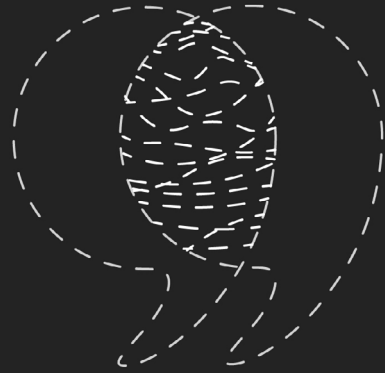




# BINDING THREADS

Shifting role of the designer from sole author to  
multi-story-enabler in fashion

Elham Atighi Lorestani  
Master of Design in Interaction Design | 2022



# BINDING THREADS

Shifting role of the designer from sole author to  
multi-story-enabler in fashion

By

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A CRITICAL AND PROCESS DOCUMENTATION  
PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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DESIGN

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

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Fashion has always been about telling stories and yet some stories are never told in the design process. All too frequently they are also missing in the clothing we wear. Hidden or neglected stories such as those connected to the experiences of displacement are important. They have value and are part of the identity construction for many people in the 21st century. Whether it is through a lived experience of moving or through the cultural convergence of mass media, individuals around the world are affected by the overwhelming pace of change in their surroundings and their social contexts. So the concept of identity and the need for a sense of self-expression are critical. The clothing we wear is arguably one of the most effective means to convey our personal identity and self-expression to/and with others.

This thesis describes a project that has drawn on the potential of storytelling as a framework for the design process as well as the means for connection and self-expression. A platform has been envisaged and developed that invites people to engage with fashion in a way that enables a designer/researcher to consider, critique and suggest an alternative way of looking at the fashion service and design process that embraces multi-storytelling.

Initiated by my personal journey of moving to a new country, early exploration in this practice-based research began with self-cultural discovery and storytelling. This phase

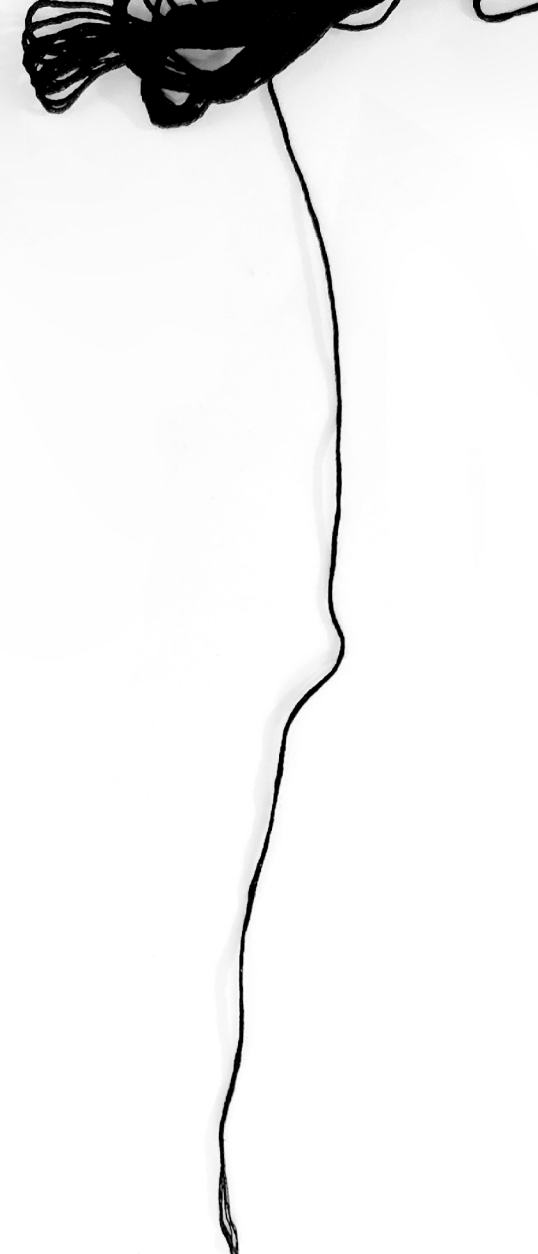
of work not only offered the initial context and medium for future research but also provided me with an understanding of the potential of visual and/or oral storytelling for healing, expression and connection. The displacement experience was the starting point for storytelling as a discursive practice. Following this phase, through a series of workshops with peers, I explored clothing as a context for sharing stories of moving, home and identity. The knowledge and insight created through each study informed the development of subsequent research activities. Drawing on collaborative design, networking and heuristic inquiry, my approach has led me to realise that clothing, beyond being tangible and interactive, is highly evocative. All of this work has informed the development of a digital platform prototype, which seeks to invite people to share, read and wear personal moving experiences with others, acting as both an initiator and holder of stories, providing new ways for clothing to be accessed and made.

Through my research, I have explored ways of designing clothes that are collaborative and act to give people a genuine way to express and share who they are. My work asserts the importance of critically evaluating how we engage with designing clothes. I have done so with the conviction that the common role of the fashion designer as the sole originator and storyteller is flawed, considering instead the role of the designer/ the design process as a multi-stories enabler.

## Keywords

*Storytelling, Displacement, Co-creation, Home, Clothing, Designer/Clothing as multiple-story-enabler, Identity*

# Abstract



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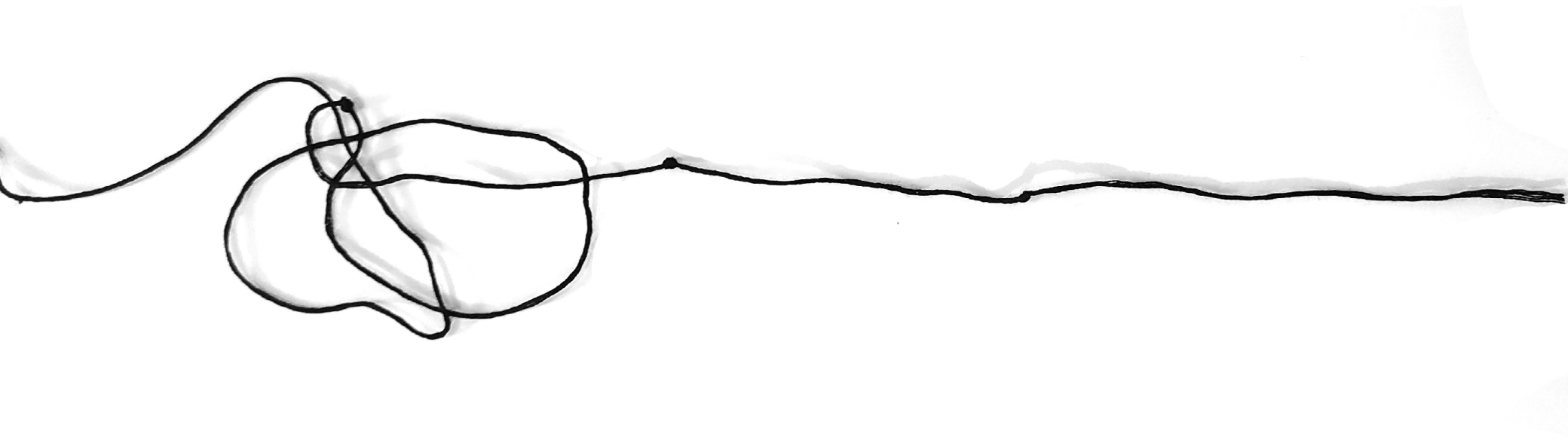
# Fashion Design Definition

Fashion is defined as an “assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body” (Eicher & Evenson, 2014), a definition that locates the actor/body and their gender at the centre and includes issues such as materiality, aesthetics, techniques, taste, and consumption. However, this is the definition that needs to be constantly challenged in changing historical as well as spatial/sociocultural contexts (Gaugele & Tilton, 2019). The way fashion design shaped in my practice was way beyond this material-focused definition, it became a way of expression, communication and collaboration. It is defined as a way of being together.

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*Past Threads*

10

# Stitching New Possibilities

I have worked as a designer and fashion entrepreneur for a decade. My passion for textiles and clothing comes from my exposure to them since I was a child. For as long as I can remember I was surrounded by people and stories connected to textiles and tailoring. My mother does embroidery and sewing and my grandparents' families worked as embroiderers and dressmakers. As I grew up there were moments when I would be disconnected from cloth, but it was never for long. I was always pulled back - to working with cloth - as if I was part of its warps or wefts. Always part of my identity, textiles are somehow just woven into my genes.

After pursuing and completing degrees in Mechanical Engineering and during my Master of Industrial Design my deep connection to textiles invariably drew me back in, leading me to create a streetwear brand that celebrated slow fashion in my home country, Iran. For seven years I developed and sustained this company. Working within the fashion industry context of Iran I became familiar with the entire process: from designing the clothes; to make them; to promoting them; and invariably to selling them too.

I began my Master's studies in the midst of the COVID 19 Pandemic. While I was unable to travel to Canada to begin my studies in person, I was still able to begin my studies and connect with new peers and mentors online. This connection,

which was facilitated through digital technology, had its own challenges and privileges. Initiating the program in our home countries enabled my peers and I to really understand the pluriversality of our cohort - we brought our very different lenses, took on very different actions for our studio projects and shared these with one another online. We not only had a diverse range of design expertise but were also from and located in very different lands. Enveloped by this new experience I realized that the fashion design process too might benefit from more than one perspective.

From the start, we were encouraged to bring our personal context to our practice, acknowledging who and where we are off. We quickly understood that our identity and life experiences were a requirement to re-frame our practice and relate to ourselves in a different way. As I write this, I can't help reflecting on my practice and the tactics I have long taken as a designer. It is almost as though my affinity for soft materials and textiles have been a means for adapting and overcoming the many different emotional challenges I have encountered in everyday life. Working with cloth has been a way to reflect and follow the streams of my thoughts through difficult and unpredictable times. As you will see in the sections that follow, this natural affinity for textiles - as a way of sorting through - has served me well as I have progressed my way through my master's studies.





## Stories Too

I see traces of stories almost everywhere in my work. In Spring 2021 - faced with grief in my own life having just lost a family member - I used storytelling to reflect back on the concept of death and life. I created a three-layered skirt that told a very old Persian myth about Nowruz and the celebration of the rebirth of nature. This work overlapped both the sorrow and celebration of the moment I was experiencing.

The skirt I designed, and my mark-making on the cloth that I used to make it, aligned perfectly with a cultural/religious belief in my country of origin that rather than mourning death as an end celebrates the cycles and connection of seasons, of being - there is life after death. I called this piece I made "Rebirth". A nod to a specific story connected to the festival of Nowruz, my skirt acted as a visual storybook. It communicates and provides access to a 2430 BC myth about the celebration of spring

(Nowruz)<sup>1</sup>. My act of making this skirt in response to a piece of my own experience in life was a new starting point for my creative practice. Creating this garment, I found a means and a process to help me deal with my own grief. This act of storytelling on clothing gave me the power to reflect on my personal challenges and emotions and a way to consider new possibilities within design. Nowruz means a new day.

Fig 1. Rebirth - Telling Story of Nowruz on Clothing

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<sup>1</sup> This story tells how, Demuzi, the king of the gods of Sumer married the beautiful goddess of fertility, Inanna. In mythology this sacred marriage is used to describe creation. In the end Demuzi dies and Inanna is left to mourn over his death. Ultimately, however, Demuzi is allowed to return to heaven to be with Inanna for one half of the year. For Persians, the story of his return marks the beginning of the new year and it is the symbol of rebirth.



Fig 2,3 & 4. Rebirth - Telling Story of Nowruz on Clothing with layers of fabric (from left to right)



# The Baggage that Informs us

Let me place a picture frame right in front of you. You open your eyes, peer through this frame and look. And there you see them all - again - the luggage you have packed are staring back at you. These bags - this luggage - are not closed. The stuff they hold - your belongings - are refusing to be contained. Some of your suitcase zippers are still open, your bags are bursting with all of your precious things that resist being contained. They (the bags) sit like this waiting. And while you (and they) wait for the travel visa to arrive, there are times that you find yourself really missing wearing a specific piece of clothing that you have packed. But you cannot/will not open your blue luggage because you have weighed it all so many times. It is a rule; it shouldn't exceed 24 Kg. There is clothing, of course, that has not made it into your bags. You have donated a lot of your things, given them away to friends and family, and yet still you see a pile of clothing stacked in the corner that needs to be left behind. Looking at it, you feel pain in a part of your heart. Your brain tries to override this emotion, to be logical/ rational. "You just have to bring the necessary stuff," you tell yourself.



Fig 5. photo of my luggage while moving to Canada

The immigration challenges and experiences connected to facilitating and preparing to move in the middle of my master's studies were another focal points that shaped my research. This experience was the starting point for storytelling as a discursive practice. Even though I tried to separate this from my studio work - to ignore it - it persistently pushed back and found its way into my design practice. At the end of my second semester, in Spring 2021, I decided to accept this, acknowledging displacement as part of me, I began to actively reflect back on it by inviting it into my practice and research.

My identity, my sense of self, is strongly connected with the displacement experiences I have had. Displacement is not actually a new identity for me but somehow a state of mind that I inherited from my ancestors. While I myself had never before immigrated to another country I had moved frequently from one city to another within Iran throughout my life. Immigration to a new country and continent was of course a whole new experience for me but the virtual binding to others and a new place through a project called "Transitional" made me less lonely and helped me find support and means to feel connected. I will explain the project in more detail further on.

Through Rebirth and other early work conducted while still in Iran (see appendix), as well as my everyday life experiences there, I realized I was circling around, three key elements in my practice:

- Fashion and clothing as a medium of expression
- Storytelling as the means to reflect a sort through difficult experiences
- The experience moving as a scenario to drive new perspectives

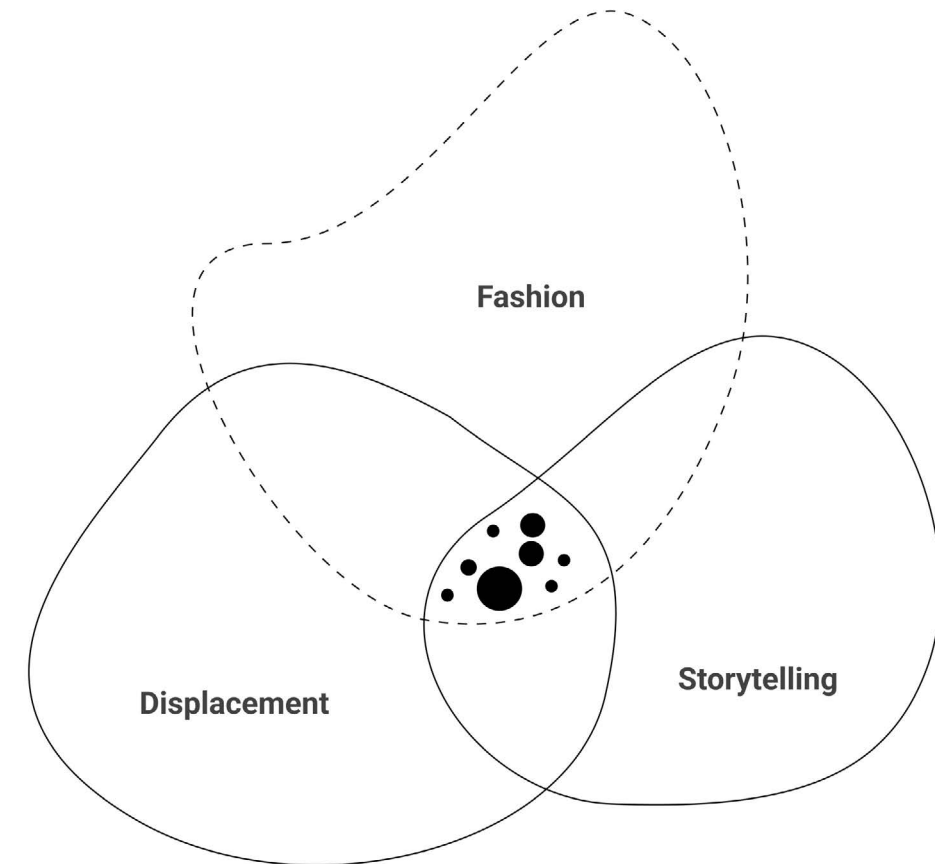
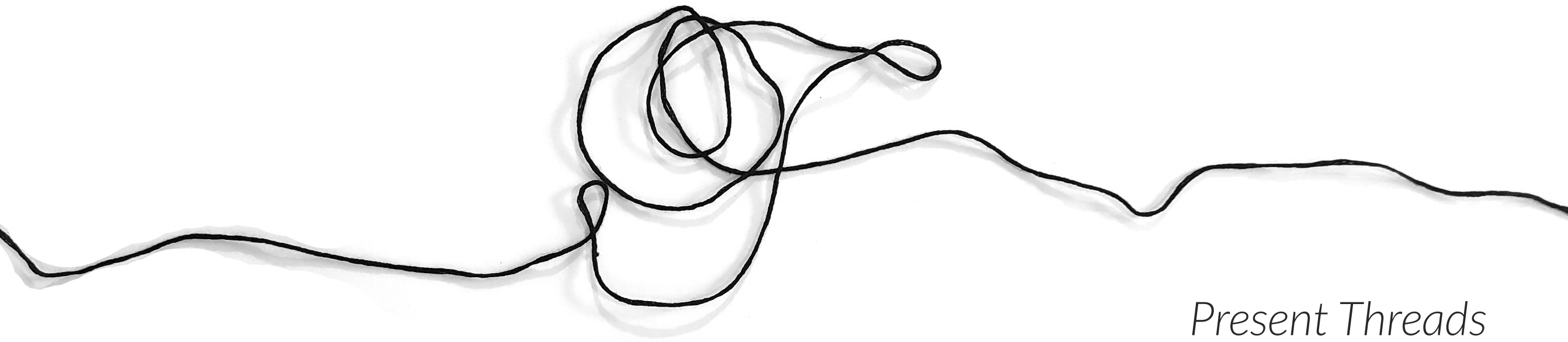


Fig 6. three key elements in my practice



*Present Threads*

02

# Single Narratives

From very early on in my work I sought to find an effective way to critique and shed light on issues of single-global north centric -narratives - frequently used in fashion design practice (Starck, 2020). Seeking an alternate way of looking at the fashion service and design process that is more inclusive, I turned to Storytelling as a key strategy. Fashion is about telling stories. In the fashion design process, the designer is conventionally the dominant and the single storyteller. This role of sole, unidirectional storyteller often draws the fashion designer to use and play with stereotypes. The issue with stereotypes however is not that they are untrue, but, rather, that they are incomplete. “They make ‘one story’ become the only story” (Adichie as cited in Bertolotti et al., 2016). “Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize” (Adichie, 2009). The stories most frequently associated with the commercialized and Western fashion system only give certain people a voice, making some communities visible while neglecting many others (Conscious Life and Style, n.d.). I view this as a significant problem.



