Towards a Futures Thinking-Feeling Ethics of Care: A Design Futures Intentional Compass

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ABSTRACT

Design Futures often reproduces colonial epistemologies unless designers cultivate reflexivity toward their own assumptions, desires, and affective orientations. Situated within an ethics of care and of political responsibility, this research introduces the Design Futures Intentional Compass: a methodology integrating Futures Literacy and Futures Reflexivity with the Latin American indigenous ontology of *Sentipensar* (thinking–feeling). The Compass embodies intentionality as a mechanism to promote a more conscious and coherent futures practice. Informed by qualitative research—including an attempted collaboration experience, critical literature review and interviews with Latin American practitioners—the study explores design intentionality as a mode of inquiry into how designers relate to the futures they create. Findings from a validation workshop suggest that engaging intentionality as a relational and embodied process can shift design's ontological ground and that seeking intentional transparency—despite systemic limitations—enables an opening toward the Pluriverse project through heightened political, relational and affective awareness.

Keywords: Design Intentionality; Futures Literacy; Sentipensar

RESUMEN

El Diseño de Futuros suele reproducir epistemologías coloniales a menos que quienes diseñan cultiven una reflexividad hacia sus propios supuestos, deseos y orientaciones afectivas. Situada en una ética del cuidado y de responsabilidad política, esta investigación presenta el *Compás Intencional de Futuros*: una metodología que integra la Alfabetización y la Reflexividad de Futuros con la cosmopraxis indígena latinoamericana del Sentipensar; concibiendo la intencionalidad latente como un mecanismo para promover una práctica más consciente y coherente. Informado por una investigación cualitativa: revisión de literatura, una experiencia de colaboración y entrevistas con profesionales latinoamericanos, el estudio explora la intencionalidad del diseño como indagación sobre cómo nos relacionamos con

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los futuros que imaginamos. Los hallazgos de un taller de validación sugieren que abordar la intencionalidad como un proceso relacional y encarnado puede cambiar el terreno ontológico del diseño y que buscar la transparencia intencional —con sus limitaciones sistémicas —permite una apertura hacia el Pluriverso mediante una conciencia política, relacional y afectiva mayor.

Palabras clave: intencionalidad del diseño; Alfabetización de Futuros; Sentipensar

INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM STATEMENT

It started out as a feeling
Which then grew into a hope
Which then turned into a quiet thought
Which then turned into a quiet word
(...) Just because everything's changing
Doesn't mean it's never been this way before
(...) Pick a star on the dark horizon
And follow the light (...)
-The Call, Regina Spektor

My engagement with Design Futures has been inherently personal—a journey marked by a felt dissonance between its transformative potential and its often-instrumental practice. In Latin America, I have observed a 'futures hype' that risks becoming “futures washing”: the use of foresight tools which, in the absence of critical reflection and framed by an innovation-driven rhetoric, can (even unintentionally) reinforce hegemonic power structures (Mereu & Preira 2023). This occurs despite efforts to stop importing Global North methodologies into mismatched realities, or even while maintaining a discourse of decolonization.

This research emerges from this felt gap, which I hypothesize stems from a lack of deeper reflexivity within the design practice. The current global polycrisis calls for a rethinking of design’s foundations, moving away from a way of inhabiting the world that is ontologically separated from the interdependent web of life. As Escobar (2018) suggests, this disconnection is the result of a modern-rationalist paradigm that has prioritized efficiency and control over relationality and care.

To address this, my research turns to the critical capability of Futures Literacy (FL) and the Latin American indigenous cosmopraxis of *Sentipensar* (Thinking-Feeling). Bridging these domains, I propose that a more responsible and transformative practice requires— as

anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2021) articulates as an "ontological openness" — grounded in an ethics of care. This approach explores design intentionality as a mode of cultivating Futures Reflexivity (Mangnus et al. 2021) to ground futures designers in a more intentional, responsible and ultimately, decolonial engagement with the world-making process.

Guiding Inquiry:

How might designers surface and articulate the often unsaid, unconscious dimensions of intentionality in Design Futures practice — and how might a Thinking-Feeling (*Sentipensar*) approach serve as a way of operationalizing this reflexivity, particularly in organizational team settings?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We are of the earth
To her we do return
The future is inside us
It's not somewhere else
-The Numbers, Radiohead

Decolonizing Design and Decolonizing Futures

Decolonizing Design critically examines and seeks to transform design practice by challenging its Western and Anglo-Centric foundations to achieve cultural justice and inclusion for historically marginalized communities (Tunstall 2023; Hernandez Ibinarriaga 2025). This demands recognizing how coloniality permeates the structures of knowledge and being (Quijano 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the coloniality of knowledge is also a coloniality of gender. As Lugones (2008) points out, the imposition of modern dichotomies has historically devalued affective, intuitive, and relational dimensions—associated with the feminine and the non-Western—under the hegemony of the "rationalistic tradition" (Escobar 2018), which still sustains current paradigms influencing design. This movement seeks ontological change, aiming to radically transfigure these power structures rather than merely adding diverse perspectives, which only delays systemic transformation (Decolonising Design 2021). The focus on rethinking paradigms is vital, as a globalized power system threatens to eradicate diverse worldviews and advance futures for a privileged few, undermining more caring

ways of relating to others and the more-than-human. (Decolonising Design 2021).

This extends to Decolonizing Futures, recognizing that "the future is not neutral but rather colonized" (Inayatullah 2013; Sardar 1993). Dominant, often Western, futures thinking imposes particular visions, marginalizing diverse perspectives. Futures thinking, as defined by Fo.Am (2019), is about discerning influenceable aspects of change, encouraging "do-it-yourself and do-it-together attitudes" towards creating and exploring multiple futures. A decolonized futures practice questions systems' continuation, envisions multiple futures by integrating diverse perspectives, and ensures translation into action. This requires personal transformation, critical reflexivity, redefining "expertise," and fostering dialogue rather than imposing solutions (Hurtado & Brown 2025).

Acknowledging the titanic scale of these systemic problems, this research proposes Minor Gestures (Abdulla & Vieira de Oliveira 2023). These are not methods or rigid guidelines but provisional arrangements of decolonial practices. And, though subtle, they can strategically fragment infrastructures of power while remaining effective by disappearing into everyday actions (Abdulla & Vieira de Oliveira 2023). They are localized, subversive acts, deriving their power from collective realization rather than individual might, as Jane Goodall so beautifully articulates (cited in Hoeve 2022). And, as De la Cadena (2021) suggests, this involves undermining hierarchies from within through a practice of "permanent transition"—one that does not seek a final culmination but focuses on the "here and now" of collective dehierarchization. Minor gestures represent a strategic entry into this resistance, a conversation against colonialist ways of being, even when we are unaware of their pervasive influence.

