

# The Mindset and Posture Required to Engender Life-Affirming Transitions

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## Abstract

This paper responds to the “Mindset and Posture” area of knowledge in the Transition Design Framework<sup>1</sup>. This paper has three parts. Part one looks at the difficulty of change, first through the lens of the tightly constructed and difficult to affect inner world of individuals and then systemic patterns that repeats itself over generations. Part two takes a deeper look at the nature of an inner shift necessary to engender a life-positive society: shifting from unequal to equal relationships, from defensive to open communication; from being imprisoned by the past to integration; moving from being the expert that knows to a participant in the process of creating. Lastly this paper discusses how we invite students to become their own “social workshops” where they can learn how to work with and shift their own humanity towards life-affirming habits.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Erwin, *Transition Design: A proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study and Research*, Design and Culture Journal, March 2015

## **Introduction**

Transition design reaches toward a world that our minds imagine, but our current behavior does not support. Collectively we feel the urge to participate in “the great turning towards a Life-Sustaining Society” (Macy & Brown 2014:5) and bring “the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible” (Eisenstein 2013) to reality. Yet, one of the key difficulties is that it is our current collective habits of thinking and acting are creating our unsustainable and oppressive systems (Scharmer 2013). Taking a systems view of our current situation helps us realize that we do not stand outside the system, we are the system. *We are* the world. Therefore, for our systems to shift toward a life-affirming world, humanity’s collective habits of thinking and behaving need to create that shift.

## **Part one: Human depth and systems complexity**

### **Behavior and the inner life**

In a dualistic mindset where form is divorced from essence, we have a tendency to categorize behavior and then set out to “change” whatever we perceive as not serving us. We act as if we can affect our behavior directly by using will power and incentives to drive to our goals. But, behavior is only the visible tip of the iceberg. Our interior invisible world animates our actions. The dynamic interaction between our exterior environment and our body/mind produces our inner subjective experience that informs our behavior (Laing 1967:8).

We become who we are by learning from the people around us who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to feel (Mehl-Madrona 2010:69). The inner world that informs our behavior is not inherited, but built. This is an ongoing process, but most of our patterns are formed in the early years of our development (Cloud & Townsend 1992:64). For example, the neural pathways laid down in our first two years determine how we trust, how comfortable we are with ourselves and how we bond with others (Perry 2012:7). We develop our internal dialogue by the age of four (Mehl Madrona 2010:74). Our patterns of feeling, thinking and reacting become our habits, our unconscious operating system. Unless we intervene, we will continue to live from our culturally installed operating system and perpetuate our current reality.

### **The individual as part of a larger self-creating system**

In our individualistic culture, we fail to see ourselves as part of a system, part of a process. In the 1960’s, Dr. Bowen questioned the Freudian model of human subjectivity where a change in behavior was sought through an exchange of the patient’s experience and the therapist’s interpretation. Bowen suggested taking a system’s approach to change. In his theory, the unit of change is not the individual but the family. By looking at the entire family, one can start to see emotional patterns that repeat over generations. This mindset replaces the cause-and-effect story of “I am this way because of that person” to seeing individuals as “receptors and conduits of, as well as contributors to, a much larger multigenerational process” (Gilbert 1992:7).

Luhmann, in his theory of social autopoiesis, takes this a step further by replacing individuals and their behavior with “communication” as the basic element of a social system. In Luhmann’s view the individual is constructed by the social system (Seidl 2004:7). Like biologic networks, social systems are self-making. As social networks communicate, they generate thoughts and meanings which generate more conversations and eventually “produce a shared system of beliefs, explanations, and values, and this is what is known as culture” (Capra 2014).

Since social systems are self-creating, plans and visions alone will not change them. Ackoff argues that social systems can recreate their future by re-designing themselves (Gharejadaghi 2006:23). Developing a practice that equips us to create the better future through re-creating ourselves is key to engendering a life-positive world. The author of this paper pursues this question as a practitioner working in organizations, and as teacher at the Carnegie Mellon School of Design and the Masters in Design for Social Innovation program at the School of Visual Arts.

This paper focuses on re-creating our individual ways of seeing and behaving as a leverage point for systemic change.

## **Part two: Five aspects of the required shift in mindset and posture**

This shift in worldview is expressed in several dimensions of being human. This paper will touch on five: our identity, our relational stance, how we communication, our stance towards pain and trauma and how we create together.