*It is impossible to talk about a single story without talking about power. Stories are defined by the principles of nkali, an Igbo word meaning ‘to be greater than another’. How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person”.*

- Adichie, 2009

# Displacement

Displacement is a part of the self-identity of many people in the 21st century and impacts many people in many ways (Massey, 2010). I am of the opinion that for Fashion to contribute in more meaningful ways it needs to acknowledge and focus on this. Designer Helen Storey's use of clothing to communicate the complex issues of mass displacement of people is among a few fashion practices that I have found that do this (Dress for our time, n.d.). Focusing on the British context and in the light of the Brexit vote, fashion academic, Flavia Loscialpo has analyzed the condition of the immigrant within fashion as a way to see how fashion can contribute to an understanding of immigration as a constitutive aspect of contemporary society. Loscialpo discusses different conceptualizations of the figure of the immigrant and analyses how cultural identity is being reframed in the rapidly changing trans-global landscape (Lpscialpo, 2019). Similarly, the exhibition "Talking textile: Cultural Threads", which was held in the Textile Museum in Tilburg, the Netherlands, in 2019 used textile as a tool for socio-political reflection (Edelkoort, 2019). The theme of this exhibition in the Netherlands was inspired by the book Cultural Thread – Transnational Textiles Today by Jessica Hemmings which contemplates the idea of global history along with the interweaving of identity and culture (Hemmings, 2015). While the concept of fashion, immigration

and borders is investigated in these English and European contexts (Loscialpo, 2019, Dress for our time, n.d), it does not seem to have been extensively discussed in Canadian transcultural society. There is a notable gap that is odd to me considering what I know of the diversity of backgrounds that contribute to Canadian culture. With this in mind, my research over the past 18 months has tried to shift the focus away from the designer as the narrator towards the people who share experiences of immigration and displacement and contribute (in a multitude of valuable ways) as storytellers in their own right. My research sits in the triangulation of storytelling, fashion and displacement. Self-inquiry and material-based practice played a key role in this particular project. In my work I have acted as both the researcher and research participant, telling my own story as a newcomer to an unfamiliar place through a generative making process that expanded my research to include co-creative practices with others. This process shifted my role from designer as a sole storyteller to one as a multi-story enabler. It allowed for rich, divergent stories to emerge and enter through dialogue and discussion with others. I found myself thriving and deriving great pleasure in this space.

# Storytelling in Fashion

Storytelling is integral to fashion. Explored in many ways and by a wide array of means and mediums, it is applied to address many different contexts, values and aspirations: upholding the current status quo by encouraging individuality and consumption (luxury, fast fashion (Dimitriva, 2019); looking to the possibility of technology (e.g. Hussein Chalayan collection (Pixels and Feathers, 2019)); concern for the environment (e.g. Tonle's zero waste maker-led community (Tonle, n.d.)); concern for perspectives outside of the Western, modernist construct (e.g. Craft based and maker-centred Indian brand Pero (Pero, n.d.)). Below I went through more details about how storytelling is been used in fashion by different brands, fashion networks and entertainment industries.

## Comodity and Defined Identity –Gucci

Storytelling is paramount to luxury brands for which purchase behaviours are often driven by emotional triggers. Storytelling is one of the key strategies in digital and mobile marketing. In marketing strategies, convincing consumers to join the brand journey via the storytelling principle is key, (Romo et al., 2017). Gucci has emerged as a traditional luxury brand that has managed to transform its brand to engage with the new generations of affluent consumers through the use of narrative on social media. Practically reinvented itself in the last seven years, with its turn in vision, voice, and values – Gucci has applied storytelling techniques that have permeated all aspects of its line from product development through to its digital marketing strategies (Lunchmetrics Content Team, 2019). In this luxury-based context, the focus of digital marketing is to make the brand an intimate part of the self-identity

of its consumers. Social influencers and celebrities working with luxury brands feed into this storytelling. Bryan Bubbly posted “Travelling light” on 6 March 2018, while surrounded by six Louis Vuitton bags. A few days later, he posted a picture from Dubai where he is dressed in Gucci from top to toe. Examples of the commodity that has colonized social life, this is what the French philosopher Guy Debord (1994) referred to as “the world of the commodity”. Here, in this social, economic context, the mediated world is populated by luxury fashion objects and brands, and all the narratives essentially revolve around this material experience. The self that is presented in digital storytelling relies merely on the multiplied luxury fashion object (Debord, 1994 as cited in von Wachenfeldt, 2021).

## Action Attachments – Local Wisdom

As a point of contrast, and in the domain of change-making, storytelling has also been used to expose the diverse relations people have with their clothing. Here it is a way to help enable and encourage more sustainable fashion solutions. In research, a good example of this is the international Local Wisdom Network led by Dr. Kate Fletcher. The network collected, documented and categorized the many ways that people adjust and become attached to their clothing over time. Through Local Wisdom ‘Craft of Use’ practices were identified. These offered a new possible type of prosperity in Fashion – one that is not based on buying and selling more garments. The gathered stories and images of the general public at community photo shoots have become an important source and site for reflection for designers working in sustainability (Local Wisdom, 2019).



## Emotional Attachments – Worn Stories

Along a similar vein but in a different context (entertainment), the Netflix series *Worn Stories*, which is an adaptation of Emily Spivack's book of the same name, focuses on telling stories of clothing. Both the book and the series share how garments can be imbued with meaning or experiences beyond their aesthetic. This body of work explores how people go through similar basic human emotions and how these feelings, connected to experiences, are linked to the clothing people collect and wear. "A closet is an archive of memories and experiences," Spivack says. The experiences we have while wearing a piece of clothing become imbued on it significantly (*Wornstories*, n.d.).

## Connecting People – IOU

In all of the examples above, storytelling has been studied and explored after the making process has been completed. It is situated mostly in the pre-production, production and post-production phases. The focus is on the stories attached to the clothing after the clothing production phase. An alternate approach that does focus on the narrative during the design and production process is the IOU project. The IOU project was developed by Kavita Parmar in 2011. The initiative focussed on the narrative of connection between the makers, weavers,

and also wearers of articles of clothing in its collection (BOF, 2012). Even though Parmar shifted her focus in 2018 and developed a new forum called XTANT, her focus of finding means of connecting people linked to articles of clothing was still its core value. XTANT was aimed at supporting artisan communities worldwide and was followed by GUNAKAZI, "a vertical social network for garment factory workers to help them get visibility in the new digital paradigm" (Kavita Parmar, n.d.).

Local Wisdom, *Worn Stories* and IOU explore our attachment to the things we wear – concentrating on the actions people take over time, on the memories and experiences they hold on to, on the accumulative stories of people embedded into clothing over time. They are all inherently relational and collective. Luxury brands and their approach to storytelling, in contrast, is clearly product-focused. A Western materialist scenario perpetuated in the Global North, privileges the prerogative to generate aspirational (as opposed to real, lived) scenarios. Luxury brand-oriented stories invite people to consume and be part of a single narrative and pre-defined structure.

Interestingly, in all four of these cases above the act of involving the wearer(s) and/or storyteller in the process of making the clothing from the very beginning is missing. It is this and the possibility of giving voice to people to talk about their personal stories through the medium of clothing that I am intent on building. I have a feeling that shifting the fashion design process towards the act of collaborative storytelling will uncover new voices. I have to specify that I am not questioning the entire structure of the current fashion system but seeking to propose a new way of looking at the fashion system and design process that embraces more stories.

Following this trajectory my subsequent research built on this interest in the possibility of collaborative storytelling with clothing, and two key issues of concern that I wanted to address:

- Linear Eurocentric single narratives
- The experience of displacement

The two questions below also helped me frame my work:

- How can sharing stories help in connecting people going through similar experiences of displacement?
- Can tangible visualization of narratives on clothing help us better understand individual and collective identity?

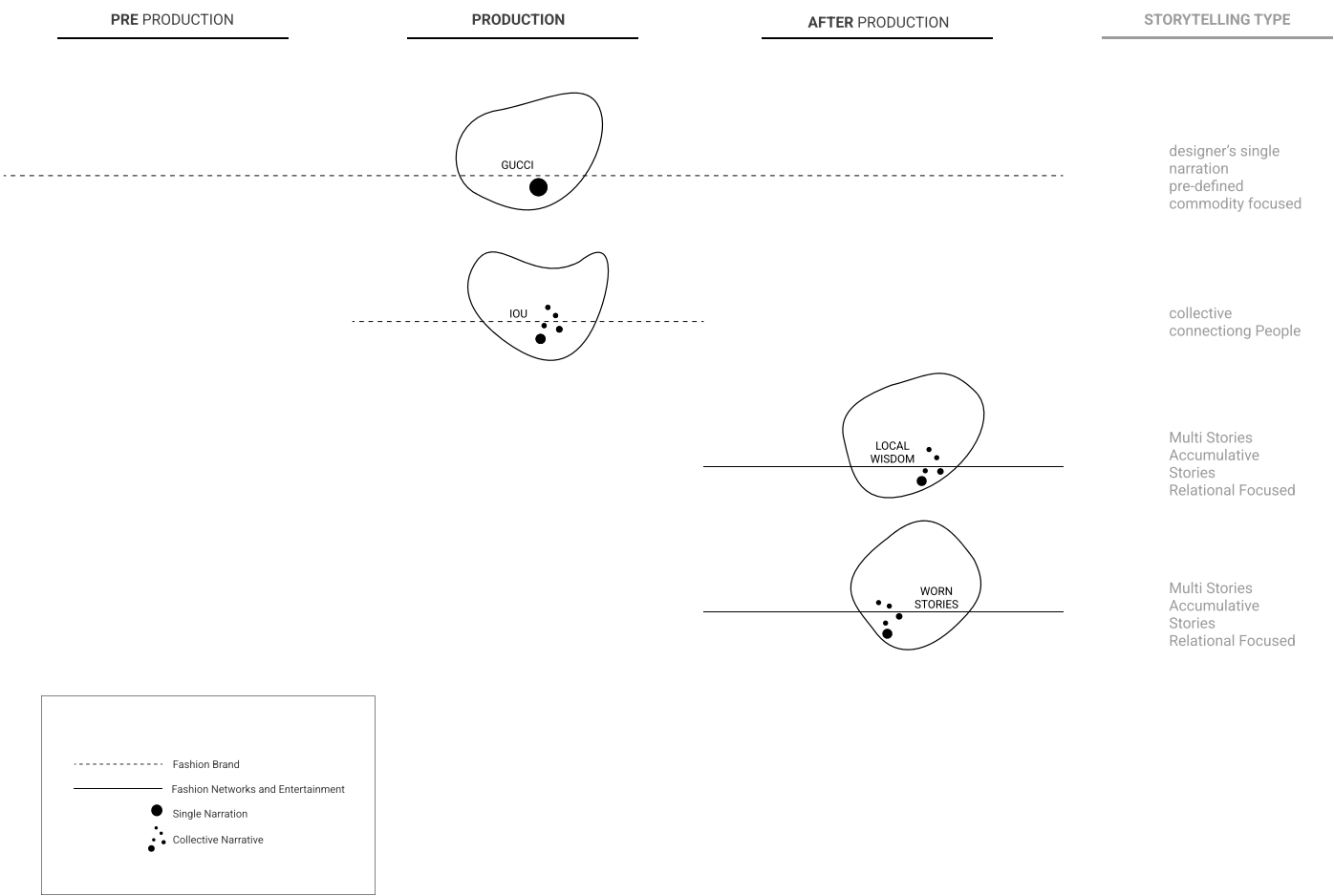
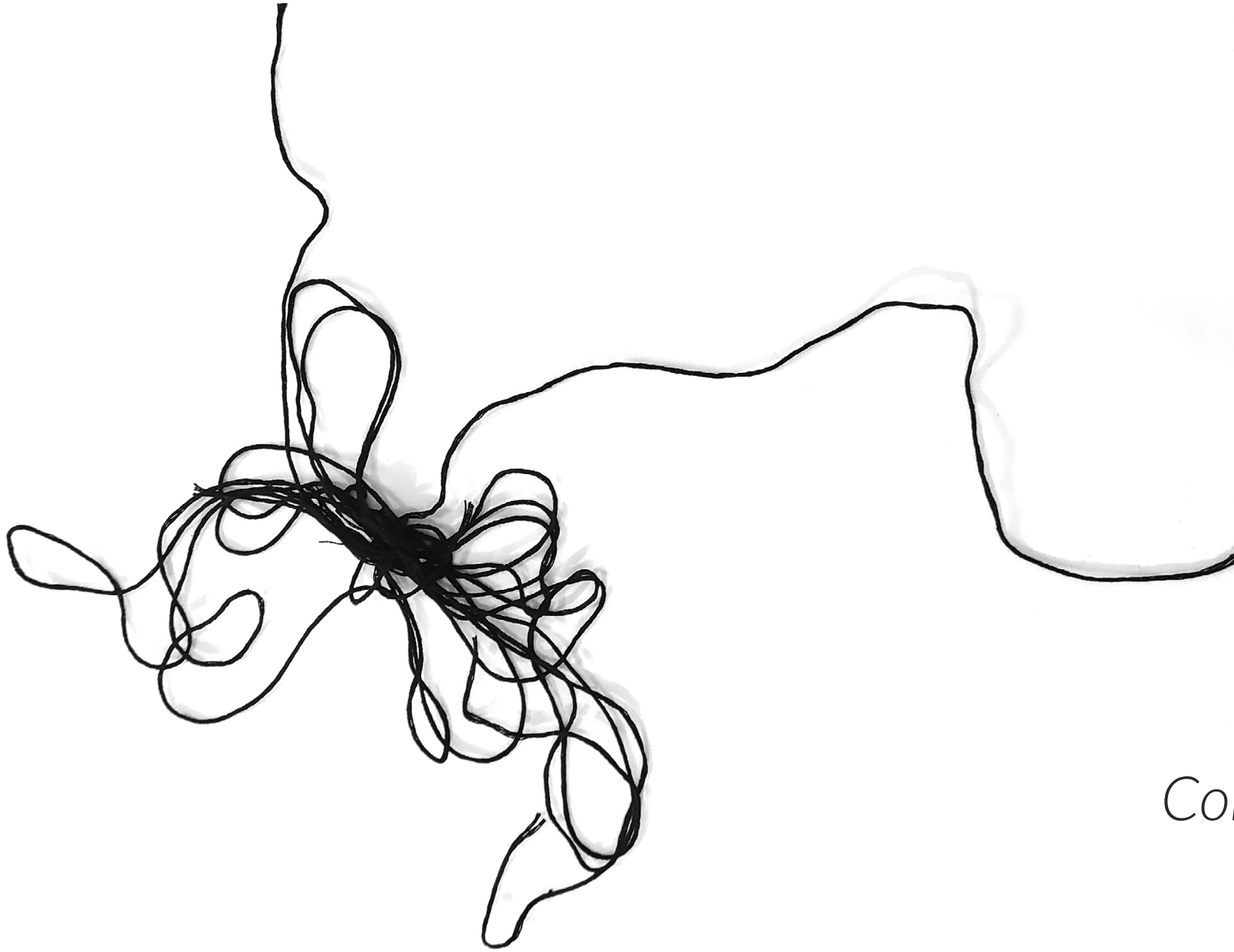


Fig 7. how storytelling is been used in fashion by different brands, fashion networks and entertainment indutries



*Connectiong Threads*

03

Over the past two years, I have taken a practice-based approach to my research. Practice-based research is a conceptual framework for researchers to integrate creative practice, creative methods and creative output into the research design and as a part of the research output (Myers, 2017). It focuses on creative practice as well as the insights, conceptualization, and theorization generated by practitioners' reflection on their own creative practice (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 5). According to Smith and Dean (2009), the content and the process of creative practice plays a key role in opening new avenues for knowledge as well as redefining the meaning of knowledge itself. Practice-based research is characterized as generating experiential knowledge and recognizes the sometimes tacit and elusive knowledge that emerges during the design process (Grocott, 2010, p. 18). It is often flexible in its approach, allowing a variety of methodologies and methods to be incorporated. Since the concept of displacement, home and identity are things that cannot be clearly articulated because of the multiple hidden layers, values and meaning, practice-based research was an effective way for me to generate new insights and knowledge for further development of my design concepts. It also repositioned me from researcher to maker and facilitator.

