

Designing Something Else

Cooperative, Inclusive, and Creative Communities

Colin Clark, Associate Director

Inclusive Design Research Centre, OCAD University



Exploring a Reversal

Instead of asking “what can design do for cooperatives?” or “how should we design with cooperatives,” I want to ask,

What can cooperative forms of labour do to design?

Dreaming of Something Else

A speculative thesis: Working our way out of the conventional design hierarchies and relationships (e.g. expert/layperson, researcher/subject, designer/user) can unlock crucially-needed new design imaginaries.

Entirely new methods and economies may unfold by working cooperatively, specifically if we reconceptualize design participants (including us) as “worker-owners” of the process and products of design.

Richard D. Wolff, “Every economic system builds and supports other institutions to support it... an economy based instead on a democratic community/worker coop will develop markets or other mechanisms of distribution that reinforce coops.”

Technology is “the way things
are done around here.”

Ursula Franklin

The Real World Of Technology, 1989

Sociotechnical Entanglement

- We saw Franklin's concept of technology at work yesterday at Anddelssamfundet i Hjortshøj (co-housing community)
- Inclusive of buildings, governance, values, practices, bodies, mechanisms, passions—*the way things are done around there*.
- HCI research is premised on a foundational “cut”—human and computer. (What forms of human are produced from this difference?)
- While Franklin sees that social practices and computation are endlessly entangled, simultaneously constitutive and constituted by each other

Karen Barad, **agential cut**: any act of observation [and ontology] makes a cut between what is included and excluded from what is being considered. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter” *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831.

Franklin's Politics of Scale

"In political terms, **prescriptive technologies** are designs for compliance... While we should not forget that these prescriptive technologies are often exceedingly effective and efficient, they come with an enormous social mortgage. The mortgage means that we live in a culture of compliance, that we are ever more conditioned to accept orthodoxy as normal, and to accept that there is only one way of doing 'it'."

Scaling Down (while scaling up?)

- Should we scale down our designs to more specific situations and communities, rather than building more and larger abstractions and generalizations?
- Technologies (and their accompanying ideologies) often seem to be biased towards scaling up. Success == more users
- There is a high cost to substantive use of technology for many communities (“social mortgages”)
 - Financial and complexity cost for creating, hosting and maintaining your own infrastructure, or
 - Social cost of using free technologies like Google Suite, Facebook etc.
 - Permanent dependency upon specialist technologists
- Scaling down also is **taking time**—it’s slower

Inclusive Design is design that considers the **full range of human diversity** with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference.

Designing on the Margins

- The margins are germane!
- Too much emphasis in design is placed on the majority, centre, mythical conception of “the norm”
- This is short-sighted economics (and we know how much change ends up costing us later)
- Diversity is a catalyst for innovation; we should shift our attention and prioritization to the edge, the outliers

The Unrecognized Technology Pioneers

- Disability forces us to rethink our values and roles on research
- People with disabilities often express how they've been studied, subjected, and told what's best for them all their lives – the medical-deficit model takes away agency and decision-making
- **Nothing about us without us!**
- Alan Cooper, etc. “Users don't know what they want and couldn't express it anyway.” – **Not true here!**
- Non-normative experience is by necessity reflective—when the world doesn't fit you, you have to constantly adapt, and are often deeply aware of what you need. “If only...”

