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## Making and negotiating value: design and collaboration with community led groups

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### ABSTRACT

Value in collaborative design research and practice can be understood fundamentally as relationships, materials, processes, contexts, and outcomes that are subjects of and for negotiation. We argue for conceptions of value that move beyond traditional ‘outcomes’ based measurements to reimagine and rearticulate value itself as co-created, emerging from negotiation, relationality and immersion in specific contexts. These understandings of value, we argue, are not rooted in or always knowable through designers’ experiences, even as designers participate in creating them. Using case studies from our research we suggest that value in design collaboration emerges as a question: value to whom, and to what end? We propose that addressing these questions ethically through co-design requires actively engaged, grounded work with collaborators based in three principles: being present for the work, participant making, and co-creating capacity for collaborators to ‘go off and do their thing’.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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In this article, we argue for a conception of value in collaborative design rooted the specific and located values, arguments, and worldviews people and organisations bring into design contexts. We consider forms of value made in specific collaborations, with specific social, political, and knowledge-generating aims, proposing that value in collaborative design research and practice can be understood as relationships, materials, processes, contexts, and outcomes that are subjects of and for negotiation. Learning what is valuable, to whom and to what end, is a critical part of this work. Drawing from feminist and postcolonial theories, we explore three guiding principles: participant making; being present for the work; and ‘going off and doing your thing’, that is, when ‘non-designer’ partners use collaborative research and making for their own purposes. Together, these comprise an ethical orientation of researchers holding ourselves accountable to values which prioritise partners’ work as they make it their own. This often requires a reorganisation of designers’ own thinking, resulting in research outcomes that are sometimes harder to narrate as ‘design outcomes’.

Concepts of value in collaborative design practices have been proposed as intrinsic to collaboration, especially regarding ethos, methods, contexts, and outcomes. We build on Participatory Design (PD), Human Computer Interaction (HCI), Information and

Computer Information for Development/Technology for Development (ICT4D/T4D), and Design Anthropology. Authors in these fields highlight the intersections of people's involvement in making their own futures (Robertson and Simonsen 2012; Greenbaum 1991) and the importance of making space for complexities of collaboration across power and difference (for example, Light and Akama 2012; Le Dantec and Fox 2015; Hillgren, Seravalli, and Eriksen 2016). Following Lucy Suchman's (2002) call to 'be accountable for what we build,' we expand on these articulations of value, proposing *self-determined* design as an approach to design with people grounded in the values of those most affected by the questions at hand.

With historical roots in workers' movements, Participatory Design provides a foundation for imagining the political stakes of co-design (Greenbaum and Kyng 1992; Robertson and Simonsen 2012). As sites for PD have shifted out of workplaces, debates focus on retaining its political foundation and engaging with the stakes of design work (Beck 2002; Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2012a, 2012b; Karasti and Syrjänen 2004). Here, understandings of what matters about designing with people are framed through articulations of the value of designed technologies or systems to those who use them or change them in use (Ehn 2008), or of the value to a community, whether pre-existing design work or fashioned through it, of processes that build capacities specific to those people and sites (DiSalvo, Clement, and Pipek 2012; Hillgren, Seravalli, and Eriksen 2016). Others have posited that design in dynamic contexts presents possibilities for re-imagining political discourse and formations (Binder et al. 2015; Crivellaro et al. 2016).

The notion that design might be valuable as a (named or unnamed) working practice in explicitly political engagements is also central to movements organising for systemic change. Nelson's (2011) history of the Black Panther Party's (BPP) development of anti-racist and self-determined health services for African-Americans in the 1970s shows how envisioning and designing these services was part of years of political organising against systemic racism. Here, infrastructure-making was one practice for shifting structurally limited access to resources and power, or what geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls 'group differentiated vulnerability to premature death' (2007, 28). In contemporary movements, links to design are perhaps more explicit, as designers are working with people to, for instance, challenge US-based structures of racism and white supremacy in the face of police violence and incarceration (Pedersen 2013; Carroll 2018; Critical Resistance 2018; see also: [adpsr.org](http://adpsr.org) and [oaklandpowerprojects.org](http://oaklandpowerprojects.org)). These arguments also resonate in the Global South, and are linked in global design conversations to ongoing post- and decolonial struggles on the ground, in practice, and in scholarship (Schultz et al. 2018). As one example, designers in *Who Builds Your Architecture?* work together to unsettle architects' complicity in global routes of exchange and labour exploitation in international architecture projects (WBYA 2017).