My work over the past two years has concentrated on critiquing and suggesting alternate ways of looking at the contemporary fashion service and design process. In this regard, my research is located in the domain of speculative design. Imagination is at the heart of speculative design, as it seeks to offer alternative perspectives on so-called wicked problems, to create spaces to discuss alternative ways of being and to inspire people's imagination to flow freely (Dunne & Raby, 2013, as cited in Ho Tran, 2019). Auger notes that Speculative design serves two distinct purposes: First, to enable us to think about the future; second, to critique current practice (Auger, 2013). This is an approach to design that not only seeks to encourage contemplation on the technological future but also (and most relevant to my work) provides the opportunity to analyze, critique and re-think contemporary design. It is

these latter sets of qualities that relate most to my own and Critical Fashion Practice. As with all the critical research, fashion practice values a discourse that is speculative and discursive rather than an aesthetic of resolution and perfection. In other words, it follows an approach to aesthetics that constantly challenges the beautiful and the good (Geczy & Karaminas, 2018). Critical fashion practice is any item, piece or work of fashion that announces a level of conceptual functionality that exceeds the capacity of simple clothing (ibid). Critical designs act as a form of critique and argument that is established through the design of objects and through the communication of an object's narrative of use. Considering my practice, this can be achieved through processes of making and production, scenario building, and storytelling (Malpass, 2017). By building new scenarios around "what if" questions initiated by storytelling I have begun to imagine new possibilities and other ways of thinking about the fashion design process.

In Fashion, a lot of garments start from a story formed in a designer's mind. In addition to contributing to the beginning point, the content and the resulting finished piece of clothing, the story also provides a framework to the fashion design process itself. I argue for the importance of critically re-evaluating the role of the designer as a sole storyteller, to consider instead the designer in a role of multi-story enabler. Here is the place where the concept of pluriversality comes into my practice.

The graphic designer and social justice-focused design researcher Renata M Leitão shares her perspective on the types of collaboration that occurs between designers and communities outside of the Centre of Eurocentric Modernity. In a recent paper, she notes that a lot of research done by designers of the Global North working with communities of the Global South makes no mention of desires, aspirations, visions of future, and sense of identity. The communities who receive help in this case have no voice, except to express their

problems, needs and difficulties. The process starts with an emphasis on an assumed need or problem and moves toward a subsequent search for a solution. Leitão argues that “by focusing on needs right at the start, and not on desire, we are merely reproducing the world we know it with some minor tweaks” (Leitão, 2020). The concept of a world with many centres makes great sense here as the focus should shift from problems to deeper values. The concept of the Pluriverse suggested by Arturo Escobar is “a world where many worlds fit” (Escobar, 2018).

I see the storytelling elements of my MDes projects as initial attempts towards enabling and validating multiple ways of being, thinking, knowing and world-making. The building of such a world needs participatory co-design strategies and can be characterized as a shift from the design of discrete objects and ‘things’ to relationships, interactions and experience for and within complex social systems (Irwin, et al, 2020). This design is not passive but more of an active generative process that takes into consideration hidden values and meanings. In particular, I examine the possibilities offered by storytelling as an activity that can bridge initial, exploratory phases and possibly future design activities in community-based co-creative projects.

Storytelling enables participants to elicit meaning from

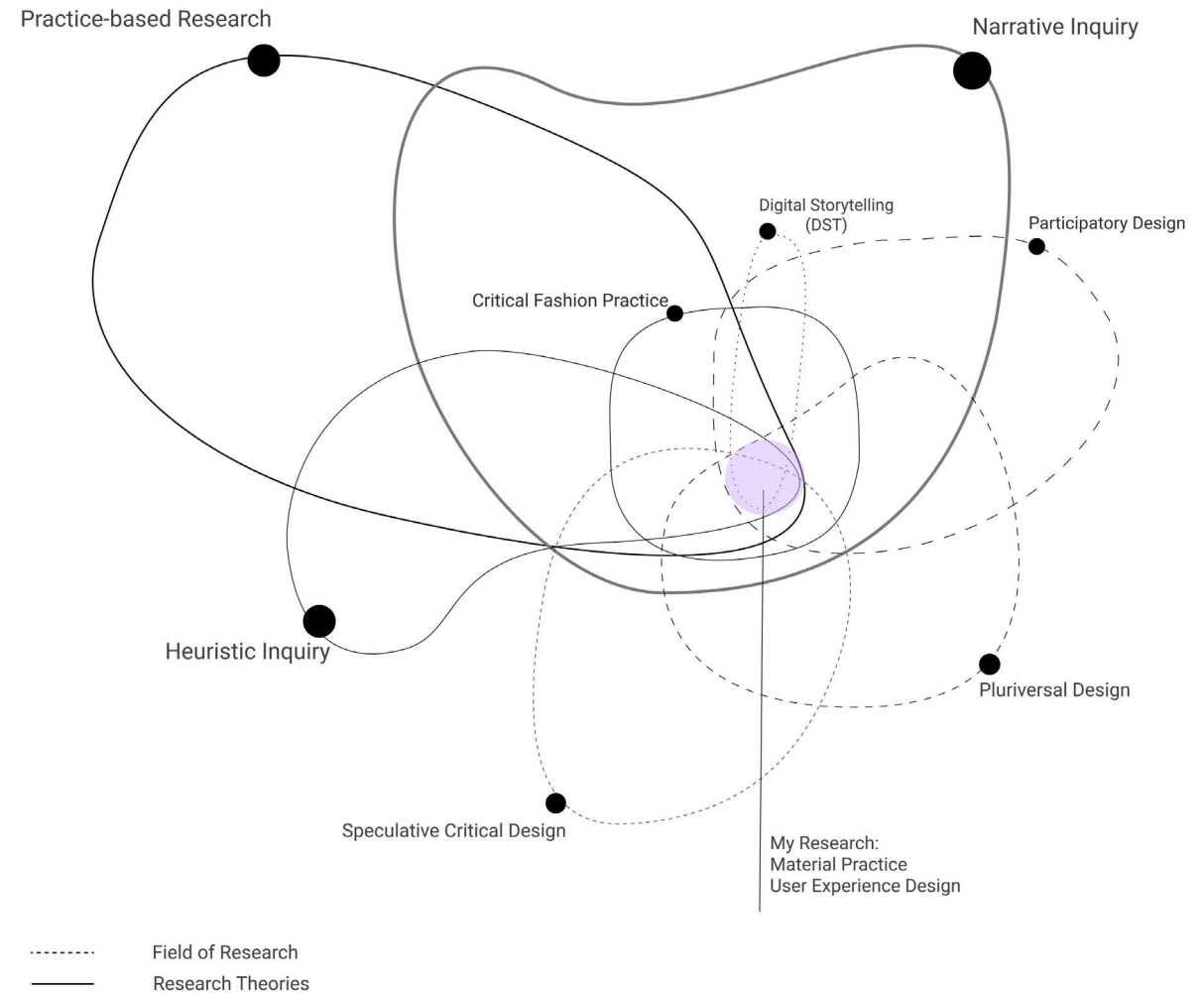


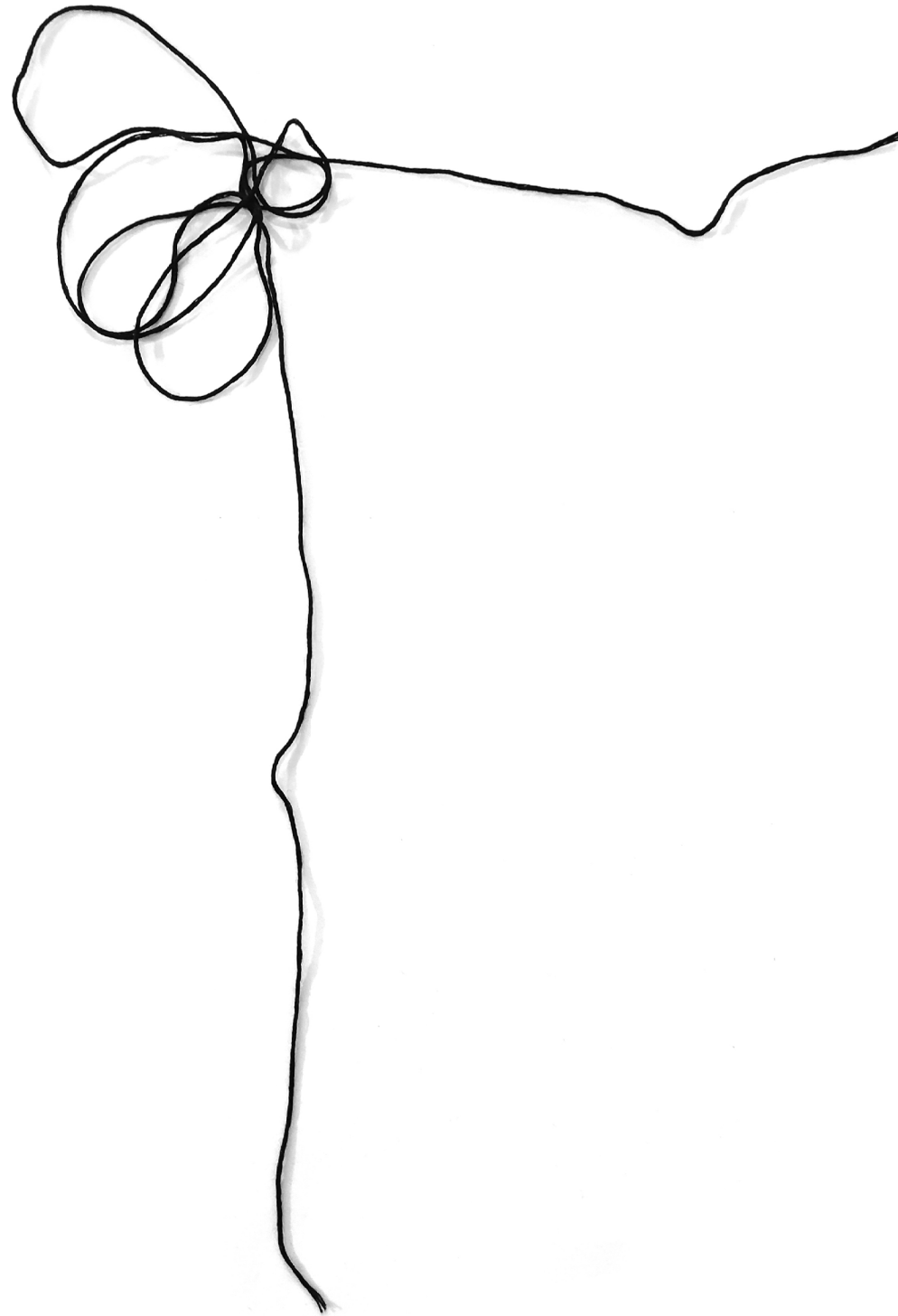
Fig 8. Where my research sits

experience and enhance their capacity for interpretation of their life and socio-cultural context (Lorini et al., 2017). I see my future research and design work exploring ever more inclusive and dynamic ways of storytelling. To that end, I am interested in the capacity of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a tool for inclusiveness and to accommodate a variety of voices. Design researcher, Tacchi (2009), notes that DST is particularly rewarding when employed in underserved, disadvantaged and informationally isolated communities, that it allows these communities to voice their views and take effect in achieving social change or wider social and political participation (Tacchi, 2009 as cited in Lorini et al., 2017).

To sum it up, my practice-based research over the past two years has been situated mostly under the umbrella of critical speculative design in combination with pluriversal design. The focus of my work has been the development of a fashion design process that disrupts singular narrative processes through the advocacy of pluralistic narratives - the sharing of many stories. As previously touched upon, the element of the story has always been part of my practice. As such I see storytelling as the main characteristic of my

creative practice. Most recently it has become a powerful design tool that has changed my approach from being a story author to a story mediator. In this new role of story mediator, I enable and encourage multiple stories to arise and interact with one another. I have come to see my role as a weaver of stories - what, after all, is more valuable than the weaving of stories?!





*Future Threads*

04

# My Story + Heuristic Inquiry

Looking back and reflecting on my Master's journey, I realize that every single action I have taken on makes perfect sense. My personal journey with all its challenges taught me a new way of looking at the design process that is more than just solving a problem. A way of designing that starts from embracing yourself fully. Similarly, heuristic inquiry is directly concerned with self-inquiry and the researcher's lived experiences becoming the focus of the research (Moustakas, 1990). Throughout this process, the researcher "experiences a growing sense of self-awareness and self-knowledge, promoted by self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery" (Given, 2008). So instead of shutting down personal challenges, the designer can embrace them and reflect back on them. This way of designing is so powerful and can also be a healing process.

My research path aligned with the proposition that design should recognize and include the self as a critical function of practice. "Personhood, informed by culture and aesthetic sensibilities, directs and determines how design is mediated and realized. A diffusion of uncertainty, anxiety, unease, and longing, experienced and felt in the doing of design became the portal through which research found its pathway" (Gaur, 2020). As such, the researcher can become fully immersed in the research as an active tool; an instrument to gather insights and meaning that are often tacit, hidden or denied (Moustakas, 2001, cited in Hiles, 2001). Having said that, the initial context of this research was self-discovery and storytelling based on heuristic inquiry. I started reflecting back on stories that are usually hidden or denied.

As a relational self<sup>1</sup>, newly immigrant and a designer, the process of heuristic inquiry

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1 "relational self (1) is self-knowledge that is linked in memory to knowledge about significant others; (2) exists at multiple levels of specificity; (3) is capable of being contextually or chronically activated; and (4) is comprised of self-conceptions and a constellation of other self-aspects (e.g., motives, self-regulatory strategies) that characterize the self when relating to significant others" (Chen, 2011).

and self-exploration through material practice enabled the concept of storytelling to emerge in order to connect people with displacement experience. In telling my own story as a person who experienced displacement and transcultural identity<sup>2</sup>, I was both the researcher and research participant. I felt paralyzed a lot of times with some overwhelming emotions. What helped me get through and survive these moments was the connection to others and giving myself space to reflect on those connections. With its inherently personal and compassionate approach, heuristic inquiry embodies open discussion with participants and "allows participants to have their stories understood and their voices heard" (Moustakas, 1990). Participants in heuristic research are considered co-researchers and co-creators who are integral to this process. The next phase of my research, "Many Stories", detail how this appears in the work I have done with others.

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2 People who experience a social and psychological transformation to create a different sense of self—identity as multiple—through experiencing the interweaving and exchange of human cultures (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010).

# Many Stories + Narrative Inquiry

## Where and How We Connect


Studying in a corner of my home and participating in a virtual learning space with people in different places all over the globe, I was acutely aware of the distinction between place and space. “Space is more abstract than place. Space and place require each other for definition. From the security and stability of the place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa.” (Tuen, 1977). Existing in-between, in this hybrid space, can be challenging and scary. It made us, our MDes cohort, vulnerable. Building relationships was our way of countering this – of weaving ourselves through uncertainty, connecting to our

program, school and physically distant new friends. It was our way of keeping going.

These virtual connections with peers, described above, set in a peculiar time (the COVID Pandemic) was the beginning of a group project called “Transitional”, which would serve to inform and shape my work in many significant ways as I moved to Canada and continued to develop my thesis. The Transitional project was a collaborative action that included Marcia Higuchi, Yun Xiao, Meghna Mitra and myself.



