In The Mood

Mapping Moods for Future Cities.

Insights from the In the Mood
'Mapping the Mood' Workshops

RMIT UNIVERSITY

PlaceLab

Acknowledgment of Country

RMIT PlaceLab acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT PlaceLab respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, as the original and continuing Makers of Place.

Thank You

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Find out more

Even though cities know a lot about their residents, typical surveys or automated data collection can only provide basic information about what really matters to people. Emotions, feelings, and moods can convey a lot of valuable information about the life and pulse of a city, yet is difficult to gather and understand.

These moodboarding workshops are part of a larger research project to expand methods for generating rich and nuanced data about how the city feels. This project is part of RMIT PlaceLab, a hub for exploring place in creative and meaningful ways. Please drop by the PlaceLab locations or contact the researchers of the In the Mood project if you would like to hear more.

RMIT PlaceLab is a new urban initiative that connects communities, shapes place, and takes a radically different approach to doing research.

RMIT PlaceLab aims to cultivate a platform of civic participation and knowledge sharing by connecting locals, both in Brunswick and in Melbourne city, to RMIT's rich ecosystem of specialist academics and local government partners. Our governing model, of 'Research, Engage, Transform', looks at addressing vital urban issues, by taking research 'street-side'; starting with two shop-front style Research Studios located in Brunswick and Melbourne, while also allowing collaborators to engage both in person and online

Participants from the Brunswick In the Mood Workshop heading into RMIT PlaceLab Brunswick.

In the Mood Research Project Overview

A conversation that brings communities together to assemble sensory moodboards that capture the feeling of their city to inspire future planning.

Featuring an interactive workshop in each of the cities involved, the In the Mood research project aims to facilitate a conversation between city planners, policy makers, community members and researchers. Allowing space for many voices, different knowledges, and potentially competing interests to come together with equal influence in the process, product and application. Here, the local community can contribute meaningful layers of lived experience to inform future city planners, projects and public policies through sensory forms of data.

This project was delivered by RMIT PlaceLab in collaboration with RMIT's Digital Ethnography Research Centre and supported by RMIT Europe and RMIT Vietnam.

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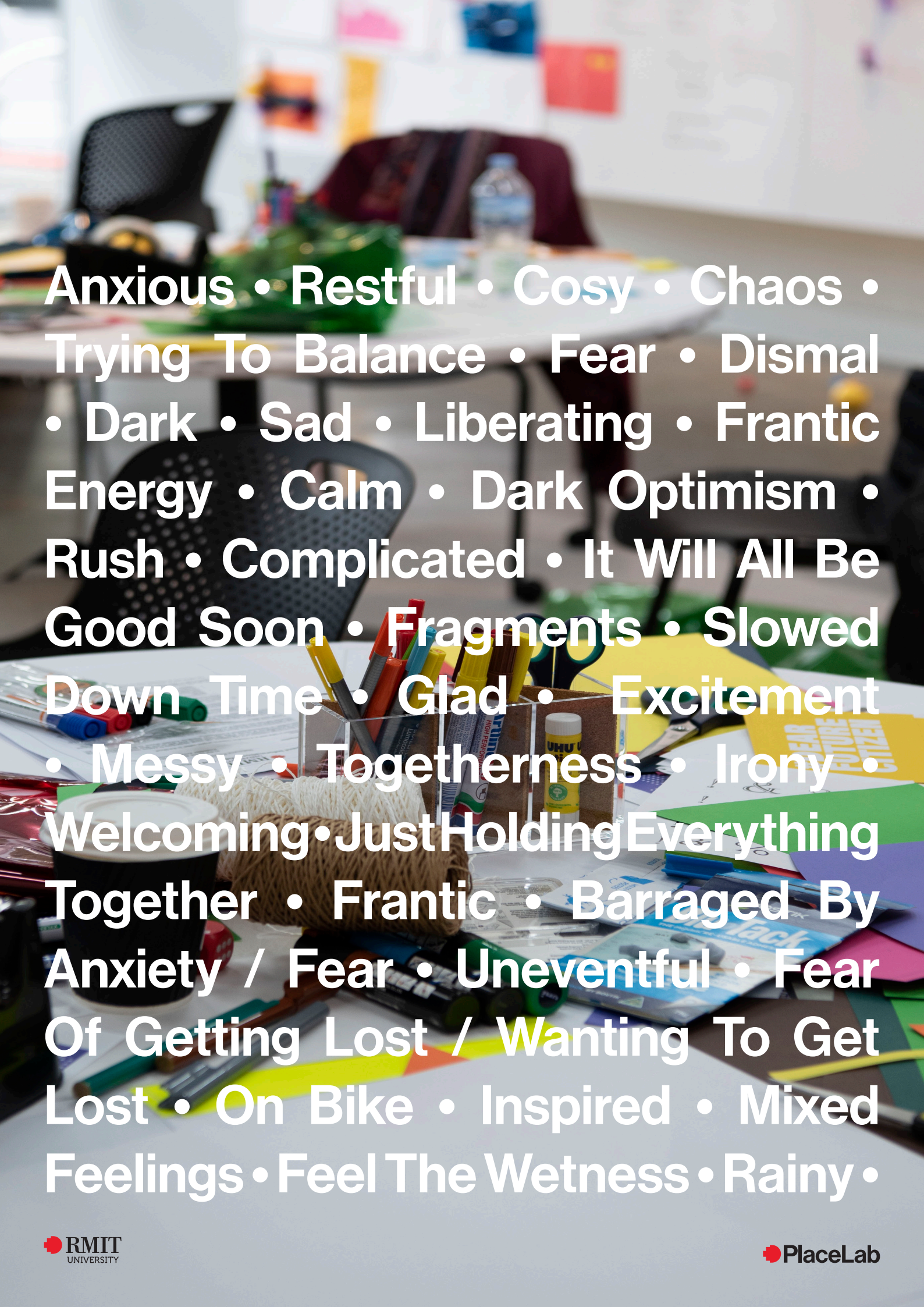
Anxious • Restful • Cosy • Chaos • Trying To Balance • Fear • Dismal • Dark • Sad • Liberating • Frantic Energy • Calm • Dark Optimism • Rush • Complicated • It Will All Be Good Soon • Fragments • Slowed Down Time • Glad • Excitement • Messy • Togetherness • Irony • Welcoming•JustHoldingEverything Together • Frantic • Barraged By Anxiety / Fear • Uneventful • Fear Of Getting Lost / Wanting To Get Lost • On Bike • Inspired • Mixed Feelings•Feel The Wetness•Rainy •

