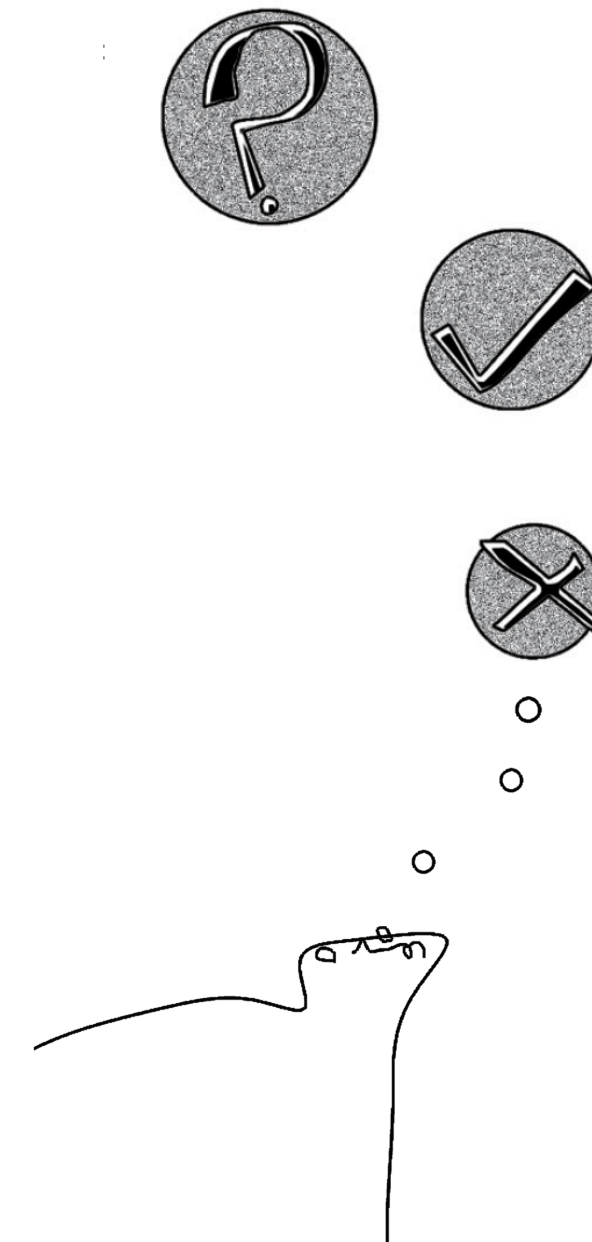
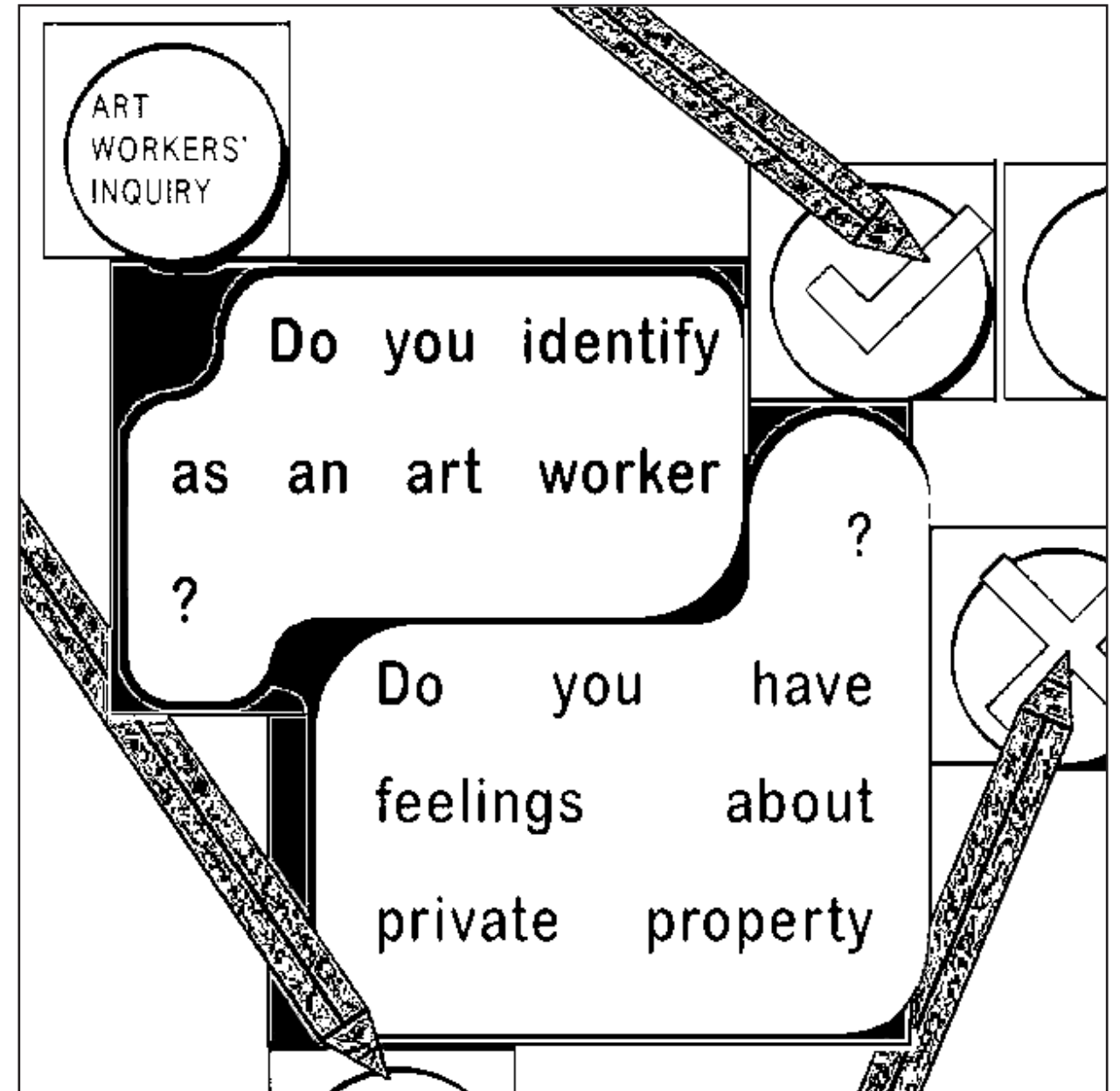


bash █ guided tour, ugly private properties █ workers' night school, Land Back course, free pantries, resource-hubs █ squat █ quiet spaces noisy, body and voice █ Red Deal, hand-in-hand █ while she just heals, can't drive, missing out, scarcity mindset, economy will get a bit fucked up, consequences of systemic fracture █ violent global revolution, overthrows the aruling class █ free clinics, horses into free transpot, entire weapons budgets █ embrace, systems of chaos █ walking on a mountain, I am not a lady, miles of evergreen glades, serene blue lakes, withered bones crumble into dust, free the mountain █ seeing movies in theatres █ latter █ chandelier █ inherent emptiness █ free community classes, open educational structure █ food for the community █ friends with complementary skills █ TIME █ help this land flourish, rehab program, gas and oil execs █ oversized and underused homes, art assets █ Indigenous sovereignty, organize to educate █ higher taxes for the rich, force more money █ dissolve my organization, wellness of my community █ government shut down, redrawing of the constitution, finer details █ carve wooden objects, rip out roads, accessible transportation, small and intentional, recycle skyscrapers █ populist left solidarity network, UBC, lanes of natural growth, think tank █ treaties, every Canadian household, red paint splotches, zines █ intervene regularly, written policy, my form of activism, █ housed, shared █ illegal to generate profit, maximum wage, worker co-ops █ administrataive class, damp and mouldy, active gas leak, abolish tution and student debt █ exceeds my skill set and logistical capacity █ landlords in jail, de-zone █ every cop car █ way longer convo, unpaid labour █ 105 Keefer █ too diffiuct to answer, vested interest, due dilligence, Indigenous legal processes █ teach criticality, indoctrinated into producing value, Vancouver Mural Fest █ dignified housing, spas █ isn't worth my time █ snap my fingers, carbon footprint, urban farms

The Art Workers' Inquiry For Decolonial Potential





Graphic for the Art Workers Inquiry for Decolonial Potential, 2023, designed by Rupali Morzaria.

INTRODUCTION

Steff Hui Ci Ling

The Art Workers' Inquiry For Decolonial Potential is a survey that I circulated in 2023 asking art workers twenty-eight questions about worker identity, skill sets, housing conditions and most significantly feelings about private property. It received 100 responses, 43 completed questionnaires.

Arranging questions about labour towards questions about private property is to ask art workers to consider our labour in connection to the history of settler-colonialism. These are not moral questions, but material ones — how are our labour conditions informed by institutions of private property? How is settler-colonialism contingent on the exploitation of workers' labour — of artists' labour? In other words, I'm interested in the political economy of artists and art workers as members of the working class.

ART WORKERS' INQUIRY

I use workers' inquiry as a tool to determine what we know about ourselves and our political conditions as art workers and then offer, develop, and use that knowledge for class war, liberating our time, and taking care of each other along the way.

In 1880, Karl Marx addressed an inquiry to the French working class through a questionnaire published in *La Revue Socialiste*. He asked one hundred questions on working conditions, rent, access to healthcare and workers compensation, becoming progressively more politicized in the arch of questions. Worker's inquiries cultivate workers' standpoints that can be shared and understood by and between workers. In the ongoing genealogy of this tool, the inquiry extends to the broadly exploited classes beyond or in combination with the wage relation, such as social reproduction, unfree labour, non-standard, migrant, or workers or non-workers on disability or welfare.

The exchange of these standpoints informs us of our class position and capacity to structure, organize, and resist exploitation. In the context of the art workers' inquiry for decolonial potential, inquiring into the economic relationship between

our labour exploitation and land dispossession should reveal a lot about our class (and class aspirations) and this will shape our collective power to act on choices between reproducing and “destroying” private property.

I think workers’ inquiries are a viable tool for art workers to develop a political standpoint from where we can co-resist alongside decolonial struggles taking place on Turtle Island. Here, the settle-colonial capitalist state, corporate banks, and the surplus value of extractive industries play enormous financial roles in supporting the operations of public museums, awards, arts periodicals, and non-profit cultural spaces. Therefore, the budgets, salaries, and artists fees for art workers’ labour and production are inextricable from land dispossession and the ongoing occupation and assault on Indigenous nations. An art workers’ inquiry in the settler-colonial context must necessarily forge decolonial potential through our knowledge systems and implement campaigns against labour and land exploitation.

FOR DECOLONIAL POTENTIAL

Decolonial potential is part of a “working-class knowledge system” which consists of practices that workers use to produce self-knowledge about ourselves, our working conditions, and intellectually defend ourselves against hegemonic actors and narratives of sacrifice, competition, meritocracy, and so-called justice in the capitalist horror fantasy that is private property.

To return to the aims of the Inquiry, I am drawing from what I think we have a consensus about, which is that the theft of Indigenous land and workers’ time are the foundation of settler-colonial capitalism. The Inquiry’s questions attempt to connect this dual theft with what we do, what we think we’re good at, and how we survive on a day-to-day level to make our decolonial potential as workers living during a time of ongoing occupation a little more concrete.

In Jaskiran Dhillon’s *Notes on Becoming Comrade*, she prescribes politicized allyship as comradeship that puts importance on “humility, self-interrogation, and the necessity of interreflexivity in building social movement relationships.” Her formulation of comradeship as a form of “political” allyship suggests that allyship alone is not political, and therefore requires politicization achieved by becoming comrades.

My contention is that one way we can more easily determine our decolonial potential is by developing a workers’ standpoint and a firm understanding of the land-labour relationship in the development of the cultural labour force. This is not just for art workers, but it is particular to us, because of where the resources to finance all our labour (paid and unpaid) is sourced from and what our labour is used to reproduce in the institutions that contract us.

Dhillon cites Metis artist Christi Belcourt, who emphasizes that, “Settler states have no interest in non-Indigenous people identifying with Indigenous movements for the very simple reason that it opens one’s eyes to the process of settler capitalist accumulation that are only possible through Indigenous erasure and elimination...”

Belcourt describes a precolonial arrangement of artistic activity that also divided labour among artists, because in addition to being artists, they acted as thinkers, philosophers, and lodge leaders. Dhillon’s lecture relays an Indigenous framework for an artistic resurgence that harnesses the unique and varied skills artists possess to foster spaces of decolonial opportunity and political consciousness, which can be understood as artistic activities that do not reproduce value, but instead social relations through expressions of political and social imagination.

As long as artistic labour is understood as decommodified (“free” or culturally constructed as universally priceless), socially divided, and disorganized, the life affirming world views of Indigenous artistic resurgence remain subdued or captured by the settler colonial cultural elite, and “underutilized [as a] form of decolonial weaponry.”

In this sense, “decolonial potential” is how we employ the strategies and tactics we have learned to compete, survive, relate, heal and struggle are reimagined/ redeployed as working-class skills and intellect towards infrastructure and projects and contexts that build genuine opportunities for solidarity between art workers and the broader working and precarious classes.

I have worked as an art worker for over ten years and remain, however willfully rarified, in the art world’s labour market as an occasional critic, film programmer and consultant. In other words, my work experience is as a mercenary gatekeeper, but my work in the university and within the labour movement help me to strategize

how to wrestle what we like about art (and how we like about art) away from capital — to reclaim its social form.

My experience as a worker and my training as a labour sociologist has led me to an earnest suggestion: art workers should unite over something other than simply making art without becoming destitute — we should mobilize as workers to abolish the traditions, mechanisms, and institutions that exploit land and labour. Yes, as many art workers in this zine noted, the fucking police have obviously got to go, but even some of the museums, galleries, and non-profit models that contract and employ us clearly can't continue to exist in their current form without funding from extractive industries contingent on the ongoing invasion and extraction of Indigenous land and culture. These models and the bosses who defend them are incommensurable with decolonization no matter what the diversity metrics and press releases say. Recognize these places for what they really are — work sites in a disorganized job sector — so let's sharpen our “decolonial weaponry” and do what the tired, sick, overworking masses have always done best, organize and build collective power!

This zine is an article of gratitude for the contributors of the inquiry but it's also a portrait of these art workers' contempt for private property and the skills we collectively have to redirect our technical and intellectual capacities towards developing our own working-class knowledge alongside decolonial movements.

The Inquiry has produced a dataset that will definitely inform my academic research and organizing, but the responses should circulate among art workers who may find it helpful to determine analysis and action most appropriate to their own work sites and labour contexts.

The zine was initially only going to publish responses to the last question but later I decided to present those responses in parallel with the responses to questions of skill.

This is the reason: earlier in the series of questions, I asked what art workers think they are good-at in their practice (6) and in their employment (8). Even though the last question asks for responses informed by their skill set, a fair majority of responses either neglected that aspect of the question and instead responded

with quite beautiful poetic ideations, romantic anarchic scenes of degrowth and destruction, or admitted that such a thing is beyond their skillset.

By including the answers to the questions about skills in the zine, I wanted to put in visual and textual relationship what people think they are capable of, and what people envision for the end of private property to encourage us to narrow this gap between conception and execution. For me, bringing these questions together touches on the Marxist concept of immanence: the condition that the working class always have the potential (or skill) to effect significant changes on history (this potential is also revealed even when we fail to overcome the contradictions our potential is directed towards).

Most of the skills listed can be directed towards organizing to destroy private property but are not frequently factored into the imaginings of how a respondent might methodically approach doing it. This is a design flaw in the survey because the question of skill was posed more than ten questions away from the final question about how one might use those skills to end property. I hope the presentation of these responses in relation to each other in the zine helps to think of our collective skill and imaginings against private property into its intended proximity.

“How will you destroy private property?” seems kind of like a sensational question, and I wanted us to have some fun with it, but actually — given the skills we have developed to survive in the labour market, how would you use them to intellectually, socially and economically divest from private property in solidarity with decolonial movements? I know I certainly do not intend to do it without comrades.

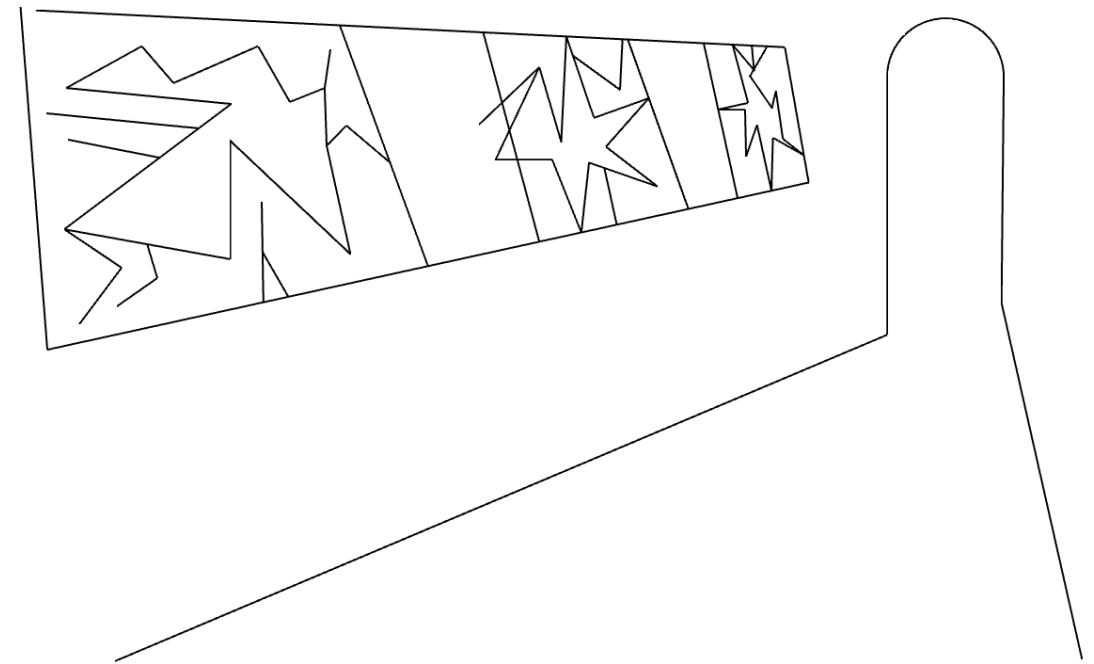
**Given the opportunity to reappropriate
and/or destroy public and/or private
property without any legal consequence,
employing any means within your
skillset and logistical capacity, how
would you implement this intervention
?**

As an example,
I would burn all email servers so I don't have to get any more
emails, then my job will be abolished and I can start a cute
Japanese restaurant.

