

**Curating for Empathy:
Design Thinking for Social Engagement**

By

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CRITICISM AND CURATORIAL PRACTICES

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Abstract

This study asks, what strategies do curators as design thinkers use to foster social engagement in art exhibitions? Through examinations of the curatorial strategies in two case studies: *A Mile in My Shoes*, curated by Clare Patey (2015) at the Empathy Museum in London, and *Boxed*, curated by Sheila Sampath (2017) at The Public Studio in Toronto, I portray five curatorial tactics gleaned from secondary source research and first-person interviews with the curators. Drawn from Ezio Manzini's five concepts on social engagement and from Tim Brown's conceptual modes of Design Thinking, I argue that a balance of relational intensity between all participants enables empathy; participation is a refusal of the curator's authority; participants' openness to the lives of others enriches the participatory experience; embodied experiences produce empathy in participants; and iterative space produces participants' own sustainable stories as art. Design thinking in curatorial praxis is a catalyst for social change.

Keywords

Curatorial practice, empathy, resilience, design thinking, social engagement, social innovation, contemporary art

To all who seek wellbeing.

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Diane Mikhael: Thesis

**Curating for Empathy:
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I. Introduction

What does it mean for an art exhibition or a museum to be human-centered? How do curators transform their audience into an empathic public? *A Mile in My Shoes*, curated by Clare Patey in 2015 at the Empathy Museum in London, UK, and *Boxed*, curated by Sheila Sampath in 2017 and showcased in the window gallery at The Public design studio in Toronto, Canada, are two participatory art projects worthy of investigation in light of these questions. *A Mile in My Shoes* is a public art project. In it, the participant enters a giant shoebox installed in a public space at the Peninsula Square in Greenwich Peninsula, London. Each participant picks a pair of shoes and an audio story recorded by a storyteller who shares emotional moments from their lives. Embarking on a physical and empathetic journey, each participant wears headphones to listen to the selected story, puts on shoes that belong to the narrator and walks a mile. *Boxed* was an exhibition in a window gallery at The Public studio in Parkdale, Toronto. Audiences access the vitrine from the street. The exhibition consisted of forty boxes on which words around the theme of shame were painted. The aim of this exhibition was not to create an artwork per se, but a human centered experience for both participants and audiences. In partnership with *Shameless* magazine, whose mission is to practice and develop an inclusive feminism, four youth from the advisory board of *Shameless* collaborated in a series of workshops to create a dialogue between the participants. This

dialogue became an opportunity to collaborate, empathize with one another, grow in self-confidence and name and honor the resilience¹ they already have. The Public project gallery has been the ear and heart for the community at Parkdale both for its activist installations, but also for the engagement of these four participants who many are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) youth.

This study seeks to ask, what curatorial strategies do curators use to foster social engagement? How do these tactics mirror the philosophy and processes of design thinking methods? What is at stake when spaces of positive engagement activate difficult memories and negative emotions? How can curatorial strategies foster empathic responses in curators and viewers with an aim to inspire change and articulate demands for social justice?

1. Resilience appears as a key concept in a wide variety of fields, with diverse definitions and applications. For the purposes of this study, I define resilience as the capacity to recover from trauma and other difficult lived experiences, often through relational and social encounters. In defining resilience in this way, I follow the work of Luis A. Bojórquez-Tapia, a scholar with research interest on social-ecological challenges, and professor Hallie Eakin whose research focuses on social-ecological resilience, who describe resilience as not only the ability to recover from hindrances resulting from a crisis, but also to adapt well to transformation, and keep going in confronting adversity, trauma, and critical stress in order to limit impending vulnerabilities. See Luis A. Bojórquez-Tapia and Hallie Eakin, "Conflict and Collaboration in Defining the 'Desired State': The Case of Cozumel, Mexico." In *Collaborative Resilience: Moving Through Crisis to Opportunity* by Bruce Evan Goldstein et al. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 153. In the development of communities resilient to crisis, "a 'resilient system' is one that can withstand shocks and surprises, absorb extreme stresses, and maintain its core functions, though perhaps in an altered form," says Connie P. Ozawa. See Connie P. Ozawa, "Planning Resilient Communities: Insights from Experiences with Risky Technologies" in *Planning with complexity: An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy* by Judith Innes and David Booher (New York: Routledge, 2015), 19. A "resilient community" may be defined as a community that is able to respond to unexpected and unwelcomed events in ways that enable groups and individuals to work together to minimize the adverse consequences of such crises. A resilient community is adaptable, not rigid." See Connie P. Ozawa, "Planning Resilient Communities: Insights from Experiences with Risky Technologies" in *Collaborative Resilience: Moving Through Crisis to Opportunity* by Bruce Evan Goldstein (Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press, 2011), 19. Michael Ungar, a professor, and a social worker and family therapist with experience in mental health affirms, "Aspects of positive psychological functioning like social bonding, a capacity for empathy, and a sense of coherence can co-occur with trauma-related symptoms typically associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is the promotion of these positive aspects of adaptation that concern those who study resilience." See Michael Ungar, "Resilience, Trauma, Context, and Culture," *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 14. 3 (May 2013): 255-266, 255.

The curator of *A Mile in My Shoes* offers an embodied experience that engages empathy to create human bonds between participants. As for *Boxed*, the curator's strategy is to inspire participants to explore their agency, with an aim to increasing resilience by facing shame and trauma collectively. In this study, I argue that *Boxed* provides access to a collaborative, dialogical, safe and empathic environment whereby participants become visionary, active and efficient in dealing with their own difficulties. In both exhibitions, curators engage the audience as active participants: co-authors and co-producers in the creation of the social artwork.

Each curator co-designs a public space for the purpose of creating awareness about the problems of others. Each curator includes interactions centered on practical, real-world problems of ordinary people with an aim to triggering emotional responses, and thereby empathy in the audience (described hereafter as participants). The curator aspires to create and inspire in participants the capacity for social change. I draw from the perspective of Catherine Docherty, a researcher and consultant in social innovation who defines design thinking as “an enabler in the innovation process, by providing a ‘safe’ space for diverse perspectives to be openly shared, for new insights to emerge, for knowledge to be created, while empowering participants in the co-creation of shared visions.”² Patey and Sampath build their curatorial strategies on a design thinking approach that is generally defined as a *human-centered process for innovation*.³ By analyzing the convergence of design thinking and public programming in these two case

2. Catherine Docherty, “Perspectives on Design Thinking for Social Innovation,” *The Design Journal* 20, no.6 (2017): 719-724, doi: 10.1080/14606925.2017.1372005

3. Thomas Lockwood, *Design Thinking: Integrating Innovation, Customer Experience, and Brand Value* (New York: Allworth Press, 2009), xi.

studies, the goal of this thesis is to acknowledge and encourage transdisciplinarity in curatorial practice, providing insight into how curators can tap into, and influence, the wide discourse of human-centered design thinking.

This thesis analyzes the curator as a design thinker for social innovation.⁴ While the curator approaches a social need through a design thinking mindset and process, the result is a participatory art project. When I use the term design thinking, I am not suggesting a physical product, or a virtual artifact, but framing a process through which curators can stage a relational experience that can influence people's attitudes and transform a social situation.

I choose design thinking as a framework for social art exhibitions because, in a social engagement project where curatorial methods are non-linear and exploratory, design thinking principles can guide curators to rethink the very nature of curatorial practice. Design thinking offers tactics to map, review and evaluate the successes and the failures of a project. Curators working with design thinking strategies can transform failures into opportunities that allow them to innovate in structuring and restructuring the design of an exhibition; better learn about and understand the audience as participants; generate alternative learning milieus; and reveal new possibilities for

4. In today's economy, social innovation could be seen as a market centered focus and a shift from traditional socioeconomic contexts to new financial vehicles for changing systems. Ezio Manzini frames this as a "social economy where the market, the state, and the grant economy coexist with self and mutual help, barter, charity and pro bono activities (Manzini 2015, 14-15). Different from economies based on the production and consumption of commodities, social innovation is seen as strategies and concepts for social conversation about "what to do with people's lives and how to do it. It is a collection of conversations for action." (Manzini, 2015, 14-15). In my approach, I frame social innovation as a platform for social conversations and interaction between curators and participants in the context of participatory art. Then the exhibition space goes beyond the visuals and installations and expands to include feelings, emotion, affect and empathy. See Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation* (London: The MIT Press, 2015), 14-15. This converges with the concept of designing for humanity that is altered to become design *with* humanity as designers, according to curator, writer and critic Ellen Lupton, "seek more egalitarian relationships with an increasingly well-informed public." See Ellen Lupton, *Beautiful Users: Designing for People* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014), 15-21.

curators to influence social change. These possibilities create ideas that are significant to the challenges everyday people encounter in their lives.⁵

A Mile In My Shoes is concerned with a general lack of empathy. Clare Patey has curated this public art project to evoke an experience of ‘shared humanity’ that is rooted in stories. She explores tactics to “make empathy active in participants.”⁶ As a curator, she is also practicing empathically with all who are engaged in the project. Sheila Sampath, curator of *Boxed*, identified the need to increase the visibility of marginalized communities in Parkdale, Toronto.⁷ She refers to her programming strategies as a processual method that transforms participants’ intense and painful emotions into an opportunity for healing and growth. She, like Patey, also curates with empathy. Increased resilience in participants is an integral outcome of the project.

I find that the empathic experience evoked through *A Mile in My Shoes* and *Boxed* mirrors my own experience. For over thirty years (1975-2006) I survived civil wars, occupations and forced displacements in Lebanon. I have been subjected to famine, traumatophobia (the fear of war or physical injury), marginalization, and racism. I have learned to empathize with the vulnerable. Today, I feel the necessity and value of living and working empathically. As a design educator, curator, and researcher, I am always probing for dialogical spaces in art and design that activate our need to bridge human relations, create universal wellbeing, and democratize systems.

My rationale behind conducting interviews with curators Clare Patey and Sheila Sampath is due to the particularity of their curatorial practice. This triggered my curiosity

5. Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation* (London: The MIT Press, 2015), 4-10.

6. Clare Patey, interview by Diane Mikhael, January 30, 2018.

7. Sheila Sampath, interview by Diane Mikhael, January 26, 2018.

to learn more about the engagement strategies that activate empathy in participants in social art projects. Through their curatorial praxes they have developed concepts and processes that mirrored the philosophy and approaches of design thinking that are worth unpacking in this thesis. Both curators develop an exemplar for a better humanity, where an art experience is mobilized by a design thinking approach to stimulate a politics of identification, and sociability.

Designers are called upon to be socially responsible by responding to others' needs and it is this call to responsibility that also informs the work of the curator in socially engaged art projects. Conversely, not all designers are design thinkers.⁸ Design begins with setting a strategic intention. A strategy is a path to accomplish objectives.⁹ With their strategic practices, Patey and Sampath advocate that design thinking is transdisciplinary.

8. Don Norman, "Design Thinking: A Useful Myth," *Core 77*, June 25, 2010, <http://www.core77.com/posts/16790/design-thinking-a-useful-myth-16790>.

9. Thomas Lockwood and Thomas Walton, *Building Design Strategy: Using Design to Achieve Key Business Objectives* (New York: Allworth Press, 2008), xii.

II. Literature Review

Design Thinking overview

Design Thinking is a human-centered method that employs participation, co-design, co-creation and intuitive problem-solving practices.¹⁰ Not a new phenomenon, design thinking has been in flux since the 1960s.¹¹ The year 1960 marked the emergence of a design methods movement succeeded by a vital debate over process, theory and methodology.¹² Today, contemporary design thinking is framed as a mindset and a method. The IDEO consultancy agency and Stanford Design School play a significant role in inspiring many sectors, whether business and education institutions, or social and cultural communities, to adopt design thinking in the hope of creating innovative outcomes that respond to people's needs.¹³ Many design thinking models differ in processes and methods based on the nature of the problem, participants, context and needs, and often these factors are interdependent.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to define what design thinking is and how it expands to engage people in the problem-solving process. This review presents

10. Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt, "Design Thinking for Social Innovation," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 8, no.1 (Winter 2010): 29-35.

11. Kees Dorst, "The Nature of Design Thinking," *Proceedings of the 8th Design Thinking Research Symposium* (Sydney: DAB Documents, 2010), 131-139.

