SHIFTING: ONTOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS AND WRESTLING WITH DOMINANT POSITIONALITIES AND WORLDVIEWS IN SOCIAL DESIGN PRACTICES

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Shifting: Ontological Orientations and Wrestling with Dominant Positionalities and Worldviews in Social Design Practices

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DECLARATION

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Kate McEntee
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ABSTRACT

The research in this exegesis argues that in order to disrupt dominating paradigms in social design practice, there is a need to recognise the politics inherent in the people doing the practice, and how we (social design practitioners) work with our own dominant positionalities across diverse worldviews. These two elements — positionality and worldviews — are described in the research as ontological orientations.

The research situates domination and dominant positionality within a complexity of identity and experiences, and how we are constantly being shaped and reshaped through many worlds, peoples, contexts and places (Akama 2021). The research is informed by literature from feminism, decolonising design and racial justice to think about how social design can bring the critical into practice. This research attends specifically to how these critical discourses support an intersectional decolonial praxis that encourages social design practitioners to activate and apply these ideas to everyday lives and practices.

Building from this examination of discourse, the research unfolds across three projects which seek to address dominant positionality and worldviews from different entry points: ways of knowing and ignorance produced by dominant positionalities; ways of doing and the relationships between “best practices” and critical-dialogical approaches to practice; and how practitioners have addressed and challenged the complexity of their own domination in practice.

The intent of this research is to produce resources for social design practitioners to productively recognise and address various ways domination operates through our own ways of being in the world. The contribution of this research is “shifting”, as a concept and practice that offers a way to account for the role of dominant positionalities in practice, support more heterogeneous worldviews, and bring the critical into practices in order to challenge dominant paradigms in design. Shifting builds from Third- World feminist Chela Sandoval’s (1991) concept of differential consciousness and was developed through attention to ontological orientations across the analysis of the three research projects.

This document is accompanied by an exhibition. You can find the exhibition at: shifting.hellothisiskate.com. The exhibition is designed to provide an exploratory experience of shifting through images, recordings, stories and artefacts produced through the projects and practices of

this research. It should be viewed after reading this document. It is not designed as a standalone website to be viewed or understood outside of the context provided by this exegesis.

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PREFACE

This research begins with an orientation to who I am. As a design researcher, I reflect on how particular aspects of my identity, background, experiences and relationships shape the research process and outcomes. This positioning underlies the ways in which my worldviews have been shaped. There are things about who and how I am in the world that are fixed. I am white: not just by the colour of my skin, but through my ancestors' European immigration that blurred particular family histories; through an American upbringing that celebrated individualism, hard work and progress; and through the Christian values that forms the foundation of my beliefs and values about social justice and equality in the world. I primarily move through a world (one world within many) that privileges white ways of being, while discounting, fearing and erasing worldviews and ways of being that are "other".

As will be explored throughout this research, however, my positioning is not static. How I have been conditioned to see and understand "the world", and my role in it, moves. In order to address the ongoing, oppressive influences

of colonialism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in design practice, we must address it in our dominant positionalities, and question how these positionings shape our interactions with worlds. This requires bringing attention to our starting points, and attuning to the ways in which our encounters with many worlds shift and mould our ways of being, affecting and informing our ontological orientations. In recognising plural, dynamic and relational ways of being, we are constantly being shaped and reshaped through many worlds, peoples, contexts and places (Akama 2021).

DISCOVERING WHITENESS

The following relates one of many starting points, which could be chosen to orient the reader to me and this research. It is an experience that describes ways I am embedded in the world with a particular identity, history and politics, as well as characterises the type of design practices with which this research is concerned. It also serves to situate how this research project unfolds across three discrete aspects of enquiry: knowledges and ignorances, worldviews and approaches to doing practice, and ways of being developed with practice, time and relationships.

In 2015, I was searching for a project topic for my master's thesis in Transdisciplinary Design in New York City. This was three years after the murder of Trayvon Martin, the event that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. It was a little more than a year before Trump was elected, and five years before the Black Lives Matter movement surged to its current national and global prominence in the middle of 2020. I read an in-depth, investigative article about political lobbying and mass incarceration in the United States as a bi-partisian issue. People from both the left and the right were concerned about the growing costs, high recidivism rates, ineffective programming, and violent abuse within these institutions as well as the increased use of private prisons to meet the growing demand. There was agreement on the system being broken and in need of an overhaul, with varying ideas on how it should be fixed. It was a "wicked problem" (Rittel and Webber 1973). As transdisciplinary designers in training, this was the kind of topic we were encouraged to focus on for our thesis. Mass incarceration comprised social, political and cultural issues, as well as economic and urban infrastructure concerns. As described initially by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, wicked problems are ill-formulated, have no beginning or end, make it difficult to gather clear data, are informed by sometimes conflicting facts, and encompass many stakeholders and competing values (Rittel and Webber 1973; Buchanan 1992). Wicked problems have no clear or straightforward ways to address them, and require a facilitative and ongoing process to work through rather than solve. This way of defining major social "problems" has become a foundational element for the social practice of designing (Diefenthaler 2017).

At the time, I began to investigate the "wicked problem" of mass incarceration in the United States, with questions such as: why were so many people being put into prison? How might we support people who

are entering the prison system rather than punish them? I had ideas about creating social service programming for those affected by the prison industrial complex. I imagined post-incarceration employment programs, family support groups, social and educational supports within prisons. I wanted to work with people across the system: police, inmates, families, policy makers and activists. I was eager to engage with and learn about the lives of all these very different people, their challenges and successes.

I presented my selected topic for approval from my advisors, and began to read more about the history of mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex. In the beginning, I felt quite confident that I would be able to *do* something about this issue. It was not that I thought I had the *answers* to these difficult questions, but rather that I had the tools, curiosity and empathy to understand other people and address this topic in some way. My personal experiences with family members who have suffered from mental illness and addiction felt analogous in some ways, albeit with my own limited experience in the prison system. I wanted to bring folks together across experiences and disciplines to create something that could have a positive effect on reducing mass incarceration. My lack of expertise in the specific content area, and my own personal positioning in relation to the issue were not of concern to myself, advisors or part of the research training or process.

The resources I used to approach the initial research effectively stopped my original, "collaborative, problem-solving" proposal. I first encountered the work of James Baldwin (1965; 2012; 2017), and then other critical Black scholars and activists such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2012), Angela Davis and her organisation Critical Resistance (Davis 2003). These revealed completely different ideas about the way I saw myself and my experience in relation to the proposed project. At the risk of oversimplification, what I learned was that mass incarceration exists in the United States because of racism. Entrenched, systemic and blatant racism. As a white American, I was part of, or at the very least benefitting from, the same system that creates and perpetuates mass incarceration. I was not, as I had imagined, somehow uniquely positioned to 'help' those being affected by crime and prison. Rather, I was in a position of total ignorance to the wider system in which these oppressive realities persisted.

Through exposure to Black scholarship and activism, and the personal reflection it catalysed in me, I was led to see *for the first time*: 1. Whiteness exists, and is a historied and active social, political, economic

force in the world; and 2. I am white, and part of this history and force. Previous to this, I had never considered my own racial identity as part of my work. I had never read anything that pointed out, as Baldwin (2017) does, the role of "whiteness", and its established invisibility to white people, in the perpetuation of racism. Feminsit scholar and Goenpul woman from Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2020) argues that white women are never represented to themselves as white. Through the work of mainstream white feminism, they are represented back to themselves as gendered, classed, and even from different ethnicities, but never as white.

Writing this now in 2022, after the significant events of 2020 and beyond, this revelation might sound trite. And although anecdotal, it is significant to relating my alarming, though unsurprising ignorance. It is one experience that illustrates the ways I was able to move through the world and believe my values, good intentions and good education put me in a position to "help" others, while ignoring the underlying systems that supported me to be placed within that particular position. It reveals how much I did not understand about how I was situated in the world, and how that ignorant position was supported by family, culture, politics and educational institutions. The process of learning about my own ignorance continues to foster a healthy uncertainty in both myself and my research.

DEVELOPING A PERSPECTIVE ON WORLDVIEWS

Two years before my thesis work began, I had decided to enter this particular Transdisciplinary Design program driven by my own experiences of wanting to "help" and "solve" social problems. I had previously undertaken Religious Studies, and worked in interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution projects. In 2012, I was introduced to using design methods and practices for social outcomes when my employer sent me to the Stanford d.school Executive Education program. The interdisciplinary process of design thinking—bringing diverse mindsets, experiences and expertise to collaboratively and creatively work together—drew me to design in the same way I was drawn to interfaith dialogue. I saw design thinking as a human-centred and participatory methodology that enables designers to creatively solve problems in the world (Brown 2009). At the "centre" of this methodology was an empowering process of collaboratively learning from and with people. Proponents of design thinking from the d.school noted

that accessibility of the methodology is one of its strengths; the "excitement over design thinking lies in the proposition that anyone can learn to do it" (Goldman and Kabayadondo 2017, 3, quoted in Diefenthaler, 2017, 10). My passion for design was linked directly to practices of collaboration—building relationships and working with people from various different backgrounds in collective and creative work, and addressing complex social and political challenges. This inspired me to look into where design was doing this kind of collaborative and social work in the world.

I have no formal design qualifications or material design practice. I was brought into design from sites that evidence privilege through access to elite educational institutions and financial support for their costly programming. While the 8-week, industry-focused d.school program and my two-year masters by research were very different in scope, depth and engagement, they were both eager for the non-designer to apply design processes, design thinking and design approaches in ways that were outside of conventional, materially-driven design practices. As a non-designer, I was part of a wave of people coming from diverse fields into design, and excited by the interdisciplinary and process-oriented creative practices being shaped and deployed across different contexts. I pursued these educational experiences out of a desire to engage in collaborative social practice from more creative and embodied perspectives than my professional experiences at the time working in policy, dialogue and legal support.

The very idea of accessing elite education to be better positioned to "help", "solve" complex, social issues is indicative of a particular worldview, one that values institutional education, and seeks a sustainable income from this as a professional career. This contrasts with engaging in critical social work as a means of survival in the face of opposing forces such as white supremacy and institutionalised racism, and the reality of colonial-driven annihilation of one's languages, cultures, knowledges and people. This is not a simple dichotomy, that you sit on one side or another. There are people who face these opposing forces everyday, *within* these institutions. There are also ways these institutions have played important roles in fostering worldviews and actions in opposition to domination. However, the pursuit of this institutional knowledge is part of a particular positioning within social practice that values credentialing as a means of engaging in social change in the world. This PhD is further evidence of this situation, although this perspective is challenged and problematised

at different points in this work. The issues being confronted here are not unique to design, as they are present across all fields of practice seeking to engage collaboratively and inclusively with diversely-positioned peoples and communities.

Through my own process of trying to understand the role of my identity and conditioning, I have confronted the particular ways that I have been taught to perceive "helping". This lineage can be traced back to models of thought and systems based in Christian ethics and capitalism, driven by underlying aims seeking to exert control over others and assimilate differences (Pascoe et al. 2019; Davis 2017). "Helping" work uses a language of generosity, compassion and empathy that obscures the hegemonic projects it perpetuates (Keshavarz 2017; Nicholls 1999). As Moreton-Robertson (2020) explains, those from dominant, racialised, settler worldviews are not able to fully see themselves because of how their own world is conquered by this singular worldview. This alignment with dominant ways of being contributes to an illusion of singularity and, more insidiously, a singularity that propagates fearful beliefs that diverse worldviews and politics are an existential threat to the only way of being in the world. Breaking the cycles of perpetuating white, colonial hegemony does not require "solving" poverty or mass incarceration or gun violence through dominant, modernist, rational worldviews. It does require recognition of how thinking and operating within singular, dominant worldviews perpetuates systemically-driven challenges, and distorts possibilities for more plural, situated responses. Recognising and moving away from ingrained, dominant knowledges and approaches is essential for creating space for equity-driven, inclusive and collaborative social practices that engage plural knowledges. This is a process. We can learn to continuously engage and critique our positioning and worldviews, rather than simply accept their influences. This research investigates how to create opportunities for this awareness in ways that are accessible within the everyday lived experiences of practitioners, including myself.

Learning to recognise that our worldviews, knowledge processes, and how we are in relationship with the world becomes fundamental in social design practice. As Yoko Akama (2017) contends, "Research across class, race, gender, and cultural difference means working with and through difference. It means discovering how one's own positioning and perspective is fluidly and continually constructed through encounters with others" (83). This requires not simply engaging with new knowledges or

new kinds of doing, but being open to radically different ways of relating and engaging with criticality, and fundamentally shifting how we relate to worlds and developing an understanding of the ways in which worlds move to and through us.

WHO THIS WORK IS FOR

The research of this PhD more broadly investigates dominant identities, and ways of doing and being in the worlds that are shaped and perpetuated by embodying this dominance. This includes whiteness, Eurocentrism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy. This work is for people who, like me, embody dominating ways of knowing and doing, in both explicit and subtle ways of our practicing and being. This work seeks to understand how we can be and operate in ways that are more aware of this dominant conditioning, and not suppress, deny, exclude or dominate diverse worldviews. This research was inspired by my personal experiences, some of which are related here. The experiential impetus for the research was whiteness. Whiteness, as an identity and a structure, is one shape that dominant identity can take. This work is for people who may identify with whiteness, either through identity characteristics or how the structure shapes their practice, or who identify and connect through other dominating paradigms that they embody.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

As a field, design has been criticised, internally and externally, for reproducing "white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism" systems of oppression (Costanza-Chock 2018, 1). Further, the discipline has been unwilling to recognise the centrality of "Western, Anglophonic and neoliberal" ways of knowing and doing in design research and practice (Abdulla et. al. 2016, n.p.). These deeply entrenched values hinder the ability of design research and practice to earnestly engage with peripheral knowledges (Abdulla et. al. 2016, n.p.) and work meaningfully with heterogeneous communities (Akama 2017).

Design aspires to be a "different" way of engaging in social practices by using creative, participatory and human-centred methods. These practices and the practitioners using them, however, often operate within the same colonial mindsets and capitalist values, inhibiting the potential of the work to create fundamental social change. While social design projects can be successful in addressing and alleviating particular harms and social issues,

these “solutions” often operate and solve problems within the very same systems responsible for creating them (Stanton 2018). At best, social design creates temporary fixes and remains on the surface level of deeper, longer-term and radical change. At worst, social design perpetuates entrenched dynamics of white, patriarchal, Western knowledge “solving the problems” of historically oppressed and marginalised social groups under the guise of helping. There is a growing challenge for designers to attune to how, “design is a discipline deeply entangled in the dynamics of inequality” (Canlı and Martins 2016, 3) and how “heterogeneous practices and worldviews [are] often omitted from design orthodoxy” (Akama 2017, 80). These critiques open up the possibility for design, and designers, to shift away from dominating narratives that direct practice and “solutions”.

In this chapter, I first lay out the research argument, to orient you the reader to the specific concerns of this research. I then establish social design as the context of this research through the practice and training of both myself and the research participants, and a discussion of

the contested nature of defining social design across literatures and practice. I frame the notion of ontological orientations through a politicised self and multiple worldviews as the key components necessary to support a concept and practice of shifting, define shifting and state its contribution. I then provide an outline of the methodological approach of the research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the exegesis structure, including the website and description of the accompanying exhibition.

1
RESEARCH ARGUMENT

This research argues that without addressing the politics inherent in design practice and *the people doing the practice*, social design will continue to perpetuate dominating narratives and oppressive systems, including reenforcing structures of colonial imperialism, conforming to ideologies of heteropatriarchy and inherently supporting white supremacy. This research argument is grounded by developing an understanding of the politicised self, and how it operates within multiple worldviews (described as ontological orientations later in this chapter). A politicised self indicates one's identity, and the relationship of this identity with larger socio-political systems. This politicised self contributes to one's capacities and qualities of being in the world, and provides a way to interrogate the politics inherent in the people who do design practice. Operating from this and my own dominant positionality, I ask the following questions:

- How can social design practice and practitioners account for the role(s) of dominant positionality in their practice?
- Within messy, complex, and compromised professional and research environments, can social designers support heterogenous worldviews and meaningfully engage and work across diverse lived experiences and communities?
- How can social design practice, and practitioners activate critically-informed practices (bring the critical into practice) within everyday contexts of living and working in this role?
- How do critically-engaged social design practitioners rely on practices and knowledges in their processes to encourage this work?

These questions serve as helpful guides throughout the research, but are not stated as questions that the research aims to "answer". Instead, the research seeks to be a critical and creative response to the research argument. This research is not asking how, or if, dominant positionalities

shape worldviews and practices. Dominant positionality is understood as a given, active agent that shapes how one operates. This underlying premise is inherently supported by the literature, projects and stories shared throughout this research.

In seeking to understand how politicised nature of the people engaged in social design practice, the research comprises three distinct projects. Each project is described in one of three practice chapters in Part 2. While examining different content and working with different groups, all three projects are attempting to understand accessible ways to bring the critical project into practices. To "bring the critical into practices" means to take in critical, alternative accounts (critical theories) and apply, activate and understand them *through* practices. Each project uses different approaches to translate and activate criticality, in order to address positions of power and confront dominant narratives in our own selves. This work includes approaches of accumulating knowledge, or teaching "content", to bring in valuable alternative perspectives and accounts, as well as approaches oriented towards more relational and ongoing criticality, or how processes. Working across these highlights limitations of relying only on "content" to address how we are in our work, and the challenges of learning, teaching or describing ongoing, relational processes outside of those experiences. The research uses the various layers of research and accounting across the projects to discuss bringing the critical into practice with support from critical theory, and into maintaining an ongoingness with a dedication to practices, relationships and support.

Here in chapter 1, I further develop the argument for attending to *how we are* in practices as part of ontological orientations. Ontological orientations allow us (dominantly positioned practitioners) to keenly address dominant positionality as a way of our being in the world, and how this influences social design practices. Doing this work is supported by the contribution of the research, the ongoing development of the concept of "shifting". Shifting provides directions towards addressing dominant positionality, through engaged, situated, ongoing attention and practices. The concept is used to describe movement and relationality as part of our ontological orientations, while refraining from notions of changing oneself through self-development or volitional improvement.

I argue here the role of one-off engagements such as workshops, classes, takeaway insights, and materials like card decks and toolkits, can offer useful content and facilitate critical engagement. However,

standalone learning experiences and material tools can also create a false sense of “change” and promote the notion that anti-racism or decolonising is a piece of content to be learned or a static destination to be reached. Reliance on these experiences and tools promote developmental models based around ideas of “improvement” and emphasise outcome-driven actions in search of progress and change. In order to address the kinds of “being shifts” this research is attempting to pursue, research, literature and methods attempt to disclose dedicated practices that develop over time, in relationship with notions of practice and community. This goal recognises how working within communities of practice, from which ongoing relationships are built and maintained, provides support in ways that one-off engagements such as workshops and classes do not. Being in a community and being in relationships with others can support practitioners to critically examine ways of being and move beyond content-driven outcomes.

2
CONTEXT

The questions, literature and concepts developed through this research reach across a broad church of thought and practice. The research methods, myself as the practitioner-researcher and the participants in the research exercises, are joined by backgrounds in what is defined here as “social design practice”. As discussed in more detail below, social design is contested terrain, arguably not a field or practice, fraught with political implications and often used as a cover for neoliberal capitalism to parade around in the guise of social good. The context provided below seeks to recognise these complications, while at the same time identify a commonality of practices and methods as a broad field of practice that can be referred to as social, rather than a discretely defined field. This matters to this research because the social design practice described supports understanding the context of my practice as the researcher, the

professional and research practices of research participants, as well as the audience to which this research is speaking. The aims and significance of the research are also directed towards this idea of social design practice.

1.2.1 SOCIAL DESIGN PRACTICE

As noted in the preface, my research focuses on collaborative social practices in design. “Social design” can be defined as design-based practices aimed at creating social change, “to make change happen towards collective and social ends, rather than predominantly commercial objectives” (Armstrong et al. 2014, 6; Chen et al. 2016). Drawing from participatory design, codesign, and design anthropology, social design practices have historically placed value on human-centred approaches, and participatory and ethnographic methods to develop research and co-create with communities of focus (Armstrong et al 2014; Bannon and Ehn 2012; Binder et al. 2011).

The term “social design” refers to a wide range of practices and “will most likely disaggregate into new modes of practice...that cannot be predicted” (Armstrong et al 2014, 26). In this research, social design is regarded as a specific orientation to design practice, rather than a specific field of design practice (DiSalvo 2016). Social design is used as a term to signify a distinct milieu of design practice and scholarship that can be identified through shared characteristics, aims of practices and methods. Although, there are significant differences about how it actually manifests in the world (Chen et al. 2016; Abdulla 2016; Tromp and Vial 2022, Manzini 2015, Tonkinwise 2021). Identifying shared characteristics is used in this research to more clearly define the practice, scholarship, and participants involved in this research.

The participants in this research are practitioners using design-based approaches in fields such as government, policy, consulting, studio practice, healthcare, education and international development, in order to achieve social aims (Armstrong et al. 2014; Blomkamp 2018). These types of practices can also be found under labels such as: design thinking, co-design, human-centred design, civic design, social innovation, service design, strategic design, design research, and other terms. For the purposes of this research, social design denotes collaborative, socially-oriented design practices. Given this broad description, Markussen (2017) further delimits the term social design by comparing it with “social

innovation" and "social entrepreneurship". He argues the key difference is that social design operates on a relatively small scale, concentrating on projects that allow direct engagement with communities of focus. Markussen underlines the singularity of social design—as compared to social innovation or social entrepreneurship—which seek to create change on macro-levels and/or create systems that are transferable across different contexts. A social design project therefore requires direct engagement with particular people and communities, and the ability to navigate and facilitate multiple stakeholders with diverging needs and opinions. These social design projects use particular design methods to guide participatory and collaborative processes.

Others have argued that the project-by-project, community-scale approach of social design forecloses any large-scale sensemaking around social and political structures that are central to understanding and addressing social issues (Chen et al. 2016). However, this understanding of social design allows us to recognise three important characteristics. First, social design aims to work directly with communities in which the work is placed, relying on ethnographic and participatory methods to learn about communities and collaboratively design with them (Bannon and Ehn 2012). The developed history of practice established through participatory design helps support this trajectory. Second, social design is guided by project-level goals rather than large-scale change (Markussen 2017). This means the work is, in part, defined by distinct issues and outcomes within the boundaries of the project (ibid.; DiSalvo 2016). Third, social design requires a focus on the processual and relational aspects of the work (Light and Akama 2021). Working *with* communities on specific projects requires facilitation skills and an understanding of relational practice (Agid 2016a; Agid and Chen 2019). These characteristics support the importances of understanding and working with a politicised self through situated and relational means.

In these practices, collaborative design methods are used to build mutual understanding around an issue, and eventually lead the group to converge around an interesting and impactful project. However, the actual experience of working on complex, social issues is not reflective of this often-promoted, taught and idealised practice. The constraints of a commercial (and non-profit) studio model means it must bring in clients and complete projects in order to generate revenue (Stanton 2018). The celebrated and often visually engaging methods do not hold the complex,

embodied, messiness of what it means to work in diverse, socially-fraught environments and issues (Light and Akama 2012, McKercher 2020). Additionally, one of the challenges of co-creative social practice is that there is rarely a point upon which working across diverse expertise, experiences and backgrounds can authentically "converge" around a singular project idea or solution. This highly sought after convergence is problematically touted across design literatures and universalising models (Akama, et al. 2019). When the reality of practice is a process of compromises, sacrifices, open-ended and unfinished. Even a starting premise that convergence, i.e. homogeneity, is a goal requires people, generally those with least power, to conform, sacrifice ideas and compromise values in order to move work forward (Escobar 2018).

By recognising the importance of politics, situated and relational practices, social design connects to the more well-developed literature in participatory design around infrastructuring. "Infrastructuring" offers a critical lens as a way of understanding interventions at the level of socio-material systems (Agid 2016b). Infrastructuring attends to the processual and relational qualities of collaborative work aimed at creating social change (Karasti 2018). While not a topic directly addressed in this research, the central role of infrastructuring as a critical lens within participatory design demonstrates the complex, relational work of co-creative social practice (Agid 2016b). Infrastructuring petitions design practice to account for the processes and relationships as much as the artefacts or outcomes of the work. Thus, social design is a practice of facilitative, community capacities as well as socio-material outcomes. Infrastructuring is critical, specifically where participation, collaboration, power, design agency, and socio-material issues are of concern (Smith and Iverson 2018; Karasti 2018). This research positions social design as a practice that is not about large-scale social innovation or systems change, but focused on what is embodied, situated, culturally-bound and relational (Agid and Chin 2019).

1.2.2 SOCIAL PRACTICES NEED GOOD THEORY

Social design practice and its dedicated aims of so-called "common good" (Manzini 2015; Tromp and Vial 2022) need to be problematised. As Canlı and Prado (2016) argue, designers are all too willing to jump in and "solve" without deeper consideration of the contexts in which they are engaging:

> *...in the recent decades, many designers and design researchers have been directing their paths towards disadvantaged and marginalised groups or engaging themselves with community projects to 'empower people'... As to how these very disadvantages are historically, practically and epistemologically deployed and how design/material configurations are the first hand actors in this deployment is yet to be articulated; sometimes due to various complexities and difficulties involved in such possible discourses, sometimes due to lack of understanding and self-reflection (Canlı and Martins 2016, 3–5).*

Within the literature defining social design, there is a lack of engagement with the diverse accounts found in critical theory. This is part of an historical divide between theory and practice in design. Marjanne van Helvert describes how, "Design does not yet fully profit from theoretical foundations and critical, historical analysis" (van Helvert 2019, 27). Van Helvert notes that this history-theory-practice is particular to social design: "Because of its urgent nature, the field of socially committed design would benefit considerably from a more widespread historical awareness and more developed critical theory" (ibid.). This is not simply about analytical research skills or "facts" of history, but opening up the kinds of critical accounting (from whom, from where) that is available to the field and to practice.

In chapter 2, I argue that within social practice and design, critical theory and analysis is a supportive and necessary tool for building the robust and complex methods needed to attend to the individuals doing the practice, and work towards the stated aims of developing social design. In my own practice, making time and space for theory has been a force of slowing down that shapes a different approach to my project than the speed and delivery of project work. It has also been an agent of provocation, confronting my beliefs and practices and taking me down different worlds of thought. This critical engagement is in itself a mode of research (St. Pierre 2018). It makes seemingly straightforward constructs more complex, and opens up a greater depth and complexity of experiences.

For example, theories of Afro-Pessimism trouble the binary construct of settler-colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty. Afro-Pessimism highlights how a binary discourse around colonialism and land dispossession from Indigenous peoples erases the complexity and

racialised experiences of colonialism, forced migration and land. These theories offer diffracted understandings of bodies, immigration, land and sovereignty (Day 2015; Sexton 2016; Wilderson 2003). Engaging with Afro-Pessimism compels me to consider my own previously unconsidered perspectives in regard to the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty, forced migration and the loss of Indigenity experienced as a consequence of chattel slavery (Sexton 2016). Theory does not "answer" how to address these challenges. Rather, it moves me into a space of complexity and encourages me to have an attitude of there are no "right answers"[1]. My engagement with critical theory calls for ongoing, situated discourse, rather than axiomatic policies or blind support. These theories highlight the need to attend to how injustices are entangled across histories, identities and discourses, and the limitations of singular perspectives. In my practice, this type of engagement challenges a dominant paradigm that seeks solutions in a design process through either dualistic understandings of value (better or worse), or efforts to converge or synthesise disparate worldviews into singular cohesion. Instead theory encourages sifting through divergent perspectives in particular, situated, lived experiences, and accounting for those experiences. The complexity of this work refutes efforts that seek a resolution, and instead allows the ambiguities and uncertainties of lived experience to be present and felt.

Theory, as a way of giving account, offers individuals a voice to represent their experiences, and provides a window into understanding diverse lived experiences in worlds. The work of Black feminists in The Combahee River Collective (1977) describes the lived experiences of being Black, queer women on the frontlines of struggles for gender and racial equality, demonstrating how their social and political lives are uniquely shaped through these intersecting identity characteristics (Taylor 2017). Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) legal theory drew on the same intersectional experience to demonstrate the failure of the United States legal system to account for how Black women experience discrimination (namely sexism and racism) in ways uniquely different from how Black men

1 "No right answers" is not to avoid the responsibility necessary to support particular actions, opinions or groups. It is used to promote a position of intellectual humility and curiosity (See Tanesini 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso et al. 2020). Rather than encouraging decisions about what is true, it creates a position that is activated and demonstrable in lived-experience situations. "Knowing" is not held in a constant through theory, but activated in situational application and practice.

experience racism, and how white women experience sexism. Her now famous term “intersectionality” provided a tangible concept that helped make this reality legible to the court system, and offered greater visibility and acknowledgment of the experience of Black women in America. “Intersectionality” has since become a tool for analysis, a distinct field of discourse, and an embodied method for political action (praxis) (Cho et al. 2013). Here, theorising has created space for diverse lived experiences to be seen and validated across disciplines and spheres of life, as well as a force to create substantive changes. In my own practice, intersectionality helps me situate the positionality of myself and of others in the room, and account for how dominant positionality is not static and fixed, but dynamic and relational. Intersectionality provides me with a tool to account for complexity within my own situated self, and an understanding that collaborators and participants also hold this complexity. Theory can help design practitioners notice the invisible things happening in a room and gives “language” (visual, material, written, verbal) to a moment, gesture, or look (Diatta et al. 2021[2]). Theory can offer guidance for how to be with others, and provide encouragement to take the time to investigate a feeling, an affinity or affect (Stewart 2007; Stewart 2017; Bertlant and Stewart 2019; Anderson 2009). Critical theory helps reveal things I cannot see simply practicing on my own.

However, just like any tool, knowledge or practice, theory can be wielded in many different ways. It is not a magic cure-all that only promotes careful, thoughtful practice and reveals hidden truths. In her essay, “Theory as Liberatory Practice” hooks tells us, “Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfils this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorising towards this end....” (1991, 2–3). Theory can also be used in ways that entrench conventional power dynamics and exert control over others. Discussing the struggle for Black liberation, hooks describes how some “elite academics...construct theories of “blackness” in ways that make it a critical terrain which only the chosen few can enter, using theoretical work on race to assert their authority over black experience” (ibid., 7).

2 This is an essay I co-authored and published in 2021 during the course of this research: Myriam D. Diatta, Stacy Holman Jones, and Kate McEntee. 2021. “A Place to Meet: Living with Critical Theory as a Mode of Care in Everyday Artistic Practice.” Research in Arts and Education 23.

Theory is often considered an encounter with thought that we experience individually through hearing or reading the words of a theorist; however, theory is also an active, engaged part of how we live and practice. Theoretical accounts are integral and necessary parts of collective action. As part of a larger, liberatory framework, "...we must continually claim theory as necessary practice within a holistic framework of liberatory activism" (ibid., 8). For this research, the point is not simply to learn about these alternative, critical practices but for them to be active in practice. This distinction, between engaging with "content" as opposed to "process" is repeated in different contexts throughout this research.

This project uses critical theory—particularly feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial thinking—to inform the research in three distinct ways. First, in chapter 2, I outline a collection of critical discourses to inform an intersectional, decolonial design praxis. This praxis is defined and detailed below in section 5 on methodology and methods. Second, throughout the document, I tell stories from my own practice and learning to explain how engaging with theory provided me the opportunity to slow down, be more thoughtful, and consider alternatives to my ingrained, dominant practices. Lastly, the projects described in Part 2 (chapters 3, 4 and 5) bring critical, alternative theories into practice, in both explicit and implicit ways. These uses of critical theory are shaped through attention to ontological orientations. A focus on only the accumulation of alternative knowledges, and alternative practices or ways of doing, maintain the same entrenched oppressive systems and dominating relational dynamics unless there is also attention to ways of being with the work. Thus, the research is ontologically oriented. It seeks to understand how to use critical theories and create critical accounts, through our ontologies and attention on dominant ways of being that become embodied in practices.

3

ONTOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

Ontological orientations are called upon as a way of attending to complex positionalities and multiplicity of worldviews. This research recognises that social design practices are understood and enacted through ontological orientations—the politicised self and multiple worldviews—that contribute to ways of being in the world. These are significant factors in how collaborative social design practices are articulated and produced, and how systems, services and products are brought into being through these practices. The research seeks to interrogate how social design practitioners from dominant positionalities can account for the role of these factors, and become more skillful at attending to their own ways of being and doing in practice. Ontological orientations set up the structure to be able to understand shifting as a movement that occurs within this structure.

1.3.1 THE POLITICISED SELF

This research argues that social design practitioners cannot productively participate in the complex issues and processes that social design projects pursue, without understanding that the politicised self at the center of an individual's approach to practice. The politicised self refers to the political implications of one's position in the world including class, racialised identity, gendered body, citizenship status, and subsequent privileges from these positions (Diatta et al. 2021). How one is situated in the world plays an influential role in shaping one's worldviews.

My own lived experience means my practice is embodied through a multiplicity of ways of being in the world. This includes the characteristic labels of white, American, female, queer, cis-gendered, settler living on and benefiting from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. These labels stated on their own exist as flat, performative ideas of who and how I am in the world. This research has been structured through theories that address the complex intersections of ways dominant identities show up in the world. To understand the influence, impacts and operations

of just my own dominant positionality requires engagement across a multiplicity of discourses. This research therefore situates domination within a complexity of identity and experiences.

Positionality—mine and that of research participants—is of central importance to this research. Positionality is a well-established practice which affirms a researcher's own role in shaping and influencing the outcomes of the research. Fox et al. (2020) frame a relational positionality in design work stating, "Recognizing and contending with design positionality entails a reflexive analysis of personal history, cultural status (e.g., gender, nationality, and racial identity) and power differentials—aspects of our identities that mark relational positions rather than essential qualities" (67). Across the discourses employed in chapter 2 to shape an intersectional decolonial praxis, the importance of situating oneself in one's own history and identity in relation to the specific context, place and people one is working with, is a key theme that is reiterated throughout.

1.3.2 WORLDVIEWS

Worldviews refer to how one understands, or interprets the world around them. Worldviews are built out of both how we are situated in the world—body, geography, politics—how we understand the world from situated positions, and how the "view" from that position is shared by others similarly positioned. Our worldviews influence how we relate to others and operate in practice. Māori academic Linda Tuhawi Smith opens her foundational text *Decolonising Methodologies* (2012) by framing the completely different worlds of Indigenous people and the world of research. She points to how each of these groups operate from fundamentally different understandings of how the world works, and dramatically different ideologies about what research is and does. Western researchers often believe their work serves a "greater good" and operate from a worldview that the pursuit and categorisation of knowledge has ultimately led to benefitting a generalised understanding of "mankind" (Smith 2012, 2). For Indigenous peoples, research is "deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" (ibid., 2). Research is a tool for stealing and oppressing

traditional knowledges[3], to constitute Indigenous existence as a "savage Other", and justify the genocide of Indigenous peoples. This exemplifies dramatically different foundational worldviews that are used to interpret the relationships and activity happening in a given situation.

Design researchers Agid and Akama (2018) use the term "worldview" to characterise different ways of accounting for what occurs and what is meaningful in collaborative design processes. They describe a dominant, instrumentalised worldview that interprets the world through "clean", straightforward and functionalist understandings. This results in descriptions and design tools that aim to fix and statically categorise people, events and interactions (such as a journey map). This is contrasted with a "feminist, phenomenological worldview" that makes sense of what is happening by attending to what is dynamic, relational and situated in the particulars of a moment. This worldview results in highlighting situated movements and moments, rather than universal relationships. The use of the term worldviews signals that this research is committed to understanding how people embody different histories, knowledges, communities and experiences, how these shape into particular understandings of the ways we operate in the world, and how one accounts for and attends to relationships. Our worldviews are not neutral. They are shaped by a politicised self and situated, but there is also agency in choosing how we attend to and interpret what happens around us.

The ontological orientation stops this research from seeking volitional self-improvement plans and changes to be "better". Our bodies and identities are politicised in the world in ways we do not control. We are subject to these systems. However, we can become more aware of how we are being shaped by these systems, and received by other worldviews. Worldviews are entangled with how we are situated in the world and our experiences. These forms and our related subjectivities are not subject to measurable change, improvement or development. And yet, this research is considering how to address them as ontological matters of concern. It

3 Karen Martin is a Noonuccal woman from Minjerripah and also has Bidjara ancestry. As an Aboriginal academic, she stories these incongruous worldviews through the ways her experience and contributions were discounted in the Western-model research process employed to register and grant Native Title to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She describes how Western worldviews that categorise and interpret Indigenous identity and knowledge contradicted Indigenous worldviews, but nonetheless were prioritised in the research process. Through this experience she goes on to propose meaningful frameworks for 'Indigenist research' (Martin and Miraboopa 2003).

recognises that the dominantly positioned practitioner can become more skillful at accounting for our politicised-self and embodiment of particular worldviews.

1.3.3 SHIFTING

This research offers the concept of "shifting" as a way dominantly-positioned practitioners can attend to, and account for our ontological orientations. Chela Sandoval (1991) developed differential consciousness as a model to illustrate how Third World feminist praxis broke from the hegemonic model of oppositional consciousness structured through fixed ideologies by white, Western feminism. Sandoval instead outlines oppositional consciousness as a series of different "modes", emphasising that, within a Third World feminist praxis, each mode is a different tactical approach of thinking and action. Differential consciousness is then described as the "fifth" mode of consciousness, which allows the movement between and among the other modes[4]. She uses the metaphor of shifting gears in a car to describe how differential consciousness allows a Third World feminist to embody dynamic consciousness and shift between tactics. Sandoval describes:

> *Differential consciousness requires grace, flexibility, and strength: enough strength to confidently commit to a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power's formation require it; enough grace to recognize alliance with*

4 These other modes of consciousness are adapted from a 4-phase developmental model of white feminism. Sandoval claims the diverse modes of consciousness in Third World Feminism include: Legitimation of humanity: Women and men across race, class and culture are equal, and should be treated as such; There is no desire for assimilation: Revolutionary tactics affirm differences and resist assimilation; Superior positionality of the oppressed: The oppressed offer a higher ethical and moral vision than those holding power; Separatism from domination: The differences found outside the social and political dominant order must be nurtured and protected through separation from it. Through engaging differential consciousness one enacts one or more of these positions fluidly, sometimes for short periods of time and sometimes longer. It is not that one reaches different phases of consciousness or attempts to live within one mode to create smooth, contradictory-free ways of being and thinking in the world.

> *others committed to egalitarian social relations and race, gender, and class justice, when their readings of power call for alternative oppositional stands (1991, 15).*

It is valuable to note how different Sandoval's description of consciousness is from ideas of development in a linear, forward progression. It is not a model of accumulation or growth, something that deepens into established roots, gets bigger, and takes up more space (both in thought and practice). Rather, it is a description of consciousness that is responsive and fluid; able to move backwards or sideways rather than only forward. It is a type of consciousness that both creates and breaks alliances (to fixed ideas) as an active approach of setting "new processual relationships" (ibid., 12)[5].