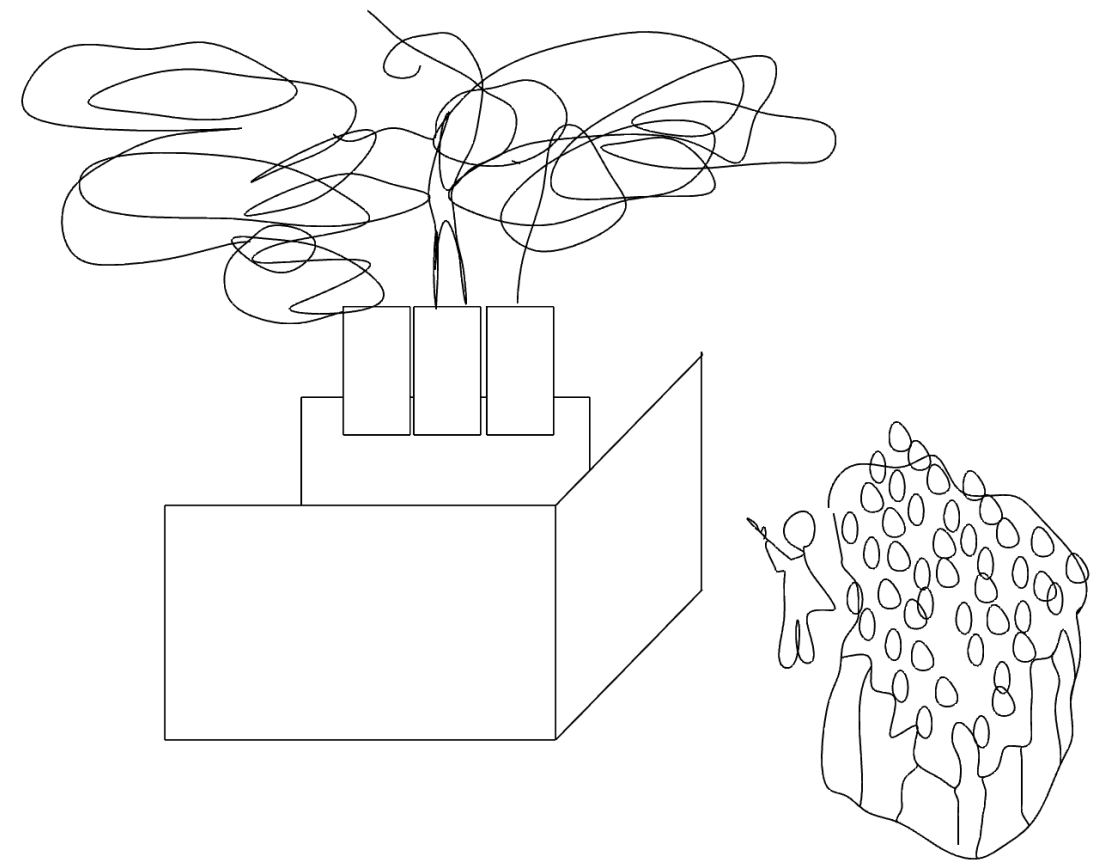
And,
I would crack a single egg on the [president of an art
university's] laptop.

Or,
Private property isn't just physical or spatial, it's also an ideology
of land use, so I would run a class at a workers' night school
about Land Back.

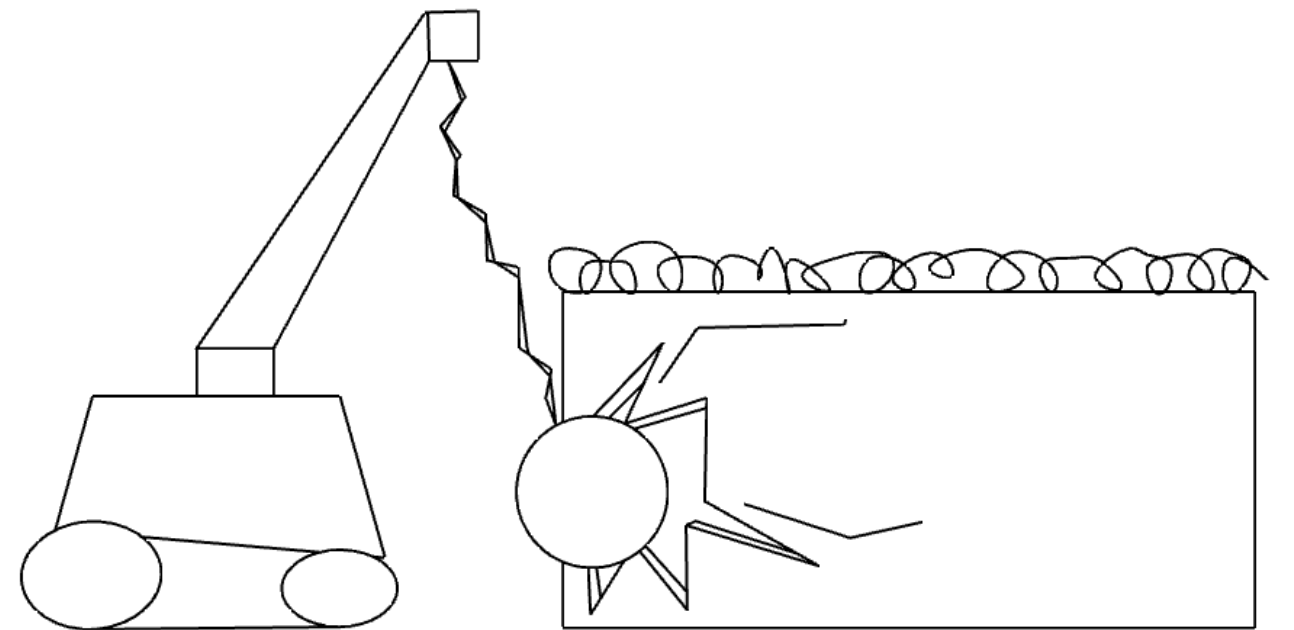
I would bash all the
screens in the subway
systems.



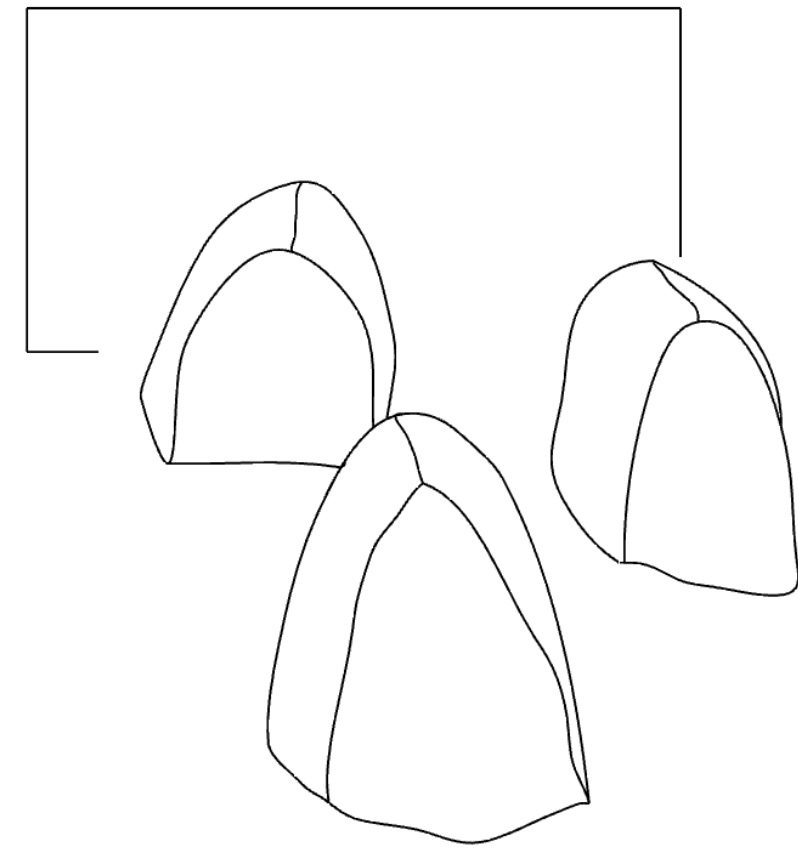
Maybe I'd start some sort of guided tour of the most wasteful and ugly private properties.



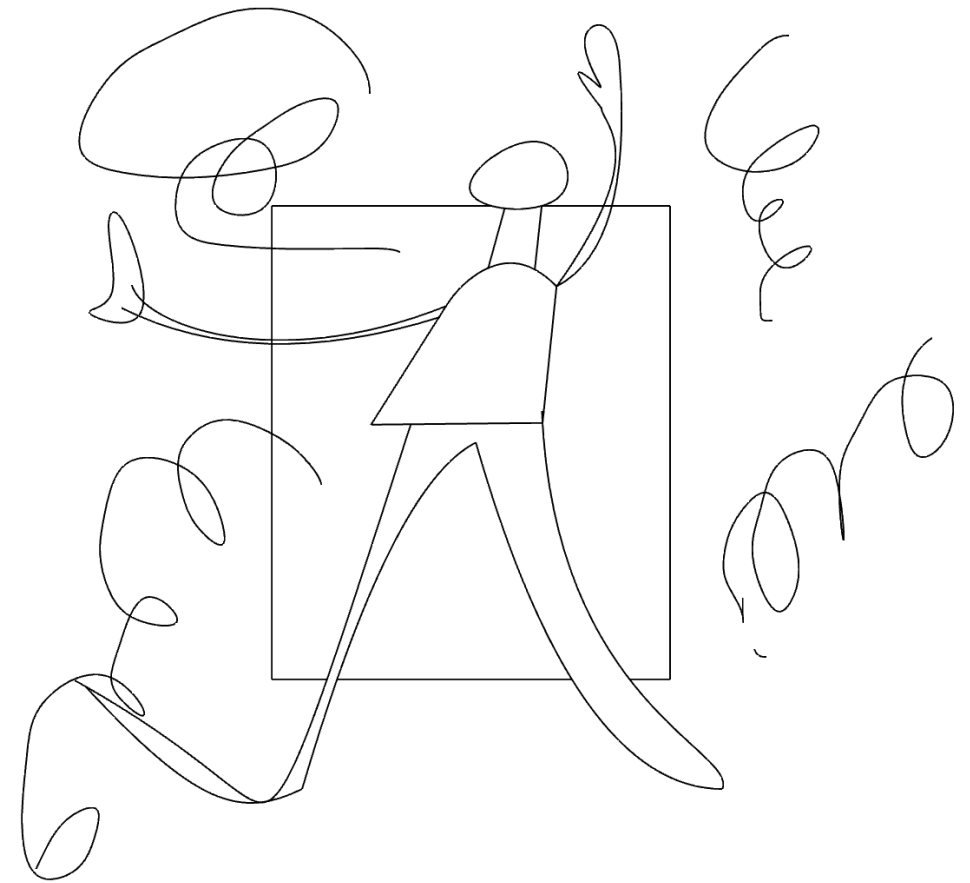
well I definitely want to attend the workers' night school Land Back course. I would demolish all police precincts, jails, and prisons, and support communities to build farms, gardens, community centers, social housing, free pantries, and other resource-hubs the communities deem suitable in their place.



I will move the arts organization I work at into a city-owned property and squat. Reason being, despite being assessed for cultural use, the city's Real Estate department is solely driven by profit and intends to charge "market rent."



I would make the quiet spaces
noisy! With my instruments and
body and voice.



I would look to movements like Land Back, Red Deal etc to steer the direction. Abolishing private property and the state and ideologies surrounding them would go hand in hand with this approach.



Honestly I think I'd ask my girlfriend what she wants to do. Chances are I'd end up working on resource distribution while she just heals. Even if property is valueless, there will still be people who can't get access to resources because they can't drive / commute / move around easily. People will be hoarding things at stores and a lot of folks will be missing out. Scarcity mindset won't just vanish - that shit is passed on intergenerationally. Also I imagine the economy will get a bit fucked up from this dramatic shift in how money works and a lot of people will be coping with the consequences of system fracture.



Can you think of three things you think you are good at in your work or creative practice?

I would abolish private property so that everything is collectively owned and stewarded – but that probably can't happen without a violent global revolution that overthrows the ruling class. :)

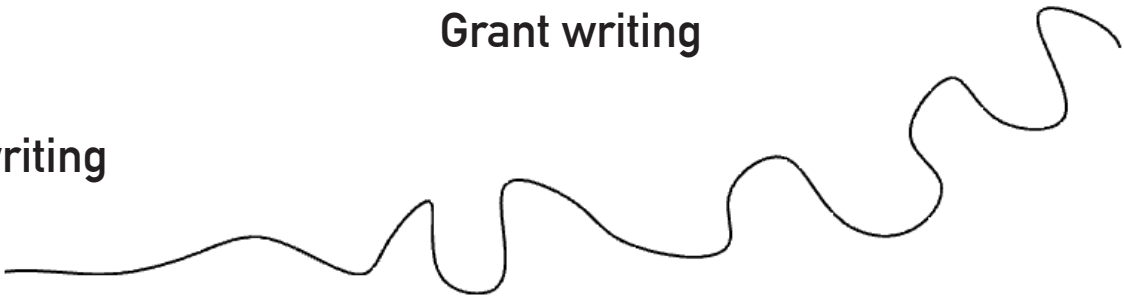
Attention toward obscured places

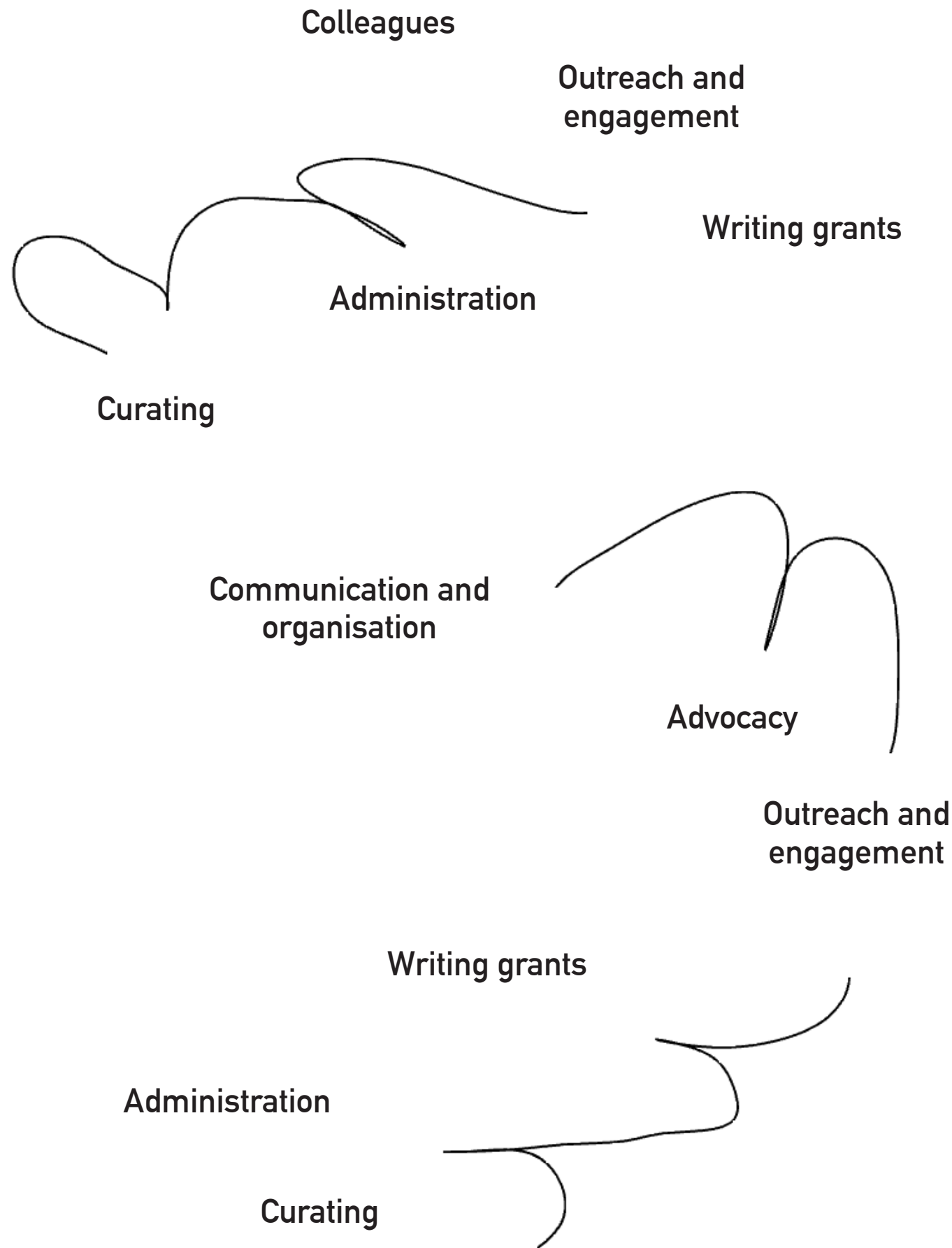
Representation

Writing around and through art as exploration

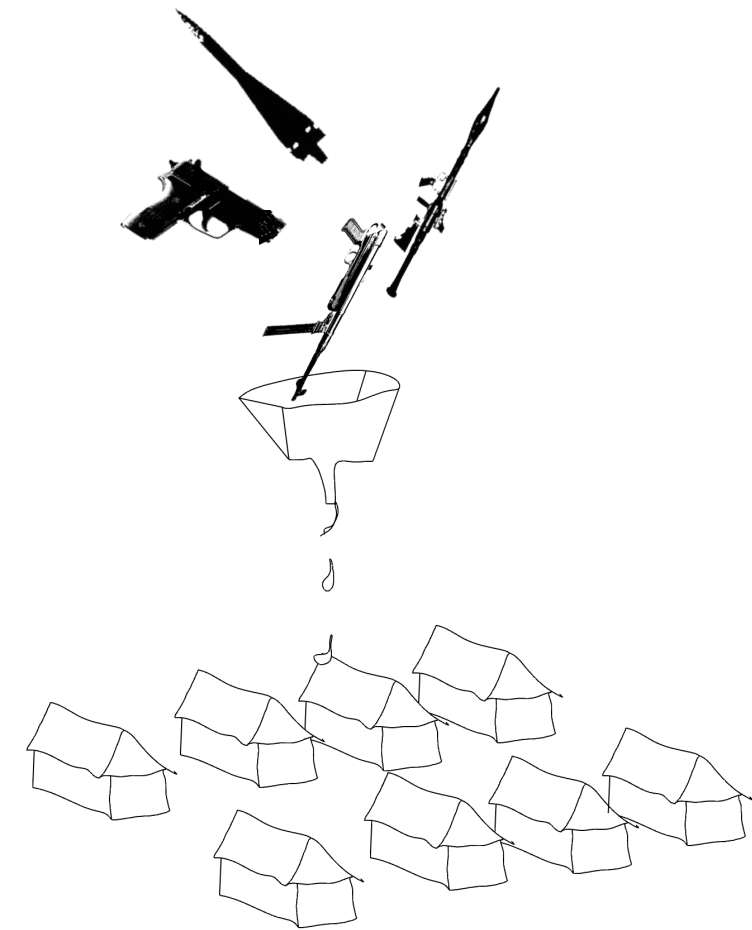
Grant writing

Grant writing





I would turn all the police stations into public community centers – libraries, free clinics, schools, repair shops – and reappropriate all the cop vans & horses into free transport and community stables. Their parking lots become gardens and farms, and their entire weapons budgets get reallocated towards social housing and public goods!