### **1. Identity: From ego to eco**

Macy & Brown (2014:5) frame our current societal shift as moving from an Industrial Grown Society to a Life-Sustaining Society in which we can meet our needs without destroying our life-support system. In many respects this paradigm shift translates to a different way of being. Otto Scharmer (2013) calls this shift from “ego” to “eco” perspective. In an ego-centric mindset, we see ourselves as separate, this continues the Cartesian division where mind is separate from body, one person from the other, man from nature. In this dualistic worldview of separation, our usual mode of operating is to take control, to take power over or be taken over. On the other hand, in an “eco perspective” or living systems view we are no longer separate from anything in the world. Our mindset is one of interdependence and our mode of operation shifts from the need to take power over what is “other” to partnering with life itself.

### **2. Relational stance: From power over to partner with**

For much of design’s history, designers were asked to come into a situation as “the expert” that will “fix things.” This mindset has held true when it comes to shaping the built world, but not for social systems. Coming into the work of shifting social systems as “the expert” casts us into a hierarchy: there is the expert that knows and the client that needs. Coming into a situation with a predetermined story of our role to “save,” “convince,” “improve,” or “change” has often proven to be ineffective and sometimes harmful.

How ever well intentioned we might be, we have inherited an oppressive paradigm that can keep us locked in unequal power dynamics based on superficial labels such as gender, race, age, income etc. Unconsciously acting out our conditioned roles - such as the one that takes control, the expert that always leads, the order taker, the subservient listener, etc. - means we are repeating our cultural conversational patterns. This reinforces invisible power dynamics and structures, prohibits true collaboration, blocks great ideas from being born and life affirming futures from forming. When we work towards creating a life-positive world, we need the full participation of the people we are working with - a diverse pool representing the whole social ecosystem. In such a context there can be roles, but not unequal power structures.

*Relational stance invitation: move towards equality*

We are invited to become mindful of how we see each other and ourselves and to adjust our internal stance in ways that inch us closer towards healthy relationships. Healthy relationships <sup>2</sup> are underpinned by deep respect for one another and equality based on our shared humanity. This stance of unconditional acceptance and respect towards our co-creators is a key ingredient to forge robust connections that can withstand the rocky road of co-creation.

### 3. Communication: From defense to openness

Humans have a long track record of hurting each other. As a result, we have powerful built-in defense systems – our body reacts to perceived threats before we can think of a better option (Musho Hamilton 2013:33). When things are going smoothly, most humans can maintain emotional connection and open conversation. When we feel threatened, we feel the need to self-protect and adopt communication styles aimed at relieving, not resolving, the tension.

From the speaker's perspective, Common habits of defensive communication styles, derived from Thomas Kilmann's conflict inventory and Bowen's theory, include the following:

- *Avoiding what is difficult*: the desire to withdraw or walk away rather than facing the conflict. Behaviors include creating emotional or physical distance by withdrawing, talking superficially, being silent, avoiding topics or people that bring up discomfort, or forming triangles by talking about someone behind their back.
- *Asserting one's will*: the drive to assert your will and opinions at the expense of the other person's feelings. Behavior includes being critical, assigning blame and projecting of problems.
- *Pleasing others*: the desire to stay connected to others at the expense of your opinions or will. Behaviors include over care, advice giving, and an inability to stand up for yourself and engage in honest conversations.
- *Passive-aggressive*: the drive to assert your own will, coupled with the desire to be perceived as kind. The resulting behavior is to manipulate others.

Communication is a two way street. Once the message has been communicated, the recipient can choose how to make sense of the act. Otto Scharmer (2013) describes four levels of listening that shape what we hear, how we respond and therefore the quality of the interaction.

- *Downloading*: we select data to reconfirm our old opinions and judgment, we feel as though we are hearing the same story again.
- *Debate*: we are in factual listening mode and start to see a different point of view that might disconfirm what we know.
- *Empathetic listening*: we see through another person's eyes and connect emotionally to their experience; empathy for another is generated.
- *Generative listening*: here we are open to be changed by what we are hearing. Our identity shifts, we are changed by what we've heard.

