

Peer Review Article

# Awareness-Based Design:

## Bringing Design to Social Presencing Theater

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### Abstract

To shift beliefs, values and practices, we need to design learning experiences that can transform our inner dimension—that is, our ways of thinking, feeling and being in relation with the worlds we are a part of. With a view to promoting transformative learning (TL), we must start with becoming aware of our experiences within a social field. Given that our experience is oftentimes intangible (i.e. non-verbal, felt, relational and emergent), this paper argues that making intangible experiences visible or tangible can support TL. This research asks: How might design practice support awareness of intangible experiences during the process of transformative learning? The paper emphasizes four kinds of intangible experiences: thoughts, emotions, felt senses and sensations. The methodology brings practice-based design research to Social Presencing Theater (SPT)—and SPT to design. The SPT practices foreground an embodied, gestural and felt contribution often sidelined in design; while design brings a material and visual contribution to the embodied awareness of SPT. Awareness-based

design (ABD) is the term introduced here for a design practice that learns from and engages with SPT. ABD is framed as a method-pedagogy aspiring to become a living curriculum. The set of relational, embodied and co-creative literacies, comprehensions and sensibilities outlined demonstrate how the acts of becoming aware and making sense of the intangible support the work of transformative learning.

## Keywords

transformative learning, inner transformation, design research, social presencing theater, awareness-based design, social arts

## Introduction

I often introduce myself as a social designer. I situate my design practice within the intersection of social design, embodied awareness, and transformative education.<sup>1</sup> My practice is transdisciplinary, situated, reflexive, relational, and emergent. In light of social, cultural and technological changes, designers might feel called to generate not only material objects but also systems interventions, services, and experiences (Buchanan, 2011; Davis, 2008). When I observe what my practice generates, I note the experiences and models of engagement I've designed, as well as the tools and processes that support the engagement. But I also attune to the spaces the practice opens up, the shifts, and the experiences it invites in myself and others.<sup>2</sup>

As a designer, I recognize that the materiality of *things* is intertwined with the intangible aspects of our life. By *things*, I mean material objects or visual entities that are part of our lived experiences and have some degree of agency, significance, resonance, and/or vitality (Bennett, 2010; Bollas, 2009; Brown, 2001; Miller, 1987). In my design practice, I often wonder: What are the relationships between the tangible and the intangible? That is, how do materials *evoke, prompt, initiate, surface, and/or sustain* intangible experiences in us? Is it possible to materialize our intangible experiences in tangible, visible forms?

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<sup>1</sup> I consider social design as a field addressing social challenges and *wicked problems* (Buchanan, 2011) through design-led ways of knowing, being and doing. Social design can deliver various tangible as well as immaterial outputs: new routines, habits, behaviors; both at an individual as well as at a systemic level. Additionally, in education, I have worked with both youth development (e.g. agency, citizenship, empowerment, 21st century skills and future-making abilities; middle and high-school education) and adult learning (i.e. life-long learning through immersive experiences; higher education).

<sup>2</sup> You can read more about samples of my applied practice and work here: <http://www.ricardo-dutra.com/>.

In this paper, the key *hunch* is that making intangible experiences tangible or visible can take people on a journey of fresh discoveries and insights.<sup>3</sup> I, Ricardo Dutra Gonçalves, am interested in designing tools and processes that guide people towards becoming aware and making new meanings out of their felt and relational experiences (Ackermann, 2007; Rinaldi, 2009). Lisa Grocott, my co-author and PhD supervisor, is riding in the passenger seat. We share a foundational belief that the co-creative, affective, and generative practice of designing can play a significant role in enabling the hard work of supporting people to shift perspectives, mindsets, and the stories we tell ourselves. Lisa's research on designing transformative learning encounters animates the line of inquiry I chase in this paper. Here, I deepen her work by focusing on the important role awareness can play in scaffolding how we can engage with the intangible.

By intangible, we mean that which is unable to be grasped or seen because it does not have a physical or visible presence—therefore, being ephemeral, tacit, oftentimes unaware. This paper emphasizes four kinds of intangible experiences: thoughts, emotions, felt senses, and sensations. We argue that to become aware of our experiences, we need to attend to, and stay with the non-verbal and pre-reflexive qualities of these lived experiences (Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023; Petitmengin, 2007).

The importance of becoming aware of experience resonates with the theories proposed by other researchers. For instance, in the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005), becoming aware of our experience is indicated as a move from precontemplation (i.e. when we are still unaware) to contemplation (i.e. when we begin to recognize our experience).<sup>4</sup> Mezirow's 10 phases of transformational learning start with a disorienting dilemma and self-examination (Mezirow, 1991). For Senge (1990), transformation begins when we become aware of the underlying models that guide our thinking and action. Freire (1970) spoke of conscientization as a process of becoming aware of the social, political, and economic forces shaping our lives. However, none of these thinkers emphasize the process of becoming aware as an act of making that integrates material, embodied, relational, and co-creative literacies.

This research is situated within a broader field of education, and, in particular, of transformative learning (TL). Transformative learning here is the meaningful learning that connects inner shifts in awareness with outer changes

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<sup>3</sup> I choose to use the word *hunch* instead of *hypothesis* to honor how designers often pursue intuitive knowing and being as ways of guiding their action—rather than trying to prove a pre-established hypothesis.

<sup>4</sup> The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) is a framework for understanding how people change their behavior (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). TTM suggests that behavior change is a process rather than a one-time event, and people go through a series of stages before they can successfully change and maintain new behaviors.

in actions and systems (Barrett, 2017; Dewey, 1938; Grocott, 2022; Henriksson et al., 2020; Sullivan, 1999). This paper argues that in order to address the complex issues of the present and emerging future, we need learning encounters that can transformatively nudge the inner dimension of our individual and collective actions. If we hope to unsettle the ways we act and respond to a world facing meta crisis, we need to not just think of behavior change, but to also imagine how we might shift our ways of being, thinking, relating, and collaborating. Through design practice, this research addresses this challenge by resisting a separation of mind from body and self from world. I (Ricardo) develop an expansive conception of what it means to design, to engage with the inner-outer dynamics of transformative learning. The recursive interactions between being aware and making tangible offer a continuous, reciprocal relationship that helps to shape current perception and future action (Barrett, 2017; Ingold, 2000; Noë, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

In the scope of designing for awareness within processes of transformative learning, this paper's main question is: *How might design practice support the awareness of intangible experiences during the process of TL?* Our focus is to offer a conceptual articulation of a design practice based on awareness—in which theory informs practice, and practice informs theory. By focusing on the process of becoming aware of experience, it is not our intention to discuss the resulting dynamics of transformative learning itself. Therefore, this paper's main contribution to theory is, ultimately, a method-pedagogy called *awareness-based design* (ABD)—including a set of literacies, comprehensions and sensibilities towards becoming aware and making sense of the intangible.<sup>6</sup>

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first section introduces the main research question and methodology. The next section clarifies the background context of a design research practice that aspires to make the intangible visible. Here, the awareness-based design prompts I developed by combining design methods with Social Presencing Theater are introduced. The third section of the article narrates how the prompts were developed and iterated on through applied research in two situated contexts and in reflective conversation with myself (Ricardo). The practice of Awareness-Based Design is articulated in the fourth and final section by way of a distilled set of literacies, sensibilities, and comprehensions.

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<sup>5</sup> Ingold's "dwelling perspective" suggests that people do not stand apart from their environments as detached observers but are deeply embedded within them. Perception and knowledge arise from direct engagement with the world, not from abstract, detached cognition. This view aligns with the non-dual concept, as the inner (perception, thought) and outer (environment, action) are not separate but co-evolving (Ingold, 2011) or as pointed out by Noë (2004), perception arises from our dynamic involvement with the world around us.

<sup>6</sup> By method-pedagogy, we refer to pedagogical processes that emphasize the *how* of learning—therefore encouraging, for example, learner-centered approaches, experiential learning, critical thinking and mastery (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978).

## Methodology

A mixed-methods approach to research through design (Frayling, 1993) is the primary methodology for this research. The practice-based orientation here goes explicitly beyond the material, artifact framing of research through design. To bring an awareness-based approach to design, we must design for the intangible by being in conversation with the body and one's own reflective backtalk (Hayashi, 2021; Schön, 1983).<sup>7</sup>

The research design includes a series of one-week-long experimental in-person and online workshops conducted in India (Mumbai, 2020) and Chile (Temuco, 2021).<sup>8</sup> In India, K-12 teachers explored how they perceive, notice, and make sense of emotions in the school. In Chile, university students explored how to make shared hopes and longings for their city visible—therefore, becoming aware of emergent future possibilities to engage in collectively.

