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Citation: Akama, Yoko and Yee, Joyce (2016) Seeking stronger plurality: Intimacy and integrity in designing for social innovation. In: Cumulus Hong Kong 2016, 21st - 24th November 2016, Hong Kong.

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## Seeking stronger plurality: Intimacy and integrity in designing for social innovation

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### Abstract

A seminal post-colonial scholar, Deborah Bird Rose (2004, 154) exclaims, ‘the west collectively is the leader; it is closest to the future, and the rest of the world follows along behind’. Similarly, Design and Social Innovation is largely populated by case studies in Europe and the US, further reinforcing global hierarchies and certain paradigms. We speak to this politics and dominance from the periphery and share early insights from two international symposia on Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP) to highlight the importance of exchanging ideas in various directions. We use Kasulis’ (2002) heuristic of *integrity* to frame design that emphasizes rational, impersonal, discrete, externalised principles and models, in contrast to *intimacy* that starts from an interrelated view of designing that cannot be disentangled from the ecological, relational, intimate contexts in which it is performed. Using integrity and intimacy in our analysis, we heard practitioners undertaking community-led change speak of empathy, humility, respect, trust and emotional resonance that enhances the *intimacy* between entities already interrelated, embedded in contextual specificities. These cannot be abstracted by a model or a method for scaling or replication elsewhere, often desired in the dominant, integrity view of design. When relationships are foundational and heterogeneity is a contemporary context of designing with communities, we propose that the intimacy orientation can help shift from a weak form of pluralism towards a stronger one, and bring attention to cultural, emotional and relational entanglements that are integral to Design and Social Innovation – to work with, and through difference.

### Keywords

Heterogeneity, culture, inter-relatedness

## Introduction: Design looking West

Academic discourses in Design and Social Innovation are largely dominated by case studies in Europe and the US, inadvertently creating a trend for seeking expertise, replicable methods and best-practices of their models, establishing an unspoken hierarchy and dominant paradigms of design. Theory, practice and discipline of design evolved through industrialisation, modernism and the Bauhaus, all of which originates from and is centred in Europe. Bousbaci's (2008) comprehensive article explains that design theory assumes particular 'model of the designer' that shapes design discourse through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. His search for an underlying philosophy of design traverses through works by key scholars such as Christopher Alexander, Richard Buchanan, Nigel Cross, Bryan Lawson, Allan Newell, Horst Rittel, Herbert Simon, Melvin Webber, to illustrate shifts from Cartesian thinking in the first generation of design methods, through thrusts towards planning methodologies at Ulm and the emphasis of 'wicked problem' in second and third generations. His discussion reveals a consistent dominance of rational approaches in relating 'problems' and 'solutions', before 'post rationalist' models began to emerge around the 1980's, following Donald Schön's theory of reflective practice and the influence of feminism and anthropology in design. We explain that such models and rational thinking can be framed as an *integrity*-based orientation to culture and knowledge that emerged from philosophical modernism and Enlightenment (Kasulis 2002). This will be elaborated later, but here, when we note the names who fundamentally shaped the thinking in design, it starts to indicate circular patterns of theory proposed by a handful of people largely concentrated in Europe and US whose ideas are continually cited to perpetuate its authority and privilege. This reflects the broader phenomenon of the visibility of men and the invisibility of women and ethnicities in design, both in industry and academic texts (see Akama & Barnes 2009; Buckley 1986; Thompson 1994). Feminist and post-colonial theory exposes the mechanics of established canons and occupied theories where the dominant is unable to recognize its own power, privilege and penetration (Minh-Ha 1989). Our abstract opens with the quote by Rose (2004, 154); 'What is not in doubt in modern thought is that the west collectively is the leader; it is closest to the future, and the rest of the world follows along behind' – this power and politics is expressed in design where theories, illustrated by Bousbaci, constitute its centre and remain as the main point of reference.

