

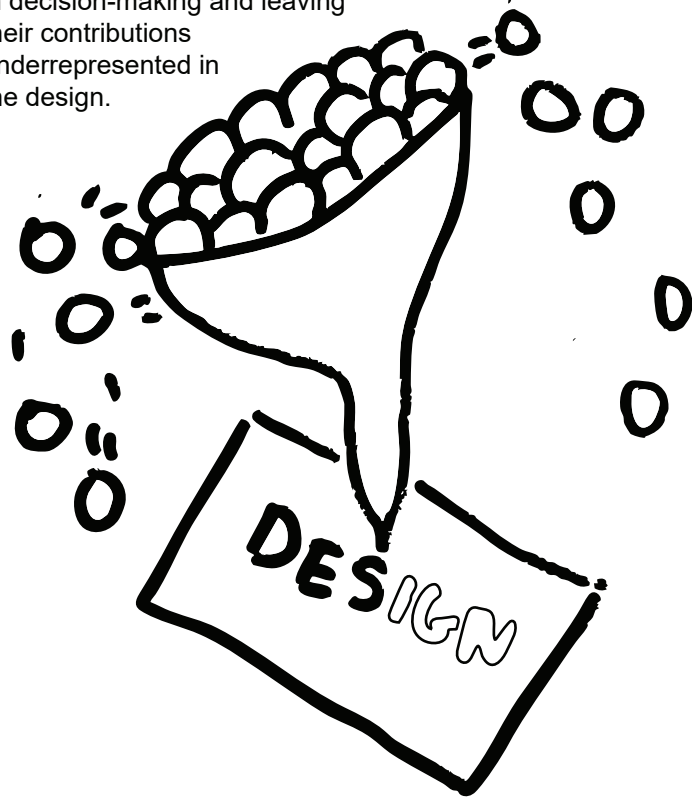
The following present a set of warnings:
**signals and factors
to watch out for
when designing,
being the designer,
and developing the
design.**



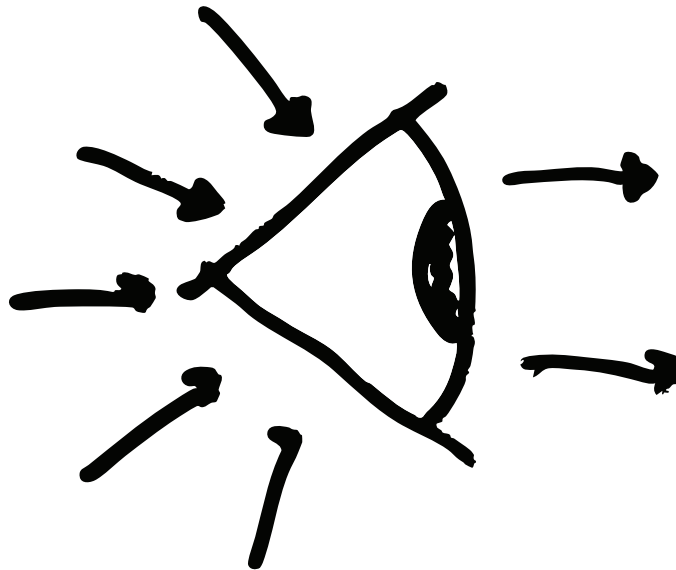
They invite awareness of the **perils and responsibilities** that come with integrating diverse ways of knowing, reminding us that integration in design is never neutral.

Design translation

Design translation becomes a critical challenge when designers struggle to convert certain perspectives, social, cultural, ecological, into spatial expression, causing important voices to be heard but not activated in decision-making and leaving their contributions underrepresented in the design.

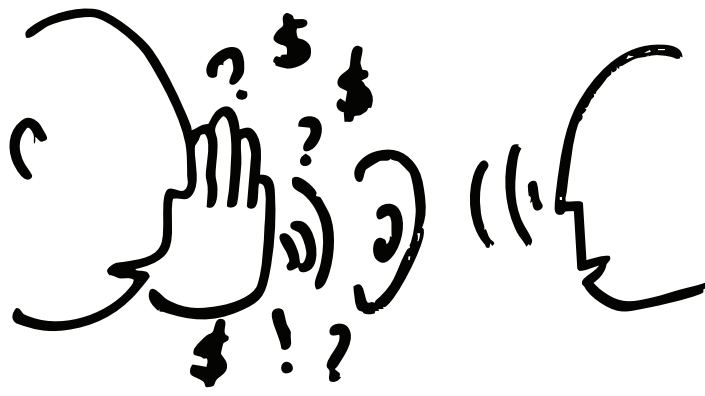


Designer's gaze



The designer's gaze shapes integration through personal preferences, training, and institutional values, influencing what the designer notices, prioritises, and ultimately translates into design sometimes without awareness of what perspectives are being unintentionally muted.

