

# **A Basket of Offerings:**

## **Propositional Tactics to Design with Emergence**

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

MASTER OF DESIGN  
EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN  
2022



# Land Acknowledgment

This project took place in the unceded Indigenous territories of the Musqueam, Skxwú7mesh-ulh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh nations in the city colonially known as Vancouver. The text presented here uses colonial names of areas such as Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside neighborhood, while acknowledging that these lands are systematically stolen from Indigenous communities through colonial violence.

I continue to reflect on and reconcile the tension in my own identity of being a settler on stolen land and an immigrant from India. I do this by staying connected to my own cultural and ancestral practice that uphold values of healing and a commitment to relationality, enacting these in alignment with Indigenous paradigms. Through this project and ongoing work, I hope to support, learn from and put into practice knowledge held by these communities as a way to challenge colonial structures and systems.

# Acknowledgment

Thank you to my incredible supervisor Laura Kozak for opening up so many opportunities and helping me envision what meaningful change-making work could be like. You've taught me so many lessons around care and vulnerability. I owe you infinite gratitude for helping me understand the concept of pace and always reminding me to slow down. I will now, I promise.

And to supervisor Katherine Gillieson for bringing so much support and ease into this wild process.

Thank you Caylee Raber for all your trust and support over the years and for opening up so many opportunities and allowing me to take up space and test my voice. I continue to be inspired by and hope to emulate your thoughtful leadership.

Thank you to instructors Manuhuia Barcham, Craig Badke and Sophie Gaur for all your support and encouragement.

Thank you Bernadette Phan for reviewing this document, connecting me to the Indigenous Cultural Sharing Program and for always being an unwavering source of inspiration.

Nicole Bird and Elder Marr for your work at the Indigenous Culture Sharing Program and all the healing work you do.

Thank you to all my incredible colleagues at the Carnegie Outreach Team who I miss dearly.

Thank you Myrna Norman and everyone else associated with the Collaborate Gather Share project who have brought so much joy to my life.

And so much love and gratitude to Marcia Higuchi for being an amazing partner in crime on so many design stories and Melanie, Soumya, Sam, Kimia, Zahra and Aman for all the studio conversations that kept me going.

Most importantly a thank you to friends and family for putting up with me and caring for me throughout these wild few years.

**to Ma and Nani**

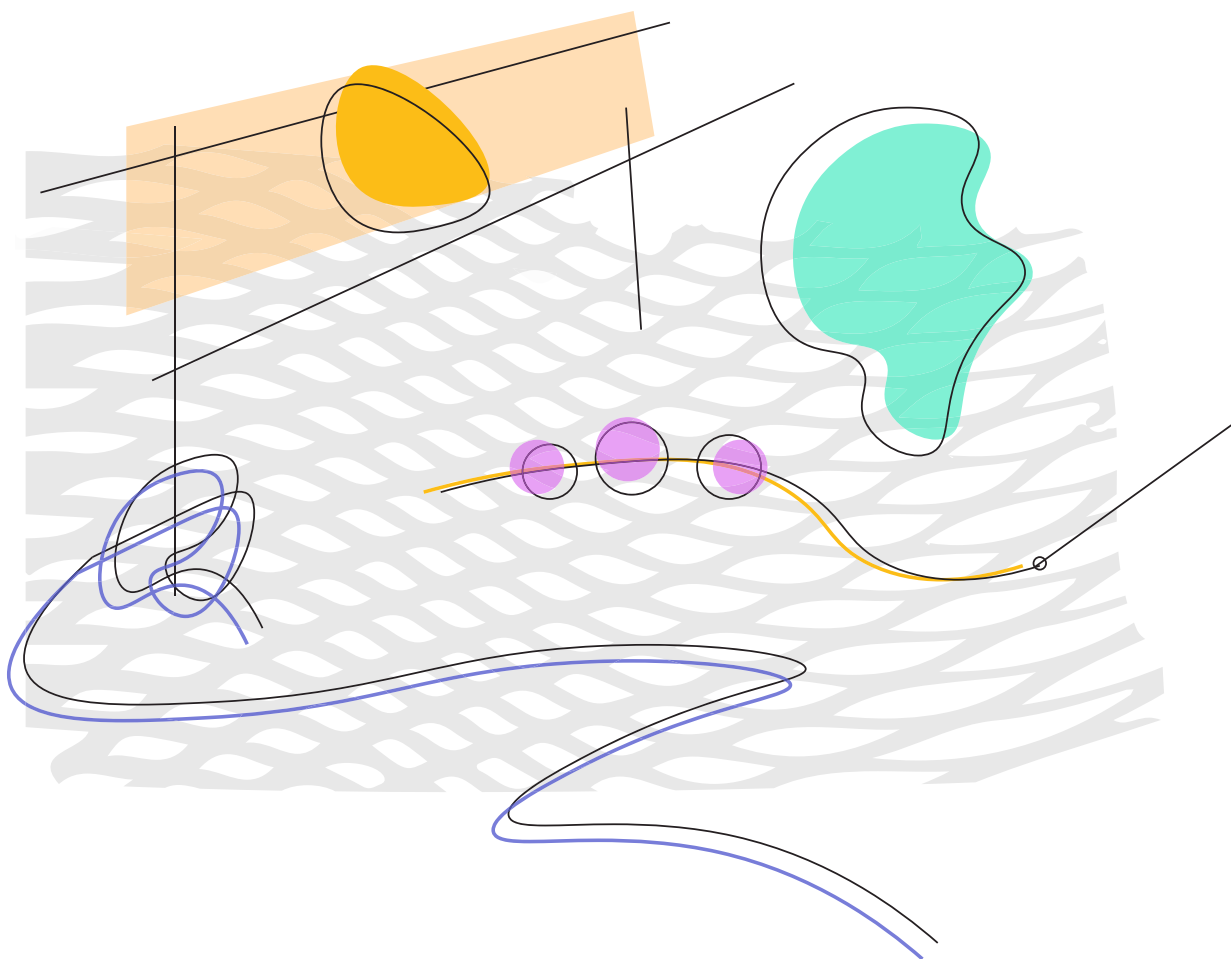
and all the female powerhouses in my life

# Abstract

As we continue to be confronted by multiple and overlapping systemic crises, it is imperative to respond to urgent needs while facilitating deeper healing and vision that supports future goals and possibilities. As such this project explores the role of design in facilitating this twofold imperative while focusing on design-as-inquiry work that is initiated to make sense of “wicked problems”. The underlying proposition of this project asserts that design-as-inquiry work can yield outcomes that are tethered to both immediate concerns and future possibilities when done in relational entanglement with emergent networks. Emergent networks are groups of collaborators that sit at the forefront of systemic challenges, continuously adapting to radical events by self-organizing into simple but multiple interactions of interdependence to navigate systemic barriers and dynamic conditions (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018).

This project explores collaborations with three distinct emergent networks to unpack a set of propositional tactics to facilitate relational entanglement with emergent networks in design-as-inquiry processes. For the purpose of this project, relational entanglement is viewed as the convergence and blurring of contextual, value-based and practice-based boundaries between designers and emergent networks to manifest deeply entangled inquiry methodologies and outcomes. Such methodologies and outcomes reflect the perspectives and experiences of inquiry partners while implicating the designer in the process by fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment to ongoing relationships. Through project research, it was observed that inquiry methodologies that grew out of different relational collaborations, were further getting entangled in practice, cultivating a dynamic and generative evolution and unfolding of design approaches applied across different projects. I find that these entanglements of methodologies and approaches stemming from collaborations with emergent networks have further shaped my overall design practice to be more emergent. This includes being more contextual, limber and adaptive to respond to urgent concerns while effectively creating space to envision future possibilities through inquiry. Like a basket woven from multiple strands of material, this continually unfolding design practice emerges from and reflects the underlying entanglement that gives the practice- the basket- its form and carrying capacity. The practice then acts as an offering- a manifestation of multiple entanglements- that designers bring to design spaces. As such the underlying proposition of this project is to redirect design work towards developing relational entanglements with emergent networks to support emergent work and be guided by emergence to better contend with dynamic and unpredictable conditions and crises.

Keywords: emergent networks, designing for complex and dynamic systemic conditions, design-as-inquiry, relational entanglement, dialogic process, power, reflexivity, witnessing and remembering, nourishing and sustaining



# Glossary

## *Design-as-inquiry*

Design-as-inquiry is an area of design that focuses on generating divergent conceptual pathways to make sense of complex problem spaces. In contrast to traditional design practices of prototyping and implementing design solutions, design-as-inquiry sits closer to the practice of social science research.

## *Emergent Networks*

Emergent networks are self-organizing networks that adapt to radical events through simple but multiple interactions of interdependence (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018). Without a commitment to any centralized authority, these networks self-generate to respond to urgent needs, while doing work that heals at a deeper level and has lasting impact

## *Methodology*

Methodology is an assemblage of decisions, methods and processes guiding a research or a project. Some social science research methodologies “regard the values, beliefs, practices and customs of communities as ‘barriers’ to research...” (Smith, 2012). To challenge this approach, the word methodology in this project, is a conversation between to underlying beliefs, values and practices and the procedural decisions that shape methods and project trajectories in an inquiry space.

## *Relational Entanglement*

Relational entanglement is a recognitions that all beings are interconnected including humans and non-humans (Haraway, 2016), which challenges epistemic categorizations endemic to western research and epistemological traditions. For the purpose of this project, relational entanglement is viewed as the convergence of contextual, value-based and practice-based boundaries between social agents. These sites of convergence and interconnections give rise to new positions, identities and even material realities (Giraud, 2019).

## *Systems of Oppression*

American Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) describes systems of oppressions as systems that shape and structure human experience and conditions. These include systems of race, gender, class and other social, political and economic, cultural and physical identities and affiliations “that help us think about how power, oppression, resistance, privilege, penalties, benefits and harms are systematically distributed (Costanza-Chock, 2020)

## *Tactics*

In design processes, tactics are design techniques that are continually translated and recalibrated to resonate with the underlying contexts, materials, actions, concepts and values of a design space (DiSalvo in Russell, 2017). Tactics challenge notions of replicability and universality upheld by Human-Centered and User-Centered approaches to design.



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# Introduction

In April 2021, I was part of the final three days of the decampment of Strathcona Park tent city in Vancouver[1]. I was there as an outreach worker to support homeless folks to move out of tents and into their next homes. During the last four days of the decampment, with chants and drums, we were welcomed by a group of Indigenous families with connection to folks in the tent city. In the dead center of Vancouver's homelessness crisis, we stood in a circle surrounded by about 130 tents, littered piles of belongings, carts, bottles, cans, clothes, tools, pipes, used needles, rot and rust. I remember noticing the constantly shifting landscape around us, from the mounds and boundaries of the litter to the tent homes that were cropped up and uprooted multiple times over in those four days. The scope of this "clean up" to remove these tiny and huge remnants of human and non-human life seemed overwhelming and unfathomable.

At one point during the ceremony, I remembered looking up at the trees, where a few birds settled into their nests. Meanwhile, the freight train carrying massive cargo containers rolled by the park, its engines, loud, angry, and enveloping, unconcerned by the proceedings of the ceremony, the tent city or the multiple crises at hand.

[1] The Strathcona Park Homeless Encampment, two kilometers from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside cropped up in late 2020 and housed over 200 people. While the tent provided a place to rest for many homeless people, the growing violence and overdose cases led the City of Vancouver to dismantle the encampment in April 2021 (St. Denis, 2020).

At the start of my graduate research in September 2020, I had been part of the City of Vancouver's homeless outreach program, the Carnegie Outreach Team for nearly five years. In this role, I supported homeless folks in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) community and implemented the City of Vancouver's homelessness strategy. This formative and formidable experience in one of the most unique neighborhoods[2] in Canada has informed my Master's research in Design. Being part of the Strathcona Park decampment was especially illustrative: crisis is systemic, multi-variant and overlapping; and people are resilient, generous, and tired. Walking around the park, we felt a sense of systemic urgency followed by helplessness as we talked about underlying factors associated with this crisis.

As a designer with roots in front line work, I reflect on design's capacity to respond to and work within this type of urgency as they become increasingly prevalent. We continue to be confronted by multiple and overlapping systemic crises including the burgeoning global pandemic of COVID-19, wide-spread inequality, disintegration of ecosystems, discrimination, and displacement. Meanwhile, design practices rooted in rationalist, modernist, and Euro-centric legacy (Escobar, 2018) prioritize linear thinking and problem solving for simplicity, replicability, and efficiency, undermining the inherently complex and uncertain nature of these crises (Akama, 2019). This is especially evident in Human-Centered, User-Centered and Double Diamond approaches to design that seek to universalize knowledge by overestimating Euro-centric values and practices. These approaches undermine knowledge produced and carried in the margins amongst those that have been historically left out of design conversations, generally non-European groups (Escobar, 2018), Indigenous people (Akama et al, 2019), women (Rosner, 2018b) and trans-gendered and queer folks (Costanza-Chock, 2020). The legacy of industrialization is visible in the business and corporate instrumentalization of these design methods to find quick and clean solution to drive progress at the expense of human interactions, relationality and embodiment (Akama et al, 2019). As such, these design practices are ill equipped to contend with complex and crisis problem spaces that arise out of interconnected and overlapping systems (health, economic, political, natural and socio-technical systems) that converge in messy ways. Responding to these types of problem spaces, "cleaning up" the mess requires an acknowledgment of the continually shifting and mutating, dynamic nature of this messiness. It also requires an appreciation of change in general which (Brown, 2017 and Akama et al., 2018), as author Octavia Butler describes, is a fundamental and constant condition of our existence: "All that you touch You Change. All that you Change

[2] The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Vancouver. The DTES community has cultivated a range of assets including community activism, creativity, diverse cultures, care and resilience (Newnham, 2015). The community is also confronted by the worst social and health challenges in Canada including poverty, mental illness, opioid crisis, homelessness crisis and increasing displacement due to gentrification amongst others (Housing and Mental Health: 2019 CCAP and Gallery Gachet Mental Health Project Report, 2019). Nonetheless, the community continues to show incredible resilience in the face of such systemic barriers.

Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change” (Butler, 1993).

Our contentious relationship to change is reflected in how we confront emerging problems. Constantly changing and shifting conditions preclude an anticipated clear path, which causes further stress and fear of change (brown, 2017). We are driven by fear (brown, 2017) and thus aspire for clean, reductive and simplified solutions in how to make sense of complexity (Akama et al., 2018). This was palpable at Strathcona Park in the hyper-bureaucratic institutional oversight which masked a lack of commitment to real change. But those of us walking through the maze of tents desperately craved change, deep systemic change that is larger than our individual reactionary tasks of rehousing people, quickly, and cleaning up the mess. We recognized that despite the imperative need to do this work, the work was a band aid for a broken system that instead needed to be healed at a deeper level. This conflicting moment of craving systemic change and creating future possibilities while tied to our immediate responsibility to respond with urgency has spawned this research project.

