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Designing for Transformative Education and Well-Being through Holistic Epistemic Integrity: Un-tabooing Spiritual Ways of Knowing

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In design research, epistemic boundaries remain tied to Western paradigms of rational empiricism. Although reflexive approaches have gained ground, a persistent taboo endures: the exclusion of spiritual, intuitive, and transrational ways of knowing as valid sources of inquiry. This matters for Design for Health, Society, and the Public Good—especially in sustainability-related contexts foregrounding SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education)—because health-related wellbeing and transformative education routinely involve ambiguity, non-linearity, overstrain, and meaning-making, dimensions not fully accessible through purely rational-analytical modalities. This paper explores the epistemological, and methodological implications of designing for and with this taboo—the resistance to holistic research practices, including spiritual approaches. Drawing on holistic creative reflective practice, autoethnographic and arts-based forms of inquiry (spiritual insights and poetry), it outlines how design researchers may integrate creative-imaginal, integrative-visionary, and spiritual-contemplative ways of knowing as empirical modalities without compromising scientific integrity. To keep the approach academically accountable, it is specified how insights are made transparent, traceable, and dialogically checked, and where their claims must remain bounded. Referring to diverse experiences in academic and professional contexts I propose a framework for holistic epistemic integrity in which rational, creative, and spiritual modalities co-exist as interdependent dimensions of holistic ‘knowledge’ creation.

Keywords: designing for and with taboo, holistic epistemic integrity (HEI), spiritual ways of knowing, holistic creative reflective practice (HCRP), autoethnographic and arts-based forms of inquiry, transformative education and learning, organizational and societal well-being

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Introduction

"We are always lost when we are overcome by thought, and we are reborn when we entrust ourselves to the world with a sense of foreboding, drifting like clouds in the bright wind, for all boundaries that remain are more distant than the heavens." (Lines from the poem "There is much to become" by Jean Gebser, translated by Author)

Design research is often celebrated for its openness to complexity, ambiguity, and embodiment. Yet an enduring epistemic taboo persists: the reluctance to recognize spiritual and intuitive ways of knowing as valid empirical sources. This paper seeks to design for and with that taboo—to investigate and transform the silent boundary separating rational from transcendent epistemologies in design inquiry.

Rather than rejecting rational empiricism, I aim to re-integrate it within a holistic epistemic ecology that recognizes cognition, creativity, and spirit as interdependent modes of human knowing. I write as a communication and innovation design researcher, educator, and creative entrepreneur moving between academic precision and poetic intuition, institutional structures, and spaces of emergence (Borghoff, 2021).

Positionality and scope. I write from within Western-European higher education and design research environments shaped by peer review, publication norms, and funding criteria that often privilege rational-empirical evidence regimes. My critique is therefore situated: I do not claim that all design research operates uniformly, nor that spiritual ways of knowing are absent everywhere. Rather, I focus on recurring boundary-making practices I have encountered across academic and professional settings, where contemplative and transrational modalities tend to be treated as epistemically risky or "non-empirical." Naming this context is part of the paper's commitment to epistemic integrity.

Across my work, I have repeatedly encountered resistance to methods drawing on inner perception, resonance, and spiritual reflection. To address this tension, I write autoethnographically, applying a holistic creative reflective practice (HCRP) in which personal experience and observation become both material and method—not from self-focus, but from epistemic honesty: when the researcher is part of what is known, reflexivity ensures integrity. This text moves across essayistic, poetic, and theoretical registers as a methodological necessity mirroring the pluralism it advocates.

The paper itself becomes a designed artifact of inquiry—a performative reflection on how design research might un-taboo the spiritual dimension without lapsing into esotericism, showing how holistic epistemic integrity (HEI) can emerge from the balanced co-presence of rational, creative, and spiritual knowing. My experiences serve as design-reflective data, forming the empirical basis for a multi-perspective exploration of this theme.

Contribution and paper type. The paper is intentionally hybrid: it functions as a methodological position paper grounded in autoethnographic inquiry. It proposes a framework (HEI) and a set of validity practices that make first-person and contemplative data accountable within design research—particularly when addressing transformative education and well-being. The paper unfolds in six interconnected sections following the spiral movement of inquiry: section 2 outlines the methods (HCRP, autoethnography, spiritual insight, creative reflection, and poetry). Section 3 introduces the epistemic taboo. Section 4 explores spiritual ways of knowing as spiritual empiricism. Building on these, I develop the framework of Holistic Epistemic Integrity (HEI) and discuss how HEI contributes to transformative education and well-being in section 5. Section 6 concludes with reflective and poetic pathways embodying design research as a scientific and spiritual practice of awareness, integrity, and care for life.

Methodological Approaches

*“When logic and intuition merge within you, you will perform miracles.”
(Unpublished spiritual poem by Birgitta Borghoff)*

Holistic Creative Reflective Practice (HCRP)

The holistic creative reflective practice (HCRP) is an integrative reflective approach that combines cognitive, creative, intuitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026). It strengthens non-cognitive skills, such as integrity, creativity, empathy, and inner wisdom. And it enables transcendent communication and transparent problem-solving beyond roles, disciplines, and institutional boundaries. Building on Schön's (1983) concepts of reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action, as well as Candy's (2020) creative reflective practice, reflection is understood as a creative, transformative act in which thinking, feeling, being, and acting merge. In practice, HCRP comprises three intertwined approaches (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026):

1. **Creative Reflective Practice:** mindful self-awareness and exploration of one's experience
2. **Creative Agility:** experimental action and change of perspective
3. **Spiritual Poetry:** symbolic-aesthetic condensation of perception, where intuition and inspiration merge into transrational insight

These three approaches make reflection a HCRP—a research and professional future skill that is essential for our world, shaped by AI and BANI (brittleness, anxiety, non-linearity, incomprehensibility; *ibid*; Farah Liyana, 2025)—as they cultivate holistic human presence, compassion, and a sense of meaning in organizational, academic, and educational contexts.

Autoethnographic Inquiry and Arts-Based Research

According to Adams et al. (2020), autoethnographic inquiry is a qualitative, self-reflective method that intertwines personal experience (auto), cultural context (ethno), and scientific analysis (graphy). It treats research as an embodied, performative, and narrative process in which life stories serve to understand social and cultural meanings. Through writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), it merges scientific and arts-based practices, revealing personal experience and introspection as a valid source of knowledge (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015; Faulkner, 2019; Prendergast, 2009; Lahman, 2025). Evocative autoethnography emphasizes aesthetic and emotional resonance: researchers write about formative “epiphanies,” creating multilayered texts that invite readers’ self-reflection (Ploder, 2021; Stadlbauer & Ploder, 2019; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2010). The aim is not objectivity but the generation of “narrative truth” (Adams et al., 2020)—a relational form of knowing emerging in dialogue between writer and reader, expanding research into a creative, performative act of embodied understanding.

Artifacts of Spiritual Insight, Creative Reflection and Poetry

In this paper, I understand spirituality as a form of inner guidance arising through resonance, introspective perception, and inner dialogue. As a multidimensional communication and innovation design researcher, I experience spiritual insights as moments of mediated inspiration—a dialogical process between reflective consciousness and an inward, often poetic source of knowing. These insights manifest in diverse communicative forms: spiritual poetry, essayistic reflections, and hybrid artifacts that weave inner knowing with professional and academic experience within reflective practice.

Following Hartmut Rosa (2019), I view resonance as an existential mode of relating in which humans enter a responsive and transformative connection with the world. Within this framework, spirituality becomes one possible axis of resonance, while poetic texts function as portals through which such relations can be felt and expressed. The spiritual insights, creative reflections, and poems embedded in this paper (see sections 3.1, 4.1, 6.2) emerged organically during writing as performative acts of inquiry. To preserve their authenticity, they remain untranslated in tone and rhythm, rendered word for word to maintain their epistemic atmosphere. They are included as research artifacts, not as standalone evidence. The artifacts function as sensitising devices that make tacit dimensions of experience articulable and open to analysis. Each artifact is therefore followed by a brief analytic note that clarifies (1) what the artifact

surfaces, (2) how it informs the argument, and (3) how it is methodologically checked through the validity practices described in section 2.4.

