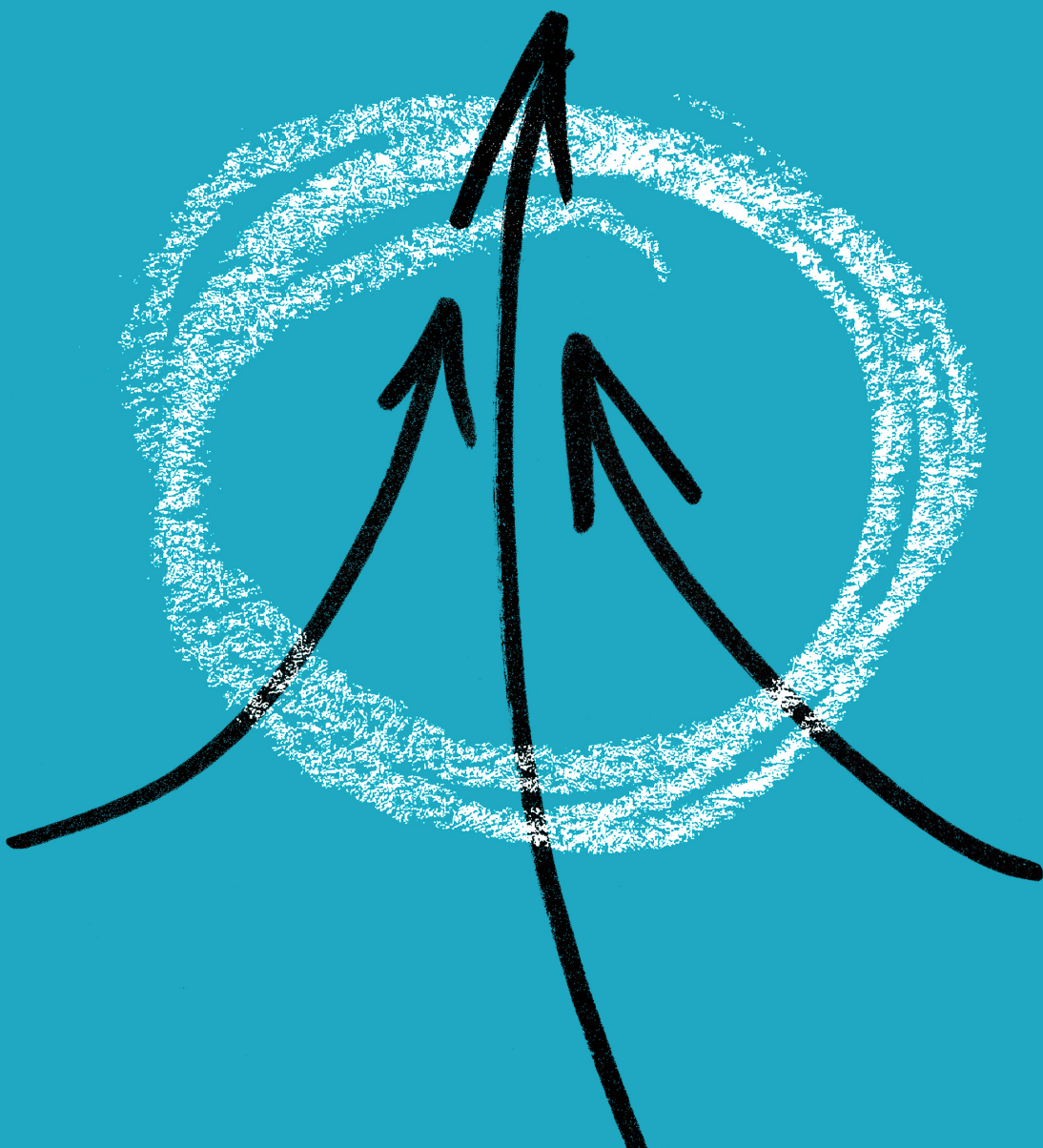


Drawn Together Through **VISUAL PRACTICE**

An Anthology Edited by

Brandy Agerbeck, Kelvy Bird, Sam Bradd & Jennifer Shepherd



This anthology contains exciting and varied contributions to the growing literature on visual language and its power to “draw us” together. The authors offer a wide range of experience, powerful illustrations and the core message that visual language enables us to learn, think, and grow in new ways – especially when considering the complex relationships that words alone can’t illuminate. *Drawn Together through Visual Practice* reflects the power of this field to help transform organizations and communities in life-affirming ways.