cities.inclusivedesign.ca

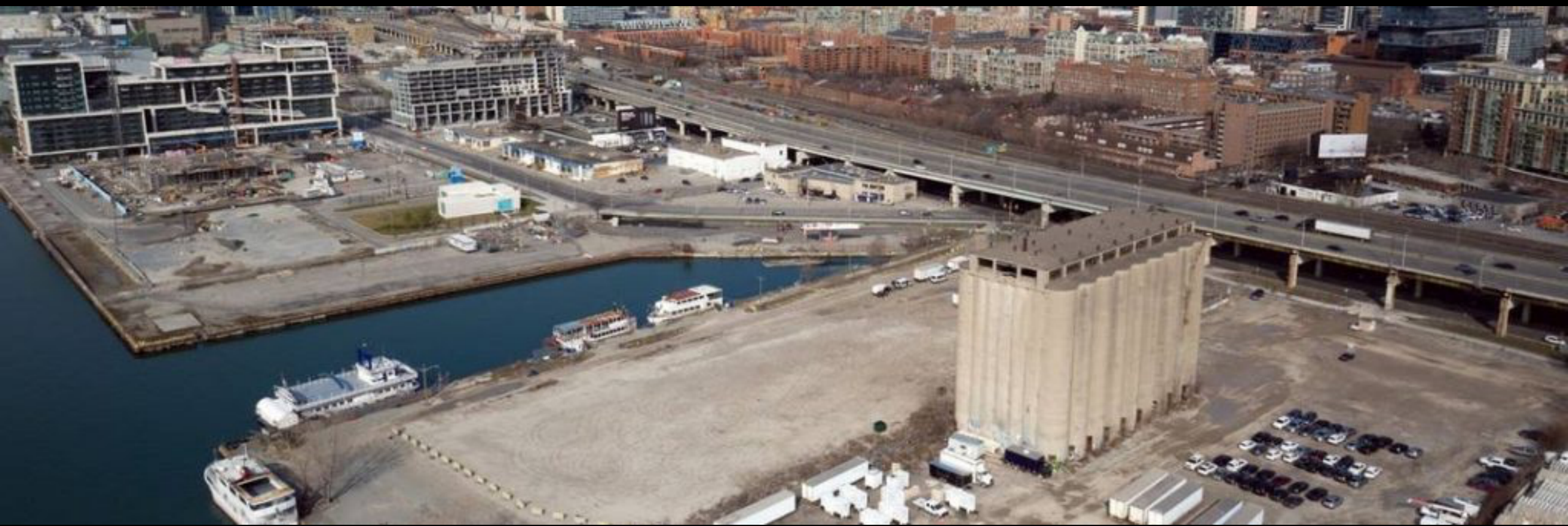
Co-designing Inclusive Cities

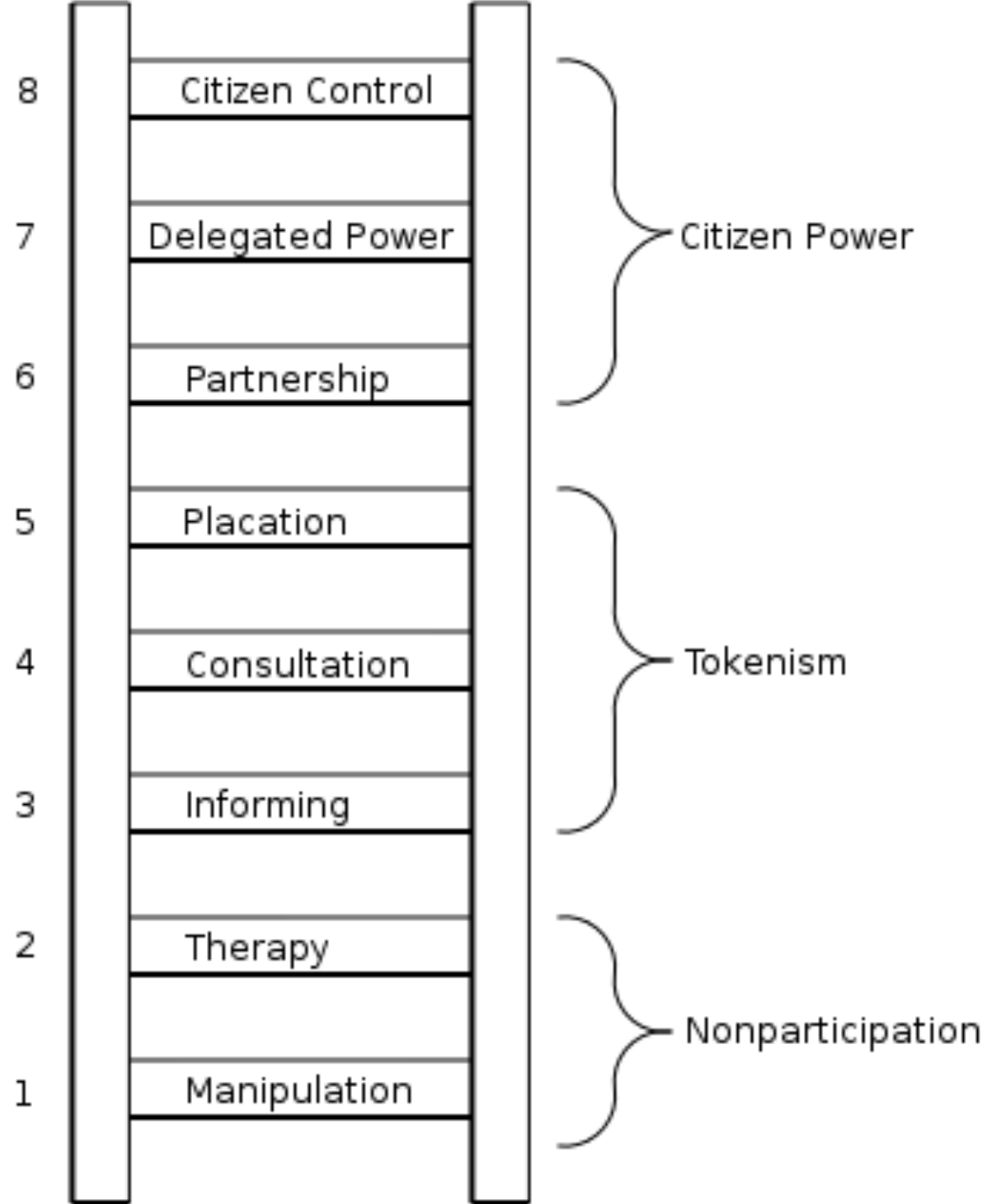
“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

