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## **Design and Social Innovation at the Margins: Finding and Making Cultures of Plurality**

Ann Light is Professor of Design and Creative Technology at the University of Sussex, UK and Professor of Interaction Design, Social Change and Sustainability at Malmö University, Sweden. Her work addresses themes of social and ecological justice; the co-making of futures and the politics of design. She has specialized in participatory practice and the social impact of technology, bringing a background in arts, humanities, AI, and human-computer interaction to bear on innovation in social process, culture, and wellbeing. She is currently investigating how creative practices can promote transformations to sustainability.  
ann.light@sussex.ac.uk

### **ABSTRACT**

Design has become a global activity dominated by one set of cultural interests to produce a consistency of practice. This essay uses an experience of design for social innovation in northern Finland, inspired by land and place, to speculate upon the dimensions across which plurality in designing could be embraced in an increasingly globalized world. Informed by discussions while helping to run the Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific events of 2016, it uses Kasulis' (2002) analysis of cultural orientation and his insight that a key difference underpinning cultures is how people may orientate towards intimacy and integrity. It then explores what a form of intimate design might look like. In doing so, it uses Ingold's study of *North-ness* to challenge totalizing narratives of progress and explore what a marginal view can offer to address site-specific needs and dispense with design orthodoxies.

**KEYWORDS:** land, place, margins, social innovation, plurality, design, intimacy, culture, silence

### **Introduction**

This essay challenges a dominantly 'Western' articulation of design (Akama and Yee 2016) by taking an intimate look at place. In doing so, it does not so much leave the 'West' behind as explode the idea of generality with which it has come to be associated. By taking a marginal place and the idiosyncratic practice of design for social innovation developed there as a basis for discussion, it aims to start a broader consideration of the need for and value of plurality and its close relation, hybridity.

I write the essay as a design researcher, so when I think about the spaces and places of social innovation as they are situated, I am concerned with futures and how things might be different. Yet cultural nuance and the politics of design are important to me and my ambitions for change are always in this context: How am I *Other?*; Am I justified to come into this space and on what terms?; What, as an outsider, do I bring, that supports what I find? I ask these questions of my engagement in areas that I know well, such as my hometown of London, and those I do not. The account here fits into the second group, in concerning northern Finland, at a short drive north of the point where the Arctic Circle is marked by a series of grottoes in which one can meet Santa Claus at all times of the year.

## **Background**

In this first section, I introduce the three bodies of work I am using thematically: intimacy in social innovation; land, culture, and geography; and margins of power. Brought together, they challenge Western hegemonic norms and representations of meaning and relevance in design and social innovation, demonstrating that there are other ways of making meaning in design research. I use them as a framing for analyzing a case, before reflecting on its relevance for other situations and the need for approaches to embrace cultural plurality.

The encounter at the heart of the paper is a short 'camping' trip in Arctic Finland, designed as a project of sensitization, intended to increase the design capacity of the social innovators involved, and with relevance only to this one context: making innovation here more appropriate for its habitat. My account of it examines the goals and actions of varied participants: researchers from the nearby university experimenting with forms of collaboration; local people hoping to establish useful land-based enterprises; and two overseas academics invited by the local researchers. It details two stages of camping: first researchers alone, devising ways of encountering the concerns of the second wave; then the arrival of people with development ideas, and what happened to agendas and activities in this new mix. Throughout, emphasis on the land was unusually strong, caught in the professional interests of many of those gathered and the collective desire for a culturally and ecologically relevant approach to making change.

## ***Intimacy in Social Innovation***

As a domain, social innovation is still being formed. We are told by a founding father of design for social innovation in Italy:

Social innovation is a process of change emerging from the creative re-combination of existing assets (from social capital to historical heritage, from traditional craftsmanship to accessible advanced technology), the aim of which is to achieve socially recognized goals in a new way. (Manzini 2014, 58)

Manzini describes the breadth of what he perceives as social innovation with two axes: incremental vs. radical, and top-down vs. bottom-up.

Other commentators have also worked to pin down social innovation. For instance, in the United States, Phillips, Deiglmeier and Miller (2008) suggest that social innovation is: "A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals."

Both understandings give a lot of room for maneuvering. Yet, we can ask what work they are doing. Calling this heterogeneous creativity 'social innovation' lumps together the ingenuity and imagination of many people across many situations, labeling it with an innovation framing that implies well-bounded issues and a formula for addressing them. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the business of naming and defining, in general, is a neoliberal project (Light 2018a). Here, I note the tension between "socially recognized goals" (Manzini 2014, 58) and a "novel solution" (Phillips,

Deiglmeier and Miller 2008). The ongoing movements and adjustments of the former do not come to be as tidily packaged as the latter suggests.

A related critique of 'innovation' appears in accounts of co-design practices in Malmö, Sweden (Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard 2014a). The concept is pulled apart, then reclaimed to offer an "archipelago of futures," which "deviates dramatically from the future colonized by the technological frontrunners and innovation centers of the world" (Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard 2014b, 10).