Practice-based design research is a form of inquiry in which the creative design practice itself is the method of research (Candy, 2006). Social Presencing Theater (SPT) is a social art-based research practice drawing on embodied awareness and systems thinking—seeking to surface invisible social dynamics through the use of body-led and awareness-based social practices (Hayashi, 2021).<sup>9</sup> In the workshops in India and Chile, SPT practices (i.e. 20-minute Dance, Duets, Dance of 5's, and Stuck) were combined with practice-based design methods to support awareness of intangible experiences during the process of TL.

The resulting *awareness-based design prompts* I developed integrate design- and arts-based sensitizing methods. These prompts bring an awareness for people to experiences that might otherwise be hard to access, feel, or articulate. Using photographs, videos, imagery, drawings, and writing, these intangible experiences are given visible form. The workshops were followed up by micro-phenomenology interviews (Petitmengin, 2007) and qualitative surveys (Appendix I).

In this paper, references in the first-person, speak to my (Ricardo Dutra Gonçalves) grounded experience as a practitioner-researcher with a design and presencing practice. The first person voice critically acknowledges equal parts of embodied, material, emotional, and analytical rigor of a practitioner-researcher

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<sup>7</sup> In this paper, we attempt to generate new knowledge through a performative artistic inquiry. Dutra Gonçalves considers his practice-based design research approach as performative because it values and uses embodied knowledge. For instance, by exploring embodiment as a creative form of knowing to articulate complex individual and systemic phenomena.

<sup>8</sup> The choice of working in these two countries stems from Dutra Gonçalves' own contexts of practice—having worked extensively in Latin America and India.

<sup>9</sup> Hayashi (2021) defines SPT as an individual and group practice rooted in embodiment, meditation, and systems thinking that engages the body's physical and spatial intelligence.

undertaking awareness-based inquiry in the social field.<sup>10</sup> Lisa Grocott, as second author, supports the conceptual framing and dialogic listening necessary when seeking new, sophisticated ways of “attuning” across diverse forms of “data” (Grocott, 2022). Just as a designer learns to attune to how someone interacts with a prototype or engages in a workshop, attending to the embodied and oftentimes ineffable qualities of SPT require new and disciplined modes of attuning.

The mixed-methods approach and practice-based orientation resists a methodological triangulation that declares “the data tells us” this. The awareness-based commitment calls for sense-making through and across the practitioner-researcher’s insights, the qualitative data, and the emergent theorizing of practice. The intention here is not to offer a theoretical position, a prescriptive framework, or a suite of experiential tools. Instead, the set of literacies, comprehensions, and sensibilities presented offer a way to engage with the feedback loops of practice that will forever be evolving and reconfiguring.

## Bringing Design to Social Presencing Theater

When working as an action researcher at the Presencing Institute (2016–2021), I was asked to collaborate with choreographer Arawana Hayashi to (1) organize Social Presencing Theater as a research methodology within the theoretical framework of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009); and (2) create case studies from the application of SPT in diverse global contexts.<sup>11</sup> Back then, I was the only designer at the Institute and my core intention was to bring design to embodied awareness and awareness-based systems change. The embodied awareness practices touched upon intangible aspects of personal and societal transformation. Otto Scharmer’s work and the Institute’s practice framed how these intangible aspects were essential to engage if we sought transformation (Scharmer, 2009).

With Lisa as my Ph.D. supervisor and Arawana as my collaborator, I came to see how Lisa’s research practice of designing tangible tools and learning encounters could integrate with Arawana’s embodied approach to systems change. By making intangible experiences tangible, we can encourage shifts in perspectives, mindsets, and action. This is how I came to explore the hunch that physical, tangible design probes could complement the inherent subjectivity of bringing awareness and shifting consciousness to transforming social fields.

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<sup>10</sup> Scharmer (2009) defines social fields as the sum total and quality of relationships we collectively enact.

<sup>11</sup> Theory U is a framework for leading profound change by moving through a process of co-sensing, co-presencing, and co-creating. It emphasizes shifting awareness from downloading old patterns to accessing emerging future possibilities, enabling transformative action (Scharmer, 2009).

## The Materiality of *Things*

In design research, I first experienced the connection between the tangible and the intangible when I encountered Mattelmäki's (2006) work on design probes. According to Gaver et al. (2004), probes are evocative tasks that elicit inspirational responses from people. I remember the first time I saw an image of a few design probes, all symmetrically placed on a table: a disposable camera, an audio recorder, maps, a workbook, and postcards. The image of the design probes communicated a subjectivity, open inquiry, and an embracing of ambiguity and playfulness, which drew me in.<sup>12</sup>

As a knowledge-creation method, I see probing as a means to enact Krogh and Koskine's (2020) notion of *drifting* that not just accommodates but values "actions that take design away from its original brief or question and lead to a result that was not anticipated in the beginning" (p. X). In this way, the design probes ask participants to engage with open-ended and ambiguous tasks and materials to express, reflect, and document their experiences, feelings and thoughts (Gaver, 2004; Hutchinson et al., 2003; Mattelmäki, 2006, 2014). After some early-stage prototyping when working at the Presencing Institute, I observed how *probe* could be a word that had intrusive connotations.<sup>13</sup> For awareness-based design I chose the word *prompt* to refer to these design invitations to drift.

## Intangible Experiences

In this paper, I refer to *intangible* simply to indicate that something cannot be directly perceived by the physical senses or grasped in a concrete way. By *experience*, I refer to the wide range of sensory, emotional, felt, affective, and cognitive responses—resulting from the active, dynamic, and interconnected engagement with one another and the world (Barrett, 2017; Bortoft, 1996; Dewey, 1938; Ingold, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

This research focuses on four types of intangible experiences: *thoughts*, *emotions*, *felt senses*, and *sensations*.<sup>14</sup> By *thoughts*, I mean the mental process of

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<sup>12</sup> Mattelmäki et al. (2014) write that encountering "new types of challenges" has led designers to look for "new approaches to design—approaches that were able to dive into more ambiguous topics, such as experiences, meaningful everyday practices and emotions" (p. 67). While Gaver et al. (2004) write that probes value "uncertainty, play, exploration, and subjective interpretation" (p. 53).

<sup>13</sup> For example, like when a doctor probes a patient with an instrument.

<sup>14</sup> Here, it is important to observe that the individual experience is inseparable from the experience of a larger group—that is, our experiences are inherently social because we are always interconnected with others (humans and non-humans) within larger social and cultural contexts (Dewey, 1938; Haraway, 2016; Ingold, 2011; Kimmerer, 2013; Shiva, 1991; Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

thinking—including, for example, ideas, beliefs, assumptions, etc.<sup>15</sup> By *emotions*, I refer to constructed affective experiences by the brain in response to specific situations, based on past experiences, context, and cultural influences (Barrett, 2017)<sup>16</sup>. By *felt senses*, I mean the pre-reflective bodily experiences that are difficult to articulate in words. They often start as fuzzy and unclear experiences—which then can take form and change (Gendlin, 1978; Hayashi, 2021; Petitmengin, 2007; Rome, 2014).<sup>17</sup> By *sensations*, I refer to the initial, immediate, and elementary units of consciousness resulting from perceiving internal and external signals through the body-mind senses (Barrett, 2017; James, 1890).

Based on the practice of bringing SPT to multiple global contexts, I have observed five characteristics common to all these intangible experiences (Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021). Intangible experiences include (a) non-verbal (i.e. tacit, pre-reflective),<sup>18</sup> (b) embodied (i.e. experienced through the body-mind system), (c) relational (i.e. interdependent), (d) subjective (i.e. experienced from the subject as a point of view and access toward the world), and (e) creative dimensions (i.e. emergent, unfolding, changing).<sup>19</sup> In this research, I used these characteristics as guideposts to inform how the prompts could elicit awareness.