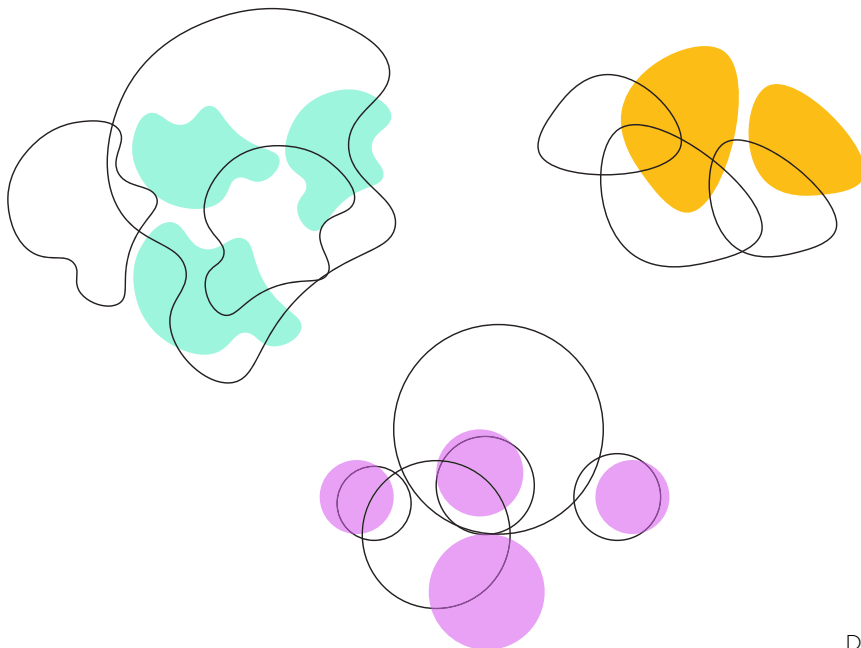
I reflected on the types of responses mobilized to contend with persisting problems. These responses prioritize either crisis-response work that deals with issues requiring immediate attention or visionary work to construct future possibilities that is frequently disconnected from real conditions and relationships. This distinction in responses seems limiting. I wondered how we can prioritize these simultaneously. In relation to design, I ask: How might designers facilitate this twofold work that responds to dynamic problems while being tethered to both immediate concerns and future implications and possibilities?

In this text, I situate this question within the practice of design-as-inquiry and unpack different approaches to achieving this twofold imperative. Part I of this text explores aspects of design-as-inquiry methods that can augment traditional research practices and support design work in “wicked problem” spaces. Part II includes summaries of case studies that allude to three different project collaborations. It also includes methodological considerations that were adopted for these projects and those that were derived from relational work. In Part III, I develop a dialogue around the tactics that came from these case studies, reflecting on pivotal interactions and insights that have informed the propositional premise of this thesis.

*Part i*

# Context + Lit Review

Emergence Perspectives  
Design as Inquiry



Distributed, local emergent interactions

*" I use the term 'sharing knowledge' deliberately, rather than the term 'sharing information' because to me the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented. By taking this approach seriously it is possible to introduce communities and people who may have had little formal schooling to a wider world, a world which includes people who think just like them, who share in their struggles and dreams and who voice their concerns in similar sorts of ways."*

- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*

# Emergence Perspectives

While participating in various community engagement projects to support my research, I found traces of the aforementioned approach being practiced by emergent networks. Emergent networks are self-organizing networks that adapt to radical events through simple but multiple interactions of interdependence (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018).[3] During my research, I found myself connected to three different emergent networks.

Working with the Carnegie Outreach Team, I was directly a part of multiple emergent collaborations. Initiated by the Outreach Team, community services, clinics and housing providers (to name a few) frequently collaborated to develop informal, grassroots and ad hoc relationships to better support underserved homeless clients.

Through Emily Carr's Health Design Lab, I worked in collaboration with an inter-regional network comprising of a group of advocates living with dementia working to make dementia research more collaborative, inclusive, and accessible.

I supported the Indigenous Culture Sharing Program, a program that emerged in response to the systemic severing of cultural connection and the consequent inter-generational trauma impacting Indigenous people in Canada.

These networks stand at the forefront of systemic challenges, innovating grassroots interventions to navigate dynamic conditions (Spade, 2020). They are characterized as local interactions and organizations that come together out of necessity to respond to urgent needs, while doing work that heals at a deeper level and has lasting impact. These are self-generated networks, exercising a degree of autonomy over their work, surpassing pressures arising from external factors

[3] Examples of these networks might include formal and informal social organizing, like mutual aid groups that emerged in response to the COVID 19 pandemic shutdown in 2020 (Spade, 2020).

[4] A good example of an emergent network is the collaborations that emerged to make income assistance more accessible to vulnerable homeless clients. Heavy digitization of social services in BC has disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable people who don't have access to digital tools and know-how. As a response, led by the Carnegie Outreach Team, community service providers in the Downtown Eastside and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction are collaborating in emergent ways to deliver small scale and ad hoc services to ensure that most vulnerable clients have access to income assistance. These service providers are adopting multiple methods to push through and navigate the challenges that have come with digitizing services. They are providing technological access and know-how to those in need of social services. For urgent cases, they are finding loopholes in Ministry's mandate to find alternative ways of applying for social assistance that either circumvent digital platforms or supplement non-digital relationships and interactions to this process. Furthermore, they are finding ways to advocate with the Ministry of Social Development to formalize these non-digital routes to access social assistance, creating long-lasting impact. Ad hoc collaborations between service providers are emerging organically- they are bottom up, self-organized and interdependent networks that work towards a common goal.



such as funding, elections or bureaucracy (brown, 2017). [4] Similar self-organizing behavior is found in different complex physical, biological and socio-cultural systems that are made up of multiple moving parts and lack centralized decision-making. Systems theorists label this self-organizing behavior as emergence because this behavior emerges in response to changing conditions and new challenges. Self organization takes place to share priorities, resources and supports, while being tethered to deeper goals and intentions to heal and sustain systems instead of a commitment to a centralized authority (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018). This type of behavior is visible in ant colonies, where ants know how to work without centralized instruction, shifting their roles and collaborating with each other to respond to unexpected events to sustain their colonies (Gordon, 2003) [5], or in “migrating birds who know how to get where they’re going even when a storm pushes them a hundred miles off course...”(brown, 2017).

Emergent networks mentioned in this project follow this type of behavior. They also share another common thread; These groups have been systemically or institutionally subjected to discrimination or marginalization (this also includes the Carnegie Outreach Team and the population they serve). When working with these groups that disproportionately bear the burden of systemic challenges, emergence perspectives is useful in highlighting their capacities and agency. This is because emergent interactions arise out of a network’s “tendencies to act in a particular way given an entity’s capacities, its dispositions, and instincts... that adjust in concert with the rest of the ecosystem’s responses” (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018). As such, attention on propensities and capacities can support a reframing of deficit narratives to narratives of power and agency. [6]

When working in complex problems spaces that are propelled by multiple or overlapping systems without central coordination, emergence can provide inspiration and guidance on how to be responsive with urgency while also shaping future possibilities. By focusing on emergent interactions and behaviors, we can reproduce or sustain emergent models of working that are equipped to thrive in complex and dynamic conditions (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018).

The project, A Basket of Offerings, outlined here attempts to highlight emergent characteristics of emergent networks to propose a process of being intentionally guided and shaped by these networks and their ability to thrive in ever shifting and mutating complexity. In this project, situating design within emergence perspectives to facilitate work that is

[5] An ant colony is a great example and analogy of this emergent work and how emergent networks organize. In ant colonies, there is no central control or management or direction of what individual ants should or shouldn’t do. Ants in a colony work individually and in collaboration with each other (Gordon, 2003).

Ant colonies adjust to changing conditions (ex. floods that damage colony nests) by taking on tasks that require urgent attention like cleaning up the mess in flooding situations or doing nest maintenance when cracks form. This task allocation is facilitated by different signals emitted by ants creating varying feedback loops that move ant power to where its most necessary. They rely on each other’s signals to inform their tasks and sustain the larger colony. These are interdependent interactions; tasks performed by one ant effect the task of the others. They are constantly taking on different roles to meet the needs of the larger colony. These are emergent interactions, they are responsive to urgent needs while shaping conditions to sustain and heal underlying systems (Gordon, 2003).

[6] This project proposes propositional ideas on how to foster design practices that are grounded in relational responsible to our design collaborators and partners who are constantly designing in their own contexts, even though they are subject to marginalization and their work is not defined as design.

simultaneously reactionary and supports deeper goals and future possibilities, I explored how designers can internalize emergent characteristics in their own work by being relationally entangled with emergent networks in design inquiry projects. I first propose that a process of design inquiry (problematizing and inquiring an issue) can be mobilized to have both responsive and long-lasting impact when done in relational entanglement with emergent networks. As such, I propose a design practice that is deeply focused on developing design-as-inquiry methodologies that facilitate relational entanglement with emergent networks. In design-as-inquiry spaces, relational entanglement can support a blurring of contextual, value-based and practice-based boundaries between designers and emergent networks to manifest deeply entangled inquiry outcomes that are responsive to urgent concerns and tethered to deeper intentions and future implications.

### **Characteristics of emergent networks**

Their work is not driven by any centralized control

They adapt to radical events through simple but multiple interactions of interdependence

Their reliance on interdependence suggests an underlying primacy of relationality

They sit at the forefront of systemic challenges, constantly navigating multiple barriers

They are responsive to urgent needs of their community

They work to heal at a deeper level.

# Design as a Form of Inquiry

Design as a form of inquiry can be mobilized to have both responsive and long-lasting impact when conducted in relational entanglement with emergent networks. The role of design is increasingly shifting, whereby designers are being tasked with “wicked problems” that are “difficult and impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize” (Rittel and Webber in Sanders and Stappers, 2013; Buchanan, 1992). As such there is greater emphasis on the front end of design that is concerned with the practice of inquiring and making sense of complex problem spaces to develop that recognition (Sanders and Stappers, 2013).[7] Design-as-inquiry differs from design's traditional focus on prototyping and implementing design solutions. It sits closer to the practice of social science research and can augment knowledge-producing practices that inform decision-making and outcomes (Frankel & Racine, 2010).

I note gaps in traditional research and data gathering practices in healthcare and social planning to suggest areas where design methods can play a constructive role. These research practices are frequently criticized for producing evidence and outcomes that are not representative of peoples' lived experiences and are disconnected from systemic context (Wuttunee, 2019; Lin, 2017; Costanza-Chock, 2018; D'ignazio & Klein, 2020). The politics of categorization and atomization of knowledge is endemic to practices of data collection in these spaces and leads to an oversimplification of complex systemic issues (Bowker & Star, 2000; D'ignazio & Klein, 2020).[8] Furthermore, exclusionary data gathering practices in research yield data that is decontextualized (Simpson, 2014) and result

[7] There is power in inquiry processes as it produces knowledge that shapes outcomes and as such can change outcomes. Knowledge systems are precious. Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) says, “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions. Rebecca Burgess, who works at the intersection of circular fiber systems and ecology describes knowledge systems as blood. She says, “what if you could change what type of nutrients you're putting through (blood), through... systems of knowledge. You change the content. You change up some of the policies about who you're serving and how you're serving”(Fiber-shed Field School: Emily Carr University, 2021). Being attentive to modes and processes of knowledge-production targets the blood lines of problem spaces- the underlying survival systems.

[8] It is important to note that similar critiques are voiced in design-as-inquiry approaches that follows human-centered or user-centered approaches, as well as aspects of co-design and participatory methods. As mentioned above, these reductive approaches universalize and decontextualize knowledge (Akama et al., 2019). As such the goal of this project is to reject reductionism in social science and design research, alike and complicate how we make sense in inquiry spaces.

While being attentive to critiques of design, this literature review focuses on aspects of design practice and methods that can produce positive and inclusive outcomes in research spaces.

in reproduction of specific assumptions, norms and institutions that can perpetuate disparity (D'ignazio & Klein, 2020).[9]

Instead, design-as-inquiry as an alternative or a way to augment traditional data gathering and research practices can facilitate co-creation of knowledge that has ontological significance to shape desirable futures (Steen, 2013). Design-as-inquiry[10] is equipped to represent lived experience as it centers sharing of and reflecting on experiences as the method to arrive at knowledge. As such “competency, contextual appropriateness and transferability can legitimately underscore an inquiry’s conclusions” (Dixon, 2017), which is much needed in research processes.

Furthermore, knowledge created through design-as-inquiry is used not to propose a reality, but to propel further inquiry (Dixon, 2017) and provoke new ways of thinking (McKercher, 2020). This divergent approach invites multiple conceptual pathways and perspectives to envision new and alternative arrangements of systemic parts and actors (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018; Rosner, 2018). Through the process of inquiry, the inquirer mobilizes a process of ontological transformation by drawing into focus or reconstructing relationships and meanings from existing people, things and consequences as they surface (Dixon, 2017). Rejecting reductive problem solving in favor of divergent strategies to envision new possibilities pushes us beyond what we already know towards what we have yet to discover together through inquiry (Akama et al., 2018).

To gather data and produce insights that are contextual and rooted in lived experience, design can facilitate process by which “people are empowered to jointly reflect on their practices and experiences, to communicate and cooperate, and to improve their own or other people’s situations” (Steen, 2013). Widely adopted co-design and participatory methods of gathering data invites those served by design to contribute to this collective sense-making process of inquiry, idea generation and concept development (Sanders and Stappers, 2013). Meanwhile, practitioners are continually evolving co-design to bring in intentional methods that correct power imbalance

[9] To illustrate this using a local example, the City of Vancouver’s overdose data overemphasizes deficits and medicalization of opioid use in Indigenous population, while overlooking systemic barriers underlying the opioid crisis as well as those resilient, healing, and relational practices that are emerging in response (Wuttunee, 2019). This is largely due to the exclusion of Indigenous people in collection of data and decision-making processes, effectively rendering this population’s experiences invisible (Wuttunee, 2019).

[10] Design-as-inquiry presented in this literature review follows John Dewey’s theory of inquiry insofar as it asserts the centrality of experience, virtue of divergence in inquiry and the transformative ontological implication of the inquiry process (Dixon, 2017). My own approach to design research diverges from Dewey’s pragmatism in his assertion that pre-inquiry experiences are considered as non-knowing states (indeterminate problem spaces (Steen, 2013)) and the inquirer espouses some superlative ability to facilitate knowledge construction through a reflexive process of merging unknown concepts and relationships shared by those participating in an inquiry process. In my experience working with emergent networks, those most impacted by and entrenched in problem spaces have an embodied understanding of these problems spaces and can usually conceptualize causal factors, underlying systems and relationships. The assumption that inquiry process tackles indeterminate problems spaces undermines knowledge carried-embodied and practiced- by effected groups. These groups are continually putting their knowledge to practice in their contexts prior to participating in any inquiry process. Knowledge carried by those participating in inquiry prior to coming together is fundamental to the propositions presented in this project.

between researchers and those participating in design inquiry (Noel, 2022; Qazi, 2018). [11]

Meanwhile, moving away from co-design that values participation of those served by design from a user standpoint, design justice practitioners endorse Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR mobilizes community knowledge and action to engender citizen power and agency in developing and sustaining design outcomes (Arnstein, 1969). Design justice practitioners propose designing in collaboration with emergent community networks to foster conditions of power that resist systems of oppression. Such a process produces outcomes that first serve the most marginalized (Costanza-Chock, 2018) and creates outcomes that are responsive to urgent needs while fostering transformative change (brown, 2017).

To extend this further, I suggest a design practice that amalgamates co-design methods and participatory action research insofar as they support an imperative to foster relational entanglement with emergent networks. Relational entanglement is viewed as the convergence of contextual, value-based and practice-based boundaries between social agents. These sites of convergence and interconnections give rise to new positions, identities and even material realities (Giraud, 2019). To foster relational entanglement requires a focus on power dynamics and mobilization of methods that resist systems of oppression to ensure that emergent networks are meaningful and fully taking up space in design-as-inquiry process. In this way, my approach to design sits closest to participatory action research, with co-design methods adopted at various stages of a project. I propose that designers can foster relational entanglement by developing relational methodologies in design-as-inquiry projects that weave together values, systemic contexts, lived experiences and practices of people most impacted by design with designers' own experiences, values and practice-based offerings. Methodologies that facilitate relational entanglements create research outcomes that are representative of research collaborators and implicate the designer in the process of inquiry, influencing designers to practice in generative, adaptive and emergent ways.