Further, Akama and Yee detect an orthodoxy of theory and practice now developing in design and/or social innovation, which they attribute to globalized thinking and "trends of looking 'West' to seek answers" (2016, 174). This results in "theory proposed by a handful of people largely concentrated in Europe and the US whose ideas are continually cited to perpetuate its authority and privilege." Akama and Yee suggest work is needed to "embrace difference and accommodate heterogeneity as its central condition" (ibid., 174-175), asking for a stronger form of pluralism.

This paper picks up their challenge, not merely to critique a hegemonic perspective, but to address any design narrative that considers geography as merely coordinates. In doing so, it uses a distinction introduced by the philosopher Thomas Kasulis about cultural orientations to build on existing work addressing design and heterodoxy (Light 2011). Kasulis (2002) proposes that culture, knowledge, politics, and ways of being are informed by one of two orientations: *intimacy*, prevalent in East Asian contexts, and *integrity*, more often foregrounded in Western cultures. In attempting to understand perspectives, he argues, we need to notice and understand the predominant orientation. In Kasulis' account, there may be no simple or direct mapping of orientation to place, culture, or individual, but, nonetheless, this binary introduces a new dimension into how we might speak about cultural influence. Akama and Yee (2016) use Kasulis' distinction in their critique of Western dominance. I go into some detail about it here since I devote part of this paper to furthering an analysis of how these orientations might inform pluralism and design.<sup>1</sup>

To explain integrity, Kasulis points to the beach: "Sandbars affect the formation of waves, and waves sculpt the sand from the floor that is then deposited on the shore. Yet their relationship maintains its respective integrity—seawater remains seawater and sand remains as sand" (Kasulis 2002, 54). This is an approach that values public objectivity, distinction, and scientific borders. The intimacy model looks for co-influence; Kasulis describes it as the relationship between water and salt—that becomes seawater when merged. Their independent identities, as salt and water, disappear (2002). Rather than defining things by opposites and isolating parts, intimacy seeks to discover overlaps that are already there. We can observe that pluralism is necessary, intellectually, to welcome the distinction of integrity/intimacy into designing, but is partly subsumed by the nature of intimacy, which does not need to specify this difference. Distinctions belong to an integrity discourse.

If the Western tradition might be characterized, in this view, as all-knowing and absorbed in definition, the plural vision is grounded, situated, self-reflexive, and ever evolving. It respects Abbott's (2001) rejection of simple causes and effects. Introducing the pairing of integrity and intimacy allows us to see that gentle encounters, alliances, and entanglements have their place alongside more sharply-drawn and analytic boundary-setting. And, while intimacy is fluid and responsive, integrity is not only about

making distinctions, but speaks to dominant commercial branding imperatives, which build distinctions for competitive advantage.

In common with feminist thinking (e.g. Haraway 1991; Suchman 2002; Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, and see Akama's work on design and Japanese philosophy [e.g. 2015]), Kasulis' (2002) intimacy model of engagement in the world is one where self and other are not sharply distinguished but emerge from interdependencies. Intimacy, here, is close to what Suchman identifies as "located accountabilities" (2002, 96), following Haraway's (1991) insights into "situated knowledges."<sup>ii</sup>

Social innovation, by its very breadth, must include a range of practices and positions. Yet, looking with the lens of orientation, the picture is one where home-grown varieties are not visible, and the well-promoted methods of high-profile design coterie start from an integrity position. Integrity models are often used to design in contexts where intimacy would be a more culturally appropriate framing. This should be challenged. It may be an irony, then—or a welcome challenge to this Western integrity orthodoxy—that what follows is a paper attending to intimacy and marginalization set in a European context.

### ***Land, Culture, and Geography***

Kasulis talks of the sea to illustrate types of relation. Also employing natural metaphors, anthropologist Tim Ingold proposes our relations with our environment such that "lives are woven *into* the land rather than laid *over* it" (2010, 6). He constructs a concept of *North-ness*:

Perhaps when we think about northern environments we should think of the land as if it were the sea... a fluid, dynamic environment, in which there are no more objects than if you were at sea. Is the wave an object?... All these things are growing and moving in a highly dynamic space. (ibid., 10)

In his allusional way, Ingold describes four directions of travel. Neither free of a European starting point nor indifferent to the politics of it, these directions are interesting here for the approaches they embody. Ingold sums up: "the West, as history *of*, associated with modernity and universal progress; the East, as history *about* the rise and fall of other civilizations; the South, as history *against* colonial and post-colonial oppression and resistance" (ibid., 3-4). His prepositions (*of*, *about*, *against*) embody a wry post-colonial sensibility. In particular, "The West stands for a history which appeals to human universals, riding rough-shod over the particularities of time and place," driving "a wedge between the world of humanity and the world of nature" (2010, 2). Ingold's characterization of the totalizing West shares Akama and Yee's (2016) critique.