## Bringing Social Presencing Theater to Design

In this research, I combine the awareness-based, embodied, and relational practices of SPT with the *making* orientation of design (Cross, 2006; Grocott, 2022; Kolko, 2011; Mattelmäki, 2006). By *awareness*, I wish to evoke the sense

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<sup>15</sup> Indigenous scholars argue that thoughts are not just the result of mental activity—but are rooted in people's relationship with community, spirituality, and the natural world. Therefore, they call upon the need for research approaches that respect and honor the interconnectedness of all aspects of life (Alfred, 2005; Little Bear, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> According to Barrett (2017), the brain continually interprets sensory information to predict and make sense of bodily signals, integrating these with memory and social context. This way, emotions are categorizations the brain constructs to help us understand and respond to our internal and external world. One of the implications of Barrett's findings is that transforming emotional responses require shifts in the ways we make meaning of experience—that is, rewiring how we come to interpret and make sense of internal and external signals of the world.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett (2017) refers to felt senses as “affective experiences”—that is, basic states of arousal and valence (positive or negative quality) in the body, such as feeling energized or calm, pleasant or unpleasant.

<sup>18</sup> By tacit, I mean known without being directly expressed (Polanyi, 1967); and by pre-reflective, I mean that experiences are present prior to reflection and sense-making (Depraz et al., 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

<sup>19</sup> There could be a parallel between some of these five dimensions and Varela et al. (2016) 4E cognition framework—which says that cognition is deeply rooted in the body and environment, emphasizing that our minds are not isolated but highly interconnected with the world. Therefore, cognition is embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended.

perceptions of how we come to feel, experience, sense the world inside and all-around us while by *making* I evoke the embodied, conceptual, and material aspects of giving form to the intangible.<sup>20</sup> This combination forges two primary methods: (1) awareness-based design prompts for working with self within a social field; and (2) awareness-based design prompts for working with others.

## Awareness-Based Design Prompts

Awareness-based design prompts are offered as non-intrusive sensitizing tools to support individuals (including oneself) to attend to and become aware of non-verbal and embodied experiences. In practice, this research combines embodied methods of SPT with producing material and/or visual elements such as photographs, videos, imagery, drawings, and writing. We recognize the potential of design prompts to support the investigation and communication of tacit and experiential knowing. Therefore, they can provoke and assist in the emergence of awareness and sense-making.

The core function of these prompts is an act of distancing, a moment to momentarily surface something otherwise intangible in a visual or tangible form (Ackermann, 2007). I agree with Edith Ackermann when she says that this temporary act of distancing is a paradox because it allows us to “objectivize our experience to better understand it” and “project it to better internalize it” (2007, p. 3). Lisa recognizes the act of making tangible as *temporarily fixing* while Akama and Agid (2018) make a distinction between “fixing to make static” and “freezing as a temporary state to trace and orientate our movements” (p. 800). This temporary freezing in a tangible form is a prototypical action that is not about making a tangible object or output, but rather about surfacing an awareness of an intangible experience.

This way, design prompts help sustain awareness by bringing one’s attention to what Kegan (2000) refers to as *subject-object* shifts—that is, the process in which individuals transition elements of their experience from being subjects (identified with and unexamined) to objects that can be reflected upon, analyzed, and transformed. Therefore, the tangible/visible artifacts permit documentation and encourage reflection (Kegan, 2000; Rinaldi, 2009; Sanders & Stappers, 2014).

We argue that sustaining awareness of one’s experience by making it (even momentarily) tangible contributes to what Loris Malaguzzi (1996) defined as a *pedagogy of listening*. By curiously listening to our experience with all our senses, we can cultivate the quality of our attention—therefore, returning to ourselves, to things themselves, and to phenomena (Depraz et al., 2003; Merleau-

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<sup>20</sup> This way, I wish to respond to Varela’s call for researchers to train in becoming black belts in first-person experience (Varela & Scharmer, 2000). That is, training in recognizing the value of subjective intangible experiences, attuning to them, and letting the awareness of lived experiences inform individual and collective choices and actions.

Ponty, 1945; Rinaldi, 2009; Varela, & Vermersch, 2003).<sup>21</sup> In returning to ourselves and others, we can counter the habit of trying to get rid of our experiences, particularly the difficult thoughts and emotions (Chödrön, 2003; David, 2016). In this way, the awareness-based design prompts are a relational site that can help people attend to and stay with meaningful aspects of their lived, non-verbal, relational experience(s) (Rinaldi, 2009).

### ***Working With Self***

A core premise of this research is that in order to work with others and the world, we must work with ourselves as well because self and others are interconnected (Bortoft, 1996; Grocott, 2024; Hanh, 2020; Hayashi, 2021; Ingold, 2000; Taddei, 2018). The inner work of being in conversation with oneself means developing the literacy to “read” our own lived experiences: thoughts, emotions, felt senses, and sensations. In this section, I bring poetry, sketching, and photography (design prompts) to make intangible experiences visible during the individual practice of two SPT methods: 20-min Dance and Stuck (explained below). My intention is to demonstrate how I use these awareness-based design prompts to develop and cultivate my own embodied awareness. This is not to offer a prescription for these prompts, but to share an example of how one may work with the self as the basis for working with others.

#### **20-Min Dance (SPT) + Poetry (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)**

The 20-min Dance, an embodied exercise I learned from Arawana Hayashi (Hayashi, 2021), is one of my most transformative personal practices. It involves lying on the floor and allowing the body to move freely for 20 minutes, interspersed with moments of stillness. This practice taught me to appreciate gaps, pauses, and intervals, revealing that movement emerges from stillness (Hayashi, 2021). I transition from lying down to sitting, ultimately standing up, giving my body the main stage while setting my thoughts aside. When I feel overwhelmed, lying down becomes a kind, self-compassionate act that helps me regain a sense of groundedness.

Practicing the 20-min Dance inspired me to use poetry to express my embodied insights. After completing the exercise, I immediately pick up a notebook to write a short, three-line poem (haiku-inspired). As I connect with the freshness of my experience, words flow into a sequence of three phrases. Over the years, I've maintained a personal notebook of these short poems, a few of which I

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<sup>21</sup> In this research, we believe that our direct experience of the world (i.e., our perception) is the foundation of understanding how things are. That is, we challenge the idea that the world is simply something “out there” to be observed objectively, separate from the perceiving subject. Instead, we suggest that the world and the self are intertwined through perception.

share below. I believe they gently capture the essence of my embodied experiences, allowing me to recall and feel them anew each time I read them.

*pain, resting pain,  
lives in the body,  
still.*

*clouded in thoughts,  
wandering in a fog,  
stillness whispers.*

*lying on the ground,  
strength comes,  
pushing me out.*

—Reflective notes (2018–2023)

### **Stuck (SPT) and Sketching/Photography (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)**

The Stuck (Hayashi, 2021) is an embodied method that helps me engage with challenging situations. It serves as a rich site for inquiry and discovery, holding the seeds of wisdom, and healthier conditions (Hayashi, 2021).<sup>22</sup> I begin by recalling a situation where I feel stuck, whether it's an inner experience (like a difficult emotion) or an outer one (such as a work relationship or systemic issue). I then focus on the felt quality of the situation, setting aside the storylines. I observe how this felt quality manifests in my body and stay in that posture for a few moments until words arise.<sup>23</sup> I finish by making a sketch. In group practice, I ask others to photograph my Stuck shape, which I later use to evoke the experience.

Reviewing my reflective notebooks and diaries, I find numerous sketches and polaroid photographs of embodied Stuck shapes. One photograph (Figure 1) is titled “Forces at Play.” On the left page, notes describe how the Stuck felt: the shape is at ground level, attempting to move forward (future) but held back (past). The notes mention tight legs and an unbalanced, strained body.

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<sup>22</sup> The Stuck is not ourselves—that is why I refer to the Stuck as *it*.

<sup>23</sup> Here it is important to notice that the Stuck shape is not a representation of a situation or feeling. It is its *embodiment* itself.



Figure 1: Dutra Gonçalves's personal diary with sense-making notes on the *Stuck* "Forces at Play" (2018, April).

## Working With Others

As I begin writing this section, I hear my dear friend and mentor Sonali Ojha's voice. I met her ten years ago, then an Ashoka Fellow, educator, and founder of Dreamcatchers Foundation, an awarded education NGO in Mumbai (India). At major thresholds in my life, Sonali taught me the value of opening space for paradox, embracing not knowing, and attuning my senses to what wants to emerge. The work outlined in this section comes from a series of four experimental workshops Sonali and I co-designed and co-led for 60 teachers at a private school in Mumbai in January 2020. The workshops were intended to help teachers explore the social-emotional environment at their school by tuning in first to themselves and then to others.<sup>24</sup> In July 2021, Sonali passed away. Her loss/departure/disappearance has left a gap, pause, open, unfilled, blank space which continues to be present.

