p. 16).

In what ways were we naive or unaware of the systemic injustices in our communities, and how does our design education and culture perpetuate them? What kinds of design practices should we be using with communities to dismantle these systemic injustices?

[16] Designing for Public Space is a research team based out of Emily Carr, currently consisting of Laura Kozak, Charlotte Falk, and myself. *Story Ropes* is one workshop in a series of public space research collaborations with Prince George. A full report of these projects can be found in the *Sticks, Ropes, Land: Confronting Colonial Practices in Public Space Design* report (see bibliography).

[17] See Appendix 5 for full list of *Story Ropes* participants.

> "What are the implications of how we care from the positions we hold, the systems we operate in?" (Puig da la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 11).

Through our work with Designing for Public Space over the spring of 2019, Laura, Charlotte and I had established a methodology rooted in making.[18] However, we had not deeply examined how the concept of public space is defined and supported by colonial structures, or our own complicity in supporting and benefiting from those structures as three white, middle-class, cis-gender women working in an art and design institution. "Our critique of colonial biases in public space had to begin with ourselves" (Kozak et al., 2019, p.19).

Yoko Akama, Penny Hagen & Desna Whaanga-Schollum note that as designers, "we are all working within differing legacies of colonialism and entrenched systems of 'othering'" (2019, p. 59). Although many Canadian art and design universities are making efforts to reckon with their entrenched coloniality, design education still carries many of the modernist ideologies of its Eurocentric origins, which emphasize "problem-solving, replicable methods and outcomes" and "pursue simplicity and efficiency," detaching the designer from place-based knowledge, communities and relationality (Akama et al., 2019, p. 59). This detachment, coupled with our own privilege of living as white settlers on stolen Indigenous lands, enables a design practice that perpetuates colonialism, displacing and denying the plurality of Indigenous practices, knowledge and world views that exist on these lands (Smith, 2012).

We were grateful to have the time to explore this critical self-reflection over the summer and fall of 2019. We committed to being honest and open with each other, and asked for each others' permission to stumble in trying to do this work together and with others (Kozak et al., 2019, p.19). Together, we shared readings[19] and conversations[20] while walking, a deliberate strategy to place this self-reflection in public space and resist academic distancing and context removal (Horton & Friere, 1990). Rather than sheltering ourselves from the environments we were talking about, we worked while inhabiting public space in an embodied way (Kozak et al., 2019, p.21). We also drew from our individual experiences of engaging with and supporting Indigenous activist movements, learning about embodied practices of resistance and resurgence within place-based ontologies.[21] It was important to us that during this learning we did not appropriate any Indigenous knowledges into our own practices, especially land and place-based methodologies. Instead, we tried to learn and address the criticisms that were directed at us (white settlers),[22] reflected on how Indigenous place-based knowledges echo or

[18] See our full report, *Sticks, Ropes, Land: Confronting Colonial Practices in Public Space Design,* for an in depth study of our methodology. To review more Designing for Public Space projects, visit https://research.ecuad.ca/livinglabs/projects/designing-for-public-space/

[19] See Appendix 6 for the full list of readings we discussed.

[20] It was important to us that we keep the labour of this critical self-reflection amongst ourselves, and not burden the people we are trying to support with the responsibility for our own education (Gunderson, 2019).

[21] In July 2019 I had the opportunity to visit Unist'ot'en Village with a small group of professors and students from the University of Northern British Columbia. Unist'ot'en, located approximately 350km south-west of Prince George, sits within unceded Wet'suwet'en territory. The village is both an action camp, protesting and preventing the Coastal GasLink pipeline, as well as an expression and practice of traditional Wet'suwet'en knowledges, embodying an "alternative way of living, a way of re-orienting our lives to repair our connections to the world beyond human relations, a more socially and ecologically sustainable way of being" (Spice, 2018b).

[22] Our full report, *Sticks, Ropes, Land: Confronting Colonial Practices in Public Space Design,* offers in depth study of this learning.

confront our own experiences of relationality, and look for ways to use our privileges, resources, and skills to support Indigenous resurgence and self-determination.

Wanting our projects to be grounded in reciprocal relationships, we aimed to ask "what can we offer?" and "how can our work benefit or support you?" at the beginning of any community-based collaboration. Learning to listen, understanding who to work with and how, and acknowledging that our design skills and expertise may be utilized in unexpected ways (or not needed at all) was essential in finding and building these reciprocal relationships. We also acknowledged the power of these questions lies in *who* we are asking.

One of our core values as a research team has been to explore methods that allow for a broad range of community members to contribute to public space design processes, particularly people who are marginalized and tokenized through universalized approaches (Kozak et al., p. 36). But we also wanted to resist replicating the failures we saw in participatory planning and community engagement processes, such as: investing a lot of energy into soliciting input from a reluctant group of citizens; asking "over-researched" groups to repeatedly contribute to projects where no trust or follow-up processes have been established (Smith, 2012); putting participants into situations where they are asked to spend time and energy giving input on issues they have no expertise or knowledge-base; and asking planners and designers to solicit and utilize this poor-quality input to inform design approaches simply to satisfy a consultation requirement, resulting in a tokenization of participants' ideas and a waste of time for all involved (Kozak et al., p. 22). *Story Ropes* became the space where we could explore these critiques and alternative collaborative processes.

on hosting

> "[Touch's] unique quality of reversibility, that is, the fact of being touched by what we touch, puts the question of reciprocity at the heart of thinking and living with care" (Puig da la Bellacasa, as cited in Tham, 2019, p. 139).

Laura popped out to the alley beside Omineca[23] to gather some natural materials. We had always intended to include some branches, grasses and other green and growing things to accompany the various ropes and tapes we flew up with, but we forgot to collect anything earlier in the afternoon. I lent Laura some gardening gloves I happened to have in my bag, and she returned a few minutes later with an armful of branches, leaves, thistles, grasses and shrub appendages. We organized them on the table alongside our other materials, curating the pallet for our

[23] The Omineca Arts Centre is an interdisciplinary, locally-led artist run centre located in downtown Prince George. The organization was initiated by an emerging group of artists, curators, and community organizers in collaboration with Living Labs at Emily Carr University and Two Rivers Gallery following the *Neighborhood Time Exchange* project.

[Figure 19-20] Materials arranged for *Story Ropes* workshop at Omineca Arts Centre.

workshop that would be starting in a few minutes. Overlooked patches of wild breaking through cracks of pavement were now carefully arranged just a few feet away from their roots.

This fluidity between the impromptu and the planned seemed to weave throughout the weekend, a fluidity that we, as the facilitators, perhaps felt more acutely than the rest of the group, but a fluidity that we were willing to feel out and bend to. In trying to centre reciprocity in our work, we recognize that we are in a relation of mutual dependence, action, and influence with each other and places we inhabit. These relationships are not binary, but rather a complex and organic network, a "living process" that "demands our responsibility to everything we are connected to" (Armstrong, 2005, p.13).

It was important to Laura, Charlotte and me that we spend a significant amount of time in Prince George with the group. Our time together was spread out over a weekend, with many informal opportunities to gather amidst structured group activities. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson talks about "the hard work of being present;" from a social perspective, "being present, face-to-face, is essential in building trust and accountability, empathy, and the ability to give each other the benefit of the doubt" (2017, p. 221). A kind of place-based accountability disappears when designers and those making design decisions are removed from the place and the people they are intending to serve (Kozak et al., 2019, p. 22).