In welcoming a North-ness that is further north than we generally look (his early work was among circumpolar hunters of the Arctic), he proposes that no direction of travel is limited to a single part of the world and suggests:

that we think of the North, the history *from*, as a particular *kind* of history, which we could apply not *just* to northern peoples but perhaps to peoples everywhere... This history *from* is a history whence we can understand indigenoussness as habitation, whence we can understand migration as movement, and whence we can understand identity as emplacement within a

fluid environment. So my radical claim is that North-ness is everywhere. (Ingold 2010, 14)

Thus, Ingold, like Kasulis, carefully resists a direct mapping of culture to land while drawing attention to the characteristics of certain ways of being. Things can be done differently and the *mood* of North-ness, which is neither a civilization nor aggressive in character, is the one he embraces. It is a mood in which identity emerges “within a fluid environment” (2010, 14) where boundaries are diminished or disappear. Ingold appreciates conceptual metaphor (he is sparing with the term “indigenous” and we might see this use of direction as a project to avoid over-classification). In his vision of the complementary and fluid North, there is something akin to Kasulis’ intimacy.

Both Kasulis’ analysis of orientations and Ingold’s “history from the north” challenge simple understandings of place. Design as a field has acknowledged the subtleties of location in discussions of place/space (e.g. Dourish 2006), context (e.g. Bayer and Holzblatt’s 1998 contextual inquiry) and culture (e.g. Evers and Day 1997). There are considerations of local meaning (Hester 1993). Rosner (2018) rejects universalism and solutionism in design. Merritt and Stolterman (2012) identify cultural hybridity as pre-existing and unavoidable, seeking “to destroy the static cultural binary opposition between the self and the other,... ‘Western’ and ‘non- Western’ or the designer and the user” (2012, 75).

Nonetheless, much work has involved what Bauman refers to as “glocalization” (1998), i.e. exogenous design made relevant to areas considered to be culturally different from the producers’ own. In some readings, that would apply to all decisions made by designers coming into an existing situation, since they are necessarily a stranger to the situation in some dimension (though this may also be part of their value). As a challenge, participatory design has helped to establish local relevance (e.g. Dearden and Rizvi 2008; Ehn, Nilsson and Topgaard 2014a/b,) and postcolonial theory has been invoked to increase political reflexivity (Irani et al. 2010; Merritt and Stolterman 2012). But design practices—and design research—may homogenize, simplify, and impose visions and/or solutions in a search for answers that are transferable between places.

In this paper, I deliberately break with glocalization. Escobar reminds us that place is “constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices [... and] culture is carried into places by bodies” (Escobar 2001, 143). He points to “an inevitable hybridization” which does not make places “less local, nor more global, only differently so” (ibid., 148). Places are not ‘real,’ not least, because our view of realness is “within the structures of meaning provided by socialization into certain (usually privileged) backgrounds, intellectual contexts, political beliefs and culture” (Tuathail 2003, 17). Places flow into each other, but we cannot lump them together without adopting the geopolitical practices that strip the “tremendous geographical diversity and particularity of places on the surface of the earth. Difference becomes sameness. Geographical heterogeneity becomes geopolitical homogeneity” (ibid., 17). Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is a particular (and broad) example of this: a Western construct bundling the Near, Middle, and Far East into an idea of the Orient, characterized by an exotic cultural history. This is

an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also a ...certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world .(Said 1978, 12)

This turns the non-Western into the *Other*, which Ingold (2010) alludes to with his use of the preposition “about” for the East. To interrupt such a logic, Soja (1996) invites *Othering* as a deliberate and self-conscious tactic.

### ***Margins of Power***

This leads to a third theme. Soja (1996, 22) deliberately disrupts his suggestions for new conceptual categories with “the ‘stimulus of a little confusion’ to keep them open to rethinking and re-evaluation,” warning that new conceptions of spatial relations can take on force as they come into existence. In queering his suggestions, he recognizes and embraces feminist theory of center-periphery relations (e.g. hooks 1984).

Margins have the merit of queering the mainstream. If there are voices at the margin with different interests from the center, then there is not just an ideological need for plurality, but a pre-existing plurality. Marginalization has a physical and a discursive manifestation. Geographically, the Asia-Pacific region is a periphery around water, but is it discursively a margin too? Is it marginalized as East of everything West (in one reading of geography)? What of viewing the Nordic countries as a giant peninsula? Do rocks, bays, and archipelagos invoke a different design ethos from solid mass?

But it is not helpful to set up a binary opposition between margin and center when living beings are all both uniquely individual and a point on multiple imagined maps of demographic distribution. At the personal level, the concept of intersectionality (e.g. Crenshaw 1991) adds perspective to this. Crenshaw alludes to the complex identity relations engendered by demographic categories (such as ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and gender). Again, if we embrace intimacy, we do not note these points of/as difference; our embrace is closer to a layering and enfolding, with a very different structural politics (see Light and Akama, forthcoming, for a discussion of this tension). If we unseat a Western view, we destabilize these categories along with the process of categorizing. We apply close attention, rather than itemize. As well as plural, things are singular. In observing this singularity (uniqueness) as a radical specificity, we are nonetheless acknowledging the indivisible nature of the whole. The question is how to respect this simultaneity in designing, using it to sensitize ourselves to the flow of situation and encounter as well as the absolutes of location.

The approaches described in these sections offer ways of engaging with geography and social relations as they pertain to place. I use them to talk politically about space while remaining playful. I speak of intimate and entangled encounters, drawing on processes of intimacy and North-ness to investigate the tangle that is land and culture, margins, and marginal practices.