By integrating these spiritually inspired forms of inquiry, the methodological framework of this study expands beyond cognitive empiricism toward a holistic mode of knowing—one that embraces spiritual insight, creative reflection, and poetry as legitimate pathways of knowledge creation. Section 3 explores how such alternative epistemologies encounter boundaries and how their exclusion constitutes an epistemic taboo within design research.

Validity Practices for First-Person and Contemplative Data

Because the paper enters contested epistemological territory, I make the conditions of rigor explicit. The study draws on arts-based research (e.g. Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015) to validate spiritual, intuitive, and poetic materials (e.g. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Faulkner, 2019; Prendergast, 2009; Lahman, 2025) as empirical data through phenomenological transparency, aesthetic resonance, theoretical–artistic triangulation, and collaborative reflexivity; rather than aiming for post-positivist generalisation, this approach emphasises exemplary depth and disciplined, research-creative integrity. Throughout the study, spiritual, intuitive, and poetic materials are treated as empirical inputs only when they meet four accountability requirements: (1) transparency (the practice that generated the insight is described), (2) traceability (insights are translated into explicit concepts, criteria, or design-relevant propositions), (3) triangulation (checked against literature, observations, or stakeholder dialogue), and (4) intersubjective testing (peer debriefing, co-interpretation, or dialogic challenge). In addition, I articulate boundary conditions to avoid epistemic inflation: first-person insights are not universalised and do not substitute third-person evidence where such evidence is required. These validity practices operationalise Holistic Epistemic Integrity as a disciplined research approach rather than a belief-based stance.

The Epistemic Taboo

*“So let us tread carefully through taboo’s gate,
and question the rules that we may debate,
for they can both uplift and castigate,
and shape our world, both small and great.”
(Lines from a poem by Vahi 'Agyat')*

Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections on Taboo

Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections

Epistemic Taboo

Designing for and with taboo, for me, means engaging with something that has nothing to do with everyday routines, to-do lists, rules, and norms. Instead, it is something that wants to emerge and unfold from within, from the center of my heart. Something that springs from the immediacy of the moment, wants to reveal itself, communicate with the world and present itself, because it is now ripe to take shape and pour itself into the world. For me, a taboo is not something fixed and unchangeable, but something that began some time ago to condense out of the subtle realm into our world in order to draw attention to and point out something that has fallen into disorder in our physical-material world. If there were no disorder in the gross material world, the taboo would not emerge as a word and concept from the spiritual realm of creation. It is absolutely necessary in order to bring up something that has fallen out of balance in the earthly realm. And there is much that is evident in current world events. Be it the exclusion of certain marginalized groups in society because they seemingly do not fit into this world due to their otherness or foreignness. Or those people who contradict the general mainstream by expressing a different, personal opinion and opposing the majority thinking that is usually shaped by politics, media, science, education, and religion and is often not questioned because it is coded as a kind of "secure knowledge." Conspiracy theories or simply questioning the seemingly "certain knowledge" of our society are instead, and rightly so, scrutinized intensively and sometimes met with hostility because they are not accessible to the general public with conventional routines of thinking and understanding. Because we humans are unable to communicate peacefully and freely about the different approaches to truth, disputes, controversies, and even small wars arise between family members or colleagues in organizations, leading to the very large wars in human history such as World War I and II, or, as we are seeing again recently, even close to home in democratic Europe.

How do we deal with these contradictory ways of thinking, scientific, media-oriented, or faith-based paths to knowledge? This is where taboo comes into play, lending itself to shaping a discursive field of concepts in which various social phenomena emerge as if from the depths of the ocean to give voice to what has fallen out of balance. In other words, to give linguistic form to what may not (yet) be visible or expressible.

Language itself springs from our rational thinking and cognitive apparatus, with which we seek to name things and circumstances that are in truth more complex than can be condensed into a single term. Much of what falls under the umbrella of the term is lost and fizzles out again, so that some taboos—which would be taboos—never come to light and are never addressed linguistically. Only when a certain degree of imbalance in society silences the silence does it tip over and a topic finds its way into the discursive field of taboo, because the majority usually wins and brings about change. So it takes time—or rather the right moment, and therefore patience—until something actually comes up for discussion and finds an anchor in social discourse. Ultimately, it is impossible to plan when a taboo topic will have reached the necessary maturity to rise from the depths of the social ocean and actually reveal itself. Face to face. Then, and only then, can a taboo be talked about and discussed, whereupon a taboo topic takes shape and a name—namely the one we agree on socially. This is called "common sense" or "common ground" (e.g. Stücheli-Herlach, 2020; Wengeler & Römer, 2025; Another Author & Author, 2024).

Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections

Epistemic Taboo

Against this backdrop, what about **Holistic Epistemic Integrity**? What made me come up with this neologism for this taboo, in order to present it in this paper to a scientific community that is largely at home in the current scientific paradigm of rationality, reason, and intellect? A good question and an important one, I think. Because ultimately, no one can know when the time is right for a topic—Not even I. The impulse that moved me to address this taboo topic—which has been growing and slumbering within me since my childhood and my exploratory learning, and which ultimately led me to pursue a career in science—came when I read the title of the call for papers “Designing for and with Taboo”. The term “taboo” created an inner thematic resonance within myself, inviting me to take a closer look. The term “design,” on the other hand, made me realize that I myself, as a communication and innovation designer, belong to the target group addressed. That’s why I decided to embark on this autoethnographic writing endeavor in a reflective and creative, but also very personal way. This, in turn, breaks a taboo in traditional scientific practice, namely that of placing the researcher’s personality at the center of holistic research that is trained and at home in both conventional scientific methods of knowledge, creative paths of discovery and spiritual forms of perception. For me, this is a courageous and exciting adventure on the path to integrating linear-rational—i.e., scientifically verifiable, and non-linear-intuitive—i.e. spiritual methods, practices, approaches, and mindsets. An important note: For me, religion is part of science.

The connecting element between these two poles of apparent opposites is the third scientific method of inference, abduction. As a third form of reasoning, it acts as an agile hinge between induction—i.e., inferring from a single case to the general—and deduction—inferring from the general to the single case.

During my work in qualitative research, a very experienced researcher once told me that careful research requires that one be able to derive abduction—i.e., an immediate flash of inspiration that occurs during the qualitative coding of text or image files—retrospectively either inductively or deductively, so that our work is considered scientifically plausible and valid and not esoteric. When I heard about the process of abduction, I was totally enthusiastic because I had constant flashes of inspiration while coding data, which I couldn’t code as quickly as they were “input” to me, by whomever. However, having to justify these inspirations artificially and retrospectively completely wiped me out, because it seemed illogical, unnecessary, and extremely time-consuming. So I would have to justify my intuitive insights retrospectively in order to be taken seriously as a researcher. That made no sense to me at all, and my joy of discovery was shattered. It seemed not only complicated to me, but also wrong. It would have meant that I would have had to violate my “common sense” and set it aside just to do something “correct,”—which would have been distorted again by this “wanting to do it right” and would have been untrue. Why should I, must I, deny my intuition of abductive flashes of inspiration and instead—with great diligence and duty—compulsively analyze data in detail, only to then no longer see the forest for the trees? Just to satisfy a scientific paradigm? How much energy and nerves does that cost—and also research funds. Do I want that, can I do that? Is that legitimate? Why do abductions have to be made comprehensible at all? That doesn’t make any sense, does it? Why don’t we integrate intuitive and spiritual research methods into science right away? And why do we not also evaluate what lies beyond textual and verbal data but can be perceived with senses that go beyond the five earthly senses—such as clairaudience, clairsentience, claircognizance, and clairvoyance—simply because many people cannot see, feel, know, or perceive it in and through the data itself—i.e., cannot “grasp” it in concrete terms? If abduction is the third mode of inference, why is it so restricted and cannot develop freely in the context of research?