In April 2021, I was invited by the Universidad Católica de Temuco (Chile) to host an online workshop for undergraduate students as part of a seminar called *Co-Creando el Futuro Emergente* (Co-Creating the Emerging Future).<sup>25</sup> Building on learnings and emergent questions from the workshops in India, I

<sup>24</sup> We were invited to run these workshops by the principal of R.N. Podar Santacruz (Mumbai, India), Avnita Bir. I met Avnita through Sonali Ojha a few years before—and was impressed by how open and interested she was in design-led and whole-education approaches. Avnita came across as someone who was willing to try things out and who cared for teachers and students.

<sup>25</sup> The 5-day workshop was part of an online seminar—open to all students at Facultad de Arquitectura, Artes y Diseño (FAAD) and international guests. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the seminar was completely online and featured speakers including Otto Scharmer and Arawana Hayashi (<https://www.faadworkshop.com/workshops/faadworkshop2021>).

designed a week-long session entitled *Imaginarios Futuros* (Future Imaginaries). In the workshop, I explored the act of sensing as the birthplace of emergent futures—including noticing, attending to, and tuning into our experiences and those of others (Scharmer, 2009; Hayashi, 2021).<sup>26</sup> In this workshop, the students followed a path of self-inquiry which ultimately led them into co-creating a collective artifact for the future: a design brief with their longing and hopes for the city of Temuco.<sup>27</sup>

The awareness-based design prompts outlined below were created and proposed in the context of the workshops with the K-12 teachers in India and the university students in Chile. In these workshops, I combined embodied SPT methods (i.e., Dance of 5's and Stuck) with material/visual design prompts (i.e., video, imagery, photographs, and photo-collage). The surveys and interviews which followed the workshops can be found on Appendix I, and the data analysis on Appendix II.

### **Dance of 5's (SPT) + Video (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)**

Inspired by the Dance of 5's (Hayashi, 2021), Sonali and I created an exercise where teachers in India improvise interactions between emotions (Figure 2).<sup>28</sup> One teacher steps forward to embody an emotion silently, without naming it. Another teacher joins, embodying a different emotion in response. Others can join as they wish. The teachers are encouraged to move dynamically rather than remain static, responding to one another's embodied shapes. These short scenes are recorded, resulting in videos that became tangible artifacts showcasing how emotions can interact.

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<sup>26</sup> One point of view which I gained while working with Arawana Hayashi and Otto Scharmer is to bear in mind what is at the core of one's intention for future-making—that is, do we consider the future as a space of hope and possibility? Are we inclined towards co-creating healthier futures (as compared to the present)?

<sup>27</sup> The students created a video by assembling meaningful parts of their self-inquiry process. The video was meant to be a design brief and be shared with stakeholders (government, companies, families)—therefore, making the students' longings and hopes for the future of the city visible.

<sup>28</sup> The Dance of 5's is a SPT method in which a group of five people co-create movement by using a shared vocabulary: sitting, standing, walking, turning, and lying down. With a simple movement vocabulary, the method emphasizes attention on the emergence of a shared social body—and its collective values, choices, behaviors.



*Figure 2: Teachers improvising how emotions meet and relate with each other. Mumbai, 2020.*

### **Stuck (SPT) and Imagery (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)**

While working with the teachers, Sonali and I discussed how difficult emotions (e.g., anger, rage, fear) can feel like a Stuck. To broaden their awareness of emotions, I designed a set of nine Navarasa cards based on the Indian classical dance Kathakali (Gopalakrishnan, 2016; Zarrilli, 2012), where facial expressions represent different clusters of emotions.<sup>29</sup> We asked the teachers to select up to three cards and observe students' facial expressions and embodied behaviors in various locations within the school (Figure 3). They recorded their observations on the back of each card with prompts: "When I saw... I felt..." On the front, they marked the intensity of the emotions perceived. Upon returning, they co-created an emotional map of the school, specifying the emotions they had noticed and their locations.

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<sup>29</sup> The Navarasas include: Love (Kāruṇyam), Rage (Raudram), Humor (Hāsyam), Fear (Bhayaṅakam), Courage/ Willpower (Veeram), Awe/Wonder (Adbhutam), Peace (Shantam), Aversion/ Disgust (Bibhatsam). To these, we added Hope—drawing from the work Sonali Ojha has done in India for over 20 years.



*Figure 3: Teachers picking up Navarasa Cards. Mumbai, 2020.*

### **Stuck (SPT) and Photographs (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)**

In a variation of the previous method, we asked the teachers to embody various emotions and have a partner photograph them (Figure 4). They observed a moment just before the click when their embodied shapes took form, feeling that the camera prompted them to pause and clarify how they wanted their bodies to be perceived. When discussing the limitations of photography as an awareness-based design prompt, the teachers noted the challenge of capturing expressions quickly: “One has to be quick to photograph an expression” one participant shared. As they played with embodying different emotions, some wondered, “Could there be hidden meanings in the expressions and behaviors of students?”



*Figure 4: Teachers embody facial expressions and photograph one another. Mumbai, 2020.*

### Stuck (SPT), Photo-Collage, and Video (Awareness-Based Design Prompt)

While working online with university students in Chile, we engaged in self-inquiry to co-create a collective artifact: a design brief reflecting their hopes and aspirations for the city of Temuco. The prompts guided students to first explore their own emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ways of knowing, gradually leading to a whole-group inquiry where they sensed into a relational space to make their shared aspirations for the city visible. This transition was grounded in the idea that our identities and the systems we create are interdependent.<sup>30</sup>

The students began by selecting an online news article that resonated with them—something occurring in their city or country that provoked, moved, or concerned them. Using an online whiteboard (Miro), they reflected on the question “how does the news article make me feel?” by posting the article and linking it to an emotion (Brackett, 2020). The next step involved embodying the emotion (i.e., Stuck) through a gesture (Figure 5). When introducing SPT to new groups, I notice that some people can feel self-conscious about making full-body shapes. To scaffold embodiment as a means of exploration, I found that using hand gestures helped reduce this self-consciousness in Chile.



Figure 5: Students embody feelings with gestures. Temuco, 2021.

Building on the insights gained from previous visual, written, and embodied prompts, the students wrote down one present longing (something lacking for themselves or their city) and one future hope (a desire or dream for what could

<sup>30</sup> This aligns with Senge's notion that the most systemic is the most personal (Böll & Senge, 2020).

be).<sup>31</sup> They then compiled their responses into a final video, framed as a design brief for the future of Temuco, based on their lived experiences. Together, the students identified city-wide stakeholders they wanted to engage with (e.g., the mayor, leaders, elders, Nature). The video was structured as a speculative letter addressed from the students to these stakeholders. Each student read aloud the sentences written by their peers, giving voice to the group as a creative collective (Figure 6).



*“Soy una persona solitaria pero que adora la compañía de los que ama; observadora, introvertida, muy sensible, que se asombra con la simplicidad del mundo.”*

*“I am a solitary person but I enjoy the company of those who love me; observant, introverted, very sensitive, scared at the simplicity of the world.”*

—Student. Temuco, 2021

*Figure 6: A student's writing sample.*

The purpose of co-producing the video was to shift awareness from individual perspectives to a collective understanding of the group as a creative ensemble. This approach moved away from individual authorship towards recognizing creativity as a relational, collective process. Thus, the video assemblage

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<sup>31</sup> I learned from educator and Ashoka Fellow Sonali Ojha that longings and hopes are at the core of a human being's ability to engage with the future, as it emerges (Gonçalves & Ojha, 2016; Ojha, 2006).

exemplified awareness-based collective creativity, creating social reality from the perspective of the whole (Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023).

## Awareness-Based Design

During the follow-up micro-phenomenology interviews (Appendix I & II), the teachers and students were asked to describe one meaningful moment from the workshop. Through guided introspection, we began by eliciting their sensorial memories (what they saw, felt, and heard) and gradually re-directed their attention to *how* they experienced that moment in time.<sup>32</sup> For example, a teacher's chosen moment was when she realized she did not know what wonder was. She shared that when another teacher spoke of wonder, she felt a need to recall in her own life a time when she had experienced it—and realized she could not locate it because she didn't know what wonder was.

