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Recovery From Design

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Recovery
From

Design

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Recovery From Design

Abstract

Through research, inquiry, and an evaluation of Recovery By Design, a 'design therapy' program that serves people with mental illness, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities, it is my assertion that the practice of design has therapeutic potential and can aid in the process of recovery. To the novice, the practices of conception, shaping form, and praxis have empowering benefits especially when guided by Conditional and Transformation Design methods together with an emphasis on materiality and vernacular form.

Argument

I want to change my role as designer from orator to instigator, to provide opportunities for people to connect, communicate creatively, and have meaningful face-to-face interactions. I hope to accomplish this by combining the methodologies of Conditional and Transformation Design. The practice of implementing 'open frameworks' (fig. 1) can create pro-social experiences through positive interactions.

Open frameworks are a way to address societal concerns and engage in public discourse. Even though, to some degree, all design is participatory, to openly acknowledge the contributions of people and materials is the most honest way to work. As a practitioner of Conditional Design methodology, it is even more important for me to talk about the large body of information that provides the context for this work.

Modern society's conveniences allow people to avoid personal interactions with others. These conveniences, however, are a double-edged sword; when we choose something that is easier, cheaper, or time-saving, it is often at the expense of our interaction with others. More subtly, as a consequence, something of the self also gets lost. It may be convenient to participate less actively in our immediate environment, but we also avoid difficult emotional situations or intellectual challenges in choosing the safe and familiar.

Because I work with a population stigmatized by illness, and because as a conditional designer I am specifically concerned with context, my work relates to the themes of public space and social justice. I am concerned with issues related to marginalization, the fate of outsiders, and how the privilege of insiders is perpetuated by the division of spaces (both physical and digital) that enable personal and cultural bubbles to exist; if you are here, you need not be concerned with conditions that exist over there.

Social conditions are affected and reflected in the physical and aesthetic characteristics of space. I have a heightened awareness of the sometimes-false notion of public and private spaces in our environments, as well as the perception of choice and access to these spaces. A great deal of emphasis on destigmatization efforts of Recovery by Design has to do with choosing and shaping public space. Recovery is often kept behind closed doors, which is counterproductive.

In our attempt to avoid discomfort by limiting unfamiliar interactions, I believe we also limit our own maturation, development, intimacy, and empathy; we miss opportunities that might expose us to new ideas, force us to consider others, and achieve significant personal growth.

Standards of orderliness and cleanliness tend to cause us to sweep society's mess under the rug. As a designer, my formative training taught me to be concerned primarily with organization and aesthetics, but as a citizen who is committed to inclusivity, I have been forced to re-evaluate my standards to be accepting of imperfection and to see the beauty of humanity in all of its forms.

I am drawn to the traditional Japanese aesthetic philosophies and beliefs about objects. For instance, handcraft and care can give life to an object; the recycling ethos of *mottainai,* and the Shinto concept of *kami*, or spirit, that exists in all things. *Wabi-sabi* is an aesthetic principle that describes the beauty in the imperfection or age of an object. "Engaging with natural, unique objects which embody wabi-sabi is believed to help still unnecessary thoughts and worries, enabling life to be experienced in a calm and accepting way" (Boston 2015, 37). The Japanese practice of *kintsugi,* in which a broken ceramic vessel is repaired using gold, results in an object that is more valuable and beautiful than it was in its original state. This is in stark contrast to Western attitudes where, except for antiques which exhibit a desirable patina, objects are considered less valuable after they show signs of age. In the United States, due to diminishing hand skills and the corporate push toward planned obsolescence, the tradition of salvage and repair has been lost. What does it say about our society when we value our objects for their appearance over their usefulness?

Not only does Western society value perfection of its objects, but also its people. Cultural expectations dictate that imperfections be hidden. I question the determination of value based on purity and perfection. Rather than to openly acknowledge our problems, we are often encouraged to deal with them privately and to withdraw ourselves from the public sphere, returning only once we feel 'better' or have 'moved on.' Challenges and failures shape us, yet we distance ourselves from them not only in our perception of the self but in our perception of others. Our actions toward objects – when something is damaged, throw it away and get a new one – translate to attitudes toward ourselves. What would happen to our culture if we were taught not to hide but to reveal – or, dare I say, celebrate – the scars of our bodies and minds, as well as highlight the wear of well-loved possessions? What if, through design, we were able to unlearn these problematic beliefs? I believe we can.

This thesis is documented in five books. This is the first; it covers over arching themes, framework, and the Richmond-based context of the work. It also serves as an introduction to my work. Book II explores the concept of design as therapy and discusses efforts to enhance aspects of design that promote well-being in the Recovery by Design program. Book III describes the benefits of physical tools, methods, and materials for the practice of design. It includes an essay on improvisation which outlines the history of craft in the United States including the disappearance of manual skills and the emergence of contemporary maker movements. It builds a case for all types of creativity that make use of what is at hand. Book IV situates my thesis in the context of Conditional and Transformation Design while providing a brief overview of design history. Book V is a photo essay that illustrates the content of this thesis related to the Recovery by Design program.

Introduction

Before I came to grad school, I felt like I had lost my voice. I could not help but question – even as I became a 'master' – whether any one voice mattered more than another. I reached as far as I could past boundaries of disciplines, communities, and ideologies trailing a spool of thread behind me so I could find my way back. Now I feel as though that thread has been pulled tight to form the body of knowledge in these publications.

Growing up, I learned to scavenge for – and alter – existing materials to suit my needs. So in that way, I have always had a DIY ethos. What started as a circumstance has grown into a methodology. I embrace the constraints of using found materials, the eco-consciousness of that which is second-hand or naturally occurring, and the economy of free items. There's an archaeological nature to my thinking as well. I dig into subjects, looking for knowledge, and when I lack understanding, I demand clarification. It has always been important for me to get at the truth of things, especially when it is hidden.

I have always been interested in open-ended processes and encouraging user or audience participation. Instead of creating solutions that elicit user response, I am more interested in how I can empower people to interact, question, and become their own creative agents.

I like to be engaged in a dialogue between myself and the person or material with which I work. Uncomfortable with the sense of dominating a process or interaction, I simply shape, seeing a creative benefit to giving up control. As a designer, I prefer to work with objects and materials that already have their own presence.

As I began my MFA journey, I had already been involved for two years with Recovery by Design, a series of classes, events, and workshops founded by Storefront for Community Design facilitated in partnership with Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA). The program engages clients in recovery for mental health issues, intellectual disabilities, and substance use disorders. John Malinoski, a professor in the Graphic Design program, invited me to participate by volunteering and teaching workshops and eventually asked me to take a leadership role. I have been involved with the project for four years now. Since starting graduate school I have become the program's co-lead. Among my many responsibilities, one of the most thrilling is curriculum design. From that, I have learned about many things: materials, tools, pedagogy, open frameworks, interaction, and well-being.

Having grown up in rural Virginia, I always had to make do – many people that lack resources or live in rural areas do the same. The challenges that I faced trying to create a design curriculum for Recovery By Design made me conscious of a number of major realizations. These include: the difficulty of getting objects fabricated and produced affordably in small numbers; the fact that

we live in a culture that undermines craft, and in reaction to these limitations, the many acts of novel creativity that occur in the age of mass production. There is a sub-culture of novel creativity flourishing amidst the over-saturation of products that don't meet our needs, and it is a glimmer of hope that people still strive to create. By reclaiming the processes of making and craft, I discovered, we instill well-being, skills, value, authority, and expertise. The combination of these revelations is evidence of larger implications on design, technology, and industry in our lives that forecast emerging and exciting trends which support alternative economies over consumer culture.

This drive toward creative autonomy indicates people's dissatisfaction with both manufactured objects and experiences. For RBD I have tried to keep in mind the importance of creating engaging experiences and authentic outcomes that show evidence of the making process.

Sociologists like Richard Sennet and Mathew Crawford have written that what is being lost from our culture is interaction and craft – both vital to our humanity and well-being. Serving this function are constructs and constraints that have broken down in recent decades. My work seeks to lift the voices of others, disseminate their knowledge and experience, and create understanding and empathy. I try to create the types of social and physical interaction that engage people with each other and the physical world through materials.

Most problems can be understood as a shortcoming of education or experience. Some studies show people change their minds by engaging in one-on-one earnest conversations about their values (Broockman and Kalla 2016). We grow and learn best when we step out of our bubbles, out of our comfort zones, and engage with people who are very different from us. *This American Life,* the podcast where I learned of the report referenced above, often impresses upon me the humbling richness of human experience, the importance of breaking your own bubble, and how much can be learned from listening.

I'd like to conclude by saying that I can't tell you why or how exactly happiness works. What I do know is that I experience it every time I enter a workshop. Perhaps it's the sense of being surrounded by work that is of the earth and made by the human hands – hands connected to persons who experienced the joy of making and the satisfaction of praxis.

Figure 1.
Framework

PSYCHOLOGY / PERCEPTION

Empathy
Subculture
\Insider/outsider
Symbols
Meaning
Ethics
Access

Advertising & Retail:
Change value/
meaning

Typography vs. language

AUDIENCE
Culture
Value
Power
Judgement
Needs
Education

DESIGNER
Expertise   Logic
Credibility   vs. intuition
Stigma
Intentions
Creativity
Personal experience

Values
Emotions
Class
Meaning
Taste

Subject Matter
Context:
Past/present
Purpose
Owner

OBJECT

Subject + Object
Materiality
Physical location
Time
Craft
Labor
Sustainability
Price
Seeing the hand
Perfection/
imperfection
Use
Color/texture
Durability

The Thing Itself
Composition
Production
Artifice
Tactility
Age

Movements
Politics
Class

OWNER
Geography
Context + personal
experience = value
Needs
Stigma
Function/
performance
Imagination
Creativity

WORLD
Era/time: "present"
Technology
Globalization
Inclusion
Communication
History

Materiality, necessity,
and/or age = value

Repurposing?
Owner + Designer?
Process of Making?
Therapeutic?

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Income Gaps

Within Richmond City, median household income is more than 17 times greater in the poorest census tract than in the wealthiest.

More than or (26%) city res live in povert

Race

Highway construction and public hou neighborhoods by race, while socioeco often stemming from discriminatory practices   prevented relocation.

Persistent segre and African A Richmond likely t

ts in
lify as

ries

h Outcomes

14 Richmond City d in the bottom 10% unties in Virginia ealth outcomes.

Education

More than 25% of the city's African American adults, and 59% of Hispanic adults, have less than a high school education, in contrast with only 7% of White adults.

Life Expectancy

There is a 20-year gap in life expectancy among census tracts

aces and unsafe streets
tivity, further increasing the
s between neighborhoods

Context

I have lived in Richmond for close to a decade, and in that time the city and I have changed together. When I moved here from a small town in Northern Virginia to attend Virginia Commonwealth University in 2005 the city had a roughness that scared and excited me. My interest in social justice had not yet been cultivated and it would be many years until I became aware of the city's considerable and problematic history. Over time the University expanded – where it had once seemed nestled into the languishing urban landscape, it now feels as if the city is nestled within the campus. Since 2005, VCU has grown from 166 buildings to 232 (Virginia Commonwealth University 2015) and has plans to complete an additional three-million-foot expansion by 2020 (Kapsidelis 2013). During this expansion, areas around campus were 'cleaned up,' buildings were acquired then renovated, police presence increased, and local businesses were replaced by chain stores.

The transformation of the University campus (and I would argue the city as a whole in tandem) has extended beyond just the infrastructure. On the street, I once saw the faces of

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the young, old, rich, poor, black, and white. That is different from what I now see – primarily young, albeit more culturally diverse, students. The demographics of neighborhoods in and around the University are changing as well, as a result of gentrifying historically black neighborhoods to accommodate the housing needs of students. While it could be argued that these changes are beneficial aesthetically and economically, paradoxically the urban renewal in Richmond has not only eroded the character of particular areas and set a trend for decreasing diversity, but also – most troublingly – it has worsened the inequities that stem from a history of racial discrimination and segregation. These changes have perpetuated the ignorance of the city's problems, perhaps especially among new residents. To put it bluntly, many of the city's neighborhoods are being "whitewashed," seemingly erasing problems on the surface, while those being displaced are faced with higher death rates (Zimmerman 2016).

In my time as a graduate student, I have worked at The Center on Society and Health (CSH), "an academic research center that studies the health implications of social factors – such as education, income, neighborhood and community environmental conditions, and public policy" (Center on Society and Health 2014). This experience as significantly shaped my understanding of the connections between social status and health. Problems of inequity are diverse and complex; they are not easy to untangle or remedy. At a macro level, solutions seem easy to identify, which is how I tended to look at things as a citizen and a designer. One problem at a time, one solution at a time: starvation > food-drive > event poster. Simple, right? In most instances though, the interconnectedness of societal ills renders the benefits of that approach somewhat of a band-aid. For example, geographic location, lack of transportation, and poverty are all contributing factors to starvation, none of which can be redressed by canned soups. Food drives may be valuable, but they can't deliver a satisfying conclusion to the problem of hunger, nor do they offer a definitive measure of success. I have found that, when viewed through the lens of public health, the most triumphant all-encompassing outcome for a variety of social ills is also the simplest – improving subjective well-being and quality of life. If you've got that, nothing else really matters.

As part of my assistantship at The Center, I have been tasked with designing various infographics that have reinforced and advanced my understanding of the importance of well-designed visual aids to advancing public health. The Center's biggest priority and most prominent graphics are an on going series of maps of U.S. cities that display life expectancy rates. The focus of these maps is in allowing for the comparison of geographic health data, following a national public health trend that is increasingly concerned with the numerous social and environmental characteristics that can impact health.

Place matters in health because characteristics of the areas in which people live affect health choices, behaviors, environmental risks, and access to medical care. Local conditions that may affect health outcomes include levels of stress and environmental toxins, the social and economic characteristics of individuals and families (such as education and income), and the characteristics of the communities in which people live (Zimmerman 2016).

In the fall of 2015, The Center on Society and Health asked me to help design the report *Health Equity in Richmond*, Virginia. In it, the report examines health disparities in and around the city of Richmond, with a strong emphasis on mapping data by census tract. As a Richmond resident, this report put into focus what has been going on in the city. I wondered – as the evidence of problems had slowly disappeared from my immediate environment – have things really gotten better? The data indicates that they have not, they just persist outside the scope of many people's privileged day-to-day lives.

Part I of the following essay will focus specifically on the data from the Health Equity in Richmond report – population, community characteristics, and health trends. It will also include information from my personal research into the conditions around issues of mental health in the State of Virginia that helped me identify the need for a program like Recovery by Design. Overall the information defines the issues related to place that can negatively affect health outcomes for residents in Richmond City. Part II will cover how Richmond's social issues provide context-based design challenges and solutions I have implemented into the Recovery by Design program.

PART I

Historically, both urbanicity and population density have held an association with public health – and they also determine the type, quantity, and quality of resources available to a population. Urbanization has been linked with growing health disparities among urban residents, especially those in low-income and minority communities (Geronimus and Waidmann 1999).

There are challenges and advantages that urban areas face that are unique to city life. It's the density of people and things that make any city a Petri dish capable of cultivating the best and worst experiences. On one hand the social and built environments can result in crime and environmental hazards, while on the other, the city offers the ability to network and create communities while offering a wider range of services. The topics discussed below emphasize the intertwinement of a person's health with where they live, which also predominately relates to the intensity of both poverty and marginalization.

above: Segregating effects of the construction of Interstate 95.