Sandoval's differential consciousness introduces a type of response that moves *in relationship* to domination. It is not a movement defined by direct, fixed opposition. It moves with the different forms that domination takes on, and recognises this as developing processual relationships. Sandoval describes differential consciousness as a "survival skill well known to oppressed peoples", already well versed in being within plural worldviews (15).

As described above, dominant positionality is not a static, singularly defined way of being in the world. Addressing it requires a response that moves and is shaped by context and situation. In this research, I am seeking ways for practitioners to embody greater awareness of identity, in order to change social design practices. However, directing this work at "being" means it is not about a kind of "forward movement change", akin to changing or transforming from Point A to Point B, and thus leaving behind Point A (including the history, identity and experiences embedded within it). Sandoval's metaphor to describe engaging differential consciousness as a car shifting gears describes a type of movement that allows for navigation

5 Sandoval was seeking to legitimise different ways "for generating identity, ethics, and political activity" (1991, 9). The work of U.S. Third World feminists recognised the limited understanding of what 'opposition' to domination could be. Within white, Western feminism, many of the same models being used by the oppressor—politics, power, money, race—were being used to win their version of "gender equality", and further oppress U.S. women of the Third World. In the face of this, it is not surprising that the kind of "intuitive" and "sensitive" skills that are highly developed, responsive and subjective are dismissed, belittled and rejected in spheres of hegemonic, institutional power.

in response to different forms of domination—ideological, structural, individual. It requires a movement that is not understood as dualistic, but responsive. In this, it allows a shifting movement, understood here as a response directed at developing new processual relationships rather than developmental change.

Shifting[6] in this research is developed to describe situated, relational responses to forms of domination we face in ourselves and in the world. Shifting is a form of consciousness that addresses our ontological orientations. It is demonstrated in different forms throughout each project. In the *Worlds We Live In* workshop (chapter 3), shifting is used to describe understanding our ignorance in a dynamic relationship, with both ourselves as individuals and as a social construct through

"epistemologies of ignorance". Shifting allows a social design practitioner to address and account for ignorance as both an individually held, and in relationship with plural relationships. In chapter 4, I develop a series of *Practice Provocations*, which respond to ideas of "best practices" designed to address identity and domination by recognising the dominant worldviews inherent in the static framing of a "best" practice, and compare these approaches with critical-dialogical approaches. Rather than being in direct opposition to one another, the aim of the *Provocations* is to create processual relationships between them. In chapter 5's *Shift Work*, I more firmly ground the research in the concept of shifting, explicitly proposing a provisional definition of shifting from which design practitioners form their own responses and stories about addressing domination from their own practices.

6 Decolonial scholarship uses the notion of ontological shift to describe the kind of work necessary to bring about decolonial change. It is used to characterise the monolithic hegemony of coloniality, and illustrate the kind of deep, pervasive changes required to address ongoing coloniality (Mignolo 2007; Schultz et al. 2018). From this perspective, the decolonial ontological shift speaks to a change on a more global level of consciousness, and frames an ontological shift as a singular, theoretical concept. It is dissimilar to how shifting is used in this research, as a framing, responsive, dynamic, ontological movement. In design studies, Anne-Marie Willis (2006) also uses the term "ontological shift" in defining ontological design. Willis characterises this shift as a "dispositional change" that is necessary to understand and wield the world-making capacities inherent in ontological design (81). This described dispositional change does touch on how one understands their relationship to practice, and what it means to shift that relationship through ontological means. However, it assigns a volitional capacity to creating these ontological shifts, which is not supported in my argument.

I rely on shifting in this research in several ways. I include “Shifting Stories” within the chapters that highlight how experiences from this research created a change in the way I relate to particular content or ways of being with practice. I use shifting as a methodological move in the research to analyse workshop outcomes (chapter 3), to guide the design of provocations (chapter 4), and as a concept to engage with and learn from other practitioners (chapter 5). Finally, shifting is framed as a contribution of this work. The development of the concept is a way to understand and relate to ways of being in the world, which both recognises dominant narrative as part of our ontology and works through this recognition. Shifting seeks to create change within design practice by establishing new processual relationships through the politicised self and worldviews, ontological “materials”.

4

AIMS, SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION

This research is focused specifically on people who work in social design and occupy dominant positionalities. This includes identities, proximity to dominant identities, and adherence to the ideologies and structures that they represent. Namely, whiteness or proximity to whiteness, settler-colonial, and cis-gendered are all identities that I embody, and are constructs that signify particular ideologies in the world. The entangled aspects of this identity are part of my own positionality. These positionalities influence social design practices by situating me in particular relationships, experiences and power dynamics to the people and projects with which I work. This influences the eventual outcomes and consequences of design work that aim to “solve” social issues that arise from the same systems that support these identities in the world.

1.4.1 AIMS

The intent of this research is to produce processes that enable social design practitioners to account for how domination operates through our ways of being in the world. It seeks to demonstrate how particular ways of knowing and doing are produced by our ways of being, and thus shaped by our positionalities. The research is concerned with how those of us high on the matrix of domination (Hill Collins 1990) can go beyond "knowing more" or "doing better" from these positions by working towards radically different ways of being in relationship with ourselves, our worldviews and relationships.

This research begins with the understanding that social design practitioners may not recognise their own proximities to dominant positionalities. When these elements of power and politics are not recognised, there is greater risk that people are operating under the assumption their work (research, project) is for a generalised benefit of others (Smith 2012). This contributes to centering the "good intentions" of one's work, while remaining ignorant of its impacts on and consequences in the world. As highlighted above through the work of Indigenous scholars, commonly held Western worldviews about good intentions and benefits distort the design and evaluation of social research and design projects across diversely positioned worldviews.

Practitioners who do recognise and wrestle with the politics and power inherent in dominant positionalities often grapple with questions such as: am I the right person for this work? Who is better situated for this context? How do I meet the expectations of my job, and ensure I maintain my values? How can I actually work collaboratively with diverse lived and professional experiences? How can I operate with more awareness of the power dynamics in the room? What are my biases and blindposts? (These concerns are illustrated in further detail in practitioners' responses and stories shared in the *Shift Work* project in chapter 5). This research aims to support practitioners doing this questioning as an entry point to wrestling with their positionality, politics, values and work in the world. The research does not aim to answer (or to help practitioners answer) these questions. Instead, it seeks to create support for practitioners to use these questions as guides to navigating and accounting for their positionalities in practice. It aims to demonstrate ways that practitioners, in their own situated experiences, can shift their ways of being and identify shifting as something real,

tangible, and able to be recognised. This is meaningful because through identifying the work of "being shifts", we can be more attuned to it in ourselves and others and build shared languages (verbal, material, written) to help support and express our work.

1.4.2 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research contributes to knowledge in social design by contextualising shifting as an ontological movement helpful for realising the aims of social design practice. Shifting builds on existing design research that interrogates, reveals and addresses dominating paradigms in design practice. In this research, shifting is developed through engagements with critical theory and communities of social design practice. I do this work by attending to both a politicised self and multiple worldviews, and propose shifting as a way of navigating these elements. Shifting is characterised in this research through a movement that recognises a relational construction of knowledges, guides actions with critical-dialogical ambiguity, and advocates for ongoing community relationships and a commitment to practice in order to support the work of challenging dominating paradigms. Shifting supports ways of moving through the world with attention on dominant positionalities and the effects of this domination on our knowing and doing.

1.4.3 SIGNIFICANCE

I argue that through examination of and attention on ontological orientations, social design practice is better able to work across perpetual, structural, systemic inequality and oppression. Attending to ways of being as the foundational structure and material of our practice supports modes of knowing and doing to address the pervasive, entrenched concerns of social practices. This research specifically names a politicised self and multiple worldviews as ways to understand and interrogate ontological orientations. Shifting offers a conceptual framework to support the practitioner to understand the role of dominant positionality, and address and practice with it through ontological orientations. The research projects in following chapters present opportunities to recognise and account for our ontological materials, and how we might consider their application directly into everyday practice contexts.

5
PRAXIS

There are diverse understandings of what it means to engage in praxis, or how the relationship between practice and theory is enacted. For this work, I define praxis as a commitment to how practice shows up in the world, in that it is informed by an underlying structure of critical, reflective methods, and theoretical engagement. Creative arts researchers Grierson and Brearley (2009) describe methodology in creative research as, "Like the skeleton on which to build the anatomy of the project, [methodology] reveals the epistemological and ontological DNA" (5). I find this anatomical metaphor helpful in considering the relationship between theory, practice-based methods and praxis, based on an understanding of how these different elements are connected and responsible to and for one another. As Barad (2007) describes, the relationship among theory, methodology/methods, and practice/praxis constitute "our connections and responsibilities to one another—that is, entanglements" (xi).

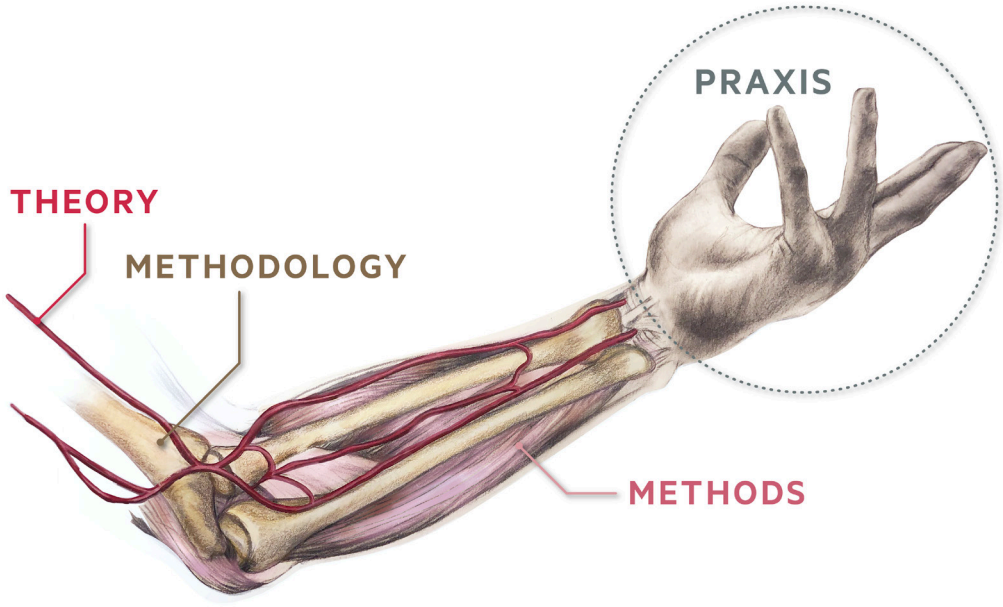


Figure 1.1 The anatomy of my research entanglements, a visual metaphor. (Illustration by Ina Lim, 2020).

Methodology forms the skeleton of my research practice, providing structural support and connective capacity for the research, and directs how the research "moves" in the world. The methods are the muscles of the body. These are what power the actions, or outward manifestations operating in the world. Theory is the blood flow. It circulates through every element, feeding and activating the research. The research is unable to develop, to connect or be active in the world without the nutritional support and vitality provided by the blood flow. Praxis is the animation of the living body that integrates these elements. Considering theory, methodology, and method individually may provide useful information for researchers, but in this state the elements are lifeless and without activation in the world. It does not have the same social and political animation that is essential to an entangled and relationally responsible praxis. Below I detail how I understand the methodological entanglement of theory and methods, and then engage with the theory in more depth in chapter 2.

1.5.1 THEORY

The methodological "bones" of this research are referred to in section 1.3: the politicised self, worldviews, and the work of gear shifting. This methodological skeleton is supported by the feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial theories that are the lifeblood of critical discourse, as well as critical practice. In chapter 2, I engage specifically with the work of design scholars and practitioners who attend to how these critical bones are activated within design practices, or what stops this from happening. Feminist technoscience warns against fixing knowledges or research into static, authoritarian knowledge systems. Decolonising informs the research through its attention to the intimate, pervasive influences of coloniality throughout our institutions, systems of thought and ways of being. Anti-racism frameworks developed through Black feminism informs the research through lessons in situating positionality and power in context, and attention on whiteness as a neglected, under-developed position of analysis.

1.5.2 METHODS

This research examines different methods for bringing the critical into practice. The methods described here navigate the tension between making the complex accessible, as opposed to making an instrumentalised tool. Methods explored include collaborative workshops, communities of practice and storying lived experience.

Workshops

The central method of engagement in this research is structured around workshops. Akama et al. (2018) propose workshops as a productive mode for exploring the role of uncertainty in change-making and future-making practices. Workshops, as a research method, rely on being heterogeneous, unpredictable, emergent, and explicitly interventionist to develop new knowledge (ibid.).This research is exploring how people might have greater awareness of and responsibility for identity and power. The investigation is supported by research methods that are able to move with and account for widely diverse experiences of identity and power, how people make sense of those experiences, and the processes that develop insight into unaccounted parts of oneself.

Workshops allow for multimodal engagements to introduce alternative, critical perspectives to participants, and offer creative and discursive ways for participants to respond to these ideas. Workshops within codesign and design anthropology “can be seen as a form of praxis (theory + practice), and in design research contexts workshops are often used as a means to precipitate understandings of participants’ perspectives as well as to co-create ideas and prototypes with them” (Akama et al. 2018, 12). This research employs workshops as spaces predicated on connecting theory, and precipitating participants’ understanding of this theory with modes of creating and doing. This aligns with the goal of seeking to activate critical theory in practice.

Co-design workshops employ a suite of techniques to elicit reflective, critical and material responses from participants. Techniques rely on creative practices to help defer judgement, elicit non-linear thinking, provide unconventional tools to externalise emotions, and visualise complex thoughts and concepts that can be hard to describe in words (Sanders and Stappers 2008; Lee et al. 2018; Grocott 2022). These

techniques are explicitly, rather than minimally, interventionist (Akama et al. 2018; Otto and Smith 2013). They are designed with a particular agenda to direct and shape participant responses (Botero et al. 2020). Through specific prompts and facilitation, participants—including researchers—are guided to tell, enact and make, in order to surface perspectives and experiences related to the concerns of the research or project (Sanders 2014). Being in a shared space allows participants to collaboratively shape ideas and prototypes which emerge (Akama et al. 2018). Workshops are a well developed and commonly used method within social design, co-design and participatory design practices (Lee et al. 2018, Botero 2020 et al.).

Across the workshops, various methods of making, reflection, storytelling were employed. There were distinct intentions behind each of the workshops, and the selected methods and approaches to facilitation reflect these intentions. For example, in the first workshop series, The Worlds We Live In, the intention was to create an accessible, reflective environment, and subtly encourage more critical thought about the relationship between one's positionality and ignorances for a diverse, relatively unknown group of design practitioners. The intention behind the two Personas workshops explicitly invited practitioners to join as part of critically consider the dominant worldviews they embody and impose through design research tools such as the persona. The Shift Work(shops) worked with a select group of critical, experienced social design practitioners to share their stories and experiences in response to research questions. Given these different aims and audiences, the particular techniques employed in each workshop vary widely. The descriptions of the methods in each practice chapter focus on the motivations and responses to the research methods, rather than detailed method descriptions (Woolrych et al. 2011).

A distinct point of methodological refinement developed over the course of the research was the role of workshops as standalone exercises. In the final project, Shift Work, workshops were used as one mode of research, connected to two other research engagements with the same group of participants, including online dialogues and reflective listening interviews. Additionally, many of the participants were also connected in ongoing relationships as part of the same community of practice. This significantly impacted the research and the depth of the resources generated. The participants in Shift Work were able to collectively explore and share tangible stories and metaphors that spoke directly to notions

of shifting and being. This refinement both elucidates the limitations of one-off engagements, and demonstrates the value of ongoing relationships and community to support deeper research explorations and support for critical capacities.

Communities of practice

A community of practice has a simple structure, coming together for purposes of connecting, networking, learning, and building capacities around particular topics and skills related to a shared field of practice (Li et al. 2009). In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the long, restrictive lockdowns throughout 2020 and 2021 in Melbourne, Australia, communities of practice arose as a space willing and responsive to participate in learning and interrogating questions of identity, power and practice outside of formal institutions (i.e. universities, conferences). In particular, the Design & Ethics community, a subgroup of the professional network Service Design Melbourne (SDM), provided ongoing, dedicated participation (organising, hosting and attending various workshops and discussions). I am a co-organiser of this group, and am active in a small organising committee, supporting community events and engaging with the online community channel on Slack (Soden et al. 2022[7]). Members of this community were active and consistent participants throughout the research projects, and participation with the community and research generated many valuable relationships. A second community, the Co-Design Club was an Australasian community of practice active throughout 2020 and 2021. This community was a curated group of co-design practitioners convened for purposes of learning from one another on “topics such as decolonising design, lived experience and moving beyond tokenism” (Beyond Sticky Notes 2022). Relationships established in Co-Design Club also lead to meaningful participation in the research exercises.

7 Section 4.4 of this publication is a case study about the organisation and maintenance of Service Design Melbourne, and specifically the Design & Ethics group during the Covid-19 lockdowns (Akama, Yoko and Ann Light. 2022 “Uncertainties of Designing with and for a Community Online.” In Foundations and Trends in Human–Computer Interaction.)

These communities of practice were not simply practical spaces for supplying participants and hosting research exercises. They were spaces created to support the very different modes of thinking and doing in design that this research examines. For example, the research workshops, interviews and online discussions invited participants to consider how their own identities, ways of working and knowledges contribute to larger systems of injustice and oppression. These were not exercises billed to improve one's hireability or resume, nor were they networking events or invitations to learn "how tos" on decolonising or anti-racism. Rather, people volunteered their time and experience to reflect, question and share difficult truths about their own selves and practices, and did this for the value of exploring these in community with others. The research required participants to be willing to interrogate their own ways of knowing, being and doing, and confront challenging questions about their own dominant positionality in the world. Communities of practice provided a structure for training into ontological orientations and surfacing an understanding of shifting. This training structure offers a space outside of the constraints of workplaces, client demands, and institutional pressures. Building on the relationships offered by the community, when participants were able to co-create and co-facilitate, the research was taken beyond the organised content and activities. The expertise and sharing provided by a community of practice proved to be substantial support for deepening my own understanding and insights developed in this research.

The role of a community of practice in this research developed across the three projects: 1. *The Worlds We Live In*; 2. *Critical Personas Workshops* and *Practice Provocations*; and 3. *Shift Work*. These three projects are described in detail in chapters 3–5, but here I will briefly comment on the integration of a community of practice as a distinct method across them. As the projects became more distinctly situated and developed within particular communities and relationships, the ability to address criticality and critical reflexivity deepened. The first project, the *Worlds We Live In* workshop was designed with a group of colleagues

from the WonderLab[8] at Monash. We relied on my participation with SDM and the Design & Ethics community as an accessible source of local designers interested in attending open, public workshops. The invitation did not explicitly invite practitioners who are interested in criticality or ethics of design practice. The workshop was designed with the assumption it needed to be accessible and comfortable for an audience that may be skeptical or alienated by overtly critical content.

The second set of workshops, *Critical Personas*, were initiated directly within Design & Ethics. Rather than using the community as a pool of participants, the workshop was created with the support of Design & Ethics co-organisers, and specifically for a monthly Design & Ethics event. A participant being an active member of Design & Ethics signals, at the very least, a cursory interest in relational, ethical and political practices of design—in contrast with the more professionally-focused network of general SDM participation (Design & Ethics n.d.; Soden et al. 2022). The engagement specifically invited practitioners to engage with a particular politicised, critical approach. It was further developed and similarly framed as a workshop for participants at the ServDes2020 conference. The first version of the *Critical Personas* workshop took place within an already established community of people, Design & Ethics. Many participants knew one another, had worked together, or had been connected via SDM previously. The pre-established relationships and known community element of Design & Ethics workshop allowed participants to be more comfortable engaging and sharing with the content. It was much easier to allow the participants to guide the flow and pace of the workshop, and become co-creators of the content and facilitation.The ServDes workshop, however, took place among a group of practitioners who were almost all unknown to one another. Here, the workshop relied on much more structured and facilitated content to provoke critical reflection and support sharing.

8 WonderLab is another supportive community of practice within this work. However, it is also an institutionally-organised and supported research lab. Collaborators and participants within WonderLab are engaging through paid work or courses of study and research. This makes it distinct from the motivations and kinds of commitment that people make in spaces like Design & Ethics and Co-Design Club, which are outside of formal commitments and require significant voluntary coordination. People demonstrate a particular commitment when making the effort to connect, learn and share with a community of practitioners outside of formally-recognised professional and academic structures.

The third project, *Shift Work*, took a different approach and reflected a different relationship with the community of practice. After an initial online discussion prompt within the Design & Ethics Slack channel, participants were invited to a one-on-one interview based on responding they wanted to respond to the prompt either in more depth, or with me in private. Additional practitioners were also invited for interviews based on their roles in the community, and their own work of actively organising, leading, participating or publishing on issues such as power, bias, identity, colonisation, race or gender. Many of these participants had pre-established relationships and knowledges about other participants and/or myself through Design & Ethics, the Co-Design Club, and general shared fields of interest in practice. These participants had established long-term experience in social design and were actively volunteering for critical challenges to their practice. The *Shift Work(shop)* was not designed to teach or provide tools or skills for critical capacities. Rather, it aimed to create a space to surface and layer stories, experiences and approaches others could learn from. Rather than foregrounding the design of frameworks or translation of critical theories as the source of critical engagement, the community provided the critical content. The prompt that initiated participation in the work was the most explicit regarding the politicised self, asking participants to reflect on their own, "dominant narratives of white supremacy and colonial ways of knowing and doing". This explicit invitation, and how it curated the subsequent participation, led to distinctly different interactions from the approach of the more covert lesson in *The Worlds We Live In* and the more overt teaching of *Critical Personas Workshops*.

Storying lived experience and layered accounts

While also relying on structured frameworks, or particular critical theories, the research emphasised using the lived experience of practitioners to recognise, story, and understand how to shift away from domination. Across all the research projects, participants were asked, in different ways, to reflect on the material of their own identity, practice and experiences. This included eliciting reflections on one's own ways of knowing and ignorances, explicit challenges to consider how worldviews direct approaches to design practices, and requests to share stories and experiences from one's own "shifting". The activities encouraged reflection and story-making through the use of materials, story prompts, visual aids and metaphor.

Engaging in creative activities, rather than explicit questions and answers, sought to encourage practitioners to slow down, think non-linearly, and surface responses that were thoughtfully developed (which may have not have been considered through other means) and/or recast their understanding of an experience through a new lens. These shared stories of lived experience were critical material to this research.

This approach culminated in *Shift Work*, which asked what can we learn from other people's practices and experiences, rather than how to teach alternative perspectives, or seek to help restructure others' practices. In *Shift Work* I employed a version of layered accounts (Rambo 1995; Fry 2014). Layered accounts recognise the researcher has particular bias in how they account for and shape the stories of research participants. Through layered accounts, the stories and lived experiences of the researcher and participants, as well as theory are layered to create, "an impressionistic sketch, handing readers layers of experience so they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer's narrative" (Fry 2014, 1171). While the researcher, myself, is structuring the material, the fragmented style invites the reader to interpret and analyse alongside the researcher's interpretations of the content (Markham 2005). This approach also illustrates how understandings and interpretations of shifting unfolded over time, across multiple forms of engagement, and was facilitated through ongoing relationships including communities of practice. The stories and experiences shared by participants across the projects highlights the importance of relational aspects of the research, and also leans on shared understandings for experiences that can be difficult to describe in words.

The argument presented here activates praxis through engaging with communities of practice, using a series of different techniques within workshops, and layered accounts of experience, interpretation and theory. This work is guided by ontological orientations of a politicised self and multiple worldviews as the methodological bones. The animation of these entangled elements, the intersectional decolonial praxis that I seek through this research, is further developed in chapter 2, and illustrated in chapters 3–5, which detail the research projects.

6

EXEGESIS STRUCTURE

This research details three discrete projects, which each centre around different engagements designed to support design practitioners to be more aware of how dominating narratives and paradigms shape our ways of knowing (chapter 3), approaches to doing (chapter 4), and "shifting" experiences in ways of being (chapter 5). The following chapters examine ways to negotiate dominating paradigms in social design practices and practitioners, through integrating one's own politicised self within a plurality of worldviews.

Chapter 2 introduces four different discourses that challenge dominant paradigms in design. These discourses argue dominant design has been established through Western, modernist, colonial, capitalist and heteropatriarchal systems of oppression. These design discoures engage with theory from the fields of feminism, racial justice and decolonising, and are used in chapter 2 to inform approaches for bringing the critical project into social design practice. Specifically, I refer to the writings of Daniela Rosner, the Design Justice Network (particularly Sasha Costanza-Chock), the Decolonising Design group, and Yoko Akama to understand ways other designers have contended with challenging dominant paradigms and reorienting design practices in relation to this domination. Drawing from these discourses, I establish elements of an intersectional decolonial praxis. This praxis is built on engaging with plural, relational and situated knowledges, establishing ongoing relationships with communities of practice that are critical and dialogical, and working to understand how one's own worldviews and dominant positionalities shape social design practices.

Chapter 3 considers the role of knowledges and ignorances, and how these are shaped within domination positionalities. The chapter discusses *The Worlds We Live In* project, which examines ignorances from alternative critical and creative perspectives. The research positions ignorances, or "unknowledges" (Tuana and Sullivan 2007), as significant to how social designers' worldviews influence their practice and perpetuation of dominant paradigms. The design and facilitation of an initial workshop draws on Atkin/Holt's "Worlds We Live In" model and Jamer Hunt's "2x2

matrix" for collaboration. The workshop invited design practitioners to consider their own ways of knowing and ignorance through a four-world framework and material making of paper collages. This project was further interrogated through theories of epistemic ignorance (Mills 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007). The resulting discussion helps to frame ignorances as structural, described as how "not knowing" is produced and maintained through how one is situated in the world, structured personal experiences and social epistemologies. This reframing of ignorances offers different entry points for addressing ignorance relationally, rather than at the level of content.

Chapter 4 is concerned with how we act in practices, and explores underlying dominant worldviews obscured within discourses of improvement and best practices. The chapter describes the development of *Practice Provocations*, which are the outcomes of seeking to activate learnings from queer feminist library sciences, specifically Emily Drabinski, within social design practice. Drabinski's work focuses on how trying to "improve" systems can often perpetuate institutional power and reinscribe prevailing, rigid understandings of identity. I initially attempted to bring Drabinski's arguments into practice through the design and facilitation of two *Critical Persona* workshops. These fell short of moving beyond binary exercises of critique and improvement, and failed to reach more nuanced and complex considerations present in Drabinski's work. Learning from these exercises, *Practice Provocations* were designed seeking to better demonstrate how different worldviews motivate particular approaches and framings of practice. The *Provocations* seek to offer constructive practices for designers from dominant positionalities to better engage with diversity and complexity in their work. *Provocations* bring the critical project into practice through their explicit attention to ontological orientations, critical theory, and demonstrating the worldviews behind trying to "improve" social design.

Chapter 5 is an examination with practitioners' of experiences and understandings of their own dominant positionalities and worldviews, and how these have been shaped and shifted through practice. The chapter describes the third and last project of this research, *Shift Work*. Rather than a one-off workshop, its multimodal research structure gathered participants in multiple engagements over several months. *Shift Work* used online discussion, reflective listening interviews and small group workshops to learn and build a notion of shifting from the reflections and

lived experiences among engaged, critical social design practitioners. Through layered accounts of personal experiences, stories and analysis, the work reflects ways of challenging dominating norms, and embraces alternative ways of being in the world. This work does not culminate in a fixed definition of shifting, but an invitation to be curious about shifting in one's own practice. Through layered accounts *Shift Work* offers a contour drawing of shifting, from which readers can analyse and construct their own interpretation and experience of the concept.

Chapter 6 concludes the exegesis presenting shifting as a concept and practice in ongoing development through the description of four shifting movements. The movements respond to the questions posed in the research argument by proposing approaches that help account for the role of dominant positionalities in practice, support more heterogeneous worldviews and bring the critical into practices. They are offered as moves shifting activates in my practice, through my own ontological orientations. These movements include questioning knowledges, staying with, communicating the in-between, and cultivating community. Other practitioners may also find these movements supportive in their own practices to address or attune to domination, but are encouraged to translate them through attention to one's own ontological orientations.

EXHIBITION

This document is accompanied by an exhibition. You can find the exhibition at: shifting.hellothisiskate.com. This exhibition is designed to provide an exploratory experience of shifting through images, recordings, stories and artefacts produced through the projects and practices of this research. The experience of the exhibition intentionally provides a dynamic and interpretive exploration of shifting. The intentional fluidity between clarity and uncertainty illustrates the layered accounts of shifting and challenges a concrete, singular understanding of how to engage with shifting and one's ontological orientations. This invites the viewer to be curious, and interrogate the ideas and relevancy of shifting through their own experiences and worldviews, rather than those of the author. It should be viewed after reading this document and is not designed as a standalone website to be viewed or understood outside of the context provided by this exegesis.

BRINGING THE CRITICAL INTO PRACTICE

CHAPTER 2

In chapter 1, I establish ontological orientations through attention on the politicised self, how the self is positioned in relation to multiple worldviews, and ways the self can move in opposition to domination through shifting. In this chapter, I build on this methodological structure, outlining four approaches from design practitioners that use critical theories to challenge dominant paradigms in design, and engage with notions of positionality, plural worldviews and responding to domination. I work across the nuances between these outlined discourses to define the shape of an intersectional decolonial praxis.

This chapter engages with literature that confronts dominant design paradigms through the critical positions of feminist, anti-racist and decolonial thinking. I premise this research on multiple, alternative theoretical positions to critically interrogate dominant ways of knowing and being. This critical multiplicity recognises the complexity inherent in "dominant positionality" as explained in chapter 1. In this chapter, I present four approaches to critiquing dominant design paradigms:

feminist technoscience; design justice; decolonial thought; and relational, situated ontologies. My analysis of these approaches is not intended as a systematic literature review. Instead, I recognise that the positions outlined by Daniela Rosner, the Design Justice Network, particularly Sasha Costanza-Chock, the Decolonising Design group, and Yoko Akama provide a nuanced range of approaches to challenging dominant paradigms in design. In the second half of this chapter, this focus allows me to engage more deeply with each approach in order to inform my own ways of addressing dominant paradigms within design practice.

This research is primarily concerned with dominating identities and narratives, and how these maintain and perpetuate oppression in social practices through our ways of being. These topics are not widespread within conventional design discourses. The literature works to establish this research as a valid matter of concern within design practice and scholarship. This research is situated within a smaller but growing sector of discourse, which seeks to challenge understandings and

relationships of identity, power, and systemic oppression within design. It helps me as a practitioner build a discursive "home" to bring the critical into practice, and legitimise this research about dominant positionality within design practice. This chapter provides summaries that outline how each of these scholars or collectives reveal and challenge dominant design discourses, from which I develop three approaches that support bringing the critical into practice, and shape an intersectional decolonial praxis. First, identifying practices of power that critical perspectives problematise, and how designers might reflect on and bring these into practice. Second, being involved in a community of practice that is committed to liberatory principles as a meaningful form of expertise in design practice. Last, recognising how each of us is situated—the who and how we are in the world—to reflect on how a politicised self and positionality are brought into practice.

1

STARTING POINT: IDENTIFYING DOMINATION

2.1.1 DOMINANT PARADIGMS IN DESIGN

The dominant design paradigm is characterised by many feminist, decolonial and racial justice scholars and practitioners in fairly similar terms. Their major critique of contemporary design is its basis in Western, Eurocentric, white, colonial, and patriarchal knowledge systems and practices. This section will examine the dominant design paradigm by detailing how it narrows ways of thinking, ignores diverse lived experience, perpetuates colonialism, and negates non-white and complex ways of being. Each critique also offers directions on addressing the dominating oppression present in design. In this research, I am attempting to address the ways domination operates through me and my own practice, and create ways to help others navigate these same challenges and questions. Outlining key arguments deriving from feminist, racial justice and decolonising critiques helps to map the distinct but overlapping ways that diverse approaches address the politics of contemporary design practices and its practitioners.

From a “ways of knowing” or epistemological perspective, dominant paradigms are addressed by learning from different knowledge lineages. This includes bringing in critical perspectives and subaltern accounts, which challenge conventional knowledges and practice methodologies. This expands what fields, geographies and histories are considered meaningful for design practices. From an ontological perspective, addressing dominant paradigms requires shifting away from dominant “ways of being” in the world. How we are as people in community and in relation with others, knowledges, places and worlds is implicated by both our personal positionings and by the structures and systems which surround us. Grosfoguel (2007) would describe this as our geo-political and body-political location. Attention to these ontological distinctions aims to provide a starting position, or point of orientation, to attend to shifting in

relationship with dominant paradigms. I want to distinguish these as orientations to ways of knowing and ways of being, rather than epistemology and ontology as separate entities.

2.1.2 CRITICAL FABULATIONS: A FEMINIST REIMAGINING OF DESIGN

In her book *Critical Fabulations*, design scholar Daniela Rosner (2018) offers a feminist critique of how domination in design operates through its foundational intellectual lineage. This lineage is described through four theoretical pillars—individualism, universalism, objectivism, and solutionism—which were developed from the perspective of almost entirely white, American and European males (e.g. John Dewey, Herbert Simon, Donald Shon). This lineage has had enormous influence on the commitments that "still govern design practice today" (Rosner 2018, 26). Social design, as developed and practised through this legacy, promises "broad, solution-oriented interventions" and assumes there is an apparent "benefit" provided to "others" through design research and practice (ibid., 24). Rosner argues "others" in this lineage are defined through a mix of amorphous research methods, client-prescribed briefs and assumed details about individual users. These ideological design solutions are believed to have universal applicability, and create positive impact regardless of person or place. This dominant paradigm allows designers to separate themselves from the outcomes of their work. Design is presented as a *user-centred* process, in which products and services are objectively developed through research and testing, and solutions are validated by the identified users. Rosner argues that this distance and objectification allows designers to avoid responsibility for their "own roles as authors" in the processes and products they produce, rather than enabling or empowering users as authors (ibid, 13). This produces a disembodied, "from

nowhere"[1], universalist positioning—where the designer is able to translate the needs of users into final products regardless of place, identity or time. This position reflects the universality of white, male experience, which has historically been understood in design as the standard against which all other experiences are evaluated. The disembodied process attends to the needs and desires of normative individuals, rather than a process of building understanding through community, relationships, complexity or consideration of more-than-human needs.

Rosner calls for a critical re-storying of design's intellectual foundations, which she calls "critical fabulations". The aim of critical fabulations is to re-tell the story and practice of design through an alternative intellectual lineage of feminist technoscience, following Donna Haraway and Lucy Suchman (Haraway 1988, 1991, 2016; Suchman 1984, 1987). By operating from philosophy and practices informed by a feminist history, Rosner argues design can break out of the ways it reinforces patriarchal domination, and create more embodied, feminist, community-oriented futures. She proposes four tactics of critical fabulation that emerge from this alternative, feminist thinking: "alliances, recuperations, interferences, extensions" (ibid, 15). "Alliances" encourage relying on multiple actors outside the designer/researcher role to shape the making process, and produce work as an ongoing process, rather than "finished" product. "Recuperations" require the design process to surface invisible labour, hidden power, or elided histories. "Interferences" draws from Haraway's (1997) work, which encourages a shift from reflection, a singular critique, to diffraction and generating multiple patterns of difference. "Extensions" refer to knowledge circulation, work that is collaboratively translated and communicated, and considers expansive forms of media and storytelling situated to the audience. Rosner grounds her critique in the intellectual foundations of design practice, particularly patriarchal and rationalist

1 Here, Rosner is quoting Lucy Suchman and Donna Haraway's use of the "view from nowhere", a phrase they adopted from Thomas Nagel. The idea of anonymity and universality is a prominent critique of dominant design. The "anonymous designer" was made prominent in design discourse in the mid-20th century, partially through the work of the Bauhaus. It was argued the identity of the designer/author of a work could get in the way of the design's purpose and reception in the world, and as such should be obscured to let the design stand on its own. However this notion was unevenly applied and used more often to obscure the authorship of women designing in the textile workshops, as opposed to the designers of objects such as chairs and products that were more often male (See Smith 2008; Bremer and van de Ven 2016).

perspectives. Her critical fabulations are translated into the world through a series of tactics, which she encourages other designers to take on in their own practice.

2.1.3 DESIGN JUSTICE: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND INVITATION TO PRACTICE

The Design Justice Network (DJN) advocates an ideologically similar critique of dominant design paradigms, but base their critique on how products of design (objects, processes and systems) reproduce systemic oppressions, and the experiences they create for people who are not part of dominant identity groups. DJN is a network of design scholars and practitioners (broadly defined as anyone who participates in design) who are committed to using design for liberatory purposes (Design Justice Network n.d.). DJN argues that contemporary objects of design contribute to marginalisation and exclusion from dominant systems. The group invites all who participate in design to use it instead as a practice for liberatory means, to: "build a better world, a world where many worlds fit; linked worlds of collective liberation ecological sustainability" (Costanza-Chock 2020, xvii[2]). The DJN is invested in the role that design can play in creating inclusive, sustainable futures if design/ers work with a justice lens, rather than from its dominating paradigms.

DJN presents this critique through the experiences of people for whom dominant design imposes and sustains systemic oppressions. For example, community member of DJN and design scholar Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020) shares her experience as a transgender person dealing with the cisgendered biases of airport security. The technology and algorithms coded into the millimetre wave scanner, and the socio-corporeal process

2 Costanza-Chock has published two single-authored papers (2018a, 2018b) and a book (2020) detailing the work and theoretical foundations of DJN. In her book, she clarifies the relationship of her scholarship to the wider DJN, "As an engaged scholar and design practitioner who is guided by antiracist, feminist principles and epistemology, I want to make clear that although this is a single-authored book, many of the ideas it explores have bubbled up through the Design Justice Network as an emergent community of practice. All credit for the key ideas of design justice is due to this community…. [T]here is a tension between my attempt to provide a normative design justice framework as a single author and my claim to be amplifying knowledge that has been produced by a movement" (Costanza-Chock 2020, 11–12). In this document I make clear when referring specifically to Costanza-Chock's scholarship and when referring to information published by the collective. However, I rely on Costanza-Chock to represent the foundational ideology of DJN.

designed to physically check people after moving through it, are designed to look for binary gender identity characteristics. Her body does not fit within the design parameters, and is subjected to additional, particular and distressful scrutiny. Through this experience, she demonstrates how inequalities can be literally invisible to those coming from dominant positionalities, “Most cisgender people are unaware of the fact that the millimeter wave scanners operate according to a binary and cis-normative gender construct; most trans* people know, because it directly affects our lives” (Ibid, 4). Rather than focus on the designer or design process that created the product, she examines the experiences of those engaging with design products. These experiences demonstrate design’s adherence to and perpetuation of dominating, normative, oppression: “white supremacist heteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, and settler colonialism” (ibid, 41). Domination is visible both in the experiences created by the dominant paradigms within the design of a product , and how one’s knowledge and experience of the world is shaped by politicised identity dynamics.

