

Maybe We're Creative:
What I Learned about Co-creation in Design by
Dancing with My Dad

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Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2024

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Acknowledgments

Land

“Without the land and the literal fruits of our love and labour, what is this all for? She deserves to be respected and tended to by the people who understand her best.”

“Despite the diaspora, we are finding each other and that in itself is resistance. Dire circumstances breed creativity—existing is resisting.”

- Karme Sabri, writer and organizer

I created this project while on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat Peoples. I thought about the land a lot on my bike rides to and from the OCADU Waterfront Campus. Some days, I would meet a schoolmate and friend on the ride in. The park and its path along the water held many class debriefs, life chats, laughs, and growth. When I was considering how to honour the land through this project, I thought about Karmel Sabri’s words, above. What is research for if it is not connected to the whole? How can we honour those who have come before us, who have suffered, if we are not working towards—and building—a better world for younger generations and life coming after? I think about one of my best friends, who is Mohawk, and how she so desperately wants to live off the land, away from the city, and how difficult that journey has been for her. Her relationships to the physical and spiritual land model a way of love I aspire to know. I honour and bear witness to it. I know I need to practice it.

Margaret Kovach’s (2021) work *Indigenous Methodologies* has been a grounding guide for me throughout this process. Notes from Kovach (2021) are “bundled,” as she writes, in my work. As she reminds academics, there is no check-box approach to research or decolonization. My research focuses on relationships and moves based on emotion and personal reflection through methodology. This is an approach that nods to and rests beside Indigenous knowledge and methodologies that the university still hesitates to incorporate and legitimize in a meaningful way. I know I am not alone in my relational focus in my work; Indigenous, Black, feminist, queer, and other academics bring these values into their work every day and have laid many blueprints. bell hooks’ work taught me that the academy could be a place to work towards collective liberation. It was through her writing that I searched for more academics challenging what ‘research’, as I had originally been taught it, meant. It is through the work of hooks that I was brought to Indigenous thinkers, queer thinkers and radicals whose actions are as impactful as their writings. Words will never do justice in honouring the ancestry that has come before me and continues to mobilize resistance against structures of power—but I can combine my words and intentions with actions and attempt to embody their teaching as best I know how, to physically be with struggle, and to promise to continue learning.

I am also currently reflecting on the work of Nasrin Himada, a Palestinian curator based in Kingston, Ontario. Weeks before this report was due, I attended a screening of short films she had curated as part of the Images Festival. In an introductory conversation, Himada shared that land reminds her of relationships, the memories and moments she cherishes, and her mourning. She shared that mourning their land is often how Palestinians love. I thought about the original caretakers of the land I'm currently on. I thought about my best friend's grandparents. I thought of how powerful love is and the pain it can hold. The depth that mourning gives love, the strength.

I'm continuing to reflect on what it means to love in the work we do—anywhere—and the accountability and action that comes with that; how all of these efforts challenge capitalism, colonialism, and their need to commodify absolutely everything and everyone. I think about the past two years of working on my master's degree, the mourning I've felt, both in community and in isolation, as we watch what feels like the world falling apart, the small interpersonal celebrations that happen in the interstices, the run I just went on as a breather from writing—how this land is always under me, quite literally, holding me and us, holding history. I think about the laugh lines, the wrinkles, the imperfections and wounds the land holds from age, from lives lived, and from colonialism. I think about the fact that we are so small, yet our conflicts over land are so big and inflict so much pain and damage. I think about all the journeys I've taken by foot, bike, car, plane—how honouring the land through these remembrances feels important, but merely honouring will never be enough to repair the harm committed before my family arrived on this land, and the harm that continues in the wake of colonialism. I hope that wounds can heal, and that pain and mourning can be managed in community, and that this life and land can know more peace and co-existence in the future than it knows presently. If the land cannot know peace, I hope, at the very least she will continue to know love.

People

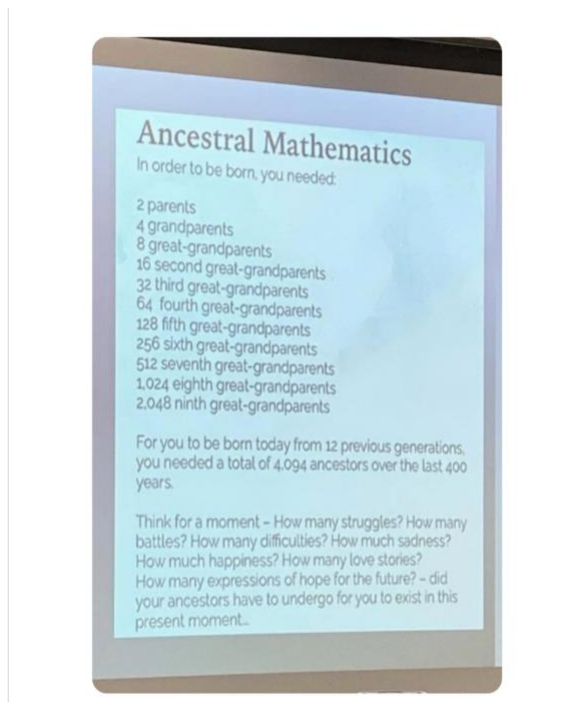


Figure 1: Ancestral Mathematics

(@todayyearsold, 2024)

I come from a complicated lineage of predominantly Eastern Europeans, through both forced and voluntary migration. I feel closest to Ukrainian culture. My mom's parents, my Baba and Gido, made sure my siblings and I knew that culture, and family, was important. Growing up, every Saturday night my Baba and Gido would host dinner with my immediate family, my aunts, uncles and cousins and whatever friends were around. Though it wasn't always peaceful, I have always carried the sense that there was something sacred about being together. It was a privilege that was meant to be cherished. My Gido was born in Lviv, Ukraine. His family was thrown in a concentration camp during the Second World War after my Jajo (my great-grandfather) refused to fight with the Nazis. The camps were bombed and my Jajo, Babcia (my great-grandmother) and Gido were able to reunite and escape, first to Nova Scotia and then Hamilton, Ontario. I don't remember my Gido talking about Ukraine much, but we tasted it whenever he made paska or potato pancakes.

My father was adopted by my Grandma and Poppy, who are Scottish and Irish, respectively. They were working-class people who had some high school education. Grandma was a quiet woman who always wanted children and loved my dad and aunt, and her grandchildren with her entire being. Both sets of my grandparents taught me that love, despite circumstances, can be the glue that keeps people together. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to meet my biological grandmother, Lynda. German and Irish, she also beams with love. Though she chose to give my father to my Grandma and Poppy, I learned it was not because she did not love him.

Getting to know her and the rest of my family has helped me better grasp and accept complexity, the reality that my parents and grandparents truly did their best with what they had and what they knew at the time. It has helped me open up to the expansion and peace that love and forgiveness can bring into relationships, especially those that might always have some pieces missing.

Lynda's next child, Lenaya, was born on the same date as my dad, and every year on Lenaya's birthday, she would wish to meet her younger brother. My dad and Lynda connected because his adoption file was the last case a social worker had to close before a change in legislation. They met right before my dad's first tour in 2008. My dad said there was a departure ceremony with media there, and one reporter tried to interview Lynda and ask her a few questions. I'm sure to the reporter's surprise, Lynda said she had only just met her son. My dad and I were not close at the time; I did not meet Lynda until years later. Lynda once had a tooth pulled by my Gido in Hamilton, a connection she made after meeting my dad. We may never meet my dad's biological father—my grandfather—who, we've found out is Latvian/Estonian (from my father's ancestry testing). Lynda lost touch with him and there is a good chance he has passed on.

There is a feeling among adoptees of "not being enough," which permeates their lives even if they've been adopted into loving families. This feeling is said to be transmitted to the adoptees' children as well. Meeting Lynda in person has helped heal that feeling in both my dad and me. The first extended visit I had with her, I left feeling like I had known her my entire life. She was with me; I was with her. Similarly, having a relationship with my father after being estranged for time is a transformation I know many people do not get to experience. Healing is the opening that has made way for a life for myself and my lineage that otherwise would have remained wounded.

There are many question marks in my ancestry, like What was it like growing up in Ukraine? And What was it like arriving in Canada, for my Jajo and Babcia? When I reached an age where I started to want to know these things, my Gido was already gone. He passed away almost instantly from an aneurysm, he was young and otherwise healthy. I wonder if trauma stored in his body had anything to do with his sudden death, from experiencing and escaping war at such a young age. It's been over a decade now and I still wake up some mornings not believing he and my Baba are gone. I wonder who my biological grandfather was, and who his parents were, what their life was like.

I feel my privilege in being able to get to know Lynda and expand the stories of my lineage. I feel my privilege in having been able to hold onto even small parts of my culture in food, holidays, and words, so casually for the majority of my life. Only in recent years, having experienced most of my grandparents' deaths and the onset of war in Ukraine, have I begun feeling the weight of colonialism offering me a cloth to wipe away the culture that my Baba and Gido worked to preserve in our family.

For me, knowing my ancestry is integral to my commitment to decolonization in both theory and practice. As mentioned above, colonial histories are complicated. My family has known loss

from colonialism and has also known privilege. Both exist and both are essential for me to be aware of everyday. Privilege from colonialism comes at a grave expense to everyone and specifically Indigenous people. This privilege is one I'm interested in dismantling so collective society can experience something closer to peace. Knowing my history and my connection to my ancestry has deepened my relationships cross-culturally and has grounded my solidarity in love.

I don't know how to separate myself from my academic or design work, and I'm not sure I ever want to figure out how. My research does not exist in a vacuum and it's taken my lifetime, so far, to get to the place where I am today, writing this paper. I would be doing myself and any reader a disservice to not include the context and experience that fuels my inquiries, the relationships and learning that continue to shape and reshape me.

I know that healing, despite it being rare, is possible. It is from this place that I continue to create.

DEDICATION

My family & friends – for helping me edit, for taking my mind off work, for understanding, for your patience, for keeping me grounded, for seeing the best in me.

Contra family – for cheering me on and for letting me do this work at work.

Chris, Ram, Maddy, Daphne, Erin, Prashant, Brian & the cohort – I have learned so much from each of you.

Tara – for believing in me since day one and seeing in me what I couldn't see myself.

Suzanne – for taking me seriously and pushing my work over the finish line.

Helen & Nabil & Michele – for your support and mentorship inside and outside of the classroom.

Ema – for being so intentional with this project as if it were your own.

The interview participants – for trusting me, dedicating your time, and sharing your stories. I am honoured to have you all involved.

Dad – for your vulnerability and taking this journey with me. I love you.

Mom – for instilling in me the idea that I can do anything. I love you.

Baba – I know you are always with me.

Maybe We're Creative is supported in part by funding from the
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

ABSTRACT

In the realm of creativity, the challenge of collaboration without sacrificing individual integrity remains significant, with some individuals and groups historically compromising more than others. This study investigates whether co-design practitioners can derive valuable insights from creative processes, such as dance, to enhance efforts. This autoethnographic research is written from the 'I' perspective, chronicling the making of a documentary using interviews, dance classes, personal journals and reflections from the researcher and her dad, a main participant. It explores the research process as a site for healing and embodied learning. This study explores influences on creative practices, extending choreographer Twyla Tharp's insights on lived experience and expression into a conceptual systems model for reflection on evolving dynamics affecting the self in relation to others. The study advocates for broader recognition of reflective, embodied practices alongside community engagement as pivotal in design and especially in co-design work.

Key Words: Co-design, Co-creation, Autoethnography, Creativity, Embodied Learning, Dance and Creativity, Creative Process, Collaboration, Design Thinking, Healing through Art

Table of Contents

Copyright Notice	1
Acknowledgments	2
Land	2
People	4
DEDICATION	7
ABSTRACT	8
Table of Contents	9
List of Tables, Figures and/or Illustrations	10
Introduction	11
I	11
II	13
III	15
IV	17
Reflection 1	18
The Research Question and Its Evolution	19
Reflection 2	22
METHODS	23
Micro-Autoethnography Using Video	23
Interviews	24
Reflection 3	26
PART I - MAYBE WE'RE CREATIVE: THE FILM	27
THE BRIDGE BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND CO-CREATIVITY	39
PART II - MAYBE WE'RE CO-CREATIVES	40
Current Challenges in Group Creativity	40
Preserving Complexity and Lived Experience with Creativity	41
How Dance is Relevant to Co-creation	43
Using Dance as a Conceptual Model: The Creative Body	45
FURTHER FINDINGS	74
FINAL DISCUSSION	80
Reflection 4	81
CONCLUSION	82
FUTURE RESEARCH	84
Final Reflection	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY	89

Appendix A	91
Interview Materials.....	91
Appendix B	93
Maybe We're Creative – Link to Film	93

List of Tables, Figures and/or Illustrations

Figure 1: Ancestral Mathematics	4
Figure 2: Film Still	28
Figure 3: Film Still	29
Figure 4: Film Still	29
Figure 5: Film Still	31
Figure 6: Film Still	33
Figure 7: Film Still	33
Figure 8: Film Still	34
Figure 9: Film Still	36
Figure 10: Film Still	37
Figure 11: The Creative Body Model.....	47
Figure 12: The Creative Body and Intention Action Impact	49
Figure 13: Translation	53
Figure 14: Collaboration	55
Figure 15: Memory.....	57
Figure 16: Measure and Future	59
Figure 17: Perception	61
Figure 18: Environment and Identity	63
Figure 19: The Creative Body and Co-creation.....	68
Figure 20: The Creative Body and the "MDA" Model.....	69
Figure 21: The Creative Body Disconnected Example	72
Figure 22: The Creative Body Connected Example.....	72
Figure 23: Kaufman and Beghetto Model of Creativity	74
Figure 24: just-shower-thoughts.....	87

Introduction

I

One morning, as I walked from Toronto's Union Station to OCADU's Waterfront campus, my dad, following our customary commute call, shared a newfound interest in learning a dance together. This was initially surprising, and I had never heard his voice sound the way it did. He was nervous—vulnerable. A week later, he revealed the underpinning desire behind the ask: to mend the gaps in our relationship, particularly around my childhood passion for dance—regretfully, a time he was absent from.

The call with my dad not only stirred emotions but catalyzed a realization in me about my life's work. As someone dedicated to celebrating and encouraging artistic practices at any level, I advocate for creativity as a means of self-exploration and expression. However, experiencing my dad's vulnerability reinforced my commitment to creative expression goes beyond the individual. At its core, creativity can facilitate the expansion of possibilities in relationships as it can help individuals feel more vulnerable, seen, heard, and better understood despite unspoken emotions or experiences.

This project became something incredibly personal, exploring the creative Self and Other in two ways: through a documentary presenting the aforementioned dance process with my dad, incorporating personal reflections from my dad and me and interviews from participants, as well as a conceptual model informed by interviews and literature. My goal was to discover a method that might bridge gaps—in the ways people think, the disciplines they study, and the values they hold. I hope the final product—a film and the conceptual model—offers insight into how people might practice and embody a more expansive co-design in their relationships and throughout the various roles they play in communities.

The project *became* personal because when I began it, I had no idea where this work would take me. I knew that I hoped that my final piece would weave together participant interviews in the material of a short film. I did not, however, anticipate the role that a dance element with my dad would take as an anchor for the project, nor how it would become a central site for personal, relational healing. I hoped to contribute to creative theory and, along the way, grew further into my identity and the transformative strength of shared experiences.

There is a substantial history of the personal being brought into the academy, and there are tension points between the researcher and the institution in the conscious choice to “emotionally texturize theory” (Spry, 2001). Using emotions in research work livens the researcher, which can connect the work in a meaningful way to life outside, but it also makes them vulnerable to the institution in a way that “being objective” might not. Vulnerability exposes parts of the researcher that in the eyes of the institution, can be seen as “weaknesses”. From my experience, weaknesses are not cared for in the institution. Weaknesses are things that need to be transformed, accommodated for or ultimately, changed. Alternatively, the institution may

suggest that a researcher find another site for their vulnerabilities. In response, one must be prepared to care for the repercussions of exploring these emotions in the container that is the academy.

Throughout this journey, the responsibility of caring for myself has largely been on me and my life outside of the university. Despite efforts towards accessibility by the institution, I take medication every day to be able to function at a pace and organization required by the institution. From my experience, accommodations help but ironically, accommodations are usually extra work for everyone involved. Additionally, my “knowledge” can be brought into the classroom but my emotions, separate from my knowledge, are only allowed in particular ways. I wouldn’t make these compromises if I didn’t believe in the power of learning and in the possibility for healing and systemic change.

bell hooks (1994) writes, "I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing."

Similarly to hooks, my drive to read and explore theory stems from my wanting to wrap my head and feelings around the world and myself. I feel a closeness and comradery with the writers that have come into my life through institutional libraries and open-source research. The academic institution as a location for the personal is broadening, but I’m not sure it is a location for healing. From my experience, the institution has started to acknowledge the nuance and complexities nested within the identities that inform it, but its challenge is to acknowledge the lineage of harm that has been done before and to put its acknowledgements into actions. At some point, most students have had to purge elements of their identities in some capacity to survive. The institution is not the entity that will fill students back up. Healing relationships are not to be confused with relationships to the institution. Healing resides between people, in experiences we share and in caring for the land that supports us.

I never saw a future for myself in the academy. I loved learning but was “too sensitive” for school. I would start projects or programs and never finish. I originally went to university for business and was told I would never be as successful as the men in my class. I didn’t feel a connection to the content we were being taught or the teachers sharing that content. When I did feel a spark of something, it didn’t seem to resonate with others. I barely passed most of the subjects in that business program. I dropped out shortly after my Gido died, school was the last place I wanted to be in my grief. From my experience, the academy wasn’t a place for unpredictable, unstable emotions such as grief.

My home while I was growing up was loud with conflict and it felt like people were always leaving. My mom was the one constant presence, teaching me a type of love that was powerful but required me to always put myself second. At multiple points in my life due to family crises, I couldn’t see a future for myself, in anything. I didn’t think I “had what it took” and I felt selfish for even thinking about wanting a different path for my life than what my family knew well—which was deep struggles with mental health and addiction. Overall, I felt my life belonged to my

family. I did not know who I was. It was at Sheridan College, struggling to get through despite loving the content, taking the Social Service Work course, that I was connected with an accessibility counsellor who helped me identify a high adverse childhood experiences (ACE) score, used to identify trauma, and an ADHD diagnosis, and it was around this time that I started to come out as queer. Up until this point, I never felt I was able to bring my true self, and any of the emotional complexities of my life, into my studies.

Mentors at Sheridan believed in me and fostered a love for research within me. Whenever I think I've fallen out of love with learning, I remember several influential books, one being *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by bell hooks (1994). This book draws my heart back to school, reminding me that spaces can change, transform, and reflect the people within them. It reinforces that my wanting to connect in a meaningful way to literature is not over-asking and that sensitivities and emotions constitute knowledge that is powerful. hooks (1994) writes that though it may be unreasonable to expect the classroom be a site for therapy, it is appropriate to hope that the content shared and received in a classroom enriches and enhances those within it. hooks (1994) writes about the classroom being a site for self-actualization. My educational journey is now about seeking out academics who take a more holistic approach to learning, who are honest about the tensions within the university as an institution and acknowledge the power of lived experience. I see the space where we can criticize but remain committed to learning a critical, generative one.

For the classroom to be a site of self-actualization academics must investigate the structures upholding its current state (hooks, 1994). For academics across Canada, this work is intertwined with decolonization. When researchers commit to personal healing within the academic institution, we commit to “recognizing the colonial wound in all of us” (Kovach, 2021). In *Indigenous Methodologies*, Margaret Kovach (2021) shares that,

Choosing to see Indigenous people and colonial history is facing racism square on. To do otherwise is not. Racism will return. This is not to diminish other groups but to point out that the distinctive relationship between Indigenous people and country calls for this response.