– *Juanita Brown PhD, Co-Founder, The World Cafe*

After 45 years of drawing on the wall it is extraordinary to see this field bloom in such rich and contributive ways. The authors are the cambium layer—advancing and shaping it with practice and questions—providing inspiration for all of us who are living into this emergent, hopeful, phenomenon.

– *David Sibbet, The Grove Consultants International*

The field of visual practice has long been nurtured by the quiet presence of artists devoted to listening and serving the groups with whom they work. It is high time that they turned and faced the room and shared the depth of artisanal practice and craft that underscores their devotion to the work. This collection is a stunning revelation of the heart of this practice. Whatever your role in group work, you will be made better by listening to these voices and stories of experience, sensitivity and careful attention.

– *Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting and Harvest Moon Consulting*

A first-rate look at the new world of visual practice. I know from personal experience that capturing content and discussion in real time imagery can help create communal understanding and memory. The images give participants a shared visual vocabulary that help capture complex ideas and enable the move to new discoveries and innovations. The book is a delightful dive into understanding the background and development of this new teaching/art form. Enjoy.

– *Deborah Ancona, Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, Faculty Director of the MIT Leadership Center, MIT Sloan School of Management*

I've seen visual practice map ideas, refresh memories, and provoke insights in many meetings involving dozens of professionals from business, government, and education. So it's a special delight to discover this collection representing the art, craft, and inspiration of visual practice from multiple perspectives.

– David N. Perkins, Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr., *Research Professor of Teaching and Learning, Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Graphic facilitation is a powerful way for a group to come to know themselves and the work they want to do together. It is no wonder that it so quickly became a part of any good meeting, conference, or problem solving session! *Drawn Together* is a valuable book, timely and well thought through. It should be read and employed by all wanting to improve and accelerate the rate of change and innovation within an organization, executive team or community. The more diversity in the room, the more powerful visual imagery becomes.

– Gail Taylor, *Co-Founder of MG Taylor, Inc., Founder of Tomorrow Makers, Inc.*

At last! A compendium of stories, helpful approaches and mind sets that reflects the diversity, the richness of scope and the broad impact of the growing field of visual practice/visual language. Our visual practice not only encompasses 'making the invisible visible' and 'making the visible visual' through many artistic means, but also, it incorporates all the human elements of working together, listening, and inclusion that our world is crying for. The potential is unlimited. This is a must read for people who are looking for ways to make substantial change and impact in our world as a group or as an individual and who are looking for paths to go 'from my way to our way'.

– Susan Kelly, *Visual Practitioner*

Drawn Together offers me tools to reflect and improve on developing campaigns for Lush, and encourages personal reflection on my process. A tremendous job bringing together a picture of the evolving work and sharing best practices.

– Carleen Pickard, *Ethical Campaigns Specialist, Lush Handmade Cosmetics, North America*

Contents

The Visual Now: An introduction	1
Making Room for Making: In praise of imperfect drawings and the humans who make them	5
BRANDY AGERBECK	
Drawing-to-Learn: A general studies course for first-year college students	15
DR. LAURENCE MUSGROVE	
In Front of the Wall	31
ALFREDO CARLO	
Visual Improvisation: How improvising influences my sketchnoting	39
EVA-LOTTA LAMM	
Solo-Practitioner Partnerships: A conversation between Lisa Arora and Robert Mittman	53
Sensemaking through Arts-Infused, Person-Centered Planning Processes	63
AARON JOHANNES	
Dancineering, Researchals, Bodystorming, and Informances: Movement-based approaches to sensemaking and transmediation through contemporary dance	75
CHRISTOPHER KNOWLTON	
Stories and Storytelling	85
ANTHONY WEEKS	