Our intent was to gather people we considered to be "community stewards," people who are actively working in Prince George to create supportive spaces for marginalized voices and environments: teachers integrating land-based education into university and public school curriculums; activists supporting safe spaces for at-risk communities; community organizers building cultural spaces that integrate Lheidli T'enneh and other local First Nations knowledges; artists and arts organizers bringing embodied, land-based methodologies into their work and inviting others to join them. The size of our group was intentionally small to give adequate space to share everyone's stories and foster connections, but we also wanted to be flexible; people were invited to bring friends, and were free to pop in out of the weekend's various activities. We were able to deepen our relationships with the people we previously knew and extend our network organically through these rhizomatic connections. This felt like a "respectful entry" into collaborative community relationships, resisting the impulse to immediately consult with the most diverse or marginalized communities (which rely on problematic processes and can result in flawed and biased outcomes, as previously discussed). Instead, we wanted to acknowledge and support people already embedded and building trusting relationships with their community.

Everyone within the group was well-acquainted with at least one other person, which helped create a comfortable and conversational space almost instantly. We recognize the exclusionary quality of this particular social configuration, but we also believe these prior relationships created spaces for vulnerability and reciprocity, helping to shift hierarchies within the group. If we had hosted the workshop with an open invitation to a much larger group, the research and objectives would have begun to feel much more extractive, rather than grounded in building relationships with a community and a place.

The progression of the weekend feels meaningful to note. The slow pace of activities, spread over a day and a half, allowed everyone to be present with each other, as opposed to trying to rush through meetings and activities in a single afternoon. We found it remarkable that this group of relative strangers would willingly give up their weekend to spend so much time together participating in unknown activities. While we (the facilitators) provided the initial scaffolding and prompts, almost as soon as we began both the rope making and the walking tour the activities felt driven and owned by the group itself. Laura, Charlotte and I inserted ourselves when we felt we needed to, but we also felt comfortable backing away, and letting the group lead us.

making ropes / making conversation

> "Meaning is derived not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference" (Simpson, 2014, p. 11).

Our first evening together was spent eating dinner and rope making. We offered the group a series of prompts, and invited them to use simple materials—ropes, string, leaves and twigs—to create a section of rope. We asked:

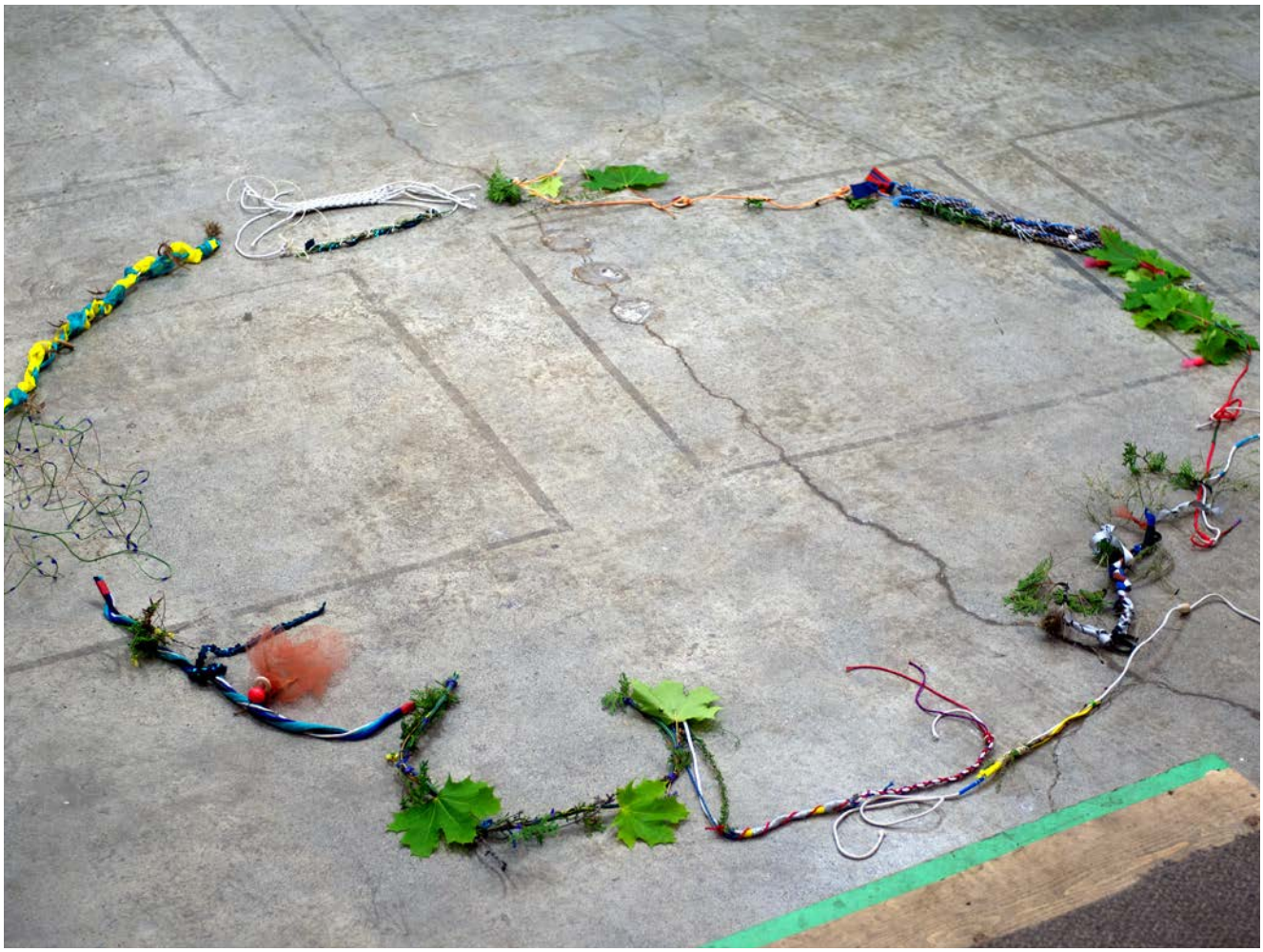
Where are you from?
When has someone or something really helped you out?
What is a space where you felt really welcome or comfortable?
What is something no one here knows about you?
Where or what is something/someone you are concerned about?

Each person selected their chosen materials and sat down with each other at the dining table. As facilitators, we participated as well, attempting to reduce any implicit hierarchies and contribute to the conversations. We spent the next hour eating dinner and crafting our ropes together, some of us quietly focused on materials and making, others loosely forming ropes while sharing stories and laughing with their neighbours. The activity was intended to be low-pressure, with no expectation to create a specific outcome, use a known method, or generate something monumental, memorable or even precise (Kozak et al., p. 11).

After we had eaten and everyone felt like they had reached a point of completion with their making, we gathered in a circle and shared the stories behind our ropes. For some, the ropes represented places and experiences; for others, they were based on aesthetic preferences. We shared stories about our past, our current practices, and changes we hoped to see in the future, showing deep care for loved ones, community, and environments. The openness and willingness of the group helped create a space where many felt safe to be vulnerable and share our worries and concerns with one another.