The *relationship* calls for this response.

||

Dance instilled a relational understanding in my body. Choreographer Annie-B Parson (2022) shares the dancer-choreographer relationship like so: “Your choreography is inside of their bodies so you are physically a part of them, and the dancers are in turn inside of your body because their bodies hold your dances”. Imagine if academics lectured with the understanding that their theory now lives inside students’ bodies or, conversely, that students are inside the academic’s body? The academy, rather, as Spry (2001) describes it, “has always been about speaking from a disembodied head.” One disembodied head to another. A stark contrast to the physical energy exchange between the audience, the choreographer, and the dancer.

Dance never had a home in my academic life. I emptied myself of it when I left for university in 2010. My first-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, single mom of four wanted the best for me, and dance was a hobby; it did not promise a future. It was also expensive. After a decade in and out of university and college, I know, in fact, that nothing promises us a future. The best any practice can promise us is the present—and dance has always done that for me.

I started dancing when I was about 13—late for a dancer. I vividly remember the feeling it gave me then because it still gives me that feeling now. Whatever was stuck inside me could suddenly move around. It was relieving and life-giving. Dance will always silence the chaos around me and will always remind me of who I am.

A “disembodied discourse” has a cost for researchers who practice in this way and perpetuates our individualized, fragmented culture. I want my research to tap into the “shared experience of giving and receiving kinetic energy” (Parson, 2022). Like many others, I find hope in methodology. Spry (2001) goes on to say,

“In calling to myself through the performance of autoethnography, someone, someone from inside my body, finally, gingerly, began to call back.”

In dancing with my dad and in my reflections, my body began to insert itself into my work. I was somewhat suddenly conversing with what was previously my disembodied head. My artist, designer, and inner selves were in dialogue, and dance was the tool I used to explore these multitudes.

It is possible to bring one’s body into an academic institution space—in fact, if academics want to see change, it requires us to, collectively and in relationship with one another. The ask is that we not dissolve our bodies into this collective space but work to acknowledge the multitudes of what exists there. Suzanne Stein and Paula Gardner (2018) write about the complexities these multitudes bring in *Intersectional Dynamics at Play: Barriers and Solutions to Diverse Womens’ prosperity in ICT and Media Spaces*. Embodiment captures the tensions, histories and reality of intersectionality (Stein & Gardner, 2018). To bring embodied knowledge into organizational environments means that corresponding spaces, as per Stein and Gardner (2018), need to be dynamic and continually adapting. When it comes to creating these types of spaces, there will never be ‘one problem’ with ‘one solution’. Part of the work then is in developing and preserving continual dialogue between theory and the physical world outside of it.

In *The Capilano Review*, Seika Boye shares, “...we can have conversations that are both about the dialogue of theories throughout history AND talk about lived experience and their intersections. Both things are true. Theories are theories. My life is not a theory.” (Chambers & Boye, 2021).

My life is not a theory.

III

What does it mean to *fail*? What does it mean to be *seen*? What does it mean to be *seen failing*?

Choreographer Twyla Tharp (2006) said some of her favourite dancers at the New York City Ballet were the ones who fell the most. She said, “I always loved watching Mimi Paul; she took big risks onstage and went down often. Her falls reminded you that the dancers were doing super-human things on stage, and when she fell, I would realize, “Damn, she’s human.”

As it does with theory, the academy takes failure and explores it as a concept, but rarely have I seen the transformative growth that comes from acknowledging public failure in academic institutions. It’s as if an academic institution’s body, by design, never touches the ground. It does not walk, it does not run, and it does not dance.

It could be said that the academic institution is creatively designed this way. Oli Mould, in *Against Creativity*, writes about how capitalism has effectively co-opted creativity, erasing the collective struggle within institutionally racist, sexist, ableist norms—“within the utopia of the creativity rhetoric, in which everyone is creative, there is no struggle, only the potential to apply your ‘creative’ energies elsewhere.” Racism, sexism, and ableist norms can now be “creatively” reframed and renamed in the institutional, capital-driven container. The academic institution does not have to account for its structure, the individuals within it can creatively adjust. Instead of addressing the root of these issues that require holistic shifts, the institution offers accommodations which still largely places the responsibility on the individual.

Mould also writes, “the power to create something from nothing [has] gone from being a divine power, to a socialized and collective endeavour, to an individual characteristic that [can] be traded.” With the rise of capitalism, the value of creativity has gone from intrinsic and spiritual to economic. The application of creativity has shifted. Society has lost the plot. Mould (2018) criticizes this shift further, “social services, charities, and other third-sector institutions are failing not because their funding has been drastically cut, but because they are not creative enough”. Again, creativity is being used as a way of shifting accountability to the individual or organization and disconnects any sort of collective responsibility or solidarity.

Design practice, at times, also co-opts creativity in a similar way to capitalism with its optimism. The irony is that this application of creativity does not actually make design more effective, or easier, it’s simply a distraction. In *Speculative Everything*, Dunne and Raby (2013) write that

design’s inbuilt optimism can greatly complicate things, first, as a form of denial that the problems we face are more serious than they appear, and second, by channelling energy and resources into fiddling with the world out there rather than the ideas and attitudes inside our heads that shape the world out there.

When designers approach projects and problems as “other” and “solvable,” they can fall into the same patterns that institutions do. Design can effectively arrange and rearrange Post-Its on the wall until something makes sense and until designers feel they have control over a project, but designed control is always a simulation. A challenge is addressing roles that capitalism, neoliberalism, and colonialism play in decentering and harming certain individuals and groups. Design’s challenge is finding a balance between optimism and a healthy dose of pessimism and criticism.

That being said, the academy and design spaces being somewhat detached from “reality” is, at times, one of their greatest strengths. They are sites that can facilitate student and designer dreaming and play. But to echo Natalie Loveless (2019), the university—and, I will add, design thinking—can be sites of critique *and* play. It’s not an issue of choosing which, it’s about finding ways for designers and academics alike to balance and be in relationship with both criticism and imagination. Otherwise, the dreams that come out of design and the university will never see the larger community outside of them.

A designer might be fearful to take a design from a controlled space and apply it to the field, only to realize it might not be the catch-all solution they thought it would be, but what happens in that process is learning, reflection and change. Further, as both education and design are disciplines deeply connected to people, who are intersectional, it should be expected that even if a design is received well with one group it may not be with another. More complex structures like capitalism, neoliberalism and colonialism cannot be dismantled if designers do not learn how to build flexible, reflective designs that have the capacity to fail.

In *Glitch Feminism*, Legacy Russell asks:

What does it mean to find life—to find ourselves—through the framework of failure? To build models that stand with strength on their own, not to be held up against those that have failed us, as reactionary tools of resistance? Here is the opportunity to build new worlds.

What does it mean to learn how to build designs that aim to fail? It means learning how to build a relationship with loss, and loss teaches people about what they want to hold onto, about what *means* something to them. Mimi Paul’s falling and failing creates a world in which audience expectations are brought to the surface, wrestled with, adjusted and negotiated. Failures in performance call into awareness the audience’s previous suspension in the air, believing anything is possible, and their journey back down to earth.

Reflection is built into failure. Is the possibility of a perfect performance the only meaning an audience is attached to, or can the realization of someone’s humanity be just as meaningful? Might academics and designers aspire to expand meaning in this way and *fail*, collectively?

Perhaps failing is the activity that attaches the disembodied head back onto the body.

IV

"Dance has the power to make us see and feel affinities" (Tharp, 2006).

For me, it has always been through movement that feelings of fear, inadequacy, or hesitation transform. Dance has allowed me to confront ideas of failure and has shown me there is always something that comes after a fall or slip. Movement will always be a capacity builder in my body to not only connect with feelings and ideas in myself but also to connect with others. I saw this project as an opportunity to share these ideas with the discipline of design and bring more of myself into my practice.

The research process and corresponding outputs felt like the development of multiple performances by the autoethnographic approach taken. The "performances" were the film, the incorporation of personal reflections and preservation of interview participant dialogue. I invite the readers and viewers to become an interactive audience and not only consider but co-reflect and make meaning with the material forms presented.

It is "in performance," Ann Cooper Albright (1997) writes, that "the audience is forced to deal directly with the history of [the performing] body in conjunction with the history of their own bodies". It is my hope that through my autoethnographic performance of this exploration, others might be encouraged to explore parts of themselves that they can also bring into their relationships and creative practice.

Ronald J. Pelias (1991) writes:

The dialogic process allows performers to present to the community others for consideration. In doing so, performers do not take the place of others. Instead they are engaged in a shared conversation in which they speak, not for, but with, the community.

My hope is that the presentation of interviews with participants and reflections along the way feel like an invitation to be in reflection and conversation with us.

Creativity, in the context of this research, was both a community conversation and a reflexive, personal one. The pages that follow could be interpreted as a dialogue, of sorts, between interviews, reflections, dance, video, stories and literature.

Reflection 1

I can't help but wonder what my research means right now in the grand scheme of things. Like Nabil asked us, "For what and for whom?" I've been exchanging texts and words with fellow students and friends, and we feel existential, lethargic, depressed, and heartbroken. We are sitting an ocean away, and all we can do is advocate and witness life, cultures, being erased.

I received Research Ethics Board (REB) approval last Friday, which felt relieving. It came after two sets of edits. The first set of feedback I received from them made it seem as though they didn't quite understand the point of my research. They said:

"There appears to be a lot of information in the researcher's mind that does not clearly appear in the application. Although it seems low-risk there are aspects of the project that are unclear. The performative aspect of the sessions is not clearly explained in the research processes, and although this comment may be overstepping into questions of methods and methodology, (normally a matter for PI and student researcher), there should be more concrete statement of goals of the activity."

There should be more concrete statement of goals.

I feel like from the moment I stepped back into school, I've been validating the importance and relevance of my experience in peer support, disability justice, social service, and community arts projects. I feel like this REB feedback was yet another reminder that I'm trying to explain a system that does not make sense and does not fit into the institution without a heavy explanation and case made. The value of exploring personal relationships with creativity and with each other is unclear to many.

Thinking about Fariha Roisin's post on Instagram today, and how Instagram is our newspaper clippings:

"We owe each other more. Never forget that. No supremacy is good, equality is worth striving for. Unlearn patterns of behavior of harm. It will free you. Unlearn what privilege makes you believe in what you are owed. It's everyone's duty to fight for fairness. For something better for all of us. Reach over and love each other. Find more ways to decolonize. Read Black revolutionaries; they are the blueprint for all of this work. We owe ourselves liberation. This is the fight of our lives."

The Research Question and Its Evolution

My initial area of exploration was the relationship between creative practice and perception, specifically, how “being creative” could alter our perceptions of Self and Other. The aim was to develop a more inclusive, accessible definition of creative practice and to discover how creative thinking could serve as a personal tool in facilitated spaces, supporting individuals across various disciplines in their daily lives and relationships. This stemmed from my most recent work with non-profits and the social service sector. The initial research question and its evolution, captured below, was imperative for me to journey through and adds further context to my relationship with creativity.

Perception was a particular focus for me, as highlighted by a piece of research from the *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* in an article titled Homeless adults engagement in art: First steps towards identity, recovery and social inclusion. I encountered this research while working at a drop-in centre in Hamilton, Ontario during the 2020–2021 pandemic lockdowns. Yvonne Thomas et al. (2011) found that "breaking the cycle of homelessness is only possible when individuals perceive their own potential to have a different future". In other words, resources alone cannot break a cycle without being paired with a mental shift. At the drop-in centre, I saw how making and sharing art enhances perceived control, improves sense of self, expression, purpose and builds social support (Thomas, Gray, McGinty, & Ebringer, 2011). However, the responsibility of shifting perception rests with society at large, not solely those who are struggling the most. If someone is able to perceive a different future for themselves, society needs to have the infrastructure to support such a shift.

In addition to the drop-in centre, some of my other work involved auditing family court with survivors of gender-based violence as well as advocacy with housing rights groups in Hamilton. I have sat through many hearings and city council meetings. Mainly, this research around perception helped me recognize the limits of language, the feelings of frustration and exhaustion when at the end of hours-long hearings and meetings, nothing changes. The overarching sentiment I was always left with, in both the family court system and municipal government, was that “things are the way they are”. I wondered how each experience might be different, how the world might be different, if judges, lawyers, and council members, for instance, experienced a shift in perception that was outside of the respective containers designated for decision-making. If individuals with the power to change societal structures experienced such a shift, how might their decision-making, and the containers that house them, change?

I began to research what was required to shift perceptions or see options in an otherwise linear, predetermined future. Echoing sentiments from my therapist, I considered whether being able to perceive alternate futures required being outside a state of survival—beyond fight, flight, freeze, or fawn responses. Could a creative response be a post-traumatic growth response? I pondered how many of us are wandering through the world in a state of survival without realizing it.

Chirico et al. (2018) suggest that "there are some profound and rare experiences able to deeply and suddenly alter our perception of the world and ourselves," such as awe. The impact of awe

on creativity remains a relatively under-explored area of curiosity. I questioned whether expanding the definition of creativity could tap into qualities of awe, thus shifting an individual's perception of Self and Other.

I had hoped to contribute to creative theory in two main areas:

- Expand the definition of creativity
- Enhance understanding of the value and application of creativity, viewing it as worth investing in, particularly regarding its healing and relationship-building capabilities

The original inquiry above was rooted in the belief that creativity can be key in shifting perception. By broadening the definition of creativity, I aimed to encourage people to see themselves as more creative, potentially shifting their perception of others and envisioning broader futures.

As my research progressed, and I began conducting interviews and dancing with my dad, my focus shifted from defining creativity to focusing on the stories and reflective processes that were emerging from the interviews. Detaching the lived experiences of participants, who were artists, teachers, doctors, students, community workers, and consultants, and attempting to generalize their experiences into a definition was no longer where I saw the value in this research. It became more important to me to preserve participants' differences and weave together a broader *story* of creativity rather than a definition.

Participant interviews are more than data, they are reflections of who each participant is as a person. Participants spoke of their relationships while being in relationship to me, the researcher. Many participants expressed their enjoyment of the process and how they appreciated what it gave them by way of reflecting on something they don't typically stop to think about. It was not an exclusively extractive process but felt closer to a reciprocal one. And even though interviews were mostly conducted separately (outside of a group of three) each of their stories connected in some way to the next.

In *Indigenous Methodologies*, Kovach (2021) writes: "Story nurtures relationship. Story kindles reciprocity. Story compels responsibility... Story is a gift. And in research, this changes everything." Shifting focus from a definition of creativity to stories of creativity naturally changed my research question. Though this shift felt like it was where my heart was wanting to go, the path ahead was unclear. I was, and continue to be, concerned that this emotionally-led project will not be considered worthy of a master's in design.

However, Kovach (2021) shares, "If research is about learning and discovery, to enhance the well-being of the earth's inhabitants, then story is research." There was a broader story-telling happening across these interviews, one about humanity and personal expression under the umbrella of creativity. Despite my concerns around external validity, I knew maintaining the humanity of the work was what felt most important.

Embedding the relational connection, I felt alongside dance theory became a co-constructive method of sharing stories about creativity. Sharing, respecting, and honouring my story, my dad's story, and the participants' stories, and moving with fluidity became the research. As Spry (2001) describes, the "always migratory identity" migrated the work too. The documentary, corresponding editing process and pacing of interviews in the film supported my pace outside of the documentary—the placement of quotes and preservation of them throughout the report, my reflecting and the continual, intuitive exploration of the meaning of creation and co-creation. My project started to centre authentic expression, human connection, and relationships—themes that had always been present but were not previously highlighted. Dance, co-creation, and preserving complexity became the academic translation of the story. Intuitively, this felt like a necessary pivot.

Where I landed:

What might co-creation practitioners learn from creative processes, like dance?

Reflection 2

I started to think about what it is I'm actually doing—which in the most idealistic way is “getting to know people and their thoughts on creativity.” But if I were to say this on my SSHRC application or REB, I probably would not have received either (I'm guessing).

To force research to be a means to an end feels like (to me) I'm using people to my own end. To force an exploration to be productive feels like I need to know an answer before ever asking the question. How do I know I'm asking the right questions if I think I already know the answer and the tool that I will design? I will never be comfortable being the “researcher,” I don't think. I can get behind not wanting to influence the participants and really get a sense for their true feelings vs. saying what they think I want to hear—but there is an element in here that I constantly wonder about and feel off about. It's what has always made me feel outside of the academy and makes me feel like I have never belonged here. This is the idea that researchers are outside of the human condition and know more or can truly observe—but what does observation mean? And what does this serve if we are all constantly participating in life? It makes me wonder about apolitical being a possibility—is it really? By embodying space in this life, we are innately political. To think otherwise is a bit of a denial—it feels colonial to deny our humanity insofar as to support this idea that we might not impact something by simply being present.

I'm wondering about the definition of meaning and where we have maybe lost sight of it—meaning may equal product or thing of service etc. as opposed to the experience shared between people. I'm finding that even throughout this process, I have connected and grown in ways I otherwise wouldn't have—I'm getting good feedback from participants that they have already started thinking about creativity differently since the interviews. It made them realize they want to be more creative—it's making me think about how much we can improve our lives when we have time to reflect—that that's where the learning comes from. Not only in reading/producing but in the process work and in the reflecting parts. We often skip these and just exist as opposed to experience/engage with life.

I think creativity is a way of processing life, of engaging with it—of being awake in a world that is so easy to be asleep in.

METHODS

Micro-Autoethnography Using Video

Micro-ethnography "examines smaller units of social behaviors with no immediate concern for the surrounding culture... close observation of the visible ways that society is created as a product of human interaction" (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2017). Rather than immediately connecting my work to the broader cultural context as ethnography does, video recordings of my dad and me in the studio captured "material culture and relationships in space," (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2017). Although I recognize cultural and societal shifts in this work, the immediate focus is on individual reflections and stories shared through interviews, reflections, and documenting the learning process in the dance studio.

As Gabriella Coleman (2010) writes, the documentary format can "push against faulty and narrow presumptions about the universality and uniformity of human experience." The editing process provided a way to organize knowledge from participants to be in conversation with each other, preserving intimacy within differences. The pacing of the documentary allows for participant sentiments to be juxtaposed in a manner that might not be possible on paper and allows for replaying and pausing. In this way, the documentary is an exercise in what Fisher, following Heidegger, describes as "worlding" (Coleman, 2010). Through storytelling, "The study of digital media transforms the possibilities and contours of fieldwork" (Coleman, 2010).

Rather than editing sentiments into formal, academic structures for all participants, the informality, phrasing, and grammatical mistakes, or the "vulgar spirit," as Iranian blogging critics call it (Coleman, 2010), are embedded into the work. Preserving and celebrating imperfection in the oral (versus the edited word) attempts to honor the liveness of storytelling (Kovach, 2021). Video also preserves the visual authorship of quotes, meaning the sound of someone's voice, their mannerisms and personality in a way the written word does not.

The process of building the documentary was as much the project as the final version. The way the video has been curated could be seen as choreography in itself. Annie-B Parson (2019) in *Drawing the Surface of Dance: A Biography in Charts*, writes of the aftermath of a performance as being a "discarded thing." Having this work catalogued serves as an archive and "reminds you how complex the body of everything is" (Parson, 2019). Similarly, Goldman and McDermott note, "The power of video records is not in what they make easily clear, but in what they challenge and disrupt in the initial assumptions of an analysis" (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2017).

I hired an editor to support the final assembly of the media, and we went through five versions of the film. Editing over twelve hours of footage down to twenty minutes was an extreme pruning process. It is impossible to capture the entirety of sentiments shared. There are endless ways this documentary could have been assembled. The contrast between the report and film not only strives to expand on the film's stories but also further demonstrates the complexity of preserving such exploratory narratives in research.

Interviews

Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted along with one group interview involving three participants. Due to timing and scheduling constraints, I selected participants from my extended network. I gathered a wide range of individuals with experiences in a variety of disciplines. The interviews included artists, teachers, doctors, students, community workers, and consultants. Although I did not see these individuals regularly, which helped maintain a level of formality, most participants and I shared some foundational relationship; they were not strangers. Notably, one individual was a family member, my aunt, Cami Boyko.