Fig 9. Transitional Group members (from left to right: Marcia Higuchi, Meghna Mitra, myself, Yun Xiao)



*The shifting away from one's own culture centre allows a look on one hand into what one has left, and another into what one must learn. As a consequence, one lives in the spaces between, drawing from two or more cultural networks and fashioning a new cultural node, where the new self is at the centre”.*

- Gaur, 2020

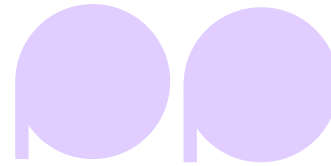
The project's intent was to track and share our experiences of transitioning from our home countries (Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Iran and China) to Vancouver. Together, we decided to explore our trajectories and personal reflections on these experiences through "SHARING SESSIONS" that we planned to have once we had all arrived in Vancouver and were out of quarantine. Between June and September 2021 we each took turns guiding the others in the group. When we met we shared our stories, and our skills following the prompts set by whoever led a particular session (we held 4 in total). We met in person, made things together - learning and listening and also empathizing. Our bonds and the connections were made through threads, fabric, paint, food and joy. We enjoyed every moment together through the process.

Telling our stories was a way of opening up and of healing and caring for each other through design. Stories can be considered as a means to share visions, values, desires and expectations of the actors involved. Storytelling represents one of the many different ways in which one can develop design actions, especially when one collaborates or deals with different people (Manzini cited in Bertolotti et al., 2016). "People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which, their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).



Fig 10. a glimpse of things we did together in our Transitional sharing sessions





Moving to a new place can be complex and emotional for people. When people share their personal stories through words, often it is difficult to communicate inexpressible or complex elements such as emotions. Acknowledging this, I aimed to explore the Narrative Inquiry method for my sharing session, which I will explain in further detail in the next sections. Narrative Inquiry is “the study of experience as story... first and foremost a way of thinking about the experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry focuses “not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek cited in Towers et., al, 2017).

*“Stories go in circles. They don’t go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.”*

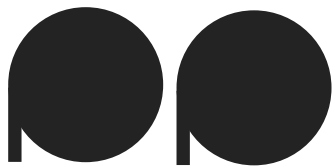
- Tafoya as cited in Wilson, 1995

This quote above resonated with all of us in the Transitional Group. We returned to it often.



## Together: Arranging a space to be deeply connected

The sharing session that I led for the Transitional project drew on my own background and experiences- it was based on clothing and storytelling. It was also based on my own background as a woman and designer from Iran. When I designed my workshop, I wanted to create a space for comfortable friendly conversation. An element that helped a lot in the flow of the conversation I led was the arrangement of the space itself. Before we gathered I placed four large pieces of unbleached muslin fabric on the ground for my peers to sit on while we talked and drew. The arrangement of cloth on the floor resembled the Iranian culture of sitting and gathering together on carpets. Interestingly weaving mini carpets was a meditative practice that I took on during my time in quarantine only several weeks prior to this sharing session.



*The setting of the workshop and how everyone was on the ground gave the sensation that everyone is equal."*

- Meghna Mitra



Fig 11. one of the Mini Carpets I wove with Persian Rug Weaving Technique During Self-quarantine (the dimentions are 3.5 by 4.5 cm)

In my culture when people sit on the ground, it means that they are close to one another and that they feel very comfortable being together - both emotionally and physically. I had the privilege of being the last to hold a workshop in our Transitional Group. All the previous sharing sessions, where my peers had invited us to cook, share dreams, paint and embroider together, had gradually built a close relationship and bond between the four of us. This allowed time and emotional space for reflection. As designers, we can visualize potentialities and give them the possibility to be translated into practice, pointing to innovative sustainable alternatives and possibly creating the preconditions for them to happen. Stories can be considered as a tool for reflection; yet, this reflection also informs the possibility for new actions to take place: what is now only possible can be brought into action. Examples of these meanings are given in our contemporary context, for instance by the sustainable qualities formulated by Ezio Manzini, such as the qualities of slow time, good work, deep relationships, and complexity, which are antithetical to what we can consider the mainstream qualities, such as fastness, efficiency in mass production, etc. (Manzini & Tassinari, 2012).



Fig 12 & 13. workshop arrangement

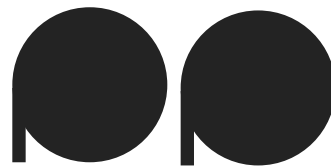
## Sharing: Clothing, Storytelling and Drawing

Before we met for my sharing session, I gave my three design colleagues and friends a form that asked them to think about and share perspectives connected to the types of clothing and colours they wore in their home country and here in this new place – in Canada (see appendix). This was created in response to my own challenge as a newcomer to Canada. Shortly after I arrived in Canada I started questioning the types of clothing and my colour choice. I was questioning my previous choice of colours and I wanted to see how the Transitional Group think of this. I also asked them to each bring a piece of clothing to the workshop that had sentimental value for them. When we met, we started our time together in conversation, discussing how we each responded to the prompts, sharing our choices of clothing and colours.

Following a meaningful conversation that offered up new insights about clothing and cultures we came from, Marcia, Yun and Meghna then showed the pieces of clothing they brought with them. We continued sharing the stories behind the articles we had brought

and the value they carried for us. After this, I asked another a set of questions about their hometown, mother language, identity, travel experience and stories connected to this new home country, Canada. My intent was to use heuristic inquiry as a tool for creating more conversation. Based on this approach, the poetic capacity of storytelling is used to understand and

interpret personal meanings behind one's experience. The session not only focused on oral and written stories but also tangible visualization of the stories being told. The Transitional Group not only shared their stories with words but also through drawing on the large (1 by 1.5 meters) rectangular pieces of fabric.



*The piece of clothing that we brought was so significant as well because there were these pieces of material that we could talk about. It was so amazing to have something to touch. We tried to do that with the thing we brought from home, like the soil. But they have never been used this way to tell a story or sentimental attachment.”*

- Marcia Higuchi



*I loved the part that we shared about the clothing codes for each of our countries and I felt so comfortable asking about your choice of clothing and your feeling. I will not feel comfortable starting this conversation just with other people. The workshop created the space to ask questions about other's cultures, even if you had a bias toward a country. Because we knew there was a safe space for sharing."*

- Marcia Higuchi



Fig 14. painted pieces of cloth after the workshop

Images are more communicative than words. This is the reason why storytelling has become so relevant to design for social innovation, as an instrument of co-design, participation, and binding people together (Manzini cited in Bertolotti et al., 2016). As work in the field of Design for Social Innovation can attest, storytelling is a highly connective medium. Applied within co-design and participatory design scenarios, it binds people together. The sharing of ideas, thoughts and experiences - of telling stories through visualization is as much of a design tool as a sketch, a prototype or a map is (Manzini as cited in Bertolotti et al., 2016). My own experience, sitting on the studio floor with the Transitional Group at Emily Carr University validates this for me.



## Feedback from Transitional Group

The space I created and the prompts I invited my Transitional peers to respond to generated stories and emotional connections. They reacted to each other's stories by making marks on some smaller pieces of cloth and attaching them to the bigger pieces of fabric (similar to commenting on a post on social media). The intention behind it was initially my personal desire to be both connected to other individuals who, like I, had recently experienced moving to a new country and to give voice to displacement stories that are usually hidden in the design process.

I received surprisingly positive feedback regarding my workshop from all the participants. The only negative feedback was that it was long in duration. The sharing session impacted my peers' perspective towards personal and collaborative storytelling and its impact on the design process as well as insights on giving credit to the personal context in their own design practice. My prompts and questions not only provoked sentimental responses but also created an intimate space for participants to talk about personal concerns. "Storytelling can be considered a design tool for telling complex stories and situations, which otherwise it would be too difficult to represent" (Manzini as cited in Bertolotti et al., 2016).



Fig 15. Transitional Group's first reaction to the arrangement of the workshop





*“We had a lot of joy in the space. We were enjoying ourselves, we laughed and had fun. There is this wonderful picture that Yun is lying on the fabric. There is one chapter of the Design in Nature, Louise’s book, that talks about the feeling of being vulnerable when you are lying on the ground and when you are horizontal, there is no hierarchy. Cause everyone is on the same level; no one is on the couch.”*

- Marcia Higuchi

*“Talking to you guys opened up more ideas and that was my experience with your workshop. As for my practice, I am just getting to put some context to it. The workshop that we did helped us find what is our personal context because we were coming from so many different perspectives and we were asked so many questions about ourselves and you cannot help but think about your own context.”*

- Meghna Mitra

*“Love is the commitment we make to others and our workshops were applied practice to what it means to be committed to one another. All our workshops were the embody acknowledgement. All the stories we shared in your workshop, we drew it and we painted it and when I am going to think about it, I will think about Meghna’s painting or Yun’s painting. It is not like let me think about the stories they said because they are in the fabric. So it is a totally different experience and we will remember them because of the action of making them together.”*

- Marcia Higuchi

*“Your workshop changed totally how our own stories and our personal experience is so important to our practice. They inform everything we do. We cannot be discounted from this fact. That is the biggest change in my practice for sure to acknowledge how important it is to bring my personal stories and also work in collaboration. How important it is to know how Elham’s, Meghna’s or Yun’s lives were and where did they come from. That is for sure the storytelling element from your workshop.”*

- Marcia Higuchi

## Making: a new relationship with the process

After my sharing session with the Transitional Project team, I gave myself some time to think. I hung the three pieces of cloth in my studio space, waiting and thinking about how best to give the stories shared with me a new context and meaning beyond pieces of fabric. After one month of sitting with it and thinking about my own strengths and experience as a designer, I made the decision to use the story cloth to create a line of clothing.

The process I embarked on, while rooted in my past experience in fashion design, was totally different in so many ways. Transitioning the fabric filled with personal stories into garments to be worn was touching. I constantly thought of each and every story as I cut through the fabric. I felt a strong attachment to every thread of the fabric.

Contrary to the common contemporary fashion design process where the designer creates the pattern pieces for a garment and then cuts the fabric accordingly (with a focus on maximizing efficient fabric usage), I had placed myself in a position where I needed to do the inverse. I found myself adjusting the patterns I was using to the fabric. I spent my time working to assure that the stories on the fabric did not get cut apart or disappear in the process. Because I wanted to keep as many of the drawn stories intact as possible I did not cut through them but rather adjusted the silhouettes of my garments instead.

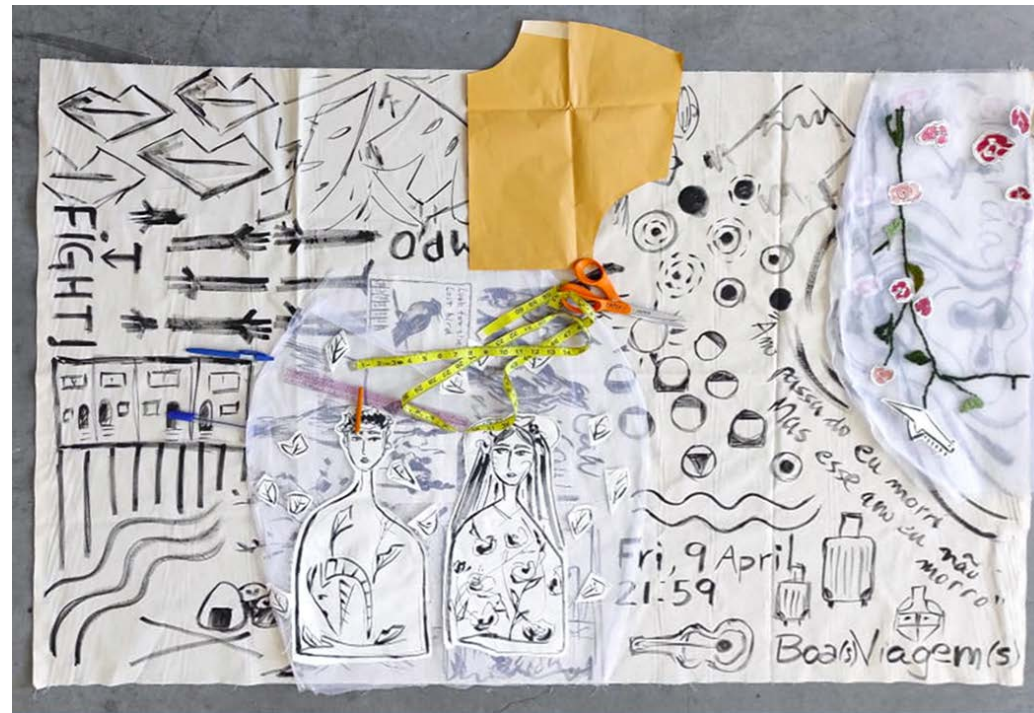


Fig 16 & 17. making Process with the Fabrics from My Sharing Session



## Through Photography: Continued Storytelling and Connection

Having spent so much time and attention on making garments deeply embedded with stories, I wanted to keep the process going. Photography became my next means. I asked two friends, Nikoo Farvardin and Ghazal Jenab, who also had moved to Canada from Iran to join me and model the clothes from my story collection. Our shared experiences of moving created a fruitful conversation before the photoshoot, contributing to how we shaped the shooting scenario, theme, colours and the locations we used. We decided to continue showing and finding ways to express the transitional experience of moving. The pictures of ourselves in the garments focused on hectic life, connection, public spaces, mother language, loneliness and more. Based on real people and real stories, the whole process was filled with value. Everyone involved felt connected and emotionally attached to this way of expressing what it means to move to a new unfamiliar place.

Throughout the entire process – from the sharing session to my making of clothing, to the photoshoot – I could see a thread connecting people together – the same experience of displacement. Some of the people involved have never met each other but the pieces of clothing created a connection that drew everyone in – a new sort of visual language and a new way of expression formed.



Fig 18. continued storytelling and connection (photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)



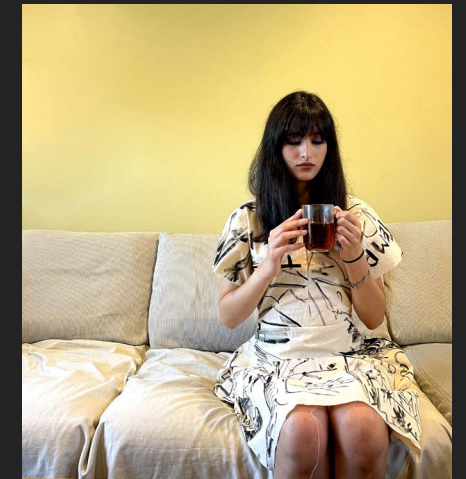


Fig 19 to 23. continued storytelling and connection



Fig 24 & 25. continued storytelling and connection (photos by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)

