

R. U. C. A.

RURAL UTAH COMMUNITY ATLAS



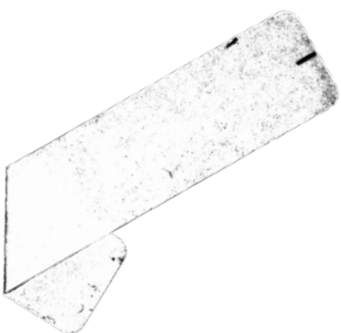
RURAL UTAH COMMUNITY ATLAS

TAGE
RINEHART

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY DESIGN,
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

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DESIGN PRODUCT STUDIO 2,
TSOUTSOUNAKIS

FALL 2021



IN
PARTNERSHIP
WITH

R.

U.

P.

RURAL
UTAH
PROJECT

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HOW CAN WE
HELP RURAL
ACTIVISTS BE
SUCCESSFUL?

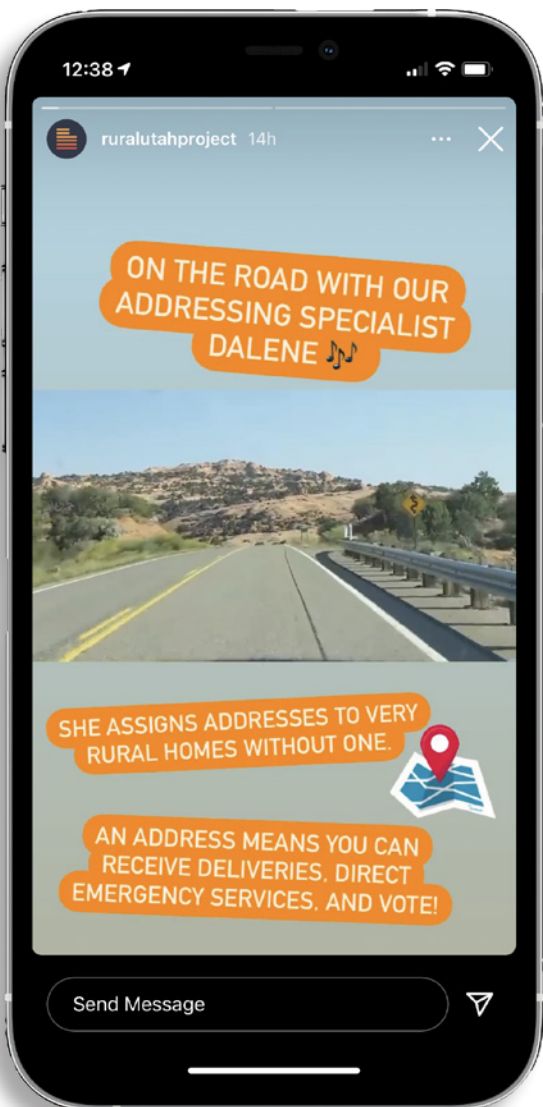
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The Rural Utah Community Atlas was born out of collaboration with the Rural Utah Project, who asked

“HOW CAN WE HELP RURAL ACTIVISTS BE SUCCESSFUL?”

Activists associated with RUP work to raise awareness and political momentum for a number of different movements affecting rural Utahns.

One of their largest efforts is assigning Plus Codes (a short provisional address) to rural homes, so that they can vote, be accessible to emergency personnel, and receive mail.



My initial conversations with RUP representatives and my observations of RUP’s online presence made it clear that rural activists spend a lot of time driving and navigating around the area.

This can be especially challenging due to the sporadic nature of internet access in rural Utah, as well as the lack of addresses, and presence of unpaved or unmarked roads.

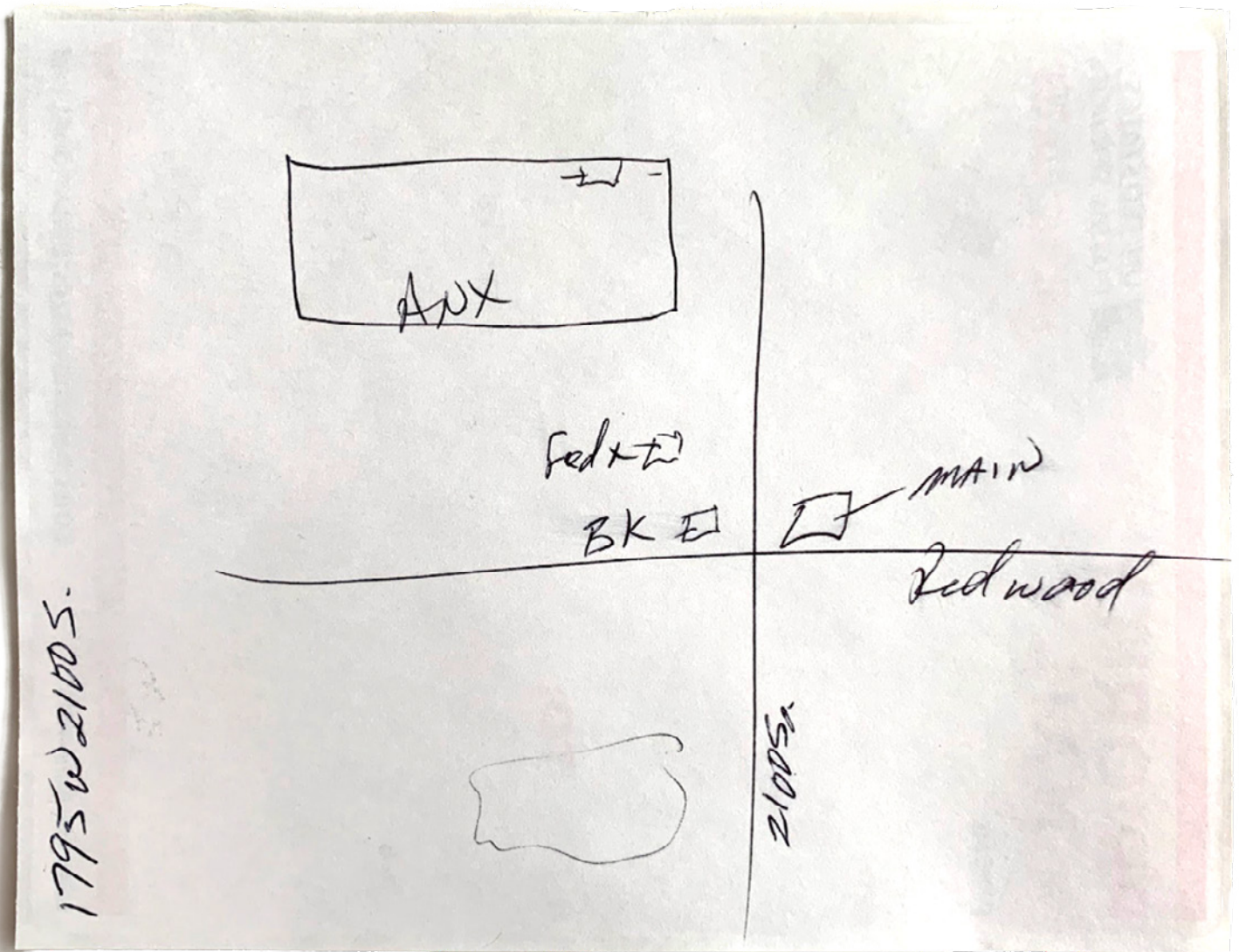
GPS based tools such as Google Maps often fall short here, because such tools are based on an urban, settler-colonial model.