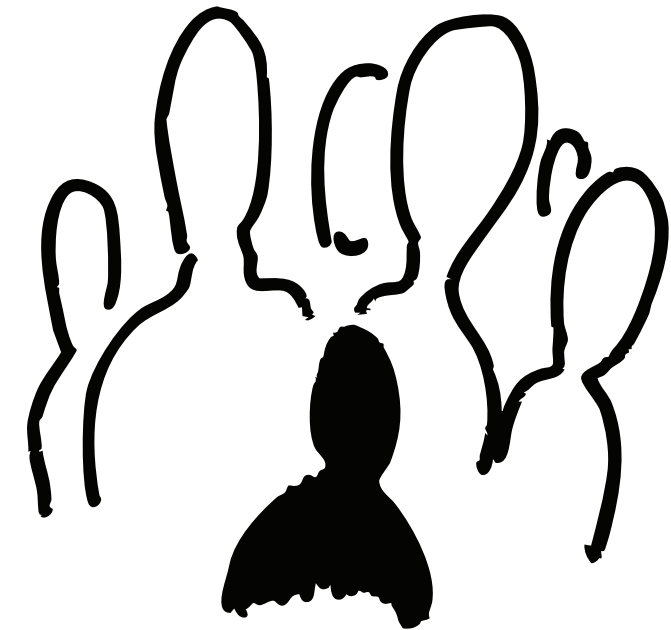
Dual client



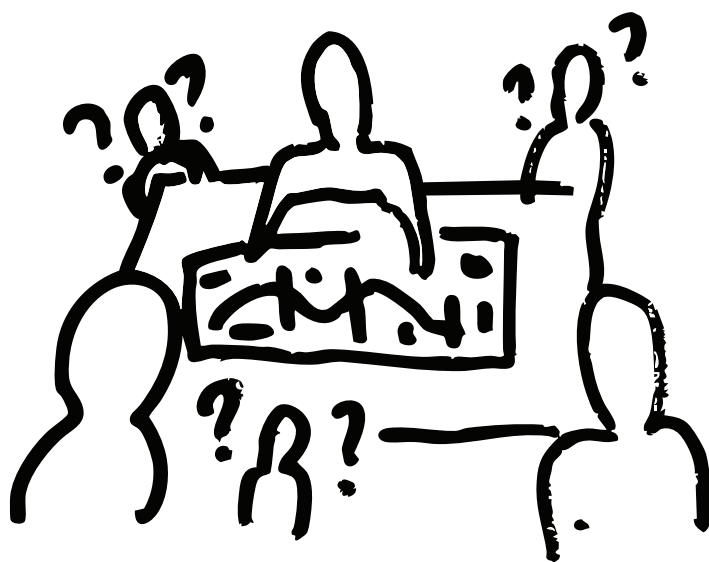
A dual-client dynamic emerges when the official client's expectations conflict with the implicit demands of company leadership, placing designers in a divided position where they must navigate competing pressures that distort fair and balanced integration of knowledge.

Epistemic dominance

Epistemic dominance emerges when certain ways of knowing, often technical, expert-driven, or institutionally privileged, take over design conversations, limiting genuine collaboration and reinforcing unequal power dynamics in what knowledge gets to shape decisions.

