

Fringe Natures

Collaborative Reflections on Method

by Feeled Lab & Friends

THE FEELED LAB

The FEELED Lab is a feminist environmental humanities field lab at UBC Okanagan, on the unceded territories of the syilx people.

The FEELED Lab asks: what does feminist environmental humanities research look like *in practice, in this particular context*? How can “academic research” itself be a generative site for exploring how feminist, antiracist, anticolonial, queer-, crip- and trans- affirming perspectives can deepen our understanding of *what climate crisis is and how it manifests in place*?


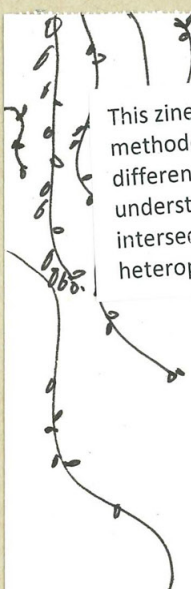
This FEELED Lab work is *research is about research*: what it is, where it is, who does it, what it is for, and how it can be responsive to the most pressing questions of our time.

“FRINGE NATURES”

To do this research, the FEELED Lab convenes a series of gatherings we call “Fringe Natures.” “Fringe natures” is a *figuration* (to borrow Donna Haraway’s term) - which means it is both a real thing (or a real place) in the world, and a metaphor that evokes certain associations. A figuration is always *more-than-metaphorical*.

Since our work on syilx territory largely takes place in the riparian littoral zone, “fringe natures” designates the “real place” of this research: in the ecotone between land and water, with all of its ambivalences, transitions and particular sensations. Metaphorically, this is also where mainstream environmentalism’s marginal or “fringe” perspectives can flourish. At our gatherings, we work to further unpick the frayed edges of colonial mastery, heteropatriarchal dominance, ablist infrastructures that reinforce tired and exclusionary norms and relegate different ways of knowing to the “fringes.”

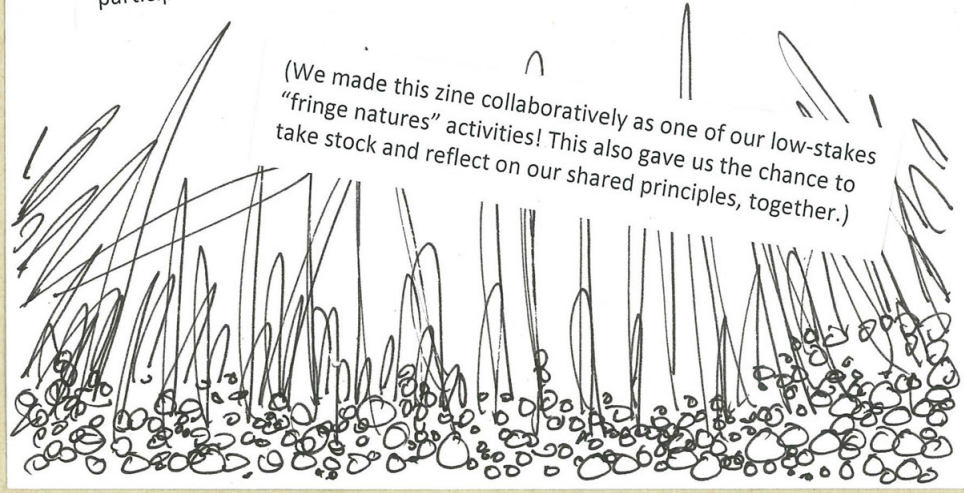
Different ways of knowing are strengthened by paying attention to different lived experiences and the ideas those experiences can generate. What new worlds can we build, dwelling tenderly and courageously at the fringes?



This zine introduces our “fringe natures” research methodology: using informal gatherings of people from different backgrounds *in place*, we come to deeper understanding about environmental issues and their intersection with issues like colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy and ablism.

Cultivating a DIY “make-do” vibe, we use informal conversation, “low stakes” activities and embodied practice (walking, listening, improv, weeding, writing haikus, games) to learn about our own ‘situated knowledges’ – i.e. our different responsibilities, accountabilities, feelings, and relations to these issues. This deepens our collective understanding, too.

Our zine includes contributions from both the FEELED Lab research team and ‘friends of the FEELED Lab’ who have participated in our research. Each page illustrates a key principle of our methodology, or offers a reflection on how participants responded to or engaged with these methods.



(We made this zine collaboratively as one of our low-stakes “fringe natures” activities! This also gave us the chance to take stock and reflect on our shared principles, together.)