With this context in mind, I began to research driving, spatial understanding, and mapping.

One of the most influential sources that I found in my research was an episode of the podcast Dispatch in Depth, which featured RUP's own Drew Cooper as well as Dawn Dilego, an E.M.T. and fire dept. volunteer in Bluff, UT.



Cooper and Dilego revealed the importance of *communication and hand-drawn maps*, which are used by residents, emergency responders, and even the school district. Many of these efforts crowd-source and compile information in order to locate community members.

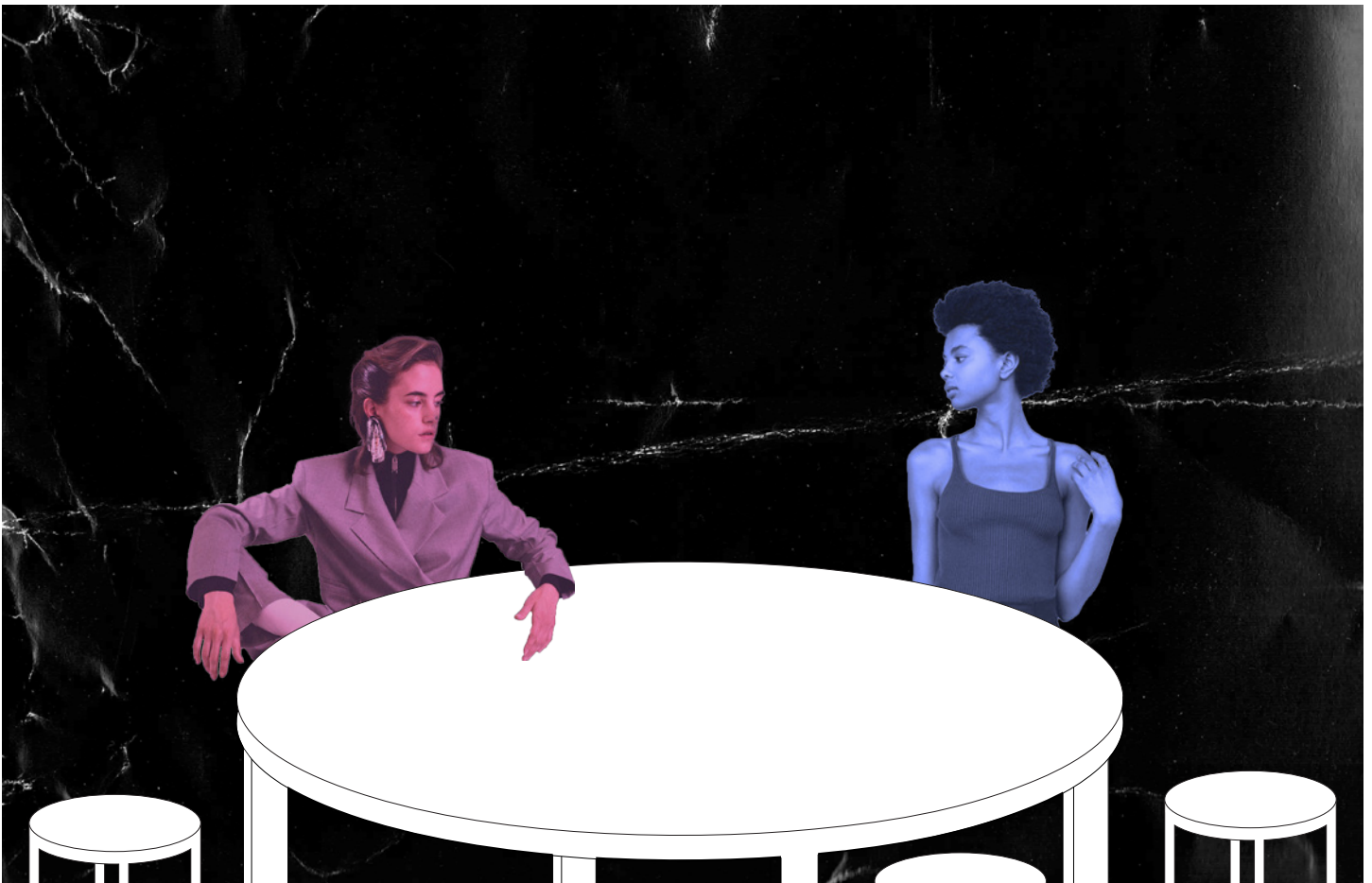


The interactions that they described reminded me of a personal experience. In the summer of 2021, a postal worker gave me directions to a different location where my mail would be forwarded. He did this by pulling out a postage label, flipping it on its back, and giving me detailed verbal directions as he drew out and labeled the streets, buildings, and even the front door. This experience was profound for me as a designer-it reminded me why we draw, and that drawing is a tool for *everyone*.