Costanza-Chock (2020) argues that by bringing an understanding of intersectionality and racial matrices of power to design practice, design can begin to address this domination and oppression. It promotes design’s potential to contribute to creating more liberatory, community-led futures. The design justice framework for analysis is grounded in Black feminist thought, specifically intersectionality as formally defined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and the matrix of domination as developed by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990). These concepts come together to inform a “design justice analysis”. Costanza-Chock explains this “multi-axis framework” can be used to account for inequality and make systems more inclusive, or to decide to “refuse to design them [a product or system] at all” (Costanza-Chock 2020, 19).

Costanza-Chock’s use of a Black, feminist intellectual frame and politics for design resonates with Rosner’s use of feminist technoscience to break design out of its myopic, patriarchal lineage. However, DJN is not leveraging the racial justice analysis in direct opposition to dominant design, as Rosner does with feminist technoscience. It encourages reappropriating the tools, languages and approaches already established in design through a racial justice framework for the purposes of addressing inequality, rather than focus on rejecting the values which underlie them. For example, Costanza-Chock celebrates the work of a design studio working to “retrofit design thinking methods with a racial justice analysis”

(Costanza-Chock 2020, 8). This contrasts with Rosner's detailed warnings against design thinking because the process is rooted in the gendered and racialised legacies of dominant design, and ultimately creates services and products to serve capitalist corporations in the name of "inclusivity" (Rosner 2018, 25).

Returning to our ontological orientations and the movement described by differential consciousness, outlined in chapter 1, can provide a way to navigate the differences in these perspectives. The role of a politicised self, and pluralities present in context and outcomes are important to recognise. "Design thinking" as a tool "owned", organised, implemented and taught by the Stanford d.school or IDEO (as Rosner relates it) represents a very specific way knowledges and actions are organised and disseminated in the world. Akama et al. (2019) critique the popularity of the design thinking process by attending specifically to its replicable methods and detachment from place. To take design thinking and port it outside the context from which it arises, as a "universal" problem-solving tool perpetuates Western, white understandings of efficiency and solution-seeking, and displaces local knowledges and processes. Sandoval's differential consciousness argues there are multiple ways to move in opposition to domination. It's not a straightforward line of total rejection applied in one way, in every situation. A different approach, not straightforward rejection or universal applicability, is a situated consideration to ask what are the ideologies, languages and processes that are harmful to our community? What are ways local knowledges can own, support and shape the work? These questions need to be negotiated within the community and engaged practitioners. Creating didactic alignment, or rejection, to a singular ideology plays into fixed structures and limits the ability to move with domination. A particular context may need to completely oppose and eradicate a process based on its intellectual lineage, in another context we may need to employ an oppositional consciousness that allows a different ontological orientation to own the process, and perhaps retrofit, redeploy or radically reimagine particular knowledges or practices. Thus either extreme, celebratory adherence to a specific process and its principles, or complete elimination, is an oversimplification of how to engage critically, situated through an ontological orientation that demands for practice to be grounded in the people, politics and place of engagement.

Like Rosner's tactics, Design Justice offers concrete principles to guide practice and encourages their wider use. These applications include centring the voices of those directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process, prioritising impact on the community over the intentions of the designer, and working towards non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other (Design Justice Principles n.d.). Practitioners are invited to sign onto the Design Justice Principles via the organisation website to indicate their commitment. There is no required training or class on racial justice analysis. Rather than "teaching" design justice, or recommending reading the work of Crenshaw or Collins, interested members are invited to join via community groups, online forums and local working groups. Use of the hashtag #DesignJustice is encouraged, whether or not it is directly affiliated with or approved by organisers of DJN. There is not an expressed concern of the principles being subsumed and flattened by shallow practices, or of justice becoming a meaningless buzzword, something that is noted in the decolonising design movement described below. Additionally, DJN praises practices that do not use the term "design justice" but are nonetheless operating under the same perceived values and principles. Costanza-Chock describes Design Justice as,, "a framework for analysis of how design distributes benefits and burdens between various groups of people", and an in-the-world, active "growing community of practice" (Costanza-Chock 2020, 23). The Design Justice response to domination is an active organising and doing of practice, a response which reflects its critique grounded in active lived experiences.

2.1.4 DECOLONISING DESIGN: RADICAL, PLURAL, AND COMPLEX

Decolonising Design (DD) is a collective that began in 2016 among eight early career design researchers with roots in the Global South, education in the Global North, and a shared dissatisfaction in how design deals with issues of gender, race and class (Abdulla et. al. 2016; Schultz and Abdulla 2017). Across several co-authored papers and an online platform, the group lays out an argument for the work required for "decolonising design". As individuals, the eight different members publish and research from different design practices and theoretical perspectives. The combination of these distinct practices into a collective voice highlights both the

overarching elements of decolonising as a mode of bringing the critical to practice, as well as the expansive breadth of approaches that are considered within decolonial criticality. DD's characterisation and critique of dominant design is structured around decolonial scholarship from diverse fields outside design, but substantially based on Latin American decolonial thinking and the work of the modernity/coloniality project (Schultz et al. 2018b). In this thinking, decolonial scholars challenge contemporary worldviews to "delink" ways of knowing and "shift" ways of being away from the modern/colonial world system, "we must consider how to decolonize the "mind" (Thiongo) and the "imaginary" (Gruzinski) that is, knowledge and being" (Mignolo 2007, 450). Decolonising here is understood broadly as an analytical and programmatic project of delinking or disobeying ways of knowing and doing from the dominant legacies of coloniality.

Decoloniality highlights the ways in which colonisation is a force beyond imperial, political and economic controls. Drawing from early post-colonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon (1971, 1986) the idea of coloniality extends into the hegemonic knowledge systems and a coloniality of being, which structures both individual understandings of our experiences, and organises the larger world system (Mignolo 2009). Coloniality is distinct from colonialism; it is the logic and power structure that underlies colonialism (Mignolo 2014). Decoloniality describes the mutually dependent relationship between coloniality and modernity, and argues that modernity—the modes of production, lifestyles, beliefs and values—facilitates and sustains Western European colonialism through the ongoing logics of coloniality (via capitalism, globalisation, neoliberal democracy, and institutionalised knowledge systems). Without the project of imperial, European colonialism, there would not have been global modernity as we experience it now, because it gave rise to coloniality (Mignolo 2007, 2015a). The relationship between modernity and coloniality sustains the current modern/colonial world system and shifting away from modernity is a movement away from coloniality. This is meaningful because it requires attention on decolonising from both the material consequences of colonialism (imperial powers, economic influences, legal and educational institutions) *and* onto-epistemological influences of modernity (Quijano 2007).

The work of DD connects this scholarship to the entrenched relationship of design with modernity and colonial systems of power. This includes the significance of the values of modernity to design practice such as: the commodification and devaluation of the natural world;

singular industrialised education based on Western European models and knowledges; racialised systems of categorisation and hierarchies which erase non-white, non-Western forms of design; and substantiating and validating exploitative colonial gender binaries. It situates dominant design in line with modernity/coloniality, as a practice which emerges from, "the wealth accumulated by and through the invasion and pillage of land and its resources, the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, and the forced displacement of populations and their resignification as commodities" (Schultz et al. 2018, 93).

The work of the DD collective emphasises the value of designers learning from and applying decolonial thinking. Collectively they also push for design as a discipline to contribute to decolonial thinking, particularly around notions of modernity, the material world, and the production of the artificial (Schultz et al. 2018a). The fact there are eight individual scholars working across diverse practices, Decolonising Design brings larger-scale, diffuse, and sometimes conflicting, notions of what the dominant paradigm entails. There is fervent interest in situating what it means to bring decolonising into design practice, but across the co-published works there is conscious restraint on defining specifics of what that looks like.

DD emphasises that decolonising cannot be contained in "how-to" proposals or guides that support decolonising. As Schultz explains: "The morality aesthetic risks simplifying decoloniality and stripping it of its criticality. Just imagine: "The Decolonizing Design Toolkit" (featuring Venn diagrams, bite-size lines of inspiration, and witty one liners...)" (Schultz et al. 2018a, 89). Decolonising as defined through structures of coloniality and decoloniality is intentionally difficult to access, and the group is concerned that these ideas may be made too easily accessible stating, "[W]e must be careful not to move into what Tuck and Yang call the 'too-easy adoption of decolonizing discourse'" (Schultz et al. 2018, 89). Referring to the work of decolonial scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, decolonising is a theory, discourse and practice that is wary of wide-adoption that could lead to shallow, watered-down versions of "critical consciousness" without actually changing colonial power dynamics or contributing to materially improve the lives of Indigenous peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012, 19). Decolonising is not only concerned with learning subaltern knowledges or different practices, the change must be, "*radical* rather than reformist" (Schultz et al. 2018b, 3, emphasis in original). Thus, the work of decolonising design requires an

ontological shift, "decolonising the ontological forces of designing must not be understood as an attempt for additive change; rather, we call for a radical structural shift in the field" (Abdulla et al. 2016, np).

DD's broader perspective on defining the dominant paradigm urges a complete reimagining and "re-foundational-ising" of what and how design is defined and practised. DD's critique is not based fundamentally in design, but more broadly in coloniality as dominant design's "locus of enunciation" (Grosfoguel 2007). This means revealing the politics from which the work is produced, both a geo-politic and body-politic (ibid.). DD proposes that design does not have to operate from coloniality, or any singular worldview. There are a plurality of other ways of practising and operating in the world from which design can learn, but the locus of enunciation cannot come from a place already within the dominant paradigm. For example, Kombumerri-Wakka Wakka academic Aunty Mary Graham discusses "Place" to teach how plural, multiple knowledges are always operating and true at the same time, when understood as coming from and connected to the land (Schultz et al. 2018a).

2.1.5 *KO*-ONTOLOGIES: A PERSONAL, PLURAL, AND CRITICAL POSITIONING

Yoko Akama's analysis of Dominant Design[3] relies on similar characteristics as previous discourses, but frames it specifically from a deeply personal and ontological position. Akama situates her work within decolonising, but not through discourses of decoloniality. She describes the homogenising force of the Dominant Design narrative, which limits and excludes alternative worldviews and limits the ability for design to work meaningfully with heterogeneous communities (Akama and Yee 2016; Akama 2017, 2021). Akama's work calls for more personal, situated and heterogeneous approaches to design education, discourse and practice. She refers to feminist technoscience by emphasising Dominant Design's "from nowhere" positioning through practices and presentations of neutrality and placeless-ness (Akama 2021). She describes being without

3 When referring to Akama's work, I capitalise Dominant Design to properly note her intentional usage of capital letters to distinguish this from lowercase 'd' design practice, which signifies, "ethical, situated and ontological notions of designing" (2021, 104). However, when referring to the dominant design paradigm in my work, and in general, I use the lower case.

location and having a false sense of neutrality as “symptoms of whiteness” (ibid, 103). Whiteness is contextualised as not simply a racialised identity, but rather as a hegemonic structure which hides, “backgrounds, socio-cultural context, values, philosophies and where/how...worldviews are shaped” (Akama 2021, 103). She argues that whiteness works as a process of abstraction, covering up and dislocating where people, ideas and relationships originate. Borrowing from a social psychology metaphor of a white lab coat, she describes how designers put on the “whiteness” of professionalism to create a clean, neutral identity. Wearing this professionalism requires concealing one’s relational, physical and ancestral positionings in order to appear objective. The choice of whiteness erases the depth, diversity and complexity of lived experiences. She adds, “For many Black, Indigenous and people of colour, this is not a choice; rather, whiteness is a violent structure that can render them as invisible nowhere and nobody” (ibid., 103). Akama recognises that while the structure of whiteness extends beyond racialised categories, the requirement to present a “neutral, white” worldview is not an option for many Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, and instead they are subjected to characterisations that place them outside of the dominant paradigm.

Akama’s description aligns with Grosfoguel’s (2007) argument about the hidden subject behind Western knowledges, which he uses to discuss the importance of the body-politic and geo-politic of knowledge (design) production. However, Akama argues her point at the level of the individual, rather than as a world system, and places her own experience at the centre. She uses the metaphor of a garment of clothing to ask the reader to consider the embodiment of practices that hide identity. This distinction is meaningful to understanding an intersectional decolonial praxis. This praxis asks for critical knowledges to be made intimate and tangible in ways that are personal and applied.

To address the paradigm of Dominant Design, Akama uses the metaphor of an archipelago, which surrounds “The Continent of Dominant Design”. She encourages departure from “the shores of the Continent” in order to explore and embrace the archipelago of islands, which serve as a, “metaphor for plurality of many minds, places, perspectives and relationalities, as well as the fluidity and partiality of our own viewpoints” (115). Akama makes it explicit that these islands do not represent specific locations or cultures—it is not leaving the Continent of Dominant Design in order to visit the island of “Indigenous design” or “Designs from the South”.

Instead she uses the islands as a metaphor to call upon a "*ko*-ontology of inter-becoming"—a collective, relational ontology. Inter-becoming is a dynamic (becoming) way of being in the world through relational pluralities (inter-). Akama uses the Japanese concept of *kokoro*, "a resonant responsiveness" that encompasses "body-spirit-place" to convey complex, entangled relational ontologies (Akama 2021, 105). This includes one's own positioning and perspectives, "discovering how one's own positioning and perspective is fluidly and continually constructed through encounters with others" (Akama 2017, 83). Akama distinguishes this movement to other islands as part of a lowercase "d" design practice, which signifies, "ethical, situated and ontological notions of designing" (2021, 104). This means a design practice that recognises what Schultz (2018) describes as a "maelstrom of ontological plurality", which Akama says is situated within each of us (Schutlz et al. 2018, 85).

In this discussion of *ko*-ontologies, Akama demonstrates her own movement away from the Continent. She stories her family ancestry and Japanese heritage, not to position her work as "Japanese" but to make explicit the histories and relationships she brings to her work. She notes her own histories of being trained and practised in a Dominant Design paradigm which, along with other life experiences, underline her positioning across many worlds. She acknowledges her place on Country of the Kulin Nations, and describes a formal Welcome to Country as an invitation to bring one's whole self into an encounter. Using descriptive storytelling and poetry, she places herself in relationships with different worlds and worldviews.

Akama uses examples of design work such as the Ise Shrine in Japan, but she does not discuss her own projects. She attends to the philosophy, values and responsibilities she carries into her practice. This is reflected in several papers (Light and Akama 2012; Akama and Prendville 2016; Akama et. al. 2019) that emphasise relationships and values in design, rather than the familiarity and tangibility of projects and outcomes. Importantly, Akama does not provide the reader with methods or tactics designed to help them "achieve" an ontological inter-becoming. She does not even encourage following her theoretical tracts. Instead, she holds the position that knowledge sharing is relational and situated rather than instructional or transferable. Indeed, she challenges the very notion of transferability, noting "we must pause to query why and where expectations for transferability comes from that assume methods and knowledge can be

untethered from the sites of their relational embodiment and moved elsewhere like a package" (Akama 2021, 106). Instead, Akama provides stories, metaphors, reflections, values, and philosophical concepts that inspire and guide her movement away from the Continent. Her work encourages others to take these same journeys, which will generate their own unique encounters, knowledges, and ways of being.

Throughout the discussion of these discourses, I have drawn attention to particular nuances between them. In the following section, I put these varying perspectives into direct conversation with each other in order to shape an intersectional decolonial praxis.

SECTION 2

SHAPING AN INTERSECTIONAL DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

2.2.1 BRINGING CRITICAL TRADITIONS INTO PRACTICE

Rosner uses feminist technoscience to supplant patriachal, industry-mainstream design theories with feminist histories, values and practices. The DD collective advocates for decolonial thinking and the "canon of decolonial theory" to reveal the operative connections of colonialism and coloniality/modernity within design. The Design Justice Network calls for the inclusion of Black feminist theory to transform objects of design to be more equitable and inclusive. These accounts demonstrate the value of alternative intellectual or critical traditions to counter the influences of dominant design narratives and practices.

These intellectual developments highlight the value of sustained exploration of theoretical work and practices from diverse perspectives, often on the margins of dominant systems. Theory is a way of giving an account. It accounts for situations, actions, relationships and ideas. It "asks about and explains the nuances of an experience and the happenings

of a culture" (Holman Jones 2016, 229). These accounts, and the work of accounting, "link the concrete and abstract, thinking and acting" and help to understand and support our ways of being and acting in the world (ibid., 229). This makes theory an integral part of what it means to make sense of how we can know, be and act in the world in response to entrenched dominant systems and lineages. This is not in contrast or parallel to practice, but rather is integral to how one comprehends and supports a continuing critical practice. Engagement in social practices through feminist, decolonial and anti-racist discourses resists instrumentalisation and cleanly-packaged, neoliberal solutions. There is an abundance of wisdoms and practices from people and communities long engaged in radical liberation projects, and contained in the theory these practices have produced. Theory is a tool that helps to translate and share these wisdoms and practices.

Embracing theory as a necessary and active part of social practice in design contests the neoliberal agenda behind design "for social innovation" that turns social practice into another facet of capitalism (Abdulla 2014; Armstrong et al. 2014). When directed towards "liberatory ends", theory forces slower, more critical and nuanced work. Adding friction helps to resist the instrumentalising of easily adopted practices (Michaeli 2017). When concepts such as "decolonising" or "anti-racism" or "Black liberation" are disseminated and wielded as practices without critical accounts, they become untethered from the individual's and communities' lived experiences that are the engines for liberatory practices. Losing connection to the people, places and relationships, these accounts become diluted into mainstream trendy buzzwords and social media rhetoric. These diluted versions of liberatory concepts are not about accessibility or application, as they are "owned" and directed by those outside of that lived experience. However, when these theories are turned into "walls" that deny participation in the process of theory making for all but elite academics, they are similarly divorced from a liberatory process (hooks 1991). Encouraging slow and nuanced engagement focuses our relationship with theory away from "knowing", "owning" or even "teaching" and instead to considering, sharing, questioning and using theory as a tool to build community and support. The argument is not whether or not theory is a valuable liberatory tool, but rather how to make critical ideas active and applied in the world. This research is specifically concerned with how those

in dominant positions of whiteness, class, gender identity, etc., can shift their own ways of being and thinking (and participate in critical accounting) through their own practice in order to support wider liberatory practices.

In this research, I consider the role of learning alternative critical theories—in this case feminist, anti-racist and decolonial perspectives—and how to apply them in practice. This is work both for my own thinking and doing, with the aim to support others in this work as well. Inherently, there is a tension in creating accessible tools and dialogues rooted in these critical perspectives, and the ways this translation can oversimplify and subdue radical politics in the process of application. Additionally, the creation of an alternative approach can still perpetuate singular and didactic paradigms to be followed, rather than helping to build situated, critical and dialogical skills.

2.2.2 TENSIONS: ACCESSIBILITY AND CRITICAL ACCOUNTING

Rosner makes her argument for critical fabulations more concrete by defining explicit tactics from feminist technoscience, which contrast with the identified dominant practices: rather than thinking through individualism, think through alliances; rather than considering objective or user-tested truths, begin understanding from marginalised histories of practice. Rosner's tactics, based in feminist ideologies, align with the ethos of this research: making tangible or creating accessible ways to challenge dominant practices and bring alternative criticalities into practice. However, their directness and straightforward tactics suggest a false sense of clarity, and ease in "attaining" such practices. Thus, Rosner's book demonstrates how the influences of dominant thinking remain, even when engaged in a project dedicated to its deconstruction. Feminst technoscience is offered as a new paradigm or intellectual lineage to follow. It is presented as a "solution" to the "problem" of dominant design. Rosner's critical fabulations suggests, through demonstrated projects, that aligning one's design practice to feminist tactics is something anyone, anywhere, can learn and do.

The process of shifting away from how dominant ideologies are asserted within our own thinking requires more than learning and "actioning" ideological perspectives. By her own admission, Rosner struggles to avoid the deep grooves of dominant practices. She acknowledges

that she presents her argument using binary distinctions and hierarchies. She laments the alternative tactics are described in opposition to the dominant pillars, but create a fixed duality because, "By charting the ends of their seemingly fixed spectrums, moving from disembodied ideal to lived experience, I want to highlight their frictions and resonances" (Rosner 2018, 15). This dualistic, comparative thinking contradicts the alternative approaches for which Rosner is advocating, such as alliances and recuperations. Thus, feminist knowledges, practices and experiences are not shared through an exploration of possible multiples, messiness, welcome contradictions and struggles that come up within the process of practicing those tactics. Instead, we are provided with the "scholarly", cleaned up and clear examples that demonstrate their deft enactment.

Rosner seeks to chart ways to practice outside of dominant, patriarchal, norms through valuable feminist perspectives and tactics. At the same time, her work demonstrates the challenge of leaving dominant norms behind, simply because we have decided they are no longer the ways of thinking we want to embrace in our practices. The tidy narrative and succinct alternative tactics belie the complex messy challenges inherent in moving towards, learning, and embracing approaches completely different from previous training and practice. Rosner's book omits the distinctions of how feminist practices and the proposed tactics would require dramatically different kinds of transitions, depending on how people are differently positioned in the world. It also fails to imagine relationships outside of dualities along the spectrum. The lack of accounting for these nuances further highlights how embracing different intellectual lineages, even with practice applying them, does not mean we operate outside the influences of our dominant lineages.

From a different perspective, Decolonising Design insists on the necessary challenges of engaging with decolonial thinking. Colonial Western thought and ways of being infiltrate critical thinking so thoroughly that a particular vigilance and accountability is required to develop critical perspectives that can actually move outside this influence. In response to this demand, DD adopts a concerned stance around making this critical thought more accessible, and the ways in which that can belittle and damage the process as a means of critical engagement. DD scholars express concern that pursuing accessibility will lead to a lack of criticality. Their work emphasises the necessary components of decolonising practices, such as a thorough understanding of political and civilisational

histories in which one is entangled, the role of Western, colonial influences within institutions and systems, and the challenging personal work of questioning our own subjectivities. While these are valid and necessary concerns, it does not help understand how one might bring these lessons *outside* the academy. It projects a reluctance of taking theory out of the academy, and fear it would lose criticality in the hands of practitioners. (The shifting story shared in chapter 3 reflects my own experience of uncertainty and reluctance to engage critical practices outside the academy.) In arguing for decolonising research methodologies, Smith (2012) directly critiques the hubris of Western researchers stating, "To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonize" (17). Smith is talking directly about how a Western researcher will assume there is only certain kinds of information that research participants will be able to comprehend, or are interested in learning. While this is not working across the same power differentials, the challenge is the same, to decolonise requires making this work more accepted, accessible and applied. Sometimes this might mean working in "bite-size" approaches.

I rely on both the tangibility of Rosner's tactics, and the breadth presented by Decolonising Design, to help shape an intersectional decolonial praxis. Describing their different approaches to making a critical, theoretical position available to others demonstrates a key tension in shaping this approach. This tension lies between emphasising the value and importance of making time and space to slow down, working with difficult alternative critical accounting, and engaging with people using knowledges as a means of making critical perspectives and processes tangible and meaningful for practice. As a design researcher aiming to activate these theoretical discourses in practice, it is useful to understand how a specific critical lens might be adopted when engaging with alternative approaches to the dominant design paradigm. For example, DD member Mahmoud Keshavraz discusses decolonial theory through a personal trajectory, particularly one's "bodily locations" as meaningful for the production of knowledge (Schultz et al. 2018a, 91). Keshavraz argues the importance of engaging with "scholars who constantly locate themselves in the world", to counter Western scholarship's production of universal facts over all others (ibid.). He adds to this the way his own bodily locations in the world (moving from Iran to Western Europe) affected his academic trajectory and relationship with knowledge production. From these experiences, he

chooses not to engage with scholarship that avoids locating its production. This is a concrete practice undertaken to challenge an aspect of Western, European hegemony.

Rosner similarly demonstrates concrete ways where she applied feminist theories in her own practice. Specifically, she stories how she revisited and revalued past work through the feminist lens. This demonstrates to her, and the reader, the ways her practice exemplified dominant tendencies, and where there were opportunities for more open, feminist practices. These examples provide guidance or points of orientation for other practitioners and scholars to consider alternative approaches in their own practice. This approach encourages an individual to consider the meaning and application in their own context, as opposed to a clearly synthesised "tactic" or broad institutional critique. These examples further demonstrate ways in which the researchers brought critical discourse into their practice, and used it as a means of "being with".

These individual examples go beyond learning and recounting different intellectual lineages and align research practices with criticality. The stories demonstrate being exposed to an idea, or work that challenges an accepted way of being in the world. They relate how that challenge is considered, reckoned with and taken on in practice. The tension between accessibility and critical accounting arises when the adoption of a critical perspective is made to seem immediately accessible, and avoids confronting the challenges of what it actually takes to put this perspective into practice. Conversely, insisting on the complexity and distance from lived experiences can alienate practitioners from understanding the relevance of critical approaches in daily life and practice.

The three projects detailed in this research are actively navigating trying to make critical, alternative accounts accessible and tangible for practice, without succumbing to "bite-size" takeaways. *The Worlds We Live In* workshop (chapter 3) encourages practitioners to consider their ignorances through a slowed down, reflective making exercise. Participants were not directed towards overtly critical or subaltern perspectives *or* provided with clearly defined applications for the work. By avoiding engaging this tension directly, participants directed their own responses to applicability and criticality. The *Critical Personas* workshop and *Practice Provocations* (chapter 4) engage directly in translating a specific, critical discourse (of queering practices in library studies) into directly applicable practices. The card-like, direct applicability of the *Practice Provocations*

run the risk of oversimplification. However, rather than trying to provide a specific directive or take-away, the provocations aim to call attention to *processes* of dominant ideologies happening in practice. The provocations are a "bite-size" offering, which encourages a practitioner (myself or others) to be more attentive to alternative critical perspectives in their approaches to doing. In the final project, *Shift Work* (chapter 5) practitioners brought their own experiences and stories into the research. These stories provide the content for layered, critical accounts, and their applicability in practice. The intersectional decolonial praxis helps inform the work of navigating tensions when trying to apply something like queer theory, or the geo-politics of knowledge production, into practice.

Shifting Story: Working into the ontological

Throughout this research, I have been trying to work into the ontological. I consider this a means of working against dominant paradigms that keep me in expository, structured knowledge sharing. Part of this ontological work has been trying to recognise my own ways of being, which are sometimes clear and sometimes not easily understood, especially by me. I struggle to express and connect how I am watching the spider web growing outside my window every morning. I sit down at my computer and watch it build up, caught by how the sun catches on its threads. I enjoy sitting with this "distraction". It is eventually abandoned or cleaned away by the weather, and another comes in its wake. It is how I am with the drafts of this work. Meticulously constructing the words on the page, creating an argument that stands on its own, that allows light to catch and shine through. But over time these painstaking works are abandoned, reshaped somewhere else. And another draft begins in its wake. In practice, I sometimes recognise afterward how I was avoiding being in a particular context. Perhaps my concern was instead to demonstrate explicit "value add" for participants or clients, or ensure I came across prepared and knowledgeable. In these practices I create concrete deliverables, or gain important research insights in the process. This research reflects my attempts at ontological work, as well as my continuous reliance on my own training and practice based in rational, structured and instrumentalist reasoning. It

moves within both these modes. What might it look like to "come across" as present and engaged instead of prepared? What does that practice produce

An earlier version of this chapter was a literature review focused almost exclusively on decolonial theory, and the extensive reaches of a decolonial critique. I was attracted to the strength, virulence and assuredness of decolonial discourse. It provided a "this-is-how-the-world-works" explanation, linking modernity and its development with colonialism. I had taken up decoloniality as the "answer" to my "problem" of whiteness. Being able to represent this growing discourse made me feel proud, intelligent of my ability to "wield this theory". As I continued into my research, a distance grew between this security and the work I was doing with others. On one hand I could explain decoloniality, as the basis for my PhD research, but on the other it felt this was completely disconnected from the actual research process I was engaging or how I was conducting my practice.

In Co-Design Club, two respected scholars presented their own research on decolonising discourses. Following this session, other members, particularly Indigenous members of the group, found the session lacking. The academic discourse used to describe co-design work felt distant from their experiences of decolonising work in their own communities. The Co-Design Club responded to this disclosure with an extraordinary session, in which these colleagues shared their own deeply personal and situated experiences of working with their communities on issues of sovereignty and identity.

My ability to "wield" what I could of decolonial theory was barely the kind of work being described in these lived-in contexts. The critical accounting of these colleagues, and the intimate details of what they navigated in their daily practices, made real what it looked and felt like to be so attuned to navigating truly plural ways of being in the world.

The confidence, or security, I had come to rely on from being able to wield a particular academic discourse was shaping me in a particular way. This experience in Co-Design Club contributed

> to a shift in how I was allowing that to happen. In the session, I did not experience an immediate "aha" moment, or completely transform the way I thought about decolonising discourse. I experienced immense gratitude at the generosity and willingness displayed by these colleagues to share their stories and experiences. Their stories helped me connect knowledges about colonial power entrenched into formal educational and legal institutions with the everyday-ness of life experiences—what it is like to navigate ways of being in the world that move between worlds of Western, Eurocentric cultures, and institutions and worlds of Indigenous communities and knowledges.

2.2.3 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY AND PRACTICE

The racial justice analysis and framework supported by DJN promotes the work of Black feminism to provide alternatives for designers to reshape their practices. This intellectual tradition is foundational to DJN, but the community aspect of the network is how DJN promotes actively challenging dominant norms in design. DJN builds local community nodes among people seeking to commit to more inclusive design practices (Design Justice Network n.d.). Similar to the personal practice examples provided above, the role of communities of practice expands the aperture beyond an exercise in learning a particular alternative intellectual lineage.

As defined in chapter 1, a community of practice connects around particular topics and skills related to a shared field of practice (Li et al. 2009). The maintenance and membership of a community of practice is through the participation of individuals who are part of a shared field. If a community of practice is regularly meeting and participating, they engage in *the practice of* particular ideologies and actions. If individuals no longer participate, in whatever form that might take, they are no longer part of that community. If the community stops regularly coming together, it no longer exists (ibid.). The community exists only by being active in relationship and practice, and is maintained only by individuals committed to being present. A community of practice does not require an official name, a website or a Slack channel. It is defined through showing up (being in relationship with others) and *active practicing*. This is how activity is how communities of practice show up in the world, rather than by what it makes, commercial viability, institutional recognition or project outcomes.

Drawing on an idea of practice from his work with leaders in the Transformative Justice movement (Kaba and Hassan 2019), design researcher Shana Agid describes practice as something that is done,

> *[W]ith the acknowledgement that you are going to mess up...get it wrong many, many times, and it is through that work that one becomes expert...but not expertise as...a moment of differentiation but having practised enough to feel that you can do things with the people around you. (Agid speaking, Penin et al. 2021, 26:06–26:25).*

Agid's presentation of practice and expertise offers a helpful re-framing of how to engage in decolonising and anti-oppression work in social design. Here, expertise is not an end goal, something to get "right" or a comprehensive agenda. Instead, expertise is demonstrated through a commitment to show up in community, be engaged in activity, and work together. Situating critical work within communities, rather than discrete project examples or academic discourses, supports a different idea of what it means to be *doing*, as well as offer alternative notions of time scales at which this work takes place. DD co-founder Pedro Olivera describes, "the need to position decolonizing design as a *doing*... this process unfolds slowly and as a constant struggle, without necessarily reaching a "pivotal point" of a "decolonial" or "decolonized" design" (Schultz et al. 2018, 93, emphasis in original). Communities of practice are a type of environment that can be used to promote and allow for developing an expertise of "having practised enough to feel that you can do things with the people around you" (Agid speaking, Penin et al. 2021, 26:25). This is about an expertise in process, rather than content. This notion of expertise is ongoing, not an achievement that occurs at a moment in time.

As described in chapter 1, this research could not have been possible without the willing and gracious participation from the Design & Ethics and Co-Design Club communities of practice. Chapter 1 elucidates in more detail the value these communities provided by creating a space for critical participation, the collaborative sharing of stories and offering experiences, and ongoing relational support. DJN's community-based approach offers a distinct way of applying critical discourse. Considering Agid's proposals from Transformative Justice, this research proposes communities of practice as a site where an intersectional decolonial

praxis can be enacted, and ontological orientations can be cultivated. A community built with attention on relationships and practicing can support a different kind of environment in which knowledges, skills and ways of doing are shared, and alternative ways of being are promoted and practiced. It is important to note that these spaces are not part of commercial or institutional entities. Thus they are not beholden to justification through measurable outcomes, publishable results, or business value.

2.2.4 BRINGING IT CLOSER

Within the Decolonising Design collective, some members highlight an over-reliance on the intellectual project of decolonial thinking as a means to address coloniality/modernity, at the cost of interrogating individual selves. For example, Ece Canlı notes, “we cannot thoroughly make sense of the ongoing effects of coloniality and its material politics without digging into our own cultural, historical, ancestral, and colonial pasts, and situating our present selves within a greater temporal and geographical context” (Schultz et al. 2018a, 97). Decolonial thinking frames coloniality as an all-pervasive world system that is perpetuated through logic and rhetoric, embedded in legal, political and educational institutions, and ingrained into epistemologies and ontologies. While this structurally pervasive world order has deeply personal and intimate implications, coloniality itself is impersonal and external. Canlı’s arguments bring coloniality back to the importance of who and how we are in the world, and the need to pursue ways beyond the intellectual project. She emphasises that, “a journey towards one’s own individual and collective history is also imperative for design researchers who seek to investigate socio-corpo-material conditions constituted and perpetuated by coloniality. Queer feminist thinking has taught us that this is not an easy task” (Schultz et al. 2018a, 97). Similar sentiments are echoed in the work shared earlier of Keshavarz, who characterises decoloniality through his personal trajectory and a politics of “bodily locations” (ibid).

An intellectual lineage can provide support to help illuminate and explain the ways in which dominating and oppressive structures are present and operating. Critical perspectives and insights provide a helpful framework to understand domination and oppression operating in ways that were previously obscured, unquestioned or unnoticed. However, having that knowledge, or critical capacity on an intellectual level, does

not equate to the practicing of it. Having knowledge itself does not necessitate any change in the socio-corporeal-material conditions that are perpetuated through colonial imperialism, heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. The "journeying" to one's own application of these learnings is something else entirely, and not necessarily supported by intellectual pursuits. For example, just because I gain the capacity to identify a world ordered through coloniality/modernity does not mean I am not still deeply entrenched within this paradigm, and therefore potentially perpetuating it. These ideas need to be activated through everyday lived experiences and practices. And as mentioned earlier, it is not possible for us to get completely outside of this paradigm. What becomes important is how we live, act and respond in the face of this awareness.

In this context, Akama, as Canlı urges, addresses the dominant paradigm by *bringing it closer* to herself. While being critical of a white ontology of erasure, her proposal for ontological plurality reveals how whiteness operates, and brings that disclosure into the work as part of an ontological plurality. This work is able to be done because of the very ontological orientations Akama brings to her work. She uses this work to urge how one might move beyond discourses of *doing*, in order to be more skillful with *being*. Her work attends to how she seeks and encourages others to *embody* complex, entangled positions, and question what it means to embrace this individual complexity inherent in social design practice. This approach is not a celebration or acceptance of domination inherent in our positionings. Rather, it seeks to orient us to questions of being, and understanding how we embody ontological pluralities in relation to multiple worlds.

I describe Akama's work through the concept of *kokoro* and the metaphor of an archipelago as a way of "bringing it closer". Bringing it closer means that, as part of an intersectional decolonial praxis, we must consider how domination, injustices and oppressions are part of *who we are*. The research projects described in the following chapters all attempt to catalyse this awareness and offer ways of giving account of ways of knowing, doing and being, positions that are perhaps uncomfortable realities in dominant positionalities.

Shifting Story: One way of being rather than doing

In my own practice, I axiomatically organise, categorise and systematise content. This is a "doing orientation". When engaging in research, design, collaboration and projects, I frame my contributions through doing. This penchant has privileged me in many professional settings, and is a process that has been wielded to inadvertently exclude and oppress others who have different, less linear though still valuable, approaches to project work.

Throughout 2021, I volunteered with an organisation in Melbourne, the Asylum Seeker's Resource Centre (ASRC). The ASRC provides a wide range of support for people seeking asylum in Australia, including legal representation, healthcare, food and material aid, education and training, and advocacy services. ASRC were working with me to develop support for management staff as part of a strategic transition in the organisation from defining their work and process through needs-based policies, to rights-based policies. In this work, I decided to find opportunities to practise with a being rather than doing orientation.

One opportunity was spending a significant amount of time in regular check-in phone calls about how management was responding to directive change from the leadership. These calls began as a space to plan upcoming co-design training for management. As the work progressed, the call became less about "productivity". The call became a space for checking in and processing the changes and challenges happening within the organisation. I stopped sending post-meeting emails with discrete follow-up tasks and timelines, and used the extra time to be more available for listening. This process meant I had to be with the organisation and process much more than I normally would make time for, without a clear idea of the "value-add" of that time. When it came time to deliver the workshops to the management team, the content was less about "how-to" codesign and more about how to navigate a challenging, resource-limited organisational transition. My facilitation was more attuned to invisible diversity in the room, and tensions among the staff. Follow up "training" proposals focused largely on making time for people

to have regular check-ins around a few concrete tasks, rather than continuous skill development. The process required me to step back from accentuating productivity and outcomes, my own and the management team's, and seek time and space to come together regularly, with more discrete purposes.

In sharing this story, I am trying to account for learning and understanding histories behind my conditioned behaviours to better position me in having awareness and agency in how I show up. It allows me to engage a doing orientation with conscious awareness (though this can be fleeting) rather than continue upon an automatic assumption that "doing" is the best/only way forward. Placing attention on what the organised and seemingly "productive" doing represents experientially (rather than simply what can be represented on an annual report), supports me to value being, and embrace not knowing or not doing. This is particularly salient with content that does not meet predetermined standards of "clarity" or "accuracy". I cannot, nor do I seek to, completely expunge these ways of working from my practice. Despite the sometimes harmful effects of my productivity-modes of doing, I recognise they form a deep part of how I operate in the world. But I do want to be able to have more agency to choose how and when they are relied on, and not employ these modes in ways that silences or excludes other ways of being.

3

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined particular feminist, anti-racist and decolonial approaches as proposed alternatives to the dominant design paradigm. I offer an intersectional decolonial praxis as a term to hold together these knowledges and practices, with the ontological focus on being and plurality, encouraged by Akama, as an orientation for us to address our

own dominating ways within social design practice. The ontological focus of this orientation is integral. If we lean on familiar, dominant ontological orientations of individualism, problem-solution-seeking, or getting it "right", as exemplified by Rosner and my own shifting story, we recreate the same ways of being in the world despite our intentions. Whether working with a critical, subaltern perspective or elucidating global theories of oppressive power, the practices will be brought into being along the same linear, Western, developmental, singular ways of knowing and doing. Just because one has decided to recognise forces of domination that influence ways of thinking or doing, does not mean that shifts will simply come about. Embracing new ways of thinking and doing is entangled with our past conditioning and ontological orientation. We do not become feminist or decolonial practitioners by arriving at a static destination. Rather, it is reflective of the ongoing work of *being* with the politicised self, plurality, and developing expertise in an ongoing state of practice.