Jane Jacobs



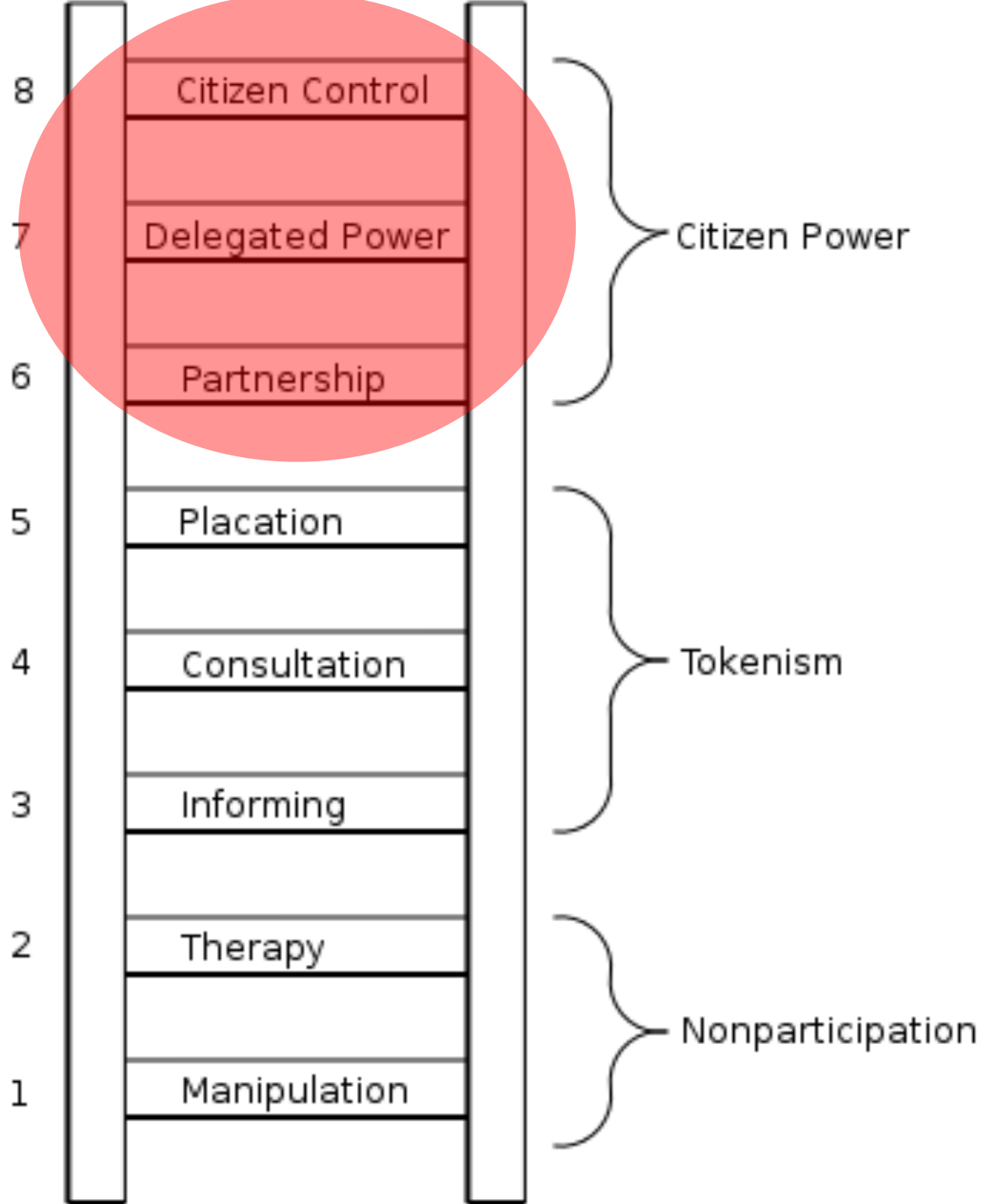
Join us in co-designing connected cities





“Participation is... citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set... resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits... are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits.”

Arnstein, Sherry. (1969). “A Ladder of Citizen Participation.” AIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.



Co-Design and Reciprocity

- Co-design is designing **with**, not simply *for*. It involves asking the people who might otherwise just be "users," particularly those on the margins of today's technology experiences, to be part of the design process.
- A process of discovering and **negotiating roles**—asking participants how, when, and how often they want to be involved, and making space to accommodate **different scales of investment and engagement**. It takes time.
- Participants must have **equal access to information**—plans, ideas, prototypes, and works in progress—that is essential for full decision-making and responsible contribution.
- Not an prescriptive or instrumental process like typical methodologies
- **Dynamic, opportunistic, flexible**

Modes of Co-Design

1. Workshops and synchronous events led by facilitators
2. Embedded co-design toolkits (led by community members themselves)
3. Open Studio methods and crits (open source designing)
4. Paired designer/user methods (working together on day-to-day designs)