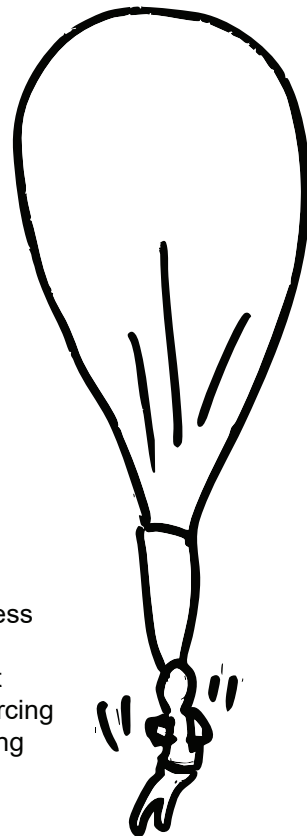


Mapping and models for a few



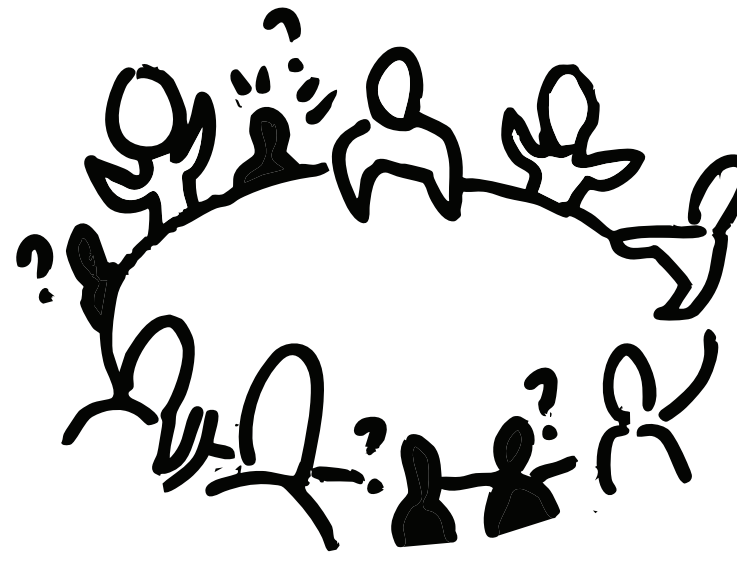
Defaulting to drawings, maps, or models assumes that everyone can speak through these visual languages, but these tools privilege those with design literacy and unintentionally exclude collaborators whose knowledge is less easily expressed through such media.

Parachuting expertise



Parachuting experts create distortions in the design process when outsiders offer generic, decontextualised insights that overlook local realities, reinforcing inequalities and overshadowing grounded, situated forms of knowledge.

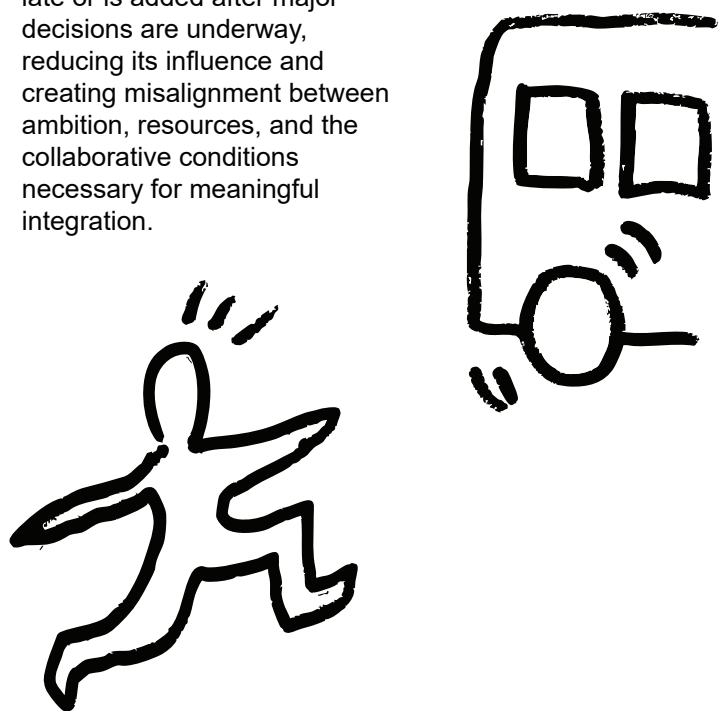
Participation setting



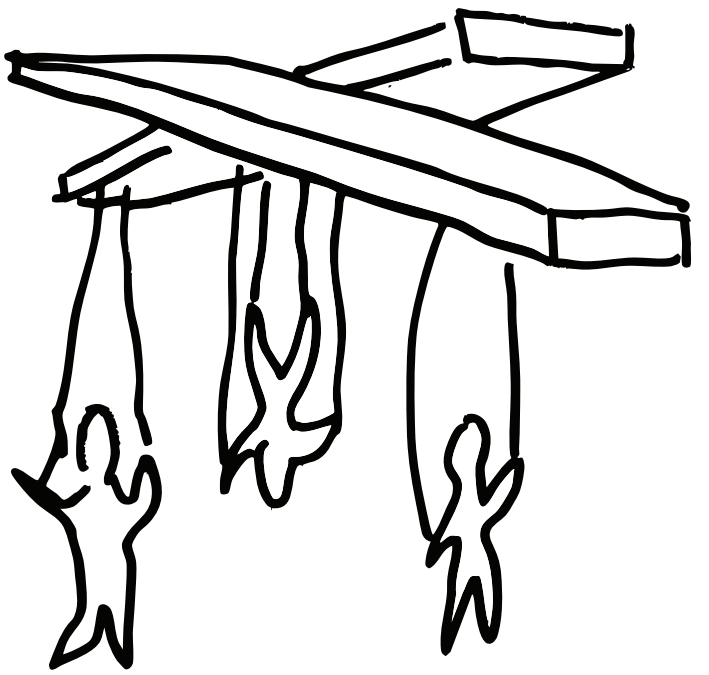
Participation settings filter whose voices enter the process, as choices like evening workshops, daytime sessions, or polished venues privilege the availability and comfort of certain groups while excluding others whose realities do not fit those formats.

Late for the ride

Sequencing problems occur when integrative work begins too late or is added after major decisions are underway, reducing its influence and creating misalignment between ambition, resources, and the collaborative conditions necessary for meaningful integration.