The Secret to Long-Term Impact in Your Engagements	
MARY ALICE ARTHUR	97
Using Perspectives to Build a Practice	
BRYAN COFFMAN	111
Cultivating Cultural Safety: The visual practitioner's role in motivating positive action	
SAM BRADD	121
The Use of Imagery in Conflict Engagement	
AFTAB ERFAN	133
Steady, to Scale	
KELVY BIRD	143
A Learning Journey: Connecting self to planet	
STINA BROWN	155
Sharing a <i>Dia</i> Experience	
CLAUDIA MADRAZO	165
Embodied Mark-Making: The Big Brush experience	
BARBARA BASH	173
Discovering Wisdom Within and Between: How storyboards, portraits, and visual explanations can help us learn to solve the puzzles of our time	
JENNIFER SHEPHERD	185
Sensemaking, Potential Space, and Art Therapy with Organizations: Moving beyond language	
MICHELLE WINKEL	197

Kinesthetic Modeling: Re-learning how to grope in the dark
JOHN WARD.....205

Becoming a Visual Change Practitioner
NEVADA LANE217

Four Mindsets of a Visual Ecology in the Workplace: Re-visioning language through visual thinking
MISHA MERCER.....225

Rigorous Design of Visual Tools that Deepen Conversations and Spark New Insights
CHRISTINE MARTELL241

Imagery That Travels Well: Making yourself understood across cultures with the help of visual language
PETER STOYKO251

The Thermal Lift of Visualization: How to empower people in visual thinking, learning, and co-creation
MARTIN HAUSSMANN, INTERVIEWED BY BRANDY AGERBECK271

Bridging on the Rise
JAYCE PEI YU LEE, INTERVIEWED BY KELVY BIRD285

When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin?
BOB STILGER.....295

Reflection and Visual Practice
JENNIFER SHEPHERD AND SAM BRADD.....303

A Learning Journey

Connecting self to planet

Stina Brown

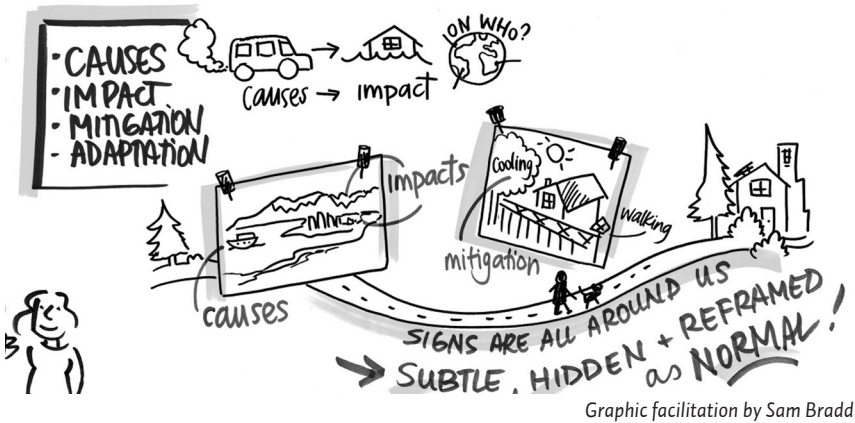
I was on a conference call last year with 600 other people, listening to (and taking part in) a conversation on “Shaping a New Narrative for a New Economy” with David Korten and Otto Scharmer. The number of times the word *mystical* came up surprised me; I’ve never heard the economy and the mystical discussed simultaneously. There are—in some conversations now—people discussing their inner and outer worlds as congruent, or at the very least related. The Dalai Lama has said, “We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.” This principle is showing itself in my meetings as well.

In late 2014, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives asked me to design a series of four full-day meetings over the course of two months as an engagement aspect of their Climate Justice Project (CJP), led by Marc Lee, Senior Economist. The CJP “asks how we can tackle global warming

with fairness and equality. Our challenge is to build a zero carbon society that also enhances our quality of life.” This series of “deliberative dialog sessions,” which took place in the Metro Vancouver area, was intended to advance the outreach work of the CJP and deepen understanding of effective engagement processes. It also held the potential for expanded activities across BC and Canada to spur climate action.¹

*“Strangers are more beautiful than I have been led to believe,”
“climate change is essentially just a people issue.” – CJP Participants*

In this chapter, we will explore how I, in the role of visual facilitator, together with Sam Bradd as a graphic recorder, guided a group of strangers toward self-determined transformation—connecting their individual experiences with each others’ to see themselves in relationship with the larger context of the planet and our collective future.



