

Pride of Place: Co-design, community engagement and the Victorian Pride Centre

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Abstract

XYX Lab, at Monash Art Design and Architecture, Melbourne, is a newly formed research collective of design academics and practitioners examining issues pertaining to communication and spatial design practices interrogated through the lens of gender identification and equity. Determined to make real-world impact, the Lab's remit is to collaborate with real-world stakeholders: other researchers, activists, affiliated groups, policy makers and the broader public. To this end we have developed a number of design thinking "tools" – two- and three-dimensional play-based prompts – through which we engage workshop participants in co-design processes that activate participatory story-telling. The tools permit our diverse collaborators to align themselves to shared ideas; extend innovative discovery; dispute contentious concepts; and reveal new insights that inform the research of the Lab and the objectives of the stakeholders. The most significant of these workshops was undertaken with the newly formed Victorian Pride Centre Board in late 2016.

In April 2016 the Victorian State Government announced their intention to establish the first Australian Pride Centre in Melbourne. The Pride Centre will galvanise the city's diverse LGTBIQ community through a physical and metaphoric site of support and celebration. Buoyed by the clear commitment of the State Government to recognise, respect and empower gay, lesbian and non-binary gender identity, the members of XYX approached the newly appointed Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality, Rowena Allen, with an offer of design thinking workshops that would surface the Pride Centre's key ambitions. The Centre must be more than a building, the identity of which is construed simply by its location and tenants. It needs to define itself through a clear, careful and outward facing communication of its culture, values and history. To this end the Lab set about constructing a bespoke set of design tools for the Pride Centre Board to engage with in a one-day workshop. The tools produced a sequential revelation: personal affiliations and deeply held opinions from the various legions of the LGTBIQ community shifted through a progression of interactive, performative and play-based activities towards a united consensus on the Centre's higher purpose.

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Use of the bespoke tools, hand-made by the Lab members, revealed the importance of well-designed, engaging and intersected prompts in revealing and extrapolating ideas from a community, that, at times, may be suspicious of participatory methodologies that activate story-telling as research. This paper reveals how the tools facilitated the participants' engagement, and how they have helped shape the future thinking of the Pride Centre Board.

Keywords

Victorian Pride Centre; LGTBIQ; Design Thinking; Co-design; Design Workshop

Setting the stage

In April 2016 the Victorian Minister for Equality, Martin Foley, announced the State Government's \$15 million pledge toward the establishment of the first Australian Pride Centre in Melbourne. Only a month before, a small research lab was initiated within the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University, located in the same city. The researchers – collectively defined as *XYX Lab* – are six design academics and practitioners who, independently and collaboratively, examine issues pertaining to gender identification, equity and safety, but through the lens of spatial and communication design practice. Unknown to the Lab then, the confluence of these two initiatives would provide for an extraordinary opportunity. *XYX Lab* was small, new, untested and unknown. The Victorian Government was (and is) none of these. Nonetheless, buoyed by the potential for possibility, the *XYX* Director, Dr Nicole Kalms, contacted Minister Foley in the spirit of congratulations, and with the offer of the Lab's fledgling expertise towards the formation of the new Pride Centre ethos. With little expectation of a reply, we were delighted when a return letter soon arrived listing the contacts and introductions we needed to pursue our further engagement with the Pride Centre and its Board.

The Pride Centre project was the first significant collaborative design engagement undertaken by *XYX Lab* that permitted us the opportunity to explore and test our own mode of collaborative design inquiry. This is one that engages traditional research methods intersected with the findings of generative, co-design processes that use bespoke design thinking tools built specifically for an identified challenge. The paper will illustrate how we use this workshop methodology to both assist stakeholders towards their goals, and at the same time inform the Lab of key questions pertinent to its own research ambitions, and importantly reveal the possibilities and limitations of our methodology. The Lab's approach is one that continues to appreciate the material beauty of the designed object (design as a "thing"); whilst revealing how it transcends into the more temporal, expanded realm of contemporary design practice and research that embraces shared experiences, collective narratives and embodied learning (design as an "action"). Our approach also enables solution-oriented thinking (design as "sense-making"); and provides a framework for further investigations (design as "inquiry"). Core to the methods of the Lab are what Peter Dasgaard describes as

“instruments of inquiry” (Dasgaard, 7). These are physical tools specially designed to collectively generate ideas that “support perception, revealing facets of a situation that would otherwise remain hidden” (Dasgaard). Our “instruments of inquiry” have become integral to the methods of the Lab; helping us to locate design at the core of research questions more readily fielded by gender and sexuality scholars. Our ambition is to position spatial and communication design research within gender-focused challenges, and in doing so, add new design perspectives that enhance the substantial inquiry already occurring in this field. Rather than default to a consultant design practice simply engaged to help realise the solutions of others; the Lab is determined to be participant in the processes that lead to discovery; but with the design capability to facilitate solutions that make genuine contributions to addressing gender inequity in Australia.