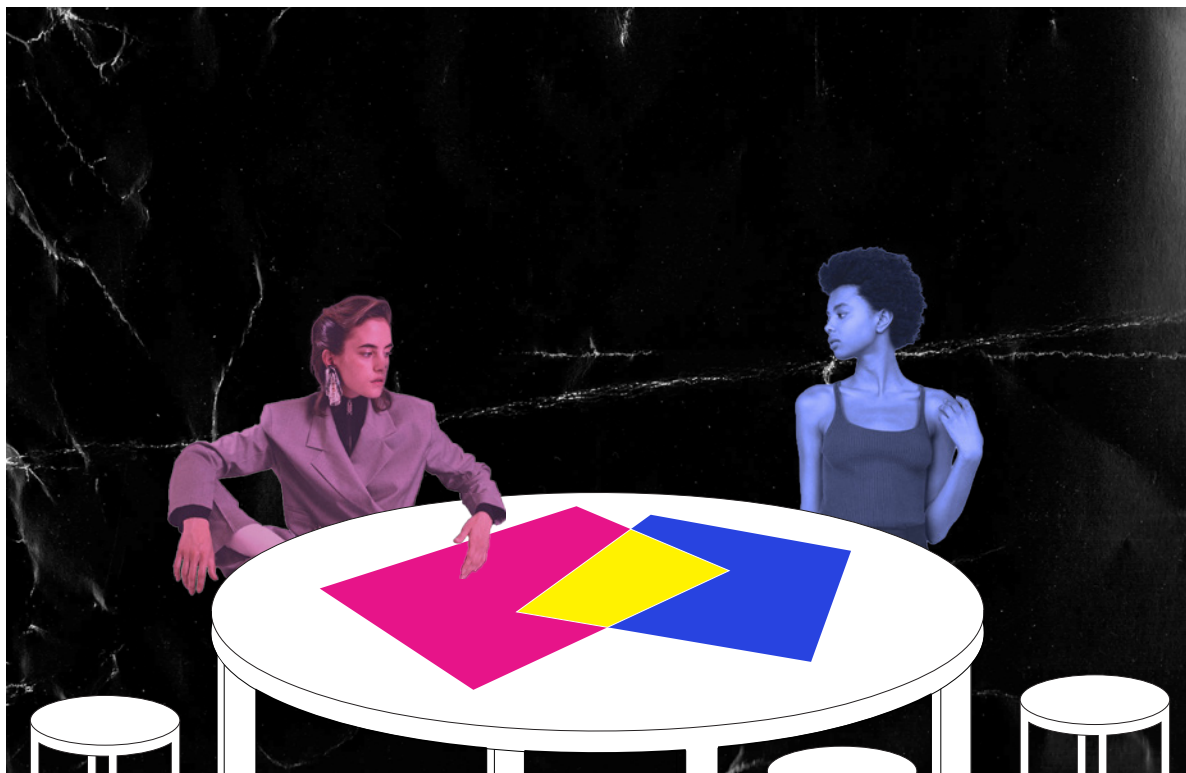
As an EMT and Bluff Fire Dept. Volunteer, Dawn Dilego is often tasked with responding to emergencies at locations that don't have an address. Here is her description of that process:

“We start looking at maps, and talking to each other, and we have handwritten maps and of course memories from other calls that we sort of pull from to figure out where it is we are going... We might have them dispatch several ambulances from different agencies because we are not sure who's closest... Just to see who gets there first.”

Dawn illustrates the importance of social interaction as a means of generating knowledge in rural spaces. To dig into this process further, I visualized each sentence to create a series of drawings.