### **Encounters**

In August 2016, I was invited to northern Finland for a week to consider design and social innovation in context. This section is an account, chosen both because it

involved creative work around place and because the place was so distinctive. I use it to discuss design and social innovation more generally and, in particular, to explore what it helps us understand about functioning in different global regions and spaces of engagement.

An immediate observation is that the land of northern Finland is a margin. Finland, as a nation, is considered marginal in geopolitical terms, and the northern part of Finland is considered peripheral to the vitality of the country by the Finns themselves (as attested, below, by a resident of the area). It is at the edge of the habitable world climate-wise and is sparsely populated. It has been Swedish and Russian over the course of history and now is in the care of the Finnish government. It also forms part of the traditional migratory grounds of the Sami peoples, who may move through up to four countries on land they regard quite differently from the people controlling it. The land is not heavily farmed, but exists with a right to wander and forage and is used by Sami herders and for a few other livestock concerns. (Finland does not recognize Sami rights as exclusive herders.)

Our host for the trip, a professor of tourism based in the region, has national funding to experiment with ways of stimulating social innovation for the area. We have met and experimented before and I am excited to experiment with her on this, though I have never been to this region and do not speak Finnish. I am joined by another international visitor, who has also become a friend of ours through creative work.

Finland and hospitality are new to me, but the trip speaks to my interests, such as improvising, playing with method, and looking at design related to place (e.g. Light 2018b; Light and Akama, forthcoming; Light et al. 2017). What makes hospitality-based innovation interesting here is that it foregrounds place and involves people in place-shaping (Lyons 2007), a form of cultural work related to land and heritage (e.g. Silverman and Ruggles 2007). This welcoming of a different future for *place* can be more or less sensitive to history, culture, and environment. Here, a mix of local researchers and guests were seeking to create conditions for place-shaping, experimenting together with how to move beyond discursive practices and how to respect history and environment in approaching change.

Ours was a four-day camp in the hamlet of Misi, taking over the community hall to co-create processes for rethinking the land. The first two days involved exploratory preparations, investigating methods by trying them out. The second two days introduced additional visitors—people bringing social innovation challenges in the area of hospitality—for whose arrival such methods were being prepared. Our host explained our activities in the following terms:

We conducted *an experiment* of camping-together in undressed spaces of a half-forgotten place, in order to find out whether *silence and slowness*, conceptualized in novel ways, could play a role in revitalizing the roles of rural regions. We wonder if regions, cast as marginalized due to their declining habitation and opportunities in both traditional and modern livelihoods, those old and forgotten home-grounds, can become sites of visitation and renewal? [...] By the idea of “camping” we refer to an inclusive and mobile social concept that is not defined by division into hosts and guests, performances and audiences, workshops and leisure but weaves all these into one reality. (Veijola et al. 2017)

So not only were we seeking to engage those working with land to think creatively about its use, we were committed to giving an experience of how we might relate to the land differently. We sought ways to work with the land as a cultural phenomenon, developing activities with particular relevance to the locale as both a geographical location and a historical place filled with different people's hopes and ambitions. How might the qualities of this particularity (and multiplicity) impact social innovation for this area?

I present our work through my eyes. Not only is this consistent with what I've claimed above about perspective (and entitlement), but, here, it was particularly true that, though we came together to work and learn, "there was no 'we'" (Light and Boys 2017) in a cultural sense. I was amongst a widely-drawn group, many of whom only spoke Finnish and some of whom spoke none. Mediating were our hosts: the professor, her colleagues, and students. Using words involved a highly visible act of translation. There were also cultural differences in how fast and how much people spoke. To me, the Finns' discourse seemed full of long reflective pauses, which were easy to interrupt by mistake. This state of affairs threw the focus further on what we could feel, make, and do without language.

### ***Quiet***

A significant part of this being-together was time to think, with silences interposed between activities where, in a more vocal culture, we might have had discussion. There were many times of the day when nothing was said. And the quiet outside (our community hall lay between a lake and the woods, but neither produced much sound except for wind rushing in the trees) helped with the quiet inside, as there was very little soundscape. This was acknowledged as "very Finnish" by the local participants.

Standing in place, there were powerful aesthetics: the space, the light, the clean lines of the birch, and the smell of air that comes from cold lands; the slight coolness on the skin.

My everyday life is different. When I look out the window at home in England, I am amid hundreds of people, their dwellings, and the raucous city animals that keep them company (crows, seagulls, foxes, and so on). When I go into the countryside, I see 5,000 years of sheep-manicured grass and trees that have been cultivated as specimens in the architected landscapes of the eighteenth-century country manor. Nothing we see in England is free of this shaping. Even the sky is a subtler blue (when it is blue) because the vapor trails of planes dull its depths with layers of white spray.

In northern Finland, a quiet pervades. Though the land has meaning, it is not signaled so loudly to me. It is grazed by deer and raided for wood. It is full of midges. There are few birds and fewer people. It shows little sign of habitation. It is a subtle place to me as outsider.