When speaking to this dominance, the intention is not to displace it with alternative paradigms but to ask different questions that concern other world-views. For example, instead of seeking growth, progress, replication and scalability of design in 'solving problems', what if we ask questions about how design can enable inter-relatedness, respect and reciprocity? These questions, beyond design, are foregrounded in many cultures and societies, shaped by philosophical, religious and spiritual evolutions in Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam and Indigenous ontologies. Here, entanglements with the invisible and intuited cannot be severed – be that life force, gods, spirits, souls, totems and ancestors – where relational, interdependent view of the world does not start and end with rational individuals or within their lifetime. This view is often considered with suspicion, exoticism and mysticism by some rational thinkers. The holistic, embodied and interrelated view will be discussed as an *intimacy*-based orientation in the paper and we argue its importance in Design and Social Innovation discourse and practice.

However, when speaking from the periphery, we have to be careful of this political act as it often invites criticism and defensiveness. As the team of design researchers behind *Decolonising Design* (Abdulla et. al. 2016) state, rejection of papers is highly likely unless 'foreign' concepts are assimilated under European philosophies that readers and reviewers will be more familiar with. This is the unfortunate consequence of the orthodoxies of publishing in design where acceptance is often based on token gestures for accommodating diversity of perspectives, but never on the merits of the argument for a radically different world-view. Our overall argument is that Design and Social Innovation is in need of effort and commitment to sharpen thinking to embrace difference and accommodate heterogeneity as

its central condition. We propose that an intimacy orientation to design can help shift from a weak to a stronger form of pluralism.

### **Design in the periphery**

Reflected in the term, 'The Asian 21<sup>st</sup> Century' by economists and political journalists, developing economies in this region are projected to outpace developed economies in Europe in this century. GDP growth of the ASEAN-5 (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam) far outstrips that of the Euro zone (AUSTRADE 2015). Australia is entering its 24th year of uninterrupted economic growth, with GDP projection higher than that for the US, UK and Europe. This shifting economic climate is a significant factor in the growing attention towards the Asia-Pacific region as an emerging global leader. However, prosperous economies like Australia, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong are facing challenges of balancing economic development with social and cultural sustainability, indicated by the emergence and popularity of Design and Social Innovation labs (see DESIS international network and government innovation labs like the PS21 division in the Singapore Government). Our worry here is how design accompanies and accelerates this economic growth and pursues a neo-liberal agenda because it is still framed within the precepts of industrialization (Girard and Shneiderman 2013). This then manifests in increased consumption and atomism (Fry 2009; Walker 2011), accelerated by globalisation. Ideology of progress and development is a European thought from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Chakrabarty 2009). The 'west knows best' thinking is still evident in the stream of 'western' experts giving talks and workshops to the 'locals' on emerging fields like service design, design thinking and social innovation, which cities like Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Shanghai are actively undertaking. We are concerned that this region continues to follow trends of looking 'West' to seek answers from Design and Social Innovation exemplars to address their own social and sustainable needs, inadvertently replacing cultural, traditional and heterogeneous practices with imported and dominant paradigms to 'design a better world' – a commonly heard catchphrase in Design and Social Innovation.

These concerns and observations fuelled the authors' motivation to host two international symposia and workshops in Singapore (2015) and Bangkok (2016) on Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP). The political agenda behind DESIAP takes on the heterogeneous characteristics of Asia-Pacific, a region consisting of a constellation of islands, countries and a continent where many indigenous cultures have been resilient in spite of colonization. These events convened academics and practitioners who are initiating change in Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand who generously shared their personal experiences of actively creating spaces and places for meaningful engagement, skills sharing, capacity building and purposeful transformation. DESIAP Bangkok 2016 also brought together leading researchers in the UK and the US whose participatory practices have strong feminist and post-colonial undercurrents that recognize difference and pursue questions of power structures in their sites of intervention. Their participation enabled us to bring this endeavor into international and comparative focus.