SO WE START LOOKING AT MAPS



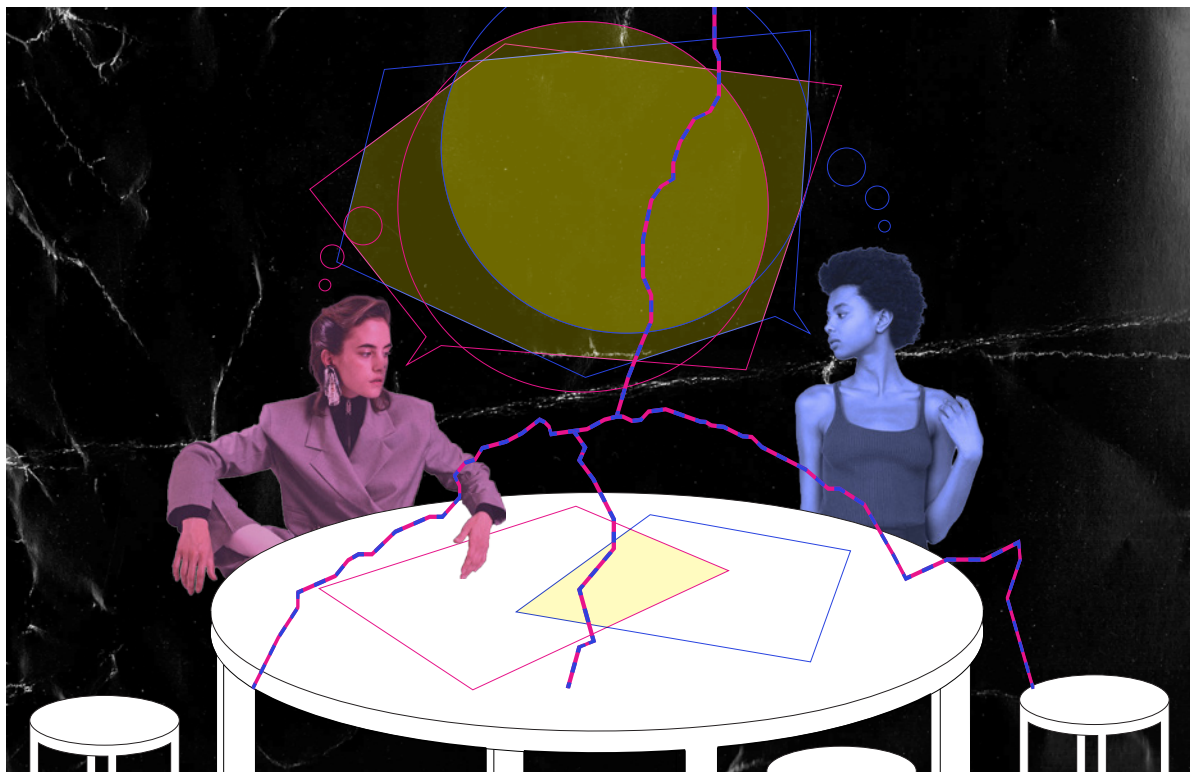
AND TALKING TO EACH OTHER



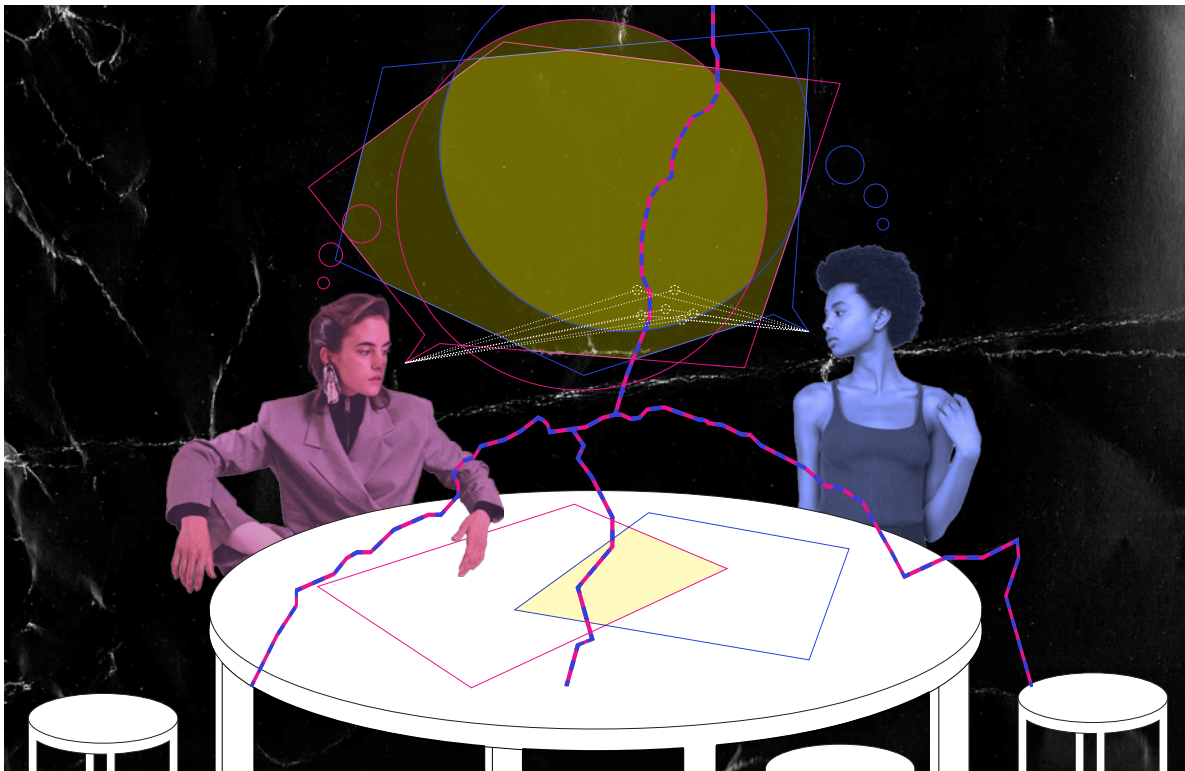
AND WE HAVE HANDWRITTEN MAPS AND
OF COURSE MEMORIES THAT WE SORT OF
PULL FROM



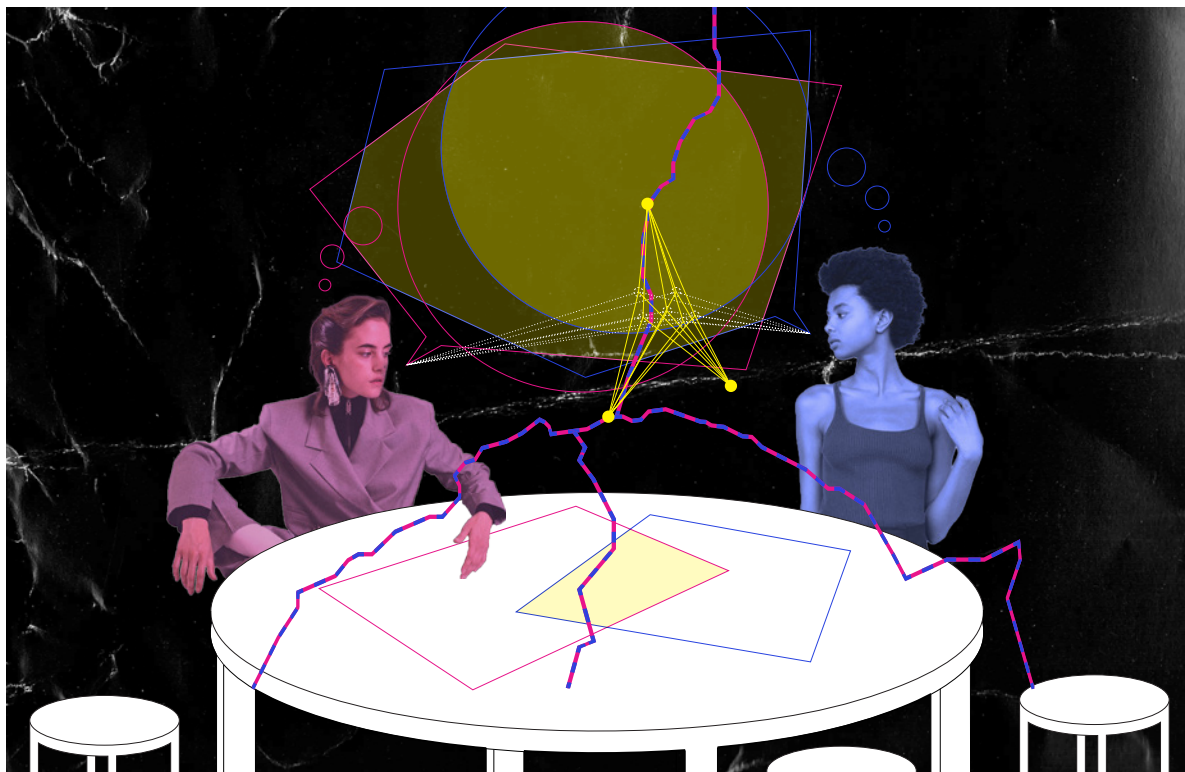
TO FIGURE OUT WHERE IT IS WE ARE GOING

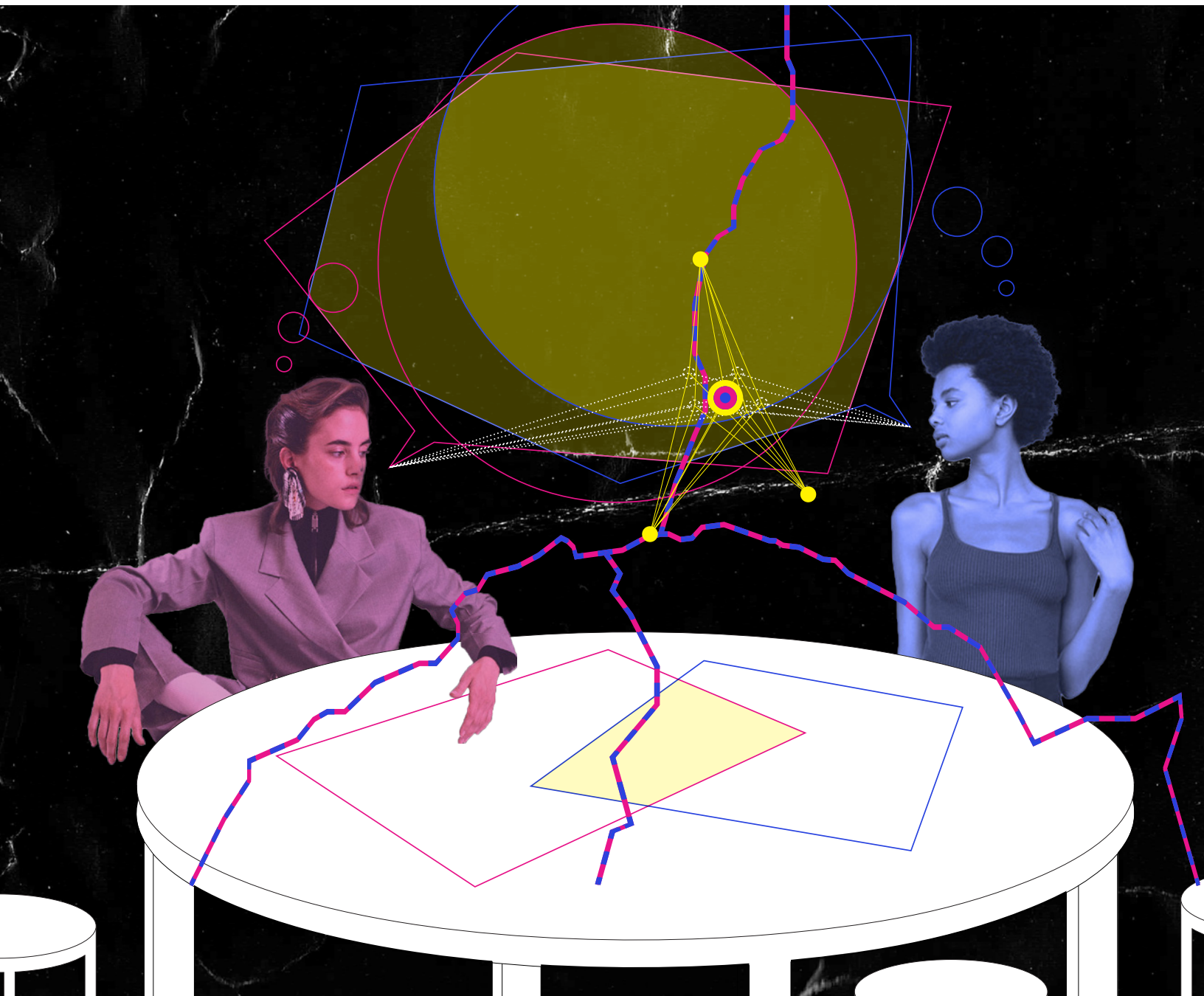


WE MIGHT HAVE THEM DISPATCH SEVERAL AMBULANCES FROM DIFFERENT AGENCIES



BECAUSE WE AREN'T SURE WHO'S CLOSEST





THIS IS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM:

A theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated, and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others.

**HOW CAN
WE DRAW
FROM THESE
INTERACTIONS
TO GENERATE
KNOWLEDGE?**

DESIGNED ARTIFACT?

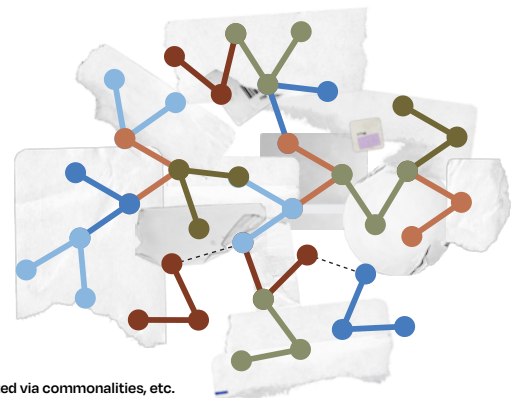
I explored many different iterations of how social interactions could be combined into a form of knowledge. My initial understanding pointed toward some sort of constructed map or artifact.

Individuals self-report information about where they live in whatever form they find appropriate, whether that is a drawing, verbal directions, or written directions.



The rural activist records this information.

