Readiness for contingency: punctuation, poise, and co-design

Article (Accepted Version)

Akama, Yoko and Light, Ann (2020) Readiness for contingency: punctuation, poise, and co-design. *CoDesign*, 16 (1). pp. 17-28. ISSN 1571-0882

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To cite:

Yoko Akama & Ann Light (2020) Readiness for contingency: punctuation, poise, and co-design, *CoDesign*, 16:1, 17-28, DOI: [10.1080/15710882.2020.1722177](https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2020.1722177)

ABSTRACT

How do we ready ourselves to intervene responsively in the contingent situations that arise in co-designing to make change? How do we attune to group dynamics and respond ethically to unpredictable developments when working with ‘community’? This paper challenges co-design conventions that focus too tightly on formal process by addressing what happens at the moment when we step into situations to alter them with others. This is intrinsically relational and we expose the politics of practice that cannot be replicated or interchanged. Instead, we suggest that practices of readying are constituted by personal histories, experiences, philosophies, and cultures and demonstrate this by giving reflexive accounts of our dimensions of preparation. We have organised these accounts around the qualities of *punctuation* and *poise* as a way to draw out some less easily articulated aspects of co-design practice. These narratives are distinct, yet reveal complementary theories and worldviews that shape ontologies and, in turn, shape the experience – and politics – of collaboration.

KEYWORDS: Readiness, punctuation, poise, feminist theory, Japanese philosophy, sociodrama

1. Introduction: designing in uncertain and contingent contexts

How do we, as designers/researchers, prepare for, step into, and become participants in the contingent and uncertain process of designing with others? What readiness are we practicing within the flexible and evolving conditions that are an inherent part of collaborative design work? We come at these questions politically by examining what happens as we step into a situation to alter it with others. This designing is, we argue, intrinsically relational and thus an aspect of practice that cannot be replicated or inter- changed. We are motivated by a curiosity about and desire to articulate dimensions of participatory practice that are often omitted from reporting in design. And we wish to challenge any sedimenting of co-design process at a time when there is increasing urgency to consider alternative futures. We set this discussion in the heterogeneous, unbounded and uncertain context of collaborative change.

Our paper is resonant with other scholars that see participatory design as configured by people, practices, place, and structures. From this entanglement, values that emerge can be recognised and negotiated in decision-making (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren

2012; Iversen, Halskov, and Leong 2010; Vines et al. 2013). DiSalvo, Clement, and Pipek (2013, 203) point to the evolving nature of design where ‘needs emerge, design objects change, designers morph and the design process is continuously reconstructed by all interested publics’. What Bannon and Ehn (2013) call controversial ‘matters of concern’ do not reveal themselves upon demand; managing different priorities requires a particular type of preparation. From such discussions, we can see that designing with and for groups of people cohering around an issue brings political concerns, which include how researchers themselves configure participation and shape agendas.

Yet, such accounts of researchers preparing are strangely missing; observations by Vines et al. (2013, 435) state: ‘it is quickly forgotten how researchers themselves have specific sets of expertise, make judgments and have agendas that they bring as co- participants in design’. In other words, the close examination of personal commitments evades reporting. We believe this is due to a legacy that narrowly defines ‘generalisable’ knowledge. Challenging this orthodoxy is our shared politics, presented here with personal histories and experiences that are not replicable, but may act as inspiration for others’ reflections.

We choose to focus on the detail of researchers’ participation and their personal politics of engagement to provoke thought about practice in others so that they may encounter themselves more clearly. Discussion about the importance of reflexivity is emerging in participatory design (see Pihkala and Karasti 2016; Stuedahl et al. 2010), owing to strong currents from anthropology (Rode 2011). We argue for the value of reflexivity in the only way possible – by being reflexive in our practice, discussing how we use this to situate ourselves and sharing what makes us different, idiosyncratic, and irreplaceable, even as we recognise that we are no different from others in being unique. This requires us to experiment with ways to account for, analyse and share knowledge of our practices of readiness, then ask what can be drawn from highly personal accounts to contribute to discourses in co-design and participatory design. To do this, we share two individual journeys of ‘attuning’: a personal process of readying that is different in every context, then conclude with some overarching observations.