As emphasized throughout this report, relationships are of great importance to me as a researcher. That being said, I was aware that any feeling of obligation had to be addressed with each participant. Prior to participation I ensured that participants had a full understanding of the project's extent and implications, allowing them to make informed decisions. I let them know at multiple points there was no pressure to be involved. It was important to me that there be a foundation of connection, respect, and trust between myself and the participants and that included respecting their decision if they did not want to participate and would rather keep our relationship separate to this published work.

Along with the evolution of my research question, that went from a focus on the definition of creativity to a broader relationship-oriented exploration of the meaning of creativity, the selection of participants evolved throughout the research process. Initially, when the focus was on the definition of creativity, I intended to include teachers in a focus group exploring how creativity is taught. However, as dance and embodied movement became more central to the study, I ensured that dance teacher voices were included in the interviews. There were two dance teachers interviewed and six teachers (as I did not ask for official identification of professions, these numbers reflect those who identified themselves as teachers in the interview). There was no focus group.

I had originally planned to collect social location data from my participants to ensure a wide range of lived experiences. I had written this into my Research Ethics Board Application however, upon reflection, I was mainly collecting this information to satisfy what I thought the university would want as a means to quantify the qualitative data. When I was in conversation with my participants, it didn't feel productive to ask that they categorize themselves in any way. Capturing categories does not capture identity or lived experience. I did not want to contribute to the pervasive academic institutional idea that checking boxes resolves issues of inclusivity. Legacy Russell (2020) in *Glitch Feminism* critiques such approaches noting that even Facebook's addition of fifty-eight gender options in 2014 was not a radical gesture but another pass at promoting the idea that "signifying who we are to others is the only pathway to being deemed fit to participate."

Moreover, I did not identify 'subject-matter experts', though some participants were teachers or held various professional roles in creative fields. This was to legitimize lived experience as expertise and emphasize the equality of personal and professional relationships with creativity.

As interviews were to be recorded and used in the development of a documentary, participants were given options for anonymity: voice distortion, voice without video, or the use of a pseudonym. They also had the option to withdraw from the research at any point up until the final approval of their transcripts. Participants were kept informed about the quotes that would potentially be used in the film. A highlighted transcript was sent to each participant asking for confirmation of quote use before proceeding with editing. It was made clear to each participant that I was aware of the vulnerability involved in being interviewed and the interview being shared publicly. I expressed honor and gratitude for their sharing and co-creation of this work.

There were two parts to the interviews: the first exploring the participant's own experience with creativity, and the second exploring academic definitions of creativity and capturing participant impressions of the definitions and how they would reimagine the definition, if at all. Interviews were roughly one-hour in length.

The academic definition of creativity focused specifically on the paper *Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity* (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). The four categories of creativity that Kaufman and Beghetto identify and their corresponding measurements (see Appendix A) provide a range of meanings of creativity as opposed to a singular definition or theory. This gave the interview participant a wide foundation of material to reflect on. Additionally, grasping the four categories of creativity does not require any prior knowledge of creative theory.

In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson (2008) writes, "The closer you get to defining something, the more it loses its context. Conversely, the more something is put into context, the more it loses a specific definition." By contextualizing creativity within lived experience first, I wanted to then explore how participants would react to the categorization and defining of creativity.

Lastly, as Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) write, "Even though the researcher's experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants." Reflection was embedded in the documentary editing process, the communication I had with participants throughout, and was a personal way of honoring the time and depth that participants gave the research. This reflection supported and, I felt, was required by the autoethnographic approach to the research. Each participant interview was a narrative on its own, my editing of those narratives along with my reflections added the layers, that Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) speaks of, to the collective story that emerged through the completion of this report and the documentary. And as per Creswell and Poth (2018), autoethnography is part of Narrative Research.

Reflection 3

I just returned from Milan on an artist residency with UKAI. We were researching the poetics of synthetic language and the materiality of AI. I read a little bit and wrote a little bit, but mostly tried to immerse myself in the moment and experience of the entire thing. Something I've been thinking a lot about is how, historically, I love the process. However, I have learned to love the process a bit too much, and I shy away from producing much output. Something SFI taught me was how to move through process and turn it into something tangible for others to interact with.

I think a roadblock we hit when we are trying to translate our process is exactly that: the translation. It will never be for everyone, or it will require a different kind of work from everyone interacting with it to understand it in the way they want to. I become overwhelmed with what the most important thing to say is, what is the most important thing to communicate in my work? I know what I learn in the process, but to zoom out and to have a sense of what you need to bridge others into your work is a whole other challenge altogether.

A piece of work we saw in Milan was Kate Crawford's "Calculating an Empire" at the Prada Foundation - it looked exactly like an MRP on display. The folks I was with were critical of the work and called it "bad art." But to me it was hopeful. There was definitely something missing in translation - but when is there not? Also, how much of our existing is us wanting others to be in the exact place we are? If a piece of work doesn't resonate with us, perhaps it wasn't made for us.

It makes me wonder/question my process and output. Is art for the sake of art or research for the sake of research valid to share? When I have these questions, I know I need to read more. I need to reconnect with the reasons why I'm doing what I'm doing. I need to remember the light I saw at the beginning of this.

PART I - MAYBE WE'RE CREATIVE: THE FILM

A link to the film can be found in Appendix B.

This documentary emerged from exploring creativity as experienced and expressed across various domains of daily life. By weaving together interviews from fourteen individuals—including artists, teachers, doctors, students, community workers, and consultants—I aimed to capture the multifaceted nature of creativity. Each participant shared their personal connection to creativity, along with the barriers and challenges they face, ultimately revealing its significance in their lives and professions. The inclusion of dance footage and reflective sessions with my dad deepens the documentary's storytelling, serving as a practical application of theoretical concepts and illustrating how creativity operates within and enriches human experience. The reflections included in this section are separate to the ones throughout the report as these are specifically related to the dance classes and conversations between my dad and I over the three months of learning. These reflections focus mostly on our relationship and the dance process versus the report process, though both are intertwined with the overarching themes in the work. There are many moments throughout the film where the viewer can hear our dance instructor sharing lessons with us. These are additional “behind the scenes” moments that upon watching and re-watching give a viewer extra material to unpack.

The analysis is in the viewers' hands, allowing them to reflect on and connect with the media, reflections, and movements presented. The assemblage below centres the words of the participants, dance reflections from my dad and me, stills from the film, and short paragraphs outlining some key parts of the film. The function of this chapter is to document some of the overall story of the film and expand on parts of the story through extended quotes from participants and extended reflections. Having this section allowed me to return participant quotes to their original form to give the reader a view into how much the project was edited.

The process in putting this chapter together was similar to the editing the film in that it was challenging to cut down the amount of content captured into only a few pages. The report and the film compliment each other in this way as readers could put names to faces from the film in the quotes of the report. Where typically participants are left anonymous, this research offers a level of intimacy with the participants as well as myself and my dad.

The film is a suggested prerequisite to the report, though not a requirement. The hope is that by the end of the film, the viewer starts to consider the possibility that *maybe they are creative*, and for various reasons outlined in the film, they may not have explored what creative practice could mean for their life and relationships. This report offers supplementary literature expanding on themes explored in participant interviews, reflections and presents a working conceptual systems model, based on and Twyla Tharp's insights on personal expression in creation. These offerings present space to reflect and deepen this (perhaps) new perspective on creativity.



Figure 2: Film Still

Dance Reflection - Dad

After coming home from a military deployment for a year I was challenged in many ways. This was mainly the culmination of being away for extended periods of time over many years. I was now closer physically to family but felt very distant, alone. I was no longer in control of feelings, life felt robotic and exhausting. Pushing through those obstacles I began to reimagine all of what I missed. I still regret strongly being absent, even though I did everything within my power to try and connect and keep in touch.

I am not sure how, or at what point Katie and I decided to dance. I know that I spent countless hours exercising, watching music videos, starting to really see and feel something again. In my mind or maybe more specifically in my heart I longed to connect, feel, and experience what I knew Katie always had when she danced. Honestly, I really wanted to experience it with her. I wanted us to share something, take a journey, listen and hear everything she had to say. I wanted to heal what I had broken, in myself but more importantly, in my beautiful daughter, in us. And I needed her help.



Figure 3: Film Still

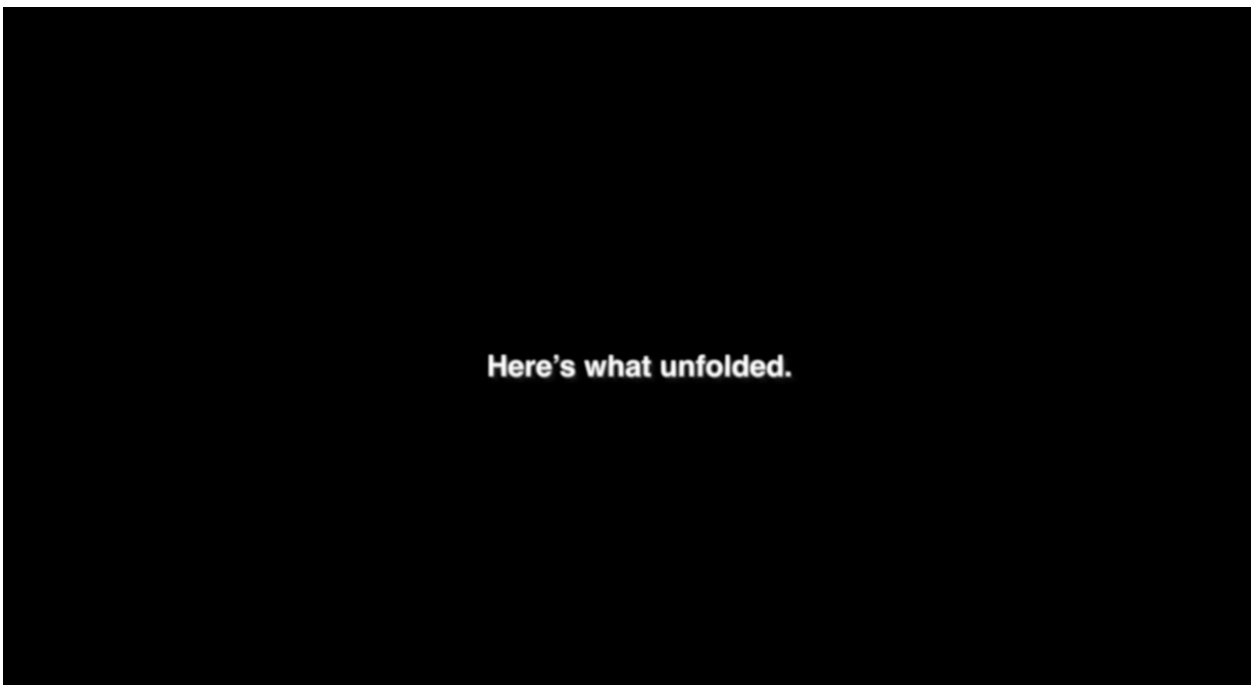


Figure 4: Film Still

Dance Reflection - Katie

I really like that we will be able to hold each other accountable to this process - I would like to think that regardless if I was doing a school project or not we would be doing this together but something in me thinks we may have put it off for a while. Having a deadline is really helpful in moments like these. It saddens me to think I need some sort of project happening to carve out time in my schedule to do things, though. This is something I'm reflecting on deeply as I make my way through Against Creativity.

I just finished the chapter on Algorithmic Creativity, and Mould speaks about the evolution of the monetization of sharing culture - that we don't share things for the sole purpose of social connection as much anymore. To share without some sort of economic gain or promise would mean some sort of sacrifice for the person doing the giving. We so rarely sacrifice anymore without the promise of something being given back to us. I'm thinking about how my friend who owns the studio has given us the space for no cost and how I feel like I should be paying her, how my dad is doing this to spend time with me, how both of them have given me gifts and are sharing time with me in different ways, but time nonetheless.

I've never felt like I could call myself a dancer. Even when I was dancing full-time there always were dancers who started before me and who were in more dances than me. Maybe this is what competition instilled in me, you had to be the best at something to call yourself a participant of it. I feel the most me when I'm dancing, though. I constantly resist dancing when I'm listening to music in a public space. My body wants to move. It always has. This part of my identity is something I'm looking forward to learning about as I move through this experience with my dad.

Creativity is something we can all bond over and connect with on a different level. I would say for some people, it's probably easier. My dad is an example. He's a very creative person. But it's crazy, because he's worked in finance his whole life... Some people aren't able to make being creative their full time job, and it shouldn't have to be either. That's the thing, right? You don't have to be an artist or a writer to be creative... But you can still be creative and have your day job be like an accountant, that doesn't make you not a creative person. That doesn't make you someone who doesn't engage in arts or culture. Everyone likes to congregate around the arts, whether it's formal or informal. I feel like that's just, once again, what makes us human.

- **Layla Ahmad, Interview Participant**

Many interview participants share the idea that everyone is creative with differing types of 'talent' or 'skill'. Alongside these sentiments, the viewer watches my dad and I learn a style of dance that neither of us have any experience in. It feels extremely vulnerable and uncomfortable to be a novice at something or to be bad at something let alone show it to others. But, a person does not have to be good at something to have fun doing it, or to connect with others through it. In fact, I might argue that the worse a person is at a creative practice, the more they may be able to build a meaningful relationship with others in the room. Varying skill-levels encourage co-design and learning from one another. Of course, trust and respect for one another should be present as well. I hope that through our vulnerability viewers are encouraged to try creative practices for the sake of trying or for the sake of connecting with others.

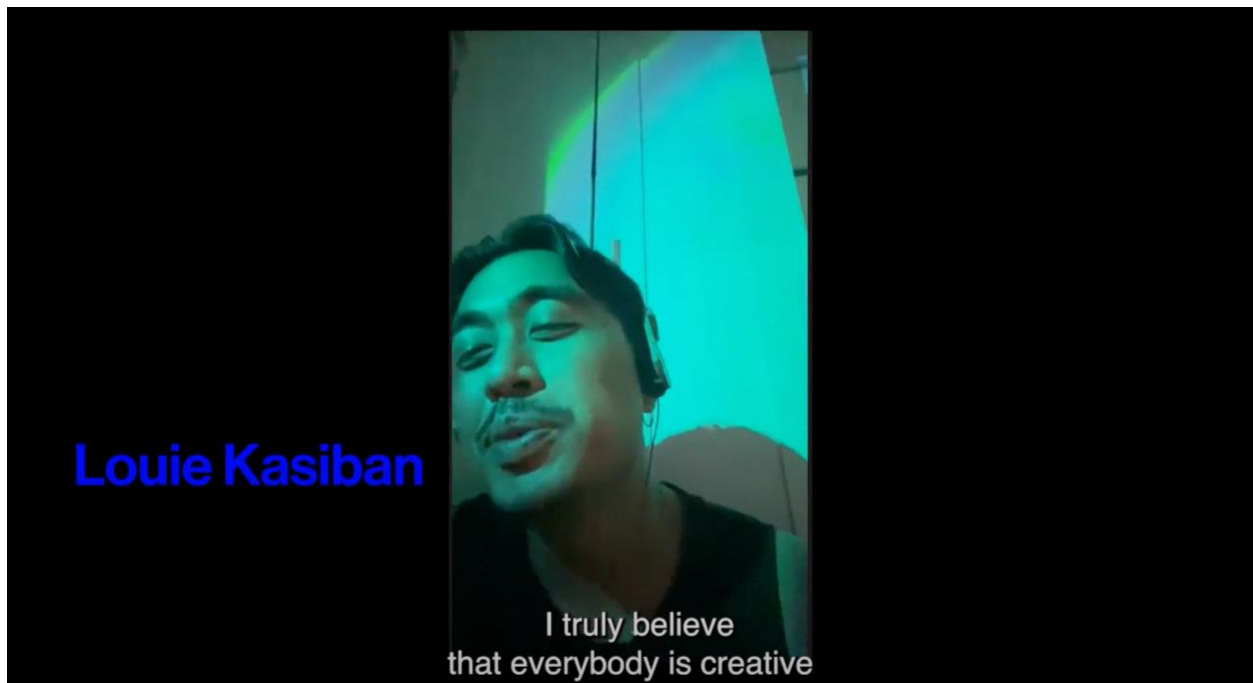


Figure 5: Film Still

Doesn't mean I'm good at it, but I'm genuinely just open to whatever happens. I believe the resistance of many is immediately overcome by the obvious thing in question, that every single human being is born creative, I believe, and those that feel they aren't just haven't dug deep enough. When we have those conversations, it doesn't take long for them to realize that they have it, and I think most people leave energized rather than discouraged.

- **Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant**

Dance Reflection - Katie

I'm really amazed with how much my dad is open to learning House Dance. I see him struggling to get the moves and instead of giving up, he just takes it slower. Dance requires humbleness to when you're a beginner. You can't just think you have something. You might understand it in your brain, but incorporating it into your physical body is entirely different. It makes me think about how out of sync our bodies are with our brains, even though we walk around as seemingly one entity. You can't fake it when you're learning a specific style in a progressive style, where one class builds on the last. I'm realizing how much I am/have been preoccupied by others and where they are when I'm learning something. I find it really hard to express myself fully in dance when I see others falling behind. It's hard to find a place where you don't leave anyone behind but where people can express their full potential. It involves compromise.

My dad and I are at different levels but we can still take this class together. We exist at the same time, neither being pulled one way or the other or being judged for where we are at. He celebrates me and how "good" he thinks I am and how he thinks I've really improved since the first class. I celebrate him when he repeats a move and finally gets it. It's cool being able to teach him or show him how I understand the moves.

And I've seen the power, it has to support students where they're at, to grow, and to come out of their shells within the classroom space as well. There was one particular student who often would leave elements of their social location outside of the classroom space. And this particular student in this community-based fundraiser, decided that this was the place where he was going to be free and come out and totally embrace his creative side and nature, and use that creativity and that space to do something that was meaningful to him that aligned with his passion and that's supported the Gay Straight Alliance at the College. [He] created a fundraiser that was also a drag show. And the student came into the classroom, fully dressed up in drag and put on a show for all of us.

It was the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced as a teacher. That student came to the back of the classroom, where I was sitting and tears were just rolling out of my eyes, and took the feather boa off of their shoulders and wrapped it around my neck. I just thought, this is the power of creativity. That student is now one of the top drag performers in Vancouver and is working on their PhD in Social Work right now and said to me that that space, in that moment, and that time - and I'm getting teary eyed right now - where they were allowed and just given permission to be creative and be themselves was the turning point for them in education and to go on to authentically be themselves in all the spaces in which they existed.