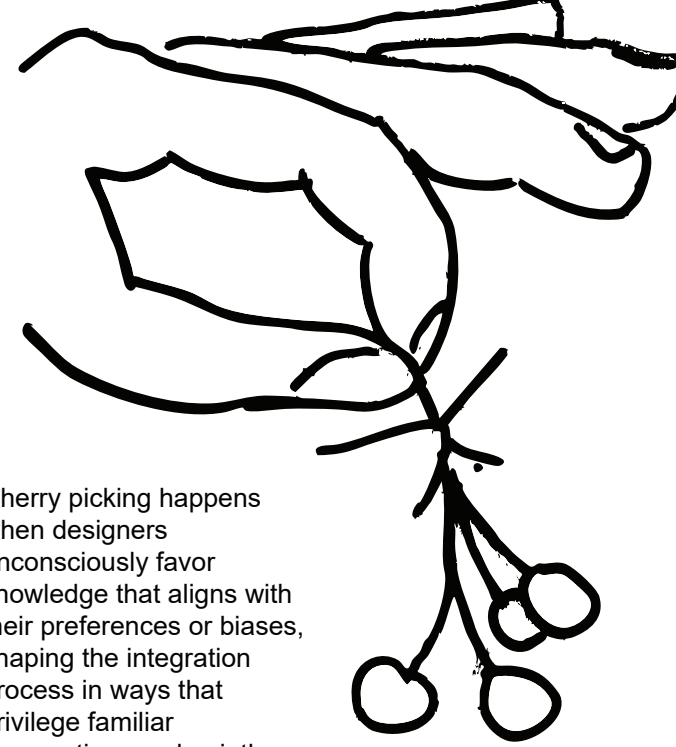


Invisible hand



The invisible hand appears when unseen actors or hidden influences shape design decisions behind the scenes, creating mistrust, ambiguity, and opaque conditions that disrupt fair, transparent, and collaborative integration of diverse perspectives.

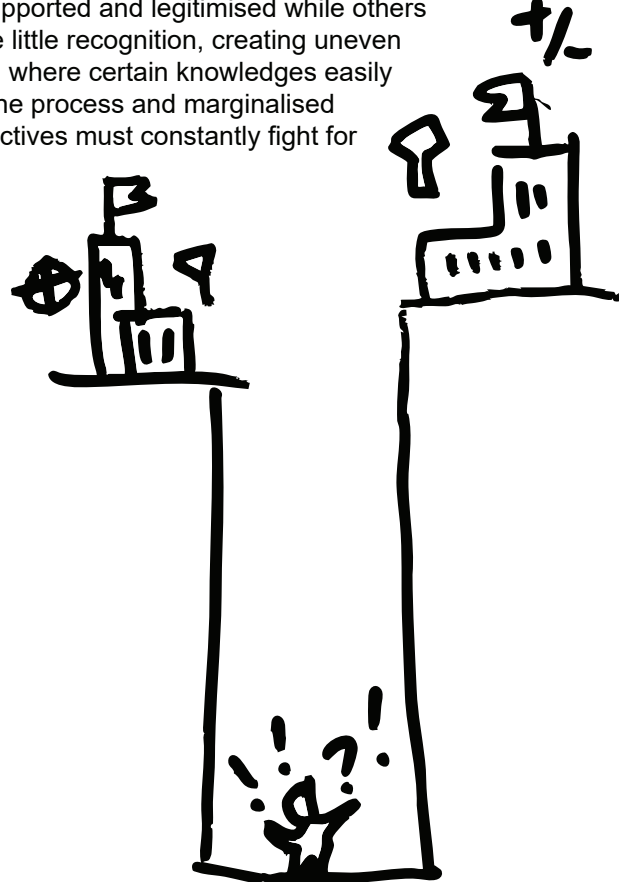
Cherry picking



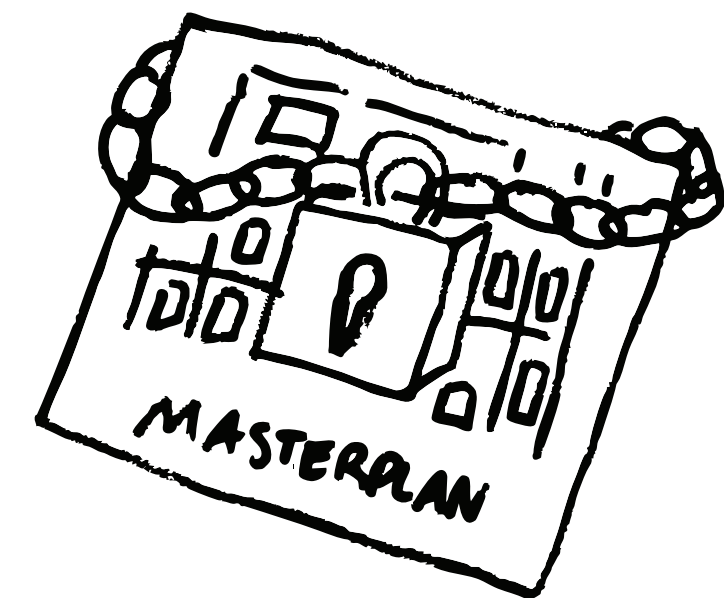
Cherry picking happens when designers unconsciously favor knowledge that aligns with their preferences or biases, shaping the integration process in ways that privilege familiar perspectives and quietly marginalise others who hold different or challenging forms of knowing.