This proposition grew out of various collaborations that took place during my research. Details of these collaborations are described in the following section of this text.

[11] As I describe co-design and participatory practices as constructive approaches to augment research practices, I want to be attentive to critiques of co-design and participatory methods. Co-design and other participatory practices are frequently co-opted by corporate “design thinkers” to whitewash businesses with superficial “innovation” branding and are ignorant to issues of disempowerment caused by systems of oppression. Design Justice theorists criticize co-design practices that are couched in values and funding that favors quick technical solutions whereby designers “parachute in” to communities and organizations to tell them how things should be done, ignoring knowledge already held by communities (Costanza-Chock, 2018).

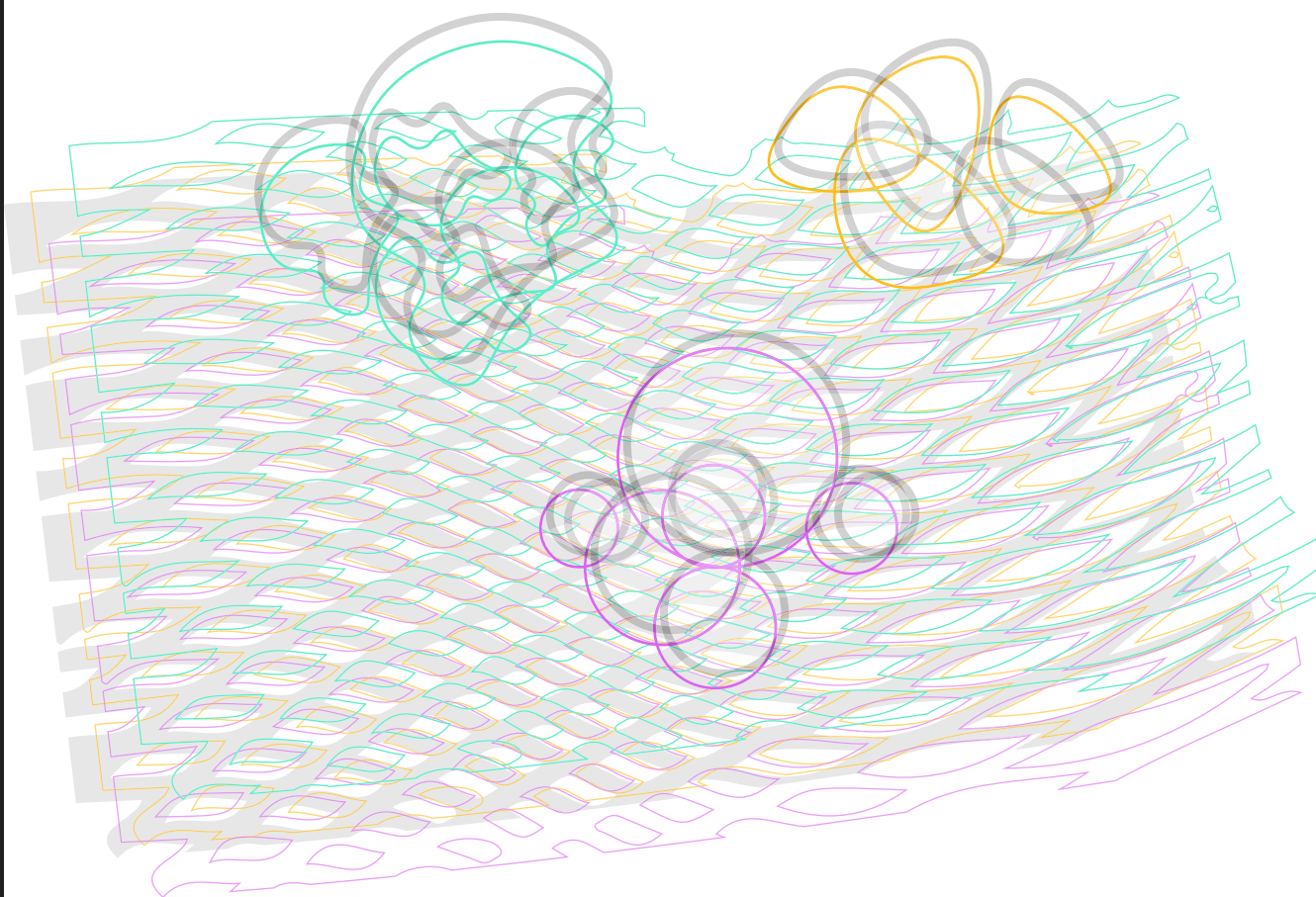
As a response, justice driven tools, such as Hajira Qazi's Participation and Power and Lesley-Ann Noel's The Designer's Critical Literacy Alphabet have emerged to highlight myths about participatory design methods that can otherwise mask imbalances of power and colonial mindsets. These tools provide new and radical conceptual ways to hold designers accountable to critical and reflexive paradigms that challenge existing systems of oppression. Hajira Qazi asserts that participatory methods are not inherently democratic, innovative, symbiotic, inclusive or ongoing; Instead, they require a great deal of consideration, self-reflection and effort to recognize, assess and correct power imbalance (Qazi, 2018).

*Part ii*

# Case studies

One: Collaborate Gather Share  
Two: Carnegie Outreach Workshop  
Three: Indigenous Culture Sharing  
program

Fostering Relational Methodologies





**Collaborate Gather Share  
Project**

Collaborators: Health Design, Lab, Alzheimer's Society of BC, Researchers Gloria Puurveen (University of British Columbia) and Jody Gawryluk (University of Victoria), Myrna Norman + a group of dementia advocates

Oct 2020-May 2022

## *Case study one:* **Collaborate, Gather, Share**

In 2021, I participated in Collaborate, Gather, Share, a generative research project initiated by the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University and design work supported by designer Marcia Higuchi [12]. The project sought to shift dementia research practices to inculcate person-centered and inclusive strategies that amplify the experiences and voices of people living with dementia (Dementia-Friendly Research, 2021). Participatory and generative design research methods were adopted in this project to understand how people living with dementia contribute to or collaborate in dementia research, identifying successes and barriers to participation.

Throughout the project we worked collaboratively with a group of health researchers, folks from the Alzheimer's Society of British Columbia (ASBC), a group of people living with dementia and the design team at the Health Design Lab. This project culminated in a set of resources including (1) a reflexive workbook for researchers, (2) a pamphlet for recruiting people living with dementia into research and (3) a research-sharing and recruitment symposium led by people living with dementia (See appendix 1-3).

Mid-way through the project, we invited a co-designer living with dementia to our project team. She further invited a group of advocates living with dementia to guide project priorities and outcomes. We started this collaboration by learning about and mapping our co-designer's experiences of participating in research and their relationship to the larger dementia community. We found that they were involved in various advocacy and support groups that emerged out of necessity in response to barriers in healthcare and the social isolation brought on by the pandemic. Conceptualizing our co-designers as an emergent network, we noticed that this interdependent group was bonded by their shared relationship to their diagnosis and connection to health systems, as well as their shared advocacy practices that center agency, capacity

[12] Collaborate Gather Share project has lasted a year and half starting in October 2020. The project has gone through three distinct phases. The first phase included generative priority setting that started with two workshops that brought together a group of dementia researchers (quality of life and bio-medical researchers), designers, people living with dementia and caregivers. This phase culminated in a reflexive workbook for researchers.

The second phase included co-designing with people living with dementia to make dementia-research more inclusive to partners with lived experiences. This phase led to the design of a recruitment pamphlet that would connect people interested in collaborating in research with dementia researchers.

The final phase of this project included planning a recruitment and research symposium, a relational alternative that would further connect researchers with people living with dementia interested in research.

Further details and resources of this project can be found here: <https://research.ecuad.ca/healthdesignlab/2022/03/09/collaborate-gather-share-research-symposium/>



and joy. They are like adrienne maree brown's (2017) flock of migrating birds, navigating the challenges of health systems and health emergencies through deep interdependence and collaboration.

Working with this group encouraged us to reassess our own roles as designers, shifting our focus towards amplifying their emergent ways of working to facilitate work that is mutually defined and prioritized. Our research methodology in this project was informed by our relationship. We embed their practices and values in our work and share our experiences and practice with them, fostering relational connections and emergent ways of working that carry forward beyond the scope of this project.



Fig. 1: Marcia Higuchi & Garima Sood, Collaborate Gather Share Panel poster. 2021. Digital Drawing. Shared on Social Media.



Fig. 2: Collaborate Gather Share Panel Discussion. 2021. Screen Shot. Shared on Social Media. Recorded with consent of attendees.

## Case study two: Carnegie Outreach Workshop

Collaborators: Carnegie  
Outreach Team

April - Oct 2021

In the second case study, I describe explorations and reflections on my work as an outreach worker for the Carnegie Outreach Team, [13] part of City of Vancouver's homelessness services strategy. Even though the Team serves a branch of the municipal government, historically their work has been rooted in community to serve urgent community needs in resourceful and resilient ways. This work has shaped my understanding of complex environments and how emergent relationships can support work that fills in systemic gaps.

As such, I was keen on engaging with my colleagues at the Outreach Team to identify and define unique characteristics of this team [14], including practices of interdependence and resilience as an alternative approach to other bureaucratic top-down and centralized models of service delivery. I organized three informal conversations [15] with my colleagues and three Ethics Board approved participatory workshops with the Team (See Appendix 4&5). The Research Ethics Board approved workshops were organized to take place at the Team's office to (1) capture the nature of their work and the systems and conditions they work within; and (2) to foster a culture of participation and bottom-up knowledge-production that felt missing amidst the burgeoning stress of their environment.

Participatory workshops validated the emergent nature of this Team. In their day-to-day work, the team is constantly navigating various bureaucratic hurdles by forming ad-hoc relationships with housing providers, community clinics, social workers, government organizations, amongst others, to fill service gaps. The most crucial lessons from the workshops spoke to the complexity of this environment including tense power dynamics, systems related trauma and multiple crises impacting this research setting, all of which shaped the inquiry process and outcomes.

[13] The City of Vancouver refers to this team as the Homelessness Service Outreach Team (City of Vancouver, 2022) but in the community, the team is known as the Carnegie Outreach Team in connection to the community center that serves the neighborhood with its root in community. An apt headline and tagline in a Vancouver Sun news article referring to this team and their iconic red jackets says, "Red jacket means help here: Outreach workers know the streets, the street people, and are pure gold out there" (Shore, 2007).

[14] Through conversations with folks that have been a part of the Carnegie Outreach Team since its inception in the late 90s, I learnt that the team has radical roots. It emerged as a response to the relocation of drug activities in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The program supported activities at the doorstep of the local Carnegie Community Centre to make access to the Centre safer and easier, as a relational alternative to security. The Team's priorities shifted to harm reduction work due to the burgeoning HIV crisis in the neighborhood in the early 2000s (Adilman & Kliever, 2000). This set a precedent for harm reduction work that is now a status quo practice in Vancouver. A colleague who has worked in the organizations since its early days says, "strategies that grew out of this work is one of trust and impartial assistance". To this day, the "the old timers" refer to the team's organization and structure as "cowboy ways of working" and the current program coordinator as a "punk who gets shit done and we just say yes."

[15] Informal conversations took place at cafes and bars. These conversations were very insightful. They informed the relational methodology and its emphasis on participation that I adopted for the subsequent research workshops.

## Case study three: **Indigenous Culture Sharing**

Collaborators: Indigenous  
Elders, Program coordinators,  
volunteers and participants

Sept 2021 to April 2022

Around this time, I felt an instinctive need to shift my relationship to the Downtown Eastside neighborhood from crisis-response work towards a more community-oriented approach. I started supporting the Indigenous Culture Sharing Program [16] organized by a group of Indigenous community members. The program is another example of an emergent network made of program coordinators, program support, Indigenous Elders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community volunteers and other participants in cultural sharing activities. Indigenous elders in the program facilitate activities to share culturally relevant craft workshops for the Downtown Eastside population, especially those seeking to connect with Indigenous cultural roots. When I first started supporting the program, I saw parallels between my relationship to this program with how designers might come into community spaces to facilitate design work. With time, immersing myself and building relationships with people in the program, I felt tied to this space and relationally entangled with these people. I was invited to witness Indigenous relationality and to better understand the ethics and obligations that come with Indigenous practice of witnessing. This experience has informed an integral part of the tactical propositions offered in this project.

It is important to note that while both the outreach and the Cultural Sharing program serve the same population, and both have emergent and relational origins, the Carnegie Outreach Team's work is increasingly influenced by City politics in the last few years. In contrast, the Cultural Sharing Program continues to be driven by emergent priorities and community relationships.

[16] The Indigenous Culture Sharing program is housed in the Carnegie Community Centre and was started in 2015 to bring cultural connection to community members. The program relies on City funding as well as multiple grants to sustain the work. It's important to note the significance of this program in highlighting the need and setting a precedent for indigenous gathering and decision-making spaces in the Downtown Eastside and within a City-funded community center. This program influenced the organization of an Indigenous advisory board in the community center (2018) which illustrates the kind of long-lasting impact that emergent collaborations can have.

# Fostering Relational Methodologies

The methodologies that I adopted in these three project involvements, including the process of research and the types of questions asked, were driven by an intuitive approach that was relevant to the questions at hand and my collaborators' contexts. In each of these projects, I adopted a different methodology (see fig section- An Entanglement of Methodologies) and tried my best to inculcate values of relational responsibility in methodological decisions and project processes; I felt accountable to my collaborators (Wilson, 2008; Simpson, 2014). My interactions and dialogue with collaborators about their contexts, ways of working (practices), concerns stemming from lived experiences and underlying values shaped the methodologies I adopted, which further yielded relational exchange.

Through dialogue and interactions, collaborators' standpoints and perspectives merged with designers' assumptions, beliefs and practice. I perceive this merging as relational entanglement [17] as described by theorist Karen Barad. She describes the moment when two stones are dropped in water causing two distinct ripples. These ripples converge and complicate each other to make a third pattern (Barad, 2007). The convergence and complication of these patterns is relational entanglement. [18]

In relation to research, this analogy was exemplified during the Collaborate Gather Share project. Our co-designers approached their work by centering capacity and agency in how they combat stigma. This, converging with the design team's values and practice around aging and creative research, as well as my own experience with witnessing methodology shaped the methodology for the second phase of this work. The

[17] Relationality frameworks highlight the primacy of relationships in shaping reality. According to theorist Hannah Arendt, "the world lies between people" and in in-between spaces (Hannah Arendt in Tassinari et al., 2020). These in-between spaces, sites of interconnection are relational entanglements where personal and social position and location, as well as material realities emerge (Barad 2007, Giraud, 2019). Furthermore, these interconnections shape the agency and affordances of entangled actors (Barad 2007). These assertions underscore the ontological significance of relationality; relational moments catalyze new ontologies and models of envisioning that are consequently relational (Escobar, 2018).