- **Sirena Liladrie, Interview Participant**

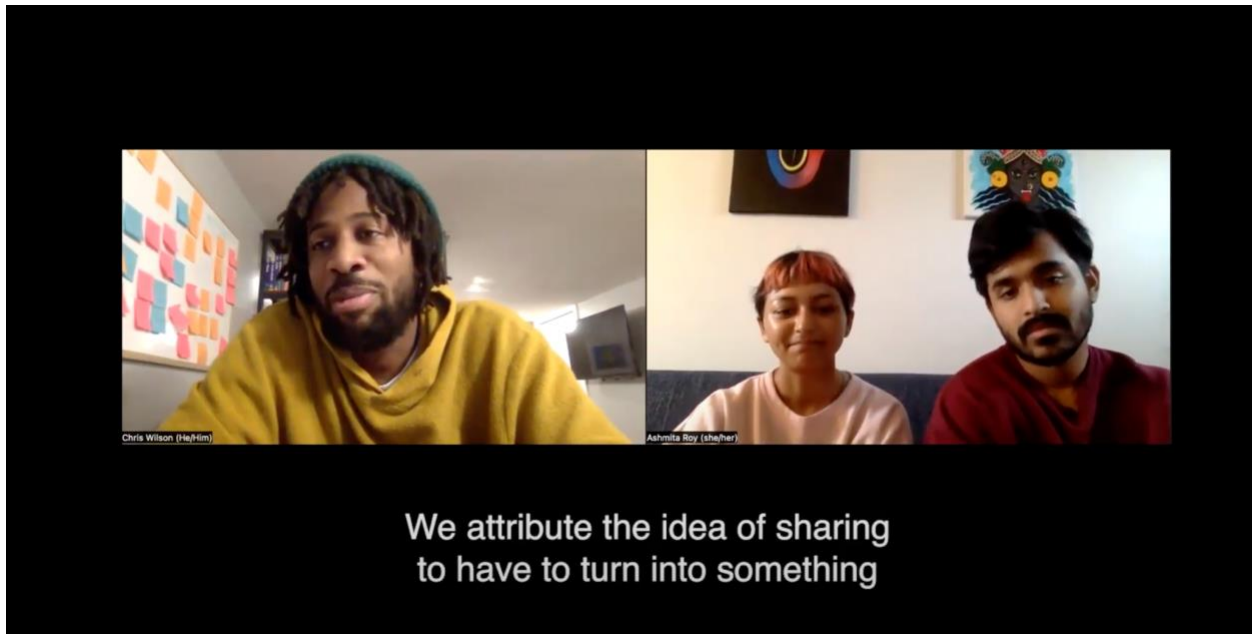


Figure 6: Film Still

The film explores societal pressures and definitions of creativity that might discourage individuals to not consider themselves creative. These pressures and definitions can also discourage collaboration.



Figure 7: Film Still

In our field, orthopedic surgery, there's lots of individuals who need to hear things different ways. And so I always use the argument of Michael Jordan, for example, right? The greatest basketball player, at least for argument's sake, in history. And, you know, in this very interesting period, up to 1994...they had won three championships in basketball. He was this phenom. And in 1994, he decided to go play baseball...he was very good at baseball, but he wasn't where he belonged... So what happened the next year, well, he went back to basketball, and history was made.

And I said, how many of you feel like you're Michael Jordan playing baseball? And you're good enough at your jobs because you're smart, you've gone through the system, but there's something missing. And I go look back to your childhood, because a childhood you were undifferentiated, you did what made you feel good and you felt, and then life happened. What's missing? And then hands go up and everyone starts talking. I used to do this, I used to run marathons, I used to do this. And I go well why did you give it up, right? And that becomes the discussion that could go on probably for three hours.

- **Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant**

This week my Dad started picking up the combinations of steps. He said something I shared with him last week unlocked what had been keeping him stuck. It's starting to feel like we are really dancing. - Katie

My Dad told me he's beginning to get the skill of conceptualizing back - something the army had trained out of him. I find this really interesting and I wonder if dancing has been helping in some way that we both don't recognize. He gets to move into this place of the unknown without any repercussion]

Figure 8: Film Still

There were key moments throughout this journey that stuck out to me, one being the reflection in still above (Figure 8).

Dance Reflection - Katie

During class, my dad was talking about regaining his ability to conceptualize his future as he was nearing retirement. The army deemed him undeployable after he returned home from his last tour, so he is finally free. He said he hadn't realized he lost the ability until he started making plans again and remembered

what it felt like. He told me that being able to plan ahead reminded him of moments from his youth when he would think about his future. It made me reflect on our ability to think into the future and how individuals under extreme stress, when making life or death decisions, do not–cannot–pause to think ahead and have to make a decision in the moment. I don't think our bodies know the difference between our work and personal lives, so this extreme reactionary response trickles over into our personal lives. I wonder how him being able to conceptualize and think about his future was connected to how he started to show vulnerability and repair our relationship.

Amy Satterthwaite's (2015), Foresight for Every Kid, looks at future time perception in education that connects to what I was witnessing in my dad. She cites Bob Yuka's work which explains how having acute needs in the present can impede a person's ability to conceive of or plan for the long term. A short-term perspective has a cyclical effect preventing people from moving out of their situation, as their focus is on the immediate need to survive (Satterthwaite, 2015).

When my dad shared the return of this ability, it was another moment where I thought deeply about trauma in our bodies and how a short-term perspective, how survival mode, impacts our ability to 'think creatively'.

Throughout the learning process there were many times where my dad and I were not able to quickly pick up moves. There are moments in practicing where we didn't believe we would ever get better. However, of course, with practice we did. At times, the challenge was habits in our bodies that we had to unlearn to be able to relearn a new step. A theme explored throughout is when knowledge becomes embodied knowledge.

And I realized that the other people were writing from impressions of other people's work, not from their own experience. In other words, there's a very big difference when you go into an organization and understand that the barrier they display towards your ideas is not a real barrier, but it's a barrier of unlearning. It's a barrier of ... neurons that were taken over by irrelevant data. And my favourite example, it's irrelevant that the Earth is round, it makes no difference to you. You knowing or not knowing, that is irrelevant, but knowing it consumes some neurons. Now, if you're a pilot, it is important to know that the Earth is round. But if you're not a pilot, it's irrelevant, irrelevant, right? So you have to choose your knowledge. Right?

So three steps. Step one, is identify something you want to unlearn. You can do this every day, right? Step two, imagine where you will be, if we got rid of it forever. Like forever. Like I said, All right. So toss your conventional wisdom. Essentially, learn to unlearn that every single day.

- **Alexander Manu, Interview Participant**



Figure 9: Film Still

...chances are that sharing [creativity], being open, probably means that you're gonna have to manage and deal with a lot of traumatic things that have cycled through your life. And that is something very difficult to do. So we're in this kind of limbo, or this space, where to explore might mean to bring trauma into the forefront. And that trauma, and dealing with it and managing it and figuring it out, will have an impact on me as a person. But it will open up the sides of everybody else to see. Then they can explore too. We kind of have to do it all together, it sounds so cliché to say, but if we can find ways to support each other, in that exploration of ourselves, and I think we have to deal or handle it with care.

...I don't think many people will travel to that space. But we can do parts of it and then I think that's where somebody else comes in and tries to take you a little bit further and another person comes. I find that we're not exposed to everything. As vast and wide as the internet could be, all the things you have access to, also makes the world really small. At the same time, you're not getting fed the thing in its entirety, we don't know if it's in its truest form. You have no idea. And so other aspects of being able to be in person with someone or be in space and be in that that realm is important.

- **Chris Wilson, Interview Participant**

Dance Reflection – Dad

Knowing Katie, she had a plan. A series of video instruction breaking down steps progressing towards a more choreographed linking of movements to music, than the connection to a personal “Jack”. I’ve learned that the connection to the music combined with movement is what encompasses a personal “Jack”. More of a personal expression from within, joining hands with the outward movement. Having her there to explain and demonstrate was invaluable. To see her move and connect the dots was a testament to her ability and free spirit. I was in good hands, although very often behind. Reflecting (ha ha) these are reflections, life or relationships are similar. They require more than thoughts, words, and

conversation. It requires a more complex interaction of the former with an activity, sharing of the personal connection we have with these things, with each other. While she was teaching me to dance, I felt we were holding hands along the way step by step.

We have a long way to go. Last week we improvised a little bit and shockingly it worked. The steps were transferable to a different tune. We were even in step with some of our practice moves! I look so forward to completing this dance. Most importantly, I never want the music to stop. While we won't always be in step, we will always be together.

Dance Reflection - Katie

My dad just sent me his reflections. I'm having quite an emotional response to them. What the military turned my dad into was robotic-like. I think this is something we might all relate to on a spectrum. Our jobs and lives ask us to show up as slivers of ourselves every day, and slowly, we might lose connection to what makes us, us. I think this process is on steroids in the military and the less "you" you are, the more "successful" you can be, or simply put, you don't die.

I keep thinking about something I heard in a podcast that hurt people hurt people and build institutions that hurt people. On the other hand, healed people heal people - and can go on to build institutions that heal people. I think the same goes for designers. I find immense hope in that.

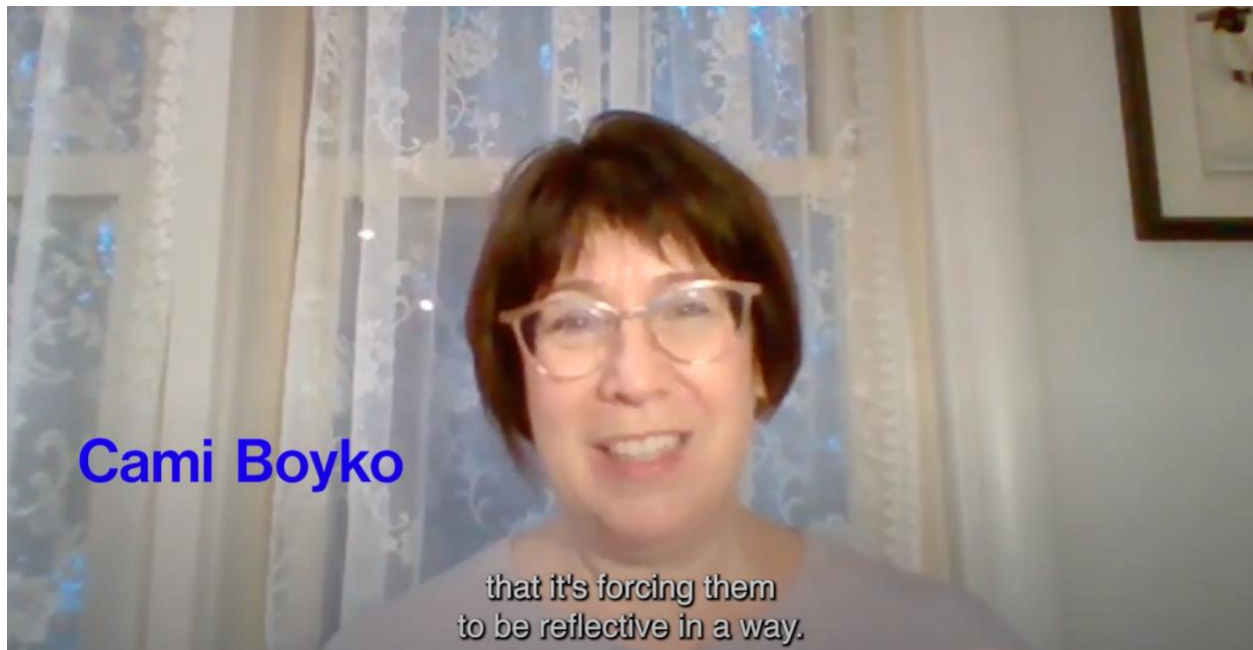


Figure 10: Film Still

Film is a way of disseminating research that is more accessible to experience in community and as a collective. Reports are typically read individually and can be considered dense, whereas creating a short-film gave me the opportunity to use more everyday language, visuals, and sound in the research to connect to people inside and outside of the university.

As many community members outside of academic institutions were a part of this research as participants, I hope that their watching of the film emphasizes the importance of their contributions. I hope to show them that their participation is making a difference in the advancement of creative theory and research creation in the university.

Ultimately the film, like the research, is an exercise in reflection.

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND CO-CREATIVITY

Why I made a film *and* a system:

As mentioned earlier, the film can be used as an entry point into personal reflection and/or seen as a prerequisite to engaging with the following supplementary research and literature. The next chapter is informed by participant interviews but organized through a framework incorporating material from choreographers, designers, and academics alike. Mainly the framework was informed by Twyla Tharp's (2006) writing in *The Creative Habit*. These frameworks culminate into a conceptual systems design to further visualize and reflect on individual creative expression that could be further adapted to groups engaging in co-creation.

A strong story emerged through interviews which I hope was communicated through the film. Trauma and lived experiences come with the exploration of creativity. These experiences may rise to the surface when practicing creativity individually or with others. By the end of interviewing, I was under the strong impression that having a framework to explore this process could possibly serve many people unpacking the process of creative pursuits individually and especially collectively. Working alongside others acknowledging their lived experiences and trauma requires care and awareness.

From my experience across business, social service work, community arts and design thinking, I was not aware of any systems that visualize the personal and reflective complexity of being creative or being creative with a group. Even Tharp's next book *The Collaborative Habit*, though it offers productive reflective prompts, it does not visualize any of her theory or storytelling nor does it explicitly carry over the framework from *The Creative Habit* that I chose to explore as a concept. Despite the theory and research that exists; personality tests, creative 'self-help' literature, creative theory and group creative theory, there remains a relative gap in corresponding conceptual models that capture not just the creative process but the complex human expressions that inform being creative and being creative with others.

PART II - MAYBE WE'RE CO-CREATIVES

The interviews and reflection process of this research led into a more specific exploration of experiences active within a person when creating or co-creating. Spry (2018) describes emotion and poetics in scholarly reflection as “scholarly treason” that is “heresy put to good use”. I quite enjoy this framing. It reinforces that reflection can be an act of powerful rebellion, resistance and in and of itself can shift societal structures. In an attempt to enhance the strength of the activity of reflection in my work, I combined this “heresy” with participant interviews that culminated into a conceptual model. This model explores a response to current group challenges in creativity, addresses complexity in individuals and groups, and integrates dance as design.

Current Challenges in Group Creativity

In one of the first foresight classes, our cohort explored feelings about the future. We shared how hopeful we were or how pessimistic we were, and why. The cohort consisted of mostly international students so any time we were given the opportunity to share individual lived experiences, the discussion varied tremendously and created a rich site for learning. The resonating lesson that day was that each individual story was no more or less valid than the next. Each was rooted in lived experience. Each story existed in the collective container we had made in the classroom that day.

Group creativity theorists, Paulus and Nijstad, explore four action principles in their work, one being the *effective sharing principle* (Bartels, Dubina, Campbell, McGrath, & Carayannis, 2019). This principle takes into account the “importance of establishing a culture of informational exchange, an openness and willingness to share...” (Bartels, Dubina, Campbell, McGrath, & Carayannis, 2019). The future is both an individual and collective one. To me, the purpose of the exercise in foresight was not to convince one another that one person’s experience was more relevant than another person's when considering the collective future. We shared for the sake of sharing, consideration and curiosity. Despite the common misconception that foresight provides organizations answers to the future, this exercise was effective in capturing some of the often unspoken, lived experiences and information in the room as meaningful learning tools and activated an exchange.

The challenge for many co-creation groups is preserving the co-existence of multiple stories. It’s resisting the urge to cling onto one story to move a group forward. Natalie Loveless (2019) in the manifesto, *How to Make Art at the End of the World* says, “Stories are wondrous in their capacity to reorganize our approaches to our social-material worlds; they are dangerous for their capacity to produce themselves as compelling objects of belief, naturalized, as all too many of us see year in and year out in the classroom, into calcified truths.”

Attempting to collaborate with the multitudes and validity of experiences sounds overwhelming, and it might be, but it does not have to be immobilizing.

Loveless (2019), turns to academics King and Haraway's respective works on stories to ask:

- How are we remade by all we speak and hear?
- How are we remade through all we touch and are touched by?

These questions shift a designed, singular, unchanging story to one that is flexible and interacts with the surrounding environment. Designers could find new possibilities in the interaction of multiple experiences and exchange. In *Collaborative Creativity and Creative Collaboration as Future Work Paradigms*, Bartels et al. (2019) writes, "Although one can look at the particular coloured pieces of the kaleidoscope individually, it only exploits its full potential when moving it around and observing the pieces as they interact."

Similarly in dance, Boye writes, "...dancing, as I've come to understand it, is just a state of awareness and self in relationship to other things...all things" (Chambers & Boye, 2021). From my perspective, both dance and design are about self-awareness in relationships.

Designing for relationships, inclusively and complexity are not new considerations for the field of design. They are, however, current challenges. Designer Jutta Treviranus (2023), in *Inclusive Design: Valuing Difference, Recognizing Complexity* writes, "We are told that to succeed we need to do what we have been doing more effectively, efficiently, accurately, and consistently." To be able to design in a way which prioritizes relationships, designers have to collectively build new definitions of success and new ways of getting there.

Treviranus (2023) continues,

The tragedy is that ... there is a large generous mountain that could fit all of us...However, to get to it we need to reverse direction and go against much of what we have been taught, all the formula we think will lead to our success.

To redefine the formula for an inclusive co-existence, designers and academics alike can turn inward to challenge the idea that the best in oneself emerges through output. Focusing on output alone distracts from what can be gained through process work and building relationships.

King and Haraway's questions add a reflective element to the design process. Designers can make meaning through the interaction of individual lived experiences. By learning about the Self and Other, designers might also be simultaneously learning how to co-design adaptive systems.

Preserving Complexity and Lived Experience with Creativity

During a guest lecture, Dr. Andrea Fatona from the Centre for the Study of Black Canadian Diaspora at OCAD made a perhaps obvious but seldom articulated point. She stated that her work is not only about Blackness but, as a Black woman, how her experience is her way into our humanity. I wonder how many designers, especially those with European ancestry, regard work that has been actively decentered, such as work by Black, Indigenous or disabled identities, as irrelevant to their experience.

Audre Lorde (2020), in her address *Difference and Survival* at Hunter College, wrote,

It is within our differences that we are both most powerful and most vulnerable, and some of the most difficult tasks of our lives are the claiming of differences and learning to use those differences for bridges rather than as barriers between us.

She went on to say,

Which differences are positive and which negative are determined for us by a society that has already been established... But it is not the differences between us that tear us apart, destroying the commonalities we share. Rather it is our refusal to examine the distortions which arise from their misnaming, and from the illegitimate usage of those differences which can be made when we do not claim them nor define them for ourselves.

If co-creation happened in a way that claimed, celebrated, and witnessed differences, tapping into individual experiences as opportunities to connect rather than merely categorize, their relationships would deepen. And as Treviranus (2023) writes, “rather than reducing accessibility into checkboxes, the goal in inclusive design is to achieve a deeper commonality between people.”

These passages offer a reflection point for creators. What is their *difference*? What are their experiences that connect them to collective humanity, have they ever stopped to think about them?

Sites for further exploration might be found within collective conversation. Alia Weston and Miguel Imas (2016) call this kind of exploration “dialogical imaginations.” People construct dialogues that are intertwined, negotiated, and contested in a new “in-between” space. They also emphasize the creative process as a social process that engages, rather than the production of a particular output (Weston & Imas, 2016).

This work is aligned with Bartels et al. (2019), who argue that “creativity is not just a characteristic of specific activities and products but also a characteristic of social relations and communications.” They place special emphasis on the creative component in communication across disciplinary boundaries.

The complexity of individual designers multiplies when co-designing. This reality of difference prompts an exploration in preserving lived experiences within projects that require some sort of cohesion to move forward. How do designers build cohesion across differences without erasing or changing those differences?

Paulus and Nijstad talk about this in their *effective convergence principle* (Bartels, Dubina, Campbell, McGrath, & Carayannis, 2019). This principle recognizes that agreement has to be

reached on what ideas a group will work towards. These principles are helpful theoretically but there are gaps in how these theories come to life. Bartels et al. (2019) point out that Paulus and Nijstad neglect the *Eigendynamik* of a group which captures the unfolding of creativity as a social, communicative phenomenon of sorts. This neglect puts group theory at risk of an additive view of collective creativity where the individual remains paramount and there is little convergence. Ideas are layered on top of each other but do not interact with each other through the collaborative process. In other words, the colours of the kaleidoscope are beside one another but do not *move* with each other. Technically, the colours comprise a group, but having insight into the potential of a kaleidoscope, we know that movement is what makes the group *magic*.

How Dance is Relevant to Co-creation

Designers can explore movement theory and dance to expand how creativity preserves individual lived experiences while converging them into collective ideas.

Well, actually three of [my teachers] always said pull from lived experiences. So I feel like that has always been my driving force. And I feel like growing up dance was my way to escape everything, as cheesy and as cliché and like, oh my god I hate my childhood trauma... But, for me, dance was my outlet and my tool. At the beginning I was a hot mess express and I didn't really know what I wanted to say. So it just looked like there was too much going on. But I think that over time, honing in on okay, but what do I want to say? How does this actually make me feel? Has been a way to do that, but in a way that is not self-destructive.