Futures Literacy and Futures Reflexivity

Following with my sense of dissonance on the futures practice, the more "traditional" practice of Strategic Foresight — which “originated in military strategy and corporate business planning for war games and profit-making” (Hurtado & Brown 2025) — felt somehow unsatisfying.

This led me to the foundational concept of Futures Literacy (FL), a capability developed over decades of research, notably by UNESCO; which is defined as “the skill to understand how and why we anticipate the future in different contexts” (UNESCO Chair 2025). This shifts the focus from predicting what will happen to examining our underlying *anticipatory assumptions*.

This framework distinguishes between two primary uses of the future:1. "Anticipation for the future": The dominant, colonizing approach that seeks to control uncertainty through prediction and planning. 2. "Anticipation for emergence": A transformative approach that embraces uncertainty as a source of novelty and creativity (Miller, 2018). This understanding resonated more deeply with me. While strategic foresight in its traditional understanding often treats the future as an object to manage, FL treats it as a sort of mirror—revealing the cultural, emotional, and ethical underpinnings of our anticipations. FL posits that the central challenge is not to "know" the future, but to learn to "live and act with not-knowing" (Miller 2011). This echoes with author and historian Yuval Noah Harari's (2018) question of how to live in a world where uncertainty is a feature, not a bug, requiring immense mental flexibility and emotional balance.

I see the drive for predictive control not just as a cognitive preference, but as a sort of emotionally rooted response to the anxiety inherent of a universe we are unable to predict. As Miller (2025) argues, we cling to the "delusions of continuity" to avoid the pain of our own ephemerality, leading to a colonial relationship with the future. FL then is proposed as an antidote —as Miller again states — a capability to make sense of change so that we feel less anxious when the world changes (School of International Futures 2023), and to rediscover hope by turning uncertainty from an enemy into an asset for freedom (cited in Koch 2020) and creativity.

This culminates in the concept of Futures Reflexivity (Mangnus et al. 2021), which argues that true FL is more than applying foresight tools; it is the critical capacity to be reflective of the different ontological and epistemological attitudes one can take toward the future, and the power structures embedded within them. It thus refers to our capacity to turn that mirror inward, implying an ongoing inquiry into the emotions and intentions that guide our engagement with uncertainty. For a designer, this reflexivity is crucial to avoid reducing futuring to a mere instrumental practice. In this sense, it also connects with affective and embodied awareness: becoming literate about the future is also, in a way, becoming literate about ourselves.

So, I believe there still is a somehow neglected gap: this “world of feeling” (Bussey & Mozzini-Alister 2020). To truly catalyze the change FL envisions, we must integrate not just the capacity to imagine differently, but also the critical emotional awareness this effort requires, as Bogner articulates as “to *feel* the need to change” (cited in Deep Transitions Lab 2025).

Sentipensar (Thinking–Feeling) and the Pluriverse

My felt dissonance began to come clear: the field's practice often felt emotionally sterile, clashing with my own experience, that considering the future is an inherently vulnerable act (Valladares 2021). This led me to seek frameworks that integrate emotion and cognition, a quest that found its foundation in Latin American cosmopraxis, specifically the concept of *Sentipensar*. Articulated in the 70's through Orlando Fals Borda's participatory work with Colombian peasant-fisher communities (2009), who described themselves as *sentipensantes*: people who "think with the heart and feel with the head"(Fals Borda 2009). *Sentipensar* unites intellect and emotion into an embodied praxis of collective agency. It challenges Western dualisms (Escobar, 2018) by proposing a unified mode of knowing: which brings together situated wisdom (*saber*): embodied, relational, affective, and collective, with formal or scientific knowledge (*conocimiento*) oriented toward praxis (Fals Borda 2009). In this view, *saber* provides the orientation to find pathways or directions, while *knowledge* becomes valuable as far as it serves to transform those pathways (Fals Borda 2009).

Escobar (2018) expands this notion into an ontological project with his concept of the Pluriverse. He argues that design is a world-making practice, a "double movement" where we design our world and it designs us back (Willis 2006). The modern, rationalistic tradition has co-opted this capacity, perpetuating a coloniality that devalues emotional, indigenous, and feminine knowledge (Gómez Correal 2016). The Pluriverse, in contrast, is an attitude and analytical posture that makes space for multiple, coexisting worlds (De la Cadena 2021). It demands an autonomous design praxis rooted in relationality and "radical interdependence" (Escobar 2018), where thinking and feeling are understood as co-dependent capacities of one embodied system; which has been largely studied in neuroscience in recent years (Kahneman 2011). However, it might only be enabled by an "ontological openness", as de la Cadena (2021) sharply articulates; arguing— in opposition to "shift" which, according to the author, implies: "a search for what things are. (...) Opening is an analytical practice toward the possibility of that which has no possibility". As designers, we are thus creating possibilities but also impossibilities.

The Affective Turn and the Reclamation of the Body in Intellectual Work

To ground the transition toward a futures "thinking-feeling" and an ethics of care paradigm, it is imperative to situate this research within the 'Affective Turn' in the social sciences (Clough & Halley 2007; Gregg & Seigworth 2010). This movement posits that affects are not

just internal subjective states, but also forces of intensity that move through bodies, determining our capacities for action and relation.

From this perspective, the body ceases to be a passive container for the mind and becomes an active sensor that anticipates and reacts to the world prior to linguistic encoding. In Design Futures, this implies acknowledging that our relationship with the future is, above all, an embodied experience. Reclaiming the body allows space for somatic-affective knowledges that have been historically "exiled" by modern rationalism (Kennedy & McDowall 2025). Thus, the body emerges as the primary territory of resistance and the foundational site from which imagining other worlds becomes possible (Ahmed 2004; Zaragoza Ruiz 2022).

Therefore, to design futures not only justly but carefully, we must first allow for an ontological opening of our own practice, where I propose to embrace Thinking-Feeling as our grounding posture to serve a pluriversal reality; recognizing that imagination is not only cognitive but affective—shaped by emotion, intuition, and relationality – and by engaging futures not merely as "rational" work, but as lived, sensed, and ethically charged possibilities. In the vastness of these possibilities, I still had a question lingering in my head: as Fals Borda (2009) had proposed that the situated wisdom in *sentipensar* provides the orientation to find pathways or directions...how might we as designers, find these said *directions,* particularly in more organizational teams settings? What could a *thinking with the heart and feeling with the head* approach actually look like in a design futures process and how might it be embedded into our practice?