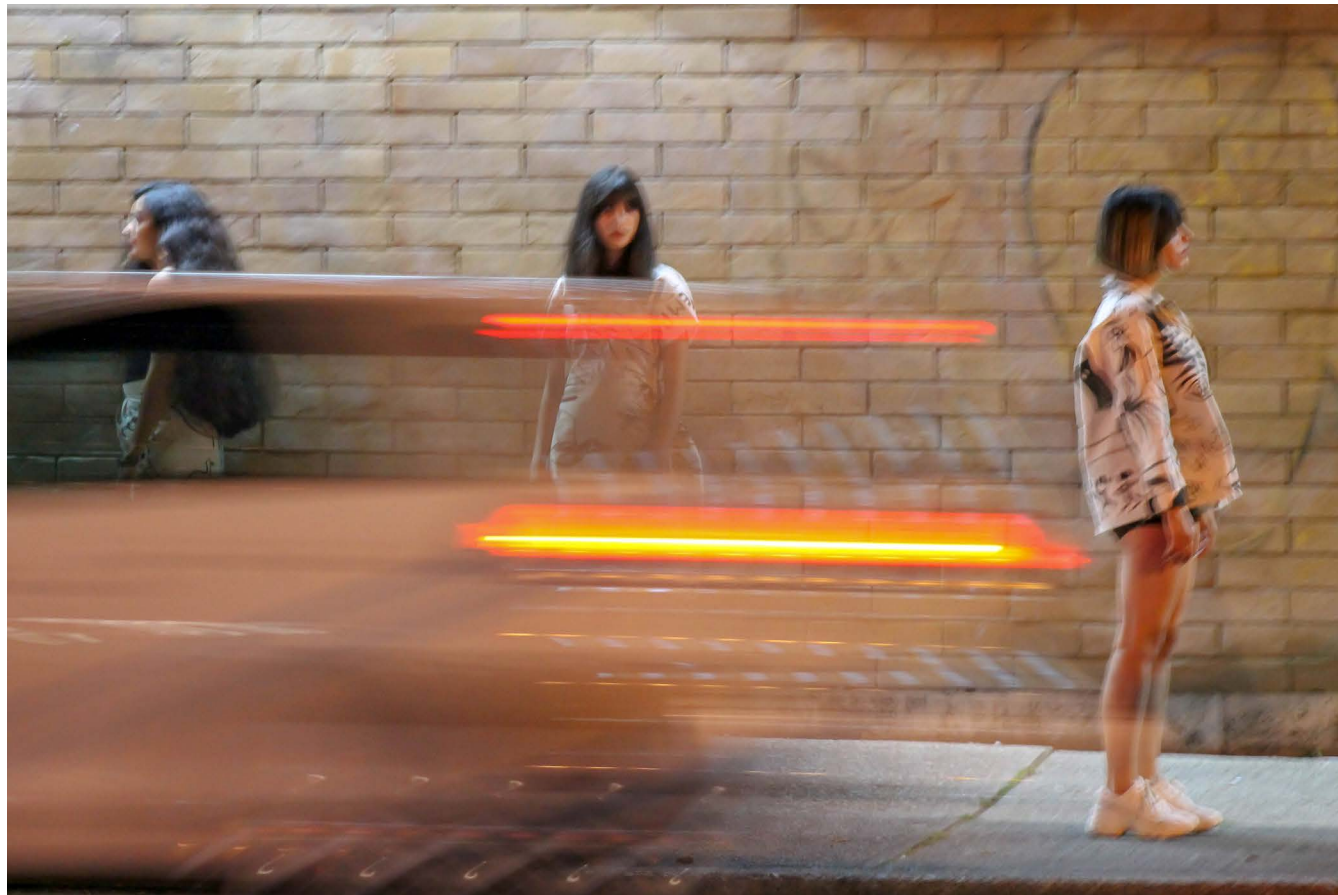
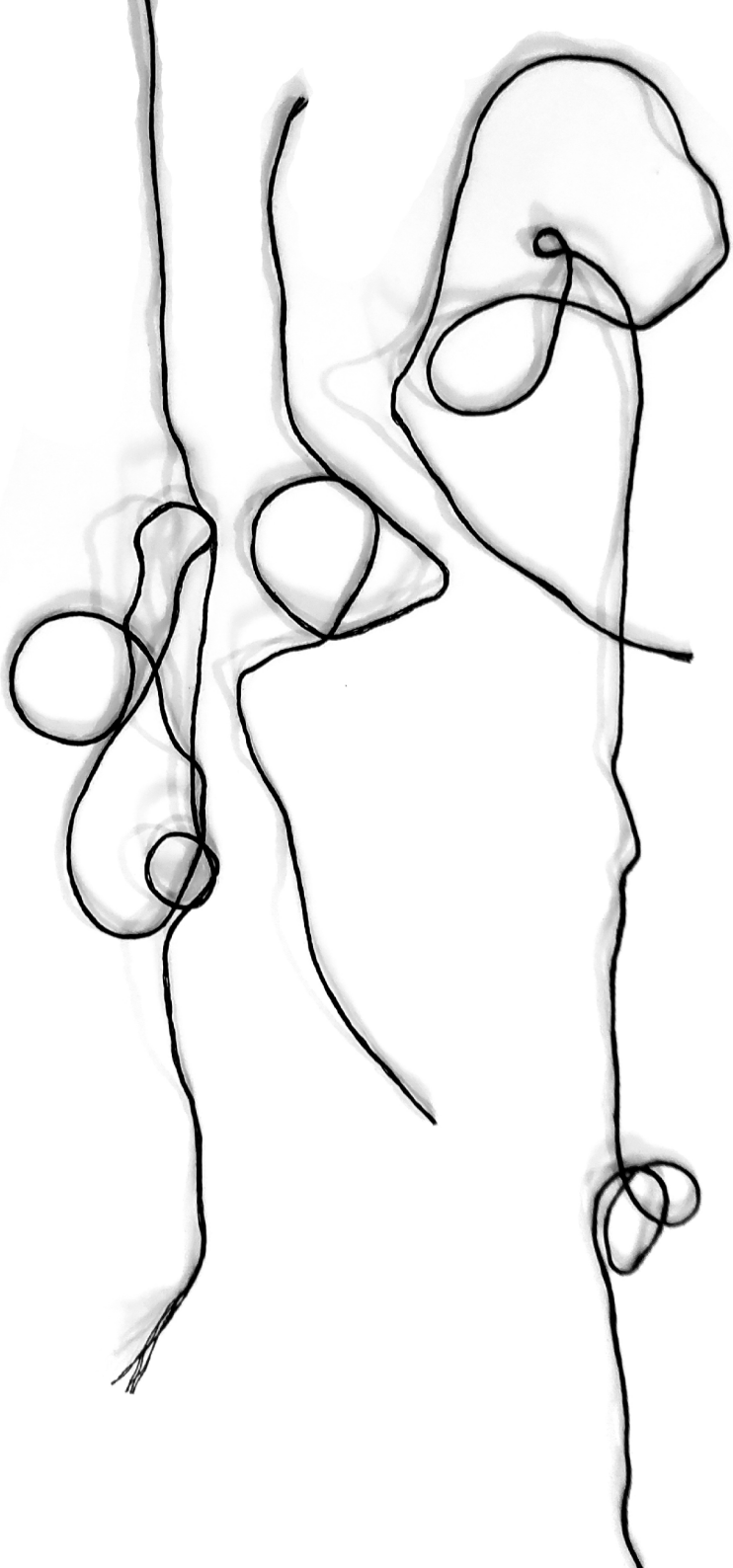






Fig 26. continued storytelling and connection (photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)





*NewThreads*

05

# Unexpected Responses

In September 2021 I shared my work and images of the clothing collection of stories to the university community in a formal presentation. I was shocked and humbled to receive so much positive feedback and encouragement. We have a WhatsApp group for the Transitional project. The messages that I received during and after my presentation was so emotive. The feeling of their story being told in a new form for my peers was valuable for the members of the Transitional group. Moreover, the new medium (clothing) seemed to have given the stories a stronger voice. The stories my peers had drawn on the large pieces of fabric had laid out on the floor in August 2021 were filled with wonderful mark-making, for a while, they had hung in my studio and attracted people's attention, but the context of clothing, the storyboard behind the collection and the photography added many more layers and even more meaning to the stories.

Feedback and responses to my work have come from many different places. Some I anticipated and others were a complete surprise. The first time this occurred was when I brought the clothing to campus just prior to the photoshoot. People I passed in the halls, in the studio, in the elevator were curious and wanted to know more - their enthusiasm and compliments about the clothing and the concept behind pieces were surprising and encouraging. The second time this happened was while

photographing the garments in public spaces and streets. The third was in a more formal setting after I presented my work to the Emily Carr community. Members of the audience shared how they wished they had been part of the storytelling circle experience and could also have their own pieces of clothing embedded with visual narrative. I was fascinated by how the stories - even without any translation or explanation - communicated to others in such a strong way.



*When the fabrics were on the wall, it was like an exhibition. You didn't have any interaction with them."*

- Meghna Mitra

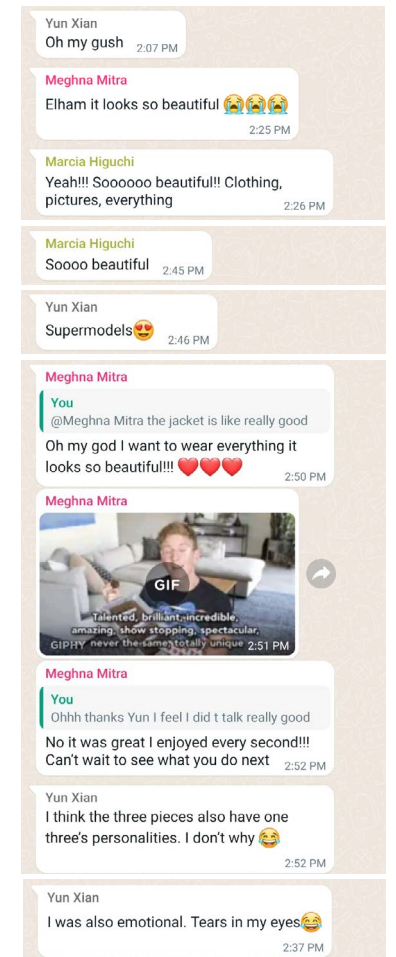
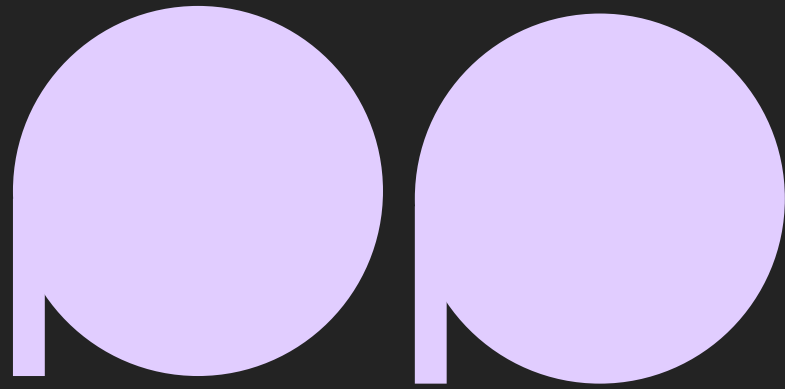


Fig 27. reaction to the pieces of clothing from the Transitional Group during my summer presentation



*“Your work got me thinking about the ways cloth could be used. When it becomes clothing, you have to interact with it like feel the material and it goes out into everyday life. Before I was just doing embroidery randomly, in a book or whatever pieces of scrap cloth I had. I have never thought of being based on a garment and how a garment is a different context.”*

- Meghna Mitra

# Workshop Outcomes and Future Directions

It is fair to say that my collaboration with the Transitional group and what came after the workshop was the turning point in my research. I received three main insights out of this process:

- people were curious to know the meaning behind the clothing
- they wanted to be involved in this way of storytelling
- they showed a keen interest to buy and own clothing like this

Another key takeaway and a personal area of concern as I thought through my next steps was the concept of immigration. I intentionally decided to move away from it and focus on a broader concept of displacement. As a relational self and new immigrant, I was concerned that focusing only on the immigration experience could inadvertently encourage further marginalization and limit valuable connections between people. I was not interested in including some voices and excluding others in the same way that the Western fashion system does. I wanted to find a different route that embraced many perspectives from all sides of this aspect of contemporary society. By shifting away from the immigrant experience to the stories around displacement more people are involved and impacted other than those who experience the moving.



*Another thing that got me thinking was the talk about immigration. I moved a lot throughout my life but I have never thought of myself as an immigrant. It was mostly because of all the moving. I knew I was going to move away from this place eventually so it didn't feel like immigration. But immigration sound permanent. But if you move constantly can you call yourself an immigrant?"*

- Meghna Mitra



*Digital Threads*

06



When we began the Fall 2021 semester I decided to take the insights described in the previous section above and use them to begin prototyping a possible new way of engaging with clothing that considers both collaboration and storytelling. Returning to the lived experience of initially connecting with peers and colleagues digitally via Zoom I started a new set of conversations. I found myself brainstorming with other design fellows who had also had moving experiences. Through these interactions with these people, I began to see the possibility of digital space.

## Storytelling Leading to Ideation

After doing all the previous work, I was in a state of flux trying to decide what to do next. Now that I reflect back on the arrangement of this second group of designers made up of old friends from Iran, my home country, I can see that in this phase I was beginning the act of mediating multi-stories. What started as an informal friendly conversation amongst a group of friends ended up shifting towards an exchange of stories about relocation and moving. Compared to the Transitional group, this second group reflected on moving experiences that had occurred (for most of them) a while ago; two to three years back. Earlier I had a shared experience of moving with new friends who were from all over the world (Transitional Group) in a peculiar and condensed period of time (during the Pandemic.) This time I was talking with people who moved from the same culture and place as I did over an extended period of time. This state was a beginning of a new chapter. This led to a creative process to help me ideate and think through possible new scenarios for expanding on the main outcomes related to the work I did so far. Half of the people in the ideation session were already involved in the process and modelled for the photography. The experience of wearing the pieces of clothing connected invisible threads between them and the stories behind the garments. The objective for this ideation session was shaped around generating more ideas by returning to the moving experiences people had previously shared with me and brainstorming possible ways

of extending this experience outwards to others. Storytelling was a tool in this process again as participants started sharing their own moving stories, their emotions and challenges to create a space for ideation as well as empathizing.

We ended up getting together twice. Storytelling, sharing, and ideating usually for about ninety minutes. Each session began with sharing some stories of the previous workshop, describing the identified needs and the context to create a clear picture of the research for participants. These brainstorming sessions created the space for exchanging ideas and experiences between myself and the participants. As the coordinator of these brainstorming sessions, I aimed to create a comfortable space to inspire creative thinking. I encouraged everyone to ignore the feasibility of ideas and to be mindful of their judgment towards others' ideas. As the participants had very diverse design backgrounds in industrial design, apparel design and interaction design the space was very generative.

## Strategies We Used – Who Why What How

The ideas we came up with were shaped around the insights from previous research that had been narrowed down into four areas of WHO, WHAT, WHY and How. This approach was very helpful, enabling me to easily clarify the goals for the ideation phase. Together we came up with a lot of ideas and then evaluated them based on these four areas.

At the end of our second session, we narrowed down our ideas and discussed the possibility of combining them. This led to the formation of a digital platform concept that would invite contributors to share, read and wear moving experiences and could act as both an initiator and holder of stories - providing new ways for clothing to be accessed and made.

My aim became to explore and create a digital platform as a tool and a core space for:

- sharing and connecting stories that have never happened in the fashion design process
- the formation of a new digital system that is more inclusive
- a space that gives the user control over the amount and the content they share



Fig 28. ideas were evaluated based on these criteria

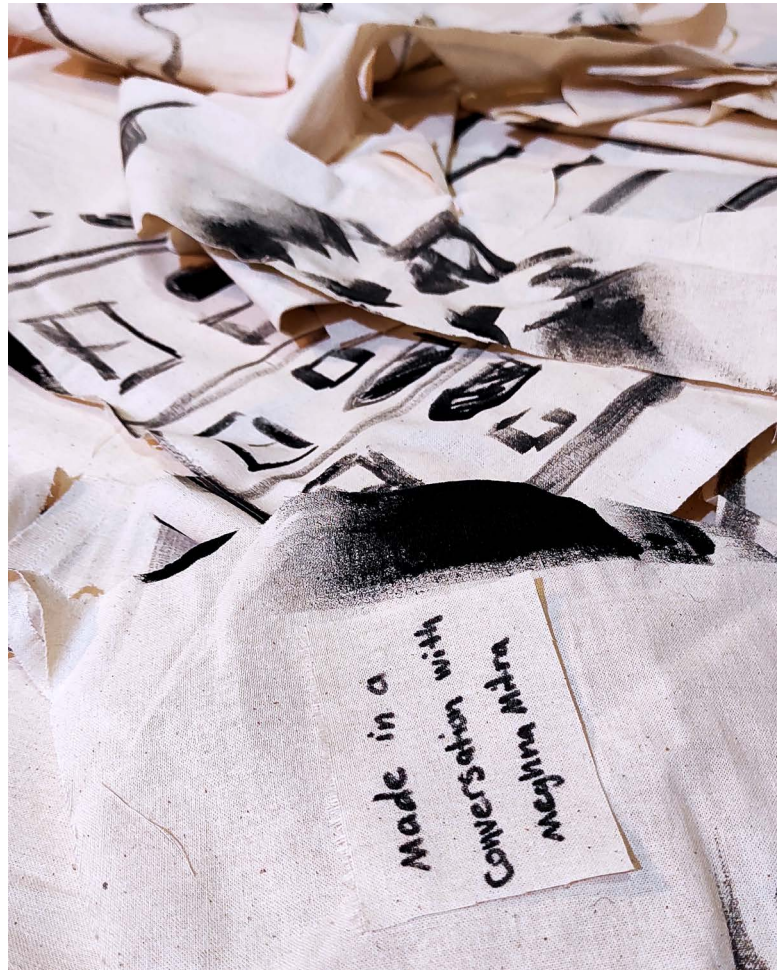
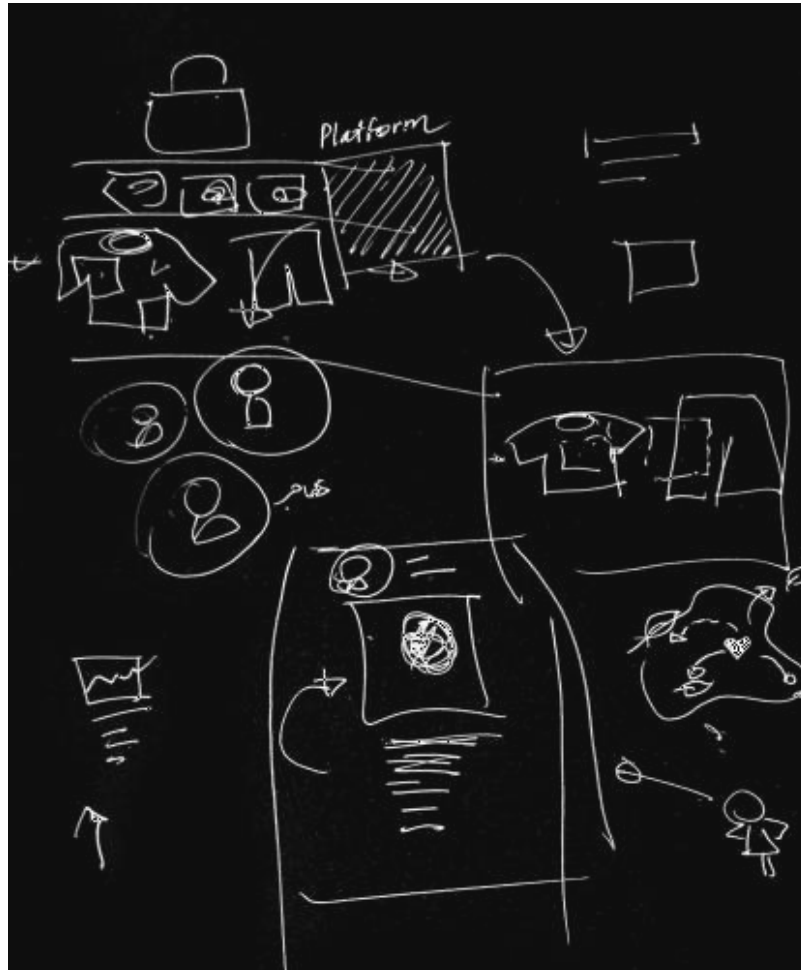