### ***Aspiring to Responsive Practices***

Together, we tried to understand the landscape and life more fully through our actions. We took walks through the trees and moved as quietly as we could, then sat and observed our habitat and the signs that other people and animals were using the space. We waited up till midnight to experience the slow-creeping moment when the

sky turns to yellow, then grey, then maybe a little midnight blue before starting to lighten again (giving us a very big, slow day at our disposal.) We destabilized hierarchies of knowledge by listening to the person with the most questions, not the most answers. We gave presence to absent, silent, and contested bodies through drama methods that allow multiple speakers to share their observations and concerns from many roles. These bodies included traditional custodians, other-than-human lives, and landmarks able to speak for lost histories.

The context allowed us to be creative within a set of physical, emotional, and professional constraints, such as, for me, unusual quiet, remoteness, and hidden uses. That the particular constraints differed for each of us, because of our highly different understandings of the context, gave us a chance to bring complementary views into conversation. But we acknowledged that not everyone with a stake or a view could be in the room, and planned ways of leaving gaps and seeking missing perspectives.

As part of this work, we talked of methods that we had no time to use because they were so slow and thoughtful, and we reached slow, thoughtful consensus on what we would have time for. The course of arriving at this agreement might be described as an umbrella methodology of experimental pluralism—an open invitation for researchers and artists to bring their ideas for working together and being-with, followed by a process of negotiating together which ones would be adopted. One exercise in particular seemed to capture this balancing of creativity and structuring. I want the mandala images here (Figure 1) to evoke a process of circling outwards from a motif of stillness, slowness, and silence, to make variations that acknowledge the source and which are neither repetitious nor free of the defining structure.

On a sunny, midge-filled afternoon, we made mandalas out of the natural shapes and patterns of the woods, at the behest and with the gentle leadership of a nun who joined us as part of the second wave. She explained to us how to regard each new layer as significant and pointed out that what we were doing in the short span of a couple of hours was normally the work of a meditative *week*, reminding me that what passed for slowness here was only *relatively slow*.



**Figure 1** “Picking flowers, leaves and twigs and shaping our concentric rings works to help us think about the world and our place in it. We contemplate death. We decenter humanity. We explore yin and yang through the red and blue of the local berries.” (Notes from Misi, Light 2016)

Mandalas are not part of north Finnish culture, but they are used in a great many places. The nun brought a Christian variant of the practice; mandalas are most often

identified with Hindu and Buddhist traditions. No part of the world is without contemplation practices; yet, encountering each other, the different approaches revealed nuances that could not be articulated or made commensurate. The style of this experimental pluralism was to bring details into focus but leave them hanging. Such were the hybrid influences at the camp, which were welcomed and noted, though not sorted out.

### ***The Paradoxes of Silence***

After the professional visitors arrived at the camp, attention largely turned from making methods to attending to cases. One of the newcomers brought a plan for building a silent retreat that had stirred up concern among her neighbors about the noise it would create. (Even the concept of neighbors turns out to be culture-specific. These people were not close to her by my standards, but would nonetheless hear cars and people if more of them arrived.) The new campers moved discussions from the land to *uses* for the land. The original group, now highly sensitized to the quiet, asked if her interest in silence and stillness might extend beyond specific therapeutic spaces to embracing the neighborhood. A bigger question was how being with us might affect her planning.

We were struck by the paradoxical demands of working in this region—promoting peace and undisturbed time for reflection with the ensuing potential to do damage to the bones of it; bringing life and business to the area but at the expense of its relative emptiness, peace, and current uses. This idea of use—and the mobilization of the land’s resources, even benignly—created a tension that ran, more or less acknowledged, through the second two days. Were we in danger of creating a *silence theme park* as an addition to the ‘Lapland Santa’ experience, in an uncritical celebration of innovation? The tension between changing and *being-with* the land raised many questions.

Another participant, more alive to these contradictions, was interested in understanding the spirit of the place, rather than bringing more people to share it. An artist working worldwide, she comes from the very north of Finland and sustains herself with her connection to these lands. The challenge of identifying what made this place special and speculating on whether that specialness can travel beyond the immediate lands and landscape also became a theme.

No one directly addressed these tensions or the desire to ‘package’ experience, but they informed our reflections. It was a camp of hints and clues: some coming from sessions of question-asking between researchers and professionals; some from activities in and around the village hall. Nothing was determined in our *being-together*, but a little of the entangling (Barad 2007) of politics, culture, land, and innovation became untangled long enough to consider what the tangle could involve. Who took what away as learning will remain partly obscure (as is typical with experiential learning), but I can say that, even now, I am left with a powerful sense of place linked to habitat and a desire to protect it from the noise and pace of other places. And I am still discussing my thoughts and feelings with other co-creators of the event. One unanticipated by-product is *A Travel Dictionary to Silence* (Veijola and Säynäjäkangas 2018), a collaboration between researchers, giving personal responses to this encounter. It points to the inter-subjective aspects of situated

innovating. Sharing experiences of being moved by the place—and moving through it—forged alliances.

So, how do we understand this as a creative method (of coming-and-being-together) and a means to make social innovation processes site-specific in other places?