When groups of strangers or acquaintances come together in conventional community engagement processes, the focus is typically on the outcome—the "thing being designed"—as opposed to the individuals involved. This is typical of most professional settings, where we are accustomed to setting aside our personal narratives and subjectivity in favour of neutrality and "professionalism." Perhaps because of this, many of us are a little uncomfortable speaking openly about ourselves and our own needs in these settings (Kozak et al., p. 12).

[Figure 21] Making, eating, and conversing.



[Figure 22] Ropes resting on the floor of the Omineca Arts Centre.

> "Artefacts... become a mode of conversation. The shared experience with individuals, the collective and the environment—the actions surrounding them—are a key component and arguably the work itself" (Day Fraser, 2016, p. 42).

By creating ambiguous and abstract forms, our ropes became representations of our personal and subjective stories, and the means to share the kind of specific, vulnerable, genuine and contextually important information that rarely gets exposed during more formal networking or consultation events. This process helped to establish a dynamic of empathy and understanding among the group.

After each person told their story, we placed our sections of rope on the ground in front of our feet, creating an untethered wreath. We had originally planned to tie the rope together, creating one long, connected piece, but after we had finished sharing our stories we all felt compelled to let our ropes rest in place until the next morning.

[Figure 23] The group gathers at Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park.

a walk

> "As we walk, with each step we simultaneously rise up and anchor down. Propulsion, it turns out, requires grounding. Walking is a process both of co-ordination and connectivity. It involves alternating between touching earth and rising up and putting that process in motion in life" (Fletcher, St. Pierre, & Tham, 2019, p. 144).

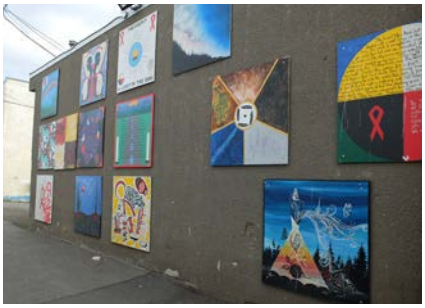
The next morning, each member of the group was invited to pick a site of interest, care or concern,[24] and we embarked on a walking tour of downtown Prince George.[25] Together, we visited sites of creativity (galleries and public art), care (social services and harm reduction centres), unseen potential (locked campus buildings, poorly considered parks), history (Indigenous memorials), and grassroots efforts (shuttered arts centres, sites of protest) (fig. 23-40). We placed our ropes down at each site, responded to built and natural conditions, and engaged in conversations about the contextual complexities of these public spaces and how our personal values have shaped our understanding of them. The ropes were reminders of the open and vulnerable conversations we had started the previous evening, and we continued to have thoughtful, generous conversations with each other throughout the day.

[24] See Appendix 6 for our walking route prompt material.

[25] See Appendix 7 for the map of our walking route.

[Figure 24-25] Antonia / Prince George Native Friendship Centre / 1600 3rd Ave.
The Native Friendship Centre is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization dedicated to servicing the needs of Aboriginal people residing in Prince George and improving the quality of life in the community. Antonia shared her memories of when the building used to be the courthouse 25 years ago, when she worked with the Wet'suwet'en Nation on the landmark Delgamuukw v British Columbia case. When the courthouse moved and the Native Friendship Centre took over the space, Antonia noted that "they had to smudge the hell out of it."

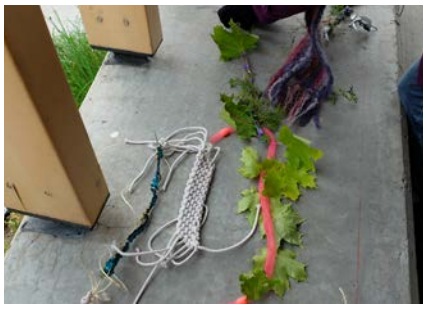
[Figure 26] Rob + Justin / Original Omineca Site / 1119 3rd Ave.
Omineca began as *The Neighbourhood Time Exchange*, a collaborative project between Emily Carr University, artists, and numerous community partners in Prince George. After the original project completed, a dedicated group of volunteers continued to run the space as Omineca Art Centre, putting in numerous hours towards restoration and establishing itself as a welcoming site for the neighbourhood. Ultimately, Omineca was forced to move to its present day location on Victoria Avenue, because their original landlord (who resides outside of Prince George in Vancouver) increased the rent and refused to reimburse them for their restoration work. While the new location's landlord lives in Prince George and is much more supportive of Omineca's mission and contributions to the community, the space lacks the lively and diverse foot traffic of the original location. The site at 1119 3rd Ave. has remained vacant since Omineca moved out over a year ago.



[Figure 27-28] Sebastian / The Fire Pit Cultural Drop-In Centre / 1120 3rd Ave.
The Fire Pit was developed in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Northern BC communities, targeting the root causes of the epidemic: colonization, racism, poverty, homelessness, lack of education and the displacement many Indigenous peoples experience. The Fire Pit often hosts impromptu activities: Dawn shared stories of butchering a moose in the back alley. Sebastian described the Fire Pit as "the most important building in Prince George." While many city officials and organizations may also recognize the important and essential services the Fire Pit offers downtown Prince George, the centre is chronically underfunded and in search of new funding streams. With the limited and precarious nature of homeless shelters in downtown Prince George, small unofficial tent encampments can also be found near the Fire Pit. These encampments are usually aggressively dismantled by the local RCMP, and belongings are often thrown away.

[Figure 29] Charlotte / Grassy patch in the alley behind WIDC. We observed the resiliency of plants, and looked for evidence of flourishing growth in small, ignored spaces.

[Figure 30] Holly + Laura / WIDC Park / George Street + 5th Ave. It is unclear who this park is for; the city has tried to activate the space by bringing out food trucks, which takes away business from nearby restaurants. The park is surrounded by closed, private buildings. Our group discussed how often cities are willing to spend money and time on master-planned projects like this park, but less willing to take the time to let things grow and develop organically. We talked about the ways the ground is scraped clear for new developments, and how we lose all the growth and nutrients in the ground in the process.



[Figure 31-32] Jean / WIDC Building / 499 George Street. The WIDC building was meant to house collaborative, or at least mutually informed, academic programming from UNBC and Emily Carr University around design and wood innovation. This joint programming failed to materialize, and the relationship between Emily Carr and UNBC disintegrated. This feels especially frustrating considering how transformative the kind of money, time, and energy that went into WIDC would be to spaces like Omineca or the Fire Pit. What opportunities are missed when the community is completely shut out of such a prominent and potentially innovative space in the heart of downtown Prince George?

[Figure 33] Twyla / Two Rivers Gallery / 725 Canada Games Way. We discussed the role of art galleries in smaller, northern cities. How can and should galleries serve their communities: by offering challenging and provoking work, and/or meeting people where they're at by offering popular and accessible programming?

[Figure 34-35] Rob / Canada Games Plaza / Canada Games Way. Rob shared a story of how he was removed from Canada Games Plaza for protesting a conference prompting natural gas and pipeline expansion projects. He was told the open, public space had been "rented out" by the conference, and was forced to move to the staircase of the nearby Public Library building.