What did it feel like getting here today?

What is the mood of this part of the city?

How can moodboards produce visual and textural layered accounts of lived experience?

Facilitated by Professor Annette Markham, this two-and-a-half-hour Workshop used questions like those above to prompt participants to actively participate in and contribute to playful experiments to generate collaborative "moodmaps", expressing some of the moods of Brunswick in a post-pandemic time of recovery.

The Workshop involved participants exploring PlaceLab's immediate surroundings to understand "what is the mood of this part of the city?", and then translating their findings into tactile collaborative maps representing their shared experience of Brunswick. Discussions of how sensory and textural experiences like 'mood' can become meaningful information, data or even maps for city planners and policy makers, as they try to build better futures in times of global crisis and recovery, facilitated the creation of the 'moodmaps'.

Bringing citizens and local government representatives together in a short but intensive workshop environment fostered a diversity in thinking about how the mood of the city can be characterised and provide insights and input into future urban consideration

Participants creating individual moodboards in response to "What did it feel like getting here today?"

What is the mood of the resilient city?

What might you say to the future city?

RMIT Researchers Larissa Hjorth and Annette Markham used a variety of techniques, physical materials, and questions such as the above, to prompt participants in bringing mood to the fore-ground before engaging in collaborative speculation about present and future possible moods in Melbourne.

This two-hour workshop sought to explore how hands-on moodboarding techniques can be combined with speculative thinking strategies. Bringing citizens and local government represent-atives together in a short but intensive workshop environment fostered more diversity in thinking about what resilient futures might look like in the city.

Participants creating individual moodboards in response to "What is the mood of the resilient city?"

When asked to discuss "What did it feel like getting here today?" some participants focused on their own moods, while others focused on the moods of the context and environment surrounding them. While this prompt was deliberately composed to facilitate the playful creation of layers of sensory material using basic arts and crafts supplies, it also highlighted the connections between external stimuli and internal states that could be evoked or described through the language of "mood" (i.e. the tram felt chaotic, which made me feel anxious, or the rain reminded me of my home country, which made me feel sentimental). What is involved in the continual attunement between people as individuals and their cities?

In the Mood Workshop participant taking images of the Brunswick surroundings.