### **Discussion**

In this account, I have sought to show how place, culture, politics, and innovation were entangled in one particular context. I also sought to present some of the untangling that we attempted in order to consider these relations without dictating responses or forcing particular interpretations. I want to refer to these relations and our ambitions in a discussion of intimacy, the inspiration of place, and the marginality of the approaches this inspired.

### **Place**

Misi, a hamlet in Finland's stretch of the Arctic Circle, is 'North,' a construct that suggests the privileged Global North of the post-industrial world. It can also be understood as a marginal place. Further, it is a place where categories are spatially bigger than those to which I am accustomed, evidenced, for instance, in the notion of 'neighbor.' The generous sweep of the local 'local' reveals that even the scope implied in our language for spatio-relational matters is culturally significant and variable.

Much of what we did in Misi was as a result of being in Misi. We understood this as being open to the influence of the place and the life constituting it, rather than as working directly on designs for Misi. It was our mooring, a means to understand the particular issues of the land and culture, and, at times, it was a stark, even simplistic, way of responding to local conditions. Nonetheless, it was challenging even for the Finns. Indeed, the performance of our camping, so that we ate, partied, worked, and slept alongside each other, raised concerns about how we inhabit our spaces, as well as raising concerns about this particular place.

Much design considers space; there are disciplines of architecture and town planning to address the siting of spatial structures and of interaction design to stage systems within them. By contrast, here was an idiosyncratic approach to place that involved experiencing histories and heritages as co-creators. This put a shared responsibility upon all of us as place-shapers. As an alternative to design orthodoxies, it offered permeability rather than novelty as outcome, *becoming-with* as methodology, and processes of coming to an understanding that were born through contact and enmeshing. It used the lens of space, boundary, margin, and proximity/overlap in designing as a means to challenge solutionist tendencies.

Something is changed by the action of arriving and *being* somewhere, irrespective of the pressure to innovate. If the process of attuning is recognized as a part of what is offered by a place, then perhaps such pressures can find fissure lines through which to dissipate, allowing for unexpected opportunities to expand in their stead. It may be another irony that the immediate artifactual outcome of the work together was a book of stories about culture and place (an abstract form of place-shaping), while other, more substantive, development processes proceeded.

Of course, land and place are related. Considering the land and our relation

with it is going to be more immediately relevant in some places and in asking some types of design questions than in others. However, it is perhaps always more relevant than it seems. The idea of land was especially pertinent for us because the hospitality theme of the social entrepreneurs brought up issues of land and land use. At the Misi camp, we met people concerned with the possibility of opening land to more people. This necessitated a consideration of land as ground, environment, nation, and culture to do justice to their ambitions. Such a complex conceptual project challenged and engaged everyone and produced a variety of observations.

Escobar reminds us hybridization is inevitable (2001, 148): not more global, only differently local. Our immersion in this place revealed the hybridization pre-existing the impact of international visitors, though the foreigners at the camp drew attention to the broader context in which the local details could be considered. We projected different types of local into the space to keep alive these cultural considerations in our designing. Our hybrid local emerged, acknowledging the sparse habitation of the area (making dimensions wider, as noted) and the understandings of the funders (who have their own codification for what constitutes a meaningful region for research and must be satisfied it is met). In London, 'local' might mean a street; here it seemed to encompass much of Finland north of the Arctic Circle. This 'local' could be both encompassing and fluid: including villagers up the road, the whole city of Rovaniemi, the main sites of Sami cultures, and imported seasonal workers foraging berries, as well as some traditional herders. However, researchers were camping in Misi with people from social enterprises, all with their quirks and particular interests, not working generically with 'local people.' To have changed the mix, even a little, would have created something quite different. This is the point about contextual detail.

We might see this hybridization as the intimate version of a plurality that comes with acknowledging the many selves interacting in the camp and making an uncritical space for sharing their experience. In offering this claim for plurality, hybridization, and specificity, I also draw attention to who was not involved in our camping. At no point did we invite the unexpected people of the landscape to participate. Nearby residents going through the village ignored our presence; life and laboring went on without interruption from the experimenters nearby.

### ***Power, Influence, and Knowledge***

We practiced a form of inclusiveness by recognizing omission (who was not there), while taking a fluid position on boundaries. Our enactments, once we reached the second stage of the camp, introduced themes of ownership, habitation, dwelling, custodianship, and respect for existing stakeholders in the area, including all types of life. The enactments paid less attention to some other cultural aspects of place, such as belonging or excluding. The approach we created avoided a direct discussion of political and cultural issues. This is, itself, contentious. On the one hand, avoidance of these themes can ignore power imbalances, political wounds, and injustices. On the other, inviting consideration of such imbalances and wounds can foreground divides, with a tendency to move people into antagonistic spaces rather than promote reflective thinking. It speaks of an integrity orientation, based in rights.

Instead of raising issues of power directly, we attempted to keep non-dominant, marginal, and silent voices in the room by reducing the amount of dominant talking, by

approaching our inquiries in multiple ways and by taking silence (and the silenced) as part of our reflection. We began exercises by listening carefully to everyone; we used structure to give balance. This was built into the camp as a starting point in bringing a range of people together, even though no one was asked to speak for any position in particular. (Of course, this does not bring the absent into the room or imbue them with power, but it does increase their influence.)

