

# 留白 (Liubai) at a Hushed Sanctuary: Layered Reflections on an Artist Residency

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Figure 1: A snow-covered frozen lake and forest, captured and processed in black and white to emphasise empty space.

## Abstract

Considering that silence has long been intertwined with ritual and spiritual practice, we explore how digital technology might support silence thereby allowing space for reflection, attunement, and meaning-making. How does the Chinese aesthetic concept of *liubai* (留白, “empty space”) open up new ways of designing for noticing and reflection? In this paper, we present lived experiences of shared silence and meditation within a one-month artist residency. By weaving together field study with interview data, first-person inquiry and artistic artefacts, we offer empirical insights at the intersection of art, spirituality, and HCI. Through this study, the residency became a site to both experiment with artistic practice and explore silence as a positive and creative practice for attentive noticing. We discuss dwelling in the in-between, the art of *liubai* in design, a technical inward turn, and posthuman perspectives to inform a design agenda for techno-spirituality with broader implications for future research in HCI.

## CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI; HCI theory, concepts and models; Field studies.**



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## Keywords

Liubai, silence, noticing, first-person methods, meditation, slow technology, art practice, lived experience, artist residencies

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## 1 Introduction

*“How much better is silence; the coffee cup, the table.  
How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-  
bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here  
for ever with bare things, this coffee cup, this knife, this  
fork, things in themselves, myself being myself.”*

– Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* ([81], P181-182)

As the quote above illustrates, silence is an intrinsically human experience whose presence can sharpen and renew even the most ordinary things. Silence has long been intertwined with ritual and spiritual practice (e.g., during meditation or prayer). In recent years, research in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) has increasingly focused on techno-spirituality [7], exploring how technology can facilitate and support religious and spiritual (R/S) experiences or transcendental encounters (e.g., [11, 15, 53]). In particular, there is a growing interest in HCI work around designing technologies to support meditation and mindfulness. For example, Markum and Toyama [55] advised against using strategies that simulate transcendent experiences or states, since they are often viewed as secondary or even distracting from the primary purpose of meditation. Their

argument emphasised that the point is often *not to design* [6] more features or interventions especially when these do not align with practitioners' underlying values. This resonates with the notion of slow technology [34], which cultivates qualities such as presence and reflection rather than acceleration and efficiency. In parallel, we see studies exploring intersections of R/S and other domains (e.g., health and wellbeing [67]) not only within R/S settings but also as inspirations for design in broader contexts [54, 56]. Both the R/S perspective and slow technology invite us to reconsider how digital technology might support 'pause' and silence thereby allowing space for reflection, attunement, and meaning-making which can have a positive effect on human wellbeing.

Artist-in-residence (AiR) programmes are increasingly recognized as valuable spaces for situated, inclusive, and experimental forms of inquiry [25]. This paper contributes to this discussion by reporting insights from a one-month AiR programme in a remote countryside setting. The programme was uniquely designed by an artistic organization with limited Wi-Fi access, collective silent activities such as meditation, and an encouragement to use alternative ways to communicate (analogue instead of digital i.e. mobile chat apps). Building on previous work [31], we found that silence can refamiliarise oneself and provide possibilities for our (individual and collective) observations. Here, we extend this view by drawing on lived experiences of shared silence and meditation within an AiR context. For the first author, who participated as both an artist and a researcher, this residency became a site to both experiment with artistic practice and explore how silence (as a positive and creative practice), as well as attentive noticing might inform a future design agenda for techno-spirituality in HCI.

We therefore explore how AiRs can serve as sites of epistemic inquiry in design, generating knowledge through situated, embodied, and artistic practices. Specifically, we focus on how silence can be reimagined as an interaction paradigm. We believe that silence is also a form of interaction (not only auditory but also visual) rather than a void that needs to be filled. Building on recent explorations [31], we ask *what if silence itself can be understood as a medium for communication and expression and how could it enrich the design of interactive technologies for supporting R/S practice and wider wellbeing?* We connect with previous works that bring R/S practice and philosophy into design [1, 2] – in our case, meditation and the Chinese aesthetic concept of *liubai* (留白, literally “empty space”) [28, 36, 82] – to articulate how restrictions on technology use, collective meditation, and artistic improvisation open up new ways for noticing and enriching experiences. Our contributions (C) are threefold:

- **C1:** Positioning artist residencies as sites for situated and embodied inquiry in HCI, highlighting their potential to support arts-based approaches that remain less visible and valued in the field.
- **C2:** Framing the art of *liubai* as a design space through empirical reflections and interviews that map out multi-faceted understandings of silence, pause, and noticing.
- **C3:** Advancing a reflective design orientation that values slowness and alternative modes of making and thinking for techno-spiritual and posthuman research within fast-paced research and technological environments.

## 2 Prelude

### 2.1 The Arts and HCI

The intersection of the Arts and HCI has long been established. Integrating artistic practices into HCI has shifted from a methodological inspiration (e.g., [26, 37, 38, 40]) to a fundamental conceptual challenge to the field's values, purposes, and expected outcomes [24, 66]. While some work framed collaboration and experimentation in AiR programmes as opportunities to map new design spaces and envision novel artefacts through material explorations (e.g., wearables [74], clay 3D Printing [30], and through craft-based explorations [65]), the third-wave of HCI has positioned AiR as a critical site for solving wicked, ambiguous, and poorly defined problems [16]. For example, Snooks and Richard [68] illustrate how art residencies can be integrated into world-building processes, providing alternative modes of immersion, narrative exploration, and speculative design.

The capacity for art to navigate such abstraction stems from its role as a means of *defamiliarization* – a concept developed by Victor Shklovsky in 1917 – a technique that disrupts the automatism of perception and opens up new ways of engaging with the world [8, 26]. Therefore, artistic engagement is not merely about generating new ideas, but about fundamentally changing how people perceive and engage with the world. Within this context, artist residencies serve as an artistic strategy of estrangement, prompting researchers and participants to reconsider habitual practices and assumptions.

By applying this strategy of estrangement, AiR programmes offer more than just artistic outputs. While they often require artists to create and share their work with the host institution, they have traditionally embraced a more open and exploratory nature of engagement. These residencies have expanded the scope for addressing design challenges by inspiring new directions in HCI or engineering research, and highlighting embodied, performative, and aesthetic modes of engagement [24]. They are valued for cultivating communal, sociopolitical, and aesthetic elements of artistic practices, aspects that HCI research has not always been attentive to [16]. Our work takes this opportunity to introduce a distinct experience of AiR to HCI: the residency presented in this paper was characterised by its open-ended structure and the integration of meditative practices. In this context, meditation was performed as a form of reflective and embodied engagement rather than a certain type of religious ritual. The emphasis on silence, freedom, and self-directed exploration distinguishes our residency from more socially-oriented and output-driven models, offering a unique perspective on how creative practices and HCI research could overlap in ways that expand both methodological and experiential possibilities.