[18] The collaborations in all these projects felt deeper and entangled, taking on ineffable properties that transcend the definition of collaboration. I see a distinction between collaboration and entanglement wherein collaborative interactions are reflected in outcome whereas entangled interactions are reflected in the entire process of a collaboration and felt in the body. These entanglements were felt in the knots in my belly reminding me "I don't want to disappoint these people I am responsible to" or in my eyes welling up when we got to share moments of stumbling and success together. We were entangled, sharing stake in the work and how the work is done. Most importantly, the traces of entanglement remained beyond the project, felt in the slight shifts in my bones- in how I take up space now- in how I move my fingers- to make, in how I make sense of the world around me and how I practice as a designer. This is the legacy of entanglement. We wove together our beliefs, experiences, practices. We wove a basket.

methodological imperative of “flipping notions of expertise” which was founded on an amalgamation of capacity, agency, creativity and witnessing guided the project. In this way the process and outcome driven by relational entanglement represented our collaborators’ experiences and values. Furthermore, as designers, we were enmeshed and implicated in the inquiry process. Our own values and beliefs shaped the work, emphasizing a need for reflexive awareness of the contexts, beliefs, and values that we carried into research.

In other projects, similar collaborative entanglements shaped research methodologies and further supported the reproduction of relational work. Most significantly, different methodologies growing out of different collaborative works were also getting intertwined and entangled, cultivating a dynamic and generative evolution, and unfolding of approaches applied across different projects [19]. These entangled methodologies, approaches and experiences formed and shaped my overall design practice. My practice became like a basket that is made of multiple entangled approaches and contexts of working- a basket that enfolds a set of relational and emergent values and unfolds a way of designing in complex situations and spaces. What is unfolded through and carried within this basket is a set of propositional tactics to design with emergence, which is presented in the following section of this text.

The contextual entanglements that have shaped the basket-my practice has fostered a way of working that is in turn contextual, adaptive to urgent concerns that might come up in inquiry spaces while effectively creating space to envision future possibilities through inquiry by honoring contextual discoveries. This key assertion is woven in throughout the following sections that describe various tactics of fostering relational work and is further unpacked in the basket weaving analogy in the conclusion of this text.

[19] An emphasis on methodology felt important in this conversation of design-as-inquiry because methodological considerations reflect and reproduces underlying beliefs and value systems that shape research and outcomes (Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012). This calls for an attentiveness to the types of beliefs and values that are introduced to research methodologies to produce intentional outcomes.

**Significance of project methodologies that are informed by and facilitate relational entanglements. They:**

- Create research processes and outcomes that are representative of project collaborators
- Implicate the designer in the process of inquiry
- Are rooted in context
- Transform design practice, making practice more
  - Generative and constantly evolving
  - Emergent in nature- that is attuned to urgent needs while also creating conditions for inquiry that facilitates future envisioning



# An Entanglement of Methodologies

## ***Gather Collaborate Share***

Flipping notions of expertise

- Decentering designers and researchers
- Trusting and supporting capacity of co-designers living with dementia

## ***Indigenous Culture Sharing***

Witnessing and remembering

- Witnessing important interactions and relational moments
- Carrying forward the knowledge of this program and applying it to other contexts

## ***Carnegie Outreach Workshop***

Relational participation

- Fostering a space and culture of bottom-up participation
- Fostering a relational interaction through workshops to focus on staff relationships with community, systems and each other

## ***A Basket of Offerings***

Weaving entanglements of various emergent approaches

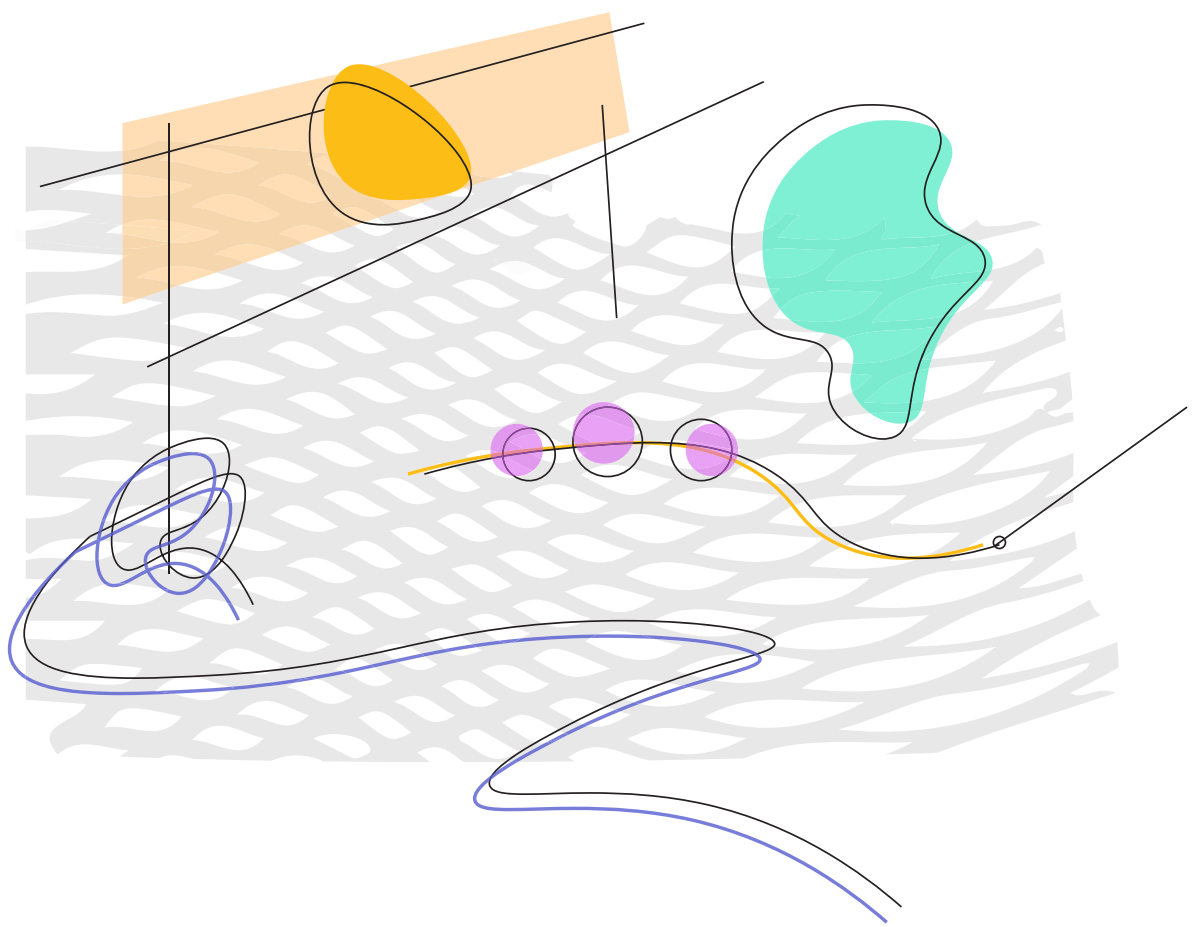
- Applying testing and recalibrating similar research methodologies and approaches across multiple projects
- Interweaving contexts, values, lived experience considerations and approaches through multiple projects to inform a larger design practice

*Part iii*

# Tactic Offerings

Tactic offerings

Table as tactic  
Play-doh as tactic  
String as tactic  
Needle-thread-beads as tactic  
Taco as tactic



A basket of offerings



# Tactic Offerings- reconceptualization of ‘methods’

In relationally entangled processes, a deeper commitment to ongoing relationships motivates a sense of reciprocity, responsibility and attentiveness to how we show up as designers in design-as-inquiry spaces (Akama, 2019). I imagine what we bring with us to these spaces as a set of reciprocal offerings. As such, a key outcome of this project research is a set of offerings that are unpacked in the following sections. These offerings are actionable steps by which we engage partners and their contexts in the design inquiry process. In relation to this project, they are methods grounded in relational responsibility and entanglements with emergent networks in design-as-inquiry work. These tactics are what I intend to bring with me into future design spaces.

Keeping this in mind, the use of the word “method” to describe these offerings seems counterintuitive. The word method tends to imply a procedural and systematic approach that is traditionally used in scientific inquiry.[20] Instead, I reconceptualize methods to ‘tactic’ to propose a shift in how we engage partners in research. The word tactic is used in design to suggest adaptations of commonly used strategies so that existing design techniques are translated to resonate with underlying project goals. These tactics are not replicable in their entirety but transferable through contextual adaptation. Tactics are tethered to existing contexts, materials, actions, concepts, and values and thus communicate and reflect the same (DiSalvo in Russell, 2017).[21] The tactics presented in this project are propositions for designers to shape their research in a way that facilitates relational entanglements. These tactics reflect my own reflexive journey.[22] As such, they should be received as propositional guidelines to “circumvent or negotiate strategies towards their own objectives and desires” (DiSalvo, 2009).

[20] ‘Tactic’ is a procedure or process for attaining an object: such as (1): a systematic procedure, technique, or mode of inquiry employed by or proper to a particular discipline or art (2): a systematic plan followed in presenting material for instruction the lecture method

[21] These offerings are ‘tactics of tracing’ that derive from and communicate existing networks, materials, actions, concepts, and values (DiSalvo in Russell, 2017). They are developed through a process of weaving together multiple contexts, lived experiences, practices and methodologies that emerged in collaboration with emergent networks and are thus responsive to and accommodating of their conditions, needs and aspirations.

[22] Simpson describes Nishnaabeg elder ways of teaching: “I’m responsible for my own interpretations and that is why you’ll always hear from our Elders what appears to be them ‘qualifying’ their teachings with statements that position them as learners, that position their ideas as their own understandings, and place their teachings within the context of their own lived experience” (Simpson, 2014). It feels important to cite this Nishnaabeg practice to emphasize the importance of positioning a thesis proposition from a place of learning, while affording others who wish to take from these propositions the ability to derive their own meaning and understanding.

In each of the research collaborations described in the text, processes, insights and lessons I gathered were frequently not communicable through language. I found myself saying, “I am doing the work, but I don’t know how to write about it?!” Most of it was experienced at an embodied level. In these complicated collaborative spaces, so much information was being internalized and small shifts and adaptations were happening constantly. Following designer Daniela Rosner’s recommendation for design-as-inquiry to take “tactility more seriously...in the interrogation of our social world” (2018), I use material metaphors to describe key moments in my research to unpack the proposed tactics. Reflections facilitated through materiality and material metaphors helped me move through conceptual blocks; what couldn’t be explained in words was expressed through string or Play-doh. Material properties found in these tactile interactions introduced a host of new vocabulary to express embodied observations, insights and feelings. As such, the tactics presented below use vocabulary derived from a table, Play-doh, string, needle-and-thread and tacos.

These particular metaphors were used in this project because these tools are commonly found in design as inquiry workshop activities. They are accessible and in many ways universally relatable. More than that these words invoke a feeling of play and levity that is much needed to dispel the weightiness that emerges in design inquiry workshops especially in contexts that are heavy and crises ridden. As we designers work in these types of complex and crisis spaces, making sense of our own approach or mediating our ways of working through the lens of these playful yet meaningful metaphors can foster much needed balance between the imperative of addressing urgent concerns with some sense of calm and light-footed ability to adapt.



# Table as Tactic

Table as a Tactic urges the question “who is invited to the proverbial decision-making table?”. In relation to research, this is a proposition to ask how research and design gatherings can be organized to invite dialogue and decision-making that is non-hierarchical and relational, akin to sharing space at a table. This tactic first emerged during the first set of workshops for the Collaborate Gather Share project.

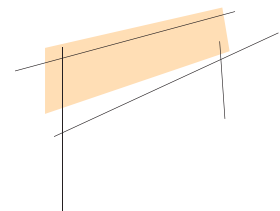
At the onset of this project, a set of workshops were organized to invite researchers, designers, people living with dementia and caregivers to share insights around challenges and strategies of dementia-friendly practices (See Appendix 1 & 2). The workshops were framed using the statement, “Everyone is invited to the table” to encourage horizontal relationality of interdependence that would inform dementia-friendly priorities in research from the bottom up. These workshops facilitated collaborative and interdisciplinary discourse that yielded a depth of insights and set a precedent for collaboration and power distribution for the duration of the project. As such, I was encouraged to replicate this process again in a different setting.

## **Collaborate Gather Share Project Phase 1**

*“Everyone is Invited to the  
Table” Workshops*

Collaborators: Health Design,  
Lab, Alzheimer’s Society  
of BC, Researchers Gloria  
Puurveen (University of British  
Columbia) and Jody Gawryluk  
(University of Victoria)

January, 2021



## Everyone is Invited to the Table!



Fig. 4: Everyone is Invited to the Table Workshop Miroboard. 2021. Screen Shot. Miroboard notes.



Fig. 5: Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants

I hoped to adopt this methodology of inviting everyone to the table with my colleagues from the Carnegie Outreach Team. I sought to unpack the uniqueness of this team and to challenge the top-down approach of priority-setting that was increasingly prevalent likely due to new funding accountabilities and the worsening nature of the housing crisis. I felt a disconnection between front-line experiences and the decision-making process taking place at the managerial and City level, which was also expressed in various conversations with my colleagues. To resist this type of siloing of practices, I developed a set of workshops to gather the team, making space for them to share their wisdom and experience, all to foster a participatory culture that appreciates relational and bottom-up engagement.

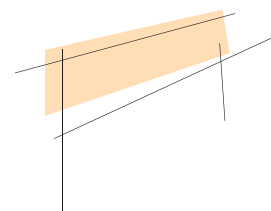
### **inviting dialogue- collaboratively assessing risk and benefits**

Reflecting on the Carnegie Outreach Workshop [23] from a critical lens, in retrospect, I find traces of top-down decision-making in my own work even though I was criticizing the same about the City and its relationship to the outreach team. Despite my longstanding connection to the team and the office where the research took place, I felt, on a few occasions, that I was “parachuting in” to extract knowledge from this group. Although I consulted the supervisors of the outreach team for guidance, I found myself most accountable to Emily Carr’s Research Ethics Board (REB), my supervisors and the intention of my own research. Anticipating risks and benefits of the workshop were set by the ethics board’s own assumptions, experiences and expectations and my ability to address them. However, not only was the Board disconnected from the lived experience of working in the Downtown Eastside, I also quickly realized my own limitation in representing the needs of my colleagues because of my recent distancing from the outreach team in the last year. This disconnect was exacerbated by the REB process of acquiring written consent and managerial approvals which made my relationship with my colleagues (many of whom are my friends) more formal and awkward, and created a disconnect between me as the researcher and those “participating” in this research. I felt like I was swooping in to do this research before parting ways. It felt transactional.

While anticipating risks for the REB approval, we anticipated the impacts of the workshops and research proceedings, but we forgot to anticipate risks around the situations and conditions preceding inquiry work that impact research participation of those working in front line and crisis response settings. Arriving at the office for the first workshop, I walked into a few

[23] Three workshops were planned for July-October 2021. Only the first workshop was facilitated. The other two workshops were cancelled multiple times for various unexpected reasons. I eventually decided to step away from attempting to facilitate these workshops so that this interaction was not burdensome for my colleagues.

### **Carnegie Outreach Workshops**



of my colleagues right outside the office doors resuscitating an overdose victim. I quickly recognized how unprepared I was to adapt my research to such events and to manage how such a situation might affect research participation.[24]

This goes to show the importance of organizing research in collaboration with those that are entrenched in spaces of inquiry, who can effectively anticipate risk and best shape research process and consent procedures. This also illustrates the limitation of university REB processes, which needs to be supplemented with ethical imperatives set by community ethics boards that are accountable to community lived experiences (Boilevin et al., 2019). Overall, an invitation to the table requires developing a shared understanding of the context surrounding participatory work. This means that an exchange of experiences, assessment of risk and benefits is grounded in the lived experience of our collaborators and their personal and relational contexts to ensure that they can meaningfully and fully take up space at the table.