XYX Lab specifically seeks to understand how gender and sexuality may limit who and what contributes to the production of – and participation in – the spatial culture of our cities. The Lab intends to reframe equity issues relevant to the contemporary expansion of gender identification through “designerly” ways of thinking, but with a focus on design practices activated in urban environments. As cities develop and grow they construct – deliberately and organically – a visual and spatial dialogue that communicates particular messages of gender inclusion and exclusion. Signage, advertising, architecture, amenities, lighting, pedestrian traffic and public transport infrastructure amalgamate to create public experiences that portray “safety” or “threat”; and these experiences can be felt deeply by women, marginalised cultures, and members of the LGBTBIQ community. According to the United Nations, “in addition to urbanization itself, the lack of inclusive, gender sensitive and pro-poor policy frameworks and governance have led to exclusionary trends in urban development” (UN Habitat, 10). Through scholarly, practice-led and participatory research XYX Lab intends to locate ways in which design interventions can help mitigate the anxieties of people who feel threatened within the spatial fabric of their city because of their gender or sexuality. Of course, this cannot be successfully achieved if the Lab operates as a single, siloed entity. We must collaborate with a myriad of partners: other academics, other designers, gender and sexuality experts, community members, not-for-profit organisations and government policy makers. As our first collaborator we could not hope for a better partner than the newly formed Victorian Pride Centre Board.

“It is not enough to provide a building; to get a good architect; or a great site; or a catchy logo. It is about the shared purpose and messages that run through the spaces, [and] the systems of communication that make a great Pride community” (Kalms). The “messages”, “spaces”, and “systems of communication” – in essence, the Pride Centre identity – cannot, as Kalms suggests, be construed simply by a location, a building and its tenants. The messages need to be crafted, the spaces curated, and the systems of communication aligned to a shared belief system that a broad and diverse community are happy and proud to assign their futures to. Well before an architect, The Pride Centre needed a vision – a vision collectively framed through a participatory community research engagement; what Liz Sanders and Pieter Stappers have termed “generative design research”. “Generative design research gives people a language with which they can imagine and express their ideas and dreams for a future experience”

(Sanders and Stappers, 14). The “future experience” of the Pride Centre cannot be determined by an outsider or even a well-meaning intermediary, but by those whose values and belief systems will be deeply entrenched in the Centre’s daily operations. Users are, as explained by Sanders and Stappers, “experts of their own experience” (Sanders and Stappers, 24). In the case of the Pride Centre, to neglect the contribution of its future users, is to disregard the cultural expertise, powerful relationships and specialist knowledge drawn together over decades by the LGTBIQ community. More than an intermediary between architect and client, the Centre required a facilitator that would, through a process of community co-design, help frame the vision that would then inform the architect’s brief.

Reaching out: Making contact with the Pride Centre

Following the arrival of the letter of invitation from Minister Foley, the Lab quickly made contact with the newly appointed Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality, Rowena Allen. Allen’s assumption to the role in mid-2015, followed by the announcement of the Pride Centre in April 2016, and the Premier’s subsequent state apology to those convicted under its previous draconian anti-homosexual laws; indicated the State Government had a clear commitment to recognise and respect diversity. This commitment clearly aligned with the agenda of the XYX Lab, and despite being inexperienced in the facilitation of co-design workshops, we were confident that we could offer the Commissioner our particular expertise. As designers we trust our instruments of inquiry to guide the participants through problem solving “without knowing exactly where they are heading, and trust their... use of instruments to help them build new understandings along the way” (Dalsgaard, 28). With little more than a promise of success and a pro-bono agreement; Commissioner Allen introduced the Lab to the Pride Centre Board and its CEO, Jude Munro. With Munro, a date was set, an agenda established, and a purpose clearly defined for the first Pride Centre Board workshop to be held with XYX Lab. The workshop would address the core beliefs of the Centre through examining the culture, values and history of Victoria’s LGTBIQ community.

The workshop: An introduction

In October 2016 the various representatives of the new Pride Centre tenancy were invited to a whole-day workshop at the Caulfield Campus of Monash University. The 20 invited participants, who collectively formed the first Pride Centre Board, included representation from Beyond Blue, Melbourne Queer Film Festival, the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA), Switchboard, Joy FM, and the Victorian AIDS Council. The geographic location of the Monash venue was an important consideration. It did not privilege one group over another, but positioned each representative as an equivalently valuable player in the day’s workshop activities. For the members of the XYX Lab, the diversity and number of participants were among our most important considerations. As designers and academics, we are active participants in the changing landscape of design practice and research. Design and the academy are both moving away from the heroic, solitary achievements of sole authorship. As explained by John