The interviews also revealed that once prompted in the workshop, the teachers and students often performed tiny “inner acts” (Petitmengin, 2007)—that is, tacit, subtle micro-actions such as accessing information, tuning into others, noticing, reflecting, clarifying, and anticipating answers. For example, one teacher said that by “offering words to describe a feeling,” she became aware of the very existence of an emotion. Another teacher shared that by “leaning into an uncomfortable feeling,” she discovered something new. This way, subtle actions like “offering words” and “leaning into” are what I am referring to as tiny inner acts.

In addition, evaluation and analysis of the participants' qualitative responses to the survey (Appendix II) revealed these design prompts can support awareness and sense-making by: (a) offering diverse ways of engaging with one's experience (i.e. by combining embodiment with sketching, video-making, photography, and/or poetry); (b) helping surface pre-reflective knowledge; (c) introducing new questions, frames of thinking and ways of making sense; and (d) assisting meaning-making while in relationship with others.

I started this research with the understanding that design can help people ground intangible experiences in tangible and/or visible forms (Ackermann, 2007; Bollas, 2009; Diatta, 2015; Diatta, Gonçalves & Grocott, 2022; McEntee et al., 2016)—and that, in doing so, making visible helps us to become aware of the intangible. Therefore, the awareness-based design prompts were primarily designed to make intangible experiences visible. However, based on the interviews (Appendix II), the clustering of emergent themes revealed nuances in the act of making the intangible visible. That is, while designing to make the intangible visible, I discovered we also designed opportunities for teachers and

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<sup>32</sup> The micro-phenomenology interviews focus on redirecting the interviewee's attention from the what (i.e., context and data surrounding the experience) to the how (i.e., their actual experience) (Petitmengin, 2007).

students *to make space for*, *to make themselves aware of*, and *to make sense of* the intangible. Here I draw inspiration from Lisa's Make Constellation (2022, p. 64) as the way of framing the research insights—and in particular, highlighting and defining words that most resonate with my practice (Figure 7).

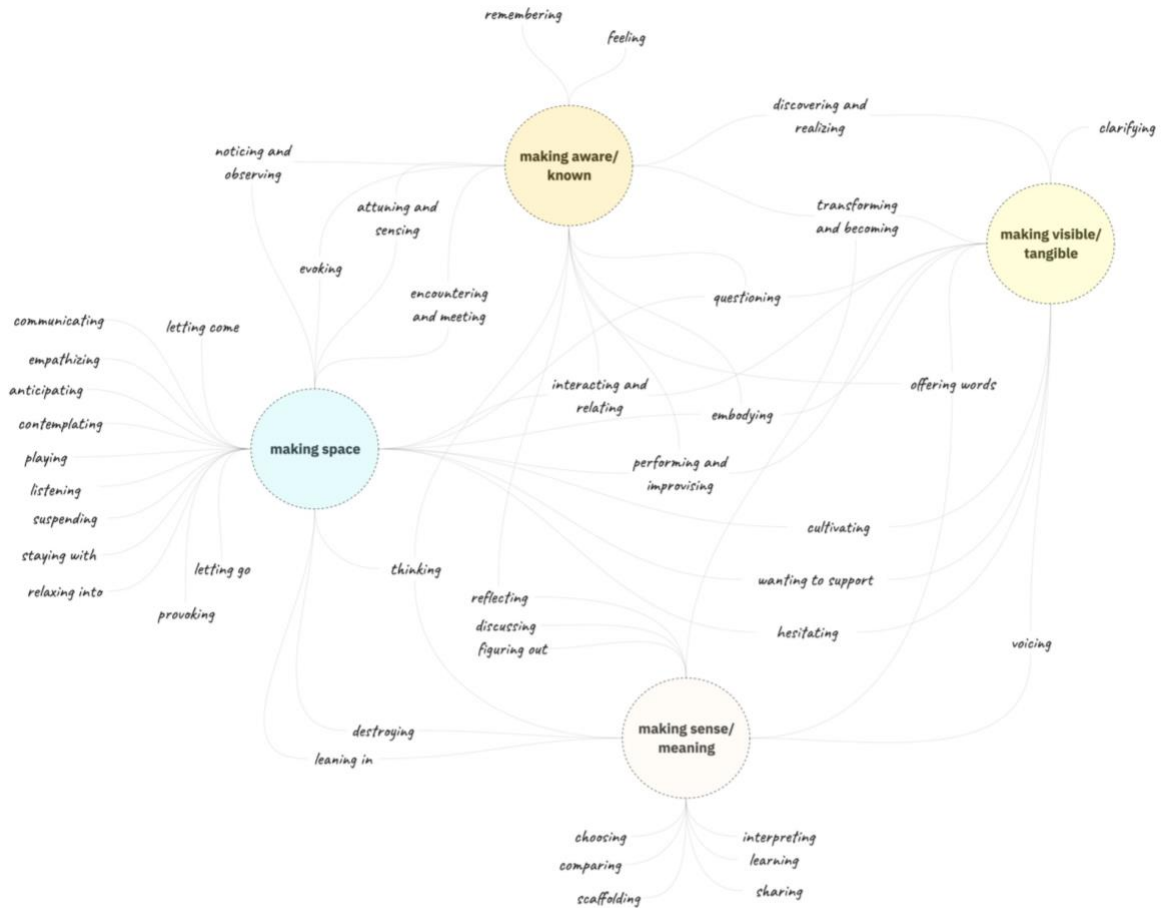


Figure 7: Grouping teachers’ tiny “inner actions” of awareness through the Make constellation.

By bringing design to SPT and SPT to design, this paper’s main practice-based contribution to theory is, ultimately, a method-pedagogy called *awareness-based design* (ABD)—that is, a pedagogical approach aspiring to become a living curriculum which includes a set of literacies, comprehensions, and sensibilities towards becoming aware and making sense of the intangible.<sup>33</sup> As a “form of craft” (Sennett, 2008), ABD is not about acquiring technical expertise but about learning a mode of pedagogy which emphasizes experimentation, adaptation, and

<sup>33</sup> We borrow these words from the Reggio Emilia pedagogy which is framed as a set of comprehensions and sensibilities (Rinaldi, 2009).

development of a set of material-based and embodied capacities (Diatta et al., 2022; Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023).<sup>34</sup>

## Literacies

Literacies are defined as the abilities to understand and apply systems of symbols and representations to generate meaning (Gee, 2010; Kress, 2010; Street, 1984; UNESCO, 2005, 2019). Visual literacies, for example, involve interpreting and manipulating visual information through elements like size, color, and composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2003, 2010), while digital literacies use technology for accessing information, collaboration, and communication (Gee, 2010; Leu et al., 2004; Rheingold, 2012). We define awareness-based design (ABD) literacies as the abilities to become aware and make sense of the intangible.

We argue that ABD literacies could help educators and learners develop relational, embodied, and co-creative skills needed to navigate social dynamics (Gee, 2010; Fischman, 2015; Freire, 1970; Jenkins, 2009; Rheingold, 2012; Shiva, 1991; Thomas & Brown, 2011).<sup>35</sup> In today's world of AI and social networks, cultivating relational, embodied, and co-creative literacies alongside digital and visual ones is essential. ABD thus supports social fields where awareness-based collective creativity can flourish.

Based on the proposed sense-making of surveys and interviews with teachers in Mumbai, India (2020) (Figure 7), we propose the following acts of making as examples of awareness-based design literacies: (a) *making visible*: expressing the intangible in tangible/visible forms; (b) *making space*: staying with not knowing and opening up space for emergence; (c) *making aware*: noticing and becoming aware of the intangible; and (d) *making sense*: asking questions, drawing out patterns and co-generating new meanings.<sup>36</sup> These awareness-based design literacies are described in further detail below. To illustrate these literacies, we draw direct quotations from the sixty surveys and twelve interviews, which have been anonymized.

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<sup>34</sup>We are inspired by the notions that learning is experiential, dynamic and ongoing (Dewey, 1997), by how a pedagogy can sustain a political stance such as in Freire's work—reinforcing the importance of dialogic participatory processes towards the development of critical consciousness and empowerment of marginalized groups (Freire, 1970). Another pedagogy which inspires my research is the work of Vygostky and the notion that learning is socially mediated (Vygostky, 1978). Vygostky's work has helped me understand that awareness-based design is a process of social mediation.

<sup>35</sup>Most of these authors have emphasized digital literacies. Fischman (2015) and Freire (1970), though, explored the notion of critical literacies and Shiva (1991) coined the term earth literacies.