## **Making space at the table- Flipping hierarchy and supporting capacity**

These lessons were put into practice in the second phase of the Collaborate Gather Share project. In Phase 2+3, we honed in on the idea that “everyone is (should be) invited to the table” to center and amplify lived experience of dementia as expertise. We did this by first inviting a co-designer living with dementia to our research team. Next, our co-designer invited a network of dementia advocates to a panel discussion to share their experiences of participating in research.[25] Using panel discussions as a design research method was inspired by the lead co-designer who also hosted and facilitated the discussions. Panelists gathered around the virtual table, sharing their stories, ideas and insights. The panels were open to the public and design researchers stood in the periphery, witnessing the conversations and internalizing insights.

Through these discussions we flipped hierarchical power dynamics of top-down priority-setting by decentering design and academic expertise and creating research strategies from the ground up. We facilitated a process whereby people living with dementia, who are most impacted by dementia research, shaped research priorities and process by guiding the knowledge-making process and co-leading the project. Moreover, during the panel planning, we developed a shared understanding of the risks and benefits of this research and methods in collaboration with our co-designers without REB oversight. These discussions were paced, consistent and

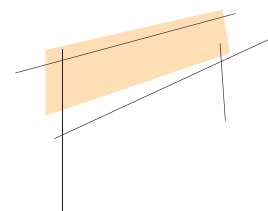
[24] Prior to the first workshop, after the overdose incident, the best I did was to ask my colleagues individually if they needed anything and if they were still up for the workshop. Despite the preceding event, they had a smile on their faces and looked forward to the chat. The energy in the office was different, slightly more tense, but everyone showed up. Many of the conversations during the workshops touched on the opioid crisis, of course. While it may have been cathartic to talk about the event, I was not prepared with meaningful support other than the presence of friends and colleagues and a number of a hard-to-access counselling service provided by the City of Vancouver.

[25] Three panel discussions took place virtually between November to December 2021

### **Collaborate Gather Share Project Phase 2+ 3** *Panel Discussions*

Collaborators: Health Design,  
Lab, Alzheimer's Society of  
BC, Myrna Norman+ a group of  
dementia advocates

Nov-April 2022



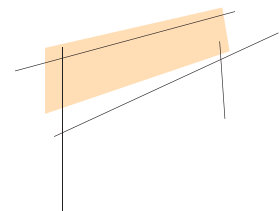
ongoing and led to an effective consent-making process and a truly positive experience for all.

Furthermore, we inverted notions of expertise by underscoring the importance of capacity experienced and repeatedly prioritized by our co-designers living with dementia. The project methodology reflected a trust in our co-designer's expertise and capacity, which resisted the protectionist and safety-oriented culture that is ubiquitous in health-based narratives around dementia and aging (Boulton et al., 2021; Puurveen & Phinney, 2016). By decentering ourselves and supporting our co-designer's capacity we opened up space for our co-designers' values, beliefs and practices to shape the project. For example, practicing joy has been deeply prioritized by this group and has now become an integral part of the project and my own design practice.

Overall, this was a relational approach that created the condition for people with lived experience, our emergent network collaborators, to take up space at the table. In this relational project, as researchers, we felt connected to this work because of our relationships with our co-designers. As co-designers they shared their experiences and felt heard. In collaboration, we were able to merge our practices to create outcomes that were responsive to the needs of the group while creating a model for long term impact. [26]

[26] The last outcome of this project was the organization of a recruitment and research symposium to be held in May 2022. The research symposium will include presentation from four people living with dementia who have partnered in different dementia related research projects. Researchers and people living with dementia interested in participating in research will be invited to the event. The goal of the symposium is to foster a connection between researchers and people interested in research partnerships.

We see this symposium as a prototype for a biannual event that will continue to connect researchers with people living with dementia through the channel of Alzheimer Society of BC.





# Play-doh as Tactic



Fig. 6: "Trying to hold it together"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants

Carnegie Outreach  
Workshops

As presented above, sitting around a table encourages dialogue, sharing and a non-hierarchical approach to knowledge-making. A proponent of dialogue as a form of knowledge-making, American Sociologist Patricia Collins (1990) describes the impact of persisting systems of oppression (race, gender, class and other social, political and economic, cultural and physical identities and affiliations) on people's access to and experience of power, oppression, resistance, privilege, penalties, benefits, and harms. She asserts that all of these factors inform people's ability to voice themselves in relational and dialogic situations (Collins, 1990). Her assertion suggests that creating space for relational exchange through dialogic arrangements does not by default mitigate or overcome persisting power imbalance. Most ethical and pluralistic approaches carry their own omissions and create exclusions (Giraud, 2019). As such it is key for design researchers to create dialogic conditions that are attentive and responsive to intersectional identities and power dynamics that emerge in relational spaces. This was especially evident during the Carnegie Outreach Workshop.



## **Reshaping as soft connectors, and scaffolds: Mitigating power differentials in research spaces**

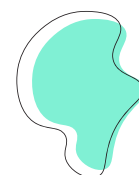
Even before the start of the first workshop with the Carnegie Outreach Team, one of my colleagues saw me setting the facilitation tables and quickly expressed unease about their participation. They felt that they were being pushed to participate in a dialogue where they couldn't openly express themselves. I heard a trembling in their voice as they anticipated their words being scrutinized and misinterpreted. They were noting a hierarchy in the process, which I imagine, caused their discomfort and feelings of distrust and powerlessness. To respond to my colleagues' unease, I attempted to make the design and intention of the workshop transparent to them through dialogue. I shared details about the workshop's motivation and questions and together came up with ideas to shift aspects of the workshop to adapt to their concerns.[27] The resulting workshop led to an overall positive experience with valuable insights generated by this participant and others.

In this case, issues of hierarchy and power dynamics were addressed by fostering trust. This should be accredited to the dialogic process of consent-making that goes beyond formal and one-sided consent forms. It is important to note that this dialogic trust-building process was made easy thanks to my pre-existing relationship with my colleague, which illustrates the importance of either fostering such relationships or involving folks that are relationally entangled within inquiry spaces; I find that there is a commitment to continue ongoing relationships which activates a different level of responsibility to these relationships and a more attuned ability to foster trust.

This example underscores the importance of establishing trust and attentiveness to power dynamics in inter subjective moments that are informed by diverse individuals coming together, their social identities and experiences in relation to underlying systems (Botero et al., 2020). It also sheds light on our responsibilities and obligations in research (Wilson, 2008; Simpson, 2014) and the types of supports we make available in engagement processes (Simpson, 2014). These insights are reflexive considerations that are starting to shape the backbone of my practice, further shifting my practice to be more reflexive. Practicing reflexivity means being committed to ongoing dialogue and attentiveness to power dynamics that emerge out of how agents in research, researchers, partners and participants, take up space and interact with each other to influence personal and relational interactions and agency (Shimmin et al., 2017).[28] It is about constantly reflecting on and shifting these dynamics to support those coming together.

[27] A key shift was in how I arranged groups during the workshop. I arranged workshop groups in a way that paid attention to interpersonal dynamics and made those participating in the discussion feel supported and appreciated by their group members. I was able to accomplish this because of my relationship with my colleagues and pre-existing knowledge about the relational dynamics of this setting.

[28] Taking insights from the Carnegie Outreach Workshops, this reflexive approach was adopted in the Collaborate Gather Share project. We created a workbook for researchers working in dementia to reflect on their assumptions and practice and how they take up space or redistribute power to patient partners and research collaborators living with dementia.



## Reshaping as shock absorbers and buffers- resisting re-traumatization

Reflecting on research case studies, I found that reflexive practice is especially important when working with emergent networks who disproportionately bear the burden of systemic challenges. In the case of the outreach team, they stay deeply entrenched in their work of supporting and responding to emergent needs of the people they serve. When inviting these groups into inquiry spaces, we ask them to step away from their work to recognize and voice their experiences and make sense of underlying patterns. Especially when asking questions about relationships and systems, as was the case with the Carnegie Outreach Workshop,[29] this act of recognizing and making sense can be a traumatic process and can unveil traumatic experiences related to past interactions with other people or underlying systems (Hirsch, 2020; Lipsky & Burk, 2009).[30] Overall, interactions around these workshops demonstrated the tense and delicate nature of engaging in complex front-line inquiry settings where people are resourcefully and resolutely navigating so many challenges but also might be tired. Inquiry work conducted in these spaces requires a great deal of care. There is a need for reflexive practice that promotes dialogue and consent-making that is slow and dialogic. It also requires constant adaptation of research methods and priorities to respond to unexpected turns in research process due to unanticipated events.

Interestingly, I noticed aspects of reflexivity being practiced by my colleagues during Carnegie Outreach Workshop. During the workshop, participants worked with different tactile crafts material to express their ideas. They were especially drawn to Play-doh to visualize and talk through how they saw their roles within the team and in relation to larger systems (See figures 7-11). They talked about their practices of support and how they take up space. They expressed themselves squeezed between the homeless crisis, stuck to bureaucratic systems, or acting as scaffold connectors to support the folks they served. They also reflected critically on how their work inadvertently upholds certain problematic systems, which was represented in little Play-doh band-aids. Shaping Play-doh was used to generate self-awareness and externalize self-reflection. It supported a reflexive process.

[29] The question explored during the workshop were: How do front line staff in this team relate to the systems within which they work? What types of relationships do they rely on to navigate or circumvent systemic hurdles and challenges.

[30] Systems-related trauma and associated fatigue was palpable during a planning session with supervisors of the program that took place two days before the first workshop. The supervisors expressed concern about having systems related conversations during the workshop, fearing that these types of conversations might challenge organizational and interpersonal dynamics. They were especially tired that day. One of them had said “nothing ever changes” as far as systems are concerned while expressing a paradoxical resistance to change that might be introduced through systems conversations. We talked through these rising concerns and ended up shifting the language of a few questions, which resulted in a positive workshop experience. Both these instances- with my colleague before the workshop and the supervisors during the planning session- demonstrate the tense and delicate nature of engaging in these complex front-line situations.



Taking from this intuitive approach, I view Play-doh as tactic of reflexivity to help us visualize how we take up space and generate self-awareness. Using Play-doh as a metaphor, I imagine embodying its material properties, taking up in-between spaces, re-forming to accommodate and adapt to existing masses of influence and emergent needs. Through a reflexive practice, we can act as soft connectors, shock absorbing buffers, scaffolds, or structures for support, or turn into vessels to carry precious responsibility and temporary burdens.





Fig. 7: "Working through barriers & making friends in the biz"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants

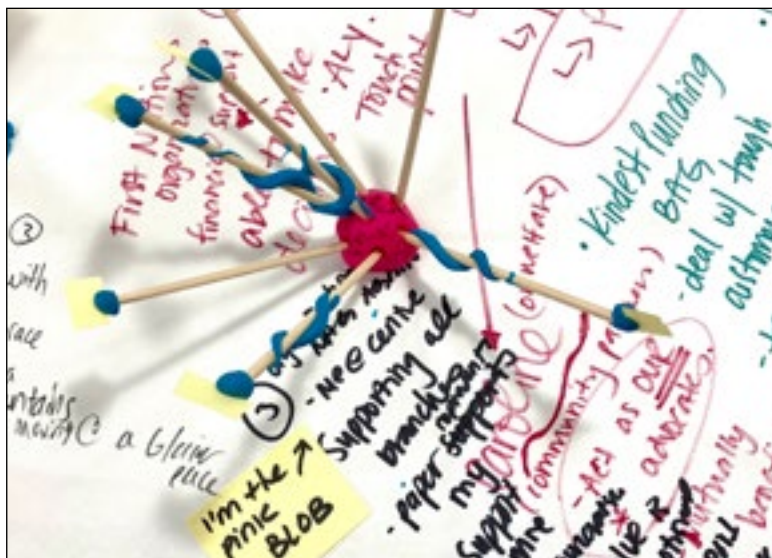


Fig. 8: "Touchpoint"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants. Other quotes documented in this image: "me at the centre supporting other branches", "kindest punching bag" and "we deal with tough customers"



Fig. 9: "How do we cope"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants. This image depicts drug paraphernalia- a crack pipe and a tin cooker.



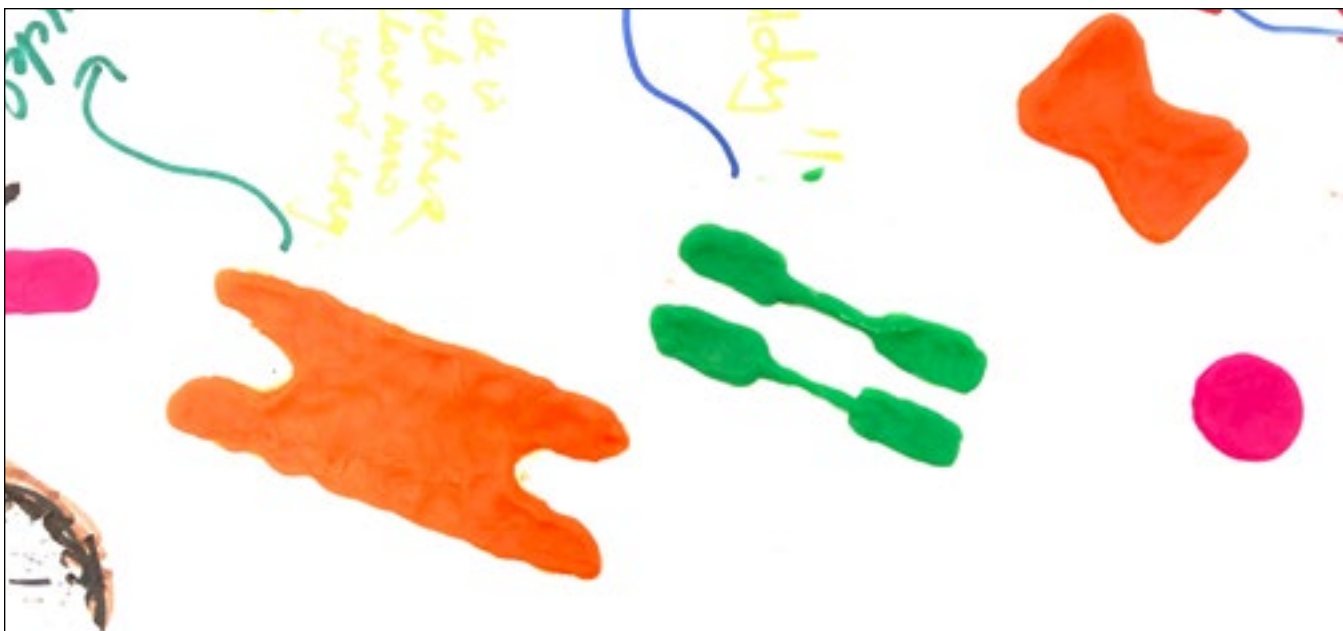


Fig. 10: "Bandaaid solution"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants.