Thakara, designers have had to “evolve from being the authors of objects and buildings, to being the facilitators of change among large groups of people” (Thakara, 7). To genuinely engage in co-design actions the designer-researcher in particular must assume the role of facilitator (Sanders and Stappers, 24) over the role of revered, creative specialist. A facilitator must have the capacity to engage the creative sensitivities of a diverse audience, draw out novel ways of rethinking challenges, and draw together the individual threads of the group’s discoveries. The facilitator/designer/researcher must operate in a unique framework that acknowledges a more people-centred and equitable process of creation. This does not, as argued by Rama Gheerawo, “herald the death of the individual designer or innovator, but signals an evolution of the role to a more multifaceted stance where users become participants, evaluators and even authors of solutions” (Gheerawo, 304). The Pride Centre workshop was critical to XYX developing its own approach to co-design, and provided a rich testing ground for a number of innovative design thinking tools that both “drew out” and “drew together” the collective ideas of the Pride Centre community. As argued by Adam Thorpe and Lorraine Gamman:

Design and designing is able to bring people together around a shared concern, assembling a ‘public’, a potential designing network which, with the necessary catalyst, may precipitate a ‘design coalition’ composed of many people, with many interpretations of a problem... They have to agree on goals and actions for reaching them in the process of ‘reframing’ the problem as an opportunity for positive change. (Thorpe and Gamman, 326)

The “catalyst” employed by the XYX lab to stimulate the creative exchanges among the Pride Centre community loosely followed the familiar Stanford d.school “design thinking” methodology, but without the linear, systematic and broadly applicable qualities inherent in their process. The d.school model of “empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test” was the foundation of the workshop, but the language was altered, and our process designed to permit periods of reflective return to earlier ideas. Most importantly our ideation tools differed considerably to the usual 3M Post-it mapping generally employed in design thinking exercises. The XYX group devised a number of bespoke, two- and three-dimensional tools to elicit the creative thinking of the Pride Centre Board through a process of physical making. Being bespoke – design thinking objects designed specifically and only for them – engendered a feeling amongst the Board of being “special” and thoughtfully catered for. Unique, purpose designed tools that clearly embraced the visual vernacular of the LGTBIQ community, indelibly connected the workshop participants to us, to each other, and to the processes they would undertake throughout the day.

The process of “thinking through making” is a vital component of the XYX methodology. Often overlooked in traditional design thinking workshops, or intentionally left out in the interest of time, is the physical construction and material thinking that is so integral to creative practice. “Within design the focus on making and building and practical creative problem solving is at the foundation of the discipline” (Graham, et al, 410). Through making and re-making designers can explore and test

multiple possibilities before settling on their most informed solution. Making, be it stories, artefacts, or a confluence of the two, is how the Lab engages its workshop participants. But, the concept of “making” is introduced through carefully measured engagements that build up confidence and allay personal anxieties of “creative” capacity among a non-design community. “Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 67). Here Herbert Simon locates “design” as an action of betterment not merely beautification. And, by including “everyone” who enables positive change, he removed the ego-centric mantle of “designer” from trained professionals to include a broad community of influential change-makers. With this in mind the XYX Lab had to carefully nurture its own community of change-makers in a single day through a sequence of exercises that developed their creative confidence as much as surface their ideas.

Pride is ... empathy: The Tetrahedron introduction

To establish an empathetic passage for the problem solving that would ensue throughout the day, the Lab devised a tetrahedron identity project for the participants to undertake as their first engagement with material thinking (see Figure 1). As already identified, “thinking through making” is a core principle to our methods that helps participants realise solutions with more complexity and nuanced narratives. As explained by John Bielenberg, Mike Burn and Greg Galle:

something happens when you move from a thought to a thing. You understand the challenge and opportunity more deeply through making which leads to richer solutions. Making triggers a new form of thinking... making is essential to understanding. (Bielenberg, Burn and Galle, 149)

The flatplan of a Tetrahedron – four equilateral triangles that would eventually form into a pyramid – was provided to each participant. At the core of the plan was a simple provocation: “Pride is...”. Here they would complete the sentence with a foundation word: the one they associate most strongly with “Pride”. The remaining surfaces permitted three further responses to the provocation: a reflection on the meaning and potency of the word “Pride” to themselves as individuals, and the LGTBIQ community, nationally, globally and historically. Slender leaf-shapes abutted the triangles. On these participants were asked to consider the qualities that would unite one surface to its corresponding other. For example, one participant connected “community” to “respect” with “listening”; immediately identifying the need for community consultation in the Pride Centre processes. Once complete, the participants were asked to cut out their plan, and fold it into its intended pyramid form.