Communication and organisation

Advocacy

Advocating for accessible practices

Supporting community members' knowledge of their rights

Setting things on fire

Resisting work

Working with very little

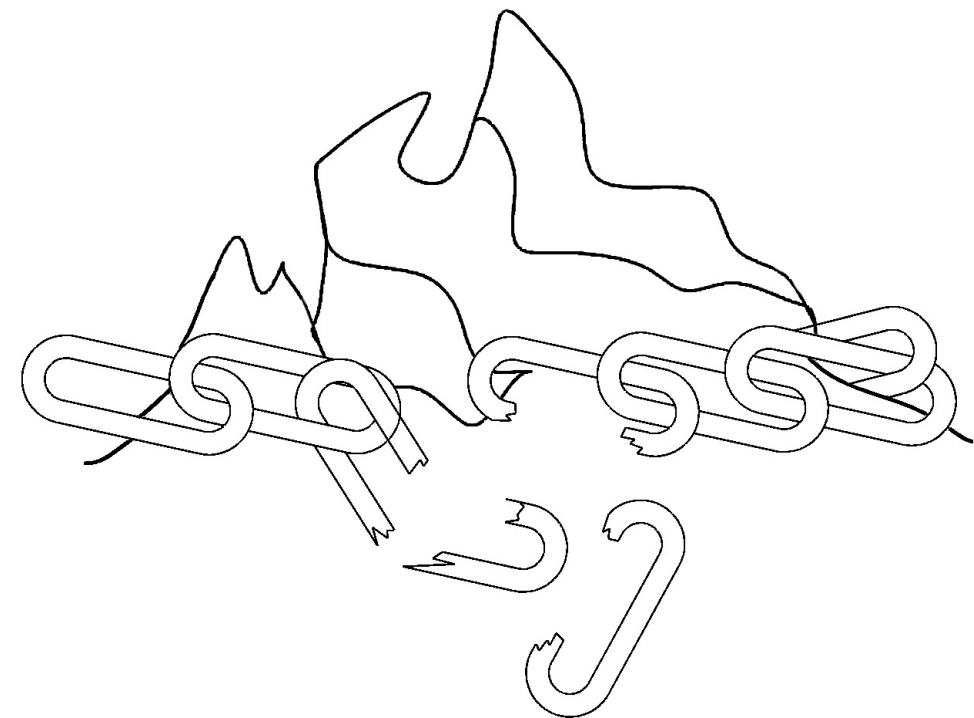
Creative direction/ concepting

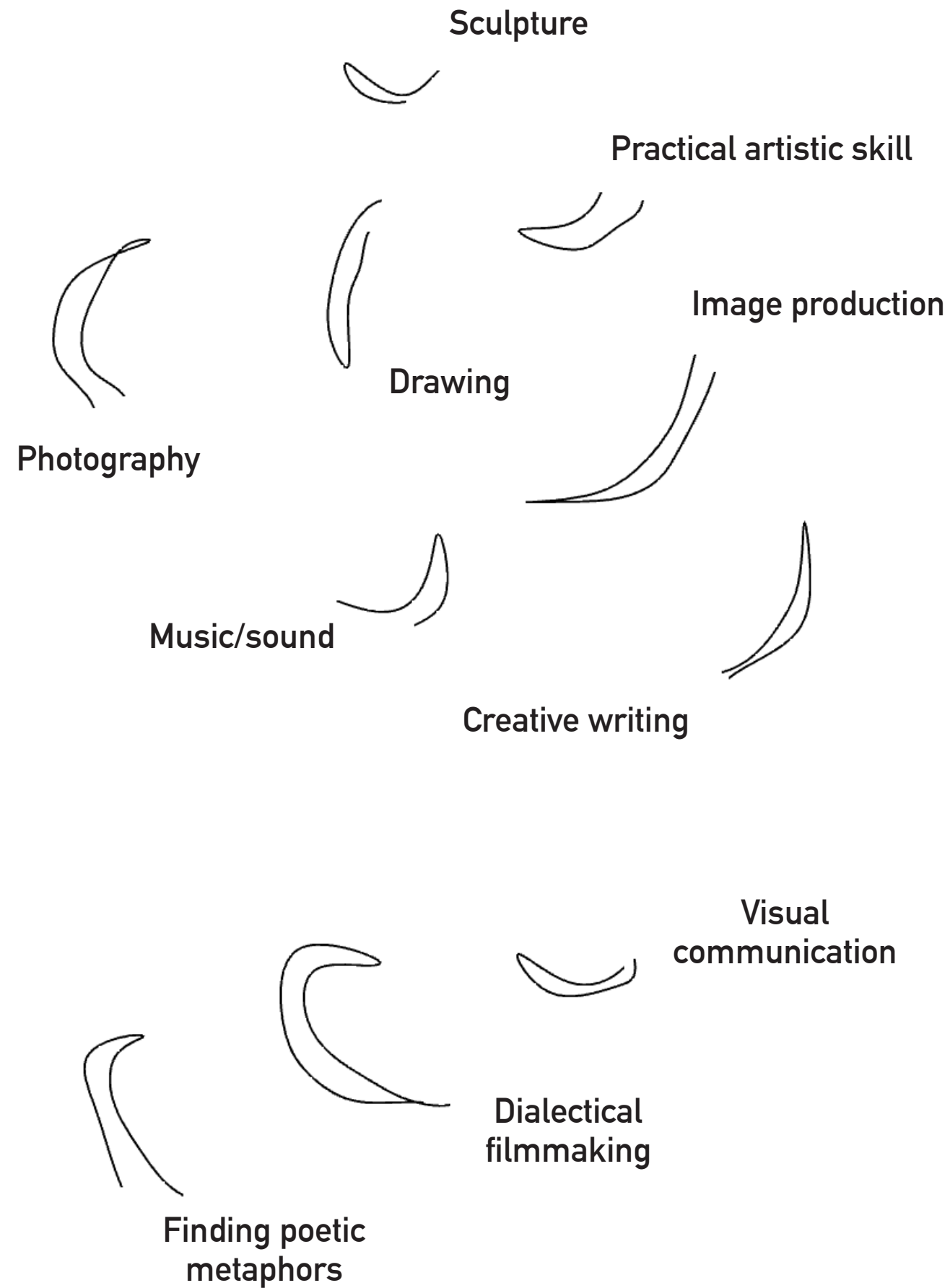
Painting

Art direction

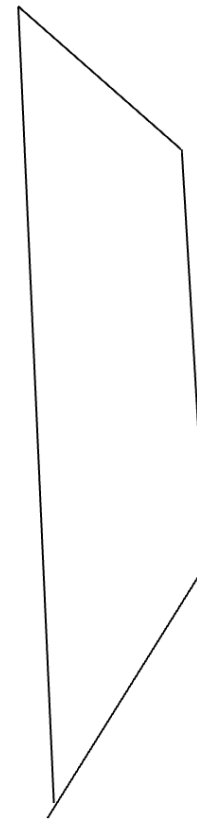


I don't know how I would fix this but one time I was walking on a mountain and had apparently stumbled onto a "private" campgrounds. I continued walking through the grounds until a man came up to me and said "where do you think you're going last?". First, I am not a lady, second I was like, I'm just walking here. He told me it was private land, no trespassing allowed. We were in a beautiful forest. Miles of Evergreen glades we're interrupted only by serene blue lakes. I couldn't fathom how someone thought they "owned" this land. It was so disgusting and repulsive. The forest and the mountains was older than any of us and would live long enough to see our withered bones crumble into dust. But there was "no trespassing." I would do anything it took to free the mountain from people who think it's theirs to claim.





I don't know about destruction, but I would like to take over any and all warehoused apartments in New York, as well as probably destroy streaming services / their servers so we can return to seeing movies in theatres



The latter

Colour

Illustration

Making do with what
resources i have

Discipline

Endurance

Obsession

Curiosity

Determination

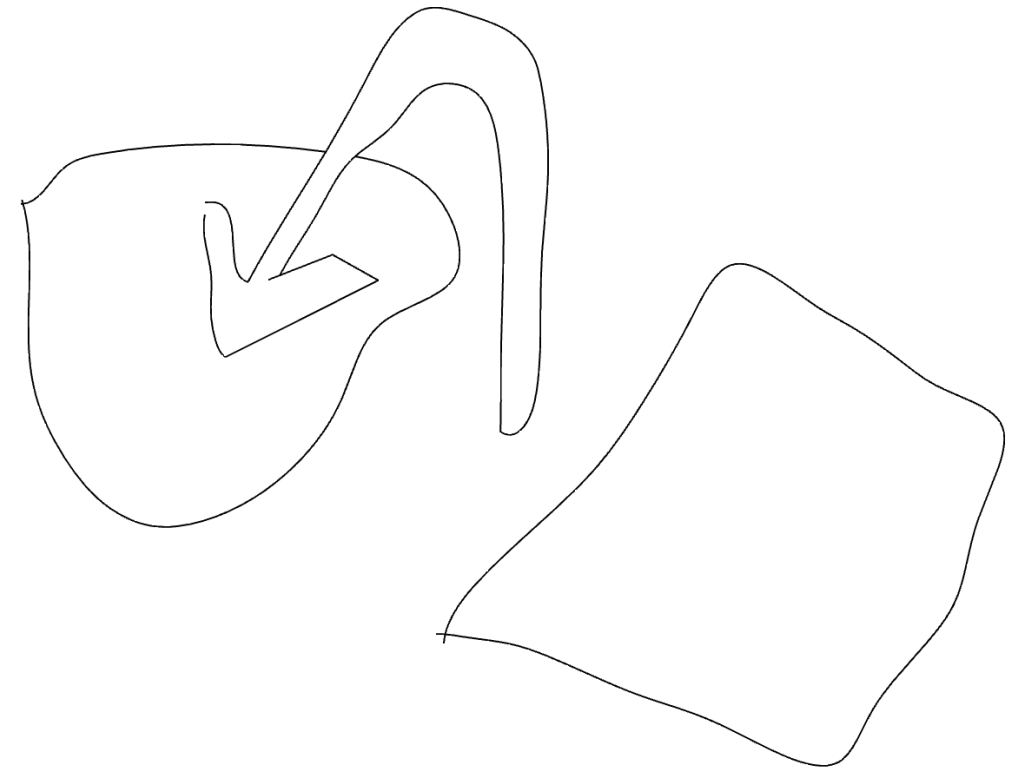
Distinct voice

Persistence

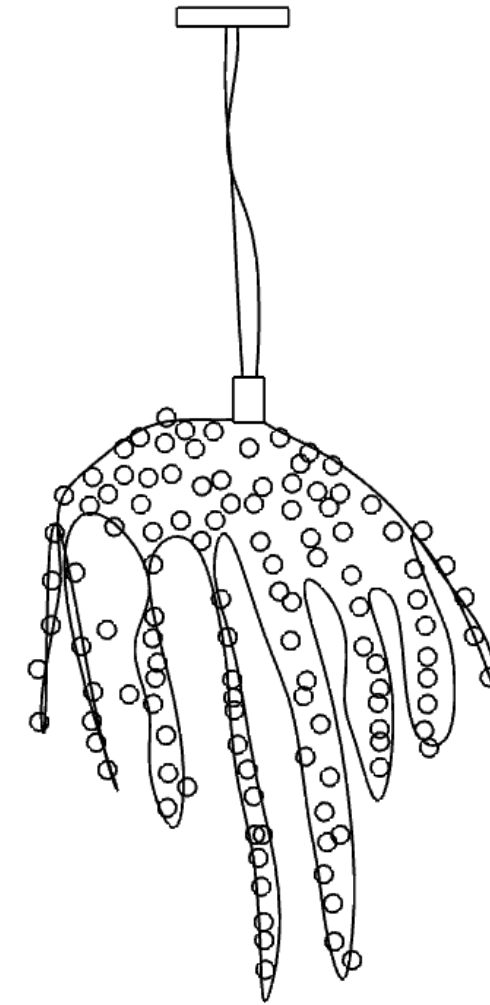
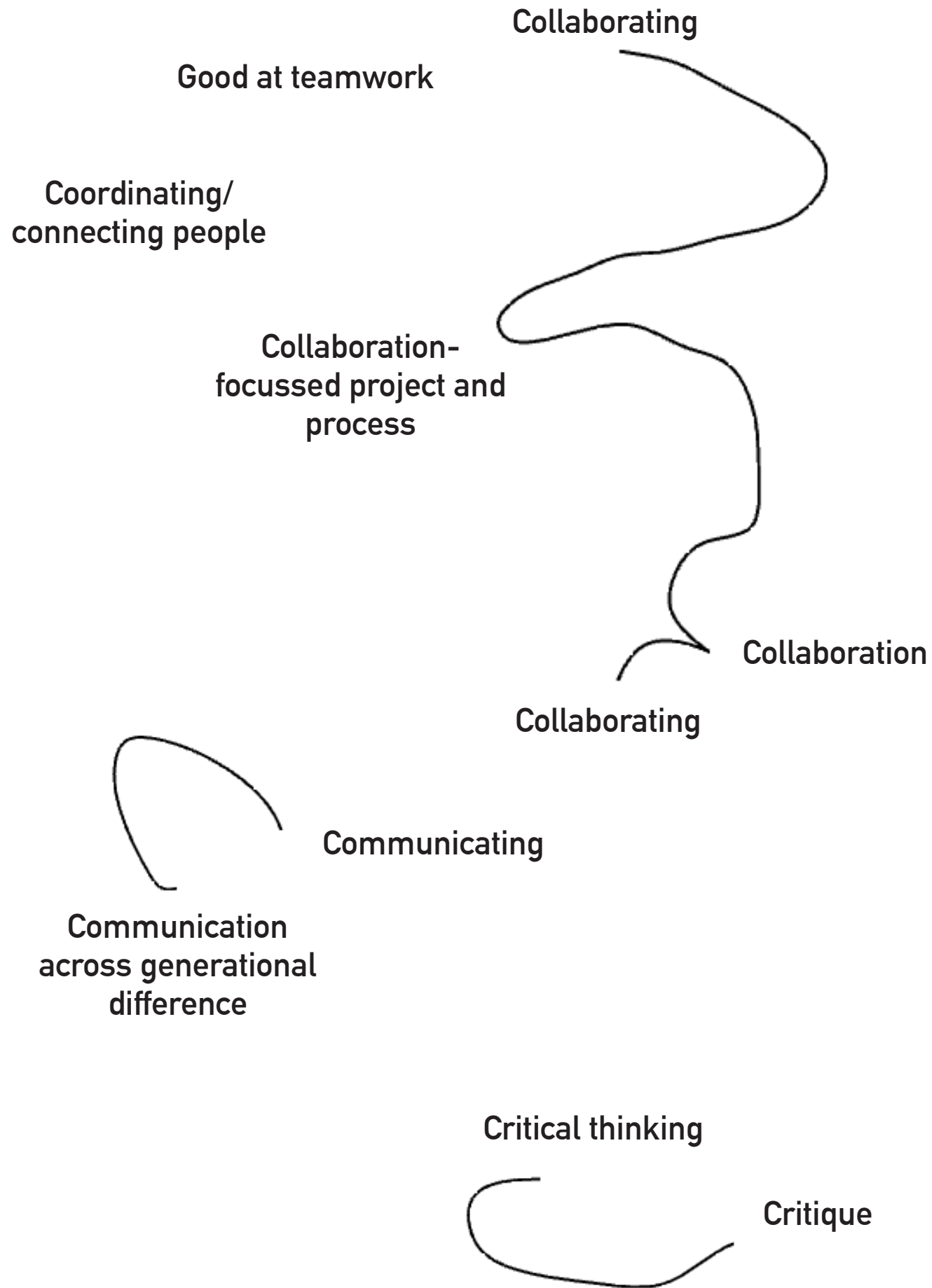
Force