Moodboarding is not intended to find universal understanding, but prompt rich expressions and evocations. This experiment begins with the idea that moods are individually experienced and changing. They are difficult to describe and once we use language to describe them, they are transformed from sensation to cognition. Humans shift from internal to external perception, oscillating between reflecting on how they feel inside and what the world around them feels like. This is a natural experience in relationships and societies, and while individuals may be more attuned to their own senses and feelings, others may be more attuned to the external environment. Everyone's individual attunements will vary slightly, and this impacts how and what city mood they experience.

When we aim to study, design or govern the experience of the city, we should consider how mood is derived and experienced in a holistic way, acknowledging the ebb and flow of internal and external sensory experiences between individuals and various aspects of the lived and built environments that can be called "the city." The moods of the city can never be static or neutral, but living elements of a larger ecosystem, continually shifting and being shaped, through innumerable micro-attunements of human and more than human entities.

"Making these I felt like a kid - not thinking, but being playful."

"It is interesting to think of it as data, as data is usually very literal."

"I had a hard time trying to figure out how I felt today, but when I started working, something came out that represented my mood."
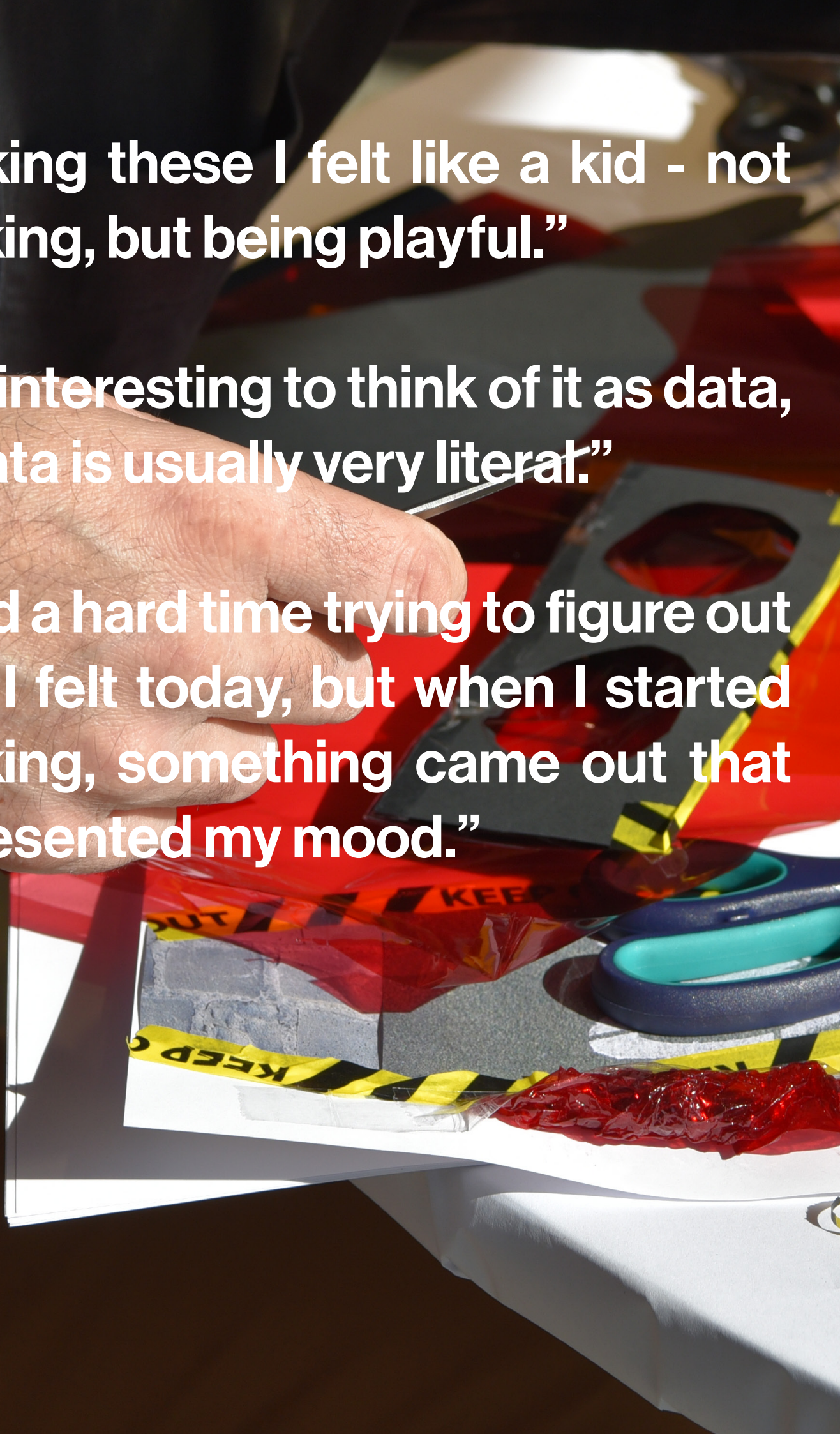
Initial Workshop Insights:

— **Understanding how immediate contexts in places shape our mood:** Mental imageries of patterns and objects perceived during participants' journeys to the Workshops were reproduced into moodboards. The feelings produced during the walk, or the feelings of getting lost on their way to the workshop, were expressed through the use of textures and colours. The depiction of gentrificiation and the interactions between human made and natural elements within the urban landscape were also incorporated into descriptions as part of the moodboards.

— **Textures, representation and non-representational:** Given the option of pens and markers, coloured paper, transparency, cellophane, printed images of textures, many participants opted for use of the cellophane, often scrunching it to varying degrees to depict different moods. Moreover, participants largely avoided literal depictions or words to express their ideas and mood, engaging more so with different made and sourced textures. This might suggest that it is easier for some participants to express these ideas through texture and tactility, particularly where words might feel limiting.

— **Collaborative visualisation:** Compared to language-based discussions, groups exhibited the ability to generate productive and meaningful moodboards together without prior experience of moodboarding or prior knowledge of each other. In discussing how they felt about the experience, many people described the process of working with non-representational visual materials enabled them to collaborate without worrying about the exactness or accuracy often required in group discussions. They also seemed capable of producing sensible and visually legible moodboards in short periods of time. Both these outcomes of the workshop suggest that nonverbal means of producing mood information may bypass some of the limitations of finding and then agreeing on verbal or language-based responses to questions.

write a postcard to your city...focusing on its mood

DEAR MELBOURNE:

I REALLY APPRECIATE ~~THOSE~~ FERAL & WILD SPACES THAT YOU RANDOMLY GAVE IT TO ME IN MOMENTS WHERE I REALLY NEED IT TO REFLECT, TO RECHARG, TO RECONNECT WITH MYSELF & NATURE. PLEASE KEEP GROWING THEM. BEST. A

2042

write a postcard to your city...focusing on its mood

Dear Melbourne

All the lights are out, the people are gone. Now we can see the stars.

Signed . . .
the rest of us

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write a postcard to your city...focusing on its mood

STAY
WHEN
YOU ARE

---

write a postcard to your city...focusing on its mood

Dear Melbourne,
           We met 20 years ago and have lived together almost ever since. I love you - and always will - but I have considered leaving you more and more over the last few years, even now as you're opening up to me once again. But I think there's still more for us to share so long as we're open to it, so let's return to the feeling of two decades back - and see if we can get two more. xox

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October 2027

write a postcard to your city...focusing on its mood

Dear Melbourne -
I hope you're still making space for all us freaks, creeps, cripples & misfits.

We need you now more than ever.

The method of moodboarding is a process of layering colours, textures, images, words, and objects to create meaning. As an activity, it can be individual or collaborative, offering layers of lived experiences. It captures the richness of sensory data that affects how we feel about ourselves and places.

Moodboards from the Brunswick Workshop.

Now its your turn!

We encourage you to create your own moodboard using items you have at home! Pens, pencils, cellophane, found objects, paper or anything that inspires you.

Think about...

- What is the mood of your street?
- How does the weather make you feel?
- What would a map of your journey today look like?

In addition to the Brunswick and Melbourne 'In the Mood' Workshops, two international workshops were also held in partnership with RMIT Europe and RMIT Vietnam. Both international workshops bookended the Australian Workshops, and helped inform and further nuance the methods.

The first Workshop held in Barcelona, Spain, as part of 'Barcelona Design Week 2022', allowed the PlaceLab research team to better understand how participants engaged with the methods, and the influence that the contextual background of participants had on the moodboards. The final workshop in the series was held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with partner researchers Dr. Andrew Stiff and Dr. Catherine Earl, allowing the moodboarding process to be further refined and tested in another cultural context. The Ho Chi Minh City Workshop presented some particularly interesting learnings in terms of workshop delivery, notably in terms of translating the concept of 'moodboarding' and 'mood' which does not exist literally in Vietnamese for example.