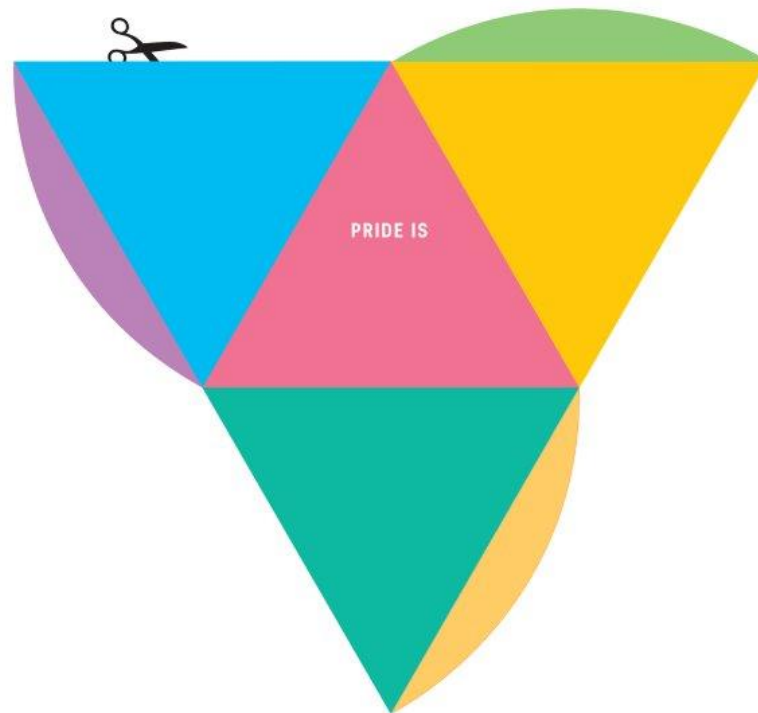


Figure 1. “Pride is...” tetrahedron flat plan.⁶

The Tetrahedron was chosen for its simplicity of construction (six easy folds with no adhesive), but also for its structural strength. The form metaphorically reflected the strength the Centre would need to exude in order to match the strength of conviction inherent in the history of the LGTBIQ community. This was the first foray into making, and started to illustrate how these physical materials could “support the generation of novel solutions, or help [communication] with other stakeholders in a design process” (Dalsgaard, 22). Pyramid in hand, each participant introduced themselves to their co-design community through the structure, explaining their choice of keywords, and the qualities they believe held the form together. Once their narrative was complete they were invited to suspend their pyramid from threads already located in the centre of the room (see Figure 2).

⁶ All images authors’ own.



Figure 2. Individuals presenting their tetrahedron and constructing their physical word cloud.

Once all participants had completed their introduction, a mass of ideas in the form of a physical “word cloud” emerged in the centre of our workspace. There for the remainder of the day, the tetrahedrons served as a reflective point of reference as we moved through the other exercises, to ensure the original narratives of conviction were being respected throughout the co-design journey. As explained by Sanders and Stappers, “ideas can be thought of as clouds of association” (Sanders and Stappers, 43). Each participant was able to articulate their understanding and commitment to “Pride”, but also locate it in a collective narrative: building associations and identifying shared beliefs and convictions. Among the most repeated terms were “community”, “celebration”, “inclusion”, “unity” and “support”. Immediately the participants were beginning to realise their workshop ambition: to identify the qualities that needed to exude from the physical and philosophical architecture of the Centre.

Pride looks like: Defining the needs of the Centre

Following the tetrahedron exercise the participants were asked to self-select into six collaborative teams, each one approximately four strong. Each team would concentrate for the remainder of the day on their self-identified mission: to extrapolate what is meant by “culture”, “values” and “history” in the Pride Centre context. This resulted in two “culture” teams, two “values” teams and two “history” teams with an *XYX*

facilitator present in each. The following exercise required the groups to concentrate on their core principle (culture, values or history) and, using various sized cardboard shapes, they were asked to identify key ideas pertinent to their theme; but also to assign a physical scale value to it. For example, one of the “values” team decided that a public, visible presence that proudly embodied “courage, inclusion and respect” needed to be a dominant form, both physically (in the building) and virtually (via the web) (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. The abstract floor plan. Using different shaped cards of various sizes the workshop participants mapped the needs of the Pride Centre.

This was simply represented by a large yellow card, around which the team located smaller forms that represented such ideas as intimate spaces for consultancy and support; free spaces for volunteers to book without charge, flexible studio spaces for arts and cultural events, and story-telling venues or devices in and around the building. Pinned to the wall, the composition of shapes began to represent abstract floor plans. These in no way reflected how the actual building might look in reality, but in every way identified what situations that must be enabled in the actual Pride Centre realisation.

This exercise was the first that asked the participants to engage collaboratively, unlike the independent voices that simply came together to form the tetrahedron narrative. In this exercise they were charged with settling upon a common vision. One of the strengths of any design thinking process is the collaborative spirit of its engagement. As explained by Idris Mootee, “design thinking helps structure team interactions... and align participants around specific goals and results” (Mootee, n.p.). Every participant was at once a member of a common board (and temporarily a member of a co-design team), but at the same time, each was also a representative of the various stakeholders that would take up tenancy in the Pride Centre. Although united by a commitment to the LGTBIQ community, they were also charged with representing their individual

sector within that community. Simple exercises like the abstract cardboard floor plan permitted individual sector needs to be represented in an overall collective vision; ensuring the multitude of needs were both heard and recorded.