This information is then organized and compiled.

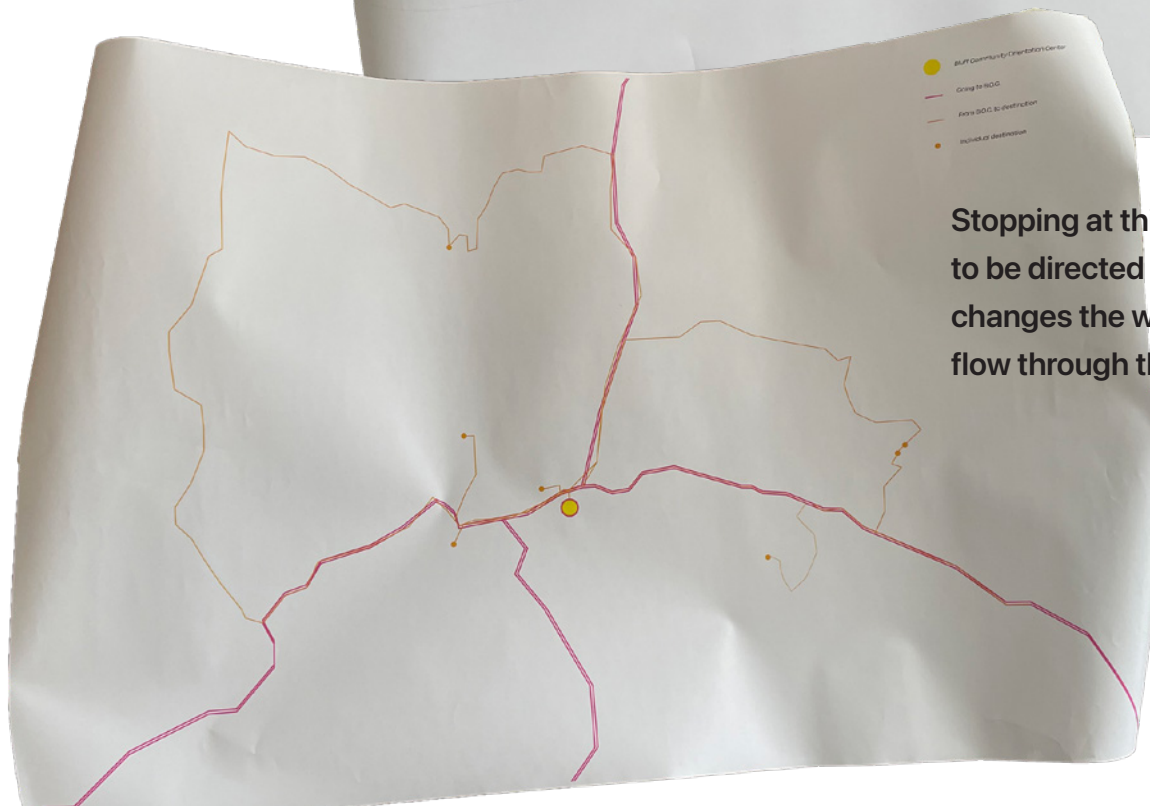


Data is connected via commonalities, etc.

This structure felt problematic because rather than prioritizing local ways of being and knowing, it would impose control over the type of content it could contain. This iteration helped me identify that my design needed to be a **platform** that empowers local knowledge without controlling it.

PHYSICAL PLATFORM?

I explored a physical iteration of this platform as a fixed location similar to a visitor's center or library, that would hold space for these spatial interactions.



Stopping at this resource in order to be directed to a final destination changes the way people would flow through the region.

Ultimately, a resource such as this would be less accessible to users and more cumbersome and intrusive for the community, so I decided to explore a **digital platform-** an iteration that would become the Rural Utah Community Atlas in its most current form.

R.
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A.

THE RURAL UTAH COMMUNITY ATLAS IS A DIGITAL PLATFORM THAT USES SOCIAL INTERACTION TO GENERATE SPATIAL INFORMATION.