### 2.2 Types of Silence

**2.2.1 Silence as Creative Practice.** Silence in the arts can be a generative medium that redefines absence. From live performance (e.g., Marina Abramović's *Seven Minutes of Collective Silence*<sup>1</sup>) to participatory installation (e.g., Enni-Kukka Tuomala's *Empathy Echo Chamber*<sup>2</sup>), silence is established as a relational force that

<sup>1</sup>Seven Minutes of Collective Silence by Marina Abramović: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/article/2024/jun/28/marina-abramovic-glastonbury-festival-seven-minute-silence>

<sup>2</sup>Empathy Echo Chamber by Enni-Kukka Tuomala: <https://amosrex.fi/en/exhibitions/enni-kukka-tuomala-empathy-echo-chamber-fridays-with-pre-booking/>

opens spaces for empathy and transformation collectively. Beyond interpersonal interactions, silence in sound art facilitates audience transition to a profound inner world. Inspired by Zen Buddhism, John Cage's *4'33"* reframed silence as a state of active listening rather than absence [42], while Arvo Pärt employed silence in his minimalist music to evoke a sense of spirituality<sup>3</sup>. These experiences align with Thomas Merton's notion of *creative silence* — a positive form of silence that nurtures self-discovery and spiritual growth, in contrast to *negative silence* that may result in confusion or anxiety ([12], p.73). By positioning silence as an intentional practice, we report on the interesting and challenging aspects of collective silent meditation practices during the residency.

**2.2.2 Silence as Language.** Beyond artistic practice, silence functions as a powerful form of communication. In traditional Chinese painting, the technique of *liubai* (留白, literally “empty space”) demonstrates how blankness is generative *per se* in visual language [36]. For instance, Ma Yuan's paintings from the Southern Song dynasty used expansive blankness to provoke contemplation of nature's vastness while opening onto a broader spiritual realm [28]. This beauty of *liubai* in Chinese aesthetics can be found in *Laozi's Tao Te Ching*, which stated that 大音希聲, 大象無形 (“the great music is without sound, the great form is without shape”), suggesting that silence embodies limitless possibilities and imagination beyond reality [82]. In contemporary contexts, however, this language of the “unsaid” has transitioned into a strategic tool of resistance. During the “White Paper Protests,”<sup>4</sup> the absence of text on paper became a strong signifier of anger against censorship, illustrating how invisibility and silence are inherently relational, situated, and political [23, 48].

This relational quality was also found through the Japanese notion of *Ma* (間) as a philosophy of sensing the “between-ness” [1]. Akama argued that while ‘voice’ was often given more weight than silence, in both everyday life and design practices, attuning to *Ma* reframed silence as an interval that structured interaction and offered new opportunities for meaning-making. All pauses in writing/reading/thinking/dialogue, and moments of silence, can be seen as an alternative form of language.

However, we also recognise the inherent paradox of silence. As Sontag argued, pure silence is both conceptually and practically impossible, as it inevitably exists in a dialectical relationship with a form of speech or an element in a dialogue [70]. Our work inhabits this very tension: while we rely on textual discourse to communicate our findings, we also use visual and non-verbal cues to convey our interpretations of silence. In this way, we try to explore how to present it within HCI research.

**2.2.3 Silence as Culture.** The cultural contextualisation of silence highlights a noteworthy design space in the field of HCI, a space that has yet to be fully explored. In Finland, research on the concepts of *hiljainen* (“silent”) / *hiljaisuus* (“silence”) identifies different meanings between (i) ‘active silence’, (ii) ‘active relaxed silence’, (iii) ‘passive silence’, and (iv) ‘passive active silence’ [10]. Silence is perceived as a way of preserving harmony with nature,

oneself, and others, and is embedded within inherited communication norms and everyday practice for Finns [58]. Similar values are echoed globally, where silence is seen as a marker of social wisdom. In English, proverbs such as “Silence is golden” and “Still waters run deep” suggest that silence holds inherent dignity and depth. Resonating with this perspective, Chinese culture also explores the intricate relationship between speech and silence: 君子之道, 或出或, 或默或, 是非一途也<sup>5</sup> (“in practicing the Way of the noble person, one may take office or live in seclusion, keep silent or express views.”) These cultural parallels show that silence is a sophisticated social skill that values appropriateness and subtlety over immediate functional clarity.

Moreover, silence is intrinsically tied to R/S practices and rituals, particularly in meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Within these contexts, silence is not perceived as a passive absence, but as a necessary “clearing” that facilitates practice. For some, moments of silence are preferred in group meditation [45], or in self-reliant meditation [21]. For others, silence makes room to hear God's responses during prayer [69], or to “cultivate oneself in silence” in mindfulness practice [41]. Such pursuits suggest that spiritual seekers, across varying traditions, often long for a silence that surpasses boundaries.

## 2.3 Slow Technology for Noticing

Hallnäs and Redström first introduced *Slow Technology* as a design philosophy that foregrounds reflection and mindfulness in interaction, rather than efficiency and speed [34]. A basic principle of slow technology is to amplify the presence of things, turning tools into objects that invite contemplation. Research prototypes such as the *Reflexive Printer* [43] and *Photobox* [61] exemplify this by intentionally adjusting the rhythm of interaction, creating space for reflection, anticipation, or pause.

More recently, the notion of slowing down has gained greater attraction in HCI, especially during and after the COVID-19 epidemic, when many people were forced to reconfigure their daily rhythms [3]. Studies showed that people welcomed opportunities to slow down, often framing it as a chance to rest physically and mentally, and in some cases chose to sustain slower lifestyles beyond lockdown [18, 52, 57, 78]. While the concept is not universally favoured, these accounts highlight slowness as a phenomenon worth designing for, especially as a counterpoint to accelerationist tendencies in digital life. In this sense, slow technology research has increasingly overlapped with mindful design, where the goal is not merely to extend engagement but to cultivate presence, awareness, and reflective encounters. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on problem-solving outcomes [2], design practices focus on making room for mindfulness and attentiveness to the here-and-now.

HCI researchers have turned to *noticing* as a complementary and parallel orientation with some advocating for the ability to be slow with *noticing* [51]. Following Tsing's framing [75], noticing is an analytical sensibility as well as a methodological involvement in ethnographic research, and researchers in HCI have embraced noticing as a creative process and commitment in design practice: from Liu et al. [46]'s articulation of noticing as a design method, to positioning noticing as a stance against techno-solutionism [48] and

<sup>3</sup>The Silence And Awe Of Arvo Pärt: <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/the-silence-and-awe-of-arvo-part/>

<sup>4</sup>White Paper Protests: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022\\_COVID-19\\_protests\\_in\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_COVID-19_protests_in_China)

<sup>5</sup><https://www.aixiang.com/data/145151.html>

using artefacts to help notice human-nature entanglements [44]. Toolkits such as the *Methods for Noticing Workbook* [47] put this commitment into concrete exercises, helping designers cultivate attention and explore new ways of attuning to the environment. This approach is also incorporated into the first author’s practice during the residency programme, as detailed in Section 3.1.

We believe that noticing is closely linked to silence, where quietude and intentional silence can open up alternative modes of focus. Recent research on silence in somatic design illustrates how silent practices can enhance perception and reveal otherwise invisible bodily and social dynamics that can enrich design processes [31]. In this paper, we bring silence, noticing, and slow technology together to explore alternative foundations for interaction design, centering experiential qualities such as reflection, attunement, and presence. Yet, we have not seen studies that explicitly tie these notions together, let alone ones that draw on lived experience of individuals. Through this paper, we offer a unique case that weaves these concepts together and grounds them in lived experience of artistic practice in an AiR setting. Now, we invite you to join us on this journey, slow-ly...

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Field Work

The first author adopted a first-person perspective, drawing on *in-the-wild* approaches to investigate the impacts of technology during the residency [17]. She actively participated in daily activities, observed and documented these activities to inform her research. Integrating the practice of ‘noticing’ into the meditation sessions, and following the *Methods for Noticing Workbook* [47], she experimented with different methods of noticing (i.e., *Global noticing*, *Panoramic noticing*, and *Sense-based noticing*) during both personal and collective sessions.

