

POURING OUT, POURING IN



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Mapping Women's Work

Ailie Rutherford, Caroline Gausden and Louise Lawson

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### Mapping Women's Work

Artist Ailie Rutherford has been working with Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) to visualise the complex nature of work and care for many women. The Pouring Out, Pouring In exhibition shares prints and other outcomes from the Mapping Women's Work workshop series at GWL. Building on a University of Glasgow study, detailed below, the women involved have mapped out their multiple paid and unpaid roles, thinking together about how a more equitable economic system might look.

The work is funded by the Nuffield Foundation an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation.

The University of Glasgow project 'Women in multiple low-paid employment: pathways between work, care and health' (2020-2024) is the first to study the nature and extent of women's multiple low paid employment (MLPE) in the UK. It examines the relationships between MLPE, caring responsibilities and health and well-being. Using mixed methods, it includes the analysis of three large-scale UK representative survey datasets, and in-depth interviews (105) with women who are in multiple low-paid employment by their own definition.

Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) is the only Accredited Museum in the UK dedicated to women's lives, histories and achievements, with a Lending Library, archive collections, innovative exhibitions programme, events and learning opportunities.

## Pouring Out, Pouring In

A conversation between Caroline Gausden Development Worker for Programming and Curating at Glasgow Women's Library, Louise Lawson, Lead Researcher on the project and Ailie Rutherford, project Artist.

**Caroline:** Louise – can you tell us a little bit more about the research project that led to this exhibition at GWL, what was your hunch in carrying out the study?

**Louise:** The project ('women in multiple low-paid employment: pathways between work, care and health') was inspired by previous research I had carried out at the University of Glasgow, primarily in the context of poverty and inequality in low-income urban areas. Over many years I talked to families living through major urban regeneration on social housing estates about their lives and the things that matter. A common experience, especially for women, was juggling many responsibilities involving low-paid work, navigating the complicated social security system, dealing with family and care responsibilities, and sometimes managing difficult life circumstances and health issues. For the project we decided to focus specifically on multiple low-paid employment as this is something that hasn't attracted much research interest as an aspect of women's lives, yet in the current economic and political climate it is ever more timely and important. Our application to the Nuffield Foundation for funding in 2020 was a long and rigorous process, but was successful, and the project was funded for three years, giving us the scope



to really dig deep. Over a two year period I carried out interviews with 105 women who were currently working or had worked in the past two or more jobs, low paid by their own definition, and we covered all aspects of work, life, care and health. It was a privilege to access these stories. Ten of the women from the project have been involved in working with Ailie as co-creators in developing the exhibition alongside five others drawn from Glasgow Women's Library's network.

**Caroline:** And did you find anything surprising?

**Louise:** Yes, lots of what we found out was surprising but also unsurprising! The sheer hard work of many women working six or seven days a week, early starts, late nights, stretched hours, but still “skint”, “working for nothing” and “squeezing it all in”. Many felt their work lacked recognition and value: “we are just numbers”, “I’m absolutely done in”, “one day I will not have to suffer this”. Metaphors were used frequently to denote the relentless nature of multiple low-paid work for many women - the “juggling act”, feeling like a “hamster in a wheel”, “on a “rollercoaster” and “forever on a loop” spring to mind. On the other hand there were stories of joy and determination with many women finding fulfilment from their work, seeing it as a route to something better, and planning to do something different in the future. It is a project that aims to make a difference to women's working lives.

**Caroline:** Yes – and projects that aim to make a difference are exactly the kind that we like to welcome in our space

at GWL! From my perspective and given GWL's history as a space founded by creatives, working with artists is important to produce different forms of knowledge and viewpoints but I'm wondering Louise if you could say something about why you decided to work with GWL and incorporate artistic responses?

**Louise:** From the project's inception, Glasgow Women's Library seemed an obvious fit for collaborative working: a library dedicated to women's lives and achievements, and who are recognised as experts in curation and community engagement. The women's library is also a beautiful building, a unique resource, and a safe space with a vibrant yet intimate vibe.

The project aims to ‘give voice’ to women and to provide opportunities beyond traditional academic outputs. We decided to incorporate an artistic response to engage women in a different form of expression, using creative techniques, to generate interesting and thought-provoking art about their lives; something visual, shared, tangible. As well as enabling consciousness-raising around the complex livelihoods of women with experience of multiple work, the collaboration was seen as a way of developing an informal network of women sharing similar experiences to generate possible solidarity networks. I was keen to see the collaboration build on the positive aspects of women's lives and achievements in the context of intractable social and economic issues, and often difficult personal circumstances.

We hope the artworks and the research findings will have mutual and synergistic effects by raising the issue of

women's multiple work and bringing it to the attention of the wider public, policy makers and those in a position to bring about change and influence. It may also be the case that collaboration itself is an outcome, where the relationship between the artist (whose work is often equally precarious!) and researcher opens specific opportunities to learn, reflect and develop new ways of thinking.

**Caroline:** Ailie, your work with the Feminist Exchange Network (FEN) made you a good fit for a project that seeks to critically understand women's work, particularly where it is multiple, low paid and consequently involving a complicated juggling act. Can you say a little bit more about what motivates you to look at these areas of economics and labour in your artistic practice?

**Ailie:** My work with FEN (a women-led<sup>1</sup> collective I initiated in South Glasgow) is centred on looking at how feminist economic theory relates to the lived experiences of women and other marginalised genders. The work began in 2015 born from a need to better understand the economic doctrine that dominates our lives, in order to conceptualise alternatives. In a lot of ways, it's work that is fuelled by both rage and hopefulness – as well as thinking critically about the way things are, there's a hopefulness that we can make things better.

Feminist economics begins by recognising that the whole capitalist economy is built on this concept of a rational,

<sup>1</sup> women and other marginalised genders inclusive of transgender and intersex women

autonomous man. Centuries of macho thinking have left us with an economy that values violence and exploitation over everything else. Alongside this, there's an assumption that anyone identifying as a woman is naturally meant to be a caregiver, destined for endless undervalued work. This doesn't just create unfair and unrealistic gender norms but also devalues crucial work done by people of all genders: caring, community building, creative projects, fighting for justice - basically, everything that maintains and sustains us. So it's no wonder so many women find themselves stuck, as Louise says "working for nothing."

While we continue to work within a system that devalues feminised work, the need to keep fighting for change feels more urgent than ever.

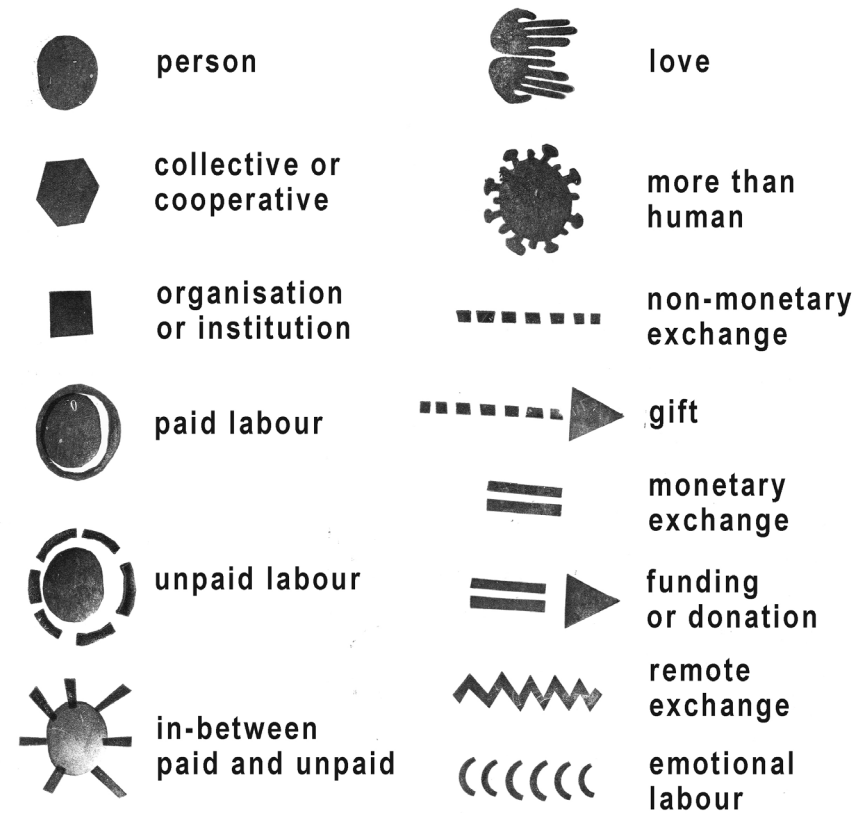
**Caroline:** Yes! So how did this translate practically? What did you and project participants do together?

**Ailie:** The block print mapping process we used in the workshops I initially designed with groups of women in Govanhill, Glasgow during a residency. We co-designed a set of symbols to visualise and value the work women were doing - to understand its strength, the networks women are constantly building to support their undervalued labour – recognising what works, and thinking about what could be different. These symbols have evolved over time as the conversations grew. During the women's library workshops, the women added a symbol for 'enough' using gold ink – to convey enough love, enough pay, feeling good enough, and putting a limit on unpaid labour. It's a process

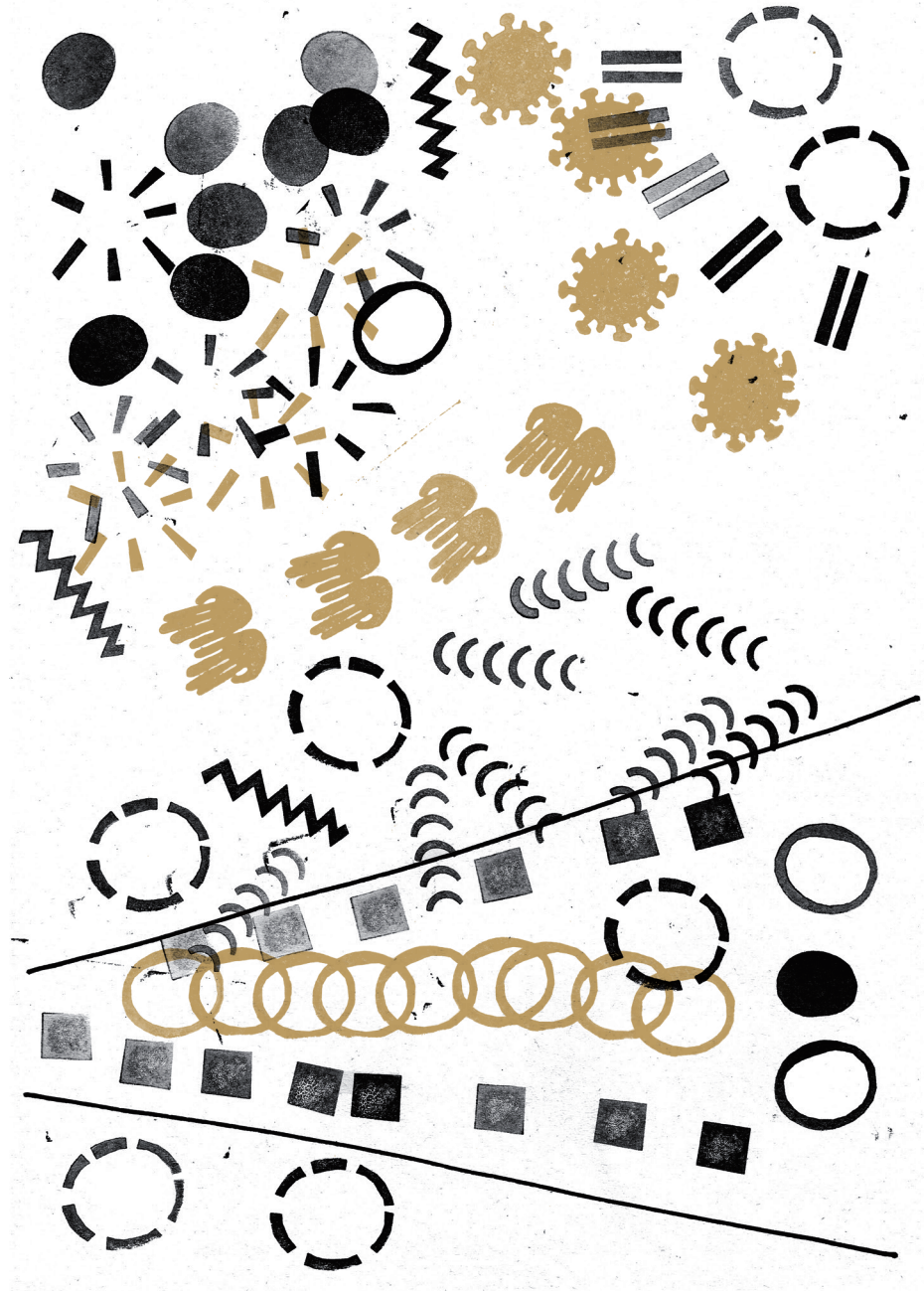
designed to shift our perspective on the economy and our place within it.