The problem with reacting out of habit to defend ourselves or being stuck in download or debate, is that we close ourselves off to the transformative power of open communication. In his book, *Non-Violent*

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<sup>2</sup> Bowen describes highly functioning relationships as having three characteristics:

Separate: each individual is capable of taking responsibility for themselves - their self boundaries are intact and they have a strong inner guidance system

Equal: Accepting the other as equally talented, responsible and free as themselves Open: Equal give and take of ideas, non-reactive and direct communication (Gilbert 1992:106)

*Communication*, Rosenberg (2003:2) describes good communication as speaking and listening “that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish.” The core characteristic of life-affirming communication is that one expresses one’s own experience – beliefs, emotions, perceptions and needs (Rosenberg 2003). In this act of courage and vulnerability, our beliefs move out of our interior space. We become aware of how we see the world and how we affect the world, how the world sees us and affects us. In these moments of honesty and opening, our beliefs can shift and our relationships can deepen. We take one step towards a life-affirming world.

*Communication invitation: attend to your habitual responses, share your true experience, open*  
As Bowen tells us, each person inherits ways of being in the world that are both helpful and unhelpful. The invitation is to become aware of how we habitually tend to react or listen in situations and to learn new skills of life-affirming communication. This work requires us to step out from behind our defense mechanisms and become visible and at times vulnerable. It also asks us to suspend our judgments and fears and open ourselves to being transformed by our encounters. Even though this is difficult, engaging in clear, open, honest and transformative dialogue is essential to shifting our individual and collective beliefs.

#### **4. Pain and trauma: From prison to integration**

One of the key ingredients in creating a future together is for people to trust themselves, the people they work with and the process of life. Our current worldview is steeped in distrust and fear, and so many of our interactions are steeped in subtle hues of oppression, domination and discrimination. It is not possible to leap from an oppressive system to a co-creative one. One needs to acknowledge and heal the ruptures in relationships before a genuine willingness to collaborate and trust emerges. This is a new frontier for us.

Painful or traumatic events occur when we experience interactions or relationships that contradict our basic values of being seen, being heard and being respected. The scale of such events varies from misunderstandings that cause pain to trauma where “victims suffer a devastating combination of terror, helplessness and loss of control” (Bass & Davis 2008:242).

Concepts like trauma, pain and healing have a history of being swept into corners of society most modern people don't associate themselves with. Mental health practitioners, spiritual leaders, activists and artists are given the task to talk about and piece together that which has been broken. In our own psyche, we tend to develop survival strategies such as dissociation, and coping strategies such as numbing to avoid abrasive feelings like shame, guilt, anger, dread and rage (Hayes & Bass & Davis). These help us get through our days, but do not help us co-create the better world and self we know are possible.

From a systems perspective, the dynamics that caused this pain were co-created by actors in the system and could best find its resolution in the relational context. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa falls short in many ways, it is a good example of the kind of collective action we might take to repair deep cultural ruptures.

From a mental health perspective, an individual who suffers pain, trauma or abuse, can engage in a process of healing, allowing the mind to integrate the event(s) into a larger narrative (Siegel 2012:39-3), re-building our capacity to feel, both physically and emotionally, and learn to trust ourselves again (Bass & Davis 2004:243).

Resolving our relationship with the past is necessary to inhabit a larger identity where one stands in a trusting relationship with oneself and become willing to re-engage in life and work. Not only is it necessary, it is also nourishing. When one can work through a painful event, on our own or with another, a deepened

sense of understanding, compassion and wisdom emerges. Having worked through our own pain, we can engage in the work of helping others do the same and create safe spaces for societal healing to happen. (Dernoot Lipsky 2009:146) As Pema Chödrön says, “Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity” (Brown 2010:16).

*Past pain and trauma invitation: do what is hard!*

The invitation is to do what is hard. Sociologist and life coach Martha Beck (2008) identifies two patterns when it comes to past pain: some people over identify with to their story and tell it over and over again, while others avoid the pain at all cost. We can choose to let go of our stories and open up to what the world currently has to offer. We can also stop avoiding our pain and engage in the emotional process necessary to resolve old wounds.

## 5. Creating together: from decree to co-creation

Habit has it that we see the world as something static, and convinced that we are right, we set out to change it. Yet, we cannot help but change it, as we are the very world we want to change. If we take a phenomenological perspective on the relationship between observer and observed (or designer and community), we find a curious thing. We leave the shores of judgment and certainty and enter into a creative conversation where we create the world as we engage. In this paradigm we recognize that “our concepts illuminate what we see, inform what we see, but equally that what we see then further elucidates our concepts” and the world continues to arise-through-conversation (Kaplan & Davidoff 2014:12). This way of seeing invites us to open ourselves to the reality of the person or group or situation we encounter and “seek to change the world through being open to being changed by the world.” (Kaplan & Davidoff quoting Smith 2014:30).