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Race and Ethnicity

Richmond's historical and contemporary conditions have influenced the distribution of minorities across the city. The construction of the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike – now Interstate 95 – in 1957 demolished and isolated thriving African-American neighborhoods. The creation of housing projects furthered residential segregation. Discriminatory housing practices have made it difficult for African-Americans to move out of isolation.

Consequently, the ethnic and racial make-up of neighborhoods diverges drastically across Richmond. Although the majority of the city's population is African-American, they have been pushed outward, while the inner core of the city remains predominantly white.

Poverty

Poverty can have a negative effect on the health of adults and children, to the extent of having discernible detrimental impact on those children's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical development (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). The city of Richmond has significantly higher poverty rates than the metro area or the state of Virginia. Richmond's African-Americans and Latinos are far more likely to experience poverty than whites. Being in poverty is a main contributing factor to poorer health and can dramatically lower life expectancy.

Education

Despite the overwhelming academic presence of VCU, there are large concentrations of adults in the city without high school diplomas. These areas are predominantly African-American and Latino. Education plays a large role in the health and well-being of a person or community. In relation to health, not only does a lack of education prevent people from getting jobs that would help them move up the economic ladder, national statistics indicate that adults (age 25+) who lack a high school education or the equivalent are three times more likely to die before age 65 as are those with a college education (Heron et al. 2009).

Life Expectancy

There is a large gap in life expectancy in various communities in Richmond. Biological, environmental, and social factors effect life expectancy significantly. In Richmond, census tracts show great variation in these factors depending on location. This means that where a person is born can determine how long they are likely to live. Differences in life expectancy across race, gender, and social class are significant. Data show that tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use occur at higher rates among men, as do high-risk behaviors (Pinkhasov et al. 2010). All of these behaviors are more common in lower socioeconomic communities. Life expectancy varies by up to 20 years for males and females combined across all census tracts.

Food Access

Areas with limited or no access to healthy, plentiful food are known as food deserts and can be indicators of poor health. Half of Richmond's census tracts qualify as food deserts. The availability of healthy food differs between neighborhoods, and these differences have a tendency to be associated with race and income (Powell et al. 2007). The obstacles to food access facing these neighborhoods include income, distance, and quality of food.

Mental Health

While there is a lack of data related to Richmond, studies show almost a quarter million adults in Virginia live with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Though many adults who are mentally ill, have substance use disorders, or are developmentally disabled live throughout Virginia, according to the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority, "Richmond remains the most vulnerable behavioral health community in Virginia, with regionally the highest rates of poverty, academic under-achievement, violent crime, health disparity, and homelessness" (RBHA 2015).

In their *Executive Summary* of local *Community Health Needs Assessments*, the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association identified behavioral health as the second most reported healthcare concern in Virginia (VHHA 2016). Engaging Richmond, The Center on Society and Health's community-engaged research team, found that mental health was the foremost concern among Richmond residents interviewed in a year-long community-based needs assessment. Amid many associated problems, residents identified "a lack of available and consistent services that are culturally appropriate for different groups of people" (Zimmerman 2016).

Historically in Virginia and specifically in Richmond, state budgets have focused on funding institutions rather than community-based services. The National Association of State Mental Health Providers ranks Virginia 9th in the country for spending on hospital-based care but a low 39th in spending on community-based care for services such as outpatient therapy, counseling, psychosocial treatment, case management, and programs that assist in stability and recovery (NAMI Virginia). In addition to lacking services, this population tends to be poor, uninsured, and unable to find work, leaving them with lots of free time but without community-based services to productively fill it.

Over half of Virginians served by the public mental health system are unemployed or out of the workforce. Individuals seeking employment face many barriers. Stigma held by the public or by the person with mental illness inhibits both applicants and employers. Coupled with a lack of job training and/or communication skills, the likelihood of relapse makes it difficult for these individuals to hold down steady work.

PART II

The designer's role in social activism can often feel minuscule in comparison to the issues and problems that their designs are asked to address. An underlying sentiment of ineffectiveness is at the heart of many designers' ambivalence toward social design. Under the old model of design that occurred in a more rigidly defined and closed system, the designer's role in these situations might seem tenuous. However, the emerging framework of Relational Design combined with evidence-based practices – the conscientious use of best evidence in making decisions – can offer demonstrable improvement.

When faced with such serious and sizable issues as the health inequities in Richmond, the challenge traditionally offered to the designer is that of translator from client to audience. Being an arbiter was often the only role to be played by the social designer. The field of design has since expanded. Because of my involvement with Recovery by Design, I have learned how to apply contexts to design thinking to contribute beyond the creation of form and appearance and to venture into the realm of systems and experiences.

While working with RBD, I developed systems in the form of curricula. I needed to be mindful of the mixed physical and mental ability of the participants. The classes would be a combination of craft and design thinking. I decided to focus on activities that incorporate repetitive motion (an early inkling of flow), materiality, and outcomes that showcase the creativity and uniqueness of the participants. As the designer of social interactions, I make sure to create classes that also engage with the community to help facilitate interaction and reduce stigma. One of the programs I created was a stamping class focused on recognizing emotional states.

I came up with the idea of using a set of stamps that could be rearranged to create faces expressing a range of emotions. The stamped faces conveyed emotions as interpreted by the individual students.

In the actual workshop, students and volunteers were paired up in groups of two to play a game. I intended the game be a playful way to randomize content generation, and stimulate emotive conversations. It also functions as an icebreaker, adding structure and focus to an activity. When the focus is on fun it offsets the discomfort that might arise from engaging in an intimate conversation about feelings with a stranger, or their apprehension about engaging in creative activities for the very first time.

Before starting the game, participants were asked to make two four-sided simple shape stamps and use them interchangeably to make various emotive faces. No type of stamp is specified, but typically they are not very complex due to the constraints of the materials. After stamp making has concluded, I add a surprise. I direct each to switch stamps with their partner, giving them a chance to utilize forms other than their own. This exercise showed how a formal but open framework, sprinkled with the magic of chance, can create diverse visual outcomes through participation and social interaction.

The participants then took portions of their designs and created repeating patterns with them. The patterns were incorporated into improvised fabric printing tools that I assembled out of natural or salvaged materials that were easier to use and more affordable than conventional tools. In a following workshop, participants were able to learn three types of fabric printing skills, two of which utilized improvised tools, and all of which incorporated the students' artwork. Since then, the fabric has played a role in subsequent workshops where garments were designed, fabric was dyed, repaired, etc.

Including constraints in the definition of these projects offers guidance to those participating, but predominantly the clients are the co-designers, who provide the content and context for the work during the process. Each workshop is designed to employ certain tools, substrates, processes, and prompts. Constraints moderate visual characteristics. Limitations also stimulate ingenuity. By providing frameworks for participation that are closed enough to reduce apprehension yet flexible enough to allow for creativity, I can quiet the "I can'ts" and instill creative confidence. Individual outcomes develop into personalized expressions, which add to a body of cohesive work for the group.

An important aspect of the program is the destigmatization that occurs as a result of interaction between client and volunteer. People who may not normally meet face to face are able to work side by side to learn and have positive experiences together. Workshops provide a chance for participants to be part of a group and a team, to work toward a common goal of engaging in collaborative design, and to be part of a community formed by the entire group. Volunteers gain an understanding of recovery from intimate experiences with people. Clients are able to shed negative labels as they adopt the identity of designer. 'Client' and 'volunteer' become 'student' and 'classmate,' who then bond as 'co-designers.' Recovery by Design creates its own culture by offering a sense of belonging to all. This is where the recovery in Recovery by Design happens. It is in the hands-on work of a project that feeds the intellect and the human interaction that is nourishing to the spirit.

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Alber's design philosophy stresses the importance of experiencing and working directly with materials. She identifies that problems in society arise due to humanity's estrangement from materials. She also points out that the imposition of authority on individuals, be it through expertise or manufacturing, results in a dependence under which experimentation and invention languishes. The essay also asserts the proper ways to teach craft.

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This manifesto argues that contemporary society must become more resourceful and that design will be fundamental to closing the gap between our behavior and our aspirations towards sustainability and social justice. The skillsets and knowledge possessed by designers make them uniquely positioned to create a more resourceful society.

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Ewald details her experience teaching photography to children to express themselves in a guide for teachers on the curriculum and methods she used to create engagement and participation in the creative process.

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Originally published in 1972, this design manifesto celebrates 'making do.' *Adhocism* identifies and encourages using salvaged, re-appropriated materials as egalitarian, sustainable, innovative, and witty acts of improvised creation.

Kapitan, Lynn. *Introduction to Art Therapy Research*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.

This book is an overview of the contemporary precedents and framework for research. It is a useful and accessible guide to the methods of evaluating the efficacy of creative interventions designed to be therapeutic.

Korn, Peter. *Why We Make Things and Why it Matters: The Education of a Craftsman*. London: Vintage, 2015.

This book has an autobiographical perspective on making. Korn proposes continued acts of craft as a process of self-transformation.

Miller, Lulu, Hanna Rosin, and Alix Spiegel. "The Problem with the Solution." *Invisibilia (audio blog),* 2016. <http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/483855073/the-problem-with-the-solution>

This radio segment compares the American medical system's approach to mental illness, which is to 'fix,' with the small town of Geel, Belgium, which takes a community care approach. It examines the pitfalls and consequences of the impulse to quick fix social problems. The episode concludes that mental illness is a lifelong continuum that is not to be fixed, but rather understood and accepted. The most holistic approach to mental illness is the reduction of stigma and reintegration into society.

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This is a complete history and philosophy of the short-lived but never-the-less influential educational institution, all in one book. Black Mountain College was an experimental model of education rooted in manual work, trade, materials, cross-disciplinary art, and the belief that all people have creative potential.

Sanders, Elizabeth, and Pieter Jan Stappers. C*onvivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*. Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2013.

The book presents a model of research that runs parallel to my thesis. This approach involves users in the process of design, is generative, and provides tools to participants.

Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. London: Penguin Books, 2009.

The book explores the relationship between thinking and making, or thinking as making. Sennett provides an overview of the philosophical arguments that historically divided thinking and making and the political and ethical consequences.

Assessment

I was lucky to be involved with Recovery by Design prior to starting my thesis. Having the program's existing structure in place was advantageous. Clinicians, resources, and participants were set up. Had there not been a group of supportive people involved already, this endeavor would have been impossible to accomplish alongside my other graduate work.

The scope of my thesis has had drawbacks as well as many benefits. It not only informed me as a designer and a future professor, but it also has implications that broaden the field of design. As a designer, I designed spaces and fabricated tools on a shoestring budget. As a pedagogue, I developed engaging generative systems for workshop prompts that were open enough for varied participation but closed enough to instill a sense of creative confidence and relevance. My research on play enabled me to incorporate games to create meaningful social interactions between strangers. My teaching ethos has developed into an emphasis on process as generative research with a focus on engagement with materials and people as a means of generating communicative knowledge within the individual as well as the group.

Practicing designers who have experienced the satisfaction of praxis may not argue the theory that design is therapy, or that it promotes well-being, but this is certainly not mainstream concept either. One of my stronger arguments is how different–yet related–design is from art therapy.

Thanks

No one does anything alone.

MFAs are ridiculous, and the last two years have been a trying experience that I would not have gotten through without the help and support of many people. I would like to thank...

Jamie Mahoney for helping or letting me 'figure it out' as needed, even on nights and weekends, and for going above and well beyond advising duties in support of the Recovery by Design program. The Richmond Behavioral Health Authority for their advocacy, particularly Laura Minnick, Jim May, Kate Boyles, and Dawn Farrell-Moore. Recovery by Design participants, you have been my light and have taught me so much. Lindsay Hall for being my unofficial IRB advisor. Storefront for Community Design, who is Ryan Rinn, for trusting me with Recovery by Design and continuous use of the space. John Malinoski for being my instigator, and introducing me to Recovery by Design. Joseph Walsh for being quick with an ear and an edit. The Center on Society and Health for teaching me about public health, offering me an assistantship, as well as providing a non-conceptual setting to remind me of what's real and important. My boss, Sarah Simon, for being cool as fuck. Amy Ford for proofreading. Roy McKelvey, Derek Chapman, John Mahoney, Samuel Jason Adkins, Kerrie Harlow, Miranda Leung, Thomas Kennedy, Eric Johnson, and the staff at VCU Library's Innovative Media Workshop. My grandparents, Jocelyn Reiter and Morris Ellison, for their support and wise words. Jason Ford deserves an honorary MFA for keeping me alive with waffles, always lightening the mood, tirelessly helping me, and for being my best friend. I will do my best to pay it forward.

This thesis is dedicated to these folks and all kind weirdos that make the world a more magical, interesting, just, and altogether livable place.

Mind

Mind
Design as Therapy

Part of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University

Cassandra Jane Ellison

This thesis is documented in five books – this is the second. Book I covers over arching themes, framework, and the Richmond-based context of the work. It also serves as an introduction to my work. **Book II explores the concept of design as therapy and discusses efforts to enhance aspects of design that promote well-being in the Recovery by Design program.** Book III describes the benefits of physical tools, methods, and materials for the practice of design. It includes an essay on improvisation which outlines the history of craft in the United States including the disappearance of manual skills and the emergence of contemporary maker movements. It builds a case for all types of creativity that make use of what is at hand. Book IV situates my thesis in the context of Conditional and Transformation Design while providing a brief overview of design history. Book V is a photo essay that illustrates the content of this thesis related to the Recovery by Design program.

contents

Introduction

Design, like psychotherapy, is a tool used to understand as well as overcome problems. Anecdotal observations of the Recovery by Design program suggest that design can be used as a therapeutic technique or tool for adults who have mental illness, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders. Design is used to solve problems and create, but it can also be used as a type of therapy that aids in the process of recovery. Like art therapy, design, when practiced by hand offers a similarly therapeutic making process. Community engagement and materiality combined with the processes of design can produce therapeutic and destigmatizing effects. When multi-faceted design activities take place in a public workshop setting, they supplement pro-social behavior among all participants – those in recovery or community volunteers who assist in the work. I examine the mental, physical, and social effects that result when people collectively practice design by hand in a publicly situated workshop setting.

My work with Recovery by Design is centered around interaction and materiality – as essential not only to the design process but also to subjective well-being. The ability to create is a powerful experience. What we can learn and gain from it is both emotional and practical. Through shaping materials we learn how we might shape the world around us. Carrying that knowledge with us, we solve problems with our bodies and our minds.

Design as Therapy

The term 'therapy' has a multiple meanings. In a traditional sense the word is associated with clinical practice and therefore, when labeled as such, bears the burden of proof backed by science. 'Well-being' is not an interchangeable word for 'therapy' – they are related but different. Therapy is an action, while well-being is a state of mind. Perhaps the term 'therapeutic' is a better descriptor than 'therapy' for the purpose of my argument. It can be read as presently experiencing a benefit from something, rather than simply having received a treatment in the past. To understand therapy as something experienced rather than something that is received may seem like splitting hairs, but hidden in the semantics is the notion of autonomy over authority – that people can have and even create their own therapeutic experiences outside of clinical settings. In a general sense, 'care' encompasses a holistic view rather than the old-fashioned medical model of 'therapy as cure' (Duckworth).

There exists a theoretical and scientific opposition to the long-held misconception that a person can be cured. The newer, progressive belief is of recovery as a continuum (Duckworth). The takeaway is that while advancing betterment is possible, there is no cure. The closest thing to a cure is understanding and acceptance that none exists. Under the continuum model of understanding, then, therapy can take the form of ongoing engagement in soothing activities that create understanding and acceptance within the self and others.