[Figure 36-37] Dawn / Fort in Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park / 17th Ave. Dawn shared the history of Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park, and how people used to smoke fish inside the fort that still stands in the park.

[Figure 38-39] Joanne / Lheidli T'enneh Cemetery in Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park / 17th Ave. We talked about how language holds other ways of understanding the world, and what is lost when a language is endangered or dies.

Noelle / Shortcut between Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park and downtown. Noelle told us about a worn-in pathway she used to take with her family from her home near Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park to downtown. We talked about desire paths: paths that are determined by how people actually move through space, rather than prescribed routes.

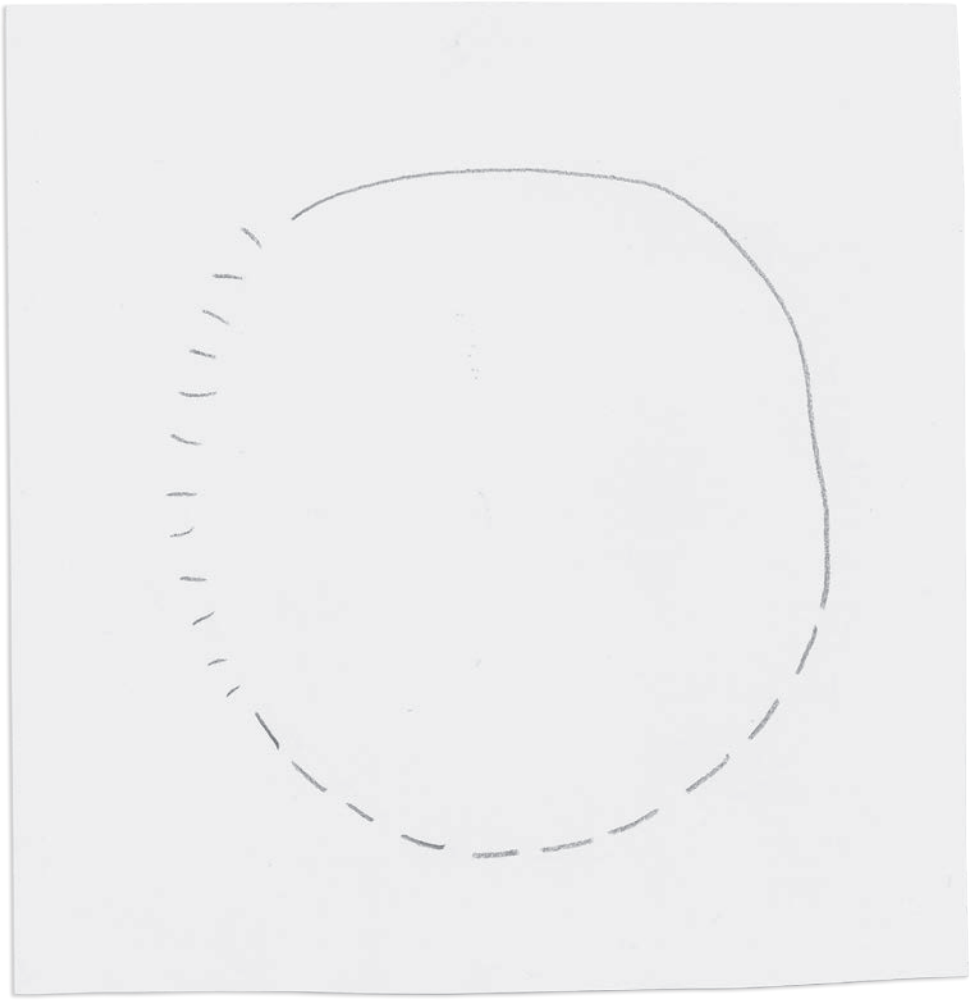
[Figure 40] Annie + Float School / Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park + Omineca Arts Centre. Float School guided the group through a few short activities that engaged our bodies and explored how we move and gather in space: we turned our bodies into compass by linking arms and huddling closely together, rotating to point in different directions; we walked alone through the park, while keeping at least one other member of group in our line of sight; we learned to line-dance together.

Struggles of displacement, homelessness, cultural homogenization, and ecological destruction are common to many cities, including Prince George. Responses to these conditions can take the form of defensive architecture (rocks embedded in concrete to prevent resting or sleeping), remote surveillance of the public realm, periodic removal of encampments or temporary shelters, scraping and scrubbing of thriving local eco-systems to make space for 'dead soil' and greenhouse-raised plants that often don't survive (Kozak et al., 2019). As a group walking through downtown Prince George, placing our story ropes within sites of concern and care, we were able to root these broad struggles and systemic injustices to place and our own lived experiences (Janssens, 2017, p. 153). Together we were able to witness and begin to unpack some of the layers of complexity specific to downtown Prince George. Making ropes and leading each other on the walking tour distributed agency amongst the group, allowing shared values and understandings of place to emerge.

Through *Story Ropes*, we explored the layered complexity of the designer's role in a community, navigating and attempting to trouble the hierarchies implicit in participatory design methods, and moving towards a personalized practice based in relationality and reciprocity. But asking for this kind of vulnerability and empathy from our participants also asks for a responsibility to one another and to place; building relationships is not merely a project objective to be contained within deadlines and budgets.

> "Staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (Haraway, 2016, p. 1).

In asking to work and support a community, we must be prepared to be a part of that community, to listen, support and care with people and place, to understand the effects of our actions, and to stay with them.



making roots / building infrastructures

A proposal: Seats

how to move forward

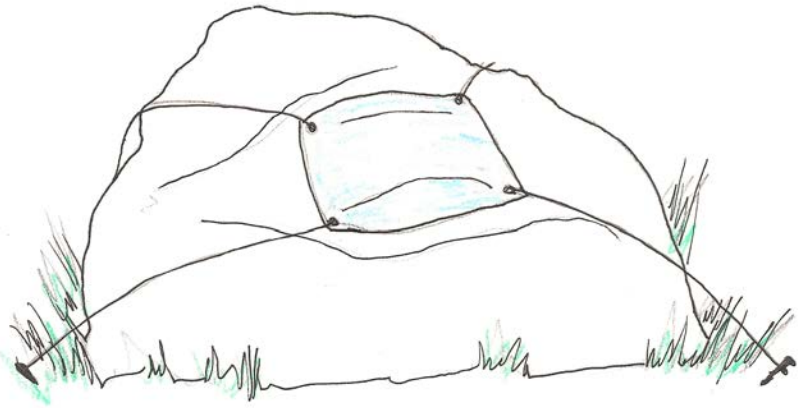
> "...futures might grow in the space between proposal and completion..." (Spice, 2018, p. 50).

