

kokoro of design (デザインの心)

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ABSTRACT

Imagine for a moment, the sparse, inky brushstrokes that depict a fishing boat in the midst of rippling waters, and how this can awaken, for the beholder, 'a sense of the vastness of the sea and at the same time of peace and contentment' (Suzuki 1958: 22). According to the prominent Zen scholar Daisetz Suzuki, nothingness or emptiness are eternal and formless worlds that are beyond mind-constructed categories. Philosophies of absence like 'emptiness' (Mu 無) or 'in-between' (Ma 間) in Japanese, evolved through intellectual and spiritual influences of Taoism, Shinto, Zen and Buddhism. Rather than considering absence as removal of form, philosophies of absence take non-being or nothingness as the necessary grounds for being.

This talk invites you to experience an approach that has been 'designed' over centuries through such philosophies as a way to contemplate what power might mean when nothingness is foregrounded. Here, instead of a clenched fist, holding on to knowledge, control and certainty, it opens into an empty palm, ready to receive and be part of the world in its continual becoming.

BIOGRAPHY

Yoko Akama is a design researcher in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University and co-leads the Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific network. Her Japanese heritage has embedded a Zen-informed participatory practice, shaped by working with regional communities in Australia in strengthening their resilience for disaster preparedness, and with Indigenous Nations enact their sovereignty and self-determination. She is an Adjunct Fellow of a ecosystem innovation studio, Re:public Japan and Visiting Fellow at the Centre of Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University. She is a recipient of several major research grants in Australia and the UK and winner of the prestigious Good Design Australia Awards (2014). For more information please go to www.rmit.edu.au/staff/yokoakama.