Many of the women who came to the workshops at Glasgow Women's Library talked of their passion for the work they do, the fierce love they have for their work and the things they care for, the constantly creative ways they navigate a system stacked against us as women. It's this passion that keeps us going against the odds, continuing to creatively juggle and organize and make the almost impossible keep on happening.

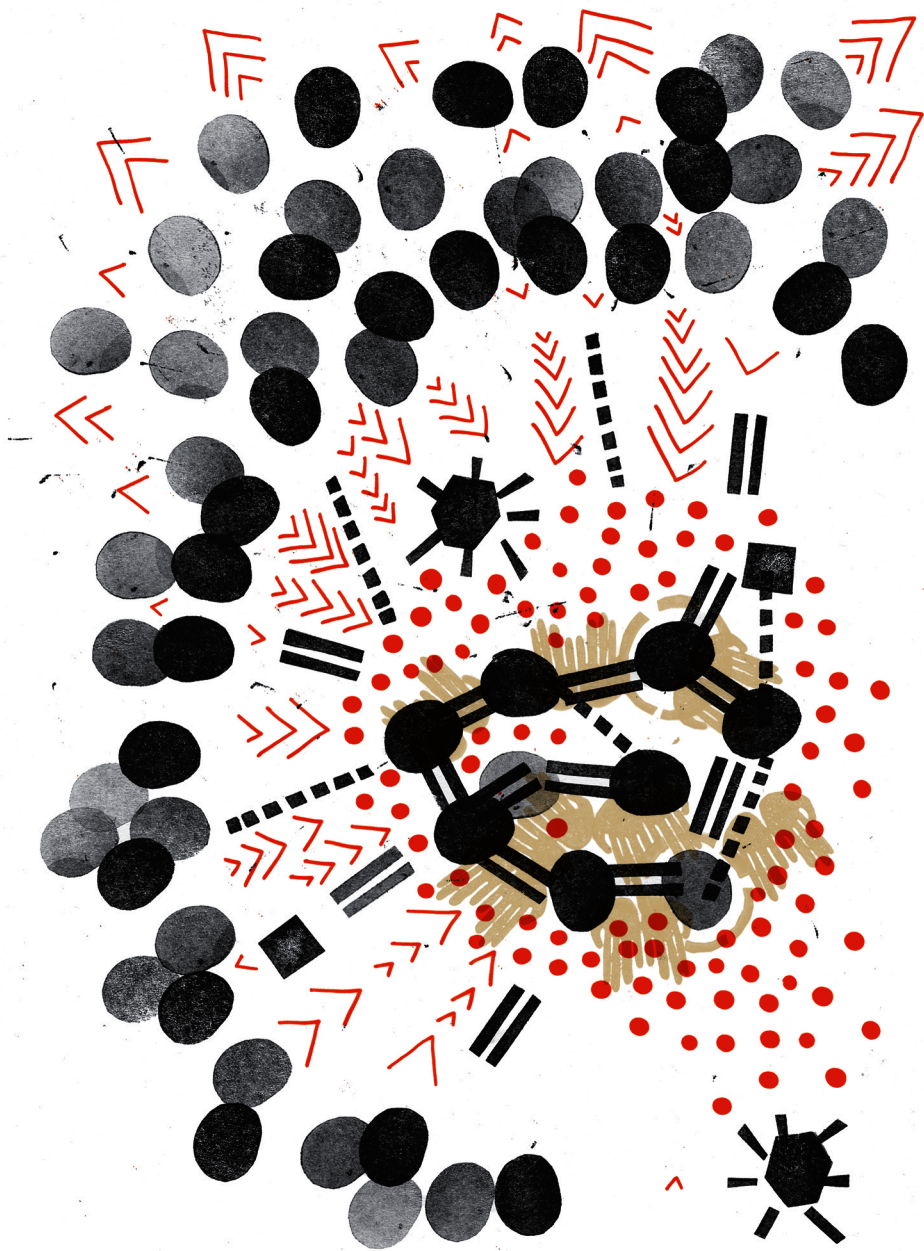
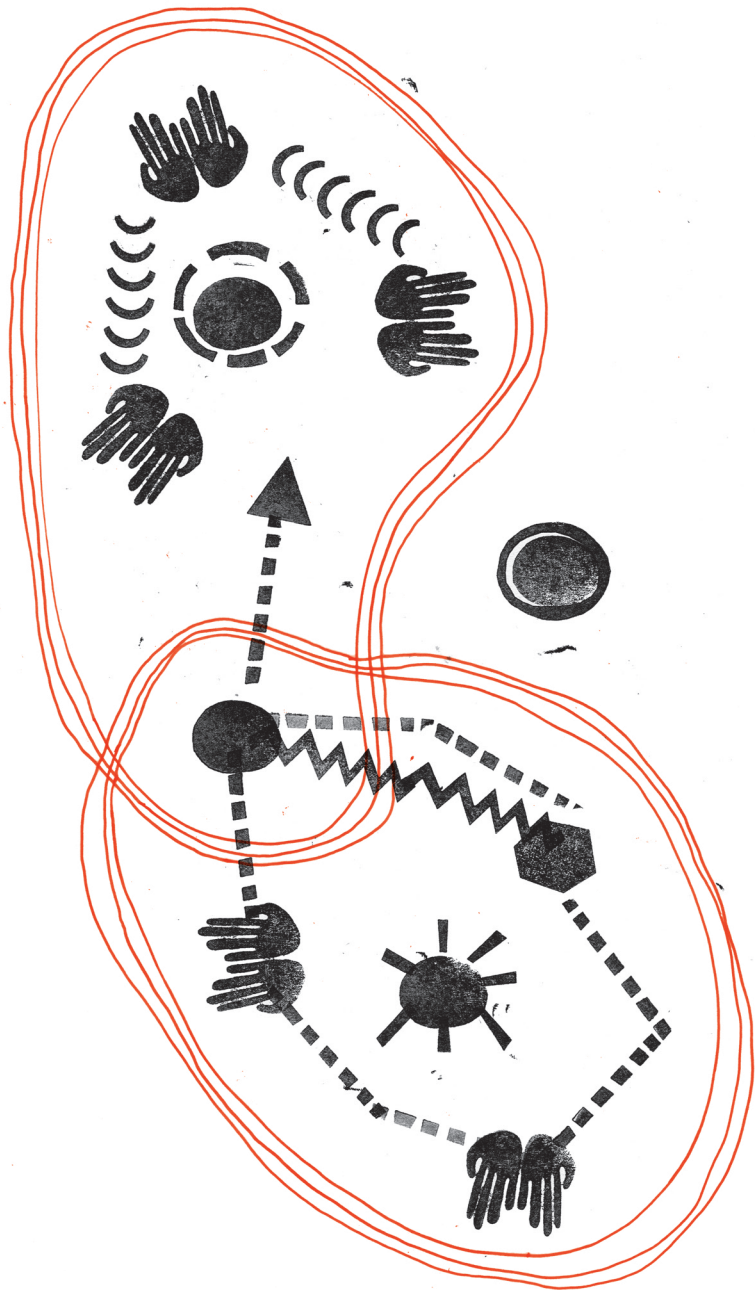
Conversations with workshop participants often circled back to imagining a better system - like sharing resources equally or having a universal basic income and how those simple systems could lead us to some profound changes. The collaborative maps, crafted by women working together at round tables, outline how we could live and work together differently.

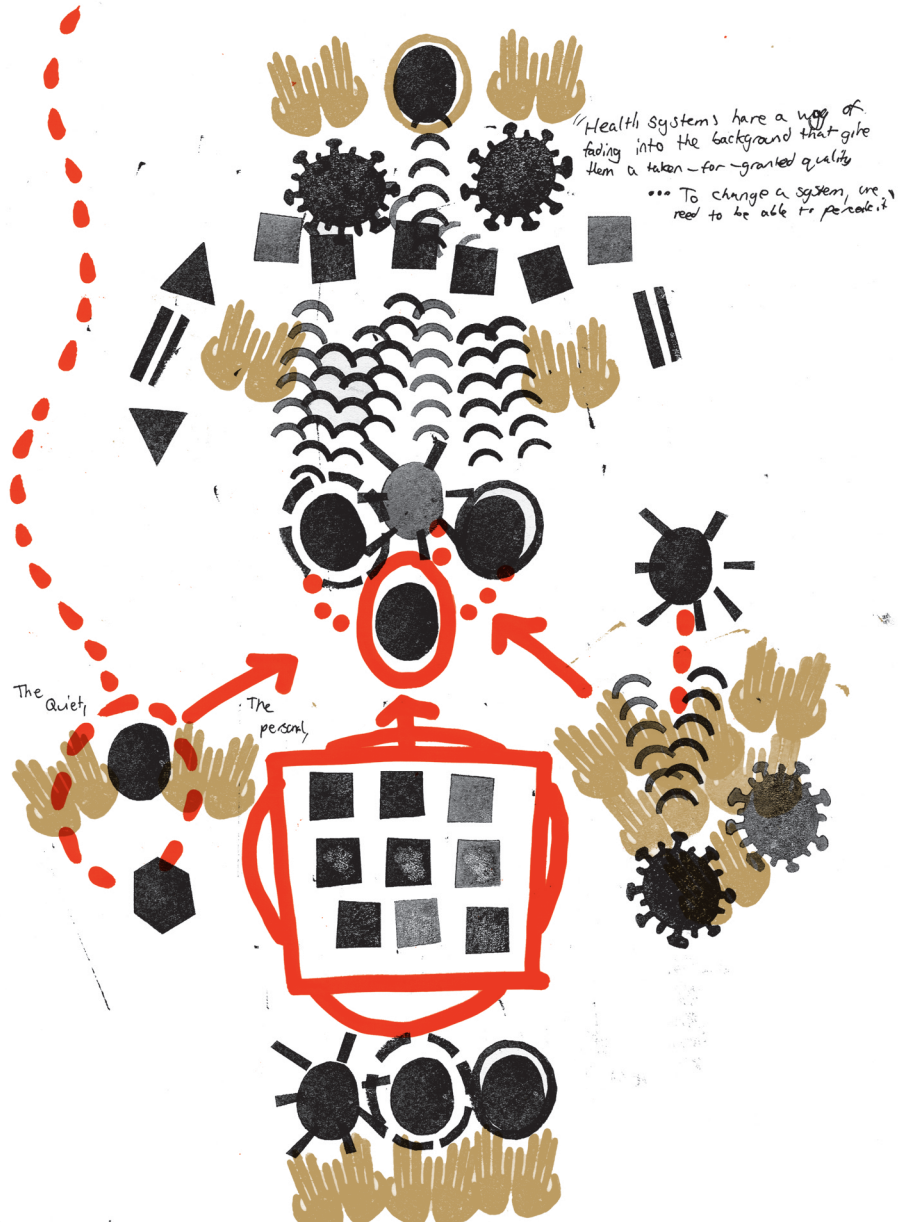


The images that follow were created during the Mapping Women's Work workshops at Glasgow Women's Library led by artist Ailie Rutherford. See page 52 for a list of contributors.