Simultaneously, design and designers have been and are implicated at myriad points in the creation and maintenance of structures of inequity and violence: as Guffey (2012) so chillingly shows, the racist segregation of the Jim Crow United States was accomplished in large part through carefully executed graphic design. Qureshi's critique that ICT4D research is based primarily on Western discourse with 'concepts and theories developed in the West being transported to people in faraway countries' (2015, 512) frames the stakes of design practices which mistake 'objectivity' or 'generalisability' for

cultural assumptions and imperialism. This problem also holds true for co-design. These relationships are undertheorized, especially regarding how we understand how value is determined in design.

Working from a feminist theoretical perspective, authors including Suchman (2002), Light and Akama (2012, 2014), Akama (2015), Karasti, Baker, and Millerand (2010), have focused on the value of, and made through, embodied and emergent practices; Rosner (2018) reclaims the importance of craft for design technology, advocating for relationality as method. These authors explore the explicit value to design processes and to all participants of openness and emergence, situatedness and accountability, close listening and an investment in learning from people, and specifically non-Western orientations to knowledge-making and understanding (Akama 2015; Bidwell 2012). Le Dantec and Fox (2015), along with Hillgren, Seravalli, and Eriksen (2016) and Dearden et al. (2014), give clear accounts of the complexity of working in-relation-to while developing and nurturing design collaborations. Here, the value-recognition and -production that emerges in the process of becoming available for collaboration, and of negotiating power and difference, point to the importance of designers' humility and reflection. This also highlights the centrality of pre-existing structures, dynamics, ethics, and investments of people with whom designers (seek to) work. These authors suggest that value in designing with people might be found in *joining in with them*, rather than bringing 'new' ideas as design-led engagements.

How, and to what ends, designers collaborate with people around 'matters of concern' (Bannon and Ehn 2012), raises questions about how we imagine the political landscape(s) of designing and how we propose to work. We note that recent calls for designers to position them/ourselves as change leaders (Manzini 2015; Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Selloni 2017), overlook the kinds of *organising* work people already do (which often looks like what is proposed as the 'expert' work of *design*). We argue for a more expansive understanding of the relevance to designers of people's situated knowing and doing, including the multiple and often culturally-bound ways in which people prefer to do (or not do) things together. For us, working in and through participation requires honing values of expression that are not differentiated or separable from the histories, visions, and aims of collaborators. We are puzzled by Manzini's recent assertion that centring participation prevents designers from 'expressing themselves' (2016) since for us, participation is inseparable from design work that is intentionally grounded in the broader relational contexts in which it takes place.

We seek to extend what Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012b, 107) have articulated as 'design (in use) after design (in a design project)' as a broader, collaboration-focused means of understanding what is valuable in, and what value and knowledge get made through, collaborative practices. Following Karasti, Baker, and Millerand (2010), Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren argue for a new temporal understanding for participatory design, 'infrastructure time,' the ongoing interrelationship of the design collaboration and its shifting context. This understanding alters what is valuable to include knowledge and forces that shape value *before* the collaboration, *during* the work, and in its *ongoing* enactment and revision (Agid 2016; Dearden et al. 2014). This presumes that what is necessary – for doing work together and as possible short- and long-term outcomes of that work – is framed with people in the midst of their own, ongoing work, in its own emergent contexts, what Karasti and Syrjänen (2004)

call local infrastructures. We understand the ongoing nature of design collaborations extending years or decades as essential to design/research relationships, contributing to what becomes valued and valuable ‘in use after design.’

Designing with people, as informed by feminist and anti-colonial frameworks and a commitment to self-determination, then, requires an orientation to what sociologist Avery Gordon ([1997] 2008, 5) calls ‘complex personhood,’ in part, the understanding that ‘life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning’. Value in the co-design situations we discuss arises from the situated knowledges of people and communities most negatively affected by systems and structures of power. Such values emerge through collaborative processes that centre those knowledges; these are rarely identified, much less privileged, in design education or theory. In calling for value in co-design to *itself* be co-created, we aim, in part, to destabilise long-standing power articulations that erase disparate voices, or universalise Eurocentric understandings of ‘good society,’ finding ways in our own practices to move toward meaningful change as articulated from below, from outside, and from the persistent margins (Gordon 2018).