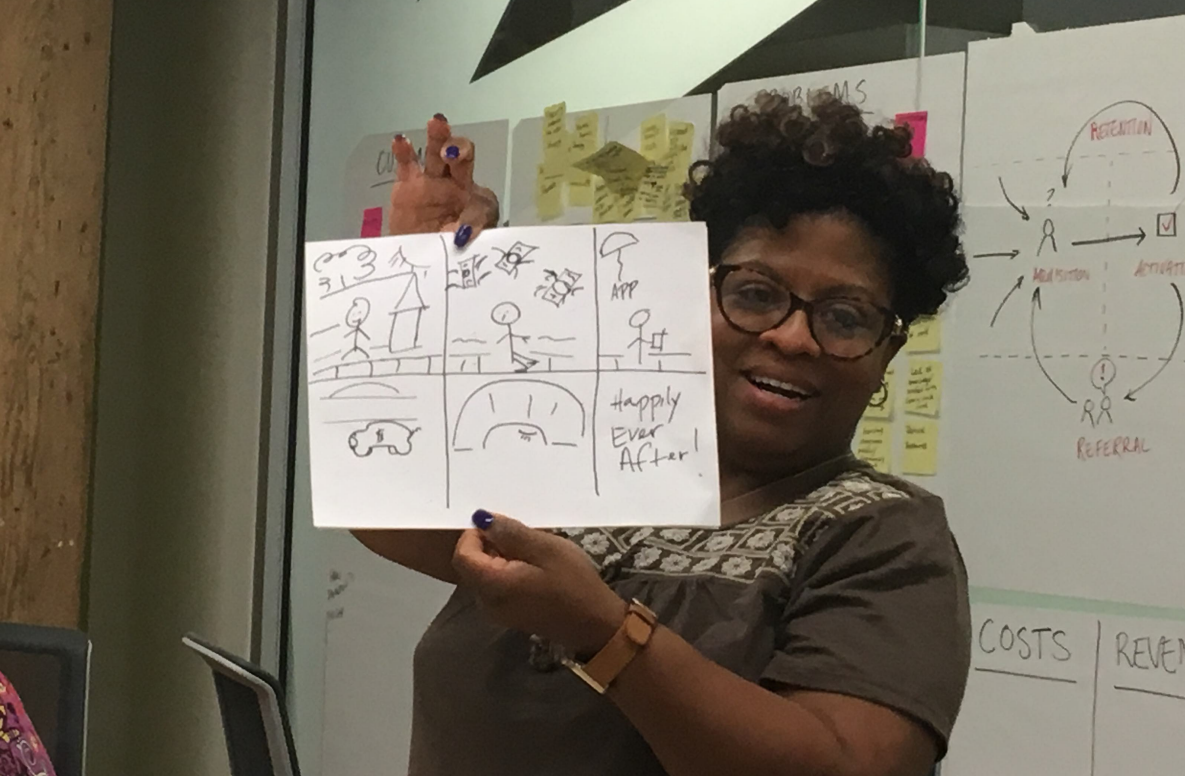
...Users designing it themselves

<https://guide.inclusivedesign.ca/>

<https://cities.inclusivedesign.ca/resources/>

Platform Cooperatives

- Worker-owned organizations that depend on technologies to deliver services or products, and to cooperatively govern and organize themselves
- Also inclusive of a movement to own and openly govern the enabling infrastructure of our digital economy—the protocols, formats, and software tools that we communicate, share, live within

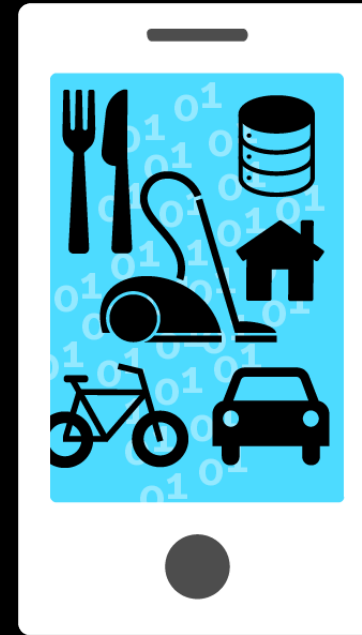


2. **INCOME**
3. **NUTRITIOUS FOOD**
4. **HEALTH CARE**
5. **CHILD CARE**
6. **HOUSE**
7. **OWNERSHIP**
8. **ORGANISING**