1.1. Distinguishing different kinds of readiness

There are plenty of examples about being ready in design, so we differentiate our arguments from those that focus on developing capabilities through design training, such as readiness for students to engage with new ideas, or actions that focus on the individual designer's creative process. Löwgren and Stolterman (2004, 57) describe such design abilities as 'preparing for action' so that designers can act in new and unique situations and be confident in making 'good judgment' that 'leads to good actions and decisions'. Design situations are often characterised by messy, uncertain, indeterminate dilemmas so the practitioner must allow him or herself to 'experience surprise, puzzle- ment, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique' (Schön 1983, 68). Schön's reflection-on-action is emphasised in design studio settings, where the action is to step out, stop, review, and analyse the work at a distance. Embracing these contin- gencies and constraints are the means to spark ideas and resolve dilemmas. However, these constraints are not the same contingencies that we speak to in this paper. We speak of accompanying people and attempting to work ethically with the dynamic conditions this creates. In other words, the distinguishing features of readiness for us are less about individual creativity and more about a capacity to be responsive with others. Readiness is a way of drawing on who we are as part of the preparation for designing, involving reflexivity to what emerges with people in dynamic contexts. Our sense is practice to Markham's (2006, 46) when she talks of 'a multilayered set of inductive and non-linear processes' for which the challenge 'is stopping at critical moments or junctures in the project to reflect on what one is actually doing so as to: Find a good fit between one's activities and one's theoretical premises, balance learned procedure and new contexts, and alter methods of interpretation so to better suit the contingencies of the situation'.

Elsewhere, there is already a tradition of readying the mind for the unexpected by knowing one's craft. Sennett (2008, 172), discussing the basis of craft, draws on research to conclude that it takes ~10,000 h of practice in any number of fields (e.g. knitting, meditation) for 'complex skills to become so deeply ingrained that these become readily available, tacit knowledge'. In the field of neuroscience, 'action-readiness' is described as a pattern of dealing adequately

with affordances within the ‘sociomaterial environment and the reservoir of abilities in our socio-cultural practices’ so that ‘one is responsive to, or poised to act adequately on an affordance’ (Bruineberg and Rietveld 2014, 2–3).

In this paper, we draw attention to the wide differences and similarities that two people can bring to a practice that has much in common, to reveal what’s under the hood. This is an exciting opportunity to examine how our own practices are, and have come to be, constituted through our personal histories, experiences, philosophies, worldviews, and culture. Yet such personal and situated practices need a degree of abstraction if they are to inform and inspire others. In order to offer an intermediate knowledge that sits between broad-level theory and specific instances, we borrow the notion of ‘strong concepts’ by Höök and Löwgren (2012). The concepts our analysis led us to are punctua- tion and poise, which mediate between the totality of readiness and the detail of our work. They allow us to give reflexive, first person accounts of our dimensions of readiness and preparedness through our personal stories, to draw out some less easily articulated aspects of participatory practices beyond method and principles. Each of our stories nuances punctuation and poise in different ways, underpinned with the philosophical, epistemological, and ontological constructs of their various histories. However, there are common characteristics of the two:

- Punctuation is a consciousness of working with immersing in the flow, gaps, and rhythms of change.
- Poise has characteristics of self-awareness, of being emplaced and a contemplation of how one is and acts. [SEP] These concepts are offered as a way into describing immaterial features of practice and as a sensitising tool to help others consider what readiness in their practice might mean to them. We start with Ann’s perspective. [SEP] 2. Design practice drawn from drama studies [SEP] There are some pre-existing understandings of how readiness and reflection take place in design work. Although there is a strong tradition in European thought of taking a break as a point of reflection (Heidegger 1962; Schön 1983), what I (Ann) became interested in was how something more immediately responsive could inform the

work of being and designing with others.

I believe that it is important for how I work that I was trained first in educational drama. It foregrounds groupwork, responsiveness, and the chance to experiment in someone else's shoes (e.g. Heathcote 1984; O'Neill 1984). I have begun to see improvising together is a form of participatory interaction design that prefigures my interest in designing social process. This was captured in a more direct form when I discovered – and was trained in – the ideas of the Viennese psychologist Moreno, parent of psycho- drama, sociodrama, and sociometry (Moreno 1946).