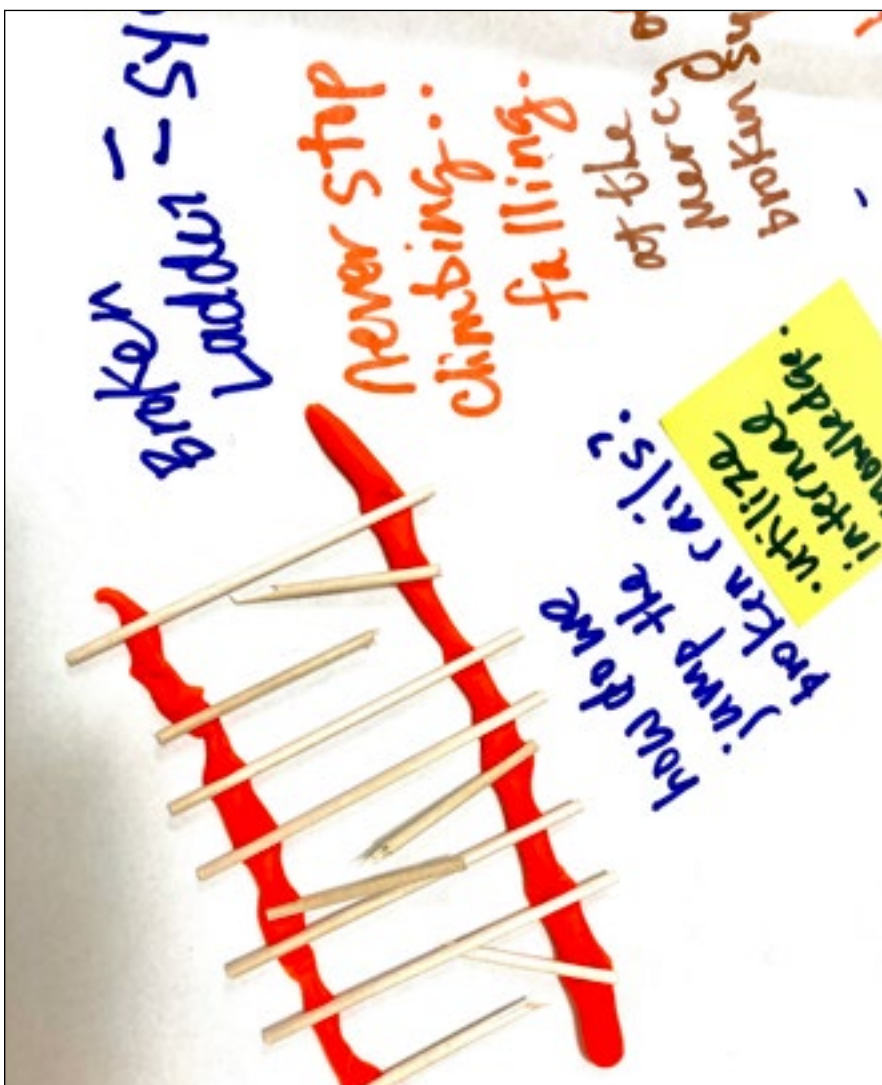


Fig. 11: "Broken Ladder"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants. Other quotes documented in this image: "never stop climbing...falling at the mercy of a broken system", and "how do we jump the broken rails?- utilize internal knowledge".

# String as Tactic

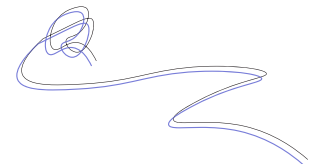


Fig. 12: Table Project as reflections. 2021. Photo documentation. This image is a documentation of a reflection process that I initiated to make sense of my work. I invited a group of people to describe their relationship to bureaucratic systems they've encountered and used this opportunity to reflect on my own relationship with the Carnegie Outreach Team. This image describes the underlying complexity and pressures that influence and shape service delivery.

An integral aspect of the Carnegie Workshops was the systems related conversation that took place. Important insights were gathered that shed light on the systemic challenges this team must navigate routinely. In an ongoing participatory projects, systems-related conversations might take place to extrapolate systemic contexts underlying our inquiry partners' experiences. In relation to developing relational entanglement in design inquiry, these conversations can shed light on the constraints and forces that are pulling and propelling the work of our emergent network collaborators. Understanding underlying forces can also better help researchers and designers anticipate needs that might come up during inquiry process. Furthermore, these insights can shed light on how emergent networks adapt, shift, heal (emergent characteristics) and move through constraints like those flocks of birds pushing through a storm, mentioned earlier in the text. They can inspire design work that is grounded in emergence and resilience.

[31] Flows are transfer of entities, whether material, informational or intangible influences and pressures that propel and shift a particular behaviors of a system and its outputs. An example is the inflow of water in the bathtub determines how much and how quickly water flows out of the tub drain (Meadows, 2008).

[32] The team spoke about constantly negotiating with competing flows of accountability and responsibility. They are tasked by the City to carry out the homelessness strategy, while maintaining their commitment and responsibility to the community and its needs, even when these are mutually exclusive, where the goals of one negate the needs of the other. These competing information and resource flows has shifted the organization's priority and behaviors.



## Forming new ties when pulled in different directions

During the workshop, the Outreach Team talked about different channels or flows [31] of forces that propel their work. These include flows of accountability, responsibility, resources, support and constraints that shape how the team arranges itself in relation to larger systems they belong to.[32] They continually restructure their work to adapt to changing flows in information, resources and support they have access to, or to address urgent gaps in the community. In the last 15 years, the organization's work has shifted from harm-reduction and street outreach to providing housing for homeless clients to most recently supporting access to income assistance and carrying out homelessness relocation projects. Some of these shifts are in response to urgent community needs; others are pushed by increasing City oversight or lack of support to do a certain type of work that has then opened space for other priorities. During the discussion, they noted that changes in priorities are visible in shifts in emergent working relationships. For example, relationships with social housing providers are shifting towards ad hoc relationships with organizations that facilitate access to income sources for clients facing multiple barriers. When pulled in different directions, the team continues to form new ties to ensure that they are able to serve the immediate needs of their clients given underlying systemic conditions.

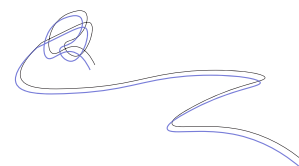
**Carnegie Outreach  
Workshops**

## Learning new knots- Taking on different roles as needed

Paying attention to emergent qualities of this team, individuals resemble ants in a colony, each taking on different tasks as necessary to sustain the work of supporting homeless clients (none of these job descriptions are officially defined or designated). This team of about twenty holds varying degrees and types of academic, practice-based and street experience. They are also immigration and criminal justice experts, income assistance policy aficionados, harm reduction trailblazers, tax gurus amongst so many others. Expertise shifts and morphs to accommodate shifting need of the community. Like ants in an ant colony, they know, without centralized instructions, which tasks require urgent attention to repair larger systemic cracks.

**Collaborate Gather  
Share Project**

Similar capacity to shift roles was visible in other collaborations. For instance, through the Collaborate Gather Share project we learned that our co-designers living with dementia take on various roles as needed to support the goals of the larger dementia community. They are advocates, researchers, support-providers, caregivers, artists, musicians and co-designers.





All these systems related insights helped me understand organizational and relational behaviors of how these networks organize. I imagine the flows of influence discussed by the Outreach Team as strings: invisible threads of connections underlying relationships. Clumpy strings look like rhizomes under the forest bed that pass on nutrition, support, and sustenance between entities (Kimmerer, 2020). These invisible strings make up the fabric that connects relationships and experiences between different agents, entities (Ingold, 2018) and contexts (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018). These string-like channels have distinct properties: they are taut or loose, they pull or are limber, elastic, or rigid, weak or robust (Pendleton-Jullian et al., 2018). Making sense of these properties sheds light on how systems operate and how different components within a system work together, reflecting the internal dynamics of change that shape systemic realities and resilience (Buchanan, 2019). These insights also inform “strategies, contextual engagements, and economic, social, and cultural interdependencies that must be addressed in theory and practice” and are thus considered in how projects are organized, and outcomes are shaped (Buchanan, 2019). Most importantly, these insights carry important lessons of resilience- behaviors of adaptation, relationship building and taking on multiple roles as needed- that can be internalized through relationally entangled inquiry and absorbed into process and practice to instigate a positive feedback loop of resilient and emergent processes and outcomes.

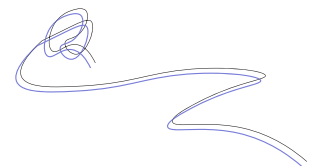




Fig. 13: "Tax Man"- Carnegie Outreach Workshop Proceedings. 2021. Photo. Taken with consent of participants. Other quotes documented in this image: "systems are jockeying for power & leaving mutual client needs and relationships behind" and "organizations can team up together to find solutions".

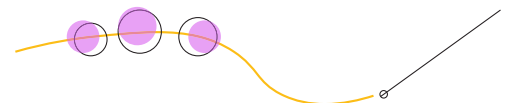
# Needle-thread-beads as tactic



Fig. 14: "Beading Red Dress". 2021. Beading on felt. A craft activity that took place at the Cultural Sharing Program

Involvement with the  
Indigenous Cultural Sharing  
Program

Midway through graduate school, I took on a Program Support role with the Indigenous Culture Sharing Program housed in the local community center. In contrast to the fast-paced crisis response work with the Carnegie Outreach Team, this program is about slow-paced relationship building through sharing embodied knowledge of culture and healing through craft practices. On one of the days, Elder Marr was teaching us how to bead on red dress pins, a symbol for the lost lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls linked to deep rooted systems of oppression in Canada. I remember asking her about the significance of the red dress. As she remembered the wounded and lost lives and shared her own story in relation to this pin, she mentioned that red signifies truth. She talked about her healing process and how she brings the same to community members through her work. I leave the program every Monday feeling enriched and healed myself and most importantly in awe of the resilience that is embodied by this woman and really everyone else who is involved in this incredibly special emergent network.



In the time that I spent supporting this program, I recognized the deep wisdom carried by this group, realizing the limitation of my own knowledge, experience and practice to engage this community. My role in this network as a program support rings true in every sense of the word. I come into this space to support the work of this group. I decenter myself and listen to learn. Mostly, I witness.

### **Threading beads- Facilitating embodied remembering**

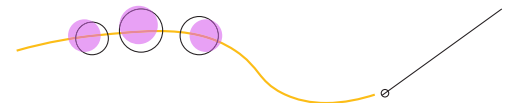
Seeing these experiences as a parallel to design work, I consider how we come into new spaces and contexts, to be respectfully enmeshed in relational entanglement with emergent networks. In this cultural sharing space, remembering is not forced. Sometimes I ask questions out of curiosity, but mostly I sit back and listen to conversations. It is a natural process. Needle pierces the red dress, carrying beads, thread pulled back out carrying with it words, stories and memories. Through this tactile process, we are embodying[33] relational exchange and emergent knowledge. We are not forcing memory, but we are present with those memories as witnesses.

### **Patching- Remembering and witnessing to hold and care for knowledge**

In Squamish tradition, witnessing is an integral method of orally documenting important activities. Remembering is intertwined with the act of witnessing. Through witnessing and remembering knowledge is produced and passed on between people and through generations (Xwalacktun in *Place-Based Responsibility*, 2021). Speaking to oral traditions, author Lee Maracle says, memory “emerges in those moments when we see that the words have directed us have unlocked a storehouse of remembering” (Maracle, 2015). Physical artifacts or tactile making can have the same effect as directing words, which was reflected in the needle-thread-beads and the red dress that facilitated a process of witnessing and remembering for Elder Marr and me. I perceive these objects and act of making as a material tactic. They are artifacts that scaffold memory (Heersmink, 2017).

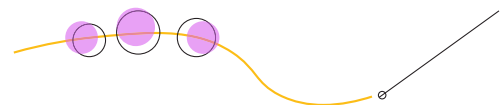
Carrying this practice of remembering and witnessing, we adopted the same methodology to the panel discussions that we hosted with people living with dementia for the Gather Collaborate Share project. The lead co-designer hosted and facilitated the conversations using questions that the larger

[33] Talking through this red dress, Elder Marr and I were enmeshed in a process of knowing elicited by the red dress that carries so much history and memories. This connection and ways of knowing fostered by tactile action displaces the concept of “knowing” and facilitates an embodying of knowledge which complicates “the logics of ‘extraction’ and ‘capture’ what that knowing inhabits” (Rosner, 2018). Logics of extraction are replaced by the act of witnessing, creating a “living memory” that is knowledge embodied (Nelson-Moody in *Place-Based Responsibility Re-Gathering*, 2022).



group of people living with dementia and designers produced together. The role of the design team and the audience invited to these discussions was to witness and uphold knowledge shared by the panel. With guidance from our lead co-designer, we adopted small tactics to support our panelists' remembering during the panel discussion. The tactics of remembering included invitation of familiar faces to the panel discussions and continually circling back to themes familiar to them like joy and capacity. The latter was especially evident in the final panel discussion that focused on the question "how do we center joy in our practice?".

Affording memory is a precious responsibility, especially for this group of people living with dementia. For them, the act of remembering is tenuous and intimately linked to aspects of their identity that carry implications of stigma but also agency and power (Niedderer et al., 2017). Remembering is also a political and spiritual act for Indigenous groups. It is a resistance to systematic separation of Indigenous people from their culture that destroyed intergenerational remembering (Maracle, 2015). As such, the needle-thread-bead that facilitates remembering and witnessing can be a powerful tactic to produce new or surface existing knowledge. The needle-thread-bead signifies sitting together through an embodied process of knowledge making that requires deep listening, witnessing and learning—a knowledge making process that is otherwise delicate and fragile and requires an embodied dexterity to hold and care for.



# Tacos as Tactic

## **Bringing offerings- Paying attention to our relational responsibilities in research**

One of my colleagues at the Carnegie Outreach Team once reminded me that in the work that we do of supporting community, we bear the responsibility of witnessing. This was especially demonstrated when I was invited to support one of the Elders at the Cultural Sharing Program with a smudging ceremony held on a very busy sidewalk. As people walked into our half open tent to receive their smudge, I was an intimate witness to the anxieties, resilience and wisdom that people carried in the fatigue and momentary catharsis evident in their body language. I was responsible for handing out prayer ties after the smudge: what an incredible responsibility to be invited into that space, to support and witness.

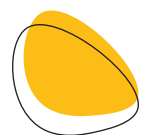
Within the practices described here, I consider my responsibility to the networks I collaborate with. In design as inquiry work, designers hear about intimate stories and experiences, like standing in that small tent for the smudging ceremony, we witness all sorts of anxieties, resilience and wisdom. Knowing this, I wonder how I can facilitate mutual knowledge-making in a way that recognizes the responsibility that comes from carrying and mobilizing this knowledge? These questions are well considered in Indigenous research paradigms that center relational axiology and ethical systems of accountability, responsibility, reciprocity and respect to tend to relational entanglements, emotional trauma and healing (Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008; Akama, 2019). When I consider my responsibility in research and design relationships, I think about the impact and legacy that our relational entanglements leave behind for our collaborating networks.

## **Feeding to re-energize- Putting aside knowledge making work**

As a part of my research, I had hoped to facilitate a second

**Involvement with the  
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and third workshop with the Carnegie Outreach Team. Upon arriving at the office to facilitate the second workshop, a few office emergencies forced the manager to cancel. On the second attempt, due to another emergency, we canceled again. This time, however, I came prepared with home-made tacos to share with the team. When the workshop was canceled, we had a taco feast instead and checked in with each other. It was lovely. Everyone left smiling, energized and nourished.

This was a practice in improvisation and renouncing control, which allows adaptation to take place in dynamic contexts (Akama, 2018). Most importantly, it was a practice in providing nourishment and sustenance to those who work hard to navigate complex and challenging emergencies. Something imperative and immediate yet lasting was left behind. This, I propose, should be the work of design that puts aside knowledge making work when necessary and instead prioritizes sustaining and energizing emergent networks.