The Digital Economy Isn't Working

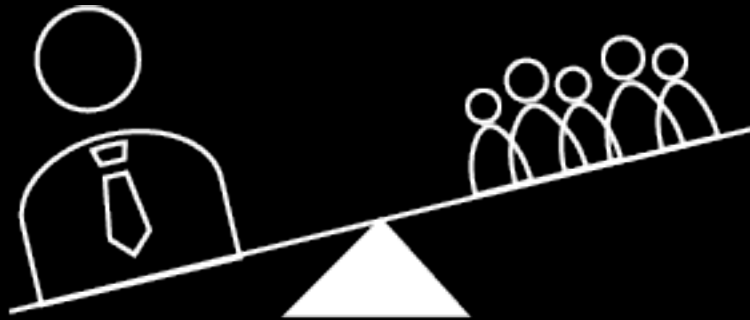
We need alternative economic models because the economy powering the Internet is not working.

- Financial inequality
- Lack of workplace democracy
- Top-down control of platforms
- Invasion of privacy
- Smokescreen of counter-culture (the “sharing economy”)
- Shift to freelance work – protection of worker rights
- Stagnating wages



The Digital Economy

Platform co-ops respond to the market failures of the online economy.



What Kind of New Economy do we Want to Create?



The cooperative model provides:

- ✓ Lower transaction and retention costs
- ✓ Surplus revenues transferred to members
- ✓ 80% of co-ops survive their first 5 years compared with 41% of other business ownership models
- ✓ Money flows within local communities
- ✓ Protection from exploitation through ownership, transparency, worker control
- ✓ Higher commitment of users reduces short-termism
- ✓ Prospect of data democracy