This is the basic premise of the process of coming into being or emergence. We are participating in co-creating something that is bigger than any one of us can understand and in the process of creation we change the system and the system changes us.

In business as usual, designers mostly have a client that sponsors and steers the work. In transition design, the client is the emerging intelligence or unborn future of the ecosystem in which we are working. The future is undetermined and unfamiliar. We cannot step into this work with a script of what is going to work best. We approach this work with a belief that life has a tendency, an urge to evolve and reconfigure itself in a way that is true and life affirming.

Working in such uncertainty can be terribly uncomfortable. Our habitual reaction to uncertainty is to attempt to shape things into a form we’re comfortable holding. Reductionist thinking would have us ignore certain data or simplify what we have to work with. Since this is unhelpful, we need to learn new skills.<sup>3</sup>

*The invitation: give up control and participate*

The precondition to successful co-creation is a shift from the need to control to the ability to relax into what is happening and partner with it. The following three skills will be helpful to adopt:

- *Befriend uncertainty:* The transition designer is invited to lean into uncomfortable feelings such as insecurity, ambiguity and loss and to develop a taste for fear. Through engagement, we can learn to trust that even if we feel lost, the wisdom in the system will reveal the next step.

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<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of the craftsman and his material is helpful in this regard as it speaks to the conversational nature between the two. Yet this analogy is devoid of the social complexity this territory comes with. Improvisation is a richer example of social co-creation

- *Pay fierce attention:* Paying attention using all our faculties (mind, emotions, body, intuition) to what is happening both inside and outside ourselves is key to sense the wisdom of the group and the necessary next step.
- *Be willing and open:* Since the group intelligence is bigger than our own, we can expect to be asked to move outside of our comfort zone and do or say things that are outside our internalized cultural scripts. This can feel uncomfortable. Yet the willingness to be broken open - to move beyond our current way of seeing and understanding - is key to transformation.

## Part three: Enabling the shift in academia

### Setting up the workshop

In most design schools there is a workshop located somewhere on the lower floors, where students go to work with the materials they are learning about. It is through the process of making that we narrow the gap between our assumptions about the material and the true possibility and qualities the material embodies. Bayles & Orland (1993:16) suggest that the knowledge we need for mind and material to meet “comes from noticing what really happens as you work – the way the materials respond, and the way that response (and resistance) suggests new ideas to you.”

Yet, where shall we find a workshop filled with materials that are invisible and interior? In our class, we see ourselves as our own social lab. There’s only one person in the world for whom you have direct access to observe and experiment. We invite each student to be their own materials lab.

### How we work

We aim to help students gain awareness of their inner world, shift perspective, build new habits and establish practices that will continue to support a life-giving and whole human. We include readings, reflection papers and self-directed research. We also give reflective journal activities and use visualization and improvisational exercises as a way to gain insight and prototype new ways of engaging with the world.

### How we see our material

#### *Unconditional acceptance*

When we work with physical materials, we don't judge the knottiness of the wood or the fragility of the glass. We accept their current state and feel for its future potential. The same stance is necessary if we are to work with others and ourselves. As mankind has had little success by judging people to be bad, defective, sick or broken, we encourage a possibility view of humanity. Kline (2009:101) argues that we might never get to the bottom of the debate about whether people are inherently good or bad. Yet we can chose to believe that there is goodness in each person. When we look through this lens, we see people who are intelligent, imaginative, capable of choice and solving problems, in need of love, care and respect.

Engaging in this work invites individuals to move outside their comfort zone, to lean into what is uncomfortable and to try things that may feel risky or vulnerable. This work can only be done inside an environment lined with care, respect, compassion, patience and a fierce belief in the worth, value and potential of each other.

#### *Objective criticism*

It is good to remember that our biography is not our identity. The norms, values and beliefs we assimilate from our culture do not make us bad people. Our inheritance may include privilege in race and class, or suffering and oppression. If these things go unacknowledged and unexamined, we give them the power to

unconsciously perpetuate our dominant paradigm. It is our responsibility to make critical choices on what to accept and what to let go of, even if these conversations cut deeply into layers of shame and pain.

Unconditional acceptance paired with clear and open honesty creates the two hands that can work our material. Maybe the phrase “optimistic grumpiness”<sup>4</sup> finds its home here.