Here, we seek to build on the ideas explored above by proposing ‘participant making’ as a way of working that produces value with people; to engage feminist theorisations of relational and embodied practice to argue for value created through ‘being present for the work’; and we counter presumptions of the primacy of designers’ actions and knowledge, while still arguing for a place for the work of design and designers in co-design, through proposing that value emerges when people with whom we are working ‘go off to do their thing’. Invested in feminist, queer, anti-racist and post-colonial orientations, these propositions ask us to question value or values as identifiable objects, instead understanding them as enacted through social engagement itself, made manifest in the work of local infrastructuring (and local organising).

Our discussion is built around case studies from each of our work. In the sections to follow, after brief introductions below, we write in the first person, as the accounting of these cases and our reflections on them are told from our perspectives and analysis. We come to the working relationships discussed here through the typically layered ways in which coalition and collaboration happens. Shana’s background in community organizing against policing and prisons led to a curiosity about service design’s potential for engaging articulations of needs, desires, and resources. In the case discussed below, collaborators collectively determined to act as educators together, working with differently situated students, using design as a vehicle for participants across sites to wrestle with open-ended designing toward ‘making a thing for ourselves’. Shana’s role was as a teacher/designer/researcher with an investment in aligning design research and education with frameworks of self-determination, situated in a university with resources we could collectively re-allocate.

Since taking a position in the Media Design Practices MFA program, Elizabeth has used design to challenge anthropology and anthropology to challenge design. Community collaboration, participatory action research, and community-based learning have always typified her research engagements. In the work that has emerged in Haiti with Lekòl Kominote Matènwa (LKM), Elizabeth has drawn from design’s interventionist energy to activate projects producing design outcomes foreign to anthropological norms. These design outcomes have been arrived at through an ethnographic

sensibility framed by feminist and postcolonial orientations that privilege relationality, power-sharing, inquiry, de-centring the researcher/designer as the expert.

## 1. Participant making: value as defined and driven by, negotiated and made with partners

Co-design brings together participants from different spheres; in working across difference, value necessarily emerges as a question – value to whom, and to what end? Here, we consider how ‘participant making,’ which brings in the ‘participant’ part of participant observation from ethnography together with the making part of design practices, allows for fusing the ethics, detail orientation and breadth of ethnography with design’s investment in making, playing and intervening.

### 1.1. Shana: case study, part 1

I (Shana) worked with collaborators on a two-year grant-funded project bringing together students and teachers from three learning environments – The Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS), a New York City district public pre-kindergarten-12th grade school with a student body who are largely poor, working-poor, and working-class people of color, many from immigrant communities; The Fortune Society in Harlem, New York, an alternative to incarceration and young adult literacy program; and Parsons School of Design/The New School, a New York City-based art and design college in a university. The project, called *The Ship’s First Shape Was a Raft* after a poem by Kay Ryan, emerged around a goal teachers at each institution had negotiated and set together: design a service that might address issues and desires raised at WHEELS and at Fortune as we explore two questions: ‘What does it mean to make a thing for ourselves?’ and ‘How do we tell our own stories?’

These ‘framing questions’ were not a design brief. We built them from questions at-hand in ongoing work at WHEELS and Fortune, where the social and political contexts of racism, poverty, and the stigmas of being court-involved framed students’ engagements with and struggles for self-determination and self-narration of their lives. Starting with these intentionally open questions, we designed for and from the context of the work. Students engaged in participant making as a means of creating capacity, developing knowledge, and proposing key elements of what mattered most in what got made, at every step. We made tools and interactive activities, means of raising core values and needs, workshops to imagine design possibilities, and experience prototypes. We led with service design, but for a time, designed anything and everything except a service.

As Yarin, a WHEELS student, said toward the end of year one, people wanted to know, ‘What are we *making*?’ We learned together that what we made had deep and far-reaching implications and permutations; it exceeded a service design and became an ethos and way of working, checking in, and puzzling out what came next. Moving forward meant waiting, reaching out, or making notes to revisit later, when a critical mass of participants could make something – provisional or final – together. This

developed into a strategy of collaboration we would come to call ‘holding it open’, allowing us to make decisions and changes to them. The partnership allowed us to ask what reimagining design through these framing questions – broad, but deeply grounded – could allow us to *do* with designing together with the explicit aim of staying valuable, and relevant, to WHEELS and Fortune, even as what we were making and how continued to change.