ICA Cooperative Values & Principles

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

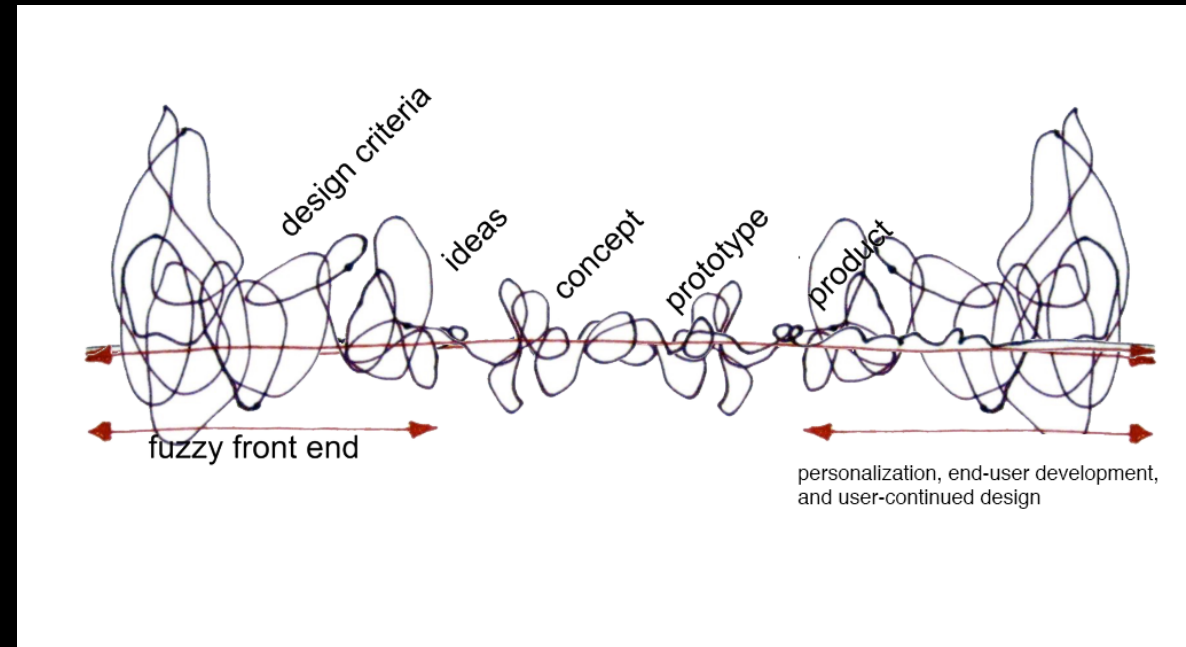


Cooperatives Design Differently

- Self-employed Women's Association in Gujarat, India
- In-home beauty worker cooperative
- Designing for risk:
 - While Uber still doesn't allow its users to request a woman driver,
 - SEWA has prioritized worker safety and communication first
 - Client isn't home
 - Client invites friends, demands everyone gets worked on for the same price as one person

Continuing Design

- A design approach that aims to combine co-design with technologies that support ongoing adaptation, modification, and authorship of software systems after they've been put in use
- “Designed, not done” – an emphasis on creativity in use
- A tactics of practice that reflects upon and shares power within sociotechnical systems, and which support diverse, sometimes conflicting, yet connected visions of community and creative practice.



How can we give an individual the power to (re)make this decision?

How can we support the serendipitous, unexpected, and informal?

What communities might arise around this design choice?