A transformation timeline

A journey map is a familiar design thinking tool, and often employed by those engaged in user experience design. They enable designers to visualise a user's engagement with their world, and they help identify pain-points, frustrations, needs and wants. In the spirit of a journey map the XYX team devised a "transformation timeline" for the Pride Centre Board. This modification of the typical journey map included the benefits of "backcasting", a method that guides participants to work backwards from a desired state – in this case, the fully completed and functioning Pride Centre. This method "allows the emergence of desired futures as a product of the process of analysis and engagement" (Robinson 854), and guided each team as they worked backwards and started plotting the steps to achieve their goals. Across a linear timeline each group was asked to identify key signifiers of developmental success; alongside any disruptions that might impede its progress. Intersected into the timeline were the events and organisations that already herald "Pride" within the city without a physical centre supporting them. These include such Melbourne institutions as the Midsumma Festival, the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Joy FM and the Pride March. Before the Centre is complete it falls to these institutions and events to retain the visibility and presence of the LGTBIQ community in the city; therefore, it is important that they feature in the Centre's transformation story before, during and after the physical completion of the building.

By way of example, one of the "culture" groups divided their timeline into three significant phases: "storming", "forming" and "performing" (see Figure 4). "Storming" involved the processes of community consultation, establishing a funding model, and agreeing upon a shared vision. The "forming" phase involved the inevitable disagreement on direction—what the team described colloquially as "the bitch fight". Regardless of what altruistic vision might be enshrined by the Board, amongst a community so diverse there is bound to be voices of dissent and disagreement. Like a political party a struggle amongst the LGTBIQ factions for a position of privilege was acknowledged as a component part of the "forming" phase. The "culture" group bravely pointed to this "inevitability", but reframed it from a "problem" to an "opportunity"; an opportunity to re-evaluate and strengthen the direction and ambitions of the Centre. The final phase, "performing" described the Centre as a functioning entity, acting out the expectations of the community and realising the vision established by the board and augmented by the community itself.



Figure 4. The “transformation timeline”.

The later analysis of the timelines permitted the XYX lab to extricate key events and ideals pertinent to each group. For culture, values and history: what would be the evidence of their inclusion in the Centre after five years? From the timelines we could determine that “culture is leadership” and “culture is celebration”; “history is archives” and “history is story-telling”; and, “values are inclusion and celebration” and “values are courage”. These guiding principles were then aligned to the visible evidence that would be seen, felt and activated in the Centre. For example, the “culture” groups identified network mapping, financial resilience, the Centre narrative and a charter for cooperation as evidence of “Leadership”. Visualising queer history through an exhibition calendar, structured education programs, and expanding the modes of community engagement with ALGA through artefacts, collections and virtual experiences would identify that “History” was being respected and shared in the Centre. “Values” would be evidenced through the Centre’s ability to support and promote Indigenous and less visible communities among the LGTBIQ; its respect for multiple cultures and languages; and, more topically then, its support of marriage equality and the expanded definition of “family”.

The abstract floor plan and transformation timeline exercises were instrumental in shepherding, refining and intersecting the ideas of the Pride Centre Board. Their physical, interactive quality allowed the groups – and the individuals within them – to give form to their ideas so they could be understood, shared and quickly evaluated (Bielenberg, Burn and Galle, 148). Just as this is a pivotal activity within any design practice; when the process is shared with, and led by, a user group, the process is a means to envision an action – rather than a product – that leads to a specific outcome which is useful for many (Margolin, 39). For example, dispute, or “the bitch fight” as one culture group referred to the pain-points in the Centre’s development, emerged among the groups within the workshop itself. A discussion by one group of the need for “women only safe spaces” within the Centre, immediately challenged its principle of inclusion. How would such a space of privilege be understood by, and impact on, people who identified as women, but were not born as such, or people who identified in entirely non-binary gendered ways? The need for the space was acknowledged – women find few spaces of refuge in our cities, and Lesbian women, even fewer – but this position is becoming increasingly shared by others, including transgender and intergender people. The discussion led to an understanding that the building itself

needed to be fluid, permitting private spaces that could be adapted for use by any subgroup, collective or LGBTBIQ organisation; but not named as specific to any. At no point was this positioned as a compromise, but rather a better solution. As explained by Thorpe and Gamman, “at the heart of design is the need to mobilise cooperation and imagination” (Thorpe and Gamman 320). Using visualisation tools the groups were able to identify a challenge, but collaboratively work through it using design thinking as both a mode of “sense making” and “problem solving” (Thorpe and Gamman 326).

Building Pride: the summative “object-thinking” exercise

Throughout the entirety of the Pride Centre workshop a colourful, playful centrepiece was an ever-present, but largely unacknowledged feature of the day (see Figure 5). The XYX Lab deliberately drew no attention to it. It drew its own attention by its physicality, scale and colour; but the workshop participants had no idea of why it was there beyond a visually seductive focal point. For the duration of the workshop its role was ornamental, providing little more than a lively backdrop for the Instagram picture-stories that participants constructed throughout the day. Unbeknownst to them, this collection of blocks, bridges and pyramids formed loosely into an archetypal cityscape of skyscrapers, buildings, flags and signage, would become the summation of the day’s activities, and the ultimate revelation of their ideas demonstrated through material thinking.



Figure 5. The Pride City, before the workshop participants were invited to take it apart and imbue the elements with narrative and meaning.