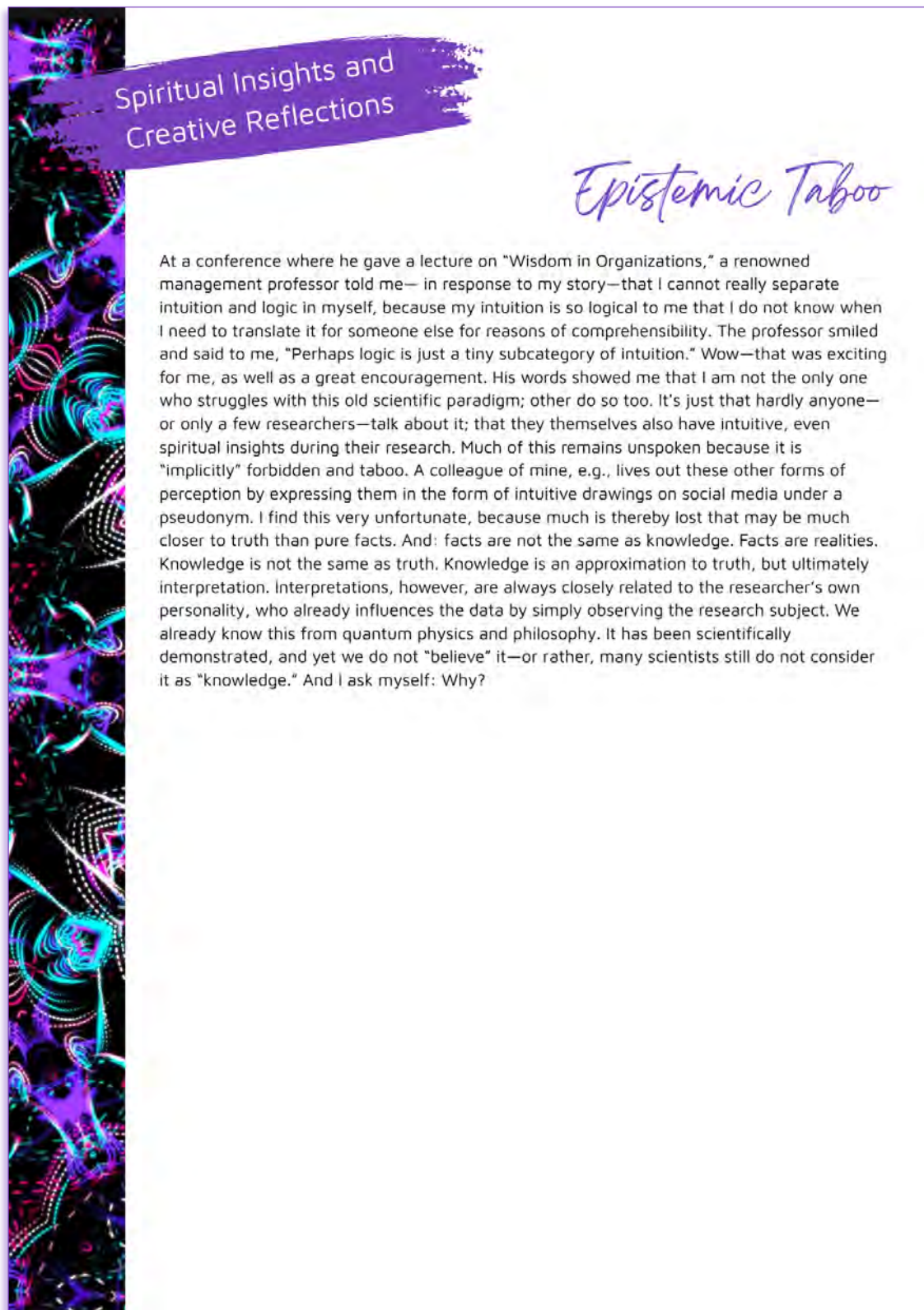


Figure 1 Author's Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections on Taboo. In section 3.3 I explain how this and other textual and visual artifacts emerged organically during the writing process as performative expressions of inquiry.

Analytic note. The artifact in Figure 1 condenses recurring patterns of epistemic boundary-making (e.g., shame, legitimacy anxiety, and self-censorship). Analytically, it supports the claim that taboo operates not only thematically but methodologically. The note is triangulated with design research literature on tacit knowledge and institutional legitimation, and it is used to derive the “double taboo” distinction developed in Section 3.3.

Exemplary Manifestations in Design Research

Design researchers work in a field where knowledge generation and design practice coincide, yet certain epistemic dimensions remain invisible or marginalized. I use the term “epistemic taboo” to describe those forms of knowledge that are rarely articulated or recognized within the design discipline—not because they lack relevance, but because they transgress implicit norms of permitted knowledge. This section reflects on why design research is particularly prone to this phenomenon, how it manifests, and how empirical and theoretical work reveal its presence.

Design research moves continuously between design as practice and design as knowledge production. As Volontè et al. (2016; 2018) observe, the field often borrows methods from other disciplines to gain legitimacy—sometimes suppressing its own formats of knowledge at the expense of epistemic specificity. I also see this dynamic in my academic environment: in peer reviews, research funding criteria, and the pressure to publish in “scientifically valid” formats.

Claudia Mareis (2012) states that while tacit knowledge—the silent, embodied, and often not fully articulated dimension of insight—is frequently invoked in design research, its deeper complexity remains underexplored because it does not align with dominant empiricist structures. In academic design research environments shaped by peer review and funding criteria, intuitive, emotional, symbolic, or spiritual forms of knowing are often treated as epistemically risky. To secure recognition and publishability, researchers may rely on conventional data formats, thereby reproducing an implicit mechanism of exclusion—what I refer to here as epistemic taboo.

- **Normative epistemology:** Design research still privileges objectivity, replicability, and methodological tradition. Alternative approaches—intuitive perception, symbolic imagination, meditative reflection—risk exclusion from what counts as “empirical.” Mareis (2012) notes that tacit knowledge, though often cited, is rarely treated as a full epistemic category.
- **Institutional structures:** Publication, peer review, and funding mechanisms favor established paradigms. Volontè et al. (2018) call this the “game of scientific archives and legitimation (GAS)” — a game I recognize from my own efforts to frame creative or reflective methods in academically acceptable terms.
- **Social and cultural dimensions:** Many taboo topics involve emotion, power, and shame (Boks & Trondsen, 2022), making them epistemically complex and socially risky. I have experienced this tension when speaking about resonance, inner guidance, or spirituality in rationalist research contexts.

Lefèvre et al. (2023) and Prochner (2022) show that projects on sensitive issues—shame, sexuality, health—face reduced funding, limited visibility, and institutional caution. Boks and Trondsen (2022) found that design students willingly explore taboo topics yet feel insecure dealing with shame, implicit power, or non-verbal knowing.

Such dynamics reflect how institutional and social power relations regulate what can be investigated. Both studies mirror my own observations how taboo also operates through institutional, and social power relations that determine who may research which topics: When students propose sensitive topics for developing a bachelor thesis—such as sexualized violence, workplace bullying, or mental health in journalism—concerns about reputational risk and emotional strain quickly arise, revealing how institutional care and responsibility gently regulate academic inquiry on highly sensitive socially relevant topics. This example reveals how power relations shape what can be explored.