In these practices, I can identify a deliberate intimacy, in Kasulis' terms. When we embarked on this gentle awareness-raising and giving space for reflection, we were allowing an intimate way of knowing to develop between us, where both the knower and the known are changed by the encounter (2002). We were aware of the more dogmatic ways we might have approached the exercise, but they were not part of our inquiries.

I also see some of Ingold's North-ness (2010) in our work. By this, I do not mean merely being north, but also engaging with his metaphor for a place where life is entangled and permeable. We were in lands that had allowed such North-ness to flourish and we had followed lines of inquiry through the body of the land, walking and thinking. As he notes, this way of tuning-in cannot be owned by a particular culture or group. In visiting and listening, we all became a little infected by it.

However, something of this infection was manufactured, temporary, and tinged with romanticism, while, at the same time, potentially encouraging instrumentalization. It was another contradictory artifact, different from the life experienced by people who move through these areas on a daily basis. To stand beneath a birch tree and listen to the leaves move was a deliberate act; noticing was both homage and calculation. It was not a passing moment. Yet even these lines blur. Many of those to whom the open land once meant so much are now settled away from it in towns; some of whom might have attended our camp but without the need to spell out a particular relationship, ethnicity, or role. Instead, the *Othering* at the event was reserved for me and the other international visitor, comedic intruders brought in willingly to be naïve inquirers and clowns, powerless to speak without help and, with little local knowledge, liable to ask strange questions at any time. For those days, we, the two foreigners, embodied Otherness in our inability to understand language and customs.

In Misi, we responded first to what we found, then tied it back to our knowledge of process and, in this way, made space to question both knowledge and process. Ahead of the bulldozers, the undertaking could be seen as a project of interruption as well as enhancement; of displacement as well as enrichment; and of intrusion as well as creative exploitation of natural resources. To introduce the language of social innovation, we could say that, in abandoning textbook design, we attempted to take on "socially recognized goals in a new way" (Manzini 2014) so that "value created accrues primarily to society as a whole" (Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller 2008). Promoting ecological balance lies at the heart of this. What emerged as knowledge was bottom-up and radical in its encounters, even if it fit into a broader narrative of state-sponsored (i.e. top-down) research into creative land use. It is, nonetheless, an incremental story of erosion, edging-out, and deterioration as the trade-off for manufacturing new places. That the resultant places might be presented as pure and natural makes this trade-off painful.

At no point did we use these romantic conceptions, and our use of the silence (and the notion of ‘silence’ employed in our camp) was discursively and practically contested by a range of interpretations and games. Our work stayed resistant to reified notions of the land and sought to trouble dominant paradigms of land use and place creation (which tend to be literal, rather than involving imaginaries and cultural inquiry, as reviewed in Palermo and Ponzini 2015). Our emphasis was on ecology, balance, and care. And here the accepted language (and categorizing practice) of social innovation falls short.

### ***Marginality***

I noted, at outset, that there is an irony in challenging hegemonic design practices coming from Europe by offering another European example. And I can mention marginality and intersectionality, but the group that gathered was not notably diverse. However, this work was nonetheless conducted on the margins, both of Europe and of what is acceptable. It used what is marginal to explode generality: we were not following accepted process or producing solutions and we were responding to a very different Europe from the metropolitan and self-confident heart of social innovation: not Manzini’s Milan or NESTA’s London or the University of Helsinki, but the fringe that is Misi and Rovaniemi. Thus, this case study works, on one level, to challenge orthodoxies from within.

Perhaps we can do more and use this margin metaphorically, to understand something about fringes and how to use them to re-invigorate the core. On the one hand, we have the cyclical nature of center-periphery politics, where there will always be a new fringe, a new practice. We were free to be edge-walkers, try things out, employ a care paradigm, leave things unfinished, and/or trouble what we found. On the other, we have North-ness as both a state of intimacy and a fact.

What if, instead of going to the north to learn what intimacy and permeability look like, we attempt to roll out the relational idea caught in these terms and apply our learning elsewhere? Does the embrace of plurality, and its intimate twin hybridity, find what is marginal in every situation?

We can understand marginalization in two respects: marginal practices (techniques we experimented with in situ until we found the combination that felt right to that group of people on that particular day) and encounters with a peripheral space (which even the Finnish regard as beyond core areas of operation, thus “old and forgotten” as living space). Yet, if we are concerned with cultural elements, all spaces become a blend of particularity and multiplicity in need of careful encounters; every area becomes a microcosm of global relations that owes much to its margins in its creation. It is to acknowledge that the very concept of *participation* presupposes there is something going on beyond you to which you can be invited. Exploding the center produces a counter-concept of *already-being-with*. While aspects of land will not be so relevant in every environment, every form of future-making (or constructing worlds) requires the production of place as part of developing new social relations and, with this, a sense of dwelling (or being-with) and of center-periphery dynamics—or their rejection.