"hanging threads left loose

OR

formed into tassels or twists"

Fringe Natures

"the border or outer edges"

When we come out together
for a
FEEled Lab Fringe Natures
gathering our
minds and bodies
are free to slip out of
whatever roles and
expectations
we carry.

The "lab" is outside
wherever we choose
to
be present
and
form a community
and our work is also
rest,
healing,
and play.

We don't have
a set path.
Our research is an
ongoing practice
or mode of
feeling out
and embodying
ways to be
with
and
open
to
each other
and the
places
we
inhabit.

community

nourishment



OUR RESEARCH HAS "YOGHURT POT AESTHETICS"



↓ ↓ ↓
AT OUR ZINE MAKING
EVENT WE MADE TEA
FROM HERBS WE FOUND IN
THE FERAL GARDEN
OUTSIDE THE LAB.
WE LEARNED ABOUT
EDIBLE THINGS AND
DISCUSSED ETHICS OF
FORAGING - AND
HAD A DELICIOUS
CUPPA! (WE
EVEN ADDED
TARRAGON
RISKY!)

THIS MEANS WE OFTEN RESEARCH,
CREATE + SHARE USING READY-TO-HAND
MATERIALS - LIKE YOGHURT POTS!

THIS IS "LOW CARBON" BUT IT ALSO
ENCOURAGES CREATIVITY AND "SAFE
RISK TAKING" - LEAVING YOUR COMFORT ZONE.
IT IS OK TO MAKE A MISTAKE!

(THIS ZINE ALSO USES A YOGURT-POT
AESTHETICS APPROACH!)

how do we know that our events are or embody feminist, anticolonial, anti-racist, queer, and crip perspectives?

A FEELING

members, participants, and FEELed friends have described a certain feeling that cocoons our time together. This feeling, we think, is assembled through many actions that centre these perspectives. Thus, these perspectives swirl around us as we gather - shaping and guiding our conversations. Here are a few of our actions:

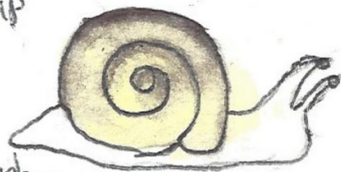
WELCOME



We work hard to create an open and inviting space. We build on this environment through constant reflection and ongoing community relationship building.



We hold space for and share our tears (and all our other emotions).



We embrace slowness. We try not to rush things - we try not to rush each other. We always give space to post-pone, to cancel, to leave when we need, and to be present when we gather.

Imagining

queer

Feminist Futures





When we organize a research event, we ask: Who will show up? What can we do to make room for people who might not have shown up? How can we offer better kinds of welcome? How can we reduce barriers to (financial, physical, mental, cultural) accessibility?

We are not always doing this perfectly. Learning from "who shows up" is part of our research, folded into our research events.



I was born amidst concrete & pollution, ergo no personal connection to nature!

In Fringe Natures, I met people who KNEW THINGS ABOUT THE PLACE WE WERE IN and places they had come from. People who could name different kinds of pines & I would just go "wow! big tree so nice!" Were I felt like an intruder in nature, I felt at home among people.

On hikes, I always like to lag a bit behind & hear the people's conversation blend into the sound of the wind & the river. People sitting around a campfire like the stones around the firewood that keeps the flame contained.

Mark C. Long, in "Close Reading at the End of Time," offers a new interpretation of close reading in the context of literature pedagogy as not only reading close to the text but reading close to others. He envisions the classroom as a collective site for the "practice of reading in proximity to others [which] is a socially situated, radically contingent, and potentially more consequential activity than the disciplinary routine of circulating scholarly or professional "readings" that advance a particular theory or a demonstration of its claims" (80).