If this model is true, mental health needs can be addressed using other means than clinical therapy. Alternative methods to the development of well-being can be explored. I suggest that designing and creating objects physically helps produce not only self-confidence but a sense of self. A sense of well-being can be attained in part through craft, community, and making by hand (see *Book III, Touch*.) In addition to the benefits to cognition and self-awareness, making provides an outlet for the expression of personal experience. Self-expression through creative activities makes meaning and builds understanding for the maker and the audience. Thus, the act of communication becomes positive and therapeutic.

Herbert Simon, in his book *Sciences of the Artificial,* astutely described the way that simply engaging in the thinking that accompanies the design process can be enjoyable. Conceiving of alternative and better outcomes can create positive emotional experiences:

Closely related to the notion that new goals may emerge from creating designs is the idea that one goal of planning may be the design activity itself. The act of envisioning possibilities and elaborating them is itself a pleasurable and valuable experience. Just as realized plans may be a source of new experiences, so new prospects are opened up at each step in the process of design. Designing is a kind of mental window shopping. Purchases do not have to be made to get pleasure from it. ...One can envisage a future, however, in which our main interest in both science and design will lie in what they teach us about the world and not in what they allow us to do to the world. Design like science is a tool for understanding as well as for acting (Simon 1996, 164).

Gestalt psychology posits that the self is discovered through contact with the boundaries between the self, the other, and the environment. Building awareness through autonomous yet interconnected physical interactions or tacit dialogues defines the self. Disengagement from contact boundaries between the self and other is thought to cause

emotional disturbances leading to a lack of identity. To follow this theory, not only are diverse interactions with people therapeutic, but also engagement with the physical world and the materials in it. It is true that Gestalt psychology has been criticized for relying on theory more than data, however its basic premises about perception and interaction can be found throughout aesthetic philosophy, educational curricula, and scientifically substantiated research, such as the emerging knowledge on 'embodied cognition.'

Part of the Reggio Emilia approach* to education is that raw materials spark curiosity, discovery, play, etc. Most of the things we encounter are designed with a specificity and therefore a finality to them. For that reason, most things (i.e. experiences, environments, objects) lack the gap that invites imagination or reinterpretation. Our interactions are stunted. Without the impetus for play we do not discover the boundary of possibility. Therefore, creative alternatives resulting from these discoveries – like repurposing objects and spacial interventions – are not only astounding and inventive but they can also be considered therapeutic.

Fun is of course beneficial to people of all ages, but playing in our material world does more than simply create enjoyable experiences. Friedrich Schiller's aesthetic concepts proclaimed that aesthetic play is a foundational human urge with the power to emancipate. "To play with aesthetics is an attempt at breaking free from the burden of necessity, as, when exposed to beauty, a man expands his freedom and is stimulated to action. It is an art which calls for change in the world instead of simply remaining in the realm of immaterial contemplation" (Wright 2016).

While creative problem-solving and working with materials can be therapeutic, they are facets of the larger experience of making. *Praxis,* the act of bringing something into being, refers to the practice of making from beginning to end. From shaping things we learn how we might shape our own lives and the world around us.

According to Gardner (1990), craft entails intuitive learning, which occurs in the craft process as a result of evaluation and skill acquisition. In this way, the craft maker can express and work through his or her feelings in an active manner and simultaneously develop his or her own skills while taking steps toward finding a solution . Tubbs and Drake (2007) have argued that succeeding in a concrete activity may result in strengthening the individual emotionally. More specifically, they argue that through the design process or the process of handling, assembling, and forming raw materials, crafting can help individuals to realise that they can also positively affect and order their own lives (Pöllänen 61).

The end of the above quote begins to touch on many research findings that show additional intellectual-, educational-, and empathy-promoting benefits of engaging in art and design. Sternberg, as quoted in Emmanuel et al. (2010), "points out that creativeness is an important aspect of 'successful intelligence'. Through creativeness the ability to redefine problems, analyse solutions, sell solutions, overcome obstacles, tolerate ambiguity and maintain a sense of perspective and humour are promoted...One needs creative skills and dispositions to generate ideas, analytical skills and dispositions" (2008, 721). Creativity, specifically design and craft, has benefits that extend beyond the emotional. With such diverse benefits comes betterment.

*Reggio Emilia is a pedagogy developed by psychologist Loris Malaguzzi following World War II, who wanted to rebuild a better society though the education and empowerment of children. Reggio Emilia introduces children to materials as early as possible. Through physical exchanges, bonds form with natural materials, which are key to fostering and valuing a place of inquiry and self-discovery. Emphasizing materials in education is not a new concept. For example, Montessori, Constructionism, and makerspaces are also built on material curriculums, just to name a few.

Art Therapy vs. Design Therapy

In her book *Introduction to Art Therapy Research,* Lynn Kapitan summarizes the primary method of art therapy, which is to "activate the process of creation in the therapeutic environment followed by critical reflection. This basic method when applied to the context of therapy differentiates art therapists from other artists as well as from other kinds of therapists" (Kapitan 2014).

Cathy Malchioti, former editor of *The Journal of Art Therapy,* has noted that art therapy acknowledges that there is some therapeutic effect gained from the process of image making, but its clinical and research practice is preoccupied with the psychological assessment of the images created. "Important though the focus on the study of art images may be, the profession has produced little empirical research on the therapeutic end of the continuum or 'the process it takes to make art images, the interchange between art therapist and art maker, and most importantly why, when and how art making is healing'" (Malchiodi 1998).

One problem with art therapy, especially in terms of assessing therapeutic value, is that of the privileged relationships between the art therapist and the art maker based on the "examiner as expert" (Malchiodi 2000). This dynamic is at odds with the "therapeutic stance that supports a non-judgmental exchange between therapist and clients where neither hold a monopoly on truth or objectivity" (Malchiodi 2000). Inversely the "client as expert" (Spaniol 1998) could not only contribute to a more therapeutic environment, but also provide new research inquiries that could yield user-centered data to better assess the therapeutic experience of art-making.

Design as a therapeutic intervention is different in that it removes the psychological assessment, and hierarchical relationship that exists between client and therapist. In many ways the role of facilitator in a design process that is meant to be trans-formative is akin to the values espoused by Gestalt coaches Dorothy Siminovitch and Ann Van Eron:

The client is regarded from the start to be functioning as a whole, healthy, and resourceful entity with respect to environmental conditions. This attitude differentiates the activity of coaching from that of 'therapy,' which traditionally construes the client to be in some manner deficient and in need of regulated remediation. Gestalt coaching eschews 'therapeutic,' remedial problem-solving, accepting instead the premise that the client already possesses the necessary resources to meet their needs and achieve their goals. Another differentiation between therapy and Gestalt coaching can be seen in the conception of resistance as an adaptive and positive force that serves a protective function for the client; resistance must not be 'overcome' or eradicated, but rather brought into awareness and worked through in a way that enables the client to recognize its constructive function and to re-channel its energy as a support in the current situation (Siminovitch 2006).

Art therapy has existed as a practice since the mid-20th century. My research indicates that 'design therapy' has efficacy and numerous advantages, which will be outlined in the following pages.

DESIGN THERAPY

ART THERAPY

DESIGN

RECOVERY BY DESIGN

Art Therapy

Clinical

Assessment of art by therapist

Artwork used in diagnosis

Doctor/patient > expert/client dynamic

Employs transference

Works of art remain private

Criticized for not putting enough emphasis on the artistic value and meaning of the artist's works, considering them only from a medical perspective

Art based assessments: prescriptive prompts that tell clients what subject matter to render — draw, paint, etc. i.e. "Draw a house, a tree, and a person"

Predetermined criteria for interpreting the work

Design Therapy (overlap)

Tools and/or techniques

Semiotics

Meaning-making

Mindfulness

Visual thinking

Facilitating the process of creation

Showing your work, solving problems through the act of "working it out" physically, visual articulation, self-awareness, reflective/ reflexive introspection

Just starting to view making as a process of sensory-based learning and visual thinking (elliot eisner, P Allen 1995 art is a way of knowing, S. McNiff/ Kingsley 1998 Art-based research, B.L. Moon 1995 existential art therapy: the canvas mirror, L. Wix 1995 the intern studio: a pilot study

Design

Design thinking

Open frameworks

Conditional

Offers tools and techniques for communication, and problem-solving. (marketable and [inter]personal skills)

Pragmatic and applied skills

Utilitarian outcomes

Prompts to create designs: re-interpretation and/or stylization by the individual encouraged

Invention

Recovery by Design

Recovery by Design is design-based, not art therapy.

Partnership with RBHA provides clinical oversight of programming, practitioner participation, and ongoing access for students.

An emphasis on programming that seeks to provide making processes and materials which have a positive therapeutic effect on the client.

Working with the behavioral health community allows RBD to establish real and meaningful performance metrics.

We offer a way for people to make income who are historically have difficulty to finding or holding employment.

The program costs little to run — no overhead, access to supplies, free transportation.

Low-cost production allows RBD to make good design more accessible and more profit goes back to the makers.

Partnership with mOb studios creates applied service-learning opportunities for young designers to serve community and become part of the solution to create the future they wish to see.

RBD bolsters the design discipline and furthers the quality/innovation of design through partnerships and residencies with up-and-coming designers who benefit from being given creative freedom.

We provide a safe space for clients to come in and work on projects outside of regularly scheduled programming.

We help destigmatize mental illness by:

Facilitating social interactions that bring clients into a publicly accessible studio to work alongside designers, faculty, and volunteers;

Bringing the client into the role of creator and empowering them to be at the center of a process/and or event;

Exhibiting the client's work, stories, and outcomes to the community.

The public at large benefits from experiencing the outcomes of Recovery by Design in the short term—at an exhibition—and long-term—living with items—that offer destigmatized images of and exposure to mental illness.

RBD brings stigmatized populations out of the dark and into public spaces.

More widespread uses of these and other educational programs helps to normalize mental illness, reduce stigma, and provide creative coping tools to clients.

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Design + Well-being
in the Recovery by Design Program

Recovery by Design makes design an impetus for mental health treatment through human expression. The program demonstrates how design can be used as a tool of communication, inclusion, and empowerment for clients in the design process. In a series of classes, workshops, and openings, the program brings the client into the role of creator. Clients shed labels in favor of embracing a creative concept of themselves. As they walk through the door, they are able to step into a new identity, reinforced by designer peers, which empowers them to be at the center of the process and/or event. To be a venue for creative exploration, workshops must accommodate personal discovery and experimentation. Participants are given the freedom to be, do, and make whatever they like with the use of open-ended frameworks. Providing a safe space creates a sense of trust, which builds creative confidence. The development of 'creative confidence' or 'competence' has been shown to benefit lifelong education and clinical performance, help heal or prevent mental health conditions, and achieve "improvement of individual and collective welfare" (Chacón-López et al. 2016, 69).

RBD starts with a marriage between design and handcraft as a foundation to its practice. "Craft comprises design and fabrication processes in which only hand-controlled machines are used and the action is based on making items by hand" (Gardner 1990, as quoted in Pöllänen 2015, 60). Emotional themes and prompts are added to the process that activate social and physical interaction. Even without the topics, the making process has its own positive outcomes. Creative problem-solving, empathy, self-reliance, planning, and collaboration are just a few of the valuable skills we learn when we engage in design. Handmaking, like the type once done in shop class, "has come to be associated with hands-on and problem-based learning, design and systems thinking, technological knowhow, and a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude, all of which are seen as skills inherent to creating a 'culture of innovation'" (Barba 2015, 79).

Function is a primary objective of design processes. Clients produce tangible and utilitarian outcomes to which function and usefulness are associated, counteracting stereotypical narratives about mental illness. The program reduces stigma by offering a creative outlet of communication with the larger community through public socialization and display of designed products. Workshops give inactive and chronically introverted people the chance to get up, out, learn, and do together. It encourages self-discovery rather than directed breakthroughs. Recovery by Design empowers the participant to become the designer of tangible designed objects over which they feel a sense of ownership.

In her extensive 2015 research study, "Elements of Craft that Enhance Well-Being" Sinnikka Pöllänen outlines the significance of physical processes and artifacts. Many wellness-promoting aspects of crafting that research participants cited were specifically related to physical engagement: working with raw materials and the control of one's body during the process (58). The significance of the resulting physical artifact is that it "strengthened the feeling of success. The data revealed that all kind of crafts, such as learning a new technique by using ready-made instructions, making variations to a pre-existing pattern or self-designing a project, elicited a feeling of success. Success in making something by hand was experienced as rewarding on such a deep level that it created a desire to repeat the endeavour" (Pöllänen 2015, 67). Great for craft, but how does design figure in?

Pöllänen found that "craft makers who were interested in design-based crafts, in particular, described their knowledge and skills acquisition. Both the self-expressive creative activities and making an artefact with a new technique or a previously unknown material required a complicated learning process with experimentation and testing" (2015, 70).

Recovery by Design builds creative connections between very unlikely collaborators. Projects and promotional materials focused on destigmatizing mental illness are created directly by students. Additional design outcomes result from mOb (VCU student) collaborations inspired by or building upon outcomes created by RBHA clients in workshops. These include posters, publications, and products for display and dissemination. The outcomes of year-round mOb+Storefront services to Recovery by Design bolster the mission and bring public attention to the organization with high quality design and promotional activities–in part created by those in recovery–furthering a destigmatized image of mental health.

The program incorporates design teaching principles as a way to encourage participants to use design to visually communicate with others. While outcomes are an important part of our goals of empowerment and communication, this thesis and program emphasize the act of making alongside themes that tie the process to exploring one's own emotions (like using a set of shapes to articulate different feelings) or metaphors of healing (like treating repair as beautification by overt rather than hidden mending). Central to the program is the emphasis on handcraft and materiality for a therapeutic effect in making. Analog design methods have been the foundation of art and design education since the Bauhaus, and craft has been shown to benefit our creativity and well-being (Wilson 2015).

In designing the workshop curriculum I developed a making process that is therapeutic for the students. Prompts were designed to show how both negative and positive emotions could be used to produce positive outcomes and also utilize making techniques that have the calming effect of rhythmic motion. Aside from making, additional therapeutic benefits are gained through positive social interaction with outside participants while building community within the group. Prior to my involvement, students had worked on their own, spread about the room at cubicle-like desks. Rearrangement of the workshop space and the people in it connected students more closely to volunteers by pairing them up in teams and seating them together. Working in a better social and physical environment helps build knowledge collectively. Recovery by Design offers meaningful opportunities for students to interact with each other, visitors, and the outside world.

The RBD workshops of the Spring 2016 session provided skills and materials needed for students to make fabric that could be made into beautiful and functional products. The curriculum was designed to intertwine themes such as social interaction, emotional awareness, and therapeutic making techniques to help develop pro-social communication and coping skills. The textile-based outcomes, which are highly marketable as fashion or home goods, are conceived to possibly create additional sources of income for people who historically have difficulty finding and holding down jobs. It is hoped that they will have a therapeutic as well as economic benefit for the clients in the future.

Art therapy emphasizes making but it focuses on the individual as subject, and does not attempt to mediate the external factors and attitudes of the community that lead

to isolation, most prominently stigma. Stigma can be both real and perceived. When stigma is perceived, it is referred to as 'self-stigma' regardless of whether the internalized prejudice is experienced consciously or subconsciously.