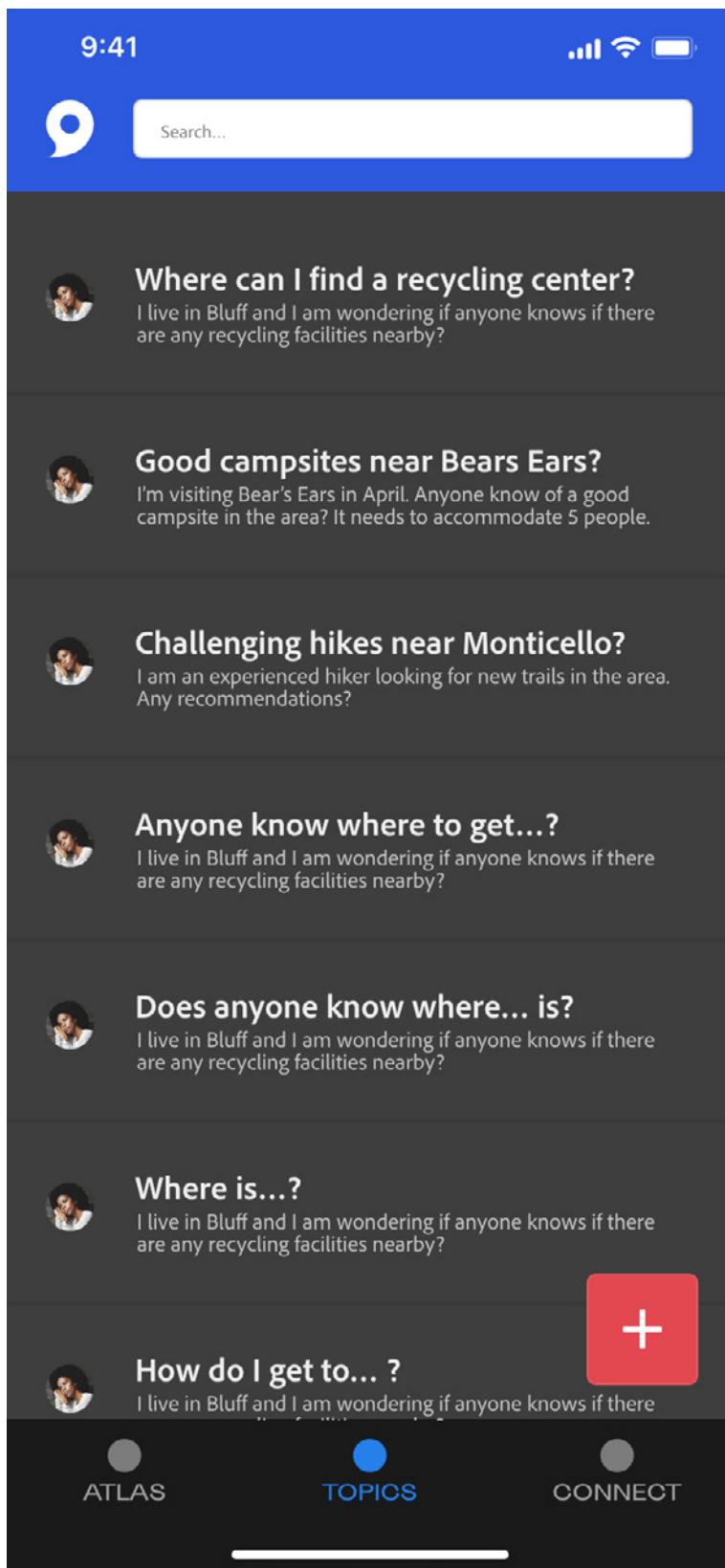
R.U.C.A was created in response to the plethora of issues imposed on Rural Utah as a result of forced compliance to the settler-colonial "map." It empowers communities in area to take control of their own spatial narratives, and in the process facilitates the creation of a collection of more relevant spatial information.

Digital tools lends themselves to the goals of R.U.C.A.'s design. They allows us to facilitate social interactions over large distances, and preserve them through time.

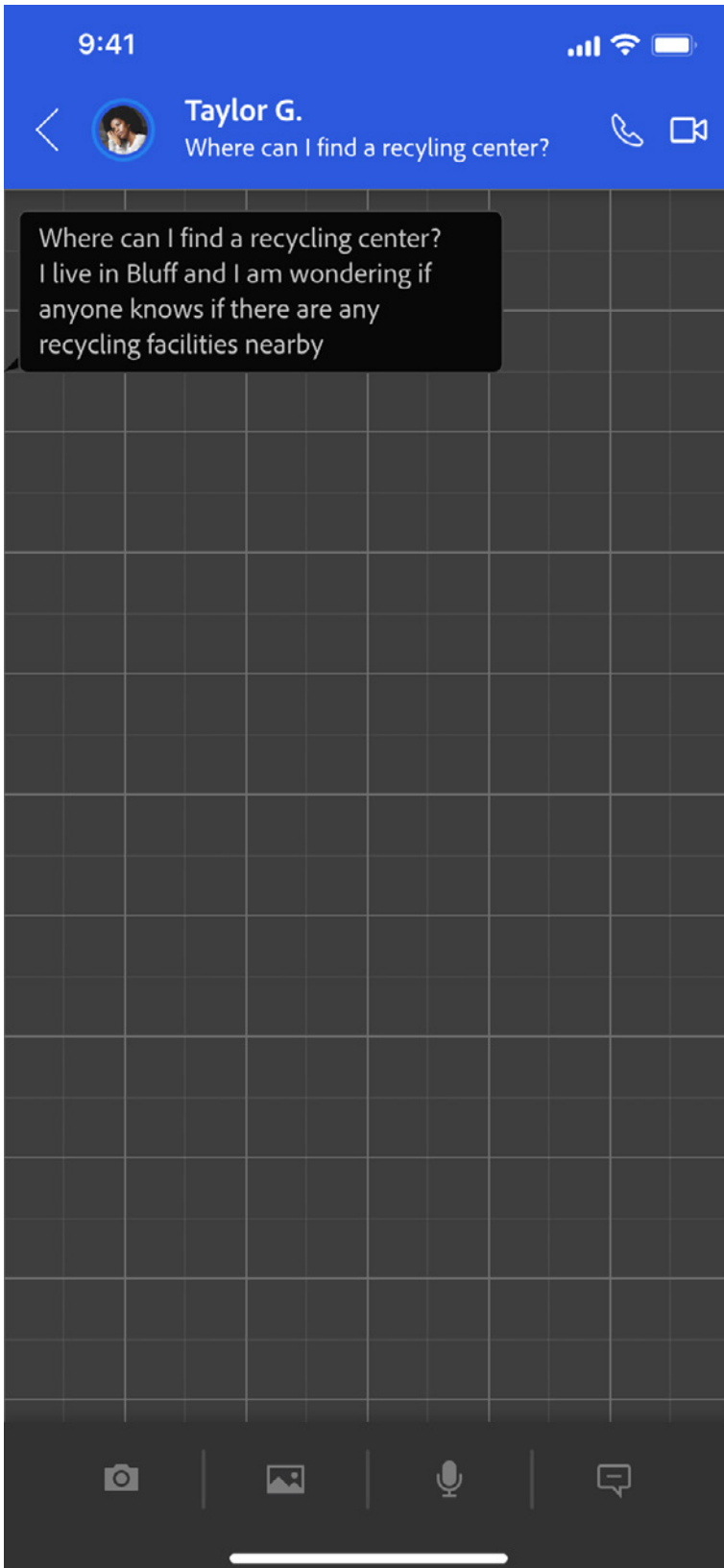
Let's dive into how R.U.C.A works.