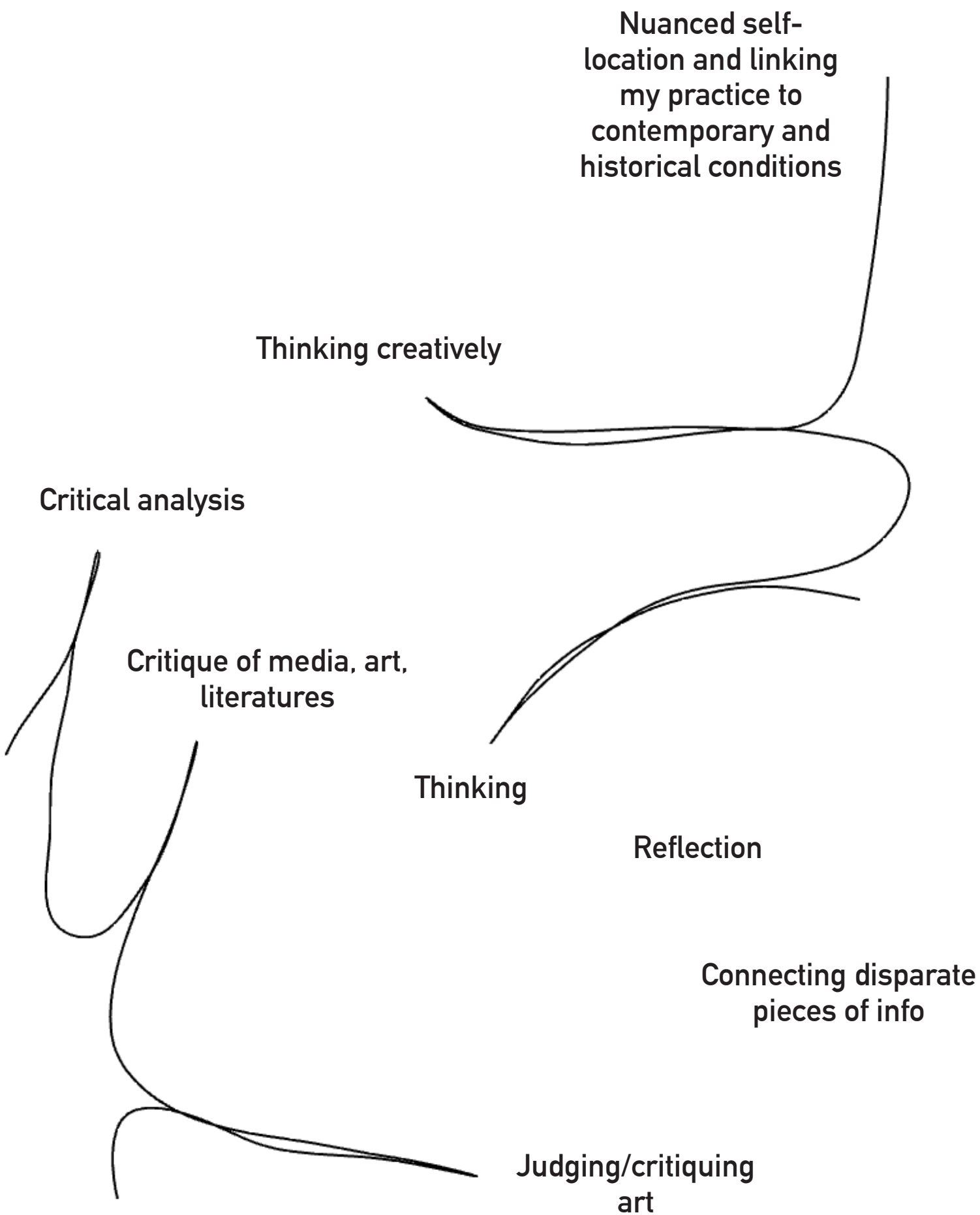
Persistence

Attentiveness

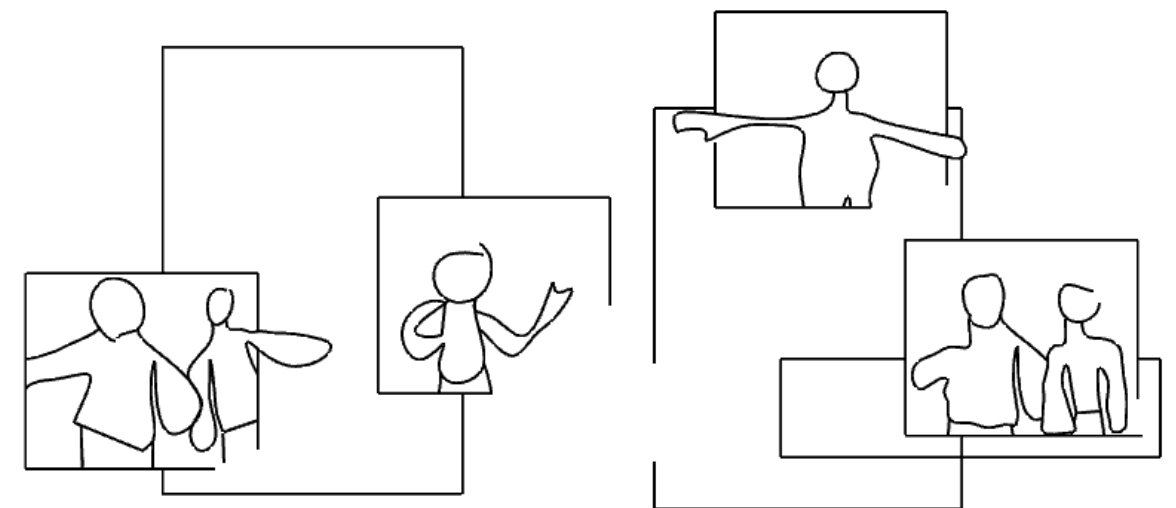


that god damn chandelier

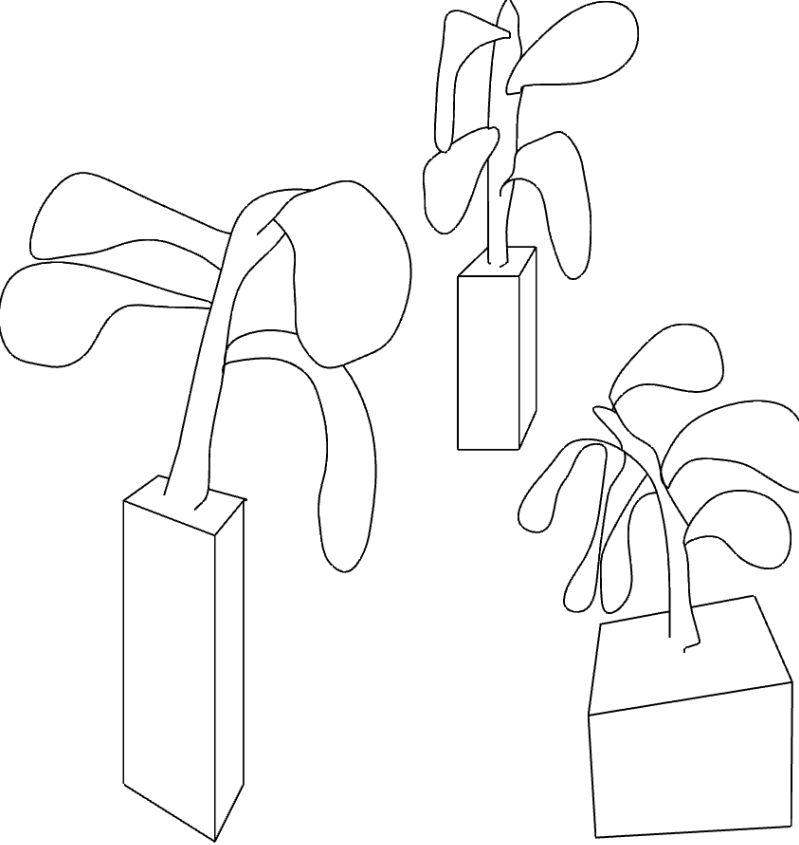
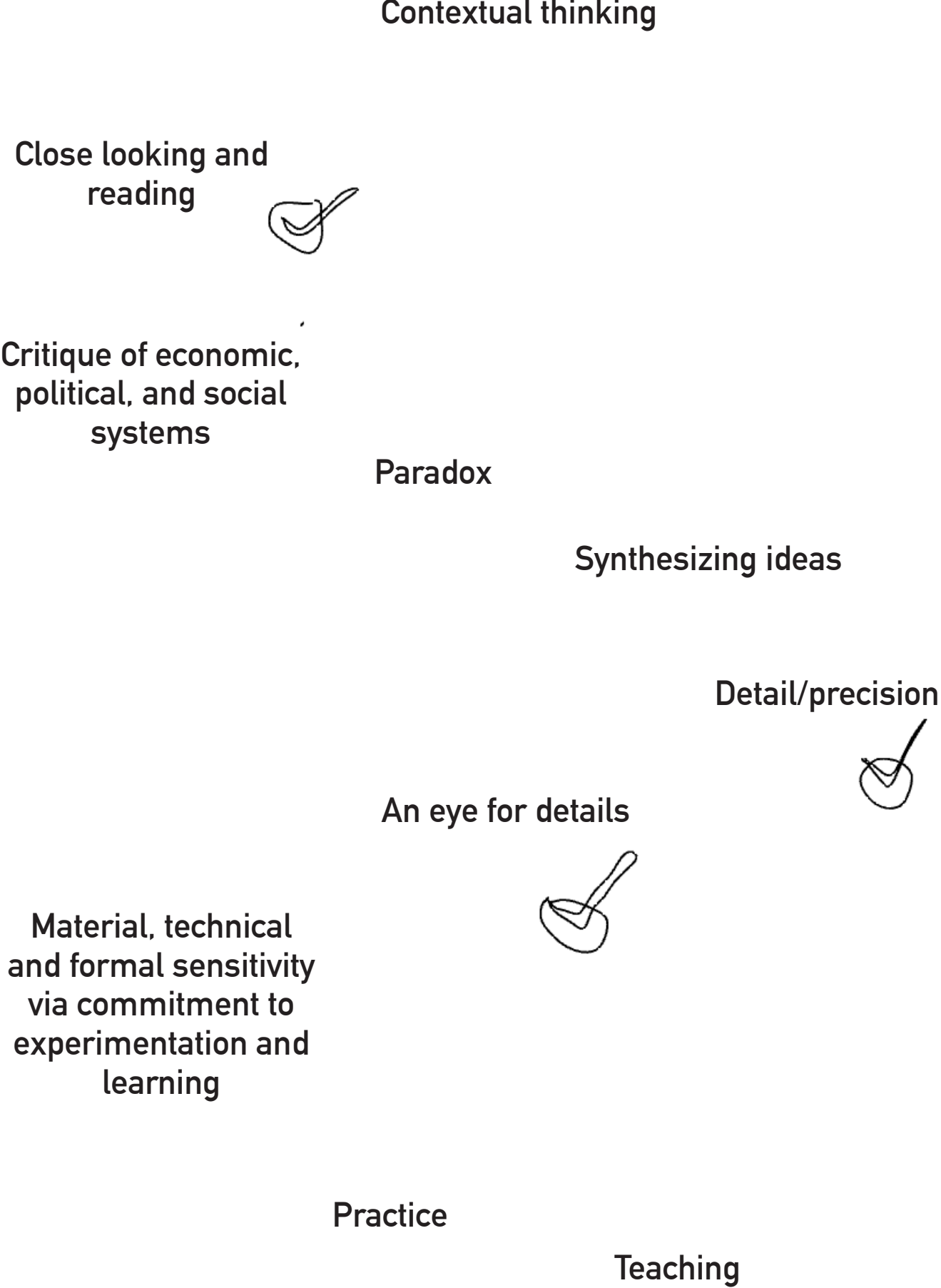




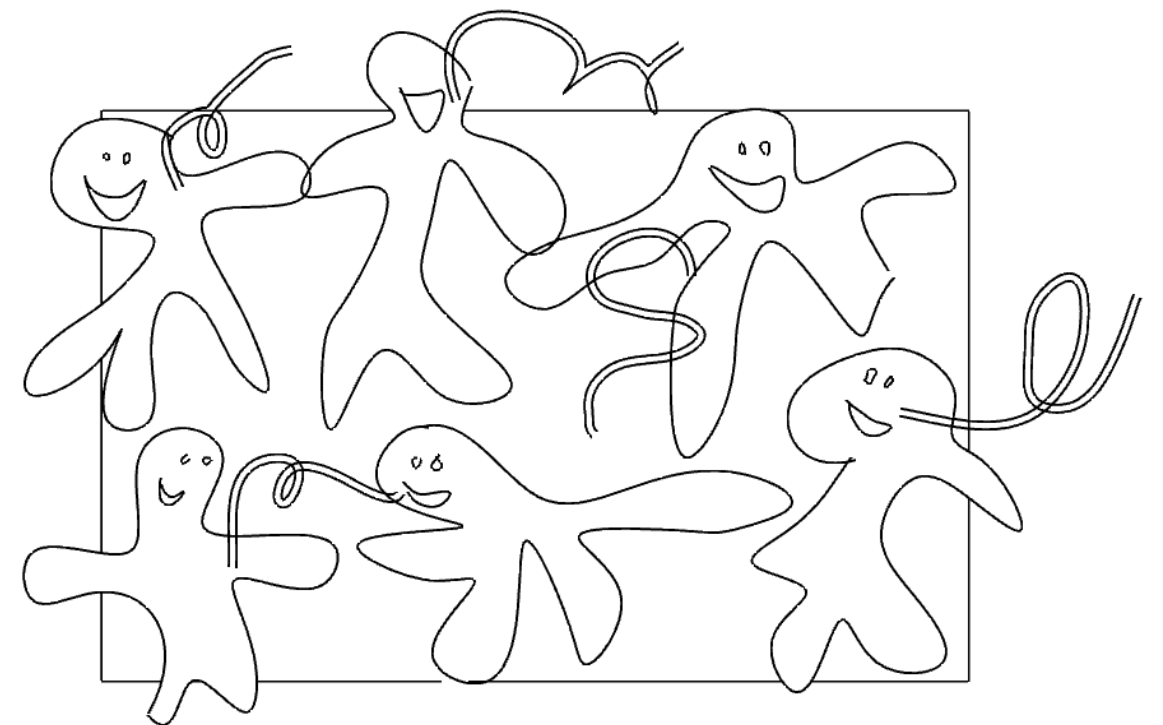
I would work to create a network of other university staff, employees, faculty and community members to bar university administrators from accessing campus. We could occupy and reappropriate the studios, shops and classrooms for free community classes, brainstorming, and strategizing for a free and open educational structure (NOT a university).



I would turn the university art gallery into a greenhouse and grow food for the community.



i would appropriate a large private home and turn it into communal housing, food garden and studios if i could. i think i. would try to do this with a group that i'm already in dialogue with, ie. friends who have complementary skills and the will to build a space together. i would choose an empty home, of which there are many locally.



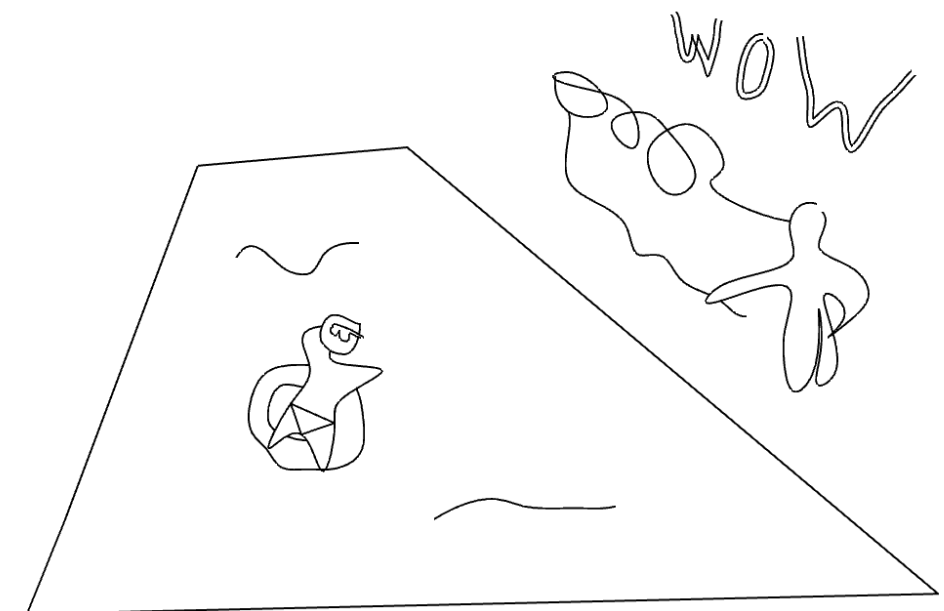
It's not something that could be done quickly without collaboration across many individuals and communities and consensus. It would have to take TIME.



All yards, gardens, and parks would become public property, but those who live on it would have a public duty to maintain it. Tax incentives would be given to those who use innovation and traditional Indigenous practices of care in order to help this land flourish. I would also kill every Gas and Oil executive and CEO, and put oil and gas workers through a rehab program.



I would commandeer the oversized and unused homes of the wealthy and make into communal studio work live situations. We'd have West Van swimming pool tours and all private beaches be made public and private boats used to ferry folks around. Art assets would be seized from these homes and sold and the wealth redistributed and used to house the unhoused in these homes.



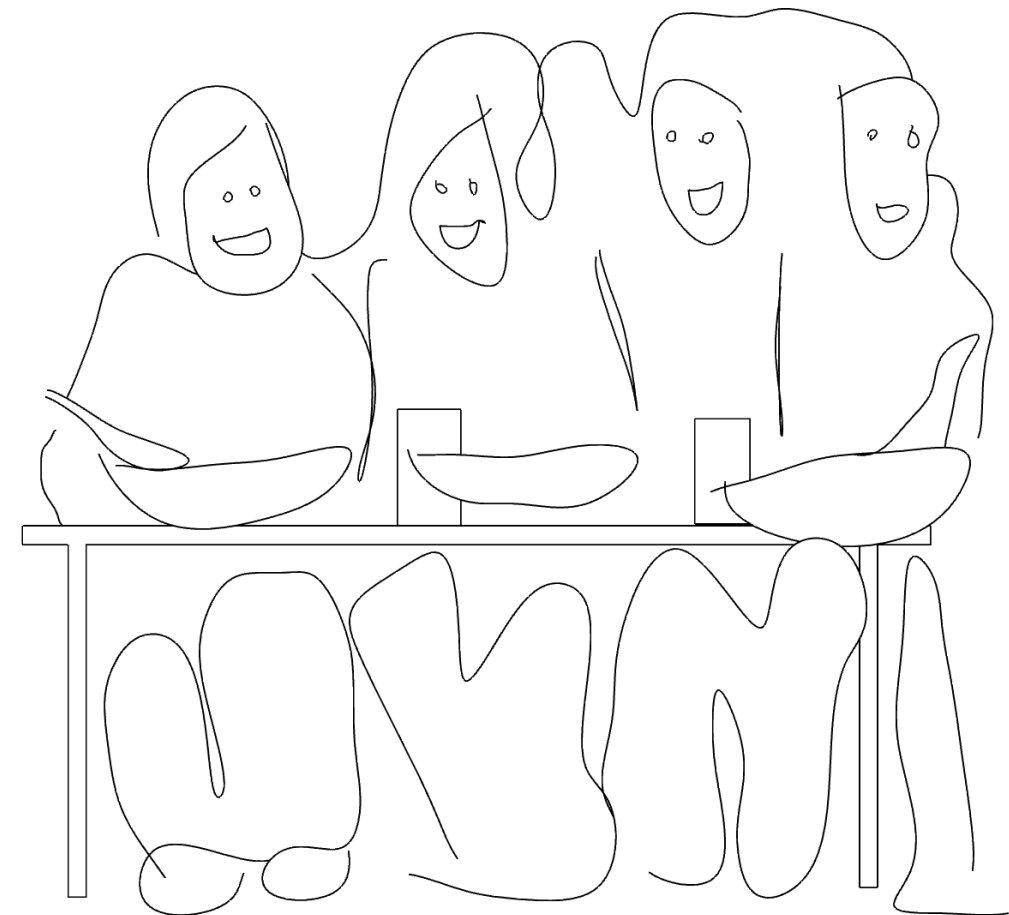
yes i would destroy private property and the ideologies that come out of it i support land back and would like to work for Indigenous sovereignty, work with everyone and the land so that we are not separate from the land and we don't own it or extract resources. i would shut down everything. but i guess in my own skillset and logistical capacity, i would organize to educate more people about land back and what decolonization looks like.



I would force all the billionaires in the world to share their wealth and create higher taxes for the rich. I would give Indigenous peoples legal leadership and stewardship over the lands in North America. I would force more money into public healthcare and social work.



I would steal all of Contemporary Calgary's money and reappropriate it to community-based initiatives. I would also dissolve my organization and create a community hub not focused on the exhibition of art but on the wellness of my community through art, food, and rest. :')



If you feel there is a difference between “work” (your creative practice) and “job” (your paid employment) -- what are three things you feel are good at in your job?
If you are currently unemployed, feel free to draw from recent experiences

?