## **1.2. Elizabeth: case study, part 1**

I (Elizabeth) have worked with Lekòl Kominote Mantènwa (LKM) in Haiti over the course of seven years. Located on the island of La Gonave 15 miles off the coast of Port au Prince, LKM was established 20 years ago in the small, rural village Matènwa. There are no municipal services in Matènwa; water must be hand carried, there are no paved roads, and there is no electricity. Haiti has been subjected to huge amounts of help, aid, and assistance, much of it unasked for, and even more of that ineffective. In the face of this, the LKM mission states: ‘We seek to empower the local community in their ability to reflect and determine their own solutions, thus creating a healthy interdependent relationship when seeking resources, financial or material, from AID agencies’. LKM positions itself to actively engage collaboration, and their stance is one that directly challenges the colonialism of so many aid-oriented projects. In contrast to the top-down orientation that typifies T4D, projects with LKM have emerged only after several years of visiting the school, and then only in close consultation with members of LKM. These have built upon one another as our mutual knowledge and confidence in our relationship also builds.

Here I will focus on one of those projects, undertaken in collaboration with my colleague Casey Anderson (Anderson 2018). The project, Bòs Kraze, roughly translates as ‘Boss Bust-it-up.’ Bòs Kraze was the nickname of a local youth, who was constantly breaking apart small electronics to fiddle with them. In 2016, inspired by the Bòs Kraze approach, and building upon a separate project from 2015, Casey and I designed an arts-based technology curriculum, and with a small grant of \$5000, spent two weeks at LKM working 8–10 hours per day with students, teachers, and staff.

In Haiti, nearly all technology comes secondhand from the US. Rejecting the common T4D approach centring on fancy and expensive tech, we sought to amplify Haitian cultural and technological orientations, focusing on inexpensive, locally available components. Valuing Haiti’s extraordinarily rich artisanal and visual arts culture, and in concert with LKM’s constructivist teaching methods, we emphasised creativity and exploration. Engaging technology in this participant-oriented way, we committed to a research process aligning with extant practices, knowledge, and culture. This differs significantly from the majority of tech projects whose orientation is usually premised on deficit narratives, providing solutions and solving problems (e.g. One Laptop Per Child, Philip, Irani, and Dourish 2012).

If participant making means pushing the limits of design culture to understand and engage the sensibilities of partners, it also means de-centring the designer, a move that is anti-colonialist and feminist in its orientation. As we immersed ourselves in making and learning alongside people, Casey and I invested in dynamics designed to diffuse

power and access. We avoided standing up when addressing the room, choosing to sit alongside participants as we introduced material or demonstrated. Similarly, in creating documentation, we avoided making ourselves the subjects of photos, and refrained from showing participants as passive observers. These seemingly simple choices were important tools in establishing horizontal power relations, signalling our openness to all participants, whether adults or children, as agents and carriers of knowledge.

Many co-design collaborations with non-profits create work for project partners, even as those partners are under-resourced. Recognizing this, we were prepared for Bòs Kraze to end after two weeks, while also hoping that one or more teachers might carry on. The value of the project could emerge either way, but different trajectories would produce different sorts of value which could not be predetermined.

These stories argue for approaches to making value collaboratively over time through participant making and staying open in the process of working together. Value, in this context emerges as the outcome of ongoing negotiation and deliberation. Crivellaro et al. (2016, 2967) argue for maintaining a deep understanding of the active role disparateness plays in making ‘community,’ which they note is ‘...often regarded as a collective of largely identical citizens, [but that] in designing for the civic sphere, our challenge should be to look for ways to keep the disparate stories going... to enable spaces where heterogeneous actors and collectives can be related to one another, not to cement oppositional grounds (us and them, etc.), but where partial accounts and differences can be recognised, understood as assets, and worked with’. The complexities of community, social structure, and organisation call for an approach to understanding and articulating what value design brings or participates in producing in a fundamentally relational way. Designers do not produce value by *creating* or *instigating* political or social change as outsiders, we do so with others through joining in, when invited, and finding our way.