A structured literature review in design ethics shows that methodological taboos persist where non-rational and experiential modes of inquiry—such as intuition or emotional reflexivity—remain marginalized despite their potential to foster ethically grounded research (Vesti et al., 2024). On a meta-epistemic level, Sørensen (2023) demonstrates that knowledge in design emerges relationally between humans, artifacts, and contexts rather than through purely cognitive processes. Yet these embodied and affective dynamics, though intrinsic to design practice, are rarely legitimized as valid knowledge. Adopting an irenic, dialogue-oriented approach, Sørensen seeks to bridge the knowledge-transfer and theory–practice gaps by recalling that science and philosophy were once inseparable—both shaping how we understood ourselves and the world. The empirical turn and Enlightenment fragmented this unity, narrowing what counts as knowledge. Sørensen’s call for epistemic pluralism—embracing material, affective, and transrational knowing—resonates with my argument that spiritual ways of knowing can help restore meaning, embodiment, and transcendence to contemporary design epistemology.

Above mentioned studies confirm that taboo is not external to design. It is structurally embedded in the epistemic organization of the design field. It shapes which kinds of knowing become visible, legitimate, and publishable—and which remain silent.

The Double Taboo: Epistemic Boundaries and the Expansion of Knowing

Reflecting on my own academic path and current manifestations of taboo in design research I recognize how epistemic taboo operates simultaneously on social, institutional, and methodological levels. It shapes not only what can be studied but how knowing itself is permitted to unfold. From this emerges what I call a double taboo:

1. A **thematic taboo**, concerning topics such as spirituality, intuition, and transrational knowing—often framed as incompatible with scientific rationality.
2. A **methodological taboo**, concerning the use of non-rational or spiritual modes of inquiry that transcend conventional empiricism.

These forms reinforce each another: when the topic challenges epistemic norms, the methods capable of exploring it are delegitimized. I have experienced this frequently when reviewers questioned intuition or creative reflective writing as valid data.

For me, the double taboo is not a dead end but a threshold. It invites design researchers to rethink epistemic commitments and to explore how alternative ways of knowing can be perceived, designed, legitimized, and shared within participatory and reflexive frameworks.

Inclusive approaches integrate reflective and embodied engagement, attention to atmosphere, iterative processes, and the making-visible of the invisible—practices I embed in research projects, workshops, and living-lab experiments (Borghoff et al., forthcoming; Borghoff, 2025; ZHAW, 2026/2025/2023a, b).

Through this lens, my focus shifts from what is taboo to how epistemic boundaries are enacted and sustained. Following Prochner (2022), Sørensen (2023), and Lee (1993)—doing design research on sensitive topics—I view the ethics of knowledge production as central: Who defines validity? Whose voices are heard? Which experiences remain unspoken? These questions have shaped my professional life and continue to guide my efforts to cultivate awareness, care, and integrity in the presence of epistemic taboos.

These epistemic challenges gain new urgency in times of BANI and AI (Farah Liyana, 2025; Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026). AI recombines existing knowledge far faster than humans, yet it mirrors our epistemic limitations. If machine learning reproduces only what has already been thought, then human research must sustain what machines cannot: intuition, imagination, embodiment, spiritual awareness. Moring (2023) even argues that contact with AI can strengthen intuition, as questioning AI outputs and integrating emotional responses fosters reflection and access to inner knowing.

Reflections on epistemic awareness in AI-enriched education suggest that learners must refine sensitivity to the sources and limits of knowing education (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026). The challenge of AI thus becomes a mirror for our epistemic fragmentation, inviting a return to genuine human skills—intuition, spirituality, ethical discernment—to expand the scientific paradigm toward holistic inquiry. Sørensen (2023) calls this epistemic boundary work: revealing where knowledge begins to silence itself. I interpret this as design ethics—engaging taboo not as prohibition but as transformation, where uncertainty and not-knowing become fertile ground for discovery.

If certain forms of knowledge are excluded from the outset or only addressed superficially, this has far-reaching consequences for the field:

- **Narrowing of the epistemic horizon:** design research stays within familiar boundaries and avoids emergent, transrational terrains.
- **Pressure to legitimize** researchers hesitate to pursue unconventional approaches for fear of losing credibility.
- **Ethical inequity:** the exclusion of holistic or spiritual knowing raises issues of epistemic justice: which forms of knowledge receive approval? which remain invisible?
- **Methodological challenge:** new methods such as HCRP, autoethnography, spiritual insight and poetry, as well as participatory sense-making are essential to articulate latent, embodied, or symbolic dimensions.

Prochner (2022) calls for institutional awareness and support for taboo topics; Sørensen (2023) urges us to expose epistemic boundaries and to design alternative knowledge spaces; and Boks and Trondsen (2022) demonstrate that safe, reflective environments are essential for innovation. My contribution extends these efforts by integrating spiritual empiricism into design research as a disciplined yet compassionate form of first-person inquiry (see section 4).

Spiritual Ways of Knowing as Spiritual Empiricism

“We know more than we can tell.”
(Poem by Michael Polanyi)

Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections on Spiritual Ways of Knowing

Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections

Spiritual Ways of Knowing

To gain intuitive insights into the topic **Spiritual Knowing**, I asked myself the question and reflected within myself which spiritual paths or approaches I know from my very own experience in academia, professional practice, and spirituality—to come to a definition of knowledge for myself. First, it is necessary to clarify what knowledge means in its original sense. Only then the actual process of knowing can be explained—i.e., the process that enables us as human beings to attain knowledge.

Knowledge, as I experience it, is limited, i.e., it has boundaries that go beyond knowledge, what is known, and what we want to know. In this sense, knowledge itself can be imagined as a kind of box, a square or rectangle with six surfaces that, triggered by the multiplication of height x width x depth, combine to form a certain volume. This volume corresponds to the content and also the substance of the box. In concrete terms, this refers, on the one hand to a specific topic—i.e., a “what,” so to speak. And on the other hand to the meaning—i.e. the “substance”—of this very topic. The substance refers to the extent to which a specific topic is and can be relevant, i.e., significant. The box itself serves as a repository that holds the knowledge and—through its clear contours—separates it from its surroundings.

Knowledge is therefore clearly and unambiguously limited and thus distinguishes itself from other bodies of knowledge in other boxes. When we talk about forms of knowledge, we are referring to the form of a box as described above. The term “forms of knowledge,” however, suggests that there may also be other forms of knowledge. So not just knowledge in a box, but perhaps also knowledge in a sphere, a line, a point, a triangle, or a spiral. Thus, there are different forms of knowledge, each of which has its own validity. This could be point-specific knowledge that refers very precisely to something, a fact or a circumstance at a specific point in time. Or linear knowledge, extending from a moment in the past over a period of time toward a point in the future, carrying with it information gathered along the way—infused with traces of the old and bearing the seed of something different or new. In this sense, knowledge connects by building networks and fuses into new or alternative bodies of knowledge over time. This process is the humus of a controversially developing knowledge that emerges from it, in which positions of right (A) or wrong (B) argue and wrestle with each other, with the aim of determining who is right or wrong in terms of knowledge, and what is true and false (C). But who decides what is right and what is wrong, or who is right or wrong? Presumably, it is the person who is able to raise its voice above the voices of others and assert themselves through the proficient use of language. That person is heard and thereby granted the status of being “right” or “true.” However, if we look at this situation from the perspective of a sphere, it quickly becomes clear that there can be no controversial, i.e. dual knowledge, but only polar, i.e., complementary knowledge. Instead of right versus wrong, there exists a both—and that mutually enriches and fertilizes each other. Yet, even the sphere itself is limited—its clear border in the form of a circle, closing like a curved line whose ends join to form completeness.