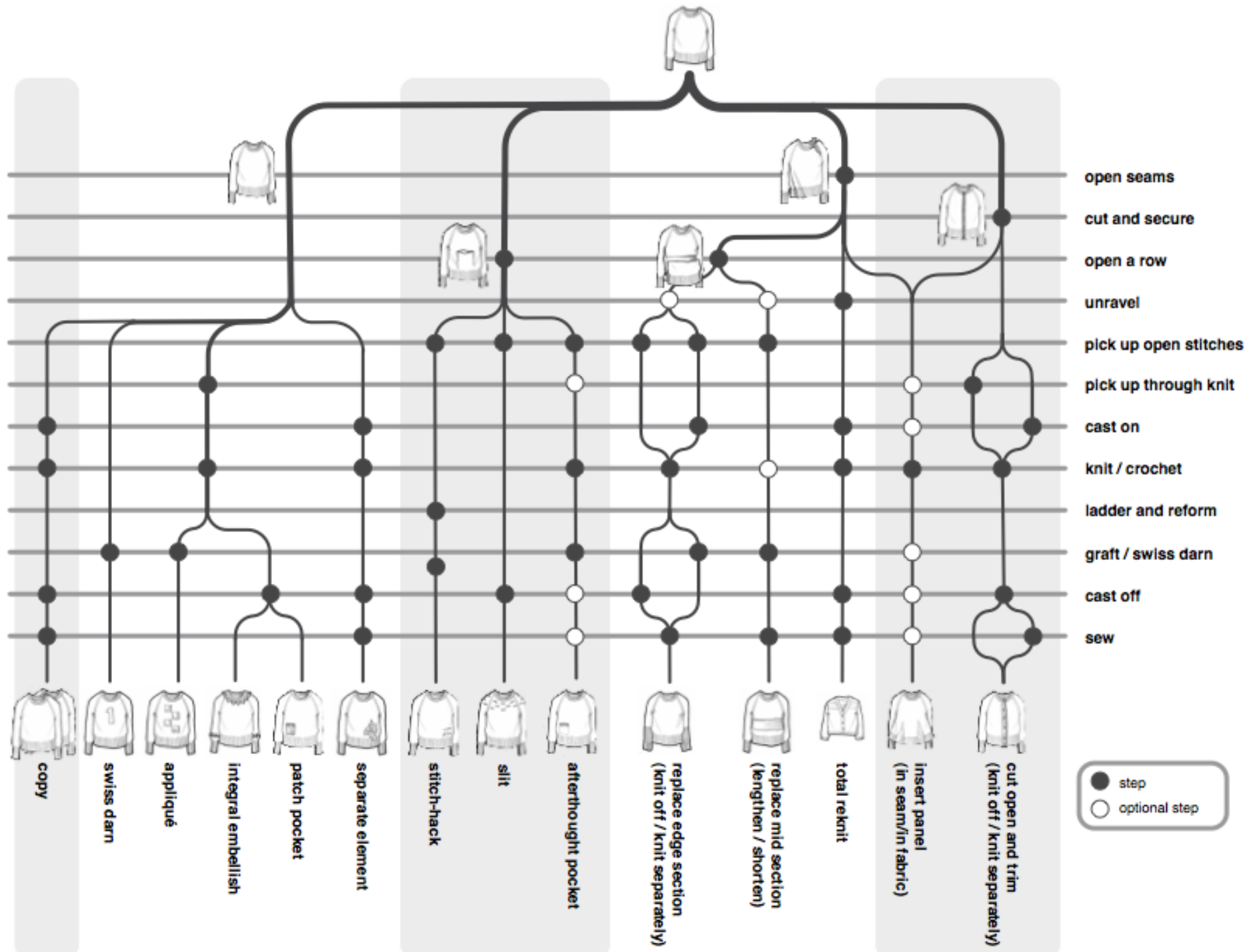
A Situational Tactics of Design

- Rather than formalized, fixed design methodologies, can we consider a tactics of design instead?
 - Choose your methods with the people you're designing with
 - Appropriate, adapt, and mix up existing methods
 - Invent new methods (some won't work, that's ok)
- Look for new approaches from outside HCI or industry or the psychological tradition
 - Artists – especially experimental or relational work (see e.g. Claire Fisher, *Artificial Hells*)
 - Social activists and community builders



Material Case Study: Amy Twigger-Holroyd

- Amy's *reknitting* methods provide knitters with a way to modify, add to, or subtract from already-completed knitted garments (including industrially produced, machine-made)
 - Unravelling, cutting, grafting, insertions, stitch hacks, and replacements
- Knitting, viewed materially, has a remarkably dual quality—you can take yarn and knit a sweater, and you can “frog it,” taking it back to its elements (yarn), and knit something new with its materials
- Re-knitting is not simply an idiosyncratic personal practice of Twigger Holroyd or her colleagues, but “an integral part of the practice of knitting” generally, a characteristic of the medium and the traditional methods of knitting itself
- A speculative future: what if software was like knitting?



Material Software

- A knitted object (software product) is a *vector*—a medium of production, communication, and becoming