## **2. Being present for the work: shifts in designer/researcher frameworks and understanding of value**

Centring relationality, our notion of being present for the work draws from nursing education scholar Doane (2002, 401) who describes relational practice as ‘authentically interested inquiry into another’s (and one’s own) experiences’. Highlighting what Doane calls ‘relational capacity’, being present for the work is embodied and active, resembling what ethnographer Dwight Conquergood called ‘co-performative witnessing’ (Madison 2007). Being present for the work creates value by making space to notice, record, and reflect. It presumes emergence as valuable and values staying-power as itself productive of knowledge that can be used on-site, through the work of partners, and in collective-reflection-on-action (Robertson and Simonsen 2012; Torre et al. 2012) to transform designers’ practices and foci of research itself. Beginning here shifts how we imagine, and communicate, designers’ roles, centring value as processual and relational.

## 2.1. Shana: case study, part 2

To work with the framing questions we set for The Ship's First Shape, we drew on Working with People (WWP), which I (Shana) co-designed with another project partner, Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani, to imagine and discuss key ideas in our collaboration. WWP is a web-based resource that creates dialog through discussions of words that are either frequently used in design and educational collaboration, or are often critically absent (Bendiner-Viani and Agid 2015). We used WWP as a starting point for framing what might be at stake in working together and to reflect and report back on what happened through that work.

As one means of being present for the work in Ship's First Shape, we kept conversations about the language and temporalities with which we were working live, for multiple audiences (ourselves, funders, and unknown future participants). Using the WWP keywords as a frame, we did semi-regular 'interviews' together about meanings of words that participants self-selected. Some never picked the same word twice, as the work called up new ideas or sources of excitement or consternation. Some returned to staples, like 'community', as their ideas shifted over time. At first, for example, few people chose the word 'power,' until the end of the project, when power was something about which we had developed a shared sense of multivalent relevance. Making the videos kept us communicating about the stakes of our collaboration.

Being present for the work also required addressing moments in which we were called to represent what we were doing. We used what we'd learned together to challenge privileged, normative representation strategies of collaborative design research. One year into The Ship's First Shape, I made this drawing (Figure 1) of our timeline, process, relationships, and focus, with the input of a collaborator. The drawing was a strategic mess. It showed how we produced understandings of value in a managing a two-year, three-institution partnership involving dozens of people with varying degrees of privilege and vulnerability in relationship to systems of education, policing, employment, and immigration. It was an argument for contextualized engagement and designers' dynamic situatedness, and one for attuning, saturation, and

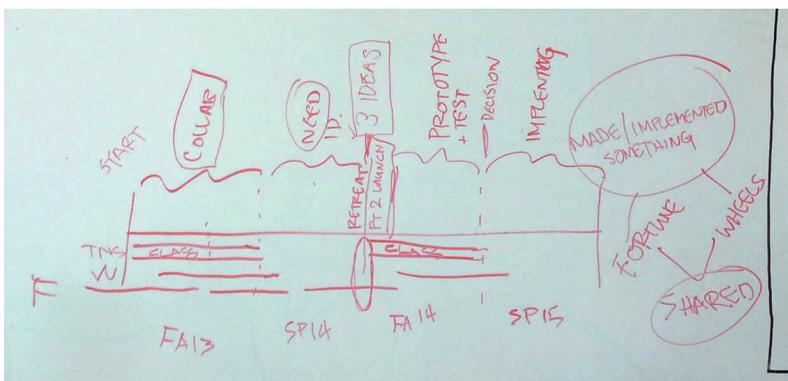


Figure 1. Timeline sketch of Ship's First Shape.

creating collective knowledge as critical elements in working with people (Light and Akama 2012; Fine et al. 2004). In using tools – planned and emergent – that could be meaningfully engaged and changed by all participants, we practiced negotiations of meaning and marking time that helped to shape how we imagined ‘value’ in the outcomes of our work.

## 2.2. Elizabeth: case study, part 2

When a storm prevented Casey from landing in Port au Prince, we lost one-third of our projected work time before we even started. The LKM pedagogy committee asked that we spend mornings working with staff and teachers, and afternoons with students. Because technology spaces tend to be dominated by boys, LKM staff identified equal numbers of boys and girls to be included. Boys flocked to the workshops and we struggled with providing equal participation space for girls; their presence dwindled. Teacher Eligène noticed, and for several days he took it upon himself to teach girls what he had learned. Eligène was being present for the work, which expanded our own ability to continue.