Knowledge delimited by points, lines, triangles, boxes, or spheres is thus separated from its immediate surroundings—i.e. the spaces between the individual geometric figures. Here, a space unfolds that is boundless. It flows around, washes over, touches, and at times even shakes the various forms, setting seemingly reliable and secured knowledge in motion—provided there is a willingness to allow oneself to be touched by the boundless and to allow it to enrich the supposedly secure and certain knowledge. Embarking on this path means mustering the willingness, determination, and courage to transcend the limits of known knowledge in favor of higher knowledge and to open oneself up to a new approach to knowledge.

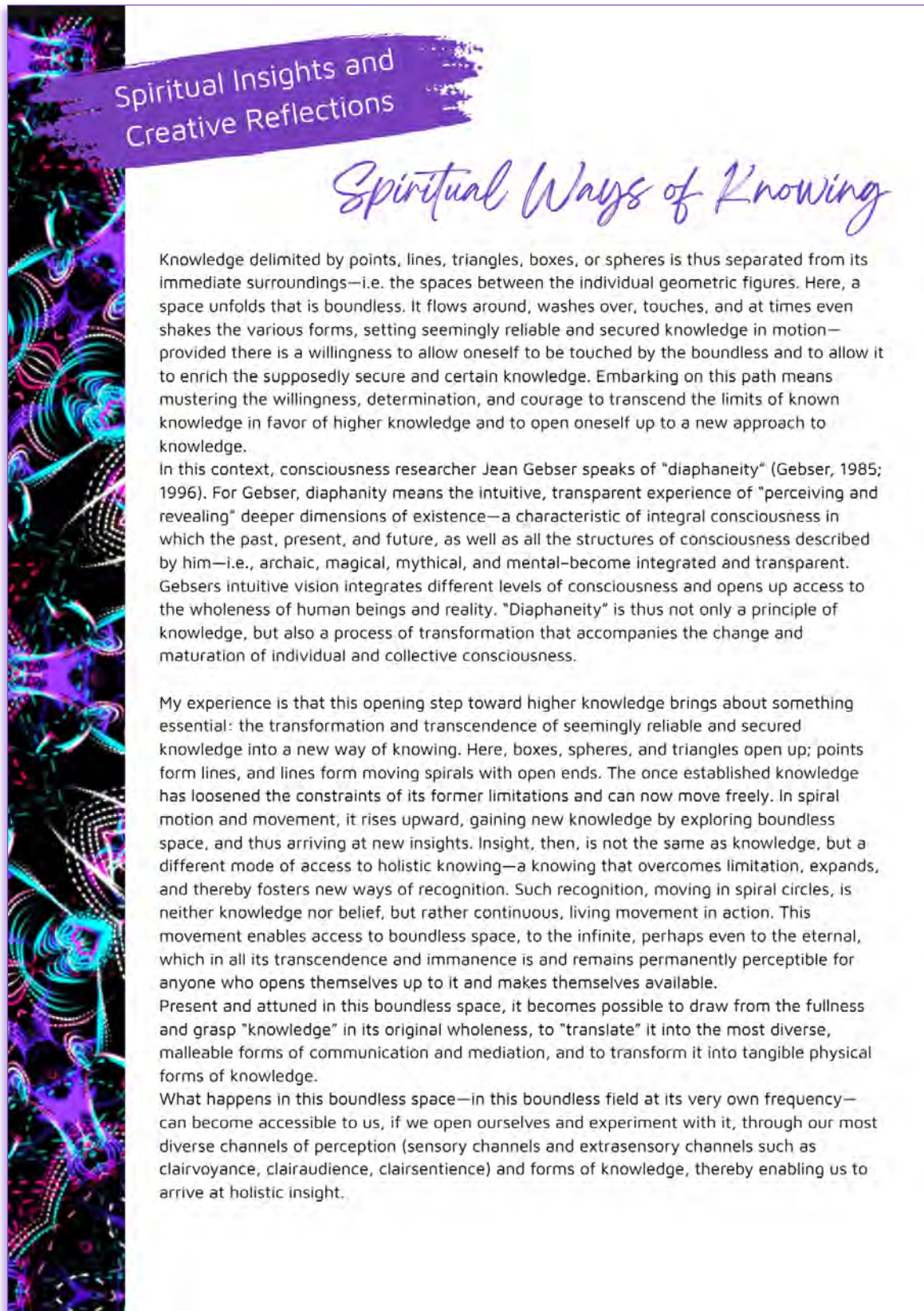


Figure 2 Author's *Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections on Spiritual Ways of Knowing*. In section 3.3 I explain how this and other textual and visual artifacts emerged organically during the writing process as performative expressions of inquiry.

Analytic note. The artifact in Figure 2 reframes “spiritual ways of knowing” as epistemic boundary work: it contrasts bounded knowledge-forms (box/point/line/triangle/sphere) with the boundless space between forms that “flows around, washes over, touches,” and can unsettle supposedly secure knowledge. The shift from linear extension toward spiral movement with open ends specifies the paper’s claim that insight is not “more knowledge” in the same regime, but a different access mode that transforms how knowledge is generated and held. By linking this to Gebser’s diaphaneity (seeing-through/integration) as outlined in sections 4.2 and 4.3, the artifact grounds spiritual empiricism as a change in epistemic stance (how one perceives and relates), not as doctrinal assertion. In the argument, Figure 2 sets up Section 4’s methodological move: boundary-crossing insights become empirically usable only when they are made traceable, dialogically tested, and triangulated through disciplined first-person inquiry (Varela, 1996) and contemplative science (Lutz et al., 2007).

Spiritual Knowing as an Epistemic Taboo

Within contemporary design research, rational-empirical epistemologies still define what counts as knowledge. Although design values reflection and participation, spiritual and transrational ways of knowing remain unacknowledged—not for lack of relevance, but because institutional norms privilege cognitive control over intuitive or contemplative awareness (see section 3).

Meanwhile, a broader spiritual turn has reopened spirituality as a legitimate dimension of human knowing. This turn re-centers the religion of the heart as a source of moral and epistemic renewal (Watts, 2022), challenging both secular reductionism and institutional religiosity by affirming inner experience, affect, and meaning as valid epistemic sources. Parallel movements—the affective, material, and ontological turns—likewise acknowledge spiritual sensibility as inquiry.

Contemporary consciousness research and neuroscience examine mystical experience, awakening, and enlightenment as empirically investigable transformations of awareness (Newberg & Waldman, 2016; Lindahl et al., 2017; Josipovic & Miskovic, 2020; Josipovic & Mills, 2021)—just as renowned psychologists and physicians do in the field of near-death experiences (e.g. Newton, 1994; Moody, 1975; van Lommel, 2010; Greyson, 2020). These transformations of awareness—marked by unity, boundlessness, and ego-dissolution—constitute structured, repeatable forms of spiritual empiricism. Jean Gebser (1966; 1985) and Ken Wilber (2000; 2017), often regarded as consciousness theorists rather than institutionally recognized scientists, also addressed such phenomena within their respective integral frameworks, where they describe transpersonal and transrational structures of consciousness—stages that integrate rational, imaginal, and spiritual dimensions of knowing beyond the limits of conventional empiricism.

The ongoing marginalization of such knowing reveals a broader epistemic imbalance. As Zsolnai & Flanagan (2019) show, spirituality is already an empirical domain in education, health, and organizational studies, yet its experiential transformative nature still challenges positivist ideals of objectivity. However, there also are current trends in which transformative approaches to knowledge are considered as new research skills in data analysis and interpretation. Anderson & Linder (2019), for example, state that transformative researchers are rigorous and precise, but also utilize their personal talents, skills, spiritual training, intuition, and creativity, whereas design researcher Walker (2019; 2021) lets us dive into a “body of knowledge” based on ancient spiritual and wisdom traditions.