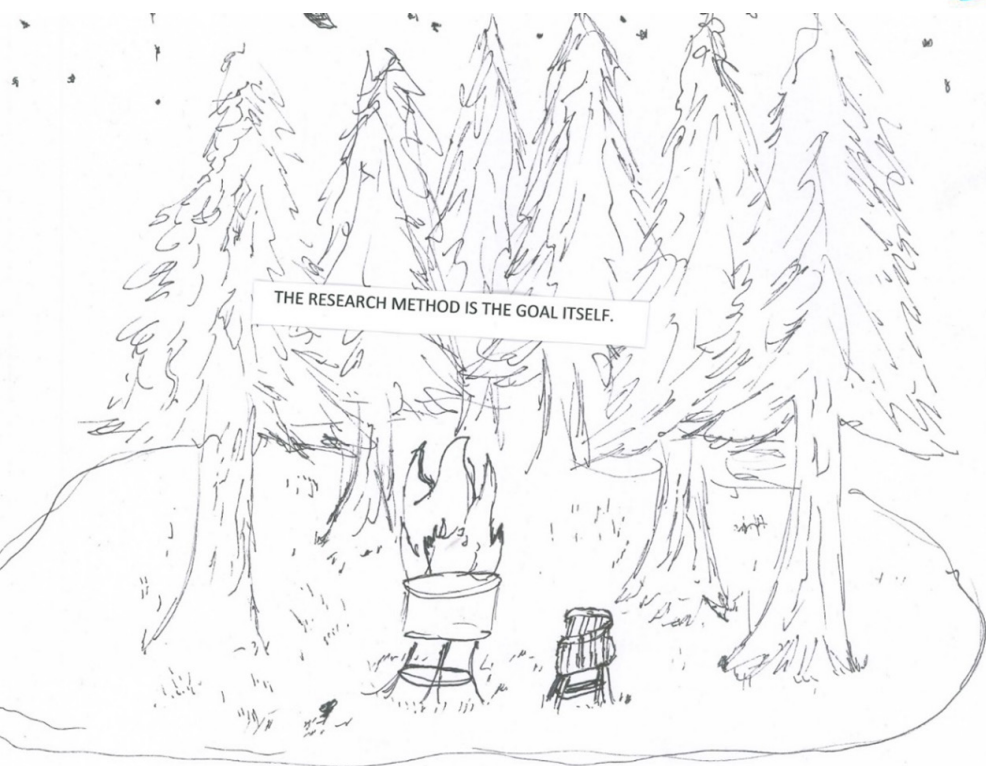
Fringe Natures is close reading: an effort to make meaning & explicate difficulties & their sources & implications regarding the environments we exist in & our relation to them.

Fringe Natures is different from a solitary hike or camping with friends.

The reciprocity that emerges is between me, the collective, & the process of our interactions with the environment.

The collective is only loosely connected. The vulnerabilities are "low-stakes" & engagements with nature are semi-structured. For me, who sees nature as always mediated by community, a new perception of nature often arises as well. My personal research question becomes: when & how does belonging begin or end?

On a hike, seeing a small stone bridge over a creek is idyllic & beautiful but a wind turbine is jarring & out-of-place, yet both are equally man-made. Sense of belonging—to a community or an environment—tells much more about me than my surroundings. Fringe Natures allows a close reading of what it means to belong. A close reading of ME.





You passed me
I circled back had an
ear full of water from
someplace else where we were alone
together & is passed you slowly it all
happened backwards kept my eye still I blinked
you pass me kept shorter intervals as I let
each opening between

We research accessibility in environmental humanities
practice by experimenting with different modes of research activities.
We walk at a slow pace, on accessible pathways, outside. We meet online.
We ask participants what they need. We offer alternative and multiple
modes of participation.