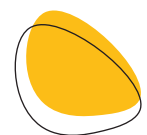
### **Nourishing- Building capacity of emergent networks and emergent work**

In the Collaborate Gather Share project, values of reciprocity underlined the entire project and showed up in the outcomes. The outcomes were developed for co-designers living with dementia to showcase their expertise and work in order to sustain and grow this work and the connectivity of this network. We hoped that these connections and work would continue beyond the project scope, perceiving the current project as a prototype for future iterations of the same. This process also felt reciprocal; we were bringing values of nourishment while being enmeshed in these relationships that brought us joy and hope. So many moments of laugh-cries happened during that project! We hold on to those moments dearly.

This work of providing sustenance to emergent networks achieves a two-fold impact. On the one hand, it is responsive to fatigue associated with conditions of working in dynamic and complex environments by offering sustenance to re-energize. This is crucial when working with collaborators that bear disproportionate systemic burdens. Meanwhile, it reproduces relational and emergent work by supporting the growth and capacity of this work. In this way, sustenance work allows us to respond to dynamic conditions tethered to both immediate and future concerns.

**Carnegie Outreach  
Workshops**

**Collaborate Gather  
Share Project**



*Conclusion*

# A Basket of Offerings: Final thoughts

Design Practice as a Basket

Concluding thoughts



# Design Practice as a Basket

## **Weaving a basket- an unfolding design practice emerging from entangled methodologies and approaches**

The tactics mentioned above stem from the various collaborative work with emergent networks. These tactics are a product of multiple project methodologies and approaches getting entangled and informing and shifting each other at different points. Through this project, I found that these entangled approaches and methodologies continue to unfold new insights and ways of knowledge-making, knowledge-holding and knowledge-caring. I further noticed that these ways of working are shaping my overall design practice and will surely inform future work that sits within or outside of inquiry spaces.

I see these design practices emerging from relationally and methodologically entangled work as a woven basket. The tactics presented above are a set of offerings that sit within the carrying capacity of this basket- my design practice that I bring to design-as-inquiry spaces. Design practice- the basket- is a result of various relational projects and interactions that are further entangled like woven strands. In this way, the designer's practice- the basket- is an unfolding and amalgamation of the entangled relationality that gives it form and supports its value proposition.

Botanist and Indigenous theorist Robin Wall Kimmerer best describes the quality of a basket as a

*“Journey from wholeness as a living plant to fragmented strands and back to wholeness again as a basket. A basket knows the dual powers of deconstruction and creation that shape the world. Strands once separated are rewoven into a new whole”* (Kimmerer, 2013, pg. 256).

In keeping with this, I suggest that developing a generative and dynamic design practice requires designers to become methodological and relational weavers to shape project methodologies and adopt relational methodologies to weave relational entanglements. The resulting practice welcomes construction and deconstruction of methodologies, methods, and practices multiple times over to become contextual, limber and adaptive. These practices are continuously and generatively unfolding and evolving, which is a fundamental rejection of Euro-centric universalizing, replicable and decontextualized practices of knowledge production criticized in this project. In this way, design practice become emergent- it is responsive to relational responsibilities and concerns that might show up in inquiry spaces while carrying a capacity to supports future possibilities.

What this looks like in practice is for designers to first push against the traditional notions of what qualifies as design. It is imperative that we move beyond a systematic packaging of design processes most evident in design tools, which serve to replicate processes that realistically cannot be replicated in practice. In contrast, the assertion of this project is that design process cannot be replicated in whole but requires a lot of contextual adaptation and emergent ways of working that is responsive to specific and unpredictable situations. There is no clean process or tool-kit that can be simply operationalized in complex or crisis settings. To work in complex and crises settings requires us to bring perspectives of those who are working in the front-line of navigating challenging areas.

In practice, this means pushing from within the institutions that we work in to collaborate with community groups and organizations that are doing the real work on the ground- emergent networks, that is. It rests on us to make those cracks from within, to create porous institutions that allow in front-line and community based perspectives. In this way we are advocates for this type of porosity and bottom-up participatory work. This is the work of designers.

Most importantly, when working in this way, we are required to be immersed and enmeshed in community spaces to foster deep understanding of values, contexts, lived experiences and practices of those who we are collaborating with to ensure that their perspectives are being appropriately and responsibly incorporated in design and knowledge making work. More than incorporating their perspectives, its about internalizing their perspectives and being entangled with them in ways that shifts how we work, not just at the processual level but at a deeper level that shapes what we value and what is enacted through our collaboration and also what each party carries beyond the scope of project deliverables.

In this way, the goal and outcome of this project- the basket that I have conceptualized symbolizes a commitment to the type of work described above. This basket is also my offering to other designers insofar as it encourages a reconceptualization of how design is practiced and what is valued and prioritized by designers. For designers, this commitment is especially put to practice by being attentive to the types of projects that we create or take on. Throughout my research, I was lucky to be a part of various non-design and design work that is relational and community based, that amplifies front-line and community perspectives, design work that is reciprocal- nourishing for our design partners and us, the designers. As we continue to be confronted by multiple crises and emergencies, how we understand the role of design needs to shift. We designers can be conduits of nourishment, moving energy where it is most required in ways that is propelling deep values of immediate care and long lasting change.

# Concluding Thoughts

This project explores how design work can take place in relational entanglement with emergent networks. These networks carry embodied and practice-based knowledge on how to navigate complex and dynamic conditions and are responsive to urgent needs while tethered to future goals and possibilities. Fostering relational entanglements with emergent networks requires a reflexive and ever-evolving adoption of generative, emergent, and contextually entangled set of methodologies and tactics in design-as-inquiry work. This enables designers to be contextual, limber, and adaptive in complex and dynamic inquiry settings and problem spaces to yield outcomes that are reflective of underlying entanglements that guide inquiry processes. Overall, this project suggests that the impacts of design-as-inquiry work do not end with a set of deliverables but are carried forward through outcomes that reproduce or sustain emergent models of working. Impacts are also carried on within designers' own practice into new settings.

Throughout this research I wanted to understand and honor the uniqueness of the different organizations I collaborated with including those seemingly small acts of relationality that propel the impactful and transformative work they do. Defining these organizations as emergent networks introduced a whole new lens to how I understood their behaviors and characteristics and helped me focus in on these transformative relational moments. This felt especially palpable in reflecting on my relationship with the Carnegie Outreach Team. Because of the changing nature of the program and the increasing influence of the City in directing priorities, it felt important to emphasize the emergent roots of this organization and all the underlying local interactions and relational moments that have shaped organizational connections, and work. While the funding for

the team is increasingly contingent on quantifiable outcomes these days, so much of the real work is happening in relational moments—between clients and workers walking around the neighborhood to run errands to secure income and housing, or in conversations with social workers, nurses, and housing providers to help homeless folks transcend barriers. I also reflect on my own conversations with my colleagues about underlying systems and moments of ephemeral yet deep connection with clients who share their story not because they are forced to for a housing application but because they find momentary comfort and catharsis in a particular interaction. These are entangled moments, moments of sharing space, ideas, contexts, beliefs and practices. They are transformative and powerful in informing how we think, work, and carry on these stories to shape a sense of responsibility and commitment to all these relationships and interactions. What occurs in these moments is a blurring of contextual, value-based and practice-based boundaries between people to foster shared commitment, priorities and resources. Adopting this approach to design, this type of relational entanglement propels emergent practices much need to navigate all the continuously shifting complexity and crises that have become a fundamental part of our existence.

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In the five years of working with the Carnegie Outreach Team, the office kitchen was always stocked with a plethora of food. We would deal with all kinds of crisis situations in the front office, then go in the back for a reprieve to find delicious treats almost every day. This was our Program Coordinator's doing. He would make extravagant BBQ, homemade sauces, popcorn always on the go. His pork tacos and home-made salsa are especially delicious. He believes in keeping the team fed so they can do what they are meant to do. This, I propose is the redirection of design work- feeding emergent networks, giving them nourishment and support to sustain and grow- sharing tacos and feasting together!



Fig. : A collection of relational moments. 2021. Sketches. A series of sketches to reflect on small yet meaningful relational moments in connection with the Carnegie Outreach Team and its work.

- Image 1 depicts a conversation with a homeless client in the Carnegie Outreach Team's office
- Image 2 represents a conversations that take place during street outreach work when staff walk around the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in pairs to hand out harm reduction supplies and make connections in the community
- Image 3 documents a smaller project that I did as a different approach to getting to know the neighbourhood. I walked around scavenging bits of trash to make ink.
- Image 4 depicts a conversation that I had with one of my colleagues about various topics around housing, homelessness and different issues affecting the population we serve. This sketch contains an image from the book *Diagrams of Power - Visualizing, mapping and performing resistance* (DuBois et al., 2019).



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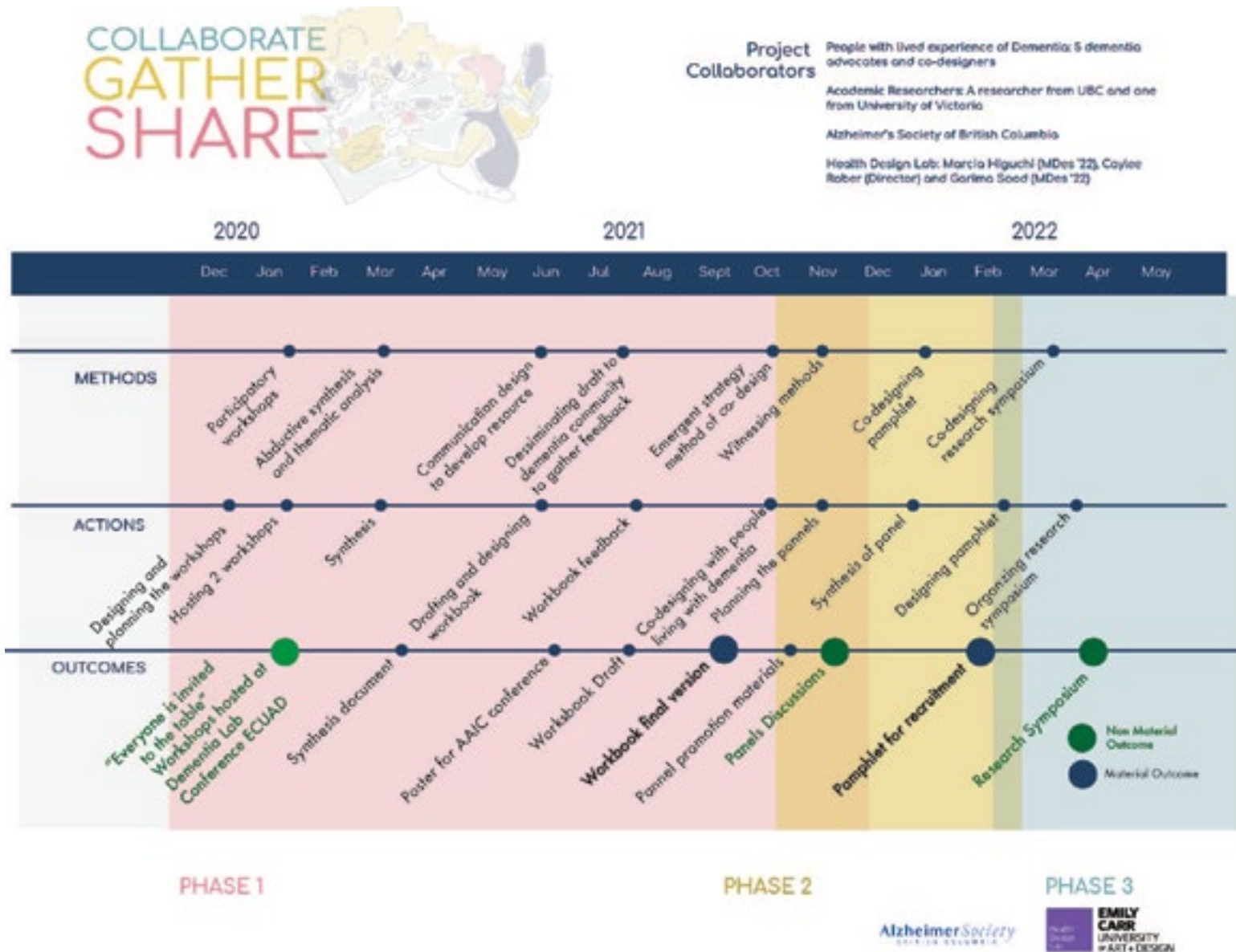
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# Appendix

# Appendix 1 : Collaborate Gather Share Project Timeline





# Appendix 2 : “Everyone is Invited to the Table” Workshop Details

## Workshop details

Two workshops were facilitated on the same day during the Dementia Lab Conference.

This workshop was attended by 37 participants including researchers, designers, carers, health professionals and people with lived experience from a range of international contexts.



## Questions Asked

Key questions discussed during the workshop included:

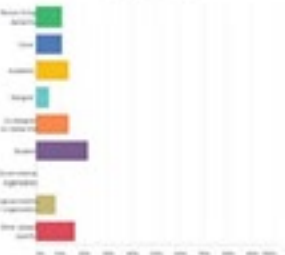
- Which role do you typically play in research?
- What are examples of dementia-related research that you have been a part of in the past?
- What are some tools of collaboration that were adopted in these research projects?
- What were some challenges of collaboration?
- Can we come up with other tools of collaboration that might be useful in different phases of research to make research more inclusive?
- What does inclusive research look like?

The workshop involved conversations organized around 6 phases common to most research projects. These include: Building Teams, Setting goals, Preparation and Training, Data Collecting, Data Analysis, Sharing and Communication of Data

## Workshop Theme: Everyone is invited to the table

### Q13 Your Role: How do you identify your role within the dementia research community? Choose as many as applies to your situation



Role	Count
Researcher	10
Designer	8
Carer	7
Health professional	6
Person with lived experience	5
Other	4

## EVERYONE IS INVITED TO THE TABLE

Developing interdisciplinary participatory practices to disrupt the status quo in dementia research

**Presenter: Garima Sood**  
 Contact: Garima.sood@utoronto.ca; Avery.amine@themerbc.org  
 Author: Garima Sood, Dr. Gloria Puurvein, Dr. Jodie Gearyluk, Caylee Robor, Daisy Couture, Avery Mine

### BACKGROUND

In dementia research, there is a growing emphasis on generating meaningful research collaborations with people with lived experiences (PWLE, who can be people living with dementia or caregivers). This brings attention to different participatory methods that have the ability to shift perspectives in research and deepen engagement with both PWLE and researchers. The purpose of this study was to investigate how such participatory methods are realized in process by exploring existing interdisciplinary practices and identifying opportunity spaces to further develop person-centred and collaborative research tools and practices.

### METHOD

Two virtual participatory research workshops were facilitated with 38 participants from interdisciplinary backgrounds and experiences including researchers, artists, creatives, designers and PWLE. Design methods such as envisioning, imagining, visualizing and drawing were adopted to facilitate dialogue and bring out tacit knowledge held by participants. The workshops followed an underlying theme namely *Everyone is invited to the table*.



### RESULTS

Data analysis revealed the following four strategies that can be adopted by dementia researchers to foster collaborative and inclusive research engagement and outcomes:

- Relational research process:** Perceiving people with lived experiences and the larger dementia community as a part of a 'neighbourhood' where people are interwoven and connected through long-standing relationships. Fostering ongoing relationships with community or university Research Ethics Board to support an environment of mutual learning.
- Power Dynamics:** Recognizing PWLE as experts and collaborators throughout the research process to break down hierarchies and engage with participants as co-researchers and co-creators.
- Paced research:** Designing a research process that affords slow paced engagement to allow for flexibility and adaptability throughout each phase of research.
- Generative and continuous:** Ensuring that research projects and phases within a research project are informed by past projects and continually feed into ongoing or subsequent projects.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Interdisciplinary and Collaborative projects

These strategies can be best realized by tapping into the interdisciplinary and diverse expertise of those involved in a research project - including lived experience as an integral knowledge base. Research teams with diverse expertise where researchers can play different roles including researchers, as people with lived-experiences, contributors, artists, designers, creative facilitators, neighbours, leaders and initiators, etc. can lead to resilient research outcomes that are founded on principles of collaboration and inclusivity.