Sometimes it can get a little like, everything is bad, but finding that balance of, you know what, some things can be bad, that's true, but things can be good as well. You know what I mean? So it's finding that balance. Also knowing that just because you have a bad dance day doesn't mean you're a bad dancer.

- **Kahvontay Slaughter, Interview Participant**

Dance is an ancient creative practice that can expand designers assumptions and frames in co-design efforts, design thinking, and foresight. Annie-B Parson (2022) writes, “before Euripides, and before Fernando Pessoa and Homer, and even before the Bible, before, before, before- there was dance.”

Dance is about dynamics, proximity and relation. It's riddled with non-linear elements of expression and story-telling coupled with sound. There is liveness, flexibility and adaptability to dance - the stuff we, as designers, talk about and dream of achieving in our design thinking.

Furthermore, as Parson (2022) writes,

There were dances for community-building, there were dances for a good harvest, there were dances for prayer and war, peace and ecstasy. People danced for every aspect of

life from the emotional to the physical to the spiritual. Dance was once fundamental and essential, and everyone danced.

Dance is a collaborative communication practice rooted in our collective ancestry. As designers build worlds, futures, and possibilities, they can look to dance practices to explore individual experience as well as collective action and conversation. Contrary to what others might think, everyone has a little bit of dance knowledge in them.

This collective, ancestral knowledge is important for designers to tap into. In *Design Journeys Through Complex Systems*, Peter Jones and Kristel Van Ael (2022) write,

Designers, social innovators, and business leaders are now called to address transformational challenges for which we have no relevant academic or practice training... these challenges are fascinating, but not quite welcome.

Conversely, Choreographer Twyla Tharp (2006) writes, “Everything that happens in my day is a transaction between the external world and my internal world. Everything is raw material. Everything is relevant. Everything is usable.” Relevant training is always all around a designer.

...If you have these tools for understanding art and other art ideas, I think [they] can give you the tools to understand yourself. Because you, yourself are having to navigate and negotiate things in the world that maybe aren't for you...and you understand the world is not about you. It's about engaging, as opposed to... having to go out and engage it.

- **Jason Lujan, Interview Participant**

So, how do designers see and sort through their lived experiences to expand on what they see as relevant training?

For a designer to expand their perception of relevant skills, detaching the definition of creativity from neoliberal ideologies will be helpful. Mould (2020) writes,

under neoliberal versions of creativity if you want to make a ‘creative’ change in your/my/a/the world, the power to do so comes from within, rather than through connecting with others.

The impact of creativity falling solely on the individual breaks life into smaller and smaller parts whose relations become hidden (Mould, 2020). Connecting with others can be vital and illuminating to see relationality in seemingly unrelated disciplines or experience. It also may impact collective perception of the future.

Toni Morrison (2019), in *The War on Error*, wrote, “Oddly enough it is in the West - where advance, progress and change have been signatory features - where confidence in an enduring future is at its slightest.” Post-pandemic, confidence may arguably be at another low. Treviranus (2023) writes, “The pandemic has highlighted the fault lines in our systems. For some it became

clear that “none of us are safe until all of us are safe” but, “Rather than change course we have collectively reverted to old patterns.”

Similarly, Sarah Pritchard (2021) wrote of dance in the pandemic observing that, “Choreographies of care emerge and persist in our homes, in our mutual aid networks, in hospitals and nursing homes, but we haven’t found our way into radically new public choreographies now that our bodies have changed.” It is an important time for designers to tap into lived experience and differences to design—to remake—public choreography. As Audre Lorde (2020) writes, “our differences are polarities between which can spark possibilities for a future we cannot even now imagine.” Connection, despite difference and contrary to neoliberal ideology, is a generative, creative action.

Collective actions remain, even subconsciously. Parson (2022) writes, “...one of the things I appreciate about city life, how 8 million of us, without language or plan, gracefully find a group rhythm as we walk down the sidewalk together.”

Dance can play a multifaceted role in enhancing design thinking and creative collaboration. Dance is a dynamic form of expression and storytelling that can extend a designer’s understanding of individual and collective experiences. It can be a therapeutic medium for personal expression and coping with trauma. Dance and its historical communal functions suggest a potential to inspire empathetic and nuanced approaches to co-creation in design. Traditional design methods can focus on output which dance challenges, fostering a more holistic and life-centered approach to process. That being said, the next section will explore how designers might approach co-creation through dance and apply Twyla Tharp’s work to personal reflection and co-creation design efforts.

Using Dance as a Conceptual Model: The Creative Body

Choreographer Twyla Tharp (2006) in *The Creative Habit* writes that anything a person creates will reflect ten items: ambition, body, goals, passions, memories, prejudices, distractions, fears, ideas, and needs. These ten items shape a person’s life by how they’ve learned to channel their experiences into them. Tharp (2006) says when she walks into a room, she is alone, but with these ten things.

I saw parallels between these ten items and the evolution of my research. I used the spirit of Tharp’s interpretation of expression as inspiration for organizing themes across participant interviews. The personal stories that participants were sharing about creativity could be organized similarly. Some of Tharp’s items fit into larger themes from the interviews, and conversely, some of the interview themes fit into Tharp’s items. I designed a conceptual systems model to capture the complexities and the personal nature of creativity as well as creativity in a group. The Creative Body attempts to outline the parts of experience that inform expression in every person and a framework for creative connection.

I think growing up, there was a lot of pressure that I felt to be a certain way from society's definition of an artist, as well as from my parents, and from school. I went to an arts middle school, arts high school and arts university. I think I also get stuck with a lot of anxiety. And now, at the moment, I'm taking a bit of a break from the concept of being an artist, because that gives me a lot of anxiety and a lot of expectations. I'm trying to just work through certain elements in my own life, work through bits of trauma that are revolving around growing up and all these expectations that I feel. I would like to, at the moment, just try to dedicate this portion of my life to working through that, so that I can be more free in my creativity and artistic practice.

- **Kern Adegeest, Interview Participant**

Kern Adegeest's story above mirrors themes uncovered throughout participant interviews and captures the interplay between individual experiences and societal influences on creative expression. The Creative Body attempts to capture this nuanced interplay and recognizes how personal experiences, societal expectations and individual expression are intertwined. When a designer, student, artist, person walks into a room, all of these parts, and the stories and experiences embedded in each, are with them.

The working model is below.

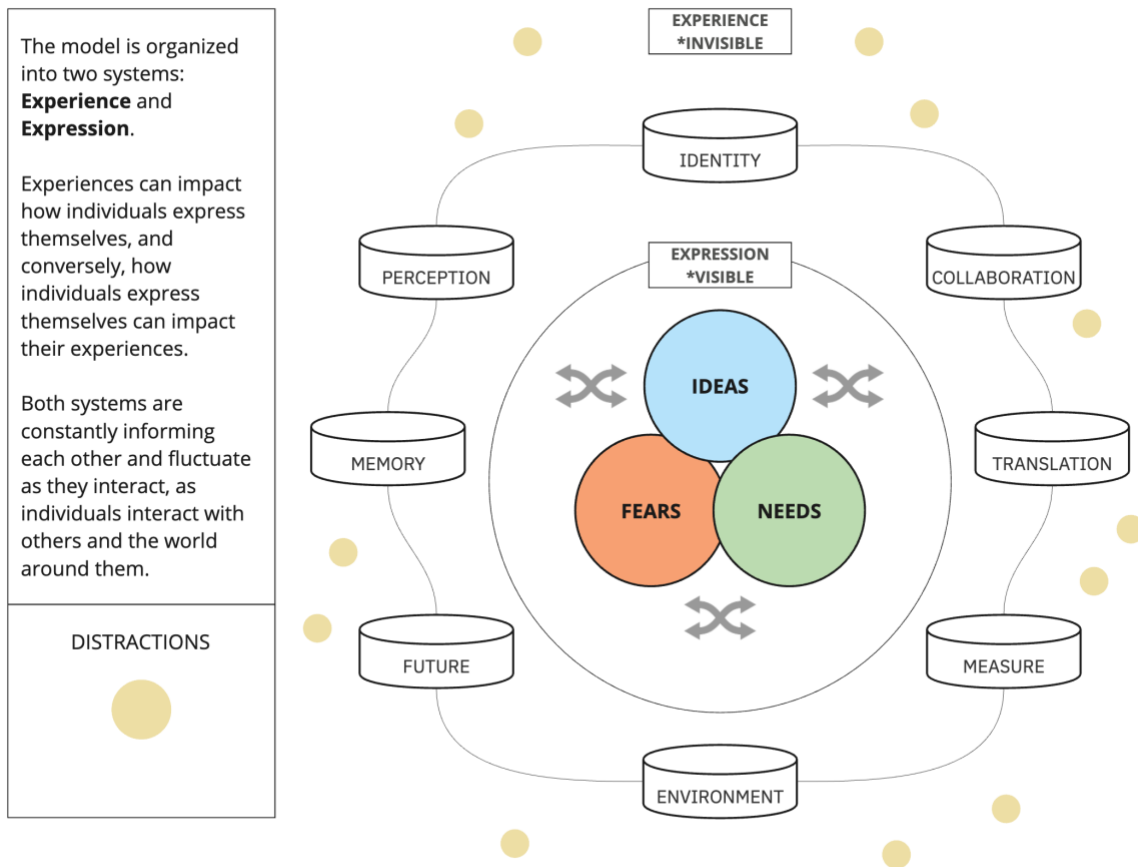


Figure 11: The Creative Body Model

The model is organized into two systems: **Experience** and **Expression**. The outer system, **Experience** includes Identity, Collaboration, Translation, Measure, Environment, Future, Memory, and Perception. A person’s **Experiences** determine the meaning of each category. As a result, each category meaning may change depending on the person. **Experience** captures what is more complex, and invisible within a person. Experiences can shape who a person is. The inner part of The Creative Body is called **Expression**. What is more visible to the outside world and what a person is more likely to share with others, is found in **Expression**: Ideas, Needs, and Fears. What is expressed, is what is communicated. Experiences can impact what and how individuals express themselves as and conversely, what and how individuals express themselves as can impact their experiences. Both systems are constantly informing each other and fluctuate as they interact, and as individuals interact with others and the world around them.

It is important to highlight that what populates the categories within Experience and Expression will constantly change for each person. The goal is not to know each area “exactly” or come to collective definitions of each variable in group work. The purpose of The Creative Body is to

bring awareness to the layers of experience that are in relationship to expression, layers that might otherwise be left at the door in design work. The purpose is to acknowledge that the whole conceptual model, for each designer, is there. Each Idea, Need, or Fear someone expresses is attached to a lifetime of changing experiences.

The last component to the model is distractions. Distractions are always happening, new ones emerging as old one's dissolve. Distractions are anything that prevent a person from being able to engage with their experiences and express themselves in a meaningful way (to them). They can range from media, newspaper, reading, movies, friends, alcohol, food, the internet, and the list goes on. Distractions can be playful, temporarily distracting a person, or they can be deeply rooted and more impactful on experience and expression. Ashmita Roy notes the influence of fear on stifling change and creativity, highlighting the challenges faced in embracing differences.

Because I think the idea of there being something different, it's very frightening. There's always this focus, I think, on what you as an individual are going to lose, rather than what collectively there is to be gained. I think, you know, fear is such an interesting piece of this larger puzzle. Fear is such an effective strategy for some people to limit just general imagination, and limit any kind of change or progress.

- **Ashmita Roy, Interview Participant**

Experiences in perception might impact how fear is expressed. Likewise, fear might limit an individual's perception and how an individual perceives possible futures. This relates back to my reflection captured in the documentary when my dad talks about regaining the ability to conceptualize. Fear also plays a role in an individual's ability to take a long or short view (Figure 8).

Further, reflecting with The Creative Body model and unpacking individual experiences and their relationships to expressions can help individuals understand themselves better, communicate more effectively and possibly enhance empathy. The Creative Body is a visual representation of what otherwise is conceptual or theoretical. Work in the field of creativity and empathy has found that "creating a mental representation of someone else's mind could be a crucial yet overlooked component that contributes significantly to the way people experience and engage in empathetic responses." (Dolan, 2023).

To reiterate, the model is to help individuals and designers understand that the expression of Ideas, Needs, and Fears does not objectively exist; expression is connected to and in relationship with a person's lived experiences.

...I've noticed that a lot of these things come from, like Chris said, traumas. Because when you're open, you're open. When you're in an art, like when you're dancing, you're open. You don't get to choose that, right? And when you're open, all your body image issues, all the things people have said in your life, they all come at you. They all come at you like a freight train, right? And this is what I mean, you can't choose not to be open, right? You might not have been an artist, but now that you're on stage dancing, you're vulnerable.

- Omar Ibrahim, Interview Participant

Omar Ibrahim highlights how the openness required in artistic expression, like dancing, inevitably exposes one to vulnerabilities stemming from past traumas and criticisms, underscoring the unavoidable presence and impact of these deeply personal experiences in expression in creation and co-creation.

Other conceptual models can be combined with The Creative Body to further illustrate its reflective function. The Intent, Action, Impact (IAI) model in relationships (Dykstra, 2011) can be overlaid onto The Creative Body due to its focus on understanding intentions, actions, and their resulting impacts within interpersonal interactions.

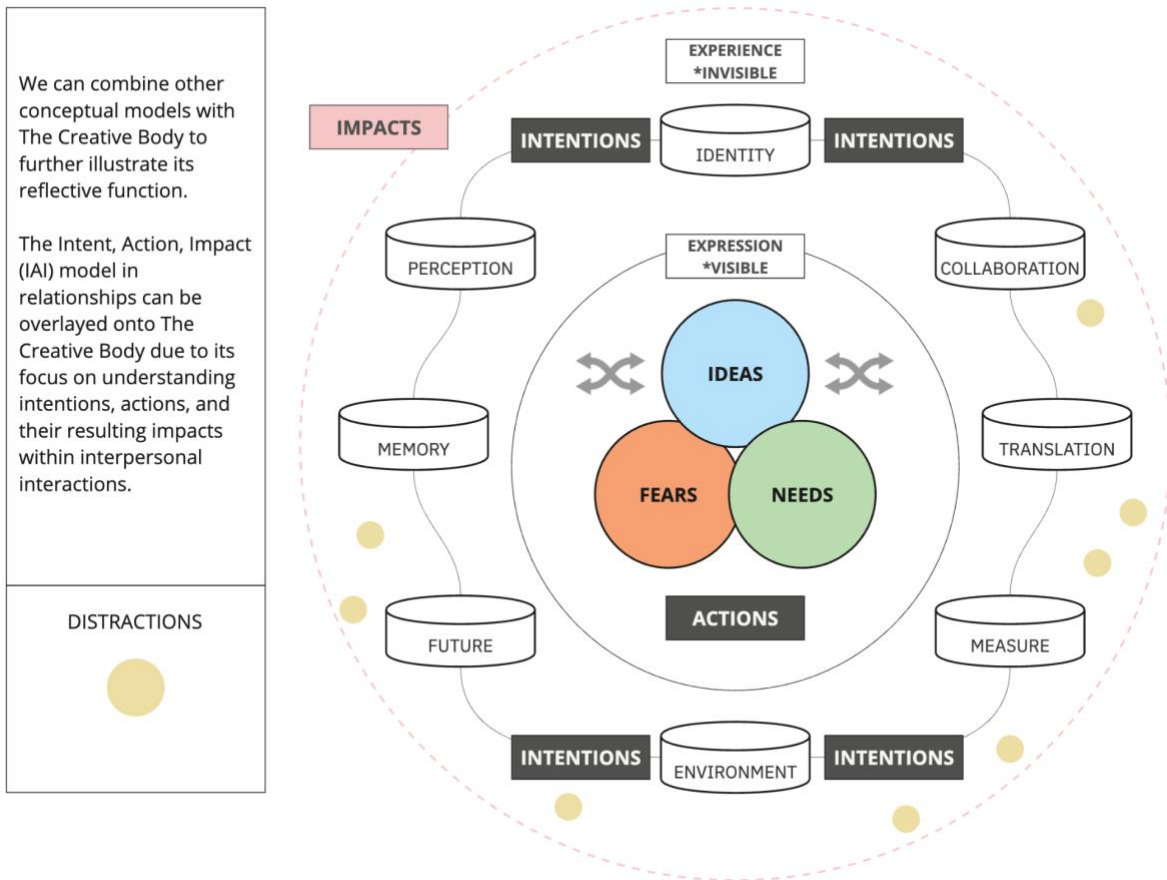


Figure 12: The Creative Body and Intention Action Impact

In this combination of conceptual models, **Experience**, which captures less visible elements such as experiences informing *identity, perception, memory, measure, and future*, serve a place for intentions. Intentions can be informed by an individual's experiences that aren't immediately apparent to others but fundamentally shape their motives and desires in interactions.

Expression, comprising more observable aspects like *Ideas, Needs, and Fears*, aligns with the action phase of the IAI model. Here, the intentions formed by a person's experiences are expressed and manifested into action. Actions can determine how individuals communicate and express their internal cognitive and emotional states, which are directly observable and impactful in creative collaborations and personal interactions.

The impact of these expressions and interactions resonates through the entire Creative Body, affecting both **Expression** and **Experience**. This comprehensive impact reflects changes and shifts within an individual's creative and interpersonal engagements as a result of intention and actions. This holistic view emphasizes that every part of the model is interrelated, where the internal intentions, informed by experiences, influence outward actions, expression, and the feedback further informs experiences and expression, driving a continuous cycle of personal and creative growth.

To review, Twyla Tharp's (2006) work in *The Creative Habit* exerts that personal creations reflect ten elements such as ambition, body, and goals. The Creative Body, inspired by Tharp, organizes themes from participant interviews into a structured system reflecting the complexity of creation. It consists of two parts: the **Expression** system, visible to the external world, encompassing *Ideas, Needs, and Fears* that dominate communication, and the **Experience** system, which includes the more private, past experiences and nuanced influences on creativity. By visualizing and reflecting on the relationships between both systems, designers can enhance their self-awareness, improve communication, and foster empathy. This approach acknowledges the dynamic and ever-changing nature of personal experiences and their impact on creativity, aiming to integrate these insights into the creative process and co-creative process in design.

The Creative Body: Parts of the Model

What follows are further pieces from participant interviews and their possible corresponding parts from the **Experience** system of The Creative Body. Categorizing participant reflections is to prompt reflection, discussion, and questioning about how experiences could be organized and how they might be expressed.

The reader will find possible considerations in the form of questions for a category first and the following page will contain participant sentiments corresponding to those questions. Some categories have been paired to prompt reflection about the interconnectedness of the system. Since there are no strict definitions of each category, the corresponding participant quote might not make exact “sense” to the reader.

If the participant sentiment doesn't make sense in the **Experience** category identified, explore why. If the corresponding sentiment does, explore why. Compare and converse with others.

Experience Category: Translation

Possible considerations for Translation:

- How do I translate information around me? Verbally? Non-verbally?
- How do I see things? How does my brain translate what is around me?
- How do I take information and making meaning of it?
- What kind of learner am I?



TRANSLATION

"I don't think it's something that is restricted to just being an artist, either. I think that creativity is involved with problem-solving. So it's in my day-to-day. Creativity comes with love, too. So how you approach love, and things like that, involves a lot of creativity as well. **It's the way that you think and see things right? And like how your brain translates those things.** So yeah, I focus on that a lot. And how it gets expressed. It comes out in so many different ways, I feel."

Louie Kasiban, Interview Participant

"Because **there's a creative nature to writing** and then the expression of it in terms of spoken word."

Sirena Liladrie, Interview Participant

"Everyone communicates differently and people receive communication differently, people give communication differently. I think what you find is, at least for me, when you're playing sports and stuff, **you're taught to communicate** quite directly. You know, yell, make sure your teammates hear you and use the fewest words possible, so you can get the message across."