Alongside these embodied practices, she kept a personal journal throughout the residency. This served as both a tool for data collection and reflective practice. She recorded in a more informal and spontaneous way, habitually following intuition rather than “generating” data. Entries included: **daily thoughts** – fragmented observations and emotional states emerging in the flow of everyday life; **creative sparks** – inspirations or ideas, often related to her artistic possibilities or design concepts, and **post-meditation reflections** – longer writings on how different sessions of meditation and noticing practices shaped her perceptions and sense of self in relation to the residency environment (see Figure 2, right). The act of writing itself supplemented by collaging and sketching, strengthened her memory, provided a structure for self-reflection, and offered traces of life at the AiR that could be analysed later in dialogue with her co-authors.

#### 3.2 Interviews

The first author also conducted semi-structured interviews in the final week of the programme with other artists (see Table 1 for demographic information) who attended at least five meditation sessions. Participation was entirely voluntary. These one-to-one interviews lasted from 30 to 120 minutes, focusing on participants’ lived experiences of meditation. Prompts explored specific meditation moments during the residency, bodily sensations, reflected

Participant	Gender	Age	Region	Tradition
P1	W	30s	RUS	Yoga
P2	W	50s	USA	Buddhist
P3	W	50s	CAN	Quaker
P4	W	60s	GBR	Yoga
P5	M	40s	AUS	Yoga
P6	W	20s	CHN	Spiritual not Religious
P7	W	30s	TWN	Protestant
P8	W	20s	CHN	Buddhist

Table 1: Participant Demographics

on meditation as part of a creative or spiritual practice, and articulating what might have felt different in the specific context of the residency. With consent, all conversations were audio-recorded, and later analysed together with the team.

#### 3.3 Artworks

Rather than from a predetermined plan, the first author ultimately produced two improvisational works (see Section 4.4) that emerged from her responses to available materials, reflections, and her contemplative practice. Together, the artworks complemented the fieldwork and interviews by offering a tangible and artistic dimension to the inquiry. While noticing practices and journaling generated experiential accounts, and interviews provided diverse perspectives from fellow artists, the artworks transformed reflection into aesthetic artefacts that crystallised the inquiry into new forms.

#### 3.4 Positionality

The three authors brought complementary positionalities to this paper. Next, we provide a description of our background and collaboration to support transparency and help contextualise the motivations for our exploration.

The first author Xiaran (Sarah) is an artist and doctoral researcher with an interest in the subfield of techno-spirituality in HCI, combining inquiry with artistic practice. She shared her first-person experience as an Asian woman. Her personal engagement with meditation during the residency resonated with her Protestant Christian background, shaping both the artistic outputs and the writing process for this project. The second author (Caroline) is an interaction design researcher interested in exploring the potential of creative practice, embodied interaction and spirituality for designing for R/S and wider wellbeing. Her contribution to this paper is informed by her perspective as a European woman with an artistic background and her spiritual practice, which involves meditation, yoga and chanting. The third author (Andrés) is an agnostic atheist Latin American man, who contributed methodological expertise on first-person methods in HCI and design research.

Together, these perspectives enabled a pluralistic account that situated creative practice and meditation as intertwined dimensions of the residency experience.

#### 3.5 Reflexive Analysis

As a team, we had bi-weekly meetings to collectively analyse the creative materials (artworks, journals, and visual experiments)



**Figure 2: The first author’s workspace at the residency, including computer, phone, journal, and other materials (left); field recording during the phone-free weekend in the forest (centre); one journal sample with personal thoughts, a printed photo and diary entry (right).**

through reflective conversations. Co-authors annotated the materials, prompted questions, and wrote short interpretations to aid in make sense of the work created by the first author. We also drew from feminist viewpoints [4, 5] and micro-phenomenological approaches [59, 64] to prevent premature interpretation or generalisation and allow meanings to develop through layered thought. These conversations enabled the first author to deepen her reflection and to identify important influences (reported in Section 4.4) that she had previously overlooked.

Interview data were analysed using affinity diagramming [49]. After independently note-taking, we identified themes and digitised the results on a Miro board for further collaborative synthesis. These processes allowed us to examine the data from multiple perspectives, treating journals, interviews, and artworks as “entangled threads” rather than independent sources. This iterative approach ensured our findings remained grounded in the first author’s lived experience of the residency.

## 4 Residency as a Site for Reflection (C1)

### 4.1 Residency Overview

The AiR programme was situated on the edge of a forest in rural Finland, embedded in a cultural context that itself shaped the experience. The annual winter session, titled *Silence–Awareness–Existence*, runs exclusively from January to March. It was a geographically and experientially isolated environment from the world. The Wi-Fi in the residency centre was deliberately shut down the day after everyone arrived. This organized disconnect from technology encouraged the residents to slow down and reconnect with nature in order to remain curious of the small, daily sparks of inspiration that emerged within the one-month time-frame. Silent meditations were scheduled daily as 30-minute sessions every morning and evening, and “Silent Weekends” were organised at the end of the week to invite everyone to remain silent for longer periods of time, make as little noise as possible and, enjoy stillness together. This distinguished the residency from other AiR programmes by actively structuring conditions that supported mindfulness and solitary introspection while simultaneously inviting participants to navigate unpredictability, whether through shared silence practices,

the uncontrollability of natural forces, or the self-directed rhythms of creative exploration. Beyond the structured sessions, residents were encouraged to self-organise for creative and outdoor activities such as hiking in the nearby national park or stargazing. Designed as broad, adaptable, and open, the residency programme scaffolded a journey in which made it possible for *silence* and *presence* to become not only possible, but also important to the individual and collective creative practices.

The programme prioritised artist autonomy: there was no pressure to produce any artwork, no exhibition requirements, and no expectations of tangible outputs. This contrasts with other AiR programmes that “*may overemphasise the output of finished artworks, favouring work with tightly-scoped and pre-defined problem framings [16].*” In contrast, the framework for this residency was closer to CERN’s programme: “*giving artists and scientists the time and space simply to explore and discover with no requirement for output.*” Within this open framework, genuine questions and heartfelt expressions could emerge as discussed in the following Sections.

### 4.2 Motivation

From here on, Sarah<sup>6</sup> will use the pronoun ‘I’ to convey my experience as an artist participating in the residency programme.

#### Vignette 1

*Realizing the importance of these gaps in life and observing myself consciously within them have been a fascinating experience. This awareness drives my frequent return to AiR programmes. Reflecting on my past residencies, from bustling Shanghai to the isolated landscapes of Iceland, those stays helped me recalibrate my state of being. These experiences allowed me to recharge and to spark creativity by immersing myself in unfamiliar environments. A key motivation for joining this AiR programme has been the desire to disconnect from the routine and place myself in a fresh setting, a form*

<sup>6</sup>In line with autoethnographical practice, the first author will tell her story in first person.

*of intentional dislocation. I eagerly anticipated this residency as a pause in my doctoral journey – a gap, a breath, an opportunity for digital fasting.*

### 4.3 From Intention to Improvisation

My initial plan was to produce an interactive installation as a continuation of the meditative practice I developed during my doctoral studies. I envisioned turning biometrical data (collected via a digital device during meditation) into real-time visualizations to project in the meditation hall. The residency offered an ideal testbed for me to test it as a prototype as it had available projectors and digital equipment on site.