Intentionality as Praxis

While Herbert Simon's definition of design implies intentionality, the concept remains strikingly under-theorized. Burnette (2002) addressed this gap, arguing that a model of intentionality is essential to any theory of design thinking. His work reveals design cognition as a system of emotionally motivated orientations—intentional stances—that activate different modes of thought. This aligns with the core of *Sentipensar*, demonstrating that "no sharp line divides thinking from feeling" (Pinker 1997, as cited in Burnette 2002).

This perspective frames intentionality as an affective-cognitive system where emotions "set the brain's highest-level goals." However, as Damasio (2003, as cited in Burnette 2020) clarifies, these emotional signals often operate subconsciously, biasing our reasoning and decisions before we are even aware of them. This creates a critical space for reflexivity. Intentionality becomes the praxis of bringing

these subconscious drivers into conscious awareness, allowing designers to consciously formulate a plan—to "choose what to decide" before acting (The Decision Lab 2025).

This understanding must expand beyond the individual. While "I-intentionality" is the starting point, design is a collective act. Philosophical and sociocultural research on "We-intentionality" (Searle 1990; Rizzo et al. 2024) shows that shared purpose is not merely the sum of individual goals, but a distinct, co-created "common ground." This collective intentionality allows a plurality of visions to coexist while working toward shared futures.

Finally, to integrate the concept of *sankalpa* from yoga philosophy, it frames intentionality as a sacred commitment—a conscious alignment of thought, feeling, and action with one's deeper purpose (Naidu n.d.). This spiritual dimension reminds us that intention is not only about direction, but also about connection. Through this integrative lens, intentionality emerges as a form of praxis: a deliberate, thinking-feeling engagement that might operationalize an ethic of care and responsibility in designing futures.

METHODOLOGY

"The future stands still, dear Mr. Kappus, but we move in infinite space."
- Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

The selected research methodology for this study represents a sort of qualitative collage: a purposeful piecing together of different methods that mirrors the pluriversal ethos of embracing multiple ways of knowing (Escobar 2018). This was not a linear process but an emergent, dialogic journey through three intertwined sources of insight, each critically informing and challenging the others; which is structured in Table 1. The epigraphs opening each section follow this same spirit: not illustrative decoration but a specific methodological choice, an attempt to let thinking and feeling occupy the same page, in the spirit of *Sentipensar* itself. Their meaning is intentionally left open rather than justified explicitly — an invitation for the reader to feel their own level of resonance with what follows.

Table 1. The three qualitative sources of insight and how they served the research.

Source	Description	Purpose
Attempted Collaboration	Initial engagement with a foresight project and its practitioners to explore real-world integration.	At the beginning, just collaboration, and then, because of the insight gained, it provided a new ground from which to explore
Critical Literature Review	Systematic analysis of Design Futures, Futures Literacy, Latin American foresight and decolonial thought.	To establish the theoretical grounding and try to make sense of the felt dissonance
Semi-structured Interviews	Dialogues with LatAm futures practitioners and experts	To capture the felt dissonance from real experience, as well as how theoretical concepts live in their situated practice

a) Collaboration experience + Participant observation:

A 3-month collaboration with a LatAm-based design futures agency ended up serving as a low-key participant observation. Tasked with helping develop a locally-sourced signals search engine, I designed and facilitated a Roundtable session with corporate professionals. In general, the whole experience revealed what I later identified as the risk of *futures washing* discussed earlier: a pragmatic orientation where the future was treated as a territory to be mapped for competitive/commercial advantage under a capitalist paradigm, rather than as a possible space for critical reflection. The complete absence of FL was palpable; practitioners desired situated data but showed no reflexivity about their anticipatory assumptions. This crystallized the core problem: without a critical foundation, these methods risk reinforcing the very systems and hierarchies of power that they claim to transcend.

b) Practitioner Interviews

To move beyond the corporate sphere, I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with six futures practitioners across Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Peru; supplemented by a conversation with a posthumanist philosopher, a journalist and a politician; because of their insightful understanding of the context or the processes lying deep behind anticipation and collective imagination nowadays. This was an act of listening for the epistemic ground of their practice, as I also felt a need to contrast my literature review findings with the lived reality across the region. Even though the full insights were rich regarding LatAm's futures practice epistemologies (and may deserve

their own publication), the analysis revealed four powerful, interconnected themes which directly influenced my proposal:

- The Crisis of Imagination: Practitioners described a collective imaginative exhaustion, fueled by technological acceleration and overwhelm. The solution, they argued, lies in a radical return to primal, human sources of inspiration—"to dance, to play, to what makes us human and differentiates us from machines" (Victor J. Krebs, personal communication, June 2025). This echoes the call to reclaim "exiled" forms of knowledge (Kennedy & McDowall 2025).
- The Ontological Impossibility of Separation: A consistent thread was the lived rejection of Cartesian dualisms. Practitioners spoke of the inseparability of person and work, thought and feeling, and even calling out on opposite ways of working that they identify as hegemonic still; inherently embodying the *Sentipensar* stance.
- The Power of the Personal: Making futures exercises personal was identified as the crucial mechanism for connecting with affective dimensions. And even though this is not a new learning in the discipline, the research revealed a deeper meaning, that the personal is inevitably also collective, enabling a recognition of our interdependent existence within broader social and ecological webs.
- The Critical Gap in Futures Reflexivity: While in some punctual cases, and at some levels implicitly understood, FL's deep implications were not identified as such. There was a lack of explicit awareness that different "uses of the future" carry distinct political and ethical weight, highlighting a critical need for FL and Reflexivity: a practice of making these uses, and the power structures they serve, visible and subject to critique. This becomes particularly relevant in Latin America, where the practice itself is a privilege – accessible to a few who usually hold higher positions of power, and were inviting less-privileged groups and providing them with tools to exercise their imaginative power entails even deeper ethical implications, given the structural conditions that make transforming imagination into action much more challenging.

c) Literature Synthesis

The field research insights resonated powerfully with an extensive literature review, creating a theoretical-practical interweaving of key themes:

- The Inherent Politics of World-Making: Mazé (2019) provided the theoretical backbone, asserting that "elaborating and multiplying

possible futures is an exercise of power," and that “Design can be understood as a profoundly political act, whether we are reflexive or intentional about this or not.” This positions design futures as an ontological act that shapes reality, making intentionality an ethical imperative.