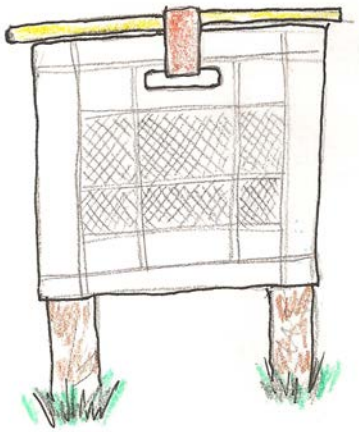
I imagine a gathering of seats. In the beginning, a loose assemblage of materials: accessible and flexible items like ropes, sticks, straps and tape, but also more substantial components like stumps, crates, boxes, bricks, and tools and techniques that might require some learning and guidance, like plastic bottle joints, saws, knot tying. This gathering will support reciprocal relationship building, and look for ways to direct institutional resources towards community stewards who are already making positive and impactful changes in their communities. In being prompted to build seats together, we might create a porous quality between our different communities, and empower each other by sharing our making skills. We might find freedom in rejecting designerly notions of a chair and simply create a form that can support our bodies, letting us rest together for a moment.

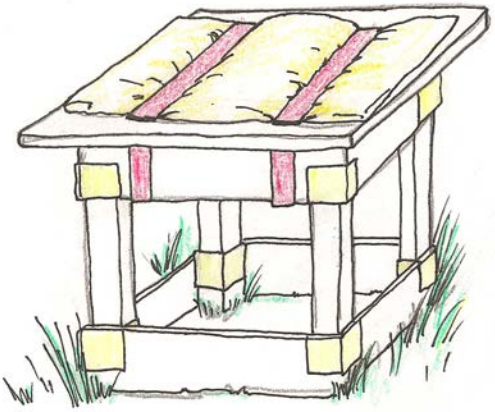
The places that have grounded me throughout this thesis research, Prince George and Vancouver, will continue to do so. How then should I move forward in a practice shaped by care and reciprocity, rooted in place and relationality? How might I continue to create shared understandings of place, and start building infrastructures that interrupt and trouble the destructive and exploitive monoculture of modernity?

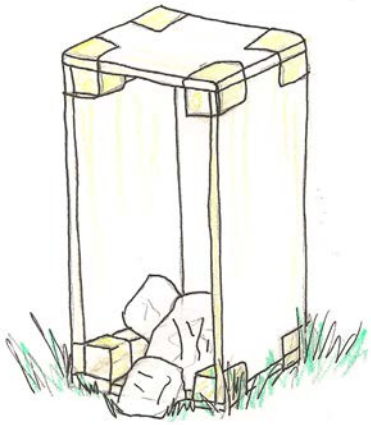
By making seats together, and putting them in places we care about, we might talk about our understandings of those places, share our individual experiences, and gain situated knowledge together, channeling our shared values into intentional interactions (Janssens, 2017, p. 55). When we disperse, we might leave our seats in place, inviting others in our community to sit and converse. These seats are flexible, movable, and temporary, but they give us the opportunity to build a space, to host conversations, to support ourselves and future visitors. These simple interventions are manifestations of our relationality to one another, and offer the potential to create new kinds of infrastructures, both social and physical. They open the opportunity to inspire more complex collaborative makings, from which we might start to build alternate futures together.[26]

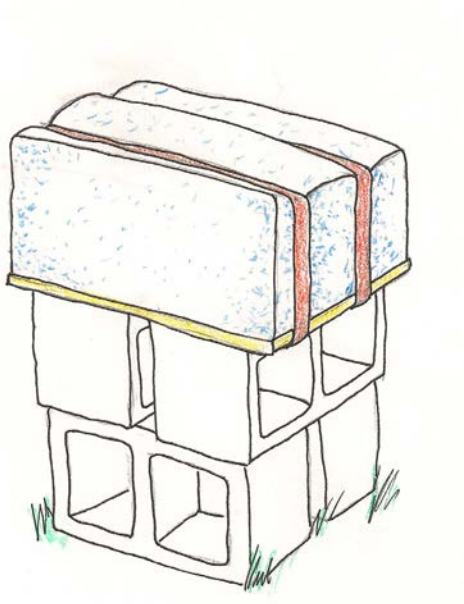
[26] I hope to develop a few variations of this workshop, including: in Vancouver, connecting the Emily Carr DESIS lab and the broader Emily Carr community with community stewards active in social action; and in Prince George in partnership with the Aboriginal Housing Society, in developing community common spaces.











[Figure 41] A gathering of assembled seats.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the role of the designer within a relational place-based practice. In addition to being "informed by a deep understanding of local ecosystems and culture" (Irwin et al., 2015, p. 10), this proposed place-based practice is contextual, embracing work that is small and unscalable, but also connected and enmeshed in community. This practice requires a commitment from the designer to the community and to place, understanding that our work does not end at the completion of a project brief, but is rooted in relationships. Growing from this relationality, a place-based practice must understand and embrace the deeply reciprocal nature of our work. All of these qualities ask designers to design as *a part of* place, *with* and *within* it, rather than *for*.

Early in my research, I felt confused by but also attracted to the elusive nature of place-based design. Descriptions and definitions offered useful language and general frameworks, but what did the designer actually *do* in this practice, and what did it *feel* like? My own practice and reflections on place-based design attempts to flesh out this understanding. For me, a sense of caring and accountability was what drove this work, navigating systemic injustices as they materialize in the places I love, and searching for ways to support transitions to sustainable and just communities. Through making *BOX*, I found ways to express this sense of care as a moral conviction, and build my own agency and voice. Through making conversation with *Story Ropes*, I examined the impulsive quality of care that was driving my work, and attempted to understand how my own biases, assumptions and privileges made me complicit in upholding the systemic injustices I had hoped to dismantle. My understanding of care evolved into one that should maintain, continue and repair our world through reciprocal relationships with place and communities. I brought this notion of care into my design practice, and attempted to re-orientate participatory design methods towards creating and maintaining authentic relationships, using my skills, resources and privileges to support community stewards already embedded in transformative community-based work. This exploration feels unfinished, but I do not expect to find a conclusion. I hope that the work I have started here carries on, that my understanding of a place-based design practice continues to grow and evolve, and that I find new ways to build relationships with community stewards in Vancouver and Prince George, supporting their work and forming new projects together.

Botanist, writer and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Robin Wall Kimmerer describes how our greatest sense of place comes from places where we feel the most nurtured and supported, from the places we feel we deeply know, but that also know us in return (2013, p. 125). How does the land and river know me? How do plants, and animals know me? How does the community know me? I have spent much of this thesis examining my role as a designer and my relation to place: how I know these places, how I care for and with them, and how I might be a part of their transformation. And while I have attempted to understand the ways place has shaped my worldviews and impacted the outcomes of my work, Kimmerer's words prompt me. I have tried to personalize my design practice, implicate myself in the complexities of place, and critique design's tendencies towards objective, distance and neutral postures, but I am not sure I have truly thought about how these places and communities know me in return. What might they, in all their cultural, political, and ecological facets, think about my work? Would they say "thank you" and "carry on, please"? This question feels confusing and overwhelming, but "knowing is not about prediction or control but about remaining '*attentive* to the unknown knocking at our door'" (Deleuze, as cited in Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 91). I hope that as I deepen my understanding and experience of reciprocity and relationality, new and more meaningful place-based practices will reveal themselves. *How* to care *with* communities still remains the core question in my design practice, and in my engagement with the world. The work continues.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Emily Carr + Prince George News Briefs and Project Reports Selections

A selection of my recollections (*in italics*) and press materials regarding Emily Carr + Prince George collaborative projects. The activity (or lack thereof) around the Wood Innovation and Design Centre (WIDC) emerged as a main question. I tried to organize this early data by date and key organizations (Emily Carr, Living Labs, UNBC, Two Rivers Gallery, and Omineca Arts Centre).