Practice

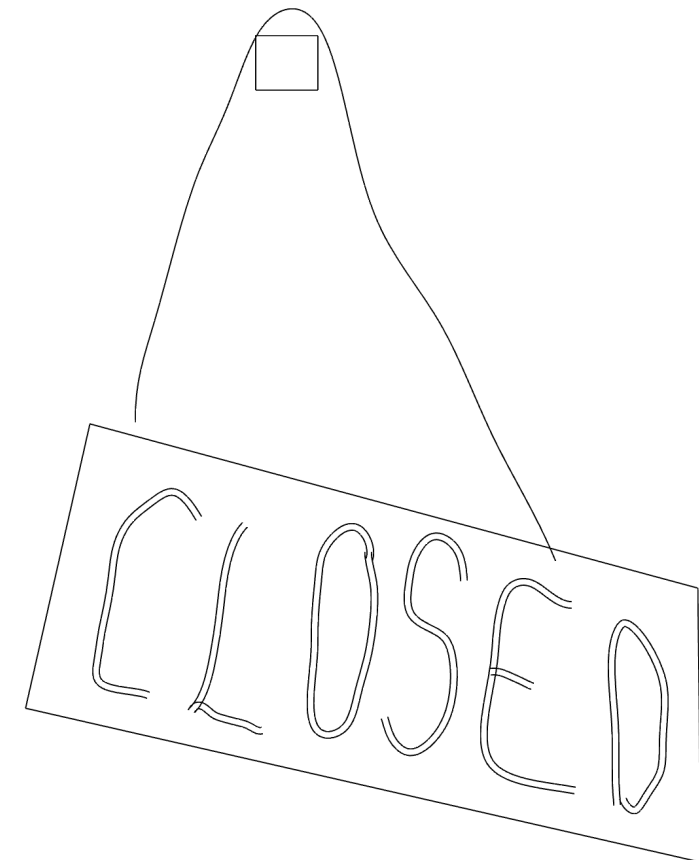
Writing reports

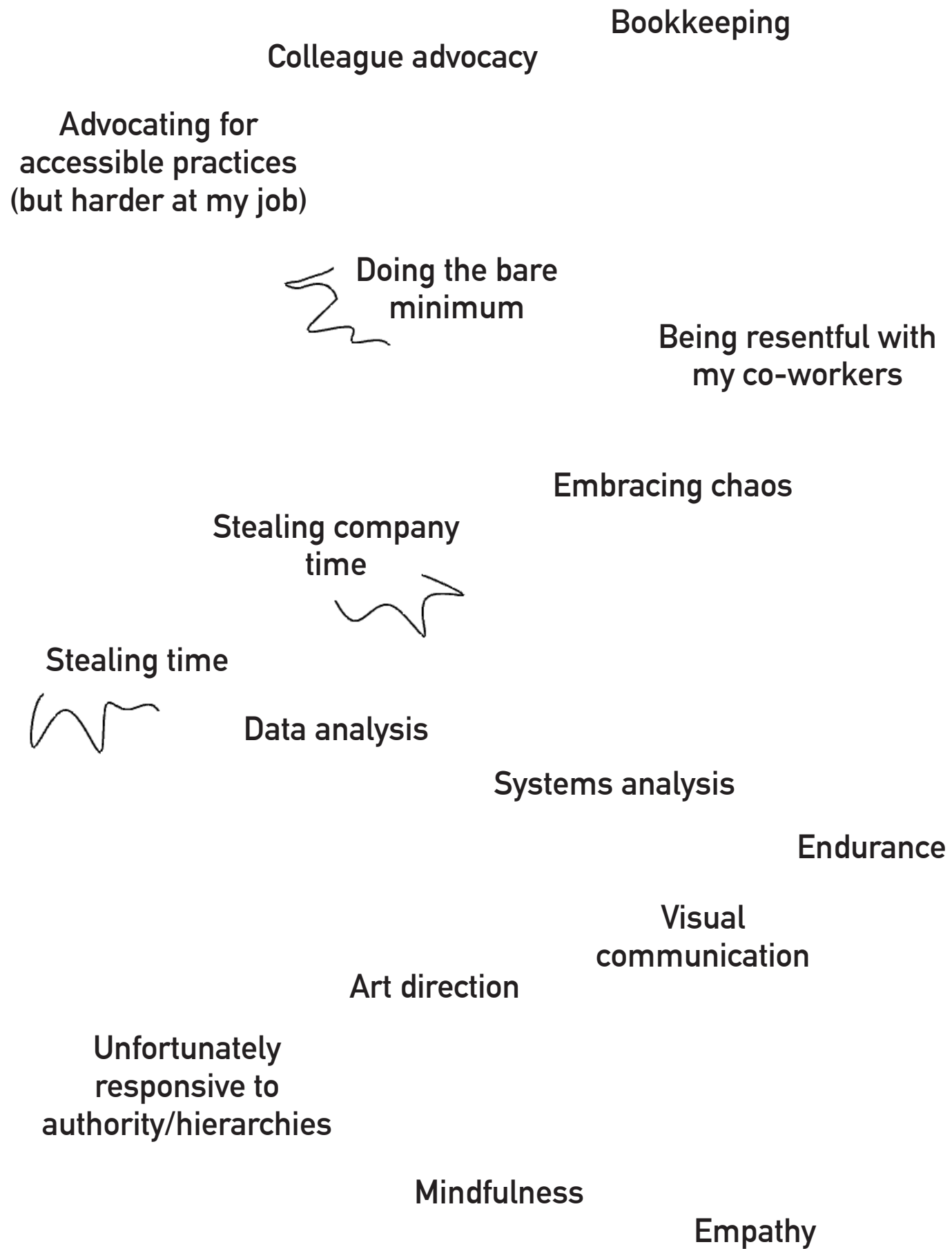
Fiscal management

Accounting & bookkeeping

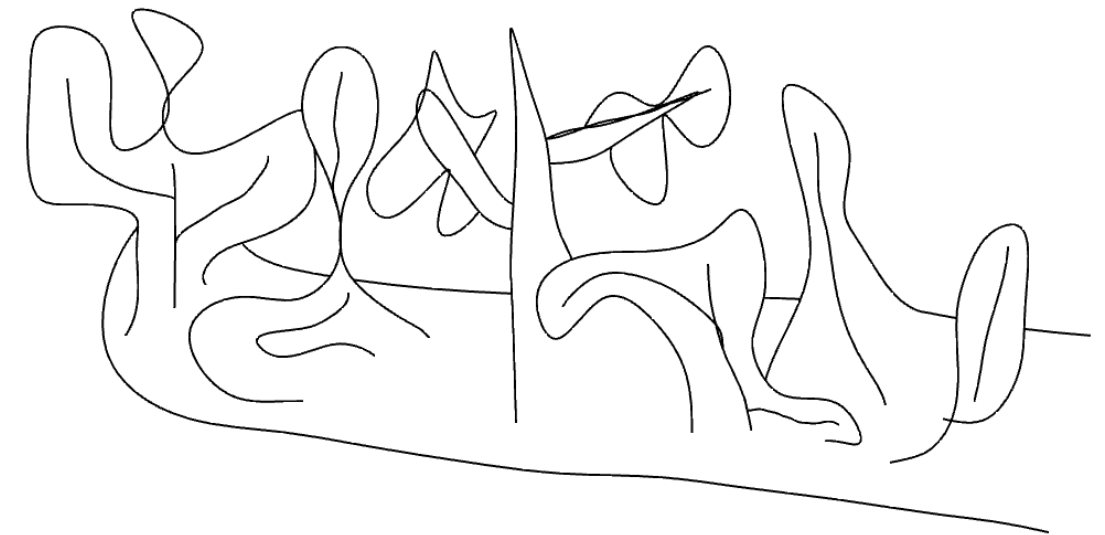
Budgeting / designing functional and accessible spreadsheets

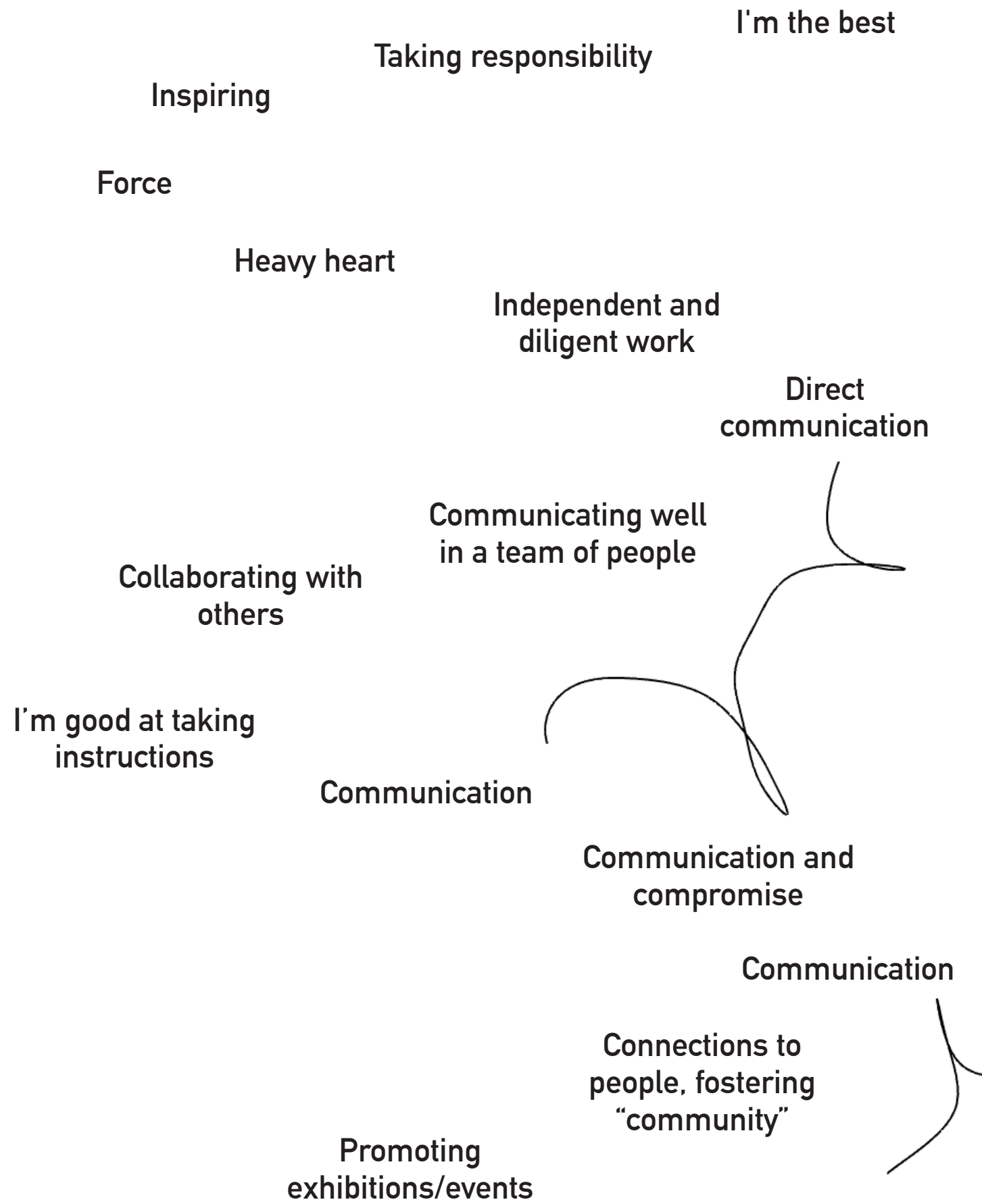
I would organize the means of a government shut down (stop all trains, ports, gas lines, highways and internet) and force a diplomatic redrawing of the constitution removing any connection to the British commonwealth and replacing it with a new system of indigenous land repatriation. Still working on the finer details



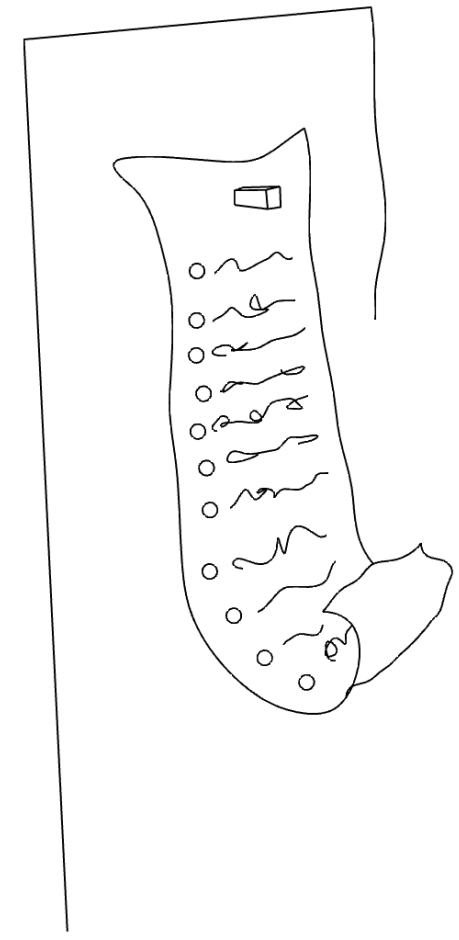


I would like to give stewardship back to the Indigenous people and learn from their guidance — I would love to have a huge garden and carve wooden objects and give them to my friends — I would rip out roads and imagine more accessible transportation — build small and intentional communities — recycle skyscrapers into pieces for sustainable housing for all





I would organize a populist left solidarity network throughout so-called North America to spread decolonial, postcapitalist ideology; democratically implement a postcapitalist Land Back continent, abolish the police, adequately tax billionaires and resource extraction industries to the point of their irrelevance and redistribute their wealth throughout the masses, implement UBI and accelerate universal public transit, plough the freeways for lanes of natural growth, and establish a think tank for sustainable postcapitalism.



Facilitating

Working directly with clients to manage their user experiences.

Community building & collaboration

Critique

Community building

Holding complexity

Contributing to a caring, supportive community at my job, with whomever i come into contact