THE WORLDS WE LIVE IN

CHAPTER 3

The Worlds We Live In project explores different facets of ignorance, with specific attention on ignorance produced from being positioned in a dominant centre. The project consisted of a collaboratively-designed workshop for design practitioners, and further interrogation of the design and creative outcomes from the workshop through concepts of epistemic ignorance. Participants in the workshop were asked to explore and materialise ignorance as one aspect of their many worlds of knowledges. From the visual and verbal reflections produced, I characterise four different relationships with ignorance. These participant contributions are contextualised in dialogue with interdisciplinary conceptual framings of ignorance drawn from Atkin/Holt's learning model in education research, Jamer Hunt's 2x2 framework for collaboration in creative practice, and epistemologies of ignorance as framed by the work of Sullivan and Tuana (2007), Charles Mills (1997), and Marilyn Frye (1983). This work ultimately argues that one way to address the structural ignorances of dominant identities is to acknowledge it as a dynamic,

social production, and address it through ongoing and situated relationships.

This chapter begins by relating my personal experience of white ignorance to philosophies of epistemologies of ignorance, and the social and structural nature of this not-knowing. It then describes the models used to structure a workshop for social design practitioners, and the design and facilitation of the workshop. The chapter brings these—epistemologies of ignorances and *The Worlds We Live In* workshop participation—together into a discussion about different relationships to ignorance. These relationships reveal challenges and possibilities in addressing structural ignorances, such as white ignorance. The significance of this for social design practitioners is to offer a productive, relational reframing of ignorance as an important element of practice, and support the argument that an ontological orientation, via the politicised self and multiple worldviews, supports practicing with more awareness of our ignorances.

1

STARTING POINT: WHITE IGNORANCE

As outlined in the preface, the 'discovery' of my own racialised identity as a young adult revealed how deeply ignorant I was regarding the ways that I, as a white woman, operated in the world, and correspondingly how the world operated through me. I realised how something deeply intrinsic and unchangeable about me—my skin colour and its racialised history—is a greatly determining factor in how I move through the world (people, systems, education, professional). I had previously never consciously considered this dominating influence. It is not that this knowledge did not exist, or I was unable to pursue it. There are plentiful resources—academic, journalistic, fiction, visual media, documentary—that detail this reality. Additionally, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, through their own lived experience, have mature and developed awareness of whiteness, processes of racialisation, and the inequitable privileges and oppressions associated with them, regardless of formalised education. Moreton-Robinson (2020) explains, "An Indigenous woman's standpoint is informed by social worlds imputed with meaning grounded in knowledges of different realities from those of white women. And we have become extremely knowledgeable about white women in ways that are unknown to most of them" (xvi). I live in a racialised and highly segregated world, and yet moved through it for well over 20 years without attending to the role of whiteness. I was not taught or socialised to see myself as white. This ignorance of my whiteness is both from my own ignoring *and* part of larger structures that maintain narratives that erase whiteness. Sullivan and Tuana (2007) note that this lack of knowledge can be, "actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation" (1). This is not a benign oversight. It is a form of embodying domination.

Sullivan and Tuana (2007) introduce epistemologies of ignorance by explaining there is more to ignorance than the one type understood as a gap in knowledge. Their examination of epistemic ignorance is concerned specifically with racial oppression, and addresses various types of ignorance which are, "actively produced for purposes of domination and

exploitation" (1). This includes ignorance produced by refusing marginalised populations access to knowledges, or the purposeful feigning of not knowing as a means of survival in the face of violence and oppression. The ignorance described by my experience, and pertinent to this research, is a type described as the dominant centre's own obliviousness to their position. This ignorance is shaped through the embodiment of a dominant identity, namely whiteness. They name this as a form of "unknowledges", that can be either willful or unconsciously maintained.

Sullivan and Tuana's investigation traces the construction of racialised ignorance to the work of Charles Mills (1997) and Marilyn Frye (1983). Mills' definition of epistemologies of ignorance describes patterns of 'cognitive dysfunction' that arise because this failure of cognition grants particular psychological and social benefits. These patterns of not knowing are not from an inability to learn or lack of access to information, a cognitive dismissal, avoidance or confusion of available information and experience. It is perpetuated because of its role in sustaining a dominant centre, a particular social grouping of 'white'. This definition of epistemological ignorance is founded in an argument for social epistemology outlined by philosopher Alivn Goldman (1999). Goldman argues the assumption that belief or epistemology is a function of individuals comes from rational, Cartesian traditions. He argues that any individual epistemology necessitates, "a social counterpart: *social epistemology*" (Goldman 1999, 4; quoted in Mills 2007, 16, emphasis in the original). Goldman identifies social epistemology as belief or knowledge arrived at through belonging to particular social groups. It is not determinable through individual beliefs, but by examining how beliefs are spread and distributed across a social group. Mills connects this social epistemology to the phenomena of white ignorance. Mills states, "the ironic outcome [is] that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made" (1997, 18, quoted in Sullivan and Tuana 2007). This resonates with the perspective of Moreton-Robertson (2020), outlined previously, in which white feminists, particularly in their assertions of anti-racism and unity of the experience of womanhood, cannot see the realities from which their beliefs and actions emerge. Mills and Moreton-Robertson attribute this to both willfully ignoring one's own privileged positions, and the systems that encourage and perpetuate this ignorance. This 'white ignorance' severely limits the dominant centre's ability to understand and work with worldviews across different racialised experiences. It conceals to white women (and those

operating from experience shaped by dominant identity) *how we are in the world*, our own ways of being and our relationships within the world. It obscures our comprehension of reality.

Frye's (1983) work describes white ignorance specifically in the United States, and illustrates my own experiences as a white American, "The determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrich like ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most white American have of Black language—ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences'' (1983, 118, quoted in Sullivan and Tuana 2007 2–3).

I grew up in Ogden, Utah, a small city on the border of Utah and Wyoming. My family immigrated to this area in the late 1800s. My great grandparents were amongst a number of immigrants who came from regions in northern Italy and Austria in response to the need for labour in the coal mines and building of the transcontinental railroad (Notarianni 1994). This wave of immigrants, both Italian and Irish, at the end of the 19th century were brought in to take over jobs that were being undertaken by Chinese labourers. Chinese immigration to the area had started slightly earlier, in the early and mid-1800s. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act by the United States government increased local anti-Chinese sentiment. In response, authorities and businesses sought to attract different sources of cheap labour.

These newly arrived European immigrants were eager for jobs, and joined the anti-Chinese sentiment, helping secure their positions. Although they came from various different language groups and cultures, they were given the ability to identify as "white", a shared identity useful against Chinese immigrants. There are documented riots led by the newly annointed 'white' immigrants, which sometimes led to violence and even murder of Chinese people (Glass 2017). There were tangible economic, political and social benefits to becoming "white" at this time. My ancestors, whether consciously or not, were part of a process of becoming "white" in order to secure a new identity as American, a choice not offered as easily to Chinese immigrants. This identity came with access to employment in an era of immigrant competition. Today, I easily carry on and identify with the whiteness my ancestors took on for me, with no conscious effort. I inherited

"white", and with it the kind of security that allows me to move through this part of the world—a relatively rural, conservative, mostly white, working class region—with the safety and security of knowing that I "belong".

Contributing to this history are personal decisions and responsibilities, as well as the structural and political forces which encouraged, supported and demanded assimilation for the creation of "white" America. In my experiences, through school, church, family stories or local media, I never learned about the Chinese or European immigration in the area. This was not general knowledge, or even presented in specialised knowledges as part of my schooling in official classes on Utah History or museums and historical exhibitions attended . The source cited above, Notarianni 1994, was written to celebrate, not examine, the history of different waves of Italian immigration to the area, because it is something relatively unrecognised. The choice to be or not be white was never consciously offered, but structurally assimilated. Through myriad small choices, like the way we pronounce our surnames, the food we serve at the dinner table, and the camaraderie we share in the face of racialised differences, all contribute to this shared and inherited identity.

I know very little about the Native Americans who were the traditional inhabitants of the area, the Eastern Shoshone and Goshute peoples. The dispossession of their lands and ongoing marginalisation is not a fact from distant history that required research to uncover. It is something to which I had direct exposure in my everyday life. Native Americans are present throughout the region, and familiar to me through freeway exits signalling territory of Native reservation, or through the sale of items such as turquoise jewelry and arrowheads in areas frequented by tourists. No institution ever exposed me to the Native histories specific to this area. And my surface level exposure never spurred in me a deeper curiosity about the culture and history that permeates the area. In addition to histories of Chinese ostracisation and the ongoing dispossession of Native Americans, this land was also the site of an infamous and horrific Japanese internment camp during World War II. In my own lifetime, my family has gained direct benefits from public programming, such as the G.I. Bill and Women Infants and Childrens welfare programs. These programs have been proven to advantage white participants and deny Black Americans the same opportunities and benefits related to home ownership, financing tertiary education, health care and food security, which they provide. These examples just begin to span the scope of ways in which I am situated

within a “maelstrom” of dominant pluralities. And address only one of many aspects of my own story, in which I have lived in multiple countries, with different notions of place and belonging, and across different cultures with equally complex histories.

It is overwhelming, and seemingly impossible, to acknowledge the many ways myself and my histories have overlapped with and benefitted from processes of oppression and racialisation. These examples show some of the interplay between the ease of choosing not to care, and the role of institutions supporting this avoidance. The structural elements (schooling, official histories, geographies) which support ignoring, combine with my own willfulness to ignore. These examples illustrate the ability I am given to choose when and how I “care” to attend to these realities. I no longer ignore them. Learning these histories is a part of addressing ignorance, but historical facts only address the kind of ignorance understood as gaps in knowledge. Racialised, epistemic ignorance, and the various kinds of “unknowledges”, ask us to look at the social process that occurs as part of belonging with a dominant identity group. This belonging promotes a sustained ignoring, a cultivated apathy or lack of curiosity, which allows us to move through the world oblivious to ongoing structures of domination and oppression. Epistemic ignorance calls our attention to the politicised self that is manifested through identification with a social group that necessitates this obliviousness. It asks us to consider the processes by which we are both unwilling and socially and politically unable to cognitively address our ways of being in the world. I call this ignorance—one that is based in that which is personal and situated, *and* part of social constructed epistemologies—a form of “structural ignorance”.

The politics of design for social practice requires engaging with broad cultural tensions and positions (Akama 2017). This includes issues of identity such as race, gender, sexuality, citizenship status and class. It is also deeply personal. It requires the design practitioner to recognise their positions and identities that deeply inform their ways of being in the world. The relationship between these broad cultural tensions and one’s own ways of being can be difficult to articulate, or even acknowledge to one’s own self. *The Worlds We Live In* workshops attempts to provoke and support other practitioners to explore their relationships with ignorance and these tensions.

2
POSITIONING IGNORANCES

3.2.1 COMMUNITY

The design of *The Worlds We Live In* workshop was inspired by the work of fellow WonderLab colleagues' design and learning research. They were using the Holt/Atkin's model (outlined below) and visual, paper-based materials to facilitate reflection and dialogue about designers' learning practices. Experiencing their research and how it maps knowledges, I was inspired to apply a similar approach to interrogating ignorance. I worked together with another WonderLab colleague, Wendy Ellerton, to build upon this work. We used the same Holt/Atkin's model, and visual collage-making as a means for creative reflection and sharing (Grocott 2022). Across this collaborative research project, I focused on my specific research questions around how people relate to their own ignorance, or are able to "imagine" worlds of unknowns[1].

As discussed in chapter 1, *The Worlds We Live In* workshop invited a generalised group of design practitioners through professional communities and networks to participate in a "design and learning" workshop. The invitation to participate in this research asked generally for, "design practitioners and academics who are seeking to experiment with alternative ways of knowing and acting in practice". We ran this workshop on two occasions, with 15 participants at each. The first session was part of Melbourne Design Week, and was composed of mostly industry professionals working in design, the majority of whom worked in social-oriented

1 While all the analysis and synthesis of this chapter was done by me as an individual, it is important to note that there was significant collaborative support in the conception, creation, and facilitation of the workshop. It was made possible through the initial conceptual work and research by Lisa Grocott and Hannah Korsmeyer, and further supported with play testing and documentation support by colleagues from the lab. Ellerton and I collaborated on all the decisions about the design and execution of the work. In the months following this work, we also created several artefacts from this work exploring collaborative research processes (Appendix 01).

practices. The invitation was posted in a few different public forums, but the majority of attendees who signed up and participated were from the SDM Design & Ethics network. The second workshop was run as part of a research intensive with PhD candidates and supervisors from WonderLab. The response to the initial invitation indicated interest within the Design & Ethics community to participate in these opportunities.

3.2.2 FRAMING IGNORANCE

The Worlds We Live In

Julia Atkin (1999) developed an illustrative model (Fig. 3.1) based on education activist John Holt's (1971) brief description of the four "worlds we live in" (20–22). Atkin has been effectively using this model for more than 20 years to help educators and designers of learning environments understand the importance of engaging with a learner's inner and experiential worlds in formal learning environments.

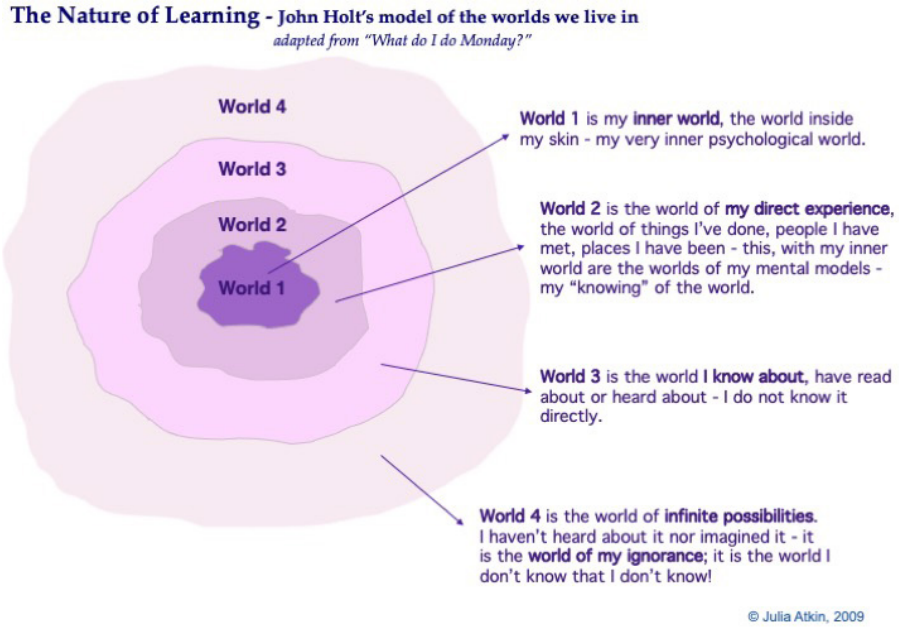


Figure 3.1 Visualisation of John Holt's model for transformative learning (Created by Julia Atkin, 1999, 'The worlds we live in').

The language Atkin uses to describe each world:

> **World 1** *is my inner world, inside my skin;*
>
> **World 2** *is the world of my direct experience;*
>
> **World 3** *is the world I know about;*
>
> **World 4** *is the world of infinite possibilities. I haven't heard about it nor imagined it—it is the world of my ignorance, it is the world I don't know that I don't know. (Atkin 2015)*

Atkin describes that while there is diversity among learners, most people experience "formal" learning without connecting it back to their own lived experiences and internal worlds (Worlds 1 and 2). She provides the example of learning about World War II, but not connecting that learning to any personal experiences of conflict. The historical event remains external to the individual and does not become personally engaged or reflected in that person's worldviews. In contrast, transformative learning connects with a learner across Worlds 1, 2 and 3. This type of learning has an implied indirect effect on World 4, without directly addressing ignorance. Atkin's research supports factors that promote this connection across worlds for transformative learning, such as intrinsic motivation, sharing with others, stimulation of emotion, connecting with inner belief systems, and experiences of crisis or catastrophe (Atkin 1999, 17). These factors emphasise experiences that create deeper connections to internal worlds.

The description and visualisation of this model implies the more that one experiences, learns and deepens internal senses of knowing (Worlds 1–3) the less "space" there is in the unknown (World 4). Transformative learning describes a "lessening" of ignorance through learning, reflection and experience. The Atkin/Holt model does not suggest that transformative learning reveals ignorance or opens a world of infinite possibilities. Learning in and of itself, even through a transformative learning model, does not directly address how certain forms of ignorance are produced and sustained by systems and social relationships, as epistemologies of ignorance examine. While this model includes ignorance, it does not contend with the structural nature of what Sullivan and Tuana term "unknowledges" and the structures that maintain not knowing (2007, 1–2). Transformative learning demonstrates how a focus on formal learning content (filling up World 3) is unlikely to traverse into someone's inner worlds of experience and reflection. Similarly, it can be argued that a focus

on “filling up” an individual’s Worlds 1–3 via transformative learning is not necessarily going to traverse into someone’s World 4 of ignorance. The argument for a social epistemology reveals that World 4 is not governed just by the individual, but also by social knowledges and structural institutions that shape access to experiences. Thus, addressing World 4, addressing ignorance, cannot only be through “transformation” on the level of an individual learner.

Creative Practice and Collaboration

An alternate description of how to understand and relate to ignorance in creative practice comes from design anthropologist Jamer Hunt. Speaking at a design and photography conference, Hunt explained, “What we don’t know is not simply a blank spot. It’s structured. It’s systemic. It’s the result of things like gender, race, class, ethnicity. It’s a result of culture and power and agency. Our ignorance is not innocent. Our ignorance is something constructed through social relationships” (Hunt 2017, n.p.). In this description, ignorance has similar characteristics to structural “white ignorance” (Mills 1997). Hunt adds to this a physical description, making ignorance not only structured, but also material. He quotes writer Thomas Pynchon saying, “It [my ignorance] has contours and coherence, and for all I know rules of operation as well” (Pynchon 1984, 15–16). This view of ignorance contrasts with ignorance being defined by its inverse relationship with your worlds of knowledge and experience. As something defined through its construction, rather than lessened with learning, it can be deconstructed, rebuilt, reshaped. By assigning it physical and material qualities, Hunt/Pynchon conceive ignorance as *actively* constructed. This tangibility is helpful to connect to seeing it as socially constructed. This aligns much more with Goldman’s (1999) concept of social epistemologies. It is purposeful, produced and designed. It is not the secondary result of a different process (i.e. learning).

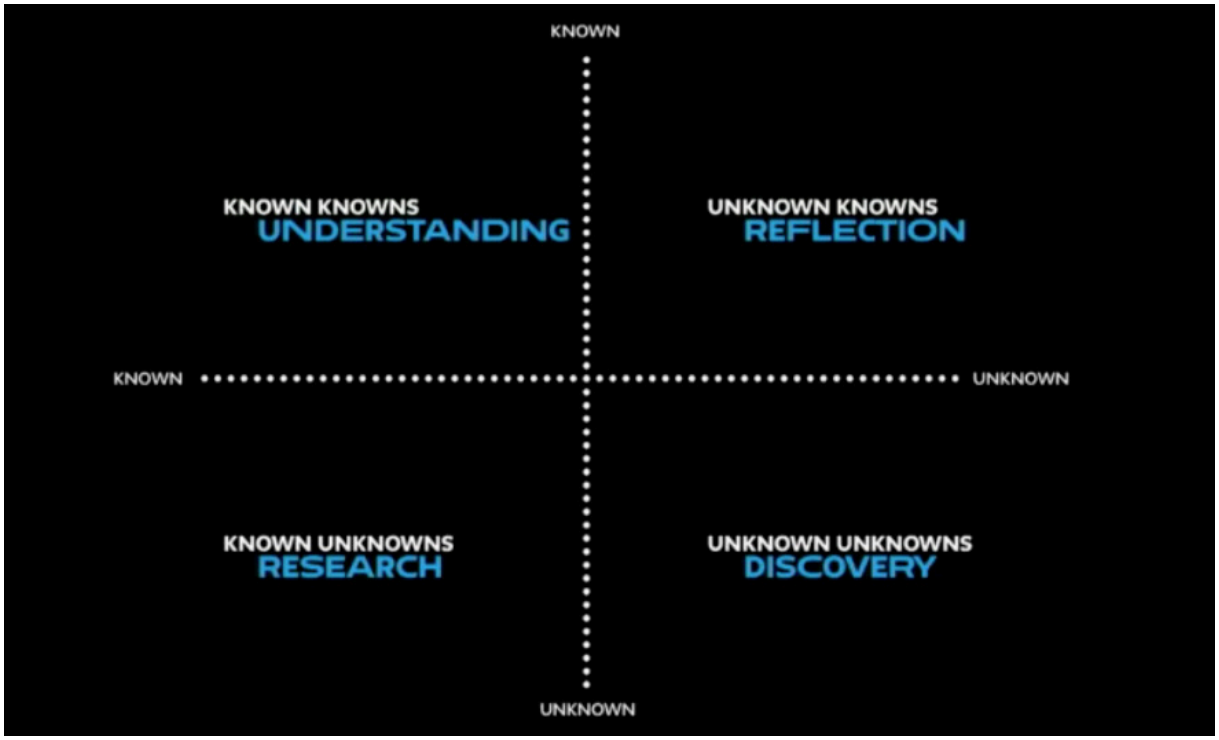


Figure 3.2: Jamer Hunt's 2x2 matrix for collaboration (Jamer Hunt. 'Unknown Unknowns'. Presented at Magnum Foundation's Photography Expanded Conference, 2017.)

Hunt also maps knowledges into four categories, across his 2x2 matrix (Fig. 3.2). These "Knowns" and "Unknowns" rely on an infamous quote by Donald Rumsfeld[2]. Hunt characterises each quadrant through a particular activity. Known-Knowns are in the realm of things we know and the action is "understanding". Using the topic of health equity in the United States as an example, it is a Known-Known that people who belong to non-white racialised and ethnic identity groups experience unequal health dispairities compared to white people in the United States. Known-Unknowns are questions we can ask and pursue through "research" or practice. For example, you could ask across which identity groups and/or geographical locations are health inequities most acute? Or, what do underserved communities create themselves to provide support and care for one another? Unknown-Knowns are the realm of our inner selves. These are things we know, but require the activity of "reflection" to access. This

2 "Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know" Rumsfeld 2002).

quadrant is not a typical consideration in research or a project on an issue such as health equity. It might include something like, how would I characterise my own relationship to the medical system? Or, what personal experiences influence how I approach work with racialised minorities, and how does that affect my work in this space? The fourth quadrant, Unknown-Unknowns, Hunt describes through the activity of "discovery". Discovery is not "research" (answering questions) or "understanding", filling up a World 3 with knowledge. Instead, Unknown-Unknowns are, in Hunt's explanation, things that you cannot control, whether you know them or not—they arise in ways that are unexpected. Here, I would argue Unknown-Unknowns are not necessarily about control over knowledges, but they are accessible or not based on how one is situated. The position you hold in a given situation, and the conditions of that situation, impose particular Unknown-Unknowns.

Staying with the example of health equity, Anne Fadiman's book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1998) is a work of medical anthropology. It documents a history of Unknown-Unknowns when the Western medical establishment collided with Hmong culture in the treatment of Lia Lee, a young Hmong refugee born with epilepsy. The challenges that arose due to these multiple, situated ignorances contributed to poor treatment and medical outcomes for Lia. This included doctors not understanding Hmong spiritual and cultural practices, and misinterpreting Lia's family's actions as dangerous and neglectful; as well as Lia's family putting her in harmful situations due to their Unknown-Unknowns about the motivations and consequences related to Western medicine practices. These examples across health equity demonstrate the kinds of challenges that social design practitioners are often faced with addressing, from the topics of health and equity, to working across different cultures, knowledges and expertise.

Hunt seeks to address ignorance through the activity of "discovery". He characterises this as something that happens through collaboration, what he describes as "colliding disciplines" (Hunt 2017). We cannot consciously encounter Unknown-Unknowns, but we can attempt to create the conditions to help us encounter them. One of these conditions is created by engaging across different disciplines, fields and

lived experiences[3]. Hunt directs our attention to the value of opinions and experiences of those outside ourselves to help us see and understand what we do not know. I would add to this, in seeking to engage across different disciplines, we can also recognise how we are positioned in the work, and address the gaps of understanding that come from that positioning. Collaboration across expertise and experience begins to address socially and politically structured ignorance through acknowledgment and engagement with a diversity of positions.

The Worlds We Live In workshop used these two models to visually and verbally frame knowledges and guide people to consider their own ignorance, or world of Unknown-Unknowns. Following Pynchon's quote, we aimed to "materialise" ignorance, proposing it as something that could be actively constructed. I was asking: what is revealed about our awareness of, and relationship with, ignorance when we grant it agency, contours and spatial relationship to our existing knowledges?

3 Anne Faidman (2017) credits her position as an outsider to both medical culture and Hmong culture as what allowed her to story these undisclosed gaps in knowledge. She attributes the success of the narrative (it won a National Book Award, has been well-received in the Hmong community as a reliable account of Hmong experience in the United States, and is required reading across medical school throughout the United States) to how she was situated. She avoids objectivity, and openly narrates the work through personal relationships developed on both sides of the story (Fadiman 2017).

3

HOW THE RESEARCH MOVES: CREATING ACCESSIBLE WORKSHOPS FOR PRACTITIONERS

3.3.1 WORKSHOP MATERIALS

The workshop was structured to collaboratively and creatively extend thinking about the shape, contours and agency of ignorance. There was not an attempt to explicitly “reveal” or “teach” participants about their ignorance, rather, the participants were invited to think about and address ignorance through more subtle material, visual and verbal prompts. The materials for the workshop included bespoke designed shapes. These included abstract shapes, such as geometric and biomorphic forms, as well as literal illustrations of objects, such as bodies, heads and speech bubbles (Fig. 3.3). From these materials, participants built representations of four predefined worlds of knowledges (Fig. 3.4 & 3.5). We included a guidebook describing each world (Fig. 3.7), and a coordinated container to package and carry away the finished collages at the end.

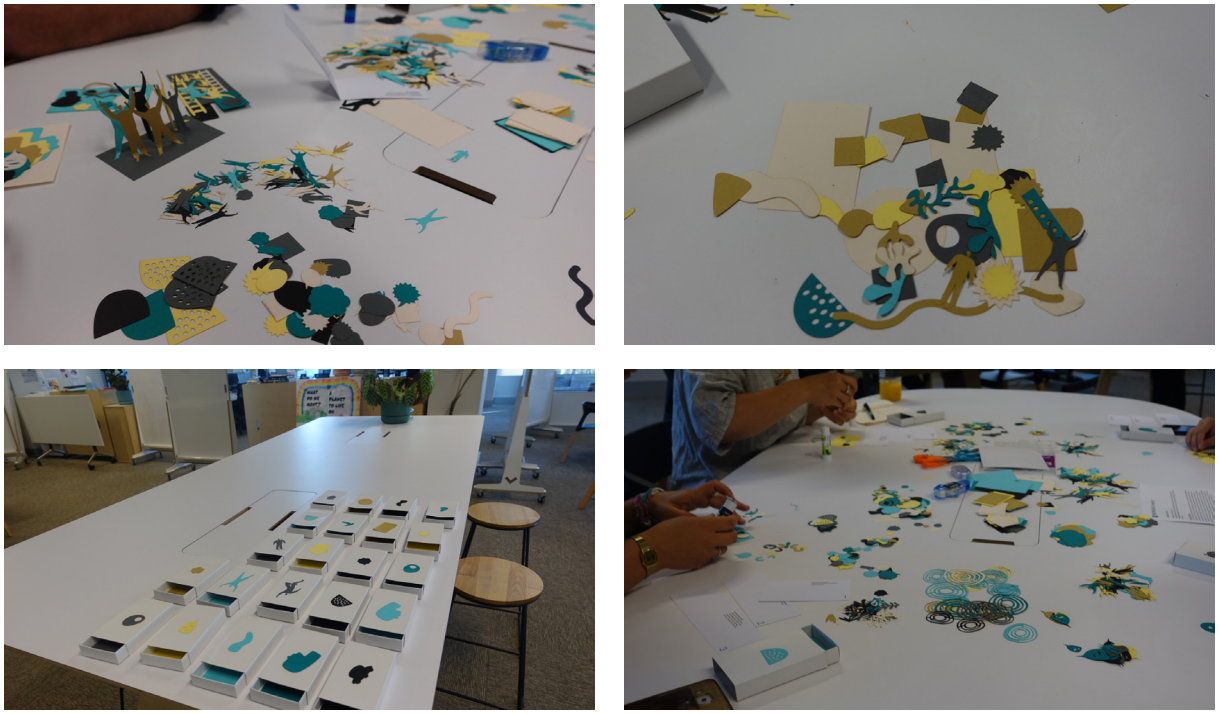


Figure 3.3 Images of workshop materials. Photo credit: Dion Tuckwell, 2019.

3.3.2 WORKSHOP FACILITATION

Ellerton and I carefully planned the verbal and written language to describe each world to facilitate the making and reflection process. The pace of activities and guidance, and environment encouraged participants to work at a slow pace and be reflective. There was minimal verbal instruction, and participants were asked to work quietly.

Participants were initially presented with Worlds 1 through 3, and asked to create visual representations and reflections of these “known” worlds (inner world, direct experience and known world) (Fig. 3.4).

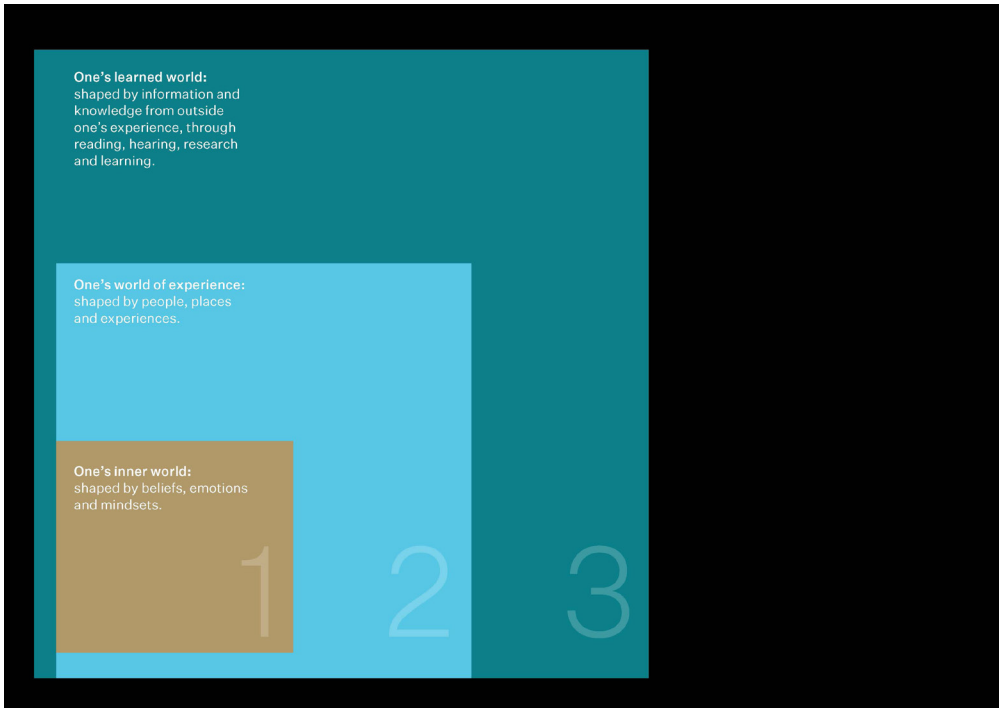


Figure 3.4 Descriptions of Worlds 1–3 shown to participants. Design credit: Wendy Ellerton, 2019

After this, the "existence" of World 4 (infinite possibility and ignorance) was revealed (Fig. 3.5). Participants were asked to create a fourth and final visual reflection.

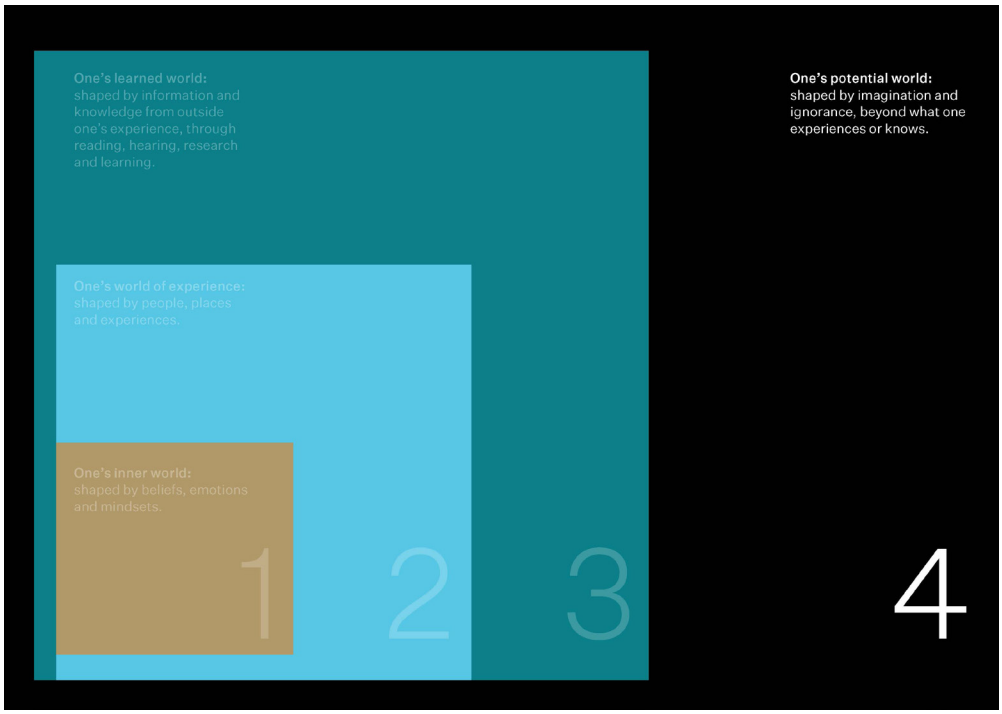


Figure 3.5 Descriptions of World 4 "revealed" to participants after they had visualised Worlds 1–3. Design credit: Wendy Ellerton, 2019.

The final description of World 4 read, *"One's potential world: Shaped by imagination and ignorance, beyond what one experiences or knows."* When introducing this world, we verbally shared the words of Thomas Pynchon: "We are often unaware of the scope and structure of our ignorance. Ignorance is not just a blank space on a person's mental map. It has contours and coherence, and for all I know rules of operation as well" (Pynchon 1984, 15-16). Pynchon's descriptions of shape and contours bring the unseen, and often un-thought, ignorance into a material existence. Additionally, the brief description does not exhort one to change it, but simply recognises its existence. The World 4 exercise asked participants to think about the contours of their ignorance. After the making process, participants were paired up and asked to share what they had created with one other person. Part of the sharing asked them to consider the relationships between the different worlds.

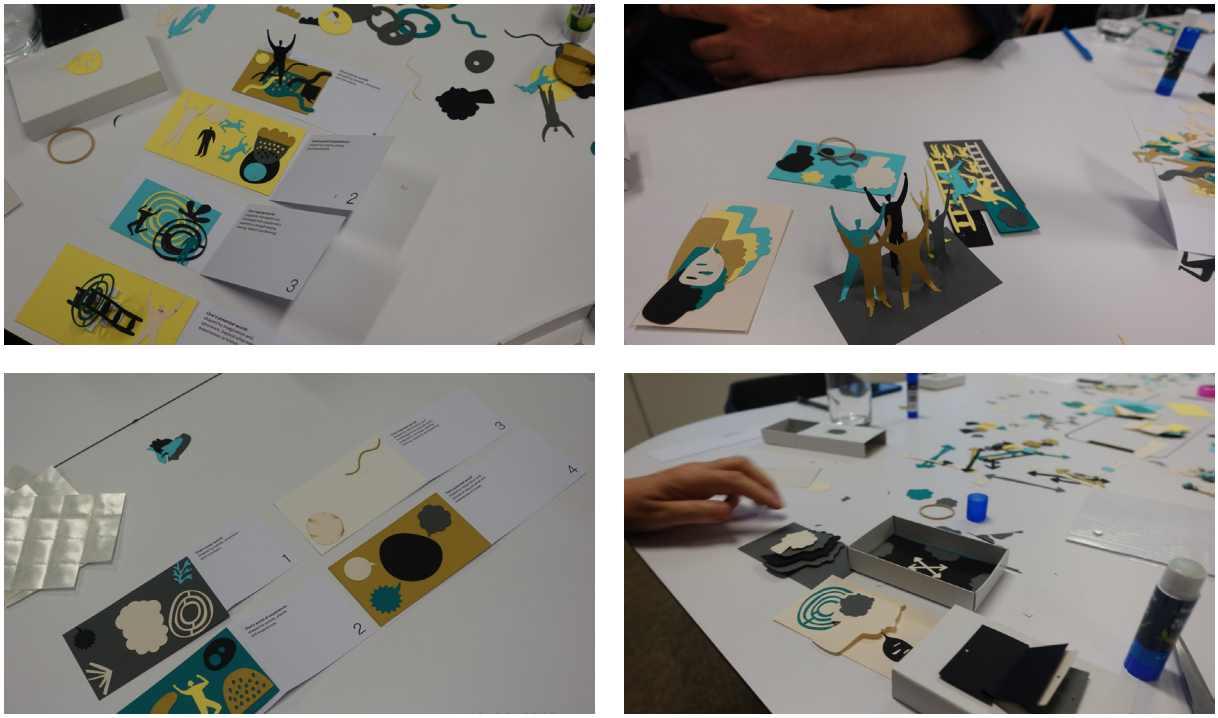


Figure 3.6 Visual representations of Worlds 1, 2, 3, and 4 created by participants at the Melbourne Design Week workshop. Photo credit: Dion Tuckwell, 2019.