The richness of DESIAP 2015/2016 means there are more insights and discussions that will continue to emerge from this initiative than we can discuss in this paper alone. So, here we take a slice through one of the most complex and central features and pay particular attention to culturally nuanced *way relationships* are foregrounded most strongly, emphasising that all Design and Social Innovation practices are enabled and conditioned by this dimension. Our early examination of how relationships are constituted, nurtured and shaped can help provide ways to discuss why, what, when and how relationship matters. This contrasts sharply with other accounts of Design and Social Innovation, such as the work of Ezio Manzini (2015), a significant Italian authority in this field and founder of the Design for Social Innovation for Sustainability (DESI) International network. In his seminal book, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*, he describes 'collaborative encounters' as node-to-node exchanges of resources (time, care,

experience, expertise) to create shared value between individuals. Here, individuals are considered having free will and choice, skill, ability and resources to participate in co-producing value. Granovetter's (1985) social network analysis of 'strong' and 'weak' ties is used to further enhance general, impersonal and detached descriptions of relations. When such descriptions of relations repeat in design reporting, it compels the notable anthropologist Lucy Suchman to lament the phenomenon of designers 'from nowhere' who continue being 'ignorant of their own positions within the social relations' (2002, 95) that omit complex and nuanced conditions that shape how people are embarking on change. This is not a new critique, yet we argue that such persistence is also due to the dominant thinking and circular descriptions of design.

We question the orthodoxies in design while noting that the authors have been conditioned by such paradigms through our education, work experiences and where we currently teach and research in the UK and Australia. Yet inscribing our heritage and upbringing – one who grew up in Japan and the other in post-independence Malaysia – is significant to highlight because being 'othered' as Asian women living and working among a dominant group that is taken as a point of reference, is also a condition of our existence (Minh-Ha 1989). This compels us to recognise our specific cultural roots as a political act rather than homogenise them under 'multiculturalism', and make these matter in designing. We seek to trouble literal and static distinctions of cultures that are assigned to countries, nations or groups of people to recognize that ideas have been exchanged globally for centuries. This embodiment of cultural plurality is a shared condition that characterises many DESIAP speakers who are 'multi-local' and have diversity in heritage, language, upbringing and in places where they choose to live and work.

As mentioned earlier, our agenda is not to set up dualisms or to displace dominant constructs in design. Following Homi Bhaba (1984, 127), our work here is to disrupt a dominant gaze and power, to continually produce slippage and difference to resist conformity. This discursive process 'does not merely "rupture" the [colonial] discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" ... "incomplete" and "virtual"' (ibid). By calling out the partial, incomplete and virtual idea of the dominant constructs of design, we seek to find a 'middle ground' and what the cultural philosopher Thomas Kasulis (2002) might call 'complementary gestalt' or 'bicultural orientation' that side steps simplistic dualisms of West/East, North/South or even episteme vs phronesis, or *integrity* vs *intimacy*. This latter framework is Kasulis' (2002, 20) heuristic to understand cultural difference that are not defined by fundamental distinctions but rather 'what aspects of our humanness a cultural tradition tends to emphasize, enhance, and preserve as central. What is foreground in one culture may be background in another.' The term 'culture' is used broadly by Kasulis to include nations, gender, socio-economic, ethnicity, and subaltern. His heuristic generalization of *integrity* and *intimacy* is one axis he proposes as a way to consider what cultures see as central or peripheral, ground or figure. Similar heuristics appear when Chakrabarty (2000, 18) talks of analytical and hermeneutic traditions in social sciences where the first 'evacuate the local by assimilating it to some abstract universal', whereas the hermeneutic tradition 'produces a loving grasp of detail' and 'thoughts intimately tied to places' to understand the diversity of human life-worlds. Similar patterns repeat in various discourses to frame a discussion, and we note that divisions are not that distinct or arbitrary but fluidly oscillate in-between the two.

### **Intimacy and integrity in design**

Kasulis states that *intimacy* and *integrity* are orientations that describe recursive cultural patterns that determine different ways of relating. The *integrity* view sees relations as existing externally between two independent entities. This relation has to be constructed according to an agreed value or principle, for example, treating another as autonomous agent with the right to self-determination. Kasulis calls this orientation *integrity* based reasoning because the two parties have their own integrity outside the relationship. He suggests principled

people believe in external set of values and standards that are applied to different situations. These principles, not the situation, guide the behavior.