Attention to detail

Being thorough in a task

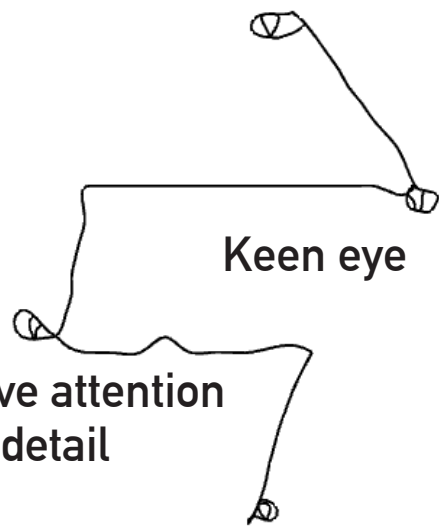
Detailed analysis and feedback

Keen eye

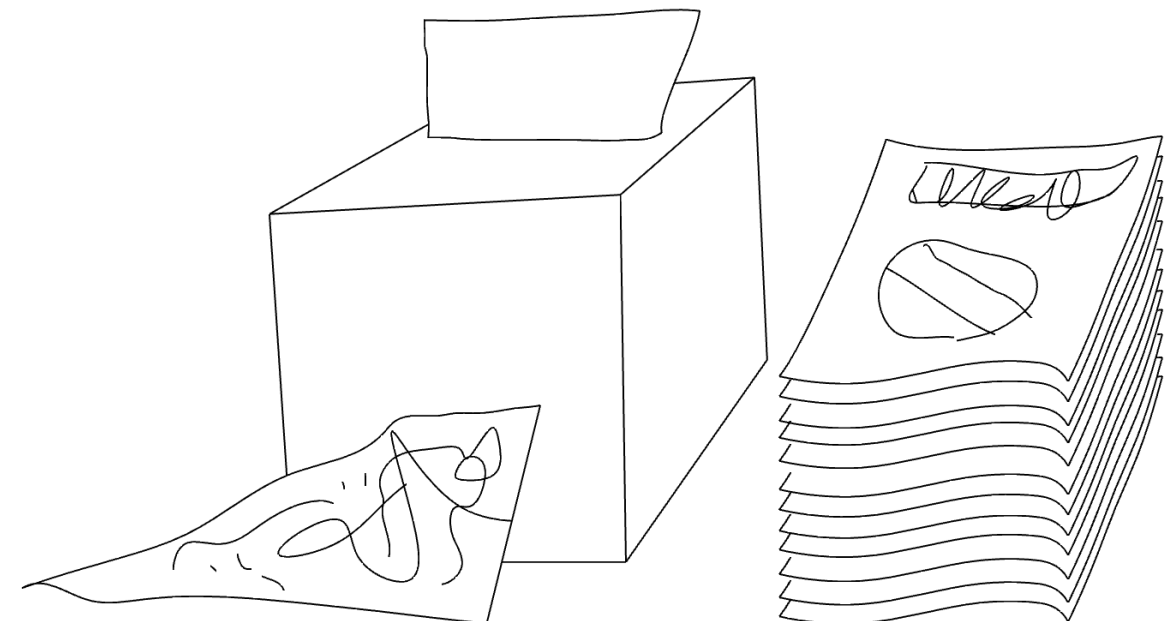
Obsessive attention to detail

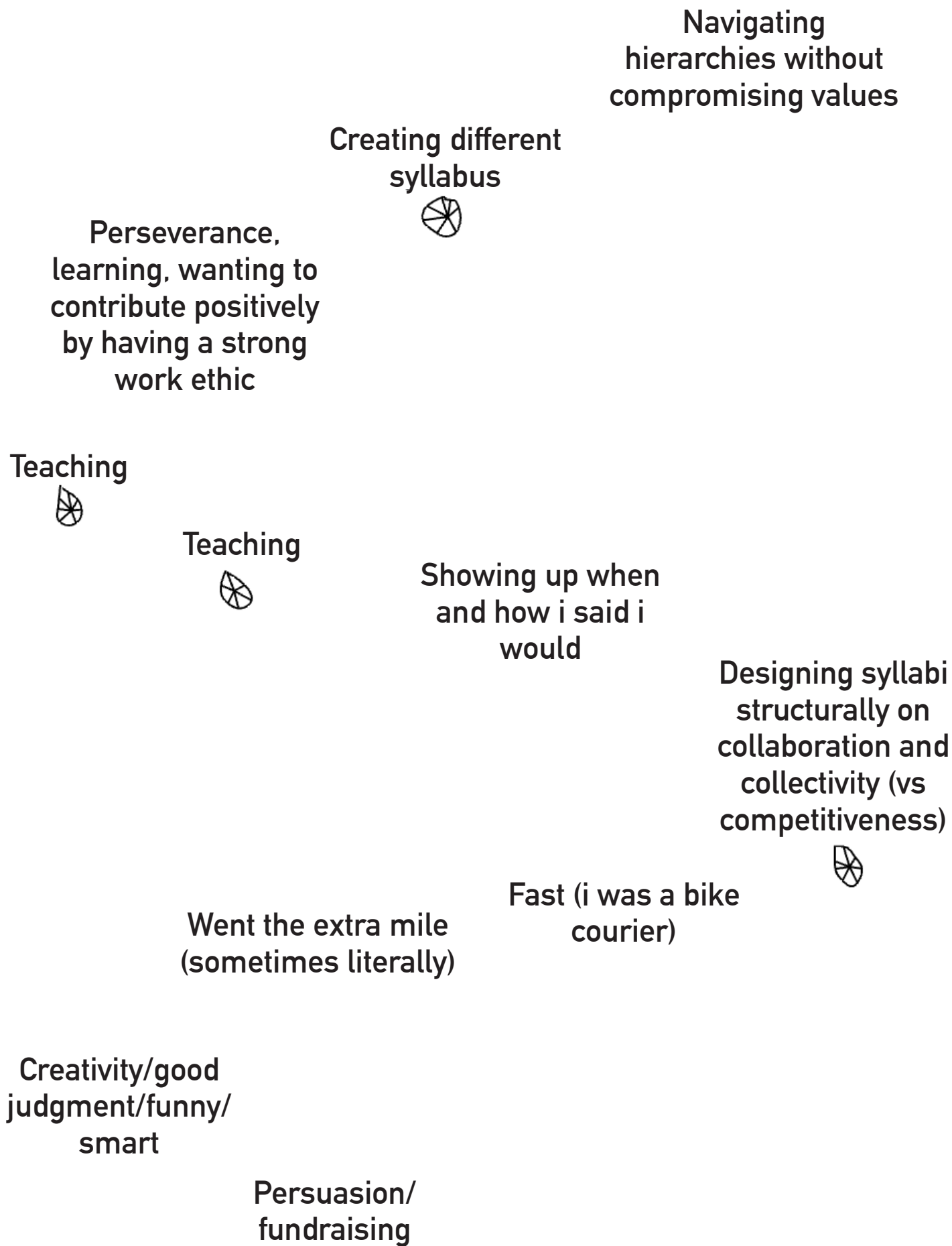
Detail

I show up

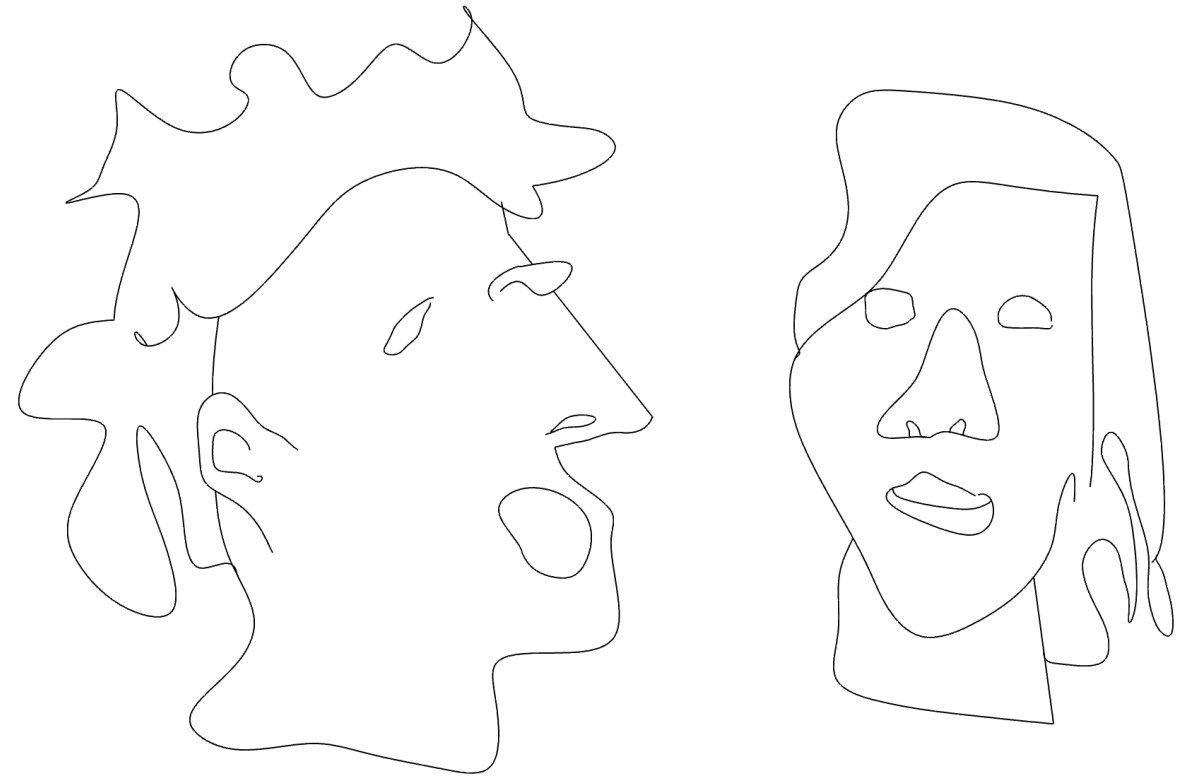


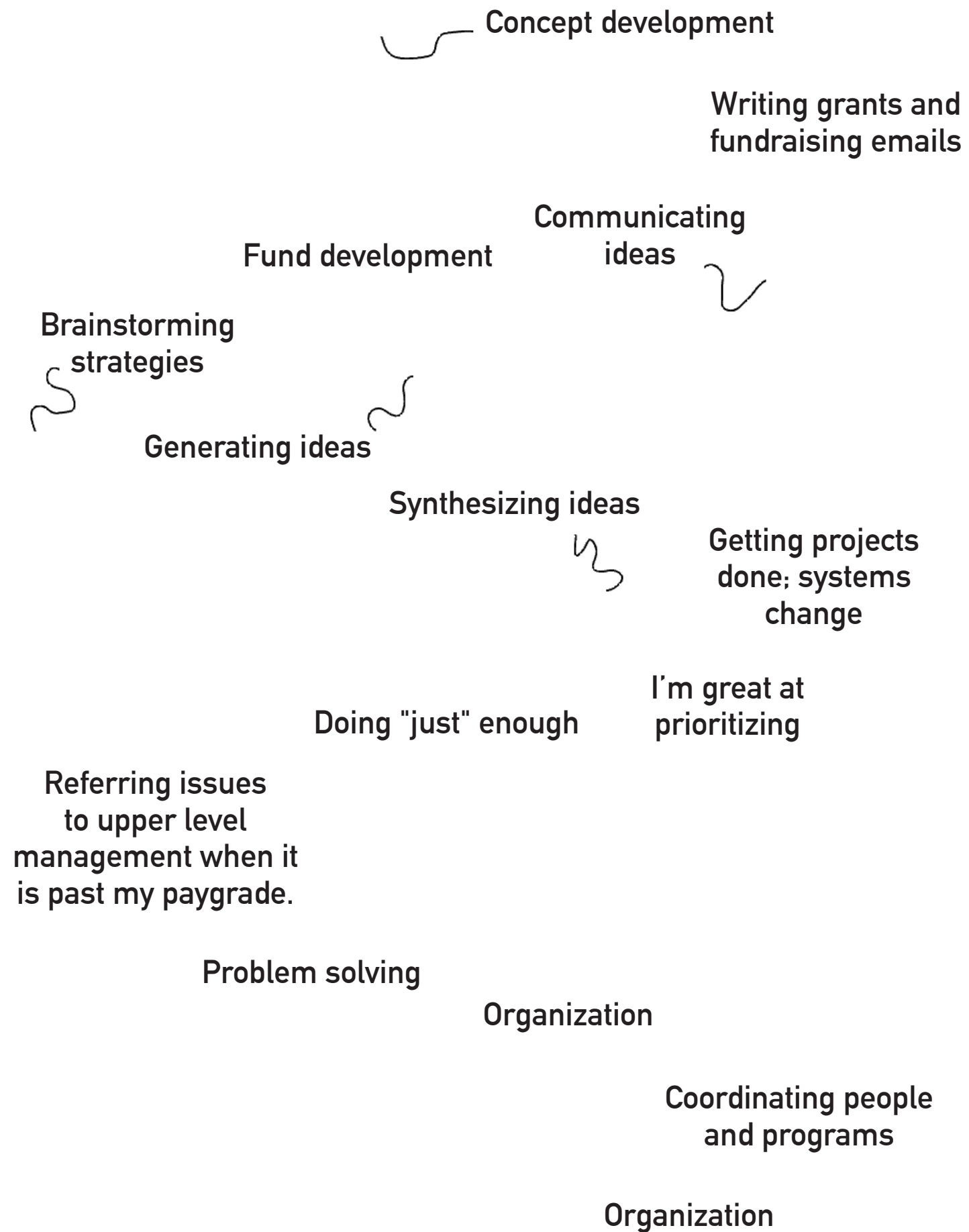
I would make copies of all the treaties and mail each one to every Canadian household in the country. I would fire red paint splotches at all private property signs. I would make a free printable and copyable zine informing settlers on the land back movement and how we can make actionable change for all indigenous communities whose land has been stolen and fucked with.



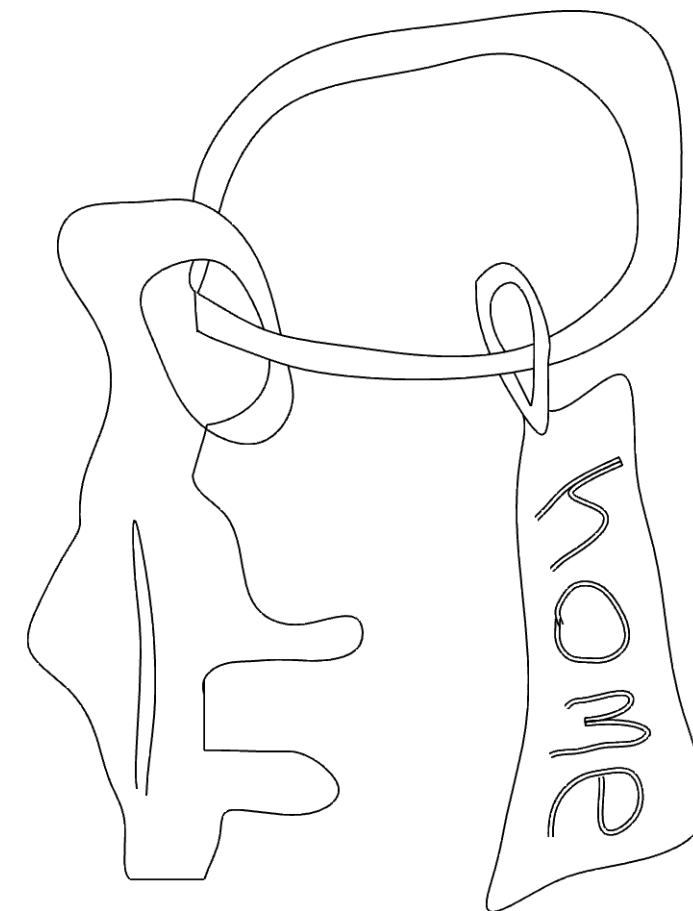


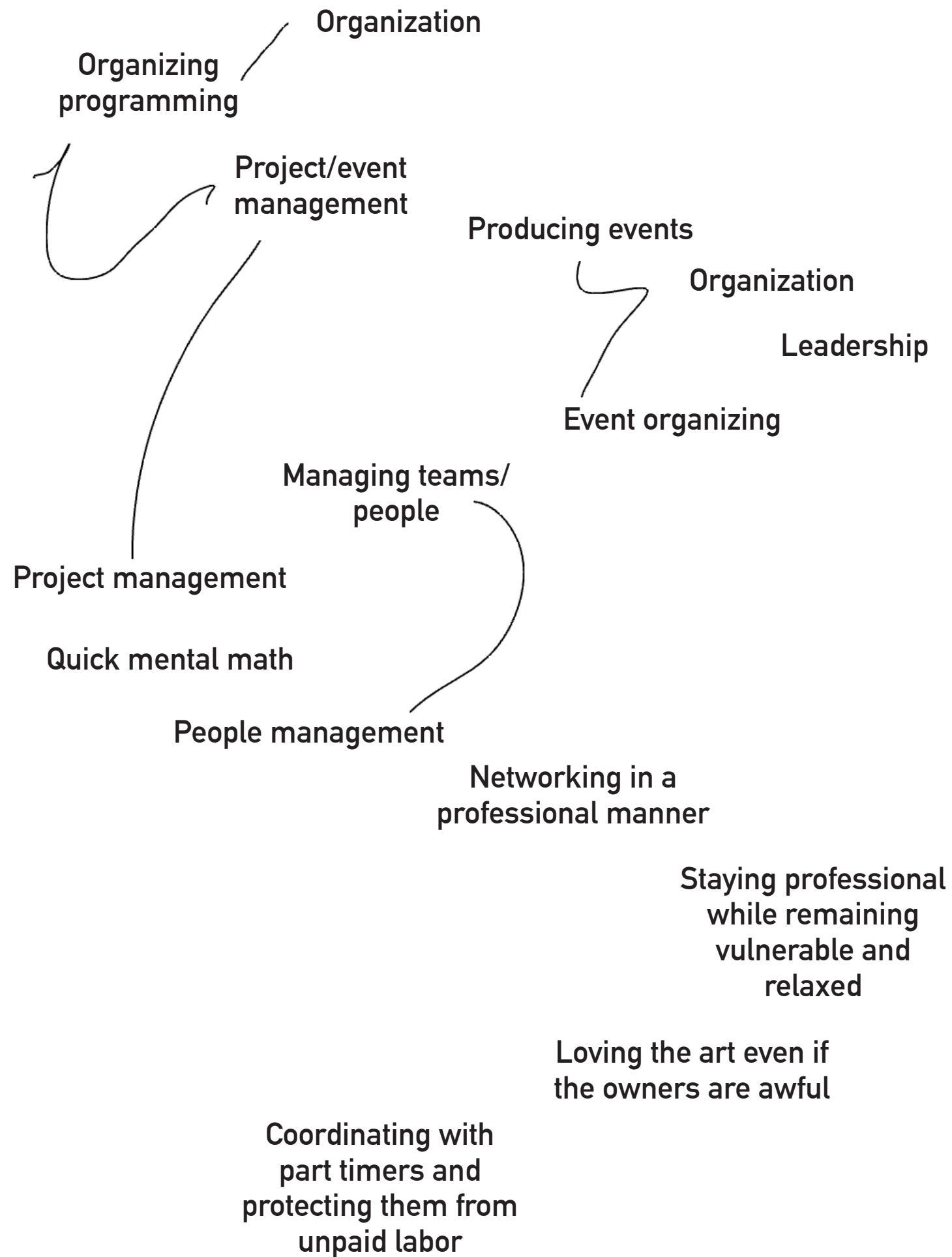
I feel that I intervene regularly and am active in conversations about LandBack in a civic context through written policy. It is not that creative or glamorous but takes a long time to get everyone to agree, I consider this my form of activism



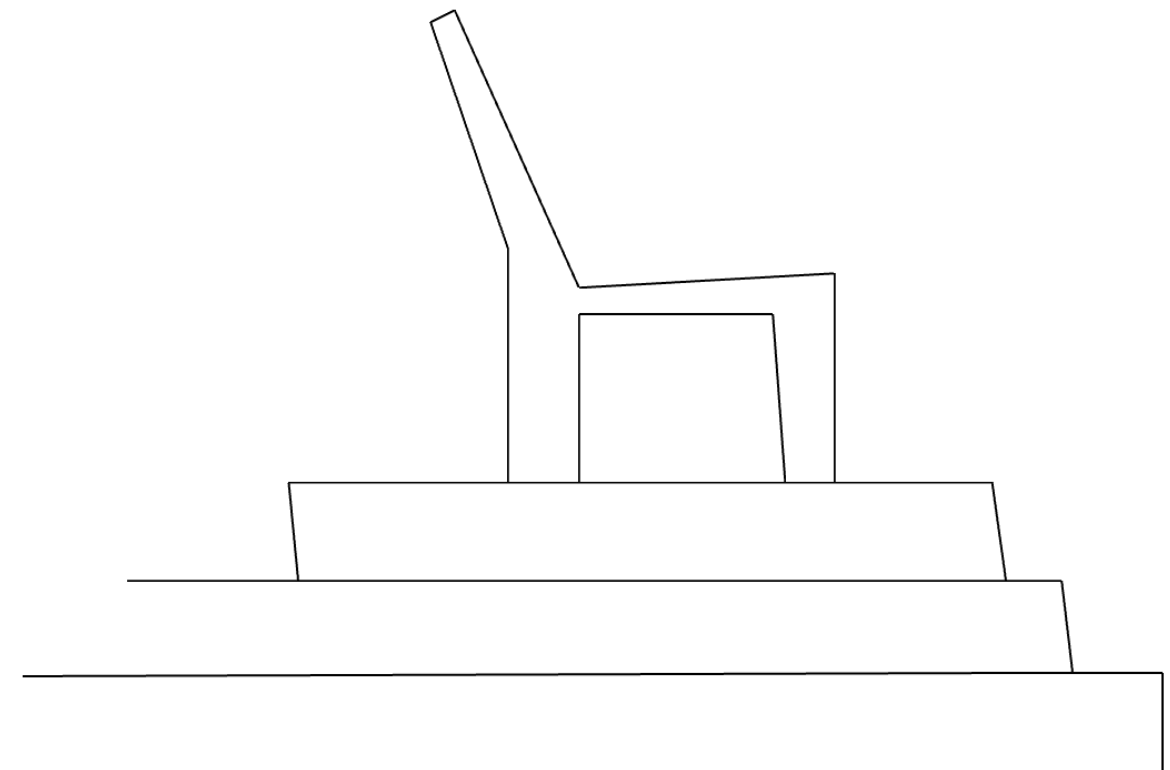


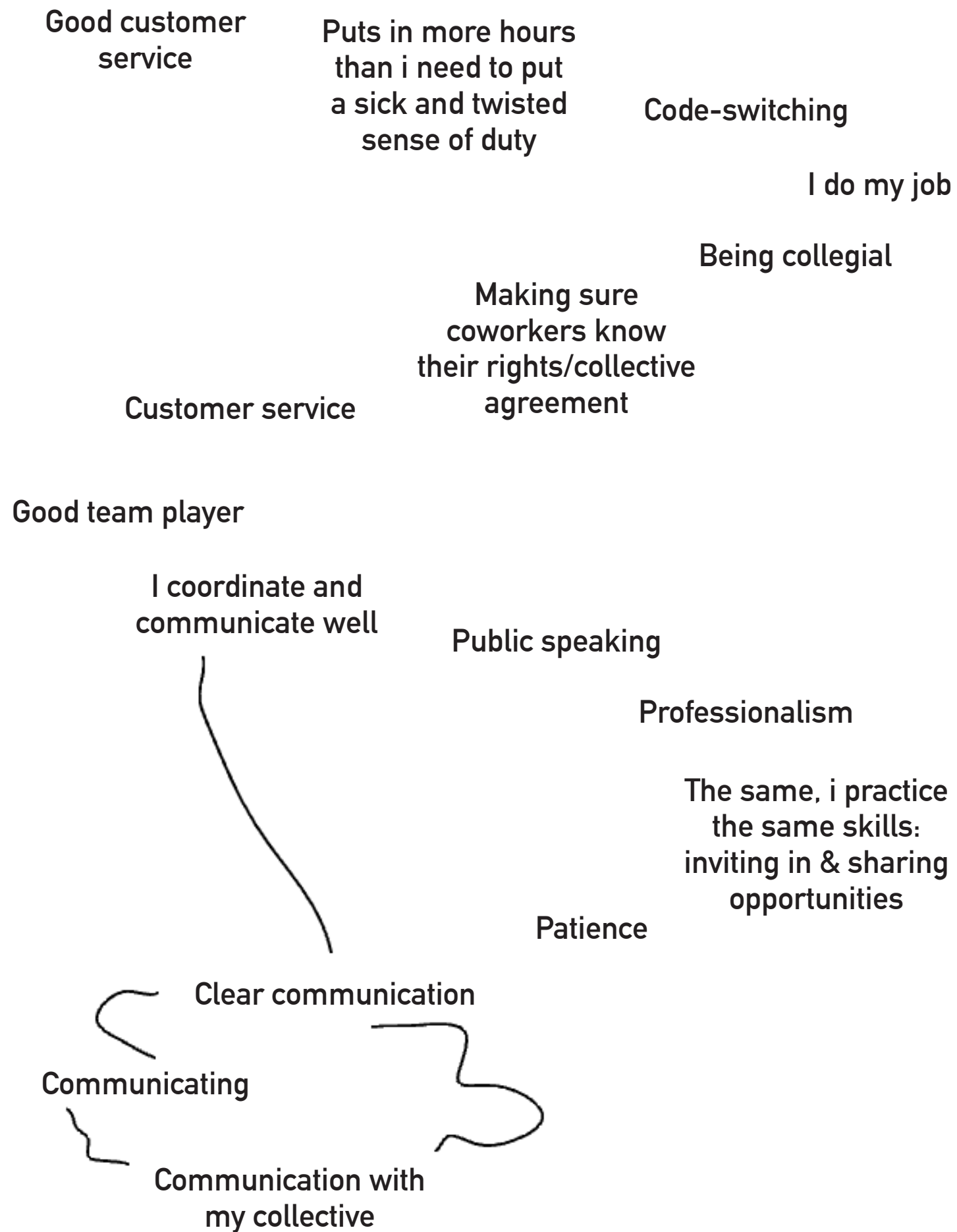
Everyone needs to be housed
and everything else needs to be
shared