This experience demonstrates how design and visual facilitation can create the conditions to:

- Connect to and increase awareness of the self and others;
- Build community by creating the space for conversation;
- Enable deep and empathic dialog through shared and visual awareness; and
- Help participants find new hopeful ways of relating and taking action to move their own “worlds” into a future of their own making.

Connect: awaken to a relationship with yourself and others

There is a science to drawing out and managing a group's peak energy, creativity, and participation. I believe it begins with connection—awakening to a relationship with yourself and others. Once you are present, you are available to engage in conversation with others, to share, envision, discover, grow, etc. Visuals help anchor this process.

The process we were undertaking would need to be one that would engage the whole person, whole brain, and whole group. I would need to guide the group through a mix of reflection, dialog, self-organizing, presentations, and collaborations, with many of the outcomes emergent. This was an experiment, and the participants and leaders were in discovery mode together.

Before participants arrived at the first in-person meeting in mid-February 2015, we asked them to consider the following questions: “Why are you choosing to be a part of this conversation on climate justice?” “What are you passionate about?” “What are three to five values that guide your life?” I made these “data” into word clouds and posted them in the room on the first day.

Creating the conversation: participate, share, discover, envision, transition, un-limit

The first morning of our first day together, 40 of us sat in a wide circle with Sam's graphic recording wall set up nearby, and four flipchart pages filled with pre-meeting survey answers in the middle, oriented around a green and blue fabric Earth. On the wall, in those word clouds I'd created, participants could see each other's names and job areas, and just as significantly, their new colleagues' values, hopes and concerns.

Marc and I welcomed the group, discussed our roles, and gave an overview of our time together in this “learning journey” as well as the desired outcomes. These outcomes were to:

- **Learn** about the local connections between climate change and overall quality of life today and in the future
- **See** the “big picture” with up-to-date science and research
- **Explore** participants' personal and shared assumptions and values

- **Connect with others** to ask questions, envision the future, and share stories, concerns and ideas
- **Reflect on** the participants' own role in addressing climate change

We established “Group Agreements” to create transparency around forming group norms, articulate a way to build trust, and encourage self-regulation and inclusion. Setting our group agreements became one of our most significant keys to success; we posted them on the wall and re-read them every day. We noticed over the course of the four days that as long as the group kept their agreements, they thrived.

But group conversation is collaborative—and even with my interventions, at times the group struggled to stay balanced. If people no longer feel a sense of psychological safety (because others are breaking agreements), dialog loses its diverse viewpoints and energy plummets. I learned when you bring a widely varying group of people together—strangers who are diverse in almost every way—there is even more of a need to facilitate closely and wisely and to provide variation in activities.

Learning shared awareness: exploring assumptions and perspectives, activating knowledge

Participants' awareness about reality—and their role in creating reality—can be explored more fully through conversations that invite them to see their own assumptions more clearly, bring out their perspectives, and link new knowledge or understanding with existing knowledge. They begin to see a bigger picture, to expand or shift the way they relate to themselves, their actions, their community, and maybe even their world. Through the process of dialog (both internal and external), their systemic understanding of individual and collective action grows and creates new possibilities.

Hearing about the dire state of the world can surface a wide range of emotions in a group. We wanted to offer people a chance to reflect on their response to the question, “How are you feeling about climate change?” I provided a handout with two articles: “Climate Change and Emotions: How We Feel Matters More Than What We Know”² by David Ropeik³ and an article by the David Suzuki Foundation titled “Coping With Climate Change is a Family Matter.”⁴



Sam Bradd

On the wall, I put images of faces demonstrating a range of emotions (hopeful, interested, helpless, worried, sad, afraid, depressed, angry, disgusted), and asked the group to reflect on them and place Post-It notes beside the expressions that resonated with them.



Stina Brown

The comments people wrote and shared on the wall revealed, to our surprise, that the majority of them felt inspired and even happy; they were experiencing feeling part of the solution already, just by participating in these conversations. Even on their first day, participants came to see that they were not alone, their opinion mattered and this conversation was just the beginning. They learned strangers “are more beautiful” than they had been led to believe, and that “climate change is essentially just a people issue.”

At times I saw group members experience feelings of guilt, grief, anger, and frustration—even mild depression. This sparked deep compassion in me, related to my own waves of ups and downs in my personal awareness of climate change. I encouraged participants to ride the waves with self-care, knowing their emotions will change many times around this topic—and that it’s healthy to feel so deeply.