12. In 1962 in London, the Conference on Systematic and Intuitive Methods in Engineering, Industrial Design, Architecture and Communication inspired the start of a movement that pointed at defining design on its own terms, an independent field from art and craft. During this period, Herbert Simon pioneered research on a design science, while Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber in the 1970s reacted to the rigid scientific approach in design by creating the term *wicked problems*—problems that are difficult to solve. In the 1970s, Victor Papanek drew attention to fundamental societal needs in design. In 1979, Bruce Archer developed design into an academic discipline at the Royal College of Arts in London and focused on discussing the nature of design methodology. From 1980 and 1990 onwards, theorists such as Peter Rowe, Nigel Cross, Donald Schon and Richard Buchanan explored the cognitive aspects of the design process. The roots of participatory design go back to the methods movement of the 1960s known as the Scandinavian approach. The method evolved and changed to generate new theories and methods fueled by the emergence of social movements and the expansion of co-operative design practice. In the 1990s and 2000s, new methods such system design, user-centered design, co-design, service design evolved focused on creating human centric experience. Stefanie Di Russo, "Understanding the behavior of design thinking in complex environments," (PHD thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, Faculty of Design, 2016), 42-50.

13. Stefanie Di Russo, "Understanding the behavior of design thinking in complex environments," (PHD thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, Faculty of Design, 2016), 42-50.

key strategies within social innovation design methods that activate empathy in the processes of producing and presenting exhibitions.

The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford framed seven vital mindsets for the design thinker to hold. A *show don't tell* approach that encourages design thinkers to convey their vision by creating experiences, using illustrative visuals and sharing stories. A focus on *human values* through which empathy, vis-à-vis the audience as participant—and their feedback—is central to the design experience. *Embrace experimentation* through prototyping a method to build, think and learn as integral activities in the innovation process. Production is *biased toward action*: doing and making that *crafts clarity* for an intelligible vision inspires others and fuels ideation. To be *mindful of process* enables the thinkers to learn where they stand (i.e., what are the methods and goals set in each case?). Finally, *radical collaboration* brings together innovators with wide-ranging backgrounds and perspectives and allows obtained insights and solutions to ensue from the diverse stakeholders.¹⁴

In light of these mindsets, the design school has refined the five modes of development. *Empathy* includes the activities to observe participants in their contexts, engage them through interaction, and immerse oneself and experience what they experience: *Define* is the phase when the design thinker unloads and synthesizes empathy outcomes into cogent needs and observations. *Ideate* is a transition phase from identifying problems into exploring solutions or possibilities. *Prototype* includes exploring an idea with physical form, and it could be anything from post-it notes, storyboard, or role-playing activity, to a space, an object, or an interface. Design team

14 . “The Bootcamp Bootleg,” D. School at Stanford University, accessed April 2018, http://dschool.stanford.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2011/03/BootcampBootleg_2010v2SLIM.pdf

participants, or any stakeholders involved in the process can experience and interact with the prototypes. This participatory and interactive experience can yield connections and influence solutions. Finally, the *Test* mode, this is when the design thinker tests the artifact or experience and creates more questions.¹⁵ This iterative mode allows opportunity to refine solutions.

Tim Brown, a strategic design thinker and CEO at IDEO consulting agency, conceives of design thinking not as a simple recipe to pursue but as alternative ways to move through the process: “The continuum of innovation is best thought of as a system of overlapping spaces rather than a sequence of orderly steps.”¹⁶ His system comprises three spaces: *inspiration space* where the problem or opportunity motivates the search for solutions; *ideation space* that includes the process of generating, developing, and testing ideas; and *implementation space* where a path leads from the project room to the world.¹⁷ These dynamic spaces frame design thinking as essentially exploratory, nonlinear, and iterative processes that allow for exploration. New directions ensue, leading to unexpected discoveries. Subsequently, it is seen as an open-ended process. Within the three exploratory spaces, Brown focuses upon three supporting elements of any successful design thinking approach: *Insight*, “learning from the lives of others”¹⁸; *Observation*, “watching what people don’t do, listening to what they don’t say,”¹⁹ and *Empathy*, which invites design thinkers to imagine “standing in the shoes (or lying on the gurneys) of others.”²⁰ By adhering to these supporting tactics, “the mission of design

15. D. School, “The Bootcamp Bootleg.”

16. Tim Brown, *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2009), 16.

17. Brown, *Change by Design*, 16.

18. Brown, *Change by Design*, 40.

19. Brown, *Change by Design*, 43.

20. Brown, *Change by Design*, 48-49.

thinking is to translate observations into insights and insights into products and services that will improve lives.”²¹ These services could take the form of experience or understanding and not just a physical product. Brown highlights the characteristics of design thinking by stating that,

Design thinking is not only human-centered; it is deeply human in and of itself. Design thinking relies on our ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that have emotional meaning as well as functionality, to express ourselves in media other than words or symbols.²²

In describing the relationships between the design thinkers and the participants, Brown states, “It’s not about ‘us versus them’ or even ‘us on behalf of them.’ For the design thinker, it has to be ‘us with them.’”²³ In this way, human-centred design thinking does not just respond to the now, but forecasts into the future: “Design can help to improve our lives in the present. Design thinking can help us chart a path into the future.”²⁴

Strategies that employ design thinking enable curators to map and review their potential resources in producing and presenting an exhibition. According to Idris Mootee, a specialist in strategic innovation and applied design thinking in business strategy, “design thinking helps us appreciate and make sense of the complex connections between people, places, objects, events, and ideas.”²⁵ Design thinkers need the attributes defined by Aline Baeck and Peter Germett in their analysis of how design thinkers strategize for interactivity and user experience. Baeck and Germett suggest seven core attributes: *Ambiguity*, or the ability to remain comfortable when occurrences are unclear or when there is no solution in sight; *Collaborative*, the ability to work together through and

21. Brown, *Change by Design*, 48-49.

22. Brown, *Change by Design*, 4.

23. Brown, *Change by Design*, 58.

24. Brown, *Change by Design*, 50.

25. Idris Mootee, *Design Thinking For Strategic Innovation* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 14.

across disciplines; *Constructive*, creating novel ideas grounded in old potential or solid ideas; *Curiosity*, being drawn to matters one doesn't understand or observing things through a new perspective; *Empathy*, understanding through another's point of view; *Holistic*, an approach that draws on the bigger picture of audience context; and *Open*, a flexible approach for any problem in any discipline.²⁶

Empathy

These approaches share a fundamental ethos, even though the terms they deploy may differ. Empathy is at the core of these processes. For every collaboration that engages people as protagonists, empathy is inevitable. Roman Krznaric, a cultural thinker, philosopher, writer and the founder of the *Empathy Museum*, states that “Empathy is the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions.”²⁷ Empathy has a role to play in humanizing the world, or as Paulo Freire, a philosopher and critical pedagogy specialist puts it, “ethicizing the world.”²⁸ Design thinking activists assert that by bridging empathy, creativity and analytical processes, true innovation can arise in the method of solving social problems.²⁹ Empathy allows design thinkers (or curators), to drop their assumptions about the world so that they obtain rigorous insight from participants. In this essay, empathy is observed in the way curators

26. Aline Baeck and Peter Gremett, “Design thinking,” in *Best Practices: How To Achieve More Impact With User Experience*, eds. H. Degen, & X. Yuan (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 229-235.

27. Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2014), 56, Kindle.

28. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2016), 7.

29. Andrew Withell, and Neil Heigh, "Developing Design Thinking Expertise in Higher Education," *DRS and Cumulus, 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers*, (May, 2013): 1-12, <http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10292/6326/Andrew%20Withell%20Final.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

facilitate the experience for participants, and in the way participants empathize with each other.

Coalescing definitions present empathy as a malleable method to be adopted across disciplines. Theoretician Richard Buchanan indicates design thinking is a multidisciplinary mindset.³⁰ The following chapters of this study explore how Patey and Sampath approach particular design thinking concepts and strategies. Through their innovative concepts and processual praxes, they created tactics to successfully engage the audience in art exhibitions.

Participatory design and social innovation

Ezio Manzini, a design thinker for social innovation and sustainability, author of *When Everybody Designs*, engages the thinking of Robin Murray to define “social innovation as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”³¹ His book approaches design and social change,

in a connected world in transition toward sustainability: a world in which everybody constantly has to design and redesign their existence, whether they wish to or not; a world in which many of these projects converge and give rise to wider social changes; a world in which the role of design experts is to feed and support these individual and collective projects—and thus the social changes they may give rise to.³²

30. Dana Henriksen, Punya Mishra and The Deep-Play Research Group, “Creativity as Invention, Discovery, Innovation and Intuition: an Interview with Dr. Richard Buchanan,” *TechTrends* 62, no.3 (May, 2018): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-018-0279-4>

31. Ezio Manzini, “A leading thinker in design for sustainability, founded DESIS, an international network on design for social innovation and sustainability, (<http://www.desis-network.org>). He is Honorary Professor at the Politecnico di Milano, Chair Professor at University of the Arts London, and currently guest Professor at Tongji University, Shanghai, and Jiangnan University, Wuxi.

32. Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation* (London: The MIT Press, 2015), 1.

Stemming from this perspective, the word sustainability is seen as a system of continuity and resilience, “an ecology of relationships between people and between people and their environment.”³³ The changes that rise from one experience can branch out, iterate, and generate new questions, new conversations, new social experiences that allow transformation of attitudes, emotions and ethics in participants to happen.

Manzini indicates that “*solutions for social innovation*” are these “new ideas that meet pressing unmet needs and improve people’s lives.”³⁴ Manzini argues that, “Design has all the potentialities to play a major role in triggering and supporting social change and therefore becoming design for social innovation.”³⁵ Consequently, what it requires is not so much a specific set of skills and methods as a new culture, a new way of being with the world and understanding what design can do with people living in it.³⁶ Richard Buchanan furthers this analogy by describing design thinking as a form of creative inquiry. “It is a form of creative action,” he says, or a “learning by experience.”³⁷ By centering action and dynamic engagement, design for social innovation as defined by Manzini, “is everything that expert design can do to activate, sustain, and orient processes of social change toward sustainability.”³⁸ Over time and in collaboration, the design thinker accretes new ways of knowing to cultivate a level of sophistication in their practice. While design thinking processes are significant in developing social innovation, design thinking strategies can also be activated outside the design discipline. Manzini describes social innovation as social conversation.³⁹ To make these conversations between

33. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 4.

34. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 12.

35. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 12.

36. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 55.

37. Henriksen, “Creativity as Invention,” 215.

38. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 62.

39. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 133.

design thinkers and participants effective, Manzini offers a spectrum of concepts that strategically guide the design thinker in the process. Among the many concepts presented across his book, I have selected five attributes that I consider key in social engagement strategies: 1) relational intensity that frames the interplay between participants and is measured based on the level of personal engagement and empathy invested in the project (here relational is defined as a relational encounter that is explained only when an individual is completely and honestly in the presence of the other, with all the unpredictability that causes;⁴⁰ 2) the sense of ownership that amplifies the voice of community (here the participants are considered “subject-actors interested in increasing their own capabilities and participating in the production of values,”⁴¹ where the role of a design thinker is “to expand the capabilities of people to lead the kind of lives they value by creating action platforms and sense systems”⁴²); 3) collaboration as a viable system for a sustainable society (a system through which “social innovation is leading to a multiplicity of experiences that together indicate a new way for people to interact with each other and the public”⁴³; this focus creates “places for experiments,” as Manzini defines it⁴⁴); 4) the radically new as a catalyst to empathy, defined by the use of an innovative strategy to resolve a given problem, by reframing a similar problem and directing it to altered results;⁴⁵ or by “responding to some urgent questions, radical innovations generate answers that change the questions themselves;”⁴⁶ and finally, 5) an iterative space as a radical innovation (in this space a resilient society is emerging and is

40. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 103-104.

41. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

42. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

43. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

44. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

45. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 14.

46. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 14.

activated by cultural diversity and creativity).⁴⁷ Manzini's five concepts of social innovation support the migration of design thinking from the design discipline to curatorial praxis. Manzini's concepts tie together effective strategies around human relationships that engage participants successfully. These tactics to create interaction, participation and collaboration are key curatorial practices for social art exhibition. Design thinking aids curators to be more inclusive and develop a new path of collaboration between stakeholders.

Sampath and Patey's curatorial activities are a leap towards design thinking approaches. The concept of each exhibition in this study is unique in needs, structure, and content. Each exhibition is driven by the participating community. I consider the curatorial strategies developed through these exhibitions to be useful prototypes that mobilize people who are facing complex social problems, offering them experiential tools to deal with challenge and change. This thesis charts design thinking in these curatorial projects, arguing for an amalgamation of a human-centered design experience and social innovation for sustainability. Human-centered design focuses on empowering the participants to actively bring about change through their own ideas or concepts, by their own effort.⁴⁸

From a macro perspective, I think broadly about how utilizing a design-thinking approach to evoke empathy unleashes the potentiality of curatorial studies. A design thinker does not need to be a designer but a strategic thinker who engages human experience at the core of their project. Design thinking for social engagement is a road map for curators in their working environment. Inclusive curators are responsive to the

47. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 21.

48. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 21.

needs of all people involved in the curating praxis.⁴⁹ They are adaptable, with an open mind, they engage difference and diversity. For instance, they may do regular studio visits with indigenous artists, artists of colour, feminist artists, queer and trans artists, older artists or artists with disabilities. They foster a plurality of voices, recognize ownership, and create a more empathic working environment. They will collaborate with participants whose identity differs from their own, and whose contribution is invaluable to the conversation. These curatorial attributes are useful approaches to decolonizing an exhibition or an institution. This observation does not mean that these practices are new to the curatorial discipline. There are many curators who already use similar strategies. However, being aware of a guiding principle can help grow and sustain these practices, to aid in the management of unpredictable challenges.

For curators who make exhibitions with an aim to create social change, the key strategy to engage the public is to activate empathy in participants. These dynamics between artwork and participation are not new to art. Nicolas Bourriaud's book *Esthétique relationnelle (Relational Aesthetics)* (1998) presents observations about hybrid relationships between art and context, culture and space, or between art and audience. Claire Bishop, a curator and art critic, criticized that all participatory systems, being inside or outside an art gallery, have to deal with conflict to be considered as participative.⁵⁰ While participatory approaches in art revolve around the meanings and values of these gestures, social engagement guided by design thinking for social innovation presents a trajectory of methods, strategies and values that activate human relations, foster empathic responses and enable transformations of participant attitudes.

49. Linda L. Nassbaumer, *Inclusive Design A Universal Need* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2012), 37.

50. Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010), 116.

Socially engaged art, as well as social innovation in design, focuses on developing social and political change through collaboration with participants, communities, and institutions in the exploration of participatory creative work. These two disciplines also foreground the experience of the project (process) over artifacts or objects (products). However, I refer to design theory in human-centered design for social innovation as it offers tools and tactics that have been generously explored by researchers, and historically proved to be fluid, and flexible to implement its principles to different disciplines, social experiences, needs and contexts.

While design thinking offers reliable approaches to engage participants and foster social change, it can also present many challenges that flip the relationship between design thinkers and participants' into dissatisfaction. One particular concern of these limitations is how design thinkers who are researchers and facilitators in the design thinking process "manage the power imbalance between researchers and participants."⁵¹ For instance, in many circumstances, design thinkers become the center of the experience, sharing their personal stories and insights, and focusing on their reflexivity. According to Linda Finlay, an integrative psychotherapist, and academic consultant, this can be used for critical self-reflection through processes that "engage researchers in explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of their own role."⁵² But it can also risk an over-investment in the experience of the design thinker and not enough accountability for the experiences of the participants. Finlay considers that researchers who are practicing reflexivity,

51. Linda Finlay, "Outing the Researcher: The Provenance, Process, and Practice of Reflexivity in Qualitative Health Research," *Sage Journals* 12, no. 4 (April 2002): 531 – 545, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052>.

52. Finlay, "Outing the Researcher: The Provenance," 531–545.

Might be forced to come clean about certain mistakes, such as asking misguided questions or choosing the wrong strategy. Researchers committed to the reflexive project need to be prepared for these eventualities and to probe their more disagreeable reactions. Although burdensome, as instruments of their own research, researchers need to engage in such analysis. Being preoccupied by one's own emotions and experiences, however, can skew findings in undesirable directions. The researcher's position can become unduly privileged, blocking out the participant's voice.⁵³

Within this shared platform of personal information between design thinkers and participants, design thinkers need significantly to reach a balance, and ambitiously enhancing self-awareness but evading of being bias, or else the concepts and objectives of collaboration and participation in the design thinking process are misrepresented. This result can hinder the participants' desire to contribute in the project.

Limitations of the Design Thinking

Ethnographers and anthropologists since 1970s have considered this methodological self-consciousness called reflexivity as confessional accounts, through which the main process transforms the personal information of an experience or encounter into public knowledge.⁵⁴ In the context of qualitative research of the design thinking process, design thinkers who are engaged in reflexivity can transform their subjectivity in research from a problem to an opportunity.⁵⁵ Inspired by ethnographic and qualitative researcher Amanda Coffey, and scholar Paul Atkinson, Finlay explains that transactions and concepts resulting from the process of exploration need to be

53. Finlay, "Outing the Researcher: The Provenance," 541.

54. Clive Seale, "The Quality of Qualitative Research," *Sage Journals* 5, no. 4 (December 1999): 472-476

55. Finlay, "Outing the Researcher: The Provenance," 531.

documented and retrievable.⁵⁶ The role of reflexive analysis enables the design thinker to identify how the gathered data has been collaboratively built by the design thinking methods, the participants, and the design thinker. As Finlay asserts,

The quality of reflexive analysis depends largely on the way the process is approached. If the researcher is sincere in maintaining a primary focus on the participants or texts involved, returning to the self only as part of increasing awareness and insight, the problem of regress is bypassed.⁵⁷

It is important to engage the reflective analysis into the design process. If this self-reflective analysis is strategically engaged in the research project, it can “enliven, teach and spur readers towards a more radical consciousness. Voicing the unspoken can empower both researcher and participant.”⁵⁸

Inspired by these observations and theories on design thinking, the following chapters present the scope of *A Mile in My Shoes* and *Boxed*, examining the curatorial strategies that were deployed, while evaluating each project’s success in encouraging audience participation. I shall limit the field of arguments to discuss only five conditions that I find effective in activating social engagement. While the thesis is structured as a comparison of two participatory art projects, its structure follows the common strategies deployed in each project. In each essay I present five engaging curatorial tactics that have been synthesized from both case studies, gleaned from secondary source research and first-person interviews with the curators. For each strategic engagement, I present one argument and I draw from Manzini’s five concepts on social engagement to critically

56. Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson, “Making Sense of Qualitative Data Analysis: Complementary Strategies,” *Sage Publishing*, (Thousand Oaks CA, 1996), 191.

57. Finlay, “Outing the Researcher: The Provenance,” 542.

58. Finlay, “Outing the Researcher: The Provenance,” 544.

discuss the significance of each strategy. In the discussion, I will also refer to Tim Brown's conceptual modes of Design Thinking.⁵⁹

First, I claim there is a balance of relational intensity between all participants that enables empathy and builds trust. Second, I suggest participation is staged in each of these projects as a refusal of the notion of the curator's authority and connoisseurship of topics, and in its place is offered the inclusion of the community's voice and strength. Third, I argue that through the multidisciplinary skills of various stakeholders, the strategy of opening the participants' to the lives of others enriches the participatory experience. Fourth, the thesis posits that embodied experience is an experiential prototype that produces empathy in participants. Finally, I examine how an iterative space helps to produce participants' own sustainable stories as art.

The implementation of design thinking within Patey and Sampath's programming demonstrates that design thinking is an integral process for generating social change through exhibition design. The study asserts that the role of design thinking in contemporary curatorial praxis is a catalyst that, by initiating human interaction, can inspire social change for the wellbeing of the wider public. Curators facilitate emotional situations, encouraging their audience to listen to unheard voices, empowering empathy to inspire social change.

59. Brown, *Change by Design*, 50.

III. Essay 1: *A Mile in My Shoes*

i. Project Description

A Mile in My Shoes is an audio portrait art project that opened to the public in 2015 at the Empathy Museum in London, UK. The installation is a scalar sculpture: a giant shoebox installed on Peninsula Square in Greenwich Peninsula. Patey described the project as having been designed beyond the perimeters of a predictable gallery or museum.⁶⁰ There are two types of participants in this project: the storytellers and the walkers. The storytellers are those who share their lives with the public. They record their stories and donate a pair of shoes so others can walk in them. The walkers are those who visit the shoebox installation, pick a story, listen to the audio file and try to walk a mile in their shoes. As the website for the project explains, “From a Syrian refugee to a sex worker, a war veteran to a neurosurgeon, visitors are invited to walk a mile in the shoes of a stranger whilst listening to their stories. The stories cover different aspects of life, from loss and grief to hope and love and take the visitor on an empathetic as well as a physical journey.”⁶¹

The huge shoebox that houses the project holds a diverse collection that explore the compendium of what the curator describes as a “shared humanity.”⁶² “When wearing the shoes out and about, you will be recognized as a walking ambassador of the empathy revolution— someone who is dedicated to the art of stepping into the shoes of others and

60. Clare Patey, interview.

61. “A Mile In My Shoes,” Empathy Museum, accessed November 2017, <http://empathymuseum.com/#amileinmyshoes>

62. The term *shared humanity* is defined as personal stories told by individuals who volunteered to share real and moving stories with the public.

Brian Hanratty, “A Shared Humanity, Using Literature to Develop the Global Dimension, Citizenship, Social and Economics Education,” *Sage Journals* 7, no. 2 (June 2007): 90 -103, <https://doi.org/10.2304/csee.2007.7.2.90>

seeing the world from their perspective,” says Roman Krznaric, a writer and the founder of the Empathy Museum.⁶³ In this way, *A Mile in My Shoes* engages the audience not as passive viewers but as participants in the creation of the work; by inviting ordinary people to serve as narrators, and by encouraging visitors to physically and emotionally experience the stories of others.

Patey has been curating relational art in public spaces: in streets, on bridges, in hospitals, and rooftops. These participatory experiences inspired her to curate empathic art. “I am passionate about public spaces, about bringing people together, and about conversation,” she says.⁶⁴ After being approached by Krznaric and invited to explore some of the ideas in his book *Empathy: A Handbook for Revolution* (2014), Patey started a brainstorming session to investigate the concept of a human-centered project. She invited people from her surroundings into the inspiration process to define the meaning of the word empathy. Most agree that empathy is described as “seeing the world through somebody’s eyes” or viewing the world from another’s perspective.”⁶⁵ Inspired by the outcomes of these sessions, she tackled the concept of walking a mile in the shoes of others to produce the structure of the exhibition. “All I’ve done is take the metaphor ... and turn it into a physical reality.”⁶⁶ The exhibition concept converges with the Empathy Museum’s objective to help viewers look at the world through other people’s eyes.⁶⁷

63. Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2014), chap 8, Kindle.

64. “Claire Patey, The Empathy Museum,” Meaning Conference, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://2016.meaningconference.co.uk/clare-patey/>

65. Patey, interview.

66. Lyn Gardner, “A Drag Queen's Heels and A Miner's Boots: Show Lets You Walk A Mile in Their Shoes,” *The Guardian* 6 (June 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jun/06/walk-a-mile-in-my-shoes-empathy-museum-london-international-festival-of-theatre>)

67. Gardner, “A Drag Queen's Heels.”

ii. Working Process and Collaboration

The first phase of the project was to recruit the storytellers. The curator met each person in their environment or at the Empathy Museum, depending on their preference. While the details of how she selected the storyteller and conducted the first meeting is not documented in this study, Patey affirmed that she met face to face prior to the recording session. With a kind and welcoming introduction, she slowly attuned to the person and listened to his or her thoughts and concerns.

The recording process occurred in the storyteller's home, working environment or at the Empathy Museum: the choice of venue was left up to the participant. Prior to the recording, the storyteller chose the most comfortable zone in the room to record the story. According to Patey, she created a space for storytellers to address questions or exchange ideas in a form of a dialogue.⁶⁸ With a tactful approach she explained the spectrum of the project. The storytellers were encouraged to stop the process at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Collaborative and open-ended, Patey gives the storytellers the freedom to choose what they felt they needed to share.⁶⁹

During the recording phase and across the whole process, Patey included specialists from various disciplines when needed. She mainly collaborated with artist producers from the *Arts Admin* production agency; contemporary artists who hire themselves out as directors and technicians to record, edit, and montage the narrated stories. Patey also indicated that she invited a neuroscientist, a therapist and social workers who offered professional counseling services on site to deal with the anticipated

68. Patey, interview.

69. Patey, interview.

difficulties storytellers or walkers might encounter during their experience.⁷⁰ During my interview with her, Patey mentioned that in particular cases, where the storyteller recounts a traumatic situation, a neuroscientist is called on board to assist and facilitate the experience.⁷¹ Patey explained that the team worked with a spirit of collaboration and readiness to help and support: “There is integrity in the way we invite someone to do or to be part of. The extending of that invitation is crucial and the way we ask something from someone is the most important thing.”⁷²

As part of the collaboration in this project, designers and artists at the museum were responsible for the look and feel of the installation: the shoebox architecture, the shoebox, the label, and the way-finding. The prototype for the shoebox was an old container that is shipped, sourced and customized locally. The approximate size is 6.1 meters long by 2.6 meters wide. The design of the container and the furniture inside were provided by the Empathy Museum.⁷³ According to Patey, the decision to make a museum in the shape of a shoebox is an attempt to avoid the cold stereotype of the museum as white cube and to replace it with a witty yet familiar object.⁷⁴

Inside the space, shoeboxes are abundant: each box contains a pair of shoes donated by the storyteller. The label states the storyteller’s name and the size of the shoe. This is the only information on the box. The design of the shoebox is formally linked to the exterior design of the shoe shop so the walkers are engaged within the same visual system to avoid any disconnection. In addition, every pair of shoes comes with a story, accessible by one pair of headphones and an MP3 device. The interior space consists

70. Patey, interview.

71. Patey, interview.

72. Patey, interview.

73. Claire Patey, “Empathy Museum,” *Arts Admin* (2015), 2-5, <https://www.artsadmin.co.uk/media/documents/promoters/EmpathyMuseum.pdf>

74. Patey, interview.

mainly of open shelves that hold the boxes. The environment is decorated with exhibition banners or posters and there are benches or seats for the walkers arranged in the room. The space is carefully designed to create a welcoming and sociable environment for the walkers. Site attendants are present to help the walkers select an experience. The site attendant shares instructional information about how to prepare during a short discussion prior the walk. Outside, the walking distance is literally one mile away from the installation. When walkers return, the museum creates a social space to share feedback.