<sup>36</sup>These literacies draw on observations of my own practice—and in dialogue with colleagues, mentors, and theoretical literature.

## **Making Visible**

A recurring theme in teachers' reflections was the importance of "looking deeply" and "not taking things as they appear." One teacher noted that by doing so, "we notice that there are emotions under emotions." Another observed that the prompts revealed how seemingly conflicting emotions, like joy and sadness, can coexist: "In our school, we see happiness alongside anger and sadness."

Making the intangible visible allows us to externalize (inter)subjectivity, turning it into something we can observe and understand. By making a mark, we play with what is made visible so it becomes an "object to think with" (Ackermann, 2007), creating a form of documentation that fosters deeper reflection.<sup>37</sup>

## **Making Space**

Teachers reflected on how the prompts created space for both care (e.g., "When I observed the students' emotions, I felt like helping them or connecting with them") and ambiguity. They appreciated that the prompts allowed them to make new choices (e.g., "I enjoyed observing the cards and making a choice"). In this way, they shared that the workshops provided a "different kind of space" from their usual routines—opening up "new ways of relating and getting to know each other."

As an ABD literacy, *making space* means staying with situations as they are, allowing a pause or interval where nothing seems to happen (Ingold, 2011; Hayashi, 2021).<sup>38</sup> This way, by setting aside rigid storylines, opinions, explanations, and preconceptions, we make space for something new (Bohm, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; de Bono, 1970; Hayashi, 2021; Scharmer, 2009).<sup>39</sup>

## **Making Aware**

Teachers noted that the prompts revealed what one called a "school full of emotions that are often overlooked," helping them become more observant and

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<sup>37</sup> From what is documented, one has to bring the meanings forward (Rinaldi, 2009). For example, Reggio Emilia Schools consider assessments as genuine offerings—because to assess is defined as to see and value what is seen (Rinaldi, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1945) described the importance of noticing the intervals between *things*. He argued that noticing these gaps do not only provide for a new rearrangement of the perceived (as in a new form of linking or associating images and sensations)—but also provide the very constitution of a new world. By *things*, Merleau-Ponty (1945) meant *wholes*—i.e., that which we see to have some intrinsic aspect and the appearance of completeness.

<sup>39</sup> Suzuki Roshi (2011) wrote that if there is space in our minds—they are ready and open to anything. Roshi referred to this as the *beginner's mind*—one in which there are many possibilities as compared to the expert's, in which there are few.

nuanced: “Initially, I had an impression of the children’s emotions, but the more I observed, the more insight I gained” one teacher commented. Many also realized they had only experienced three or four out of the nine emotion clusters on the cards, highlighting a limited emotional vocabulary. This way, as an ABD literacy, *making aware* refers to using visible and/or tangible elements as a support to becoming aware of the intangible (i.e., thoughts, emotions, felt senses, sensations).

### **Making Sense**

Some teachers valued the prompts’ ambiguity, noting that the variety in understanding and perceiving emotions sparked discussion and reflection. One teacher commented, “the prompts made us think in different directions.” Others appreciated how the prompts offered “opportunities for making sense” and “a method to begin from.” For example, the marking scale on the back of the cards helped them see the need to adapt their approach, as some emotions might be clear, others hidden or subtle. One teacher shared, “Marking the intensity on the card helped me see that even a mild expression can be important.”

In this research, *making sense* refers to drawing new meanings from intangible experiences. The prompts enabled sense-making in two phases: during the activity (reflection-in-action) and afterward (reflection-on-action) (Schön, 1983). Reflection-in-action responds to a situation’s generative potential, allowing what Schön (1983) called “back-talk”—a form of listening into an object or situation for what it wants to tell us.<sup>40</sup>

### **Comprehensions**

Comprehensions are defined as core understandings or insights which allow a person (or a group) to operate from a different perspective. These meaningful insights are what enable a practitioner to maintain a *point of view* within a social practice. In this section we propose four comprehensions as the critical and foundational points of view for ABD—based on the analysis and sense-making of the workshops in India and Chile.

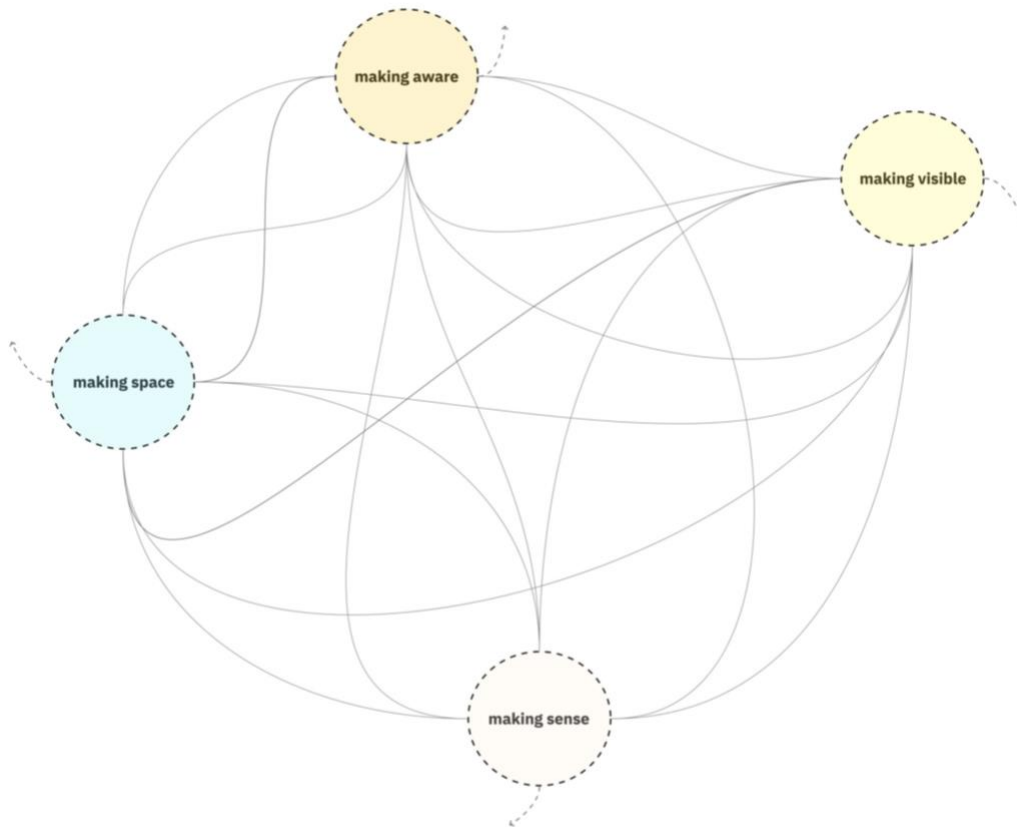
### **The Literacies are Interdependent**

We learned that the different ABD literacies are interdependent (Figure 8)—that is, they are catalysts for one another. One implication of this is that we can

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<sup>40</sup>What we *hear* in these situations then confirms or disconfirms preconceived ideas. For instance, it could be something completely new. As practitioners, we have learned to value disconfirming data because they often indicate the possibility of a fresh understanding of a situation (Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023).

design transformative learning experiences starting from any of these acts of making because one will naturally flow into the other. Therefore, we suggest that, when developing or co-creating transformative learning experiences, one must begin by clarifying an initial core intention for the activity. For example, one might think, *my core intention is to help participants make their mindsets visible*, or *I wish to make a group of people aware of the social field*, or *I want to support people to make sense of their emergent ideas*.