- Collective World-Making as Relational Praxis: Drawing from Escobar's *Designs for the Pluriverse* (2018), de la Cadena & Blaser's (2018) *A world of many worlds*, where coexistence is described as an ontological negotiation between different worlds —as opposed to a single universal order — and the Andean principle of *Buen Vivir* (Gudynas 2011); this synthesis posits that worlds are not pre-existing but are collectively enacted through daily, affective practices. This frames design as a shared process of worlding, directly linking to philosophical investigations of "We-intentionality" (Searle 1990) and its interplay with “I” Intentionality (Rizzo et al. 2024).
- The Affective Turn of *Feeling* Our Way Forward: Moral Imaginations’ pivotal inquiry of a "new rigour of feeling"; arguing that to circumvent cognitive blocks and ingrained paradigms to shift the future, we must "feel into it differently" (Tickell 2023). This is robustly supported by research on Experiential Futures (Garduño García & Gaziulusoy 2021) as well as Intimate and Embodied Futures (Bussey 2014; Borland-Sentinella 2020), reclaiming “feeling” and the body as a vital site of knowledge, challenging the rationalistic tradition that has dominated design and foresight.

Synthesis: The Foundation of the Compass

These three sources converged into a clear, actionable synthesis, forming the four pillars of the Intentional Compass. To battle futures washing and engage in a genuine decolonial design practice, our work must be:

1. Reflexive: Grounded in FL to critically examine power dynamics and anticipatory assumptions.

2. Affective: Intentionally integrating embodied, personal, and emotional ways of knowing to foster a deep, resonant and meaningful connection with possible futures; however, without neglecting “reason” — which in this case is represented by the FL framework.

3. Relational: Navigating the delicate interdependence of "I" and "We" intentionality to foster honest collective alignment without erasing difference.

4. Explicit: Facilitating the move of intentionality from a subconscious driver to a conscious and central subject of design praxis.

THE DESIGN FUTURES INTENTIONAL COMPASS

To wonder. To wonder with no plan
for where it might lead. No strategy
for arrival. No finish line. No pot
of gold. No perfect score. No striving for.
To wonder. To wonder the way a small child
might wonder when seeing a roly poly for the first time —
oh, look at all those legs. Look at how
it curls! Look how it moves again. Feel
how light it is in the palm. Feel how
it tickles as it moves. Imagine
an awareness that new meeting a life form that old.
Can I be that new as I meet this infinite world?
To wonder not just with my mind
but with my belly. To let every neuron
spark. To notice where there is a channel
and imagine the great wing of life
is scraping it clean so the stream might flow
in new ways. To wonder beyond the edge
of the known, and in that spaciousness, play.
- INTENTION, Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

The Intentional Compass is the tangible outcome of this research, a methodological pathway integrating this four-pillar synthesis by design. It is not a predictive framework but an orienting device—a means for teams to begin their work with greater awareness, alignment and care, setting a foundation for a more responsible and transformative practice.

Rationale: From a Linear Spectrum to a Cyclical Spiral

The tool's conceptual development began with the creation of an analytical model I call the "Ontological Spectrum of Transition," inspired by Buchanan’s (1992) Orders of Design and Geel’s (2002) Multi-Level Perspective. Even though suggesting a different logic than the mentioned representations (which are also quite different to each other), this spectrum (Figure 1) visually maps the core paradigm shifts this research engages with, framing the journey from a universal,

colonial, and individualistic logic towards a pluriversal, relational, and collective one.

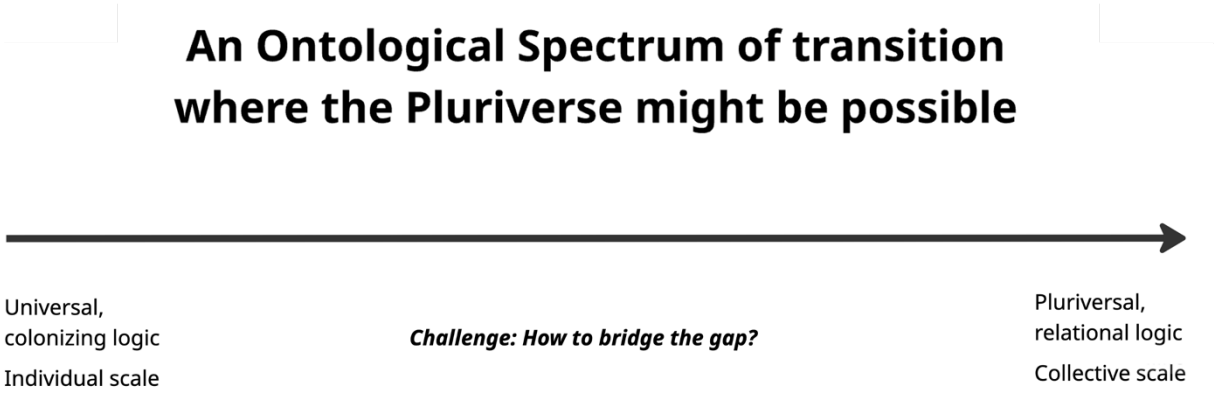


Figure 1. An ontological spectrum of transition. This model frames the overarching challenge of moving from a dominant paradigm—characterized by universalist, colonial, and individualistic logics—towards an emergent one grounded in a pluriversal, relational, and collectivist one. The journey across this spectrum represents the core work of decolonizing design futures.

However, while this spectrum is useful for diagnosing the terrain, the operational logic of the Compass itself is better modelled as a dynamic "Intentionality Spiral" (Figure 2). This spiral reframes the journey from individual to collective not as a linear, one-off progression but as a continuous, reinforcing cycle of reflection and action. It illustrates a fundamental insight: the "We"—comprising our broader social reality, organizational norms, and project constraints—always already conditions the "I." The Compass provides the structured "Thinking-Feeling" mechanism for the "I" (the designer or team) to become aware of this conditioning, to critique it, and to actively participate in reshaping it through collective action.