In further explaining the integrity orientation, his analogy of seawater and sand can be very evocative. Sand and seawater have a strong relationship. 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. In other words, its constitution remains the same - their relationship is external in its combination. When using this analogy in describing people, Kasulis explains that formal principles between person 'a' and person 'b' constitute the integrity view. It makes little difference who *a* and *b* are, which allows the relationship 'R' to be made universal  $a(R)b$ . 'R' remains constant in relations such as  $b(R)c$ ,  $a(R)d$ , and *R* can be expressed as a principle. When *a* and *b* enter into a relation *R*, it is an external relation where *a* and *b* are essentially unchanged.

The integrity orientation to knowledge is similarly external where the knower is independent from the known. The integrity of knowledge and the integrity of the knower are maintained by agreed rules and principles to deal with disagreements and to allow that any knower can attain the same knowledge. Integrity-dominant societies see knowledge as available to all, and its public demands that knowledge should be freely shared.

From this, we can see how the integrity orientation is a common foundation for a number of ethical theories, such as the concept of human rights, the Golden Rule and Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. Individuality, autonomy and independence are strongly valued. Integrity-based knowledge values empirical observation and logical reasoning and can be traced back to the quest for a pan-cultural ground through Plato, Aristotle, The Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modernism (Kasulis 2002).

Design theory that emerges from this view is captured well in Bousbaci's 'model of the designer', discussed earlier. Ethics in design also emphasizes principles that guide a designers' behavior. For example, Tony Fry's (2009) *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice* argues for a complete reconceptualization of design for new forms of living; and Ezio Manzini's (2006) *Design, Ethics and Sustainability: Guidelines for a transition phase* on how to make conscious ethical choices in the steps towards sustainability. Common to all of this is an integrity-oriented design discourse where knowledge is rhetorically and persuasively presented in rational, impersonal, and publicly contestable ways. Design knowledge, process and methods are imagined as universal so it can move easily between places and people, and this explains why various versions of the *Double Diamond* and *Stanford d-school* models are commonly used.

In contrast to *integrity*, Kasulis proposes the notion of *intimacy* that begins with the assumption of inter-dependency that inherently already has a connection, which seeks to highlight, enhance or find points of commonality between people. This means to be engaged in the contextual specificities of the overlap, determining and changing the *very nature* of those involved. Using a similar analogy of the sea, Kasulis describes intimacy like the relationship between water and salt that becomes seawater when merged. Their independent identities, as salt and water, disappear to become seawater as an intimate relationship. Intimacy's etymology as *innermost* is an opening up of one's thoughts, feelings and motives. 'We enter into intimate relations by opening ourselves to let the other inside, by putting ourselves into internal relations with others or recognizing internal relations that already exists' (Kasulis 2002, 43). Intimacy favours interdependence, rather than independence. This means 'a' is partly 'b' and vice versa, and the relation *R* is a shared, internal one. Rather than defining things by opposites and isolating parts from what they are not, intimacy seeks to discover the overlaps that are already there.

Similarly, the knower and known cannot be separated, because knowledge is relational to the person and reality. This means knowing is also partly learning about the knower. 'Intimate knowledge's objectivity... is accessible only to those within the appropriate intimate locus, those who have achieved their expert knowledge through years of practical experience' (Kasulis 2002, 35). Knowledge is thus absorbed and incorporated into the body through praxis, rather than acquired externally and existing independently to that person. Intimacy is personal, tacit, intuitive, affective, situated and is achieved through practice.

In design, the intimacy orientation is visible through feminist, anthropological and postcolonial influences in Human Computer Interaction (HCI), Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Participatory Design discourses. For example, Shaowen Bardzell (2010) warns of the danger of demoting cultural, social, regional and national differences in promoting timeless and universal cross-cultural design. Ann Light (2011a; 2011b) writes about interdependence and problematizes computer formalizations that perpetuate the status quo and argues for plurality and deferred commitment to values as a way of resisting. Instead of 'ethics' and a principle-based approach, Yoko Akama (forthcoming) pursues 'mindfulness' as a practice of unlearning and surrendering when designing with communities. Other design researchers such as Rachel Clarke and colleagues (2016) write themselves strongly into their design accounts to recognize positionality, reflexivity, the specifics of participation and the established conditions that shape the contexts in which they intervene. These scholars, who were also participants of DESIAP Bangkok, argue that we are already entangled in ecologies of systems and influences, and any design interventions are from 'within' and cannot be seen as external, isolated or independent.