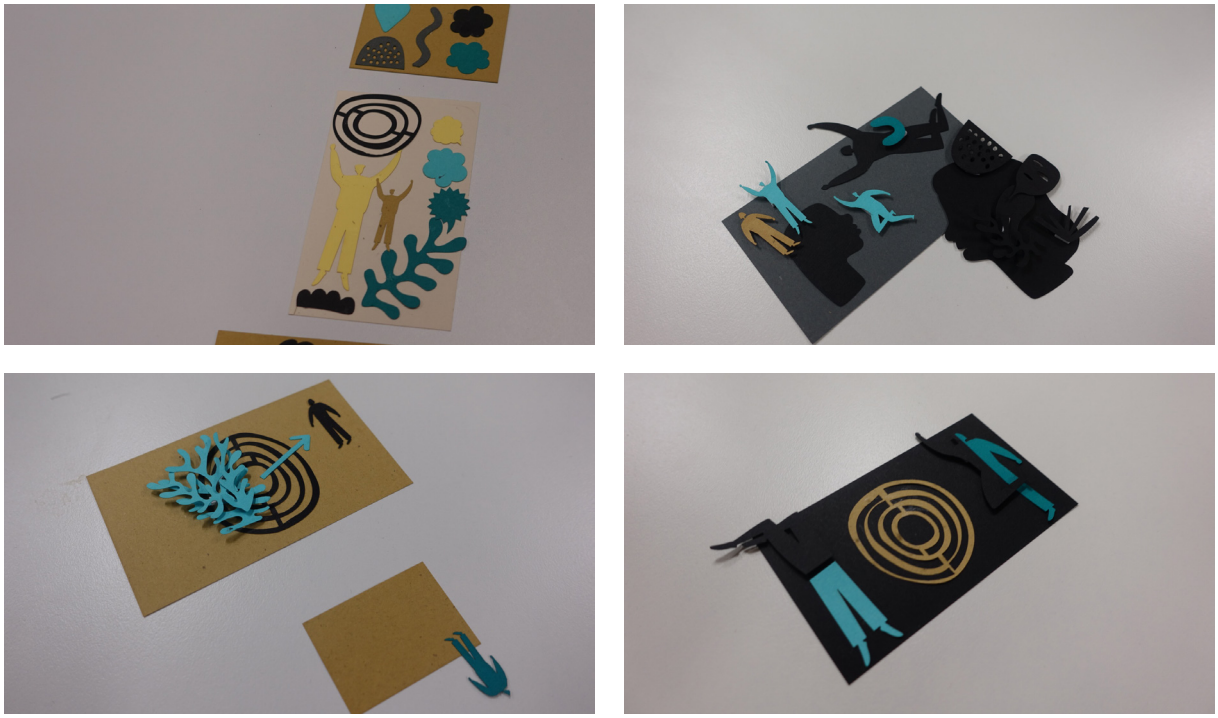


Figure 3.7 Visual representations of Worlds 1, 2, 3, and 4 created by participants at the Melbourne Design Week workshop. Photo credit: Dion Tuckwell, 2019.

These motivations carried through to how we documented the work. The workshop was an open and public event, as part of a city-wide design festival. People elected to come based on their own interest in the topic, and were not solely recruited to be participants in research. In the spirit of reciprocity, it was important to us to create an experience for participants to take something meaningful or useful for their own practice or lives. The way we asked participants to describe their visualised worlds was intentionally structured to intimately share with and learn from one other person. In a recorded exchange with a partner, the participants described each of their four worlds and shared the relationships and affinities among the four creative reflections (Fig. 3.8).This was done to enhance their own learning and reflection, while also documenting the discussions for our own research.

The collage materials were designed for people to package and take them away with them, not for us to keep for our own purposes. They were intended to be small enough that they might be placed on a desk, displayed, kept for safekeeping or used as a visual reminder of their reflections. We hoped people would find their creative reflections on how they operate in the world valuable as reminders of how they want to show up in their practice, i.e. to be more aware of their own habits, knowledge practices, unknowns and limitations. Having a physical reminder could reinforce the way these considerations influence their work with others. In the years that followed these workshops, multiple participants have mentioned to me that they do still keep their collage at their desk or taped up nearby. One participant shared at the end of explaining their worlds that this was not simply a research exercise, but “I see this as an exercise in visual journaling. I planted a few seeds here, but I...have to sit down again and reflect on each of them.” This is a reflection of how the methods employed aimed to create space for visual and personal reflection, as well as our research pursuits.

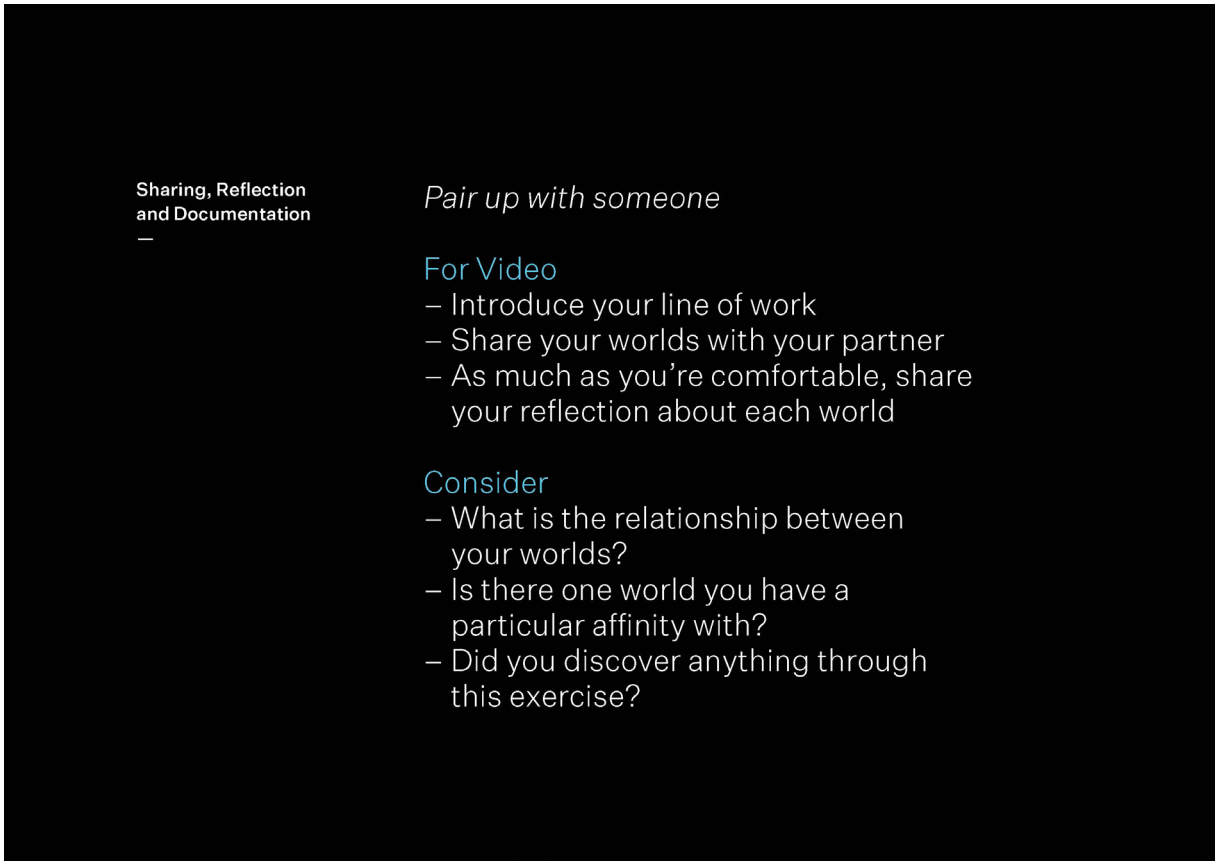


Figure 3.8 Reflection questions posed to participants, shared with one other participant and recorded. Design credit: Wendy Ellerton, 2019.

Shifting Story: Recognising tacit intentions to change others

The Worlds We Live In project was trying to create a more concrete recognition of how, within a dominant identity, ignorance is actively constructed and maintained by identity, and shapes one's experience of the world. While the project had these critical aims, the workshop itself did not explicitly recognise factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. There was an assumption made that due to the broad, general audience, the prompts, activities and facilitation could not explicitly emphasise political topics of race, ethnicity, gender, colonialism. We were afraid this could alienate practitioners who were less critically inclined and there needed to be a more gradual approach to introducing critical considerations.

The hubris revealed by these decisions is I believed people might not "be ready" or "interested" in the politicised self, but that through these workshop activities "I" could tacitly guide

them there. In reflection, I describe this way of working as a "missionary" approach. I believed I would be able to bring the necessary, "saviour" ideas of critical engagement to "unaware" practitioners. Avoiding stating these intentions directly reveals an even more fundamental belief operating that participants are inadequate to face these kinds of discussions. This belief meant participants were not as well supported to openly engage with either the potential politics of the work, or to challenge the idea of structural ignorance directly.

Ultimately, there is a significant amount of power being wielded by the design and facilitation of a workshop (as well as many types of design and research activities). These research activities, explicitly and implicitly, introduce particular worldviews and perspectives. A creative activity, like building a visual collage, prompts participants to "try on" these perspectives and use them as material for reflection and story making. Considering this power, the covert attempts at revealing ignorance as a structured, social influence on participants' practices reflects how I positioned myself with power and knowledge over them.

The Worlds workshop made me confront the idea that I both wanted to, and thought I could, change other people with a workshop. While intellectually I could understand the arrogance and ineffectiveness of this perspective, experientially I was still engaging in that practice. In the later workshops, I changed my approach. In Critical Personas described in chapter 4, it became important to be explicit about which "worldviews" participants would be asked to "try on" in the workshop (in this case, critically examining our own identities and how these influence the use of the design research tool, the persona). This also served to counteract beliefs that participants would not be "ready" to critically engage on this topic, and trust in their adequacy. These decisions went even further in Shift Work as I abdicated offering any critical expertise. While still creating structured facilitation for both of these workshops, I was explicit about why and where I wanted the participants to go. Revealing the politics of the work in these later engagements was not alienating, rather it helped support and ensure participants attending were willing and prepared to engage

with the topic. I did not have to play the role of missionary, bringing the critical to those who were "unaware". I needed to be open and honest about the intentions and goals of asking participants to try on a particular worldview.

4

DISCUSSION: RELATIONSHIPS WITH IGNORANCE

For the purposes of this research, I am focusing on participant responses that created relationships and descriptions to World 4. This discussion is specifically related to participants' perception and understanding of ignorance. The collaborative engagement created a space to examine ideas and models that seek to explain ignorance, and how people (in this case, design practitioners) might relate to ignorance. I specifically use the word "relate" to reveal the bias I bring to this analysis, and to emphasise my own exploration of a relationship with ignorance. The language purposefully does not characterise this as how people confront, overcome, eliminate, or know ignorance. After the two workshops, I went back through the recorded reflections produced by participants. Across the various understandings and visualisations, I categorised how people connected to World 4 through four types of relationships—stuck, potential, lived experience, and connection. These four descriptions are not intended to create characterisations of individual people, or provide a set of generalised mindsets about ignorance. These descriptors represent different ways I was able to build on understanding and relating to ignorance. I connect these relationships with how we might understand epistemological ignorance as a construction of ignorance from a dominant centre, as described in the opening of this chapter. As with the Holt/Atkin model, Hunt matrix and Pynchon

description, the produced visuals and descriptive relationships attempt to conceptualise, understand, relate,, and reveal the potentials behind ignorances' "rules of operation".

3.4.1 POTENTIAL: A REFLECTION ON METHODS

For some participants, World 4 was a place that held great affinity and potential because they envisioned it as a world with a total lack of content and structure. One participant responded with disgust to the premise of World 3 (formal learning) declaring, "I don't think we can know anything about the world" and embraced World 4 as a welcoming challenge, "we have to unlearn and reimagine." Another participant took her model of World 4 and continuously twirled it in circular, up and down motions, describing how this constant motion generates uncertainty. She connected this experience as electrifying and exciting, like a roller coaster. Of all the worlds, World 4 holds "so much excitement and richness in it". The ability to embrace World 4 has, "power, magic if you are able to sit in the ambiguity and uncertainty."

These invigorating responses tend towards a relationship of embracing World 4 as a place of boundless imagination and creation. It is not hemmed in by structures or institutions that, ostensibly, shape the previous worlds. It also contains a future orientation, imagining what could be possible. That the future is unknown, implicitly places it in World 4. These types of responses demonstrate there is exciting potential in the unknown, and relate to Hunt's emphasis that this is a space of discovery. However, these responses neglect to notice the role of the same structures, beliefs and institutions, which shape Worlds 1–3, are also influences on the "shape" of World 4. The participant who expressed disgust at the world of learning did not connect how this learning had its own influences on the "potential" of World 4.

This also highlights a shortcoming in the design of the workshop. It primed this type of response with language such as "infinite possibilities" and "imagination" as descriptors of World 4, as if it were something not already existing. In an invited response from participants envisaging futures in WonderLab workshops in general, fellow researcher Myriam Diatta calls to our attention, "Elaine Scarry's cautionary observation that "the vocabulary of 'creating,' 'inventing,' 'making,' 'imagining,' ... is usually described as an ethically neutral or amoral phenomenon" and is "in

fact laden with ethical consequence" (Diatta quoting from Scarry, 1987, published in Grocott 2022, 221). Diatta's attention to Scarry's work reminds us that relating to ignorance as an act of imagination, with notions of limitless potential and unbounded futures, glazes over the politics of how our imagination and ignorance operate. Diatta furthers her commentary emphasising how our imaginations and unknowns have real social and political consequences, "Overt and covert violence is made in everything from the words we speak while others are not looking to the nation-states we build" (ibid.).

When we create these experiences by seeking to generate a response, whether reflective or futuring, the ethical consequences of "what could be" are often not considered. In this sense, these consequences are not "real" because they are placed in a time other than the present. We overlook the reality that they are arising in the present moment. As illustrated in the shifting story above, avoiding a politicised self and offering ethically ambiguous prompts provides permissions for particular types of ignoring, and creates ethical ambiguities.

3.4.2 STUCK: AN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE

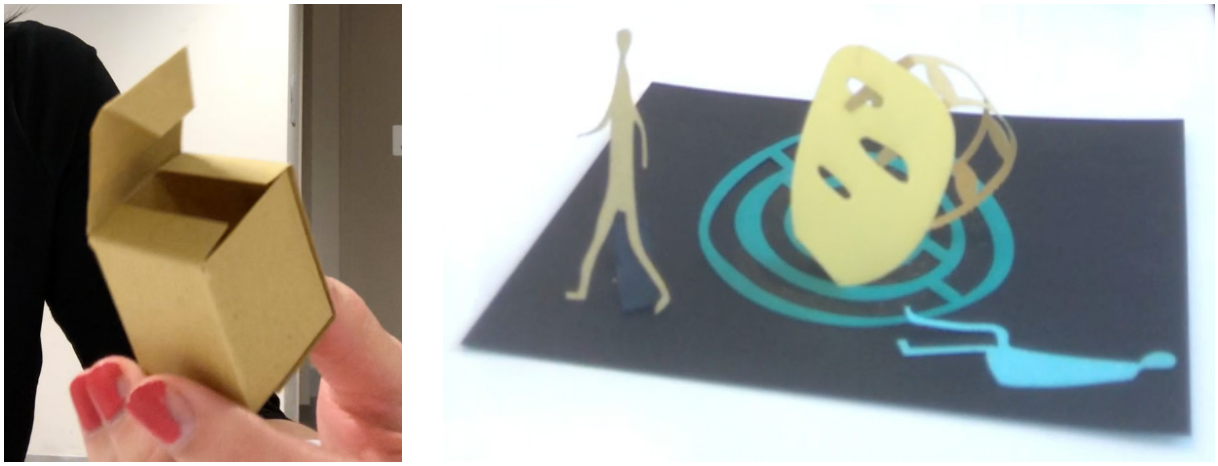


Figure 3.9 Screenshot from video recorded by participants describing their understanding and relationship with World 4.

When participants attempted to describe their World 4 in terms of being individuals focused on content, what might be "inside" this world, their responses indicate the inability to characterise or access what we do not know. Physical forms used borders and walls, and visuals emphasised opaqueness and illegibility. Verbal descriptions highlighted feelings of difficulty, confusion and feeling stuck, "hard to imagine what that world would be like. It's a box. You don't know what you will get inside, could be a box of dangers or a box of chocolates" (Fig. 3.3). Another participant created World 4 by cutting a thin, wavy barrier out of paper to enclose her first three worlds, keeping World 4 outside and separate. She described World 4 as, "Everything on the other side of the blue bit of paper...it's outside the edge of my known." Another participant set World 4 in black to contrast with the colourful worlds he had created for Worlds 1–3 saying, "World 4 is really hard...it's set in blackness, set in the unknown." And another simply described the inability to be with World 4 as "a muddle, confusion...not grounded at all" (Fig. 3.9).

These descriptions—hard, outside, obstruction, stuck—keep World 4 at a distance. With no way in, we do not see it materialise, or how it is constructed. It is not personal or impersonal. It is not about an individual's capacity to learn. It is simply illegible. When asked to creatively interrogate what might be discovered in World 4, rather than attempt to imagine or improvise possibilities, these responses point to the challenge of scoping our own ignorance. The concepts of "confusion", "impossible", and "imposed" disallow agency and do not provide room for movement or reflection on one's ignorance.

This illustrates the role of apathy or lack of curiosity described earlier when discussing the maintaining of structural ignorance. First, it describes the felt impossibility of trying to know, or describe what might be beyond the scope of one's own knowledges and experiences. When speaking to the breadth of the unknowns entangled with my own complex histories I used the language "overwhelming" and "seemingly impossible", which is reflected by the notion of a black box or a boundless space. Second, it reflects a singular, individualistic perspective to our knowledges and ignorance, as opposed to social knowledges and ignorances. This signals a key element of how structural ignorance is maintained: by keeping us focussed only on individual epistemologies and processes of knowing. Some of the large scale, entangled and obscured realities of our experiences and identities are impossible to comprehend on individual

levels. If one maintains a perspective of individual agency and personal responsibility in the face of overwhelming unknowns, understanding this ignorance becomes an impossible, defeating task. It is only by re-situating these structural, social ignorances as both personal and *socially produced and maintained* that we can seek to access what might lay beyond the boundary lines of our unknowns.

Additionally, offering ways to materialise or concretise notions of ignorance through a making process offers a material way to think about ignorance and how we might address or relate to it. As the Hunt/Pynchon quote alludes, giving ignorance materiality makes it easier to prescribe ignorance with agency. Taking that metaphor a step further, by giving it an actual physical form makes it an entity in the world that has shape, moves in particular ways, and lives in a specific relationship to other forms of knowing. This materiality supports understanding and relating to ignorance as structural.

3.4.3 TRUSTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

One participant described World 4 by layering white shapes onto a white background. The white-on-white visual emphasised an intended difficult visibility saying, “It’s hard to see, it’s unknown”, but it was not the difficulty of the black void described earlier. She expanded, “while it’s hard to see, there is trust in my memory and lived experience”. Another participant reflected on the relationship between the different worlds saying, “The main thing is that I think all of my worlds, including World 4, stem from my inner world”. These responses reflect a relationship of trust in participants’ own experiences and ability for reflection to help reveal what they are unable to see or know. There is a trust that, when it is needed, the information necessary will be available.

Trusting one’s own self and experiences demonstrates a recognition that lived experience (World 2), provides equally valuable knowledges and guidance as learned expertise (World 3). This relates directly to Atkin’s promotion of learning and connecting content to internal and lived experiences for transformation. Within social design practices, there is growing advocacy for the important role of lived experience in guiding knowledge and practice (Vink 2018; Boydell et al. 2021). The value of lived experience is often overlooked in professional settings for the sake of professional expertise (ibid.; Sandhu 2017). Recognising this, and the importance of

adjusting the balance to value lived experience, it is also irresponsible to consider only our individual experience a reliable guide to navigating what we do not know. Our own experiences are not a reliable guide if what we are seeking is understanding something outside of our own knowledges and experiences. This reliance is based on the idea that our intuition, or being guided by an inner knowing, can bring us beyond the boundaries of our minds.

While our lived experience can be a helpful guide, it is equally important to recognise the limitations and boundaries of our memory, intuition, and experiences. We also need to acknowledge that relying on any of the previous three "worlds" of inner reflection, learned, and experiential knowledge to help inform our unknown spaces, places us right back within those same worlds. Seeking out this world "beyond our knowledges" returns us back to within our own selves, in a self-perpetuating paradigm.

3.4.4 DYNAMIC CONNECTIONS

The final description, dynamic connections, characterises a relationship with World 4 that is most applicable in addressing a structural ignorance. Some of the participants described World 4 as a space with constant movement, coming in and out of it. These descriptions used relationality, the connections with other worlds and peoples, as the support for moving in and out of this potential world. Without trying to find out what was "in" World 4 or what World 4 had to offer, these descriptions imagined ways of connecting, or moving across it.

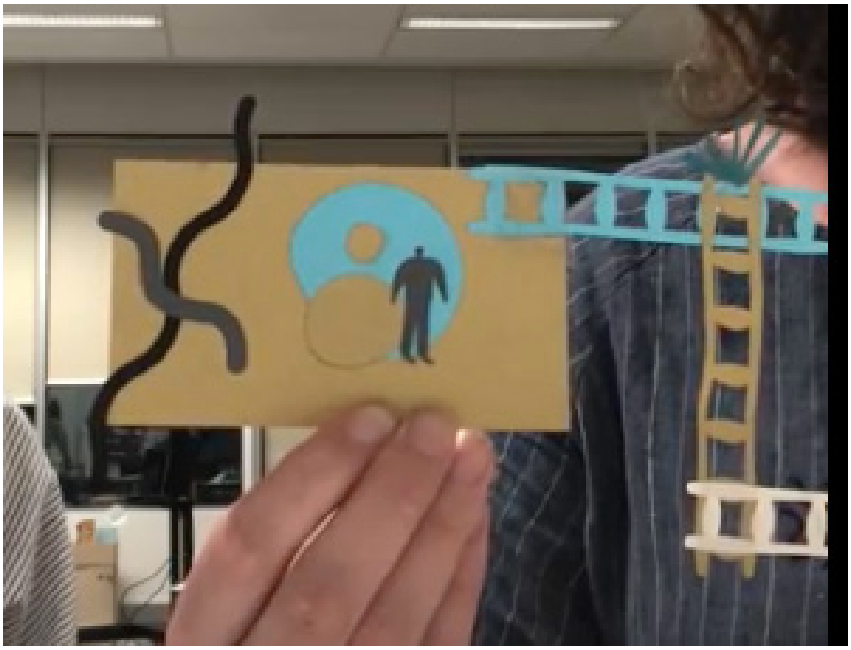


Figure 3.10 Screenshot from video recorded by participants describing their understanding of and relationship with World 4.

One participant built on an earlier description of an unknown-blackness with, “The access to the unknown, the connection between the unknown-blackness and all my current worlds is through connection and listening [to others who are different from me].” What is inside that world is unknown, but it can be thought of as an invitation to connect with others. Another participant shared her fourth world as a place for connection which leads to emergence (Fig. 3.10). She described, “My [fourth] world is really about...new patterns that need to be emerged [sic]...creating new horizons, new ladders, new opportunities for that. New growth for how that emerges”. Her exploration is not stopped by the lack of accessibility, but depicts a type of non-linear growth that comes out of her unknowns. The visual illustrates ladders that climb into and out of that world, creating connection and changing patterns. It is not creating a development plan to move out of World 4, but addressing it through a constant development of relationships and emerging patterns through and around it.

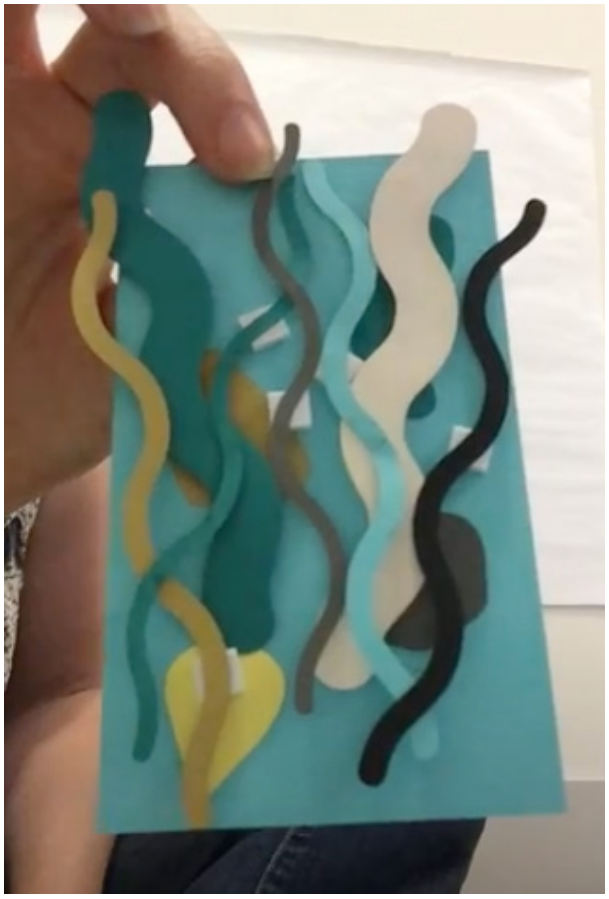


Figure 3.11 Screenshot from video recorded by participants describing their understanding of and relationship with World 4.

Another participant shared, “I got really stuck about the piece around the unknowns. How do I represent something that I am ignorant about? I found these blobby shapes and started putting them down. And then realized I’ve got a river and there’s loads of rocks. First of all, all you can see is the river. Which is where I’m focused really strongly at the moment, [movement]. But there are rocks underneath there that maybe I’ll trip up on.” (Fig. 3.11). This characterisation of World 4 was immersive, and always in motion, always changing shape. Rather than staying in a “stuck” mental process or taking a particular direction, the participant instead engaged in *movement*. This description characterises a way of being that—without acting from necessarily a point of knowing or having the intention for a specific action and outcome—there is simply the willingness to move with the not-knowing and some of the inevitable challenges, or “rocks”, that are encountered while navigating this movement.

This world of ignorance is dynamic, produced through personal and social relationships. It is not a static entity that can be addressed by assembling the right balance of expertise or the appropriate outside critique. This changing, relational ignorance requires a response that can also move, as Sandoval (1991) describes, with differential consciousness. As described by the above participant, this is a relational response. It is building relationships across diverse expertise and experience, and being in dynamic relationships with the situations, people and places that arise. This is distinct from sharing knowledges through a process of solution-oriented projects or critique. For example, building a relationship with a particular community (or individual) for the purposes of having a relationship with the community creates very different kinds of sharing and exchange than a relationship built with a community in order to "solve a problem" or "answer a research question".

Connection is not necessarily about the particular knowledges or positioning one holds, or an attempt to fix or cure ignorance. Connection and recognising the ways we are in relationship with others and their worldviews builds a capacity *to be with* ignorance as it is made evident and emerges. An explicit goal to rectify or change ignorance freezes it into something static. It makes ignorance an individually-held construct, and something that can be individually conquered. This individuality removes it from its social construction. The social construction of ignorance reflects the relationship of an individual self-situated with multiple worldviews. This relationship keeps ignorance constantly in responsive, relational movement. A quote from a Zen awareness student and teacher, Ashwini Narayanan, describes the antidote to ignorance as, "It's not resolution that's the answer, it's the looking that's the answer.[4]"

Importantly, seeking to be in relationship with our ignorance means not facing it through our ability or inability to advance individual change, or relinquish responsibility because of the sense of helplessness in the face of structural challenges. It requires one to be active, aware and responsible for how their knowledges and ignorances show up relationally, with others and in situated conditions. It is not about simply learning more to address ignorance, but about recognising our own agency to

4 Received via email through the Daily Peace Quote mailing list on 20 August 2022, https://www.livingcompassion.org/daily-peace-quotes.

connect and build relationality. Relationality is not something that can be constructed, like the structured collaboration Hunt describes. It has a dynamic quality, developed and nurtured by practices such as presence and listening. The value of this is developed further in chapter 5, which builds on the role of relationships to support examining our dominant ways of being in the world.

5
CONCLUSION

Often, when confronting ignorance as individuals, we become stuck navigating it as a type of content that can be acquired or lessened. Thinking of ignorance as having limitless potential, as with imagination, fails to account for a politics and agency that is inherently part of how we are situated in the world, and our unknowns (and imagination). Relying on critical reflection, a reflexive process to continuously reveal to us what was previously unknown, perhaps deepens self-awareness, but does not move us beyond our own expertise and lived experiences.

The Atkins/Holt worlds model and Hunt's 2x2 matrix were helpful frameworks to shape a conversation about relationships with ignorance. Epistemologies of ignorance supported examining ignorance as I experienced it—something structured and maintained through my dominant identity. This project began with questions of how to address ignorance as it relates to our positioning in the world. The development of *The Worlds* workshop and discussions around what it produced supported reframing ignorance from something singular and individual that needed to be understood and conquered, to a more complex phenomenon produced and maintained through dynamic relationships between personal curiosity and will, and between the individual and socially constructed, maintained epistemologies. These relationships describe structural ignorance as created, maintained and dismantled in an ongoing relationship with how we as individuals are situated as a politicised self, what we have access to

knowing about the world and ourselves through structural, political, social factors, and how we are in relation with the world and multiple worldviews. These ontological orientations help to reveal how our knowledge practices are constructed from both individual and social perspectives. This frame of ignorance redirects a frustrated battle “against” ignorance, and opens up different considerations for how to address the perpetuation of oppressive, structurally-produced, conscious and unconscious “unknowledges” (Sullivan and Tuana 2007).

The argument presented through this chapter is that social design practitioners working from a dominant identity will move through the world with particular ignorances that come entangled with an individual’s ontological orientations. The relational structure and social agency of this ignorance means it cannot be addressed through individual efforts, such as learning new knowledges or “overcoming” it through personal transformation. Understanding it as a force that is shaped and reshaped by how we are in relationship with the world and others (other politicised selves and plural worldviews) means we must attend to it through relational and ontological orientations. This requires relating to it in fluid, calibrated responses, as opposed to forward development or antagonistic conflict. This calls for building and maintaining relationships with other ways of being in the world, and bringing these relationships into conversation with our knowledges and ignorances. This movement is a form of shifting that allows a social design practitioner to attune to the people, contexts, and relationships with which they are engaged.

CRITICAL-DIALOGICAL APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 3 examined socially constructed and structurally-maintained ignorances that derive from one's positioning in the world. These ignorances are framed as a material construct to encourage social design practitioners to consider the agency of the unknown in shaping one's worldviews, and tangibly recognise the ways that dominant positionalities affect what one does and does not know about the worlds around them. In this chapter, I discuss the research and development of a series of *Practice Provocations* for social design practitioners to consider how dominant positionality and worldviews shape how we approach and frame the actions we take in practice.

The catalyst for *Practice Provocations* is the work of academic librarian and critical pedagogy scholar Emily Drabinski, who challenges the premise of activist cataloguing in her essay "Queering the Catalogue: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction" (2013). The essay highlights the many ways in which actions taken in a quest for improving systems, or trying to make things better ("correction"), reinscribes hierarchical and binary systems.

The *Provocations* rely on the structure of Drabinski's arguments around activist approaches aimed at "fixing" catalogue headings, and offer an alternative relationship to the work that she describes as "queering" the catalogue. Queering approaches to the catalogue are based on approaching the catalogue structure through critical-dialogical engagements with users, as opposed to acting on the system in the hopes of making it better. This conceptual relationship of how to act in relation to a dominating power structure is translated into the set of *Practice Provocations*. The *Provocations* present a "best practices" approach alongside a related, critical-dialogical approach, derived through an understanding of ontological orientations.

Inspired by my encounter with Drabinski's work, I designed and hosted two different workshops with design practitioners to create discussion and strategies for critical-dialogical approaches to practices. These two workshops were distinct, but both were grounded in the design research tool of the "persona". The workshops aimed to move away from a critique

of how we might "improve" the persona, to how we might use it as an entry point to create critical-dialogical approaches. And while I designed and facilitated the workshop to focus on critical-dialogical approaches, the resulting discussion with and between the participants in the workshop kept circling back to straightforward critiques of the design research tool of the persona.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of Drabinski's critical essay and how the argument resonates with discourses of "improvement" and "fixing" in social design. I outline the two workshops, and how the activities and discussion within them struggled to transcend the dualities of critique and improvement. The final section lays out the *Practice Provocations*. These are built from learning and reflecting on the struggles experienced in the workshops, combined with a co-creative process of creating illustrations to help communicate the different approaches to practice. The *Provocations* offer shifting as a way of moving through critical-dialogical approaches to the politics of identity in social design

practice as an alternative to simply focusing on notions of “best practices”.

1

STARTING POINT: THE INITIAL PROVOCATION

Within library and information studies, there is an active movement of critical cataloguers who seek to "correct" biased classification systems. The work of "activist cataloguers" has made significant contributions to more "accurately and respectfully organise library materials about social groups and identities that lack social and political power" (Drabinski 2013, 95). Examples include lobbying in the 1970s to change homophobic classification of materials about homosexuality from "sexual deviance" to "sexual life" across the catalogue, and more recently in 2016, replacing the pejorative subject heading "illegal aliens" to "noncitizens" and "unauthorized immigration" (Drabinski 2013; Library of Congress Report, 2016, p. 1). These examples demonstrate the activist cataloguer's intention of creating more respectful representation of identity groups that experience political and social marginalisation, and how that marginalisation becomes codified through classification and knowledge systems.

However, Drabinski (2013) argues that the work of changing subject headings does not secure justice for marginalised identity groups. The attempts to create labels that are more, "objective and unbiased" reflect changes in social and political attitudes about different identities (2013, 101). The activists' improvement process, Drabinski argues, impedes fundamental change surrounding power structures and representation, and perpetuates harmful notions of objective knowledge. While amending biased and heirarchical subject headings can be a "first step" to reveal hegemonic power structures, the act of correction, "solidifies the idea that the classification structure is in fact objective and does in fact tell the truth, the core fictions–from a queer perspective–that allow the hegemony of a universalised classification structure to persist" (Ibid., 104).

Drabinski calls for an alternative approach to support an inclusive and safe environment for library users. She compares the aims of cataloguers trying to fix the classification systems to the role a public-facing service librarian might take on working with library users. She calls for, "a shift in responsibility from catalogers, positioned to offer functional

solutions, to public services librarians who can teach patrons to dialogically engage the catalogue as a complex and biased text, just as critical catalogers do" (Drabinski 2013, p. 94). Drabinski's argument highlights what is obscured by the cataloguers' focus on getting the catalogue "right". As soon as the subject headings leave the domain of the cataloguers, they enter into the domain of a user service. From the perspective of user service provision, the goal of a library subject heading is not necessarily accuracy, but supporting patrons to safely and actively engage with the content of the library. She supports this different orientation to the catalogue by examining identity through queer theories that illustrate the processual, dynamic, relational and performative qualities of identity that elude static categorisation.

Drabinski's critique illustrates how trying to improve or change existing hegemonic knowledge systems can lead to the same power imbalances that occur when knowledge becomes more consolidated rather than distributed. Her argument also highlights who is left out when the focus is on getting the right answers, rather than engaging with users and communities.

2

POSITIONING DRABINSKI'S ARGUMENTS IN SOCIAL DESIGN

I first encountered Drabinski's essay while working on a project about updating the design collection held at the Monash University library. Working with the department librarian, we were examining texts relevant for contemporary design students and which types of texts should be

categorised in the Design section of the library (Manuell et. al. 2019[1]). This project brought me to encounter Drabinski's essay and, while initially it appeared unrelated to my PhD research, it was immensely compelling to me because of how it resonated with the same research questions I was asking about operating from dominant narratives in social design practice. I identified with the scripts of the activist cataloguers, operating with the intentions to fix and make better by creating more inclusive and respectful representations in their work. These librarians had received an education and developed a particular expertise in a field, and were using what they had been taught and the system they operated within to "improve" experiences for others. The outcomes of their actions were celebrated achievements for creating more inclusive environments, not actions that might be characterised as causing harm. This narrative aligns with social design and design-led social innovation discourses that promote the designer's role in creating changes to improve the lives, governance and social structures for others (Sanders et al. 2007; Brown and Wyatt 2010; Manzini 2015; Tromp and Vial 2022). The activist librarians' approach revealed to me parallels with how design methods and processes offer innovative ways to create social change, and evidence project outcomes that show how design work has improved various conditions for their intended audiences.

Drabinski's perspective of activist cataloguing, however, demonstrated how changing subject headings were motivated by a worldview of correction. Activist librarians operated and evaluated practices, through this worldview. Viewing offensive and biased subject headings as "wrong" motivates actions to fix. Correction validates this same worldview in a continuous "whack-a-mole" cycle of fixing problems. Rather than playing into the same notion of "wrong" and "right", Drabinski offers a practice of working with the catalogue from a different worldview. She describes this kind of practice as "queering" the catalogue, rather than "correcting" it. There is a tangible clarity to how worldviews frame the way we understand our work roles, and lead to how we guide and evaluate particular approaches in practice.

1 This is an article on which I'm a co-author, written prior to beginning this PhD research: Manuell, Romany, Kate McEntee and Marcus Chester. 2019. "The Equity Collection: Analysis and Transformation of the Monash University Design Collection." Art Libraries Journal 44 (3): 119–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/alj.2019.16.

There are well-developed critiques of the dominant narratives in social design, which operate out of worldviews that focus on Western ideas of "improvement" and "development" (Escobar 2018; Irani 2019). As detailed in chapters 1 and 2, many critiques of dominant design practices demonstrate how design operates out of a singular worldview that values similar narratives of problem-framing and solution-finding. As a result, social design projects become defined and evaluated through corrective actions. Described as creative, innovative, different and collaborative, social design defines problems and then goes about fixing those problems. Even when the fixing-process employs community-centred, collaborative approaches, the worldview driving and evaluating project work can still be focused on problem identification and how the methods and processes applied did, or did not, "fix" the defined issues.

4.2.1 CRITICAL-DIALOGICAL

Drabinski relied on concepts from queer theory to offer a different way to engage with the issues that arose from defining and categorising identities in a hegemonic knowledge structure. Through a series of detailed arguments, she encourages understanding categories or labels about identity through critical, dialogical processes with library users, rather than trying to make the structure "better" or get it "right". She uses examples from critical theory such as Butler's (1991) arguments that what is outside an identity is as fundamental to the existence of an identity as the characteristics within it: "In order for the category of lesbian to exist, everything that is not-lesbian must also exist" (Drabinski 2013, 104). While these arguments critique activist practices, they do not demonstrate harm caused by correcting subject headings. The critique encourages librarians to consider different approaches to practice, and how critical theories reveal underlying worldviews that motivate actions. Drabinski's "queering" approach encourages a different perspective on providing services, to support library users to critically engage with information systems, while at the same time revealing how the corrective process maintains a particular, dominant worldview.

Drabinski's essay and structure of her argument served as the foundation for a conversation I wanted to develop with other social design practitioners about developing critical-dialogical approaches to practice. I define the critical-dialogical as a process-oriented, alternative approach

to practice, grounded in an ontological orientation and informed by critical theories. The approach is not directive, but seeks to provoke a different relationship to practice.

Critical-dialogical approaches are ultimately presented in this chapter through the Practice Provocations discussed in section 4. These were developed through the course of two Critical Personas workshops, and ultimately working with the theories presented by Drabinski's work to develop a series of relational provocations, as opposed to contradictory tactics. Drabinski's essay was the starting point which catalysed the next two workshops, and the eventual development of Practice Provocations as ways of bringing this argument structure into the context of social design.