Central to Moreno's thinking was the paired concept of Creative Spontaneity – being able to react in the moment with an adequate and appropriate response. Moreno argues that creative spontaneity comes from extended experiential work and reflecting on group dynamics with others. Through years of experiential learning, practitioners work to develop creative spontaneity as a fluid diagnostic skill so they can work well with groups in diagnostic structures built through dramatic means. The practice takes some time to learn and, thereafter, it is easy to lose deftness, as with many skills that rely on day-to-day execution for their enactment. The theory stays intact, but the agility lessens. The role is simultaneously to lead the group in its discoveries (in the present) and to guide the next step (through considering where we have been and projecting into a range of futures). Working in this way reinforces our understanding of the contingent nature of the social: we know that we will not encounter something entirely predictable, but we know roughly the areas in which we can expect interpersonal dynamics to play out. For instance, we can expect people to be curious or nervous when they come to work with us. Sometimes, there are also frustrations brought to bear that have little to do with what we have asked of the group, yet we will have to deal with these as part of the next hours. As we have noted elsewhere, there are power politics in groups and other pre-existing factors that will influence how we can engage and how groups will respond (Light and Akama, 2012, 2019). All these elements require spontaneous responses and creative reactions. If we are tired or uncertain, our repertoire will be curtailed. As participatory designers, this need to deal with what is offered can be channelled to help participants attain their ambitions, or it can be put to service to ensure that designers' intended

outcomes are met. I tend to work in situations where I am interested by what groups bring and can allow their issues and ambitions to shape the work, introducing further contingencies into the mix.

To give more insight, I will introduce a few further ideas that have come from Moreno and now inform my practice. Morenian spontaneity is: ‘an unconservable force operating in a person, in the moment, that leads a person to make an adequate response to a given situation or context’ (Howie 2012). Creativity, Moreno says, is the end result of a warming- up process whereby a person increases the capacity to be spontaneous. He notes that ‘One activity at a time excludes every other activity; one focus every other focus. He/she warms up exclusively to immediate situations. He/she lives in immediate time’ (Moreno 1955).

In other words, we are ready for what we are warmed up to. Our strategies are limited to that moment; at their best, picked to be most relevant and guided by information around us to effect desired outcomes; at worst, stuck in conditioned responses or making knee-jerk reactions to others’ ‘stuckness’ in the moment. The techniques are devised to stop ‘stuck- ness’ and produce alternative strategies: to use the limitations of focus to shape options.

This warm-up is crucial; it is punctuation in our thinking-as-usual. At its best, it means being poised to step into the unknown. I have said earlier that I believe that in ‘imagining difference, something changes in our potential for action and the directions it might take ... We start the confrontation between the fluidity of the mind, where anything imaginable is possible, and the cultural and material choices that already shape possible futures’ (Light 2015, 86). In other words, we are puncturing the present. In that moment, we enable the opportunity for new thoughts and even self-transcendent experiences that allow us to change our orientation to the world. In the next section, I show how working with this approach can lead to collaborative working that is sensitive to context and ambitions.

2.1. Applying creative spontaneity in a design setting

The following description concerns three passionate, strongly-contrasting groups of activists who were working with me to explore how people understand themselves as effective social change

makers. I present it here to look at how readying, expressed as punctuation and poise, was part of the encounter. We were codesigning the research as well as its outcomes, so it was a very open engagement and, although the rest of the group was not aware of the processes involved in my preparation for facilitation and leadership, I believe these steps were crucial to getting us to the desired outcome.

I had observed that everyone was sensitive to power and politics, concerned with the future of neighbourhoods, communities, and their issues, but also liable to differ passionately in how to achieve desired social change. It fell to me to create the dynamics to make our joint project work smoothly. Feeling that special measures were needed, I returned to my training in Morenian spontaneous creativity to seek an approach that might benefit everyone. In the end, I proposed a tactic of gentle disruption – punctuation using design methods of defamiliarisation, surprise, and provocation – to stop people getting entrenched in rigid positions.

The work was challenging for other reasons. Participants saw the exploration of their tactics as dangerous to their activism, so barred all usual forms of research such as documenting, analysing, and publicising their processes and opposed any synthesis of discoveries. So we agreed: activist participants would lead events with other activists celebrating social action and acknowledging its variety. Then, we would report on what these events generated. I was mandated to lead communal planning and reflection.

These events brought together some 50 change-makers to explore project themes over evenings of talks and discussion. To capture this for sharing, the core (numbering about eight people by this point) adopted a policy of juxtaposing ideas to convey meaning (see also Light 2018) – introducing a punctuation of their own in place of the more usual synthesis and, with it, a critical style promoting legible difference rather than fluidity and comfort.

We then used this same critical juxtaposition in our final activity, making a book, with disaggregated authorship, to nurture social change. Out of this grew the phrase ‘There is no We’ for addressing representation, content, and authorial voice.

We ran a two-day workshop to put the book together. Often in a group, there are just a couple of people with strong temperaments who may dominate. Here, there were different dynamics to manage: the group's style made me worry that we would have 2 days of discussion without output. To avoid entrenchment, I kept people making decisions. In the process, I identified a tactic I called tacking and weaving to balance action, discussion, and reflection for rapid decision-making.