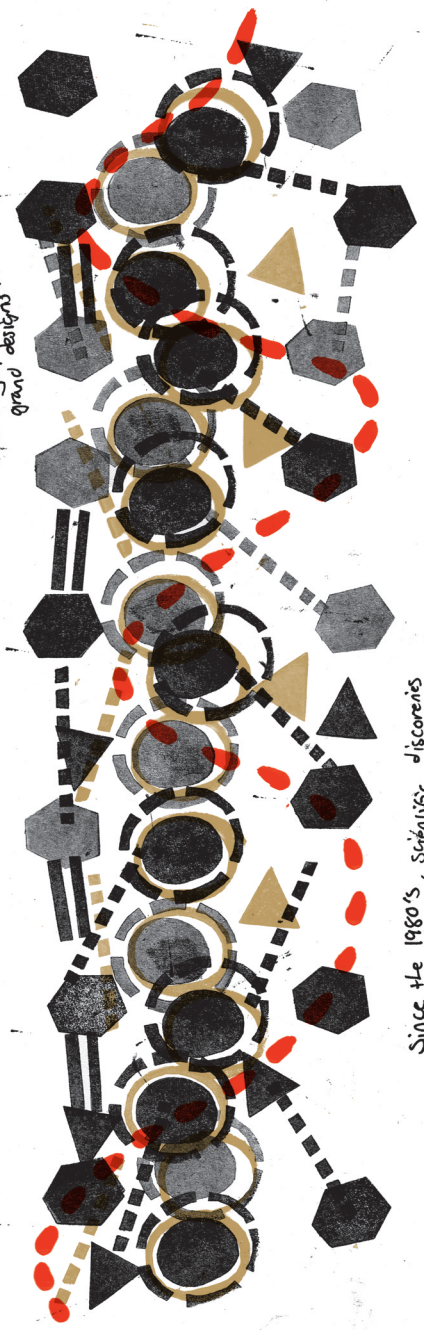
Health Systems have a way of fading into the background that give them a taken-for-granted quality  
 ... To change a system, we need to be able to perceive it

The quiet  
 The present

"All the times people have said, you're so busy, you're so productive, now I wish I could do what you do, you must be really slammed, now I know life is crazy, right?"

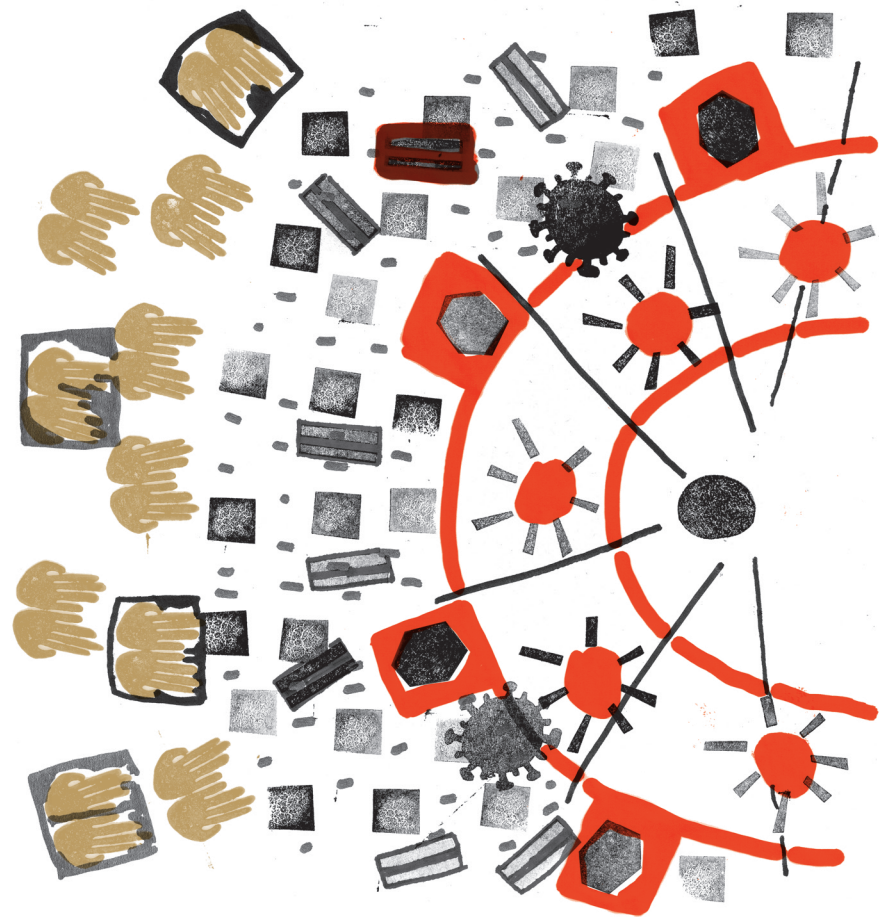
Nature evolves by paying attention to present needs & opportunities - working-piece-meet-after, than in grand designs

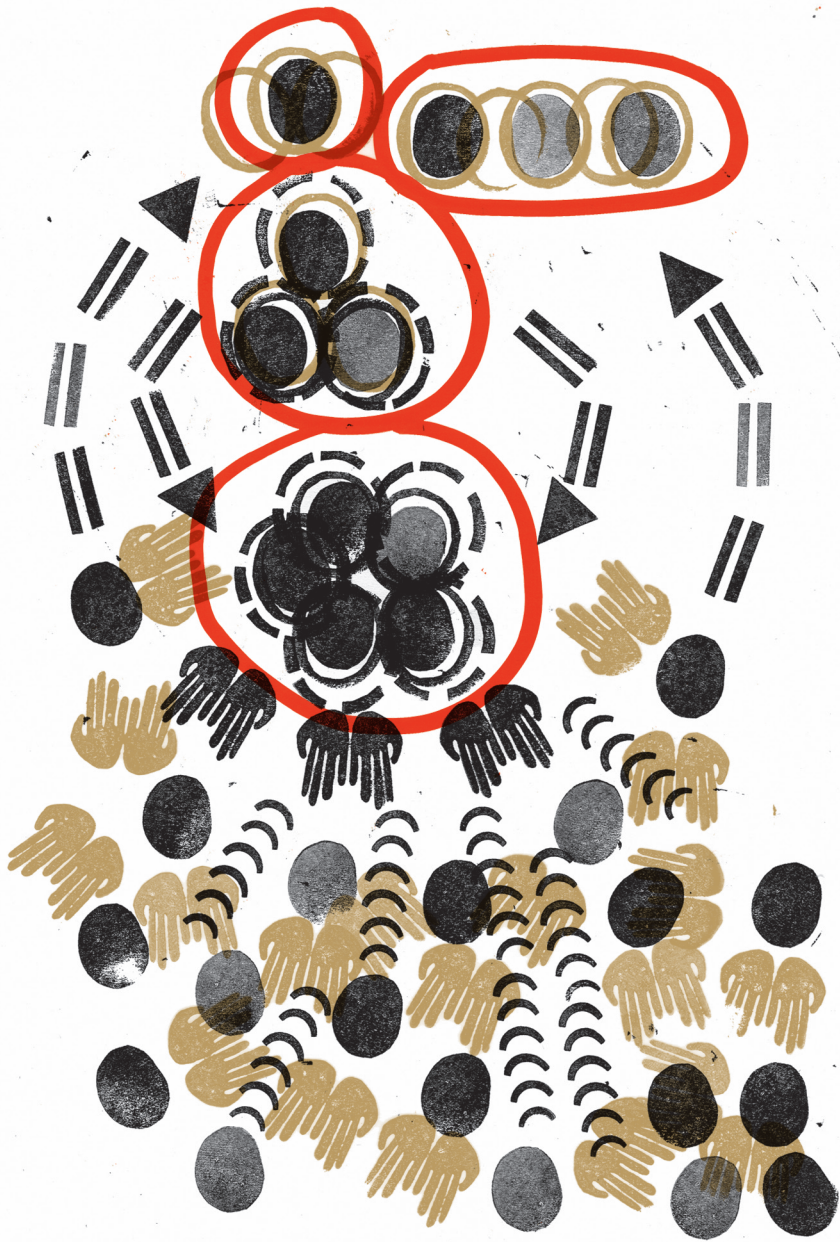
CHANGING: From do less harm, to leave things better.



Since the 1980's, scientific discourses have confirmed the proposition that no organism is truly autonomous... [rather] a web of interdependent ecosystems.