- A reknitted garment (application) represents not only the content of the vector of knitting (software), but itself a new vector, or form, for the creation of another work from and within it. This newness is not just the result of a process of copying, quotation, or appropriation, but of the possibility of the artefact itself—its ability to engender new forms and futures, “the immaterial virtuality of the material”
- Knitted objects (software programs) retain their modifiability and, as a result, have the ability to support a “community of practice” within themselves. As artefacts, they can be worked on by multiple creators and can support unanticipated uses and after-the-fact adaptation. It is this ability to be serendipitously added to, subtracted from, grafted onto, or unravelled in a form not already planned for and designed into the object that defines my concept of *materiality*, the latent and unrealized potential of software.

Decolonizing Design: Give the (digital) Land Back!

Skawennati, *She Falls for Ages*, 2016



Reading Suggestions

- Franklin, Ursula. *The real world of technology*. House of Anansi, 1999.
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society* 1, no. 1 (2012).
- Basman, Antranig, Clayton Lewis, and Colin Clark. "The open authorial principle: supporting networks of authors in creating externalisable designs." In *Proceedings of the 2018 ACM SIGPLAN International Symposium on New Ideas, New Paradigms, and Reflections on Programming and Software*, pp. 29-43. ACM, 2018.
- Clark C. and Shahi, S (2018). "On Continuing Creativity." In *Proceedings of the Psychology of Programming Interest Group Annual Conference 2018*.

Thank you!

Colin Clark

Associate Director,

Inclusive Design Research Centre

OCAD University

cclark@ocadu.ca

<https://colinclark.org>