Earlier in this book I talk about the concept of the 'recovery continuum,' which emphasizes destigmatization as a long-term, large-scale cultural intervention for betterment. By adjusting cultural attitudes to become more accepting and understanding of mental illness and/or substance abuse, it reduces the shame that creates barriers to support, integration, and services. One significant way of reducing stigma is for interaction to occur between people who are and are not struggling with behavioral health issues. Exposure erases misconceptions and creates empathy on both sides. The broader mission of the RBD program is to seek to reduce the harm of stigma through community engagement. It is also worth noting that I found no other precedents for this program or its unique design methodology.

Art in Mind, based in Nottingham, England, is the closest program I have found to Recovery by Design in its community-based interventions. Stickley and Duncan's 2007 evaluation of Art in Mind found that it was able to create benefits very similar to RBD's aims. "Art in Mind can assist people to experience a greater sense of belonging to a community, to create new friendships and feel empowered to tackle stigma and discrimination themselves, and to experience increased self-esteem" (Stickley and Duncan 2007, 29).

An important part of the intervention is to take clients out of their daily insular lives by providing social engagement and reconnection with the physical environment, resulting in decreased chronic introversion. By bringing in members of the community to participate in the program as volunteers there are two aims. Firstly to increase empathy and reduce the volunteer's stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness through exposure by interacting with client participants. Secondly, the hope is for the client participants to benefit from not only the social interaction and its subsequent social-skill building with people outside of their peer group, but also through working together on creative projects and developing confidence in their abilities as well as making connections that show that they have things in common.

Another method of destigmatizing those that experience behavioral health issues is to make their work visible to the community. Recovery by Design delivers tangible design outcomes that promote positive evidence of recovery and mental illness. Using utilitarian design prompts, RBHA clients work directly with designer(s) to create and build out products in the workshops. By developing and exhibiting outcomes, the program further destigmatizes mental illness by showcasing the positive impacts design has on individual recovery. The public at large benefits from experiencing the outcomes of Recovery by Design (at a gallery or in their homes) that demonstrate the value of the clients served and seeing the effects of destigmatization that result.

Exposure to so-called 'outsider art' (because its makers are not technically trained) provides not only an opportunity to create empathy but also offers alternative narratives and unconventional approaches to aesthetics. Blomqvist et al. (2007) examined the use of client art to teach Finnish health professionals about the feelings of loneliness among seniors. Findings revealed that by viewing artwork of the elderly population they worked with, they gained a deeper understanding about loneliness and its various aspects, which increased empathy and their ability for reflection. Prince et al. (2007), as quoted in

Emmanuel, found that nurses guided through aesthetic inquiry "develop[ed] a better understanding of themselves and of the human experience of others" (Emmanuel 2010, 720). In a 2016 outsider-art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw entitled "Why We Have Wars" that examined the evolving ways we are beginning to perceive difference through visual form, currators Katarzyna Karwanska and Zofia Płoska concluded the show's write-up by deftly challenging the 'naïve' label typically thrust onto the work of untrained artists. "In the face of major crises of the contemporary era, the distinct critical voices of outsiders appear rather as non-naïve–in a naïve, technologically advanced society, but certainly not in a wiser world" (Karwanska 2016).

Virginia, where the Recovery by Design program is based, specifically lacks programs and services for behavioral health. The population tends to be poor, uninsured, and unable to find work. These individuals have lots of free time but without community-based services to productively fill that time. Over half of Virginians served by the public mental health system are unemployed or out of the workforce. Individuals seeking employment face many barriers. Stigma held by the public or by the person with mental illness inhibits both applicants and employers. Coupled with lack of job training and/or communication skills, the likelihood of relapse makes it difficult to hold down steady work. This population would benefit from access to daytime activities and alternative opportunities for income. Providing programming for this population doesn't just benefit them but everyone in the community. Offering folks not just a place to go but a place to learn, heal, and work is the optimal solution.

Activity or employment-based interventions are well-researched and established in the fields of *occupational therapy* and *recreational therapy;* the former aptly enough was influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement (Levine 1987). Leisure activities have demonstrated ability to promote positive mental health and prevent problem behaviour (Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005). According to Iso-Ahola and Mannell (2004), as quoted in Pöllänen, "the opportunity to be involved in self-chosen leisure activity increases well-being and life satisfaction while also potentially reducing psychological discomfort, depression, and anxiety. Leisure activities may help to provide meaning by allowing individuals to have experiences of empowerment" (2015, 61). Horghagen's occupational therapy study found that simply participating in crafts in a group setting provided stability and routines people with mental illness that supported management of daily occupations and aided in the recovery process (Horghagen, Fostvedt, & Alsaker, 2014).

Over the four years the Recovery by Design program has been offered, RBHA has seen popularity for the program increase amongst their clients. Participants were excited to take any class offered, inquired about future classes often, and looked forward to it all year. This enthusiasm is indicative of a larger desire to take part in something. Most people want to participate in constructive activities–work that is meaningful and fulfilling. This population is no different.

There is no other design therapy precedent I have found which utilizes design as a therapeutic and empowering tool, teaches interpersonal and handcraft skills, offers daily flexible workspace, works to destigmatize mental illness through social interaction, and attempts to create future opportunities for economically and socially marginalized producers and designers. Design therapy has the potential to break new ground in the field of mental health.

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Touch
Design as Materiality

Part of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University

Cassandra Jane Ellison

This thesis is documented in five books – this is the third. Book I covers overarching themes, framework, and the Richmond-based context of the work. It also serves as an introduction to my work. Book II explores the concept of design as therapy and discusses efforts to enhance aspects of design that promote well-being in the Recovery by Design program. **Book III describes the benefits of physical tools, methods, and materials for the practice of design. It includes an essay on improvisation, which outlines the history of craft in the United States including the disappearance of manual skills and the emergence of contemporary maker movements. It builds a case for all types of creativity that make use of what is at hand.** Book IV situates my thesis in the context of Conditional and Transformation Design while providing a brief overview of design history. Book V is a photo essay that illustrates the content of this thesis related to the Recovery by Design program.

contents

Introduction

As a designer, I prefer to work with objects and materials that already have their own presence. Materials implemented during the design process can be considered active participants in the formation of outcomes. Materials inform both designer when working and audience when viewing the work. Instead of dominating a process or interaction, a designer gets creative benefits to giving up some control to the materiality of the form. Working with materials and with the hands provides unique benefits to the designer and non-designer alike, and to what they create. A synopsis of theories related to tactility and knowledge production is presented. It touches on embodied cognition, experiential learning, tacit knowledge, educational models, and enumerates the cognitive, emotional, and physical 'perks' from engaging with materials.

Design as Materiality

I believe that working with our hands is essential to learning, problem solving, and well-being. We are better able to understand our world when we actively engage with its physical properties. Through working with materials, a person gains experiential and tacit knowledge that is unachievable by any other means. The Reggio Emilia* approach is founded on this concept, and the curriculum at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College reinforced the importance of working with materials as foundational to design. I'd argue that this is also foundational to our being. The transition from skilled worker to knowledge worker not only atrophies our bodies, but also weakens our minds.

Materiality and analog processes are an integral part of my work. Materials can be used in design to aid in the transmission of ideas in ways that are sometimes overt and sometimes subconscious – but almost always compelling. Some of the most impressive work I've ever seen – those that are witty, provocative, and mesmerizing – is made when the form is determined by or considered a part of the content. I am interested in how materiality adds to the communication of ideas, how it transforms the message, and adds another layer of meaning, not simply how it can be utilized in form-making.

Using an anthropological lens there are fascinating things to learn about people and places by studying their objects and the techniques and materials used to make them. "Much of our human intelligence results from our ability to construct artifacts" (Norman 2007 7). Historically and cross-culturally, design is shaped by many factors (values, climate, resources) and its process, evident in the form of its outcomes, can be viewed as an encyclopedia of problem-solving techniques. While people solve similar problems differently, the best solution is not always popularized or remains relatively unknown when political or corporate interests stand in the way. I often find inventions that individuals have made are valuable and useful. Not only do I find that concept interesting but also a very valuable place to look for ideas.

In my own work, making with my hands provides many benefits to my practice. It informs the process by providing constraints as I get to know a material, learning how it behaves and hopefully developing a mastery of it. There is a sense of accomplishment from relating, improvisation, and realization is one that I could never get from working digitally. While adding the analog processes to my toolkit, I am always on the lookout for simple, elegant, low-tech design solutions.

*Reggio Emilia is a pedagogy developed by psychologist Loris Malaguzzi following World War II, who wanted to rebuild a better society though the education and empowerment of children. Reggio Emilia introduces children to materials as early as possible. Through physical exchanges, bonds form with natural materials, which are key to fostering and valuing a place of inquiry and self-discovery. Emphasizing materials in education is not a new concept. For example, Montessori, Constructionism, and makerspaces, are also built on material curriculums, just to name a few.

Grasping the Material

Material educates the user. Though a tacit dialogue, it lets the maker know what is possible. The properties that the material exhibits are means by which it indicates how it should be formed. Through its physicality, the material communicates its potential, as part of a collaborative process. It also indicates how it can be directed to inform others. Using material as a medium, one can experience the confidence that comes from shaping and changing a space. The physical world is literally manipulated by designers, allowing them agency through the making process.

Learning comes through experience and experience is best processed as interaction. Handling, moving, shaping, and changing objects teaches the user what is known about an object and how it functions. Physical interaction with materials, or at least the aesthetic experiences that derive from hands-on manipulation of materials, can positively influence the creative process (Karana, Pedgley, and Rognoli 2013, 17). Richard Sennett says, "Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding" (Sennett 2009, 9). This is where the material speaks to the shaper, guiding their decision-making process: hands on making, informed by form.

How material teaches

Understanding that material can change perspective, Howard Risatti writes, "materials have a social life, a social existence, if you will, in the sense that they help shape how we see and understand the world, the things in it, and our relationship to these things" (Risatti 2007, 185). As a result, materiality can make viewers think and reflect upon cultural and social issues where the viewer becomes an active participant in touching and viewing the artifacts (Beno 2015, 38). Stefan Sagmeister notes, "I'm attracted to materials in graphic design because they allow you to make something that involves the viewer" (Street and Ferdinand 2001, 89). By acting as a medium for knowledge, physical objects impart information to the participants, both maker and viewer.

What material teaches

What is experienced from materiality is a sense of calm, similar to meditation. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes this phenomenon as 'flow': a few moments in time when you are so completely absorbed by an activity that nothing else seems to matter. Flow, Csikszentmihalyi says, is the secret to happiness (Wilson 2015). However, you don't get the same effect from digital sources (Jabr 2013). In addition to flow, studies suggest that we better comprehend and remember information we encounter through physical objects (Jabr 2013).

Listening to your body

Your body wants to move, touch, handle, manipulate, and explore. It is vital to the learning process that one is allowed to not only learn in a cognitive manner but to learn in a physical manner as well. The idea that human cognition proceeds in a linear sequence from perceiving through interpreting to thinking, deciding, and then acting is out of date (Claxton 2016, 5). It is through action and physical interaction that one can gain knowledge unavailable to the hands-off learner. In the philosophical tradition of Friedrich Schiller and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Bauhaus education placed its focus on the innate talents and fascinations of the student, rather than assessing them against a standard measure of knowledge imposed from outside. It also emphatically encouraged collaboration rather than competition (Ridgway and Haynes 2012, 23).

Design + Materials: Historic and Contemporary Perspectives

A member of the Bauhaus school, Anni Albers was a proponent of material being intrinsic to design thinking, which was especially insightful, given the pre-digital age in which she worked. Her design philosophy, in the essay "Work with Material," stresses the importance of experiencing and working directly with materials as designer and pedagogue. She argues that problems in society arise due to humanity's estrangement from materials. She also points out that the imposition of authority on individuals, be it through expertise or manufacturing, results in a dependence under which experimentation and invention languishes (Albers 1938).

The teachers at the Bauhaus knew of the importance of material knowledge and physical interaction in the design process. Interaction designer, Jon Kolko observed in a 2011 essay that, "the Bauhaus drove craft in materiality, and students developed an intimate understanding of what a given material could do. Painters learned how various pigments 'wanted' to flow, and built up tacit understanding of how the physical material would best perform." He goes on to describe that his field, interaction design, still develops core competencies with materials, but argues that human behavior be considered the 'material' with which they work: "the 'materiality of interactions' are [...] behavior, and attitudes, and so we drive tacit knowledge of these qualities through both rote and interpretative exercises related to our medium. This demands constant interaction with people, through facilitation, conversation, and immersion, constant reflection on psychology and sociology, and a process of reflection-in-action, in order to consider why the medium of behavior responds as it does to stimuli and to shaping" (2011). In 2011 the reconceptualization of material was just emerging in interaction to reflect a shift toward design as a cultural practice with an emphasis on participation in digital interfaces. Today this methodology has moved into the 'real world' of materials to create a new type of interaction design. So new, in fact, it lacks its own separate terminology, and is difficult to categorize due to its interdisciplinary nature. In Europe a manifestation of this practice has been named 'Transformation Design.' It borrows from urban planning, architecture, game design, theater, linguistics, or engineering but converges in the material world.

Feeling the Joy

Working with physical objects, working with your hands, and working to solve a problem can all be incorporated into the same learning experience. Moving and shaping, touching and feeling–these all go into the process that engender a fuller knowledge of experience. If seeing is believing, then touching is knowing. At the end of a successful career, designer Ettore Sottsass, in his earnest essay "When I was a Child" longed to again feel the joyful making of childhood and its social and physical spirit:

I should like to find a place where, together, people could try to make things with their hands [...] with arms, legs, hands, feet, hair, sex, saliva, eyes and breath – and to make those things not to possess them and keep them or even to give them to others, but to see what has to be done to make certain things–that is, to try to make them, to see whether all of us can make things, other things, with our hands or machines or whatever else. Can it be tried? (Sottsass 1973).

Recovery by Design suggests it can.

Improvisation Puts
Design Within Reach

In a world where people go to great lengths to make our surrounding world look clean, new, and organized, it is refreshing to see something real. Improvisation acknowledges that behind the façade of the built environment people must deal with disorder in their own lives. In doing so, often outside our attention, they create artifacts that exemplify the unselfconscious creativity of 'making do.' With these improvisational acts, everyday objects and materials are adapted to solve a problem or to meet a need, and undergo a transformation of purpose. I have been interested in these "oddities in a modern landscape,"(Grass 2012) not simply as a curiosity, but because they are extraordinary examples of human resourcefulness and creation. They can be hideous, elegant, or humorous, but regardless of their irregularities, each has special things to teach us. Not only do these objects pass on a knowledge of materiality and construction exhibited through their making, to the observer they reveal illuminating truths about the human condition. They tell stories about diverse lived experiences, and adaptations to modern life. These works are compelling because they offer genuine, unabashed, and earnest qualities

that many objects encountered in our designed environments lack. What these jerry-rigged solutions may lack in structural integrity, they make up for in the virtues of ingenuity, sustainability, utility, and labor. These improvised artifacts demonstrate that many people still make and invent with their hands, and that all types of people are creative. They also show that design is not restricted to the realm of the capital D – occurring inside the studio by trained practitioners – but is evidenced in the "modest, everyday creativity" (Jencks and Silver 2013, vii) of people problem-solving in various circumstances.