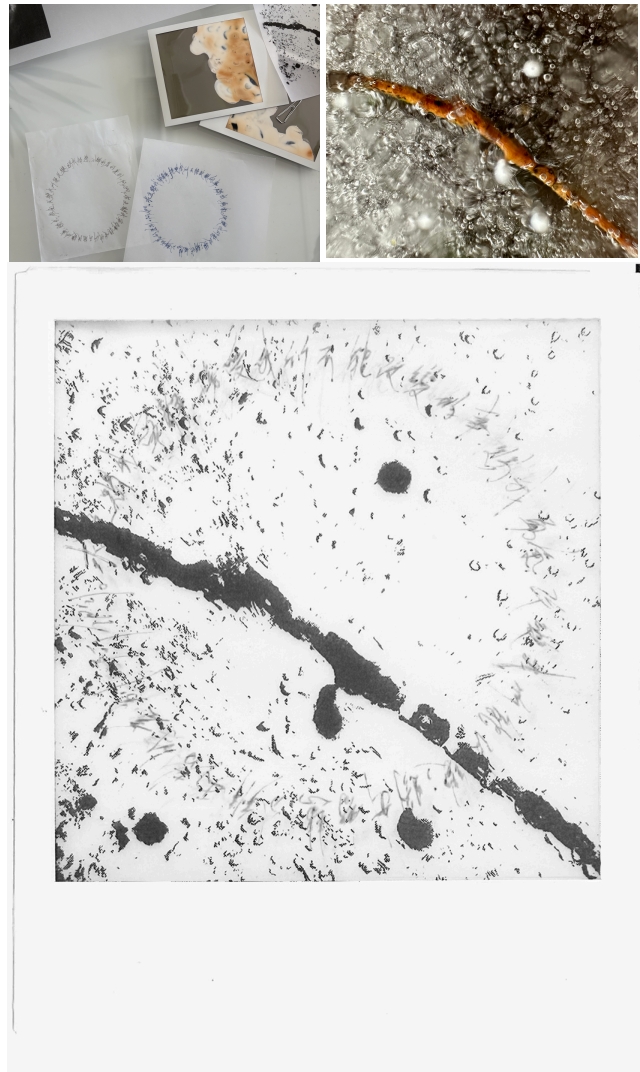
However, the nature of the residency emphasises silence, reflection, and openness to uncertainty, which gradually shifted my trajectory. I began to question whether implementing a predetermined prototype aligned with the deeper purpose for joining the residency. After having conversations with other residents and participating in collective meditation, I realised that I did not want to use the residency merely as a backdrop for testing interactive technology. Instead, I chose to embrace improvisation, working with what was available at hand. In this process, chance, the limitation of available materials, and responsiveness to the environment became central to my creative practice. For instance, I had brought a set of Polaroid photos only as bookmarks, but later, these photos became raw material for one of the artistic artefacts. The shift from planning an installation to allowing materials and embodied experience to guide my art-making process also echoes the concept of *bricolage*. This orientation resonated more with the residency's theme: "Silence–Awareness–Existence", where letting things unfold was itself a practice contributing to artistic practice/process.

### 4.4 Attuning Through Layers

The two artefacts: *The Subterranean Mute* (a series of re-worked Polaroids) and *The Snow in March* (a short video piece, duration: 5:00 min.) both became ways to translate my meditation experiences and of the whole AiR journey into tangible artistic forms. Next, I describe these two artefacts in detail, outlining the making process, and how each reflects different aspects of my experience.

**The Subterranean Mute** were carefully peeled, layered with tracing paper, prints (which were digitally edited in Photoshop to adjust contrast and framing) and my handwriting. Their qualities, such as transparency, texture, and even warmth, echoed the sensibility of my meditation experience. For example, a handwritten *Serenity Prayer* was inscribed within a circle, layered over a black-and-white landscape photo printed on tracing paper (see Figure 3). The circle served not only as a compositional technique, but also as a spiritual symbol of continuity and infinity, mirroring the walking meditation circle path at the residency site. Therefore, layering became both a technique and a metaphor, expressing the circularity of meditation and the multi-dimensionality of silence.

This process of layering and the aesthetic qualities of the Polaroids were further reflected upon in a session with Caroline who interpreted the work from her R/S experience of practicing meditation. The vignette below, highlights how creative engagement with materials and the resulting artwork (i.e., *The Subterranean Mute*) provides an alternative for sense making of meditation experience,



**Figure 3: Work-in-progress documentation of *The Subterranean Mute*: A Polaroid in its original state and the prayer handwritten on tracing paper (top left), a digital photograph of a branch frozen in ice (top right), final composition layering prayer and photograph (bottom).**

helping surface a sense of entanglement with the environment and the more-than-human.

#### Vignette 2

*The shapes and patterns in the four Polaroids remind me of phenomena associated with both nature and the body. I can relate to what is represented as to me, it says something about the concept of oneness with the environment, which is a core concept in my own spiritual practice. In our discussion, the Polaroids helped us articulate feelings and sensations about meditation*



Figure 4: Three stills from *The Snow in March*.

*practice, which we both practice and which we found hard to describe using words alone... The creative process was intriguing; the images were carefully created using 'failed' Polaroids she had brought with her to the residency, illustrating how she embraced chance, spontaneity and uncertainty. I liked how she used layering and framed the Polaroids as fragments of abstract landscapes and 'memories' of her feelings during meditation. Her creative process and the final set say something about 'attuning with' and 'becoming one' with the environment. It is clear to me how this is further explored in her film *The Snow in March*. – Reflection from Caroline following a discussion with Sarah.*

**The Snow in March** embodies the interplay of fragments, both visually and verbally. The aesthetics of *liubai* was given special attention in the video (see Figure 4). Accompanied by subtitles and voice-over, the black-and-white minimalist footage invited viewers to dwell on the blank spaces and stillness of each scene, and to sense the evocative power of what is left unsaid and unseen. The video encouraged an attunement to the vastness and created spaces “in between”: between viewer and artist, between words and visuals, between oneself and larger entities such as nature. My process of drafting scripts and translating from my native language to English was less about direct communication than mediation, capturing fragmented thoughts and reshaping them into a layered poetic narrative that responds to snow as a manifestation of nature’s blank spaces, as noted in the video’s subtitles: “*I feel that the snow-covered world is like a tranquil landscape painting full of liubai.*”

Through these works, I have been able to share the indefinable experiences of calmness, patience, and spiritual “*liubai*” I experienced in collective meditation and silence. They provided me with alternative translation of the abstract energy that was felt at the residency, and the ambiguity of that process made a significant addition to the feelings and sensations that were constrained by words in the interviews and my journal.

As I continued my reflective conversation with the team, I realised that my artistic sense was subtly influenced by my mother, a traditional Chinese painter who used ink and Chinese pigment for her nature-themed paintings. The technique of using *liubai* embodies the aesthetic concept of 虚實相生 (“the virtual and the real generate each other”) with traditional Chinese philosophy [82]. My mother frequently used this technique in her landscape paintings. One of her works in Figure 5 shows where the sky and the sea are