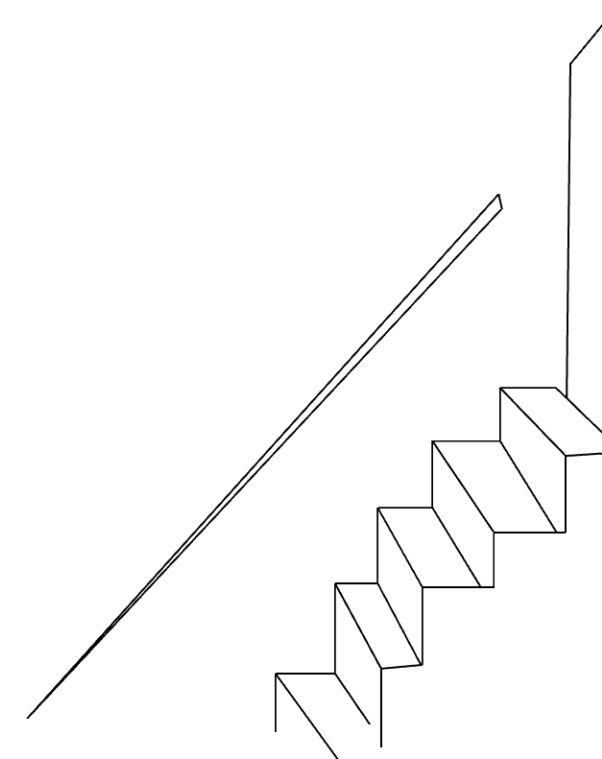


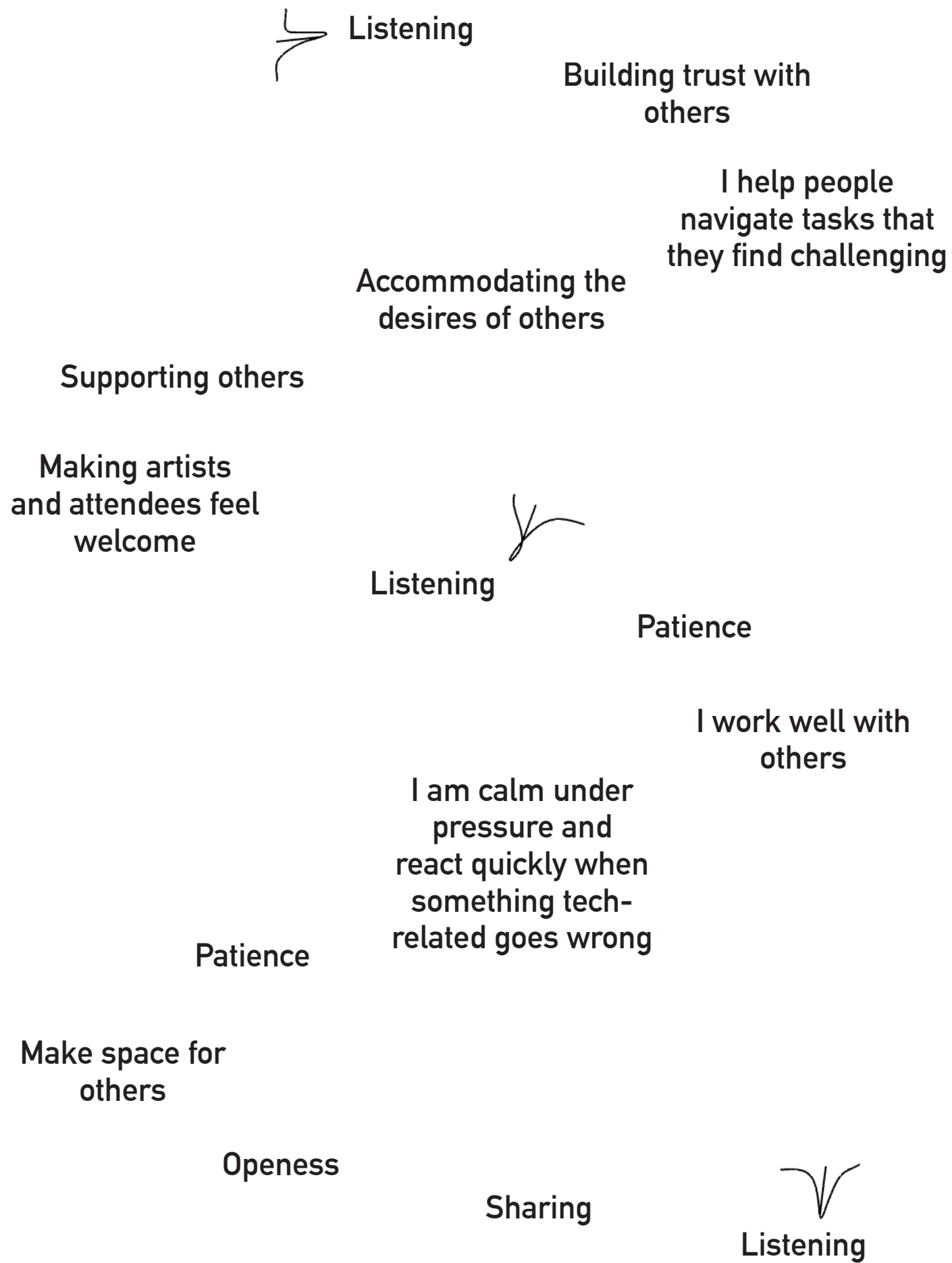
Collective work until assuming a seat of power and then make it illegal to generate profit, set a maximum wage, and make corporations into workers coops.



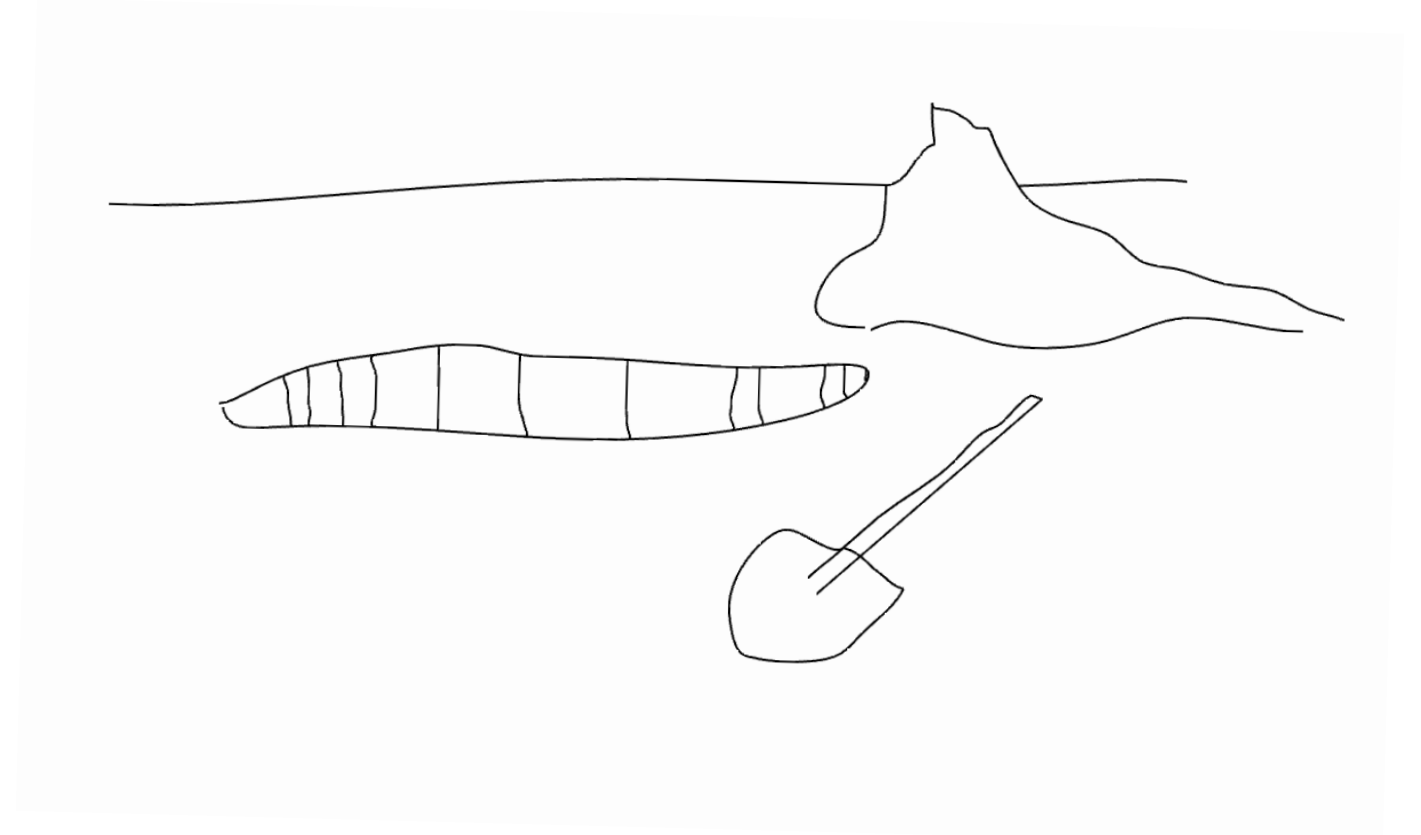


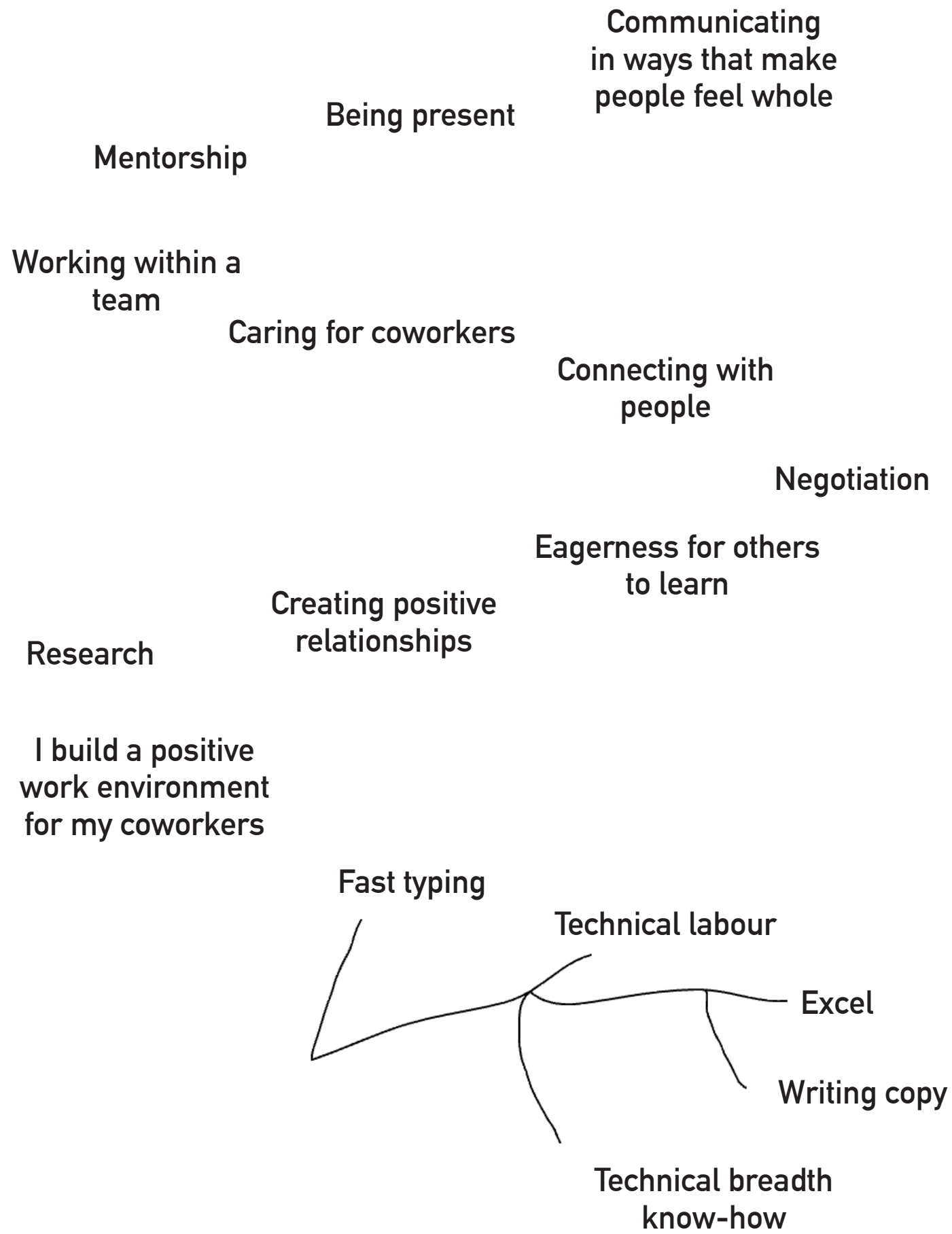
I would forcibly move all of the administrative class at the University of Toronto to transition from their offices into a work-from-home office in my damp and mouldy \$2,300/month shoe box basement apartment that has an active gas leak and see how productive they are. In addition, I will give them scored progress reviews and they will have to do detailed grant reporting for themselves. I would also bar them from a paid vacation until they abolished tuition and student debt.



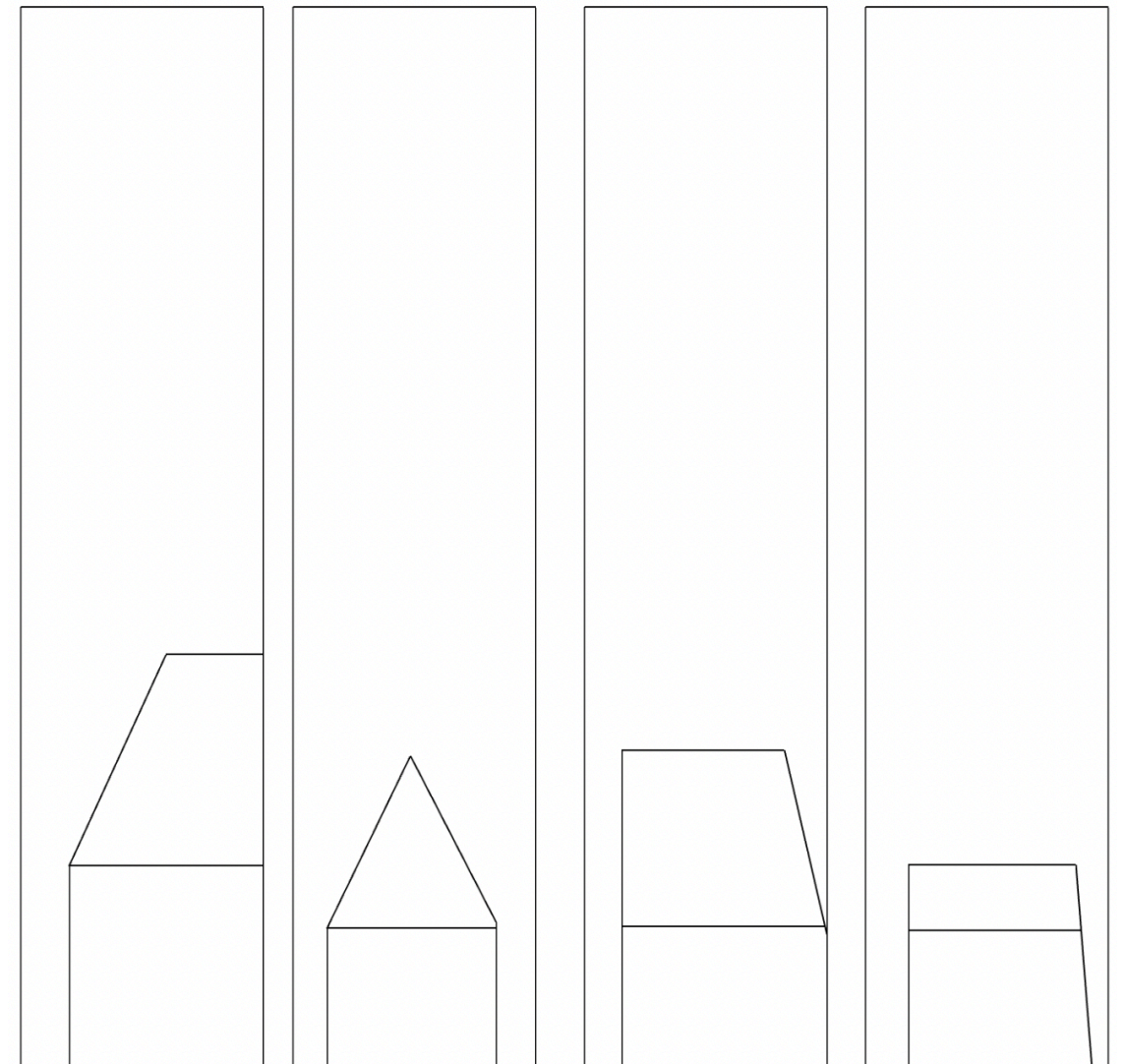


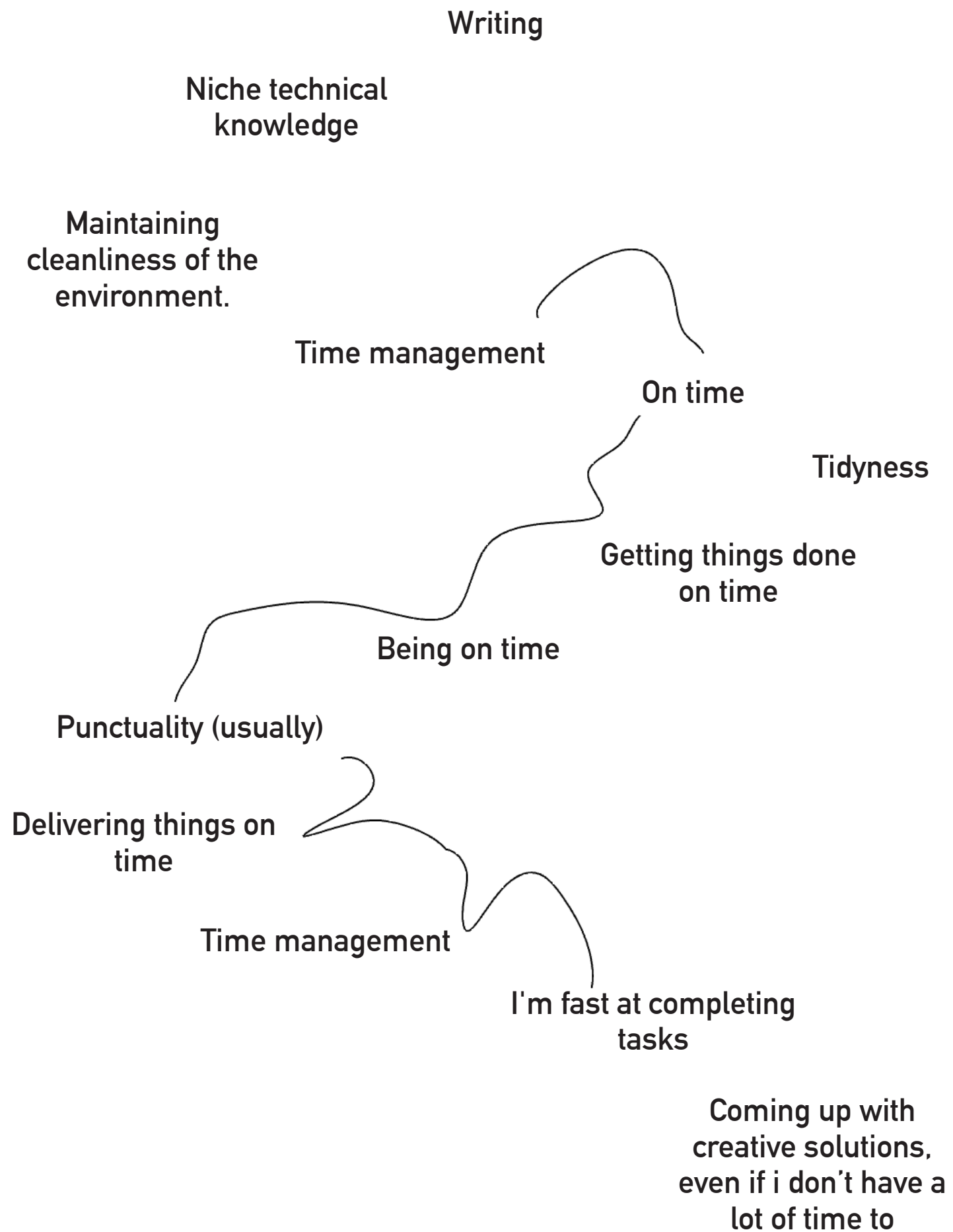
Unfortunately appropriating all resource-extraction and utility-company property exceeds my skill set and logistical capacity.