When we examine empathy in design – a theme for this conference – it can often emphasise the integrity orientation, framed as a skill, characteristic, a method associated with user-experience research or a process like 'empathetic design' to gain insight and inspiration (Kouprie and Visser 2009). See how 'Open Empathy' call describes empathy as an 'essential mental habit' that informs human action, where designers 'separated from the so-called mysterious-to-them users' can benefit from 'introducing empathy into their research processes' (Cumulus Hong Kong 2016). Psychological roots of empathy start from separating self and other where the self is reified and actualised in order to walk in the others' shoes to achieve an emotional identification or grasp the others' internal frame (DeTurk 2001). This view is problematic when working across difference as it can omit the positionality of the perceiver, reinforce divisions of power, ignore unpleasant dimensions of empathy to assume people as innately 'good' (DeTurk 2001; Gunaratnam 2003). In contrast, the intimacy view of empathy takes a relational, co-constructed encounter, where overlaps are recognised as much as points of disconnect. In this regard, empathy can be considered as a communicative action, like a dialogue, contextually emerging in-between. To see empathy in a processual way acknowledges its partial incompleteness so 'connection is worked for, with and through difference' (Gunaratnam 2003, 102) by those already interrelated to discover how their own positioning and perspective is fluidly and continually constructed through encounters with one another. This means pursuing intimacy as an alternative to the way empathy often features in design, can foreground a different orientation to relating.

In the following section, we pursue the intimacy view to counter-balance the integrity-oriented tendencies we see dominating in design and suggest how an intimacy framework can help bring attention to cultural, emotional and relational entanglements that are integral part of Design and Social Innovation. We selected five (out of 27) presentations, determined by how we (the authors of this article) found resonance with and compelling insights in their practices from an intimacy orientation – a resonance felt and intuited through our co-presence at the events and through our personal cultural heritage and backgrounds, which provided a sense of familiarity. This could be considered as a 'methodology' for this paper which may trouble design orthodoxy that demand un-biased, empirical way to evidence data and 'verify claims', in other words, an integrity view of knowledge to rationally and impersonally analyse the

presentations and transcripts. Rather, our knowledge is oriented by pursuing points where the knower and the known overlap.

### **An interrelated world-view**

In contrast to most Design and Social Innovation accounts in Europe and US where open communication, mutual understandings and individual rights-based approach is assumed and expected, the presenters selected here work in conditions where hierarchy and social stratification are prevalent. We take an intimacy orientation to highlight how relationships are nurtured in such conditions.

In Singapore where top-down authority is revered and unchallenged, Tong Yee co-founded the *Thought Collective* – a collection of social enterprises, such as a café, a learning centre and publishing house – to foster a culture of trust through conversations. He shares that hierarchy is not about roles but a respect and recognition of experience; ‘the problem with hierarchy is to think that I must know, to lead everyone else’, so instead, he tries to have irreverence for taking oneself too seriously as well as humility and fascination for experiences that other people have. This evokes the intimate view of empathy where connection is co-located through respecting and recognizing experience that can come from seniority. Respecting hierarchy can mean a culture of learning from elders. This comes to the fore when M. Ibnur Rashad ‘walk the ground’ in the *kampung kampus* in Singapore where he would meet aunties who sew and weave or uncles who do carpentry and learn lessons of life in focus and patience. M. Ibnur Rashad and Tay Lai Hock established the *Ground Up Initiative* in Singapore to foster social and environmental consciousness through programs and activities that emphasize humanity and living in harmony with the Earth. *Kampung* (village) might be considered as anti-progress or imbue romantic ideas of a by-gone era in the cosmopolitan vision of Singapore, but Ibnur’s story shares intimate relationships in the way he refers to members of the community as aunties and uncles and the cultural traditions of learning from and respecting elders.