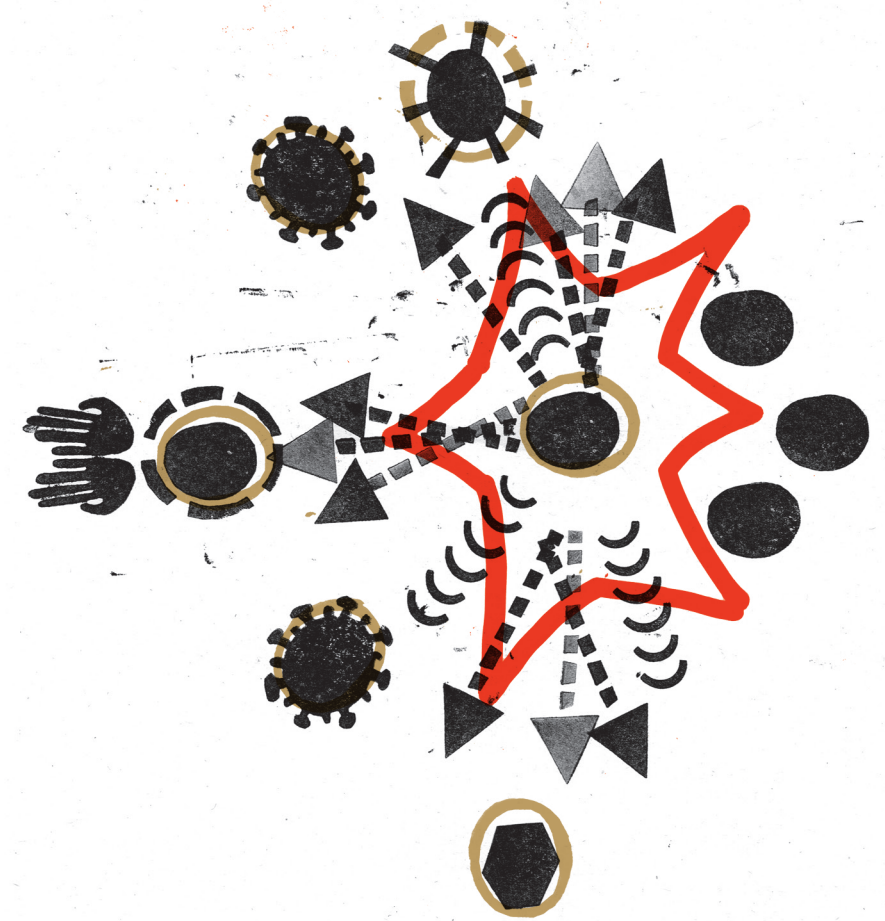
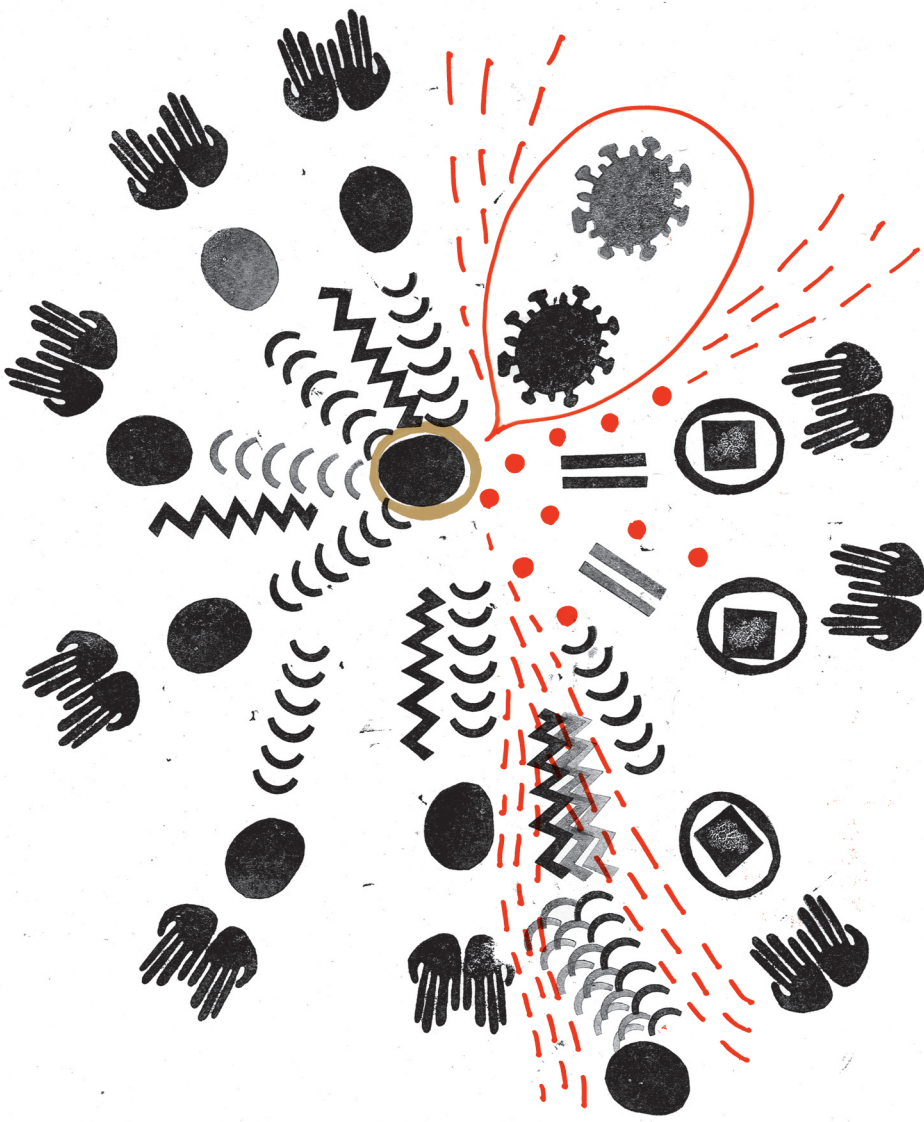


"Our world is one in which carelessness reigns"  
 The Care Manifesto



"The skill of the carer  
 lies in knowing how to  
 contain their own emotions while  
 remaining present, and being able to  
 recognise the person beyond the frailty  
 it is a deceptively demanding task, and is a  
 form of emotional labour which has to draw  
 deeply on the carer's life experience and world view  
 it can only be sustained by strong relationships  
 with colleagues or managers"  
 Labours of Love - The Crisis of Care





relationship

friends  
and  
family

personal growth  
&  
innovation



can anything?  
→ can creativity  
still be  
fulfilling?  
→ does monetary  
pressure inhibit  
or inspire creativity?  
and enriching?