In Need of Fixing: Object Politics and the De-skilling of America

In the U.S. and other developed nations, the convergence of economies and technologies are resulting in the de-materialization of the world in which we live. As designer Micheal Erlhoff states, "the history of capitalism can be described in terms of the deconstruction and (virtual) reconstruction of sensuality" (2010). He cites the transition of money from physical objects (coins) to tactile surrogates (paper notes) and finally into abstracted digital currency. Bytes of data move from one computer to another with no intrinsic value except in our collective belief in its worth. "This loss of sensuality (paralleled by a loss of sense) poses a fundamental problem for any form of design, since design is commonly understood both as being sensual and as producing sense" (Erlhoff 2010). Expanding on Marx, the Situationists, and Baudrillard's theories of commodity fetishism, Erlhoff believes that the commodification of designed, mass-produced objects creates false narratives about meaning and value. The acceptance of such narratives enables the mass delusion of belief in ideological and especially physical constructs as reality, and renders us incapable of discerning what is natural from what is artificial. Design and designers have a key role in the creation of objects that can subvert or uphold artificiality. Might vernacular design and re-introduction of natural materials and handmade processes into the world offer some kind of solution?

The fact is, people don't make things anymore. Where craftsmanship was once part of a national identity of hard-working, scrappy bootstrappers, the current socioeconomic context of American life creates a climate in which craftsmanship and manual skill is decreasing. Craft skills were historically related to jobs that required people to actually build things. With manufacturing jobs going overseas, the only work left where people are required to use their hands is in the service industry. "In an earlier generation, we lost our connection to the land, and now we are losing our connection to the machinery we depend on" (Uchitelle 2012).

Part of this evolution is the growing complexity and relative invisibility of modern products. Worldwide, education lags far behind technology to the point that most people have no idea how a computer – the most ubiquitous tool in their lives – works, much less have the knowledge of how to build or fix one. "As for craftsmanship itself, the issue is how to preserve it as a valued skill in the general population" (Uchitelle 2012).

In decades past, skills of mending, fixing, and building were handed down from generation to generation. These days, children are brought up without knowing how to repair things around the house and instead become accustomed to replacing items altogether. Compounding this problem is the fact that contemporary products aren't designed to last or be repaired by their owners. Replacement is the experienced outcome.

Vestiges of the 20th century still survive today because they were well-made – not on display, but still in use – their condition an ongoing testament to bygone American craftsmanship. In the past, items like shoes were constructed simply out of high-quality materials such that their owners wore them for decades, replacing the soles as needed. Planned obsolescence, on the other hand, ensures that things, like shoes, are made to be replaceable so that they are easier to break and difficult to fix.

In the developed world, handing over not only our physical needs but also our cognitive functions (O'Neill 2016) to mechanization has consequences as well. Kapersky lab released a study in 2015 assessing our dependence on technology. They found that people were forgetting the basic knowledge and skills their devices provide – designating the phenomenon "digital amnesia" (2015). With our increasing reliance on technology, the connections we have with each other are being lost as well. This leads to an increased desensitivity. Americans are becoming de-skilled in every way. "Skills have disappeared all around as new technologies change the rules of engagement. On-line social networking, texting and emailing have diminished the art of writing; finesse sacrificed for the speedy exchange of raw information" (Parsons 2009). Creativity and life skills are no longer a priority in education. Students today leave school with a significant amount of knowledge in their heads, but may not know how to do their laundry. Ironically, this opens up opportunities for the service industry where this lack of skill can be carried out by specialists for a fee. This arrangement encourages people to be less self-reliant, more coddled, and unable to take care of things themselves. Fortunately there are pockets of cultures that are striving to be more self-reliant and determined to make things for themselves.

Making Movements: Post-Industrial History

In 1972, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver's published *Adhocism* – a book about improvisation in design. At the time, people were just beginning to understand technology's accelerating effect on the world, and were becoming uneasy with the strict tenants of modernism. The book was one of the earliest forms of a DIY manifesto, and encouraged designers to improvise with "materials at hand to solve real world problems" (Jencks and Silver 2013) and to take inspiration from the creative problem-solving practices of non-designers. The book is now somewhat forgotten, but its message seems more relevant than ever.

Since the industrial revolution, crafts – specifically the domestic arts – have been carried out primarily by women. Craft was once revered as an act of creation,

paired with a cultivated set of handskills. People of the past were arguably much handier than they are now, but what material goods they could not make on their own were supplied by local artisans. Their lives were intimately connected with craftsmen whose work they understood and valued. In the past couple of decades, however, crafts have been adopted by urban youth culture as a subversive act – an explicit reaction against the depersonalized, techno-centric realities of everyday life. The DIY ethic of 'doing it yourself' has been most closely associated with the anti-consumerist punk subcultures that emerged in the 1970s. Later, in the 1990s, the feminist punk (riot grrrl) subcultures adopted a DIY ethic by employing creative, low-cost methods of disseminating ideology through zines and other projects (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 116–117). Over time, the feminist DIY movement embraced crafts to honor women's work and as a radical act of 'craftivism.' The greatest signifier of this not-so-traditional marriage was the emergence of Etsy.com in the early 2000s.

The rise of DIY culture in this century has been greatly abetted by the rise of the Internet. A culture of sharing ideas and providing 'how to' tutorials, has generated a renewed interest in understanding how things are made by making 'real' things with 'real tools.' Politically, this movement embraces the idea of 'getting rid of the middle man' and is concerned with the ethics of production and origin. It is also generating skilled communities where people connect over their interests and build knowledge collectively. To anyone with access and an inclination, the Internet is an encouraging presence that provides a growing archive of DIY know-how.

An additional flavor of DIY thinking has recently emerged, dubbed 'life-hacking,' representing people's desire to share and learn how to improve their lives through practical shortcuts or novel methods that save effort, money, or time. The movement encompasses the broader goals of fitness, well-being, and productivity; the 'hacks' can be psychological, physiological, or technological in nature. A subset of the movement has popularized 'life-hacking' objects which show how people can modify common household items and re-purpose them in novel ways. These objects are not generally mind-blowing solutions – for the most part they're just little discoveries. The most fascinating aspect of these objects, is that they express an inclination toward making and a desire to independently solve problems, even when a person may lack the proper skills, tools, or capital to do so. These 'hacks' are the kinds of tips one might learn through observation and interaction, but in lieu of that, they spread by way of the Internet.

The most recent incarnation of these trends is the maker movement. This phenomenon represents the most technologically advanced version of improvisation in that its proponents create dedicated spaces in which to work and provide the guest or member 'maker' the proper tools to bring their ideas to life. Maker spaces often include laser cutters, 3D printers, and other technologically advanced tools. These spaces offer regular people the chance to design and fabricate custom objects on their own. In contrast to the rigid standardization of mass production, the unique, sometimes imperfect qualities

of the one-off are embraced. "If the last industrial revolution was about making perfect objects – millions of them, absolutely identical, produced to exactly consistent quality standards – this one is about making just one, or a few. Its birthplace is not the factory but the workshop, and its lifeline is the network" (Ideas City Festival 2013).

The Really Real

As those of us who grew up in rural areas know, the DIY mindset is not just a lifestyle choice, but a continuing way of life – DIY is not a mantra, but simply the act of meeting need in a no-nonsense fashion. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. For those in rural communities it makes sense that geographic isolation would motivate improvisation when a certain tool or material is necessary, but not readily available. Other circumstances related to status contribute to isolation – social, economic, developmental, and physical factors combine to demand resourcefulness from those who live inside and outside of cities. Adhocism may also be found in other groups such as prisoners, children, and those large populations living in the third world. Files in cakes and spoons-turned-shovels are tropes that encapsulate the practice of criminal offenders assembling tools, weapons, and gadgets out of the few materials available. Children lacking mobility, expertise, and capital of their own build forts to suit their imaginations and contraptions to experiment with. To them a box may be more appealing than the toy it once contained. *Fragile Dwellings* and *Transitory Gardens,* both by Margaret Morton, document the ingenious makeshift shelters and gardens of the homeless in New York City. In 2012 MIT famously discovered a thirteen-year-old boy in Sierra Leone that built his own up-cycled generators sophisticated enough to baffle their engineers (Hudson 2012). Countries like New Zealand are a great distance from the nearest country, and have wide swaths of unsettled territory. The island's inhabitants have adapted to an adhoc lifestyle, calling it the 'no. 8 wire' tradition, "a reference to a gauge of fencing wire that has been adapted for countless alternative uses" (Derby 2010). In developing countries, 'pickers' make their livelihoods (and just about everything else in their lives) out of trash. Outdoorsmen and survivalists alike take everyday items like condoms and discover dozens of new uses for them.

These improvisational artifacts may lack craft in a traditional sense, if only because the objects being utilized were not intended to be used in these novel ways, but their reuse is still elegant and creative, and the assemblages of which they are a part are still, in a sense, made by hand. What these objects lack, if they lack anything, is the appeal of a glossy 'newness' that gives their owners a 'commercial high' to adopt the tribalist attitudes of brand loyalty. Those who thrive on the mythos of brands are likely to believe what they are sold – and told – about their purchases. Unlike MacGyver they will see a paper clip as just that. While there is some rule-following that goes into this adherence, and obvious social conditions such as privilege, there are also some interesting things these perceptions tell us about how people perceive the objects they

live with. Some find the act of re-purposing 'dirtying.' The inability to let go of a thing's intended use or context results in a sense that familiar spaces are being occupied by an alien presence. Things that are no longer being used as intended are now perceived to be a form of garbage. And yes, sometimes garbage itself is re-purposed, but does inception make an object any less legitimate if it adequately solves a problem?

When I was a kid growing up in rural Virginia, there wasn't much around, or much structured activity, so I spent a lot of time occupying myself. If something broke, I'd do my best to fix it with whatever I could find. I spent time taking things apart and putting them back together. I liked to understand how things worked. While other girls nurtured their baby dolls, I doted on objects that needed to be fixed, trying to save them from the trash. I was enthralled by the Rube Goldberg-like contraptions in movies like *Home Alone, Back to the Future,* or *The Goonies*. Many of the things I built and assembled never worked as planned (except in my imagination), but they were completely satisfying. This feeling has never left me – I still have that motivation to invent and to fix. The design profession is well suited to those with a similar drive, where creative problem-solving rules the day. Juxtaposition of type and image can create new meaning. By adding signage to a building, a button to a website, we contribute little mechanisms to the world that make it easier for people to move through purposefully and reach their goals. Often we're brought in when an existing system is broken and not meeting the needs of its users; we figure out where things have broken down and how to make repairs.

Not everyone will agree that improvised or ad hoc objects are design, because they challenge the way that we view materials and define artifacts. In the essay "On Weaving a Basket," anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that our view of making is backward. He believes that there is a hierarchic imbalance to the prominence we place on the creator's idea above the material or process of making objects. The standard view is that "the forms of artifacts are supposed to have their source within the human mind, as preconceived, intellectual solutions to particular design problems" (Ingold 2011, 81). The problem with that notion, as he explains, is "the properties of materials are directly implicated in the form-generating process. It is therefore no longer possible to sustain the distinction between form and substance that, as we have seen, is so central to the standard view of making things. Finally, the templates, measures and rules of thumb of the artisan or craftsman no more add up to a design for the artifacts he produces than do genes constitute a blueprint for the organism" (Ingold 2011, 87). Many people think of design or creative processes as the imposition of force and ideas from the mind onto "inert matter" (Ingold 2011, 81). The aforementioned trend in engineering of 'hiding the works' further perpetuates this misconception by visually divorcing the process from the outcome. To expand on Ingold's point further, form which does not account for the conditions under which it was made is inexplicable simply as a design of the maker. As designers we love to take credit for the things we make, but "we may have to recognize that a great many artifacts are merely accidental, due to chance, revealing not the designs themselves but their limitations" (Ingold 2011, 86). "The forms of objects are

not imposed from above but grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment" (Ingold 2011, 89).

Improvised objects provide a refreshing alternative appearance that is expressive and honest about its origins. Even though the revelation, and its challenge to authorship, might make designers uncomfortable, there are many benefits to embracing improvisation. Improvising in creativity leaves conditions open enough that the process and the materials can inform the maker. The practitioners of improvisation represent laudable values that emphasize function and the elevation of the everyday over pure creativity. During a time of environmental decline, they conserve, even when they can afford not to. They try to make objects better designed and accessible economically. In an increasingly technological world many people are becoming de-skilled in many aspects of their lives. Improvisational design proves that people other than designers or artists are creative, and still want to make in spite of cultural or economic limitations. They still want to do things themselves and shape the world around them rather than be contented with what's given. People still want to embrace the humanity of hand work, to engage with things physically, to learn by doing. They are reclaiming the ethics of a bygone era – frugality, self-reliance, and care. By choosing not to buy in they find something that already exists to fix the problem at hand. After all, does the world really need any more stuff?

Conclusion

Improvisation, in a time of technological advancement, is important to acknowledge because it is a creative trait we possess that can never be replicated by machines. Our humanity becomes most evident in its practices.

Adhocism is an approach that I have employed throughout my time running Recovery by Design. It was a necessity, not only economically but also pragmatically. The challenges that I faced while trying to create a design curriculum for Recovery By Design made me conscious of a number of major realizations: the difficulty of getting objects fabricated and produced affordably in small numbers, the fact that we live in a culture that undermines craft, and, in reaction to these limitations, the many acts of novel creativity that occur in the age of mass production.

I learned that what I wanted for Recovery by Design required I make my own tools. I hit wall after wall trying to buy materials and equipment from companies who would only source to wholesalers. I needed to tap into the knowledge of individual makers online and in the community – where barriers became personal and cultural. I had to recognize and re-think the way that I had conditioned myself to deal with problems. I had to stop looking for easy and impersonal answers online, and I had to take a bottom-up approach. It was through experimentation with materials and social interaction that I was able to get answers. Find all the craftsmen, tinkerers, hobbyists, pickers, reenactors, etc. in your community and make friends with them. They will teach you more than you could ever learn in school, online, or from books – lesson learned.

Reclaiming the processes of making and craft instill well-being, skills, value, authority, and expertise in the maker. Although the over-saturation of products that don't meet our needs is depressing, when I begin to see a culture of novel creativity, it is a glimmer of hope that people still strive to create rather than, as Matthew Crawford puts it, succumb to the "passive consumption of manufactured experiences" (Crawford and Claxton 2015). The combination of these realizations are evidence of larger implications of design, technology, and industry on our lives that forecast emerging and exciting trends in design which support alternative economies over consumer culture.

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Re•design

Redesign
Design as Methodology

Part of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University

Cassandra Jane Ellison

This thesis is documented in five books – this is the forth. Book I covers overarching themes, framework, and the Richmond-based context of the work. It also serves as an introduction to my work. Book II explores the concept of design as therapy and discusses efforts to enhance aspects of design that promote well-being in the Recovery by Design program. Book III describes the benefits of physical tools, methods, and materials for the practice of design. It includes an essay on improvisation which outlines the history of craft in the United States including the disappearance of manual skills and the emergence of contemporary maker movements. It builds a case for all types of creativity that make use of what is at hand. **Book IV situates my thesis in the context of Conditional and Transformation Design while providing a brief overview of design history.** Book V is a photo essay that illustrates the content of this thesis related to the Recovery by Design program.

contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the topics of therapy and materiality but where does it and the Recovery by Design (RBD) program fit into the design profession? Is this even design if the outcomes are made by people who are untrained? Can I even call myself a designer if I do not make the work? In this book I explain how my creative project is theoretically situated in Conditional and Transformational Design practice. I discuss how I utilize conditional methods, not only in a formal sense, but how I push the field further by applying that methodology in unconventional ways to mental health and well-being. I explain the emerging role of designer as facilitator as it relates to my involvement in Recovery by Design. I also examine the prevailing hierarchic notions of expertise in design and the effect of 'know-how' on creativity.