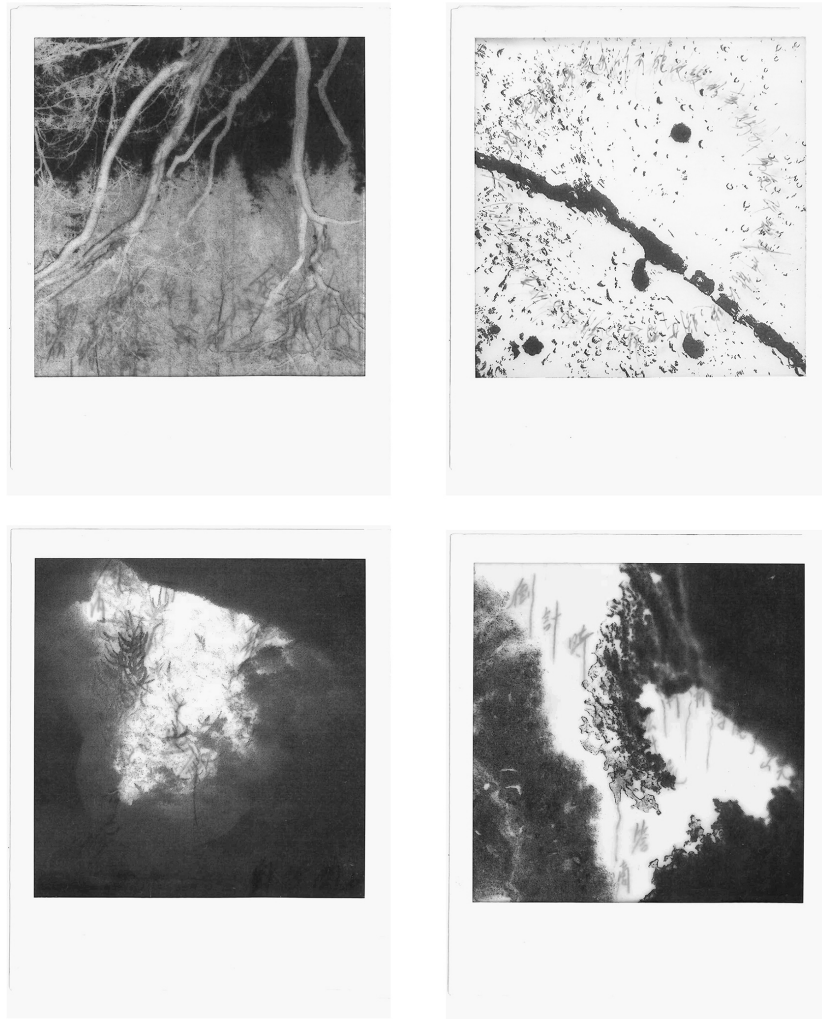


Figure 5: Mother’s Chinese painting.

represented by blank spaces. This aesthetic has influenced the way I structured and interpreted my artwork.

## 5 Liubai

Now, before you continue, we invite you to take a deep b r e a t h and pause to slowly observe the visual content on the next page.



**Figure 6:** *The Subterranean Mute.*

## 6 Importance of Silence as a Practice (C2)

### 6.1 Entering Silence

**6.1.1 Noticing in Silence Alone.** Silence can be a transformative experience, sharpening awareness of the here-and-now and enabling what I describe as ‘multi-layered noticing.’ In the solitude of the residency environment, I became increasingly attuned to the subtle “signals” and traces embedded in daily life and the surrounding landscape. When walking alone in the forest, I could walk at my own rhythm, pausing for as long as I wished. I can recall in my journal observing observing the texture of tree bark, snow-covered stones, frozen ponds, and the delicate long lichens hanging from branches, all of these invited intentional observation. Such practices of noticing were not tasks but small rituals of attentiveness that gradually shaped my perception. I call them rituals because observing subtle details has become part of a structured and repetitive set of tasks a skill in my daily journey of exploration (not just in an AiR context), allowing me to enter a state of heightened sensitivity to my surroundings as if I switched to another mode of perception.

The act of field recording further amplified another layer of my experiences. The soundscape became magnified through my noise-cancelling headphones: including the distant calls of birds, the soft scattering of snow falling from treetops, the wind threading through the forest, and even the incidental rustle of my clothing (like the scene at the beginning of my video, see Figure 7 (left)). I found that snow, as a material, absorbed much of the surrounding sound, creating the particular quietness of winter. Yet this tranquility is never an absolute silence. At times, I would close my eyes, suspending visual input to focus more fully on my sense of hearing. These moments were often interrupted by the cold but they were among the most enjoyable aspects of my daily practice because they made me feel present in nature, as if every pore of my body were open and connected to the world.

The residency encouraged this orientation toward noticing. To prevent people from losing their way in the forest, the organizers had tied strips of red and blue tape to trees as markers. My eyes continuously scanned for these subtle signs during walking. This small act of navigation showed how silence reorganised my attention: rather than being guided by conversation or a shared pace, I was orienting myself through a dialogue with my senses, balancing between visual cues, tactile impressions, and acoustic awareness. Compared with walking with others, moving alone in silence expanded both temporal and spatial freedom, offering more sensitivity to my embodied presence in place.

**6.1.2 Noticing in Shared Silence.** Shared silence introduced another layer of noticing, in which attentiveness extended beyond the self to include others and the environment simultaneously. One memorable example was a 15-km silent walk that happened with five other residents during a silent weekend (see Figure 7 (right)). Without speaking, we collectively coordinated our movement: directions were negotiated through gestures, exaggerated facial expressions were used to draw attention to interesting sights, and snacks were silently shared and passed around. Some of this was recorded in my journal, and some was later recalled in reflective conversations with the team. Several times, an intentional vocal sound was made to warn of approaching cars, but otherwise

communication relied on embodied cues. The rhythm of the group emerged organically when one person stopped to admire a scenery or take a photo, others also paused, attuning to both the landscape and each other’s pace. In this way, silence became a medium of coordination and care, echoing soma design principles that foreground felt experience as a legitimate form of knowledge [32, 59].

Yet maintaining collective silence was a shared effort itself. For the group meditation, silence was punctuated by unexpected sounds, which include the clearing of throats, the swallowing of saliva, or the suppressed laughter of the “laughing session.” Such moments made me acutely aware of how silence is co-produced, requiring not only restraint but also an increased sensitivity to the sonic presence of others. Sometimes I found myself deliberately holding my breath so as not to disrupt the fragile silence as documented in my journal: “... tonight, my throat suddenly became very itchy, and unable to cough, I had to suppress it. I made some sounds that were barely audible (I guess?). Then I wondered, what exactly is my meditation?... Is the challenge from others precisely about how to remain unaffected by them...”. Interestingly, during the “laughing session (see Vignette 5),” the difficulty of resisting laughter underscored how deeply “in sync” we had become.

For many participants, silent encounters took on sacred or even transcendental qualities. As P2 reflected in the interview: “*In thought, you can travel... The whole point in meditation is to silence all that travel. And be exactly where you are now, in this very space, in this very body, doing this very thing around these people... It’s a sacred space in there. You would never have an argument in there, or curse. It’s a space for silence.*” Others described their experiences in bodily or visual terms. For P6, meditation involved an “energy flow down the spine” accompanied by warmth and joy, while P8 reported seeing rivers or sparks with eyes closed. In these ways, silence became more than the absence of sound. Less (audible) talk or noise revealed richer awareness of bodies, environments, and intersubjective connections. Therefore, silence functioned as both communication and as a medium of exchange, emphasising its creative and spiritual potential.

#### Vignette 3

*One Friday night, we heard a mysterious “calling” from the frozen lake near our residency site, and we spontaneously decided to walk closer to listen. It was the moment when the lake, after being frozen for the entire winter, was beginning to wake up: the ice on the lake began to crack and melt, sending amplified signals through the thick surface. The sound was indescribable, almost like strange transmissions from a UFO! I went back to my room and took my recorder with me. Since the recording required us to remain silent, it felt as if we were meditating in the midst of ice and snow. As soon as the recorder started, some people sat quietly on the wooden platform by the lake, while others stood motionless until the recording was finished. From time to time, we rotated the headphones so that everyone could listen more closely. Before we knew it, it was already midnight, and our silent weekend had begun. The transition felt natural, almost ritualistic.*



Figure 7: The opening scene of *The Snow in March* (left); one moment of pause captured during the 15-km silent walk.