Methodology of Spiritual Empiricism and Typology of Knowing

Recognizing epistemic taboos requires more than critique—it calls for methodological imagination and courage. If spirituality has long been treated as an outsider to legitimate knowledge, the challenge today is to invite it back, not as doctrine or belief, but as disciplined inquiry. This section outlines an approach I call spiritual empiricism—a way of knowing as rigorous in introspection as science is in observation—and introduces a typology of knowing that maps the diverse modalities through which this inquiry manifests.

In exploring spirituality as a valid mode of inquiry, I align with Varela’s (1996) neurophenomenology—an interdisciplinary approach that integrates first-person subjective experience with third-person neuroscientific data to bridge the explanatory gap in understanding consciousness. Likewise, I agree with Stace (1960), who sees “poetic truth” as an aesthetic and intuitive mode of knowing that transcends factual accuracy by revealing meaning and insight through emotional resonance, imagination, and symbolic expression. Varela and Stace inspire me to approach inner experience as disciplined observation rather than belief. I understand spiritual empiricism as the cultivated, intersubjectively validated study of first-person experience—intuition, resonance, contemplation, imagination, mystical

union—made empirically meaningful through articulation and dialogue (Lutz et al., 2007; Josipovic & Mills, 2021).

I also draw on discourse research about the “unspeakable” and “unspoken” in personal or public communication (e.g. Foucault, 1972; Butler, 1997; Bosančić, 2020), as well as on Ricoeur’s (1976) interpretation theory and Peirce’s abductive inference (Douven, 2025) to interpret symbolic and intuitive insight, and on contemplative science to connect phenomenology with neuroscience. These thinkers support my own experiences that cognition, resonance, emotion, and transcendence can coexist as complementary, performative, and multidimensional dimensions of rigorous, holistic design research.

Yet any methodology remains abstract until it touches lived experience. Spiritual empiricism becomes real only when the subtle ways of knowing—intuitive, emotional, visionary, contemplative—are recognized in their diversity. The following typology seeks to illuminate this ecology of knowing as it unfolds through my own HCRP. It serves as an exploratively developed conceptual map for integrating diverse epistemically recognized and partially taboo modalities into design research (see Table 1).

Table 1 A proposed typology of knowing

Epistemic Domain	Form of Knowing	Definition / Description	Exemplary Key References
Somatic–Instinctive	Instinct / Embodied knowing	Pre-reflective, somatic intelligence that guides perception and action through affective and biological attunement and survival; the embodied root of all higher forms of knowing	Damasio (1999); Varela et al. (1991); Sheets-Johnstone (2011); Gebser (1966; 1985)
Rational–Analytical	Logic / Deductive Reasoning	Structured reasoning that derives valid conclusions from given premises; ensures coherence, consistency, and conceptual clarity in rational knowledge formation ensuring validity and argumentative precision	Aristotle (<i>Organon</i>); Peirce (1931–1958); Haack (1978); Toulmin (1958); Johnson-Laird (2006)
	Abductive insight	A creative inference connecting intuition and logic; the hinge between analytical reasoning and imaginative synthesis	Peirce (1931–1958); Reichertz (2019); Fann (1970); Douven (2025)
	Tacit knowledge	Embodied, unspoken understanding guiding expert performance; integrates sensory, emotional, and experiential dimensions	Polanyi (1966); Mareis (2012)
	Analytical reflection	Conscious evaluation and conceptual reasoning that structures experience and supports meta-cognitive awareness	Schön (1983); Reason & Torbert (2001)
Creative–Imaginal	Intuition	Immediate, non-linear knowing arising from unconscious synthesis; bridges perception and insight	Kounios & Beeman (2014; 2015); Sadler-Smith (2008; 2010a/b; 2021); Sadler-Smith & Wray (2020); Stadler-Smith & Hélot (2021); Stadler-Smith & Akstinaite (2021)
	Emotion	Affective resonance and embodied feeling functioning as energetic intelligence that informs perception and value	Damasio (1999); Zembylas (2005);
	Imagination / Creative imagination	The capacity to form inner images linking perception and concept; mediates material and symbolic realities	Coleridge (1817); Jung (1959); Corbin (1972); Hollis (2000); Csíkszentmihályi (2013; 2014)
	Symbolic insight	Understanding through metaphor and image; reveals deeper structures of meaning through hermeneutic unfolding	Ricoeur (1976); Hillman (1979)

	Resonant imagination	Knowing through emotional vibration and empathic connection; meaning emerges in the space between self and world	Rosa (2019; 2020a/b)
Integrative– Visionary (Threshold)	Vision	Integrative synthesis where rational, creative, and spiritual knowing converge; the transparent threshold between worlds	Varela (1996); Zsolnai & Flanagan (2019)
	Flow / Embodied Unitive Awareness	A dynamic state where action, awareness, and intention merge; knowledge arises through total absorption and effortless integration of body, mind, and spirit—knowing through being-in-action.	Csikszentmihalyi (1996); Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2002); Varela (1996); Gebser (1966; 1985)
	“Poetic truth”	Aesthetic form of integration of knowledge, where intuition, emotion, and symbolic thinking merge into transrational insight	Stace (1960); Geber (1966; 1985)
	Transrationality / Transpersonal awareness / “Diaphaneity” (i.e. “seeing through”)	Knowing that transcends but includes rationality; embodies wholeness and interconnected consciousness	Wilber (2000; 2017); Gebser (1966; 1985); Lancaster & Linders (2019); Hartelius et al. (2007); Ferrer (2002; 2011)
	Inspiration	A receptive mode of creative knowing that arises through openness and surrender; often experienced as spontaneous insight	Csikszentmihalyi (1996); Ferrer (2002; 2011); Wilber (2017)
Spiritual– Contemplative	Contemplation / Meditation	Cultivation of stillness and awareness enabling direct experiential knowledge through presence and silence	Lutz, Dunne & Davidson (2007); Josipovic (2014; 2019); Josipovic & Mills (2021); Schmidt (2014); Dahl (2015)
	Resonance	Relational and participatory knowing through attunement and transformation rather than control	Rosa (2019; 2020a/b)
	Heart intelligence / coherence	Embodied intuition mediated by the heart–brain field; fosters empathy, regulation, and integrative awareness	McCraty (2017); McCraty & Childre (2010)
	Inner guidance / Higher self	Transpersonal awareness beyond egoic control; acts as moral compass and intuitive directionality	Assagioli (1965); Walach (2005); Schlitz et al. (2010)
	Wisdom	Integrative discernment combining creative spirit, emotion, and compassion into ethical understanding and action	Sternberg & Glück (2021); Baltes & Staudinger (2000)
	Mystical experience	Direct, unitive encounter with ultimate reality; marked by ego-dissolution, timelessness, and sacred presence	Stace (1960); Hood (2001); Newberg & Waldman (2016); Maclean et al. (2012)
	Awakening / Enlightenment / Unity consciousness	Realization of non-dual awareness and transcendent consciousness; integration of perception and being	Lindahl et al. (2017); Newberg & Waldmann (2016); Wilber (2017); Greyson (2020); Josipovic (2019)

Taken individually, each of these forms represents a distinct doorway into experience; taken together, they reveal an ecology of human knowing that is fundamentally relational and interdependent. In section 5 I synthesize these insights into the notion of holistic epistemic integrity—a condition in which rational, creative, and spiritual modalities not only coexist but enrich one another, forming an ethical epistemic basis for responsible design research.

Designing the Spiral of Knowing: Holistic Epistemic Integrity

Looking back on my journey as a design researcher, I see how my work has always unfolded in spirals—moving between the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intuitive, between what can be reasoned and what must be sensed. To design the spiral of knowing means to let knowledge breathe—to allow it to evolve as a rhythm between the human and the more-than-human, between thought and grace, analysis, and surrender.