Design as Methodology

The field of graphic design has gone through many phases and characterizations since its inception. It has evolved through designer as stylist, designer as communicator, designer as author, designer as activist, but it is not until the last decade that graphic design has experienced a true identity crisis.

As with many other industries, technology and standardization has threatened to replace the designer. "Automated data-driven processes will slowly make more and more inroads into the space now occupied by human designers. New approaches to computer-generated creativity … will start taking over the creative aspect of design … We will get more design without designers" (Norman 2010). We're hit with this reality of a templated, digital DIY world (Blauvelt 2008), and now we're scattering, some of us running toward fine arts, others toward the social sciences. The lines in the sand become deeper as time passes.

Online sites allow consumers to create "quality" designs using templates to promote themselves and their businesses. How will graphic design survive? By evolving. The templated age pushes many designers into the role of facilitator. In a more important way, and on a larger scale, the field of design is evolving and growing into new frontiers. Participatory design and experience design are two relatively new disciplines but operate within open frameworks designed by designers to facilitate creativity and experiences of participants.

"With the rise of networked culture, users have come to play a key role as producers of information, meaning and value, breaking down the long-standing opposition between consumption and production. With the decline of such categories of political subjectivity as organised labour, and the waning of the social-democratic consensus, usership has emerged as an unexpected alternative" (Wright 2013, 1).

Professional graphic designers may have already noticed, as I did, this curious trend in increasing number of clients who are demanding to have a more active part in the creative process. The field has begun to embrace the user expectation that they be involved in the design process.

In *Book III*, *Touch,* I talk about the phenomenon of people creating and hacking existing objects to get specialized use out of them. This phenomenon raises two questions. Are mass-produced designs meeting people's needs? Shouldn't they be expected to do so? Design should respond to human need, but individual needs vary. Design that purports to appeal to a universal audience, through nondescript simplicity of form, ignores the pluralism that defines needs differently across cultures. If people are modifying design objects for their own purposes, there is a strong indication that needs are not being met. It also points to the ingenuity and creativity of those who hack the designed object for their individual purposes.

These desires to interact creatively may also be due to an overarching sense of being disconnected. Ironically, in the age of information, we are sheltered from reality by technology, job specialization, and aesthetic veneers. Immersed in an era when hyper-realities hinder perception, the "desert of the real" (Thackara 2013) threatens our democracy and our well-being. By opening up design to participants, we will not only democratize design, but also instigate a more healthy, democratic society.

What is Design?

Questions of whether or not my thesis work is design, or where it fits into design, have been raised many times during candidacy. Any time design is discussed there is an obligation to define it, especially when the categorization of an act as design is under scrutiny. Unfortunately, this has been difficult to do because the work as I see it cannot be defined any other way, and yet it does not fit into the traditional notion of design.

Given a loosely traditional criteria for evaluation, RBD qualifies as design. It is a method of communication for participants, plan development occurs under the consideration of user needs and constraints, and it is form-giving to object outcomes. What it seems people get stuck on is the formal hierarchy of the traditional design process, with its prescriptive roles of 'designer' and 'client,' because it threatens the view of authorship. The question then shifts from 'how is this design' to 'what am I designing?' If participants in Recovery by Design workshops are creating outcomes, what role do I have as a designer in the process and can I take ownership of any of it? It is a question of great import as the field of design is changing. Until these new definitions of design are widely practiced and understood, this question will continue to be asked of designers, most likely by other designers.

For those designers who will be asked this question in the future, and who must be armed with a response, I offer an inclusive definition of design and the role of the designer in it.

What kind of design is this?

There is no one specific type of design practice described in this thesis. It is a synthesis of many existing influences, but most prominently that of Relational Design and Transformation Design.

Relational Design is named as such because its outcomes are determined by its relation to the people, places, and constraints involved in the situation/design process. "Relational Design is preoccupied with design's effects, extending beyond the form of the design object and its attendant meanings and cultural symbolism. It is concerned with performance or use, not as the natural result of some intended functionality but rather in the realm of behavior and uncontrollable consequences. It embraces constraints and seeks systematic methodologies, as a way of countering the excessive subjectivity of most design decision-making. It explores more open-ended processes that value the experiential and the participatory and often blur the distinctions between production and consumption" (Blauvelt 2008). Relational Design also goes by the names Conditional or Contextual Design.

The British Design Council's RED Unit introduced the term 'Transformation Design' to the world in 2006's *RED paper 02* (Burns et al. 2006). In the paper, "RED identified an appropriate means for making social change happen, and

for generating new forms of innovation, not in the process of form-giving, but rather by means of the systemic core competencies of design and the design process" (Jonas et al. 2016, 9). Transformation design harnesses the power of design thinking, "meaning more than the current business hype" (Jonas et al. 2016, 11), to speculate alternative outcomes, applying that power to social issues with interdisciplinary teamwork.

In the essay "Transformation Design," Nicolas Beucker uses language to define Transformation Design that could also be applied to Relational Design — "as a context- and situation-sensitive approach with the aim of facilitating piecemeal change that ensures connectivity for social interaction." Neither method gets hung up on the artifact, the formal objects, that result from the process, and both embrace participation and co-creation. The point where the two practices diverge are in Transformation Design's large scope, even applied on small scales, and its preoccupation with social issues. Both are concerned with behavior but Transformation Design is concerned with behavior change. It widens from a user-centered approach, expanding to human-centered, to an attitude described as *society-centered*, "explicitly focusing on the social dimensions and conditions of designing" (Jonas et al. 2016, 9). Conditional Design lives in a pragmatic world, designing for 'what is' at any given time or place. Instead of just designing for what is, Transformation Design is more idealistic because it asks what could be. Transformation Design attempts to turn the speculative to reality, implementing pragmatic procedures (piecemeal, participatory, and modest) along the way.

Whose work is it? *(or 'authorship')*

Our livelihoods are built on the stakes we claim. It is the foundation of our economic system. Ownership is a concept that is not likely to go away quietly. Aside from questioning authorship altogether, which is a long way off from our societal conceit, we must redefine or perhaps clarify 'authorship' as it relates to design.

Objectively, I find the question of authorship as a challenge to Relational Design somewhat irrelevant. Here's why. As a rule, the authorship argument does not hold the same weight when evaluating work that is thought of as 'graphic design' in a traditional sense. Rephrase questions of provenance and apply them to the average designer, and our profession does not fare well overall. Consider how many designers can say "yes" to the following questions: "Did you design the typeface?" "Is the content yours?" "Did you mix the ink?" "Did you invent the circle?" The last one isn't so serious, but it does make the topic seem trivial when such slippery slope logic is applied. This notion of authorship and originality feels dated in an age of mechanical and digital reproduction when image appropriation runs rampant, and at a time when templates allow anyone to author 'designed' content. The emerging approaches to design are not radical or new if we compare it to the work of a teacher. They may not take credit for outcomes but they are certainly an accountable influence.

The pressure to take ownership of a process or outcome is complicated further when it involves a marginalized group. The term 'colonization' has exploded in

the design field. I am aware that I am a white woman working with a mostly minority population. Until definitions of authorship evolve or dissolve with the times, there will be persistent expectations to take ownership over outcomes, as proof of involvement, despite any misgivings.

Is it 'good' or 'bad'?

Claire Bishop has been one of the most outspoken critics of *Relational Aesthetics* in art. She believes that it lacks critical ethical and aesthetic evaluation because it skates by on its 'do-goodery' motivations. If one of the things that Relational Aesthetics purports to do is to encourage social relations, she asks, "how do we measure or compare these relationships?" (Bishop 2004, 60). One answer, she proposes, is to evaluate it scientifically. I wonder if we are qualifying or quantifying some forms of art or design based on intent, why not hold all to the scrutiny of science if it's outward facing? Scary thought – as such scrutiny is untenable.

A recent critique of Bishop deconstructs her arguments and shows that they point to a nihilistic perspective (Miller 2016, 175). The same perspective applied to any other type of art would provide unanswerable questions and yield few satisfying answers. Damning criticism of the ineffable qualities of art and design cannot be discriminately applied with our personal tastes. The criticism cracks and spreads to unintended areas. Her argument is a logical fallacy referred to as 'moving the goal post.'

Skepticism is appropriate towards this naive universalist humanitarian attitude. Critical voices have already interpreted it as a new Western imperialism: colonisation by Design Thinking. We agree, but why 'new'? Regardless of, or despite, these flowery humanitarian appeals, there are thousands of practical initiatives within and mainly outside design that should be appreciated and evaluated.

There is the need to become less moralistic and ideological. And maybe more theoretical, keeping ethics implicit in the theories and methodologies that we are using. Theory may provide a certain distance from the immediacy of the current chaotic dynamics of production, consumption, and design, and also a sense of consolation in the face of the often perceived powerlessness. We have to challenge the usefulness of seemingly universal standards and unquestioned assumptions in economy and science. Our hypothesis is that design thinking, meaning more than the current business hype, might support more sustainable ways of conceiving human futures, even integrating Western and non-Western thinking and value systems (Jonas et al. 2016, 11).

What makes you the designer?

If, within Recovery by Design, I do not personally make the outcomes, then what am I doing exactly? Do I take credit while reclining with my feet up? If only! A designer can be a facilitator for communication rather than the sole creator of an aesthetic or author of its content. As a designer using this methodology, I am responsible for many things. These active decisions can be categorized as:

Container/Space: this is the place within which the design occurs, chosen in some cases for its conduciveness to the design process. For Recovery by Design, the space is Storefront for Community Design. It is a public studio space well suited for workshops and events.

Constraints: these lessen the options available during the design process and limit the types of outcomes. These constraints take the form of rules, time limits, and/or restrictive supplies. The designer must also determine the amount of limits they put on the process while mitigating inherent limits. Too few constraints and a novice can feel overwhelmed with possibilities; too many and individual problem-solving and/or expression is stifled.

The stamping workshop utilized many constraints including the stamping as a medium, working with only one color, working in teams, and most importantly creating game themes along with rules for selecting specific emotional concepts as inspiration for design.

Tools/Medium: as mentioned above, designers provide the supplies for the design process, which create some framework. Putting a limitation on the range of tools and materials, as well as the types of methods applied to the design process, significantly influence the formal qualities of outcomes. For the fabric printing workshops I created tools that were inexpensive, recycled, and/or readily available that also were intuitive to use.

Metaphor/Inquiry: co-designers or participants may provide the content for the work but it is the designer's job to frame the subject. By creating a metaphor or posing a question in the form of a prompt, the designer offers a lens through which to perceive, interpret, and/or personalize subject matter. For instance, in the decorative mending workshop, questions were posed to form a metaphorical connection between repair and recovery.

What the designer provides to the process shapes its outcomes. So while they may not be made directly by the designer, they are in fact designed by the designer together with the maker. Co-designed objects are artifacts of a process that the designer designed. While I may have a role in designing the outcomes, ownership is debatable or blurred. Regardless, my practice is not as concerned with authorship of co-created objects, as much as the design of the process itself and the benefits it provides to participants.

Enriching outsider engagement

Though counterintuitive, the same constraints that designers might balk at actually allow 'non-designer' participants to loosen up. For the work to flow in the design process there must be both knowledge and ignorance.

In graduate school, I have enjoyed the freedom of exploring other design disciplines. Being a novice in the fields of fashion and interior design, my naïveté has brought play back into my practice. When I see the innovative RBD outcomes that result from people designing for the first time, I know expertise is overrated.

John Malinoski, professor of Graphic Design, shared similar sentiments following his work with RBHA clients in Recovery by Design: "With the RBHA students I feel it is interesting and exciting to consider the use of their ideas to help solve design problems and meet utilitarian needs. Their ideas are often unconventional yet thoughtful, fanciful and intriguing. They have helped me understand what things might be rather than what things have to be."

Following mastery, designers and artists alike have sought to return to a simpler, almost child-like sensibility when making. Designers Bruno Munari and Ettorre Sottsass both wrote nostalgically of childhood creativity. Pablo Picasso famously remarked that it had taken him his whole life to learn to paint like a child again. Surrealists used their own types of frameworks (games, chance) to tap into their unconscious mind, believing that knowledge of convention was repressive to creative output.

When it comes to making design decisions, expertise may not be the best mediator. When it comes to knowledge and creativity there is a sweet spot to achieving flow that lies somewhere between novice and expert. To get there experts need to loosen up and rookies need constraints to tamp down.

"The perfect state of creative bliss is having power (you are 50) and knowing nothing (you are 9)." — Tibor Kalman

Design for the 21st Century

Andrew Blauvelt, Design Director of the Walker Art Center, uses the following timeline to point out our place in design history by breaking it down into three phases (Blauvelt 2008):

Methodology	Syntax > Semantics > Pragmatics
Ideology	Form > Content > Context
Period	Modern > Postmodern > Post-Postmodern

In *Transformational Design* Jonas, Zerwas, and Von Anshelm (2016) collate a few other interpretations of design's evolution:

Expansion of design's subjects from Products > Goods, Services, and Identities > Interfaces > Multi-user Systems and Networks > Projects > Discourses

Design 1.0: Traditional Design > Design 2.0: Product/Service Design > Design 3.0: Organisational Transformation Design > Design 4.0: Social Transformation Design

We are in an emerging era in graphic design but that does not mean we got here on our own. The movements to which Blauvelt refers could be interpreted as discrete segments of a whole that is graphic design history, or perhaps they were more of a linear ideological progression toward pragmatism.

Situating RBD in Design

In order to situate my thesis and my work with Recovery by Design into the field of design, I will use the criteria outlined in Timothy Holloway's book *Defining Relational Design* (2012).

1. **Design creates a social environment**

Social interaction and public space are essential components to the objective of destigmatization. By bringing in members of the community to volunteer as participants in each Recovery by Design workshop we have two aims. Firstly, we increase empathy and reduce the volunteer's stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness through exposure by interacting with client participants. Secondly, we hope for the client participants to benefit from not only the social interaction and its subsequent social-skill building with people outside of their peer group, but also through working together on creative projects. This collaboration develops confidence in their abilities as well as facilitates connections that show that reveal they have things in common with the everyone in the group, including the volunteers.

In the past, the workshops have been 'one and done,' so to speak. The participants and their outcomes were isolated from each other. By reorganizing the space and changing the seating arrangement, students and volunteers were more connected. Working together, side by side, created a better environment for group knowledge-building.

2. **The design is contextually sensitive**

This program helps to destigmatize mental illness by bringing clients into a publicly accessible studio to work alongside designers, faculty, and volunteers. This work is possible because of a collaborative effort between Recovery By Design, Storefront for Community Design, and Richmond Behavioral Health Authority.

3. **Distinctions of production and consumption become blurred**

Using utilitarian design prompts, RBHA clients work directly with designers to create and build out products both in and outside of the workshops. Projects and promotional materials focus on destigmatizing mental illness are created by mOb student designers and inspired by the workshop's creative outcomes. These include posters, publications, and products for display and dissemination.

4. **It is generative in the form of a feedback loop, not simply additive**

Generative systems align with the belief that recovery is a continuum. Since I took on a leadership role, the program is now designed to have an overarching curriculum. Each workshop builds on the one before, not just in terms of what is made by participants but what is learned and felt by them as well. Stamping created patterns, which were then printed on fabric. The printed fabric has generated and furnished subsequent workshops in which fabric was dyed and repaired, from which additional items, such as garments, were made.