Barcelona Workshop: 09.06.2022

"How can mood and moodboarding work as a speculative tool for citizens to imagine future designs for sustainable and resilient cities?"

Professor Annette Markham facilitated a half-day workshop in June 2022, in Barcelona that invited participants to discuss and participate in playful experiments to generate collaborative moodboards. The post-pandemic time of recovery was captured, alongside other expressions of mood. Annette introduced the idea of 'moodboarding as a method for transgressing smart city data', and participants created a visual and sensory 'moodboard' of their current and imagined future city.

Ho Chi Minh City: 21.10.2022

Energy > Mood

RMIT academics Dr. Andrew Stiff and Dr. Catherine Earl facilitated an 'In The Mood' Workshop in October 2022, in Ho Chi Minh City. Held in the Study Melbourne Hub, District 3, students studying architecture and anthropology within the Vietnam National University, were invited to participate alongside RMIT Vietnam students. The idea of mood was introduced through the idea of a heart feeling or heart sentiment. Andrew and Catherine then developed an Energy Map to contextualise this for a Vietnamese audience.
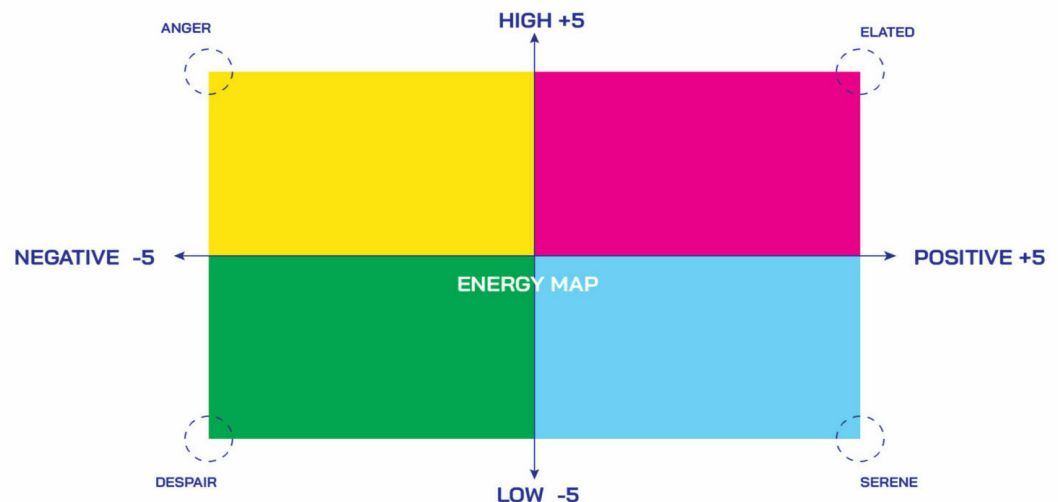
Energy Maps used by students during the RMIT Vietnam In the Mood Workshop.

Professor Annette Markham at the Brunswick Moodboarding Workshop.

This series of workshops, as part of the RMIT PlaceLab In the Mood research project, held in Barcelona, Melbourne, Brunswick, and Ho Chi Minh City, gave citizens the opportunity to build rich and textural mood maps of the social and cultural aspects of life within digitally-saturated social contexts. Their moodboards were prompted by the idea that focusing on mood as a form of 'data' can push back against the dehumanising tendencies of automated data-collection about citizens.

Professor Annette Markham's extensive experience with community workshops has led to a strong recognition that when citizens become ethnographers of their own lives and communities, they gain confidence that their local knowledge and practices can produce rich insights that are not only useful in a local sense, but can add value to discussions at the level of municipalities, cities, and regions. These Workshops help people recognise that citizens can generate complex forms of 'data' about their desires or needs. When it comes to generating information about the mood or affective feeling of a place, how might these moodboarding exercises help city planners or technology designers make more informed decisions?

Annette Markham currently holds a Professorship within RMIT's School of Media and Communication and is Co-Director of the Digital Ethnography Research Centre at RMIT University. She also holds a fractional appointment as Professor of Information Studies and Digital Design at Aarhus University in Denmark. Her written works are published broadly and can be found at https://annettemarkham.com/

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