Throughout this paper, I have explored what happens when I consciously design for and with the epistemic taboo—when I invite spirituality, intuition, and inner perception to re-enter scientific discourse, not as esoteric deviations but as essential dimensions of inquiry. For me, this is not a rebellion against reason; it is an act of reconciliation—an invitation to coherence, where rational clarity, creative imagination, spiritual presence, and reflexive awareness converge in an ongoing, dynamic interplay.

The Spiral as Method and Movement

The spiral symbolizes the way I now understand research itself from a holistic perspective: not as a linear pursuit of results but as a living movement of becoming. Each turn of the spiral brings me closer to a deeper understanding of how knowing, doing, feeling, perceiving and being are intertwined. In my practice, rational analysis gives form, creative imagination generates possibility, spiritual contemplation opens depth, and reflective writing weaves them into meaning. This movement corresponds to my HCRP (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026)—a rhythm of attention that transforms research into a practice of awareness.

Within this spiral, I experience various forms of knowing not as discrete methods but as fluid states of consciousness that call each other forth. Intuition guides abduction—the sudden, luminous insight that links reason and imagination. Imagination translates inner perception into symbolic expression. Resonance attunes me to what seeks to emerge. Contemplation cultivates stillness and receptivity. Reflection integrates what has been revealed into lived understanding. Vision, inspiration, transrationality and transpersonal awareness, in this context, mark the threshold—the moment when all previous modes align, and a new synthesis becomes not only perceivable but also tangible.

Framework for Holistic Epistemic Integrity (HEI)

From my observations and experiences as a researcher, lecturer, and professional in the field of design research emerges my framework of Holistic Epistemic Integrity—a cultivated coherence of four interdependent modalities that unfold in what I call the epistemic spiral of knowing. This spiral integrates four interrelated epistemic domains (see Figure 3):

- **Somatic-Instinctive**—sensing and responding through embodied pre-reflective awareness.
- **Rational-Analytical**—ensuring clarity, and structure through reasoning and reflection.
- **Creative-Imaginal**—generating possibilities through meaning, resonance, and imagination.
- **Integrative-Visionary (Threshold)**—fostering synthesis and transformation by across rational, creative, and spiritual modes of knowing.
- **Spiritual-Contemplative**—grounding awareness in presence, unity, and inner wisdom.

Together, they form a holistic ecology of knowing in which thought, imagination, presence, and reflection continually inform one another. HEI draws on Varela's neurophenomenology (1996), Gebser's (1966; 1985) and Wilber's integral theory (2017), and my HCRP (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026), integrating first-person inquiry with intersubjective and third-person validation. In this sense, HEI reframes design not merely as problem solving but as a highly reflective practice of knowledge creation and holistic consciousness—an ongoing alignment of knowing and perceiving, sensing, and feeling, doing and being.



Figure 3 The Epistemic Spiral of Knowing

Holistic Epistemic Integrity in Transformative Education and Well-Being

HEI calls for methodological pluralism: empirical rigor expands from measurement to attentional discipline; validity arises from coherence, transparency, and resonance. In education and practice, HEI envisions living laboratories—spaces for spiritual insights, creative reflection, and dialogue with the unseen, and unsaid—that cultivate epistemic awareness: knowing where one's knowledge begins, how it forms, and where it ends. Such awareness equips researchers, practitioners, and students to navigate AI-mediated worlds, where discernment, not data, measures wisdom. Ultimately, HEI is both methodological and ethical practice. It asks for transparency, devotion, and responsibility toward the knowledge we create—recognizing that every act of knowing shapes our understanding, consciousness, and thus also our reality.

HEI in research-based practice. In an ongoing R&D project on Creative Agility at the ZHAW (2026), we operationalise HEI as a short cycle embedded in teaching and workshop settings that address transformative education and wellbeing under uncertainty and overstrain. We frame the challenge (e.g., staying action-capable without premature closure) and ground it in conventional evidence (participant inputs, short interviews, and situational observations). We then add a brief HCRP sequence (embodied check-in, reflective writing, short contemplative pause) to access tacit meaning-making and value tensions that remain invisible in purely analytical accounts. From these materials we derive explicit design criteria or hypotheses (e.g., how to design psychological safety for not-knowing; how to shift from solution pressure to reflective agency) and test them through dialogic sensemaking and small prototypes in the learning process (prompts, facilitation moves, micro-interventions). Sometimes, short pieces of intuitive poetry from participants' verbatim direct quotes are crafted spontaneously as a reflective mirror: when shared back, these poetic condensations often enable participants to recognise patterns, name the unsaid, and gain new epistemic access to their own experience. To keep this approach academically

accountable, we explore and jointly discuss how poetic and contemplative insights can be translated into design decisions and checked through traceability, triangulation, and intersubjective dialogue.

In view of designing for transformative education and well-being HEI can be read as a sustainability-relevant epistemic stance that is closely aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) (UN, 2026; Sharma et al., 2026). The core premise is that in both domains, design outcomes depend not only on what is designed (services, interventions, learning formats), but also on how knowledge for design is generated, validated, and legitimized—including modes of knowing that are tacit, embodied, affective, and, in some contexts, contemplative or spiritual.

Well-being and health (SDG 3): Health-related well-being is multidimensional and context-sensitive (e.g. Ryff et al., 2021a, b). Beyond biomedical markers and behavioral indicators, it is shaped by psychosocial resilience, stress regulation, relational safety, moral tensions, and meaning-making—particularly under uncertainty, non-linearity, and chronic overstrain (Borghoff et al., forthcoming). These dimensions are often experienced as tacit or embodied phenomena, which design research acknowledges but struggles to legitimate when they take explicitly contemplative or spiritual forms (Polanyi, 1966; Mareis, 2012). HEI provides a disciplined framing for treating embodied, creative-imaginal, and spiritual-contemplative knowing as empirical modalities—on the condition of methodological accountability: transparent elicitation of first-person data, traceable translation into design decisions, and triangulation through intersubjective dialogue and complementary evidence (Varela, 1991, 1996; Lutz et al., 2007; Josipovic & Mills, 2021). In this sense, HEI supports public-good design by widening what becomes perceivable and discussable in well-being-oriented projects without collapsing into belief-based claims (Dahl et al., 2015; Zsolnai & Flanagan, 2019).

Quality education (SDG 4): Transformative education (e.g. UNESCO, 2024; Ocampo Cantillo & Lazaro, 2024; Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 1991) depends on epistemic capacities: navigating ambiguity, tolerating not-knowing, cultivating ethical discernment, and reflecting on how knowledge is produced and bounded (Borghoff et al., forthcoming). Reflective practice conceptualizes such capacities as core to professional learning and responsible action under complexity (Schön, 1983). HEI contributes a methodological scaffold for integrating creative reflective and contemplative practices into design research and learning design: HCRP (Neuhold & Borghoff, 2026), dialogic inquiry, and poetic condensation become tools that make implicit meaning-making processes articulable and examinable, while remaining accountable through reflexive transparency and intersubjective validation (Candy, 2020; Adams et al., 2020; Rosa, 2019). HEI also intersects with epistemic justice: whose ways of knowing count, and how implicit epistemic boundaries produce exclusions—issues with direct implications for educational equity and responsible sustainability-oriented design (Foucault, 1972; Butler, 1997; Prochner, 2022).

Read in this way, HEI reframes well-being not only as an outcome metric, but as an epistemic responsibility in how knowledge for design is generated. It similarly reframes transformative learning not only as competence acquisition, but as the cultivation of epistemic awareness and integrity—capacities that become especially relevant in BANI and AI-shaped contexts where pattern reproduction is plentiful but ethical discernment and resonant sense-making remain irreducibly human.

Reflective Conclusions and Future Pathways

Weaving the Spiral of Knowing

Reflecting on this journey, I see my work less as producing results than as cultivating coherence—between reason and intuition, form and formlessness, clarity, and mystery. Designing the spiral of knowing has meant giving voice to often-silenced dimensions of spirituality, resonance, and inner perception, and integrating them into design research as disciplined modes of inquiry rather than private belief.