Boys, for their part, became so engrossed with the third day’s project that rather than moving on as we had planned, we chose to be present for the work by responding to their interest, allowing them to follow their own paths. Individual kids followed their own making trajectories; some more advanced makers focused on projects that they brought to Casey or that Casey demonstrated for them; several brought in broken electronics to repair or experiment with.

Both teacher Cenel and teacher Eligène began to join us in the afternoon sessions with kids, in the mornings taking on a mentoring stance with those staff and faculty who were hesitant (Figure 2). As they stepped up, we stepped back as a way of being present for the work. With Cenel and Eligène becoming leaders in the space, I had more time for documentation and note-taking; girls were also enlisted as ad hoc documentarians as a way of finding a role for them.

In these stories, the plans and understandings all participants brought to collaborations shifted and were made to change through the work itself. This required and



**Figure 2.** Teacher Eligène helping an LKM student with her soldering skills.

created opportunities for us as designers/researchers to shift with it, attendant to emergent value for participants, negotiations of what was needed, and articulations of value as framed by people located in different ways. Here, as design researchers we had to both be flexible and to shape our roles in relation to the conceptions and experiences of value (and challenges) as they arose. These collaborations required a commitment to a layered, emergent, and longer-term ‘infrastructure time.’ Being present for the work also meant learning how to be in two kinds of time at once, what Gordon (2018, 42) has called – in reference to movements against structures of oppression including racial capitalism and the prison industrial complex – the simultaneous ‘acute patience and urgency’ of ‘abolitionist time’. Abolitionist time, she explains, ‘is a type of revolutionary time. But rather than stop the world, as if in an absolute break between now and then, it is a daily part of it’. Here, our understanding of ‘infrastructure time’ as a framework that recognizes the value of being accountable beyond the bounds of a particular (design) project, is both *extended* to include goals of potentially radical transformation (as part of larger movements) and made *hyper-present*, through recognizing the daily work of making something, together. Gordon helps us to understand these two kinds of time as deeply linked, and value created through design collaboration as rooted in both.

### **3. Go off and do your thing: value is something that can only be assessed and (re)presented through further collaboration or mutual agreement**

The third framework focuses on understanding that value in collaborative design research is often most apparent when partners ‘go off and do their thing’. This critical reorientation to what design and designers *do* in collaboration shifts the focus from the production of identifiable things to centre on what people themselves find valuable, emphasising their ability to take agency in making beyond designers’ own work, vision, or presence. Removing design and its easily identifiable products from the centre of co-design outcomes, we assert that value is most evident through the co-creation of value in practice. Most importantly, we argue that contributing to ‘building the capacity-for...’ is the key form of value in co-design. In contrast to assertions of the authority of designers in collaborative work, we propose that outcomes with ongoing, sustainable value are not always recognizable to designers as design outcomes, and sometimes cannot even be articulated in the moment. This work, we argue, happens in process and over time, as things get made and done, and as people go off and do their thing.

#### **3.1. Shana: case study, part 3**

Even as we held tight to our capacities for doing what WHEELS students and teachers helpfully framed as ‘being comfortable being uncomfortable’, the goal of *making something* remained. At the end of year two, we had designed something concrete: student-led cafés in each site, with linked missions, and a desire, if not the financial capacity, to create a space located between Fortune and WHEELS. By May, these cafés were running with locally-developed management systems, determining everything from what to serve, when, and how, to financial models. We used grant money to purchase equipment, determined by students at each site.

In the course of our work, what we ‘made’ shifted in ways that challenged my own understanding of value. My notion of the outcome of our work, when limited to ‘design outcomes’, was challenged by WHEELS students and teachers pointing to how the cafés at WHEELS and Fortune were, (re)designed and (continually) configured through what was useful or possible. At WHEELS, space was extraordinarily limited; the café (always also a classroom) became a meeting room, a napping spot, and a lunchroom. WHEELS students and teachers went on to organise in other ways they link explicitly to that work. They built a Critical Theory and Social Justice Club; became delegates for the neighbourhood participatory budgeting process, lobbying for the shared young adult café space they had envisioned, and on finding that adults were slow to support this idea, proposed a neighbourhood playground at WHEELS, which residents voted to fund, and is now built and in regular use. And, they developed an ongoing relationship with Parsons and Fortune, creating capacity for determining the focus of subsequent collaborations.