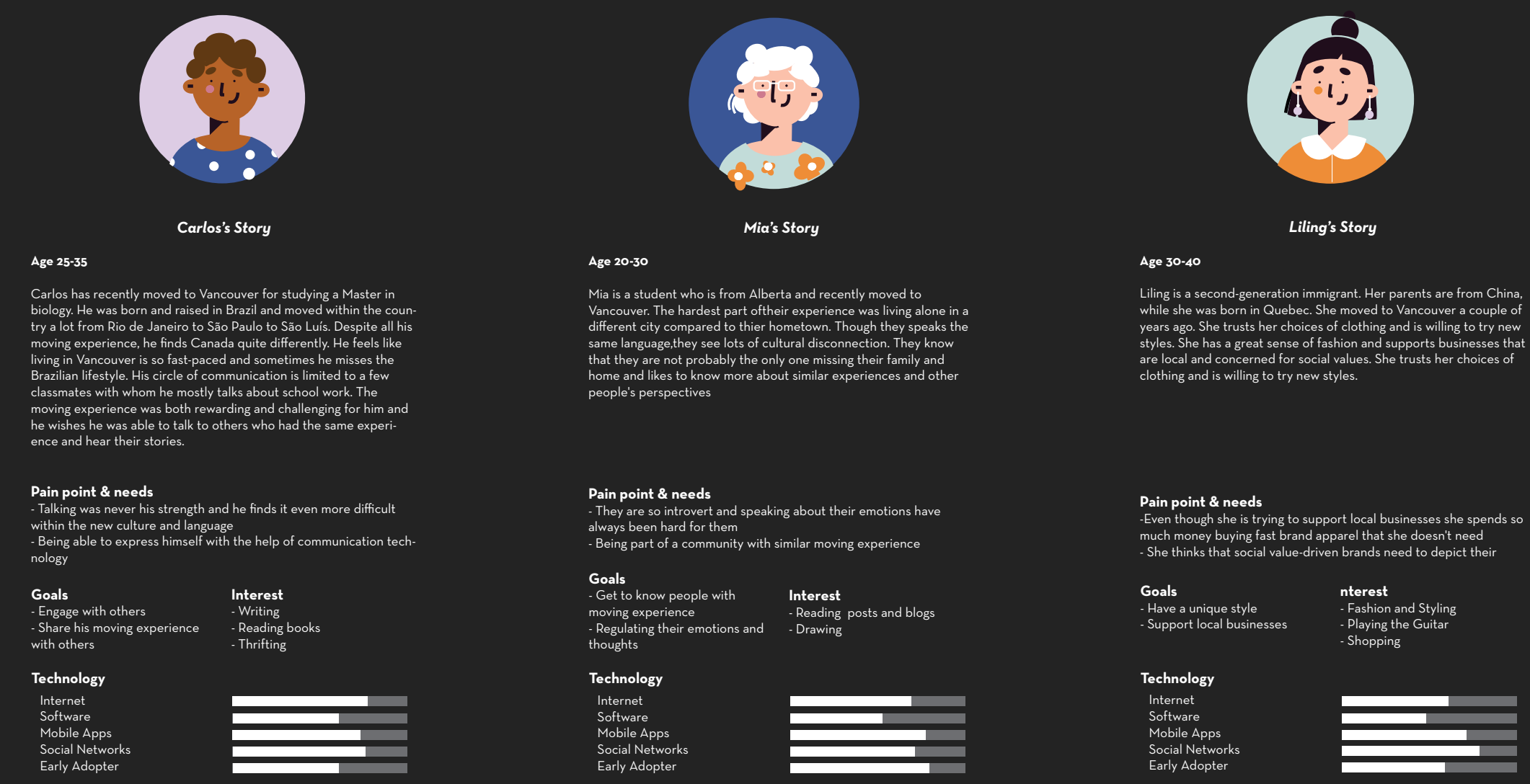
Fig 29 & 30. the initial rough idea

## Accessing Stories

We realized that there seemed to be three different ways for people<sup>1</sup> to engage with storytelling through clothing.

- **Storytellers:** People who want to share their moving stories and get connected to a community with a similar experience
- **Storyreaders:** People who want to read and get to know other people's stories of displacement. They most likely have a moving experience or they generally like reading other people's stories. Throughout the whole research, I am trying not to exclude a group or marginalized a group.
- **Storywearers (Storybuyers):** People who admire new ways of looking at fashion, value creation and connection to people. They look for new trends and they want to support a business with social values.

<sup>1</sup> These characteristics are useful to designers - often referred to as persona types





# A Digital Platform

I can see the reflection of the physical and digital spaces I experienced throughout my MDes education in the way my work has shaped. As a cohort, we have been in-between physical and digital spaces because of the pandemic and I can say that the weight of the digital space outweighed the physical space. Being physically distanced from my peers I used the digital space for collaborative making right from the beginning of our studies. On the other hand, I was dealing with some complications and uncertainty about my move to Canada. So with help of the digital space, I started some acts of healing and connection with my peers. I see lots of human connection when I look back at all my studio actions and practices. I always wanted to hear people's stories and reflect on them in my practice. I remember in one of my actions I had this personal challenge with the concept of love and I asked my cohort members to define love in their language and send me a recording of their voice saying it in their mother tongue. The connection and the making (as often the case) helped me overcome my personal challenge at that time.

I drew on their responses sent to me from afar - digitally - and my own making practice to inform my next steps, increasingly aware that the lived experience is never separated from a designer's process. Living in the time of COVID shifted the way we live and has changed our social interactions. This situation has made me aware of the value of the digital space



LIEBE IST DORT,  
WO DU DICH GEBORGEN FÜHLST,  
DORT,  
WO DU VERSTANDEN WIRST,  
DORT,  
WO DU SEIN KANNST WER DU BIST,  
LIEBE IST ANKOMMEN.



Fig 32 to 35. Language of Love shawl connectin, making and final design

we have at our hands. “Connected via distributed, non-hierarchical systems or networks. As nodes in the network, we have the capacity to reach one another and engage in a manner and to an extent that has never been experienced before.” (Fraser et al., 2015). Reading this pre-pandemic observation made by my supervisor led me to reflect on my own lived experiences. While digital interactions have their limitations and challenges they also offer an opportunity space for design such as seamless connectivity, inclusivity and flexibility.

Generally speaking, this project broadened my vision into co-design where my audiences actively played a role in different phases of my design research – from the early exploration phase to workshops, generative and evaluative phases. The whole idea was gradually built upon all the interactions and involvement of people throughout the last two years. My personal challenge intertwined with the research approach challenges taught me that design requires a flexible and strategic approach. Design is never a solid path and will form based on a sequent of events and experiences.

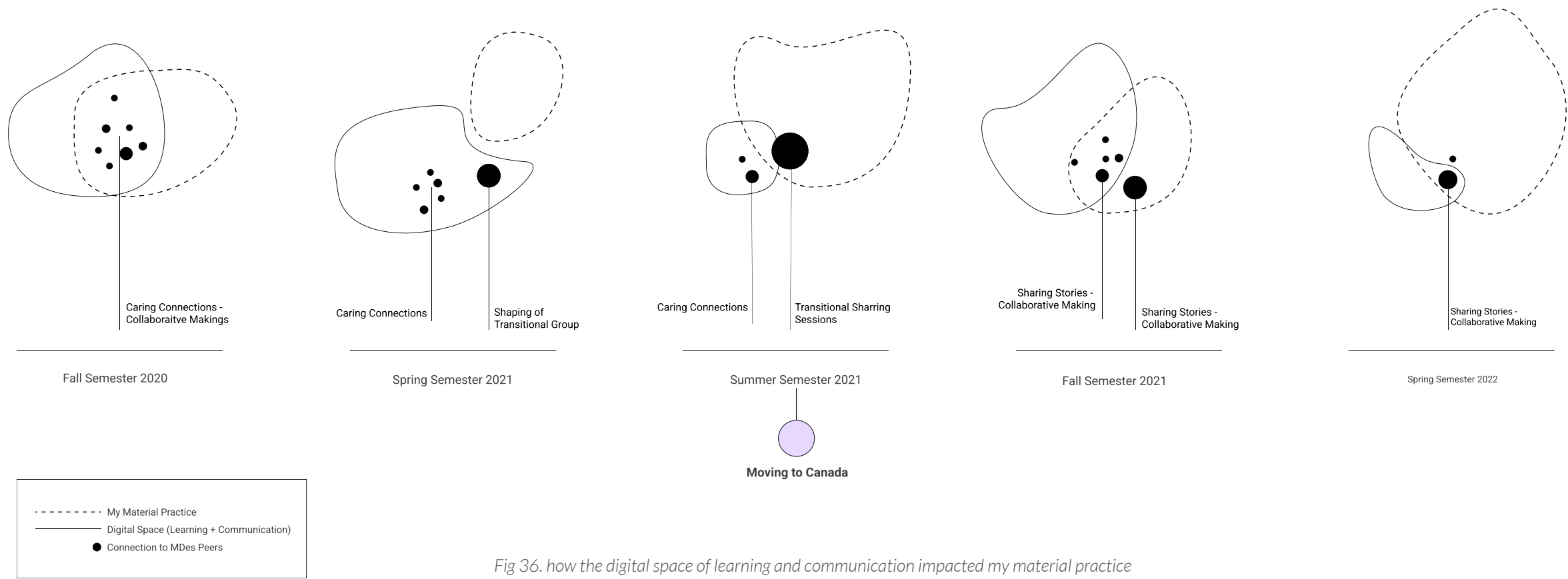


Fig 36. how the digital space of learning and communication impacted my material practice



# Co-creation – Second Clothing and Storytelling Workshop

After narrowing the ideas down to a final concept of a digital platform, I drew on co-creation again in order to continue to develop the work. My second Clothing and Storytelling workshop, held in December 2021, did not use the tactic of drawing on large pieces of fabric. This time I created worksheets that asked participants in and around the Grad Studies and Undergrad Industrial Design Studio to choose and draw their stories on four different clothing silhouettes that I provided on a sheet of paper. I used this as a low fidelity prototype and as a means to quickly test my concept of storytelling on clothing using a digital platform. I gave the forms to 20 people in and around the studios at Emily Carr inviting individuals who have had to move from one place to another to share their experience by providing a glimpse of memory about three main themes: home, identity, moving. Each theme was accompanied by a question prompt:

**Home** - Tell us about home. How would you define home?

**Identity** - Describe identity in your terms.

**Moving** - Share a significant experience of moving from one place to another place.



Fig 37. my peers participating in the workshop

People were asked to write down a couple of sentences responding to these themes and then visually share an aspect of the story they had written about through mark-making that could either be abstract or detailed, symbolic/representational or gestural - whatever was most comfortable for them.

The focus of the research, as with the earlier co-creation workshop in Summer 2021 was not about creating beautiful marks, but rather, about finding alternate ways of sharing and valuing real stories. I was interested to see if this would help me to develop the framework idea and refine it. I wanted to see:

- where participants would put their marks on the clothing silhouettes
- the clothing forms they choose to decorate/mark make on
- what colours do they choose for mark-making?
- what sort of stories do they share and how much?
- how did the participant's stories impact one another (or not)? In this open workshop, I would put each participant's drawing contribution up on a wall so that the new participants could see and read the previous stories.

# Storyboard

Based on personas and the outcome from the co-creation session, three storyboards were created to help refine the final idea.

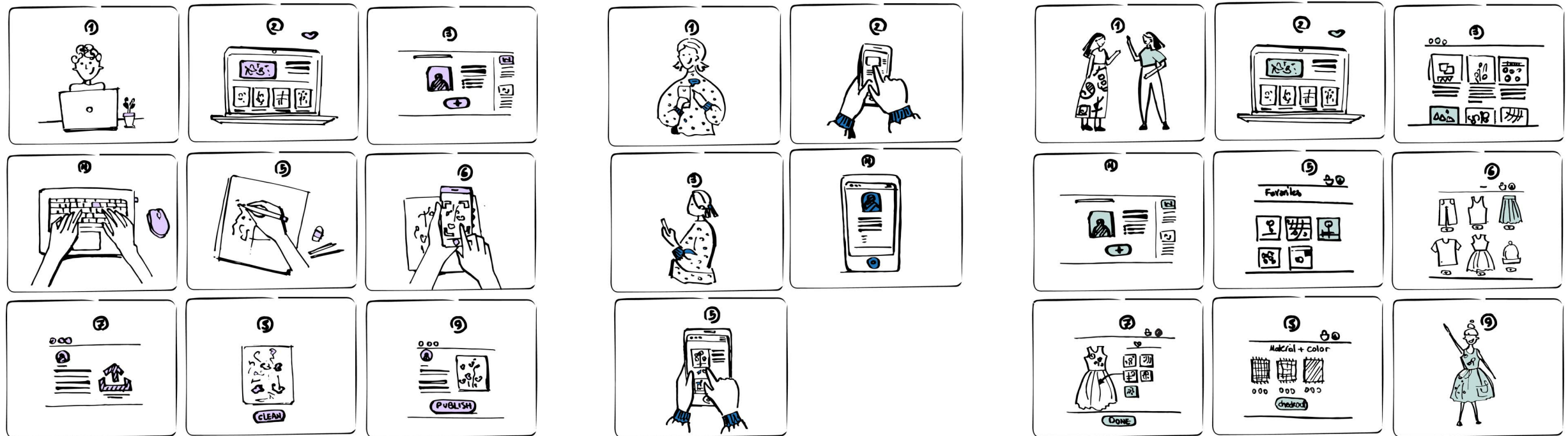


Fig 38, 39 & 40. from left to right: storyboards of the storyteller, Storyreader and Storyweaver