The blocks had been constructed over a week by the XYX Lab. Their colour and pattern drew heavily on the extended rainbow of the LGTBIQ flag, that now includes black and brown in acknowledgement of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the community that this powerful symbol has come to represent. Among the patterns were geometric shapes, but also repeated headshots of key players in the Pride Centre initiative. “Pride Centre” was typographically emblazoned on panels, and more subtly incorporated into patterns. The bespoke nature of these forms created an immediate connection to the workshop participants. These were not just any blocks; these were “their” blocks. Interspersed throughout the cityscape were toy figures of varying gender and ethnicity. The Centre, after all, had to have people at the core of its purpose.

In the final session of the day, the workshop groups were formally introduced to the Pride City. It was described by the XYX team as an aesthetically seductive form, and this was evidenced by the fact that people had engaged with it throughout the day in exactly this way: as an ornamental photographic backdrop. But, it was explained, this did not make for “good” design: pretty but meaningless forms might attract an audience in a surface way; but any deep engagement with it must extend beyond the veneers of visual seduction. As a group the workshop participants needed to “move beyond the prevalent interpretation of design as merely the creation of beautiful things” (Dorst, 41), and engage with the design “as an alternative to conventional problem solving strategies” (Dorst, 41). The forms needed to be imbued with meaning for them to deeply connect with their audience; just as the Pride Centre would eventually itself need to deeply connect with the multitude of audiences it intends to covet. A magnificent building would potentially identify the Centre as a heroic architectural triumph, but not necessarily one that connects a community and satisfies its needs.

With this predisposition firmly established the workshop participants were invited to deconstruct the “pretty city” and reimagine the forms by giving them purpose, meaning and narrative. They were encouraged to think metaphorically and materially: to connect the forms to make new meanings; tear or cut them apart to explain processes; and to collate them in sequences that revealed the narratives of history, values and culture that had surfaced throughout the day.

The deconstruction of the city permitted the group to engage in one of the most valuable design processes: prototyping (see Figure 6). As Ricardo Sosa and Lisa Grocott explain, “simulations, facsimiles, models, props and blueprints become the material and experiential way that designers tangibly explore not-yet-fixed ideas” (Sosa and Grocott, 82). Just as designers feel safe to collectively iterate, develop, confer upon and dispute ideas through prototypes, the Pride Centre Board were permitted the same freedom. “Unfixed Ideas” could be safely presented, but equally safely challenged.



Figure 6. Workshop participants co-creating the narrative for their “history” theme.

For example, using the forms as material metaphors, one of the history groups conceived of an entirely different location for the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA) that immediately challenged the assumptions of where archives belong. An archivist and a librarian from ALGA gathered together several of the abstract forms that they had labelled as “things” (like books and historical artefacts) and “themes” (like knowledge of the past, and the appreciation of struggle). These were stacked together as a larger, more complex form that was then labelled as the library/archive. Another group member, who did not work in the Archive, moved their form to a lower area of their Centre visualisation, commenting that archives would not be the first thing visitors see when they go into the building.

The archivist in the group then jokingly retorted. She bemoaned being always located in the desolate silence of a basement, away from interaction and extensive public engagement. This visual, object-based thinking revealed an implicit assumption that archives, while important, only needed to be considered as a secure documentation of time and events, and did not need to be celebrated publicly. As the group discussed the different ways the archives could interact with the public, the person who moved it down the visualisation admitted they always thought of history as something to read about but not participate in. This prompted discussion about how to create a more outward facing and dynamic archive that challenged this familiar thinking. How might the Centre translate knowledge of the past into a more interactive and public-facing

experience? Using the forms, the group were able to re-image how the Archive content might be thoughtfully embedded into the user's experience of the building.

Each group was provided with time to debate and consolidate their ideas, then invited to bring their re-imagined forms back together in a meaningful reconstruction of the city. Each group used their forms as tools to help the other participants understand the ideas that they relayed verbally. For example, the same history group that debated the location of the Archives, enacted a journey into the centre through forms that represented a tunnel coming into light. Using their forms to demonstrate, they conceived of a space where people could digitally embed their own histories through the retelling of their "coming out" stories. While the artefacts of political demonstrations and changes in laws are significant historical content represented within the Archive, the group acknowledged that "coming out" was, for many in the community, the most significant point in their own histories. Collected together in a publicly accessible space they build a visible, archival narrative of strength, resilience and honesty that both honours the past and embraces the future.

Each group was asked to present, but not in any particular order. The completion of one group's narrative would simply act as a prompt for another to extend the collective story. Through this process, the groups within the workshop took complete control of the outcome. They had needed the material and intellectual prompts throughout the day from the XYX lab, but this final exercise became one of completely autonomous thinking. The narrative flowed easily and convincingly between the groups, despite the lack of any formal structure. No one group was privileged over the other; each found their opportunity within a self-constructed framework of story-telling. As explained by Sanders and Stappers, "stories are useful for joining together many different details into a whole. Such story elements provide rich pictures (literally and metaphorically) with which we can connect" (Sanders and Stappers, 48). The stories invoked empathy for the Centre's users. How and why would they use the space, but equally how would they connect to it emotionally? The workshop had shifted from one of design thinking to what Thorpe and Gamman refer to as "design feeling". Design feeling is "linked to the designerly qualities of empathic recognition and understanding of [one] another fostered amongst the confederacy of actors engaged in the design action" (Thorpe and Gamman, 327). In essence, the engagement throughout the day had sensitised the participants to each other's needs and challenges, such that they generously incorporated them as equivalent to their own (see Figure 7).