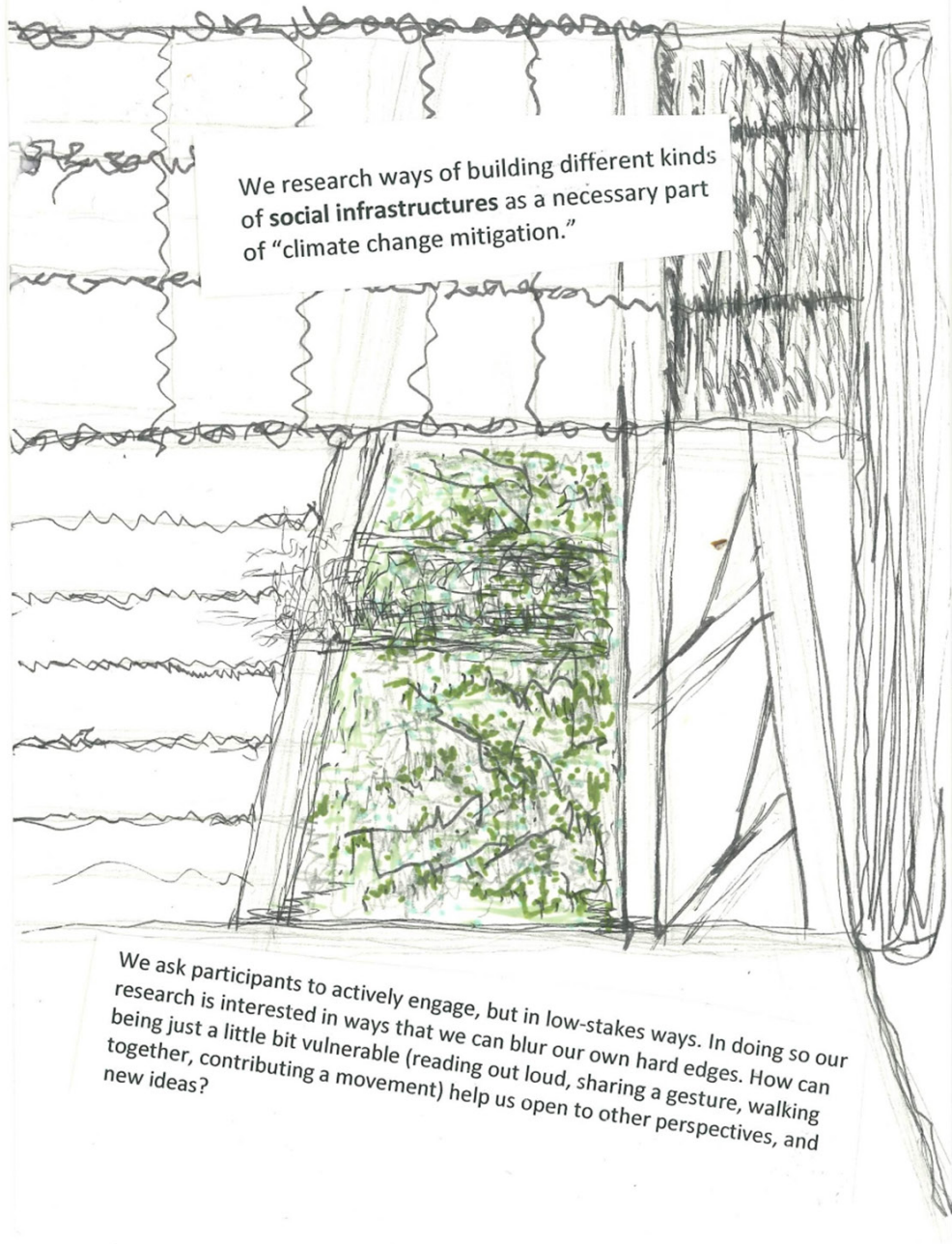
A LOW BARRIER TO ENTRY



LOW STAKES VULNERABILITY

It is mildly intimidating to join people you do not really know, in a park you have never been to, to try something semi-new. As I walked towards Munson Pond, there was a warm, dull thud in my chest and flutters in my stomach. I was apprehensive, but not deterred.

The FEELED Lab excels at low stakes vulnerability. The Fringe Natures event series gently nudges you out of your comfort zone to reacquaint you with the spaces we (co)exist in and learn with. The learning we do is experienced through our bodies as we honour these feelings of discomfort to build community. Fringe Natures does not ask for too much of you, but we share tender moments. We embrace vulnerability as we offer bits of ourselves - our voices, our poems, our hums of agreement - to each other and to the spaces we inhabit.



We research ways of building different kinds of **social infrastructures** as a necessary part of "climate change mitigation."

We ask participants to actively engage, but in low-stakes ways. In doing so our research is interested in ways that we can blur our own hard edges. How can being just a little bit vulnerable (reading out loud, sharing a gesture, walking together, contributing a movement) help us open to other perspectives, and new ideas?

• REST •

• CARE •

• SUPPORT •

Something sad and unexpected happened. I can't organize the event we planned.

You need to take care of yourself and your family. We can do it another time!