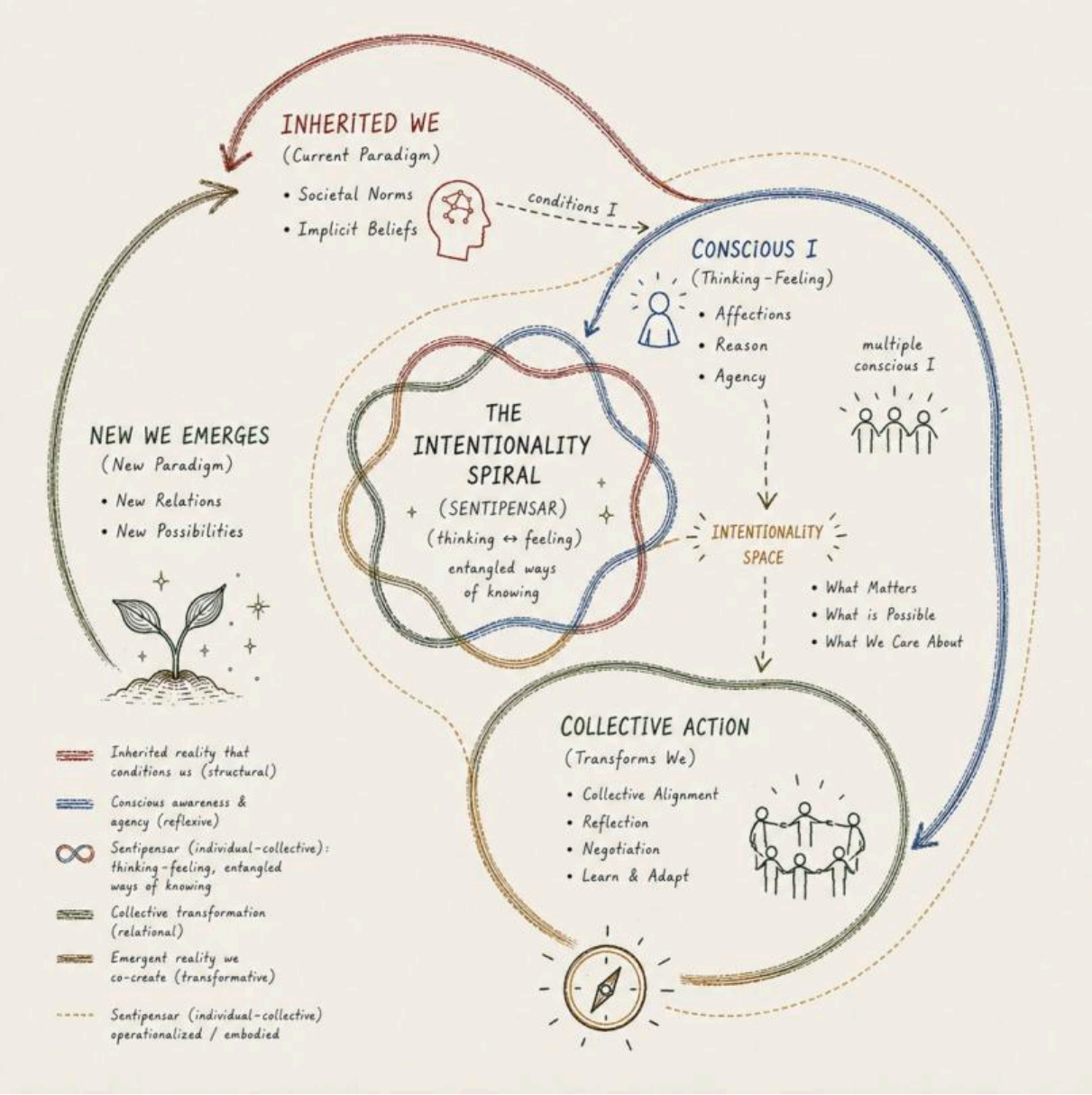


Figure 2. The Intentionality Spiral. This model illustrates the core logic of the Compass: the inherited "We" conditions the "I" (societal norms, implicit beliefs), which — through a Thinking–Feeling (*Sentipensar*) stance, held at the spiral's center as an entangled way of knowing — becomes a Conscious I, oriented by affections, reason, and agency. This orientation opens an Intentionality Space: a felt clarity around what matters, what is possible, and what we care about. From there, multiple conscious "I"s move into Collective Action — alignment, reflection, negotiation, and adaptation — through which a New We emerges, carrying new relations and new possibilities. Unlike a closed loop, the spiral is iterative and open-ended: each emerging "We" becomes the inherited condition for the next cycle, never returning to quite the same point. Color-coded lines in the legend distinguish the structural, reflexive, entangled, relational, transformative, and embodied dimensions of this process.

Integrating the Compass into the Design Process: A Cyclical Practice

The Compass is designed for integration at the very outset of a design process, acting as a crucial "Phase 0" that grounds the team before they engage in traditional discovery and definition activities (Figure 3). However, its true value and innovative character lie in its inherent cyclicality. It is not a one-time initiation ritual but a reflective practice that teams can and should return to at key project milestones. The tool's structure acknowledges that intentionality is not set in stone. As a project evolves—encountering new data, unforeseen constraints, or ethical dilemmas—a team's initial alignment can change. The Compass provides a structured yet flexible ritual to pause, re-ground, and re-align. This ensures that the team's core intentions remain a living guide that evolves with the project, rather than a forgotten document created at the start.