So, at a high level of abstraction, we can return to the notion of top-down versus bottom-up innovation and understand this methodologically, geographically, and in terms of who is taking the initiative, as a call to trouble our spaces (Butler 1990). This is troubling to design too, since it follows no recognized set of practices or codes; it does not result in a set of explicit outputs but, perhaps, a new orientation to the questions in the air. It does not intend to solve a problem or articulate these questions more closely. It is, as noted, a project of sensitization, with many things to attract but no promises. Elsewhere, the same method of creating site-specific methods might produce useful results, but another cultural quality or set of ideas might be the catalyst for collaborative discovery.

### ***Sensitizing and Attuning***

We could have been anywhere, as people interested in social innovation. But we weren't; we were in Misi.

We are always *somewhere* and this is a significant point to stress, despite its simplicity, for it acknowledges concern for situated action (Haraway 1991) and located accountabilities (Suchman 2002), both of which challenge the generality and pervasiveness to which much theory (and theory of social innovation) aspires. We could have been anywhere, but there was *context* to work from: clues as to what we were so richly entangled with. Rather than deciding this context from afar (and packaging it for ease of understanding and transfer, as some design literature intends to do), we allowed the area to speak to us as visitors, freshly, at each moment. In fact, some argue, nothing can be discussed meaningfully beyond a moment and a place (cf. Abbott 2001): everything is context until we have hindsight. In this work, context yielded ideas for encounters and ways of being-together rather than full-blown solutions: a good basis for thinking about situated innovating.

Our approach to innovating stressed sensitizing and attending to, not solving. This embedded one form of politics but passed up another type. As Light and Akama (forthcoming) note, the structural politics of issues and demographics are poorly captured in an intimacy approach. This paper has sought to reconcile this elusiveness with the obvious politics of geography and geographical approaches, from the notional mapping of difference to the spatial territorializing of colonization. Said, Soja, Crenshaw, and hooks leave little doubt of their intention to address and reshape power structures and patterns of ignorance and oppression. Those engaged in the deliberations in Misi were also committed to making thoughtful and constructive change. But to create something new is to shake up and entangle things differently without fully understanding the possible consequences (and sometimes with unintended effects). By choosing responsiveness to environment and commitment to experience as encounter, we do not lessen the importance of critical analysis but find other meanings that need to breathe alongside them. In doing so, we hope that we not only find something relevant but also anticipate a little of the impact that might come from our interfering, our research through design.

### ***Directions of Travel***

But there is a more formal relationship to be found in considering this work in the context of another margin, the Asia-Pacific region. 'The Asia-Pacific' is a geopolitical configuration. It is used by those living on the rim, as well as others, to describe the flourishing of that part of the world and to link together former enemies in a construct that stabilizes international politics (McDougall 2007). The term aggregates diverse nations, civilizations, and types of culture. In choosing this unit as a foil to Western dominance of design (which is what the Design and Social Innovation for the Asia-Pacific network did for funding purposes),<sup>iii</sup> we challenge a (design) orthodoxy coming from elsewhere, yet are obliged to introduce a homogenizing term to do so. The strategic essentialism (Spivak 1988) that makes it valuable to use the Asia-Pacific tag locally to signify new economies, common trading routes, and a separation from continental ways of thinking also introduces the possibility of perpetuating, from within, the Orientalism of which Said writes (1978). Geographical heterogeneity on the ground may be masked, in the telling, by "geopolitical homogeneity" (Tuathail 2003). This is the crux of what we need to resist. It is impossible to generalize about conditions for social innovation in this diverse area. Instead, we can talk about what is different in siting ourselves in this new orientation to the world and its histories, surrounded by such heterogeneity (as other papers in this Special Issue collection do).

There is a theoretical as well as practical point to reorientation and embracing heterodoxy (Light 2011). Introducing a notion of social innovation that has no use for a formula makes light work of peripheries and turns every intimate space into its own focus, its own center. It brings energy to participatory processes, introducing a tension between top-down and bottom-up initiatives and offering a project of cultural sensitization. It emphasizes heritage, engagement, and blend instead of novelty.

To return to our starting point, we have Kasulis' insights about the different orientations of intimacy and integrity—potentially meaningful distinctions even between neighboring countries, not least in the East Asia and Pacific regions. If that is the case, then here is a study that might not only work to reveal these different orientations, but might also use the more subtle orientation of intimacy as a base from which to do so, in contrast to exporting dominant models of design. Inevitably, much of the language of this paper has been drawn from an integrity repertoire (being academic analysis). But in working to develop new design capabilities for social innovation, this exploration acknowledges political geographer Massey's insights that space is always "in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed" (2005, 9). Staying marginal and/by resisting fixity not only recognizes the need for plurality, it creates a culture where plurality is self-generating. Or, restated more intimately: we do not need to attune ourselves to the entanglements and encounters of being-with, becoming-with and living-with; these relations pre-exist us. We need to attune our judgment to experience these relations fully and allow (endlessly) different potential to emerge.

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<sup>i</sup> Yoko and I also nod towards this in contrasting care-based interdependencies and rights-based obligations in Light and Akama, forthcoming.

<sup>ii</sup> This intimacy model is not to be confused with how Suchman discusses *detached intimacy* in her critique of *design from nowhere*: “the discourse of design from nowhere obscures responsibility for the relations of technology production and use, detached intimacy effectively yields up responsibility to the relations of employment” (2002, 96).

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