Each storyteller donates a pair of shoes to be part of the collection. The walkers are matched for size. However, Patey reports that some walkers prefer to walk with larger shoes than fit them. This literal mismatch raises productive questions about the limits of designing spaces for embodied experiences of empathy: what does it feel like to walk in shoes that are too large or small? A large man, for instance, cannot walk in the shoes of a small woman. How does he empathize with her difference when he literally cannot fit into her shoes? At this point, he has to choose another story with another pair of shoes to engage with the physical experience. As Lyn Garder writes in her review of the work, “The physical element is an important part of the experience because every time you look down you don’t recognize your feet. It changes the way you walk.”⁷⁵

More than one hundred and fifty stories have been recorded and, since September 2015, more than ten thousand walkers have visited the installation.⁷⁶ There is no specific story structure the storyteller has to follow, no specific voice tone or style to practice. The stories vary from 9 to 25 minutes in duration. The stories differ wildly, from a happy encounter to a sad, emotional or challenging experience. Attempting inclusivity, the

75. Gardner, “A Drag Queen's Heels.”

76. Gardner, “A Drag Queen's Heels.”

curator includes stories from all genders, class backgrounds, racial identities and ages.

The walker's journey starts inside the shoebox space when they pick a story. They test different shoes based on size and stories by topic or theme. Once they are ready, they switch on the device and move from inside to outside. There is an emotional moment of transition when the walkers start to experience a new perspective on life.

The feedback from the storytellers and walkers varies based on the uniqueness of the story experience. According to Patey, many storytellers were excited to have their voices heard by sharing them with the world. Others had difficulties in starting the process of narration but gradually overcame the emotional obstacle to proceed with confidence and purpose.⁷⁷ It would be useful for the future of this study to expand on this research to learn more about the experience from the storyteller's perspective. Were there feelings of regret, withdrawal, excitement, engagement, pride, healing? What could design thinking do to improve upon the storytellers' experiences of participation, and how might new prototypes for inclusion and sharing be developed?

When the walk ends, walkers are invited to a social space to communicate with the curator or attendant. Patey reports, "they come back to talk with the curator or artist and reflect on what they have experienced. Some people decide to reimagine their roles in society or change aspects of their behaviors and attitudes."⁷⁸ Is the curator trying to build a community experience based on shared thoughts and ideas? Upon exiting the project, many walkers felt moved by the powerful stories they had encountered. Is this response a sign of a broader empathetic or social effect? How does one capture the data of this branching effect/affect? What I mean by branching effect is that a moving

77. Patey, interview.

78. Patey, interview.

experience can trigger the participants' curiosity and motivate them to address new questions that can lead to generate new empathic experience.

This shift in perspective is a starting point towards social change. *A Mile in My Shoes* is now a traveling exhibition circulating around the world, as the project expands its mission. The project engages focus groups and small communities to address authority systems, questioning how empathy can impact policies.⁷⁹ To produce such a moving experience for audiences requires careful planning and strategic approaches on the part of the curator. *A Mile in My Shoes* can be held up as an example of how curatorial practice can help shape an experience of shared humanity for viewers (while divisive policies threaten to disrupt the idea of a shared human experience across much of the globe).

iii. Strategies and Discussions

At the core of design thinking is the goal of identifying a need and designing a response to it.⁸⁰ Storytellers and curators share the need to activate empathy in people. Storytellers contribute so they can voice and be heard. The curator designs a participatory installation in response to this need. I argue that Patey created the walking experience as a prototype to explore the efficacy of engagement, deploying (however unknowingly) design-thinking concepts that can contribute an effective processual strategy to curatorial praxis. In the following close reading of *A Mile in My Shoes*, I employ five concepts from social innovation—relational intensity, the sense of ownership, collaboration as a viable

79. How empathy can impact policies was one of the questions that storytellers addressed indirectly to Members of the UK parliament. *A Mile in My Shoes* teamed up with the Health Foundation to develop a collection of stories from people working within health and social care. The Empathy Museum mounted the exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall in the House of Commons, a busy thoroughfare for Members of Parliament and the public on their way to meetings in the Committee Room Corridor. The Members of Parliament who participated felt some of the challenges workers were facing. Retrieved from the Health Foundation clips website: <https://www.health.org.uk/events/mile-my-shoes-exhibits-parliament>.

80. Brown, *Change by Design*, 39-40.

system, the radically new, and an iterative space —and locate their practices in the three spaces of the design thinking, overlaying this model onto Patey’s curatorial process.

a. Relational Intensity

A group of people who share something, such as a place, culture, emotions, or occupation is broadly defined as a community.⁸¹ Clare Patey creates a community by inviting people from the public to contribute to her project as storytellers, walkers, and collaborators. However, meeting these strangers as storytellers individually for the first time is a challenging task for the curator during the recruitment process. Prior to recording the story, she clearly communicates the purpose of the project and its parameters. It is vital not only to be operationally active but also personally involved, so she listens with full receptivity, attunes to the storyteller, and presents signs that she understands their thoughts, feelings and intentions.⁸² She recognizes the value of their contribution to the project and comforts them with the safety of the exhibition as a reliable venue to share personal stories, noting that some storytellers are more vulnerable when sharing sad or traumatic stories.⁸³ Through these face-to-face interactions, Patey guides the storytellers into performance by initiating conversation about purpose, context and affect that gradually transforms the atmosphere into a discursive space of mutual interests and free expressions. What Patey has practiced here is an immersive empathic engagement that Brown classifies as the *Inspiration* space of design thinking,

Empathy is the mental habit that moves us beyond thinking of people as laboratory rats or standard deviations. If we are to “borrow” the lives of other people to inspire new ideas, we need to begin by recognizing that their

81. Shea, *Designing For Social Change*, 12-13.

82. Patey, interview.

83. Patey, interview.

seemingly inexplicable behaviors represent different strategies for coping with the confusing, complex, and contradictory world in which they live.⁸⁴

This empathic approach brings to the participatory experience ethical dimensions of respect, and trust, across all phases of the project and with all stakeholders. Brown affirms that we develop “insight through empathy, the effort to see the world through the eyes of others, understand the world through their experiences, and feel the world through their emotions.”⁸⁵ Since design thinking is non-linear and the process of divergence (the objective to multiply options to create choices) and convergence (the phase of problem-solving that drives toward solutions) repeats in the three spaces, defined by Brown as *inspiration space*, *ideation space* and *implementation space*, empathic engagements can also be practiced with other stakeholders during the ideation and implementation phases of the design thinking.⁸⁶ For example, Patey sustains her empathic approach with the walkers. The performers are self-selecting audience members who voluntarily, like the storytellers, decide to participate in the project. When they enter the shoebox space, the walkers are not restricted from choosing any recorded story to listen to out of many on display. The curator or the attendant checks in with the walkers on their ability to handle any intensity of some stories if the story they are about to experience is too emotional or powerful.⁸⁷ Many participants decide to accept this challenge but others select a different story out of a concern they might feel uncomfortable.⁸⁸

In a challenging situation such as the one facing both storytellers and walkers of

84. Brown, *Change by Design*, 49.

85. Brown, *Change by Design*, 50.

86. Brown, *Change by Design*, 67.

87. Patey, interview.

88. Patey, interview.

A Mile in My Shoes, Manzini suggests weighing the variables of immersion and empathy practiced by participants as a form of ‘relational intensity’. By comparing the difference between the participants’ *relational encounter* and *experiential encounter*, Manzini borrows Martin Buber’s writing about relations as an “I-Thou” relationship, and on experience as an “I-It” relationship.⁸⁹ He writes,

The relational encounter is one in which people stand face to face with one another and establish a deep relationship, which requires trust and implies intimacy; as Buber puts it, people become “thou” to each other: human beings present in that encounter in all their humanity. The experiential encounter, on the other hand, is one in which people render services. Thus, each expects of the other whatever the service entails: in the language of Buber, people see each other as “it,” as entities to be experienced. In this conceptual model, Buber maintains that an individual really becomes a person only when he or she engages with the other in a relational encounter, meaning only when he or she is truly in the presence of the other, with all the unpredictability that entails. In the experiential encounter, on the other hand, the other becomes an “object,” since the service through which the encounter occurs is a known, fixed procedure.⁹⁰

It follows that if Patey cultivates relational encounters which emerge from her empathic approach, she can increase engagement with the core phases of participation. When an individual connects with another, the individual opens up to the other person and becomes vulnerable.⁹¹ As Mazini writes, “It follows that encounters may be of different relational intensity: from a maximum, in which participants put themselves on the line at a personal level, to a minimum in which the interaction becomes experience: a formalized interaction where the encounter between the people follows a predefined format.”⁹²

89. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 62.

90. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 103-104.

91. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 103.

92. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 103.

If the concept of relational intensity can function as a key to identify, in curatorial practice or any other participatory fields, the levels of engagement, then relational intensity helps identify the nature and quality of connections between two or more individuals in various interactive and collaborative engagements. If they are set with high intensity, they can significantly activate empathy in collaborators, whereas if they are set in low intensity, as Manzini explains, they can only be considered an experience. Patey manages to sustain a balance between her interactions with the storytellers and the walkers. Her active presence helped make the recounting of traumatic experience more tolerable. This strategy can offer an opportunity to the storytellers to become resilient, mark the debut to recover from hindrances caused by their difficult encounters and attempt to confront their critical stress by simply sharing their untold stories with the public.

b. Community Ownership

When the storytellers are invited to narrate their experiences, they have the freedom to speak as they wish; any style, any story, as long as it is theirs.⁹³ They are the content generators, or co-authors, of *A Mile in My Shoes*. The captivating narratives of the storytellers are not rooted in a mythic or magical world but are woven out of the fabric of daily life. Storytellers punctuate their adventures with simple, impulsive and genuine expressions and idioms. They generate stories that register real life encounters. Their oral tales are transmitted as audio clips that create the core of the exhibition's materials.

93. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 103.

The storytellers are given a voice in and therefore ownership over the project. Through the rigor and the reality of their stories they contribute to the creativity of the project. In that sense they are acting as co-designer and are blurring the parameters of the conventional role of designers. Brown, quoting his colleague Jane Fulton Suri, states: “(This is)...the next stage in the evolution of design as it migrates from designers creating for people to designers creating with people to people creating by themselves through the application of user-generated content and open-source innovation.”⁹⁴ He suggests that “individuals, rather than allowing themselves to be stereotyped as ‘consumers,’ ‘customers,’ or ‘users,’ can now think of themselves as active participants in the process of creation.”⁹⁵ If storytellers are contributing to the creativity phase of the process, then co-designing gives agency to non-designers, who become designers in the process. Through their stories, they are responsible for guiding the process of activating empathy in the walkers. Their strength—delivering powerful, emotional stories that move the walkers—is key to the function and value of the project. Storytellers are then credited as co-authors, and responsible agents. Insights and creativity erupt within the three spaces of inspiration, ideation, and implementation. Brown confirms, “Insights rarely arrive on schedule, and opportunities must be seized at whatever inconvenient time they present themselves.”⁹⁶ Patey, in the *inspiration* space, allows space and time for difficult stories and strong emotions to emerge. During the *ideation* space, walkers test the prototype. Intense stories create inconvenient insights that motivate listeners and evoke empathy. By walking in the shoes of a stranger, the experience of testing the prototype makes physical these uncomfortable emotions; transforming empathy into inspiration, changing

94. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 59.

95. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 60.

96. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 60.

the participant's attitude towards a situation or people. During the *implementation* space the walkers' path of emotion leads them from the story to the world. This experience can also hold the inconvenient insight that will influence a shift in their beliefs.