Confucian and Buddhist influence of learning is strongly inflected, not just from elders and seniors but also features as reflection, self-cultivation and ‘unlearning’, to awaken new ways of see interrelatedness and catalyse a continual becoming. We see an intimacy orientation here where learning about the world is about learning about oneself (Kasulis 2002). Tong Yee describes this as another feature of fostering trust in his social enterprise where he stresses being ‘open to learning is key’ and a ‘learning culture ... as a culture of beginning’. Knowledge here is not impersonal and rational, but is shaped by who people are and dependent upon the company they keep. Joseph Foo, a designer, curator and teacher in Malaysia chose ‘neighbor’ to indicate learning through inter-dependent and inter-cultural reciprocity that is aimed for by his initiative, *Neighbor Program*, a platform for art and design students, lecturers and other experts in Southeast Asia region to participate, share, reflect and respond to local culture and issues in a global context. This network offers a complementary gestalt to the model of learning from the ‘West’ or in ‘Western’ frameworks, enabling students from different regions to draw out connections without seeking homogeneity and promote appreciation of differences in values, thoughts and behaviors. Similarly, the *Dhammagiri Home Project* was initiated when Joseph’s friend, a Buddhist monk, needed to build a larger home for hill tribe orphans in the remote province of Mae Hong Son, located in the mountains of the northwest of Thailand bordering Myanmar. The project is a labour of love for Joseph, where the project became a personal and powerful way to learn from others, not just the skills required to plan, design and construct a sustainable building, but also the humility to value, playful, educational and spiritual dimensions from the orphaned children.

Hierarchy and social stratification are not seen as barriers, because when relationality starts with interrelatedness, it means finding ways to learn from differences and work across divisions, heard in Tong, Ibnur and Joseph’s stories. Similarly, Viria Vicit-Vadakan is a designer from *Learn Education*, a social enterprise that works integrally with various socio-



cultural contexts in the Thai education sector. Viria passionately spoke about access to education for underprivileged students and the significant challenges they face, illustrating her talk with experiences of spending time with families living in poverty and the constant precariousness of their conditions, such as the fear of a bailiff banging on the door at midnight. Being a teacher herself, her empathy with fellow teachers who work in difficult circumstances was pronounced, particularly those who are unqualified in content knowledge because of requirements to teach across subjects to students from broken families, and the need to give pastoral care. This indicated an emotive identification with teachers and students alike where Viria 'mirrored' their feelings, recognizing the intimate, internal overlaps that already exist. Learning here means to identify what students' value and cultivate trusting, authentic partnerships among the students' learning circle. Like Kasulis' view of relational interaction, such relationships cannot be achieved without the genuine availability and readiness of the different parties to be present, which problematizes the agency often attributed causally to designers, techniques and technology for social change.

Emotional resonance is significant here. Tong Yee observes how trust is high in their social enterprises and the spaces they foster for dialogue, imbued with an atmosphere of laughter, minimal politics and tension. These echo Kasulis' (2002, 28) description of creating intimate contexts where 'people feel free to say anything, to share their inner secrets. Trust permeates the conversation ... there is no need (indeed no possibility) of censoring or hiding what is innermost'. M. Ibnur Rashad shares the importance of 'heartware', suggested as a contrast to 'software' (process / mindset / system) and 'hardware' (tools / technology) in design, and the intimacy orientation is compelling when Ibnur explains that 'heartware' must be part of the software and hardware. This sense of 'heart' is emotion, personality, soul and a sense of self in a design processes, systems, tools and technology, which evokes this quote from Kasulis (2002, 37): '... if I were to lose anything with which I am in intimate relation – my family, my close friends, my home, even my dog-eared reference books – I would lose more than something I have. I would be losing part of myself.' This could be interpreted as a similar socio-material view argued by many researchers where the designer and the method they enact cannot be separated, but it goes further to imply a complete interfusion where design process and technology are imbued by a *person's heart*. This intimacy orientation reminds us that it is impossible for another person to replace Ibnur or his relationships with the aunts and uncles in the *kampong* community, even if they are highly trained and equipped with techniques in co-design.