Institutional void

Institutional voids arise when some topics are well-supported and legitimised while others receive little recognition, creating uneven ground where certain knowledges easily enter the process and marginalised perspectives must constantly fight for space.



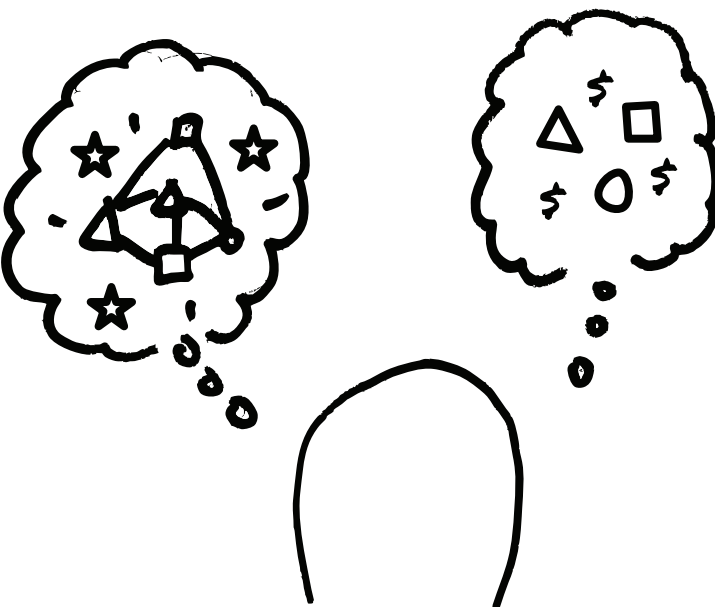
Scope lock-in



Scope lock-in occurs when fixed project expectations or traditional deliverables, like the automatic production of a masterplan restrict the openness needed for meaningful exploration, shutting down alternative outputs that could better reflect the complexity of the situation.

Innovation paradox

The innovation paradox appears when early enthusiasm for creative or transformative ideas retreats into safe, low-risk decisions as the project unfolds, leaving collaborators facing unmet promises and limiting the transformative potential of integrated thinking.



Design island



A design or integration island forms when designers withdraw to make key decisions away from the collaborative environment, producing opaque processes that distance design choices from shared input and concentrate power in the hands of the designer.

* Disclaimer (an unusual one)

This work begins from a belief that our community of designers should care for one another and take responsibility for the potential impacts of our designs, our designing, and our roles as designers. So **yes, this effort takes partial accountability for how design might (re)produce injustice.**