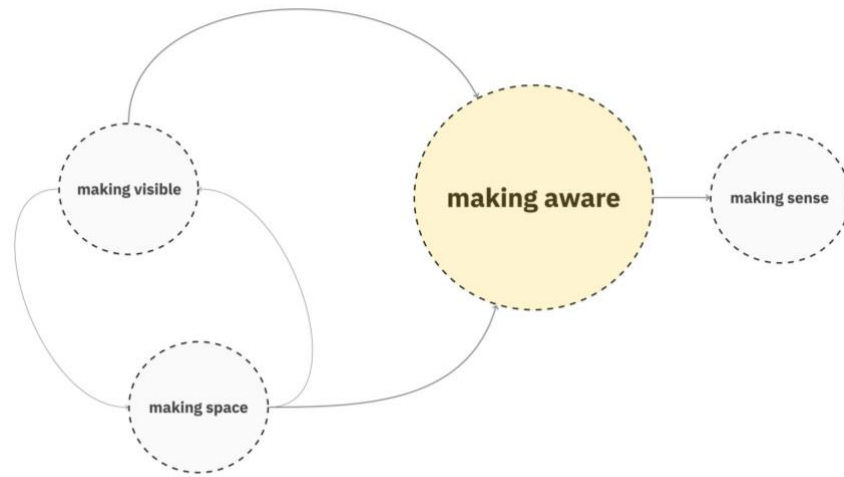


*Figure 8: The ABD literacies catalyze one another (Gonçalves, 2024).*

### ***Making Aware Amplifies Transformative Learning***

Although we believe that a learning experience can begin from any of act of making, we observed that most prompts started with making visible and/or making space, followed by making aware and sense-making. For example, making an intangible experience visible (e.g., sketching a feeling or embodying an emotion) often allowed workshop participants to make space for staying longer with the experience—being made aware of it, and therefore making sense of it in a new way. In this manner, making aware marks the transition from unconscious/unaware to conscious/aware (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). Therefore, we argue that making aware is a core lever for transformation of

individuals and groups (Figure 9) because awareness offers people an opportunity to initiate change.



*Figure 9: Making aware as a lever for transformative learning.*

### **We Can Consciously Delay Meaning-Making**

In the workshops, we often observed that staying with not knowing can feel uncomfortable. Therefore, some people rush into making meaning. This way, making sense is, at its best, a cognitive act of thinking and analyzing information. The main implication of rushing to meaning-making is that we skip altogether the value of other embodied, relational, and co-creative ways of knowing by emphasizing thinking and analyzing.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, we lose the opportunity of tapping into our embodied, relational, and co-creative intelligences.

Countering this natural tendency of pinning ideas and concepts down as soon as possible, we realized that the prompts were designed to intentionally delay meaning-making. That is, by holding our experience in suspension, we allow the time to be in touch with embodied, relational, and subjective aspects of our lived experiences—before ascribing or deriving meaning to/from it. Therefore, in awareness-based design, the prompts delay meaning-making by encouraging people to stay longer in a process of making visible, making space, and making aware.

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<sup>41</sup> We would argue that making sense of reality without a depth of awareness of our embodied, relational and subjective experiences is a common default behavior in society (Barrett, 2017; Greene, 1978; Kolb, 2015; Scharmer, 2009). Scharmer (2009), for instance, refers to the notion of absencing to speak of how we come to make sense and give form to social realities no one wants to be a part of.

In the context of education, delaying meaning-making could be understood as a practice of resisting transmissional learning and memorization (i.e., the transfer of knowledge and disconnected facts without critical reflection) (Dewey, 1938; Dirkx et al., 2006; Freire, 1970)—as well as an act of advocating for the value of other forms of knowing, such as embodied, relational, and subjective ways of knowing.<sup>42</sup> This way, to consciously delay meaning-making is a form of resistance that can, in fact, deepen a learning experience (hooks, 1994; Mezirow, 1991; Santos, 2019). By delaying meaning-making we are, ultimately, assisting new sense and meaning to emerge, take form, and transform.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Designing for Awareness is an Intentional Act***

In summary, the previous comprehensions highlight that we can be intentional about designing for awareness and sense-making even if the people do not know what needs to surface. The significance of this insight for transformative learning is that it challenges the default practice of relying on what is most easily accessed and articulated.

### **Sensibilities**

Based on what students shared in the surveys and interviews with the students in Chile (Appendix II), I propose a sense-making clustering exercise<sup>44</sup> which reveals five categories for grouping the inner acts that the students performed—often unconsciously—towards becoming aware and making sense of their inner experiences.<sup>45</sup> By practicing these embodied and co-creative capacities, I argue

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<sup>42</sup> Freire (1970) argued that transmissional learning ultimately leads to oppression, dehumanization, memorization and dependency—therefore, reinforcing social injustice by maintaining the status quo and limiting the ability of students to be critical and creative.

<sup>43</sup> We believe this understanding counters Western notions of meaning-making—which are primarily goal-oriented. Looking at Indigenous ways of knowing and being, we are inspired by authors who emphasize the importance of listening in and attending to the ways meaning emerges through dialogue and ceremony (Wilson, 2008). One beautiful example of suspending meaning-making is Armstrong's essay *The Trickster Shift*—in which she embraces ambiguity within indigenous storytelling. Armstrong (1995) argues that stories can be told with openness, curiosity, and playfulness rather than trying to pin down meanings and moral values.

<sup>44</sup> Here I question my own attempt of clustering people's insights and subjectivities. I recognize there are multiple ways of grouping and what I present is one way (and therefore, not the only one).

<sup>45</sup> Subjective experiences have an internal dynamic—that is, they are always unfolding and shifting (Bohm, 1996; Petitmengin, 2007; Rome, 2014). According to Petitmengin (2007) subjectivity can include both (conscious and/or unconscious) passive and active inner acts. The inner acts are tiny and subtle inner movements performed by our body-mind systems. The passive and involuntary inner acts, Petitmengin (2007) calls *micro-moves*. For example, an involuntary twitch of a facial expression accompanying a feeling of confusion or surprise. While the active inner

that the students are practicing a form of relational sensibility—that is, a sensibility to the interplay of the inner-outer dimensions of creativity (Figure 10).<sup>46</sup>

Figure 10 represents the inner-outer dimension through an infinite symbol—indicating a sense of boundlessness.<sup>47</sup> This diagram invites us to: (1) consider the inner-outer interdependent dimension of creativity; and (2) be intentional about creating learning prompts that trigger specific embodied, relational, and co-creative capacities. For example, one might consider whether a learning prompt emphasizes accessing and discovering the intangible, or focuses on expressing and co-creating based on the intangible.

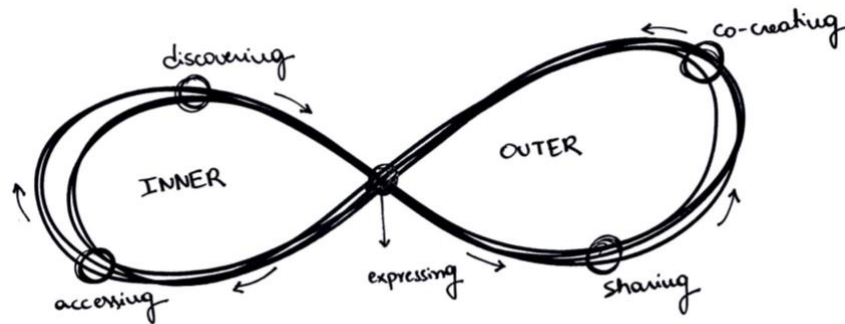


Figure 10: Inner-outer sensibilities for working with individual and collective change.

**Accessing:** students spoke of “evoking and remembering” meaningful experiences; of “opening up to, noticing, seeing deeper and feeling” emotions, thoughts, and felt senses.

**Discovering:** “recognizing, clarifying, identifying and labeling” aspects of their lived experiences. Students mentioned “searching for, framing, realizing, finding ways, and becoming aware of” important aspects of their lived experiences.

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acts towards becoming aware of our experience, she calls *interior gestures*. For instance, an active shift from attending solely to oneself to noticing others.

<sup>46</sup> That is, while attending to and working with oneself-others and the world (humans and non-humans—including, for example, our bodies, culture, history; as well technologies, objects, spaces and the larger ecosystems) (Haraway, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Here we are inspired by the Auckland Co-design Lab's introduction of the Maori concept of *Mauri*, that is, the dynamic essence quality (energy) of anything (people, systems, Nature, objects). Humphries provokes: “If we work in systems change, what is it in my own *Mauri* that I need to bring into the *Mauri* of the environment or the system?” (Auckland Co-design Lab, 2022). We can see a link between what he introduces as *Mauri Mai* (i.e. the notion of “energy from”; the qualities of “being, reflection and input”) with what we call the inner dimension, and “*Mauri Atu*” (i.e. the notion of “energy toward”; the qualities of “doing, action and output”) and the outer dimension. We wonder then: How are these (*Mai* and *Atu*; Inner and Outer) joined together?

*Expressing*: when prompted to give material form to intangible experiences, students spoke of “enjoying, expressing, and communicating.”

*Sharing*: students reflected on how they were “questioning, reflecting, connecting, bridging, thinking about, interpreting, and understanding” emergent experiences.