Items used and cherished by a loved one can often have this intimate relationship where the objects almost represents the person, imbibing their soul after their passing (Kasulis 2002). Yanki Lee's *Fine Dying* project in Hong Kong explores this intimacy in explicit and poetic ways where the public is invited to speculate what keepsake they'd like to be transformed into after they die. The inspiration comes from technology currently promoted by death care industries where the cremated ashes can turn into a diamond. A conversation about designing this jewelry seeks to catalyse conversations among family members about the meaning of death. While the subject is taboo in Chinese culture, Buddhist inflections of honoring ancestors and the circularity of life are sensed in the background. Spirits of loved ones are remembered through alters in homes, materials imbibe their spirit, and offerings like *Joss paper* are burnt to venerate the deceased on special occasions. This notion of legacy is heard in Yanki's account of an elder who took part in the project, who said, 'I want to be two pairs of diamond earrings for my daughters'. The consultation that followed revealed the daughters' fear of losing the earrings, and here, we can relate to such loss that powerfully evokes the fear of losing one's mother. Yanki further explains, 'that piece of jewelry isn't about one person but about that relationship', that suggests a way of seeing interrelatedness, reminding how connections can endure beyond an individual and their lifetime. Another example of a diamond that turns into a dispersal of light in a room also gave the possibility of the person being 'with you' in that moment. This form of intimacy is more than the body or the imagination, calling the presence of soul, spirits and life force (*chi* in Chinese) as an inseparable constituent of relationships. Again, these are cultural dimensions that can often

be omitted in an integrity-framed world-view. As Yanki demonstrates, designing can reveal and activates this connection and becomes an intimate part of this relationship. Poignantly, discussion on dying invited personal comments from the audience where someone spoke of beauty, release and forgiveness when scattering his father's ashes in the sea, or another's Hindu belief that the body is just a vessel for the soul that departs as smoke during cremation. These were felt as moments of intimacy where we each located ourselves in the overlaps in an interconnected and shared experience, contrasting with standard dynamics of impersonal questions and debate that take place during most design conferences.

Even if one might not have any experience or know the communities and contexts described by DESIAP participants, we cannot ignore the power of these stories. They are spoken from the personal, intimate knowing of situated accounts, and these reach out and touch the edges of our own personal, intimate knowing of being human across contextual, cultural difference. They evoke our own relational experiences. Audience and readers alike may recognise these stories as authentic accounts, perhaps even resonating with their own experiences in the field and design with communities. This form of intimate knowing positions oneself as a participant in the story by locating points of entry into inter-relatedness, rather than starting from rational detachment to be convinced through intellectual argumentation. As Kasulis suggests, this intimate knowledge is accessible to those within an appropriate intimate locus by those who share praxis.

### **Recognising intimacy orientation in designing**

When the integrity orientation dominates in design, as we have demonstrated here as methods, techniques, models and structures, they are described as rational, impersonal, discrete, externalised principles and entities. Undoubtedly, these also feature in the DESIAP speakers' practices, in the double-diamond process used by Mariko Takeuchi, a design strategy consultant in Cambodia, and Ingrid Burkett at The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, as well as in the models of innovation engines in Japan, shared by Fumiko Ichikawa at *Re:Public*. These are powerfully articulate and compellingly persuasive in demonstrating abstraction and application of design, while also emphasising, enhancing and preserving the cultures of design so it can be shared, recognised and communicated pan-culturally. Yet, the speakers also explicitly or tacitly disclosed dimensions that could not be articulated in a method, model or principle, revealing that their practices in social innovation emerged from an interrelatedness and embeddedness within their place-based conditions. For example, Tong shared models of their social enterprise through highly articulate innovation processes but cautioned how such models do not lead to innovation, stressing the efforts he personally makes and the culture he nurtures in his social enterprises for a trusting, learning, humble and respectful relationship through dialogue. Viria's approach to social innovation highlighted intimate ways 'to be there for the other person' compared to an ethical integrity 'to be fair to the other person' (Kasulis 2002, 120). Ibnur's importance for 'heartwear' to be part of methods, techniques and technology of design, speaks of the irreplaceability of a person's heart and soul with designing and what is being designed. This echoed Joseph's design of an orphanage, borne out of love and spiritual embodiment, and Yanki's story of a diamond that maintains interrelatedness with loved ones after their passing, revealing a world-view where invisible 'superstitious' dimensions are always there, co-evolving alongside societies.