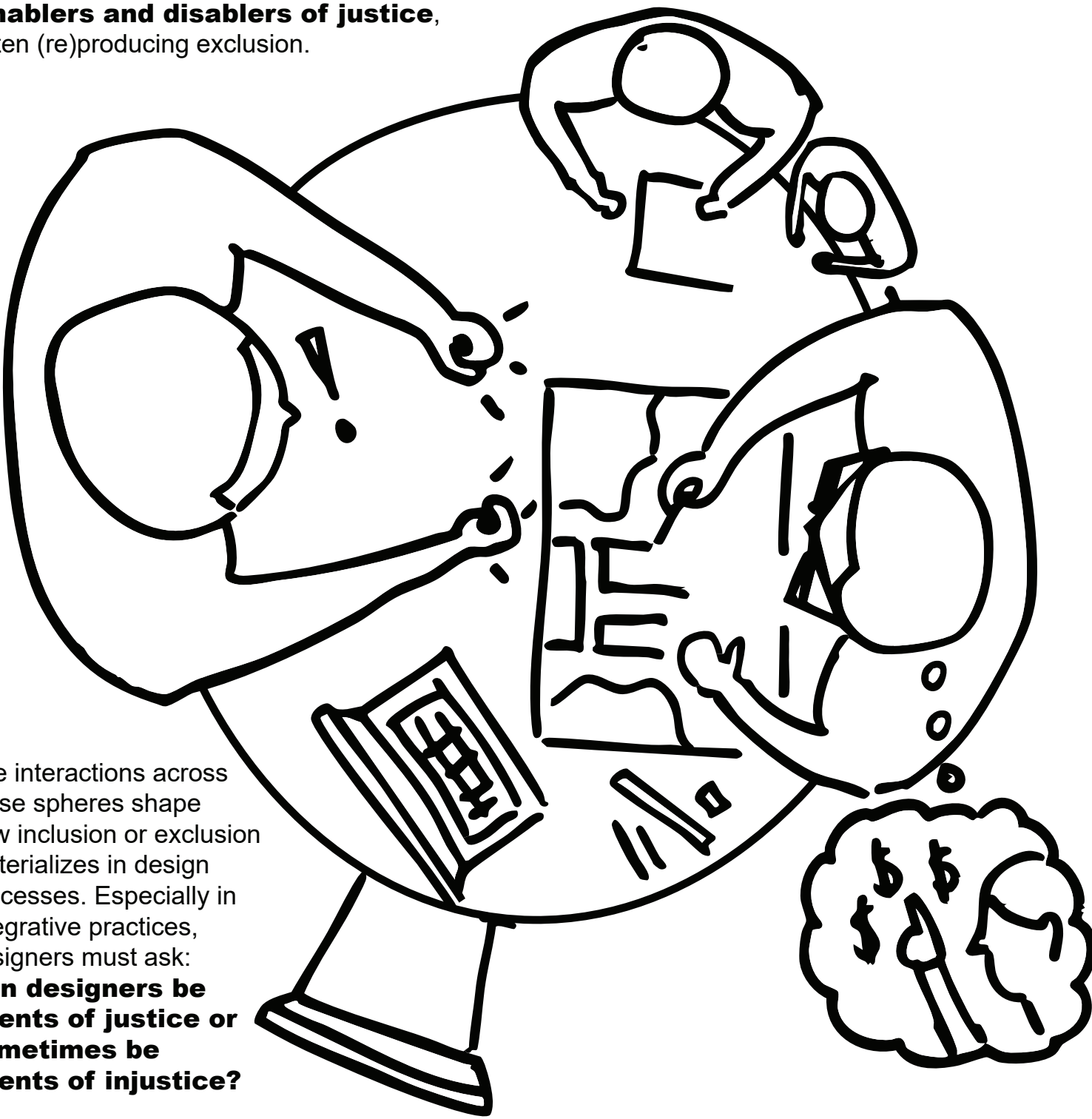
Usually, disclaimers try to disclaim responsibility, to wiggle free from what they set in motion.

This one does the opposite. It embraces responsibility and accountability.

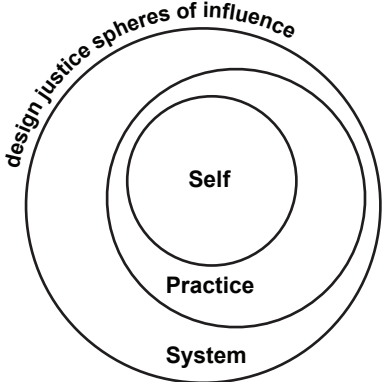
It marks a beginning, not an escape, a means to a means, **an invitation to raise the ethical imperative in spatial design.**

Integration in design is never neutral

This power does not occur in a vacuum. It is shaped by the designer themselves, the mediums and tools they use, and the people and institutions their process engages with. Integration in design is never neutral - it raises ethical concerns for designers as both **enablers and disablers of justice**, often (re)producing exclusion.



The interactions across these spheres shape how inclusion or exclusion materializes in design processes. Especially in integrative practices, designers must ask: **Can designers be agents of justice or sometimes be agents of injustice?**



Considering that designs, the designer and design processes don't operate in vacuums, these spheres of influence can surface possible disparities, factors and biases that creates unfair design processes. The **sphere of the self** - reflects the designer's role, biases, and positionality. The **practice sphere** involves the mediums, methods, and settings through which design takes place. The **system sphere** encompasses collaboration, institutional dynamics, and the broader socio-political context.

This zine exposes the many forces - bias, positionality, mediums, collaboration, and institutional dynamics that shape integrative practice in urban design, revealing how these forces influence what knowledge enters, whose voices are amplified, and which futures are foreclosed.

dialogues with urban designers

this zine emerges from a reflexive position that is both integrator and designer within design processes.