This became more valuable as it emerged that the people at the core did not wish to form sub-groups for different tasks but wanted to be involved in every editing decision: tone, content, structure, and style. Trust was based in negotiation, not delegation. A special kind of editing process was needed. Doing this, we learnt that protecting plurality is a different but equally challenging task to attempting homogeneity.

There is no room to describe all that happened to keep the mood light and the decisions flowing. But, running the session, I was forever poised to intervene – listening to mood as well as words – and to shift discussion to another aspect as soon as there were beginnings of disagreement or a slowing of ideas. I used materials and the layout of the room to support me. I watched for drops in energy, early signs of tension, a need for change in activity (what Moreno calls 'act hunger') and, of course, if it made sense to tackle another aspect first. In other words, punctuation meant I switched fast between topics to introduce a rhythm, and poise meant forever judging the group's capacity to act productively without interruption from me.

Punctuation and poise help understand tacking and weaving in terms of continuities and discontinuities of moving collaboratively towards a design goal. In collective situations, a moment of not intervening is a decision not to act; it is a prolonged readiness for the moment when it is fitting to move to a new state. No one can tell what would happen if other paths had been followed. In appreciating this, I managed choice points with more confidence. There is no right answer, only the flow of interactions. Punctuation and poise were analytical tools both to recognise the flow of these particular engagements in the moment and to describe them here.

3. Ma: punctuation and the in-between () . . .

I (Yoko) am a Japanese design researcher and my cultural upbringing informs preparation and readiness as a form of poise in ‘entering’ the everyday. This notion of ‘entering’ is to have a heightened sense of crossing over thresholds like, entering a house, an occasion, a relationship, a season, or a sacred place. For example, preparation for visiting someone’s home is to embody respectful greeting by bringing a thoughtful gift, anticipating their inconvenience, and finally taking off one’s shoes to step over the threshold of their home. Similarly, when visiting a Shinto shrine (Figure 1) the torii (a gate at the entrance) demarcates the threshold for visitors to enter the grounds with respect, and to have a clear and open kokoro (body-spirit-mind). This means if one enters the grounds in haste and mindlessness, one would only encounter the same state at the shrine. To me, this requires a form of poise that relates to Zen teaching of ichigo-ichie (一合一重), to treasure every moment as a once-in-a-lifetime occasion to highlight one’s full participation in a transient experience. These teachings are fundamental in my life and how I ‘enter’ and nurture relationships, even though I have been living and working in Australia for 18 years. It is a way of becoming with many world(s) from a place of intimacy and inter-relatedness, rather than a knowing about something that starts with references outside of oneself (Kasulis 2004).

Figure 1. Geku at Ise Shrine. Photo by Yoko Akama.

My heightened awareness for readiness, entry into spaces and relationships is a sensitivity to Ma. The written character of Ma (間) is a light shining through the gap in the shutters. Design, including many creative practices, co-evolved with Ma in Japan, seen in its theatre, art, poetry, architecture, and more. Ma is a word commonly used in Japan, but its evolution has been shaped by Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and Shinto. As I have written elsewhere, attuning to Ma is to be sensitive to in-betweens (Akama 2015, 2018). In-betweens are constituted by absence, emptiness, and nothingness, which is Mu (無). This reflects a worldview that foregrounds absence, in contrast with another that is premised upon a subject-centred view. What I find so ingenious about Ma as a device in language and concept, is that it enables Mu (absence) to be sensed as interstice, white space, a pause, or pregnant nothingness. When I see the famous Pine Tree ink drawings (Shorin-zu byobu) by Hasegawa Tohaku or read haiku poetry by Basho, I feel formlessness evoked powerfully through the considered presence of absence – Ma. This feature of Ma could be seen in writing conventions in English, appearing as a bracket () or an ellipsis ... that activates a way of sensing what's not written in a sentence and an orientation towards sensing absence. Such devices also create in-between spaces, opening up meaning and invitation to the reader or listener to sense other layers as part of the totality. In other words, punctuation informed by a worldview of Ma is not stopping or breaking continuity, but it is the very absence that evokes a receptiveness to ambiguous and liminal dimensions.