In times of AI and BANI, cognition without consciousness becomes perilous. Machines can replicate patterns but not the ethical and experiential discernment required when design work touches human well-being and transformative learning. The role of design research, then, is not only to optimize knowledge systems, but to deepen awareness of knowing itself—to holistically reconnect cognition with knowledge, and intellect with inner guidance.

HEI stands for both an ethical stance and a methodological horizon: it values attention, presence, relation, and meaning making alongside precision and evidence. Acting with integrity means holding these dimensions together without hierarchy. Future design research must translate HEI into practice: interdisciplinary experiments, comparative studies across cultural and spiritual traditions, and living laboratories where first-person inquiry, co-reflection, and collective sensemaking coexist within transparent frameworks; and thus, cultivate long-term individual and organizational well-being. In this way,

HEI reframes public-good challenges as epistemic challenges. Health-related well-being often depends on psychosocial resilience, relational safety, and meaning-making under overstrain transformative education depends on learners' capacity to navigate ambiguity, tolerate not-knowing, and cultivate ethical discernment (Borghoff et al., forthcoming). In both domains, the systematic exclusion of spiritual, intuitive, and transrational knowing can narrow the epistemic horizon—while their uncritical inclusion risks undermining credibility. HEI therefore proposes a middle path: integrating these modalities as empirical inputs under explicit validity practices and ethical boundary conditions.

Rather than accelerating data production, future design research must foster epistemic awareness and genuine human skills that AI cannot replicate—intuition, compassion, heart intelligence, and moral discernment. It should translate HEI into practice through interdisciplinary experiments, comparative studies across cultural and spiritual traditions, and living laboratories where first-person inquiry, co-reflection, and collective sensemaking coexist within transparent frameworks. Core questions ahead include: How can first-person data be ethically integrated into design research on well-being and education? How might AI augment, rather than replace human intuition? And how can plural epistemologies coexist within responsible design without collapsing difference into relativism?

To design with HEI is to restore responsibility to the act of knowing—a living choreography between reason and imagination, self, and world—through which design research becomes both scientific and spiritual care for life. My work is meant not as doctrine, but as invitation: to walk the spiral, to inhabit the thresholds of the known and not-yet-known, and to design from wisdom that is deeply human and quietly transcendent.

The poem in the last section forms part of this reflective journey—an autoethnographic, spiritual communication artifact, and practice embodying holistic research and HEI where reflection becomes expression and knowing unfolds as a lived, poetic act of inquiry.

Looking ahead, I envision design research as a field that continuously refines its spiral of knowing—a lifelong movement that integrates mind, matter, and meaning across disciplines and cultures.

Spiritual Poem on Holistic Research

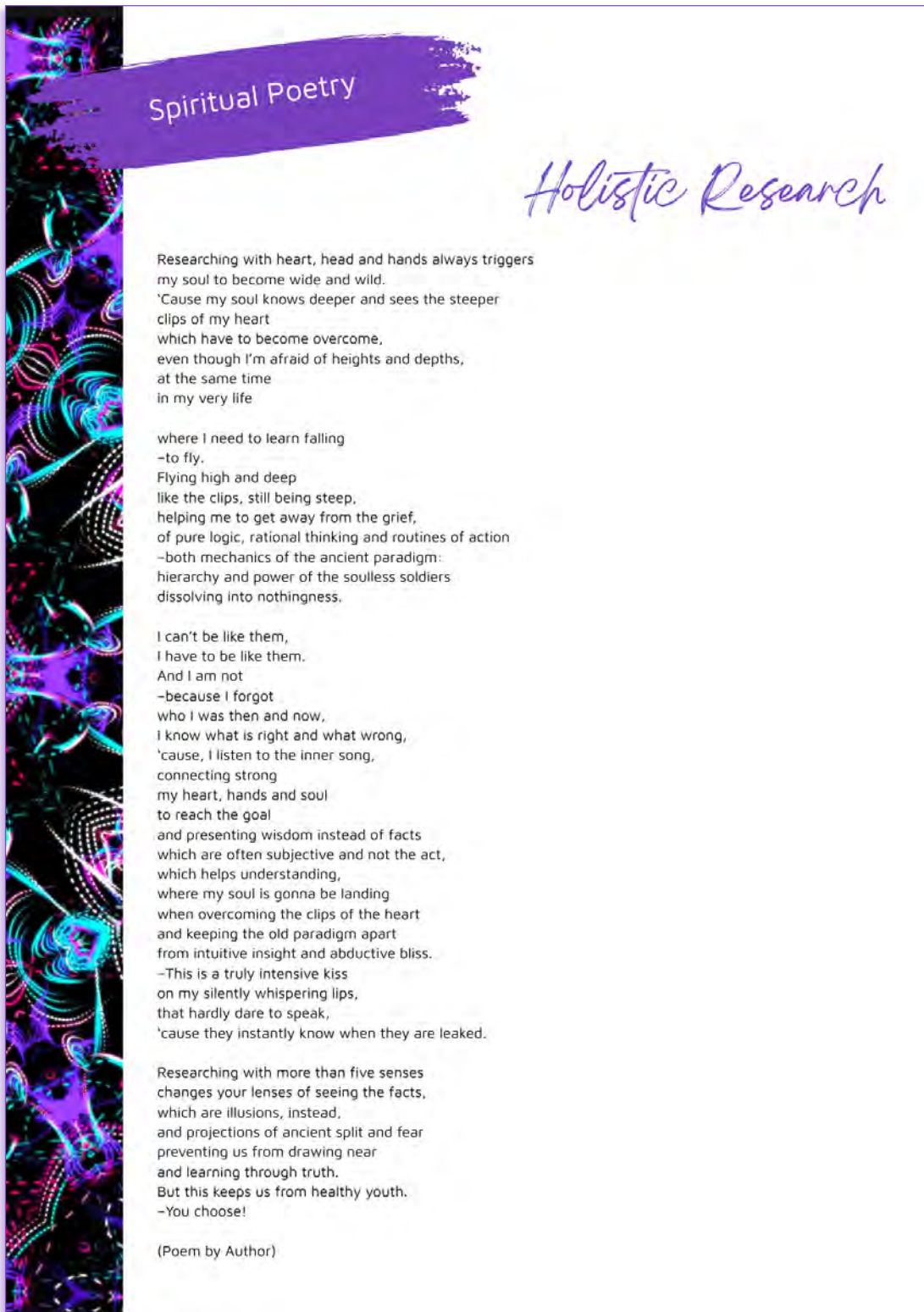


Figure 4 Author's Spiritual Insights and Creative Reflections on Spiritual Ways of Knowing. In section 3.3 I explain how this and other textual and visual artifacts emerged organically during the writing process as performative expressions of inquiry.

Analytic note. Figure 4 is presented as an arts-based, poetic inquiry research artifact—i.e., poetry as a mode of inquiry that makes tacit, affective, and value-laden dimensions of knowledge production available for analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Prendergast, 2009; Leavy, 2015). The poem condenses the paper’s core epistemic tension into concrete motifs: it critiques rational–instrumental “secure knowledge” (logic, routines, hierarchy/power) and frames holistic inquiry as a threshold practice (“cliffs,” “flying high and deep”) that requires staying with fear, uncertainty, and not-knowing. It also articulates resonant discernment (“inner song”) and “more than five senses” as shifts in epistemic access—pointing to meaning-making and well-being dimensions that elude purely rational-analytical lenses. In this sense, the poem functions as a reflective mirror and sensitising device (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Faulkner, 2020) supporting the paper’s closing move: it gathers the argument in an aesthetic form and opens into the reflective conclusions on what it means to research—and to design—with holistic epistemic integrity.

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