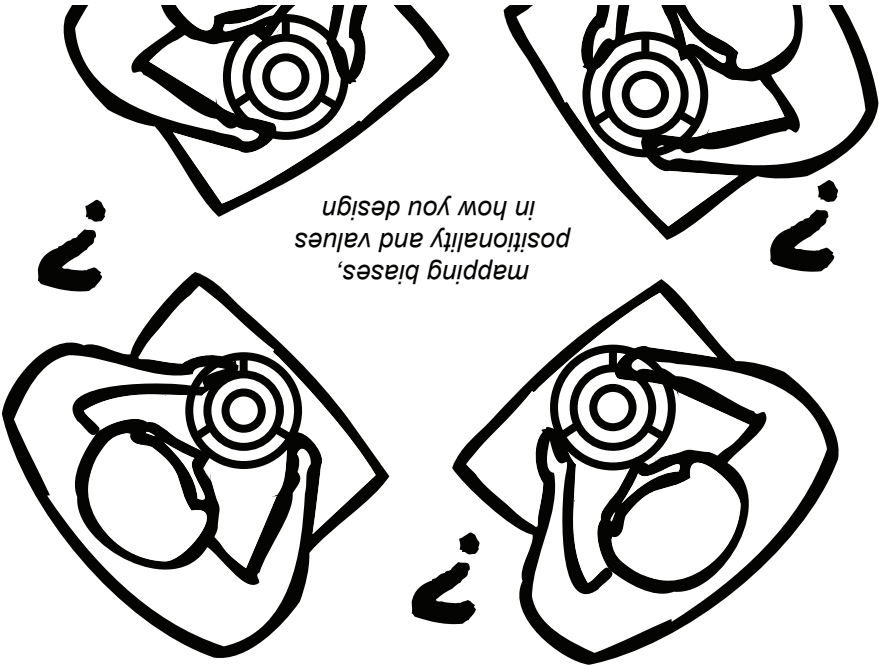
WARNING

INTEGRATION IN DESIGN IS NEVER NEUTRAL

PROCEED WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

An early warning system for urban designers on the possible perils when integrating diverse ways of knowing

Johnathan Subendran 2025



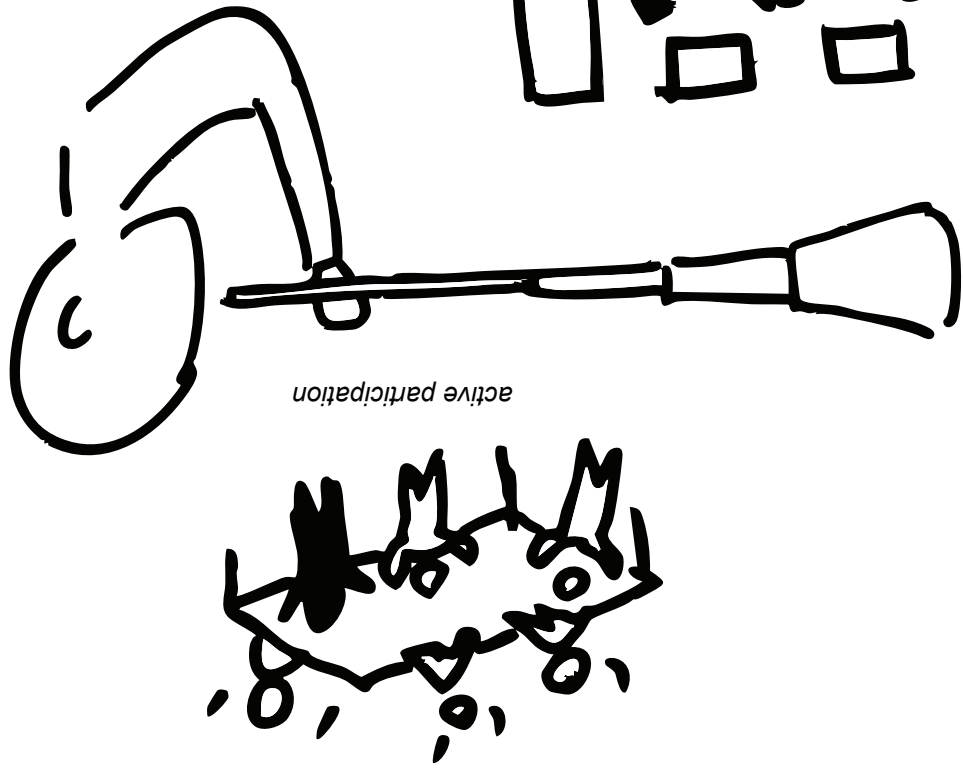
mapping biases, positionality and values in how you design