# System Map

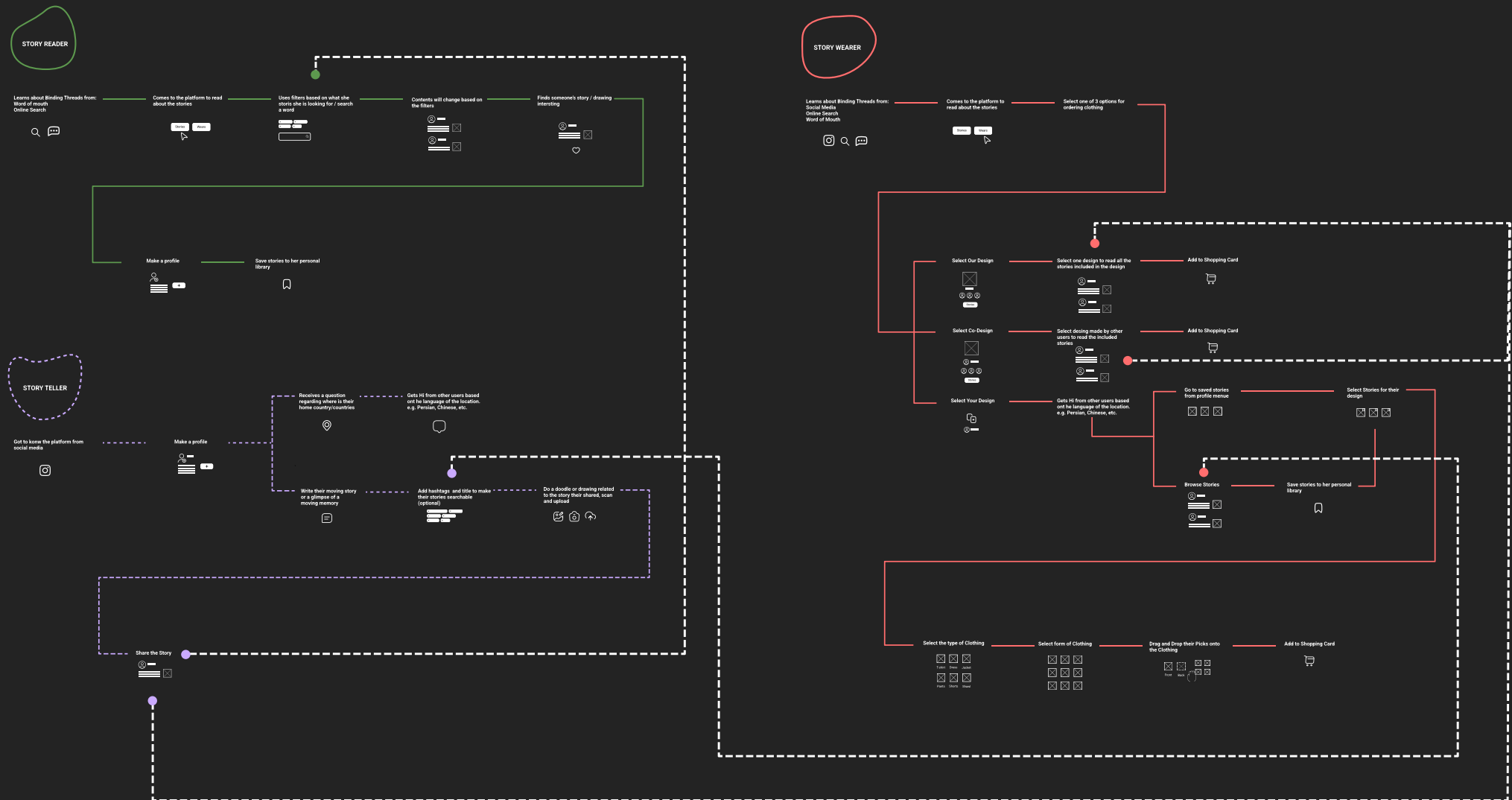
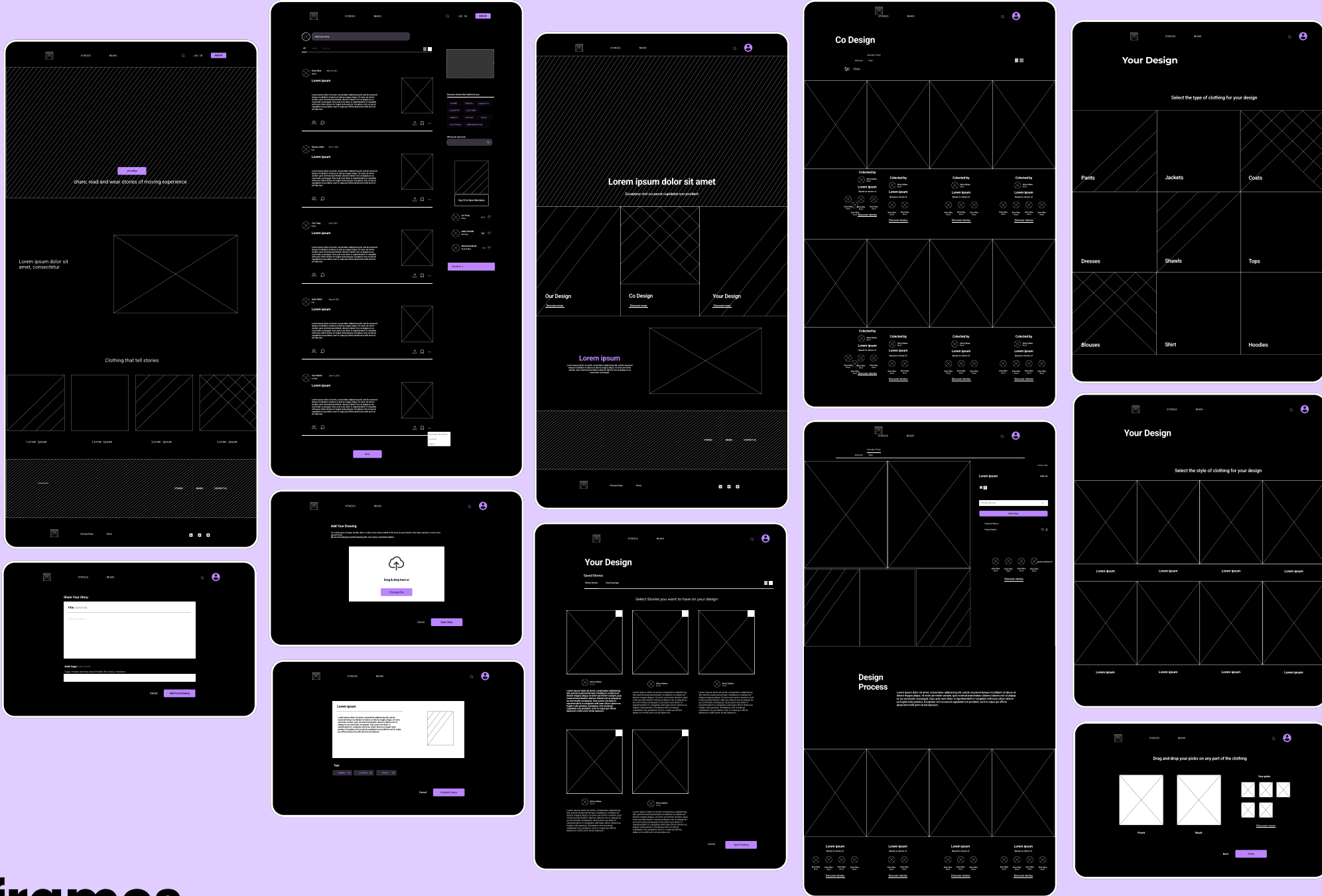


Fig 41. final digital platform system map based on the personas

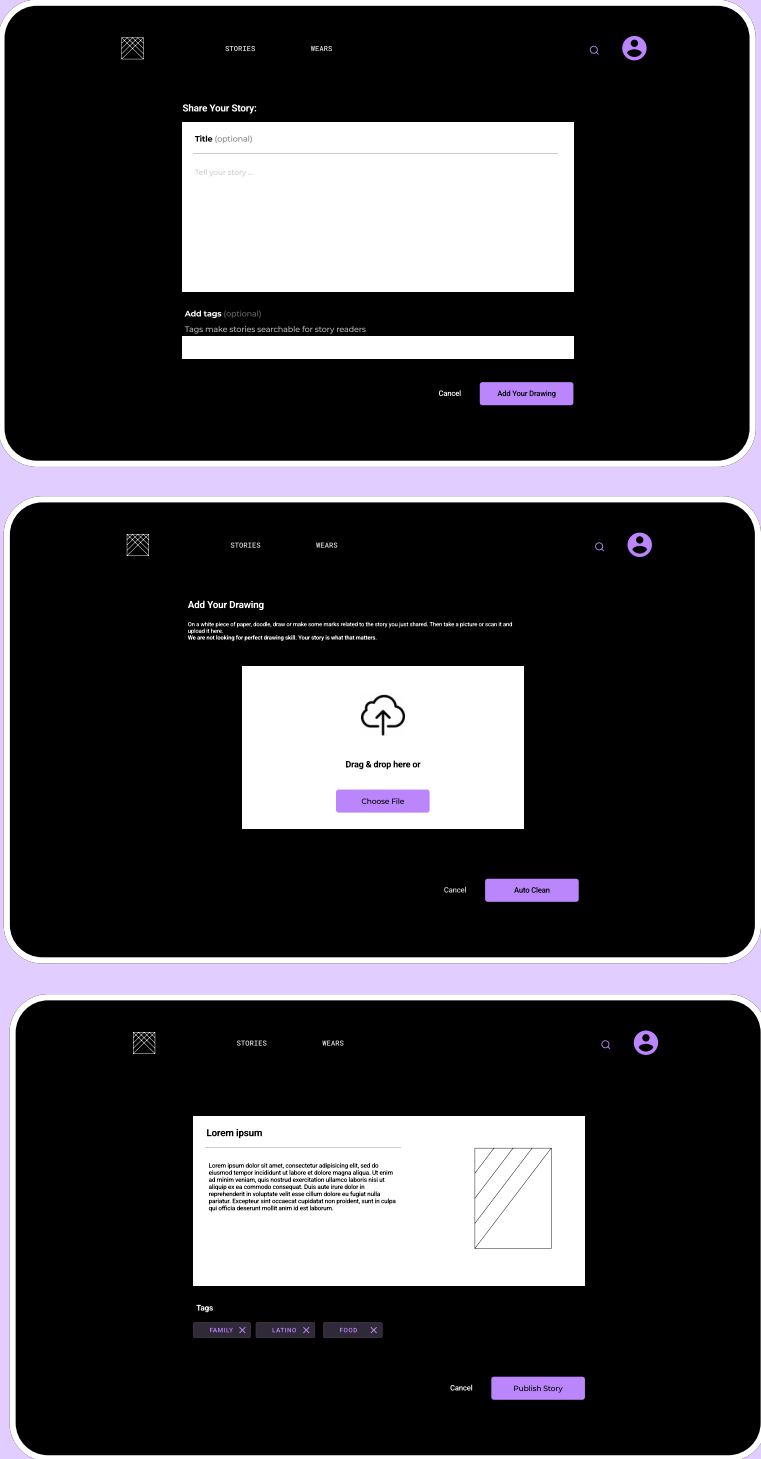
Fig 42. final digital platform wireframes



# Wireframes

Storyteller

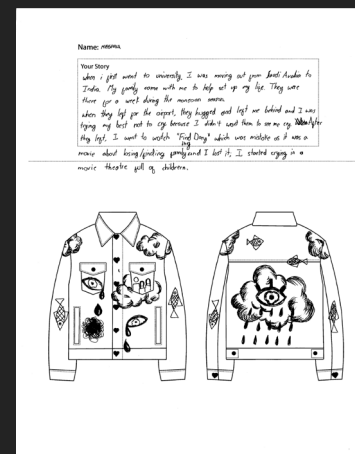
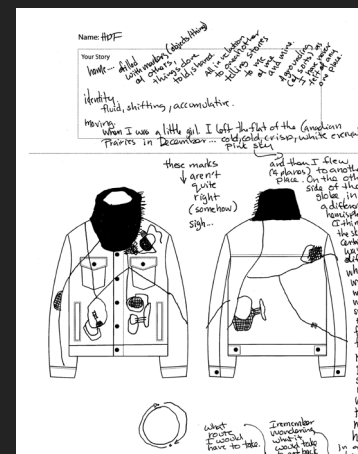
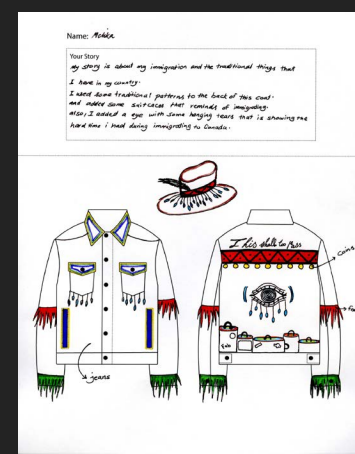
Wireframes



As an example, the interfaces for the storyteller to write, draw and upload their stories are designed like this.

Fig 43. wireframe for sharing stories





Now considering how the proposed system works based on the storyteller's contribution, I moved to the next step where I explored making the stories shared in the second storytelling and clothing workshop. As a refresher, I did a low-fidelity prototype to test how storytellers would share their stories on the platform. Moving to the next step made some pieces of clothing based on the stories shared in the workshop for either the storyteller themselves or a hypothetical storywearer.

# Expanding on Technology

## From Communication to Production

for the making of the clothing, I started learning new technologies and their capacities for helping me further develop the concept of storytelling on clothing. I wanted to explore different ways of making stories on textile by machines such as TC2 Jacquard Loom, Felting Loom and Digital Embroidery Machine. Before this, I explored a more traditional hand-involved craft process to convey the stories. The workshop with the transitional group was held with the storytellers drawing their stories on the pieces of fabric. But this time I invited machines to help me recreate those stories as well as make some stories shared at the second Slothing and Storytelling workshop. In other words, I intended to re-contextualize the traditional material making by digital form making to see the test the possibility of bringing the stories into the clothing.

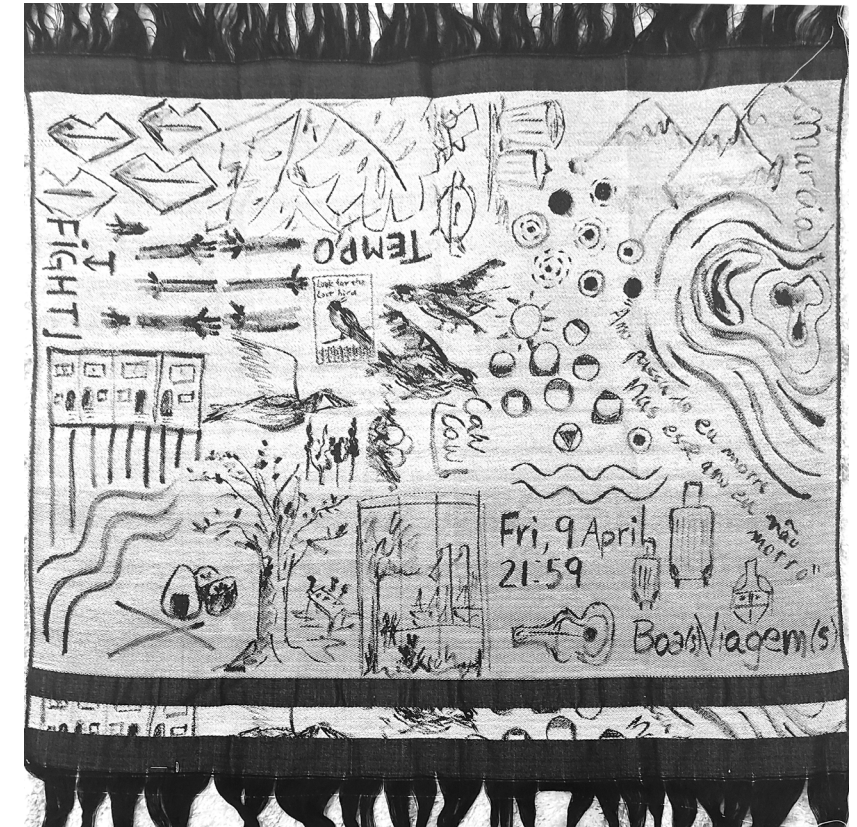


Fig 52 & 53. Marcia's story from Transitional Sharring session – woven by TC2 Jacquard Loom



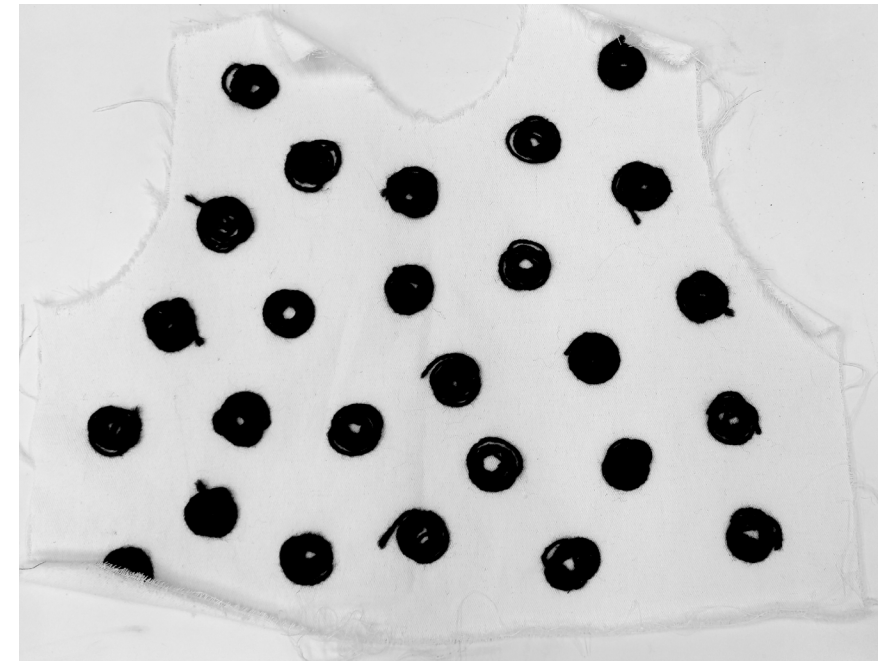


Fig 54, 55, & 56. final wears based on Meghna and Yun's story shared in *Second Storytelling & Clothing workshop* - done by Digital Embroidery Machine & Felting Loom



Fig 57 & 58. final collection based on Meghna Mitra's story  
shared in Second Storytelling & Clothing workshop  
(photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)





when i first went to university, I was moving out from Saudi Arabia to India. My family come with me to help set up my life. They were there for a week during the monsoon season. when they left for the airport, they hugged and left me behind and I was trying my best not to cry because I didn't want them to see me cry. ~~When~~ After they left, I went to watch "Find Dory" which was mistake as it was a movie about losing/<sup>ing</sup> finding family and I lost it; I started crying in a movie theatre full of children.