3

HOW THE RESEARCH MOVES: STRUGGLING TO BREAK AWAY FROM DOMINANT NARRATIVES

My initial step to bring this conversation into design was to host a Design & Ethics (D&E) event. In October 2019, I asked fellow D&E co-organisers to provide feedback on an idea for a workshop about "critical categorising", based on my reading of Drabinski's article. I had selected key ideas from the essay and developed them into a series of cards that summarised key arguments she made about understanding identity through two different lenses, which I defined as "activist" and "queering" tactics. Activist tactics were trying to get notions of identity "right", and these contrasted with the queering tactics that were trying to understand identity through a more critical-dialogical lens (Fig. 4.1). Working with co-organisers to create a tangible interaction to discuss these tactics, we decided to ground the workshop in a specific design tool. The persona was suggested, based on

being a common tool found in design practice that also relies on fixed definitions and categories, which describe identity characteristics, life-styles, values and behaviours.

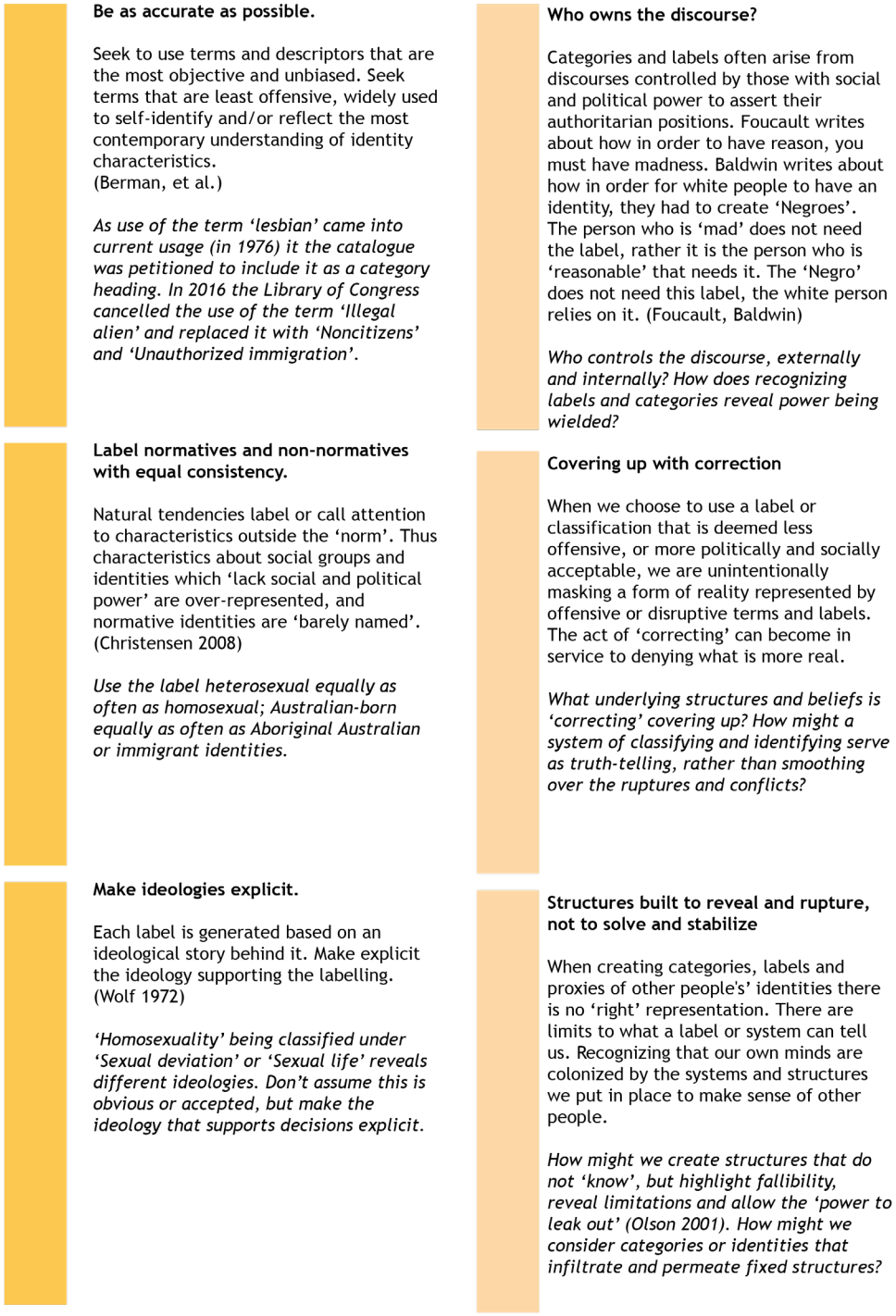


Figure 4.1 A selection of some of the "activist" and "queering" tactics derived from Drabinski's essay, used to design the initial D&E workshop (Kate McEntee 2019).

4.3.1 PERSONAS

A persona is a device used in design research to frame a specific audience being designed for. Personas do not aim to represent a single person, but are a synthesis of key characteristics that are either assumed, imagined or derived through research activities about specified user groups. Personas are distilled, synthesized or summarized characters, used during research and development phases to represent the eventual people who will use a designed product, service or system. The process of creating personas includes capturing and clustering identity characteristics, needs, goals, habits, and attitudes of existing and potential users. This capturing of information can occur with or without ethnographic user research. Rather than through research, personas can be created as a way of bringing a design team together around their own ideas and beliefs about the product and eventual users (Massanari 2010). In these instances the composite character might be created in a team workshop or meeting. Alternatively, personas can be developed through more rigorous methodologies, relying on a detailed, multi-sourced process of collecting information about users (Torres de Souza et al. 2019). The goal of the persona is to provide a human "face" to help build empathy and maintain focus on end users throughout the design process (Cooper 2004). Creating personas can also aid in building understanding of problem space and communicating across teams (ibid). They are used by design teams both for development of products, but also as tools to host conversation and facilitation with clients or user groups as well.

4.3.2 WORKSHOP #1: SHARING PRACTICE-BASED PERSPECTIVES ON PERSONAS

As noted in chapter 1, this initial workshop was developed explicitly for the D&E community. The invitation went out via the D&E Slack channel and mailing list, inviting people to a regular monthly event[2]. This meant the people who attended this workshop were, for the most part, active members of the D&E community. As described in chapter 1, this indicated

2 For both this D&E workshop and the following ServDes workshop, the research was not seeking to collect participant responses to the workshop prompts as ethnographic material or data.

their interest in challenging practices and values in design. As part of this community, many attendees had previously participated in workshops, panels, conferences or social gatherings and already had varying levels of acquaintance with each other. The workshop was hosted on a weekend morning, in a suburb neighborhood of Melbourne at the Incendium Radical Library (IRL). IRL is a community-organised and volunteer-run library space and small publisher focused on radical politics. These decisions marked this workshop as distinct from the typical D&E events scheduled on weeknights, after working hours. They are typically hosted in the city centre at RMIT University or a local design studio. This decision was made for two reasons. First, to offer an opportunity to engage more community members who have family or other weeknight commitments are unable to attend regular in-person events. Second, using the community-run space placed the workshop in an environment outside of formal institutions often associated with the values, schedules and demands of dominant design practices.

After reflecting on how the *Worlds* workshops had unfolded, in this workshop I aimed to create an engagement where practitioners could more openly contribute their own critical perspectives to the concept I was proposing. Rather than carefully planned materials, prompts and direct facilitation, the workshop had a more open format with lightly guided materials and prompts for participants to work together in small groups.

The workshop planned for participants to spend the first half looking through examples of personas gathered from studios, the internet, and educational resources, and using this to support discussion prompts about how personas were used in their regular practice, and the benefits and tensions that emerged when creating personas (Fig 4.1).

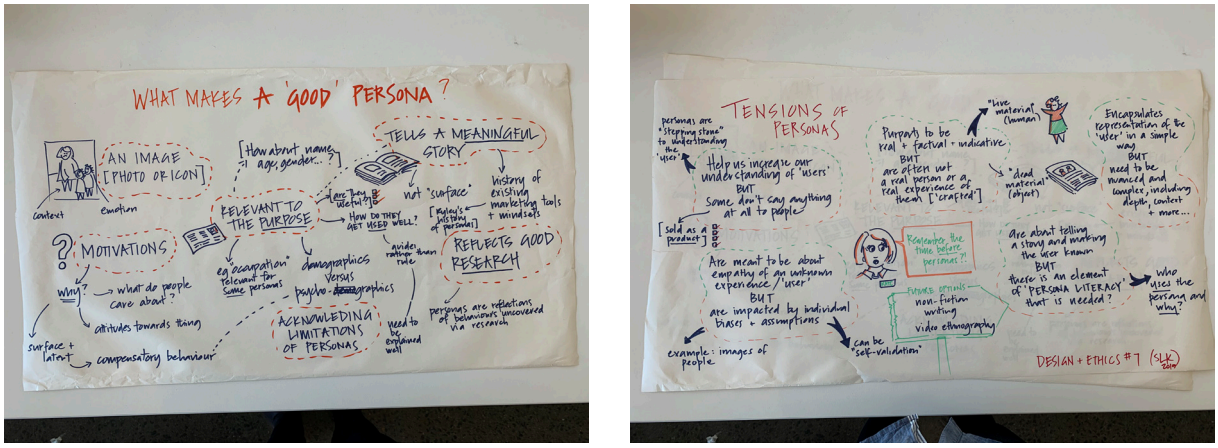


Figure 4.2 Visual notes taken during the D&E workshop from the discussion of one of the two participant groups (photographs used with permission of the creator, Leander Kreltszheim 2019)

The second half of the workshop was dedicated to introducing the tactics I had drawn from Drabinski's work. However, because the workshop prioritised space for the conversation and sharing by the attendees, we did not get past the sharing of experiences and perspectives of the positives and tensions. Participants did not have the opportunity to work with the tactics and apply them to what they had brought up about their own critical practices with personas. The workshop centered around how the practitioners in the room used the tool in their own practices. The small group discussions created space to share the applied value and also critique the shortcomings of the tool. Across the room, people shared their use of the persona as a tool in diverse work environments; from working with local councils to understand constituents, to urban transportation redesign, to UX interfaces for human resources software. Some people were adamantly against the tool and how it categorised people into boxes, challenging if it should be used at all. Others shared their experiences of how useful personas were at humanising the receiving end of policy decisions and software development as reminders of the people being forgotten in the bureaucratic and technical processes.

4.3.3 WORKSHOP #2: "CRITICAL REFLECTION" BECOMES EXERCISES OF IMPROVING AND CRITIQUING PERSONAS

For the next engagement, I designed a completely different approach to try to engage Drabinski's argument in a way that considered more nuanced approaches to practice outside of improving and critique. This workshop was still based in personas but tried to scaffold exercises to demonstrate the difference between a "right" approach and a critical-dialogical approach. I delivered this workshop at the ServDes2020 conference (hosted online in February 2021 due to Covid). By bringing the workshop into a design conference, it engaged with practitioners and academics in the field of service design, but outside a defined community of practice like the Design & Ethics event. The description of the workshop was explicit that the activity was rooted in critical and queer theories, and to explore the ways we are conditioned to understand identity through dominant paradigms. This offered participants a clear idea of the type of engagement the workshop was seeking to create.

The stated goal of the workshop was "to spark critical reflection around identity, groupings and worldviews, and collectively examine how these show up in design work. Participants should arrive open and willing to recognise personal biases, as well as be aware that sensitive issues around identity and bias may arise" (McEntee 2021, 600-601). This is meaningful because the goal of the workshop was explicitly not a conversation about critiquing or improving the persona as a design research tool. Rather, it aimed to use the way we approach personas to reveal how our worldviews show up in the ways we perform our work. To try to achieve this goal, I created a series of exercises for people to engage with three typical aspects found in personas—level of expertise in a particular skill; interests or hobbies; and defining personality characteristics. Instead of creating personas based on information about other people, the activities asked participants to consider these familiar persona fields about themselves.

Miro boards were used to facilitate the online workshop. Activities were structured so that in the first instance a general question was asked to define the particular persona element. A follow-up question was then asked to complicate the previous answer, and consider how it was not possible for there to be a single "right" answer. For example, to talk about technology skills people were initially asked to, "move the dot below to

indicate your level of experience and comfort with technology". Then the question was reframed to compare the participant's technology skills in relation to other people and contexts in their life (Fig. 4.2). This relatively simple exercise aimed to demonstrate that we can have specific ideas about who or how we are but, when based on the context or other people around us, we might consider ourselves very differently. Although we can generalise an answer about something like a specific skill, even that skill is not static. Not only do skills change over time, but they are also understood differently in different relationships or contexts.

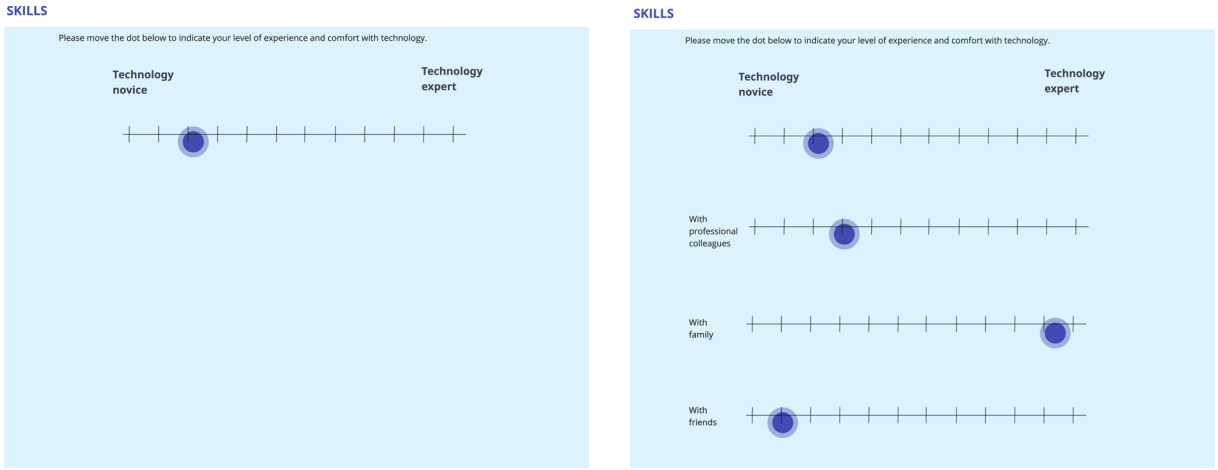
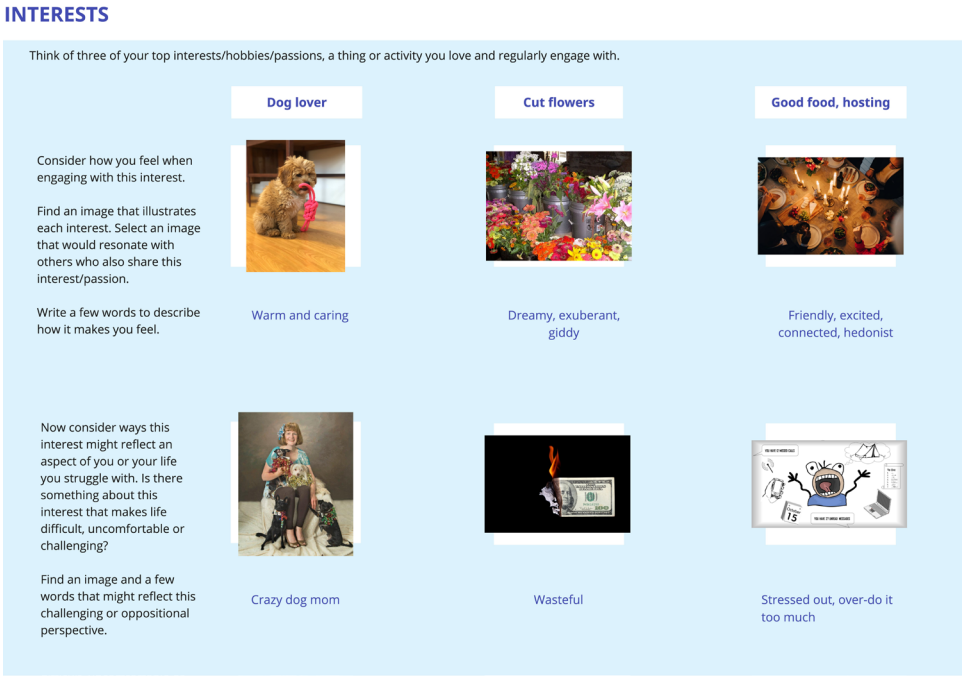


Figure 4.3 Screenshots of "skills" activity on Miro boards used to guide the ServDes2020 workshop (Kate McEntee 2021).

People were asked to reflect on the activity by sharing a story to illustrate the position of one of the dots, and to reveal the limitations of trying to get it "right". The process aimed to reveal how something as seemingly straightforward as skill with technology is not a characteristic we can aim to get "right", but rather a quality that could be explored in relationship with others and context. The following two activities were similarly structured. The second activity asked people to think of hobbies or passions that define them, and then in follow up consider how those passions could be understood to communicate a range of wholly different lifestyles and attitudes. The third activity asked participants to list their dominant character traits, and then consider how those traits might reflect more about the systems and structures that shape them, rather than who

they are intrinsically as a person. After each activity, participants were asked to reflect in different ways on what it was like to try and have an accurate answer in the first instance, to then complicate that answer with the follow-up prompt and share their reflections.



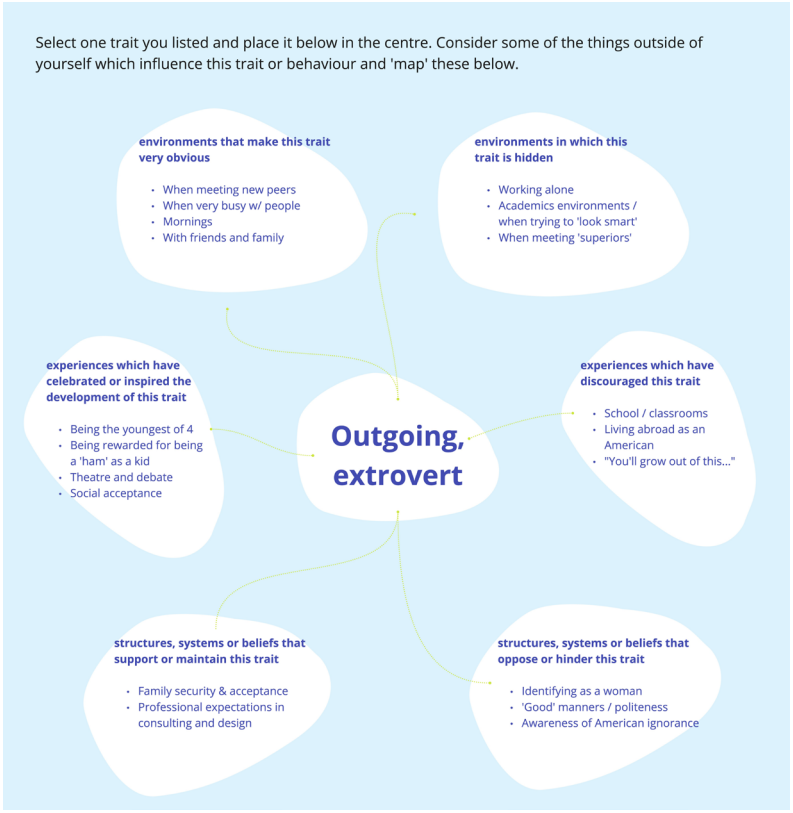


Figure 4.4 Interests and traits activities from the ServDes workshop (Kate McEntee 2021).

The goal of these exercises was to take a commonly-used research tool in design practice, the persona, to elicit a more critical and complex discourse around how our worldviews motivate us to have clear ideas about "right" and "wrong". The activities were scaffolded to create a pattern of thinking that encouraged finding a "right" answer. This prompt was contrasted with a follow-up to consider how there is not a right answer, but instead a relational, contextual or systemic influence that is directing what we think of as right or accurate. This structure opened conversation for a more substantial exploration of the complexity of identity and personhood, and demonstrated the inability of a static tool to capture multifaceted, dynamic aspects of one's skills, interests and behaviours. However, participants did not share reflections, insights or thoughts about their worldviews and how they inform approaches to practice.

4.3.4 DISCUSSION: IMPROVEMENT AND CRITIQUE IS ACCESSIBLE AND FAMILIAR

The intention of these workshops was not to improve or critique the persona as a tool directly, nor to teach practitioners how to "do personas better". The workshops were an attempt to use the format of a persona to open up a conversation about critical-dialogical approaches to practice, and how those could be activated in practice. However, the participants' reflections and discussions were, for the most part, focused on how the activities in the workshops helped them consider ways they could "improve" the tool in their own practices, or in some cases lead them to (re)affirm a rejection of the tool because of its interpretation of the world through static, inadequate representations of the complex, lived experiences around identity, values and beliefs.

Neither of the two workshops I designed and hosted adequately set up engagements for exploring and discussing a paradigm shift in approaches to practice—from "improving" to critical-dialogical engagement. In hindsight, I had been unable to fully explain and articulate the relationship I was trying to capture from Drabinski's article between "correction" and "queering". As described earlier in this chapter, Drabinski was not trying to present a better way for librarians to create inclusive subject headings, but rather a completely different way of thinking about the system in which they worked. In the workshops and materials I developed, from the initial cards made to explain Drabinski's essay to D&E

co-organisers—to the slide presentations and example sets created to set up the workshops, to warm-ups, activities, and reflection questions—I put the two approaches in opposition to one another. I described one as the "active" or "activist" approach to making change, and opposed it with what I described as Drabinski's "queering" or my "shifting" approach. This opposition aligned personas with the "getting it right" side, and the workshop activities as an attempt to problematise or question personas as a tool, rather than open up space for using them from a different worldview. Personas could only be seen through the dominant design paradigm. Following this, responses from participants examined the tool through the lens of trying to improve the tool, or moving to a total critique of the system it represented.

This structure of thinking echoes another argument Drabinski makes in a 2019 documentary about changing library subject headings: it is common and popular to offer critique of biased representations (Baron and Broadley 2019). Making changes to biased representations in a system still requires dedicated work of activists to lobby to create change. This is difficult and well-intentioned work. What Drabinski, and I, are trying to elucidate is how the problem identification and clear resolutions or outcomes rely on a clear and straightforward approach to questions that are much messier, situated, confounding and complex. There is an ease and clarity to pointing out what is clearly "wrong" and in need of "fixing". In relying on this, the approach to critique bypasses or suppresses alternatives such as critical-dialogical, which can make space to move beyond discourses of judgement. This is true in design as well. It is common and popular to critique design thinking and the cleanly packaged toolkits offered by designers to "solve" problems. Critiquing the shortcomings of the persona is not new. While the literature on personas overwhelmingly supports its effectiveness, particularly in interaction design, it is also fairly well-recognised as a tool that often creates imaginary ideas about others, is rife with bias, contains misconceptions about "averages", relies on limited descriptions and thin research (Cabrero et al. 2016; McGinn and Kotamraju 2008).

However, it is an ongoing challenge to find accessible arguments that transcend a discourse of judgement and improvement, and offer the kind of complex, nuanced perspectives that direct attention to the processes and worldviews that shape and direct the tools used and actions that are taken in practice. Developing this skill, and finding the language to reveal and articulate these processes and worldviews, is one

of my strongest motivations at pursuing academic work. As demonstrated in this project, I rely on presenting information in dichotomies, and when trying to question or examine practices, also fall back on frustrated tirades about “tools”.

Shifting Story: Critical, Not Critique

The repeated struggles to articulate and translate Drabinki’s argument into design are part of ongoing shifting in my own practice. Discussions and presentations that celebrate project outcomes, and emphasise the value or benefit a project has provided for the intended audience, immediately strike suspicion in me. On the opposite end of the spectrum, I am highly frustrated by discourse that seeks to judge others and ridicule practices for their obvious flaws and blindspots. I have lacked the tools myself to articulate what it is I find problematic about approaches to practice that are seeking celebratory outcomes, and my abhorrence for the popularity of virile critique. Engaged in a heated conversation towards the beginning of my PhD research, one friend felt compelled to defend their work in design in international aid saying “even if the value is experienced by only the group of women we worked with, it is better to be out there doing something than just offering criticism, or being too uncertain to take action from our privileged positions”. I found it difficult, unhelpful and unnecessary to argue that designing programs to provide sexual education for young women, or professional training with economic opportunities to out-of-work family providers, was in some way harmful. I was struggling with how to articulate that this work was part of larger worldviews and systems that contribute to the same harms we were trying to address in these programs, not that we should not be engaging. I did not want to stop us from taking action, or put the work of critiquing practice on a pedestal, but was (and still am) trying to understand different actions, or different kinds of practices, that can be enacted from these privileged positions. What I wanted to be able to express was: how do we work from a completely different paradigm of understanding social practice? Not simply how can we make our current work processes more equitable or inclusive or collaborative or balance power in the existing systems. Drabinski’s article offered “queering” the

> catalogue as an alternative to fixing the catalogue. It did not deny that there was valuable and important work needed to address the oppressive experiences the catalogue created. I found her offering so powerful, but I struggled, and still do, to articulate it clearly. It is ingrained, as demonstrated by the workshop discussion, to critique a design tool or mode of thinking in terms of improving it or writing it off completely. It is challenging and, in my experience, rare to be able to clearly articulate and demonstrate the tangible system that promotes this dichotomous approach, and step outside it to offer something different. This is a shifting-in-progress story, one that tries to illustrate the motivations of my research practice, interests in shifting as a concept, and ongoing reason for engaging in research.

My struggle to break outside this dichotomous paradigm is part of how deeply our approaches to practice are defined by dominating worldviews that seek to keep us in conversations of improvement and critique. In these workshops, I had set up prompts, questions, and activities that guided people in conversations and considerations about doing things better. As I sat with this work, I wanted to try to create an artefact that could get closer to the conversation I was seeking, but struggling to articulate. I worked with a friend and colleague, Myriam Diatta, to help me explore visual language that might better articulate this exploration. Using the initial tactics I had developed at the beginning of this research project, working with D&E as inspiration, I worked with Diatta and her illustration support to articulate the relationship with a series of *Practice Provocations*.

SECTION 4

PRACTICE PROVOCATIONS

4.4.1 DESCRIBING HOW WORLDVIEWS MOTIVATE PRACTICE APPROACHES

The initial cards used to illustrate Drabinski's argument drew quotes and examples from her essay to help explain what I perceived as clear, tactical actions she laid out in cataloging practices. *Practice Provocations* reformulated the stories and citations from Drabinski's essay into a series of practices a social design practitioner might recognise as a "best practice" approach to engaging with the complexities of identity. The specificity of these best practices were paired with a critical-dialogical approach to addressing the same issue, but from the perspective of trying to frame it from a different worldview, one that did not assume there was a "best", "correct" or "right" approach.

By placing the actions into pairs, I recognise a reliance on a dualistic argument structure. However, the goal of the *Provocations* was not to oppose the two approaches, against one another, presenting the shifting, critical-dialogical approach as "right", and critiquing the best practice. The best practices are the actions and behaviours that are more inclusive and context-aware. Best practices are not actions I am calling out here as problematic on their own. They are written here as provocations to help identify languages and narratives that promote more inclusive or equitable approaches to practice, but remain operating from within a dominant narrative seeking accuracy and corrective approaches. By placing them in relationship with a critical-dialogical approach, the *Provocation* attempts to reveal and interrogate the worldviews that are motivating the approaches behind the actions.

A best practice seeks to find the right approach or answer. This is focused on the designer's actions and knowledge in the process. The critical-dialogical approach responds to the same concern, within the same conditions, but seeks to find a response that is equally focused on the influences from outside the practitioner as an individual. This wider

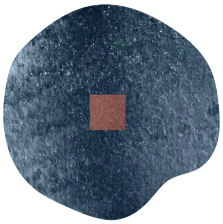
perspective arises from recognition of a politicised-self and multiple worldviews operating within a given context. By resituating where knowledges and skills are present in the context, it resituates how decisions and actions are made, and who undertakes these, and the eventual evaluation of actions and projects. This does not negate the best practices as necessarily wrong or harmful, but rather seeks to expose a primary motivation of getting it right, as opposed to engaging with the context, people, and environments in a process-oriented exploration. The critical-dialogical provocations identify approaches that challenge those narratives of dominant design in directing our work, even when we are trying to break out of this paradigm.

4.4.2 ILLUSTRATING THE RELATIONSHIPS OF IMPROVEMENT AND CRITICAL-DIALOGICAL IN SOCIAL DESIGN PRACTICE

Practice Provocations create a relationship between best practice approaches and critical-dialogical approaches. This relationship serves to further an understanding of shifting. The different sets of approaches respond to concerns which arise within social design practice: how we work with and think through diverse expressions and understandings of identity, cultural differences and ideologies. While a best practice on its own seeks to create positive and inclusive change, underlying this approach is dominating worldviews. The critical-dialogical approach is not an alternative that comes from a completely different positioning in the world. The critical-dialogical does not eliminate or change one's dominant positionality, but responds to recognition of positionality and worldviews operating in practice.

Critical-dialogical approaches are supported by the work and ideas generated from critical theory. They reflect engagement with different critical theories, and how theory shows up to support and expand applied social design practice. The Provocations themselves do not explicitly call out or dive into the specific critical theorists that inform them. I have not made the necessary space to show how theory and practice are so closely intertwined in this element of my research nor detail the influences from critical theorists such as Judith Butler (1991, 1999) and Sara Ahmed (2016, 2017). These influences were seeded through Drabinski's article, and underpin the critical-dialogical Provocations.

4.4.3 *PRACTICE PROVOCATIONS*



Use accurate language and information

When working across diverse populations, use terms and descriptions that reflect contemporary and culturally appropriate understandings of identity and culture. Avoid biased language.

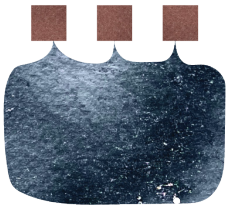
For example, use terms such as parents instead of mom and dad, primary-care-giver instead of mother, or undocumented citizen instead of illegal alien.

Letting go

Positioning your knowledge as incomplete and partial breaks appearances of objectivity and power. Creating processes that use language and information surfaced in context, and systems that provide continuous review and revision allows for ongoing engagement and learnings.

Who is considered a knowledgeable source in this context? How might that change over time? What does it feel like to not have the right words, or to make mistakes?

Illustrations by Myriam D. Diatta, 2022.



Make ideology and positionality explicit

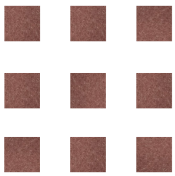
By naming our backgrounds and ideologies, we acknowledge where we are from, and how we are located. This makes visible how the world is being interpreted, potential biases, and which worldviews are being privileged in our perspectives.

For example, making it explicit that I speak from an educated, white, American background situates me in position relative to the people, place and context of a project.

Relationally constructing our worlds

Constructing one's ideologies and positionalities in relationships with other peoples, places and worldviews supports a dynamic multiplicity in how we move through worlds. This understands that how the world comes to and through us is not singular, fixed and unchanging. Establishing worldviews and positionalities can be approached as a process of constant destruction and rebuilding, rather than solidifying a singular narrative.

When establishing and recognising our positions, what do we consider important to hold onto? What conditions create more solid grounding? What conditions foster the ability to embrace instability or flexibility? What does it feel like to move between worldviews?



Be consistent across identity descriptions

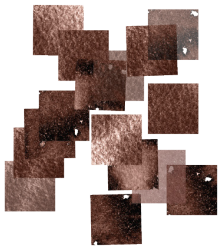
When working across marginalised social groups, marginalised characteristics and identities are often overly-represented. Only emphasising marginal identities, and not naming dominant identity characteristics, creates default assumptions of "'normal".

For example, call out identity characteristics such as straight or heterosexual as often as gay or homosexual, use Italian Australian as often as Aboriginal Australian.

Embracing complexity

People experience the various aspects of their identity as a complex source of pride, marginalisation, and targets of tokenism. Acknowledging and embracing casual, disruptive and expressive descriptions can help reveal the realities of complex, imprecise experiences and relationships with identity in the world.

Who is being protected, and who is being harmed through the processes and outcomes behind the language and labels? What are the motivations behind these decisions? Who is benefitting from the politics of correct, evenly-distributed labels?



Embrace diversity

Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender expression, age, religion, disability and sexual orientation of people involved in or represented by the design of services and products matters. Supporting diversity values and respects non-dominant identities, values and narratives. Avoid simplification and convergence for the sake of ease or expediency.

For example, when recruiting research participants, ensure there is broad representation and inclusion of non-dominant identities.

Naming and understanding identity as a process, not an outcome

People are holistic, multifaceted, intersectional and contradictory beings. We exist in constant, illogical states of relating, creating, destroying and changing. In each moment, through expressions of behaviour, action, emotion, physical characteristics, and outward appearances, we are engaging in dynamic processes which create and perform identity.

How can you describe the processes, structures or circumstances surrounding particular identities? Can we attend to how identity is being performed contextually, as opposed to focusing on the outcomes of performance?

Avoid conflicting narratives.

Take care not to place ideologies, religions, identities and experiences into inaccurate or offensive relationships. It can be misleading and destructive to approximate conflicting narratives, or connote particular values and ideologies for disparate purposes.

For example, using particular language of political and social activism in the wrong context can be exploitative. Using Audre Lorde's words about self-care as an act of political warfare to support a context of all-white women misuses the work of Black feminism.

Attending to how our contexts create meaning.

We are creating new meanings and relationships as we share different ideas and work in the world. Attending to how our sharing, or that of others, changes the meaning of the ideas, recognises a relational process of how ideas move through worlds and change through relationships and contexts. We can seek to determine the meaning and power of a message or idea as much by the person or context in which it is found, and the relationships this creates, as its content.

Who owns the narrative being told? How is the narrative attending to the relationships it is creating in context?

4.4.4 RETHINKING TACTICS INTO PRACTICE PROVOCATIONS

For the *Provocations*, I was reformulating tactics, which had been presented in contrasting relationships to one another, into provocations intended to provoke critical consideration about one's practice. In this work, I was repeatedly challenged by the inconsistencies between how I described the relationships between the two approaches on a meta-level, and the language I used in each pairing to describe a practice in smaller, day-to-day detail. It was the same structure of how I had described the meta-goals of workshops, but then created engagements that fell short of these goals in the details. I was attempting to demonstrate a relationship between the two approaches through the illustrations, while also showing a shifting between different paradigms. In the pairings, I was continuously negating, judging or dismissing the best practice. The *Provocations* were not offered as a different approach for action, but a direct critique of its pairing. I kept falling back on dualistic critiques, trying to point to "better" practices.

I needed to communicate to Diatta both the overall relationship between the different approaches from which she could develop a unified visual language, and highlight the meaningful qualities in each provocation from which she could develop individual illustrations. I could describe the meta relationship, assigning to one set of illustrations qualities of directive action and focus on individual behaviours that improve conditions, and the other set of illustrations qualities describing shifting, dynamic, and uncertain considerations. However, I struggled to explain this in terms of specific practice. Two elements of co-creating these illustrations helped me to rethink the details. The critical-dialogical provocations had been framed as a straightforward critique of best practice, similar to the initial tactics. This meant they described what *not* to do, rather than how one might engage. For example, one of the provocations was named "Using knowledge as power" and described holding onto accuracy as a form of bolstering one's security and prestige. This simply critiqued the notion of pursuing accuracy, rather than offering a constructive approach. In the illustration process, I reframed the provocation as "Letting go" by offering the consideration of asserting our knowledges as partial, rather than critiques of pursuing accuracy. Similarly, "Covering up with correction" critiqued ways in which we use language to protect ourselves, rather than include others. This

became “Embracing complexity” to support understanding the multifaceted aspects and experiences of identity. “Fixing worldviews” became “Relationally constructing our worlds”, shifting from a critique of stating our worldview to considering ways our worldviews are changed in relationship with others. The illustrations helped to create constructive, tangible manifestations of the critical-dialogical provocations.

The *Practice Provocations* and illustrations were not deployed directly with design practitioners in this research project. My ongoing engagement with them helped me to productively challenge my own understanding of how critical capacities can operate in my work. It helped me to see ways I continuously reiterate dominant critiques while trying to articulate new processes. This reframing carries into the next research project, *Shift Work*, described in the following chapter.

5
CONCLUSION

Drabinski reframes the work of improving the hegemonic project of library categorising as an engaged, dynamic process in which patrons can become empowered to take part in the creation and destruction of structures based on their own discursive and engaged knowledge production. In this reframing, the role of librarians is not to “get it right”, or even to know what is right, but to support and assist patrons in becoming critically engaged with the knowledge they are seeking. Being challenged to rearticulate Drabinski’s argument, and create language and visuals that communicate it for a design audience, helped me reframe my research pursuits more in line with this same provocation. In *Shift Work*, I practice actively seeking to let go of having the right answers or theories, which could address my research questions. Instead, I turn to a community of practitioners where the research seeks to support critical-dialogical engagements that were not providing answers, ideas or theories, but creating critical engagements in order to work with and learn from a wealth of experiences.

SHIFT WORK

CHAPTER 5

In chapter 3, I describe shifting ontological orientations to ignorance by understanding ignorance in relation to dominant positionality. Specifically, I outline shifting from conceiving ignorance as something static to be conquered, towards ignorance as dynamic and relational. In chapter 4, I discuss ways of understanding actions or "best practice" tools to support responsive, careful practice that are more aware of the "unknowledges" that come with our particular, entangled positionings. The *Practice Provocations* outlined in chapter 4 illustrate critical, dialogical approaches to everyday practices with identity, based on how critical theory helps reveal the complex, political and relational ways of being in the world.

In these initial projects, I characterise shifting through *proposing* a way of relating to knowledges and a way of approaching practices. In this final project, *Shift Work*, I evidence stories and experiences through layered accounts of shifting in real-world practice. This chapter describes how design practitioners have experienced shifts in their fundamental understanding of how they exist in worlds and

in relation with others. These stories help to demonstrate how attending to one's positionality and worldviews supports recognising shifting, and having more agency over our positionality and worldviews in practice. Giving attention to our ontological orientations does not mean to erase or break from our positioning. Attention to whiteness or power does not make these factors "go away" or "solve" inequalities. Rather, it helps to recognise and contextualise how dominant positionality is operating within the entangled contexts and relationships of a social design practice. The "evidence" is presented here through layered accounts: practitioners' stories, my own analysis, visual and metaphoric descriptions, and reflective discussion and responses. The layered accounts aim to provide mixed, varying perspectives on shifting, rather than build structured definitions, and to create a relational evidencing shifting in social design practices. This layered structure also serves as an invitation to be curious about shifting and question how and if it can be identified.