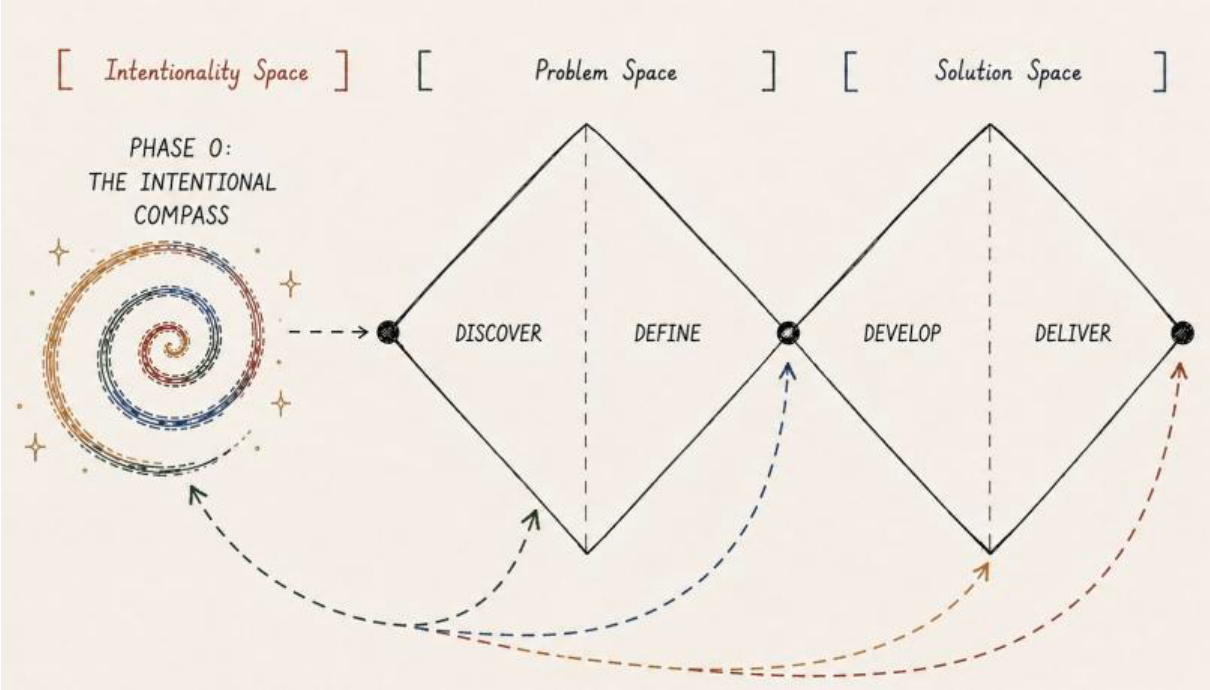


Figure 3. The Compass as a Cyclical "Phase 0" in the Design process (and where any other Futures process could be included in the same way). This diagram builds on the Double Diamond model (Design Council, n.d.) and its adaptation by Designorate.com, which makes explicit the "Problem Space" and "Solution Space" framing used here. My own addition is the preceding "Intentionality Space" — a naming choice deliberately left unengaged from the instrumentalist logic of "solving" that structures the rest of the model. The arrows indicate the Compass's operating logic: not necessarily a fixed starting point but a continuous, cyclical movement of orientation that can be re-entered at later stages, to ensure intentional alignment remains a living practice.

I am aware of the tension in anchoring a decolonial tool to the Double Diamond — a framework with unmistakably corporate, Global North origins. I do not use it uncritically. Following Abdulla and Vieira de Oliveira's (2023) concept of *minor gestures*, I understand this choice as

a strategic infiltration rather than an endorsement: working within a recognizable structure that most design teams already inhabit, in order to insert a foreign, reflexive logic into it from "Phase 0". A parallel or entirely separate framework would risk remaining external to existing practice — and probably only legible to those already convinced. Placing the Compass *inside* the Double Diamond, quietly reconditioning it from within, is closer to what de la Cadena (2021) describes as "connecting with others in the work of removing the foundations that create hierarchies," rather than abandoning the structure altogether. Whether this is the right strategic choice, or whether it risks simply domesticating the Compass into business-as-usual, remains an open question I return to in the Discussion.

I have also chosen not to engage with renaming the "Problem Space" and "Solution Space" labels inherited from this adaptation, even though their instrumentalist framing — the world as something to be diagnosed and *solved* — sits uneasily within a decolonial, pluriversal proposal. This is a scope decision: renaming those spaces would be its own project, one this specific paper does not have room to undertake responsibly. What I do claim is the space that precedes them. The Intentionality Space does not ask designers to *solve* anything; it asks them to notice what they are bringing into the work before it begins. My wager is that this preceding space can reshape what happens downstream regardless of what the later spaces are called — that a team entering "Problem Space" already oriented through embodied reflexivity engages differently with problem-solving itself, even without renaming the terrain it stands on.

The Compass in Practice: A Testing Workshop

To move from theory to practice, the Compass was tested in a one-hour workshop with five design students, using the speculative brief “Copenhagen 2040: Wellbeing in a Digital City.” The goal was not to generate solutions, but to experience the Compass as a reflective and grounding mechanism. The session’s three phases were a direct, applied expression of the Intentionality Spiral's logic.

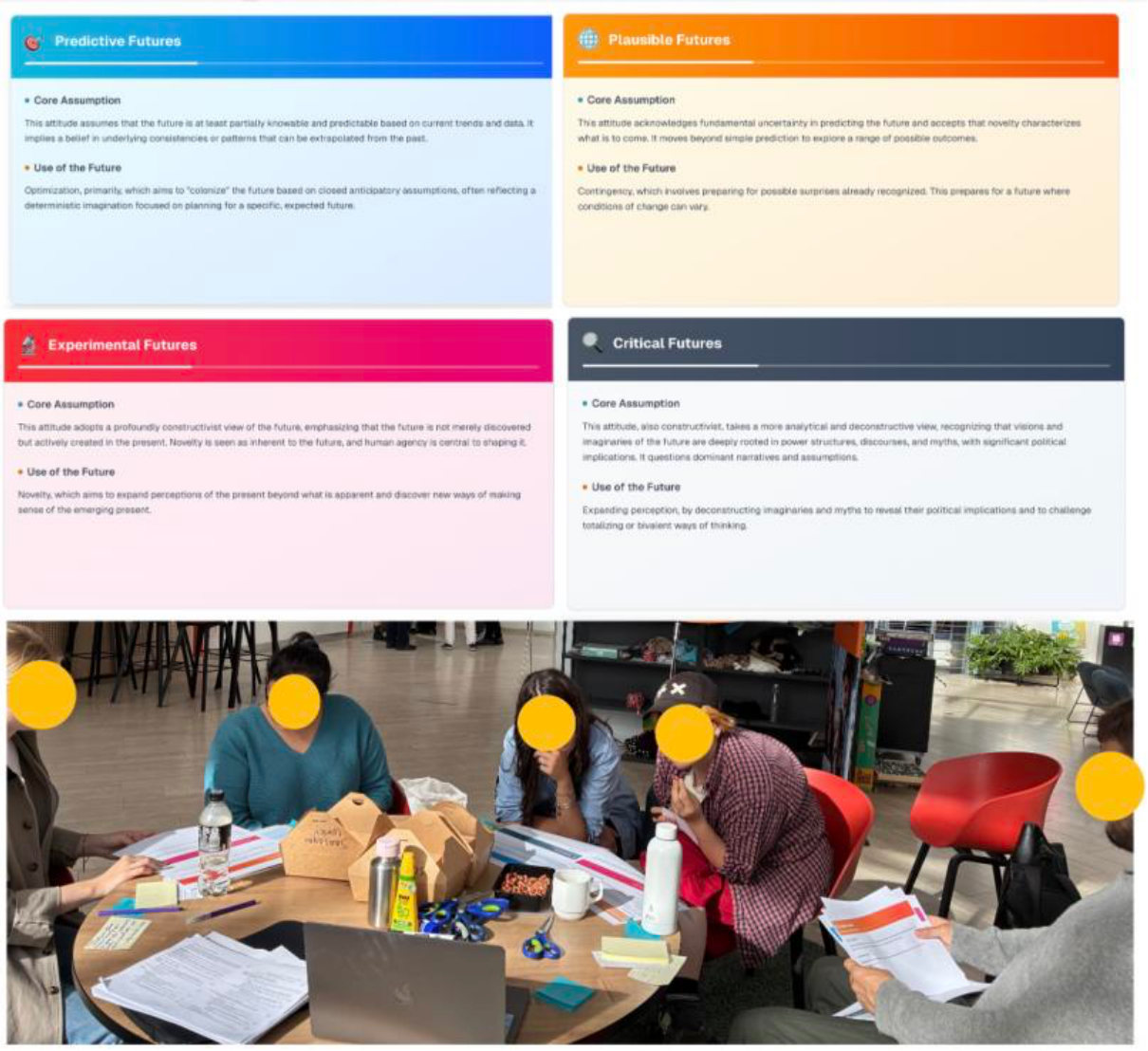
Phase 1: Grounding Futures Reflexivity (Mapping the Inherited 'We')