## 6.2 Silence Transcends Language

Silence reveals and preserves the ineffable, while simultaneously creating space for others to participate in meaning-making. As P7 remarked in the interview about artistic practice, “*You can’t say too much in a piece of work. Art is like a hint to give the audience space to think.*” Similarly, P3 described writing as leaving space for the reader to imagine.

As described in the previous subsections, creative and positive silences can foster self-awareness and environmental awareness while providing alternate non-verbal communication methods. Silence, on the other hand, not only offers a supportive setting for noticing, but it works similar to the visual blank spaces, which convey far more than words or text. It suggests a generative space where the unspoken and the unknown emerge. The second Chinese character in 留白 (liubai) – 白 (bai) – also denotes the colour white, symbolises the transition from visual reality to an inner state of mind<sup>7</sup>, echoing how silence creates a symbolic opening that transcends language.

In the context of meditation, participants also articulated silence as a temporal and affective gift. For P5, “*Silence is a gift*” seldom found in everyday life. Another participant likened it to “*an eclipse... the moment between inhale and exhale.*” These metaphors emphasize silence as a necessary pause, a transitional state that resists being filled, yet is essential for sustaining rhythm and balance. In this sense, the experience of silence is like the blank space in the canvas of life. There is no need to fill it all up, but instead, leave a little more room and leeway...

## 7 Reflection on Technology (C3)

### 7.1 Personal Encounter

A core element of the residency programme was a restriction on technology use, intended to foster a contemplative atmosphere. By limiting Internet access and arranging silent days, the programme revealed tensions with participants’ habitual patterns of technology use and the dependency on connectivity. In practice, however, such constraints were not absolute. For example, while the residency provided a shared computer with Internet access, the reservation system and limited Internet resources often forced participants to

seek faster alternatives, such as borrowing mobile hotspots from others or purchasing expensive data packages. Since I own a local SIM card with unlimited data, I occasionally shared my mobile hotspot with fellow participants. These small deviations revealed the tension between the intended design of the residency and the deep-rooted need for constant connection. Such dynamics were openly reflected upon during weekly group meetings, where participants discussed their struggles, confessions of dependency, and the process of attuning to a slower rhythm of life there.

To better embrace the purpose of this AiR programme I tried my own strategies for disconnecting. During one silent weekend, I purposefully avoided using my phone (I placed it face down with Airplane Mode, see Figure 2 left), forcing a temporary disconnect from the network. In my journal (see Figure 2 right), I wrote: “*Time feels abundant!... I climbed up to a small tree-house in the forest. Under the swaying, dappled sunlight (and slightly distracted by the 3D sound of the birds), I read for what felt like a long time, until it got too cold.*” What stood out most was the sensation of losing track of (digital) time and instead attuning to my own bodily rhythms (e.g., waking up at my own pace instead of using the phone alarm). I was able to listen, feel and enter the moment in a way that felt deeply alive after being freed from digital distractions. In the midst of that peaceful journey, an unexpected letter found its way to me. The following vignette by Andrés tells the story of this little surprise.

#### Vignette 4

*“When Sarah left for the AiR programme, I was curious how this retreat on Silence-Awareness-Existence would turn out for her. Would she be able to (fully) disconnect? But perhaps most importantly, would she be able to find what she went there for in the first place? I was well aware of not interrupting her experience while she was getting to know other fellow artists in the wintry woods of March. I then remembered that before she left we had talked about her intention to start journaling with pen and paper, so I thought about surprising her with a letter. What a fitting way to communicate with her! It would take me time to prepare the letter, find an address, send it by physical mail, and then patiently wait for her to receive it. Perfect! Sadly, the local post service quickly killed the magic. Due to the remote location of the AiR programme location, they suggested sending the letter by certified mail. It was painful to see a once carefully*

<sup>7</sup>Taiwanese art historian: The colour white in Chinese aesthetics and in life: <https://www.thinkchina.sg/culture/taiwanese-art-historian-colour-white-chinese-aesthetics-and-life>

*crafted handwritten letter that was now suddenly plastered in printed stickers and bar codes!” – Reflection from Andrés at some point during the residency.*

At the same time, these constraints also provoked my reflection on my relationship with digital tools as a media artist. My practice has long relied on using digital devices, such as cameras, recorders, sensors, and computers, to gather inspiration, experiment, and process material. During my three previous residencies, I have always brought at least my own digital camera, recorder, and laptop. They have become essential tools for noticing and documenting fleeting impressions and embodied experiences. Hence, although this residency placed a strong emphasis on disconnection, it raised the question about how I might use digital technologies to expand my artistic practice while assisting my wish to step back from it in order to be more self-aware.

My experience showed that intentionally limiting technology use created some moments that deepened awareness and reconnected me with my environment. This aligns with the idea of slow technology, which emphasises reflection and presence over constant digital engagement.

## 7.2 Collective Meditation

We now move back to the third-person voice of all authors, sharing collective findings on the group meditation sessions, where residents further slow down and synchronize collectively in daily routines. Another central component of the residency was the collective meditation sessions organised twice daily and intentionally inspired by non-Western contemplative traditions. These 30-minute, voluntary sessions, which were only marked by the sound of a singing bowl<sup>8</sup>, invited participants to slow down and reflect on the accelerated rhythms of contemporary “multi-tasking” lifestyles and creative routines. The sessions were self-guided and inclusive: all meditation traditions were welcome as long as silence for others was preserved.

There was a plethora of different meditation practices. Participants shared a wide range of meditation backgrounds. Some approached meditation through yoga, although in distinct branches (P1 - **Kriya Yoga** vs. P4 - **Iyengar Yoga**). Others drew on Christian traditions: while certain **Protestants** (including the first author) framed meditation as a form of contemplation, **Quakers** emphasised its role in a meeting for worship. As P7 said, “*When I mentioned meditation to my family, they said ‘meditation? You mean contemplation.’*” Similarly, P3 connected the residency’s collective sittings with her earlier experience of Quaker meetings, and she also practiced transcendental meditation privately in her dormitory in college. **Zen Buddhist** influences were also reflected in the participants: P2 described meditation as a way to remain grounded in the present and cultivate awareness of the “*here and now.*” For P5, this meant “*not explicitly re-visiting the day but clearing my mind. Of course thoughts will still come, but letting go of the day... and let them go.*” P6 connected meditation with spiritual or healing practices (i.e., **Reiki**, a type of alternative medicine originating in Japan), where she noted the overlap between her own rituals and meditation.

Some anticipated more guidance, while others valued the openness. As P4 reflected, “*I thought there would be a little bit of instruction. So we just sit?... I expected more guidance, but it was fine!*” The first author chose to ‘follow her inner lead,’ realising that the purpose of meditation should not be to ‘maximize’ the experience or be overly influenced by others. This minimum framework enabled individuals with different backgrounds, traditions, and expectations to find their own way. Just as P1 stated: “*I believe that strict rules may remove all the beauty of the process of investigating by yourself.*”

One recurring theme across the interviews was the sense of synchrony and communal presence that the group meditation created. Participants defined this as a feeling of being “*in sync*” with people on a physical and emotional level, rather than just co-presence in the same room. As P1 mentioned, “*No matter when or where you are doing this (i.e., meditation), we are connected.*” This sense of connection extended beyond the physical, resonating with Buddhist ideas of interconnectedness. P2 explicitly used the term *entrainment* to describe her experience, recalling one session that was particularly memorable, the so-called “*laughing meditation.*” The first author documented that session in her journal, where failed silence turned into a collective moment of perseverance, demonstrating the delicate group dynamics of shared discipline and humour:

### Vignette 5

*It was the most joyful yet challenging meditation I’ve ever experienced. With four people (including me) present, we couldn’t focus due to the weird, overzealous sound of the ‘DIY’ singing bowl. The uncontrollable laughter was incredibly contagious. I tried to concentrate (using all my willpower) on thoughts, but I was still distracted by someone suddenly making a snorting sound in the same space, which made me almost burst into tears from laughter! The half hour was truly challenging. Until the final sound of the singing bowl, everyone erupted into laughter. We held back our laughter for 30 minutes, yet no one left! We persevered!*

Community was also emphasised as an important part of the collective meditation experiences. Participants noted that the presence of others significantly impacted their own experience. As P2 stated, “*I was very aware of the presence of others in that space. I felt this human presence, the fact that we were all doing this together... The more people were involved, the more ritualised the experience became.*” This reflection highlights how meditation, while it may be considered as an individual, inner practice, here became a collective ritual. Over time, repeated meditation cultivated resonance not only with the “*self*” but also with the “*others*”, underscoring meditation as both a social activity and an act of shared meaning-making. This was evident not only in meditation sessions but also in other collective activities such as the 15-km silent walk and silent weekends. The residents became more attentive to and familiar with the dynamics and motivations of others in quiet and public spaces.

## 8 Postlude

### 8.1 Dwelling in the In-Between (C1)

What distinguished this residency from the first author’s previous AiR experiences was the explicit awareness of her ‘*dual identity*’

<sup>8</sup>Known as standing bell: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing\\_bell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_bell)

as both artist and researcher. As a team, we were able to comprehend this intermediate position as a methodological condition with implications for the knowledge this study can (and cannot) produce, rather than as an individual struggle on its own. In reflective conversations, for instance, we reflected on how the first author deliberately chose not to journal on certain days as an act that now seems like a form of quiet resistance to the researcher role. She instead relied on intuition and impulse for noticing. This revealed the tension familiar in artistic research: documenting spontaneously for self-reflection versus recording systematically for data analysis.

Recognising this in-between position also means acknowledging its methodological limits. Unlike the collaborative, output-driven AiR discussed in HCI (e.g., [16, 25, 30]), this residency foregrounds contemplation, introspection, and places more weight on the process than the deliverables, emphasising how incomplete works, discarded experiments, or abandoned ideas may occasionally be more imaginative. Similarly, the HCI community has shown how even failed or abandoned projects can generate valuable insights, re-framing failure as a productive site for reflection rather than an endpoint (e.g., [33]).

Through iterative meetings and ongoing discussions between us, we gradually came to see how the *artist self* tends to lead (making, sensing, and improvising), and the *researcher self* steps in, reflecting, interpreting, and situating the practice epistemically and often retrospectively. This aligns with artistic research as “*thinking in, through, and with art*,” where meaning emerges through practice rather than predefined hypotheses [13]. In that sense, the AiR became a liminal space of *liubai*, an intentional pause, where the artist-researcher could reflect and discover. Our study, which focusses on a single artist-researcher whose creation and investigation are inseparable, provides detailed but limits generalisability. However, these very constraints highlight the importance of art-based approaches: they create space for ambiguity, uncertainty, and open-ended exploration that conventional methods often overlook (or even try to avoid). By sharing this experience, we hope to encourage other artist-researchers to tell and reflect on their stories from the “in-between,” expanding what counts as knowledge and diversifying research methods.

## 8.2 The Art of “*liubai*” in Design (C2)

*Liubai* has rarely been explored in HCI beyond technical contexts, such as extracting inscriptions from traditional Chinese paintings [63] and VR applications for flower arrangement [79]. However, *liubai* as a poetic or aesthetic technique offers much richer conceptual and practical opportunities. Our exploration reveals how *liubai*, understood through silence, pause, and noticing, can expand the landscape of interaction design.

**8.2.1 Recognise Silence and Pause as Active Materials for Design.** Silence, as a positive and creative medium, contributes not only to personal reflection but also to collective flourishing. Our findings resonate with recent interests in soma design [32], mental health [39], human-nature entanglements [44], and R/S practices [55] within HCI. As Fritsch et al. [31] noted, shared silence offers “a sustained attentional stance: an ongoing practice of noticing, unburdened by the immediate imperative to convert perception into design concepts.” Insights from our AiR programme, focused

on meditative and mindful thinking, demonstrate how such silence integrated into daily rhythms and artistic creation can encourage new ways of thinking and relating.

**8.2.2 Amplify Existing *Liubai* in Creative Processes.** We see the potential of bringing *liubai* into our creative process; not only through creating “artificially silent” workshops or moments in design contexts, but also by finding ways to amplify and preserve the pauses or breaks that already exist (but are often overlooked) within design processes and everyday life. This aligns with work that encourages attunement to the temporal qualities of different design events in design-led processes [62]: ‘*Pauses*’ that invite experimentation and contemplation, ‘*Rhythms*’ that create opportunities for reflection, and sensitivity to ‘*Other-time*’ that helps navigate uncertainty and relate to non-researchers’ lifeworlds. Embracing and acknowledging these design events opens generative opportunities for creativity and knowledge production in design processes and HCI research.

**8.2.3 Value *Liubai* in Conducting Research.** As researchers, we easily tend to “kill silence” in interviews by rushing to fill conversational gaps. The first author’s experience at the residency acknowledged the awkwardness of silence and the desire to fill those gaps. Yet, these moments can be profoundly meaningful. As Akama put *Ma* as a tactile, instinctive, and sensory quality of “in-between” which emerges in these gaps, it shapes the atmosphere of the situation and the dynamics of relationships [1]. Cultivating sensitivity to this in-betweenness requires paying attention to how these spaces emerge, not only in terms of context but also in terms of timing, consideration for others, and the interactions between those present. This becomes an ongoing process of perceiving silence as a crucial presence rather than an absence in the research process.

## 8.3 A Technical Inward Turn (C3)

We reported on this AiR programme that actively structured conditions that supported mindfulness and reflection while simultaneously inviting residents to navigate unpredictability, whether through shared silence practices, the uncontrollability of natural forces, or the self-directed rhythms of creative exploration. These conditions reveal how careful design of digital technology can support introspective and spiritual pursuits. We organise our reflections around the following two interconnected themes.

**8.3.1 The Value of Inward Attention.** The focus of R/S practices on internal values may be needed to envision alternative and richer experiences to counterbalance the negative consequences of contemporary technology on people’s wellbeing (e.g., [50, 76]). Indeed, a recent report [72] documents the longing for spiritual connections arguing that technology has neglected people’s spiritual wellbeing and call for spiritual innovations beyond R/S contexts advocating for new ways to address spiritual needs, not only in religious but also secular contexts. Here we turn to Techno-spirituality research, which has shown how digital tools, when misaligned, can distract faith-based practices (e.g., [19, 55, 69, 80]), or brought out complex phenomena with practising meditation (e.g., [20, 22]). However, it also reveals across both Eastern (e.g., Hindu, Buddhist) and Western

(e.g., Sufi, Christian) traditions, practices of meditation and contemplation have always centered on inward attention, cultivating a sense of presence and grounding. Our study further demonstrates that in minimalist settings of silence and meditation, free from digital technologies, people can better redirect attention inward, reconnect with their body rhythms, and re-establish relational attunement with self, others, and the environment. More importantly, such inward-oriented approach created a shared space of reflection and care regardless of residents' religious or non-religious backgrounds, emphasising a rhythm of *retreat* and *return*, and awareness as universally meaningful.