2006

"UNBC Expands Art Offerings with the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design… UNBC is also continuing to work with the Emily Carr Institute to develop a Bachelor of Fine Arts program that is expected to begin in September 2007. This will be the first BFA to be offered in Northern BC and will have a particular focus on Fine Arts and Creative Writing" (UNBC, 2006).

After 3 years, this program was suspended. It is rumored that funding was pulled because of low enrollment numbers in the third year.

2015

"Emily Carr University of Art + Design is leading the way in expanding educational options in Prince George, BC, with the creation of the Centre for Design Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Wood Innovation and Design Centre *(the Centre for Design Innovation and Entrepreneurship page no longer exists on Emily Carr website)*. Not only is Emily Carr establishing a new campus focused on innovation, the University is exploring new territory when it comes to engaging with local communities…

The establishment of the Emily Carr Centre for Design Innovation and Entrepreneurship and this partnership will turn WIDC into a wood-focused education hub. Emily Carr and UNBC are currently working together to create a lasting partnership that will provide complementary academic and community programs within WIDC" (Watson, 2015).

2016

"Emily Carr Asking for Input on New Prince George Campus… With classes at the new Prince George Emily Carr campus set to begin this fall, the Art Institute is conducting some outreach in the community" (Dacre, 2016).

Around this time, many rumors were circulating that there had been stalls/disagreements between UNBC and Emily Carr on how to use the space and how to collaborate, e.g. rumors that UNBC would not share woodshop with Emily Carr; and that UNBC would not share research credit with Emily Carr on future projects.

Along a North-South Axis speakers series begins. This speaker series has been hosted by Two Rivers Gallery and Omineca (Living Labs, 2016).

2016-2017

Neighbourhood Time Exchange: Downtown Prince George takes place. After the project was completed, a local group took up the space and created Omineca Arts Centre. The broad currently consists of Jennifer Annais Pighin, Rob Budde, Dean Marsters, Darcie Smith (Living Labs, 2017).

Board and location of Omineca has changed in under a year since being formed.

2017

Float School (2017-2018). Led by Justin Langlois and Holly Schmidt, Float School explores the form of a School through an examination of the earliest understanding of the word, drawing from the etymological base of skholē, which translates as spare time, leisure, rest, or ease (Living Labs, 2019b).

2018-

Numerous smaller exhibits and workshops are hosted in Prince George by Living Labs (Living Labs, 2020).

2019

*Over the Spring 2019 semester, I worked on the **Designing for Public Space (DPS)** project with Living Labs.*

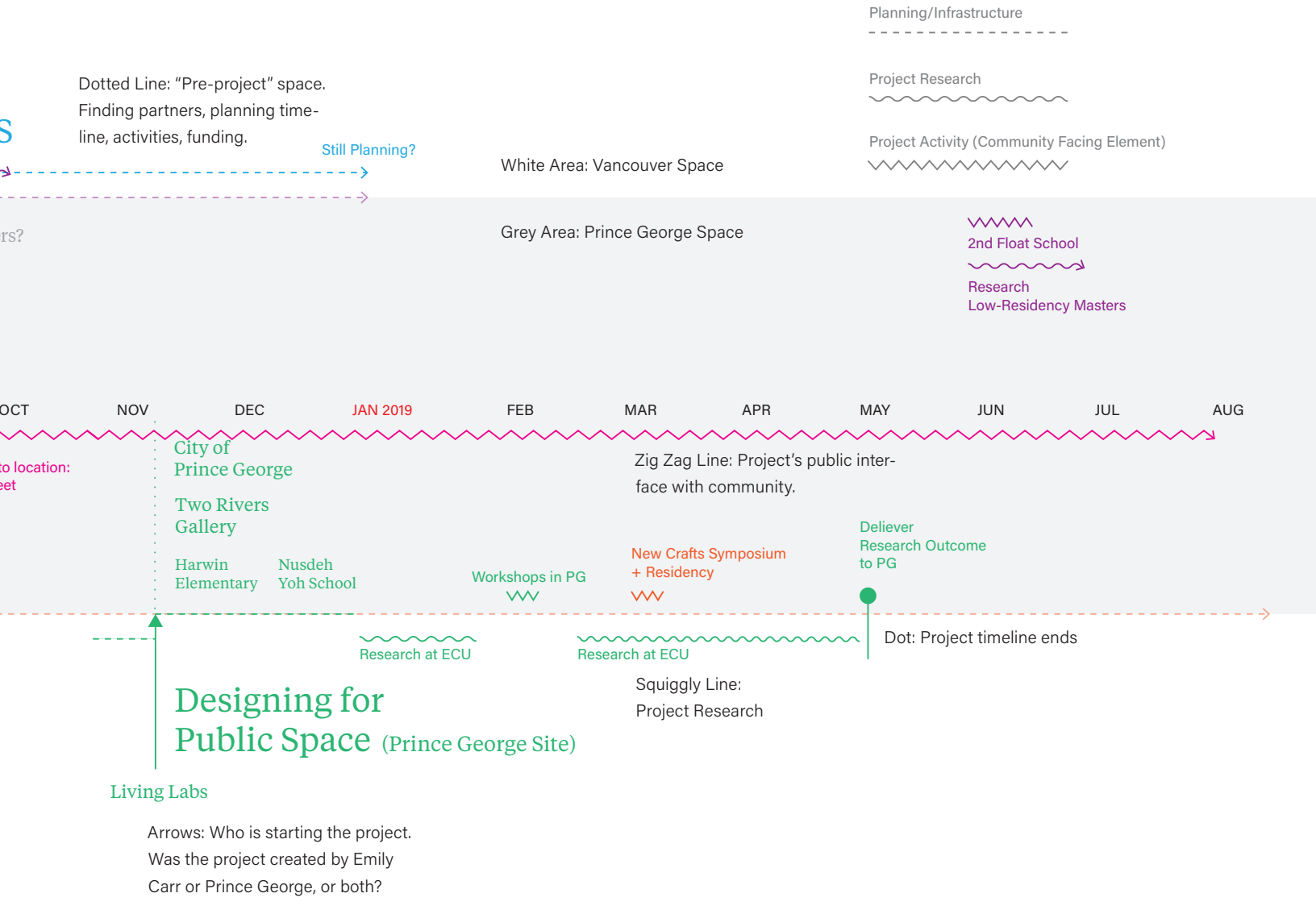
*Living Labs offered to explore a public space project with Prince George, in relation to the proposed **WIDC Park** in downtown Prince George. DPS research goals included how to include marginalized voices/knowledges in public space design. DPS hosted workshops at Two Rivers Gallery with two elementary school classes, grade 4 and grade 6, to explore these topics* (Living Labs, 2019a).

Appendix 2

Emily Carr + Prince George Projects Timeline

Using my secondary research from Appendix 1, I organized the projects into a visual timeline, attempting to highlight the areas of interest and importance. Some questions that emerged through this process: When does a project begin?; What does the social infrastructure of the "pre-project" space look like?; Who is bring projects to the table, and who is defining their parameters?; Is there a power imbalance between Emily Carr and Prince George stakeholders?; How much community face time/interaction do these project have?; Does the public understand Emily Carr's role in their local arts culture?