Collectively the group identified the need for a comprehensive inclusive space, that reaches beyond its city-centric location to connect with suburban and rural LGTBIQ who are often at risk of the detrimental impacts of isolation and non-supportive communities. The physical space needed to be social, educational, sustainable and safe. The reconfigured city also revealed the equivalent value of a virtual pride centre; an online presence that extended the purpose and ethos of the physical building. Through this, the Centre could connect services and supportive organisations to families and individuals without them once needing to set foot in the physical building.



Figure 7. Reconstructing the Pride City. Each group reconfigured their elements then told their story through them in order to contribute to a collective Pride Centre narrative.

Feeding the workshop data back

Throughout the workshop members of the XYX Lab both facilitated the various exercises, but also collected the qualitative data revealed in each one. This collation of discoveries has served both the Pride Centre Board and the Lab well. To complete the Pride workshop the Lab comprehensively compiled the data into a single document that was then returned to the Board. Timely communication back was an imperative for both the Board and the Lab. For the impact of the day's revelations to be genuinely incorporated into the formation of the Centre, key findings needed to be clearly articulated such that they could be incorporated into the final architectural design brief. The architects and designers who would eventually participate in the construction of the Centre required clarification of the needs and ambitions of the Centre. Without these, the building could easily be consumed by a designer-genius mythology that would not take into account the genuine needs of a diverse and complex community of users. On completion of the workshop the Pride Centre CEO, Jude Munro, responded to the workshop:

The design of the workshop introduced the concept of purpose, and through its focus on history, culture and values, we were together able to design a new Centre, contemplate its usage of space and even think about the Centre as a virtual entity and how it might evolve over time. The workshop was important for building on the bond between our board and our future tenants. (Munro)

“If the workshop has worked a form that has emerged in that space will somehow persist” (Graham, et al, 414). As further recognition of the workshop’s significant contribution various outcomes have indeed persisted beyond the day. The completed worksheets were collected for inclusion in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives as historical evidence of the collaboration that formed the Pride Centre vision. Images of the workshop, especially the Pride City, have been used by the Board in their subsequent documents, and have themselves become part of the visual identity of the Victorian Pride Centre. Much of the language developed on the day now forms the narrative on the Centre’s newly constructed website. The Lab was invited to bring our methods to a large community engagement workshop in 2017, and most recently the contributions of the combined workshops were published as part of the Pride Centre architectural competition, won in 2018 by Grant Amon Architects and Brearley Architects and Urbanists.

What the Lab learned

The workshop not only informed the Pride Centre’s vision and brief for the building, it provided opportunities for growth and reflection for the researchers in the lab. The process of creating the materials and activities for the participants helped us as designers learn about what was allowing the participants to engage with these materials in creative and productive ways. Observing the construction, sharing and discussion of the paper city validated our hopes that these could function as instruments of inquiry; materials that “affect our perception and understanding of the world, and help us explore and make sense of it” (Dalsgaard, 24). The positive responses from participants who found they were able to quickly make their ideas visible, and create a model to speak to, eased our fears that non-designers would find it difficult to actively – and confidently – participate in creative making.

The experience of the day also inspired ideas for what could be done differently in the future to surface insights and allow for a smoother flow of discussing, thinking and making. One common comment from participants was about the pressure of time limits, and the tendency to have to quickly push past interesting nuances or disagreements in order to get to the idea that would be permanently recorded and shared. This serves as a provocation to the Lab going forward. Is a process that directs participants towards an immediate and easily presented answer the most innovative or just the most productive option? Is there a way for these creative workshops to help participants sit with ambiguity and make visible these tensions or conflicts? What materials would best facilitate these negotiations, and how might they contribute to a more equitable and considered output?

Observing how the materials did influence the discussions and even framed the outcomes in certain ways reinforced our notion that these materials had to be designed and assembled in a thoughtful, inclusive and socially responsible way. This informs how the Lab has approached the creation of workshop activities since; from the careful inclusion of gender balance and identity, and the racial diversity of figures or images of people; to the careful consideration of facilitation language such as pronoun usage, and

the cautious use of familiar but problematised words (such as “tolerance” – people need to “be” not “tolerated”). Since the Pride Centre project the Lab continues to interrogate multiple modes workshop investigation and communication through continually reinventing, refining, indeed “prototyping”, our investigation tools.

The workshop also revealed a need to pre-plan the capture and coding of data or information produced through this process. As argued by Sanders and Stappers, “dealing with qualitative data is messy and challenging” (197). While the members of the Lab were careful to document the day’s events through photography, and we carefully collated and analysed the completed exercises, we did not capture all that was revealed on the day. Had we employed sound recording devices, or workshop “observers” who diligently recorded the emotional and physical engagement of participants we would have a far more comprehensive collection of data.