*Co-creating*: students spoke of “placing themselves in a situation”; “taking positions and finding interests”; and “holding optimistic perspectives, longings and hopes.” When describing how they made something together, they mentioned: “by sharing, learning, adding, contributing and appreciating.”

These co-creative, embodied, and relational inner acts are, in essence, forms of attunement-in-action. By being attuned to and working with one’s thoughts, emotions, felt senses, and sensations within a social field, a group can allow emergent insights to guide collective actions, choices, and behaviors. This way, the inner-outer dimension is not understood as two separate entities but rather inseparable, interconnected, and mutually-influencing aspects of relational experience.<sup>48</sup>

## Closing

This research asked how design practice might support the awareness of intangible experiences during the process of transformative learning. This question was explored by combining the embodied methods of Social Presencing Theater with the making orientation of practice-based design research. The creative prompts developed offer methods for this kind of awareness-based inquiry. The prompts present ways to access, discover, express, share, and co-create based on diverse non-verbal, subjective, embodied, and relational experiences. The combination of embodied practices and material/visual prompts offer approaches for supporting inner-outer transformation by highlighting the importance of becoming aware and making sense of what is oftentimes unaware.

Simply engaging with even memorable experiences does not necessarily lead to personal transformation. To shift a person’s perspective in ways that leads to seeing and being in the world differently calls for not just a level of reflection, but

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<sup>48</sup> Different social practices have emphasized *changing the world* while neglecting the inner dimension of individuals and social systems. For example, design thinking prioritizes problem-solving through collaboration and empathy (Brown, 2008); while human-centered design focuses on understanding user needs and designing products and services (Sanders & Stappers, 2014). In the context of awareness-based design, I argue that working with the relational self is the basis for working differently within a social field. The significance of this insight is that it counters a common pattern in systems change and transformational work—which is to emphasize the transformation of others; or even to impose change on others (Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023).

a level of disorientation. Offering diverse ways of engaging with experiences and assisting relational meaning-making ensures the emergent insights do not float away, forgotten. When the pre-reflective knowledge surfaced is grounded by the meaning made, the insights invite the participant to question what this means for future action. Lisa locates the potential for transformation in the felt sense of unsettling a belief or narrative, inviting learning through a disorienting shift in perspective (Grocott, 2022).

In bringing design to Social Presencing Theater and Social Presencing Theater to design, a more attuned, relational practice becomes possible. Awareness-based sensing brings an embodied, gestural, and felt contribution which is less common in design; while design brings a material and visual contribution which is unusual to embodied awareness. This interplay between design and SPT amplifies the potential for designing workshops and encounters to support the courageous and vulnerable work of shifting mindsets, perspectives, habits, and ultimately action.

As a set of relational, embodied, and co-creative literacies, comprehensions, and sensibilities, awareness-based design cannot be reduced to a toolkit but rather is a way of practicing. The literacies of *making visible*, *making space*, *making aware*, and *making sense*, go beyond the design-based acumen of making objects and yet stay with the value of making tangible concepts that might otherwise feel out of our grasp. The comprehensions are introduced as meaningful perspectives that can inform how a practitioner might approach ABD. Finally, the sensibilities refer to the capacities to access, discover, express, share, and to co-create based on the relational and creative interplay of the inner-outer dynamics—thus contributing to the “generative quality” of the social field.<sup>49</sup>

The underlying commitment of ABD to becoming aware and making sense of the intangible will always be an invitation to keep wondering, sensing, and imagining. This closing also then leads to an opening. We wonder how we might move from cultivating awareness to developing relational agency. We sense there is more to learn about how embodiment and materiality come together to encode deeper learning. We imagine future prompts that explore embodied practices with photography, video, sketching, and object-making. We are aware there is more designing and sensing to be done. We look forward to the generative disorientation and welcome the perspective shifting to come.

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<sup>49</sup> By generative, we refer to the group's ability to produce, create, or generate new content, ideas, or outcomes within a social field.

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## Appendix I: Survey and Interview Templates

The data supporting the theoretical and practice-based reflections of this paper draw on Dutra Gonçalves' PhD in Design for Transformative Learning. The full dissertation can be found on: <https://doi.org/10.26180/24932691.v1>. The data presented in this Appendix refer to the qualitative surveys and micro-phenomenological interviews conducted during the experimental workshops in India (i.e., K-12 teachers in a private school) and Chile (i.e. university students). All participants have responded to the survey, and 25% of the participants volunteered for the interviews.

### Qualitative Survey

1. Demographics: grade/ country/ gender/ age
2. In a scale from 0 (lowest/not useful) to 5 (highest/very useful), to what extent did the awareness-based design prompt (listed below) assist you in becoming aware of your experience?
3. For the prompt that was used in your workshop, what insight shifted for you?
4. How did the prompt shift something for you?
5. During your workshop, what surprised you when using the prompt?
6. What were the qualities of the prompt you enjoyed?
7. What were the qualities of the prompt you did not enjoy?
8. From everything we did in the workshop, what would you say is your greatest learning?
9. From everything we did in the workshop, what would you say it is something you could continue using as an educator?
10. What would have made the prompt used in your workshop (listed below) more helpful?
11. What other prompts do you think would be useful?

### Micro-Phenomenological Interview

#### *Beginning*

Here are some printed images of the awareness-based design prompt we used in the workshop you participated in. I suggest you go back to your memory of our workshop session using this particular prompt. And write down three moments from the workshop that were significant for you. I would like you to think of the moment as if it had a beginning, middle, and end. This moment might be when you noticed something you were not aware of, a moment of surprise, or a sudden discovery or insight. When were they? Please write them down.

Thank you for writing them down. To begin, I will suggest the moment X for us to explore further in this interview. When was it? Where were you?

*(X - moment using the prompt)*

*Questions to Clarify the Chosen Moment*

- *Visual question:* When you were there at that moment, what do you see?
- *Kinesthetic and emotional feelings:* at that time, what is the position of your body? What are you feeling? Retrieve the bodily sensations and the emotions...
- *Beginning of the chosen moment:* how do you know how to begin? How do you start? What happens first? (questions could be one of these three)
- *Sequence of the chosen moment:* what do you do then?
- *End of the chosen moment:* what happens at the end? What do you end with?
- *Test:* did the prompt help you know when it was finished? And when you don't know, what do you know?

*Questions to Deepen the Chosen Moment*

- Could you come back to X? When you do X, what do you do? How do you go about doing X?
- Could you come back to this feeling / sensation? And when you feel this, what do you feel? If you had to teach me how to feel it, what would you tell me?
- How did the prompt shift something for you?

*Ending of the interview*

Please come back to this moment. Thank you.

## Appendix II: Data Analysis

*Survey data*

Workshop	Prompt	0	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Mumbai, India (K12 teachers)	Stuck + Imagery				1	6	5	4
	Stuck + Photographs				3	6	3	4
	Dance of 5's + Video				1	4	3	4
Temuco, Chile (university students)	Stuck + Photo-Collage/Video				1	2	5	4.5

*Table 1: Survey data on how useful the workshop participants found the prompts to be.*

*Sample of teacher's interview notes (Mumbai, India)*

	<b>Moment-to-moment</b>	<b>Teacher's insights</b>
1	Stepping into the shoes of an emotion to give it voice	"I realized I can't find words", the teacher said.
2	The teacher began to read what the others had written down	The teacher noticed there was a wide range of words ascribed to an emotion, and thought, "we need to work on how to articulate, offer language to an emotion".
3	The teacher concluded by making meaning out of her memory	"It is important to see behind what is said. If I can't express, I can't assume others know either", she concluded.

*Table 2: A teacher's chosen moment of experience, "Walking around and reading the Voices of the Emotions."*

*Sample of student's interview notes (Temuco, Chile)*

	<b>Moment-to-moment</b>	<b>Student's insights</b>
1	At the beginning, everyone was putting up post-its and making up a structure for the video	Realizing, "usually we do not do things like this in groups. We often work alone".
2	She, then, noticed the "video was coming alive"	"We were reading, rehearsing, creating, sharing, being vulnerable. I realized it becomes more than the work or output itself—it is about sharing with each other". "Each one is different in a subjective, personal way". "I felt comfortable in the group. I discovered I can work in a group". "As the video was coming alive, I felt like an achievement and an unblocking".

*Table 3: A teacher's chosen moment of experience, "Making a video with everyone."*