self-imposed  
academic pressure  
university  
uncomfortable  
about the future

stress  
work  
load  
mental  
trauma  
lack of support  
random

redefine

# The Ideal

university

friends + family

creativity

work

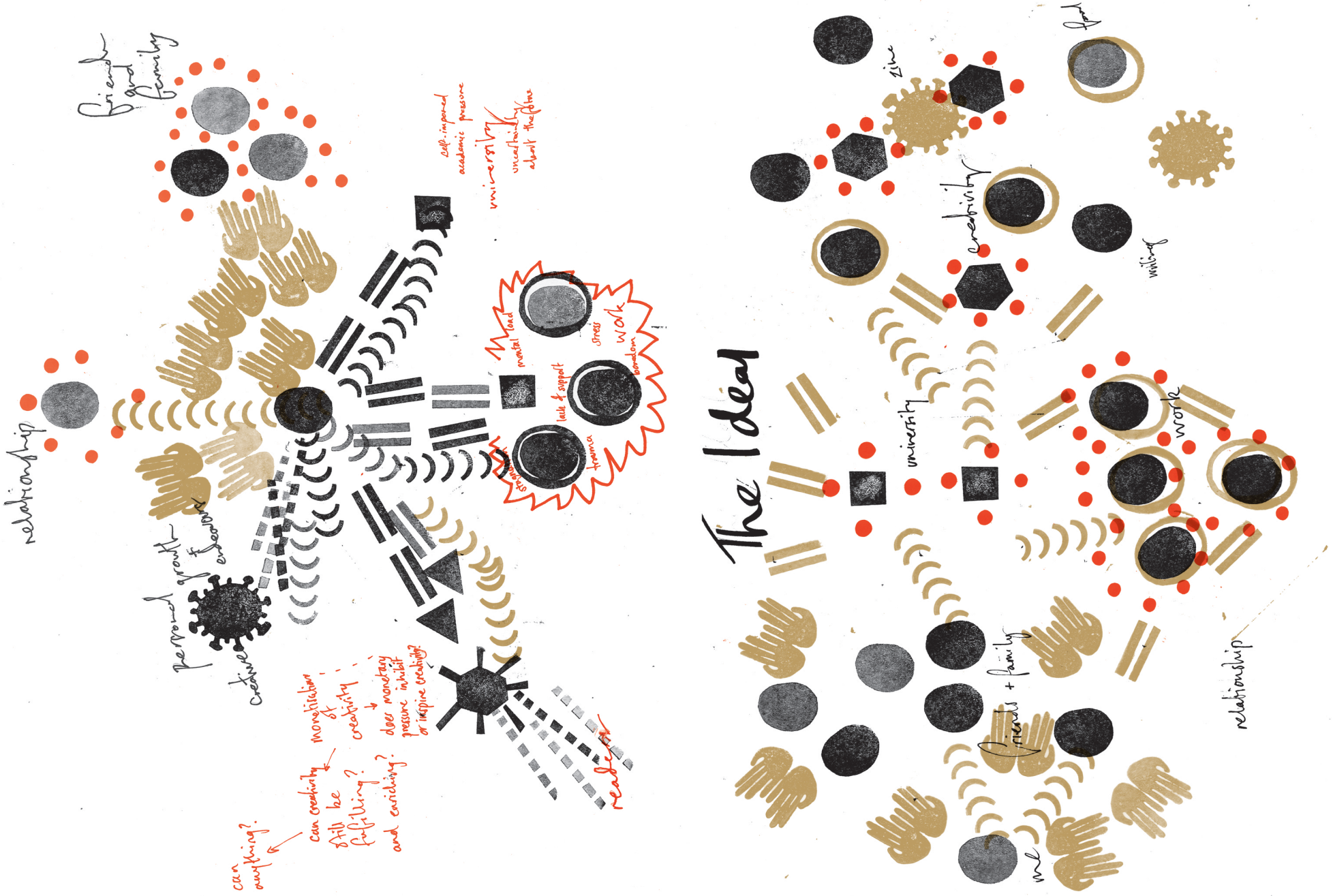
relationship

zine

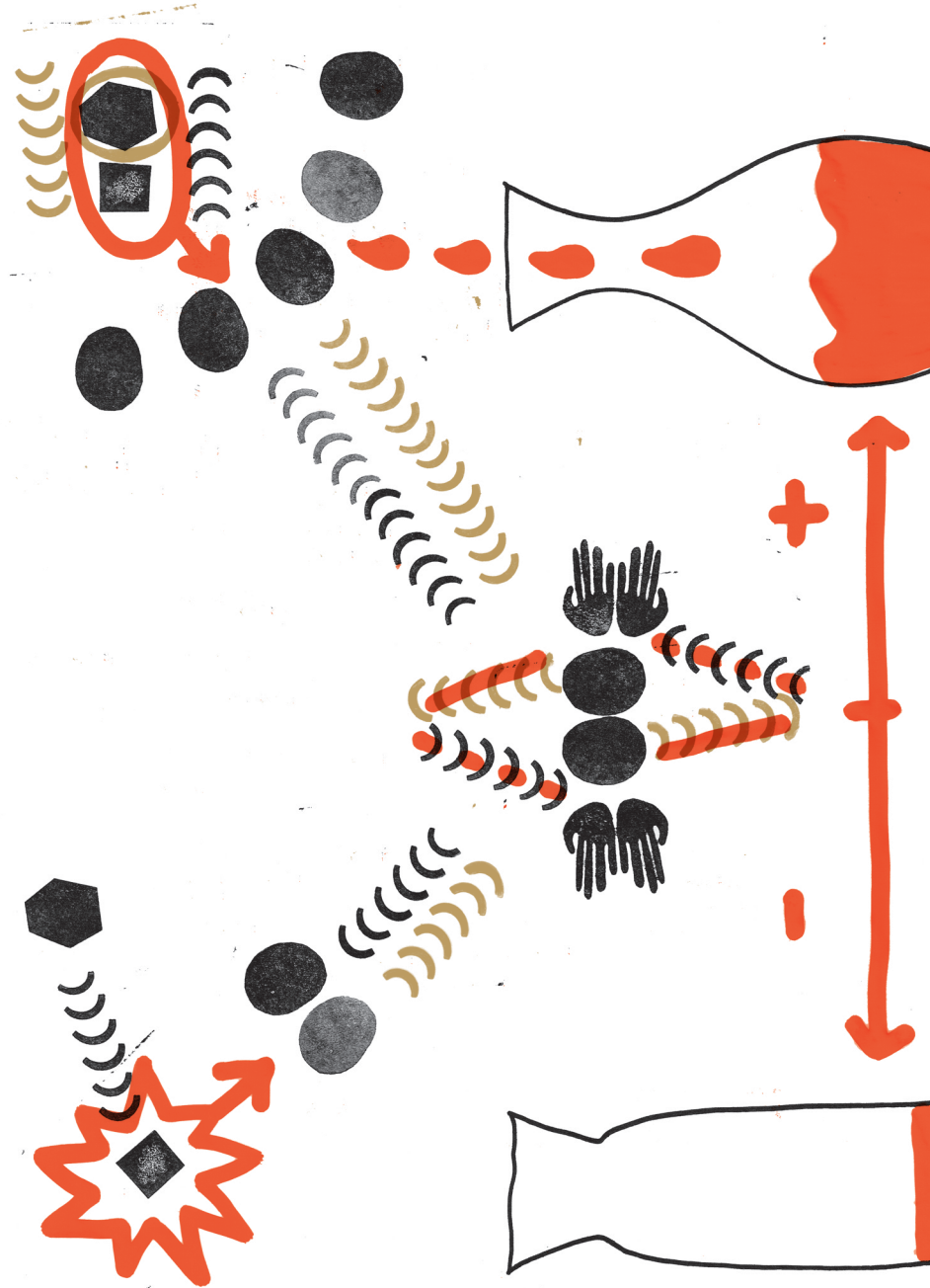
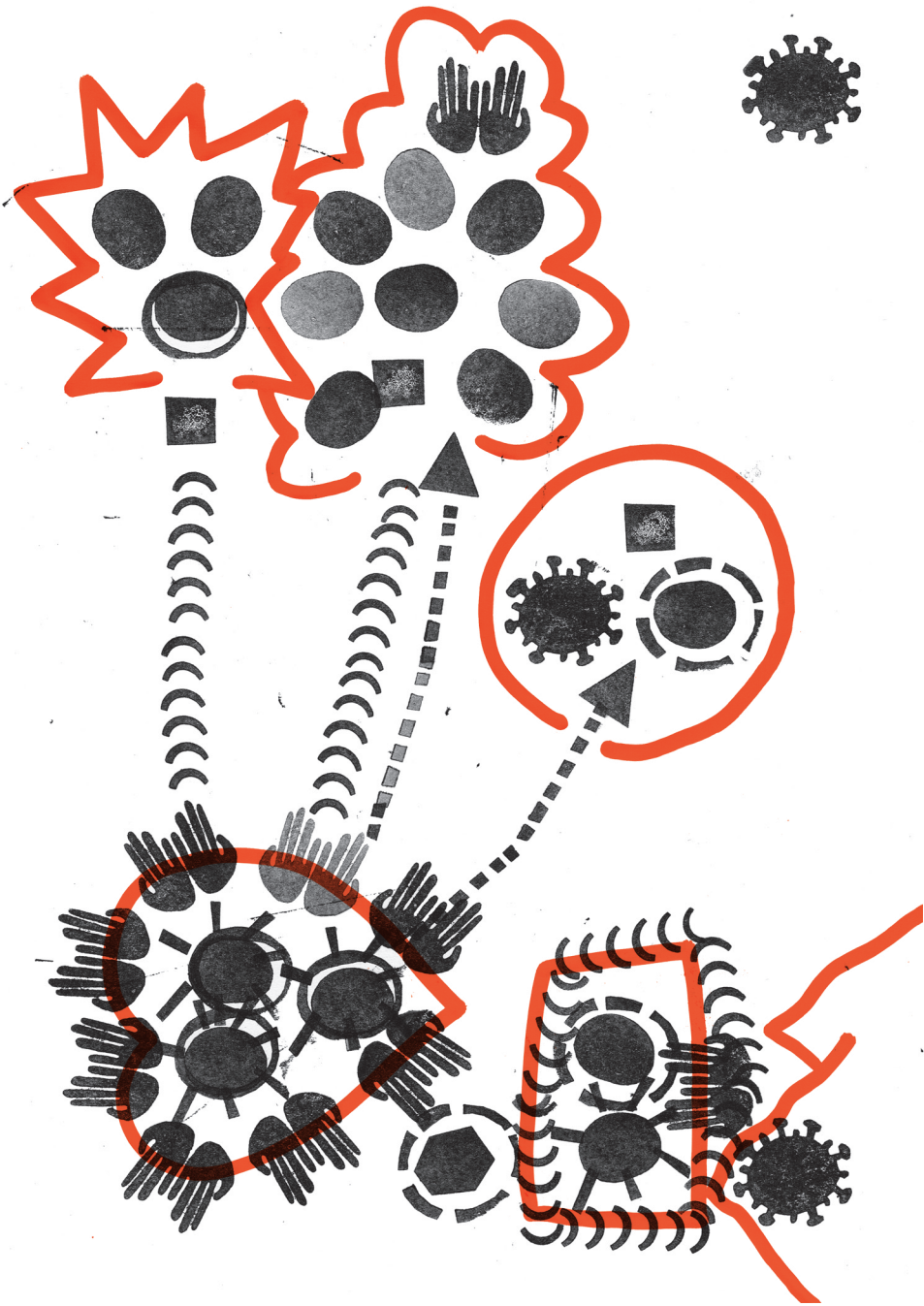
food

