# Tilting to Transform

**Sensorial problem-framing**

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This workshop will engage participants in a sequence of individual and group activities that utilise real and fictional sensorial modalities to reimagine problems and humanise design thinking. The 60 minutes online session will experiment with sensory scenarios and how they can enhance reframing and responsibly 'tilt' design problems and approaches, leading also to engaging participants in a discourse on the role of design within society and ecology. This workshop stems from wider research being undertaken into a system of teaching interventions that positively disrupt the curriculum, to catalyse and reinforce learning around design action and eco-social consequence. As such, this session seeks to explore creative and humanity-centred pedagogic approaches for reframing design problems and supporting responsible ideation.

Keywords: problem framing, sensory, design thinking, responsibility, eco-social

## Introduction and Aims

Workshop activities will explore how sensorial scenarios can enhance reimagining and responsibly 'tilt' design problems and approaches. Participants will come together to invigorate problem framing approaches by embracing alternative perspectives and utilising the senses to connect creativity with humanity and ecology across diverse cultural situations.

The aim is to engage participants in two short-burst activities that employ real-world and fictional senses to reimagine problems and humanise design thinking. Located within the context of problem framing [rather than definition] this approach challenges framing conventions, by consciously shifting away from a 'pain point' perspective and commencing instead with an activity that connects design thinking to our physicality, helping us to "understand the world through the processing of our minds and bodies" (St. Pierre, 2019, p.103).

This workshop stems from wider research into a system of teaching interventions that positively disrupt the design curriculum, to catalyse and reinforce learning around design action and eco-social consequence. As such, this session will inform development of ongoing pedagogic research into the impact of learning interventions on self-awareness and responsible design attitudes, where the underpinning action research approach affords continuous analysis and reflection across teaching implementation.

## Workshop Outline

A 60 minutes virtual workshop incorporating the following stages:

**Ice-Breaker** [4 mins]

The session commences with a dynamic activity inviting participants to focus on engaging one sense (to gaze, hear, sniff, feel and taste something in their proximity) and share their interaction – as a way to raise sensory awareness, surface analogous experiences and introduce each other.

**Activity** [52 mins]

Following a brief contextual presentation [4mins] the activity has two key phases:

    **1: Multi-sensory Reflection** [8 mins]

Participants consider a set problem statement through the perspective of a 'far' sensory modality of their choosing (vision, audition, tactition, olfaction or gustation) and utilise this sense to inform rapid collation and iteration of references and concepts. The generated words and images are captured and viewed within a shared, virtual document.

**2: Intensification and Imagination** [40 mins]

In online groups (across four breakout rooms), participants work together to further explore a problem via a heightened or extrapolated sense. Playing with extreme reality or imagined future fictions, is used as a mechanism with which to do this e.g. vision scenarios might be: an entirely myopic population due to prolonged screen-dependency, or nanotechnology that allows the human eye to see in new and extraordinary ways etc. With their exaggerated sense in mind, participants collectively ideate a response to their statement. The four groups then share their ideas and revelations, which are discussed across the collective.

**Summary** [4 mins]

Following the second activity, the workshop is summarized, further questions are collected [for a follow-up response by the facilitators] and the activity is brought to a close.

Number of participants
Minimum 12 [4 groups of 3] and Maximum 20 [4 groups of 5]

## Outcomes

The workshop will result in: 1) opportunities to tilt problem framing conventions via different stimuli, 2) an awareness of how different sensory modalities can be leveraged to connect and heighten students' learning experiences.

Viewing problems via mechanisms grounded in the sensations of 'living' is the perfect catalyst for debate on what it is to design in, and for, the world – to be a "citizen designer" (Heller & Vienne, 2018). An early pilot of sensory-focused ideation as part of our ongoing enquiry, demonstrated that by foregrounding sensorial awareness within the design process, natural (human and environmental) themes are surfaced. This engages participants in wider discourse on: the role of design within society and ecology, the responsibilities connected to their design, and the incumbent 'impact and influence' of their creative choices.

The broader research context of this workshop (with its focus on positive disruption and responsibility), offers participants the opportunity to consider how curriculum design interventions and/or wider design education systems can be 'tilted' to support responsible design practice.

## Relevance and Benefits

The workshop is relevant, because it explores an alternative method for problem framing, within design education. It meets key topics within the track concerned with relational, human and speculative future approaches.

It is critical for designers to have "… a sense of understanding about the processes and implications of design – an understanding of how design works in the world and structures our lives and interactions with things... systems, each other…" (Marshall, 2014, p.245). The unexpected, yet universal mechanisms of the far senses, makes this a perfect conduit for this relational engagement and reflection. With this in mind, the approach we have chosen to share with the conference participants is both embodied and reflexive.

Drawing on the insights from previous research activity, we note how participants embrace this sensory response to imagining and iterating, adopting it as an approach with which to scrutinize or radically interpret design challenges. When invited to extrapolate a chosen sense, playing with extreme reality or fiction to do so, the workshop coaxes speculative thinking around futures and fantasy in relation to design challenges. This is particularly relevant as "'Design and futures' together offer ecosystemic and embodied approaches to shaping our collective prospects, informed by a diverse range of practices", (Candy & Potter, 2019, p.1), and whilst seemingly light-hearted in its invitation, this activity illuminates affinitive and emerging challenges and/or innovations, very much in the present.

Benefits of the workshop activities stem not only from gaining a new design approach, or in adapting well-travelled design process methodologies, but also in taking more explicit ownership of the need to pivot and reframe when design should exert influence or impact that is detrimental and/or advantageous. Lupton and Lipps (2018) argue that "[s]ensory design considers not just the shape of things but how things shape us – our behaviour, our emotion, our truth." (p.15). Building on this insight, we believe that participants of this

workshop gain the opportunity to pause, reconnect with their bodies and through experiential learning engage with not only how they can better utilise their senses to design, but how they can harness them to see/hear/touch/smell/taste a more responsible route.

Thus, whilst the workshop has at its core a desire to reframe design challenges as a means to gain deeper understanding of them, it also seeks to offer a reflexive critique of what it is to design as a human being, a citizen and a "futural agent", (Fry, 2015, p.32).

## References

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Noemi has extensive experience in higher education curriculum design and degree launch. She teaches strategic design and approaches to responsible design practice. Her work has been published as part of 01.AKAD, Sweden; the Encyclopedia of Gender and Information Technology, USA; Visual Tools for Developing Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity, Australia; and The Design Journal, UK. Her current research investigates how to facilitate design students' sustainable decision-making, leading them to become responsible design practitioners.

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Tara is a creative and an educator. She combines her studio practice in responsible design and strategy with her academic role as a multidisciplinary lecturer. She was Validation Lead for LCC's MA Design for Social Innovation and Sustainable Futures and is co-creator of the School's Responsible Design Framework. Her research explores pedagogical strategies for nurturing citizen designers and has been shared via exhibition, film, workshop, symposia and paper.