5. Content is defined and created through audience engagement

I needed to create open frameworks that were simple enough for the wide variety of physical and cognitive abilities. The concept of repetitive physical motion offering comfort, immediately brought stamping and pattern-making to mind. I wanted the activity itself to offer therapeutic value as well as subject matter. So to get to the final outcome I led students through a narrative of negative emotions to create positive outcomes. I developed this idea of using the stamps to create faces that expressed their emotions. Using the same limited number of stamps many emotions could be conveyed.

Students were asked to make a certain number of simple shape stamps and use them to make various emotive faces using the shapes as interchangeable facial features. This is an example of how a formal but open framework can create diverse visual outcomes through participation.

6. Content is created collectively

Outcomes from Recovery by Design workshops constitute a body of work made by individuals working together. Design efforts are collaborative. Topic discussions generate personal interpretations, which are then reflected in the work. Conversations influence outcomes.

7. Content is context specific

Social interaction sparks an awareness of feelings in the self and others. Empathy and emotional intelligence, for instance, are more likely to develop between people when they interact than when they are separated. In a Recovery by Design Stamping workshop the participants are paired up and given dice and an emotion table based on Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions that illustrates how common emotions overlap and become more complex. Using the dice they roll a number to 'get a feeling.' Using their stamps they make a facial expression that interprets that emotion.

8. Communication is open, not top down

Although prompts are given to loosely frame topics, the communication that affects the design happens at a one-on-one level. For instance in the stamping workshop, conversations break out between partners about what feelings mean and the real or fictionalized situations that might cause such feelings. Their engagement with the game, and the influence of the conversation affects what types of designs are produced.

9. Relational design should be seen as a method of approach

Recovery by Design utilizes Relational techniques to create less prescriptive modes of interaction between participants with the work and each other. Serious topics embedded into playful activities creates interactions of a more thoughtful, genuine nature.

Let's Be Real: Design + Artificiality

Design and designers have a key role in the creation of objects that can subvert or uphold artificiality. The introduction of beauty and order to our spaces and artifacts presents us with tangible dreams, things to aspire to, but dreams that are not achievable by all. Despite this, many believe in and insist on unachievable reality, finding it more comforting not to acknowledge what's 'behind the curtain.'

John Thackara, writer on design and sustainability and frequent contributor to *Design Observer*, believes we are living in a 'Desert of the Real' that isolates us from vital realities. A time when most things – our built environments, our products, our food – insulate us from the harsh realities of their production. "One reason societies fail is that their elites are insulated from the negative impact of their own actions. That lesson applies equally to us, today. We lust for speed, perfection, control but, because we inhabit an abstract, digitally diminished world, we're blind to their true cost" (Thackara 2013).

Religion, the so-called opiate, has suffered withdrawal from American life since the 20th century. We've found ways to replicate its sense of security, order, and justice that are often counter to our nature, and to the natural type of nature as well. It's created through the way that we fabricate objects, media, and communication. Artifice aids the developed world in putting the collective blinders on its citizens.

We live in a time when misinformation and displacement of information threatens democracy. Specializations place decision making about very important aspects of our lives in the hands of other people. Our comprehension is several times removed from science and technology, including where our food comes from, our products, our energy, and the people and things that may be harmed in the process. On a large scale, people are unable to weigh in on decisions that may make their lives better or worse; on a small scale, there's shrinking time to make conscious decisions about one's own life by choosing convenience instead.

Aesthetics and communication are synonymous with the profession of graphic design. As a designer of form I am concerned with refinement; as a citizen who is concerned with inclusivity, I have become skeptical of the manufactured and have warmed to the beauty of humanity in imperfection. For Recovery By Design I have tried to keep in mind the importance of creating engaging experiences and authentic outcomes that show evidence of the making process.

Conclusion

Design makes everything possible. To say that it doesn't have the power to change, to inspire, to educate, to aid, to transcend, not just for those who practice it but for those who experience it is not without consequence. "Design becomes the composition or purely pictorial elements rather than the manipulation of both image and language. Design becomes mute" (Kalman 2010, 77).

Just look to *Connections*, a book and BBC series by James Burke, to see how changes to objects like adding backs to saddles have won wars that have changed the course of history. At both large and small scales, design has lasting implications. Adaptations build on each other to make progress over time. No one does anything alone. No one person has done anything without building on generations of hard work of people from the past. Ego is the enemy of our profession and of our world.

As mentioned earlier, the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College are enviable models of design education. Not only did they believe that materiality and manual labor were intrinsically tied to wholeness, but they also believed as I do that anyone is capable of creativity when provided with the necessary knowledge and tools. I believe in democratizing design through alternative educational models and alternative economies. Both the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College were short-lived, as are most things throughout history that are ahead of their time. I find some hope and sadness in that notion and I wonder doubtfully, given my interests in making art and design education more accessible, if starting a school like those would even be possible now. Recovery by Design isn't a school, but it could be a place–a place of 'O.K.'

Design can make changes, especially when others are encouraged to engage in it. Design has a very special function in the world, separate from but related to art. You won't convince me that some alcoholic Don Draper-type ad man was a forbearer of design. Craftsmen, inventors, shamans were the designers of the past. I believe there's a social, creative, and ethical imperative to echoing bygone values of our creative forefathers (and mothers). In doing so we will perpetuate the existence of design as a profession from becoming frivolous or being absorbed into the arts, and we will protect design's legacy that has left its mark in the world by being an agent of change.

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www.manaraa.com

rbdrva.org

See

Recovery From Design, Book V

See

"The real **JOY** of design is to deliver fresh perspectives, improved well-being and an intuitive sense of balance with the wider world. The real **SPIRIT** of design elicits some higher meaning. The real **POWER** of design is that professionals and laypeople can co-design in amazingly creative ways. The real **BEAUTY** of design is its potential for secular, pluralistic expression. The real **STRENGTH** of design is this healthy variance of expression. The real **RELEVANCE** of design is its ability to be proactive. The real **PASSION** of design is in its philosophical, ethical and practical debate."

– Alastair Fuad-Luke

Cassandra Jane Ellison

This thesis is documented in five books – this is the fifth and final one. Book I covers overarching themes, framework, and the Richmond-based context of the work. It also serves as an introduction to my work. Book II explores the concept of design as therapy and discusses efforts to enhance aspects of design that promote well-being in the Recovery by Design program. Book III describes the benefits of physical tools, methods, and materials for the practice of design. It includes an essay on improvisation which outlines the history of craft in the United States including the disappearance of manual skills and the emergence of contemporary maker movements. It builds a case for all types of creativity that make use of what is at hand. Book IV situates my thesis in the context of Conditional and Transformation Design while providing a brief overview of design history. **Book V is a photo essay that illustrates the content of this thesis related to the Recovery by Design program.**

Recovery by Design

This publication is based on the curriculum of Recovery by Design, a program that engages clients in recovery from mental health issues, substance use disorders, and intellectual disabilities by offering them creative outlets of expression through design processes. Facilitating social interaction in a public studio space is vital to the program's primary focus on destigmatization.[81] rbdrva.org

In workshops...

contents

EXPRESSIVE TEA TOWELS

1. Make 2, four-sided stamps.

2. Use the shapes on your stamps to make a facial expression that expresses the feeling. Print the emotion face in the upper left square inside the dotted lines.

3. Repeat steps 2-3 until you fill up all four squares on your tea towel with faces.

4. Use the window, find a pattern. Repeat pattern on second towel.

number/emotion	1 Joy	2 Surprise	3 Sadness	4 Disgust	5 Fear	6 Anticipation
1 Joy	ecstasy	delight	melancholy	morbid	surprise	optimism
2 Trust	love	curiousity	sentimental	roll again	submission	dominance
3 Sadness	melancholy	disspointment	depression	remorse	despair	fatalism
4 Disgust	intrigue	shock	self-loathing	prejudice	shame	cynicism
5 Content	laughter	excitment	meh	acceptance	roll again	hopeful
6 Anger	pride	outrage	envy	contempt	hatred	aggression

we stamped...

The stamping workshop begins with the pairing up of participants. Each pair is given dice and a table of emotions based on psychologist Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions, that shows how familiar feelings overlap to create more complex emotions. The partners take turns rolling the dice and looking at the chart to find the corresponding number. They take these two numbers and find where they intersect on the chart of emotions, to 'get a feeling' so to speak. With the emotional prompt, they then use the stamps to create a face that is a visual interpretation of that emotion.

Because of the wide range of abilities in these groups, it was necessary to frame a structure of the workshops that would accommodate that variety. The impetus for choosing stamping and pattern making was the ability for repetitive motion to instill relaxation and contentment. The activity itself was developed in order to offer therapeutic benefits and an opportunity for participants to express themselves through the subject matter. The directive was to lead a discussion about how to identify our feelings and demonstrate how this can yield positive results, that each of our emotions — even the negative ones — can serve important purposes in our lives.

I designed a system for the client to make their own stamps on multiple sides of wooden blocks, which conserved resources and space. Participants chose their own shapes but were limited in complexity by the physical constraints of the materials. They would then create emotive faces stamped onto gridded tea towels with the limited number of stamp shapes they made.

This activity quickly turns into a storytelling event between the partners that ends up informing the types of designs they produce. Conversations often bring up the last time someone felt that particular emotion and the circumstances behind it. The activity allows participants to feel more open about sharing these stories and becomes about more than just the stamps and tools and ink and dice. It becomes a social interaction where people can express and become more aware of their feelings.

The participants assemble the stamps with basic shapes they cut from rubber and adhere to wooden blocks. Using the stamping blocks, they create the faces from the emotion chart, making interesting and unique designs that express that feeling. After the faces have been stamped, they copy a portion of the face design to create a pattern that repeats itself, a second outcome from the original prompt. From a formal but open framework, participants engage in conversation with one another, make tools, and create visual outcomes as diverse as the participants themselves.
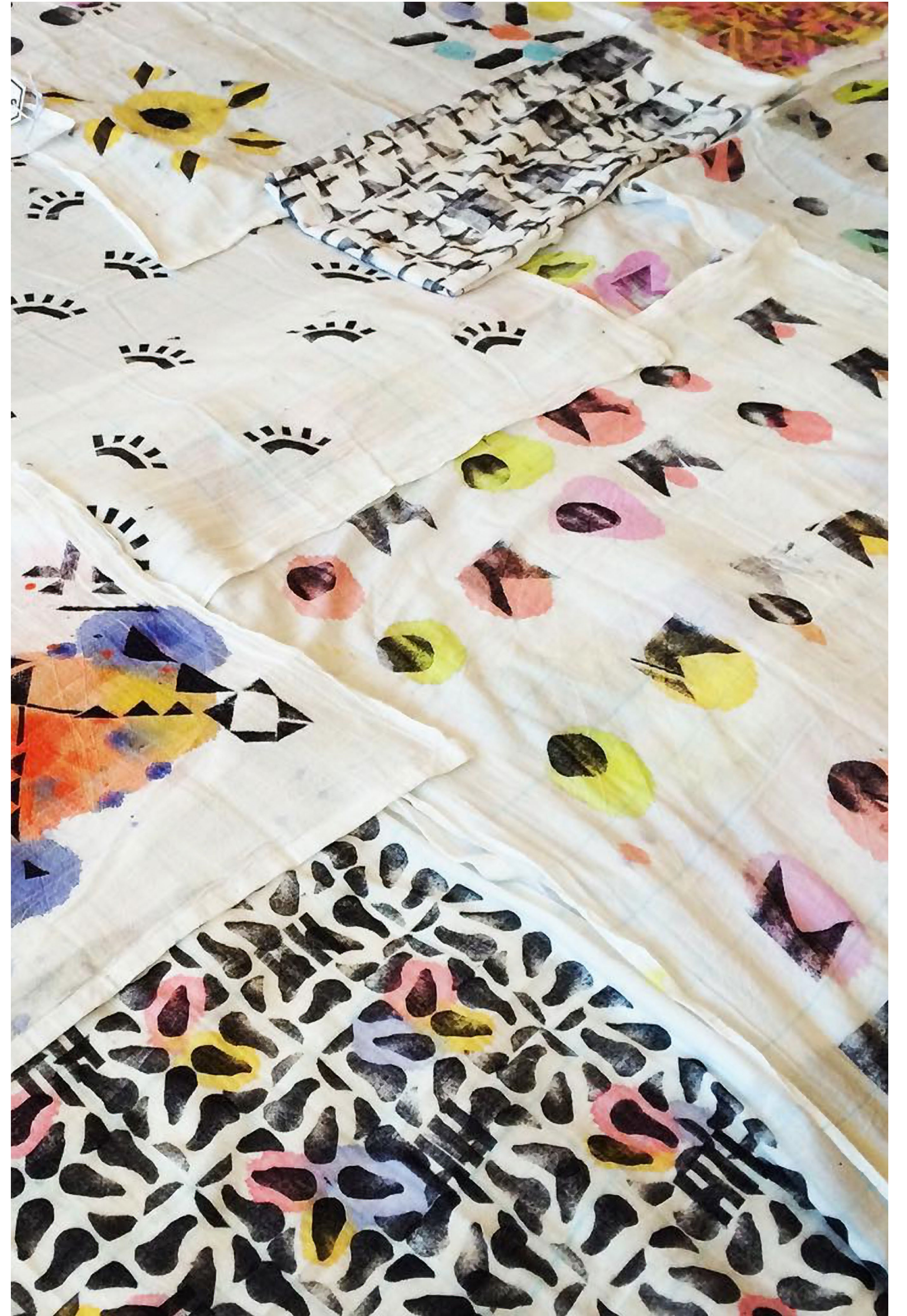
patterns prompted by games...
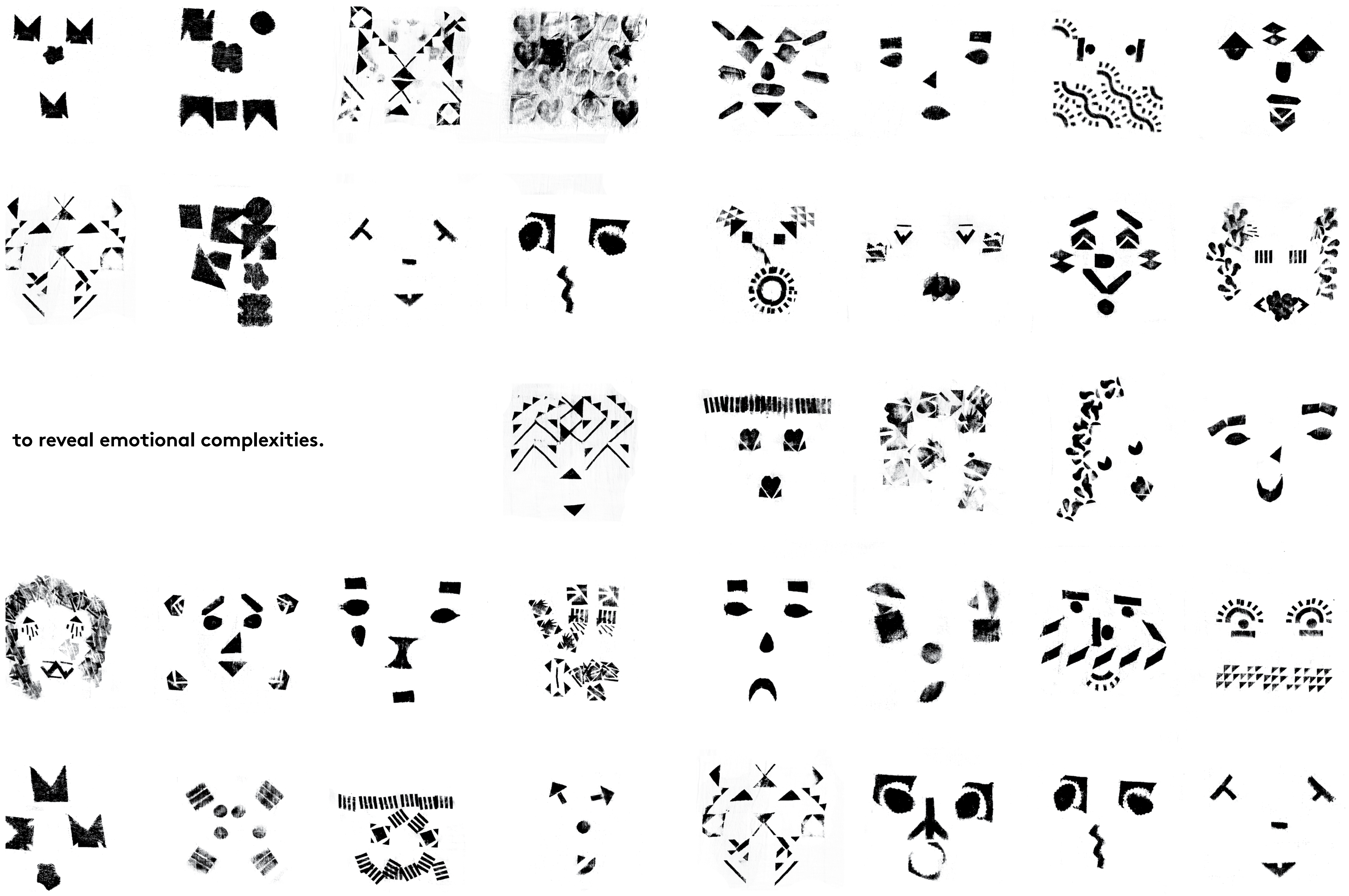
to reveal emotional complexities.