3.1. Building cultural relationships

As I mentioned earlier, I live and work in Australia. Between 2014–2017, I was working with Aboriginal people to contribute towards Indigenous Nations' self-determination and governance. In particular, collaboration with members from the Wiradjuri Nation has been profoundly rewarding, and we have been designing various gatherings to celebrate Wiradjuri sovereignty and practice cultural renewal. When an Indigenous Elder asks 'who's my mob', which is a common way of greeting, I respond with stories of my family, history of migration and ancestry. Foregrounding who I am is central in this work to follow cultural protocol – I am not just a designer

researcher from ‘nowhere’ (Suchman 2002). And while I have grown up in countries outside of Japan, the values that I cherish are those instilled from my Japanese parents, who, despite the disruption of migration and education, taught me language, stories, rituals, and customs, including sensitivities of Ma when ‘entering’ spaces and relationships.

With every invitation to meet Aboriginal people or visit their Country, I aim to ‘enter’ respectfully over a threshold, acknowledge their land, skies, and waters, and bring my cultural sensitivities to the occasion. This poise is no different to the rituals I was taught in my upbringing, of entering a host’s home or a sacred place with respect, humility, and reverence for the people, customs, materials, knowledge, and non-human dimensions I encounter. In other words, every invitation, encounter, or a visit activates a poise of being ready for one’s whole participation in a fleeting moment.

This invitation to work together culturally is a generous and humble offer, and at the same time, empowering for me. It is in stark contrast to a feeling of illegitimacy and being ‘othered’ when living and working among dominant ‘whiteness’ that is always taken as the point of reference (Minh-ha 1989). I am not Indigenous, Australian, or ‘white’ so honouring this invitation meant I had to locate my own reference points to consider what it means to be in respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples. I learnt to draw upon my own cultural teachings and finding synergies with Indigenous protocols and guidance from Elders. Quoting our co-authored texts, communicating our work in poly-vocal ways and giving partial and personal accounts as I do here has been learnt to enable me to ‘speak nearby’ (Minh-ha 1989), to work across difference, and as importantly, to respect boundaries and exclusion where knowledge, practices, and places are not open to ‘entry’.

3.2. Readiness for turbulence

The project’s broader and collective aim of Indigenous self-determination is not as simple as aligning concerns in order to achieve political mobilisation. This is because the work is nested within Australia’s colonial history of Indigenous cultural extinction and government policies that do not recognise Indigenous sovereignty – sovereignty that was never ceded. It is politically

fraught and the colonial legacy is felt viscerally by many, impacting on how people identify, gather together on another Indigenous nation's land to practice sovereignty. I quote here a piece of text, co-authored with Indigenous partners and research colleagues, that give a sense of the emotional turbulence that can accompany our work: 'Individuals are subject to personal inquiry and often made to prove or explain their aboriginality, invariably through 'white' constructs, to a 'white' audience (Heiss 2012). This is frequently an impediment to identifying and therefore gathering as a cultural group. Physical attributes, cultural knowledge and geographic location all become examined as measures of an Indigenous person's compliance with the colonial construct of 'the aboriginal'. It is common for Indigenous people to feel the pressure of non-conformity to dominant 'white' notions of the authentic 'aboriginal black' (Akama et al. 2017, 9). The artwork by a well-known Aboriginal artist, Bindi Cole Chocka, titled *Not Really Aboriginal* with light-skinned members of her family to challenge stereotypes of what black identity should look like (<https://www.bindicolechocka.com/not-really-aboriginal>), is a compelling illustration of the turbulent conditions that can surround any Indigenous gatherings.

This means my readiness is not about 'good judgment' and strategies of decision-making to be agile and creative in new situations, as we often hear in professional design. In our designing of various mechanisms to engage, celebrate, and practice Wiradjuri sovereignty, readiness as punctuation, inflected by Ma, is a way for me to be sensitive to absence, attuning to what's not articulated explicitly or made visible. Someone's hurt, fear, anger, frustration, confusion, or tension in a group, needs to be felt. I am constantly practicing to be ready to accept and accommodate such emotions. I sense these as gaps-in-between – pauses, glances, undertones, and atmospheres – that can fall out of a conditioning in design that can privilege vocal and visible actions. It is precisely in these nuanced, silent moments that delicate relationships are forming or transforming. Poise is to step over thresholds, whether they are spaces or relationships, with care, sensitivity, and respect, with a clear and open kokoro in readiness to be receptive to what might be encountered.

4. Discussion: rich characteristics of readiness

Our accounts differ in mood, duration, and scale. We enjoy the fact that while commitments to ethical and participatory practices are shared, our experiences of the world are different and that we know things differently based on our (chosen and missed) encounters with the world over a lifetime. We knowingly bring this to our joint writing activities and, here, we particularly sought out our lack of similarity to show how different theories and philosophies shape our practices of readiness. In other words, we heightened our differences through the fulcrum of punctuation and poise, which share an axis yet are practiced in contrasting ways. This allows us to show a range of ways that readiness might be interpreted and to resist a static meaning.