writing

ml







speaking  
of podcasting

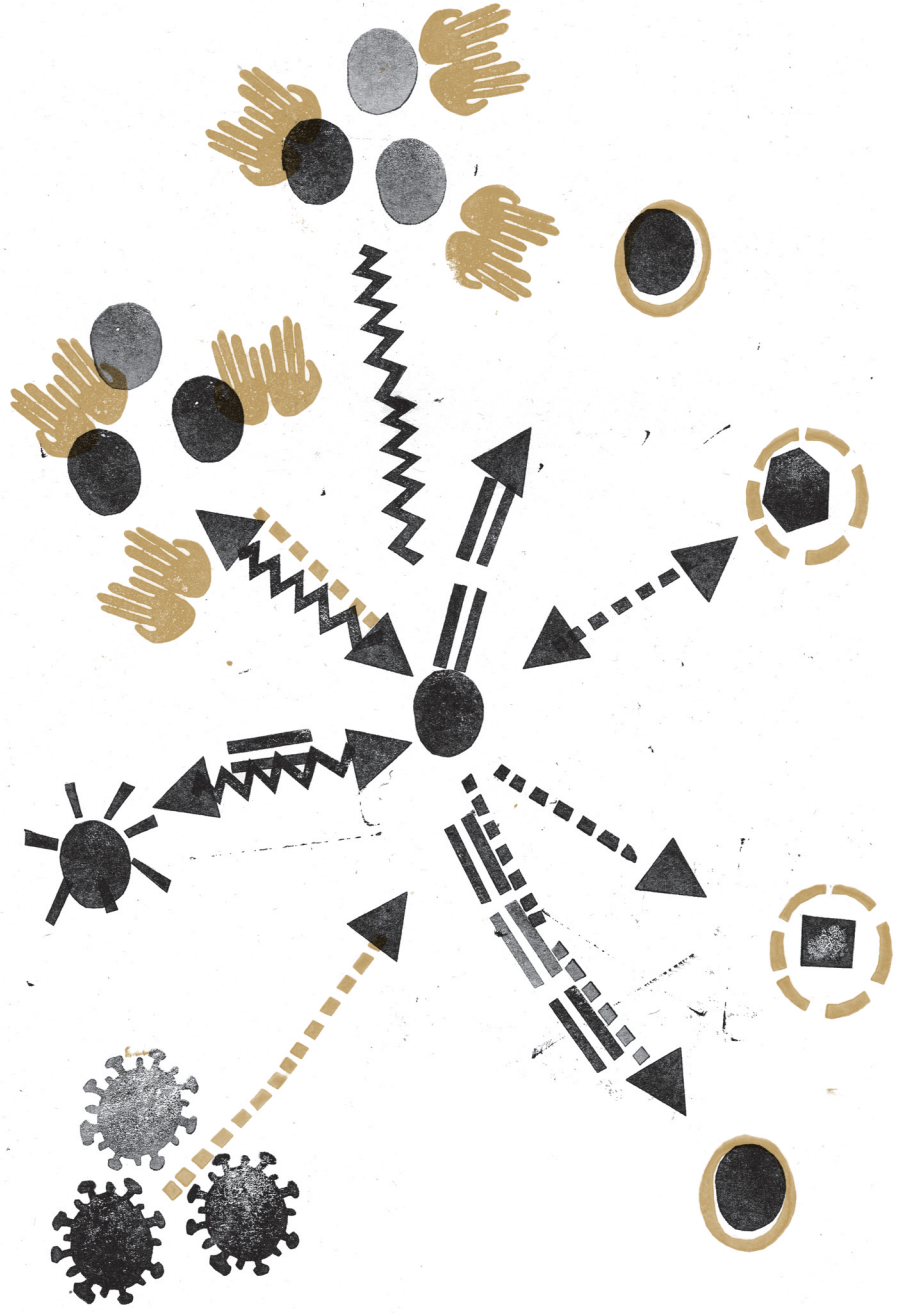
love

FAMILY  
Remote  
Connections

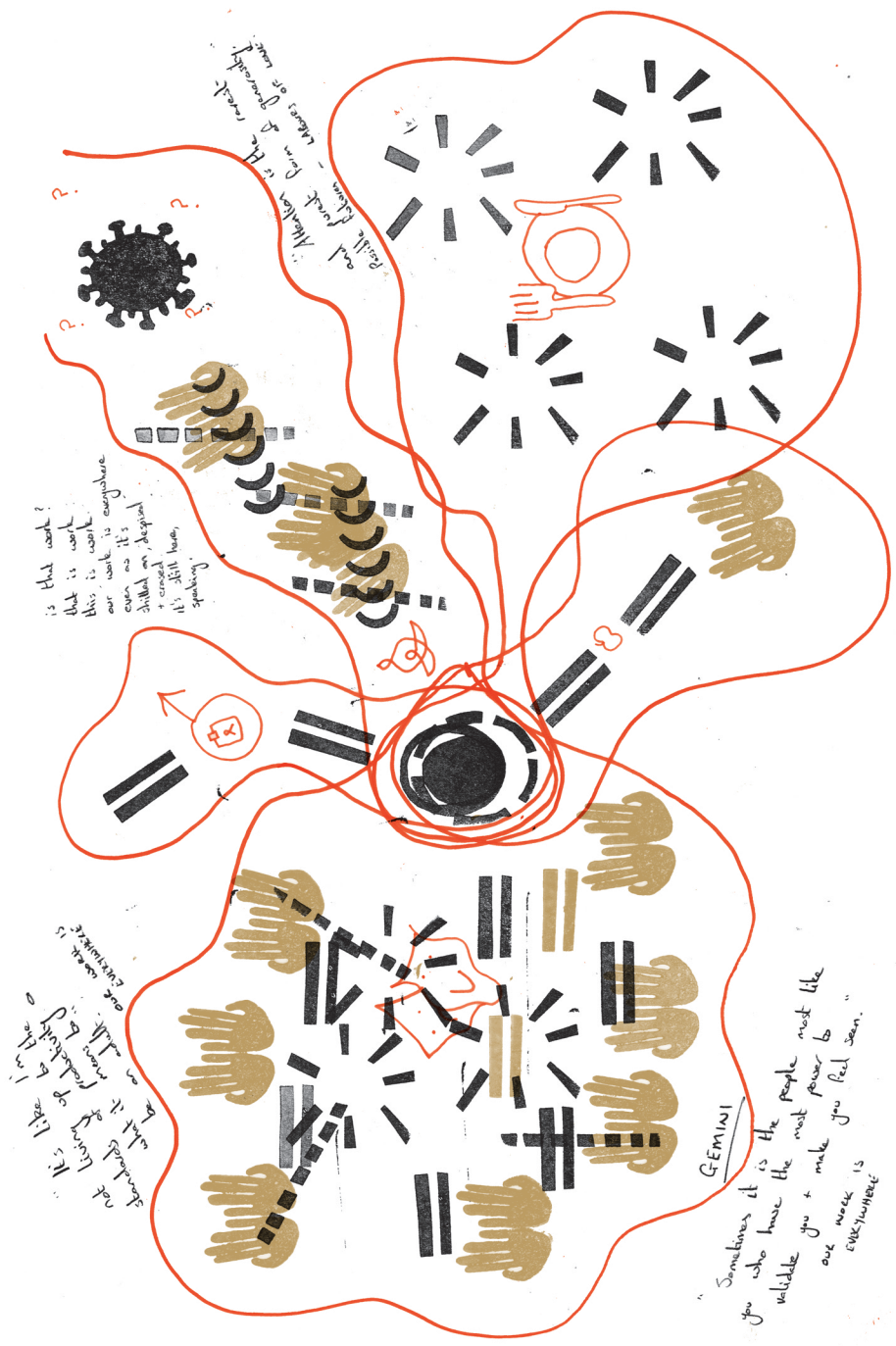
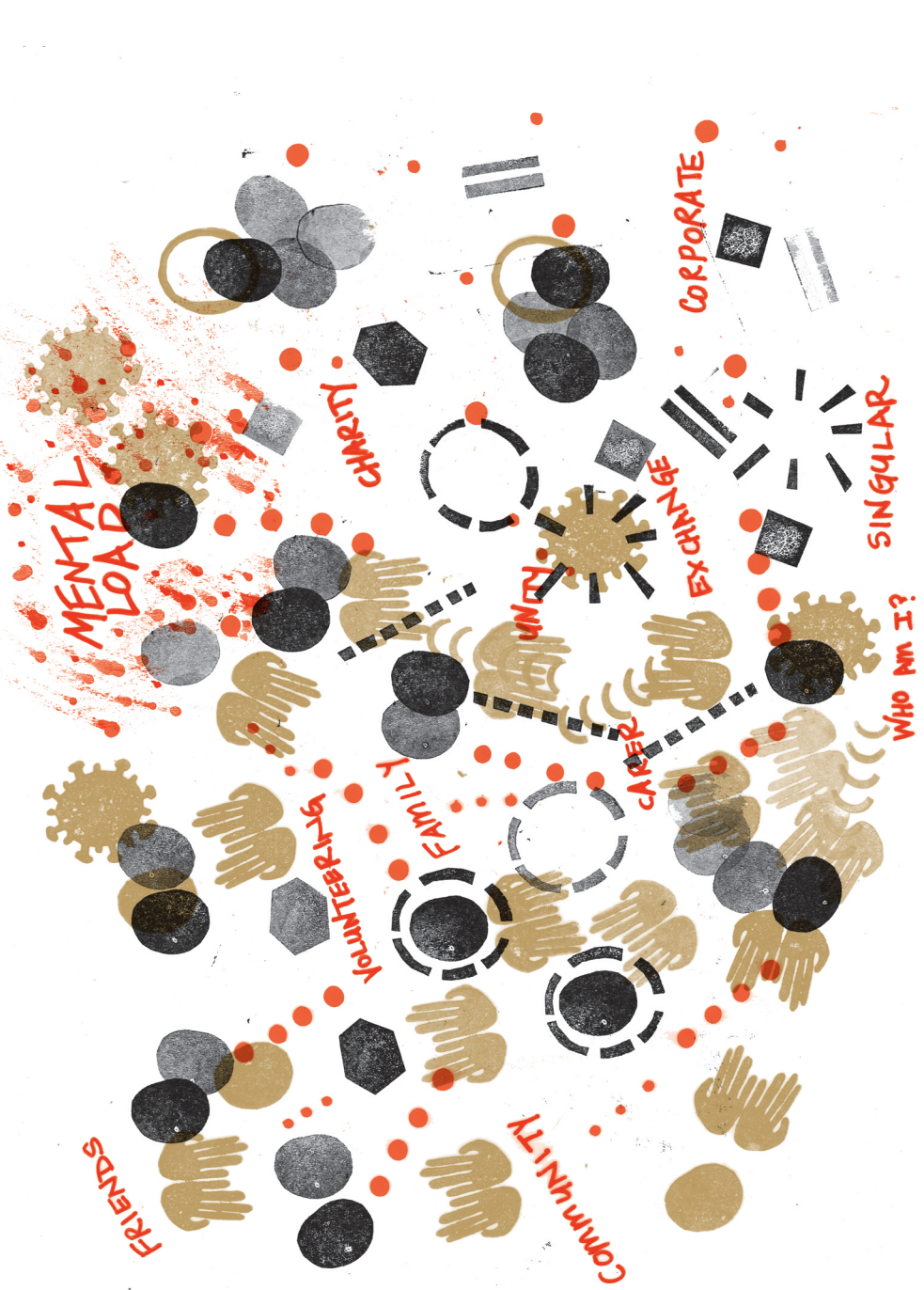
yoga

freelancing

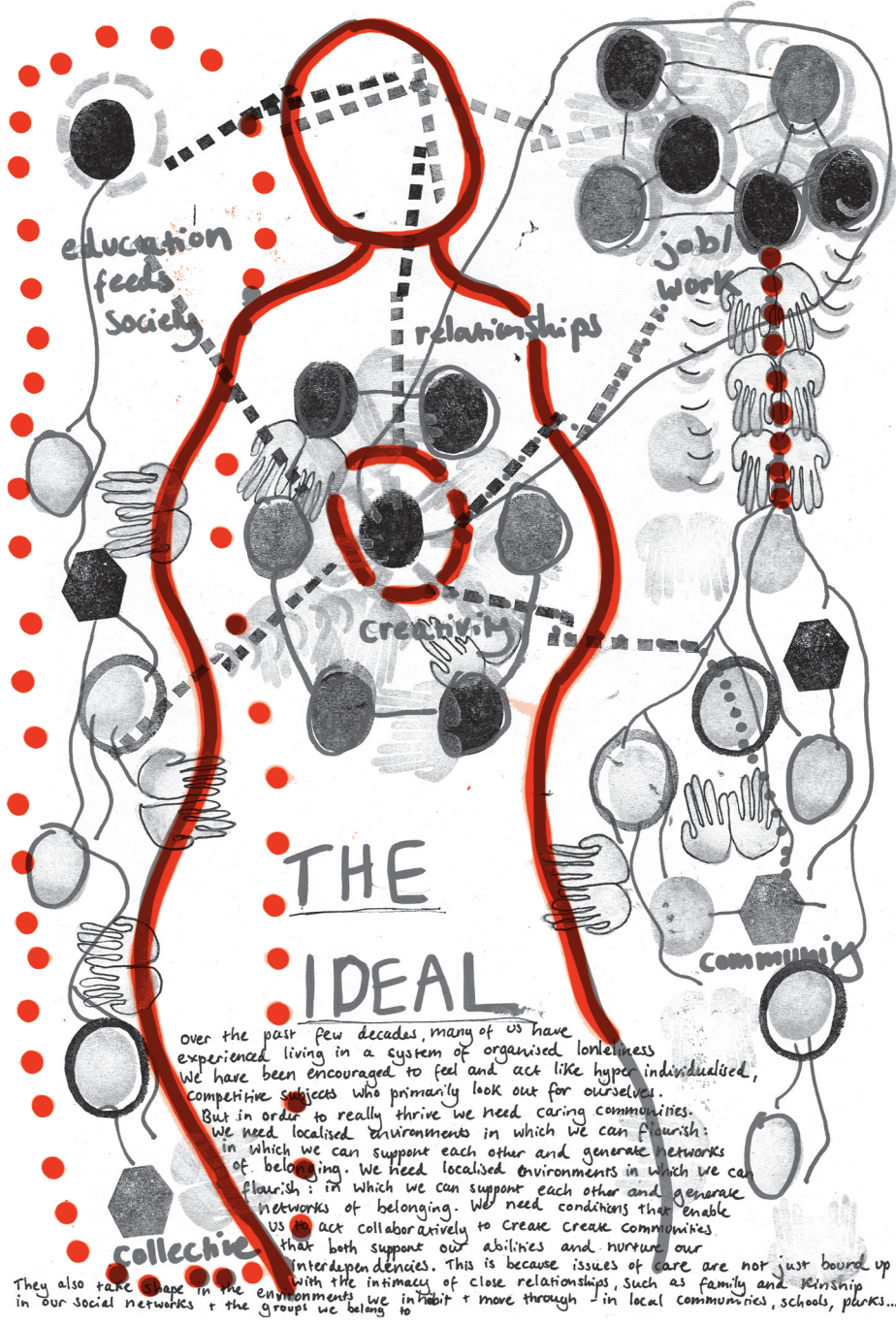
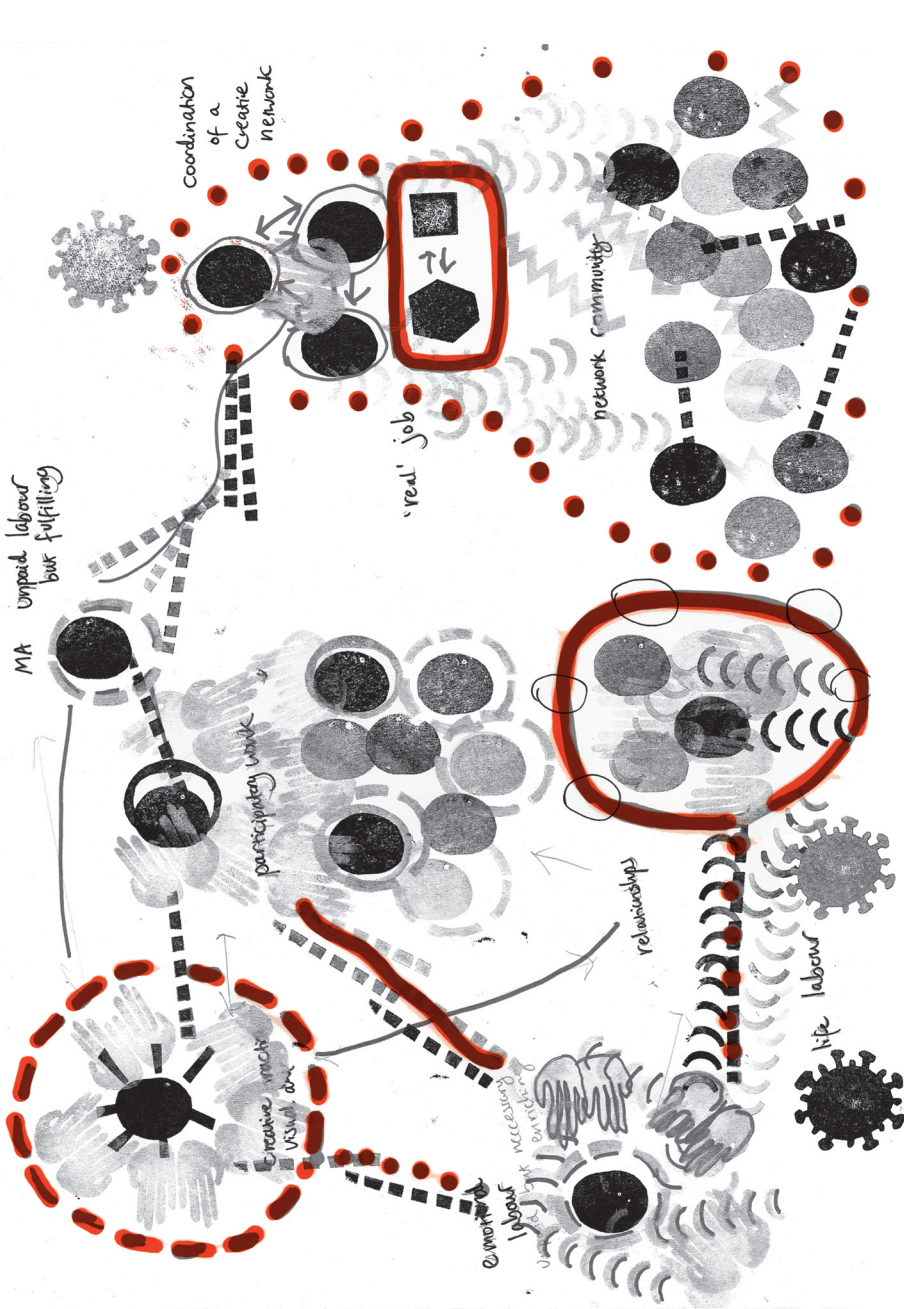
WORK