Just like in real life, this conversation starts with a question.

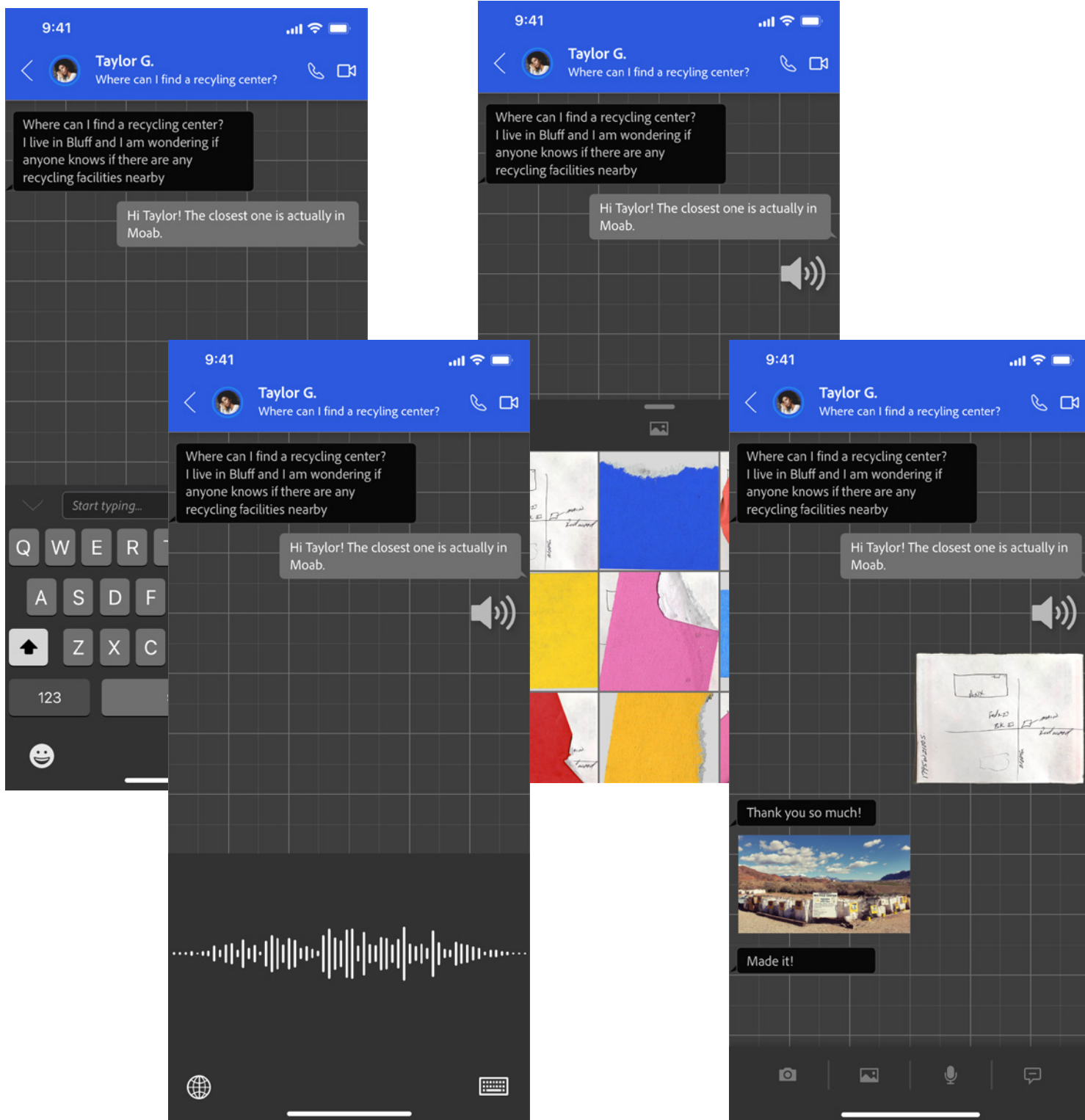
If you are wondering how to get somewhere, you can post a question for everyone to see.



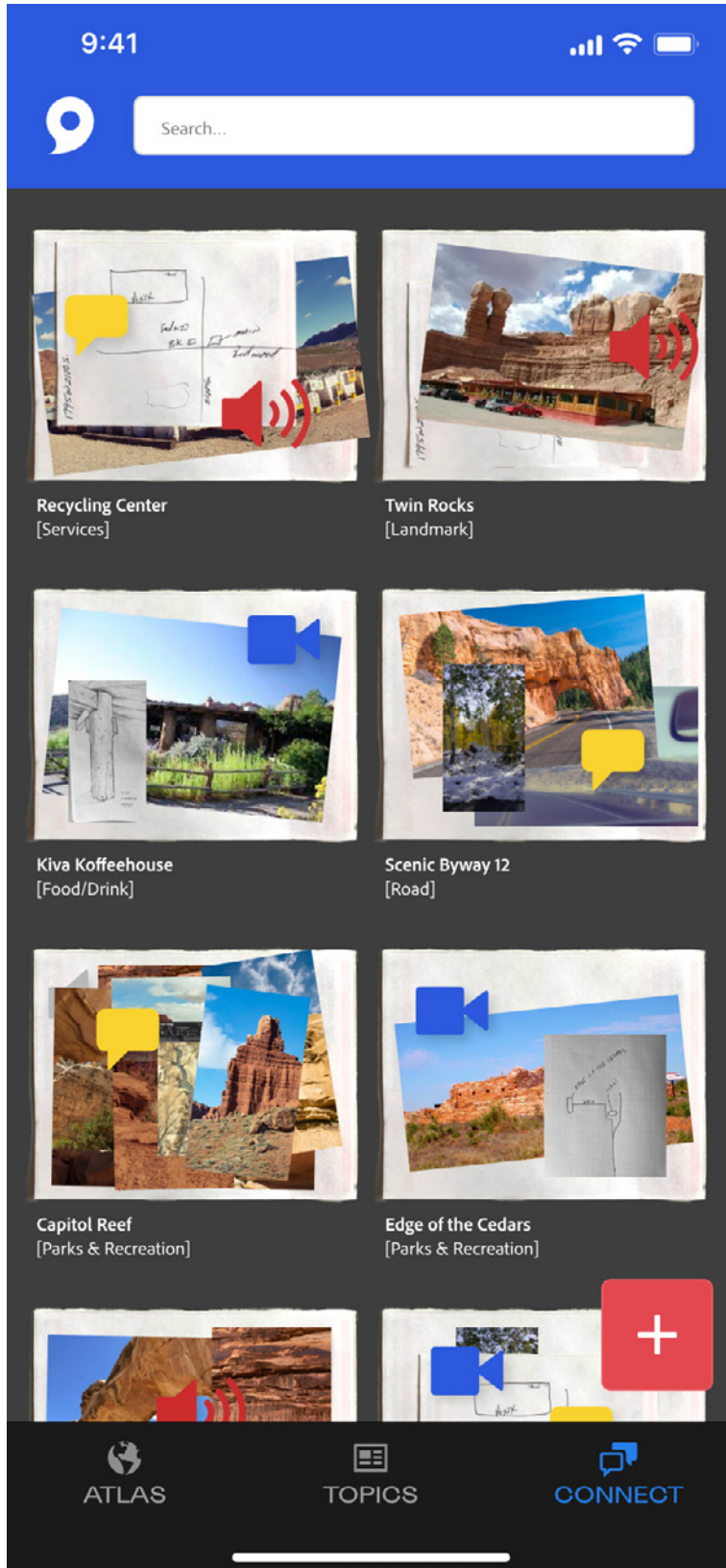
If you know the answer to another user's question, you can respond via the connect page. This page connects these two users to discuss the topic.