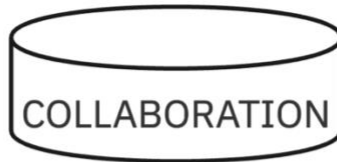
Leslie Tsang, Interview Participant

Figure 13: Translation

Experience Category: Collaboration

Possible considerations for Collaboration:

- Does anything happen in isolation?
- Are we collaborating based on skill or shared interest and curiosity? How does that impact the group dynamic?
- What is my preference for collaboration?
- What are my past experiences collaborating?



COLLABORATION

"I still find great value in at least the beginning of the year **doing things as a whole class, again, to model this idea of how you would have a discussion.** Because it's always about the ideas, or looking at the craft and it involves some **common points of reference**, at least for comparison later.

So if we all have similar experiences, then it **prepares you to make a comparison of your own choices.** But you need enough common experience to do that, and it **helps us build a vocabulary** around what we would say and all that sort of modelling for those who are ready to do it."

Cami Boyko, Interview Participant

"So I would say **some people are cagey about sharing ideas and feedback.** But I would say those are the people that like lowkey only look out for themselves. Like, basically, **in order to succeed, you have to have some kind of group or a good relationship with other people,** or you've make an effort to join these associations because when you're writing a manuscript, you have to share it with other people for feedback, because how else is it gonna get better? You can't just pitch a raw manuscript that no one's laid eyes on."

Layla Ahmad, Interview Participant

"And so **the idea of group work for me and creative interaction of the group work, just depends on who comes prepared.** I usually go to groups having reflected on the topic, so I feel I'm giving my best in groups because I've done the work before. But if you go to a group thinking that the greatest ideas are gonna pop-up, maybe, I suspect, it's probably the individuals who have put some thought into it, **you can stress test each other.** That's how I think of it."

Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant

Figure 14: Collaboration

Experience Category: Memory

Possible considerations for Memory:

- What expectations do I have going into this?
- Where do my expectations come from?
- What memories do I hold close to me?
- Does this situation remind me of any past experience in particular?



MEMORY

"I would put my heart and soul into writing this book but there was a girl in the class who was technically refined at art, and I mean at a very young age. I remember the teachers being incredibly wowed. And being young, you're like, what about my work? **It definitely did not hit those technical standards, but it was creative.**

I found those books that I had written in a folder just a few months ago and I read them to my daughter. I showed her the pictures and I read her the stories and the poems I created. **She was just like, wow, mom, you created that? And I'm like, yeah, I totally did.** She was just so proud. **So all those years later, I think I got the affirming praise that I need.**

What I'm realizing now, is that in our younger years it should be more about creativity, and not the technical aspects of it. I remember students being praised for the technical abilities of writing and drawing and not so much, wow, you did this and you created something. **That's something to be praised in itself."**

Sirena Liladrie, Interview Participant

"The other memory I have, which maybe isn't typically how you would think of being creative, but **having really strong reactions as a child to natural beauty or intense emotional responses** to various things, even if they're really sad or angering, or whatever.

I guess the reason why I would say that's creative is because **there's a situation that would feel like it would become part of me and I would therefore want to respond to it in some way** through a drawing or something."
Emily Wood, Interview Participant

Figure 15: Memory

Experience Categories: Measure and Future

Possible considerations for Measure:

- What are my ideas of “right”?
- What are my ideas of “success”?
- What is society’s idea of “right” or “success” - are they aligned with mine in this context? What does it mean when they aren’t?
- Is comparing myself to others important? Is external validation an important measure for me?

Possible considerations for Future:

- What needs to be present for me to perceive the future?
- How does my faith, beliefs, and values inform my feelings about the future?
- Is the future given? Do we all have a fair chance of making it into the future?
- Do I think of myself when I think about the future or do I think about the collective?

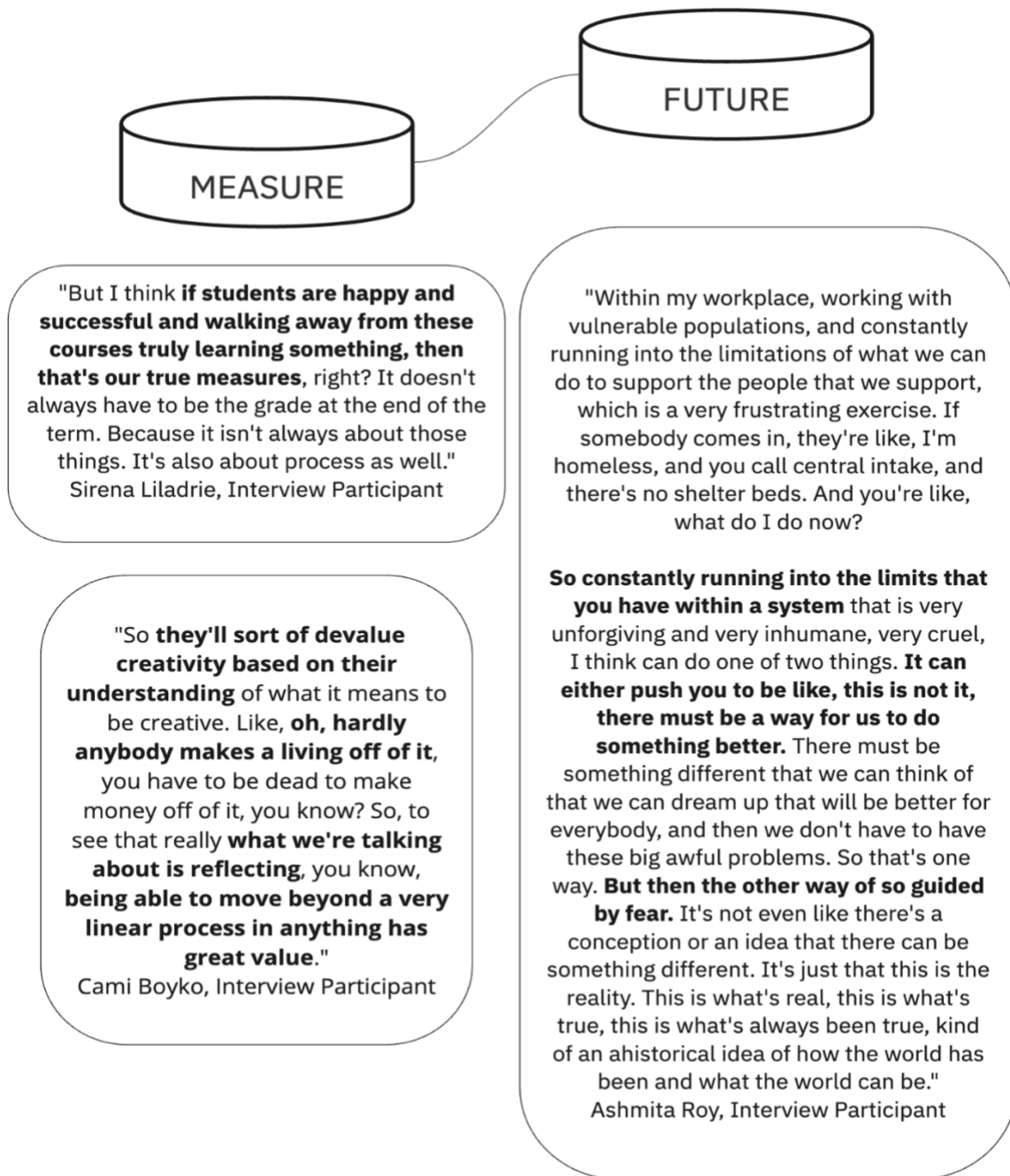


Figure 16: Measure and Future

Experience Category: Perception

Possible considerations for Perception:

- How do I feel about the current situation?
- Am I grateful to be here?
- Do I feel energized, reserved, hesitant, open, closed?
- Do I feel relaxed and excited?
- Do I feel panicked?
- Am I allowed to dream in this space?



PERCEPTION

" I think fear is such an interesting piece of this larger puzzle. **Fear is such an effective strategy for some people to limit general imagination, and, and limit to any kind of change or progress. Because, again, fear is so tied to shame.**"

Ashmita Roy, Interview Participant

"I know so many talented dancers that stopped dancing during the pandemic, they kind of just gave up, they moved home, they started different jobs or like, nine to fives. They're like, I'll be a flight attendant. But I felt so bad for them. **I was like, you could have went to the moon.**"

Kahvontay Slaughter, Interview Participant

"But transcending imagination is the real creative act. So the transcendence part is when you can see things that never existed. Because the **imagination can see things not present to the senses.**

A precondition of that is to have what's called a perception. **To have a memory of the thing you're seeing in your imagination and be able to recall it."**

Alexander Manu, Interview Participant

Figure 17: Perception

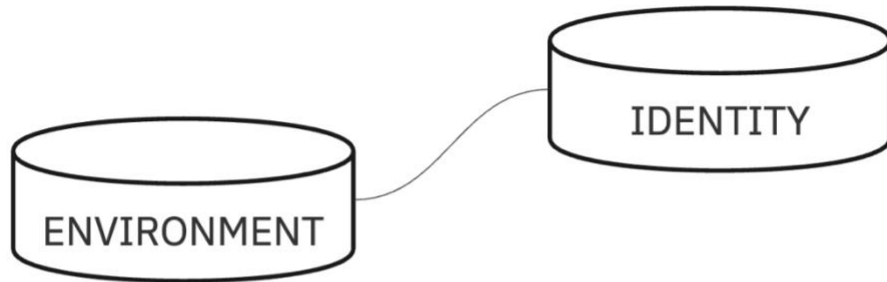
Experience Categories: Environment and Identity

Possible considerations for Environment:

- What kind of environment am I in?
 - Virtual, academic, uncertain, AFK (away from the keyboard), formal, informal, workplace, nature
- Is there risk in the environment? Can I take risks in this environment?
- Who or what is creating the environment? What boundaries are there?
- Can this environment accept new information? How does it react?
- What history exists in the land and environment we are working within? What does that history mean to me/us?
- Have we made room in our collective thinking for other stories, realities, and boundaries?

Possible considerations for Identity:

- What is important to me?
- What personal experiences do I have to bring into this current situation that make me, me?
- What experiences brought me to this place?
- Are there any parts of myself that I am afraid to share?
- Who are my ancestors, what do I know of their experience?
How did they shape the experiences that I've have?



"In Canada, every every cultural experience is a state-funded experience. And so, they would tell me, **I'm making this identity work, but I don't really want to, I want to make this thing. But then if I do this thing, I'm just going to be invisible.** I'm going to be ignored. So state granting committees, there's a very particular direction. The reason I'm telling you this is because once I moved here, and I started meeting people, **curators, and gallerists they would all say later that oh, yeah, I hate that shit. I really wish I didn't have to tow this official line.** But, you know, we have to. If I'm the outlier, then I'm seen as either a bad or not empathetic person or apolitical person, right? So as a result, it continues to churn this very narrow scope of artwork that people secretly resent. **The artists don't feel good about it. That can cause a lot of self-doubt in people's minds."**

Jason Lujan, Interview Participant

"I tend to find **academics really rigid in the way they articulate and argue things.** I feel like there's less space for uncertainty, or you need to know what you think about this point now, and you need to counter it and you need to have your own specific idea that you're like riding for **versus a lot of interesting people in the arts don't necessarily know where their ideas come from, or they're comfortable with a space of the unknown, or the mysterious or something.** I find that more interesting than the kind of systemization of thought, where you're trying to work out your ideas and argue for them, like immediately."

Emily Wood, Interview Participant

Figure 18: Environment and Identity

In conclusion of the exploration of the categories of **Experience**, I return to Loveless' (2019) questions,

- How are we remade by all we speak and hear?
- How are we remade through all we touch and are touched by?

Designers can break down these questions by asking them within the different facets of their lives, the parts of their Experiences, explored above. Lived experiences are powerful knowledge. Through reflective work Loveless (2019) writes, "we seriously attend to and recognize the constitutive power of the stories through which we come to understand the world."

When designers become more aware of their lived experiences and all of the parts of themselves, they may start to realize how parts change over time, in different contexts, and in relationship to others. Further, through developing this self-knowledge, designers can start to explore what might be required to adjust when working alongside others with different experiences. Loveless (2019) continues, "when necessary, [we can] give our all to reorganize [our stories]. Importantly, within both King and Haraway's texts, it is curiosity that emerges as key to our capacity to make such changes."

Confronting change or being open to change is no small feat. The Creative Body could be helpful when unpacking types of change from academic David Gleicher's change formula. $\text{Change} = D \times V \times F > R$ (Formula for change, 2024).

According to the formula, change happens when there is dissatisfaction with the current state (D), a clear vision of a compelling possible future (V), and the first steps needed to get there (F), and this must be greater than resistance, or the cost of change (R) (Formula for change, 2024).

Though the formula is simple to understand, it is complex to enact. Each part of the formula is tied to elements of The Creative Body. That being said, reflecting on The Creative Body's systems could build capacity to engage with the formula's complexity.

Acknowledging the complex relationship individuals have to the concept and different types of change and the reality that individual stories and experiences change, I've offered questions as "Thoughts for consideration" for each category of **Experience** and not "Meaning" or "Definition". As noted by Loveless (2019), it is curiosity and exploratory questions that can guide designers through their Systems and the corresponding moving parts. It is a designer's curiosity that will build their capacity for unpacking resistance to change further exploring difference and complexity.

It's almost like, art is like a muscle that is like being used. And when you're practicing your art, whether it's music, or painting, or whatever the practice creates, over time, you can hone that muscle and then develop it. Whereas over time, if you're no longer using it, not to say that it ever goes away, but maybe it becomes a little bit rustier, or in terms of technical like, technical abilities, I don't know abilities, maybe not quite the right word. But I think artistry is something that is practiced, whereas creativity is more so like a way of like, looking at the world.

- **Kern Adegeest, Interview Participant**

As Kern Adegeest's reflections suggest, creativity and artistry are dynamic capabilities—like muscles that need continuous engagement to remain sharp and effective. The synthesis of participant interviews and Tharp's insight culminating into the making of *The Creative Body* highlights the profound influence of lived experiences and expression on an individual. *The Creative Body* frames creativity as a living, complex system for communication and connection with Self and Others.

As Loveless (2019) emphasizes, the ability of recognizing and reorganizing the stories we use to understand the world is crucial especially when working with others. This reflective practice encourages designers to acknowledge how various aspects of their identities evolve and interact within different contexts, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and their interactions with others.

The Creative Body, particularly when paired with David Gleicher's *Formula for Change* (*Formula for change*, 2024), serves as a valuable tool for navigating the complexities and resistance within types of change. Change requires dissatisfaction with the present, a clear vision for the future, actionable steps to achieve this vision, and overcoming resistance (*Formula for change*, 2024). By encouraging curiosity and fostering a habit of questioning, designers can better engage with and adapt to the multifaceted nature of change, enhancing their creative capacities and the ability to work collaboratively across diverse experiences.

The Creative Body: Co-creation

The next endeavour was to use The Creative Body to visualize what each system might look like with multiple individual experiences and the role expression takes in communication in co-design or co-creation efforts.

You really have to look at this idea of extremism, and talk to kids about how, you know, it's their role to take a step towards the centre, at least far enough to hear what's going on. So yeah, I think I'm convincing myself that we need a this sort of curriculum of conversation, and listening. Because it's been interesting how that shut down some things in the classroom where it should be about being able to talk. But it is like this very intense conversation, invading our space, which is, and becoming, you know, what we're talking about in schools becoming a part of the societal conversation. Whereas I think schools have always been the place where you have a chance to play with these ideas and talk about them.

- **Cami Boyko, Interview Participant**

To echo Cami Boyko's sentiment, there is a growing need for skills that promote sites for openness, play and conversation. The cost of ignoring the complexity of lived experiences is significant, and doing so feeds into a fragmented, individualistic culture. Audre Lorde (2020) emphasizes the consequences of this, stating, "Unacknowledged difference robs all of us of each other's energy and creative insight, and creates a false hierarchy." Just because many designers are present in a room or in a project, if differences are not acknowledged in a meaningful way, there could be a lack of connection. The corresponding design will reflect that disconnection. As stated earlier, opportunity can be found in meaningful conversation.

So I met with a colleague. We got off completely on talking about art and life and ourselves and we're talking about her. Talking, like we're doing now, energizes you, it does. So her words to me, as she's walking out, as you're waiting, she says to me, I have to go give this lecture now on leadership and it's a so boring and so routine. But you know, Mo, I feel energized now because we've talked about this, and I'm gonna go say, guess where I was.

That's what I'm talking about. That has to happen every day. And we don't do that. I think part of is we don't allow ourselves to do that because we feel that's not a productive use of our time. And that is really where I think the shift has to happen.

- **Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant**

The focus on a conversation needing to be productive or relevant is a hindrance to connection and in turn, co-creation and co-design. To be able to get to know people, their ideas, needs, and fears, designers have to engage in conversations that are wide in scope, conversations that reveal the lived experience and complexity of others.

This issue extends into the digital space as well. Russell (2020) references Florence Okoye in her exploration of the unseen. Okoye poses the question, "How can one envision the needs of the other when one doesn't even realize the other exists?... Hasn't the glitch then become a means of seeing the unseen?" Recognition of the unseen can be tied to action, "specifically programming with the unseen or illegible in mind..." (Russell, 2020). Through conversation and

genuine curiosity, the unseen (Experience system) can become more visible (Expression) and can find its way into the output of design work.

Considering The Creative Body as an “error” is a worthwhile exercise. The Creative Body slows down the design process, considers and programs with diverse lived experiences, and could steer designers toward a failure as a radical act of group work. This kind of failure, having conversations that may seem unproductive, fosters the energy in the room, enhances creative insight, and promotes equality among participants. The Creative Body and its corresponding systems seek to reclaim and redefine societal definitions of self, putting Lorde’s writings into practice. As Lorde (2020) reminds us, “there is no separate survival.”

I don't really think about whether I'm doing something that is creative when I'm trying to work and write. Yeah, but I just don't think that we live in a culture currently that wants people to even be creative. So that's maybe why it's kind of strange to think about defining it or like consider what creativity means to me. Because that just doesn't seem to be like a conversation or, like, a socialization mechanism where it's like, how can we talk about being creative and like how you can use creativity? That's not really a thing.

I also think it's challenging for people to be around unconventional thinkers or people who are creative and trying to see things from different perspectives. And that's just uncomfortable and challenging to the status quo. You know? If you are creative, and you're trying to see things differently, and you imagine a way something could be versus like what it currently is, then that's, that's kind of bad, to more powerful entities.

- **Emily Wood, Interview Participant**

The working model of The Creative Body in Co-creation is below.