ZOOM

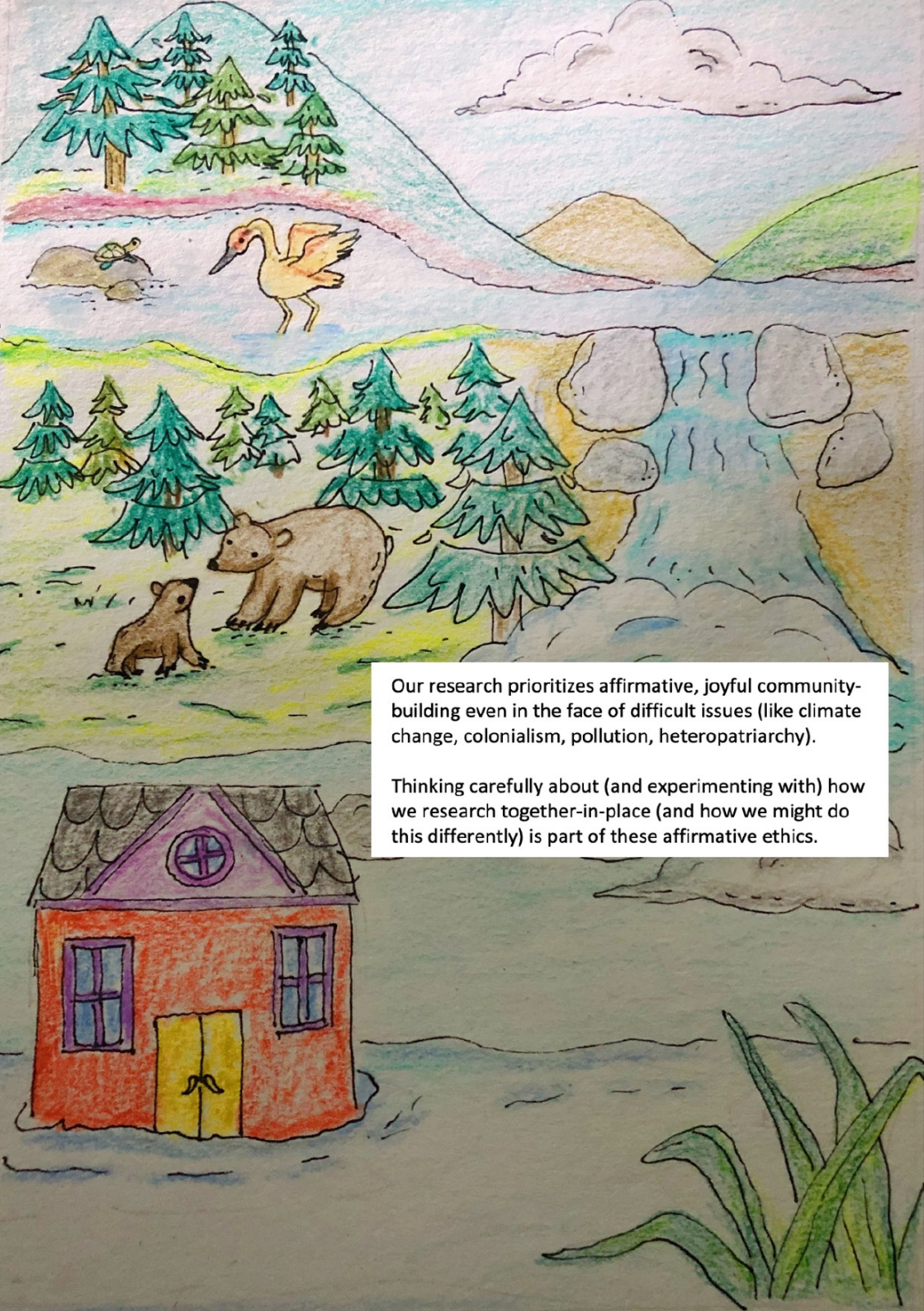


ZOOM

CHAT

• TELLING EACH OTHER WHAT WE NEED •

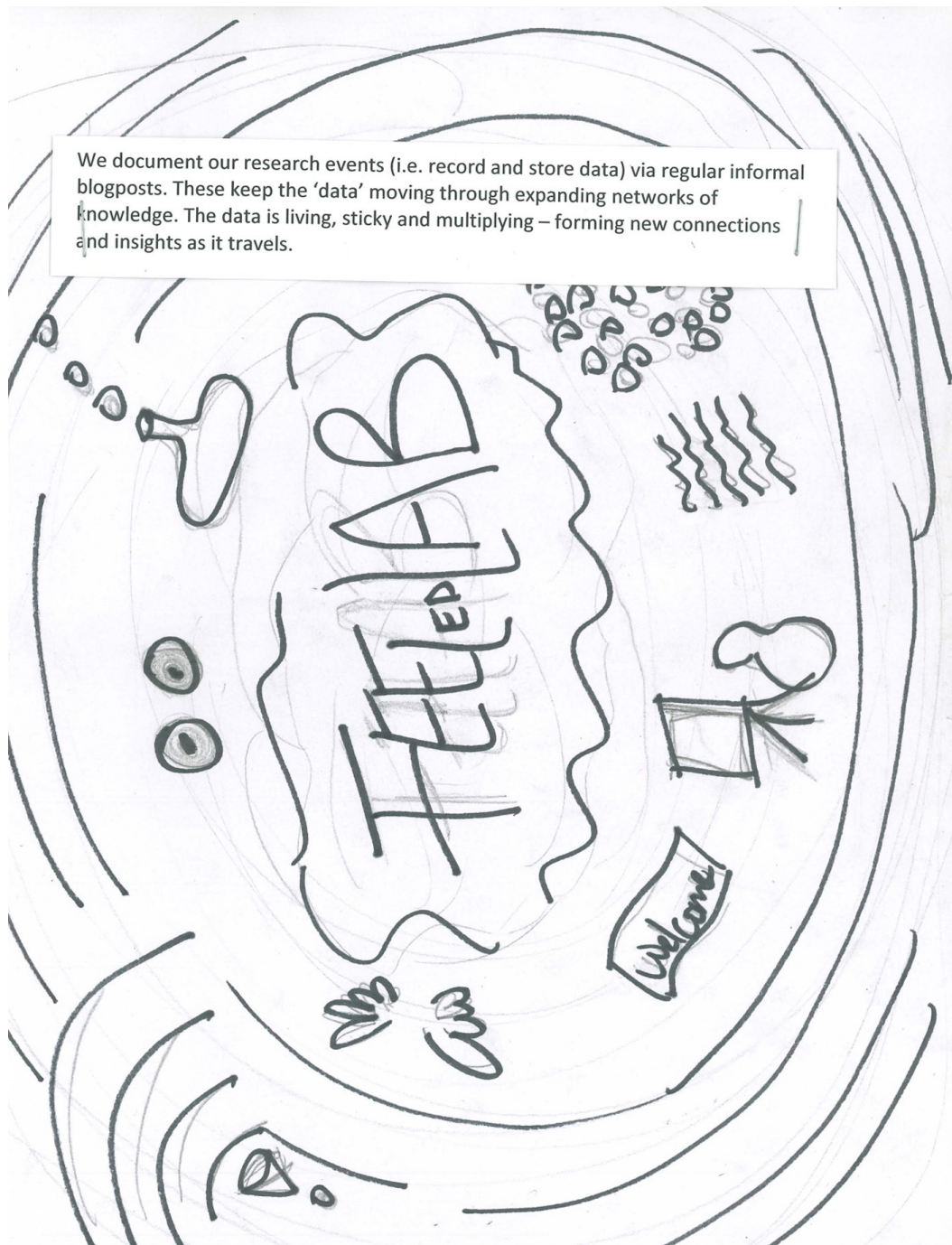
Our research is slow and responsive. Care-ful process is more important than predetermined outputs.

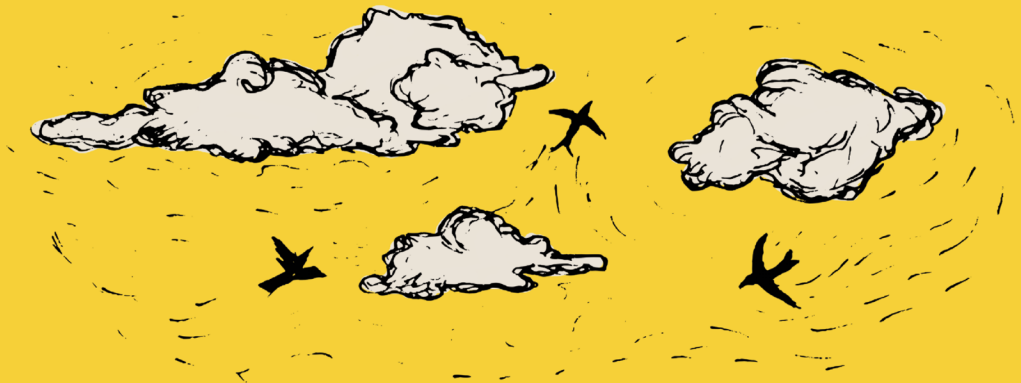


Our research prioritizes affirmative, joyful community-building even in the face of difficult issues (like climate change, colonialism, pollution, heteropatriarchy).

Thinking carefully about (and experimenting with) how we research together-in-place (and how we might do this differently) is part of these affirmative ethics.

We document our research events (i.e. record and store data) via regular informal blogposts. These keep the 'data' moving through expanding networks of knowledge. The data is living, sticky and multiplying – forming new connections and insights as it travels.





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some plants

This zine was produced on the unceded territories of the syilx people during a rainy summer solstice season in June, 2022 for the DIY methods 2022 conference organized by the Low Carbon Research Methods Group.

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