Yet the narrative that allowed our collaboration to be connected to this work is neither seamless nor obvious outside the context, and the telling, of WHEELS and Fortune Society students and teachers. Even as students at Fortune started their café, the education program in Harlem was shuttered and combined with another location, and the student-run service ended. Exigencies of power and resources in the contexts in which co-design takes place, then, are another vector through which value emerges and gets contested. WHEELS’ story of what we’ve made, and the story of how our work was ended prematurely at Fortune, have become also my stories of learning to understand, privilege, and honour things we did not ‘design’ or did not get to continue as real ‘outcomes’ of the work.

### **3.2. Elizabeth: case study, part 3**

As our departure neared, teacher Cenel began asking who would be in charge of the materials, lobbying to be made responsible for the electronics lab moving forward. But we knew we needed to consult with others and to check there was consensus. Luckily, there was wide agreement that Cenel should continue. Shortly after we left Matènwa, Cenel began sending us images of items he was making out of discarded tin cans: tiny, soldered models of houses; cut and coloured metal items that looked like Christmas tree decorations; toy cars and airplanes with working wheels. He was actively using the materials with LKM students – 30 per day by his count. That Cenel had moved the work into the realm of artisanal production spoke of his own capacity to envision and create. A couple of months after we left Haiti we learned that Cenel was no longer teaching English and had become the school’s art teacher. In other words, he was doing his thing.

We still hoped to introduce Cenel to other electronics-based projects and broaden his expertise. Coordinating schedules and catching the network at a time when a connection could be made was extremely challenging; in the ensuing months, we managed only one video conference of just a few minutes. Casey and I felt that bringing Cenel to Pasadena would allow him to learn intensively in our own space, as well as being an act of reciprocity. When we emailed Chris Low, one of the school’s founders, to ask whether this might be doable, we were unprepared for her strongly worded

response: NO! Cenel had begun teaching only that year. Travelling to the US for training is a special privilege among those at LKM. There were others who had earned that privilege who had not yet had the opportunity to travel to the US. In the past, other visiting teams had invited LKM teachers or staff to come to the US without first discussing it with school leadership, leaving Chris Low to deal with the fallout.

'I have to live here!' Chris wrote, reminding us that the implications of our work spread into the LKM community in ways invisible to us. While having teacher Cenel join us in our studio would have yielded many benefits, it was not worth disrupting the larger social universe at LKM.

For us, the best indicator of value is building capacity for people to 'go off and do their thing', which we take as evidence that collaborators are exercising agency. This means letting go of preconceived outcomes as measures of success, since our interlocutors have, in the most successful moments, taken the work into places we had not imagined. We are interested in extending what Bjögvínsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012b) call 'design for use after design' to propose the value of design-work beyond designers. In this sense, 'they go off and do their thing' extends the understanding of design as a process or relation that continues being made through use, contained neither in an object/technology nor in a closed-circuit design 'project', to the kinds of work design-involved collaborations participate in creating. We assert that these always already extend beyond, or extend the meanings and purposes of, what was designed.

#### 4. Conclusion

Building on feminist and indigenous critiques of methods and knowledge production, we find value in collectivity, relationality, and the ephemeral (Denzin, Lincoln, and Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Smith 2012). Not only is what is valuable necessarily often different among and between those involved, but how we understand and talk about what comes next, who can claim that work, and through what processes, becomes a critical negotiation. Following on scholar-activists Angela Y. Davis (2005), Gilmore (2007), and Naomi Murakawa (Camp and Heatherton 2016), we propose that value in collaborative design research must be understood in terms of how it generates capacity to make (power, alternative institutions, ways of being in the world that challenge white supremacist hetero-patriarchy and capitalism) and how that is made useful by people on the ground. Any collaboration inevitably produces multiple narratives. These need not align or even agree; our professional narratives (such as this paper) tend to be of little (if any) interest to our collaborators. In the case of on-the-ground narratives that continue as the design does, those narratives are not ours to determine. Finally, while we are important characters in these narratives, they are not about us. Focusing on relationality, negotiation and emergent, context-specific needs, we propose understanding value in co-design work as both knowledge that exists before the work begins, in the practices and investments of people and organisations, and a framework (or frameworks) that can be negotiated through the doing of the research/design itself. How, then, value is imagined, experienced, and made

material in collaboration, becomes an important part of an ethics (and politics) of co-design research.

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