- Purpose: To establish embodied awareness and collaboratively surface the project's implicit assumptions, power dynamics, and default "uses of the future."

- Activities: The session began with a somatic breathing exercise to help participants arrive fully in the space. This was followed by a playful emotional check-in using dog & cat face thermometers — selecting memes that represented their current state (Figure 4). The core activity was a Futures Reflexivity (Mangnus et al. 2021) card-sort (Figures 5 and 6), where participants identified and discussed the differences between the client's assumed "uses of the future" versus their own team's potential uses.

Figure 4. The dog & cat face thermometers used in the workshop. Participants valued a playful and fun element to break the ice and engage with their fictional team; pointing out that sharing feelings does not usually come easy in professional settings and not everyone feels comfortable with it.





Figures 5 and 6. Futures Reflexivity card-sort based on the framework proposed by Mangnus et al, (2021), comprising four epistemologically and ontologically different approaches or "attitudes" to the future and part of the activity taking place during the workshop.

- Results & Learning: Participants highly valued the meditative grounding, noting it created a different quality of attention (Figure 7). However, this phase revealed a key insight for future development: the concepts of FL, while intuitive to me, required more theoretical scaffolding. A deeper, pre-workshop introduction to FL is needed for participants to fully grasp and leverage the power of reflexivity. I also noted the importance of a subsequent step to explicitly articulate the tensions between the identified uses, which would have strengthened the connection to the next phase.

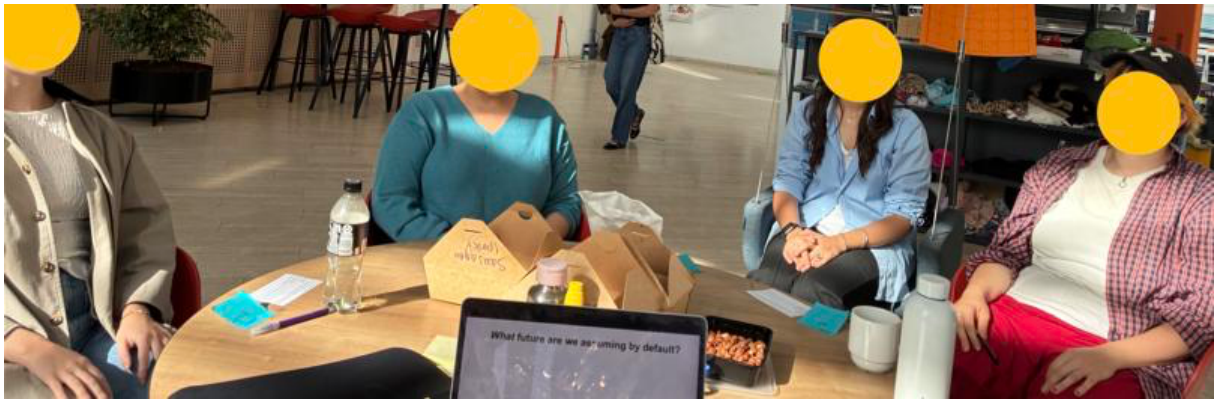


Figure 7. Four of the participants easily engaging with the breathing meditation exercise, having later manifested feeling odd as they had never experienced anything similar throughout their practice, but that they had appreciated afterwards.

Phase 2: I-Intentionality & Thinking-Feeling (Activating the Conscious 'I')

- Purpose: To make individual intentions explicit by deliberately weaving cognitive and affective dimensions, using the "personal" as a gateway, in line with Bussey's (2014) concept of intimate futures, as well as some of my interviewees' own practice frameworks.
- Activities: A guided “time travel” meditation (Neuhohoff et al. 2022) led participants to imagine a personal day in the Copenhagen of 2040, focusing on sensations, emotions, and routines. Following this, they articulated what they wished to "bring into" that future for themselves and their loved ones, as something they cared about in that imagined scenario. To externalize these often-abstract feelings, they used "vibe cards" (with tarot and astrology archetypes, spirit animals, gemstones) as symbolic support for their intentions, a generative technique to facilitate the access to non-rational knowledge.
- Results & Learning: The material support was crucial. Participants reported that the cards were a "novel and inspiring" way to articulate what truly mattered to them, bypassing purely analytical language, as seen in Figure 8. This phase successfully created a foundation of honest, personal investment and vulnerability, which proved essential for the collective work to follow. It demonstrated the practical application of *Sentipensar*.



Figure 8. Material output of the time travel activity. Vibe cards allowed participants to embody and materialize subjective inputs from each of their own imaginations.

Phase 3: Reassessment & We-Intentionality (Co-creating a New 'We')

- Purpose: To bring individual perspectives into a generative dialogue, identify shared ground, and co-create a provisional collective intentionality, enacting the "we-mode" described by Searle (1990).
- Activities: Participants shared their personal intentions, clustering common themes and noting divergences. A facilitated discussion explored points of resonance, potential clashes, and whose perspectives (human or non-human) might be affected by their chosen direction. The session culminated in the group formulating a shared intention statement and one concrete commitment.
- Results & Learning: The richest result was definitely gained through the dialogue and collective alignment between the group. The vulnerability from Phase 2 created a fertile soil for collaboration. The transition from I to We felt organic, not forced. The group easily identified shared values like “slowing down to connect” and "looking after our humanity" in the face of

technological changes and efficiency goals; as well as "patience with each other" as initial commitment – demonstrating how affective alignment can pave the way for strategic alignment and a shared "common ground" through rituals (Giovagnoli 2020).