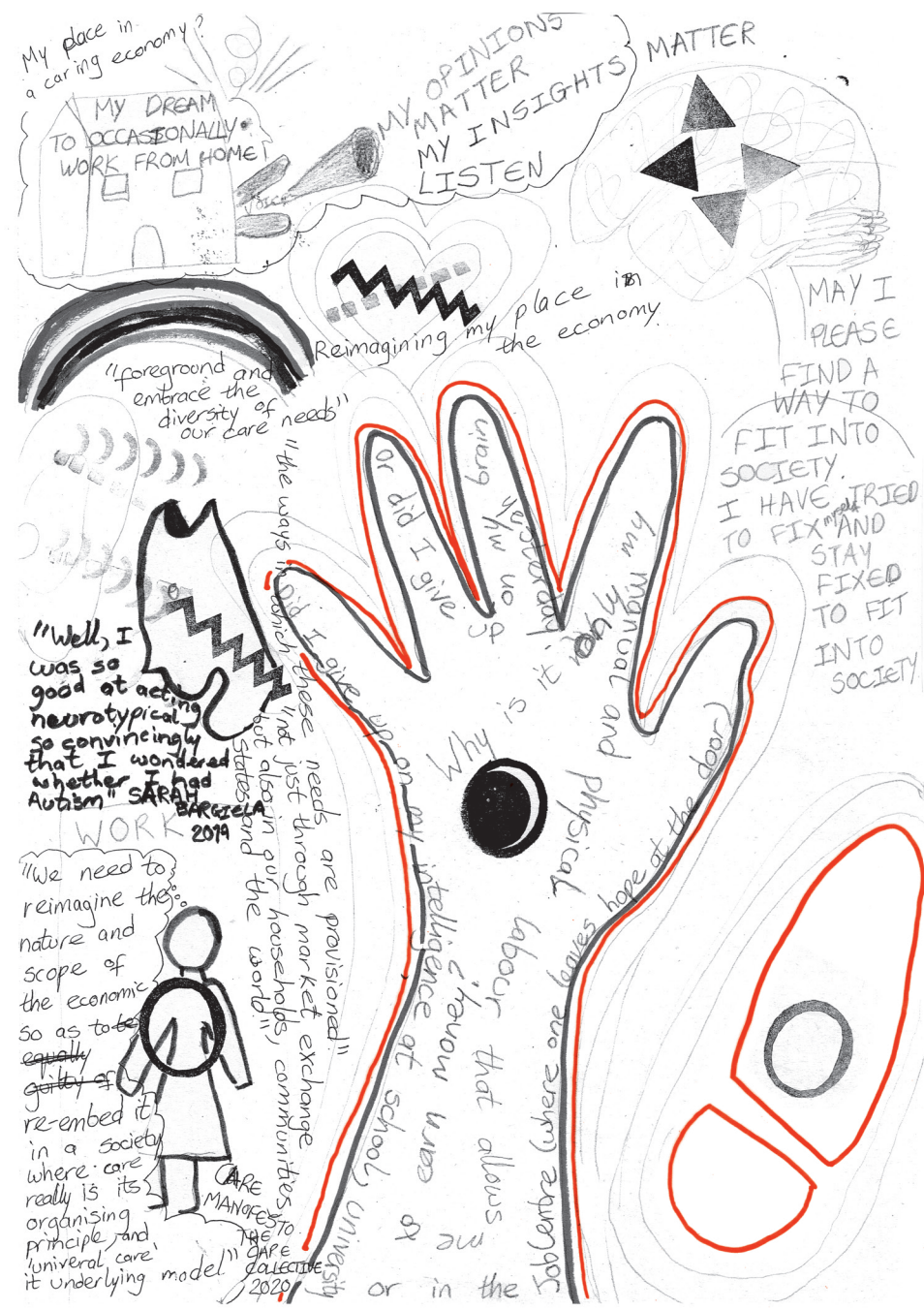
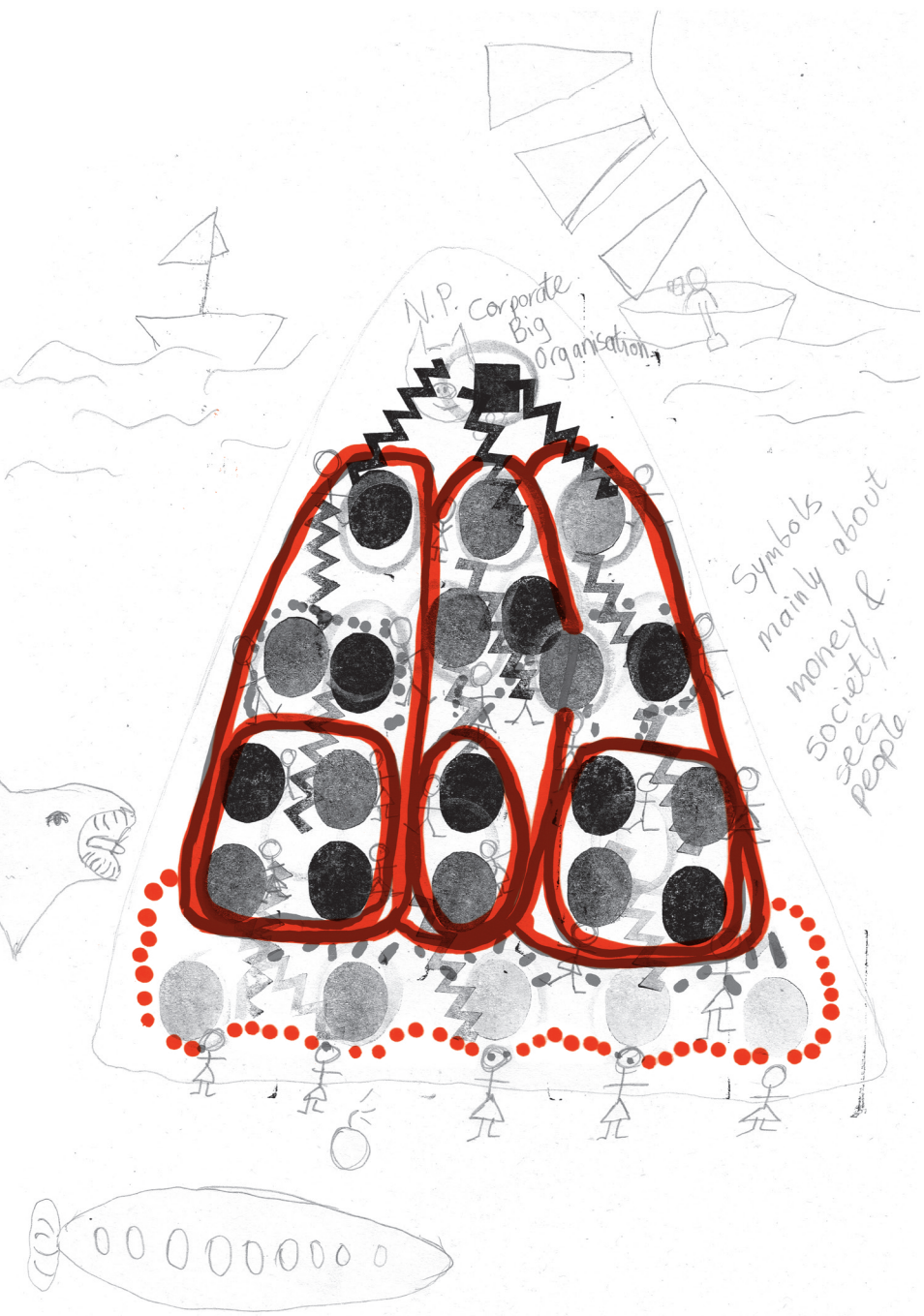


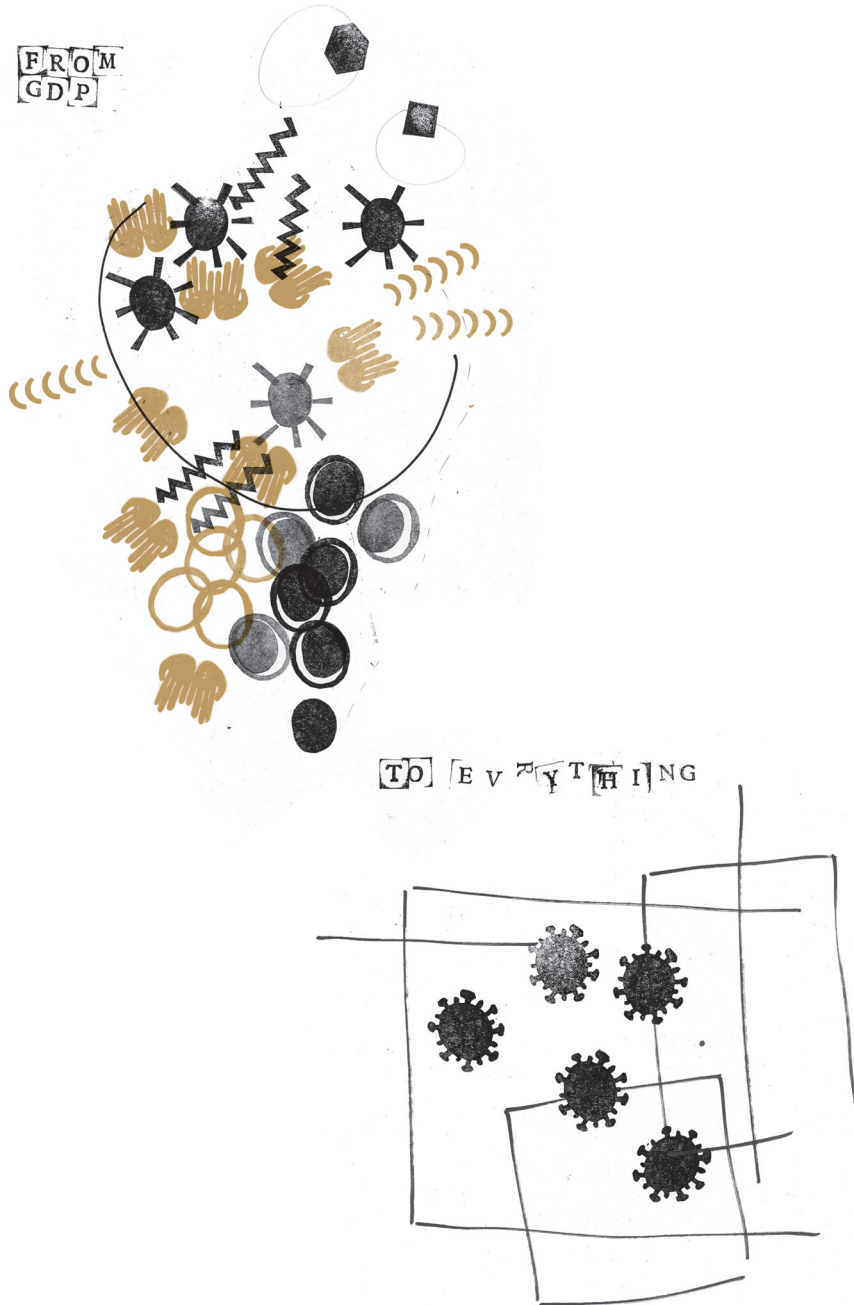












**Caroline:** For me the maps do create a different language and one that feels inspiring in places, can you tell me a little bit more about the conversations that fed into this process of mapping and reimagining? We have had FEN's mobile library in our space – I was wondering if any resources from there proved to be particularly relevant to the conversations?