Connected users have access to a toolkit that allows them to have this conversation however they would like: text, call, images, drawings, audio, etc. R.U.C.A does not prescribe a certain method for this, and encourages users to provide whatever information they would like, however they would like.



At the end of the interaction, the users have the option to upload any artifacts to R.U.C.A. where they will join the Atlas page.

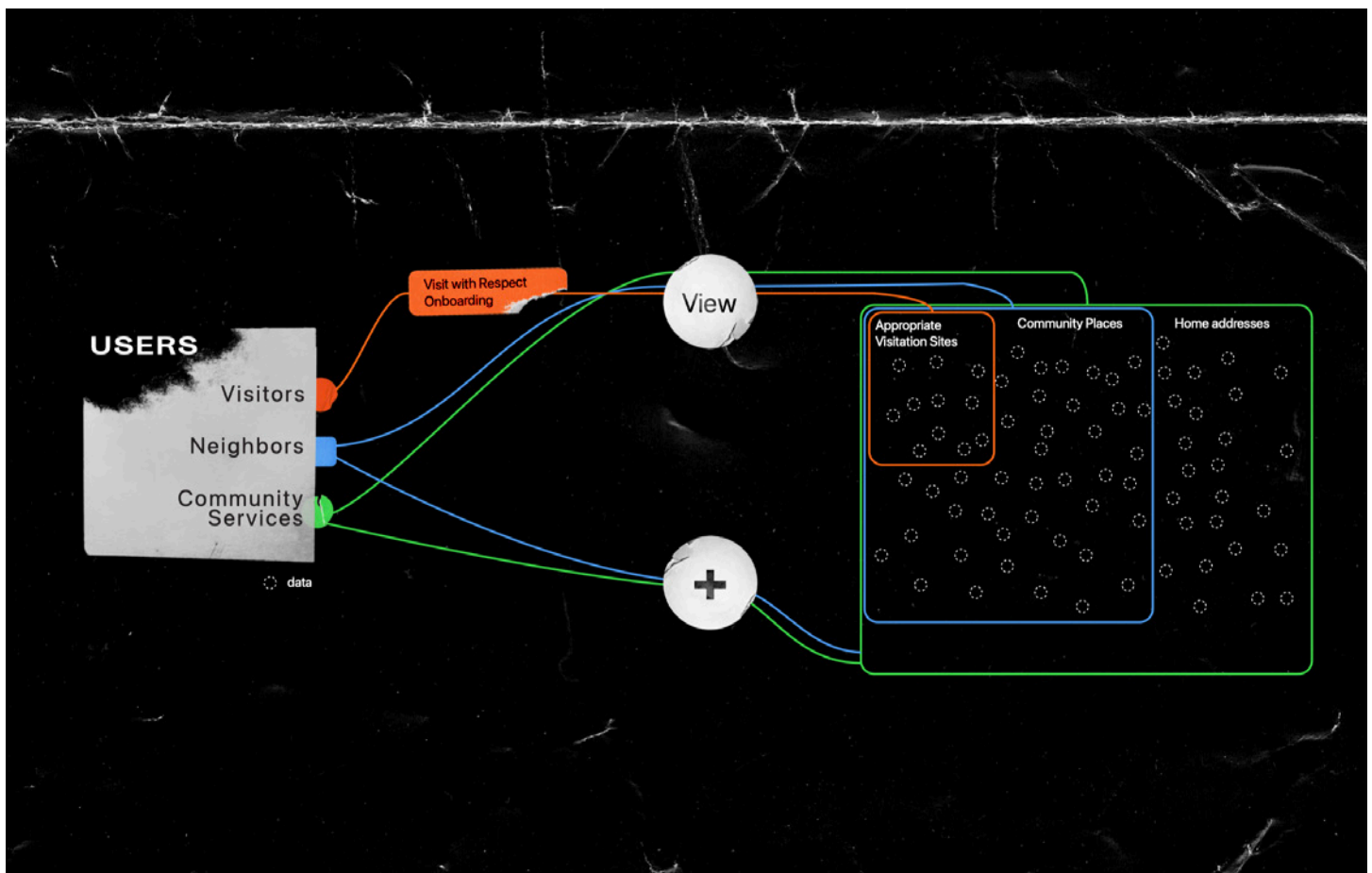


Next time someone has a similar question, they will see the uploaded interaction in the atlas archive, and will have access to relevant spatial information directly from their own community members.

See R.U.C.A in Action!



Due to the large variety of use cases, it's necessary to note that not all information in the archive will be accessible to all users. Visitors will have access only to interactions about appropriate sites for visitation. Rural Utahn's wishing to share the location of their residence with community services will not need to make this information public, and can use R.U.C.A. simply to self-report this information directly to those services.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**RESEARCH IS INSTRUMENTAL TO MY DESIGN PROCESS;
THIS BODY OF WORK WAS INFORMED AND GUIDED BY THE
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Alkon, A. H., & Traugot, M. (2008). Place matters, but how? Rural Identity, environmental decision making, and the social construction of place. *City & Community*, 7(2), 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2008.00248.x>

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT:

This document was created in Salt Lake City Utah in December 2021.

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Sticker png images were sourced from BLK Market using their pro-membership license.

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