### **How the material changes**

Mind and consciousness are processes, not things we can affect directly (Siegel 2012 1:1, Capra 2014). Armed with good intentions, well-funded change initiatives or threats, we can comply for periods of time. But real change is not a choice. It is an outcome of a process. Wellwood (2002:87) talks about the “organic process of unfolding [that] reveals the creative, emergent nature of human experience.” We are part of the natural world that is a constant act of creation. It serves us to remember that we stand in a conversational relationship with the world. In every moment we are either unconsciously enacting the habitual patterns of the past, or open to learn and become another version of ourselves. “We are created anew in every moment in relation to that which is known.” (Harbury 2009/10:5)

Humans are incredibly resilient and able to re-create themselves. Change models documenting the process of transformative change, where a person moves from one identity to another exist in many domains. “The Transtheoretical Model of Change”<sup>5</sup> documents individuals that go through an intentional change process from, for example, being an addict to being a well functioning human being. Kübler-Ross’s stages of grief<sup>6</sup> help us understand the emotional process of people who suffer severe loss. In the world of managing, we can find a case study<sup>7</sup> looking at managers moving from communism to capitalism which helps us understand the interior shift necessary to go from being fluent in one worldview to being fluent in another.

Looking at different change models helps us gain empathy for the broad movements in change cycles, and to develop patience with the process. The two biggest movements are deconstructing one’s current identity, then slowly and painfully re-creating and re-learning a new way of being and a new place of belonging. During this process, people move through the whole palette of emotions, including elation, joy, despair, depression, anger, rage, frustration, grief, shame and so on. The process can take a long time, because the learning is iterative and not without failure. It requires dedicated attention, and affects all domains of life including social relations.

Knowing about transformative change is important for students who are shifting into different roles. The shift from expert to facilitator is a change many designers are feeling at the moment. As we transition from an oil-dependent to a locally resilient world, or from a consumer to citizen mindset (Hopkins 2008), we will collectively need the wisdom of change cycles to help us feel grounded, especially when we feel we have been lost at sea for far too long and tempted to walk the plank.

Transformational change is a continual process. It is tempting to believe that we will one day “arrive” and then be set for life. From a developmental perspective we are engaged in an evolutionary process in which awareness continues to unfold. In this process, our sense of I continues to expand and increase its ability to embrace all aspects of our experience – moving beyond narrow self-concern to embrace families, communities, nations, humanity, the earth and beyond – forever unfolding into a larger perspective like nested Russian dolls (Musho Hamilton 2013:75).

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<sup>4</sup> Terry Erwin, *Transition Design: A proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study and Research*, Design and Culture Journal, March 2015

<sup>5</sup> As outlined in the book “Addiction and Change” by Carlo C. DiClemente, 2003

<sup>6</sup> As outlined in her book “On Death and Dying” 2005

<sup>7</sup> “Modeling individual transition in the context of organizational transformation” by Breu & Benwell, 1990

On a very tactical level, this process of growth is supported by the development of new habits. We cannot change our old habits. They are wired into our brains and will accompany us to the grave. But we can choose to build life-affirming habits that will eventually become our new normal (Siegal 2011:40).

### **Shaping our material: learning new habits of being**

Our brains are energy-saving machines. Once we have related or acted a certain way several times, it becomes part of our implicit memory, and when we find ourselves in a similar situation we act without any conscious thought (McGonigal 2012). The invitation is to develop awareness and to observe the process as it unfolds. Siegel (2010:32) says, “Observation offers a powerful way to disengage from automatic behaviors and habitual responses; we can sense our role in these patterns and begin to find ways to alter them.” The promise that neuroplasticity holds is that, as we bring attention to the brain’s firing patterns, we can voluntarily change our neural firing pattern to support our new habits. (Siegel, 2010:42)

The tools we need for change are not willpower or strategic smarts. We need to develop softer qualities such as:

- *openness* to welcome things as they are and let go of our pre-conceived ideas
- *willingness* to feel discomfort and to let go of our impulse to avoid or numb the discomfort
- *awareness* that enables us to watch our mental process as it unfolds
- *objectivity* enabling us to fully experience thoughts and emotions while remembering that they are not the totality of who we are
- *courage* to risk, to try something we have not done before even if there are no guarantees that it will work

### **Learning to work with it all: mind, body, feelings, and intuition**

The process of knowing creates our sense of self: “The inner dynamic of the process of cognition is also an inner dynamic in the process of the self. What this means is that the ‘self-identity’ itself emerges from the process of cognition and is not there as such before” (Hanbury quoting Bertoff, 2009/10:5). Siegel (2012:32-6) sees the mind as being “an embodied and relational, emergent, self-organizing process.” The process of cognition is grounded in both our bodies and our social relations.