**Ailie:** The resources from the FEN library played a crucial role in placing our conversations within a broader political context. The FEN mobile library, initially launched at Swap Market (a non-monetary exchange project we ran from 2018-2020), began with the collection of books that explored diverse economic models, community networks, and alternatives to the conventional capitalist framework. As the project evolved, our book collection expanded to encompass works that bridge feminism with decolonisation, climate justice, and environmental activism.

Throughout the workshops here at the women's library, certain books became touchstones, with quotes from these books finding their way onto their maps. Particularly relevant to our discussions were books such as 'The Care Manifesto' by The Care Collective, 'Labours Of Love' by Madeleine Bunting, 'Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power' by Lola Olufemi, 'The Care We Dream Of' by Zena Sharman and 'Our Work Is Everywhere' by Syan Rose as our conversations moved into the intersections of gender inequalities with disability, neurodiversity, race and class.



A significant number of workshop participants openly shared their experiences as neurodiverse women and women with disabilities. This shed light on the concept of self-care being an extra layer of work—especially for those with disabilities or neurodiverse traits. Take the scenario of the added effort required to align with a system built around a specific kind of logic, often termed as “neurotypicality.” A recurring theme that emerged from these discussions was the constant struggle many women face, navigating a system that wasn’t created for us.

A particularly memorable conversation centred around the notion that women are often credited with being skilled multitaskers. However, in reality, it’s often a matter of necessity due to the numerous roles we need to juggle.

We delved into how women have become adept at “masking,” appearing to have everything under control when, beneath the surface, we might be grappling more than it appears. This includes concealing stress or not disclosing aspects of ourselves that could potentially hinder us in securing paid employment—things like childcare needs, disabilities, or neurodiversity. One participant vividly described her work persona as “feeling like a swan moving gracefully through the water, but underneath you can see our legs furiously paddling”

I’d be really interested to know how much these conversations about women feeling the need to mask certain aspects of themselves in order to get paid work came up in your research Louise?

**Louise:** Masking is a concept I can completely relate to from a personal perspective. As Ailie said, women tend to be regarded as innate multi-taskers rather than multi-tasking being a necessity to get through the day. In the project many of the ‘multi-tasking’ women struggled with having to think of everything and do everything in the context of their working lives, including the most mundane of tasks: “making packed lunches is exhausting”; “working flat out and still having to buy the toilet roll when it runs out”; “trying to do everything and be ‘supermum’, it was horrendous”. There was a memorable interview where a woman (who identified as a lone parent with a child with complex and demanding needs) dreaded going back to the office after working from home as it exposed her personal and family difficulties.

Although not always explicit, many women were putting on a good front and holding it together in their paid work in addition to all their other roles and responsibilities. Let’s face it, most of us don’t want to be seen as crumbling or not coping. The interview – and the art workshops - gave women an outlet to express how they really feel about their lives, and I don’t think many people have that opportunity. I’m still working with the interview data and ‘masking’ is something I will look out for as I continue the analysis.

**Ailie:** That feeling of absolute exhaustion was something we talked about in the workshops too. When we then moved into collaborative mapping processes, working together to envision a better system, a dedicated space for rest and rejuvenation frequently emerged as a core element.

From there, the focus expanded outward to encompass broader networks of care, thinking about basic frameworks that could facilitate the creation of care networks without adding to the workload - creativity being a recurrent theme.

Several of the women who came to the workshops have a creative practice but few would call themselves artists or feel like they have time or space for creativity in their lives. Even among those of us who can call ourselves artists, we shared the ongoing challenges of staying afloat within a system that demands substantial amounts of unpaid labour from artists while consistently undervaluing creative work. Which led us back round to conversations about fairer systems of resource sharing and how a basic income could impact women's lives.

**Caroline:** I think these thoughts, that have come out of the process, about the intersection between creativity in women who do not call themselves artists and artists is interesting and can help us draw some conclusions about what types of labours are defined as creative. Often relational labour so caregiving, obviously, but also other types of work including the organisational flair you would need to balance multiple jobs is not seen as creative while an isolated person in a studio (traditionally and in popular imagination this has been autonomous man you mention in relation to capitalism) with no relational ties is typically how we view an artist. Of course, Ailie your work does not easily fit into this second category. The maps themselves are beautiful objects but they also function as a way to

connect people. I wonder if to close you could tell us a little more about that Ailie? Also Louise you mentioned that other, less visible, collaboration between artist and researcher, do you think in future there could be a shared map for this?

**Ailie:** I'm not sure that a more isolated style of artistic practice is necessarily a male trait; artists of all genders choose to work in isolation for various reasons. But there is a definite feminist angle to a more collaborative practice that seeks to convey multiple narratives rather than a singular voice. Collaborative art-making runs counter to the capitalist notion of the solo genius.

Similarly, I think a lot of creative work goes into all kinds of community organising, being able to imagine a world that looks different and prioritises cooperative working over competition.

I hope that the mapping process serves as a way for people to connect. In the workshops, women who returned to participate in multiple sessions discussed how the process had given them a sense of solidarity by recognizing the value in each other's work. There was an incredible calm focus in the workshops, and I hope that the printing process opens up a space for us to think differently together, to talk about our individual experiences, find commonalities in our struggles, and imagine alternatives together.

The resulting images within this book are a bit like encoded diagrams. They are abstracted just enough, I hope, to convey something of the systems and networks we described and imagined together. Meanwhile, the

details of the conversations remain a private dialogue among the women who created them.

**Louise:** Working in collaboration has certainly opened my eyes to new ways of thinking and doing. I hope there has been learning on both sides and that we can reflect on what went well, as well as how we might change things given the opportunity again: imagining a 'better system'. I like the idea of mapping as an alternative means of communication, an 'encoded diagram'. I am sure we can create a map for this type of collaborative working in the future, but we may need to make some new stamps!

FEN Library Books:

all about love by bell hooks  
(2016) Harper Collins

The Care Manifesto by The Care Collective  
(2020) Verso

Labours Of Love by Madeleine Bunting  
(2020) Granta

Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power by Lola Olufemi  
(2020) Pluto Press

The Care We Dream Of by Zena Sharman  
(2021) Arsenal Pulp Press

Our Work Is Everywhere: An Illustrated Oral History  
of Queer and Trans Resistance by Syan Rose  
(2021) Arsenal Pulp Press

What If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics  
by Marilyn Waring  
(1988) Harper Collins

Oxfam Discussion Paper: Radical Pathways Beyond  
GDP: Why and How We Need to Pursue Feminist and  
Decolonial Alternatives Urgently. Oxfam International  
[https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/  
radical-pathways-beyond-gdp-621532/](https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/radical-pathways-beyond-gdp-621532/)

Art for UBI Manifesto  
[https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/2022/09/17/  
art-for-ubi-manifesto-book-launch/](https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/2022/09/17/art-for-ubi-manifesto-book-launch/)

Basic Income for the Arts  
[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/  
unemployment-and-redundancy/  
employment-support-schemes/basic-income-arts/](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment-and-redundancy/employment-support-schemes/basic-income-arts/)

Ideas for A New Art World  
[https://thewhitepube.co.uk/blog/  
ideas-for-a-new-art-world/](https://thewhitepube.co.uk/blog/ideas-for-a-new-art-world/)

Structurally Fucked  
<https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/structurally-f-cked/>

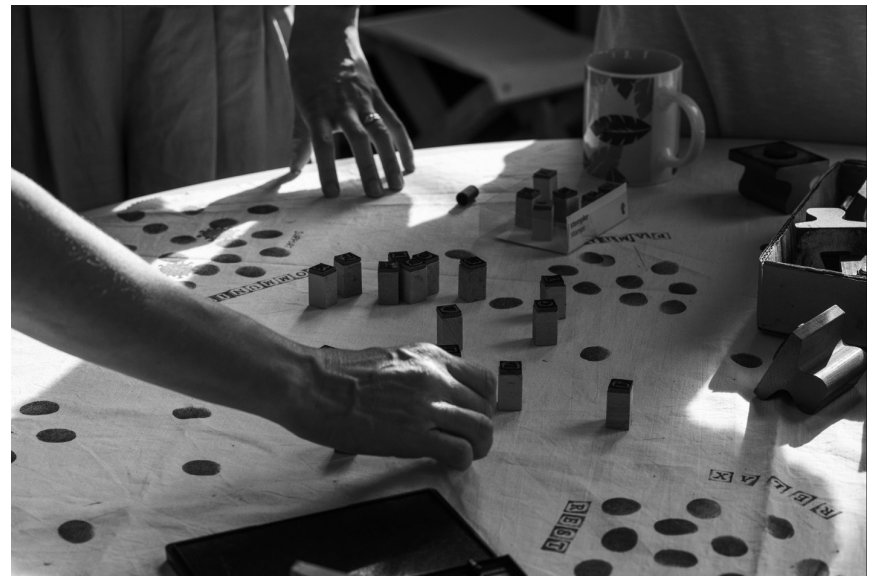
**Ailie Rutherford** is a visual artist and curator working at the intersection of community activism and creative practice. The collaborative artworks she instigates bring people together in dialogue about our social and economic landscape, often through a feminist lens.

Ailie is artistic director of the Feminist Exchange Network, a South Glasgow based women-led\* collective. Her feminist economic artworks have been shown at Unbox festival (Bengaluru, India) Institute of Network Cultures (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Supermarkt (Berlin, Germany), Tracing The Tracks//Work Affair at Rum 46 (Aarhus, Denmark) Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands) Alternate Realities for Sheffield DocFest & Site gallery (Sheffield, England) and at Documenta 15 (Kassel, Germany) <https://ailierutherford.com>

\*women and other marginalised genders  
inclusive of transgender and intersex women

**Louise Lawson** is a qualitative researcher at the University of Glasgow. She is principal investigator on the Nuffield Foundation-funded project “Women in Multiple Low-paid Employment: Pathways Between Work, Care and Health” (2020-2024). She has conducted research on a range of studies focused on the experiences of people living through major urban regeneration, and has published widely on community empowerment, relocation and health, and foodbanks as paradoxes of policy and society.

**Caroline Gausden** works in GWL developing the programme, collaborating with artists and the many of the communities that consider the space home. Before joining the team Caroline was based in Aberdeen where she completed a curatorial PhD in Feminist Manifestos and Social Art Practice. Caroline has contributed writing for numerous journals and publications including most recently a chapter in The Routledge publication *Curating with Care* (2023) on the collaborative exhibition *Life Support: Forms of Care in Art and Activism*.







# POURING OUT, POURING IN

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