More importantly, we can start to see the inadequacy of an integrity orientation of design because it necessarily strips away certain phenomena, such as the personal, cultural, tacit, affective and spiritual dimensions that constitute relationships. These matter, because relationships are fundamental in designing social innovation practices, compared to how design was once only tethered to production of objects and confined within ateliers, studios and work-place settings. Working with communities or groups of people is a context rife with contingency where needs emerge, dynamics change and all constituents of change process is continually reconstructed (DiSalvo et. al. 2013; Light and Akama 2012; Yee and White 2016). We need to sharpen our ways to accommodate difference, so that a practitioner

embedded in this space can work with the dynamics, plurality and serendipity of the condition, in other words, the chaos of messiness and change that demands respect, receptivity and responsiveness. This is important because the domination of an integrity orientation in design also means that it can prevent ways of revealing, recognising and enhancing the intimacy between people and seeing constituents as already inter-related. The speakers at DESIAP, and the stories shared by the five presenters here, is a further reminder to foreground an intimacy view and to recognise how such intimate dimensions are integral to designing, and not separate from it.

Many scholars have pointed to cultural heterogeneity as a contemporary context of designing with people (eg. Akama 2014; Bardzell 2010; Light 2011; [Winscheirs-Theophilus et. al. 2012](#)) and the need to acknowledge the multiple and invisible dimensions that are inherently entangled in making change. Instead of searching for common patterns in Design and Social Innovation or replicating 'successful' models that follow well-worn routes of colonialism, we need to broaden our own frames of design to enhance what Kasulis calls a 'bicultural orientation' or 'complementary gestalt' that value both integrity and intimacy orientations in designing. As discussed in the introduction, this broadening also means to question and disrupt the dominant gaze and power to produce slippage, resistance to conformity and call for the 'partial and 'incomplete' way Design and Social Innovation has been framed from certain world-views. Embracing heterogeneity means to step outside of circular frames of reference of design within Europe and the US, and recognise intellectual developments from other regions as relevant to design theory and practice without framing them as 'exotic', 'nostalgic' or 'mystical'. Various spiritual, philosophical and ontological considerations can enter into design, having already shaped significant scholars in Asia-Pacific such as Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Nishida Kitaro, Trin T. Minh-ha, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Gayatri Spivak, Lao Tzu and more, who question the dominance given to a particular way of seeing the world. These scholars can inspire and teach us, to move away from static and banal description of relationality towards embracing invisible, heterogeneous difference. The political agenda for DESIAP is to remind the importance of exchanging ideas through global flows in various directions.

We must shift from a weak form of pluralism towards a strong one in designing social innovation to embrace and work across cultural differences. An intimacy orientation proposed here could be one possibility to counter-balance the dominance of an integrity framing, and to bring relationality to the fore so we may attend to other kinds of questions, concerns and approaches that had been omitted from view before. This also means we cannot take social relationships for granted, nor see it as a backdrop for value-neutral designers to work within, and instead, attend to the situatedness of our social, cultural, political and spiritual encounters. The intimacy orientation can help us acknowledge interrelatedness while working across culture, geography and conditions, and find points of connection on the periphery of our work and inquiry that differs from our own world-view, and to foster respect, resonance and responsiveness to work with, and through difference.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the reviewers, DESIAP 2015 and 2016 speakers and various supporters, and in particular, Ann Light and Rachel Clarke who helped articulate salient points in this paper. We also acknowledge funding from Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), Northumbria University and RMIT University for DESIAP 2015/2016 symposia.

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