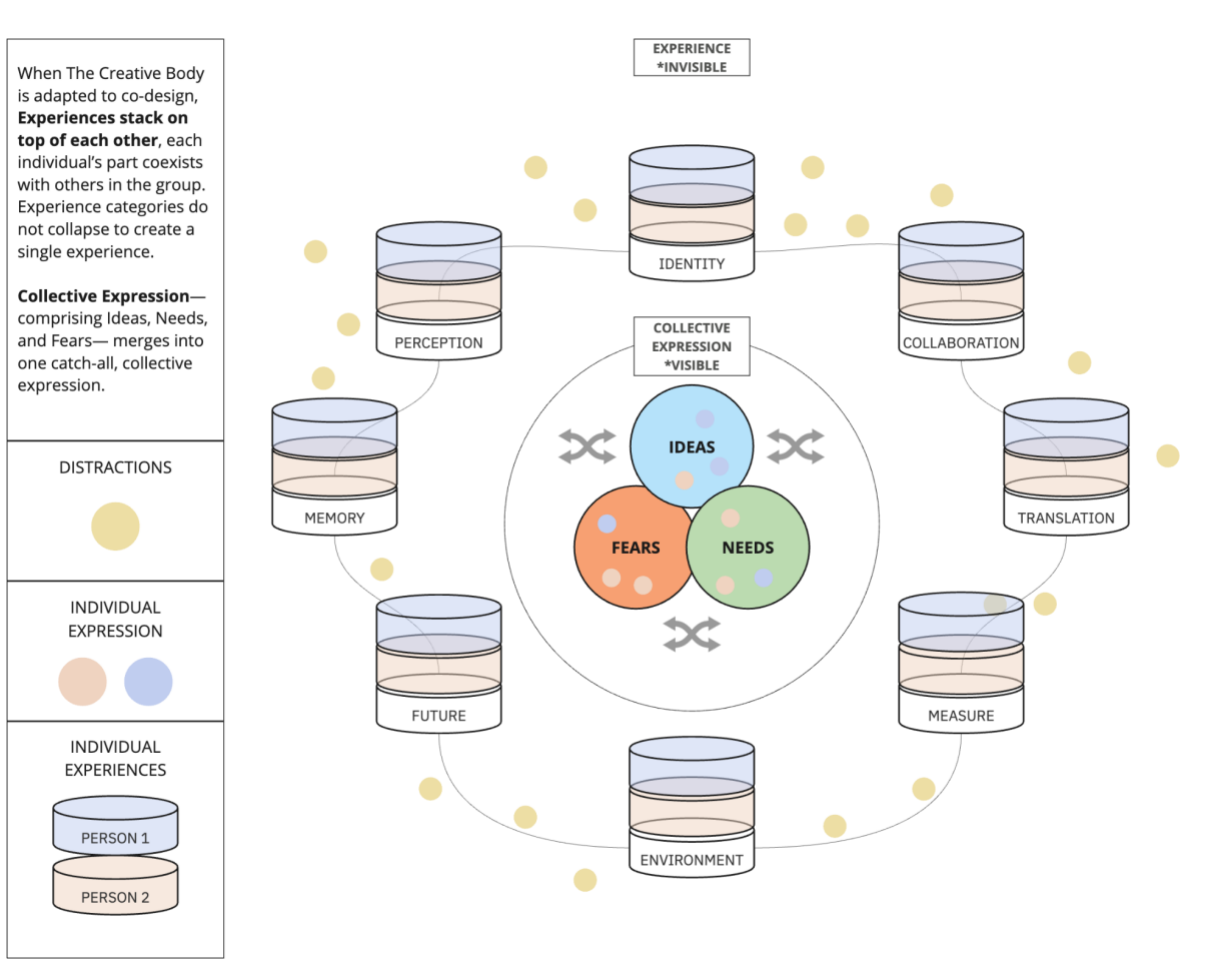


Figure 19: The Creative Body and Co-creation

When The Creative Body is adapted to co-design, Experiences stack on top of each other, each individual's part coexists with others in the group. Experience categories do not collapse to create a single experience. Visualizing the Experience system in this way can help groups comprehend the importance of acknowledging and preserving individual experience. Seeing parts stack up might feel overwhelming for a larger group, but it's important to remember that diverse experiences are not "issues to be resolved" but "differences to be lived with" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

On the other hand, in group work Expression—comprising Ideas, Needs, and Fears— merges into one catch-all, collective expression. This system, I believe, is where groups can better visualize group dynamics. A dictatorship, for example, might look like a lot of stackable, colourful parts in Experiences, but have only one person's Expression. Recognizing how the Experience categories inform collective Expression is a strength of this visualization tool.

Bartels et al. (2019) developed an approach to facilitation and collaborative creativity called “MDA” (mechanics–dynamics–aesthetics). In applying the approach, they found reflection and collective processes of meaning-making allowed groups to “interrogate existing patterns of behaviour and apply new behaviours demanded by the designed context.” (Bartels, Dubina, Campbell, McGrath, & Carayannis, 2019). They map this thinking process as “what does this mean to me” to “what does this mean to us” to “how might we move forward”. Using Bartels et al. (2019) discovery, the collective Expressions: Ideas, Needs, and Fears of The Creative Body, would be new behaviours that come about in the collaboration process.

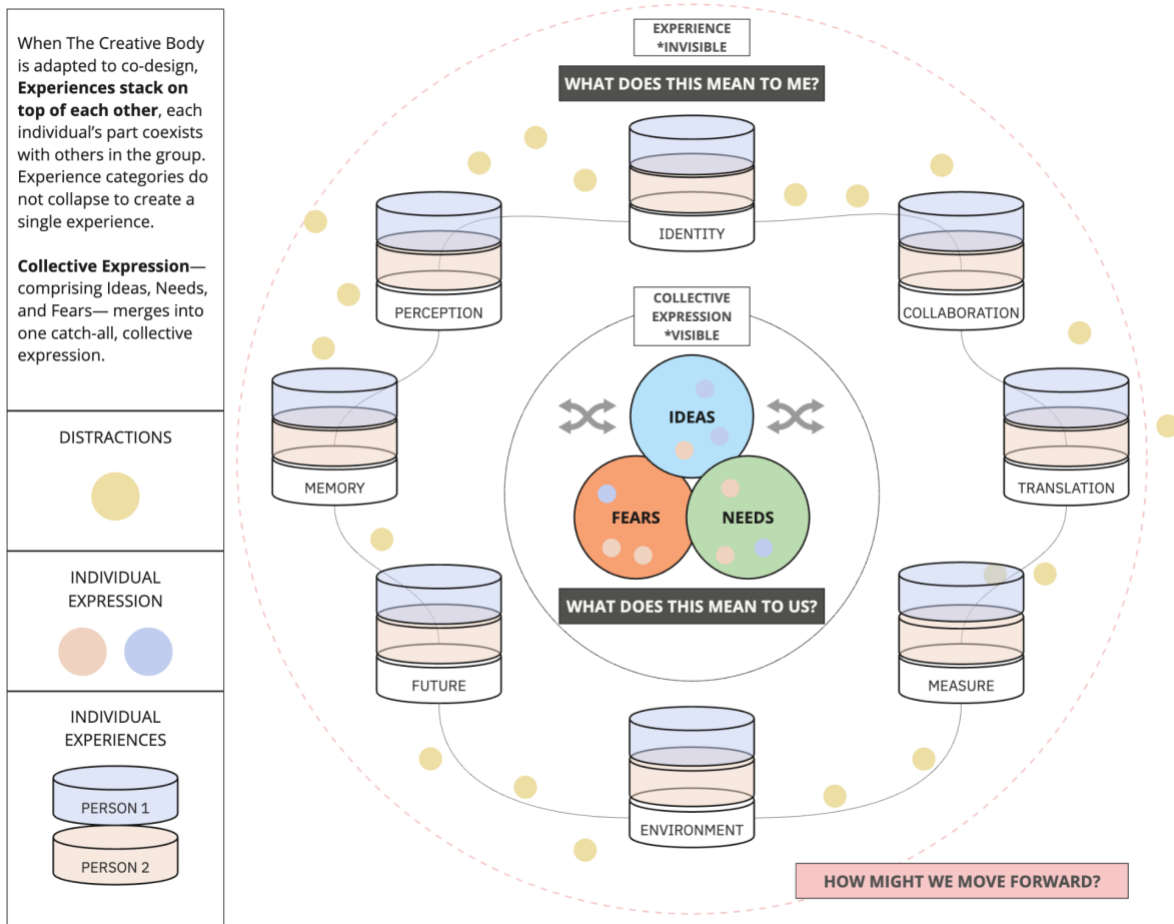


Figure 20: The Creative Body and the "MDA" Model

Similarly, the goal of The Creative Body is not to explicitly define or mathematically tally every experience that should be present or expressed within a co-design experience. Rather, it aims to complicate the narrative that to act collectively, designers must suppress experiences and differences and become one. It shares the MDA approach of focusing on reflection and meaning-making as core practices to collaboration efforts.

To further illustrate, if there are five people in a group, designers might not have exactly five or more Ideas, but they should probably have more than one, unless that one is a convergence of multiple group members lived experiences. Collective Expression should reflect the richness that is preserved and acknowledged in the Experience system. Group members might find commonalities between how they express their Ideas, Needs and Fears but those expressions may stem from different parts or experiences. Thus, even in commonality, it is still necessary to preserve the corresponding individual experiences. Reflecting on a similar idea from two individual's experiences creates an opportunity for connection and perspective.

The questions I want to raise with the creation of The Creative Body are:

- How can multiple lived experiences be in a relationship with one another?
- Where do individual parts hold contradictions?
- Where are compromises being made? How can designers make these compromises more balanced within the group, if necessary?
- Can shared Ideas, Needs, or Fears be opportunities to acknowledge individual experiences and through the process, simultaneously build connection?

This model may also support the exploration of Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Model (Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, 2023). The Conflict Model asserts there are five general positions a person can take based on their degree of assertiveness or cooperativeness during a conflict situation. A person can either be competing, collaborating, accommodating, compromising, or avoiding (Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, 2023). It can be incredibly helpful to identify types of responses and their advantages and disadvantages to be in a better position to handle conflict and know how to mediate. Further, using The Creative Body to investigate where conflict response may be attached to Experience might be helpful to humanize conflict for parties involved and as mentioned above, increase empathy.

The idea is not to solve but to explore and acknowledge the existence of differences. This sounds simpler than it is. As mentioned, every part of each system is always active, but it is not the number of parts or that they are changing that pose a main challenge for group work. I believe it is in the *denial of the existence of parts*, and specifically, lived experiences, that disconnects groups. Designers need to acknowledge their full selves, and others, if they want to collaborate in productive, holistic ways and design systems that express the same.

I think even having a conversation with someone has a lot of different elements like where you can flex that creativity muscle. How you how you converse with someone, the kind of language that you use, the topics that you discuss, and how to navigate a conversation. Those are all things that can also be a creative art in its own right.

- **Kern Adegeest, Interview Participant**

If designers recognize that each person in a co-design effort comes with various lived experiences that are in relationship with how they express themselves, groups might be able to start co-creation projects from a more open place of understanding. It won't form a perfect

equation, but mapping Experience and Collective Expression systems enable designers to make the invisible more visible, and this process alone is worthwhile.

I don't have to explain something. I just have to use [creativity] to create an environment where curiosity has jumped into it. I've just started to notice that allows for people to feel like they can be vulnerable, because you're in a space of vulnerability and now, you feel that you can be afforded that opportunity to be vulnerable as well. It's in relation to someone's vulnerability that's now in the forefront too. And I didn't have to seem like the crazy person that is talking about these hypothetical world-ending type conversations.

I don't know if I'm afforded that ability to tell you how I'm feeling because if I do, I'm opening myself up and if I open myself up, you might look at me differently. And that might change the dynamic of how I see myself and all of these other things start to come into the forefront.

- **Chris Wilson, Interview Participant**

The Creative Body: In Practice

Figure 21 and 22 below use The Creative Body to visualize the dynamic between two individuals participating in a co-design project, each bringing their experiences into the work.

Person 1, has had positive group interactions (Memory, Collaboration), may be more talkative and share more frequently at various points in the project (Ideas, Needs).

Person 2, has had a negative experience (Memory, Collaboration), hesitates to open up, and is visibly more reserved (Fear).

The purpose of this exercise is not to learn how to fix or change either person's experience, but to demonstrate how these experiences impact the expression of group work and how a group might make meaning in using The Creative Body to communicate or understand themselves or the group dynamic better.

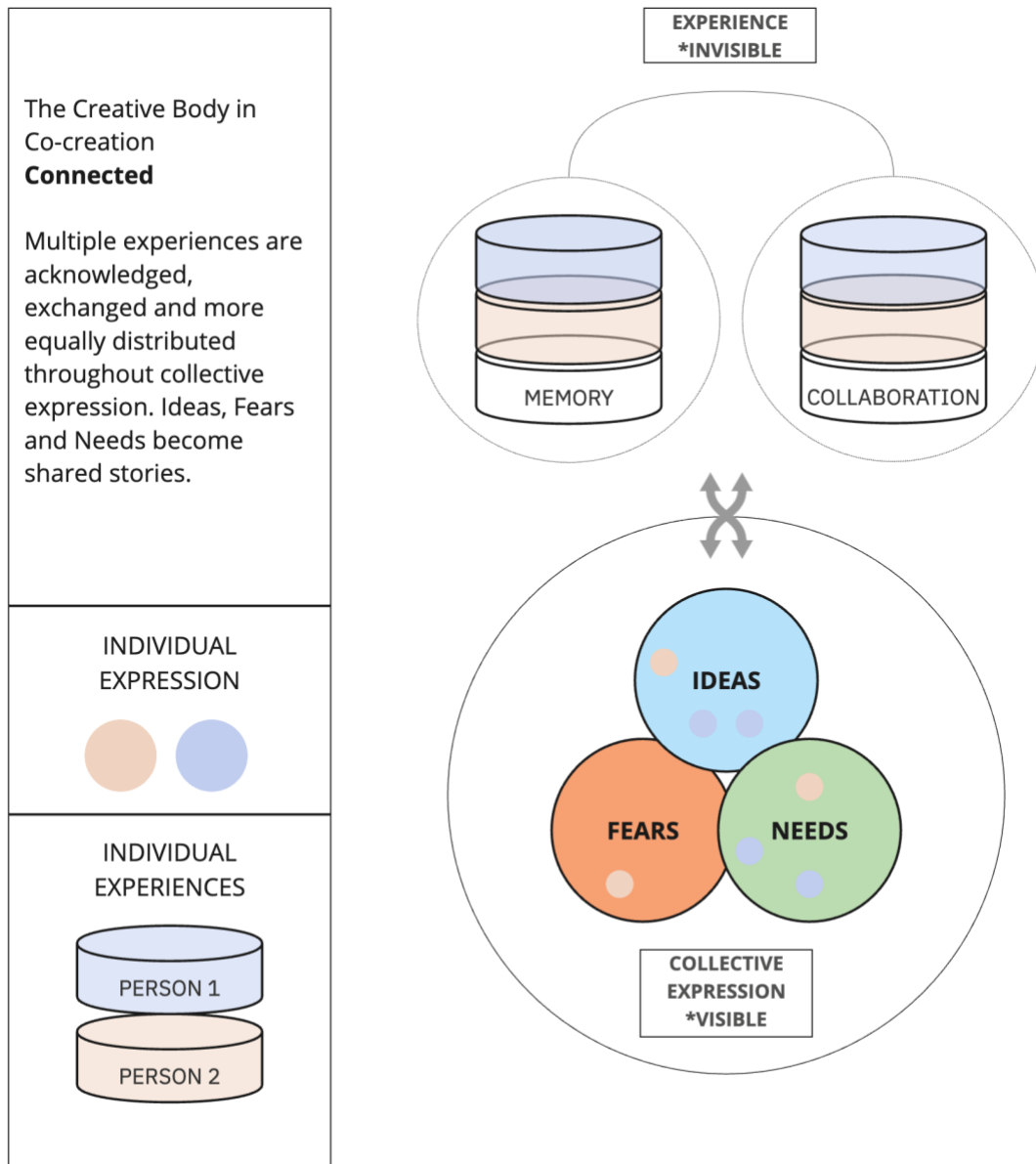


Figure 22: The Creative Body Connected Example

Being able to map experiences as described above allows designers to tap into what Parson (2022) calls the "wide shot" in her choreography work. In the design context, this wide shot enables designers, to see the "full body of everyone in the scene in their environment... we experience contentment, we suffer, we slog through what we deem uninteresting, we get inspired, we see things, we miss things, we trip or fall or slowly crumble, we get up, we fight, we reconnect." It provides designers with a more compositional view of collaboration with another designer.

Instead of a designer having to compromise parts of themselves to advance a group project, they now have a system breakdown, in parts, that aids in communicating where and who might be making the compromises. It helps co-design visualize what a more balanced group expression might look like, one that incorporates the strength that is a multitude of lived experiences.

FURTHER FINDINGS

Applying Twyla Tharp's (2006) "ten items" to organize the interview themes was also in response to participant feedback on current academic categories of creativity. Creating The Creative Body addressed some of the desires of participants which are recorded below. As described in the methodology section, interview participants were presented the 4 C Model of Creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) which categorizes creativity into four main categories. In summary, the model is as follows:

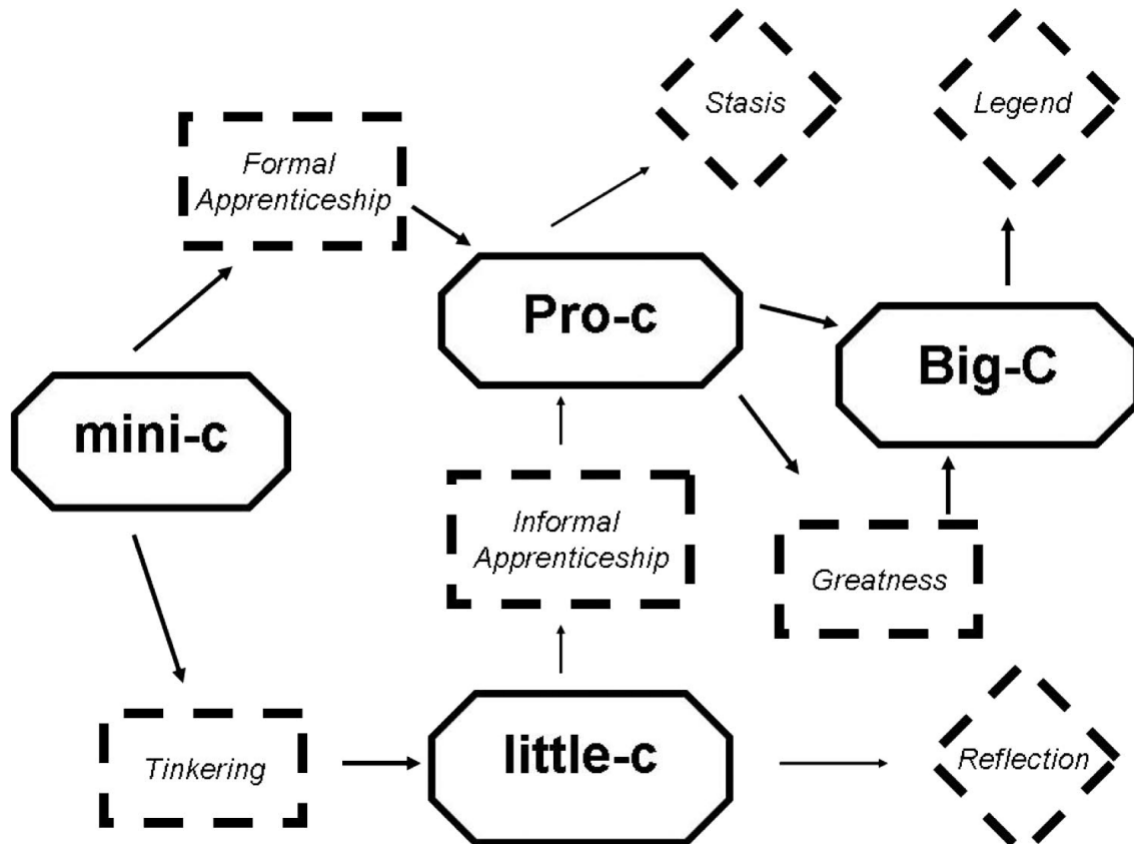


Figure 23: Kaufman and Beghetto Model of Creativity

Key feedback on the Kaufman and Beghetto model of creativity include:

Resistance to Ranking and Hierarchies:

Several participants criticize the hierarchical structuring of creativity, which can demotivate or undervalue people who do not fit into the higher tiers. They shared that ranking can undermine the inherent value of all creative acts, regardless of their scale or recognition.

“ I think creativity, you want to honour it. So I don't know, this creates in and of itself, a hierarchy, which I don't particularly like. I wouldn't use [the model] for that reason. And I also think it creates this idea that no one can really be a Big C. So, I'm not for it, but I love the idea of helping people understand that creativity isn't just, you know, understanding the universe. It is anything from, you know, finding a way to make your morning more efficient, I can find a quicker way for everyone to do something. That is really valuable and we need that. So that spectrum, I think, is important. I don't know if that's the way I would say it, though.”

- **Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant**

“Like, what if we don't think a classical piece of art is better than a contemporary piece of art? What if we just refuse that altogether? What would happen?”