Patey generally defines her role in *A Mile in My Shoes* as the “gracious and genuine agent of a host.”⁹⁷ She explains that her role as a curator is heavily loaded in the first phase when she works on the concept but also “acts as a kind of interface between the participants and the institution in the development of critical meaning, in partnership and in discussion with all stakeholders and the public.”⁹⁸ In this project, Patey creates a situation and a physical space where walkers are invited to interact with the curator and attendants on site: “I set up the whole space and then allow freely the interaction and collaboration to happen between the participants and this space.”⁹⁹ So, after securing the installation concept, display, and logistics, the exhibition space paves the way for the public explorations to take place. According to Patey, the curator has to trust the participants in leading their own experiences within the mediated landscape of the project.¹⁰⁰ While many walkers feel emotional, weird or uncomfortable wearing the shoes of a stranger, many consider this experience fun, exploratory and adventurous. However, the walkers are given the opportunity, and this is optional, to share their feelings and thoughts at the end of the walk. In that sense, the walkers are the ones who own the output of this experience, which is the experience of empathy. Whatever they do after exiting the project becomes their own responsibility and territory to explore.

97. Patey, interview.

98. Graham, *Rethinking Curating*, 10.

99. Patey, interview.

100. Patey, interview.

Manzini affirms that accepting an approach that gives people the freedom and responsibility of deciding for themselves what is important to achieve does not have the outcome of denying the designers for their decision-making capacity.¹⁰¹ He argues that,

...while design experts, by intervening in the design of the enabling solution, do not determine the way in which people will decide to operate, they do create action platforms and sense systems thanks to which different behavior may be more or less viable and more or less culturally commendable, and therefore more or less probable.¹⁰²

Manzini considers that the role of the expert designer is to participate with their skill and abilities, culture and vision, in the construction of action platforms and sense systems that give participants a greater possibility of being what they want to be and doing what they want to do.¹⁰³ The expert designers should offer the storytellers and the walkers an opportunity to define their own life stories, and do so in a lively and shared manner. Having the storytellers and the walkers at the center of the experience gives them the sense of ownership and commitment to this social project.

c. Multidisciplinary Skills

The sensitive disposition of the subject matter and the often disturbing information in the recorded stories has the potential to create traumatic and distressing situations for the walkers that can pose a set of hindrances to the curator's goals of eliciting empathy. To respond to these unpredictable and critical situations, Patey invites neuroscientists on site to facilitate conversations about the difficult moments that participants might encounter. She also invites anthropologists, historians and many other

101. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

102. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

103. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*: 97-100.

professionals to contribute to the conversation.¹⁰⁴ These supports introduced in the collaboration stage “create a virtuous circle that leads to practical opportunities and new ideas on society, production, and quality of life. In short, they permit us to outline a viable scenario for a sustainable society,” Manzini writes.¹⁰⁵ This perspective indicates that in *A Mile in My Shoes*, the roles of the storytellers, the walkers and the curator are socially tied with the skills of other specialists, transforming the collective and interactive experience into a dynamic platform of collaboration.

Beryl Graham, a curator and educator, observes in her book *Rethinking Curating* that “taking part in and acting upon each other,” the strategy of collaboration, defined as “working jointly with” others, is a significant strategy to build a sense of hospitality and community since all people involved in the artwork depend on each other’s participation, and complete each other’s activities with trust.¹⁰⁶ One would question then how does the storyteller encounter the neuroscientist? Do they go outside the shoebox for a walk? What forges a sense of community between them? Can this sense of community that nurtures interaction and collaboration produce empathy in all stakeholders? While this study does not provide answers to all these questions, I suggest that the act of participation produces a sense of community through interaction. People do not merely respond with logic; affects like sympathy, empathy, excitement, desire, appreciation, or abjection emerge during this process. For instance, the storyteller may induce emotions in the walker, and these emotions might produce a desire to be more attentive, or to question their role vis-à-vis the pain or issues of others.

104. Patey, interview.

105. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 179.

106. Graham, *Rethinking Curating*, 112-114.

Manzini connects the concept of participation to the interaction and relationship of the senses produced by human activities.¹⁰⁷ Then any collaborative or interactive works generated by participants undeniably produce a set of emotions and senses that influence the individual's responses and decisions vis-à-vis the project experience.¹⁰⁸ When the roles of curators and participants shift to include more collaboration and relational activities, it is expected that participants start apprehending their milieus and people around them through affective and empathic processes. Then, it is likely that participants develop resilience so that they can limit or more readily overcome future vulnerabilities.

Patey affirms the need to create a space of integrity and value production as a curator. All stakeholders are genuinely interacting with each other with respect and honesty. For example, the attitude of the attendant is open to, welcoming, and supportive of the walker.¹⁰⁹ Patey's strategy converges with the mission of the museum to create a public space where people can step into the world and see the world, practice the art of empathy, learn about another's culture so that participants can reflect on their own culture, and question their position and role and how they see the world.¹¹⁰ In this way, the curator creates an intersubjective relationship between her and every member of the team to develop a discursive platform of ideas, thoughts and problem solving aimed at eliciting empathy.

107. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 155-158.

108. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Design*, 155-158

109. Patey, interview.

110. Patey, interview.

d. Embodied Experience

In *A Mile in my Shoes*, the audience takes on the role of the performer when they decide to enter the shoebox space. With this engaging approach, walkers embark on a physical journey. They step out of their comfort zone and are experiencing something unexpected, new and different. Manzini interrogates “what does it mean to create a discontinuity with the current way of being and doing?”¹¹¹ His answer is to “create something that breaks the routine by proposing ways of behaving that are radically new.”¹¹² What does “radically new” mean? Within *A Mile in My Shoes*, the embodied experience of walking in the shoes of others is a radical innovation compared to the conventional act of creating your own story or wearing your own shoes.¹¹³ Radical newness emerges here out of an experience of otherness, or as a disruption to how one physically inhabits and experiences the world. The new and the unexpected experience make emotions active. If the participants feel connected, if they are triggered by the power of the story, they might feel related to and concerned with the subject whose story and shoes they have just experienced. In this state, they may practice active empathy.

As can be seen in documentation of the project (see Appendix, figures 1,2, and 3), a cis-male walker is wearing an oversized pair of “drag queen’s heels.” This could be an indication that the walker’s curiosity led him to try a pair of shoes bigger in size than those he usually wears. “Radical newness” is explored when walkers take off their own shoes and wear the storytellers’ footwear. Each pair of shoes becomes a visual surrogate that connotes the invisible persona in the story. This puts the walker in a physical

111. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 13-15.

112. Patey, interview.

113. Patey, interview.

dialogue between their own body and the invisible persona present through the ache and contortion of muscle memory. It seems that when visitors listen to truthful stories while walking awkwardly and sometimes painfully in these shoes, participants feel the reality and presence of the storyteller. As one walker reported: “you immerse yourself in a very private conversation with someone who is sharing their thoughts in such a candid way... This is a very simple concept yet so engaging.”¹¹⁴ Does this experience develop an intersubjective relationship between the storytellers and the walkers, to build a bridge between the visible and the invisible? This embodied experience seems to activate empathy in the walker. Harnessing the iterative power of storytelling, the walker becomes the new storyteller, engaging the looks of passersby whose curiosity triggers them to come and check the exhibition.¹¹⁵ The walkers’ interpretations of the stories are limitless and vary based on each person’s experiences and background. Unlike a theater show where performers are professional actors and tied to a particular script, the performers in *A Mile in My Shoes* respond intuitively and improvisationally, led partly by rational thought but also driven by emotional responses that create opportunities for an open interpretation of the artwork. It seems that this interaction between participants as storytellers and performers as active interpreters constitutes a channel of human bonds; a system of affective links to build interpersonal relationships between two or more people.

The effect of the story cannot be anticipated. Therefore, the walkers respond to the story based on their capacity to relate to the subject and its emotional impact. If Patey had planned to fully open up the participation to the experiences of the public, and create a platform for boundless interpretations, then she has developed a strategy for ‘shared

114. “A Mile in My Shoes at the House of Parliament,” The Health Foundation, accessed March 2018, <https://www.health.org.uk/events/mile-my-shoes-exhibits-parliament>.

115. Patey, interview.

values.¹¹⁶ This strategy produces an open-ended and divergent approach in the experience of participation, creating a venue for stories' permutation in the performer's mind and heart. When walkers build their own stories that carry their own emotions they are more likely to get moved and are motivated to take actions or generate responses. For instance, Patey described that many listeners decided to seek associations to help refugees, or express their interest in being with people after experiencing loneliness for a long time.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the curator here is catalyzing experiences of empathy into social action.

This is an indication that the longevity of the project *A Mile in My Shoes* expands beyond the orchestrated time and space of its presentation. The transition of the contributor's performance from participation as play to participation as political commitment demonstrates that the exhibition space becomes not only a venue for discourses of shared humanity but also a cue for ethical and social transformation.

Headphones, shoes and shoebox: Patey calls these "tools for interactivity."¹¹⁸ These objects not only function as a medium to disseminate the core content of the stories but also create an emotional bond between the walkers and the voice recorded. *A Mile in My Shoes* reveals participant identities, amplifies the diversity of voices and celebrates their shared humanity through the four actions of the artwork: storytelling, listening, walking and empathizing. The storytellers, who are co-authors of this project, narrate painful moments, traumatic facts, and vulnerable humour. Through these objects, the

116. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 93.

117. Patey, interview.

118. Patey, interview.

curator intends to create interrelations between participant and object that symbolically represent the persona of the absent person.

In their essay “Witnesses to Witnessing,” featured in their 2011 book *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton question the act of curating in the context of caring for the past, asking how curators and other stakeholders attempt to act as witnesses, by offering space and form to “absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic.”¹¹⁹ They observe that thinking about curating not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking—as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, interrelational obligation—raises key ethical questions relevant in an age of truth-telling: “What is our responsibility to stories of suffering that we inherit? Is the goal of curating to settle, or rather to unsettle established meanings of past events? Is it to create social space for a shared experience of looking, listening and talking, creating alternative relationships and publics, for constructive meaning making and action taking?”¹²⁰ During and after the experience, Patey creates an interactive space where participants listen, interact and move. Here the walkers bring new dimensions to their experience by asking themselves and others how they can help and what is their role in witnessing and working towards social justice.

e. Iterative Space and Resilience

A policy advisor, who works at the department of health in a hospital in UK, reported that when she walked a mile in the shoes of a health care staff, “I gain insights on how the front line staff does operate and what are the challenges they are facing to try

119. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton, *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Spaces* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan publishers, 2011), 4.

120. Lehrer, *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, 4.

to inform policies that I work on.”¹²¹ This testimony indicates that some of the walkers in *A Mile in My Shoes* demonstrate a positive will to take new actions in their lives after hearing the story. This proves that the transfer of a narrative from a storyteller to a walker creates an effective symbiosis, and the effect of this story creates a platform for the stories’ permutation in the walker’s mind and heart. Is this then a sign of a broader branching effect through which one experience builds the next, generating new questions and new emotions, perpetuating the empathic ethos?

This branching effect produces an open-ended approach in the experience of participation. This means that the walker’s intention is a promise to generate a new form of empathic engagement. The fact that this walk has shifted the walkers’ perspective is already a big step. Manzini describes this as an iterative space for radical innovation that transfers attention and responsiveness. According to him,

...this initial revolutionary move of considering the participants as storytellers not only for what they need to share but also for what they are able to influence led to a number of social influences on another group of people who respond to these stories through questioning their identity, role and capacity in their lives.¹²²

One would conclude that if Manzini considers the generative space a sustainable system and a cue for walkers to influence or inspire change, then iterative spaces that create an open ended platform for exploration are strategic in social engagement and a tool to allow empathic experience to flourish.

How does Patey capture the data of the branching effect/affect that her project initiates? It seems the testimonies from the storytellers and the walkers have not been

121. “A Mile in My Shoes at the House of Parliament,” The Health Foundation, accessed March 2018, <https://www.health.org.uk/events/mile-my-shoes-exhibits-parliament>.

122. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 120.

quantifiably or qualitatively analyzed, except through these short check-in sessions held by the curator or the attendants in the social space at the end of every walk. However, online interviews with the walkers have been documented on Youtube videos, blogs and online newspapers such as *The Guardian*. Reportage transferred the walkers' and storytellers' insights to the public, but I think these resources are not enough to track an important phase of the project that is the iterative potential of the walkers. While it might be impossible to track every walker's feedback, Patey needs to create a resourceful platform of information that she can refer to in order to develop future assessment of the project and learn from participants' experiences. I propose that Patey hosts a blog for *A Mile in My Shoes*. Blog websites have proved to be a vital platform to gather opinions, share research, clarify issues and more. Conner Sandefur, a postdoctoral scholar describes the importance of blogging for collaboration within scientific research teams. He states that,

research members can collaborate efficiently by posting to a project blog. Posts can be commented on, which provides a way for geographically distant collaborating project members to discuss results, new literature, and future ideas. Additionally, using blogs in electronic record keeping provides a convenient way to mentor individuals new to research and (electronic) record keeping. Regularity of blog posts by team members is easy to ascertain and can be used as an indicator of orderly record keeping.¹²³

To promote the blog as a potential research tool, Patey or attendants need to inform the walkers of the blog domain so they can visit the blog and engage the virtual community. This digital platform, if created, would offer a dialogical space that walkers can, not only

123. Conner I. Sandefur, "Young Investigator Perspectives. Blogging for Electronic Record Keeping and Collaborative Research," *American Journal of Physiology - Gastrointestinal and Liver Physiology*, December 15, 2014, <https://www.physiology.org/doi/full/10.1152/ajpgi.00384.2014>

share their experience, but also chat and exchange ideas with other walkers, or perhaps they will engage storytellers, an opportunity that is not offered in the physical exhibition space of *A Mile in My Shoes*. Then Patey will have a living record she can always refer to, which aids to map and analyze audience reception. The synthesis will inform her curatorial praxis as she considers how to improve and advance this participatory exhibition to make it more effective in activating empathy. As Sandefur notes, “A chief benefit of using blogs is that all project-related records and correspondence are centrally located. These records can be highly organized by keyword annotation and, depending on the security level, accessible at anytime from anywhere in the world.”¹²⁴ Knowing that *A Mile in My Shoes* is growing internationally, the blog can secure accessibility for international participants and storytellers.

To conclude, *A Mile in My Shoes* has built a collection of life narratives. Today, more than 150 stories have been shared. They have been a permanent part of the Empathy Museum since 2015. The project continues to grow internationally as more stories are collected. Now the project is branching off to focus on particular social themes. For example, Patey shares, “We are collaborating on a long-term project with The Health Foundation to create a unique version of *A Mile in My Shoes*. [This is] to highlight the experiences of people working in a range of roles in health and social care across the United Kingdom.”¹²⁵ The shoebox was relocated to the Upper Waiting Hall in the House of Commons, a busy thoroughfare for Members of Parliament and the public on their way to meetings in the Committee Room Corridor. The hope was to inspire members of parliament to walk a mile in the shoes of the Health workers so they would connect with

124. Sandefur, “Young Investigator Perspectives.”

125. “A Mile In My Shoes,” *Empathy Museum*, accessed November 2017, <http://empathymuseum.com/#amileinmyshoes>

the challenges employees in the medical sector are encountering. It is important to notice that *A Mile In My Shoes* narrowed its focus to target the legislative assembly. Empathy has a better chance at prompting social change if funneled into law and state policy.

Upon the participants' exit from this project, how does the curator measure the experience of empathy and its impact on the walkers? What changes occur in the lives of storytellers and walkers, or did they occur at all? Now that the project is expanding, how Patey is mapping and evaluating the methods used in curating this project? How does she check in with the stakeholders' performances especially designers and attendants? What strategies are subject to be revisited? In response to these inquiries, Patey needs to create a follow-up plan that enables her to gather information and feedback from all stakeholders and use these banks of information to analyze and assess the findings.

At this phase, the curator can refer to design thinking approaches to conduct and facilitate this type of research. In identifying and understanding the benefits of applying the design thinking process in *A Mile in My Shoes*, the curator can build a measurable framework that evaluates the effect of design thinking on the project. I suggest that curators of participatory art projects consider mapping the projects' benefits to define a measurable structure. For instance, design-thinking focuses on the participants' needs, advances innovation abilities as it offers creative participatory methods that are outside traditional thinking processes, and reinforces the flexibility and dynamism of the process as design thinking is a non-linear, iterative, and viable process. Using this structure, Patey could develop a set of measures to examine the outcomes of *A Mile in My Shoes*. First, I suggest the introduction of participants' feedback and testimonials that report the storytellers' and walkers' experiences before, during and after their contributions. In this

essay, I proposed the creation of a blog, but any other medium that is accessible, interactive, ethical, resourceful and sustainable can also work. Second, the curator can also benefit from this online medium to conduct reflective measurements such as online surveys and questionnaires. Third, I propose a project mapping that charts the strategies that the curator deployed. The mapping process also presents the number and nature of activities developed for each strategy and identifies all individuals who contributed to the experience and describes each one's capacity. This task would take part during a series of workshop sessions to be led by the curator for all stakeholders who would share their success, failure, and challenges, and define new parameters that transform the project challenges into new opportunities. Finally, during the workshop sessions, I would advocate the inclusion of measures of experiences that are central to a participatory ethos such as motivation, engagement, and collaboration.

IV. Essay 2: *Boxed*

i. Project Description

Boxed was an installation exhibited in the window gallery at The Public Studio in Toronto, June 2017. It consists of around forty boxes that are painted to include words on the theme of shame (see Appendix, figures 4, and 5). The boxes were sealed with tape, and each piece of tape had a word that answers, "how does shame make you feel" —open boxes displayed the word "community"—talking about how finding, fostering and creating community directly fights shame. This project is classified as a participatory social artwork not because the audience from the general public can interact directly with it, which is unfeasible, but because it presents a human-centered experience guided by the collaboration of the curator of the show, Sheila Sampath, and four youth from *Shameless* magazine's advisory board. The participants, who work with the magazine in a voluntary capacity, were invited by the curator to contribute to a series of workshops, during which all stakeholders developed an empathic process to represent a common human experience: shame. The results of this collaborative workshop were more than an installation. The artwork also charted the territory of social engagement through which participants felt empowered to share stories about shame, while discovering tools to create resilience.

In this exhibition, Sampath refers to social engagement strategies that position art as useful, serviceable and activist in nature, where its enactment nurtures social change. This chapter seeks to identify and analyze the strategies Sampath brings to *Boxed* project to foster social engagement. It asks, how do concepts of design thinking for social innovation inform these strategies and their outcomes? What is at risk when difficult

emotions are evoked within a collective experience? How does a processual experience of collaboration activate and sustain empathic responses among both collaborators and audiences?

Before presenting the scope of the exhibition, I summarize the aims of *Boxed* to focus on participatory experiences and demonstrate how they differ from *A Mile in My Shoes* in both structure and tactics of audience engagement. While both projects frame design-thinking attributes for social innovation and sustainability as driving forces to instigate social change, their methods and scale are entirely different. While there are 150 stories housed in the shoebox, the number of walkers is unlimited. *Boxed* involves only four youth in the conception and making of the exhibition, but the words were sourced from a larger community of their friends, and Shameless readers. With *Boxed*, there are individual and collective contributions, dialogical practices and collaborative decision-making that are channeled through a workshop. The curator facilitates this programming with the aim to transform the complexity of disruptive situations that participants are encountering into a relational resilience.

In approaching the project, the curator, designer, educator and activist Sheila Sampath felt the need to create an activist space in art that is accessible to all people. Sampath indicates that she has been disturbed by the idea that museum spaces in Toronto have been taken up by corporate messaging or limited opportunities for artists' voice inclusion when there is so much activist work that does not have access to exhibition spaces. In her opinion "art spaces in Toronto are intentionally designed to be alienating."¹²⁶ This is why she decided to take over the window gallery space at Seaforth Street and Lansdowne Avenue in Toronto's Parkdale neighborhood. The window is a

126. Sampath, interview.

civic face for The Public Studio where she creates a shared space for activist work, a space to delineate between community and fine arts practices. The aim of this window gallery and its projects, such as *Boxed*, is to create a space that is accessible and accountable to all constituents of the community. It has become a radical programming space, a catalyst to empower emerging artists of color or people who want to practice art for social changes.

ii. Working Process and Collaboration

In early 2017, Sampath, the editorial and art director at Shameless, posted a call for submissions to the *Shameless* youth advisory board members, to take part in developing a concept for execute an exhibition on a pressing social issue of their choice. Four members of the *Shameless* advisory board expressed interest. They were paid \$15 per hour.¹²⁷ The exhibition was to open to the public in June 2017. Six weeks prior to the opening, Sampath and the four youths agreed to meet once per week for two hours to design the exhibition. Sampath organized these meetings in the form of six programming workshops.

Unlike *A Mile in My Shoes*, The Public's gallery is a vitrine and the front façade at the gallery is their design studio. Audiences do not have physical access to the installation space: the exhibition has to be seen from outside as if looking in a shop window. The gallery's street-facing nature encourages the usual foot traffic, however it is located at an intersection, with a bus stop in front of the building and a public school across the street. Inside The Public Studio, right behind the window gallery is a conference room with a huge wooden table. All the workshops were conducted inside this

127. Sampath, interview.

room around the table or within the confines of the space. The space is open with an accessible working environment.

According to Sampath, the first workshop consisted of a brainstorming session to identify which social issues they would investigate.¹²⁸ Sampath and the four participants discussed feminism, equity, marginalization, and gentrification. The second workshop was a follow up and a continuation of the first one. The third workshoped the theme of the exhibition. The participants came up with two words, shame and stereotype, and discussed issues around these topics. In the end, they agreed on shame as the working theme. Then the four participants contributed to a mind map exercise led by Sampath to document the connections between ideas shared over the previous two workshops. The fourth workshop included hands-on drawing and image-making to visualize the ideas and explore possibilities. While working on visual cues they explored the symbolism of boxes.¹²⁹ *Boxed* then became the title of the exhibition. The fifth and sixth workshops further developed the concept and form of the installation. This involved a brainstorming session for words that connote shame. The participants decided to distribute an online survey to *Shameless* community members (who they knew) in attempt to accumulate these words. After collecting the words, they painted letters that spelled some of them on forty boxes that they installed in *The Public* Studio window. Sampath assisted the participants with the writing of all didactic panels. This gave the participants the opportunity to learn what it takes to create a public installation from beginning to end.

128. Sampath, interview.

129. The boxes were sealed with tape, and each piece of tape had a word that answers, "how does shame make you feel" —open boxes displayed the word "community"—talking about how finding, fostering and creating community directly fights shame. Sampath, interview.

As a curator dealing with a sensitive theme, Sampath reflected that during the workshops she felt she had a strong sense of hospitality, and was very welcoming, supportive and open to all suggestions.¹³⁰ Her role as a host and facilitator enabled the participants to take the lead during the various phases of the project. The communications between participants were friendly, empathic, and dialogical. Participants had the freedom to discuss any issue, to share difficult knowledge. Slowly, as the group created a relational experience, they built trust and respect between one another and with the curator. It is worth noting that this isn't the participants' first time working together, though it is their first time working together so intimately on a project like this. *Boxed* presents a collaborative experience and emulates Tim Brown's approaches of three spaces of design thinking — inspiration space, ideation space and implementation space — and Ezio Manzini's five concepts of social engagement in social innovation— relational intensity, sense of ownership, collaboration as a viable system, radically new, and iterative space,¹³¹ The curator, through the engagement of only four participants in a processual workshop, creates an intimate, trustworthy space where they all share stories about shame, practice the act of listening to each other, and respond to each other with immediate and constructive feedback. In her curatorial praxis, Sampath's tactics create a prototype of collaborative programming that any curator who works in social art can be inspired by. These are strategies used to empower human relations.

I was fortunate to know about *Boxed* and witness its installation in progress during my summer internship at The Public Studio. The *Boxed* installation amplifies voices that strive to be heard. Sampath affirms “Art and the process of art is mainly for

130. Sampath, interview.

131. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 120.

me a tool to regaining power through performing my own narratives around it, exposing things, reimagining things and this is the transformative experience about healing that I want to share at *Boxed*.¹³²

iii. Strategies and Discussions

Boxed is a model of curatorial practice that via programming a participatory, empathic and collaborative workshop can build in participants the capacities to become more self-confident, and resilient so they can manage transformation in their lives. I argue through the following five strategies of social engagement how shared humanities activate empathy in participants and enable change in people's belief systems.

a. Relational Intensity

I gather evidence of innovative strategies that advance an empathic collaboration between curators and participants. This section explores my interest in the quality of relationships that tends to influence behavioral choices of participants.

Over six weeks, Sampath facilitated a series of workshops (one workshop per week for two hours) that engaged the four youths and herself in the development of the *Boxed* exhibition in The Public studio window. During this programming, Sampath worked from a progressive, empathic, participatory process that tied the relations of all participants together. Participants responded to key questions through conversations, brainstorming sessions, storytelling, mind maps and survey creation. These tactics converged to develop the exhibition form, concept, theme and title. From the first workshop until the last, the four youth along with Sampath shared the same space, around

132. Sampath, interview.

the same table in the same room. Tools such as the mind map method helped everyone contribute to the discussion. Questions were asked: what issues of shame have the participants encountered in their neighborhood? They listened to each other, and shared their thoughts and experiences. They attuned to each other, discussing, debating, and exchanging thematic approaches. Through these tools and spaces, Sampath created a platform for dialogical experience. Manzini defines this approach of co-designing through dialogue as:

a process in which everybody is allowed to bring ideas, even though these ideas could, at times, generate problems and tensions. In the end, what makes this complex mesh of initiatives a design process is the fact that the actors involved will be willing and able to listen to each other, to change their minds and converge toward a common view on the outcomes to be obtained. In short, this means that they are willing and able to establish *dialogic co-operation*.¹³³

This tactic of dialogic co-operation is relational as it brings all participants together face to face to discover and learn about each other so that the communication is clear, respectful, open and inclusive. The sense of community is integral in the *design thinking process for social innovation* where empathy is a key goal for all participants. However, this is not a collective thinking process where individual difference is ignored. It is a relational experience of collective participation but with the full empathic presence of the individual. This human-centric exploration is a collaborative process that works to sustain the power and recognition of each individual, yet offers a human network of mutual trust and listening skills that build and encourage empathy. I argue it is through this empathic relationship that each individual role is strengthened.

133. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 67.

This relational intensity framed by Manzini is not only practiced in one phase of the design thinking spaces discussed by Brown. It can be active anytime in the inspiration, ideation, and implementation spaces. However, its intensity is variable based on the logistics, the context of the experience and the types of participants. In *Boxed*, the participants' relational intensity was active across the project phases where co-creation and collaboration necessitated a cognitive, physical and empathic response.

b. Community Ownership

According to Sampath, “there is a great responsibility on me as a curator not to gate keep, but to leave the door open and be a gateway. I see my role as curator as a capacity builder.”¹³⁴ Sampath calls this kind of curatorial practice “curating as activism.”¹³⁵ As a refusal to the problem of exclusion, she creates an activist space of inclusivity that engages multiple voices and perspectives on feminism, homophobia, racism, ableism, and classism.

Manzini frames the role of the designer as activist by presenting several models to develop action for change. He argues that designers need to move from the condition of criticizing the state of things toward offering potential ideas, values, and meanings.¹³⁶ “Designers need to develop actions that are fertile ground for new reflections, thus generating a positive circle between action and reflection. In other words, they must exercise a critically constructive capacity based on their experience and discussions about their experiences.”¹³⁷ Manzini’s model echoes Sampath’s description of her curatorial

134. Sampath, interview.

135. Sampath, interview.

136. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 24.

137. Sampath, interview.

strategy as an activist empathic one. In her method of facilitating the series of workshops, Sampath not only encouraged the four participants to be curious by addressing questions about concealed issues, she also motivated the four participants to unpack their concerns which led to shame as a theme. Through the mind mapping method, they were able to see the big picture and start-tracing intersecting shared experiences and concepts. They became decision makers and gained ownership of the knowledge they produced. Through this approach, Sampath nurtures a process of critical thinking to engage the participants and amplify their unique knowledge. She has therefore performed as an activist designer would, but in the space and capacity of a curator.

In his discussion of social innovation for collaborative organizations, Manzini observes, “we have seen that collaborative organizations are not driven by the simple question: ‘How can we fulfill our needs?’ but rather by the larger one: ‘How can we achieve the life we want to live?’ This is a call for designers to focus not only on the problem-solving approach that is vital to collaborative organizations, but to consider exploring what needs to be achieved to converge direction.”¹³⁸ In the ways she approached curating *Boxed*, Sampath shared Manzini’s vision of the designer working to foster the convergence of multiple needs and desires. The scale, and the nature of the *Boxed* exhibition is quite different than the one described by Manzini, however, it is a micro enterprise compared to the macro collaborative organizations of most social innovation projects. Sampath’s objective is to create a sustainable participatory method that transforms participants’ thinking from uncertainty to resilience, activate empathy in participants, and to do so requires working on a much smaller scale.

138. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 170.

Boxed amplifies voices who advocate for social justice, feminism, gender equality, and anti-racism. The participants' relational engagement is based on a connective lattice of thoughts, shared emotions, interests, humor, conversation skills and body language. Through the process-based working environment of the workshops, the youth built strength by empathizing with each other, thinking positively, looking for opportunities, staying open minded, curious, self confident, and resilient so as to work towards change. Can design thinking accountability translate observations into insights and insights into experiences that will change lives? Brown argues "there is a second layer of understanding that is to translate insight into opportunity."¹³⁹ By saying so he is alluding that design thinking presents a generative system where ideas can grow and transform beyond potential into change. This approach mirrors the objectives of the *Boxed* exhibition. The insights shared by the four youths grew into an empathic relational collaborative experience.

The participants' insights, shared during the inspiration space, originate from daily life. Insights are activated through the design thinking techniques of brainstorming, mind mapping and visual thinking methods. These techniques, according to Brown, contribute to the divergence of choice: many ideas converge into the selection of one idea built on the ideas of others.¹⁴⁰ Participants become the co-authors who own their collective thinking. In this experience, ownership starts as an individual contribution of personal insight. However, it advances through the ideation space of design thinking to become a collective ownership of concepts. With this cooperative ownership, each individual maintains their voice, what they think of shame and how they experience it,

139. Brown, *Change by Design*, 53.

140. Brown, *Change by Design*, 78-82.

but they also contribute to an amplified dialogue where all voices converge towards the same purpose to become more resilient. Brown thinks that “people have to believe that it is within their power (or at least the power of their team) to create new ideas, that will serve unmet needs, and that will have a positive impact.”¹⁴¹ Sampath affirms “the workshops aim at exploring how the process of the project through artwork can be a safe space, a space for actual growth not as individuals but as a community, an accountable community.”¹⁴² The fact that Sampath, “a capacity builder” as she described herself, facilitated these design thinking techniques and offered the participants a collaborative empathic learning process through project making, meant participants were able to build their own capacity, self-confidence, and empathy. She has created a trusting environment where the four youths were not afraid to share intimate stories, build trust and empathic bonds. This experience transformed the way they look at themselves: as resilient activists.

As part of the ideation space, participants describe experiences of shame through visual thinking. Boxes can connote isolation and invisibility. Words identify the emotions of shame: “invalid”, “confused”, “small”. Through this installation, the participants “hoped to challenge and make visible the feelings of isolation and loneliness that keeps them from reaching out, connecting with others, and finding communities of support and resistance.”¹⁴³

c. Multidisciplinary Skills

Peer-to-peer interaction is the strategy of communication between the four youth and Sampath within the creation of *Boxed*. At some points, expertise is needed to

141. Brown, *Change by Design*, 76.

142. Sampath, interview.

143. “Boxed,” The Public Studio, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://thepublicstudio.ca/gallery/view/boxed>

facilitate or instruct. Whether explaining work protocols or production inquiry, Sampath or another individual from The Public activist studio might volunteer to offer support. When Sampath, or any individual from The Public, introduces a method, she does that with an empathic approach to blur the stereotypical top-down interaction that might infer inferiority for the youth participants or create a colonizing form of aggression that generates unequal relations and reinforces problematic power structures in the collective. Sampath's aim was to sustain an empathic relational experience with the participants that offered them an opportunity to make an equal contribution to the installation. *Boxed* did not have the budget to engage multidisciplinary experts or include specialists from outside the design domain, as *A Mile in My Shoes* did. However, Sampath's objective is not to borrow skills from outside The Public gallery to complete the work; instead, she plays the role of capacity builder to empower the participants. She does however facilitate the exchange of technical skills, to install objects, or write didactic panels. According to Sampath "The window gallery is also a space to imagine an economy that is not fixed, and a capital that is not based on grant systems."¹⁴⁴

So what kind of strategy does the curator create to build capacity in others? Manzini names this approach as creating *action platforms* and *sense systems* in social engagement that offer the participant an opportunity to be who they want to be and do what they want to do.¹⁴⁵ I conclude that when the curator creates a condition where participants have the freedom and the power to act liberally, they start to trust the curator. Therefore, there is high potential that the participants respond with mutual trust. As

144. Sampath, interview.

145. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

Manzini notes, “A reciprocal trust is fundamental to any kind of collaboration.”¹⁴⁶ Trust is one aspect of empathic experience. Once attributes such as trust and empathy are nurtured, the transmission of codes between participants is clearly received, enabling thought reception.

d. Embodied Experience

Boxed allowed participants to share real experiences of shame with one another and with the public. Not only do the participants’ real-life stories constitute the content of the exhibition, but their experience of living the moments of shame and reimagining a space of resilience through the workshop events and through the processes of developing an art installation based on the semiotics of words and forms, created an embodied experience of shared honesty and ethics. This decision to curate difficult knowledge is strategic on the part of Sampath. How in the context of social innovation is the real experience communicated? According to psychologist, psychotherapist, and scholar Erik Hedman, “an important aspect of shame is that it can be external or internal. External shame refers to the affect that is based on how one is perceived by others. This is sometimes referred to as stigma awareness and concerns aspects of one's actions that could lead to rejection or criticism, if they were known to others. Internal shame could be defined as shame based on how the individual views him- or herself.”¹⁴⁷ The four participants in *Boxed* encountered both external and internal shame. Many youth experience rejection and criticism, disruption, dislocation, even trauma, and any or all of

146. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 98.

147. Erik Hedman, Peter Ström, Angela Stünkel, Ewa Mörtberg, “Shame and Guilt in Social Anxiety Disorder: Effects of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Association with Social Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms,” *Plos One* 8, no. 4, (April, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0061713>.

these can induce shame. During the brainstorming sessions, the youth shared personal stories. At some point, they asked each other questions about the experience of shame. This is a moment that is very personal and only the participants know if the process in the workshop led them to re-experience this shame or caused them to judge themselves. Brown describes this emotional situation as “latent needs, needs that may be acute but that people may not be able to articulate.”¹⁴⁸ It is up to them to share their feelings or not. However, if they do share them or not, they are given an opportunity, a platform, and a process to break this alienation through art activism. They are transforming their status from being a victim to becoming a survivor. This transformative process is at the core of empathy as it deals with the real life and embodied experiences of others and fosters change in how these experiences are narrated and received: a transformation that contributes to the wellbeing of all participants.

Hence, the curator who engages real life experience as a strategy to foster political transformation in people or situations is more likely to unsettle the routine pace of curatorial praxis—such as the reliance of a process of selection, design, and interpretation—and to commit to social obligations in care-taking and expanding intimate, intersubjective and interrelational experiments.¹⁴⁹ This kind of role in social design would inevitably inspire the curator to include specialists from other disciplines such as a counselor, or a psychologist. At *Boxed*, Sampath who is trained as a feminist peer counselor and did crisis support for survivors of sexual violence for about ten years, did not find the need to include any specialist to assist in parsing any personal issues during the participatory experience, as participant did not encounter any serious

148. Brown, *Change by Design*, 53.

149. Lehrer, *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, 4.

problems. However, Sampath offered the four youth the opportunity to learn how to write didactic panels in an exhibition. Again she did not include more people as specialists but offered her own skill to support their experience of creating social art.

The window gallery is a radical civic space that affords the opportunity to elevate the visibility of marginalized communities. It transforms the art milieu into a dynamic environment of affect, growth and provocation not only through the participants' engagement with collaborative processes and art forms but also through spatial encounter. The Public Studio, and by extension *Boxed*, presents three spaces where participants and audiences are engaged: the window gallery, the space inside or the Lab, and the Internet which is not discussed in this thesis but it is worth mentioning that the Internet as a virtual space supported disseminating ideas and conducting surveys. Each of these spaces also encourages a different kind of embodied experience of shame, or the encounter with the shame experienced by others.

The window gallery is exposed to roughly one thousand passersby per day, including children and bus passengers.¹⁵⁰ Many residents in the Parkdale neighbourhood are newcomers to Canada and face marginalization and exclusion from mainstream Toronto (and Canadian) society. In order to reach the communities of Parkdale, Sampath curates empathetic and activist art that addresses social issues drawn from daily life in the community. Sampath recounts that she observed passengers heading to the highschool and residents of the neighborhood as well as many people of color riveted by the installation, who often came closer, touched the window and reacted to it by asking “what is this?”¹⁵¹ The window gallery installation triggered the curiosity of potential audiences

150. Sampath, interview.

151. Sampath, interview.

who could relate to the theme. Many audiences might see themselves represented through the work. The installation became part of the commuters' daily routine. Though it is difficult to learn what they experienced when they saw the exhibition, *Boxed* functions as a reminder that there is always an opportunity or a platform to share difficult experiences with the public. While many commuters contemplated the work, they are considered a passive audience in comparison to the participants of *A Mile in My Shoes*. To transform the experience of these audiences from passive audiences to active participants, I suggest that Sampath develops extended programming similar to the workshops organized for the four youth, and invites the concerned passerby to register their names at the Public Studio to take part in these potential, ongoing, empathic, and collaborative workshops. For now, the Toronto commuters' experience may have been emotional if the work spoke to them, however it lacked human interaction while the London walkers experienced an embodied physical, emotional and empathic engagement.