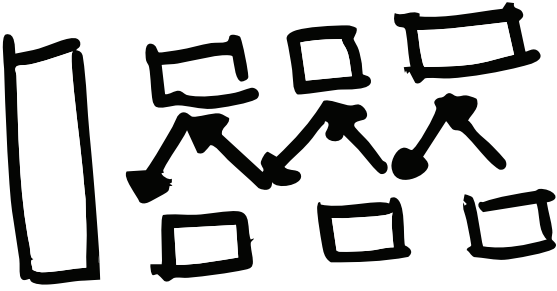
field notes



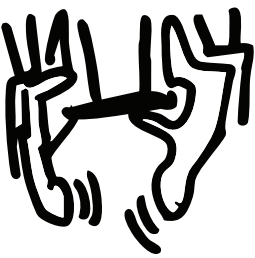
active participation



implementing integration procedures



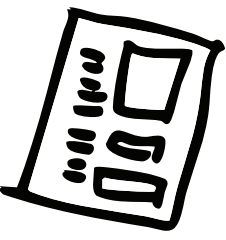
meetings



reports



fact sheets



reflective dialogues



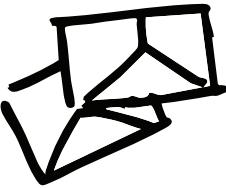
process memos



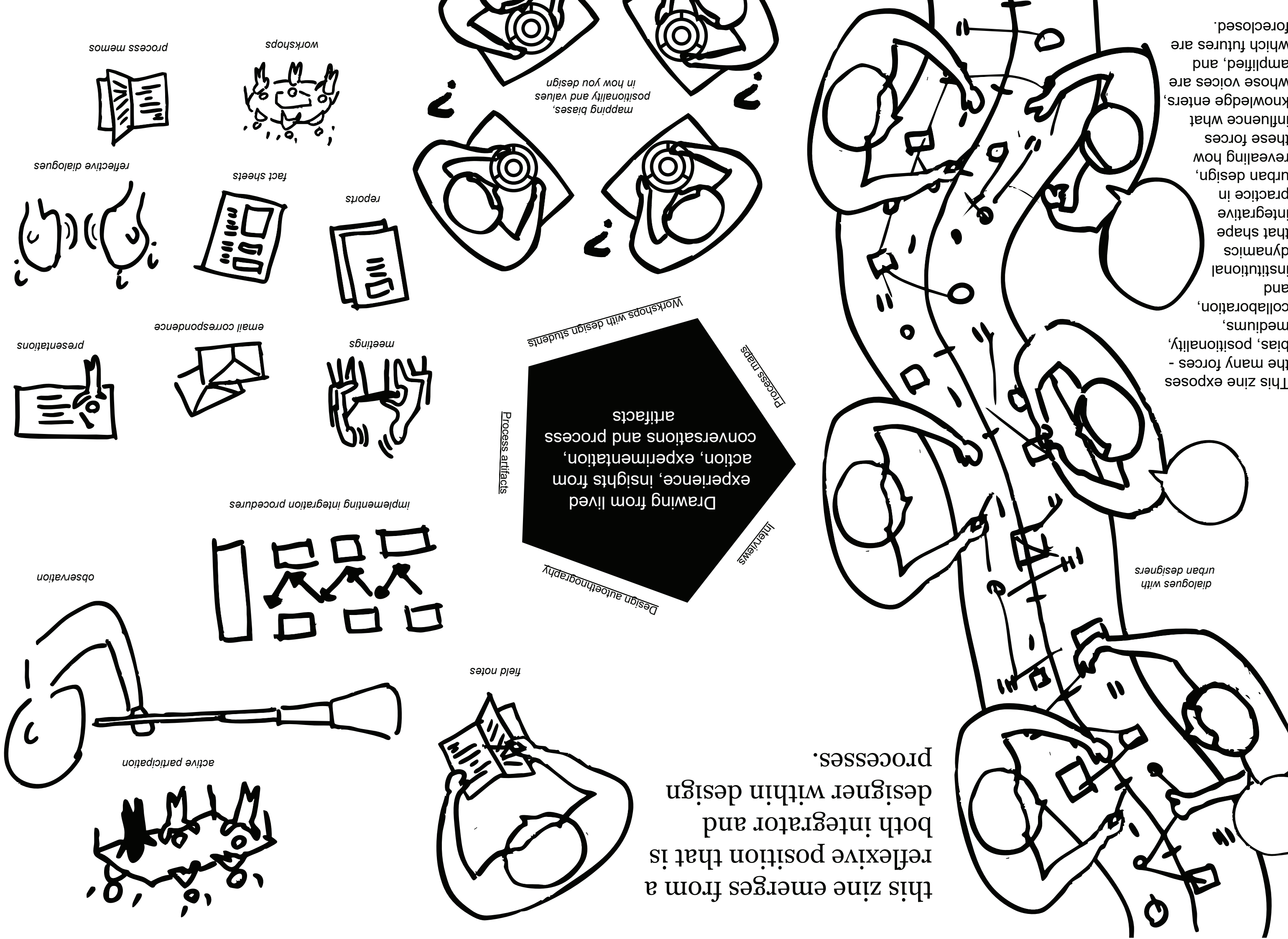
workshops



email correspondence



presentations



Integration lies in the hands of designers, making decisions about which knowledges enter the process, whose perspectives shape space, and which futures are made possible...

Can designers act more ethically and be agents of justice, especially within contested and complex collaborative settings?

The designer's bias and positionality, their choice of methods and settings of integration, and the ecosystem in which they operate make design far from a neutral act. These forces can become fertile ground for design injustice, when processes, roles, and environments exclude or unfairly treat diverse ways of knowing, creating an unequal playing field within collaboration. The integrative role of designers carries a profound responsibility to recognise how their decisions enable or disable justice in practice.