Relating differently to the world

A key element of our agenda became shifting the focus from becoming overwhelmed by the up-to-date research on global climate change and



Sam Bradd

our own emotions, toward understanding the skills and solutions that already exist—even locally—giving us what we needed to create a compelling future vision of what our world *could* look like.

I believe hope can be born in meetings where people can relate to each other as human beings and discover new things about themselves, each other, and the world along the way. And, as hope was born on the first day, regardless of what people's ideas of what the future would look like exactly, the group's focus quickly became mapping solutions.

Reflection

Sam's large live chart work over the four days, along with his daily debriefs throughout the process, brought additional rich layers of perspective, insight, reflection, memory, and integration of the learning—literally showing the group their progress and new history together. *The value of this dimension cannot be overstated!* I would often benefit from chats with Sam while the group was working; his presence added a set of facilitator eyes and ears on the process.

In Sam's words, “graphic recording made visible the learning and emotional transformation that was happening in the room. Looking back over an entire room whose walls were covered in pictures, the



Sam Bradd

group could see how far they'd come together. They could see their beginning questions—layered with information and presentations by guest experts—shift into the later stages of planning for action. It was all there. The graphics grounded their reflection, it was part of their notes, and they could take the pictures into their lives to keep the conversation going.”

Hope can be born in meetings where people can relate to each other as human beings and discover new things about themselves, each other, and the world along the way.

Participants learned how to work with people with opposing or differing views in small group table conversations. Report-outs made their words visible as Sam created graphic records. They shared ideas on what solutions could look like through hands-on neighborhood energy-mapping with templates, transportation planning with large maps, visioning with visual story-telling cards, and by conducting online research, sharing their findings with Post-It notes.

Rather than focusing on the “crisis” of climate change, we encouraged the group to explore what complete communities *could* look like, making it local, visual, holistic, and fun. Volunteers whom we named “synthesizers” took notes on the meta-learning of the group to help us reflect at the end of each day. Between sessions, participants had “homework,” such as talking with a friend or family member about what they were discovering, or taking photos of their neighborhood’s buildings, green spaces, or places they shopped for food to create a learning gallery for the group.

By the time we met for our last session, eight weeks after our first day together, there was a sense of ease in the room. The walls were covered in over 380 square feet of Sam’s graphic recordings! People were eager to catch up with each other, dive into the agenda, and meet the community “climate champions” who presented and stayed for deeper conversations. This was the day they had been waiting for from Day One, when we asked, “How do we take action in our homes, at our workplaces, in our communities, cities, province, as a country?” It was obvious: “regular folks” need to connect with people who are working every day on solutions to all of these issues—and succeeding. One “champion” spoke about change happening in a non-linear way, in “bursts,” and to illustrate described how Rosa Parks had just returned from a civil disobedience training where she learned about things like refusing to give up her seat on the bus when that fateful act became a spark of profound action and positive change.

In the closing circle, the fireman in the group commented that he was so grateful to have this group to talk with about these issues. He said someone would literally throw something at him if he tried to talk about these important topics at work. Others agreed that they had no other “safe space” to have these conversations, even in their families.



Sam Bradd

It became “cool to care” in this group of strangers who had evolved into a community over the course of two months and who were now prepared to be change-makers in their own communities.

It’s true, this was just the beginning of the conversation for many in this group. But now, they have a felt experience of becoming a community of people who cared enough to ask the hard questions, share and learn together, and take one step toward seeing and creating a future in which they can—and will—be active participants.

STINA BROWN enjoys spending most of her time reading, listening to music, sketching, writing, walking and in silent contemplation. Silence has so much to teach us. Sometimes she works with groups who want to take a quantum leap.

Stina is an artist who listens to her life, her clients, the present moment and the future. She designs and leads processes to create new shared awareness, expression, trust, vision and strategic plans. Stina also enjoys the role of “Artist in Residence” on longer retreats and prioritizes projects that enable the healing of humans’ relationship with Nature and each other. Through visual facilitation and teaching, Stina invests in people and the planet with local and international clients. Stina lives in Vancouver, BC Canada and is Super Auntie to six amazing kids. www.stinabrown.com stina@stinabrown.com

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