The second space is the internal space or the Lab where the four members of *Shameless* magazine's youth advisory board contributed to the workshops. Because of the nature of the activities taking place inside the storefront at The Public Studio, the Lab becomes a space where the participants embrace vulnerability and shame with resilience and empowerment. The Lab becomes a liminal space of power, therapy, trust, safety and a momentum for change.

The final space that engaged participants is the virtual space of the Internet where a broader audience from the Parkdale community contributed to a survey about shame. The four youths initiated a Google form survey and sent it to their friends within their

community. The main question on the survey was “how do you define shame?”¹⁵² Through this online survey, networking became a dynamic channel that engaged a wide number of participants that were not reached through the window gallery. However, while the Internet is an efficient tool for public outreach, it does not translate into the empathetic experience of regular face-to-face encounters between participants. This can be problematic, as the virtual contributors cannot experience shared feelings and attunement to other participants; therefore the chance of activating empathy is minimum.

The three different spaces constitute one radical space and the installation itself functions as a manifesto that echoes the voices of survivors of shame. Unlike the premeditated and authoritative exhibition spaces typically found in large art institutions, *Boxed* is accessible. The four youth weren't previously recognized as artists or designers, yet they explored what it was like to be one. This inevitably shifts the experience of the space from an exhibition of forms to an exhibition of shared experience, affect and expression, creating a space that elicits empathic responses in the participants.

e. Iterative Space and Resilience

With such participatory experience fueled by collaborative activities, empathy, interconnectivity, and emotions, it would be difficult for the four participants who showed full commitment and attunement during the project to ignore any impact this experience creates on them. In fact, the more that participants were empathetically connected to one another during the process of conceiving of and producing the exhibition, the greater the impact on their resilience. Sampath affirms that her facilitation moves beyond shame to “think of finding alternatives, narratives, resilience and

152. Sampath, interview.

resistance.”¹⁵³ Sampath’s work therefore raises questions about how curators hold space and encourage healing within the communities they collaborate with.

One way to do this is to consider the space of curating and collaboration as an iterative one. Manzini helpfully distinguishes between a space and a place in collaborative design. As he explains,

the physical space people occupy becomes a place when those sharing it decide to do something about it together. This means that they decide to start and manage a place-related, collaborative organization; in so doing they become a special kind of intentional community: a place-related, and therefore a place-making, community. Since these are communities existing by choice, the resulting places exist by choice too. In short: they are intentional places co-designed by intentional communities.¹⁵⁴

In my opinion, when a community is formed, it must have a plan to grow or evolve. It must have an agenda, otherwise why would individuals who are part of this community by choice decide to be there. *Boxed* endowed all four participants (who joined this experience by choice) the opportunity to interact empathically with each other and transform their time together into a place for community-making and intention-setting. They became a micro purposeful community. This is an iterative process that demonstrates the growth of these individuals who built their cognitive and emotional capacity, with the hope they will form and sustain this purposeful place to build other deliberate places. These places become sustainable as they branch out into participants’ everyday lives, beyond the window gallery, and hopefully improve their own resiliency in the face of shameful experiences.

153. Sampath, interview.

154. Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 189.

Sampath has not kept any quantitative or qualitative record of how the four *Boxed* participants have been impacted by their participation in the project. However, as the editorial and art director of *Shameless* magazine, Sampath often observes the four participants in their working environment. She can see the affect of the *Boxed* experience as she takes note of the way they embrace challenges in their daily life.

When an exhibition like *Boxed* includes the intervention of its public, its practices of social engagement inevitably break free from orthodox curatorial concepts that typically frame the audience as passive viewers. This type of social art practice, according to scholars and curators Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, propels the curator to engage “...inclusionary practices through which the form of participation and the participants themselves become constitutive factors of content, method and aesthetic” of the project.¹⁵⁵ In socially engaged participatory projects, curators position the audience at the core of the experience. Not only this, they advance the engagement of participatory art to include strategies that converge with design thinking for social innovation.

From a design thinking perspective, I suggest potential follow-up measures for *Boxed*. First, I recommend that Sampath develops sustainable programming through which she extends the practice of these workshops with new participants in a small group setting. By creating this continuity, she can explore new possibilities and enrich the experience with innovative methods to engage participants empathically and build their capacity to become resilient. Second, since the shared knowledge of the youth is very intimate and less public, Sampath can continue working with this closeness and intimacy with them and reschedule a series of workshops with these participants at a later time and space to learn about their growth in confronting life and challenging issues. Third, to

155. Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010), 111.

respect and support vulnerable participants who do not feel comfortable in documenting and publicizing their personal stories, I suggest that Sampath establish methods to evaluate whether a participant is comfortable with sharing their stories orally. Finally, I consider that a project evaluation through self-reflexivity is key to acknowledge challenges and transform difficult ideas or experiences into potential possibilities to explore and grow. I then suggest that Sampath revisits the design thinking approaches along with the youth to assess the workshops' methods and the roles of each participant. This approach makes the design thinking a flexible process as it can be repeated but with innovative ideas and practices.

V. Conclusion

A Mile in My Shoes curated by Clare Patey and *Boxed* curated by Sheila Sampath are two participatory art projects that present a human centered experience with a goal to incite social change. The curatorial strategies they deploy reveal attributes inspired by design thinking for social innovation.

Each project presents a distinct approach to participants as co-authors, agents, and capacity builders. The intention of this paper was to explore research questions: what curatorial strategies do curators (aka designers) deploy to cultivate social engagement? How do these tactics mirror the philosophy and processes of design thinking methods? How do negative emotions and difficult experiences potentially shift to positive sociality? How can curatorial strategies foster empathic responses in the audience with an aim to inspire change and articulate demands for social justice?

Inspired by Ezio Manzini's insights on social innovation I have argued that Patey and Sampath's strategic practices for social engagement borrow from many of the tenets of design thinking, particularly the three overlapping spaces of inspiration, ideation and implementation. I have argued that these curators engage five conditions in design thinking for social innovation that create social engagement and activate empathy. First, they create a balance of relational intensity that enables empathy and builds trust in participants; second, they curate with the community's voice and strength to encourage their ownership over the project; third, they include multidisciplinary skills that enrich the participatory experience; fourth, they consider embodied experience as an experiential prototype that produces empathy in the participants; and finally, they create

an iterative space that can sustain the participants' own stories and germinate new offshoots.

The synthesis of my analysis presents different conditions of design thinking for social innovation that are key to informing curatorial strategies for art in the public sphere. Learning from and with the audience is a good premise for approaching the public. Engagement can enable a shift of perspective. Through this strategy, participants play the role of co-authors and co-producers of the exhibition content. Curators are open-minded and inclusive so they can engage plurality of voices to inform the process. Pluralism in curatorial praxis creates a dialogical space for myriad perspectives and opportunities for unheard voices to be shared. This strategy of multiplicity does not just include audience members but also the engagement of co-workers and co-curators at the gallery or the museum. This tactic can be supported by collaborative working sessions during which all invited stakeholders contribute in the brainstorming and mind mapping sessions that the curator facilitates. The collaboration can vary and continue not only across the inspiration and research phase, but also through the ideation and implementation of the exhibition. It is also important to sustain these curatorial strategies, though the nature and scope of every exhibition differs. The curator's challenge is then to adapt to new needs while innovating through strategic thinking. It seems pressing to track how curators create shared human experiences as a curatorial model to respond to the challenges they are encountering at the present time such as decolonizing knowledge and decolonizing art.

In approaching the research and the writing of my thesis, I have also deployed tenets of design thinking methods in selecting and analyzing the two projects *A Mile in*

My Shoes and *Boxed*. Within the inspiration space, I conducted primary research by interviewing Sampath face-to-face and Patey via Skype. During the interviews, their unique narratives about the exhibitions' concepts, structures and processes offered valuable insights to my research process on tactics for social engagement in public art. I have also been inspired by the methods they deploy to activate empathy in participants. The synthesis of these interviews inspired the ideation of my thesis arguments. Prior to the interviews, my submission process to obtain the OCAD Research Ethics Board (REB) approval informed the constraints of how empathically and ethically I should write about a group of participants such as the storytellers, the walkers, and the four youth who cannot be interviewed so to respect participants' confidentiality and vulnerability. Design thinking mindsets and models, the insights and ideas of Patey and Sampath and my own critical analysis became fluid through a mind mapping process that allowed ideas and arguments to emerge. Then the thesis became a hybrid platform for a pluralistic dialogue.

From my observations, the two projects share common curatorial approaches but also differ in structure and content. The macro scale of participants in *A Mile in My Shoes* made the experience more publicly visible and accessible than the micro scale of the four participants in *Boxed* that transforms the experience into a focused exploratory practice. Though *A Mile in My Shoes* seems immense, the type of collaboration is more individual than collective, whereas in *Boxed*, the relations and collaborations are happening in a collective experience while sustaining the individual's role and contribution.

In *A Mile in My Shoes* there is a one on one interaction and collaboration between each storyteller and the curator, and between the curator and the walker. The only

connection between the walkers and the storytellers occurs through objects. The objects become the symbiosis of a storyteller's identity and presence. As for *Boxed*, the workshops' environment transforms the experience into a laboratory where research is explored, and ideas are shared and tested. In *Boxed* the responses between collaborators can be immediate. As for *A Mile in My Shoes*, responses from the walkers are processed slowly upon their exit. Time and pacing of participant responses is an important factor in gauging emotion and activating empathy. Despite these differences, the design thinking tactics used in these projects situate the philosophy of social artwork as both a window to the world and a voice for activism. Both projects transform the artwork from object to experience, foregrounding interconnectedness. Accordingly, the role of the curator and participants also shifts from that of sole authority or author to those of co-facilitator, co-author and co-producer.

In both projects, curators and participants collaborate to co-create an experience of shared humanity that evokes empathy and motivates change. However, curators did not offer continuity. What happens after the workshop? How will empathy evoked during the exhibition motivate the participants to take action? These questions could be a valuable follow up to this study, to track the impact of empathy in participants.

Design thinking has proved to guide individuals, communities and institutions in their processes. Due to its role as an inclusive, human centered and constructive process that aims at creating social change, the process seems positive even when failure occurs. The curator who faces undesirable results during or after the design thinking process is invited to revisit the design thinking approaches to question the rationale behind this failure and how it can be strategically fixed and avoided in the future. Therefore, in

design thinking optimistic, divergent and convergent processes transform, through participants' meta analyses, their experience of threats or challenges into opportunities. In linking back to the follow-up measures at the end of *A Mile in My Shoes* case study, I see opportunities for the curator to learn from her self-reflections and analysis of all negative feedbacks that participants shared and discussed via the potential blog, or possible surveys or through mapping processes. For instance, if several walkers failed to empathize with the storytellers via an audio story and a walk of a mile in their shoes, then the curator needs to responsively find new strategies to select the type of stories, or develop new communication methods to engage storytellers. Also, if the attendants inside the shoe shop have misguided the walkers during their selection of a moving story or ignored their conversation with them to facilitate the process of choosing the story, then attendants also contribute to the failure of the walkers' engagement.

In *Boxed*, if the curator fails to create an empathic experience of a community, then participants, who are supposed to grow through the support and the experience of each other, fail to experience empathy and develop tactics to remain resilient. Sampath is then invited to critically restructure the workshops' programming, strategize new measures for empathic engagement, and create alternative plans in the workshop activities that sustain participation efficiency. All these assumptions can have a clearer answer if the curator, in collaboration with all stakeholders, undertakes a project review using the design thinking principles and tactics elaborated in this thesis.

Both Patey and Sampath's curatorial practices created a space for participants to share respectful insights. However, the undocumented experiences of both projects create a rare opportunity to record and share meta-reflexive voices that could become useful

knowledge for future curators and artists who aim to initiate social interaction and inspire change. This anticipated knowledge functions as the roots to revisit failures and develop new strategies that can solve social needs. Design thinking teaches us that we, as humans, are the arbiters of our own experience.

Conflicts abound, and the world needs empathy. This thesis frames curators as agents and strategists who are capable of bringing people together, to feel, think, listen and share. Design thinking in curatorial contexts can guide curators in mobilizing empathy to activate human values in the institution and on the street.

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VII. Appendices

i. Appendix A: Figures



Figure 1: Tim's Shoes (Size 12)
Walking a mile in a drag queen's heels.
<http://www.clarepatey.com/projects/a-mile-in-my-shoes>



Figure 2: Shoeboxes With Different Shoe Sizes.
 These boxes include one recorded story and a pair of shoes.
<http://empathymuseum.com/#health-foundation>



Figure 3: Shoe Shop Container.
<http://www.clarepaty.com/projects/a-mile-in-my-shoes>



Figure 4: Boxed Exhibition Window Gallery, at The Public Studio, Toronto
<https://thepublicstudio.ca/gallery/view/boxed>



Figure 5: Window Gallery at The Public Studio, Toronto
<https://thepublicstudio.ca/gallery/view/boxed>