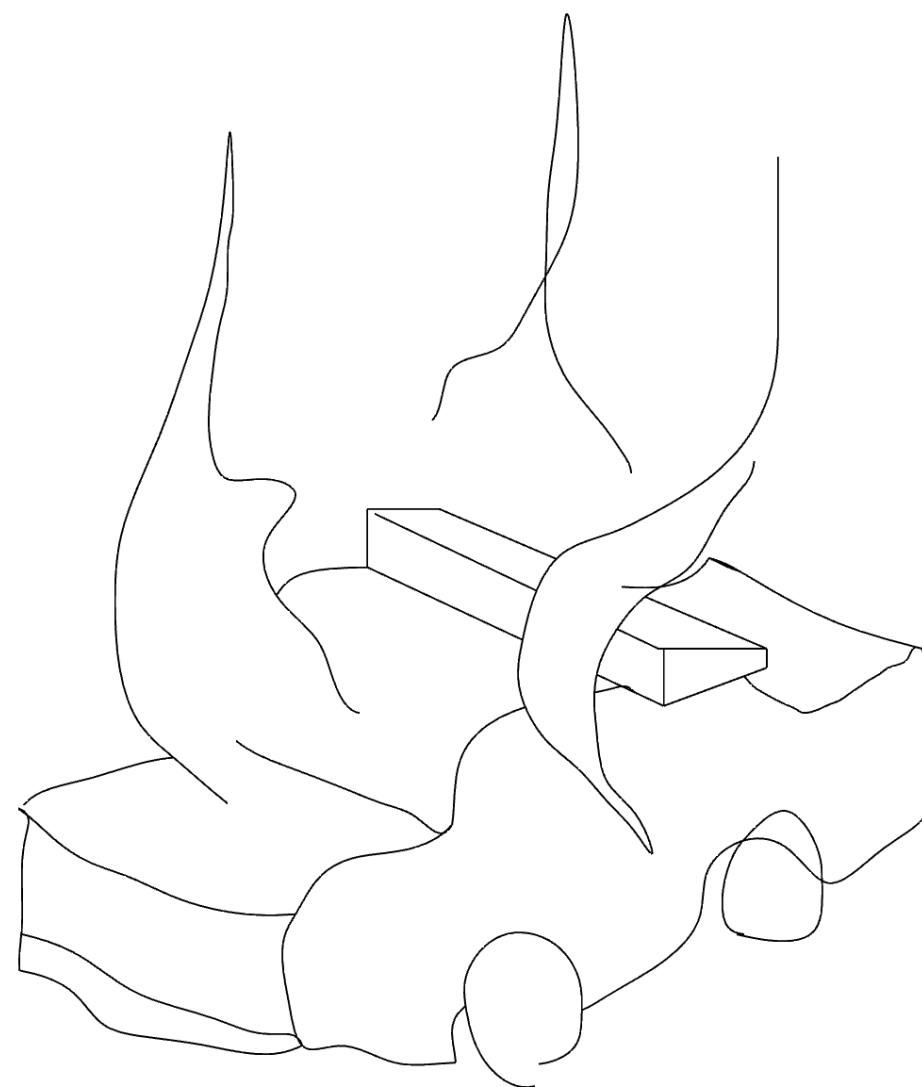


All private ownership would be swiftly eliminated. I would enact land reforms making all private exploitation of land illegal. I would throw all landlords in jail overnight. I would also de-zone all suburbs and install strict apartment only laws for every housing development inside city limits.

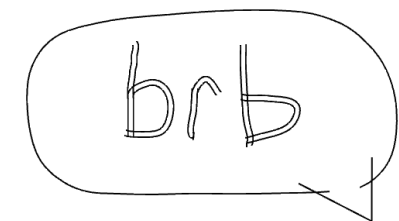
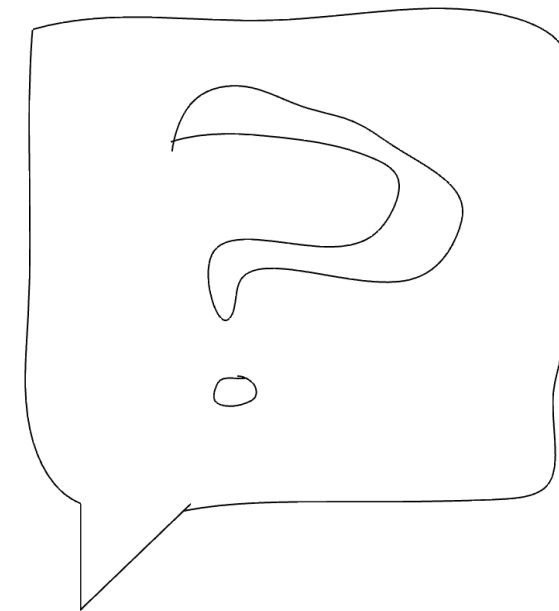




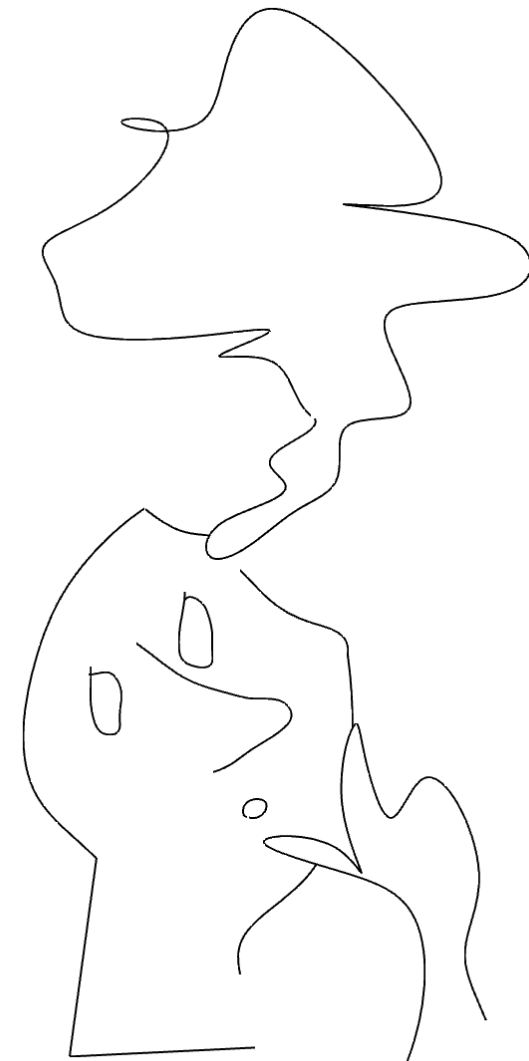
Set fire to every cop car and every MCFD office.



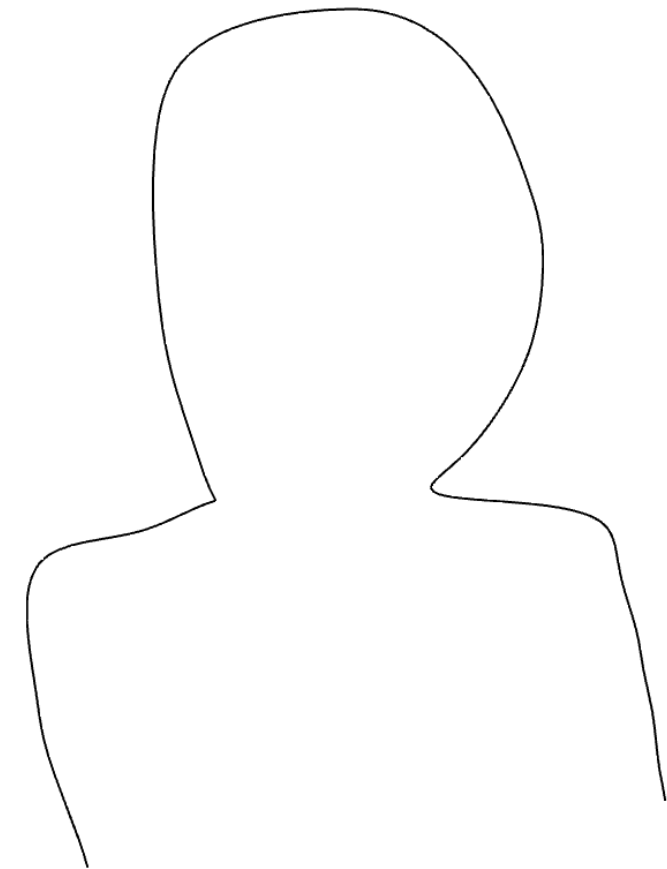
I feel this is a way longer convo? I could email or zoom about this lol it doesn't really fit into this context easily? (Also asking for this is kinda a lot of unpaid labour to ask of me; an indigenous person)



Hard of think of now, this is really dependent on social movements. Something like an occupation at 105 Keefer?



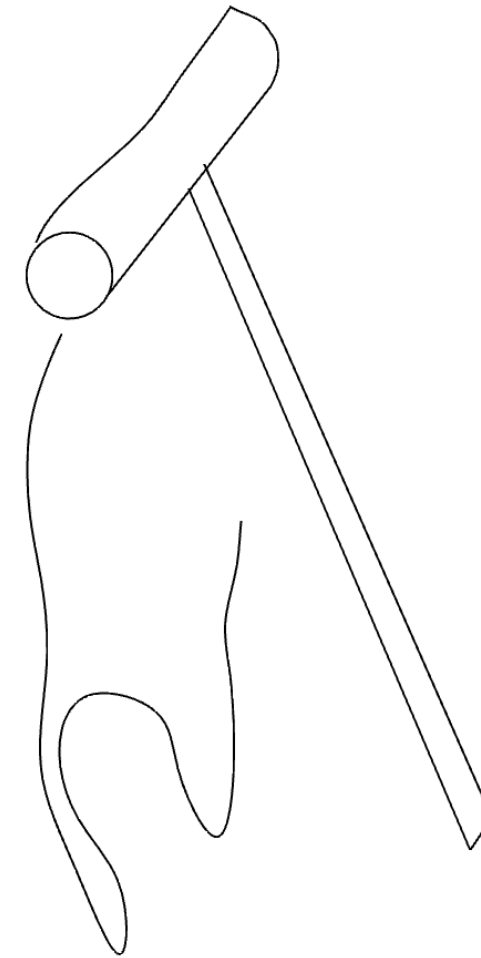
The question is too difficult to answer: within the context of a survey; as an individual who is a member of multiple communities with a vested interest in the question; as someone who is living (interloping) on the lands of other Indigenous peoples / Nations without having undergone the appropriate due diligence and protocol-determined (Indigenous legal) processes.



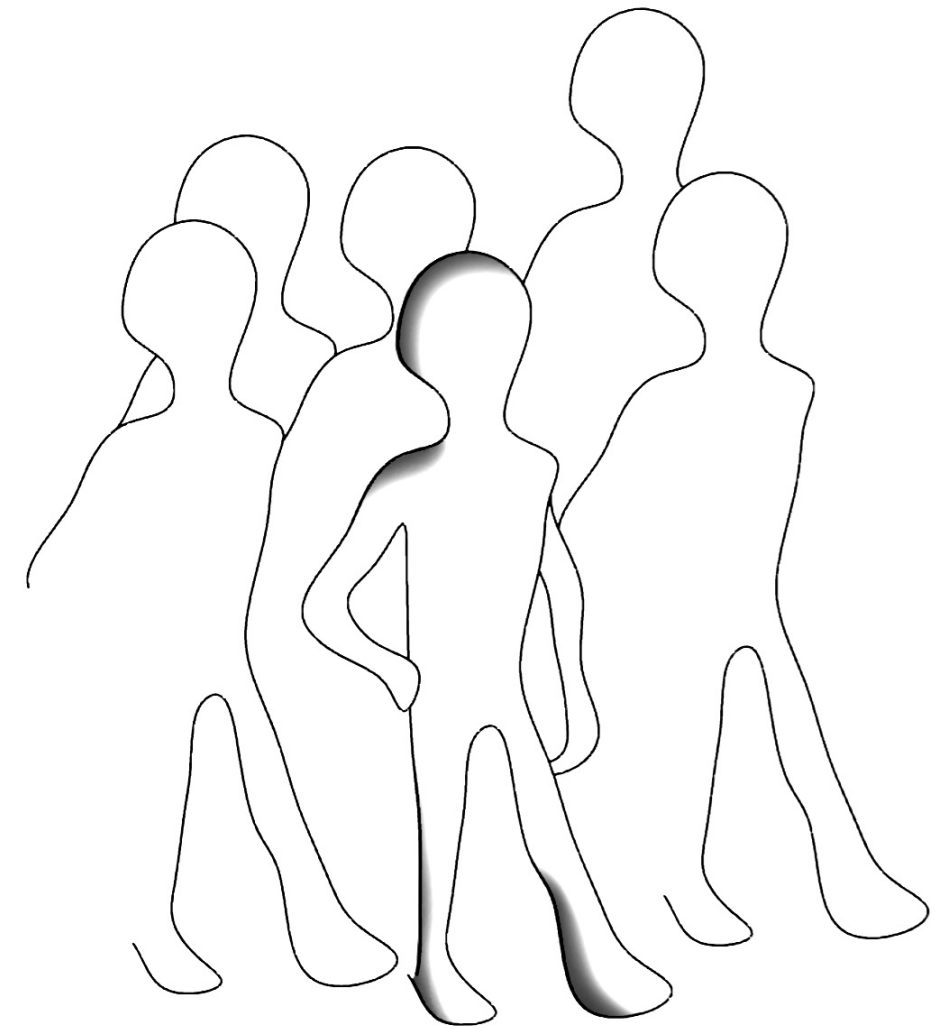
I would run classes at art school for free that teach criticality for the ways we are indoctrinated into producing the value that is pricing us out of our own neighbourhoods. I would graffiti over every Vancouver Mural Fest mural that does not connect critically to the neighbourhood it is in. I would graffiti wherever I liked, to bring joy and art and messaging to people without regulation.



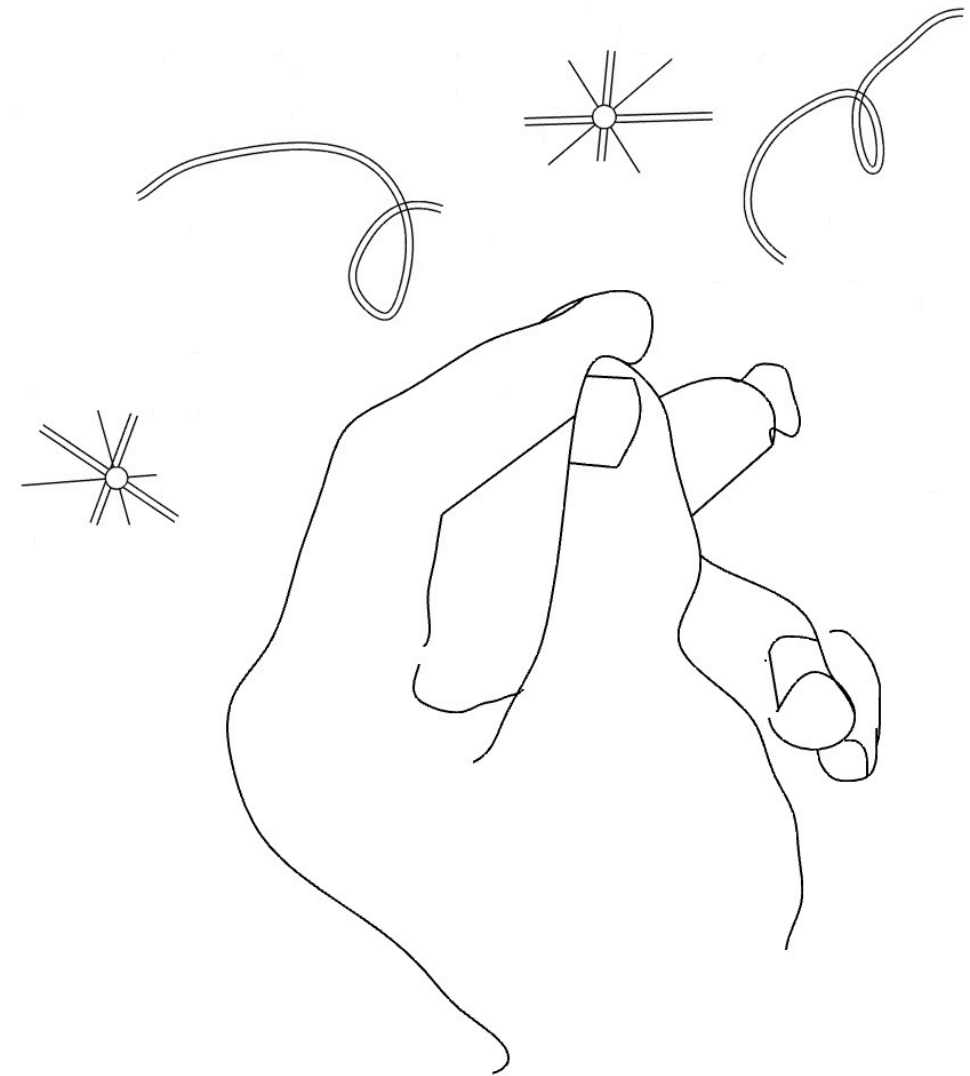
I would participate in renovating and decorating all public schools into dignified housing and all office buildings into spas or workshops



This type of activity isn't worth my time.
Long ago I've got this out of my system.
I am more down with making things
better for myself and the people that I
connect with.



**i'd snap my fingers and
reappropriate all the banks and
basically all of the downtown
tech sector. no burning b/c of the
carbon footprint. turn them all into
secure social housing and urban
farms.**



GRATITUDE

To the peoples, defenders and stewards of these unceded territories that this zine was assembled from, the lands of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ / Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) First Nations and Tiohtià:ke of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk Nation).

To Rupali Morzaria who designed this zine and the graphic that went along with the Inquiry's initial circulation. Editor of Relssue, Casey Wei for including the inquiry in the publication's weekly digest. Data scientist Matt Canute for teaching me a lot about formatting Excel spreadsheets. Leo Cocar, Byron Peters, Lily Jue Sheng, Bobby Malone, and Manden Murphy, who made many discursive and comradely contributions along the way.

To the contributors to the Inquiry across Turtle Island:

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