Testing Insights and Validation

While a minimal test, the workshop successfully validated the core premise and generated valuable qualitative insights. Post-workshop surveys indicated that the majority of participants felt "really good" using the approach and reported that it supported them in "thinking about Design Futures in a different way." The combination of somatic grounding, personal futures, and symbolic representation successfully created a more engaged, reflective, and emotionally resonant team dynamic. The primary limitation confirmed was the need for better-integrated FL education. However, the most compelling validation was the observed shift in the team's energy and the ease with which they achieved meaningful alignment. This points to a promising direction for future development: the Compass shows significant potential as an engaging and effective way to ground the often-nebulous early stages of a design futures process in a practice that is both critically rigorous and deeply human.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

But now we've got weapons of chemical dust
If fire them we're forced to, then fire them we must
One push of the button and they shot the world wide
And you never ask questions when God's on your side
- With God on Our Side, Bob Dylan

This work argues that Design Futures, if it remains a cognitive and instrumental exercise, is insufficient and risks reproducing the very colonial, controlling logics it claims to challenge (Miller 2013; Escobar 2018). The Intentional Compass proposes a necessary shift from thinking about the future to both *thinking and feeling* into it as an ontological practice. Here, Thinking-Feeling becomes both method and ethic. The "Thinking" is Futures Reflexivity—the formal understanding and the critical awareness of power and positionality derived from an elaborated discipline framework such as the critical concept of FL. The "Feeling" is what Merleau-Ponty (2012) would call operative intentionality — the lived, bodily mode of engaging with the world

prior to conscious reflection — which I extend here to describe our resonance or resistance to possible futures. By making this process both explicit and collective, the Compass frames intentionality less as a fixed state of mind, and more as a shared praxis of care: a continuous, responsible engagement with what we bring forth, what we exclude, and how we are shaped in return. This aligns with the decolonial insistence that there can be no theory of decolonization without actual decolonizing practice (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012).

This same tension—between decolonial theory and decolonizing practice—is not only conceptual but embedded in the Compass's own design. Housing the Compass within the Double Diamond — a framework I chose strategically, as a minor gesture of infiltration rather than endorsement (as previously explained) — carries the risk that this choice could function the other way as intended: rather than reconditioning the framework from within, the Compass could simply be absorbed by it, domesticated into another "Phase 0" checkbox within business-as-usual delivery cycles. I do not have a definitive answer to this risk. What I can offer is the same caution the minor gestures authors themselves hold: that solitary or singular acts of infiltration are insufficient on their own, but their insufficiency should not be reasoned as inaction (Abdulla & Vieira de Oliveira, 2023). Whether the Compass ultimately subverts or is absorbed by the structures it inhabits may depend less on the tool itself than on the intentionality — or lack thereof — of those who choose to use it.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The Compass was tested only at a low-fidelity level and within a limited academic context. Its efficacy across diverse, real-world projects and organizational cultures remains to be rigorously evaluated. A significant limitation, as Miller (2013) cautions, is that FL and heightened awareness alone do not guarantee "better futures" or prevent the "unintended replication" of harmful patterns. In the same line, designers' intentions, even when explicit, can be flawed or biased. The ethical dimension of which feelings guide our choices—and whose emotions are prioritized in collective imaginaries—remains a deeply political and even philosophical unresolved question. Furthermore, the Compass currently operates within a largely human-centered framework; extending its relationality consistently to the more-than-human world remains a complex but necessary and compelling future challenge.

Future Directions

This paper also made a deliberate scope choice worth naming explicitly: to synthesize breadth — three converging sources of insight — rather than to develop depth through a single, richly narrated case. The 11 practitioner interviews I conducted, six of which directly informed this proposal, carry qualitative texture and situated detail that this paper's scope did not allow me to fully unfold; a companion piece developing more about these practitioner accounts in depth is a direction I consider interesting for future work, and one I hope to pursue.

Future iterations of this work should focus on deepening its practical application and ethical grounding. An immediate next step is developing an introductory FL kit to deepen the reflexivity required in Phase 1. The methodology could be enriched by integrating specific Embodied Futures exercises (Borland-Sentinella 2020), such as movement or performance, to more fully activate somatic knowing. A "Mapping Agency and Boundaries" exercise could also be added, helping teams to discern their sphere of influence within complex systems (Covey 1989) by making contextual constraints more explicit. A critical research avenue is formally exploring the link between Futures Literacy and emotional literacy, investigating how empathy can act as a bridge for intertemporal and interspecies care.

I ultimately think of this work as an invitation to shift our own understanding of us designers from being agents of change to being agents of care, where perhaps the most radical act in an accelerating, fragmented world may be, for example, to slow down: to attend to the quality of our intentions and of our relations. To sit in the here and now with soothing presence and to care for what is also present around us may be the ultimate decolonial stance. Intentionality, then, is framed here as an ongoing becoming — a practice of attunement to what silently sustains life... subtle but powerful. To make it explicit is to make it visible; to act from it is to accept responsibility.

Finally, to *Sentipensar* the future as political spirituality thus emerges as an urgent direction for design futures—where spirituality is understood as a radical, shared stewardship of life (Areli Zaragoza, personal communication, June 2025). It is from this place of profound connection and care that we can begin to imagine co-inhabited futures with more integrity and tenderness, grounded in the realization that deep in the mysterious fabric of existence the I and the We are not only interdependent, but ultimately one and the same.

DISCLAIMER ON THE USE OF AI

AI tools were used to assist in the research, language refinement and drafting of this submission. It assisted with exploratory searches to identify relevant sources and to digest/ summarize research papers for my own comprehension and synthesis. It also provided feedback on preliminary ideas and conceptual framing during the early stages of the paper's development. It was also used to translate quotes and references from other languages to seek accuracy, in addition to standard grammar and spelling checks. Finally, it helped me summarize different parts of the original long-form thesis to meet the required word count but only as an initial draft. Generative AI was also used to visually refine and render the revised Intentionality Spiral diagram based on an author-created conceptual diagram and drawing. The conceptual structure, content, terminology, and final selection and editing of the figure remained under the author’s direction. I retained full oversight, editing, and accountability for all final content, figures, data, and conclusions presented in this manuscript.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ania Hildebrandt holds an M.Sc. in Service Systems Design from Aalborg University, Denmark, and specializes in social innovation across Latin America and Europe. Grounded in systems thinking, her research explores ontological design, design intentionality, and pluriversal design, foundational to her master's thesis on design futures and decolonial practice.

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