In previous iterations of this research— *The Worlds We Live In* and *Critical Personas*—I invited participants to workshops that aimed to provide social design practitioners with critical approaches that they might apply to their own practice. *Shift Work* was purposefully reframed as collaborative research engagements seeking to surface how we (those within design doing collaborative social practices) work to shift away from dominant narratives of white supremacy and colonial ways of knowing and doing. It specifically asked for people to reflect and share particular aspects of themselves and their practice. The aim was not to critique the field of design or point out the practices of others, but to reflect on shifting that we might recognise from our own personal experiences and professional practices. These engagements were focused in understanding and documenting the kinds of shifting that might be taking place within the everyday lived experience of people when recognising and addressing their dominant positionality.

1

STARTING POINT: INITIATING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

This project began with initiating a conversation on the Service Design Melbourne community Slack[1] channel. I posted a prompt (Fig 5.1) asking about, “practices people have designed to intentionally shift oneself away from dominant narratives of white supremacy and colonial ways of knowing and doing, which we are often implicitly engaging and following”. The invitation also included two examples. One was about myself and my tendency to glaze over “difficult names” I cOme across while reading the news. I made an intention to no longer ignore names I couldn’t easily pronounce, and instead stop to learn how to pronounce them. The second was an example from a white, settler Australian author practicing a ritual of “asking for welcome” when going out into the bush as acknowledgment and recognition of the land and traditional owners. I asked others to share their examples of small ways in their everyday lives where they might have tried to shift away from unconscious assumptions of dominant narratives, and challenge how one encounters the world.

1 Slack is a community messaging platform. It is used by both professional and community organisations for communication and organising.

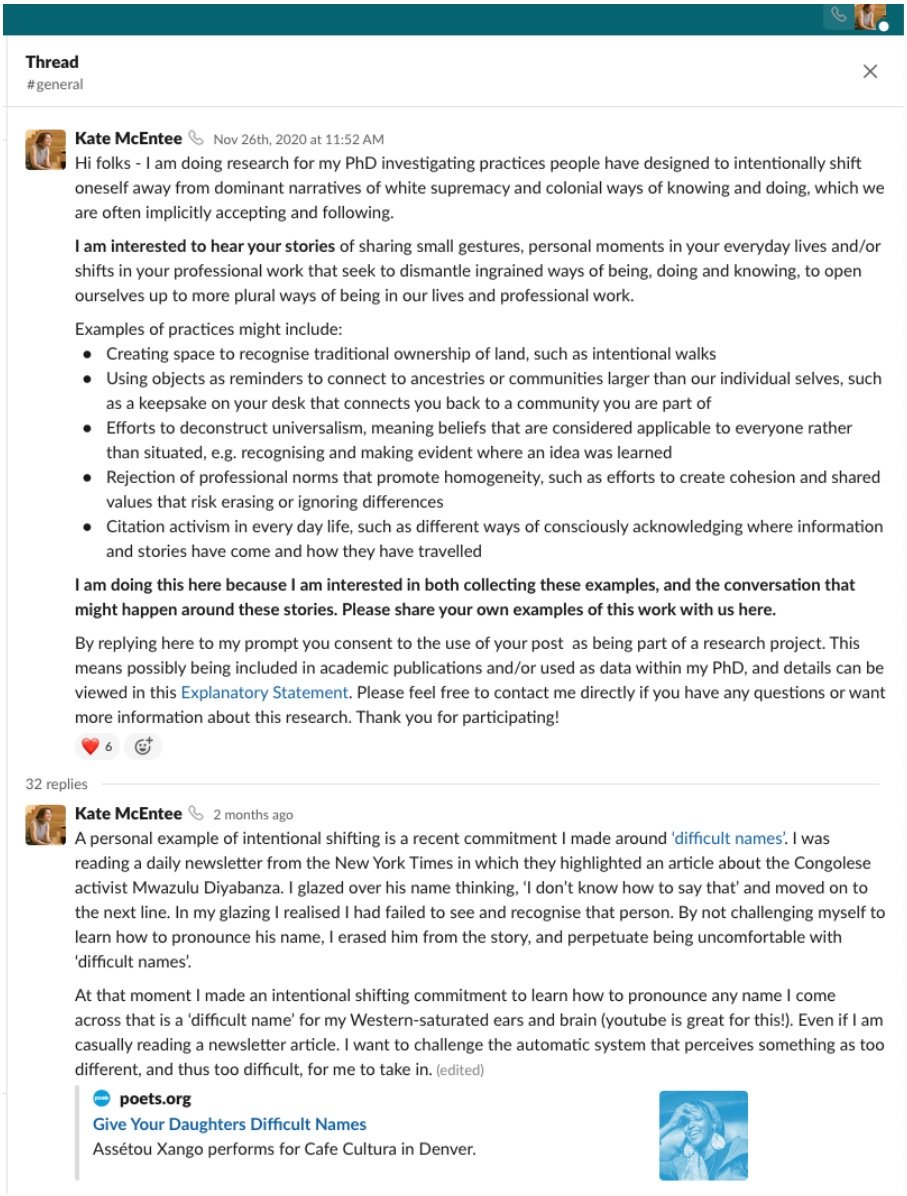


Figure 5.1 Initial invitation on Service Design Melbourne Slack channel (Kate McEntee 2021)

I received responses that described practices focused on changing external manifestations of white supremacy and colonialism, rather than personal or intrapersonal ways of encountering the world. These included practices such as tracking diversity in hiring at the studio where they work, creating gender neutral representation, using diverse stock images, and including pronouns and acknowledgement [of Country] in emails. Two participants shared personal practices, including trying to diversify the media content they consume, and a personal ritual of privately acknowledging Country and land. The bulk of the discussion, however, was participants sharing their discomfort with the prompt. This discomfort can

be summed up with how one member worried, “these practices - while well intentioned - are at risk of becoming tokenistic and a form of virtue-signalling” and another described participating in this forum discussion risks centring the “white male interloper taking a moment to make himself At One With Indigenous Culture and become a Better Person”. Participants also expressed discomfort with the public medium, and several members messaged me privately to say they were interested in a one-on-one discussion on this topic, but did not want to respond on the public Slack channel.

The initial prompt started a conversation, but did not provide the adequate support or an appropriate environment for respondents to engage in a more substantial reflection and discussion on their own ontological orientations and intimate practices of shifting away from dominant positionings. The online platform, while seemingly a productive space to share tangible, practice-oriented actions (something that often occurs on this Slack channel), felt both performative and unsafe for many participants to consider their own dominant positions in a way that felt genuine and non-performative.

I posted this prompt to other social design networks I was a part of (Design for Humans and Equity Centred Community Design). Despite numerous prompts across these channels, the Service Design Melbourne community surfaced more fruitful interactions, as I had been more actively involved in this particular community. This is notable as it indicates the value of having established foundations within a community to precipitate the kind of personal, critical work this research is seeking. It is notably less productive to try to engage in these kinds of questions and processes as an outsider, or with communities that are less actively engaged with one another (regular engagement being a key factor in defining a community of practice). Even the discussions on the SDM Slack that highlighted the discomfort with the online, public sharing demonstrated having cursory relationships provided enough familiarity to challenge the prompt, offer suggestions and share (cursory) insights. The responses from participants to the Slack prompt catalysed the transition from large community dialogue to one-on-one conversations, and eventually small group workshops. This process revealed the importance and value of both a foundational community and pre-established relationships to support critical sharing in practices.

2

POSITIONING PARTICIPATION

5.2.1 BUILDING A MORE INTIMATE STUDY

I did not initiate online conversations with an outlined plan of how the research would develop. The online discussion was limited in its ability to engage practitioners in critical reflection with depth. Responses to the prompt highlighted that while people had interest in exploring this topic, they were uncomfortable sharing in semi-public, large, online groups. This shaped my next move, to bring a similar question to frame one-on-one conversations with practitioners through reflective listening interviews[2]. As described in chapter 1, participants were invited to participate in interviews based on their response to the Slack discussion and/or reaching out to me to express interest in the research questions I was asking. As a result, many participants had pre-established relationships and knowledges about my work, my research and/or other people participating. Many had shared work experiences in organising, leading, participating or publishing on issues such as power, bias, identity, colonisation, race or gender. This created a more intimate group of designers working within diverse social design contexts[3]. The personal and vulnerable nature of the discussion was underpinned by prior understanding of the topics, while the conversations were able to build off past knowledge of professional and personal histories.

2 Interviews (and the workshops that followed) are described in sections 3 and 4. These activities took place over Zoom calls throughout a 10-month period in 2021. People joined from the United States, Brazil and Europe, but the majority were based in Australia, and within that mostly in Naarm (Melbourne).

3 All identified as working within social design practice, but in varied contexts, including: research and academic settings; independent co-design freelance and coaching; state- and federal-level government employees working in civic design; employees and leaders of industry consultancies with a focus on social practice; and in the non-profit realm, including: educational programming; disability services; Indigenous sovereignty and empowerment; and legal support services.

5.2.2 SPEAKING FROM DOMINANT POSITIONALITY

This research is underpinned by my reckoning with being a white, privileged person and trying to address how my own whiteness and privilege shapes my practice, recognising the way the world comes to and through me. As with the initial prompt on Slack, the invitation for interviews asked people to focus on how dominant narratives of white supremacy and colonialism affected their personal practice, and how they might work to shift their own ways of thinking and doing away from these narratives. The attention here was on participants' own dominant positionalities, and ways to notice and redress harm caused by how this domination operates in practice. Participants in this work came from diverse positionings in the world. They were not asked to participate based on their own embodying of dominant identity characteristics, such as being "white", "settler" or "male", but rather self-identified that dominant identity and narratives were embodied influences in their practice. Participants were invited to speak about their own experiences of recognising how dominant narratives influenced their practice, and their own experiences and processes of trying to shift away from these influences. The word "decolonising" was used in the interview invitation to characterise the research as being interested in how people shifted away from dominant narratives of whiteness and colonialism, which influence how one shows up and relates to the world. Thus, the stories and experiences were shared across different axes of identity with a particular focus on practicing from a domination position or worldview.

In the examples that follow, people did not discuss what it was like to work within power structures from a position of oppression. Rather, people spoke of experiences where they recognised how they might be supporting domination or inequity in a situation. For example, one collaborator shared what they noticed in an experience about their own perpetuation of unequal gender dynamics and ageism as a young, male-identifying person in the workplace. His positioning placed him in relationship with the principal partner on the team in a way that silenced and disregarded the valid contributions and concerns raised by an older, female colleague. In another story, a Black, non-Indigenous woman spoke to her experience supporting an Indigenous organisation's work. She experienced the tremendous difference of what it meant to work with an Indigenous-led organisation and the "white definitions" and "white-defined concepts" regarding organisational development she carried into that work with her.

This is not to minimise the experiences these same participants may have experienced at the oppressive end of dominating narratives and positioning. It is important, however, to make clear how people were invited into the conversation, and the position from which they were guided to speak.

3

HOW THE RESEARCH MOVES: SURFACING CRITICAL ACCOUNTS FROM PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES

5.3.1 REFLECTIVE LISTENING

The interview format was guided by reflective listening. Reflective listening is a type of communication that emphasises listening, and reflecting back to the person what you have heard them say. The reflecting back intends to communicate how the story or information was understood by the listener, and invite a response to the reflection. This method of communication aims to create a slow, careful conversation. The process of repetition and iterative interpretation works in shared content through multiple angles by creating further opportunities for speaking and listening to the same content. This provides the opportunity to clarify, change, add or remove details, and means conversations generally can only focus on one or two events, as much of the time is spent in reflecting and deepening the telling and interpretation of a single experience.

This method was chosen to help meet the specific intentions of this project. I wanted to learn from other practitioners about their relationship with their own forms of domination and critical practices to address it. In earlier work, I had created engagements in which I provided

critical content, and then created propositions based on how participants engaged. When I started the online conversation, it was clear the approach needed more careful attention and space to develop these learnings. Additionally, reflective listening creates a more collaborative, real-time analysis of the experience with participants and helps balance the power I hold as the interpreter of others' stories and experiences.

5.3.2 MAPPING INTERVIEWS

Following the reflective listening interviews, I mapped people's stories, insights and experiences across a range of shared topics and themes. One narrative theme that emerged was "different kinds of doing". This broad category loosely defines kinds of "doing" that lead to, or contribute to, shifts in how one understands and enacts their position in the world. These included categories like, "the we-have-to-act-neoliberal-doing", which forces the delivery of a project outcome despite it not being fully developed or supported by the intended audience. There is "the not-doing-doing", which describes when one realises they are not the right person to be leading or involved in a particular project, and have to step away. There is "the fuckup-doing", in which one recognises how they have been acting without awareness, and their knowledges and behaviours are causing harm in the context and relationships. There is also "the learning-doing", which is an effort to connect or diversify practice across broader content or knowledges, with the aim of supporting work in a fundamentally different way. Other topics included relationships, performance, reflection, critical action, whiteness, discomfort, not knowing, and others. Some prominent recurring themes included family and immigration histories and how these shape participants' understanding of the world and their role in it; the sense "there are no examples" of how to do this work, that everyone is charting new territory in practices; and how time and pace of projects significantly contribute to one's ways of being with practice and communities. The mapping was useful to highlight shared elements across different contexts, and also the unique languages people use to share diverse experiences.

From this work, I selected six discrete stories to help illustrate different "shifting experiences" and created a "story card" for each (Fig 5.2). Each story card included a descriptive title, a particular story as shared in the words of the participant, and an archetypal description pairing that I wrote. Pairing the unique story with an archetypal description connects

the detail of the experience with wider themes discussed by participants. It layers the participant's experience with my own interpretations and analysis of what was occurring in the situation, based on the wider body of research. These story cards are artefacts which present a layered account, as described in chapter 1. They do not represent just the story or experience of an individual, but give space for both a specific, situated experience, and a shared mode of experience expressed by others. The cards were created to provide a way to share participants' contributions back with them, and as a means for participants to provide feedback on my analysis. These cards ultimately became the organising structure for the follow-up *Shift Work(shop)s*. The story cards are not designed as standalone artefacts to be transferred and used elsewhere; they are an iterative tool specific to the context of these particular participants and interviews, and embedded within a relational and facilitative research practice.

THE RUB

When the conditions of reality (work, capitalism, neoliberalism) rub against one's ideals (values, beliefs, 'right' methods).

The Rub reveals previously unconsidered constraints, or unknown challenges. The Rub is often uncomfortable and can generate strong emotions and reevaluation of your role in your work.

THE RUB

There are so many of us that come into working here [social design studio] that have romantic ideas of going out there and doing cool work, with different disciplines and all that. But all the work we're doing through our own organisational reconciliation processes is very much anchored to the deep work that needs to happen around understanding your own power and privilege. Deep reflective and reflexive practices end up helping. But we're not sitting on a trust fund. If we aren't running a tight ship in the neoliberal context we're existing in, we're done. That's the constant. **The biggest sort of experience that anybody has, which is also like a tool or a method, is this kind of rub against the the ideal.**

Knowing all the issues, the facts, things as they are happening linearly, or treating things in non-relational fashion. You will have all the knowledge, know what needs to be done, and that's great. Then you have the realities rubbing against it. It is super uncomfortable, and really a struggle. But that's where the kind of real shift is taking place, in mindsets and hearts.

THE DISCONNECT

When an experience in real life contradicts or discredits closely held ideas learned through reading or listening.

The disconnect reveals a gap or conflict in our understanding of 'right' or 'good'. It can generate deep reflection and new understandings about *being* rather than knowing, as well as disillusionment and cynicism.

THE DISCONNECT

Describing attending a workshop by a respected and well-known critical design theorist and professor:

It was an experience of being schooled on how to design a new world by someone who was a fucking asshole, with no compassion at all. Here's this call for decolonizing practices, here's how we remake the alternatives to alternatives, with no consideration for the people doing the work.

This was a pivotal moment for my reflection and journey as a designer. I was previously really interested in critical design, in this modernist image. The single designer moving through the world making changes on their own. I was interested in that: **A** designer offering critical thought and changing the world themselves. And he was that turned up to 11. "I'm the only person who knows how to change the world for the good, and build the right new world." At that time, after my last year of studying, I idolised [the professor]. And now I'm here going, I do not want to be him. I do not want to be him at all.

THE POSSIBLE

When conditions change such that something new enters the realm of possibility. It is now able to be considered, practiced or attended to.

The possible reveals something that was previously unknown, not considered or an ignorance. It generates an opportunity for change in beliefs or behaviours.

THE POSSIBLE

I had been watching things that come from Australia, and I had been seeing this acknowledgement of land, or ritual, every time a public event starts. I find it interesting and curious and fascinating in many ways, but it's very different for me. This is not something that I am used to, especially in Brazil. And I've seen it many times, then one moment at a conference someone said, "Can you please put where you're speaking from on the chat." People started putting things like, I come from the unceded lands of the Kulin nation and other places, and then in parenthesis (Melbourne). And it was not until then I just realized I had no idea where I am and on whose unceded lands. At that moment, I was embarrassed about not knowing, or not having thought about it. I also had trouble finding out about it. I became very, not worried, but was curious, and thinking about it a lot. I had a conversation with a friend. She did her PhD in anthropology and she has more of this Indigenous knowledge that I was curious about. That was very important to me recently and was able to share with me about the land of my city. Before this was not something that there was very much interest, or I didn't know anything about. It was not in the realm of possibilities or on my radar for any reason.

THE DANCE

An experience of uncertainty, negotiation and not knowing what to do.

The dance reveals our limitations (individual and/or organisational); it highlights the importance of relationships and community. It can generate new perspectives and reflection about *what* or *where* to work, and also *how* those decisions are made.

THE DANCE

Reflecting on a difficult decision about about working on complex project on the national digital children's health record with Aboriginal communities:

I should have known it was actually not something for me to do. I wasn't asking the question if this is the right thing to be done, and going far enough into the historic context of what this means. I knew about children being removed from parents and the skepticism that remote communities have of government. But to take it a step further is when it meets reality. Initially it's, okay, this is good work. I think we should be doing this work. Let's do this work. But you're then not asking those next questions, which are more difficult. It's more complicated. ... **We constantly have to ask ourselves to hold back but also be courageous.** The courageous part is, it's easy to step away. That's the easiest thing, do no harm. Don't be part of any of this stuff. And then we leave these parallel worlds happening. That's kind of easy. But the thing in that is to say, what is my role as an ally or as a person? To make a connection to another entity who should be leading, and we step back right away? Or maybe they say, let's do this together? I feel like it's those experiences that really causes shifts.

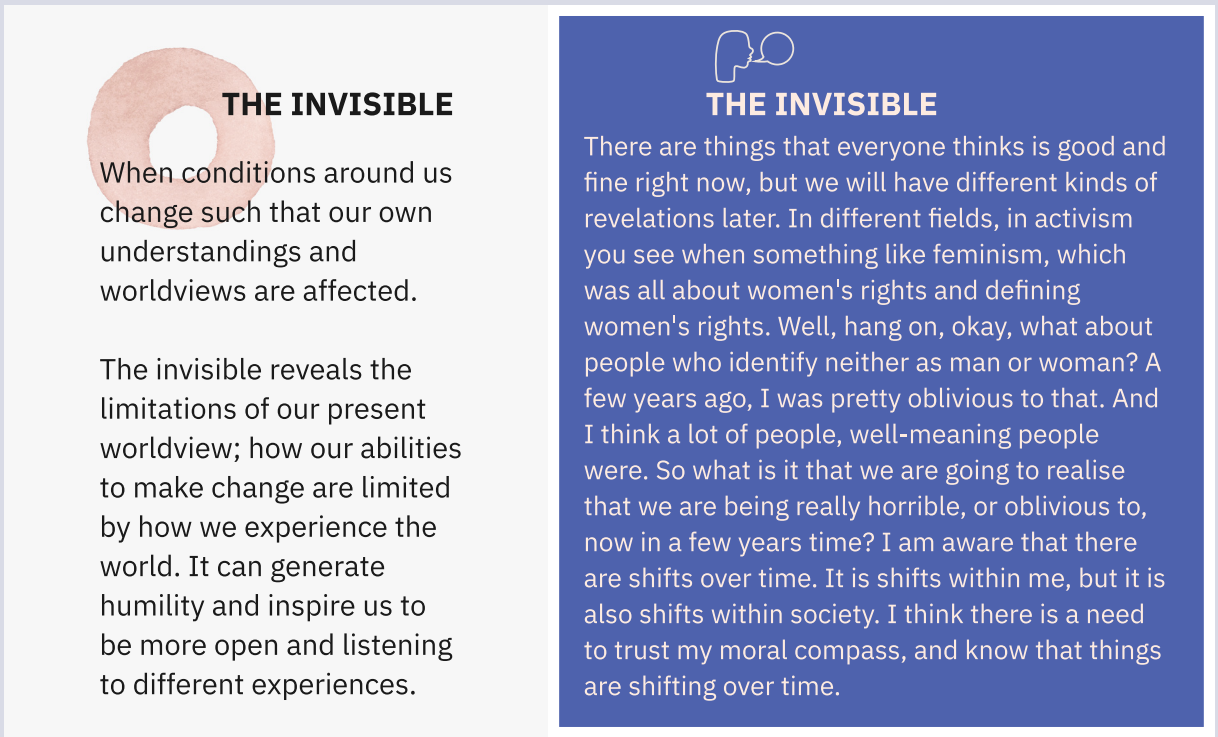


Figure 5.2 Series of six story cards developed from reflective listening interviews (Kate McEntee 2021)

I will discuss the stories and analysis shared on these cards in more depth regarding how they were received and refined by participants in the *Shift Work(shop)s* in section 4 below. The workshops offer another layer to these multi-layered descriptions of shifting, which help to build more nuanced and complex understandings of the work.

5.3.3 THE SHIFT WORK(SHOP)S

Using the story cards to organise and facilitate *Shift (Work(shop)s* was a method built off the learning, reflection and mapping from the interviews. People who had participated in interviews were invited to join 3 other participants in a small, online group workshop. The workshops began by re-presenting key concepts back to the participants, which had been further clarified through the interviews process. Shifting was re-defined and framed as an in-progress, working concept rather than solid. The concept had been previously emphasised (in the Slack forum and invitations to interviews) as *intentional* shifting through everyday practices, rituals, environments and objects (Fig. 5.1). The reframing now indicated experiences that arise without necessary deliberation and planning, but instead through an ongoing awareness of domination and commitment to attending to positioning. It read as:

SHIFTING WORK

Experiences which fundamentally shift how one understands and relates to dominant system or narrative. Shifting is based on the idea we are conditioned by dominant narratives about who and how we are to be in the world, and need to shift ourselves out of or away from that conditioning and domination, even if it appears beneficial. Shifting is not necessarily deliberate or planned, but does arise from ongoing practices and reflection attending to one's positioning, history, practice and relations in the world.

(in progress)

Figure 5.3 Definition of shifting re-presented at the start of the Shift Work(shop)s (Kate McEntee 2021)

This key change in the concept reflects how participants shared their experiences, which prompted me to reconsider practices of shifting. As illustrated in more detail in the stories in section 4 below, participants recognised their relationship with dominant positioning through experiences that *unintentionally* put them in a position to be more aware of dominating narratives, and the impacts of their position in the world. These experiences led to different ways of being with that positioning in the world.

The other element presented at the workshops was that while shifting is not "necessarily deliberate or planned", there are practices that support the skills and willingness to attend to these realities. The workshops introduced this re-presentation of shifting, as well as some of the "ongoing practices of attending to one's positioning, history, practice and relations in the world", such as building new relationships, joining communities with critical commitments to ethical practice, and seeking exposure to more diverse literatures and worldviews. While it was not through these actions, or a daily ritual or volitional practice, which led to or developed "a" shifting, but these were practices that many felt had made them more open and available to shifting their worldviews. This is distinct from the original proposition, of intentional shifting framed as small, volitional daily activities one might practice.

The workshop was structured around allowing participants to engage with the story cards, and re-interpret them through their own understandings and experiences. After being given time to read through and sit with these prompts, participants were directed to work with them individually through reflective questions, and visual and metaphoric prompts (Fig. 5.4 and 5.5). Building from these activities, participants engaged in group discussion about what they had created, and insights that arose from this work. The multiple opportunities to story and interpret similar concepts created layered accounts of shifting that provide a kaleidoscopic view of shifting as an experience and concept.

4

DISCUSSION: CONCEPTS OF SHIFTING

I hosted four workshops with 2–4 participants per workshop. In each of these workshops, there was discussion, stories, and insights provided across all six story cards. Sometimes participants grouped story cards together to create different ideas and archetypes of shifting experiences; sometimes participants expressed resonance with one side of the card, but not necessarily the other. For the purposes of this chapter, the discussion focuses on engagements and layered accounts with two examples, "The Disconnect" and "The Rub". These were selected because enough participants worked with these cards to demonstrate a few different aspects of describing shifting through the layering of experiences and reflections. Additionally, the cards' resonance across participants offered more varied applications and subtle interpretations of these experiences. The remaining four, "The Invisible", "The Long Learn", "The Possible" and "The Dance" can be viewed in Figure 5.2, while additional layers from interviews and workshops are included in the exhibition materials.

5.4.1 THE DISCONNECT: ACCOUNTING FOR MISALIGNED VALUES

Moving away from a dominant narrative

One of the participants, Sam[4], told me a story reflected in the story card "The Disconnect" (Fig. 5.2) about attending a workshop led by a well-known and respected critical design professor. At the time, Sam was a recent design graduate and a young, politically-minded, social-oriented design practitioner. Sam is white, male, university-educated, and has secure employment. He was taken with the work of critical designers examining the political and social impacts of design, who passionately advocate for

4 All names have been changed to protect people's identities.

change. This sector of “critical design” can be characterised by fiery and urgent demands for existential changes to design practice in the face of global inequality and climate crisis. It exhorts designers—students, educators and practitioners—for the harm they are perpetuating in the world. This passion and urgency resonates with the kind of concern Sam also wants to bring into his work.

Listening to Sam discuss the lead up to the workshop, I project onto his experience the excitement one feels when getting the opportunity to work with an “intellectual idol”, eager for the challenging ideas and growth that can be exchanged in such a unique environment. However, the in-person experience was not an experience of intellectual stimulation and idea exchange. He described being joined at the weekend-long event with attendees from diverse, global backgrounds doing on-the-ground social and political design work across their own communities. Despite this gathering, the professor had clear expectations that everyone in the room was to obediently listen and learn from his articulate, critical perspectives of what “designers” are doing in the world. He had “no consideration for the people doing the work” in the room. The practices and possible contributions of the people at the workshop were assumed to be within the same, linear broad stroke criticisms of “design practices”, and at best were dismissed, at worst discredited. Sam described how in watching the professor try to break down the people around him, he recognised a narrative he had been following in his own uptake of critical design. There was a modernist-inflected idea of a single designer making change in the world, and enacting this change through a directed lens of criticality at others. There are singular figures who hold knowledge, power and critical perspectives on how to “improve”, and others must listen, learn and follow from their advice.

A particular detail Sam noticed in the experience was the physicality of the experience. Sam shared, “I’ve had to think for most of my life about power through my body, just because I’m so much bigger than everybody else. And I do try to diminish, not the power I have, but the difference in power by making my body smaller, or getting at people’s level. Things like that. So it was really important that my experience with [this professor] happened in real life. I saw things in his body that I might do in my body as well. Behaviours that I was already attuned to not enacting in my body, or whatever, from sensitivity to power I had before. I was quick to pick up on that, and faster than I might have been able to pick up on that in writing.”

The experience in the workshop dramatically changed Sam's orientation to pursuing critical design work. He went from idolising this work of being a singular, critical designer who talks about making change in the world to thinking, "I do not want to be him. I do not want to be like him at all." He had been on a trajectory that was working to become "intelligent enough" to engage with design practice critically. He had unconsciously framed that engaged, social, critical work was coming from a place where the expert designer knows more than others. This individual, academic, self-improvement process was contrasted with the fruitful spaces of engaging and working with others.

In the story card I created from this conversation, I described this experience as "The Disconnect" to signal when we have projected a particular set of values and ideals onto a body of work, person or practice that we have chosen to engage or follow. "The Disconnect" occurs when we are confronted with a realisation that this "structure" is not supporting the embodiment or practice of the values we are seeking. When confronted with an unexpected misalignment of values, "The Disconnect" unsettles our adherence to a particular narrative or practice, and signals the need to account for the misalignment of values. "The Disconnect" was written to highlight the difference between embodied, communal learning experiences and intellectual, individual learning experiences, although an experiential disconnect can happen in various different forms. The story card of "The Disconnect" focuses on how the power, or praise, of the written word can be disconnected from the actual enactment and embodiment of the ideas and sentiments the words seek to convey. However, this can be true in different forms. Our embodied, relational experiences can be challenged and unsettled by the critical ideas encountered in texts, and necessitate a need to account for that unsettling disconnect (as illustrated through my own lived experiences related in the Preface). These disconnects can be catalysts for changing how we relate to ideas and experiences, and, as Sam did, cause us to reconsider the way we approach being with critical practices.

Layering: Missing the forest (community) for the tree (individual)

In the follow-up workshop in which Sam participated, he selected to work with this story card. He responded to my interpretation of the experience with an image of butter being melted and poured into small, differently

shaped moulds (Fig. 5.4). Using this metaphor he illustrated, “I melted like butter, and butter never goes back the same way after it is melted. But, what was most important was the shape of the vessels around me that I was recast in”. He described what was missing from the story card was the group of people who were around him at the time, those whose community-based practices and approaches to critical design sat in contrast with how the idolised professor was acting. Rejecting this particular embodiment of the “critical design” discourse wasn’t just a loss of direction, but also an opportunity to connect with who he saw as generous, community-oriented practitioners; “it was also a moment of shifting from having a positive image of the kind of practitioner I wanted to be to having only a view of what I *didn’t* want to be (positive and negative intended here like photographic film, rather than good and bad). The most important part of this story though is the people that were around me at the time, who I was able to learn from and adapt with (or maybe re-impress myself on - a new positive image to work towards).”

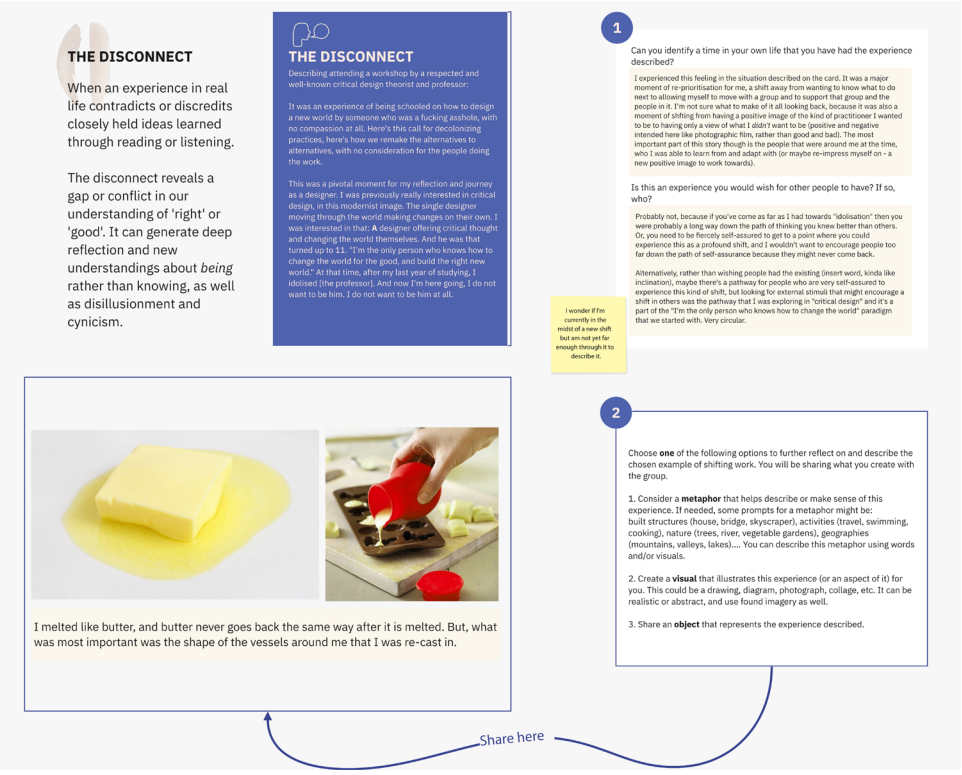


Figure 5.4 Sam added to his own story in “The Disconnect”, relating how he “melted like butter…” and was recast in the “shape of the vessels around”.

Sam's reflection indicates how I shared the experience with a particular emphasis on how domination was structured and communicated in the environment. In the interview, Sam had shared his experience about the impact of the practices and ongoing relationships he formed with the other practitioners at the workshop. In re-presenting his experience, I focused on the "negative" (what he did not want to be) aspects of the story more than the "positive" (the offered representations of alternative ways of being with the critical)[5].

The story card centred "shifting" as movement away from dominant individualism, and excluded the movements around community-engagement and building relationships. In terms of developing an understanding of shifting, my focus in the research activity was narrowed by the very same way of thinking that is being called to account. While recognising and addressing dominant ways of being is part of this movement, it is also about recognising and embodying "positive" movements, towards work we want to embrace. This is not a linear, developmental movement, but rather an entangled, in-action learning.

Entangling: The intricacies of how we are shifting

"The Disconnect" story card created a clear narrative arc to illustrate shifting: it built up a context, had specific characters, a moment of recognition and a resolution committing to a different perspective. There was even a clearly defined "problem" (the professor and the individualism he represented). One participant, June, contested the cleanliness of the tidy story cards. She described the messy dynamic of shifting using an "error" image found on her phone (Fig. 5.5). In trying to describe shifting as a "dynamic thing" she relied on an image that was indecipherable, because it was

5 It is notable that this pattern of not seeing, or not being attuned to "positive" examples was shared by multiple different participants in interviews. One person sharing there are simply not "many practical examples" of doing this kind of work. Another discussing the challenge of trying to shift practices within their workplaces was, "in terms of examples, it's quite, quite difficult". Another participant commented on the pervasiveness of "negative" examples, "it's just everywhere, and it's difficult to say, oh, I've worked in this place, and it's just this wonderful, super aware of things and doing things completely differently". This commonly expressed sentiment demonstrates perhaps how people were influenced by my own research trajectory to think about shifting in these interviews. But also offers support for the need this research set out to address, to try and offer tangible ways for practitioners to engage with alternative, critical thinking in practice.

trying to capture motion in a static medium. She contested that a shifting experience, or “how we are in moments of change”, is limited when described by a story, a single image, or even a longer-form metaphor.

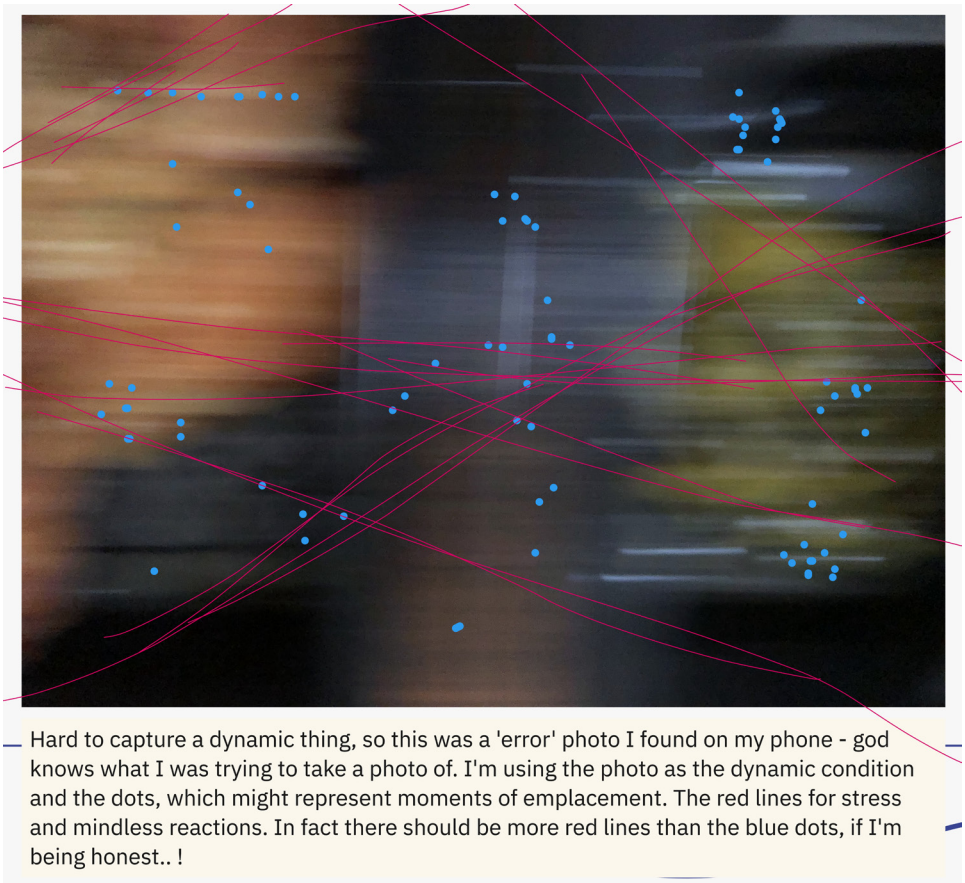


Figure 5.5 June’s visual of an ‘error’ photo was used to illustrate “The Dance” story card. This avoided focusing on a singular experience, and the idea that there are linear narratives of change as proposed by some of the other story cards.

The “dynamic condition” June emphasised in her image can be layered onto Sam’s response of what the story card missed, and offer the opportunity for me to widen the aperture of this accounting. Sam’s experience was not simply about moving away from one way of being (dominant, individual) and towards a different, changed way (community). The impetus to be at the workshop, surrounded by a particular group of practitioners, was initiated based on his passion for critical texts that ignited him to engage in different ways of thinking and doing practices. The critical perspectives learned through texts, and experience with the individual

professor, led to building relationships with both new knowledges and new communities. We can work to bring more awareness, or "moments of emplacement" as June described, to help recognise the ways that texts or communities of practice we surround ourselves with are influencing and shaping how we see and act in the world. It is valuable to recognise and account for disconnects, for misalignments, without labels in didactic and linear representations. Additionally, recognising the practicing of this reflexivity can help us try to understand how we are in times of change, and where our values are influencing our movements. Equally, however, the layering of the research between my analysis and participants' contributions illustrates how practices of listening, reflection and research remain conditioned and trained by our ingrained ways of thinking, set to hone in on dominant paradigms.

As discussed in chapter 2, Canlı (2018) argues this work, "entails a great deal of self reflection, self-redirection, and incessantly challenging one's own knowledge, subjectivity, and privileges, as well as the epistemic and ontic foundations" (Schultz et al. 2018a, 97). She states, "Queer feminist thinking has taught us that this is not an easy task", highlighting it is our individual work, community engagement, and bodies of critical thought that have been developed to support this (ibid.) These elements are not arranged hierarchically and do not play out in a linear, developmental sequence. The story does not illustrate conclusive thoughts about how we should or should not engage with critical texts, admire the work products of particular individuals, or value engaged-community practices as more or less important than critical-academic practices. The layered account highlights the different influences that contribute to an ongoingness of shifting. We move between and among text, community, criticality, learning, our lived realities, and innumerable other elements.

