Connecting with individual dementia through design objects in a theatre of conversation

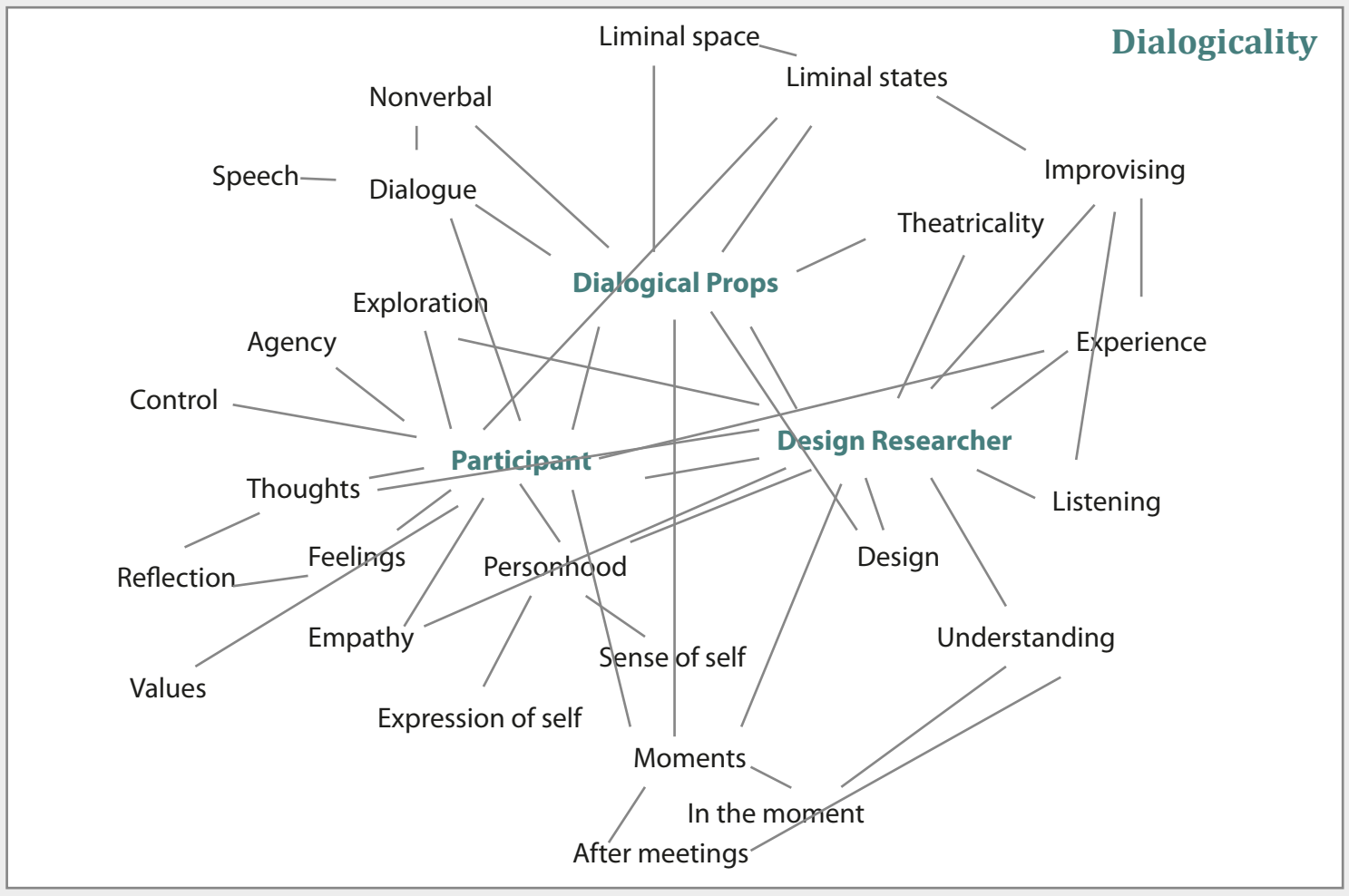
Using crafted, unusual dialogical props to evoke conversations around complex concepts within the lives of people with dementia. Getting into the realities of participants through theatrical notions and employing engaging objects as conversation prompts and pivots for connection.

What am I trying to uncover?

What makes a good dialogical prop and how designers can appropriately work with individuals with dementia, bringing to the fore their humanity and therefore ways of connecting and relating.

Dialogicality and people with dementia

There is complexity in interactions with any human. Relationships, feelings and thoughts affect the personhood[1] of individuals. Here dialogicality[2] refers to a multifaceted, empathic dialogue that incorporates the above.



1. Kitwood, T., Dementia reconsidered: The person comes first. 1997. 2. Wright, P. and J. McCarthy, Empathy and experience in HCI, 2008.

Dialogical Props

Your Dice

A card cube pattern with questions about emotional circumstances. The answers transferred onto the large cork dice to be thrown for conversation prompts.

Magic Tags

The Magic Tags ask to be attached to three different types of objects allowing the participant to magically enhance those objects for their benefit.

Yolks of Life

Three wooden eggs to be collaged onto with images representing things learnt from three different relationships.

Assistive Marvels

A pamphlet of light hearted, fictional products based on serious subjects for people with dementia.

Age Traveller

A time travelling device for people with dementia to discuss various decades in their past and future.

Secret life of a wishbone

A wishbone to be broken and closed to contain a wish. This could prompt conversations around the importance of secrets.

What is a Dialogical Prop?

Designed and crafted objects that take cues from theatricality, the surreal, and fiction. They are playful conversational (verbal and nonverbal) prompts encouraging the imagination of the participant.
These props are a scaffold and conduit for empathic interactions that may involve complex ideas around individual human lives, such as relationships, priorities, and the future.
This could provide insights for researchers involved with dementia.

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