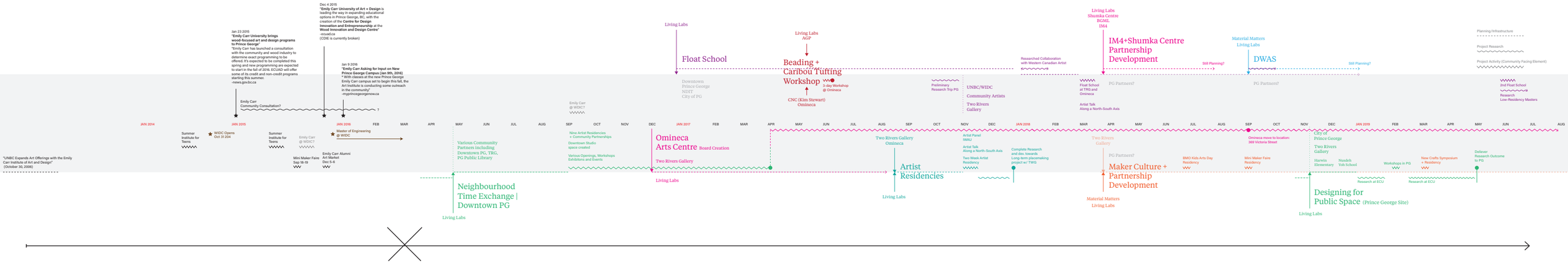
Timeline Detail:



Appendix 2 (cont.)

Emily Carr + Prince George Projects Timeline

Full Timeline:



2006-2016

Emily Carr and UNBC attempt to create joint MFA program in Prince George/WIDC.

2016-

Emily Carr activates many small projects in Prince George through Living Lab, Shumka Center, and Material Matters (only a small sample of projects are shown here). Projects are usually collaborations with Two Rivers Gallery, Omineca, City of Prince George, or other non-profit partners. No further projects have been attempted between UNBC or WIDC to my knowledge.

Appendix 3

Emily Carr + Prince George Stakeholder Interview Selections

ROB BUDDE, PHONE INTERVIEW JAN 29, 2019. Lives in Prince George. Founding and current Omineca Board Member. English professor at UNBC, involved as instructor during short lived Emily Carr-UNBC MFA program 2006-10. Budde was my instructor during my English degree at UNBC, 2004-09. Key insights:

Budde felt the first two years of the MFA program were successful (2006-09). Its third year (2009-10) saw a dip in enrollment and funding was pulled. Emily Carr would only provide online class. Students entering 3rd and 4th year had to scramble to get credits to finish their degree.

Budde notes there was a lot of excitement during the first few months of **Neighbourhood Time Exchange**. Through a local desire to make an accessible arts space in Prince George, Omineca was formed.

Finding a financially sustainable model for Omineca has been challenging. Board members work full-time jobs, everything they put into the space is volunteered.

Local arts organizations like Omineca need a steady stream of grants/subsidized funding, but that can be difficult to find.

Budde would like to offer free programs through Omineca, and make the space accessible in ways that the Two Rivers Gallery is not.

Budde has no idea what is going on with WIDC (despite working at UNBC). He has often thought it would be a nice place to host a reading or event, but has no idea how to get inside.

LAURA KOZAK, IN-PERSON INTERVIEW JAN 30, 2019. Lives in Vancouver. Research associate at Living Labs and instructor at Emily Carr (Jake Kerr Faculty of Graduate Studies). Kozak has organized numerous projects in Prince George, including Neighbourhood Time Exchange and Designing for Public Space, which I currently work on. Key insights:

Kozak was able to provide a lot of background information re: Emily Carr + Prince George collaborative projects. WIDC/a joint UNBC-Emily Carr program was initially the idea past Minister of Education Shirley Bond, who was/is an MLA in Prince George, and other government and university figureheads. A huge amount of funding went into the design and construction of the WIDC, which both UNBC and Emily Carr would use to run joint programs.

Emily Carr explored what their role in the community would look like, through the initial MFA program in 2006-10, to community outreach sessions in 2014-16.

The building was not designed to meet Emily Carr's needs, with the woodshop in particular being inaccessible. Collaboration on joint programming fell apart. Emily Carr was now left with the original funding and a mandate to use it in Prince George.

Flooding vs. Irrigations: Living Labs is trying to find strategic ways to spend the money and invest in Prince George, rather than flooding it with large projects. "The first year of a business is the hardest, so what can we do to fund projects and help with the hand off to the community?"

"It feels like we're dating, and Prince George isn't sure when/if we're going to break up with them." (Funding runs out in a year, and future funding is uncertain).

CAROLYN HOLMES, PHONE INTERVIEW JAN 31, 2019. Lives in Prince George. Director of Two Rivers Gallery. Has participated and supported several Emily Carr collaborations. I worked with Holmes at Two Rivers Gallery in 2012. Key insights:

Holmes is happy to work with Emily Carr, but often feels like they come to Prince George with their projects pre-planned, without really thinking about what the community would be interested in seeing.

Collaborations can sometimes feel like a strain on Two Rivers Gallery's resources, since there isn't a person in Prince George to help manage all these projects.

Holmes feels like Two Rivers Gallery should speak up more, and ask for more from Emily Carr.

Two Rivers Gallery wants to do more artist residencies and expose the community to the artist process, and Emily Carr helps with that.

Prince George needs a full-degree arts program if they want to keep growing and supporting an arts community, but Holmes does not know if that is still something Emily Carr is planning to offer in Prince George.

Emily Carr helps find applicants for positions at Two Rivers Gallery, because they can not find people locally.

Appendix 3 (cont.)

Emily Carr + Prince George Stakeholder Interview Selections

KATE ARMSTRONG, IN-PERSON INTERVIEW FEB 4, 2019. Lives in Vancouver. Director of Living Labs and Shumka Center. Armstrong has organized numerous projects in Prince George. I worked with Armstrong during my undergrad at Emily Carr in 2014. Key insights:

In 2014, Emily Carr was given funding to build programs and community partnerships in Prince George over 5 years.

By 2017, the WIDC building was on lockdown, and Emily Carr couldn't get access. It was not built with the facilities Emily Carr would need to run design programs.

Emily Carr was still mandated to develop relationships and community partner projects in Prince George.

Armstrong feels like Emily Carr has built really positive relationships with Prince George partners like Two Waters Gallery, Omineca, and other public organizations.

On how to work with Prince George partners, after WIDC partnership went sour: "We try to be candid and transparent. Listen to their answers."

Armstrong cites the need for *system redundancy*: Built alternate pathways/ partnerships, so if one breaks down, the system can still maintain itself.

Armstrong cites the need for *institutional memory*: what do you do when a project lead leaves or gets replaced? What happens to that original vision/motivation? How do you build that into the institution?