Punctuation and poise are in the granularity of facilitation in Ann's account and the greater meta-reflection of Yoko's practice. To share it requires a reflexivity that brings the situation of ourselves as 'knowers' to each participatory action and attempt at co-design. In becoming ready, we must be(come) aware of the dimensions on which readiness hangs. Readying is not a skillset. It is important not to erase difference in favour of any replicable method, technique, technology, and process or pitch our accounts against one another in dualistic generalisations, e.g. East vs West.

That said, we bring attention to readiness because it is an important part of going into situations to affect them. We pay respect by thinking ahead to what awaits us and this acts to help us encounter others and perform work together. It is important because we are implicated within a group of people who are cohering, articulating, and addressing issues and their consequences. We take responsibility for ourselves and our role through this readying and attuning – it is an ethical act.

4.1. Punctuation and poise

In this paper, we have shown how the terms can inform our understanding of two fluid processes of engagement and how our readying helped us in our connecting, our being-with and being-present-to. Following Höök and Löwgren's (2012) notion of 'strong concepts', we offer punctuation and poise as analytic tools to give the texture and rhythm of designer readiness. It is possible to design in groups without any thought for either, but once we had the

categories, we found them useful in three ways:

- to deepen our thinking on how to prepare oneself, ahead of a project or encounter;
- to attune to rhythms and relationalities during engagement with others;^[11]_{SEP}
- to reflect continuously as the work evolves and, as our writings do here, to consider

and articulate our practice after activities are complete.

Punctuation is an attunement to working with and immersing in the flow, gaps, and rhythms of changing. Punctuation in Ann's story is a change of gears, seen as 'tacking and weaving'. Finding rhythm can enable the emergence of multiple perspectives, allowing one to compare paths, disrupt configurations, recognise hidden undercurrents, open new directions to reflection, or invite decision-making. Punctuation in Yoko's practice is an orientation towards absence, to sense the gaps-in-between flux and becoming with, and bring forth a heightened aliveness in complete immersion and presence in the moment.

Poise shares characteristics of self-awareness, of being emplaced, and a contemplation of how one is and acts. Poise for Ann is a point of composure on a path of creative spontaneity. It is an endless moment of balance and anticipation, when tools are at hand, options seem inviting, and constraints and opportunities settle into new formations for action. It appraises situations, including one's own and others' intentions, before choices are made. Poise for Yoko is a respect for thresholds: only to 'enter' into spaces, places, and relationships with invitation. It is a sensitivity to existing structures, dynamics, and a willingness to embrace turbulence and uncertainty.

We believe these concepts are useful to contrast with Schön's types of reflection, which emphasise individual creative responses and the constraints on the designer's process as problem explorations. As we have shown, the constraints are not the same contingencies that accompany ways to ethically collaborate in turbulent, constantly changing conditions.

In summary, readying draws on who we are and what we are doing with others in situ. Preparation is not limited to planning tasks before fieldwork, community events, or facilitated workshops. Rather, being ready is a state of dealing with contingency in co- designing as it happens. We have shown how undercurrents of personal history and experience can surface, when and why, according to the situation in which we are immersed.

If we were simply to follow a plan, we would be ready as soon as we picked up our notes. But no one is automatically ready for contingent encounters and their variability. The agonism of factions in Ann's story and a delicate process of healing through gathering in Yoko's show how co-ordination and communication of agreed visions requires sensitivity and attunement. By exploring how these commitments play out in our actions, we can begin to understand our participatory practices better and work with greater sensitivity to others in the design process.

In doing so, we also reveal a way of working that approaches uncertainty with more resilience than formal methods are able to do. The emphasis we give to readiness is precisely because the risks and stakes are very high. Rhythms and granularities are different in collaborative designing, especially where the outcome is to be societal change rather than a material product. Paying attention to our readying practices honours the uncertainty of these encounters while offering the best chance of a mutually beneficial outcome.

Acknowledgments

Yoko is grateful to Wiradjuri, Indigenous, and RMIT colleagues (particularly Peter West) who have taught her the importance of sovereign relationships, and thanks RMIT University for supporting the work. Ann is grateful for funding from the AHRC for Effectiveness in Action (award no: AH/K006622/1) and thanks all her fellow participants.

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