- **Ashmita Roy, Interview Participant**

Creativity as a Universal Trait:

Many express discomfort with rigid classifications (e.g., Big C, mini c) that might limit the appreciation of everyday creativity. There's a strong sentiment that creativity isn't just about monumental achievements but is also present in everyday problem-solving and personal expressions.

“Especially within that Big C. Yes, Beethoven, I know. I went and sat in a symphony and listened to folks play his work all these centuries later, right? But that's a very small percentage of the population. And of course, they do inspire us and we're all in awe of who they are. But it's these ones in the lower category, that I think are the folks that make life worth living. They do the creative things that when you're walking down the street and you see that mural or something or that creative sign that they created, it just evokes something in you as well. And I don't think that that should be discounted.”

- **Sirena Liladrie, Interview Participant**

“I think it's more important for the individual to define creativity and what that means for them. Because, again, it looks different for everybody, we've all experienced different things, we all look at this world differently. And so creativity and what that means for somebody is going to be, it could be very different between two people. And I think that's a beautiful thing. And for people to invite that and understand each other and understand how they look at creativity, I think is like the most important part of

it, because then **we continue to gain perspective**. Because, you know, like, where would we be if it wasn't for like an idea?"

- **Louie Kasiban, Interview Participant**

Impact of External Validation:

External validation, through awards or recognition, can both motivate and constrain creative expression. Some participants shared that creativity should be self-acknowledged and not overly dependent on external validation.

"I think it's very much exactly what I was trying to say with what I struggled with growing up in terms of like, there is a ranking, there is expectations, like **what greatness means is already a subscription that everybody kind of abides by**. It's, it's already a rank as to who like what is defining a more creative versus a less creative person. **I don't think that makes any sense, because I think it almost devalues any of the other creativity that people do on a day-to-day basis.**"

- **Kern Adegeest, Interview Participant**

"**I don't really get what the point is** like, if you're creative, you're creative. Who cares if you're combining strange leftovers? Or if you're creating, like, a statue of David? **Why did someone else have to define what your processes is? Or how creative you are? Isn't that something you just tell yourself?**"

- **Layla Ahmad, Interview Participant**

"I hugely value helping people become aware of the work they're doing. **And I think there'll be oftentimes where people will be creative, but they've never been acknowledged**. No one's ever told them that. And most people don't. And that gets back to the fact that **most people do not see some of the things they do on a daily basis that actually are creative**. And once you start believing it, you take it up a notch. I'm telling you, it happened with me. I know it would happen [for others]. **But you can't just tell someone you're creative, here, go do some stuff, they won't get it. You need something that can say listen, here's why we're acknowledging you, here's why. I just don't know if that's the right nomenclature for it.**"

- **Dr. Bhandari, Interview Participant**

Societal and Psychological Effects:

The categorization of creativity is viewed by some as not just a benign classification but as something that can have significant psychological and societal impacts. This includes affecting self-esteem, funding decisions, and even the professional paths people choose to follow.

“The space between Pro C and Big C is kind of violent, I think. Actually, trying to move between any of these, like from mini c to Pro C to Big C, not so much little c. I think that’s kind of an inherently violent process. There’s a vested interest that, you know, the bodies who are giving out awards and giving out funding have and in rewarding certain people and discouraging others. So I think it’s true from a sociological standpoint or something that we could categorize people in these things, but it seems pretty sick to be little c. Like being, yeah, I have freedom and I’m unconventional and I’m really engaged in imagination. Like, that’s amazing. But yeah, I feel like people who get to Pro C that I know or could be classified in that category can be really sad. And that’s when I sort of like, start to doubt that professionalizing as an artist is actually useful or valuable.”

- Emily Wood, Interview Participant

“These definitions almost work to exclude people. What that makes you do is like, Oh, I don’t have a good ear, I won’t make music. Oh, I don’t have a steady hand. I’m not gonna do art. Right? Very famous guitarist, King Crimson, he has famously bad ears. And he said, this beautiful quote, that stuck with me my entire life, he said that music is so strong, that it’ll call people with bad ears to do it. It will call you, it doesn’t matter. [This definition] is depriving us of perspective.

The most beautiful thing about art is it can exist in extreme happiness, extreme sadness, and complete indifference. Art comes out of all these feelings and all people and the more we label it the more we [think] you have to do this, you have to be that, you have to be that, the more we’re depriving ourselves of just wonderful art... And external validation has nothing to do with creativity, in my opinion. I think there have been plenty of creative geniuses that we’ve never seen.”

- Omar Ibrahim, Interview Participant

Call for Broader Recognition of Creativity:

There is a call to broaden the recognition of creativity to include more diverse and inclusive examples, such as communal and collaborative creative efforts, which are often overlooked in traditional views that celebrate individual genius.

“One of the things I've noticed about this is it foregrounds the individual as opposed to the community, so I fully reject this...Because what this is, is this, this is a hierarchy assigning value to a person's thinking...None of this rewards relationship building. None of this rewards shared experiences.”

- **Jason Lujan, Interview Participant**

“Kids will say, Oh, I'm not creative at all. But they're thinkers, they can figure things out. I talk a lot in the classroom about the hive mind. The hive mind will solve this problem. You know, we've got lots of us here, lots of ideas, we can figure out how to do this. And people really devalue that. We could look at the bottom and talk about its, you know, things that just, we would almost say common sense type things, you know, dealing with life in a way that, you know, makes it better for everyone. But that's, as we know, not great for everyone.

A lot of kids think that that creative genius level is the only place where that type of magic happens...So they'll devalue creativity based on their understanding of what it means to be creative. Like, oh, hardly anybody makes a living off of it you have to be dead to make money off of it, you know? So, yeah, to sort of see that, that really what we're talking about is reflecting, you know, being able to sort of move beyond a very linear process in anything has great value.”

- **Cami Boyko, Interview Participant**

To summarize, the participant feedback suggests a desire for a more inclusive and flexible understanding of creativity, one that values all forms of creative expression and recognizes the creative potential inherent in everyone.

“If you think of a song, two people can listen to a song and have very different experiences and perspectives on whether it's creative or not. It's the same thing with anything that's creative. So it feels a little limiting when you have like a narrow definition or like an objective definition. But I do think it's helpful, to some extent.”

- **Leslie Tsang, Interview Participant**

This research suggests that a holistic approach to understanding creativity is urgently needed—one that embraces its complexity, its role in individual and societal well-being, and its potential to transcend conventional definitions of value. This includes investigating the origins of an individual's relationship with creativity, its evolution, and the influence of cultural and contextual

factors. This feedback indicated that a more comprehensive tool could be useful to aid in individual explorations of creativity, unpack societal definitions and structures of creativity, and connect with others throughout the process. The Creative Body was an attempt at building such a tool.

By focusing on the process of creativity rather than solely on outcomes, and exploring intrinsic motivations behind creative expression, researchers and designers can begin to uncover the deeper implications of creativity for personal growth, relational connection, and societal transformation. I will further reflect and discuss possibilities for such in the final discussion.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Parson (2022) writes, “This desire to articulate what you feel and perceive, to tell it, to name it, to describe it, this is as natural as the progression from walking to running to leaping, to shaping that leap into a pattern of leaps, and then a group of leapers in unison—into a dance.”

I perceive dance and design as interwoven because they are intertwined within me. It might not be dance for every designer, but from my experience, most designers have something outside the discipline that draws them into it. By exploring those creative facets, whatever they may be, designers might be able to design more inclusively and connect more authentically throughout the process of co-creation.

This project has reacquainted me with change—in my identity, voice as a designer and dancer, in my relationships, and in the flow of process. My imagination has been exercised by the interview participants, dance classes, personal reflections, and interactions with my dad. Just as my research evolved with my identity, so did my understanding of creativity, imagination, and design.

In *Who Am I? Creative Imagination and Art Therapy*, Young Imm K. Song (2007) writes, “Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of forming images. But it is rather the faculty of deforming the images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from immediate images; it is especially the faculty of changing images.” When designers feel the weight of creation, the pressure to move forward and the weight of building something new, it may be helpful to remember that creation can also come from remaking, changing, and failing.

Song (2007) goes on to describe, “While painting, I experienced all the feelings that coexist in my soul surrounding my family: love, happiness, anger, hatred, sadness, and passion. I realized that the rock was my obligation to my family. Because of this obligation, my river has opened many channels to understanding that every person is the creator of worlds.”

Every single person is the creator of worlds.

Reflection 4

Last week I found out I was unsuccessful in the CCA grant I applied for in August. This was the day before I interviewed Jason Lujan and had the group. These will be the last two interviews I do for my project.

This was the third grant I've been rejected for. Jason said something in his interview about not having the natural talent that his peers had in terms of drawing, and that he came from a poor family, so he had to work hard to appreciate and get to where he wanted to go. He had to make calculated next steps and risks when it came to his career goals. Every time I get a rejection and have to re-commit to my projects I feel this way. I was grateful to speak with him immediately after learning I was unsuccessful. This was me in dance as well - I was never naturally flexible - so I would go home and practice my over splits in the basement. I would practice my dances in the grocery store aisles, in the kitchen, at school, in my head. Dance was all I ever thought about. It was also a huge expense for my mom. When you have to work extra hard at the thing you love just to be in the same arena as others, you appreciate it in a particular way. You don't want to let it go. The rejection reiterated how much work I've put into my process and how much has been built - the relationships - I can't give up on any of it.

I'm learning there's an element of pride that you have to have and swallow in the art and academic world. You have to believe that your projects are important enough for investment but also understand that they aren't the most important. It makes me think about group work and how shy I usually am to take any credit at all - it's a group effort. But knowing the part you play can be critical. Knowing your strengths while being humble is a balance. I think it feels hard because I still feel lucky to be here, like it was a fluke I'm in this program. A part of me still feels like an imposter in the field of academia. I'm trying to flip the narrative as I go into the last few months of the program - what if they are lucky to have me? I feel ridiculous writing that.

I have two weeks to reapply for the same grant before they close the funding stream. Every time I get a rejection, I've started to think it's the universe asking me if this is really what I want. If it is, I should try again. If it isn't, I can quit at any time.

I'm also thinking about how I can incorporate my reflections into my MRP. There needs to be a way to show context in the process within the report and not separate each. How do I show that while doing this research, this is also happening?

Reflecting on Munroe's @munroebergdorf words from Instagram:

"The violence we allow for others, is the violence we condemn ourselves to."

"It's a horrendously dystopian reality that we're living in, for us in the West to be winding down into comfort, joy and cheer - for a holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus, a baby from the Palestine region, whilst thousands of present day Palestinian babies and children lay dead under the rubble of their homes, hospitals, schools and shelters."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research project, “Maybe We’re Creative: And What I Learned about Co-Creation in Design by Dancing with My Dad” explores the intersection of creativity and co-creation through the lens of dance and personal reflection. This study unpacks the potential uses of creativity within co-design, using personal narratives and film to challenge traditional academic boundaries.

The project explores my personal connection to dance and how, as a creative process, it offers valuable insight into group dynamics, conflict resolution, and the preservation of complexity of lived experiences in co-creation and design practices. Learning from embodied creative practices can foster a deeper connection to our bodies and intuition, which can in turn enhance the co-creative design process.

By challenging classifications of creativity, the research advocates for a broader recognition of creative expressions found in everyday life including failing as an expression. Creativity can play an important role in personal growth and relational connections when its application and value is found through reflection and process rather than output or external validation.

This project emphasizes the importance of acknowledging emotional textures in the research process, suggesting that personal healing and exploration can significantly influence self-actualization which in turn enhances collaborative design efforts. Bringing the embodied self into the academy is a challenging action but one that is required for holistic learning and meaningful exchange between academics. The research explored how insights from dance and personal experiences could inform and enhance co-design practices.

Designers can look across disciplines to further reflect on their practice and lived experiences. Creativity and movement give designers something from nothing. When a person thinks they have no relevant experience or training to a project at hand, they always have experience to pull from as prompted in *The Creative Body*.

Revisiting Loveless’ (2019) reflective questions,

- How are we remade by all we speak and hear?
- How are we remade through all we touch and are touched by?

Ultimately, this exploration of creativity is not just about understanding or defining but about living—through dance, through personal growth, and through the shared experiences that shape communities and personal identity. As creativity moves forward, designers can continue to challenge the constraints of traditional frameworks and celebrate the possibilities of expression in all its forms, fostering a world where everyone's creative voice can be heard and valued.

Further research can encourage interdisciplinary design efforts, explore how trauma and embodied experiences can be incorporated into design and co-design contexts to foster new

ways of relating to our past and envisioning future possibilities. Studying how collective memories influence perceptions of the future could offer deeper insights into the communal aspects of creativity and design.

This journey has been an important personal exploration that reaffirmed the inseparable link between my creative and personal life. By continuing to explore these intersections, the collective understanding of creativity and design can ultimately lead to more inclusive and empathetic approaches across disciplines.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As a result of this research exploring the research question, 'What can co-creation practitioners learn from creative processes, like dance?' I further wonder:

- How might we learn from creative processes outside of dance in co-creation?
- How might creative processes change how we approach and operate in group dynamics? Might it change how we perceive "conflict" or "challenges"?
- What role might healing (from the past, in relationships) play in creative practices, co-creation, and futures thinking?

This report features the first iteration of The Creative Body as a conceptual design tool. Fine tuning the model using other collaborative theories and testing its use through case studies or small group projects is a desired next step. Playing with this framework as a methodology and observing how groups shape and reshape the model would provide valuable feedback and insight into the reflection process in co-creation.

Throughout this research process I ended up reapplying to Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) Digital Greenhouse Grant and was successful. The project I am going to begin working on in May 2024 is focused on building a neural network with a project I started in 2017 called CEREMONY. I did not intend to build a conceptual framework with my master's research, so I did not apply to CCA with the idea that any sort of foundational model would be informing the project. However, I am curious about using The Creative Body as a framework and foundation for this language model development. The purpose of CEREMONY's exploration is to create what Parker Palmer calls an "intimacy that does not annihilate difference," specifically between individuals who wouldn't call themselves "artists" and those who might, in an attempt to further democratize the arts sector. As The Creative Body's focus is on relationship building and connection, it could serve as a valuable creation tool as I explore a more technological domain.

Testing The Creative Body in groups and incorporating it into a language model could further illuminate how co-creation could build trust at scale. During the episode *On Shaping Technology to Human Purpose*, from the *On Being* project, Latanya Sweeny, founder and director of Harvard's Public Interest Tech Lab and its Data Privacy Lab shared,

...Because our need for a north star around truth is just fundamental to democracy. We can't really survive if all of us come to a table with completely different belief systems and not even be able to find a common fact that we agree on. So we're going to have to navigate our society through to that, and that's going to take some unpacking to figure out what this means and how we get there. But I think that's the biggest challenge of generative AI is, how do we build trust at scale? (Sweeney, 2023)

Any exploration that aims to assist groups in finding commonality while preserving different belief systems is a timely and important exploration. I am curious as to how The Creative Body might assist in explorations of this nature.

The role trauma plays in co-creation and the corresponding care models for trauma-informed practice in co-creation are important considerations. Embodied trauma and stress represent significant areas for further exploration within creativity, design, and co-design contexts.

Movement and dance can play key roles in processing and holding trauma, as Tharp (2006) notes, "Movement and physical activity are my materials, but more than that, they're how we stay in touch with our body—and the body is how we stay in touch with the outside world. Anything that puts our instrument through its paces has to improve us, make us sharper, more connected to the world."

Further research could investigate creative responses as post-traumatic growth responses, focusing on how individuals can experience similar events yet recall and process these events differently. Exploring creativity in healing might reveal how trauma and its corresponding care can be integrated into design efforts, potentially fostering new ways to relate to the past and create alternative futures.

Additionally, collective memory within co-design could impact a group's ability to envision futures. Exploring how memory influences collective perceptions of the future would be valuable. Tharp (2006) elaborates on this, suggesting, "You can even project your virtual memory into the future. Some business people do this as an exercise in visualization, imagining the ending of a sensitive negotiation as a means to achieving the desired result. They remember what a successful deal feels and sounds like, and they call that imagery up, seeing everyone in the room smiling and shaking hands, then they retrace their steps to see how they got there, and how they can get there again."

Reflections on how the past informs our vision of the future reveal its dual role as both informative and restrictive. While historical insights can guide us in shaping future strategies and goals, they also risk anchoring us to familiar methods and traditional definitions of success. This reliance on the past can limit our ability to envision novel pathways to achieving similar successes or feelings. It raises the question of whether our pursuit is genuinely aimed at replicating past achievements or if we are seeking something entirely new—something we might miss if we remain focused only on what has already been experienced.

Lastly, reflecting on my methods, I'm curious about whether participants would have responded differently to Kaufman and Beghetto's academic definitions of creativity had they come at the beginning of the interview versus the end. In future research, participants might be split into two groups with some being shown the academic definition first and give feedback on it, and then share their personal experiences and self-perception of creativity during the second half of the interview. The two groups could then be compared. This could be a site for further research on the impact definitions of creativity have on our personal perception of self.

Overall, future research should aim to bridge the gap between societal and personal views of creativity, moving beyond the dichotomy of creativity as either a tool for economic gain or as a mystical, unquantifiable experience.

Final Reflection



Figure 24: just-shower-thoughts

(@ship, 2023)

In March (last month) I found out I was successful in my reapplication for the CCA Greenhouse Grant that I was originally rejected for. Possibility. It's the first arts grant I've ever received. Today I received a rejection letter from an application I submitted in January that (I thought) would have been a life changing mentorship.

The last two years of my life has been a stage where I have constantly, relentlessly been applying for opportunities. At times, I've made the leap and I surprise myself. Other times, most times, I'm Mimi Paul, and I remind myself that I'm human. I try and remember that if nothing else, being human should be enough.

I did not know how to close this report and then I remembered a poem by Mary Oliver that I sent a classmate at the start of the program. I remember feeling overwhelmed, as life can often make us feel, and this poem grounded me. Being able to share this poem grounded me. If we could find prayers in something so small as a blade of grass, could something like the present feel unending? Would we need to reimagine the future if we could reimagine the present? It's always the little things that bring us back – that call us to pay attention and remind us that the world is actually soft, and we are actually human. Being human is always enough.

Mindful

*Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less
kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.
It was what I was born for -
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world -
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant -
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,
the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help
but grow wise
with such teachings
as these -
the untrimmable light
of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?*

- Mary Oliver (2004)

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Appendix A

Interview Materials

Interview participants were shown my summary of Kaufman and Beghetto's 4 C Model of Creativity. The description of each category comes from words in their paper and are not mine. The text below was shown via pdf document.

1. I first presented the participants a page with current definitions of the 4 categories.

Header: Current Definitions of Creativity

Subheading: What is Creativity?

Big-C

eminent creativity, creative genius, work that lasts forever, takes time to develop, often "gatekeepers"

Pro-C

professional creativity, divisions, graduations

mini-c

personal and developmental aspects, reflection, process of learning creative expression

little-c

everyday creativity that an average person may participate in each day (arranging family photos in a scrapbook, combining left over Italian and Chinese food to make a fusion of the two, coming up with a creative solution to a scheduling problem at work)

Interview participants were then asked about initial impressions of these definitions.

2. I then presented the participants another page with current assessments of the 4 categories.

Header: Current Definitions of Creativity

Subheading: Assessing Creativity

Big-C

clear cut, eminent creatives like classical opera composers whose work has lasted centuries. A qualification for study might be winning a prestigious award or being included in an encyclopedia.

Pro-C

Professional creators who have not yet reached eminent status. Makes a living developing creativity but has not yet attained awards etc.

mini-c

novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions and events. Dynamic, interpretive process of constructing personal knowledge and understanding within a sociocultural context.

little-c

everyday innovation, nonexperts, how creative potential is widely distributed, de-emphasize analytical abilities, emphasize unconventionality, imagination, freedom

Interview participants were then asked about initial impressions of these assessment criteria.

Appendix B

Maybe We're Creative – Link to Film

Maybe We're Creative, the film can be accessed via Google Drive [here](#).