#### "Research communities (can be a) part of the support system...We can be neighbours with each other"

Person with Lived Experience



# Appendix 3 : Collaborate Gather Share: Material Outcomes Selections



Above: Workbook geared for researchers



This is an invitation from a community of advocates and researchers living with dementia. We welcome you to participate and collaborate in research projects that value your experience and expertise. In dementia research, there is a growing emphasis on generating meaningful research collaborations with people with lived experiences of dementia. Your experience and expertise are most important! This is to ensure that dementia research is designed to effectively represent and benefit those living with dementia.

**"We have a hunger for support and a hunger for community."**

Research advocate living with dementia

So often with a dementia diagnosis, we lose community as we lose our voice. Participating in research can provide a meaningful experience. It can be socially and emotionally stimulating. It's an opportunity to share our experiences and have our voices heard to make a difference in the lives of those affected by dementia.



**What your involvement could look like**

You can be involved in dementia research in many ways and during different research phases! How you wish to contribute to research can help you best choose which research projects you want to be involved in. You can be involved in:

## 1. Building Teams, Setting goals

You can shape research priorities by helping researchers identify problems and gaps that are most important to you.

Your insights can ensure that research is designed to make participants feel safe and comfortable.

## 2. Preparation and Training

You can share your experiences of living with dementia to better help researchers anticipate risks and benefits of research and other ethical considerations.

You can also support training researchers and facilitators.

## 3. Data Gathering and Data Analysis

You can help design, facilitate or participate in focus groups, interviews, completing surveys, testing medical interventions and more.

You can also be a part of research teams as a facilitator and help with data gathering activities.

## 4. Sharing and Communication of Data

You can jointly present research or co-host events to share research findings and outcomes.

You can help develop strategies on how to bring research back to those most affected by dementia.

Above: Recruitment and research pamphlet

# Appendix 4 : Carnegie Workshops Research Plan

## Carnegie Workshop Plan Submitted to the Research Ethics Board

### WKSP: Workshop

	Facilitator	Themes	Questions	Activities	Supplies	Raw Data Collected
<b>Consents</b>				First consent will be acquired to engage with participants and gather data		Secondary consent will be acquired before sharing de-identified raw data
<b>WKSP 1</b>	Garima	Reciprocal Relationship	How can we identify and strengthen existing reciprocal relationships with each other and with other community members and service providers?	<b>Drawing diagrams and maps:</b> Participants will be led through a series of diagramming and mapping activities to visualize their relationships with each other, other organizations and the community served.	Activities: Paper and markers  Research Documentation: Camera	Scans of drawings, notes, diagrams and maps drawn on paper by participants  Facilitators notes taken while observing the sessions  Data on number of participating staff and participating supervisors/ managers collected. No personal identifiable information collected.
<b>WKSP 2</b>	Garima as the facilitator to introduce the activity but no facilitator during the walk	Strengthening relationship with neighborhood and community	How do we see the neighborhood as a collaborator in how we serve the community?  How can we find moments of relationality in our place of work that extends beyond the office?	<b>A neighborhood walk:</b> Participants will be broken up into pairs to walk around the neighborhood and will be prompted to answer a set of questions to share stories about their relationship to the neighborhood and community.  A short survey will be sent out to the participants with the questions, how was your experience walking around in the neighborhood in this way?	Post activities: Google Survey	Answers to post activity survey questions  Data on the number of participating staff will be collected.  Surveys will ask for participant names. Names will be coded for data storage.
<b>WKSP 3</b>	Garima	Community and clients as collaborators	How do we foster relationships of care and respect with	<b>Playing with materials and 3D forms</b> Participants will be led through a set of activities where they engage with abstract	Activities: Drawing, mapping, and using abstract 3D forms made	Scans of notes or drawings made on paper by participants.  Facilitators notes taken while observing

			people we serve? How do we see people we serve as collaborators in finding service solutions and ensuring support?	forms to talk through themes of relationships.	of wood and textiles, paper, markers.  Research Documentation: Camera	the sessions  Photos of activities  Data on number of participating staff and participating supervisors/ managers collected. No personal identifiable information collected.
Post						Secondary consent form to include materials such as drawings and photos of materials produced

# Appendix 5 : Carnegie Workshop 1 Details

## Workshop 1 Guide

### Fostering relationships of reciprocity and interdependence

Purpose	Prompt Question	Design tools	Method	Time
<b>Identifying roles</b>	<p>How do you define your role in the work that you do?</p> <p>Pick a card or define your role in your own words?</p> <p>Share your role. Why/how do you take on this role?</p>	<p><b>A set of cards with different roles for inspiration. Cards example: support worker, helper, organizer, weaver, storyteller, advocate, witness-er of all things wild and weird, telepathic fortune-teller etc.</b></p>	<p>Each person can pick a card to define their roles or make up their own roles.</p> <p>They will be asked to share what role they usually play.</p>	
<b>Identifying who we lean on</b>	<p>Can you think of a recent example of a <b>valuable relationship</b>, where you were able to rely on someone- a relationship of dependence or interdependence ?</p> <p>Relationships can be within the organization or externally.</p> <p>Together we want to start creating a list of people/organizations that we lean on?</p>	<p><b>Note-taking by facilitators</b></p>	<p>Each person takes turn sharing their story.</p> <p>As everyone is sharing their instance of interdependence, the facilitator will develop a list of who we as a group usually lean on.</p> <p>After everyone has shared their story, the group together can continue to expand on this list.</p>	

	Can you share your experience/story ? Who, what, how?			
<p><b>Locating oneself within that system</b></p> <p><b>Visualizing the system that we work within</b></p>	<p>When you think about the work that you do within this organization, in this community (DTES) working for the city, advocating for clients, etc, generate a map or diagram to show yourself in relationship to the structures that you work within that impact your day to day</p> <p>those who you closely work with</p> <p>Pick a drawing or make your own. You can mark up the drawing if you wish.</p> <p>Once you're done with the drawing, can you locate yourself within the drawing? Make a mark, or add a sticker to locate yourself.</p>	<p><b>Pattern drawings:</b> drawings of abstract patterns that promote multiple interpretations and conversations</p>	<p>Each person will either pick an existing drawing or draw their own.</p> <p>They will make a mark to locate themselves in the drawing.</p> <p>Each person will go in a circle to talk about why they chose their drawing and what it represents for them.</p>	

Identifying opportunity to push through systemic barriers	Can you think of instances where you've felt constrained in this system and were able to make a crack, find a workaround, or navigated through these structures and systems? How were you able to do this?	Note-taking by facilitators	Each person will go around sharing their experiences.	
Identifying who we want to lean on more	What relationships do you think might allow for more support or make space to find those workarounds to push around barriers?	Note-taking facilitators	A group discussion to allow start envisioning what a larger interdependent network might look like.	



## Appendix 6: Design ways of reinvigorating stagnant spaces?- A reflection on relationships with Carnegie Outreach Colleagues

Shifting the onus by design- Chats with C

I picked up the book *Diagrams of Power and Performance* and finally started to feel unstuck. One of the projects in the book modeled the City of Medellín's paradigmatic transformation that led to community wide impact. Through the project, the Medellín Diagram, urban designers and theorists Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman "translate and visualize the complexity of political and civic processes that characterize the most progressive projects in the city, so that they may be translated and re-deployed in other contexts to cultivate a renewed civic imagination." Medellín is a case study of a Municipal Government spearheading efforts to engage the public and foster spaces of collaboration in order to confront poverty, housing and social services. "Municipalities were essential top-down catalysts to activating bottom-up sensibilities that were typically squashed into habits of acquiescence through centuries of imperialism, domination poverty. Bottom-up democratic practices are the key to civic freedom, no doubt." The diagram visualizes paradigmatic shifts within Medellín's municipal mandate. The diagram included the following ideas: Public space educates, redistribute knowledges and resources, fragmented institutions fragment the city, co-produce cultural programming, curate the meeting of formal and informal capacities, amongst others.



I was very excited to come across this project and wanted to share it with my colleague C who works at Outreach with me. On top of being one of the most empathetic and kind people, she is very aware and articulate about her work and the community that she serves. I invited her for coffee to get her advice on a possible design project on the DTES as well as share the Medellín Diagram project. She was thrilled when I showed her the diagram. Something about the visuals and the way it was laid out caught her attention. The sharing of diagram kick started our conversation really well. It gave her an idea of where design could sit in these conversations.

There was a lot of alignment between my conversations with C as well as earlier conversations with L and N. Some common themes were as follows:

The value of peer led spaces that are well resourced and supported by non-peers. This is currently not the case. We also talked about how systemic trauma impacts peer-led spaces and frequently perpetuates the same hierarchies that peer-led efforts are trying to dismantle in the first place. She talked about how self-governance has become a top-down buzz word. Top down promises of self-governance are not matched with much needed support and resources for people in those spaces of self-governance- A) Support that allows people to deal with systemic, longstanding intergenerational traumas to be able to exercise agency in a meaningful and collaborative ways. B) Adequate resources to actually succeed in self-governance spaces.

Data-based models of research- It was so great to hear L, N and C talk about how data-based models of understanding communities is not working! I felt validated. The City is not consulting the community to develop priorities as much as it conducts research to support and validate its own intentions. Traditional research is doing just that. And it puts a lot of pressure on service providers in the community to meet quantifiable goals. To make it worse, there always seems to be a stark disconnect between policy-makers/service designers at the Municipal/ Provincial level and the realities that takes place on the ground in the front lines.

The most valuable insight that came out of my chat with C was a question that she posed to me: She asked me why I wanted to do participatory research with people living in the community? And how could I make this type of research seem NOT trite (at best) or poverty pimping-ish and perpetuating trauma (at worst)? She talked about photo documentation project that represent people in the neighborhood- a sort of exotification of this “marginalized/ vulnerable” community in contrast to Megaphone, a community based publication that is by and for the community. We talked about how doing such a research will be very challenging, but that there is definitely a need to shift how research takes place. While we didn’t come up with a clear answer, she proposed a shifting of responsibility and onus.

Shifting of Responsibility/Onus: Going back to an earlier thought: people using services in the Downtown Eastside are constantly forced to tell and retell their stories over and over again. Its a constant performance of proving trauma, which I can imagine is exhausting and dehumanizing. A participatory research project to understand the woes of the community would likely do just that. C recommended ways in which I could highlight the role of businesses that are encroaching into the DTES neighborhood. These businesses are not showing any sense of responsibility to the community-we thought about the cafe that opened up a few doors down from Oppenheimer park with the most exclusionary frosted windows and overpriced offerings- classic tale of gentrification.

This makes me wonder how people outside of the DTES understand the DTES community. We talk about Vancouver in such delineated terms- addressing neighborhoods as bounded within stark contained lines- that is certainly the story of the DTES. How will people outside of the DTES ever priorities equitable systems and structures if we are not engaged with whats happening within that community? I am going back to the idea of porosity and how there is none...

Maybe a project about the DTES needs to be done outside of the DTES?

### **A Type of a Conclusion**

Okay so after all these small yet incredibly meaningful conversation, emotional ups and downs and brain-melting ambiguity, something awesome happened. I walked into my outreach supervisor B’s (who is also a colleague and friend) office this week. She asked me what I was up to at school. I just so happened to have my computer handy and showed her some of these explorations as a way to bring school and work together. I also showed her some service design



maps that I had designed, which she thought were fascinating and very helpful. She instantly started to see alignment between what she does and service design methods. She also wanted to hear more about creative methods as a different way to understand the same old problems- and as a way to get unstuck.

Our office has felt some stress from winter-during-COVID, which is not surprising. B jokingly calls this one phase of particularly troubling incidents as the time of “the Troubles”. We talked about how alone and helpless we feel in these moments. Especially coming from a managerial and bureaucratic perspective, I can imagine the pressure to adapt to quickly changing scenarios when the air that we breathe and the ideas that permeate within it become stale. In these moments, more than anything we need new energy. We need to new collaborations. A smudging ceremony hosted by the Indigenous elders literally broke through the stale air of our office. But why do we wait for the “troubles” or moments of crisis to respond in interdisciplinary ways, to bring in other methods, fresh air and energy.

As I excitedly told B about the value of creative methods, my colleague C walked into the room and saw the drawing of herself on my computer screen. She was elated. Perhaps it was the feeling of being represented that felt nice? Or just a representation of a really wonderful conversation in the cafe that we both cherished so much (I hope!)... I don't know. It was a good moment. To make it better, in that very moment, the coordinator of our outreach program popped in and became curious about our conversation. He wanted to see the drawings. He took my laptop and scrolled through the images. “Hmmm...” is all he said. But for me, THAT FELT HUGE! It was a brief moment of piercing. A very tiny and sharp pierce, but a pierce nonetheless.

This “project” allowed for a collision of frameworks. It was the meeting of social workers, teachers, front-line workers, designers, managers and all the other roles that each of us take on different days and different moments. Maybe we've modeled something important here.

Note:: All the folks mentioned in this reflection were consulted and gave their consent to publicly share this document.

## Appendix 7: Basket explorations and metaphor for research



### **Caring with + Caring for**

Designing a habitat for birds- a bird basket. Design with my mom- co-creation from scavenging material to making the basket. What does mutually beneficial design look like? Here my mom and I felt healing and joy from bringing something for birds and a deeper connection to our City. This is reciprocity.

**Designing with moms:** If we were always to design with moms what would our design output look like? There will maternal instincts of care infused in all design projects?

**Materiality of relationality:** what material properties allow for fostering relationships and impromptu connections. What about the materials that I foraged made it easy to make small object for care.

**Consider rules of foraging:** “Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may

take care of them. Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life. Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer. Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need. Take only that which is given. Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm. Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share. Give thanks for what you have been given. Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken. Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.”- Kimerrer

**Death and Caring** : Inspiration from the Japanese practice of Kintsugi that also applies here. The following reflection is from my thoughts on Daniela Rosner’s Critical Fabulation which informed this action.

I loved Rosner’s thought of repair and signs of repair like Kintsugi as a prolonging of a process instead of a final step of a process when a thing is made whole again at last- the object is fixed, the work is done. The legacy of the narrative built through the breaking is prolonged within the scars of the crack. The narrative of continuity is furthered as the mark of repair opens up the possibility of further disrepair and repair, shifting the aesthetic of an artifact and with that its embodied histories ad infinitum, until the artifact disintegrates into the smallest sediments of dust and blows away.

Kintsugi then is also a mode of imbuing care into an artifact- in anthropocentric terms, a sort of surgical prolonging of life as well as a blaring recognition and acceptance of the mortality of an artifact- everything breaks- everything dies. Rosner talks about Kintsugi’s power of suggesting competing possibilities. She mentions possible relationships between beauty and breakdown, consumption and mending, overlooking and recollecting. I’ll add preservation and death to that list which is reminiscent of Tony Fry’s mention of permanence and sacrifice.

I consider Kintsugi as care, thus caring as attentiveness to preserve, to ensure survival as well as caring towards death and post death- caring for hospice, for burial, for anatomical disintegration towards nutrition for earth’s regeneration. Perhaps, the blown away sediments of dust left of an artifact become food for micro-airborne creatures?

## **Can these considerations become analogies for how we research or do inquiry work?**