Appendix 4

List of *Story Ropes* Participants

DAWN AGNO
Indigenous Support Worker,
Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George

ROB BUDDE
UNBC Professor of English,
founding board member of Omineca

ANNIE CANTO
Emily Carr University MFA Candidate,
Float School Research Assistant

JEAN CHISHOLM
Emily Carr University MDES Candidate,
Designing for Public Space Research Assistant

TWYLA EXNER
Director of Public Programs, Two Rivers Gallery
Artist

Charlotte Falk
Emily Carr University Sessional Faculty,
Designing for Public Space Lead

LAURA KOZAK
Emily Carr University Sessional Faculty,
Designing for Public Space Lead

JUSTIN LANGLOIS
Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, Emily Carr University,
Float School Lead

ANTONIA MILLS
UNBC Professor Emeritus, Indigenous Studies

SEBASTIAN NICHOLSON
Artist and Community Worker,
Positive Living North

NOELLE PEPIN
District Aboriginal Resource Teacher,
Learning Innovations Team, SD 57

JOANNE SALE
Artist in Residence, Arts Wells

HOLLY SCHMIDT
Artist,
Float School Lead

Appendix 5

Designing for Public Space: Decolonial Reading List

Fortier, C. (2017). Unsettling methodologies/decolonizing movements. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development 6*(1), 20-36.

Gonzales, J. (2019, April 28). How One District Learned to Talk About Race [Audio podcast]. In *Cult of Pedagogy*. https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/courageous-conversations-about-race

Indian Chiefs of Alberta. 1970. *Citizens Plus*.

Kornelsen, D. (2017, November 17). Decolonizing community engagement. *Knowledge Nudge.* https://medium.com/knowledgenudge/decolonizing-community-engagement-85ee3ad5369d

Meyer, M. A. (2014). Indigenous Epistemology: Spirit Revealed. In T. Black (Ed.), *Enhancing Mātauranga Māori and global Indigenous knowledge* (pp. 151-164). NZQA.

Simpson, L.B. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 3*(3), 1-25.

Smith, L.T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Spice, A. (2018a, Sept). Fighting invasive infrastructures: Indigenous relations against pipelines. *Environment and Society, 9*(1), 40-56.

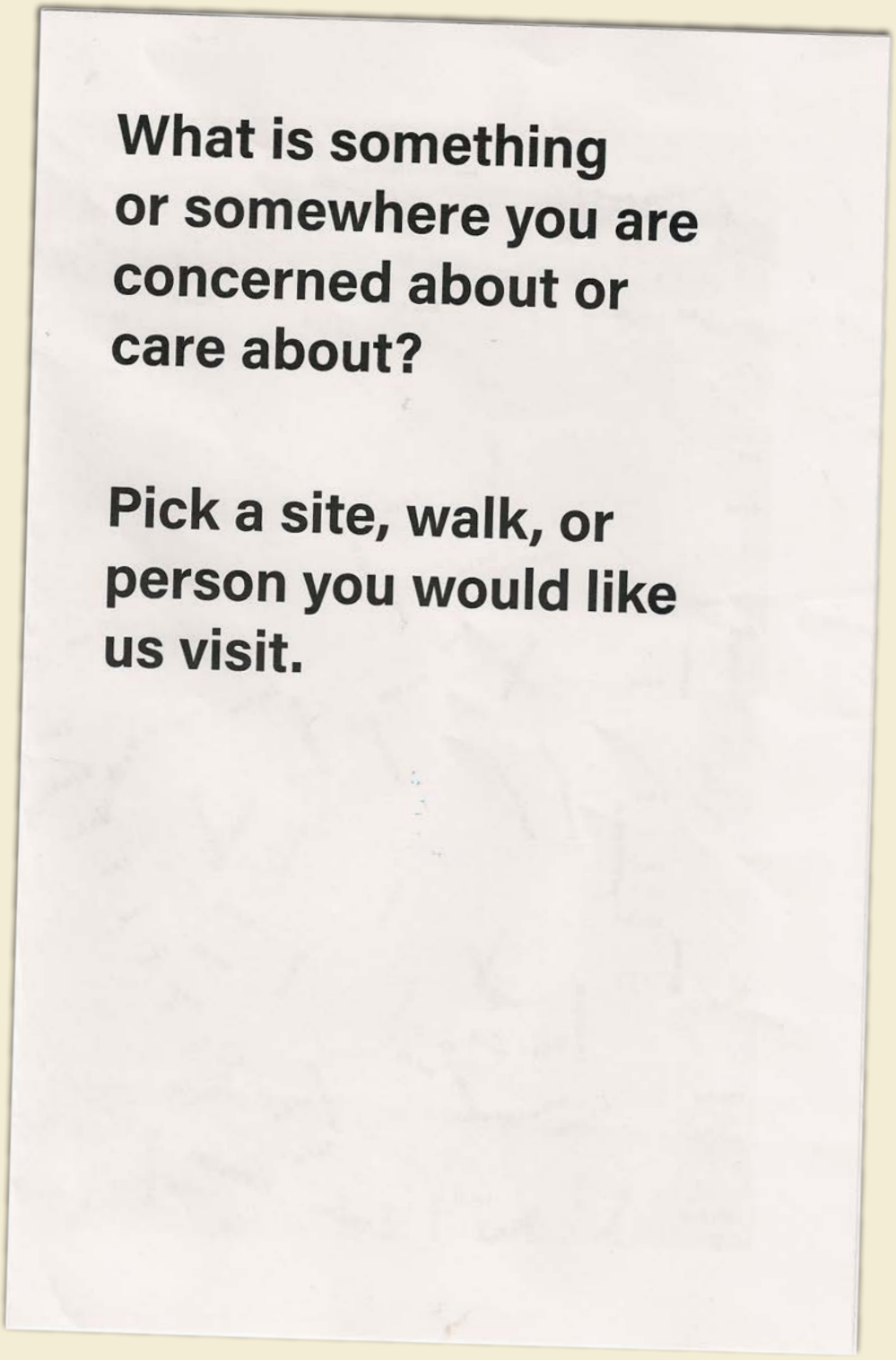
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). The survivors speak: A report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf

Tuck, E. & Yang, K.W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 1*(1), 1-40.

Ward, S. (2015, July 2). Decolonizing the Colonizer [Video]. https://vimeo.com/132494644

Appendix 6

Story Ropes "Sites of Concern and Care" Prompts



Appendix 7

Story Ropes “Sites of Concern and Care” Walking Route

DOWNTOWN PRINCE GEORGE
SITES OF CONCERN AND CARE

1. ANTONIA
   Prince George Native Friendship Centre
   1600 3rd Avenue

2. ROB + JUSTIN
   Original Omineca Site
   1119 3rd Avenue

3. SEBASTIAN
   The Fire Pit Cultural Drop-In Centre
   1120 3rd Avenue

4. CHARLOTTE
   Grassy patch in alley behind WIDC

5. HOLLY + LAURA
   WIDC Park
   George Street + 5th Avenue

6. JEAN
   WIDC Building
   499 George Street

7. TWYLA
   Two Rivers Gallery
   725 Canada Games Way

8. ROB
   Canada Games Plaza
   Canada Games Way

9. DAWN
   Fort in Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park
   17th Avenue

10. JOANNE
    Lheidli T’enneh Cemetery in Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park
    17th Avenue

11. NOELLE
    Shortcut between Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park and Downtown

12. ANNIE + FLOAT SCHOOL
    Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park + Current Omineca Arts Centre
    369 Victoria Street

thank you