We made shoes....

To begin this workshop everyone took off their shoes and piled them in on the floor, the first step of the walking/stepping mindfulness exercise. After a shoeless walk around the room, they circled back to the group of shoes. Here they were asked to pick a pair of shoes and tell the group about the journeys they look like they may have gone on and to guess to whom the shoe belonged. The owner of the shoes was then invited to reveal their identity and to chime in and refute or support the guess. They then had the opportunity to tell their own shoe story. The idea of this exercise was to imagine stepping into another person's shoes.

Afterward, participants were supplied with pre-cut shoe templates (pictured to the right), laces, and colored felt. Taking into consideration the mindfulness exercise, participants added felt designs to personalize their own shoes. The plan was for to complete the workshop by lacing their shoes together, but that proved to be difficult with the time allotted and the tools provided.
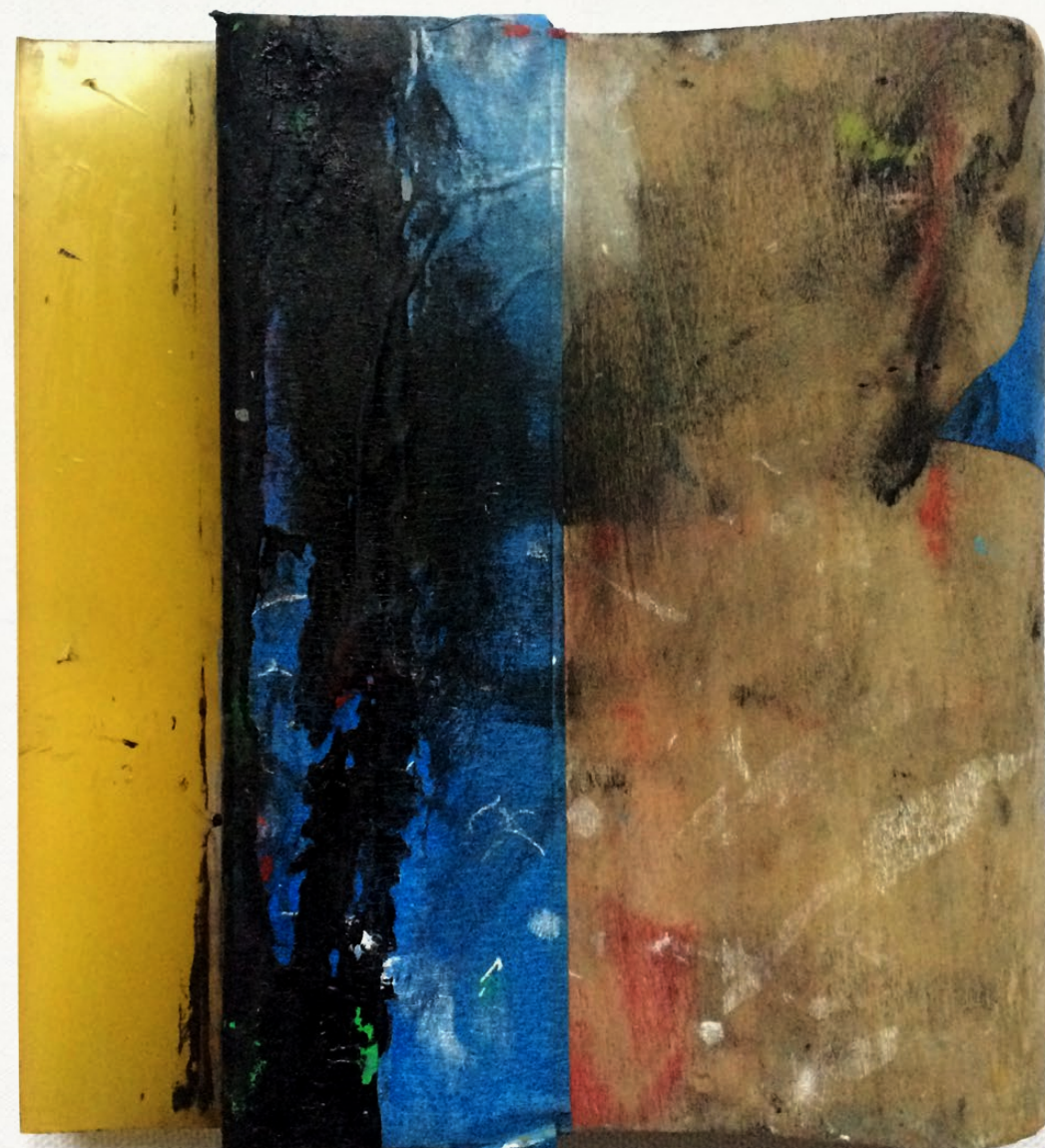
for mindful walking.

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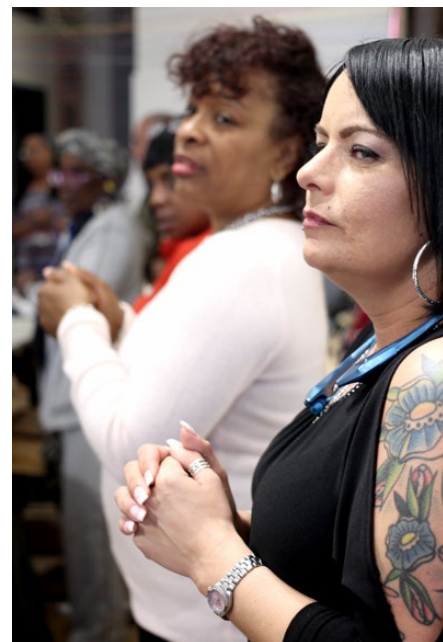
In workshops, we stamped
patterns prompted by aan
in workshops we complexities
We made shoes
Using various methods
Using various methods, we printed
patterns on fabric
with improvised tools. We learned
how to decorative mend
atic taining the aesthetic I
economic values of purity we place
on both objects and people.

# we printed fabric...

Early in the process of designing the curriculum, I envisioned fabric printing as a special community-building activity for creating design collectively. Not only does a practice like printing set up ideal context for cooperation and flow, but it also allows participants to easily reproduce their pattern designs at a larger scale.

I began by studying historical fabric and wallpaper-printing techniques from the last century. I needed to find a method that was simple, not overly strenuous, that was customizable, but affordable. The most obvious method for fabric printing is screen printing but, if I hoped that these workshops would lay the foundation for a makerspace, it was important that the process create artifacts which could build into a pattern library of sorts. American mid-scale manual printing techniques and equipment died out during the middle of the 20th century. So I began experimenting with tools and trying to create my own that would facilitate fabric printing at a larger scale without demanding expertise.

I created variations on the process of block printing to maximize user-friendliness. Block printing through a clear backing enables the printer to see through the block and line up seamless patterns more effectively. Softer materials absorb more ink than wood and remove the strain needed to get a print. This concern arose after I noticed the hand and wrist deformations in photos of artisan block-printers.

While brayering ink in a letterpress class, I imagined that the simplest way to print a seamless pattern might be to roll it on, but without constant re-inking. After talking to my advisor, about developing such a device I did some Internet sleuthing and discovered an antique tool dating back to the early 1900s in France that was invented to allow people to paint their own wallpaper. The system uses a roller with an embossed pattern which is self-inking thanks to an attached ink reservoir. The current version of that original model has an ease of use that outshined everything else for the varied skillsets of the students that I would be working with. Unfortunately the off-the-shelf system was not customizable, so I attempted to make my own rollers out of various materials. I have tested a myriad of designs with moderate success, but am still attempting improvements.
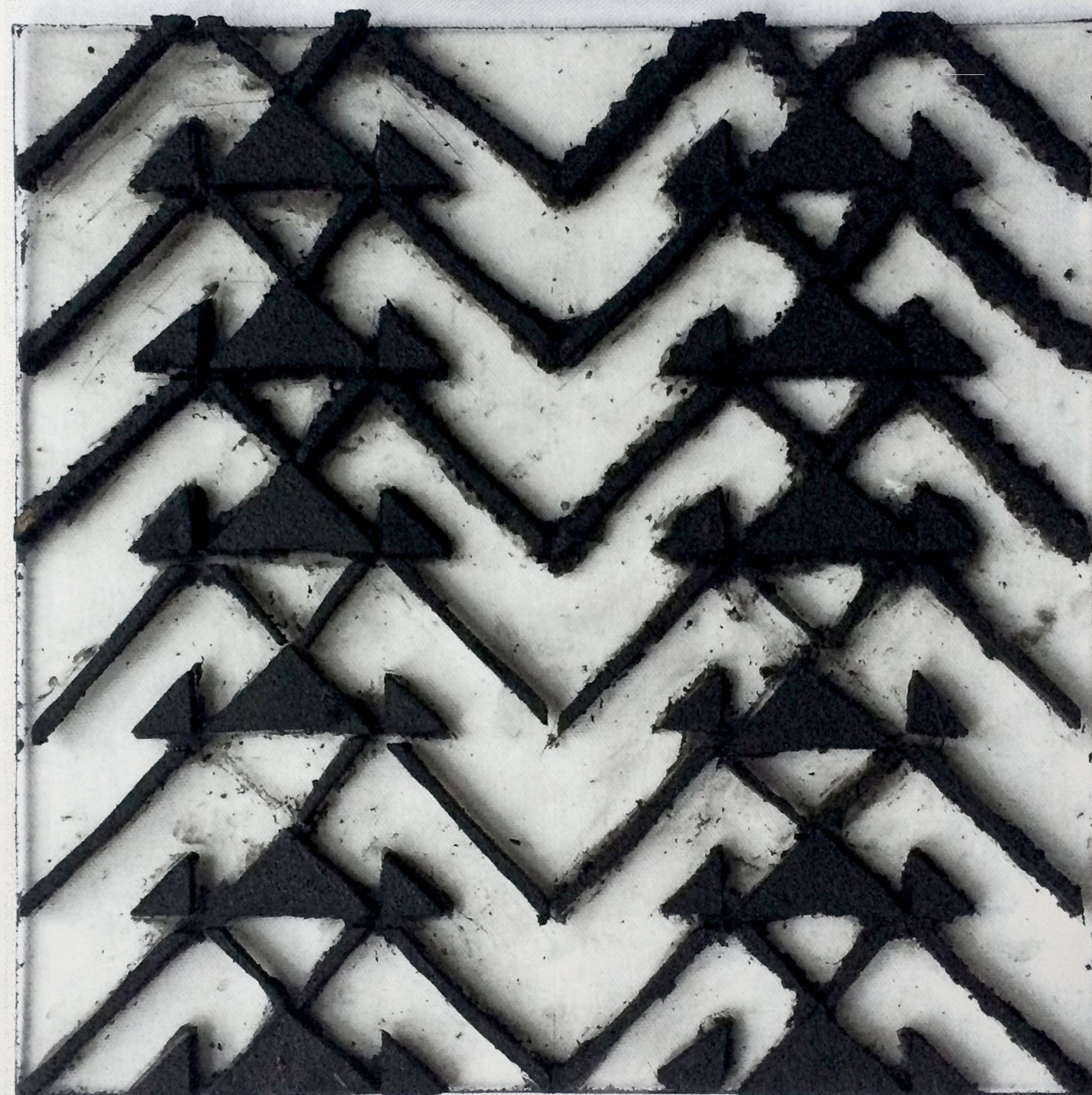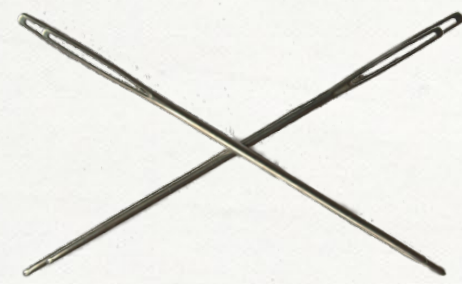
with improvised tools.

We learned to decoratively mend...

The catalysts for decorative mending as a workshop for Recovery by Design were the Japanese artistic traditions of *boro* and *kintsugi*. Both are techniques of repair – boro for textiles and kintsugi for ceramics – that exemplify the aesthetic philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, or 'imperfect beauty.'

I was drawn to the idea initially because of my own innate and ethical interest in DIY repair that I developed as a child, 'making do' in a rural environment. I realized that there was such a strong connection to recovery in the act of mending.

I found articles about sewing circles arguing that they facilitate great community dialogue and a sense of well-being (Battersby, Blood, Collier, Dravland, Johnson, Rowan). To take the idea a step further for an RBD workshop, I changed the sewing circle to a mending circle. A mending circle paired with relevant talking points led into a very productive group discussion about embracing imperfection.

Discussion Prompts

What is your favorite piece of clothing?

How do you feel when you wear it?

Clothing can get worn out and needs repairs and mending over time. Do you think this happens to people too?

What do you do to take care of yourself when you are feeling worn out?

"I think people who have faults are a lot more interesting than people who are perfect" — Spike Lee

Do you agree with this statement? Why do you/don't you? Can you compare this to clothing as well?

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questioning the aesthetic and economic values of purity we place on both objects and people.

Recovery by Design is centered around interaction and materiality, as essential not only to the design process but also to well-being. The ability to create is an empowering experience. What we can learn and gain from it is both emotional and practical. By shaping materials we learn how we might shape the world around us. Carrying that knowledge with us, we solve problems with our bodies and our minds.