We therefore take this opportunity to envision how such inward-oriented design can be adopted in HCI, beyond R/S contexts, to spark discussion for designing and researching in HCI that transcends a particular religious point of view. Future research directions could explore questions such as what would it mean for design research itself to adopt an *inward-oriented* methodology, where *introspection*, *ambiguity*, and *uncertainty* are valued as much as research outputs. Instead of drawing users to external distractions or simplifying complex experiences into digital numbers, as self-tracking technologies do, how can (slow) technology guide or train users to pay attention to internal signals, such as physical, emotional, or spiritual changes in order to foster more awareness and attunement in design research?

**8.3.2 An Inward Turn With Collective Dimensions.** While the notion of an inward turn emphasises more personal and subjective reflection, our study revealed the collective dimension of inward-looking practices. Embracing silence, practising meditation, and journaling not only served as individual actions for the first author, but also as relational practices sustained and amplified within the collective framework of the AiR programme. Group meditation, silent walks, and even moments of shared laughter illustrated how inner attunement was scaffolded by social presence, producing a sense of collective resonance. Hiniker and Wobbrock [35] argue that technologies not only consume but also erode relationships, undermining our ability to attune to others, to the environment, and (in Christian tradition) to God. Toyama [73] holds similar views that while Enlightenment values and digital advancements have improved people's material conditions, they have also neglected inner cultivation and awareness of social issues. We take up Toyama's call to advocate for *a technical inward turn: an approach to design that prioritises internal needs and reflective practices rather than just external outcomes and incentives*. We expand this notion from a purely self-exploration to a multi-layered process of relating and coordinating; therefore highlighting how the social dimension plays a key role in sustaining and deepening inner work. Connecting back with HCI, we hence ask: In what ways can we consider the boundary (if there is one) between personal technology (e.g., mindfulness apps) and collective practice? Can digital platforms creatively facilitate shared silence or inward-oriented practices while minimising distraction or monetization of users' attention?

## 8.4 Posthuman Perspectives (C3)

By foregrounding silence, ecological noticing, and situated spiritual experience, our study invites researchers in HCI to consider not only

how technology supports, but also how technology might help humans sense their entanglement with the more-than-human. Posthumanist thinking and the *more-than-human* agenda (e.g., [27, 71]) in HCI have challenged the human-centered paradigm traditionally adopted in design, that is often linked with developing functional prototypes or solutions for particular users, emphasised shifting away from such approaches toward practices of attunement [31], ecological care [29], and adopt more open, experimental, and ethically responsible methods (e.g., [26, 48, 66]). Our study connects with such exploration and contributes to this agenda by demonstrating how artistic practice can help harmonize people to environmental rhythms (e.g., observing the drafting snow, listening to the melting frozen lake, and sensing seasonal transitions) and how minimalist guidance and experiences of uncertainty can be embraced within a collective meditative setting.

In this context, silence itself functioned as a medium for encountering non-human and more-than-human presences, resonating with posthuman ideas of relationality and the endeavour to recognise that these presence are already exist [77]. Only within such *liubai* and spacetime can we first become aware of our own position and existence, and then recognise the environment we are situated in and the non-human forms/existences/objects that cohabit within it. This awareness enables us to consider our relations with these more-than-human entities, disrupt anthropocentric timescales and '*re-think the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale* [14, p. 5-6].'

Based on the first author's experience, digital tools such as the noise-cancelling headphones and high fidelity recording equipment (see Section 5.1.1) show how technology can amplify subtle environmental textures of the "here-and-now", support attunement and more meaningful experiences. This resonates with slow technology [34], which values slowness, presence, and reflective modes of making and thinking rather than efficiency or acceleration. We are not calling for the rejection or abandonment of technology, but rather emphasising critical selection and phased intervention, so that people can have *liubai* in the context of digital acceleration.

We embrace slowness, not-yet-knowing, and relational awareness as crucial components of future practices, extending posthuman agendas toward aesthetic and contemplative orientations. In the spirit of Mah et al.'s call for "*More-than-Human Yin-teraction*" [52], which introduces Daoist notions of *Yin-Yang* and *Wu-Wei* to highlight rest and non-action in more-than-human life, we ask: how can existing technologies and creative frameworks be re-purposed not to fill, but to open space up, which is creating *liubai* as a positive active resource for design, creativity, and ecological awareness? As Alice Eldridge notes: "*It is perhaps ironic that we need technology as a gateway back to nature – or perhaps it is the perfect poetic irony that rationalism, which separated humans from the rest of nature, created the foundations for the technology that can reconnect us!*"<sup>9</sup> However, we envision alternative methods, such as auto-/sensory-ethnography [51], visual method [9], micro-phenomenological interviews [60], and post-qualitative research [77], expanding our understanding of ourselves and the world.

<sup>9</sup>An Interview with Alice Eldridge: <https://sensingtheforest.github.io/2024/02/05/an-interview-with-alice-eldridge/>

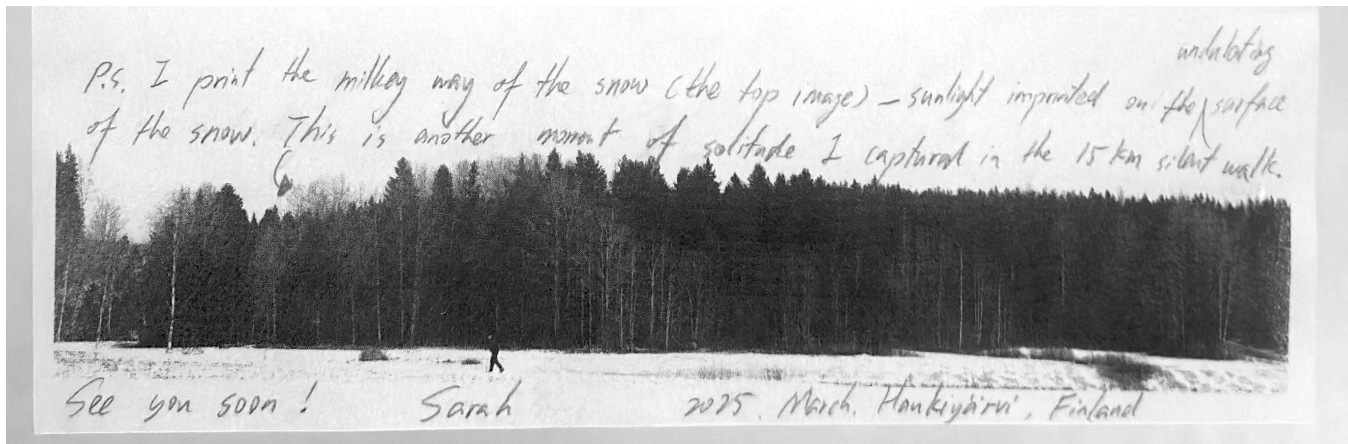


Figure 8: A reply letter (see Vignette 4) from Sarah to Andrés at the end of the AiR programme, handwritten on tracing paper with a printed photograph.

## 9 Conclusion

Through this exploration of an AiR programme, we have highlighted a distinctive setting that emphasises inward exploration, openness, and the R/S qualities of creative practice. By weaving together the first author's lived experience, two artistic artefacts, and interviews conducted around collective meditation, we seek to offer empirical insights that open up alternative perspectives on the intersections of art, design, and HCI.

In doing so, we connected silence with the Chinese aesthetic concept of *liubai* to illustrate its potential to transcend words and sound, while also shaping visual expression and non-verbal communication. We see silence as a resource for meaning-making, deep reflection, and spiritual connection. We hope this work contributes to ongoing discussions in HCI by inviting designers and researchers consider how slow technologies or restriction on technology use and R/S practices might creatively interact with silence to expand the possibilities for interaction design.

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