MEGHNA

Fig 59 & 60. final collection based on Meghna Mitra's story shared in Second Storytelling & Clothing workshop (photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)

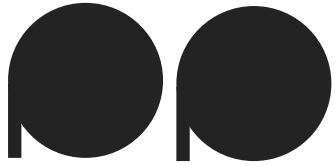




Fig 61 & 62. final collection based on Yun Xian 's story shared in Second Storytelling & Clothing workshop (photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)







Me (3yolds) and my mother  
infront of the Egyptian pharaoh  
in World park in Beijing, China.  
(They have everything, like twin towers)  
(The photo was taken in 1995)

I feel really glad that I packed a <sup>folder</sup> ~~folder~~ of old photos (in my hard  
that were digitized by my father years ago. Those photos <sup>disk</sup>  
feed my nostalgia and they are also helpful for  
my project.

Yun Xiao 肖筠

Fig 63. final collection based on Yun Xian 's story shared  
in Second Storytelling & Clothing workshop  
(photo by Mohammadhossein Sharifi)





photo credit: Skylar Kang - <https://www.pexels.com/>

*Threads to be Woven*

07



# Conclusion and Future Directions

This work was initiated with my personal experience of moving and further developed by its connection to similar experiences of others. Early explorations provided an understanding of the potentials of visual and/or oral storytelling for healing, expression and connection. Through workshops with peers, clothing was identified as a new context for storytelling. That is because clothing is not only tangible and interactive but also evocative. What started as a personal expression of immigration challenges, ended up communicating to so many people with different experiences of displacement. The fact that there were value and meaning behind every visual element of clothing and that every story is based on real experiences drew a lot of people into my way of storytelling. So my work gradually expanded to invite more people into this way of storytelling and even people who never had any experience of moving were interested in owning a piece of clothing with such narratives. All of these interactions showed a lot of potential for fashion practitioners to move toward a more personal narrative in their practice.

This research aimed to create a space for connecting people with experiences of moving to new places. Studying in the time of the Pandemic created both challenges and an opportunity space for collaboration and co-creation. Having

a shared moving experience with my cohort in the middle of our online study was a turning point in shaping the concept of storytelling on garments. This project broadened my vision into co-creation design for fashion where my audience actively played a role in different phases of my design research. All of my work was done collaboratively with people who have lived experiences of displacement, from the early making to the photography of garments, and final ideation and evaluation phases. It was practice-based research based on real stories and real experiences.

I explored a way of designing clothing that is more collaborative and expressive by asserting the importance of evaluating the role of the designer as a solo storyteller and considering instead the role of multi-story enabler. Focusing on this way of designing, the final design is a digital platform that invites people to share, read and wear displacement stories with others and act as both the initiator and holder of stories.

Right from the beginning of this research, I knew there are a lot of layers to this project. My project is just part of the proposed fashion structure that needs to be fully refined and structured to be optimized for real implementation. Moving forward, one focal point of the project that needs legitimate

and ethical research is how to give credit and compensate for the stories and the drawing that storytellers share in the system. If the stories are being used in the design process how to deal with the ownership of stories being used? Who own the stories? And how the system can value the stories when it comes to commercial benefits?

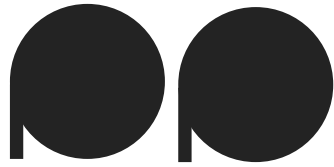
Moreover, in my attempt to change the role of designer from a single storyteller to a multi-story enabler, there have been some times that I questioned my authorship. Throughout the research, I tried my best to give voices to stories but in the end, I cannot ignore the fact that I did a lot of authoring. This occurred at different points in time when I wanted to translate the stories into garments, ideate, photoshoots and even write the thesis draft. The proposed research has never aimed to take away authorship from the designer but more of proposing a new way of authoring that embraces more voices other than of the designers themselves. Taking this approach, as a maker I ended up being in dialogue with stories and the stories became my material and my way of connection.

The storytelling element of my practice was an attempt to enable and validate multiple ways of being, thinking, knowing and world-making. Such an approach needs participatory co-design strategies and can be characterized

as a shift from the design of discrete objects and 'things' to relationships, interactions and experience (Irwin, et al, 2020). My take on co-design through this research varies from what co-design was originally defined, which refers to a process involving customers and users of products or services in their development. Instead of focusing on agendas and solutions, the co-design process in this research was shaped around shared values, meanings and the common good through the act of making together, conversation and workshops. My approach was in line with Sanders and Stappers's (2008) definition of co-design, which refers to "any act of collective creativity, i.e. creativity that is shared by two or more people". They used the term co-design in a narrower sense to refer to the "collective creativity as it is applied across the whole span of a design process". I have observed that this collective creativity enables the shift from single storytelling to multi-story enabling. In the process, the stories shared jumped from one medium to another. I followed the stories leads – mediating the deeply personal narratives across a wide range of mediums.

My next step is to give voice to all the stories shared with me. I want to explore the dialogue I can create on clothing between my personal stories and those similar to mine.

The jacket I made from the drawing with Meghna's story from my Second Storytelling and Clothing workshop held around the studios at Emily Carr University (see section Co-creation - Second Clothing and Storytelling Workshop) instigated a lot of unexpected conversation with random people who saw the jacket as I moved through the process of making it. When I finished the jacket and showed it to Meghna, she was unbelievably emotional and asked to wear the jacket. Wearing the jacket, she peered down at herself and the marks on the fabric, going through all the details of her story. We found ourselves in a wonderful loop, cycling back to the space of conversations and stories that she had shared in the workshop.

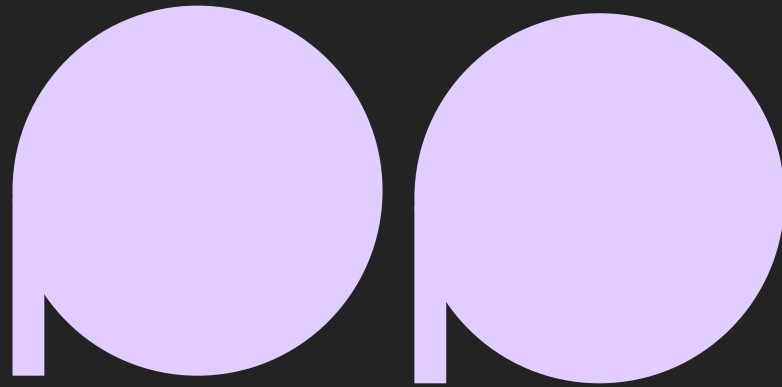


*I realised that as an **enabler** my role was not just about giving voices to stories but also how the stories continue – a process that involves translation, conversation, caring and returning to stories.”*

- Me

Fig 64. Meghna going through all the details after wearing the jacket made out of her own story





*“Stories go in circles. They don’t go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.”*

- Tafoya as cited in Wilson, 1995



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# Appendix

### Clothing & Storytelling

Name: Marcia Higuchi

These are a couple if questions regarding your clothing. It only takes a couple of minutes to fill in the form.

Please provide 5 colors you wore the most back at home

Please provide 5 colors you wear the most here in Vancouver

Please roughly draw or copy paste two patterns or motifs that you wore back at home. Don't fill this part if you wore no patterns. You can also name it like polkadot, strip, floral or traditional.

Floral

Thanks girls for your time and sharing.

### Clothing & Storytelling

Name: Meghna Mitra

These are a couple if questions regarding your clothing. It only takes a couple of minutes to fill in the form.

Please provide 5 colors you wore the most back at home

Please provide 5 colors you wear the most here in Vancouver

Please roughly draw or copy paste two patterns or motifs that you wore back at home. Don't fill this part if you wore no patterns. You can also name it like polkadot, strip, floral or traditional.

Horizontal or Vertical Stripes

Thanks girls for your time and sharing.

### Clothing & Storytelling

Name:

These are a couple if questions regarding your clothing. It only takes a couple of minutes to fill in the form.

Please provide 5 colors you wore the most back at home

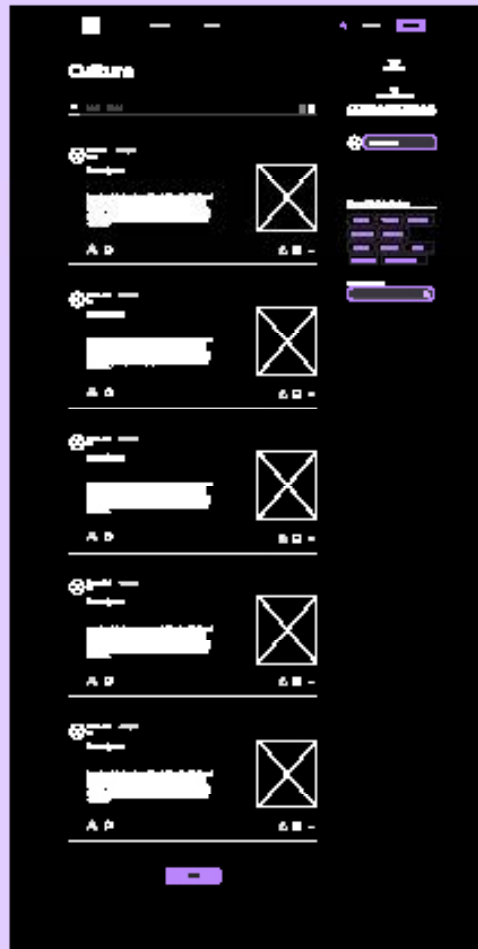
Please provide 5 colors you wear the most here in Vancouver

Please roughly draw or copy paste two patterns or motifs that you wore back at home. Don't fill this part if you wore no patterns. You can also name it like polkadot, strip, floral or traditional.

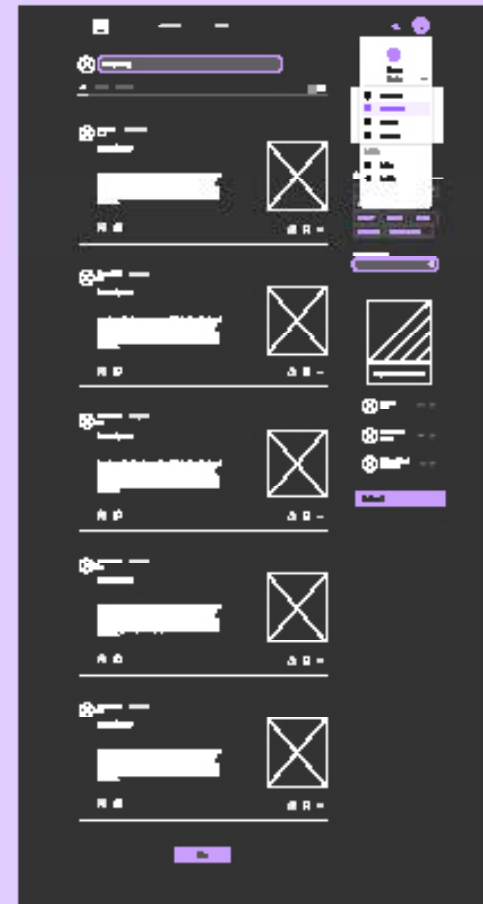
Thanks girls for your time and sharing.

Fig 60, 61 & 62. the Forms I asked Transitional Group to fill in prior to the cClothing & Storytelling Workshop

Reading Stories with tags



Profile Dropdown Menu



Navigation Drawer - Home



Buying Stories - Our Design

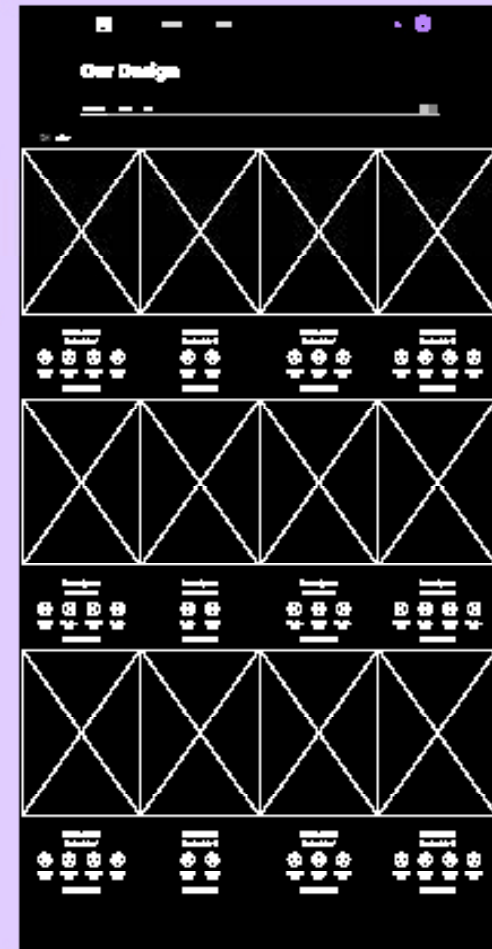


Fig 63. more wireframes for final platform idea

Date: 11/4/2021  
Project Title: Storytelling on Clothing

Student Researchers:  
Elham Atighi Lorestani, MDes Student  
Faculty of Design

Emily Carr University of Art and Design  
Phone number 604-773-5797 ; email address  
eatighilorestani@ecuad.ca

**A note from Elham Atighi Lorestani:**

The purpose of **'Storytelling on Clothing'** is to create a forum to consider, critique and suggest an alternative way of looking at the fashion service and design process. Fashion has always been about telling stories. This project draws on story as a framework for the design process as well as the content and the result. It recognizes that stories are often never told in any design process and frequently missing in the clothing we wear. Hidden stories such as those connected to the experiences of moving to a new place are important. They have value, and are part of the identity construction for many people in 21<sup>st</sup> century. **'Storytelling on Clothing'** asserts the importance of critically evaluating the role of the designer as the sole storyteller, and considers instead the role of the designer/ the design process as a multi-stories enabler. The designer is usually the dominant and the single storyteller that lies the key issue with stereotypes. "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are not true, but they are incomplete. They make 'one story' become the only story" (Adichie, as cited in Calderón Salazar, 2016). This scenario is similar to the commercialized and Western fashion system which only gives certain people a voice - making some communities visible while willfully neglecting others. I am concerned with this approach. I want to explore other ways of designing clothes which are pluriversal and act to give people a genuine way of expressing and sharing who they are.

This project invites people who have had to move from one place to another to share this by providing glimpse of a memory about three main themes:

- **Home** – Tell us about home. How would you define home?
- **Identity** – Describe identity in your terms.
- **Moving** – Share a significant experience of moving from a place to other place.

**My request is for you to:**

1. write a couple sentence responding to these themes

2. draw an aspect of your story that you would like to share. Your drawing can be as simple as making a few marks or it can be a more detailed drawing - whatever is most comfortable for you.

Identifiable material (your drawing and/ or writing) will be collected by way of video and audio recordings and also photography. The purpose of collecting this material includes:

- Design ideation and content for a clothing and storytelling digital platform
- Pattern design for the final clothing line for the thesis
- Content for the thesis publication
- My web portfolio

I agree to allow the following identifiable materials to be used in the publication of the research described above

Check all that apply:

**DIRECT QUOTATIONS -**

- ☐ Yes, I consent to being quoted in publications.
- ☐ No, I do not consent to being quoted in publications.

IDENTIFICATION-

- ☐ Yes, I consent to the inclusion of my identity (name) in publications.
- ☐ No, I do not consent to the inclusion of my identity (name) in publications.

IMAGES AND RECORDINGS OF ME OR OF MY PROPERTY -

- ☐ Yes, I consent to the use of digital images (photos or video) or audio recordings taken during the research to be used for publication purposes.
- ☐ No, I do not consent to the digital images (photos or videos) or audio recordings taken during the research to be used for publication purposes.

I agree to the release of identifiable materials as described above for the publications described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read here.

\* Please sign the next page if your answer to all the 3 release statement is YES and provide your email to receive a copy of this consent form.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in this project.



Amour Melica sottani  
Malukharshani  
10/11/2021

2AA NKWETA  
*[Signature]*  
 Nov 4 2021

Fat Vega  
~~Fat Vega~~  
 Nov 4 2021

Hilene Day Fraser  
Nov. 4, 2021

Yuhua Lin 4/10/2021  
April Tian

Yun Xiao 

Jingyuan Li

Fig 64. media release agreement for second sclothing and st[orytelling workshop

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

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