Western culture has shortchanged us by elevating mind to god-like status and treating feelings, the body and intuition with suspicion and contempt. Jung redeems this imbalance by offering a four-fold view of how man gains knowledge. In this framework mind, feelings, sense and intuition fire together like four engines helping us to know the world. When we work with students, our aim is to help them access the wisdom of their whole self and to move toward a more integrated state of being, a more life-affirming self.

### **Learning to work with mind**

Leaving the certainty that thought neutrally reports on the stable and objective world out there, we enter a dynamic paradigm where thoughts actively participate to shape our perceptions. This invites us to dial up our awareness and become the curious observers of our mental processes.

In our class, we encourage students to adopt mindfulness practices that start a habit of observing their interior process and space. We support them to become mindful of the effects their thoughts have on their bodies and emotions. Through a framework used by life coaches and facilitators, we help them question their thoughts and open their minds to other possibilities.

### **Learning to work with feelings**

After being denigrated by key figures such as Freud as “a primitive chaos, a cauldron of seething

excitement,” it is not surprising that many of us see feelings as “other” and feel the need to either act our emotions out or repress them (Welwood 2000:182). But feelings are an important part of the cognition process, helping us notice the effects people, circumstances and perceptions have on us. In our class, we suggest two approaches to working with emotions.

The first focuses on the felt experience of the emotion and allows students to detach from the story and observe as the wave of emotion passes through their body. This helps them get to know the dynamic nature of feelings and discover the larger interior space that exists within them. The second is to actively work with the stories surrounding strong emotions (fear in particular.) Learning to identify the habits of thought that can potentially drag us into rage, sadness, frustration etc. helps us stay present and choose a different strategy when we encounter our habitual response.

### **Learning to work with intuition**

After the rational worldview closed the window to anything the fingers cannot touch or the mind cannot explain, intuition has had a hard time competing with reason. Yet, if we only work with what we know, we can't possibly transcend our current paradigm. Part of our work of creating the better world is to sense and assist the birth of the impending future (Jenkins 2006:9).

In our class, we help students create the conditions to access their intuition. We do improv exercises, dropping them into uncertainty and allowing them to make sense of things by relying on their impulses. We also introduce them to exercises aimed at helping them quiet their verbal mind so they can access the softer voice of their intuition.

### **Learning to work with senses**

Moving from being a talking head to an embodied person is a long road, especially when past experience has taught people that their bodies are an unsafe place, or not to be trusted. Engaging peoples' senses in learning is a frontier we are crossing incrementally. One way of getting people “out of their heads” is with improv games. At times we remove verbal communication from the games so that students can focus directly on their felt experience and follow their body's wisdom. The body becomes the theatre in which emotions or physical sensations sing their arias and fall silent. The senses become means through which we can focus our attention, especially in difficult situations where the mind tends to wander off. We lean into the wisdom of the body and encourage students to become sensitive to when something feels complete, when something feels repelling.

## **Conclusion**

The work of creating the life-sustaining world we believe in is more complex and rewarding than we anticipated. It asks us to leave behind a fearful worldview, a stance of striving, forcing and “making it all work.” If we are partnering with life, our striving is not required. Instead, we are invited to take our place in the web of life; to trade control for the scary acts of co-creation and participation; to cease our efforts to avoid discomfort and allow ourselves to be shaped by and enlarged by the difficulties of life. This shift calls on our whole selves: a gentle stance in service of the emerging future as well as the tenacity and strength to carry on, despite the difficulties.

Coming from a design background where my work was to envision the future possibility of a building and then iteratively bring it to life, this frontier is strange for me. There is a safety in believing I stand outside a reality I can affect directly. Entering a paradigm where I co-author life in every moment is new and sometimes uncomfortable. Writing a paper that essentially asks each of us to re-engage with our own process of becoming in order to become part of the life-giving future we long for, is not what I imagined

when I started this road. Yet, it is not that we “have to” adopt new life-supporting habits of seeing, relating, communicating and working. It is that we are *invited* to, it is that we have the privilege of prototyping a self-healing world amongst ourselves as academics, with our students and staff and our clients at large. We can stop waiting, wanting and dreaming, we can engage with our whole humanity and iteratively become, as Ghandi said, the change (or in this case the transition) we wish to see.

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