A leading challenge moving forward is how a design lab located in an academy meaningfully intersects designerly methods with scholarly knowing to create results ultimately more powerful than the sum of their parts. As perfectly framed by Dwight Conquergood:

The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: ‘knowing that,’ and ‘knowing about.’ This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: ‘knowing how,’ and ‘knowing who.’ This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a ... community. (Conquergood, 2002)

“In the thick of things” is perhaps where designers feel most comfortable; among a community of practice, where their research is perceived to be revealed publicly in the design itself, rather than the dissemination of the ideas that informed it. The Lab intends to privilege both; to document and publish generative processes and the realised outcomes. Yet finding unique modes of dissemination beyond those revered by the traditions of a university system present an ongoing challenge for many creative research bodies globally.

Our experience also helped us reflect more deeply about people: whose vision was being crafted and whose voices we were championing. In the case of the LGTBIQ community our collaborators needed to be far more expanded than the Pride Board represented. Only on the day of the event were we struck by the limited extent of diversity present in the Board. While the Board did represent diversity in sexuality and gender identity, it was largely constructed of white middle-class representatives of the community. Indigenous membership and members of non-European cultures were entirely absent. So too were the extremities of age: the young, and the very old, were not represented at all, yet the LGTBIQ experience impacts a lifetime. For the XYX Lab, it was important that all our future engagements needed the broadest possible spectrum of representation from any community we engaged with.

Nonetheless, the workshop did serve to identify that our methods engender strong, inclusive and useful collaboration. As Gheerawo explains, “democratization of practice offers a framework for designers to move towards the more people-centred and equitable processes needed today” (304). Our methodologies engage the Gheerwo framework upon which we can construct ideas, knowledge and insights gathered from the interaction of numerous stakeholders in a design problem. Our methods go beyond the familiar Post-it note engagement with design thinking, to embrace a far more embodied participation where carefully designed props empower non-design collaborators to both identify challenges and surface their own creative solutions.

Conclusion

For the Lab, this first “designerly” interrogation of user needs within a complex gendered environment, revealed both strengths and flaws in our co-design methodology. These revelations have enabled us to adapt and improve them for subsequent projects. The strengths were clearly the sense of collaborative engagement that a series of bespoke, materially oriented exercises enabled in a community. They helped to grow the confidence of the participants; and indeed their own belief in the process. They grew both in confidence and contribution. By empowering the groups with specially designed visual and material thinking tools that were accessible and easy to modify, intriguingly the specialness of “designing” was debunked. For the participants, design was repositioned as a “process” not a “thing”; yet carefully designed “things” helped them realise this. The tools, especially the final toy-like Pride City, engaged the participants in the “deceptive playfulness inherent in the conceptual phases of a design project” (Dorst, 43). The playful quality of the exercises did not devalue the outcome, but rather demystified a design process that is otherwise located in a sphere of exclusivity. Acts of “play”, while not explicitly identified in this paper, was, and remains, a key mode of engagement with our collaborators. As identified among Julianne Van Loon’s *Manifesto in Ten Parts*, “Play is not the opposite of work... Play has an important relationship with uncertainty and risk... To play is—through movement—a doing, a shifting or reshaping towards a new form, finding or understanding” (Van Loon, 210). Playful interludes are richly revealing research processes because “play-ing” helps diminish the “us and them” between design, the academy and the public. Through play we occupy a shared platform of inquisitive expert.

As the “designer-hero” myth recedes into the past, co-design, user-centredness and participatory methods of inquiry speak more clearly to the original intent of design. As Alison J. Clarke posits, “is design’s lean to pluralism and its shift to social inclusion just an inevitable outcome of its original humanist vision?” (Clarke, 164). For the XYX Lab, and its concern for people dislocated from built environments on the basis of gender, Clarke’s query must be answered with “yes”. It is only through our engagement with a public as collaborators that any of our research questions can even be posed let alone answered.

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About the authors

Gene Bawden is Deputy Head of the Monash University, Art Design and Architecture (MADA) Design Department. His research and design practice embraces the confluence of the material, the visual and the spatial, and the narratives of belonging articulated in each. As a member of XYX Lab, he is afforded the opportunity to combine his knowledge of gendered spatial practices and his communication design expertise within collaborative research projects aimed at mitigating gender inequity in Australia's urban environments. Using bespoke material tools of enquiry are an area of investigation that is increasingly part of Gene's expanding area of material/spatial research.

Alli Edwards is both a Faculty member and PhD candidate in the Department of Design at Monash University, Art Design and Architecture (MADA). Delighting in blurring the lines between work and play, Alli's research explores methods for creating inclusive, energetic workshop experiences and examining the contributions of this dynamic towards collaborative creation. Her educational practice centres around challenging student's ideas of failure and experimentation in the design process, in hopes that her students can tackle the challenges that face contemporary designers – and have a little fun while doing so.