Shifting Story: Finding Vessels to Help Shape My Practice

Sam emphasised in the re-sharing of his experience the value of the "vessels around" us in offering different forms and shapes for us to reflect upon and mould our own practices around. In the course of this research, the value and importance of a community of practice became particularly clear in the interviews and workshops described in this chapter. Throughout the first two years of my PhD, I constantly battled balancing the amount of time I spent volunteering and participating in communities of practice, with

my research, in teaching and doing paid work. My role within Design & Ethics (and Co-Design Club, to a lesser extent) involved taking time during weekdays and weeknight evenings to plan and organise events and workshops, recruit members to the organising committee, share resources on Slack, and meet with co-organisers and other members of the community to think about how to support a Design & Ethics community. I regularly met with folks from these communities, whether over zoom calls, at organised events, or casual meet ups over coffee. These meetups covered ground from simple how-are-you-doing check-ins, to large online events on topics such as, "Can we (and designers) imagine a world without police"[6], to negotiating job transitions or the politics of a current research project. These events, communication and relationship building took time, effort and attention, and were very fulfilling and beneficial sources of engagement and mutual support. It was never, however, considered part of my "work" in that I was not paid to do it, and it did not "advance" my PhD. In the busyness of life, it was extra time I had to constantly manage in addition to my other research and professional commitments. As I started to reach out to people to organise more formal research interviews and small group workshops, I recognised how much the time I had spent cultivating these environments and relationships impacts and supports the trajectory of my own research and practice. This time "outside" my work was a significant source of questions, ideas, resources, support and examples of practitioners working to address similar challenges of ethics, positionality, white supremacy and colonial influences, in their own ways and practices. As I wrote about this research, Sam's metaphor of being moulded by those around us provided an apt description of the role I now recognised people like Sam, Remi and June had played in helping me to envision and shape the kinds of practices—questioning, aware, open, relational—in which I want to engage. This was a shifting of this research project, valuing the relationships and people directly in front of me as informative and with critical resources on par with the theories,

6 A recording of this event can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/428664857/957b8a4093.

research classes and PhD supervision. And it was a shifting in my own ways of understanding what is "social design practice". Deliberately building relationships and connections with practitioners and people who embody the kinds of vessels I want to be shaped by is a vital and necessary part of my critical social design practice. Making time for both the formal, organised and casual, ongoing relationships built in community is as much a part of a critical social design practice as the critical texts that inform and challenge my perspectives, and the projects and jobs that develop and hone "hard" skills. I did not begin this research with the idea that investing in a critical, engaged community around me would be a key support to being able to address my dominant ways of being in the world. In every formal research proposal, ethics application, milestone presentation, this experience was quietly shaping and informing the work, but was never on centre stage. It is, however, necessary to provide ongoing and mutual support for the ways of being that this research is trying to cultivate.

5.4.2 THE RUB: ACCOUNTING FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF LEARNING THROUGH DISCOMFORT

Rubbing against ideals

"The Rub" story card presents an experience from Remi when they were early in their career and working on designing a service for vulnerable children. They were tasked to facilitate workshops for a community "with a very strong Indigenous presence" around the design of a new civic service. They described the process of developing the agenda, materials and plan for the workshop then arriving full of confidence about how they would lead the group towards "solutions". Fairly quickly, the community rejected Remi as a facilitator and the proposed workshop. The community was not interested in working with a person they did not know, who did not structure the work within the governance models already in place, and more generally questioned someone coming in from outside their community. At the time, Remi was confused and ashamed by having been asked to enter a community to lead and facilitate this process. It was their job, for which they ostensibly had the "right" skillset. Despite being hired by a client to do this work, based on a set of co-creative social design credentials,

they were not, in reality, in a position to carry it out. The experience was uncomfortable, humbling and left them racked with uncertainty about their chosen profession.

"The Rub" was used to illustrate the discomfort that occurs when our ideals are constrained or confronted by the conditions of our professional environment. It arises when recognising the conditions and practice (within a workplace, educational environment, client relationship, etc.) do not align or do not support the stated or intended outcomes or goals of the practice. These conditions can be structural, such as performance metrics one is required to meet, or the budget and time constraints required by a client. Constraints can happen on a personal level, constrained by the resources, tools and knowledges we have at our disposal, which may not be appropriate for the needs of the situation. Or there can be project-level constraints, like needing to deliver a specific outcome for a client, which may outweigh the actual needs of the context or the means of getting there. We can see all these constraints at play in Remi's story.

The name for this story card was inspired by comments shared by Chris, who has long-established experience working in social design studios. He shared the challenges of implementing the ideals of a transdisciplinary, social practice entangled in a capitalist, neoliberal system:

> *"There are so many of us that come into working here [social design studio] that have romantic ideas of going out there and doing cool work, with different disciplines and all that... But we're not sitting on a trust fund. If we aren't running a tight ship in the neoliberal context we're existing in, we're done. That's the constant. The biggest sort of experience that anybody has, which is also like a tool or a method, is this kind of rub against the ideal."*

"The Rub" as described by these two participants speaks to the heart of the critiques of social design and design practices discussed in chapters 1 and 2. The dominant design discourses foster a belief of being able to affect positive social change with a particular set of design tools and mindsets. The discourse leverages the idealism of practitioners hoping to find ways to create positive change in the world. The combination of this dominant ideology and earnest idealism triggers the unsettling misalignment of "The Rub".

"The Rub" has been highlighted here because participants across the workshops repeatedly recognised it in their own experiences. Even when choosing other story cards to work with, people paired them with "The Rub", or mentioned wanting to select it because of how it also resonated. Experiences of "The Rub" lead to valuable learnings and, for many practitioners, helped to characterise experiences that were part of significant changes in how they conceptualise and work in their practice.

The ubiquity of this experience is not simply an unfortunate reality check of the conditions of practice and what one hopes they can accomplish in practice. In the following section, I will discuss how this reveals some of the deeply problematic politics that arise when design practice is shaped by singular, dominant, positivist, problem-solution narrative. While there are variations of how "The Rub" manifests, for many practitioners it was an experience of significant learning, at the expense of others in their everyday practices. The discomfort of "The Rub" is a discomfort that arises from a privileged or dominant positioning in relation to the context and/or community with whom we are working.

Layering: Learning at the expense of others

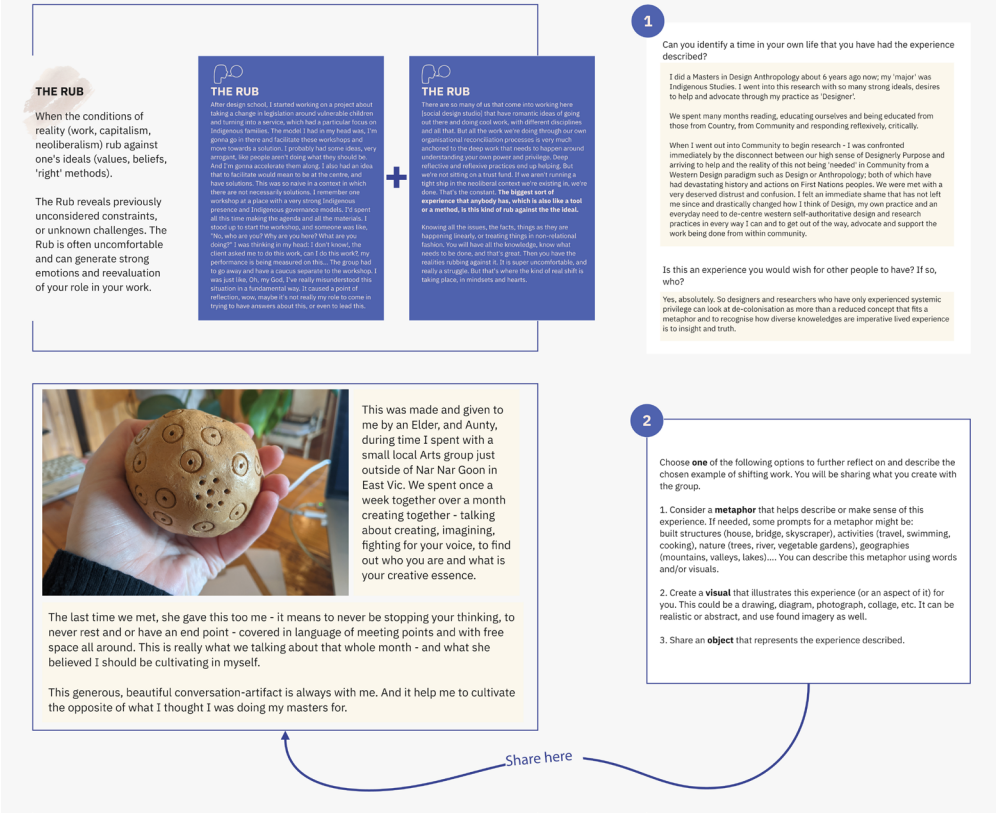


Figure 5.6 The conversation-artefact was given to Stephanie by an Elder in Nar Nar Goon. It means, "to never be stopping your thinking, to never rest and or have an end point - covered in language of meeting points and with free space all around."

Stephanie, a social design researcher, shared a story from her graduate education to describe "The Rub" in which she, "went into this research with so many strong ideals, desires to help and advocate through my practice as 'Designer'". She "was confronted immediately by the disconnect between our high sense of Designerly Purpose and arriving to help and the reality of this not being 'needed'". Similar to the experience on the story card: "We were met with a very deserved distrust and confusion. I felt an immediate shame that has not left me since and drastically changed how I think of Design, my own practice and an everyday need to de-centre western self-authoritative design and research practices".

The power of these experiences is their contribution to more humble, open, values-aligned and relational practices. Despite this impact, we must also be careful not to hold them up as something to strive for or celebrate. In the experiences described in Remi and Stephanie's

stories, “The Rub” occurred when being “sent in” to work with Indigenous communities. In these instances, we can see how traditional knowledges and governance models are insulted, and resources and time are wasted in already overextended communities. Despite the significance of the experiences for the practitioners, these costs highlight the politics of a practice that affords such learning experiences. Seeking to create learning experiences through ill-informed community engagements directly undermines aims of equality, support and respect. “The Rub” describes uncomfortable or even “shameful” experiences. Yet, they are the result of the inherent privileges, assumed expertise and respect for a “Designer”.

Remi further reflected about the inherent privileges and abuses of these lessons:

> *I’ve always been very bothered by this idea that, in social innovation work in particular, we just kind of learn on each other and on communities and projects in a way that does really expose people to not only risks but also kind of inertia and a further slowing down of progress, as opposed to some kind of actual helpful forward direction. I do think though, just from an experiential perspective, I’m not sure how else you kind of simulate such a shift in someone that they are permanently changed by an experience. And not only want to work in different ways, but feel compelled to work in different ways. Not just as an optional extra, but as a core. And it’s not even a preference, it’s the personal ethic...*

Stephanie shared that she would absolutely want other designers and researchers to experience “The Rub”. Particularly those, “who have only experienced systemic privilege and [need to] look at de-colonisation as more than a reduced concept that fits a metaphor and to recognise how diverse knowledges and lived experience are imperative to insight and truth.” In Remi’s story, there was an important lesson of decentering the individual designer, and recognising the importance of supporting community members and their wisdoms. Sam, speaking about a gendered experience of controlling and erasing the contributions of a female team member shared, “that was a really major inflection point in how I participate in teams. I went off and did a lot of reflection about it. And...I think that some of the worst kinds of learning is learning that it’s at the expense of somebody else.” These reflections shared some of the most impactful

ways into understanding and really getting to the individual hubris, dominance and educational biases that shape design practices. These engagements created change “at our core”. Methods, practices and very worldviews are dismantled and “personal ethic” is redirected towards less singular, oppressive approaches to practice.

While the value of the learning in these experiences is undeniable, it forces the recognition that we should not be in these positions to “learn on” communities in the first place. The ubiquitous nature of learning “on communities” calls into doubt the ability of social design practice to be able to work in complex, social spaces. Particularly considering how institutions like universities, governments nonprofits and industry studios place highly educated, dominantly positioned practitioners into situations in order to benefit from these “learning opportunities”. The lack of skills, knowledges and respect for relationships, resources, existing systems and politics is a widespread experience in education and practice (Keshavarz 2020). The experiences shared here are also limited in perspective to those who were in a future, reflective position and able to learn and redirect their position or practice in the world based on this experience. There are assumed privileges in these experiences of time and financial security to be able to make professional and educational changes and have a distance from the affected communities to have these perspectives. For others, this “discomfort” is more acute and characterised by more substantial harm to the practitioner as well, including burnout, anxiety, depression, and personal crisis (Ferguson 2016).

Entangling: The complexity of the conditions which we work withing

As “The Rub” is written on the story card it connotes a singular moment of discomfort that arises when we recognise the “previously unconsidered constraints” of the conditions in which we are working. This belies the complexity of the “conditions” of the situation. Participants discussed other variations of “The Rub” experience, whether working with climate action groups or with people seeking asylum, competing for research grants or meeting KPIs at a non-profit, the realities of community-oriented and social design practices are pervaded with the entangled realities of conflicting agendas or values between meeting the requirements of a job, project, funding and the social and political values of critical practices. Our

professional contexts can include: the historical precedents and politics of places, fields and people; individual limitations in knowledges and skills; ill-informed project briefs or teams; and the need for compromised approaches in the face of limited capacities. The entangled elements that contributed to Remi being in the position that generated their experience included complex, structured systems such as their institutional degree and employer-studio, the government client and system that created new legislation to be carried out, as well as numerous other histories, beliefs and systems. While the dominant narrative of problem-solution change-making runs through these systems, there is not a singular entity that is “neo-liberal capitalism”. There are no clearly defined alternative systems outside of these entangled realities.

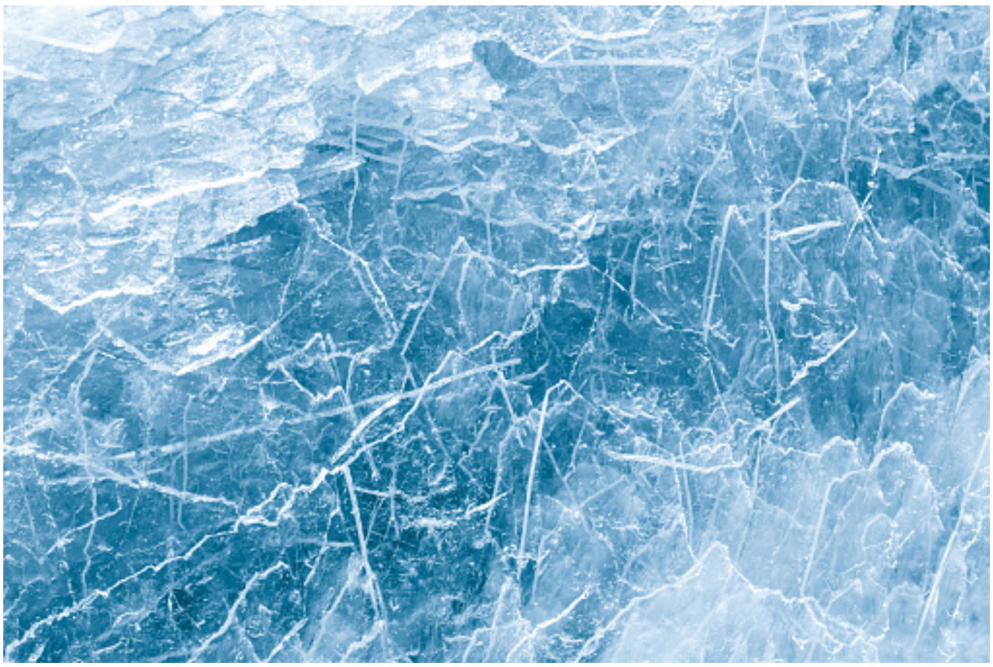


Figure 5.7 Noah describes “The Rub” as something that built up over time, rather than a moment of recognition

Noah, an early career researcher in academia with previous experience in industry studios, reflected on “The Rub” with the metaphor of cracks splintering across the surface of a frozen lake. He described the experience as not a single experience of discomfort, like the story card

relates, but “there was a whole range of things, some more significant than others. Over a period of time, you just started noticing it more and more. And I thought of it as cracks growing in the ice, something kind of chips and then slowly others form, and then over a period of time, more and more form. And then before you know it...there’s just actually micro-cracks everywhere. And that’s when you see it”. It is not that one condition breaks things, but the fractal and entangled influences create breaks and instability over time. While there are particular contexts where addressing a single “bad” crack in the ice (i.e. getting a different degree, changing jobs or fields, working with a new team) is perhaps a valid and necessary move, the entanglements help us to consider how we work with the acknowledgement and navigation of these inherent, systemic influences. We cannot avoid encountering the uncomfortable realities of how these systems are entangled. Rather than seek the “ideal conditions” that conform to idealistic pursuits, we begin to learn ways to be more transparent about the conditions, and navigate the realities of being with these compromised conditions. We inevitably encounter some degree of uncomfortable rub against our ideals and, in the face of this discomfort, we are called to account for how we are with these conditions, and what ways we navigate these entanglements.

5

CONCLUSION: FOSTERING CURIOSITY

I initially conceived of the story cards as a way to tell a narrative of transformation that attended to a particular moment in time. From our long, reflective conversations, the stories highlight a single, dramatic moment—of insight, concern or reflection—that stands out to make the shifting “obvious”. However, it was actually their activation with the community of practice through discussion and further engagement that revealed a more complex and ongoing picture of shifting. That is, the everyday stories that

emerge when a social design community comes together to talk about and share practice. These stories gave language to social designers experiences of grappling with the complexities of working from a position of dominance.

The challenge of being able to note when you are in a time of change is mysterious. It is difficult to “know” this is happening. As June shared while describing the error message, “the curiosity of not really knowing that you’re changing is the curiosity”. Curiosity can be defined as seeking knowledge or information without the motivation of extrinsic reward or utilitarian use. To be curious is not the same as a goal-oriented desire to know something (Markey and Loewenstein 2014). Curiosity was examined in chapter 3 as a way of characterising a critical, generative relationship with ignorance as a social construct, as compared to notions of overcoming or conquering it as an individual. Here, being curious about how we are changing in our ways of being encourages seeking without ever really “knowing”, by describing shifting through multiple different experiences, reflections and criticality.

Throughout this discussion section, I noted how the idea of shifting was shaped by the clear motivations of my research: recognising our own dominant narratives and trying to create clear accounts of how to address them. This work was reshaped by participants’ contributions; demonstrating wider and more complex renderings of shifting, and augmenting accounts of shifting with different relational and temporal details. Rather than considering the analysis and contributions of this research as conclusive, it encourages instead an orientation of curiosity to what is presented here. When expressing or feeling certainty, a teacher of mine encourages to instead ask:“Is that so?”. This is an encouragement to continue to look, continue to practice as new insights or awareness arises, rather than seeking security in certain truths or knowledges. The layered accounts in this discussion generate a practice and relationship to curiosity about shifting rather than conclusive truths. As demonstrated in this discussion, we can explore, story, illustrate, and share about shifting, but there remains an ambiguous quality to it. It cannot be delimited to a single practice, and it is not a singular moment of change that can be named and demonstrated with distinct before and after moments. It is not a clear narration, with a climax and ending, comfortably settling into a “new” way of being in the world. Curiosity characterises shifting as an exploratory process, without a goal at the end that we will “know” how

to be. Rather, shifting tries to encourage us to be curious, and open to constantly exploring these ways of being, with criticality and in relationship with others.

This research does suggest that within social design practice, practitioners can shift in our ways of being, and in how we see and relate to others in the world. We can become aware of how we practice with and perpetuate dominant, fixed ideologies, and cause harm through that dominance. With that greater awareness, we can also exercise more agency and work to create the conditions to make us less dangerous to others. We can refuse projects for which we are ill-prepared or do not have the right relationships. We can recognise we need more time, more space to be with complex work. The stories and descriptions offer a path for people to be curious. They do not create clear directions of shifting, or helpful plans to achieve shifting. Shifting asks to be *practicing*: looking, investigating, learning and avoiding falling into comfortable, conclusive declarations.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6

This research addresses the argument that operating within a social design practice through dominant positionalities and dominating worldviews confines the practice, practitioners, and outcomes of social design to remain within dominating structures of white supremacy and colonialism. The argument of the research seeks to understand how a practitioner coming from dominant positionalities and worldviews can embody, enact, and support knowledges and practices that depart from these dominating paradigms. The research moved through three projects that sought to address dominant positionality and worldviews from different entry points: knowledges, approaches to practice, and learning from experiences and communities of practice built over time. The visuals, stories, failings and learnings, analysis, relationships and communities generated through these projects all served to develop the conceptual and practical contribution of this research, shifting.

Shifting is presented as a concept and practice that encourages social design practitioners to account for their ontological orientations.

This contribution to knowledge is in ongoing development. The reader is encouraged to consider their own experience in relation to what is proposed by shifting, and how one's own ontological orientations might influence the proposed concept and practice of shifting. As such, I resist framing this contribution as a structured and static framework of knowledge that others might acquire.

While research questions guided this inquiry towards shifting, my approach does not respond to the research questions as linear narrative of question-research-contribution. Rather, it responds to the argument as a discussion, underpinned by three agendas: to enable my own social design practice to engage with and be able to challenge my own dominant positioning in social practices; to create ways to encourage and support other social design practitioners to engage with similar dominant positionalities; and to make tangible the value of critical praxis within the work of everyday, engaged collaborative social practitioners. The practice-based and theoretical knowledge offered through this design research

is summarised here through a description of shifting as movements to be activated in my own practice, based on my own ontological orientations. The four shifting movements described here respond to the questions posed in the research argument by proposing approaches that help account for the role of dominant positionalities in practice, support more heterogeneous worldviews and bring the critical into practices.

1

SHIFTING MOVEMENT: QUESTIONING KNOWLEDGES

Knowledges and ignorances were the specific focus of chapter 3, but the movement in relationship to knowledges was also developed across the research. The research demonstrates how accounting for our ontological orientations supports questioning and challenging knowledge accumulation, and considers ignorances as an important area of attention. Through stories about my own practice I reflected on my conditioning to rely on intellectual knowledge accumulation as the appropriate response to understanding my own blindspots around social practice. This includes the pursuit of higher degrees in order to be better qualified for social practice, and wielding theoretical texts, such as decolonial theory, as "answers" of how to work with my own domination across complex and diverse social conditions. In chapter 2, I argue replacing a dominant intellectual lineage with a different, critical lineage, without fundamentally changing practices of knowledge dissemination or relationships to critical theory and practice perpetuates the same conditioned, institutional power dynamics around knowledge production. Relying on hooks (1991) argument that theory can be liberatory or used to wield power and exclude, I highlight the value of scholars applying critical theories in situated and tangible ways through practices and personal commitments, such as Keshavaraz's practices of points and locations and Akama's use of archipelagos of design (Schultz et. al. 2018a; Akama 2021). These examples break away from prescriptive and accumulative relationships to knowledge, and demonstrate a situated relationship bringing knowledges into practice. Chapter 3 explicitly looks at how ignorances are constructed, ignored, and maintained through the social systems and experiences that shape worldviews. The different relationships practitioners shared about their own knowledges and ignorances helped to shape an argument supported by theories of epistemological ignorance, whereby ignorances are structural and relational (Mills 1997, 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007). Chapter 5 highlights the politics of

privileging learning as an outcome when practicing from a dominant position. Stories of "The Rub" illustrate ways that a focus on how we "learned" in practice can obscure the responsibility for harmful transgressions.

My conditioned pursuit of learning and knowledges implies a boundless potential of gain and accumulation, which furthers my own dominant positioning and can erase the situated, political implications of knowledges. The shifting movement in my own practice is moving from a relationship with knowledges defined by "what" (what is being learned, accumulated, mastered) to a relationship characterised by "why" and "how". This relationship challenges my worldviews around learning and knowledge accumulation as a purely benign and beneficial pursuit (McEntee in Penin et al. 2021). The shifting movement involves questioning why I do not know something, and considers the systemic and social influences on my ignorances. It also is a movement that comes from questioning how I am using knowledges in practice. Is it to increase or solidify my own power and positioning? Rather than an accumulative relationship to knowledge, a relationship that has been well-developed and engrained throughout my education and career, shifting asks me to consider the translational (chapter 2), structural (chapters 3 and 5) and relational (chapters 2, 3 and 5). This movement is not meant to discourage the pursuit of knowledge, but to create a different relationship with the process and content of knowledge.

2

SHIFTING MOVEMENT: STAYING WITH

In chapter 1, I rely on Sandoval's (1991) argument that oppositional consciousness enacted by Third World Feminists is not developmental, but through different modes of consciousness that one shifts in and out of, described as differential consciousness. This theory forms the basis from which shifting as a concept and practice developed. Sandoval argues hegemonic white feminism's developmental model serves to

create hierarchy, and demonstrates how this theory and practice of feminism is leveraged to exclude and oppress Third World women. This work challenges developmental models characterised by growth as not only inadequate to challenge domination, but as a practice of maintaining domination over others. In chapter 4, I share Drabinksi's argument for "queering" approaches (2013) that demonstrate how modes of activism focussed on correction and improvement serve to strengthen hegemonic structures, rather than challenging how they are produced and maintained. The methods of reflective listening and layered accounts in chapter 5 served to slow the research down and concentrate on creating layered accounts and diffracted analysis. This mode of research supports dynamic and dispersed accounts that are not trying to move in a linear progression towards an end point.

These arguments and modes of research counter my own dominant conditioning attuned to developing, making better and progression. As shared in my shifting story about being rather than doing (chapter 2), the impetus to move a project, or my own development, in forward, measurable and linear trajectories is something in which I have been well trained and successful. The movement to instead "stay with" is inspired by shifting. This movement encourages me to stay with a topic, project, community, or text and consider the value of staying with, as opposed to using it and then moving beyond it. In my social design practice this movement helps account for my ontological orientations and challenges the pervasive and celebrated notion of "creating social change". To stay with means rather than seeking to engineer or control social change through the lens of progression, to allow change to happen through the lens of being. This requires staying with the content, project, or process long enough to *be with* the change, rather than direct it.

3

SHIFTING MOVEMENT: COMMUNICATING THE IN-BETWEEN

In chapter 2, I use Akama's (2017; 2021) work on *ko*-ontologies to demonstrate challenges to Dominant Design paradigms. In these arguments Akama describes ontological movements using a metaphor of moving across an archipelago of different islands of design. The reader is encouraged to avoid colonial notions that would label islands with particular content (that can then be extracted), such as islands of "Indigenous Design" or "Japanese Design". Instead, Akama calls attention to the movement between and among islands, and the inter-becoming that happens as one moves in and amongst diverse islands of design. This argument prioritises movement and process as challenging domination, over identifying particular pieces of content. In chapter 4, I demonstrate my struggle to move out of discourses of improvement and critique when trying to translate the argument of Drabinski's essay into social design practice. Stepping away from trying to teach the content of the arguments in her essay, to thinking about how the argument directs the attention to a different worldview opened up a different possibility for me to be able to frame the *Practice Provocations*. Drabinski uses queer theory to demonstrate how different worldviews make sense of the same situation differently, and thus act or respond differently. What I wanted to be able to communicate and allow others to experience was not necessarily the specific content of Drabinski's argument (queer theory and how it changes understandings and constructions of identity), but the move made in the argument by critically examining underlying worldviews and motivations behind particular behaviours, and how that generates different ways to respond in practice. Queer theory supported Drabinski in this movement, but when my focus was on the content of the article alone, it obscured being able to articulate the move being made by her argument. In chapter 5, I provide a layered account of Sam's experience with a dominating professor, and how he was shaped by the community of practitioners around him. In analysing Sam's experience I was acutely focused on the

content of the professor's theory, prestige and attitude in the experience. This focus overshadowed the larger process happening across the story. The description of "The Disconnect" overemphasised knowledges learned through text, and missed the process of building relationships that redefined Sam's practice through community.

The attraction to focussing on content is ingrained in my own practice. A piece of content—whether a particular intellectual discourse, the dramatic detail of a story, or the measurable outcomes of a project—is a clearly defined "object". It is something that can be apprehended, described, and controlled. It provides a sense of accomplishment to be able to understand, and communicate it to others. To communicate the movement taking place between and among pieces of content is much more challenging. It is not where my attention is trained and does not allow me to rely on clear boundaries and categorisation to shape and control information. Communicating the spaces in-between, rather than content, directs my attention towards the movement and relationships between content. For example, how does Drabinski's argument move between queer theory and library cataloguing, or how does Sam's story move between the different elements of the experience, as opposed to linear descriptions of categories and facts. Shifting to the in-between works to train the attention towards the connections, relationships and movements happening in the in-between. It also requires developing new vocabularies that are not trying to "own" the information in the same way communication focused on content does. For example, using illustrations to help communicate the *Practice Provocations* provided alternative vocabularies to create relationships among and between "best practices" and critical-dialogical approaches.

4

SHIFTING MOVEMENT: CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

In chapter 1, I share a presentation from Shana Agid that advocates for a definition of expertise that is based on practicing enough you are able to work with people (Penin et al. 2021). This argument, based on working with Transformative Justice leaders Kaba and Hasan (2019), offers expertise as an ability to develop relationships and belong with community, rather than expertise as something that sets one apart and differentiates from others. In chapter 3, I argue that addressing ignorances is not the same as "learning". From a dominant positionality and working across diverse worldviews, addressing ignorances is not something that happens purely through our own life experiences, which are partial and limited, or through practices of trial and error, which can put others at risk for our ultimate benefit (which is expand on further in chapter 5), or even reflexive practices. Addressing ignorances happens through building relationships across distinct worldviews, and is shaped by people with experiences and knowledges distinct from our own. The story shared through Stephanie's conversation-artefact in chapter 5 particularly touches on the different expertise developed through being in an ongoing relationship with an Indigenous elder while enrolled in a Master's course on Design Anthropology and Indigenous Studies. Her relationship with the Elder led her to reject the "designerly purpose" which she had built up over her course of study and "cultivate the opposite of what I thought I was doing my masters for". This different expertise was related through the conversation-artefact given to her, which was described as covered in the language of never-ending meeting points and spaces between. Additionally, the research process across *Shift Work* described in chapter 5 recognises the value of being in community, and building relationships with people over time. These communities help create spaces to challenge, question and develop critical practices.

The movement of cultivating community understands expertise as something built through doing things with people. It attends to ontological orientations by recognising the value and importance of community and relationships as components of an engaged, critical, social practice. In my practice, this means prioritising movements towards building community and maintaining relationships with critical practice communities and diverse worldviews. This is not to develop an expertise in knowledge or content, or "grow" to become a "better practitioner". Cultivating community is a commitment that supports my ability to address ways dominant paradigms arise and are perpetuated by my own practices, and create the spaces I need to be able to stay with the work of bringing the critical into practice.

I propose shifting as a concept and practice that is incomplete and ongoing through the different experiences, embodiments, and ontologies of practitioners. One of the limitations of this study is how here, at the end, shifting as a contribution is built up over the course of the research, through diverse theoretical and design-led research practices, but remains untested and unresolved. The proposed efficacy of its ability to address dominant positionality, in practice, on the ground is not attended to. This limitation also provides a basis for ongoing work research, based on activating and accounting for shifting in future practice. Based on my own ontological orientations, shifting is summarised here through four movements it inspires in my practice. These movements perhaps serve as a starting point of attention for future research. These movements may be adopted by other practitioners as ways to address their own positions and practices that perpetuate dominating worldviews and paradigms, or shifting may inspire or activate different movements through different ontological orientations.

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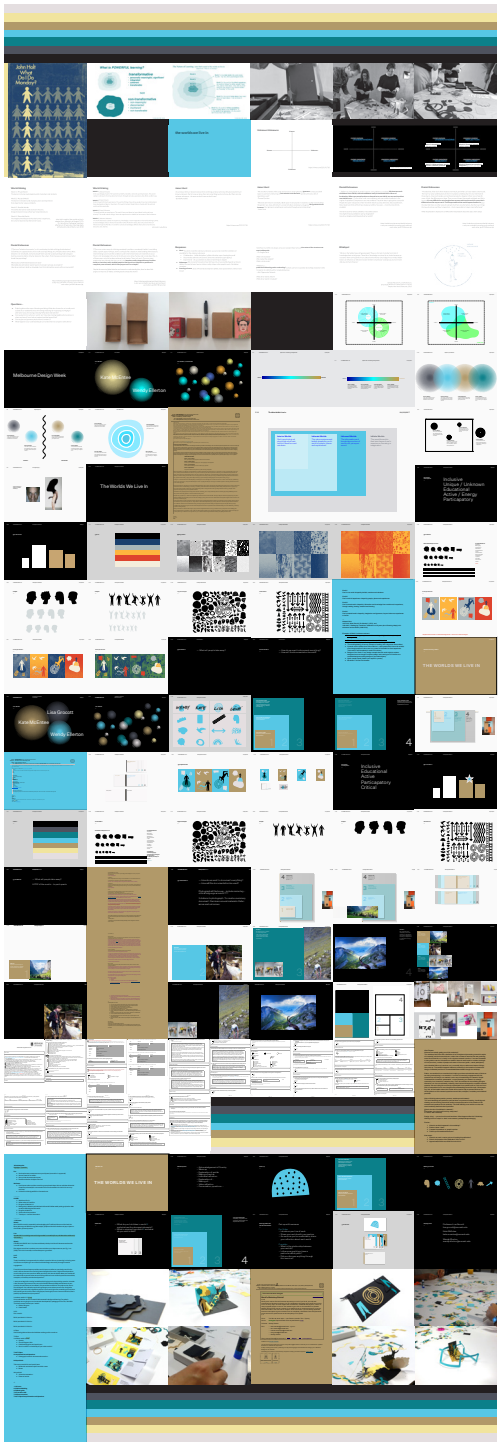
STUDY NOTES - UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH THROUGH COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

APPENDIX 1

Study Notes:
Understanding research through collaborative practice



Introduction

This publication is part of a portrait, or perhaps better described as a study for a portrait, of research and practice undertaken by Kate McEntee and Wendy Ellerton. Its creation arose out of a need to make sense of our practice and collaborative process and its relationship to research. The 'portrait' is inclusive of the visual study, an oral presentation storying our process and this publication of our 'study notes'. Using these different elements we are beginning to give shape to, and articulate, our practice and its relationship with research and collaboration.

We have used the production of a workshop (The Worlds We Live In) to create this portrait and frame how we describe or define our practice(s). The visual study illustrates the ongoing conversation we maintain visually, materially, digitally and discursively. It is wide ranging and rich, but can become so divergent it lacks direction and clarity.

Through this collaboration we are experimenting with how we use one another for critical and creative thinking, multimodal processing of our own research and creating forced 'sites of convergence' to frame and direct our work together. These structures and rhythms found working in collaboration correspond with how one might conduct research on an individual level as well.

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Three contours have emerged from our portrait study:

1. Collaboration as a research method
2. Sites of convergence
3. Researching through practice

1. Collaboration as a research method

Through practicing collaboration we seek to better understand how collaboration might be used as a research method.

We believe design practice is well positioned for collaborative work, as designers are often required to work across disciplines. Collectively individuals from different disciplines come together to tackle the ambiguous, give form to ideas and transform the invisible into public offerings. However, in a research lab bound by design, collaboration is met with both challenges and excitement. Reflecting on our own collaboration within this research lab we have drafted characteristics for using collaboration as a research method.

Moving forward we intend to further define and distinguish this research method from other ways of working with people in a research setting. Informing this process will be the literature, practice precedents and importantly collaborative practice.

Consider
From this process we have developed an appreciation for the understanding that can be generated through multimodal discourse. It is in the expansive, unstructured, and raw conversation space that understanding can formed, negotiated and established in real time.

Characteristics for using collaboration as a research method

Acknowledgement that in collaboration, the sum is greater than its parts.

Willingness to contribute concretely/productively to the conversation, through writing, reading, visualising, planning, showing up, critiquing.

Space for informal ways of coming together that are off record and typically unplanned.

Time to individually process, clarify, generate, and develop ideas alone before reconvening.

Establishing ways of extending the practice and research through formal dissemination e.g., sites of convergence.

2. Sites of convergence

We have established sites of convergence as critical to advancing research based in practice. Sites of convergence are established moments in which the research is shaped into a formal outcome. These sites allow us to reconsider the role of designed outcomes as places for synthesis, provocation and progress, but not end points. They are restarting points that extend the practice and research, rather than culminating points of the practice and research.

Sites of convergence are characterized here through our collaboration, but could be relevant in individual practice-based research.

When working in collaboration around research questions, being constantly expansive and generative without constraints hinders the depth and progress of the work. Defining a site of convergence places a frame around the practice and allows the conversation to productively move forward towards a joint goal. To maintain effective and fulfilling collaboration, we create sites of convergence towards which we can direct our research and seek to offer a contribution back to the community.

A site could be a workshop, presentation, visual, artefact, publication or paper. They are characterized not by form, but by thoughtful consideration and notable effort to create a site which extends and formalizes the research conversation. They allow for a conversation and open the research and collaboration to debate, support, criticism or accolades.

These sites force us to slow down, reflectively moderate our collaboration in order to develop a clear outcome, and thus a clear understanding of the research.

In collaboration sites of convergence are a merging of ideas and practices into singular, cohesive outcomes. They may present multiple perspectives or practices, but are packaged as a connected proposition as opposed to disparate elements.

3. Practice as research

Our practice and research has to be generated and defined by and through our practice. The knowledge contained in this portrait has been generated and disseminated through practice.

Research and learning happens through practice, and the materialization of practice, but it is not defined or described through designed outcomes. Practice is conceived as in continuity. To use practice as research we need to be continuously in a process of creation and putting outcomes into the world, through sites of convergence. This ongoing process of practice outcomes helps to shape and define the research.

Our practice-based research findings require conversation with literature, theory and other practitioners work. Practice as research does not replace the need for traditional research sources, but uses our creative practices to illustrate, magnify and extend a conversation between practice, theory and literature. In order to establish what might be 'new' or generalizable about our research, it must be in conversation with other research and practice

Conclusion

The ideas presented in this publication have come from the practice of developing 'The Worlds We Live In' workshop for Melbourne Design Week. The conversations which took place prior, during and post workshop highlighted that collaboration is a valuable research method. However, understanding how it contributes to research is an ongoing conversation.

We are learning about collaboration through collaboration, just as we are learning about practice through practice.

Questions we continue to ponder;

- How does our collaborative practice contribute to our individual research, WonderLab, or to communities beyond?
- Are we saying something that matters? Is it interesting?
- In the context of individual Phd's in Design, how does collaboration work and how might individuals be acknowledged?
- What must we consider in terms of ethics?
- Is this knowledge extendible or is it unique to our collaborative partnership?
- What can we learn from practice precedents and the literature?
- Are we contributing anything new to design research?
- Can you see something we haven't?
- How would you define a contribution, an offerings and a site of convergence?

Comments, questions, contributions are welcomed.

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Thank you

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Elders, both past and present, of the lands and waters on which Monash University operates.